

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

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RESTRICTED SECRET

TRANSLATION NO. VII /64

RESTRICTED

THE USE OF BOMBER UNITS FOR RECONNAISSANCE

Correspondence between Marinegruppenkommando Nord
and Luftflotte 5, dated June 1943

TRANSLATED BY

AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6.

25TH FEBRUARY, 1948.

G,178477.

Berlin, July 28, 1943.

1. Naval General Staff 1885/43. Secret.

I.) To Commander in Chief Luftwaffe General Staff
Robinson I (Attention Lt. General Meister.)

Herewith is returned the correspondence between Luftflotte 5 and Naval Group North (Admiral of the Northern Waters).

The Chief of the Naval General Staff has given the order that C. in C. Luftwaffe General Staff be informed that communication Lft. 5 Ia No. 105/43 (Secret) dated June 3, 1943 was answered through Naval Group North. (A copy is enclosed.)

Naval General Staff agrees with the policy of Naval Group North H.Q. C. in C. Luftwaffe General Staff is asked especially to re-examine the question of the use of bombers for reconnaissance in the light of the statements coming in from Naval Group North H.Q. The Naval General Staff is also of the opinion that, in cases of urgency, freedom of decision should be given to Luftflottenkommando 5 as to whether bomber aircraft should be brought in for reconnaissance.

I.A.

Naval Group North H.Q.
and Fleet H.Q.
Gkdos. Chefs 640/43 AI.

June 30, 1943.

To the Naval General Staff,

For attention of the Admiral of the Northern Waters, C. in C. of the Command.

With reference to Gruppe Nord Gkdos. Chefs 628/43 dated June 23, 1943, for your information. Naval General Staff is requested to effect, through C. in C. Luftwaffe General Staff, the lifting of the ban on the use of bombers for reconnaissance purposes. A speedy decision is requested.

Amendments and supplements to the order "Ostfront" follow under separate cover.

For Naval Group North H.Q. and Fleet H.Q.
Chief of Staff

(Sgd.) Ulze (?)

Pencilled observations:

It remains to be considered whether it is worth while at the moment to take up the question raised by Naval Group North. From an academic point of view, the operations of Naval Group North are suitable for our purpose of bringing home to the Luftwaffe General Staff the use of bomber aircraft for reconnaissance.

Signed.

July 8, 1943.

/Naval

Naval Group North H.Q.
and Fleet H.Q.

June 30, 1943.

B. No. Gkdos. Chefs 640/43 C.

To Luftflotte 5 H.Q. Oslo, Norway.

Naval Group North H.Q. has acknowledged communication Luftflottenkommando 5 Führungsabteilung Ia No. 105/43 (Secret) dated June 16, 1943. The most important points are summed up as follows:

- 1.) The air reconnaissance requested by Naval Group North, which is supposed to serve as a basis for the operations of the Command, cannot be nearly fulfilled, even under favourable weather conditions, with the forces available.
- 2.) The bomber forces available can under no circumstances be used for reconnaissance because such use of bomber forces is in opposition to strict orders from C. in C. Luftwaffe.
- 3.) It is impossible to rely on other reconnaissance forces being brought in. Even if other special bomber formations should be brought in, they can under no circumstances be used for reconnaissance tasks.

Naval Group North H.Q. remarks:

- 1.) Attacks on Britain-Russia convoys are the joint task of the Navy and the Luftwaffe in Norway; I assume that this is what is understood there. For the duration of these attacks, other tasks must give way to this main effort, provided that special and important commitments do not arise elsewhere.
- 2.) The plan for the most effective use of the forces available for attacks on and protection of the convoys must depend on circumstances; it cannot be definitely fixed in all its details in advance. Although the forces available - surface vessels and U-boats from the Navy and bomber forces from the Luftwaffe - belong to two different services of the Wehrmacht, the attacks on convoys are a combined task, in which it is a question of achieving the goal in the most effective way. As before, the willing cooperation of the front-line headquarters of the Navy and the Luftwaffe must ensure the unanimity of operational aims and the best possible operational use of all forces.
- 3.) The plans of the Admiral of the Northern Waters, which are based on directives of Naval Group North, aim at what are, in his opinion, the most effective operations of the Command. With this in view, he tried to find a distribution of tasks and aims amongst the three fighting forces available, such that in a given situation, a task of which they were capable would be allotted to each of the forces. No distinction was intended between main and auxiliary tasks, as all operations against convoys, including the preliminary reconnaissance, require cooperation from all forces in a combined operation. Similarly, other situations will probably arise, where, for example, the attack on the actual convoy devolves on the bomber formations and U-boats, or on only one of these forces, while the rest of the Command might be tied down to defeating the covering forces.

In attacks on a convoy, according to the conception of Naval Group North, it is highly probable that the greatest success will be most speedily and surely gained if we succeed in bringing the command in its present composition into actual contact with the convoy. In order to create the best conditions for this, and to ensure unanimity of attack from all forces, cooperation - not help - in the form provided for in the operational order was requested from the Luftwaffe. Even if Naval Group North - with regard to the importance of convoy attacks as stressed by the Fuehrer - hoped for a reinforcement of Luftflotte 5, it was quite aware that in tasks to be taken over by Luftflotte 5 in combined operations (as outlined in the Operational Order) only the most favourable circumstances were taken into consideration; it was also aware that naturally

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the weather, the enemy's position, and the ratio of power could cause substantial changes in these tasks and in the chances of their fulfilment. It was by no means intended to make Luftflotte 5 responsible, with its present units, for the lack of operations of the bomber group or for the failure of its attacks. Naturally, Naval Group North and the Admiral of the Northern Waters count only on the Luftflotte forces available at the time, just as they must take into account the fact that the weather may hamper the Naval and Air Forces in certain cases. For this reason, an appreciation of the position at the time of the operations will decide the operational possibilities and tasks for the available forces of the Navy and the Luftwaffe.

With regard to the importance of the attacks against convoys - after there has been a considerable reinforcement of the bomber group, Luftflotte 5 will understand if Naval Group North tries as far as possible to obtain a reinforcement of Luftflotte 5's forces, to make as strong as possible all forces which are vital for this task at sea.

So as to eliminate misinterpretations, Naval Group North H.Q. will see that the operational order, "Ostfront", issued by the Admiral of the Northern Waters, is altered or supplemented in those places where a misunderstanding is possible.

4.) If Naval Group North H.Q. and Luftflotte 5 have to agree that because of the over-all situation no other forces can be brought up, (although Naval Group North still has hopes that other formations of the Luftwaffe can be brought into the Norwegian area at the appropriate time), then Naval Group North considers of grave importance the ban on the use of bombers for reconnaissance purposes. Even if, under normal conditions, such operations do not take place and need not take place, Naval Group North is of the opinion that, if the situation demands it, they should be free to decide to take such a measure. Naval Group North will make a report on this point to the Naval General Staff, so as to obtain the necessary clarification of this question; this is in the interest of the combined operational tasks at sea. Naval Group North H.Q. is of the opinion that, in most cases, reconnaissance creates a basis for operations, not only for the naval forces, but for bomber formations as well. The preliminary use of bomber aircraft for reconnaissance does not necessarily in every case exclude their use as bombers later in the operations. As far as Naval Group North is concerned, the numerically limited but very valuable U-boat forces are constantly in use for reconnaissance for the Luftwaffe as well as for the Navy, even when it means their temporary withdrawal from actual battle; in the same way, a similar case for the use of bombers could be presented, if the other reconnaissance forces at hand are insufficient. Naval Group North is also of the opinion that in many cases, according to the enemy's position and defences, the necessary reconnaissance results and contact with the enemy can only be achieved with the use of more efficient bombers. What is to be done in the individual case will depend on the situation at the time. But for Naval Group North H.Q., it is important that, in order to ensure the greatest possible success in such an operation, Luftflotte 5 H.Q.'s freedom of decision for such-and-such a use of bombers should be recognised and that it should not be refused in advance because of considerations whose basis with regard to the enemy and weather conditions remains uncertain, and although the strengthening of a reconnaissance might be very necessary in the case at hand.

5.) Naval Group North H.Q. assumes that these points make the position clear; in this, it is again stressed that they are striving with all their power to ensure close cooperation in the combined operations at sea, and to make the right decision at the right time, considering the situation and the forces available. Naval Group North H.Q. is of the same opinion as Luftflotte 5; namely, that even with the same strength an Air Arm of our own could achieve no more than Luftflotte 5 is achieving now. Naval Group North H.Q.'s allusion in orders: "for lack of our own Air Arm", did not refer to the recognised and worthwhile performance of Luftflotte 5, but to the difficulties of a combined Staff as they cropped up in the previous case, and to the limitations in our own tasks.

/Naval

Naval Group North H.Q. assumes agreement in the conception that the attacks on convoys both in reconnaissance and in the later stages are a combined sea operation; and in this operation, friction can arise because two services of the Wehrmacht are participating whose operations clash, and the different conceptions of the responsibilities of each service make a combined Command difficult. However, I am convinced that as before close and understanding cooperation between Luftflotte and Group and between the subordinate commands will overcome these difficulties.

(Sgd.) Schniewind.

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