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CONDEMNATION OF GOERING BY HANNA REITSCH

1. INTRODUCTION: This report concerns itself with the condemnation of Hermann Goering as leader of the German Luftwaffe as expressed by Hanna Reitsch, the prominent German test pilot and aeronautical research expert. It is felt that her close contacts and constant movement through the top-brackets of the Luftwaffe make her opinions of value in determining the collapse of the GAF to the extent that it is contributable to Goering. Inasmuch as Reitsch is closely familiar with the orders, ideas, and mannerisms of Goering it is believed that her opinions may be illuminating and accurate. Her complete cooperation and sincere effort to tell the truth should also be considered in properly evaluating the following material. This account was prepared partly from a paper written by Reitsch and partly through interrogation. It is important to note that remarks Reitsch has made on the subject to civilians and to non-interrogating American officers have been checked and found to completely confirm her own written report as well as her statements during interrogation.

a. The report is written to conform to her own paper and to the remarks she made, both under direct and indirect interrogation. It is a composite account of her opinions as obtained through these methods.

b. It is felt that the material may be of value to help clarify various phases of Goering's guilt at the coming trial and also to assist in more clearly evaluating Goering's role in the disintegration of the Luftwaffe.

2. GOERING--THE GROSS INCOMPETENT: "I cannot and will not pretend to give a complete picture of Goering," says Reitsch, "I can only tell of Goering as I knew him and of the things he did that must be told in the name and for the sake of the truth. It is difficult after the down-fall of one's country to attack a former-great and to expose him before his own countrymen and in the eyes of the world for the gross incompetent that he is. But in spite of these qualifying scruples, anyone in a position to tell the truth to present and future generations must speak up, particularly if it is about a man who had such a high-ranking position, who was generally considered as a shining example of sacrificial loyalty and fulfillment of duty, but who nevertheless caused the greatest of harm and finally descended to the most shameful treachery. Anyone, particularly a German, who possesses knowledge to place Goering in his proper light owes it to himself and to the world to impart it. Therefore, I must make this burning accusation against the man who let the decisive weapon (the GAF) be destroyed through his own fault, and who through his personal attitude, example, and character betrayed his own people, thus loading upon himself the immeasurable blame for the suffering of a whole nation."

3. HITLER REMOVES GOERING AND CALLS HIS SUCCESSOR: "On 24 April 1945, Adolf Hitler called General Oberst Ritter von Greim, the Commanding General of Luftflotte 6, to the Reichschancellory in Berlin in order to appoint him successor to Goering. The radiogram did not state the reason but simply ordered him to come to Berlin immediately. Although it was known that the Russians already encircled the city, General von Greim believed that it might still be possible for me to fly him in."

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4. ARRIVAL AT HITLER'S SHELTER: Greim and Reitsch arrived in the shelter between 1800 and 1900 hours on the evening of the 26th of April. First to meet them was Frau Goebbels, who fell upon Reitsch with tears and kisses, expressing her astonishment that anyone still possessed the courage and loyalty to come to the Fuehrer, in stark contrast to all those who had deserted him. Greim was immediately taken to the operating room where Hitler's physician tended a foot injury that Greim had received from Russian ground fire as they flew low over Berlin.

a. Hitler came into the operating room, according to Reitsch, with his face showing deep gratitude over Greim's coming. He remarked something to the effect that even a soldier has a right to disobey an order when everything indicated that to carry it out would be futile and hopeless. Greim then reported his presence in the official manner and told Hitler what had happened and how they had managed to get into Berlin and to the shelter.

b. "The Fuehrer quietly listened," says Reitsch, "and at the end of the report tears came into his eyes. He took von Greim by the hand and clasped me around the shoulders and said, 'There is still some loyalty and courage left in the world,' and then turning to von Greim, he asked whether he had any idea why he had been called in. Von Greim said that he did not."

5. HITLER'S DENUNCIATION OF GOERING: "I have called you to me," Hitler said, "because Hermann Goering has betrayed and deserted both me and his Fatherland. Behind my back he has established connections with the enemy. His action was a mark of cowardice. And against my orders he has gone to save himself at Berchtesgaden. From there he sent me a most disrespectful telegram. He said that I had once named him as my successor and that now, as I was no longer able to rule from Berlin, he was prepared to rule from Berchtesgaden in my place. He closes the wire by stating that if he had no answer from me by nine-thirty on the date of the wire he would assume my answer to be in the affirmative."

a. "It was an ultimatum! A crass ultimatum!! Now nothing remains. Nothing is spared me. No allegiances are kept, no honor lived up to, no disappointments that I have not had, no betrayals that I have not experienced, and now this above all else. Nothing remains. Every wrong has already been done me."

b. "With eyes hard and half closed and in a voice unusually low he went on: 'I immediately had Goering arrested as a traitor to the Reich, took from him all his offices, and removed him from all organizations. That is why I have called you to me. I hereby declare you Goering's successor as Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe. In the name of the German people I give you my hand.'"

6. "TO DIE FOR THE HONOR OF THE LUFTWAFFE:" Greim and Reitsch were deeply stunned with the news of Goering's betrayal. As with one mind they both grasped Hitler's hands and begged to be allowed to remain in the bunker and with their own lives atone for the great wrong that Goering had perpetrated against the Fuehrer, against the German people, and against the Luftwaffe itself. To serve the honor of the flyers who had died, to reestablish the honor of the Luftwaffe that Goering had destroyed, and to guarantee the honor of their land in the eyes of the world, they begged to remain. Hitler agreed to all this and told them they might stay, and told them too that their decision would long be remembered in the history of the Luftwaffe.

a. "In this manner," says Reitsch, "did Goering's betrayal open the door to von Greim and to me so that suddenly we found ourselves as part of the small circle of people who were now prepared to die with the Fuehrer."

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b. "As Hitler asked me to undertake the nursing and caring for the wounded von Grein, I spent most of the time in the shelter at his bed-side, until the Fuehrer, one day before his reported death, sent us out again." (See Interrogation Summary No 1, Hq Air Division, USAF, for complete account of Reitsch and Grein's entrance into Berlin and of the events in Hitler's shelter up to early morning of the 30th of April 1945).

7. THE BLAME BELONGS TO GOERING: "The conversations Grein and I had in the bunker," says Reitsch, "were mainly of the misfortunes that had befallen Germany and, through Germany, had befallen the world. As far back as we let our thoughts go, even back to the very beginnings of the Third Reich and of the Luftwaffe itself, we could find only a long chain of injustice and evil of which most could be directly traced to the guilt of Goering. I do not write these lines out of indiscretion or without long and painful consideration. I write them solely for the sake of the truth, with the full understanding that we Germans must practically relearn the definition of the word. Hardly any of us are free from the insidiousness of the phrase, 'the end justifies the means.' This is because the honor of our land was so slowly and persistently propagandized that we hardly saw how that propaganda actually robbed us of the very honor the propaganda spoke of and how it garbled the truth into a long series of falsehoods."

8. FOR THE SAKE OF THE TRUTH: "It is for the sake of the truth, and to be able to tell the world about it that I remained alive when the terrible things of the last days of the war went on all about me. In fulfilling that purpose I must loudly declare that Goering is in no way representative of the German people as I know they can one day be, nor is he representative of the greatest part of the Luftwaffe. He is rather an unfortunate apparition who has brought untold misery to humanity. Now that we are at last able, we (the people and the Luftwaffe) must divorce ourselves entirely from all his ideas and everything he represented. The Allies must not judge all Germans as counterparts of the Goering pattern. Through Goering and the position he held, the Allies must also recognize that Hitler did not possess the slightest ability of proper character and personality evaluation. And that with eyes closed by idealism and a false conception of honor he would not or could not remove 'old followers' even when he suspected, and in some cases, knew of their inefficiencies and criminal mishandlings. This false sense of honor led him to believe in and support old comrades even after they had long been of great harm to him and to Germany. This same false sense forced him to keep Goering long after he began to suspect Goering's stupidities and failings."

9. GOERING'S CAESAR COMPLEX: "Much of the conduct and manner of Goering is, in my opinion, governed by his abnormal physical condition. Actual functional disturbances could easily be the fundamental cause for his Caesar-complex. No doubt these disturbances are also the cause of his feminine manner which was in such stark contrast to his apparently 'iron commands.' His manner of dress, his use of cosmetics, his personal vanity, his perfume drenched person and clothing, all created an actually decadent impression."

10. MORPHINE AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR: "Much of this abnormality was always attributed to his constant use of morphine. Undoubtedly the drug drove him to spasms of ecstasy during which he was known to overrate and regard as fact such things as were solely the product of his drug-doped wishful thinking. During such spells of elation he certainly presented Hitler with a picture that far over-estimated the strength and potentialities of the Luftwaffe. Hitler therefore possessed an entirely erroneous picture of his air strength and was deluded thereby into a false sense of security that prolonged the war much further than might have been the case had he known the true situation."

11. GOERING SELLS GERMANY A "BILL OF GOODS": "A striking example of Goering's falsification occurred when he invited Hitler, a group of ministers, Gau leaders, and other government officials to Rechlin to attend a showing of the newest aircraft types. Goering demonstrated new and capable planes of which not more than a few experimental models existed, and then passed them off as examples of aircraft that were momentarily to come off the production lines in battle-ready thousands. He then conducted sham air battles with out-moded Allied fighter craft to show the tremendous superiority of the German air-arm. The assembled officials returned to their respective communities where they quieted the fears of the populace with glowing accounts of the new planes and weapons that would soon cleanse the air of Allied bombers. This bolstered the faith of the people in final victory and through their resultant concentration of effort, certainly prolonged the war."

12. GOERING DREAMS UP A/C PRODUCTION FIGURES: "Whenever Goering was confronted with aircraft production figures that were less than those he imagined or hoped existed, he would rant and fume and deluge the individual with accusations of sabotage, suspicions of non-support of the war effort. An illustration of this I experienced personally:

a. "In August 1943, after my recovery from a crash with a ME 163 I received a luncheon invitation to his home on Obersalzberg. There were three of us at the table; Goering, his wife, and I. As opening remark of the table conversation Goering wanted to acquaint his wife with the plane in which I had been injured.

b. "'Do you know,' he said, 'the 163 is our newest rocket craft, which climbs with fantastic speed almost straight into the air. Thousands are now ready to sweep the heavens clean and shoot down the bomber formations wherever we can find them.'

c. "I was astounded and almost disbelieved my ears. I knew that at that moment we did not have a single 163 ready for combat and at the very best we could not expect a single craft to be ready before the end of the year. Assembly line production would, for a long time, be out of the question. Even if all the factories designated to produce this craft were set in full and immediate production, the figures he was suggesting were fantastic. I wasn't certain if Goering was joking or if, with intentional exaggeration, he was merely attempting to reassure his wife. That he himself believed what he had said seemed ridiculous.

d. "With a half-laugh, I said, that would be fine, were it true.

e. "Goering seemed astounded at my remark and loudly demanded what I meant by the statement. With stupefied amazement I realized from his retort that he actually believed we did have thousands of the ME 163's. As I felt it to be my duty to tell him the truth I explained what I knew about the production figures and what we could hope for in the way of assembly-line production. Thereupon Goering flew into a rage, and viciously pounding his fist upon the table he screamed that I didn't have the slightest idea, that I didn't know what I was speaking about, and strode angrily out of the room. With horror I realized why no one dared tell him the truth. I became sick with dread when I realized what a completely false impression he must have of the strength and power of his own weapon. As Goering came back into the room I made another attempt to discuss the matter rationally, but it was of no avail. I had simply fallen into the poor graces of the Reichsmarschall and was never again called to see him or consulted on aeronautical matters."

13. GOERING SELECTS HIS AIDS IN HIS OWN IMAGE: "Goering chose such people to fill the positions about him as mirrored his own personality; men who were self-centered, incompetent, and catering. It was men

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like these who influenced the spirit and manner of the Luftwaffe. Often they possessed not the slightest knowledge or technical understanding of their jobs and held them only because they were friendly, congenial, or hero-worshippers of Goering. Even when one of these dared give Goering information that did not laud or reflect the superiority of the Luftwaffe, they were immediately removed. An example is Udet, who was certainly one of Germany's greatest flyers. His appointment by Goering as Chief of the Luftwaffe's Technical Branch was an error that even Udet himself recognized, knowing himself to be neither an administrator nor organizer. His inevitable failure in the position, Hitler's evidenced disgust with that failure, and the personal denunciation of Goering drove Udet to suicide.

a. "The one-time Chief of the General Staff, General Jeschonneck, also took his life over despair of Goering's mismanagement. Goering, grief stricken, attended the funeral of both and with tears in his eyes he bewailed the loss of his 'beloved airmen'.

b. "Jeschonneck's successor, General Korton, later killed for his participation in the July 20 assassination attempt, and his successor, General Koller, were both driven almost insane through Goering's stupid inefficiencies. I am sure that General Koller can and would be glad to give full information regarding Goering's character and mishandlings. I am also sure that Major Krogmann, General Korton's Chief of Staff, would be able to give further information on the deceased Korton's relations and opinions of Goering.

c. "That Feldmarschall Greim took his life on the 24th of May 1945 as he was being taken to Germany as a prisoner of war was also largely due to Goering. I am sure that Greim was not able to reconcile his honor as a soldier with giving the information he would have had to give regarding the despicable traits and blunderings of Goering, his former Commanding Officer, who in his own mind he damned as the incompetent who bore the greatest guilt for the useless continuation of the war."

14. GOERING'S TECHNICAL SHORTCOMINGS: "An air force is a technical weapon and in its development engineers, research men, scientists, and industrialists must be allowed to speak. If this is not understood, as Goering did not understand it, it was inevitable that the Luftwaffe would crumble through leadership that was not short of criminal.

a. "As Research Director of the Luftwaffe, Prof. Dr. Walter Georgii of Ainring, Germany, can give a full picture of Goering's lack of interest and awareness in research matters." (See Interrogation Summary No 2, Air Division, USFA, for Prof. Georgii's account of Goering.)

b. "Of Goering's relations with Luftwaffe engineers and technicians both Feldmarschall Milch and Dipl. Ing. Otto Fuchs, Berlin-Koepenick, Wendenschlosstrasse, can give complete information.

c. "The fact that Goering made himself into the well known 'Hermann Meier' is only superficial, but indicative evidence of what can be documented by those named above. Goering always heeded the pseudo-scientists and engineers who gave him glowing accounts and promised other wonders for the immediate future that would be even more glowing, in spite of the fact that competent men saw the pitfalls and impossibilities. But as always these uncolored accounts were consistently disregarded and eventually even forbidden entrance."

15. THE "VOLKSJAEGER" BLUNDER: "A shocking example of Goering's faulty judgment was the matter of the 'Volksjaeger'. It was in favor of this new plane that Goering allowed himself to almost destroy the last hope left to the Luftwaffe in the fall of 1944--namely the hope that lay in the ME 262. The ME 262 was at this time fully tested and found to

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possess flight characteristics that were almost flawless and certainly exceeded those of any other German craft and of any known Allied plane. It was then of the gravest importance, in the fall of 1944, to get the ME 262 on an immediate assembly-line production basis. With everything ready Goering gave ear to the proposed 'Volksjaeger' plan, for which only the roughest, first-stage drawings had been accomplished, and from which a plane was to evolve that admittedly possessed poorer flight qualities and more limited potentialities than the ME 262.

a. "Ambitious construction men, motivated by interests of self-gain, promised Goering that the 'Volksjaeger' could be perfected from the basic drawing-board sketches, in the fall of 1944, to assembly-line production by March 1945 without affecting the ME 262 program. Countless aircraft engineers warned Goering of the plan's impracticability and fell into immediate disfavor as a result. Every designer, test-pilot, and constructor knew how much time would be required to develop an entirely new craft. Only Goering and his momentary favorites did not, or would not, recognize this actuality. Result, of course, was that the 'last-hope' ME 262 did suffer through the 'Volksjaeger' program. The main reason for this was that Generaldirektor Kessler, long connected and acquainted with the ME 262's evolution and in charge of its assembly-line production planning was removed by Goering and put to work on the 'Volksjaeger' project.

b. "The final result was that the ME 262 program was irreparably damaged and that the 'Volksjaeger' as everyone suspected, was another 'too-late' and a complete failure." (Full information on Goering's roll in the "Volksjaeger" affair, Reitsch claims, could be obtained from Dipl. Ing. Voigt of Messerschmitt.)

16. GOERING THE COLLECTOR AND ABNORMAL EGOTIST: "It is general information," Claims Reitsch, "that Goering was the greatest corruptionist of the Third Reich, that he used his position without restraint to collect and confiscate treasures of art, castles, villas, and untold sums of money. In his personality and morphine-sickened egotism, I see the blame for his inefficiencies and despicable characteristics. Through this came his excesses, his blunderings, the loss of the trust of most of his officers, the contempt of research and technical men, and finally even the one-time good humored faith on the part of many of the people changed to outright disgust."

17. THE ANTI-GOERING TREND: "Complaints against Goering came from all possible sources and usually found their way to Himmler's desk. Through Himmler I became acquainted with many of these. Often they begged Himmler to take control of the Luftwaffe himself or at least to impress Hitler with the stringent need of replacing Goering. These were sent to Himmler because it was known that of the big-four he was the only one who would at least read such complaints; a thing that had long been impossible with the others, least of all with Hitler, as all such information was short-circuited long before it reached his desk."

18. HITLER ATTEMPTS TO REMEDY THE GOERING SITUATION: "Through Himmler's intervention Hitler finally called General Oberst von Greim to him in September 1944 and told him in secrecy of his misgivings regarding some of Goering's activities. Hitler then asked Greim to take control of all military air operations in such a manner that he would not have to remove Goering altogether. Greim agreed, but indicated that he could accept only if he were given complete freedom to fill responsible positions as he saw fit, and in addition that he should have such other rights and authority as would insure that the operational control could be exercised in the manner he deemed necessary. He was sent by the Fuehrer to Goering to arrange some sort of a division of duties."

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19. GOERING VS. GREIM: "In presenting his matter to Goering, Greim was met with a terrific harangue and out-burst of rage. Greim at once saw that any form of cooperation with Goering was impossible, reported this to Hitler, and asked to be sent back to his post as Commanding Officer of Luftflotte VI."

20. THE LAST DAYS: "Through his sickened egotism and selfishness Goering held to his position to the last, in spite of the fact that he himself was beginning to see that he was gradually slipping in his position, and because of this a people was practically destroyed and a terrible war continued long after it had been fully lost. Until just before the end he fought with the same determination to keep the trust of Hitler, a trust that he knew was fast waning. Then when he saw the end at hand, he deserted. A man who accepts every honor, every title, every decoration, and every position with constant avowals of his faithfulness, must be more than a scoundrel when he turns traitor the moment the Fuehrer had nothing more to give him."

21. GOERING'S "PLEASANT" PERSONALITY: "Many people have always been enamored by his strange personal charm, by his sense of humor, by his apparent appreciation of tradition and culture. This danger still exists. These same people have considered him as a picture of faithfulness to Hitler as well as the Fuehrer's greatest protector. These people may not understand his betrayal and his character and may still be of their former opinions. It is true that even the greatest criminal, the most dangerous human being, has his acceptable characteristics. The danger is that many people have seen only this 'display-side' and not the proper, odious side of Goering. No doubt his household servants, chauffeurs, and orderlies, who lived practically as well as he did himself, are still firmly convinced of his congeniality and goodness, as at first the whole nation was convinced. But such opinions should never be allowed to influence a proper judgment of the man. One must never forget the danger that such abnormal vanity, such gross incompetence, and pitiful inefficiency represents against the peoples of any nation and thereby against humanity."

22. ONLY SURVIVOR OF THE "BIG-FOUR": "In Goering's case the danger is particularly great, as he is the only survivor of the four leaders of the Third Reich. It is possible that the hopes of such people who are still sympathetically inclined to the Nazi regime and its ideology might hope that through Goering some aspects of the Nazi philosophy could be kept alive. Such a thing must never be allowed to occur. The people must know what sort of criminal Goering was, a criminal against Germany and against the world."

23. CONCLUSION: Reitsch draws two sharp conclusions out of her analysis of Goering that she feels condemn him in her eyes, in the eyes of the German people, and in the eyes of the world. The first is that through his ignorance he misused the Luftwaffe to such an extent that thousands of lives were lost, both through the improper defensive and offensive use of the weapon; The second is that through his vanity and warped ego he allowed himself to be informed falsely and in turn informed Hitler falsely as to the strength and capabilities of the air-arm. Reitsch believes that this false picture that Goering carried to the Fuehrer might easily have been drawn from Goering's actual impressions as it was simply forbidden to bring any pessimistic accounts to his attention. If this was the case Goering's guilt is all the greater, in Reitsch's opinion, because she believes that if Hitler had currently known the true status of his air weapon he would have been forced to recognize the inevitable defeat much earlier than he did. She therefore holds Goering responsible for the useless continuation of the war for many months after it was, in the eyes of almost everyone, completely and irretrievably lost.

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a. Every life lost on either side during that time, is in her opinion, to be unquestionably chalked up against Goering.

b. Reitsch draws a third conclusion in which she charges Hitler with the final and over-all responsibility of Goering's failures. Hitler's crime was that he did not possess the necessary insight to realize the incompetency of Goering and that even when he did begin to realize it in the last stages, Hitler was motivated by a false and criminal sense of allegiance to one of his old-guard, long-time supporters to the extent that he could not bring himself to remove Goering while there was still time.

c. In her opinion Hitler's removal of Goering during the early stages of the war would not have vindicated Goering but would substantially have shortened the duration of the war.

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