

GÖRING INTERROGATED

Captured G A F Chief Admits Air Power Was the Keystone of Victory over Germany

UNDER detailed interrogation by MIS officers of Ninth Air Force Air Prisoner Interrogation Detachment, Herrmann Göring, Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe, Reichsminister, Reichsmarschall, chief of this, that and the other council, committee, department and so forth, of the Nazi German state, proved to be a willing talker on a variety of pertinent subjects.

Some of his opinions and revelations were of only slight importance in connection with air warfare; those that have some bearing on this phase of the war in Europe are extracted for the purpose of this article. Throughout the interrogation, it is reported, Göring made every effort to establish some sort of case in his own behalf, with the result that many of his statements appeared purposely colored by a desire to further the saving of what he apparently still considers to be a favorable reputation by contrast with those of Hitler, Himmler, and others of the Nazi hierarchy. He must be considered, the report states, a very shrewd individual, a great actor, a seasoned liar, and far from being mentally deranged in any sense affecting his reasoning powers.

Separate interrogation was made of Göring's aide, a Colonel von Brauchitsch, whose replies were used to cross-check those of his chief. Generally speaking their information was, as might be expected, less complete on technical things than on organizational and policy matters. In qualification of some of Göring's statements, it must be said that a number of them are either known or suspected to be false, either through his ignorance of exact statistics or deliberate misrepresentation for the sake of egotism. This is especially true of his generalizations on GAF fighter losses.

Air Power and the War

THE ROLE of air forces in general was the subject of some comments by the prisoner. Although air power may render a decisive contribution toward winning a war, Göring thought that air power alone would not bring a great nation to its knees. He repeated the belief that "air forces cannot occupy." They can, he said, disrupt, destroy, and interfere, thus preparing the way for ground victories.

Were Göring planning a new war, he would make the enemy air power his first prime objective, completely disregarding all other targets. Only after hostile air power is destroyed, he believed, should other objectives be sought according to priorities based on the economic situation of the nation under attack.

Allied Air Power was stated by Göring to be the one irresistible trump card against Germany, followed as a second prime factor by the successful invasion of the Continent through France. Aside from all other aspects, he emphasized the devastating effect of air superiority on the morale of ground forces. To quote him directly, "The Allies owe the success of the invasion to their air forces. They prepared the invasion; they made it possible, and they carried it through." Adequate army reinforcements and replacement, he claimed, would have been possible for the Germans in Northern France and elsewhere, had it not been for the constant air attacks on communications.

Airfield Attacks in the African campaign and again in Italy were, according to Göring, the first heavy blows delivered by Allied air forces in the war. He said that the GAF was helpless against these attacks because of the refusal of the Italians to allow the Germans to adjust airbases to their own needs. When these objections were finally overcome, Göring tried to render the attacks ineffective by building what he called air force fortresses: a system of runways on either side of a main highway, connected by taxi-strips and protected by heavy flak installations. The purpose of these was to maintain a sufficient number of runways even under the heaviest carpet-bombing attacks. Three such "fortresses" were completed in Italy, and others were started in France, Holland, and Belgium. Göring claimed that this theory had been proved sound since the fortresses stood up under heavy attacks. In practice, however, they were not of much avail, since sufficient aircraft were never on hand to make full use of the scheme.

Long-Range Fighters were credited by Göring with delivering a major strategic blow to German planning, and he considered them collectively as one of the most decisive factors in the ultimate outcome of the war. The man who once boasted that no enemy bomber would ever attack Berlin "or my name is Meyer," admitted that he was stunned by the first evidence that British and US fighters as well as bombers were flying over German soil for hours at a time. He said he was convinced that deep bomber penetrations were possible only with long-range escort, and that the latter potentiality came as a complete surprise to him. Göring went so far as to say that when fighters actually appeared over Berlin for the first time, he knew that the eventual results would be "tragic."

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Allied Strategic Bombing

GÖRING claimed that the Germans realized at an early stage of our air attacks that the Allied Air Forces intended to bomb by systematic selection of related targets. Immediately after our first attack on the oil industry, they were sure that synthetic oil works would then become our first-priority target. Generally speaking, our attacks selected the right targets and did not overlook any installations the bombing of which would have ended the war sooner. Explosives factories might have received more attention, Göring thought. The priority which we put on separate targets was not always right either. He felt that the I.G. Farben plants had been comparatively spared for some particular reason.

Attacks on Airfields were generally effective, he said. It was, however, very easy to make necessary repairs within a short time. The GAF called this "the race between the shovel and the bomb."

As between airframe and engine factories, priority should definitely have been given to the latter, according to Göring. Attacks on airframe factories were effective, but concentrated attacks on engine factories would have crippled the GAF much sooner. (This, incidentally, is contrary to the opinion of Professor Messerschmitt, who was questioned on this point and claimed that there is no difference in the importance of these two types of targets.)

Attacks on Ball-bearing Plants were, according to Göring, none too effective. He offered three reasons for this: dispersal, underground factories, and above all, substitution of roller-bearings for ball-bearings.

Oil and Communication Targets: "Then came attacks on two elements, which hurt us considerably." With these words Göring described the damage done to the GAF by our attacks on synthetic oil works and communication lines.

The attacks on synthetic oil works were the most effective of all strategic bombing and the most decisive in Germany's defeat, he stated. "Without fuel, nobody can conduct a war."

The GAF schedule for aviation fuel originally provided for a production of 300,000 tons per month, and this amount would have been ample for all needs. A maximum production of 160,000 tons was attained in the summer of 1944, but average availability of aviation fuel was only about 110,000-120,000 tons per month. Constant bombing reduced the output to 15,000-20,000 tons, and as an example of the effect of this reduction Göring related that in the Russian campaign 3,000 sorties per day had been reduced to 600-800 (on exceptional days to 1,200) per day towards March and April, 1945.

Even if 90 percent of the bombs dropped on a factory like the Leuna works missed, the 10 percent which registered were sufficient to interrupt production, said the prisoner.

A concentration on oil targets, in preference to Allied policy of bombing aircraft and ball-bearing factories from January, 1944, on, would not have permitted the aircraft industry to recover sufficiently to produce enough fighters to protect oil targets in subsequent attacks. In order to minimize the effect of our attacks on oil targets, 60 heavy bombers would have had to be shot down per day. The aircraft industry could not have recovered sufficiently to produce such an excess number of fighters as to accomplish this.

"The disruption of our communication lines has done more harm to us than the destruction of our factories." Allied attacks on the German transportation system became particularly severe and most noticeable at a time when it was finally decided to build underground factories. Destruction of the transportation system prevented a contraction of industry which had previously been dispersed all over the Reich in underground factories.

A logical conclusion can be drawn from Göring's statements on strategic bombing. In order to hamper the German Air Force most, the following order of targets should have been observed: synthetic oil works, communications, aero-engine factories, airframe factories, ball-bearing factories, and airfields.

Göring emphasized that the Germans were much relieved whenever we failed to bomb the same target in close succession and allowed the breathing spell that they were praying for in order to carry out operationally vital repairs. It also gave them sufficient time to salvage and remove vital machine tools. An outstanding example in Brauchitsch's opinion was a USSTAF raid on Schweinfurt which, if it had been promptly repeated, would have had an even more crippling effect than the 60-percent damage resulting from the one attack. Both Göring and Brauchitsch considered the Allied raids on Dresden last February, when one blow followed the other in quick succession, the most deadly, most demoralizing, and therefore the most effective series of raids of the war.

Göring's key statement, a tribute to effectiveness of Allied bombing, was, "Nothing is more terrible than an attack which is made on the same target three times in a row. That really undermines the resistance of the people."

Carpet Bombing on troop concentrations was, as in the case of St. Lô, very effective. On one occasion tanks assembling for a planned attack on a grand scale were severely hit. It took them six hours to reassemble, thus rendering the intended attack impossible.

Dispersal of Industry was the first step in counteracting the damaging effect of our strategic bombing—a step which later on, as mentioned above, proved fatal because of the destruction of the German railway system.

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avored the building of underground factories at an early stage, but was frustrated at first by the opposition put up against this plan by the industry as well as by experts. Industry, he claimed, did not realize in the beginning the danger of coming Allied air attacks. Moreover, dispersal was much simpler than going underground.

Discussion on this subject gave Göring an opportunity to show how "humane" he really was. When asked how it was possible that, in a totalitarian regime, the opposition of individuals could frustrate a plan decided upon by the Führung, he answered, "I did not want to send them to a concentration camp." But he was careless enough to give himself away by saying, "After all, I needed them."

He believed that if the building of underground factories had been carried out in 1942 and 1943, instead of 1944, the GAF would have been less vulnerable. But even so, without our attacks on the railway system, the GAF would have been completely underground by the fall of 1945. Production, particularly of jet aircraft, would have been on a substantial scale. The production schedule for Kahla alone provided for the manufacture of 500 Me-262s per month (see SUMMARY No. 78, page 7).

As things turned out, when it finally was decided to follow Göring's plan, i.e., when in his words "it got too hot on the ground," it was too late, as by then the Allied ground forces started to overrun important industrial areas.

Camouflage, he claimed, was often an effective means of protection against air attacks: "You have been fooled quite nicely by our camouflage and by our dummy installations." In many cases, instead of trying to repair damaged factories, essential production continued underneath the debris, at the same time giving the illusion that operations had come to a standstill and the plant abandoned.

G A F Production and Strength

GERMAN fighter strength was greatly reduced by our bombing attacks on Focke-Wulf and other aircraft plants, Göring admitted. The attack on the Focke-Wulf plant at Bremen in April, 1943, interfered with final assembly, but it seems that the Focke-Wulf management was not too depressed about it as it gave them the excuse for not living up to a production figure which it would not have reached anyhow. Actually, difficulties in BMW 801 engine production reduced the output of aircraft even before the attack.

After the attack substantial dispersals into the interior took place. However, no single Focke-Wulf final assembly installation produced more than 200 aircraft per month.

Attacks on the fighter plants at Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt in August, 1943, and on Marienburg in October, 1943, were most successful. However, according to Göring the plant at Regensburg was amazingly soon reestablished so that it was working again at full capacity in the month following.

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According to Göring, Allied bombing succeeded in reducing the German fighter production decidedly from February and March, 1944, on; production dropped from 1,200 in January to 450 in February.

After the formation of *Jägerstab* in March, (SUMMARY No. 53, page 7), by emphasis on young officers like Galland and others, by further dispersal of installation, and by going underground, production began to increase again to such an extent that by the end of 1944 an average monthly production of 2,000 Me-109s and FW-190s was claimed. This figure was understood to include all aircraft repaired in factories but not those handled on airfields.

The *Jägerstab* caused a pool of about 1,000 experienced pilots to be kept in readiness for the expected invasion. After the invasion, only 400-500 serviceable aircraft were left out of this number.

Fighter Losses: Göring claimed that the GAF did not pre-calculate fighter losses at a fixed rate. Losses depended too much on the circumstances, on the quality of the pilots. The greater the number of inexperienced pilots, the greater were the losses. Generally speaking, losses increased four and five times after introduction of our fighter escort.

The ratio of pilots to aircraft lost was approximately one to five, Göring reported, some pilots bailing out "two or three times a day." An important reason for loss of aircraft was their short range. "A fighter pilot wants to sleep in his own bed." Instead, therefore, of landing at the nearest airfield after completion of their mission, fighter pilots were attempting to reach their home base and had to bail out en route due to lack of fuel. Where four aircraft were lost in combat, 40 aircraft might crash on the way home.

Allied claims with regard to German aircraft losses were said by Göring to have usually been much exaggerated; according to him, we often claim about three times the actual losses.

Day of the greatest losses in fighter pilots was January, 1945, when Göring said approximately 1,000 pilots were lost. On other days, the highest losses in the defense of the Reich were approximately 800 aircraft, mostly destroyed on the ground, with a number of pilots lost accordingly small. Brauchitsch added that their losses in the air during 1945 were about three to our one.

The shift from production of offensive aircraft to defensive aircraft was, according to Göring, caused by losses in the Battle of Britain, but rather due to the beginning of the Russian campaign in June, 1941. This may be explained by the fact that the Russian campaign called for a large number of fighters. The small bomber requirements were due to the lack of concentrated targets in Russia.

(This is the first of two articles on the interrogations of Göring. The other will be published in a later issue of the SUMMARY.)

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According to Göring, Allied bombing succeeded in reducing the German fighter production decisively from February and March, 1944, on; fighter production dropped from 1,200 in January to 400 or 500 in February.

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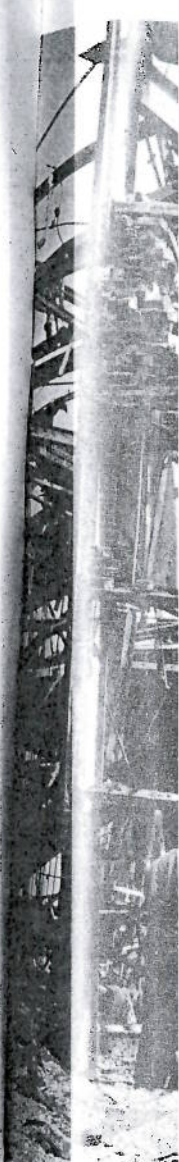
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