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Notes on an interview of Generalleutnant a.D. Ottomar Hansen, at his home, Wiesbaden, Unter den Eichen 2; from 4.00 - 10.20 p.m., 31st October 1971.

1. Hansen was 1. Adjutant des Chefs OKW from early April 1939 until early May 1940; he then took up front-line service, and at the end of the war was Chef des Stabes der Heeresgruppe Kurland; he spent ten years in Soviet captivity after the war.

2. He was eingeweiht in his position as Keitel's adjutant for some weeks by his predecessor Hptm Wolf Eberhard. Hansen volunteered that one of his most vivid recollections is the Hitler's short Ansprache to the Oberbefehlshaber on his 50th birthday (†), 20th April 1939. He and Eberhard accompanied Keitel together with the other C in C's to the new Reichskanzlei; at the door of Hitler's Arbeitszimmer, Hansen hesitated as to whether he was supposed to enter to, but Otto Meissner (in uniform*, unusually) beckoned that he should enter too. Hitler faced them from in front of his desk; the four Befehlshaber (right to left, facing Hitler: Göring, Raeder, von Brauchitsch, Keitel) stood at attention, while their adjutants stood behind them. (Hansen cannot recall whether Engel and Hitler's other adjutants were present or not). This was the Arbeitszimmer with Lenbach's portrait of Bismarck, the room reached through einer langen Flur. Göring then launched into an eloquent and emotional birthday speech for Hitler, spoken without notes, sehr ergriffen, on the subject of Hitler, der alte Kampfgenosse. Hitler then surprised Hansen (and Eberhard) by replying very earnestly (recalls Hansen) on the need to plan for eine mögliche Auseinandersetzung, which would not come in 1939, he emphasised, but which would not be delayed long after that; the sense was that Germany would be gezwungen, die Initiative zu ergreifen. Hansen was particularly surprised by

† This scene has already been described by Eberhard: interviews of ...

* Uniform eines Oberstleutnants des Heeres.

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the grim tone of Hitler's speech, since he, coming directly from "der Front" (his unit in der Tschechei) had had no inkling that the situation was so serious. That evening, when he saw his wife (at Kassel) he told her that he had experienced a most remarkable event that morning, which would change all their lives soon (dem Sinne nach) but he could not of course give her precise details.

This particular information was vividly recalled by Frau Hansen, who was present during the interview.

3. Lagebesprechungen etc were held in the "Bismarck-Saal" of the old Reichskanzlei during the winter of 1939/1940. Hansen recalls standing with Keitel on one occasion during the serious of prolonged arguments between Hitler and the Army on the westoffensive (probably November 1939). In came von Brauchitsch and Halder, their faces grim and taught, obviously bent on a further clash with Hitler. Keitel commented to Hansen, etwa: "Seh'n Sie sich mal an, wie die beiden schon wieder aussehen!" Particularly remarkable was that both the generals had removed every single order, medal and decoration from their uniforms for this confrontation. Nachher sagte Schmundt zu Keitel, "Was sagen Sie dazu!" Keitel: unverständlich. Darauf erfolgte ein Befehl auf Hitlers Veranlassung, dass wer sich beim Führer meldet, seine Orden anzuhaben hat; this order went out along the normal Personaldienstweg.

4. Further instance of Hitler's phenomenal Gedächtnis: im Führerzug, während des Polenfeldzuges, kommt Hansen in Kartenraum. Es kommt ein Anruf Grossadmiral Raeders, meldet Vernichtung einiger englischer Schiffe - quite a number of them; Raeder informs Hitler of the names of the ships that are sunk. Hitler beams with pleasure, puts the telephone down, turns to Puttkamer, and without

the slightest hesitation repeats the names of the ships, but adds the displacement, the Bestückung with various guns calibres, and the armour thickness of each vessel! He adds, "Stimmt's, Puttkamer?" Puttkamer, etwa: "Ja, mein Führer, das wird wohl stimmen." But Puttkamer immediately sauste aus dem Zimmer, holte Weyer's Marinetaschenbuch and checked the ships' details. He put the book down and said to Hansen, "Nun, hören Sie mal! Es stimmt auf dem Pfennig!"

5. Without prompting, Hansen recalled the following scene from the Norwegenfeldzug (†). The position of Dietl's force at Narvik was sehr ernst, perhaps hoffnungslos. Repeatedly Hitler looked at the possibility of getting a relief expeditionary force through to them, by air, sea or land; he commented, etwa: "Dass da oben nun die Österreicher waren" was a particularly unpleasant feature, as he did not intend to put such a great strain on the Anschluss. Jodl stated that sending a relief expedition by land was pointless. "Mein Führer, ich bin 1937 (?) da oben gewesen. Eine Expedition darauf ist gleich eine Polarexpedition!" Jodl's Bavarian accent, not unlike Hitler's own, impressed him; Hitler sah ein, und ging zum Kartentisch. Emotionally he exclaimed, "Es muss doch eine Lösung geben! Wir können die Leute nicht einfach verkaufen auf dieser Weise." At this Jodl crossed to the Kartentisch also, and said firmly and loudly, rapping his knuckles on the table with each word: "Mein Führer, es gibt Lagen in einem Krieg, wo der Feldherr seine Nerven behalten muss!" The effect on Hitler was psychologisch interessant; er wurde sofort bedont ruhig - to prove that he could master his emotions too, and replied in even voice etwa: Was können wir denn tun?" Jodl had thus succeeded in contradicting Hitler and bringing him back to his senses.

6. Hansen has little time for Warlimont and states that Hitler was not enamoured of him too - he was too smooth, too Frenchified, too self-satisfied. But he states that when Warlimont held a Vortrag, it was "druckreif" - spoken in excellent German prose, considering all angles,

† Vgl. von Lossberg: Aufzeichnungen; und ibid: Im Wehrmachtsführungsstab (neither of which Hansen has read).

and with the possible Lösungen already prepared in equal detail.

7. Hansen began a campaign of "Krach" to obtain his release after the following episode. It concerned the (well-known) Blaskowitz Denkschriften on SS Greuel in Polen. On some date between the end of the Polenfeldzug and the French campaign (he cannot be more precise) Blaskowitz appeared at Keitel's office, with two red-bound folders, and protested to Keitel about the activities of the SS in his Bereich. Keitel's reply was etwa, that it was no concern of Blaskowitz's; it was purely Sache der SS. Blaskowitz left the two folders with Keitel, and after some days they were placed in the out-tray and reached Hansen's desk. The first folder contained an extensive Bericht der Truppe, mit Anlagen, on observed instances of SS atrocities; the second was a file of photographs connected with them. Hansen states that he was so inwardly disturbed when he studied the files that for a week he could not work properly or think of anything else - he litt tagelang unter dem Eindruck. He then noticed that although the files had been before Keitel, the Chef OKW sie nicht absigniert hatte; he returned the files to Keitel for that purpose, but again they came out, unsigned; again he returned them to Keitel, and again they came back unsigned. So he took them back to Keitel in person and said, etwa: "Herr General, diese beiden Mappen sind so gravierend, dass ich glaube Sie müssen davon Kenntnis nehmen; aber bisher haben Sie sie nicht abgezeichnet." Darauf wurde Keitel ihm gegenüber sehr böse; Hansen replied, "Als ältester Adjutant muss ich die Verantwortung tragen, dass derartige Dokumente ordnungsgemäss Ihnen vorgelegt und abgezeichnet werden". Wütend, Keitel then signed the two files. The episode caused Hansen such inner anger that he decided to obtain his transfer to a front-line unit.

8. Another Keitel at this time was von Selle (Hptm.?), believed to lived in Schleswig-Holstein; Keitel's secretary and the secretary of Blomberg and others was Frl. Käthen Schimming, who probably still lives in Berlin.

9. Hansen has certain recollections of the Mechelen incident (Januar 1940) although his memory does not seem to be as clear on this as on other incidents. He recalls Schmudt coming to Keitel first with the news of the loss of an aircraft carrying Chefsachen in Belgium; General von Pappenheim wurde geholt and questioned; Keitel said er musste es dem Führer vortragen, and during this Vortrag Hansen was anwesend. Hitler was naturally erregt, but went out of his way to control his Erregung (eigentlich verhältnismässig beherrscht). Göring kam auch in wenig Stunden; a duplicate set of the missing Chefsachen was provided for Hitler to assess for himself the significance of the loss. Göring (then?) tested whether a similar bundle of documents could be wholly destroyed in a stove, as claimed, and found that much would be clearly legible still. Then Jodl(?) at once said, die Aufmarschpläne mussten geändert werden; von Keitel und Jodl wurde noch in der Nacht der Befehl zur Abänderung der Pläne gegeben. The Gefechtsstände would have to be changed immediately (to prevent surprise actions by the enemy (?)). This alone bedeutete eine fernmeldtechnische Leistung.

10. According to Hansen, he was present at neither the Berghof-Ansprache Hitlers vom 22. August 1939, nor the Besprechung im Arbeitszimmer des Führers vom 23.5.1939.

11. Hansen described how it was characteristic of Keitel that he always appeared in photographs in der zweiten Reihe. He was not one of those who elbowed their way to the front. Indeed, sometimes he was pushed so far back that he then had to trot ("in Schweinegalopp") round to the front, an undignified spectacle. Unusually, Hansen was of the view that Keitel would have made a good divisional commander; he was an upright, but spineless man as Chef OKW however.

12. Hansen recalls the outline of one other dramatic Auseinandersetzung at the Führer's Gefechtsstand at Euskirchen in the early days of the Westfeldzug. Some time before, Hitler hatte verlangt, dass die Panzerverbände, die im Norden waren (der nördlichsten H.Gr. unterstellt) mehr nach dem Süden verlegt werden sollten, um einen möglichen französischen Angriff auf die Flanke abzuwehren. Now, two or three days later, als der Ob.d.H. kam to Euskirchen, Hitler stellte fest, dass diese Panzerdivisionen noch nicht da waren, wo er befohlen hatte; das Heer hatte das nicht verfügt. Es erfolgte eine sehr scharfe Auseinandersetzung darauf; Hitler wurde von Brauchitsch gegenüber sehr deutlich. Von Brauchitsch pointed out that when the Panzer were pushing ahead it was schlecht to expect of them to strike south, at right-angles to the main line of advance. Keitel entschloss sich daraufhin: "Mein Führer, ich werde sofort zu von Rundstedt fliegen". Hansen laid on an aircraft, and Keitel and he sind bis zum Gefechtsstand von Rundstedts in Tiefflug geflogen. Keitel machte diese Anordnung des Führers klar to von Rundstedt. (Halder war ebenfalls bei der Auseinandersetzung Hitler - von Brauchitsch anwesend.)

13. Hansen does not appear to have been present during the well-known Besprechung im Führerzug in Jlnau am 12. September 1939; but he well recalls the occasion when Canaris came to the Führerzug - he, Hansen, was sent to greet him. He believes it was the only occasion Canaris came to the Führerzug in that campaign. Canaris war ein Mann mit dem man sprechen konnte.

14. Hansen recalled a curious scene at Weihnachten 1939. Hitler had paid a visit to Sepp Dietrich and the Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler" at the front, and watched their celebration - not the usual Christmas with Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht, but a pagan rite with Julleuchter and unusual incantations. As he left, he said to Schmudt in Hansen's hearing: "Ich kann mir ja ein Weihnachtsfeier ohne das Weihnachtslied nicht vorstellen!"

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15. Blomberg was Hansen's division commander at Loetzen in Ostpreussen; er war ein weit über durchschnittlicher General. That was about 1931 - 1932. He recalls that bei der letzten Manöver Blomberg sehr schwierig war, es lag irgend etwas dazwischen, of a political nature.

16. Reichenau war klar, nüchtern, sportlich, modern. Hansen recalls one typical episode, where he and about ten others were at Hitler's casual Mittagstisch in der Reichskanzlei vor Kriegsausbruch, when Reichenau picked up a rather boastful remark by Himmeler about the SS to make the Reichsführer and the SS etwas lächerlich -(auf sehr geschickter Weise den Reichsführer fertiggemacht.) Das gefiel Hitler sehr, as Hansen could observe.

17. Late in August 1939, after a visit from Botschafter Henderson, Hitler sent for Keitel. Hansen accompanied the Chef OKW. They arrived at the door of Hitler's Arbeitszimmer just as Henderson, with a weisser Nelke in his buttonhole and immaculately dressed, was leaving; Keitel, of course, was in uniform. Henderson (out of Hitler's earshot) greeted Keitel: "Na -- viel zu tun heute, Herr Generaloberst?" By this ironic comment Henderson showed he was not deceived by Hitler's masterly stagecraft (in arranging for Keitel to enter as Henderson left). Hansen believes this must have been when Henderson paid his last visit to Hitler.

18. In Mai 1939 Hitler unternahm eine Westreise from Belgium to the Isteiner Klotz, inspecting the Westbefestigungen. This too has remained vividly in Hansen's memory - the behind-the-scenes Hitler, sending Brückner out to calm the waiting crowds in each little village, and to assure them that if they would be patient they would see their Führer soon. Unlike politicians of today, Hitler strolled freely amongst the crowds, unguarded by police. The women would hold out their babies for him to see, an act which provoked from him the private comment

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to the adjutants afterwards, that this was "die höchste Ehrung" any leader could be paid -- when the ordinary people held out to him their children in that way. (Hansen related this scene as an explanation why it would have been impossible to carry out a plot against Hitler at that stage; although the leading OKW officers were aware of the "Diabolische" -the intangible Something that was Wrong - in the regime (as Oberstleutnant Winter, Chef der Zentralabteilung im OKW put it) the man in the street, indeed the entire nation, stood behind Hitler and would never have forgiven ~~any~~ or understood any German citizen who lifted hand against him. This solidity of Führer und Volk persisted far into the war, if not right to the end.)

19. Frau Hansen recalled her husband having told her in later years of an agitated telephone conversation between Göring and the polnischer Aussenminister Josef Beck, in which Göring shouted something like "Schicken Sie doch endlich den Bevollmächtigten!" -- presumably on 30. or 31. August 1939. But General Hansen himself appears to have forgotten the details of when and where this was.

20. Hansen described briefly one conversation between Hitler and the OB der Heeresgruppe Kurland, Lindemann, (to which he listened on an earpiece) in which both Gesprächspartner talked at the same time and neither listened to the other.

21. Hansen stressed the unheilvolle Rolle of the partnership Keitel - Schmundt. Schmundt would sit up until the early hours talking with Hitler, and next day he would orientate Keitel on the ideas Hitler had expressed. This had a powerful influence on Keitel; er wusste genau was, und wie Hitler dachte. When Hitler am nächsten Tage dem Chef OKW Vortrag hielt über diese Ideen,

Keitel war schon unterrichtet und stimmte zu. Das Wort Hitlers war für Schmundt Evangelium, and he considered himself solely den Transporter für die Ansichten und das Gedankengut des Führers; he considered it no part of his role to offer critical, Generalstabsmässige opinions. (He can recall no specific examples)

22. Bodenschatz was far worse, in Hansen's view. Hansen repeated the well-known criticism that Bodenschatz acted as Göring's agent at the Lagebesprechungen, hurried out to tell Göring of Hitler's views, so that Göring could arrive later and pronounce identical views as his own. When those who had known Bodenschatz in the Weltkrieg (General von Lossberg?) heard that Bodenschatz had been appointed general, they could only shake their heads. Bodenschatz was ein Schwätzer.

23. Hansen recalls one episode presumably early in the French campaign; Göring's vast bulk leaning over the Kartentisch, stabbing a finger on a map, and promising Hitler that when the Luftwaffe attacks on London started no stone would be left standing atop another stone.

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24. On Engel als Heeresadjutant, Hansen expressed a favourable opinion; Engel possessed the ability to put unfavourable opinions and points of view to Hitler, and did it with a characteristic Schnoddrigkeit which Hansen himself admittedly found unpleasant, but which evidently did not miss its mark on Hitler.

25. Hansen expressed negative views on Oberst Bernard von Lossberg; on Ribbentrop; on Ley; etc

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