

C O P Y

35.04

Report of Interrogation: # 5779

SECRET

20 September 1945

I/O: Capt. HALL

P/W : KESSLER, Ulrich
Rank : General der Flieger (Lt Gen)
Unit : Kampfgeschwader I Hindenburg
Capt'd : 15 May 1945, surrendered to Americans at sea.

Veracity: Believed reliable.

Report: Dealings with Goering

Attention: War Crimes Commission

Officers who knew Goering from World War I, such as the later Field Marshal von Richthofen and Lt. Gen Bieneck, considered him a catastrophic phenomenon. Gen. Hoffmann von Waldau, chief of the Operations Section of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe until the summer of 1942, used to ask why Goering had not become an actor; he repeatedly had surprised Goering studying Napoleonic gestures before the mirror in the briefing compartment of his special train. General von Waldau, a very fine officer, was so desperate about Goering and Hitler that he often said that the post of Chief of the General Staff should best be filled by an attendant at a lunatic asylum.

Among the German people and perhaps even abroad Goering enjoyed considerable popularity for quite a period. He was thought to be a moderating influence on the Fuehrer and opposed to the Jew baiters and fanatics within the Nazi Party. People were amused about his eccentricities and loved him for his foibles. In contrast to the deadly earnestness of Nazism, he was considered a "jolly good fellow" who lives and lets live. He had a sense of humor which other Party big shots lacked completely. Rumor had it that Goering paid three Marks for every new joke he heard about himself, which, however, P/W is inclined to doubt. He recalls the case of two young Naval lieutenants aboard the Battle Cruiser Deutschland in the naval maneuvers in the fall of 1936. Goering was a very bad sailor, one of the reasons why he hated the Navy, and had been feeding the fish abundantly. In the course of the farewell festivities, with everybody in high spirits, the two lieutenants addressed Goering and told him that they wished to add a new title to the long list of titles and offices which he already held. Already he was Reich Master of the Hunt, and now, in consideration of his generous feeding of the fish, they were appointing him to be the Reich Fish Feeding Master with authorization to wear a net shirt, which they then presented to him. Goering became highly incensed, left the mess room, and asked the Admiral of the Fleet to put the two men under arrest. This was rejected on the ground that it would be contrary to the traditions of the Navy. Thereupon Goering had Admiral Raeder order three day's restriction for the men.

As an ace of World War I and holder of the Pour le Merite Goering was supposed to be brave and daring, but the contrary was the case. When, in the twenties, former officers of the Richthofen Squadron organized the Richthofen Society there were many who voted against admitting Goering to membership, because of his proven cowardice; with the use of narcotics later on Goering became even more of a coward. He was afraid of Hitler to a degree that is difficult to understand. P/W thinks Goering is fairly intelligent and rather sly, that he really hated the Jew baiters and Hitler's gambling with war; however, his fear of Hitler kept him from ever daring to oppose him. P/W believes that although Goering boasted

SECRET

SECRET

that he was Hitler's most loyal paladin, he really wished he were dead.

P/W has speculated whether Goering was as unsuspecting of the plot of 20 July 44 as he pretended to be, because P/W knows for certain that Goerdeler, the former mayor of Leipzig who had long since been organizing the plot against Hitler, had, as late as February 1943, intended to make use of Goering as the puppet to succeed Hitler.

Goering was lazy and superficial, although he pretended to be a hard worker. His interests were hoarding jewels and works of art, even more so than hunting. His passion for wearing jewelry was effeminate to such a degree that he would often attend meetings---late as always---dressed in an Oriental dressing gown fastened with a big brooch.

One of his cousins once characterized Goering as a cross between a fake Prussian officer and a Persian shah. Until then P/W had always thought of him as a combination of Nero and Falstaff types.

P/W recalls a number of personal experiences with Goering which may be of interest.

P/W witnessed the prelude to the public announcement of German remilitarization in the air. He had been travelling with British Vice Air Marshal Sir John Salmond, who had been visiting Germany as a representative of Imperial Airways to study the German Lufthansa Air Line and particularly training in blind landing (the Lufthansa had been training many English pilots in blind flying). It was early in the spring of 1935. One day Sir John and the British Air Attache, then Col. Don, paid an official visit to Goering, with P/W acting as interpreter. Sir John and Goering discussed the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, with Goering complaining especially about the ban on military aviation. Sir John pointed out that in this respect Germany had been granted equality in theory in December 1932, to which Goering replied with some heat that Germany had not needed that other nations grant her moral equality, that what she had been waiting for for fifteen years was real equality. "Now, he added, he had been building up a little Air Force of his own. P/W hesitated to translate this latter statement, but Goering insisted. "A little one?" was Sir John's reply, to which Goering said, "Well, I would call it little." Goering thereupon promptly notified Hitler that he had let the cat out of the bag, and public announcement followed the same day.

A few days later Goering ordered P/W to leave Warnemuende, where he was commanding officer of a flying school, and proceed to Berlin to act as interpreter in connection with an inquiry from the British Air Attache. Col. Don told Goering that London was upset and wanted to know the size of the Air Force. Goering indicated that Germany already had about 1500 first-line bombers, the crews of which were distributed in an extensive school system, where they acted as instructors; this was a gross exaggeration, actually. When Col. Don said that the size of Germany's Air Force would compel England to increase her own, Goering replied that he, like Hitler, would welcome such a step, as he was convinced that the British and the Germans would one day join in fighting Bolshevism on the banks of the Vistula.

P/W again saw Goering in the tense days between Godesberg and Munich, after his return from London, in September 1938. P/W met Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador, in the lobby as the latter was leaving from an interview, in which

SECRET

ne had been remonstrating with Goering.

P/W was reporting, with General Bodenschatz present, when Goering interrupted:

G. I hear you got cold feet in London. They tell me that you were so sure there would be a way that you burned all the confidential files of the Air Attache.

P/W Yes, I burned them; I had to, considering the way the political situation looked to us.

(P/W had been staying with the Naval Attache, Kapitane zur See Siemens. On the day when Konrad Henlein delivered the ultimatum of the Sudeten Germans, the secretary to Lt. Col. von Bechtolsheim, the Army Attache, called up Siemens late in the evening. That afternoon we had given the key to Bechtolsheim's safe to be locked up in Siemen's office, as the military attache had already left the Embassy; now she wanted it back, as Bechtolsheim was to burn the remaining secret papers. This came as a complete surprise to Siemens, who did not know that Bechtolsheim had been burning his papers for three days already; he was finishing these job now as he was sure that war would come. Siemens decided to do the same with his papers, and P/W went along to burn the papers of the Air Attache, Wenninger, who was on leave on the continent.)

G. Never mind; you were wrong. Henderson left me just a few minutes ago. He tried to work my tear glands and play the sentimental tune. He tried to persuade me to use my friendship with the Fuehrer to make him give in. He threatened war with England. I told him that England would be smashed in that event. Now Henderson is off to me "friend" Brauchitsch to threaten him; he knows threats don't go with me. What ever made you think that England would go to war with us?

P/W. I have reported to the Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, General Stumpff, and to the Commander in Chief of the Navy, Admiral Raeder, as Siemens, the Naval Attache, had asked me to do. I reported on the interview that Siemens had with the First Sea Lord (or First Lord of the Admiralty); the latter had summoned Siemens the day before I left for Germany. He had pointed out that the situation was extremely critical and emphasized that England wanted fair play. The Sudetenland would be incorporated with Germany, but the transfer had to be accomplished peacefully, without any military action on the part of Germany. The Sea Lord said that what the English wanted to avoid and what they would consider a casus belli was that the wrong done to 3½ million Germans would end in a wrong inflicted on seven million Czechs. The British had the impression that over in Germany the leaders did not realize this and wanted to annex all of Czechoslovakia. The Sea Lord wanted to make it quite plain that in that event there would be war, and he wanted Siemens to make this clear to the people in Berlin.

G. We don't want to incorporate all of Czechoslovakia. (Stumpff, however, had taken a different attitude. He had asked, "What right has England to mix in our handling of the Czech question? We don't interfere with her Indian policy either." P/W had objected that he could see no earthly reason for the incorporation of Czechoslovakia; it would clash with the doctrine hitherto preached by the Nazis, and there was no military or economic need for it. On the contrary, if the Czechs were taken over they would always be a festering sore; left alone, surrounded by German territory, as they would be after the annexation of the Sudetenland, they would necessarily have to accommodate their economic and military policy to German

SECRET

SECRET

requirements. Stumpff had then emphasized that Hitler considered the incorporation of Czech territory into Germany to be a military and economic necessity.) But why do you think England would go to war for the Czechs? England has nothing to win by war.

P/W. There is not a man in England who believes that they have anything to gain by war. Perhaps that idea existed before 1914. Today they know that they would not be richer by impoverishing us. But they do have their prestige to lose, and it is already under a cloud because of the Abyssinian affair. The British Commonwealth of Nations is built on Britain's prestige as a world power; England can not afford to be pushed around by Hitler. The man in the street is not interested in Czechoslovakia, nor does he hate Germany. But he is interested in fair play and in protecting Britain's prestige. I have watched the Hyde Park orators talking about the imminent war; I have experienced the strain in which all London lived, especially after the Henlein ultimatum; that was one reason why it was impossible for me to rent a house for October 1; then I also experienced the relief when Hitler did not invade Czechoslovakia the day after the Henlein ultimatum, and I saw people on the streets and in the restaurants kissing each other when Chamberlain announced that he would fly to Germany to see Hitler.

G. If England goes to war, what can she do to us? She would blockade us from the West and we would blockade England from the East. It would end in a phony war.

P/W. When World War I started I saw the inscriptions on the troop trains that "Many enemies, many honors", and "Declarations of war to be delivered here", but then we learned that "many hounds are here's death". Even if France is unwilling, England will force her to go to war, and England is backed by the USA, and the USA means the world. I learned in London that two American cruisers which were visiting for only a few days had been ordered to stay there until the Czech question had been settled. Given the occasion the Anglo-Saxon world would start a crusade against Germany.

G. (rising from his desk and pacing up and down the room) Crusade is a good word. But then you forget that we are not alone; we have strong allies; Poland and Italy would be with us.

P/W. The German Embassy in London believes that the Poles would join the Western Powers if they went to war and would participate in annexing Czech territory if they did not. As to Italy, the German Embassy has reliable information that Count Ciano is trying strenuously to team up with the Allies, rather than go to war on our side.

G. All the Embassies are lunatic asylums; they ought to be closed. It is unthinkable that Italy should join the Allies. The personal friendship of Hitler and Mussolini alone is the best guarantee that Italy will back us up; besides, Italy is in the Mediterranean and the Near East.

P/W. I don't think the Italians amount to much. Within the last century they have not won a single battle. Besides, as Bismarck said, they are the prisoners of the Mediterranean. Italy would be strangled if Gibraltar and Suez were closed.

G. It all depends on who is closing Gibraltar and Suez. To be sure, we would not

SECRET

repeat the blunder of the earlier war in trying to close the Suez Canal with one poor division. There would be at least two armies starting from Tripoli.

P/W. Supply would be difficult with the large desert. Even supplying Tripoli would be difficult with the combined Anglo-French Mediterranean fleets.

G. Italian naval forces are stronger than the British and nearly outbalance the British and French fleets put together. As for the desert, you forget that there is a large highway to the border of Egypt. However, I realize that you are an Anglophile. There must be something in the English atmosphere that makes people Anglophiles.

P/W. I deny being an Anglophile. As a result of reading English history and some understanding of the English mentality, I have come to see that England, and not France, stands in the way of Germany's becoming a great power. Once as a lieutenant I saw the English reparations commission in operation, and I had the wish to live long enough to be a member of a German reparations commission in London. However, I am confident that the world is big enough for the two of us. I believe that England might be willing to give us some good colonies. That would be the best way and the safest guarantee for a friendly coordination, of the respective policies. However, you have to make the English realize it. When I was in the Navy I was opposed to Raeder and his school; they were worried only about the French and continually planned against a bogus invasion of the Baltic by the French fleet. In the Luftwaffe I had been in friendly disagreement with Col. Wewer, who believed that no agreement would ever be reached with the French and that the English were our real friends. I judged differently, believing that basically the English were doing their best to frustrate any sincere and wholehearted understanding between France and Germany, whereas on the surface they played the role of honest broker between the two countries; I believed that in order to reach an agreement with the English we would have to win over the French first. That is why, when I was in charge of the Air Research Group in the Ministry (the predecessor of Ic) I had protested, in vain, against the ban on any study involving England. Later I urged Jeschonnek that we must train our crews and design our armament for the eventuality of a war on ships.

G. That is why I have picked you to become Air Attache in England; that's why I have relieved Wenninger, who has become an Anglomaniac; he will get a recruiting assignment. Now, in view of the political situation, I have been considering you for the job of chief of the General Staff of that very Air Force which will have to fight England. I have been told that you have some knowledge of the English, but it would not be enough simply to have good ideas. My principal demand is that this Chief of the General Staff have the firm conviction that we will smash England now if she declares war on us.---(G apparently waiting for an answer; since P/W does not reply, he continues).---I wonder why you have such a high regard for England. The RAF does not amount to much.

P/W. A war with a sea power like England always turns out to be a long war, unless you succeed in knocking her out in the very beginning. I doubt that we can stand a long war. Even if we had stored up food, we might run short of other raw materials, like fats and iron ore.

G. Never mind iron. I have obtained long-term treaties with Sweden. We will get more ore than we need.

SECRET

P/W. It might happen that under English pressure the Swedes would cancel those treaties. Furthermore, transportation will be difficult, as Lulea is ice-free only 6-7 months. Therefore, in order to secure our iron supply we might have to invade Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

G. Don't kid me. We would never go into Scandinavia. I would prefer Belgium and Holland.

P/W. "Poor little Belgium" proved to be a hot potato in the last war. It would not be wise to try it again.

G. Then do you propose to allow the English to invade the Netherlands and secure a jumping board to bomb our Ruhr? They are already preparing airfields in the Netherlands for their bombers.

P/W. To my knowledge the ground lay-out in the Netherlands is unfit for any military use. Airfields are too small for modern bombers.

G. The English are modernizing them. Besides, we need the Netherlands as an advance base for our fighters to protect the Ruhr and for our bombers to attack England.

P/W. If fighting England means invading neutral countries first I would not go to war at all. We would have simply a repetition of the tragedy of the last war. Cut off from overseas sources of food and raw materials, we will again have to break out of our beleaguered fortress to get these supplies from other countries; we will be weakened every time we take our forces farther by taking another country, and we will be accused of planning world conquest. Then the USA will go to war against us if they have not already done so, and we would be defeated as in 1918.

G. The USA will not mix in European affairs, and England will be emasculated once her fleet has been sunk. To be sure, the little German Navy could not do this, But the Luftwaffe will finish the job; if only it has the firm conviction, it will succeed. Therefore the Chief of the General Staff of the Air Force must be an ardent believer in our capacity to smash England, since he must indoctrinate every single crew with this conviction.

P/W. The English fleet will be out of reach; the bulk of our bombers (Ju 86) has a range of only 150-170 miles.

G. We will soon have the He 11 and the Do 17. They will reach nearly all the harbors on the Eastern coast.

P/W. As during the last war, the North Sea will be empty; therefore the English home fleet will remain "in being" in Northwestern English and Irish harbors, as well as in Scapa Flow, where it will be out of reach.

G. Ships would have to go into the docks on the Eastern coast for overhauling. There we will sink them. Where there is a will there is a way. And now I ask you, Do you have the conviction that we will smash England now?

P/W. No sir, I have not. As I pointed out, to make war on England requires material and mental preparations in peacetime in such a way that it will be possible to

SECRET

knock her out in the first round. For the English have time as their ally in war, whereas we could win only by a blitzkrieg. Since we have emphasized that any war against England is out of the question, and as we did not prepare for it mentally or materially, it is too much to expect that we might defeat her. I can't believe that we will win such a war.

G. Leave the winning of the war to me. I can't use you. You will remain here, as it is no use going to England in the present political situation.

The interview had lasted about an hour and a half. P/W made extensive notes of it immediately afterwards in a letter to his wife and had a typed report of it made the following day. Both documents were later filed in his desk. The above constitutes an almost exact reproduction of the interview.

After he had left Goering P/W wondered whether he was now in disgrace or whether Goering was only disappointed. After Munich P/W's superior, General von Witzendorff, the Chief of the Central Office, ordered him to leave for London. P/W said goodbye to the chief of the Personnel Office, General von Greim, and the Chief of the General Staff, General Stumpff, as well as several others. They all wished him well at his post. When Goering returned to Berlin on 3 October P/W asked his adjutant when he should report to Goering prior to leaving for London. After a short time P/W received telephonic instructions to await new orders, as Goering had changed his mind. Then P/W was told that Goering had notified Gen. v. Witzendorff that P/W's appointment as Air Attache in London had been cancelled and that the Foreign Office was to be notified accordingly. Goering had no use for a man with an inferiority complex in England. The same day he asked the Chief of the Personnel Office and the Chief of the General Staff to have P/W removed from the General Staff; this was not done, however, due to the opposition of General v. Greim and Jeschonnek.

At the Deutscher Klub in Berlin P/W learned from Baron v. Gleichen or some of his friends that Goering had used P/W's arguments in talks with Hitler during the Munich negotiations, thus opposing Ribbentrop and Himmler; he may have had an ameliorating influence on Hitler, but after conclusion of the agreement Hitler snubbed him badly. It seems that Hitler had come to believe that if he had stood hid ground he could have had all he wanted immediately. It was assumed that Goering then took revenge on P/W.

SECRET