

UNCLASSIFIED

NDE/r1j

(Copy #

of 61)

6 July 1945

1565

copy - Info P/W

DECLASSIFIED

JCS Memo

17 Jan 1973

By authority A.O. of S., G-2

Date 6 JULY 45 (JLC)

Initials

REPORT FROM CAPTURED PERSONNEL AND MATERIAL BRANCH
MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIVISION, U. S. WAR DEPARTMENT

US HRA 170-2881

Information from a General der Flieger
(Lt. Gen. of the Air Forces) taken
prisoner on the high seas 15 May 1945.
At that time the P/W was head of a German
Air Mission on its way by submarine to
Japan. Obtained in the U.S. 25 June 1945.
Believed reliable.

KESSLER

P.R.C.

A GERMAN GENERAL VIEWS THE EUROPEAN WAR

- I. PREAMBLE.
- II. LACK OF A GERMAN PLAN OF CONQUEST.
- III. RUSSO-GERMAN PACT OF AUGUST 1939.
- IV. GERMAN ATTITUDE TOWARD SPAIN AND GIBRALTAR.
- V. ESTIMATE OF RUSSIAN WAR POTENTIAL 1940-41.
- VI. THE GERMAN-RUSSIAN WAR.
- VII. MEDITERRANEAN AND AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS.
- VIII. GERMAN ESTIMATE OF AMERICAN WAR POTENTIAL 1941.
- IX. VIEWS ON AIR WARFARE.
- X. REASONS FOR GERMANY'S DEFEAT.

I. PREAMBLE:

A Lieutenant General of the German Air Force has been asked to shed the light of his personal opinion and experience upon several controversial episodes in the European War. Although the General concerned served the changing regimes in Germany with continuing loyalty from 1914 until 15 May 1945, the remarks which follow are accompanied by considerable objectivity and frankness. It should be remembered, however, that this report in its entirety is only a reflection of the P/W's personal opinion.

II. LACK OF A GERMAN PLAN OF CONQUEST:

To P/W's knowledge there was no pre-conceived strategic plan for expanding the Reich's control over Eastern Europe. Not even the absorption of Austria was planned beforehand. The order to prepare for entering Austria came as a complete surprise. (P/W was chief of the General Staff of Luftkreis IV, Muenster, which was used in the operations; thus, if any prior plan had existed, he would have been informed.) P/W is convinced that this idea was conceived by Hitler only after he had heard of the proposed plebiscite in Austria. Hitler was reported to have been in high fury as he considered himself to have been cheated by Schuschnigg, with whom he thought he had reached complete agreement. As P/W learned from the Austrians themselves, the procedure of voting was to be such that the plebiscite itself could never be regarded as being free.

00129359

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

III. RUSSO-GERMAN PACT OF AUGUST 1939:

As Commodore of KG I Hindenburg at that time, P/W had no intimate knowledge of the military political agreement with Russia. From all he has learned, the military agreement was subsequent to August 1939. There must have been negotiations going on during the Polish campaign, because the Germans suddenly had to withdraw westward. About the occupation of the Baltic states by Soviet forces P/W can say nothing. There can be no doubt that Hitler had no wish to settle the Polish question peacefully. He desired simply to persuade the German people and the outside world that he had done his utmost to reach a peaceful solution. Further evidence that war was deliberately intended by Hitler might be gathered from the most peculiar way in which the Polish and British ambassadors were informed of the German ultimatum. Gen. Obst. Grauert told P/W in 1940 that Ribbentrop had read the ultimatum very hurriedly to the Polish ambassador and Henderson respectively; Grauert intimated that they were not given the copies and maintained that the expiration time of the ultimatum was calculated so as to make it impossible for a reply to be prepared in time.

Educated to believe with Clausewitz that "war is the continuation of foreign policy with other means", German officers were astonished by the discrepancy between the demands of the ultimatum and the much larger final frontiers. The restoration of the boundaries of 1914 was the utmost that Germans had expected or hoped for. But then, Clausewitz was not favored by the Nazi leaders, if they had read him at all; they believed him obsolete and surpassed by the tenets set down by Ludendorff in "Totaler Krieg", where he maintains that "politics is the handmaiden of war".

IV. GERMAN ATTITUDE TOWARD SPAIN AND GIBRALTAR:

In 1942 an occupation of Spain was not contemplated except in the event of an Allied landing there. The plan was considered impractical then for the same reasons for which it had been rejected in 1941, when it had been contemplated. These reasons were: the impossibility of supplying the Spanish people with grain in the amount requested by Franco in 1940 and the difficulty of defending the vastly increased coastline in view of the war in the East.

P/W had urged closing of Gibraltar and Suez immediately after the conclusion of the French campaign and had stressed to Jeschonek and von Waldau (Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, and Chief of the Operations Staff of the Luftwaffe, respectively) that, to put the British octopus out of action, it might be better to cut off his arms than to aim at his head; that, to establish a blockade-proof Europe, you had to attack North Africa; that Germany could thereby not only deprive Britain of the Near Eastern oil, but make use of it herself; then the British forces in the Mediterranean would have to surrender or scuttle. P/W learned in July 1940 that the Spanish were frantic for the restoration of Gibraltar and couldn't understand Germany's apparent unwillingness to realize the value of the Strait and to permit the Spanish to begin action. At that time the question of supplying grain had not as yet been raised.

The whole scheme was so obvious that it was regarded as the logical next step by officers who discussed the matter. P/W has been unable to find a convincing answer to this puzzle, especially in view of the fact that the scheme had been discussed by him with Goering in September 1939. At that time he had questioned Italy's willingness to join in a war arising from the Czechoslovakian issue. P/W reported that

UNCLASSIFIED

III. RUSSO-GERMAN PACT OF AUGUST 1939.

UNCLASSIFIED

GERMAN ATTITUDE TOWARD SPAIN AND GIBRALTAR (Cont'd):

The only conceivable answer is that Hitler believed, as he did, after the French campaign, that the war was over. In this he was joined by Ribbentrop, who had sent a cable to that effect to Tokyo. Jeschonck also shared this view, and when England did not give in at once, he is reported to have said, "England, my Fuehrer, that trifle can be handled by the Luftwaffe alone. One or two attacks will be enough."

P/W doubts that the German General Staff underestimated Russia's political and military power, although they might not have emphasized their views sufficiently. They had always been proved wrong in judging the consequences of Hitler's political adventures, and they had overestimated the length of the Polish and especially the French campaign. Thus, the General Staff might have been induced to believe against their inner convictions that Hitler would be right again with regard to Russia. Hitler was convinced that Russia would collapse within four weeks and that the government would be overthrown as a result of the military defeats. The General Staff came to believe that the war would be over by the fall of 1941. The intrinsic value of the Russian forces, and particularly of the infantry, was judged on the basis of what had been seen of these forces in the Polish campaign and of the Russian showing in the Finnish war.

VI. THE GERMAN-RUSSIAN WAR:

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

1565 (P. 5)

GERMAN ESTIMATE OF AMERICAN WAR POTENTIAL, 1941 (Cont'd):

been. Hitler ridiculed all estimates and disposed of the idea that any American troops would ever invade Europe by saying that there would not be enough shipping to carry them over.

IX. VIEWS ON AIR WARFARE:

The danger from bombing had become apparent as early as 1941, and to counter it seemed indispensable to everybody except Goering and Hitler. As both were governed by destructive passion rather than conservationist feeling, aerial defense was neglected in favor of retaliation bombing. But even there they failed as even the He 177 turned out to be faulty in construction; a series of about 2,000 had been built, of which only about 50 were ever flown against the enemy after 18 months had been wasted in a vain attempt to improve them. In 1944 the Me 262 might have checked Allied aerial bombardment if the Fuehrer had not ordered that it be converted into a bomber after it had been completed as an interceptor. In 1942, on first seeing the Me 262, he had asked whether it was able to carry bombs also. Messerschmidt answering in the affirmative, he had ordered that a certain percentage be converted into bombers. Later in 1943 he came to believe that he had been deceived as to the number of Me 262's that had been so converted, and, in a frantic fury, he ordered that all those planes be converted, threatening that he would with his own hands tear the guns out of every 262 that he could find and have the responsible officers court martialed.

Opinion differed in Germany as to the most effective use of the air arm in warfare. Before war broke out the most favored theory was that the air arm should be free and not tied to the army, but when war did break out, closest cooperation with the army was established. P/W's opinions on this subject are divided into 5 periods, Poland, French campaign, summer of 1942, winter of 1944-1945, and the present time.

As to Poland, P/W felt that as soon as the enemy's air arm had been crushed or weakened to such a degree that it could not seriously interfere with German aerial activity, German aircraft would have to cooperate with the Army. In the special case of Poland, of course, Germany was in a position to accomplish both strategic and tactical purposes at the same time. Cooperation with the Army may often involve the danger, of course, that the air arm is used for tasks which are completely unnatural to it. Thus, in the Polish campaign the Army once requested the air force to bomb enemy armored units which had broken through the lines in the area of Kolc-Kutno; at that time, having no adequate weapons for this special task, such a demand did not match the nature of aircraft. It was different with strongholds that could be put out of action by dive bombers, but as a rule the most successful help was given the Army in the destruction of communication lines, especially rail junctions. P/W disagreed, incidentally, with the use of the air force against main roads which were empty at the time but were potentially useful to the enemy; in this case, furthermore, the roads were too far away to have any bearing on the operations. It was also a mistake, in his opinion, to bomb enemy aircraft plants, since their output could not possibly affect the activity of the enemy air arm any longer in view of the obvious outcome of the war.

In the French campaign P/W was surprised by the effect of tactical dive bombing on troop morale; entire armored regiments would surrender at the first sign of dive bombing. Since the shortness of the French campaign could not be foreseen, the bombing of aircraft plants in the first stages of it could not be regarded as a mistake. A major mistake

UNCLASSIFIED

1565 (P. 7)

1565 (P. 6)

UNCLASSIFIED

VIEWS ON AIR WARFARE (Cont'd):

was made at Dunkirk, where Guderian wanted to use his armored forces to cut off the British; Hitler, however, wanted to avoid serious losses to the Army and assigned the task instead to the Luftwaffe alone; subsequently the weather turned very bad during three crucial days, and, because instruments like the Rotterdam Geraet were unknown at the time, air force operations became ineffective. After the fall of France, the main part of the air force should have been used in an African campaign. Barring that, it should have concentrated on sinking ships off the English coast, rather than attacking English cities. (That shipping rather than cities was England's Achilles heel could never be made understandable to the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, and especially Goering); such strategy would have resulted in crushing the RAF faster with smaller losses to Germany for the following reasons: (1) fighter control off shore would be almost completely lacking; (2) downed English pilots would, for the most part, have been a total loss, whereas, in fighting over their own territory, they succeeded as a rule in parachuting and returning to service. German personnel was lost anyway when shot down over English territory.

In the summer of 1942 the Luftwaffe should have abstained from all attacks on England, as it had become clear that the losses were so great that they could not be replaced; for example, one of the bomber wings which P/W commanded and which he had to lend at various intervals for special missions over England suffered over 400% casualties within six months (February to August). Instead, the fighter strength in France should have been increased, even at the expense of the Eastern Front. The greatest possible support should have been given to the Rommel forces in Africa; this leaves the question of oil supply unconsidered, however. At first glance it might have been profitable to attack shipping in the East Atlantic and off the Spanish coast; within six weeks, from April to June, P/W spotted about 4 million tons of shipping in convoys going south and north through this area, each convoy being in bombing range for at least four and sometimes five days; bombing would have been only a temporary expedient, however, as the convoys would have been shifted farther west and eventually out of range.

In the winter of 1944-45 the most decisive acts of Allied aviation were the destruction of communications and tactical support of the troops. If such use had been made of aviation in the summer of 1944, the war would have been over that fall.

To sum up, the decisive value of the air arm does not lie in its ability to wage a separate aerial war. Fundamentally the air arm should be used as a strategic reserve for both Army and Navy, to be used at critical moments as a decisive weapon. This does not preclude that the air arm should be used independently, provided that its operations are within the framework of the general plan and contribute at least indirectly to the operations of the other armed forces. The danger of a separate aerial war is greatest, naturally, when the air force is an independent element in the armed forces; this might result in having three separate wars, on land, at sea, and in the air, proceeding along parallel lines but never meeting at a single point; this would be the same as a coalition war, with all its weaknesses. P/W believes in a separate air arm (in 1923 he wrote an article to the contrary which was used soon afterwards in the deliberations of the American Congress; he changed his opinions later while working on aviation in the German Navy in the late twenties), but only on the condition that there be a Supreme Command which would, for example, do much of the staff work that is now being done in the separate arms.

UNCLASSIFIED

was made at Dunkirk, where Guderian wanted to use his armored forces to out off the British; Hitler, however, wanted to avoid serious losses to the Army and assigned the task instead to the Luftwaffe alone; subsequently the weather turned very bad during three crucial days, and because instruments like the Rotterdam Gortzel were inaccurate, the air force operations were hindered.

VIEWS ON AIR WARFARE (Cont'd):

1565 (P. 6)

1565 (P. 7)

UNCLASSIFIED

X. REASONS FOR GERMANY'S DEFEAT:

The critical points in Germany's defeat P/W believes to be the following:

1. Hitler's basic assumption that he could have a free hand in Eastern Europe without interference by France and England led to disaster, as it was certain that the U.S. also would enter the war if England were in danger.
2. Failure to close the Mediterranean at Gibraltar and Suez in 1940. This would have brought the whole Mediterranean basin, the rest of Europe, and Turkey under German domination without military operations or the need of occupation. Furthermore, it would have cut England's important life line. In this connection should be considered the failure to exchange Italy for France as an ally, a step which was possible at that time.
3. Failure to take proper advantage of German military success in Russia in 1941 by creation of a Russian anti-Soviet government and change to purely defensive warfare during the winter. This applies for the year 1942 also.
4. America's entry into the war.
5. Failure of the Stalingrad offensive. This point and No. (3) are closely connected.
6. Allied invasion of Italy and Italy's dropping out of the war.
7. Allied invasion of France.

The major factors which affected Germany's defeat were:

1. Inability to conciliate conquered nations.
2. The OKW was only a figurehead, not a de facto supreme command.
3. The military incompetence of Hitler and Goering as chiefs of the Army and Air Force, the two decisive branches of the armed forces. Hitler's constant interference in strategy, tactics, and armaments. Raeder's failure to acquaint Hitler with the importance of maritime questions, because of his own ignorance and cowardice.
4. Failure to get rid of Hitler and the Nazi group when it had been amply proved that their military direction was utterly irresponsible and would end in disaster.

For the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2:

NOTE: For distribution see P. 8

P. E. Peabody
P. E. PEABODY,
Brigadier General, GSC,
Chief, Military Intelligence
Service.

UNCLASSIFIED