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U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY.

APO 413

Interview No. 7

Subject: Mr. Seiler, Chairman of
the Board of Messerschmitt
Company.

Interviewed by: Brig. Gen. Sorensen
Colonel G.R. Perera
Major Holtzerman

Date of Interview: 16 May 1945.

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MEMORANDUM for the Chairman, U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey.

SUBJECT: Interview with Mr. Seiler, Chairman of the Board of the Messerschmitt Company.

I. Time and Place of Interview.

Mr. Seiler was interviewed at Lindau, Germany, by Brig. Gen. Sorenson, Col. Perera, and Maj. Holtzermann on 16 May 1945. At the time, Mr. Seiler was in French custody and the meeting was arranged for and attended by a French representative, Lieutenant Simone. The interview was purely preliminary in nature as arrangements were under way to remove Mr. Seiler to U.S.S.B.S. custody at Oberammergau for a thorough examination.

II. Technical Drawings.

A set of Messerschmitt 262 drawings had been secreted by Mr. Seiler in the collar of his hunting lodge. The local French authorities were informed of this fact by a Flemish servant girl and the entire set of documents had been removed and forwarded to the French authorities at Lindau. Lt. Simone stated that the drawings had been sent directly to Paris. Mr. Seiler stated that these drawings formed a complete set and were of the highest importance to the technical aspects of Messerschmitt development.

III. General.

The Messerschmitt 262 could have been made ready for serious production by the spring of 1944. A prototype was flown by General Galland in May 1943 and he expressed himself as highly satisfied with its performance. According to Mr. Seiler, General Milch, who was then General Luftzeugmeister, agreed to putting the aircraft into large-scale production. This required additional materials and manpower. Neither the materials nor the manpower, however, were received in sufficient quantities. The program required constantly increasing manpower reaching a peak of 4,000,000 by March 1944; at that time, only 30 per cent of the necessary manpower had been supplied.

Mr. Seiler felt that General Milch was largely responsible for the troubles with the ME 262 program. He claimed that Milch had had a personal animosity for Messerschmitt since 1931 when, as head of the Lufthansa, he cancelled contracts for a ME transport because of an accident. Milch preferred the DO 325 and the FW 190 to the ME 262.

A production rate of 20 to 30 ME 262's a month was reached in the spring of 1944. Between October and December, the rate was between 150 and 250. In all, some 1400 were produced.

In June 1944, Hitler ordered that the ME 262 be converted from a fighter to a bomber. A bomber to be used in direct support of ground forces was required to meet the invasion and Milch and Goering told Hitler that the ME 262 would be suitable. Mr. Seiler doubted that this resulted in any substantial loss of production.

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Interview with Mr. ~~Seiler~~

Mr. Seiler could never understand why the 262 was not used to a greater extent by the Luftwaffe. Late in 1944, at a time when the Company had delivered over 650 machines, the Luftwaffe only had 40 operational in combat. He thought that perhaps 250 were non-operational for lack of proper servicing and that failure to provide an adequate pilot training program might be a contributing cause. Nevertheless, he could not understand the discrepancy between production figures and L.W. strength. Accordingly, he complained twice to Goebbels about it. When Sauer demanded that the workers work 16 hours a day, Mr. Seiler told him that there was no sense in such a demand at a time when the workers were asking, "Where are our machines?"

The Luftwaffe erred in not changing its tactics to fit the capabilities of new aircraft. Messerschmitt officials insisted to General Molders, Director of Tactics, that tactics should be changed with each new machine, but no attempt was made to do this with the ME 262. General Peltz, with whom Mr. Seiler conversed in November 1943, was the only person who had given consideration to the effect of increased fighter speed on tactics to be used against bomber formations.

The Luftwaffe lacked competent leadership. No great effort was made to increase aircraft production after the Battle of Britain and, as late as 1943, the Chief of the Air Staff, General Jeschonnek, was satisfied with a monthly production of 250 fighters. At that time, the Messerschmitt people were arguing for 2000. Lt. Gen. Junck, of whom Mr. Seiler thought highly, had advocated increased fighter production as early as 1940, but Goering had said to him, "I must test your pulse to see if you are all right physically--it seems you have lost your senses."

Air attack on the Messerschmitt plants did not reduce production substantially for any extended period. In 1943, the Company's important machine tools were concentrated in some six plants and their destruction would have had serious consequences. Out attacks, however, while they damaged buildings, did not do widespread damage to important tools.

GUIDO R. PERERA
Colonel, Air Corps

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