

GOERING MATERIAL

RHINELAND

Q. What were the reasons that determined Hitler to go into the Rhineland?

A. There were three:

- (1) Not that Germany was better armed, Hitler could not permit the continuance of a large section of the frontier of Germany to remain unprotected.
- (2) If war were to insue as a result of his determination to take Austria, it was necessary to have this protection for the Ruhr, even though Germany were well armed. For the same reasons later it was necessary to take Holland and Belgium.
- (3) To erect actual fortifications in the West at the outermost frontiers of Germany. Hitler wanted this because he never believed in the old Schirflin plan for two reasons:
 - (a) It put too much weight on the right wing.
 - (b) It did strike at the channel ports.

He was of the opinion that one column should drive for the channel ports and the ~~two~~ columns drive west of Paris.

The basic idea was this: To have a strong and principle line of defense in the West that could be held by weak forces. The frontier in the West was short and easy to defend.

An Eastern line was out of the question. It would be too long. It would immobilize too many men for defense.

Although Hitler never expressed it in words I inferred from his plans and his actions and I agreed that he did not wish to hold a definite line in the East because it might act as a limitation upon his desire to seize as much land as possible in the East.

Besides, Poland and the Baltic States at that time formed a kind of barrier or fortification which meant that attack on our frontiers could not be too sudden.

Until the end of 1938 an immediate military conflict was not envisaged by Hitler. The necessity really grew out of the disagreement between Czechoslovakia and Poland. Hitler then told me he did not believe it possible to cooperate with Poland and it would be necessary to solve the question by means more harsh.

To summarize - the three fundamental reasons to take the Rhineland were:

- A. The prestige that would come to Hitler and to the party inside Germany.
- B. The protection of the Ruhr and
- C. The security of the entire Reich by fortifications. Once this was done with one frontier secured we could defend or attack in the East as dictated by circumstances.

Q. In considering his action in taking the Rhineland, did he discuss it with his cabinet and his army chiefs?

No. Hitler seldom discussed these matters. He usually announced them after he came to a decision and his will was fixed. This was especially true in foreign affairs. It was almost impossible to prevent his carrying out these things once his mind was made up. He would say all the things you are bringing up now which I have

thought over and rejected many hours ago.

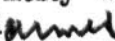
But he did usually discuss such matters with you? 
At that time he usually talked with me first, ~~as~~ I was present when he brought them up for the first time. The one exception was when he took over Czechoslovakia after Munich had settled the Sudeten question. I was away in San Remo. He sent me word by courier and I replied which reflected the atmosphere in which I then was. There were many English people there. I told him this would mean the removal of Chamberlain and the calling up of Churchill. I discussed the matter with him when I got back and made clear to him that while the British might feel all right after Munich, they would not feel that way if he seized Czechoslovakia. They would want Germany to quiet down and not start new surprises.

Q. Now, let us come back to the Rhineland question. Did he discuss that matter with anyone in addition to yourself?

A. Yes - because he felt both politicians and soldiers should be consulted with von Neurath, who at that time in 1936 was foreign minister with Fritsch, who was supreme commander and Beck who was General Staff Chief of the Army - with Blomberg and perhaps Raeder, although I am not sure of this.

A basic split came between us. Myself, von Neurath, and Blomberg were for it, but had some doubts, but Beck and Fritsch were against it.

Q. What reason did they give for ~~not~~ approving the plan?

A- They said that Germany was too weak to throw down the gauntlet before she was ~~ruined~~ 

Q- Did they urge that it was not the right thing to do?

A- Oh no- they thought it too provocative an act and would bring on a war before we were ready. They considered Germany far too weak to challenge France which they thought was strong.

Beck especially held this view. To the ordinary army officer the chief of Staff was a ~~very~~ man of great brains. Beck was the old fashioned General Staff Officer, industrious, exact, and a little pretentious, and for this reason full of anxiety.

Beck and Gamelin were great friends and would meet and compliment each other and if it had depended upon them the whole thing would have been settled in a war game. Beck had an incredible respect for the French Army. Beck talked at the meeting as if he were very cool and objective, and speaking only from the ice cold regions of the intellect. Perhaps one reason we did not agree was because he such an archaic view of an air force.

Hitler had a much clearer eye in the respect. He recognized the weakness of French Armament, the attitude of the Popular Front, and the preoccupation of England with sanctions and Italy.

Looking over the situation Hitler said "these people are not ready, will not start a war", and so he marched into the Rhineland.

Q- At that time, what was the state and condition of your army?

A-

Q- You spoke very disparagingly of Beck. Let me ask you- is this ~~fact~~  fact?

A- Beck was greatly respected by the army.  He resisted Hitler from the very beginning, did he not? He sought to depose him, ~~is that true?~~
And Beck was executed for his participation in the movement against Hitler?

Yes

Q- After the decision was made and you entered the Rhineland, what happened?

A- Hitler then was interested in the building of the West Wall. It was one of the best things we ever did.

Q- Were your relations with Italy taken into account at this time?
A- Yes, because we were not on good terms. The difficulty between us had been increased because of the assassination of Dolfuss. Mussolini had moved seven divisions to the Brenner Pass.

Then later Hitler considered the possibility of joining with other nations in ~~improving~~ sanctions against Italy. *low*

Finally he told me this- "If we take a position against Italy we take a position against Fascism. Although there are differences between us these two regimes have a fundamental base and Mussolini is a remarkable man. Out of these considerations Hitler decided to work with Italy rather than against her.

He then went to Venice and met Mussolini. There was a reconciliation and from that time on they worked together. This was on the day of .

Q- On what date was the Rhineland occupied?

A- March 7, 1936

Q- On that same day did not Hitler state "We have no territorial demands to make in Europe" (wir haben keine territoraten fundimingen zer stellen) Doc. 2288-PS

A-

Q- What was his purpose in making that statement- it was not true, was it?

A-

Q- Orders for Naval cooperation in the Rhineland had been issued by Blomberg, had they not?

A-

Q- They had been signed by Keitel and in fulfillment of these orders- detailed instructions had been issued by Raeder. Is that true? (2261-PS)

Q- On the 14 of October 1933 Germany had withdrawn from the International Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations?

A-

Q- On the 16 of March, 1935, you had enacted a law for military service?

A-

Q- Will you tell us who originated the idea of building an air force and how was it planned and put into effect?

A-

Risk Risk

I was not in favor of the Russian campaign. Not for any ^{moral} reason but because I thought we should proceed more slowly. I had thought the same in regard to the taking of Czech. and of Poland. Instead of forcing I believed another year would have meant we would have it without fighting.

I always feared that France and England would come against us if we pressed too hard and too quickly, but if we were less impatient we would accomplish our purpose with less risk. I did not want a war with the West on that account. I felt a little time and our efforts with England and France would come to something. I am sure that if Hitler had been convinced that the British and French would fight he would not have started the war. But when he saw how easily he had marched to the Rhineland, to Austria and to Czechoslovakia, he risked Poland. That I thought unwise and in addition I felt my personal prestige was involved because I had been the special envoy of Hitler to Poland for three years.

I tried many ways to divert him from the Russian Attack. I even suggested that we should support Russia in obtaining the Dardanelles and that would take both England and the Soviet Union over our backs. But I could not change his mind nor persuade him to put it off. I was depressed when Hitler decided in any case because I saw the dangers to us. He thought and most of us thought that the Russian surge of ~~offenses~~ had weakened her. We were wrong. It had strengthened her army. It was too great a risk and it seemed to me much too high. But I did not go out and oppose him. When he insisted, I said the Fuehrer is right - let's do our best. And I went into it with all my will and my energy.

(TO BE FILTERED INTO HIS OTHER STATEMENTS ON AGGRESSION)

Here is what I mean:

I own a piece of land. My neighbor has a piece that I think is necessary to me,

How can I get it? I have no weapons. I take a piece of iron, and I make a sword. I feel more secure. So now I look at my neighbor with the sword in my hand. And the piece of land comes to me. I was not compelled to use the sword.

That was your attitude. Was it the program of the party? Was it the attitude of the defendants?