

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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Gen. Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb: (Listed by Russians as war criminal according to newspaper reports.)

R.v.L. first of all relates, during the half hour interview, the reasons which caused him to ask Hitler to discharge him from the Wehrmacht. In the latter part of 1941, he, as commander of the Army Group "North", had to carry out an offensive operation in the Tishvin sector, which soon came to a stop because of lack of reserves. "The Russian supply lines were operating well, thus it could be anticipated that my entire Army Group would very quickly find itself in a difficult situation." He explained the situation to the Führer, and requested to be permitted to order a retreat. Hitler agreed, and the retreat was carried out.

Shortly thereafter the situation in the Bay of Demiansk sector again became critical, due to the fact that no German reserves arrived, while Russian reserves moved up uninterruptedly. R.v.L. foresaw that the 12 divisions comprising his Army Group would be cut off if another retreat did not take place. His request for this retreat was rejected by Hitler. Thereupon he appeared personally before Hitler, either to receive the order to retreat, or, if turned down, to request his discharge. Hitler maintained his decision and authorized his discharge from the Wehrmacht.

L. did not take this matter to heart because he had the following opinion about the Führer: "He was not only a dilettant, - worse than that - he lacked the essential qualities of a military leader. He had no sense for reality, he lived in the realm of fantasy, he was a megalomaniac, and was not qualified to judge the situation. My decision to withdraw from the Wehrmacht does not contradict my soldierly sense of duty. If my ideas concerning the tasks assigned me were not required, then they could as well have put a corporal in my place."

Attitude toward the Regime:

"At first I had the impression that some points of the party program were acceptable. Then everything changed - the good things wore away, only the outgrowths remained. The originally maintained separation of Party and Wehrmacht grew less distinct as time went on. This resulted in great dissatisfaction in the officers' corps, which considered itself non-political, and wished to remain that way."

War Guilt:

"The conflict with Poland had been provoked by Hitler. These problems did not have to be solved by armed force. At that time I wished and hoped that the conflict with Poland would become localized. When the campaign against France was postponed time and again (the first snows fell already in the Eifel), we said to ourselves: 'Well, it would indeed be splendid if this threat had passed us by without materializing.' The majority of the other high ranking officers shared my view and desired no war with France and England. After the war with Poland and France turned out better than we had expected, we failed in our foreign policy which was solely guided by Utopian considerations."

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The course of the war:

"The entire German conduct of the war can only be considered a product of insanity. There is no such thing as "I shall never capitulate" where the destinies of peoples are at stake. That is pure nonsense!"

20th of July:

R.v.L. states that he took no part in the events of July 20. However, he knew Field Marshal von Witzleben very well as the latter was his subordinate in Army Group 'North'. He also worked with Hoepfner at the time. R.v.L. thinks very highly of both men. He was particularly indignant about the fact that the 'Traitors of July 20' were branded as cowards, since he knew that Hoepfner was a "daredevil of the first order". He considered the action of July 20 as having been undertaken too late, however, as Germany's fate had already been sealed by that time. Nevertheless, great sacrifices could still have been prevented, had everything worked according to plan. He considered the execution as "something simply dreadful".

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