

The objections which weighed most heavily came from Hitler's intimate circle of associates. Hermann Goering, for example, expressed his misgivings about a war against the Soviet Union in the most explicit terms. He realized that if it proved to be unfeasible to crush the British in the air over Britain, the only other possibility would be to strike a blow at the most vulnerable points of British supremacy, Gibraltar and Suez. And, in 1940, Great Britain's position in the Mediterranean was highly vulnerable! Likewise, despite the fact that in 1942 Field Marshal Erwin Rommel would stumble into a hornets' nest at El Alamein, Germany in 1940, and perhaps even in 1941, could have achieved a full victory in North Africa and the Near East at a relatively low risk.

But Goering was unable to persuade Hitler to accept his views. Hitler had hesitated far too long in the vain hope that he could make peace with Britain, and was reluctant to deal either with maritime problems or extra-Continental entanglements, being apparently unable to break free from the impressions acquired during his World War I service at the front, an experience that consisted solely of participation in ground operations.

Just when he took the Reichsmarschall into his confidence concerning the matter of the Soviet Union is not clear,<sup>86\*</sup> but as early as 1939 Hitler had become anxious about Soviet aggressiveness, and had expressed his fears to Goering that Russia intended to usurp Germany's position in the North and South and to make the Reich dependent upon the Soviet Union for oil. On 31 July 1940 Hitler informed the Commander in Chief of the German Army of his intention to attack Russia, and the German Armed Forces soon undertook various studies on the Soviet Union. Later that year Hitler commented to Goering that Britain, though isolated, showed no sign of willingness to surrender, and thought it possible that Churchill might have made some sort of an agreement with the Soviet Union. It was already clear by the end of 1940 that the United States was intensifying its

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\*Editor's Note: Goering had already taken steps to build up the Luftwaffe in the East prior to November of 1940, when Generalmajor Otto Hoffmann von Waldau gave the Luftwaffe Operations Staff the details for a campaign against the Soviet Union. Directive No. 21 (Operation BAR-BAROSSA), outlining the plans for such a campaign, was dated 18 December 1940. See Generalleutnant (Ret.) Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1941, USAF Historical Studies No. 153, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, July 1965, pp. 1-10.

aid to Great Britain, especially in the armament field,\* and early in 1941 the Fuehrer told Goering that it was vital to crush the Russians before the United States could bring its armament project to a conclusion and mobilize its forces. To allow the Russian menace to develop would also throw Germany into the terrible prospect of having to face a powerful and well-prepared enemy in the East while simultaneously having to counter an Anglo-American attack in the West.

Goering expressed surprise at some of Hitler's remarks, and on the evening of the same day (presumably 4 January 1941), begged him to avoid "starting a war with Russia now or in the near future."<sup>87</sup> The Reichsmarschall clearly recognized the threatening nature of Soviet actions, but he urged Hitler to leave the matter in abeyance for a time, particularly since the United States already loomed as a possible addition to the coalition of enemies ranged against Germany. Goering praised Hitler for his "masterful stroke" in making sure that Germany opened its war without danger of a two-front situation. Goering also warned the Fuehrer that "The conflict which would be unleashed by a war with Russia would bring the third great world power into the battle against Germany. This would mean that we would be standing alone against practically the whole world once more, and on two fronts. The other nations are irrelevant in this case."<sup>88</sup> He continued, explaining that Russian military leaders, according to the information available to him, would not be completely ready until late 1942 or 1943 or perhaps even 1944, and by then Germany ought to be able either to conquer Great Britain or to reach a compromise with her. But, in order to achieve this, the air attacks against Britain had to be continued. However, if Germany had to go to war against the Soviet Union, at least two-thirds of the Luftwaffe would have to be transferred to the East. Goering protested further:

The sacrifices we have made thus far will have been in vain. England will have time to reorganize and rebuild her air armament industry undisturbed. . . . We would be giving

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\*Editor's Note: On 3 November 1939 the United States amended the Neutrality Act of May 1937, repealing the arms embargo and placing arms and other exports to selected belligerents on a cash-and-carry basis. On 2 September 1940 the United States sent 50 destroyers to Great Britain, and on 20 November the Stimson-Layton Agreement was concluded, providing for the pooling of British and American technical knowledge in the fields of armament and war equipment, and for a partial standardization of military weapons and equipment. By the time the Lend-Lease Act was passed on 11 March 1941, Germany had firmly committed itself to its plans for conquering Russia.

up a comparatively certain victory in the Mediterranean in favor of a far less certain alternative, . . . On the other hand, a German success in the Mediterranean would be far more likely to lead to a satisfactory compromise with England.<sup>89</sup>

Goering also declared that if the Reich succeeded with such plans in the Mediterranean, it might be able to direct Russia's preparations into other channels, perhaps even against the Western Allies, at least on the political level.

Hitler refused to let himself be persuaded by Goering's thinking. According to Dr. Koerner, Goering vehemently opposed the contemplated campaign against Russia. Since the Fuehrer had stressed the opinion advanced by State Secretary Hermann Backe that Russian grain would be indispensable for the future conduct of the war, Goering (presumably in his office of Commissioner for the Four-Year Plan) requested General Georg Thomas, Chief of the War Economy Staff (Wehrwirtschaftsstab), to prepare a memorandum dealing with this question. Thomas, to whom Goering had expressed his misgivings about a war with Russia, came to the conclusion that Germany could get along without Russian grain, even, if necessary, without imported grain from Rumania.<sup>90</sup> Goering ordered Thomas' memorandum rewritten in stronger language and forwarded to Hitler. A few days later, the Fuehrer told the Reichsmarschall that this memo contained many items that were correct, but that it also contained many inaccuracies. Dr. Backe also pointed this out. At the close of the interview concerning this memorandum, Hitler dismissed Goering with the admonition, "My dear Goering, why don't you stop trying to change my mind about the campaign in Russia? My mind is made up!"<sup>91</sup>

This gave Goering the alternative either of going along with the Fuehrer's decision, or of telling him that he wanted no part of the new plans. He could have submitted his resignation, and might have been able to force Hitler over to his way of thinking. In the eyes of the public in Germany and abroad, Goering was the Fuehrer's foremost and most powerful associate, and even a person as stubborn as Hitler might have revised his thinking if the Reichsmarschall had been adamant from the outset. Unfortunately for Germany, Goering said:

My Fuehrer, the final decision rests with you. May God guide you and help you to prove your rightness in the face of opposition! I, myself, am forced to oppose your point of view in this respect. May God protect you! But please remember that I cannot be blamed if I am unable to carry out our plans for expanding the Luftwaffe.<sup>92</sup>

Hitler replied, "In six weeks you will be able to resume the war against England."

Goering then countered by saying:

My Fuehrer, the Luftwaffe is the only branch of the Wehrmacht which has not had a breathing spell since the war began. Before the outbreak of the war I told you that I was going into battle with my training groups, and now these are practically all gone. I'm not at all sure that you will be able to subdue the Russians within six weeks. The ground forces can't fight any more without Luftwaffe support. They're always screaming for the Luftwaffe. There's nothing I'd like better than to have you proven right, but, frankly, I doubt that you will be.<sup>93</sup>

During one of the sessions in which Goering was questioned by the Nuremberg prosecutor Justice Robert H. Jackson, the question arose as to why Goering had not submitted his resignation. The prisoner replied:

. . . as far as my resignation is concerned, I have no intention of discussing the matter. During the war I was an officer, a soldier, and regardless of whether I agreed with a given viewpoint or not, my job was to serve my country as a soldier.<sup>94\*</sup>

As State Secretary Koerner noted, Goering was intensely aware of the implications of Hitler's decision to attack Russia, but he was also keenly aware of the possibilities if he had decided to resign. Without doubt he would have been obliged to relinquish not only the command of the German Luftwaffe, but also all of his other offices (including the right of succession after Hitler) and the life he enjoyed. He would have been retired "for reasons of health," which would have removed him from taking any role in the future of Germany. Even if Hitler had been disposed toward unusual leniency in his case, he would scarcely have wanted to guarantee to Goering the perpetuation of the title and income of a Reichsmarschall. Once out of office, the avalanche would also carry away the income received from the industrial sector.<sup>95</sup>

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\*In many of these sessions the prisoner acquitted himself better than the prosecution.

The situation was complicated by the fact that it was not always possible to separate Goering's private property from state property. Karinhall\* would have been difficult to maintain, and Rominten would certainly have had to be forfeited, while official inquiries would have made things trying for a retired Reichsmarschall who owned such costly estates as Veldenstein and Mauterndorf. An infuriated Chief of State could suddenly demand the return of certain property, and Goering's almost pasha-like existence would have come to a sudden end. Besides these prospects there were other possible dangers. Goering was no longer popular within Party circles, and his opponent, the indispensable Martin Bormann, was growing in power and prestige, even with Hitler himself.

Without going too far afield one might mention a parallel situation. Could the great Imperial Army Commander, Albrecht von Wallenstein (Duke of Friedland), who led the troops of Ferdinand II during the Thirty Years' War, have resigned or given up his command voluntarily? He would then have been under suspicion of defecting, and, no longer protected by the Imperial Edict, his opponents would soon have been at the usurper's throat. At the Electoral Assembly in Regensburg (1630), his enemies persuaded the Emperor that he was inordinately ambitious and had engaged in too much cruelty and extortion during his campaigns. † Ferdinand thereupon dismissed him and a large part of his forces. This was the worst misfortune which could have befallen Wallenstein, and there is no doubt that it played a decisive role in enticing him in 1633 from the path of virtue, and ultimately led to his death on 25 February 1634 as a contemptible traitor to the Emperor.

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\*See figure 27.

†Editor's Note: Wallenstein (1583-1634) led the troops of Emperor Ferdinand II (of Hapsburg) against the Protestants during the Danish Period (1625-1629) and during the Swedish Period (1630-1635) of the Thirty Years' War. He was successful in conquering the Duke of Mansfeld at Dessau (1626), of conquering (with Count Tilly) Holstein in 1627, and in subjugating Schleswig, Jutland, and Mecklenburg; and bringing Pomerania to heel (1627). Although dismissed in disgrace by the Emperor in 1630, following the demands of his enemies in the Electoral Assembly, he was pardoned and recalled by the Emperor in the autumn of 1631. The Spaniards, for whom Wallenstein had no love, continued to press for his removal. Wallenstein then entered into secret negotiations with the Emperor's opponents, the Saxons, the French, and the Swedes. While planning an intrigue against his leader, Wallenstein was once more deposed on 18 February 1634, and a week later was murdered by one of his own followers at Eger.



Figure 27  
The Waldhof at Karin hall, Goering's  
palatial residence near Berlin

Goering's rise and manner of living clearly reveal his tendency to usurp what he could, and Hitler, although patient and forgiving toward the man whom he knew to be loyal to him, would hardly have imitated the House of Hapsburg by granting him a pardon if he refused to serve him in an hour of need. Goering had his favorable qualities and his weaknesses, but he was simply incapable of failing his Fuehrer. He had no choice but to follow him into the campaign in Russia, and with him went "his" Luftwaffe, a force already seriously weakened by the Battle of Britain.

#### The Paladin Loses Hitler's Confidence

Even at the beginning of the war the old bonds of affection between Goering and Hitler were not what they had been. For Hitler the war was a test of his strength, a final venture to achieve the goals he had cherished for so long. Goering, however, had reservations about such an uncanny adventure, for, despite his martial dress, the Luftwaffe chief was far from being possessed by the god Mars. In fact, he made a number of efforts to allay the possibility of conflict.

His last-minute attempt through the services of Birger Dahlerus to keep Great Britain out of the contest and thus to avoid a war altogether failed. His efforts through Swedish intercession later in 1938 were likewise ill-fated. In the autumn of 1939, the American oil magnate William Rhodes Davis (a man with extensive business connections in Germany) crossed the ocean with the knowledge and approval of the U. S. State Department to extend "feelers" in Berlin and Rome concerning the possibility of American intercession between the Axis and Great Britain in the interest of peace. Toward this end he held several discussions in Berlin with Goering in which he assured the Reichsmarschall that President Franklin D. Roosevelt would be willing to accept Germany's eastern boundary of 1914 as a basis for peace negotiations and that he was also open to discussions concerning the question of the German colonies.

Goering was surprised, particularly so because Roosevelt's views had been interpreted in the Reich as extremely hostile toward Germany. Goering remarked that:

Germany is, and has been all along, willing to work toward peace on a sound and just basis. The views . . . which you communicated to me correspond on the whole to Hitler's views and those of his government. Under the circumstances a world conference would seem to be the only practical means by which our mutual hopes for peace could be realized. Germany would welcome Roosevelt's

assistance in bringing about such a conference. . . . The basic and realistic purpose of such a conference must be the establishment of a new world order capable of guaranteeing a lasting world peace. A prerequisite to the achievement of this goal is the annulment of the systems put into effect by the Versailles Treaty. Germany is prepared to welcome any suggestion and any solution which is commensurate with her right to exist as a nation on an equal basis with other nations, a basis capable of guaranteeing her, as well as the smaller nations, a lasting peace.<sup>96</sup>

During a second interview, on 3 October 1939, Goering authorized Davis to inform the American President of Germany's willingness and readiness to agree to the restoration of Poland and to an independent Czech government. Goering exacted the condition that Davis should use this authorization only if it should prove to be absolutely necessary in order to bring about a peace conference. Goering added:

As far as I am personally concerned, and this goes for my government as well, I would be delighted to take part in such a conference. If I should be selected to represent Germany at a conference of this kind, I should suggest that it be held in Washington.<sup>97</sup>

These remarks were typical of Goering and consistent with his thinking in the field of foreign policy.\*

All in all, it is tragic that the negotiator, Davis, was not received by President Roosevelt after his return to the United States. He then tried by letter (dated 11 October 1939) to persuade Roosevelt to intervene. In this communication he described all of his interviews and pointed out that Hitler's speech of 6 October 1939 had been couched in very conciliatory terms. "This letter elicited neither a reply nor an invitation to come to the White House."<sup>98</sup> Davis' mission, which had initially seemed so promising, ended suddenly in utter failure. Perhaps it was one of Winston Churchill's famous "personal letters" to Roosevelt which led to the President's ignoring the possibility of reconciliation.

No matter how fond Goering was of martial proclamations, and no matter how much he enjoyed the role of Commander in Chief, his

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\*Goering's remarks were made public by Professor Charles Callan Tansill, Professor of American Diplomatic History at Georgetown University.

proper sphere of endeavor was really politics, rather than war. He never felt obliged to offer a single concrete plan by means of which German forces could take effective action in the course of the war. His suggestions regarding Dunkirk, Gibraltar, and Suez were simply momentary inspirations, and his warning against a campaign in Russia was not accompanied by a precise and carefully considered alternative plan. Thus, even in the midst of war, when an accurate appraisal of developments ought to have required his daily presence in the Fuehrer Headquarters, Goering's influence was bound to wane, despite the fact that he continued, just as before, to hold secret conferences with Hitler.

These were the natural developments which served to weaken Goering's position. They were augmented from 1942 on by weaknesses in the Luftwaffe stemming from sins of omission, inadequate supervision, insufficient planning for the future, and deficient leadership. It was obvious that these sins could not be indefinitely kept from Hitler's sharp eyes. Although Udet failed to handle the Technical Office and air armaments activity in a manner conducive to success, it was really Goering who had failed by not intervening in matters in time. He had simply not taken the trouble to find out what was going on.

No matter how reluctant Hitler may have been to admit that Goering's Luftwaffe no longer possessed aircraft superior to those employed by the enemy in the West, he was bound to realize this in time and, as a result, to lose a good measure of his faith in the air forces.

As had been made amply clear in the preliminary investigation against Ploch, Tschersich, and Reidenbach, Goering had been sadly lacking in his capacity as a supervisor. This was partially due to the fact that he had no concept of what the future might bring. In this respect Udet was ahead of him, for Udet had ordered a strengthening of Germany's fighter arm at an early date. In diametrical opposition to the experience gained during his own period as a fighter pilot, Goering had concentrated his attention on the bomber arm, since it was the one which carried the battle into enemy territory, while fighters were inextricably bound to the concept of defense. Now, however, after the conspicuous success of the enemy air attack on Luebeck (on the night of 28 March 1942) the night attacks on German cities were increasing in number and intensity. It must have been highly embarrassing to Goering when a British bomber stream of 1,000 aircraft succeeded in turning large sections of Cologne into ruins during the night of 30 May 1942 without the German fighter forces having any effect on them whatsoever. As it happened, Goering was not at Fuehrer Headquarters when the report came in in the morning; Jeschonnek was taking his place. One might almost consider it a piece

of good luck for the Commander in Chief, for Hitler--for the first time--was goaded into making a number of highly disparaging remarks about the Luftwaffe. It turned out that the Cologne District Party Command (Gauleitung Koeln) had been the first to report the alarmingly high number of enemy bombers; the Luftwaffe had reported only 450. Hitler scornfully asked Jeschonnek whether he was sure this was the right figure, and then informed him of the District Party Command's report, which he had received through Party channels.

Bodenschatz made the following comment at Nuremberg: "From this point on, it was obvious that differences of opinion--first limited to minor points--existed between the two."<sup>99</sup> What steps were taken by Goering to counteract this apparent decrease in his influence over Hitler? Did he do anything to restore the old atmosphere of confidence?

Bodenschatz provides the following reply to the questions: "The Reichsmarschall began to appear at Fuehrer Headquarters far more frequently than before. He even said to me, 'I intend to do everything I can to restore the old contact with the Fuehrer.'<sup>100</sup> But just what did Goering do?

He was unable to stick to his resolve as far as regular attendance at the Fuehrer's briefing sessions was concerned. But from this time on he showed an increasing tendency towards indiscriminate submission to Hitler's wishes. In this connection, let us go back for a moment to Goering's outspoken warning against a campaign in Russia. (Koerner, incidentally, dates the perceptible weakening of Goering's influence over Hitler from this point on.<sup>101\*</sup>) In 1940 the Reichsmarschall would have been assured of a glorious exit in the improbable event that Hitler had accepted his resignation. But the Reichsmarschall, the darling of fate, who had had no compunctions about stretching out his hand towards wealth, was incapable of making the sacrifice which his resignation would have entailed. Instead, consideration for his position and for his life of ease loomed larger for Goering than the demands of history that he remain

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\*From the moment when Goering protested against the campaign in Russia, and from the moment the British air attacks on German cities began to be effective, Goering's influence gradually waned. Jeschonnek's influence over Hitler, on the other hand, grew more and more significant. Goering once said to Koerner: "I can't tell you how embarrassing it is for me during interviews with the Fuehrer to be confronted with faits accomplis." See State Secretary Koerner's Commentary, F/I/1, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

firm in a justifiable refusal to cooperate and, if necessary, take leave from the stage of world events.

Although at the beginning of 1942 it was obvious that Goering's advice had been right, thereafter the situation changed radically. An honorable withdrawal, which would have been possible for Goering in 1940-41, was no longer feasible since the British air attacks had become so successful. A withdrawal at this time would have been tantamount to an admission that the Luftwaffe had failed. It would have been quite unacceptable from Hitler's point of view, and for Goering it would have meant a dismissal for reasons of inefficiency.

Thus he had no choice but to remain, although his influence was no longer what it had been. Luftwaffe armament had still not reached a satisfactory level. After Udet's death, Milch had made every effort to overcome the unprepossessing legacy he had received and to channel production into new and more successful directions, but the unfavorable priority designation allocated to the Luftwaffe represented a serious obstacle to his efforts. The Luftwaffe had been relegated to the background in favor of the Army, whose mission was becoming increasingly taxing, and the Navy, whose submarines were now regarded as the only possible way out of Germany's difficulties. Under no circumstances was Germany capable of matching the fantastic production figures achieved by her enemies, production figures whose tangible results made themselves more and more painfully felt in the form of air attacks over Germany.

But, taking for granted that the Fuehrer was disappointed by the performance of the Luftwaffe, could this be offset by a growing tendency on Goering's part to submit unquestioningly to the Fuehrer's wishes? This was an extremely dangerous way out. Nonetheless, this was the way which was followed in the case of the decision to launch an air supply operation for the relief of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad on 23 and 24 November and during the weeks which followed.

This is hardly the place to bring up once more the relative degree of responsibility attributable to Goering and Jeschonnek, respectively, in this catastrophic decision. The fact remains that the Reichsmarschall was apparently far more eager to agree to the venture than was his General Staff Chief. It can be accepted as fact that Goering, in an argument with Army General Staff Chief Kurt Zeitzler, personally guaranteed the success of the Luftwaffe operation, although Zeitzler tried to prove to him that it was impossible. Hitler, who had been present during the rather embarrassing conversation, put an end to the argument with the

words: "The Reichsmarschall has reported that to me. I have no right to doubt his report. Therefore I see no reason to change my decision." 102\*

Later Goering explained to Field Marshal Kesselring and to his friends Loerzer and Koerner the reasons for his action, some of which exonerate him to some extent. 103† Most important of all in this connection, however, is the courageous statement made on 5 February 1943 by Hitler himself in his first conversation with Manstein after the fall of Stalingrad. He began the conversation with these words:

\*The decision that Stalingrad should not be given up.

†Kesselring (in an interview with the author on 30 January 1956) stated that in the spring of 1943, in connection with the air supply operation for Tunis, Goering said to him: "Kesselring, be careful! I fell into a trap with the air supply operation at Stalingrad. I agreed to the operation only on very precise conditions, and one of these was its presumable duration. I stated clearly that only a short-term action had any chance of succeeding. The second was that the distance between the transport aircraft bases and Stalingrad should not be permitted to grow any greater than it already was; in other words, that the front should be held at Chir. The third, which I declared to be a sine qua non for my approval, was the weather situation. I stated expressly that good weather was an indispensable prerequisite. Not a single one of these conditions was adhered to . . ." One may wonder if Goering had really made the weather situation one of the conditions. Even if he had, in view of the fact that the weather was not subject to his control and thus represented an enormous factor of uncertainty, he had no right to grant his approval to the air supply operation.

Loerzer reports that Goering told him the following: "In reality the situation was this: Hitler said to me, 'Look here, Goering, if the Luftwaffe can't carry out this operation, the Sixth Army is lost!' He appealed to my sense of honor, and there I was. I had no choice but to agree; otherwise it would have looked as though the Luftwaffe and I were to blame for the loss of the Sixth Army."

Koerner's account is as follows: "He told me that Jeschonnek, who was responsible for making decisions in his absence, had agreed to the air supply operation at Stalingrad and had already submitted a plan for its execution. Jeschonnek, in any case, thought that the Luftwaffe was capable of accomplishing the mission. Goering reported to me what he had said to Hitler: 'My Fuehrer, you know what is at stake. If the situation is really as it is reported, then I place myself at your disposal. Personally, I would prefer to let the forces at Stalingrad decide for themselves, leave them a free hand. But if the Fuehrer has made his decision, I have no choice but to obey, despite my grave reservations.'" See pp. 44-45.

What happened at Stalingrad is my fault, and mine alone. I could perhaps say that I was inadequately informed by Goering regarding the prospects of success of an air supply action by the Luftwaffe and thus pass on at least a part of the responsibility. But the fact remains that Goering is my successor by my own designation, and I therefore have no right to burden him with the responsibility for Stalingrad. 104

Goering reported to his friend Loerzer that he had sensed an appeal to his honor and thus had no choice but to agree to the air supply action for Stalingrad. Plocher, however, feels that the Reichsmarschall:

. . . gave his unqualified guarantee primarily in an attempt to regain the Fuehrer's full confidence, which he realized had been dwindling for some time. Then, too, he may also have viewed his guarantee [to supply the Sixth Army] as a means of dispelling Hitler's lack of confidence in "his" [Goering's] Luftwaffe as an institution in general and in its performance in particular. Hitler's mistrust was based in part on Goering's own tendency to boast (often against his own better judgment) of the strength and capability of the Luftwaffe. 105

It is certain that Goering felt that this was an important hour of decision for the Luftwaffe. Success--the rescue of the Sixth Army--would restore both its and Goering's own prestige in Hitler's eyes. Goering may also have been misled by the success of the air supply action on behalf of the II Army Corps trapped at Demyansk.\* The latter action, far more tightly concentrated and carried out in a far more accessible area, had succeeded, albeit at a tremendous cost in casualties.

It is clear from the report of Gen. Paul Deichmann, at that time Chief of Staff of the Commander in Chief, South, that Goering was not at all indifferent to the fate of his Luftwaffe, which by late 1942 was being drawn through his fault into an impossible situation. As the impending catastrophe began to come to a head at Stalingrad, a catastrophe which the Luftwaffe, despite terrible losses and heroic efforts, could not avert,

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\*Editor's Note: See Generalleutnant a. D. Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942, USAF Historical Studies No. 154, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1966, pp. 78-85.

Goering was filled with despair. General Deichmann describes the state of mind of the Reichsmarschall at the time:

On the evening of 21 December 1942, during an official visit to the Fuehrer Headquarters at the Wolfsschanze near Rastenburg in East Prussia, I stopped by to see Goering in the Fuehrer's bunker. I knocked at the door of the room reserved there for Goering. General Bodenschatz, who was then Luftwaffe General on the Fuehrer's Staff, opened the door and asked me what I wanted. Behind him I could see Goering sitting at his desk. He was weeping loudly and kept bending forward over the desk. While I waited outside the door, Bodenschatz tried to obtain an answer to my question. Goering asked me to come in. Without paying any attention to me, he continued for several minutes to abandon himself to his grief. Then, interrupted repeatedly by fits of weeping, he asked me a few questions and dismissed me again, only to immerse himself once more in his sorrow.

Afterwards I was told by officers of the Luftwaffe High Command that very bad news from Stalingrad had been received. 106

Thus Stalingrad had failed to restore the prestige of the Luftwaffe and its Commander in Chief in Hitler's eyes. On the contrary, the Fuehrer was embittered, for in his innermost thoughts he considered the Luftwaffe to blame for the failure. But the Luftwaffe was never to recover from the blows it had sustained as a result of the order for air transport services, an order which had cost it a total of 488 aircraft completely destroyed. And Goering's authority continued to dwindle. Future developments as a whole were hardly conducive to changing Hitler's opinion of the Reichsmarschall's achievements for the better. Even Jeschonnek, a diligent and truly capable soldier, had a difficult time of it at the briefing sessions. He could do nothing but swallow Hitler's increasingly sharp criticism of the Luftwaffe, though it often happened that Hitler, after tirades of this kind, would ask Jeschonnek to stay behind for a moment after the others had gone, pat him on the shoulder, and explain, "I don't mean you!" 107

Bodenschatz, an objective observer, notes as an external sign of Goering's waning influence the fact that it was not only Hitler who grew sharper in his criticism; Goering, too, began "for the first time to criticize the Fuehrer to his circle of intimates." Bodenschatz adds,

"the former long discussions between Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering became shorter, rarer, and finally stopped altogether. The Reichsmarschall was no longer called to participate in important conferences." 108

An exact chronology of this development cannot, of course, be reconstructed. What has been quoted above presumably refers to the last stage in the relationship between the two men.

#### The Decline of the Luftwaffe

At the beginning of World War II the German Air Force attracted the attention of the entire world as a completely invincible force. German armies, supported by the Luftwaffe's relentless attacks on enemy positions and marching columns, were able to carry out a blitzkrieg which resulted in the conquest of Poland, Norway, and France. Airborne operations, particularly the daring assault leading to the capture of the almost impregnable Belgian fortress on the Meuse, Eben Emael, filled the world with amazement. Although the Luftwaffe did not succeed in gaining a clear aerial victory against Great Britain, it was able to achieve occasional air superiority over the Channel and to put this to a successful test in February of 1942, when the German battle fleet carried out its escape dash from Brest to its home ports in Germany.\* The campaign in the Balkans required Luftwaffe participation in a blitz operation over extremely difficult terrain. The air landings in Crete and the eviction of the British fleet from the waters surrounding the island brought new laurels to the Luftwaffe. In the Mediterranean area, General der Flieger Hans Geissler's X Air Corps and (later) the Second Air Fleet under Field Marshal Kesselring, maintained air superiority for a long time. Even in the first year

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\*Editor's Note: It is open to serious question whether in fact this was really a test of air or naval superiority, since surprise played such an important role in the accomplishment of this operation. Trevor Constable and Col. Raymond F. Toliver in their book Horrido! Fighter Aces of the Luftwaffe, pp. 39-40, credit Generalleutnant Adolf Galland's "inspired leadership" for the success of the German naval dash. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1968) However, there is good reason to believe that the undertaking might well have failed if British forces had become apprised of it in time. See S. W. Roskill, The War at Sea, Vol. II, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956, pp. 154-161. See also Viceadmiral Friedrich Ruge, Der Seekrieg 1939-1945 (The Sea War 1939-1945), Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler Verlag, 1954, pp. 203-205.

of the Russian campaign (until the summer of 1942) the Luftwaffe managed to maintain air superiority and often to achieve air supremacy against a dangerous and rapidly recovering adversary. The Russian air forces were simply unable to prevail against the German Air Force whenever it appeared in a highly concentrated action, and Field Marshal Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen, a ruthless but scrupulously fair head of the VIII Air Corps and the Fourth Air Fleet, was a past master at this sort of operation. A very small number of German fighter units were able to successfully defend the home area by day and night during 1940, 1941, and early 1942, or until the first devastating attacks upon Luebeck, Rostock, and Cologne. Even after this time the Luftwaffe remained a stubborn enemy, worthy of being taken seriously by the British, and after 1942 by American bomber forces, although the latter, because of their range and efficiency of radar equipment, were undeniably far superior.

Nevertheless, in the course of this rise to fame over nearly all of Europe, large parts of Africa as far as the Suez Canal, and the northern tip of the Red Sea, the German Air Force lost some of its most valuable personnel, including carefully trained aircrews and outstanding individual aces, men such as Werner Moelders and Hans-Joachim Marseille.

The Russian theater of operations, because of its poor airfields, the dreadful winter of 1941-42, and the muddy periods, swallowed up a great amount of materiel. In addition, inordinately large quantities of equipment and huge numbers of personnel were lost in missions conducted in direct support of ground operations in the East. Air operations in support of the Army were carried out to an unusual extent there because of the fact that the Russians, fatalistically inclined, terribly stubborn, and capable of enduring great suffering, were not as easily terrorized by aerial attacks as were, for example, the French. The Russians almost invariably stood their ground and fired away with whatever they had at hand. Though ineffective as individuals, the sheer mass of fire was dangerous, and aircraft such as the He-111 bomber offered an all too easy target.

It was principally the air supply operations (which had to be carried out because of the adverse course of events on the ground) which were to become the ruin of the Luftwaffe. Air logistical undertakings such as those at Kholm, Demyansk, and finally Stalingrad (not one of which was really imperative from the point of view of military necessity and the last of which was the result of a tragically faulty decision) cost the Luftwaffe not only most of the Ju-52's, but a great many He-111's, a few He-177's, and certain other models which had been pressed into

service as transports.\* A vast amount of highly valuable Luftwaffe materiel, including aircraft, was lost through the untimely advent of the Russian winter of 1941 and through the catastrophe which overtook Army Group Don in November of 1942, with the large-scale withdrawals and hasty evacuations which followed in its wake. Apart from a relatively short period during the spring, the year 1943 was characterized by a continual redeployment of forces, usually accompanied by a loss in territory. It was not always possible to carry out systematic, timely and complete evacuation operations, and all of this became a serious headache for the Quartermaster General of the Luftwaffe.

The Russian theater, which Goering was so reluctant to enter with his Luftwaffe, turned out to be a land of costly sacrifices for both the Luftwaffe and for the Army. This situation was further aggravated by the fact that since the autumn of 1942 the enemy had gradually been winning air superiority in Africa and, after the successful Allied landings at Casablanca, Algiers, and Oran, in the entire Mediterranean as well. This led to particularly heavy losses for the German Air Force in Italy, where von Richthofen's last concentrated, large-scale operation for the purpose of throwing back the landing at Salerno (September 1943) failed in the face of superior Anglo-American air units. Thereafter, the Second Air Fleet was reduced to a feeble remnant of its former strength, and German air power in this theater of operations shrank to insignificance. The large Italian airfields at Foggia and elsewhere in Southeastern Italy soon fell into enemy hands and shortly thereafter were in use as bases for American bomber wings for their harassing attacks on southern and southeastern Germany.

During 1943 the Allies penetrated ever more deeply into the home territory of the Reich, despite the fact that they often had to pay a heavy penalty in four-engine bomber losses at the hands of German fighters. This was the case in both of the attacks upon Schweinfurt.<sup>†</sup> Nevertheless,

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\*Editor's Note: See Generalleutnant a. D. Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942, USAF Historical Studies No. 154, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1966, pp. 279-330, 344-356.

<sup>†</sup>Editor's Note: The two raids mentioned took place on 17 August and 14 October 1943, respectively. See the accounts of these attacks in Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. II, Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949, pp. 681-685, 699-704.

it could no longer be denied that the once proud German Luftwaffe had entered a period of decline. Its numbers were too small to provide effective protection for the German armies in the East in their struggle against the relentless assaults of the Russian forces. Thrown into the invasion front with its hastily organized fighter reserves and freshly trained young pilots, it had hardly any chance of being able to relieve the ground forces in the face of the overwhelming enemy superiority. Its units were literally flying to their deaths, and knew it.

The German Luftwaffe was facing collapse. Hans Jeschonnek, its General Staff Chief in the time of victory, had committed suicide on 18 August 1943. His successor, Generaloberst Guenther Korten,\* died of injuries sustained during the attempt on Hitler's life at the Wolfsschanze on 20 July 1944. †

The Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, had had countless chances to review his work, to devote himself to introspection, and to realize the magnitude of his ineptness, first at the end of 1941 when it might have been possible to salvage the situation, again in the summer of 1942, when Germany's large-scale offensive was frustrated by the surprising withdrawal of the Russian armies, and once again--at the last possible moment--at the collapse of Stalingrad. The retreat to the Dnepr, Jeschonnek's suicide, the loss of Tunis, Sicily, Foggia, and Rome, the enemy air attacks on the Reich in February 1944 were all bona fide manifestations of the "handwriting on the wall."

Goering had concerned himself too little with the problems which had been presenting themselves ever since the beginning of the Russian campaign. We know how he lived during the war. He had never been addicted to conscientiousness and perseverance in the handling of routine work, and he had never occupied himself with the solving of day-to-day problems. On the other hand, he never took advantage of the peaceful seclusion offered by the Schorfheide or the woods of Rominten to think through the major problems besetting his service branch and to work out acceptable solutions for them. He ought to have utilized the peace and quiet of these retreats to come to terms with the truth that the only way to combat the Russian giant was through an attack on the sources of its strength, on its huge war production; in other words, through strategic air warfare. Russia's air armament production, which was soon back to its original strength, her tank production centers, and her power plants

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\*See figure 28.

†See Chart No. 9.



Figure 28  
Generaloberst Guenther Korten, Chief of the Luftwaffe  
General Staff, 5 September 1943 until his death as  
a result of the 20 July 1944 plot to kill Hitler

ought to have been the targets of the Luftwaffe once the Smolensk area had been brought into German hands. Again and again, even after the catastrophe of Stalingrad, Goering's thoughts should have returned to the necessity of continuing preparations for a strategic air war (even if it had to be restricted to pinprick attacks in the beginning). This would have provided real relief for the troops at the front, for the deepest possible penetration of the Russian industrial area (where work was still going on relatively undisturbed) would have threatened Russia's nerve centers from the air, and would have tied down major contingents of Soviet anti-aircraft artillery.

When, on rare occasions, the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe succeeded in reaching a conclusion of this kind, if--drawing upon the energy typical of his most productive period--he had ordered his staff to find ways and means of implementing his decision without delay, even if it involved shifts in the production program and reorganizations (which, above all, could not be allowed to affect the He-111, which was far too valuable to be sacrificed in operations in support of the Army), his periods of idleness at Karinhall or Rominten would then have been at least creative and a blessing for the Luftwaffe.

There was no hope of altering the priority rating assigned to the Luftwaffe. It had to help itself. It could, however, have initially drawn upon its own personnel and materiel reserves, if needed, to activate new units. And once the strategic air warfare was under way, it would probably have brought about a certain measure of relief to the overall situation and thus lightened the demands upon the Luftwaffe.

The proper decision concerning bombers would have been to have utilized twin-engine bombers in strategic operations only, reserving the single-engine aircraft and the Me-210's for direct air-support operations and home air defense. In this way the He-111 and the Ju-88 could have been spared, for they would no longer have been employed in hazardous daily missions from substandard airfields. Instead, restored to their original strengths, the bomber units could have been used for large-scale missions (which need not have been particularly costly in aircraft) against highly rewarding targets.

In the event of a reorganization directed toward this end, the production of twin-engine bombers could have been reduced considerably. To make up for it, the output of single-engine aircraft could have been greatly increased. This would have benefited not only the fighting front, where Richthofen's VIII Air Corps could have been augmented by additional close-support units, but also the home air defense program, which ought to have been reinforced in time, surely by the end of 1941. A shift in production goals of this sort would also have brought relief to the training program.

There is no doubt that a switch to strategic air warfare would have required a courageous decision, and would not have been easy to make, but one is justified in expecting a Reichsmarschall to make such a decision, particularly when the issues were so crucial.\* At once the Luftwaffe (which had reached a nadir of depression) would have been inspired by a new confidence, a new energy, and impetus. These are the intangible qualities which no real commander can ever afford to overlook in his deliberations, since, by their very nature they are destined to bring a bold decision to realization and thus to alter the factors of reality.

And, if there was really no chance of reorganizing air armament production (the only armament program of a single Wehrmacht branch still permitted to exist independently), then Luftwaffe leaders would simply have had to accept the necessity of going through Speer in order to integrate air armament into the overall and far more flexible framework. Ambition or vanity had no place here. The alternatives were the imminent collapse or the continued existence of the Luftwaffe and of the fatherland as a whole, and the Commander in Chief, with his sensitive intuition with respect to political developments, certainly ought to have realized this. But, Goering spent his time shooting deer at Karinhall and Rominten and delighting in his own position of power. Thus he failed to take advantage of the hour of decision and the chance it offered him for incisive action. "If I could only figure out," as Goering himself said in severe judgment of his dead friend Udet, "what Udet was thinking of!"<sup>109</sup> One is tempted to make the same statement concerning Goering himself.

He had opposed the decision to launch a campaign against Soviet Russia and, with far-reaching insight, had pointed out the potential dangers of such a course. And later he suddenly claimed not to have been aware of what was going on! The only explanation would seem to be the one which is also applicable to his General Staff Chief, Hans Jeschonnek,

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\*Editor's Note: Even if Luftwaffe leaders had decided to engage in strategic air operations, their twin-engine bomber force was quite deficient in range, armament, and bomb-load capacity, and unable to accomplish anything more than limited strategic attacks (which were, in any case, more akin to tactical operations than to true strategic air operations). The Luftwaffe High Command not only failed to appreciate strategic airpower and its implications, but also to develop aircraft which were suitable for operations of this sort should the need arise. Utterly lacking the means to accomplish strategic air operations, the question concerning the decision in the matter becomes relatively academic.

that he had drifted into catastrophe as a result of his blind hope that Hitler would once again turn out to be right. If the Russian campaign failed to achieve the desired success in its first three months, then surely it would lead to victory by the destruction of the Russian Army Group at Kiev. Even if the enemy continued to resist, there could surely be no doubt that German operations would lead to the capture of Moscow (thus gaining a secure base of operations for the German armies), especially in view of the spectacular victories of Vyazma and Bryansk. And, if this hope should also be dashed, then obviously it would be possible to deliver a decisive blow as soon as the thaw set in and the Russian winter, that powerful ally of the Soviets, came to an end.

Within the framework of unrealistic thinking, all of these deliberations were based on the blind premises that the enemy was already defeated, that a last burst of strength on the part of the German forces was all that was needed to break his resistance completely, that the Russian counteroffensive had been born of the enemy's death throes and was exhausting the strength of the once gigantic power. To put it succinctly, the German High Command had drifted too long and had fallen prey to a trance of wishful thinking and was no longer capable of finding the way out and back to reality. Hitler continued to radiate this unshakable optimism, and one could not leave his presence without having become charged with his confidence.

Is it possible that Goering, a man fundamentally endowed with common sense, and occasionally with far-reaching insight and objectivity, was really so captivated by this wishful thinking? Granted that Hitler, at the turn of 1941, still towered above his colleagues as the incarnation of a will determined to overcome all obstacles (even in the face of grave concern or even defeatism on the part of those colleagues), and granted that Hitler, because of having survived the winter that threatened to bring catastrophe to the German armies in the East, experienced a strong upsurge in his authority, was it still possible that Goering could have been deceived about the narrowness of the escape?<sup>110</sup> Would Goering not have realized that the continuing danger was the result of a serious mistake by Hitler in evaluating the resistance and military capability of the Soviet Union?

The reality of the matter was probably based on two different factors. In the first place, it seems likely that the Reichsmarschall, after his advice concerning a campaign in Russia had been rejected, was all too ready to let himself be deceived regarding the potential dangers he had envisioned and thus greedily swallowed the optimism prescribed by Hitler. And, even though this may have been only partially the case,

the fact remains that Goering, once he had decided to concentrate his energies on achieving the invincibility of the Luftwaffe (by 1941 precariously dissipated on several fronts), simply no longer had the courage to speak up to Hitler, who had begun to criticize the Luftwaffe sharply. In short, Goering gradually became what one of his severest critics, Karl Koller, last General Staff Chief of the Luftwaffe, called him "his master's voice."<sup>111</sup>

Thus the only course left open to Goering, from the standpoint of both personality and professional status, was unconditional submission to Hitler's wishes. Any other course was out of the question for him, for Hitler himself was in a deadlocked situation from which he could not escape. His thinking, so to speak, had become rigidly crystallized. Yet, if Goering, in an attempt to restore himself to Hitler's favor or to obviate his own overthrow, insisted on blindly carrying out the will of the Fuehrer, then the entire Luftwaffe, whose star was already on the wane, would be drawn into the maelstrom and doomed to destruction.

This whole situation was reflected clearly in the matter of the Me-262.\* This aircraft was constructed by the aircraft designer Messerschmitt, who, after the Me-210 and the equally inadequate Me-410 had brought such deep disappointment to Udet and Milch, finally hit upon another sure success and brought it to completion with the painstaking assistance of the Technical Office. Galland had already piloted the Me-262 in a test flight (22 May 1943) and was enthusiastic.<sup>112</sup> A few months later, it was demonstrated to Hitler in East Prussia. It had been designed as a fighter, and Galland hoped to be able to use it to sweep the German skies clean of the Anglo-American air units. Hitler, however, pleasantly surprised at the performance of the machine, wanted to see it employed to implement his dogma of offensive air operations. He envisioned its commitment against the anticipated Allied landing in France as a bomber invulnerable to enemy fighter aircraft by virtue of its speed.<sup>†</sup> Messerschmitt, hardly a man of courageous or sincere persuasion, deceived the Fuehrer by representing as negligible the difficulties involved in the changes in design which would be required to convert the Me-262 into a bomber. Hereupon Hitler ordered that it should be developed as a bomber and, later, when he became aware of the Luftwaffe's reluctance,

\*See figure 29. See also pp. 48-49.

†In a report to the Reichsmarschall (25 May 1943) Hitler said, ". . . this aircraft represents a real bit of luck for us. Once in use, it will assure us an unbelievable lead over the enemy, assuming that he continues to utilize piston-driven aircraft." See C/IV/2bb, Karlsruhe Document Collection.



Figure 29  
The Messerschmitt Me-262 jet, a fighter which  
Hitler wanted to employ as a "blitz-bomber"

even issued strict orders forbidding its release for mass production as a fighter. Although permission was granted to continue the developmental work on the Me-262 fighter, it was as a "super-speed" bomber (as envisioned by Hitler) that it was to go into production.

Goering hesitated in the beginning to commit himself in his evaluation of the Me-262. He, too, had been a member of the conspiracy centered in Galland and Milch; he, too, had promoted the development of the fighter Me-262 after the declaration of Hitler at Insterburg because he wanted to see Germany's skies cleared of the enemy invaders; and he, too, was not quite convinced of the efficacy of the Me-262 as a bomber. At the urging of the younger men of the group he even ventured to protest to Hitler, whereupon he suffered an ignominious defeat, as evidenced by the subsequent order of 29 May, which specified that the Me-262 and the similar Arado-234 were to be produced as bombers and not as fighters.

It is a rather sad picture to think of the Reichsmarschall's unpleasant task of making Hitler's negative decision palatable to Messerschmitt, Galland, Korten (Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff), and the others who were interested in the matter, all on the same day! One can almost feel his inner apprehension, which manifested itself in a "holier than the Pope" approach. Goering, who had been just as eager as the others to see the Me-262 employed as a fighter, spoke to them as follows:

From now on, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, we shall stop calling it a "fighter-bomber" and use the term "super-speed bomber," as I have ordered. Also, the General of the Bomber Forces will be responsible for it in the future. The Fuehrer has permitted us to continue testing and developing as fighters a few of the machines which have already been equipped with airborne armament! 113

Following this qualification, Bodenschatz interrupted to announce that the Fuehrer had ordered a continuance of testing of the Me-262 as a fighter. Goering bitterly stressed the point that this continuance applied to the field of testing only, and declared that, "In order to avoid any misunderstandings or reservations on your part, I have relieved the fighter forces of any further responsibility in connection with it." 114

Messerschmitt then explained the functioning of the bomb-release system, and mentioned that once the bombs had been dropped the machine became much lighter and "absolutely a fighter again."

At this point the tormented Goering broke in, "I don't want it to be a fighter again! I just want to have it ready as soon as possible!"

Please stop using the word 'fighter'!"<sup>115</sup> The Reichsmarschall's inner lack of assurance had turned him into a schoolmaster checking the speech of his pupils.

For better or for worse--this was undeniably much too late--the Reichsmarschall decided to work for an improvement in the air armament program through the services of Reichs Minister Albert Speer. Milch and Speer had been appointed chiefs of the Fighter Staff which was established on 1 March 1944. Engineer Otto Karl Saur, Chief of the Technical Office of the Speer Ministry, was appointed chief of staff. The Fighter Staff (which even in 1944 managed to achieve a fantastic increase in fighter production) set a goal of 1,000 Me-262's per month in the early part of 1945. However, once the new model was designated as a bomber, the Staff could only stand by and watch materials set aside for it dwindle away.

During a Fighter Staff conference, Saur declared that the goal of 1,000 fighters per month could not be dropped, since it would mean that the Luftwaffe General Staff's requirements could not be met. Recognizing the fact that the Me-262 could not be simultaneously produced as a bomber and as a fighter, Saur asked, "Where are the materials to come from?" Then he uttered a statement which throws a blinding light upon the overall situation of the Luftwaffe. Saur, a man of iron nerve and rugged constitution, and one devoted deeply to Hitler, suddenly burst out, "I fail to understand how a single one of you can sit there and even for one second believe that the task assigned to us can possibly be accomplished."<sup>116</sup>

The Luftwaffe was never to derive the slightest use from the Me-262 as a bomber, and even the fighter Me-262 (finally given Hitler's blessing) came far too late to bring about a turning point in the course of events. However, as a result of the Me-262 affair, Goering's prestige within his own service branch suffered a grievous blow. Each of these costly failures served to whittle off another bit of his remaining prestige.

The enemy had already gained air supremacy over Germany, Italy, and France,<sup>117\*</sup> and at the end of July 1944, when the Allies (after landing on 6 June in Normandy) succeeded in breaking through the German defense lines and in advancing rapidly into large, virtually unprotected, sections

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\*In a conference on the Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden on 29 May 1944, the Reichsmarschall was forced to admit that, "at the moment the situation in Italy is such that not a single Luftwaffe aircraft dares show itself."

of German-occupied territory, the Luftwaffe ground organization which was pressed into defensive operations did not give a very good account of itself. 118\* The occupation forces of a wealthy land had enjoyed an easy life for far too long, and it was simply impossible, especially in an atmosphere of defeat, to turn them suddenly into heroes. The sight of fleeing Luftwaffe units arriving in German territory did have the effect, however, of mobilizing District Party Commanders in the outlying areas and of inducing them to lodge sharp official complaints through Martin Bormann to Hitler. 119† The Commander in Chief of the Third Air Fleet, Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, ‡ who had long since become unaccustomed to coping with the rigors of war and was enjoying a sumptuous life in a truly princely suite in the Palais Luxembourg, was relieved of his command. Plans were also drawn up to bring the Air Administrative Area Commanders, General der Flakartillerie Dr. Eugen Weissmann, General der Flieger Wilhelm Wimmer, and General der Flieger Karl Drum before a criminal court.

Heretofore Goering was seen to be a cautious dispenser of justice, but by mid-1944 he was under heavy pressure from the Fuehrer's Headquarters. A great many accusations against Luftwaffe personnel had found their way to Hitler via the Gestapo Chief, Heinrich Himmler. Official documents which came to Goering were transmitted to the Chief Judge Advocate of the Luftwaffe covered by his copious and radical comments. But, because the findings of fact were inconclusive--this was the case with the three Air Administrative Area Commanders--Generalstabsrichter

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\*The entire personnel strength of the Luftwaffe in the West at the beginning of the invasion was 384,579 (including 16,109 members of the Women's Auxiliary (Luftwaffenhelferinnen)), all under the command of Luftwaffe Command West until 20 September, when they came under the command of the Third Air Fleet. They were in action from 21 September until 30 September 1944.

†The Chief of the Army's National Socialist Leadership Staff, General der Gebirgstruppe Ritter von Hengl, told a number of officers of Headquarters Army Group West (in the presence of Field Marshal Walter Model), ". . . the majority of our own Luftwaffe has suffered defeat, and no appreciable change in the situation can be expected in the near future. . . . The youthful pilots acquitted themselves admirably, but otherwise the size of the organization is all out of proportion to the effectiveness of its performance. In contrast with the small number of aircraft operating in the West, the Luftwaffe had 650,000 personnel stationed there, 500,000 of whom have taken off toward the East. "

‡See figure 30.



Figure 30

High Command of the Wehrmacht Conference in France prior to the Normandy invasion. L. to R.: Admiral Theodor Kranke, Generalleutnant Dr. Hans Speidel, General der Panzertruppe Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, Generalmajor Hermann Plocher (Luftwaffe), and Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle (Luftwaffe)

Freiherr von Hammerstein was able to remain master of the situation. 120 But Hitler remained persistent, demanding again and again, "I want to see some death penalties given in the Luftwaffe!"

Goering, his nerves at the breaking point, began to telephone every day to ask, "Where are the death penalties?" Despite this, the men in charge of the administration of justice in the Luftwaffe managed to keep the situation fairly well in hand, even though harsh penalties could not always be avoided in certain cases. 121 It was at this time that General der Flieger Bernhard Waber, who had been accused of illicitly augmenting his personal property, was sentenced to death. Goering made no use in this case of his right to commute the death penalty. This was especially bad inasmuch as the Reichsmarschall himself had been guilty of looting, and to a far greater extent; yet he refused any consideration for this general, who was led astray by circumstances, and possibly even by the example of his superior. 122

Goering's attempt in October 1944 to find a way out of the difficulties besetting his service branch by creating the so-called parliament of pilots (Aeropag) was a failure. The membership of Aeropag, consisting of some 30 young front-line Luftwaffe commanders, who were permitted to criticize whatever and whomsoever they wished (except for the person of the Reichsmarschall), demanded that Goering get rid of some of the men making up his circle of intimates. Goering refused. The only result of Aeropag was an intensification of the already prevailing dissatisfaction, since its more optimistic members had naturally been thoroughly informed by those in a position to know (who were far from optimistic) just how desperate the situation actually was. 123

As the Luftwaffe continued to lose personnel, the Reichsmarschall clung to his accustomed way of life, a life which made him so vulnerable to criticism. He had been clear-headed enough after Jeschonnek's suicide to listen attentively to the latter's secretary, Lotte Kersten, even when she began to speak of the demoralizing effect of Goering's manner of living, but he did nothing about it. His spirit was willing but his flesh was entirely too weak.

Field Marshal Kesselring provides the following evaluation of this figure of catastrophe:

The Goering of 1934-35 was an entirely different proposition from the Goering of 1942-43. During the thirties he was a dynamic, self-assured, and belligerent personality. During the forties he was a weary, choleric man who had

cut himself off from the work to be done for the fatherland and who no longer had the power to bring his views to bear. 124

Was there any chance that he might have risen again to the effective level of the thirties? Hitler himself, at the beginning of Hamburg's period of travail on 25 July 1943, delivered a surprisingly favorable evaluation of the basic character of the Reichsmarschall. During the briefing session that day, the Fuehrer remarked:

The Reichsmarschall and I have been through a good many crises together. And in such periods he is as cool as ice. At a time like that there is no better advisor than the Reichsmarschall. I have noticed time and again that when the situation has reached its most critical point, he becomes a man of iron, completely without scruples. There is no better man in such circumstances, and I doubt that a better man could be found anywhere. 125

But how long was Goering to continue to enjoy the protective aura of Hitler's confidence?

#### The Attempts to Overthrow Goering

By the fateful year 1944, Goering had become no more than a shadow of his former personality.\* Among the younger Luftwaffe personnel, who had so admired him before, he was often called the "Rubber Lion" rather than the "Iron Man." His severest critics, however, came from the Army. Generaloberst Heinz Guderian said of him, "He reeked of perfume, his face was made up, and his fingers were covered with the jewels he loved to display." 126

Guderian remarked that he was present on one occasion (along with Generaloberst Alfred Jodl) when Hitler bellowed at the man he had once spoiled with his attentions. "Goering! Your Luftwaffe isn't worth a damn! It doesn't deserve to be an independent branch of service any more! And that's your fault! You're lazy!" The candid Army observer then related how tears ran down the cheeks of the portly Reichsmarschall, who could think of nothing to say in reply. 127 This lack of self-control was also noted on other occasions, and induced Guderian to suggest to Hitler that Goering be relieved of his command. Hitler refused, however, by saying,

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\*See figure 31.



Figure 31  
Hermann Goering at the height of his power as  
Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe and  
Reichsmarschall of the German Reich



Figure 32  
Goering, no longer wearing his decorations,  
shown with Generaloberst Loerzer, visiting  
a German fighter unit in early 1945

"That's impossible for reasons of domestic policy. The Party would never understand."<sup>128</sup>

Since Goering had passed up the opportunity in 1941 of exploiting his enormous prestige to prevent the ill-fated campaign in Russia or to retire honorably from public life, in 1944 his position (and possibly even his life) hung on the perilously thin thread of his public prestige and popularity.\* Guderian noted that the Reichsmarschall, intimidated by Hitler's constant reproaches against the Luftwaffe, began to follow the example introduced by Gen. Adolf Galland on occasions when Goering had been angry with him. Goering began to appear at the military conferences which he could not avoid, "dressed very simply, without his decorations, and with an incredibly unbecoming cap on his head."<sup>129</sup> Jupiter in mourning--sic transit gloria mundi!

Although Hitler did not give in to the Army demand to remove his favorite, Goering seemed to be unable to grasp that the position of the Luftwaffe was completely untenable. Motivated by his concern, Hitler determined not to remove Goering from office, but to eliminate his right to interfere. A field marshal appointed by the Luftwaffe was to be permanently assigned to the Fuehrer Headquarters and was to be granted full authority as the representative of the Reichsmarschall. If this could be arranged, Goering's retention in office could do no further harm. But, as Hitler looked about for possible candidates, he found the selection very limited. The ideal choice, Kesselring, was tied down as Wehrmacht Commander in Chief, Southwest and was indispensable in Italy, where the entire front, long subject to inhuman demands, depended upon his contagiously inspiring temperament. Sperrle had been relieved of his command after the collapse of France, and he was an embittered man, no longer fit for any important appointment. Von Richthofen was ill. The only one remaining was Robert Ritter von Greim, Commander in Chief of the Sixth Air Fleet and a courageous soldier. Not a strategist, he was an honest, down-to-earth military man, a man who had not let himself go but who was fully capable of coping with a difficult assignment. He was also loyal through and through. Hitler decided on this man and summoned him--or, rather, ordered Goering to summon him--to his new appointment.

The immediate motivation behind this step (which Hitler had obviously been turning over in his mind for some time) was the problem of the employment of the Luftwaffe during the British air landing in Holland. During the military conference on 18 September 1944, General der Flieger Werner Kreipe (Acting Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff) was given a

\*See figure 32.

bad time by Hitler. As Kreipe recorded in his diary, Hitler said: ". . . the entire Luftwaffe is incompetent, cowardly, and is letting me down."<sup>130</sup> Hitler continued, saying that he had received more reports to the effect that Luftwaffe units were withdrawing across the Rhine, and flatly refused to listen to Kreipe's attempt to defend the Luftwaffe, saying that he wanted no more arguments with the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff.

The following day, the Reichsmarschall appeared at the military conference, "a broken and beaten man." Hitler had ordered the dissolution of the Luftwaffe General Staff and the closing down of the Air War Academy. Completely unaware of its deeper implications, Goering afterwards reported Hitler's remark that "certain changes must be made in the top-level command of the Luftwaffe." The Reichsmarschall went on to say that the Fuehrer, who had again assured him of his full confidence, had expressed the wish to have Generaloberst von Greim assigned to his Headquarters. Goering did not seem to understand the implications of this. Soon afterward, Kreipe was forbidden by Hitler to ever again set foot in the Fuehrer Headquarters.

On 21 September, von Greim reported to Kreipe. Goering was not present. Significantly, the newcomer had been ordered to report directly to the Fuehrer without talking with Goering first! Kreipe noted in his diary, which records the circumstances of the von Greim experiment: "Goering is furious at not having had a chance to talk with von Greim first."<sup>131</sup>

Generaloberst von Greim later reported to the General Staff Chief that the Fuehrer had elucidated the "sins" of the Luftwaffe for one and one-half hours.\* Then he suggested to von Greim that he accept the appointment as Deputy Commander in Chief. After von Greim had reported all this to Goering, the Reichsmarschall suggested that he remain at Headquarters for a few days and then present an outline of his proposed activity.

Von Greim now began to work out a description of his duties. Kreipe's entry for 1 October notes:

Conference with von Greim in the afternoon. He showed me the outline of duties which he has worked out for himself. According to his outline, he will be Deputy Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, with all the duties and privileges involved, and will also take over certain tasks assigned to the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff.

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\*Kreipe gives no further details.

I called his attention to one or two unclear points and expressed my doubt that Goering would agree to his proposal. Von Greim replied that Hitler and Himmler (!) were in favor of it. He indicated that Christian could easily take on the small amount of routine work normally done by the Chief of the General Staff and, if not, he would bring Koller back. He intended to obtain Goering's approval within the next few days. <sup>132</sup>

But Goering refused to agree to this tacit attempt to put him out of action. On 3 October, when Kreipe arrived at Karinhall, von Greim was closeted with the Reichsmarschall. The latter, as Kreipe succinctly reports, was in a "towering rage." Presumably either the valet, Robert Schropp, or the Personnel Chief, Loerzer, enlightened him as to the prevailing atmosphere. Kreipe continues:

Then I was called in; Goering was alone, completely broken. He complained that they were trying to get rid of him, that von Greim was a traitor. He was, and intended to remain, Commander in Chief. He wanted no more to do with von Greim. Greim ought to go right back to his Air Fleet. <sup>133</sup>

And, in fact, Goering had had another narrow escape. Apparently Hitler was reluctant to insist on his new plan in the face of the opposition of the man who had once been his closest colleague.

But this was the last opportunity to reform conditions in the Luftwaffe top-level command, for Goering's attempt to do something on his own also failed. The Reichsmarschall summoned General Pflugbeil, Commander in Chief of the First Air Fleet, to offer him the job as successor to Kreipe, who--for all practical purposes--had been dismissed. Pflugbeil, however, flatly refused. "He wouldn't take this job under any conditions." <sup>134</sup>

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\*Pflugbeil submitted his official refusal of the appointment on 15 October. See General der Flieger Werner Kreipe, "Kriegstagebuch des Generals der Flieger Kreipe" ("War Diary of General der Flieger Kreipe"), entry for 14 October 1944, H/I/3, Karlsruhe Document Collection. Cited hereafter as Kreipe Diary. See also Chart No. 10.

On 2 November, when Kreipe reported to Goering before his departure--his successor was to be Gen. Karl Koller, a Bavarian whom Goering did not like particularly--the Reichsmarschall did his best to appear firm and determined. "Of course, he said, "the Nibelungen struggle is coming, but we'll fight at the Vistula, the Oder, and the Weser." But when Kreipe suggested to him that he try to persuade Hitler once and for all that policy ought to be implemented by action, Goering was silent for a while. Then Kreipe reports:

He said he couldn't do that because it would rob the Fuehrer of his own self-confidence. Then he remarked unexpectedly that he had had the feeling ever since 1938 that the Fuehrer was no longer discussing everything with him in detail. He had been surprised by von Ribbentrop's appointment as Foreign Minister at that time, and since then there had been a great many important political decisions in which he had not been consulted. In closing, he once more refused flatly to try to use his influence with the Fuehrer. 135

After the failure of the von Greim experiment, Hitler's criticism of the Luftwaffe continued unabated. 136\* It is symptomatic of the decline not only of the Luftwaffe but of the Hitler Reich as a whole that the men who had once been such close associates, personally if not by job assignments, should be unable to achieve a reconciliation.

During the war Hitler had become an unbridled autocrat, whose all-consuming willfulness left no room at all for independent action by others. It was always his instructions, his thoughts, and his decisions that had to be carried out. The second in command of the Reich, far below the Supreme Commander, yet firmly established as the Fuehrer's number two man, no longer existed, and with his downfall went the possibility of any intelligent intervention or independent initiative. The dynamic Goering, who had assumed such heights during the time when he enjoyed the full confidence of the Fuehrer, had become a suspicious and uneasy follower, jealously guarding the remnants of his once almost boundless influence. Reduced to the status of all of the rest of Hitler's subordinates, Goering had become less powerful than Himmler, whose influence was growing rapidly, or than Bormann, the efficient Chief of the Party

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\*Major von Greiff "returned very depressed from the military conference at the Fuehrer Headquarters. . . . Hitler's vilification of the Luftwaffe was more than he could bear." See Kreipe Diary, entry for 10 October 1944.

Chancellory, whose importance, while not a matter of public knowledge, was immense by virtue of his unparalleled position as an intimate of Hitler.

#### Goering's Overthrow

During September and October 1944, when the German Reich was beset by a concentrated series of catastrophes, including the collapse of France, the defection of Rumania, and a separate peace in Finland, Goering had narrowly escaped being removed from office. In such circumstances he was bound to be aware that his prestige had fallen in the sight of Hitler, and that there were influential circles waiting to take advantage of his overthrow.

But, in his innermost thoughts, Goering was still hoping to find a way to strengthen his position. He was only too happy to place the blame upon his subordinates, on the generals and the General Staff officers. This might have been an echo of Hitler's growing antipathy toward the traditional established military leadership. Goering, who felt himself disappointed by his own staff, was indeed a pathetic character during the tragi-comic Klosinski affair.

Lt. Col. Werner Klosinski, Commander of the 4th Bomber Wing, had attracted the attention of the Luftwaffe Personnel Office by his fearless criticism of policies during a training course at Oberjoch, especially the tendency to cover up and evade responsibility in high offices in the Luftwaffe. The Personnel Office asked him for a written memorandum of his accusations, which somehow was reported to Goering. The Reichsmarschall ordered Klosinski, whom he regarded as an expert in handling people, to report to him.

Klosinski was to use his special talents to straighten out the personnel problems of the Luftwaffe for its Commander in Chief. Goering explained to him, "The main problem concerns some 200 generals and 2,000 out-of-date colonels and lieutenant colonels."<sup>137</sup> Colonel Klosinski at first refused, insisting that there was no point in the whole thing. When Goering asked for an explanation of his comment, he answered boldly, "Herr Reichsmarschall, you close yourself off at Karinhall. You have no personal contact with the operations staffs!"

Goering replied, "That is being taken care of. I've already given orders for a house to be built for me there."

Klosinski remarked, "A barracks building would serve the purpose as well. The main thing is that you finally establish contact!"<sup>138</sup>

During the course of the discussion Klosinski was encouraged to speak his mind freely--this was Goering's usual custom--concerning the personnel problem. He demanded the removal of Bruno Loerzer from the post of Chief of Personnel. Goering protested, "Yes, but I need someone with whom I can drink a bottle of red wine in the evening!"

To this plea the new advisor was not insensible: "That's understandable, of course. Make Loerzer a field marshal, but get him out of the Personnel Office!"<sup>139</sup>

Goering finally agreed to remove Loerzer and to replace him by Rudolf Meister, a man suggested by Klosinski. This did not come to pass until some time later. The removal of Chief Adjutant Bernd von Brauchitsch, which Goering also promised Klosinski, did not come to pass at all.

During the early phases of Klosinski's work concerning the Luftwaffe Personnel Office, the SS appeared on the scene. Klosinski came into contact with Erich Ohlendorf who informed him that the SS would like to see Goering "put on the shelf." Karl Koller gave Klosinski the same impression, prompting the young advisor to offer to tell Hitler the whole truth about Goering's activities.

Klosinski soon went to Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Reichs Security Chief, to arrange an interview between Hitler and Koller. However, when Koller was informed that Kaltenbrunner looked forward anxiously to the meeting, and had said, "I'll see that Koller tells the Fuehrer everything," the General Staff Chief was overcome with horror. He declared, "You have no right to confront me with such a situation!"<sup>140</sup>

Three days later Klosinski was summoned to Karinhall, where a court was convened. He reported that "a court-martial had been called against me; Koller had accused me of plotting with the SS to overthrow the Reichsmarschall."<sup>141</sup>

The bizarre events have been recorded by Klosinski:

I was placed under the guard of a first lieutenant, whose name I can't remember. Then I was brought in. Goering gave a positively bellowing speech in which he accused me of mutiny and the demoralization of military power. When I tried to defend myself, I was simply

shouted down. The Reichsmarschall said that he had already appointed my execution squad. Hammerstein disarmed me; I was led away and placed under strong guard.

. . . While the hastily assembled court (with some embarrassment) was deliberating the merits of the case, I heard the firing squad practicing outside my window. . . . During a pause in the proceedings I was told that I might order anything I wanted to eat before execution. Goering obviously believed that my end had come. I expressed no wishes in the matter, but was served a portion of roast goose. I continued to listen to the squad practicing outside.<sup>142</sup>

Koller's evidence was incriminating, but then came a development which was to save the prisoner's life. Klosinski had managed to get word of the situation to Kaltenbrunner, who appeared on the scene and demanded to speak to Goering. According to Klosinski, he is supposed to have told the Reichsmarschall, "If you harm a hair on Klosinski's head, your dossier will be handed over to the Fuehrer before the day is over!"<sup>143</sup>

Thus the situation changed drastically by the following day when proceedings were resumed. Koller retracted his testimony, and declared that in the beginning, when Klosinski's name was brought up, Goering had referred to him as "that cuckoo's egg the Fuehrer has laid in my nest." The verdict of the court--von Hammerstein realized from the start that the death penalty was out of the question--turned out as expected: two years' imprisonment and loss of rank.<sup>144</sup> But, even here a way out was found. The sentence was never carried out. According to Klosinski, "The next day I was received by the Reichsmarschall. He told me, 'You were the victim of the SS. You're going to be sent off to Norway. I'm exiling you there.'"<sup>145</sup>

The Klosinski affair, though merely an episode, gives a clear idea of Goering's situation, his thoughts, and his actions in what was presumably his very worst period.

Ever since Kreipe's dismissal, Koller had been Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. A severe judge of the Reichsmarschall, an energetic man, who enjoyed responsibility and who was thoroughly (perhaps too thoroughly) aware of his own worth, he possessed a core of sensitivity unrelieved by humor. Koller stoically accepted the outbreaks of the Reichsmarschall, whose nerves were becoming less and less able to withstand the storm clouds from the Fuehrer's Headquarters. And when, during the year 1945, was the sky ever absolutely free of clouds?

The war had also begun to invade Goering's private life. His lovely hunting lodge at Rominten had been set afire in order to prevent its falling into the hands of the Russians, who were advancing into East Prussia. In Karinhall, whose location was also no longer particularly safe since the Russians had broken through on the Vistula and since Soviet troops had reached the Oder, Goering's friends had gathered and were closing ranks about him. These were the three "ice saints" (Eisheilige),\* as they were called by the malicious tongues in Goering's immediate circle, Koerner, Loerzer (who had been staying at Karinhall as a permanent guest ever since his dismissal as Personnel Chief), and the Reichsleiter Philip Bouhler.<sup>146</sup> Depressed and uneasy, they only served to intensify the Reichsmarschall's own worries.

But--there is no mistaking the signs--the more dubious the continued existence of comforts of Karinhall appeared, the more indifferent Goering became toward his own life. He began to make visits to the front. He was determined not to give up Karinhall until the very last minute.<sup>147</sup>

Once again (late 1944) Goering tried to negotiate with England through Swedish intermediaries, but in vain. And Hitler threatened: "Anyone trying to initiate negotiations will pay for it with his life!"<sup>148</sup>

The 20th of April 1945 was Hitler's last birthday. Goering, too, was among those who came to the Fuehrer bunker to congratulate him. During the following military conference, Goering remarked that someone from the Luftwaffe top-level command, either he or the General Staff Chief, ought to move farther south, since the Allied advance was already threatening to cut off northern Germany. Hitler replied: "You go, then. I need Koller here." The two men parted company without any undue emotion.<sup>149</sup>

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\*Editor's Note: May 12, 13, 14, 15, the saints' days of Sts. Pancras, Servatius, Boniface, and Sophia, the days when freezing has most often occurred to set back or ruin the vineyards in the Rhineland. Because of this, the name "ice saints" was coined, a positively derogatory term which later came to be used in other connections.

Hitler soon put a stop to these visits, on the grounds that he found it "unbelievable and ridiculous" of Goering to expose himself to danger. See Charles Bewley, Hermann Goering, Goettingen: Goettinger Verlagsanstalt fuer Wissenschaft und Politik Leonhard Schlueter, 1956, p. 297.

As Goering was preparing to leave Berlin (20-21 April 1945), he was caught on the street by an air raid on one or two occasions and had to take refuge in public shelters. There something rather strange became apparent. This man who had irrevocably forfeited his position of power, the confidence of the Fuehrer, and with it his prestige with the Party hierarchy, and who had so obviously failed in his task of protecting the fatherland against enemy air attacks, managed to retain the affection of the masses, those hardest hit by these attacks. He maintained his self-assurance before them until the very end. He visited German cities after bombing raids, tasted the food being prepared for the homeless, and addressed crowds with evident skill and self-confidence, even telling jokes at his own expense. And, only a few days before the collapse of National Socialism and the Third Reich, he was accorded a not unfriendly reception in the shelters when he spoke to his fellow inhabitants in an affable manner and joked about his own notorious remarks to the effect that people could call him "Maier" if . . . \* Learning of his presence, people from the neighboring shelters came to ask him to visit their bunkers as well, and usually he accepted these invitations. He had forfeited very little of his popularity with the people of Berlin. 150

While Goering, everywhere greeted by his friends, was on his way to the Obersalzberg by way of Bohemia, a decisive event occurred on 22 April. On the afternoon of that day, Hitler collapsed. According to Koller:

. . . he realizes now that the situation is hopeless. But he refuses to leave Berlin, and insists on staying on in his bunker and defending the city. When the Russians come, he intends to accept the consequences and shoot himself. Keitel, Jodl, Bormann, Doenitz, and Himmler (the last two by telephone) have been trying to change his mind, to persuade him to leave Berlin, since one can't conduct operations from here any more. But it is no use.

Hitler remained firm, telling the others to leave or stay, as they pleased. 151

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\*Editor's Note: Goering is reputed to have said, "If they bomb this place, my name is Maier!" Thereafter many Germans referred to him as "Herr Maier."

Koller left Christian in charge in the north and traveled southward to see Goering, arriving at the Obersalzberg by air on the 23rd. He informed the Reichsmarschall of what had happened and urged him to act, inasmuch as Hitler had "made himself the commander of Berlin and thus automatically excluded himself from the conduct of the affairs of state as well as from the leadership of the Wehrmacht." Bouhler added his entreaties to those of Koller, but Goering was undecided, saying: "Bormann is my deadly enemy. He's just waiting for a chance to get me out of the way. If I act now, I'll be branded a traitor. If I don't act, I'll be accused of letting Germany down in her most difficult hour."

Goering may also have been thinking of Himmler's odd visit to Karinhall in March 1943, when the SS Chief had discussed a possible agreement with Goering in the eventuality that the Fuehrer "would not be in a position to carry out his work." Full of suspicion, at that time Goering had told his tempter to get out. 152

Nevertheless, Goering again checked the text of the law of 29 September 1941 which designated him as Hitler's deputy or successor in all government, Party, and Wehrmacht offices in the event that Hitler's capabilities should become impaired or that he should be eliminated from the scene of action. Fearing that the Fuehrer might have had the law modified in the meantime, Goering asked Reichs Minister Dr. Eugen Lammers, who happened to be staying in Berchtesgaden, for an expert opinion. Lammers concluded that the law was still valid in its entirety.

Upon Koller's urging the Reichsmarschall decided (with the help of the General Staff Chief) to direct an inquiry to Hitler by radiogram:

My Fuehrer, in view of your decision to remain in Berlin to defend the city, do you agree to my now assuming command of the Reich with full authority in domestic and foreign policy, on the basis of the law of 29 September 1941? If I have not received a reply from you by 2200, I shall assume that you have been deprived of your freedom of action and shall act in accordance with my own best judgment. I cannot express my feelings in this hour of my life. May God protect you. I hope that you will decide to leave Berlin after all and come down here. 153

The radiogram was sent at 1500 hours on 23 April 1945. Goering also issued orders to Keitel and Ribbentrop to report to him the following day unless they should receive counter-instructions from him or from Hitler in the meantime. The Reichsmarschall, now full of determination,

ordered his General Staff Chief to undertake certain preliminary measures. Immediately upon the receipt of Hitler's reply he planned to fly to see Eisenhower, Commander in Chief of the Western Allies, with whom he hoped to reach an early compromise in person-to-person negotiations. Koller writes:

Once the decision had been taken, Goering was energetic and eager for action, as if some heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He was looking forward to contacting the Americans and kept reiterating his confidence that he could work out a satisfactory agreement with the Americans and the British. In former days, I had often called him "his master's voice" (after the famous trademark of the dog sitting in front of a phonograph loud-speaker) because of the many occasions when he was unsuccessful in pushing through his protests against some matter to Hitler and then afterwards, in his awe of the Fuehrer, would present the words and decisions of the Fuehrer with the true ring of conviction as though they were his own. Now he seemed to be a different person somehow. During dinner he beamed and was clearly looking forward to the new task confronting him. 154

But his joy was premature. Hitler interpreted his radiogram as an ultimatum and as evidence of betrayal. He did not even need to be goaded by Bormann. The Reichsmarschall was finished, as far as Hitler was concerned. Towards 2100, thus before expiration of the time limit set by Goering, his reply radiogram arrived with the message: "When the law of 29 June (?) is to be invoked will be decided by me. Have not been deprived of my freedom of action, and I forbid you to take any steps in the direction indicated by you." 155\*

Hitler, enraged, then turned completely against the man who he believed to have betrayed him. Goering was summarily stripped of all his offices. As reported to General Koller on 29 April by Col. Hans Wolter, who witnessed the events on the Obersalzberg, the news reached Goering in the form of a telegram from Bormann's office with the following text: "What you have done warrants the death penalty. In view of

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\*Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant, Col. Nicolaus von Below, who had received a copy of Goering's radiogram, also interpreted it as an ultimatum. He reports that Hitler discussed the matter with him in utmost calm. Nor does von Below believe that Bormann influenced the Fuehrer in this case.

your valuable past services, I shall not institute proceedings, provided you renounce all your offices and titles. Otherwise, appropriate steps will have to be taken. Adolf Hitler, "156

The text does not seem to have been reproduced quite accurately. Why should Hitler have demanded Goering's voluntary resignation when the newspapers had already printed a declaration prepared by Hitler, and when Goering had no choice but to obey in any case? At 2200 hours (the deadline he had set for receipt of Hitler's reply to his "ultimatum") the Reichsmarschall was arrested by the Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst or SD). For a while, Goering's entire staff (including Reichsleiter Bouhler) was placed under arrest with him. Even the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, General Koller, the chief witness concerning these events, was confined for a time to quarters. Generaloberst Loerzer (perhaps because he was already retired) escaped the notice of the SD, and State Secretary Koerner must have been away at the time.

It seems to be almost a symbol of fate that American bombers raided the Obersalzberg on the morning of 25 April 1945, almost completely destroying Goering's house, Bormann's house, and a part of the wing set aside for the Fuehrer. Once the epitome of luck and the darling of fate, Goering, with his wife and daughter, was a prisoner in his own air raid shelter.

Hitler had summoned Generaloberst von Greim to his bunker in embattled Berlin. On 26 April (largely due to the skillful flying of the German aviatrix Hanna Reitsch) Greim managed to reach Berlin in his Fieseler Storch aircraft. The city was then surrounded by the enemy and was the scene of heavy fighting. Greim did not arrive unscathed, however, having sustained a wound in his leg. Koller had also been ordered to report, but was unable to reach the capital. He telephoned von Greim, the newly appointed field marshal and Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, from the Wehrmacht High Command Headquarters in the woods near Fuerstenberg. Von Greim was still optimistic, although it was obvious that Germany was heading toward the ultimate collapse with frightening rapidity. Despite the lateness of the hour, he had succumbed to the enchantment of Hitler's personality. Koller reported Greim's incredible words as follows:

Just don't lose hope! Everything will still turn out all right. My contact with the Fuehrer and his strength has strengthened me like a dip in the fountain of youth. The Fuehrer sat at my bedside for quite a while and discussed everything with me. He retracted all of his accusations

against the Luftwaffe. He is aware of what our service branch has accomplished. His reproaches are directed solely at Goering. He had the highest praise for our forces! It made me exceedingly happy. 157

At last the implications of Hitler's remarks, which began while Jeschonnek was still in office, began to emerge. It was not the Luftwaffe that was to blame, it was Goering. Von Greim was deeply embittered toward the former Reichsmarschall, and most of his associates held their former chief in contempt. Goering's imprisonment might well have resulted in an execution, especially after 30 April 1945, when a radiogram came to Goering's guards from Bormann. According to Koller, the radiogram read as follows:

If Berlin falls, and we are killed, you are responsible by your honor, your lives, and your families for seeing that the traitors of 23 April are liquidated without exception. Men, do your duty! 158

By this time Goering had already been transferred from the Obersalzberg to Mauterndorf Castle, the scene of his happy childhood. An SS Brigade Leader (Brigadefuehrer), on his own initiative, relieved the SD of its guard duties and entrusted them entirely to the Waffen SS. Goering, now desperate, continued to demand help from Koller, whom he accused of "selling him out" in his report concerning activities on 23 April. He even had Koller's secretary called to pass on the message that, "If Koller is anything but a swine, and if he has a spark of decency in him, he'll be here tomorrow morning." 159

But all these are merely the last throes. Reality had already progressed beyond them. Goering's liberation had become a fact. On the day of Hitler's death, the leader of the SS unit guarding the former Reichsmarschall called Field Marshal Kesselring to ask whether he "should carry out the death sentence against Goering and his family. . ." Kesselring, hearing about this for the first time, forbade "execution of the sentence and ordered the SS to withdraw and permit Goering, his family, and his staff to move about freely in Mauterndorf." 160\* According to Koller,

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\*General der Flieger (Ret.) Deichmann declared, "Hitler had ordered that, in the event of his own death, Goering, his family, and his staff were to be shot." See Interview of General der Flieger (Ret.) Paul Deichmann by the author, 2 February 1956.

that must have been on 5 May, since it was on that day that Kesselring informed him of the end of Goering's arrest.

But the lack of realism with which the newly discharged prisoner evaluated the situation is clearly revealed by the fact that he immediately place his good offices at the disposal of Grossadmiral Karl Doenitz, the new chief of state, for the negotiations with the Allies. He stressed the fact that Hitler had often used him in such missions and had told him repeatedly that he possessed "a special talent" for negotiations of this sort.

Koller arranged for Goering's move to Fischhorn on the southern shore of Lake Zell, since he feared that Russian troops might occupy Mauterndorf. On 8 May the Goerings left the castle. On the previous day he had sent von Brauchitsch to Koller with a letter to Eisenhower (again the thought of face-to-face negotiations) and one to the nearest American divisional commander. On the way to Fischhorn Goering met the American Brig. Gen. Robert Stack, who--obviously on the basis of the letter delivered by von Brauchitsch--was prepared to take the former Reichsmarschall under his protection. As was reported to Koller, "Goering and his staff were deeply relieved, everyone was in a happy mood. The women in the retinue hugged and congratulated each other on their rescue. Goering joked with the American soldiers."161

To begin with, the reception accorded Goering was absolutely gentlemanly. During the dinner with the General, Goering felt himself encouraged in the hope that he, as the representative of the German people, might be able to negotiate with Eisenhower regarding a mutually satisfactory conclusion to the war. On the next day, the group set out immediately, its first goal the town of Kitzbühel. From here they went by air to the Bärenkeller Camp near Augsburg, where Goering encountered the first indications that his hopes were not to be realized. Robert Schropp, Goering's valet, reports that Goering paced back and forth for hours in the small room assigned to him. 162

Goering's resplendent past was now irrevocably gone, and this was the beginning of the somber last act of his destiny before his accusers at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, an act which was to decide whether he would go down in history as the symbol of a defeated Germany or whether the world's picture of him could be endowed with more favorable characteristics. There did not seem to be much hope of the latter when one considers his lethargy of the last years and the thorough-going change in his status. The night surrounding him was black and starless.

## Chapter 5

HANS JESCHONNEK, CHIEF OF THE  
LUFTWAFFE GENERAL STAFFJeschonnek's Early Life and Career

The way for the Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe was much more difficult after the death of Walther Wever in 1936. The path had become narrower than it had been for Wever, whose successor, the light-hearted, indefatigable Albert Kesselring, left office barely a year later. The next Chief, Hans-Juergen Stumpff, was never more than a temporary appointment, and Hans Jeschonnek, not quite 40 years of age and much younger than his predecessor, succeeded him in 1939.

As Goering personified power, so this man, the later General-oberst, at first represented brilliant achievement and success, and then the beginning of the decline of the Luftwaffe.

Hans Jeschonnek, son of an assistant secondary school master, was born in Hohensalza\* on 9 April 1899. He had three brothers and one sister by his father's first marriage, and four more brothers from his father's second marriage, yet he was always much beloved by his parents. He came from a family in which three of the sons had dedicated themselves to the profession of arms. Paul, the eldest son, was one of the great hopes of the secret air arm of the German Reichswehr in the 1920's until his untimely death at Rechlin in June 1929. The youngest, Gert, served in the German Navy during World War II and subsequently held several important posts in the Navy of the German Federal Republic. Hans, volunteering for war service at the age of fifteen and a half years, attended the Cadet School at Berlin-Lichterfelde, thereby qualifying for service late in World War I.

By 1915 Jeschonnek had received his commission as a lieutenant, and two years later made his way to the ranks of Fighter Squadron 40. When the end of the war came he had two aerial victories to his credit.

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\*Hohensalza was 21 miles southwest of Torun, then a part of Prussia. This was consigned to Poland in 1919, and recovered only briefly in 1939. It is now in Poland, and called Inowroclaw.

He later took part in the fighting in Upper Silesia against the Polish invaders as a part of Cavalry Regiment No. 6 of the Reichswehr.

He then served in the Army Ordnance Department as a member of the staff of Capt. Kurt Student in the Inspectorate for Arms and Equipment, one of the camouflaged air branches of the Reichswehr. Here the young Jeschonnek remained from 1923 to the end of 1928, learning at the right hand of this methodical and careful officer who looked upon him as a "younger brother." In this office Jeschonnek studied aircraft development in neighboring countries, although the lack of German air equipment made his education rather one-sided. This activity, however, enabled him to visit many countries and to attend most of the great air shows. The generosity of the Dutch, Swedish, and Swiss officials allowed Jeschonnek and Student to try out a number of foreign aircraft. <sup>1</sup>

In 1928 Jeschonnek completed his General Staff training as the best officer in his class, and in April of that year began his service in the Inspectorate 1 (L) of the Reichswehr Ministry. This branch was commanded from early 1929 by Lt. Col. (GSC) Hellmuth Felmy. On 30 January 1933 (with the establishment of the Reichs Commissariat for Aviation, and on 1 May 1933 with the creation of the Reichs Aviation Ministry) Jeschonnek was made Adjutant to State Secretary Erhard Milch.

In March of 1934 Jeschonnek attained the rank of captain in Bomber Wing 152, and on 1 April 1935 he was promoted to major. The following year on 1 October he assumed command of Training Group III of Air Administrative Area I in Greifswald. This assignment was one of the happiest of his career, and he was able to take an active part in the testing and experimentation of aircraft, which helped bring the Luftwaffe rapidly to the forefront among the world's air forces.

After being promoted to lieutenant colonel on 20 April 1937, he became Chief of Branch 1 of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe and entered the Reichs Aviation Ministry. He attained the position of Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff on 1 February 1938, the same year in which he was promoted to colonel. On 1 February 1939 he was selected as Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, a post which was followed by his rapid promotion in the general officer ranks.\* On 14 August he was a Generalmajor, on 19 August 1940 General der Flieger, and on 1 March 1942 Generaloberst.

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\*See Chart No. 8.

Wever, who obviously had not thought about the possibility of an early death, or at least was not anticipating any such thing, provided every possible means for the young Jeschonnek to demonstrate his skill and ability, and clearly designated him as his eventual successor.<sup>2</sup> Wever also had selected him in a 1936 mobilization plan as "Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff in case of mobilization."<sup>3</sup>

It was to the advantage of Jeschonnek that he was able to work under the guidance of Wever, a fatherly and highly gifted officer, who provided him with the opportunity of working in the fields of leadership, organization, and training. He was well along in his command education when Wever was killed on 3 June 1936.

#### A Youthful Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff

Jeschonnek was a colonel at the young age of 39 years. This was indeed unusual in a deeply-rooted, professional, peacetime army, although in the special situation of the rapid build-up of a new service (offering rapid promotional opportunities) it was quite understandable. But to become a 40-year-old Generalmajor, a 41-year-old General der Flieger, and a 43-year-old Generaloberst was quite another thing. Despite his fine mind, what would compensate for his lack of experience in high command positions and for the refinement of thought that could not be conferred along with his high ranks and positions?

Now he was charged with the command of a body that had grown to be so enormous and its organization so complex that only an experienced "old hand" could have grasped the idea of how to control it. Even when one considers his brief span of life, Jeschonnek was, after all, a Generaloberst for only seventeen and a half months, and had occupied a key post as colonel for only nine and a half months. None of these high posts were associated with experience at the front. From the colonelcy on, his advancement was precipitous and unsound. Facing heavy responsibilities to which he was unequal became his fate or Kismet!

To be sure, history records many cases of extremely youthful men (quite aside from monarchs) who held the highest ranks and commands, men whose destinies had decreed them to become the supreme commanders of their nations; for example, Alexander the Great, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick the Great. Hannibal was about 26 years old when he assumed command of the Carthaginian Army in Spain and led it through its historic campaigns, in which his greatest successes, those of Lake Trasimeno (217 A. D.) and Cannae (216 A. D.) occurred in the

first quarter of this career. Prince Eugene of Savoy was not yet 34 years old when, as Imperial Generalissimo, he won his famous victory over the Turks at Senta. In his early twenties, Archduke Karl Philipp zu Schwarzenburg of Austria won at Wuerzburg the greatest victory of his career as commander in chief. In the same year the 31-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte won his finest campaign as commander of the French Army in Italy.

However, in the case of Alexander, Hannibal, Frederick II, Eugene, and Napoleon, it is a matter of genius of the first order. Too, in Archduke Karl there is the example of a militarily gifted son and brother of an emperor; in the case of Eugene, a Turkish war had already been raging for 14 years and had taken a heavy toll of the first and second ranks of leaders; and Napoleon Bonaparte had inherited from the French Revolution a number of young and enthusiastic generals to replace the older generation of commanders who were viewed as unreliable by the young leader.

But, in addition, the conduct of war in every century prior to the introduction of compulsory military service and the rise of massive armies (along with the technical means for the transmission of orders) gave vigorous and ambitious youth far greater opportunities for success. In former times it was a matter of personal observation, of instantaneous initiative, of quick decision, of inspiring and courageous personal action, and of direct influence to the combatants by fervid words, often in the midst of a crisis, that counted. All of this was done on a battlefield over which one could command a view.

By World War II (in fact, in World War I), however, the opportunity to distinguish one's self by personal commitment, the item so decisive in deciding issues in the past, had vanished, and it was this situation into which the young Chief of Staff, Jeschonnek, found himself thrust. Because of the gigantic theaters of action and the huge massed forces, all dependent upon factors such as tremendous logistical support, the specific vigor of youth could not bring into play those values which were once so prized and significant in warfare.

But it should also be noted that the great captains mentioned above held the highest command positions, while Jeschonnek, although Chief of Staff, held no direct personal command. Even in World War I the Chief of the General Staff was no longer seen on the field of battle such as had been the case with the elder Helmuth von Moltke in 1866,

who went into combat beside his emperor. Both world wars meant painstaking and unrelenting desk and map work for the General Staff Chiefs.

Considering again the element of age, the classic example of the General Staff Chief was Field Marshal Count Helmuth von Moltke, who attained that position at the age of 58, and led the victorious campaign against Austria in 1866 at age 66, and against France in 1870 at the age of 70. Count Alfred von Schlieffen and the younger Moltke also reached that office at the age of 58. Paul von Hindenburg became Chief of the General Staff at the age of 69, and Conrad von Hoetzendorf became Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Army General Staff for the first time in 1906 when he was 53, and for the second time in 1912 when he was past 58.

Of the Army Chiefs of the General Staff in World War II, Halder held that position at age 54, Kurt Zeitzler at 47, and Heinz Guderian at 56. Only in the Luftwaffe did youth figure so prominently in the higher positions. Wever became Chief of Staff at 46, Kesselring at 48, Stumpff at 48, Guenther Korten at 45, and Karl Koller at 47. None of them, however, approached the youthful level of Jeschonnek, who had arrived at this point before his fortieth birthday.

Generalleutnant Josef "Beppo" Schmid, Chief of Luftwaffe Intelligence, points out that youthfulness was an advantage in the eyes of Goering, who was happy that he had such a young Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. Even Hitler was pleased to have a vigorous young man in the post, a man with such excellent military bearing.<sup>4</sup> Goering believed that he could work more easily with this young man than with older officers, many of them his seniors, who had definite high command views. He remembered the great prestige and personal stature held by Wever and Kesselring. It was perhaps inevitable, considering Goering's self interests, that he chose Jeschonnek, so that when the Luftwaffe's failures began to appear, he could easily shift the blame to the promising young officer.<sup>5</sup> Goering's unrestrained reproaches against Jeschonnek hampered the latter's work in the General Staff, and even though the Chief of Staff sought to stand on his own and defend his own policies, he found himself forced by Goering more and more into the role of an operations aide.

It was likewise difficult for Jeschonnek to prevail with his views before generals senior to him in age, rank, and length of service. With all due regard being given for saving face, he was often obliged to make concessions, especially among the senior officers of the numbered air fleets. Kesselring, for instance, certainly demanded nothing unreasonable of the Chief of the General Staff, but he did have the power at the

beginning of the campaign in the East to wangle two more air forces for his Second Air Fleet than Jeschonnek had originally authorized. There was also Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, Commander of the Third Air Fleet, a strong-willed man who was difficult to handle. And there was the ruthless Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen, a man as demanding as a prima donna; Jeschonnek would hardly have acquiesced to so many of his demands if Richthofen had not been like a "favorite brother Benjamin" among the generals. Generalleutnant "Beppo" Schmid and General der Flieger Paul Deichmann, as well as Generalleutnant Hermann Plocher (with some reservations), thought that Jeschonnek's friendship with Richthofen, a man who had been influential since returning from Spain in 1939, was a kind of friendship of expediency.\* In any case Richthofen made use of this friendship to further the great demands for his VIII Air Corps and later the Fourth Air Fleet, even though he insisted upon being at the hot points of every operation. 6

One fact ought also to be pointed out in this discussion, namely, that there was a very influential circle of friends around Goering, who were bound to him (and willingly acted as his vassals) through close association in Fighter Wing "Richthofen," or from common experiences during the difficult years after World War I. They were richly rewarded for their loyalty by meteoric promotions and other benefits. They had Goering's ear and could appear at his quarters at any time, even if they did not remain (as happened toward the end of the war) permanently with his Karinhall entourage.

This inner circle included Generaloberst Bruno Loerzer, Commander in Chief of the 2nd Air Corps and later Chief of Personnel; State Secretary Paul Koerner; and General der Flieger Karl Bodenschatz, who acted first as Chief of the Ministerial Office (Reichs Air Ministry) and later as Goering's liaison official at Hitler's headquarters. These were personal associations against whose influence the Chief of the General Staff was powerless. None of these men had much appreciation for Jeschonnek, who had so soon become Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff.

Perhaps even more galling was the fact that during the war Goering (who absented himself from his headquarters for such long periods of

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\*This is expressly denied by Col. (GSC) Torsten Christ, Richthofen's Chief of Staff and by Frau Lotte Kersten, Jeschonnek's personal secretary, both of whom claim that his association with Richthofen was a sincere and genuinely warm association.

time) would go to Karinhall, to his hunting lodge in Rominten, or to picturesque Veldenstein in Upper Franconia, and would issue orders through his adjutants. The latter (Col. Bernd von Brauchitsch and Lt. Col. Werner Teske), and Goering's personal physician, Dr. Ramon von Ondarza, formed a kind of collateral government, the "Little General Staff" as it was derisively called, which harassed and confused the man who had to perform the real General Staff work.

Jeschonnek's youth was undoubtedly also the reason for his inability to win over subordinates who were of his own age or slightly younger. With them he was brusque and reserved,<sup>7</sup> often carried to excess his innate tendency toward sarcasm, and could reject in a most dictatorial manner any dissenting opinions.<sup>8</sup> He was not endowed with the great gift possessed by Wever and Kesselring of a radiant personality that shone on all alike, firing them with enthusiasm and winning their cheerful cooperation.

However, the young Chief of the General Staff did open his heart to his younger comrades. He prized youth, overrating it just as did his master, the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, and, as the Third Reich in general, tended to do.<sup>9</sup> Youth, that was the age for aviation! One might hazard the reflection that the comparatively youthful Jeschonnek felt drawn to younger personnel because he himself was somewhat drawn away from them.

Be that as it may, just as his tour of duty in the Training Wing (with its close-knit comradeship) was perhaps the happiest time of his life, so also did he later cling to the loyalties of the men who became the sole survivors of those days (Maj. [GSC] Helmuth Pohle, Col. F. K. Knust, Generalleutnant Karl Wilke, and Lt. Col. Werner Leuchtenberg), all of whom retained affectionate loyalty and highest respect for him.

During the war the rising number of great fliers, like Adolf Galland, Werner Baumbach, and Werner Moelders, always found him to be understanding and helpful. That had its advantages, since the Chief of the General Staff was thus kept informed about morale at the front, and the result was a regular rejuvenation of commands. This also had certain rather important disadvantages. Jeschonnek had a weakness for forthright, energetic people, and he was "too trusting."<sup>10</sup> Because of this it was no wonder that these pampered youths grew too cocky.<sup>11</sup> They were still basically immature people who had not yet measured up to their elevated rank.

Despite his keen intellect, the Chief of the General Staff lacked an understanding of human nature, the cardinal attribute of a leader. It is true that the man in whom he was to experience the keenest disappointment, Capt. Ulrich Diesing,\* was not called back from the front by Jeschonnek himself, but (as was also true with Walter Storp) by the Chief of the Tactical-Technical Group of the General Staff, whom Jeschonnek had authorized to "get still more of the 'old timers' from the front."<sup>12</sup> If Pohle's memory was correct, neither Diesing nor Storp had yet been assigned to the Training Wing during Jeschonnek's tours to the front. Diesing and Storp, like many of their kind, including Eckhard Christian whom Jeschonnek had taken into the Training Wing, did not enjoy good reputations in the Luftwaffe, however vigorous, energetic, and ambitious they might have been. <sup>13</sup>

These young men were always ready to criticize, and Jeschonnek lived to see how Diesing, who sat at his feet like a true disciple, later betrayed him. When Jeschonnek took the turncoat to Goering's headquarters, Diesing managed to get the attentive ear of the Reichsmarschall and the "Little General Staff," where the carping youth happily engaged in regular and caustic criticism of Jeschonnek.

#### Beau Ideal of a Soldier, but a Mere Soldier

Everyone, even the critical observer, has emphasized the genuine diligence, keen intelligence, and quick comprehension of the young Jeschonnek.<sup>14</sup> He has been praised for his talented ability to give quick and uniform instructions and orders.<sup>15</sup> In his activity at Greifswald he had done outstanding work in formulating and drafting operational procedures for combat pilots. "His drafts were quite often adopted in the training directives without any specific emendations or additions, since there was nothing to change."<sup>16</sup>

These attributes were undoubtedly combined with great ambition.<sup>17</sup> In his personal bearing he was the beau ideal of a soldier. His outward appearance was attractive, and his gait was always measured. He never

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\*Killed in an auto accident in mid-April 1945.

†According to Frau Kersten, Diesing was dangerously ambitious. As an opportunist he wavered for a time between Jeschonnek and Milch, only to drop Jeschonnek. He then engaged in a more-or-less continuous assault against the character and leadership of Jeschonnek. In this criticism Brauchitsch and Dietrich Peltz occasionally took part.

††General der Flieger Josef Kammlhuber believes Jeschonnek had far too much ambition.

walked, he "strode."<sup>18</sup> The narrow-skulled, slender cavalry officer always manifested great self-control.\*

Although from his high office he had caught sight of many unsavory matters, and was probably intimately exposed to the contagious extravagances of Goering who since 1939 had lost all semblance of moderation, Jeschonnek never indulged in such luxury and always led an austere and soldierly life.<sup>19</sup> In 1940 when France, bursting with commodities, fell into German hands, Jeschonnek had no assistant adjutants as purchasing officers, and as Col. Friedrich Karl Knust testified, never brought anything "back home with him."<sup>20</sup> He told Colonel Knust in 1943, "The most dreadful thing was that Goering took me along when he went shopping!"<sup>21</sup> What self-control! If only it had been general in the Luftwaffe!

Jeschonnek shunned large social events, and set no store by them. He could be merry in a small company of people, free and easy in the bosom of his comrades of the happy Training Wing days, particularly when Pohle, a man whose character was "so in harmony with his own," was present.<sup>22</sup> Even in the days when his luck in the war was beginning to turn, he felt happy in the intimate circle of the staff of General der Flieger Ulrich Grauert or in that of Field Marshal Freiherr von Richthofen. There he was completely relaxed in a cheerful card game, and was utterly at ease, even when he "lost his shirt."<sup>23</sup>

In his youth he liked to have a convivial drink. He drank somewhat more later on when disastrous intelligence reports began to pile up, although nothing seemed to agree with him because of his stomach complaint. Alcohol offered him relief, and perhaps even an escape, but no pleasure, and he disdained all epicurean luxuries, even at the Reichsmarschall's table. Once when Knust looked him up at Luftwaffe Headquarters, Jeschonnek breakfasted on cereal, coffee, Army bread, and jam, and appeared to be as "delighted as a child." "But," added Knust, "he also wanted to set a good example."<sup>24</sup>

As a matter of fact, because he was abstemious in everything, the Luftwaffe was morally strengthened by this man, and his spirit could have provided it with a fountain of youth. However, it was not a good thing that this well-paced soldier was so completely a soldier. In Jeschonnek's life, his family (wife and daughter) did not seem to play any decisive role. He was so wrapped up in his official duties that nothing else could absorb him.

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\*See figure 33,



Figure 33  
Hans Jeschonnek, Chief of the Luftwaffe General  
Staff, 1 February 1939-18 August 1943

To be sure, he took pleasure in the contemplation of nature in quiet, and as yet unspoiled, places.\* But such walks were only a means of relaxation, often taken rather hurriedly, and became merely interruptions in his interminable work. He was not musical, although he did read good books, and not only the descriptive novels which the Reichsmarschall pressed into his hand. But the aesthetic world of the fine arts, from which can emanate so many powerful influences for strengthening, stimulating, and consoling, had receded far into the background for him, just as it had for the great majority of his colleagues in the Luftwaffe.

To Jeschonnek religion was merely a silly and superficial social matter, with which he had little to do, and in which he took almost no interest. He never afforded himself the luxury of time for introspective reflection concerning the nature of things. Thus, when the turning point of the war came to shatter his deepest confidence and threaten his hitherto intellectual type career, Jeschonnek had absolutely no spiritual reserves upon which he could call. Fundamentally, he was a lonely man, a man who needed more than most others a loyal colleague and a true friend, even though it is a moot question whether he could really have opened his heart to such a person.<sup>25</sup>

#### Jeschonnek and Germany's Unready Air Arm

With his appointment as Chief of Branch I (Operations Staff) of the Luftwaffe General Staff on 1 February 1938, Jeschonnek entered the German Air Ministry as one who was ready or proficient in his own person. One year later he became Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff.

There were two things that motivated the young lieutenant colonel in 1937 and which remained as dogma for him for a long time. One was his military, and the other his political, conviction. Both were to become ominously enmeshed, although not until the war began. These two factors influenced both the rise and the fall of Jeschonnek. That in the end both convictions were violently shaken in him is evidenced by the inner void, indeed the despair, which caused him in 1943 to take the revolver into his hand.

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\*Mrs. Kersten, Leuchtenberg, and Knust mentioned that on such occasions Jeschonnek was "completely silent" as he walked through the beauties of nature, even when his wife was present.

Jeschonnek entered the Air Ministry as a firm advocate of the dive bomber. The high-altitude bombing scores at Greifswald had been exceedingly poor.\* Since the scores, even in low-level bombing, showed no significant improvement, Jeschonnek thought that only the steep dive could effect a change. The possibility of carpet bombing had not been envisioned at that time. By its beguiling successes, the Ju-87, which had just come into the Luftwaffe's inventory, had won considerable favor. One group of the Training Wing was already equipped with Ju-87's.

Jeschonnek was convinced that the only solution to the precision bombing problem lay in the diving attack. In a discussion with the outgoing Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, Lt. Col. Paul Deichmann, Jeschonnek opposed the four-engine bomber idea and declared that the main thing in war was to hit the decisive or critical parts of a target with the fewest possible bombs, one hit in the boiler house being capable of destroying an industrial plant for operations. Only a dive bomber, according to Jeschonnek, could do this. Although Deichmann pointed out that the Ju-88 (then favored by Jeschonnek as a dive bomber) did not have the necessary range for strategic operations and would lack the speed to evade enemy fighters, Jeschonnek declined to discuss the matter further. It was characteristic of Jeschonnek that he believed he alone had the experience to judge such matters.<sup>26</sup>

Then, about May of 1939, when the first Ju-88's reached Rechlin for testing, Jeschonnek formed a Testing Command (Erprobungskommando) under the direction of his young assistant in the General Staff, Captain Pohle.<sup>27</sup> Pohle, who had been a commercial flier and an outstanding pilot, could actually dive with the rather clumsy Ju-88 and even achieved good scores with 4,400-pound bombs.<sup>28</sup> Jeschonnek was the first to visit him and dived with Pohle three times in one day. Enthusiastic about his experience, he said, "You know, this is a health spa for bombardment aviation!"<sup>28</sup> He then went to Rechlin three or four more times and each time made several more dives with Pohle.

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\*Editor's Note: According to Heinz J. Rieckhoff, Trumpf oder Bluff? (Trump or Bluff?), Geneva: Verlag Inter-Avia, 1945, pp. 110-111, in 1938 the especially well qualified crews of the Training Wing attained 1 to 2 percent bombing accuracy in high-level attacks from 13,233 feet, and 12 to 25 percent accuracy in low-level attacks against target objectives of 165 to 330 feet, while the dive bombers achieved 25 percent hits in a target area of 165 feet radius. These results, however, were achieved by the very best pilots against no enemy fire.

<sup>27</sup>See pp. 84 and 238.

Like Ernst Udet, Jeschonnek began to see hope in the Ju-88, an aircraft which was scheduled for mass production, but which was only a twin-engine bomber with rather limited range. It is not clear whether in 1938 Jeschonnek had rejected the possibility of a large-scale war (a prospect Wever evidently never ruled out since he used the name "Ural bomber" for his projected four-engine strategic bomber).<sup>\*</sup> Air Operations in such a war called for a long-range strategic bomber force, and soon after the cancellation of Wever's project in 1937, the General Staff ordered the development of a long-range bomber. This was, in fact, in the works in 1938.

During the inspection of the mock-up of the long-range He-177 at the Heinkel plant, both Jeschonnek and Udet insisted on the four-engine solution and ordered its crash production. This seems to indicate that Jeschonnek actually did envision a possible general war. It is not clear, however, whether the specification calling for a diving capability in the He-177 was first drafted by the Technical Office or by the General Staff.<sup>29†</sup> But this requirement then necessitated a solution with two power plants rather than four.<sup>††</sup>

In June of 1939, Captain Pohle announced that the He-177 would be ready for its air tests later in the summer. Unfortunately, the additional requirement for diving capability handicapped this model excessively, and it became one of the Luftwaffe's major fatalities.<sup>30</sup>

Dive bombing, with precision strikes on highly important targets and its terrorizing psychological effect on enemy troops, is chiefly a form of attack for opening a war.<sup>31</sup> With the greatest economy of force the element of surprise can be turned to good account by dive bombing an enemy who is inexperienced in such weapons, and by destroying his airfields and war economy. Furthermore, attacks upon enemy troops can exploit the principle of surprise by enabling tank spearheads to break swiftly into the heart of the enemy nation. These concepts are generally

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<sup>\*</sup>See p. 6.

<sup>†</sup>See pp. 41-44, 75, 81-83, 86-87, 91-92.

<sup>††</sup>The arrangement of two DB-606 engines mounted in parallel under a single nacelle, giving the aircraft the appearance of being a twin-engine bomber, caused overheating, and the weaknesses and faults of this system were never corrected. See Richard Suchenwirth, Historical Turning Points in the German Air Force War Effort, USAF Historical Studies No. 189, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, RSI, June 1959, pp. 40-44, 78-90. See also figure 6.

true in limited theaters of operations, such as was the case in Poland in 1939, France in 1940, and the Balkans in 1941. But, once the war assumes greater duration, the dive bombers' effect on enemy troops becomes blunted, and successes become fewer and more costly. Experience showed that it was an inept enemy that did not soon learn to take advantage of the Stuka's most vulnerable moments during the dive and the pull-out. Moreover, a war of prolonged duration offers greater scope for mass raids by a fast, long-range, horizontal bomber arm.

Once Jeschonnek had adopted a concept of aerial warfare that made him an advocate of blitzkrieg ideas, he may have given no further thought to a war against an enemy possessing the physical and territorial magnitude of the Soviet Union. Jeschonnek prepared for a lightning war without so much as a sideward glance. In the course of a talk with Lt. Col. (GSC) Hermann Plocher, Chief of the Organization Branch of the Luftwaffe General Staff, in 1939, Jeschonnek revealed his firm convictions that any war would be carried out with great speed and be of short duration.<sup>32</sup> Plocher stressed the need for a prompt build-up of reserves in both flying personnel and aircraft, insisting that only by a continuous flow of reinforcements through training and further production could the losses that were to be expected in case of war be made good to some extent, so that the operational strength of the units would not drop too quickly below an irreducible minimum. Jeschonnek replied that, if the Luftwaffe were sent into action, everything would have to be committed immediately. "We must," he said, "conduct a short war; everything must therefore be thrown into action at the outset."<sup>33\*</sup> The Chief of the General Staff set aside Plocher's objection that even the most unfavorable case had to be taken into account, including the contingency that the planned short war might not succeed, in which event, for the war of long duration which would follow, adequate and continuous replacements had to be assured. What the Chief of Staff had in mind was preparedness in breadth, rather than armament in depth, a concept which involved grave dangers for the future.

On the General Staff journey to Koblenz on the Rhine in June 1939, Jeschonnek held exactly the same view. In his concluding speech or

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\*Editor's Note: Plocher, who had one of the keenest minds in the Luftwaffe, was not alone, of course, in this concern over the need for reserves of all kinds. But Hitler's strategy, like that of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, was to get there "fustest with the mostest" and to gamble on its success, especially since he felt that time was not on Germany's side.

critique, which was well attended by Luftwaffe generals, Jeschonnek said on the subject of forces in an initial aggressive type of attack: "For this attack as many forces as possible should be committed, including the squadron reserves. The fact that the enemy's active defense has not yet entered into action must be exploited, and the target zone razed as completely as possible by bombing."<sup>34</sup>

The newly appointed Jeschonnek was quite receptive to the new German political leadership.\* Molded in his cadet training by the traditional ethos of the Prussian officer, strict discipline and austere self-denial in the performance of duty and in subordination to the military hierarchy, Jeschonnek strove to personify this ideal and dedicated himself to his career in an almost romantic, outdated way in the midst of a changed world. Hitler (who after the death of Hindenburg bore the title of Fuehrer und Reichs Chancellor<sup>11</sup>) referred time and again in his speeches and proclamations to Prussianism and its virtues, repeatedly invoking the figure of Frederick the Great, a man with whom he really had little in common, as the epitome of this Prussianism.

Hitler further satisfied the military tradition in Germany by immediately launching a great rearmament program to build up a strong Armed Forces establishment (Wehrmacht). Wever had already gone cheerfully along with Hitler and the new era.<sup>35/</sup>

Jeschonnek's confidence in Hitler led him to believe that the Fuehrer would be able to secure a revision of the Treaty of Versailles in such a way that Germany's desires could be achieved without embroiling Europe in a war. Hitler claimed that these desired objectives consisted solely of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, and not even east Upper Silesia. Moreover, Hitler had sacrificed the German-speaking South Tyrol for the sake of friendship with Italy, and had declared that the

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\*Editor's Note: The reference here is to the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP).

{According to the deposition by (among others) Wolfgang Martini, General der Luftnachrichtentruppen, a discreet, conscientious witness. On the other hand, the author could find no corroborating evidence for the remark attributed to Wever by Rieckhoff (in his Trump or Bluff?, p. 83), "Our officer corps will be National-Socialistic or else. . . ." In his study, entitled The German Air Force General Staff (Karlsruhe Document Collection), the late Generalleutnant Andreas Nielsen stated that "Wever was a firm adherent of National Socialism."

matter of the former German colonies should not be a casus belli for the Reich.

Jeschonnek believed almost as an article of faith that he was face to face with a great political genius who was increasingly assuming the role of a genius in the military sphere as well. He undoubtedly turned to Hitler as a leader, without assuming a simultaneous allegiance to the Nazi Party.\* With respect to this aspect of his life, Generaloberst Student held the view--this would seem to be the correct one--that Jeschonnek entered into the "orbit of National Socialism willy-nilly," through his professional military career.<sup>36</sup> Hitler's uncanny power to sway people had succeeded in turning the apparently cool-headed young Chief of Staff away from his sober evaluation of matters to an unconditional belief in the rightness and certainty of success of Hitler's measures. Thus Hitler became the irresistible power that determined his destiny and advanced him at his relatively young age to an elevated position.†

A concomitant cause was undoubtedly Jeschonnek's willing submission to Hitler's chief paladin, Hermann Goering, the "Iron Man."†† One might say, without exaggeration, that in Jeschonnek's ideology two convictions had become crystallized into a single firm concept. His first conviction was that of the decisive significance of precision bombing (hence the dive bomber) and the concept of the blitzkrieg, which was to be initiated by annihilating blows from the Luftwaffe, and the second (capping the climax) was that he believed Hitler was an infallible genius.\*\*

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\*Von Seidel calls Jeschonnek a "100-percent Nazi who had taken a personal oath to Hitler." Frau Kersten: "He had no political connection with the Nazi Party. But, I might say that in his character and the impression he made he was what people at the time imagined an ideal National Socialist to be like."

†Editor's Note: Many have found it hard to understand the importance which the Germans attached to the personal oath of loyalty to Hitler. All German officers and civilian officials had to take it.

††Editor's Note: The epithet of der Eiserne dates from Goering's World War I and postwar Nazi days when he did indeed seem to be indestructible and undaunted, considering all the vicissitudes of his life. The fact that Wellington was called "the Iron Duke" and Bismarck "the Iron Chancellor" (der eiserne Kanzler) would only have contributed to Goering's vainglory.

\*\*At least according to Ernst Heinkel, Stuermisches Leben (Stormy Life), Stuttgart: Mundus-Verlag, 1953, p. 411; Heinkel, He 1000, London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1956, p. 217; and Stormy Life (American abridged edition), New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1956, p. 192.

The consistency with which Jeschonnek defended his first conviction and which oriented him toward the second portended tragedy for both himself and the Luftwaffe.

We must now examine whether the young Chief of Staff, in his blitzkrieg orientation, followed a specific political directive or objective issued by Hitler. If so, then Jeschonnek would have been curbed in his purely military evaluation of affairs. Did he no longer actually have any other consideration open?

That possibility must be categorically rejected. Even if the political leadership had given a directive or reassurance that involvement in a major war was not to be expected, the Chief of the General Staff would still not have been absolved from his responsibility to prepare for all conceivable contingencies. In 1939 Hitler assured Goering that war with Britain was unthinkable.<sup>37\*</sup> Hitler certainly did not want such a war, because he considered the continuance of the British Empire a necessity, and because he greatly desired a friendly relationship between Germany and Great Britain. But there was always the possibility that England might act on her own volition and declare war on Germany just as it had done on the night of 4 August 1914.

Like all of his contemporaries, the Chief of the General Staff had seen as early as the autumn of 1938 how much affairs had been upon the horns of a dilemma. At that time, and only at the eleventh hour (23 September 1938), the day was saved by Mussolini's conference proposal. In considering the events of this time it is surely fair to say that one ought to expect a sober and independent reflection upon the situation by a Chief of Staff. Without question, Jeschonnek's appraisals and reflections should have included a consideration of the revolutionary character of Hitler's foreign policy, which, because of the incalculable nature of everything revolutionary, took sudden and surprising turns. In such a policy the propitiousness of the hour played a disproportionately greater role than would have been true of a more conservatively directed course.

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\*Editor's Note: Hitler had earlier given a like assurance to Milch, as stated by the latter when testifying in his own behalf at Nuremberg on 12 March 1947. Keitel said in his testimony of 8 May 1946 concerning Hitler, "He deceived us! He did not tell us the truth! That is my absolute conviction, and nobody can tell me differently. If he did not deceive us by deliberate lies, then he did it by deliberately keeping us in the dark and letting us fight under a false impression!"

The Chief of the General Staff was more than a highly developed robot and was not "preset" for assigned channels, and ought to have taken into account the possibility of great surprises as well as great wars.

Certainly, a war with Britain could not be carried out by blitzkrieg, and Jeschonnek ought to have considered the possibility of such an encounter. On 18 February 1938, Jeschonnek's own Operations Staff (Branch I of the General Staff) informed General der Flieger Hellmuth Felmy, Commanding General and Commander of the Second Air Fleet, of Goering's intentions concerning "preparations for the conduct of battle in the West,"<sup>38</sup> and on 23 August of that year Felmy received the order to clarify targets and operational and command possibilities in case of an air war against Great Britain. In his report of 22 September 1938 Felmy expressed his own point of view in the following terms:

With our present available resources, only a harassing effect can be counted upon. Whether this can lead to the attrition of the British will to fight depends in part upon imponderable and, in any case, unforeseeable factors. . . . A war of annihilation against England appears to be out of the question with the resources thus far available.<sup>39</sup>

After Felmy again had a discussion (2 May 1939) in the office of the Chief of the General Staff and had been charged with the plan for the conduct of the air war in case of a conflict with Britain, the experiences gained in war games during the previous autumn were tested in a war game of the Second Air Fleet at Braunschweig, 10-13 May 1939. The final critique was held on 13 May.<sup>40</sup> In this critique, the year 1942 was taken as the basis for mission planning in case of trouble with Britain. On 22 May 1939 conclusions had already been drawn from this critique by Branch I of the General Staff, which had obtained a good picture of the situation from a Branch V report of 25 August 1938, and even more so from the intelligence reports coming in after January of 1939.<sup>41</sup>

The extraordinarily incisive staff study, entitled "Designation of Strategic Targets for the Luftwaffe in Case of a War Against England in the Year 1939," began by stating emphatically:

The armament, state of training, and strength of the Second Air Fleet cannot bring about a decision in a war against England within a short time in the year 1939.<sup>42</sup>

Six days before, the staff of Generalleutnant Hans Geissler was established by order of the Chief of the General Staff of the Second Air

Fleet to test all questions regarding the preparation and conduct of air attack on and over the seas as well as along the coast. <sup>43</sup>

Hitler had plainly expressed himself on the possibility of a prolonged war. This was done in his speech of 23 May 1939 to the Commanders in Chief of the Armed Forces branches and their chiefs of staff. Jeschonnek was present and he was undoubtedly impressed. Hitler's words have been preserved in the notes taken down by his Chief Adjutant for the Wehrmacht, Lt. Col. (GSC) Rudolf Schmundt. <sup>44</sup> With the exception of the imminent case of Poland, it appears that Hitler did not count upon a blitzkrieg in every situation. Although Schmundt's minutes contain contradictions, it is clear that Hitler wanted to direct a series of quick, annihilating blows in the West, but questioned whether success could be quickly achieved. Because of this, he ordered preparations "for the long war in addition to the surprise attack in order to destroy English capabilities on the Continent." Hitler conceded that the destruction of the British fleet (presumably by the Luftwaffe) could force the immediate capitulation of Great Britain.

It appears quite certain that Hitler did not want a war with Britain but, according to Schmundt, he did have doubts concerning the possibility of a peaceful settlement with that nation, and thought that Germany had to prepare for such a contingency. In this connection he stressed the necessity (if Britain intervened in Poland) of "attacking Holland with lightning speed." He said that every country's armed forces must "strive for the short war, but must, on the other hand, also be prepared for a war of 10 to 15 years' duration." <sup>45</sup> This, of course, included the military as well as the head of state. Even if Hitler had occasionally spoken to Goering with greater optimism, and even if Goering had appeared overly optimistic of the prospects of success in war to his General Staff, still it might be an exaggeration to say that Jeschonnek had merely "gone along" with the intentions of the political leadership. Hitler's speech of 23 May 1939 might have strengthened Jeschonnek's conviction about the correctness of a blitzkrieg type of operation and encouraged him to prepare for a short war, but his preparation was preconceived, and he had not even adjusted to the prevailing political views of the government. <sup>46\*</sup>

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\*According to Generalleutnant Josef "Beppo" Schmid, Hitler also made a declaration on the occasion of the weapons tests being held at Rechlin in the summer of 1939. He said to those present (which included the Luftwaffe Chief of Staff): "I haven't succeeded in achieving my political objectives in Europe by peaceful means. I must forge Great Germany by force of arms. We are going to get a war. I don't know when. Come what may, this war must end in victory. Whether it lasts one, two, or ten years, doesn't matter; it must be won!"

From Felmy's staff study it appears that Jeschonnek knew that the blitzkrieg was impossible in the case of an adversary like Great Britain, and his own operations staff had accepted this view. Because of the inadequacy of German air armaments, the Chief of Staff henceforth should have examined with extreme care the deterioration--which was evident to nearly everyone--of relations between the Reich and Great Britain. Surely it was then imperative to accept Plocher's viewpoint of armament in depth rather than armament in breadth.

Although there is no clear insight into the inner self of Jeschonnek, one can assume that he had confidence in Hitler's genius, confidence that it would be possible for the Fuehrer to conduct the war against Poland without the intervention of either France or Great Britain. However, as matters then stood, this was tantamount to trusting in a miracle.

When Jeschonnek became Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff in 1937,\* Wever had only been dead for a little more than a year, but nothing had changed in that year (in fact, from 1936 to 1939) that could have increased public optimism. On the contrary, the situation had become increasingly critical. Wever, looking into the future, had clearly recognized the possibility of a big war, even from an initially cursory study of Hitler's book Mein Kampf. But, wars with imperial powers last a long time, and even a genius like Alexander the Great required several years to conquer the massive Persian Empire, which at the time was rotten at the core. With the passing of Wever went the supreme certainty with which the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff had envisioned future events.

#### Did Jeschonnek Inform Hitler About the Luftwaffe's Strength?

In connection with the above-mentioned Felmy staff study arises the question of whether Hitler was informed about the none-too-optimistic finding that the Luftwaffe was incapable of more than a harassing action against Great Britain. In the spring of 1939 Hitler was faced with the serious problem of whether he should or should not advance his claims against Poland, which had been sharply rebuffed by Polish officials (backed by Great Britain, France, and the United States). In the few years just prior to 1939 Hitler had successfully bluffed the world with respect to the strength of his air forces, and succeeded in worrying enemy experts, whom he "had taken in." For example, during the August 1938 visit of General

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\*See Charts Nos. 5 and 6.

Joseph Vuillemin,\* Chief of Staff of the French Air Force, the foreign officers were greatly deluded about the actual strength of the Luftwaffe.

Hitler, and with him Goering, believed in the overwhelming strength of the German air arm, and he undoubtedly took this into account in his military and political calculations. If Hitler had heeded the facts of the case, namely, that it was impossible to rain annihilating blows from the air against England because the strength of the new air arm was unequal to the task, he would have had to water down his enthusiasm in dealing with the Poles and would have made stronger efforts to reach a genuine understanding with Neville Chamberlain.

It was of the greatest importance to inform the Fuehrer immediately concerning the actual state of military preparedness. This task was primarily Goering's, a man who then had direct access to Hitler. According to von Below, Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant, all air problems, until far into the war, were handled tête-à-tête between Hitler and Goering. As Chief of Staff, Jeschonnek could only strongly urge his chief to inform the Fuehrer of the true nature of the situation. Jeschonnek's subordinates of those days (including "Beppo" Schmid in particular) doubt whether the Chief of Staff would have done so, considering the personality and attitudes of Goering.

How meager historical research becomes when the lips of the most significant witnesses, Jeschonnek, Goering, and Hitler, remain forever sealed, and when so few written records are extant from these three to illuminate the problem!

At this point another question crops up concerning an event which occurred early in 1939. The Munich Pact<sup>1</sup> turned out to be less than

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\*Editor's Note: General Joseph Vuillemin (Général d'Armée Aérienne Français), Chief of the French Air Force General Staff and its Commander in Chief 1938-1940, and his entourage in 1938 returned the visit that Milch, Udet, and Count Kerkhove de Deuterghem (Belgian Minister in Berlin) had made to France, 4-9 October 1937, on the occasion of the International Exhibition in Paris.

Editor's Note: This pact, signed 29 September 1938 by Great Britain, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Germany, forced the Czechs to cede to Germany the former Austrian area of the Sudetenland and Egerland, with about 3,500,000 inhabitants. This success emboldened Hitler, who then proceeded to try a similar operation against Poland. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain has been bitterly castigated for appeasing Hitler through this agreement. Those who have done so forget that the prevailing sentiment of the time in Britain (and even in much of the United States) was to make concessions to Hitler in the hope of satisfying his appetite or staving off the ominous spectre of war. Present-day historians are giving Chamberlain a "brighter image."

a genuine appeasement, since Great Britain then took steps to strengthen her armaments. At the same time Hitler reinforced his arms and services in anticipation of his planned political operations, especially against Poland. On 6 December 1938, Goering disclosed this to his departmental chiefs in Karinhall. The Fuehrer was to be notified by January 1939 that the program necessary for the accomplishment of his plans had been completed.<sup>47</sup>

The detailed calculation of Hitler's demand amounted to a requirement of 60 billion Reichsmarks and a huge quantity of metals which were in short supply. The several Luftwaffe office chiefs concerned declared the fulfillment of this demand to be impossible. However, in order to meet the demand to some extent, Col. (GSC) Josef Kammhuber, Chief of the Organization Staff, worked out an emergency program (which still called for the expenditure of 20 billion Reichsmarks). Thereupon a meeting took place (8 January 1939) in the conference room of the Reichs Air Ministry under the chairmanship of Milch, with General der Flieger Hans-Juergen Stumpff, Chief of Staff, in attendance. All office chiefs were consulted about Hitler's demand, and all declared that Hitler's plan, as well as that of Kammhuber, was impractical, even in the area of training. Only Stumpff concurred with either of the reports and demands, and this was with that of Kammhuber. Milch finally attempted to conclude the meeting with the comment:

Kammhuber, pack up your stuff! We're going to the Field Marshal! The Fuehrer's program is the objective, but at least the Kammhuber program must be carried out. Have any of you gentlemen anything more to say?<sup>48</sup>

At this juncture, the Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, Hans Jeschonnek, arose and said, "I object! In my opinion it is our duty not to stab the Fuehrer in the back.\* If the Fuehrer has ordered this program, he knows by what means it can be carried out." At this the State Secretary said, "Jeschonnek, you come along with me to the Field Marshal."<sup>49</sup>

After a while they both returned, and Milch told the group that Goering had decided that the Fuehrer's program could be carried out, and that he had complete confidence that each office chief would do his utmost to see to its accomplishment. Kammhuber, who as an organization expert

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\*Editor's Note: Only in the German version of Ernst Heinkel's Stormy Life (Stuermisches Leben) is there a mention of the "stab in the back." Both the English and American versions make no such mention.

figured with firm concepts, declared that he was unable to work within the framework of "as much as possible," which was no program at all, and submitted his request for troop duty. On 1 February 1939 Jeschonnek replaced the office-weary Stumpff as Chief of Staff, which brought the believer in the Fuehrer program into one of the top positions.

Despite optimistic predictions, no mountains were subsequently moved in the Air Ministry by such faith. Instead, the work went on in the old beaten track and at essentially the same old pace. There was no talk of an all-out effort to come as close as possible to fulfilling Hitler's mammoth program. The "utmost," as Kammhuber had foreseen, was little more than lip service. "Thereafter, said Kammhuber, "the German Air Force drifted!"<sup>50</sup>

Important personalities have voiced the opinion that even the undertaking of the Kammhuber program in the eight months still remaining prior to the outbreak of World War II could hardly have brought about any substantial improvement in strengthening the Luftwaffe. This, however, is not the opinion of the author.

The greater proportions of a substantially increased program immediately placed the responsibility for figuring out and providing for the implementation of the most minute details of the plan on the Luftwaffe Organization, Operations, and Training Branches. It was therefore mandatory that a considerable increase in production be effected. This should have been envisioned long before the war had progressed very far. But this did not occur until November 1941, when Milch assumed Udet's office as Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement. By then it was already too late.\*

Had this program been established, the Chief of Training could likewise have counted immediately upon a more sizable mission than the one he had had up to that time, and, on the basis of this knowledge, could have met the demands for adequate pilot training throughout the war.

All in all, until the outbreak of the war one could certainly have erected the framework for a large-scale build-up of the Luftwaffe and, with the opening of hostilities, could have advanced this undertaking. Eight months would have provided a lead for Germany. Britain's pilot training program and aircraft production were gaining momentum only very slowly and were barely sufficient to cover the RAF's combat losses. There was still time.

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\*See pp. 36, 38, and 46.

Even prior to August of 1939 any change of course by way of a compromise entailed a dangerous loss of prestige for one who wielded absolute power in his state. At that time Neville Chamberlain was still holding out against the already defiant and very dynamic Winston Churchill, a man who was given to the making of bold decisions and who for decades had not been kindly disposed toward Germany. But, not being warned of the Luftwaffe's condition, Hitler probably believed that for better or for worse the gamble ought to be made against Poland.

#### Jeschonnek's Planning Staff

Jeschonnek's appointment as Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff coincided with a change in the top-level organization in the Reichs Air Ministry. This change, which had been ordered 23 January, became effective on 1 February 1939, the day Jeschonnek took office.<sup>51\*</sup> In accordance with this reorganization, the Chief of Staff was again directly subordinated to Goering for operational matters and for the pertinent directives to the troops. For the information of the State Secretary (Milch), Jeschonnek had to transmit only short minutes of his briefings. That was desirable in view of the deteriorating relationship between Milch and Jeschonnek. This was a new phase in the struggle for power which had broken out after the death of Wever between the General Staff and the State Secretary of Aviation, a struggle which became a milestone on the road to the decline of the Luftwaffe.<sup>52</sup>

A peculiarity of this new top-level organization was that the Chief of the General Staff's area of responsibility was more restricted. This must have been in accordance with the wish of Jeschonnek, who at the moment was the most highly qualified officer in the Luftwaffe for the position and persona gratissima with Goering.

School training and even the weapons inspectorates were put under the newly created Director of Training,<sup>f</sup> who, in turn, was under the State Secretary in the latter's new capacity as Inspector General of the Luftwaffe. Although this control certainly lightened the Chief of Staff's workload, it deprived him of direct influence upon training and made it more difficult for the Operations Staff to quickly and directly evaluate troop experiences. As early as the Polish campaign, when the disadvantage of this became particularly evident, it was decided to combine

\*See Chart No. 8.

<sup>f</sup>See Richard Suchenwirth, Development of the German Air Force, 1919-1939, USAF Historical Studies No. 160, Maxwell AFB, Alabama; USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1968, pp. 60-66.

the inspectorates under a General for Special Assignments or Purposes (General zur besonderen Verwendung), who was ordered to work closely with the General Staff.<sup>53</sup> The Chief of Signal Communications was then transferred from subordination to the Chief of the General Staff and put directly under the Inspector General. A signal communications officer remained as liaison officer attached to the Luftwaffe General Staff.

Jeschonnek's staff then included (besides Branch I, Operations) Branch V (Foreign Air Forces) and the substantially smaller Branch III (Training). The latter issued only general guidelines. Branch II (Organization) was incorporated in the Office of the Quartermaster General, which, in addition to Branch VI (Armament) included Branch IV (Maintenance and Supply). Under this arrangement the Operations Staff became a very extensive office under the Chief of the General Staff, but was naturally, because of the considerable expansion, very independent in character. Even during the Russian operations the Quartermaster General, General der Flieger Hans-Georg von Seidel, did not accompany the Chief of the General Staff to the Luftwaffe's East Prussian headquarters at Goldap. Between Jeschonnek and this caustic, but very astute, man there developed no close relationship of confidence, and their association was at times severely strained, especially during the Stalingrad crisis.<sup>54\*</sup>

The stripping of the former Branch III (Training) in favor of the Directorate of Training and the downgrading of Branch II (Organization), which as the Organization Staff had had equal status with the Luftwaffe Operations Staff during the tenure of Stumpff, indicates that Jeschonnek laid great emphasis upon purely operational problems, as if the build-up of the Luftwaffe had already been completed and the Chief of the General Staff no longer needed to hold the all-important Organization Branch in his hands. It was now "mediatized" or given an intermediary position in the chain of command.

In taking over the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, Jeschonnek wore "two hats," a proof of the self-confidence he felt at the beginning of his

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\*Generalleutnant Kurt Kleinrath, at the time of the reorganization Chief of Branch VI (Armament) in the General Staff, wrote on 25 June 1956 to Generalleutnant Hermann Plocher, "At the time in question the relations between Jeschonnek and von Seidel were extremely bad. All direct cooperation between the two was interrupted for months at a time. In all Quartermaster General matters Jeschonnek got in direct touch with the chiefs of Branches II, IV, and VI."

tenure in office. His influence and effectiveness were thus assured as far down as the details of operations themselves.

In the long run, however, this solution proved to be untenable, and as a consequence the Luftwaffe Operations Staff regained a chief, the former Ia (Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations), Col. (GSC) Otto Hoffman von Waldau. He was a militarily gifted, highly intelligent, worldly wise, and urbane aristocrat. Moreover, von Waldau was far-sighted and thought in Wehrmacht-wide terms, which provided an excellent counterpoise to the austere course of the Chief of the General Staff with whom he became intimate. At that time he was one of the very few officers with whom Jeschonnek was on a first-name basis, and with whom the Chief of the General Staff spoke in the familiar form. They held confidential discussions lasting for hours on the current situations. That was a happy time, when the refined and realistic von Waldau worked together with the strict and single-minded Jeschonnek. It came to an abrupt end with Waldau's departure from Luftwaffe Headquarters on 10 April 1942 to assume the position of Air Force Commander, Africa. <sup>55</sup>

A position very important to the Chief of the General Staff was that of the IT, Referent (a junior staff officer who advised the Chief of Staff on tactical-technical requirements in Branch I of the General Staff). This included the previously mentioned Captain Pohle. This officer from commercial aviation brought with him a wealth of experience, especially in technical matters, and was the man who tried out the Ju-88 as a dive bomber for regular unit employment and who carefully trained the first aircrews on this aircraft. <sup>56</sup> Jeschonnek had great faith in him and was on good personal terms with him. It was obviously a severe loss for the General Staff when Pohle, then in command of a Ju-88 group, was shot down over the mouth of the River Tyne on 16 October 1939. He was scheduled to have completed his missions and to have returned to Luftwaffe Headquarters shortly after that date.

Following Pohle's capture no propitious star shone over tactical-technical activities within the General Staff. It was generally agreed after Udet's death in 1941, when an investigation was made into the Technical Office (including its leading engineers, among whom was Udet's Chief of Staff, Generalmajor August Ploch), that since 1939 the Luftwaffe General Staff had not had a clear control upon the reins of tactical-technical developments and requirements. <sup>57</sup> One of the witnesses in this investigation, Generalrichter Dr. Alexander Kraell, declared that the General Staff had utterly failed in its political-military orientation of the Technical Office. According to Kraell, "Even Jeschonnek knew the situation." Generalrichter Dr. Manfred Roeder expressed it even more clearly:

Neither the General Staff nor the Technical Office Chief had, since 1939, set specific requirements for performance characteristics of aircraft, but had contented themselves with generalities. For example, the Technical Office's [Walter] Storp, while inspecting mock-ups in industrial plants, paid more attention to the external suitability than to the technical data of the aircraft. A slight change in the airframe mock-up of the Ju-188 at the instigation of Storp set back its series production several months. 58

Immediately after the death of General Wever it became apparent that the Luftwaffe General Staff had neglected to coordinate technical requirements with an eye toward the possibility of war, especially inasmuch as the High Command of the Wehrmacht and the Army High Command had also timidly avoided making prognoses about how the war might develop and because they held the view that aircraft armament production could soon adjust itself to the strategic situation. It was far from common knowledge that an aircraft required an advanced period ("lead time") of at least two years between the drawing board and series production.

General der Flieger Karl Koller described the group associated with the Technical Office (including Storp, who was still a 2nd lieutenant in 1940, and Ulrich Diesing)\* as the "kindergarten." This group swaggered around in official circles, but not in operations, which Jeschonnek, assisted by such able persons as Hoffman von Waldau and Rudolf Meister, held under a firm control. 59

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\*In late October 1944, Storp (now Generalmajor), who had Goering's ear, proposed a great and highly impractical build-up of the small remnants of the bomber arm to the size of a major command. Storp proved to be unequal to his position, which he held for only two months. Diesing, like Storp, specialized in ingratiating himself to Goering, with a consistent eye open for advancement and favors. He often represented Goering at conferences on technical matters. He eventually became Chief of the Office of Technical Air Armament late in the war.

Baptism of Fire\*War and Brilliant Successes

Jeschonnek had been Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff for exactly seven months when on 1 September 1939 the war broke out against Poland, followed two days later by a declaration of war by Great Britain and France. According to a carefully-considered deployment, which committed the massed concentration of forces solely to the Eastern Theater of Operations (Plan Study 1939, Directives for Case White),<sup>†</sup> the Luftwaffe set out against Poland at 0445 hours, 1 September 1939, with a total of 1,929 aircraft, including 897 bombers.<sup>60</sup> The attacks on Polish airfields by the First Air Fleet (General der Flieger Albert Kesselring) in the northern areas and by the Fourth Air Fleet (General der Flieger Alexander Loehr) in the southern areas succeeded in throwing the Polish fliers completely into a state of hors de combat, or in effecting such disorganization that their effective commitment in the future was so severely hampered as to be of little importance. The forces of both Luftwaffe air fleets were immediately able to give indirect and direct support to the Army's operations and, by cooperating during assaults and by overcoming a temporarily threatening situation, were able to contribute to the lightning-fast course of the campaign, which even exceeded the expectations of the Army General

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\*Editor's Note: Baptism of Fire (Feuertaufe) was the title of a feature-length Nazi documentary propaganda film first run in Berlin in early April 1940 in the UFA Palace Theater for the diplomatic corps, Reichs Ministers, and high Nazi Party and military officials. William Shirer reports seeing it in a Berlin suburb on 7 May 1940. Count Ciano saw it in Rome on 4 April 1940, and it was subsequently shown in Oslo, Bucharest, Belgrade, Ankara, and Sofia.

†Editor's Note: According to Plan Study 1939, Directives for Case White (Planstudie 1939, Weisungen fuer den Fall Weiss), preparations were begun in April of 1939 for action against Poland. This followed immediately after the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the Anglo-French guarantees to Poland. The operation was in the context of general war preparations and for the seizure of Danzig. On 3 April 1939 Keitel issued the directive to each branch of the German Wehrmacht.

Staff. <sup>61</sup> In 18 days the strong Polish Army was destroyed.\* The employment of the Luftwaffe also forced the quick capitulation of the futile, but stubborn, resisting Polish forces in Warsaw.

A strategic employment of the Luftwaffe did not follow this campaign. Because of the short duration of the Polish operation, it was unnecessary and, indeed, seemed even undesirable to think in terms of strategic air power, since Germany wished to have the conquered nation with its industry intact and its business back in running condition in short order.

The Luftwaffe acquitted itself gloriously in Poland, † and its leadership proved itself equal to the mission at hand. The "Stuka" tactics were responsible in great part for the swift pace of victory. The campaign ran its course entirely according to Jeschonnek's concept of war.

The Norwegian Campaign and, to an even greater extent, the French Campaign (10 May-25 June 1940) justified the deep-rooted confidence of the German people in the young air service. †† In France everything again ran like clockwork. Douhet's theories were once more applied with devastating attacks against enemy airfields and in a framework of air superiority won by German fighters. Thereupon the German Air Force carried out almost uninterrupted support of the German armored spearheads in their swift breakthroughs. Following the panzer forces marched the infantry columns, no longer fearful of enemy airmen and protected by the spectacular Luftwaffe dive bombers, while bomber wings provided air cover for the flanks of the spearheads.

These operations benefited from the fact that, as soon as the British took cognizance of the irresistible advance of Generaloberst

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\*Editor's Note: The term "strong" is perhaps appropriate if one speaks from the point of view of determination and bravery, but is otherwise inappropriate. Poland was almost pathetically lacking in automatic weapons, the best and most modern small arms and artillery, armored equipment, and supporting air units. Polish cavalymen, trained and ready for a war which had already passed into the mists of history in World War I, had to combat German armored units.

†Editor's Note: If the defeat of a third-rate air force in a backward state can be considered "glorious," the Luftwaffe was covered with glory. Not only was the Polish Air Force under strength, but its few aircraft were almost entirely obsolete.

††See figure 34.



Figure 34

A happy gathering of top Luftwaffe commanders at an officers' casino, late 1940: L. to R.: Generaloberst Alfred Keller, Commander of the First Air Fleet, Berlin; Generaloberst Hans Jeschonnek, Chief of the General Staff; Generalleutnant Wolfgang Martini, Chief of Air Signals; General der Flieger Wilhelm Wimmer, Commander of Luftwaffe Command East Prussia; Generaloberst Ernst Udet, Chief of Supply and Procurement; and Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Commander of the Second Air Fleet.

Heinz Guderian's tanks, they no longer continued to send large numbers of fighters to France and the Low Countries, but, anticipating German air attacks on England, began to hold aircraft back for home defense purposes. Thus the first real encounter between German Me-109's and British "Spitfires" took place over the Dunkirk area when the battle for France was nearing its end. The blame for this initial failure of the Luftwaffe to gain air supremacy is attributable to Goering.

On 24 May 1940 Hitler stopped the German armored advance before Dunkirk (the port of embarkation of the British Expeditionary Force). In these circumstances, Goering's offer to use the German Air Force to smash the British forces concentrated near Dunkirk was certainly decisive.<sup>62</sup> According to "Beppo" Schmid, Goering and Jeschonnek were "unshakable" in their conviction that the Luftwaffe would succeed in this undertaking.\* However, the inclement weather, which impeded not only the German take-offs but also visibility within the combat areas, the absence at that time of German airfields close to the front, the negligible effectiveness of bombing the sandy beaches, and the intervention of the highly maneuverable "Spitfires," which inflicted heavy losses on the German "Stukas" and twin-engine fighters and bombers, were factors which enabled the British Command (27 May-4 June 1940) to evacuate by thousands of small craft a total of 338,226 men to the safety of British soil.<sup>63</sup>

\*Editor's Note: Kesselring provides a different point of view concerning Jeschonnek's attitude at the time. According to Kesselring, Jeschonnek and he were in complete agreement that Goering's offer to Hitler was unrealistic. See Generalfeldmarschall (Ret.) Albert Kesselring, Soldat bis zum letzten Tag (Soldier to the Last Day), Bonn: Athenaeum Verlag, 1953, p. 78. Galland does not mention Jeschonnek's position in the matter, although he affirms Goering's responsibility in bringing Hitler to the decision to carry out air attacks only against the withdrawing Anglo-French forces at Dunkirk. See Generalleutnant (Ret.) Adolf Galland, Die Ersten und die Letzten (The First and the Last), Darmstadt: Franz Schneekluth Verlag, 1953, p. 71.

Editor's Note: For Hitler's military intervention (a political move to have the decisive battles fought in northern France rather than in Flanders), as shown in his order of 24 May 1940 to halt the tanks of the left wing before Dunkirk, see Winston S. Churchill, Their Finest Hour, Vol. II of The Second World War, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949, p. 76. See also Helmuth Greiner, Die Oberste Wehrmachtfuehrung (The Highest Leadership of the Armed Forces), Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1951, p. 104. See also Generaloberst (Ret.) Heinz Guderian, Erinnerungen eines Soldaten (Recollections of a Soldier), Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinkel Verlag, 1951, pp. 106-108. See also the War Journal of Generaloberst Franz Halder, Vol. IV, entries for 24, 25, 26-31 May 1940.

But, since the Dunkirk days were immediately followed by the second phase of the French Campaign (which had been successfully ushered in with a great Luftwaffe strike on 8 June by 600 bombers and 500 fighter aircraft against airfields and aircraft factories in the Paris Sector)\* and since the German attacks led to the rapid and complete collapse of the French Army, and the campaign ended gloriously in the armistice at the historic site of Compiègne† (21-22 June 1940), the significance of the hazardous venture of Dunkirk was completely misunderstood. Even so critical a mind as Hoffmann von Waldau saw only the extent of the devastation on the beaches caused by the German bombers. He wrote in his Journal on 25 May 1940: "One hundred percent success not achieved, particularly because of the two-day period of bad weather."<sup>64</sup> He believed, however, that "a subsequent annihilating effect was, nevertheless, achieved. Losses through sinking of ships and through bombing of the troops concentrated on the beach and quay must be estimated as enormous." Farther on he wrote, "Degree and scope of the devastating effect of our Luftwaffe impossible to describe. The Dunkirk area presents the picture of a frightful catastrophe. . . . Some 50,000 motor vehicles lie around wedged together higgledy-piggledy."<sup>65</sup> It was not immediately recognized that the enemy had succeeded in rescuing his manpower, the main body of his irreplaceable regular army, in spite of Luftwaffe action.

There is no doubt that for Hitler himself the days of Compiègne (21 and 22 June 1940, together with the conclusion of the Armistice there on 22 June) represented the zenith of his life. So, too, for Jeschonnek the overwhelmingly glorious outcome of the French Campaign meant the fulfillment of his fondest hopes: the prestige of the Fatherland restored through the unprecedented splendor of the victories and his own work crowned by the Luftwaffe's very great share in them, his having proven himself despite his youth and the very short time of his tenure as Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, and his confidence in and his faithful devotion to the Fuehrer, whose views were vindicated despite the Army General Staff's opposition, particularly to the offensive in the West.<sup>66</sup> And, on 19 July 1940, on the occasion of the great wave of promotions to

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\*Editor's Note: Operation Paula. See Wing Commander Asher Lee, The German Air Force, New York: Harper & Bros., 1946, p. 65.

†Editor's Note: Hitler forced the French to sign the armistice in the same red railway coach in which the Armistice of 11 November 1918 had been signed. Between wars this car had been housed in a war memorial building at Compiègne, and was moved to the precise spot of the 1918 Armistice signing by German railway engineers.

marshal, Hitler, who now stood like a constellation in the zenith of the German heavens, spoke very special words of appreciation for Jeschonnek's services and announced the promotion of the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff (then only a little over 40 years of age) to General der Flieger.\* What an exceptional realization in the life of a young soldier amid the delirious rejoicing of the nation! How far he had outstripped all those of his own age and, indeed, some of his seniors!

#### Signs of Weakness Begin to Appear in the Luftwaffe

Even in the "sunny days" of this new blitzkrieg shadows began to cast themselves over events to come, events which were quite apart from the Dunkirk intermezzo. Early in the war the air fleets wrought havoc with their inroads into the personnel and materiel strength of the Luftwaffe pilot training schools by depriving them of their instructor crews, technical cadres, and aircraft in order to activate additional new combat units which were not provided for in the mobilization plan.<sup>67</sup> The Chief of the Training Command (who had become involved in the affair) appealed in vain to the air fleet commands as well as to the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. The latter could not be persuaded to safeguard the Training Branch once and for all against these incursions. And yet, training held a heavy responsibility for an important part in the war's denouement in case the conflict should become of long duration or more extensive in scope (a possibility which sober reflection should have taken into account). On the contrary, this case and numerous later ones were classic examples of how the principle of armament in breadth attained ascendancy at the expense of armament in depth, and also by making inroads into the medium which fostered future armament, namely, the training program.

According to General Deichmann, the above reason explains in part the decline of training after the outbreak of war. Yet, if the Luftwaffe desired to remain prepared for any contingency, that was the precise time when training, in all of its aspects, should have been stepped up. It was only after many attempts that the Chief of the Training Command was able to recover some of his aircraft and his instructor personnel from the flying units. But, efforts to get back the Ju-52's (which

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\*Editor's Note: For the German text of Hitler's speech before the Reichstag in the Kroll Opera House on 19 July 1940, see Dr. Hans Volz (ed.), Der Kampf gegen den Westen 1940, Teil I, Dokumente der Deutschen Politik: Das Reich Adolf Hitlers (The Battle Against the West, 1940), Part I, Documents on German Policy: The Realm of Adolf Hitler, Berlin: Junker & Duennhaupt Verlag, 1943, pp. 212-252.

had been requisitioned as transports) were for the most part unsuccessful. 68

A similar cannibalizing resulted from the demands of General-leutenant Student's 7th Parachute Division which carried out the phenomenal airborne operations in the Netherlands and Belgium during the early part of the Battle of France. The creation of a separate air transport fleet had been neglected during peacetime so that at the outset of war only one wing of Ju-52's (1st Special Purpose Bomber Wing) was in being. This was naturally insufficient for the great tasks that lay ahead. Again, demands were made upon the Training Command, which had to make available several hundred (about 378) Ju-52's, together with the appropriate instructor crews. This occurrence, at the beginning of training exercises many weeks before the operations in the Low Countries, was followed from the opening of the Norwegian Campaign in April by additional "blood-letting" of the Training Command. Thus the sensitive training instrument, which had already received shabby treatment, again suffered grave injury. 69 It can be emphatically stated that this became one of the concomitant reasons for the terrible outcome of the entire war.

To replace the Ju-52's, the Chief of the Training Command made an effort to utilize the discarded Ju-86's, \* which he was convinced would be particularly suitable as training aircraft if certain modifications were made. This proposal was rejected out of hand by State Secretary Milch, even though spare parts and cut-out material was on hand to construct 1,000 Ju-86's. Goering concurred in Milch's decision. 70 There was no apparent initiative on the part of the Chief of the General Staff to put air transport services on its own legs as a separate command, thereby relieving the hard-pressed Training Command. It must therefore be assumed that the problem did not seem urgent enough to Jeschonnek, who must have thought that the war would not be of long duration. This then was the basis of the fatal self-deception of the German Command.

The extent of the victory achieved against France had surprised even Hitler, who had been very optimistic from the first. He therefore assumed that the war was as good as won. Hitler's well-known Anglo-philism also played a part in his efforts and hopes for a quick peace with Britain. For weeks he waited for the answer to his peace offer of 19 July 1940. † This man, who seemed to be such a shrewd judge of the facts of life, politics, and war, had, in this instance, become the slave

\*See figure 35.

†See pp. 5 and 146.

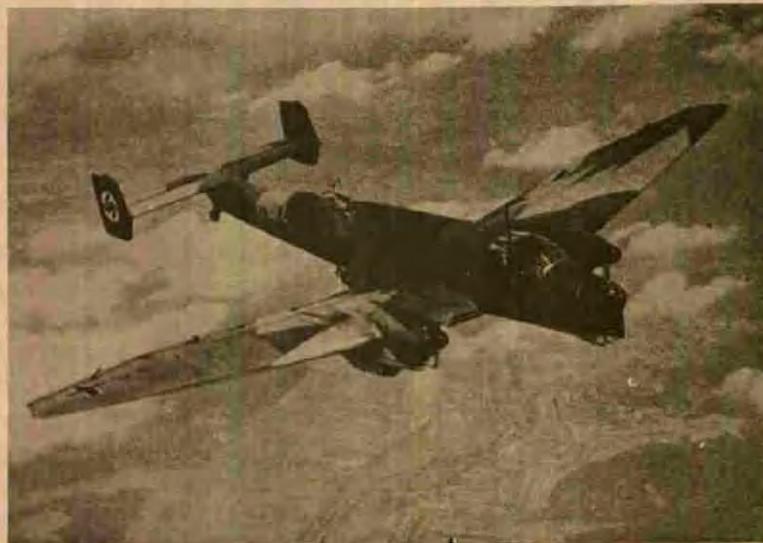


Figure 35

The Junkers Ju-86, a commercial aircraft converted to military use. With certain power plant modifications it might have served the Luftwaffe well during World War II.

of his own wishful thinking! Far into the Russian campaign of 1941 the deliberations of both Hitler and his colleagues were governed by the greatest and most tenaciously held optimism and by that most dangerous enemy of all successful leadership in war, underestimation of the adversary.

After the French Campaign, instead of girding up their loins, many German leaders relaxed their efforts. The loss of a whole year's time (in terms of operations as well as armament) from the conclusion of hostilities in France until the beginning of the war against Russia (22 June 1941), a year in which production could have been carried out without interference, became one of the main reasons for the subsequent German defeat. The tremendous victory in France caused many a top commander to "lose his head" and to allow soldierly conduct to "go by the board."<sup>\*</sup>

Jeschonnek undoubtedly shared Hitler's optimism, but he was not a man to relax his efforts. On the contrary, given his austere and soldierly point of view, he must have inwardly sincerely rejected the progressive slackening of effort by his Commander in Chief. However, Jeschonnek was unable to exercise any decisive influence over Goering.

It is not known how the Chief of the General Staff reacted to Goering's order of 7 February 1940 and to Hitler's of 11 September 1941 stopping all development that could not be completed in order to get the aircraft to the front within a year.<sup>†</sup> Jeschonnek apparently made no protest against this truly fateful order, an edict which did not reflect a careful consideration of the hard reality of the war which still had long to run. By this stoppage, work was delayed on the new weapons planned by the Luftwaffe, particularly the jet fighter.<sup>††</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup>Editor's Note: The reference is to the luxurious living and acquisition of various items and objets d'art, especially in occupied France, by some German officers.

<sup>†</sup>See pp. 44 and 158.

<sup>††</sup>Editor's Note: Despite this prohibition, work went quietly on in research and development in the jet field and in radar. See "The Development of Jet and Rocket Aircraft in Germany 1938-1945," an annotated translation by Miss Alida Herling from von Rohden Project Monograph No. 7, Development and Planning in the German Air Force, Part I, Historical Archives Branch, USAF Historical Division. Part of this monograph may have been written by Lt. Col. Werner Baumbach, who worked on part of this project.

A Farewell to Blitzes

Disappointed by his failure to force Britain to sue for peace, Hitler ordered preparations to be made for an invasion of the British Isles (Operation Sea Lion [Seeleowe]). This plan entailed a very difficult assignment for the Luftwaffe from the very outset. Quite apart from the protection that the waters of the English Channel offered for the United Kingdom, and apart also from the advantage enjoyed by the British from having radar defenses, German forces were simply inadequate for the task at hand. They could have accomplished it only if Germany's optimistic estimates of the RAF's inferior strength had been correct, but that did not prove to be the case.

Only two German air fleets were capable of making the attack. The Fifth Air Fleet (Generaloberst Hans-Juergen Stumpff) in Norway was almost completely disqualified because of the limited range of German bombers and escort fighters. But the fighter forces in the South (in northern and northwestern France under Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle) and in the Second Air Fleet in the North (Netherlands, Belgium, and northeastern France under Field Marshal Albert Kesselring) lacked coordination. As General Deichmann commented, "The inappropriate splitting up of German fighter units into three separated groups permitted only the Luftwaffe group located in the Calais area to reach the decisive combat area over London."<sup>71</sup>

Since the very vulnerable German bombers each required three or four fighter escorts, the number of operationally serviceable bombers was necessarily reduced while dive bombers (Ju-87 "Stukas") could no longer be committed because of the heavy losses they had suffered.<sup>72</sup> The attacks on British fighter airfields south of London were not decisive, and the airfields north of London could not be attacked because of the limited range of German escort fighters. Then, too, the Luftwaffe was not in a position to cover the whole of Great Britain, since the Ju-88's, which were finally brought into action, did not have the range which had been expected of them and no other long-range bomber had enough range to span the distances. Jeschonnek, who to some extent was at fault for dropping the four-engine project, was therefore responsible for the dilemma.

The commitment of individual bombers with select aircrews for the destruction of specific highly important targets--this was a favorite idea of the Chief of the General Staff--amounted to mere pinpricks for the British, although for Germany it meant losing many an irreplaceable crew.<sup>73</sup>

All in all, the long, drawn-out Battle of Britain, which was not ended for all intents and purposes until the Russian Campaign, was a defeat for the aggressor, since Germany failed to achieve its objective of wearing down the British will to resist and its armed forces.\* Although German bomber and fighter losses were heavy, the aircraft losses were less grievous than the loss of aircrews, since carefully selected and well-trained airmen could not be easily made good. German bombers were generally shot down over Britain, and the crews that parachuted to safety became prisoners of war, whereas many of the RAF fliers, shot down over their native soil or in the adjacent waters, could soon be back in aerial combat again. Too, the total losses of flying personnel were made additionally lighter for the British than for the Germans because the former used almost exclusively single-engine, one-man fighters, while the Germans used many twin-engine fighters and bombers with from two to four men in each crew.

During the Battle of Britain, how was the state of confidence of the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, who, after the initial rather pompous pronouncements of Goering, soon had to bear the brunt of abuse again? Unfortunately, there is little information about what transpired within the Luftwaffe's headquarters at this time. Wherever the slender, aloof Jeschonnek appeared, he radiated confidence. This is confirmed by Ministerial Director von Hammerstein:

At the end of the French Campaign we sat in the dining car of Goering's train and the talk turned to the impending attacks on England. Then Goering turned to Jeschonnek and asked him if he thought these attacks would be successful. Jeschonnek answered quite positively, "I certainly think so." Another time I heard him tell Goering, "I count on only six weeks more!" Goering doubted that, and stressed the fact that since the German would fight on even if Berlin were destroyed, the Britisher would not be any softer than the German, and would fight on even if London were destroyed.<sup>74</sup>

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\*Editor's Note: This was a parallel to the 1940-41 British bombing raids on Germany, which accomplished very little.

Did the General Staff Demand an Effective  
Strengthening of the Luftwaffe in 1940?

No strengthening of German armament had begun with the outbreak of war, and all too few aircraft were being produced. After the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 production went on completely undisturbed by the enemy just as it had in peacetime, yet in the first four months of the war production amounted to only 1,869 aircraft. By contrast 8,462 aircraft were produced in the first three months of 1945,\* even though at that time Germany was literally dying, its factories demolished and innumerable machines and huge stocks of materiel destroyed, while work was constantly jeopardized by allied air raids, and transportation was continually interrupted at one point or another, making it difficult to transport materials and to move workers to job sites.

Only a powerful increase in production and training immediately after the British-French war declaration would have assured the Luftwaffe of maintaining the advantage it had had upon entering the war. Since both production and training required much time, they should have received immediate attention, but this was not the case for either. On the contrary, training immediately declined to a great extent and, once the crisis was overcome, suffered further cannibalization.<sup>75</sup> These facts indicate clearly how early the German Air Force was in trouble.

It is important to know whether a man as observant as Jeschonnek failed to see this and to know if the General Staff failed to demand in good time an appreciable augmentation of forces and numerous new units. Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant, von Below, and Freiherr von Hammerstein, the Luftwaffe's Judge Advocate General, say that Jeschonnek did make such a demand.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, despite the convincing sound of Hammerstein's testimony, the documents do not confirm any such conclusion. (It is a fact, however, that Hitler, because of the Army's requirements for the Russian Campaign, reduced the Luftwaffe's armament priority to fifth place.<sup>77</sup>) Moreover, there is neither proof nor an available witness to testify that Jeschonnek demanded a strengthening of the Luftwaffe after the heavy losses of the Battle of Britain, although this encounter should have opened his eyes. The Chief of the General Staff

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\*Editor's Note: Statistics quoted for 1945 production can be misleading since they do not represent only those aircraft which were actually operational or necessarily became operational.

must have persisted in his optimism, remaining essentially a slave to Hitler, who was a man "possessed by a demon."

Although he was clear-sighted enough in his soldier's profession, Jeschonnek lacked imagination and the ability to foresee the possibilities and proportions which a great war could have. Thus his arms and forces remained at pre-war levels while, by the end of 1942, the Allies faced him in three widely-separated theaters with ever increasing strength. It is irrelevant to claim that Jeschonnek, since he was constrained by a dictator, would have been unable to make his voice heard. The truth of the matter is, he honored the dictator, shared his optimistic views, and believed Germany was destined to win. Had he been of another opinion, some trace of this would have survived for posterity. A General Staff Chief does not normally make verbal demands without some accompanying documentary justification. Furthermore, there is no reason to think that he could not have made some demands, had he so desired.

#### A War of Attrition Sets in for the Luftwaffe

A series of victories can be too much of a good thing when it prejudices good judgment. And he who makes decisions for the future with a veil before his eyes courts failure. Moreover, the greater the object of the decision, the more serious will be its consequences. The last German blitzkrieg, the Balkan Campaign (6-27 April 1941) occurred in such a way as to increase once more the fatal optimism.

Again the Luftwaffe, with its Fourth Air Fleet (Generaloberst Alexander Loehr), provided close support for Army operations. The result was a magnificent victory over two courageous opponents who had been aided by difficult terrain. The Fourth Air Fleet's contribution to this achievement was considerable. In the Battle for Crete, which followed shortly thereafter (20 May-1 June 1941), the XI Air Corps (Generaloberst Kurt Student) and the VIII Air Corps (Generaloberst Freiherr von Richthofen) performed in an exemplary manner. In the Balkan Campaign the special ability of the VIII Air Corps to perform close-support work was again in evidence as it intervened in the Army's battles on the ground. Both of these highly proven units (after only a short rest) were to be committed in Russia.

With this, Hitler's greatest and most fateful operation, the destiny of the Luftwaffe was sealed. The German victories of the first year in Russia served only to extend the Luftwaffe's vast scope of operations and to entangle it in a conflict which was beyond its resources. Were the top Luftwaffe leaders aware of the tremendous significance of this new war?

Since 1939 the Luftwaffe's build-up had lagged. Some German wings lacked a third group in 1939, and these were eventually organized along with entirely new wings, but the British build-up was going forward at a much faster pace. The Island Kingdom first reaped a blessing during the Battle of Britain, when it was permitted to increase its air armament program and to organize a number of new squadrons. However, the real gap between the British and German air forces was to become noticeable only at a later date.

There is no doubt that the Luftwaffe leadership, like Hitler and the German Army, underestimated the Russian opponent. The estimate of the number of Soviet operational aircraft was too low, the estimate of Russian industrial capacity was not high enough, and the technical ability of the Russian people was badly underrated.

A psychological factor which perhaps contributed to this underestimation was that most of the officers in the German Wehrmacht who had been in World War I had served on the Western Front against the British, the French, and the Americans. At that time the Russians, by contrast, had seemed to be poorly armed, and by tradition the Germans had known little of the toughness of Russian defenses since the Napoleonic Period. Hitler (like Goering and Jeschonnek) had served on the Western Front and thought of the Russian theater of World War I only as an area in which Austro-Hungarian troops committed a series of blunders and in which the Germans won a number of great victories. Thus, with great and general optimism the war against the Soviet Union was begun. Hitler promised Goering that, after the few weeks--he judged that this war would last no longer than that--he would immediately place 150,000 workers at the disposal of the Luftwaffe armament industry.

Nothing is known concerning Jeschonnek's position with respect to the planned Russian Campaign. We have only the testimony of Admiral Wilhelm Moessel, at that time Naval Liaison Officer assigned to the Luftwaffe High Command, who stated: "The Chief of the General Staff was for the mission."<sup>78</sup> The oft-mentioned Generalleutnant Schmid reported:

Reservations concerning the campaign against the Soviet Union were first brought to the Chief of the General Staff's attention by General von Waldau, the former Chief of the Operations Branch of the Luftwaffe. Not known is whether the Chief of the General Staff shared von Waldau's reservations and passed them on to Goering. I consider both possibilities improbable, however.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, on another occasion Schmid quoted Jeschonnek as having said in his presence: "At last a proper war!"<sup>80</sup>

The Chief of the General Staff and his immediate superior were as different as fire and water in their views of the world, in their attitudes toward duty and work, and in what they demanded of life. In all of these attitudes Goering (grown soft) could not be compared with Jeschonnek. Goering did surpass him in one respect, however. His intuition against Germany's involvement in a two-front war led him to warn Hitler about the dangers of a campaign against Russia.\* As an alternative, he suggested that Britain's position in the Mediterranean be crushed.<sup>81</sup> Jeschonnek, ensnared by his belief that Hitler was infallible, was incapable of such an intuitive stroke. Instead, he acted as if guided by some immutable physical law, and, without a sideward glance, followed Hitler's magnetism to the end.

If it is true, as State Secretary (Ret.) Koerner recalls, that Goering pointed out to Hitler that the Luftwaffe needed a period of rest and rehabilitation, and an opportunity for internal development before taking on any new enterprises,<sup>82</sup> then Goering was much more far-sighted in his views than Jeschonnek. Directive No. 21 (Operation Barbarossa) instructed the Luftwaffe to:

. . . make such strong forces available for the Eastern Campaign as to assure both an early termination of ground operations and the restriction of damage from air raids in eastern Germany to an absolute minimum. This concentration of forces in the East is to be limited by the need to provide sufficient protection against enemy air raids in all combat and armament areas controlled by us [Germany], and to ensure that the offensive operations against England, particularly against her supply lines, do not come to a standstill.<sup>83</sup>

Since, by the opening of the campaign in Russia (22 June 1941), Germany had been obliged to support its weakening ally, Italy, in Africa--this required transferring the X Air Corps to Sicily and opening the Mediterranean Front--the Reich was faced with a three-front war. The British were unconquered and defiant, and were clearly waiting for an opportunity to strike a telling blow from the West. When this was combined with the massive Soviet opponent in the East, the ever-troublesome

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\*See pp. 165-170.

Balkans, and the vast Mediterranean area, the Luftwaffe was immediately forced to improvise.

On the 1,700-mile Russian Front (including the Karelian Front), the German Air Force had 2,000 combat aircraft at its disposal. Of these, there were 880 bombers, 280 dive bombers, 600 single-engine fighters, 60 twin-engine fighters, 60 ground-attack aircraft, and 120 long-range reconnaissance aircraft. In addition, there were 150 transport planes and 80 liaison aircraft. The Army had 140 long-range reconnaissance aircraft, 450 tactical reconnaissance aircraft, and 110 liaison aircraft at its disposal. 84\*

Directive 21 immediately shackled the Luftwaffe and prevented its strategic commitment by ordering it to concentrate upon operations in support of the Army's advance. Only after this was completed could the air forces strike at the Soviet's industrial heart. The Luftwaffe had only five months in which to consider the organization of its forces for the Russian war, and it had only one organization, the VIII Air Corps, which was especially suited for the main mission, close support. In view of the expanse of the Russian Front, it should have been obvious that one close-support air corps would not be enough to accomplish the mission. Many of the coming battles were bound to be directed against field fortifications and other positions. These were hardly the proper targets for the expensive Do-17's, He-111's, and Ju-88's, but they were ideal for the more robust, economical, and single-engine Ju-87 "Stukas" and certain other ground-attack planes, aircraft which required only one to three men in each aircrew.

As soon as the planning began for "Barbarossa" a second close-support air corps should have been formed, and even if such an organization did not get under way until after the invasion of the Soviet Union, it would have been soon enough to have provided another close-support corps by early 1942. However, Hitler was convinced that the campaign would end long before that time. Optimism was the spirit of the day!

At 0300 hours, 22 June 1941, the Luftwaffe began its attacks against Russia, following its old recipe of destroying the enemy's air

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\*See Generalleutnant Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1941, USAF Historical Studies No. 153, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, July 1965, pp. 30-35.

forces on the ground, and then shifting to direct and indirect support of the Army. What was forgotten was that while a rapid surprise attack against an enemy's air forces was able to achieve lasting results in Poland and France, similar results could not be expected in the vast expanses of Russia. Serious range limitations kept the Luftwaffe from reaching all of the Soviet airfields, and, although the Red Air Force lost thousands of aircraft, it was not entirely eliminated. Most of the aircraft destroyed were on the ground, which meant that most of the flying personnel were saved for later use. With astonishing determination and speed the Russians moved many of their aircraft plants out of range, so that they were beyond the reach of any German aircraft, even if the Luftwaffe had been strategic-minded. As a result, the Soviet Union was able to rebuild completely its air forces on modern lines and to become a real threat later in the war, a most impressive achievement.

Because of the initiative of some of the air fleet commanders in Russia, some strategic missions were flown, 87 of them against Moscow. But these were neither systematic nor consequential, and their effects were virtually nil. No special forces were set aside for such operations. The High Command of the Luftwaffe could have helped to master this situation if, instead of leaving two bomber wings in the West where they were unable to achieve any decisive results, it had utilized these forces from the first as the core of a strategic air fleet in Russia. This would have been a favorable arrangement at the beginning of the Russian Campaign, and proof of this could be seen in 1943 when, under much more adverse conditions, the IV Air Corps was set aside as a strategic bomber corps. By then, of course, it was too late to help the situation.

The opening of the war in the East gave the Luftwaffe an impressive string of victories. The number of Russian aircraft destroyed was so great that Goering could scarcely believe the figures. There were, in fact, more Russian planes reported as destroyed than the Luftwaffe General Staff's estimate for the total Russian air strength. This alone should have given rise to some concern about the future, but the campaign rushed onward in an avalanche of victories so that it appeared once more that Hitler's rash optimism would prove to be justified. Even the Chief of the Army General Staff, Generaloberst Franz Halder, who was by nature a conservative man, made the following entry in his journal on 3 July 1941:

On the whole, it can be said that the mission of destroying the mass of the Russian army on this side of the Dvina and Dnepr has been accomplished. I consider as correct the testimony of a captured Russian commanding general

who says that to the east of the Dvina and the Dnepr we will only have to deal with component forces which are too weak to hinder German operations decisively. It is thus not an exaggeration when I assert that the Russian Campaign will be won within 14 days. Naturally, that will not constitute its end. Because of the size of the territory and the resistance, pursued obstinately and with every means at hand, we will still require many weeks. <sup>85</sup>

Notice that this sober man considered the campaign would be as good as won in only 14 additional days! These bold expectations were not fulfilled, even though the operations were carried out with determination. The gigantic victories of Bialystok and Smolensk were followed in August by those of Uman and Gomel, on 16 September by the surrender of encircled Kiev and the capture of 665,000 Russians, and in October by the double battles of Vyazma and Bryansk, which brought in 663,000 prisoners. These triumphs did much to obliterate the idea that the original purpose of the campaign had not been achieved. The plan of a rapid conquest failed with the onset of unseasonably cold weather, which brought the German offensive to a standstill. The surprise commitment of 15 to 20 Siberian divisions, and the Wehrmacht's inability to link up with the Finns frustrated the effort to take Moscow. A series of crises then set in, which forced the German Army to give ground in the North, Center, and South.

Thanks to the far-sighted Quartermaster General of the Luftwaffe, General der Flieger von Seidel, and State Secretary Milch, the Luftwaffe was better provided for winter contingencies than was the Army. Nevertheless, the Luftwaffe lost a considerable amount of materiel in the winter of 1941-42.

Until the setback before Moscow the Luftwaffe had served as a support arm of the Army, a consequence of Directive No. 21, but, as the war dragged on, German air forces became more tightly bound to the ground situation than before. Instead of supporting the Army's offensives, the Luftwaffe soon found itself trying to save it from a repetition of Napoleon's disaster of 1812. Poor flying conditions, snow and ice, and sub-zero temperatures hampered most of the Luftwaffe's activities, and when Hitler took over personal command of the Army on 19 December, the proper utilization of air power became even more difficult. Being army-minded and then assuming direct command of the Army, it was natural that Hitler would seize every opportunity to use the Luftwaffe for this end.

The Last Chance for Recovery: A Reorganization  
of the Luftwaffe

Once the German Army ceased to move ahead there was a grave need for the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, and especially for the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, to review the organization and strength of the air forces in relation to the new situation and to take whatever steps were necessary to permit the Luftwaffe to carry out its mission.

From the beginning of winter in 1941 hard fighting continued unabated in ice and snow all along the Eastern Front. A possible complete rout of the Army was prevented by an uncompromising order of the Fuehrer not to retreat a foot. With the front stabilized, the Luftwaffe Operations Staff was able to consider necessary measures for future undertakings. Reequipping of units was necessary, and it seemed that there was time to accomplish this. More aircraft were needed, or, even better, a number of new air units with replacement crews. Also needed was a clear organizational division between strategic and tactical units.

If Jeschonnek had made the decision to divide the air units into two forces, tactical and strategic, in July of 1940, when he first learned of the plan for a war in the East, or at the very latest in the winter of 1941, the first large, tactical units would have arrived at the front in time to relieve the costly twin-engine bombers in the bitter winter fighting. This would have made possible a hardening of the resistance against the resurgent Soviet opponent, and the losses of the Luftwaffe would have been lightened considerably. In the meantime, the strategic units could have been readied for missions against the Russian armament industry in the spring. A change in the chain of command would have been useful at this time, but it was not essential. 86

Related to this reorganization was the armament problem. Since the end of the fighting in France and the beginning of the expansion program of the Army in expectation of the opening of the war against Russia, the Luftwaffe's armaments were not on a parity with those of the Army. The Luftwaffe ranked fifth in the priority rating. This situation could not be altered in the winter of 1941-42 when the Army needed all of the strengthening it could get. Furthermore, if Hitler had not taken personal command of the Army things might have been better for the Luftwaffe. Whatever could be done for the armament of the Luftwaffe had to be accomplished within the priority which was available to it. After Udet's suicide, Milch had uncovered massive amounts of aluminum which had

been hoarded by several aircraft manufacturers,\* which was sufficient to have allowed Jeschonnek to order an increase in single-engine aircraft for 1942 and to make it possible to organize several close-support corps similar to Richthofen's VIII Air Corps.

At the same time a considerable increase in the production of fighters was necessary, for it was clear that Germany had several fronts to contend with. In such a critical situation it was highly important to build solid defenses for the skies over the homeland in order to preserve the moral and industrial resources of the nation for the further prosecution of the war. To assure this, it was necessary to organize a home air defense which was capable of sustaining day and night operations.

Luftwaffe forces were able to repulse the British air attacks of 1941 without any great damage being inflicted on the Reich. The German night fighters organized by General Kammhuber were put to the test, while those fighter units remaining in the West had a relatively easy time of it on the Channel coast. The British appeared ponderous and needed time to get in motion, but they were also obstinate, methodical, and tough enough to bear fairly heavy losses while they gathered their strength.

Was the establishment of a strong German fighter arm impossible? Certainly not! One possibility that appeared on the horizon was Udet's proposal to build more fighters because of the expected Allied heavy bomber attacks. Milch, his successor, in the course of a conference with Goering and Jeschonnek, offered Jeschonnek an increase in fighter production to 1,000 planes a month.<sup>87</sup>

In the life of every man who has reached a high office there occurs a moment when he must prove if he was merely appointed to his post, or if he was predestined to hold such a position. For the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff the moment had arrived, surrounded by such urgency that, if he failed to act positively, his reputation as a leader was likely to be severely damaged. Jeschonnek was offered an increase in fighter production, an increase which would have allowed him to remake the home air defense forces into a powerful system. At the same time there was the need to increase the production of ground-attack and dive-bomber aircraft, and to reorganize the Luftwaffe. It is possible that he could not have convinced Goering or Hitler of the necessity for these projects, but, if he had recognized the need and done everything in his power to

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\*See p. 39.

meet it, he would have assured himself a place in history as a responsible and far-sighted air strategist.\*

Jeschonnek did not accept Milch's offer to increase fighter production, nor is there any evidence that he made any effort to change the indirect support of the Army by creating a close-support corps and concentrating the bombers (which would have been made available by such a reorganization) into a strategic air force. The latter, by attacking Soviet aircraft and tank factories, would have provided much more effective assistance for the hard-fighting Army than they were able to give by indirect support missions over the battlefield. 88<sup>4</sup>

The urgency of the situation requiring strategic air power was evident from a comparison between Soviet and German tank production figures for the same period in 1941. The Russians produced approximately 150,000, while the Germans in the same period produced only about 25,000. 89

Once Jeschonnek rejected the requirements mentioned above, his fate was sealed. No doubt his deep belief in Hitler's genius was at fault, for Hitler was then confident that a renewed attack against the Russians in 1942 would crush the enemy once and for all. As a matter of fact, the Luftwaffe, from this time on, was forced to bear a number of burdens which, together, led to its downfall. First of these was its degeneration into a sort of Army artillery arm. This situation, first dictated by expediency, soon became a permanent one as the relentless Russian pressures (with the short respite afforded during the last great German offensive in the East in 1942) never let up. Within the Luftwaffe High Command stop-gap actions became the main order of business, while bomber missions were dictated by Army groups, with air fleet commanders becoming mere assistants to their senior Army colleagues. Meanwhile, on the

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\*See 187-188.

<sup>4</sup>The possibilities for strategic attacks are proven by the success of the II and III Groups of the 55th Bomber Wing against the extensive Gorkiy Tank Factory (Nishnii Nowgorod [Gorkiy]), whose weekly production of T-34 tanks alone was supposed to have totalled 800. Attacks in June 1943, during which only two bombers were lost, resulted (according to Russian agents) in serious destruction. About 800 tanks, either finished or in the process of completion, were destroyed. See Siegfried Zantke, "Der Luftangriff gegen Gorkij ein grosser Erfolg der operativen Luftkriegfuehrung 1943," Wehr-Wissenschaftliche Rundschau ("The Air Attack Against Gorkiy, a Big Success of the Strategic Air Leadership in 1943," Military Science Review), Darmstadt: E. S. Mittler & Sohn Verlag, May 1954.

home front the Luftwaffe became increasingly handicapped in its action against the ever more serious RAF attacks, while in the Mediterranean area (to which the Second Air Fleet had been dispatched from Russia in November 1941) the vastness of the territory involved and the inadequate strength of the German forces precluded any real progress. Here, too, the shortage of fighters and strategic bombers made itself felt.

In this situation the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff slid unnoticed into the role of administrator of the air forces, while the German Army became the real commander of the air forces, with Goering and Jeschonnek compelled to make units available for the Army's planned operations. They administered simply because there was no strategic air war and therefore no need for independent leadership!

It was a curious picture indeed. Hitler had burdened himself with the yoke of command over the Army and had permanently withdrawn behind the locked gates of his headquarters near Rastenburg (East Prussia), while the most faithful of his youthful soldiers, Jeschonnek, became enslaved to him through his unshakable trust in Hitler's genius and judgment. In fact, Jeschonnek became precisely what Quartermaster General von Seidel called him after the war: a "yes man."<sup>90</sup>

#### Germany's Last Great Hopes and Changes in the Fortunes of War

Since the beginning of the defensive battles in the East late in 1941, the German Air Force had been the Army's artillery. At the same time, because the Army had no adequate anti-tank weapons at hand the Luftwaffe's flak artillery arm had become indispensable to the Army for direct fire actions against enemy armor. Luftwaffe assistance enabled the Army to hold the line from the Kerch Peninsula in the Crimea to encircled Leningrad in the North.

On 18 December 1941, the Luftwaffe had to take over the supplying of hard-pressed German ground units of Army Group Center, the air supply of the 3,500-man force under Generalmajor Theodor Scherer at Kholm (21 January-5 May 1942), and the 100,000-man II Corps at Dem'yansk (February-2 May 1942).<sup>\*</sup> At Kholm, because of the narrowness of

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<sup>\*</sup>Editor's Note: For a more detailed account of these and other German air transport operations, see Generalmajor a. D. Fritz Morzik, German Air Force Airlift Operations, USAF Historical Studies No. 167, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, RSI, June 1961. See also Generalleutnant a. D. Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942, USAF Historical Studies No. 154, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1966, pp. 74-86, 97-100.

the encircled area, it was necessary to air-drop supplies from He-111's and to employ gliders, operations which brought about substantial losses to the Luftwaffe.<sup>91</sup> At Demyansk strong units of Ju-52's were committed in order to maintain a daily supply of 302 tons for the beleaguered forces. This apparent success was paid for in relatively heavy losses of Luftwaffe men and materiel. Even worse, however, was the fact that the Army became accustomed to the idea of air supply and demanded it in every difficult situation. Furthermore, Luftwaffe leaders became convinced that even greater efforts were possible for the transport forces. In every air supply situation (there being no air transport arm) the training schools were robbed of men and equipment.<sup>92</sup> This, in turn, affected the training capacity of the Luftwaffe and was later to result in a weakening of its offensive power. This was particularly crucial after 11 December 1941 when Germany was also at war with the United States.

At this point, however, the cares of the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff must have been drowned out by a series of Wehrmacht victories in the East: Kerch, Sevastopol, Kharkov, and the great space-consuming advance of the German Army to the high ridge of the Caucasus and the banks of the Volga River, an operation which extended the Eastern Front by 372 miles. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's victorious marches toward El Alamein must also have eased the mind of Jeschonnek.

In the East the Luftwaffe was in the thick of it, with its VIII Air Corps out in front, clearing the way across the steppes toward Stalingrad. Fuehrer Directive No. 41 required the Luftwaffe to support the German Army offensive in all areas, even at the price of robbing every other sector of the front.\* The Luftwaffe was already spread too thinly, and now the simultaneous drives toward the lower Volga and toward the Caucasus oil region further divided its forces. Further, it lacked the proper type of units for the mission at hand.<sup>93</sup>

During all of these operations the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe was more of an administrator than a commander, a piece of machinery to be used by the High Command. Richthofen was the only Luftwaffe commander in the East who was an example for his colleagues and whose name came into sharp focus. By his great energy, his ability to move rapidly with his VIII Air Corps and later with the Fourth Air Fleet, and by insisting upon a concentration of forces, no Luftwaffe officer was his equal.

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\*See figure 36.



Figure 36  
Generaloberst Jeschonnek greeting a Luftwaffe ground crew in Smolensk, Russia, 1 March 1942. Officer on extreme left: Generalmajor Hermann Plocher.

Goering neglected to bring up all possible forces against the powerful Russian build-up, which was a clear threat at the bend of the Don River at Kremenskaya, even though this had been recognized and reported to him by the Fourth Air Fleet (and Hitler mentioned it several times after October).<sup>94</sup> The formation of Luftwaffe Command Don under General der Flieger Guenther Korten on 1 October 1942 meant very little, since the insufficient forces assigned to it could never cope with the massive Soviet preparations being tirelessly carried out by the Red Army. There the fate of Stalingrad, the German Eastern Front, and even the Luftwaffe, was being prepared.

By autumn of 1942 the British enjoyed air superiority in Africa, and in the latter part of October and early November British Army forces broke through the German positions at El Alamein. Rommel was forced to retreat, and was unable to find another foothold in all of the immense territory of Italian North Africa. A German Army was hurriedly sent off to Tunis, but by then the Luftwaffe, whose bombers and fighters were already outnumbered by the British, also had to contend with the Americans. To add to this, there were new burdens and sacrifices caused by the necessity to carry out air transport missions past Malta (the 'wasps' nest') to the gradually narrowing German bridgehead in North Africa.

### Stalingrad

On 19 November 1942 the Russians launched an attack exactly where it had been expected, at the Don River bend at Kremenskaya, between the bridgeheads at Kletskaya and the confluence of the Koper and the Don. This attack was coordinated with another Russian breakthrough to the south and southwest of the German Sixth Army, a drive aimed toward Kalach. After a few days the Sixth Army, which had led the attack on Stalingrad, found itself enclosed in a large area just west of the main part of that city. The erroneous decision to leave the surrounded Army there was based upon the hope that it could be supplied by airlift and that it could be freed by a relief force of the Fourth Panzer Army under

Generaloberst Hermann Hoth. The tragedy which resulted was the greatest and most terrible ever faced by German soldiers. 95\*

Was Jeschonnek a Party to the Decision to Supply Stalingrad by Air?

Did Hitler consult Jeschonnek or Goering when he first raised the question about the possibility of supplying the Sixth Army by air? Unfortunately, before this question can be considered or any questions arising from it can be examined, it must be stated that documentary evidence concerning this area of speculation is either unavailable or is no longer extant. The three star witnesses and principals are all dead. The Chief of the Army General Staff at that time, Generaloberst Kurt Zeitzler, can testify only about certain aspects of the matter. 96 Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant, von Below, had no clear recollection of what happened, and Goering's old friend from the "Richthofen Wing" and representative at Fuehrer Headquarters, General der Flieger Bodenschatz spoke only vaguely of the events. 97 The other witnesses had only second- or third-hand knowledge of the situation. Two of them, however, were close

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\*This catastrophe was of greater proportions than the Austrian defeat at Ulm (1805) or the more portentous Prussian defeats at Jena and Auerstedt (1806). Leaving aside the personal problem of Jeschonnek or Goering, an investigation should have been made after World War II to determine the truth concerning the responsibility for this tragedy. See pp. 182-184.

Editor's Note: Paulus also had the belief that holding out in Stalingrad would pin down a sufficient number of Soviet units so that the extended Army Group "A" in the Caucasus would not be cut off. While Stalingrad was undoubtedly the turning point in Germany's fortunes in World War II, it was not Germany's greatest tragedy from a standpoint of troop losses. During the Battle of the Somme (1 July-18 November 1916) the German Army lost between 400,000 and 500,000 men, without winning a clear decision. In the bloody battle of Verdun (21 February-11 July 1916) somewhat less than 350,000 German soldiers died. During the Soviet winter offensive following Stalingrad (February-March 1943) the German Army lost 500,000 men in killed and captured. See the accounts of the Stalingrad disaster in Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East, Army Historical Series, Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1968, pp. 35-80, and Generalleutnant Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942, USAF Historical Studies No. 154, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1966, pp. 207-356 (published also by Arno Press, New York, 1968).

associates of Jeschonnek, while a third, State Secretary Koerner, was in Goering's confidence.<sup>98</sup>

According to Koerner, Goering told him that Jeschonnek was the first to be consulted on the matter.<sup>99</sup> Frau Kersten remembers that on the day the Sixth Army was surrounded Jeschonnek was with Hitler on the Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden, and returned with him to Berlin on a special train. Goering was not present. She continued, "During the afternoon Hitler spoke to Jeschonnek about the possibility of supplying the Sixth Army by airlift. . . . I don't know whether or not Hitler had spoken by telephone to Goering before he conferred with Jeschonnek in Berchtesgaden."<sup>100</sup>

Bodenschatz mentioned the "end of November" as the time when Goering, in Jeschonnek's presence, was asked about the possibility of an airlift for the Sixth Army.<sup>101</sup> Lt. Col. Werner Leuchtenberg, Jeschonnek's devoted Adjutant, remarked, "I don't know who Hitler first asked about the feasibility of supplying Stalingrad by air."<sup>102</sup> Frau Kersten's recollection concerning Jeschonnek at Berchtesgaden would seem to indicate that the Luftwaffe Chief of Staff was the first to be approached by Hitler about a Stalingrad airlift.

Generalleutnant (Ret.) Kurt Kleinrath, a former member of the Luftwaffe General Staff, denied emphatically that Jeschonnek believed the Sixth Army could have been supplied by air.<sup>103</sup> Frau Kersten remarked, "I know that in Jeschonnek's opinion the air supply of an entire army for a protracted period of time would be impossible."<sup>104</sup> Leuchtenberg, however, held a somewhat different opinion. He said, "In the beginning, Jeschonnek thought it was theoretically possible, although he had some reservations with respect to the utilization of training crews and aircraft from the schools."<sup>105\*</sup>

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\*In a later letter to Generalleutnant (Ret.) Hermann Plocher, Leuchtenberg said, "Jeschonnek, in any case, held an airlift of the required scope to be impractical. I still remember a telephone conversation that Jeschonnek had with von Richthofen while the latter was in Russia, during the course of which von Richthofen sharply criticized Jeschonnek for the planned airlift operation. Jeschonnek replied to the effect that he was sorry that von Richthofen considered him to be so crazy as to suggest such a thing and so incompetent as not to be able to do addition, and then broke off the conversation."

Goering's personal physician, Dr. Ramon Ondarza, seemed to recall that the Chief of the General Staff had issued "a warning about carrying out an airlift."<sup>106</sup> Col. (GSC) Kurt von Greiff commented that Jeschonnek had certain reservations, but did not rule out the feasibility of supplying Stalingrad by air. <sup>107\*</sup>

From all of this testimony it can be said that Jeschonnek did not clearly declare the air supply of the Sixth Army--this was composed of 20 German and 2 Rumanian divisions (about 250, 000 men)--to be out of the question.

No doubt the conferences with Hitler were based on a planning document. Perhaps this was the document which figures in an anecdote that was told to the author on 21 November 1955 by Generaloberst (Ret.) Zeitzler, former Chief of Staff of the German Army. According to this, the Luftwaffe General Staff declared the air supply of an entire army to be impossible, but Jeschonnek changed the word "impossible" to "hardly possible." Goering thereupon transformed "hardly possible" into "possible," the form in which the document was placed before Hitler. <sup>108</sup>

According to Zeitzler's testimony, however, Frau Kersten's claim that Jeschonnek warned Hitler of possible catastrophe at the last moment is weakened. Frau Kersten seemed positive that Zeitzler and Jeschonnek had appeared together before the Fuehrer, both stating that such an air logistical operation was impossible to carry out. <sup>109</sup> "Unfortunately not," wrote Zeitzler, "although I got along very well otherwise with Jeschonnek. He was apparently held back by Goering. I stood quite alone in this problem."<sup>110</sup>

In summarizing the case one must consider that Hitler's first vehement thought concerning the encirclement of the Sixth Army was doubtless to help it to hold out until it could be relieved. Generaloberst

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\*Writing to General Plocher on 26 February 1956, von Greiff commented: "That must, in my opinion, be understood at least in part with reference to the personality and education of Jeschonnek. He saw his mission in terms of 'carrying out his Fuehrer's wishes rather than in criticizing the latter's decisions!' Thereby he eventually (and not too long afterward) failed, both militarily and as a human being; surely a tragedy!"

Friedrich Paulus\* and his Chief of Staff, Generalleutnant Arthur Schmidt, also considered holding out while being supplied by air. Hitler, probably because of his illness, which was then in its early stages, † had become obstinate. The airlift had worked at Kholm and Demyansk, why shouldn't it work at Stalingrad? While the Fuehrer had not made his decision at that moment, the last opportunity to dissuade him from the airlift idea had come. The only thing which could have made him change his fixed opinion was a negative judgment by an expert, quickly followed by calculations from the General Staff to prove that an airlift was unworkable. For Hitler the experts would have been Jeschonnek, as Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, and Goering, the Luftwaffe's Commander. But, how did these men react?

Jeschonnek, the first to be questioned, broke down first. Unable to withstand Hitler's hypnotic sway, he did not express the opinion non possumus †† emphatically enough, but probably qualified the practicability of the operation on certain specific conditions, indicating at the same time the possible dangers involved. For Hitler, however, the half, or even the quarter, of an affirmative reply was sufficient to keep him steadfast in his views. A second breakdown followed with the pledge of Goering, which was far more optimistic and positive than any made by Jeschonnek. The operational plans must not have been sufficiently clear in their warnings, or Goering would probably not have subsequently tried to make scapegoats out of Jeschonnek and von Seidel, the Quartermaster General. ††

No collective attempt was ever made by the Army and the Luftwaffe to dissuade Hitler from his catastrophic decision. Anything of this sort

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\*Editor's Note: Paulus was promoted to Generaloberst on 1 December 1942, and to Field Marshal on 30 January 1943, just before surrendering to the Red Army. For a more detailed discussion of the Stalingrad disaster and the Luftwaffe's effort to supply the Sixth Army, see Generalleutnant Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942, USAF Historical Studies No. 154, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1966, pp. 230-330, 344-356.

†Editor's Note: Concerning Hitler's illness, see Felix Kersten, The Kersten Memoirs, 1940-1945, New York: MacMillan & Co., 1957. Dr. Kersten, who was another of Goering's physicians, mentions Hitler's syphilis. By the time of the Stalingrad episode Hitler was beginning to suffer from the early symptoms of paresis.

††Editor's Note: The traditional language of the Pope in refusing requests is to affix the words non possumus to a document, meaning literally "we cannot."

was probably nipped in the bud by Goering. The disaster ran its course. At first Hitler thought the floundering of the airlift was the fault of the responsible headquarters, and on 14 January 1943 he sought to correct this by commissioning Milch to take a direct hand in the operation. Later, however, he concluded that it was simply a general failure by the wretched Luftwaffe. He did not blame Jeschonnek, but he heaped some abuse (and quite rightly) on Goering. Ultimately, and in the presence of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Hitler accepted full responsibility for the calamity.<sup>112</sup>

Although the Luftwaffe committed all of the forces it could muster, it was never able to deliver the required daily supplies of 550 tons. In fact, during the 70 agonizing days of the Sixth Army's ordeal, the German Air Force averaged only about 94 tons daily. In this period it lost 266 Ju-52's, 165 He-111's, and 42 Ju-86's, as well as 9 Fw-200's, a single Ju-290, and 5 He-177's. The latter aircraft were all lost in the course of their miserably disappointing first mission. The Luftwaffe lost a total of 488 aircraft and 1,000 aircrew members during the airlift operations! Once again the schools were robbed to provide additional aircrew personnel and equipment, a devastating blow to the German training program.

Looking back on the entire tragedy, the observer is impressed by the fact that neither the Chief of the General Staff (to say nothing of Goering, who had so bombastically opened the Battle of Britain) nor the Quartermaster General visited the airlift departure base of the He-111's at Morozovskaya or the departure base of the Ju-52's at Tatsinskaya. They should have done so and witnessed the incredibly adverse conditions in which the air and ground crews had to operate. Equally hard to understand is why the only Luftwaffe general at Stalingrad, Generalmajor Wolfgang Pickert, Commander of the ill-fated 9th Flak Division, was flown out, and no energetic Luftwaffe general sent in to replace him and to assume responsibility for activities at the forward operating base in the pocket. During the entire period, from November 1942 to February of 1943, the only leading personalities of the Luftwaffe to go to the scene of the tragedy were von Richthofen and Milch, the latter a man who was so gladly deprecated by other Luftwaffe generals as being "just a civilian!"

The Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff  
and the War in the East

Of the men who knew something of the events surrounding Stalingrad and the ill-fated airlift, Jeschonnek's closest colleague, General der

Flieger Rudolf Meister, who was Hoffmann von Waldau's\* successor as Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, had little to say. According to Meister, "Jeschonnek never reported any of the details to me. Jeschonnek generally didn't allow his Operations Staff to advise him. Decisions were made during the morning in the Command Post, so that the Operations Staff was usually faced with a fait accompli."<sup>113</sup> General Meister found Jeschonnek difficult to approach, and was thus unable to exercise much influence over his decisions. Outside of duty the two officers saw little of each other. When they had to confer, it was done in the isolation of Luftwaffe Headquarters. "Jeschonnek," said Meister, "was cool, polite, but abrupt."<sup>114</sup>

And how did Jeschonnek get along with his second most important assistant, General der Flieger von Seidel, the Luftwaffe Quartermaster General?<sup>4</sup> The latter reports that he asked on five different occasions to be transferred. The reason for his obvious dissatisfaction, however, was more because of the prevailing conditions than because of Jeschonnek. More serious was the fact that these two men worked so far from each other. Von Seidel's office was in the Luftwaffe Headquarters at Potsdam-Werder. There was no continuous personal contact between the two men, but it is questionable whether their relationship would have been different had von Seidel had his office close to Jeschonnek. General Meister mentioned that "Von Seidel never appeared," and that a cold relationship existed between the two responsible officers.<sup>115</sup> This was an incredible situation at a time when Germany was engaged in a war to the death, and when the fate of the nation was at stake!

What a narrow and perhaps humanly helpless nature the Chief of the General Staff had! His only outlet (one that he seldom used) was that of conversation with either his Adjutant, Colonel Leuchtenberg, or with his trusted and understanding secretary of long standing, Frau Kersten. His place of work was a tiny compartment in a parlor car, and it was not until late in the war that he allowed a small block house to be built for his use. Although other officers had such accommodations, Jeschonnek had no wish to be better off than the soldiers at the front.

The happy conversations around the hearth with his comrades from the Greifswald period, Pohle, Wilke, and Knust, during the course

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\*Editor's Note: Von Waldau, a gifted and respected operations officer, indicates in his diary that he had certain misgivings about Jeschonnek because of the latter's tendency to be a "yes man."

<sup>4</sup>See figure 37.



Figure 37  
Generaloberst Jeschonnek in conversation with General der  
Flieger Hans-Georg von Seidel, Luftwaffe  
Quartermaster General, 1943

of which the pros and cons of various missions were stoutly argued, had become a thing of the past. Jeschonnek, even though he still enjoyed Hitler's confidence after Stalingrad, was no longer happy in his position, and his burdens became increasingly heavier.

#### The Growing Threat to the Home Front

As has already been mentioned, Jeschonnek was keen and capable of managing situations, but lacked imagination and an ability to foresee possible events. He failed to recognize the warning signals that British air power was growing. He still thought in terms of an offensive Luftwaffe and wanted bombers, as his refusal to accept Milch's offer to increase fighter production revealed. He could not see that two fighter wings and a number of far too weak groups--these were subsequently incorporated into the Night Fighter Forces--in the homeland would eventually be unable to repulse British air penetrations over the Reich.<sup>116</sup> He was not conscious of the fact that failure to defeat the Soviet Union quickly would then mean an unusually hard and long campaign, a consequence of which would be the critical need to defend the homeland.

He continued to hold fast to his stubborn views, which had made him an enemy of the four-motored bomber project, and which caused him to underestimate the dangers to Germany from an Anglo-American four-engine bomber force. In July of 1942 Col. (Engineer) Dietrich Schwenke, who was then giving a lecture in Kalinovka in the presence of Jeschonnek and his Chief of Intelligence, Col. Josef "Beppo" Schmid, reported on the tremendous armament and armament capability of the Western Allies, and the American four-engine bomber force in particular. In the middle of his lecture, Jeschonnek broke in with the comment, "Every four-engine bomber the Western Allies build makes me happy, for we will bring these four-engine bombers down just like we brought down the two-engine ones, and the destruction of a four-engine bomber constitutes a much greater loss for the enemy."<sup>117</sup>

What dangerous and incorrigible optimism! And this at a time when the RAF was stepping up its attacks on Germany itself! First came the raids on Luebeck (28-29 March 1942), on Rostock (24-27 April), and then (and much more impressive) the great raid on Cologne (30-31 May), which caused 12,000 fires, 1,700 of major proportions. Attacks by 1,000 bombers on Essen and Bremen were quick to follow. Germany's affliction from the West had begun, and the attacker's losses were not high enough to frighten him off, primarily because of the weakness of the German fighter arm. On 19 September 1942 the Allies struck Munich, and then turned to Krefeld, Hanover, and Stuttgart. These were just a few of the many terrible raids. The homeland was ablaze.

Since the summer of 1942 the small, fast British "Mosquito" bombers (against which the German fighters were powerless) began to appear singly or in squadrons, but in ever-increasing frequency, inflicting great damage on Germany. British daylight attacks by specially trained wings of four-engine "Lancaster" bombers also punished German cities, and it was not long before radar allowed the RAF to find targets through fog and cloud cover as well as in darkness.

While German troops pushed ahead over the broad plains of Russia or through the deserts of Cyrenaica and Egypt, thousands of civilians in Germany lost their lives from British air raids, and the great cathedrals, town halls, and architectural masterpieces, which for centuries had been the glory of Europe, sank in smoke and ashes. The German defense was unable to commit its trifling strength by day so as to destroy an entire bomber formation, let alone inflict heavy enough losses upon the enemy to cause him to desist because of the risks involved. German night-fighter strength was also inadequate and neither Jeschonnek nor Goering had any great sympathy for this arm. Jeschonnek's faulty decision concerning fighter production was beginning to have frightening consequences. 118

Goering and Jeschonnek were more interested in launching reprisal attacks against Britain, just as was Hitler, who believed that "terror could only be broken by terror."<sup>119</sup> Although this idea was correct in principle, because in war it is only when both protagonists endure great suffering that the desire for settlement and humanity can predominate, in this particular instance it was completely erroneous. The German bomber forces available were far too weak to accomplish such an objective, and, after suffering heavy losses in the best units, the Luftwaffe was too weak to even match the British attacks. In addition, Luftwaffe bombing raids were marked by severe losses.

Except for a few small raids, the Americans had not yet taken part in the attacks on Germany. The large-scale commitment of the "Flying Fortresses" (B-17's), however, was expected to begin in early 1943. No matter how much Milch tried to push German production, it was impossible to keep abreast of the massive American production figures, to which were added the considerable British figures.

Jeschonnek, according to Schmid, worked most "unwillingly on air defense."<sup>120</sup> It is possible to understand the youthful general's train of thought. Attack and the offensive is the way of battle for the vital and the strong, and it requires great self-control to admit that one is no longer strong, and even more to face the fact that the nation is gravely threatened,

requiring a defense that would conserve all of the available military power. The German soldier generally prefers attack to defense, a characteristic which was emphasized in the General Staff training prior to the First World War. Hannibal's Cannae, the classic battle of extermination, was the great German objective in warfare, and this was virtually realized at Tannenberg.\* Hannibal's other side as a master of defense, in which he achieved results equally as great, if not greater than in his offensives, seemed to be of less interest to the former German General Staff. The later General Staff training between 1919 and 1933 (of which Jeschonnek was a product), because of the numerical weakness of the Reichswehr, paid more attention to defense than before. In the Luftwaffe, Douhet was the ideal, and Douhet taught attack.

However, Jeschonnek, as the Chief of the General Staff of his branch of the Wehrmacht, should have been able to rise above the most rigid aspects of tradition and his own rather narrow intellectual orientation. Unfortunately, he was not flexible enough to do so. His management of air defense was "dragging" and improvised in character, and suggestions for modernizing and streamlining air defenses "remained a mystery to him." Field Marshal Kesselring acknowledged this, but added that, "the combining of national air defenses into a single air fleet is to his credit."<sup>121</sup> But, this was not due to Jeschonnek's far-sightedness, but rather to the pressure of events which compelled the creation of this organization.

#### Jeschonnek, Milch, and Goering

The Luftwaffe General Staff Chief had not been close to Udet, and his relationship to Milch was extremely poor. Such matters were of prime importance as Germany's air position began to deteriorate. The once exalted Luftwaffe was being consumed in an increasingly hopeless battle over the Reich, and faced the fury of Hitler, who knew as did the German people that Goering's arm of service was utterly unable to thwart Allied plans to destroy Germany. In such circumstances the three men who had the most to say about leadership in the air defense effort ought to have become more closely united. However, this did not occur.

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\*Editor's Note: The author refers here to the great German victory (engineered by Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff and Col. Max Hoffmann) over the Russian General Alexander V. Samsonov and the Russian Army at Tannenberg in East Prussia, 26-30 August 1914.

At one time Jeschonnek had been an aide to Milch. This association began well enough, but they parted on poor terms, and during the Greifswald period Jeschonnek had frequent arguments because of Milch's policies.<sup>122\*</sup> A sort of deadly enmity developed in which the young General Staff Chief refused to have anything to do with Milch. Thus Milch could neither serve as a prop nor as an advisor. Milch declared "The only time during the war when I represented Goering was during the winter of 1940-41, when he was on leave. For about two months I was stationed at his headquarters near Beauvais. On the same day that I arrived, Jeschonnek left for Karinhall. He relayed his orders to von Waldau by telephone."<sup>123</sup> One should not lose sight of this.

Jeschonnek should have made some effort to soften this situation, especially since he was the younger of the two, and junior in rank. It would have been beneficial to both men to have established a new sort of relationship, and would have given a powerful boost to German air strategy.

The relationship of the General Staff Chief to Reichsmarschall Goering was somewhat different, and toward the end assumed threatening proportions. Schmid<sup>f</sup> mentioned Goering's enthusiasm for Jeschonnek, an enthusiasm which lasted into the war as long as German arms were successful. But, when the failures began to appear and become obvious to all, there was no real human contact between them. Goering "sat too high in the saddle." It was not that the Chief of the General Staff had an aversion to Goering. In fact, according to Frau Kersten, "Jeschonnek was often an enthusiastic admirer of Goering. He liked him and was happy when he could convince him of something."<sup>124</sup> Schmid's remarks that Jeschonnek loved Hitler and Goering would appear to be somewhat exaggerated. It is true that Goering did hold considerable sway over Jeschonnek, in spite of the latter's Spartan way of life and his probable marked distaste for the Reichsmarschall's love of pomp, luxurious pleasures, the accumulation of treasures, and generally unsoldierly behavior in wartime. Moreover, it is unlikely that Goering would have acted as

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\*Editor's Note: Unusual losses suffered by the Training Wing provided the basis for sharp differences between Milch and Jeschonnek. According to Milch, many of these losses resulted from Jeschonnek's desire to have tests carried out at dangerously low altitudes over land and water. The expression mentioned in the Training Wing was, "The prop tips must touch the ground or water!" Milch claimed that Jeschonnek's policies and not his own were the root of the trouble. See Milch Interview of 2 September 1955.

<sup>f</sup>See figure 38.



Figure 38  
Generalleutnant Josef "Beppo" Schmid, Jeschonnek's  
Chief of Intelligence, discussing the air situation  
with ex-heavyweight champion Max Schmeling

a peacemaker between Milch and Jeschonnek, since it was incompatible with his imperious nature.

In the spring of 1939, during a trip of several days' duration on the Mittelland Canal in an atmosphere of seclusion, Jeschonnek had an opportunity to voice his opinions to Goering. "Beppo" Schmid was present, and noted that after the trip the two became most friendly. Later, when the relationship began to show signs of strain, Goering presented Jeschonnek with a beautiful riding horse. 125\*

But, Jeschonnek, a proper Prussian, abrupt and soldierly in his manner, could never find the right or lasting approach to the informality-loving Goering, who remained a Bavarian at heart. General der Flieger Bodenschatz once advised Jeschonnek to "tone down his Prussian ways in the presence of Goering." Bodenschatz even offered to intercede for him on occasions, but Jeschonnek always turned him down. 126

On the other hand, Goering often acted imperiously with his General Staff Chief, giving, as Kesselring related, "either directives which could not be fulfilled or none at all." 127 If Jeschonnek did not handle things to suit Goering, the Reichsmarschall "blew up." Yet, even under Goering's screaming, Jeschonnek remained "a gentleman." This happened more and more frequently, since Hitler began to shut Goering out of his confidence and to deal directly with Jeschonnek, a fact which infuriated the Reichsmarschall.

Problems were compounded by the fact that Diesing took great pains to poison Goering's mind about Jeschonnek. Schmid has described the "second General Staff" organized by Colonel von Brauchitsch as one of the reasons for Jeschonnek's suicide. Schmid noted that, "Brauchitsch had four or five General Staff officers in his office, with whose collaboration, and without informing or consulting Jeschonnek, he issued Reichsmarschall orders directly to the commands." 128 It is not difficult to imagine how depressing this must have been for the lonely, withdrawn

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\*Goering took sides with Schiller's Wallenstein: "As long as it didn't come out of his pocket, his motto was live and let live" (Ging es nicht aus den eigenen Taschen, sein Wahlspruch war leben und leben lassen). Editor's Note: Johann Cristoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), whose dramatic trilogy, Wallensteins Lager, Die Piccolomini, and Wallensteins Tod (1798-1799), was based upon the life of the German soldier and statesman Albrecht Wenzel Eusebius von Wallenstein, Duke of Friedland, Sagan, and Macklenburg (1583-1634).

man to see himself undermined, with his chief's approval, in his own headquarters. Often he was unable to secure an appointment with Goering, while the "Little General Staff" walked in and out of the Reichsmarschall's office with impunity.<sup>129</sup> General der Flieger Deichmann wrote about the relationship between Goering and Jeschonnek, noting that:

If Goering appeared before his troops in the company of his General Staff Chief, one could observe how the latter played the role of a recipient of orders. "Write this down! . . . See to that!" Such was the usual tone used by the Reichsmarschall with his General Staff Chief.

The Chief of the General Staff, who had much work to do, found his time taken up with social affairs and waiting around in outer offices in a way which was disrespectful to his rank. If Goering was with Hitler, the Chief of the General Staff would have to wait for hours on end in a room at Fuehrer Headquarters on the possibility that information concerning some matter might be needed.<sup>130</sup>

Because of his jealousy of Jeschonnek's popularity with the troops, and because he desired to keep his General Staff Chief close at hand, Goering refused to allow him to visit the front.<sup>131</sup>

One cannot dismiss the idea that after the Stalingrad catastrophe the time had come to change the leadership of the Luftwaffe. Kesselring mentioned this in his memoirs.<sup>132</sup> The situation demanded, however, the removal of both Goering and Jeschonnek. Goering had heavily damaged the Luftwaffe's position, and Jeschonnek was already worn out by 1943 as a General Staff Chief. Perhaps with the leadership of a resolute and fanatically dedicated person, such as Freiherr von Richthofen, the German Air Force might still have been saved. Surely Richthofen was the best choice to succeed Goering, for he could have been forceful and firm with Hitler. Jeschonnek could have been given command of the Fourth Air Fleet (Richthofen's old unit), which would have provided a useful post for him and would have saved the young Generaloberst. Of course, a separation of Goering from Hitler as a military collaborator could not even be mentioned. Such a change in the Luftwaffe High Command would have made too powerful an impression upon neutral and enemy nations, especially inasmuch as Goering was Hitler's legally appointed successor. In Hitler one could see that he became increasingly sharp, critical, and insulting toward Goering, but, at the same time, he tolerated so much in Goering's weaknesses, probably because of the memory of the old days and the early Party struggles. Hitler held on to his Luftwaffe Commander in Chief, just as he did to his unconditionally loyal Jeschonnek. Thus the practical solution for 1943 and the future of the war never took place.

Jeschonnek Between Hitler and Goering

Tortured with worries, the General Staff Chief saw one difficulty after another stretched out before him, and it was not only the air forces which troubled him, although the discrepancy between the Luftwaffe's strength and that of the Anglo-American air forces continued to increase, and although the He-177 could not be put into mass production, nor even the Me-262 jet, which by 1943 was progressing well enough despite the loss of time due to the development stoppage. For Jeschonnek, the decisive factor was his relationship to Hitler. And the way things stood, the fates of Hitler and Germany had become inseparable. The Fuehrer affected the young General Staff Chief like a secret magnet. Without question Jeschonnek's Spartan way of life must have impressed Hitler, who was perhaps overly impressed by good military bearing and behavior. Hitler was attracted by Jeschonnek's Prussian abruptness and manner, characteristics which had just the opposite effect upon Goering, whose personality was so different. Kesselring thought that Jeschonnek's impact upon Hitler "worked to the advantage of the Luftwaffe." 133

After the Cologne raid, and even more so after Stalingrad, Hitler's relationship with Goering changed. With his acuteness, the Fuehrer began to recognize the shortcomings of the Reichsmarschall. Col. Eckhard Christian, Chief of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, who by 1943 had won considerable influence with Hitler, was then instrumental in bringing Jeschonnek into closer relationship with the dictator. Hitler, who had been accustomed to holding private meetings with Goering, began to invite Jeschonnek. The General Staff Chief was then able to experience all of Hitler's bitterness toward the Luftwaffe for its breakdown and failures. He was also able to see himself equated with the paralysis and decline of the air forces. Every Anglo-American raid on a German city filled the Fuehrer with new wrath, and occasionally he reacted with furious outbursts of temper. Jeschonnek, chalk-white, found himself in the position of bearing the brunt of these violent displays of anger. On one occasion, however, as the participants left a briefing, Hitler held Jeschonnek back, put his arm around him and clapped him on the shoulder, saying, "Of course, I didn't mean you at all!" 134

What a difficult position for the young Generaloberst! He had indeed found himself ground down between two millstones, the strong personalities of Hitler and Goering. He had to take everything they served up to him. Hitler blamed Goering for the Luftwaffe's failures, and Goering, in turn, vented his wrath on Jeschonnek. Undecided as to which way to turn, Jeschonnek found himself in an increasingly helpless

position. Kesselring has stated that, "Opposite Hitler he was alone, since Hitler no longer trusted Goering. But, unlike Goering, he was also opposed from below."<sup>135</sup>

It is clear that Goering, feeling ever more insecure, was angered by his General Staff Chief, who still seemed to have some standing with the Fuehrer. This prevented any close working relationship within the Luftwaffe High Command. It is less clear just when, or even if, Hitler actually lost faith in Jeschonnek. Dr. Karl Bartz in his "Als der Himmel brannte" ("As the Heavens Burned") claimed that Hitler was only biding his time for the right opportunity to rid himself of Jeschonnek, but this idea finds no support elsewhere.<sup>136</sup> Hitler's feelings about the destruction of the cities are easy to imagine when one recalls that he had great interest in architecture and in the preservation of the ancient cities. It is, of course, possible that Jeschonnek felt he had lost his Fuehrer's trust, for the Generaloberst was perceptive in many areas.

By the spring of 1943 he surely realized that events had taken a turn for the worse, that the Anglo-American air forces were capable of dealing much heavier damage than he had thought and that Germany had lost air superiority in Africa. German and Italian troops were steadily losing ground in the Tunisian bridgehead and capitulated on 12 May 1943. The Allies, possessing air superiority over the weakened Second Air Fleet, landed on 9 July 1943 in Sicily, where Italian betrayal and collapse assisted the enemy to rapidly win ground.

In the East, Hitler's effort in July to cut off the unpleasant Kursk salient by committing some reequipped armored divisions failed to bring a decisive victory.<sup>137</sup> Powerful Soviet forces seized the initiative to the north of the salient, and later to the south of it, and were able to keep control from then on. The Luftwaffe did all it could to support the two attacking German armies, but in vain. Even on a restricted front, German air strength was insufficient to accomplish the assigned tasks, while the Russians grew more and more audacious in the commitment of increasing numbers of air units.\* The 1st Air Division, near Orel, managed from 19 to 21 July to turn an apparently successful Soviet breakthrough into a catastrophe for the leading Russian tank units. This was a brilliant stroke, and balm for the Luftwaffe's wounds, but the affliction of the German Air Force could no longer be healed!

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\*See figure 39.



Figure 39  
Generaloberst Robert Ritter von Greim, Commander of the Sixth  
Air Fleet (Eastern Front), discussing the Luftwaffe's  
critical situation with Jeschonnek, Summer of 1943

The Luftwaffe, bled nearly white, struggling to defend the homeland, and to prevent collapses on a number of far-flung fronts, needed to be strengthened. The first prerequisite was a different example at the top, but Goering had no interest in such ideas, nor was he willing to change his way of life. Moreover, he was quite happy to let his Chief of Staff bear the blame alone. In such a situation what could Jeschonnek have done? Hitler's fits of passion against the Luftwaffe continued to increase with each daily transmission of bad news, and even if it was directed mainly at Goering, Jeschonnek was the one who had to bear it. It is not difficult to imagine that one day the outbursts would be turned upon him.

Two ways were open to Jeschonnek. The first would have been a frank report to the Fuehrer as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, stating that the Luftwaffe was sick at the top, that it required workers and raw materials for a decisive rearmament, that its schools had to be allowed to continue undisturbed, and that every effort had to be made to get the Me-262 jet into mass production, or the German Air Force would be helpless and impotent. The men who surrounded Jeschonnek begged him to take this step. To them, however, the cause of all of the difficulties was incorporated in the person of Goering. Leuchtenberg said, "He [Jeschonnek] often spoke to me concerning his difficulties with the Reichsmarschall. I asked him if he didn't want to report it to the Fuehrer, but he replied, 'I can't do it. Perhaps you could, but I can't.'"<sup>138</sup>

Frau Kersten also mentioned the necessity of making a report to Hitler about Goering and the problems in the Luftwaffe High Command, but he invariably said, "I can't go against Goering. I am a soldier!"<sup>139</sup>

The second possibility was to resign his post as Chief of the General Staff, a decision which could have been made on the ground of health alone, since Jeschonnek had been suffering for some time from stomach pains and cramps. To the Generaloberst, however, no forty-year-old dared to make such a claim, since for the soldier the mention of ill health would have been a humiliation. Jeschonnek might have assumed the command of an air fleet, and, feeling the pressure of his job, once implored Goering to give him such a position and to replace him with Richthofen or Kammhuber. He would have enjoyed such an assignment, and could have rendered excellent service, but he was unsure whether he dared to leave his post at that time.<sup>140</sup> Leuchtenberg recalled his comment at the time, "I can still master this difficult situation."<sup>141</sup> According to von Below, Goering consulted with Hitler about Jeschonnek's request to take over an air fleet, and the Fuehrer declared it was absolutely out of the question. Hitler, in fact, demanded that the two top Luftwaffe

leaders effect a reconciliation and start working together. For 14 days this worked out satisfactorily. <sup>142</sup>

Goering, influenced by the circle around him and by his own desire to find a scapegoat for Luftwaffe failures, also thought of retiring Jeschonnek. Generaloberst Kurt Student reported that in August of 1943 he was frequently in Hitler's presence because of the planning for Mussolini's rescue, and that during this time he was able to speak with Jeschonnek on five or six occasions in the Reichsmarschall's building at Fuehrer Headquarters. He recalled vividly, "The last time I saw him he told me, 'Richthofen once came to me and said, 'Jeschonnek, please turn the business of the General Staff over to me.' I was completely dumbfounded by this and went to Goering, who said, 'That's a complete misunderstanding.' Richthofen then left. Student, what should I do now?'" <sup>143</sup>

Col. Torsten Christ, who served directly under von Richthofen denied this statement of Student's, just as did Frau Kersten. <sup>144</sup> Leuchtenberg made no comments at all on the matter. Field Marshal Milch, on the other hand, mentioned that Richthofen had expressed to Goering a desire to be named Chief of the General Staff. <sup>145\*</sup> General der Flieger Meister declared that Jeschonnek mentioned having been visited by Richthofen concerning such a matter, but that the General Staff Chief then went directly to Goering to find out what it was all about, since he knew nothing of any suggestions that von Richthofen was to succeed him. <sup>146</sup> Goering took Jeschonnek by the arm, put his arm around his shoulder and said, "My dear Jeschonnek, I will never separate myself from you!" <sup>147</sup>

In his diary, von Richthofen mentioned that Hitler had told Goering something had to be done about the Luftwaffe, and "if a change takes place I'm [Richthofen] the only one suited" for the post of General Staff Chief. <sup>148</sup> In reading this diary one gets the feeling that much is left unsaid. According to Colonel Knust, Jeschonnek told him that he received a phone call from Italy in which Richthofen said, "Hans, I am supposed to be your successor. But, I've made one condition, that they also make me Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe." <sup>149</sup> Doubtless, although Jeschonnek had heard nothing about this previously, he was deeply affected by it. It was obvious that he remained in office because of Hitler's wishes.

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\*Editor's Note: See the comments in Richthofen's diary for 27 July through 21 August 1943, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

Jeschonnek's Suicide

The question could be raised whether it is possible for a youthful officer, energetic and tough, a soldier through and through, to deteriorate to the point where he saw no other course of action than to take his pistol in hand. He has been portrayed as a cool, sober, and often perceptive officer, yet one who could be "short" with his comrades, and even be unapproachable in discussions. He never allowed lower ranking colleagues to give a real expression of opinion. He issued orders and developed his own point of view. To the public he thus seemed to be solid, steady, and able to handle whatever might come. But, was he really this sort?

It is known that he surrounded himself with officers of equivalent or inferior rank, especially younger officers, on whom he could never look as equals. It was not his strength which made him unapproachable and even solitary, it was his inner nature, which instinctively kept him from situations where arguments could arise in which his convictions might be questioned, where senior officers (who had no hesitation in speaking out) might be present. His hardened exterior concealed an extremely vulnerable inner person. Colonel Christ saw him as a shy, "almost timid," man, while Frau Kersten, who knew him best, said, "Fundamentally, he was an extremely soft person, but he didn't want to show it. He erected a wall around himself. In order to hide his inner vulnerability he assumed a cool, slightly dissatisfied and seemingly sarcastic nature in public."<sup>150</sup> General Meister noted significantly, "Goering told me that once at Karinhall, after the beginning of the Russian Campaign in 1941, Jeschonnek had a nervous breakdown, and said that the responsibility 'would be pushed off on him.' I then explained to him that I would bear the responsibility. My wife consoled the weeping man."<sup>151</sup>

Certain aspects of his character, his periods of depression and even emotional breakdowns, allow one to conclude that these were manic-depressive characteristics, even though other evidence seems to contradict this. Certainly he found himself in an ever greater inner conflict concerning the possibility of winning the war and of trusting in Hitler's leadership. General der Flieger von Seidel recalled that in the winter of 1941-42 Jeschonnek reacted almost violently when criticisms were leveled at the Army's conduct of the war, and shouted, "You must believe in a successful outcome!"<sup>152</sup> General Schmid recalled that the summer of 1942 was the turning point in Jeschonnek's true belief in a successful outcome of the war, yet he refused to allow any discussion of this.<sup>153</sup> It was during this period that von Seidel had lunch with him at the Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair) in East Prussia, and the General Staff Chief loosened up and admitted the terrible mistakes that had been and were still being made.<sup>154</sup>

As early as 12 April 1943 Generaloberst Heinz Guderian visited Jeschonnek and noted that he was "tired, resigned," and unwilling to come to an open discussion on any factors affecting both the Luftwaffe and the armored forces.<sup>155</sup> Guderian, a sharp observer, believed that Jeschonnek had lost his inner strength, and one can safely say that from this time on he was emotionally "burned out."

Jeschonnek had to reckon with being relieved of his post, an unbearable disgrace, and knew also that the failures were going to be more and more laid at his feet. It was impossible to ascribe all of the mistakes and shortcomings of the German Air Force to Goering. Jeschonnek knew only too well how deeply he was involved in the overestimation of the Ju-88; in the failure of the He-177; in creating an air force with no reserve strength, an air force designed for blitzkriegs; in insisting upon fulfillment of Hitler's program, only to modify it to mean "produce what you can"; in failing to impress his superior with the fact that the Luftwaffe could not fight a protracted war; in agreeing to stop aircraft development and to leave fighter production at a low figure, and in failing to properly mobilize his armament program; in underestimating the Anglo-American air menace; in agreeing to the air logistical operations at Kholm, Demyansk, and worst of all, at Stalingrad; in allowing the Luftwaffe to become a "fire-fighting brigade" for the Army; in failing to develop a strategic air arm and an air transport command; in recognizing too late the need for adequate air defense forces; and in overemphasizing medium bombers to the disadvantage of fighters.

Since Jeschonnek had no well-developed religious convictions and his family life held little meaning for him, he was bound to his duty, and when this rock began to crumble he had no force which could stabilize him. In this situation he thought of suicide. On one occasion (just before the overthrow of Mussolini) his Adjutant, Leuchtenberg, had to take a revolver out of his hand. Leuchtenberg then told Kesselring that he feared Jeschonnek might try it again.<sup>156</sup> Knust, who visited him on 7 August 1943 at his apartment in the Sedanstrasse in Berlin, also noted Jeschonnek's state of mind. When Knust expressed some pessimistic views concerning the war, Jeschonnek, sitting in deep depression, retorted, "Are you going to start that too?"<sup>157\*</sup>

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\*Besides Leuchtenberg and Knust, Werner Baumbach, the celebrated German bomber pilot, states that he [Baumbach] also enjoyed the full confidence of Generaloberst Jeschonnek. Baumbach declares that Jeschonnek was so open in revealing his innermost secrets, apprehensions, and problems that it often "embarrassed" the barely 25-year-old Baumbach. See Baumbach's Zu Spaet? Aufstieg und Untergang der deutschen Luftwaffe (Too Late? Rise and Fall of the German Air Force), Munich: Richard Pflaum Verlag, 1949, p. 187.

The Kursk offensive in the East had failed, and the planned strategic withdrawal to the Dnepr River (the Hagen Line) had to be accelerated because of the overthrow and imprisonment of Mussolini on 25 July, which suggested that Italy would withdraw from the Axis and would therefore have to be occupied by larger German troop units. The Russians, powerful on the ground, were becoming increasingly strong in the air. At the same time (25 July 1943) came the terrible Anglo-American raids on Hamburg, killing 40,000 civilians, among which were 5,586 children, attacks which were not terminated until the night of 3 August.<sup>158</sup> Then, on 17 August, came the American daylight attack on the ball-bearing works at Schweinfurt and a raid on the aircraft plants in Regensburg. Although the Luftwaffe seemed to win a great defensive victory on this occasion, highly important war industries were seriously damaged, and the enemy showed his capability to penetrate to the innermost points of the Reich.

Frau Kersten mentioned a telephone conversation between Goering and Jeschonnek on the afternoon of 17 August, during which the General Staff Chief was treated in a gross manner. General Meister also recalled a conversation between the two men concerning the coordination of night fighters and flak forces. Goering created a terrible scene because Jeschonnek, for technical reasons, had held back an order. He shouted to Jeschonnek, "You stand in front of Hitler like a lieutenant with your hands on your trouser seams!"<sup>159</sup>

One can almost feel the towering rage of the Pasha of Karinhall, whose frustrations and emotions had grown out of hand. Leuchtenberg recalled that it was on the evening of this day, a day rich in excitement, that he went for a walk with Jeschonnek:

... we took a ride in a skiff on Goldap Lake. Jeschonnek watched a flight of ducks. Afterwards, in his quarters, we drank a bottle of champagne, as it was his daughter's birthday. Then, as usual, we parted company.<sup>160</sup>

During the night of 17-18 August Germany received another heavy blow. Over 500 RAF bombers attacked the research and construction sites at Peenemuende, where, in utmost secrecy, the V-weapons were being made.\* The damage incurred was at first overestimated. General

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\*Editor's Note: For an account of the Peenemuende raid of 17-18 August 1943, see Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland (eds.), The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945, Vol. II: "Endeavor," Part 4, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961, pp. 158-159. See also figure 40.



Figure 40  
A view of destruction to buildings at Peenemuende following the British night air attack of 17 August 1943

Meister related, "I learned about the attack about seven or seven-thirty in the morning and presented my report to Jeschonnek around eight. He received it quietly. I then went to a situation conference. Jeschonnek did not appear."161

Leuchtenberg said, "I was holding breakfast for him. A major wanted to report to him about something. The secretary, Frau Kersten, then called him on the telephone. He said, 'I'm coming immediately.' But, he didn't come. He then called up Frau Kersten and said, 'Leuchtenberg should go ahead over [to the conference].'"162

Secretary Kersten described the tragic events which followed:

. . . I phoned Jeschonnek several times, without being able to reach him. Then I knocked, entered, and saw him lying dead. I hadn't heard a shot, which is even more unbelievable, since I wasn't more than thirty feet from him, and we were separated only by the wall. A note lay by the dead man: "I can no longer work together with the Reichsmarschall. Long live the Fuehrer!"163

Besides this note, another slip of paper was found on his desk, in Jeschonnek's handwriting, which said, "Diesing and Brauchitsch shall not be at my funeral."164

It is now time to clear away the legends surrounding Jeschonnek's death. It is untrue, as Milch has claimed, that Jeschonnek had had a heated discussion with Hitler on the afternoon preceding his suicide, during which Hitler had told him that the failures were his responsibility and that he "ought to know now what was expected of him."165 This account is denied by those who were best informed about the situation. Von Below states that Hitler again and again tried to make life easier for Jeschonnek, especially with Goering.166

Even the date mentioned by the German news bureaus and published in the People's Observer (Voelkischer Beobachter), 19 August, was assumed to be the correct date of Jeschonnek's death. The reason Goering selected this date was an awareness that there had been a connection between the raids of 17 August, and especially the raid that night

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\*Milch testified that Jeschonnek had had a stormy session with Hitler in which it had become obvious that he had lost both Goering's and Hitler's support, which ended with Hitler saying, "You know what is left for you to do now!"

on Peenemuende, and his suicide. Thus the improbable invention of the Generaloberst seizing his pistol 24 hours later. Goering had chosen the 19th (contrary to the facts) as the official date to be given in order to erase the connection with Peenemuende. At the same time, Goering deemed it a good idea to hush up the suicide by substituting the story of a natural death by hemorrhage of the stomach. 167\* It was important to the Luftwaffe High Command, as well as to Hitler, to hide the true nature of his death, from which so many conclusions could be drawn, not only by the enemy, but also by the German public.

#### Jeschonnek's Memorandum

The slip of paper found by Jeschonnek's body pointed to the fact that the despairing General Staff Chief must have seen in Goering the man responsible for the Luftwaffe's decline. There are numerous witnesses who knew of a thorough altercation between Jeschonnek and Goering prior to the former's death. According to Leuchtenberg, there were other notes which mentioned military events, decisions, and the relationships between Hitler and Goering. Frau Kersten said these consisted of about 10 pages.

Were these notes in the nature of a memorandum? And, if they were, to whom was the memorandum directed? Unfortunately, little is known about this except that it aimed at Goering. The Reichsmarschall mentioned this himself before witnesses, so that there was no doubt he knew of it. General Meister, arriving at Jeschonnek's command post, was ordered by Goering to open the safe. Meister continued:

He personally studied Jeschonnek's reference files and found among them a study, the only other copy of which belonged to Below. He didn't give it to me to read, but I believe it recommended that Goering have a deputy, something which had first been planned with Pflugbeil in mind, later Greim. Goering said to me, "You see, the man was working against me!". . . Goering read both of the slips of paper which had been found by Jeschonnek, then gave them back to me, keeping the study for himself. 168

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\*Leuchtenberg recalled that, in order to keep the suicide a secret, attendance at the burial was forbidden. Although shocked, Hitler didn't attend, because he disapproved of the suicide.

Field Marshal Kesselring, who appeared at Jeschonnek's burial despite an order forbidding it, said, "As I approached Goering, he said to me, 'Jeschonnek didn't die. He shot himself.'" Goering then mentioned a memorandum which Jeschonnek had directed to Hitler, asking for a change of command for the air war, and added that it was "directed against me."<sup>169</sup>

From the remarks of Schmid, Goering, and Milch, it appears that the General Staff Chief did draft a study for Hitler. Leuchtenberg commented that Jeschonnek had said, "My death should be a beacon light."<sup>170</sup> However, he had no time to see that it became a beacon. With the rapid onset of bad news, he obviously saw no possibility of finishing his draft.\* He was at the limit of his strength and rushed forward to his death. His suicide makes it clear that he was not hard enough, nor well enough adjusted, to bear the burdens imposed on his high office.

Suicide is always a type of escape, even when one understands that a man like Jeschonnek could not have endured the destruction of his service, nor the defeat of Germany. In the face of such dangers a healthy man, particularly a highly-placed military leader, ought to exert all of his strength to root out the causes of decay and weakness, and fight to the last second. Alive, Jeschonnek could have been very useful, even if he did not succeed in every effort to win Hitler over to ideas which were conducive to saving the Luftwaffe. His death, however, was no beacon light. It was not one for Hitler, who had lapsed into splendid isolation and obstinacy, nor for Goering, who had no wish to change, and not for the Luftwaffe.

Jeschonnek lacked the self-assurance required to get along with the amiable, but domineering, Milch, just as he lacked the artful skill required to find the proper approach to Udet, and in any case, the obstacle of the ruthless Goering would have remained. As Wallenstein remarked, "two hens cannot sit on one nest," and as Prince Kaunitz<sup>†</sup> observed, "there is not enough room for two pipers in one inn." Goering, despite his great weaknesses, was too powerful an individual and the balance of advantages was too heavily weighted on his side, for Jeschonnek.

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\*Von Below did not recall having seen any such memorandum, and believes that no copy of it came to Hitler's attention.

<sup>†</sup>Editor's Note: Wenzel Anton Prince von Kaunitz-Rietburg (1711-1794), an Austrian Chancellor and diplomat who from 1750 to 1792 was the leading political figure in eastern and central Europe.

A Child of His Times

Jeschonnek, the fourth Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, was merely a boy in 1914 when he was infected by the enthusiasm of that year, and as a very young volunteer fought in many of the great battles of the German Army. Like many other German military men, he was deeply depressed by the collapse in 1918, which he found almost incomprehensible after having witnessed so many victories.

The outcome of World War I was such that it influenced the intellectual development of Germany's soldiers in two main directions, or extremes. One group viewed any future involvement of Germany with great anxiety, fearing that even local engagements would result immediately in a gigantic coalition of enemies against them and thus lead to a multi-front war. Even Ludendorff was not free of this idea, and his successors were characterized by a cautious and careful attitude. Beck, von Hammerstein, (Field Marshal) von Brauchitsch, and Halder were men of this sort.

On the other side there were those, generally the younger men (many of whom had held junior positions at the front), who recalled mainly the great accomplishments of German arms in the war, and especially those achieved against heavy odds. They tended to equate the final defeat with the failure of the political and military leadership. The real causes of Germany's defeat were in their eyes of scant consequence, and they often expressed the idea that the German Army was "unconquered in the field," a phrase which also became the theme of a three-volume work by General von Dickhut-Harrach. 171

This belief in the invincibility of the German Army became a deep conviction of German youth, and the idea was expanded to include the concept that a German Army could never be conquered as long as the homeland, in time of war, was not the victim of a "stab in the back."\* Out of this grew an incredible pride, and leaders who shared this conviction were filled with an almost childlike optimism concerning the strength of their

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\*Editor's Note: The "Dolchstoß" or "Stab-in-the Back" story was that Germany lost World War I because of political treachery by the Republican Government which concluded the Armistice and the Peace Treaty with the Allies. Actually, the Army played a significant role in both negotiations. See John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1954, pp. 17-82.

people. They had no difficulty in finding faithful followers. The strongest believer of all was Hitler, who continued almost to the end to think that Germany's fortunes would change.

Jeschonnek also belonged to the circle which believed in a great and victorious future. His feelings were intensified by his personal devotion to Hitler, whom he saw as a genius of first rank. But in Jeschonnek there was nothing of the demonic which might have made him impervious to the vicissitudes of war or reason. Instead, he had an alert, acute mind which eventually led him to recognize the real truth beneath events, and to see that Hitler, and he along with Hitler, had been wrong. Victory was no longer to be achieved and defeat was certain. With this realization the strength of his personality was shattered. Moreover, there were the threats which menaced his position, and the problem of Goering. Patriotic, sensitive, ambitious, and naturally optimistic, Jeschonnek finally anticipated the approaching calamity. Suicide for him was the only proper way to preserve the hard and unshakable mask of the soldier. Far more lonely than hundreds of thousands of his comrades-in-arms, he died as he had lived, a child of his times.

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## Chapter 4

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## APPENDIX

## LIST OF GAF MONOGRAPH PROJECT STUDIES

## I. Published

<u>Study No.</u>	<u>Title</u>
153	The German Air Force versus Russia, 1941
154	The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942
155	The German Air Force versus Russia, 1943
160	Development of the German Air Force, 1919-1939
163	German Air Force Operations in Support of the Army
167	German Air Force Airlift Operations
173	The German Air Force General Staff
174	Command and Leadership in the German Air Force (Wever, Milch, Udet, Goering, Jeschonnek)
175	The Russian Air Force in the Eyes of German Commanders
176	Russian Reactions to German Airpower in World War II
177	Airpower and Russian Partisan Warfare
189	Historical Turning Points in the German Air Force War Effort
II. To Be Published (in approximately the following order)	
161	The German Air Force versus the Allies in the Mediterranean
158	The German Air Force versus the Allies in the West (1)

<u>Study No.</u>	<u>Title</u>
159	The German Air Force versus the Allies in the West (2)
III.	Not To Be Published, but Will Be Made Available to Researchers in the Historical Division Archives
150	The German Air Force in the Spanish War
151	The German Air Force in Poland
152	The German Air Force in France and the Low Countries
157	Operation Sea Lion
162	The Battle of Crete
164	German Air Force Air Defense Operations
165	German Air Force Air Interdiction Operations
166	German Air Force Counter Air Operations
168	German Air Force Air-Sea Rescue Operations
169	Training in the German Air Force
170	Procurement in the German Air Force
171	Intelligence in the German Air Force
172	German Air Force Medicine
178	Problems of Fighting a Three-Front Air War
179	Problems of Waging a Day and Night Defensive Air War
181	The Problem of Air Superiority in the Battle with Allied Strategic Air Forces
182	Fighter-Bomber Operations in Situations of Air Inferiority

<u>Study No.</u>	<u>Title</u>
183	Analysis of Specialized Anglo-American Techniques
184	Effects of Allied Air Attacks on German Divisional and Army Organizations on the Battle Fronts
185	Effects of Allied Air Attacks on German Bases and Installations
186	The German Air Force System of Target Analysis
187	The German Air Force System of Weapons Selection
188	German Civil Air Defense
190	The Organization of the German Air Force High Command and Higher Echelon Headquarters Within the German Air Force
194	Development of German Antiaircraft Weapons and Equipment up to 1945
Extra Study	The Radio-Intercept Service of the German Air Force

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4. Organization of the Reichs Aviation Ministry After the Implementation of the New Service Law and Open Rearmament, 16 March 1935.
5. Organization of the Luftwaffe General Staff After 1 June 1937.
6. Organization of the Luftwaffe General Staff After 1 February 1938.
7. The Top Command Positions in the Luftwaffe, 28 August 1939.
8. The Reorganization of the Luftwaffe of 1 February 1939.
9. The Top Positions of the Reichs Aviation Ministry, End of 1943-  
Early 1944.
10. Organization of the German Air Forces (Top Level), 15 August 1944.

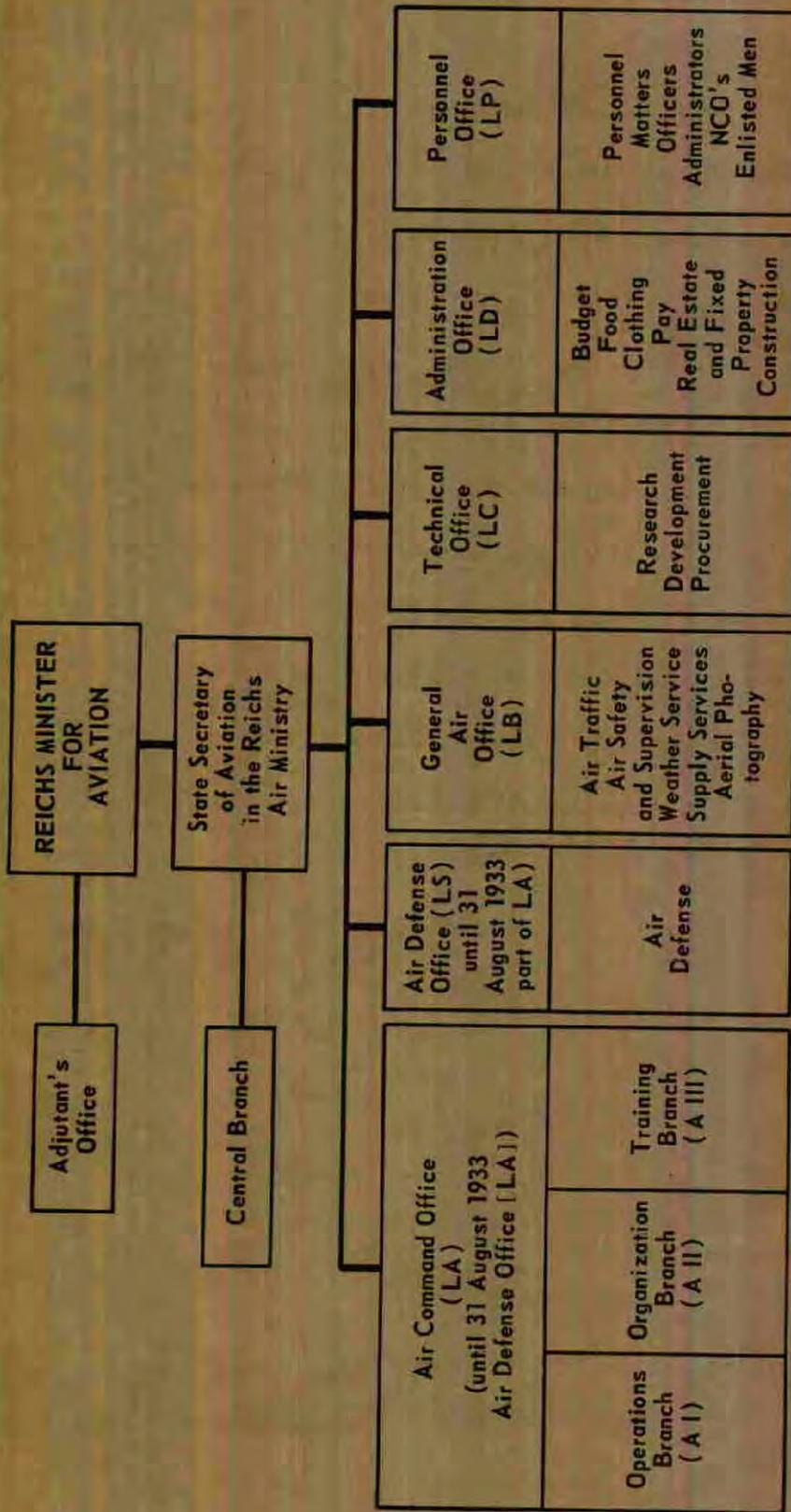


Chart 1

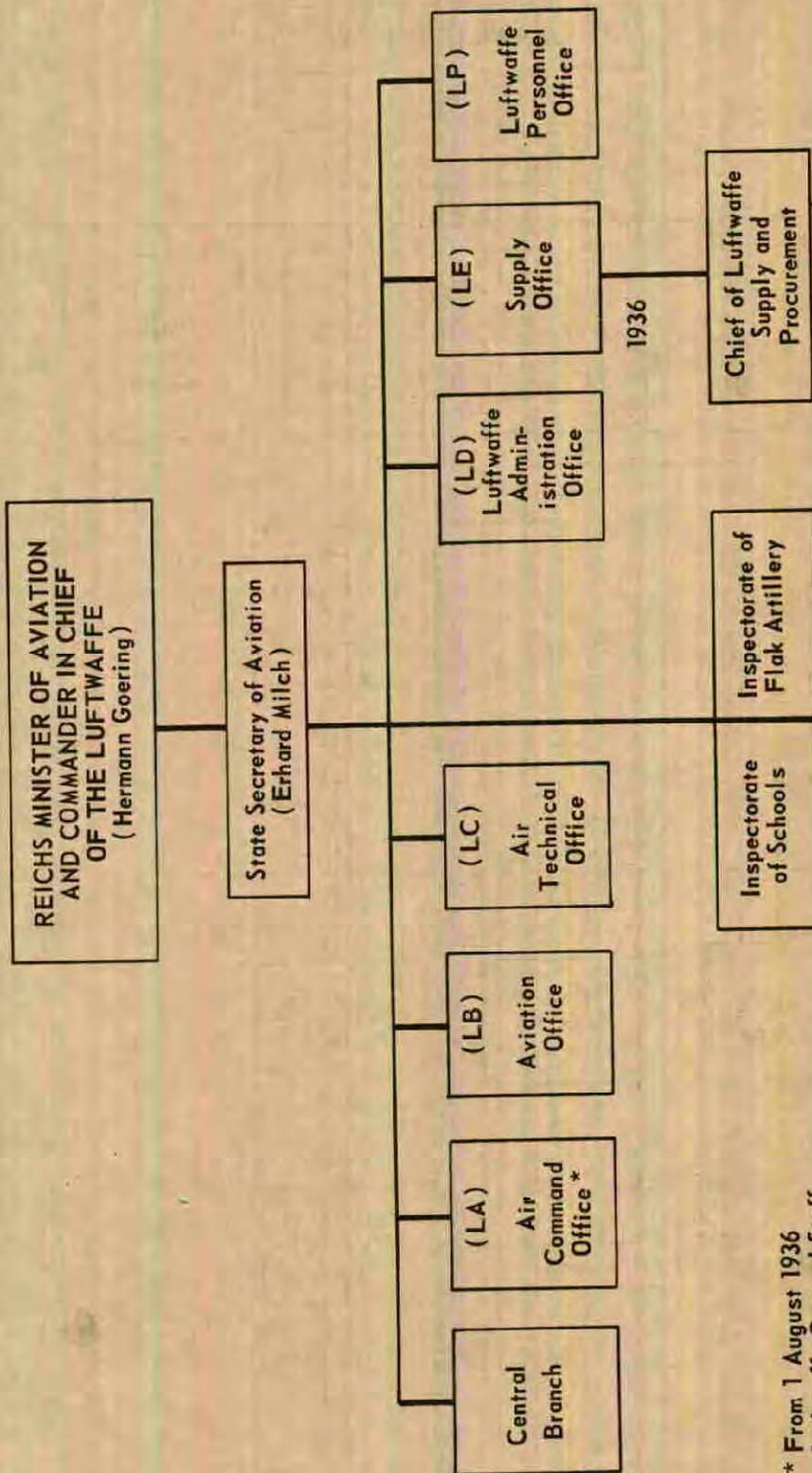


Chart 2

\* From 1 August 1936  
Luftwaffe General Staff

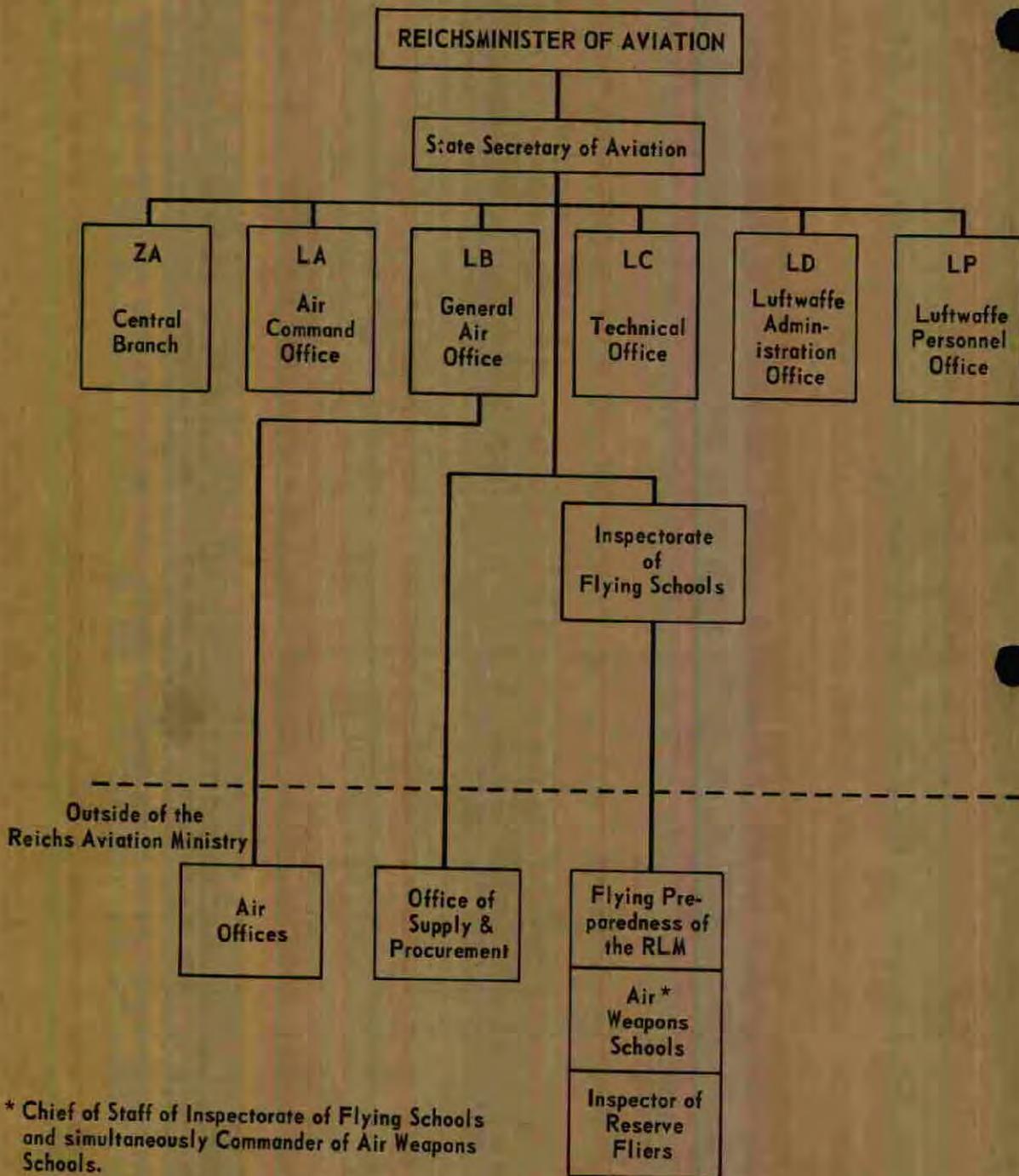
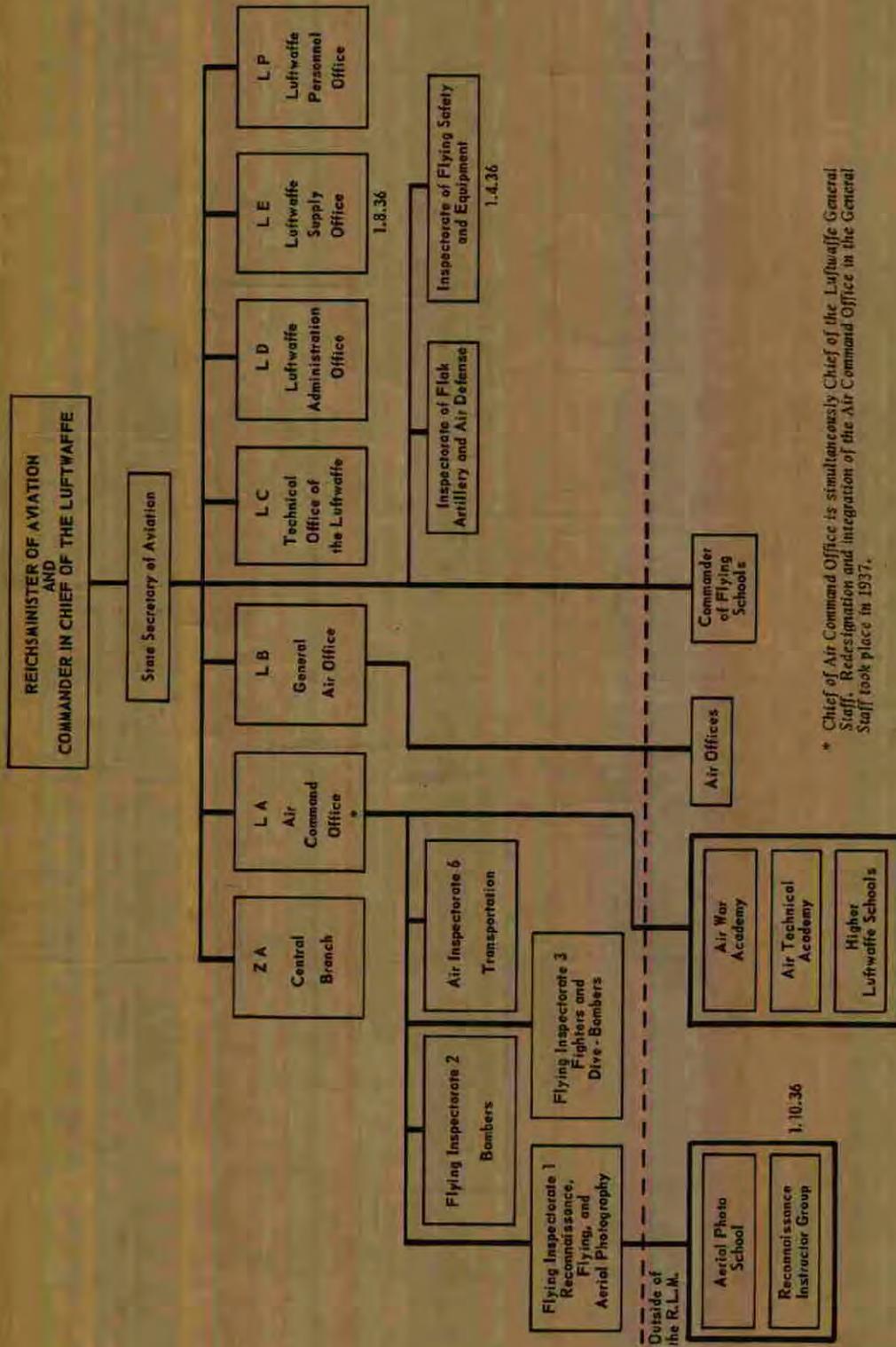


Chart 3





\* Chief of Air Command Office is simultaneously Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. Redesignation and integration of the Air Command Office in the General Staff took place in 1937.

Chart 5

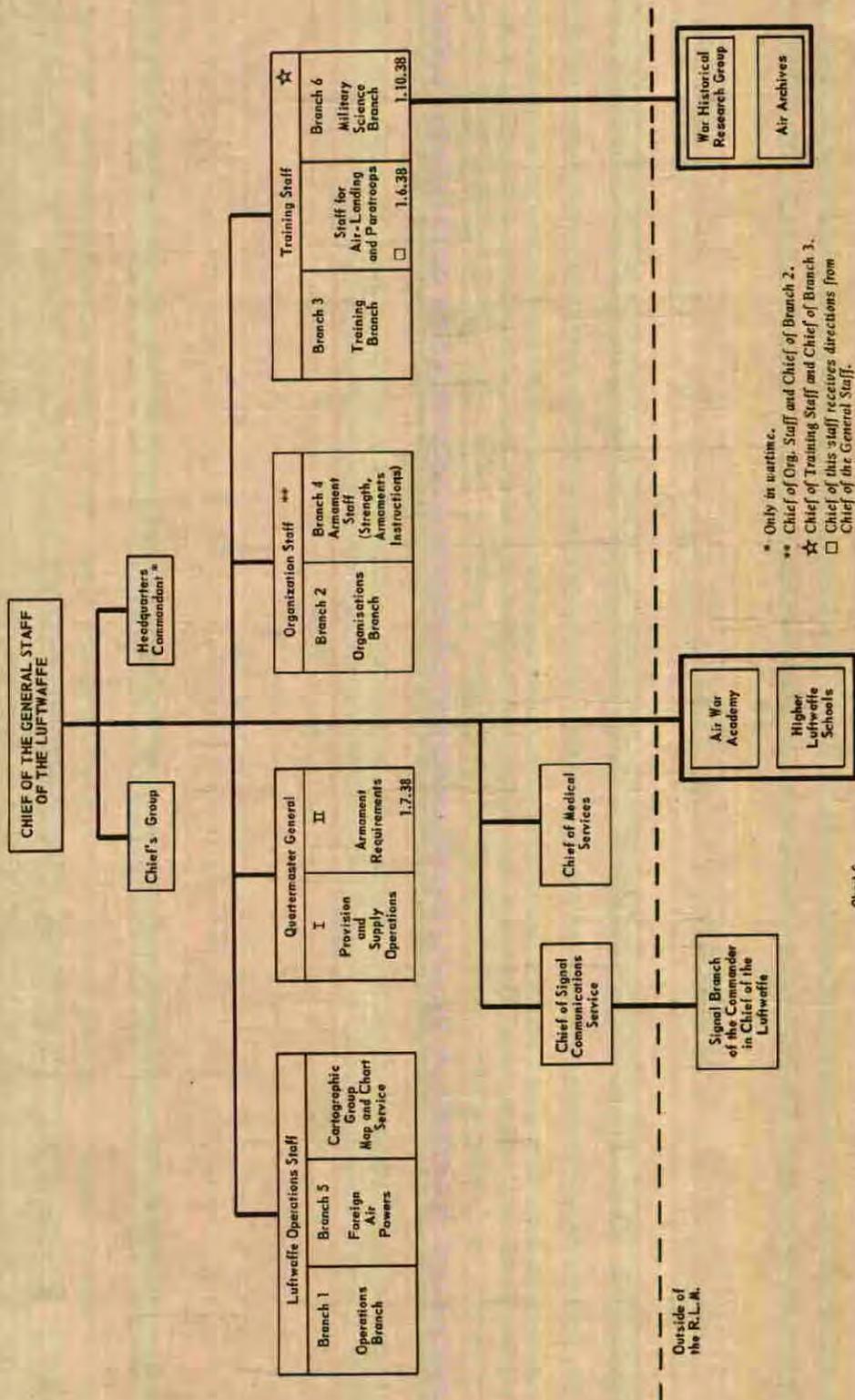


Chart 6



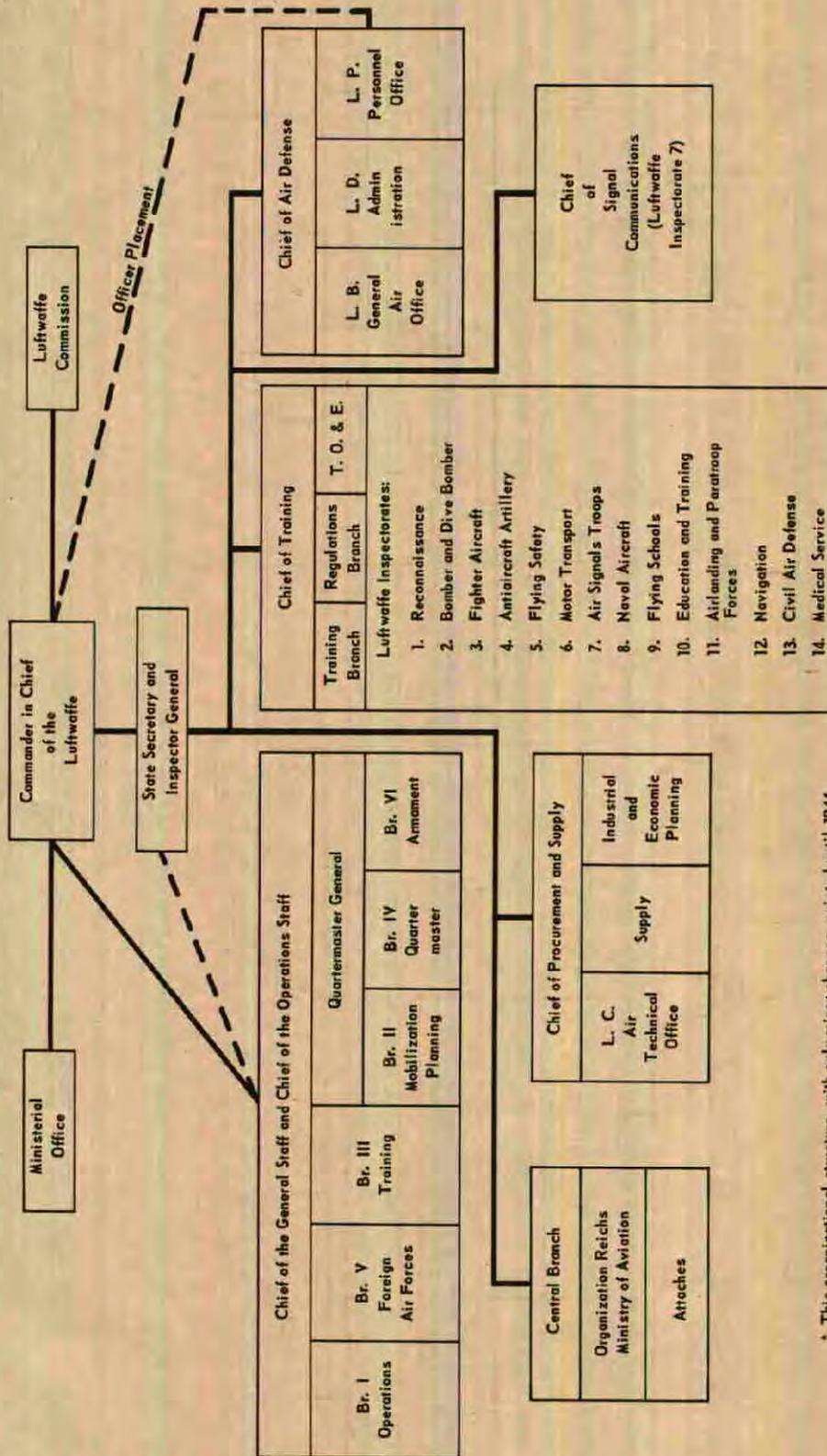


Chart 8

\* This organizational structure, with only minor changes, existed until 1944.

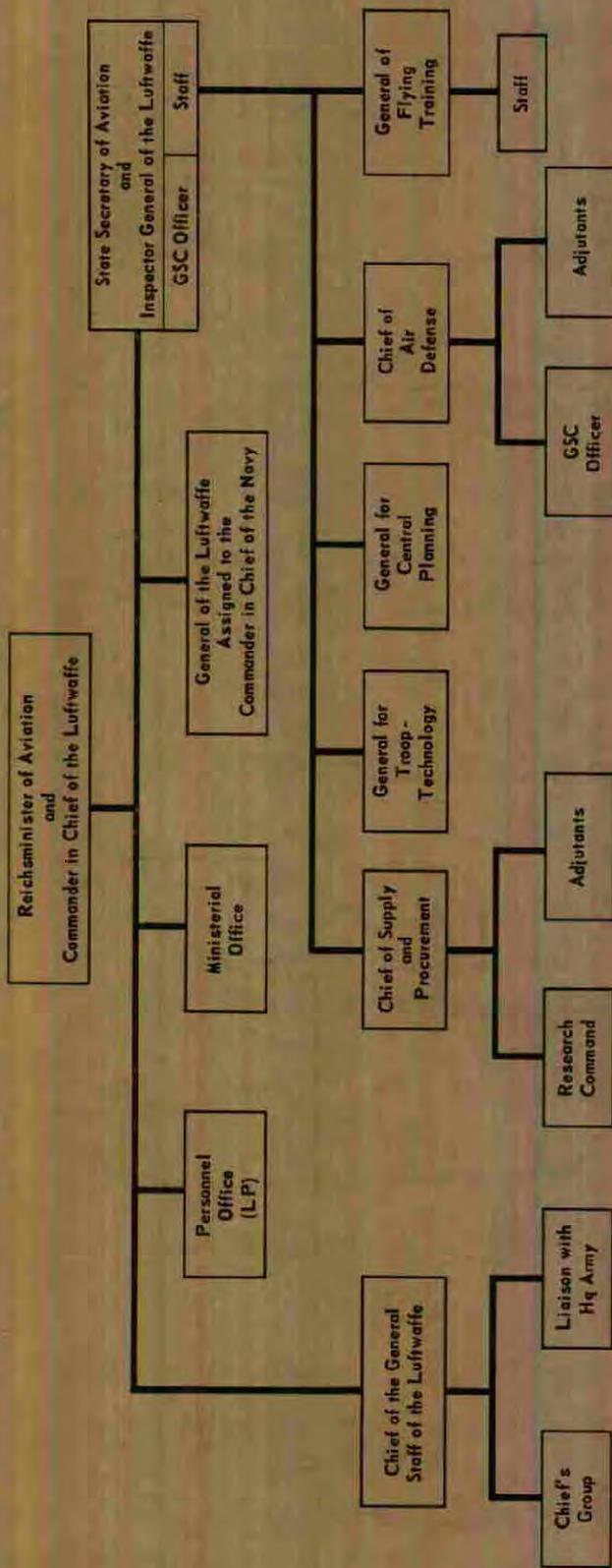


Chart 9

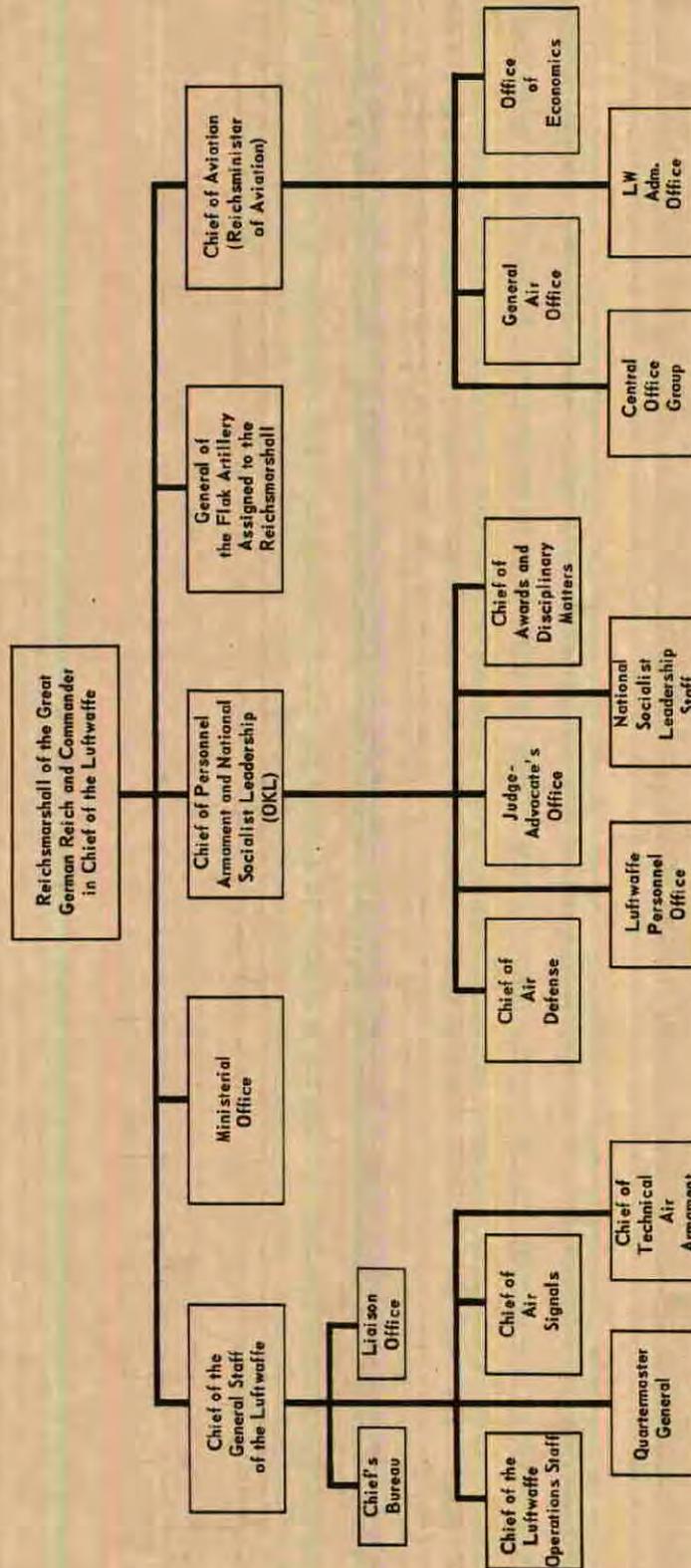


Chart 10

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