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Chapter XII

Inspection of Italy

1. Preparations.

In December 1943 I had reported sick because I considered my mission which called for the inspection of Germany as concluded and regarded it as a useless endeavor. The multitude of overlapping authorities, the fact that the top-level agencies were working at cross purposes, the mistrust on the part of the leader of the Nazi party, Bormann and SS Reichsführer Himmler, and the enmity of Propaganda Minister Dr. Goebbels ruled out the possibility of accomplishing any useful work. Dilettantism triumphed and with it the war could neither be concluded nor won. My application for retirement was disapproved and on 7 January 1944 I was ordered to report to Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia.

I was not received by the Fuehrer. My verbal report to Hitler in the fall, describing my inspections, experiences, misgivings, and proposals--at a time when not even the Chief of OKW Hitler's confidential adviser, was permitted to attend such conferences--had caused the Fuehrer so many sleepless nights and so much anxiety that I was never again received by him. Besides, the catastrophe could no longer be averted. There was nothing left but the belief in entirely new weapons announced by Hitler with complete confidence. These were supposed to bring about a complete reversal of the military situation.

I was received only by the Chief of OKW who informed me that he was personally responsible for the Italian theater of war and consequently would appreciate my briefing him on conditions in the rear area. He stated that he was under the impression that many forces serving there were superfluous and could be put to better use fighting the Russians at the hard-pressed Eastern front. Therefore, it was his suggestion that on 1 February 1944 I travel to Italy in order to look into the matter.

I saw no reason for my going to Italy, because the few units which were superfluous could be ascertained from reports, and would not be able to relieve the unfortunate situation at the eastern front. I could not help but feel that once again I was to be removed because Bormann, Goebbels, and Keitel who were my superiors, wanted to be rid of me. I told this to the Chief of OKW and asked him why my application for retirement could not be approved. I assured him that I would just work in my garden in Regensburg, that I would never again appear in public, and that neither the party nor Himmler would see or hear of me. The Chief of OKW replied that unfortunately this was not possible because I had become too popular and enjoyed the confidence of large portions of the population. This reason carried little weight with me. However, nothing could be done against a Fuehrer order. As usual, I stated that, I considered myself completely independent in accepting this assignment, and that I would frankly express my opinion about conditions as I found them. Even at that time I felt compelled to state that I disagreed with this method of conducting the war.

I studied maps and the organization of our forces in Italy and on 8 January 1944, I called on Minister Dr. Lammers and Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop in order to obtain proper credentials and have the Ambassador in Italy advised of my arrival. On 9 January I was briefed by the Luftwaffe Chief of Staff, General Korten, concerning conditions of the Luftwaffe in Italy. The picture he presented was so distressing that on the following day I called on Field Marshal Milch at the Air Ministry in Berlin in order to find out what was being done to gain air supremacy in Italy. This interview also revealed the diminishing strength of our Luftwaffe. On that same day, 10 January, I asked Admiral Canaris, Chief of Intelligence at OKW to give me his impressions of the Italian theater of war. While each one of the persons visited thus far had refrained from expressing his frank opinion, Canaris was quite outspoken. He described that events in Sicily; the negotiations of the Italian fleet, and subsequently the Italian military authorities, with the Americans while at the same time the Italian General Staff demanded from us coal, oil, and fuel; our disarming of the Italian Army following Mussolini's arrest; Mussolini's weakness of character; the American landing at Nettuno; the tremendous effectiveness of the American fleet and its immense fire power; the superiority of the American Air Force, its airfields in Africa, Malta, Sicily, and Southern Italy; and the withdrawal of the German forces from Naples. Canaris discussed industrial sabotage in Northern Italy, Italy's war weariness, and the hostile attitude of the Italian population. He expected the Americans to land in Genoa in the near future and contended that there was nothing that could really stop them. He also believed that the Americans would soon advance from Genoa and penetrate the center of the

Italian industrial region. He described Italy's incredible coal requirements, which went beyond our resources and stated that he no longer considered our operations in Italy worth while. In his opinion it was necessary to break off relations with this former ally.

I asked him whether he had expressed his opinion to the Fuehrer. He answered in the negative, stating that he was not permitted to make his report in person, but that he had given a complete account in writing. In view of the unpleasant nature of such reports they probably had not been submitted to Hitler.

On 14 January I discussed with General Fromm the possibility of establishing a position in the Alps, in case of an evacuation of the Italian theater of war. He believed this was possible but stated that unfortunately, valuable mountain troops were frequently committed at points where their functions might have been accomplished by infantry forces. He remarked that he would give careful thought to the problem of mountain troop equipment.

That same day I also went to EBERSWALDE to call on Admiral of the Fleet Doenitz, who had been greatly provoked by my speech to the admirals and shipbuilders on the S. S. "Ankora" at GDYNIA in October 1943, which dealt with the shortcomings of the Navy. He reached me in his gracious and captivating manner and remarked he now realized that at the time I had been justified when I interceded in favor of the distressed Eastern front at the expense of the Navy. He enlightened me about the naval situation in the Mediterranean, from which I gathered that in Italy, too, the usefulness of the navy had ended, and that its activities there were merely the last death struggle. He told me that the navy was

ineffectual against overwhelming American superiority. Thus the navy was also superfluous in Italy; an escape of its remnants was no longer considered possible.

On 17 January, I called on Counselor Draeger, the Chief of the Foreign Section of the Ministry of Propaganda, since I no longer had any dealings with Goebbels. I questioned him about the frame of mind of the Italian people and the type of propaganda which we were disseminating in Italy and learned, that it was impossible to achieve agreement on this issue between the Foreign Office, or in other words Ribbentrop, and the Propaganda Ministry, or Goebbels. I related that I had the same experience in France, Belgium, and Holland, and that I greatly deplored the fact that my reports had evoked the most serious vexation among these opposing elements. I expressed my opinion that propaganda could really only be effectively disseminated if the most detailed information concerning conditions in the respective countries was obtained, and that agreement between the top authorities was vitally important. I proposed that he select a highly qualified representative to accompany me on my trip. I assured Counselor Draeger that his man would be allowed complete freedom of action and that he would be able to give frank accounts concerning conditions in Italy without having to show his reports to me. This might change and perhaps put an end to many preconceived ideas. Thereupon Counselor Schippert was attached to my mission.

On 17 January I visited the SS Main Security Office, where I discussed the employment of the SS in Italy with SS Obergruppenfuehrer Lt.Gen. Kaltenbrunner. He thought it advisable to transfer the executive power in Italy to Himmler, stating that this would finally restore order.

Kaltenbrunner remarked that this was also Himmler's desire, with whose ambition for power I was well acquainted.

On 18 January I discussed with General Osterkamp, who was in charge of the military administrative agencies, the fact that there was a great excess of administrative personnel in Italy, should be reduced by fifty percent. It was clearly evident everywhere that an excess of finance officers, administrative officers, and military administration officials existed, although considerable efforts were already being made to reduce their number.

These and other preparations preceded my trip to Italy.

2. Trip to Italy

The journey, in my small special train, began in Regensburg on 1 February. Discussions with railway transportation officials revealed that the line from Innsbruck via the Brenner Pass was overloaded to such a degree that I would have to expect a detour via Gastein, Tauern Tunnel, Spittal, Lienz, and Brunico. The staff consisted of an adjutant, an administrative officer, a representative of Organisation Todt, an air force general, an SS representative, a naval captain, a representative of the Propaganda Ministry, and one state secretary who acted as the representative of the government. This made a total of nine men.

The Nazi Party, whose anger I had provoked, had withdrawn its permanent representative from my staff when I submitted my last report to the Fuehrer at the end of September 1943. However, on this trip they also wanted to be represented and an industrialist from TURIN joined us in Italy and became the tenth member of our party. The rest of the staff was as usual composed of three clerks, one cook, one supply sergeant,

five drivers, and one pullman conductor. Five automobiles were taken along. For reasons of economy none of the gentlemen was assigned an overlay.

Our destination was ISEO at Lake ISEO. The trip was uneventful. We were impressed by the excellent organization at the various stations and the fine soldierly attitude wherever we went. We inspected railway and military installations and interviewed the respective officials wherever a scheduled stop was made. No American air attacks were encountered on this trip, not even in frequently bombed VERONA, although when I passed through VERONA later I was constantly exposed to the danger of bombing attacks.

ISEO, which was located off the main line was designated for the first scheduled conferences. We were warned about partisans, but none were encountered.

3. Conferences.

First of all we went by car to FASANO on LAKE GARDA, the residence of Ambassador Rahn and Mussolini. I did not visit the latter, because I was not troubled by curiosity and had no reason to deal with Mussolini who led a peculiar life of his own. However, I questioned the strong sentries at Mussonini's three villas about the nature of their instructions. They pointed to the heights which rose to the west, and stated that partisans located there and other Italians were trying to assassinate Mussolini. Their mission was to protect him.

Ambassador Rahn impressed me as a lively and high-spirited, but at the same time very gracious young man. I listened to his wishes. In his capacity of highest-ranking representative of the Reich he

demanded jurisdiction over Italy's rear area. He stated that apart from coastal patrol, border guards, and the air forces stationed in the rear, he had no need of any military forces whatsoever. He continued with the following remarks: The country would be peaceful, provided he were able, in conjunction with Mussolini and the Italian government, to channel all regulations exclusively through the Italian government. The confiscations and requisitions made by the numerous individual representatives of German administrative and economic agencies should stop, and only he and the Italian government should have the authority to decide such matters. General Leyers (stationed at MILAN), the head of the German Military Economic and Armament Staff in Italy, should be placed directly under his (Rahn's) command instead of being subordinate to Minister Speer. Only then would the available resources, raw materials, and goods be properly utilized, and only in that manner would the mobilization ~~and~~ of Italian industry be assured. He told me that he would be able to operate throughout Italy with just the police forces and requested that to this end Obergruppenfuehrer Lt.Gen. Wolf, the SS and Police Chief, who was stationed at VERONA, be placed under his direct command. He asserted that this would make it possible to handle matters without undue friction.

He thought it inadvisable to be subordinate as on the same level with General Toussaint, the Armed Forces Plenipotentiary in Italy, who resided in PIETRO, east of LAKE GARDA. He continued by stating that orders were being prepared by the military and in some instances even issued without his knowledge, which was not in the least desirable for the maintenance of law and order within the country. He remarked that if he were granted the authority he would see to it that the Italian Government, which at present was widely dispersed, would be centralized in

the immediate vicinity of FASANO.

He claimed to have no objections to the activation of Italian Volunteer troops under the command of General Graziani. He pointed out, however, that recruiting would proceed very slowly unless weapons, clothing, equipment, rations, and shelter were made available. Nor was he opposed to recruitment of Italian volunteers by the Organization Todt. He regarded this organization as very efficient; he remarked that it enjoyed popularity and knew how to take excellent care of its volunteers, all of whom remained in the country. He urgently requested, however, that I prevent the requisitioning of laborers for Germany through Operation Sauckel, because it would result in serious unrest and offered but meager prospects for success. He felt that anything on that order would have to be done through the Italian government and on a voluntary basis, that it would have to be handled with diplomacy and skill, and that first of all it would be necessary to create an inducement for working abroad.

He also expressed the wish to be in sole charge of propaganda in Italy, and stated that at present this work was being done partly by the Foreign Office, partly by the Minister of Propaganda, and partly by the Military Plenipotentiary. He remarked that thus far he had seen little evidence of such activities.

Following this conference I visited General Toussaint, the Armed Forces Plenipotentiary in Italy, who made an excellent impression on me. He considered himself the responsible rear area commander in Italy, and claimed that he alone had been given personal instructions by Hitler.

He stated that it was his mission to comply with all demands of Field Marshal Kesselring as far as this could be done from Italy.

It was his opinion, however, that there was no need for any other delegation of authority, either through the ambassador or the chief of the SS and police. Since all of Italy was a theater of operations orders should only be issued by one authority. He also requested that General Leyers, who was subordinate to Minister Speer, be placed under his command. He remarked that matters which related to the revival of industry were the very things which created differences of opinion and consequently caused further delegation of authority; moreover, signs of labor unrest were already evident.

Another commander was General von Zangen. He was in charge of coastal and border security. He was stationed in CASTRO, in the vicinity of LAKE GARDA and traveled a great deal. He too frequently was called upon for independent assistance and intervention. Although their operations had been well coordinated Toussaint also requested that General von Zangen be placed under his command whenever economic matters were concerned.

The next person I visited was the Chief of SS and Police in VERONA. I learned that it was Himmler's wish that Obergruppenfuehrer Wolf assume the overall command, because he alone would be capable of assuring the maintenance of law and order in Italy with the aid of his security police and constabulary. Wolf expressed his willingness to assume this responsibility, particularly since he was on exceptionally good terms with the ambassador. He was willing to assume command either under the ambassador or working in coordination with him.

Unfortunately, when leaving VERONA, I was caught in a bombing attack. The air raid warning service reported: "American planes are assembling south of the PO river and will probably attack VERONA". Just as I was passing the freight station ^{at considerable speed,} a hail of bombs fell on the already severely

demolished freight station and on the main road leading past it. Although I had been in bombing attacks many times, I became acutely aware of the effect of carpet bombing. My cars were widely dispersed, and a ditch next to a small stonewall offered us some cover. However, one car was hit and two were damaged. The Party representative from TURIN and one driver were killed. The state secretary and the naval captain sustained head and back injuries. Since the staff consisted of only eight men, this constituted a fifty percent loss.

The next conference took place at DESENZANO with Colonel Zimmermann, the Chief of Transportation and Supply. He was a very capable man who had proved his ability at the Eastern front, with the Fourth Army. The weak links in the supply system were VERONA which, being a key point, was under constant attack, and the narrow Brenner Pass which was constantly threatened. Therefore, it was frequently necessary to move supplies by truck from the Brenner Pass, which meant that the vehicles had to take a detour via VIVA-DESENZANO. This made the supply route from the Brenner Pass to the area south of ROME exceedingly long and difficult. The southern stretch was particularly exposed to air attacks. Nevertheless, the supply system functioned to the satisfaction of Field Marshal Kesselring. The drivers were young, experienced men who performed their difficult task with great efficiency. Colonel Zimmermann expressed a desire for more motor convoys. I am not able to furnish any information about the strength of his columns. I gathered that Colonel Zimmermann had not as yet complied with the general Fuehrer directive which ordered the transfer of twenty-five percent of the forces to the East. He was opposed to this measure, and at the first opportunity discussed the

problem with the Chief of Staff of 9B Southwest who concurred with this view. Fuel requirements by far exceeded the supply.

The Chief of Organisation Todt and the deputy to Gauleiter Sauckel, in charge of conscription of Italian laborers, were stationed at SIRMIONE, east of DESENZANO, on the peninsula which extends into LAKE GARDA.

Organisation Todt was as usual committed wherever its services were urgently needed. Their modest existence, their untiring efforts no matter where employed, their exemplary industry and unflinching sense of duty made them popular everywhere. They used an ideal method for recruiting Italian auxiliary forces. Organisation Todt was constantly under strength and due to this lack of manpower was compelled to shift for itself. They displayed posters in the cities, which showed a happy Italian laborer with a flower in his buttonhole, smoking a cigarette. The copy printed on these posters read approximately as follows:

"Do you want work? Are you in need? Do you want to provide for your family? If so, volunteer your services to Organisation Todt. Employment only within your country. You are assured good clothes, good food, good pay, and good fellowship."

These inducements had the desired results, and Organization Todt no longer could complain about the lack of volunteers. They opened a driver school for Italians, which was equipped with good Italian motor vehicles. More and more new columns were formed. The Italians were well dressed, and their faces reflected their contentment. Organisation Todt was willing and ready to assist Colonel Zimmermann

by providing him with volunteers, should he be compelled to release twenty-five percent of his drivers. They were also prepared to place auxiliary truck convoys at his disposal.

The representative of Sauckel who was in charge of labor conscription, did not make a very convincing impression. He said that he was unable to obtain volunteers, and that the men conscripted by force always fled. I explained to him that this was not the way to deal with the situation and remarked that the proper way to conscript or recruit laborers was to make the work appear inviting. However, their fear of bombing attacks in the Ruhr was so great at this stage that very ingenious recruiting measures seemed to be necessary. I recommended the use of recruiting posters; promise of high wages which the workers would be able to deposit at a bank in Germany and which their families would be able to withdraw^{at} their banks in Italian currency; providing the men with decent and nicely decorated quarters; furnishing good clothing, footwear, and music; enlightening the men concerning employment and assignments; issue of wine; decorating ceremonies.

Although Sauckel's deputy concurred with these recommendations he was powerless. He claimed to have authorization from Hitler and to be able to carry out his mission. All I could do was warn him and report on this matter to the Chief of Staff/OKW.'

My visit in MILAN with General Leyers, the Chief of Military Economy and Production was also interesting. In order to clarify the chain of command, I had invited General Toussaint to join us, because as a rule personal discussion was the quickest way to reach an understanding.

Leyers was well chosen for this important post. He was in charge of the following: Putting Italian industry into operation and providing it with raw materials; procuring the raw materials from within the country; distributing work among the Italian factories; and maintaining liaison between Italian and German industries to coordinate production.

It was obvious that this office which directed economic affairs, was the meeting place of many vested interests, who brought their requests, troubles, and complaints to General Leyers and his staff. Consequently his staff was increasing constantly. Leyers considered himself independent and responsible only to Minister Speer and Hitler.

I enlightened Leyers concerning the chain of command in Italy and told him that he too would have to comply with the orders of the Plenipotentiary, and cooperate with him in order to facilitate and safeguard production. I stressed the fact that Leyers' methods of labor recruitment and possible conscription would have to be coordinated and approved by the Plenipotentiary. I expressed myself to the effect that only one Military Plenipotentiary should exist in the rear area of the Italian theater of war, whose mission it was to cooperate closely with the ambassador as a political adviser and General Leyers as the economic adviser. The military police force, as the law enforcement agency, could only be subordinate to the Plenipotentiary, who would then be able to assign it for special purposes to the political and economic agencies as the need arose. The commander of the coastal and border security would also have to be placed under the administrative command of the Military Plenipotentiary.

I also called attention to the various independent agencies which I had encountered and interviewed in Italy. They termed themselves special deputies of the Fuehrer and dealt in commodities such as steel, iron, automobiles, fuel, leather, textiles, raw materials, uniforms, weapons, oil, fabrics, and wine. Wherever I came across these men I deprived them of their independent status, and in spite of their protests and authorization ordered them to comply with General Toussaint's directives, to whom they were responsible. I asked General Leyers to stop these activities and to work in cooperation with General Toussaint. General Leyers replied that he understood this and would comply with my request, but that he would have to report the matter to Minister Speer.

In General Leyers' office I also met representatives of German manufacturers who had come to Italy in order to recruit specialist workers. They felt that their recruitment efforts were successful.

I also had a conference with Gruppenfuehrer (Major General) Nagel in the offices of Consul General von Harlem at MILAN. This man, who worked for the Minister of War Production Speer, had organized motor transport columns in almost every country. These vehicles were driven by Organisation Todt personnel and Italian civilians and hauled supplies for Organisation Todt. The motor transport services had been placed under central control a long time ago, but nevertheless this man stubbornly continued to have his way, and operated independently. Thus he had come to Italy in order to assume the temporary control of the motor transport system of Construction Detachment Speer. This Gruppenfuehrer was

efficient, hard-working and a keen judge of human nature. I could not permit him to act independently either, but instructed him to place himself under the command of General Toussaint. Yet Nagel knew how to maintain his independence.

The party had also established its own Foreign Agency which operated independently. The Foreign Minister and consequently Ambassador Rahn too, were violently opposed to this organization. This agency submitted reports directly to its chief Bohle, in Berlin and maintained its own intelligence service. The Foreign Minister regarded this organization as harmful, but the party considered it useful. If unification with all other agencies would have been possible, this organization might have been used effectively by the ambassador's intelligence service.

I was doubtful--as I had been in the Balkans-- about the German export of quality merchandise for the purpose of acquiring foreign currency. Whole carloads of stockings, women's clothes, etc. arrived in Italy. However, this merchandise not only bought by Italian women; our soldiers purchased these items and sent them home. The soldiers' pay did not allow them many liras, but economists and merchants who also flocked into Italy, obtained foreign exchange in Italy and bought up everything. Therefore, this merchandise which was shipped to Italy by the carload found its way back to Germany.

After checking the work performed by General Leyers' staff, which was located partly in MILAN and partly in COMC, I came to the conclusion that the staff was too large. I reduced his personnel by twenty-five percent and also stipulated the maximum strength to be maintained in future.

Lieutenant General Hartmann also attended this conference. To coincide with my arrival in Italy, the Chief of OKW had instructed the commander of Army Group Southwest to appoint a Plenipotentiary in charge of combining all personnel in Italy. This man was to counteract my influence. His staff and headquarters were charged with combing-out personnel in the Italian theater of operations in order to procure forces for the various Wehrmacht branches at the eastern front. This task had been entrusted to General Hartmann, who attended my conferences in order to familiarize himself with the problem. I ran across other "combing-out agents" who, were not subordinate to me but operated separately under the control of their respective agencies such as the Personnel Office in Berlin, the Luftwaffe, and the Navy. However, my visits to the subarea headquarters in many Italian cities already indicated that manpower was being kept to a minimum. No surplus of men existed there. Discipline was excellent everywhere, and the soldiers led a simple life.

4. Visit to the Commanding General of the Luftwaffe.

I also called on Field Marshal von Richthofen, the commanding general of the German air forces in Italy whose headquarters was in the vicinity of PADOVA. He was not at all pleased with my visit because he was of the opinion that there had been too much of this perpetual interference and combing-out of personnel from all sides. He was of the opinion that commanders and troops should be left alone. He wanted to know what I intended to take away this time and what I wanted of him.

I explained that I had nothing whatsoever to do with conscription. This activity is entirely in the hands of the Recruiting and Replacement Office, the General Army Office in Berlin, and the subordinate recruiting offices. I told him that I was inspecting the occupied area, and on the strength of my experience would be able to advise the military, civilian, and industrial officials, as well as their subordinates, how much excess manpower there was. I was able to determine where the number of forces in the occupied areas or in Germany had increased excessively. However, I could only call attention everywhere to the need of our comrades in the East and to the fact that it was the duty of all of us to offer our help. Whoever was hoarding excessive forces would have to share the blame if we lost the war. My function was merely to supervise and advise. I relied almost entirely on the good will of all comrades.

I explained to the Field Marshal that it was my task to point out over and over again that Luftwaffe ground personnel was still overstrength. I also stated that I would never intervene in the affairs of Luftwaffe flying personnel, but that ground forces, which had been established along extravagant lines had to be reduced to the correct ratio. So far I only had succeeded in obtaining 200 000 air force personnel from Goering. However, Goering did not permit their transfer to the infantry at the Eastern front. He insisted that anyone who has ever worn the air force uniform should continue to wear it as a sign of honor and should always be reassigned to an air force unit. Thus, in spite of my protests to Hitler, ineffective Luftwaffe brigades were formed; presumably everyone considered this a mistake.

It struck me that German Luftwaffe ground personnel in Italy consisted almost entirely of rested young soldiers who really should be in the infantry at the Eastern front, and who should be replaced by older and exhausted frontline troops.

Field Marshal von Richthofen agreed with my views and volunteered to turn over 38,000 young men to me, provided that I refrain from exercising any further control over him, and that I assign 5,000 older soldiers to him in exchange. I was glad to concur with his request.

All this confirmed my belief that the Luftwaffe, was well able to release an additional 300,000 young soldiers for the Eastern front without suffering any detrimental effects, and I knew of many older men whom I would have liked to transfer to less arduous duty.

Despite the fact that a telegram to this effect was sent to the Chief of Staff (OKW), no such exchange was ever effected as long as I remained on duty, up to 20 July 1944. The reason for this was explained to me on 6 March 1944 by the Chief of Staff (OKW), who told me that it had been necessary to avoid any quarrel with the Field Marshal at that time. I had to admit honestly that this was entirely beyond my comprehension. Thus he refused to give up an entire corps of young, rested, and trained soldiers for the Eastern front. All I could do was to point out again that such an attitude meant loss of the war.

5. Visit to Naval Headquarters.

I was now primarily interested in the activities of the German Navy in Italy. Many communications, to which by now I had become accustomed, directed me to LAVIS, a resort and spa which was located on a beautiful mountain lake southeast of TRENTO.

My way led through BASSANO, where I called on Colonel Seitz, the dashing, one-armed commander of the mountain infantry troops. Here at his headquarters preparations were being made for the establishment and development of a rear mountain position in the RHAETIAN ALPS and the DOLOMITES region. Colonel Seitz was an enthusiastic mountain climber, and day after day he traveled the most difficult routes in order to reconnoiter and survey artillery positions, establish the defense line, and make provision for quarters. I learned for the first time that the high command entertained plans to withdraw to the mountains after evacuating Italy.

On this trip, as many times before, I came across forgotten town commands which had become completely superfluous; I sent them back to Germany. I located the Division of Docks and Yards of the Naval Commander in Italy just outside LAVIS. I was surprised to find this agency in the mountains. I was told that this area had been reserved for the Navy High Command in case of a withdrawal. Since it was necessary to operate and supply the shipyards in the LIGURIAN and ADRIATIC SEA, this region supposedly could be regarded as centrally located. I failed to see this advantage in view of the scarcity of fuel. In LAVIS I found strong naval rear area units and rest centers. A shortage of motor convoys existed everywhere, yet here were approximately one hundred trucks which had been repaired and had been in serviceable condition for two months; they were assigned to a crew of about three hundred young drivers who were eager for action. When I had been in Holland some months ago I had come across the other half of this

naval truck unit which was also in an inactive status. These formations at LAVIS, which were excellent in every respect, made a heart-warming impression and were under the benevolent jurisdiction of Admiral von Grancy.

At every occasion, significant or otherwise, I was compelled to come to the conclusion that we did not have ^a unified Wehrmacht but only separate branches of service which lacked coordination and were in need of guidance from the top. This was further complicated by the SS and the Organisation Todt which also were under their own command.

I also checked the strength and manpower distribution of the SS and Police, but without records I was unable to make a report. Once before I had taken 113,000 men from the SS forces, but these elements were not integrated into the Wehrmacht; instead Himmler utilized them for his own purposes. He never yielded any of his men and he recruited as many young men as possible at the expense of the Wehrmacht. Therefore, I was little interested in the actual strength of the SS, because I had failed once before in my attempt to integrate at least the administrative and rear services of the SS into the Wehrmacht. Why it should have been necessary to have non-political Wehrmacht soldiers and political SS soldiers who were better cared for, remained a mystery to every officer of the army and most likely even the SS itself, until the drama came to its disastrous end.

The headquarters of German naval forces in Italy was located at MONTECATINI, northwest of FLORENCE. However, I did not meet the commander who was away on an official trip. The conditions and possibilities for commitment, as described to me by the chief of staff, presented an unpleasant picture. He said that they expected to be just as unsuccessful against the superior strength of the American fighting forces at NEPTUNO

as the Luftwaffe had been. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to report on this because the operational phase did not fall within my jurisdiction. I was therefore unable to see the picture correctly.

I was chiefly concerned about the great distance which separated the Luftwaffe and Navy headquarters from the commander in chief, who was stationed in SARACTO, near ROME. I was informed, however, that there were no communication difficulties. Naval headquarters at MONTECATINI was occupied to a large extent with preparations for an imminent withdrawal, since an American landing at LIVORNO was expected in the very near future. Rear area security at LAVIS was regarded as absolutely essential. With respect to my mission, I was struck by the fact that it would have been possible for the navy to dispense with many young soldiers and sailors which could have been transferred to the East; in some cases they had non-essential jobs and in other cases could have been replaced with older men. However the Navy was not as yet willing to part with any of its vast ground forces for the sake of reinforcing the East. Admiral of the Fleet Doenitz as well as Hitler still believed in the operational freedom and the great future of the German Navy.

6. Visit to Commander in Chief Southwest.

The last city I visited in Central Italy was Florence, where I was greeted by the Military Governor and the Consul General. This Consul General, as well as the consuls general at MILAN and VENICE, served as assistants to Ambassador Rahn. For their consular activities they had only a small staff at their disposal. I called a meeting of

the military agencies, at which occasion I listened to their reports and found everything in the best of order.

My mission, which was actually only a general inspection of conditions in Italy, came to a rapid end, I was recalled by the Chief of Staff (OKW) immediately following my first report concerning the chain of command in Italy. He insisted that this report must not be shown to Hitler. Due to the fact that a special commissioner had been appointed to audit the actual strength of the fighting forces in Italy, my services had become superfluous. I was ordered back to Germany on 1 March.

Since I still had a few days to spare, I went by car from FLORENCE to ROME via PERUGIA. I was not able to use my train for this trip. The conditions along this railroad line were deplorable. American planes saw to it that these lines remained unserviceable most of the time. It was barely possible to get a hospital train through every once in a while. The entire supply transport and evacuation traffic from the front was therefore dependent on motor transportation. It was my impression that this was an impossible condition for the conduct of the war.

The road had many curves and sharp turns, in many cases along steep embankments. Many a vehicle failed to negotiate these roads and had plunged down the embankments. This road was dangerous even in the daytime; at night only expert drivers could proceed on it. I rode in an open car in order to see and observe everything. I watched the convoys and their march discipline, which I could not help but admire. The dangers of the road were aggravated still further by the terrorizing

effects of American low-level air attacks. Particularly on the PERUGIA - ROME highway I saw many cars which had been hit. They blocked or restricted the road. The cold here during the latter half of February was still so severe, that I felt colder than I had ever felt at temperatures of -22°F in Central Russia.

The beautiful old city of PERUGIA was the refueling and rest area for all motor convoys, along a very busy traffic artery. What really surprised me was the fact that the American pilots had not yet realized the importance of this objective and thus had not destroyed it. The destruction of this traffic artery would have had a disastrous effect for the front. While my car was being refueled I saw only one American long-range reconnaissance squadron flying northward. Due to inclement weather I was not troubled by low-flying airplanes.

The trip from FLORENCE to the headquarters of Field Marshal Kesselring near SARACTO took seven hours, which meant that it would have taken even longer by truck. Antiaircraft defenses were inadequate. I saw only a small number of antiaircraft guns and few machine guns employed against the constant menace from the air. In this case economy was definitely not called for. I observed the truck drivers, and the faces of the American prisoners of war who were being brought back on trucks, as well as the drivers and escorts of the supply vehicles of the Vatican, and noticed that all of them scanned the sky. I did the same thing.

Field Marshal Kesselring occupied quarters in the caverns of a mountain range; these caverns had been made habitable and were comfortable. A narrow driveway had been built between the caves and the steep embankment.

This man, who had been extolled by the Luftwaffe as its best general, and whose acquaintance I had made previously in Bavaria, where he served as an artillery officer in the 100,000-man army, and whom I had met at training camps and on training trips, greeted me very cordially, which was in keeping with his character. I explained that I had not come to Rome sooner because I had wanted to familiarize myself first with conditions in the country.

As far as he was concerned, he was of course primarily interested in his conduct of operations at NETTUNO. I asked whether he saw any chance for a successful outcome; he answered in the negative, remarking that the prerequisites for success were lacking. He further stated that all indications certainly pointed to the fact that this was the last year of the war. In his opinion there was a perceptible weakening of the daredevil spirit, and more reliance was placed on the effect of weapons, which were inadequate. The supply lines were too long and too cumbersome. We would have to make every shell count and consequently would no longer be able to employ heavy artillery. Kesselring also spoke of the vast superiority of the American Air Force over the Luftwaffe; he mentioned the British propaganda leaflet, with which he presumed I was familiar, and which stated: Air supremacy is the key to victory! He went on to say that he neither had nor would be able to attain air supremacy, and that he could not count on naval support.

Then I asked him whether, in view of these circumstances, it would not be more expedient to halt these operations and withdraw. He replied that ~~that~~ this probably would happen and that an American landing was

expected at LIVORNO, which would make it impossible to maintain our position. With ROME in the back, the situation was not very favorable for the conduct of a military operation. Kesselring said that he realized this and would continue to make every effort to spare the ancient city.

I inquired if, in case of a successful American landing at LIVORNO, a withdrawal could still be accomplished or whether the present time would be more favorable. He stated that he had taken all necessary precautions. He said that he would prefer an intermediate defense line north of FLORENCE which would not be longer than the present one. American planes however would greatly handicap the flow of supplies to the Army in the area of PARMA, BOLOGNA, and RIMINI, and the supply of BOLOGNA might become impossible.

Kesselring stated that for the present circumstances required that he stay and continue to carry out his mission, being the Fuehrer's order.

I also asked him whether Hitler could expect the Americans to voluntarily abandon their NETTUNO operation, which Kesselring denied with a smile. Since this type of warfare did not bring us any advantages but only disadvantages--at least I saw no advantages--Hitler's decision as so often in the past, was probably based on prestige factors.

The dinner conversation revolved around a discussion of Italy. However military operations were not discussed due to their secret nature. Consequently I obtained no information about the strength of forces and the progress of operations.

I arrived in ROME during the afternoon and since I did not have my train there I stayed in a hotel. The hotel was not heated

and I felt cold. I also listened to the problems of the army surgeon and the chief administrative officer, and also called on the commandant of Rome in order to obtain information about conditions in the capital.

The Commandant, Air Force General Maelzer, admitted immediately that he had a considerable number of administrative officers and officials under his command, in fact more than one hundred. He pleaded that they be allowed to remain. He declared that he was responsible for providing the civilian population of ROME and the surrounding provinces with food. His final statement was: We have sufficient rations for the next seven days.

This was a convincing statement, as far as I was concerned. Although I saw large numbers of personnel I made no further changes.

The roar of the NETTUNO battle was audible in ROME, and at night there was much noise from motor vehicles and planes. The population carried on calmly. I could not see any advantages which might be derived from this city and thought that the end was near.

Many wounded officers spoke to me and told me of their combat experience and shattered hopes. However, since I was not familiar with the situation there, this information was of no real value to me.

Since I had lived in ROME for several weeks during better days, I denied myself the pleasure of visiting St. Peter's, but merely called on von Weizsaecker, the Envoy to the Vatican. He was in favor of an early peace, but at the same time wondered who would be willing to conclude a peace with Hitler.

The very next morning I left ROME and, due to the inclement weather, was able to cover the long distance back to FLORENCE without

air attacks. My train awaited me in FLORENCE.

It was too late to do anything about the western part of Northern Italy and the RIVIERA, or even GENOA. I was still anxious to see VENICE and its fortifications, the situation at FELTRE, BELLUNO, CORTINA d'AMPEZZO, and the partisan-infested regions of TRIESTE, UDINO, and CORIZIA, and possibly also POLA.

7. Visit to the 188th Division at Belluno.

I traveled to BELLUNO by train, where I found the headquarters of the 188th Division and inquired about their problems and needs. The area was quiet; however the equipment of the infantry in BELLUNO (137th Mountain Infantry Regiment) had by that time become quite inadequate. Poor and insufficient clothing, inferior footwear, overcrowded barracks -- all these were indications of the fact that this was the sixth year of war. The unbeat quarters and exhausting mountain duties were not conducive to good health; coughing was the predominant ailment. I found that up to seventy percent of the men were Slovenes who spoke no German. The division was earmarked to fight the partisans in the notorious GORIZIA - UDINE region. The present stage of organization made the division still unfit for this assignment. Slovene soldiers could not be expected to fight against their own countrymen. In some instances their own farmhouses were located in this very region. In view of these drawbacks, the excellent discipline presently maintained at BELLUNO and FELTRE was bound to deteriorate.

I informed the Chief of Staff (OKW) of my objections to these plans, with the result that the division, which was stationed in

this isolated spot, was reorganized. The artillery, which was stationed in the snow-covered regions of LAKE MISSURINO, presented a more favorable picture; the same was true of the hospital center of CORTINA d'AMPEZZO. Here life was almost on a peacetime basis, and the sick and wounded were well cared for. In these mountains I frequently saw convalescent homes which had been set up by individual divisions and regiments for their malaria cases and battle-weary troops. I raised no objections; these hotels or boarding-houses would certainly have remained empty in any case.

8. Venice.

In February 1944 Venice, in spite of all its beauty did not present a pretty picture, because it was a lifeless city in the midst of a war. I was merely interested in the problem whether or not an American landing in Venice was possible or probable.

To find the answer, it was necessary for me to inspect the fortifications at the LIDO and for this purpose was accompanied by the naval commander, Admiral Humaeus. Organisation Todt worked with great effort through the evenings and into the night. Two heavy batteries, their emplacements not yet completed, represented the chief accomplishment, while in other respects too everything was still in the planning or in the initial stages. These two batteries, which were not camouflaged and easily spotted, would have been put out of commission by carpet bombing. Neither the small number of naval forces, nor the subarea headquarters personnel, nor the construction workers could have prevented an American landing. I believe that an entry through

the Grand Canal, past the church Maria de Salute near the Hotel Royal Danieli, would not have presented a major obstacle, with the possible exception of the channel. The possibility of a landing existed but was not probable. Conditions had not yet deteriorated to this point. Moreover from the American as well as the German point of view, Venice could not be turned into a battlefield.

9. Trieste.

On the trip from MESTRE to TRIESTE we were constantly reminded of the fact: Watch Out! Partisans! Warning notices were posted everywhere. The train stopped one station before reaching Trieste. I was interested in only two questions: whether through some concessions and assurances, together with enlightenment and propaganda, a way might be found to check the partisan menace, and whether there was a chance for the Americans to effect a surprise landing at Trieste. In order to find the answer to the first question, I called on Gauleiter Reiner, who was not in. I questioned his deputy, Regierungspräsident Wolffenberger, concerning this matter. He informed me that conditions were really intolerable. Partisan raids constituted a constant danger, not only along the roads but in towns and large cities as well. The Slovene soldiers at BELLUNO complained about the fact that their families were either arrested or driven from house and home, while their sons were fighting for Germany. I no longer remember what suggestions I made. Confidence had been lost. The situation was completely out of hand.

This hostility could no longer be dealt with.

The deputy Gauleiter and General of Mountain Troops Lt.Gen. Kuebler asked me to see to it that the foreign SS units, which consisted of personnel from all Slavic states, including Czechoslovakia, be dissolved. I was told these formations fraternized with the civilian population and constituted a hazard. They were under the command of SS Gruppenfuehrer Major General Globocnik.

A defense of Trieste was completely out of the question. This port was to be had for the asking by the Americans.

I also wanted to visit POLA but this was impossible unless security forces provided strong protection; in addition it would have required too much time. Poor weather and landing conditions at the Pola airfield made a trip by air impossible. When I asked the admiral in Pola how long it would be possible to hold Pola against an American landing, he replied: "Five minutes."

By that time I felt that I had seen and heard enough and returned to Germany.

10. The Return Trip.

I arrived in Innsbruck on 28 February. Gauleiter Hofer asked me to see to it that all military forces leave Southern Tyrol, because he would be able to cope with the situation with his police forces and the indigenous authorities.

On 1 March I arrived in Regensburg, but was not ordered to report to the Fuehrer at the Obersalzberg until 6 March. Of course, I was not received by Hitler but only by the Chief of Staff (OKW).

My initial report concerning the chain of command in Italy, which I had sent to Hitler, had been intercepted by Hitler's Deputy, Bormann.

At Hitler's headquarters it was said: "There is trouble brewing in Italy."

Consequently I was hurriedly recalled with the explanation that important missions were awaiting me in Germany. Yet by March there were no urgent assignments for me. I related the impressions I had gained on my trip to the Chief of Staff (OKW) and summed up as follows:

Operations should be discontinued as soon as the alpine position is ready. As the next step I suggested withdrawal of the front to the mountains, stating that this was the only way to release forces for duty at the Eastern front. This discussion, which covered a great deal of ground lasted two hours.

In an interview with Reich Minister Lammers, and on 7 March, during a conference with Foreign Minister Ribbentrop at Fuschel Castle, I discussed matters of interest to these gentlemen. Ribbentrop too was unhappy. I asked him whether it might not be possible for him to request the Vatican and our Envoy Weizsaecker to put forth peace feelers, offering extensive guarantees. He did not, however, discuss this matter, stating that the Fuehrer had his own ideas on this subject.

On 8 March I had a discussion at Berchtesgaden with Luftwaffe Chief of Staff, General Korten, concerning the transfer of 38,000 men from Italy. He approved this and referred me to Goering who, as he said, had always had a soft spot in his heart for me.

Goering did not receive me. In the afternoon I reported this fact to the Chief of Staff (OKW) and requested him, on the strength of

General Korten's approval, to order the withdrawal and transfer of the 38,000 Luftwaffe ground personnel to the East. He claimed that this would result in a conflict with Goering, which would be ill-advised at the present time and that this matter would therefore have to be postponed. I called his attention to the urgent need of the Army Chief of Staff Zeitzler who would require two million men for defensive operations in Russia during the spring. The Chief of Staff (OKW) thought that this matter was not so urgent. I volunteered to obtain Goering's approval for this transfer, but this offer too was rejected.

I urgently requested that I be retired because I was no longer able to continue my work. The Chief of Staff (OKW) assured me that he already had submitted my request to the Fuehrer. He stated, however, that he still had one more mission for me to accomplish, after which my request would be granted immediately. This assignment was to ascertain how many of those might be available for early commitment at the Eastern front.

I replied as follows: this really is a purely statistical task, which General Fromm, the commanding general of the Replacement Army in Germany, is better qualified to perform. As a matter of fact, he submits semi-monthly reports along this line. This is certainly no longer the time for investigations but for action. Moreover I felt that an auditing of these lists would only provoke General Fromm. Furthermore in spite of utmost haste and exertion it would take five months before I could make the rounds of all garrisons in Germany,

whose actual strength would have changed completely on the date of my report. However, all protests against this useless assignment were futile, because, as the Chief of Staff (OKW) informed me, the Fuehrer insisted on it. Thus my Italian trip ended, and I started my new assignment.

On my Italian trip, I gained the following lasting impressions: Everyone, in high as well as low positions, was doing his duty and worked devotedly for the victory of the fatherland. Even in this sixth year of war, discipline was still admirable. The soldiers were leading a simple and unpretentious life.

The frontline soldiers were fighting against hopeless odds, always loyal to their oath of allegiance.

All operations had been carefully planned and executed. In my opinion, there was a lack of basic directives from the political and military leader, Hitler. However, neither top nor the intermediate echelons in the field, much less the low-level military agencies could do anything to influence that situation.

Walter von Unruh
General der Infanterie