



David Irving



THE RISE AND FALL OF THE
Luftwaffe



*The Life of
Field Marshal Erhard Milch*

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FOCAL POINT

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INTRODUCTION

OF THE SCORE or more field marshals created by Hitler three, and one grand-admiral, are still alive. Most of the others were killed in action, committed suicide, or were hanged by Hitler or their captors. To have written a biography of Milch, least famous of the survivors, requires some explanation. When I visited them, most of his contemporaries were surprised to learn that he was still alive. In the last years of his life he closeted himself behind an anonymous front door in suburban Düsseldorf, looked after by a niece, writing reports for a foreign aviation company of international repute. I was intrigued by the man when I first met him five years ago. Erhard Milch, Hermann Göring's deputy — his benefactor in time of poverty, his adversary in time of influence, his defender in time of trial — proved to be the repository of a thousand anecdotes of the war and its slow prelude.

He was the senior of the surviving field marshals, and the highest-ranking of the surviving Luftwaffe officers. The Luftwaffe was a force which he, more than any other German, created. But more than that: the dapper, florid businessman sitting upright in the stiff armchair next to me, preparing to narrate the three score years and ten of his life so far, had already created for himself a niche in history, quite outside the world of politics, by the time Adolf Hitler first entered the Reich Chancery in 1933. It was Milch whose administrative cunning and personal dynamism fashioned the German Lufthansa airline from its beginnings in local companies into an international concern, while at the same time secretly providing and nourishing the industrial roots from which a future Luftwaffe would spring.

This much is known. And yet the real story starts even earlier. During the First World War, Milch is to be seen with his hand camera, photographing Allied trenches from a German biplane; and if the wheel of time is allowed to spin, we catch a fleeting glimpse of the ex-Captain Milch, now commanding officer of a police air squadron in East Prussia, ordering a machine-gun to be turned on rioting strikers in Königsberg. He describes it as though it were yesterday.

Then, supporting himself on a walking stick, for he has sciatica, he walks stiffly across the drawing-room to an antique cupboard and returns with a yellowing sheaf of documents — the reports he wrote and some newspapers from Königsberg, a city name long vanished from the map of Europe.

When next I visited him I found he had retrieved from a local safe deposit a stained and heavy suitcase, which he unfastened to reveal some fifty diaries and notebooks. I leafed through one at random and found a young artillery officer trudging in streaming rain through the carnage of a midnight battlefield of the Russian front during the First World War. The language was simple, but written with great feeling for the suffering of the common soldier.

It is clear that Milch was no Prussian officer archetype himself. His conversation was studded with scornful remarks about the Prussian generals whose obstinacy and lack of vision caused the Hitler Reich's downfall, for he did not camouflage his enduring admiration of the Führer. He was a field marshal but never a true officer, if his First World War service be overlooked. From being managing director of Lufthansa he became managing director of the secret Luftwaffe. Only the rank and the uniform were new; the job was virtually the same. But it was the rank and uniform that antagonized his Prussian adversaries; and his competence infuriated them. The campaign they fought against him, with all the intrigues and tenacity the German general staff could muster, lasted the full eleven years from his appointment until his disgrace in 1944. When this biography was published in West Germany the controversy was renewed, with able commanders like General Student hastening to the attack and others, equally able, coming to his defence. Milch ruefully quoted Friedrich Schiller's lines on Wallenstein: 'Torn by the hatred and favour of each faction, his name merges unsteadily with the past.' (*Von der Parteien Gunst und Hass verwirrt, schwankt sein Charakterbild in der Geschichte.*)

Now that his personal papers and official records are open to inspection, we can reassess the role he played. The widow of another Luftwaffe field marshal, von Richthofen, has written to me:

Now I have read the biography, I must say I am simply appalled at the intriguing and bickering that went on between the ministries,

while every airman was doing his utmost at the front — and I myself lost a son as a combat pilot. The accomplishments that were Milch's, and the opposition he had to overcome! I have wept bitter tears reading your biography — the tears of an impassioned soldier's daughter, of a soldier's wife, and of a soldier's mother. I have been shaken to the core.

My conversations with the field marshal for this book lasted four years. Subsequently he read and commented on the fifteen-hundred-page draft that I produced. The changes he suggested may interest the reader curious about Milch's character. Once he invited me to delete Göring's unflattering description of a minister at the time of the Röhm massacre ('pale as a sicked-up pea'), on the grounds that the man is now dead. (He was hanged at Nuremberg.) Again, a diary note where Göring disclosed a physical debility was removed at Milch's request, with regard to the widow's feelings. Nor was he devoid of sentiment himself: he was deeply upset when he read the chapter terminating in the suicide of Ernst Udet, his closest friend, and learned for the first time the hurtful anti-Semitic epitaph scrawled by Udet before he pulled the trigger. On occasions Milch argued powerfully for the moderation of critical passages founded on my reading of the primary sources of the time. Occasionally he told me a version of an episode he had clearly related so often that it had begun to live a separate, and often charming, existence of its own, almost wholly detached from the substance of what had really happened. I hope my knowledge of the man has enabled me to detect and prune these offshoots in good time.

Under the agreement whereby the field marshal surrendered his diaries, notebooks and papers for my use, he retained a right to veto one passage. It is proper that I should state that he insisted on only one occasion, when I was unable to convince him to allow me to publish the whole truth about his real father (and in particular his identity), which I had meanwhile worked out for myself despite his wholly honourable effort to obscure it; he asked me not to disclose more than I have written in the narrative that follows, and although he has since died I am still bound by the undertaking I gave him in his lifetime.

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THE LIST OF PEOPLE to whom this author is personally indebted is long, but first of all his gratitude must be expressed to Field Marshal Milch, who made available his papers for the first time, and read and commented on the manuscript at every stage; and to his family, who bore with the author's many visits with great patience. But the author wishes to make it plain that he alone is responsible for the statements made and the views expressed in this book, and that they do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Field Marshal Milch unless expressly stated.

Mention must also be made of Dr O. Puchner of the Staatsarchiv in Nuremberg, and of Dr Friedrich Bergold, the field marshal's erstwhile defence lawyer, for their assistance in providing much of the material on which the latter chapters were based. Professor Walther Hubatsch, Messrs Basil Collier, Albert Speer, Fritz Seiler and many others patiently read parts of the draft and suggested improvements; Gunner Archie Miller, who took Milch prisoner, described from his diary the capture and the looting that followed by other soldiers; Major E. W. Rushton, of the Marine Commandos, described at length the events at Neustadt as OC of the unit responsible for mopping up in May 1945, and confirmed that Milch was 'clobbered' by the Commandos (not Major Rushton) when taken prisoner.

Among the many others who assisted by granting interviews, writing letters, or reading the manuscript, gratitude is owing to Major-General Hermann Aldinger; engineer G. B. Alpers; Colonel Nicolaus von Below; Dr Willi A. Boelcke; engineer Maximilian Bohlan; Mr Ernst Englander; Mr Richard Falke; Sir Roy Fedden; engineer Karl Frydag; Frau Irmgard Geist; Rear-Admiral Eberhard Godt; Mr Jacob Hennenberg, a former Jewish forced-labourer employed on Milch's estate near Breslau, who wrote unexpectedly to the author from Cleveland, Ohio, in defence of the field marshal; Mr Fritz Herrmann; General Walther Hertel; Frau Edith Hesselbarth; Mr Otto Horcher; Dr G. Hümmelchen; Professor Heinz Kalk; director Rakan Kokothaki; lawyer Dr Otto

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P A R T I

AIR POWER CONSERVED



C H A P T E R 1

DEATH OF A RICH UNCLE, DEATH OF A RICH AUNT

March 1892–January 1933

EUROPE FIRST SAW the shape of things to come on 15 March 1938, in a square in Vienna. To the sound of massed bands, the German army and its equipment were paraded through the newly occupied Austrian capital. All eyes centred on the knot of senior officers standing with Hitler in front of the Maria-Theresa monument. On one side stood Admiral Raeder and Colonel-General von Brauchitsch, C-in-Cs of the German navy and army; and on the other, not Hermann Göring's familiar resplendent figure, but a short, corpulent general in the blue full-length topcoat of the Luftwaffe, with round, youthful features and grey-blue eyes. It was proper that this general, Erhard Milch, should be there rather than Göring, for it was he who had recreated Germany's air power. Three years before neither the Luftwaffe nor the uniform he was wearing had formally existed; and two years before that, when Adolf Hitler had seized power, Milch was still a civilian airline manager, and the Luftwaffe nothing more menacing than a corridor in the Defence Ministry and an airfield outside Moscow.

Milch had been as surprised as anybody by the decision to enter Austria. On leave at a Swiss skiing village five days before this vast military parade, he had been called by the hotel porter to the telephone. It was Berlin on the line. He recognized the voice of his principal staff officer: 'Field Marshal Göring has

ordered you to return to Berlin immediately!' Milch asked, 'What for?' The voice hesitated, then replied, 'Your aunt is dying.' Milch had no aunts, but he had been kept informed by Hitler of his plans to take over Austria ever since February. He pointedly asked, 'You mean the *rich* aunt?' 'That's the one,' the voice replied.¹ Milch hurried back to Berlin that same evening. He flew into Vienna with the first wave of transports on the twelfth, and watched as his Junker 52s disgorged two thousand fully equipped and armed troops within the space of four hours.² The army followed more laboriously by road.

As the last echelons of the army parade passed the saluting base, Hitler ordered his adjutants to bar the streets to prevent the more unruly Viennese populace from falling in behind his Wehrmacht troops. A few minutes would pass before two o'clock struck. General von Brauchitsch passed acid comment on the absence of the Luftwaffe, and Hitler turned an inquiring gaze on Milch. The latter pointed wordlessly to his watch. Half a minute before the hour the air began to tremble as the Luftwaffe's squadrons advanced across the suburbs toward them — over 450 aircraft, none of them more than 2,500 feet above the rooftops, with German and Austrian fighter squadrons in their van, and 270 heavy bombers bringing up the rear less than a thousand feet above the ground. As the leading aircraft — piloted, symbolically, by a German and an Austrian general — passed overhead Milch turned to Hitler, saluted and announced: '*Mein Führer*, I beg to report the commencement of the Luftwaffe's fly-past!'³

What was the making of this unorthodox field marshal, this uniformed 'managing director' of the Luftwaffe?

Along the North Sea coast of Germany, the folklore is that man is born on the rising tide and dies as it ebbs. This child was born on the afternoon of 30 March 1892 in the imperial navy port of Wilhelmshaven. The city's records show that one Anton Milch, apothecary of the Kaiser's navy, had registered 'a male child born to his wife, Klara Auguste Wilhelmine Milch, *née* Vetter, also of the Protestant faith'.⁴ Of Anton Milch there is little that can be said, or needs to be, for he was not the real father of the child. His naval career tied the family to this undistinguished port, whereas his wife had grown up in Berlin. She was

twenty-seven at Erhard's birth, a tall, well-formed woman with fair hair and luminous blue eyes. Anton was away from home for long periods and for about a quarter of each year she was also away for some reason, but the family was well served with housemaids despite the humble income of an apothecary. On the Kaiser's birthday she would purchase cream puffs with whipped cream and a cup of drinking chocolate as an annual treat for her family, and most summers their great-uncle Carl Bräuer would come from Berlin and invite them to patronize the ice-cream carts propelled by Italians through the streets of Wilhelmshaven. In this way the children grew up with equal admiration for the Kaiser and their Uncle Carl. On trial for his life fifty years later, the field marshal was to recall, 'Loyalty to the Kaiser and loyalty to my country were the only political doctrines I received, either as an officer or earlier in my parents' home.'⁵

Bräuer was one of the bigger building contractors in Berlin and his private fortune was large; when he died in 1906 it went entirely to Erhard's grandmother, and the Milch family were able to move into a fashionable villa in the Königsallee. On Bräuer's death the Berlin newspapers printed an obituary notice ('Our Beloved Uncle') from Milch's mother.⁶ Her husband had by then left the navy and bought a struggling chemist's business at Gelsenkirchen in the Ruhr; Frau Milch took her children away from him and to Berlin, so Erhard moved from the Ruhr town's grammar school to the superior Joachimsthal public school in the capital, where he matriculated early in 1910.⁷

Much of his later nationalism must have stemmed from his childhood talks with his grandmother, who could relate fabulous details of the crushing of the revolution in Berlin in 1848. With the destruction of the monarchy in 1918 she lost all interest in life: 'I no longer want to live now that there is no King of Prussia any more,' she said, and she faded gracefully away soon after. When Erhard made known his intention of becoming an officer in the Kaiser's army it was she who offered to pay the money he needed to supplement the pittance that they paid.⁸ The other early formative influence was Milch's neighbour in the Königsallee, Admiral Ludwig Schröder, the legendary 'Lion of Flanders' who later commanded the Naval Expeditionary Force in the First World War; Erhard looked effectively — if mistakenly — to him as a father, a powerful rela-

tionship that was to reach its maturity in the 1920s.

He volunteered in February 1910 and after eight months' training with the 1st Foot Artillery Regiment at Königsberg transferred as the youngest cadet to Anklam Military Academy, passing the officer's examination with the best marks out of 120 cadets and the military equivalent of a *summa cum laude*. This young, fair-haired dynamo remained firmly in his fellow lieutenants' memories.⁹ In 1913 he transferred to the Artillery School at Jüterbog, where he was to stun his superiors during one paper exercise by ordering his heavy battery to 'cease fire', since he calculated that he had already run out of ammunition some days before. He applied for flying training, but was warned off by his CO after his return to Königsberg: 'My officers are too valuable for such tomfoolery!'¹⁰

At the outbreak of the First World War Lieutenant Erhard Milch, a robust artillery officer of twenty-two, was to be found at gunnery practice in West Prussia. As mobilization began he was ordered by telegram to return to Königsberg as battalion adjutant of the 1st Foot — his battalion being in reserve — with orders to defend the fortress. He applied repeatedly for transfer to one of the front-line units, fearing that the war had left him behind; enviously he hung round the railway station, bidding *Auf Wiedersehen!* to his departing comrades — a vain injunction, for the regiment was to lose sixty-five officers and 1,600 men during the next few years. But after the first great battle was staged at Gumbinnen his battalion went to war for the first time, marching with steaming horses and groaning ammunition wagons as night fell through the Sackheim Gate in the east of the fortress. 'Not a romantic exodus,' lamented Milch, 'the kind that one had dreamed of or seen depicted in the illustrated journals.'¹¹

Their first battle station was on the River Deime. On the third day a Russian attack began against their lines and Milch's battery fired nine hundred rounds. How often in peacetime he had doubted whether one could entirely suppress the coward within oneself; he was very pleased with his own composure now the test had come. On the morning of 3 September 1914 a six-hour



Erhard Milch before 1914.
(MILCH COLLECTION)

Russian barrage began and Milch's quarters suffered a direct hit. A corporal telephonist was badly injured, but continued reeling in the telephone cable as he had been ordered; Milch gently took the reel from him and led him to the dressing-station. As he left him there the corporal called out, '*Herr Leutnant*, may I write to you when they've put me together again, so that *Herr Leutnant* can ask for me back? Otherwise they might send me somewhere else.' In the midst of this bombardment Milch received the first official mail, including an urgent letter from the General Inspectorate of Foot Artillery in Berlin with the battery's scorecards from their recent gunnery practice in West Prussia: two errors were pointed out, the cards to be corrected in duplicate and returned to Berlin. Milch returned the cards unamended with a covering note: 'We believe that war broke out on 1 August, which fact we obediently call to Berlin's attention.' 'Now you will never make it as Inspector General,' Milch's CO reproached him when he heard of this.

After East Prussia had been cleared of the enemy Milch's battalion was moved to the south-east of the province. Here the Russians had wrought frightful havoc in the villages and Milch was tempted to shut all compassion for the enemy out of his mind as the pursuit continued. He entered in his diary:

There, all at once, the highway was strewn with artillery-pieces and machine-guns, with dead horses and the corpses of men. One of our batteries or a machine-gun unit had surprised the enemy and literally shot him to pieces. Whole teams of horses had crumpled in a trice, and now they lay there, their legs stiffly in the air, in one large bloody morass. On top of this came the rain, pouring down in sheets. It was a hideous sight, and yet one was glad, because this was the hated enemy.

Having written these words he reflected, 'And yet even for him I have something akin to sympathy in my heart — he too has been driven to his death by his superiors.'

In October the German offensive came to a halt and turned into a slow, hard-fought retreat to East Prussia and the Angerapp Line where they spent

the winter. In mid-February next year, to forestall a Russian evasive move to the east, Hindenburg ordered an attack, less with the intention of gaining ground than of destroying the enemy's attacking forces. So in Milch's sector two battalions of Pomeranian grenadiers stormed across the icebound River Angerapp and seized the Weedern, a famous East Prussian stud farm rendered seemingly impregnable by three lines of Russian trenches and barbed wire. As the German onslaught faltered something unforgettable occurred — one battalion commander, Major Langemark, drew his dagger, bellowed 'Follow me!' and battled his way through the entanglement while the assault troops followed on his heels, singing the German national hymn as they overwhelmed the Russian trenches.¹² Thus the Russians' fate was sealed. Milch later wrote, 'Of our two thousand assault troops over half lay on the battlefield. But the casualties of the equally valiant Siberian riflemen were by far the greater. It was an awful sight, the trenches heaped with the dead, most of them with their skulls caved in — a way of fighting as particular to our burly Pomeranians as the bayonet is to our East Prussians.'

Half the night they marched toward the east. There was no billet, for the Russians had burned everything to the ground in their retreat. The roads had been hammered into treacherous ice by the army centipede, and many a cannon and wagon skidded off the track, broke up and had to be abandoned. The weather changed, it began to pour with rain and the ice turned to slush. On the evening of 14 February they were ordered to capture Raczki. It was not a major action but again it left an indelible impression on Milch's memory. In one account he wrote,

At first light we began our advance, some way behind the advance party. To the right and left of us lay hundreds of infantrymen, sleeping as I thought at first, exhausted; but as it grew lighter I saw that all were dead. We came upon the battery we had silenced the day before, and then set out along a sunken lane leading to Raczki. The scene here was even more frightful, here the Siberians lay in their hundreds, their skulls beaten in, littering the whole path our troops had to follow.

And in his diary Lieutenant Milch recorded:

I will never be able to eradicate this memory of the road into the town; it was strewn with the corpses of our troops and those of the Russians. Most of them had hideous wounds, clubbed by rifle-butts, or torn by bayonets. Never had I yearned for peace so much as at that moment. The dead reached to the very market square of Raczki, and the filthy population just stood about, their hands in their pockets, staring insolently and without the least compassion for the horrors all about them. All this killing, even of the enemy, really hurts. But what is one to do about it? All the greater is my hatred for those responsible for this war.¹³

In July 1915 Lieutenant Milch was detailed to report for training as an aircraft observer. His aircrew training complete, he was transferred to the newly activated 204th Artillery Reconnaissance Unit on the western front, at an airfield between Metz and Verdun. His aircraft was the unarmed Albatros B, with a top speed of about eighty-five miles per hour. None of the normal accidents of flying in those days could dampen his enthusiasm; the wooden aircraft crashed, caught fire or came unstuck in the rain. There was a *camaraderie* among airmen of both sides that was wholly absent elsewhere. When a French Voisin was shot down in flames by a field-kitchen unit Milch considered this unsporting intervention by a ground formation unpardonable: ‘The only things left were snapshots and letters, one of which began, “*Ma pomme adorée!*” I found I was very sorry for the poor chaps.’ And when, a year later, a young Canadian airman called Douglas Weld was shot down in a Sopwith Camel near his airfield, Milch allowed the captive to live for three days in his mess and even to try out one of the German aircraft for himself, against a verbal undertaking not to escape; Milch sent a crew to drop a letter from Weld to his mother over his home airfield next day.¹⁴ Not long after the British No. 5 Squadron wrote to Milch that one of his aircraft had been shot down and both its crew were safe; the note invited him to drop their personal luggage over the British airfield. Thirty

years later, Milch's tender feelings for brother airmen had vanished.

On the Somme, in the summer of 1916, he met enemy air superiority for the first time. His crews were outnumbered twenty-to-one in this sector; here they had to fly three sorties a day, whereas at Verdun they had never needed to fly more than one. By the evening of the third day all four aircraft in his unit lay disabled upon the French countryside. It was the arrival on the same airfield as Milch of one man, Captain Boelcke, that saved the situation. He fought as a soldier, not as a sportsman; Milch was fascinated by his modesty and by his unforgettable eyes — the same blue eyes he found in Hermann Göring later. In the middle of June 1917 he was posted to No. 5 Air Unit as deputy commander, under the Sixth Army; it was well-housed in luxurious villas near Lille. Their planes were faster, flew higher and had longer range, and they were hardly troubled as they photographed the Allied preparations for Haig's offensive in Flanders. As the battle reached its height the redoubtable army air commander Captain Wilberg had at one stage over seventy squadrons at his fingertips, including the ace fighter-squadron under Manfred, Baron von Richthofen.¹⁵

On 1 April 1918 Lieutenant Milch was selected as a candidate for the General Staff. As a preliminary he was posted to an infantry regiment holding a small sector near Arras. Here only the former churches and factories stood out as one-time artefacts of man — shallow pyramids of rubble among the treeless, grassless wastelands marking the front line. The German regiments had arranged themselves so that one battalion was always up front, a second about four hundred yards farther back, and the third 'at ease' about two miles behind the front line. Milch was given No. 9 company of the 41st Infantry Regiment, a Memel company which had just lost forty men in a heavy British barrage; his predecessor had suffered a nervous breakdown and the survivors considered themselves doomed. It was a realistic test of any officer's powers of leadership. The soldiers had provided no trenches for themselves and were protected only by a few sheets of corrugated iron. Milch marked out a trench about sixty yards long and ordered them to form up with spades and dig an eight-foot-deep trench. Nobody moved. He repeated his order, with the same effect. A young soldier muttered that there was no point in digging, as they were all dead men

anyway. The lieutenant tore the spade from his hands and shouted: ‘Either you start digging now, or I’ll split your skull!’ The digging started. Later the British opened up again with heavy cannon-fire, and the corrugated iron shelter was blasted to pieces. The soldiers appreciated the value of the trench they had now dug. Shortly afterward one of the company’s officers asked Milch to come over. The whole company stood at attention in a fine drizzle in the moonlight, and the man whom Milch had threatened the day before stepped forward and apologized in all his comrades’ names, since it was obvious that without their lieutenant’s stern action none of them would have survived the day.¹⁶

Spring turned to summer, but no grass grew and Milch and his troops became gaunt and dirty. He was posted to the field artillery and in July 1918 he returned to the Air Corps as an intelligence officer. A month later he was promoted to captain, to await a final posting to Staff College. Meantime he was given command of his old unit, the 204th Reconnaissance, under Captain Wilberg in Flanders. The unit had expanded to eleven aircraft, two of which were armoured (one of them being the slow but excellent all-metal aircraft built by the Junkers company); the armour enabled his unit to carry out reconnaissance missions at only 150 feet or so without losses. Milch’s ability and inventiveness attracted the attention of his superiors, for on 1 October Wilberg gave him command of No. 6 Fighter Squadron, brushing aside the captain’s objections that he could not fly himself; so Milch was obliged to command from the ground, an overwhelmingly uncomfortable experience for any commanding officer.¹⁷ As the war came to its abrupt and dishonourable end five weeks later all the elements that were to characterize the later field marshal were already implanted within him — the vision and foresight, but also the unbecoming irreverence toward authority; the powerful nationalist and patriotic instinct, but also the seeds of a corroding xenophobia; the personal courage and ruthlessness in action, but also a strong humanity and sense of compassion even toward an enemy. To these features the next twenty years were to add only one — an outstanding ability to organize and administer.

On the last day of the First World War Captain Erhard Milch paraded his fighter squadron at dawn. As a final test of discipline he inspected them,

handed out a savage dressing-down to a nonplussed flight commander for insolence, ordered the men to form up again properly, and stood them to attention for fifteen minutes. Only then did he read out the Fourth Army's order for the election of soldiers' councils. He ordered all the squadron's motor transport to be equipped with machine-guns and to set out for the German border.¹⁸

As the undefeated battalions marched back across the border into the Fatherland, their contempt for the revolutionaries was open. Before reaching the German border Milch ordered his convoy to halt and again paraded his men. He told them that they were now returning to their own country, and that they must march in with their heads held high; he asked them to do him one last favour, to fly the Kaiser's colours from their vehicles as they crossed the frontier. During the night they entered Aachen, the first German town. In his diary he wrote: 'Into Germany. Not one of the swine welcomes us back — only the little children wave.'¹⁹ At the town hall the local workers' council was in session with the Fourth Army's soldiers' council; about twenty sailors with red armbands milled about. The revolutionaries stared with some perplexity at Milch's uniform. Milch bluffed, 'I would advise you to get rid of your red armbands if you value your lives. There's a division loyal to the Kaiser not far behind, shooting every revolutionary they lay hands on.' He later regretted not having acted himself to restore order — the revolutionaries' fear of the front-line troops was enormous.

At Danzig he reported to the 17th Army Corps, and for the next months he toured the provincial cities nearby, taking over from the soldiers' councils, preventing the destruction or dumping of army property and disarming the bands of partisans that had formed.²⁰ All the time he yearned to return to the air. The Corps's chief of staff agreed to his suggestion that they should establish a volunteer flying squadron at Danzig's Langfuhr landing ground; the current occupants of the landing ground — a naval air school, now strongly revolutionary — did not approve, and it took a pitched battle fought with hand-grenades to eject them. When the Germans activated a border patrol along their common border with Poland in April 1919, Milch was appointed commander of No. 412 Volunteer Flying Unit, a motley collection of patriots, soldiers and merce-

naries. In Posen and Upper Silesia there had been revolutions, exploited by the Poles to push their frontiers farther westward, and Milch sensed keenly the disgrace inflicted on these eastern provinces. He proposed to the Army Corps a small private war, no less, to hound the none-too-powerful Poles out of Posen; but to his bitter disappointment the chief of staff rejected the idea. He did not dispute that they would enjoy a small victory at first and even liberate the province to its former frontiers. He later wrote to Milch, 'Nobody could be sorrider than I to have to subject your heartfelt plans to a sober criticism. Unfortunately I must. You must not let your emotions run away with you — cool reason must play its part, unfortunately ... Once and for all, the opportunities are long gone.'²¹

Originally the peace terms had been expected to permit Germany an army of two hundred thousand men including airmen, but the final terms of Versailles proved these hopes to be illusory; only a hundred thousand men were to be permitted in the Reichswehr, and none of these were to be airmen.²² An additional police force was permitted, so the crafty Germans resolved to equip the police with air squadrons, seven in all, of which Milch was invited to establish one at Königsberg in September 1919.²³ He arrived there with his wife — he had married Käthe Patschke in Berlin two and a half years before — and daughter Gerda, and selected a former Zeppelin airfield at Seerappen as his headquarters, far from the revolutionary influences of the provincial capital.²⁴ The barracks were currently occupied by four hundred and fifty soldiers; Milch's squadron appeared with nine aircraft on the afternoon of 1 November and fired machine-gun bursts into the air while a lieutenant and a trumpeter gave the squatters two hours to get out. In his diary Milch noted that the removal to Seerappen passed smoothly, 'despite a number of unpleasantnesses'.²⁵ With thought for the future, he collected there every aircraft and component he could lay hands on; soon there was not enough space in the Zeppelin hangar for this hoard, so the Social Democrat police-president of Königsberg allowed him to store valuable equipment in the police headquarters.

To Milch's surprise he found that he was expected to be not only airman but policeman as well, his squadron's personnel being ordered to put down a

wave of gangsterism in the port. This exposed a ruthless streak in him that was to become fully developed when he was directing a war against more than just a few burglars in the streets of Königsberg, twenty years later. At first his men held back, until one of them was gunned down by an intruder; on each of the following nights, on Milch's orders, his squads shot dead a prowler. The break-ins halted dramatically as the gangsters fled to other provinces. In August 1920 his now toughly disciplined men held at bay an armed mob storming the Königsberg flour-mill; two of his men were clubbed to the ground before a third mastered the situation and opened fire with a machine-gun, holding the rioters at bay until reinforcements arrived. The factory's medical orderlies picked up the dead and injured.²⁶ A few months later the Allies exerted pressure on the Germans to abide by Versailles and even para-military flying was forbidden.²⁷ The police squadrons were obliged to surrender all their aircraft; Milch accordingly retired from the force at the end of March 1921 and took off his captain's uniform for the last time.

Temporarily unemployed, he looked to his future. Concealed in various parts of the country he had numbers of aircraft or their parts, but one by one these were discovered by the *Entente* officials and confiscated. 'Dear Captain Milch,' wrote one correspondent, 'it is my sad duty to advise you that your Fokker was discovered by the *Entente* yesterday and confiscated.'²⁸ 'Captain Milch, Right Honourable!' appealed another writer. 'There has been another unsuccessful search made here. May I now ask you to have the objects in question removed from here? I expect my farmstead to be rid of these things by 8 A.M. tomorrow at the latest. I want no part of it.' On which Milch pencilled a lapidary comment: 'Never saw such cowardice in seven lines!'²⁹ Civil aviation seemed the only answer, while it lasted.

It had already existed in Germany for two years, a small company, the German Airline (Deutsche Luft-Reederei) having been granted a licence in 1919; but its aircraft were open, hazardous and primitive. A rival company, Lloyd Ostflug (Lloyd Eastern Airways), had been founded in 1921 by Professor Hugo Junkers and a former naval air service lieutenant, Gotthard Sachsenberg, to open up air routes in eastern Europe. Sachsenberg had crossed swords with Milch over Seerappen airfield a year before, and casting about him for an ener-

getic manager for the new airline's Danzig office he remembered Milch and offered him the job; the latter accepted, and became the kingpin of the main route which was to run from Berlin through Danzig to Königsberg.³⁰ This marked the beginning of one of the most creative periods in his career — a period which was to end with him as chief executive of Lufthansa, the country's national airline.

He at once left for Danzig, leased the old airfield at Langfuhr and procured a six-year-old Rumpler CI reconnaissance aircraft, which the British high commissioner there allowed him to keep. The plane shuttled from Berlin to Danzig, with one passenger in the open observer's seat with a bag of mail on his lap. The mail to Berlin was often quicker by train, and the passenger air fare was certainly more expensive; but it was a beginning, if not an encouraging one. During the spring of 1921 the Junkers works delivered the first two F 13s — an all-metal, single-engined plane with a cabin for four passengers. Milch had advertising cards printed stressing the advantages of flying with Danzig Air Mail: 'Passengers are conveyed by the most up-to-date Junkers cabin aircraft. Special clothing like furs, goggles, *etc.*, are not needed.'³¹ And what an innovation that was! Despite the Versailles decree that all German aircraft production should cease for six months, Junkers did not stop his factories; indeed in his Dessau drawing office a four-engined aircraft was already taking shape. In May 1921 the Western Powers delivered an ultimatum — if aircraft production did not cease, they would occupy the Ruhr. The German government capitulated and all F 13s manufactured to date were ordered to be surrendered to the Allies as well.

The manager of Danzig Air Mail knew nothing of these strictures, but he felt the effects. Two more F 13s had been delivered to him, and he and Sachsenberg had flown to Kovno and won a licence to open a route to that city far to the east of Königsberg; later that summer they concluded negotiations for the route to Riga.³² But the French control officers dutifully pursued the little airline, with its Danzig-registered aircraft, and soon the company was running only one service and that was outside Germany, from Danzig onward to Riga; an adventurous game to conceal the forbidden F 13s had begun along the route.³³ The French had specific orders for the confiscation of each F 13 owned by the airline, but they knew them only by their registration numbers — DZ 31,

32, 35 or 38. They could not be in all places at all times and a paint-brush frequently reached the aircraft before the French officials did. This situation could not last forever: toward the end of July 1921 three of Milch's aircraft were seized one after the other as they landed at Berlin; a few days later two French officers arrived on the Danzig airfield carrying sledge-hammers, to smash the rest. Their leader himself scratched at the registration number on one aircraft and exclaimed that there was another number painted underneath. Milch drily advised him, 'Keep scratching. You will find a lot more.'³⁴

To add to his difficulties the four parent companies of Lloyd Eastern Airways began to break apart, and the airline was eventually divided between the contending major shareholders. Danzig Air Mail, which alone operated F 13s, fell to Professor Junkers and Gotthard Sachsenberg. At the end of October 1921 this company was forced to suspend operations altogether in the face of the continuing French harassment, an enforced idleness that was to last seven months.³⁵

Ostensibly the Reich Defence Ministry abided by Versailles, but it maintained contact with the former officers of the Flying Corps; in January 1920 one Captain Kraehe circularized the more experienced of them to write reports on their experiences. Milch was asked to write on tactical reconnaissance and on 'the struggle for air supremacy'; it is worth mentioning that his two studies showed the fighter aircraft as the key to supremacy, while the 'workhorse aircraft' whose path it was to clear was of only secondary importance.³⁶ The Corps was formally dissolved in May 1920, and Captain Wilberg, now Kraehe's assistant, was seconded as 'air adviser' to General von Seeckt. His work continued unchanged, and on 1 November 1921 Milch was to be found in Wilberg's office; he wrote in his diary, 'Discussion on training school! Latest news on secret air force.'

The military authorities were now casting thoughtful glances at Russia's territories: the Soviet Union had adopted none of the hostile measures toward German aviation favoured by Britain and France, and negotiated with both Danzig Air Mail and their rivals, the German Airline, over an air route from Königsberg onward to Moscow and St Petersburg; at the same time the Reich

Defence Ministry secured permission from the Russian government for Professor Junkers to erect a secret aircraft factory near Moscow, at Fili. Over the next four years the Reich provided nearly ten million gold marks in subsidies — a sum, as Ernst Brandenburg, Germany's head of civil aviation, later remarked, which would have sufficed during the inflation to buy up 'half Germany'.³⁷ Unhappily for the Fili venture, the parent Junkers company used the subsidies merely to meet domestic wage bills at Dessau; irritated by Russian complaints, the ministry opened an investigation of Fili's affairs and the bubble was pricked. After the Locarno estrangement with Russia, Germany stopped all further investment in Fili and an incurable crisis started for Junkers. Whether or not Professor Junkers was himself aware of the machinations of his colleagues — and particularly Sachsenberg — must remain obscure. Brandenburg later testified, 'I never knew what to make of him. Was it a childish ingenuousness or unscrupulous fraud?'³⁸ For the time being, however, at the beginning of 1922, the bubble remained unpricked; indeed, as if to drive Germany still further into the Soviet camp the Western Allies arbitrarily prolonged the veto on German aircraft manufacture a further six months, and in mid-April announced that new German aircraft were not to be designed to fly faster than 120 miles per hour, nor might they fly higher than 13,000 feet nor carry more than half a ton of payload. In high dudgeon the German delegation left the conference on post-war problems at Geneva and reached separate agreement with the Soviet Union at nearby Rapallo.

When the veto was lifted in May 1922 three large airlines — Junkers Airways, Lloyd Air Services and German Airline — dominated the scene. Sachsenberg envisaged a vast network of air routes operated by Junkers subsidiaries and flying Junkers aircraft, an airline network extending from London to Constantinople, and it was Milch who conducted the early negotiations with Swiss, Austrian and Hungarian airline representatives. His own interest centred on the east, and he drew up plans for a route from Danzig to Warsaw, Lemberg and Cracow, to be extended eventually to Bucharest, where it would pick up Sachsenberg's 'Trans-Europe Union' network.³⁹ He reached agreement with the Poles in the summer of 1922 and himself conducted the inaugural flights while Polish government officials jostled for a chance to board the Junkers

'limousines'. The new Polish company, Aerolot, opened on 1 September, the government paying sixty thousand Polish marks for every flight from Danzig through Warsaw to Lemberg, either in cash or fuel. It was, for Milch, a victory 'more satisfying than on any battlefield'.⁴⁰

A year later he was promoted to Dessau as head of the company's management office. He was less happy here than at Danzig, and he found that he had personal opponents among Sachsenberg's loyal liegemen. One of them was to say of him, when he was confined in Landsberg Prison, 'We all thought he was an opportunist, and we were convinced he could not be relied upon. In some strange way, he was not one of us. None of us was his friend.'⁴¹ Above all Milch was a hard-headed businessman — he disapproved of the professor's futuristic plans and wanted more concentration on consolidating what had so far been achieved. The professor's reputation suffered a severe setback when an expedition he had rashly mounted to promote Junkers aircraft in South America met disaster: an American colonel who had advised him of the large market waiting there turned out to be an unemployed barber; the expedition had been despatched none the less. The first F 13 had crashed, killing its two-man crew (including the professor's son); the second had been forced down and sunk. Milch was sent out to pull Junkers's chestnuts out of the fire, with two more F 13s. In Buenos Aires he negotiated with big business and by April 1924 it was clear that he had turned the venture into a triumphant success; he flew demonstration flights with the aircraft to Montevideo and other cities, arranged for the sale of the aircraft to the military authorities, and negotiated with the government on subsidies for a Junkers-controlled national airline. At one small town in Argentina an ancient, sunburned farmer approached the aeroplanes, walked round them, stroked their hot metal surfaces and finally inquired: 'Are these German planes?' Milch nodded that they were. 'Then Germany is not finished!' was the farmer's congratulation.⁴²

The professor sent Milch to New York and then to tour the huge Ford automobile works at Detroit.⁴³ He never forgot the spectacle of the Ford factories at Highland Park, and dwelt in his diary on the awe-inspiring machinery of the foundry at River Rouge and the largely Negro manpower; above all he was astounded by the mass-production conveyer-belt techniques. He believed this

ideal could never be attained in Germany, where the rival companies fought each other to the death in blissful ignorance of the industrial revolution happening across the Atlantic.⁴⁴ Milch was one of the few Germans to give warning of the mighty potential of the American war industries when the Second World War broke out.

When he returned to Germany in mid-August 1924, only two airlines were left of the thirty-eight that had sprouted in Germany since the First World War — the newly formed Junkers Airways under Gotthard Sachsenberg and the rival Aero-Lloyd. This concentration was the achievement of Ernst Brandenburg, who had seen it as his duty to allocate state subsidies only to these two companies.⁴⁵ But it was still not enough, for costly competition between the two companies continued, and late in 1925 Brandenburg ruled that both must merge into one national airline — Deutsche Lufthansa. What astounded both companies was the directorship dictated by the State to Lufthansa — Otto Merkel and Martin Wronsky from Aero-Lloyd, and Erhard Milch (not Sachsenberg) from Junkers.

That Milch, at the age of thirty-three, should suddenly emerge with such a position was inexplicable to his enemies at Dessau; it was scarcely explicable to him. In prison he later wrote, ‘It turned out to be a far more momentous step than I had ever guessed. Without it, I would have forfeited the most rewarding period of my life, the years from 1925 to 1933 with Deutsche Lufthansa; I would not have become a soldier again in 1933, and a field marshal in 1940; but nor would I now be sitting in a confined and gloomy prison cell. How inscrutable are the paths of man.’⁴⁶ His acceptance of the ministry’s offer evoked immediate Junkers accusations of disloyalty, but from his papers — which include transcripts of the vital conversations in Berlin — it is clear he acted in the professor’s best interests throughout.⁴⁷ Sachsenberg, on the other hand, clearly stated: ‘As a Junkers official my sole interest is to wreck the new company and enable our company to regain control of Junkers Airways.’⁴⁸ But Milch saw the coming of Lufthansa as inevitable, in which case it was vital for Junkers’s interests to be equally represented in it; Professor Junkers should concentrate on building aircraft, not operating an airline. The professor himself eventually accepted this

view, and Milch fought the company's case so well that while only 208 of Aero-Lloyd's former staff were taken on the Lufthansa payroll, 225 were taken on from the far smaller Junkers Airways.⁴⁹

The Lufthansa organization plan showed three directorships. Aero-Lloyd had proposed four, of which they themselves wanted three — finance, technical and flying control — but Milch insisted that the latter must be a Junkers man. Eventually he himself filled the post. At a Junkers banquet held, coincidentally, on the evening of his appointment, powerful speeches were delivered against Milch; he endeavoured to defend his action, but it was not surprising that there were now those at Dessau who believed that their former director had stuck a dagger in their backs.⁵⁰ For Junkers, Ernst Brandenburg was to write, the new Lufthansa company was to become a red rag to a bull.⁵¹ Sachsenberg waged war against it from the day it was formally established, 6 January 1926, shunning no method to bring it into disrepute and vilifying Milch as the traitor who had ruined Junkers Airways. Milch suffered deeply under this campaign.⁵²

The new company's chairman was Emil-Georg von Stauss, an enlightened director of the Deutsche Bank. As his deputy directors Milch selected Karl-August, Baron von Gablenz and Joachim von Schröder — son of the admiral and a boyhood friend; flying was to be the life and death of both these men. His technical deputy was Dr Grulich, an Aero-Lloyd official blessed with neither Wronsky's diplomacy nor Merkel's intelligence; his relations with Milch were strained, as Wronsky and Merkel had hinted to him that the far younger Junkers man was only a temporary evil whom Grulich would in due course replace.⁵³ The evil lasted longer than Grulich thought possible. Otto Merkel, the commercial manager, showed his strange talents at the very first Lufthansa board meeting. The entire capital of Junkers Airways and Aero-Lloyd had consisted only of aircraft and equipment; neither had liquid reserves. As however both companies had been assigned 27.5 percent of Lufthansa's shares, each had to value its contribution at nearly seven million Reichsmarks, which in effect meant dividing that sum by the number of aircraft each company turned in. To avoid adding cash, Aero-Lloyd's Merkel valued the obsolete Fokker F II and F III aircraft at grossly inflated prices. Milch protested immediately to Brandenburg about this millstone of insolvency being hung about the new company,

but Brandenburg made it clear that for his ministry the success of the merger was more important than the prospects of the company.⁵⁴

Thus the airline's first fleet consisted in all of some 150 aircraft of a score of different makes and types, a technical director's nightmare. The root problem of German aircraft design at that time, and for the next two decades, was the lack of powerful aero-engines. In 1926 the biggest was the Bavarian Motor Works' BMW vi, rated at about 500 horsepower, but it was still suffering teething troubles and Milch preferred the Junkers lv, a 350-horsepower engine, as the more reliable. In the first few months he repeatedly asked himself whether one could accept the risk of carrying passengers at all.

To his fellow directors he was still an unknown quantity, a man of whom they expected little because of his youth. From all but von Stauss and the two ministry nominees on the board, Willy Fisch and Friedrich Heck, the Junkers man experienced a certain hostility for the first year. His early efforts were devoted to increasing the numbers of long-distance routes and reducing the short city-to-city hops. But he fought alone: Merkel was interested only in flying as many miles as possible, to get as big a return on his aircraft as he could; and Wronsky was concerned only with the size of the network he could parade before his foreign counterparts at the annual meetings of the IATA, the International Air Transport Association. A look at the Lufthansa board assembled in the Great Hall of the Deutsche Bank in Berlin showed the opposition Milch could expect: of the sixty-six board members, the majority were local mayors like Bracht of Essen, Adenauer of Cologne, Landmann of Frankfurt, Scharnagl of Munich and Lehr of Düsseldorf.

But gradually the long-distance routes were extended. He flew to Moscow and renewed the agreement on the subsidiary company 'Deruluft' for a further five years, and that summer he promoted Lufthansa's first transcontinental expedition to explore an air route across Russia to the Far East. Two Junkers G 24s were despatched from Berlin in July 1926, following the old Danzig Air Mail route as far as Kovno, then to Moscow and onward across the Urals and Siberia to the Pacific Ocean and Peking. At Peking crowds waited on the beaches as the two aircraft, giants of their day, passed overhead, their German insignia clear to all the watchers in the August sun. The wife of one Hanover businessman wrote

home: ‘And there I stood, gazing as they flew on like enormous birds toward the lilac-coloured mountains in the west. I scarcely noticed the tears running down my cheeks. I was back home again! This was Germany calling and beckoning us from the Fatherland.’⁵⁵ Not long after Milch sent a Lufthansa ‘Whale’ flying-boat to Brazil to prepare a transatlantic service, and a Lufthansa offshoot, the Condor Syndicate, was awarded a Brazilian licence to operate along that country’s seaboard.⁵⁶

During its first year, 1926, Lufthansa carried 93,000 passengers, and its aircraft flew a daily average of 25,000 miles, a figure which was to increase to 46,600 in 1927. Lufthansa planes carried gold bullion, shipments of stocks and shares, fresh flowers from Holland, furs and caviar from Russia, gowns from Paris and Vienna, and the latest table delicacies for hotels and restaurants.⁵⁷ Milch pioneered blind-flying schools for his pilots and prevailed on German industry to supply the special instruments that this needed.⁵⁸ On Brandenburg’s initiative he opened half a dozen regular pilot-training schools. Thanks to his insistence on proper servicing and frequent overhauls, the airline flew with ninety-seven percent regularity and with ninety-eight percent safety.

Occasionally Lufthansa aircraft made unscheduled landings, but the loss of life was small. In March 1927 Milch flew on the inaugural flight from Berlin to Vienna, via Dresden and Prague; the flight went off perfectly and great was the celebration in Vienna before their return. This may have proved the pilot’s undoing, for after two attempts at flying over the mountains outside Dresden, on the third their aircraft came to rest in a pine forest on the very crown of one of them. The heavy plane snapped a score or more trees like matchwood before stopping. While Milch marshalled the passengers in the snow the pilot stood, head in hands, staring at his machine; the airline director invited the passengers to sit along one wing-edge in the sun, and led them in singing an old flying song:

If you touch down in a leafy glade,
 And the point of your journey is gone,
 Then twitter about and sample the shade
 Of the branches the birds cluster on.

Soon a handful of local villagers arrived and carried their baggage to the nearest village. Milch summoned a car from Dresden and there he invited the passengers to sample a 1921 Rhine wine with him. Lufthansa could hardly have looked after its passengers better in those days.⁵⁹

That was the spring in which an American airman, Captain Lindbergh, flew non-stop across the Atlantic. No German aircraft could match the achievement yet, but Lufthansa still intended to establish the first regular transatlantic service. The Condor Syndicate had been the first step and the second was the completion of part of the European end of the route by the establishment of a German-Spanish airline, 'Iberia', on 14 December; three weeks later the whole section from Berlin to Madrid was opened by Lufthansa. In May the following year Milch was prophesying, 'Regular transatlantic flights, non-stop, are today within the realms of reality.'⁶⁰ But the dream was a distant one, and in the meantime he opposed any Lufthansa involvement in spectacular overseas flights like Lindbergh's; overland flights were within sight of becoming self-supporting enterprises, and these were the only answer to growing left-wing criticism of the State subsidies for Lufthansa in the Reichstag.⁶¹

The criticism was further nourished by Junkers and Sachsenberg, who had gone to some lengths to curry Socialist support and who were paying regular sums of money to at least three Reichstag deputies to attack Lufthansa⁶²; these deputies demanded that Lufthansa's subsidies be halved, and when the airline's directors privately appealed to Ernst Brandenburg to defend the subsidies, the civil servant could only point helplessly to the powerful opposition and recommend Lufthansa to purchase a number of Reichstag deputies for itself.

At the Reichstag elections in May 1928 twelve extreme right-wing NSDAP deputies were elected. Among them was Hermann Göring, one of the more socially acceptable of the Nazis. Like Milch he had attained the rank of captain in the Flying Corps, serving first as an observer, and then as a fighter pilot, winning the *pour le mérite* medal on the western front. For Lufthansa he was one of the more attractive deputies, having maintained his contacts with civil

aviation after the Armistice by acting as an exhibition pilot and then as a parachute salesman in Sweden.⁶³ There can be no doubt that even before his election Göring was financed by Lufthansa. Among Deutsche Bank archives now in East German hands is a letter written by Milch in 1930, explaining: ‘As far as the Deputy Göring is concerned, he did have an advisory post in Deutsche Lufthansa before his election to the Reichstag — i.e., while he was not an employee in the strict sense of the word, he was an “expert consultant” in the American sense.’⁶⁴ The bank’s records also show at least one cheque for ten thousand Reichsmarks paid to Göring in June 1929, charged against Lufthansa’s account⁶⁵; the company also bought the Social Democrat deputy Keil and the German People’s Party deputy Dr Cremer.*⁶⁶

Junkers struck his most serious blow at Lufthansa in the summer of 1928: he declared that his own three-engined G 24 aircraft, which formed the backbone of the airline’s fleet, was unfit for flight unless its all-up weight could be reduced by a thousand pounds.⁶⁷ The airline faced ruin until Milch himself thought of an ingenious solution — they could take out the two wing engines and use just one more-powerful central engine, for example the improved BMW vi. ‘Out of the question?’ was the old professor’s astounded reaction. In 1943 Milch was to recall with evident relish, ‘So I told Schatzki to go over all the calculations. He did so and told me immediately, “It will work!”’ Dr Schatzki was one of Grulich’s senior engineers. ‘It was I, a complete layman, who had this idea, and that’s how we saved Lufthansa’s fortunes . . . And when I as Technical Director went up in it with our Flight-Captain Pieper, my own technical deputy Grulich exclaimed out loud: “I hope it crashes. Then we’ll be rid of our Technical Director at long last.”’⁶⁸ All Lufthansa’s G 24s underwent this drastic modification, to the rage of Professor Junkers. Milch demanded the dismissal of Grulich, but Otto Merkel brusquely refused.⁶⁹

* Lieutenant-Colonel Killinger told the same story under British (CSDIC) interrogation: ‘Even before 1933 in his capacity as Nazi Reichstag deputy [Göring] received about 1,000 Reichsmarks monthly from Milch and Gablenz, directors of Lufthansa, in return for which he vigorously defended Lufthansa’s interests in the Reichstag.’ It is furthermore known that the records of the Bavarian Aircraft Works show at least one payment to Göring at this time, amounting to 2,800 Reichsmarks and entered in the firm’s books as ‘a one-time cash allowance to G.’

Learning that Merkel was collecting material against him, Director Milch accordingly opened a dossier on Merkel. Later he was to give the impression that his rival's downfall was as much of a surprise to him as it was to the victim,⁷⁰ but Milch's private papers show that as early as the spring of 1928 he had begun collecting damaging material, while at the same time cultivating his own relations with his chairman and vice-chairman. Milch became a frequent guest at Stauss's home, went yachting with him, carefully entered Stauss and his wife (along with Göring) on his expanding birthday-present list and chronicled the progress he was making: 'Midday, called on von Stauss: trouble with Merkel, etc.' 'Afternoon, Heck reports to me Stauss favours Milch, opposes Wronsky and Merkel.' 'Stauss telephones: satisfied with me, but not with Merkel or Wronsky.' And, 'Von Stauss dresses down the directors on their commercial policies.'⁷¹ His most effective weapon was a pocket notebook in which he entered each month Lufthansa's precise financial position.⁷² Evidently the company was accumulating a huge deficit under Merkel and was about to meet disaster. From early 1929 onward the threat of reduced services and redundancy loomed over the airline. Lufthansa increased its financial support for Göring and his fellow deputies, but the opposition successfully forced an investigation of the airline's accounts.⁷³ Lufthansa's subsidy was halved for the coming year.⁷⁴

Göring did what he could to fight the cuts. In mid-June 1929, when the transport budget received its second reading in the Reichstag, he demanded that the Reich should expand German civil aviation, not restrict it, as a great patriotic task: 'Because if you don't you will live to regret it.'⁷⁵ The government would not reconsider its decision. Redundancy was inevitable; Lufthansa would have to cut its staff by about thirty-five percent.⁷⁶ The government audit committee recommended that the cuts should start at the top. The obstinate Grulich went, and Milch promoted Grulich's assistants, Dr Stüssel and Dr Schatzki.⁷⁷ On 1 July the committee asked Milch to take over Merkel's office as commercial director as well. He later wrote, 'This decision flabbergasted me. I did not even know how to read a balance sheet.' Unaware of this decision, Merkel mentioned to him three days later that Stauss was expecting one of them to resign to set a good example; Milch 'volunteered' to resign himself, aware as he was by then that Merkel had already drawn the short straw.⁷⁸ On 5 September

Milch took over the commercial management, making him effectively 'chief executive' of Deutsche Lufthansa.

After the Nazi seizure of power he procured a well-rewarded position for Dr Grulich out of compassion for the ageing engineer's family.⁷⁹ He bore no grudge against defeated rivals, but it will be appreciated that in his upward path he had trodden heavily on many allegiances and had collected many enemies. 'I am not surprised that the air is thick with stupid rumours about Lufthansa,' he wrote to a company official in Shanghai in November. 'Most of them can be ascribed to the fury of all those liars who have proved themselves incapable of putting their vile and selfish plans against us into effect.' And he added, 'If you like to think of me as having once been energetic, I suggest you now add the word "ruthless" — or multiply by it, whichever is easier with your slide-rule!'⁸⁰

Much had occurred to bolster Lufthansa's public reputation. The Lloyd liners *Bremen* and *Europa* had been fitted with catapults, from which mail-carrying aircraft were launched several hundred miles out in the Atlantic toward New York.⁸¹ The company had also supported a spectacular transatlantic seaplane, the 56-ton, twelve-engined Dornier X, which had flown for the first time in mid-July 1929.⁸² Late in October Joachim von Schröder flew non-stop to Constantinople in eleven hours, involving many hours of blind flying. But for the time being Milch did not anticipate any transatlantic service with land-based aircraft. 'As you see, we are concerned not with outward effect but with the steady development of air transport.'⁸³

Lufthansa's staggering deficit was currently running at 19.8 million Reichsmarks when Milch took over, of which six millions were in the form of short-term bank drafts valid for only three months at a time. His financial assistant, Walter Luz, called on him each evening and patiently went over the accounts with him. Red figures dominated every page. When the major banks almost immediately threatened to withdraw their credit Milch asked them to convert the credit to long-term; they declined, so he advised his chairman that, since Lufthansa must regard half its capital as lost, it must declare itself bankrupt under German company law (the only clause known to him at that time!). At this the banks precipitously changed the debt to a long-term one, to be re-

deemed at the rate of two million Reichsmarks a year. One year later he paid back the first two million on time; and when after only eight more months he tried to repay the entire balance, the banks at first refused because of the interest they would now lose.⁸⁴

Good husbandry alone had changed the airline's fortunes. Milch ordered a ruthless clearance of spare parts at airfield level; instead of insuring the company's aircraft with an outside firm he devised a system of self-insurance, and saved the premiums; he subjected the fleet to a thorough weeding-out process, too. The profits were invested in an Equipment Replacement Fund, for one day the wonder aircraft he was dreaming of must come, and by then Lufthansa must have accumulated so much money that they could convert their entire fleet within two years at most. Significantly, he saw his airline's role as being to revitalize and modernize the German air industry. In a lecture in May 1928 he had openly admitted this: 'We are prepared to accept the extraordinary diversity of aircraft and engine-types, in order to give the entire German industry involved a means of surviving.'⁸⁵ In September 1929 he repeated this in his first business report to the airline's bankers: 'Germany's special position compels special consideration for the maintenance of a viable aircraft industry, particularly as it must be borne in mind that civil aviation is its only customer.'⁸⁶ This was the reason for Lufthansa's costly and unusually well-endowed Technical Development Division, with its scores of outstanding engineers; and this was the reason for fitting their aircraft with the most modern wireless and navigating equipment; and this was why sometimes their aircraft were even flying on IG Farben's new experimental synthetic petrol. Erhard Milch was providing for an air force of the future.

Politics were a closed book to Milch from the very outset. He had never belonged to a party, since they all seemed to make very much the same promises, before they broke them. He had at first remained unimpressed by the gradual rise of the National Socialists, although his brother Werner had evidently been one of the earliest members, for back in November 1923 he had received a hasty letter from him excusing his sudden absence from his Danzig Air Mail job: 'Dear Erhard! I received urgent letters from Munich yesterday, summoning me

there. I know you would have acted the same if you were twenty, but please forgive me if this upsets any of your plans for me . . . I will let you know more from Munich.' In Munich, the Nazis had just begun their abortive revolution, and thousands of party members had been summoned to the Bavarian capital to assist.⁸⁷ Over the years since Versailles, however, Erhard Milch had watched the government's growing estrangement from the people, and particularly from the working classes; he reflected that something must have been wrong if even in the Kaiser's time the workers were in opposition and even a Social Democrat republic could not cure the growing unemployment. 'We all waited for leadership,' he wrote at Nuremberg. 'We waited for someone who would create work and nourishment, who would solve our social problems and would win the workers back for the nation. We waited as the Jews once waited for their Messiah.'⁸⁸ He found himself fascinated by the marked shift in allegiance of Lufthansa's salaried staff and workers from their previous acceptance of inevitable communism to an increasing support for Hitler's party.

His first personal contact with the National Socialists was Hermann Göring, and he was undoubtedly captivated by the elegant Reichstag deputy. Göring was about five foot nine inches tall, energetic and dazzlingly handsome, with ice-blue eyes and great personal presence. He spoke well, and Milch was impressed by his adroit and persuasive manner during the debates on the civil aviation budget and by his expert knowledge and grasp of difficult subjects.⁸⁹ He was a year younger than the Lufthansa director and had been wounded in the stomach in the November 1923 *putsch* when government forces had opened fire. He had fled abroad and undergone medical treatment, as a result of which he had become a morphine addict, finally curing himself by the willpower of which at that time he had still been capable. He always spoke of Hitler in tones of awe and reverence; otherwise he never mentioned Party affairs.

The manner in which Milch joined the Nazi Party reflected the manner in which it worked. The Party files retained under close American custody in West Berlin contain a letter from Milch to the local branch, written after the seizure of power, justifying his plea for a rare, early membership number:

Early in 1929 I declared to [the now] Reichsminister Göring my readiness to join the NSDAP. Reichsminister Göring asked me to wait until he could discuss with the Führer whether it would be in the Party's best interests for me to join then. Reichsminister Göring told me the Führer had decided I might regard myself as a Party member already, and a number would be reserved for me, but that the Party's purposes would be better served by my not officially joining, so that I could continue my work within Deutsche Lufthansa as laid down by Reichsminister Göring.⁹⁰

He was first introduced to Hitler in Göring's apartment on the evening of the Reichstag's tumultuous reopening after further Nazi election victories on 13 October 1930. Josef Goebbels, Rudolf Hess and about a dozen members of the nobility were also there.⁹¹ Hitler inquired about his previous career and work with Lufthansa and they spoke briefly about the development of Germany's civil aviation. Milch was captured by the Party's programme as Hitler unfolded it.⁹² In retrospect it is likely that Göring's invitation of Milch to the gathering was not a casual courtesy: Hitler was preparing a fitting position for the Lufthansa director and clandestine Party member to occupy.

The airline was already paying out substantial sums of money. Early in 1930 it had issued contracts to the air industry for 8.6 million Reichsmarks. For any major aircraft factory to survive it had to do as Milch directed. This brutal fact was brought home to the intractable Professor Hugo Junkers during the year. To Milch's consternation the Dessau engineer Ernst Zindel had built an aircraft powered by a 650-horsepower BMW engine of which only prototypes were so far available; this was offered to Lufthansa. Milch had high praise for the cabin and general construction of the fuselage, but indicated to Junkers that he would prefer a three-engined version. The professor flatly rejected the idea, but the manager of BMW was on his way to America in any case and agreed to look out for a suitable engine of about five hundred horsepower.⁹³ He discovered there the Pratt and Whitney 'Hornet' engine, and secured manufacturing rights for BMW. Lufthansa's Dr Schatzki redesigned the aircraft — none other than the

famous Junkers 52 — to carry three Hornet engines. Professor Junkers still refused to cooperate, exclaiming: ‘We don’t have to toe Lufthansa’s line!’ Fortunately the usual financial crisis descended on Dessau, and Milch agreed to bail the company out only on condition that they manufactured the three-engined Ju 52 for his airline. With many misgivings the old professor gave in.*⁹⁴

Lufthansa technicians moved into the factory and controlled the new plane’s production. Milch sent his best pilot to test-fly it a few months later, on 15 June 1932.⁹⁵ His report was so enthusiastic that Lufthansa promptly entered the Ju 52 to the Zürich Air Meeting a month later. The new aircraft displayed the shortest take-off run, the best speed and the fastest climb, and it carried the greatest payload. It won a great victory in the round-the-Alps competition, although forced to fly blind with heavy icing much of the time.⁹⁶ Milch decided to convert his entire fleet to the Junkers 52. With the coveted Chavez-Bider Cup and the first prize of eleven thousand francs in his luggage he flew back to Munich; after lunch he took off for Berlin in the same aircraft. A thousand feet up an explosion tore the port-engine, landing wheel and part of the wing away. The ground rushed up toward them, but the pilot gave the two remaining engines enough power to clear some trees, levelled out and brought the heavy aircraft down in a field of uncut corn.⁹⁷

It seemed the end of the dream: to lose an engine and half its wing the aircraft must have some basic design fault. Milch staggered clear of the maimed aeroplane and lit a cigar, blood soaking into his Lufthansa uniform from a gash in his neck. He was startled by a shout from one of the crew, inspecting the wing. There was a strange engine and a mangled propeller embedded in it — and a pair of human legs. They had survived a mid-air collision. A Flamingo trainer had rammed them head on from out of the sun. This incident, with the aircraft’s relatively smooth emergency landing, was final proof of the plane’s amazing robustness. Milch took the night express to Berlin, his last doubts about the plane removed. The Junkers 52 was a significant aviation success. The

* Milch again related this at an Air Ministry conference in December 1942, and added that it was documented in the files of Lufthansa: ‘It won’t have been the first time a bouncing baby was born to somebody quite without his wishing it!'

sturdy aircraft became the staple equipment of the later Luftwaffe's transport squadrons; altogether 4,845 were manufactured up to the end of the war, and thirty airlines in twenty-five different countries made it their standard medium-range airliner.⁹⁸

In the meantime, the world economic crisis had struck the airline just as Milch had paid off its last debts. The depression was to last for the next two years in Germany and by the end of 1931 there would be 5.66 million unemployed.⁹⁹ For the second time he had the heartbreaking job of dismissing large sections of his staff, about 1,200 all told. He arranged some compensation for them this time — the older workers, and those with families, would get more cash and longer notice than the younger ones. Nor did he take the easy way out: on 16 September 1931 he himself assembled the one thousand aircraft-overhaul workers in a big hangar at Staaken airfield, stood on a table and broke the bad news to them.¹⁰⁰ When he finished, a workman asked if he might speak. He wanted to thank the director for coming in person with the bad news and not just pinning up a notice announcing the dismissals. The other workers murmured their approval. After Milch left the hangar the entire assembly signed a statement to the effect that should times improve they all wanted to return to Lufthansa. This was the spirit he had created.

In 1932 Milch, still a civilian airline manager, chartered Lufthansa aircraft to Adolf Hitler for his election tours of Germany. A mutual respect sprang up between them.
 (NATIONAL ARCHIVES,
 WASHINGTON)



Initially his loyalties had lain unconditionally with Hindenburg. In the presidential election of mid-March 1932 Hindenburg still enjoyed a huge majority

over Hitler; Hitler was persuaded to stand again, and a second election followed in April. Deprived of the use of the mass news media, Hitler chartered a Rohrbach Roland from Lufthansa so that he could appear in two or three cities every day. Milch now met him more frequently, and when he attended Hitler's great meeting at the Sport Palace in Berlin on 4 April he was convinced that this was the leader Germany had been waiting for.¹⁰¹ On the twenty-eighth he met Hitler again at Göring's new apartment in Badische Strasse, and found himself being asked remarkably pertinent questions on civil and military aviation.¹⁰² Hitler openly told him that as soon as he seized power he would found a powerful air force in defiance of Versailles. Did Milch believe this would be possible with four hundred million Reichsmarks a year to start with? Milch replied that this sum was eight times the entire civil aviation budget, including the pilot training schools, research bodies and airfield construction.¹⁰³

Milch now states, 'Hitler then spoke at length on the ideas of General Douhet.* As early as this he was principally interested in bombing warfare as the best means of deterring an aggressor. He talked of the importance of powerful armed forces, in which he saw the air force as occupying a position equal to the army's (at that time a totally novel concept); this was the only way for Germany to rid herself of the shackles of Versailles short of war itself.'¹⁰⁴ Never before had anybody spoken so vehemently to him, and of such grand plans.

In August Hermann Göring telephoned that Hitler was negotiating with Hindenburg on a coalition government in which he, Göring, would be setting up an 'Air Ministry'; and next day he asked Milch if he would leave Lufthansa and accept the position of state secretary in that ministry.¹⁰⁵ Milch asked for time to think it over. As things turned out, Hitler and Hindenburg failed to agree and Göring's plan fell through. Milch met Hitler socially twice more before the Nazis came to power: once on 31 August at Göring's Berlin apartment, surrounded by a dozen men later to occupy key positions in the Hitler government; and again a week later over a private luncheon at the Kaiserhof hotel,

* General Giulio Douhet was an Italian strategist of the twenties; in his study *The Command of the Air* he had predicted that future wars would be determined by ruthless bombing operations alone.

Hitler's headquarters in the capital.¹⁰⁶ In the general election of 6 November he voted for the first time in his life. Along with fourteen million others, he voted for Hitler's party.¹⁰⁷ The election went badly for Hitler, but Göring turned to Milch again on the twenty-eighth and offered him the state secretaryship in the government of Prussia. Milch declined the offer.¹⁰⁸

He was supremely content to be chief executive of Lufthansa. The credit for the airline's reputation was his alone. From China to South America the network of air routes controlled by his Berlin office was beginning to extend. At a postwar session of the Federal Chancellor's office, when it was diplomatically suggested that others had played a greater role in the airline's fortunes than Erhard Milch — by now discredited and convicted as a prisoner of the Allies in Landsberg — Konrad Adenauer interrupted the debate and stated: 'Ladies and gentlemen . . . What you are saying is just not true. Those other people, Stauss and Weigelt, they were just the bankers; the real architect of Lufthansa was Herr Milch.'¹⁰⁹

C H A P T E R 2

THE LUFTWAFFE REBORN

January 1933–May 1937

TWO NIGHTS BEFORE Hitler's seizure of power on 30 January 1933 Göring appeared at Milch's modest Berlin flat with his state secretary, Paul Körner, and told him that Hitler proposed to create an Air Ministry in the new government with Göring as minister, and again appealed to him to accept the post of state secretary there.¹ That evening Milch was already host to a dozen guests, mostly Lufthansa directors; he suggested to his visitor two other names for the post, those of Brandenburg and Admiral Lahs, president of the Society of German Aircraft Manufacturers.² Göring rejected them out of hand: 'Make no mistake,' he said, 'I will not take no for an answer.' He gave Milch until Monday the thirtieth to decide.

On the Sunday afternoon Körner telephoned the still-unresolved Milch that Göring was saying he would make a perfect state secretary. Milch reminded him that he had not yet agreed.³ On Monday the Lufthansa chairman and vice-chairman recommended him to accept the offer, provided he could remain honorary director of the airline as well.⁴ For Milch one personal objection still remained. Recalling that Göring had told him about becoming accidentally addicted to morphine in 1923, he delicately broached the subject again. Göring assured him that he had overcome the affliction.⁵ He took him to see Hitler, newly appointed as Reich Chancellor, next day.⁶ Hitler adroitly conquered Milch's last compunctions: 'I may not have known you for very long, but you

are an expert in your own field, and we have nobody in the Party who knows as much about aviation as you. You must accept! It is not the Party calling you, it is Germany — Germany needs you in this office!' 'Thereupon,' Milch explained at his trial, 'I accepted.'

Initially there was no Air Ministry as such. Göring was appointed 'Reich Commissioner for Aviation' and Milch was his deputy.⁷ They immediately began work on the enlargement of the existing secret air force. Since 1931 flying training had been carried on at the 'commercial pilot' training schools on behalf of the Reichswehr. Milch was aware of the German fighter and reconnaissance training school set up some years before on Russian soil at Lipezk, and as recently as September 1932 he had flown to Moscow and inspected the establishment built by the German Aeronautical Research Institute at Yagi for the secret development of new aircraft and aero-engines. Although about 120 fighter pilots and 100 observers passed through Lipezk, these beginnings in Russia had more political than military significance. It was in Germany itself that the dramatic expansion now took place.⁸

Hitler's policies centred on regaining Germany's strategic position, as he confided to the Reichswehr commanders within a few days of taking office.⁹ This meant rebuilding the Wehrmacht as an instrument of foreign policy. Clearly, he said, 'the most dangerous time will be while the Wehrmacht is being built up. Then we shall see whether France has any statesmen, for if she has, she will not give us the time we need, but will fall upon us, most probably in concert with her satellites in the east.' Hitler's policy of rapid, concealed rearmament was transmitted to Milch in the shape of two basic dicta. Göring told him, 'I collect planes like others collect postage stamps'; and not unrelated to this, 'Money is no object'.^{*} Otherwise Milch had a free hand. At a cabinet meeting on 9 February 1933 he was advised that forty million Reichsmarks would be made available for aviation; in fact, encouraged by the new Defence Minister von Blomberg and Göring, he was soon dispensing sums of money far in excess

* Defence Minister von Blomberg had a similarly generous attitude toward financing the Luftwaffe. On 18 October 1935 Milch noted him saying, 'There is no ceiling on credit for the financing of rearmament!' By 1937 the ceiling was none the less found, as a raw materials crisis set in.

of that budget.¹⁰

The War Office still believed that it would control the secret air squadrons. Milch and Göring knew differently. Milch shunned the office space offered him by the Transport Ministry as well — with its scent of centuries of mouldering documents and cobwebs of red tape — and moved instead early in March 1933 into the empty head office of a bank ruined in the Wall Street crash of 1931.¹¹ There, in Behrenstrasse, he occupied the former desk of Dr Hjalmar Schacht, who was now President of the Reich Bank. He had the old boardroom furnished for Göring, but Göring officiated there only twice.¹² A German Flying Sport Association, which had long existed to provide a legal basis for pilot training of ‘amateurs’, was absorbed into the embryo ministry later that month and a uniform designed for it — international air force blue, with one shoulder lanyard.¹³ The otherwise identical uniform of the State flying schools, training future military airmen, was distinguished by having two lanyards. Blomberg, an officer of considerable vision, furthered the new air force’s cause with great impartiality — he was himself an infantry general — giving up some of his best army officers to fill the secret force’s ranks. About 550 trained airmen were immediately transferred from the army and navy, followed by about four thousand young officers and NCOs volunteering for the new force.¹⁴ Indeed Blomberg proved to be a more zealous visitor of air force units than Göring, and the most important orders of the following months were issued over Milch’s name alone.

This was not surprising. Göring was constructing a new police state and was enmeshed in internal politics. It was not until 29 March that he realized the advances that had been made in aircraft and equipment design, when Milch took him to see Rechlin air station. He trusted Milch implicitly, and it was the state secretary who decided on the contours of the air force he was building. Instinctively, or perhaps from his talks with Hitler, he recognized that only a predominantly bomber force would deter Germany’s neighbours from interfering in the rearmament programme. When Göring took him to Rome in April he made this point to the Italians. Mussolini agreed with this risky strategy. But General Balbo, his Chief of Air Staff, warned him urgently against defying Versailles: an all-fighter, all-reconnaissance force would be both safe and

adequate, he considered. Later Milch was forced to reflect, ‘Nowhere was the strategy of air warfare less heeded than in the native land of General Douhet.’¹⁵ In their hotel that evening Göring thoroughly approved Milch’s decision: ‘Do as you think best,’ was his only comment. The Italians promised to supply fighter aircraft and provide training facilities, but perhaps for political reasons the aircraft were never delivered.

Upon their return to Berlin the last army opposition to a separate Air Ministry had been overcome.¹⁶ On 6 May Milch commissioned studies for a thousand-aircraft programme, a significant number of which were to be bombers.¹⁷ Lufthansa’s traffic manager submitted to him a detailed memorandum in which the concept of a provisional ‘deterrent air force’ (*Risiko Flotte*), with which any potential aggressor must reckon, was set out; Milch arranged with him that in the event of an emergency the airline should provide aircraft for five bomber *Staffeln* flights of about nine aircraft.¹⁸ On 10 May Blomberg directed that the air operations staff recently set up in his Defence Ministry under Colonel Bohnstedt — a monocled army officer of the old guard — should be transferred to the Air Ministry upon its formal activation on 15 May.¹⁹ This order is rightly described as the ‘birth certificate’ of the Luftwaffe. Milch left Bohnstedt to his own devices. Blomberg’s chief of staff, Reichenau, later told him that in appointing Bohnstedt, the then Chief of the Army Command General Kurt von Hammerstein had sardonically pronounced him ‘the stupidest clot I could find in my General Staff’. This would ensure that nothing would ever come of the Luftwaffe.²⁰

Hitler publicly announced his rearmament intentions in the Reichstag a few days later, justifying Germany’s demand for at least token forces of the same types of weapons as in the hands of her neighbours.²¹ At the Geneva disarmament conferences meantime the German representatives modestly requested permission to operate a force of five hundred fighter and reconnaissance aircraft. No mention was made of bombers.²² As Blomberg stated to his commanders early in June 1933, it was illusory to expect any concrete concessions toward German military sovereignty at Geneva. Illicit rearmament was the only way. ‘Over the next few years the Wehrmacht must devote itself wholly to the task of creating the reserves denied us until now. A Panzer army and an air

force are to be established. The Officer Corps of the latter is to be an élite, fired only by the will to win. It will be necessary to give it preference over everything else, and this must be understood by the other branches of the Wehrmacht.²³ When unidentified aircraft showered communist leaflets on Berlin on 22 June, it was Milch who took this opportunity of drawing attention to Germany's impotence to defend her air space; he issued a public statement that their neighbours had ten thousand armed war planes, and demanded German equality.²⁴ At a meeting with Blomberg, Schacht and Raeder — commander-in-chief of the navy — Hitler openly praised the absent Milch's efficiency.²⁵

Financing this rearmament was a problem of its own. Hitler put the complete programme's cost at thirty thousand million Reichsmarks.²⁶ Milch was at the crucial cabinet meeting where the matter was resolved.²⁷ The Finance Minister, von Krosigk, told Hitler it would be impossible to raise funds for any grandiose armament programme, and the Prussian Finance Minister Popitz echoed his pessimism. At this juncture Schacht suddenly interjected, '*Herr Reichskanzler*, I have an idea how we could raise the money.' Hitler asked how much and the banker answered coolly, 'A few thousand millions.' Hitler asked Schacht what he would need, and the latter replied, 'The assistance of Herr Milch.' Milch was as speechless as his minister, as his contacts with Schacht had previously been minimal.²⁸ He went next day to see Schacht: the banker's proposal was a classic example of Keynesian economics. An old skeleton company — eventually the Metal Research Company 'Mefo' was chosen — should be guaranteed by the Reichsbank and used to cover the financing of industry with its own bills of exchange, of nominal validity of three months, automatically extended each time. These Reich-backed 'Mefo-bills' could be discounted at the Reichsbank at any time, and would go to selected big industrial concerns as payment. Milch and Schacht were the directors of the company. It was a neat economic trick, but not an illicit one.

The air force's armament over the next six years cost an average of three thousand million Reichsmarks each year; thanks to 'Mefo' and the Air Ministry's insistence on the expanding air industry's finding its own capital for expansion, these figures were successfully concealed from public scrutiny. By the end of 1933 the air force was employing two million workers on airfield and

factory construction.²⁹ Milch's target for late 1935, as discussed with Blomberg's chief of staff on 19 June 1933, was a force of six hundred front-line aircraft including nine bomber wings (taking Lufthansa's contribution into account). Both Milch and Reichenau opposed the allocation of any bomber or fighter units to the navy — a major error, vehemently opposed by Raeder, and subsequently regretted by Milch. The conference note concluded, 'This programme is to be carried out under camouflage as far as possible.'³⁰

The camouflage was a necessity for the next two years. On 25 July Milch issued orders designed 'to make it impossible for foreign powers to prove actual violations of our existing foreign commitments' and 'to prevent foreign powers from deriving any clear picture of the rate of growth, or of the actual size and organization of the Luftwaffe we are founding'.³¹ After confidential talks with the Transport Ministry, the Reichsbahn became the first railway concern in Europe to own an airline, conveniently operating only by night between two distant points, Berlin and Königsberg — the old Danzig Air Mail route.³² These 'RB-routes' served only one purpose, the training of aircrews in long-distance overland night flying in multi-engined aircraft; the Reichsbahn airline was an offshoot of Lufthansa's auxiliary bomber wing. At the head office in Berlin a locked door barred access to the harmlessly named 'Traffic Inspectorate'; but its staff were in reality civilian-clothed Reichswehr officers organizing the airline for war mobilization and training its personnel in war tactics at courses known simply as 'navigation courses'.³³

Colonel Bohnstedt eventually approached Milch with his own plans for the future Luftwaffe. He envisaged 144 fighters, twelve bombers and some reconnaissance aircraft, some two hundred aircraft in all. Milch told him that he was planning to have six hundred aircraft for his front line by 1935, predominantly bombers; Bohnstedt's jaw sagged and he had to sit down. Eventually he gasped, 'But this is terrible! Poor Germany!' Bohnstedt was retired in August, and a few days later a new organization came into effect which was to remain substantially the same for the next four years.³⁴ Soon Milch was considering a programme far in excess of the thousand-aircraft programme he had been thinking of in May, increasing the aircraft industry by twenty or thirty times to that end.

He had started this aspect of his work in March 1933, in tough negotiations with Junkers. The chief difficulty was the old professor himself, by now seventy-four years old, a convinced democrat and pacifist.³⁵ Both Göring and Milch insisted that he transfer his key patents on aircraft designs to the Junkers Aero-Engine and Junkers Aircraft companies before the Reich would issue contracts to them. Milch went one stage further and insisted on the dismissal of a number of Junkers's senior staff who had been identified as security risks.³⁶ The professor regarded it as a political vendetta and wrote a tragic commentary in his personal diaries. 'Political hatred is a bad coachman — it whips the horses until they bolt and the carriage ends up in the ditch.'³⁷ Early in April Milch summoned Junkers to his ministry and issued the first of many ultimatums to him, but the old man dug his heels in further; so he was forbidden to leave Dessau and this restriction was raised only at the end of May when he finally agreed to Milch's terms. This by no means marked the end of the affair, however.

With the Dornier and Heinkel aircraft companies the Air Ministry was on a surer footing. In June Milch sent Colonel Albert Kesselring, the brilliant administrative and financial expert provided for him by the army, to inspect the Heinkel works on the Baltic coast; the outcome was that Heinkel was invited to establish a big new factory at Rostock, a few miles away.³⁸ At the same time Milch issued to Messerschmitt's Bavarian Aircraft Company a contract for the construction under licence of Dornier 11 bombers. As each month passed his plans grew larger. In mid-August 1933 he ordered the establishment within twelve months of a dozen specialized air-training schools, for observers, bombaimers, air gunners, fighter pilots, mechanics and navy cooperation airmen.³⁹ He drew up a still larger aircraft production programme, reflecting the new emphasis he was properly placing on training. It provided for the manufacture of more than *four thousand* aircraft in the next twenty-one months, of which no fewer than 1,760 were to be turned over to the training units.⁴⁰ He converted factories manufacturing railway locomotives, rolling-stock and shipping to the manufacture of aircraft and components; without Professor Junkers's knowledge, as early as 24 March he had entered into talks with the ATG railway-wagon factory, owned by his friend the wealthy industrialist Friedrich

Flick, for the manufacture of Junkers aircraft.⁴¹

No industry had ever seen a revolution like it. Before Hitler's seizure of power the entire aircraft industry in Germany had employed less than four thousand workers; Junkers, with 2,200 employees, could construct only eighteen Ju 52 aircraft a year, provided all other types ceased production. Milch changed all that.⁴² On 22 August he disclosed to Klaus Junkers, the professor's son, that the factory was to be given a contract for roughly one thousand Ju 52s and a number of the older W33 and W34 types to serve as trainers. Of these the first 178 Ju 52s and 45 of the others were to be delivered in 1934. It would mean a revolutionary new production system.⁴³ At the same time Milch ordered a thousand Dornier 11 and Dornier 13 aircraft from other factories. These planes were already obsolete, but he intended to instill into the money market confidence in the air industry as such, and give tens of thousands of workers vital experience in the newest techniques involved in aircraft and aero-engine manufacture.⁴⁴ By 1937, under Milch's leadership the air industry would be employing 230,000 men, of whom 121,000 were manufacturing airframes and 73,000 engines; and still the expansion would not be complete.⁴⁵

Of all the departmental heads now officiating under Milch and Göring — Colonels Wimmer, Kesselring and Stumpff and the civil servant Fisch — none was to be rated so highly in retrospect as the man Milch selected to succeed Bohnstedt as the first real Chief of Air Staff. Originally the choice lay between two army colonels, von Manstein and Wever, but the Defence Minister assessed Manstein as somewhat old-fashioned, hostile to technological advance and certainly no admirer of aviation, so Milch asked for Wever, a level-headed officer who, though only a captain, had been Ludendorff's adjutant in the First World War. Blomberg released Wever only very reluctantly, saying he was losing a future C-in-C of the Army in doing so.⁴⁶

Milch encouraged Wever, like all his senior staff, to learn to fly, and gave him Douhet's book to read. But Wever already had a mind of his own — he pondered night and day on the tactical and strategic problems of air power and in a short time had conjured up more bright ideas than all the professional airmen had between them. Late in August Milch had inspected the blueprints of

the Heinkel 111 bomber at Heinkel's factory; this was a medium-range aircraft, suitable for hostilities with France or Germany's other neighbours.⁴⁷ He and Wever agreed that the next immediate requirement was for a heavy bomber, with a range characterized by Milch in the following words: 'It must be able to fly right round Britain under combat conditions.' This was principally for attacking Britain's shipping lanes. A specification was put out for a four-engined bomber for Dornier and Junkers to develop.⁴⁸ Not long after an excuse was found to give Göring an army general's uniform (he had refused any lower rank), and Blomberg settled that Milch should be appointed colonel, with just sufficient seniority to issue orders to his Chief of Air Staff. No use could yet be made of the Luftwaffe's real uniform, which Milch secretly demonstrated to Göring on 4 October.⁴⁹



Göring builds the Luftwaffe: 'And look as morning dawns afar, our man has built the Luftwaffe!'
 (SKETCH BY ERNST UDET)

Hitler meantime withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and the Geneva Conference in mid-October 1933. While Hitler made cynical offers to the separate governments on the limitation of air forces and the prohibition of

bombing, Milch issued the first firm production contracts for exclusively military aircraft.⁵⁰ Weeks of internal crisis followed the German withdrawal; Hitler played for time by asking the British to allow Germany a three-hundred-thousand-man army with no offensive weapons like tanks, heavy artillery or bombers, and he again proposed that poison-gas warfare and bombing of civilian targets should be absolutely prohibited.⁵¹ All these suggestions were flatly rejected. Two days after the withdrawal Milch began a series of conferences on increasing aircraft production.⁵² For several weeks Berlin expected military intervention by her neighbours: Göring was moved to deep depression,⁵³ and Milch's diary shows even old Gustav Krupp to have been flatly opposed to any action contrary to the spirit of Versailles, refusing to allow any participation of his armament works in the rearmament of Germany.⁵⁴ In Göring's absence in Sweden Milch began discussions with Blomberg on a secret Wehrmacht last-ditch directive for defending Germany if the worst came to the worst. It spoke of the Reich's resolve to resist, 'regardless of the prospects of success'. The secret air force was to defend Berlin and the mid-German industrial towns as best it could. Milch considered the time ripe to reread Douhet himself, and did so.⁵⁵

Under this fearful prospect of foreign intervention he summoned an industrialists' conference on 20 October. One of Flick's directors, Dr Heinrich Koppenberg, wrote:

In addition to the ministry's top officials I saw not only aircraft and engine factory chiefs but also senior directors of the industry producing light-weight and heavy raw materials. The assembly was presided over by State Secretary Milch. He appealed to the dependability, loyalty, ardour and patriotism of those present, and indicated that for Germany the hour had struck for the construction of a new air force. The climax of the meeting was when Hermann Göring entered, silently greeted by all present with arms raised in salute. He announced that the Führer has ordered him to establish Germany as an air power '*within one year*'.⁵⁶

The principal factory was Junkers. The process of removing the obstinate

professor from his autocratic control of the factories and patents was not a gentle one. Weakened by old age, he had withdrawn to Bavaria and surrounded himself with lawyers to fight off the Air Ministry's claims. Milch had no desire to hinder his former chief's valuable pure research, but the Reich considered that it had a strong claim to the factories, having alone kept the company afloat by subsidies and inflated Lufthansa orders.⁵⁷ The professor was told bluntly that unless he agreed to sell control of his two companies to the Reich he would be banished from Dessau for ever⁵⁸; in addition, the long-postponed criminal investigation of the Fili affair* would begin, and prosecution for treason (on a technicality) would be put in hand.⁵⁹ The professor still hesitated; he was thereupon fetched under police escort from his Bavarian retreat and flown to Dessau, where a public prosecutor repeated the threat of criminal proceedings. At 2 A.M. on 18 October, after six hours of interrogation, the old man gave in and signed over fifty-one percent of his companies to the Reich. Milch was informed of this at midday.⁶⁰ On the thirtieth he indicated to Koppenberg that he was going to appoint him chairman of both companies. Kesselring asked the Dessau criminal authorities to continue their investigation.⁶¹ Faced with this persisting threat, Junkers relinquished his chairmanship of both companies on 24 November, and Koppenberg replaced him.⁶²

On Party instructions the ailing professor was banished to Bavaria and never saw Dessau again. Milch undertook to lift the house arrest if he agreed to sell off his remaining shares to the Reich, and in mid-February 1934 the professor gave way here too, but even then he prolonged the actual negotiations and a new ultimatum had to be issued over Milch's name. It expired at 10 A.M. on 30 August, but on Hitler's instructions Milch refrained from allowing any further measures against Junkers. In any case the latter's old age was about to put a natural end to the whole distasteful affair.⁶³ The ministry sent a party with a wreath to the funeral, but the family were so incensed that they threatened to stage it elsewhere. Milch's officers were fetched off the train half-way and ordered back to Berlin. From this time on there were few troubles with what Milch was to make one of the biggest industrial combines in the world.⁶⁴

* See page 16.

The new Junkers general manager was one of the most forceful personalities to break into the German air industry: robust, bull-necked and choleric, Koppenberg was a former mechanic who had made his name building a new steelworks for Flick. He expanded the Junkers companies with 'literally American bustle'.⁶⁵ On the day after his appointment he rented a railway locomotive repair factory at South Dessau; within six weeks he was producing fuselages for the Ju 52 aircraft there. In December 1933 he and Milch reached agreement on the construction of a modern factory next to the old one at Dessau, concentrating on conveyer-belt production methods; while in February 1934 the site was still an open field, three months later the buildings were complete and production had already begun. His ultimate target was the assembly of two hundred aircraft and one thousand engines a month, with other factories acting as component manufacturers.⁶⁶ By the end of 1934 the firm was employing four times as many workers as twelve months before. The fate of Professor Junkers, outlawed from his own home town and factory, remained an awful warning to all the other aircraft manufacturers.

Toward the end of January 1934 Poland signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler. Blomberg advised his commanders that after fifteen years of tension along their eastern frontier Germany could devote all her efforts to expanding the Wehrmacht. Hitler's aim was to keep this peace for a number of years, and even then he had no intention of attacking anybody, or at least so Blomberg emphasized. 'But at the end of that time the Reich is to be in a position to intervene actively in foreign affairs.'⁶⁷ Milch's papers show that he currently planned that by the autumn of 1938 they would be producing 525 bombers, 120 fighters and 127 other types of aircraft every month.⁶⁸

Attention now turned to the threat of a French attack on Germany. As early as the summer of 1933 Milch had begun extensive air-raid shelter construction in Berlin.⁶⁹ His 1934 notes chronicle his growing concern with the west: one French bomb would suffice to immobilize Cologne's huge power station; they must have smoke-screens for the Ruhr; he recorded a demand from Hitler for 'special towers for flak, heavily armoured, rearing 100 feet above a city's skyline as a protection against low-level attack'; he was authorized to start

building a vast new Reich Air Ministry building and a modern underground operations centre near Potsdam.⁷⁰ At the end of January he also studied ways of meeting the air force's needs for scarce materials under wartime blockade conditions. IG Farben was to investigate the large-scale production of synthetic fuels, with a twenty-million-Reichsmark grant from Air Ministry funds. A similar grant was paid for research into synthetic rubber. AEG received three million Reichsmarks to develop means of running power lines underground near airfields.⁷¹ Money was still no object.

On 7 November 1933 Milch had obtained from Schacht a guarantee of over a thousand million Reichsmarks for the financial year 1934–5.⁷² The government budget publicly disclosed at the end of March 1934 revealed barely a fifth of this true amount, 210 millions, but even this was three times the amount of the previous year.⁷³ The German Foreign Office answered alarmed British official inquiries that the increase was largely necessary for the expansion of Lufthansa — the modernization of its aircraft fleet and establishment.*⁷⁴ The French were not deceived and protested to Britain that it was obvious that Germany was snapping her fingers at Versailles. When Milch, now a major-general, discussed this increasingly threadbare deception with Hitler, the latter replied: 'I could not tell a lie to benefit myself, but for Germany there is no lie I would not utter.'⁷⁵

Seldom can deception have been practised on a larger scale: all over Germany the scars left by the air force construction programme were to be seen. Two million workers were building new airfields, emergency landing grounds and the ground control stations, flying schools and barracks that the new force would need; hundreds of men were being recruited every week. The new buildings sported nameplates like 'Air Transport Office of the Reich Autobahn', 'Central German Display Squadron', 'Air Depot of Volunteer Labour Service' and 'South German Lufthansa Co.'⁷⁶ Lufthansa's commercial manager almost collapsed when he mistakenly received an astronomical bill for a new building for the latter company, an almost defunct subsidiary.⁷⁷ Word reached President

* When war broke out in 1939 Lufthansa contributed 116 aircraft for transport and training purposes.

Hindenburg and he sent for Milch: ‘One hears so much these days about a “strategic air force”. I’m an old army man myself and I don’t understand much about this new-fangled idea. Would you like to explain it to me?’ Milch asked him how much time he could spare, and Hindenburg replied, ‘It depends how much time you need — I am an old man and can’t spare long.’ Offered a quarter of an hour, Milch diplomatically suggested eight minutes and was finished in seven. ‘The way you explain it,’ Hindenburg complimented him, ‘I now understand it perfectly. Your ideas are well founded, even if somewhat unfamiliar to me at first. Keep on the same track even if others should not agree with you.’ Twenty years later, Milch could still hear the deep, melodious voice of the president in his ears.⁷⁸

By now his support for Hitler was unconditional. He understood nothing of Hitler’s programme; he had begun to read *Mein Kampf* but had given up after the first twenty pages.⁷⁹ But he recognized the Nazis as the first party to succeed in fighting unemployment. Just after the seizure of power he had once accompanied Göring to Dortmund and been shocked by the starving and ashen-faced children clustering in the working-class streets; in mid-March 1934 he returned to the Ruhr with Göring and rejoiced at the change that had come about. At Nuremberg he was to say, ‘It was small wonder that all of us believed in the man, after that, and that we would have said that anybody who predicted Hitler would lead us into a world war and would not stop until Germany was in ruins was a lunatic.’⁸⁰

Yet the warning signs were there by 1934, and Milch was a first-hand witness of them, and particularly of the ruthlessness with which Hitler purged the SA, Ernst Röhm’s brownshirt Party army. That Hitler was disturbed at the SA’s military ambitions became evident to Milch early on, and was confirmed by a macabre incident involving the notorious Berlin SA commander, Ernst, and one of Milch’s officers: after an exchange of insults outside a bar, fists had flown and Ernst’s adjutant had threatened the officer with a drawn pistol; the Luftwaffe officer, one Lieutenant Schalke, had formally challenged him to a duel. The whole matter was chased up through official channels until the files landed on the desks of Milch and Röhm themselves, and Hitler also heard of the im-

minent duel; he sent for Milch and expressed his approval. Seeing the general's astonished expression, Hitler added, 'Ernst has been asking for this for some time!' He was visibly downcast when Milch explained that it was only Ernst's adjutant who was involved.⁸¹ The duel took place and the brownshirt officer was adequately injured by the first fusillade. He was removed to hospital and he alone escaped the massacre which awaited all his colleagues a few days later.⁸²

Among the indications that Röhm was planning to overthrow Hitler was a statement to Göring by the SA officer Theodor Croneiss, vice-chairman of Messerschmitt's aircraft factory and a life-long enemy of Milch, to the effect that he knew of the plans and had, moreover, been designated Göring's successor; that Röhm saw in Croneiss his future Air Minister is also known from Messerschmitt sources.⁸³ On 29 June Göring told Milch that the revolution was likely in the next few days; Milch was to take all necessary steps to defend air force installations.⁸⁴ He already had four companies of airmen, a total of about eight hundred, undergoing basic training under Colonel Kurt Student at Jüterbog airfield ('German Glider Research Institute, Spare Parts Depot') outside Berlin; he sent them to guard Berlin's airfields and the Air Ministry building in Behrenstrasse, and he ordered fighter planes, such as they were, to stand by. Körner later told Milch that Göring sent him that afternoon to Hitler in the Ruhr, with the final proof of Röhm's guilt — evidently telephone conversations intercepted by Göring's efficient *Forschungsamt*.^{*} Hitler flew south to root out the conspirators.

Next morning was 30 June. While flying in his trainer over Berlin Milch was recalled and ordered to report at once to Göring. At Göring's villa he found General von Fritsch, the new Army C-in-C, with Reichenau, Wever, Körner and the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler.⁸⁵ 'My house looked like a castle of refuge,' Göring later said. 'They all felt safe in my house, so they came to me for protection. Even Herr Frick [Minister of the Interior] came slinking in, pale as a sicked-up pea!'⁸⁶ Körner told Milch that the Gestapo had captured execution lists drawn up by Röhm, on which were the names of Göring, Milch

* Literally 'Research Office'; the telephone-tappers were called 'researchers', but otherwise this name was purely camouflage.

and many others. Göring personally forced his way into the SA's Berlin headquarters and arrested the lot of them; Ernst himself had fled to the north.⁸⁷ Hitler was in southern Germany, stamping out the wasps' nest there; a wave of executions was sweeping the Reich.

Milch was shown into a small inner room in Göring's villa. For the next half hour he was the witness — and the only surviving one who talked — of the execution council in session. Himmler was slowly reading out a list of names, none of which Milch recognized. Göring and von Reichenau were nodding assent or shaking their beads to each name in turn. If all were in agreement, Himmler dictated the name to Körner, adding curtly: 'Confirmation!' The singular atmosphere of this dark conclave is well illustrated by the moment when one of the three suggested a name evidently not on the list, a certain diplomat's aunt who had attracted much displeasure in Party circles for her excessive Nazi zeal. ('A thousandfold *Sieg Heil!*') All heaved with nervous laughter at the thought of including her. From time to time Paul Körner took the lengthening scroll of names outside, where others telephoned the instructions to trustworthy officers on the spot. It was obvious to Milch that the men listed were not being singled out for promotion.⁸⁸ Other authors have effectively quoted *Julius Caesar*: 'These many then shall die, their names are prick'd . . . He shall not live. Look, with a spot I damn him!' From the evidence of Erhard Milch we know now that that was just the way it was. By the time he wrote his diary that night, about a hundred of the *putschists* had been shot.

That evening they drove in a fleet of black Mercedes limousines to Tempelhof airport to await Hitler's return. A Ju 52 arrived from the north, bringing back the SA commander Ernst, heavily manacled, from Bremen. Hitler landed not long afterward, looking pale as death and graver than Milch had ever seen him. He greeted the waiting officials and SS and Party units paraded on the tarmac. Then orders rang out and four hundred airmen smartly presented arms — the two companies detailed by Milch to guard the airport. Hitler's face reflected his astonishment. He asked Göring who these uniformed men were; Göring asked Milch, and Milch replied that this was the new air force. Hitler complimented Göring: 'This is the first welcome sight today. The men have been well chosen for their race!'⁸⁹

Within a few weeks the state secretary was mentally cataloguing a number of inconsistencies about the official version of the *putsch* given by Hitler in cabinet and in the Reichstag. All his endeavours to inspect the 'black list' said to have been drawn up by Röhm were unavailing.⁹⁰ Röhm himself had been executed. As for Croneiss, the informant, Göring took him under his wing after the bloody purge; he emerged with high rank in Himmler's now independent SS and was allowed to retain his very sensitive position in the German aviation industry until his death in 1942.⁹¹

Well-balanced though Milch's plans for the size and composition of the future air force were, the actual striking power would inevitably remain meagre for some years. At the beginning of July 1934 the ministry adopted a new aircraft construction programme under which 4,021 aircraft would be built during the next fourteen months, including 822 bombers; the rest were predominantly trainers and fighters.⁹² Hitler, however, demanded that they set their sights still higher and summoned Göring, Milch and Wever to see him at Bayreuth at the end of July. Wever had long urged Milch to resist such demands, but Göring willingly complied with them and actually insulted Milch in front of Hitler when he raised practical objections. Wever weakened and sided with Göring, an act for which he apologized to Milch during the flight back to Berlin: he admitted that with the best will in the world Hitler's new target was impossible.⁹³ Milch knew that they could not train aircrew or squadron commanders, or build airfields, fast enough. In his opinion Göring wanted only a propaganda air force. Milch — by now a general — wanted the real thing.⁹⁴

His relations with the Air Minister were already see-sawing sharply. Next time they went to see Hitler together, at Berchtesgaden in August 1934, Göring brushed him aside and said he would not need him to be present; Hitler overrode Göring's objection. Next day Göring apologized to Milch and at the end of the month confided to him that he had asked Hitler to approve him as the next Air Minister, should anything ever happen to himself.⁹⁵

Despite the claims by Mr Winston Churchill that Germany's illegal air force was 'rapidly approaching equality with our own', the Luftwaffe was still weak, and it was tactically aligned not against Britain but against France.⁹⁶ We

know from Blomberg's and Hitler's secret speeches of this period — particularly from a secret conference held by Blomberg on 9 October — that Germany's intention was to secure air parity with France, whose intentions Hitler suspected.⁹⁷ And there is a telling passage in General Milch's private notebook for the first months of 1935, in which he recorded — evidently after discussion with Hitler — what was to be Germany's future strength and political alignment. The German navy was to be thirty-five percent of the British Royal Navy's size; the army was to be as big as the French army, and the Luftwaffe as big as the RAF or the French air force. No hostilities were envisaged with Britain at all; indeed, should armed conflict with the Soviet Union break out, as Milch quoted Hitler, 'We must fasten our hopes on Great Britain'.⁹⁸ In a further secret speech noted by Milch on 12 January 1935, Blomberg explained to his commanders: 'We must feign as much armed strength as we can, in order to look as powerful as possible to the western powers.' And he added, 'We are only putting together the scaffolding at present. The Führer gives us full credit for this — but he expects more.'⁹⁹

In the same month Milch laid the foundation stone of the new Reich Air Ministry building in Leipzigerstrasse, Berlin. He cleared the site with characteristic inflexibility; when Hitler and Göring ordered the old Royal Prussian War Ministry on that site to be preserved as a historic example of the work of the Prussian architect Schinkel, Milch secured an expert opinion that it was not, and settled the dispute arbitrarily one night with five thousand demolition workers. Ten months later the new building was 'topped out', and a few weeks after that the first thousand of the huge edifice's 4,500 rooms were being occupied.¹⁰⁰ All over Germany the still-secret air force's new barracks and other installations were springing up, designed by some of the country's finest architects.¹⁰¹ Milch issued orders for the construction of scores of 'caretaker' airfields — unmanned landing grounds about 500 yards wide and 1,100 yards long, already provided with the necessary underground fuel dumps and flarepath equipment, to be completed by the autumn of 1938.¹⁰²

When Milch reported to Party leaders in Berlin in mid-February 1935 one of them, Reichsleiter Alfred Rosenberg, marvelled at 'the fact that within two years there has emerged from a completely naked country a Reich to be reck-

oned with, a Reich that even now nobody can affront with impunity'. And Göring — who had not bothered to visit the first secret units until 1 November the previous year — boasted at the same gathering, 'Apart from Russia, whose strength is somewhat obscure, Germany will have the biggest air force in the world by this autumn.'¹⁰³ Quantitatively this was not true, but qualitatively there could be no doubt: Junkers draughtsmen were already designing a fast medium bomber which was to become the famous Junkers 88, and Dr Koppenberg reported in the same month that preliminary work on the four-engined Ju 89 heavy bomber was complete.¹⁰⁴ Simultaneously Milch fashioned the mould for the new Luftwaffe's officers in a basic directive: 'It is a fundamental requirement for staff and technical officers of the higher echelons to have had practical operational experience,' he laid down. And, conversely, 'The paths to the very highest positions of command are open to every officer suitable for them.' He wanted the best men for the job, without favouritism and without fear.¹⁰⁵

The existence of a German air force was by now an open secret. At the Berlin funeral of an airman Milch saw one boy pointing to the uniformed airmen present and whisper loudly to his friend, 'The ones with the two shoulder-straps are the real ones; the others are just pretending!'¹⁰⁶ During February 1935 Hitler signed a decree that on 1 March the 'Reich Luftwaffe' would be founded, as a third service next to the Reich army and the Reich navy, with the present Air Minister Göring as its first C-in-C.¹⁰⁷ At the same time Blomberg authorized Göring to uncamouflage the air force, 'step by step', while carefully avoiding any measure which might provoke public comment.¹⁰⁸ In executing these orders Wever decreed that the size, type and composition of the Luftwaffe's units were to remain as secret as before.¹⁰⁹ In the event Hitler's nose was put out of joint by a premature British government announcement of a significant strengthening of the RAF, and the formal and somewhat circumlocutory disclosure of the existence of a Luftwaffe was made at attaché level on 10 March.

In Milch's eyes this violation of Versailles, and the introduction of conscription a few days later, was the most critical moment, when the Versailles signatories would have been justified in intervening. Nor could Germany have

offered much resistance: of the 2,500 aircraft in the new Luftwaffe only some 800 were of front-line types and these were distributed among the training school as well as the operational squadrons. When Hitler, Göring and Milch inspected the new service on 28 March, the fighters mustered by the 'Richthofen' squadron for its fly-past were still diminutive Heinkel 51 biplanes. By the autumn of 1935 the Luftwaffe had reached the target of 1,800 first-line aircraft set by Milch in July the previous year, but on 7 October Göring informed him that the uncertain political situation called for even faster rearmament, and Blomberg also appealed to him to increase aircraft production.¹¹⁰ The industry currently numbered fourteen major factories, including Junkers, Arado, Messerschmitt, Dornier, Focke-Wulf and Heinkel. On the twenty-fourth Milch asked for 616 million Reichsmarks more to cover the expense of this acceleration of the programme.¹¹¹ Within two years the list of major factories had swollen to thirty-six.

General Wever's Air Staff had meanwhile prepared specifications for some of the world's most advanced aircraft. At Rechlin research station in March 1936 test pilots were already flying prototypes of the Messerschmitt 109 fighter aircraft, of the Me 110 twin-engined long-range fighter, the Ju 87 and Henschel 123 dive-bombers and of the Do 17 and He 111 medium bombers. There was even an early Ju 88 bomber undergoing trials. The Dornier company had built three prototypes of the important Do 19 four-engined heavy bomber, and Junkers had built two Ju 89s — these in a year when the specification for a four-engined bomber was only just being issued in Britain.¹¹² Of all these the Heinkel 111 seemed to be the standard bomber of the future; it could carry a ton of bombs and was fast by modern standards. The Air Ministry invited Dr Heinkel to construct a large new factory at Oranienburg outside Berlin, capable of producing no fewer than a hundred of these bombers a month; Heinkel accepted and the first turf was cut on the empty site in May 1936. One year later he handed over the first He 111 manufactured there.¹¹³

Politically, the Wehrmacht considered that it was not rearming in a vacuum. In a document issued late in 1935 the Luftwaffe summed up: 'France has evidently determined on war, if her extensive military preparations are anything to go by'; it was furthermore accepted that should such a conflict break

out, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia would remain neutral only so long as this served their own interests.¹¹⁴ Early in November Blomberg invited the three services to develop a working basis for joint strategic planning; after a meeting of the principal Luftwaffe commanders presided over by Milch on the sixteenth Wever signed the Luftwaffe's part of the 'Wehrmacht Study', as the planning document was called, two days later.¹¹⁵ France and Czechoslovakia were seen as the only potential enemies. For political reasons, the Luftwaffe was to avoid the role of aggressor at all costs. Without Göring's express orders no frontier was to be crossed and there was to be absolutely no entry into the demilitarized Rhineland — or even overflying of it by Luftwaffe aircraft — until a deliberate violation of German frontiers had been established by the enemy. The Luftwaffe assumed that the French air force would begin any French attack with a surprise air raid, 'probably without any declaration of war'. The Luftwaffe's primary task would be the destruction of the French air force and its bases, followed by a rapid switching of most of the bomber squadrons to the east and the destruction of the Czech air force. Considerable importance was attached to air reconnaissance, but little to strategic air warfare — a number of French and Czech arsenals, munitions factories and wireless stations were listed by name as targets, but curiously reserved for 'reprisal attacks for raids on German towns'.

Both Göring and Milch were taken by surprise by Hitler's sudden decision to march into the demilitarized Rhineland in March 1936. The state secretary was away on a month's leave when the Führer first mentioned this new intention to Blomberg on 13 February — a result of the imminent ratification of a Franco-Soviet treaty.¹¹⁶ No word reached Milch until the eve of the day chosen, when General Wever telephoned that he was required immediately in Berlin.¹¹⁷ As he entered his aircraft at Munich airport next morning, 7 March, he heard loudspeakers relaying Hitler's announcement that at that moment German troops were marching into the Rhineland. In all Germany, as Milch knew, there were only three fighter squadrons, and since the eastern frontier could not be left denuded only one of these could be spared for the west; this was divided between airfields at Cologne and Düsseldorf, and a dive-bomber squadron was also transferred to the Rhineland that day. The fighters carried a thousand rounds of ammunition each, but their machine-guns had not been

adjusted. With this small cast the Luftwaffe laid on a great spectacle — it was like the Danzig Air Mail all over again, only this time the paint-pot and brush were used to multiply the number of aircraft in evidence, not reduce them.¹¹⁸ The fighter squadron was flown round from one airfield to the next, changing its insignia between each demonstration. Freshly painted nameplates were displayed outside harmless training schools, proclaiming them to be fighter or bomber wings. Not for the last time, the French were taken in.

The first Luftwaffe training manual on air strategy was issued by General Wever in May 1936. It was remarkable proof of Wever's and Wilberg's farsightedness, for although both officers were rooted in the traditions of the army, and of army air support, the manual set out a clear blueprint for the Luftwaffe's lightning successes three years later in Poland and France. It became the basis of all staff training at the Air Staff College at Gatow. 'Air power carries the war right into the heart of enemy country from the moment war breaks out,' ran one paragraph. 'It strikes at the very root of the enemy's fighting power and of the people's will to resist.' The Luftwaffe's duty was to fight for air supremacy; that achieved, it was to support the land and sea battles where necessary, or attack the enemy's resources — his industrial potential, his food supplies, his vital import routes, his transport and governmental centres. But the manual expressly ruled out attacks on civil populations in paragraph 186: 'Attacks on cities for the purpose of terrorizing the civilian population are absolutely forbidden.'¹¹⁹

All the greater was the tragedy which overtook the young air force on 3 June when Wever was killed piloting his own aircraft. His successor was General Kesselring, the tall, happy-go-lucky Luftwaffe chief of administration, who had played an important part in the growth of the air industry and the construction of the ground establishments. Milch felt that his knowledge of strategy and air tactics was very limited, however, and Kesselring's appointment caused widespread controversy. The two generals worked together for barely a year, with Kesselring overwhelmed by the contempt of the career officer for the 'managing director' who was state secretary, and Milch magnifying every error committed by the newcomer to create incidents of almost diplomatic magnitude. Milch marshalled the aircraft industry on his side and Kesselring was re-

placed in 1937 by General Stumpff, a more satisfactory candidate in Milch's view; Kesselring joined Göring's camp.

Kesselring's appointment in June 1936 was accompanied by another, seemingly minor reshuffle of the ministry's officers. The head of the technical department, General Wimmer, and his two chief assistants, Colonel Loeb and Colonel Wolfram von Richthofen (cousin of the famous air ace), were the architects of the Luftwaffe's technical advance; unhappily, Göring found Wimmer somewhat mulish and pedantic and decided to replace him.¹²⁰ As a successor he selected Ernst Udet, a popular First World War fighter pilot who had rejoined the Luftwaffe twelve months before with the rank of colonel. Udet — Bohemian, boisterous and likeable — had formed an intimate friendship with Milch and had joined the regular company at Milch's table at Horcher's, the leather-panelled gourmet's restaurant in Berlin. He was a virtuoso pilot, used to thrilling interwar crowds with his act at air displays, picking up pocket handkerchiefs with a hook fastened to the wingtip of his plane. He had taught Milch to fly, and on their sixth flying lesson had shouted to him that he now had complete faith in him and threw his control-column overboard — a wooden dummy he had smuggled aboard especially for the purpose.

Udet was not at that time Göring's friend — quite the contrary, for in 1918 it was Udet who was elected chairman of the Richthofen Veterans' Association, although Göring had been the squadron's last commander. Udet had moreover challenged the authenticity of many of Göring's 'kills' as a fighter pilot, hinting that he had cheated by claiming for himself the unclaimed enemy aircraft credited to his squadron; eventually Udet had thrown him out of the Association altogether. Knowledge of this was the hold that Ernst Udet had on the minister, and Göring admitted this privately to Milch.¹²¹ Milch for his part suspected that Udet's appointment was Göring's shrewd attempt to silence someone who had Hitler's ear on air matters. He later wrote, 'Hitler recognized in Udet one of the greatest pilots, and he was right. But he also saw him as one of our greatest technical experts, and here he was very mistaken.' As an inspector of fighters or of dive-bombers Udet would have been in his element; but now he was put in charge of the Luftwaffe's technical department, a desk job requiring concentration, hard work and vision. He was neither a beaver like Milch, nor an ad-

ministrator like Kesselring. Easy-going and increasingly dissolute, Udet allowed the Luftwaffe's technical lead to wither away, and in time he was to prove Göring's own undoing.¹²²

In the Spanish Civil War the Luftwaffe found its first active involvement. General Franco appealed to Hitler to help him transport his insurgent forces from Tetuan in North Africa to the Spanish mainland. Hitler was at Bayreuth when the Spanish delegation arrived in Berlin; Milch referred them to Blomberg, and Canaris, Blomberg's foreign intelligence chief, introduced them to Hitler and Party officials at Bayreuth on 25 July 1936. Göring summoned Milch to Bayreuth with Stumpff next morning and reported that Hitler was in favour of German intervention on Franco's behalf, without actual participation in the fighting. Milch flew back to Berlin for an immediate meeting of his departmental heads with the Spanish officers and Stumpff; their first action was to set up a special unit (*Sonderstab*) 'W' under Wilberg, to coordinate the airlift of Franco's troops to Seville in southern Spain.¹²³

The first Ju 52 transport plane left Tempelhof on the very next day for Spanish Morocco, transferred to a hastily registered 'Hispano-Moroccan Transport Company (Tetuan-Seville)'; a score more followed, crewed mostly by Luftwaffe reservists. On 31 July Milch took leave of the first eighty-five volunteers, who were formally discharged from the Luftwaffe and equipped with plain clothes; six He 51 biplane fighters accompanied them on the voyage to Cadiz. A week later this advance party, camouflaged as the 'Union Travel Association', was in Seville. About 270 tons of assorted equipment and ammunition joined them there.¹²⁴ During August the transports ferried about ten thousand Moroccan troops to Spain. Milch kept Blomberg, Neurath (the Foreign Minister), Raeder and Göring regularly briefed, for at this stage he was in charge of the entire German intervention.¹²⁵ The He 51 proved surprisingly inferior to the Russian-built aircraft opposing them, so on 29 October the decision was taken to send more modern equipment, backed up by bomber and fighter squadrons; the new Me 109 would have to be rushed to Spain as soon as possible. When proof was found that Russian-made bombs were being used against Franco's troops, Hitler on the same day approved full-scale military interven-

tion by the Luftwaffe (as Mussolini had said to Milch in Rome two weeks before, ‘Communism is war!’).¹²⁶

Under the code-name ‘Rügen Winter Exercise’, the Luftwaffe embarked a large force of volunteers under Major-General Hugo Sperrle for Spain; a similar force of army volunteers would be commanded by General Walter Warlimont. This new force fought in Spain as the ‘Legion Condor’. On 6 November the first bomber squadron of KG 88 left German soil; Milch saw the unit proudly off at Greifswald airfield, Göring having written, ‘Milch is to stand in for me’ on the bomber squadron’s invitation to the ceremony.¹²⁷ Thus the Luftwaffe was now embroiled in war on foreign soil. Altogether the Legion Condor was to achieve a strength in Spain of about five thousand men, with two hundred assorted aircraft. In mid-November word reached the state secretary of the first Luftwaffe ‘kill’ in Spain, and at the same time of the death of one of his friends in action.¹²⁸

The international reaction to these German ‘volunteers’ was immediate and hostile. Göring told Milch that Britain had lodged a formal protest. At a meeting with Milch and his departmental heads early in December he reflected that Germany had strictly ‘wanted peace until 1941’; now anything might happen: ‘We are already at war, if not a shooting one.’ It seemed that Russia wanted war, and it was obvious that Britain was rearming very fast. His familiar demand was that the Luftwaffe expand still faster, ‘without regard for financial difficulties’. From the New Year all his factories were to operate on a wartime basis, geared to the production of aircraft, weapons and equipment rather than to putting the finishing touches to barracks and airfield accommodation.¹²⁹

Once Göring had bragged to the Finance Minister, ‘You know, when I want to expand the Luftwaffe, I send for Milch. Then he always says, “We can’t exceed such-and-such a limit, as that would dilute it too much.” So I kick him up the arse and he multiplies the front line in a matter of weeks!’ Milch heard of this vulgar appraisal and contradicted Göring: ‘The only one to get his backside kicked is the one who offers it. And don’t expect that from me!’¹³⁰ It is impossible to put a firm date on the final freeze in Göring’s relations with his state secretary; the jealous career officers surrounding the minister will have done little

to defend Milch, the ambitious executive, the civilian in uniform (and a general's uniform at that).

The cooling off was at first perceptible only in minor details, which even then the sensitive Erhard Milch might have been exaggerating were it not for the subsequent undeniable decline. Göring no longer invited him to share his foreign leaves or be his guest at his hunting lodge during the annual Nuremberg Party rallies; Milch's name disappeared from Göring's Christmas list. When the minister himself designed a Luftwaffe brooch it seemed that every other ministry lady from the most humble clerk's wife upward received one, but not Frau Milch. For Göring the last straw came when Hitler said in a public speech, 'Two names are ineradicably linked with the birth of our Luftwaffe — Göring and Milch.' The minister took to interviewing Milch's subordinates over his head. ('There is no need to tell your chief of this,' he would assure them.) Thus we are no longer surprised to find that while Milch was in Berlin one day in November 1936, Göring was conferring with Udet at the minister's opulent new forest palace, Karinhall, about far-reaching plans for the standardization of airframes and aero-engines.¹³¹ The minutes of these discussions were not shown to Milch. Göring was wont to explain, 'That's the way the Führer works, as well.'

The ministry's telephone operators heard increasingly caustic exchanges between the two. More than once Milch slammed his receiver down, and when Göring once rang back to apologize for their having been cut off, Milch retorted: 'We weren't cut off. I hung up on you. I don't want my switchboard staff getting the impression our minister has no manners!' It was like a marriage going hopelessly wrong, but neither was in the position to end it. Göring dared not dismiss Milch, for he was still creating the Luftwaffe, and Milch had Hitler's confidence. Milch for his part was enthralled by the task and by the power he wielded as the force grew in his hands. But he suffered deeply under Göring's humiliating actions. On 26 November he threatened to resign, and when this was brushed aside he stubbornly indicated that he was not the minister's slave and hinted that a German officer always had one way out of an impasse. He motioned toward his revolver.¹³² Göring reproached him that people were beginning to speak of Milch as though *he* were the C-in-C and minister: when the

first bomber squadron had left for Spain, it was Milch who had taken the salute at Greifswald. Milch hotly reminded him of his own words on the margin of the invitation, 'Milch is to stand in for me'. Göring denied having written any such injunction; Milch sent his elderly Central Office chief, Witzendorff, to bring the letter out of the files, but Witzendorff apologized and said that there was no such letter there.

Not until six years later was that particular mystery resolved. Witzendorff retired and confessed, weeping, to Milch that he had been ordered by Kesselring to destroy the letter so as to damage the state secretary. Other officers on the Air Staff also admitted to Milch that they had had a hand in the intrigue. As the New Year, 1937, dawned, we can accept that the Seven Years' War between the Air Staff and General Milch, the outsider, was only just beginning.

The increases in the Luftwaffe's production planning were followed with growing alarm by the British government. The German authorities confidentially imparted to the British authentic details, late in 1936, of their intentions.¹³³ In Hitler's view such exchanges were to be welcomed; still fired by his dream of a great Anglo-Saxon alliance, uniting Germany's powerful armies, Britain's command of the seas and the RAF and Luftwaffe in joint domination of the skies, he authorized Milch to invite senior RAF officers to study the Luftwaffe's secrets.¹³⁴ Milch believed this very necessary in view of the enormous exaggerations appearing in the British press.¹³⁵ The outcome was a unique exchange of information between two rival air forces which only three years later were locked in combat in each other's skies. The RAF sent to Berlin two air vice-marshals, Courtney and Evill, and two intelligence officers; Milch showed them every Luftwaffe establishment of importance during the next few days. They saw the Richthofen fighter wing, the Air Staff College and the original Heinkel production line on the Baltic coast. Germany's most advanced aircraft, like the He 111, the Ju 86, the Ju 87 and the Do 17 bombers were demonstrated to them, and they were verbally informed of their performances to enable them to make precise comparisons.¹³⁶ Milch requested the British party not to take written notes, and expressed anxiety that none of the secret information should go beyond the British Air Ministry, and certainly not to the Foreign Office which

would channel it directly to Paris if it could. Courtney undertook that, when he reported to the Air Ministry, he would pass on these wishes. At Courtney's request General Milch set out the bare facts of the Luftwaffe construction programme initiated in 1934; it was due for completion in 1938, by which time Germany would have thirty bomber squadrons, six dive-bomber squadrons and twelve fighter squadrons — a Luftwaffe first line of about 2,340 aircraft including immediate reserves. He enlarged at length to the British air marshals on his political views as a soldier, and stressed that Germany desired nothing more than rapprochement with the principal western powers. The information he gave broadly was complete, honest and accurate. (Indeed, Kesselring denounced him to Göring for high treason, for disclosing as much as he had.)^{*137}

Two weeks later Major-General Wenninger, the German air attaché in London, was called to the Air Ministry there and given similar details on the RAF: 'according to current planning' the RAF would dispose of 1,736 aircraft in its first line, plus one-third more 'immediate reserves' without pilots, by the end of 1938. This force would comprise 1,022 bombers and 420 fighter aircraft, plus a number overseas. The British intimated that the RAF would welcome even closer contacts with the Luftwaffe and invited an official German delegation to visit London that autumn.

From Douhet's writings Milch knew that the Luftwaffe could never be big enough to meet every strategic demand — the multiplicity of possible targets was daunting. After the British officers had left Berlin he wrote for Göring a long confidential study, reminding his minister that by mid-1937 they would have a total of 36 bomber and dive-bomber squadrons, but that Germany alone now had over two thousand industrial plants classified as 'vital' for war production, while her 'largest neighbour' (France) had over ninety explosives factories, thirty poison-gas factories and fifty aircraft production plants. Since the Luftwaffe would be occupied with tactical operations and with the destruction of the enemy air force, some time would pass before it could turn to true strate-

* According to Milch this programme was 50 percent complete, but this did not tally with the figures secured by British intelligence. The Germans later admitted that the half-way mark had been reached in the spring of 1936 — nine months earlier.

gic air war. The quicker the enemy air force was destroyed the better. ‘The Luftwaffe’s ideal is therefore to cross the frontier simultaneously with the declaration of war, or even better, to launch its attack on the enemy’s air bases *in lieu* of a declaration of war.’¹³⁸ The lengthy study could with profit have been read by Göring, but Bodenschatz returned it to him with a note reading, ‘The colonel-general [Göring] has taken note of it, but asks you to send it to him again some time.’ The initial surprise air attack on the enemy’s air force became the Luftwaffe’s trademark, however, opening the campaigns in Poland, France, Yugoslavia and Russia; and it was imitated with equally devastating effect by Israel in the Six-Day War.

Of the three Wehrmacht branches, Milch considered only the army fortunate in its C-in-C, von Fritsch. Raeder he classed in the same category as Göring: ‘Stupid lecture by Raeder at Defence Ministry in presence of Führer and others,’ he recorded at this time; Raeder had expounded the possibilities of naval war against the United States, based on ports in Mexico and South America.¹³⁹ Raeder for his part could not stand Milch, and when the Reich dedicated a Jutland memorial in 1936 he announced that if Göring’s state secretary were invited to stay aboard the Führer’s yacht, *Grille*, then he, Raeder, would not.¹⁴⁰ But Milch’s loyalty toward Hitler was still inalienable. On 30 January 1937 Hitler presented the golden Party emblem to him at a special cabinet meeting.¹⁴¹

Göring recognized that he could not wholly dispense with Milch. He needed the dynamo to power the ministry, and to strengthen his own position with Hitler. The Reich’s strong men — Blomberg, Himmler, Hess and Goebbels — were frequent guests at Milch’s table, seeing in him perhaps a future Air Minister.¹⁴² By the spring of 1937, however, Göring’s satraps were hinting to him that Milch was no longer indispensable. Udet was looking after the technical side, assisted now by Major Hans Jeschonnek, the youthful former staff officer to Milch who now commanded the Operational Development Wing at Greifswald; Kesselring had tactical matters well in hand. As ill-fortune would have it, Milch was stricken by appendicitis at this time. The Air Staff and Göring were conspicuous by their lack of sympathy for him.¹⁴³ Upon his recovery he called a departmental conference; Kesselring stayed ostentatiously

away.¹⁴⁴ Milch convalesced in Italy. Upon his return Göring had no time to see him, so he left Berlin again for a mountaineering holiday in the Alps. In mid-April 1937 Milch at last had a ‘scarcely satisfactory’ debate with his minister. Göring broke it to him that now that his internal political duties were less arduous he intended to take over direct control of the Luftwaffe himself. Two days later he departed himself for Italy.¹⁴⁵

Weeks before, in Milch’s absence, he had already taken a crucial decision.¹⁴⁶ He had ordered the scrapping of both the four-engined heavy bomber prototypes developed by Junkers and Dornier to meet the requirement issued by Milch and Wever four years before. The Ju 89 and the Do 19 — the latter with its 110-foot wingspan and 19 tons take-off weight — were generally considered to be far ahead of their time.

Only later did Milch learn of this arbitrary decision and how it had come about: Kesselring and Jeschonnek had suggested to Göring that it would be better to drop the heavy bomber projects in view of the pressure on scarce raw materials.¹⁴⁷ The records do indeed show that of the 4,500 tons of aluminium required monthly for aircraft manufacture, only about half was currently available.¹⁴⁸ Göring had inquired, ‘How many twin-engined aircraft can we make for each four-engined one?’ The reply was ‘about two and a half.’ ‘The Führer,’ concluded Göring, ‘does not ask me how big my bombers are, but how many there are.’¹⁴⁹

The Luftwaffe reorganization decided on by Göring at the same time had equally disastrous effects, in Milch’s eyes. Göring revealed it to him in broad outline during May 1937. He intended to carve the whole ministry into two establishments — a ministerial side under Milch, and a command side as a separate entity under the Chief of Air Staff, who would be equal in status to Milch and responsible only to Göring; Milch would ‘inspect’ the Luftwaffe, but nothing else. ‘Only half a solution,’ was how Milch described it.¹⁵⁰ He doubted whether Göring — in whom Hitler had some months before vested the enormous Four-Year Plan undertaking — would really have the time, energy or inclination to devote himself to linking these two entities. On the last day of May he was shown Göring’s final draft for the reorganization: ‘Now that the construction of the Luftwaffe has reached its provisional conclusion,’ Göring wrote,

'I intend to apply to the Luftwaffe's structure a form relevant to command problems in war as well as peace.' In future he would exercise 'sole and immediate' command over the Luftwaffe. Milch would no longer act as his permanent deputy. The pious hope was expressed that although Milch and the Chief of Air Staff would now be equal in status they would keep each other informed on all basic matters. This order Göring signed in person.¹⁵¹

A few weeks later Göring removed both the Personnel Department (under von Greim) and the Technical Department (under Udet) from Milch's control and elevated them to equal status with Milch and the Chief of Air Staff. He promised to invite Milch to join all their discussions, but broke this promise within a few days as both Udet and Greim were summoned to confer with him without Milch learning of it until afterward.¹⁵² In this period Milch saw all his worst fears confirmed. Göring took only sporadic interest, discussed problems with his departmental heads alone as before, asked nobody's advice, tolerated no contradiction, cursed people in their absence and extolled his own virtues. 'And all the time,' described Milch, 'he scribbled little notes, usually in a different book each day, without anybody being able to see the point of it all, since he invariably forgot or distorted what had been under discussion.'¹⁵³

Reviewing the causes for the Luftwaffe's eventual defeat, Milch was to list this 1937 reorganization first and foremost. One minor episode serves to illustrate the Byzantine art of Hitler's paladin: several times Göring warned Milch to watch out for General Stumpff's intrigues; Milch at once mentioned Göring's warning to the Chief of Air Staff himself, and Stumpff replied in astonishment, 'But that is precisely what the colonel-general said to me about you only a few days ago!' At the beginning of the war that was to follow Milch cornered his C-in-C in a quiet moment and rebuked him. 'The ancient Romans had a motto: *divide et impera*, divide and rule. But the Romans applied this only to their enemies, while you seek to do so against your friends. I cannot anticipate much success for you.' Göring made no comment.

C H A P T E R 3

MORE BLUFF THAN BLOOD

July 1937–September 1939

IN HIS 1937 DIRECTIVE on combined Wehrmacht planning for the contingency of war, the Defence Minister, von Blomberg, stressed that it was of continued urgency to secure Britain's friendship. Should France decide to attack Germany, or should Germany first decide to attack Czechoslovakia — France's ally in the east — Britain's neutrality would be of paramount importance to Hitler; because if Britain sided with his enemies she would undoubtedly try to win the Low Countries as bases for her air force to attack Germany's industrial centres in the west.¹

These fears led to further exchanges between Britain and Germany. Ernst Udet was sent to participate in the British air display at Hendon; the chief designer of the Bristol Aircraft Company was shown round German aircraft factories and opened negotiations for the sale of Bristol aero-engines to Germany.² On 1 July 1937 Lord Trenchard, the founder of the RAF, visited Berlin. He asked whether Germany would ever use poison gas; Milch gave him a solemn undertaking that Germany would not initiate such warfare.³

At the end of July Hitler allowed the new Luftwaffe to flex its muscles at the fourth international air meeting at Zürich. Milch captained the German team. Udet flew a special Me 109 fighter, but the principal event was the bomber competition: the Dornier 17, the latest German bomber, proved to be faster than any foreign *fighter* taking part, an unwelcome surprise to many countries

present. The RAF did not compete, but Milch willingly allowed the British experts to inspect the new German equipment, particularly the advanced Daimler-Benz 600 and 601 engines.⁴ Back in Berlin he tried to report all this to Göring; the minister received Udet but did not grant Milch an audience until September, when he quietened the mutinous state secretary by reminding him he was the one he had nominated as his successor, in his will.⁵

The increase in the Luftwaffe proceeded, but not as planned. In September Göring approved Milch's estimate of three thousand million Reichsmarks for this programme in 1938; but money alone was not enough, as raw material shortages had become increasingly apparent, particularly in the supply of iron and steel as the services competed for them.⁶ Early in June Hitler had asked Blomberg to report on the effect of these shortages on rearmament, and late in August the Air Ministry had to warn that because of them there would have to be 'a significant reduction in the Luftwaffe's rate of expansion'.⁷ The complete equipment of the squadrons would not be achieved until April 1939, a delay of six months on their original target. By the end of October 1937 even this prediction was recognized as over-optimistic, and Milch advised Göring that the iron and steel deficit was such as to set back some elements of the next five years' production programme by as much as another five years.⁸

Even as it was, the Luftwaffe was already a formidable weapon, as it showed in full-scale Wehrmacht manœuvres late in September 1937. It contributed over 62,000 uniformed Luftwaffe officers and men and 22,500 civilian officials and workers; and it fielded 1,337 aircraft, 639 flak guns, 160 searchlights and 9,720 motorized vehicles.⁹ The manœuvres began with a simulated surprise air attack on Berlin early on the twentieth. Large-scale army movements followed across open countryside between Berlin and the Baltic, witnessed by Hitler with Mussolini as his guest. In the Luftwaffe's new communications aircraft, the diminutive Fieseler 'Storch', Milch visited the battlefields, alighting without difficulty in pocket-handkerchief areas among the astounded troops. He had issued the 'Storch' specification in 1933, strongly opposed by Richthofen, who saw no future for such a plane. It was to perform incredible feats during the war, including the rescue of the bulky Fascist leader Benito Mussolini from a mountain prison in 1943.¹⁰ From the slowest to the fastest aircraft, the Luftwaffe now

dominated the skies of Europe — or so it seemed.

Erhard Milch's reputation climbed rapidly in foreign diplomatic circles. He paid official visits to Germany's neighbours, collecting honours ('all good for decking out the coffin lid,' he used to wisecrack) and distributing goodwill.¹¹ The climax came in October 1937, with visits to Paris and London.

Early in October he flew to Paris with Udet and his staff, together with the French ambassador François-Poncet. He deliberately chose the Luftwaffe's most modern aircraft, the Heinkel 111, landing on the military side of Le Bourget airport. As he stepped to the ground a French military band struck up the German national anthem and a considerable guard of honour was drawn up for his inspection. General Vuillemin, the French C-in-C, impressed upon him that this was the first time a French guard of honour had presented arms to a German officer since the late 1860s. That the invitation to Paris had an inner political objective was further underlined at a private meeting with the French Foreign, Air and Navy Ministers, who asked Milch to stress to the Führer their wish to establish 'closer relations' with Germany. The German ambassador saw Milch's quizzical look and hurriedly explained that Hitler no longer received him in person. 'But when you, as a soldier, go to see him, he listens to what you say. It's the soldiers who count now in Germany.' As Milch departed from Paris the elderly French commander of the Paris air zone delivered a tearful speech, describing this as the most moving moment of his life — that 'after a thousand years of war' Germany and France had finally buried the hatchet.¹² Next day, on 10 October, Hitler received Milch and Udet for two hours on the Obersalzberg. Milch outlined the French desires for some kind of alliance, but Hitler showed in one sentence what his real sentiments were: 'I am going to teach them a lesson they will never forget.'¹³

A few days later General Milch headed an influential Luftwaffe delegation to London. Here the reception was perceptibly cooler than in Paris. Although the speeches delivered by Lord Swinton — the Air Minister — and the Chief of Air Staff were warm enough and the RAF band even played Nazi marches like *Badenweiler* and *Comrades of old*, and even a Hitler Youth ballad (*In front of us flutters the German Flag*), the guided tours of RAF bomber and fighter squad-

rons were perhaps coincidentally intimidating in effect. For a whole day he was shown over the unique 'shadow factories' in the Midlands — producing motor-cars and engines in peacetime, but ready for instant conversion to aircraft production in war. He also met the air chief marshals who were to direct the fight against Germany and the Luftwaffe in two years' time, Ludlow-Hewitt and Dowding. No doubt he also shook hands with many another, incognito, whose existence he was later to regret.¹⁴ He livened up one formal luncheon held in his honour at Fighter Command headquarters when in his own blunt way he appealed unprompted to his hosts, 'How are you getting on with your experiments in the radio detection of aircraft approaching your shores?' Glasses clattered to the floor and a very red-faced air vice-marshal tried to laugh the question off. But Milch persisted that there was no need to be coy. 'We have known for some time that you are developing a radar system,' he said. 'So are we, and we think we are a jump ahead of you.' Word of this must have reached Hitler, for years later he was to complain that Milch had betrayed the secret of radar to the British.¹⁵

Back in London Lord Swinton introduced him to another formidable future opponent, over cocktails in a secluded ring of leather armchairs in a club. Milch found himself cornered between Mr Winston Churchill and his supporters Duff Cooper, Lord Camrose and Leo Amery, while Trenchard and Swinton urged him into battle. In prison later, Milch wrote of Churchill as an enigma. Of the young Churchill portrayed in his own autobiography *My Early Life* Milch summarized that as a child he had evidently played only with tin soldiers, that as a youth he had hastened to become an officer, sought out every scene of hostilities and bloodshed from Cuba, India and Egypt to South Africa, and that everywhere he had obviously found great pleasure in the adventure of fighting and killing: 'I know of no such enthusiasts amongst my own acquaintances,' he wrote in his private Nuremberg diary¹⁶; and when one considers who Milch's acquaintances had been by that time, the sting of the judgement is recognized.

After the chatter had subsided Mr Churchill, who had been contemplating the German through their combined wreaths of cigar smoke for some time, began an encirclement action. 'What do you think of gliding as a sport?' he

asked, and ‘Do you think I could pick it up, if I tried to, at my age?’ Milch courteously offered him the opportunity in Germany (where the Luftwaffe maintained extensive gliding schools, for reasons which were to become apparent in 1940). So Churchill said, ‘If you value gliding so highly, could you not with profit dispense with powered flight entirely? That would eminently solve all our difficulties!’ This brought delighted chuckles from his party, but Milch responded: ‘I am convinced that our Führer would accept such a proposal.’ Churchill removed his cigar and said, ‘Oh, really?’ Milch explained that there was one small condition — ‘That the Royal Navy revert to those beautiful old sailing ships!’ Lord Swinton loudly proclaimed, ‘One-nil to Milch!’ The party broke up in the small hours of the morning.¹⁷

The events in London interested everybody of importance in Berlin except Göring. Milch reported fully both to the Foreign Minister, von Neurath, and to Blomberg upon his return, but the Defence Minister was already growing aware of his inability to moderate Hitler’s foreign aims, and Milch found him more despondent than ever before. He recorded Blomberg’s pessimism: ‘He is gravely worried.’¹⁸ Hitler received him for two hours the next afternoon, 2 November, and listened intently to the description of the British shadow factories and the magnificent officer material seen at the RAF College at Cranwell. The state secretary particularly warned against writing off Churchill just because of the Dardanelles fiasco in the First World War; Churchill was undoubtedly the submerged iceberg on which Germany might founder.

His faction seemed bent on war, the grounds for which could not yet be foreseen and perhaps did not yet exist. In reply Hitler outlined his grand strategy and stressed that he was interested only in collaboration with Great Britain and the Empire.¹⁹ Of course, we have only Milch’s word for this. His diary records simply, ‘3.15 to 5.15 P.M. with Udet to see Führer about journey to England! (Grand strategy.)’²⁰ The words ‘grand strategy’ (*grosse Politik*) also appear on other occasions in Milch’s diary, but always with a somewhat sinister connotation.

Of the Armistice concluded at the end of the First World War on 11 November 1918 the young Captain Milch had written on the day it was signed: ‘The terms

are the best possible cause for a future war.' But it was less the terms of the Armistice than the conditions and frontiers created by Versailles that incited Hitler. After Austria's *Anschluss* to Germany in March 1938 Czechoslovakia was surrounded on three sides by his armies; the Austrian air force was modernized and incorporated as a body into the Luftwaffe, keeping General Alexander Löhr, at Milch's suggestion, as their commanding-general; Austrian factories began the manufacture of German aircraft types; and the Luftwaffe gained important strategic bases from which to menace Czechoslovakia.

Behind all German military planning lurked the traditional ideological fear of Russia, the unknown quantity in all their calculations. In 1935 word had reached Berlin of negotiations between France and Czechoslovakia to add Russia to their alliance.²¹ There were indications that Russian air force officers were already stationed in Czechoslovakia, and that twenty-five large airfields were under construction there — far beyond the needs of such a small territory. The fear that these might be used by Russia to launch a surprise attack on Germany resulted that spring in the very first warlike contingency plans drawn up by the Luftwaffe.²² Milch represented the Luftwaffe at the Wehrmacht consultation. Von Fritsch described the Russian–French–Czech alliance as acutely dangerous for Germany. On 2 May Blomberg personally handed the C-in-Cs a secret directive to prepare an unidentified operation codenamed *Schulung* ('Training').²³ Milch's notes leave no doubt that they were being asked to prepare a blueprint for a surprise attack on Czechoslovakia, combined with a defensive campaign in the west should France intervene. By 15 May the Luftwaffe study was complete and on the following day Milch reported, 'Training exercise completed', to Blomberg's chief of staff.²⁴ The Wehrmacht's Czech study was updated periodically until the issue was finally resolved in 1938. As recently as January 1938 Milch presided over a discussion on the operation, now codenamed *Fall Grün*.²⁵

Hitler's decision to destroy Czechoslovakia left no mark on General Milch's conscience. On 21 May 1938, as he was attending a large conference with Göring on the very relevant matter of strengthening Germany's eastern and western fortifications, the first news of alleged Czech outrages against German nationals in the Sudeten territories bordering on Germany reached him.²⁶ On

the twenty-eighth Hitler announced to his C-in-Cs his intention of dealing with this troublesome neighbour, and Göring forwarded the Führer's orders to Milch and the other Luftwaffe commanders next day.²⁷ The deadline for the attack was 1 October. It was of great concern to Hitler that French intervention be resisted while he was rapidly destroying Czechoslovakia, and this he proposed to achieve by buttress and by bluff. On 1 June Milch decreed the formation of an Air Defence Zone 'West' under General Kitzinger — a secondary line of fortifications and associated flak positions along the western frontiers.²⁸ Travelling by Göring's magnificent special train, Milch and a large party of Luftwaffe generals inspected the fortifications constructed so far by the army, and back in Berlin again he busied himself with the minutiae of air warfare against Czechoslovakia. Of particular interest is the evidence that he discussed with Dr Plendl the use of radio beams for the blind bombing of Czech targets.²⁹

During June 1938 the air industry factories were converted to ten-hour shift working.³⁰ Göring, a field marshal now that Defence Minister Blomberg had been deposed, called his major industrialists to Karinhall on 8 July and warned them that war with Czechoslovakia was imminent; he concealed his knowledge of Hitler's initiative, but portrayed their neighbour as the one seeking to provoke a general European war. 'You may know,' he declared, 'that at the present moment it is by no means dependent only on Germany whether or not the peace can be kept. The sword of Damocles threatening this peace is Czechoslovakia.' On the other hand, he promised the industrialists, there was something in a war for everybody: 'If we win the fight, then Germany will be the greatest power on earth; the world's markets will belong to Germany, and the time will come for abundant prosperity in Germany. But we must venture something for this; we have to make the investment.'³¹

Three days later the First Air Group circulated a top secret study on *Fall Grün* as a basis for the operations of the four hundred fighters and six hundred bombers (plus two hundred dive-bombers and ground-attack aircraft) being concentrated for the attack on Czechoslovakia in October. The First Air Group would attack from bases in central and eastern Germany, while the somewhat smaller Third Air Group would attack from Bavaria and Austria.³² About 250 Junkers 52 transport aircraft would discharge the paratroops of Göring's Sev-

enth Airborne Division over vital Czech strong-points. At Jüterbog artillery range outside Berlin full-scale concrete mock-ups of the Czech fortifications had been erected; on 15 August Milch watched with Hitler as heavy artillery and 88-millimetre flak pieces pounded these targets to demonstrate to von Brauchitsch, Fritsch's successor as army C-in-C, and his worried generals that the fortifications were not impregnable. From 2.45 p.m. that day Hitler opened his mind to the generals about the future and the superiority of the German military position. It was on bluff that he placed most reliance. At one stage he described it as a war on Czechoslovakia's nerves: 'Imagine how it must feel to watch your neighbour sharpening up his knife for three months!'^{*} After ninety minutes Milch noted uncritically in his private diary, 'Speech by Führer. Insight into his thoughts. *His mind is made up!*'³³

It was clear that a German attack on Czechoslovakia might result in a declaration of war by France, followed almost at once by Russia and Britain, the latter with the clandestine support of America. All these risks Hitler was prepared to take. The Luftwaffe obediently developed a plan of operations, which they aptly code-named '*Fall Grün, Enlarged*', in which they assumed that the RAF would impinge on neutral Belgian and Dutch air space to strike at the Ruhr, while Russia would be restricted by Poland's more genuine neutrality to air attacks on East Prussia and Berlin.³⁴ Milch had been aware since late April that Anglo-French staff talks had been resumed at the instance of the new French premier, Daladier, and that a French military mission headed by General Vuillemin had visited London at the end of May. But for the time being neither the British nor French bomber forces was taken seriously: on 1 October the former would probably consist of only 640 bombers, all but 120 of them obsolete, and the RAF were understood to have 859 bombers, all but 350 being obsolete. In May 1938 Milch had learned that a British mission had been sent to America to purchase aircraft and organize the expansion of the Canadian aircraft industry; the Air Staff's August planning document put British production at 200 of all types per month, and North American production at 250.

* The only surviving contemporary note on Hitler's secret speech that day is in the diary of Captain Wolf Eberhard, Keitel's adjutant, in the author's possession.

General Milch initialled the first page of the document, and there is no indication that he expressed pessimism in any form as to the outcome of such an enlarged conflict.³⁵

Boundless optimism and a degree of bluff were his *forte* for the next six years — confounding his critics and enraging the despondent. When Hitler held a banquet on 24 August in honour of Admiral Horthy, the Hungarian Regent, the Army General Curt Liebmann buttonholed Milch afterward in the smoking-room and poured out his woes about the inadequacy of the West Wall. Milch refused to be infected by his mood. Liebmann angrily accused him, ‘You may well be a brilliant airman, General, but about army tactics you obviously haven’t got a glimmer!’ Milch spoke to Göring, and Göring arranged to have Liebmann (‘another of those grousing generals’) removed from his command.³⁶

The chance for grand bluff came in August 1938, when General Vuillemin arrived in Germany for a five-day tour of Luftwaffe installations. Forewarned about Vuillemin’s liaisons with the British, Milch staged a spectacular display, conducting him and his mission round the Messerschmitt, Junkers and Heinkel factories and several operational units. Every fighter aircraft in Germany was flown to one airfield in southern Germany, where Vuillemin’s plane was scheduled to make a casual stop; at Augsburg he was shown Messerschmitt’s latest fighter, the Me 109E, and an Me 110 twin-engined long-range fighter firing cannon into the butts. At the new Heinkel aircraft factory at Oranienburg — not even shown to the British the year before — an He 111 bomber demonstrated its really astounding manœuvrability, even on one engine, and the French general was allowed to glimpse scores of brand-new bombers in the despatch hangar. He was shown the modern air-raid damage-control centre, and found everything ready, down to a dozen sharpened pencils. He expostulated, ‘*Je suis écrasé!*’³⁷

But the *pièce de résistance* was to come. Udet lured him up in a Fieseler ‘Storch’, to show him Oranienburg from the air; on Milch’s instructions a Heinkel 100 fighter — in which Udet had just smashed the world speed record — flew at full throttle over the 80-MPH Storch just as it was landing. Vuillemin

and the air attaché went momentarily white. On the airfield tarmac Milch blandly asked Udet how the He 100's mass production was coming along, and the latter replied with poker face, 'The second production line is just starting up, and the third in two weeks' time.' In fact only a handful of He 100s was ever manufactured. Udet waved aside Dr Heinkel's amazement at the strange conversation, 'You have to blow your own trumpet sometimes!' In the factory gymnasium Milch challenged the French air attaché to a race up the ropes. After the French colonel had manfully hauled himself up with his arms alone, Milch scrambled up in half the time using his legs as well and proclaimed himself the winner.³⁸ General Vuillemin privately notified his government that the French air force would not last a week against what he had seen in Germany.³⁹

The RAF was another proposition.

If Göring had always hoped there would be no war with Britain this had not prevented Stumpff in February 1938 from commissioning General Felmy, the north-western tactical commander (Second Air Group) to investigate what war with Britain would mean.⁴⁰ After the *Anschluss* the Anglo-German exchange of information dried up. When the British Chief of Air Staff asked in April for further information the German air attaché admonished him, as he reported to Milch, 'If we are to hand over secret data to you, then we expect to receive in exchange something that we have not already read for ourselves in the British press and other journals.'⁴¹ By August air war with Britain had advanced from 'possibility' to 'probability'. It was only now that Göring recognized that he had no suitable aircraft for such a war; at Karinhall on the twenty-third he instructed Felmy to assemble information on targets in Britain and suitable tactics for attack. Since Felmy had only two bomber wings, he was to prepare to accommodate three or four more bombers as soon as Czechoslovakia had been crushed. Until then, with its two existing wings the group could do little more than support ground operations in the west and provide for air raids on London and Paris on a reprisal basis should the need arise. Other British targets particularly mentioned were the London docks, the capital's armament factories, the Channel ports and airfields in eastern England. Should the bomber forces prove adequate, an extensive campaign against Britain's seaborne

food supplies should begin.⁴²

Adequate was the key word. Felmy, appointed on 17 September to head a *Sonderstab* (Special Unit) England, reported on the twenty-second that the Luftwaffe was incapable of effectively attacking Britain.⁴³ ‘With the means available,’ he wrote, ‘we cannot expect to achieve anything more than a disruptive effect. Whether this will lead to an erosion of the British will to fight is something that depends on imponderable and certainly unpredictable factors . . . A war of annihilation against Britain appears out of the question with the means at hand.’ Yet war with Britain was a ‘probability’ now: on 21 September Milch toured the loading airfields, haranguing the paratroops; on the twenty-second he attended a war conference with the Air Staff; on the twenty-third Hitler issued his ultimatum to Prague, to provide the pretext for his attack a week later.⁴⁴ This was no time for Göring to learn that the Luftwaffe had been supplied with inadequate aircraft.

As Felmy warned, unless forward airfields could be established in Belgium and Holland there was no German aircraft that could operate effectively against Britain. The Luftwaffe’s existing bombers could not penetrate farther than 430 miles with a half-ton bomb load. The four-engined bombers ordered by Milch and Wever had been scrapped in 1937. Recognizing that there was a need for them, Udet had decided in mid-1938 to order a different four-engined aircraft, the He 177, that would be capable of dive-bombing — a requirement that would involve coupling the engines in pairs to avoid weakening the wing structures.⁴⁵ Clearly the He 177 could not fly for at least a year, let alone enter mass production. It was in this situation that Göring was persuaded by Junkers’s general manager, Koppenberg, to order the mass production of an as yet untested aircraft, the Junkers 88 dive-bomber, with the highest priority.⁴⁶

Designed by Junkers to meet a 1935 requirement by Wever for a conventional high-speed bomber, the straight Ju 88 had first flown in 1936. Powered by two Jumo 211 engines, it promised to carry over two tons of bombs, fly nearly two thousand miles and reach speeds faster than 300 MPH. In December 1936, however, Udet had stated a fatal further requirement — that the Ju 88 should be capable of dive-bombing, in view of Germany’s disheartening experiences with conventional bombing in Spain. Junkers redesigned the aircraft and the

new prototype first flew on 1 June 1938.⁴⁷ Production began at the Dessau parent factory early in September. Göring was persuaded that this was the aircraft he needed. He would hear no evil of the Ju 88, despite a warning from the independent air industrialists that Junkers, as a State-owned company, might well be pulling the wool over his eyes about the aircraft's performance.⁴⁸ Late in September Göring proposed to Milch, Udet and Koppenberg that they should nominate the Ju 88 the Luftwaffe's standard bomber of the future, manufacturing 250 a month in half a dozen different factories. Udet was in favour, as was Jeschonnek, but Milch felt uneasy — not, as he stressed later in the war, out of personal antipathy toward Junkers⁴⁹ but because the dive-bomber's performance would suffer severely from the heavy air brakes and structural strengthening; he questioned whether it would be any improvement on the He 111 now being manufactured in large numbers.⁵⁰

He was overruled. Years later Göring tacitly acknowledged that Milch's prognosis was correct. 'I recall the marvellous circles they drew on their charts for me,' he said in 1943, 'showing the radii — how this aircraft could cruise up and down the west coast of Ireland attacking the enemy shipping lanes. But we *still* have not got any such aircraft!'⁵¹ All too trustingly the field marshal took the fateful step and appointed Koppenberg overlord for the manufacture of Ju 88 bombers, charged with dramatic powers to issue orders and take over the production of the participating companies — 'even those outside the Junkers group'.⁵² The field marshal sent this unique document to Koppenberg on 30 September, and enjoined him: 'Now let the signal be given, and create for me in the shortest possible time a mighty armada of Ju 88 bombers!' The first production model emerged from the assembly line early in January 1939; but in the months of tests that followed, considerable design faults in the dive-bomber version came to light.

By the time he signed the letter Göring was at Munich for Hitler's talks with the British, Italian and French leaders, and a breathing space had been gained. Milch had also been ordered to fly there — perhaps Hitler had intended to amass even more *dramatis personæ* than he had for his confrontation with the unfortunate Austrian chancellor Schuschnigg in February. (On that occasion he asked both Sperrle and Reichenau to be present, 'my two most brutal-

looking generals', as he confessed with a laugh to Milch⁵³). A month after Munich Hitler summoned his military commanders to Berchtesgaden and rewarded them as though it had been a military victory — promoting Udet to Lieutenant-General and Milch to Colonel-General (four-star rank). Field Marshal Göring warned Milch that he need expect no further promotion from now on.⁵⁴

The spirit of Munich did not last long. War with Britain had been postponed but not averted. In mid-October 1938 Hitler ordered Göring to 'execute a gigantic production programme, against which previous efforts would pale into insignificance'; in particular the Luftwaffe was to be 'expanded fivefold' forthwith.⁵⁵ On the fifteenth Göring and Milch conferred on the related problem of increasing the Luftwaffe's training capacity and on plans for a future air war with Britain, and on the twenty-sixth there was a further large conference at Karinhall on the Luftwaffe's requirements for air warfare against Britain and her shipping.* Here Jeschonnek, Stumpff's deputy, persuaded Göring to authorize the manufacture of 'as many He 177s as possible, and at least four wings' — indicating an establishment of a formidable force of five hundred of these four-engined long-range bombers — by the autumn of 1942, the completion date for the new 'concentrated aircraft production programme' under consideration.⁵⁶ Clearly it was hoped to postpone war with Britain until then.

The new programme did not escape controversy. Udet's department opposed it because the mere fuelling of over a hundred wings of aircraft — altogether about nineteen thousand aircraft — would require Germany to import about eighty-five percent of the world's current output of aviation spirit.⁵⁷ The chief of the organization branch, Colonel Josef Kammhuber, drafted a more moderate programme and Stumpff suggested that they should adopt this as an interim target. Milch apparently supported him and proposed in conference that they put it up to Göring, but to this Colonel Jeschonnek objected: 'In my

* German naval archives contain (in file PG/33046) an important exposition by Jeschonnek of the Luftwaffe's plans for the next two years, at an inter-service conference on 24 November 1938. The 'common enemy' of both navy and Luftwaffe was now recognized to be Britain.

view it is our duty not to betray the Führer's ideals like this!' So Milch took Jeschonnek to Göring instead. When they returned he announced, 'Gentlemen, the field marshal has decided that the Führer's programme is capable of execution.'⁵⁸ That settled the matter. Milch agreed the final programme with the Air Staff at the end of November 1938. Its weakness, as we can see in retrospect, was that it relied heavily on as yet completely unproven aircraft. Of the 31,300 aircraft to be manufactured under the programme by April 1942, 7,700 were Ju 88s and He 177s, the troubles of which will be related at length in later chapters. Suffice it to say that the Ju 88 was not satisfactory until 1943, and the He 177 had not even entered squadron service by the end of 1942.⁵⁹ In another respect an opportunity was also missed: by 1942 Udet planned to produce about one hundred fighter aircraft per month; this target compares strikingly with the peak output of 3,500 fighters per month achieved by Milch in 1944.

The stars of both Udet and Jeschonnek were firmly in the ascendant. On 1 February 1939 Göring founded a formidable new bureaucratic structure, the Office of Air Armament, whose director (*General-Luftzeugmeister* or GL) — incredibly to all who knew him — was to be Ernst Udet.⁶⁰ He was already head of the Technical Department, and this he had reorganized from its simple horizontal structure (research, development, procurement and budget) into a hopelessly complex vertical structure (airframes, aero-engines, *etc.*); but with this new post of GL came five research establishments like Rechlin and Peenemünde and a host of other offices. Udet would now control directly twenty-six subordinate offices. Even Milch, who positively relished desk work, had never tried to control more than four. Göring exercised no supervision, either: when inevitably the whole fragile structure crashed in 1941, the legal officers appointed to investigate established that with Göring, Udet talked only of old times.⁶¹

The final blow to Milch's active authority was delivered by Göring on the same date, 1 February 1939: he replaced Stumpff as Chief of Air Staff with Colonel Jeschonnek. Jeschonnek, son of a schoolmaster from Allenstein, was seven years younger than the state secretary, but a recognized prodigy ever since childhood. An army lieutenant by the time he was fifteen, he had served in the same fighter squadron in the First World War as Milch, and had subsequently

been associated with the work of the secret air force in Russia. For the first years of Milch's office Jeschonnek had been his principal staff officer, and General Wever had predicted that he would succeed him as Chief of Air Staff. As recently as the autumn of 1938 Jeschonnek had reminded Milch of this and asked when he might expect to replace Stumpff; Milch had sent him away with a flea in his ear, for out of their earlier father-and-son friendship had blossomed an ugly mutual contempt. The real reasons are obscure, but Milch himself has mentioned two. The first was an odd incident in 1934 when his car was flagged down by an SA officer who asked him if he would transport an injured storm-trooper to hospital after a motor accident; Milch had taken one look at the trooper's severe skull injuries and instructed that nobody move him until proper medical aid arrived. Jeschonnek denounced Milch to Göring for 'refusing to assist', and declined to recant even when all the authorities, including the SA officer concerned, bore Milch's version out. The second affair, irrevocably clouding their relations, was about two years later. Jeschonnek, now commanding the Operational Development Wing at Greifswald, was accused of causing the deaths of two crews by ordering that in practice low-level attacks on shipping their planes' airscrews had to touch the tops of the waves. Milch flew to Greifswald and advised the youthful wing commander that he would let him off the court martial he deserved and delivered a verbal reprimand, to save his career. Jeschonnek resented even the reprimand. Milch later wrote of him as 'a plucky, intelligent officer but narrow-minded and headstrong, and contemptuous of other walks of life'.⁶² Their feud became notorious throughout the Luftwaffe and was ended only by Jeschonnek's untimely death in 1943.⁶³

In mid-February 1939 Milch departed for his annual skiing holiday in the Austrian Alps. He had despatched to Göring the final plans for financing the large new aircraft programme and the necessary factory expansion, and motored down to Austria in his BMW. It was several weeks before the inevitable telegram arrived, at 1 A.M. on 12 March: his principal staff officer was hastening to a nearby town with an urgent memorized message for him. Milch met him a few hours later. The message was: 'The Czechoslovakian state is breaking up. It may become necessary for the Wehrmacht to intervene within the next few days.

The Führer has requested your immediate return to Berlin.' Milch telephoned Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant that he was on his way and arrived in Munich early on the thirteenth.⁶⁴

Not only he had been caught unawares. Göring was still on leave at San Remo, and some high army officers were equally distant from Berlin.⁶⁵ In Munich Milch learned from Jeschonnek and General Sperrle that Prague had dismissed the autonomous Slovak separatist government and was planning to enter Slovakia. Hitler therefore intended to act now to 'destroy' Czechoslovakia. The role of the Luftwaffe was obvious.⁶⁶ The warlike preparations were continued all day in Berlin, with Milch presiding over further conferences with Jeschonnek and Stumpff. This time there was a marked lack of enthusiasm from the public, which was usually so proud of its armed forces. During the afternoon Milch collected Göring from the station and in the evening the Czech President arrived from Prague. In the face of the Luftwaffe's very real preparations to destroy the city, which Göring earnestly described to him, President Hacha capitulated and agreed to the entry of German troops into his country next morning. Milch toured the airborne division and fighter squadrons, and the flak batteries hurriedly stationed within Berlin, in his capacity as 'Inspector-General'⁶⁷; but the Seventh Airborne Division was grounded by bad weather, so the Luftwaffe took little active part in the occupation. By its very existence it had done enough.

So once more a newly occupied European capital vibrated to a thousand German aircraft engines, as the Luftwaffe paraded over Prague on 17 March. In a hotel off Wenceslas Square the Czech Chief of Air Staff formally surrendered his air force and handed the document to Milch.⁶⁸ Udet and his experts toured the newly acquired factories and airfields and were astonished at the quantity and quality of the aircraft and equipment on hand.⁶⁹ All of it was absorbed by the Luftwaffe. On the seventeenth Göring accepted Milch's proposal for a fourth air force headquarters, *Luftflotte 4*, to command the new south-eastern sector, under the Austrian General Löhr, and four days later he returned to his holiday at San Remo. When the territory of Memel was returned to the Reich and Hitler formally entered the city on the twenty-third, Milch exercised his newly granted status as Göring's deputy for the first time, awaiting Hitler at the

gates of that ancient German city.⁷⁰

In Poland the transfer of Memel roused apprehensions lest a coup might be imminent against Danzig. The Polish government ordered partial mobilization and upon his return to Berlin Milch quoted the latest intelligence reports in his diary on 25 March: 'Fighting between Hungary and Slovakia; Poland is mobilizing against us, Rumania against Hungary, France against Italy. Sheer confusion amongst the rest.' On the same day Hitler disclosed to von Brauchitsch that he might well force a solution of the Danzig and Polish Corridor problems in the future; and when the German High Command (OKW) issued its annual directive on 3 April one section accordingly dealt with the possibility of an attack on Poland.⁷¹ The earliest date for this operation, *Fall Weiss*, was named as 1 September 1939. The OKW asked each service to submit a draft timetable of operations.

Of all this Göring remained happily unaware until his return from San Remo on 18 April. Then, over dinner one evening, Hitler suddenly said that Danzig must become German again and that there must be a solution to the Corridor problem. He would resort to war if all else failed, and he reminded Göring that he had prepared other situations skilfully, and this would be no exception.⁷² On the twenty-seventh Jeschonnek disclosed the Luftwaffe's plans within *Fall Weiss* to a large circle of officers including Milch: the Luftwaffe was to destroy the Polish air force first, then turn to the disruption of Polish mobilization efforts and tactical support for the German army.⁷³

The spectre of war with Britain was again raised, the more so since Britain had now offered a treaty to Poland, guaranteeing her assistance in the event of war. General Felmy conducted a three-day war exercise at the Second Air Force's Brunswick headquarters during May, based on a war with Britain; Milch flew to Brunswick on the thirteenth to hear the outcome.⁷⁴ Felmy concluded that the Luftwaffe could not possibly be ready for a major war in 1939, a view echoed a week later by the Air Staff's operations division in a study on 'Tactical Aims for the Luftwaffe in the Event of War against Britain in 1939'. The latter study emphasized right at the beginning, 'the equipment, state of training and strength of the Second Air Force cannot bring about a quick decision in any war with Britain in 1939.' In particular the He 111 bomber was inadequate in range

and numbers, suitable anti-shipping tactics had yet to be developed, and the standard of blind-flying was not high enough.⁷⁵ All this was precisely what Milch had been warning of all along. In 1933 he had asked for ten years to build the Luftwaffe into an efficient fighting service. But Göring was apparently unconvinced by the threat of war with Britain and departed from Berlin to resume once again his interrupted holiday in Italy on 3 May.

This easy lack of concern reassured Milch that war was still a distant prospect. Like Göring he had much to live for, and much to lose if war broke out. Some of his minister's luxurious inclination had rubbed off on him; while he never gave up his modest Steglitz flat, he too had become a keen huntsman and had built a hunting lodge in idyllic surroundings outside Berlin. Much of his time was consumed in furnishing this new home, and in family affairs. His elder daughter had married a Luftwaffe officer. Late in May, however, he attended a secret conference with Hitler which left him with the impression that this time war might not be averted. On the morning of 23 May 1939 Bodenschatz telephoned him and said that Hitler was going to address his C-in-Cs at four o'clock that afternoon; could Milch go in Göring's place? In Hitler's study in the Reich Chancery Milch found about a dozen chairs facing a small lectern. On the middle chair was a card with Göring's name and here he took his place flanked by Raeder on one side and Brauchitsch and the OKW's General Keitel on the other.⁷⁶

It is impossible to state with certainty what Hitler disclosed to them. A memorandum exists by Hitler's chief adjutant, Schmundt, but it was probably written long afterward for it lists as present both Göring and another officer who was absent, and the contents are in no way germane to the military situation of May 1939.⁷⁷ All the witnesses questioned about the conference seven years later at Nuremberg had been shown Schmundt's record first; most of them emphatically questioned its accuracy. Milch later wrote that Hitler's purpose was to warn his C-in-Cs against complacency, the belief that this time too he would solve Germany's problems without war; they should apply themselves more urgently to the armaments problem. In Nuremberg Prison Milch privately asked Raeder for his recollection; the admiral stressed at once that it was not an active preparation for war, but just Hitler 'letting his light as warlord

glow a little'.⁷⁸ Whatever was said, Milch's documents and the surviving records of the Reich Air Ministry betray no evidence consistent with active preparation for war until the beginning of August 1939.

There are certainly tokens of contingency planning. 'Can the Volkswagen works manufacture aero-engines in the event of war?' Göring asked of Udet on 21 June.⁷⁹ And on the twenty-third he pointed out to the Reich Defence Council that the disguised methods hitherto employed to move troops would be useless if a military operation should be launched 'unexpectedly and at short notice'.^{*} The Luftwaffe's expansion was due for completion in 1942, and as late as the end of July 1939 Göring calmly accepted the assessment by Milch and Udet that the ultimate strength of five thousand Ju 88 bombers would be reached in April 1943.⁸¹ On 22 July 1939 Raeder confirmed to his officers that the Führer had given him an undertaking that no war was at hand.⁸² Hitler made similar statements to Milch, when the latter reported that recently in Rome Mussolini had also stated, 'War is inevitable, but we shall try to postpone it until 1942.' Hitler reassured Milch that the Duce's fear of war breaking out even then was quite mistaken.⁸³

None the less, on 8 June Milch and Udet took their anxieties about the continued shortage of raw materials for the Luftwaffe to Rudolf Hess, to prod him into interceding with Hitler on the Luftwaffe's behalf; currently the warship construction programme had the highest priority for materials and manpower.⁸⁴ Milch knew, perhaps better than anyone else, how unprepared the Luftwaffe was. They still lacked trained commanders at every level. They had fuel stores sufficient for war operations for six months at most.⁸⁵ The bomb dumps held enough bombs for about three weeks' hostilities against a small enemy and most of these were 10-kilogramme bombs secretly purchased by the Reichswehr a decade before; sample quantities of 50- and 250-kilogramme bombs and a very few 500-kilogramme bombs had been manufactured for the Spanish War, but all larger sizes were still on the drawing board.⁸⁶ Hitler forbade the manufacture of more, explaining to Milch, 'Nobody inquires whether

* Göring warned, 'In the field of transport, for example, Germany is still not ready for war. There were no real troop movements involved in the three operations of 1938 and 1939.'⁸⁰

I have any bombs or ammunition, it is the number of aircraft and guns that count.' Only 182,000 tons of steel had been allocated to air force equipment and ammunition in the year ending 1 April 1939, compared with 380,400 tons for the expansion of the industry and civil aviation. Hardly can a nation have planned for world war within one year with less foresight than Germany in 1939.

The only lasting solution was to impress Hitler with the Luftwaffe's potential. In mid-April 1939 Milch had already proposed to Göring that they should lay on a display to show Hitler their most advanced weaponry: 'The Luftwaffe must make use of such a display to win support for its expansion programme, since if war does break out it will have to bear the brunt of the fighting in the west virtually alone for the next few years.' Göring agreed, and a dress rehearsal was laid on for the Italians toward the end of June, at Rechlin.⁸⁷

The special display for Hitler was arranged on 3 July, a fine summer afternoon. It was to have significant effects on Hitler's thinking, for he evidently drew conclusions about the Luftwaffe's operational readiness which would have been better drawn from a visit to operational squadrons, not to a research establishment. The equipment at Rechlin was beyond doubt the most advanced in the world: there was the He 100 fighter and its rival, the Me 109, which had just smashed the Heinkel's world speed record; there was the world's first rocket-propelled interceptor aircraft, the He 176; the Führer was also shown the new 30-millimetre aircraft cannon, the MK 101, a weapon of annihilating effect, mounted in an Me 110 twin-engined fighter jacked up in the firing butts. Hitler saw a heavily overloaded He 111 bomber thunder into the air with rocket-assisted take-off units. In the laboratories he inspected a high-altitude pressurized cockpit and a new Luftwaffe procedure for starting aero-engines in sub-zero temperatures.⁸⁸ General Milch was undoubtedly pleased at the impression made on Hitler and there is no evidence that he recognized the damage that had been done.* The display did not better the Luftwaffe's raw materials posi-

* This is disputed by the field marshal in postwar accounts, where he has claimed that he warned Hitler that none of these new weapons would be in service for five years at least.⁸⁹

tion, but now Hitler, like the French War Minister Ferdinand Leboeuf seventy years before, believed that his forces were *archi-prêts* for war.

Four years later the squadrons were still waiting for most of the equipment he had seen in 1939. The Führer never forgave the Luftwaffe for this. In 1942 Göring was to complain, 'Do you know, I once witnessed a display before the war at Rechlin, compared with which I can only say — what bunglers all our professional magicians are! Because the world has never before and never will again see the likes of what was conjured up before my — and far worse, the Führer's — eyes at Rechlin!'⁹⁰ He resolved never to set foot inside Rechlin again, and when none the less he did in May 1942 he again recalled with bitterness that July day in 1939: 'The Führer reached the most serious decisions as a result of that display,' he said. 'It was a miracle that things worked out as well as they did, and that the consequences were not far worse.'⁹¹ Hitler himself expressed similar recriminations to his acting Chief of Air Staff in the summer of 1944.⁹²

The non-production of the equipment was not Göring's fault alone. Both verbally and in writing Göring stressed to his staff Hitler's interest in the 30-millimetre cannon (Hitler had emphasized, 'We just can't have too many heavy-calibre weapons') and the high-altitude cockpit.⁹³ On 20 July Udet was informed, 'The field marshal [Göring] emphasized the significance of the high-altitude bomber and demanded that the trials should be speeded up by all means at our disposal. In this connection he also mentioned the development of a high-altitude fighter aircraft.'⁹⁴ Göring also ordained the rapid manufacture of three thousand 30-millimetre cannon. None of these orders was followed up. Four years later Milch was forced to reopen the long-closed file on high-altitude fighter and bomber aircraft; and as for the 30-millimetre cannon, by 1943 only 220 had been manufactured, none of which had reached the front-line squadrons. Udet's office actively blocked some of the most advanced research undertaken by independent aircraft designers. Göring's request for research into building aircraft from wood laminates was ignored. The He 100 was dropped although 50 MPH faster than the standard Me 109, and when Heinkel protested Udet's chief engineer wrote on 12 July forbidding him to pursue the matter.⁹⁵ Udet adopted the same half-comic attitude toward all new inventions. Of Heinkel's rocket-propelled interceptor, the He 176, he jested, 'Every take-off

that prospers is a crash that miscarries, in that thing', and he ordered the prototype to be shipped to a Berlin aviation museum; here it was destroyed in an Allied air raid in 1943.⁹⁶ When, a few weeks later, the world's first pure jet aircraft, the He 178, flew no contract was forthcoming; Udet had already promised jet-fighter development to Messerschmitt. Certainly Milch — who saw the Heinkel jet flying in November 1939 — should have intervened, but Udet continued to confer alone with Göring, and kept him in the dark.

During these weeks Milch had only one personal conversation with his minister, on 21 July; Göring's yacht *Karin II* was moored in a Westphalian waterway. Milch reported his impressions of a recent visit to Brussels and of the respects paid by King Leopold to a young Luftwaffe officer killed in the air display there; but the Belgian public had displayed open hostility, and the RAF officers who had been friendly toward him in London were now cool and aloof. RAF Battles and Blenheims had carried out mock attacks on the crowds at the display. In Brussels, reported Milch, their London air attaché had left him in no doubt that Britain would honour her obligations toward Poland. He reminded Göring that their young Luftwaffe had so far experienced five different Chiefs of Air Staff, and its latest was but a colonel; for the sake of continuity he begged Göring to make more use of him. Göring readily agreed, but as readily forgot about it afterward.⁹⁷

By August 1939 it was plain that the important Ju 88 programme had gone wrong. Although being mass produced at half a dozen factories under Koppenberg's impetuous overall direction, it had still not reached the operational squadrons. Milch's own enthusiasm for Koppenberg had long waned, but not Udet's: the GL, who was an outstanding cartoonist, had drawn admiring caricatures of his friend 'Koppenbergini' conjuring multiple Ju 88s out of a hat; and of Koppenberg as a bull in the industry's china-shop, putting his indolent and contrary rivals all to flight. But the early test flights at Rechlin were costing lives and precious time. The eventual peak output was set at 172 per month, but Udet advised Hitler at Rechlin that this was impossible because of the aluminium shortage; Göring reluctantly approved cuts in the other aircraft types to allow the Ju 88 target to be met. On 20 July Udet admitted to Göring that the

design faults now showing up would set them back three months. In April Göring could boast to Mussolini, ‘Such is the range of this bomber that it can not only attack Britain but also carry on to the west and bomb the shipping lanes across the Atlantic!’ By March 1943 he would know better: ‘The plane has so far not even flown as far as Ireland,’ he raged. ‘Now can you understand my boundless exasperation! What you people have been turning out is the product of a pig-sty!’⁹⁸

Milch watched the project’s difficulties with the mixed feelings of one whose predictions have been proved correct, but whose country will suffer the consequences. Originally planned as a super-fast bomber weighing only about six tons, the Ju 88 had rapidly put on weight as the list of Air Staff requirements grew. A vicious circle had developed: being heavier, it was slower; and being slower, it needed heavier armament after all; and all this drastically reduced its range. By mid-1939 the plane’s all-up weight on take-off was over twelve tons. Small wonder that Milch termed it a ‘flying barn door’. Udet hotly disputed that its speed had suffered, but to his intimates he showed a marked uneasiness. ‘The main thing is, the plane does fly’, he pointed out to Ernst Heinkel. ‘Only Milch still has any objections — but he always was a stick-in-the-mud in my view. He never commits himself, so that it is impossible afterward to pin anything onto him should things go wrong.’⁹⁹

On 5 August Göring urgently ordered Milch, Udet and Jeschonnek to discuss a radical change in the ‘concentrated aircraft programme’ next day; they met on the sixth in the stateroom of *Karin II*, as it steamed the twenty miles from Lüneburg to Hamburg. Göring now demanded a Luftwaffe of attack — he was going to activate thirty-two new bomber wings by 1 April 1943 — 4,330 aircraft, of which 2,460 were to be Ju 88s. This colossal expansion of the bomber force was to be effected at the expense of every other kind of aircraft, such as transporters and training aircraft. It was to be a *Blitzkrieg* Luftwaffe. Jeschonnek duly rephrased the Air Staff’s requirements three days later: the aircraft industry was to concentrate on the He 177, Ju 88 and Me 210. The latter, a twin-engined dive-bomber and ground-attack plane, being an extended version of the Me 110 yet to be built.¹⁰⁰ In terms of totals, the Air Staff asked for 2,460 Ju 88s, 800 He 177s and 3,000 Me 210s by April 1943; it is a measure of the disaster

that was to come that by that date the Luftwaffe had in fact only one *squadron* with less than a dozen He 177s in service, while the Me 210 had been scrapped as useless in the spring of 1942, leaving acres of storage space crammed with useless, corroding wings, fuselages and components. Göring ordered Koppenberg to report with the others to him again on the fifteenth, to discuss the feasibility of producing 300 Ju 88s a month; Udet demanded a Führer decree equivalent to that secured by the navy in January, and this was signed by Hitler on 21 August.¹⁰¹

By that date the political situation had sharply altered. On 14 August Hitler summoned Göring and the other C-in-Cs to Berchtesgaden and informed them of his decision to attack Poland. Göring immediately ordered Milch to join him there, and Milch flew down on the fifteenth from Prague, where he had been inspecting Luftwaffe units. At 11 a.m. Göring told him of Hitler's resolve — the Führer considered the coming crisis a test of nerves, and he would show the Poles his were the stronger. This could not be said of Göring, who seemed to Milch particularly apprehensive of the future. Milch flew back to Berlin and briefed the departmental heads and Jeschonnek along the guidelines Göring had given him. For the next three days his principal task was issuing the directives for war, in Göring's name.¹⁰²

He took it all at a leisurely pace, retiring from the August heat of Berlin to the cool of his forest hunting lodge each evening, while the Luftwaffe machine slowly wound up for Armageddon. On the twenty-first he was recalled to Göring's Obersalzberg villa to confer with the four *Luftflotte* commanders, Generals Kesselring, Felmy, Sperrle and Löhr. Udet had brought the latest figures on British, French and Polish fighters and bombers. At that moment eleven production Ju 88s were on hand at Rechlin, and four more would become available before the twenty-eighth, 'provided no unforeseen technical problems occur.' This was hardly the armada of Ju 88s Göring had called for a year before. At this final Luftwaffe conference Göring disclosed that Hitler planned to attack Poland early on the twenty-sixth. Luftwaffe operations would be controlled by the First and Fourth Air Forces (Kesselring and Löhr). Göring was a different man from the nervous apparition of six days before; he an-

nounced that Stalin had telegraphed Hitler his agreement to an immediate pact with Germany.¹⁰³ ‘Russia will not march against us now,’ he beamed. Russia and Germany as allies? At that moment, Milch must have recalled the admiring suggestion of a Russian NCO he took prisoner in March 1915: ‘*Russki soldier und Prusski officer — whole world kaput!*’¹⁰⁴

Hitler summoned fifty of his senior commanders to the Berghof next day and delivered a harangue in the tradition of Caesar and of Hannibal. In effect he proclaimed that there was to be a short war, a just war and a war which Germany could not lose. ‘It is a matter of war and victory, not of law and justice!’ Poland now stood alone. The Luftwaffe would ‘grind away’ the enemy, and — an evident echo of his visit to Rechlin — ‘our technical superiority will mangle every Polish nerve’. Britain had only 150 flak guns in the entire country — equivalent to one month’s output in Germany. No discussion followed the lengthy speech.¹⁰⁵ Göring had his closer relatives withdrawn from front-line units and posted to the rear; and perhaps to camouflage his action he withdrew Milch’s relatives as well. Milch, more honourably, casually despatched his own family from Berlin to a holiday on the Baltic coast. He himself camped in the Air Ministry building each night. On 25 August Hitler ordered the attack to begin at 4.45 A.M. next morning.

Scarcely was this order issued, however, than it was countermanded. Early on the twenty-sixth Milch was summoned first to Karinhall — where he found Göring had already left — and then to the Reich Chancery. In Hitler’s study he found an atmosphere of gloom. Hitler was vehemently cursing Italy; Ribbentrop and Keitel were nodding their agreement. Hitler said the Italians were finding excuses not to join the attack on Poland and the British had accordingly ratified their pact with Poland. Milch read the latest Italian communication and exclaimed, ‘*Mein Führer*, this is the best thing that could have happened! For if the Italians were to march against us, then we should have to divert troops against them; if Italy joins forces with us, then the enemy will always know precisely where the chink in our armour is; but if they stay benevolent neutrals, we can obtain all manner of goods from them — raw materials, oil and war supplies.’ This was an aspect Hitler had evidently not considered and over lunch he brightened considerably. He believed that Britain was counting on Poland to

give way.¹⁰⁶

That night Milch slept at the Luftwaffe underground operations centre outside Potsdam. Göring's special war train, a collection of purpose-built conference cars, wireless rooms and flat tops with 20-millimetre flak mountings, had also been shunted into the compound; here Milch and Jeschonnek were summoned at 3.30 A.M. on the twenty-seventh, as Göring drove up from Berlin. He announced that King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy was responsible for Mussolini's refusal to honour his Pact of Steel commitments. Later that day the four *Luftflotte* commanders were given their final briefing, and on the twenty-eighth Milch toured the airfields of General Grauert's First Air Division, from which the main attack would be launched.¹⁰⁷ On the afternoon of 31 August the executive order was issued to the Luftwaffe to open the attack on Poland next day.¹⁰⁸ Göring still believed that hostilities could be localized to Poland, but Milch did not share this illusion: everything he had seen in Britain pointed the other way. On 3 September 1939 Britain and France declared war on Germany, and within a year the Luftwaffe was to be locked in combat with an adversary to whom Douhet's principles could not so easily be applied.

P A R T I I

WORLD WAR TOO SOON



'The war is to continue!'

Hitler to Milch, 12 October 1939

C H A P T E R 4

THE RAINMAKER

September 1939–May 1940

AT THE OUTBREAK of the war the Luftwaffe was formidable in size but suffered from a weak substructure. Its basic strength before mobilization in August 1939 was some 370,000 men, of which 208,000 were in the air force (including 20,000 aircrew and 1,500 paratroops), 107,000 were in the flak and 58,000 were in the air signals units.¹ Its basic weaknesses, in Milch's view, looking back after the war, were the following: its vertical organization in four territorially determined *Luftflotte* commands was proper for home defence, but unsuitable for carrying the attack far beyond Germany's frontiers. There was too little consultation between the three services, and only the most inadequate joint manœuvres. Milch would have preferred a horizontal organization, with all-Reich commands for fighters, bombers and the ground Observer Corps, on the British models. The airfields had not been built with an eye to the size of the new generation of aircraft that was to come; indeed the Luftwaffe still lacked a long-range strategic bomber aircraft (the He 177, designed to fill this gap, would not fly until November), it lacked night bombers, bombs larger than one thousand pounds, air torpedoes, modern mines, modern armament and bombsights. Many of the shortcomings, such as the absence of air-to-air communication facilities between bomber formations and their escorting fighter groups, were to become evident only in 1940; others, such as the Luftwaffe's inadequate investment in ground-to-air guided missile development, not until 1943.²

As war now broke out, the Luftwaffe did still field the largest air force fleet in the world: 4,093 first-line aircraft (of which 3,646 were operational) were available, including 1,176 bombers, 408 twin-engined and 771 single-engined fighters and 552 Ju 52 transport aircraft (mostly still on loan to training schools).³ But there were wholly inadequate reserves and the air industry's capacity was only a quarter of what it was later to become under Milch's direction. Germany had no significant stockpiles of materials such as aluminium, magnesium or rubber. In short, the indications are that world war came three years sooner than Hitler expected.

The local conflict in Poland lasted less than a month. Each evening Milch reported to Göring at his Potsdam headquarters and each morning he set out early in his fast Dornier bomber and toured the battlefields of east Prussia and Silesia, or climbed into a Fieseler Storch and dropped in on local air commanders. In this way he gained insight into their requirements and the course of the battle.

On 13 September Milch accompanied a Luftwaffe dive-bomber attack. He took off with about 180 Stukas; Kesselring was relying on dive-bombers for the main attacks on Warsaw, to ensure that at this stage only the strictly military targets were hit.⁴ The Polish capital put up a wall of flak as the Ju 87s peeled off and dived on their targets, their 'Udet sirens' screaming in the slipstream. From his Do 17 Milch could see every bomb blast, and he reported the results of the attack to Göring afterward. With the possible exception of the saturation attack on the Polish capital at the end of the campaign, no strategic bombing was attempted during this phase; the Luftwaffe restricted itself to army support operations.⁵

After twenty-two days the main fight was over, but the air force had exhausted over half its bomb supplies.⁶ Compared with the army's losses, however, the Luftwaffe's casualties were very low: they had lost 285 of the 1,939 aircraft in the Polish theatre; and Milch's private papers show that the air force had lost 239 airmen, with a further 88 missing, one-fifth being officers. By comparison, the Luftwaffe lost a further 520 airmen killed and 298 missing during the 'phoney war' operations from 1 September 1939 to the end of March 1940

on the western front, for no subsequent gain.⁷

On 27 September Hitler instructed his C-in-Cs that he intended to open an offensive against France as soon as possible.⁸ The Luftwaffe's most serious problem was that the bomber force would exhaust its remaining supply of bombs within the first two weeks of any new campaign. At first Hitler refused to allow the Luftwaffe to resume bomb production, but by 12 October 1939 he had to accept that both Britain and France had rejected his terms. He summoned Göring, Milch and Udet and announced, 'You may now manufacture bombs again. The war is to continue!'⁹ He held them personally responsible for ensuring adequate stocks when he opened his campaign in the west. Milch proposed to Göring that he should be given dictatorial powers, above Udet's head, to organize an urgent bomb-production programme. Göring agreed. It was now that Milch remembered a visit he and Udet had paid two years before to a Swiss factory specializing in the manufacture of concrete bombs filled with shrapnel.¹⁰ He ordered a factory outside Berlin to start churning out concrete bombs at once, and on his return from Norway in April 1940 learnt that a stockpile of several million concrete bombs had been produced, which he considered enough.*

The prolongation of the war took Ernst Udet, as Director of Air Armament, by surprise. When he and Milch visited the Heinkel factories on the Baltic coast at the beginning of November to see the He 177 heavy bomber and the He 178 jet aircraft (the latter in flight), Udet took Heinkel aside and murmured to him, 'I never really thought there would be war with Britain.'¹² Increasingly it was now Milch who had to step into this breach left by Udet, giving advice on the maze of technical problems facing them.

* At the time he even believed the fifty-kilo concrete bombs superior to the small H.E. steel-cased bombs. Later he changed his opinion. In a conference in November 1942 he admitted, 'The tests carried out here quite clearly establish the opposite. I am obliged to change my view. The others (the concrete bombs) are thus only of use as a stop-gap, as was intended at the time.' But he added, 'I am no champion of the concrete bomb, but if the French campaign had started right after the Polish one, we in the Luftwaffe would probably have been relegated to the sidelines. The war would have been over for us on the fifth day.'¹¹

Meanwhile, in Berlin Göring prepared for the new campaign with frequent nervous conferences — in Milch's view to indicate to Hitler how alert he really was. On 5 November Hitler fixed the new date as the twelfth, but he bowed to the Luftwaffe's requirement of five days' fine weather so that the French air force could be destroyed. Göring presided over daily meteorological conferences and took frequent counsel of his chief weather expert, Diesing.¹³ The one thing Göring feared most was fine weather, with the Luftwaffe as unready as it was. Milch could see the various pressures that Hitler and Göring brought to bear on this expert, but Diesing would not give way. '*Mein Führer*', he said once, 'I will gladly be bold and predict fine weather for three days, but not foolhardy — not five days!' Göring even consulted a 'rainmaker', a certain Herr Schwefler who professed to influence the weather; he was paid a hundred thousand marks, but whether Göring instructed him to make five days' good or five months' bad weather proved immaterial, for his equipment later turned out to be a broken domestic wireless set.¹⁴

Both Hitler and Milch were aware that time was working to Germany's disadvantage. Intelligence put the combined British and French air strength at 1,782 bombers and 1,823 fighters on 1 January 1940, of which perhaps sixty percent were operational. Milch knew that both Britain and France were purchasing aircraft from America — he even knew the precise figures — so it was only a matter of time before the Luftwaffe found itself confronted by a numerically equal enemy.

Hitler now fixed the date for the attack on Belgium, Holland and France for 17 January. Belgium and Holland had been particularly included at Jeschonnek's request, to provide advance Luftwaffe bases from which to attack Britain and defend the Reich's airspace.¹⁵ But a week before — even as Milch was accepting a high decoration at the hands of the Belgian ambassador — a light aircraft from General Felmy's Second Air Force strayed over the Belgian frontier and crash-landed; the aircraft had been carrying an unauthorized passenger, and he in turn had been carrying the entire operational plans for an airborne unit in the attack on Belgium due a few days hence. When Milch went to Karinhall next day to congratulate Göring on his birthday the field marshal was still in agonies of uncertainty about the incident.¹⁶

The news was the blackest mark so far against the reputation of the whole air force. Göring later said, ‘The Führer rebuked me frightfully, as the C-in-C of the unfortunate courier, for having allowed a major part of our western mobilization and the very fact of such German plans to be betrayed. Look what a ghastly burden on my nerves it is to know that in the Führer’s view my Luftwaffe officers have thrown this, the German people’s mortal struggle, into jeopardy!’¹⁷ The episode nearly finished Göring, so seriously did Hitler view this security lapse; Göring sacrificed Felmy and his chief of staff, Colonel Kammlhuber, and dismissed them immediately *pour encourager les autres*.¹⁸ Opportunist that Milch undoubtedly was, and glimpsing a chance to escape Berlin, he urged Göring to give him the vacant Second Air Force command. Göring was not averse to this, but Jeschonnek flatly objected. Göring gave the post to General Kesselring.¹⁹

The German legation in Brussels made discreet inquiries to find out whether the documents had been safely destroyed. That evening Milch found Göring somewhat more relaxed since word had arrived from General Wenninger, the attaché in Brussels, that the officers were claiming to have burnt them. Göring tried to burn a comparable bundle of documents himself, but the result was inconclusive. At his wife’s suggestion he consulted clairvoyants and they sagely — though inaccurately, as we now know — pronounced that no trace of the incriminating documents had survived.²⁰ In any event, as Milch noted in his diary next day, the ‘big event’ had been ‘postponed for some days because of the weather (thaw)’. Three days later Hitler postponed the operation until the spring.

The winter was exceptionally severe. The canals froze over and raw material movements inside Germany came to a standstill. The aircraft in squadron service were found to be unequal to the cold: the oxygen equipment of the fighters failed at high altitudes and the guns jammed, and several lives were lost through causes like these.²¹ But gradually the *Luftflotte* commanders were able to report that their bomb dumps were filling up; a number of 2,200-pounders had reached them by the end of January and they had about two hundred thousand of the scarce 110-pounders by the end of March.²²

Aircraft production itself was still falling short of expectations; for this the

shortage of steel and duralumin was partly to blame. Early in February 1940 Göring ordered that as an economy any Wehrmacht project which would not bear fruit until after the war was over was to be ruthlessly cancelled, with the exception of the plan of Professor Krauch, director of IG Farben, for the synthetic production of fuel. But how long was the war to last? The official record of Göring's conference gave a clue: 'Those projects are considered vital which will be completed in 1940 or will be bearing fruit by 1941 at the latest.'²³ Ernst Udet accordingly cancelled the Jumo 004 jet engine until further notice, along with the Me 262 jet airframe; other important fields of research like ground-to-air missiles were also set back.²⁴ When voices were raised in protest Udet brushed them aside: 'Now that I am a full general,' he told aircraft manufacturer Ernst Heinkel, 'the squadrons will just have to accept the aircraft I give them.'²⁵

Outwardly Milch and Udet were still the closest friends, but Milch was increasingly irked by the other's direct access to Field Marshal Göring. One day in March 1940, as they were all three returning from a tour of the operational squadrons in the west, Göring began to praise the Director of Air Armament for all they had seen. Milch angrily pointed out that not all the credit was due to Udet: the He 111 had first been ordered by Lufthansa and the other aircraft and engines had been ordered long before Udet's appointment.²⁶ Since war had broken out there had been no increase in aircraft output (in the first four months only 1,869 aircraft had been delivered — less than the output of one month after Milch took over). Milch later learned that whereas crankshaft output from two factories had been 6,700 a month in 1938 and 1939, a year later the output was only 7,900 ('as though war had not broken out on 1 September 1939').²⁷ Some of Milch's words must have sunk into Göring, because next time he held a conference on aircraft production with Udet he asked Milch to be present as well.²⁸ These developments undoubtedly gave Udet food for thought.

After the *Altmark* incident, Hitler accelerated planning for a possible German invasion of Norway.²⁹ At the beginning of the year he had circulated a

Wehrmacht study to the three services, providing for a planning staff under a Luftwaffe general to devise possible invasion plans for Norway. Erhard Milch was the general selected to head this small staff, code-named ‘Oyster’, and it held its first and last meeting on 14 January.³⁰ But he also fell victim to the Felmy incident. The more the Führer had pondered the less satisfied he was of the Luftwaffe’s ability to keep secrets. In any campaign against Norway — where the German navy would be at huge disadvantage — surprise was of the essence. He ordered the study to be recalled, ‘Oyster’ to be dissolved, and all further planning to be confined to the cloisters of the High Command.³¹ Here the preparations were coordinated by a navy captain, while an army corps commander, General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, was appointed to direct the actual operation. Initially air operations would be conducted by General Hans Geisler’s Tenth Air Corps, consisting of a number of bomber and fighter squadrons.

The Wehrmacht invaded Norway and Denmark on 9 April 1940, in a lightning coup a few hours before British forces, which had already been embarked, could undertake a similar operation of their own for the occupation of Norway. The Special Transport Squadron 172, established from Lufthansa crews under the company’s traffic manager, ferried hundreds of troops in Ju 52s to the airfields seized by paratroops in Norway.³² The Luftwaffe’s first preoccupation was to consolidate its hold on the airfields, from which General Geisler’s bombers could attack the Royal Navy’s units that now hastened to Norway’s aid.

Göring told Milch that he was to be given an operational command at last: he was to establish a Fifth Air Force command in Norway, to control the Tenth Air Corps’s operations there. He would not lose his jealously guarded rights as state secretary and as Göring’s representative in Berlin, but Norway was to come first, as a prologue to the main air war against Britain. In addition to directing Luftwaffe support of Falkenhorst’s operations — now increasingly hampered by the Norwegian resistance — Milch was to expand, modernize and increase in number the airfields in Norway and Denmark. As soon as the attack on France became imminent he would be recalled to Berlin at once.³³

It seems in retrospect that Göring had two reasons for putting Milch in charge of the new air force. If the Norwegian campaign went against the Germans, Milch would get the blame; and he wanted to get him away from Berlin

and his troubled protégé Udet. Significantly, when Milch suggested locating Fifth Air Force headquarters in Hamburg, because of communication problems inside Norway, Göring insisted on Oslo. The result was that Milch had inadequate communication with the most important airfield, Stavanger, and with the (totally unsuitable) emergency airfield at Trondheim, as there were no cables or telephone lines and the wireless signals were screened by high mountains.

Milch attacked the new task with vigour. In southern Norway the Luftwaffe was operating about six hundred fighters, bombers and reconnaissance aircraft, and over six hundred transporters had airlifted the German troops to this theatre. It was vital to consolidate their hold on the main airfields — Stavanger (Sola), Oslo (Fornebu and Kjeller) and Trondheim (Vaernes) — as air superiority was to be the key to the struggle. In the south it would be virtually complete, as the enemy had no airfields at all; but near Narvik the British managed in time to establish two fighter squadrons and these made long-range Luftwaffe support operations extremely hazardous. Milch flew to Hamburg to await a chance to set up his headquarters in Oslo; by 13 April Göring was already telephoning repeatedly from Berlin, urging the Luftwaffe to launch full-scale air operations in support of the beleaguered forces at Narvik.³⁴

Bad weather now kept Milch grounded in Hamburg for several days. He attended four days of conferences with the Air Staff and Hitler on the crisis in northern Norway, complicated by a British seaborne landing at Namsos, 125 miles by road north of the major port of Trondheim, which was obviously the objective. There were also reconnaissance reports of an imminent British landing at Åndalsnes, 200 miles by road to the south. (The latter operation did not in fact take place until the seventeenth.) The Namsos landing was unopposed and in considerable strength; if Trondheim were captured by the British it would make the relief of Narvik impossible and would jeopardize the whole operation. When the first reports of the landings near Trondheim reached Hitler he sent for Göring, Milch and Jeschonnek to confer on means of containing the British forces believed to be at Åndalsnes: he recommended that with even more urgency than the support operations for General Dietl's men at Narvik, the air force should rush paratroops to the endangered area, strafe armoured trains and employ what he called 'Udet bombers' — i.e., dive-bombers

— to sink the British warships offshore. The small harbour of Åndalsnes itself should be destroyed by KG 4's bombers, together with the invading troops it contained. Hitler also directed that the railway lines near Åndalsnes should be cut, but only temporarily (the important viaducts should be left intact). If the German-controlled railways elsewhere were sabotaged the nearest villages were to be wiped out.³⁵ Milch was urgently to improve Vaernes airfield, about twenty miles east of Trondheim, and to enlarge a second landing ground there, for Stuka and transport squadrons. Milch telephoned these instructions to General Geisler in Hamburg at once.

He flew to Stavanger on 16 April. Geisler's squadrons there were heavily committed to operations against British naval units. The British found it almost impossible to attack Trondheim's Vaernes airfield and instead bombarded ships and aircraft on Stavanger's airfield, starting on the seventeenth.³⁶ By 18 April the British had landed thirteen thousand men at Namsos and Åndalsnes and von Falkenhorst had the gravest fears for the German campaign's future. Milch ordered the Luftwaffe's twin-engined fighters and bombers to maintain their attack on the enemy troops. On 19 April the Luftwaffe delivered a devastating attack on the harbour and town of Namsos and left it in ruins. A few days later the British commander advised London, 'I see little chance of carrying out decisive, or indeed any, operations, unless enemy air activity is considerably restricted.'³⁷

Toward the end of April the Germans' situation in northern Norway further worsened, causing recrimination between the army and the Luftwaffe. Göring sent his staff officers to Oslo in order to report on Milch, but the latter kept his nerve throughout, even when the besieged Dietl's position at Narvik seemed quite hopeless. Von Falkenhorst visited Milch, thoroughly dejected, and advised him, 'We will all have to get back on the ships — we are just not getting anywhere.' Their only hope was still more air support.³⁸ Milch did what he could. Two giant ex-Lufthansa Do 26 seaplanes were loaded with mountain troops and flown to Narvik (where they met a sticky end). At the same time a final effort was made to dislodge the Allied troops fighting their way toward Trondheim. Göring continued to intervene with 'idiotic telegrams' from Berlin. The breakthrough at Bagn on the twenty-seventh, greatly aided by dive-

bomber support, spelt the end of Norwegian and British resistance in central Norway. On the twenty-eighth the evacuation of all troops at Namsos and Åndalsnes was ordered by the British; they left on 3 May, the transports and escorts pursued by the Luftwaffe's bombers all the way. All of Norway, except for Narvik, where Dietl's mixed force of six thousand soldiers and sailors were holding twenty thousand Allied troops at bay, was now under German control.

For the Norwegian operation, Erhard Milch's only field command in the Second World War, he was awarded the Knight's Cross. Hitler was later to utter high words of praise for Milch's contribution to the campaign. In conference with Speer and others he recalled how the colonel-general had taken control of the situation as soon as he arrived in Norway, a situation which to others had appeared all but lost. 'And why? Because here was a man like me, who just did not know the word *impossible*'.³⁹

C H A P T E R 5

A QUESTION OF TIME

May–July 1940

IN THE FIRST DAYS of the attack on France and the Low Countries the Luftwaffe lived up to its reputation. Despite the recent diversion to Norway, Göring had marshalled nearly four thousand aircraft for the new offensive, including 1,482 bombers and dive-bombers, 42 ground-attack aircraft, 248 twin-engined and 1,016 single-engined fighters. The Allies had mustered 1,151 fighters in France, but very many fewer bombers than the Germans. At dawn on 10 May 1940 wave after wave of German aircraft crossed the frontiers and attacked over seventy of the enemy's airfields, destroying large numbers of aircraft on the ground. Göring's airborne troops seized key targets like the Moerdijk bridge in Holland and the Rotterdam strong points, while gliders silently landed on the fortresses of Belgium and took them by surprise. With almost complete air superiority achieved, the Luftwaffe changed to close support of the army's operations, battering a way for the columns of tanks and field-grey infantry storming in their wake. Thanks to Milch's early insistence on mobility, the Luftwaffe's squadrons were able to leapfrog forward from one captured airfield to the next, so that close air support was never lacking. By the evening of 11 May there were reports that the enemy's air forces had lost up to a thousand aircraft already.

Milch flew his Dornier over the front line almost every day of the French campaign, witnessing every major battle; not without reason Ernst Udet sketched a winged Milch, camera in hand, hovering above the battlefields. Late

on 15 May Göring's special train, *Asia*, left Potsdam for the western front; at 11 A.M. next morning it reached its specially prepared site outside a railway tunnel near the French border. Every morning Milch attended Göring's war conference to report on the most advanced squadrons and armoured spearheads, then set out for six or seven hours in a Dornier and a Storch. In the evening he again reported on what he had seen and Göring retailed Milch's reconnaissance report — sketched on a chart just as he had taught his airmen in the First World War — to Hitler's headquarters not far away. Milch's reports were both more accurate and swifter than the routine army reconnaissance reports. The rate of advance was spectacular; the Luftwaffe's squadron flags fluttered from air-fields farther and farther to the west.

It was clear that the first battle for France was nearly over. As the British Expeditionary Force — over a quarter of a million soldiers — withdrew to the Channel ports, the German armour poised to cut them off.

It was Hermann Göring who persuaded the Führer to concentrate his army on other more immediate tasks than the capture of Dunkirk.¹ He saw it as an opportunity of scoring over the army and emphasizing the Luftwaffe's prowess; after the war one of his adjutants was to state, 'He used to look down on the army as a pitiful, obsolete branch of the armed forces.'² On 23 May Göring telephoned to Hitler his view that the Luftwaffe's 'finest hour' was at hand; single-handed it would destroy the British forces in France.³ Against fu-



Milch photographing battlefield hotspots in 1940.
(SKETCH BY ERNST UDET)

rious army opposition Hitler welcomed the offer. (General Jodl, Hitler's principal strategic adviser, sarcastically observed to an adjutant, 'There goes Göring shooting off his big mouth again!') When Göring and Jeschonnek returned to Luftwaffe headquarters the former triumphed to Milch, 'We have done it! The Luftwaffe is to wipe out the British on the beaches. I have managed to talk the Führer round to halting the army.' He waved aside Milch's misgivings: 'The army always wants to act the gentleman. They round up the British as prisoners with as little harm to them as possible. The Führer wants them to be taught a lesson they won't easily forget.'⁴

Having made his promise Göring departed on his travels, flying to Amsterdam. But now there were new conditions. Not only were the Luftwaffe's bomber airfields too far from Dunkirk, but for three vital days they were blanketed in fog. Thus on 30 May, although three hundred bombers stood by all day, with fighter cover promised, they were unable to take off because of tenth-tenths cloud cover at three hundred feet. Meanwhile the brave shoals of British small craft embarked the fleeing British Expeditionary Force, while the French army fought a costly rearguard action. The small vessels presented poor targets for the Eighth Air Corps's dive-bombers, accustomed to attacking tanks and airfields; the bombs buried deep in the sand before exploding, with little anti-personnel effect. The German tanks remained at a standstill, on Rundstedt's orders.

More potent as an augury of future events was the local daylight air superiority achieved over the Me 109 by the British Spitfire fighter, operating at short ranges over Dunkirk. All German calculations had assumed that Professor Messerschmitt's plane would prove the better of the two, but now the Spitfire wrought havoc on the German fighter squadrons and the bombers approaching Dunkirk were easy prey. One Ju 88 squadron was mauled almost into oblivion as it flew in from its distant airfield in Holland. Göring's confidence, in short, remained misplaced: by 4 June, when Dunkirk was finally captured by

* Hitler's army adjutant wrote soon after, 'The impression is that Göring has been actively stirring things up against the army. Führer keeps harping on how reliable the Luftwaffe is ideologically, in contrast to the army.'⁵

the German army, the British had rescued 338,000 men from France. At the time the long-term lessons, and even the fact of the miscarriage of German plans, were not recognized by Göring.

Milch flew to Dunkirk on 5 June. The chaos left by a whole army in full flight made an awesome spectacle. The fields were full of untended cattle, and thousands of unguarded prisoners — mostly French — were trudging into the dead city, which had been reduced to ruins by the devastating Luftwaffe attacks. About fifty thousand abandoned vehicles were choking the streets converging on the beach, and the hulks of a score of large ships could be seen half-submerged off-shore; 235 vessels, including nine destroyers, had been sunk here by the Luftwaffe.*⁶

The sandy beaches were strewn with shoes, weapons, bicycles, lorries, food and abandoned property — linen, books and photographs scattered in confusion. It reminded Milch of the scenes in east Prussia after the rout of the Russian invaders twenty-five years before.

The fact that the army itself had escaped almost intact dawned on Göring only slowly. When Milch flew back to *Asia* that evening to report what he had seen Göring was still congratulating himself on the frightful *débâcle* that the British army must have suffered. Milch disillusioned him: ‘The British army? I saw perhaps twenty or thirty corpses. The rest of the British army has got clean away to the other side. They have left their equipment and escaped.’ He agreed that being thrown out of France after only three weeks was a tremendous reverse for the British, but, ‘The fact remains that they have succeeded in bringing out practically the whole of their army, and that is an achievement which it would be hard to beat.’⁷

Göring asked what conclusions he would draw. ‘I would recommend,’ said Milch, ‘that this very day all our air units — of both the Second and Third Air Forces — should be moved up to the Channel coast, and that Britain should be invaded *immediately*.’ The navy would eventually have to be brought in to

* A similar description of the chaos left by the British army on the approaches to Dunkirk will be found in the diary of General Fedor von Bock, the German army group commander.

transfer the ground forces to southern England, but the highly mobile Luftwaffe could go over as they were. Their paratroops would have to capture a few vital airfields in southern England and the Luftwaffe would then immediately fly in fighter and Stuka squadrons to operate from them — just as they had in the Norwegian campaign. They had several hundred transport aircraft available and these could ferry over two or three divisions of troops with fighter escort. Obviously, Milch continued, it would be a great gamble without armour or heavy artillery for this spearhead, but he was convinced that for the next few days the British army would be incapable of combating a really determined landing. He warned Göring, ‘If we leave the British in peace for four weeks it will be too late.’

But Göring thought it could not be done. He may well have been right. He later explained, ‘I had only one paratroop division, and even that I had had to work up almost clandestinely, as I could make no headway with my demand for four such divisions against the demands of the army. Had I had these four divisions at the time of Dunkirk, I would have gone across to Britain immediately.’⁸

Milch saw in this hesitation the High Command’s first decisive mistake, and he laid most of the blame on his old enemy Admiral Raeder. He had gained the impression that Raeder had made no preparations for an invasion of England, and that to stall for time he now insisted that air supremacy must first be won by the Luftwaffe. And only as he raised this demand, Milch thought, had Raeder begun feverish activity to make up for the delay. By the summer of 1940 the German air force was to be involved in a costly war of attrition at extended range against the British fighter squadrons; when the onset of autumn finally killed all hope of an invasion in 1940, the German navy was still unready but could now blame the Luftwaffe for not having fulfilled the main requirement.

Visiting the various captured airfields and headquarters as Inspector during June 1940, Milch could see that in the absence of a Führer decree to that effect no preparations *at all* were being made for air war with Britain.

The end of June 1940 brought respite to the German air force. No decision had yet been reached on the future of the war. Hitler believed it was over

and considered the appeal to Britain's reason only a formality. It was time to reward his commanders: on 19 July Milch was among the new field marshals created by Hitler in a major Reichstag speech; for Göring an even more exalted rank was created, '*Reichsmarschall* of the Greater German Reich'.⁹

Milch recognized the artificiality of a promotion which now ranked him equal to a von Moltke or a Hindenburg; and for a born climber there was a certain sense of denouement upon reaching a rank beyond which no mortal could mount, with any amount of energy, diligence or ruthlessness. And yet, 'Be that as it may, my pleasure was enormous and unforgettable.' Under the old ordinance of 1878 field marshals took precedence over both the Reich Chancellor and the Reich ministers; they had a rank of which they could never be deprived and from which they could never retire. Milch wore the new insignia proudly until the day of his capture, a gesture which attracted the fury of the more anonymously clad commandos into whose hands he was delivered at the end of the war. And he greeted with derision the American attempts to strip him of his rank: 'You did not appoint me, so you cannot dismiss me!'¹⁰ The German field marshal traditionally enjoyed the right to full pay, with an office, a clerk, a staff officer and motor vehicles or horses to the end of his life. But these were the privileges of a field marshal in victory; the lot of a field marshal in defeat will be the subject of a later chapter.

C H A P T E R 6

'IF EIGHT MILLION GO MAD . . .'*July–December 1940*

THE ULTIMATE GERMAN VICTORY of arms over Britain is only a matter of time,' General Jodl confidently concluded at the end of the French campaign. 'Large-scale enemy operations are no longer possible.'¹ These were not unreasonable prophesies. Hitler commanded strategic positions which even he had not ventured openly to predict a year before. From northern Norway down to the Spanish frontier, the entire European coastline facing Britain was in his hands. The Luftwaffe's airfields were but an hour's flight from London, while Berlin was virtually unattainable for the RAF. Having gained this position, however, Hitler proceeded to squander it, for he still had no intention of humiliating Britain. He considered the British a kindred race, perverse but not without intelligence, and his eyes were already straying eastward toward his eternal, restless enemy, the Soviet Union. Until the end of 1940 he still dreamed of peace with Britain; and this alone explains why the man who nine months later was to show in the bombing of Belgrade with what ruthlessness he could invade a nation of Serbs stayed the hand of his Luftwaffe for two long months above London's streets, and even then displayed traits of sentimentality — for example on Christmas Eve — wholly unprofitable in modern warfare.

His staff were more old-fashioned and wanted to see Britain defeated, rather than coming to terms. Jodl reasoned, 'First of all must come the fight against the British air force.'² If they could destroy the British aircraft industry

the RAF could no longer be replenished, and this in turn would preempt Britain's only means of attacking Germany, since naval blockade could no longer spell the end for the Reich. Indeed now the Luftwaffe could blockade Britain: 'In conjunction with propaganda and terror-raids from time to time — announced as "reprisals" — a cumulative depletion of Britain's food stocks will paralyse the will of the people to resist, and then break it altogether, forcing the capitulation of their government.'

Whether Jodl's views would have proved true had they been put into practice at this point, one month after Dunkirk, may seem a moot point in the light of later events. But it was certainly the most advantageous time: there were still three clear summer months ahead for Luftwaffe operations, and with every week that passed the Royal Air Force's defences were growing stronger, and at a faster rate than the comparable Luftwaffe expansion. On 30 June 1940 the Luftwaffe had 841 serviceable bombers and rather over seven hundred fighters against a similar number of RAF fighters; the latter, Milch knew, were being replenished at over four hundred a month — over twice as fast as the production of the sole German single-engined fighter, the Me 109.³ This made nonsense of any policy of conservation on the part of the Luftwaffe. Yet such a policy instruction was issued⁴ while the German armies ostentatiously regrouped on the Channel coast and hundreds of ships, barges and boats were massed in full view for an invasion of southern England — an invasion which Jodl anticipated would not take place before early September, and even then only as the *coup de grâce* for a Britain with her economy paralysed and her air force beaten, 'should such a *coup* still be necessary'.

For the first three weeks in July this directive effectively tied the Luftwaffe's own hands, permitting them to execute only harassing raids in addition to an anti-shipping campaign. Under Kesselring and Sperrle the Second and Third Air Forces, with a common boundary on the River Seine, were allocated spheres of operations in western and eastern England respectively; eventually the Fifth Air Force (Stumpff) would take in northern England from Norwegian airfields. There was one organizational innovation, the introduction of two tactical fighter commanders on the ground, *Jagdfliegerführer* 2, subordinated to the

Second Air Force, and *Jagdfliegerführer* 3 to the Third.⁵ These controlled respectively 460 single- and 90 twin-engined fighters, and 300 single- and 130 twin-engined fighters. Their disadvantage over the comparable RAF Fighter Groups was that these improvised *Jafüs* could not plot the enemy squadrons' movements; nor had any provision been made for them to control their fighter squadrons by radio telephone once they had left the ground. Not surprisingly, Göring asked Kesselring and Sperrle 'to inform him how they envisaged controlling their fighter escort squadrons', and stated the need for 'information centres for the Air Corps during our attacks, so that we keep a clear picture of what the enemy's up to'; these centres were to work in close cooperation with their wireless monitoring service.*⁶ These technical shortcomings came to Milch's attention only after the Battle of Britain had begun.

Initially Hitler had been thinking of an invasion of Britain in mid-August. The orders issued by the Luftwaffe operations staff in mid-July set out their twin objectives in the 'final phase' before the invasion as the destruction of Britain's air force and the disruption of her supplies by attacks on her ports and shipping. To this latter end the Fourth Air Corps was transferred to north-west France, to tread on Britain's corns — her shipping lanes. The Eighth Air Corps (von Richthofen's dive-bombers) was assigned to closing the English Channel by day, and other units were to attack Britain's shipping and close her ports with minefields by night.

The former objective, the attack on the RAF, would be completed in two stages. First the fighter defences and defence organization in southern England only would be annihilated; then daylight operations would roll northward until complete air supremacy had been achieved, while at the same time a complementary assault on the British aircraft industry would take place. From 'Eagle Day', the initial day of this second phase, four weeks would probably elapse to the day on which an invasion could take place; and 'Eagle Day' itself could come

* Milch demanded radio communication between ground controllers and fighter pilots, and escort fighters and bombers, back in 1934. In September 1943 he reflected, 'I never found out why our bombers were unable to communicate with their escort fighters in the attacks on Britain.'

as soon as four days after the start of this intensive campaign. So much for the Luftwaffe plan; there is no evidence that Milch disputed it.

On 16 July Hitler issued a directive for the planning of an invasion ‘if it should prove necessary’; on the seventeenth the Luftwaffe squadrons were placed on maximum readiness, and a crescendo of attacks on the supply lines began as part of the softening up. On the nineteenth Hitler issued an open appeal to the British, which was rejected on the twenty-second. Hitler believed that Britain’s otherwise inexplicable attitude could be attributed to her hopes of a change of heart in currently isolationist America, and a change of alliance in Russia.⁷ In a conference with Jeschonnek and the army and navy C-in-Cs on the twenty-first, he described an invasion threat as the best means of forcing Britain to see reason, and he asked them to discover whether such an invasion could be executed by 15 September — the last possible date, it seemed, for reasons of tide and weather. The navy at once indicated that they could commence ‘practical preliminaries’ only when the Luftwaffe had secured air supremacy.

On the same day, 21 July, Göring called all his senior commanders and Air Staff officers to Karinhall for a luncheon and conference. Göring predicted that the current interim series of scattered night attacks on ports and the British aircraft industry would be replaced by the ‘final phase’ starting in a week’s time. In the meantime he asked for more determined attacks on Britain’s shipping and ports. He wanted to see the ‘convoys swept up, starting with the merchant ships’, and extensive mine-laying operations to block the western approaches, camouflaged by simultaneous bombing attacks on nearby ports. When the main attack on land targets began, these would be ‘violent attacks to unsettle the whole country’. The bombers were to drop bombs fitted with anti-disturbance and time fuses set for several hours’ delay. Primary targets like the ports of the south coast were to be spared from attack as yet, ‘particularly the unloading facilities in the ports along the coast from the Isle of Wight to the south-eastern corner’ — for this was where in September Germany would need unloading facilities the most.⁸

Before they left Karinhall, both of the *Luftflotte* commanders in France were asked to submit to Göring within one week their own views on achieving air supremacy. Göring himself believed that this could be achieved only by de-

stroying the RAF and its supporting aero-engine industry — an industry the enemy would be forced to defend. The theory was that the RAF's fighter squadrons would be hammered on the anvil of swarms of superior Me 109s and Me 110s escorting the bombers. The selection of the British aero-engine factories was a significant reflection of the most vulnerable target system in the Luftwaffe's industrial base. As to their tactics, Göring suggested they make these factories the target for 'nuisance raids' by night at once: 'Leave the enemy in constant doubt as to time and place,' he suggested, 'so that he cannot concentrate his defences.' In fact these crucial factories were beyond the range of the Me 109 escorts, and there were far too few of the heavier Me 110s for such a purpose.

A number of points must be borne in mind before the narrative of the battle commences. Firstly, Hitler had not yet decided on an invasion at all. (As late as 31 July he advised the other C-in-Cs that he would decide between the alternatives, September 1940 and May 1941, only after a week's trial of the Luftwaffe's main attack.⁹) Secondly, until mid-September Hitler refused to authorize any kind of attack on London's inhabitants, and this in General Jeschonnek's view seriously blunted the edge of the Luftwaffe's weapon. Thirdly, Göring had based his undertakings about the length of time needed to destroy the RAF on a number of assumptions which were to prove very wrong indeed.

It was only now, for example, as the attack began, that the Germans realized from intercepted wireless orders that the RAF fighter squadrons were radar-controlled from the ground; and it was only now that Göring discovered that the Me 110 twin-engined fighter (of which he had no fewer than two hundred) was useless as a daylight escort for the bomber forces since it was inferior to the agile Spitfire and Hurricane. But the Me 109 single-engined fighter could barely reach London and Milch's early recommendation, made many months before, that cheap drop tanks should be fitted to extend the Me 109's fuel endurance had been followed up too late, with the result that the crews were untrained in their use and reluctant to employ them.

This was a very late hour to make such discoveries. The battle could not be called off, but its tactics should have been amended to allow the Luftwaffe a

task of which it *was* capable. The objectives remained the same, however; in the Führer's directive of 1 August the force's objective was still 'to subdue the British air force', followed by attacks on the air industry and anti-aircraft gun production. Hitler still prohibited 'terror raids as reprisals', and London was still a prohibited area.¹⁰ With hindsight, it can be seen that in this first phase the Luftwaffe should have concentrated on destroying the fighters' radar and ground-control organization, but only the general strategic objectives were reflected in the directive issued to the *Luftflotten* on 2 August.¹¹

Hitherto the Germans had sent short-range fighter squadrons in strength over southern England to lure the RAF into a battle in which they would be outnumbered: recognizing that this was the tactic, the British fighter commanders wisely refused to accept battle unless actual bomber attacks were in progress. Subsequently the Luftwaffe had sent small formations of bombers, heavily escorted by fighters, to provoke the defences by harassing ports and shipping. It was soon obvious that the RAF's losses were not of such a rate as to weaken Fighter Command enough for the 'second phase' of the attack, the rolling-up of the defences north of southern England. All this time the British air industry was producing fighter aircraft at twice the German industry's rate.

Nevertheless, Göring launched the second phase with 'Eagle Day', a day for which he worked out a precise plan of attacks. The details were dispensed to Milch and the three *Luftflotte* commanders (Stumpff having been brought in from Norway) at Karinhall at noon on 6 August: in the new offensive, heavily escorted bomber formations would attack the 'vicinity of London' in broad daylight, as a tactic to overpower the fighter defences.¹² London itself would not be touched. If during the first days of this new phase the German losses proved too high, or the returns in RAF losses too uncertain, then Göring was ready to call the whole operation off. 'Eagle Day', the start of the full air assault on the RAF, would be 10 August, Göring announced. This would be consistent with a final invasion in mid-September.

For three days bad weather prevented the Luftwaffe from opening the assault. On 11 August Göring promised Hitler he would begin as soon as he had a forecast of three days' fine weather; and on the afternoon of the twelfth he

announced ‘Eagle Day’ for next day.¹³ Since effectively it was to be a duel between fighter forces, the opposing sides were quite evenly matched in numbers: the Luftwaffe disposed of 702 single-engined fighters on 10 August (with an additional 227 twin-engined Me 110s, which were soon taken out of the battle); the RAF commanded a force of 749, mostly single-engined Hurricanes and Spitfires, being replenished at considerable speed (490 had been manufactured during July alone). The Luftwaffe also disposed of 875 serviceable bombers and 316 dive-bombers.¹⁴

The attack opened early on 13 August, but went off at a tangent, since Göring ordered the recall of the entire Second Air Force as the weather worsened: ‘Grand slam opens with only Third Air Force because of weather,’ Milch recorded.¹⁵ Nearly five hundred bomber sorties, with twice as many fighters as escorts, were made against airfields and fighter defences in southern England, however, and fierce air battles developed. Two days later the Fifth Air Force joined in with diversionary attacks against northern England. Far from heralding the final defeat of the RAF, the offensive brought mounting German losses: on the thirteenth the Luftwaffe lost forty-five aircraft, for thirteen RAF fighters (six of the RAF pilots survived to fight again); on the fourteenth the Germans lost nineteen, the RAF only eight (the Luftwaffe claimed eighteen).

It was obvious to Göring that no real headway was being made. At noon on the fifteenth he called his three *Luftflotte* commanders back to Karinhall, together with Milch and Jeschonnek, to express his dissatisfaction with the *Luftflotte* commanders’ tactics and achievements.¹⁶ He mentioned many technical shortcomings: there were not enough He 59 ambulance floatplanes; the fighters were refusing to use the drop tanks unless they were armour-plated; and most important of all: ‘How can we establish radio-telephone contact between the bombers and their fighter escort?’ he asked. Göring now accepted that the Me 110s were inadequate when confronted with Spitfires and Hurricanes, and that they must be withdrawn from the battle. He also suggested that they should treat the British radar stations only as ‘alternative targets’. The radio-beam squadron, K.Gr 100, might be used to attack the aircraft industry at Birmingham, he proposed; but he warned, ‘Cities as such are not to be attacked yet — particularly not London.’

That day the RAF lost only thirty-four aircraft compared with the Luftwaffe's seventy-five. Within three days what should have been the Luftwaffe's hour of triumph was instead the beginning of a rout: during 16 August all three air forces had operated, losing forty-five aircraft, while the RAF lost only twenty-one (the Luftwaffe claimed 108).¹⁷ In extensive operations on the eighteenth the dive-bombers mislaid their escort and were almost annihilated: seventy-one Luftwaffe aircraft were destroyed, compared with twenty-seven RAF fighters. On the nineteenth bad weather brought the offensive to a standstill, with the objective even further away than when it had started.

Göring summoned a new meeting of every commander down to squadron level on 19 August, to tell them of his disappointment at the fighters' performance and to explain their new strategy: for the time being, the costly daylight attacks on aircraft factories and similar targets must be replaced by night attacks. Henceforth major daylight operations would aim only at provoking fighter battles, with just enough bombers provided to act as bait. The campaign against fighter airfields would continue, but the more vulnerable aircraft like the Ju 87s and the Me 110s were to be held in reserve until the 'grand slam' which would spell the RAF's final defeat: 'The main task of the twin-engined aircraft will come when the fighters reach the limit of their range.' In bad weather they would attack targets like Norwich, but 'primarily RAF targets', to force the fighter defences to come up. When the weather improved they were to destroy the RAF fighters in the air by *Schwerpunkt* formation: all single-engined fighters of both *Luftflotten* should escort the bombers of one *Luftflotte*, followed up by the twin-engined fighters as a last wave of reinforcements.

Göring angrily appealed to the fighter pilots for a sense of responsibility: 'Neither type of fighter is allowed to break off its escort mission because of weather,' he instructed, and warned that any pilot found guilty of this misdemeanour would face a court martial — a sure indication of the increasing nervousness of the bomber pilots. He ordered the bombers to keep 'grimly in formation' to give the escorts a chance of doing their job. He also recommended that each bomber formation should always have the same escort squadron, and that the respective commanders should get to know each other, in order to cul-

tivate a personal sense of responsibility. (In the event, the rigid binding of the fast fighters to slow, lumbering bombers gave the RAF just the edge it needed over the Luftwaffe.)

Mass attacks on cities, as opposed to nuisance attacks, were still forbidden. But to give credibility to the diversionary attacks from Norwegian airfields, Göring authorized General Geisler's Tenth Air Corps to make a heavy attack on the Glasgow city area in the far north. Nuisance raids on British industry were to continue, 'but not yet on London'. The primary object was still to induce the RAF to offer battle on the Luftwaffe's terms.¹⁸

The Germans believed that the RAF had managed to stock up about 350 fighters, assisted by the bad weather respite, after being down to their 'last hundred'. (In fact on 23 August the RAF had over 700 fighter aircraft serviceable.) When the weather lifted and the Luftwaffe were able to resume the offensive on the twenty-third, an important second phase of the RAF's defence also began: recognizing that the Germans lacked a long-range escort fighter the British had withdrawn their southern fighter squadrons to airfields around London where the Me 109 would be at the limit of its fuel endurance. To the Germans, the only way to destroy what seemed an importunate few was to provoke them *en masse* (*Schwerpunkt* formation) and that seemed to indicate daylight attacks on London itself.

On 25 August the RAF bombed Berlin (after one flight of Luftwaffe aircraft had strayed over London, killing nine civilians there). Within the next ten days four more RAF attacks were aimed at Berlin. This was what Hitler had hoped to avoid; on 4 September he warned, 'If they continue to attack our cities, then we will wipe out theirs.'

Of the Luftwaffe commanders it was General Jeschonnek who expected most from mass daylight attacks on London.¹⁹ Göring challenged him, after dinner in his dining car, 'Do you think that Germany would give in if Berlin were in ruins?' 'Of course not,' replied Jeschonnek. He clearly assumed that British civilian morale was more fragile than German. 'That,' concluded Göring, 'is where you are wrong.'²⁰ Not for the last time he showed that he assessed the

true position more accurately than he was prepared to admit to Hitler.

Milch had begun an extended series of inspection trips on 20 August and these spread over several weeks. Travelling by fast plane or black Mercedes saloon he sprung himself on fighter and bomber commanders without warning, checking squadron morale and equipment performance, testing their camouflage and watching their operations. ‘If the last war taught us how to dig in, this war has taught us camouflage,’ he reported to Göring on 26 August.²¹ Page after page of a green 1936 ‘Collins Paragon Diary’ he filled with notes — complaints about medals, tactics, guns, ammunition, aircraft and engines; he prodded the reluctant with his interim baton and rewarded the brave with decorations or boxes of Brazilian cigars.²²

The taut morale of the highly-disciplined Luftwaffe squadrons was still largely intact, but some of them, particularly the Stuka and Me 110 squadrons, were showing signs of strain. The Me 110’s depth of penetration was only about 160 miles and allowed only fifteen or twenty minutes’ combat endurance on top of that. All the fighter squadrons he inspected favoured freelance fighter operations rather than the murderous close-formation escort work. ‘It is unfortunate for close cooperation between fighter and bomber squadrons,’ he reported to Göring afterward, ‘that the units escorting the bombers are constantly changed; two squadrons consistently working together and able to discuss their missions in person with each other beforehand are far more likely to be successful.’

After *Luftflotte 2*, Milch turned his attention to Field Marshal Sperrle’s *Luftflotte 3*. Since 27 August it had been principally engaged in night attacks, including four heavy raids on Liverpool and Birkenhead mounted at a cost of only seven bombers.²³ When he flew back to Berlin on 3 September he saw Hitler, who had also hurried back to the capital as soon as the RAF attacks began. Hitler asked him to increase the output of 2,200-pound bombs — a sure indication that the air war was now to turn to Britain’s cities.²⁴

On the same day Hitler removed his embargo on night attacks on England, in view of Sperrle’s success, but London itself was still a prohibited area. The Luftwaffe now accepted that, despite the desperate air battles that had

taken place, the RAF still had about 420 serviceable fighters left.²⁵ Hitler recognized that the requirement for the invasion of England ('achievement of air supremacy') had still not been met, but was withholding the final order for the present until he saw the results of the continued attack on the RAF.²⁶ The earliest possible date for the preliminary invasion order was understood to be 21 September.

During August the RAF had lost 359 fighter aircraft and the German air force 653; the Luftwaffe believed that their victories were very much more substantial. Their recent tactics of concentrating some effort on the fighter airfields were indeed proving an embarrassment to the RAF. On 1 September the German squadrons for the first time reported a weakening in the defences, and on the sixth the OKW was told that average RAF fighter squadron strength had sunk from twelve to only five or seven aircraft.²⁷ It was now — stimulated by another raid on Berlin — that Hitler ordered the attack on London to begin at last, and with the abandonment of the attack on the fighter airfields in southern England the Battle of Britain passed its turning-point.

Göring had already informed Milch that to exert a greater influence on the battle he was going to Holland on 6 September and Ghent on the seventh, and that he intended to stay in the west for about two weeks, directing the battle. (Milch was to deputize for him in Berlin.) Now that the final assault on London itself was to begin, Göring told the German nation by wireless, 'I myself have taken command of the Luftwaffe's battle for Britain.' By attacking London by day he hoped to force the British to sacrifice 'the tiny remainder of their fighters'.

On the night of 5 September, as Milch was relaxing in Berlin after a day's hunting and drinking with Udet, Kesselring's bomber squadrons carried out their first attack on London's dockland. On 7 September, as Göring stood with Kesselring and Bruno Loerzer, one of the Air Corps commanders, on the cliffs at Cap Blanc Nez, training binoculars on the English coast, wave after wave of aircraft — three hundred bombers and six hundred fighters — thundered northward in tight formation toward London. All afternoon and all night long the attack on docks and oil targets along the Thames continued. Twenty-three

RAF fighter squadrons were thrown into the battle, but the victory was with Göring that day, even though the Luftwaffe lost forty aircraft to the RAF's twenty-eight.

For Hitler these results were still too uncertain to justify issuing the preliminary order for the invasion.²⁸ The most favourable date, 24 September, was barely two weeks away, and since the planning called for ten days' notice he must make up his mind on the fourteenth. Twice in mid-September, on the thirteenth and fourteenth, Hitler called Milch to hear his deliberations on invasion, since Göring was still directing the battle in the west.²⁹ Milch took a lengthy note of the Führer's remarks on the fourteenth. They began with a survey of Germany's strategic position, in which Hitler's disquiet about Russia's intentions was evident. Moscow was obviously dissatisfied with events, having hoped that the Reich would bleed herself to death, and was now turning its attention to Rumania and Finland. Germany needed Rumania for oil and Finland for the balance of power in the Baltic. Hitler hinted at the possibility of 'new conflicts', but he was inclined to view them with equanimity: 'We have attained our objectives already,' he told his commanders on the fourteenth. 'That is why we have no interest in dragging this war on.'

The question was, how to write the final chapter. Hitler now saw an invasion of Britain as a means of accelerating the end, rather than as an end in itself. The navy was ready, it seemed, while in its fight for air supremacy the Luftwaffe had achieved the near impossible. Göring had always warned that he needed several consecutive days of fine weather to destroy the RAF, and this had been denied him. The RAF had recuperated. Nobody knew how many fighter aircraft the British still had, but they must have 'suffered badly'. The brutal truth was that air supremacy had not been achieved. 'Should we call it off altogether?' Hitler asked. He answered this question himself: their earlier option of a conventional invasion with massive air superiority had been thwarted; so he now intended to try an alternative method, which was less certain, but also less harmful to prestige than a total cancellation of the invasion — a war of nerves, supported by crushing air attack and the persisting *threat* of seaborne invasion. 'Our attacks so far have already been enormously successful,' he pointed out. Such a war of nerves would force the RAF to reserve bombers to combat an in-

vasion; this would take the pressure off Germany. And the bombing of London alone might bring about the final collapse. 'If eight million people go mad, it might very well turn into a catastrophe! If we get the fine weather, and we can eliminate the enemy's air force, then even a small invasion might go a long way.' Therefore he was against cancelling invasion preparations altogether. 'The cancellation would come to the ears of the enemy and would strengthen his resolve.'³⁰



Milch (seen above with Göring and his chief of intelligence, Colonel 'Beppo' Schmid) took notes on everything.
(MILCH COLLECTION)

Milch recognized that neither army nor navy was enthusiastic about the invasion. Jeschonnek suggested that the Luftwaffe had now brought about a grave food shortage in England and asserted that 'the British public have still not been hit' in such a way as to cause real panic. (In fact, in the first half of September alone two thousand London civilians had been killed in the bombing.) Hitler still refused to authorize attacks on London's residential areas, but agreed to consider such a policy in future: 'You see, it is our ultimate reprisal. That's why we have to keep to military targets for the time being.' By these he meant

London's stations, water, gas and other public utility works and similar targets. 'That's why we can't attack the public.'*

The next day's air operations proved that German air supremacy was still a ghostly chimera. On 15 September the biggest raiding force yet — both *Luftflotten* — was sent to raid targets in London, still defended by three hundred RAF fighters; sixty German aircraft were destroyed for twenty-six RAF losses. Next day at a conference in Göring's train near Beauvais in France Göring fulminated about the failure of his own fighter escorts, while Milch stoutly defended them. The source of the RAF's strength was a mystery. Assuming that on 8 September the British had had 465 fighters (three-quarters of them serviceable), and allowing for the 288 claimed destroyed since then, the RAF could not have more than 177 left to defend the whole of Britain. Göring believed the last British reserves to have been scraped together.³¹ That the RAF's real shortage was of trained pilots, not aircraft, was not considered.³²

Göring ordered that the night attacks on London were to continue, with both *Luftflotten*, on every possible occasion; Sperrle's bombers were also to attack Southampton by day, while Kesselring — to whom most of the fighters had now been transferred — should engage the RAF's fighter force. Göring mentioned that there was evidence that British pilots had been encouraged to ram the German bombers, so harsh was their position now. He proposed a new tactic to destroy the remaining fighters: they should operate formations of up to thirty Ju 88 fast bombers three times a day over Britain, with very heavy fighter escort. Given three consecutive fine days, the ensuing air battles would so deplete the RAF defences that the main force of bombers could again operate at will. In the meantime, London's night ordeal was beginning with a vengeance, for at night there was little the defences could do to stop the bombers.

On 17 September 1940 Hitler decided on the indefinite postponement of the invasion.³³ In effect, the Luftwaffe had borne the fighting alone since July, while

* From the lengthy notes taken by Milch during Hitler's conference. Broadly similar versions will be found in the diaries of Halder and the German naval staff (14 September 1940). Keitel's version is in Nuremberg document 803-PS.

the other services had relaxed, refitted and regrouped. Now it was the Luftwaffe at whose door the blame was laid. Much of the blame is in fact Hitler's: the campaign should have been started earlier, when fine weather still prevailed and the RAF defences were still weak, and the Luftwaffe regarded themselves as hampered by Hitler's prohibition against mass attacks on the London population. As it was, mid-September 1940 found the Luftwaffe still searching for a strategy, with the bomber and fighter arms engaged in growing recrimination against each other.

Göring's new daylight strategy of small fast Ju 88 formations, escorted by sometimes ten times as many fighters, came into operation on 27 September; on other occasions single fighter-bombers operated singly over London and southern England. It was all very different from the mass attacks envisaged as a prelude to invasion. Early in October 1940 Göring seized the excuse of deteriorating weather to call off daylight operations over Britain; all hope of destroying RAF's fighters in the air receded.

Above all, the Luftwaffe's equipment had proved inadequate. As Director of Air Armament Udet felt, not without reason, that the finger of guilt was pointing at his office. He stayed away from Göring's conferences and cracked wan jokes with his friends about the future. His friends shielded him, while his rivals multiplied.³⁴ Whispers of the coming technical deficiencies reached Göring. One day that autumn when he was walking in the woods near Beauvais, Major Storp, an experienced squadron commander, shocked him with a gloomy prediction of things to come.³⁵ 'The time will come when you witness a situation which seems unimaginable to you now,' the major warned, and he related details of the negligence of Udet's senior advisers. Of one aero-engine project, probably the Daimler-Benz 603, Storp prophesied: 'You won't ever get it. You *could*, and it should have been in service long ago; but if you don't act now you still won't have it three years from now.' Göring did not act, and he was to recall this conversation ruefully to Milch three years later when the predictions were fulfilled.³⁶

The controversial Junkers 88 high-speed bomber, on which Udet and Jeschonnek had set great store, was the most problematic of Udet's protégés.

Erhard Milch was torn between two conflicting duties: he was a long-standing friend of Udet, but he was also Inspector-General, and profoundly patriotic. Throughout the summer of 1940 he collected the squadron's complaints against the Ju 88: it was slower than the obsolescent He 111, its dinghy could not be released in an emergency, there were insufficient Ju 88 workshops, take-offs at night were difficult with full tanks, there had been frequent cases of Ju 88s catching fire in mid-air, and so on. Altogether he listed thirty-two complaints in a report to Göring; early in October the Reichsmarschall ordered him to tour the Ju 88 squadrons and report even more fully.³⁷ Milch's report was a devastating indictment of the Ju 88 and its effect on squadron morale. In particular he concluded that its present armament was so inadequate that it could not be operated without fighter escort. Of one Ju 88 squadron's twenty-six crews, only five were ready to continue flying, so badly had the aircraft affected crew morale. Indeed General Loerzer's Second Air Corps had sent a medical officer to examine the others, suspecting malingering. Milch's scathing comment on this to Göring was, 'It's not the enemy the squadron's frightened of — it's the Junkers 88!'³⁸

These criticisms were tactfully laid before Junkers's general manager, Dr Koppenberg. Göring told him the aircraft 'has not fully come up to our expectations', especially those concerning air safety. He reassured the industrialist of his confidence in him ('these unseemly and carping critics get a deaf ear from me') but hinted that perhaps they should be concentrating more on the old He 111 under present war conditions. Koppenberg for his part talked of the Ju 88 Mark A4 now coming off the production lines, which was indeed a commendable improvement, and he described the new generation of bombers, particularly the Ju 288, powered by the revolutionary new engine, the Jumo 222, coming in 1942.³⁹ A high-altitude, high-speed bomber, with internal bomb racks and a dive-bomber capability, it would carry five tons of bombs over 1,250 miles or two tons over 3,100 miles; with its pressurized cockpit it would have a service ceiling of some 28,000 feet, extending to 38,000 feet once the engine had been fitted with special superchargers. From the way Koppenberg talked there seemed to be no problems with either the engine or the aircraft; but there were, and we must return to both in later chapters.

Despite their official differences Milch encouraged Udet not to forget their personal friendship. In Paris they joined forces on shopping expeditions to Cartier; in Berlin they shared a table at Horcher's at least half a dozen times that autumn.⁴⁰ But the general's condition over the last few weeks had been worsening rapidly, and it pained Milch to see how little he was applying himself to his duties. Udet was drinking and smoking to excess, and eating only meat.⁴¹ He was also relying extensively on a narcotic to overcome his growing depression and the chosen drug, 'Pervitin', brought after-effects which made him morose and suspicious.

A week after reporting to Göring on the Ju 88 Milch took the opportunity of a Sunday afternoon stroll near Karinhall to have a long fatherly talk with Udet about the aircraft.⁴² This unrelenting pressure only intensified Udet's suspicions. Two days later, his constitution weakened by his unhealthy mode of life, he was taken ill, and Milch committed him to the care of his personal physician Professor Kalk; but within a week the ailing general had discharged himself from hospital, fearing, as he told his friends, that Milch was exploiting his absence to trespass on his office.⁴³ And yet it was possible for this strange, schizophrenic general to sit at Milch's favourite table at Horcher's not long after, as though there was not a single source of disaffection between them.⁴⁴

The German public's retina still retained the image Göring had offered in his radio broadcasts at the time of the mass daylight attacks on London — the Reichsmarschall, striding the Channel coast, personally directing the battle. Indeed so pleased was Göring with this image that once his signals officer surprised him in his Ritz suite in Paris (the hotel was largely populated by the Luftwaffe), dressed only in a blue silk dressing-gown, describing by telephone to his wife how at that moment he was on the cliffs at Calais while his squadrons thundered overhead to England.⁴⁵

The reality was different. Since mid-September the air force had appeared in strength over England only by night, and a further complication of this unexpectedly continuing war was that Germany would now have to provide a realistic air defence against British bombing raids. On the night of 23 September

1940 over a hundred RAF medium bombers attacked Berlin and twenty-two civilians died. At the beginning of October Milch inspected the first squadrons of the night-fighter organization established under Colonel Josef Kammhuber in Holland; at a staff conference on the third Göring called for better flak for Berlin, a swifter air-raid alert system, stronger shelters and more decoy sites.⁴⁶

October marked the beginning of the long war between German concrete and British bombs. The Reichsmarschall decided to put Milch in charge of civil defence again. It had been his province long before — the instruction posters pinned up in every basement bore Milch's signature — but it had been taken away from him before war broke out. Now that the damage was beginning, Inspectorate No. 14 (Air Defence) was returned to him.⁴⁷

The Germans were beginning to experience the costly inconvenience they had hoped to inflict only on their enemies. Thousands of children had to be evacuated from the big cities; hospitals, factories, schools — all had to have special air-raid warning systems; millions of homes throughout the country had to have shelters; hundreds of thousands of tons of concrete and steel were needed for public shelters. All this was discussed by Göring and Milch on 12 October. Udet was told admonishingly that the only long-term answer was to build more aircraft; these were 'far more important than air-raid shelters'.⁴⁸ The wisdom of this is obvious from Milch's notes — they would need two hundred thousand workers and four thousand lorries for the Berlin shelter programme alone.⁴⁹ On the fifteenth Milch had a long private talk with Hitler on the psychology of air-raid alerts.⁵⁰

The state secretary remained responsible for passive air defence measures until 1942, when the Reich Propaganda Minister Dr Goebbels was nominally put in charge, 'which led,' wrote Milch, 'only to an improvement in the propaganda about what had been done.' In 1944 the task was transferred to Speer's Armaments Ministry and all public shelter construction came to a halt.⁵¹

With the failure of the Battle of Britain Göring lost interest in the war. At a conference at Deauville on the last day of October 1940 he mentioned casually to Milch that soon he planned to take six weeks' leave; the state secretary was to stand in for him.⁵² At headquarters a few days later Hitler for the first time

openly criticized Göring over the Luftwaffe's failure, which was having widespread repercussions in foreign policy. Citing foreign press reports he queried the success of the raids on Britain and spoke sceptically of the Luftwaffe's claims of great air victories. Göring was saved by General Jodl, who said he also believed that the RAF was at its last gasp — it must have thrown its last aircraft, piloted by a handful of training officers and the squadron commanders themselves, into the battle.⁵³

Milch had warned long ago that the current series of night attacks was useless without special radio-beam devices, like the new X-equipment. (A radio receiver in the bombers followed a main beam laid over the target, and was alerted by two cross beams a set distance from each other and from the target.) It was all too easy to bomb British decoy sites, since most bomber crews were happy to release their loads somewhere between the searchlights, whether they saw a target or not: 'On dark nights only the largest targets can be effectively found; in my view the effect on all other targets is about a fifth of a daylight attack.'⁵⁴ Milch recommended that the special radio-beam squadron, *Kampfgruppe 100*, should receive priority in personnel and aircraft. He advised Göring that if radio-beam techniques should prove satisfactory then they could attack even on the darkest nights, or through cloud, or they could fly with accuracy by day to the neighbourhood of the smallest targets.

On 14 November Göring called Milch over to Karinhall and formally handed over command of the Luftwaffe to him; he then departed on leave to his hunting lodge on Rominten Heath in East Prussia.⁵⁵ He did not resume command until late January 1941, although he was never far from his telephone. His departure coincided with one of the most destructive Luftwaffe attacks of the war: 450 bombers attacked Coventry, spearheaded by a fire-raising force from *Kampfgruppe 100* using X-equipment for the first time.

Field Marshal Milch's arrival at 'Robinson 1' — the Air Staff's headquarters at La Boissière-le-Déluge, near Beauvais — caused something of a crisis.

General Jeschonnek waited for Milch to arrive, then ostentatiously departed to join the Reichsmarschall at his hunting lodge, leaving his deputy with Milch; the latter, von Waldau, found the newcomer easier to accept than the

situation caused by Göring's departure. 'About our commanders I have my own views,' Waldau wrote, 'and these lead me increasingly to the view that the end is not in sight. We must clench our teeth.' In the afternoon he added, 'Jeschonnek still in Berlin. Thus there is much to be done — and done independently in default of the Reichsmarschall.'⁵⁶

Göring had withdrawn his special train *Asia* to Rominten as well, and with it had vanished Milch's coach. Since there was no question of his occupying Jeschonnek's train, his staff assembled a special train of sorts at the Gare St Lazare in Paris: it was put together from Marshal Pétain's dining car of the First World War, which included an opulent bathroom and a dining room upholstered in corduroy and green baize; the dining car of President Lebrun's special train with two of his best chefs; and several less august items of rolling stock. The heating system was so erratic that while the adjutant's room was permanently filled with metallic knocking, steam and heat, at the other end of the train Arctic conditions reigned. From the temperate regions of the dining car Milch now conducted the air war against Britain's cities while Göring — and, on one memorable occasion when Plymouth was the target, even his nurse Sister Christa — dictated orders down the telephone from Rominten.

A second theatre of operations was now opening for the Luftwaffe.

Late in October Mussolini — piqued by German military intervention in Rumania — had launched an attack on Greece. But his armies were already severely extended in North Africa and the new adventure brought him nothing but misfortune. The British occupied Crete, a key Mediterranean island from which RAF bombers were within range of the Rumanian oilfields. The Greeks launched a plucky counter-offensive and pursued the Italian invaders into Albania. Hitler decided to relieve the Italians by attacking the British forces in the Mediterranean; he sent for Milch to discuss means of doing so.⁵⁷

Hitler explained that as a consequence of the Italian attack not only was Germany now obliged to provide flak for Rumania and south-eastern Germany, but the Italians themselves were in danger. The Luftwaffe should prepare to attack the Suez Canal and the Royal Navy's bases both at Gibraltar and at Alexandria; meantime Milch was to go to Mussolini and explain how far the

Luftwaffe could help him directly. The Italians should be given three clear objectives — to hold their front line, to tie down the Greeks until the German army itself could intervene in the spring, and to improve their supply lines. Meantime the British should be demoralized by a number of heavy air raids on London, Liverpool and Manchester. Göring, meanwhile, continued his extended leave at Rominten, jogging pleasantly from one hunting preserve to the next in his landau.⁵⁸

The Luftwaffe proposed deploying what was virtually a *Luftflotte* in Italy, made up of Geisler's Tenth Air Corps from Norway and a number of Ju 88, He 111 and mine-laying squadrons and a long-range fighter squadron.⁵⁹ While von Waldau directed these preparations — by January 1941 there was a force of 330 first-line aircraft in this new Luftwaffe theatre — Milch returned to Air Staff headquarters in France to resume his direction of the night blitz against Britain. Since November it had been aimed generally at crippling the British industrial effort, spearheaded by *Kampfgruppe* 100, the Pathfinder squadron using the X-equipment, and another unit, KG 26, using the new Y-beam system whereby the bomber aircraft, carrying special repeater-transmitters, were precisely plotted even at great range by German ground stations and given course and bombing instructions by them.

On balance the Luftwaffe was still winning this cruel war of the cities. Measured in terms of human life, compared with over fifteen thousand British dead by mid-November 1940, the entire six months of the RAF attack on Germany had so far killed only 975 Germans. Milch established to his own satisfaction that twice as many Germans had been killed in the same period in road accidents.⁶⁰ In Britain's cities the ordeal was only just beginning — although the Luftwaffe aiming points (like the RAF's at this stage) were invariably the large factories. Mixed loads of high explosive and fire bombs were scattered round them night after night, with the RAF night-fighter defences almost powerless to intervene, the necessary radar equipment still being under development. Britain's industrial centres were the hardest hit: on 11 December we see Sperrle reporting to Milch on his night's raid on Birmingham; on the twelfth we find Milch on the runway at Villacoublay watching a squadron of KG 55's Heinkels taking off for the night's attack on Sheffield.⁶¹ On the fifteenth the Luftwaffe

again attacked Sheffield, and next day the RAF delivered the war's first 'area attack', with its aiming point the residential heart of Mannheim.* Five days later Milch himself witnessed the British attempt to raid Berlin, but it was a puny effort compared with the Luftwaffe's spectacular fire raids. In three operations between then and Christmas Eve the Germans inflicted catastrophic damage on Manchester and Liverpool. But after this holocaust came respite. From the early morning of Christmas Eve, the Luftwaffe airfields were silent: on Hitler's instructions all air operations against the British Isles were prohibited during the Christmas festival.[†]

On Christmas Eve Hitler's special train arrived alongside Air Staff headquarters at Le Déluge, and early next morning Milch and Jeschonnek were ordered to see the Führer.⁶² After the field marshal had reported on the Blitz word arrived that an emissary of the French president had arrived, so the discussion had to end; but as Hitler accompanied his guests to the door of the compartment he mentioned for the first time to Milch his fears of a Russian campaign against Germany, and he hinted that he intended to get in an attack on Russia first.

* As the official history, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939–1945*, vol. 1, points out (p. 215), 'It was not until after the German attack on Coventry that Bomber Command was deliberately given the centre of a town as its target. This, the first "area" attack of the war, was carried out against Mannheim on the night of 16th December 1940.'

† Milch's diary, 26 December 1940: 'At Robinson. From 24 to early 26 December no air attacks on Britain on Führer's orders.'

C H A P T E R 7

A NEW CAMPAIGN

December 1940–June 1941

WHEN HITLER MENTIONED to Milch in September 1940 that Moscow was ‘evidently dissatisfied’ with the way the war was going this was his first indication that there was an element of cynicism in the twelve-month-old pact with the Soviet Union.

From the several conferences on German deliveries to Russia he had attended, Milch knew just what this pact had cost them. In addition to scarce equipment and machine tools, the navy was supposed to hand over the modern cruiser *Lützow* and the Luftwaffe some of its most secret armament, including the new 105-millimetre heavy flak battery. A Russian general had arrived to test-fly the Heinkel 100 record-breaking fighter prototype, and then that had been crated up for Russia too. The Russians were even demanding the blue-prints for every item they were given. In return they were supplying oil and raw materials to Germany.¹

This cooperation ended after Germany’s staggering *blitzkrieg* victories over Norway and France. Göring later said, ‘The Soviet Union thereupon increased the scale of its own arms programme and redoubled its preparations in the territories it had newly occupied, particularly in the Baltic states, in eastern Poland and Bessarabia, where numerous airfields were constructed and troops were concentrated.’² Luftwaffe experts who toured the Russian industrial region reported to Göring that the aero-engine factories at Kuibyshev alone were

bigger than Germany's six main assembly factories.³ None the less, when Hitler told him during the autumn that he would probably attack Russia, Göring objected — on grounds of expediency rather than of morality. He argued that it would be strategically wrong to break off the air offensive against Britain now; furthermore, he considered that operations against Gibraltar, French North Africa, Malta or Suez rated more attention than opening up voluntarily such an immense new theatre. He believed the Russian rearmament programme would not be complete until 1943.⁴

The visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov to Berlin in mid-November 1940 revealed to the Germans the edge of the abyss. From these conversations Hitler realized that the 'honeymoon', as he termed it, was over. He had already ordered that preparations for a Russian campaign should continue without remission; now he tentatively set the date for mid-May 1941 — the date he had previously earmarked for the invasion of Britain. This new contingency was the subject of a select conference at the Air Ministry on 13 January 1941. Milch recorded in his diary only, 'Afternoon, major conference with Göring, Jeschonnek, Bodenschatz re: the East.' The same day Jeschonnek flew to his headquarters and briefed the Air Staff for the first time on the planning for 'Barbarossa', the Russian campaign.⁵ Two weeks later Göring's special train returned and the Reichsmarschall resumed command, his two-month leave at an end.⁶ His state secretary, Milch, now went on leave himself and it was in his absence, on 20 February, that a special unit (like those earlier established for the campaigns in Spain and Norway) was set up at the Air Staff College under Colonel Löbel, to coordinate planning for 'Barbarossa'.⁷

Milch went on leave and heard no more about Russia. On his return a bombshell burst: General Otto Rüdel, Chief of Air Defence, who had been deputizing for him, appeared in his room at the ministry with an officer from the administration department and inquired whether Milch approved the directive that no winter clothing be ordered for the new campaign.

'New campaign?' Milch asked. Rüdel explained, 'The campaign in Russia.' Milch leapt out of his chair, overcome with surprise. Visions of the eastern front — of the slaughter he had witnessed at Gumbinnen, Ossowiez and Raczki in the

First World War — crossed before his eyes. ‘We have been ordered to prepare for a campaign against Russia,’ Rüdel continued. ‘But it will all be over before winter sets in.’ Milch retorted, ‘Whoever said that must be mad.’ Rüdel warned in some embarrassment, ‘It comes on very high authority.’ The field marshal replied that even so they must assume that any war with Russia would last at least four years, and that could mean four winters.⁸

The Air Staff, and in particular the Quartermaster-General, von Seidel, refused to accept responsibility for violating Hitler’s edict; but Milch knew no scruples, accepted full responsibility and personally ordered the manufacture of extra woollen underwear, five pairs of stockings, big fur boots and sheepskins for each of a million Luftwaffe men on the eastern front. He also ordered the urgent provision of winter equipment for the squadrons. The winter clothing was manufactured, as usual, by the army’s clothing office. There was no reason why the army could not have taken the same precautions for its own men, but to the General Staff, too, Hitler’s edict was law and only the sixty divisions foreseen for the army of occupation in a defeated Russia had been provided with special winter clothing by the time the campaign began.⁹ When the terrible winter came the army suffered more casualties from frostbite than from action, and the Luftwaffe’s eight hundred thousand men were ordered by Hitler to relinquish some of their own winter clothing to the army.¹⁰

After the winter was over von Seidel accepted Göring’s congratulations. (‘We have been issuing winter orders and directives ever since 22 June 1941,’ he said — as though these could have any real effect by the coming winter.¹¹ The evidence is that the Air Staff did not itself issue such orders until late August.) Through Milch’s foresight the Luftwaffe was spared the worst.

All this did not mean that he approved of the Russian campaign. He argued strongly against it, reminding Göring that the Führer had so far avoided the perils of a war on two fronts; the formation of a western front must surely only be a matter of time, and sooner or later America would also enter the war, as was evident from the secret American arms production figures he regularly noted in his pocket-book. Göring answered that, since there could be no western front until 1942, the Führer had a year to fight himself free in the rear. When Milch

rejoined that he doubted that one summer campaign would suffice to finish off Russia, Göring reassured him, ‘If we strike hard enough, Russia will collapse like a pack of cards, because the communist system is despised by the masses in Russia.’ The Führer, he added, was a unique leader, granted to the German nation by Providence: ‘The rest of us, we lesser mortals, can only march behind him with complete faith in his ability. Then we cannot go wrong.’¹²

The existence of a God and Providence was not disputed by Milch. None the less he appealed to Göring to try again to dissuade Hitler. ‘Herr Reichsmarschall — this is your great, historic hour. You must prevent this attack on Russia — you are the only one who is in a position to bring the Führer round to accept your view. If you can prevent this war in the east, then you will have done your Fatherland the greatest service of your life.’ Göring replied that it was hopeless: ‘The Führer has made up his mind. There is no power on earth that can change it for him now.’

Even now there was an unexpected series of interludes. At the end of March 1941 Milch was committed to a one-week tour of Germany’s major towns to check on the progress of his air-raid defence programme. As he was flying to Hamburg news arrived in Berlin of an anti-German revolution in Belgrade. Hitler called his C-in-Cs to the Reich Chancery and announced his decision ‘to destroy Yugoslavia both as a military power and as a nation’. For some weeks he had been planning a lightning war in Greece to rescue the Italians; the attack on Yugoslavia would be synchronized with that on Greece, starting early on 6 April.¹³

Milch was ordered back to Berlin with other senior generals to hear a fresh harangue from Hitler. For three hours Hitler argued that the western theatre — and that meant Britain — was still the vital one, but that an attack on the Balkans was now a regrettable prerequisite to the defeat of Britain.¹⁴ Justifying his decision to attack Russia too, he stated that only by destroying the Soviet armed forces could Germany maintain her position in the air and on the seas in two years’ time. But he also spoke in unmistakable terms of his intention of destroying Bolshevism and all its panoply — ‘liquidating the Bolshevik commissars and the communist intelligentsia’.¹⁵

Within ten days the Luftwaffe had completed its rapid regrouping for the Balkan campaign, about six hundred aircraft having been moved up from bases in France, Sicily and Africa and added to the five hundred German aircraft already in this new theatre. The offensive opened on 6 April with a heavy air attack on Yugoslav airfields and the capital: in Belgrade seventeen thousand people were killed and the government quarters paralysed within hours of the war breaking out. Yugoslavia was defeated within a week.¹⁶ In Greece, despite the support of General von Richthofen's Eighth Air Corps, the Germans met more determined opposition. Milch marvelled at the heroic resistance offered by the Greeks at the crossing of the Struma river.¹⁷ On 21 April Greece too laid down her arms. It was to be the last occasion on which the Luftwaffe could claim an unqualified victory.

General Rieckhoff, in the earliest postwar history of the Luftwaffe, wrote: 'Of all the senior officers in the Reich Air Ministry there was nobody who saw the coming technical *débâcle* and interpreted it better than the state secretary, Milch.'¹⁸ Because of the lack of adequate development control the new aircraft on which the Air Staff had been relying for 1941 were still not there; indeed those bearing the main burden — the Me 109, the Me 110, the He 111, the Ju 52, the Ju 87, the Do 17 and the FW 200 — had all been developed in the pre-Udet era, before 1936. They had entered mass production only after completion of a three-year sequence of four preliminary stages. First had come the construction and design of the prototype, and then had come three carefully overlapped intermediate stages — test-flying, preparation for serial production and pilot series. Udet had attempted to concertina these three stages to cut a year off the total time; the mass production had begun before test-flying was complete, leading to repeated breakdowns and stopping of production. The Ju 88 had been the first casualty; now, in early 1941, several more became apparent — the Me 109F, the Me 210, the He 177 and the FW 190.¹⁹

After the Luftwaffe's more experienced fighter commanders, Galland and Mölders, had complained in the autumn of 1940 to Göring that the Me 109E was inferior to the Spitfire, Udet had told them about the Mark F, with its DB 601E engine, which would arrive early in 1941 at the squadrons. By the spring,

however, it was still not coming out of the Messerschmitt production plants.

Far more serious was the case of the Me 210 twin-engined fighter-bomber. The Air Staff had asked Professor Messerschmitt to update the Me 110 by minor aerodynamic changes and by fitting a bigger power plant, the 1,900-horsepower Daimler-Benz 603. The revised aircraft was to carry better defensive armament and bombs up to 500 kilos on internal racks, as a dive-bomber. Udet's intention was that the modifications should be made without interrupting the Me 110 production schedule. Without informing him, however, Professor Messerschmitt seized the opportunity of designing a completely new aircraft, the Me 210; he did not seek to amend the delivery date, and the Air Staff believed the first one thousand would have been delivered by the spring of 1941. In view of the coming offensive, Jeschonnek attached great importance to this aircraft.²⁰

By April 1941, however, not one Me 210 had been delivered and there was growing consternation at the ministry. Kokothaki, Messerschmitt's business manager, disclosed to a ministry investigator that the aircraft had gone into mass production not only at Augsburg but also on a licence basis elsewhere, even though the prototype's test-flights were not complete. He depicted this action of his master as 'irresponsible'. Messerschmitt took him aside and threatened him with dismissal, but Kokothaki stood his ground. The ministry had no alternative but to pour manpower and effort into the factory in an effort to save the aircraft; but deliveries of the Me 210 did not commence until 1942, and even then its troubles were only just beginning.

Of all this Milch had been unaware, as he had long been excluded from Udet's consultations. Until 1941 nobody ventured to injure the sensitive Director of Air Armament, although many recognized where the blame lay. General von Witzendorff described Udet as 'a sparkling society man, full of wit and humour', but he disliked desk work and had relied so heavily on his staff that their power had outgrown his own. The Luftwaffe's chief judge advocate wrote of Udet, 'He had none of the qualities needed for a high office. Above all he lacked real knowledge, he lacked moral rectitude, and he lacked a sense of responsibility.'²¹ And Heinkel's Berlin representative minuted in February 1941 that Milch was blaming Udet for their equipment shortcomings in the Battle of Britain:

'Everything turns to dust in Udet's hands.'²²

At the ministry Udet's staff had swollen to more than four thousand — a rabbit warren of colonels, bureaucrats and engineers, responsible for everything but responsible to nobody. After this unwholesome heritage had fallen to Milch, Göring warned him: 'There's still many a scoundrel there . . . There are departments you've never heard of. But suddenly they come to life — suddenly there is some foul-up and the shout goes up: "Air Ministry!" "Not us!" you say. "*And how!*" is the reply. And all of a sudden you find there is this department that has been ticking away there for a dozen years and nobody knew about it.' Göring even claimed, 'You'll find people there who've been thrown out on their ears three times already, and they come to light in some other department again, only bigger and stronger than ever.'²³

Of Udet's chief of staff, Major-General Ploch, Milch had already made an implacable enemy. He had lost heavily gambling with Milch and Sperrle at Deauville some months before and could not pay the debt; Milch had given the general a stern dressing-down, and Sperrle insisted on payment and used the money to buy clothes and food for Ploch's wife. Ploch was found to have played a crucial role in Udet's final collapse.²⁴ To his friends Udet began to complain of the interest Milch was showing in his affairs. He declared that Milch was a foe in his absence and a friend to his face. The field marshal was too much his opposite — too much of the 'able and energetic U.S. businessman', as *Time* magazine had recently described him. Moreover, even Udet, the antiseptic hero of the pre-1933 German film industry, had become infected with Nazi propaganda, and he did not remain unsusceptible to malicious rumours which were circulating about Milch's non-Aryan origins.

Early in April 1941 Udet was called upon to explain discrepancies discovered by Jeschonnek in the aircraft production figures. The resulting scrutiny exposed the weaknesses of the 'sliding programmes' which characterized the Udet era — programmes constantly altered to fit the results.²⁵ Throughout the spring the growing shortage of aero-engines and fighter aircraft featured regularly on Udet's agenda for discussion with Göring, but there is no evidence that these topics were ever discussed. 'When he met Göring,' the judge advocate later wrote, 'they just spoke of the old days. All talk of shop was painfully

avoided.*²⁶

On 6 May 1941 Göring again went on leave for a month, staying at his tenth-century family castle outside Nuremberg. In his absence Milch intervened more firmly in Udet's department, calling him to his hunting lodge one afternoon and ordering him to pull himself together.²⁷ The field marshal could be very tough indeed (one of Göring's other state secretaries once claimed: 'That Milch — he pisses ice!') and there is no doubt that Milch used his authority on this occasion. For the first time he learned that Udet had, as we have seen, no fewer than twenty-six departmental heads reporting directly to him; he advised him to regroup his organization into three or four main sections, but the advice fell on deaf ears.²⁸

Meanwhile the Luftwaffe had mounted a major airborne invasion — its last — to capture the Mediterranean island of Crete. In costly fighting, the German paratroops forced the British defences out; by the end of the operation 4,500 of the thirteen thousand of Göring's troops who had taken part were dead or missing, and the Ju 52 transport fleet had been halved (271 Ju 52s were destroyed or damaged beyond repair). On 22 May, with this battle still at its height, Göring summoned Milch to his castle to hear the news about Crete. Evidently Milch lost no time in outlining the chaotic production position — Germany was to enter the Russian campaign with 2,770 first-line aircraft in the east, compared with the 2,600 she had marshalled against Britain one year before — since on the very next day, 23 May, Udet was subjected to a blistering attack by Göring, probably for the first time.²⁹ Udet in turn vented his feelings privately on Milch, telling Heinkel in Berlin: 'They're all against me. The "Iron Man" [Göring] has just gone on leave and he has left me at Milch's mercy. Milch deputizes for him at the Führer's headquarters, and will see that every error I have ever made is served up for the Führer's edification.'³⁰ A few days

* Udet's agendas are preserved among Milch's documents. They make interesting reading. In the notes for 6 March 1941, 'Supply position and conference with Air Staff on increasing fighter production' is item 10, after such items as 'War Service Medal with Swords for Hanna Reitsch'. Item 10 was not reached, for it appears again as item 17 on 12 March and again on 18 March. Study of the whole series of notes suggests that most such items remained permanently undiscussed. Udet's notes for 29 April are decorated with a cluster of brightly coloured balloons.

later Udet was to be seen in the same restaurant, at Milch's table, laughing and drinking with his friend as usual.³¹

Göring sent Milch to France to scrutinize Sperrle's Third Air Force, but within a few days the field marshal was back in Berlin, resuming his investigation of Udet's office. The latter's adjutant recorded 'considerable arguments' with Milch; Milch just noted, 'Hopeless', in his diary.³² It proved impossible to extract firm statistics from Udet's staff. 'What they dished up there was just rubbish,' Milch recalled two years later. 'Nobody understood it, least of all the people who had prepared the figures.' And Göring shared his mistrust: 'if they come to, me with graphs, then I know from the outset that it's a swindle; and if they want to multiply the swindle, they do it all in three colours!'³³

Milch knew enough to spot the fallacies: a new aircraft took nine months or more to manufacture, yet on average Udet's staff had drafted a new programme every six weeks. He was beginning to suspect that Udet's whole four-thousand-man office was based on nothing but self-deception and fantasy.³⁴ This was a view which Göring also adopted in time: 'Never have I been so deceived, so bamboozled and so cheated as by that office. It has no equal in history.'

In mid-June Milch saw Hitler again, in company with over forty other senior officers in Berlin for a final discussion before the invasion of Russia began eight days later.³⁵ Hitler spoke to them on the justification for his attack. The principal enemy was still Britain — she would keep fighting as long as this had any point. It was a British national characteristic illustrated as much by the individual soldier's demeanour at Flanders and Dunkirk as in Greece and Crete.³⁶ But Britain's fight made sense only so long as there was a prospect of effective American aid and Russian intervention, and American aid could have no effect before the summer of 1942, and only then if the volume of traffic across the Atlantic could be maintained in face of mounting Allied shipping losses. Russia's attitude had always been one of opportunism: even if Germany were to make peace with Britain, the size of Russia's armed forces would preclude any German demobilization.

An early conflict, at a time of Germany's choosing, was the only solution.

As Russia had concentrated the bulk of her armed forces on their common frontier, there was every prospect of defeating her right there.

Hitler had set out the Luftwaffe's task as being 'to release such powerful forces for the eastern campaign that a rapid conclusion of the ground operations may be anticipated'. At the same time it was to ensure that 'offensive operations against Britain, and in particular against her supply lines, do not come to a total standstill'.³⁷ On the day after Hitler's conference Göring summoned his own commanders to Karinhall for a similar discussion. Milch gained the impression that Göring was uncertain of the future, and the general atmosphere was not one of elation.

The campaign opened shortly before dawn on 22 June, with heavy air attacks on three-score Russian airfields and on selected cities within aircraft range. The Russians were evidently taken by surprise and Milch ascribed this to the probability that the enemy had 'overestimated our intelligence'.³⁸ In fact, the Germans had underestimated the Russians' strength — the strength of Soviet industry and the blind courage of the Soviet soldier. Most of Hitler's commanders had served on the western front in the First World War and had no concept of the endlessness of the Russian expanses; this was certainly true of Göring and Jeschonnek. But Milch knew the Russians: he had himself flown across the steppes, and above all he had cause to know the willingness with which the Slavs sacrificed themselves in a patriotic struggle; he was still haunted by memories of the bloodbaths he had seen on the Russian front a quarter of a century before.

General Jeschonnek approached the new war with enthusiasm ('at last a proper war!') and even Milch shared this momentary fervour: he recorded 1,600 Russian aircraft destroyed on the first day, a figure he amended before nightfall to 1,800.³⁹ About 800 more were reported destroyed on the twenty-third, 557 on the twenty-fourth, 351 on the twenty-fifth, and a further 300 next day. Exaggerated though these early reports probably were, the Luftwaffe's own losses were nothing in comparison.⁴⁰

Only later did it become clear that the 'army support' role assigned to the Luftwaffe would last longer than just the first few weeks. Inevitably the temporary prohibition on attacking strategic targets in the Soviet hinterland contin-

ued in force, because the initial war of movement did not come to an end. In the meantime the enemy's industrial plants were evacuated along still intact railways to far beyond the Urals, where the German bombers could not reach them, and soon the stricken Soviet air force was being reequipped with new aircraft. After the first weeks of triumph, a night without end closed upon Hitler and his grand strategy.

C H A P T E R 8

EXIT A HERO

June–November 1941

SEEN IN THE PERSPECTIVE of war, the passing of one man may seem of little interest in the biography of another. Yet no event was to have a more profound effect on Erhard Milch than the death of Ernst Udet.

The long final phase of this personal tragedy began two days before the invasion of the Soviet Union. Anticipating swift victory, Hitler commanded a reduction in the level of army armaments production and high priority for the production of aircraft for the subsequent fight against Britain.¹ Göring issued orders for the quadrupling of the Luftwaffe's front line, and to this purpose he gave Milch a special commission to carry the new programme through. Milch was to discuss everything with Udet over the next few days and find out what the true capabilities of the air industry were.²

Udet, however, knew of no way of increasing aircraft production. He was already very ill — apathetic, afflicted with blood disorders and terrible headaches; all day long he heard a buzzing in his ears and no doctor could help him.³ He feared the bustling field marshal more than he feared any other. Now Milch came to him with instructions from Göring that he was to be told all. Milch later said, 'Udet told me all his woes — not enough raw materials, not enough workers.' In other ways too the Luftwaffe was the Cinderella of the war economy, said Udet: 'Nobody stands up for the Luftwaffe. Minister Todt has far greater influence on the Führer than Göring.'⁴ Todt had headed the army's

munitions procurement since the spring of 1940; as such his authority over the allocation of raw materials and manpower was formidable.

Milch told Göring that the Führer's new command would result in an increased front line only if it was supported by a powerful written authority for 'either Udet or me', an authority 'with which we can make headway against the army's armament'. Göring asked him to draw one up and he would sign it.⁵ It was ready a few hours later and Milch's was the name entered in it.⁶

The document authorized Milch to close down and confiscate factories, to erect temporary buildings regardless of industrial regulations, air-raid precautions, social amenities and the like. It empowered him to draft German manpower by force into factory construction and aircraft manufacture. He could cancel contracts, 'dismiss and transfer leading personalities of the entire armaments industry without regard to existing private contracts of service', create new limited companies and hive off old factories operating inefficiently. The document was addressed to every Reich minister, to the military economics officers and to the High Command.⁷ Göring signed it without hesitation.⁸

Milch immediately set the revolution in motion. On 23 June he charged Albert Speer, Berlin's chief architect, with the rapid erection of three huge aircraft factories — each as big as the rambling Volkswagen works — at Brünn, Graz and Vienna. Speer noted, 'Each building is to be put up in temporary form only, and is to be pulled down without question at the end of the war.'⁹ Speer completed these three buildings within eight months. Next day Milch discussed with the industrialization expert, William Werner, the radical reorganization of the industry under an 'industrial council' as supervisory body: the factories were to be encouraged to work more on their own initiative, but the industry would be divided up into slabs according to product, not according to the factory's name or the aircraft type. Each such slab, termed a 'production ring', would have a 'controller' responsible to the council, of which Milch was chairman; the controller would be the most outstanding industrialist in that particular field. If crankshafts were produced at twenty factories, all would now be controlled by the one man; it meant the end of trade secrets, but an obvious increase in efficiency.¹⁰ In Milch's view only the industrialists — whom he knew and respected from his Lufthansa days — could meet the new challenge.

Milch called a major conference at the Air Ministry to unfold the 'Göring Programme'.¹¹ He announced that the present production of the air industry was not enough to keep pace with their losses; they would probably lose eight or nine hundred aircraft during June. During the Russian campaign, moreover, British aircraft production would be undisturbed by air attack, and soon the Germans must reckon with American aircraft production being added to the scales as well. 'The Luftwaffe is therefore to be quadrupled,' he explained. The name 'Göring Programme' was Milch's own idea: 'I wanted the programme to carry the Reichsmarschall's name,' he candidly told industrialists later, 'so that he would feel some close connection with it.'¹²

The first target Milch set was to double production of war aircraft — an increase of 1,200 — by the late spring of 1942. The three bottlenecks — aero-engine production, manpower and aluminium supplies — would each be settled in a different way. A plant with a capacity of a thousand engines a month was under construction; its completion would be brought forward by one month to four months. Speer was building three aircraft assembly factories. To meet the huge labour requirements — assessed by Udet at a minimum of 3,500,000 new workers to add to the existing 1,300,000 in air armament — Hitler ordered the immediate disbandment of three divisions in the east as one contribution, while the bulk of the rest were 'to be withdrawn from army production'. To curb the growing problems of absentees (*Bummelanten*), Milch announced, 'I have reached agreement with the Reichsführer SS Himmler, that anybody who changes jobs more than three times a year is to be drafted to a forced labour battalion; and anybody who refuses to work even there will be shot.'



Udet, the Bohemian caricaturist and former stunt pilot, alternately idolized and mistrusted Milch.
(MILCH COLLECTION)

Udet did not attend these Air Ministry conferences. His engineers advised Milch that the whole aircraft programme was hamstrung by the supplies of aluminium and copper available. As it was, the existing airframe industry could use only eighty percent of its production capacity because of the aluminium shortage; what was the point of expanding the capacity?*

There seemed no way round this. Milch pondered the aluminium problem for several days and finally sent a score of young engineers to examine every aircraft factory for ways of reducing aluminium and copper consumption. They reported to him not only on wasteful metal-working practices — for example, better machining methods would save fifteen hundred pounds of aluminium in one aero-engine alone — but on downright abuses of the Reich's aluminium resources. At Messerschmitt's factory his engineers chanced upon workers manufacturing tropical huts from the Luftwaffe's aluminium stocks, for a navy contract in connection with Germany's future colonial programme; other Messerschmitt workers were turning out aluminium ladders for vineyards. All the inspectors reported finding secret stocks of aluminium hoarded for emergencies.¹⁴

In Milch's view the emergency had now come. Above all he was alarmed by the resources of the United States. By 1 May combined Anglo-American aircraft production was greater than that of the Axis countries, and if Germany was content with the present rate the imbalance would be twice as great by the end of 1942. From intelligence sources Milch knew that in June the American industry had manufactured 2,800 high-grade aero-engines. By the summer American production was 1,400 aircraft of all war types (including trainers) every month; in 1942 America would probably produce sixteen thousand military aircraft.¹⁵ 'Britain would have hauled the flag down long ago if it had not been for America's support,' Milch was to say later in the summer. 'The Ameri-

* So Milch said on 26 June 1941. In August 1943 he recalled, 'At that time the experts calculated that we needed sixteen thousand tons of copper a month, otherwise the industry would never manage eight hundred aircraft. Today we are not even getting four thousand tons of copper but we have not manufactured one single aircraft or aircraft component fewer because of any copper shortage.'¹³

cans can manufacture in peace; they have enough to eat, they have enough workers (with still over five million unemployed) and they do not suffer air raids. American war industry is magnificently organized by a man who really knows his business, Mr Knudsen of General Motors.¹⁶

Against this firm intelligence on the British and American aircraft production programmes Milch could set only the vaguest information on German production. He knew that Udet was running down production of all the currently used engine types and most of the bombers, except the improved Dornier (the Do 217), which would rise to sixty a month from February 1942; but he could extract no firm promises from Udet on what bomber was to replace the Heinkel 111 and the Junkers 88 from early 1942. There was talk in Udet's office of a Bomber B, but when Milch, suddenly alarmed for the future, pressed for information it became apparent that no decision had even been reached on which of two contenders — a Junkers 288, or a Focke-Wulf 191 — was to be the Bomber B.¹⁷

At Nuremberg Milch was to testify, ‘... and now I wanted to see this new aircraft; and in doing so I found out that this aircraft could never start production in 1942, but in 1944 at the earliest.’¹⁸ It was generally agreed that B would be powered by the Jumo 222, with a take-off power of 2,000 horsepower. It had originally been designed to succeed the 1,500-horsepower Jumo 213, the hoped-for successor to the Jumo 211 powering the Junkers 88; in 1940, when the more powerful (1,450 horsepower) Jumo 211J had been developed using special air cooling, the ministry had decided to use it to power the next generation of Junkers 88s instead of the Jumo 213 which was not much better, and then proceed straight to Bomber B — probably the Junkers 288 — at the beginning of 1942. The trouble was that the Jumo 222 was causing difficulties: the airframe of the Ju 288 had first flown at the end of 1940, using the BMW 801G engines as stand-ins, but it had still not flown using the Jumo 222s.¹⁹ This was the problem to which not only Udet but his entire staff had shut their eyes. Production of their existing bombers was being run to a standstill, but the replacement was hopelessly delayed. From the spring of 1942 the Reich would be producing fewer than one hundred bombers a month. It spelt certain death to the bomber arm.

Even worse was the fighter aircraft situation. Average fighter production had never exceeded 220 a month, but now Udet had stopped production of the old fighters and was retooling for an advanced Me 109 powered by the DB 605 engine. The trouble was that this engine was overheating and neither the industry nor Udet's engineers had solved the problem. Similarly, the replacement for the Me 110 twin-engined fighter, the Me 210, was demonstrating serious design faults: it tended to go into a flat spin, and many brave test pilots had already lost their lives.²⁰ Finally, they were also experiencing trouble with the engine for Kurt Tank's remarkable fighter, the Focke-Wulf 190; the double-row radial engine — the BMW 801 — was a departure from the in-line liquid cooled engines previously favoured by German designers. In short, a daunting task confronted Milch.

'I wanted this job like the devil,' wrote Milch in his memoirs, 'because I had no wish to make things more difficult for my friend Udet, who allowed himself to be talked into things by his staff, unfortunately. On the other hand, it was a matter of life and death.' By early July it was clear to him that a quadrupling of the Luftwaffe, the 'Göring Programme', was an unrealistic ideal, as they would have neither the aluminium to build the planes, nor the fuel to fly them. The High Command's General Thomas and Ernst Udet agreed with him on an interim target of doubling the front line, beginning in the summer of 1942; Milch asked Udet to draw up an interim production programme reflecting this. 'Give me until tomorrow,' was the general's reply. (Milch later found that there was a special department which did nothing but draw up programmes in multi-colored graphs and diagrams.) But he advised Udet to take rather longer to draw up this one, and to bring the draft to his office on 8 July.²¹ He reported to Göring on the fourth on the steps he had taken, and departed on his first tour of the units fighting on the eastern front.

Udet did not appear on the eighth. His staff said that he had flown independently to headquarters to show Göring the new 'Moose' programme. (This was evidently the embryo interim programme.) Milch angrily cabled the Director of Air Armament, 'care of Reichsmarschall Göring', instructing him to return to Berlin before showing the 'Moose' programme to the Reichsmarschall.²² How could he carry out Göring's special commission if Udet continued

to act as if it did not exist?

Neither Göring nor Udet saw the incident in this light. Udet complained about the telegram, and on 9 July Milch received a letter from Göring berating him for putting pressure on the colonel-general: he, Göring, would discuss his programme with anybody he liked. Udet returned to Berlin that evening, but for many days declined to call on Milch. Eventually Milch cabled Göring that he wished to be released immediately from the special commission. After several more days he was instructed to fly to headquarters on the sixteenth. Here Göring abused him for his lack of cooperation with Udet.²³ The state secretary replied that he had good cause: much against his instincts, he had accepted Göring's commission, yet Udet was acting as though it did not exist. Shown Udet's new 'Moose' programme, he told the Reichsmarschall it was as impossible as its predecessors. There could be no effect on finished aircraft production for at least nine months, that being the length of the production pipeline, yet the 'Moose' programme showed a huge increase within ten months. Udet could only apologize that these were his experts' figures — he could not check them himself. 'The main thing is that we are of one accord,' Milch said, and Udet and Milch flew back to Berlin together.²⁴

For the next weeks the new harmony was maintained. It was the harmony of doctor and patient. But over them hung the knowledge that production was still not keeping pace. By 5 July the Luftwaffe's first-line strength on the eastern front was down to 1,888 fighters and bombers.²⁵ Milch and Udet toiled round from BMW to Daimler-Benz and from Dornier to Messerschmitt. The state secretary tried hard to overcome his antipathy toward the latter — it was he who had recommended Messerschmitt (and Heinkel) for the National Prize some years before. Yet Professor Messerschmitt was only interested in designing new aircraft. Altogether there were currently no fewer than forty different German aircraft types under production, of which Messerschmitt was working on eleven. (Heinkel had designed ten aircraft, of which only one was in mass production.) Milch attached particular importance to the undisturbed production of the Me 109 fighter, particularly the Mark F, as soon as possible.

On 7 August he flew to Bavaria with Udet to tour the Messerschmitt factories. When they landed at Augsburg they found the Messerschmitt staff lined

up for a great parade. This was the first irritation Milch encountered. The second was that he found surprisingly little activity when he toured the Me 109 production line. The professor guided him into a development building and proudly showed him the prototype of the Me 262 jet fighter; but it had only wooden engines, and Milch knew that the first Jumo 004 jet engines were not nearly ready (the engine's flight trials did not begin for seven months).²⁶ He suspected that Messerschmitt was trying to distract attention and angrily ordered the ministry's inspector at the works to see that no work whatsoever was done on the Me 262 mock-up until the Me 109F was coming off the production lines.

But Professor Messerschmitt remained unconvinced by Milch's hard language. He now recalls, 'As soon as my visitors had flown off, I sat down with the ministry inspector — Engineer-Colonel Meyer — and his people and persuaded them to let me carry on with the jet on the quiet. They granted me twenty engineers, and we went on as though nothing had happened.'²⁷ Milch soon concluded that he could not rely on Messerschmitt, and when he promulgated his new production programme it showed an increase in the Me 109, but a demand for two and a half times as many Focke-Wulf 190s as Me 109s.²⁸

Setbacks in the Russian campaign in August resulted in a recasting of priorities. The army could no longer demobilize manpower for Milch, and now had a requirement for six hundred medium and fifty heavy tanks a month. In mid-August Milch none the less argued with the other services for the provision of sufficient workers for the air industry: 'The production and wastage of aircraft are just about balancing each other out at present,' he said. 'So there will not be any overall increase in our fighting strength — indeed, there will be a decrease, since we cannot expect to get the aircraft back from the eastern front in perfect condition for the western front, when the war in Russia is over.'²⁹ He urged the adoption of total war measures (like prohibiting any construction work of purely postwar interest, such as the reconstruction of Munich station) before it was too late.

He did what he could to alleviate the most pressing needs of the squadrons. On 21 August he flew to the eastern front and toured the units. On every

airfield there were scores, and sometimes hundreds, of damaged aircraft immobilized by the lack of proper spares. He organized squads of engineers to fly from squadron to squadron, cannibalizing the damaged aircraft to produce fit ones again.³⁰ As in one of Lufthansa's crises many years before, Milch scrutinized the stocks of useless spares held by the squadrons. 'When I recall what an idiot I was myself as a squadron commander in the Great War!' Milch said some weeks later. 'For just nine aircraft we had several hundred Bosch magnetos and five hundred rubber tyres in our stores.'³¹ A typical absurdity permitted by Udet now was that while the most frequent requirement was for new undercarriages for Ju 52 transporters damaged by the rough landing grounds, a complete set of Ju 52 spares costing 120,000 marks had to be purchased each time. On his return from the front Milch dictated a blistering letter to Udet's chief of staff: 'Our current contracts for supply of spares run to 1.9 billion marks. This sum is to be cut radically and immediately, and by that I mean at least one billion marks before further investigation!'³²

Inevitably his first major *casus belli* was the Bomber B. Since the Focke-Wulf 191 was a year behind the Ju 288 Milch could narrow the choice down immediately to the latter. But by August 1941 it was plain that a not unfamiliar problem had arisen: the all-up weight of the Ju 288 had increased as the Air Staff continually added to their specification. As a result, the prototype Jumo 222 power-plant was not only now too weak but was plagued by malfunctions.³³ Yet Udet's Bomber B was the pivot of 1942's aircraft production, rising to a production of three hundred a month by the end of that year. Milch asked Junkers's general manager Dr Koppenberg whether he could start manufacturing Bomber B *at all* in 1942. He replied emphatically that he could, but mentioned a possible delay because of the engine. Milch had obtained a graphic lay-out of the history of the Ju 52 from design through development and pilot series to mass production; and the Ju 288 was far more complex: 'If I use this as a basis of comparison,' he pointed out, 'and assume that the Bomber B can be completed just as quickly as the Ju 52, then you see we will get it not in 1942, but in 1944!' He dismissed Koppenberg from Junkers on the spot.³⁴

At the end of August Milch's staff were told that there were indeed fundamental problems in the Jumo 222's piston-rod bearings and cylinder heads,

but that mass production was envisaged for mid-1942. The Ju 288 would start production in August 1942. Milch instinctively mistrusted this aircraft; far better to rely on the most modern version of the Ju 88 for another year. On 6 September, Göring approved this reasoning: it was the numbers of aircraft alone that counted. He authorized Milch to cancel the Jumo 222 engine contract, and to postpone the Bomber B.³⁵ It was clear that Koppenberg's was just the first head to roll.

When Milch had returned from his tour of the Russian front, on 27 August 1941, he found Udet gone: he had at last departed on sick leave on Göring's insistence, and became a patient in a sanatorium.³⁶ Even here Udet had little respite, for many measures required his signature — the reorganization of his office, the reversion to the older aircraft types, new programme schedules and the like. Milch had to visit him at his bedside to ask him to reinstate the previously cancelled aircraft in the production programme: more than 240 Ju 88s, 160 He 111s, and 65 Do 217s would have to be produced with the requisite engines each month until such time as the replacement types were ripe for production.³⁷ Milch later explained, 'I visited him and procured his signature, though not without some pressure. Had we not done so on 1 September, we would have seen no new bombers and scarcely any new fighters in 1942.'³⁸

A few days later Milch also dismissed Udet's planning chief, Engineer-General Tschersich, and at the same time removed Koppenberg from the Industrial Council and stripped him of the special powers for Ju 88 production.³⁹ He already had new men lined up for the vacancies — big names from Lufthansa and industry. As a shrewd move for the future he invited Dr Albert Vöbler, one of the most respected names in the steel industry, to join his Industrial Council; on it Milch rested his hopes for increasing output. He planned to fight American conveyer-belt techniques, like those he had himself witnessed at Detroit in the twenties, and Soviet slave-labour with the capitalist profit incentive. To set against Russia's vast losses ('she has lost 1.2 to 1.3 million dead already') there remained one inescapable fact: 'In 1941 we manufactured fewer aircraft each month than we did in 1940!'⁴⁰

There was no problem associated with increasing production which the

state secretary did not consider. With Rautenbach he organized extra foundry capacity; with Porsche he arranged for the incorporation of part of the Volkswagen works; recalling that the Luftwaffe maintained large sawmills in the east, he ordered mass production of sixty thousand wooden chalets to help house the hundreds of thousands of extra workers to be injected into the industry.⁴¹

All of this had been put in hand by 25 September, when Colonel-General Udet — healed in body but still haunted by fears — returned two weeks early from his convalescence.⁴² Milch told him of the reorganization of the office and proposed Lufthansa's Karl-August von Gablenz as the new planning chief. Udet reacted violently against the suggestion, but he agreed to appoint Colonel Edgar Petersen — who had commanded KG 40, a wing of FW 200s — as the new Commander of Research Establishments, with Colonel Wolfgang Vorwald taking over Udet's second office, head of the Technical Department.⁴³

Göring persuaded Udet to accept even von Gablenz, emphasizing with a sidelong glance at Milch, 'That's the very best man I have!'⁴⁴

Milch had also recommended that Udet's chief of staff, Ploch, should be honourably posted away from Berlin, but Göring was in no mood for half measures. On 28 September Udet ordered him to report to the Reichsmarschall. The leave-taking cannot have been a friendly one, for Göring still spoke of him years later with the utmost distaste: 'There was a case when an inventor of some standing came to us with an idea. As Udet was busy he was referred to the chief of staff [Ploch]. Ploch sat up and said, "Yes? So you are the crackpot with yet another invention for us! Well, I've got an invention too. It's called a door. You came in by it. Get out!"' Göring sacked Ploch and banished him to the eastern front.⁴⁵

From that time Ernst Udet could only assume, despite all Milch's assurances to the contrary, that his own career was at an end. Inevitably he sensed the ease with which Milch invested the new programme with momentum and urgency. At Opel's production line near Frankfurt they inspected Ju 88 manufacture and Milch called Udet's attention to the mass-production techniques employed and the firm's avoidance of bureaucratic methods.⁴⁶ By the twentieth the new aircraft programme was drawn up in final outline and approved by Göring.⁴⁷

Altogether Milch and Udet were together a dozen times during October, and tried to pick up their old friendship at Horcher's again. Before the war Udet had once told the author Carl Zuckmayer that he would never go to Horcher's again: 'That's where the top Nazis hang out now.' But now he was a top Nazi himself, and he had enjoyed the fruits of power too long to be able to abdicate painlessly.

On 21 October 1941 Milch announced details of the aircraft production programme — Udet's last — to two hundred representatives of the industry at the ministry.⁴⁸ One feature was very new: whereas the old ratio of Me 109s to FW 190s had been four to one in Messerschmitt's favour, it was now three to one against. It seemed that Kurt Tank's new fighter was proving more reliable in the squadrons than the Me 109, whose fragile landing gear was a constant source of trouble. Many factories currently assembling the Me 109 under licence were to change over to the FW 190.

This shattering news was reported to Messerschmitt's board next day. The company's deputy chairman and banker, Fritz Seiler, who had devoted eight years to making Messerschmitt independent of ministry finance, was stunned by the landslide; after the Me 210 fiasco it was a terrible blow to company prestige. When he pointed out to Milch that the conversion to FW 190s would cause a considerable production loss, the state secretary observed that the particulars had been assembled for him by Udet's office. Seiler gathered that Messerschmitt's objections came at 'anything but an inconvenient moment' for Milch. The latter gave him two or three weeks to prove his case.⁴⁹

Seiler soon learned that the Me 109's superiority was *not* enough to warrant reverting to the old ratio by itself; but from one of the biggest aircraft repair plants he obtained proof that one of Udet's staff had supplied falsified test data favouring the FW 190. And from one of the Me 109 factories — the first due for conversion to FW 190 production — Seiler received statistical evidence that the conversion would cost a production loss of six hundred fighter aircraft there alone. On Professor Messerschmitt's suggestion this production loss was marked as a red shaded area on a graph for Milch.

This ammunition was ready in time for Milch's conference on 12 November. The state secretary explained that Messerschmitt's banker had claimed that

converting factories to FW 190 production was not only an unjustified repudiation of the Me 109, but would also set back total fighter production for many months. He invited Seiler to explain why his test findings on the two aircraft differed from the reports supplied by Udet's office to both Göring and himself. By way of reply, Seiler handed him the photocopied documents establishing the falsification of the test reports. Milch studied the papers and handed them to Udet; Udet looked at them and turned to Seiler, saying: 'Not a very comradely action, Herr Seiler. The decent thing would have been to tell me of this beforehand.' Seiler retorted that nobody had warned Messerschmitt's of the impending programme change: 'It's a game of chess, Herr Udet. I am making the second move.'

Now Seiler announced that, as we have seen, the fighter production loss from just one factory he had investigated would be six hundred aircraft. Milch studied the red-shaded diagram and complained, 'Why was no such chart prepared by the Office of Air Armament?' Udet made no reply. In the circumstances, Milch announced, he would do what he could to restore the original ratio of Me 109s to FW 190s, although he could not promise more than three to one, as one factory was already being converted. It was the ultimate humiliation for Udet and his staff.

Perhaps Udet felt he had been ambushed by his friend. Detecting his bitter expression as they left the room, Milch called him aside and said, 'Udet, I have the impression that our relationship has taken a beating. We must straighten things out again. Let's go to Paris for a few days' relaxation. We both need the break.' Udet accepted the invitation.⁵⁰ As Milch had arranged to go hare-coursing outside Breslau over the coming weekend he suggested that he should collect his friend at Tempelhof airport at noon on Monday. They would fly to Paris together in Udet's small Siebel 104 passenger plane.

With that they parted. Udet spent the weekend with his mistress, a rich divorcée, and with Major-General Ploch, who had returned to Berlin from the eastern front, whither he had been banished by Göring some weeks before. Milch flew to Breslau. On 17 November dense fog stopped him flying back, so he drove the two hundred miles to Berlin along the autobahn. At the ministry he was about to set out for Tempelhof when Udet's adjutant telephoned: Udet

had shot himself that morning.⁵¹

In his last long talk with his mistress the previous day Udet had mentioned some of the problems in which he had become enmeshed — problems of supply, bottlenecks and material shortages. ‘I am sitting at the wrong desk,’ he had kept repeating. That morning her telephone had rung and she had recognized his troubled voice. She offered to come round, but he had interrupted, ‘No, it is too late! Tell “Pili” Körner that he is to execute my testament.’ (Körner was one of Göring’s other state secretaries.) A shot had sounded in the receiver. Aghast, she rang Udet back on another line; the phone was not answered. By the time she and Körner reached the house the housekeeper had forced open the bedroom door. Two empty cognac bottles lay near the revolver on the floor; the body was on the bed.⁵²

She told Körner that Udet had said that ‘they’ were after him. Whom Udet meant by ‘they’ was evident from two red-crayon phrases scrawled on the grey wall above the bed. One was directed against Reichsmarschall Göring: ‘Iron Man, you left me!’ In the other he turned on Milch, his best friend, asking Göring why he had surrendered him to ‘those Jews’ Milch and von Gablenz.⁵³ While the lifeless body was carried into the bathroom Udet’s adjutant scrubbed the writing from the wall. Körner opened the dead man’s safe and while the adjutant cleared out the official papers Körner removed an envelope addressed to him. It contained Udet’s last letter to Göring. Körner decided he could not send it on. It amplified the wall graffiti with some venom — in one sentence Udet had described himself as a victim of ‘the Jews’ Milch and von Gablenz.⁵⁴

By midday Milch himself had arrived at the house. Together they reconstructed Udet’s last hours. His heavy recourse to narcotic stimulants and all the ugly side-effects of addiction on his personal appearance had finally proved too much for his mistress and she was leaving him. His difficulties in the ministry and the sudden return of Ploch from the eastern front had pushed him over the brink. Ploch had spent the small hours drinking with him and was found by the official inquiry to have hinted that Milch was planning to dismiss Udet altogether. Learning of all this from Göring six months later, Milch wrote in his diary, ‘The swine was Ploch!’⁵⁵

Not since the death of a boyhood friend in a Lufthansa crash eleven years before had one man's death affected Erhard Milch so much. He telephoned Göring that evening and discussed the implications. The Reichsmarschall was in no doubt that the scandal had to be hushed up. Next morning his physician cabled to the ministry a press notice Göring had dictated:

While testing a new weapon on Monday 17 November 1941, the Director of Air Armament Colonel-General Udet suffered such a severe accident that he died of his injuries on the way to hospital.

The Führer has ordained a State funeral for this officer, who has departed this world so tragically in fulfilment of his duty.⁵⁶

In Berlin the mortal remains of the man — a failure in his lifetime, and a hero again with his death — were returned to the Air Ministry. With solemn face Milch awaited the arrival of the cortège. As the pall-bearers slow-marched into the Great Hall the flags went to half-mast on every building in Berlin. The leading bearers of the Knight's Cross were summoned from every corner of the Reich to mount guard on the coffin during the funeral service.

That morning was overshadowed by still further tragedy. General Wilberg, one of Milch's earliest commanders and a father of the secret Luftwaffe of the twenties, had been killed in an air crash, and Werner Mölders died as his aircraft hit a factory chimney on the way to the funeral. Hitler remained silent throughout the ceremony. Years later he was to comment on the circumstances of Udet's departure: 'How easy he made it for himself!'⁵⁷ As the Great Hall slowly emptied, Hitler took Field Marshal Milch aside and said pointedly to him: 'Now there is another grave burden for you to take upon yourself.'

After four years of enforced inactivity, watching as incompetent men — some well-meaning, some evil — had destroyed the future of the German air force, Erhard Milch, the state secretary in the Air Ministry, was to become Director of Air Armament as well; he was to preside over the Luftwaffe's rebirth.

P A R T I I I

THE AUGEAN STABLES



*'Perhaps I look a sight to you today,
but I guarantee I won't still look a sight
in three months' time.'*

Milch to his staff, early 1942

C H A P T E R 9

NEW BROOM

November 1941–March 1942

ASKED BY AN ALLIED interrogator to describe the Luftwaffe's cardinal errors in the Second World War, Field Marshal Milch replied that he knew only one: 'One hundred and forty thousand unbuilt fighter aircraft'¹ More clearly than any of his contemporaries he had foretold the coming apocalypse. From intelligence sources the Germans knew that America — now at war with Japan and Germany — was planning to manufacture sixty thousand aircraft in 1942 and twice that number in 1943.²

Milch had inherited a veritable clinic of ailing projects, ill-planned industry and corrupt organization. In the spring of 1944, when air superiority was finally lost to the Allies, a Luftwaffe expert was to write, looking back over the years of Udet:

Were one to pen a faithful account, an objective history of the Luftwaffe's technical development since 1934, then any outsider today — or better, any of our descendants — would take the whole thing as satire, dreamed up by some diseased imagination. Who could seriously believe that in real life there would be so much inadequacy, bungling, entanglement, misplaced power, lack of appreciation of the truth and overlooking of intelligent ideas?³

Milch proved himself equal to the situation. In the twenty months before the appearance of the American air force in earnest in July 1943, he increased German aircraft production 2.7 times.⁴ By the time he was forced to stand down in June 1944, the industry was manufacturing *fifteen* times as many fighter aircraft as in the summer of 1941. Milch achieved this by ruthless rationalization of the industry, and by a seemingly immiscible amalgam of brutality and humanity. Important posts were filled with capable officers, paperwork was halved, efficient contacts were established between industry and squadron, and eccentric and useless aircraft projects were struck off the programmes. By early 1943 he had reached the supreme pinnacle of his career. The story would take a dozen volumes to tell with justice.

His relations with the principal aircraft designers, and particularly with Willy Messerschmitt, had always been marked by an animosity for which there was probably no sound reason; but once it was there it could not be dispelled, and each discovered added cause to dislike the other. The feud with Messerschmitt dated back to 1928. At Nuremberg — and indeed during the war — Milch alleged that the tall, balding designer had not built his aircraft with the necessary safety factors. In 1928 he had ordered six Me 20 passenger planes for Lufthansa, of which three had crashed because of a design fault, killing among others a lifelong personal friend and assistant of Milch. Milch had cancelled the airline's remaining contract with Messerschmitt, forcing his company into near bankruptcy. As will be seen in the epilogue, it was Messerschmitt's vice-chairman, the 'brownshirt' SA general Theo Croneiss, who had spread the rumours of Milch's Jewish blood in 1933, and he had even produced for Göring a dossier including a photograph of a tombstone in a Jewish cemetery in Breslau bearing the name 'Milch'. When, in June 1933, Messerschmitt approached the new Air Ministry for fresh contracts, Milch had required the banker Seiler to sign a two-million-mark bond, to be forfeited the day any new Messerschmitt aircraft crashed because of design failure. When the banker accepted this almost outrageous demand, Milch warned him: 'You are bailing out a would-be industrialist who will never make the grade. And the moment you are down, Messerschmitt won't help you up. He'll kick you in the teeth!'⁵

When Milch in turn was powerless, in Landsberg Prison, the sensitive and

gifted professor secured his revenge by spreading malicious half-truths about how Milch had 'rejected' the Me 262 jet fighter. ('Again and again the vengeance of this scoundrel,' fumed Milch. 'Just because I declared 360,000 marks a year too high a salary for him and four or five of his directors!')⁶

Professor Heinkel was another *prima donna* Milch did not believe he could trust in the drawing office. The He 177 long-range bomber and reconnaissance plane was still not in service. Its promised performance was better than any bomber in the world, carrying two tons of bombs to targets 1,400 miles inside enemy territory at 225 miles per hour, with a top speed of 325 miles per hour and a service ceiling of over 25,000 feet. Milch's programme included 120 He 177s a month, but many had crashed or caught fire in mid-air and a dozen test-pilots had already been killed. The tail-plane and rudder had had to be enlarged and there were serious difficulties with the huge airscrews and with the coupled engines. The engines were water-cooled, and the water circulation was inadequate.⁷ Göring was to ask why this strange engine design had been chosen, with the two engines fitted into the same casing side by side: 'I was told at the time that the two would be coupled in tandem, and now suddenly we find this monstrosity with the two engines welded together side by side, so that you just can't get at them.'⁸

Engine design had been Germany's weakness for some years.⁹ Under Udet's stewardship airframe design alone had made great advances. Despite Göring's express orders in 1938 work had still not even started on a thousand-engine factory. Daimler-Benz's DB 601 production was running down, but the new generation of engines was plagued by problems and delay. For three years between 1937 and 1940 Udet had stopped all work on the further development of the DB 603, and had carefully policed the factories to ensure that his order was obeyed. The DB 603's rival, the Jumo 213, had been put into abeyance in anticipation of the Jumo 222, but now that Milch had forced from Junkers's general manager an admission of the latter engine's tardiness, he was forced to put that on to a caretaker basis, and reopened the whole question of the somewhat smaller DB 603's advantages over the Jumo 213. In any event, neither could enter mass production before 1943.¹⁰ Meantime, the DB 605 had encountered technical problems: it was overheating and catching fire, and some of

Germany's best pilots, including the legendary Marseille, had been killed flying it in the Me 109G¹¹; but the mass-production lines had already been retooled, so there was no going back. 'The entire fighter aircraft programme depends on it,' Milch was to tell Göring.¹²

Reichsmarschall Göring ordered a full inquiry into the scandalous situation. The principal defendants were Ploch, Tschersich and Reidenbach; Udet himself was beyond mortal judgement.¹³ Months of interrogation of everybody, from Göring through Jeschonnek and von Seidel to the lowest clerks, began. Perhaps mercifully the records of what became known as the Udet Case have not been preserved; occasionally among the captured German files we come across the scars it left.¹⁴ The judge advocate finally reported to Göring that Udet had failed to provide any leadership and had neglected his duties in almost criminal fashion. He further proposed that no charges should be brought against Udet's three lieutenants, as nobody would now benefit except perhaps the enemy. Göring was shattered by the report, broke into tears and told Hammerstein, head of his legal department, that he was grateful for the fate which had pressed the revolver into Udet's hand.¹⁵

For many months afterward he continued to curse Udet and his staff. It was Reidenbach, one of Udet's chief technical advisers, who had prevented Germany from owning a wooden aircraft like the superb RAF Mosquito. Göring had himself issued such a specification before the war at a technical conference. 'Then the conference ended,' Göring recalled to Milch, 'and they left. And scarcely were they all outside than this fine gentleman, Reidenbach, announced, "Of course there's no question of manufacturing such rubbish!"'¹⁶ The records of the Udet Case were full of similar episodes.

Over the winter of 1941–2 the hopes of a *blitzkrieg* victory over Russia were finally dispelled. The Luftwaffe's plans for postwar occupation of a defeated Russia were shelved for the time being.¹⁷ In January Hitler cancelled the absolute priority accorded six months before to aircraft production, and reverted to the rearmentation of the army in depth.¹⁸ In the east his armies waged a desperate battle with the Russian winter. Frequently the Führer drew comfort from the

knowledge that Frederick the Great had extracted himself from worse predicaments than these, and he ordered Milch to lecture the Party and Wehrmacht on the great Prussian's exploits. 'When one reflects that Frederick the Great held out against forces twelve times greater than his own,' reflected Hitler, after reading Milch's speech, 'one looks a proper dunce in comparison. And this time it is *we* who have the supremacy! Isn't that a disgrace!'¹⁹

Of course the greatest supremacy in the world was inadequate when channelled through the bureaucracy of the German higher commands. Milch's own efforts in March 1941 had spared the Luftwaffe the worst injury; at least the airmen and ground personnel were well clothed for the Russian winter.²⁰ But thanks to the neglect of the Quartermaster-General a major disaster had overtaken their equipment: of a hundred thousand Luftwaffe vehicles in the east, only fifteen percent were still functioning early in January 1942.²¹ The complicated cold-start equipment had proved too delicate for Russian conditions, and the army, SS and Luftwaffe had all ignored the simple cold-start procedure (thinning the oil with a little petrol while the engine was still warm) which the Luftwaffe had itself demonstrated at the great Rechlin display in 1939.²² Twice since Rechlin the army had been reminded of the cold-start procedure, but only on 10 November 1941 had the German War Office ordered the procedure to be introduced.

Learning of this, Milch exploded: 'If a regulation for winter-starting is issued by an authority on 10 November, it takes eight weeks for it to circulate in Germany. So think what it will take on the eastern front!'²³ He ordered a further investigation and learned that von Seidel's department had not published the Luftwaffe pamphlets on winter precautions until October, with revisions and further leaflets still being issued in January and February 1942. The losses of military equipment were enormous by the time the winter ended. 'I have always hated snow,' Hitler said when Milch was invited to dinner during February. 'Now I know why. It was a presentiment.'²⁴

During January 1942 a number of Dr Todt's rivals came together and decided that 'an armament overlord' should be appointed, superior to Todt and to themselves; by the end of the month the choice had fallen informally on Milch,

who had the support of Göring as head of the Four-Year Plan.²⁵ ‘We did not apprise Todt of this,’ Milch later said. ‘We wanted to present him with a *fait accompli*.’²⁶ In the event, it was the plotters who were taken unawares: Todt was killed early in February when his plane crashed on take-off at the Führer’s headquarters.²⁷ Göring, who hurried over, was stunned to be told by Hitler that he had appointed thirty-six-year-old Albert Speer to succeed Todt.²⁸

Speer successfully warded off every attempt made during the coming week to carve up Todt’s former responsibilities.²⁹ On 12 February Milch put to Speer the *fait accompli* which had been intended for his predecessor: a conference of industrialists had been summoned for next morning and Speer might like to attend. Milch took Speer to Göring, who emphasized that Speer’s job was ‘purely army production’.³⁰ He would learn the rest at Milch’s big conference next day. Speer immediately reported his apprehension about this to Hitler, who assured him of his support: ‘Should any attempt be made to gang up against you,’ he said, ‘close the meeting and invite all the industrialists to the Cabinet Room. I will then address them in person!’ Next morning at the Air Ministry the steel magnate Albert Vögler announced to the industrialists the need for one overlord over all services, to decide on priorities; the Economics Minister, Funk, rose and proposed, to general acclaim, that this overlord should be Milch.³¹ Before the field marshal could speak Speer leaned across to him and whispered softly that he had just asked for, and been given, this very job by Hitler. Out loud, he announced that the Führer wished to address them all that afternoon in the Cabinet Room; in future, any such meetings would take place at *his* ministry, the Ministry of Munitions.³²

This was the beginning of the remarkable Speer–Milch partnership. It was remarkable for the completeness with which Erhard Milch now urged obedience to Speer’s requirements, even though he saw as the months passed that the army’s production was being favoured as never before under Todt. And it was remarkable too for the cynicism with which it was exploited by Speer to his country’s ends. Tall, high-cheekboned and handsome, Speer was Henry Fonda to Milch’s James Cagney. A healthy admiration and respect sprang up between them — like a tiger and a lion cub. But while Speer’s private chronicle recorded, ‘Attempted raids on the Minister’s provinces, carried out by various factions

(Funk, Ley and Milch) during the first days of his office were immediately identified and nipped in the bud', thoughts continued to linger in Milch's mind about this new — and evidently highly protected — opponent, as his private papers show. Was Speer just 'driven by pathological ambition and hunger for power'?³³ He liked the young man personally, and was genuinely impressed by his achievements in expanding the aircraft industry's floor space; yet his friendship with Speer was never to be understood. Vorwald, Petersen, Göring's chief adjutant von Brauchitsch — all warned against him. After hearing one inexplicable conflict of evidence over Speer's actions toward the end of the war, Milch, at a time of his own black despair, was to write: 'Seldom have I expected too much of anybody, but this time I have been sadly disappointed. I am still fighting off this feeling, and hoping for some favourable explanation, but this hope springs only weakly.'³⁴

On 13 February 1942 Hitler introduced Speer to the industrialists he was to govern.³⁵ He said that this was an instance where prestige must take a back seat, and assured them that he did not intend Speer to remain in charge forever. When the war had been won he would need him for finer things. In his closing words Hitler asked them all to work together, in good heart; and he appealed to their 'sense of decency' in easing Herr Speer's task.³⁶

Reichsmarschall Göring was already retiring from the war effort and devoting himself increasingly to extensive purchasing missions abroad for the art gallery he was assembling at Karinhall. His extensive knowledge of art benefited from his contempt for the rule of law, and his complicated financial transactions boiled down to thievery on a grand scale. While his attitude toward enemy persons was humane and soldierly, and the Luftwaffe itself prosecuted cases of rape and similar felonies among its ranks with unparalleled ferocity, this awe did not extend to enemy property, and Karinhall gradually filled with priceless objects culled from every corner of Germany's expanding domains.

His state secretary did what he could to step on this thievery. Late in February 1942 two crates labelled 'Glass — with Care' were found, addressed on printed labels to Göring's office, on the courier aircraft from Athens. Milch ordered legal officers to investigate and seized the crates and contents. When

Göring's office asked about the missing cargo the legal department replied: 'Field Marshal Milch suspects that, as has often happened with his own name, some unauthorized person is misusing the good name of the Reichsmarschall.'³⁷ But it was Göring himself who was the smuggler, and he tolerated similar behaviour only among his cronies. General Bruno Loerzer could send trainloads of stockings and oranges from Italy and get away with it; others were less fortunate. The Austrian Luftwaffe General Waver was found to have appropriated a bracelet belonging to a female spy, and summarily shared her fate; and when another was found to have used Luftwaffe trucks to transport his private booty back to Germany during the Third Air Force's headlong evacuation of France he was thrown into a concentration camp and dismissed from the Luftwaffe.³⁸

Once when the judge advocate, Kraell, reported on sabotage in a squadron in Crete, he made the mistake of describing to Göring in moving terms the beauty of the Palace of Minos there. 'That's coming to Karinhall after the war,' Göring promptly declared. Kraell humbly pointed out, 'That will pose some problems, Herr Reichsmarschall: it measures two miles by one-and-a-half!' Unabashed, Göring retorted, 'Have you any idea how big Karinhall's going to be after the war?'³⁹ Reichsmarschall Göring was above the law.

On Milch's desk there were already the most alarming reports not only of the gathering RAF bomber strength but of bomber production in America too. To him, air defence rested primarily on the fighter squadrons, but at present the Air Staff was calling for only 360 fighter aircraft to be produced a month. Fighter production had averaged 250 single- and 64 twin-engined aircraft a month during 1941. Milch and his new planning chief von Gablenz wanted far greater numbers, and with more bombers as well — not only the 200 He 177s but 750 Ju 88s of the latest type as well.⁴⁰

Unhappily, Milch also had to fit in the Bomber B. At the end of February 1942 he and Jeschonnek, the Chief of Air Staff, jointly reaffirmed that the Junkers 288 should eventually be adopted as B.⁴¹ Göring initialled the recommendation ('Ju 288, agreed. Göring'), but there was more to the problem than a simple green-pencil note on a letter margin. 'In my view the whole Bomber B is a misfit,' Milch was to say in June.⁴² But although he regarded the project as

still-born, he was forced to allow it to stay alive. ‘The aircraft will make sense only if its power plant is the [Jumo] 222. I have no idea what kind of aircraft it’s supposed to be: it’s not a plane that carries very much; and it doesn’t fly very far.’⁴³ Already his heart was with the fighter production programme.

Milch took his ambitious plan for ‘an umbrella over Germany’ to Göring and Jeschonnek late in March. ‘Herr Reichsmarschall,’ he said, ‘your total demand is for 360 new fighter aircraft per month. I fail to understand. If you were to say 3,600 fighters, then I would be bound to state that, against America and Britain combined, even 3,600 are too few! You must produce *more*. But to demand only 360 fighters!’ He turned a contemptuous gaze on Jeschonnek, but the Chief of Air Staff objected violently: ‘*I do not know what I should do with more than 360 fighters!*’⁴⁴

This brief reply encapsulated the Luftwaffe’s ultimate downfall. It remained rooted in Milch’s memory for many years, incredible but true. He returned to it in January 1943: ‘I just can’t get over the fact that no more than ten months ago 360 fighters were required as maximum.’ (By 1943 Milch’s planning was already envisaging three *thousand* fighters a month.)⁴⁵ Five months after that, with the Ruhr’s great towns in ruins after the RAF’s devastating assaults and with the American daylight offensive just beginning, Milch again recalled Jeschonnek’s remark: ‘If I had said then, “My plan is that in one and a half years the programme will be what it is today — in 1943 — to manufacture around nine hundred or a thousand fighters a month”, then everybody would have said, “It’s impossible!”’ Milch had achieved this impossible, but he was still not satisfied. ‘Even if we were turning out two thousand fighters, they would still be greedily snatched up by the squadrons, and there would still be enough work for them and for everything that goes with them — armament and fuel. Then things would look bloody different in Germany today; these daylight raids would be quite impossible.’⁴⁶

In the spring of 1942, however, this ordeal was only just beginning. After a very heavy RAF night attack on Paris in which eight hundred civilians had been killed, Hitler demanded a heavy reprisal attack on London as soon as the weather was suitable.⁴⁷ As his anger subsided, however, he cancelled the operation. In reply to a question from Göring, Jeschonnek explained: ‘The Führer

wishes to avoid provoking an attack on Germany's cities as long as the British keep to their present small scale of operations, and we for our part are unable to deliver annihilating blows in the west.'⁴⁸

Precisely a week later, on 28 March, the RAF sent 230 bombers to attack the North German medieval town of Lübeck by night, setting it on fire from end to end. Milch's first reaction, when he studied the reports, was that once again he had been proved right. The public had done nothing to prevent the spread of fires: 'They all got the hell out of it. Lübeck opposed our civil defence measures from the very outset and refused to join in. They kept saying, "Nobody's going to attack us." This is the result — 256 people killed in one raid, with another hundred missing and fifteen thousand evacuated. That's the payoff for their negative attitude.'⁴⁹ He had no doubt that worse was to come.

One episode throws light on the strained relations between Milch and his sole superior. Two days after Lübeck he celebrated his fiftieth birthday and noticed with pleasure that for the first time ever Göring congratulated him in person. But a document from Göring's files reveals the hollowness of the greetings: Göring's personal assistant had noted that whatever orders to the contrary Milch might have given, the press was to devote special attention to the birthday. 'Photographs showing the Reichsmarschall with Field Marshal Milch should be used in this connection. The Reichsmarschall will himself personally congratulate Field Marshal Milch in his office at the Air Ministry at 1 P.M. This fact is also to be given prominence in the next day's press, and particularly emphasized in the photographic and newsreel coverage.'⁵⁰

And so, while the General Göring regiment played a serenade outside the windows and the newsreel cameras whirred, Göring presented to Milch a priceless three-hundred-year-old Gobelin tapestry. He whispered that it was worth twenty-five thousand marks, and the field marshal replied, equally *sotto voce*, 'Where was it snatched?'

In a personal letter Hitler wished Milch a long life to expand the Luftwaffe: 'In this war I myself have come to value your presence at times when even a soldier must somehow keep faith — at times of tension, crisis and anxiety.' He said that he included Milch in that select band of men for whom the word 'im-

possible' did not exist.⁵¹ There was also a cheque for a quarter of a million marks to purchase an estate; Milch used it as the deposit on a 740-acre property in Silesia. There was inevitably criticism of this gift from his American prosecutors at Nuremberg, but Milch replied that such donations were commonplace in other countries. Britain gave great estates to the Duke of Marlborough and Wellington. But several other gifts he did refuse. He declined two honorary doctorates, and when the President of the Aircraft Manufacturers' Association approached him with a gift of fifty thousand marks he politely turned it down.⁵² The odour of corruption, which had lingered unchecked in the Office of Air Armament for so long, had finally been dispelled.

C H A P T E R 1 0

NO SUCH WORD AS 'IMPOSSIBLE'

March–June 1942

AT FIFTY YEARS of age Erhard Milch had retained his features well. He spoke emphatically, his mobile sky-blue eyes were still eloquent, and he flushed easily and often when his feelings were aroused. He liked good food and wines and smoked cigars endlessly. He was energetic and handsome and a moderate success in Berlin society. He did not neglect his family (although he was now separated from his wife, whom he had married as a young lieutenant in East Prussia), but neither did he entirely withstand the attentions of other ladies of his immediate society. One particularly persistent lady, a golden-haired beauty with the blue eyes of Germany's Baltic provinces, had finally despaired that the field marshal would ever gather the fruits while he could and had sent him a book about a Hungarian countess, the mistress of a man sharing her passion for horses, among other things. On the book's last breath-taking page Milch's admirer had written, 'All that could be yours as well!'

There was, as Hitler said, no such word as 'impossible' in Milch's vocabulary. Nothing pleased him more than to be given a great task where other men had failed, and to astound all the opponents who predicted that this time he must surely fail. One of his best friends, von Gablenz, once described how when he reproached Milch for setting unrealistic targets the state secretary replied that nothing would shake his faith in the Führer. 'Even if he commanded me to walk across the waves to him, I would unhesitatingly obey.'¹

If there was one German aircraft designer who contributed to the change in Germany's fortunes in 1942 it was Messerschmitt. Hitler thought highly of him and commented to Milch more than once that the professor had 'the skull of a genius'. Milch did not share this enthusiasm and remained bitterly prejudiced against the Bavarian despite every attempt on Messerschmitt's part to improve their relations. He admitted that the designer was entitled to credit for his Me 109 fighter, and he hoped that with the Me 309, which was due to commence production late in 1943, he would again produce a great aircraft.² But from the Messerschmitt drawing-offices had flowed many ideas which had not matched the Me 109's prewar success. Among some costly white elephants were the Me 321 and 323: the former was a transport glider, 'Gigant', and the latter its powered equivalent. Of the Me 321, designed to carry twenty tons of cargo including a medium-sized tank, Milch reported to Göring late in March 1942 that it was a swindle: 'thirty-six people have already lost their lives test-flying it. Messerschmitt even went so far as to shoot a film for the Führer's birthday with mock-ups.'³ He was equally opposed to Messerschmitt's other big aircraft project: to meet a 1940 demand for a bomber able to fly to America and back, the professor had designed the Me 264 — a multi-engined giant on which a big team was working at Augsburg.⁴ Milch wanted all these projects stopped and the really big aircraft design work left to Junkers or Dornier.*

These problems were only minor compared with the disaster which confronted the Luftwaffe over the Me 210 twin-engined fighter, high-speed bomber and ground-attack plane. Messerschmitt subsequently accepted full responsibility for it, and again the company was nearly forced into bankruptcy by Milch. Göring later proposed an eventual epitaph for himself: 'He would have lived longer but for the Me 210.' The aircraft had originally been designed by the company's leading designer, Waldemar Voigt, but the professor had adapted Voigt's blueprints to lessen the aircraft's weight and wind resistance.

* Illuminating documents on the incoherence of German aircraft production, design and planning will be found in the dossier assembled by Martin Bormann for the purpose of discrediting Göring in the summer of 1944: file 315 of the Schumacher collection, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

Although this produced a radically different aircraft, the ministry (in Udet's time) had ordered one thousand straight away, without waiting for the prototype to fly. Test models went into a flat spin, side-slipped or suffered undercarriage collapses on landing (the professor had substituted a weaker undercarriage than Voigt's to save weight).

Since November 1941 the Me 210's failure had brought increasing technical and financial embarrassment to the company. Every day trainloads of costly components and sections for the aircraft were brought to Augsburg and Regensburg, yet no finished aircraft were being completed or accepted by the ministry. Eventually four thousand workers were laid off, and still the Me 210 production line was at a standstill. Only one squadron, the second of ZG 1, had been equipped, but it had suffered such calamities that they had abandoned the aircraft for another. In February 1942 the imbalance between the purchase costs of raw materials, half-finished sections and components, and advance payments from the ministry was twenty-five million marks, and Messerschmitt's monthly overheads were running at sixteen million marks.⁵

While the company faced ruin, the Luftwaffe still awaited the aircraft. Eventually the professor admitted to Göring that the aircraft was not fit for squadron service, after seventeen lives had been lost in one week alone.⁶ Göring threatened to cancel the aircraft altogether. At the company's factories 370 half-finished Me 210s were lying around, visible to all the workers and staff, and materials were coming in for eight hundred more.⁷ During an angry discussion between Milch, Vorwald and Messerschmitt at the ministry Milch gave the professor one last chance: the Me 210 was to revert to Voigt's original design. Ten samples were to be produced immediately, the first six being delivered by 1 April. Messerschmitt volunteered to begin mass production of this new version from 1 May — again a wholly unrealistic promise, since he must have known that the ten aircraft could not possibly have been built and tested by then. In fact the tests were not completed until September.

Back in Augsburg Messerschmitt broadcast appeals over the factory loudspeakers to his workers, and denied the rumours circulating among them.⁸ He expressly denied that he had fallen out of favour with Göring. But at a staff conference in mid-April Milch mentioned the possibility of unseating Messer-

schmitt before his ‘skull of a genius’ could do them still further damage. He sent his chief engineer, Lucht, to inspect the factories. Lucht returned with a gripping description of the catastrophic situation he had found: ‘I found Messerschmitt a broken man. He was physically at a very low ebb and crazy with emotion. He was crying like a baby.’ Lucht recommended that Messerschmitt should be removed from control.⁹

Milch agreed. He secured Göring’s approval for the Me 210 to be struck from the aircraft programme. Only the new sample should be completed for trial purposes. When Messerschmitt’s stunned chairman pointed out that this meant that the aircraft was finished, Milch agreed. On 25 April all work on the Me 210 stopped; throughout the industry the suppliers were ordered to cease manufacturing the components. ‘Thus,’ Milch summarized on the twenty-seventh, ‘the aircraft can be considered a dead duck.’¹⁰ He ordered the company to continue purchasing the completed equipment, materials, half-cut sections and components for the Me 210 from their suppliers, as it was not the latter’s fault. Many trainloads of the goods, totalling in all some sixty-eight million marks’ worth, reached Augsburg and were stored in hangars on a nearby airfield.

All told Milch’s decision cost the Messerschmitt company some thirty-eight million marks. The professor’s alterations to Voigt’s designs had cost the Luftwaffe over a thousand aircraft at a time when they could not be spared. But when the first reconverted Me 210s were completed in September 1942 and tested with DB 603 engines, they were found to be magnificent in every way; Milch ordered them to be redesignated the Me 410, and in this manner every trace of the unhappy predecessor was obliterated.¹¹

On the same evening as Me 210 production ceased the RAF carried out the first of four violent attacks on Rostock and the nearby Heinkel aircraft factory at Marienehe. Nearly two-thirds of the town’s built-up area was gutted by the fire-bombs and Heinkel’s production there ceased for the time being. Had the RAF used more fire-bombs in attacking the factory the delay would have been even more extensive. Milch observed that purely explosive loads were useless for attacking industrial targets: ‘A real effect is achieved only by the proper mix-

ture, dropped over a long period. During the British attack on Rostock a few hundred cows, pigs and sheep lost their lives thanks to the stupidity of the public, as they took absolutely no action to put the fires out. But if the British had really set about attacking Heinkel's the right way, we would have been without any production at Marienehe for the next ten months.¹²

These early raids were the storm signals for the future. A new officer, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, commanded the RAF bomber force and the bomb-loads were aimed predominantly against the towns rather than against the factories. In the wreckage of a Wellington bomber examined on the morning after the Lübeck attack Milch's enemy equipment expert, Engineer-Colonel Dietrich Schwenke, had found a new electronic device for accurate blind navigation (code-named 'Gee').¹³ Angered by Lübeck, in mid-April Hitler commanded the Luftwaffe to carry out 'terror attacks on towns other than London'.¹⁴

Milch differed radically from Hitler in his proposals for combating the troublesome British bombing attacks by night. Hitler still believed in a strong defence by flak and searchlights. The state secretary, although a former artillery officer himself, was not enamoured of anti-aircraft artillery: he once calculated that besides the huge and costly ground organization it had taken on average 2,313 rounds of heavy flak and 4,258 rounds of light flak to bring down each aircraft they had claimed up to the end of November 1940.¹⁵ Such a barrage undeniably had a deterrent effect on the bombers, but the cost, particularly in copper, was too high. At a conference with Hitler in January 1942 Milch proposed that more of these raw materials should be devoted to fighter and less to flak production.¹⁶ He argued that they already had enormous stocks of flak shells in hand, and despite opposition from Keitel and Jeschonnek he stopped production of their aluminium time fuses for three months. When Keitel curtly wrote to him protesting that the Luftwaffe was not supplying army factories with enough copper for the Führer's flak programme to be carried out, and that Hitler had therefore decreed 'that the raw materials are to be made available', Milch replied to Keitel with heavy sarcasm: 'The entire Luftwaffe copper quota would suffice to cover 74 percent of the flak programme — provided, of course, that all aircraft production ceases.'¹⁷ Privately he described Keitel's letter

as a ‘self-protection’ letter: ‘If anything goes wrong, Keitel himself is covered. If you see such a letter in future, and I have written “*Self Protection*” on it, that means it’s somebody without the guts to take responsibility.’¹⁸

In his first few weeks of power Milch swept half of Udet’s four-thousand-strong staff out of the ministry and into industry, and replaced the old but fashionable system of liaison officers by twice-weekly mammoth conferences, great parliamentary assemblies attended by upward of eighty officers, engineers and industrialists. Nobody was kept uninformed any more about planning and requirements. Reichstag shorthand-typists were called in to keep verbatim shorthand records of these discussions. They show that Milch ruled by the lash of his tongue, developing an invective that at times was not bettered by Goebbels himself. Over every industrialist hung the possible fate of a Koppenberg or Messerschmitt; learning that a leading airscrew factory had fallen twenty percent below target, Milch swept out the managers and put in a *Kommissar*.¹⁹ Learning that the Ju 88 had undergone fifty thousand design changes, even while under production, he now categorically prohibited virtually all last-minute design changes to any production aircraft.²⁰ Learning that twelve-cylinder Daimler-Benz cars were still being ordered ‘for this highly placed personality or that’, he persuaded Göring to forbid such non-military production at all: ‘Any person working on any peacetime project from now on is liable to the death penalty,’ he announced in mid-April.²¹

At the same time he introduced positive measures to increase production. He aimed at greater part-standardization of aircraft components, as in America, and together with the Industrial Council introduced mass-production techniques which had not even been thought of in western countries. Multiple drilling rigs were designed for a new engine factory at Allach that could perform three dozen drilling operations in one eight-minute stroke instead of the thirty hours the old system had required.²² He tried to shorten the ‘pipeline’ in the engine industry and established the air force’s own machine-tool factory. Compared with twenty-eight thousand aero-engines turned out in 1941, Milch’s factories were to manufacture fifty thousand in 1942.²³ Above all, he injected new optimism into his entire ministry. ‘I often aimed high,’ he admits,

'but I fired them with confidence in our certainty of ultimate victory, and with pride in our work.'

A few weeks after taking office as Munitions Minister in February, Speer recognized that he still lacked influence on air armament. (He had even taken Milch with him for his first conferences as minister with the Führer.) Speer decided to create a small body comprised in effect of Milch and himself, so that Milch could not evade joint responsibility for the rest of the arms production spectrum.²⁴ Early in March Speer mentioned to the OKW's General Thomas the need for a 'small body of men gathered round the Reichsmarschall to direct central planning policy'.²⁵ At the end of the month he took the idea to Göring, and from the meeting there emerged a decision to establish a 'Supreme Court' to control raw materials, beyond which neither the industries nor the services could appeal.²⁶

This new authority, Central Planning, was to consist of three men — Milch, Speer and State Secretary Körner from Göring's Four-Year Plan office. Their task was to find out where the slack in the German war economy was; Milch referred to the body, not inappropriately, as a 'lemon squeezer'. Initially Göring gave them control over all raw materials except coal, fuel and synthetic rubber. But they had no control over the procurement of labour, for which Hitler appointed a separate overlord in the shape of Gauleiter Sauckel, and this was to prove a major hindrance in organizing armament in depth.²⁷ The inclusion of Körner was symptomatic of Göring's fear that this body would otherwise usurp his powers. Speer was opposed to Körner, but Milch commented privately that it was better to have a Göring 'stool-pigeon' they recognized than to be spied on in some other, unknown way.²⁸ The decree signed by Göring stated that all three members were equal in status, but it was in the nature of things that Speer assumed control of Central Planning as time passed.²⁹

The field marshal next saw Göring at the Rechlin research establishment on 11 May. He was exceedingly surprised by the Reichsmarschall's presence — his first visit since the famous 'magic display' in July 1939. 'I never really intended to set foot inside Rechlin again,' Göring told the Rechlin team, 'in view of the way you engineers lied so damnably to the Führer and myself during the

display in the summer of 1939.³⁰ Again he was shown the powerful effect of the 30-millimetre MK 101 cannon. A few days before one fitted experimentally in a fighter had blown up a Wellington bomber with one round. This time he saw it mounted in a Henschel 129 ‘tank-killer’ aircraft, its shells easily piercing eighty millimetres of armour-plate. He recognized in this aircraft the ideal means of combating enemy tanks which had broken through the lines.³¹ The MK 101 was the same weapon as had been displayed to Hitler in 1939; the later versions with belted ammunition feed, known as the MK 103 and MK 108, had actually lain fallow since then, until Milch had taken over, issuing immediate production contracts. But it would be 1943 before they entered squadron service. Göring’s anger was therefore understandable: ‘I keep searching like somebody demented for the devil who fouled up my Office of Air Armament like this.’ And again and again he reached the same conclusion: ‘Udet must take the blame — and in parts it is enormous — because he was downright incompetent; but I must share in that blame myself, because I burdened the man with more than he could carry.’³²

Of all the heavy aircraft inspected by Göring, Milch and Jeschonnek at Rechlin only the He 177 could carry out strategic bombing of Russian targets; but it had still not been resolved whether it should be able to dive-bomb, or attack on the level only. Indeed it had still not been finally decided whether it was better with two or four propellers.³³

The Germans saw no means of bombing the United States by direct flights, but they had studied partial solutions of the problem, such as mid-air refuelling or establishing mid-Atlantic staging posts. In mid-1941 preparations for mid-air refuelling of bombers had been put in hand: the bomber aircraft would take on seven tons of fuel from a second aircraft after flying 2,600 miles.³⁴ When Milch asked for his opinion, General Jeschonnek said curtly, ‘Quite pointless.’ Milch asked to be kept informed should the Air Staff change its view. ‘Until then I would request the idea of mid-air refuelling to be put to one side.’ He added, ‘There is also some idea of landing in Greenland and topping up with fuel from a U-boat there. I don’t know how this is visualized precisely, but I think it would be far better to fly over, drop the bombs, ditch the aircraft and ask, “Which internment camp have you picked for me!”’

A few days after his visit to Rechlin Göring, as head of the Four-Year Plan, finally persuaded the Führer to adopt radical measures to cure the chaotic transport system inside Germany and behind the eastern front.³⁵ The man who had achieved what Stalin's armies and the RAF bombers had so far failed to do was the sixty-five-year-old Transport Ministry official heading the Reich Railways, State Secretary Kleinmann. For some time Hitler had protected this man and his even older minister, Dr Dorpmüller, and Dorpmüller had rejected Speer's suggestion late in March that Kleinmann should be replaced by a younger man.³⁶ Shortly afterward Milch had been at the Führer's headquarters when Dorpmüller hinted to him that Hitler wanted Milch to put transport in order. When Milch saw the Führer immediately afterward Hitler confirmed this briefly, explaining, 'You are a transport expert, after all.'³⁷ For some weeks Milch heard no more of this.

By late April a complete seize-up seemed inevitable. The OKW had ordered tens of thousands of coal trucks to be converted to flat tops for transporting guns and vehicles to the front, since none of the proper flat tops had been returned. Hundreds of locomotives had been knocked out by the winter through lack of provision for the extreme cold. Once unloaded, nobody had bothered to send the wagons back, so now there were over 150,000 of them choking the lines behind the eastern front, and fresh, fully-laden trains could not get through.³⁸ The great distances which now had to be covered had doubled the average running time of a wagon to seven days. In Germany, denuded of rolling stock, the crippling coal shortage was threatening to bring the munitions plants to a standstill: at least seventy thousand coal wagons a day were needed to sustain capacity. Within a few weeks major factories would be standing idle.³⁹ The only solution which General Gercke, the OKW's transport chief, could offer (as Hitler later told Milch) was to tip wagons and contents off the lines to clear a way, and return the locomotives in convoy to Germany.⁴⁰ This would hardly help Germany or the fighting front.

In this situation, Hitler recalled the two men who had already shown their ability: Albert Speer, who had developed and produced a heavy anti-tank gun in a matter of weeks where the Army Ordnance Office had asked for months;

and Erhard Milch, who had saved the situation in southern Norway in 1940, and had rescued the Luftwaffe from the abyss more recently. ‘Here were the men for whom, as for me, there was no such word as “impossible”.’ He sent for them both, together with a young Reich Railways district official Speer had mentioned to him, and harangued them on the need to overcome the transport catastrophe.⁴¹

He proposed means of solving the railway crisis: turn-round times must be shortened, unloading accelerated by the use of prisoners of war, and all unnecessary journeys avoided. (Milch later discovered that while the Reich Railways were crippled by a shortage of rolling stock, four express trains still nonsensically operated every day between Brussels and Paris.) Hitler expostulated, ‘In wartime we don’t need to transport beer from Munich to Berlin and from Berlin to Munich.’ He ordered that rolling stock was to be withdrawn ruthlessly from the occupied countries: ‘Here Germany’s interests are paramount.’ He wanted to see primitive locomotives and equipment built and extensive repairs to existing stock. To achieve all this, he announced, he was dismissing Kleinmann as state secretary and replacing him by Dr Ganzenmüller, Speer’s choice. Meanwhile, Speer and Milch were to be given dictatorial powers over the entire transport system of the Reich.

For Hitler, only one thing mattered: ‘We must not lose this war just because of a transport problem; therefore the problem must be solved.’ Milch and Speer solved it essentially within three weeks. While Speer attacked the problem of mass producing locomotives and rolling stock, Milch turned his attention to the railway and inland waterway systems. If Milch, two days later, was to describe his powers in these terms: ‘I have been authorized to string up any railway official from any tree, right up to the highest directors (and I mean it!)’, then this was his usual hyperbole; but only just.⁴² It was an opportunity to break every single railway regulation — the small print on posters in every ticket hall. He recognized his familiar enemies — red tape and the centuries-old ‘megalomania’ of the legal mind — and attacked them with relish.

There were the ‘safe load’ regulations — the compositions, heights, weights and maximum speeds of loads in railway wagons. ‘The gentlemen in

charge,' said Milch, 'are naturally fully conversant with these safety regulations, and know no way round them.'⁴³ Armed with Hitler's authority, he ordered the wagons to be overloaded by as much as twenty percent with forbidden goods packed at random together, lengthened the trains and despatched them to the eastern front at speeds ten or twenty percent above the permitted maximum. He ordered the canals and ports of the occupied countries to be searched for barges and tugs to take the load off the railway system — and stumbled on 2,300 assorted barges which had been assembled and converted by the navy for the invasion of England in 1940. About five hundred, with a capacity of two hundred thousand tons, were still serviceable; Milch ordered them to be towed back to Germany and the necessary tugs to be confiscated in the occupied territories.

When his staff expressed scruples about the morality of this, he retorted, 'All of us are bound to one common aim — winning this war. If the Dutch fall by the wayside one way or another because we have to survive, that does not concern me. I could not care less if every Dutchman froze, drowned or starved to death, so long as Germany's future is assured. You may think this unadulterated selfishness, to think only about one's own country. But it is our task and our duty.'⁴⁴ He ordered seventy thousand wagons to be allocated to coal transport daily, before any more wagons were given to the military. He discovered that the OKW had been hoarding thousands of wagons for emergency troop movements to meet an Allied invasion. 'In a year's time that might well happen,' he conceded. 'But it might never happen. In the meantime the coal necessary to keep Siemens or AEG from grinding to a standstill is not being shifted.'⁴⁵ 'Stupidest of all are the Wehrmacht,' he complained on 12 June. (And how revealing was this complaint, coming from the Lufthansa director turned field marshal!) 'They have no idea whatsoever about how to do things economically.' If the coal was shifted, production — and that meant arms production — must increase.⁴⁶

A major dictum revoked by Milch was the heresy that this was to be only a short war. 'We have to accept that this is a Thirty Years' War,' he warned his own staff. 'Not that this means it will last thirty years, but we must act as though it

could. I forbid under penalty of extreme punishment any such expression as that things still under research or development will be too late to be of purpose in this war.⁴⁷

Germany's progress in some fields of research had been confirmed at Rechlin. There were two turbo-jet aircraft under development — the Arado 234 armed reconnaissance aircraft and jet bomber to be powered by four BMW 003 jet engines; the prototypes were to fly in the coming spring. And there was the Me 262 jet fighter, still awaiting its first jet-propelled flight.⁴⁸ Milch's attention was also caught by the Argus Tube: months before he had been puzzled to see a Heinkel 111 standing at Rechlin with a strange bulbous tube slung beneath one wing. The Germans were hesitant even to use it, lest the enemy copy it, because its principle was so simple and cheap. Once in flight the Argus Tube drew in air through a number of flaps at the front, mixed it with paraffin vapour and ignited it; the hot air exploded out of the rear, since the compression closed the flaps in the front. If the tube was the right length, an organ-like resonance was set up, and considerable thrust was developed. 'Have you any use for it?' Milch had asked Udet at the time. Udet had shaken his head.⁴⁹ The original use, as a source of brief extra power for Ju 88 bombers, had been disqualified by the tube's own wind-resistance.

Milch had kept thinking about the Argus Tube. Soon he had linked three things in his mind: explosive warhead, automatic pilot and Argus Tube. In May he urged his scientists that the Argus Tube was 'of importance for the future', indeed, as important as the jet engine. 'What I keep thinking is this: somewhere, we set up a conveyer belt production of these Argus Tubes. But first we must find a use for them.'⁵⁰ In fact he had already visualized a small, cheap, expendable pilot-less aircraft packed with high explosives, flying faster than the fastest enemy fighter plane. A flying bomb, in fact.

Three days later Admiral Lahs, Chairman of the Reich Society of Aircraft Manufacturers, brought an aircraft designer to see him — Robert Lusser.⁵¹ Lusser's qualifications could not have been better: he had been thrown out by Heinkel, and by Professor Messerschmitt before that. Milch sketched out his idea and a few days later the designer returned to his office with a case full of drawings and calculations. On that day the flying bomb (later known as 'V-1')

was born. By early June 1942 the project had been code-named 'Cherry Stone'.⁵² In its proposed final form it was a small, straight-winged aircraft, with the Argus Tube attached to the top of its tailplane. It would carry nearly a ton of high explosive, fly at a top speed of 440 miles per hour at low altitude, making it virtually impossible for any modern fighter to catch, and hit any large target of about five by three miles at a range of 160 miles. It would descend on its target at a speed of 650 miles per hour. If it were launched from France, therefore, London would be well within range.

Against it there was virtually no defence, for it would take a brave fighter pilot to come within range of a ton of high explosive and try to blow it up. The weapon's wings contained a special knife-edge for cutting through the tethers of barrage balloons. The whole fuselage would be constructed of thin steel plate.⁵³ The beauty of the project was that it used no aluminium, and it was fuelled with cheap paraffin. Each such weapon would probably cost only 550 man-hours to manufacture, plus the cost of the explosive and autopilot. Provided that it could be catapulted to an initial take-off speed of over two hundred miles per hour, its wings could be made short and stubby. The necessary catapult was already being developed by experts in rocket propellants; it would be ready in the autumn and then the ministry could have the first handmade 'Cherry Stones' completed and ready for testing. Milch selected Peenemünde, on the Baltic coast, as the best location for its trials.⁵⁴

Thus was one opportunity realized by the Luftwaffe; at the same time another was lost. On 4 June 1942 Milch, Speer and many leading scientists and industrialists were invited to hear Professor Werner Heisenberg, the famous nuclear physicist, lecture on atomic fission in Berlin.⁵⁵ Heisenberg headed an atomic research laboratory at the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute of Physics in the capital, and was already experimenting with atomic piles. 'He described the excellent start that they had made,' Milch recalled in his memoirs, 'but complained that nobody took them seriously and supported them.'⁵⁶ Heisenberg actually mentioned the feasibility of making an atomic bomb. Milch stood up and asked him approximately how large such a bomb would have to be to destroy a whole city, and the professor replied: 'About as big as a pineapple.'

At this, Speer also became interested and asked what Heisenberg needed

for his research. In his mind he had a figure of about a hundred million marks as being an appropriate sum.⁵⁷ Either Heisenberg or his deputy, Professor von Weizsäcker, replied that they had been asking for some time for an allowance of ten thousand marks for building purposes.⁵⁸ Speer and Milch exchanged ironic looks. The Munitions Minister granted this request immediately. On 7 August 1945, Field Marshal Milch read the news of Hiroshima, and recalled bitterly that afternoon with Speer and the German atomic scientists in Berlin: 'If Germany had discovered this,' he wrote that day, 'instead of spending the money on the war (the U.S. put the cost at \$2,000 million so far), then we could have achieved without bloodshed all that we needed, and all we were entitled to.' \$2,000 million was about the amount of money that the Luftwaffe had spent on armaments in three months of war.

C H A P T E R 1 1

THE DEAD RACEHORSE

June–October 1942

AFTER SIX MONTHS in office Milch had clear plans for the future. His experts had told him what the RAF was planning, and from General Bötticher, the former military attaché in Washington, he had heard a detailed briefing on the American air force's plans to assist.¹ Milch asked that the industry develop fighter aircraft with greater firepower and aim for supersonic speeds, with jet engines eventually; at night their exhausts should be invisible, and there should be an effective system of ground control worked out for all the fighters. He asked for a purpose-built night-fighter aircraft (the Heinkel 219 seemed most suitable), so that the output of medium bombers did not have to be raided for this purpose.

He also asked for a high-speed bomber with a one-ton payload, 650 miles of penetration and a top speed of 440 miles per hour and later of the speed of sound. Like the new generation of fighters, the bombers must have greatly increased ceilings of operation, using superchargers and additives like nitrous-oxide ('GM-1') or alcohol–water injection; by 1943 he wanted the bombers to have a ceiling of 45,000 feet, and even more by 1944 or 1945. The bombers were to be fitted with exhaust flame dampers, radar devices to warn of enemy fighter attack, and to adopt jet propulsion as soon as possible. Long-range bombers like the Hs 177 and the generation after that were to be equipped with guided missiles like He 293 and remote-controlled bombs like Fritz-X for attacking enemy

shipping in the mid-Atlantic.²

These were the tasks to which Milch was to apply himself for the next two years. But the Luftwaffe had already lost the initiative. At the end of May 1942 over a thousand British bombers attacked the city of Cologne in a raid lasting about one and a half hours; 469 people were reported killed, over five thousand injured and forty-five thousand homeless.³

After the failure of the Battle of Britain, this was the second relapse Göring's reputation suffered. Soon he would be looking back with nostalgia to 1940 and the Luftwaffe's carefully prepared attacks on Britain. 'The British have learned it all from us,' he sighed. 'That's the most depressing thing about it. Except for this electronic warfare side, they have learned it all from us — the whys and wherefores of concentrated attacks — they have copied the lot.' He added wistfully, 'How beautifully they were botching it to start with!'⁴

Milch also came in for criticism. The Cologne gauleiter reported to Hitler that the flak had had to cease fire because of lack of ammunition. Hitler attributed this to Milch's relentless campaign against flak. Milch ordered an investigation and established from the local flak battery commander that they had more than adequate ammunition, but it was stored too far away.⁵

By mid-June Milch's planning staff had produced modest figures for their possible aircraft production over the next few years, rising from 1,500 a month in 1942 to 2,860 in 1945, including 840 bombers, 1,240 single-engined and 200 twin-engined fighters.⁶ Milch wanted more. From an agent highly placed in the British Air Ministry they were receiving regular and (they believed) reliable figures on British production. At the end of June he warned Göring: 'Comparison of German aircraft production with the figures available to us from Britain shows that the British are making both more bombers and more fighters than we are.'⁷ This the Reichsmarschall refused to believe.

Nor was this all, for the British had begun operating at least one aircraft superior to anything known to the Germans — the Mosquito. Colonel Galland, chief of the day-fighter squadrons, told Milch that his fighters were completely outclassed by it. At the end of May the first such aircraft had been shot down and investigated. It was evidently a high-speed, high-altitude bomber, made

largely of wood. The prisoners captured from the first Mosquito crash stated that its top speed was 450 miles per hour, and it could well reach altitudes of 38,000 feet — a very serious threat indeed.⁸ A high-powered intelligence investigation of the Mosquito began. A second crashed and completely burnt out, but it was clear that it had carried four thousand-pound bombs and had been crewed by high-ranking officers.* Milch predicted, ‘I am bound to suspect that one day the British are going to start coming with these aircraft *en masse*.’ A few weeks later it was reported that the black-painted Mosquitoes were also being used as night-fighters, armed with four cannon and four machine-guns: ‘This aircraft is going to be the deadliest for us,’ said Milch.⁹

The wooden Mosquito was not his only headache. Three British four-engined bomber types had made their appearance — the Lancaster, Halifax and Stirling. A Stirling was captured almost intact when it made a forced landing in Holland. The Germans repaired the minor damage with parts from other Stirlings, levelled out a thousand-yard runway, primed a special crew with instructions from captured take-off papers, and flew the bomber with German markings to Rechlin.¹⁰

The American four-engined bombers were now also appearing in the European theatre. In July the B-24 Liberator appeared in North Africa.¹¹ When Schwenke briefed Jeschonnek on the coming armada of American bombers, and on the numbers of B-17 Flying Fortressess being ferried across the Atlantic, Jeschonnek was positively delighted, and boasted: ‘We will fetch these four-engined bombers down just as quickly as the twin-engined ones; and the loss of a four-engined bomber means a much higher loss to the enemy.’¹²

Milch’s own planning foresaw the use of the Me 109, powered by the 1,475-horsepower DB 605, as the standard daylight fighter until the Me 309 eventually replaced it. As for the FW 190 fighter, its BMW 801D double-row radial engine had earlier been unreliable and until July 1942 Milch had not dared

* The first had been crewed by a squadron leader and wing commander and the second by a wing commander and group captain. ‘For the RAF this is quite exceptional,’ Milch was told. ‘Perhaps they consider this aircraft particularly safe.’

hope for too much from the aircraft. The engine was now satisfactory, and in July Galland made a very favourable report on the FW 190 to Milch.¹³ By this time the faults in the troublesome DB 605 engine had been overcome: the over-heating of the valves was cured by exchanging them for components with greater chrome and nickel content, and a minor adjustment to the ignition timing had been proposed. By early summer the crisis with both engines was past. The DB 605 was running smoothly and the Me 109G was to prove one of the best high-altitude fighters in the world.¹⁴

As Hitler gathered the Axis forces for the summer offensive in Russia, the lunge toward the Caucasus and its oilfields, Milch set out his own philosophy. In his view it made more sense to have a thousand aircraft, with something like four thousand muzzles between them, than just a handful; not that the extra aircraft would cause any extra ammunition to be fired, but by proper use of a vast number of aircraft in one operation one could frequently spare the need for twenty or thirty others. ‘We saw the proof of this in France. If we had not used the means at our disposal correctly, we would have found ourselves in a war which would have swallowed up colossal amounts of ammunition. The thousand guns too few we had in 1914 would have sufficed to settle the war in our favour by that Christmas.’ He added: ‘If we could say today that after six months’ winter production effort we had six thousand fighters and six thousand bombers, instead of just the 1,800, with ammunition, crews and fuel, then the war would be over very quickly.’¹⁵ By May 1942 the position was that the Luftwaffe had about 15,000 aircraft, of which 6,600 were scattered along the various fronts, 4,300 were in the training schools, 447 in reserve, about 3,000 under repair and 685 ‘on the way’. (‘Those are the aircraft that have just been lost,’ said Milch. ‘They are not on the way, they are just missing — mislaid *en route*.’)¹⁶

Yet there were insuperable obstacles in the path of increasing bomber production — problems of selection, rather than of engine-design. Bomber B would not appear for some time; the He 111 was obsolescent, and only the latest Ju 88 — which Göring agreed to rename the Ju 188 (‘so that the enemy gets the impression it’s something new,’ admitted Milch¹⁷) — seemed worth concentrating on. Milch was aware that they were approaching the most important

season. ‘What we manage to turn out now will still be in time for the great offensive; what we turn out in four months’ time will come too late for this year’s decisive battles.’¹⁸ His experts told him that if they cancelled Bomber B, but still kept the Heinkel 177, they could eventually produce 840 Junkers 188s a month instead of the 750 currently projected.¹⁹ To Milch the Ju 188 was incomparably a more worthwhile aircraft than Bomber B, when considerations of cost, bomb-load and range were borne in mind. Göring shared this view, but both of them came up against the stubborn requirement of the Air Staff for the Ju 288, Bomber B. ‘It is adequate neither in range, nor in speed, nor in bomb-load, and suffers from a number of congenital diseases, particularly in that it is powered by two coupled engines, of whose reliability and operation we are still anything but convinced,’ Milch grumbled at the end of June. ‘If we add to all this the fact that its dive capability is nullified by the big airscrews, then I am at a loss to explain why it is required.’²⁰ For many months yet, however, Milch was forced to sustain the costly Bomber B, an aircraft which was never to fly.

There was still no prospect of attacking the United States in *direct* flight, but early in August Milch’s bomber expert von Lossberg outlined to him a proposal for bombing Washington or New York: a Blohm and Voss 222 aircraft would fly across the Atlantic and land near a U-boat stationed about eight hundred miles off New York to refuel and make up its bomb load to eight tons; it would repeat the operation one night later before flying back to Europe.²¹ The navy and the aircraft manufacturer both supported the plan, but not Jeschonnek, who turned it down as impracticable. Milch believed the Chief of Air Staff was interested only in the Russian campaign.

Von Lossberg assured him he would be prepared to make the flight any time himself. He proposed predominantly incendiary bomb-loads — in each attack they could rain about four thousand fire-bombs on New York. ‘The 2.2-kilo magnesium bomb has an explosive segment which detonates after four to ten minutes . . . If they could be laid in a swathe across New York, and the bombs kept exploding round the ears of the fire-fighters like hand-grenades, it would have a terrific effect.’ He proposed they attack first of all the city’s Jewish quarter or dockyard area; but the project, after being briefly resuscitated in the summer of 1944, was never put into effect.

Plans were drawn up by the Air Ministry for a factory designed for conveyer-belt production of a thousand bombers a month; it would employ fifty-five thousand workers.²² Milch told his staff, 'I want the foundations laid this autumn, so that it can commence production at the end of next year . . . Half a year from today the war will certainly look quite different from now, so that it is by far the best if we make our demands immediately.'²³ By this he meant that the war would have switched its main emphasis to Britain and her allies in the west again. Early in August 1942, as German troops launched the first stage of their thrust toward Stalingrad, Milch confidently predicted, 'The major fighting in the east will be over by next year; a colonial type of warfare will of course continue.'²⁴

This optimism did not last. Milch soon learned that the Russian air force would still have to be contended with. Soviet industry was believed to be producing about five hundred aircraft and fifteen hundred aero-engines a month. As the Wehrmacht rolled deeper into Russia all summer, they found that the Russian aircraft industry had vanished: the whole industrial Donets region had been evacuated; aircraft engine plants had been uprooted from round Moscow, too, and were probably already producing again. Milch was full of admiration for this lightning Soviet industrial evacuation. 'The Russians are doing things we would have said were impossible.'²⁵

All his endeavours to increase German aircraft production ran up against his inability to procure and assign fresh manpower, now that Sauckel had been put in charge of labour procurement by Hitler. Milch had significantly less control over manpower allocation than Speer, who controlled the Armaments Inspectorates which recruited local German labour. The problem became more urgent in the summer, when Hitler abandoned his undertaking to restore top priority to Luftwaffe production in 1943, and advised his Munitions Minister that army production 'must be expedited with the same priority as the Luftwaffe's, even after the successful conclusion of the operations in the east'.²⁶ At this time ninety percent of the aircraft industry was not even able to work a second shift because of the labour shortage.²⁷ In the autumn of 1941 it had employed 1,850,000 workers, but the heavy military call-up of the following

months had reduced it considerably.²⁸

The shortage was aggravated by the problem of workers who maledgered, changed jobs or just hid to avoid regular shift work. It was no small problem: from January to June 1942 the air industry had been allocated 403,000 workers, but the fluctuation caused by the shirkers was so great that the actual net increase was only 60,000.²⁹ Milch recommended that these people be turned over to Himmler's well-known facilities: 'He knows how to deal with them even though they haven't broken any laws.' Meanwhile, Speer built up the effective labour force by closing down less essential consumer industries, and Sauckel brought in the foreign labour — those from western Europe coming initially on a contract basis, and those from the east as slaves.³⁰

Milch never neglected the needs of the German public — which, he once insisted, must be considered first even if the rest of Europe had to starve. He considered that the entire economy was being maladministered in the continuing tussle between the services, the Four-Year Plan and the war industries. He had discovered one instance of this military selfishness himself: when the navy had protested that it must have greater steel allocations, and the civilian economy less, Milch had without warning sent inspectors round some of the navy's biggest shipyards. At the end of August 1942 they reported to him that there were huge quantities of steel lying round the yards at Wilhelmshaven, Kiel and Hamburg; the workers said that the steel had lain there for years.³¹

In September he reported the work of Central Planning to Hitler.³² He protested at the huge sums being spent on armaments, and estimated that forty percent of the money was being squandered. 'If one cannot buy a glass or saucepan it does not matter to these people,' he complained, referring to the High Command.

It's all right by them that thousands of families today have to cook in tin cans. But they themselves must have everything: *ten million safety razors are manufactured annually for the Wehrmacht, and twenty to thirty million toothbrushes!* There are only seven million soldiers altogether! Twenty to thirty million combs, the same num-

ber of hairbrushes, and so on. But can any member of the public buy combs or hairbrushes today? The war cannot be won by the Wehrmacht alone, but only by the whole German nation.³³

Even as a Luftwaffe field marshal, Milch did not hesitate to take the public's cause to the seat of the war economy — the Central Planning commission. Much has been written of Albert Speer's opposition to Hitler's 'scorched earth' orders in 1945; but that was opportunism, in apprehension of certain defeat and not improbably with an eye to the Allied trials to come. Milch's efforts for the German people began much earlier, when victory still seemed possible. The controversy in question was Central Planning's distribution of nitrogen and electric power. In short, Milch argued that Speer's refusal to support the nitrogen needs of agriculture would scorch the earth more effectively, though less spectacularly, than any Führer directive.

It was a double dilemma: the first was that Speer's explosives factories competed with fertilizer production for the available nitrogen supplies; the second was that Speer's armaments factories competed with nitrogen production for the available electric power. In Central Planning, Milch resolutely but unsuccessfully championed the demands of agriculture and the German people.³⁴ Speer sided equally relentlessly with the demands of war: the huge losses of the previous winter had to be replaced. When the Minister of Agriculture protested at this attitude, and particularly at Speer's decision to switch off the nitrogen plants during the coming winter and cover the 140,000-ton nitrogen loss entirely from fertilizer production — 'the loss of 140,000 tons will result in a collapse of our food supplies!' — Speer replied sardonically, 'You are free to tell this to the Führer; but alone.'³⁵

Milch argued that Germany should now meet all of agriculture's demands, since she had built up considerable stocks of explosives: 'The ground is becoming increasingly exhausted.' Speer refused to share this view, believing that in the present situation, with the German army beginning its decisive battle for Stalingrad, 'each ton of explosives is more vital than a ton of cereal'.³⁶

In other respects Milch had cause to worry about Speer's ministry. Despite clear

standing orders from Göring to the contrary, Speer's local armaments inspectors had begun seizing labour from aircraft industry factories in their territory for army production. In one case, 120 workers had been drafted from the Fieseler aircraft factory in Kassel into the army programme. 'Out of the question,' said Milch when told of this. Learning that the culprit had earlier been in the Army Ordnance Office, Milch grumbled, 'The Führer said a few days ago that these gentlemen should have read a bit more Karl May and a bit less military manual; then they would be fit for something in this war.' General von Gablenz suspected it was Albert Speer himself who encouraged these raiding parties: Speer had long held the view that 'the Luftwaffe comes after the Army.' Milch shut his ears to such talk: 'It wasn't Speer,' he said loyally. 'It was one of his agencies.'³⁷

At the end of August 1942 General von Gablenz was killed in an air crash during a thunderstorm in Turingia. Although Milch continued to inquire hopefully about the cause — after Todt's death Hitler had ordered the Luftwaffe to develop a crash-proof magnetic wire-recorder for the cockpit of such aircraft — it was never established with certainty.³⁸ The pain caused by the loss of yet another close friend from such a familiar cause really troubled Milch. He unbent enough to write one word in his diary: 'Shocking.' That evening he met Albert Speer at Horcher's. Speer, fourteen years his junior, put his arm round the field marshal's shoulders and commiserated, 'This afternoon you lost a life-long friendship. Can I offer you a new one?' The dour field marshal, who had never offered the familiar *Du* to anyone in his life, accepted.

The remarkable Speer–Milch alliance, which was to last over a quarter-century through many vicissitudes, dated from that evening. Indeed, they became inseparable. It would be hard to imagine a less likely combination. Milch was short, stocky, choleric and balding. Speer was a tall ascetic figure, ill at ease in uniform; his conversation was polished and intellectual, albeit weakened under the impact of Milch's lieutenant's jargon. The field marshal was rough, robust and ruthless, and privately scoffed at the juristic precision with which his friend consolidated his empire: 'His ministry was well known to me for its penchant for *decrees*,' he was to testify. 'There were too many experts there and

each one wanted to issue a decree.³⁹ Milch's ministry worked by mass conference behind guarded doors, at which he could harangue his generals and engineers from ten in the morning until four or five in the afternoon. Speer copied his shorthand-record idea, but mocked the conference principle. When Milch later persuaded him to hold joint conferences to hear the Luftwaffe's most urgent requirements, Speer's court historian described: 'To lend the necessary emphasis to these requirements, the Luftwaffe assembled each time in almost company strength, so that the large conference room of the Air Ministry was only just big enough.' 'The quantity of Luftwaffe participants,' the chronicler added sarcastically, 'appeared necessary in view of the somnolence of the individual members.'⁴⁰

Yet Milch's methods worked. By the autumn of 1942 the air industry was already producing fifty percent more aircraft, but he could do little to amend the existing aircraft projects. A new aircraft took four years from drawing-board to squadron, so Milch was still stuck with those begun in 1938.

Among these was the Air Staff's greatest hope, and Milch's despair, the 30-ton Heinkel 177 heavy bomber and long-range reconnaissance aircraft. Jeschonnek wanted at least one squadron to carry out long-range bombing operations in Russia, but in May he had advisedly told the Reichsmarschall: 'For such operations the reliability of the engines is of paramount importance.'⁴¹ Milch wanted the bombers for carrying out mass attacks on Allied convoys in the Atlantic, and Admiral Dönitz wanted the reconnaissance version to enable his U-boats to engage the transatlantic convoys too. All the technical opinion was unanimous that it had magnificent handling characteristics.⁴² But by September 1942 only 102 had been produced, of which the Quartermaster-General had accepted only 33 for squadron service; and of these, only two were still operational. The Daimler-Benz coupled engines were still plagued with faults, and major design errors in the airframe were just coming to light.

'If one sees how the first He 177 flew on 20 November 1939, and that the aircraft are still not in service, one can only weep,' said Milch at the end of August 1942.⁴³ Göring echoed him: 'It really is the saddest chapter. I do not have one single long-range bomber . . . I look at these four-engined aircraft of

the British and Americans with really enormous envy; they are far ahead of us here.⁴⁴ The principal delay to the He 177 had been caused by the basic requirement that it should be able to dive-bomb. It was tempting to blame Udet for this: he had explained to Professor Heinkel in 1938 that there was no future for the aircraft otherwise.⁴⁵ Milch refused to blame a dead man now: 'I have never done so, on principle,' he was to say. 'I have been taught to take responsibility for my subordinates; it is all too easy to say once somebody is dead, "It was an error of leadership". We must not assume so here.'⁴⁶ Even so, he deeply regretted the delay. How many He 177s they would have had by the end of 1942 otherwise! 'What still has some small effect in 1943 would have had a major effect in 1942, and a decisive effect in 1941.'⁴⁷

One basic error Udet had committed was to trust Heinkel too implicitly. At the beginning of 1942 Lieutenant-Colonel Petersen had visited the factory to investigate the delay. The works staff complained that the professor devoted all his attention to the profitable He 111 series, 'and devotes no capacity to the He, 177'. As the original serial production order had been cut back to five He 177s a month pending the solution of all the problems, this was only human.⁴⁸ In February 1942 the first engine-fire had occurred, and since then the aircraft had been dogged by outbreaks of fresh faults about every three months.⁴⁹ By the summer it was obvious that the wing structure had been wrongly designed, for it could not withstand the stresses of diving; Heinkel himself woke up to this only after the first wing fractured in August. Meanwhile, Petersen had ordered over 1,300 minor modifications as a result of the flight trials. These modifications were carried out with 'catastrophic lethargy' by the factory: 'We have proof,' Milch was later told, 'that from the time of the conferences concerned Heinkel took three months before he even began to attend to minor modifications to the prototypes.'

Milch knew that only a major change could save the aircraft; by this he meant dropping the dive requirement, and making the bomber a pure four-engined aircraft, instead of using two coupled engines.⁵⁰ But his development staff pointed out that this would mean a completely new aircraft, and that would take four years to realize.⁵¹ So the coupled-engine version was retained, while engineers struggled to prevent the engines — first the DB 606, later the

DB 610 — from catching fire in mid-air.

Göring had always believed that the aircraft was a pure four-engined design. When he saw the strange new beast that had developed by the time he visited Rechlin in May 1942, his anger knew no bounds. ‘I have never been so furious as when I saw this engine. Surely it must be as clear as daylight! How is such an engine to be serviced on the airfields? I believe I am right in saying you cannot even take out all the sparking plugs without pulling the whole engine apart!’⁵² The shock took him months to get over. Much later he still reproached his state secretary: ‘It is absolute stupidity. I told Udet right from the start I wanted this beast four-engined as well. At some time or other this crate must have been in a four-engined form . . . Nobody mentioned this hocus-pocus with two welded-together engines to me at all. A charming surprise that was for me.’⁵³

Throughout the summer the He 177 crashes continued. In mid-June, as Milch and Speer visited Peenemünde research establishment to watch an (unsuccessful) launching of Wernher von Braun’s A4 rocket missile, they saw a brand-new He 177 taking off with four tons of bombs on a test flight; after it had flown out of sight, it banked steeply to the right and side-slipped into the ground from five hundred feet up, killing everybody aboard. ‘The investigation has shown that a coupling sleeve broke on the propeller shaft,’ Petersen reported to Milch, and he added that a week before the very same sleeve had snapped on another aircraft before it could take off. Not only had this incident been kept secret by Heinkel and Daimler-Benz, but six identical cases had been uncovered during the factory’s test programme.⁵⁴

In the meantime, production suffered. Only two He 177s were operational. ‘It’s no use,’ said Milch in mid-August. ‘The question is, can we leave Heinkel — who bears most blame for this with his Oranienburg factory — in charge?’ He sighed and added, ‘On the other hand, he has done much good for us.’⁵⁵ Professor Heinkel claimed he needed more designers, but to Milch this was an all too familiar ploy. ‘The cause is not the manpower situation,’ he said on the twenty-sixth, ‘but the complete failure of the Heinkel company, a failure for years in this field. There’s just no excuse for it.’⁵⁶

Three weeks later Göring made a speech to the aircraft industrialists which left a very bitter taste in their mouths.⁵⁷ Messerschmitt and Heinkel were the principal objects of Göring's scorn; he reserved his most biting comments for the Heinkel 177 bomber and for its coupled engines. 'The things they told me!' Göring mocked. 'I asked them, "Why not go over to a pure four-engined type?" And they told me, "No — four-engined types are *passé* now; it is far better to have only two airscrews." So I said, "Well, well! The enemy is proving quite a nuisance to me with his four-engined types, they are a deadly nuisance." Not so, is the reply: "We are doing things differently. We are putting two together, or two in tandem."

When Milch pointed to General Jeschonnek's requirement — that the bomber should dive — as the root of all the evil, Göring apologized that in that case the firm was exonerated. But he added, 'It is straightforward idiocy to ask of a four-engined bomber that it should dive. Had I been told of this for one moment, I should have exclaimed at once: what kind of nonsense is that! But now we are stuck with it.' He asked Professor Heinkel, 'Are you going to manage, or is it quite hopeless?' Heinkel assured him that the engine-fires were as good as cured and explained: 'The airframe has to be strengthened for the dive-bombing.' 'It does not *have* to dive,' thundered Göring. Heinkel, as astounded as Milch by this swift decision, replied, 'Then it can go straight to the squadrons.' Three more times Göring repeated that the bomber was not required to dive; he wanted it only for carrying torpedoes and the guided missiles like Hs 293 and Fritz-X to shipping targets far out in the Atlantic, and for occasional raids at high-level on targets like Sverdlovsk. Milch gratefully repeated this decision to his staff: 'The Reichsmarschall has ordained that dive-bombing by the He 177 is no longer a requirement. He has quite properly described this requirement as crazy, and prohibited it.'⁵⁸

In the meantime, despite Professor Heinkel's assurances, design faults were still encountered. In investigating yet another accident, Milch's engineers discovered still more weak spots in the main wings, which tended to buckle under stress. 'That's no minor fault,' erupted Milch when he was told. 'That's a major foul-up!'⁵⁹ Early in October Major Scheele, commanding one of the

prospective He 177 units (the first squadron of KG 50), refused to take responsibility for sending the aircraft out on operations. When a ministry engineer cited none the less expert opinions that the He 177 was otherwise the best aircraft in the world, Milch could only snarl: 'What use is the best aircraft in the world if it can't stop falling apart? What use is the finest racehorse if it displays the best speed over two hundred yards and drops dead after three hundred?' In one graphic phrase he characterized the medical history of this bomber: 'First of all we tried a minor ear operation. Then we cured its teeth. And now we find it's got a chronic heart ailment and is probably being kept alive only by artificial means.'

Very soon after Göring's tirade about Allied superiority, Milch was brought firm evidence of just this. The B-17 Flying Fortress had now reached them; it was clearly designed for daylight operations.⁶⁰ By early October the remains had been reassembled at Rechlin. There were altogether eleven heavy machine-gun positions in the bomber, loaded with a hitherto unknown incendiary ammunition. Colonel Galland was full of praise for this dangerous aircraft: 'It unites every possible advantage in one bomber: firstly heavy armour; secondly enormous altitude; thirdly colossal defensive armament; and fourthly great speed.' Others echoed this praise. In formation the B-17 was virtually impregnable — they had managed to collect this sample only when it drifted out of formation.⁶¹

At the same time a second daylight threat was developing: an exhaust turbine had been clearly identified on photographs of a B24 Liberator bomber; this would greatly increase its altitude. 'These are worries I just cannot get over,' Milch said late in October. 'We have got to accept that one day the enemy bombers attacking Germany will be flying at altitudes of 28,000 or 30,000 feet.'⁶² From another Boeing crash they had recovered almost intact the famous Norden bombsight (of which a German agent in America had procured the blueprints before the war); this left no doubt as to the Americans' potential bombing accuracy. From the American bomber production figures and from the reconnaissance photographs of extensive new bomber airfield construction in eastern England, it was clear that 1943 would see the onset of a crushing bomb-

ing offensive from both the RAF and their American allies.

On 11 October the field marshal took Göring a dossier on this coming Armageddon. Jeschonnek refused to modify his careless attitude toward the American bombers, and Göring also refused to take Milch seriously. A few days later Milch related with some concern to his own staff, 'The Reichsmarschall told me that there is no cause for anxiety about the American aircraft and that, four-engined though they may be, we can contemplate the future with equanimity. I told him that I do not agree.'⁶³

C H A P T E R 1 2

NONE SO BLIND

October–December 1942

AS A PATRIOT, Milch adopted a firm line on treason. The word covered many sins, from the action of the since-discredited Engineer-General Reidenbach back in 1941 in ordering nearly a million of a certain component not used anywhere in the Luftwaffe, to the active dispensation of secrets to the enemy.¹ Milch's attitude toward traitors, even when accidental, was brief and final. When a Panzer division's operations officer crash-landed behind Russian lines in a Storch (the enemy murdered him and captured his papers, revealing the offensive beginning nine days later) Milch showed no pity: 'He would have been sentenced to death anyway.'²

Not without reason he suspected treachery all round him. He warned his own staff, 'There are recalcitrants everywhere, and traitors. Nobody knows where the next one sits, ready to betray you!' It speaks volumes for his judgement of character that he privately suspected the loyalty of the *Abwehr* (military counter-espionage) organization directed by Canaris. He thought little of Canaris. The Admiral had once visited him clutching a lump of pressed coal. 'What's that, Canaris,' he had joked, 'are you going to set fire to me?' 'It's a bomb!' replied Canaris earnestly. 'We are going to sabotage the ships of the enemy!'³ The field marshal placed his faith in the Gestapo. 'The traitors are lucky that I am not head of the Gestapo,' he once said. 'Then there would be far more death-sentences.'⁴

Treachery was even closer than he suspected. In the autumn he was informed that the Gestapo had uncovered a large communist spy ring, the 'Red Orchestra', with its seat in the Air Ministry and Milch's own Office of Air Armament.⁵ About seventy people were rounded up and indicted. The agents had established numbers of wireless transmitters and had passed to the Soviet Union information on planned paratroop operations, the latest positions of Hitler's and Göring's headquarters, details on the withdrawal of flak defences and much else. One merchant had simply walked from room to room of the ministry collecting production and casualty figures; fortunately, he had confused production targets with actual achievements. 'That's probably just as well,' Milch commented. 'Otherwise I would have been ashamed of such low figures — the enemy would have laughed at us!'⁶

Kingpin of the 'Red Orchestra' was Lieutenant Schulze-Boysen of the Air Staff's intelligence branch, whose wife was grand-daughter of the Prince of Eulenburg. Colonel Stumpff, the prewar chief of personnel, had turned him down for a commission because of suspected communist sympathies, but the Prince himself had intervened with Göring, and Göring had overruled Stumpff.⁷ Learning the full details of the spy ring, Milch was shocked at the numbers of the nobility involved. 'The harmless Central European might say, "There goes the daughter of So-and-So — the family has given generations of fine officers to the state. Impossible to think wrong of her!"' He shook his head. 'Not so, unfortunately, not so. The father may well be a fine, outstanding gentleman, and the son can be a swine.' With grim satisfaction he added, 'Of course, they are all for the high jump. The lot of them.'

He announced new precautions for the ministry. In future everybody must submit to spot-checks and X-rays as they left the building. He betrayed his deep suspicions of the *Abwehr* too: 'The X-rays will be worthwhile only if they are made by the Gestapo. I forbid any kind of X-raying by the *Abwehr*, as otherwise we have no guarantee that it will be a "successful" X-ray.' Seeing the curious faces round the table he continued, 'The whys and wherefores I cannot say. But I have my reasons.'⁸

Göring did nothing to halt the drain on the aircraft factories' skilled labour. In

October 1942 the OKW ordained a further major call-up for the army. ‘The Führer says, quite rightly, “I want more soldiers”,’ complained Milch, ‘and then everybody about him bows in unison and murmurs *Jawohl* and they simply grab more workers from our factories. I would like to know how many of the army’s millions are really in the front-line areas! I doubt if there are more than twenty percent of the infantry at the front; the other eighty percent are somewhere in the rear.’⁹

To fill the gaps in the factories, air industry workers were switched by Speer to army armaments production before Milch could protest, and foreign labour was brought in. Gauleiter Sauckel was given sweeping powers by Hitler to procure more labour from France, and these produced absurd anomalies: as the biggest airscrew manufacturers were preparing to send German workers to a factory in France, Sauckel was busy press-ganging French workers *from* the same factory. Other German workers sent to Paris factories were recruited by the OKW as soon as they arrived there. Of two hundred men working on FW 190 engines in Paris, Sauckel seized fifty overnight to deport to Germany.¹⁰

None of Milch’s counter-measures helped. In desperation individual factories turned to Himmler’s concentration camps for manpower.¹¹ The Heinkel company obtained six thousand prisoners from Oranienburg concentration camp to work on the He 177, and these were followed by thousands more for other Heinkel factories.¹² Messerschmitt’s opened direct negotiations with Dachau concentration camp for three thousand prisoners for the Augsburg works.¹³ Nobody else would appreciate the air industry’s predicament. Speer recognized the malady, but could diagnose no cure. ‘In every offensive, we lack just ten percent,’ he warned. ‘If we cannot manage that ten percent more this winter, by next summer our position will have deteriorated so much that we will be reduced to a war of attrition.’ At the end of October 1942 Speer mentioned to Milch: ‘I spoke with Goebbels recently. He is of the opinion that the public is actually waiting to be inspired to this last great effort. The public often has a much better sense of realism than the self-opinionated middle classes. The public has recognized that this final effort is not being made.’¹⁴

Two months earlier the German armies had reached the River Volga and the

outskirts of Stalingrad, and a long, exhausting struggle for this focal point had begun. As the Russians massed for an autumn offensive, Hitler appealed to Milch to mount a superhuman effort against the Soviet targets, bringing in the newest aircraft — even if they were still imperfect. Jeschonnek wrote to Milch: 'In the last few days the Führer has several times referred to the He 177 aircraft and said that he would attach particular importance to sorties by this aircraft in the eastern theatre, however primitively carried out.'¹⁵

The air force was heavily committed to supplying both the Afrika Korps under Rommel and elements of the army groups on the eastern front. When the Russian offensive broke as anticipated across the River Don on 19 November 1942, the latter commitment was suddenly extended: within four days the German Sixth Army under Colonel-General Paulus was encircled at Stalingrad. Hitler ordered the Fourth Panzer Army to the relief, but if the Sixth Army was to hold out, its three hundred thousand men would have to be supplied by air.¹⁶ Colonel-General von Richthofen, commanding the Fourth Air Force which would have to operate this airlift, noted that Paulus believed such an operation feasible, but he told his superiors he could not share this view.¹⁷ Had either Göring or Jeschonnek firmly challenged the proposal, Hitler would certainly have abandoned it and ordered Paulus to fight his way out of the encircling ring; but the proposal passed unchallenged at this stage.

Initially the Sixth Army asked for three hundred tons of fuel and thirty tons of ammunition a day; later they would need 150 tons of foodstuffs a day as well. This would require up to eight hundred Ju 52 transport aircraft, taking the very low serviceability on the eastern front into account. In the entire Luftwaffe there were only some 750 Ju 52s, several hundred of which were supplying Rommel's forces in Africa. Milch had warned all summer that the Air Staff requirement of only sixty new transport aircraft a month was totally inadequate. Now the gap would have to be bridged by temporarily converting He 111 bombers for transport purposes.¹⁸ When Hitler telephoned Göring on 23 November to question him about an airlift, the latter, unprepared for such a question, agreed it sounded possible.¹⁹ That afternoon he told his staff officers that he had given the Führer his word that the Sixth Army could be supplied by air. Every transport aircraft available was to be mobilized for this purpose — he himself

was providing his own courier flight. There was no discussion.²⁰ The huge operation began next day.

In the hours that followed, Hitler ordered Paulus to stand fast until relief arrived; meanwhile air supplies were being mobilized. If Göring made any conditions — about the stabilization of the front line, about prolonged fine weather or the limit of the airlift's duration — these were not adequately heeded in the optimistic climate his undertaking had induced. He repeated on the twenty-fifth that the Luftwaffe could deliver an average of five hundred tons of supplies a day, assembling every possible aircraft, including Lufthansa's precious four-engined Ju 90s for this purpose.²¹ Hitler waved aside the new-found pessimism of Jeschonnek and the outright opposition of the Luftwaffe representative Colonel Christian next morning, assuring them 'it was all a matter of time', and that 'a particularly gifted organizer would manage things, equipped if need be with ruthless powers, and despite whatever obstacles the generals opposing the airlift (von Manstein and von Richthofen) might put in his way.' Göring left for Paris.²²

'Wars can only be won by air power,' Milch hammered into his staff as the new year, 1943, came. 'You will lose every war, in fact, if you do not have air superiority — not in all God's skies, but where you need it, in the *Schwerpunkt*. For ground forces without air superiority or air supremacy it is impossible to attain victory.' How well the setbacks Rommel had suffered since the British capture of Tobruk illustrated this: 'He had to retreat, and for no other reason than that it was not possible, for logistics reasons, to establish German air superiority over the British.'²³

The aircraft industry was now producing fifty percent more aircraft than in 1941; the increase had only just begun, but it was still not enough. From his experts Milch had assembled the comparable figures for Britain, Canada and the United States both for 1942 and for the next two years. Where Germany had averaged 367 fighters a month in 1942, these countries had averaged 1,959; where Germany had averaged 349 bombers, the enemy had averaged 1,378, of which many were four-engined.²⁴ 'God knows what the enemy is planning with this enormous number of bombers,' pondered Milch.

He took these ominous figures with him when he went to see Göring on 4 January, confronting the Reichsmarschall across the vast desk in his study with this proof of the enemy's capabilities. Göring, however, believed in the Führer and the Führer had once said: 'The simplest logic, my dear Göring! The Americans cannot have anything up their sleeves. They know how to make refrigerators and razor blades, and that's all.'²⁵ Göring turned the pages back and forth, then angrily challenged, 'Have you joined the defeatists now, Milch? Do you believe these fantastic figures?' Milch replied that he had every confidence in them. 'I don't want to be bothered with such rubbish,' bawled Göring. 'We can't work miracles, so neither can they.'²⁶ His attitude recalls the humorous lines of Christian Morgenstern about an equally blind optimist:

And thus in his considered view
What did not suit could not be true.

Milch reported this encounter to his department heads next morning. 'The Reichsmarschall says — and he does not fully agree with me on the figures as he thinks they will manufacture fewer — "Even if they do reach these figures, it won't help them in Africa if they cannot keep the aircraft supplied, and that means shipping space."<'²⁷ Göring, like Milch, saw the Luftwaffe's principal strategic objective now as attacking the enemy's shipping. 'That is his aorta, and if we sever it he must bleed to death. And then let's see if his God and his praying can help him! If he is to maintain an army from America or Britain, he must supply it, too.' But for this the He 177 bomber was indispensable. Both ends of a rapidly closing vicious circle were now becoming apparent.

Milch's own ideal was a totally different aircraft. For months he had been looking for a design for a high-speed, twin-engined bomber or heavy fighter aircraft capable of speeds up to five hundred miles per hour.²⁸ In December Junkers's Professor Hertel had shown him one promising design which put both engines in one fuselage, powering two airscrews on the same axis — the shaft of one passing through the centre of the shaft of the other. Milch foresaw technical problems with this design.²⁹

In the first week of January 1943, however, Professor Claude Dornier visited him with sketches of a strange aircraft, the Do 335. Like Hertel, he put both engines in the fuselage, but instead of driving two airscrews at the front, Dornier's design foresaw one in front and another at the tail of the fuselage. Milch's chief of technical development had turned the idea down, but Dornier predicted that his aircraft would fly at over 470 miles per hour, and Milch knew him as a designer who kept his promises. Something clicked inside him: after a lifetime in aviation he sensed that this was a project which must work. He gave Dornier an immediate order for twenty Do 335s; from it developed one of the fastest propeller-driven aircraft in the world.³⁰

Field Marshal Kesselring later wrote that, had Milch replaced Göring at this time, the end of 1942, the Luftwaffe could still have been saved.³¹ There is no doubt that Milch was nearing the summit of his achievements. Yet another honour was bestowed on him. The Chairman of Lufthansa, Emil-Georg von Stauss, had died shortly before Christmas, and in mid-January Milch was elected to succeed him.³² Thus the beginning of 1943 saw him charged with these high offices: State Secretary, Inspector-General and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, Director of Air Armament, and Chairman of Lufthansa.

He was about to be charged with a very different commission, one which was to tax his courage and ability to their utmost.

P A R T I V

SPECIAL MISSION: STALINGRAD



After Stalingrad, Speer said: ‘The trouble is that what with the Atlantic Wall, the eastern fortifications and so on all construction in the Reich is virtually stifled. Today, eastern fortifications are more important than building projects in the Reich, because with them I can spare labour, fuel . . .’

‘The only raw material which cannot be restored in the foreseeable future,’ observed Milch, ‘is human blood’.¹

CHAPTER 13

‘PANAMA!’

January–February, 1943

TWICE ALREADY HITLER had acclaimed Field Marshal Milch as a man for whom the word ‘impossible’ did not exist. In mid-January 1943 he put this to the test. Milch was ordered to save the Sixth Army, which the Führer’s stubbornness, Paulus’s docility and Göring’s vanity had trapped in Stalingrad, encircled by Soviet armies, while the eastern front receded ever farther from the beleaguered city.²

If one man had the drive, the tongue and the personal ruthlessness to save the situation, then he was Milch. His efforts were to raise his personal status to such a level that he could afterward deliver Hitler the frankest lecture that he can ever have heard from a subordinate.

Von Richthofen’s *Luftflotte* had organized a force of Ju 52 transport aircraft on the airfield at Tatsinskaya, each capable of carrying about two tons of supplies over the 160 miles to Stalingrad. A further force of He 111 bombers, which could carry about one and a half tons of supplies in ‘supply bombs’, was centred on the equally makeshift Morozovsk airfield, about 130 miles from Stalingrad. Göring’s promise entailed landing three hundred aircraft at Stalingrad every day — an average of one every two and a half minutes. Much therefore depended on the ability of the Sixth Army to unload the aircraft and distribute the supplies in time. By early December 1942 ten squadrons of Ju 52s (including eventually six hundred Ju 52s withdrawn from the air training

schools) and various units of Ju 86s, FW 200s, Ju 90s and other aircraft had been assigned to the airlift. Some Ju 290 prototypes had also arrived — big four-engined transporters capable of carrying ten tons of supplies into the fortress and returning with seventy wounded soldiers. The aircraft losses had been frightening, and it was great testimony to Luftwaffe morale that the airlift had been sustained at all, for once an aircraft was written off in Stalingrad its crew knew that they would never get out.

During December General Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army had begun its relief drive toward the city, but in the middle of the month a sector of the front held by the Italian Eighth Army collapsed. Hoth's advance was halted, and on Christmas Eve Russian tanks overran Tatsinskaya airfield as the last of the 124 transport aircraft there escaped. Two more airfields were lost early in January as Field Marshal von Manstein withdrew the front still farther. The transport squadrons had to fan back onto airstrips like Novocherkassk, 220 miles from Stalingrad. Much of the cargo had to make way for extra fuel and the number of sorties they could fly each day was reduced. In Stalingrad, meanwhile, Paulus's troops had begun to starve. Their commanders were already talking about their 'betrayal' by the Luftwaffe. There were few homes in Germany unaffected by the drama.

Milch's Stalingrad mission began late on 14 January 1943, when Bodenschatz telephoned from Hitler's headquarters, ordering him to report there immediately. Hitler wanted him to take over the airlift to the Sixth Army. By way of warning Bodenschatz added that until now Göring had been claiming that Milch could not be spared. Now the Führer had lost patience and overruled him.³

The field marshal took hurried leave of his staff, detailed his personal physician and Colonel Petersen to accompany him, and set out. As Albert Speer drove him to the Dornier parked on Gatow airfield he begged Milch to search for his younger brother, Corporal Ernst Speer, believed to be in a field hospital somewhere within 'fortress Stalingrad'.⁴

At Hitler's war conference that evening Milch recognized the catastrophic situation at Stalingrad for the first time. The fortress's last good airfield at

Pitomnik had just fallen into enemy hands. Hitler stressed to him the strategic importance of the mission: about three hundred tons were to be flown in daily if the city was to be held; this would bind numerous large Russian formations which would otherwise be elsewhere employed. He issued special powers to Milch, giving him authority to issue orders and instructions to every military command.⁵ There is evidence that Hitler believed Stalingrad could hold out for another six to eight weeks.* As Milch left, Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant, Major von Below, appealed to him to search for his brother-in-law, one of Paulus's trapped army.

Over thirteen hundred miles separated Hitler's headquarters from the Black Sea town of Taganrog where von Richthofen and von Manstein had established their respective headquarters. Milch and his staff covered the distance in five hours. As their two aircraft landed it was snowing heavily and there was an icy gale blowing; the same forbidding weather conditions were to prevail for several weeks. At this stage he may not have been alarmed by the cold. Ever since October 1942 he had believed the Luftwaffe need not fear this second winter on the eastern front.⁷ Since that spring a special commission had toured the squadrons, gathering experience for the coming winter. Milch had personally supervised the preparations. He had ordered three thousand prefabricated wooden huts for the airfields, most of which had been shipped to the front by late summer so they would arrive before the snowfall.⁸ Tens of thousands of chemically heated bags, muffs, electric blast heaters and special ground-crew overalls had been despatched; fitters had installed cabin heaters in the airborne and ground ambulances. ('I do not want our injured to be transported back in open trucks for five days in thirty degrees of frost as they were last winter.'⁹)

Yet there was a factor he had overlooked — the human factor. He could not control the will-power of the Luftwaffe troops to struggle on; nor could he instill proper leadership and humanity into their commanders. Indeed the news that Milch, the organizer, was on his way evoked consternation at Tagan-

* Thus Speer, chairing Central Planning on 26 January, excused Milch's absence 'as he has been given a particularly important mission by the Führer on the eastern front, which will occupy him for the next six to eight weeks.'⁶

rog. General Fiebig, commanding the Eighth Air Corps, commented in his diary: ‘There is not much else to organize, for we can only drop supplies from the air from now on — a matter of pure chance.’¹⁰ And when his superior, von Richthofen, angrily protested to headquarters, Jeschonnek assured him that Milch was just the Führer’s last attempt to save the Sixth Army. The *Luftflotte* commander caustically observed in his diary: ‘Nothing would delight me more than that Milch should chance upon the Philosopher’s Stone which our supreme authorities evidently believe is lying round here somewhere. Certainly we have not found it.’¹¹

By the evening of 16 January Milch had arrived in von Richthofen’s warm and well-equipped command train. ‘He is completely misinformed about the technical and tactical situation,’ von Richthofen gloomily noted, ‘and hence he is still quite optimistic.’¹² Milch immediately summoned the *Luftflotte* staff to report on available aircraft and units. For the first time he learned that far fewer transport aircraft were serviceable than was assumed at Hitler’s headquarters; a truly staggering percentage, particularly of the Junkers transports, was immobilized by the cold. Aircraft availability at that moment was as follows: 140 Ju 52s, of which only fifteen were operational; 140 He 111s, of which only forty-one were operational; twenty FW 200s, of which only one was operational. Only seven Ju 52s and eleven He 111s were actually scheduled to fly to Stalingrad that evening.¹³

About 5,300 tons of supplies had been lifted into the fortress, an average of about one hundred tons a day. Richthofen privately advised Milch that he had warned all along that the airlift was ‘impossible’, and now that Pitomnik, the fortress’s last good airfield, had been overrun it was madness to continue.¹⁴ The loading airfield at Sal’sk was 220 miles from Stalingrad, and if Novocherkassk were lost the fortress would be beyond Heinkel range. The Ju 52s were already operating at extreme range: their fuel tanks were unprotected and the air corridor was thick with Russian fighters and flak. The remnants of the fighter squadron based at Pitomnik had escaped just in time, but they could no longer reach Stalingrad without drop tanks and these were not available. It would be inhuman to speculate further on the reasons why so many Ju 52 crews — many of them drafted overnight from the accustomed luxury of ministers’

personal crews — found it difficult to get their aircraft into the air. Milch recognized that the Luftwaffe was not above blame.

The Sixth Army inside Stalingrad had made virtually no provision for unloading the aircraft. It had thoughtlessly set up headquarters near a second airfield at Gumrak, and it had discouraged earlier attempts to ready the field for use in the airlift, not wanting to attract Russian bombing raids. Now the loss of Pitomnik left them no choice, but the field had not been equipped for night landings and it had been prepared so haphazardly even for daylight landings that most of the aircrews were refusing to land and were just throwing the cargoes out. Without petrol the army could not gather up the heavy containers, so they lay embedded in the snowdrifts, and the troops in Stalingrad continued in their deprivations. The loss of air superiority had turned a crucial situation into a desperate one.

During the evening increasingly hysterical appeals for help poured in on Milch from the Sixth Army: ‘The fate of the army depends on tonight’s airlift and on those of the 17th and night of 17/18th alone.’¹⁵ ‘By 2300 hours only sixteen supply containers seen dropped. On what are troops supposed to live and fight tomorrow?’ ‘Fighting more and more pointless, as supply gap can no longer be bridged.’ ‘Numerous German soldiers lying starved to death in streets.’ ‘Please act against vile allegations of aircrews. Gumrak landing ground is fully serviceable.’ To rebuild the crews’ morale first of all, Milch proposed to tour every squadron himself next morning; then he would fly in to Stalingrad to see for himself.

In a fierce blizzard and thirty degrees of frost, Milch next morning drove off toward the airfield. As they bumped over a railway crossing, Milch — sitting in front next to the driver — saw a shadow move outside his window, opaque with frost. He sensed danger and shouted to the driver. The driver braked, the front wheels jammed inside the railway track and a heavy Russian-built locomotive crashed into the car at forty miles per hour, hurling it across the embankment into a railway hut, which collapsed in ruins. Two soldiers in the hut were killed outright.¹⁶

Milch was crushed — unconscious — in the tangled wreckage. He was

driven in an ambulance to a field hospital and von Richthofen was informed. He was found to have a severe head injury from which he had lost a lot of blood, a concussion and several broken ribs. The flight to the squadrons and Stalingrad was off, but nobody could restrain him from resuming the Führer's special mission. Within three hours he was carried back into the *Luftflotte's* command train. 'Heedless of the shock and of the high temperature he is running, he has returned to Fourth Air Force headquarters and is in command as before,' recorded von Richthofen in his diary.¹⁷

Milch, his back and ribs encased in plaster, was propped up before a telephone. For the next two weeks his tongue would be his only weapon. The telephone line to Berlin was as clear as a local call. Soon he was discussing with Colonel Vorwald, his representative in Berlin, immediate steps such as the provision of two long-range fighter squadrons and the gearing of industry to mass production of ready-filled air-drop containers.

From General Fiebig, Milch recognized that there was clearly something wrong at the Stalingrad end of the operation. Fiebig said that several Heinkel 111s had actually landed at Gumrak airfield during the day; they had found no ground organization, and nobody in the Sixth Army took any interest in their cargoes at all. 'They handed over the foodstuffs they were carrying to troops passing by, and flew some injured back. The troops made a disorderly impression — our aircrews had to defend themselves with their small-arms against soldiers crowding in on them,' said Fiebig. They had reported seeing no Russian tanks outside the fortress, nor any major fighting. Milch ordered reliable air force officers to fly to Gumrak next morning to inspect the organization in person and reconnoitre possible air-drop zones and a glider landing site nearer to the city itself, since fifty giant gliders were now available.¹⁸

Colonel-General Paulus continued to broadcast appeals for help. On the evening of 17 January he wirelessed Hitler, '*Mein Führer!* Your orders for the supply of the army are not being obeyed. Gumrak airfield has been serviceable since early 16 January. Numerous obstacles being raised by air force outside fortress. Airfield declared perfectly safe for night landings. Ground organization standing by. Immediate intervention urged, extreme danger.' This was followed by telephone calls to Milch from Hitler's headquarters, asking why he

planned no missions that night. Milch again insisted that Gumrak had no night-landing organization. The upshot of these conflicting reports was that Hitler ordered a senior officer of the Sixth Army to be flown out to report to him next morning.¹⁹

Milch suspected that in fact the transport aircraft crews' morale had suffered, and that Paulus was not unjustified in his complaints. Later that evening Paulus again insisted that Gumrak was operational, but during the night no fewer than twenty-seven Heinkels flew at minimum altitude up and down the airfield, without sighting any flarepath; so again they could only drop out their loads in mid-air. Daylight missions were highly dangerous because of the Russian fighter patrols, but on Milch's insistence three more Heinkels took off at dawn, each carrying an officer with orders to contact Paulus in the fortress. With them they took a set of flarepath equipment so that Gumrak could operate by night.

On Milch's instructions, too, Colonel Petersen had toured the first airfields and his initial report on the Ju 52 squadrons at Zverev was horrifying: there was a fifty-mile-per-hour gale blowing, and the aircraft were enveloped in huge snowdrifts, their engines frozen solid. There was no shelter, not even a trench, for the hundreds of airmen — just a vast, inhospitable, blizzard-swept field. The Air Transport Commander had been unable to make any provision for the men in the six weeks they had been there. After only a few minutes' work, the fitters' hands froze to their tools. Of the 106 Ju 52s standing round the field, forty-two were slightly damaged and awaiting repair; of the rest, only eight had taken off that morning, of which five had turned back short of Stalingrad. The figures spoke for themselves.

Milch summoned the Air Transport Commander to his command train and asked if he had any requirements. The commander said he had none — it was useless to import more technical staff as there was not enough accommodation or equipment as things were. The field marshal was irritated by this attitude. 'These men had no chance whatsoever of warming themselves up; the only thing accomplished for them was parking a stone-cold omnibus there. Just imagine what it means,' Milch described to his ministry staff a few days later, 'working in twenty-five degrees of frost with a fifty-mile-per-hour blizzard'

howling round your ears day and night without respite, and not being able to get away from it all at six o'clock each evening like in the ministry!'²⁰ He was unconvinced by the commander's excuses. When the latter explained he had written off for everything but nothing had arrived Milch challenged: 'Do you think that lets you off?' He asked why they had not built the simplest kind of huts, taking the materials from local villages. The commander replied they could not fetch materials without transport. Milch asked about the army trucks standing near the field. The commander protested, 'We cannot touch those. That would be larceny!' 'The only larceny done around here,' thundered Milch, 'is that somebody has made off with your brains.'²¹ He ordered sixteen prefabricated huts to be rushed immediately to Zverev airfield.*

'The Junkers squadrons had not the foggiest idea how to improvise,' he related not long after. 'I had to club some sense into them. At first they had nothing. But all at once they had a wooden hut with a small stove in it so they could keep warm. Then gradually they began to look at the correct cold-start procedure for the engines. I threatened anybody who neglected it with execution.'²²

Over a hundred Ju 52 transport aircraft on hand, and only three flying! From that moment Milch recognized that the air force had let down the Sixth Army. The Fourth Air Force had totally failed to accommodate the armada of transport aircraft, and to take the necessary scale of organization into account. On Milch's recommendation, von Richthofen dismissed his chief of staff Colonel von Rohden on the spot. Otherwise, he kept his recognition of the culprits to himself.²³

This was the familiar Erhard Milch, tackling a seemingly hopeless situation, surrounded by frightened and defeated men. Sitting painfully behind his desk in the command train, he summoned the squadron commanders one by one for the rough edge of his tongue. 'In any other circumstances,' he later

* The commander and the Stalingrad air veterans' association have denied any dispute with Milch. But Luftwaffe records — particularly the war diary of Milch's staff, Milch's contemporary notes and the verbatim Air Armament conference reports — create a very different picture.

said, 'I would have stayed in hospital. But there is a time in a man's life when he must put his own person second.'²⁴ The flak general, Pickert, who had flown out to Stalingrad a week before, reported that at that time Paulus had expected to hold out only six more days.²⁵ Milch sent him to Hitler. 'I share your fears,' he told von Manstein privately shortly after. 'But we must assume that Stalingrad can be held, and do all we can to that end. Clearly there can be no question of our acting as though Stalingrad were already lost.'²⁶

During the coming night, 18–19 January, six Heinkels and one FW 200 actually landed at Gumrak and disgorged their supplies; another forty-one Heinkels, one FW 200 and three Ju 52s made air-drops over the airfield. The containers fell into deep snowdrifts and few could be recovered. A Heinkel brought out a score of injured men, and early next morning the Panzer general, Hube, was flown out of the fortress on Hitler's orders and added to Milch's staff.²⁷ Hube had lost one hand in the First World War and was an obvious leader of men. He complained that many of the earlier transports that had landed at Pitomnik had been only half full, and even now others were carrying quite useless stores. As for Gumrak, Hube questioned why so many aircraft had failed to risk the landing; he had himself seen the signal cartridges being fired as the transports circled overhead. Milch did not admit to Hube the conclusions he had drawn about the crews' morale.²⁸

Alerted by Hube's complaint, Milch ordered some of the containers to be opened on the airfields. Many of the sacks were found to contain only fish-meal. Milch sent the sacks back and asked the army to have the victualling officer hanged. 'If we had not had the contents of these sacks sampled on the airfields, our aircraft would actually have flown fish-meal into Stalingrad!'²⁹

With the arrival of Milch's special mission a new spirit prevailed. The rate of supply increased, new aircraft joined the squadrons, and a new heroism was instilled into the exhausted crews. Two squadrons of fighter aircraft were on their way from Germany. Gumrak airfield now had an improvised flarepath of ten tank-lamps and a powerful radio beacon was in operation. Milch's experts toured the loading airfields, supervised cold-start procedures, and established workshop and supply facilities. In the twenty-four hours before dawn on 20

January, the Sixth Army saw thirty He 111s actually land at Gumrak with petrol, ammunition, foodstuffs and medical supplies; and 130 injured men were flown out. Only one Ju 52 landed, a failure which angered Milch. 'I will have any commander acting against my orders shot,' he warned the Air Transport Commander.³⁰

Colonel Petersen sent to Rechlin for cold-start squads to work on the sixty-five Junkers transporters abandoned to the Russian winter at Zverevo. They found that no attempt whatever had been made by the Junkers crews to operate the trustworthy cold-start procedure. 'The Ju 52 squadrons did not even know of it,' Milch later related, 'because they had arrived from Africa.'³¹ Special cold-start fuel was also available not far away, but the squadrons had no transport and dared not appropriate the army's unused vehicles. Meantime, Milch investigated what had happened to the accommodation and equipment the Air Transport Commander had requested through service channels. 'They are probably still waiting for it,' he mocked three weeks later. 'I found out that the trains did actually set out, in part, but they were shunted off somewhere else because more important stuff had to be transported. So they lay around . . . and who knows where they are today?'³²

During the afternoon a Heinkel squadron commander reported to Milch: he had flown the round trip to Gumrak, but had had to wait five hours there before his aircraft was unloaded. His report left no doubt about the mood within the fortress. Paulus had reproached him, 'Today is the fourth day my men have had nothing to eat. Our heavy guns have had to be abandoned because we have no petrol. Our last horses have been eaten. Can you imagine soldiers falling upon the carcass of a horse, smashing its head open and eating its brains raw? . . . What should I, the Commander-in-Chief of an army, say to a man who begs of me, "Herr Colonel-General! A crust of bread?"' Paulus's chief of staff had butted in, 'And now you dare to try to whitewash the Luftwaffe, which has committed the worst treachery in the history of the German people! Somebody must have suggested the airlift to the Führer! That a whole army, this magnificent Sixth Army, has to go to the dogs like this!' Paulus commented, 'We speak to you as though from another world already, for we are dead men.'

Nothing remains but what history may write of us.' Retaining an icy composure to the end, Paulus instructed the Luftwaffe major to tell Milch that only one thing was of use — that the transport aircraft must be ordered to *land* at Gumrak whether they liked it or not.³³

During the night hours 113 transport planes took off and sixty-seven completed supply runs, of which twenty-one Heinkels and four Ju 52s landed at Gumrak. The rest of the supplies were pushed out into the dark sky, in the hope that some would be found.

At Stalingrad teams of starving troops laboured to prepare a second landing-ground, eight hundred yards long and sixty yards wide. It was subjected to continuous Russian air attack. News reached Milch that a squadron of the latest Me 109G fighters was destined for Stalingrad, plus eighty mechanics for the Ju 52 ground crews.³⁴ Trainloads of transport gliders were on their way — Go 242s, Me 321s and even seventy-two DFS 230s. The extra aircraft pre-heating equipment had been despatched, and German industry had begun the production of air-drop containers. When von Manstein telephoned to ask when the fighters and bombers would arrive, Milch could reply, 'Very soon! The fighters have already reached Cracow.'³⁵

He detailed a ground-control officer to fly with three others into Gumrak next day. Fiebig noted pessimistically, 'They want to be fetched out if the worst comes to the worst. I do not think it can be done. They are done for.'³⁶ At noon a Sixth Army staff officer reported to Milch that there were still about 160,000 German troops in the city, slowly freezing or starving to death. Nothing less than two hundred tons a day could keep this army alive. 'How long the fortress can hold out is not for me to say; things might be over very rapidly.'³⁷ Milch sent him to report in person to Hitler.

Early next day the ground-control officer returned prematurely. Paulus had ordered him out, saying he had been promised a Luftwaffe *general*. 'Whatever the assistance you are offering, it comes too late. We are all lost!' When the major had referred to other, more optimistic developments, Paulus had cut him short: 'Dead men are not interested in war history.' General Jänecke, commander of the Fourth Panzer Corps, who had been sent for by Hitler, accom-

panied him. While the Luftwaffe major reported that aircraft could land safely at the new Stalingrad landing-ground — but not take off — Jänecke said he gave the fortress three more days.

Time was now running out fast. Gumrak airfield was overrun by Russian troops. Eighty-one aircraft flew missions to the new landing ground and twenty-six attempted landings, but most were wrecked as they ran into bomb-craters concealed by the snowdrifts. The rest discharged their cargoes in mid-air. The Russians had launched a heavy assault on the western outskirts of Stalingrad and the new airstrip was overrun as well: ten more Heinkels managed to land and unload part of their fuel before the enemy arrived. From now on the airlift could be maintained by air-drops alone; no more injured could be evacuated. Some twenty-nine thousand injured troops had been successfully flown out. In grim anticipation of this final act, every soldier had been given the chance to write one last letter home. When the last Heinkel took off on 23 January it carried nineteen injured soldiers, and seven bags of mail.³⁸

Altogether 116 aircraft completed missions on that day — proof of the work put in by Petersen and the ministry engineers — but all of them had to release their cargoes in mid-air. At ten o'clock that evening Milch learned that the fortress had been cut in two, with a northern pocket about ten miles wide and eight deep, and a southern one in the city's suburbs.³⁹ It would take two more days for the first fighter aircraft to arrive from Germany.⁴⁰ Göring continued to send lengthy telegrams to Milch, and Hitler himself telephoned early on the twenty-fourth to inquire about the situation, clutching at any straws of hope Milch's staff could offer. 'He wanted a miracle to happen, and believed there would be one,' Milch later wrote. 'I myself saw no such chance.'⁴¹ As dawn broke on the twenty-fourth, the weather worsened. Wireless contact was lost for several hours. A few planes flew low over the fog-shrouded ruins and dropped sacks of foodstuffs on brightly coloured parachutes, but few were found. Later that day Paulus's headquarters signalled, 'Ghastly conditions prevailing in the city. At least twenty thousand unintended injured and stragglers are sheltering in the ruins of houses and cellars. Scenes of catastrophe on very largest scale . . . Front line being held by small squads commanded by generals and high-morale officers, who are organizing the last battle-worthy men together under fire.'⁴²

That afternoon Milch telephoned Speer from Mariupol. The Munitions Minister reported that the Führer recognized that the airlift had been speeded up, and was ruefully reproaching himself again for not having sent for Milch earlier.⁴³ The field marshal admitted that he had no news of Speer's brother in the fortress; Speer was not surprised. The family had now received a long-delayed postcard from Ernst, saying he had decided to die in the front line rather than in hospital. They never saw him again.

Although suffering agonies from blood poisoning and the inflamed injuries resulting from his crash a week before, Field Marshal Milch did what he could over the next few days to alleviate the long drawn-out death throes of the Sixth Army. Forty-five tons of supplies were parachuted into the two shrinking pockets during the night, but of the sixty-two Ju 52s operational at Zverev again only eleven had actually flown. The Air Transport Commander blamed the cold engines. Milch admonished him, 'Any pilot aborting without good reason will be stood before a court martial.'⁴⁴ On the following night, 26–27 January, no fewer than 124 transport aircraft completed missions over Stalingrad: fifty He 111s flew 104 sorties between them.† A hundred tons of food — bread, ham and chocolate — and ammunition were released over the dropping zones, now marked by criss-crossed lorry headlamps. The Me 109G squadron had now reached Lemberg, six hundred miles away, and the Me 110 long-range fighters were even nearer.

Milch sent urgent word to Berlin that he wanted engineers and oil-cooler experts to work on the He 177s; he wanted specialists for ground equipment, engineers familiar with parachute and air-drop techniques, experts for aircraft repairs, armament and equipment.⁴⁶ By now one trainload of filled air-drop

* Milch's Stalingrad diary quotes one Rechlin expert's statement in his command train on 27 January: 'This morning most of KG 55's aircraft started without the use of the heating truck and despite a temperature of minus 15 degrees, *simply by applying the correct cold-start procedure.*'⁴⁵

† Major Beumelburg wrote in his June 1943 study: 'On the night of 26–27 January two crews flew two sorties each from Zverev airfield, three crews flew two sorties each from Stalino, six crews from Novocherkassk flew three sorties each and seventeen crews flew two, and from Constantinovka four crews flew two sorties each.' The courage needed to fly three sorties in one night to Stalingrad can readily be appreciated.

containers and another of foodstuffs was arriving every day at the loading air-fields. Every three days a trainload of transport gliders arrived as well. At Zverev there were already 1,800 tons of foodstuffs and ammunition awaiting lifting into Stalingrad; but the airlift itself was still the impassable bottleneck.

On the following night eighty-seven transports flew missions to the dropping zone, now in Red Square itself, but little of the supplies reached the German troops. The Luftwaffe signals officer within the fortress now had all the radio beacons in operation; he must have known the fate awaiting all of them. Milch emulated his courage and asked Hitler's permission for General Hube and himself to fly one Heinkel mission to Stalingrad in person. Permission was refused.⁴⁷

Early next morning, 28 January, Milch was unexpectedly visited by Hitler's chief adjutant, General Schmundt.⁴⁸ The field marshal frankly told Schmundt, 'I believe it desirable for the Führer to detach himself more from the individual problems of army command and appoint a leading personality theatre commander for the eastern front, like those already existing in the west and south, to command all three services.' He warned that Germany's increased production effort could not match those of the enemy until 1944, so the coming year must be one of defensive strategy.⁴⁹ The armies on the eastern front should dig into strongly fortified positions. Schmundt invited Milch to state this case to the Führer, and Milch agreed provided that he could talk to Hitler alone.

The defence of the two remaining strongholds was now seriously hampered by the presence of some thirty thousand injured troops lying untended among the ruins. Paulus's foodstocks were so low that he ordered no food to be given to the injured or sick, so that those who were still fit enough to fight could do so. The heavy parachute containers were falling too far from Red Square, and settling down into the tall shells of ruined buildings where the troops could not retrieve them. Still the airlift continued. By dawn on 29 January another 109 aircraft had carried out supply drops, each releasing about one ton of food and ammunition. The whole airlift had now cost the Luftwaffe 330 aircraft and 791 airmen dead or missing; the latter losses were nothing compared with the Sixth Army's losses, of course.

The first twelve fighter aircraft had now arrived from the Reich. Milch ordered that on the morrow, the tenth anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power, there must be German fighter aircraft over Stalingrad.⁵⁰ ‘The reputation of the Luftwaffe, and in particular of the fighter arm, in the eyes of the German army is at stake.’⁵¹ Von Manstein’s army group alone failed to rise to the occasion. It announced the next day’s army password as one word, ‘Panama!’ To men of Milch’s generation this was an elegant insult, derived from the fraud surrounding the building of the first Panama Canal. Milch ordered the password to be changed to ‘Long live the Führer!’⁵²

Now Paulus changed his tone as well. He wirelessed Hitler: ‘On the anniversary of your assumption of power, the Sixth Army sends greetings to the Führer. Still flutters the swastika over Stalingrad. May our struggle stand as an example to generations as yet unborn, never to surrender, however desperate the odds. Then Germany will be victorious.’⁵³

Under Milch’s control the airlift was now reaching its second climax. Overnight, 124 aircraft flew over the dropping zones, and this time almost all the supplies were retrieved. As dawn of the thirtieth broke Milch’s fighters stood over Stalingrad. But already the Luftwaffe units there were wirelessing him their last farewells from within the fortress. A new discipline replaced the disorder and recrimination which had characterized the weeks before. Colonel Rosenfeld, commanding 10th Flak Regiment, signalled: ‘In the basement ruins of Red Square, Stalingrad, surrounded by the thunder of enemy gunfire, we have read our Führer’s proclamation. It has given us courage and resolution for these last hours of the battle for the ruins of the Red citadel on the Volga. Above us flies the swastika banner. The orders of our Supreme Command are being obeyed to the end. We turn our thoughts loyally to the Fatherland. Long live the Führer!’⁵⁴

The southern pocket was almost finished. Returning aircrews told Milch that fires were raging round Red Square, and that the secret police building housing Paulus’s headquarters was on fire.⁵⁵ That evening, sitting in von Richthofen’s train, Milch listened to the broadcast of Göring’s commemoration speech from the Air Ministry. ‘Oh yes,’ proclaimed Göring, ‘there were those

weaklings who came and warned that the Soviet Union had three, four or five times as many tanks, and ten times as many planes as we. Isn't that always the way cowards act!'⁵⁶ Milch knew at whom Göring's jibe was aimed.

By next morning another 120 supply missions had been flown.⁵⁷ At 10 A.M. it was clear that the southern pocket had been destroyed. The Luftwaffe signals troops there had wirelessed that Russian troops were smashing the door down, so they 'signed off' — a discipline which brought tears to the eyes of the field marshal who had created the Luftwaffe.⁵⁸ Hitler signalled the Ninth Army Corps, holding the tractor factory, 'I expect the northern pocket of Stalingrad to be held to the last man. Every day, every hour which is thereby gained is of decisive value for the rest of the front.'⁵⁹ The Corps predicted they would hold out for two more days.

His body aching and swollen, Milch was lifted into his Dornier to tour the loading airfields and harangue the crews himself.⁶⁰ The transport squadrons dropped ninety-eight tons into the northern pocket during the night, a momentous effort considering the distances now involved. But on the morning of 2 February the last German resistance in Stalingrad was overcome: 'Ninth Army Corps's six divisions have done their duty in heaviest fighting to the last man. Long live the Führer! Long live Germany!'⁶¹ Milch telephoned this text to the Führer's headquarters at 11 A.M. It might have been a Soviet trick, so he still ordered aircraft out over the city in case there were signs of German fighting men; but they returned with their loads still on board. Columns of Russian troops had been seen marching into the lifeless factory. Signal cartridges had been fired aimlessly into the sky. Milch ended the airlift forthwith, and telephoned this decision to Hitler an hour before midnight struck.

We can imagine with what memories he took leave of von Richthofen next day. The nightmare impressions of apathy and lack of leadership, the bitter realization that so much more could have been achieved, the distracted midnight conversations with Hitler and the Reichsmarschall — three hundred thousand faces crowding in on him as his Dornier took off from Mariupol airfield, churning up a whirlwind of snowflakes in its wake, bearing General Hube and himself to Hitler's headquarters.

To the field marshal's surprise the Führer sent privately for Hube first, and suspiciously inquired whether Milch had done everything in his power; to which Hube replied, 'All that and more!' Hube observed that if the Führer had sent Milch fourteen days before, Stalingrad would not have fallen. 'That,' regretted Hitler, 'is a judgement on me.'⁶²

After Hube Hitler received Milch until 1.30 A.M., but it was painful to see Hitler's nerves at such low ebb. Milch made no bones about his views: had he been Paulus, he said, he would have disobeyed orders and commanded his army to break out of Stalingrad.⁶³ Hitler coldly replied that he would then have been obliged to lay Milch's head at his feet. The field marshal, his neck bulging ominously red and his injured back hurting like the devil, burst out, '*Mein Führer*, it would have been worth it! One field marshal sacrificed, to save three hundred thousand men!' Hitler was not pleased by this remark, and Milch realized he could talk no more with him that night.

C H A P T E R 1 4

TOTAL WAR

February–March 1943

FOR TWENTY DAYS Milch was unable to report to Reichsmarschall Göring. Göring's disgrace was complete, but one factor saved him after Stalingrad in Hitler's eyes: 'He is my own designated successor,' the Führer said, 'and that is why I cannot hold him publicly responsible for Stalingrad.'¹ The defeat had not been a glorious episode for the Luftwaffe. Professor Richard Suchenwirth, the first post-war biographer of Germany's air commanders, has observed: 'Of all the leading personalities in the air force in the whole unhappy period from November until February, we can see only the one man, von Richthofen, as a man of vision and resolution; and, in the final phase, exerting himself to the very utmost, the man on the spot whom the Luftwaffe generals so willingly dismissed as "a civilian" — the state secretary, Field Marshal Milch.'²

In seventy-two days and nights the Luftwaffe had successfully flown in 8,350 tons of supplies to the fortress, an average of 116 tons a day; the cost had been 488 aircraft destroyed, missing or written off, and about one thousand airmen. It had cost the equivalent of five wings (*Geschwader*) or an entire air corps.³ The training schools had been stripped of aircraft and instructors, and Lufthansa had also lost some of its finest pilots.⁴ But what were these losses compared to those of the Sixth Army? Only 108,000 troops had survived to enter Soviet captivity; of these only six thousand survived to return to Germany.⁵ But we now know that the Stalingrad fighting tied down no fewer than

seven Russian armies for the two months that it endured.

A long time afterward Milch learned part of the background of Göring's undertaking to Hitler. Colonel Eschenauer, the Air Staff's supply officer, told him he had pointed out that three hundred tons a day was impossible; he had found some difficulty at first in making Jeschonnek realize that the so-called '250-kilo' supply bombs would not hold anything like 250 kilograms of food, but far less — it just had the same shape as a 250-kilo bomb.⁶ To Jeschonnek's credit, he immediately brought this to Göring's attention and asked him to warn Hitler that their calculations had been based on a wrong assumption. The Reichsmarschall forbade him to tell Hitler, and the outcome was inevitable.⁷

While Milch had been away much had happened that was to affect the air war. In broad daylight and unescorted, American bombers had carried out their first attack on Germany on 27 January, and three days later RAF Mosquitoes bombed Berlin in daylight too. That same night the British raided Hamburg in force, using the 9-centimetre H2S radar system for the first time — a system which more than any other contributed to the German cities' ruin.⁸ It was all happening just as he had prophesied.

Somehow the German army's losses in the east had to be replaced, for Hitler was already planning a spring counter-offensive. Speer announced to Central Planning that Hitler had commanded a major tank production effort, rising to fifteen hundred tanks a month by the autumn.⁹ Speer undertook that neither the Luftwaffe nor the submarine construction programmes would be inconvenienced in any way; but when Milch, on his return, appealed to him to accord aircraft production the same industrial priority this was delayed for three months, by which time the supply firms were so crowded with Panzer and U-boat contracts that the belated Luftwaffe contracts had little chance.¹⁰

For the first time Milch was meeting an influence as radical as himself. Speer he could handle as a friend, but the minister's chief assistant, Karl-Otto Saur, was beyond control. Saur, a stocky, bustling engineer, was an acknowledged expert on armament and industrial problems. Aided by police, he raided the Luftwaffe's most important factories and picked the best engineers for himself. Throughout February 1943 the complaints rained in on Milch, as over-

night the irreplaceable welders and engineers vanished from the production lines at Junkers and Daimler-Benz.¹¹ When Milch drew attention to this, Göring agreed that Hitler ought to make up his mind what he wanted: ‘Even Speer is powerless when the Führer hammers him for tanks. That’s why the Führer must decide in his own mind whether he will grant aircraft the same priority as tanks or not.’¹²

But the Führer’s aircraft requirements varied constantly as the tide of battle changed. In the aftermath of Stalingrad Hitler had impulsively demanded of Milch, ‘I want transporters, transporters and more transporters!’¹³ He suggested quite a primitive aircraft, capable of landing with up to four tons of cargo on rough, unprepared ground. But soon the evacuation of the Caucasus was in full swing, headed for the Crimea, and now he asked for Ju 52 seaplanes too.¹⁴ He also desperately wanted the He 177 bomber: the aircraft had flown nineteen supply missions to Stalingrad in all, and as usual had excelled as a fast, heavy aircraft; but five had been destroyed by engine fires in mid-air — a casualty rate of twenty-six percent. ‘The Führer spoke to me about it,’ lamented Milch on his return from headquarters. ‘I stood in front of the Führer like a very small boy who has not done his sums properly. I tried to go over the causes and explanations with him, but it is tough to explain the reasons to anybody who has not been immersed in it all, and it’s even tougher if you cannot simply tell him, “That’s the way I inherited it, it’s not my baby. It’s my predecessor that’s to blame.” That would be the coward’s way out.’¹⁵

The spectacle of Stalingrad and the eastern front oppressed Milch, and he resolved to speak his mind to the Führer on the next occasion. When Speer launched into a monologue on the scarcity of materials and fuel during a Central Planning session, Milch cut him short with a grim reminder: ‘The only raw material which cannot be restored in the foreseeable future is human blood.’¹⁶ He viewed the war very differently now. He discussed with Speer and Goebbels a proposal for a War Cabinet to relieve Hitler of the burden of political leadership while he directed the fighting.¹⁷ He found Goebbels’s attitude toward total war and the leadership closely allied to his own. On 16 February he told his departmental heads that Goebbels had recently pointed out to him that ‘it is the first duty of the leaders of a state to keep their heads, and to pronounce upon

the over-all situation calmly and reasonably, and without carping and grousing. Our nation must be properly led by us, and it must *feel* that it is being led. Nobody must get the impression that we do not accept the efforts this nation is offering to us.¹⁸ This was the very eve of Total War.

On the evening of the eighteenth Milch witnessed the new age ushered in by Goebbels at a major *Sportpalast* speech, broadcast throughout Europe. Afterward Goebbels invited Milch and a handful of his like-minded colleagues to his apartment. He found Göring's state secretary 'a fanatical champion of total war' and suspected he might well prove a valuable prop for the cause: 'Thus we shall also succeed in bringing the Reichsmarschall round to our side.'¹⁹ But Göring's general lethargy defeated the plan for a War Cabinet. Speer put the proposal to him in their name, and was himself optimistic; Milch recorded the results more negatively, and Göring does not appear to have broached the possibility to Hitler at all.

The Luftwaffe's dilemma after Stalingrad was formidable. It was plagued with a strange assortment of prewar aircraft designs long since overtaken by the changing patterns of air strategy. Really effective weapons like the 30-millimetre cannon would still not enter production until mid-1943, and then only in minute series²⁰; Milch's predecessor had fought tooth and nail against such devastating weapons as the one-kilo anti-personnel bomb the Führer had himself suggested²¹; and several of the air force's leading generals, like the incompetent and corrupt General Loerzer, had reached their present positions only through influence in high places.²²

The increasing shortage of trained aircrew, particularly for the bomber arm, was aggravated by the lack of aircraft and aviation fuel for the training schools, and by the huge numbers of front-line aircraft now being produced by the industry.²³ Once, Jeschonnek had assured Göring that if the front-line squadrons were to be given the petrol currently being allocated to the training squadrons, the war would be over before the latter crews were needed. Milch alone took the long-term view, and pressed for extra capacity for fuel production: without extra fuel they could not train aircrew to the proper standard, could not run in new aero-engines, could not transport stores or fight in the

air.²⁴ If the Allies ever decided to concentrate their attack on Germany's synthetic oil refineries, there would be Armageddon: 'The synthetic oil plants are the worst possible place they could hit us,' he warned Central Planning during the spring of 1943. 'With them stands or falls our very ability to fight this war. After all, if the synthetic fuel plants are effectively attacked, not only our aircraft but the tanks and submarines will also come to a standstill.'²⁵

Göring refused to be alarmed: 'I prefer,' he explained to Milch, 'to have a heap of aircraft lying idle, unable to fly because of a temporary fuel shortage, than to have no aircraft at all.' By 1945 Göring's preference had been met — with a vengeance.²⁶

On 22 February 1943 Milch saw Göring and the Air Staff for the first time since Stalingrad, to put to them the planning for the coming year.²⁷ Göring wearily complained that all the old familiar aircraft types were reappearing: 'The whole thing suffers from the complete absence of planning that reigned previously, from the tyranny of the old Office of Air Armament, and their reluctance to report defects in time to the Commander-in-Chief.'²⁸

When the conversation turned to the lack of heavy bombers, Milch recalled to him with some bitterness the events of 1937: 'In 1933 or 1934 a four-engined aircraft was built by both Junkers and Dornier. These planes were rejected later, and scrapped. At that time people believed the medium bomber was the true aircraft, and killed off the four-engined one. At the same time,' he emphasized, 'the British and Americans went over to four-engined designs.'²⁹

At this conference Milch noticed that Göring's power of speech frequently failed him; his eyes seemed glazed and he confused the aircraft types. 'What use are the finest remote-controlled bombs and all those contraptions if we can't get right out and attack the ships far beyond the range of fighter aircraft?' Göring asked him. 'And the Russian spaces present certain clear tasks to us as well. I must insist that we tackle the four-engined problem by the quickest possible means — by a crash-programme or whatever you call it. Whether we build on the Focke-Wulf, or take the He 177 as the appropriate aircraft, or an enlarged Ju 288 . . . I don't know how.' Then in confusion he asked, 'How many engines does this Junkers 290 have?'³⁰

On 1 March over 250 four-engined RAF bombers attacked Berlin, releasing six hundred tons of bombs. The extensive damage included five hundred big fires raging out of control, twenty thousand homes damaged, thirty-five thousand people homeless, and seven hundred civilians killed. As Dr Goebbels hurried back to tour his stricken gau, Göring left by special train in the opposite direction for a brief vacation in Rome. From his hunting lodge, Milch saw the fires against the skyline and hastened to the ministry: a heavy bomb had hit one wing, his own office had been demolished and fire brigades were in action everywhere.

But the news Milch gave his colleagues next morning was that the fight was still on. For the first time they had produced over two thousand aircraft a month in February, including 725 single- and 133 twin-engined fighters, and over 650 bombers.³¹ ‘That is just the beginning, the increase must continue,’ he said. ‘There can be no going back. By the end of this year we must reach three thousand aircraft and eight thousand engines a month.’ Next day an RAF photographic reconnaissance Mosquito circled high over Berlin in broad daylight. Neither the German fighters nor the flak could reach it.³²

To assuage German public opinion, Hitler ordered reprisal attacks on London, a target he had recently been sparing.³³ Of a hundred tons of bombs carried by his aircraft to London on 3 March, however, only twelve fell within the capital’s boundaries.³⁴ Göring was still in Rome. At a midday conference the Führer derided the Third Air Force’s inability to find London, a target thirty miles across and only ninety miles from the French coast. On the same night the first really heavy RAF attack had fallen on Hamburg. ‘When is the Reichsmarschall going to come?’ Hitler repeatedly asked. ‘This way we’ll never make the British give in!’³⁵ He summoned Milch to his headquarters and repeated to him his demand for the urgent manufacture of a high-speed, high-altitude bomber.³⁶

That evening, 5 March 1943, Milch dined alone with Hitler until the early hours of the morning.³⁷ His basic arguments were two — that for 1943 Germany must restrict herself to the defensive, conserving strength for a resumption of the offensive if need be in 1944³⁸; and that Germany’s leadership meantime must be

overhauled.³⁹ Göring, whom he suspected of succumbing again to narcotic influences after a ten-year interruption, should resign the Luftwaffe command and be appointed Theatre Commander of the eastern front instead. ‘But once he is there you must draw a line on the map, which he may not cross to the west without your express permission. Otherwise he’ll be off shopping in Paris again.’ He suggested that Hitler also appoint a proper chief of staff for himself, like von Manstein.⁴⁰

For the planned spring offensive in the east, Milch continued, the German forces were at present too weak and their transport was inadequate over such great distances. Inspired by his recent observations ('there were sixty-five thousand army troops at Tagarog, while one lieutenant and six men had to hold each kilometre of the front!'⁴¹), he challenged the Führer to investigate how many of the army's ten million troops were actually fighting in the east. He refused to believe that more than a few hundred thousand were actually fighting; the other millions were tucked away in the Wehrmacht's vast bureaucracy and rear areas.*

For the Luftwaffe, Milch suggested that they aim for a production of five thousand fighters a month. He warned that the Allied bomber production figures were no mirage. ‘When these bombers come, Germany and her whole armament industry will be destroyed and it will all be over.’ Equally he warned against underestimating the Russians: the individual Soviet soldier was inferior to the German, but his leadership in this war could not be faulted. Hitler interrupted to say, ‘I will certainly treat Stalin well when he is my prisoner!'

Milch concluded with a strong hint that Hitler should make peace now. ‘*Mein Führer*, Stalingrad has been the gravest crisis for the nation and armed forces so far. You must do something decisive to bring Germany out of this war. It is still not too late, and there are certainly many who think as I do. You must act now — act without ceremony, and above all act now.’

It was 3.15 A.M. when they separated. The field marshal had talked himself

* A year later Milch triumphantly related in Central Planning: ‘In November [1943] the Führer ordered a survey and found out that there are only 265,000 men permanently fighting on the eastern front.’⁴²

into a cold sweat. Hitler had listened to his arguments without anger, but Milch recognized that he had not convinced him.⁴³ He met Göring for the first time after this talk ten days later. After luncheon the Reichsmarschall took him for a drive in the grounds of Karinhall. Milch very properly reported in full his advice to Hitler that Göring should relinquish the Luftwaffe's command. The latter allowed this to pass without comment.⁴⁴ Milch suspected that his mind was far away, in consequence of more narcotics, but a year later Göring was to repeat to him word for word everything he had said.

P A R T V

THE YEAR OF THE CLENCHED TEETH



'Things don't look rosy for our big cities.'

Field Marshal Milch, March 1943

C H A P T E R 1 5

TERROR RAIDS

March–May 1943

ON THE NIGHT of Milch's talk with Hitler the RAF destroyed the big Ruhr city of Essen and devastated its Krupp steelworks and armaments complex in the process. Captured British crews admitted that the aiming points in these raids were now invariably the residential areas. The object was to burn and kill, to bring political pressure to bear on Berlin. The destruction of military targets like dockyards and air bases was left almost exclusively to the still rare incursions of the American daylight bomber formations.*

Almost every night during the coming months one German, French, Czech or other target was singled out for destruction in a methodical attack, heralded by skyborne showers of coloured pyrotechnic flares released by Pathfinder aircraft; the latter were guided by H2S or Oboe radar systems. H2S portrayed a city's outline on the aircraft's radar screen, while Oboe was a precise method employing radio beams and ground controllers in England, enabling single aircraft to release marker flares or bombs with an accuracy of a few hundred yards on targets as distant as the Ruhr.

To combat the growing Allied bombing offensive, the Germans had General Kammhuber's fighter aircraft defence system, and flak. The defences were

* As the official historians succinctly wrote, the object of the general-area attacks was 'to render the German industrial population homeless, spiritless and, as far as possible, dead'.

highly dependent on ground and airborne radar systems. Kammhuber had established a line of night-fighter ‘boxes’, each with a Freya early warning radar, a Würzburg precision radar and a ground-controlled fighter-aircraft; but it was a costly and elaborate system and it was rigid and vulnerable to Allied interference.

There was another, indirect and hence less certain, means of defence — for the Luftwaffe to strike back at Britain’s civil population. But Göring was in Rome and his absence only angered Hitler more.¹ On 8 March 1943 nearly eight hundred tons of bombs were aimed by the RAF at Nuremberg, one of the holiest of Nazi shrines. On the ninth the RAF attacked Munich in force, and on the eleventh they attacked Stuttgart. Hitler ordered Göring to return to Germany and commanded an ‘intensification of the air war against Britain’, for which he handed absolute responsibility to the twenty-nine-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel Dietrich Peltz as ‘Attack Commander, Britain’.² This further commitment, and its further failure, were to bring Göring still greater reproach from Hitler. Göring wailed, ‘Look around Stalingrad — that’s where my bombers are, strewn wrecked across the countryside.’³

For a while Milch was also deflected from his belief in the need to concentrate on the Reich’s defence. Perhaps it was the head injury at Stalingrad that caused his now more frequent outbursts; his staff noticed that he was more irritable than before.⁴ ‘We must attack Britain,’ he told them, ‘otherwise Britain will smash us to smithereens. Our entire armaments effort — air, army and navy — is dependent on whether we can clear our own skies by carrying out the appropriate attacks on the British home base — either on their airfields or on their industry or on their civilians and cities.’ ‘It’s not a matter of precise aim, but of terror raids, pure and simple! Look what *they* accomplish with their terror raids, even without aiming. They didn’t aim at this ministry or at anything else, they just plodded bravely overhead.’⁵

Göring did not like being admonished by Hitler; nor did he like having been summoned back from Rome. In a towering rage he summoned his generals and industrialists for a five-hour tirade of insults and recriminations.⁶ ‘I can only express to you my strongest disappointment about the complete failure in virtually every field of aviation technology today — and my disappointment,

too, that I have been deceived in the past on a scale to which I have hitherto been accustomed only in variety acts by magicians and conjurers,' Göring complained. 'There are some things which were reported to me as absolutely ready before this war, which are not ready even today!' Twice he emphasized that when he spoke of 'the enemy' now, he meant the western Allies, for he considered the German forces still the equals of the Russians.⁷ Germany's present aircraft were useless except for the Russian front, he added: 'In 1940 I could at least fly as far as Glasgow with most of my aircraft, but not now — not any longer.'⁸

Much of Göring's speech was devoted to the abortive aircraft projects inspired by Messerschmitt — like the Me 264 and Me 309 — and Heinkel. 'I was promised a heavy bomber,' Göring recalled with sarcasm, 'the Heinkel 177. Then, when one calamity after another happened to it, they told me: "Well, if the plane did not have to dive, it would be the finest plane in the world, it could be sent to the squadrons at once — at once!" I immediately announced, "It does not have to dive!" How could anybody think of such a mode of attack? But where it has been tried out on [level] operations' — meaning Stalingrad — 'it has resulted in catastrophic losses, none of them caused by the enemy.' Thus they still had no means of long-range reconnaissance for the submarine wolf-packs, and attacks on enemy shipping with special missiles like Fritz-X and Hs 293 were impossible.⁹ Later he challenged the professor, 'Now, Herr Heinkel . . . What do you say today. Will it work, or won't it?'

'It will work in summer, Herr Reichsmarschall.'

'And how many out of ten aircraft will catch fire,' jeered the Reichsmarschall. 'Half of them!' 'How much fun was made of the enemy's backwardness,' Göring goaded his audience, 'about the enemy's "plodding four-engined crates" and so on.' 'Make no mistake, gentlemen, the British are going to go from strength to strength with their much-mocked "four-engined crates" or whatever other fine adjectives you dream up for them. He is going to take on city after city. It makes no difference to him: he flies with the same sure navigation to Munich or Berlin, he can fly as far as Warsaw or Vienna.'¹⁰

Then there was the British Mosquito high-speed bomber. 'It makes me furious, when I see the Mosquito,' he admitted. 'I turn green and yellow with

envy. The British, who can afford aluminium better than we can, knock together a beautiful wooden aircraft and give it a speed which they have now increased yet again. What do you make of that! That is an aircraft that every piano factory over there is building.' He recalled with bitterness his experts' advice years before that such a wooden aircraft was impossible. Udet had warned him the whole world would laugh them to scorn. Who, asked Göring, was laughing now? Why did not the air industry simply copy the captured Stirling bomber, Göring asked. 'Then at least I would have an aircraft with which I could do something.' And why not copy the Mosquito?

Professor Messerschmitt was stung into retorting that it was much simpler to convert an existing aircraft to wooden construction than to design a completely new aircraft.* Göring interrupted him: 'I am just telling you, you should take the Mosquito!' The professor had not meant that, and obstinately continued, 'but it could be any other aircraft.' Again Göring roared at him: 'Why not take the best one!' Messerschmitt wearily explained, 'I think it is more complicated than that. Wooden construction is by no means simpler.' 'It could hardly be more complicated than your crates!' retorted Göring.

Milch shared this irritation at Professor Messerschmitt's attitude. Discussing the unsuitability of the Me 309 prototype for night-fighting, Messerschmitt actually claimed, 'I ordered it to be dropped because there is not enough capacity for tool-making for its mass production.' Milch exploded. 'Messerschmitt! The 309 was cancelled because it was totally unsatisfactory in rate of climb and ceiling, because it did not match the enemy at all.' The Reichsmarschall agreed, and with heavy sarcasm reiterated the Luftwaffe's basic requirements for a fighter: 'The most modest is that the aircraft must take off and land at night without the pilot risking every bone in his body.'†

The second great area of Hermann Göring's discontent was radar. By this

* Milch complained at one meeting that Professor Messerschmitt showed no inclination to visit the displays of captured Allied aircraft.

† As they left the room for luncheon, according to Messerschmitt's note on the conference, Milch crossed the room to him and stated that at times he had been so angry with the professor that he had had to restrain himself from 'rushing over and tearing out the last hairs from his head'.

time the Luftwaffe had long lost the initiative in what is now referred to as electronic warfare; and worse was to come. ‘I have long been aware of the fact,’ Göring rasped, ‘that there is nothing the British do not have. Whatever the equipment we have, the enemy can jam it without so much as a by-your-leave. We accept all this as though it were God’s will, and when I get worked up about it, the story is, “We haven’t got enough workers.” . . . Gentlemen, it’s not manpower you’ve got too little of, it’s brainpower in your brain-boxes, to make the inventions we need!’¹¹ The Reichsmarschall — who occasionally confessed he was incapable of switching on his own radio — did not mince his language about German radar: ‘I have frequently taken a look inside such sets,’ he explained disarmingly. ‘It does not look all that imposing — just some wires, some more wires and a few other bits and pieces; and the whole apparatus is remarkably primitive even then.’¹²

It is true that German radar, operating on half-metre wavelengths, was more susceptible to noise jamming than the 9-centimetre wavelengths favoured by the British. A creeping campaign of jamming had begun, first from transmitters based in southern England, and then in specially fitted four-engined aircraft over Germany and the occupied countries. But British scientists had also developed the simplest jamming method of all — the release of myriad metal foil strips into the air, exactly half the German wavelength in size. So simple and effective was this device, code-named ‘Window’, that RAF defence commanders had successfully delayed its introduction by the bombers in case the Germans should discover the technique as well.¹³ (From Milch’s documents we find that the Germans had already had precisely the same idea but were prevented from using it for precisely the same reason by General Martini, the shy, academic Chief of Air Signals.)

In April 1942 Milch had offered researchers a prize for the invention of a means of avoiding radar detection.¹⁴ It constantly occurred to him that it ought to be possible to get protection ‘by some kind of wire’ or other.¹⁵ A few weeks later his chief engineer confirmed, ‘If you scatter out wires the radar picture is so distorted that it is impossible to make accurate calculations. You don’t even need a jamming transmitter for this — just a few leaves of aluminium or something.’¹⁶ In August Colonel Schwenke had reported primitive British attempts

to dupe their Freya early-warning radar by floating metal foils toward Germany suspended on balloons. ‘They would have a degree of success, if these were used in much larger scale under certain weather conditions,’ he advised.¹⁷

Armed with hindsight, we can see that an urgent investigation of counter-measures should have followed this report. But even more explicit information did not have this result. Early in September 1942 it was alleged to Milch that the British night bombers were ‘ejecting clouds of fine aluminium dust’ to confuse the night fighters’ airborne radar, Lichtenstein.¹⁸ His experts now advised him that there was a possibility that the enemy would start a jamming campaign against the main German radar systems, and their defences would then be overwhelmed: ‘It is a big headache for Martini.’¹⁹

Milch had instinctively demanded, ‘We must use the same means over there, and deceive the enemy,’ but Schwenke pointed out that it would lead to a real jamming offensive on both sides, which would affect Germany as well. Milch retorted, ‘Let’s not start turning soft. You might as well say, “Then I won’t make bigger weapons than he’s got!”’ By the end of November 1942 the picture of what the British could do if they ever developed this simple means of jamming was complete. An engineer told Milch, ‘If they shower clouds of these strips out over a big city, they will remain suspended for about twenty or thirty minutes in the air and render our Würzburg radar temporarily blind . . . General Martini says this is so secret, that he thinks we must test only over the sea, so that these things are destroyed by the waves after we have released them, because at present we have no antidote.’²⁰

When, in January 1943, Milch pressed for an extensive jamming campaign against British radar, he was told that Martini was emphatically opposed to any jamming. ‘He asks that all such experiments to jam the enemy’s radar should be dropped for the time being, because there is a simple means whereby the enemy can jam our entire radar system, against which we have no antidote.’²¹ For the next six months no research was carried out. Only when the British first used Window in mass attacks on Hamburg in July and the German radar system was overwhelmed, as predicted, did the Luftwaffe begin research on counter-measures.

Göring and Milch both accepted that the German electronics industry had fallen far behind that of the enemy. A basic reason was that while Britain and America had actively encouraged amateur radio enthusiasts, in Germany the amateurs had been systematically persecuted by the Reich authorities.* Another was that each service had developed and manufactured its own equipment (and continued to do so until early 1944).²³ Hearing, for example, in September 1942 that the navy had developed a simple warning device for submarines to alert them when an enemy radar set was locating them, Milch demanded a similar set for German aircraft: ‘So that the pilot knows immediately, “Aha, somebody’s onto me!” — just as a girl suddenly senses a man’s looking at her.’²⁴

The British H2S radar particularly fascinated them. It had been salvaged from an aircraft near Rotterdam in February, along with two prisoners. Both stubbornly refused to answer questions and maintained they knew nothing about the equipment; this behaviour alone proved to the Germans the equipment must be something special.²⁵ It weighed about three hundred pounds, filled half a dozen cabinets and was clearly being mass produced. ‘It was installed in a place in the fuselage where we have also found a hollow space provided in the Stirling at Rechlin,’ Milch was told. ‘In the Lancaster bomber there is already a remote-controlled platform installed ready for it.’ One thing was certain: H2S could not easily be jammed. When Milch commented to Göring that the cabinets were so voluminous that no German aircraft was big enough to carry them, Göring caustically observed, ‘That’s because they have built those “old four-engined crates” for themselves — aircraft so big you could lay out a dance floor in them!’²⁶

As usual, the British had designed something the Germans could not even imitate. When the unfortunate Martini explained that radar problems could frequently be solved in two or three different ways — ‘and there may even be a fourth or fifth way which we haven’t yet discerned’ — Göring retorted: ‘You can be dead certain that if you have not found out about it, the enemy has! I

* In March 1943 Göring said, ‘The main blame belongs to Ohnesorge [Minister of Posts]. He never wanted to relax his grip on anything. We smashed up the amateur radio “ham” clubs ... and we made no effort to help these thousands of small inventors. And now we need them.’²²

have never seen such nonsense in my life,' he raged. 'I refuse to be led a song and dance like this. The enemy can actually see through the clouds whether he is over a city or not. We cannot jam him. And then you tell me we also have something, but in the same breath you add, "But it can all be jammed by the enemy!" Are you trying to make a fool of me? What am I supposed to tell the Führer! He would think me a complete nincompoop if I repeated to him what you tell me. I ask you again, do we have any such radar set?' 'Not yet,' stammered Martini. 'Aha! Not yet! But the British do. Can we jam them?' 'We hope to be able to in a year's time.' 'That does not interest me two hoots! Can we jam them now, at this moment?' 'No.' 'Good. That is a clear answer. And can the enemy jam the equipment we use for navigation, or can he not?' '*Jawohl.*'²⁷

Six weeks later Göring transferred electronic research and development from Martini to Milch.²⁸

Göring's discomfiture would be almost comic, were it not for the growing scale of the Allied attacks. During March 1943 the RAF had delivered powerful attacks on many German cities by night, releasing nearly a thousand tons over Duisburg, and 1,450 tons in two attacks on Berlin. On 3 April nearly a thousand tons were dropped on Essen, causing extensive damage to the Krupp factories. The American heavy bomber formations battered targets by day in the Nazi-occupied countries on Germany's periphery. On 4 April they killed 228 Parisians in an attack on the Renault motor factory and 221 Italians in an attack on Naples; on the fifth they killed 2,130 civilians, including three hundred children, in Antwerp. (Belgium had suffered some six thousand military casualties in the Nazi invasion three years before.) All this time Göring contemplated developments with increasing lethargy.²⁹

Milch warned Goebbels at this time that for the rest of 1943 the outlook for the Reich's great cities was melancholy, and added that Göring's completely false direction of the air war must terminate in disaster.³⁰ He used this dangerous language on the telephone in the certain knowledge that Göring's telephone tappers would report it to him. Goebbels invited him to tour the Ruhr's devastated towns a few days later. In the Propaganda Minister's sleeping car, Milch displayed his usual bluntness. 'Field Marshal Milch spoke in the most

biting and contemptuous manner of the Reichsmarschall,' recorded Goebbels. 'He accuses him of allowing the Luftwaffe's technical development to go to the dogs. He had fallen asleep on the laurels he had won in 1939 and 1940 . . . The consequence is our almost complete defencelessness in the face of this British airborne terror.'³¹

The damage in Essen was very severe. Together they climbed a tall tower at Krupp's and surveyed the gutted shells of the factory buildings. They spoke to a meeting of the anxious gauleiters and mayors of the biggest west German cities, and Milch defended the Luftwaffe's record as well as he could. Privately, he was able to discuss the future more frankly with Goebbels than with the others. 'It will not be possible to reply on a large scale to the British attacks until November,' Goebbels summarized. 'And it will not be until next spring — in other words a whole year — before we can really repay them in the same coin . . . Until then, the British, if they know their business, will be able to blast and burn a major part of the Reich. Milch views the war in the air as very grave.'

In an editorial in *Das Reich* Goebbels had himself spoken of 'adequate means' which would soon be employed against Britain. He had been referring only to organizational changes, but the public unanimously believed Germany had developed some deadly new secret weapon.³² In fact no retaliation would be possible until the autumn, as Milch had warned. Even 'Cherry Stone', the flying bomb, could not be ready until then.

Its tests had gone perfectly. One fine April day, on the northern tip of Peenemünde West's airfield, where the Baltic lapped the deserted beaches of a one-time holiday haven, Milch watched his engineers prepare a strange steel-shelled aircraft with no cockpit on the landward end of a high ramp pointing out to sea. Several prototype flying bombs had been launched from aircraft during November, and wind-tunnel tests were also now complete.³³ Catapult launchings had begun on Christmas Eve, and the pilot-less aircraft was functioning perfectly. Milch watched as the weapon's Argus Tube was ignited, the catapult was triggered, and the aircraft was hurled into the sky. At about three thousand feet it levelled out and streaked away toward the distant horizon, followed by a fast spotter aircraft. Milch was pleased as he flew back to Berlin.³⁴

Albert Speer had never been a soldier, and he lacked the experience that four years on both fronts had instilled in the field marshal. When the army reported its ammunition, clothing, food or explosives ‘consumption’ the Führer and Speer automatically believed them. Milch, guardian of the public interest, did not. ‘If anything is cut back on,’ he told Central Planning, ‘it naturally hits the weakest first, and that’s the German domestic economy.’³⁵ He argued for a more critical scrutiny of the Wehrmacht’s claims. ‘What do they really mean by “consumption”?’ ‘Consumption is certainly not what they have actually fired. I am convinced they do not count up the ammunition that has actually passed through the gun barrels. They list as “ammunition fired” the quantity they draw from the ammunition dumps.’ The point was that they made no mention of the quantities they simply abandoned during retreats.³⁶ Milch proposed that they show Hitler the quantities of artillery ammunition actually fired during the First World War, compared with the huge stocks still left at the time of the Armistice. ‘The raw materials squandered here are urgently needed for agriculture,’³⁷ he pointed out. The two government nutrition experts he had summoned to the Central Planning meeting fully supported his argument. ‘We must still have food to eat in 1947. If we shut our eyes to this, then we are deceiving ourselves.’ He reminded his colleagues that it was the starvation of 1918 that had caused the final collapse then, and he repeated his insistence that the nitrogen demands on German agriculture be met.³⁸

As on earlier occasions, Speer disagreed with Milch. ‘If you challenge the Führer about ammunition,’ he warned, ‘you are banging your head against a brick wall.’³⁹

The British bombing offensive was becoming increasingly accurate. Late in April 1943 the Germans found out why — they recovered intact the new British Mark XIV bombsight, superior even to the American Norden bombsight already in their hands.⁴⁰ The British device was fully automatic and coupled to a small computer which allowed for the aircraft’s most violent evasive actions. Furthermore, from reports of conferences between the British Minister of Aircraft Production (Sir Stafford Cripps) and the Air Council, supplied by an agent in Whitehall, the Germans also knew that the British had produced 1,920 front-

line aircraft during April, with ever-increasing emphasis on the ‘four-engined crates’ to which Göring had referred.⁴¹

By May 1943 there had been several violent attacks on the Ruhr. Fifteen hundred tons of bombs were dropped each night on cities like Duisburg and Dortmund. A handful of RAF Lancaster bombers, each carrying one special rotating bomb, smashed the dams controlling the water supplies of the Ruhr; a week later a squadron of Mosquitoes carried out a low-level daylight attack on the Zeiss optical factory at Jena, and not one was shot down. Göring remonstrated with his generals, ‘My own men say, “We are not quite sure whether we will be able to find London in bad weather.” But the gentlemen on the other side come over and find a dam lying swathed in mist at night, and whack right into it!’⁴² And on another occasion, ‘I have to admit, my respect for those gentlemen grows with every hour. I don’t mind having to put up with the occasional tip-and-run attack on the coast, but Jena lies right in the heart of Germany! One has to admit, what dash and courage on the one hand, and what *contempt* for our own fighter defences on the other!’⁴³

On 8 May Hitler told Milch, ‘There’s something wrong with the Luftwaffe, and it’s either with its tactics or its technology.’⁴⁴ Milch suggested it was the current tactics that were wrong, and patiently explained his steps to bring aircraft production up to three thousand a month by the end of the year. He himself had no control over how they were tactically employed. Hitler demanded that each of the new fighter aircraft must be capable of carrying a bomb.⁴⁵ After seeing Hitler on the same day, Goebbels summarized:

The technical failure of the Luftwaffe results mainly from useless aircraft designs. It is here that Udet bears the fullest measure of the blame. Well may he have tried to expiate this by his suicide, but this has not helped our situation very much. Speer is very disturbed by all this, but believes that Milch will probably succeed in leading us out of the woods. The public shows its common sense when they rumour that it is Göring himself who is to blame. Göring has put his old First World War comrades too much to the fore, and these

are obviously not equal to the burdens of leadership that war places on them.⁴⁶

Hitler shared Speer's view of Milch. When General Galland visited the Führer on 25 May, the latter confided in him that the Luftwaffe without the field marshal 'just did not bear thinking about'.⁴⁷

C H A P T E R 1 6

‘AS THOUGH AN ANGEL’S PUSHING’

May–July 1943

THE MESSERSCHMITT 262 jet aircraft first flew in July 1942; it did not enter squadron service with the Luftwaffe until the autumn of 1944 — too late to have a decisive effect on the outcome of the war. In retrospect we can see where the mistakes between those dates were made: Air Ministry priority was granted too late, and as soon as it was granted Professor Messerschmitt lost interest in the aircraft and turned his attention to still newer projects; and at a late stage in the fighter version’s production programme Hitler insisted that a bomber version be manufactured first, a decision for which Messerschmitt himself was principally to blame, as we shall see.

The aircraft had barely been mentioned in production studies before February 1943, and then, as Milch told the Reichsmarschall in that month, only so that it would not be overlooked completely.¹ Göring, who had been shown the research long before the war, unhappily reflected in March: ‘When I asked at that time when we should be seeing them, I was told, “In one and a half to two years’ time.” And now that I get the facts from the horse’s mouth I hear that it is still two years — at least that’s the way it looks!’²

The professor, of course, has never accepted responsibility. Looking back after Germany’s defeat he inevitably recognized the delays to his most prestigious aircraft as a major factor, but he confidently blamed Milch, by then incarcerated by the Americans and unable to reply.³ More recently he has declared:

'Milch regarded the whole thing as a frivolity and prohibited us to work further on it.'⁴ Messerschmitt has also alleged that he himself winced at Hitler's 'intrinsically absurd' idea for a bomber version of the Me 262. After the war the British captured the Air Ministry records, however, and seized the personal papers of Professor Messerschmitt; they are still held in London and present a historically unalterable picture of the tortuous path followed by the controversial project.

The novelty was the Junkers turbo-jet engine, and not the Messerschmitt airframe.⁵ For years the main difficulty had been the design of the axial compressor. In July 1939 the Air Ministry had issued a contract for the development of a jet engine with 1,300 pounds thrust to Professor Otto Mader, head of the Junkers engine research laboratory.⁶ The over-all design work was carried out by the designer of the successful Jumo 210 piston engine, and the jet engine Jumo 004 had its first hot run at the time the Battle of Britain was at its height. For eighteen more months the engine underwent improvement, modification and tests, and in June 1942 the first pair was delivered to the Messerschmitt company.

The Air Ministry had issued a contract for the design of a corresponding airframe four years before, and the result, the Me 262, was ready when the engines arrived. The engines were installed and the aircraft's first pure jet flight took place on 18 July.⁷

It was a tragedy for the project that its development should have lain in the hands of a personality — Messerschmitt — in whom Milch had little faith. 'I know only too well how Messerschmitt likes to talk big,' he would remark.⁸ After Udet's suicide Milch had seen the industry's immediate duty as being to provide enough of the existing aircraft types to prevent the Luftwaffe's total collapse. Throughout 1942 he had lived in a climate of disaster. He was entitled to fear that the Jumo 004 jet engines might develop the same maladies in mass production as had plagued the power plants of the He 177 and Ju 288 bombers, and in this he was to prove right. Moreover, in January 1943 there was still no Air Staff requirement for a jet fighter.⁹ Nevertheless, before departing for the Stalingrad mission Milch had asked General Vorwald 'as a last request' to put

pressure on Messerschmitt to complete the Me 262, and the result was that a few days later the ministry accorded priority to the completion of a small number of prototypes.

By the spring of 1943 the Messerschmitt company was tooling up for production of the piston-engined Me 209, a successor to the Me 109G, to be powered by the new Daimler-Benz 603 engine. As recently as the end of March Milch's view had been that the company should concentrate on this and the Me 410, desperately needed for the war against Britain, and on nothing else¹⁰; the jet fighter prototypes should be completed by some other firm. Messerschmitt was wounded by Milch's lack of faith in him, but did little to promote the Me 262 despite the ministry's January priority order. He removed designers working on it to work on the Me 410 instead, and in April he wrote to the ministry that the jet fighter had been shelved *sine die* for this reason.¹¹ He had however drawn up a 'crash programme' under which (given top priority) forty jet aircraft could be manufactured by the end of 1944. This was hardly likely to attract Milch's enthusiasm.¹²

The final cloud in the midst of this climate of mutual mistrust between Messerschmitt and Milch came in May. Milch was told confidentially that the piston-engined Me 209, due to enter squadron service early in 1945, would probably be *inferior* in rate of climb and manoeuvrability to the Me 109G and the FW 190D which were already in service. Thus the question of the next generation of fighter aircraft was suddenly wide open again. In April one of Galland's pilots had test-flown the jet fighter and reported that it was so good it could be sent to the squadrons as it was. Milch now turned his attention to the possibility of converting directly, without an interim fighter, to the Me 262 — a possibility fraught with risks.¹³ Torn between his confidence in the Junkers power plant and his mistrust of Messerschmitt, he asked Galland, whose judgement he trusted implicitly, to test the Me 262 himself.¹⁴

On 22 May Galland flew the aircraft for the first time, and telephoned Milch in excitement that it flew 'as though an angel's pushing'.¹⁵ He wrote an exemplary one-page report which was to shake the whole aircraft programme: 'The aircraft could be our biggest chance, it could guarantee us an unimaginable lead over the enemy if he adheres to the piston engine.'¹⁶

Galland's proposal was that the inadequate Me 209 fighter should be scrapped forthwith, and the design and production capacity transferred immediately to the Me 262. 'I think the decision is correct,' one of Milch's departmental heads said. 'But what a decision!' Milch agreed: 'A clear course of action!'¹⁷ Top priority was now granted to the Me 262 jet fighter at last, subject to Göring's consent. The company was invited to manufacture the first hundred before the year was over.¹⁸ Milch ('I may hesitate about unimportant matters, but on important ones there's nobody who decides faster!') informed the Reichsmarschall by telephone of the proposal to cancel the Me 209, and Göring approved without hesitation.¹⁹

They were none too soon with the decision. Three days later Colonel Schwenke announced that a reliable British prisoner had reported seeing a British jet aircraft flying 'very fast' at Farnborough, Britain's Peenemünde.²⁰

On 26 May Milch flew to Peenemünde, where the army's fourteen-ton A4 rocket was to be matched against the Luftwaffe's flying-bomb. Both could carry a one-ton warhead to London, but Wernher von Braun's rocket would cost about a hundred times as much as each of Milch's flying bombs. The rocket's history went back seven years, so the army was understandably loath to cancel it; and as it was an army project even a levelheaded weapons man like Speer felt it his duty to support this anachronism in an age of Total War. Had it been designed with the specific object of destroying the basis for Milch's increased aircraft production, it could not have selected scarcer commodities. By the first months of 1944 it was to employ two hundred thousand skilled workers, consume a thousand tons of aluminium a month and tens of thousands of tons of liquid oxygen, pure alcohol and hydrogen peroxide; it would swamp the electronics and precision mechanisms industry with contracts and use up every available machine tool.

The Fi 103 flying-bomb had been designed to avoid these bottlenecks. Made of thin sheet steel and fuelled with paraffin, it promised to tie down a significant proportion of Britain's air defences when it was employed, while the A4 rocket (the later 'V-2'), being invulnerable to attack, would not.

Precisely at noon the army launched its A4 rocket. It vanished into low

clouds and radar tracking stations followed it sixty-four miles into the stratosphere; it impacted 175 miles away, only three miles from its target centre — a very flattering performance for the otherwise inaccurate missile.²¹ At the Luftwaffe airfield meanwhile, Luftwaffe engineers had prepared a flying bomb on its catapult. Milch watched aghast as it plunged into the sea after flying barely a mile. A second flying bomb repeated this unspectacular trajectory. When von Braun's technicians launched a second A4 rocket, it leapt toward the high ceiling of thin cirrus clouds atop a lengthening pillar of dazzling white flame, then something went wrong. It began to topple, and within seconds it had crashed into the airfield within sight of everybody. The smile returned to Milch's face. The decision was taken to allow both missile projects to proceed side by side, but Speer allowed the A4 rocket to be placed into the highest priority rating, DE.

Milch forbade further demonstrations. 'However high and mighty the personage who visits Peenemünde, the bomb is not to be demonstrated.'²² He knew it would work when the time came. He planned mass production to start with a hundred in August, rising to five hundred a month in September and five thousand a month from April 1944.²³ Three thousand tons of steel would be needed over the next three months for the bombs and their catapults. Milch suspected that Speer would object that the weapon could not be ready if it did not always function properly; but his staff urged him to proceed none the less, although they admitted that Speer was boasting that the rocketeers would get their campaign started first. Soon Speer's lieutenant Saur was demanding the release of skilled workers for A4 electronic components production.²⁴ The struggle between the rocket and the flying-bomb, and the desperate needs of home defence, was just beginning.

In the last week of May the British continued to ravage the Ruhr's larger cities, with two thousand tons of bombs dropped in single attacks on Dortmund and Düsseldorf on the twenty-third and twenty-fifth; on the twenty-seventh an Oboe attack on the Ruhr town of Wuppertal killed 2,450 civilians and made 118,000 people homeless within barely fifteen minutes. Milch repeated his warnings of the need to do more for the home front.

The German people [he said] have become accustomed to the fact, as far as one can become accustomed to such a thing, that each night one town or other is heavily bombarded. But it will not understand it, if one fine day perhaps a squadron of Flying Fortresses appears in broad daylight over Berlin and drops its bombs with paraderound precision without the least action being taken to prevent it. The attack on Jena has struck deeply at public morale and at its faith in the Luftwaffe, although the damage itself was not all that severe. It is not a pretty situation, and we cannot have many more of them . . . What has happened in Dortmund, in Bochum and in Wuppertal is far worse than anything that has happened at the front. Because, when things get as bad as that, the soldier just gives up the fight; but the civilian population has to stick it out.²⁵

The devastation continued. On 11 June Bomber Command released two thousand tons of bombs on Düsseldorf, killing vast numbers and rendering a hundred thousand homeless. On the next night, fifteen hundred tons were dropped on Bochum, and after that the target was Oberhausen, a steel town. A German bomber commander, Major Hajo Herrmann, gave Milch an eye-witness account of the Düsseldorf attack: ‘The tactics are remarkably primitive: the first aircraft arrives and releases his cascades of markers over the target and on the target itself; then he puts out a red fireball about fifteen thousand feet up. Every minute a green flare is emitted from this fireball; when this goes out, another one is emitted, so that even the stupidest pilot can see the signal from as far away as the Thames Estuary.’ The city itself was enveloped in a cumulus of smoke, rising to ten or twelve thousand feet like a huge thundercloud through which the radar-controlled flak batteries had continued to fire at the aircraft. ‘From a distance it looked as though the whole city was one huge sea of fire.’²⁶

Milch spent some days in the west inspecting the radar and fighter defence systems. He reported to Göring that the defences were still numerically too weak, and he asked that the daylight fighter squadrons be quadrupled ‘until the Americans lose all pleasure in their handiwork’.²⁷ At wing level he had found the leadership excellent, but he suggested a radical change in the com-

mand structure in the west — the whole air force there should be put under one commander, with a Flak Command and three others identical in purpose to the RAF's Fighter, Bomber and Coastal Commands subordinate to him; he much admired the British system, and had made a similar suggestion to Hitler during their talk in March.

He called a Berlin conference to discuss a revision of their fighter defence tactics.²⁸ It was evident that more flexible tactics than those so painstakingly developed in the Kammhuber Line were necessary if the mass incursions by the RAF night bombers were to be halted. In 1940 he had in vain called for the use of single-seater fighters at night; this proposal had been ignored until recently, when Major Herrmann had commenced unofficial night-fighting experiments with borrowed single-seater (i.e., day-fighter) aircraft over Berlin. They were unofficial experiments, because Kammhuber had again rejected the idea as recently as February 1943.²⁹

The need for an improved defence was ever more pressing. In the third week of June the RAF dropped two thousand tons of bombs on Krefeld, 1,640 tons on Mülheim and Oberhausen, 1,660 tons on Wuppertal, and 1,300 tons on Gelsenkirchen. In the town of Wuppertal the civilian deathroll was brought up to eight thousand in the two attacks. On the twenty-second Hitler assured Goebbels he had ordered a major expansion of the Ruhr's defences and promised that by autumn reprisal attacks by rocket and bomber would have begun against the British Isles. Goebbels recorded afterward, 'Air force generals make rotten technicians. If the Luftwaffe's expansion had been entrusted at the right time to Milch — or better still, to Speer — then we should most certainly be far better off than we are at present.'³⁰

Five days later Hitler summoned the seven top aircraft designers to the Obersalzberg and interrogated each in turn.³¹ Heinkel — now displaced in his own factory by a government '*Kommissar*'³² — excused his He 177's tardiness by the 'hitherto unshakable requirement that it should dive-bomb' (although Göring had emphatically removed this requirement ten months before). Messerschmitt's contribution to Hitler's state of mind was even more remarkable. For an hour he heaped criticism on Milch, and actually warned Hitler and Speer — who chanced to come in — against the folly of mass producing the Me

262 jet fighter, since its fuel consumption was, he alleged, higher than that of piston-engined fighters like the Me 209 which Milch in his sublime ignorance had now cancelled.* Thus at the very time that Milch was campaigning for priority for the jet fighter, its own designer was sowing the seeds of doubt in Hitler's mind.³⁴

Milch was an advocate of *Schwerpunkt* fighting.³⁵ He believed that the Luftwaffe should be applied in strength to only one front at a time, and by that he meant the defence of the home base. And within that front the maximum possible number of aircraft should be brought to bear on the enemy. This was where the Kammhuber Line failed: the enemy bombers invaded each night in a mass bomber stream, but only a handful of the night-fighters could be brought into action. All the others had to remain inactive in their 'boxes'.³⁶

Herrmann's solution was the establishment of a *Schwerpunkt* by hurling masses of fighters at masses of attacking aircraft, and this meant striking where the bombers foregathered, right over the target area itself — exploiting the illumination caused by the fires, searchlights, bomb flashes, parachute flares and target-indicator pyrotechnics.³⁷ Each night in the Ruhr attacks the radar-controlled searchlights held up to 140 aircraft for several minutes in their beams; these would be easy prey for single-seater fighters, if the flak would stop firing. Herrmann suggested crewing a hundred or more normal single-seater fighters with freelance bomber pilots and sending them to hunt down the enemy bombers right over the target cities as though it were broad daylight.

Milch suggested to Göring that this freelance system (later known as 'Wild Boar') be put to the test as soon as possible: 'If the weather is right we can expect considerable results.'³⁸ Herrmann moved his experimental flight from Berlin to the Ruhr, began selecting crews, and waited for the next RAF attack.

When Milch's planning staff now asked, 'Does *Herr Feldmarschall* approve that we now concentrate on single- and twin-engined fighter production, at the

* He did not mention that the jet engine used low-grade fuels, which needed one less stage of hydrogenation and were thus far more plentiful than aviation spirit.³³

expense of bombers?' he replied, 'Indeed I do.'³⁹ He wrote to Göring repeating a two-month-old suggestion that one month's entire fighter production (about a thousand aircraft) be allocated immediately to the Reich's defence.⁴⁰ But Göring would not receive him, so Milch invited the Führer's adjutant von Below to ministry conferences, and to meet the foremost Luftwaffe officers and ministry experts privately at his hunting lodge.⁴¹ This must have had some effect, for early in July 1943 the Führer approved that the western fighter defences should be intensified.⁴²

The state secretary had not seen Göring for six weeks. While Milch toiled in Berlin's stifling heat, Göring holidayed on the Obersalzberg, forcing Milch to put all his communications on paper throughout June: he appealed for protection from draft for the skilled workers now engaged on the Me 262 jet fighter, on its jet engines, on night-fighters and on the TSA precision bombsight recently developed by Zeiss⁴³; he suggested that they plan now for massive defences for the flying-bomb catapult sites in France, since 'after this weapon offensive begins, our fighters and flak will find magnificent opportunities of annihilating the enemy air force which will be forced to attack them.'⁴⁴ And of course he sent Göring a lengthy report on his tour of the western air defence system.

He finally saw the familiar pearl-grey uniform and flashing rings on 2 July at Göring's hunting lodge, Rominten, in East Prussia. The Reichsmarschall had summoned all the *Luftflotte* commanders to discuss the new eastern offensive, 'Zitadelle', due to begin in three days' time.⁴⁵ Here the estrangement between Göring and his state secretary was made more public than ever before. When Göring referred on the following day to the 'cowardice' of their flying personnel, Milch was the only officer present to speak out against him.⁴⁶ He had assessed aircrew morale very highly in his inspection report in June, and he referred to the proposals he had made for improving the command structure. In front of all the other field marshals and generals, Göring angrily rounded on Milch: 'You don't imagine that I actually read the rags you send me!' Milch stonily commented that in that case it was superfluous for him to make further inspection trips as Inspector General; Göring retorted that as far as he was concerned, he need not.⁴⁷ Milch returned angrily to Berlin.

That night, six hundred RAF heavy bombers attacked Cologne, on the fringe of the Ruhr. This time, Major Herrmann had twelve single-engined fighter aircraft ready — five FW 190s and seven Me 109s — to test his proposals over the city, which was soon brilliantly lit up by fires and flares. He reported to Milch three days later: ‘I opened fire on one bomber, which began to burn at once but carried on flying for about four minutes although it was on fire. So I let him have it again from one side, right in the cockpit, and then it went down like a stone — the crew must have been hit.’ Within the space of a minute, he had seen ten or fifteen aircraft, clearly identifiable from their exhaust flames and sitting targets for a fast single-seater. If in doubt, one only had to wait around near the target-indicator flares. He estimated that given enough aircraft he could shoot down up to eighty enemy bombers a night. He already had 120 crews picked out for Wild Boar, but they still had only fifteen aircraft scraped together from different establishments.⁴⁸

‘Didn’t the flak down below know you were there?’ asked Milch. ‘They had no idea!’ said Herrmann. ‘I suppose they were amazed when the bombers started dropping like flies?’ ‘They were astounded to find ten or eleven down, when they had shot down only two the day before,’ laughed Herrmann. General Vorwald and Field Marshal Milch both exclaimed in relief, ‘It seems we have broken the spell.’

A few days later, the German agent in the British Air Ministry provided further transcripts of Whitehall conferences, which showed that the RAF’s recent losses of heavy bombers were even more severe than the Germans knew. Schwenke suggested to Milch that if they could increase British casualties by about a fifth, the enemy would have to give serious consideration to means of avoiding further losses.⁴⁹ This was a problem to which RAF Bomber Command had already faced up; the solution was reached on 15 July, with a decision that as from 23 July the embargo on the use of the secret foil strips to jam Kammerhuber’s radar system would be lifted.⁵⁰

Five days after operation *Zitadelle* began, the Allies landed in Sicily supported by three thousand aircraft; on 12 July the Russians opened a counter-offensive; Hitler ordered *Zitadelle* to be halted, and air reinforcements rushed to Italy.

In vain Milch argued at Hitler's headquarters that the defence of the home base was a prerequisite for any operations by the Germans in Sicily or anywhere else.⁵¹ 'If something happens to us here,' he pointed out, 'whatever happens elsewhere is of no interest.' Returning to Berlin he told his departmental heads, 'I have just been up there trying to sort them out a bit about the future. I can only keep saying, for us 1943 is a year to sit tight and clench our teeth.'⁵² Discussing the allocation of twin-engined fighter aircraft in mid-July, he again emphasized: 'Let us first of all set our houses in Germany, Italy and Japan in order.' When an Air Staff general protested, '*Herr Feldmarschall*, it's like this: there's heavy fighting down in Sicily, and they ...' Milch interrupted him: 'I know, they are screaming blue murder! But the more the people scream, the calmer we must keep.' For him the coming battlefield was not in Sicily or at Kursk, but in the Reich itself. 'There is only one worry,' he said, 'and that is that in some way the enemy again catches us on the hop with some radar trickery or other, and we have to start trotting after him again.'

C H A P T E R 1 7

A WREATH UPON OUR COFFIN

July–September 1943

IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS before the Hamburg catastrophe in the summer of 1943, Field Marshal Milch exhorted the leading German politicians and officers to support his campaign for concentration on the defence of the Reich.¹ Hitler did not believe that the low casualties the night-fighters were currently inflicting on the enemy would alone prevent the air attacks: ‘You can only smash terror with counter-terror,’ he told Göring and Milch. ‘You have to counter-attack. Anything else is useless.’ When they touched on the possibility of night intruder aircraft attacking British airfields, Hitler observed that if the Luftwaffe could not find London by night, it was hardly likely to find an individual bomber airfield.

‘It’s a scandal!’ Hitler told his own staff two days later. ‘And I said precisely that to the Reichsmarschall. I did not mince my words. And then I have to listen to some nincompoop telling me, “Yes, *mein Führer*, if they come to Dortmund from Britain with their present radio beam system they can lay their bombs down on factory buildings 500 yards wide by 250 yards long.” But we can’t find London, thirty miles across and only a hundred miles from our shores!’²

On 24 July catastrophe fell upon Hamburg. Seven hundred heavy bombers attacked the port and city, first releasing cascades of millions of strips of metal foil about twelve inches long into the sky — the simple means of jamming

the gun-laying and fighter control Würzburg radar sets which Martini had feared all along.³ While the searchlights wandered aimlessly over Hamburg's sky, and the blinded night-fighter aircraft fumbled in the darkness, fifteen hundred civilians were killed and much of the city devastated. Only twelve bombers were shot down. The Luftwaffe's ignominy was complete, for no counter-measure had been developed against the dreaded foil strips.



*The results of the RAF attack on Hamburg in July 1943.
This was what caused Milch to demand priority for Reich
defence. (GERMAN HIGH COMMAND)*

Next day over a hundred American bombers again attacked Hamburg to hamper the fire-fighting, and that evening six hundred British bombers attacked Essen. 'Gentlemen,' observed Milch on the twenty-seventh, 'we are no longer on the offensive. For the last one and a half or two years we have been on the defensive. This fact is now apparently recognized even at the highest levels of the Luftwaffe command.' He continued, 'For the last three months I have been asking for one month's fighter production to be assigned to home defence. This would have made attacks like those yesterday on Hamburg and Hanover quite impossible . . . I keep getting the feeling that anything may still happen!'⁴

That evening Hamburg suffered renewed violence. Again enveloped in

metal foil, the bombers released 2,300 tons of high explosives and fire bombs over the city, tinder-dry after weeks of drought. Tremendous fires broke out. The water mains had been smashed in the earlier attacks, and soon the fires were out of control, sweeping across the city with horrifying speed. Tens of thousands of the inhabitants were sucked into the inferno by the artificial hurricanes raging through the streets, incinerated alive in the giant concrete air-raid shelters or poisoned by the carbon monoxide, a feature of these 'fire-storm' attacks. Fifty thousand people died. Now at last Göring ordered the *Schwerpunkt* to be switched to the defence of the Reich.⁵ Milch was ordered to report to him and Hitler on the twenty-ninth.

Milch asked Colonel Victor von Lossberg, a bomber expert, to pilot him. During the night, an idea occurred to von Lossberg for a fighter defence system to defeat — indeed to exploit — the British metal-foil jamming, a night-fighter system which promised to bring a greater weight of aircraft to bear on the enemy than Kammhuber's rigid system. Squadrons of twin-engined fighters should assemble over Holland, awaiting the enemy bomber stream; each unit would follow a shadower, itself transmitting a radio beacon, guided by a ground controller into the very vanguard of the approaching bomber stream by means of the Y radio-beam guidance system. Once guided into the stream, the fighters would hunt freelance, using the latest radar sets. Von Lossberg also recommended reinforcing Herrmann's increasingly successful Wild Boar operations over the target area. In this way the British aircraft would be engaged not only by the Kammhuber Line but along the whole route from the coast to the target and over the target itself.⁶

'By these means,' suggested Lossberg, 'between two and three hundred night-fighters inclusive of the Herrmann Wing could be brought to bear; in other words, at least a threefold increase on the present rate.'⁷ The British bombers could soon be suffering enormous losses every night. Göring ordered a full-scale investigation of the proposals. Meantime Hamburg had again been heavily attacked; over two thousand tons of bombs were released on the residential areas. But thanks to Herrmann's new Wild Boar tactics, the British losses were mounting too. Twenty-eight bombers had been shot down, despite the

radar-jamming effort.⁸

It is evident that Milch believed that Germany's home front now faced a threat no less than confronted the Sixth Army at Stalingrad: 'It is one minute to twelve. It is a matter of trying to turn back the clock of Germany's destiny, no less.' He tackled this crisis with the same energy and decisiveness as had characterized his special mission at Taganrog. Despite the Führer's emphatic objections, he ordered that their new *Schwerpunkt* was to be the production of fighter aircraft; to square his own conscience, he listed the flying-bomb as well. In a brief preliminary discussion on 30 July he laid the foundations of a 'Reich Defence Programme', retargeting fighter production alone at *three thousand a month* instead of two thousand, by the summer of 1944.⁹

When the investigation of von Lossberg's proposal began, as commanded by Göring, Milch warned: 'What has happened in Hamburg has never happened before, not even during our attacks on Britain. The casualties in Hamburg — dead alone — are put at fifty thousand as of today, most of them caused by the immense conflagrations . . . These attacks on Hamburg strike deep at our nation's morale.' Weighing his words carefully he continued, 'If we do not succeed in smashing these terror attacks by day and by night very soon, then we must expect a very difficult situation to arise for Germany.' Kammhuber attempted to block the new proposals, but was overruled.¹⁰ That afternoon the first Lichtenstein SN-2 radar sets were installed in the Ju 188s which were to serve as the 'shadowers'.

To Germany's leaders, Hamburg seemed momentarily to spell the beginning of the end. Speer candidly prophesied in Central Planning: 'If the air raids continue on this scale, three months will see us relieved of many a problem exercising us today. Things will slide downhill smoothly, irrevocably and comparatively fast! The pressing question is simply this: can we manufacture more single-engined and more twin-engined fighters? And if so, what can we shut down to that end? Otherwise we might as well hold the last meeting of Central Planning!'¹¹ At Milch's hunting lodge Speer expressed himself even more pessimistically two evenings later.¹² To the Führer, on 1 August, Speer predicted that, if

things continued in this way, within eight weeks he could no longer guarantee a production effort; and if the same catastrophe were to befall just six more cities, the war would be over.¹³

Even Milch's iron shell of optimism was corroded by this mood of defeatism. When the ministers and gauleiters assembled on Hitler's instructions in Berlin on 2 August for Dr Goebbels to 'inject some cement into them', Milch repeatedly interrupted a discussion on the war in the air with the almost treasonable outcry, '*We have lost the war! Finally lost the war!*' Goebbels had to appeal to his honour as an officer before he would quieten down, and the minister complained to his staff afterward, 'I would just like to see one of my state secretaries dare behave like that — however right he was!'¹⁴

During the night the British attacked Hamburg yet again. 'My own view is this,' Milch lectured to the silent officers who gathered in his ministry. 'It's much blacker than Speer paints it. If we get just five or six more attacks like these on Hamburg, the German people will just lay down their tools, however great their willpower. I keep saying, the steps that are being taken now are being taken too late. There can be no more talk of night-fighting in the east, or of putting an umbrella over our troops in Sicily or anything like that. The soldier on the battlefield will just have to dig a hole, crawl into it and wait until the attack is over. What the home front is suffering now cannot be suffered very much longer.' That day he cabled Göring in these terms: 'It is not the front which is under attack and struggling for survival, but the home base, which is fighting a desperate fight.' When General Meister, deputy Chief of Air Staff, declined his suggestion that two idle long-range fighter squadrons should be taken out of the eastern front and sent back to the Reich, Milch reproached him: 'I keep getting this feeling that we are all sitting out on a limb. At this limb, the British keep sawing away! Here at home I can hear the rasp of the saw. You out there, Meister, are farther away, and are deaf to it.'¹⁵

By now he was manufacturing over a thousand new fighter aircraft every month, but still they were being dissipated in every theatre. From a military point of view this was not acceptable: the battle in the air should have been fought from the rear forward, just as on the ground. The enemy bombers

should have been swept away from the centre of Germany, and finally far beyond the English Channel if that were possible.¹⁶ But this could be done only by summoning up every ounce of fighter strength. This was going to be 'the year of clenched teeth', Milch had often warned. When Colonel Peltz volunteered the better part of his bomber strength for the defence of the Reich, Milch praised his vision: 'Attacking Britain with twenty or thirty aircraft only makes us look ridiculous. We don't impress the British like that, we just show them what we are capable of under circumstances like these. But if we do nothing, then they will say, "They must be up to something."'¹⁷

In many senses Milch *was* up to something. The Fi 103 flying-bomb was scheduled for operation by the autumn; the first hundred jet fighters were planned for the spring of 1944, and the Ar 234 jet bombers were to reach squadron service later in the year. Of the secret flying-bomb catapult sites being constructed along the Channel coast, Milch predicted: 'This is where we will bury the British air force. If they bring over their bombers and we can collect our fighters just as they attack, then we shall no longer need fighter defences in the rear — we can throw them right forward to the coast.'¹⁸ He prophesied that the Americans would also soon have to devote their effort to daylight attacks on the catapult sites in France (since the RAF night-bombers were not suited for such work). 'In a short time we can tear them limb from limb. After one or two battles like that they will be so washed up that they will need two weeks before they can attack again. And the aircraft and airmen we knock out over there cannot visit us in Germany any more.'¹⁹

But the flying-bomb was still encountering difficulties. The whole project needed nearly three thousand more workers, and nobody was parting with them, least of all the army, which had the A4 rocket project to look after. Speer had used the aftermath of Hamburg to chisel out of Hitler a formidable decree assigning top priority to the rocket's mass production.²⁰ The test launchings of the flying-bomb at Peenemünde had unexpectedly produced a disappointing number of failures. One ranging shot had however covered 140 miles, and the bombs were otherwise travelling at cruising altitudes of four thousand feet and speeds up to four hundred miles per hour.²¹ By August only about sixty percent of the test launchings were successful, but Milch observed, 'I will be

satisfied if the Fi 103 works at all . . . A weapon against which the public sees there is no real defence has such catastrophic morale effects that by itself — regardless of what the weapon is — it must have immense consequences.²² He expected that Londoners could withstand the damage for two or three days under heavy bombardment, or ‘if they are real roughnecks’ for four days; but after that it would all be over, and the fires would rage unchecked. Given a production of 3,500 flying-bombs a month they could theoretically launch one every twelve minutes. ‘They will never endure it. It will be the end of any real life in the city.’*

Early in August 1943 an unexpected blow hit the Me 262 jet-fighter project. The Führer suddenly ordered that the Me 209 piston-engined fighter was *not* to be cancelled, although both Milch and Galland believed its performance to be inadequate.

Three months had passed since Milch’s decision to cancel the Me 209 in favour of immediate jet-fighter production. Since then somebody had alerted Hitler to the supposed risks of concentrating on jet fighters. ‘The Führer sees it as taking too great a risk,’ Milch explained to his disappointed departmental heads. He himself regretted this: ‘But I have my orders. I am a soldier, and must obey them. We must observe the element of prudence demanded by the Führer.’²⁴ The Messerschmitt company had undertaken some months earlier to complete the pilot series of a hundred by May 1944, manufacturing sixty per month thereafter.²⁵ This new decision would inevitably set back their plans for mass production: ‘Obviously Messerschmitt cannot now convert a hundred percent to the 262, as he would otherwise have been able.’ The next generation of fighter aircraft after the Me 109 and the FW 190 would apparently have to be the Me 209 or Kurt Tank’s Ta 153 after all, of which the former was inevitably chosen, even though it had still not flown, since the company had more factories at its disposal and claimed (falsely) that the tooling-up for the aircraft was

* Colonel von Lossberg proposed that they use mainly incendiaries in the flying-bomb warheads. ‘One need only look at London as an example. For half a year we bombed London, and still London is not in ruins. For three days they bombed Hamburg — and Hamburg is *kaputt!*’²³

eighty-five percent complete.²⁶ Milch was angry that he could no longer promote the jet fighter's production as he had wanted in May: 'But this is an intervention from on high, so the problem will have to be solved some other way.'²⁷ He was convinced Messerschmitt had himself brought about the Führer's change of mind.²⁸

Milch's Reich Defence Programme called for the production of four thousand fighter aircraft per month by September 1945; on General Galland's advice he set Me 262 jet-fighter production at a quarter of that total. But for the August 1943 decision it could have been far more.

Meanwhile, Berlin awaited disaster. Everybody knew it was coming. In the first week after Hamburg Dr Goebbels had ordered all non-essential civilians to leave; a million people were evacuated in anticipation of the raids to come.

At Hitler's headquarters the position of General Jeschonnek, Chief of Air Staff, became intolerable. He had never busied himself much with defence problems, and he had watched in concern as Göring, shunned by Hitler, set up his own little 'Air Staff' with Diesing and two or three other colonels, to bypass Jeschonnek.²⁹ Göring began meantime to search for a replacement; von Richthofen was among the possible candidates.³⁰ After the American daylight attack on Wiener Neustadt's aircraft factories on 13 August the Führer berated him for over an hour in private. Jeschonnek afterward complained to Meister, 'Why does the Führer say all this to me, and not to the Reichsmarschall?' The answer was of course that Göring was Hitler's chosen successor. Four days later unescorted American bomber formations penetrated deep into Germany and struck at the ball-bearing factories at Schweinfurt and the Messerschmitt complex at Regensburg, killing four hundred Messerschmitt workers.³¹ The Luftwaffe destroyed sixty American bombers that day, but again Hitler sent for Jeschonnek and upbraided him unmercifully.³² That night the RAF attacked Peenemünde, the rocket research station, in great force, killing 750 scientists and workers there. The defence effort was a fiasco: two hundred of Herrmann's and von Lossberg's fighters assembled over Berlin by mistake, where the flak opened fire on them, because of orders Jeschonnek had issued.³³ He took the only way out, and his body was found in the morning with a bullet in the head. He left a note:

'It is impossible to work with Göring any longer. Long live the Führer!'

The new Chief of Air Staff was Colonel-General Günter Korten, commander of the First Air Force, who had been Milch's staff officer until October 1936. Milch thought very highly of him. 'While the newcomer Korten soon learned how to gain Hitler's confidence, his relations with Göring became very strained,' he wrote. 'Korten, in his diplomatic way, prevented things from coming to a head for a long time. At the end of June 1944, however, he confided to me, as his former chief, that by August 1944 at the latest he wanted to resign the post as with the best will in the world he could not get on with Göring.'³⁴ Before that month came, however, Korten had also met a violent end.



Earlier, Göring, Milch and the Chief of Air Staff Hans Jeschonnek (center) appeared the best of friends in public. But after the RAF firebomb raids began with a grisly series of attacks on the city of Hamburg in July 1943, Jeschonnek put a bullet in his head at Luftwaffe headquarters.
(MILCH COLLECTION)

The writing was plainly on the wall. As the hot summer streets in Berlin lay empty and deserted, and those who remained reacted nervously to every siren's sound, Messerschmitt wrote to the industrialists that 'they could tick off on their fingers' the months Germany's armaments industry could expect to survive.³⁵ With Jeschonnek dead, Milch persuaded Göring to transfer a number of fighter squadrons to Germany from other fronts: 'In my view this has been done so late as to be almost lunatic,' he commented, but at least it has been done.³⁶ He was already searching for dispersal sites for the vital aircraft factories. There was talk of giant bomb-proof factories, but the Luftwaffe's share of construction projects had shrunk in 1943 to half that of the previous four years:

the Luftwaffe was now ranked only sixth, coming after the Reich Railways.³⁷

During the summer Milch managed to find over thirty million square feet of floor space for evacuation of the factories, but the actual transport was hindered by his shortage of transport and fuel. On the railways Speer had secured top priority for the needs of the 'Adolf Hitler Panzer Programme', and by autumn the Luftwaffe's railway wagon allocation had been halved.³⁸ Göring attacked Milch over every damaged factory as though he were personally to blame, but when Milch asked for temporary use of the Luftwaffe's sixty thousand lorries, the Reichsmarschall refused point-blank. With masters like these the Luftwaffe seemed doomed to defeat.³⁹

During August 1943 Major Herrmann's Wild Boar unit had been increased by over 150 aircraft; those crews who still had no planes 'borrowed' the equipment of day-fighter squadrons. The major arranged for high-flying bombers to light up the whole target area with parachute flares, to aid his freelance pilots in their search for enemy bombers; the flak would put up a barrage of starshells, and the searchlight batteries were to illuminate the base of any cloud layers present. Milch hoped the RAF would meet its Waterloo over Berlin. 'One thing is clear: the enemy is only a hero when there is no defence! If he runs up against determined opposition or meets with a disaster, then for ninety percent of them that's an end to the heroics. And then they will have to think very hard about whether to carry on.'⁴⁰

Three nights later the RAF launched its assault on Berlin.⁴¹ Within an hour they had lost fifty-six bombers, mainly to Herrmann's night-fighters; many more were damaged beyond repair. Milch triumphantly reminded his men that by March 1944 they would be producing two thousand fighter aircraft a month: 'I give my word that then these night attacks will cease altogether.'⁴² Nothing could prevent the Allies from manufacturing bombers by the thousand; but if the Allied aircrews lost their nerve, this alone would defeat the attacks. Again and again the same bleak realization dogged the field marshal: 'If we had had enough day- and night-fighters before, all this would never have happened. Then we would not now be having to disperse our factories. Then no enemy bombers would be coming over.'

It was an enigma to him that he stood alone in his fight for the defence of the Reich. He found it shameful that the other two services did not volunteer vital assistance — raw materials and manpower — for his defence programme. ‘Not one swine helps us,’ he reflected on 31 August 1943. ‘We have to help ourselves. Each of them expresses deepest sympathy, and promises to lay a wreath upon our coffin.’⁴³ That night six hundred bombers again assaulted Berlin. The conditions were good for the night-fighters, and they were marshalled into the bomber stream from airfields as far afield as northern Denmark and central France — a classic example of *Schwerpunkt* formation. Between them they destroyed most of the forty-seven bombers shot down that night. Milch had ordered every means possible to increase the glare on the clouds by searchlights, fires and even by burning pots of magnesium in the outskirts, and he had ordered special aircraft to stand by to lay thin trails of mist if the clouds had been inadequate.⁴⁴ As he told Speer next day, ‘The enemy bombers crawl across them like flies on a tablecloth.’

Three nights later the RAF attacked the capital again, operating only the powerful Lancaster squadrons now; twenty-two were shot down, and the series came to an abrupt end. Of the total of 1,719 sorties despatched against Berlin on the three nights, only twenty-seven had dropped their bombs within three miles of the aiming point. By night at least, within one month of Hamburg, the tide was turning firmly in favour of the Luftwaffe’s new night defences. On 2 September Field Marshal Milch reported to Göring at his East Prussian hunting lodge, and found that all the Reichsmarschall’s old hostility toward him had disappeared.⁴⁵

C H A P T E R 1 8

DEFENCE OF THE REICH

September–October 1943

UNTIL AUGUST 1943 the aircraft production programmes established by Milch were adhered to, but with the commencement of the Combined Bomber Offensive the first major setbacks were experienced. The bombing of the five biggest aircraft factories and the two biggest repair plants reduced the August output by 150 fighters.¹ Not only were the big factories severely harmed, but the smaller foundries, press-shops and components manufacturers were affected by the area attacks: the shortage of airscrews after Hamburg was such that, of forty-two Ju 188s due for delivery in one month, only four could be completed.²

Speer's staff persistently claimed that Milch's new Reich Defence Programme ('224') was unattainable and that even '223', which had been issued in April, had stretched the limits imposed on aircraft production anyway by the bottleneck in engine crankshaft supplies.³ When Milch appealed to Speer to set fighter production at least on a par with other top-priority programmes for supplies, this request was rejected.⁴ A number of components, workers and machine-tools were promised but none arrived. Speer's representatives denied that these items were really needed.⁵ It seemed to the Air Ministry that the Munitions Ministry* was adopting blocking tactics to secure eventual control of aircraft production for itself, as it had done with the naval construction pro-

* In September 1943 it became the Ministry of Armaments.

gramme a few weeks before.*

Professor Messerschmitt also wished to see the industry wrested from Milch's grasp. To Speer and Saur he criticized the one-shift operation of the air industry (inevitable because of the manpower shortage); he urged the ruthless closing down of the bomber factories in favour of fighters; and he advocated production of one million Fi 103 flying-bombs a year.⁷ On 7 September he again secured Hitler's ear for his proposals: he alerted Hitler to Milch's 'incompetence' and spoke of the wonders of the Me 209 fighter aircraft and of the flying-bomb project.⁸ Then he talked about the Me 262 jet fighter. He considered that this aircraft met the requirements recently raised for a fast bomber for attacking Britain. 'Its technical lead is so great that this aircraft cannot come into service fast enough, as otherwise we must expect the enemy to start coming over with similar aircraft before us, or at the same time.' Unhappily, he did not have adequate capacity for mass production of the Me 262, he said; he proposed that the rival projects — Milch's favourite Dornier 335 and the Ar 234 armed reconnaissance aircraft and jet bomber — should be cancelled.⁹ Hitler had never seen a jet aircraft, but the possibility of using the Me 262 as a jet bomber must have lodged in his mind, because he asked about it when he saw Göring a month later. By the time he saw Milch a month after that, the idea had become a requirement. We need look no further for the origins of Hitler's 'absurd notion' of using the Me 262 as a jet bomber.¹⁰

Italy's separate Armistice with the Allies at least brought some relief to the German war economy. Germany had had to supply her ally with two million tons of oil fuel in 1941 and 1.2 million tons in 1942.¹¹ But the Italian defection also brought major strategic problems: by 27 September British forces had seized Foggia and the fifteen airfields surrounding the town; American bomber and fighter squadrons moved in. Milch was advised that they had no choice but to evacuate what they could of the Italian factories: 'One thing is clear. The way

* When Speer took over aircraft production in June 1944, his ministry approved programmes in excess of '223' and almost as high as '224', both of which it had declared 'impracticable' when Milch was still in control.⁶

their base at Foggia lies, the British and Americans have limitless opportunities. They can flatten the whole of upper Italy.¹² To Milch, who shared Hitler's dislike of the Italians, this prospect was not without its attractions. 'On the other hand,' he mused, 'we ought to leave the factories a certain element of activity, to keep them valid as bomber targets, and not us!'¹³

Reluctantly, he now had to give up all hope of manufacturing Professor Gabrielli's exceptionally fast piston-engined fighter, the Fiat G55, in Italy.¹⁴ While hundreds of thousands of disarmed Italian soldiers went into captivity, German troops took over. The evidence of Italy's bad faith that they found staggered even Milch. The Italians had concealed vast stockpiles of raw materials for themselves, while pleading with Germany for more: 'They had bigger stocks of copper than we have!' fumed Göring. 'The most amazing is the fuel oil: in two tunnels we have found enough fuel oil to have kept their entire navy operational for a year! The swine put it away, barrel by barrel, and then came to me for more: "We would dearly love to fly, but we need the fuel!" I gave them another thousand tons — and now we find they had sixty-five thousand tons tucked away.'¹⁵

On 1 October the American air force began bombing missions against the Reich from the newly occupied base at Foggia. The first target was the Messerschmitt factory at Wiener-Neustadt. 'The south and southeast are now in the firing line as well,' Milch admitted. 'Our "safe" has been blasted open. I have worked out for myself that the distance from Foggia to Vienna is shorter than from London to Berlin.'¹⁶

The heavily armoured American squadrons were daunting opponents for the German fighters, most of them still armed only with relatively small-calibre machine-guns. During the summer the enemy began appearing with P-47 ('Thunderbolt') escort fighters as far east as Aachen, and this complicated the fighter defence task still further. Milch's scientists devised many ways of combating the threat. Because of Air Ministry hostility toward rocket development, there were still no adequate ground-to-air or air-to-air missiles, but much effort had been expended on more complex methods like proximity fuses for bombs and shells operated by remote radio control or on acoustic or magnetic princi-

ples. The most awe-inspiring was a rocket-propelled five-hundred-pound or half-ton bomb which a twin-engined Me 410 could lob into the bomber formations from a range of about a thousand yards.¹⁷

In September a glider pilot who had survived the hazardous operations against the Belgian forts and Crete wrote suggesting a suicide squadron for attacking vital enemy targets; he and his comrades considered they were living on borrowed time anyway, and would like a chance to sacrifice themselves for their Fatherland. Milch asked General Korten to discuss the idea with Göring. Petersen suggested packing ageing Ju 88s with explosives and heading them for the bomber formations; the pilot could jump out at the last moment, if he could. Milch thought the prospects over: 'I do not know if *I* would have the courage for this myself.' He had always insisted the pilot must have a chance, however slim, of surviving. An engineer pointed out that it only needed an attractive girl to cross the man's path during his suicide-squadron training and the effort would be wasted. Milch related to the engineer one such episode of his own experience: 'There was this man who was about to throw his life away, for nothing. So he was told, wait a while; we have a little job you can do, where you can still throw away your life, but for the good of your country. You will be trained for it, and in the meantime you will be given everything you want — good accommodation, fine food and perhaps even the young maiden you' — indicating the engineer — 'mentioned. It all took some time, and when finally the day came the man said, "Nothing doing! I've changed my mind. Life is too beautiful to throw away."'¹⁸

Göring asked Korten to begin a list of airmen willing to undertake such missions.

Meanwhile the RAF was still dormant after the retreat from Berlin.¹⁹ The mood was very different from a month before, when Britain's (and some of Germany's) leaders were predicting Germany's imminent collapse. The autumn of 1943 saw the German fighter arm increasing daily in its strength.²⁰

This was Milch's achievement alone. In the three months since 1 July German fighter strength in the west had increased from 1,288 to 1,646 — an increase which confounded the predictions of the British Air Staff. The latter

had allowed for Germany emerging from the pre-invasion campaign against aircraft factories and the fighter defences with perhaps 650 fighters in the west; but they now estimated that the Germans would have over 1,700 fighters on the western front on the eve of the Allied invasion in 1944.²¹ By early November 1943, when these Allied estimates were made, the prospects of defeating the Luftwaffe before an invasion had evidently vanished, and Sir Arthur Harris, chief of Bomber Command, was tempting the Prime Minister with the same alluring prospect as had been held before Hitler in different circumstances in 1940: 'We can wreck Berlin from end to end if the USAAF will come in on it,' Harris promised. 'It will cost between 400 and 450 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war.'²² Churchill authorized the attempt.

The Germans expected it. To defeat the H2S radar sets carried by the bombers, they spent the remaining months of the summer dotting the lakes around Berlin with metal rafts as radar camouflage; they designed special jamming transmitters ('Roderich') and a simple receiver ('Naxos Z') to enable the night-fighters to home on to H2S transmissions; and the groundspotting organization was alerted to track the H2S emissions of careless bomber crews heading into Germany.²³ Major Herrmann's organization was expanded into three wings, and the night-fighters were equipped as far as possible with an improved radar, less affected by the metal-foil jamming, and with infrared detectors (*Spanner*). The ground organization was improved, General Kammhuber was replaced by Lieutenant-General Schmid as commander of the night-fighter squadrons, and scores of airfields, including those of aircraft factories, were prepared to receive exhausted fighters landing after the night's battles. On some nights the ground controller would have over 250 fighter aircraft following his commentary on the movements of the marauding enemy bomber stream.²⁴

The British deduced what was happening and adopted counter-measures. They split the bomber stream and attacked several cities simultaneously, leaving the German controller guessing until the last moment, and then jamming his wireless communications. Using heavy aircraft laden with nothing but transmitters, they would interpolate fake instructions to the fighter pilots, ordering them to the wrong end of Germany or, more subtly, predicting worsening

weather or ground fog.²⁵ Major Herrmann reacted by loading a special Ju 88 with fake Pathfinder flares and releasing them over open country at the precise moment of the British Master Bomber's broadcast. It was a growing nightmare, but Milch kept his nerve, confident that the Luftwaffe was winning the air war by night — as, for the next six months, it was.

The new German tactics took some weeks to organize. In the early RAF attacks on Bochum and Kassel some German night-fighters were hit by their own flak.²⁶ In early October the RAF surprised the defences at Kassel by first feinting toward Hanover and Magdeburg, causing an angry outburst from Milch about the inability of the groundspotting organization to report that the bomber stream had switched its course. 'What upsets me is that it is still not possible for us to take proper command by night, although we have been employing hundreds of thousands of people for this.' He predicted, 'You will live to see the day when they don't just attack cities lying on the Rhine, but perhaps Munich and Berlin simultaneously. Let's see how your command system tackles that!'²⁷

The RAF had also begun operating long-range night-fighters over Germany equipped with very efficient radar sets. Milch had often recommended that similar German intruder operations should be carried out over RAF bomber airfields, and on the night of 2 October there were twenty-two German night-fighters mingling with the British bombers as they returned to their brightly illuminated airfields after attacking Munich.²⁸ Hitler disapproved of these intruder operations, which were disconcerting for the enemy but not spectacular. He told Göring that it was infinitely preferable for the Luftwaffe to sustain an attack on British cities than to interfere with the landing manoeuvres of enemy bombers; and when it was suggested that the intruders created great confusion among the RAF bombers Hitler acidly pointed out, 'They may be confused, but they keep coming!'²⁹

To add to the injury, the American bomber squadrons now resumed their daylight assault on Germany's aircraft industry. During the attack on Emden on 2 October, H2S-type radar sets were detected aboard the bombers for the first time; evidently they had adopted elements of British blind bombing tech-

nique.³⁰ Milch made no secret of his respect for American accuracy: ‘When the Americans lay down their carpet of bombs somewhere, then anything beneath is pretty well matchwood.’³¹

The industrial quarter of Frankfurt was the matchwood on 4 October. As the first news of the attack reached Hitler, his staff assured him, ‘We knew this attack was on, from an agent. So the defence commander was forewarned.’³² Forewarned was not forearmed, however. Galland’s fighter squadrons failed almost completely to deter the heavily armoured bomber formations. Isolated packets of fighter aircraft came sporadically to within a thousand yards of the bombers, but then peeled away after a few ineffectual machine-gun bursts. (The eighteen-bomber formations could between them concentrate the fire-power of two hundred heavy machine-guns on attacking fighters.)

After Hitler’s evening war conference Göring reported to Milch, ‘The Führer is insisting, and he says he has to insist on this as spokesman of the German people, that whatever the cost these mass attacks by day have got to be stopped.’ He added: ‘After this daylight raid on Frankfurt I heard people say, “We all saw the enemy aircraft over Frankfurt, but not one German fighter was to be seen, far or wide.”’ Milch tried to defend Galland’s squadrons, but Göring interrupted him: ‘A large number of the fighter pilots are pussy-foots!’ Milch persisted that Göring’s harsh criticism upset the pilots sorely. ‘They don’t need to get upset,’ snorted Göring. ‘They only need to close in to four hundred instead of a thousand yards; they only need to shoot down eighty instead of twenty bombers, just once. Then their blues will be gone, and I’ll doff my cap right respectfully to them.’³³

It annoyed Göring that the pilots were regarded as national heroes; he believed they bore a large measure of the blame. ‘The German public doesn’t care two hoots about the fighter casualties,’ he reminded Galland. ‘Try going to Frankfurt and asking what impression your fighter losses that day left on them. They’ll tell you: “You can’t be serious! Look at our *thousands* of dead!”’³⁴ He admitted the daylight battles were more costly because of the Thunderbolt escort, but no position was wholly impossible. ‘The most famous and important battles have been decided by attacks launched from the most hopeless positions,’ he reminded his generals. ‘In one legendary battle Alexander carried his troops

to victory through crumbling river beds, slippery mudbanks and across heights dominated by the enemy; it was *because* the position was so bad that the enemy never believed his attack could succeed.' It was not an encouraging argument.

Two days after Frankfurt Göring undertook his first air journey for some years, as he returned from speaking to an assembly of gauleiters in Posen. As his aircraft droned in stately luxury across Central Europe toward southern Germany, his imagination came into play. For four hours he imagined himself trapped in an American bomber's gun turret, as hundreds of Luftwaffe fighters attacked from every quarter without respite; after an hour his guns were useless, their last ammunition gone. By the time Göring landed near the Obersalzberg he believed he knew just how an American airman would feel if the fighter onslaught could be maintained for hours on end: 'There's no squadron that could stand it, even if they were lions at heart!'³⁵

Next day he inquired of Galland how long his fighters could keep firing. Galland replied, 'Seven minutes!' Göring calculated out loud that a fighter pilot could therefore land to rearm and refuel several times in one battle. 'So if you really roll up your shirtsleeves, you can each engage the enemy three times or so during a four-hour battle?' Galland agreed. Göring continued, 'I herewith order: three times!' Thus Hermann Göring must go down in history as the architect of a victory which Galland's fighters shortly secured, when the American squadrons returned to Schweinfurt on 14 October — a day the Americans now remember as Black Thursday.

C H A P T E R 1 9

LIFE-OR-DEATH QUESTIONS

October 1943

IT WAS CONVENIENT to blame Udet for the technical backwardness of the Luftwaffe in the autumn of 1943. In one outburst on 9 October Göring said of him, ‘If I could only find some explanation of what Udet really thought he was up to! He led our aviation into absolute chaos. If he were still alive today I would say to him, “You are the destroyer of the German air force!”’¹ Behind Milch’s back Göring readily added him to his list of culprits, and even tried to blame him for not having copied the Mosquito. (‘I told him I would quite shamelessly copy anything the enemy had built that was any good, without any hesitation. Let Churchill say what he liked!’²) Referring to the bomber production in Milch’s new Reich Defence Programme, Göring complained: ‘It drops lower and lower! During this October we get 410 bombers a month; and by next October it will be 266! What on earth is the field marshal thinking of?’*

Nobody defended the absent field marshal. ‘I want to see an end to this perpetual business of fraud,’ Göring seethed. ‘It’s even worse than in Udet’s time.’ And moments later he erupted again when Colonel Diesing, his technical officer, claimed that daylight bombing of Britain was difficult because German aircraft had no rear gun turrets. ‘I am bound to ask,’ retorted Göring ‘what these people have in their brainboxes. They knew about the enemy’s rear tur-

* In fact Milch’s programme showed an *increase* of 169 bombers a month by October 1944.³

rets, but the thought of building our own never occurred to them. We really ought to send for Reidenbach this very evening and stand him in front of a firing squad.* Something inside him snapped. Within seconds Göring had indeed ordered the arrest of Udet's chief lieutenants Reidenbach, Ploch and Tschersich by the Gestapo. 'With every day that passes I recognize their crimes more clearly. There will be a summary court martial, not a lengthy trial. If their failure is proven, they will be shot.' Göring added: 'The field marshal talks in every conference of "having people shot"! But when I say it, I mean it, and it will be ruthlessly carried out. I don't just mouth threats — I mean them!'⁴

Milch's Reich Defence Programme was therefore unacceptable. Göring ordered Milch to reinforce the bomber arm quickly for a resumption of the campaign against Britain.⁵ Overall bomber production, including the new Junkers types, was to be increased from the present 410 per month to six hundred and then nine hundred as soon as possible. The field marshal believed this change of emphasis was all wrong: 'It is precisely in these coming months that we must avoid weakening the Reich Defence Programme,' he warned Göring on the fourteenth. 'Otherwise the enemy will smash all our bomber production anyway, and that's an end to your Junkers 188 and 388 production.'⁶ He believed they would find themselves falling back onto their original target figures eventually, and suggested instead that they develop ways of packing more explosives into the Me 410 bomb-bay — for example by producing bombs cast of special explosives, dispensing with a bomb-casing altogether. 'It is to be a pure terror-bomb!' Milch explained.⁷

The second week of October 1943 brought crisis to the American squadrons stationed in England. On the eighth, attacking Bremen and Vegesack, they lost thirty bombers, with major damage to over a score more; on the ninth they attacked Marienburg and Anklam in East Prussia, where ninety percent of the Focke-Wulf factories were devastated. Göring exclaimed, 'We cannot continue like this!' He asked Speer to start work on six bomb-proof concrete factories for fighter production.⁸ For the first time that day Galland's squadrons had oper-

* The Heinkel 177 bomber had always had a rear gun turret. Colonel Diesing was to succeed Milch as 'Chief of Technical Air Armament' in June 1944.

ated multiple sorties: every aircraft had been brought in, including some from France, and some had flown two or three sorties against the Americans. Twenty-eight of the 378 bombers had been destroyed, but it was still not good enough for Hitler or Göring. Galland, who illicitly joined in the battle himself, could see why: a few weak single- and twin-engined fighter units appeared, opening fire at too great a range, making generally irresolute attacks and then breaking away too early. He now agreed with Göring's low opinion of fighter morale.⁹

On the tenth the Americans bombed the centre of Münster, in revenge for the casualties they had suffered. The Germans destroyed thirty of the 236 bombers, a much higher percentage. In three days, therefore, eighty-eight American bombers and nearly nine hundred men had been lost. This was vivid justification of Milch's emphasis on fighter defence. 'The Americans certainly know their business in these daylight attacks,' he conceded to Göring. 'At Marienburg not one bomb hit the town — every one landed on the target area.'¹⁰ While he congratulated the Luftwaffe on its three great victories, he warned: 'There is no place in Germany proof against air attack.'¹¹

Göring would dearly have loved to bomb America, and on 14 October he again examined with Messerschmitt the Me 264 project — a bomber capable, the professor said, of carrying several tons of bombs to the Midwest of America. 'If only we could do that!' sighed Göring. 'If only we could chuck a few bombs at them, so that they had to have a blackout over there.'¹²

This day, 14 October, was Black Thursday. Earlier, three thousand American airmen had been briefed for a renewed assault on Schweinfurt. Morale in the bomber squadrons was already at crisis point. The medical diary of one unit which had suffered heavily in the earlier attack noted, 'The mental attitude and morale of the crews is the lowest that has yet been observed.' When the briefing for the attack began, 'The mention of the word "Schweinfurt" shocked the crews completely.' No estimate was announced of the number of German fighters based along the route. The medical officer checked and found this omission was intentional: 'The entire German fighter force of 1,100 fighter aircraft was based within eighty-five miles of the course. The implications were

obvious. As I went round to the crews checking equipment, sandwiches, coffee, etc., the crews were scared and it was obvious that many doubted that they would return.¹³

As the three hundred American bombers crossed the German frontier and the Thunderbolts withdrew, the first German fighter squadrons closed in. An awesome air battle ensued. The German tactics were so expertly coordinated that the Americans suspected that the mission had been betrayed by an agent in Britain. Many fighters had now been equipped with improvised 21-centimetre rocket launchers: 'If a squadron or even only a flight of aircraft closes in in tight formation and all their rocket launchers open fire,' Milch had been promised a month before, 'then something's got to catch it!'¹⁴ As wave after wave of single- and twin-engined fighters attacked with rockets, 20-millimetre cannon and even bombs, the powerful formations of Flying Fortresses fell apart, crippled bombers slewed out of station and were mercilessly destroyed. It was the bloodiest battle in the American air force's history, with the entire German fighter force, day and night, hurled against the attackers. Galland later said his men had flown eight hundred sorties.¹⁵

The short-range fighters landed, refuelled and rejoined the battle, giving the enemy no respite as Göring had insisted. At 2.40 P.M. the remnants of the American First Air Division started its bomb run on Schweinfurt. Ten minutes later Göring was told of the beginning of the attack. He took the news calmly: the Americans had been defeated once before at Schweinfurt, and they had been prevented from inflicting severe damage because the local flak commander had switched on fog generators in good time.¹⁶ Then he was stabbed by the sudden thought: 'Would the man have switched them on this time?' He relaxed, confident that the generators had been switched on. But they had not, and this time the damage was severe.* By 2.57 P.M. the last American plane had

* Göring later explained the delay to Milch: 'The idiot decided to test the atmospheric humidity first! I can only say, every time I hear of enemy bombers approaching I tremble at the thought of the follies that can happen — at the damage that these God-forsaken idiots can do.' With wry humour he added, 'I am going to round up the most monumental idiots I can find, by circularizing every branch, and add them to my staff, so that by consultation with them I can get some expert idea of what this or that idiot in the field might get up to.'¹⁷

unloaded its bombs. The ball-bearing factories had been heavily damaged.

As the bombers turned for home, 160 fighter aircraft attacked simultaneously from every angle, delivering the most concentrated onslaught yet. The running fight was kept up all the way to the Channel coast and beyond. By early evening the battle was over. South-western Germany was strewn with the wrecks of sixty Flying Fortresses; seventeen more had been irreparably damaged, and many of the others carried dead crew members as they struggled back to England. Göring telephoned Hitler to report his airmen's finest hour.¹⁸ But Hitler was dining with Speer; Speer telephoned — with some difficulty — the works foreman of one of the ball-bearing factories, and was able to report to Hitler, not without some relish one suspects, that the factories had in fact suffered grievous damage.¹⁹

The hindrance to arms production turned out to be less than Speer feared. He and Milch had already spent several weeks devising means of economizing on ball- and roller-bearings. They had discovered that the army alone had hoarded enough ball-bearings to make good the entire losses of the previous attack on Schweinfurt, and Milch suspected that the Luftwaffe must somewhere have the same kind of hoard.²⁰ Speer later wrote that not one tank, aircraft or other product less was manufactured because of the shortage of ball-bearings.²¹

Schweinfurt was not immediately recognized for the tactical victory that it was; fearing further attacks on this scale, Hitler ordered that the defence of the Reich was to take precedence over all other needs.²² Speer noted the Führer's demands for more flak, more fighters and more 200-centimetre searchlight production. Hitler also demanded that fighter aircraft should be equipped with the latest armament, particularly the very heavy 50-millimetre KWK — an anti-tank gun normally mounted on armoured cars, with a 21-shot magazine.²³ Galland was bitterly opposed to this, and it soon became a *cause célèbre* similar to the 30-millimetre cannon and the use of the Me 262 as a bomber.²⁴ On the day before Schweinfurt, Speer and Milch had still been arguing over the increased fighter production programme, but now Milch's planners confidently began studying a new programme — 225 — whereby, while increasing bomber pro-

duction, they could also bring fighter production up to five thousand a month.²⁵ This study was short-lived as Speer's ministry rejected it as totally impracticable, and Milch advised his planners, 'The [supply] difficulties for programme 224 are already great enough, according to the minister.'²⁶

By night the Luftwaffe still had to contend with the RAF's increasingly sophisticated electronic warfare and deception tactics. In the latter part of October they dropped seventeen hundred tons of bombs on Hanover and eleven hundred tons on Leipzig. The basic problem of beating the metal-foil jamming had still not been solved. Göring conceded his admiration for the British electronic devices: 'In the field of radar they must have the world's greatest genius,' he said. 'They have the geniuses and we have the nincompoops ... The British would never have dared use the metal foil here if they had not worked out a hundred percent what the antidote is.' He added, 'I hate the rogues like the plague, but in one respect I am obliged to doff my cap to them. After this war's over I'm going to buy myself a British radio set, as a token of my regard for their high-frequency work. Then at last I'll have the luxury of owning something that has always worked.'²⁷

Paradoxically, Göring's popularity with the public was still undeniable. In the last week of October he toured the fighter organization in the west, and wherever his Mercedes halted in the Ruhr and Rhineland cities he was mobbed and cheered by the populace. For the generals who accompanied him it was mystifying. In a private speech to them at fighter defence headquarters in Holland, Göring emotionally exclaimed: 'I am human too, and I would have understood if these people who stand among ruins — nothing but rubble to left and right! — and who have put up with over a hundred air raids, had taken the chance of a passing visit by one of the dignitaries who is actually responsible for this mess and had ... well, not exactly chucked rotten eggs at me, but at least put on a sour face or hollered "You fat slob!" at me.' He smiled wanly: 'Nor would I have intervened if they had!'²⁸

This public acclaim strengthened Göring in his contempt for his officers. By the morning of 23 October, as hundreds of fighter pilots gathered in one of the hangars at Arnhem to hear him speak, huge fires were sweeping Kassel, devastated by eighteen hundred tons of RAF bombs during the night. Nearly six

thousand civilians had died between dusk and dawn. Göring put it to the pilots that they were ‘pussy-foots, and some of you somewhat more’. He angrily reminded them how, when he had withdrawn fighter squadrons to the defence of the Reich, they had assured him, ‘Just let those four-engined rattletraps try coming! What a party that will be — what a thrashing! Well, the party’s over and still they keep coming. Look at it this way: the German public has suffered indescribably from the enemy bombing terror, by day and night. At night-time the public can just about understand the problems of making contact with the bombers; but what it will never understand is what problem there is by day, particularly in clear weather. I am not going to single out one squadron, or one flight, as particularly bad. But of one thing you must rest assured: I will not have cowards in my force — I intend to winkle every one of them out!’²⁹

Milch did not believe it right to blame the fighter pilots. Schweinfurt and several of the RAF night battles had shown what these officers were capable of given proper equipment and adequate leadership. It was in the Luftwaffe’s higher command that he saw the responsibility for the long-term planning errors which had reduced the Luftwaffe to its present defensive stance. He showed the new programme study for 225, the five-thousand-fighter-per-month programme, to Göring next day and urged him to secure support from Hitler; above all the industry must be protected from the drastic recruitment planned by Hitler for the next three months — no fewer than sixty thousand to be culled from the 435,000 ‘reserved’ German workers alleged by Speer to be employed in the air industry.³⁰ Milch was convinced Speer’s staff had faked this figure — he believed that the correct figure was nearer 250,000.³¹ But in the struggle for labour the Luftwaffe consistently lost, as Speer could use his local armaments inspectorates to transfer workers from a purely air force factory to one manufacturing army equipment.³²

Göring next saw Hitler on 27 October, but totally failed to persuade him to halt the recruiting. Hitler would not believe the air industry had fewer than five million workers (the real figure was 1,920,000).³³ The other services’ C-in-Cs present evidently related moving stories of their own plights. The rest of the discussion dissolved into an exchange of humorous anecdotes about manpower

wastage in the services. Milch learned this from Göring next day, and wrote in his diary: ‘Big conference at Karinhall. Terrible row. [Göring has] bad conscience as he got nowhere with the Führer.’³⁵ On the twenty-ninth he informed his ministry heads, ‘A clear decision has now been reached. The recruitment goes on.’³⁵ Sauckel had promised to procure three million Italian prisoners for German industry, but these proved unreliable: they volunteered for military service, were therefore transported back to Italy, and then melted away into the mountains. The workers who remained were given kid-glove treatment until Milch found out. He told Göring, ‘I have ordered that they are to be beaten if they do not work.’³⁶

Of one thing Hitler had persuaded Göring in particular: that whether or not the German lines in Russia were pushed back a few hundred miles was immaterial compared with whether, by the spring of 1944, Germany would be sufficiently invulnerable in the west to prevent the establishment of an Allied second front. ‘This is where the air force is of decisive importance,’ Hitler had emphasized.³⁷ If once an enemy army set foot on French soil, it would spell the end for Germany. This was an infinitely greater danger than any attack on their cities.

In vain Field Marshal Milch reminded Göring that it was not the cities as such but the armaments industries they had to defend — the very basis of their military strength. ‘I am thinking, in this context, of the real life-or-death question, apart from the eastern front — namely whether next spring the home front will be adequately protected when the American long-range escort fighter appears!’

Göring impatiently replied, ‘Even if every German city is razed to the ground, the German people will still survive! . . . I am not against the defence of the Reich — it was I who buttressed the Luftwaffe on the home front, it was I who recalled the front-line squadrons to the Reich against the bitterest opposition.’ He repeated that there were two real dangers for Germany. The first was

* The record of the conference shows Göring berating Milch: ‘All of a sudden I can’t trust anybody. I have had my fingers burnt too often! You must not try to intoxicate me with figures the way you tried before.’³⁴

when one fine day they heard, ‘The Russians (Army Group So-and-So) have entered Silesia, with another army group in East Prussia; one of them is massing on the river Vistula, the other is coming up the river Oder.’ And, ‘Then there is danger Number Two. And that is Britain.’ This was why he felt justified in regarding bombers as an essential arm of the Reich’s defence. ‘I have to start attacking them over there,’ exclaimed Göring. ‘For one whole year the British public suffered air warfare just like us now. But for two years now they have had no air raids.’ He continued, ‘The moment the British try and invade France to establish a second front, I will not leave a single fighter aircraft to the defence of the Reich; that same day every single aircraft which is airworthy will be sent forward, and the Reich itself will not have an aircraft to its name — come hell or high water.’

‘If the British once get a foothold on our coast,’ he summarized, ‘that would be fatal. For them to bomb German cities for two or three days would be unpleasant — but not fatal.’³⁸

C H A P T E R 2 0

'WHO NEEDS MESSERSCHMITT?'

October–December 1943

NOBODY NOW DOUBTED that the Messerschmitt 262 jet aircraft was vital for re-asserting Germany's air superiority, but there soon arose controversy over how it should be employed. The fighter squadrons' commander Galland repeatedly asserted, 'It will give us such a lead that even a few would make an enormous difference to us.'¹ But Hitler, who had still not seen it, envisaged it as a fighter-bomber, and he hoped it would play a decisive role in defeating the Allied invasion in the coming spring.

In October 1943 he defined to Göring the critical phase of the coming invasion as the first hours of confusion on the landing beaches, when the area would be choked with tanks, guns and troops. In those hours the fast Me 262s should make their sensational first appearance — as high-speed bombers.² They need not carry much — 'Even if they carry only a couple of 150-pounders I should be pleased enough', Hitler explained — and they would not need to aim precisely; they would merely streak along the landing beaches at low level, hurling bombs into the midst of the disembarking troops and equipment. Even a few hours' delay forced upon the enemy could be vital, for it would give Hitler time to move up his reserves. Göring agreed, but thought to himself, '*I don't know if we'll have the Me 262 by then!*' Accordingly, he said out loud that they would also try to do this with their existing fighter-bombers.³ He undertook to discuss the bomber version with Milch and Messerschmitt.

The first one hundred of the pilot series were currently due for completion by May 1944, and mass production would begin at Regensburg and Augsburg in November 1944. But Professor Messerschmitt maintained his demands for more skilled labour, more draughtsmen and more jigmakers, and by mid-October 1943 Göring very properly entertained doubts about whether the jet aircraft would ever enter squadron service: 'I would not like the Me 262 to enter service half a year too late,' he told Milch.⁴ It was a prophetic utterance.

The Air Ministry had done its best to satisfy Messerschmitt's demands, even to the extent of winding up rival companies and giving him their labour force.⁵ Messerschmitt still asked for more. At Neuburg airfield he tackled Göring in person and demanded four thousand new workers: 'I ought to warn you that the Me 262 is going to be three months late as it is; and if you don't give me the workers, half a year!'⁶ When Göring repeated this to Hitler, the latter 'almost had a fit', as he told Milch. Hitler decreed that the workers would again have to be found from some other aircraft company.

Milch disapproved very strongly of the professor's tactics: 'He did not report anything to us about any delay,' he complained to Göring. He suggested that the delays were actually caused by the company's having concentrated too much effort on the piston-engined Me 209. When Göring tamely defended the professor, Milch angrily interrupted him, 'Herr Reichsmarschall, who needs him? We have far better designers than Messerschmitt in the fields in which he works.'⁷

It must be said that at this stage nobody criticized the Führer's inclination to regard the Me 262 as a potential fighter-bomber — Messerschmitt least of all, when Milch and Göring travelled down to see him a few days later.⁸ Before they toured the sprawling factory buildings and hangars, the Reichsmarschall mentioned Hitler's requirement. Messerschmitt exclaimed, 'Herr Reichsmarschall, from the very outset we have provided for the fitting of two bomb pylons so that it can drop bombs — either one 500-kilo or two 250s!' And he volunteered, 'But it could also carry a 1,000-kilo bomb, or two 500s.' Asked by Göring how long this modification would take, the professor responded: 'That is relatively

easily done — say, fourteen days.'⁹

Before they left Göring and Milch were shown the newly completed sixth prototype in flight — the first to have a retractable nose-wheel and a Me 163 rocket-propelled interceptor, a suitable chariot for a suicide squadron if ever there was one.

Two days later they visited the Junkers works, where the jet engines were under manufacture.¹⁰ This important production line was soon to be evacuated to an army barracks at Zittau, and mass production was to begin in January. Göring urged them to find underground tunnel space if possible, and to provide realistic fire-fighting equipment meantime for the surface factories. 'Experience shows that however great the devastation of a factory by high-explosive bombs, the damage can always be repaired, even if the entire crop falls on every single machine tool; but where once the fires have ravaged, nothing can ever be made good.'¹¹ Before they left Dessau they were also shown the prototypes of the latest Junkers bomber designs — the Ju 388 (essentially a Ju 188 powered by two BMW 801 double-row radial engines)¹² and a heavy jet bomber, the Ju 287, powered by six Jumo 004 engines; with its forward-swept wings, this bomber was designed to approach the speed of sound. Its prototype made its first test-flight eight months later.

Finally, Göring and Milch toured the Arado works, now in the midst of evacuation to Landshut.¹³ The new site would start jet bomber production in September 1944, with twenty-six thousand workers. The first hundred Ar 234s would be manufactured by the end of 1944. Five had already been assembled, with a top speed of five hundred miles per hour and a range of a thousand miles; but the project had been set back by the crash of the first Ar 234 some weeks before, killing their best test pilot; and the present dispersal would cost them another two months.¹⁴ Milch insisted that the original production programme should not only be maintained but increased, and the company duly

* A shorthand record was taken of their discussion, on Göring's insistence.

† Speer said much the same a few days later: 'If today we only had to deal with blast effects, things would not be half so bad.' And Dr Werner, speaking of the Schweinfurt raid, added: 'Where there's fire, it's all over: the spindles burn out and you might just as well throw the machines on the junk heap.'¹¹

undertook to manufacture two hundred by the end of 1944 and a thousand by mid-1945, given the necessary materials and manpower.¹⁵

We can well imagine with what optimism Göring concluded his tour of the jet-engine and aircraft factories. Yet a few days of well-aimed saturation bombing could destroy all this. He anxiously initiated a major campaign to 'get my entire outfit underground', as he put it. While Air Ministry officials scoured the countryside for suitable empty caves and tunnels, Göring addressed the gauleiters on 8 November, appealing to them to cooperate and outlining his plans for the future: 'Britain has already suffered air warfare once, in the most violent manner,' he recalled. 'Like a true Germanic country, she clenched her teeth and took it on the chin.' But for many months she had been left alone, while for the German public raids had become a common occurrence. All the greater would be the anguish for the British when his reprisal raids began, before the end of 1943. London would not be the only target: 'It is always better to wipe out a town of a hundred thousand citizens completely, than to make a dent in a giant city!' He spoke of the six tons of bombs the He 177 could carry, and of the Triälen explosive in them, twice as powerful as the British explosives.¹⁶

The cloud on his horizon was the Me 262. By late autumn it had fallen several months behind schedule just as he had feared. In January 1944 Messerschmitt was to write a lengthy memorandum denying responsibility for this and blaming the Air Ministry¹⁷; this was less than fair. As recently as June 1943 he had campaigned against replacing the Me 209 with the Me 262; the 209 was, he then claimed, ninety-five percent ready for production.¹⁸ Despite Milch's embargo, he continued to invest skilled labour and draughtsmen in the 'dead' 209 at the expense of the jet aircraft against the outspoken objections of his own colleagues.*¹⁹ Milch recalled how many aircraft had gone sour in the past — the Me 110, the Me 210, the Me 264 and the Me 309; and even the Me 410 had not owed much to Messerschmitt. But then again, where would the Luftwaffe have

* Fritz Seiler chided Messerschmitt in a letter in July 1943: 'Milch ... was also able to refer to the fact that you, the entire board and I were emphatic during one of the big conferences on the 262 that the 262 can only enter service rapidly if we *concentrate* on that aircraft.'²⁰

been in 1939 without the Me 109 fighter? ‘It is unfortunately very hard to tell in advance with him whether he has another hit or another miss,’ he sighed.²¹ The upshot had been that late in September Milch cautiously asked his staff ‘while avoiding any misunderstanding, to look at the question whether we really need the 209 in view of its performance and delivery dates’.²²

The expert opinion, especially of Galland, was unanimous: they did not need the Me 209. It had still not even flown by the end of October, although it was due to enter mass production in June 1944. Now Messerschmitt was demanding a thousand more draughtsmen, and even then could not guarantee to deliver the fighter before early 1946.²³ Göring’s technical officer stated, ‘The only person who will fight against cancellation of the 209 is Messerschmitt. But all his colleagues realize they are only obstructing themselves with it, and that they will never get a breathing space for sensible projects if they go on like that.’²⁴ It was calamitous that the Me 209, sheltered by the injured pride of one brilliant aircraft designer with the ear of Hitler, should have blocked the path of the jet fighter for so long. In mid-November the professor tactlessly complained to the Führer’s special representative about the ‘superfluous’ aircraft under development, which were wasting manpower. This was the last straw for Milch: ‘If Messerschmitt complains he has too many different types,’ he snarled, ‘I can only say, we have tried to take one after the other away from him.’ He ordered all work on the Me 209 piston-engined fighter to cease, and secured Göring’s approval for this a few days later.²⁵

Albert Speer refused to accept responsibility for the new aircraft programme planned by Milch, designated 225. At that time, the prevailing programme was 223, with a target of 3,700 single- and 1,194 twin-engined fighters a month in 1945, plus 720 bombers; the post-Hamburg Reich Defence Programme, 224, issued in the second week of October, had raised these targets to 4,160 single- and 1,256 twin-engined fighters, plus 820 bombers by 1945.²⁶ Göring had ordered him to place greater emphasis still on bombers, and the resulting ‘revenge’ programme, 225, aimed at 4,585 single- and 1,264 twin-engined fighters and 930 bombers (Göring had called for 900) by 1945. Fighter production would be marginally lower during 1944, but not because of the increase in

bombers so much as because of a shortage of suitable engines. ('Whatever I am ordered,' said Milch, 'I would not dream of cutting back on fighters.'

Speer would not even consider the new programme: 'It's pointless,' he objected. 'These are utopian figures!' He added, 'I refuse to discuss anything over and above programme 224. If the Luftwaffe wants to go ahead and adopt programme 225, nobody will stop it; but I must state officially here and now that the necessary supplies will not be forthcoming.'²⁷

Milch patiently asked his office to prepare a new study,²⁸ the first of many, in an attempt to reconcile the two positions. His friendship with Speer was saved in this month of strain by an unexpected drought: by mid-November it was recognized that the drought would be so severe that during 1944 there would be less aluminium available than ever before. This new limiting factor was disclosed by Speer to Milch in mid-November and Milch had no option but to accept it.²⁹

The drought was the worst for ninety years in Germany. The loss of hydro-electric power would cause considerable production losses of nitrogen, high-grade steels, synthetic fuels and aluminium. Moreover, the Danube was so low that oil barges from Rumania could carry only 300 instead of 700 tons each; in November the amount transported would be 80,000 tons compared with 144,000 tons in October, and there were 323,000 tons waiting in Rumania to be shipped to Germany.³⁰ Of Reich aluminium production, estimated at 40,000 tons a month for the next few months, the Luftwaffe would now be allocated 22,000 tons a month. This appeared to rule out programme 225 altogether.³¹

On the night of 18 November Sir Arthur Harris, C-in-C of Bomber Command, began his attempt to 'wreck Berlin from end to end'. He followed this raid with an even heavier attack on the night of the twenty-second. Munitions and Air Ministries both suffered; soon Speer's building was blazing fiercely, and the neighbouring Army Armaments Office also caught fire. The night's casualties were 3,500 dead and 400,000 homeless. On the following night the British bombers again attacked Berlin in force.³²

At the same time, the recruiting of fresh soldiers from Milch's factories was increased. Milch watched these developments with consternation. At the

end of October he had again reminded Göring that the army had eight million men in uniform: ‘But how many of those are really at the front, as combat troops? Certainly far fewer than twenty-five or thirty percent.’³³ On 8 November Hitler finally agreed that there was an imbalance between front-line and rear areas, and he ordered the High Command to investigate; he invited Admiral Dönitz and the Reichsmarschall to headquarters on the twenty-fourth to discuss ways of increasing the combat strength.³⁴ Göring asked Milch to brief him.³⁵ Milch again claimed that of 8.3 million soldiers, fewer than two million were actually at the front: ‘On the eastern front,’ he claimed, ‘there are only 260,000 soldiers.’ Given the chance he believed he could round up two million soldiers and add them to the front line, without any need to raid the armaments factories at home.³⁶

In the event, precisely the opposite happened. So weak was Göring’s position — particularly now that Berlin was suffering again — that he not only failed to repeat Milch’s statistics to Hitler, but declared he was convinced a large number of front-line soldiers could be obtained from the Luftwaffe’s rear areas.³⁷ This was the Luftwaffe’s fate: its commander-in-chief was reluctant to state its requirements to the Führer with the necessary forcefulness, while Milch, who shared none of Göring’s inhibitions, was steadfastly prevented by Göring from confronting Hitler directly.

Milch — like Speer — had always cultivated good relations with Heinrich Himmler, chief of the SS. They had always exchanged birthday greetings, and once Milch had said, ‘I prefer working with him than with other military authorities.’³⁸ It was probably just the admiration of one organization man for another: both had created from nothing a politically conscious fighting élite.³⁹

When the agitation among the legions of foreign workers in his factories threatened production, Milch was able to refer to his association with Himmler:

I spoke to Himmler recently about this, and told him his main task must be to see to the protection of German industry if unrest breaks out among this foreign scum. If, for instance, there is a mutiny at X, an officer with a couple of men, or a lieutenant with thirty troops,

must appear in the factory and let fly with their machine-guns into the mob. The object is to lay out as many people as possible, if mutinies break out. This is the order I have issued, even if the people are our own foreign workers . . . Then every tenth man is to be picked out, and every tenth man will be shot in front of the rest.

He generally favoured giving Heinrich Himmler close control over their vital armaments factories, as was the SS chief's desire. 'Why should we stand in his way?' Milch asked his staff. 'Speer is letting him in too.'⁴⁰ (Needless to say, none of Milch's draconic proposals was ever carried out.)

On 20 November, after they had both attended the Führer's speech to four thousand officer cadets at the Century Hall in Breslau, Milch invited Himmler to his nearby estate, Althofdürr. Like Hitler, the SS chief possessed the most punctilious manners and charm, and he conversed at length with Milch's mother, who had lived here since the destruction of their fine home in Königsallee in a recent Berlin air raid. Milch poured out his heart to Himmler about the difficulties with Göring, and the urgency of support for the Reich's defence.⁴¹ Himmler promised support.

For purposes which we can readily surmise, Göring had ordered Milch to prepare at short notice a display of the most modern aircraft and weapons for Hitler at Insterburg airfield. The display was to include both jet aircraft projects, the flying bomb and the two guided anti-shipping missiles Hs 293 and Fritz-X, and film of the new panoramic radar sets and the 'Korfu' receiver stations tracking the RAF bombers by their radar emissions during a night attack on Berlin a few days before.⁴² Hitler agreed to come with his staff on 26 November; Himmler also attended.

Göring deliberately snubbed Milch at the display and introduced his own technical officers to Hitler as those to whom credit was due.⁴³ Milch was speechless with anger. More was to come: the Reichsmarschall took the printed programme out of Milch's hands and began introducing each aircraft to Hitler, working his finger down the list. He was unaware that one of the fighter prototypes had had a mishap at Rechlin and there was thus one aircraft missing;

the remaining aircraft had each been moved along one place in the line. Milch saw what was going to happen and took his revenge: he stepped tactfully back into the second row. Where the missing fighter should have been, there was now a medium bomber. Göring announced it to Hitler as the single-seater. For several more exhibits this farce continued until the Führer decided that enough was enough, and pointed out Göring's error.

The next mishap occurred as they inspected the Me 262 jet fighter. The Führer repeated his inquiry: could it carry bombs? Before the others could stop him, Messerschmitt stepped forward and said that it could carry one 1,000-kilo or two 500-kilo bombs without trouble. Hitler thanked him: 'This at last is the aircraft I have been demanding for years! Here it is — but nobody recognized it!' Colonel Petersen later commented, 'Thus the bacillus was planted.' Even now nobody protested, least of all Göring, who had only a few months before scorned Milch's interim efforts to fill the high-speed bomber gap: 'With the high-speed bomber you gentlemen took the easy way out. You slung a bomb under the fastest fighter, and there's your high-speed bomber! But a fighter is no bomber.'⁴⁴ Long of tongue and short of memory, the Reichsmarschall now approved a modification of the jet fighter project which, in time, was to set it back by many months.

Partly for security reasons (the need to avoid compromising the jet engine in a crash over enemy territory) and partly because of his desire to promote the fighter version, Milch had always urged caution on jet bomber development. In May Major Herrmann had asked for the Me 262 as a bomber, too, but Milch had answered evasively: 'First we will build it as a fighter, and then look for something answering your purpose.'⁴⁵ Colonel Peltz had echoed Herrmann: 'The jet bomber would be so superior, if it came today, that the enemy would never bring it down.' In July he asked for a hundred of the Ar 234 jet bombers as soon as possible and regretted that the reconnaissance version was planned for release first, as one crash in Britain would compromise its secrets.⁴⁶ Milch knew that a host of technical problems — special bomb-sights, strengthened landing gear and improved visibility — would have to be solved first and might take years of work. When Colonel Diesing advised him that even Hitler now envisaged jet engines more as a power plant for bombers, Milch

sharply disagreed.⁴⁷ A few days later, however, Göring also described the jet bomber as ‘a point of extreme urgency’ for their research and development. He was thinking of both a small bomber and one with a two-ton bomb-load, and he told Milch: ‘A positive effort is to be made on the development of a jet bomber.’⁴⁸ At the time of Insterburg one thing was certain: the Me 262 was not capable of carrying any bombs, however small.

Another fiasco occurred at Insterburg when Hitler stepped in front of the static flying-bomb exhibit. He asked the group leader of the Luftwaffe research unit at Peenemünde when the weapon would be ready. This man, thinking only of the development progress, replied, ‘The end of March 1944.’ (Even then some weeks would be necessary before the weapon could go into operation.) But March was bad enough, and General Bodenschatz hissed to Petersen, ‘Who was the pessimist who arranged this display?’⁴⁹

After it was over, Göring suggested they watch each aircraft fly past from the roof of the control tower. Hitler agreed, but invited only Milch and his adjutant to accompany him, as he wanted an ‘expert commentary’ on each plane. Göring stayed below. The Me 262, which swept past several times, made the greatest impression on him. Then he returned to headquarters, having demonstratively congratulated Milch on the exhibits. Milch hurried to his aircraft and took off for Berlin. As they curved back over the airfield, he saw that the Reichsmarschall had returned from the station; he ordered his pilot to fly toward Göring’s group at zero feet, and secured some satisfaction from their response.

The flying-bomb project had indeed fallen about two months behind schedule. In October Hitler had asked when the three secret ‘reprisal weapons’ — the A4 rocket, the flying-bomb and a huge underground gun battery with multiple barrels four hundred feet long aimed at London — would open fire.⁵⁰ The army were saying their A4 rocket would be ready by the end of the year. The Luftwaffe were striving to achieve the same date with their flying-bomb, but General Jodl disputed this: ‘You will trail a long way behind.’ ‘That may well be so,’ Milch admitted; the rocket project had been under way for thirteen years already, compared with the flying-bomb’s fifteen months.

Milch's fears were not without substance. By mid-December the ninety-six catapult launching sites for the weapon had been completed in France, along the whole coastline facing England; and in March the first two of the planned bombproof bunkers for launching the flying-bomb would also be complete; throughout the country caves and tunnels were being extended and reinforced to house the dumps for rockets and flying-bombs.⁵¹ But the mass production of the bomb was now running about two months behind schedule, the weapon having encountered a series of difficulties during trials. The compass and dive mechanism were faulty, the auto-pilot was imperfect and some of the bombs broke up in mid-air because of faulty spot-welding. In September ninety bombs should have been test-launched, but only fourteen had been tried out, with only thirty-five more in October. The RAF attack on Peenemünde had set them back about three weeks, and the mass attack on Kassel on 22 October had forced the evacuation of the Fieseler works manufacturing the pilot series to another site, where there was no compressed air, no electricity, and no telephones or transport. The full-scale mass-production was scheduled to begin at the Volkswagen works at the end of October, but to reach the target of five thousand a month the works needed 250 more workers and seven hundred more machine tools.⁵²

When November came it was estimated that up to 150 more flying-bombs still had to be tested, but that this could be completed by early February 1944.⁵³ Long before then, however, further faults disrupted the flying-bomb programme. Meantime Himmler, impressed by what he had seen, afforded the flying-bomb project one whole tunnel in 'Central Works', a vast underground complex being adapted by the SS and tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners near Nordhausen. Here the weapon would eventually have a bomb-proof production line independent of Volkswagen.

On the day after Insterburg, Göring promised Hitler that the Luftwaffe would execute a heavy bombing attack on London in revenge for the continued raids on Berlin.⁵⁴ To his generals he disclosed that the Führer had made it a point of honour to carry out this operation within two weeks, but he would consider waiting a further ten days should the full moon promise better results.⁵⁵ He

ordered Peltz to scrape together as many Ju 188s, Ju 88s, Me 410s and He 177s as possible over the next few days. Peltz told him, 'Anything that can carry bombs is good enough for me.'

Ideally, the He 177 could carry two 2,500-kilo bombs, of which one hundred had already been stockpiled with a so-called 'England mixture' of Trialen and Hexogen explosives. Göring planned to marshal at least three hundred for the first strike, denuding the Italian front if necessary to provide them; these would be followed by a hundred aircraft in a second wave and 150 more the next night. The attack, delayed by many circumstances, took place eventually on 22 January, by which time Peltz had assembled 524 bombers (including some He 177s) and fighter-bombers, of which 462 were serviceable. They attacked London in two waves six hours apart, but had some difficulty in finding the capital, for only thirty tons of bombs fell within its boundaries.⁵⁶ The wretched He 177 suffered particularly heavy losses. 'They can't even get *that* far,' lamented Hitler afterward. 'This rattletrap is obviously the worst junk ever to have been manufactured. It is the flying Panther' — a reference to one of Germany's less fortunate tank designs — 'and the Panther is the crawling Heinkel!'⁵⁷

The RAF's assault on Berlin was by this time drawing to its climax. Tens of thousands of tons of high explosives and fire bombs were falling on the capital every week, spreading rumours, fear and panic throughout Germany. The RAF's Bomber Command was shrugging off the normally crippling losses inflicted by the night-fighters as though of no consequence. Yet the German air industry was by no means declining: it had manufactured 15,700 aircraft in 1942, and 25,871 in 1943, with a further 18,600 reissued after repairs; the 1944 target was 51,800 aircraft.⁵⁸ Milch regretted time and again that this upsurge had not come a year earlier. Even now, there were still those who sought to cut back aircraft production to allow more steel for truck production, more aluminium for A4 rockets, or more manpower for the thousands of frivolous occupations still tolerated in this desperate war situation: at Baden-Baden the casino was still open and fully staffed, while the Me 262 jet-fighter programme was fighting for any kind of labour. The Speer ministry could not be induced to take any interest in either the Me 262 or the flying-bomb. It was said that

Speer's deputy, Saur, would cooperate only if he were given complete control over the projects: 'If he is permitted to manufacture the Fi 103 and the Me 262, he will support them to the hilt; but so long as we are responsible and he is only the supplier, he won't help.'⁵⁹

Milch was forced to admire the excellence of the RAF's night navigation, compared with the Luftwaffe's. The enemy could unerringly find his way to Berlin across hundreds of miles of darkened Europe. 'In Britain seamanship was always their strong point,' he reflected. 'It's a question of getting fixes and dead-reckoning the whole time. It's in their blood. Our aviation emanates, as you know, from the army side . . . The army has no need to navigate. They read the signposts at the crossroads, and that tells them where to go.'⁶⁰ The British moreover could jam every electronic aid used by the Germans, while the Germans did not even know the British wavelengths, as the Air Staff still refused to make aircraft available for radio-reconnaissance missions over the British Isles.⁶¹ Neither the 'Berlin' radar set nor the one hundred 'Panorama' ground radar sets needed for the future fighter-control organization could be ready until late 1944. Meanwhile 'Wasserfall', the Luftwaffe's radio-controlled, liquid-fuelled surface-to-air missile, was being blocked by the highly similar A4 rocket.⁶² Milch was advised that the A4 was swallowing up so much of the Speer ministry's capacities that they were having to 'mark time' on every other similar project: 'The importance of [anti-aircraft] rocket research does not seem to have sunk in to them.'⁶³

Yet the picture was not entirely black for the Luftwaffe. The Air Ministry had found a partial solution to the Mosquito problem, by fitting Ju 88R night-fighters with the secret 'GM1' kit, a system for injecting nitrous-oxide gas into the engine, giving it superior high-altitude performance.⁶⁴ The RAF bombers were now suffering severe losses at the hands of the night-fighters, and on 20 December massive RAF attacks began on the 'secret weapon' sites in France, just as Milch had expected. The Do 335 tandem-engined prototype had made its first flights, reaching four hundred miles an hour at ground level, and nearer five hundred at its proper altitude. Milch saw it as the piston-engined high-speed bomber and day-fighter of the future.⁶⁵ Only the Speer ministry's stubbornness stood in his way still, and his bitterness increased with every air raid.

and with every joint meeting. When Saur announced in January 1944 that the Armaments Ministry was going to accord equal top priority to still further army equipment (an assault gun programme) Milch angrily rebuked him: 'What's the use! If we cannot make aircraft, it is useless to manufacture such equipment . . . If we had been a year earlier with our present programme, everything that has happened in Germany in 1943 would never have happened.'⁶⁶

P A R T V I

‘CRASHED IN FLAMES’



‘Air force armament has just not been given the proper treatment and support — that’s why things look so black today. If we carry on like this we shall be forced to our knees before the coming year is out. I am convinced of it. Why beat about the bush?’

Milch, early in January 1944

C H A P T E R 2 1

FIGHTER STAFF

January–April 1944

ON 4 JANUARY 1944 Field Marshal Milch attended Hitler's war conference for the first time in many months.¹ He had been summoned to headquarters with Speer and Sauckel to debate with the military the necessary means of raising more than four million new workers for the coming year.²

This was the first problem of 1944. The second was the threatening Allied invasion. That evening, Milch and Speer dined alone with Hitler until the early hours of the morning, and listened to the Führer's plans for defeating the Allies. Hitler reminded them of the importance he attached to the new submarine (the Type xxI) and to the jet aircraft, the Me 262 and the Ar 234. Milch in turn reported to his ministry, 'The Führer says, "If I can get these in time I can thwart the invasion." This is the thought which inwardly pre-occupies him the most. He has told this to the Reichsmarschall too.'³ Within two days the British government had officially released details of its own jet aircraft development, and Milch was urgently recalled by Hitler to discuss this new threat, and the need for the Luftwaffe to develop counter-measures.⁴

The Me 262 as a fighter-bomber figured prominently in Hitler's anti-invasion planning. Milch did not explicitly discourage this opinion. Early in November he had cabled Göring that it had been foreseen all along that the Me 262 should be capable of bombing.⁵ On 3 December he reminded his engineers that at Insterburg Hitler had particularly emphasized this, and had also ex-

pressed an urgent interest in seeing the Me 410 fighter armed with the unorthodox 50-millimetre cannon⁶; two days later Hitler had again stressed the strategic importance of having jet fighter-bombers 'in action in large numbers by the spring'.⁷ Although Milch knew that only the tenth prototype, V-10, was being equipped experimentally with two bomb pylons for 250-kilo bombs, and that this was not due for completion until early May 1944 itself, neither he nor Göring dispelled the impression Hitler had evidently gained. Indeed late in December, after a visit from Göring, Hitler explained to his commanders,

Every month that passes makes it more and more probable that we will get at least one squadron of jet aircraft: the most important thing is that they [the enemy] get some bombs on top of them just as they try to invade. That will force them to take cover. And even if there is only one such aircraft in the air they will still have to take cover, and in this way they will waste hour after hour! But after half a day our reserves will already be on their way. So if we can pin them down on the beaches for just six or eight hours, you can see what that will mean for us.⁸

But Milch took no discernible action to promote the Me 262 as a fighter-bomber, as he was anxious not to delay its début as a fighter.

He regarded the flying-bomb Fi 103 as one of the most important projects of the coming year. But severe manufacturing problems had beset it. He had authorized mass production before the trials were concluded — the same gamble as had been taken by Udet with the Ju 88 and the Me 210 — and the gamble had not come off.⁹ Cheap production methods had resulted in a run of failures; at the end of November 1943 the Volkswagen mass production series was halted for the time being, and the two thousand bombs already partly finished were scrapped as their structures were too weak. Eventually the ministry resolved that the works should proceed with the manufacture of one hundred entirely new flying-bombs with the most up-to-date modifications incorporated; a final decision would be reached on the basis of their performance, but they would

not be delivered until mid-February.

In the meantime Flak Regiment 155(W) had been activated to man the catapult sites and supply lines, and its five thousand officers and men were transferred to France during December.¹⁰ The C-in-C of the flak artillery was quick to publicize this newly acquired weapon, although he was regrettably unaware of the technical delays. As a result of his report the Führer decided that the flying-bomb campaign against London should begin on 15 February.¹¹ Early in January 1944 the Führer's headquarters was told that the Volkswagen works would manufacture fourteen hundred flying-bombs in January, two thousand in February and increase to eight thousand a month by September — figures devoid of any accuracy. Milch knew that nothing like fourteen hundred bombs would be manufactured during January, and on his return to Berlin on the fifth he announced: 'I forbid anybody else to make reports to the High Command . . . I am strongly opposed to those gentlemen meddling in our affairs.'¹² When Field Marshal Keitel cabled him expressing disappointment, Milch unblushingly told his staff: 'I have now received an idiotic telegram from Keitel and I have sent back an equally idiotic reply. I have asked him, "Why do you question the people who are not responsible for this?"'

The final decision on whether to cancel the flying-bomb was postponed until 24 January. When, meanwhile, Speer's own Me 262 troubleshooter, Dr Krome, asked whether the various secret weapon projects could possibly release skilled workers for the jet fighter, Milch soberly replied: 'I cannot speak for the A4.' Krome pointedly asked, 'Which do we need more — A4 or Me 262?' Milch rasped, 'We need the Me 262 more than anything else — more than submarines and more than tanks, because without this aircraft all armament production will become impossible.'¹³ 'That is what I said four weeks ago,' replied Krome, 'but nobody drew the necessary conclusions.' 'Nor will they draw them in Germany!' exclaimed Milch. Turning to Saur, he appealed: 'Cannot the submarine and tank people realize that in four or six months' time Germany will not be able to manufacture one more tank or submarine? Saur, cannot you realize that something must be done?' Saur made a non-committal reply.¹⁴

The auguries for the coming year were clear and well-defined for those who

wished to read them. On 11 January the Americans resumed their strategic attack on the fighter defence structure: all three bombardment divisions, 663 bombers, set out to attack Milch's aircraft factories at Halberstadt, Brunswick, Magdeburg and Oschersleben. Two divisions had to be recalled because of bad weather; the German fighters exploited the gaps left in the ragged escort with deadly effect, destroying fifty-nine bombers and five of the escort fighters, for the loss of forty defenders.

When Göring's advisers proposed transferring BMW's Allach factory underground, Milch agreed but added: 'One day like 11 January, with real combat between our fighters and an attacking enemy, is worth far more than any cave. I don't mean to belittle our cave campaign, but it is far more important for the enemy to get a good thrashing, so that he doesn't come back; and the requirement for that is that we manage to turn out enough fighters this month. It's the famous "One Year Too Late" again.'¹⁵ Hitler asked Göring how much progress had been made with fitting the Me 410s with the 50-millimetre cannon displayed to him at Insterburg. Göring cabled Milch, 'Again and again the Führer inquires how many aircraft are already in service with this. Unhappily I have had to advise the Führer that virtually no such aircraft is yet in service, and that only two or three such aircraft have been so equipped. The Führer accordingly beholds in such displays the same kind of symptoms as once upon a time at Rechlin'¹⁶ — meaning the notorious display of July 1939. To those who knew Göring, this was certainly menacing language, and Milch put great pressure on the Rheinmetall company to equip the first thirty Me 410s with the formidable — and in due course brilliantly successful — weapon by the end of the month.¹⁷

By night, the RAF bombers continued to pound Berlin, but the promised victory was not yet in sight. On 20 January the RAF dropped 2,400 tons on Berlin — a noteworthy achievement when compared with the difficulty the Luftwaffe experienced a year before in transporting a hundred tons of supplies two hundred miles to Stalingrad. Together Milch and Saur toured the air industry's most vital factories in a special train, checking the production arrangements for the Do 335, the Me 262 and the Ar 234.¹⁸ As they returned to Berlin the sirens were sounding for a British attack on Magdeburg. During

their last three attacks on Germany the British had lost 130 heavy bombers, but still they kept coming.

The only relief for the German cities in this ordeal was the increasing diversion of Allied bombing effort to the strange secret weapon sites under construction in France. By the end of January the ninety-six catapult sites for the flying-bomb, with their conspicuous ski-shaped buildings, were being heavily attacked. Twenty thousand of the thirty-five thousand French workers had been scared away, and a quarter of the sites damaged; but the Allies had expended tens of thousands of tons of bombs, and had lost aircraft and crews as well. All this time, with ten thousand workers, Milch was constructing fifty prefabricated catapult sites a month some distance *behind* the ring of 'ski sites' currently under attack, and these had not yet been detected by the Allies. It was from these that he now intended to open the attack; he had no intention of using the other sites if he could help it. Whether or not the flying-bomb campaign ever opened, he saw that his strategy of luring the enemy bombers into 'fighter and flak traps'¹⁹ far from German territory was having good effect. 'The attacks on these sites are worth their weight in gold to us,' he triumphed. 'Otherwise we would have caught the bombs elsewhere!'²⁰

It dismayed him that ambitious generals had reported too optimistically to Hitler about the weapon's readiness: 'All the Führer's orders have been based on the assumption that we open fire on 15 February,' he complained. 'The Führer says, "You humbugged me once before at Rechlin, and now it has happened all over again."²¹ By mid-February this ordeal of waiting was over: he could tell Göring that the first five of the new Volkswagen series of one hundred had been tested, and all had functioned perfectly, travelling 140 to 175 miles with only about one degree of deviation.²² On the fourteenth Milch was advised that almost all the rest had worked equally well. He ordered mass production to be restarted immediately, and telephoned the Führer's headquarters. The long-range bombardment of London could begin in about two months' time.²³

A month had passed since Speer had entered the SS clinic at Hohenlychen with knee trouble; Milch watched with concern as the original malady was compli-

cated by lung troubles. With the minister's deputy, Saur, Milch could not reach any kind of understanding: Saur was ruthless, energetic and blindly partisan to the needs of the army. 'I knew full well,' Milch was to state in his resignation speech in June, 'that it was he who had caused us the greatest damage in chasing his own arms production.'²⁴ Milch could see only one solution. In his snow-covered hunting lodge in the forest outside Berlin he would lie awake all night, listening to the rumble of the bombers over the capital, and pondering on the future. It was futile to expect Speer's staff to collaborate with him, still less in their minister's absence. Only his total abdication of power to Speer would release to the air industry the manpower, materials, transport and construction capacity, and the extra foodstuffs and clothing allowances which Speer had monopolized. 'If somebody works on tanks in a factory,' he observed, 'he is showered with food parcels. If the same man works twice as hard on aircraft production, he gets nothing.'²⁵

During his visits to Speer, Milch proposed his own abdication for the good of the air industry, if this was the only way. Speer approved the suggestion.

Milch did not have long to wait for the right occasion. On 20 February 1944 the American bombers' 'Big Week' began; in effect, their directive was to destroy in ten days an industry to which Milch had devoted the last eighteen years. This was to be the eclipse of the Luftwaffe — it was to open the doors to the Allied invasion in the spring.²⁶ It was an unexpected feature of the industrial reorganization carried out in 1941 that it was unusually vulnerable to daylight attack, since Milch had regrouped the individual 'production rings' into tight geographical units. Now this was exploited to the full: Big Week opened with a thousand Flying Fortresses and Liberators, heavily escorted all the way by British and American long-range fighters, striking at a dozen air industry targets, and particularly at the Me 109 factories situated round Leipzig, where thirty-two percent of all Me 109 production was concentrated. The factories had survived the RAF attack during the previous night, but nothing could have withstood the American saturation bombing next day.

By the time the campaign was halted by bad weather five days later, ten

thousand tons of bombs had been dropped by the Americans on targets accounting for ninety percent of Milch's air industry. This had been followed by 9,200 tons of bombs released at night on ball-bearing centres like Stuttgart, Steyr and Schweinfurt, and on Augsburg. Between them the two air forces lost nearly three hundred bombers, but the results were a catastrophe for Germany. In the industrial targets seventy-five percent of the buildings had been destroyed; Milch had lost 350 complete Me 109 fighters at the Leipzig factories, another 150 at the various Messerschmitt factories and two hundred more at Wiener-Neustadt. He had lost his entire production of twin-engined fighters, the only aircraft capable of carrying the advanced SN 2 radar, and at Junkers the current production of 365 Ju 88s per month had been halved.²⁷ On 24 February, with the German air force now fighting desperate battles by day and by night, Göring departed on three weeks' leave to his castle at Veldenstein.²⁸

Milch and Saur had already arranged a tour of the industry to discuss means of dispersing it in face of air attack. The tour could not have begun at a more opportune time.²⁹ A lesser man might have admitted defeat, seeing the buckled machinery, the blazing buildings and the hundreds of half-finished aircraft wrecked on the production lines. But the sheer scale of the damage that met Milch's eyes acted as a challenge. His first shrewd decision was that these main factories should *not* be completely evacuated. At Oschersleben and Brunswick he ordered half the factory to be left where it was, explaining, 'The enemy shall continue to attack them. I want them to believe that the factories are still there!'³⁰ As dawn rose on the twenty-third their train was standing on a siding near the stricken Me 109 factories at Leipzig. Here 450 workers had been killed in their slit trenches, and the survivors had fled from the area and refused to return.³¹ Milch recognized that it was madness to expect the workers to shelter in the heart of the factory area during American saturation attacks, and ordered that in future as soon as the air-raid warning sounded the entire factory staff was to form up in a column of threes and 'march singing' out of the works to a distance a thousand yards away: 'They can dig their slit trenches there and watch their factory, and then if necessary return for rescue, salvage and firefighting operations.'³² Despite angry intervention by the local gauleiter, he also ordered that the foreign workers and prisoners killed in the attacks were

to be accorded the same heroes' funeral as the Germans.³³ When the final American attack fell upon Regensburg on the twenty-fifth, the Messerschmitt factory was totally destroyed, but there were only five casualties, as the labour force had been evacuated three thousand yards away in good time.³⁴

It was as their train had been approaching Leipzig that the idea of a 'Fighter Staff' was officially born.³⁵ This body should control the urgent dispersal and reconstruction of fighter aircraft production. It would consist of the principal officers of Milch's and Speer's ministries, and be vested with special powers by Hitler himself. The factories themselves had no spare labour, no construction workers and scarcely any transport. 'The local state authorities and Wehrmacht bodies confront these problems, as I have seen with my own eyes,' said Milch, 'with an impotence and helplessness that is frankly staggering.' And back in Berlin next morning he harangued their joint staffs: 'The fight is not a hopeless one — it can be won!' 'The object is to give the enemy such a fright that they can no longer bear the casualty rate. Every time they try brute force — because their political leadership is much more callous than the airman who actually has to fly the mission — they have got to be trounced.' Otherwise, he predicted, the same armada which was at present methodically ruining Berlin would in future be able to wipe out towns like Brunswick or Hildesheim, five or six at a time. 'What is the use of building a wall in Norway, if meanwhile the home base is destroyed? What is the use of emplacing one gun more or less in the Atlantic Wall, if we can state with certainty that the day will come, not long after the Luftwaffe has been defeated, when the guns will not arrive — because there will be no more trains running, no railway lines left crossing the Rhine, Weser, Elbe or Oder. Just try and visualize that, if you can!' These were prophetic words, deserving of a better audience. 'If you agree with me, then I will sacrifice all I have to carry out this programme as the Führer and Fatherland would wish. I can see no other way for Germany than this.' A memorandum advocating an inter-ministry 'Fighter Staff' was now drawn up and signed.

Within six hours the whole organization had been agreed upon.³⁶ When Milch showed Speer the document, he adroitly left the impression that all this had been Speer's own idea. Milch suggested Saur should head the Fighter Staff,

as it was he who had sabotaged aircraft production all along. Now he should bear partial responsibility for it.³⁷ Göring, still ensconced at Veldenstein, and Hitler both warmly approved the Staff's formation.³⁸ Hitler commanded that as its first task it should construct two huge bomb-proof factories to house their most modern aircraft projects like the Me 262 (which the total destruction of Augsburg had fortuitously left virtually unscathed).³⁹ The factories should enclose a floor space of between seven and nine million square feet. Milch reported on the results of Big Week, and on their possible future production figures, but he leavened this picture with one promise which he now knew he could keep: they could open fire with flying-bombs on London at any time the Führer so commanded. 'Only the Führer can make this decision,' he explained a few days later. 'I suggested to him that we ought to open fire on his birthday [20 April] and then not as an annihilating attack, but as the most evil torture you can imagine: just picture for yourselves a large high-explosive bomb failing on Berlin every half-hour, and nobody knowing where the next will fall! Twenty days of that will have them all folding at the knees!'⁴⁰

He returned to Berlin on the day after his talk with Hitler. At midday American bomber squadrons flew in splendid formation high over the capital and released sixteen hundred tons of bombs; they lost sixty-eight bombers and eleven escort fighters to the defences, but the blow to German morale was undeniable.⁴¹ On the eighth, seeing that the weather was again brilliant, Milch hurried to the First Fighter Division's operations room with Galland, arriving in time to see the next American attack begin, the glittering squadrons of heavy bombers flying in perfect formation overhead — 'An awesome spectacle with their condensation trails,' as Milch jotted in his diary. A hundred fighters tried to intercept the enemy, but failed to reach them in time.⁴² Milch left that afternoon for the Fighter Staff's first tour of the stricken air industry.

During the next three months the Fighter Staff achieved a near-miracle. It presided over the Phoenix-like resurrection of the fighter aircraft industry from the ashes of its factories, and achieved greater production than ever before. Milch and Saur toured the factories, harangued the weary workers and took emergency action backed by the full resources of the Armaments and Air Min-

istries. Incompetent managers were dismissed or arrested, the rabble was cleared, temporary buildings erected and a *seventy-two-hour* working week was proclaimed throughout the industry.⁴³ Now the Speer ministry provided the additional food rations to make the extra work burden possible, and extra clothing allowances as an incentive for hard workers. The hardships were extreme: 'We must not forget,' Milch commented at the end of the first month of this gruelling winter test of will-power, 'that most of our workers are accustomed to working in heated buildings, and are now out in the open air, exposed to all the elements.'⁴⁴

After the aircraft factories they toured the steel works, exhorting Krupp workers to hold out despite the mighty Allied bombing campaign. At that moment the American bombers were attacking Berlin again, and that night the RAF unloaded over *three thousand* tons of bombs on Frankfurt. Small wonder that when Milch mustered the quartermasters and chief engineers of the Luftwaffe a few days later to urge them to scour their stores for spare parts now vitally needed for the production lines, he lost his temper when the treatment of foreign workers was touched upon and bellowed, 'There is no such thing as international law!' — an utterance with which the judiciary to whom it was exhibited three years later profoundly disagreed.⁴⁵

The Volkswagen works, he now learned, would complete seventeen hundred flying-bombs in April and twenty-five hundred more in May. 'My own view is,' he said, 'that we might begin at the end of April, if we do not wish to do so on too heavy a scale.' The flak commander did not disagree, but proposed that they wait until a 'really sadistic' bombardment lasting many months could be sustained against London; it was unrealistic to attempt this with only three thousand bombs in hand — three thousand could all be launched within twenty-four hours, he thought. Milch replied with a warning: the catapult sites in France might suddenly find themselves in the middle of a battle zone once the Allied invasion began. 'That's why we can't waste one day, not even a minute. In my view the thing must be put into action fast. June is too late. I personally would open fire on 20 April, loose off fifteen hundred during April and the rest in May.' He gloated, 'Every half-hour or so, a flying-bomb! That will suffice to disrupt the life of this city over a very long period.'⁴⁶

Then, a week later, the Luftwaffe inflicted a very severe defeat on the RAF's night-bombers. On 30 March over seven hundred bombers set out to destroy Nuremberg. It was a clear, frosty night, and their condensation trails showed conspicuously the course that they were following. Many of the night-fighters had by now been equipped with SN 2 radar, or with Naxos Z for homing on to the bombers' radar emissions. Conditions were perfect for the von Lossberg and Herrmann pursuit techniques, and that night ninety-five bombers were brought down over Germany and twelve more crashed in England. RAF Bomber Command felt this an appropriate moment to halt the night offensive almost completely. The Battle of Berlin, which Sir Arthur Harris had predicted would end the war, had ended in a severe reverse for the bombers, as had Göring's similar assault on London in 1940. To Milch, this was the long-awaited turning-point, and he too recalled the parallel with the Battle of Britain, and the Luftwaffe's attempt to destroy the RAF. Britain had survived that crisis; Germany could survive this.⁴⁷

C H A P T E R 2 2

BREAKING-POINT

April 1944–May 1945

THE FIGHTER STAFF'S principal functions had been to restore component production in the shattered factories and to safeguard them by dispersing them into tunnels, caves and vast bomb-proof factories, or by decentralizing them so as to multiply and reduce in size the targets for daylight attack. This was a race against time, since the Allies often attacked the secret dispersal sites as soon as they were occupied. Between 9 and 13 April 1944 the Americans carried out systematic attacks on scores of such new locations, particularly on the ball-bearing factories. 'There is no means in the world,' observed Saur, 'to keep secrets with six million foreign workers in Germany.'¹

Yet the production miracle continued. In April Germany produced over two thousand fighters (2,021) for the first time, and in May 2,212. By September 1944 the climax would be reached with 3,375 fighters manufactured in one month. Obviously this would have been impossible had the ground not been prepared many months before by Milch and his staff; but it was Saur who effectively exploited these hidden reserves, and made the production possible in face of all-out air attack.²

Albert Speer was joint chairman of the Fighter Staff with Milch, but only in name; by late May he had not attended a single session.³ When, after the war, Speer allowed his interrogators to see in him the architect of this production recovery after Big Week, Milch commented in his diaries: 'Young Speer does

not seem to have been so much in the picture after all. That I was the one who first thought of a Fighter Staff, that he went on leave during March, April and May so that the whole burden fell on me, these things are not mentioned. Nor that its setting up was not primarily because of the air raids, but because of Herr Saur's swindling of air force production.⁴ Speer had in fact left Germany for the Tyrol, and had settled on a mountainside high above Merano; he referred to his absence as a convalescence, but to the hard-working Milch it was an unnecessarily extended leave. To Göring it was an unexpected opportunity to floor a rival and recoup his lost position in Hitler's favour.

Once, the Führer had incautiously hinted that Speer was a suitable candidate from the younger generation to succeed him, and this obvious high regard had earned Speer the abiding enmity of both Bormann and Göring.⁵ Göring exploited Speer's absence to introduce to the Führer the quiet-spoken head of the Todt organization, Xaver Dorsch, as being greatly superior to Speer as a construction overlord. Göring's most powerful ammunition was his allegation that Speer had patently neglected the Führer's six-month-old order, issued in October, for the construction of colossal bomb-proof factories.⁶ At that time Speer had shown Hitler Dorsch's proposals for artificial caves constructed by laying a mighty slab of concrete on the ground, and excavating the gravel beneath it. Dorsch had also designed a bomb-proof aircraft factory to be built this way.⁷ The obstacle was that Speer's organization alone was responsible for construction within the Reich; Dorsch could build only in the occupied territories.

Speer opposed such large projects for quite definite reasons: they would be too costly, too late and in themselves they would set back production by four or five months.⁸ But he had agreed none the less in October to build at least two such factories.⁹ Seven months later, no such factory had even been begun. When the Air Ministry investigated projects of its own for protecting its vital factories, particularly the BMW aero-engine factory at Allach, the Speer ministry had refused to assist in any way.¹⁰ And when the Luftwaffe then found a suitable autobahn tunnel in which to install part of the Me 262 jet-fighter production, Speer tried to requisition it for ball-bearing production instead, causing Göring angrily to remind him: 'You will recall that the Führer has ordered you to build two big bomb-proof fighter factories.'¹¹

Milch also felt that the German economy could not support such huge construction projects. On 6 April he and Saur persuaded Hitler to agree to only one such factory, since the rest of the floor space could be found in an extension of Himmler's underground 'Central Works' tunnel complex at Nordhausen, where the A4 rocket was already being manufactured.¹² This extension would be allocated to the assembly of a thousand Messerschmitt jet fighters a month and the manufacture of the Junkers jet engine and all its components.¹³ Milch afterward told Göring that the Fighter Staff's intention was for Junkers, and not Messerschmitt, to control the Me 262 production line; when the whole complex was finished it would also house an assembly line for a further two thousand piston-engined fighters and their engines.¹⁴ By late April, however, no decision had been reached on either the site or the shape of the above-ground bomb-proof factory. This was the position when Hitler intervened.

Hitherto, Hitler had shown little interest in the defence of the Reich's cities. When foreign visitors pressed him for his views on the harrowing scenes they had witnessed, Hitler replied coldly that experience showed that a man who had lost everything made a truly 'fanatical warrior'; and he would remind his questioners of how many times in the last centuries entire German cities had been gutted by fire, only to arise anew.¹⁵ But he did recognize the need to defend his armaments factories. Alarmed at last by the growing weight and accuracy of the Allied offensive, he impatiently rejected a navy suggestion that manpower be temporarily diverted from the air industry for repairs to a factory involved in submarine construction. 'I also need assault guns and tanks desperately; but nevertheless, I have to have an umbrella of fighter aircraft over the Reich. That is the alpha and omega of it.'¹⁶ When he criticized the inexplicable delay in the construction of the bomb-proof factories he had ordered in October, Dorsch advised him that his Todt organization could build only in the occupied territories; so the factories were Speer's province. Hitler replied that he would brook no further delays — he had had enough of this bureaucracy. He ordered him to take over the work immediately.¹⁷ It was a slap in the face for Speer, and Göring welcomed it.¹⁸

Dorsch had his six-month-old blueprints flown down from Berlin for

Hitler to see. Hitler now asked for ten mushroom-like bomb-proof hangars to be built on selected airfields as well.¹⁹ The Reichsmarschall, impressed by the engineer's unassuming manner, impulsively promised to place the entire Luftwaffe construction department at his disposal. Hitler again stressed to Göring the need for the bomb-proof factories, and explained, 'I could never put everything underground — that would take years. My highest priority is to put up a fighter umbrella over everything I cannot accommodate underground, and that means an actual front line of two thousand fighters to defend the Reich.'²⁰ This was the gospel that Milch had been preaching to deaf ears since the beginning of the Allied air offensive. Hitler ordered Göring to summon all the Fighter Staff and Todt organization officials — but not Speer — to a conference immediately.²¹

Milch was among those ordered to the Obersalzberg; he had not seen Göring for six weeks. A remarkable confrontation between them preceded the main conference.²² Göring picked over all the old familiar bones of contention between them, and added Milch's behaviour at Insterburg. He even repeated word for word what the field marshal had told him of his post-Stalingrad audience with Hitler — how Milch had recommended the replacement of Göring as commander-in-chief — and quoted to the field marshal a number of insults he had uttered against him in telephone conversations. Milch recognized that his telephone had been tapped. He gleaned a possible clue to Göring's rancour when he talked with the Chief of Air Staff that evening: Korten said that General Zeitzler was asking for Milch to command an airlift for the beleaguered troops at Sebastopol — the same kind of mission as he had had at Stalingrad. How many festering recollections this must suddenly have stirred up in Göring's bruised memory!

The main conference began early on 19 April. Göring announced that the Führer had decided that Dorsch should construct the bomb-proof factories and hangars, since Speer was unreliable. At least one of the factories was to accommodate a monthly production of five hundred fighters, 'and the Führer particularly wants it for the jet fighter Me 262'.²³ Milch and Saur reminded him that the jet fighter was to be assembled in the Central Works complex. Göring said that in that case the Tank 152 (a beautiful fighter to be powered by either

the DB 603 or the Jumo 213 engine, with exceptional high-altitude performance) could go into the bomb-proof factory. Previously Hitler had objected to three-shift factory schedules since this would triple the production loss if such factories were destroyed, but with the bomb-proof factories he had no such objections — he wanted to see the maximum possible concentration of manpower and machinery in the space. Göring again lamented that he had asked for all this once eight months before: ‘All this could have been ready long ago.’

Before they left, Göring briefly mentioned the danger that the Allies would attack the synthetic fuel refineries. ‘I have heard that the enemy is not attacking them as they want to keep them for themselves after the war. They believe it will be enough to destroy our aircraft.’²⁴ That same day, on the far side of the North Sea, the American Eighth Air Force commander, General Spaatz, was given permission to divert the bombing offensive to these refineries; but it was to be mid-May before this offensive, which had been Milch’s constant dread these last twelve months, became a reality.²⁵

At the Obersalzberg the Chief of Air Staff General Korten left Milch in no doubt of his inability to work much longer with Göring, and he quoted a telling aside by the latter to the effect that Speer too was ‘already finished’. Speer also considered his usefulness at an end. Hearing of Göring’s latest dealings, he wrote to Hitler from Merano warning of the folly of starting still further giant construction works, and regretting the dubious role he considered the ‘illoyal’ Dorsch to have played. He threatened to resign if his views were not accepted.²⁶ Hitler was evidently minded to let him go, and Saur certainly did not defend his absent minister.

After inspecting a big display of the new German armour at Klessheim Castle with Hitler on the twentieth, Milch asked if he might speak to him alone on Speer’s behalf. He argued that Hitler would be losing his best lieutenant in Speer, and one whom he could not well replace, through the intrigues of far lesser men.²⁷ Together they stood staring through a window at the tanks and guns displayed on the terraces below; Hitler began drumming his fingers absently on the glass. Milch asked Hitler for some word of comfort for Speer, to restore their former basis of mutual confidence. At first Hitler would not an-

swer. Milch repeated the request. '*Jawohl, gut!*' answered Hitler curtly. 'Tell Speer from me that I am very fond of him. Is that enough?'²⁸ Milch drove at once to Merano and performed his last great service for the war effort, restoring Speer to his previous favoured position with Hitler.

The Armaments Minister returned to Berlin early in May. Gradually control of the air industry was moving into his hands. Milch did not consider he had failed in any way — far from it. The RAF now hardly ventured into German skies by night, while by day the American bombers were wastefully committed to attacking the flying-bomb sites in France; both air forces had also begun attacking the French transport system, prior to the launching of the invasion. When shown a map of the railway sites selected for attack, Milch commented: 'They are attacking all the approach roads for this entire area. Here is the area they are trying to cut off — from here to there . . . You can see from the density of the bombing that here is his *Schwerpunkt*.' He pointed at Normandy. He suggested sending the map to the High Command immediately.²⁹

Within a few months, he hoped, they would be producing hundreds of Me 262 jet fighters to confront the American bomber formations. A new Fighter Staff production programme, '226', was being drawn up far in excess of programmes the Speer ministry had previously dismissed as unrealistic.³⁰ But the studies for the new programme aroused the open hostility of the Air Staff, on account of its meagre bomber production figures. In February, March and April the industry had manufactured 567, 605 and 680 bombers, respectively. Study '1026', on which the new programme was based, foresaw a production of about 550 bombers a month, which would sustain forty squadrons (*Gruppen*), so the other eleven squadrons would have to be dissolved; but a further study, '1027', anticipated production of only 284 bombers a month to allow for expanded fighter production, and this would suffice for only twenty-six bomber squadrons from 1 October 1944. General Korten saw this as the death of the bomber arm.³¹ Milch's argument that with the opening of the flying-bomb campaign against Britain a number of manned bomber squadrons would become superfluous anyway, was not accepted.

General Karl Koller, Korten's able deputy, prepared a lengthy memorandum highlighting the jeopardy their bomber arm was in, and suggested that all

aircraft production should be concentrated within Speer's ministry, while Milch's remaining departments for development and research were regrouped under the Air Staff.³² Two weeks later he supported his suggestions with an explicit study on the bomber force needed to maintain the German position in Europe.*³³ These memoranda were submitted to Hitler.

No arms production could survive without air power to protect it, however, and no aircraft could fly without fuel or pilots. On 12 May the Americans initiated their attack on German oil production: the synthetic oil refineries at Leuna and Pöllitz were extensively damaged. At an emergency conference called by Hitler between Speer, Milch and Keitel on one side and the synthetic oil industry's experts on the other, the experts described in stark detail the position confronting Germany if the crippling American offensive continued.³⁴ Yet Hitler still hankered after a powerful bomber arm, and on the same day, 23 May, we find him discussing with Göring a vast future Luftwaffe with a front line of fourteen thousand aircraft supported by a monthly production of five or six thousand planes. He agreed with Göring that in the final analysis it was always the Luftwaffe which had turned the scales in his campaigns, and he dismissed the Fighter Staff's meagre planned bomber production as 'quite out of the question'.³⁵ His earlier exhortations on the need for a 'fighter umbrella' over the Reich were forgotten.

Thus opinion again strongly diverged. Milch recognized only one hope of defeating the crippling American daylight attacks, whether they be against oil, industry or transport — the Me 262 jet fighter. For this reason he had silently ignored the autumn 1943 ordinances to develop it primarily as a fighter-bomber, and had concentrated on the pure fighter version only. By May 1944 about twenty of the pilot series were nearing completion, and ten prototypes had already taken to the air, but three had crashed — two because their under-carriage had collapsed, and a third had spun into the ground on 19 May after its pilot had radioed that he 'did not feel well'.³⁶

* Milch did not receive it until the end of the month, when he filled its margins with caustic comments indicating where the *Air Staff* had committed its errors in the past.

These technical setbacks paled into insignificance compared with the disruption that a radical policy change concerning this aircraft now inflicted. On 23 May Göring summoned a conference on the Obersalzberg to discuss the Fighter Staff's programme 226; Milch, Speer and Saur were among the participants.³⁷ He advised them of the Führer's resumed interest in a strong bomber force, and reviewed the history of their production effort so far. In searching for the errors, intentional or otherwise, they had made since 1938, he concluded that 'they had gone completely wrong as far as bombers are concerned'. Thanks to Udet, they had concentrated earlier on the single-engined dive-bomber. (Mellowed by time, Göring now conceded: 'It will always be recognized as his greatest contribution that he created the weapon with which we achieved such magnificent victories.') This had encouraged them to proceed to twin-engined, and finally four-engined dive-bombers like the Junkers 88 and the Heinkel 177, while the Allies had methodically perfected the purely conventional heavy bombers like the Lancaster and Flying Fortress. The time had come to halt this process.

Göring recognized the need to promote the fighter arm initially to allow for any kind of armaments production under its umbrella. Echoing General Korten, he pointed out, 'But the thing is, that at present this is to be done at the expense of the bomber arm; and if this goes on the bomber arm will be finished, numerically if no other way!' He now aimed to restore the bomber force to a front line of at least 2,600 aircraft, based on a monthly output of eight or nine hundred bombers.³⁸ His recent conversations with Hitler had enlightened him as never before, he added: only the Heinkel with four separate engines (termed the He 277) had any future as a heavy bomber. Therefore the Führer had asked for this production to be brought forward, and planned at two hundred a month.³⁹ For the fighting in the west they would need the high-speed bombers like the Junkers 388 and the Do 335, and 'as interim fighter-bombers' the Ar 234 and the Me 262. As for the future, Professor Hertel's swept-wing Ju 287 jet bomber would restore German air superiority; this 530-mile-per-hour bomber would be produced at a rate of one hundred a month from December 1945.⁴⁰ The first three prototypes would be ready late in 1944.⁴¹

Milch objected to the description of the Me 262 as a fighter-bomber: like

the Ar 234 it could carry only five hundred kilos of bombs (about a thousand pounds) and it had not been designed for the purpose. He could not conceal from his listeners that 1944, like the year before, was to be a 'year of clenched teeth'. The time for optimism seemed to recede further and further into the future. As the conference broke up, Göring announced that Hitler wished to examine the details of the programme that afternoon.

Milch certainly did not suspect that the storm was now almost upon him. With Colonel Petersen, director of the research establishments, he now joined Göring and Speer in a large unheated room at Hitler's Berghof, with a large picture window overlooking the Alps.⁴² Hitler listened absently to the details of the Fighter Staff programme, apparently gazing out over the mountains, until the planning for the Me 262 jet fighter was mentioned. Here he interrupted, 'I thought the 262 was coming as a high-speed bomber. How many of the 262s already manufactured can carry bombs?' Milch told him: 'None, *mein Führer*. The Me 262 is being manufactured exclusively as a fighter aircraft.'⁴³ There was an awkward silence. Milch explained that the aircraft could not carry bombs without extensive design changes, and even then no more than five hundred kilos.*

Hitler lost his composure. He now realized that with the Allied invasion in France due any week, the wonder aircraft on which had rested a large part of his hopes of defeating it could not possibly come in time. He excitedly interrupted Milch, 'Never mind! I only wanted one 250-kilo bomb!' He demanded precise statistics on the loads carried by the fighter version — its armour plate, guns and ammunition. 'Who pays the slightest attention to the orders I give?' he exclaimed. 'I gave an unqualified order, and left nobody in any doubt that the aircraft was to be equipped as a fighter-*bomber*'.⁴⁴

Saur produced the load statistics and Hitler totted them up out loud. The total was far more than five hundred kilos. 'You don't need any guns,' he

* No note survives of Hitler's conference, but the language used there was quoted during the 'post-mortem' discussions on it with Göring over the next two days, and these were recorded in shorthand transcripts.

pointed out. ‘The plane is so fast it doesn’t need any armour plate either. You can take it all out.’ Turning to Petersen he asked if this was not so. Petersen, overawed, nodded and replied: ‘It can be done without any difficulty!’ (Göring rebuked him next day: ‘*Jawohl*, Petersen — you can look it up for yourself in the transcript!’) Milch, dismayed at this turn of events, urged Hitler to hear the others, but nobody else spoke out. General Korten stayed silent, and Galland was so badly savaged by the Führer after barely a dozen words that he lapsed into silence too. In desperation the field marshal appealed to Hitler to think again, but he was subjected to a torrent of abuse; and before he could control himself he shouted back, ‘*Mein Führer*, the smallest infant can see that this is a fighter, not a bomber aircraft!’⁴⁵

Hitler turned away from him, and refused to address himself to Milch for the rest of the discussion. The man sitting on Petersen’s left whispered one word to describe what they had seen: ‘*Aufschlagbrand!* — crashed in flames!’ Milch’s days of office were evidently numbered, and the number did not exceed two figures.

Speer told Göring afterward that the Luftwaffe had not made clear enough to the Führer the problems still besetting the Me 262.⁴⁶ But the basic objection to a bomber version was that the jet fighter carried its six hundred kilos of armour plate and armament *forward* of the centre of gravity; these could not be taken out without redistributing the aircraft’s loading, which might even mean altering the position of the wings. The first hundred Me 262s and the parts already manufactured for the rest were nearly all for the pure fighter version. There could be no basic design change for the next five months. Told of this on the morning after the Führer conference, Göring raged, ‘You gentlemen appear to be stone deaf, the lot of you! I have referred again and again to the Führer’s order: he doesn’t care two hoots about getting the Me 262 as a fighter but wants it only as a fighter-bomber.’ He himself had insisted on this long before Insterburg in November.⁴⁷

‘The Führer must have the strangest impression of you. From every side, including Messerschmitt, he was left in doubt about this, right from the start. And then, in my presence [at Insterburg], Messerschmitt told the Führer that

his company had provided right from the start for it to be manufactured as a fighter-bomber. And now suddenly it is impossible!⁴⁸ When Colonel Petersen enlarged on the structural and engine problems the jet aircraft had run into, Göring unhappily replied: 'I would have been grateful had you uttered ten percent of these remarks yesterday! The Führer says, "As far as I am concerned you can cremate the fighters!" He needs an aircraft which can force its way through by virtue of its sheer speed, despite the enormous mass of fighters guarding the invasion forces. What no civilian dares to do — simply ignoring superior orders — you gentlemen venture time after time after time.'⁴⁹

Milch could see everything he had built up being destroyed. True, Göring had now spoken in terms of a standing force of three thousand fighters for the Reich defence, encouraged by Saur's estimate that he would produce a thousand fighters in the next week alone. (Milch sarcastically entered in his diary, 'Göring discovers the defence of the Reich!'⁵⁰) But where would the crews now come from? With the modification of the Me 262 to fighter-bomber, Milch considered the war finally lost. He felt bitter at the lack of support during the Führer's conference. Even Galland had acquiesced in the dreadful decision although he knew that the Me 262 was their only hope of finally exorcizing the Mosquito menace. (Galland once said, 'For the Mosquito there is no escape once a 262 has sighted it.'⁵¹)

Milch privately appealed to Göring to make one last attempt to change Hitler's mind. Then he returned to Berlin, resolved to swim against the tide no longer.

Speer now prepared to take over Milch's aircraft production. On Friday, 26 May 1944 he attended his first Fighter Staff meeting, at the Air Ministry. It was the familiar Emperor Speer: he expressed himself well pleased with Saur's achievements in his absence. His staff chronicler recorded: 'The individual members of the Fighter Staff were introduced to him and he was apprised of their efforts so far and the current status of the various campaigns. Through the minister's illness, the Fighter Staff, which he established, has become too entrenched in the Air Ministry. The minister gathers the reins into his own

hands. Milch greeted him in tones of the warm comradeship which has united both men to the benefit of all armaments production.⁵²

Milch recognized that the end of his long road was in sight. Over the next few days Göring called further conferences, and Milch was not invited. On 27 May Göring did indeed advise Hitler that Colonel Petersen now withdrew his assurance that the Me 262 was suited to carry bombs. ('I told the Führer you did not mean it,' Göring afterward told the colonel. 'But it's no good! It's written down in the transcript!'⁵³) Hitler repeated that none of his orders had been carried out. He himself was satisfied that a jet bomber could be built, capable of attacking area targets from an altitude of a few thousand feet. As targets he had been thinking of any troop embarkation movements on the other side of the English Channel, or the disembarking mass of tanks and troops swarming round the landing beaches.

In fact, Hitler had strong doubts whether the Me 262 fighter version would really be of any use against the Allied fighters, which alone were the guarantee of enemy air supremacy. He believed the jets would find it tactically difficult to engage the far slower but more agile piston-engined Mustangs and Thunderbolts; the enemy would only have to curve and the jet would overshoot him. (This fear was to prove well-founded. In combat the Me 262 fighter's chief success was to force the American long-range escort fighters to jettison their fuel tanks, which obliged them to turn back early; actual combat victories by the jet fighters were disappointingly few.⁵⁴) Göring pledged that every man working on the aircraft would now honourably try to achieve what Hitler ordered. On 27 May he telegraphed Milch emphatically: 'The Führer has ordered that the Me 262 aircraft is to enter service exclusively as a high-speed bomber. The aircraft is not to be regarded as a fighter until further notice.'⁵⁵

At a conference summoned by Göring two days later, 'to clarify things once and for all', Professor Messerschmitt and even Petersen blamed the absent Milch for the 'misunderstandings' which had arisen. Göring announced that he was transferring the project from Galland's office to that of the General of Bombers, 'to avoid further errors'.⁵⁶ When Petersen admitted that the jet engine had a tendency to 'flame out' above twenty-eight thousand feet if throttled back to reduce speed, Göring triumphed, 'Then I can only say, the Führer was

right again, with his brilliant and instinctive touch!'⁵⁷ And when Professor Messerschmitt began to explain how, after releasing its bomb, the Me 262 was just like a fighter again, Göring anxiously interrupted, 'Not like "*a fighter*" again, but "*super fast*" again. Stop calling it a "*fighter*"!'⁵⁸ That evening Colonel Petersen brought Milch the news that Göring was going to transfer air armament in its entirety to Saur.

To have resisted the Armaments Ministry's overtures would have harmed the Reich. Milch did not resist. He stayed at his lakeside hunting lodge for many weeks, returning to Berlin only to sign important papers. He travelled for one day with the Fighter Staff to Hungary for the signing of the state agreement on joint aircraft production, but otherwise he slipped out of active life.⁵⁹

When Göring complained half-heartedly to Hitler that the present huge upswing in aircraft production proved how greatly the Speer ministry had obstructed them in the past, Speer replied that the increase had been attained solely by exploiting the Luftwaffe's own reserves.*⁶⁰

The Reichsmarschall's reputation was approaching its lowest ebb. A week earlier German oil production had again been heavily attacked. When on 6 June the Allied invasion of France began, the Luftwaffe was able to fly only 319 sorties against the 14,700 flown by the British and American air forces that day. On the seventh the Führer ordered Saur to hasten production of the Do 335 high-speed bomber and the Me 262 bomber version.⁶¹ (In Central Planning that afternoon, Milch burst out, 'We are not on the offensive, but on the defensive! This is going to have to be recognized!'⁶²) So low had Göring's star sunk that during a war conference Hitler caustically asked him whether, in view of the lack of air victories during the Allied invasion operations, it was true that the Luftwaffe had taken out a 'knock-for-knock' insurance policy with the enemy?⁶³

A greater fiasco was to follow. On the night of 12 June the flying-bomb

* Speer seems to contradict this in a speech at the Flick Building on 9 June 1944: 'Since February we have on the quiet brought in capacities from the armament and Panzer industries into the aircraft industry. This is the reason, in my opinion, for the speedy success of the Fighter Staff.'

attack was opened against London, two days prematurely. The struggling catapult crews managed to launch only ten bombs, of which four immediately crashed. Of the remaining six, two were never seen again, one destroyed a railway bridge in London, and the other three impacted elsewhere. It was an inauspicious start to a campaign in which Milch had vested such high hopes.⁶⁴ The flying-bomb regiment explained that as the High Command had advanced the planned zero-hour by two days, the methodical timetable for the final installation of the heavy prefabricated catapult rigs had been thrown out of joint.⁶⁵ Göring anxiously reminded Hitler that Milch was the author of this unspectacular weapon.

Two days later the offensive was resumed. In the first night 244 flying-bombs were launched, and German reconnaissance aircraft reported that fires were sweeping the British capital.⁶⁶ Göring retracted his earlier statement on the authorship of the flying-bomb idea, but on 17 June Hitler telephoned Milch from France and congratulated him on the weapon: 'It has exceeded our wildest expectations!'⁶⁷ By next day five hundred had been launched, and by the twenty-second one thousand. During the next three months this weapon (which had cost £12 million) inflicted over £47 million in damage — in terms of cost effectiveness a clear vindication of all Milch's strategy since mid-1942.⁶⁸

Three days after Hitler's telephone call, Göring told Milch that all military arms production was to be consolidated under Speer, which would mean Milch's resignation as Director of Air Armament; this was confirmed by Hitler soon after. In Hitler's presence, Göring added that Milch was also to resign as state secretary, but in order to keep their dispute private he would prefer Milch to remain as Inspector General.⁶⁹

Speer invited him to accept the post of 'deputy minister' in the Armaments Ministry; Milch saw this as a token of his friend's clouded conscience. 'Speer,' he noted, 'has persuaded the Führer to make the change. Göring did not dare to refuse and Speer has a guilty conscience toward me. He asks if I am happy with the arrangement. My reply is that he ought to be able to judge that for himself.'⁷⁰ The full extent of the change cannot at first have been appreciated by Milch. He wrote in his diary: 'I transfer with air armament production

to Speer and remain Inspector General of Luftwaffe.* It soon became clear, however, that Saur was to manage the industry. At some indeterminate date Milch sadly modified the diary entry to read, 'I go! Air armament transferred to Speer, I remain Inspector General of the Luftwaffe.'

Speer circularized the government authorities about Milch's new appointment as deputy Armament Minister, but he also made it brutally clear that his own departmental heads' right to see him and act in his name was not affected in any way by this.⁷² When Hitler addressed an arms convention at Linz on 26 June, he praised Speer and Saur for the miracle they had achieved, 'together with their colleague, Field Marshal Milch'.⁷³ But within a month he had forgotten whatever role Milch had ever played, and explaining to Mussolini why he had taken all arms production out of the hands of 'the military', he said: 'Thus fighter aircraft production, which under military direction reached only eleven hundred a month, was increased to twenty-six hundred after just four months and then to three thousand, and is going to reach five thousand.'⁷⁴ That he himself had fought tooth and nail against increasing fighter production, and that any increase was impossible unless it had been planned and provided for at least nine months earlier (when 'the military' was still in control) was overlooked.

On the last day of June 1944 Milch confidentially explained, in a bitter farewell speech to his staff, why air armament had had to be abdicated to Speer's ministry. He conceded that the changes would lead to rumours and unrest, and that it was a remarkable decision to take in the fifth year of a war. 'But the decision has been recognized as the proper one, by everybody, including our superiors.' He emphasized that the reorganization was not a consequence of any failure by the Luftwaffe or the Office of Air Armament. It had become inevitable as a result of the air raids — it had been inevitable as the only means of overcoming the obstructionism of the Speer ministry. 'We did not have the construction capacity, we did not have the truck transport,' he reminded them.

* The British official historians of the strategic bombing offensive commented: 'Milch had not expected to be replaced by Saur, but to continue to manage the industry inside the Speer organization.'⁷¹

'Every request we expressed in these connections was turned down with a smirk by the offices concerned . . . Nor did we have any means of giving our workers the extra rations necessary for them to work a 72-hour week. So far as material allocations and parts supplies were concerned, we were treated like lepers.'

He recognized, he said, that ignorant outsiders would now claim: 'They fell down on their job. They failed!' He also recognized that his programme of industrial rationalization was still incomplete. 'I do not believe I have been an easy-going leader — I have had to use some rough language and some harsh methods. Nor am I sorry for having done so, however wrong I may occasionally have been.' He still believed in ultimate victory. But had Germany done what he had demanded for two years as Director of Air Armament, things would have been different today. He ordered the transcript of the speech to be destroyed except for one copy placed on his confidential file.⁷⁵ At a state funeral next day he saw Hitler briefly for the last time.

The doctrine Milch had always preached — the doctrine of massive reinforcement of the Reich's fighter defences — continued to attract support even after his abdication. This was small wonder, for on 20 June fifteen hundred American bombers, escorted by a thousand fighters, had again attacked the vital oil refineries. On the following day the same armada had attacked Berlin itself, releasing two thousand tons of bombs, and on the twenty-second the great Russian summer offensive had begun, supported by four thousand aeroplanes. On 25 June we find Hitler stressing the importance of checking the Allied air superiority, and asking how many extra fighters could be built if the planned two hundred Heinkel 177s per month were cancelled.⁷⁶ Saur put the increase at a thousand a month. The next day the Führer emphasized: 'In our position all that matters is the manufacture of fighters and still more fighters! With high-speed bombers as well . . . We shall just have to put up with the long-term loss of a strategic air force that that will entail.'⁷⁷ Surely this was the familiar heresy which had resulted in Milch's abdication? But Hitler repeated it on the twenty-seventh and again on the twenty-ninth, after which Göring issued to his staff the extraordinary command that 'all production of bombers, torpedo bombers and the like, and all training for such aircraft, is to cease forthwith'.⁷⁸ He stonily

overruled General Koller's protests, proclaiming: 'It is the Führer's will that only fighter aircraft are to be manufactured from henceforth.' Now that Milch had gone, extreme chaos was overtaking the air industry's long-term planning.

On 20 July 1944 cruel destiny robbed the Luftwaffe of its Chief of Staff, General Korten, standing a few paces from Hitler as an assassin's bomb exploded. Milch heard of the murder attempt and providently wrote in his diary: 'Midday: attempted assassination of the Führer. Thank God, miscarried.' He cabled Hitler, '*Mein Führer!* I beg to express my heartfelt joy that a merciful Providence has shielded you from this base murder attempt and preserved you for the German people and its Wehrmacht. May God continue to protect you and grant you the total victory you deserve.' He signed himself, 'Your loyal Erhard Milch, Field Marshal.'⁷⁹ Perhaps these sentiments were sheer opportunism. But he maintained his contempt for the murderers of one of his best friends even when a more temperate attitude might have benefited him. When a Nuremberg interrogator put it to him that the assassination of a tyrant was in obedience to God's Will, Milch replied, 'There was no plaque on the Reich Chancery saying, "I am a tyrant".' And when a prosecutor confused the date of his dismissal, Milch pounded the witness-box and shouted, 'Will you please note it was 20 June, not 20 July! I attach great importance to not being associated with those vermin!'⁸⁰

After the murder attempt Göring developed a throat infection and withdrew from headquarters for over a month. Hitler proposed the very experienced General von Greim as Korten's successor, but on 24 July Göring selected a more harmless alternative, Lieutenant-General Werner Kreipe. He later told Kreipe of the qualms he had had: 'I hesitated at first to appoint you my chief of staff, since you — like your two predecessors — were Milch's staff officer.' And he referred to Milch in terms of extreme coarseness.⁸¹ Korten's own deputy, General Koller (a former NCO who had actually been Kreipe's *superior* in the Third Air Force) was passed over.⁸² Koller attributed this slight to Göring's technical officer Diesing: 'After all, as the new Chief of Technical Air Armament Diesing will be subordinate to the Chief of Air Staff. He must have leant over backward to thwart my promotion. He knows full well I emphatically advised

Korten against having him as Chief of Technical Air Armament . . . I consider him the most two-faced and deceitful officer in the entire air force. Korten was of the same view, as were Milch, Speer and many others.⁸³

When the order for the transfer of the Office of Air Armament to Diesing as of 1 August was complete, Colonel Aldinger, the ministry's organization officer, had the thankless task of showing it to Milch. 'I know why you are here,' said Milch, 'and I know you are not to blame for this scrap of paper.' Aldinger knew few men who would have displayed such self-restraint and sovereign good temper at such a moment.⁸⁴

In Göring's absence, Hitler occupied every war conference with recriminations against the Luftwaffe. In vain Koller pointed to the planning errors from 1939 to 1942 as the cause; the Führer extended the failure to more recent years.⁸⁵ When Kreipe reported to Hitler for the first time on 11 August, Hitler lectured him at length on the failure of Göring's technical advisers, by whom he meant Udet, Jeschonnek and now Milch, and on the manner they had deceived him with 'over-hasty promises'. It was Kreipe's job to ensure that in future 'clarity and honesty' reigned within the Luftwaffe.⁸⁶

Over the next few weeks the scales fell from Kreipe's eyes. Hitler relentlessly demanded the transfer of the fighter squadrons from the Reich to France. Milch privately reminded Kreipe of the urgency of devoting fighters to the defence of the remaining synthetic fuel refineries: each should have its own fighter squadron, given the sole duty of defending that refinery.⁸⁷ In time Kreipe learned the history of the Führer's order forbidding the use of the Me 262 as a fighter: 'Galland tells me of the Insterburg display which led to Milch's downfall,' he noted. 'This has set back the Me 262 by nine months.'⁸⁸ When Kreipe broached the subject of this order, Hitler interrupted him. 'In a growing temper he made short work of me,' Kreipe noted that day. 'Now I was stabbing him in the back as well! Irresponsible elements in the Luftwaffe like Milch and Galland had talked me into it!'⁸⁹ For some days Hitler weighed the possibility of abolishing the Luftwaffe altogether except for a jet aircraft force, relying otherwise solely on a tripled flak defence.⁹⁰ Eventually Göring forbade Kreipe to communicate with Milch in any way.

During these months Milch faded out of the war picture. With Speer he discussed an idea for operating manned V-1 flying-bombs against vital enemy targets; several hundred were actually manufactured, and about a hundred pilots for them trained, but they were never launched.⁹¹ Milch took his leave of the flying-bomb designers and engineers, and then of the ministry's staff. 'I was a broken man, as the further course of German history could no longer be in doubt.'⁹² He continued to attend Speer's staff conferences and accompany the minister on his journeys. In mid-August they watched the launching of one of the new Type xxI U-boats, and went on a submarine journey in the new Walther-type submarine U793. It was the last time Milch saw Danzig, with its memories of the pioneering days of aviation.⁹³

Late in September they toured paratroop and army units in the west. One afternoon, as they were all dozing — exhausted by early starts and long drives — in a field in Holland, they were awakened by the thunder of aero-engines. They looked up to see the American Eighth Air Force passing high overhead into Germany. Milch guessed they had seen a thousand bombers, glittering in the summer sunlight. One of Speer's officials counted 987, undisturbed by flak or fighters.⁹⁴

Thanks to the continued activities of General Galland, the Me 262 did in fact first go into service as a fighter aircraft. On 3 October 1944 an experimental squadron was established with forty Me 262s under Major Walter Nowotny. The Inspector of Day-Fighters personally supervised the first few days' operations and selected the best pilots from the piston-engined squadrons for them. The unit none the less had an inglorious existence. On the very first day four Me 262s took off from Achmer; two were destroyed within minutes by enemy fighters as they took off, and a third as it came in to land. Two more took off from Hesepe airfield and one was destroyed by fighters on landing. Between them they claimed three or four enemy bombers.⁹⁵

Numerous reports reached the Messerschmitt company of the pilots' 'inadequate leadership, poor training and frivolous attitude'; there had been no advance study of the proper fighter tactics and, although the unit was once grounded for ten days by bad weather, Nowotny took no action to train the

pilots. So severe was the shortage of fuel caused by the American destruction of the refineries that jet aircraft awaiting final flight tests at Obertraubling airfield had to be moved to dispersal areas by horses and oxen.⁹⁶ By 24 October Nowotny's unit had managed to fly only three missions. In November Nowotny himself was killed, and the unit was disbanded, having destroyed about twenty-six enemy aircraft.

By late October about 265 Me 262 aircraft had been manufactured, of which thirty had been destroyed in attacks on the Messerschmitt works; production in November was expected to be one hundred thirty, and in December two hundred. The first bomber unit to operate the Me 262 was KG 51, and by the autumn eight more former bomber units were being converted to the aircraft. Further Me 262 fighter squadrons were also established, including aircraft fitted with racks of a dozen R4M air-to-air rockets under each wing; but the aircraft had come too late, and there had been inadequate attention to the proper tactics and targets for such advanced aircraft, so the real threat never materialized in the way the Allies had feared.

On the way back from the battlefields of Arnhem on 1 October 1944 — he and Speer had stayed to watch a before-dawn German counter-attack — Field Marshal Milch's driver skidded at high speed, the car hit a tree and swerved into a ditch. Milch broke the steering column over his long-suffering back, and recovered consciousness only in hospital.⁹⁷ With crushed ribs and increasing lung complications, he lay immobilized at his hunting lodge until early 1945, as the war approached its end. On one October day the RAF released nine thousand tons of bombs on a single German town, the final proof of their complete air superiority.

Uninvited, Milch appeared at Karinhall for the last time on Göring's birthday in January 1945. The Reichsmarschall was astounded and openly unpleasant.⁹⁸ Three days later Milch received a week-old letter from Göring dismissing him from his last office, that of Inspector General. The office would remain empty to the end.⁹⁹

Milch still remained in contact with affairs. Early in January one of Hitler's intimates told him that Stalin had offered a negotiated peace, but that Hit-

ler had refused to listen. Two weeks later the Soviet invasion of Silesia began.¹⁰⁰ Milch was advised to evacuate his family from the Althofdürr estate.¹⁰¹ Hitler evidently missed Milch's loyalty, because once he commented that it would probably have been far better if he had handed the Luftwaffe long before to the field marshal: 'Then perhaps Udet might still be alive now.'¹⁰² And when Speer suggested a Transport Staff under Milch to repair the internal transport system, on 1 March the Führer expressed his agreement to the plan, only to change his mind within two weeks as other elements round him persuaded him of Milch's unsuitability.¹⁰³

In the privacy of Milch's home Speer informed him of Hitler's decrees for the destruction of Germany's industries before they fell into enemy hands, and of his fight against these orders.¹⁰⁴ Here too Speer drafted a wireless speech appealing to the German people to obstruct them. There was the usual birthday greeting from Hitler at the end of March. ('The Führer sends greetings, but not Göring and his vermin!' Milch entered in his diary.) When the Führer's air adjutant visited Milch two days later, he offered to return to the capital and fight in the ranks; perhaps he longed for a howitzer battery like the one he had commanded in 1914. Now Germany was being cut in two by the Allied armies, and Speer formally commissioned Milch to act for him in the northern half. Coming from Hitler's bunker on 21 April, he reported that the Führer had made a very fine impression on him, but not 'that dodger Göring'.¹⁰⁵ According to Milch's diary, he confidentially mentioned a few days later his plans for escaping to Greenland in an aircraft, or alternatively living in a small canoe on Germany's canals and waterways; two months after the war's end he would return 'to take over Germany's leadership'.¹⁰⁶ This was their last meeting for many months.

The headquarters of the High Command were evacuated to a hut in the forest not far from Milch's hunting lodge. Here Jodl told him Göring had cabled from Berchtesgaden announcing that he was taking over; the Führer had disagreed and ordered the Reichsmarschall's arrest. Speer chuckled on the telephone to Milch, 'Göring has committed a tiny *Dummheit!*'¹⁰⁷ Two days later, at 2.30 A.M. on the twenty-sixth, Milch left his hunting lodge for the last time, heading for northern Germany by car. He met both German and Russian tanks

along the road, but he drove without headlights and was not stopped.

Hitler's suicide left Milch less perplexed than his appointment of Admiral Dönitz instead of Göring or Speer to succeed him. Milch refused to be traded from one slavemaster to the next 'as in the most reactionary Middle Ages', and declined Speer's invitation to join the admiral at Flensburg. Instead he waited for events to overtake him in Sierhagen Castle near Neustadt on the Baltic coast.

P A R T V I I

JUDGEMENT AT NUREMBERG



'Was ist gut? fragt Ihr. Tapfer sein ist gut.'

Nietzsche: *Also sprach Zarathustra*
(Tenth Speech)

C H A P T E R 2 3

IN ALLIED HANDS

May 1945–November 1946

AT THE CASTLE Milch put on his full-dress uniform with interim baton and braid and the rows of medals he had won in two world wars, and awaited capture. At midday on 4 May two British gunners appeared at his lunch table. They disarmed him and drove him off to a nearby village where a Royal Artillery unit had set up headquarters; he was handed a cigarette and driven off by a major toward Neustadt. The gunners returned meanwhile to Sierhagen and looted his valuables; in their mess that evening they displayed two of Milch's gold watches, his gold field marshal's baton and an inscribed gold cigarette case given to him by Göring in happier days in 1936.¹

British troops had witnessed some grim scenes of Nazi brutality in northern Germany, but few grimmer than here at Neustadt. It had been entered by Royal Marine commandos the day before. Three German transport ships had been sunk offshore by Allied fighter-bombers and hundreds of the drowned passengers and refugees were drifting in the bay as the commandos arrived.² The British had taken over the former submarine school at Neustadt, now being used as a transit depot for prisoners. The town's marketplace was crowded with tanks and armoured cars as the Mercedes carrying Milch into captivity arrived. He was handed over to a squad of commandos and put under guard in a restaurant being used as their headquarters. Moments later a commando strode in. He stopped in front of Milch, rounded on the field marshal and shouted that

all the generals were criminals — they were guilty of the concentration camp atrocities. Milch pointed out that he was in the German air force, but the commando was not satisfied by this explanation. He suddenly tore the field marshal's baton from his hands and began raining blows on the back of Milch's skull until the heavy wooden baton snapped. Milch staggered and fell to the ground, shouting, 'I am an officer — a field marshal!'³

Milch was then marched into the local submarine school and forced to contemplate the infernal scene the commandos had found there. The officers shouted to the surviving prisoners, 'This is your field marshal — you owe it all to him!' Milch had become hardened to horrifying sights after air raids on Berlin and other cities, but even he was sickened. In his diary, he wrote: 'It was an abominable spectacle — dead, diseased camp inmates, dressed in naval uniforms, lying about in the open air and in the exercise sheds.' Later that day he was turned over to a Scottish regiment at Lübeck, where he was given a proper meal and even some cigars before he was transferred to a prisoner-of-war cage at Lüneburg to await shipment to Britain.

Here his relatives were allowed to visit him. On his mother's farewell visit she mentioned the rumours that he had been mishandled by the commandos — his head still bore the untreated scars — and as he gave her his hand to say goodbye he felt something cold and hard pressed into it. His mother said quietly, 'If they ill-treat you again, or torture you, use this.' It was a small screw-capped phial of cyanide. This seemed the supreme act any mother could perform for her own son.

On 18 May 1945 Milch was flown to England, his mother's cyanide capsule still concealed about him. As his plane crossed southern England and landed at Croydon he was surprised at the general lack of bomb damage. An Air Ministry officer drove him through London and out toward Oxford; after twenty miles the car halted outside a white house in wooded parkland, the first of several interrogation centres. Here he was to live for some days while his interrogators courteously attempted to persuade him to accept Germany's sole guilt for the war and to give evidence incriminating his brother officers.

The most important such centre was that at Latimer, a 'Combined Serv-

ices Detailed Interrogation Centre' (CSDIC) to which Milch was transferred at the end of May.* He found General Koller, General Schmid (the former chief of air intelligence) and many other former colleagues there. The prisoners were told that they were there to write expert studies on their experiences, but it was the microphones hidden in the communal and private rooms — and even among the trees along the woodland paths — that made the top secret CSDIC reports so rewarding. Milch suspected this and wrote in his diary on the first day there: 'They opened a door into a small room, and I found myself confronted by the astonished gaze of General Galland . . . We had much to tell each other, and this was no doubt the ulterior motive, for one could take it that there was a highly sensitive listening device in there.'

Milch was to spend a record four months at this centre, interrogated almost every day by British and American officers known only by their pseudonyms. The American Major Emery (or 'Evans', as he introduced himself to Göring, who was being held on the Continent) was an air force officer whose real name was Ernst Englander. The interrogations were of a military nature, unassociated with the war crimes trials proceeding elsewhere. Milch's assertion† that the American daylight attacks on transport and oil plants had defeated Germany was an evident embarrassment to the British interrogators. 'I think they are annoyed at me for speaking this obvious truth,' recorded Milch. 'Again and again I have been interrogated on this point. I can only repeat, the British inflicted grievous and bloody injuries on us — but the Americans shot us in the heart.'⁴

Englander found the best approach was by 'getting reasonably chummy with the prisoners', as he wrote a few months later.⁵ He had already interrogated Göring at some length at Augsburg and confided to Milch, 'Göring is such a liar that he cannot tell when he's lying himself now.'⁶ From the field marshal's reactions and the transcripts of his private conversations in the inter-

* The commandant of the CSDIC at Wilton Park, L. St Clare Grondona, has described his own experiences in an article in the Royal United Services Institution's *Journal* (December 1970), but he was not permitted to disclose the use of hidden microphones.

† For example, in his (recorded) conversation with Englander on 3 June 1945, in CSDIC (UK) report SRGG 1313 (C).

rogation centre it was obvious that there had been no love lost between him and the Reichsmarschall. A year later Englander was to write, ‘Göring and Milch hated each other, and we have it in their own words — there can’t be any question about that.’

He furnished Milch with increasingly unpleasant details about the Reichsmarschall: the man was once more a drug addict and had the gall to refer contemptuously to Milch as ‘that fat little man’. But somehow Milch was sure that, in general, Göring would have to speak well of him and his other colleagues, if only to ensure that he was covered by them in turn.⁷ ‘Göring is going to cost Germany dear even now,’ Milch suspected in private. ‘How the Germans clung to him until almost the last moment — how they trusted him!’ But during these weeks Göring for his part resolved to make his final public appearance a last great act on Germany’s behalf. He was not afraid of death. ‘My philosophy is that if the time has come, the time has come,’ he told his defence counsel. ‘Accept responsibility and go down with guns firing and colours flying! It’s the defence of Germany that is at stake in this trial — not just the handful of us defendants who are for the high jump anyway.’⁸ Many months before, in November 1944, Göring had already proclaimed to his generals: ‘To stay alive at any price has always been the philosophy of the coward.’*

From a cell in an English prison camp the scene was not the same. Milch sat in his cell and watched as Germany began to pay for the war: divided, dishonoured and starving, the ordinary people were bearing the brunt of the defeat. General Stumpff arrived, bringing ugly news of the pillaging and looting in the Russian zone. There were also rumours that the Americans had reopened the former SS concentration camps like that at Dachau.

After the Potsdam conference the future looked even bleaker for the Nazi prisoners. On 10 August Milch read in *The Times* of the Four-Power pronouncement that the first major trial of war criminals was to take place at Nur-

* Personal papers of General Koller. The quotation is from a Göring speech to the Air Staff. He continued, ‘Besides, the life in this world is by no means so sublime that I am not willing to pass on with great wonderment and curiosity to find out what it is like in the next.’

emberg, with Göring among the first defendants. But on the same day an American officer whom he tentatively approached to assist him in his defence should he also be brought to trial reassured him that the prisoners brought to Britain were not considered to come into the category of war criminals. None the less word soon reached him that he might be shipped to Nuremberg as a witness. He wrote in his diary, 'The Lord preserve me from such a fate!'

The more he heard about his former boss Hermann Göring the more he inwardly raged against him. He obtained evidence of the corruption which seemed to have flowered within the Luftwaffe. He met one Heinkel director in captivity who had himself signed a cheque for forty thousand Reichsmarks for a senior test pilot to persuade him to report favourably on the ill-conceived Heinkel 177 prototypes.¹⁰ Göring seemed to have been financially involved in many aircraft companies. 'Late in the afternoon Fritz Siebel joined us. He didn't want to talk about Göring. When I asked about the latter's rake-off from his aircraft factory, he suddenly went red!'¹¹ And again,

General Kreipe came back on to the theme of the aluminium plants in Norway, which I had opposed both verbally and in writing. To-day I am beginning to suspect that Göring was getting his cut from these as well, like Koppenberg and friends. After all, one and a half billion marks were invested for a return of nil point nil. We never got as much aluminium out of Norway during the war as the existing factories had produced there in peacetime . . . The crook's proper place is before a German court martial!¹²

Toward the end of August 1945 Milch was flown back to southern Germany in a Flying Fortress. Quite informally, he had thus been transferred from British to American custody, a technicality which was to cause some anxious moments for the Allies when sentence came to be passed on him. He was imprisoned in the Air Interrogation Centre at Kaufbeuren, a former lunatic asylum where Nazi doctors had been engaged in liquidating the mentally handicapped patients for some years. Milch had no idea what was wanted of him until late in September, when the uncertainty began to clear. On the twenty-third

Englander visited him, explaining that he was about to call on Albert Speer, who was a witness in the coming trial, and would Milch like to go to Nuremberg as a witness as well? The field marshal emphatically declined.¹³ Engander's invitation was evidently purely a formality, for on 12 October Milch was called for anyway by car and driven off to Nuremberg. At two o'clock that afternoon he was in the prison yard of the forbidding Palace of Justice, within the walls of Hitler's erstwhile capital of the Nazi movement, and meeting the prison commandant for the first time.

The Nuremberg trials have already exercised enough minds to make any discourse upon them here superfluous. Ironically, Milch had been brought to Nuremberg as a witness for the prosecution: news of his unconcealed hatred for Göring was no doubt the reason for his presence here. But in the prison's confines he suffered such indignities at the hands of the Americans, and heard such remarkable reports through the prison grapevine of the transformation his former commander-in-chief had undergone, that he resolved to *defend* the Reichsmarschall to the best of his ability. Besides, he met the ailing and elderly Field Marshal von Blomberg again and he was also speaking more favourably of Göring now; together with General Guderian (Hitler's former army chief of staff), Milch and Blomberg formed one of the factions in the witnesses' wing of the prison. A rival faction formed round the General Staff: Halder ('who refused my proffered hand'), von Falkenhorst ('servile as ever') and the younger von Brauchitsch belonged to it, as did General Warlimont, Jodl's deputy.¹⁴

Eleven days after the gates of Nuremberg Prison closed behind him, Milch was summoned before Major John J. Monigan, Jr, for his first interrogation.¹⁵ It began harmlessly, touching on Milch's official relations with Speer (who was in fact indicted among the defendants) and on the history of Central Planning. But after about an hour Monigan changed the subject. 'Leaving Central Planning for the moment — part of your duty in the Air Ministry was the development of new equipment, was it not?' Milch agreed that since 1941 this was so — 'technical developments like aeroplanes and so forth'. Monigan pressed him, 'What was the situation regarding the use of the pressure chamber in the development of aviation?' The field marshal gave a neutral answer, but

the major persisted, ‘Were you familiar with the experiments which were carried out with pressure chambers?’ Monigan now asked how Heinrich Himmler and the SS had become involved in the experiments and whether the Luftwaffe’s Surgeon-General Dr Hippke was involved. And had not Himmler approached Hippke about airmen who had parachuted into the sea, to ask if the Air Ministry would assist in low-temperature experiments on human beings?

Milch replied that Hippke had refused the SS overtures because such experiments were superfluous. ‘After all,’ he added, ‘we had enough experience — we had saved several hundred airmen who had been swimming in the Channel at very low temperatures. And we had several doctors who tried out these experiments on themselves until they lost consciousness, and so all the questions connected with this matter were perfectly clear to us.’ Monigan asked about a former Luftwaffe doctor who had been transferred to the SS: ‘The name was Rascher.’* Milch did not know him. The Americans then asked if he had seen a film of experiments on human beings and Milch replied, ‘I say again, on oath, that I never saw a film or anything that had any connection with people who were undergoing water-cooling.’

When he returned to his cell he could see ahead more clearly than for a long time. In his diary he mused, ‘I only knew that Hippke complained to me that the SS was now trying to work its way into this as well, and that he had rejected a proposal for a combined research project.’ Next day he was confronted with a letter signed by him in 1942 actually referring to Dr Rascher.¹⁶ It read: ‘Dear Herr Himmler, Many thanks for your letter of 25 August. I have read with great interest the report of Dr Rascher and Dr Romberg.† I have

* Dr Sigmund Rascher and his wife had conducted these experiments on concentration-camp prisoners at Dachau; both were shot by the SS in April 1945 for fraud. The background and medical value of the experiments are investigated in the report prepared by Major Leo Alexander, MC, U.S. Army: ‘The Treatment of Shock from Prolonged Exposure to Cold, Especially in Water’ (CIOS Black List Item 24, Medical).

† Dr Hans Romberg was put on trial in the doctors’ trial, which ran parallel to the Milch trial, for the low-pressure experiments on human beings; but he was acquitted (as was Milch on this count). As for not having recalled the name ‘Rascher’, Milch’s personal assistant was to testify that the field marshal once signed eight hundred letters in three days and his adjutant testified that the daily postbag of Air Armament alone was about three thousand letters.¹⁷

been informed of the current experiments. In the near future I shall ask the two gentlemen to talk to my people and show them a film.¹⁸ Having read this, Milch suggested that it was just a diplomatic reply to a letter from Himmler which he himself had no recollection of receiving. But there was another document confronting him on the interrogation table, a letter from him to Himmler's former chief of staff, SS General Karl Wolff. This stated that Hippke considered that the continuation of a different set of experiments on the effects of high altitude (or low pressure) being conducted at Dachau had no point, but that the ministry *was* interested in other experiments relating to the problems of air-sea rescue, and in particular the effects of low temperature on human bodies; the Luftwaffe's Dr Rascher would be seconded to the SS until further notice for this purpose. The letter concluded, 'The low-pressure chamber is not required for these low-temperature experiments, but it is urgently needed elsewhere and thus cannot be left at Dachau any longer. I wish to express the thanks of the commander-in-chief to the SS for their great assistance and remain, with best wishes to an old comrade-in-arms, always yours, E. Milch.'¹⁹

At first Milch believed that the Dachau experiments referred to were the standard physiological experiments on Luftwaffe volunteers. But it was evident from further documents in this Nuremberg dossier that the SS experiments conducted by Rascher using borrowed equipment from an aeronautical research institute had overstepped this harmless concept. The wretched concentration camp prisoners had been partially immersed in ice-cold water and their bodily functions had been measured until they died (or could be resuscitated, which was not often). These savage and barbarous Nazi experiments had been filmed and the film had been shown to an (evidently hostile) audience of aeromedical experts at the Reich Air Ministry on 11 September 1942.²⁰ To the Dachau scientists' annoyance the state secretary, Erhard Milch, had still not seen the film when it was removed from the ministry building three days later.²¹

If the intention was to intimidate him, the two-hour interrogation was not without success, for his diary reflected a more pensive mood that evening, but his outward reaction was to offer an even more determined resistance to the subsequent American pressure on him to testify against Göring and Speer in

the coming trial. On 27 October 1945 he was again taken into the interrogation room; this time they tried unsuccessfully to convince him that Göring had prepared the German air force for a war of aggression.²² The mental pressure on him was stepped up: perhaps it was his rank that was the source of his fortitude? The Americans raided his personal effects and stripped all badges of rank from his uniform. Milch still proved uncooperative. The witnesses were now being treated only marginally better than the defendants on whom the indictments had recently been served. The cells were unheated and open to the winds, and for days at a time they were allowed no outside exercise at all. ‘Just twelve minutes outside today!’ complained Milch on the last day of October.²³ But even so he was being treated better than the tens of thousands of slave labourers who had worked (and often perished) in the aircraft factories, and this was to become a point of contention when Milch’s own trial began.

To Milch it seemed that the Allies were trying to exploit the rivalries and jealousies of the German leaders to divide the enemy camp before the trial began. Göring was the principal target of this campaign. Milch wrote, ‘[Field Marshal] von Brauchitsch has been told of insulting remarks Göring has uttered about the army and navy. What does this idiot think he is up to? Can he still not see that after Hitler he bears the greatest blame in the eyes of the German people? This antique-dealer and yellow-belly!’²⁴ Yet he also knew that Göring was loyally keeping the secret of Milch’s parentage, and perhaps it was this that warmed him toward his former boss. Göring correctly informed the Americans that he had requested State-Secretary Stuckart of the Ministry of the Interior to alter Milch’s birth certificate in accordance with certain facts that had been established,* and his other state-secretary, Paul Körner, confirmed this. That there was far more than this to the truth was a secret manfully kept by all who knew it and the Americans never found it out.

For the Germans and for the forces of occupation alike a hard winter was beginning. On 20 November 1945 the main Nuremberg trial began. Meantime, lack of food and exercise was beginning to tell on the prisoners; Milch had at-

tacks of giddiness and was losing weight fast. The sentries made it increasingly difficult for the prisoners to sleep: all night long there were commotions, spotlights were suddenly beamed into their faces and lighted cigarette butts were tossed onto the sleeping men. Field Marshal von Blomberg fell ill with cancer and died on the Americans' hands; like Field Marshal Busch, who had died at another CSDIC in England and was buried on a false death certificate on waste ground in Aldershot, Blomberg was buried without formality in an unmarked grave; and he was just one of the witnesses. Milch wrote, 'I do not believe we can expect any different fate from his.'²⁵

This was how the Americans achieved what may seem to the reader to have been the impossible, in transforming Milch into an active defence witness for his old enemy. Göring's defence counsel ascertained that Milch was prepared to be called on his behalf. On the way back from a discussion with Speer's counsel, Milch saw Göring briefly for the first time in fourteen months — the Reichsmarschall looked much fitter and slimmer — and they hailed each other in passing.²⁶ Göring was going to need all the help that he could get; in February 1946 he asked for General Koller as a witness, but the Americans replied that Koller could not be traced (although Englander himself had interrogated him at a CSDIC in Britain).²⁷

When Milch stepped into the witness-box at Nuremberg a few days later the transformation was complete. Göring muttered nervously to his defence counsel that he must expect to be thoroughly blackened by the field marshal as their relations had been very strained. But Milch did his best and refused to be cowed by the questioning. His two days in the witness-box left both British and German newspapers perplexed but curious. Walter Suskind, reporting the trial for the authoritative *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, wrote of him as 'a powerful, stocky man not unlike John Bull in appearance, clever and emphatic and not without a sense of humour'. Suskind relished the precise and unrehearsed nature of Milch's answers:

* See the epilogue.

Instructions for the German soldier on the laws of war are printed at the back of their paybook,' he says. Then he checks himself, says, 'I have my paybook here', and fetches it out to read out some of the items. The effect is very strong — the simple gesture speaks volumes for his ability to improvise and for his judgement, and when the day's session is adjourned soon after, we cannot help looking forward with excitement to the cross-examination still awaiting this witness from prosecuting counsel.²⁸

And *The Times* commented, 'No witness could have spoken with a greater air of confident sincerity than Field Marshal Milch.'²⁹

Erhard Milch was himself in no doubt that he had won the first round. 'I was called as a witness at 3.30 P.M.,' he wrote afterward.

A description of my journeys abroad was cut short by the President, Lawrence. When I was asked about Göring's attitude toward prisoners of war, Jackson [the American chief prosecutor] interrupted, 'We have shown enough patience, but this is going too far. I object!' The court sustained his objection and poor Stahmer, somewhat confused, asked me one more short question and sat down. When Laternser [Jodl's defence counsel] asked for the reasons for the air force's lack of striking power in 1939, the President again intervened and cut me short. At about 4.30 the court adjourned until Monday at 10 A.M. The defendants were mostly pretty low in spirits. For instance, I saw Jodl being led away and there were tears in his eyes.

The courtroom's magnetic recorders engraved for posterity the misguided attempts of the American prosecutors to brand Milch as a turncoat Jew — an exchange of some poignancy, it will be seen, when the truth of Milch's parentage is learned.*

* One of the American team had passed a note to Jackson saying that 'Milch was made a full Aryan on the request of Göring, in spite of his Jewish father'.

JACKSON: Didn't you know that the decrees which excluded Jews and half-Jews from positions were issued by Göring?

MILCH: No, I did not. As far as I know the decrees were issued by the Ministry of the Interior, the department concerned with that.

JACKSON: Uh, as a matter of fact did you not have to take certain proceedings to avoid the effects of those decrees yourself?

Milch paused for many seconds before replying.

MILCH: No. I know what you are referring to. That was a matter that was cleared up long before.

JACKSON: How long before that was it cleared?

MILCH: As far as I know, in '33.

JACKSON: 1933 — right after the Nazis came to power!

MILCH: That's right.

JACKSON: And that time Göring had you — so we'll have no misunderstanding about this — Göring had you made what's called a full Aryan? Is that right?

MILCH: I don't believe so — not that I was 'made one' by him. I *was* one already.

JACKSON: Well, he had it established, let us say.

MILCH: He was of great assistance in clarifying what was very obscure to me.

JACKSON: That is, your mother's husband was a Jew. Is that correct?

MILCH: That is not what I said.

JACKSON: You had to demonstrate lack of ancestry through any Jewish source. Is that correct?

MILCH: *Jawohl* — same as anybody else.

JACKSON: . . . and in your case it involved the . . . your father, your *alleged* father. Is that correct?

MILCH: *Jawohl*.³⁰

With the conclusion of his evidence in defence of Göring on the second day, 11 March 1946, Milch withdrew from the witness-box. The correspondent of *The Times* complained, ‘Milch was enabled by the tactics of the prosecuting counsel to draw most of their fire upon himself. For nearly five hours he was engaged in a battle of wits in which the prosecution was apparently at such pains to discredit his evidence that it often seemed that Milch, rather than Göring, was the accused man.’³¹ Milch answered challenge with counter-challenge. Asked for his attitude toward air raids on civilian populations Milch replied (so far as he could recall when writing his diary that evening), ‘I can think of nothing crueler and more objectionable than such air raids; and anybody who still has any doubts has only to take a look at Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, the Ruhr cities and particularly Dresden to see what I mean.’³² When the British prosecutor, the particularly able and well-spoken G. D. Roberts, suggested that the 1941 air raid on Belgrade was pure murder (as undoubtedly it was), Milch replied that the unpunished murder of Germans was currently a commonplace. Asked by Jackson whether he was an American prisoner, Milch replied that he was a British prisoner who had subsequently been declared an ‘internee’ by the Americans in violation of international law.³³ Challenged on weak spots in his memory, he explained that it was impossible to remember everything, ‘particularly as my memory has suffered from the severe manhandling I received after my capture, when I was beaten about the head’.³⁴

When Roberts inquired of him, in his cool and level tones, ‘You are of course aware that Norway’s neutrality was violated?’ Milch, mindful of the *Altmark* incident, replied ‘Jawohl! To our knowledge, and in our view, it was violated twice!’³⁵ When he finally stepped down, Milch had declined to answer only one question — whether he considered Göring lazy or not. In general the defence counsel spoke of him as the first witness to have worthily defended the German cause.³⁶ *The Times* commented, ‘Unless means is found of keeping witnesses to the point, the Nuremberg defence will become an opportunity for Nazi polemics and false trails. The defence moreover is by no means incapable of using the trial as an attempt to divide the Allies, which is still the clearest trend that emerges in Germany today.’ Milch proudly wrote in his diary: ‘I must have

knocked their plans into a cocked hat!'³⁷

On 3 April he was removed from the witnesses' wing at Nuremberg and transferred to Dachau concentration camp, where he was committed to the notorious 'bunker'.

In the days when Dachau had been run by the SS, the bunker had been one of its main features. It was a low building housing a number of low-ceilinged concrete punishment cells about eight feet square, each designed to accommodate one prisoner. Each had an open lavatory in one corner and a ventilation slot high up in one wall. Milch was marched into a dark and tiny cell in which — as his eyes adjusted themselves to the gloom — he could make out the forms of *five* other inhabitants. He recognized the voices of Field Marshals Kesselring and von Brauchitsch among them. Most of the space was taken up by four bunks; the two remaining prisoners had to sleep on the floor.

For many weeks he was confined to the bunker, with only liquid nourishment and less than five minutes' fresh air every second or third day. ('The United Nations War Crimes Commission states that twenty-two German generals are now held in the former concentration camp at Dachau,' reported *The Times* on 8 May. 'Among them are Field Marshals Walter von Brauchitsch, Albert Kesselring and Erhard Milch as well as Generals Alexander von Falkenhausen and Nicolaus von Falkenhorst. They are housed and fed as prisoners of war.') Eventually the International Red Cross and an American army chaplain heard rumours about the bunker and demanded to see the captives, but Milch and the others were moved to a hospital outside the Dachau camp perimeter before the Red Cross delegate, Bickel, arrived.³⁸

Meanwhile Ernst Englander — by now a lieutenant-colonel — was so astounded that Milch, whom he believed he knew so well, had turned up as a 'star witness' for Göring's defence that he wrote from America to Mr Justice Jackson to ask whether the unchallengeable evidence (obtained, of course, by concealed microphones at the CSDIC camp in England) had been available to him. 'I feel sure that with the evidence taken down in Milch's own words one could break him down in court to such an extent that he would have to reverse himself and

admit perjury,' he assured Jackson. 'I should like to see those boys hang and sweat rather than to make themselves out as heroes and martyrs.'³⁹ The chief American interrogator sent a woman to question Milch in Dachau, but the field marshal could only (truthfully) assure her that as far as he knew no shorthand record had been taken of his informal talks with Engleander. Since Engleander had not mentioned the microphones to Jackson in his letter, his suggestions were rejected as unhelpful.⁴⁰

For several months Milch had no official indication as to whether a war crimes trial awaited him or not. During July, however, he heard the first rumours that the new trials were about to begin and he thought it advisable to look for a lawyer. He wrote to Dr Dix, who had successfully defended Hjalmar Schacht, and asked him if he would stand by. Dix declined to represent him until the financial question was settled, and the field marshal was still not legally represented when late in August 1946 he was suddenly returned from Dachau to Nuremberg Prison, ostensibly for the purpose of further interrogation.⁴¹

Soon afterward he was taken with other prisoners to a room where they were showing a film of the Jewish death camp horrors. 'Horrifying scenes, complete with a commentary by a German doctor!' he wrote in his diary. 'Hitler, Himmler and consorts must have gone quite mad. Even though we suspected none of this, the burden of guilt stands heavily upon us all. The more senior we are, the heavier the burden. I cannot comprehend how human beings can become such animals — and how different was the impression we all had of Hitler in those first years after 1933! But why are our victors doing precisely the same things now?'⁴²

He resigned himself, in his tortured state of mind, to certain 'liquidation' by the Americans, and began to write his life story, a painful labour in an unheated cell from which every item of furniture had been removed, along with his spectacles, and with no usable light once dusk fell.⁴³ All night long on 14 October he lay awake listening to the noise of the carpenters hammering in the prison gymnasium — constructing the gallows for the eleven major war criminals who were to be hanged two days later.⁴⁴ As he had always expected, Göring was sentenced to be among them; and so were Sauckel, Keitel, Jodl and Ribbentrop. Albert Speer had attracted a lesser sentence and was to serve twenty years

in Spandau Prison instead. ('You'll have to get at least fifteen years,' he called out half jokingly as he was led away past Milch.) When Frau Göring called to take leave of her husband, the Reichsmarschall asked her to convey to Milch his gratitude for his courageous defence in the witness-box. So after ten years of long and harmful feuding Hermann Göring and Erhard Milch parted in a spirit of atonement. Göring wrote one last long letter to Winston Churchill (which has never been published) and swallowed poison, thus escaping execution. Of the other condemned prisoners who were hanged in the gymnasium a few hours later Milch learned: 'They all died bravely. One Yank said they must have had ice in their veins.'⁴⁵

Some days passed after the executions. One night a week later, as an icy draught was blowing across from the barred, glassless window to the ever-open Judas hole in his cell door, the sleeping field marshal had his final confrontation with Adolf Hitler, who was still alive somewhere and came to him in a dream. Milch's telephone had rung and when he answered a voice had said that it was the Führer's secretary speaking and would *Herr Feldmarschall* like a few words with the Führer? If so he was to tap twice on the telephone. (Milch's muddled brain understood that this was to prevent the line from being bugged.) He had tapped twice and the familiar guttural Austrian accents had come on to the line, as hard as ever for Milch, a north German, to understand. The sequel was as inane as most dream conversations are. Milch just asked, 'How are you getting on?' Hitler said, 'Is that all you have to say to me?' At a loss for further conversation Milch retorted, 'I was faithful to you for longer than you have been faithful to the German people and to me!' At this Hitler had evidently hung up, but this weird conversation was still drifting across Milch's memory when he woke next day, and he recorded it in his diary.⁴⁶

The interrogations on the Dachau medical experiments continued. Toward the end of one of them, the interrogator complained that he had been able to work any admission of responsibility he wanted from a subaltern, but that the higher up he went the less this was possible. Each general just passed the buck on to another. As the interrogator stood up to go, Milch stopped him: 'May I say the following! I am not interested in my fate — I should like to make that quite clear. If somebody says to me, "You were a field marshal, you were in

a high position, we are going to hang you”, then all I can say is, “Go right ahead! I am not concerned about my own life. But I will not accept responsibility for cruel acts of which I know nothing whatsoever, and which are totally foreign to my nature.”⁴⁷ There must have been a further brief conversation after the shorthand typist had been dismissed; at least Milch recorded in his diary that when he said he had a good idea why dirt was being dug up against him the interrogator replied that this was his impression too: ‘They want to pin the dirt on some people while they will let others off scot-free.’⁴⁸

C H A P T E R 2 4

ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE

November 1946–April 1947

DESPITE THE NUMEROUS earlier assurances of Allied officers that there was no likelihood of Erhard Milch's being put on trial as a war criminal, on 14 November 1946 the American court marshal, Colonel Charles Mays, served a formal indictment on him at Nuremberg Prison.¹ He was charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. The first and third counts detailed in the six-page indictment referred to the enslavement, deportation and maltreatment of millions of people — civilian forced labourers and prisoners of war; the second count accused him of participation in criminal medical experiments on human beings, and in murders, brutalities, cruelties, tortures, atrocities and other inhumane acts. The 'high-altitude' and 'freezing' experiments at Dachau formed the main basis for the second count.

Perhaps it is necessary to explain how the Americans came to put enemy prisoners of war on trial, and why they decided to afford Field Marshal Milch a trial by himself — unique among the American trials at Nuremberg. To put into effect the terms of the Moscow Declaration of October 1943 and the subsequent London Agreement of 8 August 1945 and its appended charter, and to provide a uniform basis for the prosecution of suspected war criminals, the Four-Power Control Council for Germany had enacted Control Council Law No. 10 on 20 December 1945. This provided for each of the occupying powers to arrest and try suspects within its own zone of occupation; the military governor in that

zone was to decide the form of tribunal and its rules of procedure.² The new law emulated the statute of Nuremberg under which Göring and his co-defendants had been tried (but it did specifically exclude a number of defences that would otherwise have been available under international law).



On trial for his life by an American postwar tribunal at Nuremberg, Field Marshal Milch was defended by Dr Friedrich Bergold (center) and his lawyer brother, Dr Werner Milch (far right).
 (NATIONAL ARCHIVES, WASHINGTON)

On 18 October 1946 the American zone governor, General Joseph T. McNarney, promulgated Ordinance No. 7, establishing military tribunals within his zone to try the suspected war criminals; and on the twenty-fourth he appointed Brigadier General Telford Taylor, one of the most respected members of Jackson's earlier team, as Chief of Counsel for War Crimes. Taylor was confronted with something of a problem, for the new trials had begun somewhat precipitately: he had had all summer to prepare the trial of twenty-three leading Nazi doctors which was just beginning, but a second panel of judges was already arriving at Nuremberg and no case was ready for them. A full-scale generals' trial — in which many of Milch's former colleagues were to be defendants — was planned, but these indictments were still incomplete. Taylor de-

cided, rather than have the new judges sitting round with nothing to do, to 'pitch Milch in all alone'. The field marshal was a big enough personality to warrant a trial all to himself and the indictment against him was virtually complete. In one sense the decision worked in Milch's favour: in large group trials there was always the danger that the appalling guilt of some defendants would 'slop over' onto the innocent, as Telford Taylor now points out; but in another sense the decision may have worked to his disadvantage, for these early trials were conducted in an atmosphere very different from that prevailing later, after the descent of the Iron Curtain and the birth of the Cold War. Harsh sentences against the Germans were still a commonplace.³

The indictment signed by Telford Taylor was served on the field marshal in his cell. He had expected this development ever since leaving Dachau and he handed the bearer of the document, Colonel Mays, a letter in which he formally notified him that he was a prisoner of the British and could not therefore recognize the jurisdiction of an American tribunal.*⁴ The threatened trial may be argued with justification as constituting a breach of the provisions of the July 1929 Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, which had been ratified by the United States, Britain, Germany and thirty-two other nations (and could not be abrogated† by any of them unilaterally). For example, Article 60 provided that before the opening of a trial against a prisoner of war the detaining power was to advise the protecting power (in this case, Switzerland); it was perhaps academic under the circumstances, but no such notice had been sent. Moreover, and more important, Article 63 provided that the court must be the same, and follow the same procedure, as in the case of an officer of the

* The carbon copy of the letter is in Milch's files, but the original apparently did not travel far enough, as Alvin J. Rockwell of OMGUS's Legal Division was to write in a memorandum concerning Milch's subsequent petition to the U.S. Supreme Court: '... nor does it appear that during any stage of the proceedings petitioner objected to the jurisdiction of Military Tribunal II'.

† It would be improper not to refer here to Brigadier Telford Taylor's comment to the author that the signatories of the August 1945 London Charter (see page 347) included 'with very few exceptions' all twenty-nine of the Geneva signatories, and that he did not therefore consider it stretching the facts to regard the charter as a superseding treaty. In the author's view, however, the fact that 'the few exceptions' included all the vanquished countries and that the signatories were the victors or the neutrals made it a unilateral abrogation.

armed forces of the detaining power. Legally Milch could be tried only before a British court martial comprised of officers of field marshal's rank. This does not gainsay the possibility that a military court martial might have passed an even harsher sentence than was to fall to him: it was after all a British court martial that sentenced Kesselring to death in Italy, and it was an American court martial that passed the same sentence on Yamashita. (Kesselring's sentence was subsequently commuted.)

A state of war still formally existed between the United States and Germany and the unconditional surrender of Germany's authority in no way altered the provisions of Geneva. The British Queen's Counsel who defended von Manstein has written, 'The status of the prisoner of war is the right of the prisoner and it does not depend on the discretion of the captor. So long as a state of war continues, the captor cannot alter the status of a prisoner of war.'⁵ These were very real obstacles, and the Allies adopted various devices to overcome them. The Control Council issued 'Proclamation No. 2' seeking to nullify the provisions of Geneva: 'The Allied representatives will give directions concerning the . . . revival or application of any treaty, convention . . . to which Germany is or has been a party.'⁶ Since no action had been taken by the Allies to revive Germany's participation in the Geneva Convention, this removed the Allies' legal obligation to comply, it was argued.^{*7}

Milch's legal status as a *British* prisoner of war still further complicated the issue (since the convention strictly prohibited one country from transferring its prisoners of war to another's custody). On 10 and 11 September 1946 and again early in October Brigadier-General Telford Taylor conferred with the British authorities on Milch's formal transfer from their jurisdiction — in itself, an act prohibited under the convention. The British officers, Brigadier Lord Russell, Group Captain Somerhough and Mr McAskie (the British Legal Director in Berlin) agreed orally to his release to the American zone commander.⁸ Milch

* On which argument, however, OMGUS's Legal Division itself privately commented: 'It should be noted that this argument is contrary to the view as to the *continuing* effect of the Geneva Convention in Cable W-88419, dated 26 December 1946.' Thus tortuous the legal mind!

continued to insist that he was still a British prisoner. This was ignored until he appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, when it was explained by the occupation authorities that 'due to a series of lost letters and delays in mail delivery' the written confirmation of the transfer was not received until 22 April 1947 — some days after the conclusion of the trial. Further evidence that the Americans took Milch's prisoner-of-war status very seriously was that two days after the trial began an American prisoner-of-war discharge team arrived at Nuremberg to 'release' him from that status. Milch refused to acknowledge his release and endorsed the document to that effect. He had been appointed a field marshal by Hitler; traditionally a field marshal remains active until the end of his days and no U.S. army corporal could deprive him of the rank that the Nazi leader had bestowed on him in July 1940.

With the indictment now served on him, Milch asked to be represented by an American lawyer, but this was refused him.* A list of local German lawyers was shown to him and he selected Dr Friedrich Bergold. He never regretted this choice, for although an anti-Nazi Bergold was a loyal and fearless advocate at Nuremberg. He had earlier been picked to defend the loathsome Martin Bormann *in absentia* and in doing so he had learned much about Allied procedures: the British Lord Justice Lawrence (the late Lord Oaksey) had interrupted his final defence speech and after a brief adjournment directed him to omit a number of pages in which it was objected that trial *in absentia* was contradictory to the customs of every other European country.⁹ Lawrence assured him that the missing pages would still appear in the printed record, but neither they nor the discussion between Bergold and himself are to be found in those volumes.

A death sentence on Milch would (rightly) be a certainty if the prosecution could establish that he had participated in the criminal experiments at Dachau. *Prima facie* the documentary evidence on this count against Milch was

* Manstein was defended by a British counsel; and in the 'Wilhelmstrasse' trial that followed Milch's in Nuremberg, the diplomat von Weizsäcker was allowed an American attorney, Warren Magee. Both of their clients were convicted.

damning and was more than sufficient basis for the indictment. The prosecution team began to process other prisoners, whose outlook was somewhat bleaker than his (and most of whom were subsequently hanged for direct participation in the experiments). During November and December a number of these prisoners signed statements incriminating the field marshal. It was the kind of evidence that no properly constituted British court would have admitted, but for Nuremberg the normal rules had been expressly waived. Thus the SS colonel Wolfram Sievers, head of the infamous '*Ahnenerbe*' (Racial Purity Institute) alleged: 'Dr Rascher was a Luftwaffe medical officer until the end of 1943. His superior was the Surgeon-General Dr Hippke. To my knowledge Dr Hippke was directly subordinate to Field Marshal Milch as Inspector General of the Air Force. Milch must have been informed of Rascher's experiments.'¹⁰ (Sievers was later executed.) Similar statements were procured from Dr Siegfried Ruff of the medical section of the German Aeronautical Research Institute (DVL) and from one Walter Neff, who testified for the Americans that Milch's name was 'frequently referred to' at Dachau, where he worked, and that Dr Rascher had said that he had personally contacted Milch: 'The low-pressure chamber was brought to Dachau and taken away again as a result of orders for which Milch was responsible.'¹¹ Clearly, if this could be proved Milch could not escape responsibility for the experiments.

This file of evidence was complete by 23 December 1946. Milch confidently expected that both Dr Hippke, who had actually drafted the incriminating letter to General Karl Wolff, and Wolff himself could clear him if they gave evidence. Bergold asked the Americans to trace them for him; his colleague Dr Fritz Sauter, a defence counsel in the doctors' trial, also applied for Dr Hippke to be produced as a defence witness. Bergold's application was dated 21 December. A few days later, however, word reached him that neither Hippke nor Wolff could be found.

From every quarter news was now reaching Nuremberg of other trials. General von Mackensen and Field Marshal Kesselring had been sentenced to death by a British court martial, but not yet executed.¹² Milch wrote grimly in his diary, 'I have resolved what to do if the time comes.'¹³ For the last twenty months he had been carrying the concealed aluminium capsule of cyanide that

his mother had given him. He had been X-rayed twice since Göring's suicide, but each time he had managed to conceal it in the palm of his hand while dressing and undressing.

On 14 December 1946 the American deputy military governor established Military Tribunal 11, which was to try Milch at the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg. Under the glare of film arc-lamps Field Marshal Milch was led into the court room for the first time six days later, to be formally arraigned by the People of the United States of America. He entered a plea of 'not guilty' on all three counts of the indictment.

The three American judges who were to try the case against him were Robert Morell Toms (as presiding judge), Fitzroy Donald Phillips and Michael A. Musmanno¹⁴; Judge John Joshua Speight was available as an 'alternate'. All were state, not federal judges, but of the four the one who was to play the most fateful part in the final sentencing was Musmanno. Musmanno had his good as well as his bad points: he was patriotic, energetic and versatile, and his genuine concern for the betterment of social conditions accounted for much of his political support in Pennsylvania. One of the eight sons of a poor Italian immigrant and fifty years old, he had risen through the courts of Pittsburgh to affluence and renown; he had defended the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in the twenties. As a commander in the U.S. naval reserve he had acted as General Mark Clark's naval aide in Italy. On passing through Nuremberg he formed more than cordial relations with two of Hitler's former female staff who had been summoned there for personal interrogation. (He was writing a mawkish book on Hitler's last days entitled *Ten Days to Die*.) Another of Hitler's secretaries who met him described his passion for uniforms: he had multiple photographs taken with his arm round her outside the blitzed ruins of her home in Munich, changing into a different uniform for each shot. When Brigadier-General Telford Taylor heard of Musmanno's selection he cabled to the War Department a tactful suggestion that his rank was inappropriate for the trial of a field marshal. (In truth he objected to the judge's emotional tendencies.) The Pentagon responded by promoting Musmanno to captain, a rank he displayed in official photographs by drawing back enough of his gown to reveal the rings

on his sleeve.¹⁵ The other judges, and particularly Phillips, were sincere and professional arbiters of the law.

The key role was to be played by the prosecutor, Clark Denney, a tall, handsome, hawk-eyed attorney, prematurely balding. He was of a complex character. To assist him he could call on a large staff of researchers, translators and secretaries and the full resources of Telford Taylor's office.

Milch's defence counsel, Bergold, had also obtained an assistant — the field marshal's brother, Dr Werner Milch, who was a trained lawyer himself. On Christmas Eve the latter was asked to trace Dr Hippke at all costs.* The Allied authorities had now been broadcasting appeals for Hippke to come forward for some months without success and they finally informed Bergold that the doctor was presumed to have fled beyond the pale, to eastern Germany.¹⁶ Werner Milch went to the surgeon-general's last known address at 23 Klopstock Strasse in Hamburg; here the missing doctor's wife told him that her husband had left one morning for work as usual some days before but had vanished without trace. The occupation authorities knew nothing about him. But among the neighbours one woman remembered seeing a man being arrested that morning by British soldiers, and the description fitted Hippke. Milch's brother inquired at each of Hamburg's prisons and finally learned that Hippke was in Fühlsbüttel Prison.¹⁷

'Nothing enrages so much as injustice,' the philosopher Kant once observed.

* The court file shows that Bergold formally applied for Hippke as a witness on 21 December 1946 and furnished the doctor's address to the prosecution in so doing. Under the Nuremberg rules defence counsel had to explain precisely what they expected each witness to establish (a procedure very useful to the prosecution, of course, as Mr Justice Jackson himself observed to fellow Allied prosecutors). From Bergold's application the prosecution learned that Hippke would be able to testify that 'witness [Hippke] talked only once with Milch about the Dachau experiments on the occasion of the answer to Himmler, that Milch and witness agreed upon the fact to decline any participation, however to disguise this refusal carefully, that Hippke made the draft of the letter to Himmler, that the Luftwaffe carried out their experiments with their own physicians even in peace time, that Milch never cared about medical questions and did not understand them, that he never read Rascher's reports, that moreover Hippke and Milch only knew that in Dachau criminals who had been sentenced to death by regular courts presented themselves as volunteers in order to obtain a leniency of the punishment.' [official American translation]

'All other evils endured are as nothing by comparison.' But the fact that the outcome of a trial is different from what one might have expected, knowing all the facts (the ten-year sentence on Dönitz is a case in point), does not alone mean that an injustice has been done. It is in the fairness with which a trial is conducted that we can identify justice, not only in the result.

'Mr Denney,' invited Judge Toms when the trial began on 2 January 1947, 'you may proceed with your opening address.'¹⁸

'Your Honours,' proclaimed Denney, 'the defendant Erhard Milch was a field marshal in the German air force, state secretary in the Air Ministry, Director of Air Armament, sole representative of the armed forces in the Central Planning commission, chief of the Fighter Staff and a member of the Nazi party.'¹⁹ After relating Milch's early career, Denney continued:

The defendant never went far from the aims and ideals of German militarism. He was one of that silent army of men who nurtured their memories, kept hoping and hating; but unlike the others, this man did not lie idle. He did not wait passively until Germany rose again, but devoted himself actively to that end. In 1921, one year after his discharge from the army, we find him already heading the air service of the new branch of commercial aviation.

Just how intimate Milch had been with Hitler was shown by his presence at the notorious conference of 23 May 1939, attended by only a handful of others: 'The prosecution will prove that Milch was a main instigator of the enslavement of the civil populations of the occupied countries; we shall show that he took part in the murder and maltreatment of prisoners of war.'

To the judges, the words may have seemed initially stronger than the substance. After Denney had spent some hours reading into the record a mass of documents relating to Sauckel and labour procurement, Judge Speight asked him, 'Are you going to be able to establish some kind of connection between these documents which you are reading into the record and the defendant?' By way of answer Denney read out on 6 and 8 January interrogations of Sauckel and Göring apparently made shortly before they were sentenced to death. The

statements attributed to them were damaging and inaccurate, and enough records survive in Washington to indicate — at least in Göring's case — that he was under a wholly false impression at the time he was questioned; but he and Sauckel had both been dead for over a year, so Bergold's difficulties as defence counsel can well be imagined.²⁰ He protested that the International Military Tribunal (IMT) that had tried Göring *et al.* had ruled more than once that such testimony should be accepted only if defence counsel had the opportunity of testing the witnesses concerned under cross-examination.²¹ This would place Denney in a predicament no less awkward than Bergold's, for much of his case rested on such statements, from people whose lips had been sealed forever. After a brief adjournment he reminded the court of Article 19 of the IMT's statute: 'The Court is not bound by normal rules of evidence.' And he pointed out next day that when Ordinance No. 7 governing these subsequent proceedings was issued it expressly stated that such interrogations were admissible. 'Obviously,' commented Denney, 'the people who drew up this ordinance realized that certain of the defendants in the first trial would not remain alive much longer.'²² The presiding judge had no option but to disallow Bergold's objection.

This was not the only problem confronting the defence. 'Your Honours,' Dr Bergold was again obliged to complain on 15 January,

I have to ask for an adjournment for the following reasons. The case of the defendant Milch is particularly difficult from the point of view of time. I have of course already been working for the defendant Milch since November, but as I have already had to explain to the Court on an earlier occasion, by the time the trial began I had still not received the documents. I still do not have the transcripts of the Central Planning meetings.* I am allowed to read these conference minutes only in the prosecution's information room, I am not allowed to remove them from the room, and I cannot give them to my secretary to copy, but must sit and read them there and then.

The office shuts at 6 p.m. I am here at court nearly every day, so when the court adjourns each evening I have only one hour to read them. I still have none of the transcripts of the Fighter Staffs meetings. I have been unable to speak to any of the witnesses we have applied for . . .

Your Honours, I beg you to accept that I am doing all in my power, and that I would willingly work from morn till night; but I still do not have the documents. I have heard by chance that the prosecution has already been working on this case for several months, while I have seen the documents only since the hearing of this case has begun.²³

Musmanno objected to the adjournment requested but his fellow judges outvoted him.

In the meantime — a bewildering feature to any observer familiar only with the workings of British justice — a forceful press campaign had begun in Germany against Milch.²⁴ ('The Luftwaffe general Milch has pleaded Not Guilty, but what other plea has yet been entered by any of the Nuremberg defendants?') The campaign was directed by a German claiming to be a former concentration camp prisoner, Gaston M. Oulman. For example, a month after the trial began Oulman wrote, under the heading 'The Aryanized Field Marshal', the following commentary in the German national newspapers:

In the trial which began earlier this month against the former Field Marshal Erhard Milch, the defendant appears to be not entirely unmoved, unperturbed or insensitive to the hard accusations of the prosecution, who challenge that his private and public life has been that of a traitor. The twisted features of the small, stocky man flush purple with anger, as he nervously leafs through his papers, seemingly following the prosecution's statements. The seriousness of the crimes of which Milch is accused, and his personal character, have

* The court file shows that Bergold applied for these on 3 November 1946.

been well brought out by Clark Denney, in a manner calculated to bring a flush of shame to even the most hardened person's cheeks.

Milch, wrote Oulman, was 'one of the least likeable people one could think of'. He was accused of 'sending his men ruthlessly and uselessly to their deaths'. And the columnist went even further:

All this fits in with the picture yielded by letters reaching the American prosecutor Mr Robert M. W. Kempner, in which distant relatives or friends of Milch attest that he — whose part-Jewish parentage is beyond doubt — steeled himself against their entreaties and shipped them to certain death in concentration camps. One relative of Milch lived in 1943 in the Netherlands: a man called Maurice Robert Milch asked the field marshal to help him emigrate. Milch's adjutant replied that the writer and his family would be sent forthwith to a concentration camp if they dared write one more personal letter to him. That was in January 1943. In the spring, Maurice Robert Milch and his whole family were deported to Sobibor in Poland. None of them has ever returned.²⁵

Had this infamous allegation been true, it takes little imagination to visualize with what alacrity it would have been investigated by the conscientious Denney's staff. As it was, it was not even mentioned in the case against the field marshal. Nor had any such 'relative' been heard of by his family.

The campaign against Milch as a Nuremberg defendant was not without its repercussions, however. Thus Dr Erich Hippke, who arrived from Hamburg and was summoned first to Denney's office for an interview on 16 January, explained to Bergold that he was fearful for his own future if he testified for Milch.²⁶ Another key witness, a senior foreign ministry official who was being held in solitary confinement at Nuremberg and was wanted by Bergold to establish 'that Soviet Russia [before the war] denounced all treaties of the Czar Government, among them the Geneva Convention and the Hague Law on Land Warfare,' was afflicted by a 'sudden loss of memory' and Bergold was

obliged to do without him.*²⁷ Friends of long standing cabled Milch that they could not come. Another witness was called before the U.S. Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) and advised to absent himself. General Wolff could still not be found. When Bergold asked leave to call the former French ministers Delbos and Cot to testify on his prewar endeavours for a Franco-German *entente*, and the former Belgian premier Van Zeeland and ambassador in Berlin van Denterghem, the court denied the applications.

Albert Speer, at least, had nothing to lose by defending Milch.²⁸ Dr Bergold learned on 3 February that the Allied Control Council had agreed to his evidence being taken in private commission in the presence of one judge, Musmanno. Learning that he would be called, Speer (who was under severe psychological and physical strain after the conclusion of his own trial) wrote in his diary, 'Thought a lot about this.'²⁹ But here too subtle forces came into play, for Speer had evidently drawn over-optimistic conclusions from the frequent visits certain high-ranking Americans had paid on him, and his hopes still centred on the dream that one day he might be suddenly returned to a senior governmental post in Germany — a hope that sustained him for the next twenty years in Spandau. He was taken in handcuffs to be questioned by Musmanno on 4 February. As he and Bergold were waiting for the hearing to begin Musmanno entered and shook hands with him. This harmless act had an unpredicted effect on Speer. 'Did you see that!' he whispered to the defence counsel. 'He shook hands with me!'³⁰

He was feeling very ill and the strain of the months of imprisonment had clearly told on him. In his own diary Speer recorded, 'No press or newsreel men present [in the courtroom]. Very pleased, as this allows a clearer testimony ... I sapped a lot of energy, as I was exhausted. Prosecution declined to cross-examine me. [Milch's] counsel satisfied. Hope I did my duty toward Milch — by helping take some of the load off his shoulders.'

Bergold was anything but satisfied, however. The testimony of the former armaments minister was hardly what he had expected. Twice Speer had tripped

* From the court file. Since Milch was accused of illegally employing Soviet prisoners on arms production (forbidden by the Geneva Convention), this was a very pertinent inquiry.

him up on details and he had even insisted that Central Planning *did* concern itself with labour procurement, an allegation that Bergold had been at pains to disprove. Seeing his client soon afterward Dr Bergold lamented: ‘Herr Milch, I thought you said Speer was your friend!’³¹

Meantime — and this may have been a natural consequence of the general disorganization reigning within the ruined and defeated Germany — Bergold was having difficulties in securing his other witnesses. In court next day he rose and said, ‘I would like to put to you a further worry of mine, your Honours. There is a large number of witnesses approved by this court, including several in the hands of the American occupying forces, who have not yet been brought to Nuremberg. I have made frequent representations about this already.’ His carefully organized timetable for hearing each defence witness was in danger of collapse and the prosecution authorities were certainly not making life easier: Dr Hippke, whom he had traced with such difficulty, had now been arrested by the Nuremberg authorities and was being held incommunicado. ‘There is an order by the prosecution posted downstairs in the interrogation room,’ Bergold protested on 6 February, ‘that for eight days no defence counsel is to be allowed to speak with Hippke. That in my view is something not allowed even under American law.’ Bergold declared that he was sure that Mr Denney had nothing to do with this, but he continued: ‘My difficulty is as follows. I have to begin tomorrow to deal with that count of the indictment concerning the Dachau experiments. My key witness is Dr Hippke, whom I had wanted to call to the witness-stand tomorrow morning. Your Honours will understand that I must speak to him today — in fact I had really wanted to see him yesterday.’

Denney denied all knowledge of the incident and Bergold willingly accepted his assurances. From the court file we know that Bergold had applied for Hippke on 21 December, specifying Hippke’s hitherto unknown Hamburg address. Denney now stated that the prosecution had been searching for Hippke for several months. ‘We were not able to find him. He was in the British zone and was arrested in about December — I think it was about the twenty-first.’³² But he disposed of any suspicions that might otherwise have lingered in the court’s mind: ‘I can assure the court that I did not take [Bergold’s] application into my hands, read it and then order somebody: “Arrest that man!”’ The court

ordered that nothing should be put in the way of Dr Bergold's interviewing the surgeon-general that evening and putting him into the witness-box next day.*

Dr Erich Hippke entered the witness-box on 7 February.

With his first answers the 'Dachau experiments' case against Milch collapsed. He testified that while he *had* been directly subordinate to Milch up to 1940 or 1941, he had thereafter been transferred to the Head of Air Defence (General Rudel, who was succeeded by General Foerster).³³ He explained that he himself had drafted the letter to General Wolff and that Milch had tried his utmost to keep the SS from meddling in the air force's medical affairs. The Dachau experiments of the SS were believed to be of no importance to the Luftwaffe and the Air Ministry had certainly never been informed of any fatalities they had caused. In cross-examining him Denney unfortunately lost his temper and confused the experiments on concentration camp prisoners with the Luftwaffe experiments on volunteers. When Hippke pointed out quite simply, 'They are two quite different categories', Denney shrilled at him, 'We don't want any speeches from you!'³⁴ Dr Bergold objected to this type of browbeating. ('We are not in America, and these are German witnesses!') Denney apologized and candidly attributed his outburst to high blood pressure.†

The trial was not without its more comical aspects either. When Milch's seventy-one-year-old personal assistant, Karl-Eitel Richter, arrived to give evidence he was at first mistaken for a prosecution witness, driven off by limousine to a luxurious apartment and prepared an ample dinner; as soon as the error was detected he was whisked off to an unheated cell in the prison building and the food remained uneaten.³⁵ A week later General Wolff was also in the witness-box: Bergold had found him incarcerated in a Nuremberg lunatic asylum. Wolff was a strange character indeed: despite eight months' solitary confinement he — as Himmler's adjutant until 1943 — had *volunteered* to answer for

* Brigadier-General Telford Taylor has stated to the author that he recalls enough to state with confidence that there was no basis for the suggestion that the prosecution was holding back on either Hippke or Wolff, and it must be said that apart from the incidents set out in the text no obstacles were put in Bergold's way.

† From the shorthand record of the trial.

the SS alongside General Ernst Kaltenbrunner before the IMT. When this offer was turned down he had volunteered his services as a defence witness, only to find himself removed, as he said in evidence, to a lunatic asylum, where the military had locked him in one room with sixteen insane, paralytic, tubercular and incurably deranged patients.

After speaking his testimony for Milch, Wolff seized his chance and asked the judges if they could believe he was ‘insane’. The guards attempted to remove him from the courtroom, but the presiding judge replied, ‘My colleagues and I are ready to affirm that your bearing in the witness-box, the rapidity with which you responded, your excellent understanding and your ability to answer questions have convinced us personally that you are an intelligent and mentally perfectly normal human being.’³⁶ Wolff could not be returned to the asylum after that.

The prosecution had not neglected its own case meantime. From the shorthand records of the meetings of the Fighter Staff and Central Planning and — as surprise exhibits toward the end of the trial — Milch’s own Air Armament conferences, the prosecution extracted every incriminating passage that it could, be it a furious outburst after Hamburg, or the mention by SS General Kammler that thirty forced labourers had been hanged by the SS to set an example. (The defence of *tu quoque* was explicitly denied to defendants under the Nuremberg statute, but Bergold did not fail to remind the court that General Eisenhower’s Ordinance No. 1 had similarly provided for any German workers in occupied areas who refused to work to be shot.) Whether Milch had actually issued criminal orders, or had any powers to issue the orders attributed to him; whether Central Planning had any function other than allocating raw materials; whether these documents had been signed by, addressed to, or even seen by Milch — all these were points the court did not contemplate. Bergold found it particularly trying that he was not allowed to examine the *unextracted* part of the conference transcripts for any material that might have been helpful to the defence.

Yet he fought with great tenacity. To establish the legality of Milch’s actions in relation to the ‘slave labour’ programme he reminded the court on 5

March 1947 that Proclamation No. 2 of the Allied Control Council had empowered the Allies to deport German labour for reparations.³⁷ As far as Russian prisoners were concerned, the Soviet government had defined on 1 July 1941 that there were no restrictions on the type of work that could be demanded of German prisoners.³⁸ Perhaps it was a measure of his success that an American campaign of persecution began against Milch's defence counsel and his staff. On 6 March Bergold's Nuremberg home and its contents were confiscated by the American military authorities and placed at the court's disposal. Bergold protested to Judge Toms in his private room, 'Here I am *collaborating* with the Americans, and that is the gratitude I get!' Toms was so angry that he contacted the occupation authorities at once, and when they refused to rescind the order the judge declared (in Bergold's presence), 'Then I shall discontinue the trial and return forthwith to the United States. I shall there tell the press that defence counsel has been treated in this shameless way. I dislike this trial anyway!' Bergold's home was returned to him.³⁹

Throughout this spring the field marshal's endurance was also severely tested. His diary records how his liquid nourishment was almost totally removed and his cell windows were smashed; there was no heating and again there was no light in the evenings, until he tried to sleep, and then a spotlight was turned on. The table and chair had vanished long ago and these were followed by his mattress and blanket. (It was the American army that was responsible for this, not the judicial authorities.) Whereas in December he had been allowed out in the fresh air seven times (three hours all told), in January he had only two hours and in the whole of February, at the height of his trial, only one hour fifty minutes.⁴⁰ Despite this lack of exercise, Milch showed surprising resilience in the witness-box. For four days he battled with grim humour against what he (mistakenly) saw as 'the forces of the Old Testament'* arrayed against him. Bergold had adjured him to keep his temper and he succeeded well until he was examined by Judge Phillips about the Polish workers' conditions in Germany. His temper snapped: 'I would like to ask your Honours to accept that we in Germany were not all public torturers. I would say that the greater

part of the German people were well-intentioned and treated other people properly.' Then his neck went red, his eyes bulged and he shouted at the president, 'Or you may think — and you are perfectly entitled to — that all Germans are criminals. And then you must say you are justified in simply hanging the lot. In which case you had better make a start with me!'⁴¹ Bergold sank his head into his hands.

There were altogether thirty-one witnesses for the defence. The Americans had broadcast repeated appeals for direct evidence of Milch's activities over the wireless system, but not one witness had come forward. By the time the trial began, they had found only three men willing to testify against the field marshal — two French labourers and a German who professed to be a qualified aircraft engineer, one Josef Krysiak. Taken together, their evidence gave a vivid impression of the cruel conditions encountered in various armaments factories.

The emotional effect of Krysiak's evidence moved even Milch to write sympathetically about him that evening as a 'German engineer from Messerschmitt's thrown into Mauthausen concentration camp in 1940 — poor devil'.⁴² The testimony was devastating.

KRYSIAK: I swear by Almighty God to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

DENNEY: What is your profession?

KRYSIAK: A qualified aircraft engineer.

DENNEY: And when did you terminate your studies?

KRYSIAK: In 1936, in Berlin-Charlottenburg.

DENNEY: And were you professionally employed thereafter?

KRYSIAK: Yes, at Fokker's in Amsterdam and at Messerschmitt's in Augsburg.

DENNEY: Would you tell us what happened in 1940?

KRYSIAK: On 9 December 1940 I was arrested for sedition against the armed forces and for defeatist remarks . . . and I was sent for

* Milch's diary.

political re-education to the concentration camp at Mauthausen near Linz on the Danube.*⁴³

Gradually the whole tragic story was elicited from him — how he had had to work for twelve hours a day in a Messerschmitt plant three hours' drive from the camp, with starvation rations and frequent thrashings. In the camp four men had had to sleep to each bed. 'Most of those at Mauthausen and Gusen 11 died. As a rule nobody was released and the gaps caused by these convict deaths were filled by new transports.'

Judge Musmanno himself leaned forward to ask: 'What was your health like before your experiences in concentration camp?'

KRYSIAK: I can only say that I am now ill in my lungs and am undergoing medical treatment. That's what the five years cost me.

MUSMANNO: What was your health like before?

KRYSIAK: I was a sportsman and long-distance runner, so my health must have been good then — my lungs were perfect.

Krysiak was the last witness to be heard before the final speeches.

One more surprising feature became known to the defence in this case on 25 March, the day of the closing speeches. The court asked for Bergold's defence speech to be heard *first*. It lasted until that afternoon. Bergold regretted that he would have no chance to reply to the prosecution's final speech, the practice he had been accustomed to. Of Denney's final speech, which lasted a further two hours, Milch predictably observed that it 'maintained all the old lies intact. Illogical, confused, but diabolical.'⁴⁴

Today [began Denney] we close the case against a Major War Criminal, a leader of the slave programme, of an enormity unparalleled in history and a principal instigator of crimes of murder in a

* The reason for quoting Krysiak's remarkable evidence will become plain in the epilogue.

horrible masquerade of scientific progress that leaves both the world of medical science⁴⁵ and laymen aghast. The evidence discussed before this tribunal has shown that Erhard Milch is particularly incriminated as a leader of the forced labour programme which brought workers to Germany and distributed them to the various sectors of the German war economy and systematically exterminated them as soon as their value for science was at an end.⁴⁶

The prosecution formally demanded the death sentence on all counts.

When Milch himself spoke for the last time, he did so for only three minutes. He made no mention of the charges laid against him but talked instead about his life's work for Germany since becoming a soldier in 1910. He recalled how he had built up German civil aviation and promoted increased international understanding. In war he had done his duty in his country's defence. 'My personal fate is of no consequence in this connection,' Milch concluded. 'I have only one wish — that the German people may soon be released from its endless suffering, and enter as an equal partner into the community of nations.'⁴⁷

Word of the conclusion of the trial had been noised about the prison and the American soldiers guarding him were impressed. By evening a can of toddy, chocolates and cocoa and malt, scores of cigarettes, cigars and pipes of tobacco, pencils and beer had found their way to his cell.⁴⁸ One American told him that he was now rated with Speer and Wolff among the most popular inmates of that grim hostelry. Another said to him in very broken German, 'I won't use truncheon or shoot if you run away.' Milch declined to make the effort and sadly reflected that with men like that one could soon settle one's differences, 'but the Denneys . . .'

Four days after the court adjourned the Chinese-American soldier assigned to guard him, Private Lee, confided that he had just come off guard duty in the judges' room: 'You get two years and two months!' This would be a notable sentence, for it would effectively result in Milch's immediate release, as he had served that time already. Bergold heard a similar rumour from one of Denney's own team — that a sentence of about two years' imprisonment was to

be handed down to Milch.

Originally the verdict had been expected within about a week. Soon it was announced, however, that judgement had been postponed.⁴⁹ On Easter Monday, 7 April, a lieutenant warned Milch that the verdict was expected next day. That night they took away his belt so that he could not hang himself.⁵⁰ He ended his diary and dedicated it to his closest friends and relatives, but eight more days passed before judgement was pronounced.

At 2 p.m. on the sixteenth the tribunal met to announce its verdict.⁵¹ Judge Musmanno announced at once that he was submitting a separate opinion. The tribunal then proceeded to consider the three counts of the indictment. On the second of the three counts, concerning the criminal medical experiments at Dachau, Judge Phillips announced their verdict that it was obvious that Milch had never been an accessory, and he was acquitted completely on this count. Then Musmanno read the tribunal's finding on the first count, the charge that Milch was responsible for the deportation of foreign labour to Germany, resulting in its 'enslavement, torture and murder'.^{*} He was found guilty. So far as the third count of the indictment was concerned, the court found no evidence that Milch was guilty of crimes against humanity, but found him responsible for the torture and deportation of 'large numbers of Hungarian Jews' and other citizens of Hungary and Romania (a difficult verdict to understand, since these deportations were decided on long after Milch had relinquished office in June 1944, and since no instance of deportation of Romanian labour had actually been discovered). On this last count he was therefore also found guilty.

Sentence was passed next day, 17 April 1947. 'High Court of Military Tribunal No. II. Court is now in Session! God bless the United States of America and this High Court.' Dr Werner Milch, seated with Dr Bergold, could hear

* Brigadier-General Telford Taylor who was in court took exception to Musmanno's theatrical and flamboyant reading of the judgement and afterward interviewed the judge about it. Musmanno acknowledged his error on this occasion and promised to keep better control of himself in future. On that basis he remained in Nuremberg and sat as presiding judge in a later case.⁵²

low voices murmuring over the odds that sentence would be death by hanging. The court marshal banged his gavel: ‘Those present in Court Room A are requested to be silent.’ Milch was ordered to rise to his feet.⁵³

Until this moment he had been handcuffed to a burly U.S. sergeant next to him. Private Lee, who had snapped the handcuffs on him in his cell, had begun weeping with emotion for some reason, and even the Prison Office sergeant had apologized. In a subdued voice the court president read out the sentence:

This tribunal takes no pleasure in performing the duty which confronts it, but the deliberate enslavement of millions must not go unexpiated. The barbarous acts which have been revealed here originated in the lust and ambition of comparatively few men, but all Germans are paying and will pay for the degradation of their souls and the debasement of the German honour caused by following the false prophets who led them to disaster. It would be a travesty of justice to permit those false leaders, including this defendant, to escape responsibility for the deception and betrayal of their people.

It would be an even greater injustice to view with complacence the mass graves of millions of men, women and children whose only crime was that they stood in Hitler’s way. Retribution for such crimes against humanity must be swift and certain. Future would-be dictators and their subservient satellites must know what follows their defilement of international law and of every type of decency and fair dealing with their fellow men. Civilization will be satisfied with nothing less.

Raising his voice, he pronounced, ‘It is the sentence of this tribunal that the defendant, Erhard Milch, be confined to the Rebdorf prison for the remainder of his natural life.’ Milch scrutinized them dispassionately. The president ordered, ‘The Court Marshal will remove the defendant from the court-room.’⁵⁴

The handcuffs were replaced. As Milch was marched across the prison yard he caught sight of General Vorwald looking out of a cell window high up in the wall ahead. Milch raised his arm, defiantly jerking the army sergeant's arm aloft as well, as he saluted him.⁵⁵ Some of the defendants in another case — that against the industrialist Friedrich Flick — called out to ask the sentence. Milch shouted back, 'Let off with a reprimand!' Then he was put into Cell Eleven, where the rest of his life was to begin.

E P I L O G U E

A DISCLOSURE

April 1947–January 1972

SO, FOR ERHARD MILCH, two years after most people, the war was over at least. He had survived again. There was now hardly any risk to which he had not been exposed — he had crashed four aircraft, two cars and one railway locomotive. In the Second World War alone he had made over five hundred flights, forty of them operational in the battles for Norway and France. Now he had escaped a death sentence too.

After it was all over the judges expressed sincere regrets to Milch's counsel for the contemptible publications propagated by Gaston Oulman.¹ (Before the year was out Oulman had himself been arrested and imprisoned for repeated forgery of documents: he had never been in a concentration camp and he had forged the certificates to that effect himself.)

The rumours of Milch's Jewish parentage had started in the autumn of 1933.² They were nourished by Milch's own reticence on the subject, they were believed even by his closest friends like Udet, and they left behind a legend which will live on long after the field marshal's death. The whole truth was not disclosed even to him until the autumn of 1933, after Göring had first mentioned the rumours to him. In Nazi Germany, for a state secretary to have partly Jewish blood could have only one consequence. Milch could only reply that he had never heard talk of a Jewish strain in his family before: Anton Milch, who had married Klara Vetter at the end of the 1880s, had been, as we

have seen, a naval apothecary; and if in turn Anton's father had admittedly been called Benno, that was a normal Catholic name at the time.³ But the evidence against Milch could not be overlooked; the allegation was backed up with a dossier including photographs of a tombstone in a Jewish graveyard in Breslau, bearing the one word 'Milch'.⁴

An investigation was immediately carried out. The unwholesome truth the authorities shortly uncovered was the cruellest blow that any man could have expected. In one sense there was relief, for Milch's father was unquestionably Aryan; but that was not all, for he was not Anton Milch, and he was not a man whom the Church would ever have accepted as Klara Vetter's husband. So awful were the implications that Erhard Milch knew that this one fact about his parentage could never be revealed. He concealed it from the author, and when the truth nevertheless emerged from the family papers he asked that the confidence should be respected about his father's identity. All his life Milch had longed for a father. Anton Milch he had scarcely known. Now the tragedy was complete, for at nearly forty years of age he had identified his real father, a man he had known and admired like no other as a boy, but a man already dead for a quarter of a century.

Soon Milch had in his hands a document which dispelled any last doubts that might have lingered in his mind, a letter his mother had written six months before (in March 1933) to her son-in-law, whose career had also been threatened by the rumours.⁵ Four pages long, the letter responded to his appeal that she should set out in writing the truth about her marriage. Briefly summarized, it was that her parents had decided that she should marry an apparently orphaned naval apothecary, Anton Milch; she however was consumed with illicit love for another man, who wanted to marry her — a union which would have been disallowed by the Church but not illegal in those days. Her mother and father had insisted that the wedding to Anton, humble and unloved, should go ahead. Her unhappiness had changed to horror when she learned by chance that Anton's mother was in fact still alive, but incurably insane in an asylum. Klara vowed that she would never bear his children. In distraction, Anton had pleaded with her and out of pity she consented to the marriage on condition that all their children should be by her heart's true desire, the man

whom Göring's investigation had identified. Thus the unique combination had come about, to the contentment of all parties.

On 7 October 1933 the then state secretary drove up to Kiel for one last meeting with Anton Milch, still alive but with not many months to live. A more poignant occasion can scarcely be imagined. Anton dictated to him a two-page statement, admitting everything Erhard had now found out.⁶ He signed the document at its foot. He had no children of his own and before he died he disinherited the four who had been born to him by his wife. Thus the matter was finally settled. Apart from Göring, who never revealed the truth — which no man knowing it could ever forget — only a few people were informed. The letter of Milch's mother and Anton's confession were produced to Hitler, and on 1 November Milch recorded in his diary, 'Afternoon: Göring has spoken with Hitler, von Blomberg and Hess about my parentage.' A few hours later he added the telling phrase, 'Everything in order.'⁷

Yet the long-drawn-out agony of indignity was to continue much longer, inflicted first by his fellow Germans and then by his captors at Nuremberg, to whom his 'Jewish' background and his subsequent 'clean billing' by Göring were anathema. His mother was still alive: Milch could only bite his lip and contain the truth within himself. We have seen how the American prosecutor Jackson bluntly challenged Milch upon this point; and Dr Robert Kempner, his assistant, continued to work this haemophiliac wound in the interrogations over the years that followed. From Milch's diary we can sense his agony of mind: 'Kempner grills me about father (A.M.) and mother ... I turned it all over in my mind, then answered in line with my original official papers. Should I have disclosed the truth, shameful as it is, about C — to him? But now Kempner will exploit all this,' he wrote in frustration. 'It makes me sick!'⁸

From the autumn of 1933 onward there had been one thing of which he was now certain: he could expect to advance no further if he admitted the truth about his parentage. It would have been unthinkable under the rigid Prussian code of ethics for a minister or a commander-in-chief to have a concealed history like his.⁹

As Milch's life sentence now began, members of Denney's own prosecu-

tion team privately urged Dr Bergold to lodge an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court, a course which no other German lawyer had yet considered. On 2 May Bergold did indeed petition the military governor either to quash the sentence as illegal under the Geneva Convention or to reduce it as certain findings had not been supported by the evidence.¹⁰ At the same time Bergold petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court, challenging the legality of Military Tribunal II, and applying for a writ of *habeas corpus*.¹¹ As to the first petition, the U.S. deputy military governor, Major-General Frank A. Keating, upheld the tribunal's findings.¹² As to the second, Keating forwarded it to Washington with a recommendation that the application should be rejected.

The device used by Dr Bergold in applying for a writ of *habeas corpus* had been overlooked by the planners of the Nuremberg statute, and the petition could not be prevented from going all the way to Washington. In the American capital it nearly succeeded: it reached the very doors of the Supreme Court, but by four votes to four the court ruled that it was unable to hear it (Justice Jackson very properly abstained from voting).¹³ Subsequently Bergold appealed to the Swiss government as the protecting power about what he alleged were the American violations of the Geneva Convention in putting Milch on trial. In reply the Swiss government disclosed that the United States had withdrawn their recognition of Switzerland as the protecting power in early 1945 (Britain and Canada had not). This did not, in their view, lessen the force of the Hague Treaty of 1907 or the Geneva Convention concerned, but there was nothing they were prepared to do about it.¹⁴

All this time people like Professor Messerschmitt and Dr Heinkel, who were — as the documents indicate — *personally* responsible for the employment of concentration camp prisoners in their factories, were free, as was indeed Karl-Otto Saur, Milch's joint chief in the Fighter Staff.

For the first three months of his sentence the field marshal was imprisoned with the seven major war criminals who had survived the first trial. He passed the time in long private talks with Speer, Hess and the others, who were not to leave Spandau for many years to come. Milch was an accurate observer and a conscientious recorder of detail and the diaries he kept thus have a certain interest.

Rudolf Hess appeared to be the only one left with any faith in National Socialism. All the others had recanted to a greater or lesser degree. He was evidently writing a book: a typewriter clattered constantly in his cell, and from time to time he would emerge to grill Milch and Speer on the details of the important weapons-project failures, like the four-engined Ju 89 stopped by Göring in 1937. He evidently considered these responsible for the German defeat.

I told him that all these were just minutiae, and not the decisive factors. We were defeated because Hitler went to war after only four or five years' rearmament, with no rising class of military leaders. I said the same was true of the civil sector: the conflict between the state and party, and the disorganization that this caused. And on top of that virtually useless people acting as administrators — gauleiters, district leaders and the like.¹⁵

It was one of a number of somewhat brittle conversations conducted in an atmosphere of forced politeness; Speer often found some excuse to leave the discussions early on. He told Milch privately that he thought that Hess was trying to prove that Hitler and National Socialism had been let down by the incompetence of the lesser leaders. Milch could see that not only was Hess's faith in Hitler unshattered, he had a growing belief in his own National Socialist mission.¹⁶ In June 1947 the erstwhile deputy Führer stunned him with a remark that he was 'trying to find a better name for the Ministry of Propaganda'.¹⁷ 'He is a strange man,' concluded Milch, 'partly intelligent, partly very mixed-up, but such a fanatic and ascetic that it is not possible to regard him as completely sane.' And after he saw him for the last time, 'He has donned the mantle of a martyr and sees every occurrence only as an act of spite against his person.'¹⁸

The field marshal's relations with Grand-Admiral Raeder, now seventy-two years old, were at first strained. Both had attended Hitler's secret speech of 23 May 1939, but when Milch had asked him in February 1947 to testify to its true nature, which was very different from what Hitler's adjutant had recorded, the admiral sent word back to Bergold that 'if I have come a cropper

and been convicted I see no reason why the others should not suffer too'.¹⁹ Later he had said of Milch, 'I can't abide the fellow!' But now that the ordeal of both was over, a belated friendship sprang up between Milch and the reserved and charmless admiral. Raeder now confirmed what Milch had remembered of Hitler's 1939 speech to them and pointed out that, had the Führer at that time stated his firm intention of declaring war, the navy would have entered the hostilities far better prepared than it did.²⁰

It was Albert Speer who still fascinated Milch: he regarded him with a mixture of envy, loyalty, amusement, cynicism and admiration. 'Speer thinks nothing of soldiers. After all, he himself never served. Strongly egocentric — particularly interested to know what the Yanks and Germans think of him. Still has the same old ambitions — very outspoken against Göring, Keitel and Saur. His memory only good in parts.'²¹ By his own account the minister had lived through many dramatic events, sometimes as observer, sometimes as conspirator. Of the last days in Berlin Speer described how Hitler had planned his suicide:

Hitler really wanted to stay alive and remain in Berlin until he had organized the resistance. This latter intention he, Speer, foils by persuading Colonel-General Heinrici and his chief of staff [Colonel] Kinzel to abandon Berlin. Only in this way can Speer prevent the large-scale demolition of Berlin's bridges and industry as ordered by Hitler in the event of a battle. The OKW detects this sabotage attempt, and Hitler sends Keitel and Jodl out of Berlin. They dismiss Heinrici, but cannot undo what has been done. Only at Nuremberg do Keitel and Jodl learn that Speer was the *spiritus rector*.

To this Milch added, 'Well, well!'²²

The field marshal also maintained a healthy scepticism about Speer's claim to have planned to assassinate Hitler, and he questioned him privately about this on at least three occasions. Speer's account grew more detailed with each telling.

About the middle of February 1945, he [Speer] plans to infiltrate a new poison gas, capable of penetrating any filter, into Hitler's bunker at the Reich Chancery, by means of the ventilation shaft. In the evenings there are usually only Hitler, Bormann and Goebbels down there in the bunker. Speer intends to procure the gas from Stahl, of the Main Munitions Committee. The idea fails for three reasons: the chemicals have to be activated by an explosion, impossible in the air intake duct; secondly, on Hitler's orders the intake duct has suddenly been bricked up to a height of ten feet, and thirdly the garden round the shaft is patrolled by several sentries. He does not want to run any personal risk. Thus he toys with the idea in his mind until the end of March — now for, and now against. Then he goes to the Ruhr on about 23 or 24 March 1945, where he talks, unrecognized, to an elderly miner who displays a childlike faith in the Führer. Whereupon, says Speer, he gives up his assassination idea!

He was asked about it during the trials by Lawrence and Jackson. The 'plot' has been of the utmost value to him. Jackson has let him know that he is the only defendant he respects.*²³

Milch purposely avoided discussing with Speer his repeated claims to have increased aircraft output after the field marshal's resignation. ('What's the point of bickering — it's all over and done with!')²⁴

After the lorries finally rolled out of Nuremberg Prison, carrying Speer and his fellow prisoners away to Spandau in Berlin, Milch put down on paper his private assessment of his former colleague:

Of the younger ones, his is the most marked personality — highly intelligent, artistic in temperament and ambitious to the point of

* Jackson's respect for Speer also speaks loudly from his private papers: given a choice as to which defendant he would have acquitted, he wrote in a memoir he would have acquitted Speer.

power-hunger; knows what he wants and what his worth is. Temperamental, well suited for higher office with the reservation that he frequently displays poor judgement of character. Very accommodating, but at times also abrupt. Always unpredictable. Sometimes belligerent, sometimes peaceable. Usually opposed to the general trend and whatever one would normally expect. Personally courageous, and intercedes for others without thought of his own safety. Desires publicity, as he suffers from a certain vanity . . . Germany could make better use of him elsewhere, even today.²⁵

Finally there was Walther Funk, the flabby, homosexual former Economics Minister. Like Hess he was a sick man and every personal attack wounded him deeply. When the German press announced that '45,000 bottles of wine and several hundredweight of flour' had been found hidden in his home — a total invention, of the kind which found ready credence in post-war Germany — he flew into an impotent rage which repelled Milch.²⁶ Funk's sensitive nerves had worse to suffer next day: SS General Pohl, on trial for his life, confessed that he had sworn his affidavit against Funk (which had figured prominently in the evidence before the IMT) only after considerable maltreatment.*

A few weeks later, early in September 1947, it was Milch's nerves that suffered. It was unexpectedly discovered during the Pohl trial that Josef Krysiak, the sole German witness produced by the American prosecution in the case against Milch, was a perjurer of astounding audacity and a convict with a criminal record.²⁷ He had never been inside a concentration camp in his life, let alone worked for Messerschmitt's or in the aircraft industry. Yet this was clearly the witness who had made most impression on Judge Musmanno; altogether fifty-six lines of his written opinion were devoted to the harrowing, but entirely fictitious, evidence of this thirty-six-year-old German:

* Full details are in the shorthand record of Case iv, USA *v.* Oswald Pohl *et al.*

In contrast to the idyllic picture of harmony in an explosives factory or of 'Strength through Joy' at Nuremberg, one recalls the picture of the final witness in this trial to one's memory: he too was a German. He too worked in a war factory. In December 1940 he commented in a conversation with friends that Germany could not win the war if America entered the European conflict. The Gestapo learned of this remark and he was put into a concentration camp
...

The collapse of this man's health is perhaps only a fraction of the real damage he has suffered. In the witness box he gave the impression of a man broken by the hell of these five years. His voice trembled, his shoulders dropped, his looks were far away. He was alive, and there was something in him that had already died. Perhaps he was musing on the real tragedy — that all these horrors had been inflicted upon him by his fellow-countrymen, not because he had turned against his own country, but because he had spoken the truth, which — had it been heeded — could have prevented not only his misfortune but also the ruination of millions of his brothers.

The Americans tried to introduce Krysiak again as their witness during the Pohl case. Dr Georg Fröschmann, a colleague of Dr Bergold, established from the civil police records that Krysiak had a long criminal record, starting at the age of nineteen, with twelve convictions for repeated fraud, begging, illegal frontier-crossing, illegally wearing a uniform to perpetrate marriage frauds on rich widows, embezzlement and forgery. In October 1941 the regular criminal courts had sentenced him to death as a habitual criminal, though the sentence was later commuted to ten years' penal servitude.²⁸ In his evidence in the Milch case he had perjured himself from one end to the other. Yet despite his background the Americans had made this creature an official 'property trustee' after the Milch case, working in their Property Control Division. Here he reverted to form, for within eighteen months he was back in prison on two counts of embezzlement, the fraudulent use of an academic degree and forgery.²⁹ Bergold

and Fröschmann both appealed to the tribunals to convict Krysiak for perjury, but in August 1948 Judge Toms finally ruled that perjury was not an offence under international law, so they had no jurisdiction.

Milch remained in Landsberg Prison, watching the constant flow of prisoners, some less fortunate than he, with the red jackets that marked them out as ‘candidates’ for the hangman. His bitterness turned to stoicism. He learned carpentry and glazing. (He jokingly told a visitor that Landsberg was the only jail that could boast about its priceless ‘Milchglas’.*) Early in 1951 the Allies reduced his life sentence to fifteen years and he was released on parole after serving two-thirds of this sentence, in mid-1955.³⁰ Much in the world outside had changed, but much was the same as ever. A new Lufthansa airline had been founded and a new German air force under General Josef Kammhuber was in its infancy. Once again Milch was the outsider, but this time there could be no return: he had been stripped of all his possessions and was forbidden under the terms of his parole to meet his wartime colleagues and friends. The memory of Milch faded from the public mind.

Industry — the Fiat aviation division and the Thyssen steel combine — did not forget him and employed him almost to the end as an adviser. He lived with relations in Düsseldorf until illness carried him to hospital at the end of 1971. On 30 December his field marshal’s baton, which had been taken from him in 1945 and been purchased after many wanderings by a Scottish family in memory of three sons they had lost in the RAF in the war, was returned by their generosity to Germany, and formally handed back to Milch in a small ceremony by a Bundeswehr general at his bedside. When he died not long after, the newspapers published the announcement with the words he had requested: ‘Erhard Milch, Field Marshal: born 30 March 1892, died 25 January 1972, signs over and out.’ It was characteristic of him to use the same phrase that the Luftwaffe unit, trapped inside Stalingrad, had signalled to him as the enemy broke down the door twenty-nine years before.

* An expensive opalescent glass.

The tragedy of the German air force was wrought by the three men who had ruled its fortunes — Göring who had fathered it, Milch who had created it, and Hitler who used it. Its ultimate defeat cannot be attributed to any insuperable disadvantage in materials or resources. (Even the oil shortage which reduced the hours of flying training and finally grounded the operational squadrons themselves would not have become crucial had the energetic defensive measures of 1944 been adopted two years before, as Milch had recommended.) The principal cause of its defeat was its unreadiness and the high-level conflicts over how it should be committed to battle: the blade that destroyed the Polish and French air forces was still too brittle to survive the exhausting conflict that lay ahead, and was shattered in its turn.

Of its two principal officers, Göring was characterized by a pathological vanity and hunger for power, while his deputy Milch was motivated by a more congenial alchemy of personal ambition and deep-rooted nationalism. Between them reigned an endless, alternating cycle of *Hassliebe* — Milch refusing to recognize his minister's qualities, Göring reluctant to trust his state secretary further than he could throw him. Of the two, Göring may in some respects be considered the more attractive personality: he possessed undoubted personal authority, indeed he was a lion among lambs. Before the war his reputation among foreign diplomats was enviable and his attributes were sufficient to cloud his faults. He knew how to inspire great deeds in his men: the dogged bravery of the Luftwaffe crews in the Battle of Britain, as indeed at Stalingrad, testify to that. He was a hard worker, though only in spasms, and was defeated by the sheer multiplicity of his offices. He would work for a long stretch in the capital, then tire suddenly and depart for Italy, France or the Netherlands, however real the crisis he left behind. Small wonder that he mistrusted the more consistently able officers of the Luftwaffe command — men like Milch, Koller and von Greim — and contrived to keep them far from Hitler's headquarters.

In his personal life, Göring was contentedly married, a mark of personal stability which cannot be overlooked; but unlike Milch, Göring was not a man of vision, as is shown by his ready abandonment in peacetime of Milch's ten-year plan for the creation of a well-exercised and -staffed strategic air force in

favour of rapid armament in breadth, and by his reluctance to invest in the defence of the Reich in wartime. In this Göring ignored a basic tenet of strategy — that the home base from which all operations are launched must be defended first and foremost.

By 1942 at the latest, the provision of adequate air defences for the Reich should have found first priority. The truth was that the Reichsmarschall lacked the courage to represent this to Hitler; he was possessed of great moral and physical courage at other times, but was awestruck in Hitler's presence. This weakness was a major factor in the over-extension and defeat of the Luftwaffe. Another contributory element was Göring's uncertain judgement of character — how else could he have appointed officers like Udet, Loerzer, Kreipe and a host of others to the positions that they held?

It must be added here that Milch's judgement was not flawless either. His unconcealed prejudices against able officers like Kesselring (and even Jeschonnek) and his ready acceptance of indolent and harmful commanders like Sperrle testify to this. Nevertheless, Göring's initial choice of Milch — insensitive, ruthless but outstandingly capable as an organizer — was one that he cannot have regretted. In other circumstances history would probably have ranked Milch with Lord Brabazon, Juan Trippe and other great airline pioneers as the promoter of flying without fear. Even now history should still compare him with Mr Robert S. McNamara, as the civilian manager of a large commercial undertaking suddenly plunged into a world of military strategy and high politics.

For the first years after 1933 it is difficult to fault Milch's administration, although it was increasingly circumscribed by the jealous actions of his master. No regime could have picked a better architect for its air power. When he began there was virtually nothing. Out of these small beginnings he created by 1940 the biggest air force in the world. Even in war his achievement was undeniable: faced with the diminishing resources of a blockaded nation at war, and by annihilating air attacks, he more than trebled aircraft production between 1941 and 1944.

Yet as much as the Luftwaffe was Milch's creation, the field marshal was himself a product of the Nazi era: he adapted his language and adopted its

methods. His enemies began to outnumber his friends. In later years he ruled the ministry by bluster and fear, by threats of courts martial and firing squad. Though the threats were never carried out, the court martials ordered were profuse, and when Speer took over in 1944 he had to declare a general amnesty and stop all the proceedings Milch had initiated. Milch argued to the end that to combat the mass destruction and terrorizing of the Reich, ruthless measures alone would suffice; without them, it was impossible to stamp out despondency and defeatism. At the same time Milch showed great positive virtues. Among them were his outstanding loyalty toward his friends (evidenced above all by his refusal to undermine Speer's early position) and his buoyant optimism in spite of the most catastrophic situations.

From the time of Udet's death in November 1941 Milch alone championed the need to defend German air-space above all else. This was a realization that dawned on Hitler and Göring only later, in 1944. By then Milch had given up the unequal struggle, and had engineered his way out of the war using the Fighter Staff as his bridge.

History will hold against him many matters, which are not all identical with those counts on which he was formally found guilty. He must have recognized that the Hitler of 1943 was different from the Messiah he had seen ten years before, a dictator irrevocably committed to the domination of territories to which Germany had not even the pretence of a legal claim; yet from this man Hitler flowed his own rank and his authority. When he 'thanked God' for the Führer's escape from the assassin's bomb in July 1944 he really meant it. For Milch too there was no going back, and he shut his eyes to what was happening about him. He had exulted in the splendours of the Nazi rise; he had marched next to Hitler in Munich, he had taken the salute in Vienna, he had banqueted in Berlin. That he suffered also in the decline and fall cannot entirely have surprised him.

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Milch's personal papers include about five thousand pages of diaries and notebooks, which vary considerably in content from 1910 to 1950. From the First World War until 1923 the diaries are wordy and intact; as his offices expanded, Milch compiled two diaries — a vest-pocket version which has survived complete, and a more bulky book of which latter all but a few were looted by Allied troops in 1945 and must be presumed lost. The most important texts of the diaries have been transcribed by this author and can be found on his microfilm, DJ-59, together with selected items of his correspondence. The diaries themselves are microfilmed throughout on microfilms DJ-54, 55, 56, 57, 58a and 58b. The personal papers also included a number of studies, including a manuscript autobiography, which are listed in Section 2 below.

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C H A P T E R 1

- ¹ Diary, 10 Mar 1938. Memoirs, and Pre-Trial Interrogation, 17 Oct 1946. An earlier hint of coming events can be found in Milch's diary, 15 Feb 1938: 'Evening with the Führer. Dinner. [He discussed] the assimilation [*An-gleichung*] of Austria.'
- ² MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1810. Cf Werner Bross: *Gespräche mit Hermann Göring*, pp. 116f. Milch, IMT, vol. ix, p. 84. Also, K. H. Völker: *Die deutsche Luftwaffe 1933–1939* (Stuttgart, 1867; cited hereafter as Völker: *Luftwaffe*) Milch's diary, 12 Mar 1938, and letter Milch to author, 1 Sep 1968. And Documents on British Foreign Policy, Series 3 (cited hereafter as DBFP:3), vol. 1, p. 27: Palairet to Halifax, 12 Mar 1938.
- ³ Diary, 15 Mar 1938. Memoirs, and Milch, Feb 1967. The programme for the parade is in MPP. The German general in the fly-past was Wolff, Sperrle's chief of staff in the Third Air Group, Munich (who from 12 to 31 Mar 1938 acted as C-in-C of the Luftwaffe in Austria).
- ⁴ Milch, Nov 1968. A copy of his birth certificate, dated 31 Mar 1892, issued on 14 Dec 1937 with a further (significant) endorsement by the Minister of the Interior (sgd pp Stuckart) on 18 Feb 1938, is in Milch's personal papers (cited: MPP).
- ⁵ MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1755.
- ⁶ *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, 26 Jun 1906.
- ⁷ Milch's officer's record (*Personalnachweis*) in MPP. Also MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1954f. For a minor act of bravery on his part — rescuing a drowning boy — see the citations in *Berliner General-Anzeiger*, 28 Aug 1908, and *Amstblatt der Königlichen Regierung im Stralsund*,

- 10 Dec 1908 (MPP).
- ⁸ Milch, Nov 1968.
- ⁹ Letters from Fritz Herrmann, 22 Aug 1968, and Richard Falke, 29 Aug 1968, to the author. The former was seven years Milch's senior and served in the same regiment; the latter was a fellow officer at Anklam.
- ¹⁰ Werner Beumelburg: *Ein Leben im Dienst der Luftfahrt*, *Deutsche Soldatenzeitung*, 30 Mar 1953.
- ¹¹ Diaries. Milch also wrote a notebook of essays during the early months of the First World War. This chapter is also based on the 334-page typescript of the handwritten memoirs written by Erhard Milch in Nuremberg Prison (MPP). The diaries are on the author's microfilm DJ-54.
- ¹² This was a remarkable coincidence, for in the battle of Langemarck in autumn 1914 in Flanders, the young German regiments also attacked singing the German national hymn.
- ¹³ Diary, 14 Feb 1915.
- ¹⁴ Memoirs; and diary, 12 Jul 1917: 'British prisoner of war (shot down near Anermoi) joins us in the mess. Douglas Weld, from Canada. A small party is held.'
- ¹⁵ Capt. Helmuth Wilberg, who played a significant role in the Reichswehr phase of the Luftwaffe's history, was *Kofl 4* (commanding air units, Fourth Army) at this time.
- ¹⁶ Memoirs.
- ¹⁷ Diary, 1 Oct 1918; and memoirs.
- ¹⁸ Diary, 11 Nov 1918; and memoirs.
- ¹⁹ Diary, 14 Nov 1918; and memoirs.
- ²⁰ Milch in MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1756ff.
- ²¹ Letter, Major E. von Stülpnagel (70 Inf Brig) to Capt Milch, Stolp, 3 Jul 1919 (MPP).

- 22 Memoirs.
- 23 Doc. 6, in Karl-Heinz Völker: *Dokumente und Dokumentarfotos zur Geschichte der deutschen Luftwaffe* (Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1968) cited hereafter as Völker: *Dokumente*. This is a list of the police air squadrons, dated 31 Mar 1920. The invitation to Milch came from Major Streccius, *Fliegerführer* of the Army Command North.
- 24 Käthe Patschke, born 28 Aug 1889, was the daughter of the landowner Paul Patschke of Schöneck.
- 25 Diary, 1 Nov 1919.
- 26 Milch: Report on the incident at the Flour Mill, on 13 Aug 1920 (MPP); see also *Ostpreussische Zeitung*, Königsberg, 13 Aug 1920: 'Blood on the conscience of rioting strikers. One dead, many injured' (MPP).
- 27 Milch's officer's record (see note 7). On the dissolution of German flying units, see Völker: *Dokumente*, Doc. 1, dated 9 Apr 1920; Doc. 2, dated 6 May 1920; and Doc. 4, dated 13 Jan 1921.
- 28 Letter, German Airlines to Milch, 22 Nov 1920 (MPP).
- 29 Letter, Herr Porr to Capt Milch, 22 Nov 1920 (MPP).
- 30 Memoirs, and letter Milch to author, 3 Aug 1969; Milch's diary had not spoken kindly of Sachsenberg before (17 and 19 Dec 1919).
- 31 The card shows flight time from Berlin to Königsberg via Schneidemühl and Danzig as 5½ hours; it is undated but probably before May 1921.
- 32 Diary, 23 Apr 1921.
- 33 Diary, 4 Jun 1921; and memoirs. Diary, 26 Jul 1921 *et seq.*; and memoirs, and letter Milch to Sachsenberg, 27 July 1921 (MPP).
- 34 Diary, 29 Jul 1921; and memoirs.
- 35 Characteristic of airline operating problems then are the letters Milch to Lloyd Eastern Airways, Devau, 31 Jul 1921; Harry Winter to Milch, Danzig Air Mail, 2 Aug 1921 (MPP); Milch to Sachsenberg, 11 Aug 1921, and Hermann Müller to Milch, Riga, 25 Sep 1921 (MPP).
- 36 Milch, Dec 1968; and circular re: Processing of War Experiences in Aviation, Berlin, 5 Jan 1920 (signed Kraehe, and counter-signed Wilberg) in MPP; and Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 61. Milch's two studies are 'Aerial Reconnaissance', 21 Feb 1920, and 'Struggle for Air Supremacy', 24 Feb 1920 (MPP); Milch's papers also contain a lengthy study he wrote in 1917 on the future development of air power in war — a study which has proved very accurate in time.
- 37 Milch: comments on *Frankfurter Illustrierte* articles, 2 May 1952 (MPP): 'The Reich Defence Ministry put the money at his [Junkers's] disposal. I myself had to collect the first installment from the Reichsbank.'
- 38 Affidavit Dr Ernst Brandenburg, 29 Oct 1949. He described the Fili affair as 'one of the most hateful and grievous experiences in my life'. Also report of State Prosecutor Lämmler, Dessau, to the Reich Air Ministry, 5 Feb 1934 (Berlin Document Centre, file: Junkers–Milch) and Junkers company, Main Office; Description of the Relations between the Reich Defence Ministry (Army Command) and Professor Junkers from Autumn 1921 to Autumn 1926 (dated 8 Dec 1926, in the Junkers archives). This latter report was circulated *inter alia* to Reichstaff deputies Quaatz, Kulenkampff and Wieland, and this constituted the treason of which Junkers was later accused.
- 39 Milch: Half-annual report on the operations of Danzig Air Mail from 5 May to 30 Sep 1922 (MPP) and memoirs.
- 40 Memoirs, and letter Milch to Junkers company, Aviation Department, 4 Aug 1922 (MPP).
- 41 Memoirs; and *Frankfurter Illustrierte*, 27 Apr 1952.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 15 June 1924.

- 43 Diary, 16 July 1924; and Milch in MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1761.
- 44 Diary, 21–28 Jul 1924.
- 45 Letter, Brandenburg to Prussian Ministry of Trade, 23 Nov 1924; quoted in KarlHeinz Eyermann: *Der grosse Bluff* (based on documents in East German archives); cf Willy Polte: *Uns aber gehörte der Himmel* (Bonn, 1956), p. 145.
- 46 Memoirs.
- 47 Von Gablenz: note on telephone conversation between Koch and Dr Kaufmann, 13 Nov 1925 (MPP). Milch, letter of Aug 1969.
- 48 Memorandum, Dessau, 15 Nov 1925, in which the whole episode is recounted by von Gablenz stage by stage (MPP). Cf diary, 14 Nov 1925: ‘In Berlin with Koch and Fisch: would I like to become manager (instead of Sago [Sachsenberg])? Yes, provided Prof [Junkers] also asks me to.’
- 49 Memorandum of 24 Nov 1925 (MPP).
- 50 Milch: Memorandum of 24 Dec 1925.
- 51 Brandenburg: affidavit, 29 Oct 1949: ‘From that moment on, this company [Lufthansa] was like a red rag to a bull for Junkers. As Milch had previously been employed by Junkers Airways Company, he was regarded by the professor and by many of his partly innocent but misinformed colleagues as a deserter.’
- 52 Milch, letter of Aug 1969.
- 53 Memoirs; and memorandum of 24 Dec 1925 (MPP).
- 54 Memoirs.
- 55 *Frankfurter Illustrierte*, 27 Apr 1952; the pioneers were led by Dr Robert Knauss and Lt Cdr (ret.) Georg von Winterfeld.
- 56 The licence was awarded on 27 Jan 1927.
- 57 Cf article, ‘Air Traveled Germany’ by W. Jefferson Davis in *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 Nov 1927.
- 58 Milch in MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1762; and memoirs.
- 59 Diary, 21 Mar 1927; and memoirs.
- 60 Milch, lecture: Technical Developments in Aviation, delivered at Essen, 24 May 1928 (MPP).
- 61 On the successful east-west transatlantic crossing by Lufthansa’s Captain Köhl (an attempt which Milch flatly opposed), see Milch’s memorandum on confs with Herr Köhl early and mid-Mar 1928, dated Berlin 12 Apr 1928; and on 22 Jun 1928, dated 23 Jun 1928 (MPP). And diary, 12–13 Apr 1928.
- 62 Memoirs.
- 63 MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1762ff. Milch, letter of Aug 1969; and draft OSS biography of Hermann Göring, 18 Jun 1945 (NARS). Milch: A confidential study on the life of Göring, 17 May 1947 (NARS: RG-238; in file: Pre-Trial Interrogations of Milch). Diary, 4 Dec 1928. Milch evidently did not consider Göring of sufficient importance to commemorate his earlier meetings with him in his diary. Hermann Göring was born at Rosenheim, 40 miles east of Munich, on 12 Jan 1893.
- 64 Letter, Milch to Deutsche Bank, 30 May 1928 (quoted by Eyermann, *op. cit.*, p. 320).
- 65 Letter, Deutsche Bank to Lufthansa, 6 Jun 1929 (*ibid.*, pp. 356f). Under German criminal law (paras. 331 *et seq.* of Reich Penal Code) bribery of Reichstag deputies did not constitute a crime. To the author Milch disclaimed any part in the decision to make payments to Göring.
- 66 Memoirs.
- 67 Memoirs; see also Milch at GL conf, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35, p. 3222): ‘This was what Junkers devised, and this was how he tried to kill off Lufthansa.’
- 68 *Ibid.* Dr Stüssel and Dr Schatzki were the engineers who made the F 24, Ko, as the single-engined version was called, possible.
- 69 Diary, 14–15 Sep 1928.
- 70 Cf Milch’s comments 2 May 1952 (note 37): ‘I played no part whatsoever in Merkel’s dismissal.’ But see his memo-

- randum of 23 Jun 1928 on the Köhl affair.
- 71 Diary, 15 and 26 April, 11 and 15 May, 29 Nov 1928.
- 72 This notebook is tucked into the beginning of the *following* year's diary, 1929, the year in which Merkel went.
- 73 There are references to Milch lunching with Göring at the Kaiserhof in diaries, 28 Jan, 12 Feb, 6 Mar, 8 Apr and 9 Apr 1929, etc.
- 74 Diary, 9, 11 Apr; 10, 26, 27 May 1929.
- 75 Gritzbach: *Hermann Göring, Werk und Mensch* (1940), pp. 121f.
- 76 Diary, 18 Jun 1929: 'Audit committee: "The bombshell bursts". Heck, to tell him my views,' 28 Jun 1929: 'Afternoon, audit committee: Grulich, von Schröder, Schmidt dismissed.' Cf also diary, 29 Jun, 1–2 July 1929.
- 77 MCH, 13 Mar 1947, p. 1895.
- 78 Memoirs. Milch comments, 2 May 1952 (note 37); and diary, 4 Jul 1929.
- 79 Memoirs.
- 80 Letter, Milch to Fritz Horn, Shanghai, 1 Nov 1929 (MPP). Horn had been a fitter in Milch's squadron in the First World War.
- 81 *Bremen* first launched her aircraft 250 miles from New York on 22 July 1929; *Europa* 500 miles from Europe in 1931.
- 82 Cf Eyermann, p. 115.
- 83 Letter, Milch to Horn, 1 Nov 1929.
- 84 Memoirs. The Deutsche Bank (Dr Kurt Weigelt) headed a consortium of five major banks granting Lufthansa three-monthly credits of six million Reichsmarks.
- 85 Milch: lecture (see note 60); cf his article, 'Technical problems of Lufthansa', in *Nachrichtenblatt des Reichsverbandes der Deutschen Luftfahrtindustrie*, Berlin, 23 Apr 1928.
- 86 Lufthansa business report, 27 Sep 1929; quoted in Eyermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 106f. Cf Gritzbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 123f. 'The nucleus of German aviation was always Lufthansa. There was a number of minor companies apart from her, mostly of a local character. The parsimonious spirit of the time never understood that, quite apart from their real civil aviation job, these companies had vital duties to fulfil, in keeping Germany abreast of the technical progress made by the world's aviation.'
- 87 Letter, Werner Milch to Milch, 15 Nov 1923 (MPP).
- 88 Memoirs.
- 89 MCH, 11 Mar 1947; memoirs.
- 90 Berlin Document Centre: Parteikorrespondenz, Erhard Milch.
- 91 Diary, 13 Oct 1930, lists the following people at Göring's apartment: Hitler, Goebbels, August Wilhelm of Prussia and his son, the Duke of Prussia, Prince zu Wied and his wife, Niemann and his wife, the photographer Hoffmann and his daughter who was acting as Hitler's secretary, Rudolf Hess and his wife, Paul Körner, Eßer, Schulze-Naumburg and his wife and daughter, Frick and Epp.
- 92 Milch also recollects Frau Karin Göring and the adjutant Wilhelm Brückner as being present; cf memoirs.
- 93 Memoirs; and Milch, Oct 1967. Cf diary, 7 Mar, 27 Apr 1931.
- 94 Cf Eyermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 146f. Milch again related this story at GL conf, 12 Dec 1942 (MD:34, p. 2654), adding that it was documented in the files of Lufthansa.
- 95 Polte, *op. cit.*, p. 206; the first 32 Ju 52s were named after German air pioneers who had lost their lives.
- 96 Diary, 15 Jun 1932. Memoirs; and Polte, *op. cit.*, pp. 209f.
- 97 Diary, 28 Jul 1932. *Junkers Nachrichten*, May 1936.
- 98 *Junkers Nachrichten*, Mar 1962.
- 99 Meinck: *Hitler und die deutsche Aufrüstung*, p. 16.
- 100 Diary, 16 Sep 1931; and memoirs, and MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1803.
- 101 Memoirs; and diary, 4 Apr 1932.

- 102 Diary, 28 Apr 1932: Milch records those present as Göring, Hitler, Kube, Ludwig Grand Duke of Hesse with his Greek wife, Prince zu Wied and his wife and daughter, Prince zu Waldeck, Putzi Hanfstaengl, Rudolf Hess, Bruno Loerzer, Frau Käthe Milch and Levetzow. Cf also Milch's other meetings with Hitler, on 31 Aug at Göring's, and on 8 Sep with several others present at the Kaiserhof. It is known that during the Jul 1932 elections Hitler took the opportunity of a visit to Dessau to tour the Junkers works, and made generous promises about his rearmament plans after the Nazis seized power (Dr Adolf Dethmann, quoted by Dr Ing August Lichte, in his study: *The political persecution of Prof Hugo Junkers by the Nazi Regime*).
- 103 Letter, Milch to the author, 22 June 1969; and MCH 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1770ff: 'Hitler said he would make available quite different means for aviation, when he took over the government. He even named a figure to me, which seemed quite fantastic at the time, but was in fact only one-fifth of the Luftwaffe's running costs in one month's war, for one year.'
- 104 Letter, Milch to the author, 22 Jun 1969; but see also his memoirs and his MCH testimony, where he makes no mention of Hitler's discourse on military air power. Hitler had occupied himself with Germany's weak air position since 1928 at least (cf Hitler's *Second Book*, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1961), pp. 148, 173. The high opinion Hitler had of Milch is confirmed by the wish he expressed to Göring in 1932 to have Milch as a personal Chief of Staff; Göring dissuaded him from this.
- 105 Diary, 5 Aug 1932: 'P.M.: Göring telephones about an Air Ministry.' Memoirs and MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1774.
- 106 Diary, 31 Aug 1932: Milch lists those present as Göring, Hitler, Goebbels, Strasser, Röhm, Frick, Prince of Hesse, Prince zu Wied, Brückner, Körner and Hess; and diary, 8 Sep 1942: Heck, Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, August-Wilhelm, Kube, Körner, Brückner, Kerrl.
- 107 Diary, 6 Nov 1932; Milch also voted for the Nazis in Jan 1933 (cf MCH 11 Mar 1947, p. 1771; and Military Government of Germany, Questionnaire completed by Milch, Oct 1945, in NARS: RG-238).
- 108 Diary, 28 Nov 1932. Cf *ibid.*, 10 Dec 1931.
- 109 Hans-Karl von Winterfeld: memoirs (unpubl. MS); one of the officers of the postwar Lufthansa, he was present at this discussion.

CHAPTER 2

- 1 Diary, 28 Jan 1933; and memoirs, and Milch at IMT, vol. ix, pp. 93f, and MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1775ff.
- 2 Diary, 12 May 1948: 'In reality he [Brandenburg] was sorely wounded in his pride and vanity, as he had wanted to head Germany's aviation. If only he knew that I actually proposed him rather than me to Göring, though in vain, but that Göring scornfully turned him down, which was not my fault. Anyway, he would hardly have been suited to the job as he was too sensitive in temperament, and too full of theory.' Milch also relates why Hitler chose Dr Fritz Todt, rather than Brandenburg, to build the autobahns.
- 3 Diary, 29 Jan 1933.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 30 Jan 1933.
- 5 MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1777; cf diary, 24 May 1945: 'So Göring was still addicted to this vice, although he gave me his word at the beginning of 1933, when I mentioned the rumours to him and added I must have a clear answer, as I refused to have any truck with morphine addicts.' Cf diary, 3 Jun 1945, on Milch's interrogation by Major Ernst Englander.
- 6 Diary, 31 Jan 1933; and MCH, 11 Mar 1947,

- p. 1776.
- 7 Völker: *Dokumente*, Doc. 40, p. 131, dated 2 Feb 1933. Milch was formally appointed state secretary by Hindenburg on 22 Feb 1933. He joined the NSDAP after Hitler's landslide election victory in Mar 1933, being allocated an artificially early number (123,685), but his membership lapsed when he was re-commissioned in Oct 1933. In the Mar 1933 election he also voted for the NSDAP (Questionnaire, 20 Oct 1945).
- 8 Völker: *Luftwaffe, passim*; and Helm Speidel: Reichswehr und Rote Armee (in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1/1953, p. 18).
- 9 Hitler: speech 3 Feb 1933 to army and navy commanders; in IfZ file Liebmann Papers, ED.1, pp. 191ff. Milch was not present. Blomberg has stressed the defensive nature of the rearmament, and pointed to the violations of German sovereignty during the disarmed period: 'There was the separation of the Rhineland, the occupation of the Ruhr region, and the fights in Upper Silesia to alter the plebiscite results; even little Lithuania had been able to take Memel from us!' (SAIC/FIR/46, dated 13 Sep 1945). Cf diary, 24 Feb 1933.
- 10 Diary, 9 Feb 1933: '10.50 A.M. Reported to Hindenburg as deputy Reich Commissar for Aviation. Afternoon and evening individual talks with Reichswehr. 5–7.15 P.M. Ministerial Council [grants] 40 millions for aviation. I am sworn in.' On 7 Nov 1933 (diary) Milch was guaranteed RM 1,100 million for the 1934/35 budget by Schacht and Wilhelm Keppler.
- 11 Memoirs; and diary, 11 Mar 1933.
- 12 Göring's main office was first in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior and subsequently in the building next to his official residence, Leipziger Platz 7a.
- 13 Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 44, 61, 66. The former DLV (German Flying Sport Association) had been founded in 1920 and had over 50,000 members. The DLV's chief of staff Major (GS) Nordt soon asked to be relieved because of friction with Bruno Loerzer.
- 14 According to Col Gen Stumpff, head of the Personnel Dept at the time, the Reich Air Ministry took on 182 army and 42 navy officers for the secret Luftwaffe in 1933, all with some flying experience (letter to Milch, 27 Apr 1964); the figures in the text are from Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 16. Milch's comments on Blomberg: MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1807; and memoirs.
- 15 Memoirs; and diary, 11 Apr 1933, and Milch, Oct 1967. Göring saw Mussolini at 4 P.M., 11 Apr 1933 (cf DBFP:3, vol. v, pp. 144ff). Gritzbach's account of their flight home (*op. cit.*, p. 23) is largely fictitious.
- 16 Diary, 25 Apr 1933: 'Saw Göring about the agreement reached with Reich Defence Ministry. We get the lot.'
- 17 Diary, 13 May 1933: 'Major technical etc. conf on thousand-aircraft programme.' Cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 27, and Gritzbach, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- 18 Capt (ret.) Dr Robert Knauss: The German Air Force (memo dated May 1933) quoted in Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 29f, 34. Milch states that the phrase 'Risk Air Force' was his; he had in mind the 'Risk Navy' of the First World War (Milch, Dec. 1969).
- 19 Order of Reich Defence Minister creating Air Ministry, 10 May 1933 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 41, p. 131); cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 12, 224ff. This simple division of the ministry into two large departments, military and civil aviation, remained in effect until 31 Aug 1933.
- 20 Milch, Dec 1969. The air adviser to the Army Command had been Captain Helmut Wilberg, followed by Hugo Sperrle and Hellmuth Felmy; the air advisers to the German Admiralty had been Adm (ret.) Lahs, and Rear-Adm Ralph Wenninger. Wilberg was retired

- as army commandant of Breslau Fortress shortly before 1933, but reactivated on Milch's recommendation; he died in an air crash in Nov 1941.
- 21 Diary, 17 May 1933: '3 p.m. Reichstag. Hitler's big speech on Geneva — magnificent. Hitler greets me.'
- 22 Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 26, citing memo by *Ministerialdirektor* Fisch to Milch on phone conv of 20 May with Major Reinicke (civil aviation department) in Geneva; this Reinicke, brother of the later General in the OKW, died in an air crash. Cf diary, 25 May 1933: 'Two and a half hours with Hitler and Göring on air expansion and Geneva.'
- 23 Liebmann: remarks of the Reich Defence Minister on 1 Jun 1933 at Bad Wildungen (see note 9).
- 24 Telegram, Rumbold to Simon, 24 Jun 1933 (DBFP:3, vol. v, p. 375). The air attaché considered the incident a clumsy attempt to justify the construction of fighter aircraft. He doubted whether there had been any such leaflets dropped. But see diary, 22–23 Jun 1933: 'Socialist leaflets showered over Berlin'; and 24 Jun 1933: 'Noon: press conf re: leaflet.' See also Herring's note on his conv with Capt (ret.) Bolle, 10 Jun 1933 (DBFP:3, vol. v, p. 378). Milch complained about Herring's tendentious reporting (Newton to Vansittart, 14 Aug 1933) and secured Herring's recall to London. Cf DBFP:3, vol. v, pp. 496, 499ff. Herring's note on his conv with Milch, 26 Jun 1933 (*ibid.*, pp. 383ff). Hansard: *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 279, col. 1469. Telegram Vansittart to Newton, 27 Jul 1933; and 3 Aug 1933 (DBFP:3, vol. v, pp. 450ff, 468f). Herring: note on conv with State Secretary von Bülow, 29 Jun 1933 (*ibid.*, pp. 456ff, 462f).
- 25 Diary, 24 Jun 1933.
- 26 Pre-Trial Interrogation of Göring, Nuremberg, 17 Oct 1945.
- 27 It is difficult to state with certainty when this was. It may have been on 8 Jun 1933; diary: 'Morning, reception of British by Hitler; afternoon Cabinet meeting, as Göring's deputy.' Milch, Nov 1967, Nov 1968. (See also note 28.)
- 28 Cf diary, 9 Jun 1933: 'Midday to see Schacht, with Göring, v. Blomberg, re: finance. My new job.' Cf pre-trial interrogation of Göring, 17 Oct 1945: 'In 1933 Schacht, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, assumed the obligation to raise funds for the rearmament, which was kept secret up to 1935. Göring confirms the fact that any money used for armament purposes which was not covered in the budget had to be raised by secret means unknown to foreign nations. At the conference where the secret means of raising funds were discussed, Hitler, Göring, Blomberg, Schwerin von Krosigk, Schacht, Reichenau and the Supreme Commanders of all three branches of the Wehrmacht were present; all the state secretaries concerned and the Secretary of the Reich Chancery were also present at this conference . . . Schacht made proposals about the ways and means to raise secret funds for the rearmament programme, especially about the famous Mefo bills.'
- 29 Dr Hjalmar Schacht: 1933 — wie eine Demokratie stirbt (1968).
- 30 Milch, conf with Col von Reichenau of Reich Defence Ministry, on the activation of air force units, 19 Jun 1933 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 79, pp. 193f).
- 31 Order on camouflage of Luftwaffe (sgd pp Milch) 25 July 1933 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 71, p. 183).
- 32 Diary, 21 Jul 1933: 'To see Dorpmüller about the freight routes!' Cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 16.
- 33 From the unpubl. memoirs of Hans-Karl v. Winterfeld, head of the 'Traffic Inspectorate' (which in fact was commanded by Knauss with Major Fütterer as its second in command).
- 34 Milch, Dec 1969.

- 35 Letter, Göring to Junkers company, Jan 1933 (Junkers archives).
- 36 The security risks were identified to Junkers as Dr Adolf Dethmann, Fiala v. Fernbrugg and Drömmen; all were arrested at the end of Mar 1933 and forbidden to work in Junkers again (report of Lämmle, Dessau, 28 Apr 1934).
- 37 Prof Junkers's diary, 12 Mar 1933 (Junkers archives). Cf memo on Prof Junkers's conf with Milch and *Ministerialrat Panzeram*, Berlin, 6 Apr 1933; and Junkers's diary, 7 Apr 1933. On 27 Apr 1933 Prof Junkers wrote to Hitler requesting an interview; his notes show he intended to propose the development of a mass-production fighter aircraft as a defence system. The agreed interview was cancelled at short notice, however.
- 38 Diary, 1 Jul 1933.
- 39 Instructions on setting up air training schools (sgd Milch) 14 Aug 1933 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 81, pp. 195ff).
- 40 British Air Ministry: *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, pp. 7f. Of the 4,021 aircraft included in the programme, which was superseded by another in Jan 1935, 1,714 were land-based operational types, 1,760 were trainers, 89 were communications and 309 miscellaneous (experimental series etc.). They were distributed as follows: Lufthansa 115, units 1,085, training 2,168, research 138, airfields 156, flak schools 5, target-towing 48, clubs 33, Reichsbank 12, Hitler 10, miscellaneous 80, wastage 171. Cf diary, 13 Sep 1933: 'Berlin. Noon to Hitler to discuss aircraft for Party (twelve) and publishing-house (six).'
- 41 ND: 1708, 1715, and 1724-NI.
- 42 Pre-Trial Interrogation, 6 Nov 1946; in 1933 Junkers manufactured 41 aircraft and thereafter the following numbers: 1934, 238; 1935, 433; 1937, 529; 1939, 922; 1942, 1,782; 1944, 3,106, or altogether 12,530 from 1933 to 1945; the licensee factories manufactured 17,522 Junkers aircraft from 1933 to 1945.
- 43 Junkers diary, 24 Aug 1933. *Junkers Nachrichten*, Mar 1962.
- 44 Diary, 24 Aug 1933.
- 45 Manpower of air industry, statistics, Berlin, 14 Aug 1939 (Udet file: FD.4940 45). The annual labour statistics for the air industry, divided as to airframes, motors, signals and national equipment, bombs and ammunition (not including Army Ordnance Dept contracts) show 230,000 workers in 1937, 269,000 in 1938, 325,000 in 1939, and anticipated totals of 340,000 in 1940, 400,000 in 1941 and 500,000 in 1942.
- 46 Milch, May 1968; and memoirs. Wever's appointment as chief of staff (*de facto*) took effect from 1 Sep 1933. Milch stated to the author that besides Wever the then Col Stumpff also had his personal file endorsed, 'Suitable for a later C-in-C of the Army.'
- 47 Diary, 25 Aug 1933.
- 48 Milch, May 1968: Milch stressed that there was never any talk of a 'Urals bomber', a word subsequently attributed to Wever. Cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 30, where the recollections of the then head of the Technical Dept, Col Wimmer, are cited. Cf Milch at GL conf, 27 Apr 1943 (MD:20, p. 5212): 'in 1933 we set wheels in motion in this field, but we stopped the development work again in 1937. That was the Ju 89 and the Do 19. I never understood why.'
- 49 Hindenburg was told that since the flak commander was expected to take orders from Göring, the latter must have a military rank. Diary, 19 Oct 1933; MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1779f.
- 50 Völker: *Die Entwicklung der militärischen Luftfahrt in Deutschland, 1920-1933*, pp. 212ff.
- 51 Telegram, Phipps to Simon, 24 Oct 1933 (DBFP:3, vol. v, pp. 717ff).
- 52 Diary, 16-17 Oct 1933: 'Big conference on increasing production programme.'
- 53 Diary, 12 Oct 1933.
- 54 Diary, 14 Nov 1933.

- 55 Diary, 20 Oct 1933; also 23–24 Oct 1933. And Blomberg: Directive for the event of sanctions, 25 Oct 1933 (IMT, vol. xxxiv, pp. 487ff); Meinck, *op. cit.*, pp. 50f; and diary, 1 Nov 1933: ‘Discussion [with Göring]: he was dissatisfied, because Blomberg had signed the A [mobilization] order.’ Diary, 22 Oct 1933: ‘read Douhet’.
- 56 Dr Heinrich Koppenberg: introduction to Report, The Development of Dessau during 1934; early Jan 1935 (Junkers archives). Koppenberg was born on 15 Mar 1890.
- 57 Draft (by Milch) of letter, Röhm to Prof Junkers, with covering letter, Milch to Röhm, 6 Dec 1933 (Berlin Doc Centre: file ‘Milch-Junkers’). Kesselring: affidavit, 4 Sep 1948.
- 58 Report by Lämmler, Dessau, 28 Apr 1934. Also letter, Dr Wiegand to Milch, 17 Sep 1934 (Junkers archives); Wiegand was a close friend of the professor. Also Reich Air Ministry memo on Junkers Case, 8 Aug 1934 (in BDC file, see note 57).
- 59 Basically, the allegations resulted from the Fili episode (see Chapter 1, note 38). After the Locarno treaty, the Fili factory became a political embarrassment to the German government, who stopped all subsidies. Prof Junkers claimed he had made nothing but loss from Fili and, after a lengthy battle, fought partly in public in the Reichstag, received a further 17 million Reichsmarks. This brought the Fili affair to the public attention (cf *Manchester Guardian*, Dec 1926). The Central Criminal Office at Dessau seized Junkers’s company accounts and claimed proof that, of the original 9.7 million Reichsmarks subsidy given for Fili, Junkers had diverted nearly 5 million for other purposes outside Russia. Milch told the author he believed the allegations were true, but that Prof Junkers himself was not to blame.
- 60 Cf diary, 18 Oct 1933: ‘Noon, with Körner to see Röhm. Junkers has relinquished 51 percent of Junkers Aircraft Company.’
- 61 It is not known whether Milch was as concerned in this affair as the Administration Dept officials Kesselring, Höfeld and v. Hellingrath. Cf diary, 16 Nov 1933: ‘Big Junkers conf, with Keppler and Koppenberg.’
- 62 Cf Junkers diary, 21 Nov 1933.
- 63 Prof Junkers: note on conv with Dr Eschstruth, 16 Feb 1934. August Lichte, *op. cit.*, p. 63. And appendix to report to Rudolf Hess, 15 Aug 1934 (*ibid.*, p. 78). Letter, Air Ministry (Admin Dept) to Wiegand (sgd Milch, counter-sgd Kesselring), 28 Aug 1934; diary, 28 Aug 1934: ‘Speeches about Junkers, Gürtnér.’ Milch wrote to Prof Sauerbruch on 29 Aug 1934 to assure him that no arrest of the sick Prof Junkers was planned. One of Junkers’s lawyers, Dr Semmler, published a very erroneous article blaming Milch for the professor’s death, in *Basler Nachrichten*, 27 Jan 1948.
- 64 Early in May 1935 Milch opened negotiations with a consortium of Flick, Thyssen, IG Farben and Stahlverein to purchase 75 percent of Junkers’s shares (ND:10114-NI: note on Milch–Koppenberg conf, 2 May 1935).
- 65 Letter, Koppenberg to Milch, 5 Jan 1935.
- 66 Plan for expansion of Junkers concern, Dessau, 6 Jul 1934. Appendices to Koppenberg report (see note 56).
- 67 Liebmann: C-in-C conf, 2 Feb 1934 (see note 9). Cf Meinck, *op. cit.*, pp. 81, 126. Diary, 2 Feb 1934.
- 68 Tschersich: memo on monthly output planned by 1 Oct 1938, dated 6 Jan 1934 (FD.4829/45).
- 69 Telegram, Newton to Simon, 31 Aug 1933 (DBFP:3, vol. v, p. 564).
- 70 Milch notes, 1934.
- 71 *Geheimrat* Bosch’s principal aides were Prof Krauch who was expert on synthetic fuel manufacture, and Dr Ambros, the expert on synthetic rubber. Cf

- Milch notes, 31 Jan 1934: 'Conf [with Gen] von Bockelberg [Head of Army Ordnance] and Udet. Production 1) at Leuna; 2) in the Ruhr; 3) elsewhere inside Germany. Dr Ruperti, Benzole; Dr Rott, Ruhr Coal; Dr Krauch IG [Farben], Dr Fischer of IG. A small plant, 150,000–200,000 tons annually, total production in Germany 800,000 tons. 3.5m tons needed. IG: 350,000 tons from lignite. Production cost 35m marks for 100,000 tons, 65m for 200,000 tons. I [insist on] 1) stockpiling as interim measure, 2) stockpiles of lubricants, 3) anti-knock qualities.' Cf also Milch notes, late Apr 1934: 'Convert four nitrogen factories in Reich to petrol production forthwith.' And notes, autumn 1934: 'Von Blomberg says: synthetic fuel cannot be used for aircraft.?? [ask] Krauch.'
- 72 Diary, 7 Nov 1933. Milch now comments that all these figures in his diaries were momentarily the genuine ones.
- 73 *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 26 Mar 1934. The published budget had increased from 78.3m marks in 1933–34, to 210m in 1934–35. Diary, 22 Mar 1934: 'Afternoon: Cabinet meeting. Budget etc. Hitler discusses Air Force etc. with me alone.' And *ibid.*, 23 Mar 1934: 'Afternoon, Cabinet. (Reich) Finance [Minister] on budget objections.' Cf DBFP:3, vol. vi, pp. 595ff.
- 74 Telegram, Phipps to Simon, 9 Apr 1934; Simon to Phipps, 10 Apr 1934; and letter, von Neurath to Phipps, 11 Apr 1934 (DBFP:3, vol. vi, pp. 613ff, 621f).
- 75 Milch, Oct 1967. An identical admission is quoted in Hewel diary, 2 Jun 1941.
- 76 There is a list of 63 such camouflaged names in Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 73, dated 12 Apr 1934.
- 77 Von Winterfeld: memoirs.
- 78 Diary, 24 Mar, 28 Mar, 1 and 5 Apr 1934. Memoirs.
- 79 MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1772; and Milch, Dec 1968.
- 80 MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1803; cf diary, 28 Feb 1933 and 17 Mar 1934.
- 81 Milch had attended Ernst's marriage: diary, 17 Sep 1933.
- 82 Cf diary, 4 Jun 1934. 'Midday: Röhm, about duel.' He had previously seen Hitler on 6 May 1934.
- 83 Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates. For other details on Theo Croneiss's career, see Prof Willy Messerschmitt's obituary speech on him, Nov 1942 (Messerschmitt file: FD.4355/45, vol. 1). The records of the Führer's *Adjutantur* (Bundesarchiv files NS-10) show that Croneiss was also active later as Martin Bormann's technical adviser.
- 84 Diary, 29 Jun 1934, records only: '9.45–10.45 A.M., solo flights in Kadett. Noon with Teucci [Ital. attaché] then head of Army Command, von Fritsch.'
- 85 Diary, 30 Jun 1934; notes, 30 Jun 1934.
- 86 Bross: *Gespräche mit Hermann Göring*, p. 19.
- 87 Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates.
- 88 Milch, Dec 1968.
- 89 But cf OSS, Research and Analysis Branch, secret report 3152: Hermann Göring as a War Criminal, Washington, 25 Jun 1945. Göring had in fact first set eyes on his men in uniform ten days before. Cf Milch. Diary, 20 Jun 1934: 'Schorf Heath. Burial of Karin Göring. The Führer. Air Force [*Fliegertruppe*] presents arms for first time.'
- 90 Diary, 1 Jul 1934, 2–3 Jul 1934. Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates. Göring later insisted that the *putsch* was real enough. 'I myself was present as SA-General Ernst's headquarters was cleared out. As I looked by chance out of the window, I saw to my amazement that my troops were staggering out under crates of machine-guns and ammunition' (Bross, *op. cit.*, p. 18). But see Milch diary, 13 Feb 1948, 25 Feb 1948 (his discussions with SA General Jüttner).
- 91 Seiler and Kokothaki, Nov 1969: Seiler was a close friend of Croneiss and saw the ceremonial dagger he had received

- from Röhm; after the purge Rudolf Hess took Croneiss under his wing, as aviation expert on his Liaison Staff. Prof Willy Messerschmitt proposed that Croneiss should be asked to leave the company, as a political embarrassment, but Seiler bitterly opposed this mark of disloyalty.
- 92 *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, pp. 7ff.
- 93 Milch: The Development of the German Air Force, Jun 1945. Diary, 31 Jul 1934.
- 94 Pre-Trial Interrogation, 25 Oct 1946.
- 95 Diary, 22–23, 31 Aug 1934; and 1945 notes thereon. *Ibid.*, 9–10 Sep 1934. *Ibid.*, 11 Sep 1934, and 1945 notes thereon. Diary, 21 Sep 1934.
- 96 W. S. Churchill: *The Second World War*, vol. 1, pp. 106ff. Pre-Trial Interrogation, 6 Nov 1945; Basil Collier: *The Defence of the United Kingdom*, pp. 27ff. Also records of the Technical Dept, quoted in *Rise and Fall* (note 92), pp. 11f. Cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 56f.
- 97 Diary, 9 Oct 1934: ‘C-in-Cs to see Blomberg.’ Cf Liebmann: conf Minister von Blomberg on 9 Oct 1934 (see note 9), pp. 228ff.
- 98 Memoirs. Cf Milch, notes ca Aug 1934: ‘Von Blomberg: . . . If we reach agreement with Britain, what to demand? They won’t put up with equality.’ And notes, early Feb 1935: ‘Navy 35 percent of Britain (Russia?); Army 100 percent of French; air 100 percent of British, assuming British as strong as French. We place our hopes on Britain, against Russia.’
- 99 Diary, 12 Jan 1935; ‘Big conf of C-in-Cs in Reich Defence Ministry’. Notes, 12 Jan 1935. Cf Liebmann: conf on statements by Minister [Blomberg] and Chief of Army Command [Fritsch] on 12 Jan 1935 (see note 9), pp. 233ff. Milch’s notes contain the following a few days later: ‘Funds (now calculated by calendar years). 1935–8, 223m, of which 5,500m in [Mefo] bills. Of which Army [receives] 4,000m, Navy 760m, Air 3,300m (2,900m). Supply build-up [*Bevorratung*] of these could be sacrificed, saving additional 570m. Altogether including SA etc., 9,600m. Schacht prepared to provide 6,000m. [Funds required by] SA, SS, etc., 266m.’ There is also a note on a conversation with Schacht late in Jan 1935: ‘Should we publish the budget? A danger for our image?’
- 100 Milch; and Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 78.
- 101 Memoirs; and Kesselring, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- 102 Reich Air Minister: order for setting up of reserve airfields and expanding ground organization (sgd pp Milch), 8 Oct 1935 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 103).
- 103 Diary, 5 Feb 1935: ‘Speech to Gauleiters. Koch (of East Prussia) hostile to me, but Streicher, Goebbels, Hess on my side.’ Cf Rosenberg diary, 24 Feb 1935.
- 104 Koppenberg’s report, 3 Jan 1935.
- 105 Ordinance on Luftwaffe’s Officer Corps (sgd Milch), 18 Feb 1935 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 138).
- 106 Milch, Nov 1967.
- 107 Führer decree on Reich Luftwaffe, 26 Feb 1935 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 44).
- 108 Reich Defence Minister: directive for uncamouflaging the Luftwaffe, 26 Feb 1935 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 75).
- 109 Reich Air Minister: instructions for uncamouflaging the Luftwaffe (sgd pp Wever) 27 Feb 1935 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 76, cf Nr. 78).
- 110 Völker: *Luftwaffe*, *passim*. Diary, 7 Oct 1935.
- 111 Diary, 24 Oct 1935: ‘2 P.M. to see von Blomberg. Asked for 616m Reichsmarks more.’
- 112 *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 12.
- 113 Heinkel: *op. cit.*, pp. 329, 339.
- 114 Reich Air Minister: directives for operations in first phase of a war (sgd Wever), 18 Nov 1935 (Völker: *Dokumente*, pp. 445ff).
- 115 Diary, 16 Nov 1935; cf Völker, *Dokumente*,

- pp. 445ff.
- 116 IMT, vol. xxxiv, pp. 644ff: Blomberg's order of 2 Mar 1936 described the remilitarization of the Rhineland as 'a peaceful operation to transfer troop units into locations prepared for them.' Cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 147f.
- 117 Diary, 6–7 Mar 1936.
- 118 IMT, vol. ix, p. 83; Milch, Oct 1967.
- 119 Air Force Manual: 'Air Warfare' (LDV 16) May 1936, and regularly brought up to date thereafter. Cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 198ff.
- 120 Dipl Ing Alpers, who took on the Special Aircraft unit in the Technical Dept under von Richthofen early in 1934, describes Wimmer as 'open, correct, exemplary but unimaginative.' Von Richthofen found Udet an uncongenial new chief, and arranged to be replaced by Lt Col Jungk (Alpers, Dec 1969).
- 121 Milch, Oct 1967, Nov 1967, May 1968; and letter, Milch to Prof Suchenwirth, 3 Jan 1957.
- 122 Letter, Milch to Suchenwirth, 10 Jan 1957.
- 123 Milch, Dec 1969, diary, 26 Jul 1936. Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 148ff. There are references to Special Staff 'W' until late 1938 in the Milch documents, reporting experiences with new weapons (letter, Bodenschatz to Udet, 9 Dec 1937, MD:65, p. 7482) and forwarding requests for more war materials (letter, Göring's office to Milch and Stumpff, 21 Oct 1938, *ibid.*, p. 7439).
- 124 *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 13; cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 149.
- 125 Diary, 3 Aug 1936; and 8–9, 14 Aug, 23–24 Sep 1936.
- 126 Diary, 29–30 Oct, 2, 4–7 Nov 1936.
- 127 Diary, 6 Nov 1936.
- 128 *Ibid.*, 14 Nov 1936.
- 129 Bodenschatz: memo on Göring conf, 2 Dec 1936 (ND: US exhibit 580). In fact the date was probably 3 Dec 1936: cf diary.
- 130 Milch, May 1968; cf Milch: The Develop-
- ment of the German Air Force.
- 131 Udet: memo on his conf alone with Göring, 16 Nov 1936 (MD:65, pp. 7532f). Milch, Nov 1967. Diary 8 Sep, 24 Dec 1936. Milch for his part had solicitously attended to Göring and his wife: cf diary 24 Mar, 10–11 Apr 1936. Notes, 24 Dec 1935.
- 132 Diary, 26 Nov 1936, and 1945 comment thereon. Cf *Inter Avia*, Aug 1946, p. 12. Reich Air Minister: order altering establishment of fighter units (sgd Wever), dated 15 Apr 1936 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 88). Udet: memo on conf with Göring, 11 Jan 1937 (on increased production programme), MD:65, p. 7529. Among others the new programme called for the total output by 1 Apr 1938 of 850 He 111s (previously 831), 184 Me 110s (104), 444 Do 17Fs (270), 570 Do 17Es (518), 345 Ju 87s (264). Cf diary, 11 Jan 1937.
- 133 Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- 134 Milch, Oct 1967.
- 135 Memoirs; and IMT, vol. ix, p. 56.
- 136 Diary, 21–22 Jan 1937, and esp. 19 Jan 1937: 'Big discussion with Courtney: [exchange of] statistics.' Also: memo on conf with Air Vice-Marshal Courtney on 19 Jan 1937 (MD:56, pp. 3003ff). German Embassy, London: note on conf in British Air Ministry, 28 Jan (MD:56, pp. 3006f). Wg Cdr C E H Medhurst was head of the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence. Letter, Wenninger to Milch, 28 Jan 1937 (MD:56, pp. 3010f). Webster and Frankland, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 73.
- 137 Diary, 28 Jan 1937; Milch, Oct 1967.
- 138 Milch: Thoughts on Air Warfare, ca. Jan 1937 (MPP), with cover letter, Bodenschatz to Milch, 1 Feb 1937. Milch's statistics appear to have been obtained from a report by the head of the operations branch of the Air Staff, Major (GS) Paul Deichmann: Basic Facts for Strategic Air Warfare, dated 29 Oct 1936 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 198).

- Cf diary, 24 Oct 1936.
- 139 Diary, 3 Feb 1937; cf diary, 4 Jun 1936: ‘Personal feud with Raeder set aside.’
- 140 Rear-Adm von Puttkamer, Mar 1970.
- 141 Diary, 30 Jan 1937. This was the occasion on which the Minister of Posts, Eltz v. Rübenach, refused to accept the badge and resigned. Cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 16 Sep 1947; Milch, Nov 1967. Letter, Eltz v. Rübenach to Führer, 1 Feb 1937 (ND:1534-PS) and *Völkischer Beobachter*, 31 Jan 1937 (ND:2964-PS).
- 142 Cf diary, 5 Feb 1937: ‘Afternoon: lecture by Heydrich’; and 2 Jun 1937: ‘Party leaders in Air Ministry: lecture by Himmler on homosexuals and abortion. Very good. Afternoon, Führer speaks to Party, two and a half hours on foreign policy.’
- 143 Diary, 9, 15 Feb 1937, 16–17 Feb 1937.
- 144 *Ibid.*, 2 Mar 1937.
- 145 Diary, 2–17 Mar 1937 shows Milch in Italy. Diary, 18, 23 Mar 1937 shows Milch’s attempts to see Göring. Cf diary, 25 Mar, 3 and 19 Apr 1937; and Milch: Development of German Air Force.
- 146 It is difficult to be precise about the date of the decision. Latterly 29 Apr 1937 has been accepted, because of Milch’s testimony to IMT: but his diary that day reads only ‘Ju 86 [and Jumo 205] diesel engine cancelled.’ Neither his diary nor, more significantly, his Jan 1937 study (see note 138) mentions the role of heavy bombers, or the decision to stop them. (On the Ju 86 decision, see Udet’s memo on his conf with Milch, 5 May 1937, MD:65, pp. 7512ff.) Many legends have grown up round the far-reaching decision on the Ju 89 and Do 19, and Gen Paul Deichmann even blamed Milch in an MGFA study, postwar: ‘Why did Germany have no four-engined bomber in the Second World War?’ Deichmann relates an audience he secured with Göring to protest against the decision (he was then a major). Milch’s diary shows no such conf. See also Gen Kesselring’s statement, 17 Mar 1954, printed as App. 12 to Cajus Bekker: *Angriffshöhe*, p. 463; and Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 132ff, 208f. Völker suggests that the four-engined bombers were dropped because of the lack of a suitable engine, but this is disputed now by the Junkers aero-engine experts.
- 147 Milch, 16 May 1968. See especially a letter from Adm Lahs, Pres of Reich Assn of Aircraft Manufacturers, to Milch, 1 Nov 1942 (MD:53, pp. 78of): Udet’s military advisers had turned the four-engined bombers down in favour of twin-engined medium bombers. ‘The task of anti-shipping warfare across vast ocean distances had apparently not been recognised.’ Junkers and Dornier had both produced prototype heavy bombers by 1936: ‘Had they been systematically developed still further they would by now, six years later, have been superior to all the American and British heavy bombers.’
- 148 IMT, vol. ix, p. 72; and memoirs. Memo on Göring conf (with Körner, Udet, Ploch), 24 Feb 1937 (MD:65, p. 7526). Milch was in hospital at the time.
- 149 Cf diary, 24 Mar 1946: ‘Göring has testified, “There has been much talk of two- and four-engined bombers.” Nobody could pass judgement on that except himself. He would have built a four-engined one if he had had a serviceable type and enough aluminium.’ Note that a programme schedule dated 26 Jun 1936 (file FD.4829/45) lists the Do 19 and Ju 89, and a Ju 90 airliner.
- 150 Diary, 8 May 1937. Milch: Development of the German Air Force, and cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 78f.
- 151 Diary, 30–31 May 1937. Göring: order on reorganization and line of command in Reich Air Ministry, 2 Jun 1937 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 48). Völker states that this reorganization of the command structure of the Luftwaffe was drafted

- by the Air Staff. Cf diary, 1 Jan ('Major row with Göring') and 3 Jun 1937.
- 152 Diary, 8 Jul 1937: 'To see Göring with Stumpff and von Richthofen re: Spain.' *Ibid.*, 10 Jul 1937: 'New ordinances by Göring, against me!' Cf MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1799; and diary, 13 Jul 1937: 'Udet and Greim to see Göring.'
- 153 Milch: The Development of the German Air Force (MPP).
- ### C H A P T E R 3
- 1 Reich War Minister: Directive for unified preparation of a possible war, dated 26 Jun 1936; *ibid.*, dated 24 Jun 1937. (IMT, vol. xxxiv, pp. 733ff.)
- 2 Col. Max Pendele: Udet timetable, 25–27 Jun 1937. Udet: notes for conf with Minister on 13 Jul 1937 (MD:65, p. 7501).
- 3 Diary, 7–8 Jun 1937; cf letter, Wenninger to Milch, 28 Oct 1937 (MD:56, p. 3026). Memoirs.
- 4 Memoirs; and Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 157. Diary, 23–27 Jul 1937; and Polte: *op. cit.*
- 5 Memoirs; and diary, 23 Aug 1937. Diary, 1 Sep 1937. Pre-Trial Interrogation, 18 Oct 1946.
- 6 Udet: note on Göring conf, 24 Feb 1937 (MD:65, pp. 7526f). Diary, 11 Sep 1937. Col Georg Thomas of the Military Economics Branch complained of the Air Ministry's 'dynamism', and wrote in 1944: 'The desire to go its own way was one of the determining features of the Luftwaffe, and the need for a centralised direction of the war economy, as Field-Marshal Milch was to represent by his transfer to the Reich Armaments Ministry in 1944, was unfortunately not realised at that time [1934]. On the contrary, the very thought was most emphatically opposed by the Luftwaffe.' Thomas: Basis for a History of the German Defence and Armaments Economy (ND:2353-PS).
- 7 Memo on telephone conv, Lt Col Hüne-mann (for Thomas) to Maj Schmid, 3 Jun 1937 (MD:53, p. 867); letter, Volk-mann to Reich War Minister, 31 Aug 1937, re: Effects of Iron and Steel Short-age on Luftwaffe's Rearmament (MD:53, pp. 850ff). Udet had been as-sured monthly quotas totalling 99,800 tons from May to Sep 1937, of which only 35,000 tons would in fact be deliv-ered by the end of Sep 1937.
- 8 Cf draft of letter, Milch to Göring, 30 Oct 1937, enclosing table of iron and steel re-quirements of Luftwaffe, 'as basis for the conference provisionally planned for Monday 1 Nov with the Führer.' (MD:53, pp. 849ff). This document puts the Hossbach protocol of the Führer conf on 5 Nov 1937 in its proper perspec-tive.
- 9 Memoirs; and Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 158.
- 10 Later Milch recalled how difficult it had been to persuade von Richthofen (one of Wimmer's subordinates) to accept the 'Storch' project. GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, p. 1114): 'Nothing was harder than to push that through. It actually took several years for the gentlemen in the department to understand that such a plane was necessary.'
- 11 Amb Vicco von Bülow-Schwante: affi-davit, 11 Aug 1948 (head of protocol in the German Foreign Office, 1935–38): 'Milch enjoyed great respect among the diplomatic corps, as he was accustomed to speaking his mind about everything.'
- 12 Diary, 11 Aug 1937; and memoirs. Diary, 4 Oct 1937; *ibid.*, 5 Oct 1937. MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1794.
- 13 Diary, 10 Oct 1937; cf Pre-Trial Interro-gation, 17 Oct 1946.
- 14 Letter, Wenninger to Milch, 28 Oct 1937 (MD:56, pp. 3026f). The shadow facto-ries visited were the Austin works at Birmingham, and the Standard and Humber works at Rugby: 'All the facto-ries are working at 70 percent strength these last four to six weeks, will achieve top output in four to six more weeks.' Diary, 17–25 Oct 1937; appendix to letter,

- Wenninger to Milch (note 3).
- 15 Peter Townsend: *Duel of Eagles* (London, 1970), p. 134; and Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947.
- 16 Diary, 19 Aug 1945. Milch also copied into his diary, without comment, the following extract from Churchill: *My Early Life*, p. 370 (first publ. in 1939): 'To cope with all this [Boer War guerilla activity against the British in South Africa] the British military authorities found it necessary to clear whole districts of their inhabitants and gather the population into concentration camps. As the railways were continually cut (!) it was difficult to supply these camps with all the necessities of life. Disease broke out and several thousands of women and children died.' Milch inserted the exclamation mark.
- 17 The meeting and conversation with Mr Churchill are related in identical terms in CSDIC (UK) Report SRGG 1313(C), 3 Jun 1945; and memoirs.
- 18 Memoirs; diary, 1 Nov 1937; and Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates.
- 19 Pre-Trial Interrogations of Milch, 17 and 18 Oct 1946. Diary, 2 Nov 1937. Cf MCH, 12 Mar 1947, pp. 1746f; and Milch, Oct 1967.
- 20 Diary, 2 Nov 1937.
- 21 Memoirs; cf Meinck, *op. cit.*, p. 226: 'Such treaties can assume an aggressive character only too easily, as the early history of the Great War showed.'
- 22 Meinck, *op. cit.*, p. 149; and Liebmann: note on von Fritsch's conf with von Blomberg, 24 Apr 1935. Milch diary, 11 Apr 1935 and 18 Apr 1935: 'Göring, on seriousness of situation in long term. Until 9 P.M. drawing up plans in the Ministry.'
- 23 Diary, 2 May 1935: '[To see] von Blomberg: three C-in-Cs, Czechoslovakia plan.' Also letter of Reich Defence Minister, 2 May 1935 (IMT, vol. xxxiv, pp. 485f). At Nuremberg it was wrongly assumed that the codeword *Schulung* re-
- ferred to the remilitarization of the Rhineland.
- 24 Diary, 15–16 May 1935.
- 25 Diary, 20 Jan 1938: 'Conf on battle directive *Green* [Czechoslovakia].'
- 26 *Ibid.*, 21 May 1938.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 22, 28–29 May 1938. Cf E. M. Robertson: *Hitler's Pre-War Policy*, p. 125.
- 28 Diary, 30–31 May, 1 Jun 1938; cf Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 69: Order setting up Air Defence Zone West (sgd pp Milch); cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 111.
- 29 Diary, 7–11 Jun 1938. Milch notes, 20 Jun 1938; cf diary, 23 Jun 1938: 'Morning [conf on] Plendl's system, *Green* [Czechoslovakia].'
- 30 *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 19. And Udet: notes for conf with Milch, 21 Jun 1938 (MD:65, p. 745f).
- 31 Diary, 8 July 1938; and Göring speech to gentlemen of the air industry, Karinhall, 8 Jul 1938 (ND:R-140).
- 32 Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 154f. The C-in-C of First Air Group was General Kesselring.
- 33 Milch, Mar 1967, May 1968. Diary, 15 Aug 1938, and notes of same date. For full report on Führer's speech, see Eberhard diary, 15 Aug 1938; and cf Liebmann: personal experiences 1938–1939 (Inst. f. Zeitgeschichte, file ED.1, pp. 417f).
- 34 German Air Staff: 'Extended Case *Green*', dated Berlin 25 Aug 1938 (ND:375-PS).
- 35 Letter, Wenninger to Göring, 23 May 1938 (MD:56, pp. 3024f, 3018f). The quoted passage was underlined by Milch, and he placed '!!?' in the margin next to it.
- 36 Liebmann (see note 33) wrote that Hitler's adjutant Capt Engel asked early in Sep 1938 whether he had had a row with a senior Luftwaffe officer recently. Liebmann recalled the row with Milch. 'Engel then told me he had by chance overheard a conversation between Milch and Göring in which my name had been mentioned as one of the Army's "troublemaker" generals.'

- Liebmann was replaced in Nov 1938 in his command.
- 37 Diary, 20 Aug 1938. Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 402; Alpers, Dec 1969.
- 38 Letter, von Winterfeld to the author, 23 Sep 1969.
- 39 Manvell and Frankel: *Göring*, p. 141, 40 Völker: *Luftwaffe*.
- 41 See note 35.
- 42 Diary, 23 Aug 1938. See note 397; and preamble to Second Air Group study on 'Planning Case Green'. 22 Sep 1938; cf Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, p. 38f, and Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 159. Also diary, 25 Aug 1938: 'War Game Green.' On the inadequate range of Luftwaffe aircraft, see diary, 28 Feb 1938: 'Göring: range of He 111'; and letter, Göring to Udet via Milch, 20 Sep 1938 (MD:65, p. 7440).
- 43 Notes, ca. 17 Sep, 1938: 'Felmy, special unit for war with England.' Second Air Group study on Planning Case Green, 22 Sep 1938.
- 44 Diary, 21–22 Sep 1938.
- 45 Capt (GS) Pohle: 'Lecture during Air Staff journey, Jun 1939' cited by Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 191ff.
- 46 Lichte; also Junkers company chart: Chronology of Ju 88, dated 13 Nov 1940.
- 47 Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 191.
- 48 Lahs at Göring conf, 8 Jul 1938, p. 37 (see note 31). For early licence production plans for Ju 88 see Udet's papers (MD:65, p. 7425), a document dated 30 May 1938.
- 49 Milch at GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1986f).
- 50 The conf was most probably on 27 Sep 1938; Milch *recalls* the conf as being at Karinhall, attended by Udet, Lucht, Koppenberg, Stumpff, Lahs, Jeschonnek and others (cf MD:57, p. 3227).
- 51 Göring at conf, 18 Mar 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5474).
- 52 Göring's commission to Koppenberg, sgd and forwarded by Göring to Koppenberg on 30 Sep 1938 (MD:57, pp. 323off).
- 53 Milch, Mar 1967; cf diary, 24 Jun 1946, and affidavit, Dachau, 24 Jun 1946; Bross has the same story, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- 54 Memoirs; cf Wünsche diary, 30 Oct 1938.
- 55 Thomas: conf with Göring on 14 Oct 1938 (ND:1301-PS); cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 30 Oct 1946. Milch was not present.
- 56 Diary and notes, 15 Oct 1938; notes, 24 Oct 1938. Diary and notes, 26 Oct 1938; cf Udet's notes for this Göring conf (MD:65, p. 7436).
- 57 Memo by fuel supply office, 5 Dec 1938; quoted in Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 138.
- 58 Suchenwirth suggests it was about 8 Jan 1939; this author suspects it was earlier. Cf diary, 13 Dec 1938: 'Iron conf with Göring and Wehrmacht chiefs. Will not release raw materials, but adhere to the Big Programme.'
- 59 Diary, 28–29 Nov, 1 Dec 1938; cf Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, p. 46. Udet: notes for Göring conf, 13 Dec 1938 (MD:65, pp. 7409ff).
- 60 Göring order dated 23 Jan 1939 (MD:65, pp. 7403f); and memoirs. Cf diary, 16 Jan 1939.
- 61 Baron v. Hammerstein quoted by Suchenwirth: Udet, p. 28.
- 62 Memoirs. As an example of Jeschonnek's 'narrow-mindedness', Milch has drawn attention to the then Capt Jeschonnek's Aug 1932 memorandum (Völker: *Die Entwicklung der militärischen Luftfahrt in Deutschland, 1920–1933* [1962], p. 273) in which he advocates the killing off of 'civil aviation, which is useless for military purposes'. In so far as it was to be allowed to survive, it must be ruthlessly subjected to the needs of the Reich Defence Ministry.
- 63 Milch, Oct 1967; cf also Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, pp. 120, 164. The conflict between Milch and Jeschonnek continued with occasional pauses until the latter's suicide in Aug 1943. Cf diary of von Richthofen, 12 Feb 1943 and 15 Mar 1943 ('conf with Jeschonnek. Jeschonnek

- has made peace with Milch.’). Cf also Milch’s diary, 24 Feb 1943: ‘Bury the hatchet with Jeschonnek, at my suggestion.’
- 64 Diary, 12 Mar 1939. Letter, Maj Gen Schlichting to the author, Oct 1969: Stumpff ordered him to memorize the message.
- 65 Göring was opposed to the occupation of Czechoslovakia and wrote trying to dissuade Hitler from it (USFET-MISC Interrogation of Göring, OI-RIR/7, dated 24 Oct 1945). That he was previously unaware of any such plans can be seen from his conf with Udet, 28 Nov 1938, where he advocated expenditure of several million Reichsmarks in foreign currency on machine tools and iron in Prague. Also, ‘Field-Marshall [Göring] recommends purchase of shares in Czech factories’. (MD:65, pp. 7429f). Cf Wagner: *Der Generalquartiermeister*, p. 79.
- 66 Diary, 13 Mar 1939.
- 67 Milch remained Insp Gen until Jan 1945. Göring’s order dated 30 Jan 1939 (Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 53); and service instructions dated 6 Feb 1939 (*ibid.*, Nr. 54).
- 68 Letter, Maj Gen Schlichting to the author, Oct 1969.
- 69 Udet: report on journey of *General-Luftzeugmeister* to Prague, and other documents went to Göring in San Remo on 27 Mar 1939 (MD:65, p. 7395). See also the report on Göring’s conf with Mussolini, 15 Apr 1939 (ND:1874-PS).
- 70 Diary, 22–23 Mar 1939.
- 71 Diary, 25 Mar 1939. Führer’s brief to C-in-C Army, 25 Mar 1939 (ND:100-R); directive for unified preparation for war of Wehrmacht, 1939–40, dated 3 Apr 1939 (ND:120-C).
- 72 US State Dept interrogation of Göring, 6–7 Nov 1945.
- 73 Diary, 27 Apr 1939: ‘Big speech by Jeschonnek on White.’
- 74 Conf of Gen Felmy with Jeschonnek, 2 May 1939 (in MGFA, cited by Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, p. 39). Diary, 13 May 1939; cf Völker: *Dokumente*, Nr. 199: final conf of war exercise of Second Air Group on question of air warfare against Britain and at sea (13 May 1939).
- 75 German Air Staff: report, 22 May 1939; quoted in Suchenwirth; Jeschonnek, p. 39.
- 76 Cf Milch, IMT, vol. ix, p. 57: ‘I was suddenly sent for, since the Reichsmarschall was not present.’ When the prosecution ignored this, Milch insisted, on 11 Mar 1946: ‘May I state that my recollection is that Field Marshal Göring was not present. My recollection is that I was sent for to stand in for him, at the last moment.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 134.) Cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 17–18 Oct 1946: Göring had by then been dead for several days, so it cannot be held that Milch was trying to defend him. And in particular Milch’s diary, 23 May 1939: ‘Air Defence College Wannsee opened by Göring. Funeral Count Schulenburg, Potsdam, Lustgarten, 4–8.30 P.M. Führer, Commanders-in-Chief, grand plans. I as Göring’s deputy, called in at last moment by Bodenschatz.’
- 77 Report on conf in Führer’s study, 23 May 1939 (ND:79-L). For an analysis of the anachronisms in the ‘1939’ document, see Dr Friedrich Bergold’s defence closing speech, MCH, 25 Mar 1947. Göring, shown the document at Nuremberg under Pre-Trial Interrogation, at first denied knowledge of the conf, but was then persuaded that he must have been there as his name was on the list. Bodenschatz (interrogated 6 Nov 1945) said: ‘I must honestly say that I cannot remember this thing in this form . . . I do not want to say I was not present there, but I cannot recall this form of the conference as it has been drawn up here by Schmundt.’ Halder (29 Oct 1945) also stated: [The Schmundt report] does not reproduce the trend of the

- thoughts expressed there.' Warlimont also denied that he was present.
- 78 MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1816. Diary, 30 May 1947; cf also: 7 Nov 1945, 17, 19 Jan, 19 Feb, 12 Mar, 18 Nov 1947; and 21 Mar, 1 Apr 1948. The conf was discussed in MCH, pp. 1814ff, 2283ff, and 2367ff.
- 79 Letter, Bodenschatz to Udet, 21 Jun 1939 (MD:65, p. 7371).
- 80 Report on 2nd session of Reich Defence Council, 23 Jun 1939 (ND:3787-PS); cf IMT, vol. xvii, p. 438.
- 81 Letter, Udet to Milch, 20 Jun 1939 re: raw material quantities for July 1939 (MD:65, p. 7341); Milch sent this to Göring on 23 Jun 1939. Also letter, Keitel to Göring, 15 Jun 1939 re: determination of metal and rubber quotas for the coming months (MD:65, p. 7343); note on conf, 27 Jun 1939 (*ibid.*, p. 7354); and Tschersich: points touched upon by Göring during his conf with Udet on 20 Jul 1939 (*ibid.*, pp. 7318ff).
- 82 On the strength of Raeder's assurance, Adm Dönitz, the submarine commander, went on leave (CCPWE, interrogation of Dönitz, 4 Aug 1945).
- 83 Diary, 26 May 1939; cf Ciano diary, 3 Feb 1939: 'He [Duce] said once more that he regards war as inevitable.' On the Italian-German air force exchange of aircraft and information, see Milch: note on conf with Udet, 29 Jun 1939, with an Italian delegation (MD:65, pp. 7368f). On 23 Jun Göring ordered that no flak batteries were to be handed to Italy and on 14 Jul he amplified this: 'but the Italians are to be advised that there may be partial delivery in 1940 according to how the raw materials situation is.' (Letter, Udet to Göring, 11 Jul 1939; Bodenschatz to Milch, 14 Jul 1939; MD:65, pp. 7327ff).
- 84 Diary, 8 Jun 1939; an extract from a letter from Hess to Göring subsequent to this visit is in MD:65, pp. 7348f.
- 85 Tschersich: report on supplies position, Jul 1939, dated 15 Aug 1939 (FD.4940/45).
- This states that the Luftwaffe consumed 52,000 cubic metres of aviation spirit in Jul 1939: 'The stocks have thereby been reduced from about 712,600 to 691,300 cubic meters (adequate for 3.9 war months); but of this quantity only about 420,000 can be regarded as fit for use, as no more can be ethylised in consequence of the release by us of 512 cubic metres of ethyl fluid.' See also Dr Karl Gundelach's study in *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 1963, p. 687. On the general issue of the unreadiness of the Luftwaffe, cf Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 194, 203, 205, 210, 214.
- 86 Chef OKW (Keitel) had reported to the C-in-Cs on 7 Dec 1938 that Hitler had ordered the services to concentrate on producing weapons rather than ammunition.
- 87 Report, Milch to Göring, 18 Apr 1939 (MD:51, pp. 5667f).
- 88 Diary, 26 Jun, 3 Jul 1939. Heinkel: *op. cit.*, pp. 490ff. Article: The Secret Fight that Doomed the Luftwaffe, *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 Apr 1950: 'Messerschmitt laughingly disclosed to an American reporter after the war, "The plane that Wendel flew was no Me 109 (horsepower 1065) but a stripped down special Me 209 (horsepower 2300), a plane no ordinary pilot could ever handle." That the cold-start procedure was displayed to Hitler on this occasion was recalled in a document of 11 Apr 1942 (MD:56, p. 2678) when the reasons for the German Army's ignorance of the procedure were discussed (the Battle of Moscow).
- 89 Suchenwirth: Udet, p. 44. But Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, p. 42f, cites Lt Gen Josef Schmid's postwar recollections of a statement by Hitler on this occasion: 'I must forge the Great Reich with weapons. We will have a war, I don't know when. Under all circumstances this war must end in victory for us. Whether it lasts one, two, or ten years is all the same to me — it must be won.'

- Diary, 8 May 1947; von Below also regarded Hitler's policies as bluff (diary, 21 Mar 1948).
- 90 Göring speech to air industry, 13 Sep 1942 (MD:62, pp. 527ff.).
- 91 Eng Gen Gerbert Hübner: The engineer problem in the Luftwaffe 1933-1945, p. 21 (MGFA).
- 92 Kreipe diary, 11 Aug 1944.
- 93 Alpers, Dec. 1969. Hitler's closing speech at Rechlin was recalled by Göring in his conf on 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6185f); see also memo, Tech Dept to Milch, 21 Oct 1943, explaining why the 30mm cannon had been delayed (MD:51, p. 329). The MK 101 was an early and very heavy weapon (178 kilos) developed by Rheinmetall Borsig since 1935 from the tank weapon MKS-18-1000, of 20mm calibre. It would only fire from a drum magazine, a maximum of 30 rounds. It was to be replaced by the MK 103 (weighing 143 kilos) and later by the MK 108 (weighing 62 kilos), both belt-fed, and the latter with very rapid fire, important for fighter aircraft. Later on, Milch fitted fighters with 75mm and even with 88mm guns, in experimental versions. (Letter, Maximilian Bohlan to the author, 31 Jan 1970.) Göring's emphasis on these is in MD:63, pp. 6185f. The next conf was on 12 Jul 1939 (Milch was not present). Cf letter Bodenschatz to Udet, 14 Jul 1939 (MD:65, p. 7326) and letter Schmid to Udet (MD:65, p. 7325).
- 94 Tschersich: points touched upon by Göring during his conf with Udet on 20 Jul 1939 (*ibid.*, p. 7318).
- 95 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 413.
- 96 Lichte and Böttger: The development of aircraft jet engines by Junkers research, study dated Aug 1963; letter from Erich Warsitz, 26 Jan 1970; letter from Milch to the author, 19 Mar 1970. The Jumo 004A engine had its maiden run in Oct 1940; the operational version, the Jumo 004B, first ran in summer 1943.
- 97 Diary, 21 Jul 1939; Pre-Trial Interroga-
- tion, 27 Oct 1945; and *Development of the German Air Force*.
- 98 Ciano diary, 15 Apr 1939. Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5474).
- 99 Udet: notes for Göring conf on 21-22 Aug 1939 (MD:65, pp. 7309ff). Heinkel: *op. cit.*, p. 434.
- 100 Letter, Jeschonnek to Udet and others, 9 Aug 1939 (in file FD.4940/45). By Oct 1939 Udet's staff were already issuing an aircraft production programme with completely different figures.
- 101 Letter, Bodenschatz to Milch, 9 Aug 1939 (MD:65, p. 7313). Udet: note for conf of 14 Aug 1939 (FD.4940/45). Cf diary, 15 Aug 1939. Führer order for expansion of Ju 88 and flak programmes dated 21 Aug 1939 (FD.4940/45), and other documents in the same file.
- 102 Halder diary, 14 Aug 1939; cf Keitel memoirs, pp. 208f. Milch diary, 15-16 Aug 1939; cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 17 and 27 Oct 1945.
- 103 Memoirs; cf MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1833.
- 104 Milch, May 1968; cf diary, 4 Mar 1915.
- 105 Diary, 22 Aug 1939: '12 noon: all C-in-Cs and army commanders with Führer: the situation and his intentions, directives. 5.40-7.47 P.M. [flew] Ainring to Berlin.' Milch disputes Hans-Bernd Gisevius's version *Bis zum Bitteren Ende*, vol. II, p. 103, according to which caviar was served during the luncheon. He accepts the text prepared presumably by Adm Canaris: Führer's speech to C-in-Cs, 22 Aug 1939 (ND:798-PS) as being correct. Cf Albrecht diary, 22 Aug 1939, printed in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2/1968, pp. 148f.
- 106 Diary, 25-26 Aug 1939: 'Overnight in Air Ministry. Then to Karinhall, and thence to Reich Chancery. Lunch with Führer. Then to Air Ministry and Wild Park. At 3.30 A.M. Göring comes, and we await him at his train. He says Italian king blocked Mussolini!' Also Milch, Mar 1967, Oct 1967, May 1968; and *The Development of the German Air Force*.

- 107 Diary, 27–28 Aug 1939; Milch's draft inspection report to Jeschonnek and others, 29 Aug 1939 (MD:51, p. 485).
 108 Diary, 31 Aug 1939.

C H A P T E R 4

- 1 Völker: *Luftwaffe*, pp. 182f.
 2 Milch: Reasons for the Defeat of the Luftwaffe.
 3 Report of Air Staff, 6th Div, 2 Sep 1939 (cited in Völker: *Luftwaffe*, p. 189).
 4 Kesselring, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
 5 Gen Wilhelm Speidel: The Polish Campaign, vol. 1, appendices 1–10.
 6 Milch puts the bombs consumed at about 60 percent of the total stocks. Cf Göring, quoted in *Inter Avia*, Jul 1946, p. 17.
 7 Notes, diary, 1940: 'Casualties east, casualties west.'
 8 Halder diary, 27 Sep 1939; cf Helmut Greiner: The Campaigns against the Western Powers and in the North (MS:C-065d). Diary, 28 Sep 1939.
 9 *Ibid.*, 12 Oct 1939.
 10 Cf diary, 31 July 1937; and 16 Jan 1940: 'Conf with Udet on bombs. For concrete [bombs] I propose Degelow.'
 11 GL conf, 10 Nov 1942 (MD:17, p. 3193). See also Milch at GL conf, 29 Jul 1942 (MD:34, pp. 1672ff): von Richthofen had seen the bomb early in 1940 and been impressed by its fragmentation effect. By Jul 1942 there were 1.5 million 50-kilo concrete bombs in stock.
 12 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 440; diary, 1 Nov 1940.
 13 A relation of the better-known Col (GS) Diesing on Göring's staff. Cf Göring interrogation SAIC/13, 19 May 1945: 'Hitler asked Göring to inform him as soon as a period of fine weather days was in sight, so that the Luftwaffe could be committed for at least five days in a row . . . Göring claims that at that time he was very much opposed to the invasion in France, and suggested repeatedly that it be postponed until spring. He was in constant fear all through the

- winter that a period of fine weather might precipitate the offensive against France.'
- 14 Milch, May 1968; and diary, 7 Nov 1939; weather confs were also called on 8, 10 and 20 Nov 1939.
 15 Jodl diary.
 16 Milch, May 1968; ND:TC-58a; Jodl diary, 11 Jan 1940; and diary, 12 Jan 1940: 'Evening, to see Göring: "Belgian papers have been burnt."
 17 Bross, *op. cit.*, p. 130. GL conf, 15 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1926): 'The Reichsmarschall also says that the affair in 1940 was a frightful blow to his prestige with the Führer.'
 18 Kesselring, *op. cit.*, p. 66. Hitler also ordered that experiments be carried out on selfdestructo devices for couriers' briefcases in the event of their capture.
 19 Milch, Nov 1968.
 20 Göring, 19 May 1945. (See note 13.)
 21 Milch, May 1968. German air intelligence put the combined British and French front-line air strength at 1,782 bombers and 1,823 fighters on 1 Jan 1940, of which perhaps 60 percent were serviceable. Comparable figures for 20 Jan showed the German air force to have 4,724 war planes, of which 72 percent were serviceable. The number increased by about 800 by the end of March. Milch knew that both Britain and France were purchasing aircraft from USA — he knew the precise figures — and it was only a matter of time before the enemy was numerically equal. Hitler repeatedly stressed that time favoured only the enemy.
 22 Cf Göring conf, 29 Jan 1940, recorded in Milch's notes. Present were Göring, Milch, Jeschonnek, Bodenschatz, Sperrele, Koller, Kesselring, Speidel, von Waldau, von Seidel, Martini and Schmid. Also Göring conf, 3 Feb 1940, with the same participants plus von Greim, Plocher, Grauert, Loerzer, Korten, Meister, Keller, von Richthofen,

- Seidemann, Genth, Geisler, and Harlinghausen.
- 23 Four-Year Plan: memorandum on conf on acceleration of arms production, 9 Feb 1940 (MD:65, pp. 7281ff); cf Milch's notes, 9 Feb 1940: those present were Göring, Milch, Udet, Neumann, Todt, Krauch, Gritzbach, Funk, Becker, Witzell, Keitel, v. Hannecken, Hernekamp, Thomas, Kleinmann, Landfried, Zimmerman; and diary, 9 Feb 1940.
- 24 Letter, Udet to Four-Year Plan office, 21 Feb 1940 (MD:65, p. 7280).
- 25 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 442.
- 26 Diary, 1–2 Mar 1940; and Milch, Nov 1967, May and Nov 1968.
- 27 Diary, 26 Dec 1947. Milch adds: 'What on earth was the *General-Luftzeugmeister* thinking of?'
- 28 Göring conf, in Milch's notes, 13 Mar 1940. Cf diary, 13 Mar 1940: 'First [Göring] conf with Udet.'
- 29 Diary, 17 Feb 1940: 'British *Schweinerei* against the *Altmark*.' In this incident the German tanker *Altmark*, carrying 299 British captives taken by the raider *Graf Spee*, was boarded in neutral waters by a party from a British destroyer, and nine of the unarmed German seamen were killed. Cf US Army Pamphlet No. 20-271: *The German Northern Theater of Operations 1940–1945*. Diary, 11 and 13 Jan 1940; Milch, May 1968.
- 30 Diary, 14 Jan 1940: 'Morning, first "Oyster" conf – and last.' Cf Jodl diary, 21 Jan 1940: '6 p.m.: C-in-C Army and chief of staff. Operation "Oyster". C-in-C Air Force.'
- 31 Jodl diary, 23 Jan 1940: 'Study N[orth] withdrawn on Führer's orders and will not be processed by services. Activation of special unit in C-in-C Luftwaffe's staff is to be stopped. Processing only by OKW.'
- 32 Eyermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 160, 310–311.
- 33 Diary, 11–12 Apr 1940; and Göring conf noted in Milch's notes, 12 Apr 1940.
- 34 Diary, 13 Apr 1940.
- 35 Notes, 14 Apr 1940: conf in Reich Chancery with Hitler, Göring, Raeder, Milch, Jeschonnek, Keitel and Bodenschatz.
- 36 Diary, 17 Apr 1940.
- 37 *Royal Air Force, 1939–1945*, vol. 1, p. 86.
- 38 Diary, 26 Apr 1940: 'Row with Harlinghausen!' And 27 Apr 1940: 'Morning, Falkenhorst here: very downcast. "Impossible to make progress without strong air activity!" Agreed. Midday: we capture Kuam and Bagn: Group xxi holds up its head again.'
- 39 Führer–Speer–Milch conf, 24 May 1942 (MPP); also publ. by Boelcke, *Deutschlands Rüstung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, pp. 127ff.

C H A P T E R 5

- 1 Diary, 23 May 1940; Milch was apparently at Göring's headquarters all day.
- 2 *Inter Avia*, Jul 1946, p. 17.
- 3 Engel notes, 23 May 1940.
- 4 Milch, May 1968; cf Gen Josef Schmid: Background of the Luftwaffe's operations at Dunkirk; cited by Suchenwirth: Göring, p. 99, and Jeschonnek, p. 61. Engel, notes, *op. cit.*; Kesselring and v. Richthofen also objected to the decision. Cf Richard Collier: *Sands of Dunkirk*, pp. 24ff.
- 5 Engel notes, 23 May 1940.
- 6 Memoirs; cf also description by Gen v. Waldau, diary, May 1940.
- 7 Diary, 5 Jun 1940; CSDIC (UK) report SRGG 1313(C), dated 3 Jun 1945.
- 8 Bross, *op. cit.*, p. 47; Milch does not consider this an adequate excuse.
- 9 Diary, 19 Jul 1940.
- 10 Memoirs; Milch, Nov 1967, May 1968.

C H A P T E R 6

- 1 Jodl: *The Continuation of War against Britain*, 30 Jun 1940 (ND:1776-PS).
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 RAF fighter production since Jun 1940 was

- 490 monthly; while Me 109 production was 164 in June, 220 in July, 173 in August, 218 in September 1940.
- 4 German Air Staff order, 30 Jun 1940.
- 5 *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 75.
- 6 Notes, 21 Jul 1940: a long record of a conf attended by Göring, Milch, Sperrle, Kesselring, Speidel, Stumpff, Jeschonnek, v. Waldau, v. Seidel, Udet, Grauert, Lörzer, Kühl, Weiss, Martini, Bodenschatz, Gritzbach, v. Richthofen, Schmid, Keller, v. Greim, Coeler, Dessloch, Kastner, Putzier, Witzig. Cf also Luftwaffe ops staff staff memo on the conf, 21 Jul 1940. Milch had first demanded radio to enable ground controllers to communicate with fighter pilots, and escort fighters with bombers, in 1934. Cf GL conf, 10 Sep 1943 (MD:38, p. 4566): 'I never found out why our bombers were unable to communicate with their escort fighters in the attacks on Britain.'
- 7 Conf of three C-in-Cs with Führer, 21 Jul 1940 (in German Naval Staff war diary, 21 Jul 1940); Göring was represented by Jeschonnek.
- 8 See note 6.
- 9 Führer naval conf, 31 Jul 1940; cf Naval Staff war diary, 31 Jul 1940, and OKW war diary, 1 Aug 1940.
- 10 Führer directive no. 17, 1 Aug 1940.
- 11 Luftwaffe ops staff directive, 2 Aug 1940.
- 12 Diary, 6 Aug 1940. Most problematic was the realization that the bomber formations could not defend themselves adequately. Robert Lusser, Messerschmitt's chief designer, had warned since 1936, from his knowledge of the Me 110's armament, that German bombers with their drum-loaded MG 15 machine-guns were far too weakly armed. In Jan 1939 he proved to the Reich Air Ministry that a standard fighter (Me 109) was not seven times but *five hundred* times superior to the standard bomber (He 111) in any air combat. No action was taken on Lusser's report. (Cf report, Lusser to Milch, 15 Jan 1942, MD:53, p. 817).
- 13 OKW war diary, 12 Aug 1940.
- 14 The figures are of serviceable aircraft. Basil Collier, *op. cit.*, appendix xi.
- 15 Diary, 13 Aug 1940. In fact not all Second Air Force's units received the recall message (KG 2 for example), and thus made their attack without fighter escort. Cf Richard Collier: *Eagle Day*, pp. 55ff.
- 16 Diary, 15 Aug 1940; and notes, 15 Aug 1940.
- 17 OKW war diary, 16 Aug 1940. On the 18th, dive bombers had attacked Portsmouth and mislaid their fighter escort — 'a small mishap' — and German losses that day were 147, compared with 49 enemy aircraft.
- 18 Diary, 19 Aug 1940; and notes, 19 Jan 1940; see also the part report on the conf (MD:65, pp. 7251ff), circulated in no fewer than 920 copies. Cf Basil Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
- 19 Cf notes, 27 Aug 1940: 'Sperrle believes that enemy can be softened up by night attacks. Jeschonnek thinks differently.'
- 20 Baron v. Hammerstein to Suchenwirth in: Jeschonnek, p. 72. He also related this in his privately-printed memoirs, *Mein Leben*, pp. 131f.
- 21 Milch: inspection report, 20–25 Aug 1940 (MD:51, pp. 538ff).
- 22 Notes, 20–25 Aug 1940.
- 23 Notes, 30–31 Aug 1940; and inspection report, 27 Aug to 4 Sep 1940 (MD:51, pp. 530ff).
- 24 Notes and diary, 4 Sep 1940: 'Führer approves larger quota for 1,000-kilo bombs.'
- 25 OKW war diary, 4 Sep 1940. In fact the RAF had 650 fighters serviceable.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 30 Aug 1940. Cf notes, 4 Sep 1940 ('Point 1: when London?') and OKW war diary, 4 Sep 1940 ('London still not released for attack by Führer').
- 27 OKW war diary, 6–9 Sep 1940.
- 28 OKW war diary, 10 Sep 1940. *Time*, 26 Aug 1940, pp. 21–4.

- 29 Diary, 13–14 Sep 1940; the latter conf was attended by Hitler, Milch, Keitel, Jodl, Bodenschatz, v. Brauchitsch, Halder, Jeschonnek, Raeder, v. Puttkamer, Schmundt and a major.
- 30 Notes, 14 Sep 1940; cf Halder diary, 14 Sep 1940; and OKW war diary, 14 Sep 1940: The Führer had ordered, 'Terror raids against purely residential areas must be reserved for use as an ultimate means of pressure.' Cf also German Naval Staff war diary, 14–15 Sep 1940. Keitel's version is in ND:803-PS.
- 31 Diary, 16 Sep 1940; and notes, 16 Sep 1940. Those present were Göring, Sperrle, Kesselring, Milch, Greim, Pflugbeil, Martini, Bodenschatz, v. Döring, Loderzer, Jeschonnek, Zech, Kastner and others.
- 32 Between 24 Aug and 6 Sep 1940 the RAF had lost 103 pilots killed and 128 seriously injured, and 466 fighters were destroyed or seriously damaged. In general, see Warlimont's report in OKW war diary, 23 Sep 1940.
- 33 Naval Staff war diary, 17 Sep 1940.
- 34 Letter, Erich Warsitz to the author, 29 Jan 1970.
- 35 Major Storp later became Technical Officer on Göring's staff; as a lieutenant he had served under Jeschonnek in the Greifswald unit.
- 36 Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5713).
- 37 Notes, 2 Sep 1940. Cf Milch at GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1986f): 'I had to consider the matter very thoroughly once about two years ago. Major problems had arisen in the operations of the Ju 88 as it then was. This resulted in an inward rejection of the Ju 88 by the mass of the squadrons. I am not talking of those people who believed I was personally opposed to the Ju 88. I was as neutral toward the Ju 88 as toward the He 111 or Do 217, etc. I have no interest in standing out for or against a firm or office. In my reports I purely forwarded the squadrons' opinions, without suggesting they were proper ones. But I had to report what the subjective views of the squadrons were, and I tried to narrow the causes down for the technical authorities; but the technical authorities begrudged me that, and said, "This is an attack on us — it looks as though we have failed."
- 38 Milch: inspection report dated 15 Oct 1940 (MD:51, pp. 522ff). Cf notes, 12–15 Oct 1940. See also Werner Baumbach's version in *Broken Swastika*, where he suggests Milch recalled the third squadron of KG 30 from the front 'as a punishment for mutiny and defeatism.' And cf notes, 13 Oct 1940.
- 39 Koppenberg: note on Göring conf, 12 Nov 1940 (in file: Correspondence with Dr Koppenberg, FD.5515/45).
- 40 Diary, 13 Oct 1940; cf *ibid.*, 5, 16–18, 27 Sep, 1 Oct 1940.
- 41 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 422.
- 42 Diary, 20 Oct 1940.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 23, 25, 28 Oct 1940; cf Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 444; and letter Prof Kalk to the author, 11 Dec 1968.
- 44 Diary, 28 Oct, 12, 14 Nov, 10 Dec 1940.
- 45 Letter, von Winterfeld to the author, 22 Dec 1969; Lt Simniok was the signals officer.
- 46 Diary, 3 Oct 1940; and notes, 3 Oct 1940.
- 47 Pre-Trial Interrogation, 6 Nov 1946; the Inspectorate was returned to Milch on 13 Oct 1940.
- 48 Diary and notes, 12 Oct 1940.
- 49 Notes, 30 Oct 1940. Cf Koppenberg's note on Göring conf, 8 Nov 1940 (see note 39): 'The General-Luftzeugmeister [Udet] is considering similar measures to increase the industry in Germany by 400,000 workers, and start up the French industry again with 200,000 workers, in other words an increase in manpower by 600,000 to 1,200,000 altogether.'
- 50 Diary, 15 Oct 1940; and notes; 15 Oct 1940. Cf letter, Milch to Göring, 15 Oct 1940.

- (MD:56, pp. 279off).
- 51 Memoirs.
- 52 Diary and notes, 31 Oct 1940.
- 53 Engel notes, 4 Nov 1940.
- 54 Milch: inspection report 27 Aug to 4 Sep 1940 (MD:51, p. 534).
- 55 Diary, 14 Nov 1940.
- 56 Waldau diary, 16 Nov 1940.
- 57 Diary, 25 Nov 1940: '4.30-4.50 P.M. with Führer: situation and measures to be taken, Mediterranean. Telephone Göring at Rominten: I am to return to West, Jeschonnek to go to him.' And notes, 25 Nov 1940.
- 58 Diary, 3 Dec 1940. Notes, 3 Dec 1940.
Waldau diary, 3 Dec 1940: 'In the evening, went to Insterburg, thence to Rominten. Wet autumn day. A very warm and personal discussion with Reichsmarschall (mostly in his hunting landau, which was taking us to the feeding place of the world record deer "Matador"). Night, returned to Berlin.'
- 59 Diary, 4 Dec 1940; and notes, 4 Dec 1940.
Cf letter, Hitler to Duce, 4 Dec 1940 (personal papers of Mussolini, NARS film T-586, roll 405).
- 60 Notes, Nov 1940: the 1,845 Germans had been killed in a period of severe petrol rationing of motor vehicles; over the same six months in 1938, there were 4,280 people killed in traffic accidents.
- 61 Diary, 11–12 Dec 1940.
- 62 Cf war diary of Führer's HQ, appendix; and Bormann diary, 24–25 Dec 1940.
Milch diary, 25 Dec 1940: 'Minister Hess visits us, early. Then to Führer, for conf (his train near Asia). East first! Adm. Darlan visits Führer.' Hitler had signed the OKW directive no. 21 (Case *Barbarossa*) on 18 Dec 1940: 'The German Wehrmacht must be prepared to knock out the Soviet Union in a rapid campaign, even before the war with Britain is over.'

CHAPTER 7

- 1 Cf diary, 17 Dec 1939: 'Morning at Karinhall with Udet, conf on deliveries to Russia.' Notes, 30 Mar 1940: a conf on supplies to Russia (in some detail); also Alpers, Dec 1969.
- 2 Bross: *op. cit.*, pp. 76ff. Göring's last public speech in Berlin, 30 Jan 1943 (reported in *Völkischer Beobachter*, 2 Feb 1943).
- 3 US State Dept interrogation of Göring, 6–7 Nov 1945; and USFET report OI-RIR/7 on Göring, 24 Oct 1945. *Inter Avia*, Jul 1946, p. 17. *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 162, states that the engineers' reports 'were not believed by Oberst [Col] Schmid who suspected Udet's engineers of being the victims of Russian bluff.' One of them was Oberstingenieur Dietrich Schwenke: cf GL conf, 9 Dec 1942 (MD:17, pp. 3614ff, 3716f) for his experiences there; on Russian production in general see GL confs 21 Jul 1942 (MD:15, p. 1551ff); 17 Nov 1942 (MD:17, pp. 3246ff); and 23 Mar 1943 (MD:19, p. 4763).
- 4 Bross, *op. cit.*, p. 26: 'I [Göring] tried in vain to dissuade him; for three hours I harangued him. Of course this won't have the slightest effect on this trial.' Cf also Göring interrogation, SAIC/13, 19 May 1945; and OI-RIR/7, 24 Oct 1945; and Pre-Trial Interrogation of Göring, 11 Oct 1945; and US State Dept interrogation, 6–7 Nov 1945.
- 5 Diary, 13 Jan 1941; cf Waldau diary, 6 Jan 1941: 'Jeschonnek recalled to Berlin and Obersalzberg after being back here barely half a day!' And 13 Jan 1941: 'Jeschonnek returns with basic directives, then goes back to Berlin.' Cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 18 Oct 1946; and MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1839. And letter, Col Edgar Petersen to the author, 3 and 18 Dec 1969: from Dec 1940 to Mar 1941 Petersen was the expert on navigation and blind flying on Jeschonnek's staff at Le Déluge; he is certain that the date

- was 13 Jan 1941.
- 6 Diary, 1 Feb 1941.
- 7 Kesselring, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
- 8 Pre-Trial Interrogation, Oct 1946; cf IMT, vol. ix, pp. 57ff; and MCH, 12 Mar 1947, pp. 1839f. 'From the memoirs of Field Marshal Milch' reproduces the dialogue from memory; cf memoirs.
- 9 Milch, May 1968; cf Bross, *op. cit.*, p. 46, where Göring takes the credit. MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1841; and memoirs.
- 10 Cf Goebbels diary, 15 May 1942: 'Naumann tells me about yet another instance of the War Office's neglect. They ordered rubber boots for the mud period in the East, which will not be ready until July, probably. The Army always complains about the better clothing of the Luftwaffe and SS. This can only be attributed to the fact that people there worked more promptly and responsibly than in the Army. The Army is governed by a scarcely tolerable bureaucracy.' Milch himself recalled this period at GL conf, 9 Dec 1942 (MD:17, p. 3669): 'Everybody knew at the time that the Eastern affair was coming. It was long before June [1941]: I was asked in the Supply Department whether we were to prepare for the winter or not. That was months beforehand. Thereupon I gave the order: "Prepare everything for the winter. The war in the East is going to last for years!" At that time the official view was different. I know the East, its expanses; I have been there often enough myself . . . Do you believe the winter measures could have been carried out if we waited until the order was finally given? Then it would have been far too late.'
- 11 Göring conf, 8 Jan 1942 (MD:62, pp. 516ff): Von Seidel: 'Since 22 Jun 1941 winter orders and directives have been continually issued. Everything possible has been done. There are still stocks in hand for further units going out there.' Suchenwirth (Milch, p. 20) gives credit to both von Seidel and Milch, but the latter correctly points out that von Seidel's orders were issued, if at all, in Aug 1941; this is supported by Vorwald (Jun 1968), who at the time was head of the Equipment Branch of the Air Staff. In about Sep 1941 (when GAF headquarters was already at Goldap, East Prussia) Jeschonnek told him, 'Telephone Seidel that everything must be stocked up for the Luftwaffe — cold-start equipment, clothing, etc.' (Jeschonnek himself was not on speaking terms with Seidel.)
- 12 Memoirs; cf MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1884ff, and IMT, vol. ix, p. 60. Cf also Brauchitsch in MCH, 20 Feb 1947, p. 1281: 'I do recall one remark, in April or May 1941, that Field Marshal Milch went to the C-in-C of the Luftwaffe in a conference to advise him that it would not be possible to wage a war against Russia, and asked him to make the appropriate representations to the Führer.'
- 13 Waldau diary, 28 Mar 1941: he ordered KG 51, KG 2, Stuka 77 and JG 54 immediately to the new front.
- 14 Diary, 30 Mar 1941; this version is based on Waldau's note.
- 15 Halder diary, 30 Mar 1941.
- 16 The Fourth Air Force's commander, Col Gen Alexander Löhr, and General Fiebig, were executed by the Yugoslavs after the war for the attack on Belgrade.
- 17 Waldau diary, 6 Apr 1941; Milch diary, 7 Apr 1941.
- 18 Rieckhoff: *Trumpf oder Bluff*, p. 135.
- 19 Robert Lusser: memorandum to Milch on development and research planning in German air armament (MD:53, pp. 804ff) dated 15 Jan 1942; Lusser was with Messerschmitt until Jun 1939 when he transferred to Heinkel as chief designer.
- 20 Rakan Kokothaki: on the reasons and sequence of cancellation of Me 210 production (Mar 1970). Cf letter, Udet (sgd Reidenbach) to Prof Messerschmitt, 17 May 1941 (FD.4355/45, vol. 5).
- 21 Baron von Hammerstein, *op. cit.*, p. 132;

- cf Udet's notes for conf with Göring 7–8 Feb 1941, point 6.
- 22 Heinkel *op. cit.*, p. 446.
- 23 Göring to Milch, conf, 7 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5697f).
- 24 Milch, Nov 1968; diary, 31 Oct 1940; and Manfred Roeder: Investigation after suicide of Col Gen Udet (dated Nuremberg, 27 Jun 1947).
- 25 Von Brauchitsch in MCH, 20 Feb 1947, pp. 1283f.
- 26 Von Hammerstein, *op. cit.*, p. 133; cf Baumbach: *op. cit.*, p. 104.
- 27 Diary, 16 May 1941.
- 28 Milch in MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1844; cf von Brauchitsch, MCH, 20 Feb 1947, p. 1283.
- 29 Diary, 22 May 1941; *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, pp. 165, 176. Pendele: chronology, 23 May 1941.
- 30 Heinkel: *op. cit.*, pp. 450f.
- 31 Diary, 29 May 1941. 'Midday: with Udet at Horcher's.' It cannot be denied that Milch was jealous of Udet's ready accessibility to Göring, for MPP contains a scrap of paper on which Milch listed the numbers of Udet's confs with Göring each year, as compared with his own.
- 32 Pendele: chronology; Milch diary, 11 Jun 1941.
- 33 Milch, GL conf, 22 Jun 1943 (MD:21, p. 5772). Göring to Milch at conf, 7 Oct 1943 (MD:62, pp. 5697f).
- 34 Diary, 12 Jun 1941; MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1844.
- 35 Diary, 14 Jun 1941.
- 36 Waldau diary, 14 Jun 1941; Halder diary, 14 Jun 1941. See also Warlimont: *Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht*. Cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 18 Oct 1946, and Milch at IMT, vol. IX, p. 65: 'We sat round a large table and each of the Army Group and Army commanders outlined their tasks and planned operations on a map, while Hitler signified his approval or made minor corrections.' And diary, 15 Jun 1941: 'Major conf of Luftwaffe at Karinhall: *Luftflotten*, Air Corps, Air Zones.'
- 37 OKW directive, 19 Dec 1940.
- 38 Diary, 22 June 1941.
- 39 The Soviet publication, *History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, suggests that by noon of the first day, 22 Jun 1941, 1,200 Soviet aircraft had been destroyed, including 800 on the ground.
- 40 Diary, 22–26 Jun 1941. Göring claimed the Russians lost 2,700 aircraft in the first three days, mostly on the ground (*Inter Avia*, Jul 1946, p. 18).

C H A P T E R 8

- 1 A. Milward: *The German Economy at War*, p. 43.
- 2 Diary, 20 Jun 1941: 'Göring [gives me] special commission to quadruple the Luftwaffe.'
- 3 Thorwald: *Ernst Udet; Mein Fliegerleben* (Berlin, 1954), p. 178.
- 4 Milch at MCH, 13 Mar 1947, p. 1910. Cf Milch at GL conf, 22 Jun 1943 (MD:21, p. 5772): 'I am thinking of the times of the late Dr Todt. There was perpetual argument about whether Udet had been given the workers or not. He proved that Udet had received 60,000 each month, and Udet said he had not received one.'
- 5 MCH, 13 Mar 1947, p. 1911. The date in Jun 1941 is uncertain.
- 6 *Ibid.*; and diary, 21 Jun 1941.
- 7 Göring special authority to Milch, Jun 1941. (MD:57, pp. 3206ff). The only copy is in the Milch documents, among the papers left by Udet. It was evidently typed in Göring's office and initialled by Pendele for Udet on 25 Jun 1941 (p. 3209); the copy shown to Udet was not signed by Göring and it was undated. *Ibid.*, p. 3209.
- 8 MCH, 13 Mar 1947, p. 1911.
- 9 *Chronik* of Inspector-General of Construction in Reich Capital (cited hereafter as Speer, *Chronik*), 23 Jun 1941. Cf Speer: *Erinnerungen*, p. 197. Cf Thomas's

- note (see note 11): ‘... with the provision that the factories are to be torn down after the war, to avoid any incentive to invest huge sums in them.’
- 10 Memoirs; and notes for conf with Field Marshal Milch, undated (MD:65, pp. 7118ff).
- 11 Diary, 26 Jun 1941. Milch and Todt had known each other since 1915, at Verdun, where both were stationed on the same airfield. And cf Thomas: note on conf in State-Secretary Milch’s office, 26 June 1941 (publ. in OKW war diary, vol. 1, pp. 1016ff).
- 12 Milch: speech to Industrial Council, 18 Sep 1941, stenogram (MD:53, pp. 1162ff).
- 13 GL conf, 3 Aug 1943 (MD:23, p. 6597).
- 14 In Nov Koppenberg was given special powers by Göring to double Norwegian aluminium output to 120,000 tons a year by mid-1942, with the Air Ministry as sole beneficiary. He established Hansa Leichtmetall AG for this purpose. By Jul 1941 he was talking of expanding Norway’s aluminium smelting capacity to 250,000 tons a year (letter, Koppenberg to Krauch, 11 July 1941, in FD.5515/45). The added capacity would come from Herven II, Eitrheim, Aura and Ulvik. By mid-1941 his main problem was securing raw materials — alumina and bauxite; he looked to France (letters to Udet, 31 Mar, 4 Apr 1941, *ibid.*), Greece and Yugoslavia (letter to Udet, 23 Apr 1941, *ibid.*); on 23 Jun 1941 he was already considering Russian sources (letter of 2 Jul 1941 to Udet, where reference is made to a conf of 23 Jun). (Koppenberg was most interested in the alumina works at Kandalashka, but he advised that the biggest aluminium smelting plants, with a capacity of 27,000 tons a year, were on the Dnieper, with associated aluminium, electrode and cryolith factories.) Koppenberg was frequently thwarted by Dr Westrick’s rival United Aluminium Works, a Reich company, which at-tempted to secure a monopoly of Yugoslav bauxite; cf note on conf, 17 Jul 1941, where Krauch proposed dividing Soviet Union into a northern area for Koppenberg’s Hansa, and a southern one for Westrick (FD.5515/45). Cf Milch diary, 23 Jun 1941.
- 15 Conf of 26 June 1941. Similar information on enemy air forces, including the American, compared with Germany was given to the OKM by the Air Staff liaison officer and by Schwenke during Aug 1941. Cf Naval Staff war diary, 5 and 13 Aug 1941.
- 16 Milch: speech, 18 Sep 1941 (see note 12). Göring shared Milch’s admiration for Knudsen: ‘What Mr Knudsen, the organizer and leading figure of the US armaments industry, is capable of we are all capable of.’ (See chapter 6, note 39.) Knudsen had visited Milch in Germany.
- 17 Memoirs.
- 18 Milch in MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1845.
- 19 Note on Programme for Jumo 222: conf in Reich Air Ministry, 30 Aug 1941 (Junkers archives).
- 20 Vorwald in MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1672.
- 21 Memoirs. And Thomas: note on staff conf under Field Marshal Keitel, 14–16 Aug 1941 (publ. in OKW war diary, vol. 1, p. 1046). Milch, Nov 1967.
- 22 Diary, 8–11 Jul 1941, and 1945 note thereon: ‘Udet’s deception of Göring.’ Cf Udet’s notes in MD:65, p. 7133. From a letter of state prosecuting authorities dated 8 Apr 1942 it appears that ‘Moose’ programme was dated 5 Jul 1941 (Udet’s version) and 15 Jul 1941 (Milch’s re-draft). MD:56, p. 2556. Also Milch, Nov 1967.
- 23 Diary, 15–16 Jul 1941: ‘At headquarters, Rostken: report to Göring luncheon, then Göring called to Führer. Went for a walk. Göring still with Führer. My attendance a waste of time.’ We now know that Hitler was holding an important conf with Göring, Ribbentrop,

- Lammers and others on the exploitation of the Soviet Union after its defeat (ND:1221-PS, 2360-PS; and Thomas: note on result of confs with Reichsmarschall and FM Keitel on 17 Jul 1941, NARS film T-77, roll 441).
- 24 Diary, 17 Jul 1941; and 1945 notes thereon. Cf Roeder in MCH, 3 Mar 1947, pp. 1395f.
- 25 Statistics in MD:53, p. 742.
- 26 Diary, 7 Aug 1941; and Milch, May 1968.
- 27 Messerschmitt, interviewed on Second German Television, 17 Feb 1970.
- 28 Milch: speech, 18 Sep 1941 (see note 12).
- 29 See note 21, conf of 14–16 August 1941. Also diary, 16 Aug 1941. Thomas evidently discussed the conf in some detail with Amb von Hassel, cf Hassel diary, p. 196f.
- 30 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 451. Diary, 12–17 Aug 1941.
- 31 Milch: speech, 18 Sep 1941 (see note 12).
- 32 Letter, Milch to Maj Gen Ploch, c/o Udet, 4 Sep 1941 (MD:56, pp. 2682f). On 18 Sep 1941 (see note 12) Milch assessed the cost of the whole air industry expansion at about 1,200 million marks.
- 33 Note on Programme for Jumo 222, conf in Reich Air Ministry, 30 Aug 1942 (Junkers archives).
- 34 Milch believes this discussion was about 28–30 Aug 1941. (Milch, May and Nov 1968.)
- 35 Diary, 6 Sep 1941: At Rominten: big conf on factory construction programme. Göring: large number of aircraft, postpone Bomber B, cancel Jumo 222.'
- 36 Pendele: chronology, 25 Aug 1941. Roeder in MCH, 3 Mar 1947, p. 1395: 'It resulted in a lengthy discussion [between Udet and Göring] in the garden of Karinhall, which ended with Udet taking six weeks' leave.'
- 37 Diary, 1 Sep 1941.
- 38 Milch in MCH, 12 Mar 1947, p. 1846.
- 39 Diary, 9 Sep 1941; cf Milch's note on *Frankfurter Illustrierte* series, 2 May 1952 (MPP). Suchenwirth: Udet, p. 75. Milch, May 1968. Letter, Göring to Koppenberg, relieving him of his commission, 20 Oct 1941 (MD:57, p. 3205).
- 40 Diary, 9 Sep 1941; and Milch: speech, 18 Sep 1941 (see note 12). The original composition of the Industrial Council was: Milch as Chairman; Director William Werner (Managing Dir of Auto Union) as deputy; Karl Frydag (of Henschel, later of Heinkel); Heyne (of AEG), with Albert Vögler (of United Steel), Westrick (of United Aluminium), Bruhn (of Auto Union) and Adm Lahs (Pres of the Assn of Aircraft Manufacturers).
- 41 *Ibid.*; the figures Milch gave for future monthly output, with current output in brackets, were: He 111: 160 (100); He 177: 120 (0); Do 217: 100 (24); Me 210: 140 (90); Me 109: 200 (200); FW 190: 485 (170); Ju 87: 156 (55); and Ju 88: 300 (220).
- 42 These fears were confirmed in a letter from Roeder to Milch's lawyer, P. H. Gordan, 7 Dec 1953 (MPP).
- 43 Pendele: chronology, Sep 1941. Roeder in MCH, 3 Mar 1947, p. 1395.
- 44 Diary, 25 Sep 1941: '[Rominten]. Conference with Schmid, chief of intelligence. Early morning hunt, for "Klumpenbalis", without success. Agreement reached with Udet. Morning and afternoon, big organization and personnel conf with Göring re: Office of Air Armament. Agreement reached. All my proposals accepted.' Milch, May 1968, Nov 1967.
- 45 Suchenwirth (quoting Ploch) in Udet, p. 76. Göring conf, 9 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:63, p. 6317). Göring had by then read extensively in the reports of the Udet case.
- 46 Conf on Opel, 10 Oct 1941 (MD:65, pp. 7107ff).
- 47 Diary, 20 Oct 1941.
- 48 Diary, 21 Oct 1941.
- 49 Seiler Papers: The Udet Case (a 13-page description of the events from 22 Oct to 17 Nov 1941).

- 50 Milch, May 1968. On Milch's plan to visit Paris with Udet, see also Pre-Trial Interrogation, 25 Oct 1946, and his note, dictated in Landsberg, 27–28 Jul 1953 (MPP).
- 51 Diary, 15–17 Nov 1941: 'Left Schill for Berlin. There [received] news that Udet died approx 9.15 A.M.!!! Evening with [Prof] Kalk at hunting lodge Bärenwiese. Telephone conversation with Göring.'
- 52 Frau Inge B[leyle] interviewed by *Münchener Illustrierte* 8/1953 (21 Feb 1953); Suchenwirth: Udet, p. 78. Cf Pendele: chronology, 17 Nov 1941: '9 A.M.: after a telephone conversation with Milch and then with Frau Bleyle, the end comes.' There is no mention of such a telephone call in Milch's diary, and he states that there was none (Udet would not have known his telephone number at Breslau, he states); the car journey to Berlin must have taken Milch 3½ hours, so Udet may have tried in vain to reach him.
- 53 Letter, Gordan to Pendele, 23 Oct 1953; letter, Roeder to Gordan, 7 Dec 1953; letter, Lawyer Dr Justus Koch (Körner's lawyer) to Gordan, 25 Jan 1954 (MPP). Körner, in interview with Thorwald, Jan 1953; letter, Thorwald to Gordan, 16 Aug 1953 (MPP).
- 54 Roeder, *op. cit.*; Pre-Trial Interrogation of Milch, 25 Oct 1946; and diary, 21 May 1942, and 1945 notes thereon; and memoirs.
- 55 Telegram, Dr v. Ondarza (Göring's office) to Gen v. Witzendorff, 18 Nov 1941 (MD:51, pp. 444f).
- 56 Göring was deeply distressed by the sudden loss of Udet and Mölders. When Ciano met him in Berlin three days after the funeral, tears came to Göring's eyes when he mentioned them (Ciano diary, 24 Nov 1941). After a period of vehement recrimination against Udet (Oct 1943) he softened again. Reviewing the reasons for Germany's loss of air superiority in his speech to Air Staff officers on 25 Nov 1944 (Koller Papers), Göring recalled: 'Things got completely out of hand for the controllers of our arms production. One of them, seeing the chaos coming, then took a step which obviously one cannot approve of, but one now understands better than ever.'
- 57 Führer war conf, 1 Feb 1943. Hitler continued to blame Udet to foreign statesmen, e.g., Führer–Antonescu conf, 5 Aug 1944.

C H A P T E R 9

1 Diary, 16 Jul 1946.

2 Intercepted despatch of French amb in Washington, in Naval Staff war diary, 7 Mar 1942.

3 Petersen: notes on the organization of Luftwaffe technology, 20 May 1944 (MD:56, p. 2561).

4 Air Ministry, Tech Dept: On the reasons for the Increased Aircraft Production Mar to Jun 1944 (undated, probably Aug 1944). FD.4439/45. This document sets out to establish that the Fighter Staff achieved its great mid-1944 production figures only because of the provisions already made by Milch and by lifting the obstacles that the Speer Ministry had refused to lift when Milch was responsible. For comparative figures of airframe and aero-engine production 1941 and 1942, both in Germany and abroad, see Milch, GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, pp. 3932ff).

5 Papers of Fritz Seiler, Munich; in particular his memorandum (postwar), 'How to explain that my career was ruined by the work-prohibition imposed from 1946–1949'. Seiler, born in 1895, was a financial expert specializing in doctoring sick companies; in Jul 1923, although only 29, he was appointed general manager of a respected Hamburg banking house, Carlo Z. Thom-

- sen. He had saved the famous Dyckerhoff cement concern for that family in 1933 from the clutches of five major banks, and at the request of Manfred Stromeyer took over the financial affairs of the Raulino family (which owned Messerschmitt's company), which was threatened by disaster as the result of an uncovered attempt at fraudulent transfer of capital abroad.
- 6 Pre-Trial Interrogation, 25 Oct 1946; diary, 6 Aug 1949.
- 7 Report, Petersen to Milch, 13 Aug 1942 (in Milch file: He 177, FD.5514/45); cf report, Petersen to Milch, 7 Oct 1942, re: He 177's structural strength (*ibid.*).
- 8 Göring: speech to air industry, 13 Sep 1942 (MD:62, p. 5294).
- 9 Letter, Lahs to Milch, 11 Jan 1942 (MD:53, p. 783): the DB 603 and Jumo 213 engines were both between 1,800 and 2,000 horsepower.
- 10 Tech Dept: comparison of DB 603 with Jumo 213, 3 Nov 1941 (MD:53, pp. 835ff); and diary, 27 Nov 1941: 'Air Ministry. Staff conf with industry on Jumo 213.' On the long, sad history of the DB 603, see Eisenlohr's remarks, GL conf 1 Jun 1942, and Milch, GL conf 9 Jun 1942 (MD:14, pp. 845f, and 958ff). Milch: 'Do you know when the DB 603 was first offered to us, with 1,400 to 1,500 horsepower? On 4 Sep 1936!'
- 11 Cf Eisenlohr, GL conf, 5 May 1942 (MD:13, pp. 327f).
- 12 Göring conf, 13 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5202); Milch, May 1968.
- 13 Göring conf, 6 Mar 1942 (MD:62, p. 5174).
- 14 Von Hammerstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 130ff. According to Roeder the warrant for the inquiry was issued on 17 Mar 1942. 'Scars': see Judge Advocate Dr Kraell's circular dated 8 Apr 1942 (MD:56, pp. 2556f).
- 15 Roeder says the closing conf with Göring was on 17 Oct 1942. Göring also expressed his relief to Milch; Milch, May 1968. In Jan 1942, when Munich asked

permission to name a street or square after Udet, Göring agreed (NARS film T-84, roll 8, frame 8229); but by Jul 1942 his attitude had hardened. He decided that the question of naming the plaza in front of Tempelhof airport after Udet 'should be postponed to the end of the war' (*ibid.*, frame 7691).

- 16 Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5698f); cf Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942, on the need to convert to wooden construction as quickly as possible: 'I gave Udet this order two years ago.' (MD:62, p. 5242).
- 17 Air Staff order: Division of Occupied Eastern Territories into Air Zones, sgd Jeschonnek, counter-sgd Hoffmann, dated 15 Oct 1941 (MD:53, p. 1065).
- 18 OKW order: Armaments 1942, dated 14 Jan 1942 (MD:51, pp. 435f).
- 19 Diary, 24–29 Jan 1942. Hitler's table talk, 28 Jan 1942.
- 20 Breith, at GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:16, p. 2849).
- 21 Seidel, Göring conf, 8 Jan 1942 (MD:62, p. 5165).
- 22 Herrmann: report to Milch on Cold Start Procedure for Vehicles, 11 Jan 1942 (MD:56, p. 2678); there were Army and SS liaison officers at the Rechlin display on 3 Jul 1939. See also Technical Instructions of *General-Luftzeugmeister*: Cold Start Procedure by means of Diluting Lubricant, 18 Oct 1942; and *ibid.*: Measures against Cold Effects (MD:65, pp. 7188ff and 7192f); cf also Herrmann at GL conf, 7 Aug 1942 (MD:34, pp. 1721f): means of determining degree of dilution of a lubricant.
- 23 Milch at GL conf, 7 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 59).
- 24 Hitler's evening table talk, 19 Feb 1942; Speer was also present.
- 25 Memoirs. On Ley's role, see Goebbels diary, unpubl., 14 Feb 1942.
- 26 Milch, May 1968; MCH, 12 Mar 1947, pp. 1856f.
- 27 Foul play was ruled out: Letter, Ilsabill

- Todt to Milch, 6 Oct 1946; Milch replied that he did not believe it had been sabotage. Milch, May 1968. Cf Max Müller: The Todt case, an attempt to solve the mystery. He cites the terminal report of Air Zone 1, Königsberg, 8 Mar 1943 (Bundesarchiv: Zentralnachweistelle).
- 28 Speer (*op. cit.*, p. 211) says Hitler called for him at 1 P.M. and said, 'I appoint you Todt's successor in all his offices'. This seems improbable, as Speer, *Chronik* shows Speer still being appointed to the other offices on 9 and 12 Feb. Cf Milch diary, 2 Aug 1947: 'Speer told me at the time he really wanted to fly with Todt in the same aircraft to Berlin, but changed his mind at the last moment. He always did want to be in the thick of the danger!'
- 29 For the 'attempts', see Saur report, 9 Jul 1945 (FD.3049/49, file 1); and Milch diary, 11 Feb 1942.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 12 Feb 1942: 'First conf with Speer [then] big conf with Funk and others, "Command structure". To see Reichsmarschall with Speer. Todt funeral.' Cf Speer, *op. cit.*, p. 215. Cf Speer, *Chronik*, 12 Feb 1942.
- 31 Diary, 13 Feb 1942; Speer, *op. cit.*, pp. 215f. Cf Col Neef's memo on Conf of Armaments Inspectors, 13 Feb 1942 (FD.5444/45 page J-007442ff): Milch had agreed with Speer, the Luftwaffe and the OKW to concentrate joint planning under Speer: 'This issue will be put to the Führer this afternoon in conference.' Milch was very frank about his own role in this; cf GL conf, 10 Aug 1942 (MD:38, p. 4736): 'Real brains know how to get on together and work together. About a year ago [in Feb 1942] I was confronted by the same problem: the problem then was, "Who is to head German arms production, Minister Speer or I?" I said, "Speer is to head it, and I will support him 100 percent." I can happily do without any medals or decorations.'
- 32 Memoirs. Cf Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1447: 'Funk proposed Milch as the senior for this post. But I felt it important that I should get it.' And see Goebbels diary, 10 and 14 Feb 1942, unpubl., relating to events of the 13th; and Speer, *Chronik*, 13 Feb 1942.
- 33 Diary, 22 May 1948.
- 34 Diary, 21 Jul 1946; and 22 May 1948.
- 35 Cf Saur notes, 13 Feb 1942: '4 P.M. Führer introduces Speer in presence of Funk, Dorpmüller, Ley, Hupfauer, Maienbach, Vögler, Zangen, Milch, Witzell, Schulze-Fielitz, Schäde, Fromm, Leeb, Keitel, Thomas, Kessler, Landfried.' Cf Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1447; and Saur report, 9 Jul 1945 (FD.3049/49). Saur, *op. cit.* Hitler made a similar statement to Rosenberg on 8 May 1942 (Rosenberg memo, ND:1520-PS).
- 36 Milch wrote notes of the speech in his 1942 diary.
- 37 Letter, Görnnert to Schrötter, 24 Feb 1942 (NARS film T-84, roll 8, frames 8146f).
- 38 Milch, Dec 1969. Cf *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, p. 901.
- 39 Roeder. Cf diary, 6 Oct 1947.
- 40 Vorwald, MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1674. Milch, GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3932). *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 207. Cf also Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, p. 5237): Milch then planned to turn out 1,600 aircraft a month by the end of 1942, 2,500 by the end of 1943, and 2,800 by the end of 1945.
- 41 Letter, Milch and Jeschonnek to Göring, re: choice of Bomber B, 27 Feb 1942 (MD:62, pp. 5178f); diary, 26–27 Feb, 6 Mar 1942.
- 42 GL conf, 30 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1350f).
- 43 GL conf, 17 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1844).
- 44 Burton H. Klein: *Germany's Economic Preparations for War* (Harvard, 1959), pp. 198f. This conf transcript is not in the MD files in London, cf Milch diary, 21 Mar 1942: 'Rominten. Minus 26 degrees C!! Major conf with Göring and

- Jeschonnek. Latter would not know what to do with more than 360 fighters [a month]. Midday with Speer, then bomber production programme *etc.* Evening by special train to Berlin.'
- 45 Milch, GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3946).
- 46 Milch, GL conf, 29 Jun 1943 (MD:21, pp. 571ff); Milch, Oct 1967.
- 47 Jeschonnek, Göring conf, 6 Mar 1942 (MD:62, p. 5168); cf Koller diary, Mar 1942.
- 48 Göring conf, 21 Mar 1942 (MD:62, pp. 5181ff).
- 49 Milch at GL conf, 7 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 107).
- 50 Memo, Görnnert to Schrötter, 27 Mar 1942 (NARS film T-84, roll 8, frame 8129).
- 51 Letter, Hitler to Milch, 30 Mar 1942 (MPP). Memoirs.
- 52 Vorwald, in MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1709, 1743; both Milch's former employers, Lufthansa and Junkers, presented small paintings to him, and these he accepted.

C H A P T E R 1 0

- 1 Von Winterfeld: report on reception of the German air attachés by Milch, Steengracht and Goebbels [*etc.*], 24 Aug 1945.
- 2 Milch at conf on 23 Apr 1942 (MD:53, p. 796); and see Petersen's biting criticisms at GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1125f).
- 3 Göring conf, 21 Mar 1942 (MD:62, p. 5187). Milch was equally hostile toward the Me 323, the Me 321's powered equivalent: Göring conf, 8 Aug 1942 (MD:62, p. 5258): the Me 323 used four (and later six) Gnome-Rhone 14-N engines.
- 4 Telegram, Urban to Messerschmitt company, 30 Mar 1942 (FD.4355/45, vol. 5); cf Milch at GL conf, 4 Sep 1942 (MD:34, p. 2002): It had been 'absolutely wrong' to start the company building big aircraft.
- 5 Kokothaki.
- 6 Göring conf, 6 Mar 1942 (MD:62, pp.

- 5167ff).
- 7 The production position varies from document to document: cf conf 23 Apr 1942 (MD:53, p. 795), GL conf 27 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 282) and Göring conf, 13 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5203).
- 8 Messerschmitt: speech to his workers, 25 Mar 1942 (FD.4355/45, vol. 1).
- 9 GL confs, 14 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 129); 21 Apr 1942 (MD:13, pp. 191f); and 23 Apr 1942 (MD:53, pp. 791ff). Milch had a very high opinion of Seiler's capabilities (see GL conf, 17 Nov 1942, MD:17, p. 3240).
- 10 Milch, GL conf, 27 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 282). And Messerschmitt company meeting, 30 Apr 1942 (Seiler papers): the main decisions reached were that Messerschmitt should restrict himself to his job as chief designer, and that Croneiss should become Chairman, with Seiler as Managing Director.
- 11 Note on phonecall from Lt Col Petersen, 3 Sep 1942: Me 210 had just flown with two DB 603s, reaching top speed of 525km per hour at ground level. Milch orders it to be named Me 410 (FD. 4355/45, vol. 4).
- 12 Milch, GL conf, 5 May 1942 (MD:13, pp. 38off); cf Milch at GL conf 10 Sep 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4505): 'I am the one who sent one appeal after another to the authorities about this in 1940 and 1941. It is nonsense, this high explosive load; a mass of fire bombs belongs in every load of high explosive.'
- 13 Schwenke, GL conf, 26 May 1942 (MD:14, pp. 691f).
- 14 Air Staff: directive on air warfare against British Isles, 14 Apr 1942; cf Basil Collier, *op. cit.*, appendix xxxvi.
- 15 Milch, 1940 notes. Cf Milch, GL conf, 7 Aug 1942 (MD:34, p. 1729): 'I can never forget how General [Otto] Rüdel believed we would be able to shoot aircraft down with 47 rounds apiece, no more, no less. Then he worked out, the enemy has 6,000 aircraft, multiply it by 45 (or for that matter 100), gives 600,000

- rounds of 88mm flak ammunition. According to that sum, I cannot need any more. Fortunately we did not all believe that before the war broke out.'
- 16 The Chief of Naval Construction, Adm Witzell, reported this to Raeder, adding that they must be prepared for attempts to cut the naval quotas in favour of the Luftwaffe; he privately stated that the overall raw material allocations to the navy 'were not all that bad', however (Naval Staff war diary, 3 Feb 1942).
- 17 Letter, Keitel to Milch, 6 Mar 1942 (MD:49a, p. 216). Jeschonnek also wrote to Milch insisting that the Führer's flak production programme be adhered to. On the copper shortage, see also Göring conf, 6 Mar 1942 (MD:62, pp. 516ff), and Milch, GL conf, 7 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 94).
- 18 Milch, GL conf, 27 May 1942 (MD:14, p. 798); letter, Milch to Keitel, 11 Mar 1942 (MD:49a, pp. 213f). Cf GL conf, 7 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 94): Milch: 'It is out of the question for us to hand over the copper to them for [searchlight] production.' And cf GL conf, 14 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 170).
- 19 Milch at conf, 23 Apr 1942 (MD:53, p. 796).
- 20 GL conf, 7 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 36); Milch: speech, 18 Sep 1941 (MD:53, pp. 1166f).
- 21 Milch, GL conf, 14 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 124).
- 22 Milch, May 1968.
- 23 GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3941).
- 24 Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, pp. 1447f; Milward, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
- 25 Military Economics Branch: note on conf with Speer, 2 Mar 1942 (FD.5454a/45); Milward, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
- 26 Memoirs; and diary, 2 Apr 1942; cf Speer, *Chronik*, 2 Apr 1942. See Milch's Central Planning file (MD:48, pp. 8196ff).
- 27 Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1452.
- 28 Cf Görnnert: note for Göring at Führer conf, 3 Apr 1942 (NARS film T-84 roll 8, frame 8040). And decree establishing a Central Planning commission, 22 Apr 1942 (MD:53, p. 1035).
- 29 Speer: Führer conf, 4 Apr 1942; see also Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, pp. 1447ff. Milch gives a somewhat different version in Pre-Trial Interrogation, 18 Dec 1946; cf Milch at IMT, vol. ix, p. 75; MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1449; and Körner at MCH, 5 Feb 1947, p. 1668f; and Speer: *Erinnerungen*, p. 235.
- 30 Hübner.
- 31 Göring conf, 13 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5200). For details of the production and contract for the MK 101 and MK 103 see GL conf, 12 May 1942 (MD:14 p. 486f).
- 32 Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5712f).
- 33 Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, p. 5235). Cf Jeschonnek's report to Göring, 13 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5204).
- 34 Friebel at GL conf, 13 May 1942 (MD:14, pp. 527ff).
- 35 Görnnert: note for Göring conf with Führer shows that railway matters were to be discussed with Hitler on about 3 Apr and 22 May 1942 (NARS film T-84, roll 8, frames 8039, 8003f).
- 36 Military Economics Branch: conf with Reichsmarschall on 26 Jun 1941, para 2, 'The Führer does not wish to drop Kleinmann' (FD.5444/45).
- 37 Milch, Dec 1969. This may have been on 20 Apr 1942, the occasion Milch last saw Hitler before 24 May.
- 38 Goebbels diary, 24 Apr 1942; cf *ibid.* 16 Apr 1942 and 20 Sep 1943: 'The Führer has awarded Dorpmüller and Ganzenmüller the Knight's Cross of the War Service Medal — Dorpmüller for his failure, and Ganzenmüller for his exceptional achievements, which at times have been decisive for this war.' Speer, *Chronik*, 21 May 1942; and *Erinnerungen*, p. 237.
- 39 Milch, GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, p. 1121); cf Webster and Frankland, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 481. For Reich railway statistics, see GL conf, 26 May 1942 (MD:14, p.

- 690).
- 40 So Hitler told Milch; Milch, Dec. 1969.
- 41 Conf in Führer's HQ, 24 May 1942 (MPP).
- 42 Milch, GL conf, 2 Jun 1942 (MD:14, p. 811) and 26 May 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 690); cf Speer, *Chronik*, 24 May 1942 and 11 Jun 1942.
- 43 GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 2013).
- 44 Conf on inland waterways and rail transport, 3 Jun 1942, stenogram (MD:55, pp. 1832ff) and on 8 Jul 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 1892ff). And GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, p. 1121).
- 45 GL conf, 2 Jun 1942 (MD:14, p. 808).
- 46 GL conf, 12 Jun 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 1078f).
- 47 GL conf, 27 May 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 794).
- 48 Friebel at GL conf, 12 May 1942 (MD:14, pp. 556, 507f).
- 49 Milch, May 1968; memoirs, p. 302.
- 50 Milch, GL conf, 27 May 1942 (MD:14, pp. 786ff).
- 51 Diary, 29 May 1942; but cf diary, 11 May 1947.
- 52 Milch at GL conf, 9 Jun 1942 (MD:14, p. 978). Milch saw the flying-bomb Fi 103 as a means of economizing on manned bomber sorties, and above all of exacting reprisals without risk to one's own crews, should German cities be further bombarded (cf Brée at GL conf, 16 Oct 1942, MD:34, p. 2228).
- 53 This in itself was an innovation. Milch predicted (GL conf, 26 Aug 1942, MD:15, p. 2106): 'The future [aircraft] construction material will be steel. Aluminium is not the real material — it has only been the interim material. The ultimate material will be steel.' He added that it would have to be made especially for the purpose.
- 54 GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1195ff).
- 55 Cf diary, 5 Jun 1942 (entered under wrong date): 'Air Ministry. Afternoon: "Atom smashing" at Kaiser-Wilhelm Foundation.' Cf Otto Hahn diary, 4 Jun 1942, and Speer, *Chronik*, 4 Jun 1942.
- 56 Memoirs.
- 57 Speer, May 1968. At the GL conf, 4 Sep 1942, Milch stated that the cost of airframe and engine procurement for the Luftwaffe was now 6,000 million marks a year (MD:34, p. 2045).
- 58 Cf diary, 7 Aug 1945 (when news of Hiroshima reached Milch). In his memoirs he puts the figure at 60,000 Reichsmarks.

C H A P T E R 11

- 1 Gen von Bötticher in GL conf, 2 Jun 1942 (MD:14, pp. 855ff).
- 2 These demands were summarized by the Tech Dept in their study: Guidelines for Aircraft Development, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:65, pp. 7073ff).
- 3 Police-president report on attack on Cologne, 30–31 May 1942; cf final report on same attack dated 15 Jun 1942 (NARS film T-175, roll 65). Görnnert's files contain a letter apparently from Göring to Lt Göring, dated 3 Jun 1942: 'Finally, I expect the report from Gauleiter Grohé on the air raid on Cologne will interest you.' (NARS film T-84, roll 8, frame 7564).
- 4 Göring conf, 8 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5723).
- 5 Milch, Jan 1967 and May 1968.
- 6 Sellschopp at GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1101ff). This was the new study '1011'.
- 7 Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, p. 5241).
- 8 GL conf, 12 Jun 1942 (MD:14, pp. 1092ff); cf Schwenke, GL conf, 7 Jul 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1368ff).
- 9 GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1966).
- 10 GL conf, 7 Jul 1942 (MD:15, p. 1368). And Schwenke, GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1964f) and GL conf, 1 Sep 1942 (MD:16, p. 2185).
- 11 Schwenke, GL conf, 14 Jul 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1421f).
- 12 Corr between Schmid and Schwenke cited by Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, p. 113. One RAF prisoner volunteered to return to Britain as a German spy; cf

- Schwenke, GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:16, p. 2810).
- 13 Göring conf, 21 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5220); in Mar 1942 Milch had advised Göring on problems with the BMW 801 engine (Göring conf, 6 Mar 1942, MD:62, p. 5173); cf also letter, Lahs to Milch, 24 Jan 1942 (MD:53, p. 800); and Göring conf, 11 Jul 1942 (MD:62, p. 5245). On the DB 605 see GL conf, 5 May 1942 (MD:13, pp. 327ff and 331) and Petersen at GL conf, 24 Nov 1942 (MD:17, pp. 3303f), and especially Milch at GL conf, 27 Nov 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2634f).
- 14 Dietrich at GL conf, 19 May 1942 (MD:14, p. 610); and memoirs. Milch, GL conf, 26 May 1942 (MD:14, p. 703).
- 15 GL conf, 12 Jun 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 1032).
- 16 GL conf, 23 Jun 1942 (MD:15, p. 1249).
- 17 GL conf, 26 May 1942 (MD:14, p. 758); cf Göring conf, 21 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5222).
- 18 GL conf, 5 May 1942 (MD:13, p. 346).
- 19 Sellschopp, GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1103, 1106); Milch, GL conf, 30 Jun 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 1350f); Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, pp. 5221f).
- 20 GL conf, 30 Jun 1942 (MD:15, p. 1352); cf GL conf, 17 Aug 1942 (MD:34, pp. 1811f).
- 21 Von Lossberg, GL conf, 7 Aug 1942 (MD:34, pp. 1811f).
- 22 Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, p. 5237).
- 23 Milch, GL conf, 7 Jul 1942 (MD:15, p. 1381). Cf Milch at GL conf, 26 Aug 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2147f); Herr Pöhlmann was appointed Milch's commissar to carry out the task; cf GL conf, 16 Oct 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2205ff).
- 24 Milch, GL conf, 7 Aug 1942 (MD:34, pp. 1728f).
- 25 Milch and Schwenke ('the statistics [on Russian aircraft production] are available in detail'), GL conf, 21 Jul 1942 (MD:15, p. 1553). On 17 Nov 1942 Milch was told Russian production was: 150 bombers, 600 fighters and 350 low-level attack aircraft. This caused him to ask, 'How do the Russians manage such a production? They have lost their Ruhr, and yet still they turn out fighters and more fighters — 50 percent more than we do!' (GL conf, MD:17, p. 3247.)
- 26 This new decision was reported by Milch to his staff on 17 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1785).
- 27 Milward, *op. cit.* Hertel assessed on 20 Oct 1942 that only 20 percent of the factories were running a second shift on that date (GL conf, MD:16, p. 2828).
- 28 Frydag and Speer at Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6018f); cf FD.4439/45, pp. 12f and appendices 8 and 9.
- 29 GL conf, 18 Jun 1942 (MD:15, p. 1932). Cf GL conf, 26 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 2096f). In general a well-documented account of the strained Speer–Sauckel–Milch relationship will be found in Edward L. Homze: *Foreign Labour in Nazi Germany* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1967).
- 30 Cf Bross, *op. cit.*, pp. 28f. Göring pointed out that the Dutch government having fled had *de jure* passed government status to the occupiers; in Belgium the king had surrendered unconditionally, and the French and Danish manpower was supplied under an agreement with the constitutional governments.
- 31 Milch in Central Planning, 21 Aug 1942 (MD:46, p. 8595). Cf GL conf, 9 Sep 1942 (MD:16, pp. 2361f).
- 32 Diary, 7 Sep 1942; cf Speer: Führer conf, 7–9 Sep 1942 (Boelcke, *op. cit.*, pp. 179ff).
- 33 Milch, Central Planning, 4 Sep 1942 (MD:46, p. 8650).
- 34 Central Planning, 22 Jul 1942 (MD:46, p. 8491).
- 35 Central Planning, 29 Oct 1942 (MD:46, pp. 8892ff).
- 36 Speer, Central Planning, 18 Nov 1942 (MD:46, pp. 9189ff).
- 37 GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:16, p. 2860). Milch was with the Führer at midday and on the afternoon of 14 Oct 1942,

- along with Speer. And GL conf, 17 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1785). Vorwald, Jun 1968. It was von Gablenz's decision in 1938 against recommending Lufthansa to give the Siebel company a contract for light aircraft (the Si 104) which almost ruined the firm. Diary, 21 Aug 1942.
- 38 The precursor of today's 'Black Box' system in modern airliners. Cf GL confs, 14 Apr 1942 (MD:13, pp. 130f), 21 Apr 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 184), 27 May 1942 (MD:14, p. 788), 2, Jun 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 829), 26 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 2127), 9 Oct 1942 (MD:16, p. 2667) and 28 Aug 1942 (MD:34, p. 1954). For a good survey of the two projects, *Unfallwächter* ('accident monitor') and *Telephon*, see statements of Wendroth and Milch, GL conf, 16 Oct 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2300f).
- 39 Milch, MCH, 13 Mar 1947, p. 1876.
- 40 Speer, *Chronik*, 25 Aug 1943.
- 41 Göring conf, 13 May 1942 (MD:62, p. 5204).
- 42 Göring conf, 16 May 1942. KG 40's representatives stressed the excellent manoeuvrability of the aircraft, which the two crews had highly praised (MD:62, p. 5214).
- 43 GL conf, 26 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 2145f).
- 44 Göring conf, 13 Sep 1942, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5277ff).
- 45 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 411.
- 46 GL conf, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35, p. 3233).
- 47 GL conf, 9 Oct 1942 (MD:16, p. 2698).
- 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 2689f.
- 49 Göring conf, 22 Feb 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5356f); cf Friebel at GL conf, 4 Sep 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2034ff); and Prof Seewald's report at GL conf, 30 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2360f). In general see Petersen: chronology of accidents to He 177, dated 27 May 1943 (MD:53, pp. 745ff).
- 50 Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, p. 5235): 'The Air Armament Office proposes the He 177 should better be built with four separate engines.' Cf Von Gablenz, GL conf, 18 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1909).
- 51 Milch, GL conf, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35, p. 3220).
- 52 Göring conf, 13 Sep 1942, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5294).
- 53 Göring conf, 22 Feb 1943, stenogram (MD:61, p. 5373).
- 54 Petersen at GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1167ff).
- 55 Milch, GL conf, 17 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1795).
- 56 Milch, GL conf, 26 Aug 1952 (MD:16, p. 2100). On 7 Sep 1942, Eng Gen Lucht inspected the Heinkel works and established a 'neglectful and dawdling treatment of the question of the structural strength' (report to Milch, 9 Sep 1942; in Milch file, FD.5514/45). He warned Prof Heinkel of the ominous parallel between the He 177 and the Me 210 affair (Heinkel: memo on Lucht's visit to Marienehe, 7 Sep 1942 [*ibid.*]).
- 57 Messerschmitt: memo on Reichsmarschall's speech to an assembly of air industry representatives in Reich Air Ministry on 13 Sep 1942 (FD.4355/45, vol. 4). See also Heinkel, *op. cit.*, pp. 458f. And especially Göring conf, 13 Sep 1942, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5277ff). Cf diary, 12 Sep 1942: 'Midday at the Ministry. Preparations for Göring's speech.'
- 58 GL conf, 15 Sep 1942 (MD:16, pp. 2398f).
- 59 GL conf, 9 Oct 1942 (MD:15, p. 2687). Cf Milch, GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 2861).
- 60 Schwenke at GL conf, 15 Sep 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 2429).
- 61 GL conf, 6 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2628f).
- 62 GL conf, 27 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2936f).
- 63 Diary, 11–14 Oct 1942; Milch, GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2762ff).

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- 1 GL confs, 26 Aug and 1 Sep 1942 (MD:15, pp. 2108f and MD:16, pp. 2173f): Reidenbach had ordered 900,000 nuts with 11mm metric thread.
- 2 GL conf, 21 Jul 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1520f).

- 3 Milch, May 1968.
- 4 Milch, GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1974f).
- 5 USFET interrogation, Alexander Kraell, 6 Sep 1946.
- 6 Milch, GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:169 pp. 2731ff): only his department heads appear to have been present.
- 7 Letter, Milch to the author, 19 Jul 1969.
- 8 GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:16, pp. 2731f).
- 9 Milch, GL conf, 27 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2923f). For a similar remark, see Milch, GL conf, 6 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 2614).
- 10 GL conf, 6 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 2595); and 27 Oct 1942 (MD:169 pp. 2612, 2977).
- 11 Brückner, GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:16, p. 2886). Milch, GL conf, 27 Oct 1942 (*ibid.*, pp. 2898f and 2907). And Brückner, GL conf, 3 Nov 1942 (MD:16, p. 3008).
- 12 Vorwald, MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1667; and remarks of SS *Obersturmführer* Karl Sommer (of the SS dept of manpower) to Milch, in the latter's diary, 28 Oct 1947. The first approach came to the Oranienburg concentration camp from Heinkel's Director Hayn in person. Cf GL conf, 16 Oct 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2247ff).
- 13 Letter, Prof Messerschmitt to SS *Sturmbannführer* Weiss, Dachau, 20 Jul 1943 (FD.4355/49, vol. 3).
- 14 Alpers at GL conf, 5 Feb 1943 (MD:35, p. 3086); reported to Milch, GL conf, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4357f). The negotiating parties were Prof Messerschmitt and Director Hentzen, and Dr Schieber of the munitions ministry, and SS Lt Col Maurer of the SS manpower office. Of all these, Milch alone was imprisoned for the use of concentration camp prisoners in the air industry.
- 15 Letter, Jeschonnek to Milch, 28 Oct 1942 (MD:51, p. 479). And letter, Milch to Jeschonnek, 12 Nov 1942 (MD:51, pp. 474f).
- 16 Bundesarchiv military archives: Fourth Air Force at Stalingrad, 20 Jul 1942 to 21 Mar 1943 (monograph). Cf Suchen-
- wirth: Jeschonnek, pp. 100ff.
- 17 Von Richthofen diary, 21 Nov 1942.
- 18 Göring conf, 8 Aug 1942 (MD:62, p. 5256); cf Milch, GL conf, 19 Jun 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1120ff). Cf Göring: speech, 13 Sep 1942 (MD:62, p. 5304).
- 19 The best study of the decision to supply the Sixth Army in Stalingrad by air is Lt Col Johannes Fischer: On the decision to supply Stalingrad by air, in *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 2/1969; and General Fiebig diary, 26 Nov 1942 (Fiebig's Eighth Air Corps was assigned solely to the airlift from 30 Nov 1942 onward). Cf also von Richthofen diary, 21 Nov 1942 and 10–12 Feb 1943. Göring, interrogated on 19 May 1945 (SAIC/13), suggested he implored Hitler to let Paulus break out. 'Hitler called Göring [by telephone] one day and asked him for a statement on the total number of transport planes available and their total loading capacity. Göring told him but added that the number of planes would be inadequate for the task ahead. Hitler then asked Göring whether it would be possible to carry in supplies by bomber, and Göring told him that it could be done, but that it was not advisable since many bombers were being used in the battle against Britain . . . Göring protested bitterly, stressing the impossibility of the job due to a number of factors, including the weather.' Much of this sounds like hindsight.
- 20 Letter, Vorwald to Milch, 27 Jan 1970. Engel notes, Nov 1942; this source must be viewed with some misgivings, in view of conclusions drawn by Lt Col Manfred Kehrig's forthcoming official German government history of Stalingrad.
- 21 von Richthofen diary, 25 Nov 1942; cf Koller diary, 20–22 Nov 1942.
- 22 Engel notes.
- 23 Milch, GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3953).

- 24 The 1942 average German monthly production (with 1941 in brackets) was: fighters 366.5 (251.7); twin-engined fighters, 109 (64.2); bombers 349 (291); dive-bombers 75 (43.5); transporters 48 (42.8). *Ibid.*, p. 3932. Cf also Schwenke, report to Milch on estimated possible aircraft production in Britain and USA, 16 Dec 1942 (MD:53, pp. 1281f).
- 25 *Inter Avia*, Jul 1946, p. 18.
- 26 Vorwald in MCH, 10 Mar 1947, pp. 1672f; and Vorwald, Jun 1968. Milch, IMT, vol. IX, p. 96.
- 27 Milch, GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3950f).
- 28 See discussion in GL conf, 13 Nov 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2458ff) on a high-speed bomber; on Milch's ideal, see esp *ibid.*, pp. 2475ff.
- 29 Cf Friebel, GL conf, 12 Dec 1942 (MD:34, p. 2652); Milch again discussed his requirement (p. 2655). The Hertel and Gropler proposals were discussed.
- 30 Diary, 8 Jan 1943; Milch, May 1968. Milch also describes Dornier's visit at GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, p. 5117). It was decided to make the Do 335 at Dornier's Wismar works (GL conf, 26 Jan 1943, MD:18, p. 4207). See also Reidenbach, GL conf, 20–21 Jan 1944 (MD:32, pp. 930f) on the history of the Do 335. Milch, GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3945); cf also GL conf, 7 Aug 1942 (MD:34, p. 1783).
- 31 Kesselring, *op. cit.*, p. 466.
- 32 Dr Kurt Weigelt: notes for a speech on the election of a new chairman, 11 Jan 1943 (Deutsche Bank archives); and letter, Weigelt to Knipfer, 16 Jan 1943 (*ibid.*; quoted by Eyermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 69).
- 1 Central Planning, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:47, p. 9408).
- 2 The diary of Milch's special staff has survived intact and is in the Bundesarchiv military archives under file III L78 1–5. Milch also remained in contact with Col Angermünd at the ministry, who reported regularly at the GL confs; a further source of importance is Gen Hube: Report of Proceedings on the Airlift to Fortress Stalingrad, 15 Mar 1943 (in Jacobsen: *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Chronik und Dokumenten*, pp. 365ff). Reference has also been made to Maj Gen (ret.) Fritz Morzik's study: Airlift Operations of the German Air Force (NARS: MS no. AF-167) where the cruel conditions prevailing on the eastern front are vividly described. Also to Maj Werner Beumelburg: Stalingrad, a report based on documents and individual testimony, dated 8 Jun 1943 (MPP).
- 3 Diary, 14 Jan 1943; memoirs; and Milch at MCH, 14 Mar 1947, pp. 1991ff.
- 4 Speer, Dec 1968; Milch, affidavit, 12 Jul 1947; Speer, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
- 5 Special staff diary, 15 Jan 1943; OKW war diary, 15 Jan 1943; and Führer directive, 15 Jan 1943.
- 6 Speer, Central Planning, 26 Jan 1943 (MD:47, p. 9236).
- 7 The final conf on the status of winter preventive measures was on 20 Oct 1942 (GL conf, MD:16, pp. 2844ff).
- 8 The special commissar, Eng Col Breith of the Eighth Air Corps, reported regularly at GL confs after 7 Apr 1942 on his recommendations for the coming winter (MD:13, pp. 45ff); cf GL confs, 5 May (MD:13, p. 375), 26 May (MD:14, p. 751), 9 Jun (*ibid.*, pp. 914f), 30 Jun (MD:15, p. 1303), 21 Jul (*ibid.*, pp. 1570ff), 20 Aug (*ibid.*, p. 2013) and 9 Sep 1942 (MD:16, p. 2364).
- 9 Milch, GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 2013): 'I do not want our injured to be transported back in open lorries five days long, with 30 degrees of frost, as they were last winter.'
- 10 Fiebig diary, 16 Jan 1943; Gen Wolfgang Pickert, commanding the Ninth Flak Division, expressed identical senti-

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- ments (Pickert diary, 16 Jan 1943).
- 11 Von Richthofen diary, 15 Jan 1943.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 16 Jan 1943.
- 13 Eng Gen Weidinger, Chief Engineer of Fourth Air Force, conf with Milch, 18 Jan 1943 (special staff diary); cf von Richthofen diary, 15 Jan 1943; and Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, p. 55: 'of the 483 aircraft available [on 16 Jan] only 87 were momentarily serviceable.'
- 14 Memoirs.
- 15 Special staff diary, 16 Jan 1943.
- 16 Memoirs; letter from Prof Dr Heinz Kalk, Dec 1968; Petersen, Jun 1968; Milch, Oct 1967. Diary, 17 Jan 1943.
- 17 Memoirs. Von Richthofen diary, 17 Jan 1943.
- 18 Milch–Fiebig phone conv, 17 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 19 Phone convs, Milch–Jeschonnek and Milch–Lt Col Christian (special staff diary, 17 Jan 1943).
- 20 Milch, GL conf, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4336f). Cf Col Morzik's conf with Milch, 18 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 21 GL conf, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18 pp. 4376f; cf p. 4338).
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 4337.
- 23 Cf phone convs, Milch–Fiebig, and Göring–Milch, 18 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 24 Milch, Oct 1967.
- 25 Pickert diary, 18 Jan 1943, describes Milch as 'looking somewhat the worse for wear'.
- 26 Phone conv, Milch–von Manstein, 18 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 27 Col (ret.) Kühl, conf with Milch, 19 Jan 1943 (special staff diary). Kühl was Air Transport Cdr, Novocherkassk. Memoirs. Diary, 19 Jan 1943: 'Von Manstein, conference: recommend despatch of three front-line officers to the Führer!!'
- 28 Conf Milch–Hube, 19 Jan 1943. And see conf, Milch–Lt Col von Beust, Col Kühl, 19 Jan 1943 (special staff diary); Beust was Air Transport Cdr, Voroshilovgrad.
- 29 Milch, GL conf, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18, p. 4285; cf p. 4339).
- 30 Phone conv, Milch–Morzik, 20 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 31 Milch, GL conf, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4336f).
- 32 Milch, GL conf, 16 Feb 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4438f).
- 33 Fiebig diary, 20 Jan 1943; and Major Thiel: report to Milch, 21 Jan 1943, on serviceability of Gumrak landing ground, and on conv with Col Gen Paulus (appendix to Fiebig diary, pp. K.2294ff).
- 34 Phone conv, Milch–Lt Col Christian, 21 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 35 Phone conv, Milch–Manstein, 21 Jan 1943 (*ibid.*).
- 36 Fiebig diary, 20 Jan 1943.
- 37 Conf, Milch–Maj von Zitzewitz, Sixth Army staff, 21 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 38 Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
- 39 Phone conv, Army Group Don–Milch, 23 Jan 1943 (*ibid.*).
- 40 Conf, 24 Jan 1942 (*ibid.*).
- 41 Diary, 23 Jan 1943: 'Farewell conf with von Manstein, one hour. 12.30–12.55 P.M. flight Taganrog West to Mariupol South. The new airfield is lost! No communications. Swinish weather. Until 2 or 3 A.M. long telephone conversations with Führer's headquarters. Göring sends lengthy telegrams.' Memoirs; and letters from Milch, 1 Sep 1968, and Kalk, 11 Dec 1968.
- 42 Sixth Army signal to Fourth Air Force and Eighth Air Corps, 24 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 43 Diary, 24 Jan 1943. Speer, Dec 1968; Speer, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
- 44 Cf von Richthofen diary, 28 Jan 1943.
- 45 Conf, 27 Jan 1943 (special staff diary); cf GL conf, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18, p. 4338).
- 46 Col Angermünd at GL conf, 26 Jan 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4153f); diary, 25 Jan 1943.
- 47 Phone conv, Milch–Christian, 28 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).

- 48 Conf, Milch with Gen Schmundt, 28 Jan 1943 (special staff diary).
- 49 This was a view Milch had also expressed to his dept heads on 5 Jan 1943 (GL conf, MD:18, p. 3936).
- 50 Conf, 29 Jan 1943 (special staff diary). Cf Milch, GL conf, 17 Apr 1944 (MD:29, p. 9565).
- 51 Phone conv, Milch–Maj Wilke, 29 Jan 1943.
- 52 Diary, 30 Jan 1943.
- 53 Col Gen Paulus signal to Führer, 29 Jan 1943.
- 54 Flak Regt 104 signal to Eighth Air Corps, 30 Jan 1943.
- 55 Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
- 56 Göring: speech, printed in *Völkischer Beobachter*, 2 Feb 1943; cf memoirs, and Vorwald in MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1707. (Vorwald testified that everybody at the ministry knew that Milch was meant.)
- 57 Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
- 58 Memoirs; Fiebig diary, 31 Jan 1943, and Milch diary, 31 Jan 1943: ‘End of Stalingrad South approaches. Our Luftwaffe officers “sign off”!!’ Cf Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, p. 65: ‘Air Signals unit 129 signalled, “Rest of Stalingrad unit is now signing off. All best wishes to the Fatherland.”’ (Signal timed 4.22 A.M., 31 Jan 1943.)
- 59 Hitler signal to Ninth Army Corps, 5.25 P.M., 1 Feb 1943.
- 60 Diary, 1 Feb 1943.
- 61 Signal, Ninth Army Corps to Army Group Don, 2 Feb 1943.
- 62 Memoirs. Cf Hube’s report (see note 2): ‘Field-Marshall Milch and his staff could have had a decisive effect on the airlift to the Fortress Stalingrad if he had been sent out earlier. His measures needed ten to fourteen days to take effect. So had he been in charge from the time the fortress was besieged [23 Nov 1942] the effect would have been felt by mid-December at the latest and, if kept up, the airlift would have made it possible for the fortress to hold out for many months.’

- 63 There is little doubt that Milch did make this dangerous statement; he made an identical one to Goebbels (Goebbels diary, 9 Apr 1943); cf Milch diary, 28 Sep 1947.

C H A P T E R 14

- 1 Erich von Manstein: *Verlorene Siege* (Bonn, 1955), p. 395.
- 2 Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, p. 109.
- 3 Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 49.
- 4 In comparison with sorties flown, loss rates were: Ju 52, 10 percent; He 111, 5.5 percent; Ju 86, 21 percent; FW 200, 9.7 percent; He 177, 26 percent. The British Bomber Command operated on the assumption that no air force could maintain flying operations in the face of a sustained loss-rate exceeding 5 percent, which again testifies to the courage of the Luftwaffe aircrews.
- 5 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 Jan 1968.
- 6 This is presumably the Eschenauer report mentioned (at third hand) to Suchenwirth (cf his Jeschonnek, pp. 105f). Milch had it from Eschenauer direct (diary, 21 May 1946). It was more likely that it was the 250-kilo supply bomb that was meant (cf GL conf, 9 Feb 1943, MD:18, p. 4283): ‘My own experience is that I was only too pleased not to have got the 1,000-kilo ones . . . The 250-kilos were somewhat better.’ The supply bombs were in use from 26 Nov 1942 at Stalingrad (cf Beumelburg, *op. cit.*, p. 30).
- 7 Diary, 21 May 1946: ‘Deceit plus incompetence equals one Reichsmarschall!! One guessed it already, but now one gets the proof of it, one can’t help vomiting all over again.’
- 8 Cf Schwenke, GL conf, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35).
- 9 Speer, Central Planning, 26 Jan 1943 (MD:47, p. 9236).

- 10 Milch, GL conf, 16 Feb 1943 (MD:18, p. 4466). Cf FD.4439/45, pp. 8 and 22: decree of Munitions Ministry, 28 Jan 1943. Subsequently the transport codeword 'Panzer' played equal havoc with transport of Luftwaffe requirements.
- 11 Hertel, GL conf, 18 Feb 1943 (MD:18, p. 4467) and Milch, GL conf, 2 Mar 1943 (MD:19, p. 4488).
- 12 Göring conf, 22 Feb 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5403).
- 13 Diary, 4 Feb 1943; cf Milch at GL confs, 9 Feb 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4375f) and 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35, pp. 3187f); also MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 1992.
- 14 Diary, 17 Feb 1943: 'Evening at hunting lodge. Führer telephones about Ju 52, floatplane version.' MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 2008.
- 15 Milch, GL conf, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35, pp. 3226f). Details of the He 177 losses were reported to the GL conf on 16 Jan (MD:189 p. 4122) and 29 Jan 1943 (MD:35, p. 2976); also conf in special staff diary, 31 Jan 1943, attended by a representative of first squadron of FKG 50, the squadron operating the aircraft. Gen Fiebig considered the He 177 useless as a transport plane: it could carry only eight '250'-kilo containers, a total of about 1,120 kilos of food, for which it used four tons of fuel! (Fiebig diary, 14 Jan 1943.)
- 16 Central Planning, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:47, p. 9408).
- 17 Diary, 12 Feb 1943; alternatively the conversation may have been that of 17 Feb 1943 recorded in Milch's diary and Speer, *Chronik*.
- 18 Diary, 15 Feb 1943; Goebbels diary, 16 Feb 1943; Milch at GL conf, 16 Feb 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4481f, 4461.)
- 19 Memoirs; and diary, 18 Feb 1943. Goebbels wrote, 'I discuss with Milch the question of the airlift to Stalingrad. The Luftwaffe did not fail here after all — the difficulties were just insuperable.'
- 20 Cf notes of Eng Col Hauser, GL conf, 10 Nov 1942 (MD:17, pp. 309off). Three prototypes of the MK 103 cannon had been made, and from Apr to Jul 1943 200 more would be manufactured. Production of 300 a month was guaranteed from early 1944, rising to 1,000 at the end of 1944. He also reported the difficult position with the MK 108: this was scheduled at 500 a month in factories at Poasen, Karlsruhe and Liege; but there was a serious shortage of the necessary machine tools.
- 21 The Führer had evidently asked for the SD 1 bomb early in 1942. It had been demonstrated by the Luftwaffe in mid-1942 at Peenemünde, when Col Gen von Richthofen had immediately demanded its mass production. Cf Milch, GL conf, 10 Nov 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 3192): 'The position on the SD 1 is that firstly the Führer demanded it very urgently, and secondly we sent the pilot series of the first ten thousand straight to the squadrons — in other words we dropped the trial series not at Rechlin but actually in action; and the word got round about it, and suddenly everybody wanted it.' On 9 Feb 1943 (GL conf, MD:18, p. 4319) Milch added: 'The pacemaker must be the one-kilo bomb . . . The SD 1 and its containers must be given special priority, equivalent at least to that of the Panzer programme. The Führer keeps telling me, "This is what I always wanted." And again three days later, Milch added: 'The Führer is a man who peers very deeply into the needs and necessities, and without being an engineer has a very sound common sense about technical things. Consider the notorious one-kilo bomb, which the last Director of Air Armament [Udet] and his entire staff turned down, until we put pressure behind it last year, so that today we can say: the most valuable bomb we have is the one-kilo bomb. It was the Führer who said it, not one of us.' (GL conf, 12 Feb 1943, MD:35, p. 3191.)

- 22 On Loerzer, cf Baumbach's letter to Jeschonnek, 12 Dec 1942, in *Broken Swastika*, pp. 137ff.
- 23 The shortage of fuel for training squadrons became acute in July 1942. Cf letter, von Brauchitsch to Milch, 23 May 1942 (MD:57, p. 3055); Göring conf, 29 Jun 1942 (MD:62, pp. 5243f); Milch at GL conf, 7 Jul 1942 and 28 Jul 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1398f, 1636f). The fuel then available was enough to train only 40 percent of the fighter and 20 percent of the bomber crews required. This shortage began to have its effect on the squadrons early in 1943. Cf Milch, Oct 1967: 'I demanded 45,000 tons of fuel a month to be set aside for training; I was allowed 15,000 tons.'
- 24 Eisenlohr at GL conf, 1 Sep 1942 (MD:16, p. 2193): new aero-engines needed five hours' running in; but they were now being accepted from factories after only 2½ hours' running in because of the fuel shortage.
- 25 Central Planning, 22 Apr 1943 (MD:46, p. 9657). Cf letter, Milch to Göring, 23 Jun 1943: 'In this connection I wish to mention that more than 50 percent of all synthetic oil capacity is concentrated within the confines of the Ruhr.' (MD:51, p. 426.)
- 26 Göring conf, 22 Feb 1943 (MD:62, pp. 5355); cf Göring conf re: training, 24 Feb 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5416ff; particularly Milch's opening speech, pp. 5417ff).
- 27 Diary, 22 Feb 1943: 'Air Ministry. Major programme conf with Göring. Study "1015" approved.' Göring conf, 22 Feb 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5350ff).
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 5368f.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 5370.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 5371.
- 31 Diary, 28 Feb 1943: '2,004 new aircraft manufactured in February!' Cf Milch, GL conf, 2 Mar 1943 (MD:19, pp. 4489f).
- 32 Diary, 3 Mar 1943.
- 33 Cf Col. Theo Rowehl's remarks at GL conf, 28 Aug 1942 (MD:34, p. 1874): three Ju 86Rs had bombed small British towns from 40,000 feet up: 'London is prohibited as such.'
- 34 Basil Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
- 35 Führer war conf, 5 Mar 1943.
- 36 Milch, MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 1992.
- 37 Diary, 5 Mar 1943: 'Reich Air Ministry. 11.05-1.45 P.M.: Gatow [airport] to Kalinowka, Speer there. Dinner with the Führer. [Conf on] high-altitude and high-speed bombers, etc. Overall situation. Discussed all questions with the Führer alone until 3.15 A.M.' Cf Vorwald in GL conf, 5 Mar 1943 (MD:36, p. 3410).
- 38 This version is based principally on Milch's recollection of the discussion (the original memo he wrote afterward was lost). Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates, 1 Sep 1945; Milch afterward told Goebbels (on 8 Apr 1943) that the bombing of England could not be resumed until Nov 1943 or the spring of 1944.
- 39 Cf Vorwald, MCH, 11 Mar 1947, p. 1734: Vorwald stated that upon his return Milch related how he had proposed the dismissal of von Ribbentrop and Keitel, and making peace with France. See also Gert Buchheit: *Hitler der Feldheer*, p. 331 (Grote, Baden, 1958).
- 40 Milch, May 1968. In his Nuremberg diary, 11 Aug and 23 Aug 1946, Milch wrote passages showing he had completely changed his attitude toward von Manstein, for personal reasons; and he recalled how he had recommended him to Hitler after Stalingrad.
- 41 Milch, Central Planning, 1 Mar 1944 (MD:48, pp. 9987f).
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 9983: 'On 3 March last year [sic] I proposed to the Führer that the Army, Luftwaffe and Navy had enough manpower between them to mobilise the necessary extra combat troops.'
- 43 This advice to Hitler seems credible, since we have seen on earlier pages how Milch was making the same provisions

about visits to the Eastern Front and France by his own subordinates.

44 Vorwald, MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1681.

C H A P T E R 15

1 Goebbels diary, 7–8 Mar 1943.

2 *Ibid.*, 12 and 15 Mar 1943. Milch. Diary, 13 Mar 1943: ‘Demonstrations at Rechlin. [Führer has ordered] intensification of air war against Britain.’ Telegram, Göring to Milch and others, 17 Mar 1943 (MD:65, pp. 7071f); Basil Collier, *op. cit.*, pp. 314f.

3 Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

4 Richter, MCH, 11 Feb 1947, p. 900.

5 Milch, GL conf, 9 Mar 1943 (MD:19, pp. 4669f).

6 Messerschmitt: memo on industrial conf with Reichsmarschall at Karinhall (FD.4355/45, vol. 2). And especially Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5461ff). Those present included Göring, Milch, Martini, Dornier, Rottgardt, Plendl, Lüschen, Hertel, Heinkel, Messerschmitt, Franke, Kammlhuber, Peltz and Nallinger. Cf diary, 18 Mar 1943: ‘At Karinhall: the chiefs of development. Major onslaught!'

7 Cf *ibid.*, p. 5463: ‘I am not speaking of the eastern theatre, because we are absolutely equal to, and in part superior to the enemy; I am talking about the enemy in the west.’

8 *Ibid.*, p. 5473.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 5466. Cf p. 5503.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 5476f.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 5471.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 5482 and 5473. Cf Milch’s report on Göring, 17 May 1947: ‘Almost proudly he boasted to anybody he met that he was so untechnically minded that he did not know how to switch on his radio set; one of his servants had to do it for him.’

13 For the whole ‘Window’ story, see Alfred Price: *Instruments of Darkness* (London, 1967), *passim*.

14 Milch, GL conf, 24 Apr 1942 (MD:13, p. 398).

15 Milch, GL conf, 5 May 1942 (MD:13, p. 351).

16 Lucht, GL conf, 12 Jun 1942 (MD:12, p. 1094).

17 GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1868).

18 Milch, GL conf, 1 Sep 1942 (MD:16, p. 2229).

19 GL conf, 27 Oct 1942 (MD:16, pp. 2952f); cf Göring conf, 14 Oct 1942 (MD:62, pp. 5324ff). For Milch’s view on General Fellgiebel, military chief of signals, see GL conf, 20 Oct 1942 (MD:169 p. 2825): ‘If one of us is a stupid pig, then it certainly isn’t me!’ Once Göring asked of Martini, ‘What can this man Fellgiebel do, if anything?’ And Martini replied, ‘He is an excellent horseman’ (Milch, Dec 1969.)

20 Nebel, Vorwald and Milch at GL conf, 27 Nov 1942 (MD:34, pp. 2575f).

21 GL conf, 5 Jan 1943 (MD:18, p. 3990).

22 Cf Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943 (MD:62, p. 5552).

23 Milch, GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1971ff).

24 Milch, GL conf, 9 Sep 1942 (MD:16, p. 2337).

25 Schwenke, GL conf, 12 Feb 1943 (MD:35, p. 3263). Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5472).

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 5498, 5545.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 5491f, 5546f.

28 Göring order re: responsibility for execution of radar and radio navigation programme, 2 May 1943 (MD:52, pp. 677ff).

29 Goebbels diary, 6 Apr 1943 (unpubl. fragment: NARS microfilm T-84, roll 272).

30 *Ibid.*, 7 Apr 1943.

31 *Ibid.*, 9 Apr 1943, and Milch diary, 8–9 Apr 1943.

32 Goebbels diary, 2 Apr 1943 (unpubl.).

33 GL conf, 27 Nov 1942 (MD:34, p. 2607).

34 Diary, 16 Apr 1943.

35 Central Planning, 23 Apr 1943 (MD:47,

- pp. 960ff).
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 9729. In this connection Milch was referring to two million bombs abandoned by the Luftwaffe. Cf Milch, GL conf, 9 Mar 1943 (MD:19, p. 4606): ‘As the Führer tells me [on 5 Mar] two million of our two-kilo bombs were allowed by the Fourth Air Force to fall into enemy hands, instead of being dropped in action . . . The question arises how such a thing was possible.’
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 9729ff.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 9730f. Milch returned to this subject again in Central Planning on 4 May 1943 (MD:47, p. 9796): ‘It would be important to find out once and for all how much ammunition each of the services has, and how much has been manufactured, so that we can work out if the figures are correct: where the quantities are, how much should be there, what the likely consumption will be and how much has been wasted in the various operations.’
- 39 *Ibid.*, pp. 9737f.
- 40 Schwenke, GL conf, 20 Apr 1943 (MD:20, pp. 5234f).
- 41 GL conf, 1 Jun 1943 (MD:21, pp. 6062f).
- 42 Göring conf, 8 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5804).
- 43 Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, pp. 5632f).
- 44 Diary, 8 May 1943: ‘At Reich Air Ministry. Noon to see the Führer, war conference. Then conf on small bomb containers, armament. Führer says, “Either Luftwaffe’s technology or its tactics are out of order.” I prove to him that the technology is all right.’
- 45 Milch, GL conf, 11 May 1943 (MD:20, pp. 5278f).
- 46 Goebbels diary, 22 May 1943.
- 47 Diary, 27 May 1943.
- 5413).
- 2 Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943 (MD:62, p. 5475).
- 3 Messerschmitt, in *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 Apr 1950. Messerschmitt’s war papers are filed as FD.4355/45 at the Foreign Documents Centre, Imperial War Museum, London, and are available on microfilm.
- 4 Messerschmitt, in Second German Television programme, 17 Feb 1970.
- 5 Cf Milch, GL conf, 31 Mar 1943 (MD:19, p. 4832).
- 6 Lichte, Böttger: The Development of the Jet Engine by Junkers, 1 Aug 1963.
- 7 Messerschmitt: Survey of development chronology of Me 262 (FD.4355/45, vol. 2), dated 31 Mar 1944.
- 8 Milch, GL conf, 17 Apr 1943 (MD:20, p. 5201).
- 9 Sellschopp, Vorwald at GL conf, 16 Jan 1943 (MD:18, pp. 4112, 4114).
- 10 Milch, Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943 (MD:62, p. 5521).
- 11 Vorwald, GL conf, 23 Mar 1943 (MD:19, p. 4788); and Galland, GL conf, 13 Apr 1943 (MD:19, pp. 5030f).
- 12 Antz, GL conf, 22 Mar 1943 (MD:36, pp. 3729f).
- 13 GL conf, 14 May 1943 (MD:36, pp. 4164ff). Cf Milch, GL conf, 31 Mar 1943 (MD:19, pp. 4824, 4828).
- 14 Milch, GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1998); Milch, GL conf, 4 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1738). ‘One gets the impression that one is speaking to a man who knows more than an engineer about his own subject.’
- 15 Galland: *The First and the Last*; and in Second German Television programme, 17 Feb 1970.
- 16 Report, Galland to Milch, 25 May 1943 (MD:56, p. 2620).
- 17 GL conf, 25 May 1943 (MD:20, pp. 5468ff); cf GL conf, 18 May 1943 (MD:20, pp. 5430f).
- 18 GL conf, 25 May 1943 (MD:20, p. 5473).
- 19 Diary, 25 May 1943: ‘Massage. GL conf with department beads. Lunch with

C H A P T E R 1 6

1 Study ‘1015’, discussed by Milch with Göring in conf, 22 Feb 1943 (MD:62, p.

- Speer. Afternoon, telephone Göring: "Drop the Me 209, put Me 262 in its place. I propose an anti-invasion [air] corps." The latter corps was to consist of airborne troops, special fighter and fast bomber units fitted with special weapons for combating an Allied invasion attempt wherever it might be made. (*Memoirs*.)
- 20 Schwenke.
- 21 A4 rocket-firing records in Peenemünde archives in Deutsches Museum, Munich; cf David Irving: *The Mare's Nest* (London 1964), pp. 58f. Diary, 26 May 1943.
- 22 Milch, GL conf, 4 Jun 1943.
- 23 The programme was: Aug 1943, 100; Sep, 500; Oct, 1,000; Nov, 2,000; Dec, 2,500; Jan 1944, 3,000; Feb, 3,500; Mar, 4,000; Apr, 5,000.
- 24 GL conf, 15 Jun 1943; Heyne, GL conf, 22 Jun 1943 (MD:21, p. 5803; von Below was also present); GL conf, 13 Jul 1943 (MD:22).
- 25 Milch, GL conf, 4 Jun 1943.
- 26 Herrmann, GL conf, 15 Jun 1943.
- 27 Milch: report on inspection trip 7–12 Jun 1943, dated 29 Jun 1943 (MD:51, pp. 512ff). On page 4 is a note that it was discussed on 3 Jul.
- 28 GL conf, 15 Jun 1943.
- 29 Milch, GL conf, 6 Jul 1943 (MD:21); Herrmann, *ibid.*, pp. 5566f. Cf diary, 15 Jun 1945, where an Allied officer 'reminds me of Kammhuber, who to the Luftwaffe's misfortune "governed" its organization for a long time.'
- 30 Goebbels diary, 23 Jun 1943, unpubl.
- 31 Heinkel, *op. cit.*, pp. 459ff. (He incorrectly dates the meeting 23 May 1943). Messerschmitt dates it 27 Jun 1943, and this is confirmed by Bormann diary ('Führer confers with the most important designers'); cf Speer: Führer conf, 26 Jun 1943 (Boelcke, *op. cit.*, p. 272). In general much of Heinkel's version seems unlikely: quite apart from making no mention that Göring had dropped the requirement for the He 177 to dive in Sep 1942, Hitler had long been fully aware of the He 177's technical background: cf Führer's war conf, 1 Feb 1943 (pp. 139ff).
- 32 Pasewaldt, Milch at GL conf, 2 Mar 1943 (MD:19, p. 4545); Milch approved the replacement of Heinkel by Dr Harald Wolff as commissar (GL conf, 9 Mar 1943; MD:19, p. 4672). Cf Heinkel, *op. cit.*, p. 547. Milch said at GL conf, 23 Mar 1943: 'Whenever he [Heinkel] gets some facts, he duplicates them and sends them to just about everybody except us; or Heinkel reports what a magnificent achievement it was to turn out a few He 111s, and sends a telegram to the Führer. Next time I'll put him inside! What he should report [to the Führer] is "... moreover, I report that for two long years I have been unable to complete the He 177, because I haven't cared a hoot about it." — Not that he will ever do that.' (MD:19, p. 4715).
- 33 USSBS interrogation of Prof Messerschmitt, 11 May 1945.
- 34 Messerschmitt comments on letter of Herr Kokothaki, 19 Jan 1944 (FD.4355/45, vol. 6): 'The Führer and Reichsminister Speer both expressed reservations about converting the entire fighter programme to jet fighters, for fuel supply reasons.'
- 35 Milch to Maj Herrmann and others, GL conf, 6 Jul 1943 (MD:21).
- 36 Col von Lossberg: Proposal for a new night fighting tactic, 29 Jul 1943 (MD:56, pp. 2613ff).
- 37 Göring conf, 27 Jun 1943 (MD:63, pp. 5842ff); Milch was not present. Cf Herrmann at GL conf, 6 Jul 1943.
- 38 Report, Milch to Göring, 29 Jun 1943 (MD:51, p. 514).
- 39 Alpers, GL conf, 29 Jun 1943 (MD:21).
- 40 Report, Milch to Göring, 29 June 1943 (MD:51, p. 513).
- 41 Diary, 30 June 1943; and MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 2008.
- 42 Milch, GL conf, 6 Jul 1943. He added,

- 'The Führer has approved a considerable reinforcement of the home defences, particularly in the west.'
- 43 Letter, Milch to Göring, 19 Jun 1943 (MD:51, pp. 423f); cf Milch, GL conf, 22 June 1943 (MD:21, p. 5809).
- 44 Letter, Milch to Göring, 30 Jun 1943 (MD:51, p. 425).
- 45 Diary, 2 Jul 1943: '[Flight] Insterburg to Goldap (by Storch) for conf of *Luftflotte* commanders at Rominten on *Zitadelle*'.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 3 Jul 1943: 'Continuation of Rominten conf. I oppose Göring on "cowardice" of air crews.' Cf von Richthofen diary, who describes other conf events, 3 Jul 1943; and Milch, May 1968. Von Brauchitsch, MCH, 20 Feb 1947, pp. 1278f, relates the episode to 'a conference in East Prussia, where [Milch] tabled proposals for modifications in the manner of Luftwaffe operations.' (And see note 27.)
- 47 Memoirs. Cf Milch, MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 2008; Maj Englander, quoting Milch in *Inter Avia*, Aug 1946, p. 12, used almost identical wording. Cf von Richthofen diary, 3 Jul 1943; he describes how after lunch Göring discussed with him, during a long forest walk, the possibility of replacing Kesselring as C-in-C, South, with an Army officer, and of making Kesselring Inspector-General (Milch's office!).
- 48 Herrmann, GL conf, 6 Jul 1943 (MD:21, pp. 556ff).
- 49 Schwenke, GL conf, 9 Jul 1943.
- 50 Price, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
- 51 Diary, 13 Jul 1943: 'Göring conf, with Jeschonnek'; Göring conf, 13 Jul 1943 (MD:63, pp. 584ff); cf memo on visit of Italian ambassador Alfieri to Milch on 16 Jul 1943 (MD:53, pp. 1116f).
- 52 Milch, GL conf, 16 Jul 1943.
- 2 Cf Führer, at war conf, 25 Jul 1943: 'That was precisely the tenor of the remarks made at that discussion a few days ago, when I asserted, "Terror . . ." See Milch diary, 23 Jul 1943: ' . . . by Dornier from Oranienburg to Rastenburg. Technical conf with Göring. Afternoon: with the Führer.'
- 3 In a cable to Milch, the Chief of Air Signals Martini mentioned on 4 Aug 1943 the GL's radar research unit at Werneuchen commanded by Maj August Hentz, 'which six months ago, on the basis of its experiments, recognized the great danger of enemy jamming.' (MD:56, p. 2589.) Martini tried to place sole blame for the embargo on research into counter-measures on Göring after the war (cf *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*, p. 277); the flavour of the Milch documents suggests that Martini was at least equally responsible.
- 4 Milch, GL conf, 27 Jul 1943.
- 5 Richter: memo on telephone message, 11.30 A.M., 28 Jul 1943 (MD:51, p. 421); cf von Brauchitsch, MCH, 20 Feb 1947, p. 1279. And Milch, GL conf, 30 Jul 1943: 'The day before yesterday the Führer agreed that the absolute *Schwerpunkt* of the industry is to be the defence of the home territory: "All else must take less priority."
- 6 Von Lossberg, letter to the author, Aug 1969.
- 7 Diary, 29 Jul 1943. *Ibid.*; and 1945 commentary thereon.
- 8 Of the 28, Herrmann's Wild Boar fighters were credited with 18 (GL conf, 30 Jul 1943).
- 9 Diary, 30 Jul 1943; Milch, GL conf, 30 Jul 1943; and letter, Milch to Göring, 30 Jul 1943 (MD:56, pp. 2592ff).
- 10 Göring: order for expansion of night-fighter force, to Milch, 1 Aug 1943 (MD:56, pp. 2599ff); cf telegram, Milch to Göring, 3 Aug 1943 (MD:56, p. 2590).
- 11 Speer, Central Planning, 29 Jul 1943

C H A P T E R 17

1 Diary, 15–20 Jul 1943; MCH, 13 Mar 1947, p. 2009.

- (MD:48, pp. 10443f, 10445); Milch, who was not present, lined both passages in the margin.
- 12 Diary, 31 Jul 1943.
- 13 Speer, GL–Speer conf, 3 Aug 1943 (MD:23); in his memoirs, Speer dates his warning to Hitler ‘three days after’ 29 Jul 1943; there is otherwise no record of a Speer–Führer conf on 1 Aug 1943.
- 14 Wilfred von Oven: *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, vol. II, pp. 77ff: diary of 4 Aug 1943. There is no corresponding entry in Milch’s diary (and Milch indignantly denies having made the remark as quoted), but the Speer *Chronik* records: ‘On 2 Aug Dr Goebbels spoke in the presence of Minister Speer to the ministers and state secretaries, in his Ministry.’
- 15 Milch, GL–Speer conf, 3 Aug 1943 (MD:23, pp. 6607f).
- 16 Memoirs.
- 17 GL–Speer conf, 3 Aug 1943.
- 18 Milch, GL conf, 10 Sep 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4523f).
- 19 *Ibid.*, 4525.
- 20 Führer decree: production of A4 rockets (FD.3049/49); and Speer; Führer conf, 25 Jul 1943. After the war, Speer suggested that he had always been opposed to the costly A4 project. Cf Milch diary, 21 Jun 1946: ‘[Read] Speer interrogation, very interesting. He says the V-2 [i.e., the A4 rocket] was madness, and ordered from above against his will!!’ See also Speer, *op. cit.*, p. 374: ‘It was again Hitler who made the moves which aided the enemy air offensive in 1944’; one such move was the ‘absurd idea’ of reprisal attacks on Britain.
- 21 Krüger, GL conf, 29 Jul 1943.
- 22 GL conf, 24 Aug 1943 (MD:24, pp. 7056ff).
- 23 Milch, GL conf, 10 Sep 1943 (MD:30, pp. 4507f, 4522).
- 24 Milch, GL conf, 17 Aug 1943 (MD:24, pp. 7234ff). On the history of how Messerschmitt secured Hitler’s decision, see Seiler, GL conf, 4 Jun 1943; letter, Prof Messerschmitt to Seiler, 2 Jun 1943 (FD.4355/45, vol. 6); GL conf, 27 Jul 1943; GL conf, 3 Aug 1943 (MD:23, p. 6555): ‘The [Me 209’s] design work is 95 percent complete.’ 3 Aug 1943 (MD:23, p. 6554); and Galland, GL conf, 10 Aug 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4722f).
- 25 Cf GL conf, 22 Jun 1943 (MD:21, pp. 5804f). The plan was sent in on 17 Jun and approved on 22 Jul 1943 (Bley at GL conf, 29 Jun 1943, MD:21, p. 5702). Each Me 262 would cost on average 24,000 manhours for the first 100, dropping to 3,500 in mass production, compared with 4,200 manhours for the Me 109. Telegram, Messerschmitt AG to Col Petersen, 20 Jul 1943 (MD:65, p. 7051).
- 26 GL conf, 10 Aug 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4687ff, 4694, 4699).
- 27 Milch at GL conf, 10 Aug 1943 (*ibid.*, p. 4726).
- 28 Milch at GL conf, 20 Aug 1943 (MD:24, p. 7134); cf GL conf, 17 Aug 1943 (MD:24, pp. 7233f, 7238). Milch had meanwhile discovered that Messerschmitt’s tooling up for the Me 209 production was only 60 percent complete (pp. 7234f).
- 29 Suchenwirth: Jeschonnek, pp. 132ff.
- 30 Von Richthofen diary, 27 Jul 1943, *et seq.*
- 31 Results of Air Attack on Messerschmitt AG (FD.4921/45).
- 32 US State Dept Interrogation of Gen Warlimont, 26 Sep 1945. This may have been at 1.25 P.M., 17 Aug 1943 (cf Linge diary).
- 33 Milch, von Lossberg at GL conf, 20 Aug 1943 (MD:24 pp. 7068ff); and Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, pp. 283f).
- 34 Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates.
- 35 Letter, Messerschmitt to Frydag, 23 Aug 1943 (FD.4355/45, vol. 3).
- 36 GL–Speer conf, 25 Aug 1943 (MD:30, p. 411).
- 37 Memoirs, p. 320; FD.4439/45, p. 16; cf diary, 7 Aug 1943.
- 38 FD.4439/45, p. 22.

- 39 Memoirs, p. 320.
- 40 GL conf, 20 Aug 1943 (MD:24, p. 7077).
- 41 During the attack on Berlin about 400 were killed, 300 missing, and 65,000 left homeless (Milch at Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943, MD:30, pp. 283f).
- 42 Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, p. 285).
- 43 Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, p. 227).
- 44 GL-Speer conf, 1 Sept 1943 (MD:30, p. 3771); cf Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, p. 206).
- 45 Diary, 2 Sep 1943. Rumour of Herrmann's successes soon spread: see Note of discussion Ribben-trop-Antonescu, 3 Sep 1943. 'A new tactic has been worked out whereby using the existing aircraft types about 20 to 25 percent of the attacking aircraft can be shot down.'

C H A P T E R 1 8

- 1 GL-Speer conf, 25 Aug 1943 (MD:30, pp. 411ff).
- 2 Cf Milch at Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943 (MD:62, p. 5704).
- 3 FD.4439/45: 'As machine tools reserved for aircraft production had to be released at short notice *en masse* on account of the shortage of crankshafts for tanks, a considerable shortage of crankshafts for our own purposes arose.' Cf GL-Speer conf, 25 Aug 1943 (MD:30, pp. 390ff).
- 4 GL-Speer conf, 25 Aug 1943. Cf FD.4439/45. The accuracy of Milch's planning was contested: Speer, *Chronik*, 1 Sep 1943; and GL-Speer conf, 1 Sep 1943 (MD:30, pp. 328ff).
- 5 FD.4439/45. Cf Speer, *Chronik*, 15 Sep 1943.
- 6 FD.4439/45.
- 7 USSBS interrogation of Prof Messerschmitt, No. 6, May 1945. Letters, Messerschmitt to Frydag and Lusser, 23 Aug 1943 (FD.4355/45, vol. 3). Messerschmitt had independently had the same idea

- for the 'uninterrupted bombardment' of London with flying bombs powered by the 'amazingly cheap' Argus Tube (letter, Messerschmitt to Croneiss, 15 Sep 1942, *ibid.*, vol. 4).
- 8 USSBS interrogation of Messerschmitt. Linge diary, 7 Sep 1943: '4.20–5.25 P.M.: Prof Messerschmitt and Col von Below [with Führer].' Hitler admitted that if the same happened to Berlin as had happened to Hamburg, he might have to liquidate the war.
- 9 Messerschmitt's notes on his conference with Hitler, 7 Sep 1943 (FD.4355/45 vol. 1.) It should be noted that he had also ascribed bomber characteristics to the Me 262 in his correspondence with Frydag, 23 Aug 1943 (FD.4355/45, vol. 3).
- 10 Speer, p. 372, refers to a telegram from Hitler to Milch early in Sept 1943, ordering him to stop mass production preparations for the Me 262. This is not evident from the archives.
- 11 Fischer and Thomas, in Central Planning, 29 Oct 1942 (MD:46, p. 8934). Becht also said, 'On the outbreak of war the Italians had about a million tons of heating oil in store; they have reduced this volume so much that they do not even have enough now for their ships.' (*Ibid.*, p. 8936.)
- 12 GL conf, 5 Oct 1943 (MD:25, p. 7454).
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 7456.
- 14 Cf Göring conf, 22 Feb 1943. Göring: 'If the Italian aircraft is any good, we must not be ashamed, but mass produce it. Let's have no embarrassment about it!' Milch: 'We would win a year like that.' Galland: '... and it would do our own designers a power of good!' (MD:62, pp. 5397f.) Milch and Kesselring had seen the Fiat fighter in Italy early in Dec 1942. Cf Milch at GL conf, 9 Dec 1942: 'Field-Marshal Kesselring tells me the Italian fighter is first-class, absolutely the equal of ours.' On the Fiat G-55 fighter, see also Milch at GL conf, 5 Oct 1943 (MD:25, p. 7439). Cf also note of

- discussion between Führer and Mussolini, 19 Jul 1943. The Führer said, 'According to the Luftwaffe, Italy turns out magnificent airframes.'
- 15 Göring conf, stenogram, 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6228). Cf note on discussion between Hitler and Antonescu, 26 Feb 1944: Rumania had supplied Italy with oil, which Italy had 'secretly tucked away'. On these secret stocks in Italy, see also GL-Speer conf, 27 Oct 1943 (MD:31, p. 754).
- 16 GL conf, 5 Oct 1943 (MD:25, p. 7486).
- 17 Cf GL conf, 9 Dec 1942 (MD:17, p. 3681); 22 Dec 1942 (*ibid.*, p. 3824); and Göring conf, 8 Oct 1943 (MD:62, pp. 5753f).
- 18 GL conf, 14 Sep 1943 (MD:25, pp. 7634ff).
- 19 Diary, 20 Sep 1943; cf Goebbels diary, 21 Sep 1943, and GL confs 14 and 21 Sep 1943 (MD:25, pp. 7648f and 7519); 12 Oct 1943 (MD:38, p. 4285).
- 20 Webster and Frankland, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 45.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 22 Sir Arthur Harris to Mr Winston Churchill, 3 November 1943, *ibid.*, p. 48.
- 23 Camouflaging lakes and important factories against H2S radar was discussed at GL conf, 24 Aug 1943 (MD:24, pp. 6996ff), 19 Oct 1943 (MD:26, p. 8345), 3 Dec 1943 (MD:39, pp. 4848f), and GL-Speer conf, 16 Dec 1943 (MD:32, pp. 1251ff). On active devices against H2S, see Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, p. 277).
- 24 See also ADI(K) Report No. 416/1945: *The History of German Night Fighting*, 8 Dec 1945, paras 52ff.
- 25 In general on German radio counter-measures: on the jamming of 'Gee': GL conf, 4 Aug 1942 (MD:15, p. 1748) and 15 Sep 1942 (MD:16, p. 2426); on the coming role of RCM: GL conf, 20 Aug 1942 (MD:15, pp. 1975ff); on jamming enemy radar: GL conf, 6 Apr 1943 (MD:19, pp. 4938ff); on deceiving British jammers: Night Fighter conf, 13 Dec 1943 (MD:43, pp. 6659ff); on measures against 'Win-dow' jamming: GL conf, 10 Aug 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4746f), Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, pp. 172f), 5 Nov 1943 (MD:43, pp. 6707ff) and GL conf, 14 Dec 1943 (MD:27, p. 8645); on tracking H2S transmissions by 'Korfu': GL conf, 24 Aug 1943 (MD:24, pp. 7009f); on homing on H2S by 'Naxos Z' or jamming with 'Roderich': Night Fighter conf, 31 Aug 1943 (MD:30, pp. 277f), GL conf, 16 Nov 1943 (MD:26, p. 8001) and 14 Dec 1943 (MD:27, p. 8648).
- 26 Von Lossberg at GL conf, 5 Oct 1943 (MD:25, p. 7506).
- 27 Röderer, *ibid.* For a lengthy statement by Schwenke on Allied electronic warfare, see GL conf, 30 Nov 1943.
- 28 In several conferences Milch talked of the need for intruder operations against RAF airfields.
- 29 Christian at Führer's war conf, 4 Oct 1943. Hitler: 'I spoke yesterday with the Reichsmarschall.' Cf Linge diary, 3 Oct 1943, 12.30 P.M.: 'War conference (with Reichsmarschall).'
- 30 Schwenke at GL conf, 26 Oct 1943 (MD:26, p. 8191). Cf *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. II, pp. 692ff. The first H2S attack was on 27 Sep 1943 against Emden, but two of the four H2S sets broke down before the target was reached.
- 31 GL conf, 26 Oct 1943 (*ibid.*, p. 8183).
- 32 Christian at Führer's war conf, 4 Oct 1943.
- 33 Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:62, p. 5658). Cf Linge diary, 4 Oct 1943: '9.30 P.M. conference (conversation with Reichsmarschall)'. And 5 Oct 1943: '3.05–4.30 P.M.: Reichsmarschall, Gen Korten, Col Peltz, Col Christian, Lt Col v. Below [with Führer]; 4.30–5 P.M.: Reichsmarschall, Maj Waizenegger [with Führer].' Cf Milch at GL conf, 5 Oct 1943 (MD:25, pp. 7504ff): 'Tell this to him [Diesing] immediately, because there is a conference today between the Führer and Reichsmarschall.' Göring

- did not see the Führer again until 27 Oct 1943.
- 34 Göring conf, 7 Oct 1943 (MD:62, p. 5665). 'I am quite properly held to be principally responsible.'
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 5626f.

C H A P T E R 19

- 1 Göring conf, 9 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6309).
- 2 Göring conf, 8 Oct 1943 (MD:62 pp. 5748f). Milch was not present.
- 3 Provided the Ju 290, the He 111 *Kampftransporter* and the new high-speed bombers were included. Memorandum by Vorwald for Milch, 27 Dec 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6277f).
- 4 Göring conf, 9 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6308f).
- 5 Telegram, Göring to Milch, 11 Oct 1943 (MD:53, pp. 732f).
- 6 Milch at Göring conf, 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6191). According to Göring on 2 Nov, during the Marienburg attack, a large number of BMW 801 engines had been destroyed, as they had all been stored in one building (MD:63, p. 5967).
- 7 GL conf, 12 Oct 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4315 and 4382).
- 8 Göring conf, 9 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6311f).
- 9 Galland: *Die Ersten und die Letzten*.
- 10 See note 6.
- 11 GL conf, 12 Oct 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4285f). The Germans claimed to have destroyed 62 US bombers in the Anklam attack.
- 12 Göring conf, 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6147ff).
- 13 Martin Caidin: *Black Thursday* (New York, 1960).
- 14 Pasewaldt at GL conf, 14 Sep 1943 (MD:25, p. 7640).
- 15 GL-Speer conf, 27 Oct 1943 (MD:31, p. 751).
- 16 Göring conf, 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6134).
- 17 Göring speech at Arnhem, 23 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6133f). Col von Below has said that this was typical of the Führer's views as well.
- 18 Linge diary, 14 Oct 1943, records *inter*

- alia*: '9 P.M.: dinner with Minister Speer, Herr Dorsch, Herr Saur (telephone conversation with Reichsmarschall).' 19 Speer, p. 298.
- 20 More damaging for the Luftwaffe was the shortage of airscrews for many types after Schweinfurt; the aircraft had to be stockpiled without them (Milch at Göring conf, 2 Nov 1943, MD:63, p. 5969).
- 21 Speer, p. 299. Milch at Göring conf, 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6228); cf GL conf, 12 Oct 1943 (MD:38, pp. 4291f). Milch and Speer had arranged on 11 Oct to reduce ball bearings for motor transport in favour of the air industry; the latter would also do without so many ball bearings, 'as we too have been making pigs of ourselves with ball bearings.'
- 22 Diary, 15 Oct 1943. Cf Milch at GL conf, 15 Oct 1943 (MD:39, p. 5243): 'I have heard this morning that the Führer, in Speer's presence, yesterday ...'
- 23 Cf Speer's record of the conference with Hitler.
- 24 At Insterburg on 26 Nov 1943, Hitler was to pronounce that he considered the combination of the Me 410 with the 50-millimetre KWK cannon 'the backbone of the Reich's defence.' (Telegram, Göring to Milch, 12 Jan 1944, MD:51, pp. 414f.) Galland had always opposed the weapon as too slow-firing — only one round every 1.8 seconds (GL conf, 26 Oct 1943, MD:26, p. 8245). Cf Galland: *Die Ersten und die Letzten*.
- 25 Speer, *Chronik*, 13 Oct 1943 (FD.4439/45). The related Programme Study, '1018', was concluded on 23 Oct 1943.
- 26 Milch at GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, pp. 5119f). Speer repeated the refusal at his conference with Göring on 28 Oct, so Milch was not in the position to issue the programme.
- 27 Göring conf, 8 Oct 1943 (MD:62, pp. 5750ff).
- 28 Göring conf, in officers' mess at Arnhem, 23 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:63,

- pp. 6119f).
- 29 Göring: speech to aircrews of Third Fighter Division, day-fighters, in hangar at Arnhem-Deelen airfield, 23 Oct 1943, stenogram (MD:63, pp. 6091ff).
- 30 Diary, 24 Oct 1943; memoirs, pp. 321f. Speer at Führer conf, 14–15 Oct 1943, point 20. Speer at Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6062ff).
- 31 Milch at Göring conf, 2 Nov 1943 (MD:63, p. 6007). Cf Milch at GL conf, 12 Nov 1943 (MD:39, p. 4964): ‘The whole figures are false! Speer is talking of 435,000 men. According to our calculations it cannot be more than 259,000 of the 1.9 million men.’
- 32 Milch at GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, pp. 5108f). Vorwald in MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1656. Compared with air armament’s 1,920,000 workers in Sep 1943, army armament had originally employed 1,600,000 and had now risen to 1,900,000, while Speer assessed air armament’s labour force as 1,852,000, of which 817,000 were German men (44 percent) and the rest women (25 percent) or foreigners (23.5 percent male, 7 percent female). Figures in MD:63, p. 6024.
- 33 Linge diary, 27 Oct 1943. Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6018ff). Cf Vorwald in MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1659: ‘During our activities from 1941 to 1944 our labour force did not expand, but barely remained constant as we covered the gaps caused by disease, absenteeism and death with workers from GBA [Sauckel].’
- 34 Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6019ff). By 21 Sep 1943 there were 190,000 Italian prisoners of war in Germany, according to Speer (GL–Speer conf, 22 Sep 1943, MD:30, p. 45).
- 35 Milch at GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, pp. 5108f).
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 6021ff. Cf Milch at Göring conf, 4 Nov 1943 (MD:63, pp. 5938f).
- 37 Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6080).
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 6084f. Cf Göring conf, 9 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6294f).

C H A P T E R 2 O

- 1 Galland at GL conf, 26 Oct 1943 (MD:26, pp. 8261f).
- 2 Göring, *ibid.*, pp. 6080f. Von Below has commented on Göring’s ‘amazingly accurate reproduction’ of Hitler’s language. Cf also Göring conf, 2 Nov 1943 (MD:63, pp. 5961ff).
- 3 Göring admitted thinking this. Conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6080).
- 4 Göring conf, 14 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6261f).
- 5 Milch at Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (*ibid.*, p. 6058).
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 6021.
- 7 GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, pp. 5117ff). Milch: ‘[Kurt] Tank understands three times more about fighter aircraft than Messerschmitt, because he climbs in himself. Messerschmitt never has sat in one of his aircraft.’
- 8 Cf Milch at GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, p. 5174).
- 9 Göring conf, 2 Nov 1943, at Messerschmitt works, Regensburg, stenogram (MD:63, p. 5963).
- 10 Göring conf, 4 Nov 1943, at Junkers works, Dessau, stenogram (MD:63, p. 5923; ND:NOKW-180).
- 11 Speer at GL–Speer conf, 10 Nov 1943 (MD:31, p. 697).
- 12 The Junkers 388 was in an assembly building with one of the two BMW 801 engines already installed. Göring asked later for it to be shown to Hitler at Interburg: ‘No need for it to fly, just for the Führer to see it.’ (Göring conf, 23 Nov 1943, stenogram, MD:64, p. 6666).
- 13 Göring conf, 5 Nov 1943, at Arado works, stenogram, (MD:63, pp. 5706ff).
- 14 On 2 Oct 1943 Flight Capt Selle had carried out test dives to assess the Ar 234’s dive performance. At 9,000 metres’ al-

- titude the left-hand jet engine flamed out. He dived to 4,500 metres hoping to cut the engine back in. Selle was heard to radio, 'All my instruments are dead', and then 'The ailerons and wing flaps are vibrating.' At 1,500 metres a flame was seen licking out of the left engine. The pilot jettisoned the cockpit cover, but could not get out in time. (Vorwald at GL conf, 5 Oct 1943, MD:26, pp. 743ff.)
- 15 Letter, Arado company to Milch re: Ar 234 production situation, Potsdam, 19 Nov 1943 (MD:53, pp. 727ff). Lt Col v. Below had inspected the factory on 18 Nov for the Führer to ascertain whether the Ar 234 could be regarded purely as a bomber, while the Me 262 was regarded as a fighter.
- 16 Göring speech to the gauleiters, stenogram, 8 Nov 1943 (MD:63, pp. 5859ff). Goebbels diary, 9 Nov 1943. Cf Göring conf, 14 Oct 1943: 'Just watch our first attack on London with 150 aircraft — only with 150 — and then read the British press! And then down with the Tri-alen [aluminized explosive] and new fire bombs . . . The British have only one pleasure in war, and that is when they are the only ones doing the hitting. Just watch what happens when we are knocking them around again, and their bombers start saying, "We are suffering terrible losses." I can see the squaring of accounts coming.'
- 17 Memorandum by Messerschmitt re: letter from Herr Kokothaki, 19 Jan 1944 (FD.4355/45, vol. 6).
- 18 Letter, Prof Messerschmitt to Fritz Seiler, 4 Jun 1943 (*ibid.*).
- 19 Memorandum, 31 Mar 1944 (FD.4355/45, vol. 2). The original document also gives the half-monthly figures.
- 20 Letter, Seiler to Messerschmitt, 22 Sep 1943 (FD.4355/45, vol. 6).
- 21 GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, p. 5162).
- 22 GL conf, 26 Sep 1943 (MD:38, p. 4489): 'We are severally come to the opinion that we are holding up too much other work with it, and that we do not really need it.'
- 23 GL conf, 15 Oct 1943 (MD:39, p. 5207). Vorwald: 'That's what Messerschmitt had to admit yesterday, although he carped no end beforehand, when the Reichsmarschall reproached him about these figures.'
- 24 GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, pp. 5161f). Messerschmitt's visits to the Führer were frequently debated. Cf Milch at GL conf, 12 Nov 1943 (MD:39, p. 4926): 'And then he scurries off with it to the Reichsmarschall or to the Führer, and lies until he is in the clear again.'
- 25 GL conf, 16 Nov 1943 (MD:26, p. 8046); letter, Seiler to Messerschmitt, 22 Sept 1943 (FD.4355/45, vol. 6).
- 26 See Milch at GL-Speer conf, 27 Oct 1943 (MD:31, pp. 733ff) and 17 Nov 1943 (MD:31, pp. 609ff) on the history of these programmes. '223' had been issued in Apr 1943.
- 27 GL conf, 27 Oct 1943 (MD:31, p. 742). Speer: 'Even agreeing to Programme 224 was something approaching lunacy in my view.'
- 28 The first such study, '1019', suggested 3,000 single- and 1,090 twin-engined fighters a month by 1945, with 610 bombers. This was not shown to Göring (GL-Speer conf, 17 Nov 1943, MD:31, pp. 593, 603).
- 29 Sellschopp at GL-Speer conf, 17 Nov 1943 (MD:31, p. 593); and see the biting sarcasm about Milch's conference in Speer, *Chronik*, 17 Nov 1943.
- 30 Central Planning, 22 Nov 1943 (MD:48, pp. 10257ff). Although energy capacity had increased by over 700,000Kw (6 percent) and load had increased by only 3 percent, there was now an energy gap of 930,000Kw compared with 1942; part of this, 400,000Kw, had been caused by enemy action. In addition several power stations now lay idle for want of repairs, as they had no manpower. Agriculture

- would suffer as usual. Von Trotha said, 'The 35 percent reduction in carbide and calcium nitrate means that fertilizers will not be manufactured at all.' (MD:48, p. 10265).
- 31 Göring conf, 23 Nov 1943 (MD:64, pp. 6632ff).
- 32 Speer, *Chronik*, 23 Nov 1943. Cf Frydag at Göring conf, 23 Nov 1943. For description of these early raids' results, see Milch at GL conf, 30 Nov 1943 (MD:26).
- 33 Göring conf, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6036f).
- 34 OKW war diary, vol. III, pp. 1214f: 27 Nov 1943. And letter, Korten to Milch, 17 Nov 1943 (MD:53, pp. 1026ff). Korten points out that 'reducing the force by 25 percent would mean around 430,000 men from the military strength, or virtually the dissolution of the Luftwaffe.' A commission was to investigate both the Luftwaffe and its industry.
- 35 Cf point 23 of telegram, Göring to Milch, 21 Nov 1943 (MD:51, p. 418): 'For Führer conference: Statistics and proposals for saving in manpower in the Army, Luftwaffe and Navy in rear areas, particularly in headquarters, military stores, supply authorities, etc., with a view to considerably reinforcing the combat troops as proposed by Field-Marshal Milch and Reichsminister Speer in the conference with Herr Reichsmarschall.'
- 36 Göring conf, 23 Nov 1943 (MD:63, pp. 6691f): Göring stated that the entire Luftwaffe front line from Kirkenes to the Crimea was 247,000 men.
- 37 Dönitz: Führer conf, 25–26 [sic] Nov 1943. The dates must be wrong as both the Göring conf quoted and the Linge diary make it clear the date was 24 Nov 1943. Cf also diary of Chief of Army Personnel, Schmundt, 27 Nov 1943.
- 38 Diary, 7 Oct 1940: 'Congratulated Himmler [on his birthday] by telegram.' Also Milch at GL conf, 19 Oct 1943 (MD:26, p. 8391).
- 39 For a description of how Milch delayed the deportation of Jews from Holland, see affidavit Dr Herbert Rohrer, 13 Sep 1954 (MPP) and of lawyer Gerhard Wilcke, 18 Apr 1950. Rohrer was trustee of the Phillips concern from 1943 to 1944.
- 40 Milch at GL conf, 19 Oct 1943 (MD:26, p. 8391).
- 41 Diary, 20 Nov 1943; Himmler diary, 20 Nov 1943: '8 P.M.: with Field-Marshal Milch.' Cf Milch in MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 2010; and 20 Mar 1947, p. 2244.
- 42 Telegram, Göring to Milch, 21 Nov 1943 (MD:51, p. 419). Göring ordered that apart from his own entourage, Milch, Speer, Korten, Vorwald, Galland, Peltz, Petersen, Knemeyer, [Lt Col] Werner, Heyne and Frydag were to take part, together with Messerschmitt, Hentzen, Tank, Hertel, Tiedemann, Cambeis, Franz, Dornier, Franke, Blume, Nallinger, Lusser, Wagner and Günther from the air industry.
- 43 Diary, 26 Nov 1943: 'Insterburg. Equipment inspected by Führer. Göring pushes me aside.' Petersen, Jun 1968; Vorwald, Jun 1968. Interview of Prof Messerschmitt on Second German Television, 17 Feb 1970.
- 44 Göring conf, 18 Mar 1943 (MD:62, p. 5475).
- 45 Herrmann at GL conf, 25 May 1943 (MD:20, pp. 5486f).
- 46 GL conf, 28 May 1943, and 9 Jul 1943. Re: the Ar 234 reconnaissance plane, see also Col Theo Rowehl at GL conf, 19 Jul 1943 (MD:22).
- 47 GL conf, 20 Aug 1943 (MD:24, p. 7134).
- 48 Göring conf, 2–3 Sep 1943 (MD:62, pp. 5595ff).
- 49 Kröger at GL conf, 1 Feb 1944.
- 50 Vorwald at GL conf, 3 Nov 1943 (MD:39, pp. 5061ff).
- 51 Bilfinger at GL–Speer conf, 10 Nov 1943 (MD:31 pp. 68off).
- 52 Cf also Heyne, Vorwald and Offenhammer at GL conf, 19 Oct 1943 (MD:26, pp. 8354ff).

- 53 See note 50.
- 54 OKW war diary, vol. III, p. 1313: 27 Nov 1943.
- 55 Göring conf, 28 Nov 1943, stenogram (MD:64, pp. 6593ff). Cf Goebbels diary, 7 Dec 1943.
- 56 Basil Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 327.
- 57 Führer war conf, 28 Jan 1944.
- 58 Cf Milch at GL–Speer conf, 19 Jan 1944 (MD:32, pp. 1114ff): ‘At present the Americans alone are producing 8,800 aircraft a month, the British 2,600 and the Russians 2,300 to 2,400, of which 1,200 are four-engined bombers. This year will also see the new American B-29 and B-32, and these aircraft can attack at altitudes of 11 to 12 thousand metres.’
- 59 GL conf, 30 Nov 1943 (MD:26, pp. 7918ff).
- 60 Milch at GL conf, 14 Dec 1943 (MD:27, pp. 8674f).
- 61 GL conf, 14 Dec 1943 (MD:27, p. 8672).
- 62 GL–Speer conf, 16 Dec 1943 (MD:32, pp. 1309ff).
- 63 Memorandum by Eberhard, 10 Jan 1944. He urged that intensive attempts should be made to brief Speer on the importance of ground-to-air missile development (MD:53, pp. 873f).
- 64 Von Lossberg at GL conf, 14 Dec 1943 (MD:27, p. 8663).
- 65 Letter, Milch to von Below, 11 Nov 1943 (MD:51, p. 511). On the Do 335 see also GL conf and Night Fighter conf, 13 Dec 1943 (MD:43, pp. 6606ff).
- 66 Milch at GL–Speer conf, 19 Jan 1944 (MD:32, pp. 1114f).

C H A P T E R 2 1

- 1 There is insufficient space to detail all the subjects discussed at Hitler’s headquarters from 2 to 4 January 1944. One was the unsatisfactory organization of electronics research: as a result of the criticism by Speer and Dönitz of electronics research under Staatsrat Plendl, Hitler approved its removal from

Göring’s control to Speer’s on 2 Jan 1944. Cf Führer naval conf, 19–20 Dec 1943; Göring conf, 3 Jan 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6568ff); and Führer naval conf, 3 Jan 1944, and Speer–Führer conf, 3 Jan 1944. Speer’s *Chronik* and Himmler’s diary, 3 Jan 1944, show Milch, Funk, Speer and Lammers dining with the Reichsführer SS before the important manpower conf with Hitler next day.

- 2 To examine the crucial manpower crisis in this book would have filled many pages and impeded the narrative. The Milch documents are a fund of information on this sorely neglected aspect of war policy and further researchers should not ignore them. The Jan 1944 conf arose from Sauckel’s belief that French workers were more productive in factories in Germany than in the ‘protected’ factories Speer was establishing in France. Speer objected that most of the deported Frenchmen escaped long before reaching the Reich (Central Planning, 21 Dec 1943, MD:48, p. 10165). The dispute was settled by Hitler on 4 Jan 1944, at a conf attended by Keitel, Speer, Backe, Himmler, Sauckel, Milch and Hitler himself; on this there is a number of reliable sources, so Speer’s recollected version in his memoirs is best read last. Lammers: memorandum of 4 Jan 1944 (ND:1292-PS) and circular, 8 Jan 1944 (on NARS film T-84, roll 175, frames 4886ff). Sauckel and Milch discussed the conf at length during Central Planning conf on 1 Mar 1944 (MD:48, esp. pp. 9953ff, 9987f, 9994, 10003f and 10012f). See also Milch’s diary, 4 Jan 1944: ‘War conf with Führer. Midday, lunch with Führer. Afternoon, manpower conf (Führer). Evening, dinner with Führer and Speer. Teahouse with [Führer], Bodenschatz, Speer and Schmundt.’ Speer’s version (*op. cit.*, pp. 333ff) differs from the wartime records: e.g., Speer himself, not Bormann, arranged the

- conf (Central Planning, 21 Dec 1943, MD:48, pp. 10126 and 10165). And Sauckel was emphatic that he could not guarantee the 4,050,000 new workers needed in 1944 (Central Planning, 1 Mar 1944, MD:48, pp. 9953ff). On the nagging but unresolved question of increasing the use of female labour in the Reich, which Hitler would not tolerate (explaining that there could be no comparison between 'our long-legged, slender women' and the 'stocky-legged, primitive and healthy Russian women' [Sauckel, Central Planning, 1 Mar 1944, MD:48, pp. 9958, 0076f, 9980]) see also Speer's testimony in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, pp. 1459ff suggesting it was *Sauckel* who always opposed the employment of women. This is not borne out by the sources. At GL conf on 27 Nov 1942 Milch interestingly stated that if the same percentage of the German public would work, including women, as worked in Britain then 'at least ten million more would be in our labour force' (MD:34, p. 2563). There were fewer women working in the Junkers factory now than pre-war, and Milch argued that the 'huge dependent-relatives allowance' paid to soldiers' families was a disincentive to their finding employment. (GL-Speer conf, 16 Dec 1943, MD:32, pp. 1306ff; at GL conf, 14 Dec 1943, MD:27, and in Central Planning, 16 Feb 1944, MD:48, pp. 10040f.)
- 3 Diary, 5 Jan 1944. Cf Speer, *Chronik*, 5 Jan 1944. Speer's protocols are missing for many of his conferences at this time. See also Milch at GL conf, 5 Jan 1944 (MD:32, p. 1203).
- 4 Diary, 8 Jan 1944. The Air Ministry release announcing the British jet aircraft research was timed 11.50 P.M., 7 Jan 1944. Cf Speer, p. 372.
- 5 GL conf, 3 Nov 1943 (MD:39, p. 5080); cf GL conf, 29 Oct 1943 (MD:39, p. 5174): 'The Reichsmarschall said yesterday the 262 is to carry bombs without fail!'
- 6 GL conf, 3 Dec 1943 (MD:39, p. 4870).
- 7 Telegram, Göring to Milch, 6 Dec 1943 (MD:53, pp. 730f.); cf GL conf, 7 Dec 1943 (MD:27, p. 8748).
- 8 Führer war conference, 20 Dec 1943. Cf Linge diary (for Hitler), 18 Dec 1943: '12.30 P.M.: conference (with Reichsmarschall); 2.25 lunch (with Reichsmarschall); 4.30 P.M. [to 5.45 P.M.] Maj Buchs (with Reichsmarschall).' Cf Göring conf, 3 Jan 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6576f).
- 9 GL conf, 25 Jan 1944 (MD:27, pp. 8411ff, 8437ff). Cf GL conf, 3 Dec 1943 (MD:39, pp. 4857ff).
- 10 War diary of Flak Regiment 155(W).
- 11 Jodl diary, 15 Dec 1943.
- 12 GL-Speer conf, 5 Jan 1944 (MD:32, p. 1214). Cf Milch at GL conf, 1 Feb 1944: 'Of course our Chief of Air Staff must be told everything.' Cf GL conf, 18 Jan 1944 (MD:27, pp. 8611f).
- 13 GL-Speer conf, 19 Jan 1944 (MD:32, p. 1152).
- 14 Cf diary, 19 Jan 1944: 'GL-Speer conference. Lively. In the evening depart in new special train with Air Armaments Office and Speer's men.'
- 15 GL conf, 18 Jan 1944 (MD:27, p. 8554).
- 16 Telegram, Göring to Milch, 12 Jan 1944 (MD:51, pp. 409ff). Milch replied on 14 Jan.
- 17 GL-Speer conf, 25 Jan 1944 (MD:27, pp. 8399ff, 8421ff).
- 18 This was the first so-called 'Operation Hamburg'; the conferences with Dornier, Messerschmitt, Blume, etc., were all recorded (MD:32, pp. 929ff).
- 19 On 3 Nov 1943 Milch recalled the demands he had made in June: 'I said at the time we must transfer appropriate forces of flak and fighters to the district to defend all the launching sites.' It was his strategic objective to establish 'flak and fighter traps' for enemy bombers, far from German soil (GL conf, MD:39, pp. 5024ff).
- 20 GL conf, 25 Jan 1944 (MD:27, p. 8470).

- 21 GL conf, 1 Feb 1944; cf GL–Speer conf, 2 Feb 1944 (MD:33).
- 22 Göring conf, stenogram, 8 Feb 1944 (MD:64, p. 6561).
- 23 Diary, 14 Feb 1944. Cf GL conf, 25 Jan 1944 (MD:27, pp. 8410ff, 8437ff).
- 24 Farewell speech to GL conf, 30 Jun 1944 (MD:56, pp. 2701–14).
- 25 This was the most common criticism. Milch in Central Planning, 16 Feb 1944 (MD:48, pp. 10072f).
- 26 *The United States Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. III, pp. 30ff.
- 27 GL–Speer conf, 23 Feb 1944.
- 28 Diary, 24 Feb 1944: ‘Göring departs for three weeks’ leave.’
- 29 Diary, 20 Feb 1944.
- 30 GL–Speer conf, 22 Feb 1944.
- 31 Cf Milch’s remarks at GL–Speer conf, 23 Feb 1944; and at GL conf, 25 Feb 1944 (MD:41, p. 5826); and in Central Planning, 1 Mar 1944 (MD:48, p. 9982). Describing his visit to the Böhler factory at Kapfenberg, he said: ‘Things are so bad that in one factory which had been disastrously bombed three times I myself had to step in and lay down regulations on how the factory was to be evacuated. It is stupid to keep the workers in a factory under saturation bombing attack, as the orders previously said, if there are not enough shelters of the right type available.’
- 32 Central Planning, 1 Mar 1944 (MD:48, p. 9982). For Milch’s praise of US tactics on 20 Feb 1944, see GL–Speer conf, 23 Feb 1944.
- 33 Fritz Seiler, *Rakan Kokothaki*, Nov 1969.
- 34 Results of air attack on Messerschmitt’s (FD.4921/45).
- 35 GL–Speer conf (‘Operation Hamburg’), 23 Feb 1944, 11.45 P.M. On the early history of the Fighter Staff, see Milch’s Pre-Trial Interrogation, 14 Oct 1946: ‘The man who put us at a disadvantage was this Herr Saur . . . For months on end we held weekly conferences with Speer to bypass all these injustices. Much was promised, but the promises were not kept . . . The result was that we could not turn out enough fighters.’ Cf also Pre-Trial Interrogation, 6 Nov 1946: ‘I was extensively throttled — I’m trying to use moderate language — by the Speer ministry to its own ends. I got nothing — neither the workers nor enough materials.’ (NARS:RG-248.)
- 36 Diary, 23 Feb 1944; Speer, *Chronik*, 23 Feb 1944; and Speer, Dec 1968.
- 37 For further details of the Fighter Staff’s foundation history, see Milch’s opening speech at GL conf, 31 Mar 1944 (ND:NOKW-417) and MCH, pp. 2181ff; and Speer’s testimony, MCH, 4 Feb 1947, pp. 1464ff; and Vorwald’s testimony, MCH, 10 Mar 1947, pp. 1685ff.
- 38 Saur: Points from a conference with Göring, 4 Mar 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6510ff). And Saur: Points from a conference with the Führer on 5 Mar 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6505ff). Diary, 5 Mar 1944, and memoirs, p. 324.
- 39 Petersen at GL conf, 29 Feb 1944.
- 40 GL conf, 24 Mar 1944 (MD:28, pp. 8838f).
- 41 Diary, 6 Mar 1944.
- 42 Diary, 8 Mar 1944. On this occasion 100 fighters were scrambled, but they failed to reach the bomber formation on time; had they done so, Galland told Milch later, they would have shot down 80 or 100 bombers.
- 43 Vorwald testified (MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1670) that Milch had previously opposed the 72-hour week as similar attempts had led to a decline in output.
- 44 GL conf, 31 Mar 1944 (MD:29, pp. 9579ff).
- 45 Diary, 25 Mar 1944. Cf Vorwald’s testimony in MCH, 11 Mar 1947, pp. 1645 and 1729f, and 21 Mar 1947, p. 2348. Also testimony of Pendele, MCH, 18 Feb 1947, pp. 1201ff.
- 46 GL conf, 24 Mar 1944 (MD:33, pp. 8837f).
- 47 GL conf, 31 Mar 1944 (MD:29, pp. 9579ff).

C H A P T E R 2 2

- 1 Cf Saur in Göring conf, stenogram, 19 Apr 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6478f).
- 2 These figures are from USSBS report, Effects of Strategic Bombing, Table 102, p. 277: Reclassification of German figures (Aircraft Division, USSBS). The Speer ministry's figures are somewhat higher: 1,830 in March, 2,034 in April, 2,377 in May 1944 (Output Survey, Weapons and Equipment, 18 Oct 1944). Air Force acceptance figures are lower: cf Milward, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
- 3 Speer himself made no bones about having attended none of the Fighter Staff's sessions: MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1470.
- 4 Cf *The Observer*, 5 Aug 1945. Milch commented on this in his diary, 6 Aug 1945. Milch's attendance at Fighter Staff sessions fell from fifteen in March to eight in April, five in May and only two in June 1944.
- 5 Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates. Cf Speer, p. 289.
- 6 Göring conference, stenogram, 4 Nov 1943 (MD:63, pp. 5935f).
- 7 Dorsch in MCH, 24 Feb 1947, p. 1369. Göring conf, stenogram, 1 May 1944: bombproof fighter factories and hangars (MD:64, pp. 6400ff).
- 8 Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, pp. 1467ff.
- 9 GL-Speer conf, 13 Oct 1943 (MD:31, p. 844).
- 10 Göring conf, stenogram, 28 Oct 1943 (MD:63, p. 6040). GL-Speer conf, 10 Nov 1943 (MD:31, pp. 680ff); cf FD.4439/45, p. 16.
- 11 Göring conf, stenogram, 8 Feb 1944: Leonberg autobahn tunnel as factory site (MD:64, p. 6520ff).
- 12 Diary, 6 Apr 1944. Cf Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1487. Saur: Points from conference with the Führer, 6–7 Apr 1944; and cf Milch, IMT, vol. IX, p. 74.
- 13 GL conf, 7 Apr 1944; and Saur at Göring conf, stenogram, 19 Apr 1944 (MD:64, p. 6480).
- 14 Göring conf, stenogram, 19 Apr 1944 (MD:64, p. 6479).
- 15 Note on Führer's discussion with Bulgarian representatives, 18 Oct 1943.
- 16 Cf Führer naval conf, 12–13 Apr 1944, and Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1480. At this time the Führer recognized that fighters must be given priority over bombers in production. The Führer's words were repeated by Göring at his conference with Dorsch, Milch and Saur on 19 Apr 1944 (stenogram, MD:64, p. 6481): 'This was the opinion expressed by the Führer when the Grand-Admiral [Dönitz] tried to make small inroads into the fighter programme by asking for equal priority for certain naval items.'
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 6458, 6460.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 6459.
- 19 Dorsch in MCH, 24 Feb 1947, pp. 1369f; also Dorsch: Protocol of Führer conference of 14 Apr, including conference with Reichsmarschall, dated 17 Apr 1944 (Boelcke, pp. 349ff; cf Speer, p. 348).
- 20 Göring conf, stenogram, 19 Apr 1944: 'The Führer sent for me the day before yesterday and we both walked up and down for some time, discussing it all over again.' (MD:64, pp. 6480f.)
- 21 Göring's opening remarks were: 'The Führer commanded me to hold today's conference, and he also prescribed exactly who was to take part; he did so because he desires this matter to be tackled with vigour.' (*Ibid.*, p. 6458.)
- 22 Diary, 18 Apr 1944. Memoirs, pp. 324f. Milch in MCH, 17 Mar 1947, pp. 2079f. Interview, May 1968.
- 23 Göring conf, stenogram, 19 Apr 1944. Subject: concrete construction projects. Those present were Göring, Milch, Bodenschatz, Korten, Diesing, v. Brauchitsch, Saur, Dorsch and Knipping (MD:64, pp. 6457ff). Cf Speer, p. 348, and Milch diary, 19 Apr 1944: 'Major conference with Göring, Dorsch and Saur. Intrigues [against] Speer.'
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 6499.

- 25 *The United States Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. III, pp. 175ff.
- 26 Speer: Memorandum for the Führer, A Survey on Construction Work in the Reich, and Proposed Reorganization of the Todt Organization, dated 19 Apr 1944 (FD.2690/45). Cf Speer, *op. cit.*, pp. 348ff.
- 27 Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates. Diary, 20 Apr 1944; cf *Völkischer Beobachter*, 25 and 26 Apr 1944. Diary, 5 Aug 1947; and interviews with Milch in May 1968, Vorwald in Jun 1968.
- 28 1945 commentary on diary, 20 Apr 1944. Cf Speer, *Chronik*, 20–21 Apr 1944.
- 29 Milch in Central Planning, 18 May 1944 (MD:55, p. 2276). Ganzenmüller reported that 40 to 42 trains were being shot up daily on average (*ibid.*, pp. 2269f).
- 30 Office of Air Armament: On the reasons for increased deliveries under the Luftwaffe programme, from Mar to Jun 1944, dated approx. Aug 1944 (FD.4439/45), p. 4.
- 31 Korten was following a very independent line already. ‘Korten is very optimistic,’ wrote Field Marshal v. Richthofen in his diary on 22 May 1944. ‘I.e., in this connection he exactly follows the views of the Führer’s headquarters. He has far-reaching plans for the reorganization of Luftwaffe command. Conflicts with Milch and his organization, but of a concrete nature and fully justified. Plans to expand the Luftwaffe; what Korten wants is quite sensible. But he is no fighter, so we must wait and see whether he manages to avoid all the pitfalls.’
- 32 Koller, letter to Chief of Air Staff, Korten, 5 May 1944, and appendices re: Structure of Production Programme, Study of Aircraft Supply Position for Bomber Units (in OKW war diary, appendices vol. C: NARS film T-321, roll 10).
- 33 Chief, Luftwaffe operations staff: Study on Necessary Minimum Strength of German Air Force to Maintain Position in Central Europe, dated 19 May 1944 (from the papers of Gen Karl Koller, loaned to the author by the Führungskademie der Bundeswehr). A copy is in the Milch documents (MD:53, pp. 706ff). Milch received it on 30 May and pencil-led bitter comments in its margin.
- 34 Diary, 22 May 1944; cf Speer, pp. 357f. (He wrongly puts the date as 23 May.)
- 35 Göring, quoted this at his conf the next day, 23 May 1944 (MD:64, p. 6846).
- 36 Saur at Göring conf, 25 May 1944 (MD:64, p. 6726); Milch at Göring conf, 24 May 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6906, 6911); and Messerschmitt at Göring conf, 25 May 1944 (MD:64, pp. 6727f).
- 37 Göring conf, stenogram, 23 May 1944. Subject: Programme and planning conference. Those present were: Göring, Speer, Milch, v. Richthofen, Korten, Koller, Vorwald, Galland, Eschenauer, Diesing, Marienfeld, Petersen, v. Below, Knemeyer, Krause, Zurmühlen, Schieber, Dorsch, Saur, Werner, Frydag, Heyne, Schaaf, v. Brauchitsch, Schubert (MD:64, pp. 6826ff). Cf Vorwald’s testimony in MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1696.
- 38 Göring conf, 23 May 1944, p. 6833. German bomber production in 1944 was: May, 648; Jun, 703; Jul, 767; Aug, 548; Sep, 428; Oct, 326; Nov, 412; Dec, 262.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 6835. At the GL conf of 25 Feb 1944 Col Petersen had reported flying the four-engined version of the He 177 and said its qualities were ‘amazingly good’ (MD:41, p. 5833).
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 6836.
- 41 The following Ju 287 jet bomber production was planned: one each in Aug, Oct and Dec 1944; two in Jan and Feb 1945, three in Mar, six in Apr, 13 in May, 21 in Jun, 26 in Jul, 30 in Aug, 35 in Sep, 55 in Nov and 100 a month thereafter (*ibid.*, pp. 6785f). Göring had a very high opinion of v. Richthofen, rating him, with Kesselring, as the best operational commander in the Luftwaffe (USSBS

- interrogation, no. 56, 29 Jun 1945).
- 42 Diary, 23 May 1944. ‘Technical conference with Göring, Speer. Afternoon to see Führer, Me 262! Fighter-bomber! Evening, Korten.’ Baumbach and various other writers have put this important conf in April 1944 or even in 1943. From the diary and from references in the subsequent Göring confs (24 and 25 May), it was unquestionably on 23 May 1944. Cf Saur’s postwar notes on Speer’s Führer conference protocols (FD.3049/49, file 1, p. 0364): ‘23 May 1944: the additional protocol on the conference with Göring, Milch, Speer, Saur and Petersen on the 262 is missing.’ Cf v. Richthofen diary, 23 May 1944. Colonel Petersen, Jun 1968; and letter to the author, 2 Jan 1970.
- 43 Galland: *Die Ersten und die Letzten*, p. 355.
- 44 Göring conf, 24 May 1944 (MD:64, p. 6905). V. Richthofen, who was evidently present during the Führer conference, noted only: ‘Afterward Milch and the Reichsmarschall came [to see the Führer] to discuss technical air matters. I sat in on this. Immediately afterward, the things I reported to the Führer were ordered from the Reichsmarschall.’ That evening, v. Richthofen asked for a private talk with Saur: ‘Milch accompanies him, as he thinks there is going to be talk against him and his system. Bad sign for Milch. Saur makes a splendid impression and (in Milch’s presence) criticizes what has been done hitherto only in moderation. One can view Saur’s future actions with equanimity.’
- 45 Milch, May 1968. The words are repeated almost verbatim by Gen Rieckhoff: *Trumpf oder Bluff*, pp. 136ff. (Milch was not the source.)
- 46 Göring conf, stenogram, 24 May 1944 (MD:64, p. 6901).
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 6901.
- 48 Cf also Göring at his conf, 25 May 1944, stenogram (MD:64, pp. 6718f).
- 49 Göring conf, stenogram, 24 May 1944. Subject: Shape of programme and planning. Those present were as in note 37, except for v. Richthofen (MD:64, pp. 6907, 6972f). After the war, Göring put the blame on Hitler. He blamed the Me 262 ‘fighter-bomber’ decision on ‘Hitler’s madness. When the first Me 262 was ready, I had it displayed to him, full of hope that at last I had my hands on something which would throw the Allies out of Germany’s skies and put some spirit back into the Luftwaffe. But to my, and everybody’s horror the Führer announced, “The aircraft does not interest me in the least as a fighter”. He insisted on having it operated as a fast bomber and ordered that nobody was to speak of the Me 262 as a fighter. It was to be called “Blitz bomber”, and I had to issue an order to that effect.’ (*Inter Avia*, Jul 1946, p. 14.) This is repeated in Ninth Air Force interrogation of Göring, 1 Jun 1945, paras 116ff. But in his interrogation by USSBS on 29 Jun 1945 he stated, ‘The Führer had originally directed that it be produced as a fighter, but in May 1944 he ordered that it be converted into a fighter-bomber. This conversion is one of the main reasons for the delay in getting this plane into action in any quantity.’
- 50 Diary, 24 May 1944.
- 51 Göring conf, 29 May 1944, stenogram (MD:64, p. 6333).
- 52 Speer, *Chronik*, 26 May 1944. Milch in MCH, 17 Mar 1947, p. 2053.
- 53 Göring conf, 29 May 1944, stenogram (MD:64, pp. 6323ff). Subject: Me 262. Those present were Göring, Korten, Bodenschatz, Galland, Marienfeld, Thierfelder, Behrens, Messerschmitt, v. Brauchitsch, Schubert and Petersen.
- 54 Hitler’s doubts about the Me 262’s usefulness as a fighter have often been criticized, but there is operational evidence in support of them. Prof Kurt Tank commented on the superior Allied

- fighter tactics against the Me 262 (in report by Dipl Ing Wolfgang Hupe: Note on a Visit to Prof Dipl Ing Tank, Lindau, 2 Feb 1945; NARS film T-178, roll 4, frames 9201f). Messerschmitt's own Dipl Ing Ludwig Bölkow reported that jet fighters were particularly vulnerable during landing and taking off because of their slow speeds, and that enemy piston-engined fighters could easily dodge the fire of a jet fighter by tricks like sideslipping, throttling-back, and lowering their flaps: 'This was clear from the outset to all the experts.' Bölkow blamed the Air Staff for failing to adapt their tactics accordingly. On the other hand, the bomber version of the Me 262 had flown up to eight sorties a day in KG 51 without breakdowns. (Report by Bölkow with appendices, Oberammergau, 25 Oct 1944; Seiler papers, FD.4924/45.)
- 55 Telegram, Göring to Milch and others, 27 May 1944 (MD:53, pp. 730f); Milch received it 30 May.
- 56 See note 53. MD:64, p. 6326.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 6332.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 6336.
- 59 Diary, 2 Jun 1944; and Vorwald in MCH, 10 Mar 1947, p. 1702. The ratio of aircraft production was to be three for Germany for every one for Hungary.
- 60 Speer-Führer conf, 3–5 Jun 1944 (Boelcke, p. 375). Göring continued to maintain this argument after the war: cf USSBS interrogation no. 56, 29 Jun 1945. See also FD.4439/45 and Milch's remarks in his farewell speech to the Office of Air Armament.
- 61 Saur: Führer conf, 7 Jun 1944 (Boelcke, pp. 380f); and Saur at Fighter Staff conf, 8 Jun 1944 (MD:7, pp. 3218ff). Göring was not present at the Führer conf on 7 Jun.
- 62 Milch in Central Planning, 7 Jun 1944 (MD:7, p. 2138). He was complaining about the additional bombers added to the Fighter Staff production pro-
- gramme by Göring on the Ober-salzberg.
- 63 *Inter Avia*, Aug 1946, p. 12.
- 64 Diary, 13 Jun 1944: 'Cherry-stone [flying bomb] flops, as zero hour advanced two days.'
- 65 War diary, Flak Regt 155(W), 13 Jun 1944.
- 66 Diary, 15 Jun 1944.
- 67 Diary, 17 Jun 1944: 'Telephone call from Führer at 1735 hrs from his journey in west: "Thanks for Cherry-stone, has exceeded our wildest expectations. According to Below it was I [Milch] who personally had the idea."
- 68 David Irving: *The Mare's Nest* (London, 1964), pp. 302f.
- 69 Diary, 19–20 Jun 1944. Milch in MCH, 18 Mar 1947, p. 2082. Cf his Pre-Trial Interrogation, 30 Aug 1946: '... because on 20 June I was discharged from my offices.'
- 70 1945 commentary on diary, 20 Jun 1944.
- 71 Webster and Frankland: *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, vol. II, p. 280. Cf USSBS Aircraft Division Industry Report, no. 4, p. 35.
- 72 Speer: circular to highest Reich authorities, Berchtesgaden, 21 Jun 1944 (MPP and MD:56, p. 2699). Cf Speer: speech at armaments convention in Linz, 24 June 1944: 'I have appointed Field-Marshal Milch my deputy. I make it quite clear that the department heads will continue to remain responsible only to me for their programme.' (Bundesarchiv file R3/1550, pp. 149f.) Cf Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1491. The fact that he had stated that the department heads were to deal with him as before meant that in reality Milch was not his deputy. Cf Speer, *Chronik*, 24 Jun 1944.
- 73 *Es spricht der Führer*, p. 359. Diary, 26 Jun 1944: 'Armaments convention, Linz. Air raid alert. By car through St Florian to Berchtesgaden. Führer's speech to armaments chiefs. Conference with Führer on (a) tanks; (b) the Heinkel 177. Then special conference between

- Führer, Speer and me. Evening, departed for Berlin.'
- 74 Note of Führer–Mussolini conf, 20 Jul 1944. Hitler: 'With the aid of these fighters, the protection of the battlefields and the production centres would be guaranteed first; and only then could Germany go in for counter-attacks.' He spoke of the new 'jet fighters', of which production was to reach 1,200 a month, and which he intended to operate against the beachhead in Normandy: 'The effect would certainly be decisive.'
- 75 Milch's farewell speech to the Air Armament Office, 30 Jun 1944. The pages of the GL conf concerned were placed in his private file (MD:56, pp. 2701ff), away from the rest of the conf record (MD:29, pp. 9162ff). Cf diary, 30 Jun 1944; and Milch in MCH, p. 2018.
- 76 Koller: notes on Führer's war conf, 25 Jun 1944. Cf Saur diary, 25 Jun 1944 (postwar).
- 77 Koller: daily record, 26 Jun 1944.
- 78 Koller: notes on Führer's war conf, 27 Jun 1944; and daily record, 29 Jun 1944. Koller objected to Göring that the directive would mean an early end not only to bombing operations but also to sea-mining operations. The new aircraft programme ('Göring programme') was finalized with Hitler on 7 Jul 1944 (cf Speer: Führer conf, 68 Jul 1944; Boelcke, p. 396). Milch's diary, 7 Jul 1944: 'Führer holds [aircraft] programme conference, attended by Göring, Saur, Diesing. Nobody told me — thank God!' Cf also Speer, *Chronik*, Jul 1944.
- 79 Diary, 20 Jul 1944. Telegram, Milch to Führer, 21 Jul 1944 (MD:53, p. 1091).
- 80 Interrogation by Kempner, 1 Oct 1947. Diary, 8 Oct 1947. For Milch's attitude to the murder plot, see also diary, 6 Apr and 16 Sep 1948, 5 Feb and 2 Mar 1950.
- 81 Milch: Hitler and his Subordinates. Lt-Gen Werner Kreipe, diary, 24 Jul 1944 (Foreign Military Studies, MS:P-069); *ibid.*, 19 Aug 1944; and letter from Hans-
- Karl v. Winterfeld, 13 Sept 1969.
- 82 Koller diary, 24 Jul 1944: 'Was Gen Korten, who repeatedly emphasized in his speeches that he and I were the closest personal friends, really so faithless? Or is there a lack of moral courage somewhere else, is somebody taking cover behind the dead general?'
- 83 Koller diary, 26 Jul 1944: 'The Jeschonnek and Milch episodes are common knowledge. Brauchitsch and Diesing once told me they were sick of the game and wouldn't ever intrigue again, but "cats can't stop mousing"!'
- 84 Letter, Maj-Gen Hermann Aldinger to the author, 9 Nov 1969.
- 85 Koller diary, 8 Aug 1944.
- 86 Kreipe diary, 11 Aug 1944.
- 87 Letter, Milch to Kreipe, 8 Aug 1944 (MD:53, p. 1084).
- 88 Kreipe diary, 12 Aug 1944.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 30 Aug 1944.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 3 Sep 1944.
- 91 Diary, 29–30 Jul, 1 Aug 1944. Milch's documents originally contained a memorandum on a conf on this topic with SS-Gen Skorzeny on 31 July 1944 (cf MD:53, p. 691), but it is now missing. The history is set out in a letter from Dipl Ing Otto Skorzeny to the author, 11 Jun 1970.
- 92 Diary, 19 Jul, 9 Aug 1944. Memoirs.
- 93 Diary, 15 Aug 1944.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 28 Sep 1944.
- 95 Report of Dipl Ing Ludwig Bölkow, 25 Oct 1944 (Seiler papers: FD.4924/45).
- 96 Report to Minister [Speer?], 'Production and Operations of Fighter Aircraft of the Messerschmitt Group', dated 30 Oct 1944 (*ibid.*).
- 97 Speer, *Chronik*. Milch diary, 1 Oct 1944.
- 98 Diary, 12 Jan 1945.
- 99 Diary, 15 Jan 1945. Interview, Oct 1967. Pre-Trial Interrogation, 14 Oct 1946.
- 100 Milch interrogation, CSDIC (UK) report SRGG 1255(C), 23 May 1945; top secret.
- 101 Diary, 19–21 Jan 1945.

- 102 Sepp Dietrich related this to Milch at Nuremberg. Diary, 1 Dec 1947, 21 Mar 1948.
- 103 Diary, 1 Mar 1945. Pre-Trial Interrogation, 30 Aug 1946. Diary, 13 Mar 1945, and Speer in MCH, 4 Feb 1947, p. 1490: 'Hitler then sent for me and told me that on no account was Milch to be allowed to take up any such activity. I replied that I should like to know why. Hitler did not give any reasons, but he said he had material from Kaltenbrunner and that this would be more than enough to justify preventing Milch from returning to active life.'
- 104 Diary, 3 Apr. 1945: 'Transport Staff conference. Speer relates his struggle with the Führer over demolitions.'
- 105 Diary, 21 Apr 1945.
- 106 Diary, 22 May 1948. Speer, Dec 1968, states that when the Dönitz government was formed, and not the Himmler one he had feared, he dropped the idea as pointless.
- 107 Diary, 24 Apr 1945.

C H A P T E R 2 3

- 1 Diary. Milch also wrote a number of sworn statements on the circumstances of his capture of which this account is necessarily non-specific.
- 2 Cf Capt Fritz Brustat-Naval: *Unternehmung Rettung — Letztes Schiff nach Westen* (Köhlers Verlagsgesellschaft, 1971); and even more recently the excellent East German account by Rudi Goguel: *Cap Arcona* (Röderberg Verlag, Frankfurt/Main, 1972). Allied records indicate that the British aircraft responsible came from the Second Tactical Air Force. *Cap Arcona*, a luxury liner, was 27,560 tons. For an alternative view of what happened, see the official captions on the British war photographs BU 5424 to 5430 in the Imperial War Museum, London: 'Some 80 Polish women and children and a few men were being removed for some reason or other by the Germans by barge [sic]. Our aircraft unfortunately strafed the barge, putting it out of commission, but the German SS troops opened up machine-guns on the shipment, killing every occupant.' See also the memoirs of Brig Derek Mills-Roberts (Wm. Kimber, London) and Michael Horbach: *Out of the Night*, p. 249. In fact 7,300 prisoners and seamen were drowned.
- 3 Milch affidavit, 8 Mar 1948; and his statement at Nuremberg, IMT, vol. ix, p. 125. See also the letter of Milch's counsel, Dr Fritz Bergold, to Princess Josia zu Waldeck, 8 Mar 1948; and diary. Milch's secretary, Frau Elisabeth Hesselbarth, was one of those who personally witnessed Milch's head injuries next day (interview, Dec 1969).
- 4 Diary.
- 5 Letter, Lt Col Ernst Englander to Judge Robert H. Jackson, 18 May 1946 (NARS: Jackson papers, box 179).
- 6 Diary, 30 May 1945.
- 7 Diary, 5 Jun 1945.
- 8 Werner Bross: *Gespräche mit Hermann Göring*, pp. 85f (entry of 20 Feb 1946).
- 9 Reichsmarschall's speech to the Air Staff officers, 25 Nov 1944 (Koller papers): 'The German must display his greatest strength as being able to contemplate the most awful difficulties, and above all the prospect of Eternity itself, with a certain equanimity and calmness . . . For me Life is only one of many phases, a phase in which I am to deport myself on this globe as well as possible, but nothing else . . . To Hell with the lot of them, before I would allow myself to be pulled into the mire, or forced to drink the vinegar sponge!'
- 10 A handwritten note amongst Milch's prison papers.
- 11 Diary, 29 Jul 1945. Speer confirms that Göring was financially involved in the Siebel company (interview, Dec 1968).
- 12 Diary, 20 Aug 1945. On Koppenberg's

- alleged financial involvements with Göring, see Pre-Trial Interrogation of Milch, 6 Nov 1946.
- 13 Diary, 22 Sep 1945.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 15 and 19 Oct 1945.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 23 Oct 1945. Pre-Trial Interrogation, 23 Oct 1945.
- 16 Diary, 24 Oct 1945.
- 17 Richter (MCH, 11 Feb 1947, p. 897); and Pendele (*ibid.*, 18 Feb 1947, pp. 1206f).
- 18 Letter, Milch to Himmler, 31 Aug 1942 (ND:343-PS); letter, Himmler to Milch, 27 Aug 1942 (ND:1607-PS).
- 19 Letter, Milch to SS-Ogruf. Wolff, 20 May 1942 (ND:343-PS).
- 20 Dr Romberg: 'Short report on the briefing arranged for 11 Sep [1942] in Herr State Secretary Milch's presence.'
- 21 *Ibid.*; and diary, which shows that on 11 Sep 1942 Milch was at Rechlin and Neu-ruppin with Speer all day.
- 22 Pre-Trial Interrogation, 27 Oct 1945.
- 23 Diary, 31 Oct 1945.
- 24 Diary, 16 and 19 Feb, 14–15 Mar 1946; cf Seventh Army Interrogation of v. Blomberg, 13 Sep 1945: 'Blomberg despises his fellow officers of the German General Staff. He is grieved by the knowledge that none of his former subordinates was sufficiently courageous and independent to keep in touch with him after his separation from the Wehrmacht.' (SAIC/FIR/46.)
- 25 *Ibid.*, 6 Mar 1946.
- 26 Cf Bross: *Gespräche mit Hermann Göring*, 25 May 1946.
- 27 Statement of Dr Kurt Kaufmann, Kaltenbrunner's defence counsel, who also stood in for Dr Stahmer, 19 Jan 1947 (MPP); cf Dr Werner Milch, 'Letter to a friend in America', a detailed report on the background to the trial, given wide circulation (amongst others to Sen Taft) in the US and Canada early in 1948 (cited as Werner Milch, *op. cit.*).
- 28 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 Mar 1946.
- 29 *The Times*, London, 9 Mar 1946: 'And the most remarkable statement he made

was that it was not until 12 October 1939, with the Polish campaign almost concluded, that Hitler gave his assent to a full-scale programme of bomb production.'

- 30 Printed record of International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg (a body which was neither international, military, nor tribunal), 8 Mar 1946, vol. ix, p. 63 (cited as IMT, vol. ix). The German text has been used, and corrected where necessary against the sound recordings held in Washington.
- 31 *The Times*, London, 12 Mar 1946.
- 32 Cf IMT, vol. ix, p. 138. This was omitted from page 5661, line 32, of the *mimeo-graphed* transcript; the passage concerned is on disc 1440B (NARS). The further part quoted by Milch does not figure on the discs, although there is no evidence that the original wire-recording of the US Signals Corps was not 'edited' before the discs were made. Dr Bergold also recalled Milch's having made the missing statements.
- 33 IMT, vol. ix, p. 88 (disc 1430B).
- 34 IMT, vol. ix, p. 125 (disc 1437B).
- 35 This was missing from the *mimeo-graphed* transcript (p. 5660, line 20) but restored in the printed transcript, IMT, vol. ix, p. 137 (disc 1440B).
- 36 Diary, 11 Mar 1946.
- 37 Diary, 21 Mar 1946. And see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 Mar 1946.
- 38 Cf also diary, 18 Apr 1946: 'In the evening wireless announces that twenty officers are in Dachau and are being treated in accordance with Geneva Convention. So something of our maltreatment must have been rumoured abroad.'
- 39 On the Dachau bunker, see also Kesseling, *op. cit.*, p. 429.
- 40 Letter, Thomas J. Dodd to Jackson, 10 Jun 1946; cf Milch diary, 4 June 1946. And OUSCC Buckslip, Lt Col J. Amen to T. J. Dodd, 7 Jun 1946.
- 41 Letter, Milch to Dr Dix, 22 Jul 1946. Di-

- ary, 21 Aug 1946.
 42 Diary, 6 Sep 1946.
 43 Cf Pre-Trial Interrogation, 18 Oct 1946:
 ‘Might I ask for a table. It is extremely
 tiring to write on a bed.’ And *ibid.*, 6
 Nov 1946.
 44 *Ibid.*, 14 Oct 1946.
 45 *Ibid.*, 17 Oct 1946.
 46 *Ibid.*, 24 Oct 1946.
 47 Pre-Trial Interrogation, 8 Nov 1946.
 48 Diary, 8 Nov 1946.

C H A P T E R 2 4

- 1 Bill of Indictment, signed Brig Gen Telford Taylor, Nuremberg, 13 Nov 1946 (in Nuremberg Staatsarchiv); diary, 14 Nov 1946.
 2 Control Council Law No. 10, especially Article III, section 2. See also the introduction to NARS publication, ‘Preliminary Inventory of Textual Records of the US Military Tribunals, Nuremberg, 1966’.
 3 Prof Telford Taylor, Oct 1969.
 4 Diary, 14 Nov 1946; Erhard Milch: petition for writ of *habeas corpus*, 31 May 1947.
 5 R. T. Paget, QC: *Manstein, his Campaigns and Trial*, p. 80.
 6 Control Council Proclamation No. 2, section 6.
 7 The legal division of OMGUS itself commented in a memorandum on Milch’s petition (Berlin, 12 June 1947, cited hereafter as OMGUS memo).
 8 OMGUS memo.
 9 Dr Fritz Bergold, Dec 1968 and Jan 1969.
 Letter, Bergold to the author, 7 Nov 1968.
 10 Affidavit, SS-Standartenführer Wolfram Sievers, 19 Nov 1946 (ND:NOKW-264).
 11 Affidavit, Dr Siegfried Ruff (ND:NOKW-140). Interrogation of Walter Neff, 23 Dec 1946.
 12 Diary, 2 Dec 1946.
 13 *Ibid.*, 9 Dec 1946.
 14 On the status of the American Military

- Tribunal judges, see Paget, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
 15 Prof Telford Taylor, Oct 1969; interview, Frau Traudl Junge; this is confirmed by the British court interpreter Harold Kurtz (Sep 1970).
 16 Letter, Dr Werner Milch to the author, 8 Nov 1968.
 17 Diary, 31 Dec 1946.
 18 Official transcript of the US Military Tribunal II in the Case of the United States of America *versus* Erhard Milch, defendant, at Nuremberg, Germany (cited above and hereafter as Milch Case Hearings or MCH), 2 Jan 1947, pp. 9ff. (The transcript is available at the Wiener Library, London: the Nuremberg Staatsarchiv; and NARS).
 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 9ff.
 20 Interrogations of Fritz Sauckel, 22 Sep 1946 (ND:3721-PS) and of Hermann Göring, 6 Sep 1946 (ND:NOKW-311). This was after the final speeches and before sentence was pronounced in the IMT.
 21 MCH, 6 Jan 1947, pp. 130f, 272, 273, 443.
 22 MCH, pp. 154f, and p. 188.
 23 MCH, pp. 477f.
 24 Dr Werner Milch, *op. cit.* R. T. Paget, QC, writes similar criticism of the British press’s behaviour during the Manstein trial: ‘As a military tribunal was not a real court they were not restrained by any fear of contempt of court.’ (p. 82.)
 25 Dr Gaston M. Oulman: ‘Der “arisierte” Feldmarschall’, in *Münchner Mittag*, 24 Jan 1947. And Bergold’s letter of protest to the Secretary General of Military Tribunal II, Nuremberg, 8 Apr 1947 (Nuremberg Staatsarchiv: Rep 501, LXC, Nr. 9 u. 9a).
 26 Diary, 15–16 and 31 Jan 1947.
 27 Bergold, Dec 1968.
 28 Milch had applied for Speer as a witness on about 6 Jan 1947 (Speer diary).
 29 Speer diary, 3 Feb 1947.
 30 Bergold, Dec 1968. Speer diary, 4 Feb 1947. Cf MCH, 4 Feb 1947, pp. 1444ff.

- 31 Letter, Frau Käthe Herbst (Bergold's secretary) to the author, 17 Dec 1968.
- 32 MCH, 6 Feb 1947, pp. 727ff.
- 33 MCH, 7 Feb 1947, p. 771.
- 34 MCH, 11 Feb 1947, p. 862. *Hamburger Freie Presse*, 12 Feb 1947.
- 35 MCH, 11 Feb 1947, p. 899.
- 36 MCH, 18 Feb 1947, p. 1271.
- 37 Among the Jackson papers (NARS) is a top secret British memorandum of 27 May 1945 in which the British government approves of the deportation and forced labour of German workers and prisoners of war.
- 38 MCH, 5 Mar 1947, pp. 1542ff. On German knowledge of Soviet plans to use German forced labour postwar, see also the Goebbels diaries, 12 and 21 Nov 1943.
- 39 Bergold, Jan 1969. Diary, 6 Mar 1947.
- 40 Diary, 31 Dec 1946, 31 Jan, 28 Feb 1947.
- 41 MCH, 14 Mar 1947, p. 1980. Cf diary.
- 42 Diary, 21 Mar 1947.
- 43 Testimony of Krysiak, MCH, 21 Mar 1947, pp. 2379ff.
- 44 Diary, 25 Mar 1947. Cf Dr Werner Milch, *op. cit.*
- 45 It is not uninteresting to find among official American files the following note, dated 22 Jun 1945: 'The Aero-Medical Section of the United States Strategic Air Forces wish to interrogate the following German scientist: Stabsarzt Rascher. With the SS. Did experiments in cold-water decompression and explosive decompression at Dachau.' (NARS: special film.)
- 46 Closing speech by Denney, MCH, 25 Mar 1947, pp. 2452ff.
- 47 Closing speech by Milch, MCH, 25 Mar 1947 (MPP).
- 48 Diary, 25 Mar 1947.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 3 Apr 1947.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 7 Apr 1947.
- 51 MCH, 16 Apr 1947, pp. 251ff.
- 52 Prof Telford Taylor, Oct 1969.
- 53 MCH, 17 Apr 1947, p. 2543; Dr Werner Milch, *op. cit.*
- 54 Diary, 17 Apr 1947. The British inter-

preter Harold Kurtz said (Sep 1970) that, as sentence was passed, Milch defiantly thrust his jaw out and marched out with his head up as though he had won a victory.

55 Vorwald, Jun 1968.

E P I L O G U E

- 1 Diary, 22 Apr 1947; and Werner Milch, *op. cit.* On Milch's sentence it should be stated that according to Telford Taylor, Judge Phillips believed Milch's sentence could have been 'increased' if he had been charged with preparing a war of aggression as well. See also diary, 25 Apr and 29 May 1947.
- 2 In general on the issue of Milch's parentage: Milch, Nov 1967; letter to the author, 7 Aug 1968; interview, Nov 1968. Körner, Göring's other state secretary, had evidently discussed the allegation privately with Milch a week before the motor journey which took place on 18 Aug 1933. Diary, 11 Aug 1933: 'Körner re: parentage . . . Evening, with Körner to see [SS Chief of Police] Daluge at Döberitz.'
- 3 In his officer's record (*Personalnachweis*) Milch's religion is entered as 'evangelical'. In his answers to the American Questionnaire (see chap. 1, note 107), Milch also wrote 'evangelical' in answer to the questions: 'What religion? Which church do you belong to? Which religion did you enter in the National Census of 1939?' The records of the Reich Office of *Sippenforschung* (Family Research) held at the Deutsches Zentralarchiv, Potsdam, have no file on Milch.
- 4 Seiler wrote in his unpublished memoirs: 'At the time, I did not know he [Milch] could not stand Croneiss.' Croneiss showed the 'Milch' dossier to some of his fellow directors at the Bavarian Aircraft Works; interviews of Seiler (suc-

- cessor of Croneiss and deputy chairman after 1940), Nov 1969; and Rakan Kokothaki, commercial manager, Nov 1969.
- 5 Letter, Klara Milch (*née* Vetter) to Fritz Herrmann, 16 Mar 1933 (MPP).
- 6 Statement dictated by Anton Milch, Kiel, 7 Oct 1933 (MPP). Diary, 7 Oct 1933.
- 7 Diary, 1 Nov 1933. That Milch accepted that the tragic fact discovered by the authorities and related by his mother was true, is indisputable: he marked the date his true father had died in his pocket diary, and every year after that he marked the man's birthday along with those of his wife, mother, and colleagues in his diaries, and he continued to do so long after the war had ended. Although the name of Anton Milch is given as his father in his officer's record (*Personalausweis*), the date of his death is given as 23 June 1906, the date the other man died. Cf diary, 10–11 Oct 1933: 'Körner, re: Croneiss . . . Evening: I confess to Göring about [——] — the real father's name. 14 Oct 1933: "Göring sees Croneiss, throws him out. Rage at all these trouble-makers.'
- 8 Diary, 31 Aug 1948.
- 9 Milch said in Feb 1969, 'That was always my big handicap.'
- 10 OMGUS memo, 12 Jun 1947.
- 11 Petition of Erhard Milch to the Supreme Court of the United States. Nuremberg, 31 May 1947 (MPP).
- 12 Cf *Stars and Stripes* (European edition), 8 Jun 1947.
- 13 Bergold, Dec 1968.
- 14 Letter, Swiss Consul-General, Munich, to Bergold, 14 Nov 47 (in diary).
- 15 Diary, 8 May 1947.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 10 May 1947.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 8 Jun 1947.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 10 May and 18 Jul 1947.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 19 Feb 1947.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 18 Jul and 30 May 1947; cf 8 May and 20 Jun 1947.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 26 Apr 1947.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 9 May 1947.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 14 May; cf 9 May 1947. After Speer had gone, one of his senior officers, Dr Schieber of the Armaments Supply Office, told Milch that he was sorely disappointed in his chief: 'The assassination thing has badly damaged his public image — in fact it was all quite different, he planned it against Bormann and Himmler (the rivals!).' (Diary, 28 Aug 1947.) In connection with Speer's plan, cf also diary, 6 Mar and 21 June 1946, 9 and 14 May 1947, 28 Aug 1947 and 22 May 1948.
- 24 Diary, 20 June 1947.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 19 Jul 1947.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 9–10 Jun 1947.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 20 Aug and 4 Sep 1947.
- 28 Certified copy: previous convictions of Josef Krysiak, born 8 May 1911 in Dortmund. Cf statement by Dr Fröschmann in the Pohl Case, Military Tribunal II (case IV) at Nuremberg, 4 Sep 1947, pp. 731off.
- 29 In February 1952 Krysiak resumed his career of fraud (cf letter, 'Hanse' Grosshandel GmbH, Hamburg to Bergold, 21 Mar 1952 in Bergold files: Krysiak).
- 30 Letter, John H. McCloy (US High Commissioner for Germany), 31 Jan 1951. Memorandum No. 9, War Crimes Prison No. 1, 7 Feb 1951 (MPP).

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