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USAF HISTORICAL STUDIES: NO. 174

COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP
IN THE
GERMAN AIR FORCE

by

PROF. RICHARD SUCHENWIRTH

USAF HISTORICAL DIVISION
AEROSPACE STUDIES INSTITUTE
AIR UNIVERSITY
July 1969

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Edited by Mr. Harry R. Fletcher
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> The art of war is like all arts. With the right application it is profitable, and with improper application ruinous.
>
> Frederick the Great

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FOREWORD

Command and Leadership in the German Air Force, written by Professor Richard Suchenwirth, and revised and edited by Mr. Harry R. Fletcher, is one of a series of historical studies written for the United States Air Force Historical Division by men who had been key officers in, or outstanding authorities on, the German Air Force during World War II.

The overall purpose of the series is twofold: 1) To provide the United States Air Force with a comprehensive and, insofar as possible, authoritative history of a major air force which suffered defeat in World War II, a history prepared by many of the principal and responsible leaders of that air force; 2) to provide a firsthand account of that air force's unique combat in a major war, especially its fight against the forces of the Soviet Union. This series of studies therefore covers in large part virtually all phases of the Luftwaffe's operations and organization, from its camouflaged origin in the Reichswehr, during the period of secret rearmament following World War I, through its participation in the Spanish Civil War and its massive operations and final defeat in World War II, with particular attention to the air war on the Eastern Front.

The German Air Force Historical Project (referred to hereinafter by its shorter and current title, "The GAF Monograph Project") has generated this and other especially prepared volumes which comprise, in one form or another, more than 40 separate studies. The project, which was conceived and developed by the USAF Historical Division, was, upon recommendation of Headquarters Air University late in 1952, approved and funded by Headquarters USAF in early 1953. General supervision was assigned to the USAF Historical Division by Headquarters USAF, which continued principal funding of the project through 30 June 1958. Within the Historical Division, Dr. Albert F. Simpson and Mr. Joseph W. Angell, Jr., respectively Chief and Assistant Chief of the Division, exercised overall supervision of the project. The first steps towards its initiation were taken in the fall of 1952 following a staff visit by Mr. Angell to the Historical Division, Headquarters United States Army, Europe, at Karlsruhe, Germany, where the Army was conducting a somewhat similar historical project covering matters and operations almost wholly of interest to that service. Whereas the Army's project had produced or was producing a multiplicity of studies of varying length and significance (more than 2,000 have been prepared to date by the Army project), it was early decided that the Air Force should request a radically smaller number (around 40) which should be very carefully planned initially and rather closely integrated. Thirteen narrative histories of GAF combat operations, by theater areas,

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and 27 monographic studies dealing with areas of particular interest to the United States Air Force were recommended to, and approved by Headquarters USAF in the initial project proposal of late 1952. (A list of histories and studies appears at the end of this volume.)

By early 1953 the actual work of preparing the studies was begun. Col. Wendell A. Hammer, USAF, was assigned as Project Officer, with duty station at the USAREUR Historical Division in Karlsruhe. General der Flieger (Ret.) Paul Deichmann was appointed and served continuously as Control Officer for the research and writing phases of the project; he also had duty station at the USAREUR Historical Division. Generalleutnant (Ret.) Hermann Plocher served as Assistant Control Officer until his recall to duty with the new German Air Force in the spring of 1957. These two widely experienced and high-ranking officers of the former Luftwaffe secured as principal authors, or "topic leaders," former officers or specialists of the Luftwaffe, each of whom, by virtue of his experience in World War II, was especially qualified to write on one of the topics approved for study. These "topic leaders" were, in turn, assisted by "home workers"--for the most part former general and field-grade officers with either specialized operational or technical experience. The contributions of each of these "home workers," then, form the basic material of most of these studies. In writing his narrative the "topic leader" has put these contributions into their proper perspective.

These studies find their principal authority in the personal knowledge and experience of their authors. In preparing the studies, however, the authors have not depended upon their memories alone, for their personal knowledge has been augmented by a collection of Luftwaffe documents which has come to be known as the Karlsruhe Document Collection and which is now housed in the Archives Branch of the USAF Historical Division. This collection consists of directives, situation reports, war diaries, personal diaries, strength reports, minutes of meetings, aerial photographs, and various other materials derived, chiefly, from three sources: the Captured German Documents Section of The Adjutant General in Alexandria, Virginia; the Air Ministry in London; and private German collections made available to the project by its participating authors and contributors. In addition, the collection includes the contributions of the "home workers." The authors have also made use of such materials as the records of the Nuremberg Trials, the manuscripts prepared by the Foreign Military Studies Branch of the USAREUR Historical Division, the official military histories of the United States and the United Kingdom, and the wealth of literature concerning World War II, both in German and English, which has appeared in book form or in military journals since 1945.

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he completion of the research and writing phases in 1958, at Karlsruhe were closed out. At that time the project was Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, where of editing and publishing the studies was begun by the USAF Division.

Basic revising and editing of the monographs has been handled by Edwin P. Kennedy (1958-61), Dr. John L. B. Atkinson (1961-62), Mr. rd E. Hasselwander (1962-63), and the present Editor, Mr. Harry R. cher. Final review and editing has been the responsibility of Dr. ert F. Simpson, Chief, USAF Historical Division, with the assistance Dr. Maurer Maurer, Chief of the Division's Historical Studies Branch.

The complexity of the GAF Monograph Project and the variety of rticipation which it has required can easily be deduced from the acknowl- gements which follow. On the German side: General Deichmann, who, Chief Control Officer, became the moving force behind the entire proj- and his assistant, General Plocher; General Josef Kammhuber, a ributor to, and a strong supporter of, the project, who became the chief of the new German Air Force; Generaloberst (Ret.) Franz [illegible], Chief of the German Army General Staff from 1938 to 1942, whose sympathetic assistance to the project was of the greatest value; the late Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, who contributed to several of the studies and who also, because of his prestige and popularity in German military circles, was able to encourage many others to contribute to the project; and all of the German "topic leaders" and "home workers" who are too numerous to mention here, but whose names can be found in the prefaces and footnotes to the individual studies.

In Germany, Colonel Hammer served as Project Officer from early in 1953 until June 1957. Colonel Hammer's considerable diplomatic and administrative skills helped greatly towards assuring the project's success. Col. William S. Nye, USA, was Chief of the USAREUR Histori- cal Division at the project's inception; his strong support provided an enviable example of interservice cooperation and set the pattern which his several successors followed. In England, Mr. Louis A. Jackets, Head of the Air Historical Branch, British Air Ministry, gave invaluable assistance with captured Luftwaffe documents. The project is indebted to all of those members of the USAREUR Historical Division, the Office of the Chief of Military History, and the USAF Historical Division, whose assistance and advice helped it to achieve its goals.

At the Air University, a number of people, both military and civilian, have given strong and expert support to the project. The several

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Commanders of Air University during the life of the proj
(1952-58) without exception were interested in the project
full backing. Other personnel at Headquarters Air Univer
tributed time and experience include: the several Director
space Studies Institute since 1952; Dr. James C. Shelburne,
Advisor to the Commander; Mr. J. S. Vann, Chief of Special
Branch, DCS/Operations; and Mr. Arthur P. Irwin, Chief, Budg
sion, DCS/Comptroller.

The project is grateful to Lt. Col. Leonard C. Hoffmann,
Assistant Air Attaché to Germany, who gave indispensable aid durin
project's last year in Germany, and to Mr. Joseph P. Tustin, Chief
torian of Headquarters, United States Air Forces in Europe during th
years when the project was at Karlsruhe, who rendered substantial a
ance by solving a variety of logistical and administrative problems.

Mrs. Mary F. Hanlin deserves special thanks for her exper
typing of the final draft.

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PREFACE

There is considerable truth in a saying which was current in Germany in 1945 that in World War II Germany had "an Imperial Navy, a [illegible] Army, and a National Socialist Air Force." The German Luftwaffe, a new branch of service, was composed of a greater number of younger officers than was true of either the Army or the Navy, but lacking the time-honored traditions and stability of the senior arms, it was from the first more receptive to the influence of Hitler and National Socialism.

During the Weimar period the German Army, retaining the lifeblood of the old Prussian Army, quietly reestablished itself as an instrument of national power, cautiously attempting to keep itself above the machinations of politics. The Navy pursued a similar course, assisted by the remoteness of its installations and a devotion to the principles of the old Imperial Navy. But the Luftwaffe, a new entity, was entrusted to the command of Hitler's closest Party associate, Hermann Goering, a man who was sufficiently ruthless and ambitious to secure preferential treatment for the air arm. Without question, Goering exercised tremendous influence in the Third Reich, especially upon those who were so casually associated with him that they could afford to be indulgent with respect to his weaknesses and vices. And there is no doubt but that in the early days of the German Air Force he provided the energy and drive that brought the Luftwaffe into the forefront as a full-fledged branch of the German Armed Forces and into a premier position among the world's air forces.

In the beginning the Luftwaffe was beset by problems stemming from a shortage of leaders. It was relatively simple to secure former fliers who yearned for the adventurous life in the air, but, without an institution comparable to the Army General Staff, it was difficult to find personalities capable of creating a "nerve center" to organize and administer the affairs of a great new service. This situation was resolved by transferring a number of Army General Staff officers to the Luftwaffe.

Of these officers, the most significant was Generalleutnant Walther Wever, a man still revered in German aviation circles. He was a person of great quickness and flexibility of mind, and a natural leader, but he was also devoted to Hitler and his ideas for a greater Reich. Wever's work for the German Air Force was terminated by his untimely death in 1936, so that he knew only the most favorable aspects of the Third Reich and saw only a bright future for the Luftwaffe, which he envisioned as a sword destined to strike a powerful blow for the future of Germany. His

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firm but genial character deeply impressed all with whom he came into contact, and he faced the prospect of war with quiet, strong confidence.

Following Wever's demise, the second and third officers taken from the Army (Colonels Albert Kesselring and Hans-Juergen Stumpff) succeeded, in turn, to Wever's post as Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. However, neither of them exerted a lasting influence upon it, and were, in short, merely interim Chiefs of the General Staff.

Along with Wever, four general officers immediately stand out as the most important and decisive personalities of the Luftwaffe: Goering, Milch, Udet, and Jeschonnek. Their ideas and decisions were largely responsible for raising the Luftwaffe to a foremost position among the world's air forces, and their leadership, or lack of it, was likewise a major cause for the German Air Force's decline and fall. Three of these men committed suicide, one died in an air crash, and only one survived the war to live into retirement. Wever, of course, did not live to see the ominous future which lay ahead. Udet and Jeschonnek both experienced a shattering of their faith in German arms, in the eventual victory of National Socialism, and, betrayed and isolated by their associates, found it impossible to face what appeared to be a disastrous end. Goering early abdicated most of his responsibilities to the Luftwaffe by lapsing into a selfish epicurean existence, absorbed in the enjoyments of the gourmet and the art collector. At Nuremberg, after the war, he was still strongly impressed with the importance of his position and his fabulous honors, and continued to play the confident, and even blustering, Reichsmarschall. Mustering a defense that was cool and, at times, even brilliant, he appeared more like the real Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe than he had during most of the war itself. Although sentenced to death, he cheated the gallows by taking poison, leaving Erhard Milch as the sole survivor of the top echelon of the German Air Force.

German Air Force commanders became victims of self-deception. The surprising successes in Czechoslovakia (1939), and the blitz victories in Poland (1939) and in the West (1940), created an air of excessive optimism which completely obscured the sobering reality that the Luftwaffe had failed to establish itself in depth, to prepare organizationally and logistically for a long-term war, to mobilize the means of production, and to carry out a logical program of aircraft development.

Ernst Udet, a famous World War I "ace," and an internationally renowned stunt pilot, was selected to head up the Luftwaffe's Technical Office and the Office of Supply and Procurement, but he lacked the prerequisites of training and personality which the job demanded. No one

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was more aware of this than Udet himself, who protested his appointment from the beginning. As his tasks rapidly expanded in scope, he became increasingly depressed with his inability to handle his massive and complicated assignment. Without adequate support from Goering, and deeply suspicious of the one man who could have been of assistance to him, State Secretary Milch, his position became more and more untenable. The unsatisfactory outcome of the Battle of Britain and criticism of the Technical Office proved to be more than Udet could bear. Suicide seemed to be his only escape. Here, as in many other instances, Goering made no concerted effort to correct grave organizational and personnel problems, but preferred, instead, to allow one office to work against another.

Jeschonnek was the youngest General Staff Chief of any of the German services and a faithful devotee of Hitler and National Socialism. He failed to understand both the value of strategic air power and the inherent dangers from the air from the coalition of enemies ranged against Germany. He thus failed to provide for an adequate air defense organization. His exemplary conduct and adherence to all of the Prussian military virtues meant little in the face of his inability to properly assess the significant events and turning points in the war. A silent and bitter rivalry developed between him and State Secretary Milch, which further hampered the operation of his office and delimited his influence. By 1942 he had also become the "whipping boy" of Goering, the frustrated Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe. Still devoted to his Fuehrer, Jeschonnek found himself trapped between Hitler and a vindictive Goering, who was rapidly falling from grace. Burdened with the additional knowledge that he had failed to act correctly or decisively in numerous crucial situations, that the Luftwaffe had proved to be incapable of accomplishing its mission (especially after the disastrous Stalingrad airlift), and that Germany could not defend itself against the destructive Allied air attacks such as those of August 1943, he decided to end his life. Believing that his death would "light the way" to fresh thinking in the Luftwaffe High Command, he tragically proved once again that he was unable to clearly assess the situation and to draw the proper conclusions.

Until the collapse of Germany's air defenses in the period 1943-44, State Secretary Milch united under his personal command all of the important offices of the Luftwaffe, with the exception of the General Staff and the Personnel Office, which remained within Goering's province. Milch was an energetic and able leader who brooked no interference with his policies. Because of this, as well as his great talents in the technical field, it was not surprising that his influence soon became so extensive that the General Staff was relegated to a minor role in Luftwaffe affairs. He was able to increase aircraft production and to streamline organization

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to some extent, but he could not hope to compensate for the many deficiencies of the Luftwaffe, some of which dated back to the 1930's. Even had he been able to accomplish such a task, it was impossible to do so during the course of a war which had grown out of all conceivable proportions. With his strong personality and his undoubted ambition, it was probably inevitable that he would eventually run counter to the domineering, but pleasure-addicted Goering, and even to Hitler. This resulted in his removal from office in 1944. Thereafter there was a futile attempt by the Luftwaffe General Staff to strengthen Germany's air defenses and to stabilize the Luftwaffe. This "eleventh hour" effort, despite amazing successes in certain areas, notably aircraft production, did little more than postpone the inevitable end.

In retrospect, it seems incredible that the Luftwaffe High Command could have presumed to defeat, let alone cope with, the great powers of the world. Obviously, Germany's supremely confident air leaders never envisioned any such prospect, nor did they allow themselves to speculate seriously about the possibility of a war of great dimensions. Instead, they moved rapidly along with the political leadership and the resulting flow of events, falling from one debacle into another, solving critical problems by improvising and "scraping the barrel," without pausing for a sober consideration of the air force's proper role in a long-term, multi-front engagement. Even worse was their failure to act promptly and decisively in carrying out necessary modifications within the areas of organization, training, development, and production which could have given the Luftwaffe a chance to fulfill its mission within the framework of the Wehrmacht.

Behind these failures lay a mosaic of peculiar personalities, many of them possessing character weaknesses which hampered them during times of severe stress and crisis when sober and responsible action was imperative. As the war progressed, the Luftwaffe became filled with inter-departmental rivalries and strife, vicious intrigues, and an inordinate amount of currying of favor. Various factions lined up behind the individual whose cause they favored or who seemed most likely to advance their own particular fortunes, taking the side of Goering, of Hitler against Goering, Milch or Jeschonnek against Goering, Udet against Milch, Milch against Jeschonnek, or Jeschonnek against Milch. Within Goering's headquarters there was the so-called "Little General Staff," a cabal of officers who issued Reichsmarschall orders, including matters pertaining to the Luftwaffe General Staff, without the knowledge or the assent of the Chief of Staff himself. Added to all of this was the almost unbelievable fact that in the closing days of the war, when Germany's back was to the wall and the nation required absolute internal solidarity, many of the Luftwaffe's

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leaders were avidly engaged in "empire building" and status seeking. Perhaps the best example of this was the rivalry for Goering's office in 1945, when there was virtually no longer an air force to command.

The collapse of the German Air Force revealed dramatically that the Luftwaffe had really been all along precisely what Heinz J. Rieckhoff suggests, not "a phantom but a bluff," a force which stumbled along behind the Army in training, development, and organization. The wonder of it all is not how the Allies were able to bring about the Luftwaffe's downfall, but how the Luftwaffe was able to carry on for so long against such formidable odds.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Dr. Richard Suchenwirth, a well-known and somewhat controversial German and Austrian historian, author, teacher, and lecturer, was born in Vienna on 8 October 1896. Until 1934 he pursued the career of teacher in his native Austria. He became a citizen of Germany in 1936, and, until 1944, was Director of the Teacher's College at Munich-Pasing. In the final year of World War II he was a Professor of History at the University of Munich. _Europas letzte Stunde?_ (_Europe's Last Hour?_), the last of his many books, was published in 1951.

Professor Suchenwirth's interest in military history dates back to his childhood when he memorized accounts of Hannibal's battles and traced the great general's campaigns on his father's maps. A lieutenant in World War I, he served as an aide to an Austrian general and learned much at firsthand concerning the problems of leadership.

Probably no other historian interviewed as many of the highest ranking officers of the German Wehrmacht as did Professor Suchenwirth. He enjoyed a particularly close association with all of the contributors to the GAF Monograph Project and was thoroughly familiar both with their work for the USAF Historical Division and with the documents which were brought together in the Karlsruhe Document Collection.

In his own words, Professor Suchenwirth's interest in military history lay "not in any affection for militarism, but rather in the realization of the extent to which freedom and the greatness and fate of a people are dependent upon military decisions; of how many human lives, how many brave soldiers and people behind the front are affected by good or bad leadership in time of war."

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Chapter 1

THE FIRST CHIEF OF THE LUFTWAFFE GENERAL STAFF, WALTHER WEVER

Wever's Military Background

It rarely happens that one finds unanimity of opinion in evaluating an individual, especially if the person was active in public life and had an important role upon the stage of history. And, if this unanimous opinion is a favorable one, the individual concerned then takes on an aura of splendor which is seldom encountered.

A man who early reaches the height of professional fulfillment and who is snatched away by death in the midst of his activity and at the very pinnacle of his influence is apt to remain eternally young in the memory of his associates. Walther Wever thus remains untouched by age, unbowed by the disappointments and disasters of life. One cannot escape the thought that if he had been permitted to guide during World War II the activity of the service branch which he had done so much to form, the fate of the Luftwaffe and perhaps the outcome of the war might have been very different.

Wever's extraordinary gift for leadership has been extolled by all who knew him. Nearly all of those persons interviewed described him as a man of genius, and it is this epithet that has come to be inextricably attached to his name in the literature dealing with the history of the Luftwaffe.

He was born on 11 November 1887 in Wilhelmsort, county of Bromberg, in Germany's former eastern province of Posen. In 1905 he joined an infantry regiment as an officer candidate, being promoted the following year to second lieutenant. After a number of years of troop duty and staff assignments he was promoted in 1914 to first lieutenant. He served on the Western Front during World War I, rising in 1915 to the rank of captain and to a position on the General Staff. In October of 1917 he was transferred to the staff of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and Generaloberst Erich Ludendorff, where he established a reputation as a keen and thorough General Staff Officer. He served in several significant staff positions during the closing months of the war, always applying himself to the tasks at hand with great industry and freshness of mind.

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After the fall of the Monarchy in 1918, Wever remained on active duty in the new National Army (Reichswehr) as a member of the Troop Office (Truppenamt), an entity which had become the cover for the German Army General Staff. On 1 February 1926 he was promoted to major in Branch T-1 of the Troop Office, all of which came under the command of Generalmajor Werner von Blomberg. It was during a staff trip with his department that Wever became the first German officer to suggest the proper utilization of armor in warfare. The trip (described by General der Flieger (Ret.) Wolfgang Martini as being in 1927 or 1928) was directed by the Branch Chief of T-1, Col. Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, and included two groups of officers, one group under the leadership of Wever and the other headed by Maj. Heinz Guderian. At the close of the exercise Fritsch summarized the problems and reviewed the problem solutions written by the individual participants. Of the 16 papers discussed, only one had the full approbation of von Fritsch, who commented: "Now I come to a solution which I cannot describe as being other than pleasing. As your leader, who has to know and judge both sides, I must tell you that I did not arrive at this solution. This conclusion was grasped by Major Wever."[1]

In 1930 Wever was a lieutenant colonel, and two years later became a colonel and Branch Chief (Abteilungsleiter) in the Troop Office of the Reichswehr. Ultimately Wever assumed command of Branch T-4 (Training) of the Troop Office as the successor to Generalmajor Walther von Brauchitsch.[2]

Chief of the Air Command Office

On 1 September 1933 Wever was selected for the post of Office Chief in the newly established Reichs Aviation Ministry, and was soon appointed Chief of the Air Command Office.* This in effect made him Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, although at the time there was no such title. The original suggestion to request him for the Aviation Ministry was presented on 1 July 1933 by Col. (GSC) Hans-Juergen Stumpff, a former colleague of Wever's from Branch T-1 of the Troop Office and a man who had himself been drawn from the Army for the new air force. After World War II, Stumpff commented:

> I had known Wever ever since World War I. At that time I was assigned to the Personnel Office of the Army High Command and Wever was Operations Officer in the

*See Chart No. 1 in the back of this study.

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Operations Branch. Later I became acquainted with the work he had done on the staffs of von Seeckt and Heye,* and finally as Personnel Chief in charge of General Staff officers. He was an outstanding military man in the Army High Command, even then. In the 100,000 Man Army, he and Manstein were the most outstanding personalities among the younger officers. I considered both of them to be "coming men" for the Troop Office. When I was transferred to the Luftwaffe on 1 July 1933, I immediately suggested to Goering that a number of men be recruited from the Army. Wever, I thought, was the better choice for the A-Office [Air Office], since I felt that Manstein was too stubborn. Goering gladly accepted my recommendations and requested Wever's transfer from Hammerstein.≠ Wever decided to accept during a trip with me up the Rhine.[3]

It was not an easy task which awaited Wever. Aviation was a completely new field for him, a field which had to be mastered, and he was already in his forties. Nevertheless, he easily earned his pilot's license and later flew whenever he could, preferably alone.[4]≠≠

Serving in the top position under General der Flieger Hermann Goering and State Secretary of Aviation Erhard Milch meant having supervisors who were not particularly easy to handle. At that time, though, Goering's face still beamed with the satisfaction of his achievements, a consciousness of his power, and the bliss of knowing that he enjoyed the full confidence of his Fuehrer. Wever was benevolent, and presumably felt that his own position was not yet strong enough to permit him to intervene in the topmost matters without restrictions. In any case, despite a difference of 10 years separating him from Goering, he soon proved himself to be a man capable of inspiring great confidence. Generalleutnant (Ret.) Josef "Beppo" Schmid and General der Flieger

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*Editor's Note: Generaloberst Hans von Seeckt and General der Infanterie Wilhelm Heye, Chiefs of the Reichswehr and the Army Command, respectively.

≠Editor's Note: Generalleutnant Curt Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equord, Chief of the Army Personnel Office, and an early and outspoken enemy of Hitler.

≠≠Nielsen points out in his study, The German Air Force General Staff, pp. 28-29, that Wever soon became one of Germany's most enthusiastic flyers, inspiring both young and old.

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(Ret.) Karl Bodenschatz, long-time associates of Goering, confirm the story that Goering would brook no unfavorable comments about Wever.[5]

The new General Staff Chief brought to his office a thorough familiarity with a very great art, one which can never be acquired by mere study or by an obsession with technology. This was the art of handling people. Wever was capable of accepting his associates as they actually were and as they desired to be,* and, with inherent intuition of the expert, he knew how to inspire them to cooperate. Wherever he appeared on the scene his colleagues redoubled their efforts, because he had made them aware of their common mission and that he supported and appreciated their work. He instinctively knew how to bring out the best in men. Not only did he enjoy unparalleled prestige in Goering's eyes, but he was even able to win over a coldly realistic man like Milch so completely that 18 years after Wever's death Milch declared with firmness and warmth:

> He [Wever] was the most significant of the officers taken over from the Army. If he had remained in the Army he would have reached the highest positions there as well. He possessed not only tremendous professional ability, but also great personal qualities. He was the only General Staff Chief since the end of World War I who came close to Moltke. Wever, not Beck![6][/]

Goering was full of enthusiasm for the teachings of Giulio Douhet, the Italian who viewed an air force as an instrument of attack, capable of deciding a war in the shortest possible time through the devastation by bombardment that could wreck an enemy's military, industrial, and communications facilities. Goering found in Wever a colleague who was equally imbued with these ideas and who was capable of translating them into exact General Staff planning.

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*"Beppo" Schmid mentions that Milch liked to be "coddled."

/This view is shared by General der Luftnachrichtentruppe (Ret.) Wolfgang Martini and General der Flieger (Ret.) Hans-Georg von Seidel. Ministerialdirektor (Ret.) Willy Frisch (of the Reichs Aviation Ministry) told the author in a conversation on 20 December 1957 that "Wever was one of the most highly qualified and, I would say, one of the most far-sighted General Staff officers Germany had. In releasing him to the Luftwaffe, Field Marshal von Blomberg gave up the best man he had. Wever radiated calmness and assurance. His decisions were always well founded. He never tried to do things in a hurry."

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Wever's thinking was clear and realistic. Who were Germany's potential foes? Hitler had explicity stated that he did not want a war with France, even if it meant a permanent renunciation of Germany's claims to Alsace-Lorraine, and certainly wanted no war with England. While in the case of Kaiser Wilhelm II it had been partly family relationships and sympathy and partly the dazzle of the glory and wealth of the British Empire that created within him his peculiar attitude of simultaneous love and hatred for Britain,* Hitler saw in the British Empire an indispensable factor of order in the political structure of the world, an expression of the power of the Germanic races, and therefore the best possible ally for the Reich. There is no evidence that he intended to go to war against Britain.[7]† As far as the West was concerned, Germany's air arm was to serve only as a deterrent force, to warn the West against attacking the Reich.[8] For this reason, Germany's air armament program concentrated upon bomber aircraft capable of retaliating in case of necessity.

There was only one mighty enemy which a General Staff Chief had to take seriously, a nation whose ideological basis and _Weltanschauung_ were diametrically opposed to that of Germany. This was the gigantic Slavic power to the East, which, with its tremendous population and rapid industrial growth, stood in the way of what Hitler considered to be Germany's historical avenue of expansion. Wever had read Hitler's _Mein Kampf,_ and it was therefore obvious to him that Germany would probably have to reckon with the possibility of a military conflict with Soviet Russia,

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*_Editor's Note_: Wilhelm II lacked the firmness and coolness of decision that characterized his famous father and grandfather. Psychologically handicapped by a withered arm, he blamed this upon the English obstetrician who attended his mother at his birth, just as he blamed his father's liberal and constitutional governmental views upon the influence of his English mother. See J. Daniel Chamier, _Als Deutschland Maechtig Schien_ (_As Germany Seemed Powerful_), Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1954, pp. 36-39.

†_Editor's Note_: Although Hitler did have war with Britain, all available evidence indicates that he wished to avoid this, that he saw the British as "Aryan brothers" and that he viewed the British Empire as a necessary instrument of world order. See _Hitler's Second Book_ (translated by Salvator Attanasio), New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961, pp. 146-159. See also Maj. Gen. J. F. C. Fuller, _The Second World War_, London: Eyre and Spottswood, 1948, pp. 83-84.

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and that he, as General Staff Chief of the Luftwaffe, was reponsible for forging the necessary weapons to accomplish this task.

A General Staff Chief cannot be branded as a war monger when he looks ahead to potential developments and dangers and prepares to meet them. On the contrary, if he fails to do so, he merits the reproaches of a nation which then finds itself defenseless in its most crucial hour. Wever was simply a man of action with an intuitive sense for potential danger when he conceived the idea of the long-range bomber for the Luftwaffe.[9] The name he selected for it, the "Ural Bomber," is a clear indication of the direction from which he foresaw danger. This name also reveals the manner in which the great General Staff Chief visualized a future air war. It was to be strategic in character. He was convinced that the important targets would be Soviet industries at the outermost corners of European Russia and even beyond, and in the area just east of the long Ural Mountain chain. The Urals were increasingly becoming the backbone of the Russian giant, and Wever saw with coolness, daring, and logic that he would have to crush this backbone. When one considers today the full implications of a Douhet-type air war against Russia's industry in the Urals, one cannot help recognizing the pitiful inadequacy of the air war which was actually waged by Germany against Russia, a war fraught with strategic pinpricks.

The magnitude of the goal which had been established provided the inspiration for the hard and painstaking work necessary to establish a new service branch, a task made even more difficult by the need for strictest secrecy until 1935 and the lack of adequate machinery.* The Air Command Office, responsible for the supervision, organization, and training of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, worked under constant pressure and had more to do than could be squeezed into normal working hours. Everything centered upon the goal of transforming Germany as rapidly as possible into an air power. Units were activated and immediately augmented by others, one project following closely upon the other. Goering, backed by Hitler, called for speed and more speed. But Wever was interested first of all in building up a strong and competent air arm in order to be able to protect Germany's rearmament program in case an armament race should ensue.

Wever was not a friend of the constant organizational changes being made in the execution of projects already under way, changes dictated

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*See Charts Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, in the back of this study.

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in part by Goering's thoughtless eagerness and in part by Hitler's sporadic concern over Luftwaffe affairs, since they had a detrimental effect upon the personnel composition of the Luftwaffe and on the training of troops. He knew that Luftwaffe troops were already burdened to the limit, and that changes served only to delay the build-up of the entire organization. Wever also knew very well why he preferred to hold the reins steady in his own hands, since he had already plotted his course far, far ahead.[10]

With his tremendous industry and interest the General Staff Chief inspired his staff members to approach their tasks with a zeal of equal intensity. "Tremendous," was the word chosen by Goering to describe the work of Wever in the address given at his funeral. "How often," Goering went on, "were the lights still on in his office after midnight, when he was still hard at work. Tireless by day, tireless by night."[11]

Many officers coming from the old Inspectorate No. 1 (Air) found the scope of the planning carried on by the Air Command Office rather breathtaking. Wever fired his co-workers with the vision of a huge air arm. It is perhaps understandable that some of them were inclined to feel that this realistic and uncompromisingly clear-headed man had a second soul in his breast, a soul which indulged in fantastic and unrealistic goals.[12] This spirit served to widen the horizons of his staff and to provide the air armament program with one of its most fruitful periods of achievement. The course of the war proved only too clearly that Wever's "unrealistic objectives" were far from exaggerated when one scans the almost incredible Anglo-American production figures. It was precisely these immense figures which the German air armament industry under Milch's guidance (after the years lost under Udet) was called upon to match at the last minute. Needless to say, Milch's effort was in vain, largely because of the relentless hail of Allied bombs over Germany. But, even so, Germany was able to produce 44,758 aircraft during the year 1944,* a year studded with catastrophic defeats at the front which swallowed up the equipment of entire armies, a year during which raw material supplies dwindled to a minimum, and in which continuous enemy air attacks caused untold devastation and interruptions of work in the armament industry.

If one then considers that during the entire course of the war 113,609 new aircraft were produced in Germany, and that the German

*New, reconditioned, and repaired aircraft delivered to the Quartermaster General of the Luftwaffe are included in this figure.

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Air Force still had some 30,976 aircraft at its disposal in September of 1944 (compared with about 10,000 at the beginning of the war), it is obvious that Wever's goals of creating a first-rate strategic air force as well as a solid air defense system were not at all unrealistic. These facts merely serve to bear out the truth of comments about his extraordinary far-sightedness.[13]

The task of creating a uniform officer corps for the Luftwaffe was extremely difficult. Officer material poured in from many sources and from all walks of life, but little of it was of a quality comparable to the best of the fliers of World War I. Years of training were needed, training based on the spirit radiated by Wever, which first had to penetrate the inner circle of his immediate staff before it could have an impact upon the periphery. In barely three years the General Staff Chief succeeded in imbuing the inner circle of personnel with his ideas and vitality and in molding it into a capable and stable nucleus for a future General Staff. On 1 November 1935 Wever opened the Air War College and Air Technical Academy at Berlin-Gatow with the following admonition to the students:

> The realms of the air are not restricted to the fronts of the Army; they are above and behind the Army, over the coasts and seas, over the whole nation, and over the whole of the enemy's territories.
>
> Mountains, rivers, forests, and swamps are natural defense lines, imposing certain restrictions upon the movements of armies and, in the period of massed armies, sap the strength of a nation and bleed it to death in the mud of shell craters and trenches, as was illustrated in the Great War.
>
> This does not mean that we believe that ground warfare in the future will become as static as in the Great War. On the contrary, we hope and believe that a modern Army, cooperating with the air force, will find the means of preventing the positional warfare of massed armies. In the air forces we have a weapon which knows no such boundaries. Its operations cannot be impeded by the natural formations of a country or by concrete fortifications. . . .
>
> Thus, it is only a question of moral steadfastness and boldness of spirit, imagination, and determination if we are to achieve the development of the air force into a

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weapon which will command the air and thereby fulfill its two most important tasks:

1) home defense, to which all the services and the whole population will contribute, and
2) the second, more important, and decisive task, the defeat of the enemy threatening us.

Command of the air is the condition upon which both of these tasks depend if they are to be carried out with complete success.[14]

Wever, a medium-sized man with graying hair, a sharply-chiseled nose and chin, was capable of turning from deep seriousness to mercurial liveliness and humor. His colleagues were invariably captivated when the critical sternness of his face was relieved by the smile they knew so well, a smile expressing marvelous self-assurance and superiority, but with the warmest kindness. Wever was a fatherly supervisor, but his mind was extraordinarily keen and told him instantly whether his discussion partner was trying to cloak superficial knowledge with a flow of words or was standing on uncertain ground. He was fond of testing the capabilities of his staff members, but never in a pedantic or discouraging fashion. He would sit across the desk from an officer, present a situation, and force the man to collect his thoughts. In the course of the conversation he would frequently interrupt his partner to present arguments of his own, thereby forcing the man to consider the matter in all of its aspects. Wever's method threw his colleague onto the defensive, and he kept after the officer until all of the pros and cons had been thrashed out and the problem lay clearly crystallized before them. Often after such a session he let his subordinate go without giving a final solution. The decision in the matter would then be delivered the next morning.[15*]

Wever possessed the gift of leading and guiding his subordinates without ever injuring their pride or personal feelings when they proved to be inadequate. He was never petty about misdemeanors, although he often judged them harshly in the interests of the cause. Knowing the secret of how to get the best out of people, he never humiliated them, but, instead, made them feel dissatisfied and ashamed of their own failings, their mistakes, and their ignorance. Thus he formed the General Staff from his Air Command Office by word and deed, but most of all by his own straightforward example, free of moodiness and vanity. He turned the officers of his staff into capable military men, able to carry out independent thought and unafraid to accept responsibility. He liked for

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*Generals der Flieger (Ret.) Paul Deichmann and Wilhelm Speidel informed the author that Wever "liked to play the Devil's advocate."

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them to be natural and forthright in their attitude toward him, and they were encouraged to express their opinions freely before him. Wever had a calm disposition without any traces of the bigot, and his associates likened his temperament to a ray of sunlight, warming, brightening, and penetrating all with whom he came into contact.*

This great leader also found a way to influence officers located outside his own office by resorting to the medium of the airplane. He thus reached air wings in the field without undue loss of time and was able to return in short order to the mountains of work awaiting him in his office.[16/] Family life, harmonious as it was in Wever's case, never interfered with his crowded schedule. It was a blessing for the officer corps that this highly-respected top commander, who otherwise sat at his desk in far-off Berlin, would suddenly appear to take his place among officers in the field, joining his hosts at the coffee table, which was invariably graced by a cake he had brought along for the occasion.[17] On these trips he learned to know his Luftwaffe officers personally and to become acquainted with their problems at firsthand. He insisted on seeing how things actually were. Despite his seriousness, the troops recognized him as a cheerful mentor, a man who would not ask them to do anything he would not do himself, a willing helper, and a reliable leader.

Even after his death, Wever's spirit lived on to give strength to the German Luftwaffe. His handling of enlisted personnel was exemplary. He unfailingly knew the proper tone and words to use to make even the most apprehensive of them feel at home and open their hearts to him. He gave many of them the opportunity to tell him their thoughts and to come to him with personal problems.

Wever's war games were simply designed. The Luftwaffe was still relatively weak and its aircraft (Ju-52's and Do-XIII's) were still comparatively ineffective. For this reason he began by assigning the Luftwaffe the task of supporting ground operations of the still fairly weak Army. The maneuvers invariably took place on German soil, such as the defense of the Neckar-Enz line in southern Germany, of a sector of the Weser Valley in the North, or of the Oder or East Prussia in the East.[18] But, as General Deichmann points out, ". . . it would be very wrong to conclude from these war games of the transition period that

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*See figure 1.

/Goering said at his funeral, "No matter what the weather was like, he always hurried on, from airfield to airfield." See Newsletter of the Wever Family Society, p. 4.

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Figure 1
Generalleutnant Walther Wever, the able and energetic Chief of the Air Command Office (First Luftwaffe General Staff), taken in 1935

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Wever considered the air support of the Army to be the primary mission of the Luftwaffe."[19] This was made clear in his address to the Air War Academy in 1935, in which he said:

> . . . in a war of the future, the destruction of the armed forces will be of primary importance.
>
> This can mean the destruction of the enemy air force, army, and navy, and of the source of supply of the enemy's forces, the armament industry. . . . Only the nation with strong bomber forces at its disposal can expect decisive action by its air force.[20]

Wever's strategic views became even more clear to the observers of the last of the war games at Salzbrunn in the spring of 1936, where many of them saw Wever for the last time. The games at Salzbrunn, which von Seidel called "the most impressive of all,"[21] were based on a hypothetical military conflict between Germany and Czechoslovakia. The plans initially called for the achievement of air superiority and the support of army operations during the breakthrough of the Czech border fortifications, but, at the last minute, Wever expanded the plan to include a large-scale attack by the Luftwaffe upon the most important political and military targets in and around Prague.[22] The enemy was to be made aware of the uselessness of further resistance. This was a strategic mission in the sense of Douhet, intended to bring about panic, chaos, and despair, thereby forcing a quick conclusion of hostilities.[23]*

But fate, which was destined to play a number of tricks on the German Luftwaffe in the years to come, was already preparing to step into Wever's life. He had voiced the opinion that it would be wonderful in departing from a life of such urgent and gratifying activity to die with one's powers unimpaired. On 3 June 1936 he was again on his way to the Air War Academy (Luftkriegsakademie) in Dresden. Although he had been warned on the previous day that he was not yet thoroughly familiar with the aircraft he was flying, he had taken the He-70 (Heinkel "Blitz") on his trip. He had to hurry back from Dresden in order not to be late

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*According to General der Flieger (Ret.) Wilhelm Speidel, Wever's war games were always systematically prepared and carried out with exemplary clarity and discipline.

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for the funeral of the famous General Karl von Litzmann, the hero of Brcezeny.*

In his haste Wever forgot to release the block on the aileron steering system. His flight engineer was late and had forgotten to remind him that the block had to be removed. Wever was annoyed at the delay and anxious to get started. The flight was brief. Hardly had the aircraft taken off than it crashed, instantly killing Wever and his engineer. With his death the Luftwaffe was forcibly reminded of the greatness of Wever's personality. Goering, a supreme egotist, but a man with a soft heart, wept like a child when he heard the news.[24] Deeply moved, he held the funeral oration at the state ceremonies ordered by Hitler, stating, "I acquired him through the generosity of the Army. He was one of many other outstanding officers. In Wever, the Army gave me its best. From day to day, as our work brought us together, I realized that I had been given the best of them all."[25]

To the generations of German airmen who would listen Wever left behind words of inspiration:

> The command must work with great foresight and indicate the objectives for the future. It is itself dependent upon political, strategic, and economic factors. Sometimes it will be compelled to make demands which are apparently impossible to fulfill. But that is the very purpose of command, to show the way. But, the tactician must not merely make demands; in so doing he must recognize the possibilities of technical development.
>
> . . . Although much is expected of you in the fields of organization, operations, tactics, and technical science, never forget that the decisive factor is not technical science and tactics, but the men who control them. Neither the people nor the armed services are lifeless machines of cold metal, but are living beings of flesh and blood.
>
> Do not let your ambition lie in coveted promotions or honors, but set it on the hope that in Germany's decisive

*Editor's Note: World War I general who saved an encircled German Army on the Russian Front (23 August 1914) by an audacious breakout operation. During World War II (in November 1941) the famous German fighter ace, Werner Moelders, was killed in an air crash en route to the funeral of Generaloberst Ernst Udet.

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> hour you will be able to lead men against the enemy. However, this can be done only if personal contact exists between officers and men, be it a subordinate commander or the commander in chief. Without this contact, enthusiasm and self-sacrifice cannot be inspired.
>
> . . . Gentlemen, if we work here in that spirit, the academies will not only prepare you to be General Staff officers, but they will develop the capability which each of you possesses to become the leaders of the future, and then, by virtue of a strong air force, Germany will also succeed in the future in the struggle against superiority.[26]

Wever, primarily a leader of men, ought to have been less interested in being a top-notch pilot--at least this is the view one has in retrospect--but he used aviation to further his interests in command, and one must live by the laws under which he is born. In assessing the value of his life, one has to consider what he did and what he might have done had he lived.

The harmonious relationships within the top command echelons began to disintegrate shortly after Wever's death. He was the essential catalyst that held all together. He was also the moderating influence upon Goering, and even had the favor and ear of Hitler.* He would have honestly and objectively informed them of the true strength of the Luftwaffe and its manifold weaknesses. In so doing he might have helped to ward off a war.[27]

Wever would have assured a calm and steady development of the German air arm, and he would have visualized a war against either

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*Editor's Note: Wever had a definite National Socialist orientation, as shown by his general approval of Hitler's policies. Wever fully supported the "stab-in-the-back" legend about the defeat of the German Army in World War I, and concurred in the necessity of "eradicating dangerous national enemies" such as happened in the purge of top SA and other political enemies of Hitler on the "Night of the Long Knives," 30 June 1934. At that time Wever told some of his Luftwaffe colleagues, "Tonight the Fuehrer pricked the boil which he had intentionally allowed to come to a head, and has taken the criminals personally in hand." See Interview of General der Flieger (Ret.) Wolfgang Martini by the author, 12 March 1955, D/II/1, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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Britain or the Soviet Union in strategic terms. As early as 1940 he would have foreseen the consequences of the Battle of Britain and would have called for more air armament. It is also likely that he would have protested vigorously against an involvement in the East until Great Britain had been defeated.

Wever would have strengthened the air defense arm from the outset and would have had better sense than to make a commitment of air power in the manner it was used to attempt to hold off the Stalingrad disaster.* Critics of these suppositions point to the fact that Goering became increasingly self-centered, allowing nothing but pale reflections of himself to appear on the horizon. Likewise, one is obliged to acknowledge that as Hitler became involved in more and more far-reaching activities, and as one catastrophe after another fell upon the Reich, the voice of reason and moderation ceased to exist. It is uncertain whether Wever's voice would have been able to penetrate more clearly than that of Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, or other competent leaders, during the war years.

Wever, however, left the scene before he had been dazzled by his own glory, and before his potentialities could be fully assessed. History is interested mainly in what was--and from this point of view one must conclude that he was an unusual leader--perhaps a genius, who, like Alfred Count von Schlieffen before him, was denied the final test of his abilities, an opportunity which for the soldier comes only in war.

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*Editor's Note: For an interesting account of the Stalingrad catastrophe and the Luftwaffe's role in this disaster, see Generalleutnant (Ret.) Hermann Plocher, The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942, USAF Historical Studies No. 154, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1966 (also published by Arno Press, New York, 1968), pp. 260-329, 344-356.

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Chapter 2

FIELD MARSHAL ERHARD MILCH, STATE SECRETARY OF AVIATION*

Milch's Early Career

With the single exception of Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, no member of the German Air Force High Command exercised such a lengthy and continuous period of influence as Field Marshal Erhard Milch. As State Secretary of Aviation he shared with Goering very heavy responsibility for both the rise and the fall of the Luftwaffe.

Erhard Milch was born in Wilhelmshaven on 30 March 1892, the son of Anton Milch, a Chief Staff Pharmacist in the German Navy./ From April of 1898 until January 1910, he attended primary and secondary schools in Wilhelmshaven, Gelsenkirchen, and Berlin. After completing his secondary school examination (maturity and proficiency examination), he enlisted on 24 February 1910 as an officer candidate in Foot Artillery Regiment No. 1 in Koenigsberg.

Milch was commissioned on 18 August 1911 and, with the outbreak of war in August 1914, went into action with his unit on the Eastern Front,

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*The effort to express an opinion about the character and personality of Field Marshal Milch, a man still living, whose memoirs have not yet appeared, can only be considered an attempt. One can therefore note the impact of Milch upon the Luftwaffe, but a complete portrayal is presently beyond accomplishment.

/Editor's Note: According to Willi Frischauer, "Goering knew that Milch had Jewish blood in his veins, and though he, personally, was not particularly concerned with such details, it might create difficulties for his principal officials. A solution was soon found. Milch was the son of a Jewish apothecary from Breslau, but his mother was a pure Aryan. . . . Frau Milch made a solemn declaration that she had committed adultery with a minor German aristocrat. Erhard Milch's original birth certificate was withdrawn and a new one issued. Baron Hermann von Bier figured on it as his father." See The Rise and Fall of Hermann Goering, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951, p. 99. Milch is therefore often called the "adopted son" of Anton Milch, the Navy Pharmacist.

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serving as a battalion adjutant. Following his promotion to 1st lieutenant on 18 August 1915, he entered the German Imperial Flying Service and was trained as an aerial observer and photographer. He then served over the Western Front until late in the war, when he was promoted to captain and given command of a reconnaissance group, and, later, of Fighter Wing No. 6, a replacement training unit. Milch retired from the Army as a captain, 31 January 1920.

After brief service with a police air unit in East Prussia, Milch became active in the field of civil aviation and joined the organization of Lloyd Eastern Flying Co. (Lloyd Ostflug Gesellschaft). In 1921 he became the business manager of the Danzig Air Mail Service. Two years later Milch joined the Junkers Airways, Ltd., and soon rose to become the head of its central administration. As a member of the Junkers firm he traveled to North and South America and other parts of the world, wherever the network of Junkers Airways extended, and wherever the Reich had aviation interests.[1]* On 6 January 1926, Aero-Lloyd Airways and Junkers Airways, Ltd. were brought together into a single German national airline, Deutsche Lufthansa AG.† Three men were named as Directors of Lufthansa: Erhard Milch, Otto Merkel, and Martin Wronsky, the latter two coming from Aero Lloyd Airways. With their great experience and ability it was not surprising that Lufthansa immediately began to establish a national and even international reputation for excellent service and efficiency.

Milch was a key figure in creating an air network that covered all of Germany and connected the Reich with most of the important cities of Europe. In 1926 the first regular passenger service was opened by Lufthansa between Berlin, Cologne, and Paris, while it established an auxiliary line along the eastern coast of South America (Syndicato Condor). A year later Lufthansa established a line from Stuttgart to Marseille to

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*Editor's Note: Goering assisted Milch in wresting the control of Junkers Airways, Ltd. from Hugo Junkers. Junkers, who disliked the Nazi regime, was systematically deprived of his airline, his firm, and his patents, and only escaped a "trumped-up" charge of treason by dying on 3 February 1935.

†Editor's Note: Fischer von Poturzyn, the Public Information Director of Junkers Aircraft Works, used the name "Lufthansa" in describing a future German national airline which would be a boon to German commerce much as were the fleets of the Hanseatic League (or Hansa) to the North German cities of the 14th-17th centuries, particularly the 14th-15th.

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Barcelona, with a connecting Lufthansa-organized line from Barcelona to Madrid to Spanish Morocco (Iberia Compaña Aero de Transportes). In 1930 Lufthansa opened an airway system in China called "Eurasia." By 1933 this German national airline had regular service over the Alps to Rome and flights to Latvia, Estonia, and even the Soviet Union. Otto Merkel left the directing triumvirate of Lufthansa in 1929, relinquishing his authority to Milch and Wronsky. Both were undoubtedly able, but it was Milch who became especially well known as a far-sighted, tremendously energetic, and capable manager. These talents did not go unnoticed in the highest German governmental circles.

Milch as State Secretary of Aviation

On 3 February 1933, only four days after the establishment of the Reichs Commissariat of Aviation, Milch had already become Deputy Reichs Commissioner of Aviation, and on 22 February 1933 was named by Goering (with the full approbation of Hitler) as State Secretary of Aviation, and given, simultaneously, equal rank within the Reichs Air Ministry. Milch advanced rapidly. On 24 March 1934 he was promoted to the rank of Generalmajor, on 28 March 1935 to Generalleutnant, and on 20 April 1936 to General der Flieger. His strength within the governmental aviation circles could be seen in the fact that thereafter his military advancement kept pace immediately behind the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, Goering. When Milch's chief became a field marshal on 1 November 1938, the State Secretary was promoted to Generaloberst, and on 19 July 1940, when Goering was elevated to the rank of Reichsmarschall, Milch (along with Hugo Sperrle and Albert Kesselring of the Luftwaffe and several Army generals) received the coveted field marshal's baton. In citing the State Secretary for promotion, Goering credited him with "outstanding merit in the build-up of the German Air Force."[2]

Through his extensive civil aviation contacts Milch had assisted Goering in securing employment in the 1920's. Furthermore, the Nazi Party was obligated to Milch because he had readily placed Lufthansa aircraft at the disposal of Hitler for his large-scale campaign flights during his successful bid for election in 1932. But, of equal importance to Goering and Hitler in selecting Milch as State Secretary and in promoting him rapidly was the fact that he had broad experience, an expert knowledge of aviation, and a highly developed gift for organization.*

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*See figure 2.

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Figure 2
The newly-appointed Reichs Commissioner of Aviation Goering under an He-70 at Staaken Airfield, May 1933. L. to R.: Erhard Milch, Director of Lufthansa and new State Secretary of Aviation; v. Pfistermeister, Head of Heinkel's Berlin Office; Friedrich Christiansen; Hermann Goering.

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No close personal relationship ever really developed between Milch and Goering. As a matter of fact, the Reichsmarschall, who possessed such a keen scent for the usefulness of others, valued Milch almost solely because he saw him as an indispensable element for the German aviation program. This induced Goering to come to Milch's support at certain times, and generally to interfere little with the operations of his office.

Milch, despite his generally practical outlooks and his normally logical approach to matters, especially in the handling of personnel, had an inordinate sensitivity to the personal attitudes of his colleagues, possibly because he could not help being aware of the whispers so frequently bantered about within the Ministry about his Jewish background. It was fairly well known in higher German aviation circles that Milch was at least partially of non-Aryan descent on his father's side, and that official documents had been altered to make him fully acceptable to the Nazi regime.* It is thus probably safe to assume that he could not entirely overlook everything that he heard, particularly at a time when he still needed strong backing from the Party and from Goering.

Although he faced a number of bureaucratic hurdles in gaining acceptance for his ideas during his first years in office as State Secretary of Aviation, Milch's greatest power struggle came after the untimely death of Generalleutnant Walther Wever, the first Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, on 3 June 1936. Still somewhat uncertain of his own position and strength, and noting Goering's flagging interest in Air Ministry matters, Milch began to fill offices with men of his own choice and to take other steps calculated to strengthen his hold upon the Ministry.[3] These measures did not go unnoticed by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the successor to Wever and head of the first officially

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*Editor's Note: During a visit to Air University in 1964, Ministerial Director (Ret.) Dr. Adolph G. Baeumker told the Editor that Milch was the obvious choice as State Secretary because of his broad experience, undoubted ability, and because he was "the best technical mind in the Luftwaffe." Dr. Baeumker also remarked that Goering really cared very little whether his personnel were Jews or Gentiles, and that the Reichsmarschall often repeated the phrase attributed to him, "I will say who is a Jew and who is not!" See footnote, p. 17.

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designated Luftwaffe General Staff.* Kesselring's position as Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff was not a pleasant thing to Milch, who was quite content with the arrangement as it had existed under Wever. Now, being an official entity, the psychological impact of the Luftwaffe General Staff was something with which to be concerned. Was it not possible that this body might attempt to encroach upon the domain of the State Secretary's office?

Kesselring complained to Goering that the General Staff of the Luftwaffe ought to have an even stronger and more independent position, and pointed out that Milch's activities seemed to be those of an overly ambitious man. The Reichsmarschall, on the other hand, could not bring himself to settle the matter and permitted the bitter rivalry to continue unabated.

But, in order to comprehend the singular position of Milch, it is necessary, even at the risk of being repetitious, to present certain facts and points of consideration. Within three months after the death of Wever the Reichs Aviation Ministry brought together three powers whose relationships with each other were not always harmonious and were often sharp and bitter. The most important of these was the position of Goering, who "wore two hats" as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe and Reichsminister of Aviation. The other two were the office of State Secretary of Aviation (Milch) and the Luftwaffe General Staff (headed by Field Marshal Kesselring).†

The Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe was no soldier, or, at least, he had not been one for a long time. As Reichsminister of Aviation he had become a general officer overnight, and soon afterward had been raised to the very apex of the newly formed Luftwaffe hierarchy. The very possession of so much rank, without the broader knowledge and skill which is so essential to it, and which can be acquired only through years of service and experience, must arouse in its bearer a certain inner sense of insecurity. This was surely aggravated by the fact that Goering was not a worker and did not devote himself faithfully or thoroughly to the tasks of the Aviation Ministry.

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*Editor's Note: Although Wever has been called the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, this body was not so designated at the time. There was officially no Luftwaffe General Staff until 15 August 1936. Wever, however, organized the unit and gave it its first direction. See Chart No. 2 in the back of this study.

†See figure 3.

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Figure 3
Milch's early opponent, Albert Kesselring, shown here as Field Marshal, leaving a situation conference in the East, 1941. Left: Col. Werner Moelders.

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Clearly, a man who demands supreme power for himself, without having the ability to work steadily or accurately, and who even lacks a desire to work, requires the assistance of an energetic and competent deputy who will accomplish the work for him. Milch thus became more and more an absolute necessity for the Reichsmarschall. The State Secretary, in fact, shouldered the "lion's share" of Goering's responsibilities.[4] In a totalitarian state suspicions are much more apt to arise than in either a monarchy or a democracy. This being the case, is there not a danger that a deputy whose work is so successful that it brings him increasingly into the foreground will one day step into the place of a superior who, being a drone, holds a position of power but does not exercise it? In the Third Reich all government power became more and more concentrated in the person of the Fuehrer, and the last remaining spheres of power and influence were imperceptibly drained of their authority until they were mere recipients of Hitler's orders. Because of this development one could assume that the Fuehrer might one day raise the true worker to the position of leadership, placing Milch in Goering's ministerial post.

In such circumstances it behooved Goering to proceed with some caution. It is said that trees should always be "lopped off in good time." Therefore it seemed desirable to the Reichsmarschall to discover whether his deputy, Milch, had an "Achilles' heel" whereby, in case of danger, he might be removed. Milch had such a "heel" in that he was no more a professional soldier than Goering, despite his service prior to and during World War I. There were two aspects of this which made him especially vulnerable. Not only was he the deputy of a ministry which was becoming increasingly military in character, but, after 1935, he was also the deputy of the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe. Such a man might therefore quickly arouse the suspicions of the command apparatus of the Luftwaffe, the General Staff. This vulnerability of Milch made him more acceptable to Goering, who thus felt that he always had "an ace in the hole." Of course, once his suspicions were aroused the Reichsmarschall did not want to leave the State Secretary with too much power, at least not more than necessary for the accomplishment of his duties.[5*]

Like Goering, Milch wanted very much to be considered as a soldier, and he coveted high military rank. Yet, in contrast to Goering,

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*Editor's Note: Generaloberst Hans-Juergen Stumpff claimed that "Goering feared him [Milch] and saw him as a possible successor." See D/II/1, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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he did not want rank for appearances alone, or even for the feeling of power it might impart; he wanted it because he knew that he needed it in order to achieve his desired reforms and programs within the Luftwaffe. Thus a chasm continued to exist between Milch as a general (and later as a field marshal) and other officers of his rank. Milch, it must be recalled, had simply skipped nearly 13 years of Army service, yet, he was still several years younger than the two most important Army officers acquired by the Luftwaffe, Wever (born in 1884) and Kesselring (born in 1885). Owing to his rapid succession of promotions, Milch had gained an advantage of not merely 13 years, but of nearly 20. Furthermore, he was no General Staff officer, and his past experience with troops was relatively meager. Having never done any General Staff work himself, and faced with the eagerness to learn on the part of newly acquired Army personnel, Milch's tremendous advantage in aviation experience was bound to decrease as time went on. By serious application, the Army personnel soon demonstrated their talents (which had brought them to the fore within the Army) and were successfully transformed into excellent Luftwaffe officers. It must be borne in mind that civil aviation, the area in which Milch's experiences were formed, was being continually converted into military aviation from the late 1920's on, and especially after 1933. This was a field in which the regular military men were more at home than Milch, even though his superiority in technical matters and in questions pertaining to aircraft production remained undiminished.

Milch had an advantage, however, in that his connections with Hitler and the Nazi Party were materially better than his connections with Goering. Thus, Goering was obliged to keep in the back of his mind the possibility of having to rely upon the Luftwaffe General Staff to help him in curtailing the scope of the State Secretary's influence. But, Goering also feared an overly powerful Luftwaffe General Staff, especially one filled with officers who were, from a point of experience and date of rank as general officers, his superiors.

For the General Staff of the Luftwaffe the situation was quite different. The German Aviation Ministry was becoming increasingly an exclusive war ministry for the German Air Force. Formed under Wever in 1934-35, and given official standing on 15 August 1936, it was obliged to compete within the Wehrmacht against the Prussian-German Army with its great tradition and tremendously capable General Staff.*

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*See Charts Nos. 3 and 4.

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Certain members of the Army General Staff had been assimilated into the newly formed General Staff of the Luftwaffe, and they then had to help the Luftwaffe organization to realize its potentialities to the fullest extent. As the soul of a powerful body, the Luftwaffe General Staff had to exclude every bit of nonmilitary interference it encountered, since the civilian and military spheres represented two different worlds, between which there has been a certain contrast since the beginning of time.

Within the hierarchy of the Luftwaffe General Staff, which was being established in the mid-thirties, it was thought to be quite enough to have a commander in chief who was not a professional soldier, let alone having a second in command of like background. Goering's leadership was tolerable because he was an old-time flyer who had won the coveted Pour le Mérite in World War I, and who had the additional prestige of having been the last commander of the famous Fighter Wing No. 1 "Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen." It was also significant that, with his position of seemingly unlimited power, he was the closest man to the Fuehrer. Such a person could be of immeasurable use to the young air force.

The State Secretary of Aviation, although he had been a captain at the close of World War I and had been a soldier and officer longer than Goering, was connected with reconnaissance and pilot replacement units, and lacked the dash and color of a highly decorated fighter pilot. He was regarded by the military as a civilian, even though he held the rank of field marshal (a promotion which was granted to him after the pretense of a few days in command of a regular air unit). Goering's dizzy rise had to be accepted as fate, since he was, after all, something like a supreme war lord for the Luftwaffe. But, many of the higher air force leaders felt that it was unbearable to have a second Goering around their necks. This second "civilian" was even more unpleasant and inconvenient because he worked so hard and knew so much about his business, and thus never hesitated to have his say about the conduct of affairs.[6*] Was this "working-Goering" to command the Luftwaffe? Neither the General Staff nor its Chief wanted to accept this possibility as an irrevocable fact, and, from the time of the organization of the official General Staff, they rebelled against any sort of subordination to the State Secretary and against his constant and all-embracing deuputyship.

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*General der Flieger (Ret.) Werner Kreipe informed the author that Milch, ". . . feeling himself to be the actual Minister, interfered in the activities of the Luftwaffe General Staff."

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Basically, the General Staff wanted to see its own chief above Milch in the chain of command, thereby leaving only one "nonsoldier" in the Luftwaffe command structure, Goering, who would then find himself facing a united military front. The General Staff felt that, because of his natural indolence, Goering would presumably allow the work of the military to run its course undisturbed in a purely military manner through regular military channels. Everything could then be brought under the control of the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, who would actually function as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe. This would also bring the civil aviation section of the Reichs Aviation Ministry under the direction of the military.

There was another side of this matter. How powerful might a Chief of the General Staff be according to the views of a commander? Even an indolent commander would not relish the idea of an all-usurping General Staff Chief virtually divesting him of office. It is not difficult to imagine Goering's anxieties in this matter, and to understand how he would find it a much more convenient and safer arrangement to provide an additional or intervening space between himself and the General Staff, a buffer to be filled by State Secretary Milch.

And, what was the situation with respect to the State Secretary, whose head was at stake in this drama? Milch had appeared on the scene almost simultaneously with Goering, and he had undoubtedly played the leading role in building up the German Aviation Ministry. Until Germany proclaimed its military sovereignty in 1935, this was outwardly a civilian ministry, and its civilian section (Allgemeine Luftamt or General Air Office), which included civil aviation, weather, signals, etc., was originally the most important element within the organization. As time went on, this agency's role became less and less significant and the military aspects of the Ministry took precedence. Military personnel working within the Reichs Aviation Ministry were discharged (on paper) from the service and wore civilian garb until the end of the period of secrecy, 1 March 1935.*
Just prior to this the ministry had secured its first important officers from the Army, leaders such as Wever, Kesselring, and Stumpff.

The Reichs Aviation Ministry consisted of the Air Command Office, the General Air Office, the Technical Office, the Luftwaffe Administrative Office, and the Luftwaffe Personnel Office, most important of which was

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*See Richard Suchenwirth, The Development of the German Air Force, 1919-1939, USAF Historical Studies No. 160, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Historical Division, ASI, June 1968, pp. 57-59. See also Chart No. 4.

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the Air Command Office because it was the heart of the new air force. Within the table of organization of the Air Command Office were the Air Operations, Organization, Training, Flak Artillery, Supply, and Signals Branches, and a Medical Branch which was being organized. The Air Command Office was really the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, although it was not so designated until 1936. Heading it was Walther Wever, who succeeded admirably in maintaining the dignity of the position while steering with good grace a middle course between Goering, who was usually hard to reach or absent but who might suddenly appear to take a hand in matters, and Milch, who was always present and zealously guarded his authority. Things progressed smoothly because Wever knew how to handle both men, and because Milch allowed the inspiring Chief to work relatively undisturbed. Eighteen years later Milch declared, "When Wever was there everything functioned properly."[7] Kesselring corroborated this statement, remarking that, "It was an excellent marriage. Only with [Generaloberst Guenther] Korten did Milch later experience equally good cooperation."[8]

As has been noted earlier, difficulties in the Ministry became manifest during the tenure of Kesselring as Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. Despite his well-known smile, his amiable and winning manner, and his ability to "get on" with others, he was every inch a leader, and had no intention of becoming a mere "recording" of the directives of his superiors. Much of the trouble between Kesselring and Milch probably happened by chance. The first shadow fell upon their relationship when the State Secretary demanded a court-martial against the Commander of Training Wing "Greifswald" because of the serious aircraft losses at that experimental station. Kesselring took offense at this and stoutly defended the commander. This was the first open indication of trouble between the Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe and Milch, although it may have been merely the exposure of an already seriously impaired relationship.

The more firmly the military sat in the saddle, the more it (including the younger professional military men) turned against the State Secretary, whom it regarded as an intruder.[9] Goering openly acknowledged at the end of World War II that the bitter rivalry and command difficulties within the Luftwaffe after Wever's death were deeply injurious to the German Air Force, and that the lack of harmony proved to be detrimental to Germany's cause.[10]

The State Secretary felt himself to be just as much a soldier as the others, and tried to fill the gaps in his military career by ceaseless work. He could not understand the negative attitude of the Luftwaffe

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General Staff, even though he appeared to have made no great efforts to cultivate friendships within it. He knew the quality of his ability, and was sure of his ground within the difficult fields of aircraft production and negotiations with ambitious aircraft firms. Moreover, Milch was a superb organizer and could handle large organizations well. He knew that Goering did little work and, being overloaded with offices and titles, actually would be unable to devote much time to the German Air Force, even if he were inspired by a greater desire for achievement. The State Secretary therefore compensated for Goering's lack of industry. In so doing, however, he was not of a disposition to remain in the "shadows." He was, to put it mildly, no "Gray Eminence."* Neither was it possible for Milch to play such a part had he been so inclined, for his chief was not in the building and seldom close at hand. He was, instead, enthroned in a palace in which, according to his fancy, he would receive the heads of his ministries. Because of Goering's frequent absences the next in command had to spring into the breach and handle affairs in the Ministry and make the necessary public appearances. Milch became the customary voice of the Luftwaffe before the eyes of the public, acting with full willingness as Goering's "right-hand man." Despite the fact that he allowed this, the Reichsmarschall often felt injured because Milch took the laurels, and worried that he might usurp his position. Moreover, there were always plenty of informers in the Third Reich, ≠ and it must have embittered Goering to learn that, in the inner circles, Milch occasionally referred to himself as the Minister.[11]

Milch had no intention of yielding, even to the Luftwaffe General Staff, when it attempted to subject him to pressures. From his point of view as State Secretary and permanent deputy of the Reichsminister of Aviation, it only stood to reason that he could not relinquish any of his several offices in the establishment, and any influence he could get over the General Staff was all to the good. Milch believed that a deputy had to be a deputy in all things, and he was well aware of many difficulties

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*Père Joseph, the "man Friday" who worked quietly and methodically in the background for Cardinal Richelieu of France.

≠Editor's Note: "Informing" was one of the cornerstones of Nazi Germany. Various Nazi organizations were warned to report any actions which seemed to deviate from the official "line," and Hitler Youth were rewarded for informing on anyone who made careless or hostile remarks. This habit, well ingrained, presented one of the major difficulties in handling personnel problems during the de-Nazification processes and the military occupation of Germany.

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which were coming to a head. For this reason, he caused the several individual offices in the Minstry to be made immediately subordinate to him, a contradiction to the role of a mere deputy of the Chief.[12]

Goering suspected most of Milch's motives until the very day when Milch left the Luftwaffe, while the Luftwaffe General Staff was anxious to shake off any influence which Milch exerted over it. Hitler's old Party favorite, Goering, never came up with a solution to the problems between the Luftwaffe General Staff and his deputy, the State Secretary. There were three possible courses of action: the first was to allow the State Secretary to exercise his old powers and bid the General Staff to obey his directions; the second, of which Milch may have had ambitious visions, was to make the State Secretary also Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, and thus enable him to intercept all opposition;[13] (this, of course, would have been a solution with the most serious question marks for the future); the third could have been the dismissal of Milch from the Ministry.

The Reichsmarschall did not satisfy Milch's ambitions for the office of Chief of the General Staff. That would have made Goering's silent rival far too powerful. But, neither did Goering clearly adopt either of the other two possibilities. Milch remained as State Secretary of Aviation and deputy to the Reichsmarschall, and was not sacrificed to the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, despite the Luftwaffe Commander in Chief's anxieties over his hard-working, but ambitious assistant. Nevertheless, Milch's feathers were painfully "plucked."

On 2 June 1937, the Reichs Minister of Aviation made the Luftwaffe General Staff directly responsible to himself.* He did likewise with all other significant positions within the German Air Force. This arrangement was not effected in a permanent way, so that matters within the Reichs Aviation Ministry, precisely the most decisive and sensitive organization of the entire command, remained in a continuous state of uncertainty and disharmony. This situation persisted until 20 June 1944, when Milch turned over most of his duties and responsibilities to the Speer Ministry, remaining Inspector General of the Luftwaffe for the time being and thus keeping "one foot in the establishment." Goering's failure to act decisively and in a far-sighted manner in 1937 opened the door to widespread insecurity in the German Air Force, which tended to plague the organization until the very end.

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*See Chart No. 5.

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None of the three principals was blameless that this hybrid command situation came to pass; not Goering, for he tolerated the indefiniteness, although, with his acute perception he must have known what was lacking in the structure and probably had no great objection to the creation of an atmosphere of uncertainty; not the Luftwaffe General Staff Chief, for Kesselring was not willing (as Wever had been) to adapt himself completely to the conditions at hand, and, by patience and wisdom, including fair treatment of the State Secretary, to compensate for the existing disadvantages to his own position; and last of all, not Milch, because he tenaciously and forcefully defended his dubious position instead of yielding voluntarily or, if necessary, resigning. But, of course, one might ask where could the State Secretary have gone?*

Therewith the question leads directly to the one power which still existed beyond the control of Goering, the Fuehrer. Hitler ought to have been aware of these conditions, especially since he had a Luftwaffe Adjutant in his headquarters who kept him apprised of developments in the air forces. However, there are numerous examples which prove that Hitler, both in matters of party and of state, had a fondness for two-way situations. He may have assumed that in this way he had a stronger grip on personnel and conditions. In any case, he allowed things in the German Air Ministry to continue as Goering left them, and took no measures to free the efficient Milch from his dilemma within the Reichs Aviation Ministry or to situate him in a position where he could develop his full potentialities and accomplish great things. Milch, having neither the temptation to attempt to alter his position nor even a possibility of changing it, defended his prerogatives all the more.

The State Secretary recognized very well the weaknesses, particularly the egotism, of his Minister, Goering, which made cooperation difficult. Milch was only too aware of the irregularity of Goering's work, his growing indolence (despite a superior intelligence and great buoyancy), and his sense of being all-powerful with a complete disregard for all situations. The State Secretary, himself, had distinctly fine qualities for the Luftwaffe, a quick and perceptive mind, high intelligence, and an exceptional gift to build up whatever he undertook and to make rapid dispositions, coupled with an incredible capacity for work and a devotion to his duties.* Yet he was not free of faults. First of all, he was inordinately ambitious. He also took even the most objective matters

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*See Charts Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

/Generalleutnant (Ret.) Klaus Uebe described Milch's industry as "an obsession that was thrilling to see."

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personally, and could be influenced by personal impulses. Moreover, he was not free of vanity, which only heightened his sensitivity. His position in the Ministry exposed him to numerous disputes, and caused him to appear as a man who would be quite willing to subordinate himself for the purpose of personal recognition. 14* He also was susceptible to employees who willingly "played his game." Those who knew of this weakness soon learned how to take advantage of it, and found him to be an amiable and grateful patron.

Although his courtesy to persons of inferior rank and even the most junior officers has been generally praised, his lively temperament tended to remove his inhibitions so that he often made sudden comments and--frequently in the strongest language--statements which were difficult for him to retract. 15 He was, moreover, not averse to making serious threats and harsh accusations. 16 In many instances it was a mistake to place undue credence in his words. After all, loud talk, threats, and accusations were all too popular in the Third Reich and became one of the hallmarks of the regime. ≠ While making his lightning-fast commentaries on various persons and situations, Milch easily lapsed into self-contradictions, which gave rise to some extremely harsh judgments by others concerning his truthfulness. Like other strong personalities, he needed recognition and corroboration for his achievements,

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*Walter Goerlitz, in his Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs (History of the Second World War), Vol. I, p. 481, remarks that Milch, ". . . because of his ambition was, in spite of everything, a disputed personality and did not enjoy general respect." Ministerial Director Dr. Kurt Knipfer remarked to the author, "He [Milch] is an exceptionally sagacious and industrious person, outstandingly talented, but also very ambitious. For a time after 1933 this ambition of his was actually unhealthy." But Milch himself told the author, "I never had personal ambitions."

≠General der Flieger Werner Kreipe remarked, "In his judgments [i.e., Milch's] he was too irresponsible and excessively sharp. He placed no check upon his insolent manner." Similar comments were uttered by Generalleutnant (Ret.) Hermann Plocher, Generalleutnant (Ret.) Josef "Beppo" Schmid, and Ministerial Director (Ret.) Dr. Kurt Knipfer. Goering said at a meeting in Berchtesgaden on 3 October 1943, "At every meeting the Field Marshal [Milch] speaks of executions by firing squad, but if ever I were to make such a statement, then it would be carried out, regardless of any consideration. I would actually carry the matter out, not just with my tongue." See C/I/2c, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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the soundness of his judgment, and the correctness of his actions. If necessary--he often resorted to this expedient--he could secure these assurances from his own mouth. And the historian knows how easily human nature tends, because of its subconscious need to establish a defense, to put all of its deeds in the most favorable light possible.

Milch's tendency toward intrigue can perhaps best be explained by his lively temperament, his outgoing manner, his urge to influence all of the people with whom he came into contact, the fight it cost him to maintain his position, and by the generally slight support accorded to him by Goering.

Any effort to evaluate Milch's impact upon the Luftwaffe must begin with the founding of the German Air Ministry. No one will deny that the State Secretary had earned considerable merit in helping to found the Reichs Aviation Ministry, and, subsequently, the Luftwaffe. "Milch," according to Field Marshal Kesselring, "was, next to Goering, the decisive personality, and, despite his youth, proved to be extraordinarily useful in the establishment of the Luftwaffe."[17] Generalleutnant Klaus Uebe stated that Milch, "taken in the right way and assigned to the right position was a motor without equal."[18]*

During his early years with the Ministry, this great aviation specialist was a highly skilled and tactful mentor for the newly arrived Army colonels, who were to play such a major role in the German Air Force,[19] and it was he, along with Walther Wever, who converted Goering's great impulses into constructive activity.

In the spring of 1937 Goering ordered a halt on all work concerned with the four-engine bomber, a decision which was to prove disastrous for the Luftwaffe. This order was issued despite the fact that a four-engine bomber program had been in progress since the autumn of 1932, and that on 26 April 1937 the Technical Office of the Luftwaffe listed the Ju-89 and the Do-19 as models ready for testing. Now, however, attention and energies were turned toward the enticing, but overrated, twin-engine bomber, the Ju-88. After the war Milch outlined the importance of the stoppage decision, and lamented that, "The great four-engine bombers of Junkers [Ju-89] and Dornier [Do-19] were not included in

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*See figure 4.

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Figure 4
Generalleutnant Erhard Milch, State Secretary of Aviation, April 1935

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the construction series despite excellent performance of test models. Thus we had no really adequate aircraft for strategic operations."[20]*

To what extent did Milch himself share in the formulation of this truly disastrous decision? At Nuremberg he commented that on 29 April 1937 the Reichsmarschall had halted construction on the long-range bombers upon the suggestion of the Chief of the General Staff, Generalleutnant Albert Kesselring.[21]/ In the light of this statement, particularly if one considers the tension then existing between the State Secretary and Kesselring, there would seem to be grounds for the assumption that Milch did have a role in making the decision. Yet, General der Flieger Paul Deichmann, who in 1937 was Chief of Branch I of the General Staff, declared that in that same year he had requested an audience with Goering and had expressed (in the presence of the State Secretary) his great concern because he surmised that the Reichsmarschall was going to abandon the four-engine bomber project. Deichmann implored Goering, "in any case to allow the continuation of development of this aircraft."[22] Milch, however, claimed that the advantages ascribed to the four-engine bomber by Deichmann were "pure fantasy," and that the "Ju-88 program left no industrial capacity for the production of four-engine bombers."[23] Milch argued against the supposed advantages such aircraft would have for use at home or abroad, declaring that such claims were in any case irrelevant since the German aircraft industry could produce a bomber fleet of only about 1,000 four-engine aircraft, whereas it could turn out many times that number of twin-engine bombers. He feared, moreover, that the development of even a few large bombers might adversely affect the Ju-88 production program. Deichmann's final pleas that the matter be put to a test rather than decided at once fell on deaf ears, and Goering accepted Milch's view that nothing should be done which could possibly exert a negative influence upon the Ju-88 program.

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*One of the reasons for the failure of the air offensive against Great Britain, as well as for the lack of air support for the operations of U-boat forces, was the absence of a good, reliable strategic bomber in the Luftwaffe.

/Editor's Note: For additional material on the four-engine bomber program 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. 40-49, and Generalingenieur (Ret.) Herbert Huebner, "Die Bomberentwicklung von 1933-1938" ("The Development of Bombers from 1933-1938"), C/IV/2c, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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Thus, even if the suggestion to stop developing four-engine bombers did originate within the Luftwaffe General Staff, Milch made it so much his own policy that his voice prevailed over all opposing opinions before the Reichsmarschall. There was no denying that it was the voice of Milch which was decisive in the formulation of Goering's decision. After World War II, the State Secretary told General Deichmann that he felt compelled to support Goering's basic idea to stop development, inasmuch as the Reichsmarschall was so anxious to report a massive production figure of twin-engine bombers to the Fuehrer. This meant turning out Ju-88's in record time. Milch recalled the words of Goering: "The Fuehrer does not ask me what kind of bombers I have. He simply wants to know how many!"[24]

The State Secretary was not innocent in the abandonment of the large bomber project, and it would have been to his credit if he had pointed out in his commentary of 21 February 1954 that he was not fully aware at that time of the potential importance of this particular type of aircraft.

During the early campaigns of the war, Milch, who had become a field marshal in the great promotion surge of 19 July 1940, was a veritable "storehouse of energy." He was untiring in his visits to the front, both as Goering's deputy and (after Udet's death in November 1941) as Generalluftzeugmeister (Chief of Special Supply and Procurement). One of the most far-sighted actions taken by Milch was the order to supply winter clothing to the Luftwaffe as soon as he heard the plans for an imminent campaign against the Soviet Union. Because of this, and because of the tireless efforts of the Quartermaster General of the Luftwaffe, General Hans-Georg von Seidel, the German Air Force (unlike the German Army) was quite adequately equipped with proper clothing when the untimely blasts set in late in 1941.*

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*Editor's Note: The Luftwaffe suffered greatly during the first winter in the East (1941-42), but principally because of technical and organizational unpreparedness for the adversities of a Russian winter. But, with respect to clothing, the Luftwaffe was far better off than the Army, which had to endure the hardships in field blouses in many instances. See "Ausstattung der Luftwaffe mit Winterbekleidung fuer den Russlandfeldzug 1941" ("Equipping of the Air Force with Winter Clothing for the Russian Campaign 1941"), Interrogation of Field Marshal Erhard Milch by Prof. Richard Suchenwirth on 29 September 1954, and comments of General der Flieger (Ret.) Hans-Georg von Seidel, G/VI/1, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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In the summer of 1941, while Germany's fortunes on the Eastern Front were still riding high, Milch found himself forced to assume a most difficult task under problematical circumstances. It had become imperative to intervene in the province of the Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement, Generaloberst Ernst Udet. Udet was directly subordinate to Goering, but was obligated to inform Milch of all important and decisive matters. As Goering's deputy, Milch was able to keep himself informed quite well anyway. Both Milch and Udet were in relatively close contact with one another, and appeared together in various aircraft plants for the testing of new models. But Udet was by nature overly sensitive and tended to build suspicions out of nothing. He disliked the fact that Milch often peered into the workings of his office, especially the huge C-Amt or Technical Office. Udet suspected Milch of secretly coveting his position and of trying to "undermine" his position in order to enlarge his own sphere of control. There was little doubt that Milch often acted like an "imperialist" with ruthless elbows, and every failure on Udet's part made Udet more apprehensive of the State Secretary. Because of this situation and the well-known sensitivity of Udet, Goering allowed the Chief of Supply and Procurement to confer directly with Goering, often without Milch.[25] Udet, in all probability, did not relay all of the results of these discussions to the State Secretary.

It still remains unclear why the State Secretary did not take timely action and call attention to the threatening danger that the German aircraft production program might fail, and it is difficult to understand why he did not use his influence as Goering's deputy to make serious remonstrances about the situation to his superior. Of course, the Luftwaffe General Staff did no better in this respect. Both the General Staff and the State Secretary urged an increase in aircraft production, but Udet protested that he was not issued enough raw material from the Wehrmacht High Command to make any progress. The war was clearly becoming a long, drawn-out affair, one which was bound to require increasing amounts of raw materials and which would require increased production in every area.

Milch's failure to alter the situation or to make serious efforts in this direction (despite his hasty temperament) was probably due to his continuous interest in handling Goering with care. Yet, Udet was in some ways closer to the Reichsmarschall than the State Secretary, a fact which may have embittered Milch and made him secretly hostile toward Udet. Furthermore, Milch may have harbored strong feelings about Udet having control over the vast complexes of the Office of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement, an organization for which the State Secretary was by training and experience much more suited than Udet.

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According to General der Flieger (Ret.) Karl Bodenschatz, chief of Goering's Ministerial Office, the appointment of Udet as Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement meant the "sudden exclusion" of Milch from all matters pertaining to defense production. Bodenschatz believed that the State Secretary may have been so embittered by this situation that he was quite willing to let Udet "fend for himself" and, if things took a turn for the worse, "take the full brunt of the consequences."[26] This point of view is understandable from the side of human nature, which manifests itself among the learned as well as among the unenlightened; yet failure to take timely action and thus ward off disaster cannot be condoned in any circumstances.

When Udet's health began to fail, and with Goering's anxieties for the future of the Luftwaffe and of Germany increasing, Milch was finally given a free hand in reorganizing Udet's disarrayed offices. Outwardly Udet was allowed to retain his office, but Milch had the authority to put things in order.[27*] With complete disregard for personal considerations, Milch energetically set to work making key changes in Udet's organization. Unable to bear this humiliation and finding himself "out of step" with the ruthlessness of the Third Reich, and deserted by Goering, Udet chose to take his own life on 17 November 1941.[28]

Milch then had to spring into the breach with full responsibility. He assumed Udet's post, managed to bring aircraft production back into line, and to give the aircraft industry a new impetus. The number of new constructions rose rapidly. Under Udet the monthly fighter production exceeded 400 only in March, April, and May of 1941, and then only because of the dangers arising from the planned offensive against the Soviet Union. In only three other months was Udet able to produce more than 300 fighters. Altogether only 2,992 fighter aircraft were turned out in 1941. But, in 1942, under Milch, the German aircraft industry produced 4,583 fighters, and in 1943, when production began to open up, 9,601 Fw-190's and Me-109's were brought off the assembly lines. The story was much the same for German bombers. In 1941 only 4,007 bombers (Ju-88's, He-111's, and Do-217's) were built, but in 1942 this was increased to 5,228, and in 1943 to 6,601.[29]

The State Secretary of Aviation was much more effective and consistent than his predecessor. He was certainly more energetic, harder, more ruthless, and doggedly tenacious in pursuing his objectives. Yet, he was unable to secure a significant increase in the

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*See pp. 86-91, 99-102.

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allocation of raw materials for the Luftwaffe. During the winter of 1941 Hitler was deeply enmeshed in the problems of the Russian campaign. He had personal command over the High Command of the Wehrmacht and had just taken command of the Army (the latter with disastrous results), and he viewed the deteriorating events in the East with great anxiety. In such circumstances--he was inordinately "Army-minded anyway--he was quite unwilling to increase the amounts of raw materials going to the Luftwaffe. In such matters the Army had top priority, and with its situation in the East steadily worsening, and seeing scant hope for improvement in the spring of 1942, it was not disposed to grant any concessions to the air forces, which in any case did not even hold a secondary place in priority ratings.

Heavy cares burdened Milch, even though he was able to locate a reserve supply of aluminum by discovering that aircraft firms had been engaged in large-scale hoarding operations by submitting considerably larger demands for materials than were actually required.[30] In the Tuesday and Friday briefing sessions in the Reichs Aviation Ministry Milch almost invariably appeared optimistic, but this could not have been genuine in many instances. The third year of the war had come around, and with it came increasing distress for the German aircraft program because of material considerations as well as the growing threat from Allied air forces. In many areas the situation appeared to be getting out of hand. Although few could see it then, it was already becoming apparent that Milch's intervention in the air armament program had come two years too late to save the German Air Force.

The State Secretary recognized well enough that Germany would eventually succumb to Anglo-American air attacks unless a powerful German fighter arm could be built up. Udet had already seen the danger well in advance. Milch informed Generaloberst Hans Jeschonnek, Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, that he could produce 1,000 fighters per month through the end of 1942, but the urgency of the situation was not grasped by Jeschonnek, who remarked that 360 per month would be sufficient.[31] Milch was obviously innocent of this disastrous negligence and all of its far-reaching consequences, and it was he who, conscious of the situation, began to increase production, even though he did so with extreme caution after the refusal of the General Staff Chief to accept his proposal to build more fighters.

For Milch, the need to protect the homeland remained ever in the foreground, but there was less and less aluminum, and, for the time being, one had to be content with fewer aircraft.[32] Under Milch's guidance the ship of air armaments seemed to be driven ahead by a

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fresh wind, but there were still cares enough. The need for aircraft forced German industry to produce obsolete aircraft again, since serviceable new models were not ready for series production. The constant and time-consuming improvements on the older models did not obscure the need for more advanced designs, and the State Secretary was never able to achieve an optimum modification of the obsolete types (an objective which Udet had set his sights upon in 1938). On the contrary, there were 11 aircraft models being produced in 1941, with 7 distinct variations; in 1943 there were 23 types with 10 variations; and in 1944 a total of 27 types were built with 11 variations. 33 Sub-series were still being built throughout 1942 and too many individual wishes were being fulfilled. The way to Goering was all too easy, and the "Iron Man" was often easy to influence. It is probable that some of these problems were not foreseen by Milch prior to taking over the Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement responsibility.

The State Secretary was only too willing to indulge in recriminations against his predecessors, Udet, now dead and unable to defend himself, and Udet's co-workers, Ploch, Tschersich, and Reidenbach,* who had been removed from office, defamed, and silenced. Although all of the circumstances which brought this situation about are not clear, it gives one pause for thought that Milch remarked to the Reichsmarschall in a teletype message of 10 March 1943:

> As per instructions court-martial investigations regarding He-111 and Fighter-Bomber series are in progress. For 15 months Chief of Supply and Procurement has been trying to establish order in the office he inherited. At present not fully effective in all fields. To clarify situation suggest that major court-martial proceedings against Chief of Supply and Procurement intended some time ago by Reichsmarschall be now set in motion on questions: What demands had been made of the Chief of Supply and Procurement and to what extent had he been informed concerning experiences gained at the front. 34≠

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*See pp. 70-71, 90-91, 103-108, 157.
≠See figure 5.

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It is obvious that even Milch, who had felt himself to be so strong and self-reliant, was no longer master of the situation. 35* The difficulties in air armament were becoming overwhelming. In 1942, in the already wounded Luftwaffe, mistakes were bound to mean disaster, and Milch was not above making wrong decisions. There was, for example, the all-important matter of the long-range bomber. By 1942 the Eastern Front sorely needed such aircraft, while the Navy needed this type to prevent defeat in the U-boat war. Even Hitler, choked with worry over the Russian front, urgently wished to have such aircraft at his disposal. Milch wanted to supply this badly needed item--Udet had already tried it--but he did not recognize that Udet, in sponsoring the He-177, which had two sets of parallel-mounted engines, each acting upon a single airscrew so that it appeared to be a twin-engine aircraft, was following a faulty trail. Udet's efforts to make the obvious failure workable brought only deceptive or misleading results, and millions of man-hours had been wasted on it.

Upon taking over Udet's office, Milch should have made a clean-cut decision to rid himself of the mortgage left behind by his predecessor, a heritage which was rotten to the core, by simply ordering an immediate conversion of the He-177 to a four-engine aircraft with four independent motors and airscrews. Instead, Milch, the man who was supposedly so suspicious, so cool, experienced, and perceptive, permitted himself to be deceived by Ernst Heinkel's smooth and high-pressure salesmanship which, when applied to the He-177, was simply wanton. On 12 September 1942 Heinkel told Milch that the danger of the parallel-mounted engines overheating and catching fire was as good as eliminated, and that this engine arrangement would make the aircraft more serviceable than any other plane of the time. Heinkel also announced that his He-177 could be ready for use at the front at once if the General Staff of the Luftwaffe would waive the requirement for diving capability. 36†

It is to Milch's credit that he did subsequently insist upon a four-engine bomber, whereas Jeschonnek, even as late as mid-1943, showed

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*Werner Baumbach judged Milch even more harshly by commenting that "Milch's mania to shift all blame indirectly to Udet, who had been dead for one and a half years, can only be regarded as an effort to make excuses for himself." Oberstleutnant Werner Baumbach, Zu Spaet? Aufstieg und Untergang der deutschen Luftwaffe (Too Late? Rise and Fall of the German Air Force), Munich: Pflaum Verlag, 1949, p. 155.

†See figure 6.

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Figure 5
Germany's mainstay in the twin-engine bomber field, the Heinkel He-111

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Figure 6
Germany's "ugly duckling," the Heinkel He-177 heavy bomber. Two engines were placed side by side under a single nacelle, giving this four-engine plane the appearance of a twin-engine bomber

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little enthusiasm for it. Yet, it was also a disastrous omission on Milch's part when he failed to order a timely conversion of the pseudo-four-engine He-177 to a straight four-engine He-177. Milch's leadership of the Technical Office and the Office of Supply and Procurement did not result in the production of any significant new aircraft types until the appearance of the jets, and he nearly succeeded in awakening the High Command to the importance of the Me-262 and Me-163 as fighters for air defense operations.

The State Secretary of Aviation did save the Luftwaffe from a fatal standstill in the field of aircraft production and air armament, but he cannot be spared the reproach that he gave too little support to new developments in the Luftwaffe while there was still time to effect a turning point in Germany's air war. The Me-163, for example, a creation of the Messerschmitt engineer Prof. Alexander Lippisch, had been completed in several models as early as 1939, and on 10 May 1941 had flown at a speed of 621.138 miles per hour.[37] This plane could have protected Germany's vital production centers had Milch expedited its completion. He likewise failed to "put his shoulder squarely behind the wheel" in promoting the Me-262 jet fighter (and probably also the Arado Ar-234 jet), whose development was cautiously continued by Willi Messerschmitt despite an order in 1940 to halt new developments.[38*] In this entirely new area of jet propulsion Milch turned out to be the epitome of timidity, fearing that any failure in the program could bring about his dismissal.[39]

The State Secretary was hard at work raising the aircraft production levels when Hitler, on 15 January 1943, assigned to him the special project of attempting to airlift 300 tons of supplies daily to the

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*In a study on Milch by Generalmajor Hans-Detleft Herhudt von Rohden, a study strongly biased against the State Secretary, von Rohden said, "Although he realized that it would be possible for the Anglo-Americans to bomb the country with large, four-engine bombers, and although he knew also that the German fighters, especially in high altitudes, did not have the capacity to fight that kind of battle, he still did not make the decision to use the only means by which Germany might have been able to solve this problem: to bring the jet fighter plane to the fore in time so that it could have been effective. It had already been flown in 1939. Instead, it was his standpoint that it might be a risk to deviate from the dependable gasoline power unit and to decide on a totally new type of power unit."

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entrapped Sixth Army at Stalingrad.[40]* Milch was obviously mistaken when he said, in retrospect, that he could have accomplished this herculean task if he had received the order six weeks earlier. In reality, what Hitler ordered Milch to do was more than human strength could accomplish in the given circumstances. By mid-December of 1942, Generaloberst Friedrich Paulus, Commander in Chief of the Sixth Army, had already declared that it was impossible to break out, and rejected even the idea of making a try. Likewise, Paulus held little hope that his unit could reach the advancing relief force of Generaloberst Hermann Hoth (Panzer Army Hoth).

By resigning himself to heavy losses of Ju-52's and badly needed He-111's, as well as irreplaceable flying instructors who were assigned to him, Milch actually managed to increase the amount of already seriously insufficient supplies available for the hapless Sixth Army, even though the airfields of Morozovskaya and Tatsinskaya had been lost to German forces by January of 1943. Milch never spared himself, nor was he lacking in energy in attempting to solve this difficult logistical problem; hence Hitler did not withdraw his confidence in him when the operation failed to prevent the final disaster at Stalingrad on 2 February 1943. On 28 January Milch was at the height of his prestige and indicated that his judgments concerning the Stalingrad situation were sound and straightforward. Hitler appreciated his candor.[41] In a lengthy session on 5 March 1943 it was clear that the Fuehrer not only had an "open ear" for Milch and his appraisal of the situation, but that he warmly agreed with him.

Kesselring also noted that Milch was then at the very pinnacle of prestige with the Supreme Command, and that he had had a chance to prove his efficiency at the front. Because of this, Kesselring believed that the Luftwaffe could still have been saved at the end of 1942 or the turn of the year 1943 if the State Secretary, or von Richthofen or

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*Editor's Note: The Sixth Army required 400 tons of supplies daily. The highest amount ever delivered was never as much as 300 tons, and generally was 100 tons or less. See Generalleutnant (Ret.) 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, 334-356. See also Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East, Army Historical Series, ed. Stetson Conn, Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1968, pp. 75-80.

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von Greim, had taken Goering's place as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe.[42]*

The post which had been held by Ernst Udet and which was taken over after his demise by Milch was not an enviable one. More and more as Hitler began to express his annoyance with Goering and the progressive weakening of the German air forces, the embittered Reichsmarschall felt compelled to resist with all his might the curtailment of his own powers and influence. Hence, he began to exert pressures downward, and the State Secretary-Chief of Supply and Procurement was the first person to feel the impact of these attacks. Goering, in the discussion of 3 October 1943 (during which time he condemned his former best friend, Udet), became coarse and blustering, shouting:

> What does the Field Marshal [Milch] think he's doing anyway? . . . Six months ago he told me not to worry, that by this time everything would be in order. What kind of a pig-sty is this? . . . Things have become worse than they were under Udet! Where is the increased production? There is none, except for the fighter planes! If the construction of bombers is stopped, then it's no trick to produce more fighters![43]

As Goering's influence over Hitler diminished to the point of a tensely camouflaged "crisis," the relationship between Goering and Milch deteriorated correspondingly. Comments carelessly made by the State Secretary came to the ears of the Reichsmarschall, making him (who knew only too well how insecure was his seat in the saddle) still more furious and suspicious. One day Goering revealed to his old comrade and Chief of Luftwaffe Personnel, Generaloberst Bruno Loerzer, that he wanted to make him head of a new office, Chief of Personnel Armament, which was to be directly subordinate to the Reichsmarschall, and in which all personnel offices would be united.[/] Then, according to Loerzer:

> Goering took from Milch all jurisdiction over legal matters, which Milch had held until then, as well as the right to grant pardons. Practically nothing was left to Milch. His position as State Secretary had been completely undermined. I asked Goering, "What is Milch

*See Chart No. 9

/See Chart No. 10.

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to say to that?" He answered me, "I want to have these things close to me. Milch is always working against me."[44]

The State Secretary can hardly be blamed for feeling uncomfortable. To make matters worse, while the Anglo-American air forces were delivering heavy blows to the German air armament industry and were preventing the increased production of fighter planes from materializing as well as Milch had anticipated, the Speer Ministry was treating the Luftwaffe badly. Otto Karl Saur, the chief authority in this Ministry, took two important plants away from the Luftwaffe in 1943, one of which was a crankshaft factory that had been laboriously built up before the war.[45] "Saur," said Milch, "was constantly sabotaging our defense work. He was getting the Luftwaffe down to the point of being turned over to a receiving agency."[46] That the work continued at all can only be ascribed to the friendship existing between Milch and Speer. Saur, however, paid little attention to Speer's orders that the Luftwaffe be given a better share of the available materials.

In February 1944 the Luftwaffe suffered the most dire distress from American and British air attacks. On 1 March, with the authoritative cooperation of Milch, a Fighter Staff (Jaegerstab) was formed, an organization established to protect the defense plants and to expedite fighter aircraft production. Speer and Milch were its leaders. Saur, at the request of Milch, became his chief of staff. For the tremendous defense work which then got under way, the Chief of Supply and Procurement (Milch) could not claim the sole credit. In fact, Milch's activities within the Aviation Ministry were rapidly drawing to a close. On 29 July 1944 the post of Luftwaffe Chief of Supply and Procurement was eliminated, and on 1 August the entire air armament program was shifted to Speer's province, both actions having Goering's approval. Milch then became the State Secretary of Speer. According to his own statement, the Fuehrer assigned him to work in Speer's office in order, some day, to become Speer's successor.[47] Although as Inspector General of the Luftwaffe Milch was still able to keep one foot in the air establishment, Goering also eliminated that post early in 1945. This act took Milch definitely out of the Luftwaffe, or, as Bruno Loerzer, a man close to Goering, commented, "Milch was organized out."[48] Milch's testimony also makes it clear that already in the summer of 1944 the Fuehrer had withdrawn his original plan for the State Secretary to become the eventual successor to Goering.[49]

Those who are severe in their judgments of Field Marshal Milch are of the opinion that he deliberately wanted to shift the responsibility

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for mistakes and shortcomings to Saur, by making him the actual head of the Fighter Staff in what seemed clearly to be a losing cause. 50* This would correspond to Milch's address as Chief of Supply and Procurement on 29 July 1944, when he told his co-workers:

> This rearrangement (the assimilation of the air armament program into the Ministry of Defense) is not the result of failure of any offices of the Luftwaffe or of the Chief of Supply and Procurement. . . . It was clear to me that something like that probably would develop when I, as the only one, demanded the founding of the Fighter Staff. The Fighter Staff is the child of my brain and of none other. 51

The establishment of the Fighter Staff meant the end of the independent functioning of the air armament program. Since Milch declared himself to be the originator of the idea of the Fighter Staff, no one could doubt the validity of the reasons he offered at the 29 July meeting for ending the independent status of the program. Everything that had transpired spoke in favor of maintaining the air armament program as an independently functioning entity. The question comes to mind whether things were really very much different when Milch was in control. In his own words, "In the matter of quotas and deliveries we were treated like the fifth wheel on a wagon!"52 As far as the problem of Saur was concerned, Milch definitely preferred to have this powerful and uninhibited man within the organization as a co-worker, rather than to have him in a position to exert powerful pressures from "just outside the door." Saur lost no prestige by becoming the head of the Fighter Staff, and even here he made a disputed, yet considerable, name for himself.

In April 1944, Milch was obliged to endure a terrible outburst of rage from Hitler concerning the production of the Me-262 jet. When the Fuehrer asked how many of the completed 262's were capable of carrying a bomb load, the State Secretary answered, "None, my Fuehrer. The Me-262 is being built exclusively as a fighter aircraft. 53 Milch, finally

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*So successful were the Allied raids in February 1944 that he rid himself for the time being of further responsibility for fighter production by shifting it to his greatest opponent, Saur. In June he also shifted responsibility for production of other flying equipment to Saur. Milch was by no means convinced that Saur could succeed in appreciably raising the production of fighters, especially since about 65 defense plants had been seriously damaged by the Allied raids in February.

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grasping the urgent necessity of turning out large numbers of jet fighters, found himself facing a deteriorating and revenge-hungry Hitler. Galland, and several other officers who were present at this conference on the Me-262, said that the Fuehrer was "foaming with rage," and that they had seldom seen him in such a fury. Milch, Goering, and the entire German Air Force were reviled and accused of unreliability, insubordination, and even treason. Milch was thus somewhat relieved on 21 June when he was deprived of his post as State Secretary of Aviation. He still had certain tasks, including that of Deputy for Armament and War Production and Plenipotentiary in Armaments of the Four-Year Plan (assistant to Speer).[54]

Within Speer's Ministry for Armament and War Production, Milch found no opportunity to achieve a field of activity of any scope. Ministerial Directors within this organization had the right of direct access to Speer, and Milch soon discovered that he would never again have a chance to show his capability in the field of aircraft or armament production. In the autumn of 1944, Milch was injured in an auto accident and confined for several weeks in a hospital. Upon returning from this sojourn he exercised very little influence within the area of German aviation. In March of 1945 he was transferred to the Fuehrer Reserve, from which he was not recalled.

Milch played a decisive part in much of the history of the German Air Force. At times difficulties which converged about him caused almost continuous unrest within the German Air Ministry. Milch was too much of a worker, too eager for useful activity, and too strong a personality to remain continually in the role of a deputy, but, despite his ability, he was never granted the type of position to which he was entitled, one in which he would have had complete freedom of action. His ambition and innate enthusiasm, his constant activity, and his impulsive temperament, which sometimes produced the strangest contradictions, made a number of enemies for him.* This had a distinctly unfavorable effect upon his already difficult position as well as on the judgment placed upon him by history.

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*Editor's Note: Ministerial Director (Ret.) Adolph Baeumker told the Editor that Milch made enemies easily, and that he probably would not have been tolerated within the Reichs Aviation Ministry and the Luftwaffe itself except for the fact that he was "the best technical administrator in Germany." See figure 7.

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Figure 7
Field Marshal Erhard Milch, State Secretary of Aviation and Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement, visiting the 55th Bomber Wing in the East, 1941. To the right: Col. Benno Kosch, Commander, 55th Bomber Wing

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Nevertheless, one must give credit where it is due. In the over-all view of the Luftwaffe, Field Marshal Erhard Milch must be regarded as a man of great ability. From the very first day he accomplished great things, and his prodigious capacity for work and his optimistic spirit caused him to fight to the last to prevent the final decline and collapse of the German Air Force, striving with all of his might to further the fighter production, which alone offered some hope of saving Germany from complete catastrophe.*

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*Editor's Note: In preparing the monograph on Erhard Milch, Professor Suchenwirth was hampered to some extent by a dearth of materials. The very large "Milch Papers" collection, so rich in details of the Reichs Aviation Ministry, the Technical Office, and of Milch himself, were held by the British Air Ministry. A few excerpts were taken from these Milch materials, but the mass of these records remained almost unexplored at the time this monograph was written.

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Chapter 3

ERNST UDET, CHIEF OF LUFTWAFFE SUPPLY AND PROCUREMENT

One of the most colorful and best known of the five personalities who held the highest positions of responsibility in giving form to the German Air Force was Ernst Udet,* a man with cosmopolitan outlooks and numerous friends among the artists and intellectuals.[1] His appointment in 1936 to a high post in the Luftwaffe undoubtedly invested the German air arm with some of the magic surrounding his famous name.[2]

Udet, who served as Luftwaffe Chief of Supply and Procurement (Generalluftzeugmeister) until his death,[3] was the first German Air Force leader to surrender to despair concerning Germany's chances for an ultimate victory, and to see no further purpose in life or possibility for his continued existence in a high military post.[4] Strangely enough, Udet was the most cheerfully serene leader in the Luftwaffe, and a man who seemed, at least outwardly, to be the most confident officer of them all. When he later took his own life, the particulars of his suicide were withheld from the public for fear of the possible interpretation which might have been put upon it by enemy military leaders and foreign powers as well as by the German people. His death was officially attributed to an air accident, which helped to produce a legend about this famous personality.[5] It was broadly hinted that Hitler, Goering, and even Milch

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*The literature on Ernst Udet is extremely limited. Juergen Thorwald published in 1954 a book entitled, Ernst Udet: Ein Fliegerleben (Ernst Udet: A Flyer's Life), Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, with a supplement which deals with Udet's role in German air armament and also with his final collapse. Unfortunately, there is no bibliography, and the entire supplement is handled in a journalistic style. According to a letter from the flyer's sister, Maria Udet, to the author, dated 12 December 1956, she assisted Thorwald in preparing the summary.

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might well have had a hand in his demise.[6]* In reality, Udet's suicide was the inevitable and final aspect of a breakdown in his personality and the disastrous events which he had so irrevocably set in motion. The death of this unusual man was the culmination of a life which, although apparently composed and settled, was intensely linked with a series of errors and signal failures in Luftwaffe planning, development, and production. All of these were, in short, cardinal failures in Udet's leadership of the Luftwaffe Technical Office.

His interesting and many-sided life and his popular appeal to the masses, coupled with an outwardly sunny disposition, helped to support the rumors and misconceptions concerning him which have persisted to this day.

Udet's Early Life and Character

Udet, the son of a businessman, was born on 26 April 1896 and was a flying enthusiast even in his earliest school days. Everything that went up seemed to enthrall him, whether it was lighter-than-air craft or airplanes. During World War I, while still little more than a boy, he became one of the most famous combat pilots in the Imperial German Army, and, with 62 aerial victories, achieved a record which stands second only to that of the legendary Capt. (Rittmeister) Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen, the "Red Knight of Germany." Udet's victory score stood three times higher than that achieved by Hermann Goering, Richthofen's second successor to the command of his famous Fighter Wing No. 1. Among a host of high decorations and honors Udet received the coveted order of Pour le Mérite. ⁄

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*In his book, Canaris und der Tod Udet (Canaris and the Death of Udet), Paul Beneke has attempted to trace Udet's suicide back to the systematic activity of the group of conspirators around Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, Chief of the German Intelligence Services. This view is clearly based upon an article by Joseph Ackermann, "Wie Udet endete: Ein Gespraech mit Heinkel und Oderbruch" ("How Udet Died: An Interview with Heinkel and Oderbruch"), Die Welt (The World), 16 October 1948. Beneke claims that Friedrich Grosskopf, Canaris' right-hand man, in alliance with a secret Gestapo group, drove Udet to suicide with warnings of eventual imprisonment in a concentration camp. Though bristling with errors, Beneke's article on the very "cleverly conceived intrigue of the Canaris circle" shows clearly that Udet's sudden death had assumed the magnitude of a legend.

⁄See figures 8 and 9.

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Figure 8
1st Lt. Ernst Udet, Pour le Merite winner and Commander of the 4th Squadron, Fighter Wing No. 1 "Rittmeister Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen," 1918

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Figure 9
Lieutenant Udet with his Albatros D-III and his mechanics Behrend and Gunkelmann, 1918. The number of his aircraft was D-1941, the year in which he committed suicide

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Flattered by countless dignitaries and much sought after because of his early fame, Udet declined after World War I to remain in the German Army, which had been reduced to a very small professional force and which, because of the Versailles Treaty, was forbidden to have an air arm. Yet, the spirit of flying was strong within him, and he was not disposed to let any restrictions prevent him from continuing to participate in air activities. In this intention he found a willing companion in the former fighter ace Robert Ritter von Greim.

In 1921, with the assistance of an American of German parentage, Udet established a small aircraft factory. He soon merged this modest undertaking with another small shop belonging to the former fighter pilot Erich Scheuermann, a man who was destined to become a general in the Luftwaffe Engineer Corps (Generalingenieur). All of their work had to be carried on in secret because of the ban imposed by the Versailles Treaty against the manufacture of aircraft in Germany. This enlarged firm produced a low-wing model, the U-1, which was immediately turned out once the freedom to manufacture aircraft was permitted. In 1922 this organization was named the Udet Aircraft Construction Company. The plant was located in Ramersdorf near Munich, and the brother of the American who had helped Udet during the previous year was taken into the firm as business manager. The Udet Company built the Udet Hummingbird (Kolibri), which was soon followed by a four-seater, high-wing monoplane known as the Flamingo, and the four-engine Kondor, commissioned by Lufthansa (German Airlines). Only one Kondor was constructed.*

In 1926 Udet and Scheuermann became dissatisfied with the practices of their business manager and left the company.[7] Udet was still a young man, and lacked the patience to adapt himself to permanent relationships, in business or in private life. In 1918 he had married Miss Lo Zink, the daughter of a wealthy felt manufacturer from Roth (near Nuremberg), but after a few years their marriage was dissolved. Thereafter, Udet's interests, untrammeled by ties of any sort, belonged to the

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*Udet commented, "I left the Udet Aircraft Construction Company in spite of the fact that it was going well. The Hummingbird won the Rhoen Flying Show in 1924, and the Flamingo had already established itself as a training plane. But then they started to build large machines, the Udet Kondor, with four engines. I warned them, but they refused to listen to me. So, I left." Juergen Thorwald, Ernst Udet: Ein Fliegerleben (Ernst Udet: A Flyer's Life), Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1954. Cited hereinafter as Thorwald, A Flyer's Life.

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world, and the world reciprocated by admiring not only the fighter pilot hero of World War I, but also the newly-discovered, and most daring, stunt pilot which he had since become. Despite his talent for trenchant wit and his gift for perceiving human weaknesses at once, Udet was overly receptive to acts of friendliness and affection and quite sentimentally inclined. This helped him to find an open heart among many persons. He was an "ideal comrade,"[8] with a nonchalant manner of living, a man who seemed to have, despite this, a hard core of indestructibility.

Udet moved into the spotlight of international affairs, giving full rein to his natural tendency toward "Bohemianism." His pleasant manner captivated everyone with whom he came into contact, and his innate gallantry and genuine sense of humor endeared him to all. Wherever he went he made a wide circle of new friends, and revealed himself as a man of international understanding and good will. His talents in this direction were almost incredible. During this period he also demonstrated once more that quality which had been so characteristic of his philosophy as a combat pilot over Alsace, in the Champagne country, near Albert, and along the Somme, the element of dash and straightforward boldness of the individual feat, the constant willingness to accept great hazards, the moments in which fierce determination must be combined with technical expertness in order to accomplish the task at hand. Once the crises had passed and all dangers had subsided, Udet's irrepressible spirits soared again and became completely devoted to the enjoyment of life.

Udet cannot be visualized except in the open spaces, as a master of his fate in an airplane or as a crack shot on the hunt, a member of that free society of individuals who feel themselves to be subordinate to no one; he was never more in his element than when he undertook flights to Africa and the Arctic Circle for film companies. Yet, there were certain things which he never learned; the monotony of military service, the necessity for obedience, barracks duty, the acceptance of a mission which required regular, daily attention, a mission imposing the strictest limitations upon personal freedom and one which had to be systematically dealt with even when it appeared to be unrewarding. Udet had been a soldier, but he had never learned to accept the life which truly characterizes the professional side of the military service. He had been a wartime soldier, when men were needed for battle rather than for the routine garrison life of peacetime assignments, and served when there was flying to be done. Flying was a completely new field of activity, a skill which strongly appealed to the young, and which, in World War I, with its highly specialized missions, could allow its devotees a life of lordly independence. This situation was further enhanced by the unique character of the fighter pilot's mission. A man who must constantly

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reckon with the chance of death, and who encountered this in every dog-fight with an enemy aircraft, was bound to feel himself apart from the normal military order and to claim the right to be tolerated within such an order.

Udet never had any particular interest in political developments, and there was something of the citizen of the world about him which made him virtually immune to the claims of nationalism. National Socialism, which had so captivated the mentalities of many Germans, left him utterly unmoved, and it is characteristic of his nature that one cannot envision him as having been bound by any ties whatever.

And this man, a fearless daredevil and impeccably expert flier, devoted to his "compact" aircraft, in whose operation he had the reputation of being one of the top specialists, an artist of perfected talent, possessed an extraordinarily fine sense of the strengths and weaknesses of aircraft without really knowing very much about the technical side of aviation. He was one of Germany's national heroes, and his name carried a good deal of weight at home and abroad, but it was precisely because his name was so closely associated with Germany (even if Udet was not fettered by strong national ties) that he fell into the last insoluble problem which ultimately ended in tragedy.

One by one, Goering selected nearly all of his old "Pour le Mérite" comrades of World War I for the new German Air Force. Most of them were only too glad to answer his call, and the gap between their lowly World War I ranks and their service ages was generously closed by means of rapid promotions. Udet was naturally on Goering's list, for a service branch starting from scratch could hardly afford to ignore a personality who had already become a legendary figure.

Schiller once said, "Where everyone else loves, it is impossible for Carl alone to hate." Yet, it is not this well-known maxim, this invitation to follow an established example, which decided Udet's fate. It could not have been easy for him to withstand the temptation to join the new German air arm, for at that time all of Germany was caught up in the intoxication of a military resurrection. It is probably justifiable in Udet's case to conclude that his final motivation in returning to the military service was his dream of adapting to German use the dive bomber, which he had seen perform in the United States in 1933. While in America, Udet had become friendly with the American aircraft manufacturer Glenn Curtiss, and had even been permitted to fly the Curtiss

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"Hawk."* Responding to his plea to purchase one or more of these planes for German experimentation, State Secretary Milch arranged for Udet to buy two "Hawks" and to ship them back home. On 16 December 1933, shortly after his return to the Reich, Udet made the first trial flight with the newly-acquired American aircraft.[9] He was soon asked to attend an office chief's meeting in the Reichs Aviation Ministry. This conference was devoted to the question of whether or not Germany should also begin to construct dive bombers. Several years previously, engineers of the Junkers firm had brought up the dive-bomber question, but the matter had never progressed beyond the discussion stage. At the 31 January 1934 meeting the matter was resolved and Goering issued orders to proceed with the dive bomber.

A comparative performance test was made on 17 April 1934 at Jueterbog, using the Arado-68, the He-51, and the Curtiss "Hawk." Milch and the office chiefs were present during the trials, and Udet and Ritter von Greim flew the two Curtiss "Hawks" during the main tests. One of the "Hawks" was apparently damaged in the course of these flights, and on 20 July 1934 Udet lost control of it during a test and was forced to bail out.[10]

At that time Udet was not yet a member of the Luftwaffe and had no active part in military life. It is true that upon his return home to Germany he found conditions radically changed, aviation having in the meantime caught the imagination of the new regime. Moreover, the German Aviation Association (Deutscher Luftverband) had come into being under the leadership of Pour le Mérite winner Bruno Loerzer, and Udet, a pilot comrade of Loerzer, had been given the honorary rank of vice commander. Yet, Udet was no more than a highly respected aviation expert, and, from the point of view of the military, an outside expert. Despite this, his continuous contact with military aviation circles, because of his involvement with the dive bomber, moved him ever closer to the resumption of a soldier's life. An established connection with the new branch of service, lively contact with its leading personalities, the chance to influence aircraft developments by his carefully considered advice, and the opportunity to fly as many aircraft as he wished were surely strong inducements in this direction.

Juergen Thorwald mentions that there were differences of opinion between Udet and Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen (who was in charge of development in the Air Technical Office [C-Amt] under Wilhelm

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*See figure 10.

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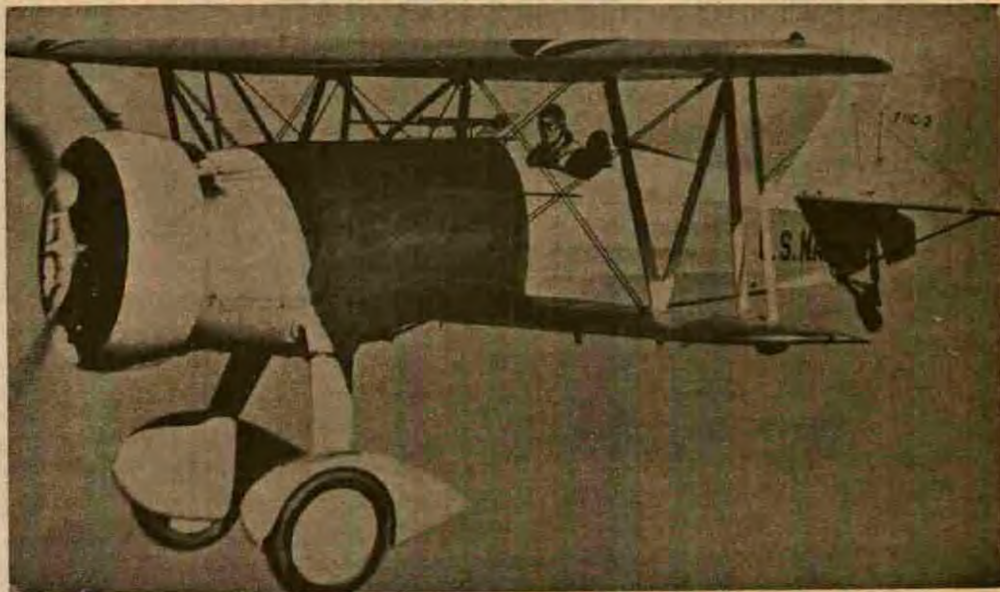

Figure 10
A 1933 model Curtiss "Hawk" fighter and dive-bomber similar to the aircraft purchased by Udet and brought back to Germany for testing, leading to the development of the "Stuka"

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Wimmer) concerning the dive bomber, but Field Marshal Milch refuted such a contention, saying:

> I have no information about any differences of opinion regarding the dive bomber. I cannot imagine that such conflicts could have occurred, since I myself had ordered the development of the dive bomber. In any case, there can be no question about the prompt execution of the orders issued by me.[11]

Chief of the Technical Office

The decision to take Udet into the Luftwaffe was already in the making. On 1 June 1935 he entered the German Air Force with the rank of colonel,* and on 10 February 1936 was appointed to succeed Ritter von Greim as Inspector of Fighter and Dive-Bomber Forces. In this capacity, Udet, a connoisseur of small aircraft, was right in his element, and was finally in a position to influence aviation matters to a great extent. Thus, one of Germany's most talented pilots had come to a point where he had a force of enthusiastic and youthful workers and the opportunity to advance hiw own wishes in developmental work.

It was unfortunate for Udet and for the Luftwaffe that he did not hold this position (for which he was so ideally suited) for a longer time. On 9 June 1936 he was named Chief of the Technical Office, a far more comprehensive area of responsibility and a completely different kind of job.≠

Thorwald's suggestion that Goering had exerted considerable influence in winning Udet for the Luftwaffe seems highly unlikely in view of the fact that there had never been a particularly close relationship between those two men, even during World War I when they served together in the famous Richthofen Fighter Wing No. 1. After the war there was even less contact between them, and their very natures almost precluded intimate relationship, since Goering always manifested his desire to dominate and to make the weight of his personality felt, while Udet was delighted simply to enjoy the fame his ability had won for him and was

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*Udet's appointment as a colonel was the result of a joint decision by State Secretary Erhard Milch, Generalleutnant Walther Wever, Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, and Generalmajor Hans-Juergen Stumpff, Chief of Luftwaffe Personnel.

≠See Charts Nos. 4 and 5.

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always ready to put his talents to a test, whether it was in a marksmanship contest or in the sketching of caricatures, which so clearly revealed his gift for sharp observation. Moreover, Udet was sensitive, and disliked being pushed around by someone more ruthless than himself. He was, in fact, much more reserved and refined in temperament than the "Iron Man," the name given to Goering by Udet late in World War I.

Because of this, Milch probably has presented the most likely version of the deliberations leading to Udet's appointment as Chief of the Technical Office:

> Hitler quite properly saw in Udet one of Germany's greatest pilots. Unfortunately, he also saw in him, quite erroneously, one of Germany's greatest technical experts in the field of aviation. Bowing to necessity, Goering appointed Udet to the post of Chief of the Technical Office. This was surely not easy for him, for he and Udet had been on anything but good terms for the past decades. Goering informed me of Udet's appointment on 4 June 1936 in a detailed discussion which touched a good deal on personality factors. It goes without saying that I voiced a number of objective reservations, but I do not believe that Goering made any attempt to understand these. For him the important thing was to enhance his own position with Hitler.[12]

With his appointment as Chief of the Technical Office, the wheels of destiny were set in motion for Udet as a person. At the same time, the appointment entailed the grave risk that in the long run his appointment might turn out to be detrimental for the fields of development and procurement in the Luftwaffe. No one had been more free than Udet for the previous 17 years, and the only responsibilities he had accepted in all that time were those which just happened to coincide with his own desires, none of which involved long-term responsibility. Above all, no one had ever tied him down to a desk or committed him to a definite routine. The plain fact was that actual professional military service was something entirely new to him, especially the constant awareness, even in the highest ranks of the need to be a shining example of order and self-discipline.

Udet's new and comprehensive position was not dependent upon the military environment alone. This was merely the inner framework of his position, a framework enclosed by an outer one which was neither integrated nor even attached from the military point of view. Instead, it was a part of the free and independent world of business, yet one

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which was vitally important to the Luftwaffe. Udet had to cope with Germany's young aviation industry, which was ambitious, eager for power, and bristling with special business interests that soon mushroom around any new industry. This was a harsh and difficult world, and anyone entering into it had to be firmly grounded in his special areas of interest and responsibility, and to have a gift for evaluating human attitudes and conduct in order to avoid its pitfalls. Absolute consistency was necessary, as well as the coolness to be on guard and to weigh statements with care, especially those bearing upon decisions of importance. All this was vital in order to avert involvement in dangerous and unbreakable commitments resulting from hasty or ill-advised acts.

A talent for leadership was of paramount importance. This included not only the ability to place the right man in the right job in one's immediate staff and to compensate by careful countermeasures for any weaknesses which might appear, but also the ability to guide ambitious and fanatically egotistical aircraft designers and business directors of the aviation industry into a common area of endeavor, where their obviously great capabilities and energies could be properly utilized for the benefit of the entire nation rather than for the aggrandizement of the separate little "empires" of the individual firms. This was indeed a formidable task to impose upon a man like Udet, an artist who was inclined to make judgments on the dictates of the heart rather than the mind, a man open to friendship and averse to time-consuming business transactions, always ready for a discussion with friends, even if it turned into an all-night session, a connoisseur of the delicacies to be enjoyed at Berlin's famous Horcher Restaurant, passionately devoted to the hunt, highly susceptible to the smooth and cleverly-worded invitations of the ruthless and coldly realistic business managers of the aviation industry, invitations which slyly managed to take advantage of the industry's new-found "pal" in his natural and unguarded moments of human weakness. Such a situation was bound to give rise to disappointments, which, in turn, tended to arouse distrust on the part of the party suffering from them. And, if the suspicious person is sufficiently lacking in knowledge of human nature, his distrust might take such a childish and awkward form that it would fail to serve a useful purpose, namely, to put the distruster on guard against those who would "use" him for their own selfish interests. Such a feeling of distrust is even more apt to do harm when a sensitive, naive individual finds himself confronted by what appears to him to be a "stone wall." Unfortunately, Udet, the soul of open-hearted sincerity, did not succeed in introducing an aura of willing cooperation into the aviation circles around him.

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Udet could have maintained himself in the exceedingly important function of directing the Technical Office in the Reichs Aviation Ministry and in the even more far-reaching and responsible area of activity which fell to him with his appointment as Chief of Supply and Procurement if he had only had the assistance of a completely objective and energetic chief of staff, one well-versed in the ways of the business world. Even in these circumstances, there would have been enough difficulties with which to cope, and certainly his chief of staff, Generalmajor August Ploch, was far from being the kind of chief described above. Unfortunately, the appealing quotation, "The individual grows when confronted with higher purposes," must all too often be interpreted to mean that the individual's demands upon life and the overestimation of his own abilities grow rapidly to keep pace with the "higher purposes," while basically he remains the same man he always was, a man who becomes increasingly helpless in the face of a reality demanding a higher performance and competence.

One must not be tempted to minimize the grave difficulties involved in the technical equipment of a service branch that had grown up almost overnight from scratch, especially in a country whose raw materials were so seriously limited, whose other two service branches were also engaged in far-reaching expansions of their own armament programs, and whose government chiefs were simultaneously trying to carry out a large number of construction projects at the same time. All of this was taking place in a nation where everything was forging ahead in an almost breath-taking and intoxicating surge of development, a movement which was advancing too rapidly to be halted, despite the fact that the means available for its accomplishment were definitely limited.

The difficulties inherent in this situation were further aggravated by a revolutionary policy which implied highest responsibility on an all-encompassing scope. Motivated by the titanic goals to be achieved, it set a headlong pace which made no allowance for pauses to take stock of matters or to correct the mistakes bound to occur during the rush of preliminary planning, in order to prevent their being overlooked until it was too late to remedy them without having to accept the consequence that they might even mean the loss of another war.

When Udet took over the Technical Office from Generalmajor Wimmer, its organizational structure was horizontal; in other words, testing and manufacturing were on an equal level, and each of these departments dealt with all of the various types of aircraft and with the models of each type. In the quiet efficiency which had characterized his activity as Chief of the Technical Office, Wimmer had managed to

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provide his successor with an enviable legacy of developmental work which gave promise of bearing tangible fruit in the near future in the form of aircraft much superior to those produced by Germany's neighbors. These aircraft were the bombers, the Ju-86 (which, of course, later proved to be unsatisfactory), the capable He-111 and Do-17, whose flying characteristics in initial tests had aroused the enthusiasm of the undemonstrative Chief of the Luftwaffe Command Office, Generalleutnant Walther Wever.[13]

There were also two four-engine bombers, the Do-19 and the Ju-89, which were being tested by two aircraft firms. During 1935-36 there were three dive-bomber models being tested, the Ju-87 A, the Ar-81, and the He-118. With a perfectly clear conscience, Udet was able to decide on the more capable and robust Ju-87.* As a matter of fact, this aircraft later proved to be valuable during the war, first in support of the successful offensives of the Wehrmacht, and later (until almost the very end of the war) in support of German infantry forces in their unequal struggle against the Red Army.[14]

As far as fighters were concerned, the Arado, Heinkel, and Messerschmitt companies had all been commissioned to design an up-to-date model, and all of them had possible aircraft ready for testing. Soon after taking over office from Wimmer, Udet flew all three models in a comparative performance test and decided in favor of the Me-109, a choice which was fully justified in view of its subsequent highly satisfactory service. Viewing the situation in retrospect, the question arises whether the He-100, a faster aircraft than the Me-109, ought not to have been put into production as a second fighter model. The twin-engine Me-110 fighter also dated from Wimmer's period in office, but it failed to fulfill the hopes which had been placed upon it, a fact which was not clearly revealed until the Battle of Britain.

Of the models described, the Ju-86 was soon deleted from the construction program. In addition, the Reichs Aviation Minister decided to discontinue development of the two four-engine bombers, the Do-19 and the Ju-89, a decision for which Udet cannot be entirely absolved of responsibility, even if weightier opinions than his (those of Milch and General Staff Chief Albert Kesselring) were the determining factors in the matter. Udet, a World War I fighter pilot, was not particularly interested in a heavy bomber, especially one which, because of its inadequate Bramo

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*Editor's Note: The model accepted by Udet was the Ju-87 B. See figure 11.

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Figure 11
Germany's basic dive-bomber design, the Junkers Ju-87B. This aircraft became well known in World War II as the "Stuka."

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engines,* was relatively slow (according to Generalingenieur Herbert Huebner, the cruising speed of both the Do-19 and the Ju-89 was about 178 miles per hour).[15] The majority of aeronautical engineers shared Udet's unfavorable opinion.[16]

The first serious problem encountered by Udet in his new office was the critical state of the raw material situation, a problem which became apparent at the beginning of 1937. Primarily, it took the form of shortages in iron, steel, and aluminum, and had a catastrophic impact upon the Luftwaffe's program. Not only did it greatly delay the fulfillment of program goals, but it also prevented an urgently needed expansion of the armaments industry. The Heinkel and Messerschmitt companies were even forced to lay off valuable personnel as a result of the curtailment of their production orders. Needless to say, when the war began the lack of these trained workers made itself painfully felt. Luftwaffe leaders made no effort to avoid, or even to mitigate, the effects of the curtailed allotments by means of a drastic cut in their own program, in particular by a modification of the Luftwaffe's construction program.[17]/ But this situation had little to do with the sins of commission or omission perpetrated by Udet and his staff.

Udet had a valuable legacy which was just beginning to bear fruit, and he had access to the counsel of a man of wide experience in precisely the field in which he needed help. This man was State Secretary Milch. One must weigh the human aspects of all these things in order to judge with any degree of fairness. There is no doubt that the former director of Lufthansa was flattered to be asked for his opinions, and it was both necessary and personally satisfying to him, as the permanent deputy of the Reichs Aviation Minister, to keep the important sector of air armament under constant surveillance to prevent what he considered to be steps in the wrong direction. There could be no denying that air armament was one of the most vital fields in the Aviation Ministry.

These circumstances took on even greater significance after the death of Wever, when Milch (State Secretary) and Kesselring (Wever's

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*Editor's Note: A nine-cylinder radial engine made by the Bavarian Motor Works (BMW). Produced initially in 1933, it developed 650 h.p.

/From 1 April 1938 to 1 April 1939, 182,000 tons of the Luftwaffe's iron and steel contingent were allotted for Luftwaffe construction, the expansion of industry, machine tools, maintenance, and repair, while 380,000 tons were set aside for civil air defense programs. See figures listed in folio C/II/2b, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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successor as Chief of the General Staff) came into conflict concerning the leadership of the Ministry. Kesselring sought to strip the State Secretary (who had hitherto kept an eye on all of the Ministry offices) of every vestige of power, and had little concern about Udet. The Technical Office was subordinate to the State Secretary (in his capacity to act as permanent deputy for the Reichs Minister of Aviation), and, because of this, was not one of the offices being contested between Kesselring and Milch. The Technical Office was in direct subordination (with Milch's guidance and supervision) to Goering, who alone could decide what its status was to be. On 18 January 1938, when the Chief of the General Staff-State Secretary conflict was interrupted (although never finally resolved) by a top-level reorganization, Goering was obliged to intervene more directly than before in Ministry matters, while Milch was deprived of considerable power.* Udet and the rest of the office chiefs were directly subordinated under the Reichs Minister of Aviation.[18]

This reorganization of the top-level of the Reichs Aviation Ministry is recognized as the beginning in that body of a lack of cohesion and leadership. The changes wrought by this reorganization deprived the State Secretary of his authority to keep an eye on the Technical Office, but, in effect, provided no alternative supervision. Goering had no intention of stepping into the breach, although this was the logical and consistent thing for him to have done.

The new organizational arrangement was extremely significant to Udet. Goering's relationship to him (a former comrade-in-arms) became more intimate than to the other men directly under his command, even Milch. Consequently, it was clear that the right of direct access to the Reichsminister could have a more profound effect upon Udet than anyone else, except the Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff.

All this, of course, was bound to strain the association between Udet and Milch. The State Secretary was keenly aware that the reorganization had been primarily directed at his office, and he could not help but interpret Udet's direct subordination to Goering as a loss of another important area of influence, and may even have wondered if it did not come about, in part, by Udet's urging.

When Udet first assumed direction of his new office the relationship between the two men was harmonious, and the "Milchians" were

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*See pp. 142-143.

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always ready to assist the "Udetians" in any way they could.* Ploch states that the relationship between the two men was like that of father to son.[19] After the reorganization, however, Milch became more reserved, and it appeared to many that Udet, whose self-confidence had been immeasurably boosted by the change, was drawing away from his former friend. After all, the Luftwaffe, with all of its new aircraft models, was well on the way to becoming the best in the world, and on 1 April 1937 Udet was promoted to Generalmajor and on 1 November 1938 to Generalleutnant. His new position assumed further importance because he concurred in the overestimation of the dive bomber along with the Chief of the Operations Branch of the Luftwaffe General Staff, Lt. Col. Hans Jeschonnek, an officer who was obviously the "coming man" and who, on 1 February 1939, actually became Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff. Thus, Udet had become the spokesman for the prevailing opinion in the German Air Force on aircraft production.

In these circumstances, Udet, who was approaching the climax of his career, was not inclined to keep State Secretary Milch too well informed about his conferences with Goering and the activities of the Technical Office. He had no desire for a guardian, and now that he had been granted the right of direct access to Goering, he defended this privilege jealously and suspiciously. Udet's inclination toward suspicion was one of his more unfortunate qualities, especially so since he often held this attitude when it was wholly unnecessary.[20]

With the deterioration of his relationship with Milch, Udet lost a pillar of support which he badly needed, especially on the shifting ground on which he stood in the labyrinth of complex air armament functions. He therefore continued on without an experienced and level-headed advisor, being forced to rely more and more upon his own subordinates. This brought to an end the possibility for fruitful work in the armament sector of the Ministry. His chief of staff, Generalmajor Ploch, was not particularly helpful, since he too found it difficult to maintain a comprehensive view of all that was transpiring.[21]≠ Udet's adjutant, Col. Max Pendele, was a willing assistant as far as his own area of responsibility was concerned, but was not a highly competent advisor nor a solid supporting pillar. Udet therefore had no alternative but to place himself in the hands of his top engineers, whom he had made the most important

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*The two staffs were called (within the Reichs Aviation Ministry) by the names of the respective commander of each. See Charts Nos. 5, 6, and 7.

≠See pp. 40, 90-91, 103-108.

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people in the Technical Office. One of these, Generalstabsingenieur Rulof Lucht,* was younger than Udet himself.[22] Generalingenieur Guenther Tschersich, who is often described as a capable man in his field, managed to acquire a great deal of influence with Udet,[23] but, like his chief, was far more interested in development than in the extremely important field of procurement. Personally, he was not free from complexes himself, and his belief that things would, in any case, end unfavorably for Germany became progressively more obvious as the war went on.[24]≠

When a supervisor who is not entirely sure in his field falls under the influence of his subordinates, it probably lies in the nature of things that these subordinates then do their utmost to keep their chief isolated from other, outside, influences. Can it be doubted then that Udet's subordinates did nothing to mitigate the growing estrangement between their chief and the State Secretary.[25]≠≠

When Udet first took over the Technical Office, it was logically organized into four departments: (C-I) Research, (C-II) Development, (C-III) Procurement, and (C-IV) Internal Administration and Budget. Unfortunately for the Luftwaffe, all of this was changed on 1 April 1938, when the organization with its four strong subdivisions was replaced by a vertical organization consisting of 13 departments on an equal level. This meant that the chief of the office then had to deal with 13 rather than the previous four department directors. The reorganization also ended what Udet needed most, a small staff with a high degree of authority directly under him, a staff capable of coping with a large variety of problems on its own and trained to bring only the most complex matters to

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*Lucht at this time was about 34 years of age, and had neither a "well-developed personality," nor "any experience in life." He had then been employed as a designer in an aircraft company for only three months, and was incapable of making an "independent evaluation of technical problems." Generalingenieur Herbert Huebner, although a stern critic of Udet, says Udet was more profound in his understanding of technical matters than his advisors. Industry was well aware of this and took good advantage of it.

≠Generalstabsrichter Dr. Alexander Kraell called Tschersich a defeatist.

≠≠In view of the rancor with which Milch later spoke of Tschersich, one can assume that Milch did not exonerate him from fault in the instigation of misunderstandings with Udet. In interviews with the author on 27 September 1954 and 2 September 1955, Field Marshal Milch described Tschersich and Ploch as "Udet's evil spirits."

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the chief's attention. Instead, there were a large number of department leaders looking to him for decisions, which was hardly ideal for a man as busy as Udet and as averse as he was to the bureaucratic routine of office. The result of the organizational change was that department heads soon had to wait for months to get an opportunity to see their chief.[26]

One would think that the flaws in the new organization would soon have become apparent and that the organizers were merely waiting for a favorable opportunity to simplify the structure once again, but this was not the case, probably because the Ministry's top-level staff was completely unaware of the difficult situation in which the individual departments found themselves because of the change.

Then, when the gigantic office of the Chief of Supply and Procurement was established on 1 February 1939, Udet directly controlled not only the 13 departments of the Technical Office (whose chief he remained), but an additional 9 departments, plus the 5 testing stations at Rechlin, Travemuende, Tarnewitz, Peenemuende, and Udetfeld, the Industrial Section (Amtsgruppe Industriewirtschaft) and the Supply Office. If there had been difficulties before, they now assumed astronomical proportions. There was no such thing as leadership in the new complex; there was hardly any such thing as administration. Udet simply went through the motions of presiding over the mammoth agency, while his real interest, like that of Ploch and Lucht, continued to lie in the field of aircraft development.* It is no wonder that the Office of Chief of Supply and Procurement, with its total of 26 departments, had no firm internal organization, nor is it surprising that it was incapable of a harmonious effort to overcome its own difficulties. Generalstabsrichter (Ret.) Freiherr von Hammerstein, the Luftwaffe's top legal officer, came to know supply and procurement organization intimately because of the investigation which was initiated against the leading officials of the Technical Office after Udet's death. Hammerstein said, "Internally everyone was working against everyone else."[27]

Hammerstein points out that during Udet's conferences with Goering the two discussed old times and rarely discussed any "official business." Goering himself admitted that the mention of work was scrupulously avoided.[28] For the chief of a gigantic organization to go frequently for months without seeing his department heads and for the commander in chief of a service branch to restrict his conferences with the man in charge of armaments to reminiscenses of old times instead

*See figure 12.

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Figure 12
Generaloberst Ernst Udet, Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement and Inspector of Fighter and Dive-Bomber Units, January 1940

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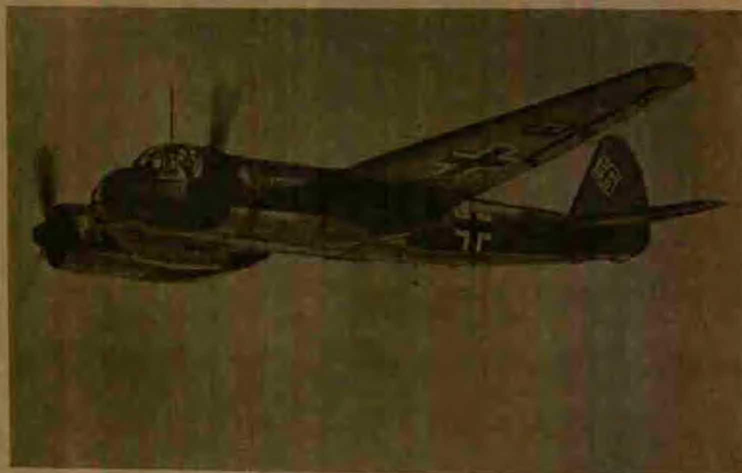

Figure 13
A bomber about which Luftwaffe leaders were overly optimistic, the Junkers Ju-88

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of informing himself about the problems of that sector of his command were dark and ominous signs.

In his key position as Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement and Chief of the Technical Office, Udet's relationships with industry were bound to play an important role. In reality, however, these relationships were not conducive to promoting any satisfactory achievements. Udet got on well with the larger firms, in fact sometimes very well, but the consensus of opinion is that he was "no match for the tricks of the industrialists."[29] His fellow protagonists were experienced businessmen, jealously determined to increase their power through the volume of Luftwaffe orders, while two of them (Ernst Heinkel and Willi Messerschmitt) were highly competent engineers as well. Moreover, Messerschmitt was a trusted confidant of Hitler, who considered him to be a genius in his field. The aircraft companies all tried to seize as many orders as they could, even though it meant overextending the capacities at their disposal. During peacetime as well as during wartime, the industrialists remained incorrigible individualists and egotists, while the exigencies of the time were demanding a spirit of self-effacement and sacrifice from everyone else. Udet's behavior towards these industrialists was neither consistent nor self-assured, let alone firm, and, in view of the far-reaching importance of this sector of the armament program, there were certainly times when unwavering firmness was needed.

The estrangement between Udet and Milch was unfortunate to begin with. Later on, however, when the first real difficulties and genuine disappointments began to crop up following the successful early years, it became positively detrimental. The old huntsman Udet had stumbled into a pitfall which was to be as disastrous to himself as it was to the Luftwaffe. This trap concerned the two aircraft models, Ju-88 and He-177.* In each of these two cases the aircraft represented a thoroughly feasible aeronautical idea. Great hopes were placed in both of them, and in the case of the Ju-88 an all-out effort was ordered and full authority granted to insure its timely production in quantities to impress the world. This was designed as a high-speed bomber with a long penetration range. If the aircraft was able to meet the range objectives (620 miles) of its designers, it would then be able to cover all of Great Britain and the waters surrounding it.‡ According to Maj. (GSC) Helmuth Pohle, in the spring of 1938 the General Staff intended to requisition only 200 test models of

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*See figures 13 and 6, respectively.

‡Editor's Note: This would entail using bases in northern and western Europe.

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the Ju-88 (all equipped for diving performance) as a basis for further development. However, these planes were suddenly released for mass production in the autumn of 1938, mainly because of the Czechoslovakian crisis.[30] Owing to the speed of the Ju-88, the Technical Office calculated that its armaments could be reduced as well as the overall weight of the aircraft.

This estimation was shattered by the demand of the Luftwaffe General Staff for diving performance. This requirement was fostered and advanced by a group of young engineers, especially one named Schmedemann, although Udet liked the idea as well. For a twin-engine aircraft to be capable of dive performance, it required a much more solid and robust construction as well as the installation of dive brakes; this, in turn, meant decreasing the speed because of a considerable increase in weight. As if this were not enough, the decreased speed then made it mandatory to install additional airborne armament. According to the original plans the plane was to have a flying weight of about six tons, which would have allowed its development into a really high-speed bomber, but by the time the plans had been altered for the last time, the weight had increased from six to nearly 13 tons.[31*] Milch describes the final result as a "flying barn door which was capable of becoming a bird again" only after it had dropped its load of bombs.[32≠] In connection with the increase in weight of the Ju-88, Dr. Heinrich Koppenberg, Member of the Board of Directors of the Junkers firm, mentioned the "horrendous number of changes, some 25,000 in all," which contributed to the problem.[33]

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*A report from Dr. Heinrich Koppenberg, dated 20 October 1944 (a report which is not free of an attempt at self-justification by attacking others), mentions a decrease in speed of the Ju-88 from 340 to 185 miles per hour in a flight from Dessau to the Zugspitze (near Garmisch-Partenkirchen) in Bavaria and back, a decrease brought about by additional weight.

≠In an interview with Field Marshal Milch by the author on 2 September 1955, Milch stated that the test flight of the Ju-88 was carried out with a streamlined version of the Ju-88, fitted with none of the equipment it would actually have to carry during combat, and with an engine especially designed to deliver a high-speed performance for a limited period only. Milch repudiated the role Koppenberg claimed to have played in the development of the Ju-88, and said that the entire text was performed under unrealistic conditions with the intention of deceiving those who were not well informed concerning developments as well as uncritical members of the audience.

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The notes made by Count Galeazzo Ciano of Italy during a conference between Goering and Mussolini on 15 April 1939 indicate how much confidence the Reichsmarschall placed at that time in the Ju-88: "This bomber," as Ciano quotes Goering, "has such a long range that it could be used to attack not only England herself, but also could branch out toward the West, to bombard the ships approaching England from the Atlantic."[34]

Goering's hopes, which were certainly shared by Hitler, became pressing obligations for Udet. He therefore breathed a sigh of relief on 15 October 1939 when he was able to unload these responsibilities on the robust shoulders of Koppenberg. On this day Goering gave Koppenberg general, over-all authority to requisition any other aircraft plants outside of the Junkers complex which might be required for the manufacture of the Ju-88. The industry was thus forced to give top priority to the Ju-88 program.* One of Udet's extremely clever caricatures shows Koppenberg as the magician who pulls one Ju-88 after another out of his top hat in order to meet Goering's demand for a strong fleet of twin-engine bombers. In another caricature, Udet depicts Koppenberg as a bull breaking into a factory compound and putting the laggards to headlong flight. The bull has one of the recalcitrant workers impaled on a horn.† One can almost feel Udet's sight of relief at being freed of the burden of responsibility and decisions which lay outside his field of interest, and his delight that this task had been assigned to another person, especially one who was also his close friend and advisor.[35]

Goering issued the mass production order for the Ju-88 on 3 September 1938 for reasons of political expediency before testing had

*Generalingenieur (Ret.) Dr. Walter Hertel, Chief Engineer of Heinkel Aircraft Company, mentions in his study "Die Beschaffung in der deutschen Luftwaffe" ("Procurement in the German Air Force"), p. 141, that the Reichs Aviation Minister sent a letter to Koppenberg on 30 September 1938 granting him plenary powers to take "any and all measures designed to guarantee the early mass production of the Ju-88 model in the greatest possible quantities permitted by the capacity available. . . . In keeping with these powers, Koppenberg was authorized to issue orders to all of the companies concerned in the manufacture of the Ju-88." The date cited in the text (3 September) is the date given by Col. Max Pendele in his "Zeittafel Generaloberst Udet, Chef des Technischen Amtes und Generalleutzeugmeister, 1936/41" ("Chronology of Generaloberst Udet, Chief of the Technical Office and Chief of Supply and Procurement, 1936-1941"). See pp. 35, 85-87.

†See figures 14 and 15.

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Figure 14
Udet's caricature showing Dr. Heinrich Koppenberg, member of Junkers' Board of Directors and plenipotentiary for stepping up the output of Ju-88's, shown as the magician "Koppenbergini" bringing forth dozens of Ju-88's from his top hat by a wave of the wand

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Figure 15
Another of Udet's caricatures, showing Koppenberg putting recalcitrant or lagging workers to flight in order to increase the production of the Ju-88

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begun. This is presumably the reason why so many subsequent alterations were made. Thorough testing was not completed until June 1939, which was just the beginning of the tale of woe.[36] Koppenberg was unable to justify the confidence which had been placed in him, and, despite his relentless urging, Hertel says, "he was unable to achieve the speed-up and increase in production as he had promised. On the contrary, his intervention did much to hamper the Luftwaffe in meeting scheduled goals for equipping flying units."[37]

The conferences and planning for the production of the Ju-88 occurred under the pressure of a potential conflict with Great Britain, a possibility which Luftwaffe leaders had not previously foreseen. Koppenberg's crucial failure--by the beginning of World War II there was only one group of Ju-88's complete with aircrews and ready for action--understandably resulted in a general feeling of anxiety. As a matter of fact, on the occasion of a joint trip through the Midland Canal (Mittellandkanal) in the spring of 1939, Lt. Col. Josef Schmid heard Goering remark to Jeschonnek, "What can we do about Udet? He can't possibly accomplish what we need!" Jeschonnek suggested that Udet be assigned four or five technically trained General Staff officers to help him, and Goering himself undertook to make the suggestion palatable. Later on, he reported that Udet had refused point-blank.[38]

Pendele's chronology of Udet records a visit on 15 August 1939 by Udet to Hitler, with the notation, "Difficulties in the mass production of the Ju-88."[39] The worry about the postponement of the production deadline for the Ju-88, which put it nearly a year behind schedule, was augmented by worry about its diving performance. The latest requirement demanding full diving capability cost the life of Capt. Freiherr von Moreau, a capable and highly-experienced officer. A few expert pilots like Captain (GSC) Pohle were able to achieve a dive at 80°, but Pohle's hope that average pilots could be trained to accomplish this feat was never realized.* Pohle, Technical Officer on the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, had been too optimistic in judging others on the basis of his own flying ability. During the war, as it turned out, the Ju-88's were used in diving attacks only over water, while the gliding approach was

*At his own request, Pohle was assigned by Jeschonnek to take over the testing of the Ju-88 after von Moreau's death. After four weeks, Pohle became seriously convinced that even average crews should be capable of operating the Ju-88 in use against specific, limited targets. See interview of Captain Pohle by the author, 18 April 1956, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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preferred over land targets. Thus, in the final analysis, the aircraft had been increased in weight and encumbered unnecessarily.

If the Ju-88 appeared too late on the scene, and without having achieved the desired diving capability after all, the long-range bomber (He-177) was not ready for employment until more than a year after Udet's death, and even then its performance was a source of bitter disappointment. But the sad history of these two examples of failure in Germany's air armament program had its beginning under Udet, and, despite the confusion and legends surrounding the story today, it is undeniable that the Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement played a significant role in the final entanglement of the affair. His part centered mainly on the problem of the diving capability of the Ju-88, whose flying weight had climbed to 29.4 tons by the time it went into production.[40]

According to Generalingenieur Herbert Huebner, the development of a long-range bomber was first ordered in the autumn of 1936.[41*] The General Staff had established its range at 3,100 miles with a bomb load of 2,205 pounds, and 1,240 miles with a bomb load of 4,410 pounds, holding a cruising speed of 310 miles per hour. Heinkel offered to design a large aircraft with two propellers, each driven by two power plants, much like his test model, the He-110. In the beginning, Junkers Aircraft Company was also in the running. The inspection of the mock-ups in the spring of 1938 by Jeschonnek, Udet, and Pohle led to their requesting a straight four-engine construction instead of the parallel-coupled engines originally designed. They agreed, however, that Heinkel could go ahead and construct a model with parallel-coupled engines and all of the latest gadgets. According to Heinkel's report, he personally asked the Aviation Ministry for permission to drop the parallel-coupled engines from the plan on 19 November 1938.[42] He claimed that the General Staff of the Luftwaffe refused on the grounds that the diving capability of the He-177 depended upon the aircraft having only two engines; a standard four-engine aircraft could not be put into a dive, and for this reason, the four-engine construction was out of the question. In contradiction to this, Pohle states that it was Lucht and Reidenbach who insisted in the summer of 1938 that the He-177 should be constructed to incorporate a diving capability. He maintained that he gave his permission to equip only one test model (the V/8) for diving performance. Huebner believes that the letter to Heinkel came from the Technical Office rather than the General Staff, and that it was the youthful aeronautical engineers assigned to the He-177 project

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*This statement is flatly contradicted by General der Flieger Paul Deichmann, who was at that time Chief of Branch I, Luftwaffe General Staff.

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in April 1938 (during the course of the reorganization) who were the real advocates of dive-bomber construction, and that they, eagerly supported by Heinkel's extremely energetic chief engineer, Dr. Hertel, persuaded Lucht and Reidenbach that diving capability was indispensable. On the other hand, Heinkel mentions that Udet himself came out strongly in favor of the diving requirement during a conversation in 1938, stating that, "The He-177 must be made capable of diving at all costs." To this Heinkel replied, "You can't make a dive bomber out of an aircraft of that size." To this remark Udet countered, "For all practical purposes it's a twin-engine aircraft. If the twin-engine Ju-88 can dive, why shouldn't the He-177?"43*

With this conversation, however, another problematical aspect of the He-177 was already apparent; should it be built at all? In this connection Udet remarked to Heinkel:

> It's possible that Jeschonnek and the General Staff may not even have any use for it. None of them think that we'll be going to war with England. . . . Before it was decided to concentrate all our efforts on the twin-engine, five-bomber program, the "Iron Man" . . . discussed things thoroughly with the Fuehrer. A war against England is completely out of the question. If anything happens at all, it will be a conflict with Poland or Czechoslovakia. The Fuehrer will never let us in for a conflict which might take us beyond the confines of the Continent. Consequently, it will suffice for any potential conflict if we have a medium bomber with relatively limited range and relatively low bomb-carrying capacity, but with a high degree of diving accuracy, in short, the new Ju-88. And, with the means at our disposal, we can build as many of these as the Fuehrer wants. At the same time, it will impress England and France sufficiently so that they will leave us alone in any case. We shall continue to develop the He-177 as an experimental aircraft, perhaps as a long-range aircraft for the Navy. But, the He-177 must be made capable of diving at all costs, otherwise it won't have a chance. 44

Later, in a report presented during a Luftwaffe General Staff trip to the Rhine in June of 1939, Pohle spoke only of an He-177 based

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*See figure 6.

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on the parallel-coupled design, noting that the construction of a large aircraft had been ordered because the Luftwaffe had no really effective bomber at its disposal for operations over large water areas, such as the Atlantic.

From the above we see that Udet, like Goering, and like Jeschonnek after him, accepted Hitler's erroneous belief that there would be no war with Britain for the simple reason that Germany did not want it. And, because of this overly optimistic and self-deceiving attitude, neither Udet nor the Luftwaffe General Staff really pushed very hard for the construction of the required bomber aircraft. This failure to evaluate the potential danger accurately was augmented by a failure to keep careful watch upon the development of the He-177, and the blame here must be assigned to the Heinkel Company, Udet, and the General Staff, but especially to the first two of these. The first model to be tested at Rechlin (19 November 1938) revealed unusually satisfactory flight, take-off, and landing performances as well as a good margin of extra speed for aerial combat. But, the test pilot, Ingenieur Franke, was forced to land before the trial could be completed because the temperature of the engine oil had reached an alarmingly high point.[45] This was the first clear indication of what was to be one of the basic defects of the aircraft.

It was a painful blow to Udet, who was not particularly fond of office routine in any case, when Hitler ordered him to stop going along on test flights after he had very narrowly escaped death on a number of occasions. His sphere of activity was increasingly limited, and one of his caricatures depicts himself firmly chained to his office desk.

Udet was in his element during visits to the aircraft plants, especially when he was able to guide foreign visitors over the premises to show them the available facilities. In his memoirs, Heinkel gives us a rather ill-humored report of the masterful aplomb with which Udet guided the French Air Marshal Joseph Vuillemin around the Heinkel plant in August 1938 and, in fact, even led him around by the nose a bit by representing the German air armament program to be considerably more extensive than it was in reality.[46] As we know now, guided tours of this sort played their part in maintaining the peace.

In a situation like this, Udet was an actor, and his performance was highly effective. After all, he was used to enthusing a world audience with his aerial acrobatics. However, while it was all very well to deceive foreign visitors on the grounds that such deception served the cause of peace, Udet had no right to deceive the commander in chief of his service branch or the chief of government of his nation by giving them over-optimistic information during their extensive tours, so that they were

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bound to draw erroneous conclusions as to the real strength of the Luftwaffe and the deadline dates by which they might expect new, highly significant developments on a mass-production scale. Yet, this is precisely what Udet did during a highly critical period for Germany's foreign policy.

On 3 July 1939 Hitler and Goering visited the testing center at Rechlin. Major Pohle, who took part in the inspection visit as a representative of the Luftwaffe General Staff, commented:

> The day before a dress rehearsal of the visit was held. During the rehearsal, Udet gave a speech in which he mentioned each individual model and made a number of very incautious predictions as to how soon each would be ready for testing at unit level. I immediately mentioned my reservations to Jeschonnek, and as a result Udet was more careful the next day. Any tour of this kind has a certain fascination for the participants. Goering simply let himself be carried along by this fascination, but Hitler was not taken in to the same degree. Nevertheless, this visit to Rechlin was poison, for Hitler as well as for Goering.[47]

On 13 September 1942 Goering gave vent to his reproaches with these words: "I witnessed demonstrations at Rechlin before the war, and I can only say, what bunglers all our alleged magicians are! The things which I, and the Fuehrer as well, were shown there have never come true!"[48] At this time his anger was directed chiefly against the industry, whose representative, Konteradmiral (Ret.) Rudolf Lahs, Industrial Group Director, was not even present at the Rechlin demonstration and could offer no convincing excuse.[49] In March 1942, however (again during a visit to Rechlin), Goering remarked, "Actually I had made up my mind not to set foot again inside the testing station at Rechlin after the way its engineers deceived the Fuehrer and me during an inspection visit in the summer of 1939, when they really sold us 'a bill of goods.' As a result of what he had seen during this visit, the Fuehrer made a number of highly important decisions. We have only our good fortune to thank that things turned out as well as they have and that the consequences were not more serious."[50]

Goering's comments were a reproach against the engineer personnel of the Luftwaffe, but especially those associated with Rechlin. Generalingenieur Huebner replied to this attack by saying, "It is clear enough that the full responsibility for the 1939 inspection visit must be borne by the Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement, Generaloberst Udet."[51]

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Hitler also mentioned the Rechlin visit as one of the reasons for the ultimate failure of the German air arm. Milch claims that he warned Hitler at that time, "My Fuehrer, the things which you are seeing here are things which will not be ready for use in front-line units for another five years."[52]

The Rechlin affair could have been dismissed as unimportant and might even now be considered insignificant except for Goering's testimony that the demonstration so impressed the Fuehrer that he was then determined to bring things to a head when the Polish crisis was at its height.

Udet was doubtless in a difficult position during the spring of 1939 as a result of the delay in the production of the Ju-88. Presumably his own hopes were based on the continuation of peace or at least on avoiding a war with Great Britain. Britain's declaration of war in September, followed shortly by that of France, must have made him extremely nervous. Once the worst had happened, however, the main thing was to increase production to such an extent that Germany could remain a match for these two strong antagonists despite the potential defection of her Italian ally. Germany's armament program was still at a disadvantage in consequence of the curtailment of raw material allotments in 1937 and the subsequent reduction in production figures. In such circumstances it is impossible to understand why there was no over-all industrial mobilization at the beginning of the war. Instead, German industry continued to produce on a peacetime basis, just as before the war.

Unfortunately, there is no information to indicate what measures were taken by the Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement to bring about total mobilization.* One can hardly be expected to believe that Udet, in his highly responsible position as head of a vitally important agency, should have left any stone unturned in an effort to achieve all-out mobilization of industry. The fact remained, however, that the German armament industry continued to operate on a peacetime basis and that the early months of the war, during which there were no enemy air attacks to interfere with its work, were permitted to pass by without being properly exploited. At the same time, British industry was engaged in an all-out effort, and the United States was beginning to expand its industrial facilities to permit the establishment of gigantic air flotillas. One is certainly justified in considering Germany's laxness in regard to her

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*Editor's Note: Much of this information was not readily available to the author at the time he wrote his study, but is believed to have survived the war.

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armament program during the early stages of the war as one of the main reasons why she lost it.

Heinkel reports that Udet visited him on 1 November 1939 and states, "I never really considered the possibility of a war with Britain." Udet's voice, according to Heinkel, was no more than a murmur, as if he were trying to persuade himself of the rightness of his convictions. After this, he hastily drank a few brandies and, after a number of optimistic remarks about the Ju-88, which was to "smash the British fleet in its harbors" and "bring the British into a peaceful mood," added nervously, "We've simply got to get the He-177 into mass production at any cost!"[53]

The Deterioration of German Air Armament Under Udet

Although the development of the He-177 had been carried on with the utmost nonchalance up to that time, from then on no time was lost in rushing it into production (without even providing for adequate testing). All of the requirements and instructions from Berlin to the Heinkel firm reflected the nervousness of people who had lost their footing where they once assumed they were standing on solid ground. The plants at Oranienburg and the "Weser Flying Works" were to assume the manufacture of the aircraft, and by mid-1940 were scheduled to be turning out 120 per month. During an encounter in late March in Berlin, Heinkel found Udet in a highly restless state and smoking nervously. Udet remarks, "I hope there won't be any trouble with the He-177. The Ju-88 has caused enough difficulty for my taste. The He-177 has got to get into operation. We don't have any other large bomber that we can use against England. The He-177 has got to fly! . . . It must!"[54]

This mood of depression and anxiety was dispelled briefly by the storm of rejoicing over the triumphant campaign in France. Generalrichter Dr. Kraell remembered that Udet was exultant about this and repeated again and again that the "war is over. Our plans [the aircraft program] are not worth a damn! . . . We don't need them any longer!"[55]

The Chief of Supply and Procurement, like Goering and most of Germany's top-level military leaders in World War II, who never really thought through the terrible dangers inherent in such a conflict, had succumbed to the intoxication of victory. At the same time, Udet's fantastic optimism helped to buoy him up in the face of the nagging worry over low aircraft production, the unforeseen delays in the Ju-88 program, and its failure to measure up to the prescribed standards, especially in terms

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of range. Udet was further encouraged by being promoted to the rank of General der Flieger on 1 April 1940, and to Generaloberst on 19 July 1940.*

But this enjoyment was short-lived for Udet, a bon vivant and a courageous man who had the misfortune to be completely misplaced in his job assignment, a man who would much have preferred an airman's life, engaged in untrammeled combat for victory or death. The failure of the offensive against Great Britain, the mounting aircraft losses resulting from this seemingly endless struggle, and the disappointments connected with the long-range fighter model, the Me-110, were becoming increasingly painful. All of these worries affected his health and his ability to cope with problems.

In June he allowed himself to be persuaded by Koppenberg (who wanted to make his Ju-88 the standard bomber of the Luftwaffe) to postpone the production deadline for the He-177 by three months and to limit production to three aircraft per month for the time being. Udet's share in the development stoppage of 7 February 1940 (when his carefree days ended) has still not been established beyond doubt. Even the concept of the development stoppage and Udet's first reaction to the over-all affair require further investigation. In any case, the first rude awakening came when, in consequence of Hitler's contemplated action against the Soviet Union, air armament was placed fifth on the list for the allocation of raw materials. As a result, the Luftwaffe had to cancel all of its plans for expansion.

According to Pendele, this extremely unfavorable priority allocation came right after the armistic agreement with France. Germany's leaders, however, still under the spell of victory, allowed themselves to be comforted in the hope of an early peace. It seemed to matter little that the Luftwaffe fared badly in the allotment of raw materials, and neither the General Staff nor the Chief of Supply and Procurement tended to think seriously of their plans in terms of accumulated wartime experience or within the framework of the impending war against Russia. After all, the latter project must have occupied the minds of top Luftwaffe leaders from a fairly early date, and those who were most concerned ought to have made every effort to find a way in which urgently needed aircraft (especially those best suited for the coming action), and those

*See Udet's caricature in which he depicts himself "reaching for the stars," the last pip for his shoulder which would make him Generaloberst, figure 16.

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Figure 16
Udet, "reaching for the stars," a caricature of himself showing his quest for the third "pip" which would indicate a four-star general (Generaloberst)

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which were cheapest to manufacture in terms of raw materials, could still have been turned out despite restrictions and unfavorable priority ratings. Past experience pointed in the direction of establishing strong tactical air forces from which a strategic air fleet should have been created. Production of the single-engine bomber should have been increased considerably, while that of the twin-engine machine could well have been reduced, since single-engine bombers could have been utilized with greater economy in the coming conflict with the Soviet Union against relatively weak air defenses.*

Neither Goering, Jeschonnek, or Hitler were very much impressed by reasoning of this sort. There is no information available to indicate just when Udet was informed about the plan to attack Russia, nor is there any indication of anything being done by him to curtail the production of long-range bombers in favor of increasing the strength of the tactical air arm.

No attempt was made to meet the blow represented by the unfavorable priority rating by means of self-help, specifically, the modification of the construction schedule. Instead, Luftwaffe leaders continued to muddle along, and in this stalemated situation Goering's penchant for younger men, for the youthful, highly-decorated fliers, and his tendency to be all too easily persuaded by their advice, hampered the air armament staff because of the constant demands for additional alterations in the production models.

Udet's inveterate optimism was beginning to fade. Heinkel found him alarmingly depressed:

> I met Udet in the Hotel Bristol in Berlin late in October 1940, after the first phase of the Battle of Britain. I hardly recognized him. He looked bloated and sallow, as if he were being torn to pieces inside, in short, as if he were heading for a nervous breakdown. He was suffering from an apparently irremedial buzzing in his ears and bleeding from the lungs and gums, which certainly must have been due in part to his unsound eating habits--his diet consisted almost exclusively of meat--coupled with overindulgence in alcohol and nicotine. Primarily, though, these symptoms were probably the result of the terrible disappointment in

*This statement is based upon the conditions then prevailing in the U.S.S.R.

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> connection with the war against England and worry over the technological catastrophe it was bound to unleash. Udet drank a good deal more on this occasion than I had been accustomed to seeing him.
>
> "The Iron Man wants to shove me off to Buehlerhoehe," said Udet, referring to a well-known sanatorium in the Black Forest, "but I refuse to go!"
>
> A few days later, however, he did go after all, but soon returned to Berlin on his own initiative, just as ill and worn as he had been before, apparently because he was afraid of Milch's gaining too much influence in his office during his absence. When he moved into his recently completed house in the Stallupoener Allee in Berlin, he stopped short in the garden and cried out, "There's a cross on the door. I won't move in here!"[56]

The change which had come over Udet had progressed to the point where he was having premonitions of his own death. Generaloberst Bruno Loerzer reported a visit which Udet paid him in Amsterdam about this time. Udet wanted to fly right back to Berlin despite prevailing unfavorable weather conditions, while Loerzer, also an experienced pilot, warned him against it. Udet in a tone of hopeless resignation replied, "Let it go, Bruno. I don't have much longer to live anyway. Milch makes trouble for me wherever he can." Udet went on to say that the State Secretary never warned him ahead of time, but, as soon as failure became apparent, would say that he had foreseen it all along.[57]

Thus, within the Reichs Aviation Ministry, conditions existed which prevented the leadership from standing united together in the face of a war which threatened to annihilate Germany as a nation. These men were being driven farther and farther apart by their mutual differences of opinion and mistrust of one another.

Ploch, who referred to the initial relationship of Milch to Udet as that of "father and son," noted that:

> While Milch was away in Norway, being awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, Udet got along splendidly with Goering. When Milch got back, he saw immediately that his position of influence had been usurped. He realized right away that Udet had dropped him. This was quite possibly true, for our own inclinations (mine, Tschersich's, Lucht's, and Reidenbach's) tended in this direction. We felt that Milch's habit of interfering everywhere was not

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> beneficial and we were against his personal tendencies and his efforts to gain power. 58*

The above statement is substantiated by Field Marshal Kesselring, who noted that, "The relationship between the engineers and Milch was antipodal. Udet was in their hands, and it was chiefly Lucht who was responsible for driving Udet into a position of isolation."59

These two statements seem to exonerate Milch, in whom Udet came to see an enemy lurking in the background, and so, as a matter of fact, does the testimony of Generalrichter Kraell, who knew so much about the Technical Office.60 He emphasized the differences between Milch and Udet, and believed that Milch was aware that all was not well in the office of the Chief of Supply and Procurement. He recognized the difficulties quite early and worried about future developments. Perhaps he was even eager to show that he could do a better job himself. Surely he felt no real professional satisfaction in being appointed Inspector General of the Luftwaffe.

To the question of whether matters were really in such a bad state in the gigantic office of the Chief of Supply and Procurement an answer must be given in the affirmative. Production had risen only slightly over the peacetime level and, in fact, had even dropped below this level for a short time after the outbreak of the war, and this in spite of the fact that Germany was already at war with Great Britain and that war with the United States had to be viewed as a definite possibility in the near future.

Udet, an intuitively fine connoisseur of aircraft, especially the smaller aircraft, lacked the firmness needed to steer a sure course in aircraft production. It seems almost as if his luck deserted him at the beginning of the war. Mention has already been made of his vacillation concerning the production of the He-177. Then, as Heinkel has pointed out, in October of 1940, in a head-over-heels decision, the large bomber was rushed into production. The sudden order demanded time-consuming reorganization in the aircraft factories concerned. Heinkel indicated further that:

> . . . production had to be stopped until the plants had had time to retool for the large aircraft. All this was bound to take months. . . . The long-range, heavily-armed big bomber seemed to be the only hope. Yet, it was precisely in this respect that catastrophe struck. Now produced for the first time in quantity and subjected to thorough testing, the He-177 with its parallel-coupled engines did not measure

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*See p. 81.

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up to the military requirements for which it had been designed. Many of them went down in flames when their engines caught fire, or crashed when their wings cracked for apparently inexplicable reasons. Thus, as suddenly as it had been released for production, the He-177 had to be withdrawn once more. Time had been wasted, comprehensive preparations had been made in vain, and precious raw materials had been consumed to no avail.[61]

Udet's only recourse was to order the resumption of production on the He-111, whose employment had proven to be no longer practical in the Battle of Britain (after the Do-17 had earlier been declared unfit for use).

Udet was also worried about the Messerschmitt Me-210, the successor to the Me-110. He was to be spared the misery of having to go through the dreadful disappointments connected with the development of this aircraft. Engineer Eberhardt Schmidt, Production Manager of Messerschmitt AG, has described the numerous tragic accidents with high loss of life which ultimately resulted in an order to discontinue the Me-210. About 2,000 aircraft were lost, which ended the hope for a long-range fighter and high-speed bomber--the aircraft was intended to fulfill two distinct purposes--for the Luftwaffe.

Udet and Messerschmitt had been close friends for a long time, a relationship which continued almost to the end. They went hunting together, just as Udet occasionally did with Ernst Heinkel.[62]* Messerschmitt,

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*The investigation carried out after Udet's death failed to reveal any evidence of "pay-offs" or bribery in connection with contracts, etc. As far as hunting was concerned, however, it was a different matter. Hitler referred to the "green Freemasonry of the hunters," and noted that "The big industrial firms all had acquired hunting preserves to enable them to do business more easily with influential politicians who are passionate hunters. For, as the former Lord Mayor of Vienna, Neubacher, once said, 'Once a confirmed hunter has sighted a fine piece of game, you can get him to agree to anything you want.'" See Dr. Henry Pickert, Hitlers Tischgespraeche im Fuehrerhauptquartier 1941-1942 (Hitler's Table Conversations in the Fuehrer Headquarters 1941-1942), Bonn: Athenaeum Verlag, 1951, pp. 328-329. Generalingenieur Huebner points out that Udet and Tschersich were passionate hunters, and that "Heinkel didn't have a hunting preserve in the Rominten Heath for nothing."

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however, enjoyed direct access to Hitler, who considered him a designer of genius and thus entitled to preferential treatment. Because of this special status, Messerschmitt, who was already a stubborn individualist, was difficult to bring into line. Messerschmitt was especially careless about making promises, and one could never rely upon what he said. In addition, he had a fondness for daring and inadequately tested innovations. Once a model had emerged from the design and preliminary construction stages, he was apt to lose interest in it entirely. However, his most serious characteristic was that he lacked the requisite bluntness to tell Goering and Hitler the truth, a quality which was later to have extremely detrimental consequences.[63]

Udet, who had once been so carefree and so openly receptive to human relationships, was the man who was obliged to speak plainly to Messerschmitt in a letter, dated 27 June 1941:

> As highly as I esteem the performance of your creations, which are making a decisive contribution to our operations at the front, I feel it imperative to point out to you with the greatest emphasis that you are, in my opinion, moving in the wrong direction. Military aircraft, especially in time of war, must be designed on the basis of tried and true ideas; we cannot afford the luxury of making subsequent, time-consuming alterations. Proper design would also make the coordination between development and series production more harmonious. In this connection, may I remind you of the necessary strengthening of the wings on the Me-109 and the Me-210 and the delay in finding a solution to the tail assembly defect in the Me-110. Not only in my capacity as Chief of Supply and Procurement, with responsibility for insuring that production deadlines on new models are met and that their performance meets the standards set for them, but precisely in my capacity as your friend, I consider it my duty to inform you clearly that the path you are following is dangerous and capable of getting us all into serious difficulties. Precisely because of your acknowledged status as a designer, which in the past has brought you unbounded confidence and the highest awards, you must cultivate your feeling of responsibility and you must scrutinize yourself and your work more critically. . . . If I may give you a bit of advice, I suggest that you really begin to utilize the experience gained at the front and the recommendations of my staff so that the Messerschmitt name may keep its fine reputation![64]

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Despite a long-winded reply from Messerschmitt, scarcely a month passed before Udet was again forced (on 25 July 1941) to compose another letter to the aircraft magnate. This communication was necessary since not a single Me-210 had been released for testing at the front during the month of July, and one of this model had been involved in another fatal crash. Udet's language was even more to the point in this letter:

> I have the feeling that far too many changes are being made at your plant after the first phase of construction has passed. The test models and production-line models are so different that test results are completely useless when it comes time to try out the aircraft at field level. I hardly need point out the unnecessary duplication of work or the other operational costs and difficulties involved.
>
> One thing, my dear Messerschmitt, must be perfectly clear between us--there must be no more machines cracking up on perfectly normal airfields because of defective landing gear. After all, it can hardly be claimed that landing gear is an innovation in aircraft construction. Nor can the introduction of this model, which is to play a decisive part in the war, be delayed any longer than is absolutely necessary because of subsequent changes or modifications.
>
> All the unnecessary annoyances and indefensible delays of recent months force me, from now on, to apply more rigorous criteria in the inspection of your new models and to instruct the members of my staff accordingly. I request that in the future you keep them informed exactly, in order to avoid similar situations by means of more effective coordination.[65]*

In the lines of this letter one can sense Udet's deep disappointment. Interestingly enough, however, this letter, written on the letterhead of the Chief of Supply and Procurement, bears the handwritten notation, "not sent." At the time this letter was composed, Udet was already in serious trouble, but he held back the letter instead of letting it go out to the friend who had disappointed him so bitterly. Probably this all too sensitive person did not have the heart to transmit the message. Huebner reports a similar happening in connection with Dornier. Huebner had prepared a strong letter reproaching Dornier for certain defects in the Do-18 and had

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*See figure 17.

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Figure 17
Udet and his friend Willi Messerschmitt
in the "good old days" of 1938

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presented it to Udet for signature. Udet returned it to him with the remark, "I refuse to sign this!"66*

But Udet was also desperately worried about the air-cooled engine BMW-801,† production figures for which were only a third of the delivery quota which had been agreed upon. The two newest aircraft models, the Do-217 and the Fw-190, were the ones which were directly affected. During a speech in 1941 (the precise date is not known) Udet felt obliged to express the following complaint:

> This breakdown in air armament at the decisive point in the war is catastrophic and indefensible. It is particularly painful for me, inasmuch as I was the one who spoke up most warmly for the air-cooled engine and who ordered the development of the twin-row radial engine in the face of nearly unanimous opposition. 67

If these words are revealing of the personal misgivings felt by Udet, who had always been a good comrade and who now felt himself to have been betrayed, his letter to Engineer Friedrich Popp, Member of the Board of Directors of the Bavarian Engine Works Ltd., and the man chiefly responsible for the delay, expresses it with unmistakable clarity. In this letter Udet speaks of his "shocked astonishment" at the postponement of the delivery date for the BMW-801 and at the inadequate preparations for mass production of the BMW-800. He viewed the entire situation as "intolerable," and did not hesitate to express his personal feeling of injury:

> I believe that I have always acted in a loyal and sincerely friendly manner towards you, which was only to be expected in view of our long acquaintance. Thus I found it all the more disturbing when I learned that, as early as December of last year, you took the liberty of criticizing my decisions and my methods of handling the industry in a letter to Director Wolff. I should never have expected such action on your part in view of the relationship between us. 68

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*Huebner believed Udet was far too lenient with the aircraft industry.

†Editor's Note: A 14-cylinder, double-row, air-cooled engine. The A series was rated at 1,600 h.p. and the E series at 2,000 h.p. See Karlheinz Kens and Heinz J. Nowarra, Die Deutschen Flugzeuge 1933-1945 (The German Airplanes 1933-1945), Munich: J. F. Lehmann Verlag, 1961, pp. 586-587, 802.

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Armament activity for the Russian campaign was carried out at top speed, and the leading men in the aircraft industry were not able to keep up with the pace. Their models were either not ready in time, or, as was soon discovered in the case of the Me-210, proved to be completely unserviceable. The good old days were gone forever.

With the opening of the campaign against the Soviet Union all of the factors which had sown their seeds of disaster beneath the surface began to come out into the open: the lack of internal leadership within the huge agency, Udet's inability to cope with an industry which was neither innocuous nor reliable, and the isolation of a man who was more and more drifting along with events. Udet did not have a single strong personality to stand beside him as a loyal subordinate, and lacked any significantly strong personalities in the various subsections of his organization. The edifice had forfeited whatever solid foundations it had, and there seemed to be no way to stop the "swaying" so that armament activity could function smoothly and even speed up its tempo.

A firm hand had been conspicuously lacking with respect to the selective reduction of aircraft models then being produced and development programs which seemed unpromising. The fact remains that at the time things were building up toward Udet's downfall, the 16th major aircraft program since the beginning of the war had just been launched.[69*] The

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*In his study "Die Beschaffung in der deutschen Luftwaffe" ("Procurement in the German Luftwaffe"), Volume II, page 68 ff., Generalingenieur Walter Hertel gives the following reasons for the program changes: fundamental changes in the conduct of tactical and strategic operations by the General Staff; changes in the targets of military operations, leading to changes in the potential employment of aircraft and equipment; the practice of not informing the technical agencies until the operations concerned were already under way, which of course meant improvisation and a disruption of the production process; and, above all, the inadequate allocation of necessary production materials both before and during the war and the drafting of skilled workers from industry. In many instances, the industry was unable to fulfill Udet's programs because it simply did not possess the necessary capacity. And, since the production backlogs brought about by inadequate capacity could never be made up, half-finished products sometimes simply had to be scrapped. This, in turn, inevitably led to the preparation and directive for a new procurement program. Hertel, who is disposed to leniency, points out cautiously, "The reasons for the changes mentioned above still require detailed investigation."

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constant need for modifications which is reflected by this figure clearly indicates the degree of uncertainty present in the production program. However, it must be admitted that many of these modifications were the result of Goering's indiscriminate approval of every change suggested by his pampered young coterie of Luftwaffe stars and of the fact that Udet, in order to obviate any possibility of confusion, ordered a separate program designation even in the case of relatively insignificant changes. In view of this, the harsh words spoken by Milch on the occasion of a briefing of the Industrial Council on 18 August 1941 require some qualification. At that time, Milch pointed out that there had been 16 programs since the beginning of the war (one every six or seven weeks). He declared: "They were never followed, and no one even took them seriously any more. They were nothing but a basis for invoices to the Luftwaffe."[70]

Heinkel reported that he received a message early in February 1941 from his business agent in Berlin (a private "air attaché" such as those kept by all of the German aircraft firms) to the effect that the "confusion in the Technical Office and in the aircraft industry as a whole was beyond belief."[71]

That month Goering started an argument with his old friend, Udet.[72] The Reichsmarschall himself had been sharply criticized by Hitler, who demanded an explanation of why the German Air Force was so far behind. Goering realized by that time that he had made a mistake in supporting Udet for the task of Chief of Supply and Procurement and the Technical Office. The unfavorable production figures in the aircraft industry--these were ultimately traceable to the failure to order all-out industrial mobilization in 1939--had become intolerable to the Luftwaffe's Commander in Chief, just as they had to Hitler. Goering then told Udet, "If I were not in trouble, I wouldn't need you!"[73]

On the other hand, Udet--tormented by worry--was simply ignored when his concern over the increasing number of British flights over German territory led him to issue warnings such as the following: "If we cannot considerably increase the fighter forces and cannot go off the defensive by 1942, the war is lost."[74]

Udet was also concerned about the possibility of America's entry into the war. At about this same time, he also discussed the need for strengthening the fighter arm with Fritz Siebel, Luftwaffe entrepreneur and an old friend of his.[75] Siebel reports that the former dashing fighter pilot was "gravely ill, apathetic, plagued once again by serious hemorrhages,

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headaches, and an intolerable buzzing in the ears for which no doctor seemed to be able to find a cure."76*

The campaign in Russia failed to bring about the rapid victory which Hitler had promised to Goering and with which Goering had then comforted Udet. It continued to smolder in the summer heat of 1941, despite the many individual German victories which provided intervening high points. But Udet was no longer in a position to permit himself to be encouraged by promises. He had suddenly become a sick man, exhausted and incapable of making decisions.

Just before the beginning of the campaign in Russia, Goering had made a decision which was to have tragic consequences for Udet, and which was bound to wound him deeply, for this decision brought to the fore a man whom Udet had feared ever since their friendship had come to an end, State Secretary Milch. Yet Goering's decision was not a sword blow, intended to sever the Gordian knot, but only a half-measure, pointing in the direction of his growing determination to deprive the Chief of Supply and Procurement of his power.

Reorganization of Udet's Organization

On 20 June 1941, the Reichsmarschall issued orders to Milch to the effect that a "quadrupling of the present level of production in all sectors of armament" was to be achieved "within the shortest possible time."77 In order to permit the fastest possible accomplishment of this production increase ordered by the Fuehrer, Milch was given full authority to take whatever steps he deemed necessary in the following respects:

> 1. The shutting down and requisitioning of factories; The expropriation and mandatory renting of factories; the seizure and expropriation of construction materials with the concurrence of the Commissioner in Charge of Construction (Generalbevollmächtigter-Bau). The construction of temporary buildings without reference to the restrictive

*See Thorwald, A Flyer's Life, p. 178. Thorwald may have received this information either from Seibel or from Pendele. As a result of Siebel's sudden death in April 1954, the interview scheduled between him and the author never took place. It is most regrettable that, with Siebel's death, there was lost an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the personality and fate of Udet through the eyes of an extremely gifted and well-informed observer.

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regulations of the Building Control Office (Baupolizei), the Industrial Inspection Board (Gewerbebauaufsicht), civil air defense authorities, or welfare agencies, insofar as these regulations might hinder the earliest possible completion of the projects concerned.

2. The seizure, expropriation, and rental of machinery of all kinds and its distribution among the various air armament plants. The requisitioning of workers, regardless of whether they might be free for hire or already employed (no matter in what kind of plant) for assignment to construction projects as well as to air armament plants.

3. The confiscation of whatever raw materials might be needed for the Luftwaffe armament program, with the allocation in accordance with normal priority schedules to be applicable only to what was left over. This applies particularly to light metals and gasoline.

4. The removal from office or transfer of key personnel within the entire air armament industry, regardless of existing employment contracts. The dissolution or modification of previously issued plenary power agreements and the issuance of new agreements. The establishment of working teams and patent groups and the merging of companies. The establishment of new companies and the elimination of economically inadequate plants by integrating them into, or subordinating them to, better-run enterprises.

5. The deviation from existing regulations regarding wartime financing and repayment in those cases in which they might interfere with achievement of the highest possible increase in production. The economic and financial capacity of the enterprises concerned must be given due consideration.

6. Any decisions made or orders issued by my representative on the basis of this authorization are to be treated as though they emanated from me. Such decisions and orders are to be given precedence over all other official orders and decisions insofar as the latter may be deemed to stand in the way of the earliest possible realization of an increase in industrial capacity.[78]

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Mrs. Bleyle said afterwards: "In vain I pleaded with him, and begged him to wait. I told him that I would be right there. I heard the shot over the telephone. When I got there, he was dead. His bed was covered with notes, brief letters of farewell."[89]

The housekeeper couple who took care of Udet had already broken down the locked bedroom door and phoned Pendele. Before he and the physician, Dr. Bruehl, arrived, Mrs. Bleyle was already there. She called Paul (Pilli) Koerner, an old friend of Udet's, and asked him to come at once. On the wall over the bed, or on the headboard of the bed itself, were two small inscriptions in red, one of them directed against Milch and the other consisting of the words: "Iron Man, you deserted me!"[90] Udet's friends erased the inscriptions.

Goering, who was informed by Koerner through the Chief of the Luftwaffe Personnel Office, Generalleutnant Gustav Kastner-Kirdorf, declared immediately (as soon as he had recovered from the initial shock) that the suicide had to be masked as an accident. It was decided that Udet's death would be revealed to the public as a "result of injuries sustained during the testing of a new weapon." Deeply moved, Goering delivered a speech at the state funeral, in which he issued the following order of the day:

> . . . In Ernst Udet, the German people have lost one of the most victorious fighter pilots of the World War, one whose record was second only to that of von Richthofen, a shining example to our youthful fliers, and for the German Luftwaffe a bold and single-minded mentor.
>
> In prideful sorrow the banners of the service he loved above all else dip over the bier of this holder of the Knight's Cross and the Order of Pour le Merite. In the somber years that followed Versailles, and especially since his reentry into our ranks, Generaloberst Udet paved the way for rearmament and victory. As Chief of Supply and Procurement, he looked after the developing of equipment which the German Luftwaffe has forged into a mighty shield to protect the homeland and a powerful sword to smite the enemy. With great personal courage, Generaloberst Udet, aware of his tremendous responsibility, often insisted on carrying out the final flight tests of new aircraft models himself. And, only when he was convinced that a model was capable of meeting the most exacting combat requirements did he turn it over to his comrades at the front. His words, "To be a soldier means to think of the enemy

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Figure 18
One of the last photographs taken of Udet
before his suicide in 1941

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On 1 October 1941, Ploch left for the Eastern Theater of Operations. Three days later, Udet officially approved the appointment of the new office chiefs: Col. Wolfgang Vorwald for the Technical Office, Generalmajor (Res.) Karl-August Freiherr von Gablenz for the Air Force Equipment Office, Ministerial Director Hugo Geyer for Supply, and Ministerial Director Alois Czeijka for the Industrial Office. As Pendele aptly remarked, "By this time it was all over for Udet!"[85]

Udet's Death

There is little information concerning the month that followed. Udet probably took almost no interest at all in the work of his agency. According to Thorwald, Udet's old friend Engineer Fritz Siebel urged him once more to submit his resignation. But Udet had become totally apathetic, and could not even summon the energy to make a break.* Thorwald reported that one evening, about midnight, Udet stopped by to see his mother and sister in Mauerkirchnerstrasse in Munich just to say "good evening," and then rushed out into the night after replying to his sister's words of sympathy, "You have every reason to feel sorry for me!"[86]

On 12 or 13 November (on the 15th according to Pendele), Lucht, Pendele, and Ploch, who had just returned from the East, were at Udet's. When Pendele came back, after being away for a while in the afternoon, he found Udet terribly upset. Ploch had been telling him about the horrible massacre of the Jews in the East. According to Ploch:

> We were invited to lunch at Udet's, but nobody ate anything. We all drank French cognac. Udet said to me, "Plochinger, a man has to be able to shoot [himself]." I knew that he often carried a pistol in his pocket when he went to see Milch. And he had often spoken of suicide. I replied, "But, you can't simply shoot!" He broke off the conversation with the remark, "Ah, Plochinger, you just don't understand!"[87]

On the morning of 17 November, Udet telephoned Mrs. Inge Bleyle, the woman who shared his life, and said hurriedly, "Inge, I can't stand it any longer. I'm going to shoot myself. I wanted to say goodbye to you. They're after me."[88]

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*See figure 18.

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of the Office of Supply and Procurement. Milch's visit was hardly conducive to the successful continuation of Udet's cure, especially since Udet had, meanwhile, withdrawn his approval of the reorganization idea. However, on 7 September 1941 Goering gave Milch the necessary approval for organizational changes within the Technical Office and the Office of the Chief of Supply and Procurement. The axe soon began to fall. The most important members of Udet's staff were dropped, one after the other. On 9 September, in the presence of Ploch, Milch fired Generalingenieur Tschersich with a reprimand:

> As the Reichsmarschall's representative, I have asked you to come in to see me. He is not satisfied with your work. Your plans are inaccurate. Your attitude is one of constant negativism. I have been ordered to inform you of these facts and to let you know of his displeasure. You are herewith relieved of your assignment, and you are expected to tender your resignation. 83*

Milch also discharged Koppenberg (whose reputation was by that time already completely shattered) from his post on the Industrial Council. On 14 September, Udet agreed to the new organization of his offices, and on the 26th he returned from leave. The situation had changed so much in his absence that he was no longer able to hold on to his office chief, Generalmajor Ploch, who described the unusual circumstances at that time:

> It was a beautiful Sunday when I went out to see Udet in his apartment on Pillkallen Allee in [Berlin] Gruenewald. Udet came out of the house and addressed me as follows: "Plochinger, we've reached the end. You know that you won't be working with me any longer. Thank you for everything you have done for me. You still have to report to the Reichsmarschall. You're to be appointed commander of an Air Administrative District Command." Suddenly overwhelmed by his grief, he turned quickly around and went back into the house. 84

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*Even today Milch still bears a grudge toward Tschersich. Milch has indicated that he thinks Tschersich's Russian friend, Achmeteli (with whom the Generalingenieur lived in Berlin-Lichterfelde/West), exerted a negative influence upon him. Pendele, on the other hand, declared that Tschersich was a rather stubborn, but extremely capable, person.

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ambitious, but it had the advantages of being cheaper and, from the military viewpoint, more secure. This was the opening of a conflict between Udet and Koppenberg, whom the Chief of Supply and Procurement had once considered to be one of his most reliable supporters.

Udet's first open and bitter disagreement with Milch came on 9 August 1941. Pendele and Ploch were in Milch's office and Milch asked them, "What's the status of aircraft program 17-a?" Ploch replied, "Udet has gone to see the Reichsmarschall about it." Milch, who felt that Udet had "gone over his head," banged on the desk and declared that the program had been assigned a scope 10 times greater than was actually necessary. Milch picked up the telephone and ordered Udet's return, whereupon Goering sent the State Secretary a blistering cable.[79] The Reichsmarschall, however, still refused to make a clear delineation of the command problem. On 17 July he summoned both Milch and Udet before him and reprimanded them for their inability to get along with one another.[80]

Milch brought up the question of a reorganization of the office of the Chief of Supply and Procurement. Udet was reluctant, but finally agreed that the 22 section chiefs should be replaced by four office chiefs (Amtsleiter). His colleagues, the engineers who were mentioned earlier and Generalmajor Ploch, all bitter enemies of Milch, did what they could to sabotage the reorganization idea, while Goering continued to refrain from taking firm action.[81]

Goering advised Udet to take a vacation. His attitude was still a friendly one, and he even invited Udet to spend some time in the peace and quiet of the Rominten Heath (Rominter Heide). But Udet had lost his interest in hunting, and soon returned to the sanatorium at Buehlerhoehe.[82]* He took leave on 25 August 1941. Two days later he received a telegram from Goering, phrased in words of warmth and reassurance and affirming the Reichsmarschall's continued friendly interest. Udet never knew that it had been composed and sent off without Goering's approval or knowledge by Dr. Erich Gritzbach, Goering's Cabinet Chief, and Pendele, Udet's own adjutant.

While Udet was convalescing, State Secretary Milch paid a visit to him and once more brought up the matter of a proposed reorganization

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*According to Thorwald, Udet went to Speck/Mueritz and remained there. It is certain, however, that he returned to Buehlerhoehe after a short time. See Thorwald, A Flyer's Life, p. 181.

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Thus Goering's authorization affected all sectors of the air armament industry. Since the aircraft designers were also members of the air armament industry, the new order obviously applied to them as well. The Chief of Supply and Procurement was reduced to a nonentity. In short, Udet's huge agency could no longer function without close (and eventually subordinate) coordination with Milch. Field Marshal Milch was selected to bring about a quadrupling of air armament production, a feat which was impossible without a clearly defined program, which, in turn, implied a careful selection of the models to be produced. Milch's intervention could no longer be resisted on the grounds that it represented intrigue, since it became his duty to intervene if he was to carry out his orders. This naturally led to tremendous friction and produced conflicts which would have been extremely difficult for Udet, even if he had a firmer hand on the reins, and even if Milch was a man of less efficiency and ruthlessness in doing a businesslike job.

Goering's half-measure was his refusal to call "a spade a spade" by failing to cut clear to the heart of matters by subordinating the entire office of the Chief of Supply and Procurement to the State Secretary. It was a typical case of attempting "to put out the fire without getting anything wet!" Milch was to be in charge, but at the same time, Udet, Goering's old comrade, was to be spared any embarrassment. Udet knew that he had forfeited his freedom of action and no longer had a voice in matters, even though this had not actually been put into writing. Half-measures, even when motivated by the best of intentions, invariably do more harm than harsher measures which are more in keeping with the realities of the situation. A direct replacement of Udet by the harder-nerved Milch and the assignment of Udet to a suitable important post might have saved Germany one of her most famous pilots. It is, of course, possible that Udet, by this time bruised and exhausted, might have followed the path of desperation in spite of such a solution.

There was now no clear delineation of areas of authority between Milch and Udet. The two of them still went on inspection tours together, and there were many joint conferences which both had to attend. But none of these enforced associations were able to resurrect the old friendship. Udet felt his own power slipping with each encounter, while Milch could hardly help being annoyed by Udet's passive resistance. One of the first overt conflicts, arising in connection with the aluminum question, was decided in favor of Milch. Udet had approved a project in Norway which had been suggested by Koppenberg and which was just getting under way at an enormous expense in time and money. Milch and the Chief of Technical Air Armament, Dr. Kurt Koerner, were in favor of constructing an aluminum plant near the Isar River Falls. Their project was less

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and of victory and to forget one's self entirely" are the legacy of a hero's life and an enduring pledge for us. His fame is immortal. In compliance with the wish of the Fuehrer and the Commander in Chief of the Wehrmacht, I christen the 3rd Single-Engine Fighter Wing the "Udet Wing."

Thus the memory of one of her greatest members will be preserved for all time in the Luftwaffe.[91]

So much for the official statements. In his funeral oration, Goering even referred to his old comrade as his "best friend." Milch was appointed without delay to succeed the deceased in his offices.

Milch, a man with iron nerves and ruthless energy, was not a pilot like Udet but knew a good deal more about production questions and the peculiarities of the air armament industry, and was able to head off the immediately impending danger of a collapse in the air armament field. But even Milch, who tackled his job with such great energy, was unable to raise air armament production to the level necessary to preserve the Luftwaffe as a strong supporting pillar of the Wehrmacht and to enable it to hold its own against American and British air forces. To be sure, the legacy he inherited from his predecessor (the Me-210 and the He-177) was a poor one,[92] and it must be counted a point in Milch's favor that during Udet's tenure in office, when the Luftwaffe was still able to operate without interference,[93] air armament production was low. By the time Milch succeeded in bringing production up to a higher level, the devastating attacks of the Anglo-American air forces were being carried out in full force. Soon afterwards, they began to affect the entire air armament industry. Thus Milch was also destined to fail.*

In February 1942, an investigation was launched against Ploch, Lucht, Tschersich, and Reidenbach; i.e., against Udet's former chief of staff and leading engineer personnel. Generalrichter Dr. Kraell was appointed to head the investigation, with Dr. Manfred Roeder, a colonel in the Judge Advocate's Branch, to assist him.[94] Although Goering himself urged legal proceedings, at which he offered to personally appear as a witness, the investigation never reached this stage. Instead, it was stopped shortly before July 1942. Although it was twice resumed after that date, once by Roeder and once by Generalrichter Dr. Franz Ernst (at Goering's own order), on each occasion it was soon discontinued. After studying the situation carefully, Dr. Kraell had no choice but to

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*See pp. 203-207, 286.

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explain to Goering that the individuals involved would be able to exonerate themselves on unshakeable grounds, since there was no incontrovertible evidence of inefficiency, let alone of criminal intent. Roeder agreed with Kraell in stating that the Luftwaffe General Staff, by its lack of interest, could not be absolved of all responsibility for the catastrophe.[95] In addition, in the event of legal proceedings there would be no way to avoid bringing in the influential aircraft designers and air armament industrialists.* And, Goering, himself, would come in for criticism for having neglected his supervisory responsibilities.[96] A final significant factor that cannot be overlooked is that Udet, in whose hands the entire matter had rested, had already passed sentence upon himself.

On 9 October 1943, the Reichsmarschall, who now found himself beset with increasing pressures because of the Allied air attacks, uttered a sharp and severe condemnation of the former Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement, the man whom he had earlier referred to as his "best friend":

> If I could only figure out what Udet was thinking of. He made a complete chaos out of our entire Luftwaffe program. If he were alive today, I would have no choice but to say to him, "You are responsible for the destruction of the German Luftwaffe!"[97]

Goering had long since forgotten his own role in the catastrophe as well as the fact that it was he who had brushed aside Udet's original stubborn objections to taking on a task of this sort, and one which was so difficult, claiming that he knew nothing about his job. Udet knew his own limitations better than Goering, and was motivated by the best of intentions,[98] and it is perhaps surprising that he did not run into an impasse earlier.

There are no secrets surrounding Udet's death, and none surrounding his reasons for failure. This extremely likable man, whose name was synonymous with an entire chapter in the history of the German Air Force, might have contributed so much in the right job had he not been arbitrarily assigned by Goering to a post for which he was unsuited. He detested the bureaucratic aspects of his work and was not the type to be placed in "official charge" of offices. Temperamentally, he was incapable of being an effective supervisor, and in the final analysis remained a "lone wolf," an artistic outsider, as his delightful (and psychologically revealing) caricatures show. In compensation for his inadequate

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* See p. 92.

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knowledge of human nature, he was inclined to be suspicious of his associates. In a man like Udet this tendency seemed to be childish, and, in fact, did him a good deal of damage.

For Udet, armament planning revolved exclusively around the aircraft designed to engage in aerial combat. He viewed the development from the standpoint of single, individual entities, and was less interested in the requirements and significance of combat in unit formations. He was a stubborn champion of dive bombing, and it was largely due to his efforts that dive bombers were finally produced in Germany. Along with Jeschonnek, he stumbled into the pitfall created by over-infatuation with the dive-bombing concept. In this respect his judgment was faulty, but, because the dive bomber was a high-quality individual combat aircraft, he devoted the greatest attention to it. With respect to the quantity required and the production of dive bombers, both he and his chief advisor, Lucht, were completely inexperienced.

Udet was inexperienced in most aspects of his job and had no particular instinct which might have guided him in leading a large organization. He lacked consistency, moderation, and the stubborn confidence necessary to head such an agency. Thus, although he was an ideal supervisor from the point of view of friendliness and benevolence, he was dogged by misfortune. Many of the industrialists with whom he had to deal exploited and deceived him. Nowhere was there a man to come to his aid who could support him in an effective way, precisely because his colleagues for the most part were as inexperienced in the field as he. His guilt, if one wishes to use this word (with due caution), lay in the fact that he permitted himself to become too accustomed to high office, even though in the beginning he was surely aware of his own inadequacy, and was thus perhaps no longer capable of recognizing his growing inefficiency. This may be the reason why, in the end, he was unable to make the decision to submit his resignation.

Those who appointed Udet to his position, and those who urged him to accept the appointment, were evidently not aware of the old adage that one should never press a man to take on a task of great responsibility unless he insists that he is confident of his ability to handle

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it, and even pleads for a chance to try it. The Benedek affair in 1866* is one of the warning examples provided by history.

There is, however, one factor which seems to exonerate these men: the fateful spell woven by Hitler's confidence in a German victory and especially his conviction that Germany would soon be able to make peace with Britain. In the beginning, of course, Hitler's optimism refused to let him believe in even the possibility of a war with Great Britain, but once the island kingdom had declared war on the Reich, he was firmly convinced that it would not be a war in the real sense at all. He expected that the British would sue for peace right after Germany's Blitzkrieg victory over Poland. When this failed to transpire, he postponed his hopes until the German victory in the West. The overwhelming character of this victory made it seem impossible at first to doubt that the war was really over, in spite of the fact that England again disappointed his hopes. After all, this optimism emanated from a man who had thus far succeeded in everything, and who had so often been proved right over the objections of his official advisors. Even the clear-minded young Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, Hans Jeschonnek, had succumbed to this optimism. How could one expect an emotionally inclined individual like Udet to withstand its powerful spell?

Because Germany's military leaders refused to contemplate the possibility of a life-and-death struggle with Great Britain, they permitted the armament program to lose its impetus. The possibility of a long-term war should have been admitted from the very beginning and an immediate all-out effort made to bring armament production up to a much higher level. The gravity of the situation after the Anglo-American declarations of war and the immensely far-reaching consequences of a possible defeat was not readily apparent to the vast majority of German military leaders, including Udet.

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*Editor's Note: Field Marshal Ludwig Ritter von Benedek, Austrian Commander in Chief during the Seven Weeks' War between Prussia and Austria (June-August 1866), was an officer with limited field experience, mainly in Italy. He was called to command the large Austrian forces in Bohemia so that Albert, Archduke of Austria, might make a "name" for himself by defeating the Italians. The command of the large armies was contrary to the wishes of Benedek, who protested that he was "not the man for the job." On 3 July 1866 the inept Benedek came into confrontation with the Prussian forces commanded by the highly competent Count Helmuth von Moltke, and suffered a crushing defeat at Koeniggraetz (Sadowa), which became a turning point for the fortunes of the Hapsburgs.

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As a result of this, Udet, who remained alone and helpless in his high office (despite his gregarious nature), was on his own, without benefit of realistic orders or instructions from above. It is understandable that for some time he was overweeningly optimistic. And, when the optimism of this artistically-inclined man faded--this was a rapid transition once the process had begun--to make way for a deep-seated pessimism, it was too late for worthwhile achievements in the prevailing circumstances. All of the possibilities for improvement had already been exhausted for Udet. Hard-pressed though he was, he possessed neither the flexibility, the quickness of mind, nor the stubborn persistence required by this situation, nor did he have any ideas as to how the dilemma might be solved. His downfall was thus inevitable.

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Chapter 4

REICHSMARSCHALL HERMANN W. GOERING

Goering's Career up to 1933*

Hermann Goering, the first, and for all practical purposes, the only Commander in Chief of the German Air Force, has come to personify the early and almost meteoric rise of the Luftwaffe, and then, almost as abruptly, its sudden decline and ruin. He was the child of a 55-year-old father and a considerably younger mother. His father, Dr. Heinrich Ernst Goering (who had been a judge), a man of tremendous energy, had five children by his first wife and four by his second wife, Fanny Tiefenbrunner, whom he had married in London on 28 May 1885 while making a study of colonial affairs preparatory to his appointment by Chancellor Bismarck as National Commissioner (Reichskommissar) in German Southwest Africa.

After about five years in Africa, Dr. Goering returned to Germany for an extended leave prior to departing for a new assignment as Consul General in Haiti. In 1896 he was assigned to the Foreign Office in Berlin, where he served until his retirement from professional life.

His marriage to the determined and energetic Fanny Tiefenbrunner produced two daughters and two sons, the youngest being Hermann Wilhelm, the later Reichsmarschall, born in Rosenheim, Bavaria, on 12 January 1893. After retirement, Dr. Goering was offered the use of a small castle at Veldenstein, in the upper Palatinate, by Dr. Hermann Eppenstein, a wealthy Austrian physician and a friend of Goering from his days in Southwest Africa. Eppenstein frequently invited the Goerings to visit him during the summer at his newly acquired and magnificent estate, Mauterndorf Castle, in the Lungau near Salzburg. He was Hermann Goering's godfather and assumed the costs of the boy's education. In 1934 he also bequeathed him Veldenstein Castle.

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*This section is based upon the works of Charles Bewley, Willi Frischauer, and Erich Gritzbach, as well as upon information provided by Generaloberst (Ret.) Bruno Loerzer, and a small amount of information concerning Goering's life during World War I from General der Flieger (Ret.) Karl Bodenschatz.

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Hermann's father was rather old at the time of his youngest son's birth, and he probably did not have the necessary vitality to exercise a truly decisive influence upon his strong-minded and growing child.[1] Even his mother, at 34, had reached an age in which it is easier to close an eye to mischief in the raising of a willful son than to remain absolutely firm. Besides, little Hermann had obviously inherited his mother's great determination and energy, and was spoiled by his sisters, especially by Paula, the younger of the two. It is quite possible that the decisiveness which was to characterize his early career may have been inherited from his father. Hermann may also have inherited a certain depth of character which tended to cast a faint light of benevolence upon him just when the world's image of him was growing blacker.[2] In any case, his parents were not authorities who required him to obey, and it is likely that they were careful not to put this matter to the test against their pampered youngest son.

School, first in Fuerth near Nuremberg, and then in Ansbach, seemed to have made only a scant impression upon the youthful Hermann Goering. In Hitler's case there was at least the deep impression made by a history course given by a certain instructor, but Goering seems to have been virtually unaffected by school and may even have developed a contempt for all that was intellectual. After all, he was an individual who was bound to detest the rigid discipline which schools must demand in order to fulfill their function, and this same strong will would not allow him to submit even superficially in order to achieve the objective of gaining a position of academic superiority over his peers. He was never a good student, and was an incorrigible cutter of classes. Deeds, not intellectual ideas, were his ideals.

At Veldenstein Castle he could give free rein to his impulses, for he was the young master, and he led the village boys in daring games of knighthood and adventure. There was also the castle at Mauterndorf, rising imposingly out of its romantic setting of steep and thickly forested hills. Here too there was a group of village children to look up to their young leader. In such a milieu and with such a childhood it is no wonder that Hermann developed a certain degree of arrogance. As a young man he once signed a register at an inn as a "Boer general," a rank he seems to have thought appropriate even then.

Hermann Goering, supremely self-confident, outwardly toughened by Alpine climbing, and a bold commander in any circle whose members were disposed to follow a strong leader, wanted to become an officer. It was not until he entered the Cadet School at Karlsruhe, and later the famous Lichterfelde Cadet School, that he really felt himself to be in his

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element. Contradictory as this seems to be for a headstrong youth who resented authority, the youthful Goering was apparently willing to accept the superficial discipline of the Army without surrendering his stubborn inner self. So many domineering, strong-willed, and anarchistically inclined persons in history have accepted military subordination, for military subordination does not imply stagnation at a given level of obedience. One is promoted, as evidenced to all and sundry by one's uniform, which reminds those of lower rank of their obligations to salute and to subordinate themselves to the wearer. Each successive stage is no more than a transition to the next, and far in the future, really not so very far at that if one is ambitious and energetic, beckons the overall command, the unlimited authority over one's lower ranking colleagues. As Napoleon has said, "a marshal's baton" lies ready and waiting in every soldier's pack.

Hermann Goering wanted to become a regular officer, not merely a reserve officer like his father. Commissioned in 1914, the young Lieutenant Goering was sent to his first post in Muehlhausen (Mulhouse), in Alsace.* An officer of the infantry, Goering chafed at the relative quiet reigning along the Alsation Front and longed for action. While there he made friends with Bruno Loerzer, a somewhat older lieutenant in his own regiment, and remained on good terms with him almost to the brink of the catastrophe which finally ended Goering's life. At Muehlhausen Goering also made the acquaintance of a noncommissioned officer, Guenther Tschersich, whom he was to meet again later on, and who, like Loerzer, would become one of Goering's subordinates and rise to the rank of general.

In Alsace and elsewhere Loerzer played the role of Goering's trail blazer. While confined to the hospital in Freiburg undergoing treatment for an attack of rheumatism, Hermann heard that his friend Loerzer was in the area and was attending a pilot training course. Goering was wild to join him, but his application was rejected by his commander. Whereupon, Goering took it upon himself to follow Loerzer to Darmstadt, where his friend took him along as observer on a number of flights. In view of the special status enjoyed by the still new aviation branch, Goering's act of disobedience led to no serious punishment. Soon after the beginning of the war he had earned the Iron Cross, Second Class and the Iron Cross, First Class (along with Loerzer) while flying as an observer. This award

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*Alsace was never a full-fledged State in the Reichs government, but had the position of being a Reichsland, a status somewhere between that of a true State and a protectorate. Frustration over this was a major cause of considerable unrest within Alsace and Lorraine.

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was given by the Crown Prince himself, for whose armies Goering and Loerzer had carried out their reconnaissance missions. Goering also met at this time Prince Philip of Hesse, who was later to prove an invaluable social connection.

Not only did Goering go to Darmstadt in defiance of orders, but he then learned to fly at his own expense without military permission to do so. Again he escaped heavy punishment; moreover, he succeeded in transferring to the flying forces. In 1915 he was wounded in the leg and hip and confined to a hospital for several months. Upon being discharged he was to report for duty at Boeblingen. Instead, he returned directly to the front, stating that he had been unable to locate Boeblingen either on the map or in the railway timetable. Once more Goering was able to talk his way out of a crisis.

Loerzer had already become the commander of the 26th Squadron, and Goering, now also a fighter pilot, was soon appointed commander of the 27th Fighter Squadron. [3] Without doubt Goering was an excellent flier, and after 20 aerial victories, he was awarded the highest Prussian decoration, the Pour le Merite. On 21 April 1918 the legendary commander of Fighter Wing No. 1, Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen, was killed in action. His designated successor, Captain Reinhard, soon suffered the same fate, and on 7 July 1918 Goering was appointed commander of Fighter Wing No. 1, which took the name of the famous "Red Knight." Shortly thereafter he was promoted to captain.

Fighter Wing No. 1 continued to maintain its great reputation under Goering's command.* The young leader brought down two more enemy aircraft, while 1st Lt. Ernst Udet, of the same unit, continued his string of victories until he had run up a record of 60 aircraft downed. The wing was thrown into action wherever the situation was particularly critical, and it suffered from a steady attrition rate in a battle which by 1917 had become a drawn-out struggle against overwhelming enemy superiority. [4]

Amid the conflicting orders at the war's end, Goering decided to fly his unit to Darmstadt. One element went to Mannheim by mistake, where a Communist-dominated "soldiers' council" disarmed the fliers and subjected them to abuse. When Goering heard of this, he threatened to bomb the area unless his men were "given their weapons" and allowed to join him in Darmstadt. The threat sufficed, and the revolutionaries

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quickly released his comrades. Shortly thereafter Goering was ordered to surrender his aircraft to the French at Strasbourg, an order with which he complied most reluctantly. Nearly all of the old "flying circus" pilots crashed their aircraft into the landing field, leaving the French with just a pile of wreckage. A few days later Goering deactivated the wing at Aschaffenburg. He had had enough, with the war and the Communist revolution, and resigned in 1920.

That year he attended a meeting in Berlin of the Association of German Officers, who were especially bitter about not being able to wear their insignia of rank on their uniforms (which they had to wear when they had no civilian clothing). Here Goering, with his usual impertinence toward higher authority, had a run-in with the Minister of War, General der Infanterie Walther Reinhardt, who, dressed in the uniform of the new Army, was trying to win adherents for the new force from among the old officer corps. He implored the officers to remain faithful to the Weimar Republic and to retain its discipline. At the end of his speech Goering rushed to the platform and denounced those at home who had "stabbed the old Army in the back," urging the officers to remember those "criminals" for the day of reckoning to come, and pointedly attacked the position of Reinhardt. The Minister left the meeting, leaving Goering to capture the minds of his listeners with impassioned oratory. Goering had learned not only self-assurance and command in the famous fighter wing, but he had also learned how to captivate a crowd, an art which requires a certain amount of self-discipline.

The new National Army (Reichswehr) could not offer the lure of aviation which was a part of the old Imperial Army, and Goering wanted nothing to do with the Republic. As far as he was concerned it was all too closely identified with the revolutions of 1918, which were mutinous and treasonous. Moreover, Germany's treatment as a criminal nation at Versailles was seen by him as a massive swindle planned by the victorious Allies, especially the ostensibly fair-minded President Woodrow Wilson of the United States.

The years that followed were dull and difficult. The retired Captain Goering earned his living with flying demonstrations in Denmark and Norway for the Fokker aircraft firm. In view of the stable currency of the Scandinavian countries this could have been most profitable, but Goering was extravagant, and his quickly earned pay was dissipated just as rapidly. He accepted a job as pilot with the Svenska Lufttrafik, and during one of his flights for this company was introduced to Baroness Karin von Gantzow (nee Baroness von Fock). The Baroness, four years Goering's senior, divorced her husband, Baron Nils von Gantzow, and

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Figure 19
1st Lt. Hermann W. Goering in his office as last Commander of Fighter Wing No. 1 "Rittmeister Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen," 1918

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Figure 20
Goering as first Commander of the
Nazi Storm Troops (SA), 1923

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renounced all claim to their eight-year-old son Thomas in order to go with the young German flier. They were married in Munich on 3 February 1922.

This lovely and unusual woman, who was easily fired by new impressions, had inherited a streak of romantic enthusiasm from her Irish mother, Mrs. Hukdine (nee Beamish of the famous brewing family of Cork). The Baroness was an idealist through and through, and she exerted a strong influence over her husband. As long as she lived, she kept Goering scrupulously faithful to her and thoroughly receptive to her ideas and outlooks upon life. They lived in a small hunting lodge which Goering had purchased in the vicinity of Bayrisch-Zell. Goering had enrolled at the University of Munich as a student of history and economics, while his wife earned money by her handicraft work and painting.

In November 1922, at a political demonstration at the Koenigsplatz in Munich, Goering saw Hitler for the first time. Two days later he attended a meeting of Hitler adherents, and from this time on both he and Karin were sworn disciples of this rising political star. Goering called upon the Party leader and placed his services at his disposal. Hitler then fascinated him with an explanation of the quintessence of his program, and Goering, who had recognized no authority but that of the Emperor as the personification of the State, was captivated and became his loyal follower until his death. Hitler entrusted him with the leadership of the Sturmabteilung (Storm Troops or SA).*

Goering's status as a captain of the old Army and winner of the Pour le Merite, and the aura which then distinguished any flier, but especially a fighter pilot, his imposing and congenial bearing, the social position he apparently occupied, all made him welcome and useful to Hitler and his young National Socialist Party. The Nazis were only too eager to acquire well-known adherents, and to have been an officer was a factor of considerable importance in Germany after 1918. In his struggle for power, Hitler made frequent and clever use of individuals who were capable of bringing a measure of prestige and influence into the Party. It is therefore likely that in 1922 Hitler may in a sense even have looked up to Goering. Some years later, Hitler even took advantage of the services of a man bearing the title of "Your Excellency" (Generalleutnant Otto von Heinemann) as organizational director of his Party.

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Goering took part in the abortive Hitler Putsch in Munich on 8 November 1923. He was in the second row in the fateful march to the Feldherrenhalle on the following day and was seriously wounded when the Bavarian State Police opened fire on the demonstrators. Before his wounds were entirely healed, Goering fled to Innsbruck, Austria. Afterwards he spent considerable time in Italy and in Sweden, the home of his wife. At that time he was still "young and slim," as he recalled when speaking of this period to Generalleutnant (Ret.) Enoe Egan-Kriegern.[5]

At the end of 1927, Goering returned to Germany, but his first attempt to renew contact with Hitler failed to bring him a Party position. He took up residence in Berlin and earned his livelihood by acting as a distributor for the German aircraft industry and for the Tornblad Parachute Company of Sweden. Erhard Milch, Director of Lufthansa and an acquaintance of earlier days, was in a position to arrange a number of profitable transactions for him. His friend Bruno Loerzer provided him with quarters for a time, and Paul (Pilli) Koerner, another acquaintance from the war, served as a willing assistant, secretary, adjutant, and, possessing a taxi, even as a chauffeur.[6]

Karin Goering was at this time quite ill in Sweden. Hitler and Goering had meanwhile conferred in Berlin and come up with the idea of Hermann running as a National Socialist candidate for the Reichstag in the forthcoming election. On 20 May 1928 Goering won a seat in the Reichstag, which thereafter assured his livelihood. He moved his wife into an expensive apartment in the Badensche Strasse, where they entertained lavishly and lived far beyond their income. Here, although infirm for years, Karin was obliged to receive demanding guests, to entertain them, and to help to impress them.

Goering relinquished his post as leader of the SA, since Hitler had begun to utilize his services primarily for moves in the field of political diplomacy. In 1930 Goering was appointed Hitler's "Political Commissar" in Berlin, and he revealed remarkable diplomatic skill in this position. He already had valuable social connections and continued to acquire new ones. Needless to say, his status as a retired captain and his unusually high war decorations were extremely helpful. Among his most important connections were the rather controversial German Crown Prince Friedrich August von Hohenzollern and the ambitious President of the Reichs Bank, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, a man with a reliable nose for changing political winds. These were soon augmented by the industrialist, Fritz Thyssen. After the sweeping National Socialist success at the polls in September 1930, Goering was also invited to Neudeck, the ancestral estate and vacation residence of the elderly Reichs President, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg.

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Hitler, who was no doubt suspicious of the activities of Gregor Strasser, who, although an energetic supporter was the leader of the wing of the Nazi Party which advocated strict adherence to a program of socialism, was quite content to give Goering a free hand, since Goering's personality was more congenial to him and he felt that the former flier was immensely valuable for increasing Party prestige. Goering's skill in handling people was enhanced by a certain indefinable quality which he was to retain to the very last, a quality which made it easy for him as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe to gain the permanent loyalty of his coworkers.

It is difficult to describe the qualities which Goering possessed. His personality was a mixture of benevolence and warmth, slyness and self-assurance, with a touch of arrogance which was just as unconscious as it was accepted by others. All of these qualities together created an aura of superiority which, incredible as it may seem, exerted a powerful attraction upon those with whom he came into contact. As the Nazi Party increased in strength and importance, the figure of Goering (who was hardly the type to remain modestly behind the scenes) emerged into the limelight.

On 16 October 1931, President von Hindenburg received Hitler and Goering for the first time, albeit with a reserve that bordered on discourtesy. Goering's wife was unable to appreciate this triumph, however, since on the same day she died of consumption in her native Sweden. Goering, whose speeches at Nazi rallies were infrequent but impressive, was well able to push himself to the fore, and although he took no part in the real routine work of the Party, he soon acquired the highest honors that Hitler could bestow. His influence was greater than that of Gregor Strasser, whose tireless efforts were unhesitatingly accepted as far as organizational planning and speech delivery at Party meetings were concerned, and whose zeal could be compared only with that of Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Yet, despite his work and ability, it was not Strasser who became President of the Reichstag, but Goering, a man whose Party contributions had been comparatively insignificant. Goering assumed the position of number two man in the Nazi Party in the following year.

Together with Hitler, who was appointed Reichs Chancellor on the morning of 30 January 1933, his paladin was also carried to the top by the general wave of success. On the same day Goering was named Reichs Minister, Reichs Commissioner of Aviation, and Minister of the

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Interior for Prussia. He was appointed Minister President of Prussia (Prime Minister) on 11 January.*

In order to understand Goering's true character, we must recall the night of 30 January, when Goering, as Hitler's partner in victory, stood beside his Fuehrer at the window of the Reichs Chancellor to acknowledge the salutes of the veterans' organizations, the Stahlhelm, and the SA. While Hitler, his hand lifted stiffly in fanatical determination and his features a rigid mask of willfulness and dangerous intensity, returned the salute of his fellow fighters, Goering obviously regarded the parade as a personal tribute and acknowledged the salutes with a nonchalant air, his face beaming and his bearing conveying the impression that he was the top man in whose honor the whole thing had been arranged. One must not be tempted to conclude that this was his intention. He simply was that sort of person, a man whose tendency toward usurpation could not be concealed.

Soon Goering became the recipient of a veritable plethora of offices. His position of influence in Prussia, where he organized a Provincial Council over which he (naturally) presided, gave him the key to power over all of Germany. Soon he was a fully accredited Minister by virtue of his appointment as Reichs Commissioner of Aviation, an office which was expanded on 1 May 1933 into the Reichs Aviation Ministry. He was also Reichs Minister of Forestry and Reichs Commissioner of Hunting, the only two functions which this overburdened official carried out with any genuine interest and devotion to the very last. On 30 August 1933, the weakening von Hindenburg let himself be persuaded by Goering (whom he already knew from the negotiations of 1930, 1931, and 1932 to have been a main supporter of Hitler) to confer upon him the rank of General der Infanterie. In this way, the holder of the Pour le Merite, who had been only a captain, and a young captain at that, in 1918, jumped five ranks in one promotion. Having an Army general's rank also gave him standing among the senior officers of the Reichswehr.

As soon as the veil of secrecy could be lifted from the growing Luftwaffe, Goering was styled "General der Flieger," and on 1 April 1936 was promoted to Generaloberst. Following the rather shameful overthrow and expulsion of Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg as War Minister, Goering was appointed a Field Marshal of the Luftwaffe on 4 February 1938. This made him the senior Wehrmacht general from a point of rank, a state of affairs which defied all of the traditional axioms of military promotion.

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*See figure 21. See also Charts Nos. 1 and 2.

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Figure 21
Goering as President of the Reichstag, 1932

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Figure 22
Hitler gives Goering directions for the
Four-Year Plan, 1936

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Goering's already copious assignments and varied ranks were augmented still more on 16 October 1936, when he was placed in charge of the newly announced Four-Year Plan, with its ambitious economic and expansionist goals.* Goering already possessed a certain amount of influence in the sector of industry and had asked his Austrian brother-in-law, the Saalfeld Notary, Dr. Otto Riegele, to look after his interests in this respect. Now Goering became intimately acquainted with industry on his own, and proceeded to make his influence felt. With his enormous income and connections he was able to wield decisive authority.

During this period Goering represented, even for Hitler, an unimpeachable authority, and his influence was certainly greater than that of Hitler's nominal "deputy," Rudolph Hess. At this time (1936) Martin Bormann, who was later to become the Party's most powerful man after Hitler, was still in the background. Goering, the "Iron Man," had succeeded in everything he turned his hand to, and this included the most responsible offices. Thus, for all practical purposes, Goering was the "number two man," and even Dr. Goebells could not compete with his standing in Party circles. In such circumstances, it was obvious that even District and National Commanders of the Party (Gauleiter and Reichleiter) often had to bow, albeit reluctantly, to his great prestige. The masses of the Nazi Party and followers fell enthusiastically into line behind Goering, captivated by his forceful, down-to-earth approach, and, strange as it may seem, by his rather condescending concern for their welfare and his obvious determination to dominate.

Moreover, Hermann (as he was soon widely called) possessed so many human qualities that the adoring masses were able to understand and accept him in spite of his overbearing egotism, which he never attempted to hide, and in spite of his evident weakness for a variety of colorful uniforms, which almost made of him a quick-change artist. His obesity may even have helped him among the common people, since eating and drinking are such universal pleasures, and to some they are the greatest pleasures that life affords. Danton was also more popular with the masses than was Robespierre, and the French, ordinarily so vain as far as personal appearances are concerned, never permitted Napoleon's growing paunch to detract from his immense prestige.

Even in circles which were characterized by a deep-rooted distrust of the new regime, Goering enjoyed a certain standing. Unlike the lean and hungry Goebbels, who was discriminated against from the first

*See figure 22.

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by nature, Goering did not look like the revolutionary type at all. His family life was above criticism. He had married for a second time in a gala state ceremony on 10 April 1935. Political caricature, which often flourishes during a period of upheaval and is often quite vitriolic in character, found a favorite subject in the portly Hermann. Generally speaking, most cartoonists dealt with him in a very gentle manner. The cartoon entitled "Nothing but tinsel in front, nothing but fat in the rear," was the most cutting of these ever published on Goering. But, the masses were never really critical of him, they were amused by and fond of making fun of Goering's love of ostentation, his delight in uniforms and decorations, and they felt a deep affection for him.

He was considered the number two man in Germany even by representatives of foreign countries. They considered him the most important associate of the Fuehrer and regarded him as a man of compelling power in his own right. Goering understood this and knew how to deal with these envoys. His name, his activity, and his orders were known throughout the country, and Hitler had been well aware of this when he entrusted to him the great task of building up the Luftwaffe.

There is no doubt that Goering approached his new task with genuine interest, especially since it was a task which he had long envisioned as his own project. In the beginning of this venture, just as had been the case when he had become Prime Minister of Prussia, Goering displayed an amazing amount of energy, and as Reichs Minister of Aviation was able to exercise a highly favorable effect upon the young Luftwaffe. "He was always at his best under pressure," recalls Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, "when the rest of us were completely exhausted, and was still able to go on."[7]

As Reichs Aviation Minister, Goering recruited as many World War I pilots as were still available and interested in the air forces. Unfortunately, he did not possess the magnitude of soul to include the extremely competent Ministerial Director Ernst Brandenburg of the Reichs Traffic Ministry. Brandenburg, the former commander of the bomber wing attached to the Army High Command (BOGOHLS) was a man of great versatility and talent, and would have added considerably to the new force.

This was the happiest period in Goering's life, as he saw his air force growing daily in strength and poise. His success in winning capable persons for the Luftwaffe during 1933 and 1934 was never repeated to the same extent thereafter. During these years he was able to bring his personality to bear in all respects, infusing his colleagues and

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subordinates with enthusiasm and elan, and the men who had been working for the advancement of German aviation in the Reichswehr Ministry had the satisfaction of seeing the goals for which they had struggled in vain suddenly achieved, apparently with the ease of a flick of the wrist. Most significant was the fact that the Luftwaffe was approved as an independent branch of the Wehrmacht. Goering, through his speeches, had turned Germany into a nation of air enthusiasts.

The first of the men recruited by Goering for the Luftwaffe was the Director of Lufthansa, Erhard Milch, a man who was selected as State Secretary of Aviation and as Goering's permanent deputy. Milch was a highly efficient deputy, fully capable of guiding the development of an expanding ministry and of tactfully and skillfully orienting the men who had been recruited from the Army for the Luftwaffe.[8] Among these Army men, Walther Wever was recruited as a colonel and was soon promoted to the rank of general.[9] Goering entrusted him with the Luftwaffe Command Office, which, although there was then no General Staff, actually functioned as such. Wever, an experienced soldier, whose former subordinates still speak of him as a man of genius, was endowed with a quality which commanded willing obedience, and served as a counterbalance to Goering's more expansive personality. The fatherly character of Wever had a salutary effect upon the headstrong inclinations of his chief. When he died, on 3 June 1936, Goering was deeply shaken.[10*]

Wever's successor, Albert Kesselring, the second of the strong personalities of the build-up period, was never fully able to fill the breach. Kesselring's strength was based on his achievements as Chief of the Luftwaffe Administration Office, but it was only during the course of World War II that he rose to the pinnacle of his career. A man with an outwardly sunny temperament, coupled with deep earnestness of deliberation and decision, Kesselring was never a close intimate of Goering, and the relationship never advanced beyond the initial, formal stage.

The third officer to be transferred from the Army to the Luftwaffe was Col. Hans-Juergen Stumpff, a competent chief of personnel, but no match for the temperament of Hermann Goering. Stumpff's period of service as the third Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff was virtually

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*Generalstabsrichter Freiherr von Hammerstein, in an interview with the author, 5 September 1956, recalled a remark made by Goering at this time: "After Wever's death, the whole thing ceased to hold any interest for me." See figure 23. See also Charts Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4.

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Figure 23
Goering, Hitler, and Wever at an
Air Demonstration, 1935

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without significance for the Luftwaffe. With Goering as Commander in Chief, he never developed into a strong personality in his own right, but remained a permanently intimidated subordinate.

Milch, Wever, and Kesselring, the real architects of the Luftwaffe during the build-up period, together with an elite staff of young General Staff officers with pilot training, were able to meet the exacting standards set by Goering without letting the new and untried administrative apparatus fall apart under the heavy pressures of continual demands for personal achievement and the adherence to unreasonable deadlines. These problems were inevitable in view of the established goals and the scope of expansion which Goering had outlined for his air force.

Whenever Milch and Wever sought to obtain funds for the new service they found a host of bureaucratic obstacles in their way, some of which were almost impossible to surmount. The Luftwaffe needed a large amount of money if it was to become a strong air arm by 1937. The Navy and Army were also expanding, and although their expansion programs were advancing at a somewhat slower pace, neither of these branches would permit itself to be indefinitely relegated to the background. Until 1938, the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe was still subordinate to the Reichs War Minister and Commander in Chief of the Wehrmacht, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, and the senior services constantly opposed the tremendous expenditures demanded by the air service. Even Milch, who was well known for his political cunning and ability to advance his ideas "behind the scenes," found that he was up against a stone wall. Efficient as he was, Milch was seen as just a civilian, a protege of Goering, who was also a usurper, and a man who had yet to gain the respect of the ruling military body of the old Reichswehr. He was treated with a certain amount of reserve in any case because of his spectacular rise in the National Socialist Reich from captain to general. Milch clearly needed Goering's protection until such time as he could make his own mark within the Party. In the beginning he was hard put to find willing ears for the requests he independently advanced. Even Wever, although his professional ability was widely acknowledged, and although he had filled a highly important post during the most crucial days of the Reichswehr and had later acceded to an even more significant position in the Reichs Aviation Ministry, would probably have encountered deaf ears in the Reichswehr Ministry with requests for the new air force. He would have had to face older and even more influential generals than himself. The bureaucratic hurdles faced by Milch and Wever were at first tremendous, and would perhaps have been insuperable had anyone other than Goering been the Reichs Aviation Minister. Hitler was much more disposed to consider a request from his second in command.

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In his capacity as Reichs Minister of Aviation, Goering was a colleague of the Reichs War Minister and the Reichs Finance Minister, which inevitably served to elevate the status of the Luftwaffe High Command (which was actually subordinate to the Reichs War Ministry). Goering's other governmental offices, and his personality which refused to recognize any authority but Hitler, created a position of predominance which even von Blomberg's promotion to field marshal was unable to jeopardize. Whenever Goering's staff was unable to find a way to push through Luftwaffe requests for funds, the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe would say, "Give that stuff to me!" Soon afterwards he was invariably able to bring Wever the necessary approval from the top, from Hitler himself. "Here it is," Goering would say, "the Fuehrer is surprised that we're so modest. He expected us to ask for a lot more. Incidentally, once and for all, money is no object! Remember that!" How could the Reichs Minister of Finance, no matter how horrified he might have been at the magnitude of such requests, be expected to refuse his signature when Hitler had already given his approval?

Goering, whose forceful personality indisputably made him the creator of the Luftwaffe, was a firm believer in the teachings of Douhet, and insisted upon such a broad demand for equipment and such a rapid expansion of the air forces that his colleagues in the Reichswehr Ministry and in the War Ministry were appalled. Goering was the driving force behind the air arm, and he was the person with whom other military leaders had to contend. Although Stumpff and Kesselring stress Goering's role in devising the ideals of the build-up period, his main contribution to this early period lay in the domineering force of his personality and its impact upon associates and subordinates.[12] The "Iron Man" was clearly an imposing individual with his impressive bearing, portly frame, his startlingly blue eyes, and an array of high decorations resting upon the most splendid of uniforms. His powerful voice had a great effect upon all listeners, and he had learned to make it an instrument of clarity and persuasion. He was inordinately optimistic, and seemed not to know the meaning of the word "impossible." One word from him and countless ambitious minds and industrious hands in a number of fields went earnestly to work, each vying with the other to report new successes to the commander. Yet, despite this marvelous and seemingly indestructible leader, was he really so imposing or powerful after all?

The Impact of Goering's Personality upon the Luftwaffe

The tremendous abundance of assignments placed in Goering's hands required a person of enormous energy and industry, as well as one who had great perseverance tempered by objectivity. Without such

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qualities, developed to a high degree, no one could have hoped to give the appropriate amount of emphasis to each task at hand or proper attention to the countless honors, most of which were preliminaries to the future responsibilities that were heaped upon the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe. It was far from easy to integrate this massive body of responsibility into an already busy life.

Goering's youth was cast in a highly romantic atmosphere around Veldenstein and Mauterndorf castles.[13] Here he had developed his dreams of great adventure and deeds. The moral aspects of knighthood as an ethically ennobled form of the application of force quite naturally receded into the background for young Hermann, whose imagination was more captivated by armor, lances, and swords, and by the feuds of robber barons launched from defiant and unassailable castles. He early became a victim of self-deception which centered around the idea that he could succeed by the sheer force of his will and by an unconquerable will to win.[14]

At the same time, with his realistic, down-to-earth manner of looking at things, he was quite gifted and possessed considerable cunning. Dr. Ramon von Ondarza, his personal physician during the war, described him as a man with "remarkable cunning."[15] His common sense enabled him to perceive immediately the significant aspects of any problem, and he had the ability to take quick advantage of any situation, thus paving the way for his longing for recognition. His innate courage assured his recognition as a soldier and flier, and his almost insolent self-assurance gave him world-wide recognition. He had not been especially popular with the members of his old fighter unit, since he was too anxious to get ahead and lost no opportunity in pushing himself forward, even at the expense of others.[16*] It may be significant that this energetic pilot and commander was nicknamed the "Iron Man."

However, beneath this façade Goering was quite softhearted and easygoing, and, despite the courage which he manifested on occasions and which characterized his last days, he was no lover of battles which were costly in human life. He was really more interested in the beauties of nature, in the joys of the hunt through the vast German forests, and loved a life of relaxation enhanced by the splendor of his possessions. Most of all he loved a life of contemplation within a highly refined and sumptuous milieu which belonged to him alone.[17] But these inclinations

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*According to Generalleutnant (Ret.) Bruno Maass, one of Goering's World War I associates, General der Flieger Helmut Volkmann, said that the Goering of World War I was "just as uninformed and as impudent as today!"

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represented a difficult and, for the future, catastrophic contradiction to his great ambition and will to power.

Even Goering's severest critics willingly admit that he was the best of family men, and one who was deeply devoted to the memory of his first wife, after whom his imposing estate in the Schrofheide (Karinhall) was named.[18] Goering was absolutely faithful to both of his wives, and his strong inclination toward domesticity gave each of them a high degree of influence over him. His brilliant and strong-willed first wife (Karin) encouraged him in his rapid professional achievements, but his second wife (Emmy Sonnemann) was quite different. She enjoyed intermittent periods of anonymity and an easy and luxurious way of life. She thus influenced her husband in this direction, and became associated with the Goering of Karinhall, Veldenstein, and Rominten.*

Goering's strongly developed family sense also kept him in close and affectionate relationship with his sisters and brothers, especially Olga Riegele. Hermann was naturally viewed by his family as the ultimate authority. This applied not only to his brothers and sisters, but to his two Austrian brothers-in-law, Dr. Riegele and Dr. Franz Ulrich Hueber (who held a high post in the Austrian Civil Defense Office, was twice Austrian Minister of Justice, and finally Deputy Secretary in the Reichs Justice Ministry).[19]

Goering was extremely fond of children, as could be seen in his affection for his daughter Edda. Each year he insisted upon personally selecting the gifts for his children's Christmas party. Field Marshal Kesselring, who once accompanied him on one of these shopping tours, describes the care with which Goering examined each toy to be sure that there were no sharp corners or rough edges.[20]

The family circle of Goering could be extended to include his friends who had become his subordinates in the literal sense of the word. Karl Bodenschatz, Goering's adjutant in Fighter Wing No. 1 (Richthofen), later became Chief Adjutant and Chief of the Ministerial Office; Paul (Pilli) Koerner became State Secretary; and Bruno Loerzer transferred to the Luftwaffe and moved up the ladder of rank with amazing speed.

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*Frau Emmy Goering was a person of considerable charm. In an interview with the author on 22 November 1954, General der Flieger Werner Kreipe said, "Frau Goering was nevertheless completely lacking in understanding for the gravity of the situation. She mentioned repeatedly that Hermann ought not to work so hard."

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These were the men who surrounded Goering. State Secretary of Aviation Milch did not belong to this group. Goering was aware of Milch's abilities and knew that he was indispensable as a worker, but he found him personally uncongenial. Udet, whom Goering made Chief of the Technical Office in 1936, retained his status as an old comrade from the days of the Richthofen Wing, but all the rest, with the exception of Wever, were simply subordinates, to whom Goering felt as superior as the British traveler Gulliver did toward the Lilliputians.[21]

In all of his dealings with other men Goering made it clear that he was the sun, the center of attention, and he was not always able to conceal this conviction even in relationships with foreign ambassadors and representatives.* Goering was capable of being most generous and magnanimous, but Schiller's famous words, "as long as he didn't have to pay for it himself, his motto was live and let live," could well have been applied to the Luftwaffe commander.

Goering liked to see his subordinates and their families happy.† This interest, which he retained to the very end, may well be the reason why so many top Luftwaffe officers forgave him for his abysmal failures during the war.[22] His closest associates spoke of him with affection.[23] This was true of his oldest assistants, Koerner and Bodenschatz; his closest associates, the adjutants Bernd von Brauchitsch, Georg Teske, and Dr. Ramon von Ondarza; his Luftwaffe Intelligence Chief, Josef "Beppo" Schmid; the legal staff of the Wehrmacht, headed by Dr. Rudolf Lehmann, Dr. Christian Freiherr von Hammerstein, and Dr. Alexander Kraell; and the High Command of the Luftwaffe, from the scrupulously fair-minded Kesselring to the thoroughly intimidated Hans-Juergen Stumpff, whom Goering often plagued in an unmerciful manner. Even Ministerial Director Dr. Kurt Knipfer, for whom Goering once refused to intercede to save him from an act of violence by Hitler, said "Hermann was not a bad man, he was a personality."[24]

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*Goering's all-pervading casualness may well be due to his consciousness of superiority over his subordinates, especially the younger ones. On one occasion, during the official opening of an exhibit on a hot day, Goering nonchalantly handed his field marshal's baton to Generalleutnant "Beppo" Schmid to carry because it was getting in his way.

†Dr. Ondarza told the author that he recalled wonderful Christmas packages "which he [Goering] had sent from Holland as late as 1944 to families of his staff members. Christiansen [General der Flieger Friedrich] had to do the shopping for him in Holland. And everything was paid for in cash."

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Goering was capable of switching on short notice from beaming kindliness to brutal coarseness and to a ruthlessness so violent that it was impossible to discuss anything objectively with him. This streak of brutality and Goering's need for recognition could occasionally assume frightening proportions. Bodenschatz's comment that he was "somewhat rough on the outside" is a masterpiece of understatement, since Goering had a decided tendency to rant and shout against his enemies, and, in certain moods, considered that anyone who tried to contradict him had to be crushed. His words on such occasions frequently included threats to have the culprit shot. This was surely enough to brand him an amoral tyrant and a cruel sultan.[25] Important witnesses maintain that his friendly, good-hearted nature was more than offset by his greed for power and his vicious inclinations.[26] On the other hand, it is often pointed out that Goering was able to bear criticism, that he was receptive to reasonable arguments, and that he was quick to make amends for inflicted injustices once his temper had abated.

Some observers have remarked that Goering's breast harbored two souls, while others suggest that he must have had more than two to make him as changeable as he was. But all agree that he was a natural-born actor, a person constantly aware of the impression he was making.[27] Some think that he was quite different at home in the bosom of his family from what he was in public, particularly before Hitler, the Party, and the Wehrmacht, where he played the role of the strong man until the cruel reality of war finally shattered his pretenses and revealed his inner weakness and lack of force.

It is clear that his character possessed two extremes. On one hand he was human in everything he did, with great kindness and generosity, an admirable husband and father, who in his character was much like a child. Thus the Goering who loved beauty, nature, and domesticity, and even solitude, also was greedy for recognition, fabulous wealth, and treasures.[28] He was as unscrupulous about accepting gifts as he had been in the old days about incurring debts. Presents which were perilously close to being bribes were graciously accepted as justifiable tributes to his exalted person.[29] It goes without saying that he was extremely naive in this, but he craved power and glory and therefore almost entirely ignored ethical considerations. It was precisely this aspect of Goering's character that drove him into public life.

When he behaved like a king he was not entirely acting, for this pose was the inevitable result of his hunger for power and glory. Many noted something of the demonic and fascinating in his nature, and detached observers have always tended to interpret such characteristics as

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theatrical. Perhaps this streak of cunning enabled him to measure the effect of his speeches upon his audience and thus instinctively to control the force and style of his delivery. This might appear to be acting, but it is not.

The demonic aspect of Goering's character led to the excesses mentioned, and the night of 30 June 1934 (the "Night of the Long Knives") indicated that he was capable of sinking to low levels, even so low as to dip his hands in blood.[30] Fear for his own position, which he believed was threatened by Capt. Ernst Roehm, his deadly enemy, probably played the decisive role in this action. Besides, it was a matter of carrying out Hitler's orders (even if the Fuehrer did not spell out the details of the horrors that were to be committed), so that he felt himself to be both avenger and executioner.* He may even have persuaded himself that he was really helping to crush a threat against the German government, as the affair had been presented to the increasingly senile Reichs President von Hindenburg. On 2 July 1934 Hindenburg expressed his thanks to Goering for his energetic and "successful action in suppressing the high treason."[31]

At the height of his career, Goering thought he was living his life fully and freely by merely putting up an appearance of strength and indestructibility. He was probably not acting, at least not consciously, during his last appearance at Nuremburg, where he seemed to have been fated to represent defeated Germany. Under no illusions whatever concerning the intentions of his judges, Goering bitterly told Dr. Werner Bross, the assistant of his defense attorney Dr. Otto Stahmer, that he

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*In his book Hermann Goering, p. 114, Charles Bewley notes that Goering was later reluctant to talk of the incidents of 30 June 1934, "presumably it was a deed which weighed heavily upon his conscience." The author has also heard evidence corroborating the story of Willi Frischauer in The Rise and Fall of Hermann Goering, p. 106, that SA leader Gehrt, a friend from the Richthofen Wing, was brought to Goering, who ripped off Gehrt's Pour le Merite and sent him to the firing squad. Yet, Bodenschatz, one of Goering's closest coworkers, was never able to recall the incident.

Editor's Note: Gehrt's name has been carefully omitted (along with that of Wilhelm Frankl, Germany's only World War I Pour le Merite winner of Jewish background) from all German lists, appendixes, and books on aviation, 1933-1945, nor can his first name be found from currently available sources.

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was determined to make a fight of it.[32] At Nuremberg he played himself fully and intensely, and was one of the few who stood unbowed before his prosecutors. In this crucial situation, deprived of fame and glory, he appeared in many respects a stronger character than he had in his previous life.

As far as the Luftwaffe was concerned, however, there were two aspects of Goering's character which were destined to play a major role in bringing about the collapse of Germany's air forces. The first was his inner compulsion to take everything personally, just as he refused to submit to authority, except to that of Hitler, and his refusal to acknowledge any obligation unless it was likely to be useful to him in his desire to dominate or unless it fulfilled a personal need. In such circumstances, Goering did not view the German Luftwaffe as the main mission and vocation of his life. Instead, he regarded it as his personal property. It was _his_ air force--one might even say it was his slave organization--and he considered himself to be its absolute master, with control of life or death over it (although he mentioned the latter only for the sake of rhetoric). This attitude explains the almost incredible lack of tact displayed by Goering during the war when he threatened to have Udet, his Chief of Supply and Procurement, shot for inefficiency if the British fighters were really "as powerful and as good" as had been reported to him.[33]

He was unable to face sobering or skeptical reports dealing with actual facts and situations.[34] In consequence of his desire to hear only what was favorable, he often refused to face reality, and in the end he really believed that "his" Luftwaffe was an invincible force, whose commitment was alone capable of deciding the outcome of the war. Since he also had a fondness for boasting to the commanders in chief of the other Wehrmacht branches, it is clear that he did not always succeed in winning their sympathies for his service. Moreover, he put the Luftwaffe at a disadvantage from the beginning by exaggerating its performance potential.

Without doubt Goering had the same tendency to become pompous as did Wilhelm II, but his unconditional obedience to Hitler and a certain talent for sensing political changes kept him from making as many _faux pas_ in his speeches as was unfortunately the case with the last German Emperor. But even Goering's behavior during World War II reminds one of the breakdown of Wilhelm at the very moment when his grandiose

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speeches and martial bearing ought to have been followed by the reality of effective leadership.*

The second aspect of Goering's nature which proved so disastrous for the Luftwaffe was his growing tendency to make a distinction between himself and his colleagues by demanding uncompromising devotion to duty from them, while his own zeal in this respect was no more than a pretense. Sometimes, whenever he felt like it, he even abandoned all semblance of industry for long periods of time. 35/

Goering and Hitler

If Goering's intoxication with power and with the achievement of personal goals were genuine, it is then quite likely that his secret awareness of inadequacy would drive him to pretense when he was forced to confront an even stronger personality. Without doubt the qualities which he lacked most of all: a real iron core, a vast body of knowledge acquired by hours of reading and study, cold objectivity, an almost inhuman detachment, an indifference toward the enjoyments of life and external trappings of power, and a primitive naturalness were personified in the character of Adolph Hitler. Since the Fuehrer held Goering's fate in his hands, the Luftwaffe leader was obliged to continue to impress him or, at least, to keep alive in him the favorable impressions about himself and his abilities from an earlier period. Because of his innate cunning, Goering knew that if he failed to impress Hitler he would not only lose his fabulous position of power, but also the sumptuous life of ease to which he had become so accustomed. Probably he instinctively recognized the almost inhuman naturalness which was so characteristic of Hitler's life, yet he submitted to him unconditionally.

But even this explanation is not entirely adequate, because personal advantage was not the only determining factor in Goering's relationship to Hitler. He was really devoted to the Fuehrer, believed in him sincerely, and accepted subordination to him in the fullest sense of the word. Hitler was, in fact, the only authority he had ever recognized except the German

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*Editor's Note: Two interesting works dealing specifically with the personality of Wilhelm II are Daniel J. Chamier, Wenn Deutschland Maechtig Schien (As Germany Seemed to be Powerful), Berlin: Aragon Verlag, 1954, and Admiral Georg von Mueller, The Kaiser and His Court; The Diaries, Notebooks, and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Mueller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet 1914-1918, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961.

/See pp. 142-145, 149-150.

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Emperor. Thus, even though he might not be able to conceal all of the weaknesses of his character, Goering simply had to appear to be strong, unassailable, and indispensable to Hitler, who embodied power, toughness, and success. Toward this end he played the strong man--and here he was surely acting a part--at the expense of the Luftwaffe and probably at the expense of Germany's future as well. The Fuehrer's Luftwaffe adjutant, Col. Nicolaus von Below, reports that until late in the war Hitler discussed all matters pertaining to air forces with Goering alone, and that Hitler trusted Goering implicity.[36] It is therefore hardly likely that Goering, who was so often unwilling to listen to reports in his own office concerning the Luftwaffe's lack of readiness, would have informed his Fuehrer of the true situation.[37] In July 1939, a demonstration was arranged for Hitler and Goering at the Luftwaffe Testing Station at Rechlin, during which experimental models of newly developed air equipment, none of it even remotely ready for mass production, were put through a series of tests in such a convincing manner that both of the main observers were bound to get the impression that these marvelous things, rocket-propelled and jet-propelled aircraft, and antiaircraft rockets, would all be available for use in combat units in the very near future. Could one imagine Goering speaking cautiously in his ensuing discussions with Hitler, or of giving him warnings against the apparent brilliant successes shown in Udet's demonstrations? Hitler made a number of far-reaching military decisions on the basis of what he saw at Rechlin.[38] One can only ask whether Hitler would have decided to bring international problems to a head during the summer of 1939 if he had been aware of the actual state of unreadiness in the Luftwaffe, a force which could not even hope to have a long-range bomber or a really long-range fighter at its disposal in the near future, much less the futuristic showpieces which he had seen at Rechlin.*

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*In his diary entry of 11 August 1944, General der Flieger Werner Kreipe states that the General Staff, as well as Hitler, was deceived into believing that great new aircraft models would soon be available. Goering commented during an inspection visit to Rechlin in 1942, "Actually I never intended to set foot in the Rechlin Testing Station again after the engineer people deceived the Fuehrer and me so completely during the demonstration in the summer of 1939 by putting on such a show for us. On the basis of what he saw then, the Fuehrer made a number of exceedingly vital decisions, and we've been very lucky that everything turned out all right and that the consequences were not more serious." See also Generalingenieur Herbert Huebner, "Die Ingenieurfrage in der Luftwaffe 1933-45, insbesondere bei den Dienststellen des Generalluftzeugmeisters und des Technischen Amtes" ("The Engineer Problem in the Luftwaffe from 1933 to 1945, Particularly in Regard to the Agencies of the Chief of Supply and Procurement and the Technical Office"), H/I/3, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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Despite Goering's deep and abiding loyalty to Hitler, he never managed to achieve as close a personal relationship with the Fuehrer as did Rudolf Hess (Hitler's official deputy) with his quiet and unassuming manner. 39

Spontaneous as was Goering's respect for Hitler, he made few attempts to approach him on a personal basis. Erich Gritzbach, Goering's eulogist, describes this relationship up to 1938: "Two or three times a week he [Goering] ate with the Fuehrer in the Reichs Chancellory, or if the Ruehrer happened to be on the Obersalzb rg, in the mountain villa 'Wachenfeld.' After they had eaten Goering remained closeted alone with Hitler for hours. During these visits he was able to present his reports or discuss difficult questions in detail and receive instructions."40 These visits later became less frequent. Perhaps Goering began to realize that while he was the top man in his own sphere of influence, he was nothing but a servant in the presence of Hitler, a top-ranking servant to be sure, but, nevertheless, a servant.

Hjalmar Schacht, the German Finance Minister and a fiscal genius with an exceedingly sharp wit, wrote in his memoirs:

> In the beginning, Goering tried to preserve a certain measure of independence beside Hitler. Goering felt himself to be a dominant personality, and it flattered him to be compared with a figure of the Renaissance. I remember that once, after a session with Hitler, Goering called him a "clever devil." But the more deeply Goering became involved in morally questionable activity, the more abject became his dependence upon Hitler, for the Fuehrer kept a very precise record of the misdeeds of his followers. He did not punish them outright, but used this knowledge to force each one of them into a position of absolute submission. 41

It is possible that this picture is exaggerated. Goering's supposed description of Hitler as a "clever devil" does not seem to be clearly consistent with the awesome respect in which Goering held his Fuehrer. Yet, another statement attributed to Goering by Schacht does seem to fit the pattern: "Do you know, Mr. Schacht, I always make up my mind to tell Hitler certain things and then the minute I enter his office my courage invariably deserts me."42

The fact that the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe was totally incapable of speaking frankly and openly with Hitler, and, in spite of the fact that he was the Fuehrer's highest deputy, was unable to make an

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objective, down-to-earth report without having to impress the listener or to win personal recognition for himself, was one of the major factors responsible for the decline and final collapse of Germany's air arm.

Incredible as it may seem to clear-thinking observers, Goering wanted to possess even more than he already had, and more than Hitler could give him. But what other offices were still to be had by the insatiable Reichsmarschall? There was the highest office of all, that of Reichs Chancellor. During the early days when Hindenburg was still alive, Hitler may have expressed the idea that he would be content with the honor and (probably expanded) authority of Reichs President, and would make Goering Chancellor. This is the opinion of Koerner, Goering's closest friend and almost inseparable companion. Later, however, Dr. Goebbels warned Hitler against taking such a step, and probably cautioned him against the all too obvious greed for power of the Fuehrer's favorite. According to Koerner, Goering never got over this disappointment.[43]

Nor can it be denied that Goering would have liked to succeed Baron Konstantin von Neurath as Foreign Minister. This was a field of endeavor in which he felt himself destined to succeed. After all, he had always enjoyed playing a role in foreign politics and, by virtue of the frankness with which he spoke of Germany's claims and desires, had always made a favorable impression upon foreign diplomats.

But Goering was most deeply disappointed at Hitler's failure to make him Minister of War to succeed Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, after the latter's dismissal on 4 February 1938.* At that time Goering tried to approach the matter through his friend Karl Bodenschatz, Chief of the Air Ministry Office, and Hitler's adjutants, Captains Nicolaus von

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*Editor's Note: In January of 1938 von Blomberg asked Goering's opinion concerning his intention to marry a lady "with a past." Goering replied "What does it matter? We are all men of the world!" However, shortly after the marriage, which took place 10 January 1938, Reichswehr officers lodged a complaint against the War Minister. Goering and Hitler saw a splendid chance to damage the prestige of the old regular Army officer corps and to throw it over to the defensive. Goering then took an active role in securing the dismissal of Blomberg and the removal of Generaloberst Freiherr von Fritsch, the Commander in Chief of the Army. See Frischauer, The Rise and Fall of Hermann Goering, pp. 138-139. See also Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, New York: Frederich A. Praeger, 1953, pp. 312-319.

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Below and Wiedemann.* Both of the latter declared that they were powerless to help in the affair. Wiedemann explained to Bodenschatz, "The Fuehrer won't take him. Goering's too lazy!"[44] About this time Hitler's admiration for Goering and his ability to cope with problems must have been put to a severe test, and it was not until 11 March 1938, the day of the Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg's resignation, that Goering took the decisive action which renewed his leader's faith in him.† Goering's appointment as field marshal on 4 February 1938 seemed to the Luftwaffe chief to be no more than a consolation prize.

Goering's Waning Interest in Work

Goering's zeal and energy have been confirmed beyond doubt up to 1933 and even into 1934, but thereafter they diminished rapidly and noticeably.[45] As far as the Reichs Aviation Ministry was concerned, this meant that the conduct of business was pretty much in the hands of State Secretary Milch, Goering's permanent deputy, a state of affairs which was by no means detrimental to the Ministry. In the long run, however, a situation of this kind was dangerous. A deputy whose authority covers all aspects of activity, and whose office bears all of the work, cannot escape public notice. This was especially true of the Luftwaffe as a newly established branch of service which needed and sought publicity by calling attention to its achievements. It was therefore natural that Milch often acted as the spokesman of the Reichs Aviation Minister on occasions when Goering himself ought to have made an appearance. This situation must have been called to Goering's attention either by the Nazi Party or by someone else. Goering's name was no longer so closely associated with the German Air Force since it was Milch who was accomplishing all of the work.

But Goering had no intention of altering the situation by resuming the industriousness which had been so characteristic of his early work in the Luftwaffe. By this time hard work had completely lost any enticement it may have had for him.[46] Nevertheless, he did put Milch in his place.

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*Editor's Note: At the time of the publication of this study Wiedemann's first name has not been found.

†Editor's Note: In the critical days following Schuschnigg's visit to Germany and especially at the time of his final resignation on 11 March 1938, powerful demonstrations carried out by the Luftwaffe along the Bavarian-Austrian border at the instigation of Goering further underlined the fact that Germany would tolerate nothing less than a complete absorption of Austria. See Ludwig Eichstaedt, Von Dollfuss zu Hitler (From Dollfuss to Hitler), Mainz: 1955, p. 209.

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After Wever's death a conflict had sprung up between Milch and the young General Staff of the Luftwaffe. General Kesselring, the Chief of Staff, objected to being subordinated to the State Secretary of Aviation. Goering took advantage of this prevailing dissatisfaction by decreeing that henceforth Milch's office would be on the same level as the General Staff. The General Staff Chief was also granted the right of direct access (Immediatstellung) to the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, and the function of the State Secretary as deputy was restricted to the periods when Goering was absent from work by reason of illness or leave.[47]* The effect of this action was to destroy the previous inner continuity in the conduct of ministerial affairs, for Goering himself had no intention whatever of stepping into the breach created by the weakening of Milch's position. Actually, in reducing Milch's authority, Goering had prepared the way for the greatest evil of all, lack of leadership, and thus opened the door for internal intrigues and rivalry, which were bound to have a detrimental effect upon the work of the Air Ministry.

Milch declared that he had warned Goering at the time, "You're ruining the air forces this way. Somebody has to be in charge of everything. If I don't do it, then you'll have to, . . . but you won't!" Goering then assured him that he would do so, but Milch remained apprehensive. "I don't believe it," he said. "I request that I be relieved of my post." Goering's loud reply was, "Look here, Milch, I'm not demoting you because you've failed, but because you've succeeded too well. The Party keeps telling me that it's Milch who does all the work. And . . . I won't stand for that!"[48]

The question arises, however, why a man like Goering, despite the fact that countless public appearances demanded by his many and varied offices left him little time for his air force, should have sinned against it so gravely by inadequate leadership on one hand and by overbearing decisions on the other. If it had been simply a matter of his collecting offices alone it would have been one thing, but it was quite another when he began to consume more time and give more attention to furnishing Karinhall with the most superb art treasures, to designing and fitting countless styles of uniforms and clothing, and to indulging in long and undisturbed siestas. When all of these were considered, it is easy to see that there was little time left for serious work.

There is, of course, the question of whether Goering's tendency to tire easily may have been due to his health. Dr. von Ondarza, Goering's

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*See Chart No. 5.

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personal physician during the war, is understandably cautious in his statements on this subject and has hesitated to commit himself in positive terms. He did mention that Goering, "was an unusually tall and very fat man. He needed large quantities of liquid, not alcohol. His heart had never been too good, nor was his circulation entirely in order. He had attacks during which his heart seemed to be galloping and his pulse varied between 100 and 220. There must also have been some weakness of the cardiac muscle. His blood pressure was subject to fluctuation, but was not the reason for his feeling of fatigue."[49]

After his serious injury in 1923, Goering had become addicted to morphine. He underwent two stringent cures and managed to overcome this addiction. His tendency to seek refuge in medicines may have originated at this time, and it is presumably the explanation for his inordinate fondness for having a vast variety of pills available, an idiosyncrasy which became his "trade mark" during the war. These were not pills prescribed by a physician, but were obtained for him by a nurse, Christa Gormann, and not even Goering's faithful valet, Robert Schropp, was able to put a stop to it.

In view of the fact that, at least outwardly, things seemed to be going along well, Goering may have been led by his disinclination for work to think that he was following a policy of statesmanlike wisdom in the way he commanded the Luftwaffe. He avoided critical thinking whenever possible, and was not assisted in this regard by the host of willing helpers and unscrupulous flatterers who hovered about him. In such circumstances it is understandable that Goering enjoyed the role of a man of great power and influence, earning clamorous applause with his public speeches, and the support of many of his own staff who were frequently summoned to Karinhall where they could be properly impressed. He enjoyed life and rested from his labors. Even before the war he had allowed himself to be restricted less and less by official responsibilities as time went on, and he had already learned to enjoy switching from the glowing limelight of Berlin to the princely seclusion of Karinhall, or to

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the solitude of Rominten or Veldenstein. If others required his advice or decisions they had to follow him to one of these places. 50*

Actually, Goering had managed to achieve a remarkable degree of success during the build-up phase of the Luftwaffe without too much hard work on his part, and this success gave him the reputation as the creator of the German Air Force in the eyes of the world as well as in the eyes of his staff workers.

Commander in Chief During Wartime

In the war with France and Great Britain, Germany could have made good use of the energy which had been demonstrated by Goering in 1933 and 1934. At the very least, as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, Goering ought to have taken up permanent residence at the Luftwaffe headquarters in Potsdam-Werder.

The words attributed to Goering by former envoy Paul Schmidt following Britain's declaration of war in September 1939, "If we lose this war, then heaven have mercy on our souls!"51 indicate that Goering was aware of the far-reaching consequences of that titanic struggle, and had no illusions concerning the effects which a lost war would have upon the Reich, the German people, upon himself and his family. But he did not act accordingly. He had obviously become too addicted to soft living to be able to change, to make a determined effort to abandon his accustomed manner of living for a life of military order and discipline.

It was also fatal that Hitler either failed to recognize or was unwilling to admit that he had been fundamentally wrong in his evaluation of Great Britain. Instead, he clung even more desperately to the hope of an

*On 22 November 1954 Generaloberst Hans-Juergen Stumpff told the author that Goering's aversion for work increased gradually in direct proportion to his acquisitions of estates and art works. Stumpff remarked: "I recall one occasion in which he [Goering] had retired to Karinhall for a month after having given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed. I had to see him, however, and he finally agreed to give me an hour of his time. He listened to what I had to say and made a number of decisions which hit the nail on the head. But then--the hour was not yet up and I was not finished--he jumped up and said, 'That's enough! Now I'll show you Karinhall!' As time went on, these distractions gradually gained the upper hand until he no longer had firm control over the Luftwaffe."

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early reconciliation with the United Kingdom (which he sincerely admired) and thus fell prey to a faulty and overconfident belief that the war would be of short duration. He hoped to conclude a peace with Britain immediately after the Polish campaign, again after the victory over France, and even after he had unleashed the Luftwaffe against the British Isles. In short, he kept hoping for peace until it was too late, or until his hesitations and restraints had led to irreparably unfavorable results for Germany. Because of these hopes for an early peace, Hitler had neglected to order full mobilization in 1939, and again in 1940, with the result that German industry was on a peacetime footing for far too long a time.[52]

Hitler's hesitation concerning Britain and the mobilization of German industry was also influenced by the boundless optimism which took possession of him after the surprisingly brief and decisive victory over France in 1940. From this he derived the idea that the final victory was already as good as won.[53] His optimism infected all with whom he came into contact, and it clearly played a significant role in the general refusal to face up to the seriousness of a long-term war with Britain (which would obviously have a powerful ally in the United States). Hitler's optimism was so contagious that his subordinates were inclined, almost without exception, to exaggerate the impact of Germany's actual military achievements and to close their eyes to the already apparent indications that the attacks on England were not having the desired effect at all.*

From the human point of view one might therefore tend to excuse Goering to some extent. He was well aware of Hitler's firm belief in an early reconciliation with Great Britain, and it can certainly be assumed that Hitler had repeatedly discussed this prospect with him. Too, Goering had personally experienced the triumph of the offensive in the West and was privy to Hitler's jubilation and unshakable conviction that the final victory already belonged to Germany and that no one could deny her this. Goering probably reassured himself that the man who continued to express these ideas had, after all, been right up to that point, and had even demonstrated brilliant command ability in his decisions affecting the spectacular

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*Even Udet, whose temperament often fluctuated between being "raised to the heights of ecstasy and being driven to the depths of despair" (Himmelhochjauchzend . . . zu Tode betruebt), commented to his busy armament staff upon his return from France in 1940: "The war is over! All our plans can be tossed into the waste basket! We don't need them any longer!" See the commentary of Generalstabsrichter Dr. Alexander Kraell concerning Udet's death, p. 78, Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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Ardennes breakthrough. He had even achieved success in the face of General Staff opposition and had accomplished what the Emperor's armies had failed to accomplish in World War I.

Goering was basically an optimist, and it is therefore not surprising that he failed to see any need for determined action or for altering the life he had learned to enjoy so much in peacetime. But, there is still another factor which one is tempted to advance to explain Goering's behavior during World War II. For years he had lived in the sovereign assumption that he was one of the closest intimates of the Fuehrer, that he was, in a sense a godfather to the Fuehrer's feats, and that he was the only person in all Germany who still retained a certain importance in his own right. During the war, however, Hitler's consolidation of absolute powers over the Wehrmacht, Army, and the German populace brought about a change in his relationship to others, including Goering. The gap between the Fuehrer and his staff, including his top-ranking paladin, grew greater and greater. The feeling of being a part of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht, which had previously inspired Goering into unusually vigorous activity, gradually lost its basis in fact. Hitler continued to treat his loyal follower with the greatest of consideration, even at a time when he had long since lost confidence in him, but there was no escaping the fact that Goering, like all of Hitler's associates, had become merely a servant.

These possible excuses have been deliberately emphasized. However, in spite of them, Goering's conduct as Commander in Chief of the German Air Force during World War II, when this new branch of service was being put to the most crucial test, remains incomprehensible. It is true that he still took an active part in Luftwaffe affairs during the Polish campaign, and, in fact, personally intervened in many acts of the Luftwaffe High Command. It is also true that the rapid and highly successful French campaign also managed to secure his interest, and he took part in this undertaking with a strong awareness of his own power. He even launched the air offensive against Britain with a rather bombastic speech from his command headquarters.

On 19 July 1940, by virtue of his promotion to Reichsmarschall, he had achieved the highest possible military rank and honor, with the exception of Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht. He was clearly above all of the leaders of the other service branches, but this did not dispose him to be more cooperative with them.[54] During his testimony at Nuremberg, Goering reveals how brusquely he treated the Chief of the Wehrmacht High

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Command, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel:*

> An order, or instruction, or request from the Wehrmacht High Command to me, as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, is unthinkable unless the communication begins with the words "The Fuehrer orders" or "In the name of the Fuehrer you are informed of the following." If I may put it emphatically, I once told Generaloberst Keitel that only the commands of the Fuehrer were binding upon me. Only the originals of orders signed "Adolf Hitler" are forwarded to me for action. Any orders or instructions beginning with "At the order of the Fuehrer" or "In the name of the Fuehrer" go to my General Staff Chief, who then reports the important points to me orally in the periodic briefing sessions. Whether (and it is in regard to this point that I would like to put it most emphatically) these orders are signed "In the name of the Fuehrer, Keitel, Generaloberst" or "In the name of the Fuehrer, Maier, Staff Sergeant" is completely irrelevant as far as I am concerned. 55

As soon as it became clear that the air offensive against London was not having the desired effect, Goering rapidly lost interest in directing the operations himself. According to the recollection of the Luftwaffe's top legal officer, Dr. Christian Freiherr von Hammerstein:

> At the end of the French campaign, we were sitting in the dining car of Goering's special train and were discussing the forthcoming air attacks against England. Goering turned to Jeschonnek and asked him whether he believed that these attacks would be successful. Jeschonnek replied firmly, "Yes, of course I do!" Later we heard him say to Goering, "I don't think it will take over six weeks at the most!" Goering doubted this and pointed out that if we assumed that the Germans would continue to fight even if Berlin should be destroyed, we ought not to consider the British to be softer than the Germans and simply assume that they would stop fighting once London had been destroyed. 56

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*Editor's Note: Keitel was principally an administrative man as Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht. He never found the strength to stand up to Hitler. In Germany he was often called "his master's voice," and most of the active military commanders held him in low esteem.

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It was true that Goering rapidly lost interest in the air war against Britain, but there was another factor which went along with the Luftwaffe's failure to down the RAF. With the defeat of France Goering had become intrigued with a new interest, which held sway over him more firmly than any of his well-known peacetime pursuits such as the siestas at his princely estate of Karinhall, his model railway, or hunting in the Rominten heath or in East Prussia. This new passion was the acquisition of property, especially art treasures, for which purpose he traveled to Paris and other French cities in a special railway car.

During the war years, Goering reminds one particularly of the figure of the Emperor in Goethe's Faust, Part II, except that the latter was more congenial and less responsible for the tragedy which was to come. In this work Goethe describes the desire of the Emperor to "govern and indulge one's appetite,"[57] which, of course, describes precisely what Goering did. The Reichsmarschall continued to command "his" Luftwaffe while simultaneously living like a Persian potentate in Karinhall, at his East Prussian hunting lodge, or at Veldenstein Castle. Yet, despite his frequent and lengthy absences, he seldom allowed his deputy to take his place. In the words of Milch, "The only time I substituted for Goering during the war was in the winter of 1940-41, when he was away on leave."[58]

Even the best informed officers were scarcely able to discern between Goering's periods of official leave and his frequent periods of relaxation. This was precisely the sort of thing that helped to bring about the ruin of the Luftwaffe, for it deprived the service of any leadership at all. The State Secretary ought to have been empowered to fill the breach, but, instead, he was quietly deprived of his powers, which (apart from the duty of acting for the Commander in Chief for unimportant matters) were concentrated in his capacity as Inspector General of the Luftwaffe, so that he was gradually "organized out" of the top level command.[59] Moreover, after Udet's death in November 1941, Milch became increasingly burdened down with duties in the area of supply and procurement.

Leadership in the Luftwaffe, such as it was, remained within the purview of Goering, who enjoyed the function of command and who exercised his prerogatives before his colleagues and the Luftwaffe High Command as if he had been appointed to a position of incontrovertible authority similar to that of a cardinal-archbishop of the Church. After the fall of France, no German military commander surrendered as readily or as completely as did Goering to the pursuit of relaxation and the enjoyment of the "good life." Very often he summoned his air fleet commanders to Rominten, where the most urgent and difficult Luftwaffe problems were discussed with them between shots during a stag hunt. On one occasion--

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this happened for several days in succession--just as Goering and his subordinates were about to begin their military discussions, the Reichsmarschall was called away by the receipt of a message from his gamekeeper. Finally the most resolute of those present, Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, rebelled and insisted that they get down to business. But Goering commented that he could not understand why his air fleet commanders did not let their chiefs of staff take over for a few days every once in a while so that they could relax. "After all," he added, "I do this occasionally, so that I can relax among the beauties of nature, and everything works out fine."[60] The naiveté of Goering might have appeared more attractive if one was not obliged to consider the serious consequences of his actions, including the impact of his unrestrained egotism upon the weaker and more impressionable personalities around him.

In the long run Goering's behavior placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of the Luftwaffe, a burden which became almost intolerable for those in the positions of top responsibility. It is more than mere coincidence that two of Goering's most important subordinates committed suicide. Ernst Udet, basically a man of sunny disposition (although sensitive) who was able to laugh at himself and others, and Hans Jeschonnek, the energetic Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, both found the situation unbearable and sought their own ways out of the dilemma. Both had been recruited by Goering, and both looked in vain to him for support when the first flush of success gave way to an increasing series of misfortunes.

In 1936, Goering appointed Udet to the important post of Chief of the Technical Office, overriding Udet's protests that he was not qualified by giving him a few casual phrases of encouragement, and in 1938, he appointed Udet to an even more important post, that of Chief of Luftwaffe Supply and Procurement. Udet failed seriously in this task, and to an extent which did not become clear until much later. Late in 1940, he began to break down under the burden of responsibility, and in 1941, when Udet's inadequacy in his job could no longer be ignored, Goering took only a half measure in attempting to remedy the situation.* Timely intervention, with kindness and firmness, would have restored the adverse situation, and might even have saved the life of Udet, the great fighter ace of World War I. Goering decided to solve the dilemma by placing Milch on the same level as Udet, but without making a clear delineation between their respective areas of responsibility. This was a most unsatisfactory decision, and one which did little to postpone the Luftwaffe's final collapse. Later on, after Udet's death, when the Luftwaffe found itself in desperate

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*See pp. 36, 38, and 46.

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> a case with a predetermined opinion, he was quite willing to be convinced of the contrary. . . . Serious decisions were made only after a thorough evaluation of the facts and earnest consideration of the pros and cons.[72]

The Reichsmarschall reserved the right to confirm a large number of decisions handed down in legal matters, including all of those leading to the death penalty. In defiance of the severity which the Fuehrer demanded of all his officers in deciding legal matters, Goering was often inclined to be lenient in his decisions in individual cases, although he was mercilessly strict when it came to treason and moral offenses. In political matters he was far more lenient than Hitler and frequently acted in deliberate defiance of the latter's thinking and demands. On the other hand, Goering was far more strict than Hitler in condemning offenses against the populace of an occupied country.

Lehmann's evaluation (which was concurred in by the top military-legal counselor of the Reich) is fully substantiated by the statement of Generalstabsrichter Christian Freiherr von Hammerstein, Chief of the Legal Branch of the Luftwaffe. Hammerstein emphasizes the fact that Goering, often against his advice, insisted upon reserving the right to review all decisions leading to demotion in rank or to death. Goering gradually became more and more interested in his mission as principal legal authority as he realized the significance which his activity was bound to have in keeping him informed about the functioning of the Luftwaffe. He was also aware of the effect his interest would have in increasing the confidence of Luftwaffe personnel in their Commander in Chief. According to Hammerstein, Goering refused to allow himself to be dissuaded from personally intervening during legal proceedings.

Hammerstein describes an episode of this sort in which Goering took strong action in the execution of his duty as chief legal authority:

> Just before the French campaign in 1940, three young pilots, slightly tipsy and singing loudly, marched into their camp. It was just before last call. An Army lieutenant stopped them and took the pay book from one of them. Since they were afraid of missing curfew, one of the pilots snatched the book out of the lieutenant's hand, and all three fled. Army soldiers stopped them and placed them under arrest. Their top superior [Wolfram Freiherr] von Richthofen, whose duty it was to investigate the case and decide upon the penalty, left the determination of their punishment up to the Army. The Army sentenced all three to death for mutiny, and the sentence

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> in gathering all of the incriminating evidence against Goering, which his unrestrained indulgences so easily brought to light. . . . Goering was acquainted with his opponents and knew what they were up to. But he did not possess the self-discipline needed to change his mode of life.[69]

One ought not to underestimate the significance of this factor, for it played an important role in the process which led to the weakening of Goering's position. Thus, the man who had inspired almost unlimited confidence at the outset of the war, almost entirely lost his confidence as the war progressed, and his deteriorating standing then depressed his subordinates and damaged his Luftwaffe.

Goering as Chief Legal Authority of the Luftwaffe

The Reichsmarschall, who as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe appears to have been guilty of grave sins of commission and omission, presents an entirely different picture when one examines his activity in the legal sphere.

"Negligence" and "lack of seriousness," the qualities for which he is most often reproached, were not apparent in legal matters, according to the declaration made by the Chief Judge Advocate of the Army, Generaloberstabsrichter Rudolf Lehmann,* before the Nuremberg Tribunal. Lehmann reports that the Reichsmarschall at first (perhaps influenced by Hitler's own attitude) took "a very jaundiced view" of the legal staff. However, this feeling changed radically in proportion to the degree "in which he concerned himself with the administration of justice within the Luftwaffe." He was very proud of the Luftwaffe's reputation in this particular field.[70]

It is not without a certain amount of surprise that one reads Lehmann's account in which he notes that Goering, who was otherwise not particularly interested in matters relating to official business, "always asked for detailed information in those matters in which I had dealings with him. He spent a great deal of time studying these cases." Moreover, Lehmann remarked, the discussions with Goering were always carried out with calmness and objectivity, "without sporadic outbreaks of temperament," even when a serious difference of opinion existed.[71] Lehmann continued:

> The Reichsmarschall listened carefully to all sides of the affair. Even in those instances in which he approached

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*Died in 1955.

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> had had an opportunity to orient Goering concerning the morning's discussion: At the beginning of the discussion, Goering reports to the Fuehrer that he has been worrying for days about a particular point along the Bock sector of the Eastern Front. The Fuehrer views this as a substantiation of his own acuteness and is delighted that Goering is always of the same opinion as himself. 68*

The accuracy of Admiral Raeder's account seems to be beyond doubt, since Adjutant Bodenschatz was quick to seize upon opportunities and was a past master at tricks of this sort.

Doubtless Goering's behavior was influenced by still another factor. When the war began, Hitler had named Goering as his successor in the number one spot, with Hess in the number two position. After Hess made his fateful flight to England, Hitler reaffirmed his choice of Goering, this time making it legally valid. It may be that Goering began to take better care of himself from this point on, especially since he was convinced that Hitler, living in an unhealthy atmosphere and overburdening himself with work, was not destined to enjoy a long life. This is a possible theory, and one which is not without some objective basis. It is possible to conclude that Goering was saving himself for the hour and task which he expected to devolve upon himself. Nevertheless, waiting is always an unprofitable occupation, especially during a war, when waiting may all too easily mean a failure to take advantage of situations calling for actions and decisions./

Lutz Count Schwerin von Krosigk also believes that Goering's appointment as Hitler's successor was a burden for the Reichsmarschall during the war years, but views this from quite another position:

> Goering had been ceremoniously named as Hitler's successor. The fear that this honor might be withdrawn robbed him of the courage to contradict the Fuehrer in important matters. After all, there were a number of other candidates for the job of heir apparent, chiefly Goebbels and Himmler, who had not yet given up hope. These two were busily engaged

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*This reflects the relationship between Goering and Hitler in 1941.

/Editor's Note: Goering, who so firmly believed in the ideals and objectives of the "great society" of National Socialism, may, like many a modern Gnostic, have become deluded to the point that he could not face the sober realities at hand, especially the unpleasant ones, and thus became completely incapable of taking logical or decisive action within the framework of actual situations.

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It can be assumed that the Goering of 1944--this is the period from which Koller's close relationship with the Reichsmarschall dates--was even less prepossessing than the Goering of the Jeschonnek period. The conditions which brought about this thorough-going change will be considered in greater detail later. However, in the main, these conditions had existed for some time. Jeschonnek suffered deeply under the rule of the so-called little General Staff made up of Goering's adjutants, which came into play when Goering withdrew to Veldenstein or Karinhall. This type of control was bound to result in confusion, loss of authority, and decreased self-assurance for the real General Staff Chief. This was compounded by the fact that Jeschonnek was required by Goering to accompany him to Fuehrer briefings, only to wait for hours outside the door, and was also obliged to follow the Reichsmarschall on his various trips, thereby squandering time and energy on unworthy projects. Obviously, Goering had no compunctions about undermining his General Staff Chief when it pleased him to do so.[66] Could the Reichsmarschall's gifts to his staff members--he once presented a horse to Jeschonnek--make up for his otherwise atrocious behavior?

Jeschonnek's suicide seemed to sober Goering to some extent, and he was deeply impressed by his conversation with Mrs. Lotte Kersten, Jeschonnek's secretary, a mature person who had no hesitation in telling the Reichsmarschall about his role in the events leading up to the death of her chief.[67] But the sobering mood brought about by isolated interviews of this kind soon gave way to the indestructible optimism and self-assurance which were so typical of Goering.

On the whole, Goering's role during the war was far from the picture the masses had had of their Reichsmarschall, the man who possessed the gift of impressing all of those who were not intimately acquainted with what was going on. The cunning with which he managed to deceive even Hitler for a surprisingly long time into believing that he was working and worrying tirelessly about the air forces is substantiated by the words of Grossadmiral Erich Raeder:

> The following situation is typical of Goering's eagerness to display his full agreement with the Fuehrer. A morning conference attended by Goering's adjutant, Colonel Bodenschatz: The Fuehrer points out a sector on the Eastern Front in the operational area of the Army Group under Field Marshal von Bock, about which he [the Fuehrer] is concerned, since he considers it insufficiently secured, although the Field Marshal [v. Bock] maintains that the line is stable. Afternoon conference on the same day, after Bodenschatz

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the ultimate way out. Beside his dead body lay a note, "I can't work together with the Reichsmarschall any longer!" Other serious recriminations against Goering were also left behind.[64] The Luftwaffe did not have such a superfluity of leading personalities that it could afford to lose a man like Jeschonnek, and wise and timely action by Goering might have saved him.

The Reichsmarschall possessed neither the dignified superiority nor the calm self-assurance with which one holds servants who are capable of great deeds, the qualities which Emperor Wilhelm I used so admirably in winning devoted helpers for the task of uniting Germany. How could Jeschonnek, overcome with a sense of inadequacy as Chief of the General Staff, exist in an atmosphere which General der Flieger Karl Koller* described as follows:

> He [Goering] talked things over with anyone he felt like, the Chief of Supply and Procurement, the State Secretary, an air fleet commander or two, or with young squadron captains or group commanders with fantastic, completely immature ideas and concepts, but always apart from the others. No one knew what he had been discussing with anyone else, and the General Staff Chief was usually the last to find out (and then only by chance) what was actually going on. Then, too, the Reichsmarschall was hopelessly under the influence of his none too reliable intimates and his totally incompetent friends who had absolutely no ideas of the functioning of the Luftwaffe.
>
> The Reichsmarschall delighted in playing one man off against the other, and it gave him malicious pleasure when the two protagonists were at each other's throats. He would stand nearby and make scornful comments to those around him. He often impressed me, and others as well, as being pleased with the disharmony reigning among his own most important staff members. One had the feeling that he had no interest in bringing about an atmosphere of smooth cooperation, that he was almost afraid that this would lead to the establishment of a united phalanx against himself.[65]

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*The last Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff and one of Goering's severest critics.

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straits, an official investigation was made of the activities of the Technical Office during Udet's period of leadership. Goering then admitted to Generalstabsrichter Dr. Kraell that during Udet's briefing periods with the Reichsmarschall they frequently spent all of their time discussing the old days in the Fighter Wing "Richthofen," rather than in conversing about serious business.[61] Admissions of this sort opened Goering to grave rebukes for not having intervened in the affairs of the Technical Office in time.[62] There were, of course, instances in which Goering turned on his former friend in biting words with comments such as, "If I could only figure out what Udet was up to. He's brought the Luftwaffe into a state of absolute chaos! If he were alive today, I would have no choice but to tell him: 'You are the one who ruined the Luftwaffe!'"[63]

In the second case, that of the suicide of Jeschonnek on 18 August 1943, the matter centers upon an ultimate failure to act in the face of a specific task, an inadequacy which was crystallized largely in Goering's own method of fulfilling his official obligations and by his habit of doing nothing for weeks at a time. Jeschonnek failed because of his inflexible adherence to the concept of dive bombing, insisting that bombers the size of the He-177* had to be capable of diving performance--this was the death blow to the He-177--his failure to realize the urgent necessity of strategic air warfare against Russia even after it had become obvious late in 1941 that Hitler's promises for a successful blitzkrieg in the East would not be fulfilled, and because of his emphasis upon offensive operations at the expense of Germany's defenses. Jeschonnek, who was forced into the difficult role of attempting to please both Hitler and Goering, was bound to feel that he was trapped between Scylla and Charybdis.≠

The proper action would have been to relieve Jeschonnek of his post as Chief of the General Staff. An excellent soldier of the old military tradition, he could have rendered valuable service as the commander of an air fleet. Instead, Goering continued to treat him with pasha-like capriciousness, either praising him or chiding him, and refused, despite Jeschonnek's repeated requests, to relieve him of his post as Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe. The devastating news of highly successful enemy attacks on Germany and the telephone call in which a furious Reichsmarschall heaped recriminations upon his head drove him to despair and

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*See figure 6.

≠Editor's Note: Scylla is an outcropping of rock on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina, opposite the whirlpool Charybdis near the Sicilian coast (between the rock and the whirlpool, or, in American parlance, "between a rock and a hard place").

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> was confirmed by the Army chief legal authority, General [Walther] von Reichenau. The three pilots were shot. The case was brought to my attention. I explained the situation to Goering, pointing out that von Richthofen had violated regulations by granting legal authority over members of his service to the Commander in Chief of another service. I also mentioned other significant factors, including the triviality of the offense perpetrated by the three young pilots, when all things were considered, and the technical error which had been committed during the hearing in that they had not been assigned a defense counsel.
>
> Goering exploded when I told him all this. He immediately ordered von Richthofen and von Reichenau to report to him. He talked to the two of them in my presence, giving them a speech which I still remember to this day: "The factor of legal authority is the most precious jewel in the crown of any high-ranking troop officer." He described legal authority as deriving from two roots, "the duty of assuring self-discipline in others" and "the duty of watching over one's subordinates." He continued, "You, von Richthofen, have violated both precepts. You turned over your subordinates to the legal authorities of another branch of service. You abandoned these three pilots in their hour of greatest need." He sent von Richthofen and me out of the room while he talked to von Reichenau, but his thundering rage was audible from behind the closed door. He deprived von Richthofen of his legal jurisdiction for three months. . . . For years Goering was unable to banish the spectre of the death of these three youthful airmen."[73]

Goering's behavior during the investigation carried out against the leading engineers of the Technical Office and Udet's former chief of staff, Generalmajor August Ploch, rounds out the picture. Goering had worked up a towering rage against Generalingenieur Gottfried Reidenbach and particularly against Guenther Tschersich, to whom he attributed the catastrophic developments in Germany's aircraft production during the early years of the war. His attitude toward Ploch was one of uncompromising hatred and contempt.[74] In his opinion, the investigation which he ordered ought to have ended with the death penalty. He was so sure of his ground that he even demanded to be called as a witness. Dr. Alexander Kraell, however, the Generalrichter in charge of the investigation, was able to convince the reluctant Reichsmarschall that there was no indication whatever of criminal intent.[75]

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"Haven't we got anything against Ploch?" demanded Goering of Kraell.[76] He was intent upon seeing that this engineer got his "due." Yet he finally resigned himself to the opinions of the investigators and Dr. Kraell, and agreed that the case did not prove what he thought it would.* According to Kraell, "Goering's entire upbringing had made him respect the authority of impartial investigations. He had a sincere interest in justice and its administration. Subconsciously he may have been thinking of his own judgment by later generations."[77]

As he grew older Goering began to be more like his father, and took considerable pleasure in the administration of justice, just as did his father and grandfather before him. This was one aspect of the Reichsmarschall's life that was clearly in his favor, and an aspect which had a highly beneficial effect upon the Luftwaffe, for it was much easier for lower echelon legal officers to stand firm against legal abuses when they knew that the Commander in Chief backed them up.

Wrong Decisions and the Beginning of the End

On 7 February 1940 Goering signed a decree which was to have catastrophic effects upon the Luftwaffe, an order to stop aircraft developmental work. This decision affected work on all equipment which could not be ready for employment at the front within the next year. Without question it was based upon the optimistic assumption that the war would be a short one as Hitler had promised. Because of this decree (which was confirmed again in September of 1941), developmental work had to be discontinued on jet and rocket-propelled aircraft as well as on a number of other vital modern pieces of equipment.⁄ Although the air armament firms continued to work secretly on these items on their own initiative, they were unable to assign enough workers to these projects to keep them moving on a reasonable schedule. In any case, the former impetus was gone. The failure to mobilize in 1939 was now aggravated by the failure to take advantage of the period of undisturbed working conditions during 1940 and 1941. The development of the jet aircraft would have created a wide gap between Germany and the Allies, putting the Luftwaffe in a decisive position which the enemy could not overtake. It is not certain whether the development stoppage was Goering's own idea or whether it was issued on Hitler's

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*Hammerstein points out that Kraell's final investigation report did show criminal negligence in the Technical Office, but that Kraell's opinion was that, since the principal sinner was already dead, a continuation of the legal proceedings could only be of profit to the enemy.

⁄See p. 248.

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orders or instigation. Certainly the decree was not issued without Hitler's approval.

Goering's responsibility in the fatal decision to stop the German armored forces before Dunkirk is clear. According to the testimony of Generaloberst Heinz Guderian and Generaloberst Franz Halder, Hitler was nervous and uneasy during the successful advance of the German armored wedge toward the Channel coast (the first phase of the campaign in France). These witnesses assume that he probably subconsciously considered the French forces to be stronger than his conscious deliberations had indicated. He may also have been influenced by the memory of this terrain from his own days as a soldier.[78] In any case, he was obviously worried by the thought that Weygand's army, still intact, might deliver a crippling blow to the rear of the German forces while the panzer units were engaged against the withdrawing British forces along the coast. If an enemy maneuver of this kind had succeeded it could well have cancelled out the remarkable victories won up to that point. The French still had a reputation for courage and stubbornness, and the idea of a blow to the rear of the German armies might also have occurred to the French military staff. On the other hand, if the German armor had advanced deep into the Dunkirk area (or even as far as the critical Generaloberst Halder thought it could advance), Germany would have had a chance to capture the entire British Expeditionary Corps and the remainder of the French Army Group North, which was fighting beside it.

At this moment Goering approached Hitler with a most enticing proposal, one which was so typical of the Reichsmarschall's megalomania. The Luftwaffe, which had already won its laurels in the campaign in the West and which had until then intimidated British fighter pilots so that they hardly dared face the German air might, appeared to its temperamental Commander in Chief (then at the zenith of one of his emotional cycles) as an absolutely invincible force. He saw the Luftwaffe as the instrument chosen by destiny to dive-bomb and batter to destruction the enemy, which was then in full retreat toward the port of Dunkirk. Why bother the German Army with this detail? Quite obviously, Goering's motivations were vanity and an overweening pride in his air forces.*

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*According to Kesselring, Goering alone was to blame for the decision, especially since he had already been informed of the necessity of providing rest for German air units after three weeks of day and night combat action. See _Soldat bis zum letzten Tag_ (_Soldier to the Last Day_), Bonn: Athenaeum Verlag, 1953, p. 77.

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Generalleutnant Josef "Beppo" Schmid, Chief of Luftwaffe Intelligence, was an eyewitness to the entire affair, and described the situation:

> I happened to be present when Goering learned, through normal communications channels, that the German tanks approaching from both east and west had reached the outskirts of Dunkirk. Thereupon, without even stopping to think, he decided that the British Expeditionary Corps had to be conquered from the air. I heard the telephone conversation which he subsequently had with Hitler. Goering described the situation at Dunkirk in such a way as to suggest that there was no alternative but to destroy by an attack from the air those elements of the British Expeditionary Corps trapped at Dunkirk. He described this mission as being a specialty of the Luftwaffe, and pointed out that the advance elements of the German Army, already battle weary, could hardly expect to succeed in preventing the British withdrawal. He even requested that the German tanks, which had reached the outskirts of the city, be withdrawn a few miles in order to leave the field free for the Luftwaffe.
>
> Hitler, stopping no longer to think than Goering had before making his suggestion, agreed to the proposal.[79]

Goering and his General Staff Chief were firmly convinced that the Luftwaffe would succeed in crushing the British Expeditionary Corps in the Dunkirk area and in preventing its escape to the British Isles.[80] It is now common knowledge that the Luftwaffe did not achieve its goal of destroying the enemy, since it carried out effective attacks only on the city and harbor of Dunkirk, attacks which did nothing to prevent the British from escaping by day and night in small and medium-sized boats from the long, broad, sandy beaches. Those German bombs which landed on the beaches were simply dissipated and buried by the sand, thereby being completely ineffective. The Luftwaffe also had no opportunity to reassemble for the Dunkirk operation. Thus, participating units were stationed at bases situated relatively far away. One wing of Ju-88 bombers was stationed in Holland, and had to fly along the English Channel to Dunkirk, meanwhile providing easy prey for enemy Spitfires. In the course of the action over Dunkirk the Spitfires even managed for a time to achieve aerial supremacy during daylight hours.[81] Moreover, during the period in question the VIII Air Corps, the unit best trained and equipped for dive-bombing operations, was kept out of action for three days (29-31 May) because of fog over northern France. The result was that the British managed to rescue most of the Expeditionary Corps, altogether

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a total of 338, 226 British and French troops, although they had to abandon 7, 000 tons of ammunition, 90, 000 guns, 2, 300 artillery pieces, 120, 000 motor vehicles, 8, 000 machine guns, and 400 antitank guns.[82]* Goering's intervention enabled the British to free their forces from the deadlock in front of the German armored forces, and allowed the Allies a free hand to withdraw, German Army units not reaching the inner city or harbor of Dunkirk until 4 June, by which time the last British ships had departed.

In this instance Goering had promised much more than he could deliver, at the expense of the Luftwaffe's reputation. This was the first serious loss of prestige suffered by this arm of service. Yet, despite this lesson, the incorrigible Reichsmarschall was no more cautious with respect to the air war against England. The Luftwaffe simply had too many missions to fulfill, and Goering overestimated its potential, just as he underestimated the strength and tenacity of British fighter forces. The struggle for air supremacy along the English coast and over southern England, and the shift (before air supremacy had been achieved) to all-out attacks on London and an economic war, were tasks which far exceeded the capability of the German Air Force. The experience at Dunkirk concerning enemy strength and resolve were simply ignored. In the words of the Swiss historian, Dr. Theo Weber, "the Luftwaffe Operations Staff ought to have given due consideration in its planning to the effectiveness of the British fighters employed at Dunkirk, which, after all, were responsible for the successful evacuation of a third of a million British and French troops. Jeschonnek and Goering cannot be absolved of blame for having failed to exercise the degree of care which must be demanded of military leaders during wartime in collecting and evaluating information pertaining to the strength of the enemy."[83]

During the German air offensive against Britain, which lasted until 10 May 1941, the Luftwaffe for months on end was involved in an endless series of missions which were extremely costly both in materiel and in personnel. Most aerial combat took place over British soil or the Channel, so that those pilots who managed to escape from their damaged aircraft by parachute either drowned in the Channel or were captured by the enemy. In either case they were no longer available to the Luftwaffe, whereas the British pilots in similar situations were soon able to go into the air again in new aircraft.† The Luftwaffe's losses were all the more serious because they involved many of its best qualified personnel. Generalleutnant Theo Osterkamp, in his memorandum of October 1943, went

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*See figure 24.

†See figures 25 and 26.

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Figure 24
Air view of the hazardous open beaches at Dunkirk, France, just after the British evacuation of Anglo-French forces, May 1940

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Figure 25
Damage by Luftwaffe bombing around
St. Paul's Cathedral, London, 1940

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Figure 26
Part of "the few" who defended Britain against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, Hurricanes of No. 73 Squadron, RAF

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so far as to state, "I cannot help thinking that the German Luftwaffe never recovered from this blow, especially in view of the fact that it was forced to curtail training time and to reduce its standards with respect to moral fitness in order to fill the gaps which were thus created."[84]

In Germany, aircraft production was progressing much more slowly than in Great Britain. Even the German pilot training program, which at first had been well ahead of its British counterpart, began to suffer as a result of the continual requisitioning of training planes and instructor personnel for use in air-borne operations. Both factors embodied a tacit shift in military superiority for the future, quite apart from the fact that American war materiel shipments to Britain were rapidly becoming a factor with which to be reckoned.

In the aura of glory surrounding Germany's remarkable victory over France, Goering, like his Chief of Staff, Jeschonnek, and like Udet in the Technical Office, failed to realize that fate was beginning to spin its threads into a web of catastrophe for the future. He failed to see that critical evaluation and hard work were even more important after the fall of France than at the beginning of the war. It is true that British air attacks on German cities had not yet reached a point in 1940 where one had to take them seriously, but could such a situation be expected to continue for long?

Clearly the year 1940 was an unproductive year for the Luftwaffe, and one which did little for the future. The situation was aggravated by the fact that five days after Compiegne Hitler placed the Luftwaffe in fifth place on the armament priority list, which made the procurement of raw materials more complicated, and practically impossible for the ineffectual Udet and his staff. There, in the midst of victory, stood factors which were to lead to the defeats of 1944 and 1945, all of them unnoticed by the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe.

Goering Advises Against the Russian Campaign

In the summer of 1939, Hitler had been obliged to pay a high price for freedom of action against Poland. The treaties Germany concluded with the Soviet Union on 23 August and 28 September 1939, which envisioned a limitation of the mutual spheres of interest in the East (patently in favor of the Soviet Union), were not in the nature of an alliance calculated to range the eastern giant on Germany's side against Great Britain. Instead, Stalin found himself in a convenient position to take advantage of the collapse of Poland, brought about by the German attack, to occupy more than half of the country without any need for Russian bloodshed. The German

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victors even handed over the city of Lvov, taken at such a high cost, much as the Americans in 1945 were to hand over Saxony and Thuringia to the Russians, who had not fired a shot to conquer that area. While Germany was tied down by its struggle in the West with France, Russia, upon the flimsiest of pretexts, calmly took over the Baltic states, attacked Finland (to the horror not only of Hitler, but of most of the western world as well), and in June 1940 seized from Rumania the provinces of Bessarabia and northern Bucovina (neither of which had been mentioned in the Moscow treaties). Stalin had no compunctions about going beyond the boundaries of the spheres of interest agreed upon, and Hitler felt himself to be a victim of Bolshevist blackmail. There was no doubt about it, Germany's Russian ally, which had taken advantage of the war in the West to expand its own territorial holdings without trouble or danger, was beginning to become a menace. Moreover, at first in secret, and then more and more openly, Russia was beginning to concentrate large numbers of troops along the eastern border of Germany.

Hitler felt extremely uneasy about Russia, with which he had concluded a treaty of friendship (albeit with inner reservations and only for reasons of political expediency). He had been thwarted in his hope of securing a peace with England, chiefly because the United Kingdom under the leadership of Winston Churchill had become enraged and was determined, regardless of the costs or the probable end, to see Germany brought to her knees. Thus Germany's leader decided to cut the Gordian knot in the East, and the Wehrmacht's remarkable victory in the West served to increase his self-confidence to an incalculable degree. Hitler underestimated the Russian opponent, which had not made a particularly good showing in the war against the Finns. This attitude of overoptimism was apparently shared by many of the German generals. Halder's diary, for example, gives no indication of the fact that any of the Army generals had brought serious misgivings of any kind to Hitler's attention.* The Commander in Chief of the Navy was of a different turn of mind. In a discussion on 26 September 1940, Grossadmiral Raeder suggested that Germany ought to concentrate its efforts in the Mediterranean and the Near East, the occupation of which would not only force England to sue for peace, but would also restrain Russia from intervening in the war. Although Rader tried to warn Hitler a second time,[85] he did not succeed in winning him over to his opinion.

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*Editor's Note: Generaloberst Heinz Guderian asserts that he did not believe that the Soviet Union could be defeated in a blitzkrieg of 8 to 10 weeks' duration, and that he reported this to Halder through his Chief of Staff, but without receiving any response. See _Erinnerungen eines Soldaten_ (_Recollections of a Soldier_), Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1951, p. 128.

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