

Chapter 26

December 1945

The recorders meet with me again in my living quarters at 7:00 P.M.

“Greetings. How are you this evening?”

“Couldn’t be better,” says Krieger, “except for Thoet, who has a bad cold.”

“I’m anxious to get home to Berlin. I’ve had a letter from my wife, brought here by a direct-flying plane. She and my two daughters are having a hard time making it on the short rations card.” Reynitz is grim.

“I see. Wish I could help. The only thing I can think of is to get you a ride on one of those direct-flying planes. I’ll look into it. Let’s begin where we left off last. Who’ll start?” I ask.

“I will,” says Krieger, leaning forward in his chair and speaking slowly. “Hitler’s domain was shrinking. His forces were pounded with

greater intensity on all fronts. There was much bad news. Russians were advancing in Poland. The Allies made landings several places in Italy. The Allies were now united under the American general, Dwight Eisenhower. Almost all the news for Hitler was getting worse, especially from Russia,” Krieger concludes.

“The tables were finally turning against Hitler, as well they should be. What about taking slave laborers from other countries? That is a violation of the Hague Treaty.” I address Hans Jonuschat, who is the best on legal questions.

“In March 1944, the question came up about the Hague Treaty and that taking millions of foreign workers from occupied countries was in violation of the treaty. Hitler said he didn’t care about the Hague Treaty. He had said the same thing several times before: ‘Whatever you do—if you win—it’s unimportant. Nobody will ask. I am right in putting these people to work, to give me manpower to replace those drafted into military service.’”



Fritz Saukel

Jonuschat goes on: “Gauleiter Fritz Saukel had been appointed directly by Hitler sometime before, and in 1944 he was ordered to speed up the drive to get able-bodied civilian workers from eastern Europe and Russia to do armament work in the concentration camps.”

“Did Hitler say anything about concentration camps?” I ask.

Reynitz moves forward in his chair: “I feel sure Hitler did not know all of the mistreatment and killings that went on in the concen-

tration camps down to the last detail. But he certainly knew these civilians from occupied areas were slave laborers and worked against their will. He had private conferences with Heinrich Himmler and Albert Speer many times. I recorded a conference between Hitler and Speer about these camps. He didn't care about details. He wanted to get the manpower to make armaments.

"This had been going on for two years, but in 1944 I'm sure it was stepped up considerably, as manpower became acute because of the heavy losses in Russia," Reynitz recollects.

"Heavy losses is putting it mildly. It was actually disastrous. What about Allied air bombings in Germany?" I ask him.

"Everything was worse than ever. Berlin was bombed several times. One time I went to Berlin on leave, and I saw a macadam street burning. The incendiary bombs were the worst. I also saw many that had not detonated.

"One of the typists had a letter from a relative in Frankfurt saying much of the city was in rubble," recalls Reynitz.

"I had leave for about eight or ten days about every six months. It gave me the opportunity to talk with my family and friends. They brought me up to date on what was going on inside Germany, especially from Allied air bombing," he says.

"What effect did the bombing in Germany have on the people you talked with?"

Reynitz, still erect in his chair, looks at me, and the others look at him. "The influence of the bombing on the population was astonishing. There was demoralization of the people. I suppose that was the aim of the Allies. But I think in many cases the influence was to the contrary. If a man lost everything, had no place to sleep and little

food, he would say, 'Now there is nothing else to lose, and we must learn to fight better and to work harder.'"

"What did Hitler say about Allied bombings of Germany? It seems to me he would comment about this." I glance at Jonuschat.

"In several military conferences, Allied air raids on German cities were discussed. Hitler was angry and said, 'We can fight terror only with more terror. Why can't I find out what our bomber planes are doing to cities in Britain?'"

Jonuschat continues: "Hitler said in a conference that the V-1 missile was inaccurate, and he was upset that he could not find out what damage it did. He relied more on the V-2 rocket, which could be aimed more accurately, was supersonic, and could not be shot down by enemy fighters. Hitler still hoped to bomb the British into submission, to stop their bombing of German cities. But he was angry when told that no one could measure the damage in Britain." Jonuschat finishes and leans back in the davenport.

"Were any of your residences bombed?" I glance at Buchholz.

"Yes. One day my colleague and I were in the room with Hitler before the conference started. I told Hitler that Thoet's apartment building in Berlin was destroyed, and my apartment was severely damaged. His comment was: 'It will be rebuilt, and then it will be better than before.' He also said, 'I know the British. They are stubborn people. They will go on with that until the bitter end.'"

Buchholz goes on: "Later, in a military conference, he warned Goering not to neglect fighting against British bombers with his fighter planes. Goering complained that he did not have enough planes and that over 75 percent were on the Russian front. He said Allied bombs were falling on German homes, railroads, highways, and

even in the fields. He called it 'area bombing.' Hitler made no reply.

"The apartment where I had lived was in a suburban residential quarters. There were some anti-aircraft barracks nearby, but they had few weapons. They couldn't do much to stop the bombing at night.

"At a conference one day, Goering described how aluminum foil was dropped from Allied planes to foul up the German radar," Buchholz concludes.

"Jonuschat, you told me about Hitler's avoidance of looking at physical destruction. Can you give me an example?"

"He refused to look at any destruction in Germany. If the headquarters railway train passed through rubble, the shades on the windows were pulled down by his order or that of an adjutant or Bormann, who knew Hitler's wishes."

Jonuschat continues: "One time—I think it was at Leipzig—the headquarters train, on its way to Berlin, stopped in a switchyard alongside a train from Russia that was evacuating wounded German soldiers. I was told Hitler became angry and ordered all the shades drawn on that side along the whole train."

"The next major event?"

Jonuschat sits erect and intense, his feet flat on the floor: "Hitler was told the Allied forces were strong and moving northward toward Rome. In June 1944, he said, 'Rome is such a historic city, and it should be saved from ruin by a major battle. I have ordered [Field Marshal Albert von] Kesselring to withdraw our troops from the city. If I didn't, he would probably do it on his own.' Kesselring was a famous and popular commander, and Hitler probably did not want a confrontation with him. But Hitler was probably thoughtful about saving Rome," Jonuschat recalls.

Then I tell the recorders about the Allied invasion of France, which occurred about the same time as the surrender of Rome: “The invasion of Normandy was a bloody event. The Allies lost many men and ships from German artillery, air bombing, and ground forces.

“A furious hurricane hit across the Cherbourg peninsula after the invasion started in June 1944. For a four-day period, all ship landings and flying stopped. I learned this from *Stars and Stripes*.

“The media in America were critical of the effort, saying the Allies had gained only a toehold in France after seven weeks of assault. What they didn’t understand was the difficulty of getting through the hedgerows. Tanks could not be used in the hedgerows, as their bellies would be exposed and their guns would be pointed skyward in the attempt to get across. The American press and radio continued to complain about the lack of progress. Some writers predicted our failure.

“But we broke through with the Saint Lô bombing, got through Mortrain, and finally, in August 1944, the Allied forces encircled the Germans. Capturing Port of Brest made a new path for the troops following. The American press obviously was wrong,” I finish my monologue.

Then Reynitz says, “Not long after that, in September, I was summoned to Hitler’s bedroom at about 11:00 P.M. I learned later that he had been ill in bed for two days with the onset of Parkinson’s disease. He had only his shirt on. Gen. Alfred Jodl, chief of operations, was there, and Hitler was talking to him about his plan for the Ardennes Offensive. I took verbatim notes of their conversation, and it was clear that it was entirely Hitler’s idea.

“Jodl kept saying there were not enough soldiers, equipment, and supplies for such a long drive, and that there was not enough gasoline

for the tanks and other vehicles. Hitler bluntly said, ‘You will get all you need when you take Antwerp, an Allied supply port.’”

“What a preposterous idea—you will get all you need when you reach Antwerp! Again, this shows that Hitler had no business directing the war. What was the plan, anyway?” I ask.

“Hitler said his plan was to split the Allied forces and deny the important seaport of Antwerp to them. I think he desperately needed some kind of victory after so many losses on all the fronts, especially in Russia,” Reynitz recalls and goes on:

“He ordered Jodl to draw the plans for the offensive through the Ardennes forests and hills in Belgium. He ordered that the spearhead of the drive be manned by Waffen SS. He directed that SS Col. Otto Skorzeny assemble English-speaking troops dressed as American soldiers. They would be parachuted in ahead of the drive to create confusion by attacking American soldiers behind their front line and destroying their communications and ammunition dumps. Hitler said that after the plans were ready and the troops and equipment assembled, the attack would start in late fall. Then rain and fog would ground the American planes.”

“You certainly have a fine memory, Dr. Reynitz. That was a good account of how Hitler operated,” I say. He leans back and smiles.

“Who wants to carry on?” I ask. Thoet leans forward, and I nod.

“When Allied troops crossed the German border, Hitler ordered German units that had already been wiped out to push the Allies back. He said, ‘If the Allies come farther into Germany, the war is lost.’ He had said the same thing about situations occurring earlier. Then he would order another attack as if nothing had happened. He was following his old pattern of always being positive, never nega-

tive. After a serious defeat, he often ordered an attack at another place, saying, 'We will have victory.' He acted like a man waiting for a miracle."

"Carry on," I say as Thoet warms to the subject. The eyes of the other recorders are on him.

"When Allied troops were close to taking Aachen, Hitler said at a military conference, 'We cannot allow that to happen.' There was a discussion that Aachen was a city of 400,000, including its suburbs, and that its capture would demoralize the German people. It is a famous city, I think the most ancient in Germany. It was the seat of the revived Roman Empire, and Charlemagne was crowned emperor there in 800. His rule is called the First Reich; that of Chancellor Bismarck in the late 19th century, the Second Reich," Jonuschat concludes.

"Who wants to finish this up?" I ask, glancing at Buchholz. He has been unusually quiet, but he sits forward, now ready to talk. I nod.

"I think the major events were the advances made by the Allies into Germany and their very heavy air bombing of German cities. They crushed cities unmercifully, and the worst were those incendiary bombs that crashed through tile roofs and burned out the insides of homes and business buildings.

"It was awful. There was no pattern. Women and children were killed and buried in the rubble. I can't remember a worse year. We were all talking about it in Hitler's headquarters. The staff there were receiving letters from home telling about the horror of it all," Buchholz concludes.

"That is terrible," I say. Then looking at Krieger, I ask, "What about Russia?"

He replies slowly: “The Russians made huge advances in all the eastern countries—one after the other. They took countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania.

“It seemed as if Hitler’s forces were falling apart. There just was no stopping the Russians and Allies from closing in. And the worst thing of all was that Hitler himself was all bent over, his face was always red, his hands were always shaking, and he shuffled his feet instead of walking.” Krieger recalls all this soberly. He relaxes into his chair with a sigh.

“That must have been quite an experience,” I say.

“None of us thought it was more than Hitler deserved. It was the beginning of the end for him.” Krieger is composed but unsmiling.

“Anything else?” I ask no one in particular.

Krieger picks up the ball again. “When the Ardennes Offensive started on December 16, 1944, Hitler’s headquarters were near Bad Nauheim, about 30 kilometers north of Frankfurt. The attack started at several points and Hitler had ordered as many troops as possible into it. He seemed pleased when at first the offensive, moving rapidly toward Antwerp, was successful.

“He said nothing when told his offensive had been stopped half-way to Antwerp. What *could* he say? He ordered another attack at the north side of the Bulge. His conduct was the same as ever,” Krieger concludes.

“I think it’s time to stop,” I say.

Each man shakes my hand, puts on his topcoat, and leaves.

Minister of armaments Albert Speer, right; master propagandist Joseph Goebbels, below; Luftwaffe commander in chief, president of Germany, and presumed successor to Hitler, Hermann Goering, below right.

