An analysis of the effect of civil-military relations in the Third Reich on the conduct of the German campaign in the West in 1940

John Ogden Shoemaker
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork

Recommended Citation
AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECT OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS
IN THE THIRD REICH ON THE CONDUCT OF THE
GERMAN CAMPAIGN IN THE WEST IN 1940

by

John Ogden Shoemaker

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

June 1964
PREFACE

The author's analysis of the effect of civil-military relations on the conduct of the German campaign in the West in 1940 is based upon three case studies. Chapter I provides the background for the civil-military relations existing in the Third Reich in 1940 and introduces the major personalities in the case studies which follow. Each of the next three chapters describes a separate military situation during the German campaign in the West in 1940 and the civil-military environment in which it developed. These three cases were selected because each has posed difficult and controversial problems of interpretation for historians. The fifth and last chapter provides a cumulative analysis of the three cases and briefly extends the Nazi debacle to its conclusion.

Chapter II appeared in slightly different form in an article in the March 1962 issue of Military Review entitled "Sichelschnitt, Evolution of an Operation Plan." That paper was first undertaken as a research project in a "Graduate Problems" course in History at the University of Omaha and was prepared for publication with permission of the Department of History and the Graduate Council, the University of Omaha. The maps in Chapters II, III, and IV were prepared from sketches by the author and are based on research connected with this study.
The author expresses his appreciation for the guidance and assistance provided him by Dr. A. Stanley Trickett, Professor and Chairman of the Department of History, University of Omaha. Without Dr. Trickett's wise counsel and encouragement this endeavor would not have been possible.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I. HITLER REMOVES THE MILITARY OPPOSITION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 100,000 man Army - The S.A. - The Blood Purge - The Blomberg-Fritsch Affair - The Opposition of Ludwig Beck - The Halder Plot - The Eclipse of OKH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN OPERATIONAL PLANNING</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Airplane Mishap - THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN - OPERATION ORDER YELLOW - Manstein's Opposition - SICHELSCHNITT, the Manstein variant - Hitler Changes Plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN &quot;THE STOP ORDER&quot;</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing the Dunkirk Pocket - Hitler's Stop Order - The Military Situation on 24 May 1940 - Political Considerations - Military Considerations - Historical Controversy - Rundstedt, von Brauchitsch, Goering, and Hitler - The Evacuation of the B.E.F.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND THE FAILURE TO INVADE BRITAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Defeat of France - No Plans for Invasion of Britain - Invasion Possibilities - Disagreement Among the Military - OPERATION PLAN SEA-LION - The Preparation - Political Considerations - Hitler's Indecision - Abandonment of the Plan - The Decision to Attack the Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND THE FAILURE OF GERMANY TO ACHIEVE VICTORY IN THE WEST IN 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Failure of Military Leadership - The Failure of Political Leadership - The Significance of WESERUEBUNG, the &quot;Stop Order,&quot; OPERATION SEA-LION, and BARBAROSSA - Civil-Military Responsibilities in Development of National Strategy - Responsibility for the German Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Illustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>OPERATION PLAN YELLOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>SICHELSCHNITT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Battle Situation at the Time of German &quot;Stop Order&quot; of 24 May 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>OPERATION PLAN SEA LION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>OPERATION PLAN SEA LION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

"We live in an age in which military influence in both foreign and domestic policy is marked and is growing, and there is little hope that this tendency will be reversed in the foreseeable future."¹

Germany, more than any other modern nation, has had a wide variety of problems in its civil-military relationships. "No other officer corps achieved such high standards of professionalism, and the officer corps of no other major power was in the end so completely prostituted."² Each phase in the development of the German State had its corollary in civil-military relations. During the Imperial period, the collaboration between Chancellor Bismarck, War Minister Roon, and Field Marshal von Moltke illustrates the success that may be achieved through civilian control of national destinies when accompanied by competent military advice. The political upheaval of the Republican period shows the difficulty of maintaining civilian control during periods of political turmoil. The virtual military dictatorship of the World War I period illustrates the chaotic results of purely military control of political decisions. The disintegration of the German Armed Forces (Wehrmacht) during the Nazi era indicates the


equally catastrophic results to be expected when political leaders ignore the warnings of professional soldiers. In Nazi Germany, the absence of a civil-military equilibrium resulted in distortion of the perspective and judgment of soldiers and statesmen alike, "leading to a bellicosity in peace and a weakness in war which contributed to their ultimate downfall."3

The thesis that follows concerns itself only with the Nazi period of German history--in particular, the German military campaigns in France and Flanders in 1940. The civil-military relationships during this period reflect the complete lack of rapport between Hitler and the General Staff. The resulting unclear division of responsibilities and conflicting authority precipitated a host of inexcusable errors in military and political management. These factors, together with Hitler's propensity for directing local military actions far beyond his competence, contributed to the eventual defeat of the German Armed Forces by the Allied Powers.

3Ibid., p. 99.
CHAPTER I

HITLER REMOVES THE MILITARY OPPOSITION

The story of civil-military relationships in the Third Reich during the years 1933-1940 is an account of one man's conquest of a military organization. It describes the diabolical process by which Hitler, "the one time corporal, outmaneuvered the strongest General Staff and gained absolute control of the most formidable military machine that the world had ever seen."¹

The General Staff with which Hitler had to deal was the product of the European development of the German State. The precepts and traditions of the General Staff were admired and emulated by every military power. It was the model to which the United States turned in 1898 to modernize its own armed forces.

The General Staff developed by the elder Moltke and von Roon subscribed to a policy of complete divornment of military and political affairs. Military plans were prepared without regard to their political implications. Although corporate anonymity in military command was the tradition of the General Staff, the highest level of individual competence and responsibility within the corporate leadership was developed. By adherence to the strictest moral and intellectual--as well as caste--standards, the General Staff operated with

selfless devotion to the sovereign and state. These were the traditions developed by the General Staff as answers to the basic problems of military command in the democratic-capitalist-technological society of the times.\(^2\)

The high standards and traditions of the General Staff did not long survive their exposure to Adolf Hitler. The Fuehrer corrupted the German military leaders as he corrupted everything else in the Third Reich. The collapse of the German Army in 1945 was the result of the failure of the German General Staff to control Hitler while this was still possible. The German generals realized this too late—to their anxiety and chagrin. Walter Goerlitz, in his *History of The German General Staff*

draws a picture of men like Beck or Halder or von Model or even Rommel in the end, tortured by their consciences and their fears, caught up upon the terrible wheel of Hitlerian Satanism, unable either to acquiesce or to oppose, bound by oaths which others had betrayed and dedicated to a national end which others had turned into a thing of loathing and putrefaction.\(^3\)

When President Hindenburg entrusted the German Chancellorship to Adolf Hitler on January 30, 1933, the German Army (*Reichswehr*) was limited by the Treaty of Versailles to a total strength of 100,000 men. Although the political direction of military affairs was constitutionally vested in the Reich Minister for Defense, General [later Field Marshal] Werner von Blomberg, the real control of military power was vested in the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres* -


\(^3\)Ibid., p. ix.
OKH). The OKH staff, which succeeded the old German General Staff (Grosse Generalstab), staunchly maintained the old German military traditions.

An immediate and natural antagonism sprang up between Adolf Hitler and the politically conservative General Staff who looked upon the new Chancellor as a demagogue and an upstart. For his part, Hitler hated the older type of officer as representative of a rotten and incompetent upper class. 4

A product of the masses and a man of passion, whose chief experience of war had been as a battalion runner, Hitler spontaneously distrusted these ultra-rational, aristocratic professional soldiers. Yet he needed them, for they controlled the decisive force in the state; they alone could provide the foundation of Germany's military resurrection. 5

Prior to obtaining the Chancellorship, Hitler had established his own private army for political purposes. The Brown Shirts (Sturmabteilung - S. A.), while useful enough in street battles, were incapable of opposing the Reichswehr. Although Ernst Roehm, leader of the S. A. and Hitler's confidant from the days of the Beer Hall Putsch, recommended a direct assault on the General Staff as a means of obtaining immediate and complete control of Germany, Hitler preferred the indirect approach. Unsure of his power while President Hindenburg was still alive, Chancellor Hitler adopted the tactic of infiltration. However indirect Hitler's approach was, the test of strength between sword and swastika had begun.

4Wilmot, op. cit., p. 83.
5Ibid.
Though concerned with the rowdy tactics of the new German Chancellor, the generals felt secure in their traditional prerogatives. With President Hindenburg as Commander-in-Chief, the General Staff relaxed in their headquarters on the Bendlerstrasse and observed the machinations of the Nazis with detachment. The generals made a fatal error at this time in not realizing the threat posed to their security by Adolf Hitler. As Field Marshal von Blomberg testified at Nuremberg, "Before 1938-1939 German generals did not oppose Hitler. There was no reason to oppose him, since he produced the results they desired."\(^6\)

From 1934 to 1938, the aims and objectives of Hitler and the generals largely coincided. The Nazi politicians, and General Staff, and the resurgent German industrialists cooperated effectively in the rearmament of Germany.

The remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936 struck many of the generals as a dangerous gamble, but when it came off successfully they were delighted. There were promotions and big responsibilities for everyone. Even the cautious and high-principled Chief of the General Staff, General Ludwig Beck, was temporarily won over. Open opposition to the Fuehrer was non-existent; those few who still doubted his leadership held their peace.\(^7\)

Hitler's full support of clandestine rearmament in violation of the Versailles Treaty, the impetus he gave to the nationalistic orientation of the Nazi Party, and the deference with which he initially treated the senior generals had the combined effect of convincing the military


leaders that the new Chancellor was pursuing goals common to their
own. This is not to contend that the German General Staff unanimously
subscribed to the National Socialist Revolution. Individual or collec-
tive responsibility for Nazi success cannot be attributed to the generals.
There were many who were uneasy about the activities of the brown-
shirted terrorists. It can be said, however, that a primary prerequi-
site to the seizure of power by the Nazi conspiracy was the consent
given by the German military leaders.

Closely interlocked with the Junker aristocracy and carrying
enormous prestige with the business and professional classes,
an unmistakable military frown would have had prodigious effect
throughout Germany, . . . If the senior generals had had a
modicum of devotion to the Republic and firmness of purpose
there is little doubt but that they could have laid Hitler low. 8

One of the first major crises between Hitler and the General
Staff involved the position of the S. A. Captain Ernst Roehm, leader of
the S. A. and recently appointed a cabinet member by Hitler, proposed
that the Army, Navy, Airforce, S. A., and Schutzstaffel (S. S.) be
merged into one national defense organization. 9 The prospect of the
elite German officer corps being merged with the brown-shirted
rowdies of the S. A., the special troops of Goering's Luftwaffe, and
Himmler's Gestapo oriented S. S. alarmed the generals and they
quickly gained Hitler's agreement to quash Roehm's grandiose plans.
For this, however, they paid a high price.

8 Ibid., p. 68.
9 John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power: The
German Army in Politics (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1953),
pp. 307-308
To indemnify the Party for the withdrawal of Roehm's plans, the Defense services agreed to adopt the Party's emblem, the eagle with the Swastika, upon their headwear and uniform as a sign of their allegiance, an action which, whatever the leading men might think about it, had a great symbolical effect both on the services and the population in general. 10

Besides accepting the National Socialist Party emblem as part of the uniform insignia of the Armed Forces, the General Staff, on 25 May 1934, issued an eight point directive to the Army entitled "The Duties of the German Soldier." This directive was a bonus paid by the Army for the abolition of the S.A. The directive was written in the new Volkisch style and "said proudly that the Army's first duty was to protect 'The Reich,' the people now united in National Socialism, and its living space. . . . Hitler could have asked for no more generous avowal of support."11

By thwarting the plans of Roehm to integrate the Reichswehr into a national organization under his own leadership, the General Staff achieved only an interim objective. In their view, the entire S.A. organization had to be shattered in order to assure that the Reichswehr was the sole instrument of armed power in Hitler's Germany. The Army prodded Hitler into destroying the S.A. in order to establish the primacy of the Reichswehr, and for this they again paid a high price. The generals agreed to support Hitler and the Nazi Party. Thus, in a sense, the General Staff precipitated the "Blood Purge" of June 30th, 1934.


The Army, . . . was pressing for the purge, but it did not want to soil its own hands. That must be done by Hitler, Goering, and Himmler, with their black-coated S. S. and Goering's special police. 12

This tacit agreement to a massacre without precedent in German history was the undoing of the German military leaders. "The action of the Reichswehr on this occasion has been rightly described as the most fatal in a long succession of unwise steps." 13 At the time, however, it appeared to have many appealing advantages for the Army as well as for the Nazis. Hitler sought to placate the generals without whose support he could not succeed. The price the generals placed on their support of Hitler was the assurance that they alone would direct the armed military forces of the Third Reich. The purge of the S. A., and the murder of Ernst Roehm, was to be their practical guarantee.

The agreement between the Army and the Nazis by which the generals would accept Hitler as Hindenburg's successor, provided he would break with and "settle" the S. A. and left wing of the Nazi Party, "was made plain and accepted in conversations between Blomberg and Fritsch 14 on the one side, and Hitler and his deputy [Rudolf] Hess, on the other, during a cruise on the Robert Ley in the beginning of June [1934]." 15 It was von Blomberg himself who suggested the "deal" with Hitler. Blomberg's position was in full accord with the principles

12 Shirer, op. cit., p. 220.
14 Colonel General Freiherr Werner von Fritsch, Commander-in-Chief of the German Army.
he had expressed that, although it was a point of honor for a Prussian officer to be correct, it was "the duty of the German officer to be crafty."16

By purging the S.A., Hitler appeared to have placed himself in the hands of the military leaders. The preeminence of the General Staff was transitory, however, for one month after the purge the S.S., under Himmler, was made independent and responsible only to Hitler. This highly disciplined and elite force became much more powerful than Roehm's Brown Shirts had ever been and a powerful rival to the Army.17

By forcing Hitler to destroy Roehm and the S.A., the Army further increased the Fuehrer's enmity toward the General Staff. Ernst Roehm had been Hitler's most intimate friend and comrade of long standing. Although the two had had many disagreements before the purge, the Fuehrer was not to forget the men who pressured him into his crony's murder. "The 4th February 1938, 18 was Hitler's revenge for the 30th June 1934."19 "The officer corps only deluded itself in thinking that . . . it got rid forever of the threat of the Nazi movement

---


17Shirer, op. cit., p. 226.

18On 4 February 1938, Hitler announced that he would personally assume the office of Defense Minister, with General Walter von Brauchitsch as C-in-C Army and General Wilhelm Keitel as Chief of Staff of the newly created Ober Kommando Wehrmacht, OKW. Goering was advanced to Field Marshal.

19Rosinski, op. cit., p. 224.
against its traditional prerogative and power. . . . For the moment, however, the generals were smugly confident."20

The sense of honor and decency upon which the German General Staff had prided itself for generations was forever lost by its open condonement of the massacre of the S. A. Complicity in this massacre was the first step of the Reichswehr "towards its adaptation to the moral standards of the Third Reich."21 The slaughter of Germans "for the defense of the State" included the brutal murder of two leading German officers, Generals von Schleicher and von Bredow, who were branded as traitors.

Only the voices of the eighty-five-year-old Field Marshal von Mackensen and of General von Hammerstein, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Army, were raised in protest against the murder of their two fellow officers and the charges of treason which had been the excuse for it. 22

By obtaining the collusion of the military leaders in the political murder of two of their senior colleagues, the Nazis had gone far in their efforts to corrupt the high principles of the General Staff. Two days after the Blood Purge of the S. A., Field Marshal von Blomberg, Minister of War, publicly indicated the General Staff's "agreement"

---

20 Shirer, op. cit., p. 226. The S. A. was never completely eliminated, although it was said in Berlin that this was only because it was mentioned in the Horst Wessel Song. It ceased, however, to be a military force of any consequence or future. See Craig, op. cit., p. 478, fn.

21 Rosinski, op. cit., p. 225.

22 Shirer, op. cit., p. 225.
with the Nazis by issuing an order of the day to the Army: "expressing the High Command's satisfaction with the turn of events."  

President von Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934. Hitler, by means of astute political maneuvering and the support of the Reichswehr, merged the offices of President and Chancellor under the title Fuehrer and Reichskanzler. In so doing, he himself assumed supreme power in the Third Reich. Hitler lost no time tightening even more the political and moral fetters binding the General Staff to the aspirations of the Nazi Party.  

That same morning [that Hitler assumed power] von Blomberg and the heads of the three services were summoned to Hitler's study and ordered to swear an oath which he himself had drafted out on a slip of paper; an oath of allegiance not to the constitution, as hitherto, not to the Fatherland, but to the Fuehrer personally. The following day every member of the German Armed Forces was likewise obliged to declare; "I swear by God this holy oath: that I will render unconditioned obedience to the Fuehrer of the German Reich and People, Adolf Hitler, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier, to stake my life at any time for this oath."  

Prior collaboration between the military leaders and the principals of the Nazi Party led directly to the signing of the oath. By signing the oath, the German military leaders became an inextricable part of the Nazi machine. Hitler's desire for absolute military power—

23Ibid.  
24Wilmot, op. cit., p. 84; Craig, op. cit., p. 480, gives von Blomberg credit for drafting the oath for Hitler. The taking of the oath was reported in the 3 August edition of the Voelkischer Beobachter, which reported: "Following the taking of the oath, the Armed Forces gave three cheers for the new Commander-in-Chief, whereupon the two National anthems were played." [Lied der Deutschen and Horst Wessel Lied] See Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10. --Nuernberg, October 1946--April 1949 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1951), X. (Hereinafter referred to as TWC), "Document NOKW-3132, Prosecution Exhibit 419." p. 473.
his determination to be Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht—was closer to realization. From that day on, the autonomy of the General Staff was doomed.

That oath was to be the corner-stone of his [Hitler's] power, the rock upon which every attempt at military opposition to the Nazi regime was broken. In obedience to it Germans in arms were to carry out manifold acts of aggression and spoilation, torture, and murder throughout the length and breadth of Europe.25

The generals' "deal" with Hitler concerning the purge of the S. A., the acceptance of the Nazi symbol for the Wehrmacht uniform, and the Army's loyalty oath to the Fuehrer had by the fall of 1934 severely compromised the General Staff. The Reichswehr, however, was not yet the complete creature of the Nazis. Other crises would arise, other disputes would occur, other deals would be made, and more humiliation would be heaped upon the generals before Hitler would completely dominate the Heeresleitung. Three major military figures remained in the Fuehrer's way in 1934 and had to be eliminated before his control of the officer corps could be absolute. These three—Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, Minister of Defense; General Freiherr Werner von Fritsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Army; and General Ludwig Beck, Chief of the General Staff—were to be removed by Hitler for opposing his desire for a new war. Von Blomberg and von Fritsch would be the first to go. It turned out that Hitler arranged their dismissal within days of each other.

On 5 November 1937, Hitler convened a secret conference in Berlin at which he expressed his intention to go to war in order to obtain

25Wilmot, op. cit., p. 84
lebensraum for Germany. Attending the conference were a small group of high ranking officials including Blomberg, Fritsch, and Goering as well as Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, and the German Foreign Minister, Baron Konstantin von Neurath. The conference lasted for four hours during which Hitler spoke on the necessity for Germany to go to war to solve the German economic and social problems and left no doubt as to the identity of his first intended victims.26 Hitler informed his generals: "For the improvement of our military and political situation it must be our first aim, ... to conquer Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously, ..."27

Neither Blomberg nor Fritsch wanted war; they both strongly opposed Hitler's thesis. They stated that Germany was not yet ready for war and that France and England would immediately oppose any German move toward Czechoslovakia.28 "One result of the discussion was unmistakable. Everyone knew where he stood. Hitler had plainly declared his wish for another war, while his War Minister and the Commander-in-Chief of his Army made it equally clear that they wanted nothing of the kind."29 Three months after this November

26Taylor, Sword and Swastika, pp. 139-140.


28Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 145.

29Goerlitz; op. cit., p. 310.
meeting, Blomberg and Fritsch were out of office, their involuntary departure the result of Hitler's anger at their opposition.30

Field Marshal von Blomberg was a widower who unwisely married a secretary in the War Ministry without knowing that she had a police record. The police dossier on the girl, which came into Goering's possession, "showed that the bride of the Field Marshal and Commander-in-Chief had a police record as a prostitute and had been convicted of having posed for pornographic photographs."31

Neither General Fritsch nor General Beck came to Blomberg's defense in this matter. Blomberg, by his close association with the Nazi leaders and by wearing Nazi decorations on his Army uniform had alienated many of his military associates and had no true friends in the officer corps. General Fritsch, when informed of the scandal, went directly to Hitler and demanded Blomberg's resignation.32

General Beck, hearing of the police dossier on Blomberg's wife, told General Keitel, "one cannot tolerate the highest-ranking soldier marrying a whore."33

On 25 January 1938, Goering brought the evidence against Blomberg to Hitler who, upon reading the charges, became enraged.

30Taylor, loc. cit.

31Shirer, op. cit., pp. 312-313. As a young girl, Blomberg's new wife had been arrested for her activities in her mother's "massage salon," which, as was common in Berlin, was a cover for a brothel. See also Taylor, op. cit., p. 146.

32Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 367.

Apparently what disturbed the Fuehrer the most was the thought that "his Field Marshal had deceived him and made him, who was an official witness at the wedding, look like a fool." Goering after informing Hitler about Blomberg's wife, made a personal call on the Field Marshal to break the news to him. Blomberg appeared to be genuinely amazed at his wife's background and offered to divorce her at once. Goering informed him that this was no longer enough as Fritsch and Beck were demanding his dismissal. On 25 January, 1938 Hitler summoned Blomberg to an audience and informed him he was through as Minister of Defense and, ironically enough, asked him to nominate his successor. Passing over General Fritsch—the logical successor—who, he considered, had abandoned him in his hour of need, Blomberg nominated Goering and General Keitel, in that order, as his successor. The Fuehrer thanked him for his long service, expressed his sympathy for the fallen Field Marshal, and bade him farewell with the promise to recall him to active duty when he was needed in time of war.

"Like so many other promises of Hitler, this one was not kept. Field Marshal von Blomberg's name was stricken forever from the Army rolls, and not even when war came and he offered his services was he restored to duty in any capacity."  

---

34 Shirer, op. cit., p. 313.  
35 Ibid.  
36 Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 367-368; see also Shirer, op. cit., p. 314, and Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 149.  
37 Shirer, loc. cit.
The behavior and motives of the several actors in this weird sequence remain somewhat obscure to this day. It has not infrequently been suggested that Goering (or Goering and Himmler) deliberately lured Blomberg into the marriage in order to bring about his dismissal. The factual basis for this appealing inference is slender. 38

The dismissal of von Blomberg—the first Field Marshal of the Third Reich—did, however, eliminate Goering's rival for the highest military rank. The charges against von Blomberg also enabled Fritsch and Beck (with no pangs of conscience) to abandon their military superior whom they suspected was too close to Hitler; it also enabled Hitler to remove a senior soldier in order to clear the way for his own assumption of supreme military command and simultaneously set the stage for his attack on Fritsch whom he considered his most dangerous opponent.

Colonel General Freiherr Werner von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and a gifted and unbending officer of the old school ('a typical General Staff character,' Admiral Raeder called him) was the obvious candidate to succeed Blomberg as Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. 39

Unlike Blomberg, who had become tainted through his close association with the Nazis, Fritsch had the respect of the German generals. General Albert Kesselring, who had collaborated closely with Fritsch in the old Truppenamt days and at the War Academy, considered him "the paragon of what a man and officer should be." 40

---

38Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 147.

39Shirer, loc. cit.

Having shattered the aplomb of the officer corps by dismissing the Minister of Defense for marrying a whore, Hitler continued his assault on the citadel of the General Staff by accusing the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of homosexual activities. Though completely innocent of the charges, General Fritsch's constant preoccupation with his duties and his austere living habits made him especially vulnerable to accusations of this type. In addition, "Fritsch was a lifelong bachelor who was not known to have ever had much to do with the opposite sex, and a very reserved man." In addition, General Fritsch once wrote "I never go out, I decline all [invitations from] foreign ambassadors as a matter of principle, and I never invite them myself." In answer to a correspondent's question as to the extent of Army influence in politics, Fritsch replied "The Army does not mix in politics." The Nazis had little to fear from Fritsch's political aspirations. However, the constant and hopeful rumors abroad that the Army would soon have to "settle" Hitler associated Fritsch with those opposing the Fuehrer; hence the general's removal was both inevitable and predictable.

The charges against Fritsch presumably were passed to Hitler by Goering or Himmler. The police dossier presented to the Fuehrer alleged that the general had engaged in a homosexual act

---

41 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 155.
42 Craig, op. cit., p. 490.
43 Kielmansegg, Fritschprozess, p. 30., quoted in Craig, loc. cit.
44 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 154.
with a young man [Lustknabe] in a dark alley near the Potsdam railway station, and had since been paying blackmail to an underworld character who had caught him in the act. When informed of the charges by Hitler's adjutant, Colonel Hossback, "the taciturn Prussian nobleman was stupefied. 'A lot of stinking lies!' he blurted out."45

Hitler seized upon the charges against Fritsch as a golden opportunity to destroy the prestige of the Army High Command without alienating the officer corps as a whole,46 and on 26 January [the day after Blomberg's dismissal] he summoned the Commander-in-Chief for a personal interview.

In the presence of Himmler and Goering, Hitler confronted Fritsch with the charges against him, and brought the general face to face with his accuser who promptly identified him. When the Fuehrer demanded Fritsch's resignation, the general—livid with rage—refused and demanded a military court martial. Hitler, for his part, vetoed Fritsch's request for a court martial, curtly dismissed the general after ordering him on indefinite leave, and thereby effectively removed him from office pending resolution of the charges.47

The scene in the Bendlerstrasse on the return of von Fritsch from the Reichskanzlei must have recalled a similar occasion just five years before, when, on January 28, 1933, von Schleicher came back from his dismissal as Chancellor. Then,

---

45Shirer, op. cit., p. 315; see also Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 313.

46Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 369.

47Ibid.
as now, the generals raged furiously together; then, as now, they imagined a vain thing. 48

The atmosphere in Berlin during the last days of January 1938 was filled with tension "not unlike that on the eve of the purge in 1934; and the air was filled with rumors to the effect that the Army at long last was prepared to make its stand against the tyrant." 49 Unlike von Blomberg, who had lost the confidence of the Army, von Fritsch was a highly respected senior officer. It is quite possible that had he raised the cry to revolt, the majority of the officer corps would have followed him. In 1926, Fritsch had urged General Seeckt to employ force to prevent his dismissal. Later, in June, 1938, Fritsch agreed that he too had erred in not resisting his dismissal with violence. 50 Thus, Fritsch joined the distinguished company of Groener who admitted that he should have acted in 1932, and of Hammerstein who regretted not having acted in January 1933.

General Beck, Chief of the General Staff, who might have persuaded Fritsch to revolt, did not try. Von Fritsch was confused and in a state of shock. He still did not realize that Hitler was behind the monstrous conspiracy against the Army. 51 It is difficult to

48 Ibid.
49 Craig, op. cit., p. 493.
50 Kielmansegg, Fritschprozess, p. 122; quoted in Craig, loc. cit.
51 Craig, op. cit., pp. 493-494; see also Shirer, op. cit., p. 317 and Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 315. Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 369, maintains that Beck wished to organize an Army Putsch against Hitler. Wolfgang Foerster, who had the general's private papers, does not support this thesis. Quoted in Shirer, op. cit., p. 317, Foerster says: "It was clear to these men [Fritsch and his close associates, including Beck] that a military Putsch would mean civil war and was by no means sure of success."
speculate what went through the mind of von Fritsch as he debated the alternative courses of action that might be used to combat the evil charges levied against him by Hitler. He may rightly have discounted his chances of success in a Putsch against the Nazis. The German people were still much enamoured of "Der Fuehrer," and there was also good reason to believe that the Army would be opposed not only by the S.S. and the Gestapo, but by Goering's Luftwaffe and the German Navy as well in any move against the Fuehrer. Then, too, there was Fritsch's oath to the Fuehrer taken in August 1934--no German officer could in honor break such an oath. Shaken and confused by the enormity of the conspiracy against him, Fritsch quietly surrendered and submitted his resignation as Hitler had demanded.

Fritsch had his day in court however. His fellow generals--led by the venerable von Rundstedt--saw to that. The military court of honor presided over by Goering who was promoted to the rank of Field Marshal, opened in Berlin on 10 March 1938. Serving with Goering on the court were the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army and Navy--General Walter von Brauchitsch, also newly appointed; Admiral Raeder; and two senior professional judges of the Supreme War Tribunal. The trial was almost immediately suspended upon receipt of news of the Austrian plebiscite; but it resumed on 17 March 1938 and concluded the following day. "The Tribunal announced the acquittal of Fritsch 'for proven innocence' and the proceedings were closed."  

---

52 Goerlitz, loc. cit.

53 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 158; see also Shirer, op. cit., pp. 320-321.
Fritsch's personal honor and reputation were vindicated by his acquittal, but the Nazi's purpose was achieved. Another major obstacle to Hitler's control over the Wehrmacht was removed. The German generals did not yet realize "that what had actually come to pass was the complete subjection of the Army to the will of Hitler."54 The removal of Blomberg and Fritsch and the related reshuffle of Army as well as other government leaders55 were not immediately made public. On 4 February 1938, however, public announcement was made to the high level changes. The 6 February 1938 edition of the Voelkischer Beobachter announced, under date line of 4 February, the retirement of Blomberg and Fritsch "on grounds of health;"-- "The Fuehrer takes over the supreme command of the Armed Forces;" --"Armed Forces Office becomes High Command of the Armed Forces and is placed under the Fuehrer as his Personal Military Staff;"-- "General Keitel [is designated] Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces;"--"General Goering is designated Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force and is designated Field Marshal;"--and, "General von Brauchitsch is designated Commander-in-Chief of the Army."56

It was Ludwig Beck's turn to reckon with Hitler. As the military leader of the abortive 20 July 1944 Putsch against Hitler,

54Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 319.

55Including Ulrich von Hassell, Ambassador of Italy; and von Neurath, the Foreign Minister who was replaced by von Ribbentrop.

56"Extract from Voelkischer Beobachter, 6 February, 1938." TWC, Document NOKW-3115, Prosecution Exhibit 1439.
Beck has become a legendary figure and a hero of the anti-Nazi forces. He had several opportunities to oppose Hitler before the war, but in each instance he stopped short of taking violent action. General Halder testified at Nuremberg that even at the time of his resignation as Chief of Staff in 1938 Beck still believed that the Army "should not aim at a revolutionary change, but that an evolution would still bring about Hitler's removal." Halder said he told Beck at the time that he did not understand creatures like Hitler and advised: "With such a man or beast you can compete only by using force." 57

Although Beck had welcomed Hitler's coming to power and in the early days of the NSDAP had publicly extolled the Fuehrer, the Fritsch affair had opened his eyes, and by 1938 he was totally against Hitler's policy. 58 Even if Beck had not opposed Hitler for political reasons, he would have been compelled to oppose him on military grounds. Hitler's increasing disposition to meddle with military plans and the growing tendency of OKW and the Fuehrer's personal staff to interfere with Army matters greatly angered Beck and aroused his distrust. He finally severed all relations with Jodl and Keitel and


58 Ibid.

59 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 198; see also Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 392.
thereby further isolated himself from the seat of Power.\(^{60}\) The only means he had left to combat the steady encroachment of the Nazi regime was von Brauchitsch, but "Beck soon realized this was a slender reed to lean on and no relation of mutual confidence developed between the two."\(^{61}\) "Brauchitsch unquestionably belonged to the old school. . . .  He was by no means a convinced National Socialist, but like all the generals he had to accept the fact of Hitler’s enormous popularity."\(^{62}\) Von Brauchitsch had no desire to place himself in charge of a movement to oppose or restrain Hitler, for he was convinced that Hitler had the support of the German people. "Why in heavens name," von Brauchitsch demanded after the war, "should I, of all men in the world, have taken action against Hitler? The German people had elected him, and the workers, like all Germans, were perfectly satisfied with his successful policy."\(^{63}\)

Although Beck could not approach Hitler except through von Brauchitsch, he could, as Chief of Staff, write staff studies expressing his views. In June 1937, Beck returned from a visit to France and thereupon issued a detailed staff memorandum expressing the folly of German involvement in a premature war. This memorandum was a lengthy and critical evaluation of the Hitlerian thesis of "inevitable

\[^{60}\text{Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 323.}\]
\[^{61}\text{Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 196.}\]
\[^{62}\text{Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 324.}\]
\[^{63}\text{Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 400, quoting from memorandum of Otto John.}\]
war. 

Now, in the spring of 1938, Beck composed a series of memoranda to von Brauchitsch which strongly maintained that an attack on Czechoslovakia would provoke a world war that Germany could not expect to win. Beck's belief was sustained by the majority of the General Staff. In 1938, most of the senior German officers believed that while Germany was militarily capable of defeating either Poland or Czechoslovakia, she was not in a position to engage in a war with France. They also believed that an attack on Czechoslovakia would force France and England to honor their treaty obligations to that country and would therefore be tantamount to an attack on these countries as well. The anxiety of the German General Staff was eased therefore when Hitler said, after the Austrian Anschluss in March 1938, that "there is no hurry to solve the Czech question because Austria has to be digested first."

Hitler, however, in a secret meeting with Keitel on 21 April 1938, discussed the political and psychological factors involved in preparing world opinion for a German military move against Czechoslovakia. Later, on 21 May 1938, the Czechs partially mobilized their forces and moved troops toward the German frontier. This placed Hitler in a defensive position diplomatically. Greatly angered, Hitler boiled inwardly for a week and then, on 28 May 1938, determined that

---

64 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 144.
65 Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 392-393.
66 Jodl diary, undated entry—from context apparently written on or about 11 March 1938.
Germany must attack Czechoslovakia before the end of the year. On 30 May 1938, he issued **OPERATION PLAN GREEN**.  

The Fuehrer signs directive green, where he states his final decision to destroy Czechoslovakia soon and thereby initiates military preparations all along the line. . . . The whole contrast becomes acute once more between the Fuehrer's intuition that we must do it this year and the opinion of the Army that we cannot do it as yet, as most certainly the Western Powers will interfere and we are not as yet equal to them.  

The issuance of **OPERATION PLAN GREEN (FALL GRUEN)** was the signal to Beck that time was fast running out for those who would deter Hitler from war. He therefore increased his efforts to intensify the resistance to Hitler. He prepared more memoranda, set up secret meetings with the senior generals, and made more frequent contacts with key civilian opponents of Hitler.

On 16 July 1938, Beck, in the last of his memoranda to von Brauchitsch, proposed that the Commander-in-Chief call a meeting of all the senior generals, read them his memorandum, and then lead them to the Chancellery where—with a united front—they would demand of Hitler that he stop preparations for aggressive war. Beck concluded his memorandum with the words: "In order to safeguard our position before history and to keep the repute of the Supreme Command of the Army unstained, I hereby place on record that I refuse to approve any warlike adventures of the National Socialists." Beck told von

---

67 Ibid.
68 Jodl diary, 30 May 1938.
Brauchitsch that if Hitler refused to stop his plans for war, the generals should resign in a body. 71

The meeting was arranged for 4 August 1938. Beck had prepared a rousing speech for von Brauchitsch to read to the generals incorporating details from his memorandum. Von Brauchitsch, however, declined to speak, and it fell upon Beck to read his own memorandum of 16 July which he did in a very impressive manner. For his part, von Brauchitsch made only a few remarks describing the situation merely as "serious." 72

None of the generals present voiced a dissenting view, but neither did any of them arise to lead the assembled group to the Fuehrer to present an Army ultimatum. One of the senior generals present, General Wilhelm Adam, however, ex-chief of the Truppenamt and the Commander-in-Chief-designate of the western forces in case of war, stood up to support Beck's views and--complaining about the inadequacy of the western defenses--predicted that his forces would be speedily overrun by the French in case of war. 73

Beck greatly desired von Brauchitsch to take the general's case to the Fuehrer, but the Commander-in-Chief would not do so. In his summary at the conclusion of the meeting, "he stated the fact that,

71 Shirer, op. cit., p. 368.
72 Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 402-403; see also Shirer, op. cit., p. 369, and Taylor, Sword and Swastika, pp. 200-201.
73 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 201.
with two exceptions, all present were opposed to war, but he made no appeal for action. "74

Hitler quickly learned of Beck's memorandum and its presentation to the assembled generals. Halder, in his pre-trial interrogation at Nuremberg, told of the memorandum and Hitler's reaction to it:

Adolf Hitler, who had his spies everywhere, heard about the memorandum. Of course it took a few days before it was presented to Hitler, but already Hitler had asked where it was. Then Brauchitsch submitted the memorandum to him. I was not present at this conference. Brauchitsch told me... "he handed the memorandum to Hitler and in broad outline expressed the warning of a policy leading to war. . . . Hitler said that he, as responsible leader of Germany, must decline all assumptions that his policy would bring about a conflict. . . . Hitler's main interest was who got this memorandum. He wondered who might have read it, . . . Brauchitsch replied that only the generals and some higher officials of the OKH had learned about the memorandum."75

Upon learning that Beck's memorandum had been read to all the senior generals, Hitler was furious. Having always distrusted the "Old School," he had come to feel that he could expect greater support from the younger officers like Guderian and Manstein. "In private conversation Hitler had declared that he would take Czechoslovakia with the old generals, and then take France with a new crop."76 He decided to assemble the "new crop" to listen to his philosophy and counteract the effect of Beck's memorandum.

On 10 August 1938, Hitler took an extremely unorthodox step. He invited the Army Chiefs of Staff (except Beck), the Luftwaffe Group Chiefs of Staff, and several other general staff officers--but none of

74Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 403.
75Halder Testimony, pp. 1549-1550.
the commanding generals or senior officers—to the Berghof, his residence on the Obersalzburg above Berchtesgaden. This breach of protocol was a direct rebuff to the senior officers concerned. In the German Army, where protocol meant so much, it was an enormous affront—one which Fritsch, for example, would never have tolerated.

After lunch, the Fuehrer spoke for three hours on world politics, discussing each European country individually and at some length. During the harangue, the assembled officers—ranging in rank from Lieutenant Colonel to Lieutenant General—listened politely. At its close, however, the generals challenged the Fuehrer's conclusions concerning the possibility of Anglo-French nonintervention, the supremacy of German industry, and the strength of Germany's western defenses. On the subject of Germany's western defenses, General Adam's opinion—expressed at the 4 August meeting of the generals—was presented to the Fuehrer. Hitler became furious and launched into one of his famous diatribes, bitterly chastising the officers most of whom had never experienced such an exhibition. General Jodl described the luncheon and its aftermath in his journal entry of 11 August 1938:

The subsequent attempts to draw the Fuehrer's attention to the defects of our preparation, which are undertaken by a few generals of the Army, are rather unfortunate. . . . The Fuehrer becomes very angry and flares up. . . . The cause of this dispassionate opinion, which unfortunately enough is held very widely within the Army General Staff, is based on various reasons. First of all it [the General Staff] is restrained by old memories; political considerations play a part as well, instead of obeying and executing its military mission. That is certainly done with technical devotion, but the vigor of the soul is lacking because in the end they do not believe in the genius of the Fuehrer. And one does perhaps compare him with Charles XII. And since water flows downhill, this defeatism may not only possibly cause some immense political
damage, for the opposition between the general's opinion and that of the Fuehrer is common talk, but may also constitute a danger for the morale of the troops. 77

Prior to this time, Hitler perhaps had not realized just how far the water had indeed "run downhill." His solution, however, was a simple and direct one--shut off the water. This meant that Beck had to be removed from office. Three days after the 15 August 1938 Jueterbog review, at which Hitler reiterated his intention to "solve the Czechoslovakian question by force," Beck resigned--asking von Brauchitsch to resign with him. Von Brauchitsch declined, however, saying "I am a soldier; it is my duty to obey."78

Hitler promptly accepted Beck's resignation but insisted that his departure be kept secret. From misguided patriotism and loyalty, and showing unbelievable political naivete, Beck agreed. As a result, no publicity was accorded the event. Ulrich von Hassell observed that Beck was "pure Clausewitz, without a spark of Bluecher or Yorck."79

In view of the failure of Beck's appeal to the generals and the representations that were circulating in London at the time, it was truly a tragedy that Beck did not make an immediate public announcement of his resignation.80 The news of an open and violent disagreement

77Jodl diary, 11 August 1938.


79Von Hassell, op. cit., p. 347.

80On 18 August 1938, Ewald von Kleist-Schwenzin was sent to England where he spoke to Sir Robert Vansittart, Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government, and Winston Churchill. Von Kleist's thesis—that England and France must strongly oppose Hitler's demands upon Czechoslovakia, as the German General Staff, led by Beck, did not want war and was opposed to Hitler's warlike intentions—was passed to the British Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister who received it with extreme skepticism. Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 411-412.
between Hitler and his Chief of Staff at this particular time would have lent great credence to von Kleist's visit to the British leaders and "might have prompted Neville Chamberlain to think twice before reaching for his umbrella."  

Beck's successor, General Franz Halder, was a strong opponent of Hitler. When Beck resigned, he told the members of the German resistance group--with whom he had been in contact--that Halder was equally determined to oppose Hitler's plans for aggressive war. In his testimony at Nuremberg, Halder described the situation at the time he was appointed Chief of the German General Staff:

If [the invasion of the Sudetenland] was to be prevented, action had to be taken. With methods of memoranda and resignation, nothing could be achieved. All that remained was the possibility of force. Thus, the resistance group, which at that time existed and became stronger in the OKH, was forced necessarily on the path of a military revolt. After Beck had retired, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army had asked me whether I wanted to become his successor. After a short time for consideration, during which I discussed matters with Beck, I answered: "If I take over this office, I am only doing it in order to exploit all possibilities of that position for a fight against Hitler and his regime." The Commander-in-Chief shook my hand, and that is how I became his chief of staff.

Franz Halder came from a professional military family in Bavaria. His father had been a distinguished general. An artilleryman, Franz Halder served as a staff officer to Crown Prince Rupprecht of

---

81 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 204.

82 Ibid.

Bavaria in the First World War. He served in the Truppenamt from 1926 until 1931 when he returned to Munich to become chief of staff, first of a division, and later a corps. Here also, he subsequently commanded the 7th Division until his appointment to the General Staff as an assistant to Beck. Besides his reputation as a believing Christian, he was the first Bavarian and the first Catholic to be appointed Chief of Staff. A man of wide intellectual interests with a special bent for botany and mathematics, Halder was reluctant to concede that his duty might some day compel him to become the first Chief of the General Staff to plan the overthrow of the German government.

Halder rapidly became the center of the plot to remove Hitler, and it was he who prepared the detailed military plans for the Putsch. The Putsch—a counterplan to Fall Gruen—was prepared with infinite care and was to be executed on Halder's order in lieu of OPERATION PLAN GREEN at such time as Hitler ordered the Army into Czecho-slovakia.

Co-conspirators with Halder were General Stulpnagel, Halder's chief of plans; Count Wolf von Helldorf, Chief of the Berlin Police; Count Fritz von Schulenburg, the Deputy Chief of the Berlin Police; General Erwin von Witzleben, Commander of the Berlin Military Area and III Corps; General Count Erich von Brockdorff-Ahlefeld, Commander of the Potsdam Garrison; and General Erich Hoepner, Commanding General of an armored division in Thuringia. There were,

84Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 405 fn.
85Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 331.
in addition to these military leaders, Dr. Carl Goerdeler, ex-major of Leipzig; Johannes Popitz, Prussian Minister of Finance; Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reichsbank; Ulrich von Hassell, ex-Ambassador to Italy; and other lesser known figures who had become disenchanted with the Fuehrer's plans for the Third Reich. Allied with the plotters and supplying them with information and a secret courier service were Admiral Canaris, Chief of the Abwehr [Secret Police] and his deputy, Colonel Hans Oster. Deeply involved in the plotting and intimately aware of all the plans were Hans Gisevius, an official of the Prussian Ministry of Interior, and Erich Kordt, Chief of Ribbentrop's secretariat in the Foreign Office. 86

The plan of the "Halder Plot" was a simple one. Upon receipt by Halder of Hitler's order to execute OPERATION PLAN GREEN, General Witzleben's troops would surround the government buildings in Berlin, arrest Hitler in the Chancellery, and hold him for trial as a warmonger before the German Peoples Court. 87

It had been planned to occupy by military force the Reich Chancellory and those Reich offices, particularly Ministries, which were administered by Party members, and close supporters of Hitler, with the express intention of avoiding bloodshed, and then trying the group before the whole German nation. 88

The case against Hitler had already been prepared by Dr. Ernst Sack of the Judge Advocate General's Department. A panel of psychiatrists, under the chairmanship of Professor Dr. Karl Bonhoeffer, had

---

86 Halder Testimony, pp. 1551-1563; see also Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 407; Shirer, op. cit., pp. 375-405; and Goerlitz, op. cit.
87 Halder Testimony, loc. cit.; see also Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 334.
88 Halder Testimony, loc. cit.
prepared to declare Hitler insane based upon his actions and his prior medical record. Hitler's case history on file at the Passwalk medical hospital, where he had once been a patient, suggested his certification—but nothing had ever been done about it. 89

Exactly what was to happen after the Army's seizure of power was not clear. Halder's ultimate intention, however, was to establish a caretaker military government until another civil government could be formed. Halder likened this "transition period" to the time "Seeckt had taken over the executive power 90 and the Reich Government had retired for a period." In Halder's view, "Such a transitory period was necessary in order to give the German people a chance to make up their minds and to show to the German people what sort of men were at the head of the German state. The material for this enlightenment of the people had been collected by other people like Canaris." 91

To be head of state during the transition period, Halder had initially selected von Fritsch—but von Fritsch politely refused. 92 Halder then settled on von Braunschitsch whom he did not bring into the plotting, however, until a very late date to avoid exposing the Commander-in-Chief to the risk of Hitler's prematurely discovering the plot. As Halder later testified, "I had to keep my Commander-in-Chief apart.

89 Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 407.
90 1923-1924, under the Weimar Republic.
91 Halder Testimony, pp. 1552-1553.
92 Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 335.
I had to keep him clear of this. I may play with my own head, but not someone else's. 93

The terrible tensions of the Czechoslovakian crisis in late September 1938 provided an ideal psychological environment for the proposed Putsch to oust Hitler. Never again would such an opportunity present itself.

For the first time—and it was to be the last—the General Staff had the chance of striking a blow, and discontent with Hitler was so widespread as to promise such an excellent chance of success. The masses had cheered Hitler rapturously when he brought them peace and bread. The masses were now wavering for he was bringing them peace no longer. 94

To arouse enthusiasm for his warlike declaration against Czechoslovakia, Hitler ordered the parade of a motorized division in Berlin on 27 September 1938. The Berliners did not want war and were in no mood for a parade. Consequently, the marching troops received little attention and less applause from the few apathetic spectators. William L. Shirer, an eyewitness to the event, related: "At the urging of a policeman, I walked down the Wilhelmstrasse to the Reichskanzlerplatz where Hitler stood on a balcony of the Chancellery reviewing the troops. There weren't two hundred people there. Hitler looked grim, then angry, and soon went inside, leaving his troops to parade by unreviewed." 95 General von Witzleben, commander of the troops on parade, "later confessed that he was tempted to unlimber his guns

93 Halder Testimony, p. 1553.
94 Goerlitz, op. cit., pp. 334-335.
95 Shirer, op. cit., p. 399.
right there before the Chancellery, and then go in and lock 'that fellow' up."\textsuperscript{96}

Halder considered three conditions essential to a successful revolutionary action. "The first condition is a clear and resolute leadership. The second condition is the readiness of the masses of the people to follow the idea of the revolution. The third condition is the right choice of time."\textsuperscript{97} The Chief of Staff believed that in September 1938 the first two conditions existed. Accordingly, he had arranged with Jodl to give him at least five days' notice of the order to German troops to march toward the Czech border. Jodl promised OKH that at least forty-eight hours notice would be provided.\textsuperscript{98} This gave Halder enough time to complete his plans and make last minute dispositions of the troops for the Putsch. In Halder's opinion, Hitler's order to the Army to invade Czechoslovakia would be incontrovertible proof to the people of the latter's desire for war, and would be an appropriate time for the Putsch. All the requirements for a successful revolt would thus be met.

The tensions in the Allied capitals and in Berlin increased as September 1938 drew to a close. On 24 September, Neville Chamberlain returned to London from Godesberg where he had received Hitler's newest demands on Czechoslovakia. These demands were promptly transmitted to the Czech government which immediately ordered general

\textsuperscript{96}Goerlitz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 338.

\textsuperscript{97}Halder Testimony, p. 1557.

\textsuperscript{98}Jodl diary, 8 September, 1938.
mobilization. The French government called up 400,000 reservists in addition to those already on duty, and the British High Seas Fleet put to sea. War appeared imminent.

On 27 September, the third condition for a successful Putsch -- the right time -- was satisfied: Hitler issued the order for the German troops to occupy their attack positions for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Also on the 27th Halder, as he testified later at Nuremberg, "initiated" von Brauchitsch into the plan. Meantime, the German people were greatly disturbed by the rumors of war as evidenced by public reaction to the parade ordered by Hitler [page 35 supra]. By 28 September, the Halder cabal was convinced that the time was ripe to execute the Putsch. Halder, therefore, summoned von Witzleben, Schacht, and Hans Gisevius to his apartment in a quiet sector of Berlin to discuss the final act. The Putsch was about to be executed when, on the 29th the news of the pact of Munich arrived. At Munich, Hitler, Mussolini, Daladier, and Chamberlain had reached an agreement subsequently announced by the British Prime Minister as "Peace in our time." The conspirators against Hitler were stunned. Once again the Fuhrer was spared by a stroke of that evil good fortune that appeared to guide his destiny. Halder described the situation in bitter words:

99 Jodl diary, 27 September 1938.

100 Halder had not yet moved to the luxurious villa in Grunewald that was later provided him by Hitler as his official residence.

101 Halder Testimony; see also Hans Bernd Gisevius, To the Bitter End (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 287.
The nation was ready to assent to a revolutionary act for fear of war. . . . The choice of time was good because we had to expect . . . the order for execution of a military action. Therefore we were firmly convinced that we would be successful.

But now came Mr. Chamberlain, and with one stroke the danger of war was avoided. Hitler returned from Munich as an unbloody victor glorified by Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier. Thus, it was a matter of course that the German people greeted and enjoyed his successes. Even in the circles of Hitler's opponents--the senior officer corps--those successes of Hitler's made an enormous impression. . . . With the stroke of a pen, an open victory was attained. The critical hour for force was avoided. 102

At Halder's pre-trial interrogation at Nuremberg, the interrogator asked the ex-Chief of Staff, "Do I understand you to say that if Chamberlain had not come to Munich, your plan would have been executed, and Hitler would have been deposed?" Halder's response was, "I can only say, the plan would have been executed, I do not know if it would have been successful."103

The success of the Munich conference convinced Hitler that not only was his intuition in political matters infallible but that the time was ripe for a further restriction of the authority of the generals. "Hitler was now wholly the autocrat. He was short-circuiting both the customary diplomatic channels and the General Staff, the latter now having perforce abandoned its advisory function and sunk to the level of a mere executive tool."104

Von Brauchitsch and Halder found their spheres of authority more constricted daily, and there was little they could do about it.

102 Halder Testimony, p. 1558.
103 Ibid.
The German people and—to a lesser extent—the German Armed Forces were delighted by Hitler's bloodless victory at Munich. The notion that Hitler was infallible became widespread. The Fuehrer's prestige soared and the generals were powerless to counter his increasing incursions into their previously inviolate prerogatives. Obviously, a Putsch was now impracticable; yet the only remaining weapon against Hitler's policies—the wholesale resignation of the General Staff—was wholly antithetical to the education, customs, and tradition of the German officer corps. The initiative had passed to Hitler, and the moment for revolt had gone—never to return.

At a meeting with Keitel, Jodl, von Brauchitsch, Halder, Goering, and Raeder—held on 23 May 1939 in his study in the Reichskanzlei—the Fuehrer announced his intention "to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity." The General Staff was directed to prepare OPERATION PLAN WHITE (Fall Weiss) in detail. Behind a screen of diplomatic and political camouflage, the military planning was completed, and on 1 September 1939 the forces of the Third Reich attacked Poland. On 3 September, Britain and France declared war on Germany, and World War II had begun. The lightning success of the Wehrmacht's Blitzkreig in Poland further whetted Hitler's appetite for aggression, and he immediately initiated plans for attacking the Allies in the west. The generals, however, were not immediately taken into their leader's confidence and remained ignorant of his strategic aims.

By 1939, because of the many crises of confidence, Hitler and his General Staff were not communicating well. Lacking positive strategic guidance from the Chief of State, the General Staff was preparing only for defensive action in the west. Even when the battle of Bzura was concluded in Poland, Hitler and von Brauchitsch had not had an exchange of views on what action the Fuehrer was contemplating in the west. General Heinrich von Stulpnagel, Chief of the Operations Section of the General Staff, had prepared an appreciation of German offensive opportunities against France, and had concluded that the German Army would not be adequately equipped to break through the Maginot line before 1942. In addition, the General Staff, inhibited by Hitler's recent assurance to Holland and Belgium, did not consider going through these countries to attack France. Accordingly, at the end of the Polish campaign, the plans of the General Staff were geared to placing the Army in a defensive posture. 106 Von Brauchitsch was therefore totally unprepared for Hitler's decision of 27 September 1939, followed by the OKW directive on 9 October which announced his plans to attack in the west. Hitler mentioned 12 November 1939 as a possible date for commencing hostilities. Without any previous consultation with the Commander-in-Chief, he [Hitler] not only ordered offensive measures in the west but even decided on the timing and method to be adopted. All these were matters which should on no account have been settled without the concurrence of the Commander-in-Chief. 107


107 Ibid., p. 84.
Staff was left with the technical direction of a war plan in which it had not been consulted and for which it could not guarantee any measure of success.

Faced with this fait accompli, von Brauchitsch and Halder developed OPERATION PLAN YELLOW (Fall Gelb) for an attack in the West. By late October, however, the Commander-in-Chief and his Chief of Staff were trying to persuade Hitler to postpone the attack until spring. The many bitter arguments between Hitler and the Army over the timing of the attack in the west and the evolution of the operation plan itself are recounted in the following chapter.

Although the generals did not cease their clandestine resistance to Hitler after the Polish campaign, and although the Halder cabal continued to plot against the Fuehrer, no further plans of any consequence were developed for a military Putsch on the scale of that arranged for September 1938. The campaign in the west in 1940 was executed essentially by the same high command that had controlled the armed forces since the resignation of Ludwig Beck. Supported by Keitel and Jodl at OKH and aided by his adjutant Colonel Rudolf Schmundt, Hitler personally directed the western campaigns. In doing so, he paid ever more attention to the details of the tactical battle even though von Brauchitsch and Halder opposed his brash interference with purely tactical military matters. The resulting civil-military dichotomy met with mixed success dependent upon the degree to which battlefield tactics were dictated by Hitler and based upon political rather than military considerations.
CHAPTER II

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN OPERATIONAL PLANNING

On 10 January 1940--four months before the Nazi invasion of the West--a German aircraft with engine trouble made a forced landing 12 miles north of Maastricht at Mechelen-sur-Meuse in Belgian Limbourg. The pilot and his passenger were apprehended by Belgian authorities, and the official German documents they were carrying were impounded by the Belgian government.

This incident, relatively unimportant in itself, may have had far-reaching consequences for the success of the German invasion of the low countries and France, and perhaps for the outcome of the entire war in Europe.

This particular airplane was carrying Major Helmut Reinberger, an important Luftwaffe staff officer and Commandant of the Parachute School at Stendal, who had been detailed to help form the plans for the airborne invasion of Holland. For personal reasons, Major Reinberger was anxious to hasten the trip from Muenster, where he had been delayed awaiting train connections, to his headquarters in Cologne. Impatient at the delay, Major Reinberger violated security regulations requiring him to travel by rail and accepted the invitation of a Major Hoenmanns, an old friend and pilot, to fly him to Cologne. Unfamiliar with the type of plane he was flying, Major Hoenmanns set a course taking them over a bit of Belgian territory and
became lost in the clouds. 1 It was at this extremely inopportune moment that the aircraft developed engine trouble and shortly thereafter the plane, pilot, passenger, and the papers they carried were on the ground in Belgian territory.

Major Reinberger attempted to burn his papers as soon as the plane landed but was stopped in the act by Belgian soldiers who hastened to the scene. Later, at the Belgian headquarters where he was taken, he again attempted to destroy the documents by grabbing them from a table where they had been placed and throwing them into a stove. Again the papers were saved when an alert Belgian officer retrieved them before they were burned. The documents were then delivered to the proper Belgian authorities who immediately determined their significance and communicated their contents to the British and French governments. 2

The documents carried by Major Reinberger included a draft of the German Operation Plan--complete with maps--for the invasion of France through Belgium and Holland. Only the date was blank. The attack had been planned, however, to start in seven days.

The German Embassy in Brussels reported that Reinberger had burned the papers to "insignificant fragments, the size of the palm of his hand." 3 General Alfred Jodl, Chief of Hitler's Supreme Staff (OKW), in his diary of 12 January 1940 reported consternation in

---


3 Ibid.
Berlin. "If enemy is in possession of all files, the situation is cata-
strophic." At 1300, 12 January 1940, Jodl telephoned the Chief of the
Army General Staff to stop all troop movements forward for the planned
attack.

The German attack, which had been delayed several times
because of changes in plans and bad weather, was now postponed again
on the basis of the compromised plan.

The Germans had good reason to doubt Major Reinberger's
statement that he had destroyed the plan. The Belgian government
ordered "Phase D" (the next to last step in their mobilization) into
effect and called up two new classes. On 17 January 1940, the Belgian
Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, told the German ambassador that
the German documents that had recently come into Belgian hands con-
tained clear and detailed proof of an intention to attack.

Winston S. Churchill, in his war memoirs, acknowledges
receipt of the captured German plans, although he gives a wrong date
for the airplane mishap; and reference to receipt of the information is
found in the diaries of several of the high-ranking officers on the French
General Staff of the period. In every case, the information appears to
have confirmed the belief of the British and French governments that

4 Jodl diary, 12 January 1940.
5 Ibid.
6 Shirer, op. cit., p. 672.
Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., The Riverside
their current war plans to meet the anticipated German attack were sound and required no revision.

The reaction of the German war leaders to the news that their war plans had been compromised is interesting. General Albert Kesselring, in Berlin at the time, described it:

On 12 January 1940, as Chief of the Berlin Air Command, I as usual conveyed to the Reichsmarschall our birthday greetings. . . . Whispers had been current the day before that there had been a flare-up between Goering and Hitler, though nobody knew the reason. When my appointment with Goering was put forward an hour I guessed this had something to do with this rotten business. I was right. Never before or afterward did I see Goering so down in the dumps, and that is saying something with Goering's temperament. But he had reason enough for his depression. It turned out that a flying officer had made a forced landing in Belgium with a passenger carrying a draft of our plan of campaign. That this should have happened to an airman of all people was enough to unsettle stronger nerves than Goering's. The extent of the harm done, however, could not be gauged, as no clear report of the incident was available; we did not know parts of the plan the pilot had been unable to burn and had thus fallen into the hands of the Belgian General Staff and consequently into those of the French and British.

When Air Marshal Winninger, our sometime Air Attache in London, who represented our air interests in the Benelux countries, arrived soon after me, he was unable to give an entirely satisfactory explanation either. We had none of us any doubts on that day that a courts-martial sentence hung over the two unfortunate. But here, as altogether in the first campaigns, luck was on our side inasmuch as the importance of the capture - to put it briefly - was not recognized by the enemy and on our side the over-all plan was soon changed.  

Air Marshal Helmuth Felmy, Commander of the Air Fleet to which Major Reinberger was assigned, and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Josef Kammhuber, were both relieved by Goering over the airplane incident although there was no proof of their complicity in the matter. Air Marshal Felmy was retired to civilian life and Colonel Kammhuber

8Kesselring, op. cit., p. 48.
was sent to Bavaria to command a bomber group. After joining the Nazi Party in May 1941, Air Marshal Felmy was recalled to active duty; Colonel Kammhuber survived the war to eventually become the head of the West German Air Force.\(^9\)

General Kesselring was made Commanding General of Air Fleet Two supporting General Fedor von Bock's Army Group B after the previous commander, Air Marshal Felmy, had been relieved. In describing his first conversation with General Bock after assuming command of Air Fleet Two, Kesselring says: "The offensive had actually been ordered for the middle of February, but though we considered it probable there would be changes in the plan they were not of sufficient moment for us to discuss them."\(^{10}\)

It appears, therefore, that though acknowledging the original plan would have to be changed as a result of the compromise, the high ranking field commanders felt that these changes would be slight.

When the Polish campaign was successfully terminated, the Fuehrer had turned quickly to the task of mounting an offensive against France. The German high command, desiring time to retrain the disorganized divisions which had been engaged in Poland and to replace the key leaders and critical materiel that had been lost, was not overly enthusiastic about the proposed sudden attack against such formidable opponents as Britain and France. Spurred on, however, by Hitler, who demanded instant action, the OKH produced the original

---


\(^{10}\) Kesselring, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
OPERATION PLAN YELLOW of the 19 and 29 October 1939 as the basis for offensive action in the west. This was the plan that was captured by the Belgians and placed in the hands of the British and French.

German critics of the plan immediately attacked it as only a slightly modified version of the time honored SCHLIEFFEN PLAN of 1914. They questioned its application to the conditions prevailing in 1939—some 25 years after its inception.

For two generations prior to 1939, the SCHLIEFFEN PLAN had been a magic phrase to German military students and planners. The great plan of Graf Schlieffen, worked out while he was Chief of the German General Staff from 1891 to 1905, had received the approval and admiration of the apologists for the German defeat of 1918. Had the plan been followed as originally conceived by Schlieffen, they said, rather than modified as it was by the younger Moltke, Germany would have very easily achieved great victory over France in the west.

Although much has been attributed to the SCHLIEFFEN PLAN, very little was actually known about its details until Gerhard Ritter, an eminent German historian, uncovered the original Schlieffen papers in the United States Archives in Washington after World War II. They had been carried there after the war along with a mass of other German documents captured at Potsdam by United States forces. Ritter, in his book, The Schlieffen Plan, Critique of a Myth, published in 1958, presents the original Schlieffen papers in detail. As B. H. Liddell Hart points out in his foreword to Ritter's book, the magic of the SCHLIEFFEN PLAN was actually a myth. "As a strategic concept it
proved a snare and a delusion for the executants, with fatal con­sequences that were on balance inherently probable from the outset."

The problem faced by Schlieffen in 1900 was much the same as that faced by Hitler in the fall of 1939. Both men were haunted by the spectre of a war on two fronts—one against the Russians in the east and the other against the Allies in the west. In 1939, as in 1900, the combined strength of Germany's opponents was vastly superior to her own. Although Hitler had recently signed a treaty with the Soviets, he was seriously concerned about the security of his eastern frontier.

Schlieffen's solution to his strategic dilemma was to deal with the adversaries separately: first, knock France out of the war and then turn east to deal with the Russian forces.

Tactically, Schlieffen's plan was a bold one—Napoleonic in concept and scope. It has been described as "little more than a gambler's belief in the virtuosity of sheer audacity."12

In simple terms, Schlieffen's plan for the conquest of France envisioned a great wheel of the German Armies across northern Belgium to the channel coast and then southwest to the rear of the opposing French forces. Under this plan, the German formations facing the main French Army in the center would attack to hold them in place while the bulk of the German Army would envelop the northern flank of the French by marching deep through Belgium and Holland. The pivot point of this great envelopment was to be in the vicinity of


12Ibid.
Metz, with German strength steadily increasing toward the outside of the wheel or right flank. If the French could be induced to cooperate by launching a simultaneous attack south of Metz, the effect would be much the same as a great revolving door with the heavier forces on the German right gaining momentum as French pressure was exerted against German defenses south of the Ardennes.

The original OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, prepared by General Franz Halder and the German Army General Staff, was undoubtedly inspired by Schlieffen's tactical concepts, but resembled Schlieffen's plan only in the proposed initial action of the right wing in Belgium and the placing of preponderant force including panzer units on the north. The strategic aim of the OKH order was far less ambitious than the SCHLIEFFEN PLAN.

The OKH Plan called for the main weight to be placed on the north where Army Group B under General Fedor von Bock would make the main effort. General Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group A in the center would make a secondary attack and protect Bock's left flank. Army Group C, under General Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, facing the Maginot Line, was to attack to pin down the French forces deployed to protect the frontier. Army Group B on the north was to have a total of thirty divisions for its task, including all of the mobile forces (nine armored and four motorized divisions). Army Group A, in the center, was allocated twenty-two divisions, none of which were armored. Army Group C in the south was allocated eighteen divisions to hold the line from Luxembourg to Switzerland. [See figure 1.]
OPERATION PLAN YELLOW [Fall Gelb] was received with mixed emotions by the German Generals who had to execute it.

General Heinz Guderian, whose panzer corps was to play a major part in leading the attack, stated: "It is true that this plan had the advantage of simplicity, though hardly the charm of novelty." 13

Other distinguished German military planners thought even less of the OKH plan. Lieutenant General Erich von Manstein, then Chief-of-Staff for General Rundstedt, commander of Army Group A, who would participate in the execution of the plan, had this to say:

I found it humiliating, to say the least, that our generation could do nothing better than repeat an old recipe, even when this was the product of a man like Schlieffen. What could possibly be achieved by turning up a war plan our opponents had already rehearsed with us once before and against whose repetition they were bound to have taken full precaution? 14

General Manstein's previous duty as Chief of the Operations and Plans Staff Section of the German General Staff certainly would seem to have made him an authorized critic of the merits of the OKH plan. As finally accepted and adopted by Hitler, Manstein's recommendations for modification of this first plan are both interesting and pertinent to the investigation of the causes behind the eventual and fateful course of events.

Manstein objected both to the narrow strategic concept of the plan and to the tactics to be employed to achieve the strategic end.

First, the plan as written did not contemplate the utter and final defeat


14 Manstein, op. cit., p. 98.
of the French Army. Rather, the aim of the operation expressed in paragraph one of the OKH operation order of 19 October 1939, was:

General intention: To defeat the largest possible elements of the French and Allied Armies and simultaneously to gain as much territory as possible in Holland, Belgium and Northern France as a basis for successful air and sea operations against Britain and as a broad protection for the Ruhr.\textsuperscript{15}

That the Army Operation Order expressed a limited strategic aim is understandable. Its "General Intention" merely reiterated the "Purpose of the Offensive" as written in the OKW Directive No 6 for the Conduct of the War (signed by Hitler and dated 9 October 1939), upon which the Army plan was based. It was peculiar that the OKW Directive No 6 itself did not direct the annihilation of the Allies and, in this sense, was not in consonance with Hitler's strategic concept as presented to the Armed Forces Commanders-in-Chief and their Chiefs of Staff on 10 October 1939.

General Halder reports the conference on 10 October 1939 at which Hitler gave his strategic guidance: "10 October 1939: Fuehrer Conference 1100—He reads us a memorandum giving us the reasons for his decision to strike a swift and shattering blow in the West in case he is compelled to continue hostilities. . . . 'Directive' will be issued still today."\textsuperscript{16}

The memorandum referred to by Halder was the Memorandum and Guiding Principles for Directing the War in the West. This is a lengthy and detailed document dealing with German world-wide strategic

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 97.

\textsuperscript{16}Halder Diary, 10 October 1939.
aims and policies. It is replete with references to the requirement for the annihilation of the Allies.

The German war aim... must be to eliminate completely the military power of the west... It is and remains the destruction of our western enemies... It must be the German war aim to attempt to annihilate the French and British forces. The gain in territory is of importance only to the extent that it helps to destroy our enemies, and this is what counts in the long run. Therefore first of all the aim should be to destroy the enemy forces and not until then to occupy enemy territory... An offensive which is not aimed from the very beginning at annihilating the enemy forces is meaningless and will only result in the useless waste of human life.\(^1\)

How this guidance from Hitler to "annihilate" the enemy could have been translated by the German General Staff into the limited objectives of Directive No 6 is difficult to fathom.

General Manstein believed that by placing the preponderance of strength on the right, as contemplated in OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, the German main effort in the coming attack would come face to face with the strongest Anglo-French forces and be forced to attack them frontally. Even if successful, the best that could be expected would be to drive them back behind the Somme. There, reinforced by troops from the Allied strategic reserve, they would have a very strong defensive position. Thus, having lost the initiative, German forces would be faced with a war of attrition against a formidable foe which still had major forces intact. The German commanders would at one time be faced with the threat of a Soviet attack from the...

\(^1\)U. S. Department of the Army, Fuehrer Directives and Other Top-Level Directives of the German Armed Forces 1939-1941, T 223 C, German Naval Staff Archives (Washington: 1949).
east while the major offensive power of the German Army was being effectively entertained by the British and the French.

General Manstein's strategic solution in 1939 was to attack France first, eliminate her from the war quickly by a lightning armored thrust, then retrieve and regroup the German military forces before the Soviets could marshal an effective offensive in the east. The tactical trick in this plan was to achieve a sudden victory in the west and quickly disengage forces before the Soviets could achieve the major troop redeployment necessary for a strategic offensive against the Reich.

Manstein immediately prepared an alternative plan embodying his own ideas. He felt that if a surprise attack employing massed armored divisions were launched through the hilly and wooded Ardennes, it would achieve great success and quickly gain the rear of the Allied armies advancing east into Belgium. The more troops the Allies would send into Belgium, the more would be trapped and liquidated by the German panzers. Then it would be an easy matter to turn the German attacks south, capture Paris, and attack the rest of the Allied forces in the Maginot Line from the rear.

Thus conceived, the plan embodies the conditions of success. By skilfully distributing forces, von Manstein counted on obtaining maximum effectiveness by means of surprise, speed and power at the decisive place and moment. Appearing unexpectedly and in force out of a weakly defended region, he would crush the defenses, cross the Meuse, and then assembling all his tanks he would push in the direction of the sea, across the Allied lines of communica- tion, inflicting a staggering blow, while a secondary thrust toward the south would ensure freedom of action and continuity of maneuver. It would not be Cannae again; it would be Arbela. 18

---

Once the draft of his plan was completed, Manstein called General Guderian, the foremost German authority on armored warfare, to his headquarters to discuss it with him. The meeting was friendly and informal as the two were old friends.

Manstein asked Guderian to examine his plan from the point of view of a tank man. After carefully studying the most up-to-date maps of the Ardennes and recalling his experiences in the area during the First World War, Guderian assured Manstein that the operation he proposed was feasible and "could in fact be carried out. The only condition I attached was that a sufficient number of armored and motorized divisions must be employed, if possible all of them."\(^{19}\)

Encouraged by Guderian's favorable comments on his plan, Manstein prepared the first of several memoranda for OKH, proposing major changes in the Yellow Plan. This first memo, over Rundstedt's signature, was sent to OKH on 31 October 1939. It marked the beginning of a severe struggle with the Army General Staff which vigorously opposed Manstein's proposals. On 1 November 1939, when General Halder received the criticism of his original plan, he noted simply in his journal: "Report from Army Group A: Lacks positive aspects."\(^{20}\)

While Manstein and Guderian determined that a German armored attack through the Ardennes was feasible, the French High Command dismissed the possibility. General Maurice Gamelin, Chief of the French General Staff, felt that the heavily wooded hills of the Ardennes and the

---

\(^{19}\) Guderian, op. cit., p. 89.

\(^{20}\) Halder Diary, 1 November 1939.
steep banks of the Meuse were impassable to major armored or mechanized formations. In his analysis of PLAN D—the plan the Allies were to use against the German attack—Gamelin did not even discuss the possibility of a German thrust in this area.

Things could only happen in the north. Gamelin left only the possibility of an outflanking attack through Belgium, a renewal of the Schlieffen Plan of 1914. Our plan [French] therefore, was to oppose this with our best troops, at the expense of the central sector of the Ardennes itself where, it was said, "The terrain would defend itself."  

The French preoccupation with the old SCHLIEFFEN PLAN was apparent to the younger and more astute German generals. Guderian determined from an analysis of French troop dispositions along the border that the French were deployed against an anticipated repetition of the SCHLIEFFEN PLAN, and that the French counter strategy was to bring the majority of their best motorized troops forward to meet the expected German thrust in the north through Holland and Belgium. "A sufficient safeguard of the hinge of their proposed advance into Belgium by reserve units—in the area, say, of Charleville and Verdun—was not apparent. It seemed that the French High Command did not regard any alternative to the old SCHLIEFFEN PLAN as even conceivable."  

Although slight modifications were made in the original plan by OKH, none of them satisfied Manstein, and he continued his memo

---


writing over Rundstedt's signature. In addition to the original memo of 31 October 1939, Manstein sent six other memoranda to General Halder and General Walter von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, proposing that the Army Group A Plan be substituted for that of the high command. In response to queries as to what action was being taken on these memoranda, he was told that they were "being considered."

The degree to which Army Group A's recommendations were, in fact, being considered by OKH is unclear. On 6 December 1939, Manstein wrote Halder another personal letter recapitulating all the advantages of the Army Group A Plan. This letter contained the details of the entire plan. On 15 December 1939, when his letter had not evoked a reply, Manstein telephoned General von Stulpnagel, the Oberquartiermeister of the Army General Staff, and asked when he could expect an acknowledgement of his latest communication. This prompted a return call from Halder who, although he expressed complete agreement with the Army Group A proposals, stated that he was under "strict instructions" to leave the main effort with Army Group B, at least until the offensive had begun.23

Manstein might have assumed from this that von Brauchitsch and Halder had come around to Army Group A's way of thinking in the matter of the operation plan. He learned, however, from General Warlimont, General Jodl's Deputy, that the Army General Staff had never submitted the Manstein Plan to Hitler in any form. Manstein's

---

23 Manstein, op. cit., p. 112.
comment on this was: "It was all rather perplexing as far as we were concerned." 24

The Fuehrer himself apparently never completely believed in the original OPERATION PLAN YELLOW and accepted it only with reservations. "His disenchantment with the plan may have been due to his "strategic flair"; or perhaps he felt, as did Manstein, that his new Reich could conjure up a newer and better plan. "His greatest fear seems to have been that the many bridges over the route of the northern wing could not be seized intact and that his armored formations would be slowed or halted before the main Allied armies." 25

Hitler's actions and orders in November contribute to the picture of his dissatisfaction with the plan. On November 11th, he formed a new, fast-moving, striking force under Guderian to be employed in the assault of the Meuse river line at Sedan. Manstein reports the receipt of the following message from OKH on 12 November 1939:

The Fuehrer has now directed that a third group of fast-moving troops will be formed on the southern wing of Twelfth Army or in the sector allotted to Sixteenth Army, and that this will be directed against Sedan and the area to the east of it, taking advantage of the unwooded terrain on either side of Arlon, Tintigny and Floreville. Composition: Hq 19th Corps, 2d and 10th Panzer Divisions, one motorized division, the Liebstandarte and the Gross-Deutschland Regiments.

The task of this group will be:

(a). To defeat enemy mobile forces thrown into southern Belgium and thereby to lighten the task of Twelfth and Sixteenth Armies;

24 Ibid.

25 Goutard, op. cit., p. 92.
(b): To gain a surprise hold on the west bank of the Meuse by or south-east of Sedan, thereby creating a favourable situation for the subsequent phases of the operation, specifically in the event of the armoured units under command of Sixth and Fourth Armies proving unsuccessful in their own sectors.\(^{26}\)

On 20 November 1939, Hitler issued a warning order (Directive No 8 for the Conduct of the War)\(^{27}\) for the possible employment of Bock's armor in the zone of Rundstedt's Army Group A after operations had begun. Although this order did not change the plan as written, today's analysis of it indicates that Hitler was considering alternative courses of action that closely resembled Manstein's plan. The Fuehrer apparently wanted to prepare for a possible switch in the main effort from Army Group B to Army Group A in the event Rundstedt achieved greater initial success. This provision for a change in effort would give the supreme command more flexibility of action after the battle had been joined and the initial reaction of the French and British forces had been determined.

It is doubtful whether Hitler, in November and December of 1939, was aware of the existence of the Manstein Plan. Manstein himself is unclear on this point.

It is not clear whether Hitler himself conceived the idea of shifting the main weight of the operation to Army Group A or whether he was even then [end of November] aware of Army Group A's views.

On 24th November, the day after he had addressed the heads of the three services at Berlin, Hitler received Colonel-General v. Rundstedt and Generals Busch and Guderian. . . . I consider it most unlikely that v. Rundstedt used this occasion to present Hitler with our own draft plan, particularly as v. Brauchitsch's position was so precarious just then.

\(^{26}\) Manstein, op. cit., p. 108.

\(^{27}\) Fuehrer Directives, Document T-32019, p. 140.
A few days later Blumentritt [Chief of Operations Army Group A] with my consent (given only very reluctantly, though with v. Rundstedt's approval), sent Colonel Schmundt [Hitler's personal adjutant] a copy of my last memorandum. Whether it was passed on to Hitler or even to Jodi I cannot say. At all events, when Hitler sent for me on the 17th of February to hear my views on an offensive in the west, he gave not the least hint that he had seen any of our memoranda to OKH.28

In any event, on 9 January 1940, Hitler ordered OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, only slightly modified by OKH, to be executed on 17 January 1940. The German juggernaut was poised to strike when the German Staff received the news of the downed airplane and the captured plans. The Fuehrer's violent reaction to this news has been well reported by General Kesselring [page 45 supra]. Goutard reports it from the French point of view:

This incident [the captured plans] was laden with consequences, not only because it contributed to the scrapping of the Yellow Plan, which was already in disfavor, but because it lent further weight to the French conviction that the Germans were going to re-enact the Schlieffen Plan, and it reinforced their intentions of sending into Belgium as many troops as possible. This Fliegerpech (air mishap) made a substantial contribution to the success of the Manstein Plan.29

Although January 1940 saw the beginning of the end for OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, including its eventual abandonment and replacement by the Manstein Plan, time was running out for Manstein as Chief-of-Staff for Rundstedt. Dismayed by the OKH's latest change in plans, which would have split up the armored divisions between the armies rather than employ them in mass, Manstein wrote the last of his now famous memoranda to the General Staff protesting this decision. The

28 Manstein, op. cit., p. 110.
29 Goutard, op. cit., p. 92.
fact that Guderian was in complete accord with his action was but small consolation, as this last memorandum cost him his job and the opportunity to participate with the staff of Army Group A in the execution of his plan. Guderian said of his [Manstein's] objection:

Any subdivision of our already weak tank forces would have been the greatest mistake that we could make. But it was precisely this that the High Command was intent on doing. Manstein became insistent and by so doing aroused such animosity in the High Command that he was appointed Commanding General of an Infantry Corps. . . . As a result our finest operational brain took the field as commander of a corps in the third wave of the attack, though it was largely thanks to his brilliant initiative that the operation was to be such an outstanding success. 30

This memo was apparently "the straw that broke the camel's back" as far as OKH was concerned. Manstein was promoted to corps commander and placed where his propensity for writing embarrassing memoranda was not as annoying to Halder and the General Staff, and where von Rundstedt was not present to sign the memoranda for him.

The reason given Manstein for his transfer was that he could not be passed over in the selection of new corps commanders. Since General Reinhardt, who was his junior, was being given a corps, he too should be promoted. This was a perfectly normal advancement procedure, although there obviously were other means of solving the rank problem. If Rundstedt had protested strongly to Brauchitsch, it is probable that Manstein would have been promoted in his position as Chief of Staff of the Army Group.

The audacity of Manstein's Plan, the vigor with which he bombarded OKH with his recommendations, the personal dislike felt by

30Guderian, op. cit., p. 90.
Halder for the younger officer, and the suspicion held by some that Manstein was attempting a backstairs approach to the Fuehrer—all these factors—contributed to his unpopularity with the leaders on the Army General Staff.

In reporting the sentiments of the OKH in this matter, it was also said: "Their sore feelings were aggravated when it came to their ears that many of the younger members of the General Staff were saying that 'Manstein ought to be made Commander-in-Chief.'"31

Manstein himself was under no delusions as to the cause of his removal from the Army Group staff. He reports: "It can hardly be doubted, therefore, that my replacement was due to a desire on the part of OKH to be rid of an importunate nuisance who had ventured to put up an operation plan at variance with its own."32

Manstein left Coblenz on 9 February 1940 for Stettin and command of his corps. His absence was immediately felt by the Army Group staff. He was replaced by Lieutenant General Georg von Sodenstern who Guderian considered "more prosaic."33

In commenting on the irony of Manstein's removal at this time, Liddell Hart points out:

Promotion was a convenient means of moving him out of the way, to the relief of his superiors yet with honour to both parties. Nevertheless, it was ironical that the man who had shown the most imagination in grasping the potentialities of highly mobile armoured warfare - though not himself a tank specialist - should have been

32Manstein, op. cit., p. 120.
33Guderian, op. cit., p. 90.
sent to take charge of an infantry formation (which merely played a walking-on part in the offensive) just as the new type of mobility was to achieve its supreme fulfilment.\textsuperscript{34}

Although the irony of Manstein's removal is apparent, there is little to justify the contention that he should have been given command of an armored corps in the coming offensive. Prior to the campaign in France and Flanders, Manstein was known as a brilliant staff officer and planner--one, however, without combat experience or troop duty with large units in the field. The fact that later experience was to prove him an able and competent Feldherrn has no bearing on his status at this time. Each of the German panzer corps was commanded by general officers senior or equal in rank to Manstein and acknowledged experts in their speciality.\textsuperscript{35}

Although ensuing events were to prove the validity of Manstein's position, he was, for the moment, removed. As Vanwelkenhuyzen remarks of Manstein's battle with Halder and the OKH Staff: "It is not enough to be right; one should also be forgiven for it."\textsuperscript{36}

Manstein's banishment to Stettin by no means ended the operation plan controversy. It had precisely the opposite effect. It is highly ironical that Manstein's relief as Chief-of-Staff and appointment as corps commander should have afforded him the opportunity to personally express his opinions to Hitler and obtain the Fuehrer's approval. The

\textsuperscript{34}Liddell Hart, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{35}Corps commanders were Wietersheim, XIV Corps; Hoth, XVI Corps; Guderian, XIX Corps; R. Schmidt, XXXIX Corps; and Reinhardt, XLI Corps.

\textsuperscript{36}Vanwelkenhuyzen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 96.
action taken by OKH to silence the importunate Manstein precipitated
the golden opportunity for him to speak. What a shock it must have
been to Halder when he realized, on receiving Hitler's order to modify
the OKH plan to incorporate Manstein's ideas, that he himself had
indirectly given Manstein his great opportunity.

On 17 February 1940, Hitler, as was his custom, entertained
his newly appointed corps commanders at a luncheon reception. During
the luncheon, the **Fuehrer**, as usual, did all of the talking. After the
luncheon, however, while dismissing the other officers, Hitler invited
Manstein to accompany him to his study. There he requested Manstein
to present his plan for the projected offensive in the west.

Manstein attributes his opportunity to speak to the **Fuehrer** to
the efforts made by his **Army Group A** colleagues after his departure.
He refers to his "trusty colleagues," Colonel Blumentritt and Lieutenant
Colonel von Tresckow, and states that they apparently had no intention
of "throwing up the sponge" and giving up on the operation plan on
which they all had labored so long and hard. 37

It was Tresckow, I imagine, who induced his friend Schmundt,
Hitler's military assistant, to fix an opportunity for me to talk
to Hitler personally about the way we thought the offensive in the
west should be conducted. 38

During Manstein's presentation to Hitler, he could not deter-
dine the degree, if any, to which Schmundt had informed the **Fuehrer**
of the details of the **Army Group A** plan. Hitler, however, immedi-
ately agreed to the proposals put forth by Manstein. "I found him

---

37Manstein, op. cit., p. 120.
38Ibid.
[Hitler] surprisingly quick to grasp the points which our Army Group had been advocating for many months past, and he entirely agreed with what I had to say."39

Manstein's long struggle for his plan had ended in victory. Although it must be admitted that Manstein had by now acquired much experience extolling the virtues of his ideas, his brilliant exposition cleared up Hitler's last doubts and the Fuehrer adopted the plan.

On the day following his audience with Manstein, Hitler instructed his staff to shift the Schwerpunkt [center of gravity] from Army Group B to Army Group A in order to carry out Manstein's scythe stroke on the axis Sedan-Amiens-Abbeville. "Six days later, after a great deal of work, the OKH produced the SICHELSCHNITT [Scythe-stroke] PLAN on 24 February 1940."40

So, with the demise of OPERATION PLAN YELLOW was born SICHELSCHNITT. [See figure 2.] Army Group A was to make the main effort with the massed panzer divisions through the Ardennes area and then on to the channel coast. The ratio of divisions between the two Army Groups was reversed, with Army Group A now having by far the preponderance of strength and the Army Group boundary adjusted to further strengthen Rundstedt's forces. The successful execution of the plan spoke well for the genius of Manstein who conceived it. Its adoption by Hitler spelled doom for the Allied armies.

39Ibid., p. 121.
40Goutard, op. cit., p. 93.
Although Manstein was the principal progenitor of SICHEL-SCHNITT, and it was his energy, drive, and determination that kept it alive in the face of formidable opposition, he had by no means a monopoly on its development. It was the product of many factors, personalities, and coincidences, each contributing in part to its evolution. At Army Group A, Blumentritt and Tresckow made their contribution and Rundstedt's distinguished support enabled it to survive the displeasure of OKH. Hitler's distaste for the original Yellow Plan, the airplane mishap, and the staff war game of the plan at Coblenz on 7 February 1940 that revealed OPERATION PLAN YELLOW's shortcomings were additional factors that led to the revision of the original plan. The competent OKH staff strengthened the Manstein variant in its final form, and Halder himself added his professional touch to the polished final product.

What conclusions may be drawn from a study of the operation plan controversy? First, it is virtually certain that OPERATION PLAN YELLOW would have failed to be decisive. In any event, it would not have achieved the striking success of SICHELSCHNITT. Liddell Hart, from a detailed study of the plans of the opposing armies and his years of familiarity with the terrain over which most of the battle was fought, has come to the same conclusion:

It is clear now that if that plan [Operation Order Yellow] had been carried out it would have failed to be decisive. For the British Army and the best-equipped part of the French Army stood in its path. The German attack would have met these forces head on.41

41 Liddell Hart, op. cit., p. 112.
The airplane mishap and subsequent capture of OPERATION PLAN YELLOW by the Allies played a significant part in Hitler's final decision to abandon the Yellow Plan; these incidents also strengthened the French and British conviction that Germany intended to re-enact the SCHLIEFFEN PLAN. The Allied action in sending the cream of their armies into Belgium was as responsible for the success of SICHELSCHNITT as the audacity of the German armored thrusts through the Ardennes. The direction of the actual German attack came as a complete surprise to the Allies. General Alanbrooke, then commanding a British Corps in the B.E.F., reported the surprise of the French High Command. "The German plans for the coming offensive were not those the French High Command had anticipated." 42

Although the capture of the operation plan may not have been the primary reason for the decision to adopt another course of action, this event, occurring when it did, is bound to have exerted a profound influence upon the decision. Hitler had ordered the OPERATION PLAN YELLOW attack to begin on 17 January 1940. Had the plan not been captured on 10 January 1940, the attack may well have proceeded as planned and, as has been pointed out, probably with less than complete success. Had this been the case, the course of World War II in Europe might have been considerably altered.

Thus, the desire of a young Luftwaffe major to spend a few more precious minutes in Cologne for purely personal reasons, and the poor judgment exercised in transporting secret papers by airplane in violation of security regulations to gratify this desire, precipitated significant reactions on the part of major world powers that changed the course of history. Major Reinberger, the courier, and Major Hoenmans, his pilot, never received the courts-martial they so richly deserved. When the German attack began on 10 May 1940, they were taken to England and eventually to Canada where they spent the rest of the war as prisoners. 43

Human foibles and follies have often been destined to play as large a part in the fate of mankind as the best laid plans of nations. Those of the year 1940 were no exception. For the first and last time in the history of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler, his general staff, and his field commanders mutually contributed to a successful military effort. The Fuehrer, however, did not consider SICHELSCHNITT in this light. Confirmed in his own mind as an infallible military leader, he considered his acceptance of the Manstein variant as further evidence of his military prowess. Once again, in his opinion, he had proved Brauchitsch and Halder wrong in a military matter. In his victory speech to the Reichstag [page 113 infra] Hitler claimed sole credit for the success of the plan. The contributions made by Rundstedt, Manstein, Blumentritt, and Tresckow were quickly forgotten as was the detailed staff work of Halder and the OKH. As the self-acknowledged

political and military genius of the Third Reich, Hitler was to exert an ever increasing influence upon tactical army matters with disastrous consequences to the conduct of the German campaign in the west in 1940.
CHAPTER III

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS
IN THE STOP ORDER

The defeat of Nazi Germany and the liberation of Europe began on the 24th of May 1940. The Allies would not have been easily convinced of this at the time for their situation was indeed black. The Nazi war machine had launched its attack two weeks earlier and the German panzer columns had now reached the sea and turned north toward Dunkirk. The corridor made by General Ewald von Kleist's panzer group through Belgium had been widened and strengthened by the infantry corps which followed. The small Allied counterattack at Arras had been repulsed and Calais was now isolated. Only the ports of Dunkirk and Ostend remained as escape routes for the French, Belgian, and British Armies that were heavily engaged by General Fedor von Bock's Army Group B attacking relentlessly from the north and east. General Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group A, spearheaded by von Kleist's armor, had cut off the Allied armies in Belgium from French reinforcements in the area south of the Somme. The Anglo-French force that had been hurriedly grouped together to attempt to break out of the encirclement and link up with the French forces to the south had been diverted north to meet von Bock's heavy attack on the boundary between the Belgian and British Armies. The last Allied reserves in Flanders thus had been employed in a blocking and defensive
role while French forces in central France were as yet too disorganized to launch an effective counterattack to relieve the besieged Allies in the Flemish salient.

At this time, when the defeat of the Allied armies appeared imminent—only a matter of days—and the audacity of the new Blitzkrieg had paralyzed all resistance, Hitler and his generals collaborated in the first of a series of tactical and strategic errors that would eventually bring about the defeat of the Third Reich.

What has frequently been described as "The Miracle of Dunkirk" was not so much the fantastic escape of the British Expeditionary Force across the channel as it was the behavior of the German leaders who abetted it. Although von Bock's forces maintained heavy attacks on the north and east against the Belgian and British fronts, von Rundstedt's panzer divisions, which were practically unopposed, were ordered to halt within sight of Dunkirk where they remained immobile for two days. During this time, the Allies moved forces into defensive positions in front of von Rundstedt and prepared evacuation plans unmolested. [See figure 3]

The origin of this incredulous "Stop Order" to the panzers of Army Group A and the reasoning behind it remain one of the great mysteries of the war. A major controversy has arisen among historians over this incident, and conflicting analyses have been offered by both German and Allied participants. The German generals unanimously blamed Hitler—and Hitler alone—for the order, while certain noted historians on the Allied side have produced evidence from documents of the period that would place the blame on the German
professional military leaders. As frequently happens in controversies of this nature, each side has established what it considers convincing evidence to support its position. Analysis of the diverse beliefs involved reveals merit in the arguments of both sides.

Several explanations for the "Stop Order" have been pro¬pounded. Among these are: Hitler's concern with the political goal of Paris rather than the tactical battlefield; his desire to let the British escape in order to make political settlement possible after the defeat of France, on the theory that a totally impotent Britain would make an unfavorable balance of power vis-a-vis the Soviet Union; Hitler's concern that his tanks might bog down in the marshes of the Flemish coast and not be available for the main attack south of the Somme; and his belief that the Luftwaffe could destroy the British on the beaches.

Those who would blame the generals have a multitude of reasons. Some of these are: von Rundstedt was concerned about his southern flank and about the future operations planned for the south, and that in any event he preferred to let von Bock do the dirty work of cleaning out the pocket of surrounded Allied armies while his own troops rested; von Kleist and General Gunther von Kluge were worried about the Allied foray on their flank at Arras and wanted to wait for more of their motorized divisions to close up before sending their tanks into the Dunkirk area; that tank losses were an astounding fifty percent and the men were exhausted. Another reason offered is the extremely confused German command situation that existed around
Dunkirk as the German Armies converged there and waited while the assault troops "untangled and regrouped."

Then there are those who maintain—not without reason—that the British were not "permitted" to escape. They say that the superior tactics of Lord Gort, the B. E. F. Commander; the valor of such men as Generals Alexander, Montgomery, and Alanbrooke; the efficiency of new Spitfires; the courage of the RAF; and the heroism of the Royal Navy brought the B. E. F. home in spite of all the German efforts to prevent it.

This tangled web of diverse opinion and prejudice does much to obscure the evidence and makes it extremely difficult to determine exactly who was to blame.

The German generals interviewed at the end of the war were unanimous in their opinion that Hitler was to blame for the now famous "Stop Order." Among them was Siegfried Wesphal, later Chief of Staff for von Rundstedt, who said:

At the end of May, the German 18th Army coming from the north was engaged in a severe struggle with the bitterly-fighting British. The vanguard of the Panzer Group von Kleist had already penetrated from the south to the English rear and threatened the escape route to Dunkirk. The final closing of this route was only a matter of days. On May 30th the two German forces were already so close together that it became necessary to agree on lines after crossing which they would cease fire to avoid shooting each other. Lord Gort's troops had now been pressed into so narrow a corridor that by rights no chance of escape existed. Then occurred something which was beyond the comprehension of the front line commanders, Kleist was ordered to halt, and forbidden to take another step northwards. He even had to withdraw some of his advance units. In this way the English troops were given a clear passage to Dunkirk. Heads were scratched. Could it be that the two German Armies were to form a lane for the withdrawing English? What could be the reason for such a proceeding? Who could have given the order? It was Hitler who had intervened. He was afraid that Kleist's panzers would suffer such severe losses in
the battle with Gort that they would be unable to take part in the final and imminent struggle with the French Army. In this, Hitler was apparently influenced by an entirely false idea of what the Flanders terrain was like.  

Hitler had served in Flanders in the First World War. His memory of the area was of a vast plain, deep in mud and flooded salt flats. This time, however, the situation was not the same, the great sluice system which flooded the entire area and which had been designed by Marshal Vauban, the great French military engineer of the Bourbon Kings, had been seized by German troops before it could be opened. In spite of this fact, von Brauchitsch was unable to convince Hitler that the attack should be pressed forward rapidly into Dunkirk before the British had an opportunity to prepare the defense of the town.

Brauchitsch was unable to dissuade Hitler from ordering the halt. In order to make sure that his will prevailed against the opposition of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, he sent officers of his own personal staff, Keitel among them, to all the appropriate commands. He may have been confirmed in his resolve by Goering's promise that the Luftwaffe would prevent the English from escaping. Both overlooked the fact that even the Luftwaffe had its limitations. It might be in a position to hamper movements on the ground and to make them very costly, but not to paralyze them altogether. Unhappily the weather now became very unfavorable so that the Luftwaffe was only able to devote comparatively weak forces for short periods to this task throughout the decisive days. This interval was sufficient to allow the British Army to take up positions around Dunkirk to cover its withdrawal, and it was thus possible for Lord Gort to carry back to England the overwhelming majority of his troops.  

What is perhaps a more unbiased opinion than General Westphal's is expressed by Chester Wilmot in his book *The Struggle for Europe.*

---


2 Ibid.
The Dunkirk decision was Hitler's first great military mistake, but it was not so irrational and short-sighted as some German generals have asserted. Although Hitler was influenced by the lure of Paris, the goal of all German conquerors, a more important factor was his determination to avoid the costly mistake of 1914. He would not falter and be stopped on the Somme, as von Moltke had been stopped on the Marne through excessive concern about the British on the flank and through failure to maintain the momentum of the right wing. He felt he could safely ignore the British for the moment, and he was soon to confide to von Kleist the opinion: "They will not come back in this war." Although he had often warned his military leaders that Britain was the more formidable enemy, his personal triumph at Munich had profoundly affected his judgment of British character. He was fond of declaring: "Our enemies are little worms; I saw them at Munich." — (Speaking to his Commanders-in-Chief, August 22nd, 1939. — Nuremberg Document 789PS.)

Hitler considered that any troops who escaped from Dunkirk would be imprisoned in the British Isles. The important task, therefore, was to gain quick and undisputed possession of the French coastline, as a rampart against further British interference in European affairs, and of the continental bases from which Britain could be bombed and starved into submission.

Much has been said of Hitler's visit to von Rundstedt's Headquarters on the 24th of May. During this visit, he rescinded an order of von Brauchitsch placing all troops surrounding the northern Allied armies under command of von Bock's Army Group B, and directed the panzers under von Rundstedt to halt before Dunkirk. There are several accounts of this visit and ensuing events.

British historians are generally in accord on the significance of the Hitler - von Rundstedt meeting of 24 May. Winston Churchill tells of the British interception of a German message sent in the clear at 1142 on 24 May, to the effect that the attack on Dunkirk was to be

halted, and continues to recount his version of events in his historical series *The Second World War*.

Hitler visited Rundstedt [on 24 May] who represented to him that his armour, which had come so far so fast, was much reduced in strength and needed a pause wherein to reorganize and regain its balance for the final blow against an enemy who his staff diary says was "fighting with extraordinary tenacity." Moreover, Rundstedt foresaw the possibility of attacks on his widely dispersed forces from north and south; in fact, the Weygand Plan, which, if it had been feasible, was the obvious allied counter stroke. Hitler "agreed entirely" that the attack east of Arras should be carried out by infantry and that the mobile forces should continue to hold the line Lens-Bethune-Aire-St. Omer-Gravelines in order to intercept the enemy forces under pressure from Army Group B in the northeast. He also dwelt on the paramount necessity of conserving the armoured forces for further operations. However, very early on the 25th a fresh directive was sent from Brauchitsch as the Commander-in-Chief ordering the continuation of the advance of the armour. Rundstedt, fortified by Hitler's verbal agreement would have none of it. He did not pass the order on to the Fourth Army Commander, Kluge, who was told to continue to husband the panzer divisions. Kluge protested at the delay, but it was not till the next day, the 26th, that Rundstedt released them, although even then he enjoined that Dunkirk was not yet itself to be assaulted. The diary records that the Fourth Army protested at this restriction, and its Chief of Staff telephoned on the 27th: "The picture in the Channel ports is as follows. Big ships come up to the quayside, boards are put down and the men crowd on the ships. All matériel is left behind. But we are not keen on finding these men, newly equipped, up against us later." It is therefore certain that the armour was halted; that this was done on the initiative not of Hitler but of Rundstedt. Rundstedt no doubt had reasons for his view both in the condition of the armour and in the general battle, but he ought to have obeyed the orders of the Army Commander, or at least told him what Hitler had said in conversation. There is a general agreement among the German Commanders that a great opportunity was lost.

Churchill's interpretation of events was based to a degree upon German documents captured after the war. L. F. Ellis, in his official British history of the war, explores these documents in more detail and

---

5Ibid., p. 78.
quotes Hitler as saying, in justification of his decision to halt on the canal line: "... Any further contraction of the ring encircling the enemy could only have the highly undesirable result of restricting the activities of the Luftwaffe." Ellis' authority in this case is the German war diary of Army Group A for 24 May 1940, which mentions Hitler's visit at 1130 that day. It is interesting to note that the intercepted German radio message to which Churchill refers [page 77 supra] must have been sent during the time Hitler and Rundstedt were actually in conference. Ellis continued his story of the 24 May visit:

Thus it is clear that the decision to halt the armour on the canal line on the 24th (taken the day before Hitler arrived and endorsed it) was originally Rundstedt's decision. But after Hitler had left, Rundstedt issued a directive which read: "By the Fuehrer's orders . . . the general line Lens-Bethune-Aire-St. Omer-Gravelines (canal line) will NOT be passed [Nicht zu überschreiten]. (Extract from Army Group war diary App 32, 24 May 1940). The armoured divisions were to close up to the canal line and use the day as far as practicable for repairs and maintenance. This hold-up puzzled divisional commanders straining to get forward, and their war diaries show how disappointed they were by "The Fuehrer's" orders to halt. They were to quote this years later, as an instance of Hitler's interference with conduct of the campaign, for so it must have appeared to them at the time. "By the Fuehrer's orders" was all they could know of the origin of this decision; but Rundstedt and Hitler knew the true facts, and, while Hitler was only too anxious to appear the director of operations, Rundstedt saw that if he was to get his own way when it differed from the intentions of OKH he must make it appear that what he did was by "The Fuehrer's orders." 

If Hitler's decision was influenced by his conversation with von Rundstedt, the general himself was acting out of consideration for his subordinates. On the 23 May, von Kluge, the commander of the Fourth Army, is reported to have said his troops "would be glad if they

---

could close up tomorrow." General Halder records a talk with von
Glydenfeldt [Chief of Staff, Panzer Group Kleist] who "communicated
Kleist's anxieties. He feels he cannot tackle his task as long as the
crisis at Arras remains unresolved--tank losses as high as fifty per-
cent." These and other extracts from contemporary records form
the basis for the British contention that the "Stop Order" was initiated
by the German generals rather than Hitler.

General Guderian, commander of the panzer corps closest to
Dunkirk, was under the impression that the "Stop Order" had originated
with Hitler. The following extract from his book *Panzer Leader* con-
irms this; it also indicates that, whatever the sentiments of von
Kluge and von Kleist for a "breathing spell," Guderian thought that a
continuation of the attack was necessary.

On the 24th of May the 1st Panzer Division reached the Aa
Canal between Holque and the coast and secured bridgeheads
across it at Holque, St. Pierre-Brouck, St. Nicholas and Bour-
bourville; the 2nd Panzer Division cleared up Boulogne; the
bulk of the 10th Panzer Division reached the line Desvres-Samer.

Guderian described his order of battle for the attack on the
beaches and then described what he referred to as "Hitler's moment-
tous order to stop."

On this day (the 24th) the Supreme Command intervened in the
operations in progress, with results which were to have a most
disastrous influence on the whole future course of the war. Hitler
ordered the left wing to stop at the Aa. It was forbidden to cross
that stream. We were not informed of the reasons for this. The

---

7 Fourth Army War Diary, 23 May 1940. Quoted from

8 Halder Diary, 23 May 1940.

order contained the words: "Dunkirk is to be left to the Luftwaffe. Should the capture of Calais prove difficult, this port too is to be left to the Luftwaffe." (I quote here from memory.) We were utterly speechless. But since we were not informed of the reasons for this order, it was difficult to argue against it. The panzer divisions were therefore ordered: "Hold the line of the canal. Make use of the period of rest for general recuperation."

Fierce enemy air activity met little opposition from our air force. 10

Evidence indicates that both Hitler and von Rundstedt must share the responsibility for the "Stop Order." As Telford Taylor so aptly puts it in his formidably documented book The March of Conquest: "As is not infrequent in the discussion of competing propositions, the protagonists of each have overlooked the possibility that they are not mutually exclusive." 11

After the war, von Rundstedt, in a personal interview with Milton Schulman, a Canadian intelligence officer, expressed his recollection of the incident as follows:

To me, remarked the Field Marshal rather ruefully, Dunkirk was one of the greatest turning points of the war. If I had had my way the English would not have got off so lightly at Dunkirk. But my hands were tied by direct orders from Hitler himself. While the English were clambering into their ships off the beaches, I was kept uselessly outside the port unable to move. I recommended to the Supreme Command that my five panzer divisions be immediately sent into the town and thereby completely destroy the retreating English. But I received definite orders from the Fuehrer that under no circumstances was I to attack, and I was expressly forbidden to send any of my troops closer than ten kilometers from Dunkirk. The only weapons I was permitted to use against the English were my medium guns. At this distance I sat outside the town, watching the English escape, while my tanks and infantry were prohibited from moving. This incredible blunder was due to Hitler's personal idea of generalship. The Fuehrer daily received statements of tank losses incurred during the campaign, and by a simple process of arithmetic he deduced that there was not

10Ibid., p. 117.
11Taylor, March of Conquest, p. 256.
sufficient armor available at this time to attack the English. He did not realize that many of the tanks reported out of order one day could, with a little extra effort on the part of the repair squads, be able to fight again in a very short time. The second reason for Hitler's decision was the fact that on the map available to him at Berlin the ground surrounding the port appeared to be flooded and unsuitable for tank warfare. With a shortage of armor and the difficult country, Hitler decided that the cost of an attack would be too high, when the French armies to the south had not yet been destroyed. He therefore ordered that my forces be reserved so that they could be strong enough to take part in the southern drive against the French, designed to capture Paris and destroy all French resistance. 12

Contributing at least in part to the circumstances surrounding the "Stop Order" was the tactical command situation at the front. The Sixth, Twelfth and Eighteenth Armies—plus Kleist's two panzer corps—were converging on the rapidly shrinking Dunkirk pocket. Coordination between the two army groups commanding these troops was imperative but difficult. Communications between the two headquarters was inadequate, and the personalities of the two commanders mitigated against friendly cooperation. Three alternative solutions were possible. First, OKH could coordinate the advance of the two army groups. OKH, however, was far from the scene of operations and unfamiliar with the details of the rapidly changing situation. It was also deeply involved in the planning for future operations south of the Somme. Second, Army Group A could assume command of all troops surrounding the salient. This would place a tremendous burden on von Rundstedt who, in addition to paying attention to the canal line, was supervising the tricky operation of integrating the movements of more than forty divisions through the battle corridor and into line on

the German south flank on the Somme. The OKH situation map of 24th May shows twenty-one divisions already in the line facing south, and twenty-three additional divisions on the road moving into their assigned sectors. Plans for the attack south were being completed, and supplies and communications were being readied for the impending operation.

To impose upon von Rundstedt the additional responsibility to supervise the majority of Army Group B's divisions would have been as unsatisfactory a solution as to have OKH attempt it. Von Brauchitsch made the correct decision by placing the Fourth Army and von Kleist's Corps--both facing the Dunkirk front--under von Bock's Army Group B. This decision has been widely criticized, but it was a sound one. It placed the responsibility for reducing the narrowing pocket firmly upon one commander on the spot, and freed von Rundstedt to properly supervise the two armies moving into position for the operation to the south. Against Halder's recommendation, von Brauchitsch issued the order transferring Fourth Army to von Bock's command on the evening of the 23rd. Halder was much put out. He wrote in his diary that night:

The stated desire of Ogd. H [von Brauchitsch] to unify direction of operations under A Gp B for the last phase of the encircling battle will get us into serious trouble owing to the personalities of Cinc A Gp B and his staff, and the difficulties for von Bock to get through to all commanders at a point of the battle when to do so would be difficult even through well established communications. Ogd. H's insistence of unification of command looks to me like a device to sidestep responsibility. He keeps arguing that he has no choice but coordinate the efforts of the various elements converging on the pocket under his own command or under that of von Bock. The first alternative, which I should think he would accept as the logical and manly one, he feels unsure about. He seems to be glad to let someone else take the responsibility. But
with that he also foregoes the honors of victory. Operational Order 5852/40 GK goes out without my signature to signify my disapproval of the order and its timing.\textsuperscript{13}

Nevertheless, the order went out from OKH on the 23rd to attach von Kluge's Fourth Army to von Bock, and the next day Hitler chose to visit von Rundstedt at his command post. Colonel Rudolf Schmundt, Hitler's military assistant, reported later to von Manstein that Hitler arrived in very good humor but became furious when he was informed of von Brauchitsch's order. General Jodl records Hitler's displeasure in his diary entry of 24 May.

Fuehrer is very much displeased and thinks this order is a mistake, not only militarily but also psychologically. Commander-in-Chief [von Brauchitsch] is ordered to report, and shifting of the Army Group boundary is rescinded. New crisis of confidence.\textsuperscript{14}

Von Brauchitsch had left early in the morning of the 24th to visit von Bock on the Belgian front. Here Halder contacted him by telephone and informed him of the Fuehrer's action in countermanding the OKH order. Halder's diary records the details.

24 May: 1'1530; The Fuehrer arrived at Rundstedt's Hq this morning.

a. He orders that the new boundary line is not to go into effect today. Wants to talk to Obd. H.

b. Obd. H. summoned to Fuehrer.

1600; Talk this over on phone with Obd. H., who is at Hqrs Sixth Army. Orders to comply with Fuehrer's wishes are issued to A Gp A by myself, to A Gp B by Obd. H.

\textsuperscript{13}Halder Diary, 23 May 1940.

2000; Obd. H. returns from OKW. Apparently again a very unpleasant interview with Hitler. At 2020 a new order is issued, cancelling yesterday's order and directing encirclement to be effected in area Dunkirk-Estairis-Lille-Roulaix-Ostend. The left wing, consisting of armor and motorized forces, which has no enemy before it, will so be stopped dead in its tracks upon direct orders of the Führer! Finishing off the encircled enemy army is to be left to the Air Force!!15

Thus, it is clear that the official "Stop Order" was issued by Hitler over von Brauchitsch's strong objections. Undoubtedly, the visit to von Rundstedt influenced Hitler's thinking, but the actual decision was his. Von Rundstedt had undoubtedly been influenced by von Kluge and von Kleist. Also, during this time Goering had been to see Hitler and had made an ill- advised and boastful commitment to the Luftwaffe to destroy the cutoff Allied armies with no further assistance from the army. General Albert Kesselring, commander of the German air fleet in the Dunkirk area, was much annoyed by Goering's imprudence:

My Command - [Air Fleet 2] perhaps as a reward for our late achievements? - was given the task of annihilating the remains of the British Expeditionary Force almost without assistance from the army. The C-in-C Luftwaffe must have been sufficiently aware of the effect of almost three weeks of ceaseless operations on my airmen not to order an operation which could hardly be carried out successfully by fresh forces. I expressed this view very clearly to Goering and told him it could not be done even with the support of VIII Air Group [recently taken away from Kesselring's command]. Air Marshal Jeschonnek [Luftwaffe Chief of Staff] told me he thought the same, but that Goering for some incomprehensible reason had pledged himself to the Führer to wipe out the English with his Luftwaffe. It is easier to excuse Hitler with so many operational tasks to occupy his mind for agreeing than Goering for making this unrealistic offer. I pointed out to Goering that the modern Spitfires had recently appeared, making our air operations difficult and costly - and in the end it was the Spitfires

15Halder Diary, 24 May 1940.
which enabled the British and French to evacuate across the water. 16

While researching material for his book, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, William L. Shirer, much puzzled over the reason for Goering's actions in this matter, queried General Halder by letter on this and other matters related to Halder's diary. Halder's reply, dated 19 July 1957, sheds additional light on the Luftwaffe's participation in events preceding the "Stop Order."

During the following days [i.e., after May 24] it became known that Hitler's decision was mainly influenced by Goering. To the dictator the rapid movement of the Army, whose risks and prospects of success he did not understand because of his lack of military schooling, became almost sinister. He was constantly oppressed by a feeling of anxiety that a reversal loomed. . . .

Goering, who knew his Fuehrer well, took advantage of this anxiety. He offered to fight the rest of the great battle of encirclement alone with his Luftwaffe, thus eliminating the risk of having to use the valuable panzer formations. He made this proposal . . . for a reason which was characteristic of the unscrupulously ambitious Goering. He wanted to secure for his Air Force, after the surprisingly smooth operations of the Army up to then, the decisive final act in the great battle and thus gain the glory of success before the whole world. 17

General Halder recounted a conversation he had with von Brauchitsch after the latter had spoken to Luftwaffe Generals Kesselring and Milch while they were awaiting trial at Nuremberg in 1946. According to these officers:

Goering at that time [May 1940] emphasized to Hitler that if the great victory in battle then developing could be claimed exclusively by the Army generals, the prestige of the Fuehrer in the German homeland would be damaged beyond repair. That

---

17 Shirer, op. cit., p. 733.
could be prevented only if the Luftwaffe and not the Army carried out the decisive battle. 18

The day after the issue of the "Stop Order" began with another clash between von Brauchitsch and Hitler. Halder's diary entry of the 25th records the event.

The day starts off with one of those painful wrangles between Obd. H. and the Fuehrer on the next move in the encircling battle. The battle plan I had drafted for A Gp A, by heavy frontal attacks, merely to hold the enemy, who is making a planned withdrawal, while A Gp B, dealing with an enemy already whipped, cuts into his rear and delivers the decisive blow. This was to be accomplished by our armor. Now political command has fixed the idea that the battle of decision must not be fought on Flemish soil, but rather in northern France. To camouflage this political move, the assertion is made that Flanders, criss-crossed by a multitude of waterways, is unsuited for tank warfare. Accordingly, all tanks and motorized troops will have to be brought up short on reaching the line St. Omer-Bethune.

This is a complete reversal of the elements of the plan. I wanted to make A Gp A the hammer and A Gp B the anvil in this operation. Now B will be the hammer and A the anvil. As a Gp B is confronted with a consolidated front, progress will be slow and casualties high. The Air Force, on which all hopes are pinned, is dependent on the weather.

This divergence of views results in a tug-of-war which costs more nerves than does the actual conduct of operations. However, the battle will be won, this way or that. 19

Jodl, in his diary, reports von Brauchitsch's 25 May visit to Hitler and mentions the recommendation of the former that the panzers resume their attack north of the canal line.

In the morning 25 May the Commander-in-Chief of the Army arrives and asks permission for mechanized divisions to push forward from the high terrain Vimy-St. Omer-Gravelines towards the west into the level terrain. Fuehrer is against it, leaves decision to Army Group A [von Rundstedt]. They decline for the time being because tanks should rest a while to be ready for tasks in the south. 20

18Ibid.
19Halder Diary, 25 May 1940.
20Jodl Diary NCA, 25 May 1940.
Undeterred by his failure to get Hitler to issue the order, and apparently determined to keep the record straight, von Brauchitsch sent a message to von Rundstedt giving OKH's permission to begin an advance toward Dunkirk. Colonel Guenther Blumentritt, operations officer of Army Group A, wrote on the OKH message "By order of the Commander-in-Chief [Rundstedt] and Chief of Staff [Sodenstern] NOT passed to the Fourth Army, as the Fuehrer has delegated control to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army Group." The Army Group War Diary adds the comment: "The C-in-C [Rundstedt] considers that, even if their further advance is extremely desirable, it is in any case urgently necessary for the motorized groups to close up."21

In commenting upon Rundstedt's action of not passing Brauchitsch's order to Kluge, Ellis [Official British War Historian] reminds the reader that "The Fuehrer's" orders of the previous day WERE passed to all formations. The last entry of the Army Group A War diary for 25 May contains the cryptic statement, "The task of Army Group A can be considered to have been completed in the main."22 This certainly indicates that von Rundstedt did not contemplate becoming too deeply involved in the confused battle developing in front of Dunkirk. As the Army Groups, Armies, Corps, and Divisions converged upon the dwindling pocket of resistance, boundaries were crossed, command relationships become confused, and troops got intermingled; artillery fires were difficult to coordinate; missions and objectives became

21 Ellis, op. cit., p. 150.
22 Ibid.
obscure and the situation unclear. It is entirely possible that at this state of the battle Lord Gort—encircled as he was—had more complete command of the battle situation than did the besieging forces.

Von Brauchitsch was unhappy with the situation generally. This is indicated in Halder's diary entry for 26 May which describes the C-in-C as "very nervous."

No significant change in situation. Von Bock, suffering losses, is pushing slowly ahead between inner wings of 18th and 6th Armies. Kluge's II Corps gains some ground around LaBasse. Our armored and motorized forces have been stopped as if paralyzed on the high ground between Bethune and St. Omer in compliance with top level orders, and must not attack. In this way, cleaning out the pocket may take weeks, very much to the detriment of our prestige and our further plans.

All through the morning Oabd. H. is very nervous. I can fully sympathize with him, for these orders from the top just make no sense. In one area they call for a head-on attack against a front withdrawing in an orderly fashion and still possessing its striking power, and elsewhere they freeze the troops to the spot when the enemy rear could be cut into anytime you wanted to attack. Von Rundstedt too, apparently could not stand it any longer and went up front to Hoth and Kleist, to get the lay of the land for the next move of his armor.

Around noon, a telephone call notifies us that the Fuehrer has authorized the left wing to be moved within artillery firing distance of Dunkirk in order to cut off, from the landside, the continuous flow of transport (evacuations and arrivals).

By noon on the 26th, Lord Gort was in full retreat to the beaches of Dunkirk. He had been able to extricate enough forces to protect the canal line and his flanks were relatively secure to protect the evacuation. When Hitler lifted the "Stop Order" on the 26th, the stalled panzers began to move again toward the perimeter of the Allied forces around Dunkirk—but it was too late. The vision of the escaping British forces had alarmed the Fuehrer and he called for

---

23Halder Diary, 26 May 1940.
von Brauchitsch. Halder briefly reports the interview. "1330: Obd. H. summoned to Fuehrer. Returns beaming at 1430. At last the Fuehrer has given permission to move on Dunkirk in order to prevent further evacuation."24

This word apparently was passed rapidly to the German forces on the canal line because Guderian, after making a false start in the morning when he was again restrained by higher headquarters, reported he was released from restriction "too late."

On this day [the 26th] we attempted once again to attack towards Dunkirk and to close the ring about that sea fortress. But renewed orders to halt arrived. We were stopped within sight of Dunkirk! We watched the Luftwaffe attack. We also saw the armada of great and little ships by means of which the British were evacuating their forces.25

In summarizing the battle of Dunkirk, Guderian offers his opinion as the commander on the spot:

It was not until the afternoon of May the 26th that Hitler gave permission for the advance on Dunkirk to be resumed. By then it was too late to achieve a great victory.

The operation would have been completed very much more quickly if Supreme Headquarters had not kept ordering XIX Corps [Guderian's Corps] to stop and thus hindered its rapid and successful advance. What the future course of the war would have been if we had succeeded at that time in taking the British Expeditionary Force prisoner at Dunkirk, it is now impossible to guess. In any event a military victory on that scale would have offered a great chance to capable diplomats. Unfortunately the opportunity was wasted owing to Hitler's nervousness. The reason he subsequently gave for holding back my corps - that the ground in Flanders with its many ditches and canals was not suited to tanks - was a poor one.26

24Ibid.
25Guderian, op. cit., p. 118.
26Ibid., p. 119.
In the foregoing discussion, the military reasons for the "Stop Order" have been covered in considerable detail. It has been established that both Hitler and Rundstedt contributed to the order. The responsibility for the order, however, must rest with Hitler as Dictator.

The political reasons for the "Stop Order" are somewhat more obscure, although they have been alluded to in general terms by several of the participants. Political objectives may have significantly affected Hitler's thinking. In this respect, Halder's diary entry of 25 May [page 87 supra] is interesting. It refers to "Political command," "This political move," and "The battle of decision must not be fought on Flemish soil." There were innuendos in Halder's words which hinted that there was more to the matter than the insinuations and veiled references to "political decisions." In his 19 July 1957 letter to Shirer, Halder recalled Hitler's political reasons for not wanting to finish the battle for Dunkirk on Flemish soil. He said that Hitler, in subsequent references to the episode, supported his "Stop Order" on two bases. The first, of course, was military; the second was purely political. He felt that the generals could not argue with the political reasons involved as these were outside their sphere of competence.

The second reason was that for political reasons he did not want the decisive final battle, which inevitably would cause great damage to the population, to take place in territory inhabited by the Flemish people. He had the intention, he said, of making an independent National Socialist region out of the territory inhabited by the German-descended Flemish, thereby binding them close to Germany. His supporters on Flemish soil had been active in this direction for a long time; he had promised them to keep their land free from the damage of war. If he did not keep
this promise now, their confidence in him would be severely damaged. That would be a political disadvantage for Germany which he, as the politically responsible leader, must avoid. 27

Another interesting statement attributed to Hitler, apropos the political desirability of avoiding a decisive defeat of the British Expeditionary Force, was made to Liddell Hart by General Guenther Blumentritt, Chief of Staff for von Rundstedt. Blumentritt refers to the 24 May 1940 visit of Hitler to von Rundstedt's headquarters.

Hitler was in very good humor, he admitted that the course of the campaign had been "a decided miracle," and gave us his opinion that the war would be finished in six weeks. After that he wished to conclude a reasonable peace with France, and then the way would be free for an agreement with Britain.

He then astonished us by speaking with admiration of the British Empire, of the necessity for its existence, and of the civilization that Britain had brought into the world. He remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders, that the creation of its empire had been achieved by means that were often harsh, but "where there is planing, there are shavings flying." He compared the British Empire with the Catholic Church - saying they were both essential elements of stability in the world. He said all he wanted from Britain was that she would acknowledge Germany's position on the Continent. The return of Germany's lost colonies would be desirable but not essential, and he would even offer to support Britain with troops if she should become involved in difficulties anywhere. He remarked that the colonies were largely a matter of prestige, since they could not be held in war, and few Germans could settle in the tropics.

He concluded by saying that his aim was to make peace with Britain on a basis that she would regard as compatible with her honour to accept.

Field Marshal von Rundstedt, who was always for agreement with Britain and France, expressed his satisfaction, and later, after Hitler's departure, remarked with a sigh of relief - "Well, if he wants nothing else, then we shall have peace at last." 28

Blumentritt felt that the halt had been called for more than purely military reasons. He felt sure it was but part of a larger

27 Shirer, op. cit., p. 734.
political scheme to make peace terms easier to obtain. Liddell Hart describes Blumentritt as believing that: "If the British Army had been captured at Dunkirk, the British people might have felt that their honour had suffered a stain which they must wipe out. By letting it escape, Hitler hoped to conciliate them." 29

Liddell Hart questions whether Hitler's attitude was determined only by his political aspirations of the moment or whether, perhaps, there were some deeper psychological motives involved.

Was this attitude of his toward England prompted only by the political idea, which he had long entertained, of securing an alliance with her? Or was it inspired by a deeper feeling which reasserted itself at this critical moment? There were some complex elements in his make-up which suggest that he had a mixed love-hate feeling toward England similar to the Kaiser's. 30

Hitler at times discussed the political implications of his activities more freely with his Italian allies than with his own staff. The utter candor of some of his admissions to Mussolini is startling. The Ciano diaries are revealing in this respect. The situation vis-a-vis the British was included in Hitler's correspondence with Il Duce during this time. The Italian Foreign Minister reported in his diary that he was astonished to find the Nazi Dictator, then at the zenith of his power, [17 June 1940] harping about the importance of maintaining the British Empire as "a factor in world equilibrium." 31

Ciano, analyzing Hitler's sentiments at the time of the "Stop Order,"

---

29Ibid., p. 135.

30Ibid., p. 136.

described the Fuehrer as "the gambler who has made a big scoop and would like to get up from the table risking nothing more."\(^{32}\)

On the evening of May 26th—the same day the "Stop Order" was cancelled—the British Royal Navy, supported by the Royal Air Force, began the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from the port and beaches of Dunkirk. \textbf{OPERATION DYNAMO}, as it was called, was in effect. An armada of 850 vessels, ranging in size from heavy cruisers to sloops and harbor craft, began taking the soldiers from the battered shore. Even the fireboats from the port of London were pressed into service, and one of them was mentioned in dispatches for her actions.

In the first four days, 125,000 men were returned to England. The German staff finally came to realize exactly what was occurring. Although German troops on the canal line had been reporting the intense British naval activity for days, the magnitude of the evacuation was not apparent to the German generals who were ignorant of the power and flexibility of seapower.

Halder's diary entries of 29, 30, and 31 May reveal the growing awareness of the significance of the evacuation.

\textbf{29 May:} The enemy pocket has again shrunk. It will indeed be interesting to see how much of the enemy did get caught in this pocket, 45 Km in length and 30 Km in width.

\textbf{30 May:} Morning conference with Obd. H. He is angry, and the reason is that the effects of the blunders forced on us by O.K.W. are beginning to be felt now. . . . the pocket would have been closed at the coast if only our armor had not been held back. As it is, the bad weather has grounded our air force and now we

\(^{32}\textit{Ibid.},\ p.\ 266.$
must stand by and watch how countless thousands of the enemy are getting away to England right under our noses.

31 May: The reports received during the day confirm the picture given by the morning reports. . . . An intercepted radio signal would indicate that the enemy is going to resume evacuation operations during the night. It will be difficult to stop him. We are now paying for our failure, due to interference from above, to cut off the coast. 33

The Luftwaffe, when it was not grounded by bad weather, was severely attacked by the new Spitfires of the R. A. F. Even when the German bombers were able to penetrate the British air defenses over Dunkirk, the soft sand of the beaches muffled the effect of the bombs; and British engineers, exerting superhuman effort, kept the dock facilities repaired and the port open. Churchill, in his address to the House of Commons on 4 June 1940, attributed the "deliverance at Dunkirk" to the R. A. F.

By 4 June 1940, 338,226 British and French soldiers had been evacuated. Not only was the port still in Allied hands; it was being stubbornly defended by 40,000 French soldiers. The epic of Dunkirk was over.

The last British ship sailed from Dunkirk just before dawn on June 4th. At noon, Hitler conferred with his Naval Commander-in-Chief, Raeder, and told him he planned to reduce the size of the Army as soon as France had been overthrown and to release all older men and skilled workers. "The Air Force and Navy," said Hitler, "will have top priority." The invasion of England was not discussed. 34

33 Halder Diary, 29, 30, and 31 May 1940.

In retrospect, there remains one singularly important aspect of the "Stop Order." Apparently it never occurred to Hitler or his generals that the British were not helplessly trapped with their backs to the sea. Having always been woefully ignorant of naval matters, Hitler and his generals could not conceive of the sea being used to evacuate a significant number of troops. This, however, is not as strange as it may seem. Even the British were aware of the dangers as well as the possibilities attendant upon a large-scale evacuation by sea. The British in fact surprised themselves by the success of the operation. Initially, the British estimated that a maximum of only 45,000 troops could be evacuated by sea.

Thus, by analysis it is apparent that the ramifications of the "Stop Order" were lost on those who directed it. The generals who opposed the order contended that its issuance would prolong that particular phase of the campaign. To them, the ports of Dunkirk and Ostend were significant only as routes for funneling supplies to the Allied armies—not as escape routes. Apparently, even von Rundstedt saw no need to hasten the closing of the pocket. As far as he was concerned, the pocket was already closed by German armies on three sides and by the unfriendly sea on the fourth.

Right or wrong, the "Stop Order" at Dunkirk had many and varied reasons: some military, some political, and some even that resulted from sheer ignorance of the actual conditions. The latter pertain more exclusively to Hitler. As J. F. C. Fuller has said in reference to Hitler's ignorance of the terrain and the tactical situation on the canal line on 24 May: "As we shall see in other campaigns, the
dominant defect in Hitler's generalship was that he would emulate that Gilbertian hero, the Duke of Plaza-Toro, who led his army from behind. "35

The civil-military relations underlying the "Stop Order" are indeed difficult to understand without first comprehending the monumental German ignorance of the sea. In any case, it may be said that both Hitler and his generals contributed to the issuance of the order, but in the last analysis, Hitler alone must bear responsibility for it. Besides assuming responsibility for all political decisions, Hitler had asserted his command over the entire Army; and by impetuously countermanding the orders of the Army Commander-in-Chief in a tactical situation, he reserved for himself complete responsibility for the consequences. This the German generals were perfectly willing for him to do. Ignoring their complicity in the matter, von Rundstedt, Kleist, and Kluge unanimously indorsed the thesis that the Fuehrer alone was responsible for the "Stop Order."

CHAPTER IV

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND THE
FAILURE TO INVADE BRITAIN

At dawn on 5 June 1940, the day after the last British ship sailed from Dunkirk, the German Army unleashed a massive assault south across the Somme river. Against the well trained Wehrmacht, the confused and disorganized French forces were able to offer but little resistance. The morale of the poorly led French Air Force was shattered, and little assistance could be provided by the R. A. F. as the British were even then husbanding their strength for the coming Battle of Britain. The French High Command, now led by the defeatists Petain and Weygand, was exploring means of ending the unequal struggle and of salvaging some part of the rapidly disintegrating French Army for use as a pawn in armistice negotiations.

On 14 June, French humiliation was complete when German forces occupied Paris and hoisted the Swastika over the Eiffel tower. Two days later, the Reynaud government, which had fled to Bordeaux, resigned and on 17 June, Marshal Petain, the new head of state, asked the Germans for armistice terms.

Hitler was at his headquarters Wolfsschlucht [Wolf's lair] near Bruly le Péché when he received the news. Fraulein Schroeder, a woman secretary who was present at the time, recorded the scene
upon delivery of the armistice message. She told how the Fuehrer was beside himself with joy:

He gave his shanks a slap and went into a wild jig. . . . The secretary could think of nothing like it except St. Vitus's dance. This was one of two occasions when she saw Hitler utterly carried away. . . . Only Keitel seemed equal to the moment. He made a little speech and hailed Hitler as the greatest Field Commander of all time—der groesste Feldherr aller zeiten. 1

At 1930 on 22 June 1940, General Charles Huntziger, head of the French Armistice delegation, and General Keitel signed the armistice treaty. The Battle of France had ended and Hitler stood triumphant on the channel coast. According to the planning of Graf Schlieffen [see page 47 supra] this military victory should have solved all attendant political problems. Hitler was soon to discover the fallacy of this theory. "After the war, Field Marshal von Kleist, that very enlightened man who commanded the tanks that rolled over France, remarked as follows: ' . . . The German mistake was to think that a military success could solve political problems. Indeed, under the Nazis we tended to reverse Clausewitz's dictum and regard peace as an interruption of war.'"2

On 22 June 1940, the mighty Wehrmacht, on the threshold of its greatest victory, was in undisputed control of Western Europe. One

---

1 Walter Ansel, Hitler Confronts England (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1960), p. 92, quoting from Albert Zalder, Hitler Privat (Dusseldorf, 1949), p. 156. "Keitel was probably the first to bring the Feldherr appellation into prominence. Goering followed suit in like terms and the press brought it into public use. Some of the professional military shortened it, as time went on, into an uncomplimentary nickname: GROFAZ--GRO(sste)F(feldherr) A(ller) Z(eiten)."

prime question, however, remained to plague "The Greatest Field Commander of All Time"--What Now?

The success of the Nazi offensive in France and the rapidity and completeness of the French collapse surprised even the most optimistic of the German leaders. Hitler and his generals, however, were still confronted with a battered but uncowed foe in Great Britain whose leaders vowed to continue the struggle against Germany to the bitter end. The Germans, moreover, were without a plan to invade the British Isles to administer the coup de grace.

The absence of a German plan to carry the fight to the British homeland is recognized today as a serious strategic error. Historians differ as to the reasons for this error and who should bear the blame. As might be expected, the German generals unanimously blamed Hitler for the poor planning and stated that Hitler never intended to attack England directly for either of two main reasons. One reason was that Hitler desired to maintain the British Empire as a force in European politics; the other was that he was convinced the British would sue for peace when France fell and England was blockaded by sea and subjected to heavy bombing from the air. Other apologists contend that the error was a stupid oversight on the part of the German military leaders who, because of their continental orientation, could not appreciate the strategic possibilities of an invasion of the British homeland. They point out that by 1940 Hitler had banished from his immediate circle all the real brains of the Wehrmacht, and had surrounded himself with acquiescent mental pygmies who, though they had a flair for tactical military operations, were hopelessly incompetent to deal with strategic
matters transcending the movement of Army corps on the battlefield. Although much can be said for each proposition, the fact is indisputable that in May and June of 1940 the Germans had no operation plan to invade Britain.

Chester Wilmot, World War II historian, supports the thesis that Hitler intentionally did not plan for an assault on England as he considered such an operation unnecessary. Wilmot refers to Hitler's original plan of campaign in the west which the Fuehrer outlined to the Commanders-in-Chief on 23 May 1939 during a conference in his study at the Chancellery. On this date--the day after the signing of the "Pact of Steel" with Italy--Hitler told the assembled generals and admirals:

If Holland and Belgium are successfully occupied and if France is also defeated, the fundamental conditions for a successful war against England will have been secured. England can then be blockaded from western France at close quarters by the Luftwaffe, while the Navy with its U-Boats can extend the range of the blockade. When that is done, England will not be able to fight on the continent and daily attacks by the Luftwaffe and Navy will cut her life lines. The moment England's supply routes are severed, she will be forced to capitulate. 3

The evidence is strong that Hitler did not expect Britain to continue the struggle after the ignominious defeat of her forces in France. On 20 May 1940, the day Guderian's panzer columns reached the channel coast at the mouth of the Somme, Hitler told General Jodl that "The British can have a separate peace at any time after restitution of the colonies." 4


4Jodl Diary, NCA, 20 May 1940.
At noon the following day, Admiral Raeder met with Hitler and in a "private discussion" talked about the "details concerning the invasion of England which the Naval Staff had been working on since November [1939]." That Hitler was not considering an invasion in the near future is evidenced by the fact that in the course of the meeting with Raeder he approved the latter's recommendation that the battle cruisers Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Hipper—in company with four destroyers—be deployed to the arctic to "threaten enemy communications between the British Isles and Northern Norway."\(^5\)

Two weeks later, on 4 June 1940—the day the evacuation of the B. E. F. from Dunkirk was completed—Raeder and Hitler again conferred on naval matters. No mention was made of Dunkirk, the campaign in Northern France, or a planned cross-channel pursuit of the defeated British Army.\(^6\) These Hitler-Raeder conferences strongly indicate that neither Hitler nor his Naval Staff considered invasion of England imminent or necessary at the time.

The French position as to why Hitler failed to invade England immediately after Dunkirk was expressed by Adolphe Goutard, a French officer who participated in the Battle of France, who said the French were amazed at the lack of a German plan to continue the assault against Britain. Goutard commented:

> A German leader will do nothing without a plan, and at this juncture [5 June 1940] no plan for the invasion of Britain had as yet been prepared by the OKW. Furthermore, Hitler was

\(^5\)FCNA, p. 105. Both the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau were seriously damaged in action against the British Home Fleet in June 1940.

\(^6\)Ibid., pp. 107-108.
convinced that victory could be obtained on the continent. France had to be liquidated first in order to remove all British hopes in this direction.7

Ronald Wheatley, author of the official British history of **OPERATION SEA LION** [German invasion of England] told of a meeting on 17 June 1940 between Colonel Walter Warlimont, Chief of the Operations Division OKW and Rear Admiral Kurt Fricke, Chief of the Naval Staff Operations Division, during which Warlimont told the Admiral that "with regard to a landing in Britain, the Fuehrer... has not up to now expressed such an intention, as he fully appreciates the unusual difficulties of such an operation. Therefore, even at this time no preparatory work [has] been carried out in OKW."8

On the same day that Warlimont confided to Fricke that OKW had no plan to land in Britain, Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, met with von Ribbentrop. In his diary entry for 17 June 1940, Ciano described the meeting in which he found the Reich Foreign Minister exceptionally calm and moderate, and in favor of peace. . . . If London wants war it will be total war. . . . But Hitler makes many reservations on the desirability of demolishing the British Empire, which he considers, even today, to be an important factor in world equilibrium. I ask von Ribbentrop a clear-cut question. "Do you prefer the continuation of the war, or peace?" He does not hesitate a moment. "Peace."9

In his postwar writings, German Field Marshal von Manstein characteristically placed upon Hitler the responsibility for failure of

---

7Goutard, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
German planning. Von Manstein stated, with considerable justification, that Hitler discouraged forthright military advice by intimidation, by relief of those generals who disagreed with him, by intrigue against those personages who were too popular to be immediately relieved, and by favor toward those who consistently trusted his intuition—the net result being reduction of his military advisory staffs to administrative instruments of silent compliance. Manstein attributed the lack of a German invasion plan to Hitler's intuition that the British would give up short of a German assault on their homeland.

As for Hitler's military advisers, they clearly felt obliged to await a "Fuehrer's decision." . . . The above state of affairs strikingly exemplified the . . . organization that had emerged in Germany when Hitler assumed supreme command. . . . From its very inception Hitler had relegated OKW to the status of a military secretariat. In any case, its chief, Keitel, would not have been in the least capable of advising Hitler on strategy. 10

After taking a swipe at Keitel, whom he thoroughly despised, von Manstein further commented on the situation that permitted the German forces to reach the channel coast and win the Battle of France without a plan to invade England:

As for the Commanders-in-Chief of the three services, Hitler allowed them practically no influence whatever on grand strategy. From time to time they were able to express an opinion on policy matters at personal interviews, but ultimately Hitler alone made the decisions on the basis of his own deliberations. . . . Since no one—least of all OKW—was authorized to draft a "War Plan," the effect in practice was that everyone left things to "the Fuehrer's intuition." Some, like Keitel and Goering, did so in credulous adulation; others, like Brauchitsch and Raeder, in a mood of resignation. . . . The result of this pattern of command was, as I have stated, that when the campaign in the west was finished, we were confronted with the problem of what to do next. 11

Many of the German troops and junior officers considered the war won when the campaign in France ended. To them the lack of a plan to invade England presented no problem. One young German officer, Lt Baron Tassilo von Bogenhardt, reported:

We really did feel that the war was over now. It looked as if we should not even have to land in England. With our U-boats blocking the sea routes, it seemed as if the British hadn't a dog's chance of getting help from the Empire or America. This meant that eventually they would simply have to throw up the sponge; all we had to do was send in the Luftwaffe to help them make up their mind.12

Once Hitler's decision to land in Britain was announced in the German press, the Nazi propaganda machine began to prepare the public for the invasion. Songs were written, cartoons and posters were placed in barracks and public places, and the entire apparatus of public information was geared to perform its task. Else Wendel, a German Hausfrau, reported the sentiments of the homefolk:

Feverishly we waited for the invasion of England. Some of us were astonished that it did not at once follow the defeat of the British Army at Dunkirk. But this time I did not become skeptical. I had learnt my lesson that I really could not judge political or military situations at all. We must leave these things to Hitler and trust his judgment. The Press, too, assured us daily that the day was not far distant when we would land in England.13

The possibilities of success of a German invasion of Britain have been debated by historians since 1940. The timing of the invasion was of paramount importance in any evaluation of its probable success. Thus, in postwar discussions of the pros and cons of the matter, those


who believe an invasion would have succeeded have theorized that Hitler should have attempted a hasty crossing of the channel immediately or shortly after Dunkirk with forces available at the time. The proponents of this theory argue that the French Army south of the Somme was so disorganized that it presented no threat to the German forces, and that the B.E.F. was not only whipped and disorganized but without weapons. The Germans on the other hand, had more troops in the field than could profitably have been deployed against the French.

General Kesselring, commander of the German Air Fleet immediately concerned with the invasion and the Battle of Britain, was convinced that "at least until the middle of August [1940] a properly organized offensive must have been successful."

General Blumentritt, Chief of Operations for von Rundstedt in May and June 1940, was also of the opinion that "Hitler should have tried an invasion of England immediately after Dunkirk." General Student, commander of German parachute forces, considered that the most propitious time for an airborne assault against England would have been immediately after Dunkirk. Student was in a hospital in the summer of 1940 recovering from a serious head wound received during the fighting in Rotterdam, but he later outlined his plan for employing the Parachute Division and the 22nd Air Landing Division of the XI Corps in an invasion of England.

14 Kesselring, op. cit., p. 78.

I would first have urged the use of the parachute forces against England while [British] evacuation from Dunkirk was still in progress, ... Even if this project had been vetoed, ... I should have used my force to capture airfields [and] transported infantry divisions over by air ... The best time was immediately after Dunkirk--before [British] defensive measures were developed. 16

General Kesselring also believed the use of paratroops feasible for the invasion. "With proper planning enough parachutists and glider planes could have been made available to swamp the defenses ... and seize airfields on which the landing of one or two airborne divisions would have been possible." 17 The opinions of both Kesselring and Student were voiced after the war, however, when any obstacles to an invasion that might have been present some years earlier probably appeared more academic than real.

To have been successful, an invasion of England during the course of the Battle of France would have had to be planned beforehand and as a sequel to the fighting in Flanders. In this wise, the operation would have been an additional phase of OPERATION PLAN YELLOW for which trained invasion troops were available and adequate shipping, naval support, and air cover were earmarked for the assault and standing by.

Telford Taylor, in his analysis of the probable success of a cross-channel invasion after Dunkirk, concluded that "with sufficient foresight and boldness this could have been done." 18

16 Liddell Hart, op. cit., p. 152.
17 Kesselring, op. cit., p. 70.
It is indeed possible that an assault on Britain under the circumstances prevailing in June 1940 would have been successful. Necessary preparations for executing such an operation are normally made by armies planning the attack of a major river line. They could and, as events were to prove, should have been made as part of OPERATION PLAN YELLOW. General Halder, in his diary entry for 3 July 1940, referred to the contemplated invasion as "similar to a large scale river crossing." Hitler, on the other hand, considered the difficulties inherent to such an operation more formidable. On 21 July 1940, at a conference with General Brauchitsch and Admiral Raeder, the Fuehrer described the operation as an "exceptionally daring undertaking." The effort, continued Hitler, "is not just a river crossing, but the crossing of a sea which is dominated by the enemy. This is not a case of a single crossing operation as in Norway; strategic surprise cannot be expected. ... Forty divisions will be required."\(^{19}\) Hitler’s appreciation of the "difficulties" and the "daring" aspects of the crossings may have been influenced by the "secret" briefings he had received from Admiral Raeder who viewed the entire operation with much apprehension.

Although many military experts and pseudo experts have advanced postwar opinions on the probable success of a German cross-channel invasion of England and have speculated on the reasons why the German Wehrmacht never attempted the crossing, an even greater number of opinions have been advanced as to why the invasion was not

---

\(^{19}\)FCNA, p. 119; also reported in Wheatley, op. cit., p. 43; and Halder Diary, 22 July 1940.
even contemplated by the talented German operations staffs prior to June 1940.

Hitler's intuition that the British would accept peace terms after the defeat of France is the only logical explanation for the lack of a German plan to invade Britain. Also, his indecision to continue the attack in the face of continued British resistance in June and July of 1940 was influenced to varying degrees by a combination of military, political, and economic factors that prevailed throughout the summer and fall of that year.

In the last days of June, Hitler waited impatiently for word that the British desired to talk peace. Even Winston Churchill's speech to the House of Commons on 18 June, which reiterated the determination of the Churchill government to fight on "whatever the odds," did not shake the Fuehrer's confidence that the British would soon sue for peace.

On 29 June, Hitler returned to his field headquarters at Tannenberg. Situated west of Freudenstadt in the Black Forest, Tannenberg was a strange place indeed to locate the supreme headquarters, as has been commented upon by many. Here Hitler sulked in isolation, although he did take long walks in the woods while his staff officers visited the local wine gardens. It was here that Hitler drafted his victory speech to the Reichstag, wrestled with the strategic dilemma

---

20 Bullock, op. cit., p. 592. This well known speech continued - "so that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: This was their finest hour."

posed by continued British intransigence, and considered the major problem confronting him: What Now?

General Jodl, second only to Keitel in his adulation of the Fuehrer as "The Greatest Field Commander of All Time," but nevertheless a capable staff officer, was, by the end of June, quite disturbed by the lack of a plan to deal with the stubborn British. Spurred on by the "Young Turks" of the OKW staff such as von Lossberg and Warlimont, Jodl prepared for the Fuehrer a rambling six page memorandum titled "The Continuation of the War Against England." This document was completed by the time Hitler returned to Tannenberg, and on 30 June Jodl presented it to him for his consideration.  

In this staff memorandum, Jodl considered two broad courses of action against England: first, a direct attack against the British Isles; secondly, an attack on the British Empire, or, as he put it, "an extension of the war to Britain's periphery." The final German victory, Jodl continued, "including victory over England, is only a matter of time." Considering victory assured, Jodl theorized that Germany could "choose a course of action that spares her strength and avoids risks;" he concluded that an air war alone against England would destroy her war potential and her critical supplies, and would "paralyze and finally break the will of the people to resist and thereby force their

22 Ansel, op. cit., p. 116.

government to capitulate. [Italics are Jodl's]\textsuperscript{24} Jodl believed that a landing in England was possible only if German forces had command of the air. He also believed that a landing was necessary only to "deal the death stroke." The "death stroke," however, would not be necessary until the "end of August or early September." Even so, Jodl considered that "the landing must be prepared in all details as ultima ratio."\textsuperscript{25}

For two days during his stay at Tannenberg and his walks in the Schwartzwald, Hitler studied Jodl's memorandum. Then on 2 July he directed Keitel to issue the first planning directive for the invasion of England. Beginning with the usual Hitlerian preamble: "The Fuehrer and Supreme Commander has decided," the directive stated: "A landing in England is possible, providing that air superiority can be attained and certain other [unspecified] necessary conditions fulfilled." The directive ended with the admonition that "all preparations must be undertaken on the basis that invasion is still only a plan, and has not yet been decided upon."\textsuperscript{26}

In the evening of 2 July, \textit{Force H}, the British Naval striking force stationed at Gibralter, "sortied in strength and headed eastward into the Mediterranean. It consisted of a carrier, three battleships, several cruisers, and the usual destroyers."\textsuperscript{27} During the morning of

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{26}FCNA, pp. 112-113.  
\textsuperscript{27}Ansel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 123. British ships in \textit{Force H} included the aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL and the battleships HOOD, RESOLUTION and VALIANT.
3 July, this strong British naval force appeared off the French naval base at Mers-el-Kebir [Oran]. Its commander, Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville, requested Admiral Gensoul, commander of the French fleet anchored inside the breakwater, to accept any one of several British proposals for keeping the French ships out of German hands. Precious time elapsed in polite but futile conversations. Meanwhile, Admiral Gensoul's four French battleships and three cruisers, plus the destroyers and submarines comprising his force, prepared for an attack by the British. 28

As the summer twilight deepened with no agreement being reached, Somerville requested further guidance from the British government. At 1820, the Admiralty replied: "Firm intention of H. M. G. that if French will not accept any of your alternatives they are to be destroyed." Somerville reported the French intransigence to London and was instructed: "French ships must comply with our terms or sink themselves or be sunk by you before dark." 29 Somerville immediately opened fire on the French fleet, and before dark on the evening of 3 July most of the French ships were either destroyed or sunk in the harbor at Mers-el-Kebir. 30

---

28 Ibid. French ships anchored at Mers-el-Kebir were the battleships DUNKERQUE, STRASBOURG, PROVENCE and BRETAGNE; and the cruisers VOLTA, MOGADOR, TERRIBLE, LYNX, TIGRE, and KERSAINT.

29 Churchill, Their Finest Hour, pp. 234-236. Compare these seventeen words of positive guidance with the lengthy and equivocal wording of most of Hitler's directives. Sunset came at 1929 GMT in Oran on 3 July 1940.

30 Ansel, op. cit., p. 123
If positive and violent action on the part of Britain was needed to convince Hitler that the British were prepared to match with deeds the words of defiance they had voiced against the Reich, the attack and sinking of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir should certainly have sufficed; for if Britain could bring herself to attack her former ally, what force must she be prepared to unleash against the Nazis? As painful as its execution must have been for the British, this naval action was a tremendous defeat for the Fuehrer psychologically.

Count Ciano reported on 2 July that he was "convinced that there is something brewing in [Hitler's] mind, . . . Now he is considering many alternatives, and is raising many doubts which account for his restlessness." Hitler was indeed having his doubts about the British. "The little worms" he had dealt with at Munich had turned overnight into British Lions. The faded memory of Chamberlain and his umbrella at Munich had been replaced at Mers-el-Kebir by the vision of a new and bold adversary in the person of Winston Churchill, who presented a quite different personality to the Fuehrer.

Hitler waited until 19 July, a full month after the fall of France, before summoning the Reichstag to hear his victory oration. The month's silence, punctuated only by the guns of the British fleet, left no doubt in the Fuehrer's mind that the war must continue. In this Reichstag speech, however, Hitler intended to make one last direct appeal to the English people. Ciano, who came to Berlin to hear the oration, recorded in his diary: "Hitler's speech will be a last appeal

31 Ciano, op. cit., p. 271.
to Great Britain. I understand that, without their saying so, however, they are hoping and praying that this appeal will not be rejected.

The Fuehrer's speech was given at the elaborately decorated Kroll Opera House in an atmosphere of pomp and supreme triumph. Hitler was in top form as an orator for the occasion. The time lavished on the speech, which had been so long in preparation, was not wasted. It was a masterpiece of staging and metaphor and was ideal for German consumption. Count Ciano, seated in a diplomat's box for the occasion, considered the speech "solemn and stagy," but delivered "simply and in an unusually humane tone." The Fuehrer reported to the Reichstag the details of the "astonishing" success of the Wehrmacht, assuming personal credit for every facet of leadership including the details of changes to the OKH plans for OPERATION PLAN YELLOW. He assured the German solons that any possibility of estrangement between Germany and Russia did not exist, and he blamed Winston Churchill and the other British leaders for continuing the war when "all is lost." In a direct appeal to the British people, he stated:

In this hour, I feel it to be my duty before my own conscience to appeal once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain as much as elsewhere. I consider myself in a position to make this appeal since I am not the vanquished, begging favors, but the victor speaking in the name of reason. I can see no reason why this war must go on.

The New York Times, in commenting on the speech, reported:

32 Ibid., p. 277.
33 Ibid.
In form and in substance, Hitler's ultimatum yesterday was the same mixture as before. . . . It proffered the same sweet reasonableness. . . . It was another attempt to undermine the morale of the enemy, to weaken his willpower, to provoke a revolution of opinion in Britain which would give victory to Germany without a long and costly struggle. 35

The immediate reaction of the BBC to Hitler's speech was, to say the least, disappointing to the Fuehrer. Without waiting for the official Whitehall reaction, the BBC flatly rejected the German overtures. In so doing, it reflected the firm opinion of the British "man on the street." Ciano, in the company of the German leaders in Berlin, awaited the international reaction to the speech. He reported:

Late in the evening of the 19th, when the first cold British reaction to the speech arrived, a sense of ill-concealed disappointment spread among the Germans. [Hitler] would like an understanding with Great Britain. He knows that war with the British will be hard and bloody, and knows also that people everywhere are averse to bloodshed. 36

In spite of his disappointment at the British attitude toward his peace overtures, Hitler still hoped for a British accommodation. Meeting with the Fuehrer on 20 July 1940, the morning after the Reichstag speech, Ciano reported: "Conference with the Fuehrer, . . . He confirms my impressions of yesterday. He would like an understanding with Great Britain." 37

Mussolini was concerned that the speech might influence the British to begin peace negotiations because, according to Ciano: "More

35Ibid.
36Ciano, op. cit., p. 277.
37Ibid.
than ever now [Mussolini] wants war." 38 Churchill, commenting on Il Duce's fears, stated: "He need not have fretted himself. He was not to be denied all the war he wanted." 39

The Fuehrer's speech to the Reichstag was more than a victory speech. He used the occasion to honor and advance the rank of his military leaders. Breaking all precedence, he stopped half way through his speech to award medals and promotions to his generals and admirals. Seated in the first [military] balcony at the Kroll Opera House, they stood and saluted as their names and awards were announced. 40

The large number of these awards and promotions, however, and the attitude with which the Fuehrer presented them seriously detracted from their worth.

The Officer corps was there to be honored, but even as Hitler spoke its stature dwindled. This was no mere chief of state, graciously and gratefully applauding the exploits of a Wellington or Nelson, a Foch or Pershing. This was the very Author of Victory--this was Napoleon or Frederick the Great, pausing to acknowledge that his assistants had indeed been of service. 41

Hitler took complete and sole credit for the military victories.

I advised the German forces . . . and gave them the necessary detailed orders. . . . I therefore gave orders for an immediate attack. . . . Contrary to the Schlieffen Plan of 1914, I arranged for the operation to bear mainly on the left wing of the front. . . . I planned to aim for the Seine and Loire Rivers. 42

38Ibid., p. 278.
39Churchill, Their Finest Hour, p. 261.
40The New York Times, 20 July 1940, p. 5; see also Shirer, op. cit., p. 754; and Taylor, March of Conquest, p. 344.
41Taylor, March of Conquest, p. 345.
Small wonder that the observant Shirer thought Halder the "saddest figure" in that martial assemblage, as Hitler calmly assumed parenthood of all the General Staff's brain children of the recent weeks of triumph. 43

During the ceremony, Hitler awarded field marshal's batons to twelve generals; and awarded an extra large baton to Goering who was made Reich Marshal of the Greater German Reich—a position newly created for the occasion. 44 Nine Army generals were promoted to field marshal. In order of rank, these were - Brauchitsch, Keitel, Rundstedt, Bock, Leeb, List, Kluge, Witzleben, and Reichneau. Also, three Luftwaffe officers—Milch, Kesselring, and Sperrle—were made field marshals. Halder was promoted one rank to the grade of general. This large number of promotions was considered unusual in the sense that only five field marshals had been made by the Kaiser during the entire first World War. As the name of each promoted officer was called he arose and saluted Hitler with raised right arm. And when he sat down he had to shake hands with all his colleagues in the immediate vicinity, and there was much slapping of backs and smiling among the officers. 45

Hans Gisevius, perennial plotter against Hitler and an eyewitness to the occasion, described it thus:

Gray row upon gray row, each gray uniform splashed with the red of the coat flap, the victorious generals sat and received decorations and honors from their "Greatest General of All Time." New generals of the army, new colonel generals, twelve field marshals and a Reich marshal! . . . It was enough to take ones

45 Ibid.
breath away. Afterward the people tried to console themselves with a joke: "They're cheaper by the dozen."  

Gisevius was convinced, and so confided to von Hassell, that these promotions brought over to Hitler's side most of the generals who had been engaged in underground opposition to the Fuehrer. On 7 August, the ex-ambassador to Italy wrote in his diary: "Gisevius no longer expects anything from the highest generals; they are being fattened on titles, decorations and gifts."  

Telford Taylor considered the large number of promotions no "mere burst of Hitlerian generosity. It was a deliberate and highly successful maneuver to debase the coinage of military rank."  

Taylor pointed out that the new profusion of batons was a perfect illustration of W. S. Gilbert's apothegm: "When ev'ryone is somebodee, then no one's anybody."  

Many Army men also believed that the large number of promotions had the effect of cheapening the value of the ranks awarded. Von Manstein said: "Natural as the German people found it to honour meritorious soldiers, we army men felt the distinctions now bestowed overstepped the bounds of necessity both in character and scope."

The promotions of 19 July 1940 were not the only ones awarded after the Battle of France. When the Nazi attack began in May 1940,

---


47 Von Hassell, op. cit., p. 137.

48 Taylor, March of Conquest, p. 347.

49 Ibid.

50 Manstein, op. cit., p. 150.
there were only forty six senior German generals on the rank roster. After 1 August, there were seventy one.\textsuperscript{51} Besides the senior officers promoted at the Kroll Opera House, twenty six additional officers were advanced to general,\textsuperscript{52} twenty seven to Lt. General, and twenty three to Major General.

While thus increasing his hold on the Wehrmacht, though cheapening the rank of its leading officers, Hitler continued to emphasize his own position by living a simple austere life. In so doing, he hoped to stand in clear contrast to the star-spangled presence of his generals. On 21 October 1941, Hitler confided to Reichfuehrer SS Himmler:

As far as my own private existence is concerned, I shall always live simply—but in my capacity of Fuehrer and Head of State, I am obliged to stand out clearly from amongst all the people around me. If my close associates glitter with decorations, I can distinguish myself from them only by wearing none at all.\textsuperscript{53}

The plethora of decorations awarded 19 July was but another of Hitler's tools to dominate the Wehrmacht. Von Hassell noted at the time of Dunkirk that "The Army fights anonymously as far as its leadership goes."\textsuperscript{54} Telford Taylor considered the Kroll Opera House ceremony a prime example of the shrewd tactics by which Hitler "converted the

\textsuperscript{51}Taylor, March of Conquest, pp. 399-408.

\textsuperscript{52}Including Corps Commanders Manstein, Schmidt, and Reinhardt; and Sodernstern, Rundstedt's Chief of Staff.


\textsuperscript{54}Von Hassell, op. cit., p. 129.
generals stunning victories to his own uses, and thus perpetuated his
own domination of the officer corps. "55

The Fuehrer's contribution to success in the west, however,
cannot be overlooked. Even Goering made a distinct contribution.

Hitler and Goering together deserve their share of credit; "yet the
accomplishments of the military leadership, the inherited qualities of
the old army, and the achievements of individuals, from Gessler56
and Seeckt to Beck and Fritsch, [were] shamelessly suppressed. "57

Von Hassell, although violently anti-Hitler, admitted that:

nobody can contest the proportions of the success achieved by
Hitler, but that does not alter the real nature of his deeds or the
cruel dangers now threatening all our higher standards. A
demoniac Spartacus will wreak nothing but destruction if the
opposition does not act in time. It is tragic not to be able to
rejoice over such achievements. The masses of the people take
everything with an astonishing stolid indifference; deafened, I
suppose, by seven years of listening to loudspeakers. 58

The awards and promotions dispensed so lavishly by the
Fuehrer were more than recognition of past accomplishments; they
were insurance of good behavior in the future--but they were not
issued without cost. As proved by subsequent events, Hitler made the
generals "pay dearly for their batons and stars and medals. The
price was a powerless anonymity, and it is chiefly remarkable that so

55Taylor, March of Conquest, pp. 350-351.
56Dr Otto Karl Gessler, Reich Minister of Defense under the
Weimar Republic.
57Von Hassell, op. cit., p. 133.
58Ibid.
few of the generals sensed the cost, and that so many were content with their mess of pottage. "59

The Kroll Opera House ceremony marked the end of a phase of the war in the west. The generals and admirals returned to their commands to receive the accolade of their subordinates and to get on with the planning for their next great adventure—the invasion of Britain.

The Army plan for OPERATION SEA LION was presented to Hitler by Halder and von Brauchitsch in a meeting at the Berghof on 13 July 1940. The meeting began with "Introductory remarks on over-all objectives of Armed Forces—Task of Army—Basis for attainment—Time factors—Strength."60 In marked contrast to Jodl’s rambling memorandum on "The Continuation of the War Against England," [page 110 supra] the notes of the Army Chief of Staff listed succinctly and methodically:

Conduct of the Attack:
I Enemy: Ground Forces, coastal defences, distribution and expected actions.
II Own Deployment: Coast, terrain, England, mounting base, disposition and strength at hop-off, further actions.
III Own Task Organization: and technical preparation.
IV Own Scheme: River crossing, landing, development of attack—strength, estimates and organizations.
V Summary of Proposals: And demands on other services.
VI Time Schedule: And preparations initiated by now.61

59 Taylor, March of Conquest, p. 351.
60 Halder Diary, 13 July 1940.
61 Ibid.
Although no Naval Staff representatives were present, Hitler approved the OKH plan and directed von Brauchitsch to begin preparations. After the conference, which lasted less than two hours, Halder recorded: "Recommendations are accepted as a basis for practical preparations. . . . which are to begin immediately." The Army Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of Staff immediately returned to the forward Army Headquarters in Fontainbleau and commenced their "practical preparations."

The news of Hitler's approval of the OKH plan did not reach Admiral Raeder in Berlin until 15 July. The Naval Commander-in-Chief was astounded at the Fuehrer's decision.

Practical preparations for invasion to begin at once--it was unbelievable! Twice, frantic phone calls were made to OKW requesting verification. . . . Admiral Raeder's worst fears seemed realized--precipitate orders for invasion, no time to prepare, and certainly no conception of what was involved.

Raeder had good cause for his consternation. On 11 July, 1940, two days before Hitler's meeting with von Brauchitsch and Halder, the Admiral, in a detailed report to the Fuehrer on naval operations, had recommended "that an invasion should be used only as a last resort to force Britain to sue for peace. . . . Hitler was sympathetic and seemed more interested in the development of Norway." By 15 July, OKW had received word of Hitler's decision and had informed the Naval Staff that OPERATION SEA LION was to be prepared for.

---

62Ibid.
63Ansel, op. cit., p. 144.
64FCNA, pp. 113-114.
execution at any time after 15 August 1940. The following day, 16 July, Hitler issued his detailed Directive No. 16, "Preparations For The Invasion of England." 65

Initial Army plans called for a landing force of forty divisions as the minimum required to secure the invasion attempt. Such a force far exceeded German Naval capabilities, however, and OKH later scaled it down to thirteen divisions in the first wave. 66 The remainder of the available Army forces were to be sent across the channel on succeeding days if conditions permitted. The small number of barges suitable for landing armored vehicles severely limited the number of panzer units that could be used in the assault. This became a matter of grave concern to the OKH planners.

The major Army-Navy controversy involved the proposed width of the landing front. The Army maintained that maximum security for the landing force, once it was ashore, could be assured only by landing on a wide front initially—a front running from Ramsgate to Lyme Bay as a minimum. [See figure 4] The Navy insisted that naval protection for such a wide deployment of amphibious shipping was beyond its limited capabilities. Admiral Raeder considered that a narrower front was more practicable; such, for example, as that

65Ibid., p. 116.

66Ibid., p. 121 - Extract from Naval Staff War Diary entry for 29 July 1940. "The Army requires the transport of 13 landing divisions (about 260,000 men). In view of their anticipated tasks, the Army High Command regards this as the minimum number, from which no departure can be permitted, even if there are difficulties in transport. This is a considerable reduction [compared with previous estimates]."
FIGURE 4

ARMY (OKH) INVASION PLAN OF MID-JULY 1940.
THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES THE "WIDE FRONT" LANDING
DESIRED BY THE ARMY.
from Dover to Beachy Head. 67 For three weeks, the Army and Navy
staffs tried to negotiate a settlement. Halder declared that the narrow
landing area proposed by Raeder would be like forcing the landing
troops "through a sausage grinder." 68 Admiral Schniewind, Naval
Chief of Staff, responded that it would be equally as suicidal to try to
protect naval forces deployed on such a wide frontage as that proposed
by the Army. Halder's diary entry for 7 August described the Army-
Navy controversy over proper frontage for invasion of England as an
"unbridgeable gap."

On 13 August 1940, Admiral Raeder conferred with Hitler,
Keitel, and Jodl on the "Wide Front--Narrow Front" controversy.
Requesting a prompt decision on the matter, the Admiral reported:

In view of the limited means available for naval warfare and
transport, Operation "Sea-Lion," as emphasized repeatedly,
should be attempted only as a last resort, if Britain cannot be
made to sue for peace in any other way. The Fuehrer agrees
completely. Failure on our part would cause the British to
gain considerable prestige. We must wait and see what effect
our intensive air attacks will have. The Fuehrer will make a
decision on August 14 after a conference with the C-in-C,
Army. 69

On 16 August, apparently, after conferring with von Brau-
chitsch. Hitler made his decision. In a Top Secret Memorandum
titled SEA LION, Keitel announced that:

The following decisions were made by the Fuehrer— . . .
(b) Preparations for a landing in Lyme Bay are to be abandoned,
. . . (c) Dispositions should be made in such a manner as not to

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 125.
69 Ibid.
exclude the possibility of an attack on a narrow front, should this be ordered at the last minute, . . .\textsuperscript{70}

A further OKW directive issued the same day stated: "Main crossing to be on a narrow front, simultaneous landing of four to five thousand troops at Brighton by motor boats and the same number of airborne troops at Deal-Ramsgate."\textsuperscript{71} [See figure 5]

Hitler's decision was thus a compromise which pleased neither the Navy or the Army. Goering meanwhile had remained aloof from the controversy. Presumably, he considered the frontage matter to be of academic import only as, in his opinion, the Luftwaffe alone could and would bring Britain to her knees. He considered that the Army would be able to make an administrative move across the channel to accept the surrender of the British after their defeat by the German Air Force. In any event, massive air attacks on Britain had begun on 8 August 1940, and the generals and admirals postponed their dispute to await the outcome of the air battle. On one point, the Army and Navy staffs were in firm agreement. This was that if the Luftwaffe gained control of the air over England, the invasion problems would be immeasurably reduced; on the other hand, if the Luftwaffe failed therein, the feasibility of the entire invasion would be highly questionable.

Field Marshal Kesselring, [promoted 19 July 1940] commander of the Air Fleet charged with "softening up" Britain for the invasion, considered that "as a preliminary to SEA LION the plan for the

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., p. 128.
\textsuperscript{71}Ibid.
FIGURE 5

ARMY (OKH) INVASION PLAN OF MID-SEPTEMBER 1940.
THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES THE "HARBOR FRONT"
LANDING FAVORED BY THE NAVY.
first phase of [the] air offensive against England was ill-conceived."  
In the opinion of this experienced airman, "the air battle for England suffered from the muddle-headedness of the entire SEA-LION programme." With the exception of Goering, the majority of the Luftwaffe leaders believed that "England could not be brought to her knees by the Luftwaffe alone." As a result, the air war conducted by the Air generals was an exercise that could not possibly succeed. This had a harmful effect upon the morale of the officers responsible for the Luftwaffe effort and was largely the cause of its failure.

The preinvasion attack conducted by Kesselring's Air Fleet between 8 August and 6 September 1940 was designed to eliminate Britain's air defense and simultaneously continue heavy bombardment of her merchant shipping. Strong German fighter formations penetrated British defenses to attack the R.A.F. on or over its bases. Irregular attacks were also launched against air bases in Southeast England, while Stukas and Jabos attacked the sealanes and harassed unloading operations in British ports. Terror raids were forbidden during this period.  

While the Luftwaffe maintained pressure against Britain in an attempt to gain air superiority over the island, the Army staff continued its planning and Raeder's naval staff exerted supreme effort to

---

72Kesselring, op. cit., p. 75.
73Ibid., p. 72.
74Ibid.
75Ibid., p. 73.
obtain the necessary amphibious sealift to transport the invasion forces. Von Manstein, whose corps was to lead the invasion, described the training of his troops near Boulogne:

The troops had daily exercises in the dunes and neighbouring fenland, which in many respects resembled our intended landing places. After the arrival of our ferrying equipment—converted Rhine and Elbe barges, small trawlers and motor-boats—we were able, in calm weather, to practice embarkation and disembarkation with the navy. . . . All personnel showed the utmost keenness in training for their unaccustomed task, and we were convinced that, like everything else, it could be mastered in due course. 76

Although the Naval Staff was not quite so optimistic, naval preparations continued nevertheless, and large amounts of shipping were readied for movement to the channel invasion ports where it would be used initially for training troops and boat crews. The number of ships was kept to a minimum to reduce losses from British air raids on the channel ports. On 1 September 1940, the German North Sea convoys started toward the channel, and on 6 September Raeder reported to Hitler that the assemblage of transport and personnel for SEA LION was progressing well and would be completed by 21 September in time for the invasion. 77 Raeder, however, could not avoid making a final qualifying remark:

If air supremacy is increasingly established it will be possible to meet the deadline. The crossing itself will be very difficult. The Army cannot count on keeping the divisions together. The execution of operation "Sea Lion" appears possible, if attended by favourable circumstances regarding air supremacy, weather, etc. 78

76Manstein, op. cit., p. 152.
77FCNA, pp. 132-136.
78Ibid., p. 133.
The Army—perhaps in its chronic ignorance of the sea—continued preparations to execute the invasion. Army leaders, though not overjoyed with the operation at hand, expressed confidence that the Army could execute its portion of the mission. The Luftwaffe generals, on the other hand, considered their efforts misdirected; and although German air units gained air superiority over southern England for a short time in early September, they failed to maintain this superiority once terror raids were begun on the London area.\(^79\) The switch of emphasis of the air attack to London had significant consequences for \textit{SEA LION}. As noted by Kesselring:

> The second phase of the air battle for England, from 6 September 1940 to June 1941, saw the scrapping of the invasion idea. 

> From the new nature of our missions [terror raids] those who could read the signs knew that sentence had been passed on Operation Sea-Lion.\(^80\)

Besides the military problems associated with \textit{SEA LION}, there were economic and psychological factors that significantly influenced Hitler's subsequent decision to abandon the cross-channel attack. Much postwar speculation has ensued as to the reasons for Hitler's cancellation of \textit{SEA LION}, but no unanimity of opinion has resulted. A generally discounted factor is the strategic pressure that was brought against Germany by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940.

In secret protocols to the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 24 August 1939, Germany had agreed that the Soviet sphere of influence included Finland, Estonia, and Latvia on the Baltic, and

\(^79\) Kesselring, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 75.

\(^80\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 80.
the Rumanian province of Bessarabia. Lithuania on the Baltic and the rest of Rumania remained in the German sphere. In mid-June 1940, while the German Army was still heavily involved in France, Soviet forces moved into the Baltic states and, in addition, occupied Lithuania. Russian occupation troops remained in these countries despite violent German protests. Later in the month, Soviet forces also moved into Rumania and M. Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, told H. von der Schulenberg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, that Stalin intended to demand from Rumania not only Bessarabia but Bukovina. To avoid a military confrontation, Hitler advised the Rumanian government to acquiesce, but he simultaneously informed Moscow that Germany henceforth unconditionally guaranteed the territorial integrity of the rest of Rumania and Hungary.

Soviet moves into Rumania placed Russian troops within 100 miles of Ploesti, the main source of German oil. In September 1939, German oil reserves were sufficient to support military operations for less than six months, and in the ensuing year the seven and a half million tons of oil obtained by Germany from all sources were barely enough to meet the daily demands of the Wehrmacht and the home-front. The Soviet Army in Bessarabia, with its expressed intent to move into Bukovina, presented Hitler with a serious strategic problem which had to be reckoned with in any decision to continue the war.

81 Bullock, op. cit., p. 530.
82 Wilmot, op. cit., p. 23; see also Bullock, op. cit., pp. 610-612.
83 Wilmot, op. cit., p. 22.
against England. If, for example, the Soviet Army had marched through Ploesti on its way to the Dardanelles at the time the Wehrmacht was astride the channel in an all-out assault against the British Isles, the Fuehrer would have been in a precarious strategic position.

On 29 July, 1940, ten days after Hitler had assured the Reichstag that any possibility of estrangement between Germany and Russia did not exist, General Jodl informed Colonel Warlimont, Chief of the OKW planning staff, that Hitler intended to attack the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941. The word was not long in reaching OKH. Halder entered in his diary for 31 July 1940: "Fuehrer - with Russia smashed, Britain's last hope would be gone. . . . Decision: It follows from this reasoning that Russia must be done away with. Spring 1941."85

German negotiations with the Soviets continued while Hitler pondered the questions as to what to do about Britain. On 3 September, Ribbentrop cabled von der Schulenberg in Moscow:

Please call on H. Molotov and tell him: . . . In article 3 of the German-Russian Nonaggression Pact an obligation was agreed upon for reciprocal information and consultation on questions of interest to both parties. . . . Germany, . . . is vitally concerned in the remaining Rumanian territories, . . . particularly in the question of oil and grain. . . . 86

---


85 Halder Diary, 31 August 1940.

From 12 to 14 November 1940, M. Molotov paid his famous visit to Hitler in Berlin. To assure the German military staffs that the Soviet Foreign Minister's visit did not connote a change in Nazi policy toward Russia, the Fuehrer issued "General Directive No. 18, Nov 12, 1940," which said, *inter alia*:

> Political discussions have been initiated with the aim of clarifying Russia's attitude for the time being. Irrespective of the results of these discussions, all preparations for the East which have been verbally ordered will be continued. Instructions on this will follow as soon as the general outlines of the Army's operational plans have been submitted to me and received my approval.\(^7\)

On 5 December, while busily engaged in the preparation of plans for the attack on Russia, Halder entered notes in his diary concerning Operations *FELIX, MARITA, OTTO, and SEA LION*. His entry for *SEA LION* was cryptic: "Need not enter calculations."

On 3 December, the German War Production Ministry appealed to OKW concerning the Army's demand for priority for its tank building program, Minister Todt's demand for priority for the national construction program, and the Navy's demand for priority for *SEA LION*. When asked for priorities, Keitel told the War Production Minister (1) there would be no invasion of England, and (2) first priority would go to the air defense of Germany.\(^8\) This guidance was followed by Hitler's "Directive No. 21, *OPERATION BARBAROSSA*" which stated: "The German Armed Forces must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia.

---

\(^7\)Wheeler-Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 510, quoting from Nuremberg document 444-PS.

in a quick campaign [italics in original] (Operation Barbarossa) even before the conclusion of the war against England."\textsuperscript{89}

\textbf{OPERATION SEA LION} was an on again--off again proposition for months. Constantly circumscribed by numerous qualifications, the invasion was at best an "if, as, and when" operation. Hitler's interest ran from hot to cold and by late fall 1940, pressure from the Soviets turned his attention toward the east. What was happening there contributed mightily to the cancellation of \textit{SEA LION}. \textit{SEA LION} was not cancelled, however, by any clear-cut documented decision; rather it died a slow death which was not complete until 22 June 1941 when, one year to the day after the French armistice, the \textit{Wehrmacht} invaded Russia.

The demise of \textit{SEA LION} was the result of a number of cumulative factors. Primarily, however, the decision was a strategic and political one made by Hitler himself--as was normal--without regard to either political or military advice. The German Army was prepared and willing to execute the plan; but even the Navy would have undertaken the task with a good shove from the \textit{Fuehrer}. Admiral Raeder had consistently considered England to be Germany's greatest enemy. Strong evidence of this is the fact that even after the decision had been made to execute \textbf{OPERATION BARBAROSSA}, Raeder still harbored serious doubts about attacking Russia before first conquering England.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{89}NSR, p. 260.

\textsuperscript{90}Bullock, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 680-681.
Although the R.A.F. was never conclusively defeated, the Luftwaffe seriously weakened its tactical capabilities. The Luftwaffe's best effort, however, merely secured a stand-off in September 1940. Field Marshal Kesselring said in defense of this effort: "It is historically undemonstrable that SEA LION had to be abandoned because the Luftwaffe was not up to the task. . . . The fact was that . . . the Luftwaffe was thrown in as a stop-gap to bridge the interval until the curtain rose on the great act—Russia." Kesselring thus concluded that "SEA LION was often contemplated, but never planned. . . . The High Command continually flirted with the idea of an invasion as a conscience salve for its failure to make up its mind by reason of a number of political and military misgivings." 

Hitler's lack of enthusiasm for SEA LION was not caused by military considerations primarily. Indeed, the operation was more feasible than many he had embarked upon previously. The General Staff's opposition to SEA LION could not compare with its concern over Hitler's decision in 1936 to occupy the Rhineland. In 1938 the Wehrmacht leadership shook in its military boots at the prospect of assaulting the strong Czech border fortifications to clash with a large, modern, and well trained Czech Army. Many times in the past, the Fuehrer had brushed aside, with a wave of his hand, considerations of far more formidable military impact and, ignoring all military advice, had carried on regardless of the possible consequences.

91 Kesselring, op. cit., p. 90.
92 Ibid., p. 71.
Hitler's decision to abandon the assault on Britain and attack the Soviet Union instead was based largely upon his evaluation of the political situation, but even more upon his intuition—his marvellous and hitherto infallible intuition. For a man of such clairvoyance, advice was contemptible, unwelcome and, in his opinion, quite unnecessary.

In summary, it can be said that German forces were prepared to make a serious effort to execute SEA LION; that from a military point of view the invasion might have succeeded either after Dunkirk or as late as September 1940; that the decision to drop the plan was Hitler's alone; and that in making the decision Hitler was more influenced by Soviet pressure in the east than by any other single factor.

Field Marshal Kesselring, the perceptive Luftwaffe field commander, summed it thus: "If Hitler had really wanted to carry through the project he would ... have imposed his will on the three services. In that event so many vague orders would not have been issued which made agreement between service chiefs difficult."93

The definite schism in German civil-military relationships that became evident in earlier campaigns widened to even greater proportions during the development of plans for SEA LION. Hitler's tactical error in permitting a defeated enemy force to withdraw to sanctuary without a vigorous pursuit was unwise though not necessarily fatal. His strategic error in abandoning the initiative in the west coupled with his decision to attack the Soviet Union without first

---

93Ibid.
securing the German rear against Britain was more serious. Hitler's fatal error, however, was his persistent application of the "Fuehrer Prinzip." Not only did Hitler deliberately degrade his top military leaders in the notorious Kroll Opera House ceremony, he intentionally encouraged dissension among the German military services. "Inter-service mistrust and scheming to gain the inside track with the Fuehrer was one factor that added yet another front to sap the vitality and honest purpose of the German professional leadership."94 Hitler accepted the Army wide front invasion plan without even consulting Admiral Raeder. He gave Goering full freedom to prosecute the air attack against Britain without coordinating Luftwaffe plans with those of the Army and Navy. He gave Admiral Raeder operational guidance without discussing the matter with either OKH or the Luftwaffe; and, as has been mentioned previously [page 102 supra] Hitler ordered major fleet units to the Arctic at the time they were sorely needed to prepare for the invasion of Britain.

The furtive method he practised of dealing apart with each service head insured subservience, and fed personal ambition to thicken still more the climate of jealousy and mistrust. . . . Hitler himself epitomized the basic differences and his personal feelings, when he used to exclaim to aides on frequent occasions, "I have a reactionary Army, a Christian Navy, and a National Socialist Air Force."95

Adolf Hitler effectively and by design divided German political, diplomatic, naval, air, and army efforts directed toward achieving victory over Great Britain. As a result, viable civil-military

94 Ansel, op. cit., p. 330.
95 Ibid., p. 331.
relationships ceased to exist except through the person of the Fuehrer. By thus controlling the course of German military affairs, Hitler assured his rise to personal leadership of the Wehrmacht. In the process, however, he personally thwarted any form of collective effort toward German victory. In so doing he assured not only the eventual eclipse of his personal power but the complete and inglorious defeat of the German Armed Forces.
CHAPTER V

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND THE
FAILURE OF GERMANY TO ACHIEVE
VICTORY IN THE WEST IN 1940

The failure of Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" to achieve victory in the west in 1940 was an event to which the Fuehrer and the generals contributed in nearly equal measure. By failing to control the National Socialists at a time when it still had the power to do so, the Wehrmacht was not altogether blameless. The German General Staff, however, viewed the Nazi seizure of power "with a good deal of lofty indifference and with an equally lofty assumption that whatever happened it would be able to control the course of events at will."¹

From 1933 onward, Hitler slowly but surely sapped the power of the German military leaders. By 1939, the influence of the generals in strategic matters was practically nil. By 1941, the military leaders had become increasingly powerless to affect even tactical decisions, as was evidenced in the development of OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, "the Stop Order," and OPERATION SEA LION.

It is generally considered that responsibility for assessing a nation's international political situation from the standpoint of possible warlike operations rests with its military leaders. It is incumbent

¹Rauschning, op. cit., p. 167.
upon them as professional soldiers to provide the military means 
required to defend the nation and insure its success against the most 
unfavorable combination of military power conceivable.

It is no less the responsibility of national political leaders 
to determine whether international political situations created by 
the pursuit of national political goals create the possibilities of mili­
tary conflict, and to advise the military accordingly. Political 
leaders are also responsible for considering the military implications 
of their policies in terms of impact upon the national economy to 
include impractical increases in armaments, infeasible expansion 
of military forces, or excessive risk taking in the event of war with 
major powers.

Quite early in the rise of the National Socialists in Germany, 
the military leaders failed to maintain the proper civil-military 
balance in national affairs. In 1934, for example, General Blomberg, 
German Defense Minister at the time, and later the first Field Marshal 
of the Third Reich, remarked to Hermann Rauschning, the Nazi leader 
in Danzig, concerning Germany's foreign policy toward Austria:

I have a sort of jester's freedom to say anything I like to the 
Leader. But I shall never dream of saying anything to him about 
Austria, and I strongly advise you to steer clear of the matter. 
It is a point on which he is not quite sane. 2

Rauschning was astounded and dismayed at this admission by 
a senior German military leader and former officer of the Imperial 
German Army that he had a "jester's freedom" with the Fuehrer

2Ibid., p. 144.
whose political importance had neither been confirmed by experience nor proved by any genuine achievement. A Minister of the Reich declined, in a question of outstanding importance, to intervene on the strength of his joint responsibility, and yielded to a leader of problematical qualities on a point on which the leader was not quite sane. I must say that few things so disturbed me as this revelation of the pass we had come to.

With the possible exception of Hitler's decision in early March 1936 to occupy the Rhineland, no serious differences developed between the Fuehrer and the Officer Corps during the years 1933-1937. The early days of the Third Reich were devoted to rearmament and the enlargement of the army. "Those were the golden days of rapid promotion in the armed services. Officers, long starved for advancement under the Weimar Republic, at last received professional recognition and overdue pay increases." The Fuehrer was generous to his senior commanders. He frequently gave them sums of money not appearing in the military budget and on which no income taxes had to be paid. Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge, for example, received a birthday gift of 250,000 Marks from Hitler.

The early political success of the National Socialists in foreign affairs inspired the junior members of the Officer Corps and gave them confidence in Hitler's leadership. The announcement on 16 March 1935

---

3Ibid.


of the sovereign right of Germany to rearm, which set aside a degrading part of the Treaty of Versailles, was welcomed by the German military, as was the conclusion of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 18 June 1935 which replaced the dictatorial terms of Versailles with a voluntary agreement.\(^6\)

Hitler employed every means at his disposal to gain control of the German military machine without which his plans for the future could not succeed. He used bribes, promotions, cajolry, and threats. He saw to it that these were cleverly mixed with political maneuvering of all kinds, and the playing of the ambitions of individual military leaders one against the other—all to the end that the Fuehrer would emerge in complete control of the Wehrmacht.

The Fuehrer not only divided the military leadership; he infiltrated the ranks of the armed forces with his own "Hitler Youth." In one of those rambling postprandial monologues with which he habitually entertained his dinner guests during the war years, the Fuehrer admitted that during his early years as Chancellor he had avoided any open conflict with the Wehrmacht until universal conscription could be introduced and the ranks of the armed forces filled with properly indoctrinated youth.\(^7\)

Once that was accomplished, the influx into the Wehrmacht of the masses of the people, together with the spirit of National Socialism and with the ever-growing power of the National Socialist movement, would, I was sure, allow me to overcome all opposition.


among the armed forces, and in particular, in the corps of officers.\textsuperscript{8}

The major failure of German military leadership occurred during the early 1930's when the German Army became the last refuge of the German democratic state. As the repository of the ultimate moral and material resources of a state, an army is necessarily in the forefront of any new or revolutionary process: "Even without setting up a military dictatorship or desiring to do so, it becomes of primary importance in all functions of the life of the nation."\textsuperscript{9} By abrogating their responsibilities to maintain a proper balance between the civil and military forces in Germany, the army generals had by 1939 become prisoners of the Nazi revolution rather than a "dictatorship within a dictatorship" as they had intended.\textsuperscript{10}

Looking back, it can be said that the year 1939 was the decisive year for the fate of Germany and the world. If it was necessary to remove Hitler and his regime, it had to be done before the war. [[Italics in original] During the war, when the entire German nation was fighting for its existence against a world of enemies, it was too late.\textsuperscript{11}

Hitler's supreme triumph over the generals came at Munich in 1938. Here the Fuehrer's force of personality, political acumen, and bluff not only secured the solid backing of German public opinion in his behalf but removed the doubts of many members of the Officer Corps as to his ability. At Munich, Hitler acted against the advice of

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9}Rauschning, op. cit., p. 129.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 162.

\textsuperscript{11}Assmann, op. cit., p. 514.
the general staff for the third time and was successful. The occupation of the Rhineland was an important and bloodless political victory for the new National Socialist government. The Anschluss with Austria, also taken against the generals' advice, turned into the "Blumenkrieg" rather than the disaster predicted by the generals. After Hitler's phenomenal success at Munich, political and military opposition to his strategic plans collapsed. Hitler's confidence in the advice of his generals—if he ever had any—likewise vanished. When in 1939 he ordered the army to occupy all of Czechoslovakia, OKH was not even informed. Instead the Fuehrer issued his orders directly to the army corps concerned and personally directed the operation.

The Army High Command objected to Hitler's dictation of tactical movements during the German attack on Poland, but the extreme success of this operation further strengthened Hitler's opinion that the OKH was a collection of "hidebound peasants." As early as 1936 the Fuehrer had said "If I listened to my generals, I would not be where I am today." 12

Hitler strongly resented and violently protested against army opposition to his tactical plans during the campaign in Poland. In a stormy session held on 23 November 1939 with von Brauchitsch and the commanders of the army corps selected for the attack on France, Hitler "declared war" against the General Staff.

The generals of the army at that time, he stated, were the last remnants of an old fashioned trend of ideas whose incapacitities had already been proven in the First World War. In Poland we have shown that we had not yet grasped the spirit of the times, 

12Ibid., pp. 518-519.
and we were still being chivalrous; then he said that he knew the resistance in the army and threatened, once at the beginning and once at the end of the speech, the destruction of all those who resisted him.... Hitler told the Commander in Chief of the Army that he knew the spirit at Zossen [OKH Headquarters]—and he would destroy it.\(^\text{13}\)

According to General Halder, von Brauchitsch returned "very upset and despondent" from this meeting which was punctuated by a violent torrent of abuse from Hitler. The Commander-in-Chief visited Hitler again privately on the evening of 23 November to protest the Fuehrer's indictment of the Army. In the course of the evening, von Brauchitsch tendered his resignation, but Hitler refused to accept it. Instead he ordered the Field Marshal to continue in his post.\(^\text{14}\)

Hitler's complete distrust of the army leadership was exemplified by his announcement that army forces to be employed in the occupation of Denmark and Norway would be "directly under my orders." Army leaders were not even consulted about plans for WESERUEBUNG [Occupation of Denmark and Norway]. Hitler's "Directive for Case Weser Exercise," dated 1 March 1940, named the army generals and specified the army units to be released by von Brauchitsch and placed under direct control of the Fuehrer's headquarters.\(^\text{15}\) By acquiescing to this degrading and insulting subordination, the Army surrendered completely to the Fuehrer. By now the


\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 857.

general staff had not only ceased to advise on the military implications of political matters and the strategic aspects of military operations, it no longer exercised any controlling influence over the tactical direction of army forces in combat. Thus, all civil-military relationships had ceased to exist. The tactical success of WESERUEBUNG confirmed Hitler's opinion of himself as the greatest Field Commander of all times and encouraged him in his next conflict with OKH in the OPERATION PLAN YELLOW controversy.

The remarkable success of SICHELSCHNITT further enhanced Hitler's stature as a tactician and prompted him to delve even deeper into army operations. Had the revised operation plan failed, or had it been only partially successful, von Brauchitsch and Halder might have retrieved some of their lost prestige. By regaining a degree of the Fuehrer's confidence, they might have been able to restrain him from meddling in army tactics. "But, as it was, he would no longer take advice on the most technical of matters and he insisted on dealing personally and directly with an ever widening range of problems."16

Hitler assumed full credit for the success of SICHELSCHNITT --he pointedly ignored the contribution made by his general officers in the conception and execution of plans for this operation. The German generals likewise collectively and unequivocally placed full blame upon the Fuehrer for issuance of the "Stop Order," even ignoring the recommendations in this regard by the senior military leaders on the

16Wilmot, op. cit., p. 87.
spot. The record clearly indicates, however, that Rundstedt, Kluge, and Kleist must share the responsibility for the halt of the panzers outside Dunkirk. If von Brauchitsch and Halder were mistaken about the merits of SICHELSCHNITT, they were certainly correct in their denunciation of the "Stop Order." If it was wise on Hitler's part to bypass OKH to take von Rundstedt's advice in the case of SICHELSCHNITT, it was an error in judgment that caused him to accept the Army Group Commander's recommendation to stop the panzers outside Dunkirk against the expert advice of Brauchitsch and Halder. Whatever the rationale behind Hitler's decision to issue the "Stop Order"—political, military, psychological, or intuitive—it was a serious military error; and the historical fact is that von Rundstedt contributed as much to the folly of Dunkirk as he did to the overall success of SICHELSCHNITT.

OPERATION SEA LION was the culmination of chaos in joint military leadership. The German Army, Navy, and Air Force appeared to outfumble one another in the development of a plan for this operation while the "greatest Field Commander of all time" contributed to the confusion by dealing separately with the services in adherence to his "Fuehrer Prinzip." SEA LION was the fourth instance during the German campaign in the west in which Hitler decided momentous issues apparently on the spur of the moment. In each instance, the outcome of the war hung in the balance. The Fuehrer, on 27 January 1940, approved Admiral Raeder's plan for employing army forces to occupy Norway and Denmark without consulting either Brauchitsch or Halder. On 17 February 1940, he approved Manstein's recommendation for a
major change in **OPERATION PLAN YELLOW** without consulting OKH. On 23 May 1940, he approved Goering's suggestion that the Luftwaffe be permitted to destroy the B. E. F. in the Dunkirk pocket. He did this without consulting his own OKW staff despite the fact that von Kleist's panzers had Lord Gort's troops at their mercy. Finally, on 13 July 1940, Hitler approved the OKH plan for invasion of England without consulting the Navy leaders who would be responsible for the plan's implementation.

The generals justly complained that command arrangements such as these compromised the planning and execution of military operations in the German campaigns in the west. They must share the blame, however, for the circumstances which permitted the development of these arrangements. The Wehrmacht not only permitted National Socialism to survive in its infancy but protected it as it grew. The generals made their "deals" with Hitler without questioning the price. Individually and collectively, German military leadership thus contributed materially to the appalling civil-military dichotomy that existed in 1940.

Most of the well known German military leaders were captured by the Allied forces at the end of the war. The senior officers were assembled by the Allies as a working group to assist with preparations for the Nuremberg trials. They rendered valuable assistance in this endeavor by analyzing and indexing the mass of official German war records in the hands of the Allies, and by preparing historical monographs to be used in writing the Allied history of the conflict. In addition to investigating the historical question of how the German nation
was defeated, they attempted to depict the military "lessons learned" and to show how, in future wars, the errors made by the Germans could be avoided. Two of the most interesting papers on the general topic, "High Command in the Future," were essays prepared by General Franz Halder and Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. The substance of these two essays is especially germane to this study as the authors thereof had actively participated in the development of OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, the "Stop Order," and OPERATION SEA LION. Halder and Kesselring, though of widely different temperaments and dissimilar war experiences and viewpoints, concurred in the belief that the failure of Hitler's command arrangements was a prime factor in the defeat of the German military forces. For success in future war, the two proposed formation of a Combined Armed Forces General Staff under one Supreme Military Commander-in-Chief. Interestingly enough, both generals recommended that the Commander-in-Chief be a military, rather than a civil, leader. Although Halder acknowledged that the branch of the armed forces in which the Commander-in-Chief received his education and training was immaterial, he specified that "he must in all respects be the best soldier." In Halder's view, the relationship between the

---


civil leader and the military commander should be one of mutual respect and confidence; that the military leader "must believe in the head of State firmly and unreservedly and this confidence must be reciprocated in full measure.¹⁹ As the epitome of a proper civil-military relationship, Halder cited that which existed in the latter part of the American Civil War between Abraham Lincoln as President and General Grant as Commander-in-Chief of the Union Armies. To express this relationship, Halder quoted from a letter Lincoln wrote to Grant in 1864:

The details of your plans are unknown to me and I have no desire to know them. You are prudent and self confident and this suffices for me, so that I do not wish to impose any pressure or restrictions upon you. . . . If you should lack anything that I could obtain dont hesitate to let me know.²⁰

Kesselring's "ideal" command arrangement also postulated an intimate relationship between the civil head of State and the military Commander-in-Chief. The Luftwaffe Field Marshal believed that the collapse of the German High Command began when Hitler with a "single will pushed ministers and popular representatives farther aside." The result, in Kesselring's view, was that "to an increasing extent advisers became men who simply received orders, the Reichstag a forum for the Fuhrer's proclamations to the people and the world at large, and the party and its formations a supervisory and in part executive agency." The major consequence of the lack of a civil-military balance in the German High Command, according to Kesselring, was that "no strategic

¹⁹Ibid., p. 44.
²⁰Ibid., p. 45.
war plan existed; the operational plans born of suddenly arising situations had the character of improvisation and [were] therefore neither creatively constructive for the future nor a compelling motive for internal improvement." In his postwar essay, Kesselring concluded that the dissolution of the German military organization began at the time of Blomberg's dismissal "when the Fuehrer as a 'non-professional soldier' assumed supreme command of the Wehrmacht with an extremely inadequate staff," and that the final collapse of the German military machine was assured when "as a result of the increased requirements caused by 'global warfare' the loyalty crisis between the Fuehrer and his generals entered its final stage." 21

Although many German officers surrendered completely to Hitler's domination, there were some who deliberately obstructed the Fuehrer's designs or found themselves unable to perform the unreasonable and impossible tasks he imposed upon them. These officers paid the price. Of ninety two German generals who had active major commands or were in key positions in the High Command between 1933 and 1945--thirty five were relieved or dismissed in disgrace by reason of disagreement or dispute with Hitler while eight more were severely disciplined and given dishonorable discharges. Of seventeen Field Marshals, ten were relieved. Only one retained his command throughout the war. Of thirty six four-star generals, twenty six were relieved and only three survived the war in their positions. 22 The various

22 Assmann, op. cit., p. 520.
forms of opposition of the German officer corps to Hitler's policies thus "make an interesting study in futility." 23

The relief and suspension of high-ranking generals was at times accomplished with the knowledge and connivance of their brother officers. Ambitious for high rank and decorations, the generals, in their intrigues within the Heeresleitung, contributed to an appalling disunity within the officer corps itself and prevented the possibility of a solid front of opposition ever being presented to the Fuehrer. A condition of von Brauchitsch's appointment as Commander-in-Chief, for example, was his agreement with the forced retirement of six outstanding army generals—von Leeb, von Kleist, von Kressenstein, von Pogrell, Lutz, and Leise—who apparently were selected in connection with Hitler's desire to remove those officers whose anti-Nazi sympathies were suspected, and to "loosen up" the ranks for the promotion of several officers of definite pro-Nazi sympathies. 24

Although it is true that Adolf Hitler, in the course of his twelve year domination of the German nation, imposed upon the Army a control more positive than any it had ever before experienced and compelled "the obedience of its officers even to commands which violated their historical traditions, their political and military judgment, and their code of honor," 25 it is equally true that the officer corps frequently and for its own selfish ends permitted or even encouraged

---

23 DeWeerd, loc. cit.
24 Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 170.
25 Craig, op. cit., p. 469.
Hitler's intrusion into tactical and technical military matters in which he was less than expert. Thus, the German generals contributed to both the successes and the failures of the German military campaign in the west. The position of the generals with respect to the Fuehrer on 2 August 1934 when Hitler demanded of them their oath of allegiance, on 4 February 1938 when Hitler announced that he would assume the office of Defense Minister, on 1 September 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland and plunged the world into war, and again on 22 June 1941 when the Wehrmacht marched across the border into the Soviet Union was, in each instance, a position for which they themselves were largely responsible.

In departing from the "correctness" of the Prussian officer and adhering to the "duty of the German officer to be crafty," the German generals departed from their tradition with tragic results for their profession and their country. In the past the German officer corps was accustomed to regard strict objectivity, unambiguousness and acceptance of responsibility as the mark of the corps of officers. The degeneration of the Army's participation in the awakening of the new Germany, from nationalism into a nihilist revolution, was due to the Army leader's lack of elementary straight-forwardness.26

Franz Halder, in his postwar analysis of Hitler as Warlord, joined the host of German generals who blamed the Fuehrer for Germany's defeat on the basis of his destruction of the German apparatus for high command.

Piece by piece the unity of the Army's High Command was whittled away and was finally destroyed. . . . This "divide and conquer" policy of the Dictator, forever obsessed with the maintenance of his own power, destroyed a well organized system of military command which no true leader would ever have given up.

26 Rauschning, op. cit., p. 123.
In place of this organization, which for all its faults, had been capable of a high standard of military command, there was left at the end of the process a chaos of improvisation which has already become next to impossible for a historian to unravel.27

By examining the civil-military relationships that existed prior to and during the German campaigns in the west in 1940, Halder and the dozen or so other senior Army leaders who controlled the Army should have been able to predict the course events would take under Hitler's leadership. Though Halder cannot be considered the sole author of the general postwar apologia for German military leadership, he was a generous contributor to it. As a professional military snob, Halder habitually deprecated Hitler's prowess as a tactician and strategist. Although he resisted Hitler's warmongering; he, nevertheless, along with many other generals, collaborated in the martial events that took the Wehrmacht to Warsaw and positioned the Waffen SS on the channel coast. His resistance was neither strong enough nor sufficiently long-lived to be effective. That Halder was eventually relieved as Chief of Staff and imprisoned by the Nazis is but one example of the fate that befell those who resisted too little or too late. They could neither gloriously win nor nobly fail.

The principal theme of the German generals as written in their memoirs and expressed in their lengthy testimonies at the Nuremberg trials was the discrediting of Hitler's military leadership. Fortunately for posterity but unfortunately for the truth of their thesis, the record does not support them. OPERATION PLAN YELLOW, the

"Stop Order," and SEA LION, were joint civil-military ventures for which responsibility as to success or failure must be shared mutually by the Fuehrer and his military advisers. In their postwar efforts to discredit Hitler's leadership, the German generals neglect to mention his prewar diplomatic successes. They quickly pass over the successful occupation of the Rhineland, the abrogation of the "war guilt" clause of the Versailles Treaty, the bloodless Anschluss with Austria, the Munich Pact, and the Nazi-Soviet agreement. Instead, the generals point to Hitler's good fortune in finding the two weaklings—Chamberlain and Daladier—at Munich, to the airplane accident that delayed the start of the ineffectual OPERATION PLAN YELLOW until Manstein could present his SICHELSCHNITT PLAN to Hitler at precisely the right moment. They dwell upon the fortunate circumstances that placed leaders like Guderian and Rommel at the head of the panzer columns which raced across France in May 1940. Conversely, in justifying their thesis, they stress their dismay at Hitler's "Stop Order" and the Fuehrer's vacillation in executing OPERATION SEA LION. The generals fail to mention that it was Hitler's force of will that carried the discussions at Munich; that it was the Fuehrer alone who discerned the weakness of the opposition. They neglect to point out that Hitler saw immediately the genius of the Manstein variant, cancelled GELB, and directed the execution of SICHELSCHNITT over the objections of von Brauchitsch and Halder. They fail to acknowledge that Hitler personally selected Guderian and Rommel as panzer leaders, that he was advised to issue the "Stop Order" by von Rundstedt and von Kleist, and that it was inter-service bickering and procrastination that
delayed **SEA LION** until late fall of 1940 when the likelihood of its success was problematical at best. If, as the generals insist, Hitler must bear sole responsibility for the military errors of the Third Reich, the **Fuehrer** must also be accorded the glory that attended its successes.

The significance of **SICHELSCHNITT**, the "Stop Order," and **SEA LION**, lies not in the fact that Hitler and his generals were frequently at odds in these cases, nor in the fact that the **Fuehrer** received conflicting advice from military leaders who frequently disagreed among themselves. Rather it lies in the pernicious estrangement that arose between civil and military leaders of the Third Reich and the extent to which this estrangement grew until Hitler, as self-appointed warlord, personally dictated all civil-military relationships. From that point on, the course of the war in Europe was but a logical and predictable progression of the basic conflict between German military and political leaders over objectives to be attained.

The **Fuehrer's** frequently expressed sentiment that he would have gotten nowhere had he listened to his generals, and the generals' equally brash assertions that the German cause was doomed because Hitler would not listen to their advice were the key notes of the chorus that introduced the final act of the German catastrophe. For the truth was that neither could do without the other; yet cooperation between "The Greatest Field Commander of all Time," and "The Greatest General Staff the World had ever Known" was impossible. This final fatal dichotomy of civil-military relations, which became so apparent
during the German campaign in the west, increased and fanned the flames of the funeral pyre that finally engulfed Field Marshal and Fuehrer alike.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Public Documents


Books


**Articles and Periodicals**


Unpublished Material


