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Interrogation of XAVER DORSCH, Deputy Chief of the OT,
Reich Ministry for Armaments and War Production at
Dustbin Interrogation Center, 25 August 1945.

25-2062-2
Dorsch

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Q: Was the organization TODT (OT) intended from the beginning to be a permanent mobile construction organization for State projects?

A: The OT developed out of the building of the west wall and of its commitment in the mobile warfare of the French campaign without having been originally intended to be a permanent mobile organization.

In 1933 the construction industry was no longer used to big projects. The industry was first restarted and mobilized by the building of the motor highways and the experience gained there was very useful for the construction of the west wall.

The OT was originally set up as Section Wiesbaden of the General Inspector of Roads (Dr. Todt) which is the official designation of the so-called OT. On Hitler's orders, this non-military organization was to remain as a building organization. Dr. Todt was given charge of the building of the west wall and received authority to draft engineers and all other necessary personnel for this purpose. Todt, like his boss Hitler and his successor Speer, was an enemy of bureaucracy, and in his organization for the first time introduced the so-called principle of self-responsibility of industry, which was later applied by Minister Speer to the entire armament industry. He maintained only a small supervisory staff, leaving the execution of the projects to individual contractors.

Dorsch joined the OT at the outbreak of war and was charged with the so-called front leadership. That is, care for the workers from the military point of view, providing distinctive uniforms, alarm and shelter facilities, etc., which had become necessary because the work was carried on in what was then the front line (September 1939 till May 1940). Dorsch also was the principal representative of the DAF (German labor front) which had to make exceptions for the personnel of the OT which did not fit in with the regular organization of the DAF.

The OT worked with the Army engineers who had been originally charged with the building of the west wall but who were too slow and bureaucrat in their methods. Out of this cooperation grew the next assignment of the OT to move forward with the troops in the French campaign to repair bridges, roads, utilities, and the like.

Q: When was the planning for the west wall initiated?

A: Actual construction began in June 1938 but Dorsch is not familiar with the original planning since he only joined the OT in September 1939. It seems to have been the original plan of Hitler to have a line of fortifications in the west strong enough to be held by very few troops so that he could commit the main weight of his military power in the east.

Q: What was the strategic importance of the motor highways (AUTOBAHNEN)?

A: The strategic importance of the motor highways has been generally over estimated. Source believes that it was Hitler's main intention to initiate and stimulate motorization on a vast scale.

Experience during the war proved that the railroads which had been neglected were much more important.

Q: Was the OT greatly expanded prior to the invasion of Russia?

A: After the original tasks of the OT (West wall and French campaign) Dr. Todt wanted to preserve the initiative of the construction firms under the control of his organization. There had been no prior planning in the commitment of the OT during the French campaign but it had proved its worth.

The first big stationary job the OT received after the end of the campaign in France was the installation of batteries on the Channel Coast. The next big task was the construction of the U-Boat pens on the French coast. This project was again not organized on a military basis but through private contractors including French firms.

To prepare for the war against Russia, Dr. Todt gave an order in March 1941 to organize a force of 20,000 German workers, fully motorized with 2,000 vehicles, with new equipment, machinery, bridges, and uniformed as a para military formation but again to work under private firms. It was their task to follow the troops and reconstruct transportation and public utility facilities.

There were many engineers from private industry in the OT. Work contracts were based upon a fixed performance but if work could not be planned in advance, a cost-plus basis had to be used in contracts. The percentage of profit allocated to the contractor fell with an increase of workers and wages. A special trustee of labor was appointed for the OT and uniform wage rates were fixed by Dr. Schmelter. Such a uniform rate was all the more important since German contractors moved all over the continent where wage rates differed greatly. The payment received by the OT workers, who frequently worked in close conjunction with service men, was quite a headache for the Armed Forces since the wages were higher than the soldiers' pay. This higher pay, however, was only apparent since the Army feeds, houses, and clothes its men, pays family allowances, etc.

Q: Why was there not an east wall similar to that in the west?

A: Only individual fortifications were built in Russia because Hitler thought that the Army would be reluctant to drive forward relentlessly if they had a wall to fall back upon.

Only sometime in 1943 a line of fortifications was ordered which was to extend from Narwa-Lake Peipus-Orscha-Dnjepor River to Zaporosche and the Crimea. This line was to consist of field fortifications with concrete bunkers (one meter thick walls) and some steel bunkers prefabricated in Germany. This line was never completed and rolled up by the Russians without difficulty.

Long before the war some fortifications had been built by the old Reichswehr. In 1944 the party itself, not the OT, started to build fortifications near the frontier.

Source is convinced that Hitler never counted upon such a disastrous retreat before the Russians and thought that he could, under all circumstances, hold the Narwa--Crimea line.

Q: Was the OT subject to the same regulations as applied to private building contractors (allocation of materials and labor, draft of workers, priority and wage controls, etc.)?

A: The procurement of materials was administered by the OT on a regional basis, such as the allocation of gravel pits and cement production. Iron and timber had to be provided in most cases from Germany and were allocated by the Central Planning. Contractors could order material but

they were told, however, where to get it. In France the OT was the only large builder and establishment of priorities was not necessary there.

The General Commissioner for Construction (the last one was Dorsch himself) was responsible for Central Planning of all construction in the Reich and occupied territories. The General Commissioner could not function any too well because the course of the war was not clear and there were, therefore, no clear over-all directives. For instance, far more underground factories should have been built if the extent of Allied bombings had been correctly anticipated.

The building of the Atlantic wall in 1933 had first priority as a matter of course. (The first task of the OT in the Reich was reconstruction work in the Ruhr and only after May 1944 it greatly enlarged its activities in the Reich.)

The work of the OT in occupied territories had been well planned but building in Germany had not been rigidly coordinated or controlled. Besides, the best building contractors and engineers were working for the OT.

About 850,000 workers, including 120,000 German workers, were under contract to the OT but as employees of the individual contractors. The staff of the OT itself never exceeded 35,000 which included personnel in charge of supply, housing, transportation, signals, medical care, etc.

Q: Who was responsible for providing food, lodging, etc., for OT labor?

A: The OT, through its own staff mentioned in the preceding paragraph, was responsible for the living conditions and welfare of its labor forces. When it first started out with the building of the west wall on German soil, it was operating in territory under the jurisdiction of the DAF and the individual labor stewards were under the control of the regional agent of the DAF. The OT became more independent of the DAF when the French campaign started and connections with local party organizations were disrupted. From there on, the OT was considered as one enterprise with one chief steward of the DAF who was at the same time chief of the front leadership and who constituted the only link with the DAF without interference from lower DAF echelons.

When building on a large scale was resumed in the Reich, the OT again came under the authority of regional DAF agencies which caused some friction. All the same it was decided that the OT should return to the fold of the DAF which, however, remained on paper only since the OT men were pretty independent. Labor problems were handled quite well in the OT which had taken over many good men from the DAF, which in 1944 could not function very efficiently any longer anyway due to the effect of air raids. The emphasis was on providing for OT workers in the OT without excluding the DAF or the party.

Q: Was the OT charged with the task of building underground factories?

A: Only since May 1944. The OT had worked in the Ruhr since the bombing of the dams in May 1943 but not on underground factories. The latter were mostly already under construction when Dorsch took over under the Speer Ministry in 1944. Too many factories had been planned in relation to what was then possible to achieve and the methods used had not been the right ones. Besides, there had been no consistency in providing against protection in air raids; for instance, protection had been provided for U-Boat pens but not for factories.

Q: Would underground factories in the essential industries have been an important factor in German resistance?

A: Dorsch told Hitler once that a defense against bombings could not be carried on with cement only as the transportation system would still remain exposed unless the German Air Forces could provide protection. But with more underground factories the Air Forces could have concentrated on the defense of transportation. Actually the Germans were surprised that the Allies attacked transportation only at such a late stage of the war in a concentrated form -- attacks on transportation would have been even more important than those on synthetic oil plants.

Q: What would have been the magnitude of the task of putting the essential industries underground?

A: In order to be successful it should have been started before the war. Many underground factories were bombed during construction and a new method of surface factory space under a protective concrete ceiling based upon the experience of the building of the V-2 emplacement in St. Omer was introduced too late.

As far as construction was concerned the war was lost in June -- July 1944. 120,000 workers were employed in the rebuilding of synthetic oil factories alone (so-called Geilenberg program).

Q: What would you consider to be the most effective methods in the field of construction during war?

A: There should be coordination of and technical assistance to the building industry by the State. The question of private competition as against the overlapping of governmental authority should be carefully weighed.

As long as there was a shortage of building capacity, manpower, and material source would recommend regional agencies to be in charge of construction, including some control over construction work on railroads and roads. Not so much from the technical side but with regard to allocation and coordination.

When the OT was set up the original momentum of centralization was very effective but bureaucracy gradually crept in. It would, therefore, be very important to have a constant influx of young people from industry who could oppose a vested bureaucracy.

Notes on an interview with Dipl.-Ing. Xaver Dorsch, Sr., at his office, München, Ischauerstr. 21, from 11 to 11³⁰ pm, 15 Jan 1969

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- 1.) Xaver Dorsch later expressed his dismay at passages referring to him in my book "Geheimwaffen", based on Speer's papers. I said I would look into these.
- 2.) Dorsch recalled a episode in (?) May 1944: because of the heavy bombing the non-O.T. builders were making with the new Schlesisches Hauptquartier, the Führer announced that he would order the O.T. to take it over. (This was work under the GB-Bau - Stöbe-Dethleffsen.) Speer heard of this and was very disturbed. He was more disturbed when Hitler telephoned him about this, and on the following day he told Dorsch about this. Dorsch was summoned to see Hitler. Hitler told, "Sie müssen das machen." Dorsch explained that the O.T. worked only in the occupied territories, not in the Reichsgebiet. Hitler insisted. Dorsch: "Das muss ich alles mit Speer besprechen."
- 3.) A long Unterredung between Speer, Dorsch? and Hitler at the Oberschlagung in May 44 was the interview. (9. Mai 44?) Dorsch said he could only understand the new fight of factories if the production of GB-Bau were transferred to him. He said there were 16,000 Bauarbeiter in Krauch, and 10,000 more in the mines, belonging to the O.T. The work had to be finished. Then the air attack on Leine followed. At an Oberschlagung-beratung attended by Speer, Hitler, Birtel, v. Behn and Hitler.

the Führer said against Dorsch, "... nun jetzt gehen die Kräfte die heute ab!" Dorsch: "Wenn Führer ich könnte den englischen Luftangriff nicht voraussagen." Hitler promised him, "bei Krieges Stille." "Wann?" Hitler replied he had spoken with Mussolini on the plan the day before and Mussolini had promised him 1 million workers. Dorsch knew this was impossible, as Goebbels had already stopped Italy of "männliche Arbeitskräfte." The Führer called in Keitel and advised him to provide at once 3000 of the 10000 workers on the Reichsmarsch im Kaukasus. When these 3000 reached Passau, Speer caught them and diverted them to the task of the Verlagerung of Walzlagerfabrikation underground.

- 4.) Later Speer demanded two* (?) of the Tagelöhner, in the Ruhr, for an Edelstahlwerk [der Führervermerkt]. The sites were two near Munich, one near Stuttgart, and one or two near Linz. The work was quite far advanced at the end of the war - baulich halb fertig, bei einem von sogar die Montage begannen. Work on the sites was now stopped.
- 5.) Dorsch was seriously ill in the latter part of 1944, culminating in a serious neck operation on 13 November 1944.
- 6.) Dorsch's Vertreter im Lagerstab was Knipping.

* near Bedburg in Paderborn.

- 7.) Dorsch last saw the Führer on day in mid-March 1945 - between 13 and 15 March. He was in the Reichs-Kanzlei, when the bunker was being altered. The Führer went past - Dorsch was shocked by his appearance. "Seine Augen waren gebochen." He Hitler asked Dorsch, "Wie geht's Ihnen." Dorsch replied, not very well; and Hitler replied, "Ich ich weiss - you have no men, no machinery and not enough cement."
- 8.) In March 1945, Speer told Hitler that he could not carry out the scorched earth policy. He told Dorsch that the two men had sat talking to each other for five minutes, and that tears had come into their eyes.
- 9.) Equally, Speer told Dorsch that he had flown into Berlin on the last occasion only to take leave of Hitler.
- 10.) Dorsch and Himmler were in the First World War in the same Schlaflucht (?) in the same Regiment, and there was a Dutzpländerschaft since then.
- 11.) After the collapse of France, Todd and Dorsch went through the ruined battlefields. Seeing a church, Todd went in to see if the organ worked, then played it while Dorsch worked on the bellows.
- 12.) Speer was not so musical. After all Dorsch disliked Speer's lapdog Kriebel of Murenbach. One Dorsch got into a temper, and smashed a plate-sized ashtray into smithereens on the table. Kriebel began picking up the

pieces, and Dorsch refused Speer's invitation to assess

13. Dorsch was called by the prosecution to identify ^(a photostatic of) a Vermerk - Vermerk signed by Speer, concerning the distribution of Hungarian tens at the aircraft factories. The Vermerk was dated perhaps late June 1944, and was on the characteristic typewriter. On the Vermerk were the names Stöckl-Dethlefsen and Gfm. Mithel. Dorsch was about to admit the document's authenticity, when he recalled Dr. Bergold's warning to him that morning: "Sie haben nicht mit einer deutschen Staatsanwaltschaft zu tun - das sind Gangster." Then he saw what was wrong: Stöckl-Dethlefsen had been ^{dismissed} replaced as GfB-Bau on 1 May 1944 - so the Vermerk was impossible! He printed this out. The interrogator quickly took the photostatic back, and passed on to the next item. -