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Schackendorf

MEMORANDUM

24 October 1945.

SUBJECT: Relationship of the German General Staff
with Hitler.

TO : General Donovan

1. Note:

There is no doubt that today the whole world is of the opinion that the German General Staff was a docile tool in Hitler's hands and therefore also responsible for the conspiracy to establish a criminal dictatorship over the world, as planned by Hitler. To prove this, reference is being made mainly to the military history of Prussia, particularly to Frederic the Great, the founder of the Prussian Army. It is certain that the succession: Frederic the Great, Bismarck, Hindenburg and Hitler constitutes an essential pillar in supporting this opinion. But on the other hand one should be on guard against the conceptions, raised, to become a principle, just by the Nazis, to judge the part exclusively from the point of view of the present. Every epoch in history can be judged correctly only by analyzing the conditions of its own time. Frederic the Great's entire policy had become possible only through his alliance with England and his understanding with Pitt. Also it was Frederic the Great who as the first monarch in Europe recognized the U.S.A. constitutionally. And after all, it was one of his generals, Friedrich von Steuben, who superorised the creation of the American Army in the U.S.A. for which the Americans erected a monument in his honor in Potsdam. In other words, it is wise, if one is judging Hitler, to leave the past alone and to restrict oneself to the history of National Socialism.

2. The position of the German General Staff before Hitler's ascension to power.

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The creation of the German Army and the German General Staff after the first world war is the work of one man, namely of General von Seeckt. His leading idea was the preservation of the German Military potential within the framework of the treaty of Versailles. Apart from that, he tried to strengthen the German military potential also outside of this framework. For this purpose he concluded treaties with Russia, first with Lenin and later with Stalin. Because of these treaties it was possible to train German soldiers in Russia as aviators and for armored warfare. Von Seeckt was striving to preserve and strengthen the standing of the German people. But his ~~strive~~ did not extend beyond the German people. To what an extent he opposed the installations of a criminal dictatorship may be seen by the fact that he suppressed Hitler's first attempt on revolt from 9 November 1933 with the help of the Army and that he initiated disciplinary action against all soldiers in Bavaria who had participated in Hitler's attempt for revolt. Seeckt's successor, General

Heye, remained within the framework set up by Seeckt. When at the end of 1932 Hitler got ready to seize power, two men who were definite adversaries of Hitler, stood at the top of the German Army - General von Hammerstein as Chief of Staff and General von Schleicher as Minister for Defense and Chancellor of the Reich. Both had successfully thwarted Hitler's first attempt to gain a foothold within the German Army by initiating procedures which ended with the exclusion from the Army of two young officers who had become Hitler's disciples. This trial took place before the Supreme Court of the Reich, ("Reichgericht") During the proceedings the contrast between Hitler and the General Staff became clear when Hitler answered the prosecutor's question as to what his intentions were contrary to the General Staff's: "I want to carry the German colors across the Rhine into France."

77

3. The relationship of the General Staff to Hitler during the time from 1933 to the outbreak of the second world war.

When Hitler on 30 January 1933 became Chancellor of the Reich and therefore seized the power in Germany, he necessarily had to overthrow his predecessor in the office as Chancellor, General von Schleicher, that is the political representative of the German General Staff. For this reason, a certain tension was apparent from the beginning between Hitler and the General Staff. At that time, General von Hammerstein was nursing the idea to overthrow Hitler by force. This plan was discarded only because General von Hammerstein was unable to secure the Reichs-President's support and did not believe that he could succeed without this support. On these plans General von Hammerstein has written a memorandum which Colonel von Harbou brought to England and deposited with the Bank of England in London. It ought to be still there today. Hitler tried to overcome the tension between himself and the General Staff by propaganda. Therefore he dismissed General von Hammerstein. His successor was General Freiherr von Fritsch. He also was Hitler's adversary when in the year 1934 the SA leader Röhm was ready to eliminate the German General Staff and to take over the Command of the Army himself, it was the General Staff under Fritsch who on 30 June 1934 took the power of the SA and at that time was still able to keep the Army free from the influence of the Party. Hitler on his part used the 30 June 1934 to eliminate with the help of the SS the two generals who to him seemed to be particularly dangerous. This way General von Schbicher and General von Bredow were murdered by the SS at the time. Although Hitler had branded both generals as traitors, the Schlieffen - Society, that is the club of all generals and General Staff officers, made it known through Generalfieldmarshall von Mackensen that General von Schleicher and General von Bredow had been murdered in full possession of their honor. After that Hitler managed to gain a certain influence over the Army. General von Blomberg, who looked upon himself as an absolutely faithful follower of Hitler's was promoted to be Minister of Defense. At that time already von Reichenau who later was to be Generalfieldmarshall, had the same attitude. In spite of that General von Fritsch succeeded in securing a special position for the Army. In this Fritsch received extraordinary support from General Beck who was at that time Chief of the General Staff of the Army. Both ~~approved~~ *insisted* vividly Hitler's idea to increase the German Army -- beyond any limits. This is the reason that Hitler declared in the fall of 1941 in any presence that at the time he had thought the General Staff was a butcher's dog who

threatened to fall upon everybody; but that in reality the German General Staff was a pious lamb; this General Staff had time and again prevented him from carrying out his intentions on schedule; he had had to accomplish his plans always against the opposition of the German General Staff. In order to be able to eliminate his enemy, General Freiherr von Fritsch, Hitler invented a false accusation against Fritsch, namely that he was a homosexual. Hitler's Chief-adjutant Hossbach who later became General of the Infantry, learned of this lie. He told Hitler that he was going to report on the affair to General Beck. Hitler prohibited that. But Hossbach refused to obey Hitler's order and reported it. The result was that Fritsch was dismissed all the same but the false accusation was disproved. General Freiherr von Fritsch has left notes on that period which most likely still exist.

General von Hammerstein's son, Lt. Ludoig von Hammerstein has begun a search for these notes. Together with Fritsch, Generalfield-marshal von Blomberg was dismissed. The reason for his dismissal was not political but the fact that he had married a woman who had been a whore. Keitel who later became Generalfieldmarshall took von Blomberg's place. Keitel trailed Blomberg's footsteps, that is he belonged to those members of the General Staff, who sold themselves body and soul to Hitler. Fritsch's position was taken over by von Brauchitsch, later to become Generalfieldmarshall. He did keep a certain distance from Hitler but he was not a clear-cut personality like Fritsch. Consequently the opposition of the General Staff to Hitler was concentrated in General Beck, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army. Fritsch had been let down in February 1938; Beck resigned his post in summer 1938. The reason for Beck's resignation was that Hitler had let drop the mask before the Chief of the General Staff. Hitler had asked of Beck the immediate preparation for war against Czechoslovakia. Beck was of the opinion that this war which was asked of him was a crime, that he as Chief of the General Staff could not carry the responsibility for such a step, and therefore he retired from the Army. This way the General Staff had lost its foremost intellect. Halder who later was a General, became Beck's successor. If Fritsch and Beck had been of first-rate ability, Brauchitsch and Halder constituted second-rate forces, so to speak. They did not equal their predecessors in office, neither as personalities nor as far as abilities go. In the meantime, the political resistance movement in Germany had grown quite a bit. The leading personality among the civilians was without any doubt Dr. Goerdeler, Oberbuergermeister of Leipzig. He pushed Brauchitsch and Halder. At first they could not very well refuse, particularly since from the General Staff men like von Witzleben who later became Generalfieldmarshall, General Hoepfner and the General of the Armored Forces von Funck were actually hurting to clamp down on Hitler and destroy him. All preparations were made when shortly before the deadline Brauchitsch and Halder refused to go along: they reasoned that the right moment had not yet come. Therefore this first plan was not carried out. But three groups had now developed within the General Staff: a. the group of those who followed Hitler through thick and thin, b. the group of those who, faithful to the tradition of the General Staff, were resolved to act against Hitler, and c. the group of those whose conception of Hitler was correct but who were not decided enough to concentrate all their efforts in one action against Hitler. So the beginning of the war approached. On 20 August 1939, Hitler informed his generals of his decision to make war against Poland. He did not expect England and France to go to war. His speech

was taken down in shorthand by Admiral Canaris, an outspoken enemy of Hitler's. In orders by General Beck, Canaris began with the transcription of this speech a collection of documents which, if found, would conclusively prove that important groups within the German General Staff had recognized the truth about Hitler and his policy and were resolved to do everything in their power to overthrow Hitler and tried every chance to realize their intentions. This collection of documents would also prove that another group within the General Staff made common cause with Hitler while a third group though they had the right conception got stuck in continued deliberations.

4. The relationship of the German General Staff with Hitler during the second world war.

The war against Poland was finished according to schedule within three weeks. After that, the reign of terror through the SS began in Poland. The military commander in chief in Poland, General Blaskowitz, fought a fine but unsuccessful battle against the reign of terror. When Hitler demanded of the General Staff to make war on France, Belgium and Holland, the General Staff refused. The General Staff believed to be conscious of the fact that this war could not be won and that it would bring undescribable harm to Europe. Only after a bitter fight did Hitler succeed in imposing his will. Against all expectations, France's will to defend herself failed her. Within a few weeks she had broken down. From this moment on Hitler's position before the General Staff became dominant because the General Staff had been wrong. Before and during the French campaign there were again forces in the General Staff who had planned to turn against Hitler the moment the German offensive in France would prove to be unsuccessful. The principal exponent of this idea was General von Tresckow. When Hitler prepared the offensive against England, it was again that officers of the General Staff dissuaded him from this plan, partly because they were afraid of a failure, partly because they regarded a defeat of England as a final consolidation of Hitler's regime. At the end of 1940 Hitler decided to attack Russia. All objections against the plan on the part of Brauchitsch and Halder led nowhere. After initial successes the turning-point came in the winter campaigns of 1941/1942. With the battle of Moscow Brauchitsch lost his position. Hitler as Supreme Commander of the Army took over this constituted an interference with the rights of the General Staff which degraded the members of the General Staff to mere handy men. True, Halder had remained as Chief of the General Staff but during the years of struggle against Hitler he had become so tired that his influence did not amount to anything anymore. He was dismissed in summer 1942. General Zeitzler became his successor. At the time when he took over his job, he was Hitler's follower, one hundred percent. But he changed his attitude as time went on, and the Saulus became a Paulus. From now on Zeitzler's daily work became one wild struggle against Hitler and Keitel. In this struggle the General Staff fought for a quick peace, for the surrender of a large portion of the occupied territories for a humane treatment of subdued peoples and for a truce within the Reich. The smallest minority within the General Staff under Generalfieldmarshall Keitel's leadership remained on Hitler's side without argument. The majority within the General Staff under Zeitzler fought for the restriction of Hitler's powers while the best group within the General Staff under the clandestine leadership of General Beck, supported by active soldiers such as Generalfieldmarshall

von Kluge, Generalfeldmarschal von Witzleben, General Olbricht, General Tellgiebal, General von Tresckow and others, fought for an overthrow of Hitler by force. But the power of the General Staff was on the decline. Its homogeneity was a thing of the past. Exceptional men like Admiral Canaris and General Thomas were dropped. To top it all off, Hitler introduced the National Socialist Leadership Officers ("Nationalsozialistische Führungsoffiziere") whose function it was to keep a check on it that in the General Staff and in the Army only Hitler's opinions, nobody else's, were tolerated. At this last moment General Beck ordered to shun any risk and attack. The result was the 20 July 1944.

5. From my personal knowledge I classify the Generals of the German Army as follows:

To the group of faithful followers of Hitler belong:

Generalfeldmarschall Keitel

Generalfeldmarschall von Reichenau (deceased)

General Jodl

Generalfeldmarschall Busch

Generalfeldmarschall Schoerner

Generalfeldmarschall Dietl

General Guderian

Lt. General Schmidt

General Scherff

General Harpe

General Reinecke

General von Müller

General Rendulic

To the group of those who had the right conception but lacked the necessary force to make decisions, belong:

Generalfeldmarschall von Mannstein

Generalfeldmarschall von Rudstedt

Generalfeldmarschall von Leeb

Generalfeldmarschall List

Generalfeldmarshall von Kleist

General Zeitzler

General Haeusinger

General Halder

General Fromm

General Weiss

General Reinhardt

General Glydenfeldt

General Warlimont

Of the last group of the outspoken enemies of Hitler, the majority are dead since 20 July, for example:

General Beck

Generalfeldmarshall von Witzleben

Generalfeldmarshall von Kluge

Generalfeldmarshall Rommel

General Oster

Admiral Canaris

General von Tresckow

General Olbricht

General von Hase

General von Stuelpnagle

General Wagner

General Stieff

General Feldgiebl

General Lindemann

Colonel Graf Stauffenberg

Colonel Schultze-Guettger

Colonel von Merz

Colonel Freiherr Roenne

*not the one in Russia
(AB death)*

Of those from this last group who are still alive, I mention:

General Thomas ?

General Speidel ?

General of the Armd Force von Funck ?

General of the Infantry Hossbach S W

General of the Armd Force Geyer von Schweppenburg ?

General of the Infantry von Falkenhausen

General Freiherr von Gersdorff

Colonel Berndt von Kliest

6. Concluding note:

In my opinion the members of the first group are doubtless war criminals. In my estimation they should be sentenced according to the general rules of the indictment. I don't think that this goes for the members in the second group. According to the general rules as set forth in the indictment they have also caused war crimes to be committed but they are not guilty. Because their guilt does not result from pre-meditation but at the most from neglect. The fact of neglect can not justify a pronouncement of guilt. Because those Non-German statesmen who tolerated Hitler to become strong and powerful may also be reproached for neglect. Of course the members of this group will have to accept an investigation as to whether or not they are guilty of individual war crimes. For example this may be so in the case of Brauchitsch and Halder in order to determine their responsibility for the order to shoot Russian PWs, Commissars and Russian soldiers who were members of the Communist Party.

The group of the determined enemies of Hitler within the General Staff does not come into the category of war criminals, I'd say. Permit me to propose to you that you give them an opportunity to put down their opinion on the destruction of the General Staff and the useless fight of the General Staff against Hitler. A particularly good judgement have:

Colonel Berndt von Kleist
General Freiherr von Gersdorff
General Speidel
General von Falkenhausen }

(signed) E. V. Schlabbrendorff