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OFFICE OF U. S. CHIEF OF COUNSEL
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INTERROGATION DIVISION SUMMARY

Interrogation of FRANZ VON PAPEN
By: Mr. T. J. Dodd, 12 October 1945, PM, Nuremberg

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VON PAPEN'S RATIONALIZATION OF HIS SUPPORT OF HITLER

Up to the Munich agreement, the world, the British and the French governments, all believed in the possibility of having an understanding with Germany. And VON PAPEN, who felt responsible for this government, had the same hope and conviction. (p.1) Repeats that he could not take the course of Thyssen, of emigrating and then writing a book in protest, says that he considers this as the worst one could do; the opposite way - his way - was in his view no less courageous. (p.2) All of Thyssen's property was seized by Goering, and that Thyssen's son-in-law died in concentration camp.

Franz von Papen, 12 October 1945, PM.

Thinks that the 30 th of June, 1934, was the last chance for action on the part of the Army, because at that time the Army was the sole independent power in Germany, and that he hoped fervently the army would act. If Hindenburg had still been in better health, things would have taken a different course. (p.4)

RUSO-GERMAN PACT OF 1939

Holds the view that England's alliance with Poland was a bad thing; that the Corridor question could have been solved without it; that Hitler would never have made war against Poland, if Russia had not signed the 'Mutual Assistance Pact'. Everybody had known Hitler's hatred against Bolshevism, and it was therefore a tremendous surprise when, from one day to the next, the Russian-German agreement was concluded. (p.5-6) Again refers to Henderson's book, quoting from it that "one of the main reasons for forming the agreement was to get Germany embroiled in Europe and then, to get the chestnuts out of the fire:" states that that was the reason for the Russo-German Pact, on the Russian side. As he, Papen, understood it, the Russians had wanted the Balkan countries and half of Poland. The only way to get it was war. If they did not want to start a war, the next best thing was to encourage Hitler and suggest to him that it was easy to overrun Poland. (p.6)

Papen denies that, agreement or no agreement, Poland was to be divided eventually, anyway. He says they never thought of it, nor of absorbing Poland. Why change the great advantage to Germany of Poland's position as a buffer state between Germany and Russia? (p.7) Claims that while von Moltke was ambassador in Warsaw, Hitler was very friendly towards Poland. (p.8)

FRANCO - GERMAN RELATIONS

Papen says he was convinced of Hitler's sincerity with regard to France, that everything was settled, including the Alsation problem. Hitler often said: "Alsace and Lorraine were of no use for either side, thus let this question be settled." (p.8)

INFLUENCE OF INNER CIRCLE

Admits Hitler may have intended to dominate Europe in the last years of the war, not in the beginning. Shares Henderson's opinion that Hitler had changed 'from top to bottom'. Believes this must be attributed to Hitler's circle, which showered flattery upon him. They said Hitler was the greatest fieldmarshal in the war. In Papen's view, Hitler was quite incapable as a soldier. (p.9)

THE INFLUENCE OF MILITARY LEADERS

von Papen, 12 October 1945, PM

VON PAPEN'S APPRAISAL OF MILITARY LEADERS

Keitel was never regarded as a great soldier by the military. There were no outstanding military leaders on the German side in this war. (p.9) Names Brauchitsch, Beck, Halder as being very good, Rommel was good, too, a real mercenary, with great courage, etc, Kesselring did very well with a few divisions in Italy. Even Rundstedt, whom Papen knew well, certainly was not a great figure. Papen says this was due mainly to Hitler and the Party who kept these generals down, so they were not to get popularity in the army. (p.10) Admits many generals were removed from one day to the next. Believes, the idea was in the end to have everywhere SS generals and SS people, because after July 20, 1944, Hitler completely distrusted the army generals. (p.10)

20 JULY 1944, PLOT

Papen says it was pure chance only if one's name was not included in the list Goebbels had drawn up for the purge on July 2, 1944. If the attempt on Hitler's life had succeeded, the total destruction of Germany could have been avoided. Himmler would have been removed, too, if the generals' revolt had succeeded, because the SS troops were still in the minority. (p.11-12)

VON PAPEN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD CONCENTRATION CAMPS

He says that everybody in Germany knew of the concentration camps, but only in a general way, assuming the inmates were held prisoners but treated decently, honestly. Papen adds that everybody who knows Germany well, knows that the average German person is a mild and decent individual (p.12). Says he never even imagined that such gangs could be created, and that his only explanation can be found in his recollections, where he writes that total war on both sides, destruction of entire cities with hundreds of thousands of women and children, such as bombing of Dresden, produced the feeling on the opposing side that the war must be conducted without reserve; that every crime which extinguished lives that might be useful to the other side was justified in total war. He adds that he cannot find another explanation. (p.12-13).

SS He denies ever having heard that such crimes were committed even before the war began. Points out that the whole principle of the concentration camp for political prisoners was unknown in Germany, too, before the Nazis rose to power. The idea of concentration camps was an invention of dictatorship (p.13-14). The constitution and parliamentary rights were suspended by HITLER's 'Emergency' law, of July, (1934?). He now believes all he has 1944. If the attempt on Hitler's life had succeeded, the total destruction of Germany could have been avoided. Himmler would have been removed, too, if the 3rd Reich's revolt had succeeded, because the SS troops were still in the minority. (p.11-12)

Franz vpm Papen, 12 October, 1945, PM

now heard about concentration camps. Seeks to explain the horrors caused by the lack of any food in the camps with the complete destruction of railway and other communications, but adds that the cruelties and outrages cannot be excused.

Papen admits to be one of the men now living who had a part in Hitler's rise to power and all the historical developments. (p.16). Asked whether he thinks it is justified that he should be declared responsible, he replies that history should decide; that God will better judge the motives and intentions behind acts. (p.16). From a human point of view, he feels that he cannot be found guilty of all this disaster. Reiterates that he is responsible for having helped Hitler to power; that later on he took the responsibility again in Vienna and Turkey in order to get Germany out of the mess. Stresses that he never wanted to have National Socialism reign in Germany; he wanted a normal life for the people, being a conservative man. The good points of the National Socialist program, such as the social points, overcoming of class hatred, appealed to him. He and the people felt certain, they could fight Bolshevism. He considers this a worthwhile and legitimate purpose for which he worked (p.17) during the 'first phase' of the Hitler regime. As to the second phase - from June 30, 1934 to March, 1938 - he denies having been responsible for Hitler's government; that he had to fulfill the special task in Austria. (p.18) He again

He denies any responsibility for the cessation of civil rights, or the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws. (p.18-19). Maintains he made a stand when he refused to remain in Hitler's government and declined to assist in the Reichstag session. He opposed Hitler frequently when talking with him, but reiterates he was against taking the second course left to him, emigration. (p.19-20) Repeats that he refused to carry out orders against German Jews in Turkey or against Catholic schools; that in his own domain he remained steadfast (p.21). Maintains it was impossible to offer any actual resistance, like forming an underground movement, etc., inside of Germany. Hitler in the beginning had been successful in abolishing the growing class hatred, the workers distrusted Papen's class, but regarded Hitler as their man. Papen admits he had the choice between active opposition to the Nazis, thus making himself a martyr, and what he did. (24)

The third phase - after March 1938 - when Hitler broke his word given in the agreement with England, left no more choice. The whole world then knew that all had been futile, then the question for a German patriot - like Papen - was how to save Germany from a terrible war (p.25). Admits that after this fact of dishonesty in dealing with other nations he still continued to serve this Nazi regime, in the hope of preventing war. (p.26)

Ernst von Papen, 12 October 1945, PM

Papen states he certainly did not believe in the righteousness of Germany's cause when the invasion of Poland began, but that he thought it the best way to continue in serving his country in a position (ambassador to Turkey) where he could do the most good, perhaps restore peace. He claims he even served in this way the Allied interests, for he thought that after this criminal war had been started, the important thing was to save as much of Europe as possible. (p.27) Claims he would not have accepted the mission to go to Turkey as ambassador, several months before the war, if he had not believed he could accomplish something to prevent war. (p.28) Suggests asking Horthy what he thinks about Papen and his activities (p.31).

Papen continues to say that he knows he is in a serious situation, very serious, before an international court; points to his recollections which he has written at Mondorf, as an 'examination of his conscience' .(p.32)

PARTICIPATION IN AUSTRIAN ANSCHLUSS

Once more asked about the message from Vienna, calling for assistance against rioters, denies knowledge of the instigator of the prearranged call for help; says Goering never told him about it. (p.34)

VON PAPEN'S OPINION OF HESS AND BORMANN

Papen believes in Hess' insanity; says he was a far milder man than Bormann, who in every way has been the very spirit of Hitler. He saw Bormann only once, in Hitler's presence. From the beginning he felt antipathy for Bormann, who was a bad influence and most rabid in religious matters. (p.3)