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The Prosecution of Multi-Theatre Warfare

**An Analysis of the German
Military Leadership's
Attempt to Direct War in
Simultaneous Theatres**

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
History

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1999

Illustrations

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Sources

Photograph 6 from Matthew Cooper, *The German Air Force 1933-45*.

Photograph 2 from James S. Corum, *The Luftwaffe: Creating the Operational Air War, 1918-1940*.

Photographs 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, from Martin Gilbert, *Second World War*.

Photograph 21 from Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader: General Heinz Guderian*.

Photographs 22, 27, 28, from David Irving, *Hitler's War*.

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Photograph 20 from Kenneth Macksey, *Kesselring: The Making of the Luftwaffe*.

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Diagram 1 from Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-45*.

Glossary

'Ariel'	The Allied evacuations from Dunkirk
Auftragstaktik	Mission-orientated tactics
'Barbarossa'	The invasion of the Soviet Union
'Blau'	The offensive against the Caucasus
Blitzkrieg	Lightning War
'Citadel'	The Kursk offensive
'Felix'	The proposed conquest of Gibraltar
'Gelb'	The invasion of Holland and Belgium
'Hercules'	The proposed attack on Malta
Kesselschlacht	Encirclement battle
Kriegsmarine	German Navy
Luftwaffe	German Air Force
'Marita'	The invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia
'Merkur'	The invasion of Crete
Schwerpunkt	Place of main effort
'Seelöwe'	The proposed invasion of Britain
'Theseus'	The proposed attack on Libya
'Typhoon'	The assault on Moscow
Wehrmacht	German Armed Forces
'Weiss'	The invasion of Poland
'Weserübung'	The invasion of Denmark and Norway

Abbreviations

OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (High Command of the Army)
OKL	Oberkommando der Luftwaffe (High Command of the Air Force)
OKM	Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine (High Command of the Navy)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces)
PLW	Polskie Lotnictwo Wojskowe (The Polish Air Force)
RAF	Royal Air Force (Britain)

Introduction

On 1 September 1939 Adolf Hitler convened a session of the Reichstag to announce war with Poland. Dressed in a grey field tunic, he declared that Polish aggression would be suppressed, and that he would wear the tunic until "victory is ours, or, I shall not live to see the day!"¹ Germany did not win the war, and Hitler did not live to see the day of its defeat. The established record of the Second World War adequately portrays what happened, and the chronology is ingrained. Nevertheless, aspects of the war have been neglected, especially in relation to command issues within the German armed forces. Because of the prominence of Hitler in all accounts, the actions of those below him have traditionally been marginalised. The purpose of this thesis is to address this 'gap' in history by evaluating the overall German military leadership's attempt to direct war in simultaneous theatres.

Using primary sources such as war diaries, memoirs, and various accounts of Führer conferences, this study will analyse how the unique German command structure eventually contributed heavily to Germany's defeat. While many authors hold Hitler solely responsible for defeat, and thus overlook the role of others, my work is primarily concerned with analysing the German High Command structure and its attempt to direct war on multiple fronts at the same time. Responsibility for eventual German defeat cannot be laid at Hitler's feet alone because while he maintained sole executive powers, he remained open to the suggestions of those in his inner circle. In the end, those figures, who will be discussed in this study, failed Germany because they were unable to present a united front against Hitler when the situation became critical for the armed forces after 1941.

Because of Germany's initial success, the perception of invincibility that Hitler so cherished became global and unquestionable. However, behind the facade, the world did not see the tensions between the individual services of the armed

forces regarding the conduct of operations. The tensions that would hinder German operations during the war were already festering during the formative stages of the post-Versailles armed forces. This inter-service conflict resulted from a proposal that the individual prerogatives of each service be denied in favour of a joint-service command structure.

In this proposal, unity of the services became preferable to individual action. On 21 May 1935, the adoption of unity in the German armed forces became official through the Military Service Act. Hitler reformed the Army, Navy, and Air Force High Command structures and stipulated that an umbrella organisation called the Armed Forces High Command would be made their superior. This organisation would plan and co-ordinate all operations, which Hitler would then order the three branches to execute. Thus, as early as 1935, the command structure that the German armed forces would use during the war was already in place.

In response to Hitler's move, the services roundly condemned the possibility that they might lose their traditional right to conduct independent operations. This resistance continued after he became Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces in 1938, even though it became somewhat muted. While the Wehrmacht advanced during 1939 and 1940, these tensions remained controlled. However, as the war situation deteriorated after 1941, the command structure increasingly became fragmented. Frequently, Hitler would have to mediate between feuding Commanders-in-Chief in an attempt to maintain unity. Paradoxically, he also worked against unity by skilfully using this tension to reinforce his position as Führer by adding more responsibilities to his portfolios. Hence, because of the situation, with Hitler as Head of both the state and military, when the armed forces became involved in simultaneous multi-theatre warfare, its command structure fragmented as the Führer lost control over the course of the war.

Integral to simultaneous multi-theatre warfare was the necessary maintenance of the Axis coalition by the Germans. Throughout the war this proved a problem. There were many instances of conflict over command responsibility, especially when Germany became involved in combined operations with Italy. Yet Hitler would not subordinate Italian forces to German command (despite the pleas of his generals) because he wished not to insult his ally, Benito Mussolini. Their inability to see their Axis allies as equals, as well as Hitler's inability to bring the Italians under full German command, combined to frustrate Germany's war effort. Furthermore, as the manpower and raw material situation deteriorated as the war became protracted, tension between Italy and Germany heightened when Italy continued to demand German resources that were sorely needed elsewhere.

The crux of my thesis is the way the German leadership responded to the stress of conducting warfare on several vast, and diverse, theatres simultaneously. Hence, the purpose of this study is not an evaluation of Hitler as Supreme Commander. Undoubtedly, he limited Germany's chances of ultimate success because of his inability to allow others, who were possibly more qualified than him, to make crucial decisions regarding operations. However, this thesis will focus on the command structure beneath Hitler, and its direction of the war, with the purpose of highlighting command, control, and communication problems brought on by multi-theatre warfare. Nevertheless, Hitler will often feature in this study because without him it is doubtful whether Germany could have returned to a position of dominance in Europe in the first place.

Hitler's penchant for the innovative, and unusual, protected the new idea of unity from the condemnation of the conservative Army. Furthermore, Hitler adopted advances in armoured tactics, the use of air power, and radical operational plans such as that used against France, despite the fervent objections of his advisers. Initial German success gave those disenchanted with the direction of the war no grounds for opposition, while Hitler gained an exaggerated

impression of his powers. To all, the German command model appeared revolutionary; and it was. To this day it remains apposite. Nevertheless, this study will highlight that while this might be true in theory, in practice, the model had many inherent flaws and tensions. Therefore, while the German command structure remains relevant, during the Second World War, because of its leading personalities, it contributed heavily to Germany's defeat.

Chapter One

Germany Rises Again - The Wehrmacht and the Polish Campaign

The seeds of a German resurgence were sown during the aftermath of the Great War. Because Germany was defeated, the victorious nations, Britain and France, resolved to make it permanently weak by forcing it to sign the punitive Treaty of Versailles. Under the Treaty, Germany was required to pay £6.5 Billion in reparations, forfeit territory to France and the newly created states of Poland and Czechoslovakia, and ordered not to form a union with Austria. However, Germans were probably more incensed at demands they accept a 'war guilt' clause, and that their military be disarmed to the level of a 100,000 man Army, and six small battleships, while submarines, tanks, and an Air Force were prohibited. To oversee the dismantling of the German Imperial Army, the Allies appointed Hans von Seeckt Chairman of the Commission for Peacetime Army Organisation.

In this position (he was effectively Commander-in-Chief of the Army), the Allies instructed Seeckt to dismantle the German military hierarchy under the terms of the Treaty. However, while it appeared that Seeckt complied with Allied demands during the early 1920s, he only did so because he wished to prepare the ground for a resurgent German military at a later date. In order that Germany's armed forces could be reconstructed, Seeckt had first to satisfy the Allies that he had reduced the Imperial German Army. Thus, behind the appearance of conformity, Seeckt actually created the foundation upon which his successors constructed their plans for Germany's return to power in Europe.

By 1921, Seeckt had replaced the Imperial Army by forming the Reichswehr, which consisted of the Reichsmarine (Navy), and the Reichsheer (Army). In a

further move to deceive the Allies, he set up a Truppenamt (Troop Office), which covertly dealt with the creation of war plans, training, and doctrine; and the Waffenamt (Weapons Office), which concerned itself with the procurement, testing, and development of weapons and equipment for the Army.²

Despite the fact that these organisations represented a contravention of the Treaty, they were remarkable for another reason. With the Commander-in-Chief overseeing both the Troop and Weapons Offices, and having ultimate control over the entire hierarchy during wartime, for the first time in German military history, the entire Army and air assets came under a unified authority; namely that of Seeckt.³

Seeckt based his Reichswehr on the ideal of a responsive and well-trained force. Furthermore, by creating an organisation that unified the three branches of the armed forces, Seeckt allowed for close communication and co-operation between the Army and Navy. However, as this study will show, although the apparatus was there for the integration of inter-service operations, the individual services were less than willing partners in this movement towards unity.

The bi-service organisation (Reichswehr) that Seeckt created was the first significant departure from the fragmented command structure of the Imperial German Army. However, the Reichswehr's unity was minimal because while the Army and Navy shared common legal, budget, and intelligence agencies, they demanded individual action in matters of command, doctrine, and training.⁴ Demands from the individual services, especially the Army, were to constantly frustrate those wishing to implement a command structure to control the operations of the armed forces during the 1930s. However, in Hitler, there arrived a person with both the will, and the necessary power, to implement innovative ideas over the arguments of the individual service commanders.

Within three days of becoming Chancellor on 30 January 1933, Hitler reiterated his intention to break the shackles of the Treaty of Versailles and to undertake an expansionist policy towards Eastern Europe. Many German civilians, as well as those in the military, supported such a policy because of the widespread belief that Germany had been humiliated at Versailles. In his talk to Reichswehr leaders on 3 February 1933, Hitler stressed the need for strong armed forces as a prerequisite to a revision of what he considered the injustices of Versailles. He added that a single Commander-in-Chief should be charged with responsibility for running the rearmament programmes of the three services so that they could be realised despite the economic and financial uncertainties of the time. However, as the individual services had resisted Seeckt's call for inter-service co-operation, so they also initially resisted Hitler's because the ordinance offices of each service insisted on carrying out their own armament plans independently of each other. The individual services, then, became competing 'consumers' who negotiated their own industrial contracts separately.⁵

In one of his first moves on taking office, Hitler confirmed Werner von Blomberg's appointment as Reich Defence Minister, (he became Defence Minister shortly before Hitler's assumption of power), in addition to his position as unofficial Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. In the tradition of Seeckt, Blomberg decided that his overriding task was to create a powerful High Command. So, with Hitler's approval, Blomberg set about realising his aspiration.

In March 1935, much to the world's dismay, Germany announced that it had regained independence in defence matters by substantially exceeding the limits placed on the armed forces at Versailles. At the same time, Blomberg became Reich Minister for War, but still remained only the unofficial Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Still, with this new position appearing as a sign of Hitler's approval of his work, Blomberg became increasingly determined that his new command organisation should have substance and authority.⁶

Blomberg had no minor renovation of the military in mind when he took up his position. He had the authority to create a unified command that incorporated the role previously given to the Army regarding the planning and execution of operations during wartime. A new command apparatus was required because of the Air Force's rise to independent branch status, and because the next war would necessitate the mobilisation of the entire nation, not just the military.⁷ Therefore, he maintained (as the unofficial Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces) he alone should be responsible for the co-ordinated direction, not only of military operations, but also of other weapons of 'total war' such as propaganda, economic warfare, as well as civil defence throughout the public services.⁸

Blomberg, however, was astute enough to recognise the monumental task ahead of him. The services would not be pleased that their direct access to the Head of state (Hitler), had been impeded by the appointment of another layer of authority in the form of Blomberg. This meant that the individual Commanders-in-Chief of the three branches of the armed forces had to renounce a substantial part of their independent authority in the sphere of operations in favour of him.⁹ Obviously, each branch would not allow this progression to occur smoothly.

In 1934, Blomberg began to expand the scope of his Ministry from purely administrative matters towards an office that would provide unified operational direction for the entire armed forces. Yet because of stubborn resistance from the three services his office was largely ignored. The Army saw his operations staff as detracting from its status as the largest and most important service in the armed forces. The Navy felt that, because it was accustomed to planning its own operations, it should continue to do so, while the growing Air Force had no intention of allowing a restriction on operations in its expanding sphere of influence. Each branch of the armed forces saw itself as unique, and as such, reserved the right to plan its own operations independent of the others. Furthermore, the Army felt that in wartime, it alone should have the right of co-

ordinating forces, not Blomberg's office. Feeling that its customary right to make crucial decisions during war was threatened, the Army General Staff presented Blomberg (and indeed Hitler), with most resistance to their implementation of a tri-service command structure.

Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, the Army's Commander-in-Chief from 1934 until 1938, proved most resistant to Blomberg and Hitler's plans for an integrated command organisation. Fritsch boldly asserted that the Commander-in-Chief of the Army must lead in war. He felt that he alone must be Hitler's principal adviser in all matters concerning the conduct of war, including naval and air matters, and must be his sole adviser on questions of warfare on land.¹⁰ This attitude prevailed not only in the Army, but also in the political arena because most politicians thought of the Army as the state's primary military force. Should war occur, they believed, the Army's leaders would automatically assume paramount military command functions.¹¹ Furthermore, this idea of the Army as the predominant branch of the armed forces was ingrained in German society.

However, this pro-Army environment did not prevent the other branches from pushing their own agendas and voicing their grievances with Blomberg's ambitions. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, based his objection to Blomberg's position on Germany's continental position and implied that a unified High Command would be little qualified to direct naval warfare. As Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan, Reich Minister for Aviation, and Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force, Hermann Göring relied on these privileged positions in the state, and his close friendship with Hitler, to retain the operational independence of the Air Force. However, despite the fervent objections of the individual services, Hitler took a further step in formalising the authority he had vested in Blomberg and his Operations Office by introducing the Military Service Act on 21 May 1935.

Through this Act, Hitler reorganised the command structure of the armed forces, and renamed the Reichswehr the Wehrmacht. Individual service High Commands were re-designated as the OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres - Army), OKM (Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine - Navy), and OKL (Oberkommando der Luftwaffe - Air Force). Each of these branches became theoretically subordinate to the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht). In the OKW, Hitler had formally created a new command headquarters (which he nominally led as the nation's Supreme Commander), that was superior to that of the Army. Blomberg was formally appointed Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the umbrella organisation, OKW. Wilhelm Keitel, who met Hitler in July 1933¹², and later became one of his closest advisers, was at this time Blomberg's Chief of Staff.¹³ Because of his pliable nature, Hitler earmarked Keitel for future promotion within the Armed Forces High Command.¹⁴

Hitler believed that he knew more than many of his older, conservative generals. Though he might need them, he never thought much of the vaunted General Staff. Thus, the resistance of Fritsch (and his General Staff), to Hitler's political and military decisions, merely reinforced his mistrust of many military advisers and commanders.¹⁵ Hence this explains his disdain for generals who fought against the imposition of his will regarding the OKW.

Yet it was not merely in matters of state that Hitler thought himself superior to his generals. It was also at their own game as well: the art of strategy and war making. Although some generals might at times have referred to Hitler as a 'facile amateur', he was, so far as an understanding of military history and weapon technology went, better informed and equipped than most of them.¹⁶ He studied extensively the writings and campaigns of Frederick the Great, Clausewitz's *On War*, and the theories and practices of more recently successful Commanders-in-Chief, Moltke, Schlieffen, and Seeckt.¹⁷ Additionally, in keeping with his desire for innovations, Hitler also read the theories of the Wehrmacht's young radicals:

Heinz Guderian and Erwin Rommel. So, regarding military theory, Hitler was almost without peer.

However, his knowledge was not restricted to the lofty heights of theory for he was generally conversant with the requirements of other areas relating to the conduct of war. Albert Speer observed that in matters of Army equipment Hitler's knowledge was far greater than his military staff's. Furthermore, he knew more than they about the characteristics of specific weapons and tanks, types of ammunition and armament innovations.¹⁸ However, in other areas Hitler proved incapable of distinguishing the important from the unimportant. Furthermore, he often did not establish clear lines of jurisdiction. Sometimes he assigned various individuals the same tasks.¹⁹ Alternatively, he gave specific instructions to persons of secondary importance and rank. These actions caused concern within the armed forces because Hitler consciously ignored established channels of command and communication.²⁰

The rise of the Waffen SS as an independent force of the Army was an alarming example of Hitler's lack of consultation with his armed forces. Heinrich Himmler effectively received a 'blank cheque' from Hitler to build up the Waffen SS by requisitioning equipment from the production quotas of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Only when these services noticed that their requirements had not been met did they discover the existence of the Waffen SS.²¹

Another advantage Hitler enjoyed was that his inexperience in the handling of armies in operations and his lack of a formal military education meant that his ideas were unhindered by convention or experience. Some generals, on the other hand, were imprisoned by their own professional training and knowledge, incapable of easily grasping the new, the unusual, and the unorthodox.²² However, Hitler's demand for innovative and unorthodox responses over convention eventually crippled the German war effort, as he attempted the

unusual in later campaigns when trying to emulate early successes. Yet, it could be argued that without his adoption of the unorthodox, Blomberg's notion of unified command, Guderian's use of armoured formations, Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen's use of tactical air power, as well as Erich von Manstein's creative plan to invade France, would not have become reality because the Führer's support protected these innovations from the strident attacks of the conservative Army. However, even Hitler's fervent support for the creation of the OKW was not enough to silence the OKH's continued assertions that it should control the crucial Operations Office.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Army (after Fritsch's dismissal in February 1938 on charges of homosexuality), Walter von Brauchitsch, softened his predecessor's hard-line. He conceded that the OKW had a part to play in the co-ordination, control, and formation of operational plans, and that a single Supreme Commander was essential in modern warfare. Yet, in accordance with Fritsch's stance, Brauchitsch also considered the imposition of the OKW, between Hitler and the three service commanders, to be intolerable mainly because of the need for each to have direct access to the only person with the necessary power to make final decisions.²³

On 4 February 1938, Keitel effectively became Hitler's Chef (Office Chief) when Hitler replaced Blomberg as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces because of his marriage to a woman of "ill repute". In response to Brauchitsch's thoughts, Keitel retorted that Hitler needed, if he was to direct and co-ordinate all political, economic, and military aspects of war effectively, the assistance of a staff (OKW), with wide ranging powers to co-ordinate the overall activities of the nation at war. Additionally, Keitel rebuked the Army's notion of itself as dominant over the Navy and Air Force by saying during wartime the relative importance of any service over the other two would doubtless rise and fall as circumstances changed. Therefore, it made no sense to place command in the hands of the Army, or any

service for that matter. In addition, normal human tendencies towards jealousy and favouritism would make it difficult for any one service Commander to deal fairly with all when it came to the procurement and allocation of men and material.²⁴

The strained official relations which resulted from these disagreements affected close friendships. As a result, there appeared an unprecedented division in the ranks of the senior officers of the Army; they carried their immediate subordinates along with them and the result was little short of a split on political lines throughout the body of senior officers; revolutionary Nazis on one side and Army traditionalists on the other. This later became a significant factor in developments within Supreme headquarters.²⁵

This division of power suited Hitler, as there became no possibility of concerted resistance against him because of the infighting his measures caused. His desire for control led him to assume the role of supreme war leader in addition to being the Head of state.²⁶ Rather than having one joint operations staff provide him with counsel on military matters and issue uniform plans to the three services (as envisaged by Blomberg), he preferred to receive advice and plans not only from Alfred Jodl's office (OKW Operations), but also, in a spirit of direct competition, from each of the services involved in a particular operation.²⁷

However, in any case, the OKW's Operations Office was not in a position to direct operations of its own anyway because it lacked an Intelligence Office. Thus, for intelligence, as well as for supply and other organisational functions, it was totally reliant upon the goodwill of the corresponding offices in the individual service headquarters.²⁸ Once the operations drafts were submitted to Hitler from each of the services, the Armed Forces' Operations Office, as his personal staff, would then implement the Führer's decision by way of an operational directive. Then, on the basis of this directive, the individual service staffs would create

orders for the execution of operations. During this process, the Commanders-in-Chief of the services maintained close liaison with their subordinate staffs in order to continue complete co-ordination and integrated preparations.²⁹ Yet, within this apparent environment of co-operation, there remained deep division based along lines of individual service prerogatives. This division was clearly apparent as the Wehrmacht prepared for war against Poland during 1939.

When planning for the invasion of Poland, Hitler favoured the OKH plan over that of the OKW, accepting with a few alterations the basic plan proposed by Brauchitsch and Army Chief of Staff, Franz Halder. Hitler preferred the Army's plan simply because Poland would predominantly be land-based, and the Army alone had expertise and experience in conducting land warfare. This decision consigned the OKW Operations Office only the task of drawing up the timetable to be followed.³⁰ Hence, Poland became known as an OKH theatre, where the Army had full authority over planning and execution of operations.

During the late 1930s, under Hitler's leadership, Germany achieved Anschluss (Union) with Austria, claimed the Sudetenland, and then assumed power in Czechoslovakia. By 1939 only the presence of Poland served as a reminder to the German people of their nation's humiliation at Versailles. On 3 April 1939 Hitler, through Keitel, issued a directive concerning war preparations, and more specifically, an attack on Poland to remove this last vestige of the Treaty.³¹

Hitler resolved to attack Poland when the Poles rejected his requests for the return of Danzig and the construction of an extraterritorial highway and railroad to link the Reich and East Prussia.³² Dubbed Fall 'Weiss' (Case 'White'), preparations were made for a rapid surprise attack against Poland so Germany could quickly claim victory and shift its forces west to meet a possible attack by Poland's allies, Britain and France. The German plan of operations revolved

around the idea of a pincer operation to outflank deeply, encircle, and destroy the main Polish forces.³³ D-day was initially confirmed as 26 August, 1939.

In his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and in a theatre where his service had predominant status, Brauchitsch called on the Army to open the war with surprising, heavy blows, and to achieve rapid successes. The military doctrine called for a surprise drive into Polish territory in order to forestall the orderly mobilisation and organisation of the Polish Army.³⁴ The Wehrmacht in Poland consisted of Army Group North, under Fedor von Bock (with Albert Kesselring's Luftflotte 1 providing air support), and Army Group South, under Gerd von Rundstedt (with Alexander Löhr's Luftflotte 4 providing support). The Navy played little part in the campaign because of its land-based nature. Its role in the war will be discussed elsewhere in this study.

During the Polish campaign, the Germans employed a traditional strategy of *Kesselschlacht*, or a battle of encirclement. The OKH was traditional in its planning for 'White' in that it adapted the 1914 plan of Alfred von Schlieffen for the situation in 1939. The idea behind the Schlieffen Plan was a complex system of railways, which were used to mobilise and supply large masses of troops. In 1939, rail would be exploited in a similar way. However, unlike the former plan, the modernisation of the Wehrmacht allowed it to have greater freedom from railheads than had been seen before. Yet, because German intelligence indicated that Polish forces had positioned themselves west of the Vistula, 'White' demanded the direct reduction of Polish forces near the German-Polish border. By doing this, the chance that retreating Poles could reorganise east of the Vistula would be eliminated, and the Army would remain within easy distance of supply railheads in Silesia and Pomerania.³⁵

Halder also expressed the need for the Wehrmacht to be totally efficient in Poland so the eastern front could be secured as quickly as possible:

Goal: Annihilation of Poland, that is, destruction of active power. We are not setting out just to reach a specific line or establish a new frontier, but rather we seek the annihilation of the enemy, which we must pursue in ever new ways.

Execution: Harsh and remorseless. We must steel ourselves against humanitarian reasoning.

Speed: Have confidence in the German soldier, even if reverses should occur. Of paramount importance are the wedges that must be driven from the south-east toward the Vistula, and from the north to the Narew and the Vistula.³⁶

However, while the Army seemed unified in its purpose, arguments between it and the Luftwaffe occurred over the latter's role in Army operations. Göring wanted strategic air attacks on Polish military installations and armament factories in Warsaw, and an attack on the Polish Air Force on the ground. However, the Army was not appeased by his claim that once air superiority had been achieved, and the Reich and its forces protected from air attacks, then the Army would receive the Luftwaffe's full support.

Despite the fact that the Air Force was created as an independent branch of the armed forces, inherent in its creation was the Army's implicit understanding that the Luftwaffe's primary mission would be to provide air support for ground forces. *Regulation 16: The Conduct of Aerial War* maintained that while the Luftwaffe was an independent entity, it still had to remain aware of the unity of all parts of the Wehrmacht in the common struggle.³⁷ Thus, after complaining to Hitler about the need for immediate air support during the campaign's opening hours, the Luftwaffe's role was revised in favour of the Army. Hence, Hitler's ultimate power of decision became evident once more.³⁸

Another reason for Hitler's backing of the Army's view of the Luftwaffe as a tactical force was his initial dislike of strategic bombing. He knew that it was one

thing to threaten the use of air power for diplomatic advantage, but quite another to use it on its own during war. What feared Hitler most was a repeat of the civil unrest and rebellion seen in World War One; this time caused by retaliatory strikes on German cities. Yet, he reserved the right to conduct such operations should the Allies first choose a policy of 'terror' bombing.³⁹

So, as D-day moved closer, the Wehrmacht mobilised in secret along the eastern frontier with Poland and lay in wait. However, on the eve of the invasion, the OKH suddenly communicated to its forces: 'Do not - repeat not - commence hostilities. Halt all troop movements. Mobilisation to continue.'⁴⁰

Manstein later reflected on what consequences this last minute order had for the Wehrmacht:

Every soldier can judge what an eleventh-hour counter-order of this kind implied. Within the space of a few hours three armies moving straight for the frontier across a zone extending from Lower Silesia to the eastern part of Slovakia had to be brought to a halt - not forgetting that all headquarters staffs up to at least divisional level were also on the march and that there was still a security ban on wireless traffic. Despite all the difficulties, we managed to notify everybody in good time - a first-rate piece of work by the Operations and Signals staffs.⁴¹

This example illustrates vividly how efficiently the Wehrmacht's command, control, and communications apparatus worked initially. Having been forced to postpone the initial attack of 26 August 1939 because of Italy's vacillations, Hitler then set 1 September as D-day, having received notification of its decision not to intervene. He also made this decision on the urging of Brauchitsch who demanded that his troops either attack or withdraw immediately otherwise the surprise component of 'White' would be lost.⁴²

Hand in hand with Hitler's knowledge of history went his belief in himself as a maker of history, charged with the mission of rescuing Europe from Jewish-

Bolshevik ideology and replacing it with a new order based on his notions of race and space.⁴³ Therefore, despite the reservations of many of his generals, and ignoring all opposition and last-minute hopes of peace, Hitler loosed war upon Europe.⁴⁴ On the false pretence of a Polish attack on the radio station at Gleiwitz (staged by the SS), the Wehrmacht invaded Poland at 0445 on 1 September 1939.⁴⁵ Ironically, (because the Navy would play little part in this campaign), the German cruiser *Schleswig-Holstein* fired the first shots of the war when it attacked the bastion in Danzig harbour.⁴⁶

In keeping with the OKH's demand that Polish forces be confronted west of the Vistula, the Wehrmacht wished to engage Polish forces directly in order to annihilate them, so that Germany could then transfer forces to the west to meet an expected attack from Poland's allies, Britain and France. A vivid example of this occurred during the opening days of the campaign when approximately one-third of the Polish Army was engaged and destroyed in the 'Polish Corridor' by Third and Fourth armies using a direct attack method.⁴⁷

While the Wehrmacht 'reduced' its Polish counterpart, German generals looked warily to the west, hoping that Poland's allies would abandon it as they had Czechoslovakia. From the beginning of the campaign Hitler emphasised that responsibility for opening hostilities in the west be left unmistakably to England and France. Minor violations of the frontier would be dealt with, for the time being, purely as local incidents.⁴⁸ Because Germany should not enter a two-front war, he gambled that the western front would not be opened until the Poles had been defeated. Hence, there was a constant emphasis on speed and surprise in Wehrmacht operations. However, while the speed of the German invasion was obvious, total surprise was not possible.

The Wehrmacht's attack on Poland did have elements of strategic surprise because its mobilisation and eastward deployments were disguised as fall

manoeuvres. Therefore, while the Poles believed that an invasion was possible, they delayed mobilisation until the end of August in order to avoid provoking the Germans. While the German invasion date was a surprise, it was not a crucial advantage because the Polish forces were bound to lose in any case. Because of this situation, which was widely realised in the German High Commands, Manstein does not include surprise in his list of decisive factors in the Polish campaign.⁴⁹

While the Polish campaign continued to provide the Germans with continuous success, Colonel von Vormann, the Army's Liaison Officer, noted the tragic nature of the situation on the western front: 'The French have hung out a sign at Saarbrücken reading: *We won't fire the first shot.*'⁵⁰ Vormann again on 6 September wrote: 'So far not a shot has been fired on the western front. On both sides there are just huge loudspeakers barking at each other, with each side trying to make it clear to the other how impossible their behaviour is and how stupid their governments are. At some places the troops were bathing in the river. There were secret exchanges of food and drink between the French and German lines.'⁵¹ Furthermore, French deserters disclosed how prophetic their sign at Saarbrücken was when they revealed to the Germans that their front line sentries were not permitted to load live ammunition in their rifles.

Meanwhile, the Poles suffered more from the disruption of their communications than from the bomb attacks on airfields and factories, the effectiveness of which was greatly over-estimated by the Germans. Therefore, the Polish armed forces were hindered more by internal organisational collapse than by direct conflict with German forces.⁵² Everywhere, the Poles were pushed back, and very rarely could they put up any co-ordinated resistance. Anywhere they did make a stand, the German Army and Luftwaffe combined to suppress them.

Despite claims from the Luftwaffe of their decisive influence, the Army accounted most for the quick and overwhelming German victory in Poland. The Army's rapid advance overran the Polish early warning systems and forward bases, preventing a co-ordinated direction of Polish fighter aircraft. The Army's advance also engulfed depots and dumps, thereby cutting off the supply of spare parts to the remaining operational Polish aircraft.⁵³ Therefore, when the Russians fulfilled their obligations (under the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany) by invading Poland from the east on 17 September 1939, the imminent Polish defeat came even sooner.

Realising the potential propaganda value of the situation, Hitler attempted to claim that Germany had exclusively defeated Poland. Consistent with his view of the Aryan race as omnipotent, Hitler believed that Russian intervention in Poland on the previous day was of no consequence because Poland had already been conquered. Under no circumstances was he prepared to allow any conjecture with regards the exclusive German nature of the Polish defeat.⁵⁴

Hitler was not the only prominent figure who viewed the campaign as a great success. Manstein recalled: 'The new Wehrmacht had passed its first test with flying colours. So far, even the Army staff had been able to act without interference from outside. So far, the military commanders had retained full authority of command. So far, the troops had had a purely military battle to fight, and for that reason it had still been possible to fight chivalrously.'⁵⁵ So while Manstein agreed with Hitler over the success of the Wehrmacht, the former also had a barb at the Führer by suggesting that the armed forces only did well because he interfered little in operational planning, and followed the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, whereby commanders were given a battlefield objective but not lengthy orders on how to obtain it.⁵⁶

Indeed, it appears that Hitler seemed content to let his service commanders direct the campaign in the way they saw fit. Keitel noted only two occasions on which Hitler intervened in the conduct of operations in Poland. On the first occasion, Hitler demanded prudently that tank units be transferred to East Prussia, to reinforce the northern flank, so the Polish capital, Warsaw, could be encircled from east of the Vistula. On the second occasion, he intervened in Johannes Blaskowitz's Eighth Army operations, to which he had taken exception. Otherwise, Hitler restricted himself to expressions of opinion with his service heads, with his nightly contact with Göring over the telephone simply being indicative of his interest in the co-ordination of land and air elements.⁵⁷

However, while Hitler had daily contact with his confidant Göring, the same could not be said for his other service chiefs. While the lack of contact with the Navy is understandable because of its limited role in the Polish campaign, the same cannot be said for the Army. Remarkably, while Poland was the domain of the OKH, its Chief of Staff, Halder, never once spoke on the telephone to either Hitler, Keitel, Jodl, or even the Army's Liaison Officer on the Führer's train, Vormann.⁵⁸ The absence of communication between Halder and Hitler did not hinder operations in Poland because success was far more likely than failure. However, in future campaigns, this situation proved intolerable, for Halder at least, and contributed heavily to the command confusion that occurred later in the war when lines of communication became stretched over several theatres.

On the surface, the Polish campaign had been an overwhelming success for the Wehrmacht. In the space of less than a month, Germany had beaten an army of over one million men, and had secured two-thirds of Poland. Furthermore, the Wehrmacht had suffered far fewer casualties than Poland. The Luftwaffe had lost 285 aircraft and 759 personnel (539 of them air crew) while the PLW lost between 327 and 335 aircraft. Comparative figures for the Army were 16,000 German dead and 32,000 wounded, while the Poles lost 66,000 dead, 133,000 wounded,

and 787,000 taken prisoner (587,000 by the Germans and 200,000 by the Russians after 17 September).⁵⁹

Despite the Wehrmacht's victory, the OKH judged that operational success was insufficient and inadequate. Furthermore, the higher the headquarters, the more demanding and dissatisfied were commanders with operational performance.⁶⁰ The OKH was not alone in questioning the degree of German success in Poland. Kesselring, the commander of Luftflotte 1 believed: 'The campaign had proved that as far as air strategy was concerned we were on the right road; our various crises and reverses, however, showed that there was much leeway to be made up if we were to stand up against a more powerful enemy.'⁶¹ Additionally, F.W. Mellenthin, an officer of the Army General Staff, thought that, while the campaign was an overwhelming success for the Wehrmacht, it remained obvious that in Poland, the quality of the Wehrmacht's *material* left much to be desired. Moreover, both armoured strategy and tactics were in an experimental stage.⁶²

The prevalent view of the Polish campaign as a *Blitzkrieg*, which requires little examination, is clearly a myth when the accounts noted above are considered. The myth of the Polish campaign was a creation of the German propaganda machine that kept pace with the Wehrmacht in the field. German armies were depicted as highly motorised, with tank support out of all proportion to the actual number of armoured vehicles they had. Little mention was made of the horse drawn supply columns, of the infantry divisions which often marched on foot at a rate of thirty miles per day, or of the many Luftwaffe bombings of German units at the front.⁶³

Yet as a result of the campaign, the Wehrmacht learnt that in the tank, they had an important weapon. In Poland, the tank was not used to its potential because individual Army Group commanders only committed their panzer force piecemeal. Guderian realised if the armoured divisions were tied to the infantry, their main

asset, mobility, could not be exploited. He felt that by attacking with tanks, the Wehrmacht would achieve a higher rate of movement than had been previously obtainable, and could keep moving once a break-through had been made.⁶⁴

With the two panzer, and two light divisions he led in Army Group North, Guderian made many astonishing gains because he used his armour as a single force. However, in Army Group South, his views did not prevail, therefore, the armour was split up and dispersed among the various armies and corps.⁶⁵ Hence, the potential shock power of the tank, as envisaged by Guderian, was neither understood, nor applied in Poland. In subsequent campaigns, the Germans did not repeat this mistake. The tank example proves that problems surrounding the direction of forces emerged very early on in the war. Yet, because of the German ability to critique and improve their methods, and because of the calibre of their enemies at this point, these tensions remained controlled until later crises.

Germany won through the effective, if not always perfect, co-ordination of the Army, Navy, and the Air Force. The Germans themselves put their victory down to the 'co-operation of the old weapon - the Army - and the new weapon - the Air Force.'⁶⁶ Indeed, while the OKH appeared reserved in its appraisal of the campaign, Hitler seemed in no doubt as, on the official conclusion of hostilities on 5 October, he proclaimed from Berlin:

Soldiers of the Wehrmacht in the east!

On September 1, on my orders, you set out to defend the Reich against the Polish attack. In exemplary comradeship in arms between the Army, the Luftwaffe, and the Navy, you have fulfilled your mission. You have fought courageously and bravely. Today, I was able to greet the troops engaged against a fortified Warsaw. This day brings to an end a battle which is testimony to the best of German soldiership.⁶⁷

Not everyone saw the campaign in such a glowing light. Halder, in particular, did not see Poland as a serious opponent, but rather as a testing ground for the tools

of war. This campaign was to be viewed not as a general showdown, but as the disposition of specific issues, which harked back to Versailles.⁶⁸ Although the Wehrmacht had conquered Poland, the perception of the degree of success varied enormously.

The Germans used the Polish campaign to validate their weapons and doctrine. The lessons learnt during this campaign were then applied to Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and France in the Wehrmacht's *Blitzkrieg* of 1940. Like the Polish campaign, the Wehrmacht's advance in these battles was irresistible. As long as this remained the case, the tensions within the Wehrmacht remained controlled. However, the strength of the Wehrmacht's forces was not the only influence on Germany's future conduct of the war. As this study will illustrate, when Germany became embroiled in simultaneous multi-theatre warfare, the Wehrmacht's flawed command structure increasingly proved detrimental to their war effort, and ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Third Reich.

Chapter Two

Blitzkrieg - Scandinavia and the Western Campaigns

With the completion of the Polish campaign Hitler had acquired his most immediate goal. However, unless he could make peace in the west (both France and Britain resisted Hitler's overtures), either by persuading them to accept the partition of Poland, or by defeating them, Hitler could not be assured of keeping his territorial gains.⁶⁹ So the prime question remained after Germany's conquest of Poland: what next?

Hitler had done some thinking on the subject of an overall strategic plan and expressed these ideas during various conferences and conversations with his generals. He had thought about the possible course of the war after the Polish campaign. An example of this was his call for reconciliation with Britain and the preservation of its empire in 1940. However, as events after Poland showed, he remained flexible.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the immediate focus of the Wehrmacht was the conclusion of hostilities in the east, not the potential for war in the west.

Because of the possibility of a two-front war, Hitler constantly emphasised the need for the Wehrmacht to focus solely on its task in the east. In his directive of 3 September 1939, Hitler reiterated that the immediate aim of the armed forces was the rapid and victorious conclusion of operations against Poland. He also added that the transfer of any considerable forces from the eastern front to the west was not to be made without his approval.⁷¹

However, because of the rapid German advance in Poland, as early as 7 September, Halder made preparations for the transfer of ground forces from the east to the West Wall.⁷² On 9 September, Hitler's third directive made it clear that

once Polish forces were unable to establish a line of solid resistance against the Wehrmacht, then parts of the Army and Luftwaffe that were no longer required for German success would be transferred to the western frontier. The Wehrmacht consolidated its strength in the west in order to maintain the status quo until the campaign in Poland had ended, and the intentions of Britain and France had become clear.

In the meantime, Britain and France were to be held at arm's length if at all possible. Regarding Britain, Hitler ordered the Navy to begin offensive action against merchant shipping under prize regulations. The entrances to the Baltic were to be mined without infringing neutral territorial waters and the North Sea was to be blockaded. The Luftwaffe was to refrain from attacks on naval forces, bases, and transports until Britain chose to conduct such operations against Germany.⁷³

In reference to France, which remained the more immediate threat because of geography, Hitler demanded that under no circumstances were German troops to violate French borders. The Navy and Luftwaffe were also forbidden to conduct offensive operations against France without extreme provocation. Furthermore, Hitler reserved for himself the right to initiate pre-emptive strikes against either Britain or France.⁷⁴

During the early stages of the war in Poland, Hitler was generally resident at his headquarters in Berlin. However, he also made a point of touring the front lines, and travelled extensively in his mobile headquarters dubbed the 'Führer Special'.⁷⁵ At Nuremberg, Keitel recalled Hitler's daily routine during the Polish campaign:

The 'Führer Special' was stationed in the training area of Gross-Born (Pomerania); from this area we went off every other day on tours of the front lasting from early morning to late at night, visiting Army and Corps headquarters. At each place the

Führer had the situation presented to him; occasionally he happened to meet the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Hitler very seldom intervened in the conduct of operations; I can myself only think of two instances. Otherwise he did no more than give his point of view, discuss with the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and make suggestions. He never committed himself so far as to give an order.⁷⁶

While Keitel seemed confident that Hitler would limit himself to the direction of strategy, Hitler wanted to control and conduct operations. Additionally, others on the 'Führer Special' felt that this would be a natural expansion of his role. Often those in Hitler's inner circle complained that the cramped and ad hoc organisation of the headquarters would not be satisfactory should the war expand to include other enemies. They thought that a new, more solid structure was required so Hitler could direct not only strategic war planning, but actual operations.⁷⁷

In the meantime, because of Hitler's distance from the front, he became reliant upon the daily briefings of his generals for information on the war's progress. This resulted in his order that the OKH be located alongside his headquarters. This demand had many implications for the conduct of subsequent campaigns. Outwardly, it appeared that this situation would allow for easier communication between the Army High Command and the Supreme Commander. Halder thought that such an arrangement would also free the OKH from the tutelage of the OKW. However, Hitler's intention was to maintain a tight reign on the Army.⁷⁸

At first, Hitler had intended to confine himself to the conception of strategy, coordination of the services, and the issue of operational directives of a wide scope. During the Polish campaign, as Keitel noted, this intention generally held true, with the Commanders-in-Chief of the individual services retaining a fair degree of latitude regarding the formulation of operational orders. However, in subsequent campaigns this situation changed dramatically.⁷⁹ With the Polish campaign won so comprehensively, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Hitler feared that the achievements of the generals might impair his own prestige in the eyes of the

people. This partially explains why he treated the OKH with hostility regarding the conduct of the western campaign.⁸⁰

On 27 September 1939, the very day that Warsaw fell after heavy German bombardment, Hitler, without prior consultation with Brauchitsch, gave the order to prepare plans for an attack on France.⁸¹ Hitler went so far as to select the date of execution of this plan, 12 November. Even though he was not obliged to, before planning this significant military campaign, it would have been prudent for him to advise his service commanders. However, in a practice that was to become common place, he chose to by-pass Brauchitsch, Göring, and Raeder in making decisions regarding the war's direction. Hitler already knew that the Army was against any immediate western offensive. So, having resolved to attack the west he might have considered it needless to discuss his intentions with his service commanders before his announcement.⁸² This lack of consultation indicates that Hitler was fashioning for himself an enlarged role in the everyday planning and execution of operations as early as the western campaign.

Most in the Army (as well as the Navy and Luftwaffe), had not envisaged that such an ambitious campaign would be considered immediately after victory in Poland. Thus, they did not react warmly towards his demands. In a memorandum submitted to Hitler on 30 September, Brauchitsch and Halder outlined their concerns, and their preference for defensive operations in the west.⁸³ Regardless, Hitler ordered that plans be made for Fall 'Gelb' (Case 'Yellow', the attack on France and the Low Countries) in case agreement with Britain and France could not be brokered regarding Germany's eastern gains.⁸⁴

Hitler knew of the Army's reluctance to prepare for 'Yellow'. In a speech before his Commanders-in-Chief in the Chancellery on 27 September, he said that an attack in the west would only be a result of a British and French refusal to accept the new situation in Europe. Should an attack prove necessary, Germany would

batter them until victorious. In response, the Army mustered what arguments it could against any attack in the west. Brauchitsch articulated these concerns in person to Hitler on 7 October.

Brauchitsch argued that the tactics that had proved so successful in Poland would not suffice against more substantial and organised resistance. Furthermore, the Army lacked the ammunition stores and equipment necessary for such an expedition. Meanwhile the timing of the attack in autumn meant that there was general concern at the prospect of fog, and short hours of daylight, both of which would put the Luftwaffe at a disadvantage.⁸⁵ Brauchitsch also revisited the debate over whether the OKH should have sole responsibility for the planning of operations, citing its success in Poland. However, these arguments did not impress Hitler, and he was further enraged by Brauchitsch's assertion that the fighting spirit of the German soldier in Poland was worse than at the start of World War One.⁸⁶ Hitler exclaimed that it was incomprehensible that, just because of a little lack of discipline, Brauchitsch condemned his own service. Furthermore, as Supreme Commander, Hitler stated that he would have to reject out of hand such charges against his Army.⁸⁷

In this last assertion, Brauchitsch was not alone. Halder noted in his diary that Army Group North commander, Fedor von Bock, held the impression that the infantry fell below the calibre of 1914. Furthermore, the impetus given by the first line of attackers was lacking, and the advance of the Wehrmacht depended solely upon the initiative of the commanders.⁸⁸ In his own diary, though, Bock qualified his comments by saying that, because his troops were constantly subjected to the rigors of forest warfare, his observations may not be a general reflection of the German soldier in Poland.⁸⁹ Manstein thought along similar lines. Yet, he immediately saw the folly in suggesting the Wehrmacht was deficient in fighting spirit because Hitler saw himself as the sole creator of the new armed forces whose ability was now being called into question.⁹⁰

Despite objections from the Army, Navy, and Luftwaffe, Hitler resolved to attack the west on 12 November. On 9 October, he issued a memorandum to Keitel, Brauchitsch, Raeder, and Göring, which further justified his position regarding 'Yellow'. For reasons of superior population, human quality, and equipment, Germany would defeat the western powers. However, time was of the essence because of a number of factors. Thus, an immediate attack was necessary if Germany was to have any hope of maintaining its position of strength in Europe should Britain and France choose to resist.⁹¹

The German war aim was, then, the defeat of Allied forces in Western Europe. Hitler maintained that the German people must shoulder this burden. Despite this, he still saw a peace agreement as in the best interests of Germany should the opportunity arise. However, such a resolution would not be concluded if Germany had to relinquish any of its eastern gains.⁹²

On 10 October, French Premier Edouard Daladier formally rejected any possibility of peace with Germany under the current circumstances. Two days later, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain followed suit. With all hope of a peaceful resolution now extinguished, Hitler called on the Luftwaffe to resume bomb production, and declared that he would not bargain with the Allies any longer.⁹³

Hitler did not believe the French would provide stiff resistance in any conflict, and he viewed both Holland and Belgium as even weaker. Hence, he believed that the latter two would not be able to preserve their neutral position should either Britain or France demand their assistance against Germany. If they were to fall into western hands, Germany's weakness, the Ruhr, would then be put at an unreasonable risk.⁹⁴ Furthermore, looking at the long term, Hitler considered the status of the Soviet Union as uncertain, and like his Navy Commander-in-Chief, Raeder, he felt that it was only a matter of time until the United States entered the

war. This meant that the resource-rich Ruhr was of crucial importance to the continuation of the German war effort in a global war.⁹⁵ Therefore, despite the reservations of his generals, Hitler thought it imperative that Germany occupy Belgium and Holland because it was easier to violate their neutrality than face possible Allied attacks from these countries should Germany not act.⁹⁶

Dated 9 October, Hitler's Directive Number Six set out the strategic objective of operations in the west for which the services were to prepare. The Wehrmacht was to strike with force across the Luxembourg-Belgian-Dutch area in two offensive wedges, engaging the enemy through the co-ordination of armoured formations and the Luftwaffe. These operations would prevent a stagnation of the advance, which had proved so costly during World War One, and would stop the Allies from mounting effective operations against the Reich or its armed forces.⁹⁷ The objective laid out in this directive held that the Wehrmacht was to defeat as much as possible of the French, and Allied armies, while also winning as much territory as it could in Holland, Belgium, and northern France. The importance of gaining this territory was emphasised, as it would serve as a base for the execution of the air and sea war against Britain, while also providing a buffer zone for the economically vital Ruhr.⁹⁸

Brauchitsch continued to formulate an operations plan for 'Yellow' based on Hitler's strategic plan, despite his reservations. He did say that it would be prudent to attack in the spring because the additional time would allow the Army to train fresh units, and also because an autumn campaign might see tanks bogged down and the Luftwaffe grounded.⁹⁹ Rather than taking the offensive in the west, the OKH much preferred to counter any Allied attempt to take the Ruhr. Both Brauchitsch and Halder wished Hitler would postpone the attack so a political agreement between the warring factions could be concluded. Göring also held the view that the Wehrmacht needed time to regroup after the Polish campaign, and that success was not guaranteed should the blow be struck too

soon. However, Raeder, held no such misgivings.¹⁰⁰ He did not want an attack on France at all. What the Navy proposed instead was a concerted effort to bring England to its knees.

Fortunately for the ill-prepared Wehrmacht, bad weather forced a postponement of the initial attack, a process repeated fifteen times before the end of January.¹⁰¹ Indeed, during the period between the conclusion of the Polish campaign, and the outbreak of hostilities in the west, there were twenty-nine postponements because of inclement weather, shortages of soldiers, and other priorities such as the Norwegian campaign.¹⁰²

In venting his frustration at this sequence of events, Hitler targeted the Army, accusing it of cowardice, disloyalty, sabotage, defeatism, and a lack of belief in his military genius.¹⁰³ Hitler also criticised the Army for its slow build-up of armaments and manpower, which stemmed from a lack of will to continue the fight.¹⁰⁴ Brauchitsch was so offended by Hitler's barrage that he unsuccessfully attempted to resign.

The postponement of the attack ultimately proved positive for the Wehrmacht as it gained the opportunity to revise the plan of attack in light of subsequent events.¹⁰⁵ However, a negative result of the postponement was a crisis of leadership that developed between the Supreme Commander and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The split between Hitler and Brauchitsch had significant implications for the subsequent execution of the German war effort as, for the time being, the two simply ceased to meet.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Manstein noted in his memoirs on 18 January 1940, that, according to Adolf Heusinger (Chief of Operations Section (OKW)), Brauchitsch had not seen Hitler since 5 November the previous year.¹⁰⁷ Hence, even though the Wehrmacht had proven a potent force in Poland, already, the divisions within its command structure were growing because of the poor relationship between Hitler and Brauchitsch.

At a conference on 20 January 1940, Hitler made it clear to his generals that secrecy of operations was of the utmost importance. He demanded that the number of people involved in the planning of operations must be kept to a minimum, and that this group of people should only be told as much of the situation as is essential for his function. No total picture would be allowed, information would be given only at the last moment, and the intention of the operation known only by a very select group.¹⁰⁸ This emphasis on security may have been sparked by the crash landing of a German officer (who held important documents regarding German plans for the western campaign) at Mechelen on 10 January, and his capture by Belgian authorities. Hitler's demand that only he have 'total knowledge' of the situation would become crucial when Germany faced reversals later during the war.

With the postponement of the western campaign until spring, and because Hitler had learned of British intentions regarding Germany's iron ore shipments, the first targets after the conclusion of 'White' became Norway and Denmark. These countries were selected on the basis that Germany needed both to consolidate its strategic position before any attack on France, and by occupying them, it would also forestall any English invasion. Raeder impressed upon Hitler Norway's importance as a major outlet for Swedish iron ore supplies heading for Germany via Narvik, and its potential use for North Atlantic naval bases.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, its geographical location meant that it dominated Germany's submarine route past the Shetlands. Hence, Britain could well use Norway to conduct operations against Germany. By occupying Norway, Britain would also halt the Swedish supply of iron ore to Germany, without which the German armaments industry would die overnight.¹¹⁰ Germany had to move to seize it first to prevent this happening.¹¹¹

Responsibility for planning the Scandinavian campaign fell on the OKW's Operations Office. In a departure from previous expeditions, the OKW would

devise the campaign not only in terms of strategy, but also in the finer details of preparations and operations. On 13 December 1939, Hitler decided to give the OKW the sole right to create operations in this area for a number of reasons. Firstly, in view of the size and difficulties of this operation it seemed inappropriate to subordinate the forces of two services to the third. Clearly, the Army was not qualified to direct the extensive air and naval operations connected with the venture, nor could the Luftwaffe or the Navy direct the extensive ground operations necessary after the initial landings.

The second consideration taken into account when assigning the OKW this campaign was that the operation required close collaboration with the Reich's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its representatives in Denmark and Norway. It seemed easier to secure this collaboration by putting the OKW in charge of preparations than by assigning one of the individual services to its direction. Furthermore, the necessary maintenance of secrecy also seemed safer within the more restricted circle of the OKW Operations Office.

Finally, while the Army had numerical superiority, and it would assume critical importance after the initial landings, Hitler did not consider the OKH as the primary planning organisation for this campaign. Because its Operations Office was already involved in preparing 'Yellow', it seemed pointless to burden the Army further by assigning it this task. In any case, the Army was already offside with Hitler because of his perception that it was too pessimistic regarding the imminent western campaign.¹¹² This caused him to lose confidence in the OKH, and resulted in its almost total exclusion from the planning of operations in the Norwegian theatre.¹¹³

The campaigns in Scandinavia were predominantly guided by political considerations. Therefore, It appeared that this was one of the primary considerations in giving the OKW responsibility for planning in Norway; simply

because it was inherently connected with the political agencies of the Reich, and had more insight into the political situation than did the individual service High Commands. For the reasons noted above, Norway became known as the first OKW Theatre of War.

On 27 January 1940, Hitler took another step towards consolidating the Norwegian theatre as the OKW's sole domain by ordering that a special bureau be set up within the OKW to formulate possible occupation plans. This bureau consisted of a senior officer from each branch of the Wehrmacht.¹¹⁴ So for the first time, the OKW began to function as a working headquarters for Hitler's overall command of the armed forces, as it took over the unified command of a campaign that would involve combined operations of the Army, Navy, and Luftwaffe.

The Norwegian theatre allowed the OKW to illustrate the effectiveness of a joint and centralised command structure (in the form of the OKW's Operations Office). During this campaign, Hitler made it clear that the Navy would be responsible for troop transports and logistics, while the OKW had direct control over all Army and Luftwaffe units involved.¹¹⁵ German occupation plans were intensified with intelligence suggesting the Allies had designs on Scandinavia, and news that British sailors in neutral Norwegian territorial waters had boarded the German supply ship *Altmark* on 16 February 1940.¹¹⁶

The OKW plans for operation 'Weserübung' ('Weser Exercise') were ready by 1 March, with Denmark added because Danish airfields were deemed necessary to extend the striking power of the Luftwaffe. Hitler stated that the objectives of 'Weser Exercise' were threefold: firstly, the British were to be prevented from intervening in Scandinavia and the Baltic; secondly, Swedish iron ore supply to Germany was to be protected; and finally, the Navy and Luftwaffe were to be given bases from which to attack Britain.¹¹⁷

The Army and Luftwaffe were not in favour of this operation because of their material commitments to 'Yellow', and because Hitler had not advised them of his plans for Norway. However, the main reason for their resistance would have been that the OKW had been given sole responsibility for the conduct of operations in Norway. Citing what he saw as the inevitable entry of the British into Scandinavia (under the guise of assistance to Finland, which Russia had invaded in November 1939), Hitler overruled the concerns of the Army and Luftwaffe. Although the end of the Russo-Finnish war on 12 March 1940 removed the pretext for Allied intervention in Scandinavia, Hitler, fearing this in any case, pushed on with 'Weser Exercise'.

Beginning on 9 April, the Danish part of the campaign was decided quickly in Germany's favour with Denmark falling without a fight. However, the Norwegians, with indecisive British and French support, proved somewhat more stubborn, and it took the Germans two months to take full control of Norway, with the all-important Narvik not taken until 8 June.¹¹⁸ The Norwegian campaign was well planned and executed, and showed the Wehrmacht's potency. However, behind the facade of success a crisis of leadership arose when Allied troops landed at Narvik on 14 April. Up to this time, the Luftwaffe had effectively helped the Navy and Army's advance. However, Narvik was at the extreme of the Luftwaffe's fighting range. Combined with the superior British naval presence in the area, this caused Hitler to lose his nerve. Only the efforts of Jodl and Keitel dissuaded Hitler from ordering the withdrawal of the regiment at Narvik to Sweden for internment.¹¹⁹

Walter Warlimont, Chief of the National Defence Section of OKW claimed:

The success of the Norwegian campaign owed nothing to Hitler but had been won in spite of his amateurish interventions by the combined efforts of highly trained commanders and troops. In particular it should be noted that, if Hitler had his way, Narvik, the real key point of the entire operation, would have been needlessly

evacuated only a few days after it had been occupied and after the Navy had lost almost half its strength in heavy destroyers.¹²⁰

Indeed, Hitler had cracked under the pressure, and those in his inner circle felt that this did not bode well for future operations. While the Wehrmacht continued to win these short campaigns, this disquiet was easily suppressed. However, as the war became protracted, the failings in Hitler's leadership became more pronounced. For the rest of the war, and for the Navy in particular, Norway would provide a major headache as Hitler prescribed it exaggerated strategic importance.

Nevertheless, the Wehrmacht continued to win victory after victory. The Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg all fell to a German offensive during May 1940. This proved a warm up for what lay ahead for Germany's main enemy, France. The period between September 1939 and May 1940 had allowed the Army (especially the Command of Army Group A) enough time to revise 'Yellow' by reluctantly adopting Manstein's alternative plan for the invasion of France, which Hitler thoroughly endorsed. Hitler rejected the Army's initial plan for the campaign in the west because he saw it as just another version of the Schlieffen Plan with a strong right flank along the Atlantic coast. What he proposed was an armoured breakthrough at Sedan, which would strike to the coast at Abbeville and then swing north into the rear of Anglo-French forces advancing into Belgium. When Manstein conceived a plan along similar lines, Hitler left no doubt as to the pleasure he gained from this support.¹²¹

The Hitler-Manstein Plan envisaged a surprise attack through the Ardennes and a breakthrough on the weak Meuse front, and fast armoured drives towards the Channel coast with a view to annihilating the isolated northern remnants of the Allied armies. Army Group B received the task of confronting the strong Allied forces on the north-eastern border of France by attacking through Holland and Belgium.¹²²

On 9 May 1940, the 'Führer Special' departed from Grunewald destined for Hitler's new headquarters, Felsennest, which the Todt Organisation had built far from any populated area. Here, Hitler, Keitel, and Jodl had offices in the immediate vicinity of each other. Furthermore, Brauchitsch's headquarters was only half an hour away by car.¹²³

When the Germans launched their attack in the west on 10 May, a substantial force remained involved in Scandinavia. However, this had little effect on the initial advance of the Wehrmacht in France. Very early on in planning for a Norwegian campaign, Jodl had secured Hitler's approval to execute 'Weser Exercise' independent of 'Yellow'.¹²⁴ In the end, the rapid advance of the Germans in France saw Allied resistance in Norway crumble. By 8 June, the Allies had evacuated Norway in order to reinforce France, which in turn resulted on 10 June in the surrender of the northern Norwegian commander.¹²⁵

The battle for France commenced with the rapid German attack though the supposedly impenetrable (by motor vehicles and tanks), thus lightly defended, Ardennes by Ewald von Kleist's panzer divisions. The strategic surprise of this attack was total, and by 15 May, the Dutch Army had surrendered, while the Belgians followed on 28 May. Guderian's forces accounted for the French Ninth Army. In the race to the Channel ports, the Germans overwhelmed substantial French forces and pushed the British, and some French armies, off the continent at Dunkirk.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, here the German success could have been much more significant had Hitler not allowed over 340,000 Allied troops to escape to fight another day. He probably made this grave error in the mistaken belief that the humiliation of expulsion from the continent would suffice to compel the British to abandon France and look for peace. However, instead of providing for an environment of peace, Hitler had sown the seeds for the eventual destruction of Germany.

After the Germans had taken Dunkirk on 4 June 1940, they then carried on the offensive by attacking the Somme-Aisne line. On 10 June, Italy finally entered into the war against the Allies, expecting that it would gain some of the spoils from the imminent fall of France.¹²⁷ In the short term, the entry of Italy into the war provided a small boost for German morale. However, as the war progressed, Italy proved a major distraction for the Wehrmacht as it opened theatres of war that the Germans preferred to stay closed.

By 22 June, France was forced to sign an armistice that allowed Germany to occupy sixty percent of the country while a French government would be set up in the unoccupied zone to administer the French colonial empire.¹²⁸ This provision of French Government was Hitler's attempt to avoid France from continuing the fight in North Africa, and thus from establishing another front that would stretch German resources to breaking point.¹²⁹

During the execution of 'Yellow' (which lasted forty-three days from 10 May to 22 June), Hitler only visited his front line commanders on four or five occasions. Primarily this lack of visitation was the result of active enemy aerial operations over the theatre. However, the German communications network proved robust, despite Hitler moving his headquarters ever further away from Berlin and his isolation from the front. But this situation deteriorated as the Wehrmacht became over-committed later in the war.

The Wehrmacht defeated France because of its mobility, and because of a qualitative and tactical advantage enjoyed by the Germans. Numerically, the combatants were even, with the Germans mustering 103 divisions against 99 French (with a small British contingent). The Allies had 11,200 artillery pieces versus the 7,700 German. However, in the air, the Germans held a significant advantage. The French also held true to their First World War defensive mode as shown in their construction of the vast, but ultimately useless Maginot Line.¹³⁰

Furthermore, the quality of the German war machine, in terms of training, equipment, and strategy, proved far better than that of the Allies.

Following on from the Allied execution of Operation 'Ariel' (the Allied evacuations from the French coast), there prevailed a widespread belief in Britain that a German invasion of their homeland was imminent. Yet Hitler privately discounted such an undertaking at this point because of his awareness of the logistical problems involved.¹³¹

Not everyone in Britain expected an immediate invasion, though. On 22 May British decrypters at Bletchley Park made an important breakthrough in their attempts to read some of the most secret German wireless communications. On this day the British broke the German Enigma key most frequently used by the Luftwaffe. Thus, from this day forward, British intelligence could read daily messages sent from the OKL's headquarters to the field, and vice versa. Among the most important of these were the messages sent by the Air Force liaison officers with the German Army because these messages provided many pointers to the position and intentions of the German field formations, as they turned towards the sea.¹³²

Since May 22, then, British Intelligence had been able to read the most secret German Air Force directives within a few days, and sometimes within hours, of their issue to the German Air Force commanders in France. This not only gave local operational details, but, as Military Intelligence reported on June 1, made it clear that the German priority was the defeat of France. Therefore, before France fell, an invasion of Britain was unlikely because there were simply no plans or preparations for it. Had such preparations existed, the Enigma decrypts should have revealed them. Yet not a single Enigma message referred to any move of aircraft needed for Hitler to follow up the Dunkirk success with an assault across the Channel.¹³³

Nevertheless, on 2 July 1940, Hitler asked the Army, Navy and Air Force to begin operational planning for an invasion of Britain.¹³⁴ He set no date, but stated that a landing would only be possible if air superiority could be attained. The OKW received planning rights for the invasion of England because this campaign was to involve the combination of each of the services. Yet by no means was an attack on Britain a certainty because, just as he had after the Polish campaign, Hitler wavered between continuing the war and trying for a peaceful conclusion with his enemies.

Hitler's reluctance was born of doubts he held over the outcome of any operation against Britain. He believed it necessary that the Wehrmacht maintain the reputation of invincibility it had acquired in previous campaigns and he was not confident that in executing such an invasion an embarrassing reversal would not happen. Hitler hoped that Britain would agree to a peace agreement because of the fall of its only other substantial European ally (at this time), France. Hence, he did not wish to destroy the possibility of peace by inflicting further casualties on the British. Additionally, Hitler thought primarily along continental lines. Therefore he had not previously favoured the idea of operations across the sea, especially against Britain.¹³⁵

Hitler's overtures fell on deaf ears, and on 16 July, he issued Directive Number Sixteen regarding the execution of Operation 'Seelöwe' ('Sea Lion', the invasion of Britain). During preparations, however, it became clear that Germany did not have the means at its disposal to carry out such an operation. On the one hand, after the Norwegian operation, only sections of the German Navy, which was inferior to the British Navy in any case, were ready for action. On the other hand, the lack of amphibious equipment could not be adequately compensated for by improvised measures. Above all, however, in contrast to the Norwegian campaign, the Luftwaffe was not able to achieve air superiority to protect a landing in the projected area.

Göring's direction of the air war in the early stages of the Battle of Britain proved ineffective because he attacked too wide a range of targets and did not concentrate on the Royal Air Force's airfields and radar stations. Additionally, Hitler's decision to focus on British cities (after the RAF's bombing of German cities) also contributed to the survival of the RAF during the early stages of the battle.¹³⁶ More importantly, however, the RAF fought over its own territory. Hence, if Allied pilots were required to bail out, when they landed safely they were quickly back with their units. However, for the Germans the only real possibility was capture. Therefore, with the possibility of success fading, Hitler postponed 'Sea Lion' on 17 September until further notice, while the Luftwaffe continued attacks on Britain in the vain hope of forcing a decision alone.¹³⁷

Following the careful scrutiny of the German Enigma messages, the British Inter-Service Combined Intelligence Committee accurately concluded that no German invasion of Britain would take place until the Luftwaffe had won the air war over Britain. Therefore, after it became readily apparent during August 1940 that the Luftwaffe was not achieving air superiority over Britain, those close to the decrypters knew that Germany would not attempt an amphibious landing.¹³⁸ In any case, Hitler's attention had already turned towards what was always his primary adversary: the Soviet Union. With the air offensive against Britain proving ineffective, Hitler proposed that the next best means of defeating it would be to defeat its last possible European ally, the Soviets. On 29 July, Jodl expressed Hitler's demand that the Wehrmacht now focus on ridding the world of the dangers of Bolshevism through a surprise attack on Russia at the earliest possible moment, which would be sometime in May 1941.¹³⁹

Up until the Battle of Britain, the Wehrmacht had won victory upon victory in Poland, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and France. Now, however, Germany had experienced its first failure to achieve a stated goal. Instead of taking time to consolidate, Hitler insisted on planning an even more ambitious campaign in the

graveyard of many armies: the Soviet Union. The Wehrmacht was already stretched in terms of material before 1941. Yet the situation would deteriorate further during this year as Germany became embroiled in campaigns (the Balkans and the Mediterranean) which were not entirely of its own making. However, it was in the Soviet Union, a campaign that Germany started of its own accord (not because of its allies' actions), where most problems were encountered after an initial period of unprecedented success. Hence, the German execution of Hitler's Operation 'Barbarossa' provides the basis for the following evaluation of the Wehrmacht's attempt to direct simultaneous multi-theatre warfare.

Chapter Three

'Barbarossa' - The End of the Golden Weather

In preparing operations against his ideological enemy, the Soviet Union, Hitler wished to correct what he saw as war against the wrong enemy on the wrong front. Instead of continuing war against Britain with the neutrality of the Soviet Union, he wished to attack the latter and force the former to remain neutral. Because Britain maintained an aggressive posture towards Germany after the Wehrmacht's victory in the west and during the Battle of Britain, the political value of Hitler's success appeared not as great as he had hoped.¹⁴⁰ The Soviet Union's territorial expansion through annexation provided him with another reason to invade.

In the twelve months since its invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939, the Soviet Union had engulfed 286,000 square miles inhabited by 20,000,000 people.¹⁴¹ This westward spread convinced Hitler that Germany's strategic position in Europe was declining in direct proportion to the Soviet enlargement. The Soviet Union's occupation of the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), as well its annexation of Romania's Danubian provinces, combined to threaten Germany's status because of the possibility of Soviet interference in the Baltic and the Mediterranean.¹⁴²

During the Luftwaffe's bombardment of Britain, Hitler's interest in the Soviet Union never waned. When the Luftwaffe proved unable to achieve the air superiority he had set down as a prerequisite for 'Sea Lion', and when Britain continued rejecting the "new European order", Hitler turned the Wehrmacht's attention towards the Soviet Union.¹⁴³ He concluded that a campaign in the east would bring the war back to the direction he had originally intended, and, by

removing Germany's last potential enemy on the continent, greatly diminish British hopes of continuing the fight.¹⁴⁴ However, between September and December 1940 Hitler weighed this option with another.

The other option Hitler considered called for an increased German presence in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. This presence in the Atlantic would weaken Britain by cutting off a number of its trade routes while also providing a platform for future German operations in the area. On the other hand, operations in the Mediterranean would have to be executed in order to protect German sources of raw materials in the area from British attacks. Until Mussolini decided to attack Greece in October 1940, Hitler had hoped this area could be isolated from the war. However, he subsequently faced the prospect of British intervention in the region, and thereby, the threat of a second front. Yet Hitler's concern for the situation in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic soon became subsidiary to his one overriding desire: the defeat of the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁵ He favoured attacking the Soviet Union because he saw the Mediterranean and Atlantic as secondary theatres, and moreover, he had long viewed the east as desirable for Lebensraum (Living Space).

For these reasons above, a German attack on the Soviet Union became Hitler's primary consideration over the coming months. Because he felt preparations for this dominated all other concerns, this study will now depart slightly from the chronology of the Second World War by analysing the Wehrmacht's actions in the east, before events in the Mediterranean (and other OKW Theatres of War) are investigated.

Although distracted by the opening of hostilities in satellites he wished to remain neutral, and because of his indecision regarding different strategic options for the continuation of the war, Hitler remained focused on an attack on the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁶ During September 1940 he initiated efforts to strengthen the newly

signed Tripartite Pact (between Germany, Italy, and Japan, binding any two to come to the aid of the third if attacked) by gaining Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia as allies.¹⁴⁷ Hence, Hitler attempted to construct a robust alliance with which to execute his ideological war against the Soviet Union. He was only partially successful in his quest.

The importance of ideology in Hitler's strategy towards the Soviet Union cannot be understated. He rejected plans submitted by Ribbentrop and Raeder, which proposed alternatives to an offensive in the east. Raeder hoped for a shift of German effort to the Mediterranean, the Near East, and North-west Africa, to disrupt crucial trade links between Britain and the United States. Ribbentrop's plan, on the other hand, conceived a 'Continental Bloc', including the Soviet Union, against the Allies. Both of these plans came to nothing because they ignored Hitler's underlying desire for the near future: the defeat and subjugation of the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁸

Halder's diary entry on 22 July 1940 notes that the war in the east would be a clash of ideologies and that Germany must execute such a war to exterminate Bolshevism and Communism. Furthermore, in support of Hitler's view, he felt operations would be different from those in the west because there was no expectation that the war would be chivalrous.¹⁴⁹ In a speech to military leaders in March 1941 Hitler expanded on these views by suggesting that a massive demographic revolution was about to begin in Eastern Europe. Several prominent figures worried about this plan, including Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (the Chief of Intelligence). However, most showed support for such a campaign by putting their minds to the creation of operational plans.¹⁵⁰ On 27 August 1940, Hitler instructed his Adjutant Rudolf Schmundt, and his Chief of War Construction Fritz Todt, to find a suitable site in East Prussia from which he could oversee the execution of operations in the Soviet Union.¹⁵¹

Preconceptions were to prove costly when the Wehrmacht clashed with the Red Army. Ideology had a crucial impact upon the quality of German intelligence because of the constant underestimation of the Soviets and the exaggeration of the Wehrmacht's abilities. Hitler himself said that Germany only had to kick in Russia's door and the whole rotten structure would come crashing down.¹⁵² Not simply the product of rhetoric, this attitude towards the Russians was deeply ingrained in the German High Commands. Hence, from the outset, the planning and execution of operations in the east were strongly influenced by ideological factors.¹⁵³

The lack of accurate intelligence provided Hitler and his generals with such a distorted picture that the Wehrmacht suffered immeasurably in Russia. A graphic example came during May 1940 when the OKH Intelligence Branch, Foreign Armies East, reported on Soviet intentions and capabilities. Although the Red Army had the potential to mobilise up to two hundred divisions, popular perception viewed Russia as so disorganised after the purge of 1938 that it would be impossible to raise such a force in the short term. However, false intelligence on arms production proved even more fatal. Russia's tank fleet in reality numbered 24,000, yet in the eyes of the OKH it totalled 10,000. Against this enormous force Germany could muster only 3,500.¹⁵⁴ The Germans dismissed this advantage in both manpower and equipment by reasoning that the Russian advantage was only quantitative, not qualitative.

In keeping with previous campaigns, Hitler instructed both the OKH and OKW to prepare plans for the upcoming eastern campaign. He did this so he could choose what he saw as the best plan from the two submitted. Halder and Jodl then set about drawing up independent plans for the invasion, with Halder unaware that his efforts were duplicated by the OKW.¹⁵⁵ Halder chose the Eighteenth Army's Chief of Staff, Erich Marcks, to oversee the OKH's invasion

planning. Meanwhile, Jodl selected Bernhard von Lossberg, an officer in the OKW's Operations Office, to prepare their response to Hitler's request.

The OKH's plan established three primary objectives for the invasion of the Soviet Union: the area around Moscow, the region around Leningrad, and the cities of the Ukraine. The OKW plan 'Fritz' (named after Lossberg's son)¹⁵⁶ on the other hand, replaced Moscow as the main objective with Smolensk, which was two hundred miles to the west.¹⁵⁷ The OKH plan perceived Moscow as the most important military objective because the Red Army would mass forces in front of their capital, guaranteeing the Germans the decisive battle of destruction they wanted. In contrast, the OKW plan considered economic objectives more urgent.

On 15 September, Lossberg submitted his plan to Jodl. Ultimately, this plan was used by the Wehrmacht to invade Russia. However, the OKH simultaneously continued to draft its own plan that Halder thought to be the only one.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov met with Hitler on 12 November in an attempt to come to an understanding with the Germans before the two came to blows. Subsequently, Hitler dismissed the Russian proposals for settling matters because he viewed Molotov's demands as an affront to the German successes up to that time. Hitler recalled later that the Russians wanted military bases on Danish soil on the outlets to the North Sea as well as Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland; 'and we were supposed to be the victors!'¹⁵⁹ In the opinion of Hitler and the OKW, it had become obvious that the time for talk had ended. The marriage of convenience was over, with Hitler justifying this break up by admitting that the pact was never an honest one because the ideological gulf between the nations was just too wide.¹⁶⁰

On the day Molotov arrived in Berlin, and before he had stated his case, Hitler instructed his service commanders to continue preparations for operations in the east, regardless of the outcome of talks between the two nations. Additionally,

once the OKH had submitted its plan for Russia, Hitler would set about formulating directives for the campaign if required.¹⁶¹ On 5 December, Brauchitsch and Halder presented Hitler with the OKH plan for Wehrmacht operations in Russia. Fully expecting that their draft would be fully adopted, both were astonished that, while Hitler approved their basic plan, he dismissed the Army's emphasis on Moscow.¹⁶² On 18 December, Hitler issued Directive Number Twenty-one outlining the German plan of attack; namely that Leningrad would be targeted before any attack on Moscow. The OKW's code name 'Fritz' changed to 'Barbarossa', and the invasion was scheduled for the spring of 1941.¹⁶³

Hitler favoured an emphasis on Leningrad because such operations in the north would weaken the Soviet position in the Baltic, and thus protect this area as a crucial training ground for Navy. Meanwhile, operations in the south would be executed to capture the Donets Basin and the Caucasus, and to destroy Russian air bases in the Crimea, which were threats to Romanian oil supplies.¹⁶⁴ The Army, on the other hand, felt that Moscow should be the primary objective because of its importance to the Russians as their economic, political, spiritual, and communications centre. In capturing the capital, the Germans would effectively destroy the ability of the Russians to prepare unified resistance.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, because of Moscow's importance to the Soviets, they would mass their strongest force there, giving the Germans the opportunity to wage the battle of annihilation they desired. However, as was often the case, Hitler's view prevailed and his directive acted only as a temporary salve between the two incompatible operational ideas.

On 31 January 1941 the Deployment Order of the Army High Command added further emphasis to the issues discussed in Directive Number Twenty-one, namely that the Wehrmacht had to defeat Russia in a rapid campaign. Additionally, in advancing to the predetermined Archangel-Astrakhan line (which Hitler designated the extent of 'Barbarossa' because it brought industrial areas in the

Urals within range of the Luftwaffe, and made it impossible for the Russians to launch effective air attacks against Germany), the prerequisite for success was a confrontation with the bulk of the Red Army west of the Dvina-Dnieper line.¹⁶⁶ By forcing a decisive battle near the German-Soviet border, the OKH hoped to avoid advancing deep into the Russian interior to wage war. Therefore, the problem of logistics would be avoided if the front eventuated near the supply routes of the Wehrmacht.

The German order of battle on the eve of 'Barbarossa' consisted of three Army Groups: North, Centre, and South. Wilhelm von Leeb, Fedor von Bock, and Gerd von Rundstedt commanded these respectively. Von Leeb controlled twenty-eight divisions with six armoured and motorised divisions under Erich Hoepner's Panzer Group 4. Von Bock had fifty divisions, ten armoured, and six motorised as part of Guderian's Panzer Group 2 and Hermann Hoth's Panzer Group 3. Von Rundstedt directed forty divisions, including six armoured, and three motorised divisions under von Kleist's Panzer Group 1. The Wehrmacht held thirty divisions in reserve.¹⁶⁷ Army Groups North and Centre were to be sited in the area north of the great Pripet Marshes, while the remaining Group South would aim to capture the Donets Basin as quickly as possible.

The air support component of the German attack consisted of Alfred Keller's Luftflotte 1 (supporting Army Group North, 592 aircraft), Kesselring's Luftflotte 2 (Army Group Centre, 1,367 aircraft), and Löhr's Luftflotte 4 (Army Group South, 887 aircraft), while Luftflotte 5 was directed to deal with special operations in the north.¹⁶⁸ Despite the emphasis on the flanks of the attack, Army Group Centre received the largest air fleet because of its position as the largest ground force in 'Barbarossa'. Hitler wanted the centre to be strong so that at the appropriate moment large portions could swing both north and south against predetermined targets.¹⁶⁹ Because of the limited influence it could have in operations in Russia,

the Navy's activities were restricted to continuing the trade war in the west, and in the Baltic, to defence and supply duties.¹⁷⁰

The figures above give a clear indication that the size of the Wehrmacht that invaded the Soviet Union was not significantly larger than that used to overwhelm France. In particular, the Luftwaffe struggled to provide a large force for 'Barbarossa'. Because of the raids against Britain, and the need to provide protection from British attack in the Mediterranean, and German occupied Europe, the Luftwaffe attacked Russia with an inadequate force.¹⁷¹ Therefore, Göring, as well as Raeder, held valid concerns about the wisdom of attacking such a substantial foe when the Wehrmacht already had pressing concerns in both the west and the Mediterranean.¹⁷² Hitler dismissed such concerns by pouring scorn on the Russian ability to wage war, and added that the campaign would not last more than two months.

However, as months went by without complete success, the spectre of a simultaneous multi-theatre war became reality. Hence, as secondary fronts developed, they became a severe drain on the already scarce resources of the Wehrmacht. Yet during the early days of 'Barbarossa' it appeared that the German opinion of superiority had solid foundations, and that Russian resistance would quickly collapse. So confident of success were the Germans, that even before the commencement of hostilities the efforts of each of the service High Commands were directed towards the planning of operations for after the successful conclusion of the campaign in Russia.¹⁷³

At 0300 on 22 June 1941, the German invasion of Russia finally began after the protracted assembly of sufficient ammunition, fuel, and other supplies. Altogether, the Wehrmacht comprised 3,050,000 soldiers (3,600,000 including allied soldiers from Finland, Romania, Hungary, Italy, and Slovakia), about 600,000 vehicles, 625,000 horses, 3,500 tanks, and around 2,800 aircraft.¹⁷⁴

Against the numerically stronger, but surprised and disorganised Russians, the Germans penetrated their positions on all fronts.

Within days of the invasion, von Leeb's armour had reached Dvinsk while von Bock's tanks were busy closing a Russian pocket from Bialystok to Minsk.¹⁷⁵ These forces eliminated two Russian armies (the Third and Tenth), while a third (the Thirteenth) was shattered when this pocket collapsed on 9 July. From this victory alone, the Germans captured 350,000 Russian prisoners, and seized or destroyed more than 3,000 tanks.¹⁷⁶ Within a month, the OKW's objective of Smolensk fell into German hands and von Rundstedt had arrived at the outskirts of Kiev.

Unlike campaigns in the west, Hitler waited over a day while he followed initial events, before ordering the move of headquarters to East Prussia. Leaving from Berlin-Grünwald at 1445 on the following day, the National Defence Section (Section L) of the OKW reached the site of Hitler's new headquarters early next morning.¹⁷⁷ Dubbed the 'Wolf's Lair' (Wolfschanze), this headquarters was located in the forest of Görnitz, ten miles east of Rastenburg. From this site, Hitler planned to command the defeat of the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁸

The Wehrmacht hierarchy meant that the working staff of Section L and the Führer's Guard Battalion were located in Area 2 of the 'Wolf's Lair' while Hitler and his entourage from state, Party, and military, such as Keitel and Jodl, were all accommodated in Area 1.¹⁷⁹ In accordance with his earlier headquarters, Hitler ensured that the OKH, OKW, and OKL were in close proximity to him, while during the initial stages of 'Barbarossa', the OKM remained in Berlin. However, this soon changed as an admiral arrived as the Navy's permanent representative at Area 1.

The daily routine of the National Defence Section of the OKW involved the collection of situation reports from each of the services, and the dispatch of morning and evening reports to Jodl who then drafted a briefing for Hitler. With the expansion of the war during 1941, the OKW had to cope with the increasing flood of information from the east, west, North Africa, the Balkans, and the remainder of the Mediterranean. Except for the east, where the Army oversaw operations (with some input from Hitler and the OKW), these other areas were dubbed OKW Theatres of War because the Armed Force High Command had sole planning rights in these areas.¹⁸⁰ As the war progressed, the OKW became increasingly overloaded because of this division of the Wehrmacht's effort into spheres of influence.

While the OKW became weighed down with the responsibilities it had in the occupied territories, Hitler's optimism regarding progress in the east found favour with others. An indication of this initial confidence was evident when Halder wrote on 3 July that the prerequisite for German success in Russia (confrontation with the Red Army west of the Dvina-Dnieper line) had been accomplished. He added that it would be no exaggeration to say that the campaign had been won in the space of two weeks.¹⁸¹ This view became obvious not only in German military circles but those of other countries also. Finland felt that operations were going so well that the Soviet Union would fall in two to three months. Furthermore, the British and Americans thought along similar lines.¹⁸² Thus, it seemed justified that Hitler maintained the appearance of a renewed offensive against Britain, during July 1941, before Russia had even capitulated.¹⁸³

On 14 July, Hitler issued OKW Order Number Thirty-two concerning preparations for the period after 'Barbarossa'. This order had as its focus a shift away from army armaments, which were necessary for the land campaign against Russia, towards the Luftwaffe and Navy, which were to dominate in any action against Britain.¹⁸⁴ Hitler became so confident of success that he ordered

essential parts of the war industry to be converted back to peacetime productions. Furthermore, the transfer of sixty to eighty divisions back to Germany was planned in the belief that the remaining force in the east would suffice to hold Russia down during the winter.¹⁸⁵ However, this assumption proved fatal when the campaign continued into the winter months, for which the Germans had not planned. The entire Army in the east faced the prospect of winter warfare. Hence, every soldier required winter clothing, not just one in every five as envisaged by the Germans before the war.¹⁸⁶ Because of the premature nature of these changes, they were to have a serious and prejudicial effect on the subsequent course of the war.¹⁸⁷

Towards the end of July, after more than a month of advance, the Wehrmacht began to strike problems. German forces were in need of refurbishing while Soviet resistance stiffened, much to Hitler's shock.¹⁸⁸ Despite Halder's claim, the Germans did not seriously apprehend the Red Army west of the Dvina-Dnieper line, and it had been able to easily escape east when in danger of defeat.¹⁸⁹ Now the question of divergent strategies regarding the primary objective of 'Barbarossa' came to a head. With the advance stagnating, Hitler decided to execute armoured drives from the centre, to the north and south, to secure what he saw as vitally important targets, Leningrad, and the Ukraine.¹⁹⁰

Because of staunch Soviet resistance against Army Group Centre's drive towards Moscow, and the Army's logistical and supply problems, Hitler called on von Bock to assume a temporary defensive position on 30 July while armoured and motorised units reinforced armies to the north and south.¹⁹¹ The OKH objected to this diversion on the grounds that it would consume so much time that winter warfare would be inevitable, and that further delay in their push towards Moscow would allow the Red Army to reinforce its capital. Hitler overruled these objections because his concerns were dictated by the Wehrmacht's need for raw materials.¹⁹²

Hence, during the night of 23 August, Guderian's Panzer Group 2 moved south in accordance with Hitler's desire to capture the Ukraine, while Hoth's Panzer Group 3 drove north to assist a fresh offensive against Leningrad.¹⁹³ Within a month, the Wehrmacht had taken control of Kiev, and had captured 650,000 prisoners. This overwhelming victory convinced Hitler that the Red Army had surely exhausted its last reserves. Therefore, he directed the tanks back to Army Group Centre so a renewed drive on Moscow could be made.¹⁹⁴ In making this attack on the capital before winter, Hitler wished to conclude the campaign in Germany's favour before the end of 1941.

Despite numerous logistical problems, by 30 September, forces were assembled to execute Operation 'Typhoon'. Again, the Germans achieved early tactical victories such as that at Vyazma, where a further 650,000 Soviet soldiers were captured.¹⁹⁵ However, the weather soon turned bad and German supplies and reserves rapidly became depleted in the face of ferocious Russian resistance. Without winter equipment in ice and snow, and in temperatures at a constant minus 20-30 degrees centigrade, the German offensive collapsed.¹⁹⁶

At a leadership conference in Orsha, Russia, on 13 November, the heads of the various Army Groups involved in the east rejected the possibility of any new offensive as unrealistic. However, two days before this meeting took place Hitler decided to launch one last offensive against the industrial areas of Vorosilovgrad, Ivanov, Yaroslavl, and Rybinsk as well as the urgently desired goals of Maikop, Stalingrad, Vologda, and Gorki.¹⁹⁷ This offensive aimed to reach an advantageous position for continuing the war in 1942. Hitler believed that he should stake everything on this last effort and display strong nerves and willpower to the rest of the world.¹⁹⁸ However, all this offensive proved was that the distance between Hitler's headquarters and his front line commanders severely distorted his view of the Wehrmacht's ability to win the campaign.

Although at the start of the Russian campaign Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia was close to the front, once the German advance began the distance between the two became substantial. Warlimont recalled that the areas involved in the campaign were so vast that it soon became impossible to keep in touch with events at the front even by using a plane.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, because his headquarters became increasingly isolated, Hitler rarely got a direct impression of the struggle in the east, or of the destruction of German cities in the west.²⁰⁰ This distortion of the war ultimately led Hitler to view the capture of Russian territory as more important than the destruction of the Red Army. Even though this stance ran counter to one of Clausewitz's central tenets (the primary objective in war is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces), the Reich's precarious economic situation forced Hitler to abandon this theory.²⁰¹

The siting of Hitler's headquarters resulted in the stretching of German lines of communication from Berlin to the 'Wolf's Lair', and to the eastern front because the Organisation, Replacements, and Equipment sections of the OKW remained in Berlin while the rest were located at 'Wolf's Lair'. These two centres maintained communications by courier, but this system rapidly became overloaded as an ever-increasing number of officers, officials, and Party representatives travelled by rail between Rastenburg and Berlin.²⁰² Other headquarters were constructed at Vinnitsa in the Ukraine, at Soissons in France, in the area of Nauheim-Giessen, and near Breslau. However, only the one at Vinnitsa was occupied for an extended period while some were never used at all.²⁰³

The final push planned during November and December ended in failure on 5 December in the face of minus 35-40 degree centigrade temperatures.²⁰⁴ Aggravated by severe shortages in equipment and manpower, the offensive halted soon after it started.²⁰⁵ German forces were in a state of almost complete exhaustion. Frostbite casualties were more numerous than those resulting from

combat. When ten fresh Soviet armies arrived from Siberia and the Far East (since the threat of Japanese invasion had resided), a major Russian counter-offensive started on 5 December, and proved the end of German attempts to take Moscow.²⁰⁶ Thus the last all-out German effort to force a result in 1941 ended in failure.

The Wehrmacht's drive on Moscow had hinged on the concentration of its forces on this target alone. Hitler had constantly stressed the need to concentrate Germany's resources on a single blow against the enemy.²⁰⁷ However, during 'Barbarossa', he violated his own principle, much to the dismay of his generals. Hitler's resources were shrinking, while the Russian's were growing at an alarming rate. This explains, in part, why Hitler decided to seize the resource rich Ukraine. However, in doing so, he afforded the Russians the opportunity to strengthen their defences in anticipation of a new German offensive.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, the battle for Kiev reduced the potency of German forces returning to Army Group Centre for 'Typhoon'.²⁰⁹

As a result of the Russian counter-offensive, the Red Army broke through the German lines at many points, and threatened to encircle several German armies. With the situation reaching crisis point, Hitler accepted the resignation of the ailing Army Commander-in-Chief Brauchitsch, and attempted to shore up the lines by issuing orders prohibiting retreat. Commanders who insisted on retreat were replaced, dismissed, or relieved at their own request. Most notable casualties of this upheaval were Army Group commanders von Bock and von Leeb, and Panzer leader Guderian.²¹⁰ Despite these measures, by the end of December, the Wehrmacht had been thrown back between 100 and 280 kilometres from Moscow.

By the end of 1941 the situation appeared grim for the Wehrmacht in the east. To complicate matters further, Japan brought the United States formally into the war by bombing its Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour on 7 December. Because of the

Tripartite Pact, Hitler felt obliged to declare war on the United States, and in doing so, hoped Japan would take reciprocal action regarding Russia. Yet in no way could he insist the Japanese to do so because he had no bargaining power.²¹¹ Nevertheless, the Japanese action pleasantly surprised Hitler because he hoped that American forces in the east and west would be reassigned to the Pacific theatre. Despite Japan's intervention, at the end of 1941, Germany's strategic position remained perilous.

The Wehrmacht now had a war in three separate theatres to direct. Firstly, in Russia, German troops had Leningrad surrounded, while the Wehrmacht had overrun the Ukraine on its way to the Caucasus. Additionally, its attempt at seizing Moscow had failed. Secondly, in the west, the war in the Atlantic continued between the British and the German navies. Meanwhile, in North Africa, Egypt, and Malta, German forces assisted Italian troops in their fight against the British. So at the end of 1941, the war had become truly global with the entry of the United States into the war on the Allied side.²¹²

To add to the turmoil on the front lines, on 19 December 1941, Hitler appointed himself Brauchitsch's replacement as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. This situation created a peculiarity that had serious repercussions for the planning and execution of Wehrmacht operations for the remainder of the war. By removing the last level of influence over his decision making in the affairs of the Army, Hitler now had more power over the direction of the war than ever before. He had consolidated his supreme control over all military operations because as Commander-in-Chief of the Army he directed the war in Russia, while as Supreme Commander of the OKW he ran operations on all other fronts. This appointment resulted in the awkward situation whereby Hitler, as Supreme Commander, conceived operations that he would then have to plan and execute as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The result of this appointment was that Hitler alone retained a strategic grasp of the war as a whole.²¹³

Halder's relationship with Hitler proved difficult during the early stages of the OKH's campaign in Russia. Indeed, as early as 14 July 1941, Halder claimed that Hitler's perpetual interference in matters he did not fully understand had become a scourge that would become intolerable.²¹⁴ However, when Hitler replaced Brauchitsch, Halder suddenly believed himself to be in the best position to influence the Führer's future conduct of the war. During 1942 it became obvious that Hitler followed Halder's advice, even when it proved incompatible with that of commanders at the front.²¹⁵ This shows yet another example of how the distance between the front and the 'Wolf's Lair' heavily impacted upon the direction of the war.

The failure of 'Typhoon' before Moscow spelt the end of the military ideals upon which the Germans had based their operations in Russia. No longer could the campaign be won quickly and decisively. By January 1942 the Wehrmacht's image of invincibility that Hitler so cherished had been tarnished. The Luftwaffe had lost around 6,000 aircraft, while the Army also suffered hugely through the loss of more than 3,250 tanks and artillery pieces. Almost 918,000 men were dead, wounded, missing, or captured; a total that represented nearly twenty-nine percent of the Army's normal strength of 3,200,000 men.²¹⁶

The Wehrmacht's substantial loss of strength during 1941 alarmed Hitler to the extent that he made the capture of centres of raw materials the priority for campaigns launched during 1942. In other words, a major strategic reorientation took place, which stipulated that, in the next offensive, economic objectives were to take precedence over strictly military objectives.²¹⁷ With petroleum production forecasts increasingly pessimistic, and with stocks dwindling, Hitler quickly decided that the Caucasian oil fields would provide the basis for German attacks in the summer of 1942.²¹⁸ On 1 June, Hitler highlighted the Wehrmacht's fragile situation when he told assembled officers from Army Group South that he would have to end the war if oil from Maikop and Grozny could not be secured.²¹⁹

Operation 'Blau' ('Blue'), the offensive to capture the Caucasus, began on 28 June 1942, and penetrated Soviet lines over a 450 mile front.²²⁰ 'Blue' threw a severely depleted Wehrmacht against a replenished Red Army that had prepared for an extended period of total war. The German armed forces which participated in 'Blue', with regards to personnel, material, and logistics, were not as strong as those which invaded the Soviet Union a year earlier.²²¹ Because of the numerical superiority of the Soviets, the initial success of 'Blue', then, can only be attributed to surprise.

The early success of 'Blue' revived Hitler's optimism that Germany would triumph in the end. However, his over-confidence again resulted in his violation of his principle of concentration. As he had done during 'Barbarossa', Hitler decided that a division of the Wehrmacht's power should be made so several targets could be attacked simultaneously. Barely a month into the 'Blue' offensive, Hitler deviated from the initial plan of firstly attacking Soviet forces west of the Volga, then heading towards the Caucasus. He preferred to split the offensive in two, with each thrust having an independent objective. One group drove north against Stalingrad, while the other moved south to capture the Caucasus.²²² This dispersion of the already stretched Wehrmacht proved disastrous.

During September 1942, another leadership crisis arose, as the situation became critical. Jodl argued against Hitler's wishes to see a Mountain Corps advance on Stalingrad with Wilhelm List's Army Group. Hitler did not take kindly to this criticism and considered firing both Jodl and Keitel, but refrained, possibly on account of Jodl's performance during a crucial moment in the Norwegian campaign. Instead, Hitler replaced List, and assumed command of his Army Group until 23 November when von Kleist took control as the Stalingrad crisis deepened.²²³

List proved not the only casualty of Hitler's housecleaning. Halder, after arguing against the Führer once too often, was replaced by General Kurt Zeitzler.²²⁴ Previously von Rundstedt's Chief of Staff in the west, Zeitzler attempted to restore Hitler's faith in the OKH by giving timely advice based on accurate information. He ultimately failed to restore the situation, but did manage to exclude Jodl from briefing Hitler on the situation in Russia, thereby restricting the OKW's influence over Army operations in this theatre.²²⁵ Now even Hitler's closest advisers had no idea of the total war situation.

In attempting to rescue the situation in Stalingrad, Hitler resorted to the 'hold the line' tactic that had saved the Germans during the winter of 1941. This Russian centre had limited strategic importance, yet Hitler invested many resources in its capture. Therefore, even when the Sixth Army of Friedrich Paulus became encircled in Stalingrad, he rejected Zeitzler's plan for a withdrawal.²²⁶ Instead, Hitler called on the Luftwaffe (after Göring's promise that his service would be up to the task) to conduct a major airlift operation to sustain this force.²²⁷ The problem with this pledge was that the Luftwaffe had no chance of supplying the Sixth Army adequately because it never had enough resources itself to carry out such a task. The Air Force needed to supply the Army with 600 tonnes of supplies per day, yet the best it could ever achieve was 120 tonnes.²²⁸ Hence, without reinforcements, it proved only a matter of time before the Russians engulfed the Sixth Army.

Hitler claimed full responsibility for the situation in Stalingrad. Manstein noted in his memoirs that, on 5 February 1943, Hitler said he could have blamed Göring by saying that he had given him an incorrect picture of the Luftwaffe's potentialities. However, because Hitler appointed him as his successor, he decided that he could not charge Göring with responsibility.²²⁹ Nevertheless, Stalingrad tarnished Hitler's close friendship with Göring (and Hitler's opinion of the Luftwaffe) for good.

In a final attempt to regain the initiative, Zeitzler devised Operation 'Citadel', which called for a German offensive against Soviet concentrations west of Kursk. Such a commitment made Hitler nervous. Nevertheless, he allowed planning to continue. Meanwhile, the OKW recommended that two strategic reserves be made available for possible Allied moves in the south. However, because Hitler still thought that Germany could force a result in Russia, he set 5 July 1943 as the start date for 'Citadel'.²³⁰ Because of the scarcity of resources, the German offensive assembled very slowly. But a substantial force formed all the same. Yet the Russians realised that the Germans were preparing to attack Kursk and reinforced this sector immediately. Hence, when the Wehrmacht launched 'Citadel' on 5 July, they confronted not only a large enemy, but their formidable defences also.

Hitler soon realised the futility of the exercise in light of the recent Allied landings on Sicily. By 19 July 1943, 'Citadel' ended in total failure, with the Red Army and the Wehrmacht both suffering large casualties. By the end of 1943, as the Germans were pushed back, Kiev and Smolensk fell back into Russian hands while the siege of Leningrad in the north was about to lift.²³¹ Although German resistance did not collapse immediately, from the end of 'Citadel' until the Russians captured Berlin, the Wehrmacht suffered reverse after reverse as overwhelming Allied forces closed in on Germany during 1944 and 1945.

Ideological prejudices remained strong throughout the Russian campaign and proved a major hindrance to the German conduct of the war. However, increasingly it became Hitler's frequent intervention in the formulation and execution of operations which proved fatal for the Wehrmacht in Russia.²³² While it appeared that the Wehrmacht would be triumphant, Hitler generally agreed with the way the OKH ran the war. Similarly, with the Luftwaffe, (the other service involved in this essentially bi-service campaign), he did not interfere with its operations once its missions against Soviet airfields and other targets had been

completed. After these independent missions, the Luftwaffe generally executed ground support tasks in co-ordination with the OKH and the individual Army Group headquarters. However, as the situation deteriorated, Hitler, believing that Brauchitsch and the Army General Staff were not up to the challenge, decided that he would intervene personally in the direction of operations, and later on, in tactical command functions.²³³

This interference led to increasing disquiet among generals in the High Commands. Manstein, (with encouragement from others such as von Richthofen) felt that the future of Germany depended upon persuading Hitler to leave the conduct of military operations in all theatres to a single responsible tri-service Chief of Staff, while he maintained the position of Supreme Commander.²³⁴ In response, Hitler claimed that, because Göring's unique position as Reichsmarschall would never allow him to submit to anyone but the Führer, it would be better that he remain in charge.²³⁵ However, as the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944 testified, the rejection of Manstein's proposal did not spell the end of attempts to remove Hitler from his position.

The failure of the German invasion of the Soviet Union ended Hitler's aspirations of greatness. His platform for this ideological war, 'Barbarossa', did not achieve its objective (the quick defeat of Russia), and instead greatly reduced the Wehrmacht's freedom of movement. In 1940, an invasion of the Soviet Union had been one of several options available to the Germans for continuing the war. However, by the end of 1941, in view of the grim situation, the Wehrmacht had no other option than to resume the offensive in the east in 1942.²³⁶

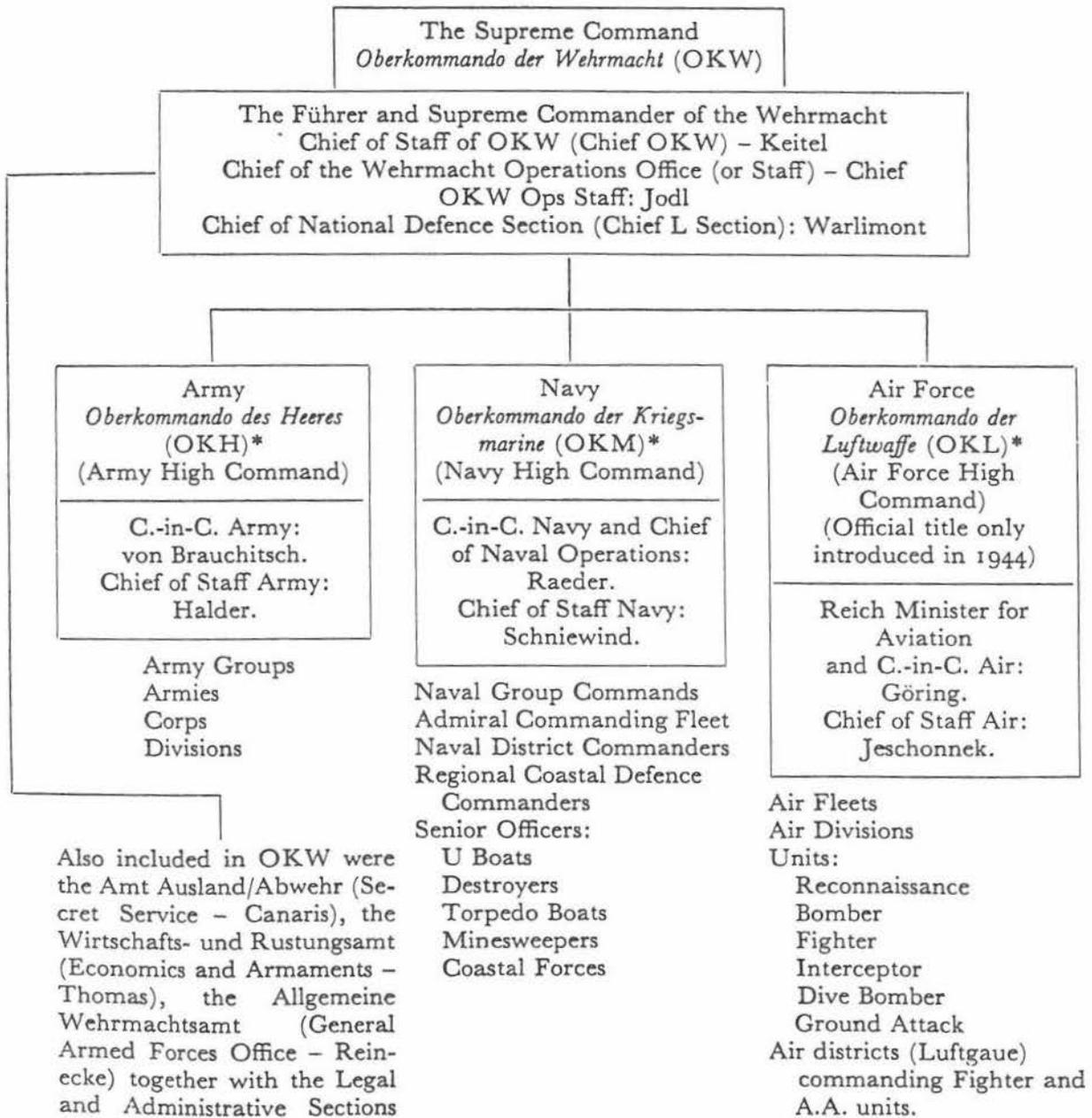
The east became Hitler's preoccupation because his whole ideology was at stake. Conflicts on the periphery, (in the Balkans and the Mediterranean) steadily became large drains and a distraction for the Wehrmacht whose main effort remained in the east. A clear indication of the German armed forces' decay came

between 1941 and 1943 when the front along which any offensive took place contracted substantially. Furthermore, the declining length of each campaign provides another sign that after 1941, Germany was in dire straits. However, because of the loss of face any retreat of the Wehrmacht would cause, Hitler refused to concede the advantage to the Russians.

'Barbarossa' penetrated Soviet territory along a 1,250 mile front between 22 June and 5 December 1941. 'Blue' was fought along a 450 mile front between 28 June 1942 and February 1943. Finally, in 'Citadel', the Germans attacked along a 150 mile front between 5 and 19 July 1943.²³⁷ This last offensive marked the beginning of a long retreat back to Germany for the armed forces as the United States, Britain, and of course, Russia, threw huge forces against the steadily deteriorating Wehrmacht. However, between the end of the German offensives in Russia, and the end of the war in Europe, there were numerous other events that are worth evaluating with regards their effect on the Wehrmacht's handling of command, control, and communication issues. Hence, in the next chapter on the OKW Theatres of War, this study will analyse how events on the periphery influenced the running of the total German war effort.

THE HIGHER ORGANIZATION OF THE WEHRMACHT

Situation at the Outbreak of War – Organization by Services



* Oberkommando des Heeres (Kriegsmarine, Luftwaffe) – OKH, OKM, OKL = High Command of the Army (Navy, Air Force). It is a generic term used to describe the overall staff of the Army (Navy, Air Force) including its C.-in-C.

This diagram clearly illustrates the Wehrmacht's command hierarchy at the start of the Second World War. In theory, this model was innovative, and it remains apposite today. Yet in reality, because of the personalities involved, the German war effort suffered enormously when this command structure collapsed under the pressure of simultaneous multi-theatre warfare.



Architects of change, part one: The Allies appointed Hans von Seeckt to reduce and restructure the German Imperial Army in 1919. Little did they know that he instead covertly prepared for a resurgent Germany in the future. In order to facilitate this goal, he promoted the idea of unity in the armed forces. However, the individual branches cherished their traditional right to independent action. Seeckt played a crucial role in protecting early notions of an office to co-ordinate all operations from the attacks of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.



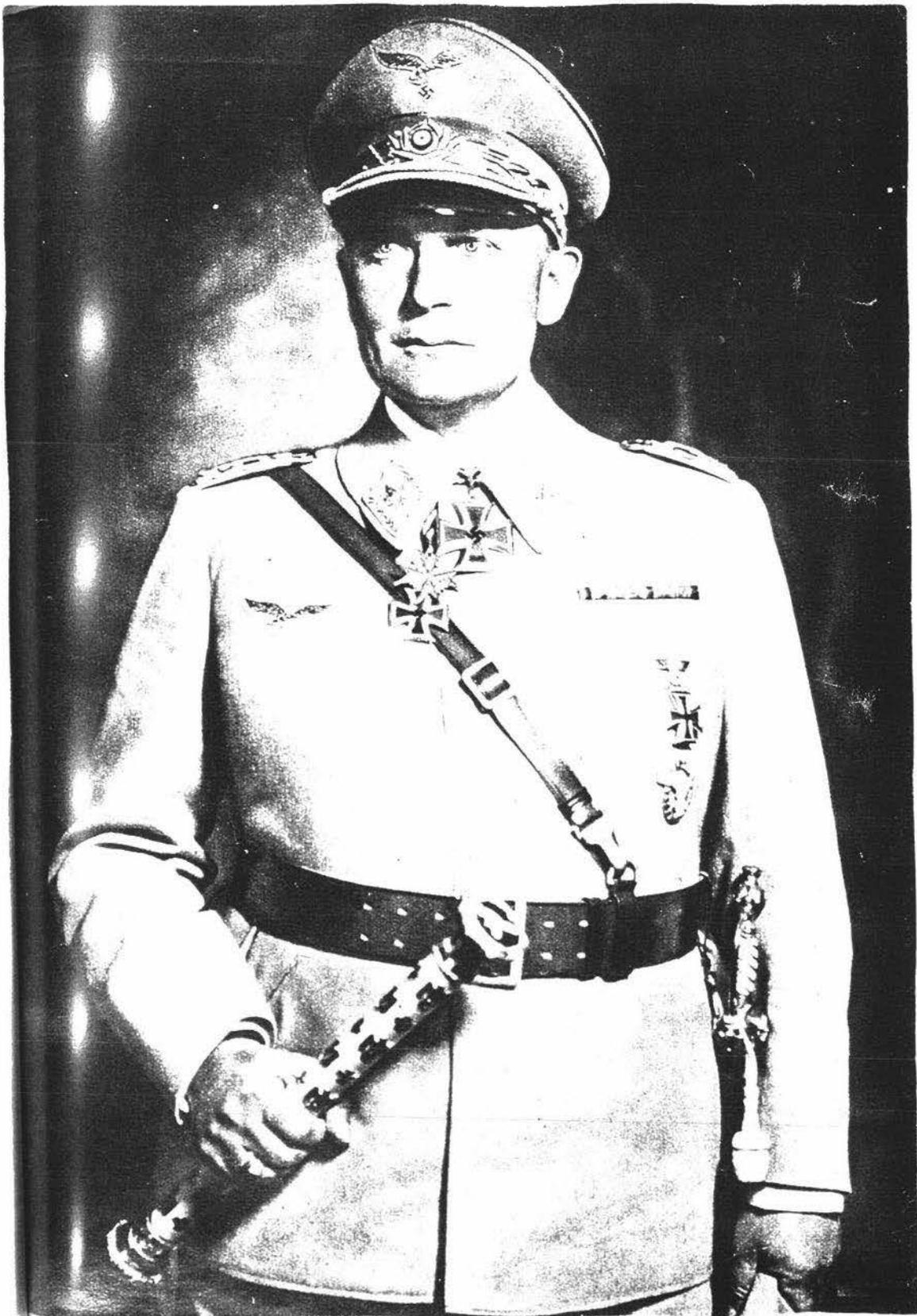
Architects of change, part two: Werner von Blomberg subscribed to Seeckt's ideas and in his capacity as the Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht he highlighted the importance of his office in any future war. With Hitler's assistance, Blomberg ensured that the concept of the OKW became an integral element of the Wehrmacht's command structure. His career ended prematurely on 4 February 1938 because of his marriage to a woman of "ill repute". Nevertheless, Blomberg's efforts had solidified the OKW's authority to direct operations.



Freiherr von Fritsch provided the staunchest resistance to Blomberg's innovations. As Commander-in-Chief of the Army, he articulated the concerns of those in his service, as well as those in political circles. Because the Army led in war, they argued, it should also have the right to conduct operations independent of the OKW. Fritsch's stance put him offside with Hitler, and when charges of homosexuality arose, Hitler dispensed with him on 4 February 1938.



Walther von Brauchitsch replaced Fritsch as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Brauchitsch softened his predecessor's view of the OKW by suggesting that it did have a role to play in the planning of operations. However, he added that the Army should have predominant status. His relationship with Hitler was always tense, but became especially so after September 1939 when Hitler viewed the Army as dragging the chain over preparations for the western campaign. In December 1941 Hitler finally accepted Brauchitsch's resignation, and appointed himself Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Hitler had then consolidated all power of decision in his own person.



Hermann Göring occupied a peculiar position in the Wehrmacht's command structure. He controlled the Luftwaffe as Commander-in-Chief and he was Hitler's deputy. Additionally, he oversaw the production and distribution of resources as Deputy for the Four Years' Plan. Göring used his many positions of authority to bolster the Luftwaffe's status. In particular, he used his relationship with Hitler to undermine the efforts of the other services when it came to the direction of operations. He often influenced Hitler to decide in favour of the Luftwaffe, to the detriment of the other branches. In the end, his unique position as Reichsmarschall contributed heavily to the personal conflicts and command problems that arose as the war progressed.



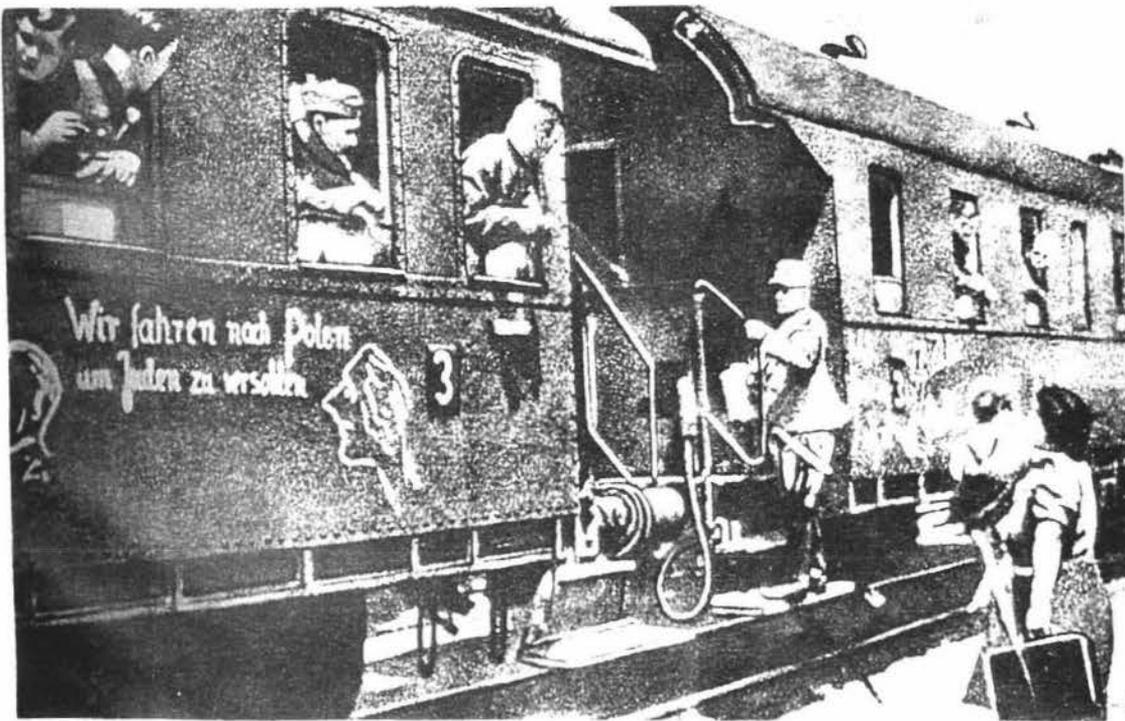
As Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Erich Raeder, like Göring, often used his relationship with Hitler to further the cause of his service. Although the Navy had little involvement at the beginning of the war, Raeder ensured that Hitler remained informed on naval matters. As the Wehrmacht became involved on several fronts, the Navy assumed more responsibility, especially for the defence of Norway. Yet, because of conflict between himself and Göring, as well as with Hitler over the future of large ships, Karl Dönitz replaced Raeder on 31 January 1943.



Franz Halder replaced Ludwig Beck as Army Chief of Staff in 1938 and remained in this position until September 1942. His relationship with Hitler deteriorated as the latter became increasingly irritated with the OKH's reluctance to follow his instructions. There are numerous examples in Halder's war diaries of tension between the two. However, when Hitler succeeded Brauchitsch as Army Commander-in-Chief, Halder noted that he would then be in the best position to influence the Führer on the conduct of the war. This thaw in their relationship only lasted a short time as the worsening situation in Russia exacerbated their differences until Halder's position became untenable and Hitler replaced him.

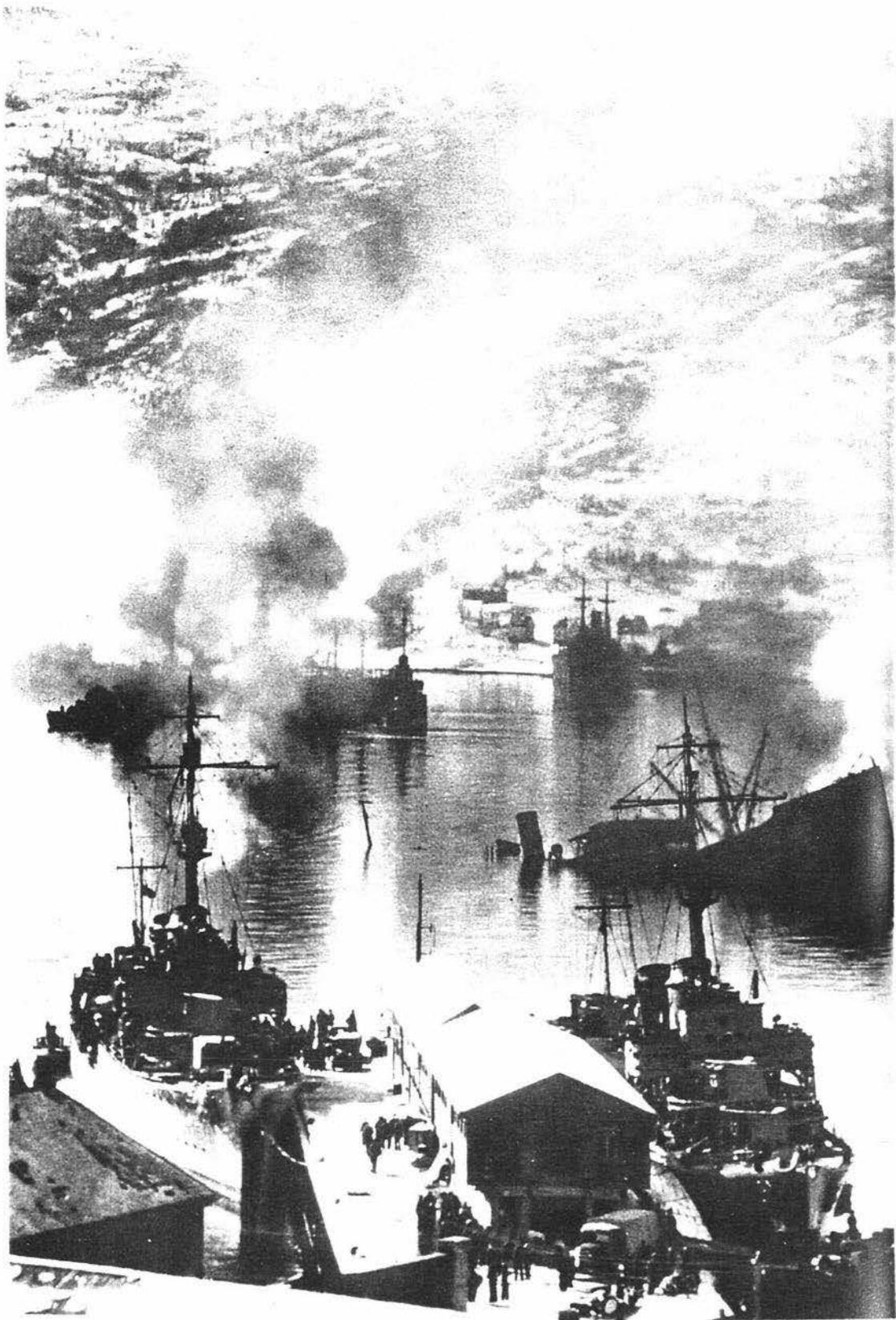


The faces of the OKW: When Hitler dismissed Blomberg and appointed himself Supreme Commander, he made Wilhelm Keitel (left) Chief of the OKW. Keitel continued to defend his office from Army attacks, just as Blomberg had done before him. However, with Hitler now the Head of both state and the military, hostility to the Wehrmacht's structure became somewhat muted. When war broke out, Blomberg meant for Alfred Jodl's (right) OKW Operations Office to co-ordinate the actions of the services. Yet, contrary to Blomberg's ideals, Hitler instead preferred to have each service submit plans to him for operations in which they were involved. Therefore, almost from the very beginning of the war, Hitler assumed the OKW's pre-ordained role, the co-ordination of all Wehrmacht operations.



The photo above shows German troops on their way to war. The writing on the side of their railway carriage reads: 'We're off to Poland to thrash the Jews'. While rail proved an important means of mobilisation for the Germans, it also provided a means of maintaining communication between Berlin and Hitler's various field Headquarters during the war. As the Wehrmacht became entrenched on several vast fronts, logistics meant that this, as well as other forms of communication became increasingly difficult. Regardless of the problems that the Germans would face later, initially, they achieved success after success. Here in the photo below, Hitler reviews his troops in Warsaw on 5 October 1939, after their conquest of Poland.

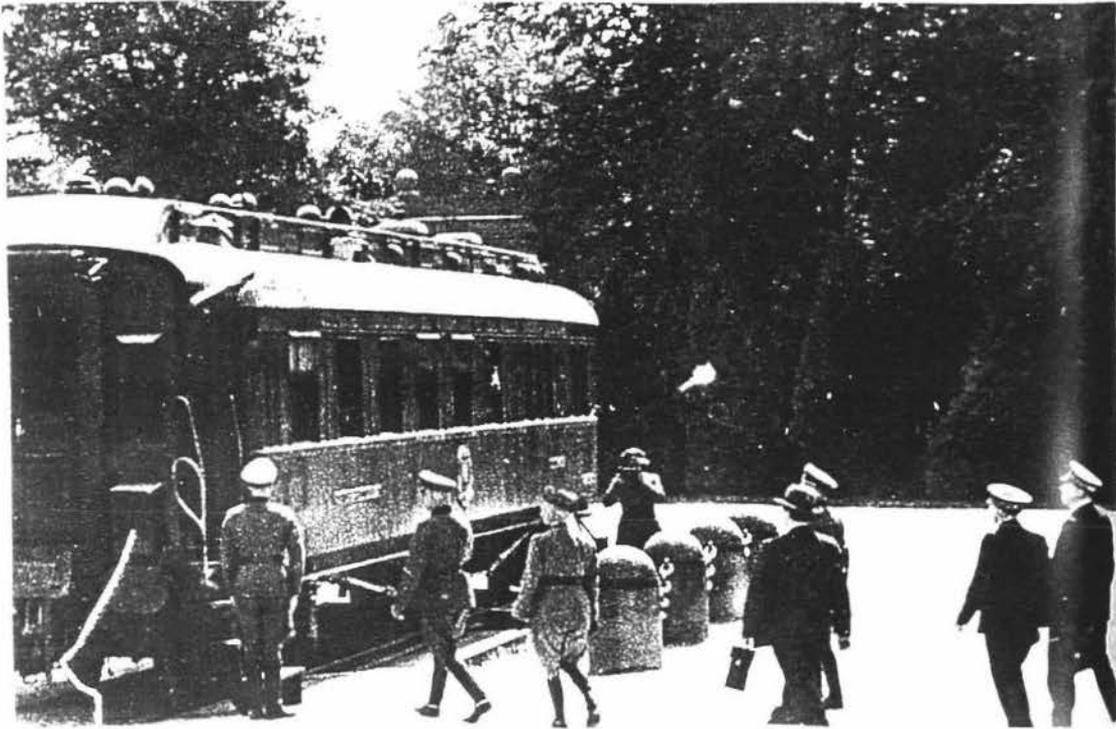




This sight brought sighs of relief from everyone involved in planning for the campaign in Norway. In the pivotal harbour of Narvik, the Germans just managed to fight off an Allied attempts to remove them. For the rest of the war, Norway consumed a disproportionate amount of resources, as Hitler perceived that the Allies would eventually invade to seize this strategic position. The Allied attack never happened. Nevertheless, Hitler demanded that Raeder send the bulk of his Navy to defend it. The result of this demand was an argument between Hitler and his Navy Commander-in-Chief, and the end of the latter's career.

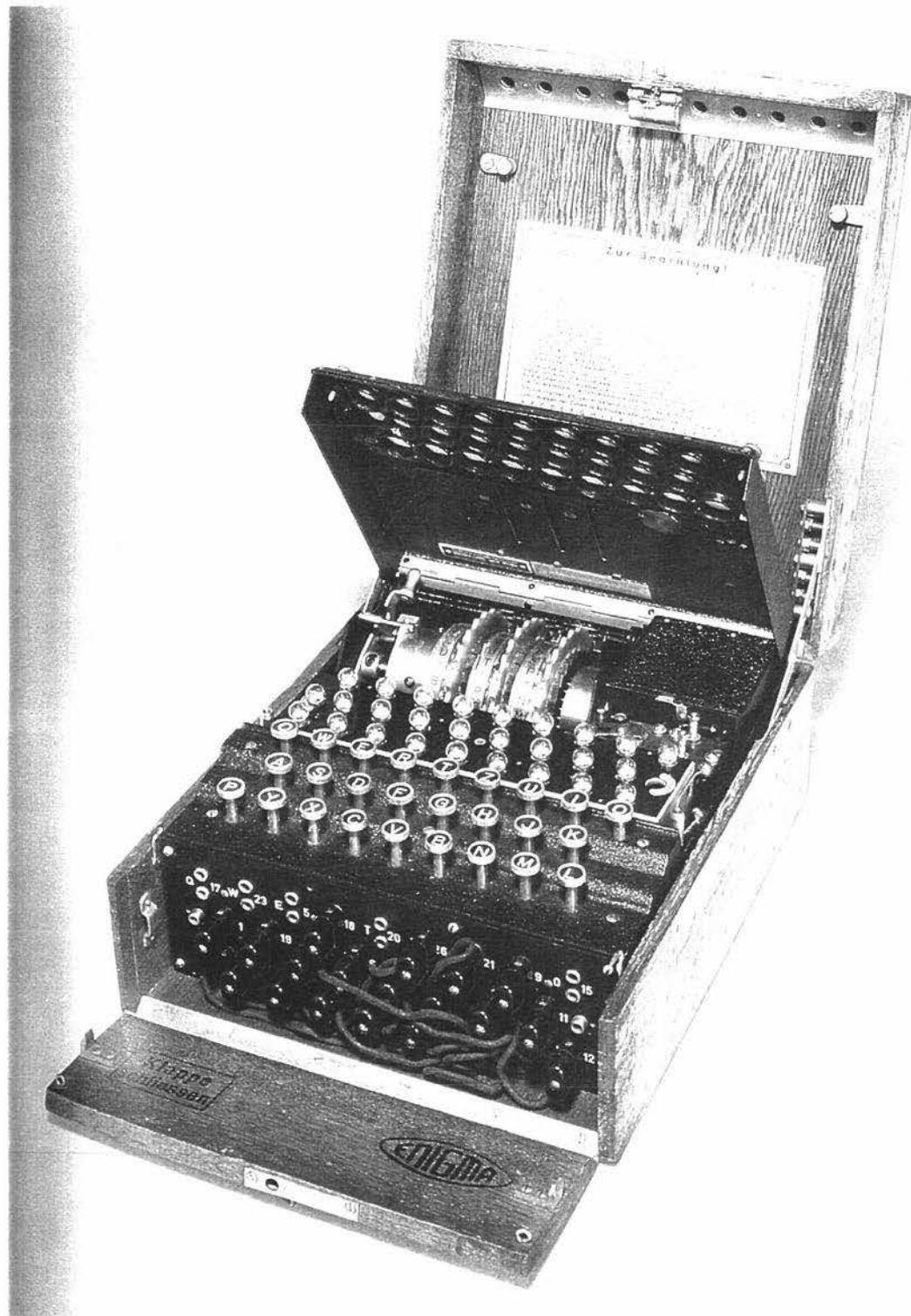


After their irresistible advance through France, the Germans pushed towards the coast and eliminated the last Allied presence on the continent. Here, at Dunkirk, British and French soldiers were taken prisoner by the Germans. The Wehrmacht had achieved a comprehensive victory. Nevertheless, this could have been much more substantial had Hitler not held back his forces from Dunkirk. He allowed over 340,000 Allied troops to escape in the mistaken belief that his mercy would persuade the Allies to accept the new European order. The humiliation brought on by their defeat only steeled the Allied desire to fight on.



On 20 June 1940, armistice negotiations began between the French and the Germans in the forest of Compiègne (above). Hitler chose the same railway coach in which the Germans had signed the surrender at the end of the First World War. At the beginning of negotiations this time, Keitel read out the terms of the German armistice, and then added that there would be no discussion, only compliance. Two days later, the French signed the armistice. With France out of the way, only Britain stood in the way of German aspirations. Hitler failed in his attempts at peace after the fall of France, and resolved to attack Britain on the proviso that the Luftwaffe accomplish air superiority over Britain. Hence, below, during July 1940, German soldiers practiced for the invasion. Regardless of these preparations, it remains doubtful that Hitler ever took 'Sea Lion' seriously. Nevertheless, this operation consumed a significant amount of resources, especially those of the Navy, much to the detriment of active operations.

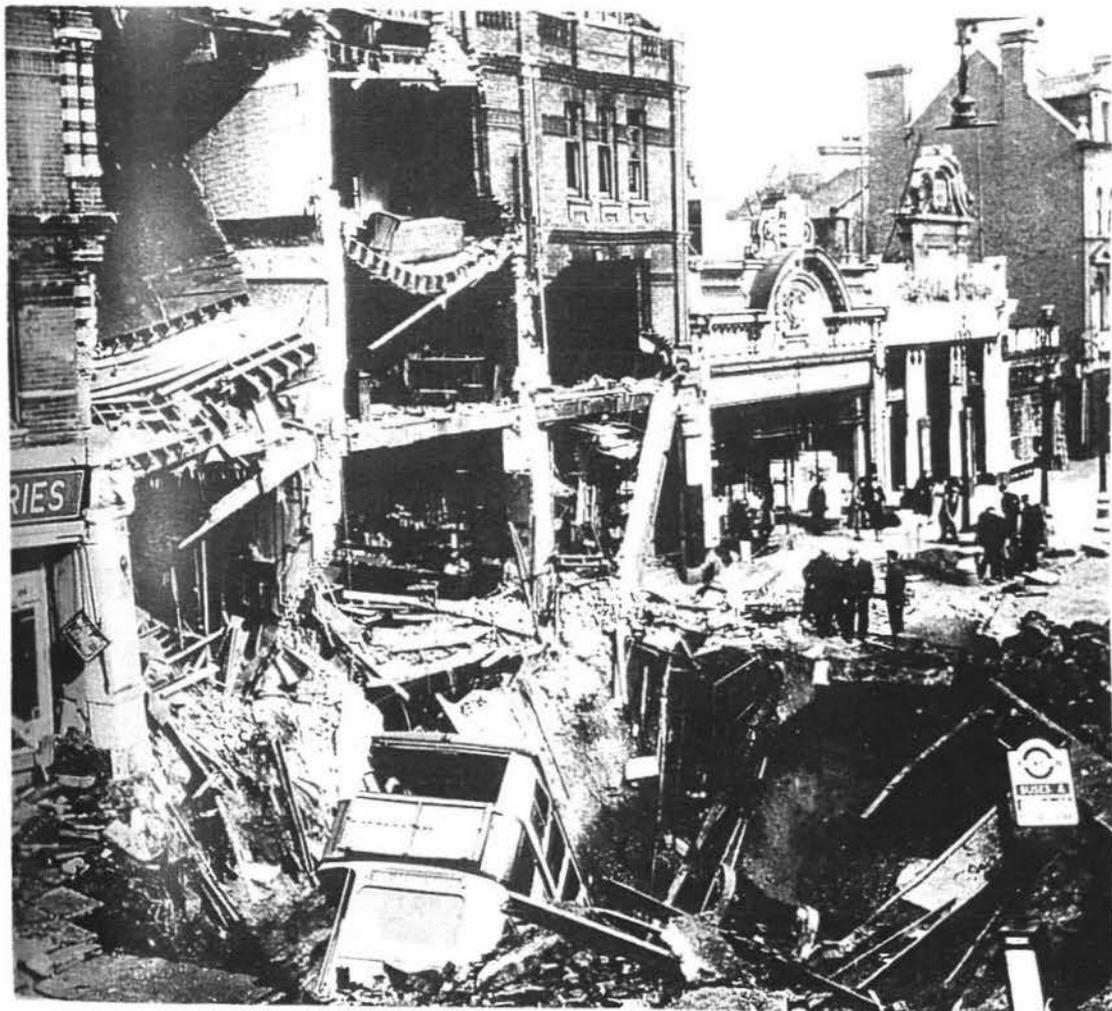




After the Allied flight from Dunkirk, the British public generally expected an inevitable sea born German invasion. Not everyone shared this opinion though. On 22 May 1940, British decrypters at Bletchley Park made a significant breakthrough when they broke the Luftwaffe Enigma code. Hence, the British could intercept and read the OKL's messages to their field commanders, and vice versa. Most importantly, messages sent by Luftwaffe liaison officers with the Army allowed the British to plot German movements as they moved towards the coast. This information told them that the Germans had not moved aircraft up in preparation for an assault across the Channel.

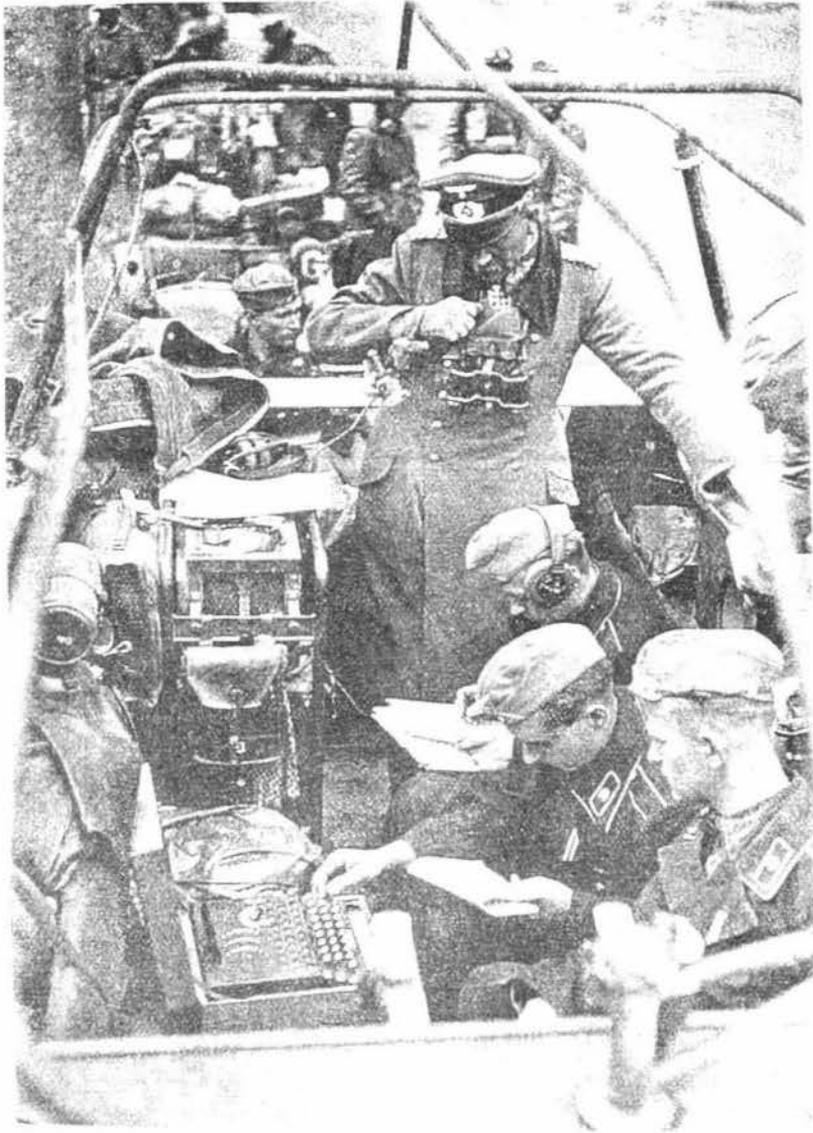


While Hitler's purpose for 'Sea Lion' remains in doubt, the Luftwaffe took its obligations very seriously. These two photos illustrate graphically how the war had been removed from the battlefields and transplanted into the populated areas of the enemy. Above, 6 September 1940, vapour trails in London's skies point to the battle for air superiority waged between the Luftwaffe and the RAF. Because of a British air raid against German cities, Hitler decided to conduct air raids of his own. Here, below, the Balham Underground Station received a direct hit from a German bomb on 15 October 1940.





Albert Kesselring, seen here directing the Battle of Britain during September 1940. Later on in the Mediterranean, he played a major role in attempting to formalise a command structure oversee combined German-Italian operations in this theatre. However, due to Hitler's reluctance to force a command apparatus on Mussolini, for fear of insulting him, Kesselring's attempts ultimately came to nothing. This failure heavily restricted Axis operations in the Mediterranean because no common ground could be established. In any case, such an agreement might never have lasted long because the Germans viewed their Italian counterparts in such a poor light.



Pictured here in an armoured command vehicle, Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, liked to lead his forces from the front. Previously, his promotion of the tank in the pre-war years had caught Hitler's eye. Initially, the Army dismissed Guderian's ideas, but Hitler's support for innovations encouraged him to continue pushing the tank's cause. While tanks were used during the Polish campaign, they were not used as Guderian had envisioned. During the campaign in the west, the Army adopted Guderian's concept of independent armoured spearheads and this, in part, contributed to the rapid fall of France. Another contributing factor to this rapid victory was the efficiency of the German communications network. This photo illustrates how field commanders kept in touch with their superiors in the rear. In the foreground, a soldier uses an Enigma machine to receive and send messages. However, this system did have one major drawback, it could be intercepted and read by the British once its code had been broken.



On 10 June 1940, the Italians entered the war on the German side. In the short term, this move provided the Wehrmacht with a small boost. However, in the long term problems over who would command combined force operations increasingly paralysed the Axis. This photo gives the impression that the Germans and Italians undertook a combined strategy. Mussolini, Jodl, Hitler, and Keitel, were all central figures in the direction of their war effort. Unfortunately, for them, this impression had no basis in reality as they rarely met to co-ordinate their activities. This lack of communication between supposed partners repeatedly caused disunity within the Axis.



While Wehrmacht's position appeared grim at the end of 1941, Hitler's mood lightened considerably when he heard of the Japanese attack on the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour on 7 December. Pictured here are the American battleships West Virginia and Tennessee ablaze in the harbour. This attack formerly brought America into the war on the Allied side. Yet, Hitler applauded the Japanese action because he hoped that the Americans would divert their attention away from the Atlantic, and instead direct it towards the Pacific. The situation in the Atlantic did ease for a short time as the Americans focused on the Pacific. However, with the industrial might of the Americans against them, the German position did not stabilise for long.



Kurt Zeitzler replaced Halder as Army Chief of Staff on 24 September 1942, and held this position until June 1944. When he took over, the campaign in Russia had reached crisis point. He attempted to alleviate the situation by planning for a withdrawal from Stalingrad. Hitler rejected this plan and instead called on the Luftwaffe to maintain the Sixth Army from the air. This course of action ultimately failed, but Zeitzler did manage to reinforce Russia as an OKH theatre by preventing Jodl from briefing Hitler on the situation in this theatre. Hence, the OKW ceased to have any influence on operations in Russia.



Contrasts of War: These two photos illustrate two of the vast, and contrasting, theatres in which the Wehrmacht became entrenched during 1941. On 7 December 1941, German soldiers (above) pull back from Moscow as the Russian winter took its toll. Casualties caused by the cold numbered more than those caused by battle. The failure of the Wehrmacht before Moscow ended any prospect of quickly ending the Russian campaign. Had the Germans won a rapid victory, then they would have been free to concentrate on the Mediterranean theatre. Because this situation did not prevail, the Germans became involved in simultaneous, multi-theatre warfare. While the Wehrmacht achieved success in both theatres, (such as below, where British soldiers were taken prisoner at Tobruk on 21 June 1942), the sheer distances involved meant that the German ability to wage war declined the longer it continued.

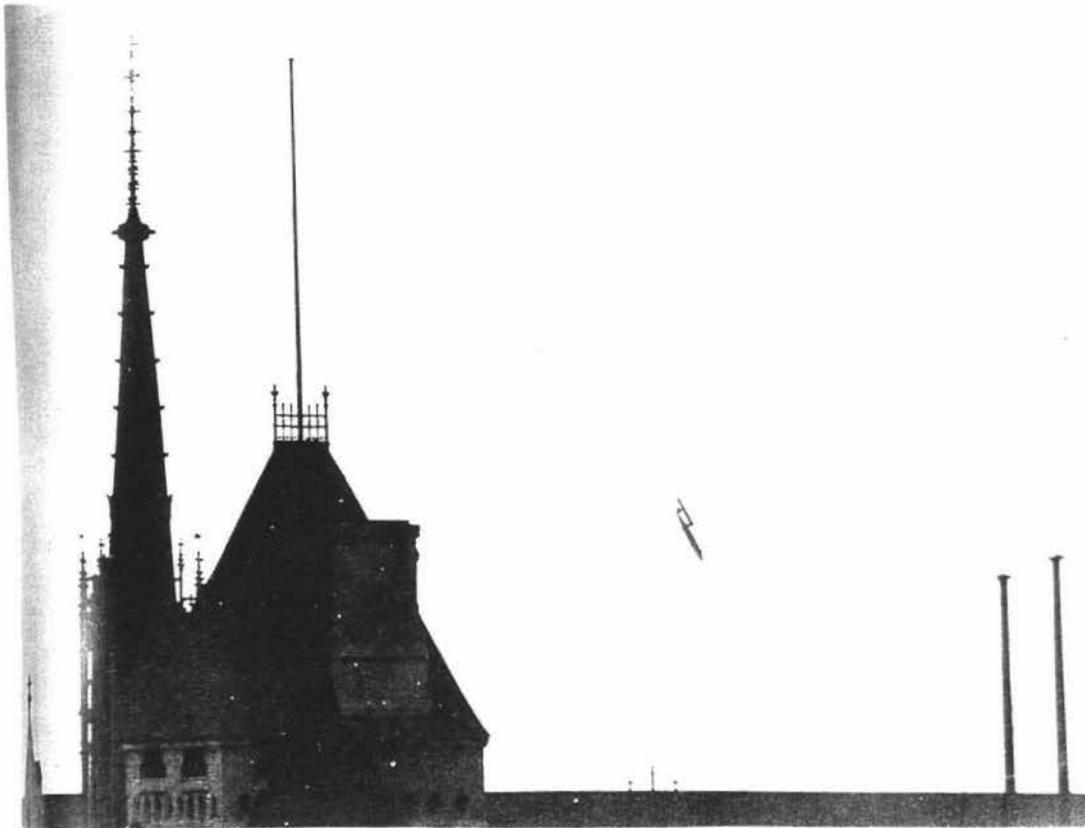




The top five representatives of the Wehrmacht, Göring, Keitel, Dönitz, Jodl, and Hitler, take the salute at the Memorial Day parade in Berlin, March 1944.



After the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944, Göring rushed to the 'Wolf's Lair' to inspect the shattered remains of the map table under which a bomb exploded. Disillusionment with Hitler's rule had finally overflowed in this explosive action. However, the attempt failed and Hitler convened a court to find those responsible. Hitler believed that he had been saved by divine intervention and that it was his destiny to see the war through to the end.



After 1944, the Wehrmacht's decline continued. In desperation, Hitler relied on innovative weapons, such as the V-1 rocket (above) that targeted London. The Germans launched the first rocket of this type across the English Channel on 13 June 1944. On 8 September 1944, the V-2 rocket emerged. In the hope that the situation could be rectified, Hitler also resorted to extending the age group subject to the draft to include 16 to 50 year olds. In the photo taken below, on 20 April 1945, in the courtyard of the Chancellery of Berlin, Hitler farewells young soldiers on his 56th birthday. Only days later, on 30 April, he committed suicide.



Chapter Four

The OKW Theatres of War - The Balkans and the Mediterranean

After the failure of the Luftwaffe to bring Britain to its knees, the Wehrmacht looked elsewhere for a decisive victory. As this study has mentioned previously, the failure of the Luftwaffe to secure air superiority over Britain led to the evaluation of other targets to defeat it indirectly. In particular, Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, felt that Germany should focus on British interests in the Mediterranean as a precursor to attacks elsewhere.

Raeder maintained that, because Britain would target Italy in order to gain a strategic foothold in northern Africa, Germany must act first to seize Gibraltar, and French North Africa, with the assistance of Spain and Vichy France. Furthermore, with the Italians, the Wehrmacht should capture the Suez Canal, and advance through Palestine and Syria and Turkey. Through these expeditions, Raeder argued, the question of Russia could be seen in a different light, with no attack being necessary because of the Soviet fear of Germany. Göring also felt that the Mediterranean provided a preferable target to the Soviet Union.²³⁸ However, the reasons behind his opinion probably had more to do with the depleted state of the Luftwaffe than with any strategic outlook of his own.

Every German victory during previous campaigns had resulted in an amplification of the force arrayed against it. The Wehrmacht's success in Poland led Britain and France to declare war, while the defeat of France brought the Soviet Union and the United States into the strategic picture, especially when the Luftwaffe failed to bring Britain to its knees during the autumn of 1940. On the other hand, Germany did gain some allies during its period of expansion, such as

Italy and the states of Eastern Europe. These countries would provide some assistance during the coming campaigns. However, just like Germany, they were not prepared for protracted hostilities, therefore they soon became more of a hindrance than a help.²³⁹ Italy, in particular, fell into this category.

While the Luftwaffe continued its bombing campaign against Britain, Hitler became preoccupied with preparations for the invasion of Russia. Hence, he charged the OKW with responsibility for the planning of Operation 'Felix', the attack on Gibraltar. The OKW received this assignment, in line with previous practice, because each service would be involved, and the need for Spanish collaboration demanded the diplomatic expertise of the Armed Forces High Command.²⁴⁰ However, 'Felix' did not eventuate because Francisco Franco demanded too much in terms of raw materials from Germany to warrant a combined approach towards the question of Gibraltar, while Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain was reluctant to bring Vichy France into the Axis alliance. Despite these snags, German involvement in the Mediterranean became crucial as Mussolini precipitated a crisis that significantly upset the status quo, much to Hitler's annoyance.²⁴¹

Before the Greek crisis emerged, Hitler gave a sympathetic hearing to the opinions of his service commanders surrounding the Mediterranean option after the failure of 'Sea Lion' to become reality. However, before the Battle of Britain had even ended, the Soviet Union became his primary focus because the decisive ideological battle he had desired could now be fought. He hoped that through the blockade of Britain, it might fall, though it would be highly unlikely judging by the resolve displayed during the Luftwaffe's bombing campaign. Hence, he felt that by eliminating its final substantial ally in Europe, the Soviet Union, Britain would be forced to sue for peace. Therefore, in the Mediterranean, operations would only be conducted to pre-empt any British attempt to gain a base in North Africa from which to launch an offensive back into Europe.²⁴²

As mentioned above, Hitler had wanted to keep the Mediterranean and the Balkans as satellite regions through diplomacy. However, Mussolini dashed this hope by invading Greece on 28 October 1940 from Albania. Believing that Greece would collapse soon after invasion, the Duce did not expect the stiff Greek resistance that eventuated. From 3 November, British air units in the Peloponnese assisted the Greeks, and by mid-December they had forced the Italians back fifty miles into Albania.²⁴³ Mussolini's impetuous attack caught Hitler off guard as he had not been fully advised of Italy's intentions. Obviously, Mussolini must have heard of Hitler's intention to restrain him from such an undertaking.²⁴⁴ This lack of consultation only served to illustrate that, although Germany and Italy were partners in the Axis, their relationship did not reflect this as communication between their armed forces High Commands was inadequate.²⁴⁵

Mussolini invaded Greece because of his jealousy of Hitler's accomplishments, and because he perceived Italy as always the last to know about German intentions. This time, it would be him who would present Hitler with the *fait accompli* in Greece.²⁴⁶ However, things in Greece did not turn out as he had hoped. Understandably, Hitler was not amused at Mussolini's attempted one-upmanship as the British were now provided with a pretext for intervention in the Mediterranean to protect their interests.

On 1 November 1940 Halder recorded Hitler as being very annoyed at the Italian manoeuvres in Greece and that the Führer was in a mood not to send any assistance to Libya or to Albania: "Let the Italians do it by themselves!"²⁴⁷ Furthermore, rather ironically, Hitler said to Rommel: "Not one man and not one pfennig will I send to North Africa", and that he was of the mind "to let the Italians stew in their own juice all winter."²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, he felt obliged to help Italy. He could not allow a substantial British force to intervene in the Italian-Greek conflict because the RAF (sent after 7 March) might use Greek airfields to strike

at the Ploesti oil fields, which were the Reich's primary source of oil during the entire war. Furthermore, instability in the Balkans would threaten the southern flank of 'Barbarossa'. Hence, Hitler saw the need for immediate action.²⁴⁹

On 8 and 9 January 1941 Hitler held a war council at the Berghof. At this meeting it was decided that Italy would be supported in both Africa and Albania. Assistance would be given on the proviso that the Mediterranean question be solved by May 1941 so 'Barbarossa' could begin on 15 May. Despite German suspicion of the Italians, Hitler realised that they must be helped to prevent internal collapse that would seriously undermine Germany's strategic position in Europe.²⁵⁰ Therefore, in contrast to what he had said earlier, Hitler sent Rommel's Deutsches Afrikakorps to Libya to counter British advances against weak Italian opposition. Furthermore, Operation 'Marita' would start at the end of March to expel British and Greek influence in the Balkans. Italy's role in this operation would be to attack Greece simultaneously from the Eastern Po Plain and Albania.

Previously, on 15 November 1940, in light of Italy's flawed invasion of Greece, a conference convened between the OKW and the Comando Supremo (Italy's Supreme Command). Represented by Keitel and Marshal Pietro Badoglio respectively, this conference discussed the future execution of combined operations, especially in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. However, the question of a combined command structure to prosecute such campaigns was never discussed, and never created, much to the detriment of the Axis later on.²⁵¹ The failure of the Germans and Italians to find common ground on strategy and objectives greatly hindered their ability to wage effective coalition warfare. This in turn affected the Wehrmacht's total war strategy because of its reliance on its partners to help wage war on multiple fronts.

Just as the German plans for Gibraltar had hinged on Spanish assistance, so 'Marita' also relied on the compliance of Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Yugoslavia before the operation could begin. Each country agreed initially to German advances. However, the situation became more complicated when the pro-German government in Yugoslavia fell on 27 March 1941, only to be replaced by one hostile towards Germany. In a testament to the flexible command approach of the Wehrmacht, Hitler was immediately able to include Yugoslavia as another objective of 'Marita'.²⁵²

Hitler's Directive Number Twenty-five, issued on the same day as the coup in Yugoslavia, branded this country an enemy and he ordered the OKW to devise plans to invade it along with Greece. Crucially, Hitler also announced that 'Barbarossa' would have to be delayed for up to a month while the Axis secured the Balkans.²⁵³ Thus, the timetable for the submission of Russia before winter had become that much tighter.

During the night of 27 March the OKH was also required to submit an operational plan while the Operations Office of OKW informed the Luftwaffe and the Navy of the addition of Yugoslavia to 'Marita'. After Brauchitsch had submitted the Army plan, Hitler made several amendments (such as the addition of an air raid on Belgrade), and then the OKW Operations Office issued a corresponding directive to the individual branches of the Wehrmacht.²⁵⁴ Therefore, incredibly, within the space of twenty-four hours after the coup in Belgrade, the Army, Navy, and Luftwaffe received operational instructions regarding Yugoslavia.

On 3 April, Hitler's Directive Number Twenty-six released details of the campaign against Yugoslavia and, only three days later, 'Marita' commenced.²⁵⁵ With great efficiency, the Wehrmacht routed Yugoslavia by 17 April, with an air raid on Belgrade on the first day claiming 17,000 lives. However, as the

Wehrmacht was to find out, Yugoslavia would become another 'Norway' because of the disproportionate number of troops needed to suppress guerrilla activity. These territories were to prove a serious drain on the Wehrmacht's resources, especially when it became entrenched simultaneously in the Soviet Union and North Africa. Meanwhile, after being invaded on 10 April from Yugoslavia, the Greeks managed to hold out until the end of the month, with the capital Athens captured on 27 April.

During the Yugoslav and Greek campaigns, Jodl and Keitel used the 'Führer Special' as a mobile command post. From this point, they were able to guide both campaigns to their successful conclusions. This achievement would have been impossible had the German signals network not worked beyond reproach.²⁵⁶ The effectiveness of the German approach to these campaigns proved more than enough to gain victory. However, the performance of the Italians proved much less decisive.

During this campaign there was no common command structure governing Axis forces in the Balkans. The Germans and the Italians had an informal understanding that the Italians would act in accordance with the requests of the OKW transmitted through the German general. However, because the Italians proved unable to reach the objectives delegated to them, the Wehrmacht was forced to assist.²⁵⁷ Although it was clear to all that the Italian troops were inadequately led in the Balkans, the Comando Supremo successfully convinced Mussolini that it should retain rights of individual command in the Mediterranean. Hitler repeatedly attempted to persuade the Italians to allow Kesselring (already Commander-in-Chief South) to assume the position of a Commander-in-Chief over all Axis forces in the Mediterranean to combat British air and sea forces.²⁵⁸ However, Mussolini never allowed this to become a formal arrangement for he feared a loss of prestige if he relinquished the right to dictate the movements of the Italian Navy and Air Force in his own region.²⁵⁹

Now that he had the British on the retreat from Greece, Hitler resolved to attack Crete, to where the British had withdrawn. Departing from previous practice, the OKW did not receive planning rights for this campaign, despite the fact that each of the services would be involved. Instead, Göring successfully persuaded Hitler to give the Luftwaffe planning rights over a campaign for the first time.²⁶⁰ In the airborne Operation 'Merkur' ('Mercury'), the Luftwaffe claimed that Crete had to be taken because of its strategic importance in relation to the geography of the Mediterranean. If taken, this island would cut off Allied access to the Aegean sea while making Axis sea routes through the Dardanelles via the Corinth Canal to Italy, and from Italy to Eastern Cyrenaica, significantly more secure. Furthermore, Crete would provide the Axis with a base from which to attack Allied sea communications between Egypt and Malta.²⁶¹

The strategic importance of Crete explains why Hitler reacted incredulously to the news of Mussolini's invasion of Greece because he thought that at least a campaign against either Crete or Malta could be understood in terms of the wider context of the war in the Mediterranean.²⁶² Malta provided an important base for British sea and air attacks against Italian communications in North Africa. However, because the Italians had not acted, it was then the responsibility of the Germans to redress the balance of power in the Mediterranean.

Beginning on 20 May, 'Mercury' proved a successful, but expensive campaign in terms of casualties and destroyed aircraft. Wehrmacht operations in Crete nearly resulted in disaster as the interaction between the services left much to be desired. The airborne and naval schedules were not properly co-ordinated as important supplies were only sent after the paratroops had landed. Furthermore, because the Luftwaffe lacked experience in executing its own campaign, the enemy situation compiled by the Air Force Intelligence Officer consisted of information pertaining only to airfield and anti-aircraft positions. Vital information regarding coastal defence and ground force positions was missing.²⁶³

Nevertheless, by 27 May Crete had been taken and the British were forced to retreat to Egypt from the southern harbour of Sphakia. This victory claimed the lives of 5,678 German paratroopers, and led Hitler to discount the possibility of future airborne operations.²⁶⁴ However, British presence in the area had been eliminated, and the southern flank of imminent German operations in Russia secured.

Despite Raeder's preference for a concerted Mediterranean campaign to totally eliminate British presence, Hitler never seriously considered such an operation a viable alternative to the execution of his ideological war against the Soviet Union. While the British had significant interests in the Mediterranean, Hitler realised that their loss would not prove decisive when looking at the war in general.²⁶⁵ Germany had already overextended itself both in terms of material and personnel, yet the Wehrmacht was preparing to execute another extensive campaign. Obviously, if events conspired against Germany in the forthcoming battle, then problems regarding logistics and leadership would soon become crippling.

The Middle East is so vast and diverse as to defy exact demarcation. The British viewed it as encompassing not only the Levant and Egypt, but also Greece, Crete, and North and East Africa. It was here that the Allies wished to gain a foothold from which to launch a new European offensive against the Axis. However, when Hitler finally granted the Italian request for assistance in January 1941, British possibilities in the Mediterranean became somewhat limited. While the British swept Italian forces back in East Africa during December 1940, on the arrival of the Afrikakorps, the balance of power in this theatre changed almost immediately.²⁶⁶ Between March and April 1941, Rommel, with Italian assistance, pushed the British out of Cyrenaica and into Egypt, leaving only Tobruk in British hands.²⁶⁷

While the Wehrmacht had become embroiled in two expansive theatres, the OKW Operations Staff felt that an urgent task was the reorganisation of the command set-up in the OKW Theatres of War through the appointment of a single Commander-in-Chief in each area. This was the obvious form of organisation for the direction of inter-service operations; and in addition, by 1942, the war had assumed such world-wide proportions that it was neither possible, nor right for Supreme headquarters to try to direct other than by the issue of broad operational directives.²⁶⁸ Because of the isolation of Hitler's headquarters from both the front and Germany, his interference in operations was untenable. In any case, the OKW Operations Staff was so small (so it could follow Hitler in its mobile headquarters, when needed, without major difficulties²⁶⁹) that it seemed essential to delegate the greatest possible power to theatre commanders and at the same time try to get some order into the almost impenetrable jungle of authorities and chains of command that were a feature of the temporarily inactive theatres.

Nevertheless, both the Navy and Luftwaffe maintained their own headquarters in the OKW Theatres of War in addition to and on the same levels as those of the Army. All were independent of each other and there was no unified command even for the defence of the area concerned.²⁷⁰ However, because of individual service agendas, no solution to this problem was reached until it was too late to effect change. Furthermore, in the Mediterranean, the Comando Supremo would not have co-operated with such a reorganisation, even if it had occurred. The result of this inaction was a continuation of a confused, inefficient, and confrontational chain of command that would hamper the operations of the Wehrmacht until the end of the war.

On 18 January 1942, the major Tripartite powers, Germany, Italy, and Japan, signed a pact in Berlin regarding the division of the world into spheres of interest. The areas east of seventy degrees longitude were the domain of the Japanese while the areas west were Germany and Italy's. More importantly, this pact was a

blueprint for the execution of the Axis' global war against the Allies. Germany and Italy were to conduct operations against American and British interests in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic while the Japanese took responsibility for the Pacific theatre. Moreover, co-ordinated operations in the Indian Ocean would be undertaken. This approach went further in that if the Allies concentrated their naval forces in the Atlantic, then the agreement provided for the partial transfer of the Japanese Navy to this area. An alternate transfer would have occurred had the Allies focused on the Pacific.²⁷¹

The importance of such an agreement between the major Axis partners should not be underestimated. Had the Germans, Italians, and Japanese been allowed to join forces in the Indian Ocean, the crucial supply routes of the Allies would have been cut, and the southern supply route to the Russians disrupted.²⁷² However, as the war progressed over the months following this pact, the enthusiasm, of both the Germans and Japanese, as well as their ability to effect such a link up, waned as their individual spheres took priority over those of their Axis partners.²⁷³

When the individual interests of each nation became more important than the global strategy, the Axis alliance started to deteriorate. The tensions that became obvious within the Axis, and also the Wehrmacht itself, stemmed from clashes between the leading personalities. Especially in the Mediterranean, Rommel and Kesselring had many clashes. On several occasions, Rommel conducted operations despite being warned of possible dangers; as he did when he ignored Halder's warning about probable supply difficulties should he over-reach the stop-lines dictated to him by Berlin and Rome.²⁷⁴ For a time, his tactics paid dividends. However, when things went wrong, they went badly wrong.

Furthermore, beyond mere personality clashes, the inappropriate shifting of personnel within the command structure severely impeded the ability of the Axis

to project a unified front.²⁷⁵ Hitler did not intervene to any great extent because he became obsessed with trying to break up what he saw as the unholy Allied alliance against Germany. Additionally, the 'Führer Principle' meant that even though Hitler would not move to stop the rot, he would not allow anybody else to assume a position of genuine authority to resolve the chaotic command situation. This, and the inability of the German and Italian armed forces High Commands to reconcile their different strategies and priorities, eventually resulted in command paralysis.

In North Africa, where German and British troops faced off over the Gazala line, an Axis attack on Malta in June 1942 was sought to relieve the supply situation in the central Mediterranean before a resurgent offensive was undertaken at Gazala. At meeting between 29 and 30 April, Hitler and Mussolini decided that an attack on Libya (Operation 'Theseus') would be conducted, despite the objections of the Commando Supremo. Once German troops had overrun Cyrenaica, and Tobruk in particular, and had reached the Egyptian border, Rommel and the Italian divisions were to stand on the defensive. Air units were then to be shifted to help in the assault on Malta (Operation 'Hercules'), to take place by early August at the latest. Yet by 20 May, less than a week before a drive on Gazala was to take place, Hitler voiced his pessimism at the chances of success at Malta. At the eleventh hour, the Malta operation was abandoned, with the Axis instead focused on North Africa, and specifically the Suez Canal, as the primary target in this theatre.²⁷⁶

Despite all the talk and preparations surrounding German operations in the Mediterranean, Hitler and his advisers in the Army never thought of it as more than a secondary theatre. They never provided the necessary manpower or supplies, partly because of logistical problems within the theatre, and partly because of the distance from Germany's economic and military base. Furthermore, as Hitler remarked to Halder: "this war on the periphery doesn't

interest me."²⁷⁷ Hence, Hitler's attention remained firmly fixed on the Russian front.

Meanwhile, on 26 May, three German and six Italian divisions attacked British, Commonwealth, and Free French troops at Gazala. Initially, the Allies held their lines, but by 10 June, Rommel had taken a number of Allied strongholds and they were forced to withdraw towards Egypt. On 20 June, the Axis forces turned towards Tobruk and took it in a *coup de main*. Rommel then asked Hitler for permission to advance into Egypt, rather than stop at the frontier as had been decided at the April meeting between Italy and Germany. Having persuaded Mussolini, Hitler allowed this move, and Rommel entered Egypt and by 30 June had reached El Alamein.²⁷⁸

Simultaneously, the Wehrmacht executed Operation 'Blue' in Russia, and its early success led to the possibility of an expedition across the Caucasus into the Middle East from the north, with the added prospect of a German drive through Turkey. At this time in the war, there were indeed several possibilities for the Wehrmacht to gain significant victories.²⁷⁹ However, in North Africa, the offensive had exhausted Axis supplies and stretched logistics to breaking point, while in Russia, Hitler's dissipation of his forces ultimately lost them the initiative.

In the North African theatre the OKW received sole responsibility because of the political considerations involved in the planning and execution of any operation. The OKW had the necessary political apparatus with which to best deal with the Italians. Furthermore, shortly before the start of the Russian campaign, all theatres, bar the Soviet Union, were placed under the umbrella of the OKW. This transfer relieved the OKH from all tasks in the occupied territories and allowed it to focus solely on the prosecution of 'Barbarossa'.²⁸⁰

At first, the OKW and OKH maintained somewhat cordial relations regarding co-operation in each other's theatre of operations. Jodl, especially, promoted frequent official and unofficial contact between the two High Commands. However, this situation gradually deteriorated, as the OKW became increasingly isolated from the campaign in the east. When Zeitzler replaced Halder as Chief of Army General Staff, he succeeded in excluding the OKW from having any idea of events on the eastern front. As the situation became critical on both the Russian and Mediterranean fronts during 1943, the relationship between the leading personalities in the OKW and OKH became impossible. Because there had been a division of operational authority between the theatres, both Jodl and Zeitzler had to present their cases directly to Hitler, who would then decide which theatre would receive assistance.²⁸¹ This situation resulted in the complete fragmentation of the Wehrmacht into theatres of interest. All unity of purpose dissipated when the individual services had to lobby Hitler for necessary resources. Success in individual theatres became more important than the overall strategic position of the Wehrmacht.

By May 1943, divisions within the Wehrmacht had cost Germany the Mediterranean, as the Afrikakorps was defeated in North Africa. Meanwhile, Italy, its only substantial European ally (with the possible exception of Finland), was trying to extricate itself from the war with as few repercussions as possible. For the Germans, this meant that they alone had to make defensive preparations to meet possible Allied landings in Spain, Sardinia, Sicily, Italy, and the Balkans, as well as in Western Europe. Furthermore, the Wehrmacht had to make all of these preparations while it remained locked in battles of annihilation on a shrinking front in Russia.²⁸²

The German military leadership was split regarding the possible site of the inevitable Allied invasion. There was only one certainty, Germany would be attacked sooner, rather than later. On 3 November, Hitler, on the basis of an

appraisal by Gerd von Rundstedt (Commander-in-Chief West), issued a directive that outlined the focus of Wehrmacht operations during 1944. Instead of focusing on hostilities in the Soviet Union, the spectre of Allied invasion in the west was to be addressed, as Hitler felt that this was where the Allies would attempt a mass landing. Fortifications would be strengthened and air, sea, and land units built up to meet the expected onslaught. Thus, Germany's agenda for the final two years of the conflict had been set: defeat of the Allied invasion in the west while theatres in the east and south were to be held, giving ground only when absolutely necessary.²⁸³

As a result of this directive, Hitler was forced to inform his already overstretched forces on the eastern front that they would get no reinforcements until the landings had been defeated. Meanwhile, further evidence of the emphasis on defence was that the Luftwaffe production of fighters rose from an average of 435 per month during the last half of 1942, to 753 in the first half of 1943. This reflected the fact that the Luftwaffe's leadership had become more defensively orientated in its thinking.²⁸⁴ Hitler's defensive strategy in the west gambled that the invasion would be defeated so he could then commit everything he had against the Russians in a final battle of annihilation.

Jodl stated after the war that the Wehrmacht's expedition in the Balkans had cost Germany the war because 'Barbarossa' was delayed while troops and time were committed to liquidating British presence in the area.²⁸⁵ This claim has merit, though it cannot be used exclusively to explain Germany's ultimate defeat. British intervention had to be addressed in the Balkans and Mediterranean before 'Barbarossa' could begin.

By May 1941, the situation had stabilised enough to allow the Russian campaign to begin. However, the British threat had not been extinguished, thus, this area provided the Wehrmacht with numerous crises while it was preoccupied

in Eastern Europe. More than any other time, the Wehrmacht was stretched beyond its means as it struggled to hold down occupied territories while prosecuting the ideological war against the Red Army. When the Germans were defeated in the Mediterranean, and the Allied Operation 'Overlord' was not defeated at Normandy, Hitler's gamble had not paid off. After this it simply became a matter of time before the Wehrmacht was crushed between converging Russian and American forces.

This study has thus far analysed how the German Army and Air Force valiantly prosecuted a simultaneous, multi-theatre war, until overwhelming forces, and internal command disorder, eventually brought it to its knees in May 1945. Now, in the final chapter of this work, the role of the German Navy will be discussed by illustrating how it was an important instrument for the Wehrmacht during World War Two, despite the supremacy of its British counterpart.

Chapter Five

The Conflict at Sea - The OKM's Role in World War Two

The German Navy performed a unique role during the Second World War as initially, most of its operations were free of Hitler's interference. In contrast to the Army, the Navy (as well as the Luftwaffe) preserved some independence because Hitler essentially understood little about sea power. For the Navy, this appearance of operational autonomy continued, for the most part, throughout the war. Additionally, Hitler had considerable respect for both Raeder and Karl Dönitz (who replaced Raeder as Commander-in-Chief of the Navy in 1943), and this meant that even Jodl, who was no expert in naval affairs, treated them with marked circumspection.²⁸⁶

Because Raeder viewed the Navy as unique, he resisted the formation of the OKW from the very beginning. Raeder argued repeatedly that the independence of the Navy must be maintained because a unified command structure, with a "continental" bias, would be little qualified to plan naval operations.²⁸⁷ Hitler over-ruled the Navy on this matter, and the OKW assumed the facade of unified command authority. In the beginning, Hitler confined his dealings with the Navy to the examination of their proposals only. He did not interfere in operational planning because of his limited knowledge of naval principles. However, as the war progressed, and Hitler consolidated his position as Supreme Commander (by replacing Brauchitsch with himself as Commander-in-Chief of the Army), the Navy, Army, and Luftwaffe, increasingly became subject to Hitler's penchant for single-handedly controlling operations.

In a meeting at the Berghof on 22 August 1939, Hitler stated that war was not expected before 1944.²⁸⁸ By this time, the Wehrmacht would be at full strength, and would be ready to fight any foe. However, his prediction proved wrong, much to the anguish of his service Commanders-in-Chief as their forces were in the midst of major construction programmes, and thus, were not ready for war. Hitler maintained that Britain had used the Wehrmacht's invasion of Poland as a pretext to begin hostilities because it would prefer to fight then, rather than later when Germany would be stronger.²⁸⁹

Raeder stated that the Navy remained in no way adequately prepared for war with Britain in 1939.²⁹⁰ Because war had broken out prematurely, the Navy terminated its long-term construction programme, the Z-Plan, before any tangible progress had been made.²⁹¹ Furthermore, Raeder claimed, the submarine arm would not be strong enough to have any decisive effect on the course of the war while surface forces were so inferior in number and strength to the British Royal Navy that all they could do was show how to die gallantly.²⁹²

Following the declarations of war by Britain and France, Hitler's Directive Number Two outlined measures (laying of mines and attacks on merchant shipping) to be taken against these countries at sea. Raeder submitted these details to Hitler, who then accepted them and issued his directive without question. The laying of mines and attacks on merchant shipping proved the most effective means by which the Navy contributed to the German war effort. From the outset of the war, both the Navy and Hitler saw submarines as the decisive weapon with which to strangle British sea supply and communication routes. However, building them in sufficient numbers would prove a problem throughout the war.

On 7 September 1939, Raeder expressed his opinion that after the collapse of Poland, the British and French might accept the new geopolitical situation in

Europe, and pursue peace. Therefore, it would be prudent for the Navy not to conduct an offensive while the situation remained unpredictable. Hitler agreed, and supported Raeder's restraint.²⁹³

In a conference in Zoppot on 23 September, Raeder asserted that in any conflict against Britain the Navy would provide the primary offensive tool, the submarine. Hitler felt likewise, and thus promoted the submarine programme at the expense of Göring's Ju-88 aircraft programme.²⁹⁴ Hence, with Hitler's support, the Navy commenced preparations for significant additions to the submarine fleet.²⁹⁵

On 10 October 1939, Hitler issued an order concerning the Navy's submarine construction programme. This order stipulated that any request submitted to, and approved by Hitler for the submarines, had to be fulfilled immediately. Raeder would submit the Navy's need for raw materials, workers, and factory facilities, by way of the OKW, to Göring, in his capacity as President of the Reich Defence Council and Deputy for the Four Years' Plan. He would then decide from which quotas of other services they were to be withdrawn.²⁹⁶

However, as the war progressed, the Navy found that even the Führer's promise of support did not guarantee their requests were met. Constantly, Raeder had to recruit Hitler's support to gain the necessary manpower and raw materials for submarine construction. In order to have these resources, the Navy programme had to have priority over all others.²⁹⁷ Hitler understood this, but the other services advanced similar demands. He could not cater for every request. By initially assigning responsibility for resource allocation to Göring, Hitler created a precedent of ignoring conflicts of interest.

Göring's numerous positions of authority resulted in great disharmony and tension between the service commanders within the High Commands of the

Wehrmacht. Because of his position as Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, in addition to his other responsibilities, he could not have acted impartially when assigning material quotas to each of the services. In no way would Göring have assisted the Navy's submarine programme if it proved detrimental to the Luftwaffe's quota. Hence, from very early on in the war, the Navy and Luftwaffe were at odds.

Owing to the inferiority of the German surface fleet to its British counterpart, Raeder noted that additional naval air forces were needed in order to protect what ships they had. Here again, the dominant personalities of Göring and Raeder clashed, and this time they argued over the allocation of Luftwaffe units to air support and reconnaissance missions for the Navy. To end this argument, Raeder successfully requested Hitler's support.²⁹⁸ However, this support did not immediately achieve Göring's acquiescence, and the lack of an adequate naval Air Force plagued the Navy until the end of the war.

After the successful conclusion of the Polish campaign, the Navy believed that a siege of England must be laid, despite the complications such a move would have regarding the position of America. Raeder and his staff believed that the earlier an intensive submarine blockade of England began, the sooner the effect, and the shorter the duration of the war. Any restriction on the freedom of the Navy to execute submarine warfare would lengthen the war.²⁹⁹ Hitler agreed with the need for a blockade, but remained mindful of America's posturing, and went to great lengths to ensure American ships were not sunk (even if they contravened neutrality laws). Through this limitation Hitler wished to give America no pretext on which to enter the war on the British side at this time.

As part of the war against Britain, on 8 December 1939 Raeder reported to Hitler on the strategic importance of Norway to both Germany and Britain. Transport of iron via Sweden and Norway over Trondheim to England was very

active. Because of the geography of the Norwegian coast, it proved difficult for the German Navy to control this traffic.³⁰⁰

On 12 December Raeder again warned Hitler of the dangers any British occupation of Norway posed for Germany's war strategy and economy.³⁰¹ If such an occupation occurred, Sweden would come under British influence and the war carried into the Baltic Sea, where German submarine crews trained. Hence, German naval warfare in the Atlantic and North Sea would be severely interrupted.³⁰²

1940 provided many successes for the Wehrmacht as it swept westward. The Navy gained the French Atlantic coast which gave it submarine bases close to the supply routes on which Britain relied heavily. However, this opportunity also created problems, as the Navy then had the responsibility of defending the coast from northern Norway to the Spanish frontier. Additionally, Hitler became impatient to attack the Soviet Union, something the individual branches of the Wehrmacht wished to avoid for the moment. Raeder opposed such an attack and proposed to concentrate instead on the defeat of Britain by weakening its position in the Mediterranean.³⁰³

In response to Raeder's suggestion of a concentration in the Mediterranean, Hitler questioned whether such operations would be decisive for the war. Raeder replied that the net result of such operations would be decisive, and that surprise attacks would be especially significant in dispersing British forces.³⁰⁴ Additionally, Hitler asked Raeder about the maintenance of iron ore supplies from Norway to Germany in the future. He responded that continued Norwegian neutrality would be the best way to ensure this. However, if this proved impossible, then German occupation would be preferable (despite the risks involved for the Navy) to allowing the British to cut off supply completely.³⁰⁵

Raeder's requests for operations with aerial mines against Scapa Flow (to hinder the British Navy from countering German moves against Norway) gained Göring's approval, and were set down for 28 May 1940. However, the night before these scheduled attacks, they were cancelled without reason. Göring later claimed that the Luftwaffe was not experienced enough to conduct such a raid. However, Raeder, Hitler, and Keitel were not satisfied with this excuse and, hence, called on the Luftwaffe to carry out these operations immediately.³⁰⁶

Hitler and Raeder disagreed over other aspects of the Norwegian campaign. Debate raged over whether naval forces should be left in Norway at Narvik and Trondheim to reinforce and support landed troops. Hitler thought such support would boost the morale of the troops. In contrast, Raeder suggested that the ships would be vulnerable to attack from superior British air and sea forces. Hitler conceded this point regarding Narvik, but insisted that Raeder investigate whether Trondheim could be supported after a landing.³⁰⁷

In order to protect a continued naval presence in Norway after the Army's landing, Raeder asked that the Luftwaffe also leave units in the Trondheim and Narvik areas.³⁰⁸ Göring vehemently declined this request in a strongly worded telegram, for which he later apologised.³⁰⁹ Despite this apology, the fact that Raeder and Göring so despised each other inevitably led to competition between their services for resources and prestige. In turn, this contributed heavily towards the numerous problems that arose later in the war as the Wehrmacht became stretched over several active theatres simultaneously.

In the meantime, squabbling between Raeder and Göring led Hitler to demand that his decisions on joint air and sea operations be sought through the OKW in future.³¹⁰ Hitler frequently mediated between the two commanders (until Raeder's dismissal in January 1943), and promoted unity by stating: 'All branches of the Wehrmacht must co-operate. It is the combined effect which is decisive.'³¹¹

However, tension between the Luftwaffe and Navy proved a major distraction for the Führer for the duration of the war.

As early as November 1939, the Naval Staff began examining the problems associated with an invasion of Britain, while at the start of December the Army had prepared similar plans. By May 1940, Raeder presented Hitler with the OKM's plan for the execution of Operation 'Sea Lion'.³¹² Raeder considered an invasion of Britain as a last resort to force it to agree to the new situation in Europe. Through an intensification of the blockade by submarine warfare, combined with air attacks on its convoys and main centres, Britain might be defeated without a sea-born invasion.³¹³ Hitler remained unconvinced that this would happen, and stipulated that if this proved correct, then an invasion was needed, but only if the Luftwaffe gained total air superiority.

'Sea Lion' never took place, partly because of the Luftwaffe's inability to secure air superiority over Britain, and partly because of Hitler's deception. For many months the Navy remained tied to the operation because Hitler wished to maintain the facade that an invasion was imminent so Britain had to focus its attention on defence. This deception committed almost all the Navy's resources to an attack that never happened, yet Hitler initially declined Raeder's repeated requests that the operation be cancelled so the Navy could turn its attention elsewhere. Hitler had wanted to hide preparations for 'Barbarossa' by maintaining the illusion of an imminent invasion of Britain. Only on 13 February 1942 did the Navy finally succeed in having personnel and material commitments to 'Sea Lion' cancelled, and dispersed to areas of more strategic importance.³¹⁴

It remains doubtful that Hitler ever took preparations for 'Sea Lion' seriously in the first place. His Naval Adjutant, Karl Jeso von Puttkamer saw Hitler as half-hearted in his plans from the beginning because of his fear of possible losses from a sea-born operation. Additionally, the Russian question arose in Hitler's

mind at the same time, and the destruction of Bolshevism, and the continuation of oil supplies from the fields around the Black Sea became his preoccupation.³¹⁵

Meanwhile, another debate between the Navy and Luftwaffe raged, this time regarding the laying of mines. Raeder felt that mine warfare was the domain of the Navy, which determined where the mines were laid and of what type they were to be. The Navy also developed mines and trained the units. Therefore, in order to conduct mine warfare with the greatest possible effect, the Navy should also carry out the operations. Göring espoused the need for unification of all air units in order to economise personnel and material, but Raeder emphasised that the Navy should operate in the closest co-operation with naval air units.³¹⁶

Raeder added that an increase in the efficiency of submarine warfare relied heavily upon air reconnaissance, which worked in closest co-operation with the submarines. Such co-operation between aircraft and submarines should also be under a combined naval command, with reconnaissance being conducted by trained naval officers. The Naval Staff requested the posting of Do-217s to the Navy as armed reconnaissance aircraft.³¹⁷ However, Göring resisted the Navy's demands, and his resistance would be experienced time and again during the war as he stated it would be over his dead body that the Luftwaffe supplied aircraft for reconnaissance.³¹⁸ In Göring's mind, everything that flew belonged to the Luftwaffe.³¹⁹ In response, Hitler, in keeping the peace, decided to bow to Göring's tantrum for the time being, and sided with the Luftwaffe.

Nevertheless, the conflict between the Navy and Luftwaffe continued. Raeder conceded to Hitler that a total blockade of the British and French coasts proved beyond the Navy's capabilities because of the limited force at his disposal. However, he maintained that its campaign paid dividends due to reports from Britain at the time that supplies were severely taxed because of the submarine war. Therefore, Raeder again called on Göring to provide energetic air support

for naval operations against merchant shipping. Additionally, and most importantly, he also called for all ships to be sunk without warning, whether they be enemy or neutral. On this point Hitler and Raeder disagreed. The former had to take into account the political implications of permitting the Navy to conduct such operations, while Raeder thought along purely military lines.³²⁰

Raeder felt that the Navy had unnecessary political constraints placed upon it by the "continental ideas" of Hitler and the OKW. This claim appeared well founded when Hitler ordered the Navy to supply both personnel and equipment to the Army should the war be prolonged.³²¹ This directive ignored the fact that the submarine programme remained handicapped by a lack of manpower and materials because too many projects had received special priority. Raeder began negotiations with Keitel to rectify the situation and stated that, if they were not successful, he would then make a personal appeal to the Führer.³²²

On 4 June 1940, Raeder drew Hitler's attention to the delays in submarine construction because of a lack of men, iron, and other metals. From the attitude of the OKW, Raeder formed the impression that the Navy had the lowest priority in the Wehrmacht. Hitler responded to this assertion by stating that, after the fall of France, he intended to decrease the size of the Army and to release all older men and skilled workmen, with the Luftwaffe and Navy having first call on their services. Hence, Hitler had successfully appeased Raeder, but this peace did not last long.³²³

Towards the end of the Wehrmacht's campaign in France, Italy contributed forces to the Axis, and fulfilled Hitler's long held expectation that Mussolini would enter the war. Immediately, however, Italy's entry presented Hitler with serious problems over command authority. Although the Germans and Italians were fighting on the same side, their individual agendas, and methods of war differed enormously. In the case of the Italian Navy, Hitler welcomed their commitment of

submarines to the Atlantic theatre. Yet he realised that this created command problems. While Raeder wanted the Italians to come under German authority, Hitler felt that, if such demands were made, the Italians would ask that German forces in the Mediterranean come under Italian command. Thus, he favoured separate commands, but compromised and allowed Raeder to appoint an admiral as liaison with the Italian submarine command.³²⁴

Meanwhile, the OKM prepared another plan in case the pre-conditions for 'Sea Lion' did not eventuate. This alternative looked at the Mediterranean as the next best place to defeat Britain after its homeland. The Navy called on British control of the Mediterranean to be eliminated as German occupation would guarantee the Wehrmacht unlimited sources of raw materials, while strategic bases could be won for future decisive campaigns. The capture of Gibraltar formed the basis of this plan because its loss by the British would severely disrupt its sea traffic from the South Atlantic.³²⁵ While the Navy promoted the Mediterranean as the next target, Hitler's attention had already turned towards the defeat of Germany's only remaining substantial foe on the continent, the Soviet Union.

After the Italian invasion of Greece, the OKM learned of Hitler's plans for an invasion of Russia, and considered them to be potentially disastrous. In attempting to appease Raeder, Hitler explained that these troop movements were just feints to camouflage 'Sea Lion'.³²⁶ Nevertheless, the Naval Officer in the OKW's Section L produced a proposal that attempted to divert Hitler's attention away from Russia, and towards other issues concerning combined German-Italian naval co-operation (and the removal of British influence from the Mediterranean). While Hitler initially accepted such an undertaking it ultimately came to nothing as he refused to see the Mediterranean as a decisive theatre (despite the best efforts of the Navy to make him see otherwise).³²⁷ Hitler wished to focus his attention solely on the Russian question. However, Mussolini sabotaged this by attacking

Greece, and thus provided the spark that turned the Mediterranean into a major theatre of war.

Despite initially feeling that the Italians should be left to their own devices, Hitler eventually realised that they needed German intervention in the Balkans and Mediterranean to prevent collapse. Raeder again demanded that the Mediterranean not be seen as a secondary theatre, but as the Wehrmacht's primary focus until Britain was defeated. An expedition in the Mediterranean would not be detrimental to Hitler's overall strategy. Therefore, the Navy wanted the invasion of Russia postponed because the stress of fighting in two vast, and totally different theatres (in terms of fighting conditions), would not be advantageous. Furthermore, an end to hostilities could not be foreseen, despite many optimistic German predictions.³²⁸ Regardless of the Navy's advice, Hitler demanded preparations continue for 'Barbarossa'.

Because the Italians had undertaken an independent offensive and needed Germany's assistance to prevent defeat, the question of a unified command structure that had been avoided earlier in the Atlantic, now came to a head in the Mediterranean. The Navy provided particularly scathing reports on the Italians when presenting their case for a unified command under German leadership: 'The Italians have neither the leadership nor the military efficiency to carry the required operations in the Mediterranean to a successful conclusion with the necessary speed and decision. The Italian leadership is wretched.'³²⁹ However, despite the Navy's low opinion of the Italians, Hitler's political considerations left him reluctant to force the issue.

At a conference at the Berghof on 8 and 9 January 1941, Hitler repeated his opinion that if the Italians were to be kept in line he must not demand that they submit to German command. Germany should make no demands because there was a chance that the Italians might have some demands of their own. For

example, they might wish to know the strategy behind German operations, something Hitler would not divulge because of the possibility that the Italian Royal Family transmitted intelligence to Britain.³³⁰ Despite the meeting between Keitel and Badoglio over combined operations in the Mediterranean, the question of a unified command structure to conduct such operations proved impossible for the two nations to resolve. Thus, political considerations conspired against this union ever becoming reality.

At a conference on 27 December 1940, Raeder told Hitler that the German Navy viewed its British counterpart as the decisive factor in the outcome of the war, and that an offensive to drive them out of the Mediterranean (that the OKM had often proposed) would no longer be possible. Now the situation in Africa was becoming dangerous to Germany's strategic situation in Europe.³³¹ Hence the importance of Gibraltar arose again.

During May 1941 the situation in the Mediterranean stabilised for the Wehrmacht. Yet the Navy indicated that 'Barbarossa' should under no circumstances cause operations in the Mediterranean to be abandoned, reduced, or postponed in view of the successes achieved. The initiative had to be kept in the area because, given the chance, the Allies would rapidly reassert their superiority, and thus threaten Germany's southern flank in 'Barbarossa'.³³²

The war of words between Raeder and Göring heightened as the war progressed. Raeder repeatedly attacked the effectiveness of the Luftwaffe's assistance to the Navy. He expressed doubts about the accuracy of Luftwaffe reports on bombing raids because the greater proportion of large ships reported hit remained operational in the North Sea.³³³ Additionally, aerial photographs showed that its attacks on key English ports were ineffective. Hence, the Navy suggested a change of strategy by attacking production plants, repair shops, and ships in harbours, rather than individual ships at sea.³³⁴ Ships at sea must be the

target of the submarines while enemy ships in harbours and shipyards must be the Luftwaffe's target.³³⁵ Such a strategy would prove important not only for the Navy, but also for the Wehrmacht's overall prosecution of the war.

Despite Raeder's numerous pleas that the Luftwaffe attack British ships under construction, or those forces lying in Scapa Flow, operations of this type were not carried out, much to his displeasure.³³⁶ He claimed that this proved the Luftwaffe considered reconnaissance an inferior task. Anticipating Göring's resistance to any ruling favouring the Navy, Hitler attempted to solve this dispute by deciding that reconnaissance fliers would receive decorations.³³⁷ Hitler thus wished to appease Göring by appealing to his vanity.

While the Wehrmacht held air and sea superiority in the Mediterranean, and sunk many Allied ships, on land the contest proved more even. After 1942, as the Allies started to gain the upper hand in North Africa, and while German troops were tied down in Russia, Hitler turned to the Navy to stabilise the situation in the Mediterranean by cutting off Allied sea supply routes. Both he and Raeder realised the importance of submarines to operations against merchant shipping. However, while Hitler wished to transfer submarines from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, Raeder felt that this transfer should only occur in an emergency because of the decisive importance of submarine warfare in the Atlantic.³³⁸ With the number of submarines at his disposal, effective operations in both areas would be impossible. In response to this statement, Hitler again pledged support for the submarine programme, and said once the Russian campaign had ended, it would receive top priority.³³⁹

To reinforce the Navy's effort in the Atlantic, the Naval Staff believed that military co-operation with Vichy France would be imperative to gaining important bases for operations in the Atlantic. This relationship had to be attempted even if some political concessions and temporary political disadvantages were the

result.³⁴⁰ However, Hitler did not believe that such an accommodation could be reached because it might prejudice relations with Italy. Therefore, his political considerations once again prevented the Navy from carrying out what it saw as an essential mission.

During the second half of 1941, the Wehrmacht began to experience shortages brought on by fighting in several diverse theatres simultaneously. The Germans were entrenched in both Russia and the Mediterranean. On top of these commitments, Hitler also became convinced that occupied territories, such as Norway, needed to be fortified from possible Allied attacks. The Wehrmacht became severely over-stretched both in terms of personnel and resources because it was over-committed. Hitler, as Supreme Commander of the OKW, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, had sole responsibility for the allocation of resources to the various theatres. The Navy, in particular, felt aggrieved by some of his decisions during the later stages of the war, yet it had no power to resist them.

On 7 December 1941, Japan attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour. This resulted in the official entry of the United States into the war after Hitler declared war against it in support of Japan. The Japanese action pleased both Hitler and the Navy as American ships supplying British forces could now be sunk without prejudice. Additionally, Hitler felt that American merchant vessels would be diverted from the Atlantic to the Pacific, thereby slowing the flow of supplies to the Russians and British.³⁴¹ Therefore, the Atlantic could then again become the domain of the submarine. However, because Germany's supply lines and resources were already stretched beyond braking point, Hitler had to ration fuel according to his prerogatives. For the Navy this meant that its allocation of fuel was cut in half midway through 1941, thereby severely restricting the mobility of the Navy and its ability to conduct training.³⁴²

Raeder expressed his displeasure at the way Hitler reduced the Navy's quota. However, he would have been enraged by Hitler's suggestion that the Navy should use all its forces to defend Norway in case of British invasion.³⁴³ After the fall of Poland, Raeder had encouraged an occupation of Norway. Nonetheless, he felt it futile to invest the entire Navy in its defence when it had pressing obligations in other theatres.

While most of the large German ships had been sunk, or severely damaged during the war by the Royal Navy, precious resources were spent to repair them so they could occupy British forces. It is true that the submarine received more credit than the big ships for the results gained during the war. However, Raeder maintained that the big ships had their place in modern naval warfare. Hitler wished for the remaining ships to break through the English Channel from Brest (where most were being repaired) and sail to Norway. If this proved impossible, as the Naval Staff felt, then the ships were to be decommissioned and the guns and crews used as reinforcements in Norway.³⁴⁴

By April 1942 the situation looked increasingly grim for the Wehrmacht. Raeder reported to Hitler that Allied strength continued to grow as Germany's declined. The Army and Luftwaffe were over-committed, which, in the case of the latter, had severe complications for the conduct of submarine warfare in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Additionally, Raeder attempted to address problems experienced with communication between the Navy, the OKW, and Hitler. Raeder thought that the OKW belittled the Navy and regularly by-passed it when making decisions regarding strategic and operational planning. A comparison with the other branches showed that the Navy, with only von Puttkamer present at the Führer's headquarters, was not in a position to properly counsel Hitler. By increasing naval representation in Hitler's inner circle, the Navy hoped that its voice would be heard, and that Hitler would heed its advice.³⁴⁵ However, as

Raeder soon learned, it proved far too late for any effective change to be made to the situation.

After 1941, the meagre raw material situation curtailed any repair or construction work on battleships, heavy and light cruisers, aircraft carriers, and troop transports, and on 2 February 1943, the Navy ordered a permanent halt to all work on big ships.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, as a result of his conflict with Hitler over the commitment of the Navy to Norway, as well as the decommissioning of the big ships, Hitler replaced Raeder with the previous commander of submarines, Dönitz. Raeder's parting words to Hitler encapsulated years of frustration the Navy had endured at Göring's hands: 'Please protect the Navy and my successor from Göring!'³⁴⁷ Hitler's faith in the future of large ships had evaporated and he said on 26 February 1943, in the presence of now Grand Admiral Dönitz, that large ships were a thing of the past, and that he would rather have the steel and nickel contained in them than send them into action again.³⁴⁸

For the rest of the war, the OKW and OKM had only very irregular contact. After Raeder's resignation, all questions concerning naval matters were generally dealt with personally between Hitler and Dönitz, who spent much of his time at the Führer's headquarters. As a result of enormous effort on the part of the Navy, the submarine once again became a potent weapon and there were many occasions when reconnaissance and coastal defence would have been better served by a unified command other than Hitler's. Yet, despite this situation, the OKW remained restricted to its role as a report collection centre.³⁴⁹

Hitler held great hope that the submarine, and especially the new models that were due for operations in 1944, would prove miracle weapons, and turn the war back in Germany's favour. Like Raeder before him, Dönitz tried to impress upon Hitler that if the war was to turn because of the new submarine, it would firstly need to be built in sufficient numbers. However, Hitler responded that the

perennial problem remained: where could the raw materials and manpower be obtained? He had the authority to order the amounts to be made available, but that would mean extracting it from another branch.³⁵⁰

This dilemma over the allocation of personnel and raw material to the various services and theatres haunted Hitler until the end of the war. He realised that the submarine might have been decisive for the war, but he never had the resources to produce them in sufficient numbers. By May 1943, the situation was such that even Dönitz conceded that the Navy could no longer be a definitive element in the war, and that a defeat at sea would not mean the end because submarines were no longer decisive in battle. Everything then became of secondary importance to the battle on land.³⁵¹

Despite the increasing dissatisfaction with Hitler's conduct of the war, not one man could compete with him when it came to rallying morale. Dönitz, for one, seemed captivated, as his notes on the conference between 9 and 11 August 1943 indicate: 'The enormous strength which the Führer radiates, his unwavering confidence, and his far-sighted appraisal of the Italian situation have made it very clear in these days that we are all very insignificant in comparison with the Führer, and that our knowledge and the picture we get from our limited vantage are fragmentary. Anyone who believes that he can do better than the Führer is silly.'³⁵² Despite Dönitz's admiration, his admission that he had only a fragmented picture of the war illustrates Hitler's ultimate authority, and how he maintained it throughout the war by ensuring only he knew the total picture.

By the final year of the war, the Navy's role at sea became limited to the odd submarine raid as both personnel and material had been generally committed to the land battle. Until the end, submarines operated in significant numbers in the Atlantic, and Hitler, as late as 14 April 1945, spoke of the possibility of organising a new taskforce.³⁵³ However, as had been the case from the beginning of the war,

the Navy experienced problems mustering the necessary resources and support to prosecute the naval war to the extent it desired. Constantly, the Navy requested that the OKW, and Hitler, allocate the manpower and raw materials essential to build new submarines of sufficient number and quality. However, because the other services also competed for materials from the same pool, it became inevitable that conflicts would break out. This tense environment did not encourage a spirit of co-operation within the armed forces. Therefore, although Hitler favoured the formation of a naval Air Force, this remained impossible because of Göring's continued resistance and assertions that the Luftwaffe did not have the necessary number of aircraft to fulfil the Navy's requirements.

Hitler repeatedly pledged his support to the submarine programme. However, because of opposition within the Wehrmacht, and the constraints born of a protracted war over several theatres, his support did not guarantee that the submarines would be built to the Navy's timetable. Because the naval programme faced many delays due to the shortages of men and materials, and for other reasons regarding representation at Hitler's headquarters, Raeder claimed that the Army and Luftwaffe received preferential treatment.

This hostile environment highlights how Hitler's dual, and contradictory role as Supreme Commander of the OKW, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, resulted in only him knowing the total war situation. Only he could distribute material to the various theatres based on this knowledge. Thus, while Raeder resisted Hitler's plan to send most of the Navy to Norway, as well as his plan to decommission its big ships, ultimately, he was in no position to overturn the Führer's decisions. Hitler's Norwegian strategy weakened the Wehrmacht's ability to defend other possible Allied landing points. Yet no other figure in the upper echelons of the German command could possibly overrule his directives.

For the Navy, this inability to lobby Hitler in the same way as the Luftwaffe (because of Göring's position as the Nazi Party's Deputy), left it unable to persuade him not to place political considerations above military objectives. The special restrictions placed on submarine attacks on American shipping, the denial of German command over Italian naval forces in the Atlantic, and Hitler's rejection of any alliance with France, are all examples of the Navy's failure to influence Hitler's thinking. In the end, Raeder's successor, Dönitz, gained the ultimate compliment when Hitler designated him as heir apparent. Ironically, only when the Navy's strength had dissipated, did the opinions of its Commander-in-Chief hold Hitler's attention. But by this stage, the war had already been lost.

Conclusion

Why did the Wehrmacht's command structure that is perceived today as a model of unity eventually contribute to Germany's defeat during the Second World War? Essentially, the answer is that the dominant personalities of the central figures in the higher echelons of the German Armed Forces worked against each other to the detriment of their war effort. Despite this, the theory behind the German tri-service command structure is still viewed as valid today. The consensus is that the activities of each branch of the military should be coordinated within the framework of an umbrella planning organisation (such as the OKW). The Wehrmacht embodied this concept in theory. However, in practice, the German model became far from the ideal envisaged by the pioneers Seeckt and Blomberg.

Responsibility for divergence from the original command structure created by Seeckt and Blomberg has traditionally been laid at Hitler's doorstep. This claim is well founded, although Keitel and Jodl (among other high ranking German generals) are also responsible because they failed to protect the OKW's powers from Hitler's repeated interference. Even though Hitler had the authority to intervene in operational planning, he should have delegated the power of decision to others who had more knowledge than he on specific issues. However, he was loath to do so and, during the war, periodically reinforced his position as sole executor of power. He gradually consolidated all positions of authority in his own person, and divided operational responsibilities in the various theatres to different High Commands, either the Army, Navy, Air Force, or the Armed Forces. Furthermore, he demanded that each group focus its attention solely on its own theatre, and did not allow anyone, but himself, to gain a total impression of the war situation.

Hitler maintained his position for the duration of the war because of his principle of 'divide and rule'. No concerted opposition to his authority could ever be formed because no one knew as much about the war's progress as he did. Therefore, while Hitler's increasing interference in operational matters after the Polish campaign raised tensions, especially within the Army, nobody would dare argue against him because he had just won a grand victory. Even when the victories dried up, and the Wehrmacht became involved in different theatres simultaneously, nobody would confront Hitler because he had reinforced his position as head of the state and military to the extent that his decisions were unquestionable. Only he had full knowledge of the war situation. Therefore, Hitler reasoned, only he could direct the Wehrmacht's operations.

This study shows that from Seeckt's first tentative steps towards a unified command structure (Reichswehr), and even after the creation of the Wehrmacht in May 1935, the individual services consistently expressed objections to this movement. In particular, the Army advanced many arguments against the concept of the OKW. Because of the Army's status as the largest force in the Wehrmacht, it felt it should retain the right (that it had during the First World War) to plan the operations of the other services. Keitel refuted the Army's calls, stating if any single service had full command of the Wehrmacht, fair procurement and allocation of men and material would be impossible.

Much to Keitel's disappointment, the OKW never gained control of resource allocation because Göring assumed responsibility for distribution, even though he was the Luftwaffe Commander-in-Chief. Later in the war, as the situation worsened, Hitler took responsibility for the direction of operations, and with this came the distribution of resources. Each service fought for Hitler's favour as he alone had authority to distribute resources to the various theatres from a shrinking pool. So, while Keitel had argued against a single service being given authority

over resource allocation, he allowed a single person to assume this position. Therefore, the status of the OKW had been allowed to diminish further.

In the opening campaign of the war, the Wehrmacht showed the world that through its inaction, a potent German Armed Forces had been allowed to rise from the ashes of its predecessor. Admittedly, the Wehrmacht was qualitatively far superior to the Polish Armed Forces. Yet, because of the speed of the Polish collapse, and the connotations associated with the word *Blitzkrieg*, fear spread around the globe. However, while dissent was muted at the start of the war, the tensions within the Wehrmacht's command structure that were to cripple it later started to appear soon after the Polish campaign.

After the defeat of Poland, Hitler continued the war despite the reservations of his generals who wished to delay the onset of any campaign. The Army and Luftwaffe opposed the continuation of the war in the short term because they needed time to replenish supplies and machinery, and because Germany's future opponents would be more substantial than Poland. Hitler denied their requests for more time, and despite a number of delays, conquered the rest of the European continent west of Germany. He had proved his generals wrong, and this precedent later gave Hitler the confidence to overrule their objections to his desire to wage an ideological war against Russia.

The failure of 'Sea Lion' to eventuate after the fall of France dented the Wehrmacht's aura of invincibility in the eyes of the Allies. Yet, rather than consolidate Germany's strategic position Hitler resolved to push on with other plans. Instead of adhering to the advice of his generals, he concluded that Germany would defeat Britain by eliminating its only remaining European ally, Russia. Before Hitler had the chance to execute 'Barbarossa', Mussolini's disastrous campaign against Greece forced Germany to become involved in a theatre he had wished to remain inactive.

During operations in France, Italy finally backed up its supportive gestures by committing forces to the German war effort. However, this immediately raised serious command issues regarding the conduct of combined operations. Despite the requests of his generals, Hitler refused to force Mussolini to hand over command of his forces to the Germans. Hitler felt that if such demands were made, the Italians might make similar demands if German forces were needed in Italy. While the OKW and Commando Supremo did meet to discuss the issue of combined operations, the crucial question of a combined German-Italian command structure to run such operations remained neglected.

The German commanders, and Hitler, uniformly viewed their allies as incompetent and as liabilities. Yet they knew the importance of having them within the Axis. All the minor theatres were manned by troops from allied nations, but they were not trusted to be reliable in active theatres. Although Hitler viewed the Finns as reasonable troops, during 'Barbarossa' they advanced only as far as the lands taken from them by the Russians during the previous two years. They then concluded a peace with the Russians, forcing the Germans to shift forces north to cover that part of the front previously manned by Finnish troops. The point is that the Germans generally did not see their allies as reliable. Thus, the Wehrmacht had to dissipate its forces to cover weak parts of the front to prevent collapse.

By the end of 1941, the Wehrmacht had become entrenched in two vast and diverse theatres. In Russia, the Red Army had retreated east and avoided the decisive battle that the Germans had wanted. Therefore, the Wehrmacht was forced to march deep into the Soviet Union to confront the Russians. While successful in the short term, the Germans were slowly ground down as problems associated with logistics became overwhelming, and manpower and supplies dwindled. Additionally, conflicts over the objective of 'Barbarossa', between the OKH and OKW, culminated in the failure of the Wehrmacht to take Moscow.

Even though the Wehrmacht had become involved on multiple fronts there was no committee to bring together the three branches of the Armed Forces. Furthermore, the service commanders only met irregularly, and always in Hitler's presence. The much heralded unified Wehrmacht command structure existed in theory only because there remained a distinct lack of co-ordination and co-operation regarding the conduct of operations. The mediation in this system was Hitler himself. Yet access to, and communication with, the Führer became increasingly difficult as the German Armed Forces marched further away from both Berlin and his various field headquarters.

When Hitler relocated his headquarters to the Wolfschanze for 'Barbarossa', communications between there and Berlin, where most of the command apparatus remained, became rapidly over-stretched. As the Wehrmacht moved further into the interior of the Soviet Union in search of the Red Army, the communication situation worsened as there was no communications network, such as rail, to link Berlin and the Wolfschanze with the eastern front. When the distance to the Mediterranean is added to the equation, it is little wonder that the German communications network broke down as the Wehrmacht became involved on multiple fronts.

Hitler's aspirations of greatness effectively ended with the failure of 'Barbarossa'. By not defeating Russia decisively in the short term, the Wehrmacht became consigned to a protracted war while it was also committed to defensive measures in the Mediterranean and in the west. Norway, in particular, became Hitler's preoccupation as he wrongly feared an Allied invasion there. Hence, he essentially assigned the Navy to Norway's defence, despite Raeder's serious misgivings. In the end, just as Brauchitsch had been replaced for dissent, so too was Raeder after heated arguments with Hitler over the defence of Norway.

Until 'Barbarossa', Germany had several strategic options. Yet, after 1941, the Wehrmacht's freedom of movement became severely restricted as the situation in Russia and the Mediterranean demanded substantial German attention. On top of this, the United States entered the war against Germany (after Hitler declared war on it in the spirit of the Axis partnership) after Pearl Harbour. As a result of having to conduct warfare over two vast, and totally different theatres (in terms of conditions), and against growing enemy forces, Germans lines of supply and communication were stretched beyond breaking point.

The Allied landing on Sicily and the subsequent surrender of Italy finally relieved Hitler of the command issue that had dogged him since Italy's entry into the war. However, because of Italy's collapse, Germany had to send troops from the eastern front to protect the Wehrmacht's southern flank in Russia. Therefore, the stresses incurred by fighting simultaneous, multi-theatre warfare were exacerbated by the fall of Germany's only substantial European ally. Hitler's idea of defeating Britain's allies as a means of defeating it had now been applied by the Allies to Germany with regards Italy.

By 1943, the situation became grim for the Germans. Yet the Wehrmacht miraculously continued to wage war for another couple of years. Indeed, Hitler held that Germany would win the war because the unholy Allied alliance would crumble because of inherent ideological differences between Britain, Russia, and the United States. However, unlike the Axis, the Allies were able to find compromise solutions, and did not succumb to differences of opinion. While Hitler became obsessed with the Allied command structure, he neglected his own alliance. This neglect, along with constant infighting within the Wehrmacht, contributed to the gradual decline of the Reich until the end of the European war in May 1945.

While the theory behind the Wehrmacht's command structure appeared apposite, the personalities involved in the conduct of the German war effort made it impossible for it to function as Seeckt and Blomberg had envisaged. Hitler often by-passed the OKW when communicating with the individual service commanders. Similarly, the commanders overlooked the OKW when consulting Hitler on operational matters. Hence, the OKW never assumed its primary function of co-ordinating all of the Wehrmacht's operations. Hitler interfered with the command structure to consolidate his position. While he had an incredible capacity for detail, it would have been impossible for him alone to direct the war appropriately. Yet, he attempted to do so.

Hitler, however, should not be held solely responsible for the eventual collapse of the Reich. Leading personalities in the Wehrmacht must also be held accountable because they allowed Hitler to assume the position he did. Initially, their lack of action against him could be explained by the success of the Wehrmacht. However, when the tide turned against Germany, these people, despite their post-war professions, did not form a unified front because inter-service tensions, and Hitler's sole knowledge of the war situation prevented them from doing so.

In the end, the Wehrmacht was defeated because its infrastructure could not keep pace with Hitler's territorial demands. He over-stretched lines of supply and communication, and basically lost control of the situation when he could not dictate the course of the war after Germany became involved in simultaneous multi-theatre warfare. He maintained the facade of authority until the end, but after 'Barbarossa', Hitler could essentially only wage a defensive war because of the privations born of a protracted war, and because of the overwhelming Allied forces arrayed against him. So, while the Wehrmacht's command structure was a revelation, Hitler's dominant personality, and the conflict between those he appointed to key positions (such as Raeder and Göring), all fatally conspired

against the possibility of ending the war in Germany's favour. In theory, the Wehrmacht embodied the concept of inter-service unity. However, in reality the German armed forces command structure was made up of fragments that cracked, and then collapsed under the pressure of simultaneous, multi-theatre warfare.

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