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GROSSADMIRAL KARL VON DOENITZ

At some time in the early part of April, 1945, in the expectation that Germany might be cut in two, Hitler had directed in writing that should he go to South Germany, Gross-admiral Doenitz was to take charge in the North. Should Hitler, however, proceed to North Germany, Field Marshall Kesselring was to assume command in the South. In accordance with these instructions, Doenitz, who was at that time in Ploen in Holstein, proceeded to Flensburg.

On the evening of April 30, 1945, he had received a telegram from Hitler's headquarters (The Bunker) in Berlin in the official code and under the signature of Bormann to the effect that Hitler had executed a political testament appointing Doenitz to be successor and directing the Grossadmiral to take such measures as he considered right and expedient. Doenitz had learned from General Jodl and Field Marshal Keitel that Hitler had given up the war for lost on April 22nd. Doenitz was at first surprised at his appointment because he had never been a politician, but after further consideration came to the conclusion that in the circumstances the allegiance of the forces could not have been secured except by a trusted commander. He knew too that there had been a dispute between Hitler and Goering, and that there could be no question of the latter's claim to the succession being ratified at this stage. Doenitz had at once decided to surrender and to put an end to the hostilities with the least possible bloodshed. On the following day he held a conference with Jodl, Keitel, General Lindemann from Denmark, Terboven and Boehmer from Norway, and Schoener's chief of staff, General von Natzmer. His chief concern, apart from bringing hostilities to an end, was to enable as many Germans as possible, both civilians and military to escape from the advancing Russians to the West. In the meantime he had asked Himmler, who was nearby in Holstein, to come to see him. Doenitz had only his personal staff and no armed forces whatsoever at the time. Himmler arrived with a heavily armed escort and on hearing that Doenitz had been named by Hitler to succeed him, Himmler, who had expected the appointment for himself, proposed that he should be made second in command. Doenitz found this impossible as he had decided upon a government of technicians to assist in the carrying out of the surrender. Himmler thereupon left.

On May 1st, he received a second telegram from the Berlin headquarters, signed by Bormann declaring that the document referred to in his previous telegram was legally effective and that the document itself was on its way to him by courier. The courier was last heard of somewhere in the neighborhood of Wennsee. In the evening of the same day Doenitz received a

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third telegram from Berlin signed by both Goebbels and Bormann giving the time of Hitler's death, with Doenitz as his successor in the office of President, Goebbels as Reich Chancellor, Bormann as Minister for the Party, and Seyss-Inquart as Minister for Foreign Affairs and advising him that Goebbels and Bormann were enroute to Flensburg.

Doenitz having been originally charged to take such measures as he considered right and expedient felt under no obligation to accept the proposed new set-up, and he then appointed von Krosigk as his Minister for Foreign Affairs. Ribbentrop had been in Flensburg at the time, but Doenitz would not have considered appointing him. Lack of communications made it impossible for Doenitz to obtain an oath of allegiance from the armed forces, but since Hitler had designated him his successor he maintained that the oath of allegiance to Hitler now ran to his person, and he broadcast to that effect. He had discussed with Generals Jodl and Keitel the best means of effecting a surrender but he felt sure that the armies in the East who would have expected to be sent to Siberia would not obey an order to lay down their arms.

During the night of May 2nd and 3rd he sent Admiral von Freideburg to Field Marshal Montgomery, and upon his return with Montgomery's terms, Doenitz at once gave orders for the withdrawal of German forces from Denmark and the Netherlands. General Blaskowitz queried his authority and Doenitz confirmed that the order came from him as Hitler's successor. On the night of May 5th and 6th, Freideburg was sent to General Eisenhower, who demanded surrender unconditionally to the Russians as well as to western allies. Doenitz was still uncertain whether the Germans in the East would obey the order and Jodl and Keitel were of the definite opinion that Schoener would not do so. Jodl was sent to General Eisenhower to explain this, but the latter did not modify his terms and proposed moreover to close the western territory to troops and civilians moving in from the East. On May 7th, therefore, Doenitz agreed to surrender unconditionally to the three powers and was given 48 hours to communicate with Schoener to whom General Meyer-Dietring was then sent under American escort.

The unconditional surrender of the German armed forces became effective on May 9, 1945, and Doenitz' primary task was complete. He felt it his duty, however, to remain as head of the German state as long as possible and did this until the allies abolished his government.

Grossadmiral Doenitz wanted to add that when von Freideburg returned from General Eisenhower's headquarters on May 7 he brought with him an American paper with pictures in it of

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the German concentration camps, and he stated that before seeing that paper neither he nor any of his naval or army colleagues had the faintest idea of the conditions prevailing in those camps. Naval personnel were under naval jurisdiction and there would at no time have been occasion for contact between the navy and the administration of the concentration camps. He did not dispute the fact that in character and scale these German atrocities were the worst in the history of mankind and was at a loss to account for them.

In discussing the outbreak of the war Doenitz explained that the significance of the march into Prague and the seriousness which the outside world had attached to this had only dawned on him in the last few weeks, but that he could now understand the importance of it.

As for the declaration of war against the United States, until the time of Pearl Harbor he had been ordered by Hitler to do everything possible to avoid provoking them and had been forbidden to attack American destroyers even after they had attacked and sunk his U-boats. This meant, in fact, that the U-boats were unable to attack any destroyers of whatever nation and were under considerable handicap.

Hitler had little interest in Submarine warfare at first. His inclination was towards big battleships with big guns, but he had gradually seen his mistake especially after the U-boat success of 1942. When the submarines were beaten in 1943 by aircraft and radar, Doenitz had planned another type of submarine which could remain under water and travel at high speed. These submarines were under construction at the time the Germans surrendered. Only one was at sea.

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