

HITLER'S COMMANDERS



Samuel W. Mitcham
and
Gene Mueller

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INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up in America in the 1950s, evaluating Hitler's commanders was all very simple: all Germans were Nazis, and all Nazis were evil. The higher in rank a Nazi rose, the lower he sank as a human being. A German general would, then, logically be a horrible human being. A typical Nazi (i.e., German) general would be brutal, absolutely regimented, totally insensitive to human suffering, and completely ignorant of anything outside the immediate sphere of his profession. Other than a certain amount of skill in military science (and an unsurpassed talent for destruction and disorganization), he had no redeeming qualities whatsoever. He undoubtedly ate with his hands, wiped his mouth on his coat, burped loudly, interrupted people anytime he felt like it, screamed, threw things, pitched fits, and was really happy only when he was launching unprovoked invasions of innocent countries. His favorite hobbies were mass murder, bombing undefended villages, and eating small babies for breakfast.

After I became an adult, the picture I perceived became much more complex. I was somewhat shocked to discover that not all Germans were Nazis and not all Nazis were German; furthermore, the men who came closest to doing away with Hitler (prior to 1945) were none other than German officers. Eventually my interest in military history led me to study the Wehrmacht in depth, and I discovered that there were all types of people in the German armed forces: heroes, cowards, Nazis, anti-Nazis, non-Nazis (as opposed to anti-Nazis), Christians, atheists, professionals, well-educated men, high school dropouts, backroom politicians, chameleons, innovators, dissenters, geniuses, the obtuse, men who looked to the future and men who lived mainly in the past. They came from many social classes, with varied backgrounds, varied educations, and varied levels of skill and intelligence. Also, they had many different types of careers and various kinds of luck.

The purpose of *Hitler's Commanders* is to describe the lives and careers of selected German officers from all three branches of the Wehrmacht, as well as from the Waffen-SS (armed SS). These officers were picked by Dr. Mueller and me on the basis of the

diversity of their characters and careers, the availability of information, and our own interests. Some readers may take issue with certain of these selections, but, since there were 3,663 general officers in the German Army alone during World War II, it is natural that our selections should differ from those of others; in fact, it would be quite remarkable if *any* author or sets of authors would choose exactly the same cast of characters we selected.

One aspect of this book that warrants mention is the relative lack of field marshals covered here. This is because my book *Hitler's Field Marshals and Their Battles* was just published in the United States in 1990, and I thought it inappropriate to cover them again here. We made five exceptions: Wilhelm Keitel, Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb, Georg von Kuechler, Fedor von Bock, and Friedrich Paulus. Keitel is included because Dr. Mueller knew his family and wrote a book on his life many years ago. Paulus is here because in a chapter on the generals of Stalingrad it would be impossible to leave him out. The remaining three—Leeb, Kuechler, and Bock—are discussed in the chapter on the commanders of the Eastern Front because they represented three different types of generals. Leeb was a moral, Christian, anti-Nazi, straitlaced Bavarian general of the old school, who had no use for Hitler or his party. Bock cannot be labeled pro-Nazi, non-Nazi, or anti-Nazi; he can only be described as pro-Bock. Kuechler fell somewhere in between. Even so, the treatment of these three is considerably different from that in *Hitler's Field Marshals*. There the emphasis was on their battles; here it is on their personalities and characters.

Dr. Mueller and I would like to express our appreciation to a number of people for their assistance in the completion of this work. First, we would like to thank our wives, Donna Mitcham and Kay Mueller, for their long-suffering patience and assistance in proofreading. Thanks also go to Paula Leming, professor of foreign languages, for help in translating; to Colonel Jack Angolia, Anthony Johnson, Thomas Smith and Dr. Waldo Dalstead for the loan of certain photographs; to Valerie Newborn and the staffs of Huie Library, Henderson State University, and Henderson Library, for their assistance in acquiring interlibrary loans; and to the staffs of the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Army War

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Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr.

MAP 1



MAP 2



EASTERN EUROPE, 1941

1

THE GENERALS OF THE HIGH COMMAND

**Wilhelm Keitel. Bodewin Keitel. Alfred Jodl. Ferdinand Jodl.
Bernard Lossberg. Georg Thomas.
Walter Buhle. Wilhelm Burgdorf. Hermann Reinecke.**

WILHELM KEITEL was born on the family estate of Helmscherode in western Brunswick on September 22, 1882. Although he longed to be a farmer, as his ancestors were, the modest 650-acre estate was too small to support two families. Consequently, Keitel joined the 46th Field Artillery Regiment in Wolfenbuettler as a *Fahnenjunker* (officer-cadet) in 1901. The desire to return to Helmscherode, however, remained with him throughout his life.

Keitel was commissioned second lieutenant on August 18, 1902, entered an instructor's course in the Field Artillery School at Juterbog in 1905, and in 1908 became regimental adjutant. He was promoted to first lieutenant in 1910 and to captain in 1914. (See Appendix I for a table of equivalent ranks.)

In 1909, Wilhelm Keitel married Lisa Fontaine, an attractive, intelligent young woman from Wuelfel. Her father, a wealthy estate owner and brewer, initially disliked Wilhelm due to Keitel's "Prussian" background but eventually became reconciled to the marriage. Lisa bore Wilhelm three sons and three daughters. Like their father, all three sons became officers in the German Army. Definitely the stronger partner in the marriage, Lisa wanted her husband to advance as high as possible in the ranks of the military. Incidentally,

Herr Fontaine was wrong about Keitel's background: he was not Prussian at all, but Hanoverian. This same mistake was made by Adolf Hitler and the Allied prosecutors at Nuremberg later on.

In early summer, 1914, Keitel took a well-earned holiday in Switzerland, where he heard the news of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Keitel was hurriedly recalled to his regiment at Wolfenbuettler and was with the 46th Artillery when it was sent to Belgium in August, 1914. He saw considerable action and in September was seriously wounded in the right forearm by a shell splinter. After recovering he returned to the 46th, where he became a battery commander. In March, 1915, he was appointed to the General Staff and transferred to the XV Reserve Corps. In late 1915 Keitel came to know a Major Werner von Blomberg, and the two men began a friendship that continued throughout both their careers. Keitel finished his service in the Great War as a General Staff Officer with the XIX Reserve Corps (1916-17), the 199th Infantry Division (1917), the General Staff of the Army in Berlin (1917-18), and as a staff officer with the Marine Corps, fighting in Flanders (1918).

The Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, was a very harsh one. Among other things, it abolished the General Staff and limited the German Army (now dubbed the *Reichsheer*) to 100,000 men, of whom only 4,000 could be officers.¹ Keitel was accepted into this officer corps of the Weimar Republic and spent three years as an instructor at the Cavalry School at Hanover before joining the staff of the 6th Artillery Regiment. He was promoted to major in 1923 and from 1925 to 1927 was assigned to the organizational branch of the *Truppenamt* (Troop Office), as the clandestine General Staff was called. In 1927 he returned to Muenster as commander of the II Battalion, 6th Artillery Regiment. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1929—a significant accomplishment in the *Reichsheer* which, like most small armies, was characterized by slow promotions. That same year he returned to the General Staff as chief of the Organizations Department.

An interesting event took place in Keitel's career in late summer, 1931, when he took part in a military exchange trip to the Soviet Union. He admired the Russia he saw, noting the vast spaces, abundance of raw materials, the Five Year (economic) Plan, and the disciplined Red Army. Following this trip he continued to work

at his arduous task of increasing the size of the German Army in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles.

Although Keitel did his job very well, as even his personal enemy Field Marshal Erich von Manstein later admitted, his abilities were taxed to the limits. The demanding (and illegal) work took its toll both physically and mentally. The nervous Keitel smoked too much and, by 1932, was suffering from arterial embolism and thrombosis and had severe phlebitis in his right leg. He was recovering under the care of Dr. Guhr in the Tara Mountains of Czechoslovakia when Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Keitel's close friend Werner von Blomberg became minister of defense the same day.

In October, 1933, Keitel began a year of troop duty. He served first as Infantry Commander III (and one of the two deputy commanders of the 3rd Infantry Division) at Potsdam, near Berlin. In May, 1934, he heard Adolf Hitler speak at the Sportplatz in Berlin and was moved by the Fuehrer's words. That same month Keitel's father died and Wilhelm inherited Helmscherode. He seriously considered leaving the army to manage the family estate, even though he had just been promoted to major general the month before; however, as he wrote later, "My wife was unable to keep house with my stepmother and sister, and I could not solve the problem."² No doubt Lisa wanted him to remain in the Army, and he did so.

In July, 1934, Keitel was transferred to the 12th Infantry Division in Leibnitz, more than 300 miles from Helmscherode. Because of this distance, he once again seriously considered leaving the service. General Baron Werner von Fritsch, the commander of the Army, dissuaded him by offering him a new assignment, which he accepted. On October 1, 1934, Keitel, now stationed at Bremen, assumed command of what was soon to become the 22nd Infantry Division.

Keitel thoroughly enjoyed his new command, organizing units and developing measures necessary to build the division up to full combat strength and effectiveness. (Many of the battalions he helped organize would later be destroyed at Stalingrad.) While he built the 22nd Division he also made frequent visits to Helmscherode and increased the value of his family estate. Then, in August, 1935, War Minister von Blomberg offered Keitel the post of chief of the *Wehrmachtamt* (Armed Forces Office). Although Keitel hesitated, his wife urged him to accept the appointment, which he eventually did.

Upon arriving in Berlin, General Keitel put aside his former reluctance and enthusiastically embraced his new role. Working closely with him was Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Jodl, the chief of Division "L" (National Defense). The two men developed an intimate professional relationship that lasted until the end of the Third Reich. Keitel labored tirelessly to promote his idea of a unified command structure for all three services and received encouragement from von Blomberg. However, all three branches of the armed forces—the Army, the Navy, and most especially Goering's Luftwaffe—rejected the idea, and Blomberg quickly abandoned the concept. That result caused Keitel to gravitate to the idea of absolute and unquestioning support of the Fuehrer (the "Fuehrer Principle") and subsequent personal loyalty to Hitler. After the war he presented a document at the Nuremberg Trials, wherein he stated that the Fuehrer Principle "applied throughout all areas and it is completely natural that it had a special application in military areas."³

Keitel was proud when, in January, 1938, his eldest son, Karl-Heinz, a second lieutenant of cavalry, became engaged to Dorothea von Blomberg, one of the war minister's daughters. There was also another wedding: Field Marshal von Blomberg, whose first wife had died several years earlier, married Eva Gruhn, a 24-year-old stenographer with the Reich Egg Marketing Board, in the middle of January. The Blomberg wedding was a small, quiet, civilian affair, with Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering appearing as witnesses. Little did anyone suspect that this simple ceremony would cause the crisis that would culminate in the final act of the Nazi Revolution.

Shortly after the Blombergs exchanged vows, a minor police official happened upon the dossier of a Margarethe Gruhn, which he immediately delivered to the office of Count Wolf-Heinrich Helldorf, the police president of Berlin. When he read it, Helldorf was appalled. Margarethe's past included prostitution and an arrest for posing for pornographic pictures. Helldorf, a former military officer, took the file to Keitel, hoping the chief of the Wehrmachtamt would suggest a proper and quiet procedure for having the matter settled. Were Margarethe Gruhn and Eva Gruhn the same person? Was the sex offender the same woman the war minister had recently married? Keitel did not know and suggested the file be taken to Hermann Goering, who had met the minister's wife. Keitel was apparently unaware that Goering was waiting for just such an

opportunity to have Blomberg sacked, so that he could take control of the war ministry himself. Goering went directly to Hitler and exposed the entire incident, which led to Blomberg's dismissal. Events did not work out exactly as Goering planned, however.

Following the ouster of Blomberg, Keitel was ordered to report to Hitler. The Fuehrer shocked Keitel by saying that he, Hitler, had to charge General von Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the German Army, with the criminal offense of homosexuality under Paragraph 175. Although the charges were the result of carefully produced lies by Heinrich Himmler and Goering (with the help of Reinhard Heydrich, Himmler's top man in the Security Service), and even though Fritsch was later acquitted by a military tribunal, the dismissals of Blomberg and Fritsch led to the creation of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (the High Command of the Armed Forces, or OKW) and the total subordination of the German armed forces to the will of Adolf Hitler.

On February 4, 1938, to Hermann Goering's private chagrin, the dictator personally assumed the post of war minister and simultaneously appointed Wilhelm Keitel commander-in-chief of OKW—thus providing himself with his own personal military staff. Why was Keitel chosen as chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces? Because the Fuehrer needed someone on whom he would rely to carry out his will and to keep his "house" in order—someone who would not question his orders and who would identify with the Fuehrer Principle. Keitel fit that role. He was, as General Walter Warlimont later wrote, "honestly convinced that his appointment required him to identify himself unquestioningly with the wishes and instructions of the Supreme Commander, even though he might not personally agree with this, and to represent them faithfully to all those involved."⁴

Keitel organized the OKW into three subdivisions: the Operations Staff, under Alfred Jodl; the Abwehr (the intelligence/counter-intelligence bureau), under Admiral Wilhelm Canaris; and the Economics Staff, directed by Major General Georg Thomas. All three sections were in direct competition with other agencies of the Third Reich. The OKW operations staff competed with the general staffs of the three services, but especially with the General Staff of the Army; the economics office had rivals in the Todt Organization and the Four Year Plan; and the Abwehr had overlapping responsibilities

with the army, air and naval intelligence staffs, with Ribbentrop's Foreign Office, and with Himmler's SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or Security Service), which finally absorbed the Abwehr in 1944.

While the above seems incongruous, the problems multiplied during the Nazi era. New organizational groups appeared throughout the history of the Third Reich, intensifying the competition and contributing to an eventual chaos of leadership in which only one individual could make important decisions and resolve crises—and he was named Adolf Hitler.

Crucial to the whole concept of high command was the relationship between the Fuehrer and Keitel, who trusted Hitler and served him very obediently. The OKW transmitted Fuehrer Orders and aided in coordinating the German economy to meet military demands. General Warlimont described the OKW as the "working staff" or even the "military bureau" of Hitler, the politician. Nonetheless, Keitel did exercise some early influence on at least two occasions: he succeeded in getting his own nominee, Walter von Brauchitsch, to replace General Fritsch, and in having his younger brother Bodewin named chief of the Army Personnel Office.

The OKW never performed as Keitel envisioned—that is, as a real command for the armed forces. Hitler literally used Keitel during the Austrian crisis in February, 1938, to bully Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg. When the war began in 1939 the chief of OKW merely performed desk duties. Actual operational planning was carried out by the General Staff of the Army. Keitel supported Hitler's attack on Poland, as well as the successful German invasions of Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France in 1940. Although the actual plan for the Norwegian campaign (Operation Weser) was drafted by Warlimont, Jodl, and Hitler, the OKW chief created the administrative structure to carry out the operation. This 43-day campaign ended successfully and was the only military operation coordinated by the OKW.

Along with the other generals, Keitel applauded Hitler's victory over France in June, 1940. Hitler paid tribute to Keitel by promoting him to field marshal on July 19, 1940, and by giving him an endowment of 100,000 Reichsmarks—a gift Keitel never spent because he felt he had not earned it. That same July Keitel took leave for a hunting trip to Pomerania and visited Helmscherode for a few days. Returning to duty in August, he worked on preparations

for Operation Sea Lion—the invasion of England (which, however, never took place).

Rather than attack his one remaining enemy, Hitler decided to invade the Soviet Union. Keitel was alarmed and voiced his objections directly to Hitler. The Fuehrer retorted that the conflict was inevitable, and therefore Germany must strike now, while she had the advantage. Keitel then wrote a memorandum outlining his objections. Hitler rebuked the field marshal savagely. Shocked and upset, Keitel suggested that Hitler replace him and appoint an OKW chief whose strategic judgment was more amenable to the Fuehrer. Hitler rejected Keitel's request for a front-line command and sharply criticized him. He shouted that he, the Fuehrer, would decide when to replace his chief of OKW. Keitel turned and left the room without a word. From then on Keitel submitted to the will of Adolf Hitler, almost without reservation, although he occasionally offered very weak objections to certain of the dictator's notions.

In March, 1941, Hitler secretly decided to wage a new kind of warfare, in which all restraints were cast aside. This war would be vicious and aimed at the total eradication of the enemy. Accordingly, Keitel issued Hitler's draconian Commissar Order, which called for the liquidation of Soviet political officers, who always accompanied Red Army troops. Keitel also affixed his signature to a decree of July, 1941, which specified that the Reichsfuehrer-SS (Heinrich Himmler) would politically administer all rearward areas in the East. This order was tantamount to endorsing mass murder.

Although Keitel tried unsuccessfully to soften some of the decrees coming from Hitler, the field marshal continued to obey his orders. Keitel had unbounded faith in Hitler, and the Fuehrer craftily exploited this relationship. A series of decrees aimed at subduing Soviet resistance emanated from Fuehrer Headquarters, including instructions to kill 50 to 100 Communists for every German soldier who died in occupied territory.⁵ These orders originated with Adolf Hitler but bore Wilhelm Keitel's signature.

The failure of the German armies to win a quick, decisive victory in Russia caused Hitler to berate his generals and call for even harsher measures. Keitel meekly succumbed to Hitler's outrages and continued to sign infamous orders, such as the *Nacht und Nebel* ("Night and Fog") decree of December 7, 1941, which directed that "persons endangering German security" were to vanish without

a trace, into the night and fog. The responsibility for carrying out this decree was assigned to the SD, and many resistance members and other anti-Nazis were secretly executed under the provisions of this order.⁶ In many cases their bodies were never found.

Although on occasion the OKW chief offered quiet objections to Hitler's proposals, he remained extremely loyal and was precisely the type of individual Hitler wanted in his entourage. Unfortunately, Keitel's behavior adversely affected the behavior of his subordinates. Keitel would not defend them and submitted to the will of the Fuehrer on almost every issue.⁷ Such irresoluteness led many officers to refer to him as "LaKaitel" (lackey).

On July 20, 1944, Colonel Count Claus von Stauffenberg planted his briefcase, containing a bomb, under the briefing table at the Wolf's Lair during a Fuehrer Conference. At 12:42 p.m. the bomb exploded. The chief of OKW was momentarily stunned, but as soon as he recovered, Keitel rushed to Hitler, shouting "Mein Fuehrer! Mein Fuehrer! You're still alive!" He then helped Hitler to his feet and embraced him wildly. Keitel supported the dazed Fuehrer as the two left the demolished wooden hut, which had been a briefing room only minutes before.

After the failure of this assassination attempt, Keitel became closer than ever to Hitler, and, as Albert Speer observed, Hitler leaned on Keitel.⁸ The OKW marshal showed no mercy in carrying out measures against the attempted coup. He arrested his own signals chief, General Erich Fellgiebel, and ordered the arrests of Colonel General Friedrich Fromm, the commander-in-chief of the Replacement Army, and Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben. Keitel displayed no sympathy for "disloyal" officers, such as Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, upon whom he had never wasted any love.⁹

During the final months of the war, as the Soviets continued their march to Berlin, Keitel issued decrees against enemy "terrorist activities."¹⁰ His accepting without question the need for brutal retaliation against partisans and saboteurs clearly indicated that Keitel had reached the point where he accepted Hitler's orders verbatim. During the Battle of Berlin Keitel completely lost his grasp of reality. He blamed General Walter Wenck and Field Marshal Ferdinand Schoerner for the fall of the capital, as well as Colonel General Gotthard Heinrici, who retreated to the west without authorization. Keitel failed to realize that Germany had lost the

war—no matter what these three officers did or failed to do.

On May 8, 1945, Wilhelm Keitel performed his last official act for Germany. Appearing in full-dress uniform, with his marshal's baton in hand, he signed the surrender document in the presence of the Soviets in Berlin. He then returned to Flensburg-Muervik, the seat of the rump German government, now headed by Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz. He was arrested there a few days later by the British military police and remained in custody for the remainder of his life.

Field Marshal Keitel was tried at Nuremberg, where he admitted his responsibility for carrying out Hitler's orders. Although his honesty did not lessen his crimes, he nonetheless faced his accusers truthfully. He was found guilty of committing crimes against peace, of war crimes, and of crimes against humanity. On October 16, 1946, Wilhelm Keitel was hanged. As he dropped through the gaping hole, he shouted his last words: "Deutschland über Alles!" (Germany above all!)

Field Marshal Keitel had naïvely believed that in serving Hitler he served the German people. He realized only after the war that his actions were wrong—something he did not grasp during the seven-year period from 1938 to 1945, when he helped Hitler carry out his demonic policies and wage his war. In the end, Keitel unconsciously aided in dooming the Prussian officer corps, which, in his own inept way, he had tried to defend.

* * *

BODEWIN KEITEL was born at Helmscherode on December 25, 1888, six years after his brother Wilhelm. He entered the Imperial Army as a *Fahnenjunker* in 1909 and was commissioned second lieutenant in the 10th Jaeger Battalion the following year. He fought in World War I, served in the *Reichswehr* (as the armed forces of the Weimar Republic were called), and was a lieutenant colonel when Hitler came to power in 1933. He was promoted to full colonel in 1934.

Shortly after Hitler named Wilhelm Keitel commander-in-chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces on February 4, 1938, Wilhelm—then at the height of his power—used his influence to secure advancement for his younger brother. Bodewin was promoted to major general and was named chief of the Army Personnel Office

on March 1, 1938. Later promoted to lieutenant general, he became a general of infantry on October 1, 1941.

Bodewin's fortunes fluctuated in direct relation to those of his more famous older brother. In September, 1942, a dispute between Hitler and Wilhelm's chief of operations, Colonel General Alfred Jodl (see below), threw the elder Keitel into temporary disfavor with the Fuehrer. As a result, Bodewin was replaced as chief of the personnel office by Major General Rudolf Schmudt. The younger Keitel was sent to Danzig, where he assumed command of Wehrkreis XX (XX Military District), which exercised territorial jurisdiction over the former Danzig Free State, the old Polish Corridor area, and the western part of East Prussia. Bodewin Keitel was in charge of recruiting, drafting, and training replacements in this region, as well as forming new divisions and rebuilding old ones, until November 30, 1944. Then, with his military district already threatened by the Soviets, Keitel was replaced as Wehrkreis commander by General of Infantry Karl-Wilhelm Specht.¹¹ Keitel was left without a command. Apparently unemployed for several months, he was named inspector of fusilier and support organizations on April 1, 1945.

Of even less real consequence than his brother, Bodewin Keitel surrendered without fanfare at the end of the war. Not indicted as a war criminal, he was released from Allied captivity in 1947 or 1948. He then quietly retired to Goetzenhof d. Bodenfelde, where he died in 1952.

* * *

ALFRED JODL was born in Würzburg on May 10, 1890. His father was a retired Bavarian artillery captain who had been compelled to leave active duty because of his intended marriage to a Franconian girl from a simple milling and farming family. Alfred was one of the five children produced by this union. There were three daughters, all of whom died at an early age, and another son, Ferdinand, who rose to the rank of general of mountain troops during World War II.

Young Alfred Jodl joined the cadet corps as a student and later entered the 4th Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment in 1910. He was commissioned to second lieutenant in 1912. Shortly thereafter he married his first wife, Countess Irma von Bullion, of an established

Swabian family, despite the objections of her father, Colonel Count von Bullion. The Countess, who was five years his senior, was an intelligent and vivacious socialite whom Alfred dearly loved.

Jodl saw action as an artillery officer on both the French and Russian fronts in the Great War of 1914-1918. During the first month of the war he was wounded by a grenade splinter but soon recovered and returned to the front. He remained in the army after the war and began his clandestine General Staff training in 1920. His superiors were very happy with his performance, and a typical officer fitness report from his period described him as "very thoughtful, decisive, energetic, a good sportsman, eager, an excellent leader and suitable for higher command."¹² During the Weimar era Jodl served as a staff officer, was promoted through the junior officer ranks, and, as a major, received an appointment to the operations branch of the Troop Office (*Truppenamt*), as the secret General Staff was called.

Jodl was a highly respected officer; however, his unbridled enthusiasm for Hitler and the Nazi Party created a chasm between himself and many other officers—a gap that was never bridged. In 1935 Jodl (by then a colonel) entered the Armed Forces Office (*Wehrmachtamt*), and when Hitler created the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW), Jodl took charge of the National Defense Office. A few weeks later, in March, 1938, Lieutenant General Max von Viebahn suffered a nervous breakdown because he feared war would result over the Austrian crisis. Jodl replaced him as chief of operations of OKW.

Colonel Jodl took on his new task with enthusiasm and leveled harsh criticisms at the army generals (such as Ludwig Beck) who, following a Hitler talk on August 10, claimed Germany was not ready for war. Jodl, writing in his diary, called the generals' attitude "pusillanimous" and wrote that they should focus on military strategy, not political decisions. He further noted that it was a tragedy that the whole nation supported the Fuehrer with one exception: army generals. He castigated the generals for not recognizing Hitler's "genius."¹³ Without question, Jodl had unbridled faith in Hitler and truly believed the Fuehrer was politically infallible.

Although Jodl now assumed Hitler would utilize the OKW Operations Staff to plan his military campaigns, the Fuehrer turned instead to OKH (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, the High Command of

the Army) in the early planning stages. Meanwhile, Jodl was promoted to major general in 1939 and assumed command of what was to become the 44th Infantry Division in Vienna. An avid mountaineer, his hopes were heightened when General Keitel (the chief of OKW and brother of the chief of the Army Personnel Office) discussed the possibility of Jodl's receiving command of the 2nd Mountain Division in early October, 1939; however, he did not get to command this or any other mountain division because the war intervened.¹⁴

On August 23, 1939, Keitel telegraphed Jodl to return to OKW as chief of operations; there he would conduct the planning for the attack on Poland (Case White). Jodl would remain in this post throughout the war, receiving a promotion to general of artillery in 1940 and to colonel general on January 30, 1944 (the 11th anniversary of the Nazis' assumption of power). He bypassed the rank of lieutenant general altogether. He enjoyed his first personal conversation with Hitler on the Fuehrer's train during the Polish campaign and remained loyally at Hitler's side until the end of the war.

Due to the fact that Hitler turned to OKH to direct the campaigns against Poland (1939) and France (1940), Jodl made the decision to support Hitler whenever disagreements arose between OKH and the Fuehrer. According to his deputy, Walter Warlimont, Jodl initiated an order in May, 1940, directing the 1st Mountain Division to turn south (i.e., carry out a Hitler order) without OKH approval. Such an action—in direct violation of the military principle of unity of command—is evidence of both Jodl's outspoken support for Hitler, as well as of his frustration (shared by his superior, Keitel) with the lack of command authority of the OKW.

Operation Weser (the invasion of Norway) finally gave OKW an opportunity to exercise direct operational control. The Fuehrer sealed Weser for OKW by appointing General of Infantry Nikolaus von Falkenhorst as commanding general of the operation and as commander of Group XXI.¹⁵ Normally, such command assignments were made by OKH and then sent to Hitler for routine approval. Hitler further decreed that Falkenhorst was to serve directly under him and that Falkenhorst's staff be composed of officers from all three services. Consequently, Weser came directly under Hitler's command through the OKW.

The operation was planned principally by Jodl and his staff. The German invasion of Norway caught the British (who were themselves planning to occupy Norway) completely by surprise. Although the campaign succeeded, a particularly tense situation developed when the British destroyed 10 German destroyers that had escorted Major General Eduard Dietl's landing force to Narvik in northern Norway. The British also landed a large number of troops north of Narvik on April 14. A worried Hitler frantically ordered that Dietl's troops be instructed to fall back to the south.

Jodl realized the folly of Hitler's judgment. To abandon the battle merely because the enemy threatened the Narvik position might endanger the entire campaign. Jodl pointed out to Hitler that a march south would not only be impossible, but could well result in considerable loss of airplanes, which would then have to land on frozen lakes to resupply the mountain troops. Hitler, having calmed down, agreed to postpone a decision. However, on April 17, the Navy suggested that Dietl's group might be destroyed and thus rekindled Hitler's anxieties. Even Goering entered the fray against OKW, claiming there was now no way the Luftwaffe could assist Dietl. Hitler came completely apart and, screaming, ordered Dietl's withdrawal from Narvik (after promoting him to lieutenant general). Jodl's staff was astounded. Lieutenant Colonel Bernhard von Lossberg, of the OKW planning staff, refused to send the order to Dietl, and Jodl confronted the Fuehrer directly.

Pounding the table with his fist, Jodl told Hitler that Dietl's group should fight where it stood and not give up. Jodl emphasized that the position had not been lost and should not be passively surrendered. Hitler finally succumbed to Jodl's stubbornness and allowed Dietl to remain at Narvik. By the end of the month it was clear that Jodl had been correct and that the Germans were winning the Norwegian campaign. Hitler was pleased and asked Jodl to join him for lunch. For the next two years Jodl sat at Hitler's table for meals. The Fuehrer had great confidence in Jodl's military judgment as a result of Operation Weser, and, for his part, Jodl's faith in Hitler remained unimpaired.

Alfred Jodl thus became invited into the so-called inner circle of Adolf Hitler. This entourage consisted primarily of civilians; furthermore, as Albert Speer told Dr. Mueller, all were silent, loyal admirers who would listen for hours on end to the Fuehrer's monologues.

Jodl's participation caused the OKW general considerable grief, for it separated him from his staff; and, since he was a soldier, Jodl considered himself to be merely a "guest."¹⁶ Nonetheless, he basked in the glory of Germany's victories in 1940.

Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Soviet Russia, added another front for the German armed forces. Jodl was skeptical of the prospects for success (Keitel openly objected to the attack), but the OKW chief of operations believed the Fuehrer's genius would defeat the hated Bolshevik empire. Barbarossa was an OKH theater, while OKW's task was to make certain that Hitler's directives were followed. At the situation conferences Hitler turned more and more to Jodl for advice, rather than to General Franz Halder, the OKH chief of staff, even though OKH directed operations in the campaign.

A Byzantine atmosphere emerged at Hitler's HQ, with Jodl and other staff officers on center stage with Hitler. As a result, Jodl "became divorced from his own staff" and even "contrived to bypass Keitel and establish a direct relationship with Hitler."¹⁷ Jodl was drawn to Hitler by the Fuehrer's willpower, revolutionary thinking, and initial successes. Jodl believed Hitler had a "sixth sense" and would continue to achieve great victories.¹⁸

The strategic decisions regarding the Eastern Front brought about the first crisis between Hitler and Jodl. In August, 1942, when Jodl defended Halder against Hitler's criticisms, Hitler flew into an almost uncontrollable rage and never again joined Jodl at meals or shook hands with him. A second, more serious crisis occurred in September, when Hitler became impatient with the lack of progress of Field Marshal Siegmund Wilhelm List's Army Group A in the Caucasus sector. The Fuehrer sent Jodl to List's headquarters to investigate the situation and to press for a faster advance. To Hitler's surprise and anger, Jodl returned and defended List's analysis of the situation. An argument ensued between the two men, resulting in Hitler's decision to replace Jodl with General Friedrich Paulus after the expected victory at Stalingrad. This victory, of course, never came. Paulus surrendered to the Russians, and Jodl remained at OKW.

Although Hitler treated Jodl with a cold shoulder for awhile, the Fuehrer came to realize that Jodl was indispensable. For his part, Jodl remained loyal to Hitler and continued to carry out his orders. Indeed, the relationship between the two strengthened during the

remainder of the war. To his credit, however, Jodl flatly refused to issue Hitler's Commando Order, which called for the execution of captured enemy commando troops. Nonetheless, even though he realized that after Stalingrad the war could not be won, Jodl believed he must continue to obey and support his supreme commander.

The spring following the Stalingrad disaster Jodl suffered a personal tragedy. His loving wife went to Koenigsberg to undergo major spinal surgery. When the Allies launched their first major bombing raid against this East Prussian city, she was forced to seek protection in a cold and damp air raid shelter. As a result she contracted double pneumonia, which, in her already weakened condition, proved fatal shortly thereafter.¹⁹ Later that year, in November, Jodl married Louise von Benda, who had admired him for some time. She stood by him throughout his agonizing postwar trial at Nuremberg and took it upon herself to successfully vindicate her husband at the *Hauptspruchkammer* proceedings in Munich in 1953.²⁰

During the final 18 months of the war, Jodl continued to labor at Fuehrer Headquarters. The general suffered minor injuries during the July 20, 1944, explosion at the Rastenburg HQ, when Count von Stauffenberg narrowly missed assassinating the dictator. The blast drew both Keitel and Jodl closer to the Fuehrer. Jodl remained with Hitler in Berlin until late April, 1945, when he left for Admiral Doenitz's command post. Ironically, one of the last orders Hitler issued (April 25) placed supreme command authority in the hands of OKW. It came too late and was a clear reminder of how the dispersion of authority hampered the German war effort. By then defeat was certain, and Hitler recognized that his loyal commanders were, as he told Goebbels, exhausted.²¹

The end came soon after Jodl left the Fuehrer Bunker. Colonel General Alfred Jodl bore the responsibility of signing the document by which Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. He did so at Rheims on May 7, 1945, with tears rolling down his face.

Jodl (along with Doenitz and his government) was arrested on May 23, 1945, and held for trial at Nuremberg. His defense was honest and befitting a soldier who carried out his duties. As Albert Speer wrote: "Jodl's precise and sober defense was rather imposing. He seemed to be one of the few men who stood above the situation."²² Under interrogation, Jodl insisted that a soldier cannot

be held responsible for political decisions and stated that Hitler's decisions were absolute. He faithfully followed the Fuehrer, he said, and believed the war to be a just cause. The tribunal, however, rejected his arguments, found him guilty, and sentenced him to death by hanging. While at Nuremberg, Jodl dictated a letter to the wife of his defense counsel, concluding with the following words: "He [Hitler] had himself buried in the ruins of the Reich and his hopes. May whoever wishes to condemn him for it do so—I cannot."²³ At 2 a.m. on October 16, 1946, Colonel General Alfred Jodl was hanged. Later that morning his body was cremated, and his ashes were secretly scattered beside an anonymous stream somewhere in the German countryside.

* * *

FERDINAND JODL, unlike his older brother Alfred, was not an officer of the high command, but his career is briefly sketched here as a matter of convenience.

The younger Jodl was born in Landau on November 28, 1896. Educated in cadet schools, he entered the service as a war volunteer with his brother's 4th Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment when World War I broke out. After fighting in Lorraine, he received his commission as a second lieutenant on September 19, 1914. The junior Jodl apparently spent the entire conflict on the Western Front. After the war he served in the Reichsheer, became a member of the General Staff, and was a lieutenant colonel and Ia (operations officer) of the XII Corps when the Second World War began. Appendix II shows the German General Staff positions during World War II.

Ferdinand Jodl initially served on the Western Front during the "Phoney War" of 1939-40. During the campaign in France he was elevated to chief of staff of the XII Corps and was promoted to full colonel on November 1, 1940. A week before, he had been named chief of staff of the newly formed XXXIX Mountain Corps, which had been assigned the task of planning and conducting the German seizure of Gibraltar. OKH opposed this plan, and it was eventually cancelled; in April, 1941, the XXXIX was used in the invasion of Yugoslavia, where it took part in some heavy fighting during the first week of the campaign. It was then sent to the Eastern Front, where it fought at Lemberg, in the Uman encirclement, at Stalino,

on the Mius, and in the capture of and subsequent retreat from Rostov. During these operations the capable Jodl proved himself to be a highly competent staff officer, and on January 14, 1942, he became chief of staff of General of Mountain Troops Eduard Dietl's 20th Mountain Army, then serving in Lapland. Jodl was promoted to major general on September 1, 1942.

Apparently, service in the harsh tundra climate following three years of active campaigning undermined Jodl's health, for he stepped down as chief of staff of the mountain army on March 2, 1943, and did not see further active service for more than a year. He was nevertheless promoted to lieutenant general on September 1, 1943, and when he returned to duty on May 15, 1944, it was as commander of the XIX Mountain Corps in Lapland. He was promoted to general of mountain troops on September 1, 1944.

During Operation Nordlicht—the retreat to northern Norway from northern Russia and Finland—Ferdinand Jodl fought his most exacting campaign of the war. With only the 2nd and 6th Mountain divisions, plus an ad hoc division and a few security and fortress battalions, Jodl successfully extricated his corps despite repeated attacks by six Soviet divisions and 10 independent brigades.²⁴ He was, however, able to save only one-third of his stockpiled supplies; the rest had to be destroyed or abandoned to the Soviets.

On December 1, 1944, following a successful retreat down the Arctic Ocean Highway and into northern Norway, Jodl was named acting commander of Army Detachment Narvik (*Armeeteilung Narvik*), consisting of the XIX and XXXVI Mountain corps. The fighting was virtually over in the northern theater, however, and Jodl remained in charge of a relatively inactive sector until the end of the war. He surrendered to the Western Allies in May, 1945.

Although Ferdinand Jodl did not owe his advancement to his powerful and influential brother, having a strong advocate close to the Fuehrer did him no professional harm, either. Not implicated in any war crimes, the younger Jodl was released from captivity in 1947 or 1948. He retired to West Germany and died in Essen in 1956.²⁵

* * *

BERNHARD LOSSBERG, who was described by David Irving as “a towering figure with a game leg and a fearless nature,”²⁶ was born

in Berlin on July 26, 1899. His father had a brilliant career as a General Staff officer in the Kaiser's army, ending up as chief of staff of the 4th Army in Flanders in 1918. Bernhard entered the service in 1916 (just before his 17th birthday) and saw action in the Great War as a member of the elite 2nd Grenadier Regiment in France. He was commissioned second lieutenant in 1917.

Selected for the Reichsheer, young Lossberg served in the 5th Infantry Regiment from 1920 to 1926. He was promoted to first lieutenant in 1925 and joined the staff of the 3rd Infantry Division in 1930. Lossberg was then posted to the staff of Wehrkreis III in Berlin²⁷ and while there received his promotion to captain on January 4, 1933. Recognized for his hard work and ability to assimilate data into meaningful military strategy, he was assigned to the Defense Ministry and was promoted to major in 1936.

With the expansion of the Wehrmacht in Hitler's Reich, Lossberg was transferred to the 44th Infantry Regiment at Bartenstein, East Prussia, to assist in training. He continued to impress his superiors and in 1938 was attached to the OKW to plan joint service maneuvers. On January 2, 1939, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and later that month assumed duties with the OKW Planning Staff, where he remained for much of World War II.

Early on, Lossberg (along with Warlimont, Jodl, and others) envisioned a unified command structure for the armed forces. Although Wilhelm Keitel, the chief of OKW, supported this very rational concept, Hitler rejected it; indeed, the Fuehrer treated the armed forces as he did other state functions, by dividing authority and power. In any event, Lossberg continued his work on operational plans for OKW, including Case White—the invasion of Poland. In August, 1939, Lossberg and Keitel were invited to Hitler's home in Munich. The Fuehrer assured both officers that Case White would "never" be cause for a world war. Events were to prove otherwise.

The first major challenge for the OKW was the Norwegian campaign. Serving directly as Hitler's personal staff, the OKW operations staff planned the invasion, with Hitler acting as commander-in-chief of the operation. While the Germans successfully landed forces in Narvik in early April, 1940, the British sank all the German Navy's destroyers there and threatened Dietl's combat group at Narvik with defeat or with internment in Sweden.

Hitler was on the edge of despair. For the first time he exhibited the panic and indecisiveness that he sometimes showed later. On April 14 a nervous and agitated Fuehrer told Keitel to order Dietl to evacuate Narvik. "The hysteria is frightful," Jodl wrote in his diary. The coded message was given to Lossberg, who angrily refused to send it. Instead, he visited Jodl, who sent him to see Colonel General Walter von Brauchitsch, the commander-in-chief of the Army. Lossberg wanted him to appeal to Hitler to reverse this decision, but the weak-willed Brauchitsch refused on the grounds that he had nothing to do with the Norwegian campaign. He did, however, sign another message to Dietl (apparently drafted by Lossberg), congratulating him on his promotion to lieutenant general and stating: "I am sure you will defend your position [i.e., Narvik] to the last man." Lossberg then returned to Jodl and tore up Keitel's handwritten message before his eyes.²⁸

Adolf Hitler, however, still paced nervously. He sent Lossberg to General von Falkenhorst's headquarters near Oslo to observe the situation. Lossberg returned on April 22 and reported that the British had landed only 5,000 troops. Once again Hitler panicked and suggested how Falkenhorst should move his forces. Lossberg rejoined that the general controlled all the key points and Hitler should leave everything in Falkenhorst's hands—in other words, Hitler should mind his own business. The Nazi dictator did not enjoy being lectured to and for weeks afterward would not allow Lossberg into his presence. The colonel's analysis, however, proved correct, and Falkenhorst's forces seized control of the entire country.

Meanwhile, Lossberg returned to his operational planning duties at OKW, and his next task was a significant one indeed. He carried out a feasibility study of a Russian campaign. Lossberg finished his 30-page report in July, 1940, and gave it the code name "Fritz"—his son's name. Lossberg stated that for Germany to defeat Russia the Berlin and Silesian industrial areas would have to be protected from enemy bombing. Hence, the invasion must penetrate deep into the Soviet Union, allowing the Luftwaffe to devastate important rear areas.

The primary targets in the Russian campaign, Lossberg concluded, should be Leningrad and the north, where better roads and railroads existed (or at least the Abwehr reported them to exist). German success there would also remove Soviet influence from the Baltic

region and would bring both Leningrad and Moscow under German artillery fire. Furthermore, the push north would be bolstered by Group XXI, operating from Norway via Finland. He proposed the thrust north as follows: "An attack by two army groups from the general line east of Warsaw to Koenigsberg, with the southern group the more powerful [the group assembling around Warsaw and southern East Prussia] and being allocated the bulk of the armored and mechanized units."²⁹ The key to the success of his plan would be the encirclement of the Soviet armies from the north and their failure to withstand a rapid onslaught. Lossberg also wrote that Russia's only hope would be to take the offensive and invade the Rumanian oil fields. Such a move would be forestalled by a German-Rumanian military agreement. Besides, Lossberg argued, the Soviets would not abandon the Baltic region, which they had seized only a few months before.

Although OKH drafted the operational plan for what was to be code-named "Barbarossa," it basically followed Lossberg's plan, except that a third army group (Army Group South) was added. Although the Wehrmacht invasion of Russia proceeded rapidly in the summer of 1941, the invading armies bogged down in the mud of early winter. Then they struggled forward—but only very slowly—in subfreezing temperatures. Once again concern appeared on the faces of the men at Fuehrer Headquarters, with army generals pleading for a retreat so defensive lines could be set up. Hitler, however, insisted that the Wehrmacht continue the advance. Lossberg, believing there to be a need for a firm, unified command, tried to convince Jodl to form a unitary German Staff to coordinate all services. It should be commanded by an officer who clearly demonstrated exceptional leadership—General Erich von Manstein. Jodl refused, for he knew that Manstein and Hitler did not get along.

Later that winter, sensing Lossberg's criticisms, Hitler demanded that the colonel be replaced. (The Fuehrer had not forgotten the Norwegian incident, either.) On January 1, 1942, Lossberg was promoted to full colonel and became Ia (operations officer) on the staff of the Wehrmacht Commander, Norway (i.e., Falkenhorst). After two and a half years in this backwater theater, Lossberg was named chief of staff to the Special Commissioner, Danube, in June, 1944, and was promoted to major general on September 1, 1944. His last assignment was as chief of staff of Wehrkreis VIII, head-

quartered in Breslau, a post he held until the Replacement Army was dissolved and its various components were sent to the fronts in March, 1945. Apparently without an assignment at the end of the war, Bernhard Lossberg retired to Wiesbaden. He was still living there in the late 1950s.

* * *

GEORG THOMAS, the son of a factory owner, was born into an upper-middle-class family in Brandenburg on February 20, 1890. He entered the Imperial Army in 1908 and received his commission as a second lieutenant in the 63rd Infantry Regiment in 1910. By 1914 he was adjutant of the III Battalion of the 63rd Infantry and during the Great War served on various regimental staffs, as well as the General Staff. He was promoted to captain on April 18, 1917, and ultimately served on the staff of the 6th Infantry Division in France. Thomas earned the respect of the men with whom he worked and proved to be daring in combat. He received several decorations, including the House Order of Hohenzollern; the Iron Cross, First Class; the Wounded Badge; the Cross of Honor for War Service, Saxe-Meiningen; and the Austro-Hungarian Military Service Award, Third Class.

After the war, Thomas joined the Reichsheer, served on the staff of the 4th Infantry Division at Dresden, and in 1928 was assigned to the staff of the Army Ordnance Department. He received his promotion to major on February 1, 1929, and became chief of staff of the Ordnance Department in 1930. During his years (1928-38) with army ordnance, the highly gifted Thomas thoroughly studied the economic aspects of preparing for war (as well as prosecuting the war) and, in applying the lessons learned from World War I to his studies, concluded that economic warfare was equally as significant as armed warfare.³⁰ A nation's economic resources, Thomas argued, must be constantly inventoried for their most effective wartime use, and this must also be a major factor in preparing for war. Hence, through several written memoranda to his superiors, Thomas pushed forward the concept of a centralized agency supervising a "defense economy" to enable Germany to make the most effective use of its economic resources, especially in the production of armaments.

Although Thomas's proposal was an ambitious one, given the

complexities of an industrial society, it was the stubbornness of the three services that doomed his ideas. The Army, Navy and Air Force insisted on supervising their own armaments programs. Consequently, the armed forces looked upon Thomas as only an adviser. "Thomas' staff never managed to exert any decisive influence on essential decisions regarding armaments," Wilhelm Deist wrote later.³¹ Undaunted, Thomas continued with the economic preparations for war. His accomplishments and abilities were rewarded when he was promoted to major general on January 1, 1938, and was again promoted on January 1, 1940, to lieutenant general.

Already skeptical about the Nazi government, Thomas became more disillusioned after the Fritsch affair in 1938, during which Hitler removed Colonel General Baron Werner von Fritsch as commander-in-chief of the Army on trumped-up charges of participating in homosexual activity. Even though he was subsequently cleared of the false charges, Baron von Fritsch was not reemployed. After this incident, Thomas could no longer accept National Socialism and later described his decision as "my complete inner breach with this system."³² As a result, he began discussions with two conspirators—General Ludwig Beck (who resigned as chief of the General Staff in August, 1938) and Carl Goerdeler (the mayor of Leipzig)—primarily to explore ways of preventing a conflagration that Germany could not survive.

In late summer, 1939, a concerned Thomas submitted a memorandum to the Chief of OKW, Colonel General Wilhelm Keitel, warning that an attack on Poland would lead to a world war for which the Reich was economically unprepared. Keitel scoffed at the notion and refused to act on Thomas's memorandum. An obsessed Thomas responded with a more detailed report containing tables and graphs "illustrating the economic warfare capacity of Germany and other great powers, from which Germany's inferiority clearly emerged."³³ This time Keitel looked with astonishment at the analysis and forwarded the report to Hitler. The Fuehrer responded nonchalantly, telling Keitel that the general should not worry, as the Soviet Union (one of the great powers cited by Thomas) would cooperate with Germany. To Keitel the matter was ended; for Thomas it had just begun.

Thomas still believed that the conflict Hitler initiated when he

invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, ultimately would lead to Germany's destruction. He therefore became intimately involved with the conspirators (Beck, Goerdeler, and associates) who were trying to devise a plan to remove Hitler and other top Nazis from their positions of power. During November, 1939, Thomas attempted to convince General Franz Halder, the chief of the General Staff, and General Walter von Brauchitsch, the commander-in-chief of the Army, to arrest Hitler. Both men adamantly refused, with Halder citing the soldier's duty to obey his supreme commander (Hitler). Brauchitsch was even more upset and suggested to Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the chief of the Abwehr, that Thomas be arrested. The enigmatic Canaris—himself a peripheral member of the anti-Hitler conspiracy—hushed up the whole affair. Concerned with the possibility of German armies invading neutral countries, Thomas again tried to convince Halder to take some action; Thomas showed Halder a message from Dr. Josef Mueller, a Bavarian lawyer friendly with Pope Pius XI, which stated that if both Hitler and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop were eliminated, the Vatican would intercede to bring about peace. Halder again rejected Thomas's pleas.

Failure to convince others to act against Hitler subdued Thomas's conspiratorial activities for a while. Following the successful German invasion of Denmark and Norway in the spring of 1940, a discouraged Thomas decided to let fate run its course. By then he had been promoted to general of infantry (on August 1, 1940) and had become head of the Economic Department and Armament Office of the Army (in addition to his duties at OKW). Although he conscientiously carried out his duties, his efforts were still plagued by the inter-service rivalry mentioned earlier.

Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union in June, 1941, once again stirred the despondent Thomas. During late August and early September, he journeyed to the Russian Front, visiting several army groups to gauge possible support for a coup against Hitler. Although he received no direct assent to such a plan, General Thomas was "moderately satisfied," according to fellow conspirator Ulrich von Hassell, the former ambassador to Italy.³⁴

It was during this trip to the Eastern Front that Thomas witnessed the murder of Jews by the *Einsatzgruppen*—the mobile killing units of the SS and SD. An infuriated Thomas shared his experience with Baron Friedrich von Falkenhausen, another active conspirator, and

the two of them visited Field Marshal von Brauchitsch. They wanted to ascertain how Brauchitsch now felt about the Hitler regime. Brauchitsch responded by pointing out to his visitors that it was his duty to obey his Fuehrer. Thomas then blurted out that Brauchitsch was partly responsible for the murder of the Jews. The field marshal walked away without replying.

A rebuffed Thomas returned to his duties and on May 6, 1942, was appointed to the Armaments Council. Although he still disdained the Nazi regime, he carried out his duties and participated in the planning, for example, of the economic exploitation of occupied Russia. Later that month, in fact, he was appointed chief of the new Armaments Office of the Reich Ministry for Armaments and Munitions. Although he had an impressive title, economic authority was still divided, with Albert Speer (Hitler's designated munitions expert) assuming more and more control. Consequently, Thomas resigned his post in the armaments and munitions ministry on November 20, 1942. He continued his duties at OKW, however.

Thomas took no further part in the anti-Hitler conspiracy after the Casablanca Conference of January, 1943. At the conclusion of these meetings U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that the Allies would accept nothing less than the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Since Thomas saw that the war was clearly lost and that no alternative German government could expect any softening of the Allied terms, the general felt that the assassination of Hitler would serve no purpose except to make Hitler a martyr in the eyes of the German people.³⁵

After the July 20, 1944, assassination attempt, papers were discovered that implicated Thomas as a possible conspirator. Although the Nazi Tribunal failed to uncover any direct evidence linking Thomas with the attempt on Hitler's life, he was nevertheless arrested and sent to the prison camp at Flossenburg. He also spent time at Dachau Concentration Camp and was finally imprisoned in a concentration camp in South Tyrol, Italy. As the war came to an end Thomas was rescued by American troops and quickly freed. He moved to Frankfurt-am-Main, but his health had been broken during his imprisonment, and he died there in 1946.

* * *

WALTER BUHLE was born in Heilbronn, Wuerttemberg, on October 26,