VER

e produc-
yed boiler
r left was
warehouse
right was
roducts as
workers'
times by
ve results

DEFEAT THROUGH AIR POWER

Prof. Messerschmitt Provides His Version of Why the Germans Failed

THE GENERAL vagueness of many of Göring's statements about the German aircraft industry (*page* 12) makes a report on the interrogation of Professor Willi Messerschmitt, one of the Reich's leading plane producers, of especial interest.

Messerschmitt, interviewed by officers of the US Strategic Bombing Survey, provided considerable data and numerous sidelights on the development and production of planes for the Luftwaffe. He had a good deal to say about the mistakes of the higher-ups in the German Air Ministry, and about his own good judgment all along the line, and it should be remembered that he was not in particularly good standing with Göring, among others, by the end of the war. This may perhaps account for his attitude.

On political matters, Messerschmitt appears quite uninformed, and his statements are open to considerable question.

General Problems : Professor Messerschmitt was strongly of the opinion that the errors of the German Air Ministry had prevented the aircraft industry from obtaining the necessary workers, machine tools, and material to implement the great fighter aircraft production fixed by the Jägerstab in February, 1944. The Air Ministry had promised Messerschmitt the necessary material, workers, and tools, but neither the workers nor the tools was furnished. This was particularly true of jigs and jig-makers. The trouble lay not in lack of such materials but in the method of their allocation to industry. Bad organization and faulty leadership, for which Messerschmitt held General Milch and Göring both personally responsible, was the cause of the difficulty. Milch, incidentally, was crowded out of the picture by the fall of 1944.

Transportation, which was a very serious problem after September, 1944, was not a large factor prior to that time. In Professor Messerschmitt's opinion, however, had our troops not crossed the Rhine in April of 1945, the Messerschmitt Company could still have managed to achieve the program figure.

The Messerschmitt Company suffered from no lack of raw materials or components until at least the second half of 1944. After the heavy attacks on the Ruhr, and particularly after the heavy attacks on transportation in the second half of 1944, shortages of sheet metal and of components arose. A shortage of nuts and bolts occurred early in 1945, and during that year there was also trouble with electrical instruments. At no time, however, did Messerschmitt suffer from a lack of ball bearings or of other components. Propellers were never a problem. Undercarriages were obtained in satisfactory quantities despite our attacks on the Opel plant at Russelheim, which was the largest source of supply.

The Luftwaffe suffered from deficient leadership, in Messerschmitt's opinion. One of its principal defects was caused by the fact that young pilots who had distinguished themselves in combat had been placed in positions of great responsibility. At least so far as production problems were concerned, these men were largely incompetent. In Germany, a front-line fighter had been made the hero and the production men had been considered only as mechanics.

German Production Errors : One of the early strategic mistakes was the failure to construct a fleet of long-range bombers to supplement submarine warfare in the Atlantic and thereby to deny the United States the ability to set up an operating air force within range of German industrial centers. In March of 1941, Messerschmitt, on his own initiative, commenced and undertook the design of a four-engine long-range heavy bomber known as the Me-264 (SUMMARY NO. 10, *page* 14). He thought of this aircraft as an essential adjunct to U-boat warfare. During the course of the Balkan campaign, he conferred with Göring on the subject and obtained his approval to the undertaking. General Milch evidenced no interest. The aircraft was built to carry seven tons of bombs over an operating range of 2,500 miles at a speed of 370 m.p.h. It was powered by four Jumo 213 or BMW 801 engines. The first aircraft of this type was flown in December, 1942, but nothing further came of the project.

Professor Messerschmitt believes that Göring's and Milch's failure to proceed with quantity production was due to the failure of Air Ministry technicians to advise them as to the potentialities of the aircraft. He believes that a production of 30 to 40 per month could have been achieved by the middle of 1943, when it was too late for a construction program to bear strategic results. It is probable that the reason for the interest evidenced in the Me-264 at the end of 1943 was the fact that the Navy then wished to prepare for extensive U-boat warfare. Although Messerschmitt did not know Admiral Dönitz, he understood that Dönitz obtained his advice as to aircraft from the Air Ministry. The Air Ministry was then messed up in the production of some 35 types of aircraft and could not determine which type of production should be curtailed in order to produce four-engine bombers.

One of the reasons for the failure to proceed with the Me-264 may have been the decision taken by the Air Ministry to concentrate on the production of the

He-177. This aircraft was never a success. The engines were continually catching fire and this resulted in explosions which destroyed the entire aircraft.

Another serious error was the failure to build an adequate fighter force for the defence of Germany. Professor Messerschmitt believed, from the day that Germany invaded Poland, that the US would enter the war, and was much disturbed by the published figures of our aircraft production, which he took seriously despite that fact that most people in Germany did not. During 1942, he stated to the Air Ministry, to Milch and to Göring, both orally and in writing, that Allied air attack would become very serious and that Germany should concentrate on the production of large quantities of fighters. He argued for the production of the Me-262 fighter, which he felt was better than anything we had and which was suited to combat our daylight precision raids. These raids were the most damaging to German industrial production. The unanimous reaction, except for General Udet, was that Messerschnitt was merely trying to exploit the virtues of his own aircraft. Udet had serious difficulties with Milch and Göring and found himself blamed for many things for which he was not responsible ; he finally committed suicide in November, 1941.

In June, 1943, Professor Messerschmitt took the matter up personally with Hitler. He was then disturbed about the program for production of V-weapons. Messerschmitt explained to Hitler that, in his opinion, unless a production of 80,000 to 100,000 V-weapons per month could be achieved, the entire program should be scrapped. He argued that 50 percent of the V-weapons would be ineffective. Messerschmitt felt that it would be possible for Germany to build 100,000 V-weapons a month when the US was capable of building 4,000,000 automobiles a year. He urged upon Hitler that one thing or the other should be done ; either V-weapons should be produced in overwhelming quantities or everything should be done to build up the Luftwaffe. In Messerschmitt's personal opinion, if the Luftwaffe were not strengthened the war would be lost.

During the first part of this meeting Colonel von Below, the adjutant of the Luftwaffe, was present and, during the last part of the meeting, Speer came in. Neither von Below nor Speer made any comment but Hitler turned to von Below and instructed him to see that aircraft production was increased. Professor Messerschmitt handed Hitler a copy of a letter he had written to General Milch during 1942, proposing that the production of aircraft be improved by concentration on fewer and better types. At the time of the meeting, Hitler, who seemed impressed, stated to Messerschmitt that, if Berlin were to be attacked as Hamburg had been, the result would be that he might have to take steps to " liquidate the war." In answer to questions, Professor Messerschmitt thought that the Hamburg attack had neither seriously affected high productive war plants nor civilian morale ; doubtless Hitler overestimated the effects of the attack at the time.

The Hitler meeting was the direct outgrowth of a conference held by Messerschmitt with Dr. Sauer, Speer's No. 1 assistant, during the early part of June, 1943. Messerschmitt told Sauer that, in view of the failure of the Air Ministry to obtain better results, the Speer Ministry had better take charge of aircraft production. Sauer replied that it was not worthwhile worrying too much about aircraft production as the war would be won by other means. He did not explain what the other means were.

As a result of his insistence upon increased aircraft production in many Air Ministry meetings, as well as at the Hitler conference, several of Messerschmitt's friends warned him to be careful or he might be sent to a concentration camp.

The Allied Bomber Offensive : Professor Messerschmitt had long feared attack on German industry and thought, from the outset, that the combined bomber offensive attacks were a very serious matter for Germany. The first attack on his company was on the plant at Weiner Neustadt and was made with very few aircraft ; the results obtained were an ominous indication of future potentialities. Professor Messerschmitt had always taken US production figures seriously, although many others in Germany had refused to do so. He was aware, therefore, of the increasing weight which could be thrown into the attack on German industrial targets and cities.

The first raids upon the Messerschmitt plans were not so accurate as later ones, he said. The company did not suffer more than a 30 or 40 percent loss of production for a period of one month after the 1943 attacks on Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt. High explosive bombs were used and the machine tools at these plants were not seriously damaged either by high explosives or by fire. It was discovered that even though the buildings collapsed on machine tools, relatively little damage was done. Efficient fire fighting in one later instance permitted a plant to cope with 1,000 incendiary bombs without great damage from fire. This was in part because there was little or no wood construction or other inflammable material in the plants. The workers were given additional rations, tobaccos, liquors, and food as a reward for clearing up debris and restoring production and the Army furnished troops in addition. No large numbers of troops were required. As soon as the machines had been cleared up, a tarpaulin was stretched over the rafters and protection was reestablished.

The February, 1944, attacks caused a deduction of 50 percent in the company's production for a period of one month, and production had been restored to normal at the end of that time. A persistent and heavy attack on the Messerschmitt aircraft plants in the summer of 1943 would have had a far greater effect than the series of raids which were in fact

made against the company's plants in 1943 and 1944. In the summer of 1943, the Messerschmitt Company had not dispersed and had the company's machine tools at Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt been severely damaged, it would have taken a considerable time to get back into production. In Professor Messerschmitt's opinion, this would have required one year at the minimum.

Dispersal of aircraft production is most inefficient and Professor Messerschmitt estimates that Germany's potential production in this field had been cut by as much as 50 percent. Underground plants are the best form of safeguard against air attack. Messerschmitt sought to place his plants underground in 1935 but got no support from the government because of the expense involved and because of overconfidence as to the Luftwaffe. Underground dispersal, generally, however, would have progressed throughout Germany to a point where, within the next six months, Germany might have warded off the worst effects of air attack.

Our combined bomber offensive attacks on oil were extremely successful and were the principal cause of Germany's collapse, he feels. A lack of gasoline was first noticed after Stalingrad. During this phase of the Russian campaign, the demand for oil for transport purposes was enormous and great stores were lost. After D-Day, stocks were lost in France as well as in Russia, and in the Balkans. By Fall of 1944, the situation was extremely serious.

Jet Aircraft : The Me-163, which utilized the rocket principle, was of interest only as an experiment. Work had been done on this aircraft prior to the war. Its flight duration, which Messerschmitt said was 10 minutes, was too short for operational purposes. It had tremendous speed and had achieved as high as 625 m.p.h. at level flight, both at altitude and near the ground. The stability of the aircraft, however, was not great enough for its speed.

The Me-262 had a maximum speed of 560 m.p.h. at level flight, both at altitude and near the ground. Its normal speed was approximately 500 m.p.h. The individual engines supplied for this aircraft varied markedly in efficiency. Due to difficulties with workmen and machines the airframes were inferior. Professor Messerschmitt was working on a specially built Me-262 with which he expected to achieve a speed of 575 m.p.h. The aircraft was capable of two hours flight at 27,000 feet without belly tanks.

Professor Messerschmitt believed that conventional engines and propellers were satisfactory for designs involving speeds up to 500 m.p.h. Beyond that and until the speed of sound had been achieved, he believed a turbo-jet was the best type. For speeds in excess of sound, he had no definite opinion.

Willi's War History : Professor Messerschmitt did not feel that Britain's fighters outclassed German fighters during the Battle of Britain. The plan for the Battle of Britain was first to knock out the RAF and then to make out a landing.

On 10 November, 1940, Professor Messerschmitt completed the drawings for a glider capable of carrying a 21 ton tank, which was then Germany's heaviest model. This glider, known as the Me-321, was to be towed by three Me-110s and was to be assisted in its takeoff by eight rockets, four under each wing. On 7 November, 1940, Messerschmitt saw Hitler and proposed to him that construction of these gliders be undertaken. He stated that he did not wish to take the matter up through the Air Ministry but preferred to negotiate directly with Todt. Hitler agreed. Messerschmitt saw Todt in Stuttgart two days later and enlisted his help in obtaining the necessary steel and fabrics. The first glider was ready for flight 28 February, 1941, and proved successful. By June, 1941, 200 were completed. They were eventually used in the Russian campaign, specifically in occupying the island of Osel.

Professor Messerschmit believed that the reason that no attempt was made to invade England was that Germany was afraid that Russia would seize the opportunity to stab her in the back. In this connection, he insisted that he had been told in 1941 by Dr. Todt that Germany had information that Russia had intended to attack her. It was therefore considered necessary for Germany to attack first to obtain the advantage of surprise. He reported having heard that Russia had notified Germany that she demanded Finland, the Baltic States, half of Poland. Rumania, Bulgaria, European Turkey, and the Dardanelles.

German Intelligence was unaware of the degree of Russian armament. Russia had better tanks and artillery.

Hess's flight to England was for the purpose of making peace. Hess saw the danger of war on two fronts and apparently had concluded that war with Russia was inevitable. An early peace with England was therefore essential. Professor Messerschmitt saw the letter that Hess left for Hitler in which he set forth his views and stated that he was willing to give his life to the cause of making peace with England.

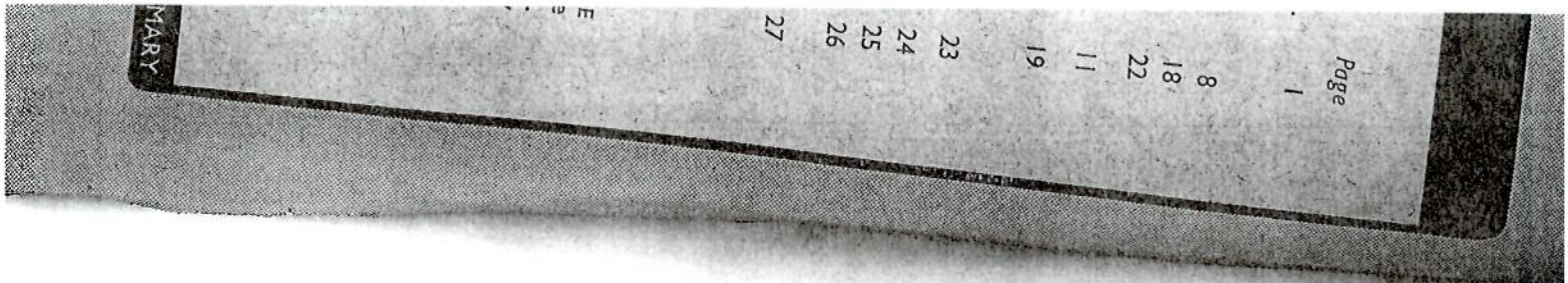
Professor Messerschmitt was instrumental in Hess's escape although he did not know of the nature of his trip or his destination. He had known Hess previously and, one day, Hess turned up at his plant and asked to be given instruction in flying the Me-110. Messerschmitt knew that Hess had done some previous flying and he therefore complied. Hess practiced for about three days and then took off on his flight.

No attempt was made after the Battle of Britain to increase the number or effectiveness of German aircraft. This was a great mistake, Messerschmitt thought, as the Luftwaffe had been a decisive weapon in all other campaigns. He could not understand why no such action had been taken. He always claimed that the war would be won by the nation which could control the air over its own territory and over the battlefield.

UNITED STATES STRATEGIC AIR FORCES IN EUROPE

AIR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY No. 82

25 June, 1945



IRIS Public Record

Key Information

Main: UNITED STATES STRATEGIC AIR FORCES IN EUROPE

Rcvd:		Rel	1987/08/11
Indexer ID:	35	Entered Date:	
QC ID:		QC'd Date::	
Scanner ID:		Scanned Date:	
Acc ID		Acc Date:	

Document Type:
Call Number: **519.607A**
IRIS Number: **00217347**
Accessions Notes:
Old Accession Nbr: **4555-55**
Title:
Beginning Date:
End Date:
Publication Date: **1945/06/25**
Classification ***UNCLAS***
Media Roll #: **6752** First Frame: **918** Last Frame: **949** Linear Feet: **0**
Old MFlm Roll # **A-5724** Audio Rec:
NUMPAGE **0**
Title Extensions:
Abstract INCLUDES NOTICE OF DISCONTINUANCE OF PUBLICATION.
Descriptive Notes:
Title Added Entries AIR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY NO. 82
Author:
Subject:
Major Command:
Doc Link:

Administrative Markings

No Administrative Markings Listed
Security Review Information: