

Field-Marshal Albert Kesselring in Context

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Abstract

This thesis explores the life and context of Kesselring the last living German Field Marshal. It examines his background, military experience during the Great War, his involvement in the *Freikorps*, in order to understand what moulded his attitudes. Kesselring's role in the clandestine re-organisation of the German war machine is studied; his role in the development of the *Blitzkrieg*; the growth of the Luftwaffe is looked at along with his command of Air Fleets from Poland to Barbarossa. His appointment to Southern Command is explored indicating his limited authority. His command in North Africa and Italy is examined to ascertain whether he deserved the accolade of being one of the finest defence generals of the war; the thesis suggests that the Allies found this an expedient description of him which in turn masked their own inadequacies. During the final months on the Western Front, the thesis asks why he fought so ruthlessly to the bitter end.

His imprisonment and trial are examined from the legal and historical/political point of view, and the contentions which arose regarding his early release. The thesis will confirm that Kesselring was guilty of war crimes, and offers new evidence that he was aware of his guilt, and explains why he committed perjury. His postwar activities are explored, and illustrate that he failed to come to terms with the new West Germany. During and after the war Kesselring was frequently regarded as a non-party, decent man considered by some a possible candidate for the presidency of West Germany. This thesis challenges these long held views; he simply stayed in the limelight for a brief time due to the politics of the Cold War.

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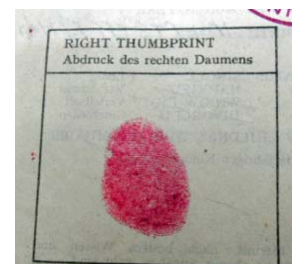
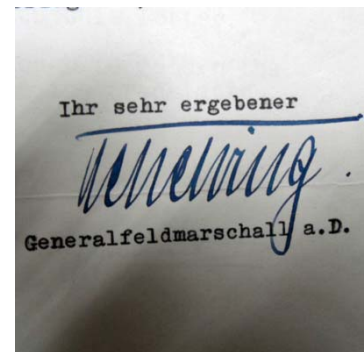
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Abbreviations

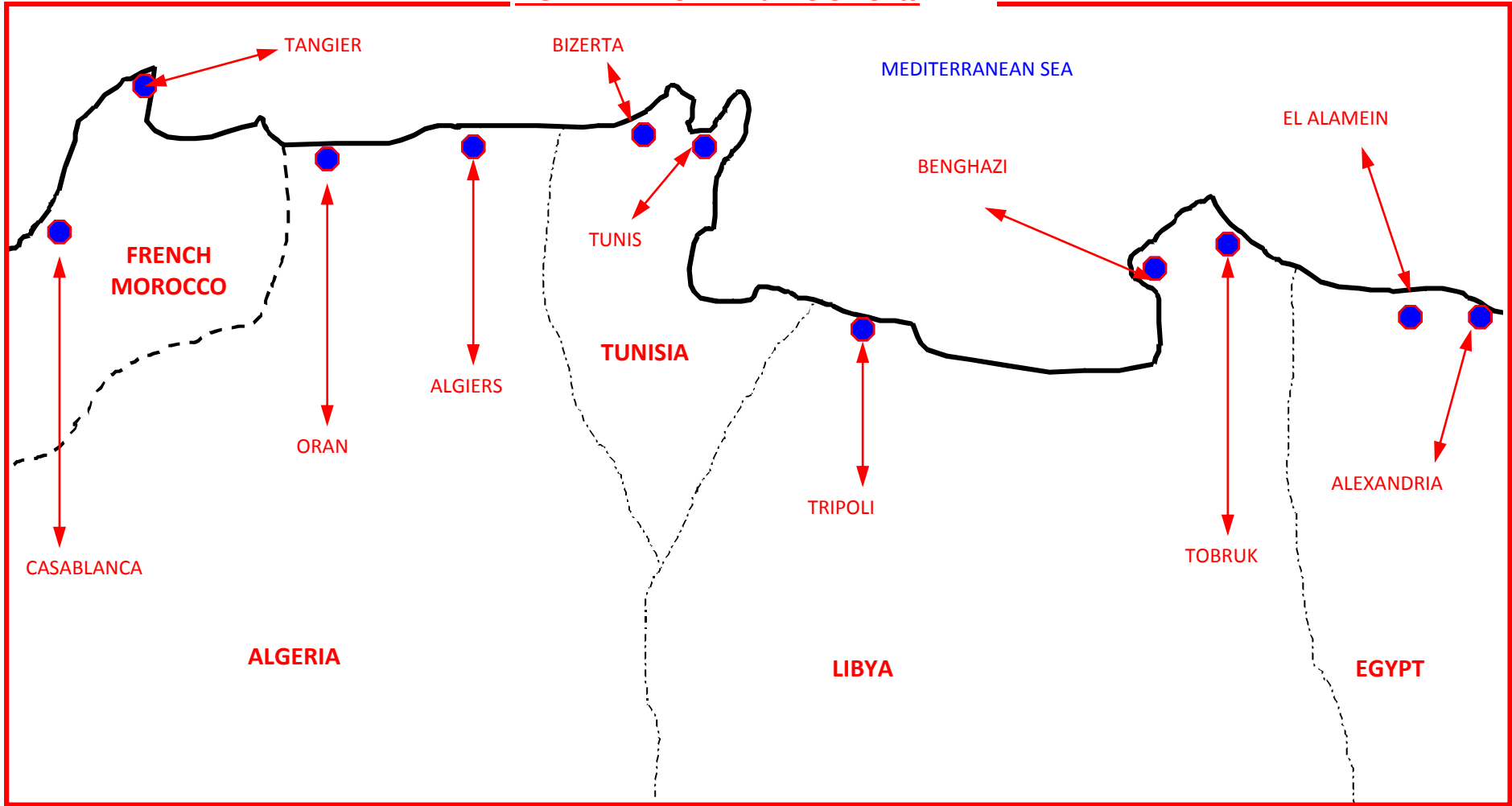
BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg
BA-BL	Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde
BHMK	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, München
CLNAI	Committee of National Liberation of Northern Italy
IMCC	Inter-allied Military Control Commission
KNA	Kew National Archives
LRWC	Law Reports War Crimes -The UN War Crimes Commission,
NA-AMP	National Archives- Air Ministry Pamphlets
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei National Socialists German Workers' Party
PAC	USA Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality
SIB	Special Investigation Branch
SNP	Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings
USAHD	United States America Historical Division
USDS	US Department of State, Publication 3556
USFR	US Final Reports to Secretary of Army on Nuremberg War Crimes Trials under Control Council Law No. 10
VdS	Verband deutscher Soldaten

ALBERT KONRAD KESSELRING

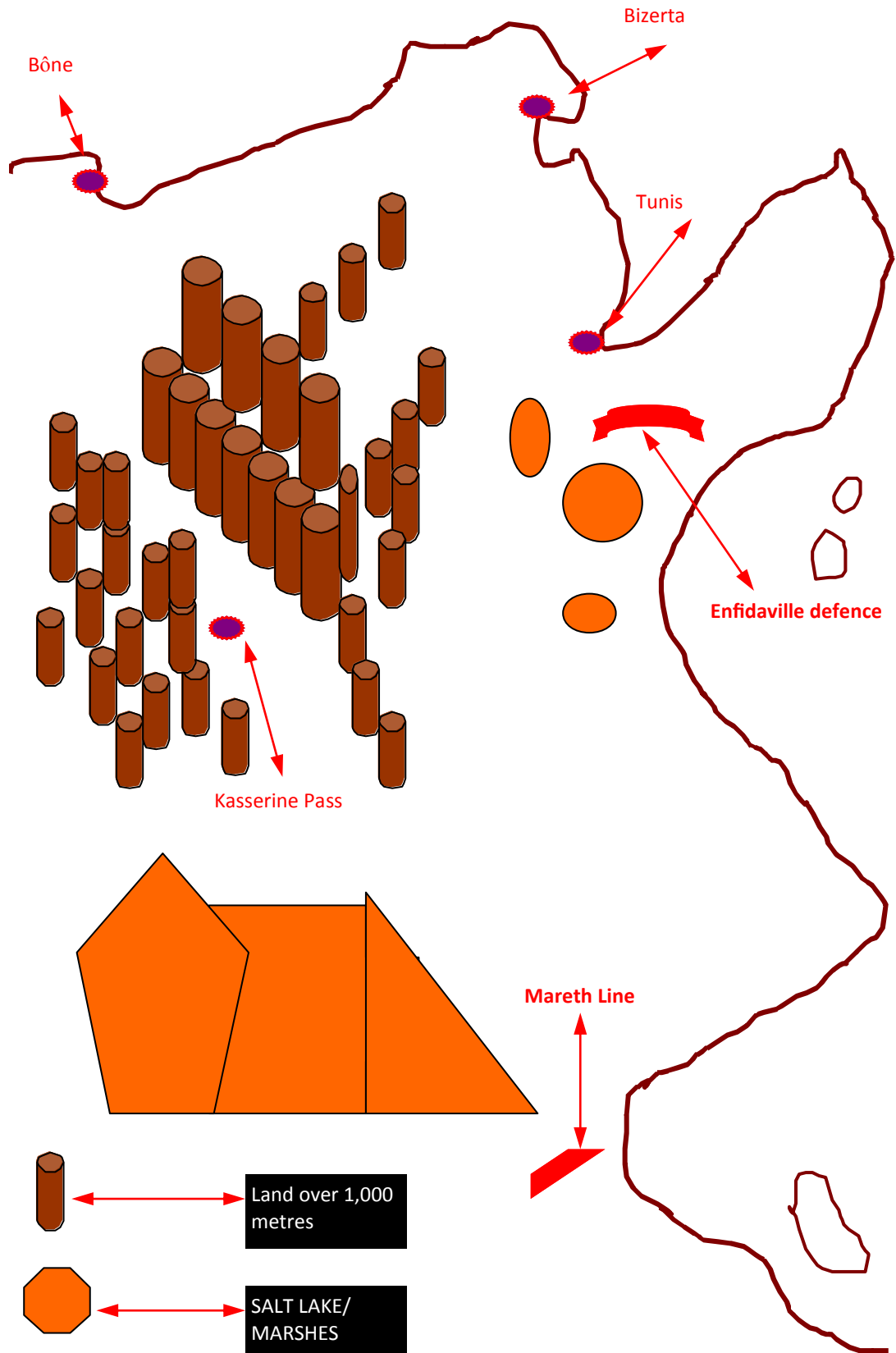


Uniform als Oberleutnant der kaiserlichen Armee

NORTH AFRICA – Main elements

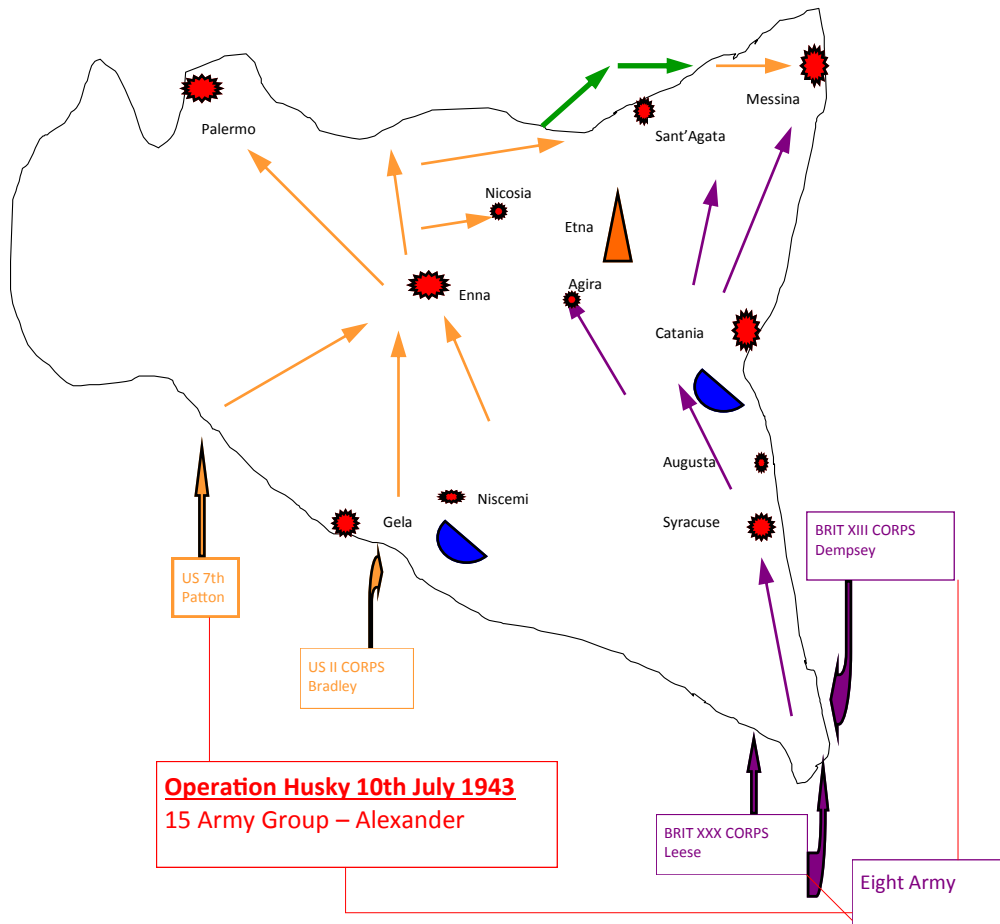


TUNISIA



INVASION of SICILY

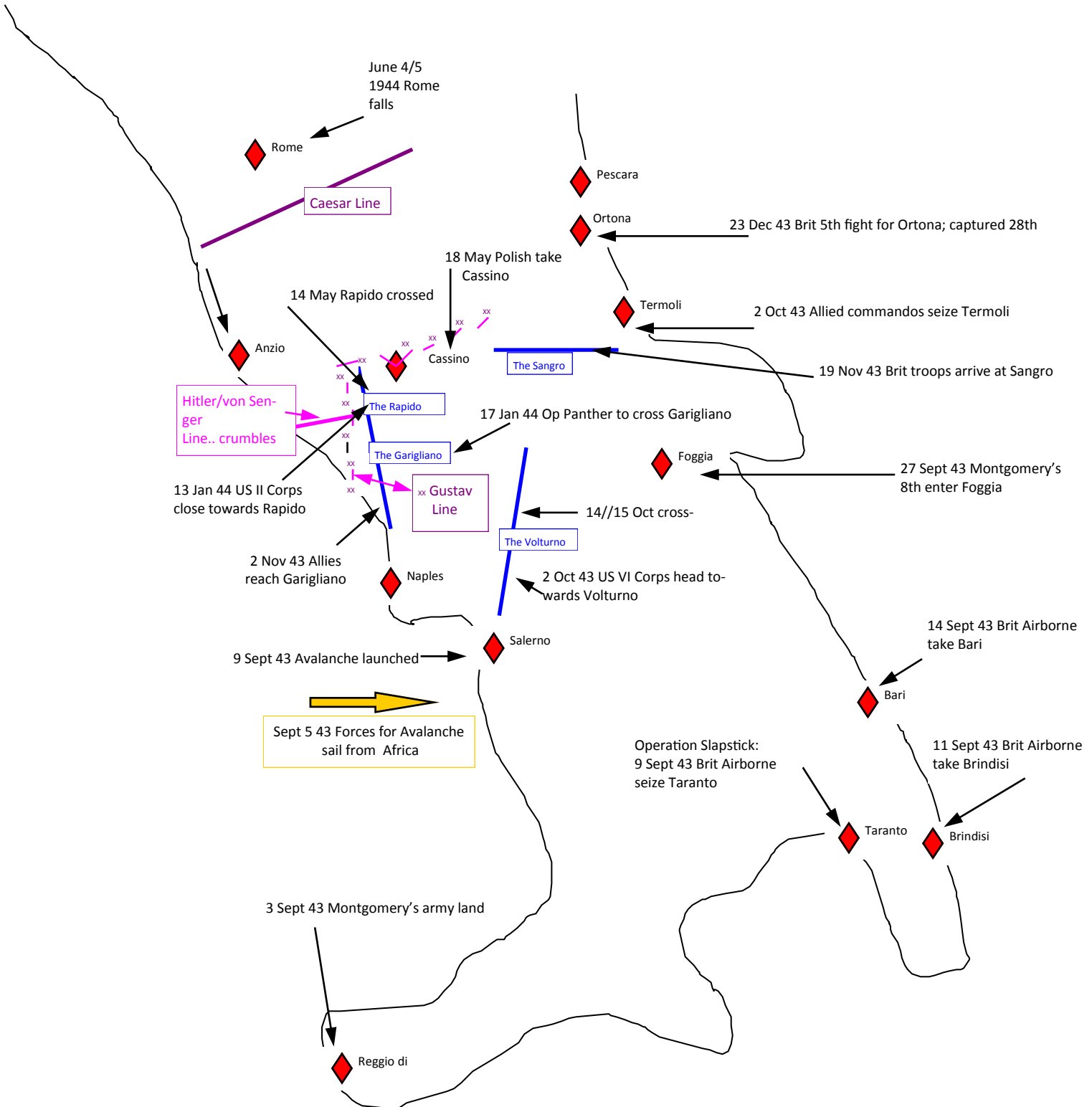
- 11 July** – Livorno Div & Herman Göring Div converge towards Gela. XIII Corps take Syracuse.
- 12 July** – H Göring tanks retreat north. Americans taken 18,000 prisoners but lost 1000 men. Brit XIII Corps repulse Schmalz Group and head towards Augusta.
- 13 July** – Augusta falls. XXX Corps, 51st Div engaged by Herman Göring Div. At night Schmalz attacked by Brit to enter Catania plain; **airborne troops dropped**.
- 14 July** – Amer 1st Div enter Mazarino & Niscemi. Allied bombing intensified along communication lines.
- 16 July** – Amer 2nd Arm sent by Patton against Palermo – Can 1st Div takes Caltagirone after battle with battalion of German 15th Armoured Div
- 17 July** – Herman Göring Div & Schmalz Group resist attacks towards Catania
- 18 July** – Brit 5th & 51st Divs halted before Catania
- 19 July** – Amer 7th head towards Palermo with less resistance
- 20 July** – Montgomery brings 78th Div from Africa intending to go around Catania
- 22 July** – American troops enter Palermo
- 27 July** – Nicosia falls to Amer 1st Div & Agira to Can 1st Div



- 3 Aug** – remaining Italians evacuate Island
- 5 Aug** – Brit troops enter Catania
- 7 Aug** – Amer troops bypass Sant'Agata with **amphibious landing**
- 12 Aug** – Axis forces withdraw towards Messina; Brit XXX Corps held in difficult terrain south and east of Etna; Germans evacuating.
- 17 Aug** – Patton's troops enter Messina at 10.15 am
- 18 Aug** – German resistance on island ceases

ITALIAN CAMPAIGN 1943 Sept – 1944 June 5th

- 8 Sept 43** Italy surrenders **30 Nov 43** Op Raincoat **13 Nov 43** Italy recognised as 'co'belligerent'
- 12 Sept 43** Mussolini rescued **22 Jan 44** 22 Jan 44 Op Shingle, Anzio landings **25 Nov 43** Op Shingle ap-
- 15 Feb 44** Cassino Bombed **23 Feb 44** Anzio – Lucas replaced by Truscott 29 Feb last attack on Anzio by Germans
- 12 April 44** Emmanuel III resigns for Umberto **11 May 44** 11.00 pm major offensive on Gustav line
- 1 June 44** Gustav line breached **3 June 44** Hitler allows Kesselring to withdraw from Rome



PREFACE

'A biography can be a problematic methodology, especially when it decontextualizes the individual and elevates him or her to the status of hero' which is why this biography is entitled 'Kesselring in Context'¹. In writing an account of Kesselring, a German Field-Marshal condemned to death as a war criminal, it has been important to explore him in the context of his times. A danger with this type of research is the tendency to develop a degree of empathy with the central figure, or the polarisation of views which sanctify or demonise the man. I concur with the words of Christopher Browning when he wrote - 'What I do not accept, however, are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive. Explaining is not excusing, understanding is not forgiving'². It is necessary to examine Kesselring in context in an attempt to discover the historical and psychological predisposition which made him the man he was.

Whether he was a great military commander, or simply another Nazi war criminal, is only part of the study; it is the importance of background and circumstance which dictate the human predicament that motivated this thesis. Much of Kesselring's life was conflict, and 'the physical, intellectual, and moral challenges of war allow us to see deep into the heart of Humanity'³.

Because of the intricate nature of conflict and war, various academic disciplines must be drawn upon in this study, because underpinning some of this particular investigation are areas of Law, both national and international, matters jurisprudential, and sometimes the fraught area of human conduct.

It is hoped that by placing Kesselring in the spotlight, the thesis will demythologise and reappraise some of the versions/narratives which tend to accumulate around admired enemy commanders such as Kesselring.

¹ Priemel C & Stiller A Eds, *Reassessing the Military Tribunals* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012)p.48

² Browning Christopher, *Ordinary Men* (London: Penguin, 2001)p.xviii

³ Boff Jonathan, *Military History, Studying Military History* (Issue 20, May 2012)p.51

INTRODUCTION

Why this thesis?

After the last war there was a steady stream of memoirs written by military commanders on both sides; they make interesting reading, but very few are self-deprecating. Fewer still accept errors or blunders on the part of the writer, even less reflect any form of apologia. The vast majority are self-serving and self-justifying, and must be tested for historical truth. Following such autobiographies, a number of biographies appeared which still retained an appeal. Some tend to be hagiographies, which have a tendency to suggest a sneaking admiration for German commanders. Manstein's latest biography is proudly entitled *Hitler's Greatest General*, and Rundstedt's *The Last Prussian*¹.

There is almost a fascination and envy about enemy commanders, and Rommel is the classic example; he has been the subject of numerous books and articles casting him in a heroic light, frequently ignoring the fact that in his early years he was a passionate disciple of Hitler. Rommel, who was subordinate to Kesselring, has been consistently presented as the epitome of brilliance². Even during the war Göbbels, after reading the English press, noted that 'they are making him one of the most popular generals in the entire world'.³ In her diary Countess of Ranfurly wrote of Rommel that 'in spite of being our enemy, he gained our admiration and respect, almost our affection,' reflecting a widely-held opinion during and after the war⁴. Many were cautious of giving an almost mystical heroic status to an enemy leader: Alexander noted, in his memoirs, 'Rommel's reputation contributed a great

¹ Melvin Mungo, *Manstein Hitler's Greatest General* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010) and Messenger Charles, *The Last Prussian, A Biography of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2011).

² Field-Marshal was generally a title more than a rank. Under Hitler a Field-Marshal was simply the 5th rank of general and it was not unusual for one Field-Marshal to be subordinate to another, 'Rommel – even when he was a Field-Marshal had always been subordinate, first to the Italians, then to Kesselring, and later – in France – to Rundstedt' Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt Potsdam (Eds), *Germany & The Second World War Volume IX/X* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001)p.899.

³ Lochner Louis (Ed), *The Goebbels Diaries* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948)p.8.

⁴ Ranfurly Countess of, *To War with Whitaker* (London, Charnwood, 1994)p.256.

deal to the English Army's widespread belief in the invincibility of the *Afrika Corps* ... a debilitating effect.⁵ Likewise, it has been argued that 'the Allies esteemed Rommel more highly than did many German officers, partly because British and American self-respect was massaged by attributing their setbacks to his supposed genius⁶'.

Kesselring's first biography, entitled *Kesselring, German Master Strategist of the Second World War*, wrote that he was 'one of the top three German soldiers,' the others being Guderian and Rommel⁷. This thesis examines Kesselring, and intends to put this much admired commander in the context of his background, and explore whether the admiration heaped on him, by so many, is justified.

Current Research

There are two biographies on Kesselring one by Macksey, and recently another by Battistelli; both tend to concentrate on the military campaigns⁸. Macksey paints Kesselring as a great military strategist, and although it falls short of sanctifying him it is a sympathetic portrayal, viewing him as something of a patrician. The Italian historian Battistelli, who gave me personal assistance in understanding the Italian perspective, is more realistic, but only deals with Kesselring's military campaign. Finding personal information about Kesselring has not been easy, he left no diaries or notes, and his postwar interrogation was nearly all military. The various German archives are seriously deficient in material, as I was warned by Kerstin von Lingen at Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen: much of the material was destroyed, although not the early personnel records in the Bavarian archives. This German historian has studied the change of attitude by the Allies to German commanders because of the need to keep postwar Germany in the Western fold, and her work is quoted where appropriate. Dr Richard Raiber

⁵ Alexander Earl of Tunis, *The Alexander Memoirs 1940-1945* (London: Frontline Books, 2010)p.13.

⁶ Hastings Max, *All Hell Let Loose* (London: Harper, 2011)p.668.

⁷ Macksey Kenneth, *Kesselring German Master Strategist of the Second World War* (London: Greenhill, 1978)p.11.

⁸ Ibid and Battistelli Pier, *Albert Kesselring* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012).

died before he finished his thesis on whether Kesselring committed perjury or not, and whether Kesselring was innocent. His work has been published privately, posthumously, and his detailed research casts new light on one aspect of Kesselring's trial⁹. The National Archives at Kew Garden has revealed a few items of interest, from an unexpected file which revealed evidence that Kesselring considered himself guilty, and may provide part of a confirming element in Raiber's research¹⁰.

Context of General Consensus

Mainly arising from the early Macksey biography, but enhanced by other sources to be studied later, Kesselring is viewed as a non-political soldier, an educated man who was a linguist, good-natured and just followed orders. This would be Kesselring's own projected self-image, viewing himself as an honest career soldier who obeyed his government. He always claimed that, although a patriot, he had no idea of Hitler's plans for war. As a Luftwaffe leader who oversaw the bombing of Warsaw, Rotterdam and London, he is often regarded as the originator of strategy-bombing and a successful commander¹¹. When he was transferred to Italy and the Mediterranean he was understood by most, then and since, to have been in total charge, and was considered as sympathetic to the Italians. He had issues with Rommel because of supply problems, and leaving Malta militarily viable, but few consider this to have been Kesselring's fault. From the defeat in North Africa, through Sicily and Italy he developed a legendary reputation in defence. The American military historian D'Este described Kesselring as bearing 'the stamp of genius for defensive operations'¹². Graham and Bidwell in their history of the Italian Campaign informed their readers that the Allies were 'facing as good a general as emerged from the German Army in the Second World War and certainly the best on either side in the Italian

⁹ Raiber Richard, *Anatomy of Perjury* (Delaware: Delaware Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Unexpected source was a top secret communication from the Chinese Embassy in Geneva, KNA, HW1/3007.

¹¹ See Murray Williamson, *The Luftwaffe 1933-45 Strategy for Defeat* (Washington: Congress Library, 1996).

¹² D'Este Carlo, *Fatal Decision* (London: Fontana, 1991)p.86.

Theatre¹³. There is a body of opinion that believed Kesselring operated independently from Hitler, and that he was the saviour of much of Italy's cultural heritage¹⁴. He always claimed total ignorance of the Holocaust and other barbarities, claiming the Wehrmacht always fought a 'clean war.' In Western Europe, in the final months, he fought to the bitter end claiming it was to save German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front, as all he cared for was his soldiers and Germany's future¹⁵. Although condemned to death by a British Court, his sentence was commuted following pressure by Churchill, Alexander and many others, leading Kesselring and others to believe he was vindicated. His short term in prison, released after seven years was viewed in the same fashion. For a time a few considered him as a potential President for the Federal Republic of Germany, and he devoted his final years to caring for old soldiers and POWs¹⁶.

This thesis will explore all these aspects of Kesselring, using a biographical outline looking at the various contexts in which Kesselring lived and fought, which will demonstrate that most of the above notions are far from the truth, and lack historical reality.

Kesselring's Background

Chapters 1-2 will explore Kesselring's background, and the degree to which he was a 'typical' product of the German military, in so far as commanders reflect the ethos of their national background. It has been suggested Stalin 'grasped the convenience of death as the simplest and most effective political tool' especially in the war of extermination¹⁷. Stalin did not have any moral standards even when it came to 'close family and friends'¹⁸. As such a General like Zhukov merely reflected the ethos of his nation where

¹³ Graham D & Bidwell S, *Tug Of War The Battle for Italy 1943-45* (Yorkshire:Pen and Sword, 2004)p.38.

¹⁴ See Nicholas Lynn, *The Rape of Europa* (London: Papermac, 1995).

¹⁵ Kesselring Albert, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring* (London:William Kimber, 1953).

¹⁶ See Macksey, *Kesselring*.

¹⁷ Montefiore Simon S, *Stalin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003)p.28.

¹⁸ Ibid.

life was cheap. On the other hand, Field-Marshal Alexander appears at the opposite end of the spectrum. The son of an Earl educated at Harrow and Sandhurst he was raised a typical English gentleman, conscious of the sanctity of life and frequently accused of not being aggressive enough for that reason¹⁹. Alexander and Zhukov were two entirely different commanders from two diverse backgrounds. It would have been out of character for Zhukov to worry about the potential loss of life, as it would if Alexander had given an order which ignored casualties. Alexander reflected his background as Zhukov was influenced by the Soviet system. Alexander noted that ‘British Generals had to be conscious of the sanctity of men’s lives,’ Zhukov was not obliged to exercise that care²⁰. For this reason Kesselring and his background must come under scrutiny.

Chapters 1-2 will illustrate that Kesselring was a product of his own country's ethos from the earliest days. He was born into a changing Europe; ‘by 1871, yet another new order had been created in Europe: that of nation states’²¹. This new order had been created by war and industrialization, which was hastening a new military and social structure. At the time of Kesselring’s birth Europe was at peace, but there ‘were military dynamics at work;’ also nationalism was increasing, and in some states this sense of national self-consciousness took on a military ethos²². Whether the Bavarian *Kriegsschule* was any different from the English Sandhurst of this period can be debated at length, but there can be little doubt that Kesselring’s birth-country had its own unique military ethos, self-conscious of the importance of its military might, which was both aggressive and expansionist. Germany had its great musicians, theologians and doctors, but military leaders created their own niche.

Kesselring was part of that generation which reflected the Wilhelmine military atmosphere; his generation was organic to a national

¹⁹ See Atkinson R, *The Day of the Battle, The War in Sicily and Italy 1943-44* (London: Abacus, 2013).

²⁰ Alexander, *Memoirs*, p.27.

²¹ Howard Michael, *The Invention of Peace & the Reinvention of War* (London: Profile Books, 2001) p.47.

²² Ibid.

structure that viewed war as a profession, and he never questioned or took issue with this ethos. The Wilhelmine Empire was deeply affected by ultra-right-wing-nationalism, and although there were numerous members of the SPD and communists, they were unlikely members of the influential military machine Kesselring joined. Later he was a member of that generation obliged to accept what they perceived as a humiliating defeat, allowing themselves to believe that they had not so much lost, but had been betrayed; ‘*dolchstoß*’ – the stab in the back, the popular theory that the undefeated military was ‘betrayed by Social Democrats, profiteers and, most ominously, the Jews’²³. This was a pernicious and fallacious lie that persuaded many that Germany’s greatness should be restored.

Another influence was anti-Semitism prevalent immediately after the Great War, as clearly demonstrated by the German historian Wolfram Wette. Although the Bavarian military took a slightly less offensive attitude than the Prussians, Wette clearly demonstrates that from the earliest days the military was riddled with anti-Semitism, which clearly influenced Kesselring.²⁴ The man whom Kesselring admired most, General von Seeckt, was anti-Semitic, although his wife was Jewish. The defeat and humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles drove military officers such as Kesselring towards the extreme right-wing; it appeared to offer the route to recovery. Chapter 2 will explore Kesselring’s conduct in the 1920s, and will question Kesselring’s claim he was non-political.

Seeckt’s sway cannot be underrated, and his influence on Kesselring was considerable. Seeckt ‘succeeded in rebuilding its {the army’s} spirit by making each regiment the ‘tradition-bearer’ of several of the old, which he intended would be reborn in better times, and by teaching the officers that they were the guardians of Germany’s past and future greatness’²⁵. Kesselring came under his pervasive influence, even though Seeckt made co-operation with Soviet Russia for military purposes necessary which was cynical and

²³ Sangster Andrew, *Nazi Thug to British Mayor* (London: Robert Hale, 2010)p.18.

²⁴ Wette Wolfram, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (London: Harvar UP,2007)p.33.

²⁵ Keegan J & Wheatcroft, *Who’s Who in Military History* (London:Hutchinson, 1987)p.279.

illegal, since it ran counter to the Versailles Treaty. Not only did they agree to build planes, train pilots and army officers, but also established a German/Russian joint stock company Bersol, near Samara, to build a chemical factory in order to make poison gas²⁶. Seeckt's one aim was for 'Germany to recapture the prestige, powers and territories of which it had been stripped'²⁷. Alexander was a product of English aristocracy and Zhukov a product of the Soviet regime; this thesis will illustrate that Kesselring was a typical product of the Wilhelmine era and the German defeat in the Great War. From his birth the thesis will argue that by nature Kesselring was unquestionably inclined towards right-wing nationalism, and remained so until his death. Chapters 1 and 2 will propose that Kesselring's political attitudes and views were built in by his national background, a posture Kesselring never questioned. It will also demonstrate that after the Great War Kesselring was part of a team that prepared for an aggressive war even before Hitler came to power, and Chapter 2 and 3 will propose that despite postwar claims Kesselring knew war was anticipated²⁸.

Context as Military Commander

This thesis does not throw any doubt upon Kesselring's military ability, and his administrative skills were unquestionably good, but Liddell-Hart, noted that many German military leaders, 'were essentially technicians, intent on their professional job, and with little idea of things outside it. It is easy to see how Hitler hoodwinked and handled them, and found them good instruments up to a point.'²⁹ The thesis will explore this question in relation to Kesselring.

Kesselring left the Army as a Colonel who had been deeply involved in the clandestine re-establishment of the Wehrmacht, and joined the

²⁶ Haigh R, Morris D, Peters A, *German-Soviet Relations in the Weimar Era* (Aldershot, Gower, 1985)p.165.

²⁷ Ibid, p.63.

²⁸ See Ibid and Blackbourn David, *History of Germany 1780-1918* (London: Blackwell, 1997) and Citino Robert, *The Path to Blitzkrieg* (Mechanicsburg, Stackpole, 2008) and Corum James, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg* (Kansas: UP Kansas, 1992).

²⁹ Liddell-Hart BH, *The German Generals Talk* (London: Harper, 2002)p.x.

Luftwaffe. His considerable contribution to military tactics, especially in what has been dubbed by others as *Blitzkrieg*, which is by nature aggressive, raises a question as to his claim that war came as a surprise. In chapter 3 the frequently made claim that Kesselring started strategy bombing or terror bombing with Warsaw, Rotterdam and London will be challenged. It was not a question of morality or ethics, but a matter of tactics and suitability to the system of surprise attack. Moreover, despite Kesselring's claims that the Battle of Britain was inconclusive it was not, and the British claim that it was the few against the many was a myth; this battle was Kesselring's first major defeat because he was against a superior foe that was equally as ruthless³⁰.

Also in Chapter 3 as a Luftwaffe commander Kesselring watched the Barbarossa attack fail because of the leadership's failure in underestimating Russia, yet despite this Kesselring remained loyal to Hitler. Kesselring and many others followed military decisions dictated by Hitler. The thesis will examine why Kesselring remained faithful to Hitler's wishes to the bitter end, and the strange hold Hitler exercised over men like Kesselring. This is examined in Chapter 8 when Kesselring was responsible for the Western theatre in the closing months of the war. Kesselring may not have been a party member, but he exhibited a loyalty and allegiance to Hitler which most contemporaries and historians do not ascribe to Kesselring³¹.

Attitudes towards Kesselring are mixed but mainly positive, and throughout the thesis this enigma will be explored. Amongst contemporary German officers and politicians Kesselring was admired, disliked, and held in affection. The critical and deeply religious Senger, who opposed the NSDAP, wrote that he admired Kesselring, whom he also recognised as a person torn between duty to his country and the evil of their political masters: this was a common attitude postwar³². Opinions about Kesselring were divided at every level within the power structure. When Göbbels asked Hitler how the

³⁰ See (NA-AMP) *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force 1933-45*, (The National Archives, Air Ministry Pamphlet, Issued by Air Ministry 1948, 2008

³¹ See Senger von und Etterlin, *Neither Fear nor Hope* (London: Macdonald, 1963) and Macksey, *Kesselring*.

³² 'Senger, a rare and indisputable good German,' Hastings Max, *All Hell Let Loose* (London: Harper, 2011)p529.

Generals were doing he wrote that 'his opinion of Albert Kesselring's military abilities is higher than my own.'³³ Göring was less enthusiastic and Jodl, who had always opposed Kesselring, backed Kesselring once it was perceived that Kesselring's Italian policy was working. Manstein, a major contemporary, had little time for Kesselring before and during the war, and his ADC, Stahlbertg, wrote he had the distinct impression that Manstein 'had no time for his fellow Field-Marshal Kesselring.'³⁴

It is immediately discernable that opinions during Kesselring's lifetime are mixed, but generally favourable as they are amongst historians. There are many attitudes, and this thesis will attempt to examine him, and explore his context in an objective fashion to try and understand the real person. In Chapter 3 Kesselring's time in Eastern Europe raises the issue of how much Kesselring knew about the savagery and developing Holocaust, but there is little substantive evidence, only room for speculative assessment.

Chapters 4 to 6 will explore Kesselring's reputation amongst the Allies: the vast majority of historians have commented on Kesselring's ability if not genius as a defence commander, as do some of those he fought, but these chapters will show that although Kesselring was a sound professional military commander, much of his success was due to the inept and inexperienced Allied military leadership, and the defensive nature of the Italian terrain. There can be an impression that as Rommel proved an excuse of failure in the desert, so Kesselring provided a similar excuse for failure in Italy.

The Allies knew him as *Smiling Albert* because in all photographs he appeared convivial; in their 'top-secret cipher telegrams' in the Italian campaign they referred to Kesselring as the Emperor because of his supposed total control. The thesis will question the ambiguous and limited nature of this command in Chapter 4, and again in Chapter 5, for when the Italians

³³ Lochner, *Goebbels*, p.382.

³⁴ Melvin, *Manstein*, p.421.

surrendered his power increased, but he never held total authority³⁵. His London interrogator wrote that 'proud Kesselring insisted on calling himself Commander-in-Chief of all German forces in Italy ... by 1944 he was nothing of the kind ... Kesselring's authority in Italy had been virtually confined by 1944 to the realm of fighting the enemy; while the power of Himmler's SS and SD police forces under the supreme control of General Karl Wolff was growing ever stronger³⁶. Kesselring's power fluctuated, but he was never in total control as he and the Allies believed.

Kesselring experienced many failures which rarely detracted from the admiration expressed by so many. Chapter 4 will illustrate his failure to cope with British Intelligence, his failure as a commander to persuade Hitler and Mussolini to seize Malta, (which could have changed the North African war) his inability at times to control Rommel or provide necessary supplies, and his reputation also survived the surrender of a German army larger than that in Stalingrad.

The image projected by Kesselring, as well as his defence counsel, and even some Italians, that Kesselring loved Italy's cultural treasures needs to be explored. Chapter 6 examines Kesselring's reputation for fighting in a museum with minimum damage (increased by the Allied destruction of Monte Cassino Abbey) whilst saving the treasures and granting historical sites 'open city' status.³⁷ What is not so well documented was the agricultural and industrial plunder which took place under his command.

Kesselring's charm disappeared when the Italians surrendered: Chapter 7 will explore the conduct of irregular warfare, and the vexed question of hostages and reprisals. Italy had become an invidious partisan/civil war, especially between the communists and the Fascists, and many other parties in between. Near the end of the war the brutality increased, and postwar the partisans fought one another killing on a scale commensurate

³⁵ KEW, FO-954/17A File, Ref/296.

³⁶ Scotland Lt Col A P, *The London Cage* (London: Landsborough,1957)pp.175-176.

³⁷ See Kesselring, *Memoirs*.

with the war years³⁸. Italy was in turmoil before, during, and after the war. Chapter 7 will examine the particular nature of the Italian partisan/civil war, and try and understand Kesselring in this context.

Dealing with partisan/civilians involved political decisions which were subsumed into the questions of legality and morality. Kesselring's particular background made him a ready resource for the mores, or lack of mores, created by Hitler's NSDAP and their views on conquered races and civilian resistance. Max Hastings noted that Kesselring was *in the front rank of commanders*, yet in the same book states 'that it is bizarre that Kesselring ... was reprieved from execution at Nuremberg'³⁹. This raises the question as to whether it is possible, as Hastings implies, that a general can be considered first class, but should also be executed for the way he conducted the war, unless one holds the view that a morally corrupt leader can be a good leader. A successful commander, if totally ruthless in disregarding human life, may be considered by some as not being successful, if destruction and annihilation are the outcome: others may view this as irrelevant. How others viewed Kesselring will be explored, and where possible, how Kesselring viewed himself.

The Context of Guilt

Kesselring's main opponent in Italy was Field-Marshal Alexander who after the war, with Churchill and Attlee, spoke against his death sentence because he fought a 'decent' war⁴⁰. His first biographer, Macksey, portrays him in a sympathetic light, and his interrogator in the notorious 'London Cage,' Lt. Colonel A P Scotland became Kesselring's life-long friend. The concept of the decent war in Africa and Italy often arises in autobiographies such as Colonel von Luck on the German side, and Lord Alexander himself

³⁸ See Lamb Richard, *War in Italy 1943-45* (London: Murray, 1993)p.236.

³⁹ Hastings, *All Hell*,p.461.

⁴⁰ Churchill had political reasons to save Kesselring from execution, although Alexander may have thought Kesselring fought a decent war - yet as late as 1952, a government minister had to deny that Alexander had anything to do with Kesselring's eventual release, see Commons Debate, 12th November 1952, volume 507,cc926-928.

on the Allied side, as well as a variety of historical accounts.⁴¹ Chapter 9 will examine this concept of a clean war, both in terms of how it was viewed in the trial and in reality.⁴² Chapter 10 will examine why the clean war question became such a contentious political issue in the postwar period.

Kesselring's trial was based on events in Italy surrounding the partisan war, and as Howard writing on Clausewitz observed, if one side uses extreme measures the other reciprocates⁴³. Italy typified this view and was a bitter war, and whilst Chapter 7 will explore the nature of the Italian partisans and Kesselring's reactions, Chapter 9 examines the trial.

Kesselring's trial was founded on two charges, the first being the infamous Ardeatine Cave massacre, and the second his command-orders regarding the partisan war. How far Kesselring was personally responsible for the first charge must be examined with care, as must the legality of his orders in the second charge. Also to be explored is the accusation that Kesselring committed perjury to avoid yet another more serious charge.

In law the question is usually resolved by whether the defendant had the necessary *mens rea*; but in this trial the most frequently raised legal question was whether the law itself was retrospective, (the London Agreement was, for example, signed as late as 1945) giving us the important jurisprudential dictum '*nulla poena sine praevia lege poende*' as well as '*nulla poena sine lege*' (no penalty without a law). There was also the vexed problem as to whether the Allies could agree that any law had been broken. Chapter 9 will examine the Southeast Case, *United States v Wilhelm List, et al*

⁴¹ See Luck Col Hans von, *Panzer Commander, Memoirs of Colonel Hans von Luck* (London:Cassell, 1989).

⁴² In his papers Alexander is impeccably polite and pleasant about his enemies; it may be that he was conscious that his orders to the Italians to kill Germans at every opportunity caused the brutal retaliation which Alexander found morally repulsive. This type of warfare was not always appreciated, and some senior officers believed guerrilla war not to be 'gentlemanly;' it was felt by some that SOE and others blurred the notion of non-combatants. It was a conundrum, as Air Chief-Marshal Portal objected to dropping civilians in order to kill Germans, though he found indiscriminate bombing acceptable. This question of provocation was raised by the defence, but never adequately dealt with by the then legal standards.

⁴³ Howard, *the Invention* p.3.

when the Tribunal had occasion to consider at length the law relating to hostages and reprisals⁴⁴. 'It was therein held that under certain restrictive conditions ... hostages may be taken, and after a judicial finding of strict compliance with all preconditions and as a last desperate remedy hostages may even be sentenced to death'⁴⁵. The Allied view appearing to be that the shooting of hostages was not necessarily illegal; immoral maybe, but not illegal.

The tangle is not just a legal issue, but involves moral and political perspectives. The alleged crimes were committed by Germans on Italian soil, yet it was tried in a British military court in Venice. The day the trial started the British and Italians signed a treaty which resolved past problems and had obvious economic benefits; the British however found it difficult to trust the Italians, the Italian record overseas in the Balkans was highly suspect, and the Italians wanted the British to oversee the trial.

The British frequently claimed that the person who should be in the dock was the Supreme Head of the SS in Italy, Karl Wolff, but he was given favourable treatment by the Americans. Amongst the arguments never raised, because of Kesselring's pride, was the fact that he was never solely in charge despite his title of 'Commander-in-Chief South.' The area of Kesselring's authority was never raised in the court proceedings, and Kesselring's conceit may explain this omission.

Chapter 9 will demonstrate that the trial was made yet more complex by the moral and human issues. These are the factors that run the deepest in human memory. Recently, in 2011, nine ex-German soldiers were sentenced to life imprisonment for massacres carried out in the Emilia Region.⁴⁶ The men, now in their 90s, ex-members of the Herman Göring Division had slaughtered up to 140 civilians. The ex-soldiers remain safe in

⁴⁴ Case No 7, LRWC, Volume VIII Case47,p.80.

⁴⁵ LRWC, Volume VIII Case47,p.80.

⁴⁶ Sydney Herald Newspaper, 7th July 2011.

Germany, but the heat of the conflict was still being considered in a Verona court.

Kesselring avoided using the Nuremberg Defence of *obeying orders* claiming his orders were legal, and that the partisans were immoral and illegal under international law. His other defence related to his efforts to save Italian treasures and historical places from the effects of war; but they are a side-issue compared to the question of the massacres. Chapter 9 will examine the original court notes and try to understand the nature of the essential arguments as they stand in law, and within the context of that historical period. The main probe must be to identify whether the process was fair, or whether it was the much vaunted expression, *victor's justice*. Some newly discovered messages in the Kew National Archives will reveal how Kesselring personally regarded his own guilt. It will also be necessary to view the trial in its long term context and ask whether Kesselring behaved any differently from other commanders caught up in a total war.

Context of postwar Politics

Chapters 9-10 explore Kesselring in the light of the Cold War, when new memories were constructed for political expediency. It has been claimed that after 1975 Spanish 'people spoke of a voluntary collective amnesia.'⁴⁷ Kesselring's trial also invoked the same phenomenon when 'the manner in which a punishable action ... can disappear from the collective memory, while the trial itself can be retrospectively reinterpreted as an exercise in victors' justice ... such misinterpretation and reinterpretation can be explained by considerations of *Vergangenheitspolitik*, the politics of memory, that accompanied the war trials after 1945'⁴⁸. This extract from Lingen's study summarises one of the more intriguing aspects of Kesselring's life after the war. The argument is that because the West perceived what it saw as potential dangers from the Soviet block, West Germany had to be brought back into the

⁴⁷ Battini M, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)p.27.

⁴⁸ Lingen Kerstin von, *Kesselring's Last Battle Crimes Trials and Cold War Politics* (Kansas: Kansas Press, 2009)p.2.

fold both politically and militarily. Politically, it had to be believed that the Wehrmacht had fought a clean war, and that the imprisoned Kesselring and Manstein, were good soldiers, who must be released as a sign of respect in order to encourage the new Federal Republic of Germany to co-operate. Kesselring's trial took place as the 'Cold War lay its glacial hand on Europe. From the summer of 1947, the USA and Britain moved over to a policy of rapidly reconstructing western Germany as a prelude to any future agreement with the Soviet Union.'⁴⁹ The new world politics needed it understood that in Italy the Wehrmacht conducted a clean war.

In a debate on the King's address in Parliament the Minister of Health, Mr Reginald Paget argued that 'one of the conditions for getting the right sort of German into our defence forces is that we should stop treating the Germans who once served in the army as criminals. There are at present people like Kesselring, Manstein and other commanders in prison. I saw a newspaper article {German} the other day which was headed. *'What sort of people do they think we are?'* It went on to ask if we imagined that they were going to serve as comrades with the men who are now imprisoning their most honoured commanders.'⁵⁰ The question of good and bad Germans evolved quickly after the war. Eisenhower reflecting on Nuremberg said that the German officer corps had been identical with Hitler, 'perpetrators of the same crimes, subject to the same penalties. Less than six years later, Eisenhower and the Allies had moved dramatically away from this global indictment; soldiers and NSDAP could not be lumped together... Eisenhower now averred that 'there is a real difference between the regular German soldier and officer and Hitler and his criminal group.'⁵¹ As Eisenhower moved from military to political status he was aware of the need to have West Germany within the fold. Eisenhower's declaration was made on January 23rd 1951, and the Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer made a similar statement on April 5th 1951 because both leaders recognised that a new West German Army was

⁴⁹ Fulbrook Mary (Ed), *Twentieth Century Germany* (London: Hodder Headline Group, 2001)p.180.

⁵⁰ House of Commons, 1st November 1950, Volume 480, cc164-293.

⁵¹ Bartov, Grossmann, Nolan (Eds), *Crimes of War "Guilt denied in the 20th Century"* (New York: The New Press, 2002)p.171.

needed, ‘and that the expertise of the former Wehrmacht elite would be indispensable in creating it’⁵².

The thesis will demonstrate that Kesselring’s postwar reputation was repaired mainly for political reasons, albeit briefly, as political pressures worked to clean up the Italian campaign in retrospect. When the House of Commons debate mentioned *vide supra* it was not that Mr Paget was part of a political scheme, a greater plan of ‘fixing’, but that it suited the current mentality to colour the past in order to secure a better future. The argument that politics demanded a different version of the Italian campaign for its own reasons is very cogent, but there were other factors.

The actual trial of 1947 would not necessarily have felt the influence of Cold War politics, but the aftermath did, when there was intense political pressure to have Kesselring released; although this thesis will contend that the motives varied from person to person. The key to Kesselring’s release was probably his ‘defence lawyer, Hans Laternser, who accompanied by a barrage of publicity, combined to exert pressure to which British *Vergangenheitspolitik* had to react’⁵³. There were some who sincerely believed that Kesselring and Manstein were being badly treated, both Lord Alexander, already mentioned, and Lord Hankey, were two such people.

Kesselring was released for a variety of reasons, but mainly political. Chapter 10 evaluates the post-prison period, and Kesselring's decline. Kesselring never changed, and made an error in accepting the presidency of a right-wing ex-soldier’s association. Some hoped Kesselring might become the president of the new Germany, but he created diplomatic problems with an insensitive tour of Austria, and supported home-coming German officers who had committed war crimes. In his closing years his views and position made him something of a pariah. This thesis will show that in his final years Kesselring had become both a pawn in the new world of

⁵² Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.236.

⁵³ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.6.

Cold War politics, and also a slave to his own past, his reputation was tainted both at home and overseas. He was a product of a period that failed to recognise change.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY LIFE (1885-1922)

Early Influences

Throughout his life, in his memoirs, postwar interrogations, interviews and various statements Kesselring consistently denied he had any interest in politics. He regarded himself as a professional soldier who simply served his political masters¹. Like the vast majority of senior German army officers he never joined any political party, but his early life, from his adolescence, through the Great War and immediate postwar years, it becomes apparent that Kesselring was a dedicated right-wing military protagonist. Always noted as charming and amiable, the sobriquet 'smiling Albert' gives a sense of the affectionate, in reality this is a myth, he was a tough right-wing nationalist.

The first part of this chapter will look briefly at Kesselring's birth, family, schooling, marriage and early military training. It will serve to illustrate that everything in Kesselring's environment was biased towards the traditional right-wing; from where he was born, the anti-Semitism of the military, and even his first posting at Metz which echoed the glory of the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. It is necessary to examine the influence of the Wilhelmine era with its passion for patriotism, to understand why many German officers acted as they did. His early context was one of right-wing nationalism.

Albert Konrad Kesselring was born on November 30th 1885 in Marktsteft, a municipality in the district of Kitzingen in Bavaria, where he spent his early childhood with members of his wider family who ran the local brewery. He was the sixth and youngest child of Carl Adolf Kesselring; his mother was Rosina, who had also been born a Kesselring, and was her

¹ See Kesselring, *Memoirs*.

husband's second cousin. Kesselring spent some of his early youth in the town of Wunsiedel². His father was by profession a schoolmaster, later elevated to Schools Director in Bayreuth, he was a Lutheran and a Freemason, and Kesselring admitted in a prison interview that his father would have opposed the NSDAP. His father was eighty-nine when he died in 1934; Kesselring stated 'the death of my father was felt keenly, because we were a very closely knit family'³. His mother had died from kidney failure much earlier, at the age of fifty-five when Kesselring was twenty-eight.

Bayreuth is a traditional Bavarian town and became a centre of NSDAP attention because of the Wagnerian Festival in the 1930s. It was later to be the site for the Flossenburg Concentration Camp, built in May 1938 by the SS primarily for 'antisocial' prisoners⁴. This was the town associated with the young Kesselring, a marketing-centre for a large rural district. Researching Bayreuth shows that it is a conservative Roman Catholic area, widely known because of Wagner. Since the 1890s, and because of the Wagner connexion, Bayreuth became something of a shrine, and a fertile ground for nationalism. As noted by Macksey in his 1978 biography of Kesselring, Bayreuth with its sense of 'national spirit' must have had a persuasive influence on the young Kesselring. Lingen noted that the subject of Kesselring's matriculation essay was to do with the sense of loyalty to the empire as well as Bavarian patriotism⁵.

Kesselring associated his name with an aristocratic past of 'knights, patricians and priests,' but he was born into a middle-class environment and conscious of his ancestral heritage.⁶ In Bayreuth Kesselring's schooling followed the typical German pattern of a Classical Grammar School, namely the *Christian Ernestinum* School in 1904. According to the school records he

² Curiously Wunsiedel was the birthplace of the author Jean Paul, and more recently came into the headlines as Rudolf Hess's burial place in 1987, which was removed in July 2011 to avoid becoming a rallying point for neo-Nazis and their opposition.

³ Goldensohn L & Gellately R (Ed) *The Nuremberg Interviews. Conversations with the Defendants & Witnesses* (London: Pimlico, 2007)p.323.

⁴ Prisoners were used in a nearby granite quarry.

⁵ Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.17.

⁶ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.15.

held no great aptitude for ancient languages, but was considered by his teacher as diligent in studying English and Italian⁷. He was a pupil of average ability, unlike his two older brothers who went on to a university education - one was to become a medical Doctor. According to the school records Kesselring was viewed as ‘good-tempered and upright, his behaviour as composed and decent,’ and he was described, ‘as one who sought to battle his way to the top’⁸. This was a perceptive comment which characterised much of his life. When he matriculated in 1904 ‘one observer noted that he seldom smiled (*nur selten lächelnden Schüler*): an interesting observation since the nickname *Smiling Albert* has invariably been bestowed on him by almost every non-German writer⁹.

Apart from a few details there is little information about his early life. It is not surprising that a Bavarian boy from a good family should join the military; it was regarded as prestigious to be an officer in the Imperial Army. In the socio-political atmosphere of that day, some young men would have considered themselves German before being Bavarian, but proud of their Bavarian roots, an attitude shared by many young Prussians. In the closing days of 1945 Hitler handed over the reins of power to Kesselring and Dönitz, whose upbringing was similar to that of Kesselring, except he was Prussian. Dönitz too came from a non-military background, was middle-class, and ‘particularly aspired to be worthy of the ideals, to imitate the bearing and outlook and the manners of Prussian nobility of the sword who stood behind the Kaiser at the head of the empire’¹⁰. Kesselring, Dönitz and many of the German commanders of World War II were raised in an environment where patriotism and nationalism were fundamental.

It has been said that Kesselring’s non-noble birth and middle-class background were factors that played ‘a role in explaining not only the cadaver-like obedience with which Kesselring later served Hitler to the bitter end, but also helped him surpass many of his noble-born colleagues whose

⁷ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.17.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.20.

¹⁰ Padfield Peter, *Dönitz The Last Führer* (London: Harper & Row, 1984)p.11.

climb to the higher military positions had been accepted because of their birth-rights'¹¹. However, men like Kesselring, Dönitz and others, were part of a development in which senior officers were no longer automatically noble, 'officers of middle-class background succeeded in making substantial inroads ... by 1913, they accounted for no less than 70 per cent of the total officer corps'¹². The later blind obedience to Hitler may, as Raiber suggested, be part of Kesselring's upbringing, but other factors such as his right-wing nationalism, patriotism and military obedience, later drilled in by Seeckt, all played a part.

Social class dictated entry into the army, and because his father had no military background Kesselring entered as a *Fahnenjunker* (corporal-cadet), one who hoped to become an officer. It was more difficult to become an officer-cadet in the Bavarian Army than in the Prussian Army, as the latter did not require a matriculation standard of education. The Prussian intake tended to rely on their aristocracy, whereas the Bavarian Army found its main-roots in the educated middle-classes. The competition for the Bavarian military entrance led to its own form of elitism, but not based on class. Hitler assumed he was *von* Kesselring as the officers normally came from the aristocracy. Nevertheless, the Bavarian background was right-wing-nationalism, and a breeding ground for possible NSDAP support.

On July 20th 1904 he enlisted as a gunner joining the 2ndBavarian Foot-Artillery-Regiment - 2nd *BayerischeFußartillerieregiment*. He followed the traditional route, becoming an NCO (*Unteroffizier*) on the 25th October 1904, an officer cadet (*Fähnrich*) in February 1905 and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant (*Leutnant*) on the 8th March 1906. His first two years were served at the Munich *Kriegsakademie* of the Bavarian Army which was the military academy and staff college of Bavaria, founded in 1867. It was based on similar lines to its Prussian counterpart, but only a tenth of the size.

¹¹ Raiber, *Anatomy*,p.20.

¹² Berghahn V R, *Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987)p.13.

Kesselring would have been deeply influenced by the *Kriegsakademie* and the Bavarian military ethos, which contained strong anti-Semitic elements simply 'because a general prejudice against Jews existed in the first place'¹³. Anti-Semitism was common throughout much of Europe, traditionally being at its most vicious in Russia as well as the old Hapsburg Empire; France had suffered the Dreyfus affair with its vast implications of inherent anti-Semitism, and 'Germany before the First World War was far from being Europe's heartland of anti-Semitism'¹⁴. In Bavaria and Saxony Jews were able to become officers until the turn of the century: in Prussia the prejudice appeared to be deeper. The German historian Wette, found that many affluent Jewish families left Berlin and moved to other states so that their sons could become officers¹⁵. In 1911 the Association of German Jews published a pamphlet on Jewish men in the military showing that twenty-six Jewish men had made the status of officer, because they had all converted to Christianity¹⁶. Anti-Semitism is mentioned at this juncture because it is not unreasonable assumption that Kesselring would have been influenced.

In 1906 he joined his Regiment at Metz, an important place from the point of view of understanding the young Kesselring and the spirit of the times. Metz, one time headquarters of the Third-French Army, became a German city and an important garrison after the 1870 war. The German army decided to build a second and a third fortified line around Metz.¹⁷ Kesselring's first posting was in territory won during a European war, and held as of right of military power. It was considered part of the front line, and a defence against a traditional enemy. As a young soldier Kesselring travelled with his companions to study the battlefields of the 1870 war: he never mentions any particular friends, and these outings came to an end as border sensitivity increased.

¹³ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.25.

¹⁴ Kershaw Ian, *Fateful Choices* (London: Penguin, 2007)p.438.

¹⁵ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.33.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.34.

¹⁷ Given back to France in 1918, retaken by Germans, returned to France 1945.

His Regimental Commander, Otto Mayer, described Kesselring as amongst his best students, and to be found in the Munich War Archives personnel files that contain short sharp reports on the young Kesselring: 'among the young officers, Lieutenant Kesselring is by far the best; all indications are that he will distinguish himself above the average ... in 1911 a qualification report noted his leadership qualities ... he was allowed to attend the School of Artillery and Engineering in Munich from 1909 to 1910 ... he had a positive intellectual inclination ... a superb sense of duty, a reliable and stable character ... had authority over subordinates to whom his attitude was decisive, just and benevolent ... his behaviour towards superiors was tactful and modest ... Kesselring's good nature and polished social deportment were also mentioned'¹⁸. The same reports note that Kesselring was 'temperamentally suited to and technically interested in new forms of weaponry'¹⁹. Some of these attributes were to surface later in life; most of his later subordinates held him in high esteem, and his 'tactful and modest' approach to superiors even endeared him to some of his captors and interrogators as will be seen later. It would appear from this report, that his early training, along with later training under Prince Rupprecht, instilled in him good manners and a charming approach to people at a personal level, which became one of his hallmarks even during the years of his imprisonment²⁰.

Kesselring developed an interest in the technical side of military life when he attended the Artillery School in 1909. He claimed to have played a role in the development of the powerful 88mm flak gun-*flugabwehrkanone*, but there seems no extant evidence to this claim²¹. However, as an artillery man with a technical knowledge he had an interest and possible involvement in one of the best artillery pieces of the war²². This curiosity in technical

¹⁸ BHKM-(Kesselring personnel file) 61536: and quoted in Lingen,p.18.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Had there been war trials post-1918 Prince Rupprecht's name was on the list- Hankey Rt Hon Lord, *Politics, Trials and Errors* (Oxford: Pen in Hand, 1950)p.5.

²¹ Prototypes were produced as early as 1928 by Krupp in Essen with Swedish Bofors

²² The 88mm *flugabwehrkanone* - used in the Spanish Civil War against planes/tanks; it could destroy any Western tank from 1000 metres, and was the one weapon capable of dealing with the Soviet T34 tank.

development had been stimulated in Metz where new weapons and gadgets were frequently tested. Tactics and technology were important for Kesselring in his military progress; his instructors had considered him as developing into something of an ‘expert with an understanding of the interplay between tactics and technology’²³. At Metz, along with testing new weapons, they practised artillery accuracy, and Kesselring became interested in balloon-observation for directing artillery fire, and for observing enemy movement. He volunteered for work in one of four Balloon Companies at Metz, but with the arrival of aircraft and improved optics balloons soon became redundant.

During these years Kesselring considered marriage; little is known of Kesselring’s youth or family life; he was a private man leaving no personal papers. Kesselring married the daughter of a wealthy Bayreuth Apothecary on 29th March 1910. His bride was Pauline Anna Keyssler, often known as Liny, and it was Kesselring’s father who had encouraged this marriage for financial reasons, knowing that an army officer would need substantial funds; it has also been stated that Kesselring’s father received ‘30,000 marks in the bargain’²⁴. Part of the arrangement was that his wealthy mother-in-law should live with them²⁵. The American historians Raiber and Mitcham state that the mother-in-law made Kesselring’s life miserable, but neither cite the information source, only claiming ‘Kesselring’s Catholic religion prohibited divorce’²⁶.

Kesselring and his wife honeymooned in Italy, possibly explaining Kesselring's early fondness of that country's culture. They could not have children and Liny underwent unsuccessful surgery to resolve this problem in 1912 and in 1926 had to have the menopause artificially induced²⁷. They overcame the childless problem by adopting Rainer, the son of Kesselring’s second cousin, Kurt Kesselring. They may have married for family and financial reasons, nevertheless, the marriage survived until Liny died in 1957.

²³ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.19.

²⁴ In some sources spelt ‘Kayssler’: Mitcham Samuel, *Eagles of The Third Reich* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole 2007)p.16.

²⁵ In 1946 Kesselring in prison, Liny was living in Telz still with her 89 year-old mother.

²⁶ Mitcham, *Eagles*,p.16.

²⁷ Goldensohn, *Nuremberg*,p.324.

Kesselring converted from his father's Lutheran faith to Catholicism to marry Liny, who was an ardent Roman Catholic. There is no evidence that Kesselring's family life impinged on his military career. He never kept personal letters; his life was motivated by military considerations. He had become, by the age of thirty, a loyal, dedicated German Army Officer, undoubtedly looking for promotion; he was of an age and type that would one day be a fruitful resource for the NSDAP.

One of the major influences that moulded Kesselring was being born into a Germany which was looking outwards to a world policy (*Weltpolitik*) and was strongly nationalistic. What inspired nationalism is open to debate, whether it was Bismarck and his successors who understood diplomacy in the light of Germany's lengthy borders, or, as argued by 'Eckart Kehr, who, concluded that the peculiar shape of Wilhelmine foreign policy can only be understood in terms of the primacy of domestic politics'²⁸. For young Kesselring his Germany was nationalistic and militaristic. 'The unified Germany created in 1871 was an authoritarian state based on Prussian traditions, and the thinking of its officers was characterized by the belief that armed conflict between nations represented the natural state of affairs'²⁹. Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany 'regarded pacifism as a mixture of stupidity, cowardice, and treason'³⁰.

The Wilhelmine era included rituals which gave the military an almost divine status: in the months of May and June the 'emperor reviewed troops every day from 7:00 a.m. until late morning. He then frequently lunched with the unit officers at their mess and was thus unavailable for government work until the afternoon'³¹. The emperor was extreme in his nationalism, always envious of the British fleet (of which he was an Admiral); 'his dream was to make Germany respected, feared and admired'³². Although

²⁸ Berghahn, *Modern*, p.29.

²⁹ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.140.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.143.

³¹ Fink, Hull & Knox, *German Nationalism and the European Response* (USA:Oklahoma UP, 1985)p.27.

³² Gilbert Martin, *First World War* (London: BCA, 1994)p.5.

most royal families brought their children up with military discipline, Wilhelm treated military matters as worship, and the Crown prince wrote in his autobiography that ‘there was the reverence and military subordination taught us towards our father from our infancy’³³. As a youngster the Crown Prince found the Kaiser remote because he was so enthralled with military matters; even finding an accidental meeting with Bismarck a kinder experience³⁴. It has been claimed that in the modern world the Kaiser would have been ‘diagnosed as having histrionic personality disorder’³⁵.

This atmosphere of nationalism and the priority given to military matters was re-enforced by the memory of recent martial success. The Franco-German War of 1870/1 had been ‘actively sought by the French, who were itching to teach the Prussians a lesson... they found themselves facing a coalition of all the German states, whose forces were better armed, better organised and better lead ... the first cannon-shot was ceremoniously fired on 1st August 1870 by the Emperor Napoleon’s son, to cries of ‘Á Berlin’... the long term consequences was the declaration of a united German Empire’³⁶. This war helped create a Germany with a sense of military might, with France as the enemy, all of which would have influenced Kesselring. The fact that in the 1870 war the Germans had, with a single thrust, crossed the frontier and encircled the main French army at Metz, would not have been lost on Kesselring when he was stationed there. Kesselring had been raised on a military diet, which had strong right-wing attitudes so typical of Germany at this time, with a high degree of self-confidence.

The nature of Wilhelmine Germany, Wilhelm's personality, and the competitive nature of industrialism, would have made nationalism and military power prominent in the mind of young men like Kesselring, who naturally inclined their attitudes towards the right-wing. It was not that there was no left-wing or liberal thinking in Germany, but ‘German liberals have

³³ William Crown Prince, *Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany* (www.forgottenbooks.org: Classic Reprint, 1919)p.15.

³⁴ Ibid,p16.

³⁵ Tipton Frank B, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815* (London: Continuum, 2003)p.243.

³⁶ Davies Norman, *A History of Europe* (London: Pimlico, 1997)p.868.

often been assessed not according to what they did, but what they failed to do'³⁷. The military circles, closely bound to the monarchy, with which Kesselring was associated, could not be described as liberal or left-wing. Unlike Britain the attitude of the monarchy was more influential than that of political leaders, 'Wilhelmine Germany had a febrile, nationalistic, and superficial form of politics rather than a stable, democratic political culture ... Wilhelmine politics were materialistic, populist and irresponsible. And the search for antecedents of the Nazi seizure of power is justified and important'³⁸.

As such 'Anglo-Saxon historians were now ready to see a pattern of German aggression stretching back before 1914 ... German historians after 1945 tend to see Hitler as an aberration' but even they have to admit that 'Wilhelmine Germany had its annexationist soldiers and Pan-German extremists' although they argue that the country's leaders were not bent on aggression, and were obliged to fight a defensive war³⁹.

Kesselring's personality was being moulded in a right-wing nationalistic atmosphere. Even when Kesselring was a young officer in Metz, von Schlieffen in the December of 1905 had posited 'the Schlieffen plan which was to annihilate the French army in one enormous push (*Vernichtungsschlacht*)' through Metz⁴⁰. At the beginning of 1914 Kesselring was twenty-nine years of age, a Lieutenant who anticipated promotion; he had been moulded in military tradition which by its very nature made him nationalistic and right-wing.

World War I

In order to understand Kesselring and some of his generation, it is important to view the passions stimulated by the Great War: particularly in

³⁷ Thompson Alastair, *Left Liberals, The State, & Popular Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (Oxford: OUP, 2000)p.7.

³⁸ *Ibid*,p.8.

³⁹ Blackbourn, *History*,p.334.

⁴⁰ Zuber Terence, *The Real German War Plan 1904-14* (Stroud: The History Press, 2011)p.5.

Germany with its right-wing form of nationalism, patriotism, and anti-Semitism. At a more personal level it is necessary to understand the influences on Kesselring's development, for example his admiration of Prince Rupprecht; the changing nature of war and its technology; his early brush with Soviet communism, and his lack of comment on the tragedy of the mass slaughter. All of which will serve to illustrate how this product of Wilhelmine military culture, was further honed into a potential willing tool for the Hitler regime of later years.

Some believed that a large scale war could not happen; the English economist Norman Angell (1873-1967) argued that the economic interest of countries had made war redundant. Although Russia was busy building up military resources, the Tsar motivated two peace conferences of The Hague in 1899 and 1907⁴¹. The concept of pacifism was not always popular: the famous French pacifist Jean Jaurès was assassinated in a Parisian café by a 29 year old nationalist called Raoul Villain, on the grounds that pacifism was an act of treason. In Germany, famous for its musicians, theologians and scholars not everyone wanted war. However, the military establishment was becoming a rising feature. Moltke had claimed 'perpetual peace as a dream' and young officers like Kesselring probably saw war as their profession⁴². Kesselring like many others typified the military aspect of German society.

Not everyone wanted war; recent research has indicated that this joy may have been exaggerated, almost 'a legend that Europe welcomed the conflict is today heavily qualified, if not discredited ... thoughtful people were appalled.'⁴³ As the war drew near 'the German public mood became much less exuberant.'⁴⁴ In Berlin '100,000 people demonstrated against war.'⁴⁵ However, in the military, Kesselring noted that during an artillery exercise at the Grafenwöhr range near Metz the atmosphere was 'pervaded with a warlike backdrop,' and the batteries in the forts of the western front, such as Metz,

⁴¹ These conferences produced The International Court of Justice-1900, and The Hague Convention, 1907,

⁴² Davies, *History*, p.875.

⁴³ Hastings Max, *Catastrophe* (London: William Collins, 2013)p.118.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.82.

⁴⁵ Tipton, *History*, p.295.

were prepared and ready. In understanding this period it is critical to realise the significance of 'patriotism and nationalism' to all countries. Kesselring can recall the Commander-in-Chief of the Sixth Army as it moved from Lorraine to Belgium saying 'now with the happy prospect of war,' a sentiment shared especially by the professional military⁴⁶. 'The Kaiser had become the symbol of his country's assertive nationalism,' and this political stance eventually subsumed even the Socialists, who had initially opposed war⁴⁷.

Kesselring remained with his regiment in Metz, but it was clear that the war was not going to centre on the fortress, and Kesselring in the September of 1914 was caught up in an early local defeat. He was with the Bavarian Crown Prince Rupprecht attempting to breach the lines at Marne which, in his sector, proved to be a failure; the French had been lucky in discovering the plans on a dead German officer who had driven his car the wrong way⁴⁸. The war changed its nature from one of mobility to the infamous trench warfare of attrition. Kesselring observed the slaughter in Flanders, but devotes less than two pages to war in his memoirs, and makes no comment on the numbers killed and wounded; as a professional soldier he appeared to view this as the order of war

Kesselring saw the trenches but never served in them; later a General Karl Ritter von Wenninger, who had been his Divisional Commander, wrote a report on 19th May 1917 pointing out that 'he {Kesselring} had not served in the trenches on the front line ... but he possessed the qualities and capabilities of a *Generalstaboffizier*'⁴⁹. An overview of Kesselring indicates he was regarded as a highly observant man, meticulous in detail, and the awfulness of trench warfare could not have evaded him.

On December 5th (1914) Kesselring was appointed Regimental Adjutant to the 1st Bavarian Foot Artillery holding his 1913 rank of

⁴⁶ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.17.

⁴⁷ Hastings, *Catastrophe*, p.79.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *First*, p.66.

⁴⁹ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.22.

Oberleutnant. In 1915 he was promoted to *Hauptmann* and spent a considerable time with the Sixth Army in Vosges, and was involved in repulsing the French in their final assault on Vimy Ridge. As Adjutant to the GOC (General-Officer-Commanding) he experienced the nature of command, and, as the war progressed, he noted that planes and artillery had a substantial role.

The year 1917 brought Kesselring a degree of prominence, and enforced some of his political attitudes. Kesselring was made Adjutant to the 2nd Bavarian Artillery which was mainly fighting in the Arras area. He was on leave on April 9th when the German front collapsed along an eight mile line, Kesselring returned as this attack was occurring, and repelled ‘a British bridgehead by means of a tactical dodge with operational consequences, subsequently closing the impending gaps in the line of defence and thus avoiding the threatening retreat, a gambit he used in Italy thirty years later’⁵⁰. His prominent part was noted by superior officers, and he was commended for ‘clear and carefully constructed orders despite being on duty for twenty hours’⁵¹. In January of that year he was praised by Lieutenant-General Kreppel for being an ‘alert and persistent observer with very strong nerves’⁵². As a result of this action at the Arras break his Commanding Officer decided that Kesselring was ready for the General Staff⁵³. One of the reasons for the success of the Allied push was the failure of the German Commander von Falkenhausen to employ Ludenforff’s ‘elastic defence,’ which allowed the enemy to break through by yielding space, giving the attacker time to exhaust himself. This created logistic problems, encouraged over-confidence, and then allowed for a strong counter-attack⁵⁴. This was activated by Kesselring, and it was a *modus operandi* he used successfully in the next war in Italy. As a young professional officer Kesselring was learning the dark arts of warfare.

⁵⁰ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.24.

⁵¹ BHKM-(Kesselring personnel/file)-61536: 24th May 17.

⁵² BHKM-(Kesselring personnel/file)-61536: 1st-Jan 14 & Herde Peter, *Albert Kesselring (1885-1960)* (Fränkische Lebensbilder, Vol 18, series vii, Neustadt an der Aische, 2000)p.299.

⁵³ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.24.

⁵⁴ Known as Deep Defence or Defence in Depth.

Kesselring also observed that whenever the British penetrated German lines, they appeared to lack orders as to how to exploit the advantage. This aspect was to repeat itself during the next war, and was instructive. Later, in Italy, he reckoned that if the Allies fought their way across a river or made a sea landing they would pause instead of advancing. Ironically, his future opponent Alexander was in agreement with Kesselring as he wrote that ‘the British will go into the attack with great bravery and tenacity, as a whole they are not quick to exploit a success or to react to a sudden emergency’⁵⁵.

In the winter of 1917 Kesselring met Russian communists at the armistice meeting between Germany and Russia at the Dūna, which he attended as a General Staff Officer of the 2nd Bavarian *Landwehr* Division⁵⁶. It was his first meeting with communists and it left an indelible impression on him. The armistice negotiations took five days, and the two senior Bolshevik negotiators were Russian Jews, Adolf Joffe and Leo Kamenev (Trotsky’s brother-in-law): there was a common opinion that the Bolsheviks were mainly Jews, a belief of which Kesselring would have been aware. There was also Anastasia Bitsenko, who had been a prisoner of the Tsar for murdering one of his ministers, and for the ‘sake of revolutionary propriety, a worker, a peasant and a soldier had also been included in the delegation: the peasant had only been found at the last moment, during the railway journey, at a wayside station’⁵⁷. This probably explains Kesselring’s reaction to Soldiers’ Councils and the communists he met; in his memoirs describing them as ‘peacocking as if they were the officer’s bosses.’ This experience ‘hardened his political views’ against the left-wing and confirmed his own right-wing position⁵⁸. The right-wing attitudes inculcated into him, alongside this encounter with early Bolsheviks, left Kesselring further entrenched in his views. He was at the Dūna River just over a month before he returned to the Western Front; it was insufficient time for Kesselring to understand what was happening in Russia, but sufficient time for the right-wing bigotry and growing anti-Semitism to be inflamed.

⁵⁵ Alexander, *Memoirs*, p.156.

⁵⁶ *Landwehr*, or *Landeswehr* - meaning 'defence of the country'.

⁵⁷ Gilbert, *First*, p.386.

⁵⁸ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.19.

Kesselring must have been aware that General von Hohenborn had in 1916 demanded to know the numbers of Jewish men fighting in the Prussian army⁵⁹. The census indicated the Jews were better educated and serving in large numbers, but the military did not publish and 'thereby supported the attack on Jews as slackers'⁶⁰. 'Many Jews regarded it as defamatory, and they were entirely correct'⁶¹. It caused uproar amongst the Jewish population, and no census was carried out in Bavaria. Kesselring distrusted the communists, and the 'talk' about Jews was a growing feature that surrounded him. It has been suggested that Ludendorff and Bauer may have started the *Dolchstoßlegende*, since they believed that the 'Jews had created a secret international organization to promote revolutionary movements in several countries, first Russia in 1917 and then Germany in 1918'⁶². In his book *Kriegführung und Politik* Ludendorff wanted a Germany that was *judenrein* – 'free of Jews:' the ethos was similar to that promulgated by Hitler. For many people the fact that the two senior Bolshevik negotiators were Russian Jews placed communists and Jewish people into the same category, and Kesselring probably held the same view.

Due to his energy and efficiency Kesselring was not required to participate in the special staff course before being selected to the General Staff⁶³. The fact that Kesselring joined the General Staff without being required to attend the Sedan Course was an indicator of the regard he was held in by senior officers. On January 4th 1918 he was appointed as a Staff Officer in the Quartermasters Branch to the II Bavarian Army Corps with the Sixth Army. A few months later on 15th April he was appointed as GSO to Headquarters, III Army Corps. During this final period of the war Kesselring was involved in the preparations for what was to be the greatest artillery attack ever produced by the Germans.

⁵⁹ Minister of War.

⁶⁰ Tipton, *History*, p.310.

⁶¹ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.36.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.40.

⁶³ Sedan course - usually lasting four weeks.

Prince Rupprecht influenced Kesselring in the meticulous in the way he addressed his officers, and held dinner parties for them; Kesselring emulated both these formalities. Rupprecht commanded the German Sixth Army at the outbreak of war in Lorraine, and while part of the German army was participating in the Schlieffen plan, the Crown Prince led his troops in the Battle of Lorraine. During the regrouping of 1917, as German troops moved back to shorten the line of defence, Ludendorff ordered the area to be heavily mined and totally destroyed; Prince Rupprecht strongly challenged this once he saw the nature of the devastation, but was overruled⁶⁴.

Eventually Rupprecht realised Germany was so out-matched it could not win the war; he pressed the German Chancellor, Count Hertling early on to open peace talks with Britain, France and Italy while Germany and Austria still held the military ascendancy in the west⁶⁵. Rupprecht, promoted Field-Marshal in 1916 had been one of the better commanders during the war, but because of the postwar revolutions he went into retirement, though many regarded him as the natural king. When Hitler was seeking total dominance in 1933 some hoped that in Bavaria, the monarchy would be restored under prince Rupprecht. Although appearing at first to support Hitler, Rupprecht's outspoken opposition necessitated his flight to Italy⁶⁶. Kesselring acknowledged his indebtedness to Rupprecht by emulating his style of leadership, as with Seeckt much later, who helped form Kesselring's style of command, all of which will be explored later.

During the closing period of the war Kesselring increased his understanding of defence against superior numbers and material; lessons he was to deploy effectively in the next war. His involvement with the communists entrenched his distrust of their political system, and his association with Rupprecht may have enhanced his courtesy levels, but his adherence to the extreme right-wing continued to grow. The continued anti-

⁶⁴ Gilbert, *First*, p.309.

⁶⁵ Gilbert, *First*, p.429.

⁶⁶ He went into exile in 1938 - in Florence as guest of the Italian king during WWII managing to avoid arrest, although his wife and children were interned in separate concentration camps until the war ended. He died in 1955.

Semitism in the military would have prejudiced him, but above all his apparent lack of comment on the mass slaughter cannot go unnoted. For Kesselring, the military man, death appears to be part of the job whatever the scale; while being personally brave his acceptance of the mass slaughter indicates his ruthlessness. Part of the reluctance of the Western nations to confront Hitler in the 1930s was a fear of the repetition of the Great War's slaughter, which Kesselring never mentions. He gives the impression of belonging to a warrior caste in which war is their profession: a dangerous tendency with its roots in the Wilhelmine era: this was a major part of Kesselring's context.

WWI aftermath - 1918-1922

Kesselring's background of right-wing nationalism, his admiration of Rupprecht and all things military, his experience of the war and meeting with the communists were amongst many factors forming his outlook and attitudes, and the aftermath of the war provided an environment in which his views developed to the point of conviction. The final part of this chapter will examine how the Versailles Treaty was perceived, especially by right-wing military men like Kesselring. The postwar political quarrels led Kesselring into personal conflict with his *Freikorps* superior. Kesselring was immersed in the mire of *Freikorps* street politics despite his protestations, and the experience taught him to conceal his political views. The inability of the Weimar Republic to deal with extremism, along with inflation became a breeding ground for men like Kesselring.

The shock waves of defeat, revolutions and anarchy, as well as the unjust (as he would have viewed it) Versailles Treaty shaped Kesselring's attitudes⁶⁷. Most Germans regarded the reparations with anger since they were based 'on a manifestly false premise - the assertion written into the Versailles

⁶⁷ 'Among Germans there was near universal agreement that such treatment was unjust and intolerable making the Versailles Treaty perhaps the only political issue around which there was widespread agreement in Weimar Germany.' Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.23.

Treaty (Article 231) that Germany alone had been responsible for the war'⁶⁸. The treatment of Germany after the war fuelled nationalism once again - 'apart from the ostracism and humiliation of Germany, which in spite of the servitudes imposed by the treaty settlements, remained the most powerful nation in Europe'⁶⁹.

The legacy of the so-called Peace Conference achieved few of its aims; Germany was humiliated and with little hope of any internal or external reconciliation. The new Republic was delicate and run by a coalition dominated by social democrats, whose 'representatives only signed the Treaty of Versailles under the express threat of coercion'⁷⁰. Kesselring saw his old stamping ground of Alsace-Lorraine returned to France; Poznan and parts of East Prussia and Upper Silesia given to Poland, territory was taken by Belgium, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia. In addition to this war reparations were placed around the £6,600 million mark, which was to prove crippling for a country trying to re-emerge from a major war. There was a ban on any union between Germany and Austria, and a limitation of Germany's army to 100,000 men with no conscription, no tanks, no heavy artillery, no aircraft and no airships, as well as limiting the German Navy to deploying vessels of under 100,000 tons, with no submarines. This was the treaty to guarantee that Germany never provoked another war. Many thought at the time that the treaty was far too drastic, too punishing, but it has been recently suggested that those critical of the treaty should try and imagine 'what sort of peace Europe would have had if a victorious *Kaiserreich* and its allies had been making it'⁷¹. However, with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to understand that although the treaty sought a peaceful stability in Europe, it created an environment for further conflict. It has been said that 'a harsh dictated peace must inevitably arouse a determination in the defeated side to reverse it'⁷². Even in 1939, John Colville, a civil servant at 10 Downing Street,

⁶⁸ Tipton, *History*, p.329.

⁶⁹ Howard, *Invention*, p.62.

⁷⁰ Davies, *History*, p.941.

⁷¹ Hastings, *Catastrophe*, p.xix.

⁷² Veale FJP, *Advance to Barbarism* (Torrance: Inst for Historical Review, 1979) pp.151/152.

anticipating an early British victory noted in his diary there should be no 'guilt clause' in the next final peace treaty⁷³.

The financial reparations were just about possible but not manageable politically, and this is true of nearly every aspect of the Treaty: Germany was politically unstable and the Versailles Treaty made it more so⁷⁴. John M Keynes as early as May 26th 1919 in a letter to Austen Chamberlain wrote that 'we have presented a Draft treaty to the Germans which contains in it much that is unjust... if this policy is pursued, the consequences will be disastrous in the extreme'⁷⁵. If the treaty divided the Allies at the time of its signing and afterwards, it certainly united the Germans. The treaty provoked a deep resentment on German military men like Kesselring; they felt that however long it took the treaty's misdeeds had to be rectified for Germany's honour: all they needed was a government or leader who agreed.

These financial consequences of the Great War were far reaching: Germany suffered to a far greater extent than most nations. In addition to the loss of a generation, and a recession that destroyed people's savings, 'including Kesselring's wife's wealth,' unemployment was high throughout Germany for a long time⁷⁶. Kesselring claimed he considered retiring from the army; dressed in mufti, he spent time with his wife looking for work, but employment opportunities were few and far between. Soldiers returning from a lost war which they believed was through no fault of their own, found their country on the verge of internal conflict, and under a very different political regime. Instead of a country trying to stabilize itself towards an era of peace, Germany found itself in the midst of a civil-war. Kesselring's home, Bavaria, and Munich in particular, offered 'exceptionally fertile soil for the development of right-wing extremism ...the political pressures brought to bear by military and paramilitary groups in Munich was greater than anywhere else in Germany'⁷⁷.

⁷³ Colville, *The Fringes of Power* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985)p.26.

⁷⁴ Weitz Eric, *Weimar Germany* (Woodstock: Princetown University Press, 2007)p.144.

⁷⁵ Gilbert Martin, *Britain & Germany between the Wars* (London: Longman,1964)p.7.

⁷⁶ Macksey, *Kesselring*,p.28.

⁷⁷ Bracher, Karl Dietrich, *Turning Points in Modern Times: essays on German and*

Kesselring struggled through a personal wilderness of despair, but emerged with a belief that Germany would rise again as a power, despite the Versailles Treaty, and the perceived weakness of the Weimar Republic. Kesselring was persuaded by his GOC to stay in uniform, and work on the demobilisation of the III Bavarian Army Corps in the Nuremberg area. This was not a difficult decision; Kesselring preferred the military life to that of family. Like many returning soldiers peacetime life was not simply difficult but bitter, ‘psychologically they remained in a state of war ... they referred to the first few years after the war as the *Nachkrieg*, which means something like the ‘post-war war’ or the ‘war extension’⁷⁸. Anti-Semitism flourished; it was probably Ludendorff himself who tried to forge a link between Rathenau and the stab-in-the-back theory which may have led to the latter’s assassination⁷⁹. The military dictatorship had failed and shifted the blame to the Left, and opposed the new Republic: Kesselring and many of his military contemporaries would have been deeply involved in this ferment, as well as keenly aware of the way anti-Semitism was developing a dangerous political-edge.

Former soldiers were formed into *Freikorps* in order to combat the communists and left-wing groups⁸⁰. The right-wing *Freikorps* were ruthless and many parts of the country were reduced to street brawls. Nuremberg was not as bad as other parts of the country, but Kesselring experienced his GHQ (*Deutschherrn* Barracks) attacked by a riotous mob. By the spring of 1919 Kesselring’s *Freikorps* was gaining the upper hand, although the Left continued to hold itself together. It is clear that Kesselring was a typical right-wing nationalist who would have found a natural refuge in the extremism of NSDAP, and, speculatively, may have been involved in directing some of the street-fighting.

European History (London: Harvard UP, 1995)pp.79-80.

⁷⁸ Wette, *Wehrmacht*,p.51.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*,p.57.

⁸⁰ *Freikorps*-ex-soldiers and other discontents led by ex-officers proliferated and numbered more than 65 corps. Mainly nationalistic, radically conservative and employed unofficially to put down left-wing uprisings.

By the end of 1919 the military had regained the initiative and suppressed the various 'soldier-sailor-councils.' After meeting the communist councils in the Russian armistice Kesselring would have seen this as a triumph. Ironically, Germany now had a 'socialist led government which had authorised right-wing troops to stop workers struggling for a more democratic and socialist Germany'⁸¹. When the Weimar Constitution had been signed it protected basic liberties, gave freedom of speech, freedom of press, equality for women and equal voting rights for those aged over twenty one⁸². Although the communists rose three times against the state, it was 'the Right that was Weimar's greatest threat; probably more Germans stood on the right of politics'⁸³. The *Freikorps* fought the Left, undermined the new Republic and in so doing prepared the ground for dictatorship.

The Weimar Republic reflected Germany's problem: it remained divided because no single party or set of ideas could easily prevail. In the early days from 1918 to 1923 the main sway was left to centre, from 1924 to 1929 it tended to be centre right, and from 1930 to 1933 it became authoritarian right. This movement towards the authoritarian right is a study in itself, but some factors ought to be noted in terms of understanding men of Kesselring's political and military inclination, who resented the Versailles Treaty, and seethed when France and Belgium moved into the Ruhr to seize, as compensation, key assets⁸⁴. When, by the end of November, a single USA dollar was bought for 4.2 trillion marks this, amongst many other factors, must have caused resentment thus shifting the political constellation to the Right. Because of the financial crash, many lost hope in the Weimar experiment, leaving political space for the extreme Right.

Kesselring's involvement with the *Freikorps* caused a moment in his life which he refers to as the most 'humiliating moment of my life,' and 'my cup of bitterness was full when I saw my devoted work rewarded by a warrant for my arrest for an alleged *putsch* against the socialist influenced

⁸¹ Weitz, *Weimar*, p.31.

⁸² 11th August 1919.

⁸³ January 1919, March 1921 and October 1923: Weitz, *Weimar*, p.92.

⁸⁴ January 11th 1923.

command of my III Bavarian Army Corps⁸⁵. This is the only vague allusion to the incident in Kesselring's memoirs, leading his first biographer to claim that he was displaying 'his obtuse knack of evasiveness in covering up personal miscalculations'⁸⁶. However, the Munich War Archives reveals a little more about this event: Kesselring had an argument with the leader of the *Freikorps*; Kesselring having refused to carry out orders which 'he claimed made no sense', probably because the officer had slight sympathies for the left⁸⁷. The military authorities were actively involved in building up the *Freikorps*, Kesselring himself having been pro-active in this venture, and so falling out with a *Freikorps* leader was just as dubious as questioning his commanding officer, which in effect he had done. Kesselring's right-wing attitudes were self-evidently strong; he felt that the commanding officer(s) of the III Bavarian Army Corps were influenced by Socialist opinions. For a man who later claimed he steered clear of politics it was apparent that during this time he was deeply committed to the political right. His commanding officer, Major Hans Seyler, claimed he had failed to 'display the requisite discretion' and the Brigade Commander, Major-General von Zoellner decided Kesselring had been away too long from the troops, and therefore deployed him as a battery commander, only allowing him to re-join the General Staff once he had proved himself⁸⁸. Kesselring was censured for being too stubborn; it was the worst assessment Kesselring had ever received leaving his career in grave danger.

Following the debacle with the *Freikorps* leader, Kesselring found himself as Battery Commander in the 24th Artillery serving in Amberg, Erlangen and Nuremberg where he claimed he had close contact with servicemen on a daily basis. Little is known about him during this period, but given the length of time he served in the army, plus his war service, and being awarded four medals he must have been held in some regard⁸⁹. He continued to be involved in the reduction of the German army, changing from a war-

⁸⁵ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.18.

⁸⁶ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.29.

⁸⁷ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.20.

⁸⁸ BMK-61536-Seyler-10.8.19.

⁸⁹ Including the Prussian Iron Cross 1st and 2nd class.

time fighting force to a small peace force (*Führertruppe*). The need to reduce the strength of the army was humiliating for senior officers serving in the *Reichswehr*; to carry out such a drastic re-organisation of their army was the result of defeat⁹⁰.

He was commended for his administrative abilities, and for being of an amiable character⁹¹. Having served his stint as a battery chief in Artillery Regiment 24 it was felt that his time with the troops was served, and on the 1st October 1922, he was seconded to the *Reichswehr* Ministry in Berlin; he was back on the promotional ladder where he became active in what he perceived as Germany's reconstruction.

He may have been seen as an 'amiable character,' but the *Freikorps* incident had a marked effect on Kesselring, and may account for his future attitudes towards those in authority. Politicians may not be at the front line, but they hold the power, and this lesson was understood by Kesselring. The problem arises when politicians become corrupt, and therefore the apolitical officer class also becomes corrupt. The consequence was that for Kesselring he retained a blind obedience to his masters to the bitter end if not beyond. Kesselring learned from this point to conceal his right-wing politics, but they were now an intrinsic part of his very nature. By 1922 he was a highly professional military officer, a product of the Wilhelmine era with right-wing inclinations, anti-communist and possibly anti-Semitic views, and who regarded war as necessary for the policy of revanchism.

⁹⁰ The *Reichswehr* (German for "National Defense") formed the military organisation of Germany from 1919 until 1935, when it was renamed the *Wehrmacht* ("Defence Force").

⁹¹ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.31.

CHAPTER 2

THE REICHSWEHR (1922-1937)

Introduction

In 1922 Kesselring, then aged thirty-seven stopped smoking and looked to his future¹. The German historian Herde wrote that with ‘great industry and self-discipline united with a certain warm-heartedness and exceptional deportment, perhaps here and there mixed with an exaggerated self-confidence, he was marked as an achiever ... the genial behaviour of a well brought up Bavarian ... with a zealot’s pursuit of career advancement ... but his political horizon was circumscribed ... later in 1947 he would testify at his trial that the *Führer* had been placed in power legitimately ... but he was more honest than most of his comrades who metamorphosed in the de-Nazification process to a group of serious resisters’².

The first part of this chapter will further explore the effects of the Versailles Treaty on postwar Germany, and the underhand way men like Kesselring opposed the Treaty, and consorted with their natural enemy Stalin, in order to build up a clandestine war-machine³. The new military was effective, and many felt that it undermined the Weimar Republic. During this period Hitler was of little significance, but the military machine prepared by men like Kesselring gave Hitler the tools for war. Kesselring always claimed he never anticipated war, but this chapter will illustrate the hypocrisy of this statement, by exploring Kesselring's rise through the ranks, as he participated in nearly every aspect of building an aggressive war-machine, deeply involved in the thinking behind *Blitzkrieg*, and the genesis of the Luftwaffe. Herde's described Kesselring as having the 'genial behaviour of a well brought up Bavarian,' and quite recently Overy called him 'jovial,' but in reality he remained ruthlessly right-wing⁴. As he had been with Rupprecht so he was

¹ Goldensohn, *Interview*, p.320.

² Herde, *Kesselring*, pp.299-300.

³ Inter-Allied Military Control Commission.

⁴ Overy Richard, *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-45* (London: Allen Lane, 2013) p.74.

equally influenced by General von Seeckt, who typified German militarism, and encouraged men like Kesselring to pretend they were above politics, a profound deceit in which they emulated Pontius Pilate.

Versailles Reaction

On 1st October 1922 Kesselring was seconded to a key appointment as G.S.0.1 to the Chief-of-Staff Army Direction in the Berlin Reichswehr Office. During these *inter bellum* years he was involved in every aspect of military life, in training, technical developments, economics, law, personnel and administration. The Weimar Republic was rarely stable, and to understand Kesselring it will be necessary to explore the attitudes in Germany at this time.

Versailles united most Germans, and Churchill viewed it as 'natural that a proud people vanquished in war should strive to rearm themselves as soon as possible'⁵. Most Germans considered Versailles unreasonable, but many more on the right-wing of the political spectrum regarded the treaty as 'criminal;' there were many overseas who thought the treaty too stringent⁶. Keynes was one, and Churchill wrote that 'the economic clauses of the treaty were malignant and silly to an extent that made them obviously futile'⁷. In 1919 a Daily Herald cartoonist, named Will Dyson had sketched a picture of the Versailles gathering with a baby crying in the corner with the label '1940 Class'⁸. It has long been stated that the allies imposed a clumsy peace settlement at Versailles, but it has been recently argued that had the 'Germans instead been dictating the terms as victors, European freedom, justice and democracy would have paid a dreadful forfeit'⁹. Nevertheless, as Kissinger wrote, 'it is the temptation of war to punish: it is the task of policy to construct'¹⁰. It is not a matter of suggesting, as Hastings does, that one side

⁵ Churchill Winston, *The Second World War Volume 1* (London: Cassell, 1948)p.34.

⁶ William, *Memoirs*,p.295.

⁷ Churchill, *Second*,p.7.

⁸ Bryant Mark, *World War II in Cartoons*, (London: Grub Street, 2009 p.11 and see Appendix 7.

⁹ Hastings, *Catastrophe*,p.563.

¹⁰ Kissinger Henry, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of*

did a better job than the other may have done, but an opportunity for peace was missed, making the ground fertile for war.

Churchill anticipated how Germany would respond, and speculated how the Germans felt, but the sense of resentment in Kesselring's military circles was deep. It is true that 'the bitterness of national and personal shame produced an incoherent anger,' especially amongst many right-wing Germans¹¹.

Many Germans felt the humiliation of having the victors impose the Inter-allied Military Control Commission (IMCC) which tried to ensure that German industry was not rebuilding a war-machine, and that the Reichswehr remained a mere defence force. The Control Commission was eventually removed from Germany in January 1927¹². It was withdrawn even 'though its task was unfinished.' Although Germany was eventually admitted to the League of Nations, and a better system of reparations was planned under the Dawes Plan, many military men like Kesselring still felt humiliated¹³.

Kesselring in a moment of false apologia wrote that it was not the legendary militarism of Germany that circumnavigated the various clauses, but the fact that Germany had to take account of its 'geo-political situation'¹⁴. The implication was that Germany was surrounded by enemies was a common feeling, and this nervousness was aggravated when French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr in January 1923¹⁵. The American historian Boyne noted that 'before Hitler, Germany had a well-founded fear that either or both France and Poland would initiate a war'¹⁶. The political/military bodies of Germany, aware of their vulnerability in postwar Europe, felt

Peace 1812-1822 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973)p.138.

¹¹ Beevor Anthony, *The Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012)p.2.

¹² The Allies did not provide the financial resources nor did they have the willpower.

¹³ Taylor AJP, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965)p.255.

¹⁴ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.22.

¹⁵ Germany failed to meet reparation quotas.

¹⁶ Boyne Walter, *The Influence of Air Power Upon History* (New York: Pelican 2003)p.154.

justified in supporting the clandestine re-organising of its military power¹⁷. The 100,000 army was made up of many NCOs prompting Churchill to claim that the 100,000 men were 100,000 officers in waiting. Technically 100,000 men meant 4,000 officers, but up to 40,000 were trained as NCOs¹⁸. Ever since Clausewitz had advocated that war was chaotic Germans were taught to do the jobs of the next two ranks up, to take action in the chaos, and thus the German military lent itself to 'mission command' at a time when its potential enemies, including the British did 'not sanction individuality'¹⁹. They were, military-wise, advancing on their old enemies even while the IMCC was present.

Clandestine Activity

Kesselring, as *Sparkommissar des-Reichsheeres*, was involved at every level of military re-organisation and expansion; as head of the Seventh Regional Command in Munich, he was active at most of the crucial points of overall development²⁰. He took considerable interest in the embryo Luftwaffe; this meant not only side-stepping agreements of the Versailles Treaty, but being involved in arrangements with the Soviets. It was clear that Kesselring's administrative ability and general aptitude were being utilised.

Germany had retained a *Reichswehr Ministerium* giving them the opportunity to maintain a select number of the General Staff, with the expertise to circumnavigate the Air-Clauses which were intended to end military aviation in Germany²¹. The Treaty demanded that over 15,000 aircraft and 27,000 aero-engines had to be surrendered²². However, the 1926 Paris Air-Agreement withdrew these limitations, giving complete freedom in civil aviation. This was seized on by the Germans who increased the size of

¹⁷ The Ruhr was critical, when later the re-occupation of the Ruhr occurred 'most military staffs were convinced that there had to be a full-scale war or nothing. And full-scale war could not be prepared overnight.' Davies, *History*,p.938.

¹⁸ Haigh, *German-Soviet*,p.159.

¹⁹ Caddick-Adams Peter, *Monty and Rommel, Parallel Lives* (London: Arrow, 2012)p.27.

²⁰ Commissioner for Army-Retrenchment.

²¹ Defence Ministry.

²² NA-AMP-Pamphlet,p.248.

their civil and commercial aviation, and generated the growth of various flying clubs. Italy and France were busy enlarging their air-forces, but, as AJP Taylor noted, by the late 1930s these countries had huge numbers of antiquated aircraft, whilst Germany and especially England by sheer default, and leaving it so late, managed to produce more up to date models²³.

To the consternation of the allies, Germany and Russia signed the Treaty of Rappallo in 1922, to normalise relationships between the two countries: this was not just an economic arrangement, but meant to circumnavigate many Versailles restrictions. Rappallo underlined the weakness of the Allied victory in that 'it revealed that Moscow and Berlin in concert could defy the West with impunity. Often unspoken, it underlay all of Europe's peacetime deliberations until the nightmare finally turned to reality'²⁴. In the treaty there was a secret clause stating Russia would supply heavy weapons to Germany, and provide pilot-training facilities. Arrangements were made with the Soviets for establishing a flying school, and for testing new types of combat-aircraft at Lipetsk, and even a branch of the Junkers Works was built at Fili close to Moscow.²⁵ Kesselring 'worked in the T-4 (Training) Department, where he was involved in the secret training of airman in the Soviet Union,' and made several visits between 1923 and 1924²⁶. Such was Kesselring's distrust of communism, it clearly indicates his determination to see the German war machine rebuilt, given that he was prepared to use their facilities in a most clandestine and cynical fashion.

Ironically, Lloyd George in a secret note to the American President and French Prime Minister, as early as the 25th March 1919, stated 'that the greatest danger that I can see in the present situation is that Germany may throw in her lot with Bolshevism;' he was thinking more of the German

²³ Taylor AJP, *English*, p.231.

²⁴ Davies, *History*, p.938.

²⁵ Fili was close to Moscow but was a failure compared to Lipetsk; it had a capacity of 600 aircraft a year but only built 142 in the four years it existed before being taken over by Tupolev: also often known as Lipetz or Lips; 300 miles south-east of Moscow: training fields were established by 1924.

²⁶ Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.17.

socialists²⁷. There were four articles in Versailles to prevent such German/Soviet relations, article 116 reserving Russian rights to reparations in order to stop Germany influencing the east²⁸.

Seeckt, who had a major influence on the emerging German military and on Kesselring, had been a member of the delegation in Paris, and worked against the treaty, never wavering in his conviction 'that Germany needed to recapture the prestige, powers and territories of which it had been stripped'²⁹. Like the Russians he distrusted Poland believing co-operation with the Bolsheviks would help Germany. There were trade-arrangements between the two countries, but Seeckt and his staff such as Kesselring, were engaged in secret collaboration. The Soviets needed to rebuild their military, and the Germans needed space and secrecy for the same reason. Such was the growing relationship that the Dawes Plan was viewed by the Soviet leadership as a bribe, to bring Germany back under western influence³⁰.

It has been claimed that 'it was hard to prove that rearmament was in itself inspired by aggressive motives,' but Russia and Germany were rearming, with more than defensive precautions in mind³¹. By 1925 in Russia, German firms such as Krupps, Junkers and Stolzenberg were producing ammunitions, aeroplanes and even poison gases³². The German-Russian joint stock-company Bersol, near Samara, produced poison gas. German pilots trained at Smolensk, and after 1923 at Lipetsk, where German officers were disguised as Red Army. It is estimated that between 1925 and 1933 approximately 120 pilots were trained at Lipetsk, whilst tank-training facilities were used at Kazan³³.

Men like Kesselring saw rearmament as a natural part of the recovery process, but war was also seen as a resolution. The German right-

²⁷ Haigh, *German-Soviet*, p.60.

²⁸ Articles 116/117/292 /293.

²⁹ Haigh, *German-Soviet*, p.63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.115.

³¹ Davies, *History*, p.1053.

³² Haigh, *German-Soviet*, p.169.

³³ *Ibid.*

wing distrust of the communists underlines the cynical attitude of Seeckt, Kesselring and others. The hated Bolshevik used in the rebuilding process, later became a partner in the Polish war of 1939, and then a victim in the long planned Barbarossa. The work done in Russia and Germany at this time set the stage, so 'when Hitler came to power in 1933 he found all the technical preparations for rearmament ready, thanks to the Reichswehr'³⁴.

Kesselring was daily immersed in rebuilding Germany's military capabilities. Behind the scenes Kesselring dealt with many of the matters concerning the developing air-power as a senior staff officer to the Army Training Department (*Heeresausbildungsabteilung*). He had contact with the airmen of the day, including Walther Wever, whom he worked with on new concepts such as the Ural Bomber. The development of the air-force was strengthened when in 1926 the air-firm Lufthansa came into being. One of the directors was Erhard Milch, and it provided an ideal opportunity for training pilots in long-range operation/navigational skills³⁵.

These developments were observed by Kesselring who was promoted to Major on 1st February 1925. His progress through the ranks was less remarkable than the varying tasks he fulfilled. He was appointed First General Staff Officer in the General Staff of the Army Directorate to Seeckt. From 1st October 1926 until 1st April 1929 he was in the Defence Office (*Wehramt*), where he developed his administrative ability. In 1928 Kesselring proposed to the Chief of Army Organisation, a Major Wilhelm Keitel, that an air-inspectorate be organised. The same type of inspectorate had been organised by the panzer-units which, with the Luftwaffe, were to be the two-pronged basis of the later so-called *blitzkrieg*. Kesselring was part of a team lead by Seeckt.

³⁴ Haigh, *German-Soviet*, p.177.

³⁵ Milch, later a Field-Marshal had previously been employed by a small air-transport company, Lloyf Ost, having worked at Junkers. By 1933 Milch was deputy to Göring, who was more interested in party politics and, consequently, Milch found himself in charge of the Luftwaffe. This was to lead to a power-struggle after the death of Wever, when Milch became a General.

Seeckt - Politics and Blitzkrieg

Seeckt, who would eventually find Hitler distasteful, influenced Kesselring to obey in blind obedience the elected politicians, and behave as one 'who took care to keep out of {party} politics'³⁶. Seeckt was a dominant and persuasive man who influenced Kesselring, and many army officers, with an attitude towards the Weimar Republic which 'ranged from an angry denial of its legitimacy at worst to luke-warm support at best, a tragic state of affairs that contributed in no small way to the downfall of the republic and the rise of Adolf Hitler. Such is the political indictment; about Kesselring's military abilities, however, there have been very few complaints'³⁷. This comment about Kesselring remains true to the present day; he is always commended and upheld for his military skills, but his political side which he concealed is generally ignored.

Kesselring regarded Seeckt as a model for the younger generation of officers, who 'may be said to be the real founder of the new German Air Force; already in 1920 he was convinced that military aviation would some day be revived in Germany ... he therefore secreted a small group of regular officers ... in the various sections which dealt with aviation in his ministry ... notably Felmy, Sperrle, Wever, Kesselring and Stumpf'³⁸. He did not look for top pilots, 'he needed planners and builders, not aces'³⁹. Given the state of postwar Germany 'von Seeckt, known as *the sphinx* within the Army because of his arrogant secretiveness, seemed to have a hopeless task'⁴⁰.

Liddell-Hart argued that although Seeckt died three years before the war, and retired ten years before that, he remained the single German General who had the greatest influence on the Second World War⁴¹. Seeckt's authority during this period of reconstruction was immense. 'His polished

³⁶ Kershaw Ian, *The End: Hitler's Germany* (London: Allen Lane, 2011)p.303.

³⁷ Citino, *Path*,p.7.

³⁸ NA-AMP pp.1-2.

³⁹ Boyne, *Influence*,p.153.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Liddell-Hart, *German*,p.10.

manners and pleasant personality contrasted with the domineering Prussians such as Ludendorff, making him a more attractive proposition to the leaders of the new Republic. He appeared to keep the army out of politics but pursued an aggressive Right-wing nationalist agenda 'cloak{ing} his military development schemes, as well as the half-veiled political activities in which numerous officers of the older school indulged'⁴². Seeckt's military manuals were based on the German Army being more than 100,000, and centred on the premise that every action should be based on surprise; this contrasted with the French manuals, which reflected the slow moving tactics of the First War. Above all Seeckt re-established the army and eventually 'removed the danger presented {to the army} by the *Freikorps* by dissolving it'⁴³.

According to Kesselring, Seeckt encouraged him and all officers to be non-political. Kesselring's insistence on ignoring politics is a deceit; it could be argued that 'the Seeckt-pattern professional became a modern Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of all responsibility for the orders to be executed'⁴⁴. The concept of the non-political-soldier can be carried too far: General Siegfried Westphal wrote that 'the soldiers' political ignorance rendered them blind to the satanic side of his {Hitler's} character and actions'⁴⁵. The officer class did not vote and it has been argued that 'political isolation encouraged political naivety, with many senior officers becoming apolitical rather than unpolitical'⁴⁶. Bismarck was well aware that army officers, though pretending to be non-political, formed camarillas to influence the monarchy 'as they did in Russia or Prussia ... in such extreme cases officer politics takes the form of conspiracy'⁴⁷. Attitudes towards the military and politics has always been divided, from Seeckt's apparent no contact, to the political commissars of the Soviet Union, to a later commentator like Janowitz, stating that the 'military commander must develop more political orientation, in order to explain the goals of military activities to his staff and

⁴² Liddell-Hart, *German*, p.13.

⁴³ Westphal Siegfried, *The German Army in the West* (London: Cassell, 1951)p.3.

⁴⁴ Liddell-Hart, *German*, p.18.

⁴⁵ Westphal, *German*, p.5.

⁴⁶ Caddick-Adams, *Monty*, p.177.

⁴⁷ Vagts A, *A History of Militarism, Civilian and Military* (New York: The Free Press, 1959)p.295.

subordinates'⁴⁸. Kesselring's and Seeckt's views were fundamentally dishonest, because it was pretence that they had no interest in politics, when they were a secret cabal, what has been described as a state within a state.

Kesselring always looked back with self-serving reflections, often convincing post-1945 listeners that he was politically neutral. Seeckt was a political intriguer, and quite capable of manipulating politicians. A traditional monarchist, he laid the foundations of a strong *Reichswehr*, and concealed the forbidden leadership of the outlawed General Staff, under the ubiquitous name of *Truppenamt* (Troop Office). An elitist, Seeckt surrounded himself with the best. He frequently ignored the Weimar government, and 'took major military decisions without going to the Reichstag,' but he made a political blunder in allowing the eldest son of the German Crown-Prince to take part in an army manoeuvre, and this finished him in 1926⁴⁹.

Kesselring was a pupil of Seeckt's: his ability to influence people by careful diplomatic manoeuvrings and pleasant personality was a trait of Seeckt, as was his boast of ignoring politics. If politics were raised postwar Kesselring brushed them aside as of no consequence. Seeckt had found nothing 'incongruous in pledging the support of the armed forces to the Weimar Republic and in making it clear that he would not permit the army to interfere or become enmeshed in the sphere of domestic politics'⁵⁰. Kesselring had become Seeckt's disciple in ostensibly ignoring NSDAP politics, however morally reprehensible those politics were becoming. This aspect of his character will be explored later when this non-party member remained totally 'loyal to Hitler' to the very last⁵¹.

Kesselring worked with others alongside Seeckt with the aim to establish a 102 Division Army, a breaching of Versailles, which Kesselring regarded as patriotic. During the Weimar Republic, and through all

⁴⁸ Janowitz M, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1971)p.8.

⁴⁹ Haigh, *German-Soviet*,p.64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.p.159.

⁵¹ Eberle & Uhl (Eds), *The Hitler Book* (London: John Murray, 2005)p.207.

the political strife as the Hitler brokered his way to power, officers like Kesselring were rebuilding a technically advanced and efficient war-machine. Part of their planning was the preparation of Seeckt's insistence on surprise and speed, combined with air power. The historian, Carlo D'Este, saw Kesselring as 'one of the originators of the *blitzkrieg*'⁵². The core of Seeckt's and Kesselring's strategy 'was founded on the harnessing of modern technology to armed warfare, and the utilisation of motorised armoured vehicles supported by self-propelled guns, aircraft and infantry'⁵³. *Blitzkrieg* as a means of warfare remained effective until the Allies grasped its nature; 'it was a tactical innovation rather than revolutionary form of warfare'⁵⁴. Seeckt, Kesselring and others produced a professional expertise which would be used by a corrupt regime still in the ascendancy.

Blitzkrieg 'proved Seeckt to be quite right ... nobody could have foreseen that a clever combination of modern weapons untried in war would achieve such speedy results'⁵⁵. It was self-evidently an offensive rather than a defensive military machine being built. During the Weimar Republic Kesselring helped re-build the German military machine, with the backing of various political masters and working with other officers preparing the way. Kesselring's key theme was 'efficiency,' and on complaining about red-tape he was appointed as 'Reichswehr Commissioner for Retrenchment and Simplification.'

Planning war

Kesselring's claim that he was not anticipating war raises some doubts. 'German map production was deliberately stopped in 1931' so when war started there would be no up-to-date maps of Germany⁵⁶. On June 23rd 1933 all German newspapers had an identical article entitled 'Red Plague over Berlin' in which it was claimed that foreign planes had flown over

⁵² D'Este, *Fatal*, p.86.

⁵³ Haigh, *German-Soviet*, p.160.

⁵⁴ Maycock Ian, *Military History, Poland 1939* (Issue 36, Sept 2013) p.37.

⁵⁵ Senger, *Neither*, p.27.

⁵⁶ Kearley S, *Military History, The Secrets of Hughenden Manor* (issue 23, August, p.11, 2012) p.11.

defenceless Germany⁵⁷. It was Göring's hope that this hoax would stimulate support for an increase in fighter planes. A young Berlin diarist wrote: 'At the end of June all the papers had banner headlines, Enemy Planes over Berlin! No one believed it, not even the Nazis'⁵⁸. None of this necessarily suggests that war was being planned but at the very least it was 'sabre-rattling.'

The British were alert to the German-Soviet agreements and interchange of personnel; there must have been an awareness of German developments, but not necessarily intentions⁵⁹. Senger specifically mentions his relationship with John Dill who later succeeded Ironside as CIGS, and it was not unusual for military personnel to be acquainted with their opposite numbers as Kesselring was with Winterbotham, the British air-attaché in Berlin, though really working for MI5⁶⁰. On the 10th September 1931, Lord Robert Cecil, member of the British Government, claimed that 'there has scarcely been a period in the world's history when war seems less likely than it does at present,' a world disarmament conference was being summoned (February 1932), and all seemed well in Europe⁶¹. E.H. Carr in his *Conditions of Peace* wrote 'reconstruction, restoration, recovery were the key words of the twenties,' and this may have made sense even to those Germans yet to perceive the corruption of the NSDAP⁶².

It has been claimed by Senger that 'the isolation of the Reichswehr is said to have undermined the democratic basis of the Weimar state. The Army had not become integrated with the state'⁶³. Men like Kesselring, who pretended to have no political views, planned a powerful and efficient war machine that was aggressive and not defensive, which undermined the democratic Weimar Republic, and provided Hitler's regime

⁵⁷ Schreiner A, *Hitler Rearms* (London: John Lane – Bodley Head, 1934)p.114.

⁵⁸ Haffner Sebastian, *Defying Hitler* (London: Phoenix 2003)p.197

⁵⁹ Major Desmond Morton in the British Intelligence Service used to report on arms in other countries he was a friend of Winston Churchill - Gilbert Martin, *Winston Churchill, The Wilderness Years* (London:Macmillan, 1981)p.15.

⁶⁰ Jeffery Keith, *MI6 The History of the Intelligence Service 1909-49* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010)p.295.

⁶¹ Taylor AJP, *English*,p.298.

⁶² Ibid, p.299.

⁶³ Senger, *Neither*,p.43.

with the means to wage war: Kesselring, along with his mentor Seeckt, cannot evade the responsibility for being a major part of the crime against peace.

Arrival of Hitler

The latter parts of this chapter will examine Kesselring's relationship with the NSDAP, his involvement with the emerging Luftwaffe, his continued pretence of disinterest in politics, and the Hitler Oath, along with the bribes by which Hitler bound military commanders to himself. In 1930 Kesselring was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, and left Berlin to spend two years in Dresden as a full Colonel and Divisional Commander with the 4th Artillery Regiment. On Oct 1st 1933, aged 48, Kesselring was discharged from the army and put in charge of the *Luftwaffenverwaltungsamt* (Administrative Office) of the Luftwaffe with the rank of Commodore. This date corresponds with the arrival of Hitler in power, who saw the emergence of the Luftwaffe as critical to his plans of domination.

As Hitler rose to power, Kesselring, an educated and intelligent man, consistently pretended the politics passed him by. Even when the demilitarised zone was occupied (7th March 1936) he claimed that he only heard about the event on the same morning, and later when the Germans entered Austria (11th March 1938) he alleged he was equally surprised, but pleased; this ignorance seems almost impossible to believe, and is part of the postwar evasion in which many senior Germans indulged. The facts indicate otherwise, at the beginning of March Hitler 'delegated the diplomatic coercion of Austria to Göring, who promptly put the Luftwaffe on a war footing;' it beggars belief that Kesselring would have been unaware.⁶⁴

Although his claim to ignorance is barely plausible, it is likely that his military role was remote from the party political intrigue. However, it is difficult to conceive he had no knowledge of the growing ill-treatment of the Jewish population. After the war he admitted that he had

⁶⁴ Boyne, *Influence*, p.175.

flown over Dachau, and he must have been aware of the dismissal of Jewish and half-Jewish (*Mischlings*) men from the military. When questioned at Nuremberg (when he stood as a witness for Göring) and was asked whether Jewish officers were excluded from the army, he simply replied 'Jewish officers did not exist'⁶⁵. As with so many other postwar soldiers he appeared to have blanked this crime from his mind. 'It required a considerable effort of denial for Germans not to be aware of what was going on. The steady drip of information from multiple sources was cumulatively compelling'⁶⁶. While Kesselring had nothing to do with the persecution of the Jews, he must have had some knowledge which made him complicit, using the sanctimonious and lame excuse that 'I paid very little attention to the junketings in Berlin,' and 'kept myself from gossip'⁶⁷.

Kesselring could not, especially when given monetary gifts by Hitler, have been unaware of the corruption. Later, when told of Göring's criminality in amassing stolen art, he was reassured when Göring informed him it was for the Reich. It could be Kesselring was unworldly, but more likely he was probably dissembling. It must be asked why an educated man like Kesselring aligned himself to Hitler and the self-evident corruption. Part of the answer was the military ethos of the day; Seeckt had re-enforced loyalty and therefore obedience: Hitler led the state therefore loyalty bound all to him. Hitler understood this and tied the military power to himself by what is called the 'Hitler Oath' in 1934; in his memoirs Kesselring asks the rhetorical question 'what else was the meaning of an oath'⁶⁸? It had been a German tradition for a long time; any drafted man had to swear an oath of allegiance to the crowned head. Some older officers still wanted the oath to the monarchy, and who, Westphal wrote, were 'particularly resistant to attempts to make them adopt the National Socialist outlook and who believed that they could maintain their inner independence even under Hitler's

⁶⁵ Taylor Telford, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials* (New York: Knopf, 1992)p.328.

⁶⁶ Burleigh Michael, *Moral Combat A History of World War II* (London: Harper, 2010)p.437.

⁶⁷ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,pp.27/28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*,p.26.

dictatorship⁶⁹. Manstein wrote that ‘officers who were brought up as Christians, and this was the vast majority, particularly in the older generation could not break their oath to their supreme commander, let alone kill him’⁷⁰. Senger, who was a Benedictine Lay Brother and a man not prone to lying, wrote ‘how little officers knew of the criminal nature of the Nazi leadership’⁷¹. German military tradition put great emphasis on ‘the oath;’ their English equivalents swear allegiance to the monarch, and ‘did not differ significantly from that required of civil servants ... or by United States army officers to the President’⁷².

Historically, the Prussian King was not that far removed from the *Führerprinzip* – Leader Principle in which the strongest hierarchical lines are laid out. This involves acts of total obedience from everyone, and leads to the ‘unquestioning cult of the Party Leader, the fount of all wisdom and beneficence, the *Führer*, the *Vozhd*, the *Duce* the *Caudillo* or the Great Helmsman ... it was a centrepiece both of Stalinism and Hitlerism’⁷³. For men of Kesselring’s generation it was not such a vast jump from Prussian style obedience to the ‘Leader Principle.’ In postwar interrogations Kesselring was one of the very few who never criticised Hitler, probably because of his misplaced loyalty: in this aspect ‘he was not hypocritical like so many who back-pedalled in postwar interrogations’⁷⁴.

Hitler, perceptive of human-nature, gave senior military personnel ‘grants,’ usually a gift of some 6,000 RM, a considerable sum of money⁷⁵. Kesselring was one who benefited: a gift of money as sizeable as this indebted the recipients, binding them to the donor. These gifts by Hitler were tax-free payments from a discretionary account in the Reich, and ‘the timing and manipulation of the gifts showed that Hitler intended them not as

⁶⁹ Westphal, *German*, p.6.

⁷⁰ Mungo, *Manstein*, p.435.

⁷¹ Senger, *Neither*, p.296.

⁷² Tipton, *History*, p.427.

⁷³ Davies, *History*, p.946.

⁷⁴ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.22.

⁷⁵ A *Feldwebel* earned 3,000 a year.

rewards but as bribes to ensure obedience'⁷⁶. At Nuremberg, the USA army lawyer, Taylor noted that 'Hitler had offered the Generals what they wanted ... that is why they climbed on the Nazi bandwagon'⁷⁷. This union between Hitler and the military leadership had been nurtured as early as 'the evening of 3rd February 1933 when the commanders gathered for dinner at the Berlin home of General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord ... the principal guest that night was Adolf Hitler ... as General Blomberg had hoped, the dinner party inaugurated an alliance between the military elite and Hitler that would drive the first phase of all-out German rearmament'⁷⁸. It could be said that the military leadership of Germany and Adolf Hitler needed one another: 'the officer corps in particular was enjoying its new status and its expanded responsibilities'⁷⁹.

At a personal level Kesselring felt drawn to the NSDAP by their emphasis on loyalty, comradeship and duty. Kesselring admitted that the NSDAP made a strong impression because it was a 'brilliant and smooth running organisation,' which appealed to many military personnel expecting high standards of presentation⁸⁰. There is the alternative view that 'the Nazis use of drum and trumpet, light and luridly coloured symbols resulted in what the satirist Karl Kraus called cerebral concussion'⁸¹.

The question of the NSDAP success is of interest where it portrays Kesselring in the political context, and his belief that Hitler was the legitimate ruler of Germany. It was Kesselring's view, and many others that after the failed Putsch, Hitler and his party kept to the rules of the constitution and rose to power 'through participation in Germany's democratic process, and at the invitation of the lawful authorities. It is beside the point that he and his ruffians were anything but democrats or constitutionalists at heart... he did

⁷⁶ Tipton, *History*, p.468.

⁷⁷ Mungo, *Manstein*, p.436.

⁷⁸ Maiolo Joe, *Cry Havoc The Arms race and The Second World War* (London: John Murray, 2010) pp.38-39.

⁷⁹ Steinhoff J, Pechel P, Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich, An Oral History* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994) p.6.

⁸⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.27.

⁸¹ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.26.

not breach the constitution once⁸². The powers of Germany saw in Hitler some form of answer to what terrified them most: communism, which Kesselring had detested since 1917. When von Papen made Hitler Chancellor, the NSDAP reached their political zenith within the rules. 'Hitler's democratic triumph exposed the true nature of democracy. Democracy ... is as good, or as bad, as the principles of the people who operate it ... in 1933-4 Germany it produced a Nazi government because the prevailing culture of Germany's voters did not give priority to the exclusion of gangsters'⁸³.

On these grounds Kesselring accepted, and possibly with some justification, that Hitler was the head of a legitimate government who had to be obeyed⁸⁴. Democracy when manipulated by evil men becomes a danger that can happen anywhere. In Germany it led to Hitler, and men like Kesselring, who obeyed him, who used the Hitler oath as a reason, along with their common hatred of communism, sealed by their acceptance of bribes, but what motivated the military leaders most was the power and resources Hitler gave them.

Emergence of the Luftwaffe

Carlo D'Este described Kesselring as one of the 'architects of the Luftwaffe' and one of the originators of *blitzkrieg*; this may be an exaggeration, but he was among the 'main players,' and his role has frequently been overlooked⁸⁵. Whether the Luftwaffe planned for strategic bombing is questionable, and Kesselring's part in this is open to debate and needs exploration. Kesselring's involvement at a senior level will be explored because it illustrates that his later protestations that war came as a surprise was sheer nonsense, both from the nature of his personal contributions, and the massive acceleration of the Luftwaffe development.

⁸² Davies, *History*, p.967/p.969.

⁸³ Ibid. p.969.

⁸⁴ In 1932 the NSDAP received 37.3 percent of the polls, the highest they were to receive in a free election, 'they now became Germany's largest party and had 230 delegates sitting in the Reichstag' - Weitz, *Weimar*, p.356. The constitution was manipulated not broken.

⁸⁵ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.86.

Kesselring headed up the *Luftfahrt Commissariat* (administration) technically first as a civilian, and as one of four colonels transferred from the *Wehrmacht*. He had finished Army life as a Colonel, but promotion in the Luftwaffe was rapid. Kesselring was created a Major-General on 1st October 1934; promoted again on 1st April 1936, and was appointed Chief of General Staff (replacing Wever) on 9th June 1936. If Kesselring were zealous for promotion his transfer to the clandestine and emerging Luftwaffe provided him with meteoritic rise⁸⁶.

After Versailles Germany's air-force was virtually non-existent, but was built-up through clandestine activity. In 1929, as a result of a commission led by Major Kesselring in his role as Reichswehr Commissioner for Retrenchment and Simplification, he proposed that all aviation officers and agencies be openly consolidated into one inspectorate for aviation. Colonel Hans-Jurgen Stumpf was tasked with creating a Luftwaffe officers corps virtually from scratch; during the years 1933-6 training schools were established drawing from a variety of personnel⁸⁷. This was kept from the general public by using Lipetsk and other places in Russia. In 1933, in connivance with Mussolini, German pilots disguised as South Tyrolean soldiers, crossed the border and trained with the Italian Air Force, the *Regia Aeronautica*, at that time one of the best air-forces in Europe⁸⁸.

During the period 1933-1935 the Luftwaffe grew rapidly, personnel developed to approximately '900 flying officers, 200 flak officers and 17,000 men'⁸⁹. This was a phenomenal expansion for a military force which relied on technology. Some criticised the use of ex-army officers at this time, claiming that it was all very 'amateur,' but men like Kesselring and Wever learned to fly, following the old military dictate that officers should not ask their men to do something they could not do themselves: Kesselring,

⁸⁶ Suggested by Herde, *Kesselring*, pp.299-300.

⁸⁷ Like Kesselring an ex-army officer.

⁸⁸ Killen John, *The Luftwaffe - A History* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2009)p.53.

⁸⁹ Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.6.

Wever, and Stumpf all belonged to the traditional officer corps and proved adaptable⁹⁰.

This developing air-power was far from defensive: there had been debate when the use of gas from the air was discussed. Seeckt had suggested that only non-deadly gas (forms of tear gas) should be dropped if civilians were present, but even this type of gas could prompt an enemy to retaliate by dropping a more deadly type⁹¹. As a result experiments in gas continued to be authorised in secret places in Russia, as well as its means of delivery; as it happened the Germans never used gas, they also advised the Italians against doing so. Himmler later initiated biological warfare, by re-infesting the Pontine Marshes so that 'cases of malaria spiralled'⁹². Mutual fear stopped chemical warfare.

Another doctrine under discussion during this period was the use of long-range bombers as postulated in Douhet's theory on air power⁹³. Douhet differed from other prominent early theorists, by proposing that civilian populations should be directly targeted, as part of the air campaign. This theory of attacking population centres as a means of causing morale breakdown, or making a political point was known as strategic bombing: a controversial policy in which heated arguments of legality and morality have a tendency to distant themselves from historical reality. The British and Americans deployed this more fully than any other nation. In Italy the Allies used all strategies, Monte Cassino was bombed to break the German front, Florence and Rome 'to provoke a military crisis' and later in Germany annihilation⁹⁴. An air force 'could project power in this way, so by default the bomber became the supreme instrument for waging what was now defined at the time as total war'⁹⁵. During the 1920s the Germans had no less than forty study groups evaluating airpower, but only four examined bombing with

⁹⁰ Corum James, *The Luftwaffe Creating the Operational Air War 1918-1940* (Kansas: UP Kansas, 1997)p.161.

⁹¹ Only the Italians used gas -103 times in 1935/6 Ethiopia, Overy, *Bombing*,p.33.

⁹² Evans Richard, *The Third Reich at War* (London: Allen Lane, 2008)p.478.

⁹³ Douhet Giulio, *The Command of the Air* (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

⁹⁴ Overy, *Bombing*,p.10.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*,p.13.

Felmy and Wever as the two main protagonists. Most saw the Luftwaffe's primary task as supporting ground attacks; the Luftwaffe service manual in 1936 excluded the use of aircraft for terror raids.

Nevertheless, the theory of strategic bombing was examined. As early as November 1937 at his factory in Augsburg, Messerschmitt had shown Hitler a mock-up of a four-engine long-range-bomber, with a range of 6,000 kilometres, with a one ton capacity and capable of 600 kph. There had been difficult relations between Milch and Messerschmitt and the German Air Ministry remained sceptical about the figures⁹⁶. Wever had proposed that if there were to be a war against Czechoslovakia the Douhetian use of air power could break the enemy's will⁹⁷. During the traditional German Staff procedure of war-games and quartermaster exercises, the Luftwaffe re-examined its requirements in time of war, and explored the need for heavy fighter bomber/destroyer aircraft with an effective fighter-escort. The long-range heavy-bomber was critical to Wever's plans⁹⁸. He argued for an 'elastic defence to minimize casualties ... the way to win wars was to destroy the enemy's industrial heartland'⁹⁹.

Wever's plan for the four-engine and long-range Ural bomber was eventually put aside: Kesselring considered it too costly in raw materials¹⁰⁰. Various Luftwaffe personnel such as Colonel Paul Deichmann (Chief of Operations) and Colonel Kurt Pflugbeil (Inspector of bomber-forces) 'protested,' but Göring, wishing to ingratiate himself with Hitler who demanded large numbers, not large bombers, followed Milch's and Udet's advice¹⁰¹.

⁹⁶ Below Nicolas von, *At Hitler's Side, Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant 1937-45* (London: Greenhill, 2004)pp.20-21.

⁹⁷ Manstein, after the war, wrote that he did not believe Douhet's theory of winning by strategic bombing, pointing out that neither Britain nor Germany succumbed - Manstein Erich von, *Lost Victories* (Minneapolis: Zenith, 1982)p.158.

⁹⁸ Wever supported the four-engine-bomber with two advanced prototypes: Junkers-Ju89 and Dornier-Do-19. At that time the Germans did not have an engine with the necessary power.

⁹⁹ Boyne, *Influence*,p.158.

¹⁰⁰ Each machine would require six tons of fuel per operation.

¹⁰¹ Mitcham, *Eagles*,p.18.

Luftwaffe historians place the responsibility for the Ural Bomber's cancellation on various heads. Richard Overy implies that because Kesselring was ex-soldier he was more interested in 'greater army-air cooperation'¹⁰². James Corum states that 'Kesselring strongly supported the programme to produce a long-range heavy bomber', and most tend to agree that there seems little question that both Udet and Milch did not, if only to please Göring¹⁰³. The American historian Richard Raiber wrote that 'this was a mistake for which both Kesselring and Göring must shoulder responsibility – that might have had a decisive influence on the war's outcome,' most probably in the east-European war¹⁰⁴. The historian Corum is probably right in claiming that Kesselring initially supported the four-engine bomber, because although he hardly mentions the issue in his memoirs, his annoyance with Milch and disregard for Udet was probably based on their betrayal of Wever's policy, which Kesselring had always supported. However, it was Göring who issued the cancellation order on 29th April 1937, and under his guidance, along with Udet and Jeschonnek 'forced the Luftwaffe to fight till the end equipped for the most part with its first generation of warplanes – and far too few of them'¹⁰⁵. Significantly, according to Hitler's Adjutant, Göring never realised the importance of advancing technology¹⁰⁶.

Kesselring may have had his doubts, stating that ground troops were essential, and this may have later influenced his opinion on the development of the four-engine long-range bomber. However, Kesselring published an article in a technical periodical in which he stated that 'I regard the purpose of the Luftwaffe in a total war by its very nature to have been achieved when lands are attacked, power centres annihilated, and the capacity of the people to resist smashed, so that occupation can follow more or less without a fight, or at least when the mere threat of occupation is enough to crash down the last vestiges of a people's will to resist'¹⁰⁷. This ruthless

¹⁰² Overy, *Bombing*, p.227.

¹⁰³ Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.235.

¹⁰⁴ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.27.

¹⁰⁵ Boyne, *Influence*, p.158.

¹⁰⁶ Below, *At Hitler's*, p.24.

¹⁰⁷ Times, April, 26th1941.

argument tends to indicate that Kesselring leaned more towards Douhet than he later claimed in postwar times.

Kesselring and his colleagues had secretly rebuilt the Luftwaffe, which, when it was eventually publically revealed in 1935, had 1,888 aircraft and 20,000 officers and men. Significantly much was kept secret to conceal that it was more than a defensive force. His first biographer records that Kesselring met an air attaché called Frederick Winterbotham at a Berlin function, and that Winterbotham had found Kesselring sullen but later, away from meetings, an affable and pleasant person with excellent flying skills. Frederick Winterbotham worked for SIS as Head of the Air Section, and was in Germany estimating Germany's air rearmament¹⁰⁸. Whether Kesselring knew Winterbotham's motives is unknown, but certainly Winterbotham 'had been taken into the confidence of General Reichenau and his Luftwaffe colleagues about the planned attack on Russia'¹⁰⁹. Intelligence about the Luftwaffe was a difficult task for the British SIS. In 1938 they sent 'agent 479' and a female companion on a tour of Germany, they produced little information because the airfields had been built away from the roads, and it meant penetrating agricultural ground to sight a place, which was extremely dangerous; it was all very clandestine¹¹⁰.

'Kesselring played a major role in the construction of the Luftwaffe ground establishment and in creation of the parachute corps during his tenure as Chief of the General Staff'¹¹¹. His influence was wide-reaching; as head of administration he prepared budgets, established airfields and training sites, and made the necessary contacts with industry.

Kesselring worked strenuously making personal contact with the aircraft industry, owners and designers. As early as 1933 he arranged with Ernst Heinkel to build one of the largest aircraft factories, claiming the sales-

¹⁰⁸ Jeffery, *History*, p.295.

¹⁰⁹ Smith Alfred, *Rudolf Hess and Germany's Reluctant War 1939-41* (London: The Book Guild, 2001) p.115.

¹¹⁰ Jeffery, *History*, p.298.

¹¹¹ Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.17.

orders would not stop¹¹². Heinkel was initially a supporter of the NSDAP, but was acquitted after the war, because of his anti-Hitler activities. He was obliged to sell his interests in the factory to Göring. Where industrialists were uncooperative, such as Hugo Junkers, a socialist and pacifist as early as 1917, he was forced into partnership with Anthony Fokker to ensure war-production. The regime demanded ownership of all Junkers' patents, and control of his company. Whether Kesselring was involved in this brutal behaviour is unknown, but he must have been aware.

When Wever died in a plane accident on 3rd June 1936 it provoked problems within the leadership of the Luftwaffe, and his death gave way to a series of power struggles. The petty politics of the emerging Luftwaffe were almost self-destructive, and Kesselring was one of the protagonists. Wever was replaced by Kesselring, then a Lieutenant-General, as the Luftwaffe's Chief-of-Staff, described by a Luftwaffe historian as a good choice, with a hardworking and dynamic personality, 'yet behind his friendly Bavarian demeanour he was as demanding as the toughest Prussian aristocrat'¹¹³.

The growth of the Luftwaffe was hindered by Göring's tendency to interfere. Until Wever's death he had been content to let others do the work: yet at this critical moment in the development, he interfered. It was aggravated by Göring's fear that Milch was becoming too powerful. Whereas Wever had managed to carry both Göring and Milch with him in his views, Kesselring found it difficult to handle Milch, who some believed, was too ambitious¹¹⁴. Kesselring became involved in some abortive machinations of returning Milch to civil aviation. Matters were aggravated when Milch demanded that Major Jeschonnek, commander of the III Training School at Greifswald, be court-martialled because of the high number of flying accidents. Kesselring saw this as none of Milch's business, and refused to comply. He even 'accused Milch of high treason for divulging too much

¹¹² Heinkel planes such as the Heinkel He59, He115 and He11 are well known; Ernst Heinkel's interests in fast flight and rocket propulsion were important.

¹¹³ Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.224.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.225.

information about the Luftwaffe's strength to the British during a trip he took to England'¹¹⁵. Kesselring does not refer to this incident, but these so-called revelations by Milch to the British were all part of an official scheme called 'bluff'¹¹⁶. There was a great deal of personal animosity mainly based on policy and personality; a feature of the Luftwaffe during this period. In a prison interview after the war Kesselring was asked how he and Milch got on; he said they were good friends, but 'some differences arose,' - Kesselring was evasive¹¹⁷.

Adding to the problems Göring promoted an old friend, Ernst Udet (with a previous career of stunt-pilot, filmmaker and described as a 'hard-drinking *bon vivant*') to the position of Chief of Luftwaffe's Technical Office¹¹⁸. Udet was not competent for this office, committing suicide in 1941 because of the strain. From 1936 to his death he was responsible for the development and selection of aircraft and overseeing production. This appointment and weak administration by Göring created more friction in the Luftwaffe resulting in poor production, lack of technical progress, and an emphasis on the wrong type of aircraft.

Despite these problems Kesselring remained a key figure, and with Stumpf they embarked on the largest peacetime air and joint air/ground exercises in the inter-war period; a process that would make the German war-machine formidably efficient¹¹⁹. In the June of 1936 he directed that night-fighter exercises be held for the first time, and as a result the Luftwaffe's first manual on night-fighting was published in April 1937¹²⁰.

Kesselring also initiated the full paratrooper (*Fallschirmager*) training programme, which by July 1938 was under the command of General Student. This force was designed for aggressive attack¹²¹. The concept of

¹¹⁵ Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.20.

¹¹⁶ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.52.

¹¹⁷ Goldensohn, *Interview*, p.320.

¹¹⁸ Boyne, *Influence*, p.159.

¹¹⁹ Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.234.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.235.

¹²¹ Later played a formidable role in Rotterdam and Crete.

dropping highly-trained troops from aircraft had been studied first in Russia. The German copy, encouraged by Kesselring, was first-class and was emulated by the Allies. Apart from their ability to parachute, they were highly-trained soldiers who proved their effectiveness on the ground in many places, especially Monte Cassino.

As Chief of Air Staff Kesselring emphasised the importance of training bomber-navigators and bombardiers for long-range missions, as well as the Flak regiments whose guns were useful against aircraft and tanks¹²². The Flak guns, by being dangerous to both aircraft and ground-forces, were powerful and feared by the Allies. Kesselring produced a blueprint of how the Luftwaffe should be organised in groups of Air Fleets: Göring agreed by signing the policy on 2nd June 1937, and Kesselring offered his resignation seeking a field post¹²³. According to his son Rainer it was to avoid 'the frictional strife' developing in the command; it has also been suggested that Kesselring sought a senior field post to ensure that his plans worked¹²⁴. Another more likely suggestion has been made that because Kesselring failed to accommodate himself to Milch 'the back-biting between the two led to Kesselring's replacement by Hans-Jürgen Stumpf within a year'¹²⁵. An immediate postwar study by the British Air Ministry, suggests that Kesselring was replaced by Stumpf because 'Kesselring was a forceful character and potentially troublesome to Göring'¹²⁶. Kesselring wrote little about Göring, but he had been quoted as saying that 'Göring could be made to work, and when he felt the need for it he worked with remarkable concentration and perseverance'¹²⁷.

From the very beginning of Hitler's regime, it was clear that war was his intention; as early as 30th September 1934 Schacht submitted to Hitler a 'Report on the state of preparation for war-economic mobilization' and it is extremely unlikely that Kesselring was unaware of such long-term intentions,

¹²² Flak is *Fliegerabwehrkanonen* the same as A.A.

¹²³ This differed from the British: Kesselring's plan was a full force within given areas.

¹²⁴ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.53.

¹²⁵ Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.11.

¹²⁶ NA-AMP, p.34.

¹²⁷ Manvell & Fraenkel, *Herman Göring* (London: Heinemann, 1962)p.177.

despite what he claimed in his self-serving memoirs.¹²⁸ Kesselring's introduction of aggressive parachute regiments; his support of strategic bombing; his insistence on night-fighters; training the navigators of bombers for long distance navigation, and his concept of mobile control areas for the various Air Fleets, are all highly indicative that Kesselring, through these preparations knew an aggressive war was being planned.

¹²⁸ Mendelsohn Peter de, *The Nuremberg Documents* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946) p. 16.

CHAPTER 3

LUFTWAFFE COMMAND (1937-1941)

Introduction

Kesselring's involvement with the Luftwaffe in Poland, the West and Russia will be examined in this study of Kesselring. Kesselring's postwar protestations that he knew next to nothing of Hitler's plans will be seen as nonsense: he may not have been consulted, but his involvement was far too intense to pretend he was caught by surprise. First, the fact that he prepared for an aggressive war, not least because he was a leading figure in organising the Luftwaffe for aggression, not defence. Secondly, for a long time there has been a popular myth that the Luftwaffe initiated strategic bombing, first Warsaw, then Rotterdam, London, and Barbarossa. This chapter will suggest that strategic, or what the Germans described as terror-bombing, was not part of the original plans, not for moral reasons, but in the belief that there was greater efficiency when airpower supported ground forces. Terror bombing may not have been planned, but the lack of technical resources meant it happened anyway. Thirdly, there will be an overview of how Kesselring's Luftwaffe fought in the east and the west, including the Battle of Britain. In Poland and Western Europe Blitzkrieg worked, but its initial success in Russia stalled because of the size of Russia. In Britain the Luftwaffe found itself up against an equally modern and ruthless opposition, and failed. Kesselring also had weak intelligence information, a problem that would dog him until the end of the war. Finally, as this thesis progresses the question must be asked as to how much Kesselring knew about the genocide and cruelty of the NSDAP in the Eastern war, because this is the context in which he planned and fought.

Kesselring's claimed ignorance of an Aggressive War

Carlo D'Este wrote that Kesselring was one of the 'originators of *blitzkrieg*,' a term used after the Polish invasion, and only by the Allies'¹. 'The German armed forces blended the tactical lessons of the First World War with the new technologies of armoured vehicles, combat aircraft and radio communications to create a devastating new form of combined-arms warfare'... although in Poland they 'had still not perfected its novel tactics, and German casualties were relatively heavy for such a short campaign'². Under the guidance of Seeckt, Kesselring had made a rigorous study of mobile war, and Carlo D'Este was correct in his estimation of Kesselring's input. Even Hore-Belisha in a 1942 parliamentary debate linked Kesselring's name with the military development of land and air working together³.

Kesselring argued that only ground troops could give final victory using a supportive Luftwaffe. This was one of the central themes of the so-called *blitzkrieg*, which was prepared for an aggressive war to restore Germany's borders. Luftwaffe-regulation-16, 'The Conduct of Air Operations' (*Luftkriegsführung*) issued in 1935 'served as the primary expression of Luftwaffe battle doctrine in World War II in which six major missions were outlined,' four of which related directly to supporting the army on the ground, especially the second which specified support for ground troops⁴.

Significantly, when in 1947 the RAF decided to write an objective account of the Luftwaffe their report on the Polish campaign read that 'from the German Air Force point of view, *{the Polish campaign}* was the supreme test of all the theories of air warfare on which the Air Force had been built up; in its overwhelming success it was viewed as the complete justification of all the hopes and principles which had been enumerated consistently by the German Air Staff and tested experimentally in Spain. The

¹ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.86.

² Zaloga Steven, *Poland 1939 The Birth of Blitzkrieg* (Oxford: Osprey, 2002)p.6.

³ HC-Debate, 2 July 1942, Vol381/cc527-611.

⁴ Corum, *Roots*, p.167.

principles laid down for the employment of the Luftwaffe was simple and direct ... It was the theory of *Blitzkrieg*; the elimination, stage by stage, of each and every obstacle which might frustrate the freedom of movement of the ground forces. It was an art of war which attributed to the Air Force almost every possibility except that of occupation of enemy territory. It was ideal for the type of continental warfare which the German High Command had planned⁵. They noted that 'Kesselring had written that beyond all other military arms, the Luftwaffe, by virtue of its mobility in space accomplished tasks which in former wars had been inconceivable ... in this campaign the Luftwaffe learned many lessons and prepared itself for a second, more strenuous and decisive clash of arms'⁶.

Kesselring's work was well known as he primed the Luftwaffe to operate in an aggressive war; there can be no justified claim that Kesselring was establishing a defence-force. By the very nature of his work Kesselring knew that war must be imminent. He claimed in his memoirs that he was kept in the dark about war-plans as did Manstein: Manstein insisted that Hitler conferred only with political colleagues who would never have contradicted him; military officers were simply given instructions. Hitler initiated all policies - the only exception was 'Raeder's suggestion of invading Norway' for strategic reasons⁷. However, Kesselring mentions his meetings with Hitler and Brauchitsch in the June of 1937 and alleged no mention of military matters was made; yet in the summer of the same year he was preparing airfields near the Czechoslovakian borders. The General Staff may have called it 'War-Games,' but there can be no escaping the conclusion that Kesselring and Manstein were alert to Hitler's intentions: many of the postwar biographies are self-serving in evading incriminating knowledge.

From mid-1937 Kesselring had been in charge of Air-Region III operating from Dresden, and from the 1st October he became Chief-of-Staff of *Luftflotte-I* operating from Berlin. He left the paper work to his Chief-

⁵ NA-AMP,p.53.

⁶ NA-AMP,p.57.

⁷ Manstein, *Lost*,p.154.

of-Staff, Wilhelm Speidel, while he flew his own Ju52 with his personal flying instructor Zellmann, visiting airfields from Berlin to Dresden⁸. He attended training sessions, checked fighting conditions; he was preparing his *Luftflotte* over eastern Germany where the political tensions existed.

Kesselring knew that invasion was close; the majority of Germans felt that the Sudetenland was German and it was much discussed. It was known that many international contemporaries agreed with the Germans. When Chamberlain asked Lord Runciman to give a considered opinion on Sudetenland, Runciman stated that the Czechoslovak rule over Sudeten Germans had 'been marked by tactlessness, lack of understanding, petty intolerance and discrimination... and I consider, therefore, that these frontier districts should at once be transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany'⁹. Kesselring was instructed to prepare in the May of 1938 for an invasion. He noted there was no Maginot defence, and proposed to drop airborne troops behind the frontline. In preparation Kesselring moved his operational headquarters to Senftenberg in the Lansitz to be closer to his units.

The situation was resolved at the four-power conference in Munich and Kesselring asserted he was relieved at the solution. Despite his postwar protestations of ignorance, he knew war was coming because his continuing preparatory plans included air-raid precautions, and educating civilians.

When the order came for the annexation of the rest of Czechoslovakia, Kesselring stated he had no time 'to speculate on the justification or need for intervention' he simply had to respond to his orders¹⁰. Seeckt's influence was manifest: although Kesselring never relied on the defence of obeying orders, he explains any awkward moment in his memoirs claiming he was a soldier who obeyed.

⁸ Brother of General Hans Speidel; later served NATO forces.

⁹ Gilbert, *Britain*, p.113.

¹⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.41.

Poland, like Czechoslovakia was a 'creation' of the Versailles Treaty; Lord Vansittart wrote in his autobiography 'that Piłsudski threw over the Left, banned communists ... ruled for nine years and riddled the state with his creatures. Their poor quality antagonised not only their neighbours but the few British politicians who knew anything of Poland'¹¹. Many, including Kesselring would have been aware there was no immediate tradition of Anglo-Polish friendship, and more than aware of Hitler's intentions.

Kesselring is vague and evasive concerning the start of the Polish offensive despite being summoned to the Berghof with all major commanders to hear Hitler's plans. An Australian professor of History published a book in 1937 clearly indicating why Hitler would go to war: 'Hitlerism cannot achieve its aims with war; its ideology is that of war'¹². It seems ludicrous that an Australian academic in 1937 understood what was happening, but military commanders could pretend ignorance. Kesselring could not deny knowledge; amongst the Luftwaffe documents gathered at Nuremberg was one entitled '*Organisation Study-1950*' dated 2nd May 1938 which dealt with the most suitable proposals for staffing when the Luftwaffe spread beyond German borders¹³. A map shows the Luftwaffe in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary, and the need to concentrate forces in the west in order to reach all parts of English territory. The document undoubtedly 'shows the lines upon which the General Staff of the Air Force were thinking at that time'¹⁴. Found amongst documents post-war was one entitled 'Basic target maps of British ground organisation,' September 15th 1938, and another demanding 'tactical maps of London and Hull' to be produced before September-1938'¹⁵. It may just indicate war games, but it is probable that Kesselring was aware of Hitler's war intentions.

Kesselring would also have been aware of the outlawing of aggressive war in the Kellogg-Briand Pact signed by Stresemann; the opening

¹¹ Vansittart Robert G, *The Mist procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958)p.326.
¹² Roberts Stephen, *The House that Hitler Built* (London: Methuen, 1937)p.363.
¹³ PAC, Vol I,p.679.
¹⁴ PAC, Vol I,p.680.
¹⁵ Mendelssohn, Nuremberg,p.203 and p.204.

clause read that the participants were ‘deeply sensible of their solemn duty to promote the welfare of mankind,’ and outlawing war as they prepared for battle¹⁶. He was a high ranking commander, intelligent and educated, and this international pact could not have passed him by without notice.

Kesselring always alleged he was unhappy about the war, and claims Göring was opposed to the policy. He was with Göring when he received the phone call saying the invasion was on, who then phoned Ribbentrop saying ‘Now you’ve got your ***** war it’s all your doing’ and furiously hung up¹⁷. Kesselring made no comment as to the morality of the Polish invasion, for him it was a matter of duty under the authority of the recognised government. Despite post-war protestations Kesselring, like most other senior commanders, knew that war was inevitable: he had prepared the war-machine for aggression, worked on *Blitzkrieg* and planned the attacks: the only aspect over which he probably had late knowledge was the precise timing.

Strategic bombing

British tradition claims when the Luftwaffe started ‘*the blitz*’ over London they inaugurated terror bombing, a traditional myth which also has its roots in justifying the retribution German cities suffered later in the war. Kesselring had been one of the authors of the regulations governing the *Luftwaffe-Manual/16*, namely only to bomb areas of military importance. The technology for accurate aerial bombing had yet to be developed, and although Kesselring had initiated scientific investigation for accuracy, he believed it was years away¹⁸.

Corum wrote that ‘the Luftwaffe did not have a policy of terror bombing civilians as part of its doctrine prior to World War II ... Rotterdam was bombed for tactical military reasons in support of military operations... the Luftwaffe leadership specifically rejected the concept of terror bombing in

¹⁶ PAC, Vol VIII,p.359.

¹⁷ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.42.

¹⁸ Luftwaffe scientists experimented with radio direction - the *Knickebein* system.

the interwar period, and one must look well into World War II, starting with the night bombing of selected British towns in 1942, to see a Luftwaffe policy of terror bombing in which civilian casualties are the primary desired result'¹⁹. It remains a 'prevalent myth about the Luftwaffe that the Luftwaffe had a doctrine of terror bombing... in order to break the morale of an enemy nation:' the evidence, regarding Kesselring indicate that this was not part of original Luftwaffe development, and terror bombing only came into being later in the war under the direction of Göring and Hitler, and was taken to its zenith by the Allies²⁰. In general practice 'German air strategy was linked closely to the ground campaign'²¹.

Despite popular myth most historians accept that the Luftwaffe was a tactical air force designed to assist the army. Telford Taylor argued 'the Luftwaffe's fundamental limitations were not the consequence of its immaturity but of a deliberate decision, taken in 1937, to design it for short-range operations in support of the army, rather than for long-range strategic undertakings of its own'²². Under Kesselring and Wever the Luftwaffe developed an extremely wide doctrine of air power. Although a tactical force it was able to locate and bomb Coventry at night, seeking to hit the industrial heartland, but it led to indiscriminate for bomb-aiming techniques remained primitive for many years.

Near the end of the short Polish campaign Warsaw still held as a centre of resistance, and the artillery and Luftwaffe were ordered to bring it to a conclusion, which it did on September 27th. The bombing of military sites may have been Kesselring's claim, but in reality bombing was indiscriminate. Ribbentrop, in his trial, claimed that Hitler did 'not want Polish civilians harmed,' but Hitler in his fanaticism wanted Warsaw erased, and the result was that '15% of Warsaw was ruined brickwork; 60,000 homes were destroyed'²³. It has also been claimed that although the Polish resistance was

¹⁹ Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.7.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Overy, *Bombing*, p.60.

²² Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.5.

²³ Overy, *Bombing*, p.512; Burleigh, *Moral*, p.135

finished Warsaw was left unoccupied 'only because the Germans wished to destroy it before claiming the ruins'²⁴. However, most historians agree there was still some resistance; the bombing started on 25th September, sometimes known as the Black Monday air-attack; Richthofen was allowed to strike using 1,150 airplanes: 'eleven percent of the bombs that fell were incendiaries ... they were dropped by thirty Ju52 transports ... two men in each plane hurled the two-pound fire bombs out of the cargo door with ordinary potato shovels,' - hardly suggestive of preparation for terror raids²⁵. 'Special Purpose Air Command flew 1,776 sorties against the city and pulverized it with 560 tons of high-explosive bombs and 72 tons of incendiaries'²⁶. The American military historian Williamson Murray somewhat understated the case by writing 'in these raids the Germans were not adverse to any collateral damage inflicted on the civilian population'²⁷.

Warsaw was virtually destroyed yet Kesselring wrote that the war 'was conducted with chivalry and humanity as far as is possible:' aerial or artillery bombardment in civilian areas can never be chivalrous or humane²⁸. The only reason Kesselring was not indicted in postwar tribunals was because the Nuremberg prosecutors decided not to pursue this line of enquiry, for fear of reciprocal charges.

There was a similar issue in Rotterdam where Student called for air-support by bombing areas where there was resistance. Rotterdam was the key to Dutch defence, and on May 12th in a unique attack the Luftwaffe seized the Willems Bridge with twelve or so Heinkel seaplanes by landing on the River Lek. Two days later, on May 14th surrender negotiations started, but the Dutch, still with larger numbers, stalled for time.

²⁴ Hastings, *Hell*, p.18.

²⁵ Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.66 The fire-bombs caused smoke to rise and confused the bombers who managed to drop their loads on German infantry; General Blaskowitz's protests reached Hitler.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.67.

²⁷ Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.30.

²⁸ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.48.

Kesselring alleged that the bombing of a city's defences or defenders was 'not against the Geneva Convention,' and that he had serious arguments with Göring who wanted the city flattened; the seriousness of this debate was confirmed by Göring's biographers²⁹. After the war, when interrogated about Rotterdam, Kesselring referred to the Bomber-Wing reports, pointing out that on their maps only military targets were marked; if red flares were seen they were to divert. The bombers had taken off closing down their primitive trailing radio-antenna. The smoke from the ground obscured any vision, and one wing went in and bombed whilst another, under Wing Commander Höhne saw the flares on time, and turned away³⁰. They dropped high-explosive bombs; some fell on a margarine warehouse creating serious fires in the city. Kesselring claimed it was a justified tactical operation in support of ground troops. Precise figures are difficult to establish, but it is generally assessed that some '980 people were killed and some 78,000 were left homeless'³¹. A Dutch officer, Captain Bakker, had started to negotiate a surrender of Rotterdam and during the 'coming and going' process the German General Schmidt, aware of the proposed aerial bombardment, ordered the red flares to be fired, but he was literally minutes too late³². The truth of the situation may never be known. The bombing so horrified the Dutch supreme commander, General Henri Winkelman that he surrendered that evening with his army intact.

Historians are again divided as to whether the bombing of Rotterdam was an act of terror or tactical: 'it was another deliberate act of force inspired by Göring,' and 'a deliberate act of terror, as Telford Taylor suggested, it 'was part of the German pattern of conquest – a pattern woven by Hitler and the *Wehrmacht*'³³. The postwar British Air Ministry report omits any reference to a terror attack, and implied a motive stating that 'a particularly savage attack on the centre of the city of Rotterdam had its immediate effect and on May 15th the Dutch Army capitulated after five days'

²⁹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.58: Manvell, *Herman*,p.226.

³⁰ Shirer is suspicious about the red flare explanation, Shirer L William, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (London: Book Club Associates, 1973)p.722.

³¹ Mitcham, *Eagles*,p.90.

³² Killen, *Luftwaffe*,p.110.

³³ *Ibid*,p.110: Murray, *Luftwaffe*,p.37.

fighting'³⁴. Kesselring's point of view that the bombing was aimed at military targets has some support.

The official German historical view of Rotterdam is that 'it appeared to the British, who got wind of 30,000 civilian losses, - in fact there were just 980 - to be a terror attack, showing that the *gloves were off*' it was no longer so regarded after the war; though opinions differed³⁵. The British used the attack to justify their later retaliations: an 'RAF air-training manual issued in March 1944 described the attack as an unexampled atrocity with 30,000 dead in 30 minutes'³⁶. Overy stated that the later 'German campaign against Britain was based on a detailed gazetteer of industrial and military targets scrupulously compiled before 1939 from photo-reconnaissance evidence and industrial intelligence:' the plan may not have been terror bombing, but bomb-aiming inaccuracy meant it happened anyway³⁷.

The general conclusion must be reached that Kesselring, and the Luftwaffe made no plans for strategic bombing, but not from moral considerations, as the Condor Legion illustrated in Spain³⁸. Kesselring frequently stated that he considered high level bombing imprecise, and saw the tactic as wasteful of time and money. The Luftwaffe was used primarily as a support for the land forces, and in this Kesselring's preparation played a major part, as will be explored in the next section.

Poland

When Kesselring's Luftwaffe fought in the mobile mode that had been planned in the 1920s, and with machines built in the 1930s, it was successful. Poland fell, Western Europe fell, and Russia nearly collapsed. Where it did not apply was the Battle of Britain where the English Channel

³⁴ NA-AMP,p.69.

³⁵ Militärgeschichtliches, Volume VI,p.498.

³⁶ Overy, *Bombing*,p.65.

³⁷ Ibid,p.13.

³⁸ It was probably Spain that prompted Roosevelt's statement on Sept 1st 1939 'condemning the "inhuman barbarism" of aerial attacks on civilian populations.' - Schlosser Eric, *Command and Control* (London: Allen Lane, 2013)p.44.

meant the Luftwaffe faced a different foe and set of circumstances, where Kesselring's military intelligence was faulty, and the opposition just as ruthless.

'The German aggression against Poland which began on 1st September 1939 was a model of the modern exercise of air power³⁹. Kesselring used the Luftwaffe in *Blitzkrieg* style, to help Bock's forces on the ground. Kesselring with *Luftflotte-I* was responsible for the northern part of the Polish invasion, the Danzig area which would return East Prussia to Germany. He organised attacks on the Polish naval installations near Danzig, claiming that the Polish air force was destroyed on the first day, but it was not until the 14th September that the Polish air-force virtually ceased to exist. It is a myth that the Polish air-force was destroyed on the ground in days; the Poles had 800 aircraft of which 430 could be rated as first-line operational, and they fought with their sturdy but out-dated PZL P-11s⁴⁰. The Polish air-force 'put up a substantial resistance in the first days of the war; its pilots, as they would do in the Battle of Britain, not only proved themselves tenacious and brave but highly skilled as well'⁴¹. Kesselring never mentioned that the Luftwaffe had considerable trouble locating the dispersed Polish airbases, 'and only about 24 combat aircraft were destroyed on the ground during the campaign'⁴². The belief that the Polish aircraft hardly had time to get airborne is as much legend as the infamous Polish cavalry charge against tanks. However, numbers and technologically advanced aircraft gave the Luftwaffe unquestionable superiority. There were errors and exaggerations, but the Luftwaffe succeeded with ease because men like Kesselring had spent the previous two decades preparing for this war. Military commanders like Kesselring were as guilty as Hitler who wanted this war.

As *Luftflotte-I* settled into eastern air-fields, unbelievably Kesselring again alleged ignorance of proposed military plans in Western Europe. His task was extending the airbases in Northern Poland, assisted by

³⁹ Overy, *Bombing*, p.61.

⁴⁰ Killen, *Luftwaffe*, p.100.

⁴¹ Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.31.

⁴² Zaloga, *Poland*, p.50.

General Bieneck, Commander of Administration in the Posen Area. A bomber-school was established at Thorn, and aircraft-workshops were set up in Warsaw. Even these preparations could hardly be regarded as defensive. In fact observing Kesselring in Poland with all the anticipation in the west caused the British to wonder whether Kesselring was preparing for war against Russia⁴³.

Kesselring's contributions, along with other senior officers, had shown the world how effective air-power was when deployed in *blitzkrieg*. It worked in mainland Europe to a terrifying extent, and it would take time for Germany's enemies to assimilate the lessons, and for Germany to realise the ineffectiveness of the dive-bombers when they met fast British fighters.

Western Europe

When a Major Helmut Reinberger with the plans of the proposed invasion in the West crash-landed in Belgium, it led to General Felmy, the commander of *Luftflotte-II*, being replaced by Kesselring⁴⁴. The loss of these plans had provoked Hitler's anger against Göring. The Commander of *Luftflotte-II*, Felmy and his Chief of Staff Colonel Kammhuber, were sacked from their posts where they had been preparing for the invasion of Western Europe. Kesselring with his trusted pilot, Zellman, and his Chief of Staff, Speidel, flew to Munster, the battle headquarters. It was a mere quirk of fate that the German pilot's disaster led to a train of events, that was to place Kesselring in charge of a critical part of the battle for Western Europe.

Kesselring claimed he was confident of ultimate victory; the German military machine had battle familiarity, and was more experienced in mobile warfare. Kesselring also believed, from his Great War experience, that the western Allies would be hesitant. He never explains why, just assuming that Western commanders were inept, when often it was caution for men's

⁴³ NA-AMP,p.96.

⁴⁴ Manvell, *Herman*, p.177 (Reinberger was flown by fellow Officer, Hoenmanns): Felmy was in Hitler's 'bad-books' because of his 'frank appraisal on the capabilities of the Luftwaffe vis-à-vis the RAF' - Mitcham, *Eagles*,p.81.

lives. He may have detected the same hesitancy in the overly-cautious diplomatic handling of Hitler, and again for the same reasons, no good man wants war. In the battle plans *Luftflotte-II* had been allotted to support Army Group-B under Bock; they had worked efficiently together during the invasion of Poland. When Kesselring saw the plans, he noted the amount of tactical intrusion made by Hitler, who would not agree to any changes. He started the technique for what he was to become adept at, chipping away by persuasive argument until he felt the plan was more feasible⁴⁵.

Meanwhile, in France the Luftwaffe was generally feared because of its experience in Spain and Poland. The French General Joseph Vuillemin in 1938 had been given a tour of Luftwaffe airfields where Milch and Udet had played a hoax, showing him the very same planes as he travelled from airfield to airfield, giving the impression the German numbers were far greater than they really were⁴⁶. It was this kind of preparatory deception that helped undermine French morale; it may have increased German self-assurance too much. Nevertheless, Kesselring was concerned about the aircraft, not least because the heavily used Ju52 was not the best transport plane, having no bullet-proof fuel-tanks, and the Me-109s had a limited fuel range. His fears were well founded; on May 10th the Luftwaffe lost 304 aircraft of which 157 were Ju52s.

Kesselring was again in disagreement with Göring who had promised Hitler that 'his' Luftwaffe alone could destroy the British on the Dunkirk beaches⁴⁷. Kesselring's forces had been reduced, and repairs were necessary; there was personnel fatigue and his *Luftflotte* was reduced by up to 50%.⁴⁸ His supply lines were stretched to the limit, and the Stukas, ideal for a Dunkirk attack, were exhausted, pilots and machines⁴⁹. The reality was that the Luftwaffe was being weakened while keeping its image as a formidable threat.

⁴⁵ Macksey, *Memoirs*, p.68.

⁴⁶ Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.86 also quoted in Boyne, *Influence*, p.175.

⁴⁷ Halder was told by Brauchitsch following a conversation with Kesselring/Milch - January 1946 that Göring wanted to deflect some of the army glory to himself, Shirer, *Rise*, p.733.

⁴⁸ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.73.

⁴⁹ Killen, *Luftwaffe*, p.115.

Kesselring followed Göring's orders and entrusted the destruction of the beaches to *Fliegerkorps-I/IV/VIII* led by Generals Grauert, Keller and Richthofen. They caused considerable damage, but failed to halt the evacuation. The Luftwaffe was hampered by bad weather, and in Kesselring's words the 'modern Spitfire had appeared on the scene'. It has been suggested that over Dunkirk the Luftwaffe suffered its first defeat⁵⁰. Most of the forces were evacuated at night; a difficult time for aerial attack. Despite what British soldiers thought on the beaches, the RAF was busy, and what Göring had promised his Führer was impossible – over 250 German aircraft were to be lost over Dunkirk in proving it⁵¹.

Kesselring knew that in hitting French military targets that civilians would be killed: 'it is a matter of rueful reflection that in these high and low level attacks civilians intermingled with the troops were hit,' he wrote after the war⁵². One of the many criticisms of *blitzkrieg* was the inhumane attack upon civilians. There is justification in this criticism, but from 1000 feet a clear vision is seldom possible. James Holland relates how German soldiers encouraged an Italian family to flee the battle area, keeping in the centre of the road to avoid mines, and run for cover every time an allied aircraft appeared⁵³. This was a common feature for fleeing civilians; in her diary the American/Italian Iris Origo describes the Allied machine-gunning of civilians from the air, stating that 'it cannot easily be explained. It is difficult to believe that public opinion in England, if fully informed, would approve of all this'⁵⁴. She recited many incidents; one where a woman and a child were machine-gunned whilst on the beach⁵⁵. However, a recent investigation into German POW conversations appeared to confirm that strafing civilians was not just rogue pilots but orders: 'We had orders to drop our bombs right into the towns. I fired at every cyclist,' a pilot of a 109, May-20-1942⁵⁶. There is no

⁵⁰ Boyne, *Influence*, p.208.

⁵¹ Killen, *Luftwaffe*, p.116.

⁵² Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.61.

⁵³ Holland James, *Italy's Sorrow* (London: Harper Press, 2009) p.235.

⁵⁴ Origo Iris, *War in Val D'Orcia* (London: John Murray, 1947) p.136.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁵⁶ Neitzel S & Welzer H, *Soldaten* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012) p.63.

information as to who gave the order, but this statement confirms similar behaviour against retreating civilians.

The French signed the Armistice on June 22nd, and Kesselring thought this would end the war, that the English would sue for peace. The French had lost 757 aircraft in combat and the RAF 900+ including 453 fighters. Kesselring knew the battle had been costly; the Germans lost an estimated 1,279 aircraft between May 10th and June 20th including 500 bombers and 300 fighters. In fact since the start of the fighting in Norway the Luftwaffe had lost 36% of its force⁵⁷.

On July 19th 1940, in the Berlin Kroll Opera House, 'Hitler offered Britain peace' and created Kesselring as a Field-Marshal along with eleven others⁵⁸. The general feeling in Berlin was that the English would not pursue the war; Halder believed that Britain 'probably still needs one more demonstration of our military might before she gives in,' though reporting that Hitler 'is greatly puzzled by Britain's persisting unwillingness to make peace;' he would have been aware of the strong pro-peace lobby⁵⁹. Halder believed only Sea-Lion was 'the surest way to hit England'⁶⁰.

Battle of Britain

It is clear that the sudden collapse of France had surprised everyone, even Hitler. There were no carefully prepared plans for the invasion of England, and Kesselring noted that Sea-Lion may have been contemplated, but was never realistically considered, quoting the historian Fuller in support.⁶¹ 'Hitler would have preferred to avoid a life-and-death struggle with the British Empire because his real aims lay in the East' was Manstein's view,

⁵⁷ Boyne, *Influence*, p.210

⁵⁸ Manvell, *Herman*, p.230: The Kaiser created 5 Field-Marschals in WWI

⁵⁹ Burdick C & Jacobsen Hans-Adolf (Eds), *The Halder War Diary 1939-42* (Novato: Presidio, 1988)p.219 and p.227

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.288

⁶¹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.58; in Hastings, *Hell*, p.81 it is claimed that Kesselring preferred an attack on Gibraltar, rather than England.

and shared by most senior military leaders⁶². It has been claimed that Hitler stopped the panzers outside Dunkirk because he was not interested in the British; this is nonsense, it was Rundstedt's plan for practical reasons and only needed Hitler's say so⁶³.

Hitler had acknowledged as early as May 1939 to his Commanders-in-Chiefs that 'a country cannot be brought to defeat by an Air-Force'⁶⁴. He believed a seaborne invasion was an 'antiquated and unnecessary method of forcing her capitulation' and that it was merely a simple matter of cutting England's lifelines⁶⁵. There is no clear information about his thinking; even the Directive dated August 17th 1940 gives two dates in August⁶⁶. During these months of indecision, it was decided that the RAF had to be destroyed.

In mid-July 1940 Kesselring received orders to prepare for the attack on Britain, and his pre-war planning ensured that the transfer of Luftwaffe units to Western Europe was efficiently expedited. He sent out armed reconnaissance missions against British shipping, attacked some of the ports, and selected to bomb some armament factories such as the Vickers Armstrong Aircraft works at Reading. Between July 10th and August 12th 30,000 tons of shipping was sunk, making the English Channel highly risky, and 148 RAF aircraft downed for the loss of 286 German planes, of which 105 were fighters⁶⁷. Bombers, and especially dive-bombers were easy targets for British fighters, and it was soon evident that experienced pilots were critical. Kesselring understood this as he observed aircraft from his underground HQ at Cape Gris Nez⁶⁸. When a German pilot parachuted over England he was lost, whereas an RAF pilot could return next morning. A German pilot, Steinhilper, in his biography, makes it abundantly clear that

⁶² Manstein, *Lost*, p.155.

⁶³ Sebag-Montefiore, *Dunkirk* (London: Penguin Books, 2007)p.246.

⁶⁴ Mendelssohn, *Nuremberg*, p.203.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.206.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.212, giving the dates of August 17th as well as August 27th.

⁶⁷ Macksey, *Memoirs*, p.77.

⁶⁸ Cape Gris Nez - advanced HQ; main HQ - Brussels. At Cap Gris Nez he was pinning a Knight's Cross on Galland when interrupted by Spitfires, Galland Adolf, *The First and the Last* (London: Methuen, 1995)p.52/3.

many German pilots felt on a back-foot despite the myth that the Luftwaffe was a David and Goliath battle⁶⁹.

Kesselring observed there was always chivalrous conduct, but noted that killing parachuting pilots would have been more effective than the destruction of aircraft. He noted the English were aware of this, but accused them of attacking air-ambulances in the Channel by order of the war cabinet⁷⁰. Such a claim clashes with the myth of gentlemanly conduct, but boundaries were crossed as in this English naval account: 'on July 1st1940, we were off the Tees with a southbound convoy about 6am when we sighted an unusual aircraft... it was a white seaplane with red crosses painted on the fuselage, and while we were wondering whether to open fire or not, the question was settled for us by a couple of Spitfires, who zoomed up from nowhere and shot the machine into the sea ... the crew were highly indignant at being shot down ... they explained they were an unarmed rescue plane ...'⁷¹ For the British this was total war, and again on March 15th-1941 the Hospital Ship Po, at anchor in the port of Vlore was sunk by British planes⁷². It was two way process, both sides were guilty, the hospital ship Talamba was sunk off the Sicily coastline during operation Husky, with many numerous examples both sides. The notion of a total war is often ascribed to Germany, but both Britain and eventually America responded in kind. Kesselring has frequently been described as ruthless, but the British were also ruthless, and when Kesselring gave orders that there should be no operational flying over England during the Christmas period 24th – 26th December, he wrote in his memoirs that he was disappointed the British did not reciprocate. Kesselring had underestimated the British, who, Hitler once told his dinner party guests, 'are realists, devoid of any scruple, cold as ice'⁷³. To Kesselring the battle was a campaign, but the RAF knew it was a matter of life and death.

⁶⁹ Steinhilper U & Osborne P, *Spitfire on my Tail* (Worcs: Self-Publishing Co, 1989).

⁷⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.70.

⁷¹ Donald William, *Stand by for Action* (London: Seaforth, 2009)p.44.

⁷² Farrell Nicholas, *Mussolini, A New Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.348:In his diary 'Soldat' Knappe refers to Red Cross vehicles being attacked - Knappe Siegfried & Brusaw, *Soldat* (London: BCA, 1993)p.280.

⁷³ Overy, *Bombing*,p.85.

On August 6th Göring ordered Kesselring 'to stun the island defences by sharp hammer blows and launch the attack with the Luftwaffe'⁷⁴. Kesselring viewed the plan in two phases. The first from August 8th to September 6th was preparation for invasion by eliminating the RAF and attacking shipping; Kesselring insisted that terror raids were forbidden. In his memoirs Kesselring makes uncomfortable reading for people raised on the Battle of Britain. Kesselring argued that in the early battles the Luftwaffe held the tactical superiority and later battles resulted in a 'draw.'

At the beginning of September Kesselring felt confident because the Luftwaffe had air-control over Holland, Belgium and Northern France. *Adler Tag*, the start of the attack on August 12th, had inflicted damage to many fighter airfields, but the following days were hampered by weather conditions, and Kesselring never realised the effectiveness of British radar, and the excellent ground-to-air-communications in the RAF. The attack on the airfields could have been fatal, but there were many airfields and weak German intelligence could not differentiate between major and minor airfields. Kesselring lacked any real intelligence about the strength of the opposition. Ultra, radar and 'Y' Service intercepts of the German radio traffic 'gave the British an increasingly accurate picture...' ⁷⁵. On the other hand, with details from crashed aircraft, crew interviews, and some 'ultra' information the British 'deduced the nature of the German blind bombing system, the so-called *knickebein* method'⁷⁶. Kesselring always had the reputation for being astute, but his weakness was not only in his own military intelligence, but his optimism probably gave him the adolescent belief they could not lose. He also woefully underestimated the British advances in radar, fighter planes and many other scientific advances. When the Luftwaffe attacked the radar installations the damage was contained, and Kesselring made the mistake of leaving the radar alone; he had grossly underestimated its value. Perhaps the greatest intelligence errors were the 'persistent

⁷⁴ Hitler's Directive No 17 issued 3 days earlier read 'The German Air Force must with all means in their power and as quickly as possible destroy the English Air Force...'. Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.68.

⁷⁵ Dowding, through Ultra, knew of Adler Tag precisely, Lewin Ronald, *Ultra Goes to War* (London: Penguin, 1978) p.86; Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.47.

⁷⁶ Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.47.

underestimation of the size of Fighter Command and the capacity to reinforce it continuously with men and aircraft⁷⁷. There is the same sense of arrogance in this assumption as there was in the conceited certainty that the Enigma code was unbreakable. Part of the Luftwaffe's overall failure had been poor intelligence about Britain: the Head of Luftwaffe Intelligence was a Colonel Joseph 'Beppo' Schmid, whom Galland in post-war interrogations described as 'a complete wash-out as an intelligence officer, the most important job of all'⁷⁸. In addition to this there had been the failure to develop a 'coherent naval-air-war doctrine:' General Felmy had proposed to Göring that the best way to attack Britain was to attack the ports and the shipping⁷⁹. He had 'pointed out in 1938 how an aerial-mining campaign could be pursued to shut British harbours'⁸⁰. Finally, as Kesselring always knew, the Luftwaffe had suffered serious losses in the continental campaigns, while the RAF could retract their fighters to safety. It is interesting to note that in an immediate postwar British Air Ministry study the German failure was not attributed to the Luftwaffe commanders, but to 'the attitude of Hitler and Göring themselves, rather than any lack of foresight on the part of the German Air Force Staff'⁸¹.

Kesselring needed to engage RAF fighters within range of his fighters in the South-East, and claimed that the attacks on London were in order to draw the fighters up to protect the city. In reality RAF Bomber Command on August 25th had made five minor raids on Berlin in eleven days 'doing little material damage but infuriating the Führer ... who on Sept 4th publically announced: 'when they declare that they will attack our cities in great strength, then we will erase theirs'⁸²! Kesselring may have preferred military reasons for these tactics, but it was the whim of an angry Führer. During early September a Luftwaffe Officer Conference had been called at The Hague: present were Kesselring and Sperrle of *Luftflotte-III*. A directive of August 20th had been to exhaust or destroy the British fighters by directly

⁷⁷ Overy, *Bombing*, p.79.

⁷⁸ Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.106.

⁷⁹ Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.280.

⁸⁰ Corum, *Luftwaffe*, p.281.

⁸¹ NA-AMP, p.87.

⁸² Mitcham, *Eagles*, p.105.

engaging them, drawing them to the bombers. Sperrle believed the RAF had a thousand planes at its disposal, but Kesselring's opinion was that the RAF was finished. Kesselring optimistic and with poor Intelligence made the wrong military judgement. Kesselring would have been startled to know that although the British economy was smaller than Germany, it out-produced Germany, and 'was ahead in aircraft from 1940 and in tanks in 1941-2'⁸³.

In October Kesselring was informed that the English had been interfering with the radio beams which assisted the Luftwaffe to pinpoint targets. When questioned postwar about the attack on Coventry he pointed out that Coventry was similar to Essen with its armament factories; in fact they 'levelled twelve armament factories, gutted the medieval cathedral, and killed 380 people ... Coventry was to become a symbol'⁸⁴. The raid was carefully observed by Kesselring who flew over the operation⁸⁵. The Coventry raid was not strategic bombing, but it was also evident that accurate bombing was too difficult to achieve by either side, and that area-bombing was the consequence. Kesselring had some justification in arguing that the first raids on 'Open Cities' were flown by the RAF.

In February 1941 Göring's conference at Quai d'Orsay in the historic Salle de l'Horloge, discussed the future war against England, but they knew they had lost this battle which would have ramifications for Germany's war. The battle had also been costly to both combatants: the Luftwaffe lost 1,773 aircraft and almost 3,000 aircrew; the RAF 1,265 aircraft and 1,537 aircrew⁸⁶. 'This was never the contest of the *Few against the Many*. High attrition ... could not be made good from German production'⁸⁷. Although Kesselring tried to console himself that the battle was 'more of a draw' it was in effect a serious defeat for the Luftwaffe.

⁸³ Edgerton David, *Britain's War Machine* (London: Penguin Books, 2012)p.75.

⁸⁴ Davies Norman, *No Simple Victory* (London: Penguin, 2007)p.297.

⁸⁵ 'Entirely characteristic of a man who believed in leading from the front,' Lewin, *Ultra*,p.100.

⁸⁶ Figures vary but these seem the most reliable; they are found in Boyne, *Influence*,p.215.

⁸⁷ Overy, *Bombing*,p.89.

Barbarossa

In July the OKW had been instructed to plan an attack on Russia. From Hitler's viewpoint it would have been easier had England sued for peace avoiding a war on two fronts. On May 21st Field-Marshal Sperrle became air commander in the west and Kesselring moved to Posen in occupied Poland.

Barbarossa was known only to the few, and Kesselring was complicit in keeping it from his staff until the last moment. From February 1941 he was kept in touch by a small planning-staff led by Göring at Gatow Air-Academy; and he flew to Warsaw for a conference with von Kluge, the Commander-in-Chief. The Luftwaffe was already playing a major but little known role in preparation. In October 1940 a Lieutenant-Colonel Rowehl had been given instructions to organise 'long-range reconnaissance formations capable of photographic reconnaissance of Western Russian territory from a great height'⁸⁸. The Russians could not see such high-flying planes. This was advanced camera-technology which has attracted little attention in post-war history, and which the Americans emulated a couple of decades later with U-2s.

Kesselring attended Hitler's final conference on Barbarossa, held on June 14th 1941, during which Hitler made a speech lasting one-and-a-half hours. Kesselring never commented on whether he found Hitler's views barbaric. The concept of launching an attack on a country with a treaty-relationship was not discussed; the military leaders just accepted the orders. Nowhere in his memoirs does Kesselring reflect on the criminal nature of such orders, nor on the suicidal enormity of such an enterprise. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler had written on the dangers of a two-front war, yet in his memoirs Kesselring agrees with Hitler's decision to invade Russia. Kesselring accepted Hitler's belief that there were fundamental ideological antagonisms between the two countries, as if that created a legitimate case for war. After

⁸⁸ Carell Paul, *Hitler's War on Russia* (London: Harrup, 1964)p.60.

Kesselring's earlier experiences at the end of World War I, he had a hatred of communists; his memoirs written in the Cold War reflect this. As a dubious justification Kesselring indicated that on the two hundred mile German/Soviet front in September 1939, the Russians increased their military⁸⁹.

Stalin's unbelievable trust in Hitler greatly assisted Kesselring's Luftwaffe attack; Stalin had issued an order that 'restricted flying over German territory' so that 'the Russian bomber force (which had largely escaped the first Luftwaffe strike, owing to its bases being farther from the front) took off obediently in accordance with an already outdated operational plan. Over 500 were shot down'⁹⁰. Kesselring had flown his FW-189 over the projected war-zone to familiarise himself with the territory, to see the gathering of German forces, and in his memoirs confesses that it was incredulous that Stalin would not believe all his informants.

OKW Directive No 21 made the Luftwaffe responsible for eliminating enemy planes, cutting communications and assisting ground-troops. Kesselring knew he needed more flyers and flak, and he claimed that after a heated argument with Göring, and with the support of Göring's Chief of Staff, Jeschonnek, he 'got his way'⁹¹.

In view of the Finnish war Kesselring believed that the Soviets had exposed their military weaknesses, and was confident that the *Luftflotte-II* would work efficiently with Bock's Army Group. There was a degree of truth in these claims, yet, as with other German commanders, there was an arrogance which believed German technology and efficiency was superior, whilst underestimating both the potential Russian logistics, and the character of their soldiers.

Bock, in charge of *Heeresgruppe Mitte* (Army Group Centre) frequently told his subordinates that it was a 'good thing' for a German

⁸⁹ 65 Russian Divisions, in December 1939 growing to one-hundred and six; by May-1940 there were one-hundred and fifty three plus thirty-six motorised divisions.

⁹⁰ Clark Alan, *Barbarossa* (London: Phoenix Press, 1965)p.49.

⁹¹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.85.

soldier to die for his country; ironically he was to be the only German Field-Marshal to be killed by enemy fire⁹². Kesselring described Bock as a 'kindred spirit,' probably because he concurred with their aims of using war to re-establish the power of pre-Versailles Germany. Bock controlled a formidable striking force made more fearful by large Stuka concentrations in Kesselring's *Luftflotte-II*. 'This mailed fist...' could hardly fail against an unprepared Russian force⁹³.

The Luftwaffe caught the Soviets totally by surprise, and within a few days destroyed 2,500 aircraft, mainly on the ground⁹⁴. Soviet fighter strength was virtually wiped out: it has been described as the 'Pearl Harbour of the air'⁹⁵. The Russian air force was destroyed on the ground, in 'the Western and Kiev military districts, the fighters and bombers were so neatly lined up on the runways ... not hundreds but thousands of machines were thus displayed in a style best fitted to ensure their destruction'⁹⁶. Some, including Major-General Zakharov in Odessa, ordered his aircraft to disperse. The figures regarding destroyed Russian aircraft vary, but it has been claimed that the Luftwaffe destroyed more than 5,000 Russian aircraft by October 5th⁹⁷.

The Citadel of Brest-Litovsk resisted bravely for nine days, and Kesselring sent in a Stuka-*Geschwader* and dropped some 4000-pound bombs⁹⁸. Remarkably this garrison fought for some considerable time against the odds⁹⁹. Within a few days Kesselring was able to fly his FW-189 over the Russian zone; the Luftwaffe had total air superiority. The Russians had old fashioned Polikarpov 1-15s/16s which were easy targets; unlike Spitfires these obsolete planes could not shoot down Ju-87 dive-bombers. It also meant that the Soviets lost some of their best air-crews. Guderian requested that the

⁹² He, with wife and daughter, were killed in a car strafed by a British-fighter.

⁹³ Erickson John, *The Road to Stalingrad Volume 1* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975)p.84.

⁹⁴ The minimal figure is in excess of 2,000 'a casualty rate without precedent' Clark, *Barbarossa*,p.50.

⁹⁵ Carell, *Hitler's*,p.61.

⁹⁶ Erickson, *Road*,p.111.

⁹⁷ Boyne, *Influence*,p.220.

⁹⁸ Usually three groups of about 93 aircraft.

⁹⁹ This bravery was not acknowledged by Stalin; today they have been decorated and appear in a film directed by Alexander Kott - '*The Fortress of War*.' Carell, *Hitler's*,p.43.

Luftwaffe bomb general artillery areas, not so much hoping for accurate bombing, but as a means of scaring the artillery men away from their guns into shelters. It was a cynical and clever use of air-power which the pragmatic Kesselring appreciated.

However, poor intelligence failed to note the primitive roads in Russia, especially the minor roads, so the intermittent poor weather slowed advances. The Luftwaffe's ground-organisation had no track-vehicles and so Kesselring was obliged to move his Air Command HQ to a train north of Brest-Litovsk, and then in July to a motor-transport command column east of Minsk, in order to stay in touch with his forward units. These were just some of the flaws already appearing in the Barbarossa plans.

There were areas where it was possible to encircle the enemy, but the task was vast, the country wide. Kesselring, flying his FW-189 over the area saw Russian soldiers escaping between Yartsevo and Smolensk. He wanted to drop airborne troops, but they were too depleted from the battles in Holland and Crete¹⁰⁰. Kesselring kept pace with the fast moving army/panzer assaults; it has been said that 'the Luftwaffe carried the German army to the gates of Moscow. After that point it became overextended ... now essentially a fire-brigade.'¹⁰¹ *Blitzkrieg* had worked in the West, but was destined for long-term failure in Barbarossa, because of the 'infantry's inability to keep up with the armoured spearheads over a long distance'¹⁰². Army Group North covered 200 miles of Soviet territory in the first five days, and then had to wait for a week for supplies¹⁰³. The Luftwaffe proved useful in destroying tanks, motor vehicles and bridges. Kesselring moved his command post to Smolensk and used the huge freight gliders (Giganten type) to try and bring necessary supplies to the front.

By August 1941 Kesselring and other commanders were becoming concerned at what Kesselring called the High Command's *shilly-*

¹⁰⁰ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.97.

¹⁰¹ Boyne, *Influence*, p.221.

¹⁰² Bartov Omer, *Hitler's Army* (Oxford: OUP, 1992)p.15.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.17.

shallying, and especially when the decision was made to strike south, in order to cut off fuel supplies from the Caucasus¹⁰⁴. As the German forces struck north towards Leningrad and south towards Kiev, Kesselring was unhappy that *Luftflotte-II* was now too diversified to help Guderian at Smolensk.

The Luftwaffe was losing men and material. Hitler had demanded bombing to undermine the morale of the Russian people, but the raids over Moscow were dangerous, and crews were lost behind enemy lines. It has been suggested by his first biographer that Kesselring may have had moral qualms about bombing civilians: 'I think Kesselring realised this. His record is pretty clean when it comes to deliberate attacks on non-combatants', but he never stopped¹⁰⁵. Kesselring noted that some better Russian fighter-planes were beginning to make appearances, and it was proving difficult for the Luftwaffe bombers to penetrate, allowing the Russians the opportunity to build planes and tanks.

Despite the weather the Russians were fighting back. Kesselring found it difficult to understand how the arrival of Siberian troops was not caught by reconnaissance, but he also realised that the Luftwaffe were finding it more difficult to assist the army, because the Russians were becoming invisible in the winter landscape; the Luftwaffe was also now overstretched, over-tired and down on equipment. It was at this point that Kesselring received a completely new assignment.

Kesselring and his compatriots, who had planned what is now dubbed *blitzkrieg*, and prepared the formidable Luftwaffe, were able to watch it work well in Poland, the Low Countries and France. The defeat, which it was in the Battle of Britain, sent the warning signs: against the RAF he met an equally ruthless foe, and Kesselring's military intelligence was extremely weak if not misleading. The sheer enormity of the attack on Russia was not only immoral but militarily insane, and men such as Kesselring showed a continuous lack of judgement in supporting Hitler. In doing so Kesselring's

¹⁰⁴ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.93.

¹⁰⁵ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.98.

reputation, along with other famous names, comes under question: Kesselring may have claimed to have been non-political, but it was the same right-wing fanaticism as that of the NSDAP that drove him forward.

Did Kesselring know of the Atrocities?

At the Berghof, when the invasion of Poland was proposed, Hitler's speech included the extermination of inferior races. Kesselring's Chief-of-Staff, Speidel, spoke of the event as one of 'unmistakable dismay' and it has been suggested that Kesselring and many others thought the idea too incredulous to believe¹⁰⁶. Despite this statement by his first biographer Kesselring expresses no strong opinion or remorse about the 'lesser races,' denying all knowledge and evading the question. Hitler's obsession with '*sub-humans*' and their treatment may well have sounded like mere rant to military men wanting to re-create German borders; its reality would become apparent in the years to come, but unquestionably if Speidel were aware of the proposed atrocities, so was Kesselring.

It must be asked how aware Kesselring was of the brutality of the SS under Governor Frank, particularly in Warsaw. Blaskowitz had protested loudly at the atrocities, and Kesselring knew Blaskowitz¹⁰⁷. Kesselring related how Hitler had asked for a field-kitchen meal to be served on the airfield, which Blaskowitz organised using table-clothes and flowers, causing Hitler to storm off, which, Kesselring wrote, put Blaskowitz in Hitler's bad books. Kesselring must have known that Blaskowitz was incensed by the treatment of Poles and Jews in Warsaw and had written several memoranda, one to be delivered by von Barsewisch, his Luftwaffe commander, but Milch intervened before it was presented to Hitler. When Blaskowitz continued protesting against all advice he was sacked, not because of table-clothes and flowers, but by his protestations against the inhuman treatment of Poles and Jews.

¹⁰⁶ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.60.

¹⁰⁷ Blaskowitz was opposed to the Army committing war crimes with the SS. Between November 1939 and February 1940 he wrote several memoranda to higher command, detailing SS atrocities in Poland, their effects on Wehrmacht soldiers, and the insolent attitude of the SS to the army. He committed suicide in 1948.

Later in life Kesselring and many others made much of ‘fighting a clean war,’ but it has been cogently argued that large swathes of the Wehrmacht had willingly participated in the process of *Gleichschaltung*, that is the coordination of the army into the NSDAP state, and there were many officers and men who genuinely thought they were fighting *Untermensch* (subhuman) who would otherwise destroy Germany¹⁰⁸. It is generally accepted that the Wehrmacht did behave differently in the West – ‘there is a clear difference from the moment they were transferred from the West to the East ... always when they arrived they tended towards brutality,’ but Kesselring, during his time in Poland must have seen some of the cruelty perpetrated in the east, even though he were not personally involved¹⁰⁹.

Kesselring, like all senior officers, pretended to ignore politics, and never revealed his thoughts about the NSDAP, of which he was never a member, but he was self-evidently at one with their views on re-establishing and expanding German powers. He wrote only on what concerned him most, namely the effectiveness of the war machine he had helped create. He had complained about the Russians and their lack of co-operation in sending weather reports, describing them as ‘strange bedfellows in a coalition war’¹¹⁰. In comparison with Blaskowitz, he was ruthless; his one interest was military.

The moral repugnance of attacking another country is still open to debate; it continues to happen, but Hitler's orders relating to Jews, commissars and POWs is one of the most hideous events in history. From the start of Barbarossa it was common knowledge that Russian POWs were being starved to death, commissars shot and anti-Semitism had become lethal. Most of Hitler's military commanders like Kesselring said nothing. Hitler and National Socialism had no need for political commissars ‘to provide the troops with an ideological indoctrination; the German generals were taking

¹⁰⁸ Bartov, Volume 42, Issue-4 Bartov Omer, History Today, *The Myths of the Wehrmacht*.

¹⁰⁹ Fawcett, Volume 52, Issue 4 Fawcett Gabriel, History Today, *The Wehrmacht Exhibition*.

¹¹⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.47.

care of this need themselves'¹¹¹. National Socialism had managed to define Aryan-Germans as a master-race (*Herrenvolk*) and those in the east as less than human (*untermenschen*); 'it was Adolf Hitler who then fused the idea of an *Asian peril* with anti-Semitism, anti-Bolshevism, and anti-Slavic racism'¹¹². Recent research has indicated that many of the generals acquiesced in the criminal orders, and the OKW orders which specifically mention the question of Jewish people¹¹³. Halder and Blaskowitz had been aware of the atrocities in Poland, and when a Field-Marshal Georg von Manstein protested in Poland he was removed from his post. Before Barbarossa Hitler had given a speech on March 30th to some 250 generals on the approaching war against Russia, and the generals made it clear that they stood alongside their Commander-in-Chief in terms of the invasion, the criminal orders against captives, commissars and Jews. An order issued by von Reichenau stated that 'the primary aim of the campaign against the Jewish Bolshevik system is the complete annihilation of the means of power and the eradication of the Asiatic influence on European culture ...the {German} soldier is not only a fighter in accordance with the rules of warfare'¹¹⁴. He is also the bearer of merciless national ideology ... that is why the soldier must fully understand the necessity for hard but just retaliation against Jewish sub-humanity'¹¹⁵. The military seemed at one with their political masters, and Rundstedt circulated the commands to all his troops.

Kesselring was Luftwaffe, and saw himself as a professional commander with only technical expertise, but by being there he would have heard, if not seen, the consequences of Hitler's perversions; he was complicit. The Luftwaffe were not above brutality, Göring himself had said 'I ... do not care if you say your people {the Russians} are dying of hunger. So they may, as long as not a single German dies of hunger'¹¹⁶. Richthofen, commander of *Luftflotte-IV* who, having read in *Mein Kampf* about Russian and Eastern

¹¹¹ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.23.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p.24.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.92 and p.94.

¹¹⁴ 1941 October 10th

¹¹⁵ Messenger, *Prussian*, p.147-8.

¹¹⁶ Bartov, *Hitler'sp*.75.

policies decided the troops in his area must be made fully aware of such orders¹¹⁷.

There can be no doubt that Kesselring had sufficient knowledge of the barbarities carried out in Germany's name, to make him realise that the regime for whom he worked was fundamentally evil. Yet he had helped prepare the military aspect of their onslaught, using his skill as a Luftwaffe Field-Marshal: the conclusion must be that when viewing Kesselring in this context, one can only see a man seeking military success, who accepted the fundamental evil of Hitler.

¹¹⁷ Ibid,p.132.

CHAPTER 4

SOUTHERN COMMAND (1941-1943 (45))

Introduction

This chapter and the next two will have several themes in common. These include the nature of Kesselring's command as *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd*, the weakness of Allied command, and the problematic relationship with Rommel. These themes need to be studied chronologically.

First, there must be a brief examination of the relationship between Italy and Germany before exploring the ambiguous and changing nature of Kesselring's appointment in Italy; it is often assumed that Kesselring was in charge, but this lacks reality. This appraisal will also include Kesselring's views of the Italian situation, because his misconceptions hampered his command, and when German Intelligence failed he was quick to blame the Italians. Secondly, the conflict between Kesselring and Rommel will be introduced, and looked at again in the next chapter when the tensions between the two commanders became critical in the Italian campaign. Connected to the Rommel question the failure to invade or destroy Malta must be explored. Thirdly, in terms of the North African war the thesis will explore how Kesselring had major supply problems, uncertainty about French attitudes, and experienced trouble with his own subordinates, oversaw a defeat as great as Stalingrad, and yet apparently started to develop a reputation as a great defence commander. The reason was the inexperience and ineptitude of Allied command, which used Kesselring as an excuse in the same way they had with Rommel. Also to be examined is the postwar claim that the war in Africa was a clean war, almost a sporting enterprise, which in reality was a myth, not least in the brutal treatment of Tunisian Jews. Finally, the major question must be asked as to Kesselring's responsibility in allowing nearly a quarter of million men to be captured.

Backdrop to Italy

As Kesselring was questioning the wisdom of attacking Russia he heard from Jeschonnek that he would be sent to the Mediterranean¹. Mussolini's bellicose actions had not been successful, and the ventures into Albania/Greece and North Africa needed German assistance.

The relationship between Hitler and Mussolini had its origins in Hitler's admiration for *Il Duce*, a term both Hitler and Franco adopted. Hitler admired Mussolini, even becoming annoyed on a state visit when he felt Mussolini received 'demeaning treatment' from the royal court - 'those courtesans'². Mussolini had tried to play statesman as a European peacemaker, and he 'did not actually enter the war until it indeed seemed won by his fearsome German ally'³. 'The revisionist De Felice ... agreed that 'one man alone' had taken Italy into the war, although, in his opinion, Mussolini's motivation was at least in part the creditable one of suspicion of Nazi Germany and a desire somehow to restrict its hegemony'⁴. The historian Farrell in his work *Mussolini* also argued that the Italian dictator was taking the safest route for his country, whilst building up the defences at the Brenner Pass⁵. Despite these claims, Mussolini was bellicose, had imperial desires in North Africa, and was resentful towards the British. The relationship between Germany and Italy was not always healthy. 'Privately, *Il Duce* referred to Hitler as a sexual degenerate' but as the years passed Mussolini became more and more dependent upon Hitler⁶. Hitler, despite his admiration for *Il Duce* 'unceremoniously excluded {Mussolini} from the negotiations in the railway carriage at Compiègne, and Hitler rejected his claim on the French fleet even before it was destroyed by the British'⁷. Mussolini lacked judgment, fatally under-estimating Greek resistance, and also the USA, informing his own

¹ Chief of *Luftwaffe* General Staff.

² Schroeder Christa, *He was my Chief* (London: Frontline Books, 2012)p.63.

³ Bosworth R, *Mussolini* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2002)p.370.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Italians entered the war on 10th July 1940.

⁶ Burleigh, *Moral*,p.6.

⁷ Evans, *Third*,p.147.

Foreign Office 'that America has no military importance'⁸. By 1941 Hitler considered it essential to stabilize Italy; the main concern was that in the Mediterranean the British were fighting back, the *Africa Korps* had supply problems, and Rommel was continuously complaining about the Italian military at every level. Hitler looked to Kesselring as a problem solver; he was known to have diplomatic skills, was considered loyal to Hitler, he was a linguist, and having honeymooned in Italy had some experience of the country.

*The Appointment*⁹

Kesselring's arrival had been prepared by General von Waldan, of the Luftwaffe General-Staff, who had been the air-attaché in Rome. Kesselring received his briefing from Göring and Jeschonnek, and the title of *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* – Commander-in-Chief-South. Kesselring understood he was to be in charge of all matters military in Italy, but subject to the 'complex Italian command and the OKW and Hitler'¹⁰. It was a strange appointment in so far that Hitler wanted to impose his military authority through Kesselring, but the Italians were bemused, viewing Kesselring as a senior liaison officer who would, within a short space of time, be known by the Allies under the code name of 'the Emperor'.¹¹

Kesselring's new position was difficult to define because there were many complex factors within the Italian situation. In his memoirs he admitted that although Hitler saw him as in charge, for diplomatic reasons, he subjugated himself to Italian command under Mussolini and his fascist council, but there were also the political factors of the monarchy, the army, and even the Vatican to be considered, and a high ranking German was not necessarily welcome. Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, was always suspicious of Kesselring and German motives, and later wrote, as relationships between

⁸ Hansen Eric G, *The Italian Military Enigma* (Seminar Paper, Command & Staff College, Quantico, Virginia 22134, 1988)p.23.

⁹ For text see Appendix 9.

¹⁰ Trevor-Roper Hugh (Ed), *Hitler's War Directives* (London: Pan Books, 2004)pp.297/8.

¹¹ KNA, Top-Secret-Cypher-Telegram/19th-March-45, Ref/FO-954/17A-File, Re-296.

Rommel and the Italians deteriorated, that 'Cavallero found himself between Rommel and Kesselring like Christ between the two thieves'¹².

Cavallero, the Italian Chief-of-Staff, was not prepared for Kesselring to take command of naval and air-forces, only placing some of the air-force at Kesselring's disposal. Hitler had anticipated that Kesselring should have the whole command, but Kesselring recognised that tact was essential, and in his words 'ignored Hitler's orders' by respecting Italian demands, making himself 'only subordinate to the King and the Duce'¹³. It has been said that he moved into 'a political balancing act, the precarious diplomatic course which was to govern his every subsequent move'¹⁴. Kesselring not only had Mussolini and the King as superiors, but was also responsible to the OKW and Hitler. The relationship between Kesselring and the Italians remained cordial for a time, but the Italians successfully kept him in the dark about many things, and especially the planned downfall of Mussolini, and surrendering in September 1943: then the diplomatic and charming side of Kesselring was replaced by the ruthless streak which would one day bring him before a British Military Court.

The title *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* was almost misleading: it was 'not until the beginning of 1943 that he became chief of the German Army formations in Africa and Italy'¹⁵. Throughout the African campaign Kesselring was obliged to spend considerable time on diplomacy, but as the Allies grew in strength and the Italians weakened, Kesselring's power increased exponentially. This theme will be further explored in the next chapter. Eventually, Kesselring became the only General to control all three services in a joint command, with the exception of the *Afrika Corps*. When supply-lines became a serious problem, Kesselring even considered arresting Vice-Admiral Weichold because the navy refused, with Grand Admiral Raeder's support, to allow Kesselring to control the sea-lanes directly. Much later, with the arrival of the SS, it was obvious that Kesselring was never truly

¹² Muggerridge Malcolm (Ed), *Ciano's Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1947)p.490.

¹³ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.104.

¹⁴ Macksey, *Kesselring*,p.107.

¹⁵ Westphal, *German*,p.122.

Oberbefehlshaber-Süd, and his insistence and pretence that he was caused him problems in all aspects of his postwar trial. As far as Hitler and Kesselring were concerned he was *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd*, and the British and Americans also viewed him as having this full authority. In reality Kesselring's position, senior as it was, remained ambiguous to the bitter end, and will be examined further, but he never had the type of total authority that his Allied code name, *Emperor* implied¹⁶.

Kesselring's views of the Italian situation

Kesselring believed the Italians lacked any sense of urgency, and his observation was based on the Italian military and the apparent peaceful lifestyle compared to Germany. The White Russian aristocrat Marie Vassiltchikov, wrote of 'the sense of normality and the abundance in Rome compared to Germany'¹⁷. What irritated Kesselring was Mussolini's failure to inspire what Kesselring called a 'warlike manner:' later the Italian partisan showed this fighting spirit lacking in Mussolini's time¹⁸.

Italian soldiery attracted tasteless humour; the photographer Robert Capa, wrote about the Sicilian invasion it 'turned out to be a twenty-one day race and in the lead was the Italian Army. They were afraid not only of the Americans, but of the Germans too, and ran in every direction'¹⁹. In North Africa they had surrendered in thousands, and Capa was reflecting the unfair humour then and now, and again, when Sicily was invaded 'one observer remarked that the Italian coastal troops 'stampeded to the safety of our prisoner of war cages on the beach in such terrific disorder that our troops faced greater danger from being trampled upon than from bullets'²⁰. No one with any humanity could claim that Italians are any different from other nations; in North Africa it is a myth that they did not fight well, 'such a point

¹⁶ KNA, *Top-Secret-Cypher-Telegram/19th-March-45/Ref/FO-954/17A*, File-Re-296.

¹⁷ Vassiltchikov Maries, *The Berlin Diaries 1939-45* (London: Pimlico, 1999)p.95.

¹⁸ KNA, HW1/1844.

¹⁹ Capa Robert, *Slightly out of Focus* (New York: Modern Library, 1999)p.70.

²⁰ Bradley N Omar, *A General's Life* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1983)p.180.

of view is completely incorrect²¹. When they were unwilling to fight it often arose from varying factors such as not supporting the war in the first place, unsuitable equipment, poor leadership and frequently poor training. Kesselring has sometimes been given too much credit; in a relatively recent American military research paper, at the Quantico Command and Staff College, which studied the Italian military potential, the author relied upon Kesselring's personal observations. It reached the conclusion that Italy is a place of varying cultures, differing regions, which meant that a military force lacked cohesion and real identity, the 'Italians themselves admit that the Italian victory in the 1986 Soccer World Cup promoted greater national pride than any other event in recent history'²². This conclusion is cynical, but as Keith Lowe noted in his book on postwar Europe 'national rivalries still come to life occasionally for the duration of a football match'²³. Equally cynical was Kesselring's belief that the southern temperament was not belligerent, pointing out that the only protection for some cities was medieval cannon; he believed the Italians did not make 'natural soldiers,' observing that in the changing of the guard they appeared to have no enthusiasm for their profession.²⁴

Kesselring's views of the Italian were typical of his background in which professional militarism was given undue priority. Unlike Rommel he was more able to conceal his contempt, but both of them only observed the situation militarily, and misunderstood the Italian people. His subordinate, the more perceptive Senger, was probably closer to the truth when he wrote that 'the Italian is by nature more critical and therefore politically more mature than the Germans,' and they had realised they were in a hopeless situation²⁵.

²¹ Crociani P & Battistelli PP, *Italian Soldier in North Africa* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013)p.4.

²² Hansen, *Italian*,p.3.

²³ Lowe Keith, *Savage Continent*, (London: Penguin, 2013)p.378.

²⁴ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.107.

²⁵ Senger, *Neither*,p.152.

Military Situation & Intelligence Failure

The British attacked the Italian fleet at Taranto making it inoperative, and later sank three Italian cruisers and two destroyers off Cape Matapan. The rest of the Italian fleet stayed in port for the duration, and was criticised for this by Kesselring and many others; it was an unfair criticism because there was a shortage of fuel, and hypocritical because the German navy tried to keep its larger surface vessels safe from attack. As *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* Kesselring had the task of supplying the Axis troops in Africa, complicated by the problem that 'German and Italian equipment was invariably different and rarely interchangeable'²⁶.

Kesselring frequently spoke of 'total war', but he was now realising that Germany and Italy were not geared up for such an enterprise²⁷. The USA would soon show an industrial commitment to total war, and Kesselring found himself running short of essential supplies and of the means of delivery. Kesselring felt his hands were tied, there were too few ships for the supply lines, Malta was active as a naval and airbase and the OKW had forbidden the use of Tunis and Bizerta because of French sensitivity. In order to send Rommel supplies Kesselring was using destroyers, submarines and air-transport formations which were hardly designed for logistical support.

This shortage of military supplies and transport was one of Kesselring's major problems, and he was also aware that the British appeared to know about the supply-line timetables. In his memoirs he suspected that there were leaks in Italian Intelligence, and he may well have been correct since a recent history of MI6 shows the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was active in Italy, and their co-operation with the Italian *Servizio Informazioni Militaire* (SIM) may have started early in the war²⁸. The British spy network was excellent, but Kesselring never knew the Enigma code had

²⁶ KNA, HW1/1029.

²⁷ 'Total War' is sometimes seen as peculiar to German thinking, but it was a phrase often employed by Churchill-'modern war is total war' Churchill, *Churchill Winston, Onwards to Victory* (London: Cassell, 1944)p.97.

²⁸ Jeffery, *History*,p.500.

been deciphered. Ultra 'revealed to the Allies more about what the other side was doing and planning than had been vouchsafed to any previous combatants in history'²⁹. Throughout the war this was a hindrance he would never know about, since the secrets of Enigma/Ultra were not revealed in his lifetime. Brooke frequently referred to intercepts to or from Kesselring. On November 26th1942 Brooke knew that Kesselring had 'insufficient forces to hold both Tunis and Bizerta', and then later he was able to read the whole of Kesselring's outlook on the situation in Italy; on June 28th1944 Brooke was able to read about Hitler's instructions to hold northern Italy, and realised that Kesselring's military capacity was being held hostage by political interference³⁰. Kesselring, like the vast majority of the German commanders was obliged to accept Hitler's whim. The revelations by Enigma/Ultra would bedevil Kesselring throughout his professional life. In the spring of 1943 a 'whole air-transport wing of Ju-52s and six-engine Giants' were caught by British fighters and totally destroyed, and once again 'Ultra had revealed where they would be flying'³¹. The failure to discern Enigma may have been breached was arrogant and a major disadvantage, making Kesselring suspicious of others and most especially the Italians. Kesselring later condemned the Italian Admiral Maugeri for passing secrets to the Allies, and being responsible for the loss of lives. Maugeri later wrote that 'the British Admiralty had many friends among our high-ranking admirals' leading Westphal also to suspect that this was the source of betrayal³². Spying was a two-way process: intercepted messages revealed that spies in Lisbon were informing Berlin of the difference 'of opinion between English and American staffs, chiefly in regard to fixing the boundaries to future spheres of influence,' but this knowledge was of little advantage compared to the Ultra revelations³³. As in the Battle of Britain, it appears that Kesselring paid too little heed to the security of his military intelligence, and found it difficult to gain accurate information about the enemy. His failure in this area, both in the

²⁹ Hastings, *Hell*, p.367.

³⁰ Alanbrooke Field-Marshal Lord, *War Diaries 1939-45* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001)p.344/ibid, p.563/4.

³¹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.116/ Lewin, *Ultra*, p.272.

³² Westphal, *German*, p.121.

³³ KNA, HW1/1844.

Luftwaffe and in Southern Command leaves a question mark over his supposed renown as a great commander.

Rommel

The tensions between Rommel and Kesselring started in North Africa and continued in the Italian campaign which will be examined later. The attitude of friend and foe towards military commanders remains an interesting phenomenon: Rommel has always been painted in bright colours and Kesselring to a lesser degree, but both were frequently held in esteem by their enemy.

Rommel was almost popular, even admired by the enemy.³⁴ The Countess of Ranfurly wrote of Rommel that, 'in spite of being our enemy, gained our admiration and respect, almost our affection'³⁵. In Germany he was Göbbels' great propaganda figure, and much admired. He was a leader of fighting men, but 'less was known about his neglect of logistics, a critical factor in North Africa,' for which Kesselring often took the blame³⁶. When Kesselring was appointed he was needed by Cavallero to smooth the differences between German and Italian commanders in the African command structure. Rommel was subordinate to both Cavallero and Bastico, but 'showed little regard for the Italian generals'³⁷. According to Kesselring he 'had to act as intermediary between the *Commando Supremo* and Rommel'³⁸. There had been times when 'Rommel was incensed by the performance of most Italian Divisions,' and this one time ardent supporter of Hitler became equally critical of the top leadership, even of Göring when he claimed Americans 'can only make razorblades'³⁹.

³⁴ Göbbels wrote in his diary that the English 'are making him one of the most popular Generals in the entire world' Caddick-Adams, *Monty*, p.260.

³⁵ Ranfurly, *War*, p.256.

³⁶ Hastings, *Hell*, p.130.

³⁷ Evans, *Third*, p.149.

³⁸ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.119.

³⁹ Beevor, *Second*, p.332/p.374.

Kesselring first met Rommel when he was an instructor at the Dresden Infantry School, and they met again during the Polish campaign. Ironically they were both sons of schoolmasters; Kesselring respected for apparent modesty and Rommel for excessive confidence. The relationship between Kesselring and Rommel occasionally deteriorated, not least when the *Afrika Corps* failed to get necessary supplies, and on one occasion when the Luftwaffe attacked German ground troops. Kesselring believed Rommel's independence was potentially dangerous, what he called 'fatal insubordination' which could lead to disharmony⁴⁰. It was in North Africa that their problems emerged. Their relationship was complex and sometimes strained, but they were not always at loggerheads: when Hitler ordered them to stand and fight, when retreat from El Alamein was the only sensible move, 'Rommel was shaken and bewildered by the insanity of the command,' but 'assured by Kesselring's support Rommel ordered a general retreat' which, as Westphal pointed out, avoided the total destruction of the German army⁴¹.

Some of Rommel's staff 'suspected Kesselring of double-crossing him, of continually reporting against him and the *Afrika Korps* to Göring, while assuring the Army Command that all was going well in North Africa;' Ciano referred 'to Kesselring running to Berlin to complain of Rommel'⁴². Kesselring was far too optimistic, and was criticised by those who admired him for his 'over-optimism,' Rommel was more of a realist. Rommel frequently resented Kesselring's support of the Italian command: on the 13th December 1941 having resolved a disagreement with Cavallero, Rommel discovered the Italian had returned with Bastico as well as Kesselring who 'backed him up strongly'⁴³. This disagreement between Cavallero and Rommel was over whether to retreat or press forward, and Rommel was determined to have his way, writing that 'finally, after Kesselring had made some attempt to back him {Cavallero} up, he went off growling'⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.141.

⁴¹ Beevor, *Second*, p.378.

⁴² Young Desmond, *Rommel* (London: Book Club Associates, 1973)p.168.

⁴³ Liddell-Hart BH (Ed), *The Rommel Papers* (New York: De Capo Press, 1953)p.175.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.182.

These types of problems flared up during their time together, Kesselring finding Rommel too pig-headed, and Rommel being critical about Kesselring's putting too much trust in the Italians, being over optimistic about their military potential, and his failure to provide air-cover and bring necessary supplies. On Rommel's death Kesselring wrote to Rommel's wife 'there were times when I did not always agree with him, just as he did not always understand me ...but I was glad when he was appointed to an important command in the West, because I knew his experience of fighting against the British and Americans would be of the greatest value'⁴⁵. The relationship between Kesselring and Rommel is difficult to ascertain with accuracy, there was certainly mutual respect; there was probably a touch of egotistical and professional jealousy. Their apparent differences regarding the Italian contribution was Rommel's passionate and sometimes irrational desire to push on, and Kesselring's constant concern about logistical supplies. It was also to do with their personalities, but the history of major clashes between the two became more serious in the Italian campaign.

Malta

Hitler had sent Kesselring to Italy to stabilize the military situation, but was irritated by Kesselring's insistence on invading Malta. Hitler's main concern was Russia and he expected Rommel to win the war while Kesselring smoothed the way. North Africa for Hitler was almost inconsequential, the British often referring to the conflict as the 'cauldron' while the Germans 'called it the sausage pot'⁴⁶.

The year 1941 was a critical time for supplies to Africa; in August some '35% of supplies and reinforcements were sunk and 63% in October' which caused serious concern⁴⁷. Malta was like a port in the middle of the sea, or put more succinctly by Rommel's adjutant, 'Malta probably has to be

⁴⁵ Young, *Rommel*,p.240.

⁴⁶ Beevor, *Second*,p.315.

⁴⁷ Young, *Rommel*,p.99.

occupied first, as we cannot leave the English on our flank⁴⁸. Throughout January Kesselring continued an intensive air attack on Malta, but he later wrote that the island needed to be captured. Kesselring's failure to invade Malta would prove to be a decisive factor in the Mediterranean, and Rommel became one of his scapegoats, Kesselring complaining in his postwar interrogation that Rommel kept changing his mind about Malta⁴⁹.

It was a matter of timing: in the *Rommel Papers* it is clear that Rommel believed 'Malta should have been taken instead of Crete'⁵⁰. Later Rommel was to write 'it had actually been intended that Malta should be taken by Italo-German parachute and airborne forces ... but for some unaccountable reason our High Command abandoned this scheme. My request to have this pleasant task entrusted to my own army had unfortunately been refused the previous spring'⁵¹. Given that these lines come from Rommel's papers written during the war, and Kesselring's version postwar it seems that Kesselring may have been shifting some of the perceived blame cast in his direction during and after the war.

Kesselring knew that North Africa stood or fell on the question of supplies, so he flew to Germany in February to persuade Göring, Mussolini and Hitler of the strategic importance of Malta. The meeting became heated and Kesselring alleged Hitler grasped him by the arm and said 'keep your shirt on Field-Marshal Kesselring; I'm going to do it'⁵².

The OKW eventually agreed March would be ideal for the Italian invasion of Malta, to be known as Operation *Hercules*. Frustratingly Kesselring discovered that Cavallero was 'getting cold feet,' and proposing August. In mid-March Kesselring increased pressure on Malta with destructive air attacks, destroying new Spitfires and Hurricanes on the ground as they arrived, and stopping supply ships arriving safely. Rommel demanded

⁴⁸ Schraepfer Hans-Joachim, *At Rommel's Side, The Lost letters of Hans-Joachim Schaepler* (London: Frontline Books, 2009)p.93.

⁴⁹ USAH Division, 007718.

⁵⁰ Liddell-Hart, *Rommel*, p.120.

⁵¹ Liddell-Hart, *Rommel*, p.203.

⁵² Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.109.

that Malta should be taken before he attacked Tobruk. Eventually on 29th April at Obersalzberg, Hitler and Mussolini with Kesselring and Cavallero gave permission, but when Kesselring asked for a start date of May 31st Mussolini and Cavallero still clung to August.

Because of this Italian reticence, operation *Theseus*, the attack on Tobruk, took precedence on June 18th and Malta was reset for July 18th. Kesselring organised a number of aircraft to assist in the Tobruk operation diminishing the number available for attacking Malta. The British made a remarkable recovery in Malta, flying in new Spitfires while their ground control ensured their safety on the ground. Kesselring was mistaken in thinking that Malta had virtually been destroyed⁵³. The problem with Malta was that it was a natural fortress with miles of underground tunnels, stores and barracks, Malta 'had a hard outer shell ... a rhinoceros-like hide' which was difficult to crack⁵⁴.

Kesselring's plans for Malta may well have succeeded⁵⁵. Student's airborne troops were to seize the southern heights while the airfields were bombed; then naval forces and landing parties were to attack in the harbour during which there would be a diversionary attack by sea against the Bay of Marsa Scirocco. Had it succeeded then the North African situation may well have changed; German and Italian supplies would have been much more reliable.

Kesselring believed the failure to invade Malta earlier was a serious blunder by the OKW; he also blamed the Italians⁵⁶. After the war, during interrogation, Kesselring also blamed Rommel's desire to advance after the capture of Tobruk; Rommel had 'wanted the Luftwaffe support so he

⁵³ 'Kesselring's air offensive against Malta in the Spring of 1942 at times surpassed the intensity of the air battle of Britain ... and above all it proved conclusively that the island could not be defeated from the air alone' - *Militärgeschichtliches, Volume VI*, p.1226.

⁵⁴ Killen, *Luftwaffe*, p.199.

⁵⁵ 'Kesselring's feasibility study showed that an invasion was possible...' Below, *Hitler's*, p.124.

⁵⁶ KNA, WO208/4348.

could destroy the 8th Army before it recovered, and he had Hitler's support⁵⁷. Kesselring also blamed Jodl and Keitel and finally Mussolini for failing to take Malta and 'leading to the loss of the Italian colonies and of the German and Italian armies'⁵⁸. There were many factors in the decision not to invade Malta, not least Hitler's fear of a Crete repetition where victory was expensive, but Kesselring, as *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* should probably have pushed harder, and the failure to invade or destroy Malta caused the German defeat. General Montgomery was to write later that 'The battle of El Alamein could not have taken place if Malta had fallen'⁵⁹.

North Africa - Supply Problems

Kesselring became personally involved in the ground battle when General Crüwell's pilot mistakenly landed amongst British troops. For Crüwell it was the end of his war: Kesselring had just sent him 'birthday greetings'⁶⁰. Kesselring took over Crüwell's ground-command for a time, and was able to observe Rommel's leadership in the desert. Kesselring would overfly the battle areas, and frequently guide the bombers to the target: whether it was appropriate for the senior commander to expose himself to so much risk is questionable. For example, it was not long after Crüwell's capture that Kesselring landed his Storch at Italian Headquarters, and was fired on by machine guns.

Tobruk capitulated and its stores were soon in German hands. Rommel was created a *generalfeldmarschall* for which Kesselring congratulated him, but believed an important decoration would have been more appropriate, because the Italians were unhappy at this promotion. On June 26th Kesselring, Rommel, Cavallero and Bastico held a meeting at Gambut; Kesselring argued about the dangers of stretching supply lines too far, and had the backing of Halder in Berlin who thought Rommel had gone 'stark mad' ... {and} he was sharply critical of Rommel's pathological

⁵⁷ Beevor, *Second*, p.319.

⁵⁸ KNA, HW1/614.

⁵⁹ Lucas Laddie, *Malta The Thorn in Rommel's Side* (London: Penguin, 1992) p.4.

⁶⁰ KNA, HW1/449.

ambition'⁶¹. Kesselring at this stage of the campaign referred to himself as a glorified quartermaster, but without total control: there were about '91,000 German soldiers vis-à-vis about 146,000 Italian soldiers' using different equipment making their supply complicated⁶². In reality Kesselring was the superior commander, but he was correct in the cynical self-application of his title as quartermaster; Rommel was in the driving seat, and Kesselring had to supply the fuel, ammunition, replacements. Kesselring had promised fuel supplies which never arrived, and remarked he should not be saddled with the sinking of the tanker at Tobruk, which carried seven thousand tons of petrol and was a 'severe blow'⁶³. Hastings wrote that 'vanity and ambition often caused the Desert Fox to overreach himself' which Kesselring would have agreed with, but Kesselring's experience and seniority should have cautioned him against promising so much⁶⁴. It has been suggested that the fault was Rommel's, because of his impulsive nature, namely it 'was Rommel's own land logistics arrangements that let him down'⁶⁵. In reality it was a German command fault, Hitler pressing for too much, Rommel over-stretching himself and Kesselring promising impossible supplies.

Kesselring and Halder had been right about stretched supply lines, but Hitler wanted results, and backed by the enthusiastic Mussolini the Axis fought against desperate odds at El Alamein. The Luftwaffe, few in number, lacked fuel and the RAF controlled the skies; less than 20% of supplies were getting through. Rommel complained to Kesselring that 'air reconnaissance has been completely inadequate' which caused reverberations⁶⁶. Later Rommel complained bitterly that 'we urgently need fighters'⁶⁷. The German supplies were inadequate, and British strength was superior. Rommel, falling ill, asked to be relieved; in postwar interviews Kesselring believed Rommel had a 'nervous breakdown,' but there is little evidence for this⁶⁸. Exhaustion is

⁶¹ Evans, *Third*, p.150.

⁶² KNA, HW1/1029.

⁶³ Westphal, *German*, p.118.

⁶⁴ Hastings, *Hell*, p.366.

⁶⁵ Caddick-Adams, *Monty*, p.268.

⁶⁶ KNA, HW1/1331.

⁶⁷ KNA, HW1/1149.

⁶⁸ Goldensohn, *Interviews*, p.321.

not the same as a nervous breakdown, and by March 9th when Rommel left North Africa for the last time, it was clear he 'was suffering from jaundice'⁶⁹.

It is curious to note that postwar British analysis was kinder to Kesselring than his colleagues: 'the British also knew that Kesselring had responded to Rommel's request for fuel with alacrity and sent five ships with fuel under foggy conditions therefore anticipating its safe arrival'⁷⁰. Ultra picked it up and Kesselring's old English acquaintance Winterbotham, phoned Churchill for permission to find and sink these vessels immediately without first pretending to spot them with aircraft. Rommel actually suspected Enigma at this stage, but 'Winterbotham sent messages thanking Italian informants that he knew would be picked up by German interception'⁷¹. There is little wonder that Kesselring and other German commanders hardly trusted Italian security. The British noted the criticism of interrogated German POWs that Kesselring was accused of 'criminal optimism,' and his failure to provide supplies he was blamed for the defeat. However, the British noted that 'Kesselring's efforts were energetic and continuous, and the blame must be shifted to the British naval and air efforts. The postwar British Air Ministry review concluded that Kesselring was the innocent, stating the blame 'can hardly be laid at his door, but were rather the result of the short-sighted policy of Hitler and the Supreme Command'⁷². This was a kinder review than later history has given.

Torch and understanding France

A landing by the enemy was suspected. Kesselring requested reinforcements for the air-force bases in Sicily and Sardinia, and demanded that submarines be despatched to observe and challenge, and asked the OKW for one division in Sicily which he could move to the endangered areas; the

⁶⁹ Beevor, *Second*, p.413.

⁷⁰ Brown Cave Anthony, *Bodyguard of Lies* (London: WH Allen, 1977) pp.127/8.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² NA-AMP, p.143.

latter was not approved. The watching U-Boats detected an empty convoy SL125 and attacked, thereby missing the main invasion fleet⁷³.

Westphal wrote that the OKW found it impossible to conceive of an African landing, and Göring 'even went so far as forbidding Kesselring to let the Luftwaffe make any preparation for a North African landing'⁷⁴. Kesselring and his Chief-of Staff were more accurate than Göring, but never dared criticise their superiors, indicative of a command weakness.

The day before the invasion Göring assured Kesselring the invasion would be Southern France, but radio-messages from submarines indicated that the invasion convoys were heading south-east. Meanwhile Rommel was in full flight, poor supply-lines were a major issue, and until the Axis powers knew where Vichy France stood, the use of French ports was not permitted. Kesselring checked the Italian defences, and found them so appalling that he rushed in German construction staff to remedy the problem⁷⁵.

It was claimed that Kesselring suggested to Dönitz they invade Spain and take Gibraltar to avoid a North African landing, and although Dönitz was convinced, Hitler was not⁷⁶. Kesselring, watching the British 8th Army move westwards, considered it might be on the West African coast. He believed the Luftwaffe threat precluded Sicily, Sardinia or Corsica, and that the invasion force was too small for the south of France.

The methodical Montgomery was 'gently' pursuing Rommel west and Kesselring, correctly, feared that an invasion west of Tunisia could squeeze the Germans out of Africa⁷⁷. Montgomery's leadership on this

⁷³ It has often been asked as to whether 'the fate of convoy SL125 was a fortunate accident or a strategic sacrifice?' *Bodyguard*, p.234.

⁷⁴ Westphal, *German*, p.122.

⁷⁵ Eisenhower was nervous about Torch but Ultra was able to confirm the Germans knew nothing, and picked up Kesselring's surprise Lewin, *Ultra*, p.244.

⁷⁶ Observer, May 18th 1947, p.5.

⁷⁷ Montgomery never rushed, but the retreat for the Axis troops was not easy, 'Panzer officer Tassilo von Bogenhardt said: 'All he fight seemed to have gone out of the men ... we were carpet bombed, dive-bombed and machine-gunned ... the last thing I

laborious pursuit has been criticised by General Bradley who believed that Liddell-Hart's criticism of Montgomery characterised every battle he fought, and 'his failure to annihilate Rommel when the opportunity was there ... set the stage for very difficult times ahead in Africa for Ike and the Allies'⁷⁸. Kesselring was faced by superior industrial might, and hampered by inter-personnel problems within his own forces, and disharmony between Italians and Germans. The '*Torch* landings had provoked Hitler into reinforcing Tunisia and occupying South France' which diverted numerous troops and Luftwaffe, in fact 'Göring's formations had lost 40% of their entire strength in the Mediterranean'⁷⁹. Hitler had no intention of allowing the Allies a base for invasion of Southern Europe.

Kesselring wrote he was concerned about French reactions: this was natural since Vichy France remained lost in its own world of conspiratorial conflicts: Pétain was just a figurehead, Laval was the power and 'always confident of his ability to manipulate others'⁸⁰. It was anticipated that Pétain would direct the French to resist the allied invasion, but 'there were now three claimants to French sovereignty: the Vichy regime in France; Darlan in North Africa; de Gaulle in London'⁸¹. Roosevelt detested de Gaulle; 'Murphy believed Giraud would serve allied interests best' and Darlan who just happened to be visiting a sick son in North Africa, took the initiative⁸². Eisenhower was criticised for being too involved in the politics, but Kesselring was also just as lost. The pro-German Laval had 'allowed the Axis to use the French airfields in Tunisia', but Hitler also occupied the free zone of France⁸³.

Hitler was inclined to trust that the French would fight with the Germans. Laval, pro-German and Prime Minister of the Vichy government agreed to the German demand that French airports in Tunisia should be

remember is blowing up my panzer when the petrol had run out' Hastings, *Hell*,p.374.

⁷⁸ Bradley, *General's*,p.122.

⁷⁹ Beevor, *Second*,p.404.

⁸⁰ Jackson, *Jackson Julian, France The Dark Years 1940-44 (Oxford: OUP, 2003)*p.230.

⁸¹ *Ibid*,p.447.

⁸² Beevor, *Second*,p.381.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.384.

opened to the Luftwaffe. Pétain informed Roosevelt that the French would always defend their empire if attacked, although in a secret telegram he allowed French Admiral François Darlan to negotiate with the allies if necessary. Kesselring was at first hopeful of French assistance, and the Allied 'calculations about French cooperation were ill-judged. Over 1,000 US soldiers died from French fire on the beaches near Casablanca'⁸⁴.

The reaction of the French remained a mystery to both the Germans and the Allies, and when on November 9th Patton's troops attacked Port Lyauty they met unexpected fierce French resistance. The next day, Darlan read an order over the radio informing all French troops in Algeria and Morocco not to resist the allies. In the early stages Kesselring acknowledged that German and French troops were co-operating, and in his memoirs for some reason blamed the unexpected arrival of an Italian air squadron as the cause of the break down between the French and the Germans. This was just a local situation: the real issue was political and fought out in a series of mysterious negotiations between the Allies and the French; the turning of the Colonial French 'put an end to the senior Fascist experiment; it deprived the Reich of its most important ally'⁸⁵. Kesselring and Hitler may have understood Vichy France, but they misunderstood the French as much as they misunderstood the Italians.

Defence in Africa

Kesselring established a viable bridgehead as Italian troops from Libya joined with German troops, and took over the old French defensive position called the Mareth Line, built to protect the eastern border, and then occupied Tunisia⁸⁶. (See maps, pages 10-11) Kesselring stabilised the military situation, and Tunisia operated as a port supplying the Axis forces with tanks and guns despite the aerial onslaught launched from Malta. Rommel had been able to 'extricate a substantial part of his forces, the Eighth Army had taken

⁸⁴ Davies, *Simple*, p.109

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.113

⁸⁶ Mareth Line-sometimes known as the African Maginot line – a poor description.

30,000 Axis prisoners and destroyed large quantities of weapons and equipment⁸⁷. By November 16th Axis forces had occupied nearly all of Tunisia; German paratroopers had tried to capture the airfield at Souk-el-Arba, but had been met by Allied paratroopers dropped virtually at the same time, not so much a coincidence, but the use of Ultra.

Rommel had reached El Agheila with just thirty-five tanks and the remnants of two divisions, with Montgomery only 60 miles away⁸⁸. The winter weather slowed down the British troops, but Kesselring's problems were mounting. Rommel and Bastico were in open feud, and Cavallero failed to arbitrate. On Hitler's instructions Göring had arrived in Rome for a conference with Kesselring and Rommel. Göring instructed that Rommel delay his retreat in order to hold onto the Tripoli airfields as long as possible; he gave further instructions to the Italians, and took a tourist tour of Naples and Sicily. Göring was more interested in attending parties and searching for art treasures, and Rommel claimed that he 'was disgusted with Göring, who was quite mad, and Hitler was not much better'⁸⁹. Alan Brooke was aware of 'Kesselring's difficulties' because of the German code was being read⁹⁰. The German command was not as efficient as some believe; it was a matter of 'too many cooks.'

On January 22nd the Axis forces evacuated Tripoli, and a week later the German troops established themselves at the Mareth Line. Kesselring could not stop the inevitability of the Allied advance, but he reported that on January 25th they took 4,000 prisoners; however, shortage of supplies and fuel was weakening the Axis forces.

The Mareth Line was only a series of block houses near the coast beside a mountainous area, and in that terrain the enemy could not conceal outflanking manoeuvres. Kesselring had demanded time and time again 'that the enemy be held up as long as possible in the area before Mareth, since

⁸⁷ Hastings, *Hell*, p.375.

⁸⁸ Nov24th.

⁸⁹ Brown, *Bodyguard*, p132.

⁹⁰ Alanbrooke, *War*, p.344.

otherwise reception of Panzer-Army-Rommel will be exceptionally difficult;' which Kesselring must have known would be true anyway⁹¹.

The Opposition

By mid-February the scene was being set for the dénouement. The two Allied armies were still apart, but Kesselring observed the capability of the four-engine bombers attacking the port from a ceiling of 30,000 feet, and his inability to counter such attacks. Also frustrating were the continuous problems with subordinates Arnim and Rommel; Kesselring described them as 'pigheaded'⁹². These strained relationships were known by the Allies; when Rommel arrived in Berlin the London Times speculated that Rommel could be suffering some tropical illness, or he was on bad terms with Kesselring, or because of his failures, which the writer considered the least likely⁹³.

Rommel and Arnim had their own plans and Kesselring accepted neither: he produced a master plan, which some military commentators see as excellent and others as a disaster. It did, however, result in a disaster for the Allies, especially the untried Americans at Kasserine, where they suffered a considerable loss of men, equipment and pride. The historian Carlo D'Este noted, 'Kesselring exercised command through two independent-minded subordinates, von Arnim and Rommel,' with Kesselring being 'an outwardly amiable bear of a man {whose} sunny disposition marked an iron will'⁹⁴. Despite his amiable bearing this 'triangular argument' betrayed a command structure that created problems for Kesselring⁹⁵.

Kesselring was astonished at Montgomery's slow pursuit of Rommel after El Alamein, a point made by many military historians: 'that the remnants of the Panzerarmee got away at all was due to Montgomery's slow

⁹¹ KNA, HW1/1331.

⁹² Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.151.

⁹³ Times, October 1st 1942.

⁹⁴ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.87.

⁹⁵ Beevor, *Second*, p.412.

reactions and excessive caution⁹⁶. Montgomery's record was tarnished by his failure to destroy Rommel by the 'sluggishness of his subsequent pursuit'⁹⁷. The western advance may have been slow, but 'the Allied advance east toward Tunis was ill organised and almost unplanned'⁹⁸. Many historians have been critical about Allied leadership, noting that the British 'had numerical superiority of men and armour, but this advantage was nullified by weakness of command, tactics and equipment ... the institutional weakness of the British Army produced commanders at every level who lacked energy, imagination and flexibility: most units deployed in the desert were poorly led and trained'⁹⁹.

Kesselring suspected that the American troops were inexperienced. Eisenhower admitted his troops were unprepared, even finding engineers ordered to dig into rock to give cover for senior officers; 'it was the only time, during the war, that I saw a divisional or higher headquarters so concerned over its own safety that it dug itself underground shelters.'¹⁰⁰ The blame for the Kasserine Pass 'must be shared by Anderson, Eisenhower and Fredendall' and led to the humiliating spectacle of some 4,000 Allied POWs being marched through Rome¹⁰¹. Eisenhower, amongst the reasons he listed for failure, noted 'greenness, particularly among commanders,' as well as the failure to comprehend the capability of the enemy¹⁰². It has to be acknowledged that 'Fredendall was a disastrous commander'¹⁰³.

As with Kesselring the Allies had their tensions in leadership. Bradley saw Rommel's retreat towards Tunisia as slow because he faced 'Monty's ponderously oncoming Eighth Army,' and Alan Brooke had noted in his diary that 'unfortunately 'Ike' had neither the tactical nor strategical experience required for the war in Africa'¹⁰⁴. Bradley confessed 'it was

⁹⁶ Beever, *Second*, p.379.

⁹⁷ Hastings, *Hell*, p.379.

⁹⁸ Beever, *Second*, p.393.

⁹⁹ Hastings, *Hell*, p.129.

¹⁰⁰ Eisenhower Dwight, *Crusade in Europe* (London: Heinemann, 1948) p.157.

¹⁰¹ Roberts Andrew, *The Storm of War* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) p.312.

¹⁰² Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.163.

¹⁰³ Beever, *Second*, p.411.

¹⁰⁴ Bradley referred to Rommel as the 'Champ' Bradley, *General's*, p141/ p.125.

probably the worst performance of U.S. Army troops in their whole proud history,' and Harmon accused Fredendall to Patton of being a 'physical and moral coward'¹⁰⁵. These leadership tensions amongst the Allies were to become a constant feature, and their weak planning and leadership, meant that victory had required 'five months more fighting than the Anglo-American high command has first anticipated,' and it allowed Kesselring's reputation to blossom¹⁰⁶. This question of inexperienced and inept leadership by the Allies, which enhanced Kesselring's reputation, is important and will be a theme throughout the next two chapters.

Defeat

By February 15th the Axis appeared to have the ascent, but it was temporary. Kesselring knew that with the paucity of supplies and reinforcements, the Axis troops were losing, and soldiers were passing 'bitter jokes about Tunisgrad'¹⁰⁷. When Rommel had turned to face Montgomery and the 8th Army at the Mareth Line he found Montgomery waiting and was obliged to stop his attack¹⁰⁸. Kesselring seemed to think another leading Italian had betrayed them, this time Messe. On March 9th Rommel left for what Kesselring called some 'well-earned leave;' Kesselring recommended him for the Knight's Cross with diamonds; he failed however to persuade the Italians to give any significant award. After Rommel's departure the New Zealanders blocked the Tebaga Pass, and the British XXX Corps launched a frontal attack against the Mareth Line, which was being held by divisions of the Italian 1st Army. The Axis forces retreated to the defensive position known as the Enfidaville line (maps p.10/11) which was attacked by British troops on 20th April, and although there was some bitter fighting, General Messe's troops held. Kesselring was out-numbered and faced better technology. Westphal later blamed the defeat on 'poor supply-lines' and lack of 'air and sea power'¹⁰⁹. Kesselring was outgunned at all levels, and although the Allies

¹⁰⁵ Bradley, *General's*, p.128/ p.135.

¹⁰⁶ Hastings, *Hell*, p.379.

¹⁰⁷ Beevor, *Second*, p.415.

¹⁰⁸ Montgomery had early warning once again from 'Ultra'.

¹⁰⁹ Westphal, *German*, p.132.

suffered '76,000 casualties they also captured 238,000 prisoners of war,' a greater number than those who surrendered at Stalingrad¹¹⁰. The British suffered heavily, accounting for more than 'half the Allied casualties'¹¹¹.

A Clean War

After the war, for political reasons to be discussed later, it was claimed that North Africa was a 'clean war' and Kesselring encouraged this, though it was a myth¹¹². Certainly it has been noted that the terrain afforded few opportunities for booby traps, and the dreaded sniper, since it was possible to see the enemy from afar¹¹³. It was seen as two professional armies facing one another, and when General von Thoma was captured, Montgomery invited him to dinner claiming he had enjoyed the battle. 'British commanders and their superiors in London became increasingly dismayed by local capitulations and the allegedly excessive sporting spirit of the campaign'¹¹⁴. There are plenty of autobiographies making reference to the cordial if not friendly relations between German and British soldiers, notably Hans von Luck who recalled a possible exchange of '600,000 cigarettes' in exchange for a family member of the 'Player cigarettes' company¹¹⁵. Other accounts, although referring to deals of 'Schnapps for English cigarettes' also mention Italian prisoners being killed because of home news of bombing¹¹⁶. However, when Kesselring was shown captured British orders of the 'Armoured Brigade that German prisoners are not allowed to eat, drink or sleep before their interrogation;' he reciprocated the orders for English prisoners¹¹⁷. Luck wrote of Kesselring that 'he was a charming man of medium height with warm and sympathetic eyes. We respected him as he was the only high commander to come to Africa'¹¹⁸. Some of Kesselring's fighter-pilots were less enamoured

¹¹⁰ Figures supplied by Dear (ed) *The Oxford Companion to WWII* (Oxford: OUP, 1995) p.818 - Liddell-Hart doubts their veracity.

¹¹¹ Roberts, *Storm*, p.314.

¹¹² Kesselring's reasons and the concept of a clean war will be explored later in the thesis.

¹¹³ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.377.

¹¹⁴ Hastings, *Hell*, p.13.1

¹¹⁵ Luck, *Panzer*, p.126.

¹¹⁶ Gregg V & Stroud R, *Rifleman* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) p.61/p.41.

¹¹⁷ KNA, HW1/614.

¹¹⁸ Luck, *Panzer*, p.149.

with him, Franz Stigler pointing out that when Kesselring had 'heard that Marseille {a top ace} was casting doubt on the G {model of Bf109} he ordered Marseille to fly the new plane anyway,' in which he died because of a technical failure¹¹⁹. There is no clear picture; sometimes Red Cross signals were accepted and sometimes ignored; the French Goumiers terrorised the enemy and civilians, and in a north Algerian village drunken US engineers gang-raped six middle-aged Arab women¹²⁰. War cannot be clean, and the concept of a 'clean war' came to be an expression only once the horror of the Eastern European war came to public notice.

The Jews of Tunisia were used for labour, and all Jews who lived in Tunisia suffered by having their homes looted, property confiscated, and 'the rape of Tunisian Jewish women by German soldiers was far from uncommon. Walter Rauff, the Gestapo Chief in Tunis, transferred from the killing fields of Eastern Europe, quickly instituted a reign of terror against the Jews of Tunis'¹²¹. Kesselring had 'responded favourably to the suggestion of Mollhausen's superior, Ambassador Rahn, that instead of deporting the Tunisian Jews' they were to be labour¹²². This was sometimes referred to as the 'Tunisian solution' because the entire community suffered but survived, but nevertheless, the 'Tunisian Jews were rounded up for forced labour ... the Jewish community was also ruthlessly plundered for gold and money'¹²³. Göbbels complained in his diary about the Italian lax treatment of the Jews, both in occupied France and Tunis, neither compelling them to work nor making them wear yellow stars¹²⁴. The civilian population of North Africa was minimal, there were no well-known major massacres, and it was not until the partisan/civilian involvement in Italy, that any fantasy of a clean war could be seen as false.

¹¹⁹ Makos Adam, *A Higher Call* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013)p.94.

¹²⁰ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.379.

¹²¹ Evans, *Third*,p.150.

¹²² Katz,p.70.

¹²³ Beever, *Second*,p.410. The treatment of Jews in neighbouring Vichy France colonies was little better, 'French anti-Semitism ran deep': and even Jews serving in the French Foreign Legion were cashiered and badly treated. - Hastings, *Hell*,p.126.

¹²⁴ Lochner, *Göbbels*,p.181.

Concluding notes

Kesselring's task was too vast. Westphal, his adviser and loyal friend, recalled the frequent times they visited Mussolini to keep him stable. On one occasion, Kesselring had politely declined some of Mussolini's more dangerous ideas such as using gas, and using hospital ships to transport fuel¹²⁵. Not only did Kesselring have to keep Mussolini on side, but he had to ensure that Germans worked with their Italian counterparts. This was not made any easier when Cavallero was later side-lined for being too close to the Germans. Despite his diplomatic skills and charm Kesselring had problems with the Italians, especially Cavallero's replacement, Ambrosio. Kesselring was 'regarded as reliable and prescient' in matters of defensive war, but he had, as he acknowledged in his memoirs, made strategic errors, not least capitulating too quickly in Tunisia, and giving the Allies total victory that boosted their morale and confidence, whilst at the same time de-stabilising the Italians who now saw their motherland in peril¹²⁶.

Following the defeat the blame fell with varying degrees of intensity on different people, but most especially on Kesselring. In Trent House England, where captured German generals were secretly monitored, they first blamed the defeat on the Italians, others felt Tunisia had not been worth hanging onto, and Arnim believed his personal reports had not reached Hitler¹²⁷. Some blamed Arnim, some Rommel, but it was Kesselring who was blamed most: Göring had insulted him about running away. The failure led to a heated postwar debate in which Kesselring felt he had to justify himself, and 'this he did in a dignified manner: he shouldered the responsibility,' according to the official German history¹²⁸. A significant reason for the defeat was the failure of the OKW, especially Keitel and Jodl, as well as Mussolini in not heeding Kesselring's advice to occupy Malta. Keitel and Jodl paid little heed to essential logistics, because they were consumed with the Russian campaign, to them, North Africa was a mere sideshow.

¹²⁵ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.146.

¹²⁶ Westphal, *German*, p.128.

¹²⁷ Neitzel Sönke (Ed), *Tapping Hitler's Generals* (Yorkshire: Frontline Books, 2007) p.35.

¹²⁸ *Militärgeschichtliches, Volume VI*, p.755.

The defeat of the Axis was critical, they had failed to ‘disturb British control over Egypt and the Middle East, {the Allies} denied the Third Reich access to key sources of oil ... {they} signalled the fact that the British were determined not to give in, but also the strength of the far-flung British Empire, backed to an increasing degree by the material resources of the United States’¹²⁹. They had also lost a vast number of troops, and ‘these forces would have provided a very strong defence for the Italian gateways to Europe, and the Allies chances of a successful invasion would have been dim’¹³⁰. Kesselring had been the senior commander when the defeat occurred, and the question of the logistics and the failure of the supply lines will be debated as long as this is studied, but Kesselring cannot avoid all the responsibility for the failure. As *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd*, the man on the spot and trusted, he pleaded for the invasion of Malta, but as a Field-Marshal he failed to convince the OKW and Hitler of the magnitude of the island's importance, thus giving the enemy both sea and air-dominance.

Kesselring's only success was the fighting defence German soldiers persistently produced, but his real failure was not to evacuate the huge number of fighting troops to Italy. Rommel's personal papers clearly indicate that he could see that the sheer logistics meant the German and Italian forces were going to be captured, and he was determined to get his men out; he approached Kesselring who told him, eventually ‘that the Führer was unable to agree with my judgement’¹³¹. Rommel linked Kesselring with the OKW and Hitler, stating that ‘it was clear that our higher authorities were building illusions for themselves on the strength of our increased shipments’¹³². Rommel went to Rome with Ambrosio and Westphal but Mussolini saw Rommel as a defeatist. Ignoring Göring's offer of a trip in his private train he flew directly to Hitler's HQ where it was apparent that Hitler was ‘unreceptive:’ it dawned on Rommel that Kesselring had already flown to

¹²⁹ Evans, *Third*, pp.467/8.

¹³⁰ Liddell-Hart, *History*, p.435.

¹³¹ Liddell-Hart, *Rommel*, p.417.

¹³² *Ibid*, p.417.

speaking to Hitler and 'was the bearer of better tidings'¹³³. 'Rommel's reasonable and strategically sound requests to extricate his forces' came to nothing.¹³⁴

Kesselring, as with the proposed Malta invasion, should have pressed the issue much harder, but failed because he had the traditional blind view of obeying the master. In a single line Rommel put his finger on Kesselring's weakness without referring to him directly, he simply wrote that 'optimism could not help, nor energy however ruthless'¹³⁵. Time and time again Kesselring's critics were right, his optimism encouraged Hitler to stand firm on his 'stand and die' orders, and thus Kesselring assisted Hitler in producing another Stalingrad but with greater numbers.

¹³³ Liddell-Hart, *Rommel*, p.417.

¹³⁴ Roberts, *Storm*, p.314.

¹³⁵ Liddell-Hart, *Rommel*, p.420.

CHAPTER 5

SICILY TO SALERNO (1943)

Introduction

This chapter looks at Kesselring within the context of Operation *Husky*, the invasion of Sicily, through to the invasion of the Italian mainland via Calabria and Salerno. It will not try and trace the various military campaigns, but will develop the themes of the previous chapter, specifically the ambivalent nature of Kesselring's command, and his complex relationship with Hitler and Rommel; it has been assumed that Kesselring was total commander of the Italian campaign, but this thesis will cast serious doubt on this assumption. The second part will study his relationship with the Italians, the problems of military cooperation, and Kesselring's apparent inability to realise what was happening in the Italian political body. It will also take stock of the effect of the collapse of Mussolini's regime, and of Kesselring's change of attitude towards the Italians: as he said, 'I loved the Italians too much. Now I hate them'¹.

Thirdly, and critical to the analysis here and subsequently, will be the theme started in the previous chapter regarding Kesselring's role in the defence of the 'soft-underbelly' of occupied Europe. The tendency has been for most historians to portray Kesselring as a master of defence, bearing the 'stamp of genius'². Allied commanders spoke highly of him, especially Alexander, his opposite number³. The argument made here and in the following chapter is somewhat different. Instead it will be suggested that the reputation of a man who was 'as good a general as emerged from the German Army' grew mainly because he faced inadequate opponents⁴. His reputation, it will be argued, was augmented by Allied blunders, poor planning and frequently weak leadership. Putting Kesselring on a plinth has, in reality, led

¹ Katz Robert, *Fatal Silence* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003)p.43.

² D'Este, *Fatal*,p.86.

³ Bradley, *General's*,p.161/Alexander, *Memoirs*,p.125.

⁴ Graham, *Tug*,p.38.

to inadequate critical analysis of the performance of the inexperienced and anaemic Allied command in the Italian theatre.

The Nature of Kesselring's Command

Kesselring, as did other *Wehrmacht* commanders frequently found himself at odds with Hitler over policy. Even as Operation *Husky* was being planned Hitler opposed both Kesselring and even Mussolini in their belief that Sicily was the next Allied objective. Richthofen and other senior commanders were convinced it would be Sardinia, but Kesselring remained convinced Sicily was the obvious candidate⁵. He perceived Sicily to be 'the door to Fortress Europe'⁶. Hitler was convinced that Churchill was intent on the Balkans, and recent research into the Allied deception codenamed *Mincemeat*, which attempted to convince the Axis command that the attack would not be Sicily, suggests that because Hitler sent reinforcements to the Balkans the deceit succeeded⁷. Kesselring's analysis demonstrated that air-power would be the critical factor underpinning Allied plans, making Sicily the obvious place, and he was correct. Fortunately for the Allies, it was Hitler's decision that counted as 'in Rome, neither Albert Kesselring nor the Italian high command was deceived' by the British subterfuge⁸. Hitler's reputation for being right in his instincts was based on Poland and France, but now these so-called instincts were hampering Kesselring's command and authority. Kesselring was the leading German presence in Italy, but was always tied by Hitler's constant intrusions, even minor command issues such as his insistence that certain troops be evacuated from Sicily before others, and later, in Anzio, which regiment should lead the attack, even though, once again, it was a self-evident blunder of gigantic proportions⁹.

⁵ Senger, *Neither*, p.128.

⁶ Klibansky R(ed), *Mussolini Memoirs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1949) p.55/
Whicker Alan, *Whicker's War* (London: Harpers, 2005) p.49.

⁷ Macintyre Ben, *Operation Mincemeat* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

⁸ Bradley, *General's*, p.175.

⁹ In Anzio Hitler insisted the Lehr (Demonstration) Regiment lead a critical attack; they were inexperienced, did not know the terrain and it was night.

Although Kesselring carried the title of *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* his position was, prior to the Italian capitulation, far from what the title suggested. Hitler considered him to be in sole charge, but in reality it was only of the German troops. Most of the Italian military viewed him with a high degree of suspicion; as noted he had only an advisory position within the Italian High Command, the *Commando Supremo*, subordinate to Mussolini and therefore the monarchy. Hitler had begun to suspect the Italians of seeking peace, and accused Kesselring of being too sycophantic towards the *Commando Supremo*¹⁰. This was because Kesselring was well known for his charm and diplomacy; after the war he turned his British interrogator, Lt Col Scotland into a friendly witness for his trial, and the American Historical Division Commander admitted to admiring him. This charm and diplomacy managed to maintain friendly relationships with an ever growing suspicious Italian military that was beginning to be cautious about German dominance¹¹.

As the Allied threat to Italy drew closer it seems implausible that Kesselring was not sharply aware about the political and military machinations taking place amongst his allies. He had managed to gain a cooperative and friendly relationship with Cavallero, (Chief of the *Commando Supremo* until February 1943), but his successor Ambrosio was hostile towards him, being involved in the plot against Mussolini with the King¹². Some of the senior military wanted to change sides and were planning Mussolini's downfall. Politically the Italians were divided on issues of fascism, Mussolini, the Royal family, communism, the place of the Vatican and above all their relationship with Germany. It seems that Hitler was more aware of some of these issues than Kesselring, which suggests that when Hitler described Kesselring as gullible when it came to the Italians, he was probably right. There seems little question that Kesselring viewed the Italians as reliable colleagues, and he convinced many senior Italian figures of his

¹⁰ Ciano had approached Hitler with the suggestion of peace in Russia.

¹¹ 'Where senior rank enabled him {Kesselring} to mediate with diplomatic skill between Hitler and Mussolini, Rommel, and the German and Italian High Command ... he generally performed the role with objectivity and success' - *Militärgeschichtliches-Volumen-VI*, p.635.

¹² Mammarella Giuseppe, *Italy after Fascism, A Political History 1943-63* (Montreal: Casalini, 1964)p.17.

sincerity. However, as the months unfolded towards the Italian collapse, it became obvious that Kesselring had failed to gain any real understanding of the Italian political scene.

He was more alert in the military theatre and it was during the invasion of Sicily that Kesselring started to assume more authority. Originally Mussolini had insisted that General Guzzoni commanded in Sicily: Kesselring was only there to assist and keep a watchful eye on the some 90,000 German troops preparing for the Allied invasion¹³. Even as he was attempting to work alongside Guzzoni power politics were at play in Germany.

Kesselring's lack of authority was further undermined when Hitler appointed Rommel as his adviser in the Mediterranean theatre without informing Kesselring¹⁴. Hitler seemed to fan the personal conflict between Rommel and Kesselring, both men wanting the authority to wage war their way. Jodl and Rommel had recommended that there be one 'competent' commander, namely Rommel, and that Richthofen take over the air-force; it was an attempt to cut Kesselring from the picture¹⁵. Hitler had a series of 'mind-changes' about Kesselring; he was unsure how the Italians would react to Rommel. At other times Hitler was sure that Rommel was best choice because of the glamour attached to his name by Göbbels' propaganda. At times affairs for Kesselring looked bleak. When his friend Jeschonnek, Chief of Staff to the Luftwaffe, committed suicide, Kesselring was forbidden to attend the funeral: he disobeyed. The day Sicily fell, Hitler created a 10th Army under Vietinghoff, so when Kesselring had gone Vietinghoff would be reporting to Rommel¹⁶. There is little question that Rommel was scheming against Kesselring; even at an important meeting with General Roatta, Kesselring had not been invited by Rommel, and had tendered his resignation as a result; it was refused by Hitler, who was still undecided¹⁷.

¹³ General Alfredo Guzzoni has been described as 'woefully unfit to fulfil' the role – Hastings, *Hell*, p.444.

¹⁴ Rastenberg-May 24th.

¹⁵ Macksey, *Memoirs*, p.167.

¹⁶ August 17th.

¹⁷ August 15th.

Rommel, like Hitler, openly distrusted the Italians, and proposed that the Germans defended from the north to block the Allies entering Europe, like a cork in the Italian bottle¹⁸. Kesselring postulated that the best defence was to fight from the south. Rommel actually 'believed that he would shortly take over from Kesselring as Commander-in-Chief South, especially since the latter had no control over what he was doing'¹⁹. It was power-politics as Rommel 'interpreted the two opposing strategies in personal terms: this was a battle between himself and Kesselring for Hitler's Trust,' and there can be little doubt that Kesselring also felt this personally, although in later years he always denied this²⁰.

Hitler claimed 'Kesselring doesn't have the name,' the charisma²¹. Hitler knew that although Rommel could be enthusiastic, he was an 'absolute pessimist when the slightest difficulties arise,' whereas Kesselring was the eternal optimist²². Rommel had projected a New Army Group B of some thirteen to fourteen divisions to hold North Italy, but Kesselring eventually won the debate for defending from the south²³. This was a blow to Rommel's prestige who had hoped to 'upstage' Kesselring. Hitler, who once considered 'Kesselring as a replacement for Keitel or Jodl', favoured Kesselring because of his blind obedience²⁴.

It is difficult to understand the type of magnetic influence Hitler held over so many people, not least Kesselring. Despite Hitler's undermining Kesselring's authority by appearing to favour Rommel, and continuously criticising Kesselring for trusting the Italians, Kesselring remained loyal to Hitler even to his postwar trial. When the coup against Mussolini was eventually announced it was not until after the war that Kesselring claimed that he discovered 'Hitler's double-track methods of organization' namely that

¹⁸ *Plan Alarich*.

¹⁹ Messenger Charles, *Rommel* (London: Palgrave, 2009)p.153.

²⁰ Caddick/Adams, *Monty*,pp.305/6..

²¹ Heiber Helmut & Glantz David (Eds), *Hitler and his Generals* (London: Greenhill Books, 2002)p.231.

²² *Ibid*,p.465.

²³ Ultra indicated that the North Defence was the preference, but despite its many break throughs it could not predict Hitler's changes of mind, -Hastings, *Hell*,p.443.

²⁴ Heiber, *Hitler*,p.xii.

that Himmler's agents were working in the intelligence service in Rome. Their information was 'not reported to me, or to the ambassador, but to Himmler or Hitler'²⁵. It seems incredible that Kesselring was unaware of Himmler's activities, indicating an appalling naivety. Badoglio, the Marshal of Italy declared martial law, and formed a cabinet without fascists which again caught Kesselring completely by surprise. Hitler frequently complained that Kesselring trusted the Italians too much, that he was an '*Italophile*'²⁶. Mackensen, the German Ambassador had asked Hitler not to be too 'pessimistic about Italy', and Kesselring claimed the post-Mussolini Badoglio 'government is trustworthy and is against any interference on our part'²⁷. Hitler was not fooled, and by August 9th he insisted the King and Badoglio's government were 'planning treachery'²⁸. Kesselring trusted the Italians, but according to Douglas Porch, his trust of the Italians 'had not blinded him to Italian treachery and made him insufficiently vigilant in protecting German interests'²⁹. Nevertheless, Hitler's sources appeared more reliable to what was happening than that of Kesselring, the man supposedly in charge, the *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd*.

Hitler may have understood the Italian situation better because of his information and suspicious nature, but his continual fascination with the glamour associated with Rommel was a mistake, and a continuous threat to Kesselring's status. During the Salerno landings the OKW, on Rommel's advice, refused Kesselring a single division from North Italy; Kesselring believed this caused the loss of the Apulian airbases. Some historians argue that had Rommel sent troops 'events might have been very different in Italy,' and 'if Rommel had sent his eight divisions in the North of Italy to join Kesselring's in the south the beachhead would not have survived'³⁰. Had Hitler heeded Kesselring, and given him the northern divisions, most agree there

²⁵ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.171.

²⁷ Fuehrer-Conferences-Aug 19th, p.362/July 26th-28th, p.348.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, -Aug 9th, p.355.

²⁹ Porch Douglas, *Hitler's Mediterranean Gamble* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004)p.423.

³⁰ Holland, Italy's, p.40/ Nicolson Nigel, *Alex, The Life of Field-Marshal Earl of Alexander of Tunis*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973)p.218.

was a good chance that the Salerno landings would have failed. This would have created a sense of Allied nervousness, and may have had ramifications for future amphibious landings including Normandy.

On 12th September Hitler resolved the question of Field-Marshals. He observed that the Salerno landing nearly failed, and the successful policy of delaying defence caused another change of mind towards Kesselring. The amphibious landings posed less danger than previously feared; OKW having been concerned that an entire army could be isolated. Hitler decided to hear both Rommel and Kesselring on whether to fight in the south or the north. Rommel was recovering from appendicitis and feeling depressed, Kesselring, optimistic as usual, had Vietinghoff as support with him at Rastenberg. Kesselring was smooth as a diplomat, and won against Rommel who was at his gloomiest. Kesselring argued that he could hold the line for nine months. Hitler was incapable of reaching an immediate decision, but Jodl, who had rarely appreciated Kesselring, agreed that Kesselring was right³¹. On October 25th Rommel left, and on November 5th he was sent to France to prepare the defence of Western Europe.

Kesselring, *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd*, was finally put in charge of Italy on November 21st. Up to the invasion of Sicily Kesselring had little real power or authority, and had to use his diplomatic and social skills to carry any weight with the Italians. Many Italians had been deeply suspicious of him, Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, had written that in Kesselring 'Mussolini has swallowed a toad', meaning he had swallowed poison³². During the Sicily invasion Kesselring's authority grew exponentially as the Allies progressed. It was Salerno which was the making of Kesselring's position, as finally Hitler accepted his defence arguments, and following Italy's capitulation Kesselring assumed more control with no need for diplomacy. His power was never total even though his code name used by the Allies was 'the Emperor,' because Mussolini was restored as a puppet, and Himmler's SS now became an open

³¹ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.185.

³² Muggeridge, *Ciano*, p.393.

factor within the Italian scene³³. His authority expanded but he was never in total control though he always considered himself as such. Scotland, his British interrogator, described Kesselring as 'the correct, proud, too proud Field-Marshal,' and this appraisal was close to the truth³⁴. Kesselring insisted on being *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* in total control, but he never was in reality. He started as an officer on Mussolini's staff, and was the highest ranking German in Italy, but he was 'far from supreme in executive powers'³⁵. It was a misnomer by the Allies to regard Kesselring as *Emperor*, but it was a delusion shared by Kesselring, and paid for at his trial.

Kesselring and the Italians

As Kesselring's time in the south progressed, his relationship with the Italian military did not, and he was caught by surprise by Mussolini's downfall and the Italian capitulation. Kesselring was the highest ranking German officer in Italy and the chapter will raise the question of Kesselring's failure to have any understanding of what was happening on the Italian political front, where he appeared to be out of his depth. Finally, this section will examine Kesselring's change of attitude towards his one-time partners, and how he started down the road of brutality.

There is no doubt that in North Africa Kesselring had appreciated and supported the Italian partners a great deal more than Rommel. He had realised 'the Italian soldier did play a part in the war in North Africa, even after the arrival of the *Afrika Corps*'³⁶. He had also rejected the nonsense that the Italians could not fight, but during the Sicily invasion he also started to feel the tension between the German militaristic approach, and the Italian lack of desire to be involved in such a war.

In Rome the Italians had informed Kesselring that Sicily's defences were satisfactory, but after flying there he formed a different view. He

³³ KNA-Top-Secret-Cypher-Telegram/19th March 45/Ref/FO-954/17A-File-Re-296.

³⁴ Scotland, *London*, p.173.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.175.

³⁶ Crociani, *Italian*, p.4.

discovered gun-emplacement constructions which were mere 'eyewash' and altogether the defences 'all so much gingerbread'³⁷. The Todt organisation used re-enforced concrete, but many of the Italian constructions, viewable today, show gun-emplacements made from brick covered with thin cement.³⁸ Kesselring flew in construction teams to work with Italian labour, but time was against them.

There was an immediate clash; the Italians wanted their defence out of sight of naval guns, but Kesselring wanted them close by the beaches; 'the resulting controversy was still raging when the invasion commenced'³⁹. Kesselring finally admitted his surprise at the accuracy of the naval guns and admitted they made a powerful impression upon him⁴⁰. The master of defence may have been wrong: the Italians appeared to appreciate the Allied naval threat better.

Disturbingly for Kesselring, Marshal de Bono wrote to Graziani claiming morale was high, but warned of lack of mechanised transport, the age of the soldiers, and that conscripts had 'a scant familiarity with modern automatic weapons'⁴¹. The equipment, training and attitudes of German and Italian soldiers were very different. The German military had prepared for war, but most Italians were uncertain about fighting this war, and according to recent research by Italian historians their weapons were not the best, and 'adequate training was, from the beginning, a serious shortcoming for Italian soldiers'⁴².

Kesselring was amazed at the effectiveness of the Sicily beach-landings, and the effective transfer of fighter-planes to captured airstrips, but was more disturbed on hearing that the Augusta Fortress had surrendered to the British without a fight. He flew to Sicily to assist, 'and to check on the story that Italian formations were surrendering without a shot

³⁷ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.158.

³⁸ The author saw such defences in 2012: red brick and concrete looking like 'gingerbread'.

³⁹ Senger, *Neither*, p.129.

⁴⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.164.

⁴¹ Klibansky, *Mussolini*, p.25.

⁴² Crociani, *Italian*, p.21.

being fired⁴³. A Brigade Commander, Schmatz, sent Kesselring a telegram regarding Augusta stating 'the English have never been in there. Notwithstanding this the Italian garrison has blown up its guns and ammunition and set fire to a large fuel dump'⁴⁴. This transpired to be true, and the Italian surrender in large numbers was a shock to the Germans as well as to the Allies. The invasion of Sicily was the invasion of the Italian homeland, and there was some truth in what Ciano said to Admiral Maugeri that 'our people have no faith in the war, or in our leaders ...they have lost their will to win'⁴⁵. Kesselring should not have found this so incomprehensible, he should have known that the Italians were divided about fascism and Mussolini, they were generally opposed to German occupation, not particularly antagonistic towards the British and Americans in particular, which made them question the need to fight: 'every soldier and every officer had to make that decision and it was very apparent when allied troops finally invaded Sicily on 10th July 1943, that the majority of Italian forces had decided not to do so'⁴⁶. When Patton marched into Palermo it was self-evident that the Italians wanted no part of the war, 'the citizens of Palermo had waved white flags at the invading Americans' and the Germans had time to prepare their escape⁴⁷.

It was apparent that many Italian soldiers simply did not want to fight, not through cowardice, nor because their weapons were outclassed, but because their leadership was as confused as the ordinary soldier who had families in Britain and America. Their heart was not in the war and many regarded fascism as a failing system. So it was that on Monday July 19th Hitler felt obliged to fly to Treviso to encourage Mussolini and ensure the Italians stayed in partnership. As Hitler gave one of his infamous monologues, 'an elegant Job's messenger in the person of an air-force officer violated protocol by bursting in excitedly' with news that Rome itself was being bombed⁴⁸. It was clear that Mussolini's Italy was in serious danger, and it still

⁴³ Lucas James, *Hitler's Enforcers* (London: Arms and Armour Pub, 1996)p.50.

⁴⁴ Klibansky, *Mussolini*,p.41.

⁴⁵ Hansen, *Italian*,p.37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*,p.38.

⁴⁷ Evans, *Third*,p.469.

⁴⁸ Dollmann Eugen, *The Interpreter, Memoirs of Doktor Eugen Dollman* (London: Hutchinson, 1967)p.215.

appeared that Kesselring was either trying not to believe this, or did not understand.

In addition to this problem Kesselring appeared to remain totally ignorant of the motivations and machinations of senior Italian officers. When Kesselring offered Ambrosio three divisions they were accepted reluctantly. When Hitler offered Ambrosio five divisions the Italian refused; it was clear that the Italians did not want that number of Germans in their country. In a conference with Dönitz, Kesselring claimed, somewhat naively, that the refusal was simply that the 'Italians wanted to remain masters in their own house'⁴⁹. Hitler was right to doubt Kesselring's judgment in the matter of Italian loyalty. Given that the Italians appeared to be trying to resist the presence of too many German soldiers, it is remarkable that Kesselring did not realise earlier that the Italian heart was not in the conflict. It should have been part of his remit to understand what was happening, but Kesselring appeared oblivious to the dissent at all levels, and that many Italians wanted to be free of German dominance.

Later Kesselring recognised that when the Allies were broadcasting to the Italians that they would be invaded it was intended to de-stabilise Italian leadership⁵⁰. There was no certainty prior to the mainland invasion as to whether the Italians would fight with their German partners. As such on August 6th representatives of the Italian and German governments met at Tarvisio to clarify their relationship. Attending were two foreign ministers, Ribbentrop and Guariglia, along with two Chiefs of Staff, namely Keitel and Ambrosio. The Italians claimed they were intent on fighting on, but there was a total lack of trust by everyone, except Kesselring, who was optimistic in trusting the Italians.

On Sunday 15th there was a further meeting at Bologna between the Italians and German military representatives, Rommel, Kesselring and

⁴⁹ Fuehrer-Conferences-May12th, p.324.

⁵⁰ August 2nd.

Roatta⁵¹. No resolution was reached on a unified defence, and the meeting was tense and full of suspicion. A week later on Saturday 21st August Kesselring claimed he had a more optimistic meeting with Ambrosio, who wanted a German Division in Sardinia which Kesselring refused on military grounds. In hindsight Kesselring later suspected that Ambrosio had wanted to assist an Allied takeover, and during postwar interviews Kesselring admitted some were concerned that Ambrosio was trying to place German divisions where they could be taken by the Allies as an Italian gift⁵². Two days later on Monday 23rd Kesselring had a meeting with Hitler and Göring in which Hitler said he had evidence of Italy's betrayal, and Kesselring had to stop trusting the Italians. Kesselring, who expected the Italians to honour the partnership, was ordered to be realistic, and have plans prepared if the situation changed. As early as July 28th Badoglio had sent Hitler a telegram stating we 'shall carry on the war in the spirit of our alliance', but Hitler was not fooled⁵³. As a professional soldier Kesselring had followed OKW instructions and prepared for the eventuality of an Italian collapse, but his understanding of the Italian military was totally disastrous. He was described by Hitler as too trusting, and Göbbels that 'Generals are usually too unpolitical to understand the background of such a scene;' in fact Kesselring was duped making it clear that with his Italian colleagues he was out of his depth⁵⁴.

Hitler and the OKW appeared more aware of the Italian military thinking than Kesselring, and in the political sphere Kesselring appeared totally blind as to Mussolini's fortunes. Even in February 1943 Kesselring still felt Mussolini to be secure, as did Mackensen the German Ambassador, and Rintelen, the Military Attaché.

Mussolini also appeared unaware of his imminent danger, although he had conducted a purge in February of 1943 of discontented party-members, 'this was virtually his last decisive act. Disorientated and demoralised... the

⁵¹ Roatta-Chief-of-Staff of the Italian army.

⁵² US-Army-Historical-Division-Special-007718, p.16.

⁵³ Klibansky, *Mussolini*, p.107.

⁵⁴ Lochner, *Goebbels*, p.325.

sacked party bosses began to intrigue against him⁵⁵. Mussolini was not in touch with reality: in a meeting with Kesselring he claimed that Grandi was loyal, although he was eventually the very man who led to his downfall. He informed Kesselring that Grandi had just left him and that 'we had a heart-to-heart talk, our views are identical. He is loyally devoted to me'⁵⁶. Kesselring later told the American Historical Unit 'nothing could have surpassed Mussolini's blind confidence:' his overthrow could have been avoided with the support of the Germans and loyal Italians, which was possible given his re-emergence later⁵⁷.

In effect 'there were two coups, in other words a Fascist and a Monarchist one, and the royal coup superseded and overtook the Fascist coup'⁵⁸. Mussolini later claimed that the king had said to him 'you can no longer count on more than one friend. You have one friend left you, and I am he'⁵⁹. Mussolini was confused, and so were the Germans like Kesselring who never had a clue to the Machiavellian plots of the Fascist council, the military or the king.

Later in September when the armistice/surrender was announced it was also a total surprise for Kesselring. The SS interpreter Dollmann later wrote that 'whatever their former rank, unit and colour of uniform, any Germans who claim to have had advance knowledge of 8th September are simply lying'⁶⁰. However right Dollmann was, Kesselring should have made it his business to try to know more about what was happening in his command. To pretend he was non-political in this situation is to admit failure. As the announcement of the surrender was made, and deliberately timed with the Salerno landing, Kesselring's HQ was also seriously bombed. A map was retrieved from a downed-bomber pinpointing the headquarters which Kesselring shared with Richthofen, indicating to Kesselring that the Italians had betrayed him. It is now known that 'Castellano had obligingly ringed the

⁵⁵ Evans, *Third*,p.470.

⁵⁶ Parker Matthew, *Monte Cassino* (London: Headline Press, 2003)p.12.

⁵⁷ US-Army-Historical-Division-007718, p.7.

⁵⁸ Morgan Philip, *The Fall of Mussolini* (Oxford: OUP, 2008)p.11.

⁵⁹ Klibansky, *Mussolini*,p.55.

⁶⁰ Dollmann, *Interpreter*,p.255.

Field-Marshal's Headquarters in red on an aerial map which the Allies had given him in Lisbon⁶¹. From this juncture Kesselring changed his attitude towards the Italians; they were now the enemy.

As Kesselring extricated himself from the bombed ruins Jodl managed to make contact with him demanding to know the truth about the Italian capitulation. The Chief of Staff for the Italians, Roatta said that it was a hoax, and when the truth eventually emerged Roatta claimed he was just as surprised; but by then the King and government had fled Rome 'leaving only the cryptic instructions that the army should *resist the enemy*'⁶². It seemed as if 'they were preoccupied with saving their own skins ... their pusillanimous flight ...left Italian troops bewildered and demoralised' and the Germans perplexed⁶³.

The Italian plot had been clever, on September 7th the Italian Navy Minister, Count de Courten had informed Kesselring that their navy would not be caught in harbour, and they had sailed to engage the British. According to Westphal, Kesselring's Chief of Staff, Courten shed 'tears and ... his invocation of the German blood that flowed in his veins from his mother's side, did not fail to make a deep impression'⁶⁴. It never occurred to Kesselring that it was a ruse to lull German suspicions, the Navy turned south in order to surrender as the Allies demanded.

Kesselring viewed the surrender as simple betrayal. Cavallero, when released from prison, along with other fascist officers, was put in Kesselring's care. These officers were told they would be flown to Germany in order to assist the restored Mussolini. Cavallero, Kesselring's trusted colleague apparently committed suicide in Kesselring's garden. He did this because Mussolini 'possessed compromising material about him'⁶⁵. In reality, 'Cavallero had sent Badoglio a memorandum from Fort Bocca, informing him

⁶¹ Dollmann, *Interpreter*,p.257.

⁶² Parker, *Monte*,p.17.

⁶³ Porch, *Hitler's*,p.470.

⁶⁴ Westphal, *German*,p.148.

⁶⁵ Heiber, *Hitler*,p.802.

that he, Cavallero, had devised a plan for ousting the Duce as early as Autumn 1942' and he must have realised that Mussolini now knew⁶⁶. Kesselring was disgusted at the Italian betrayal, but whether he had Cavallero murdered, as was the popular rumour within Italy at the time, is questionable⁶⁷. In a post-war interrogation, Kesselring gave a full account of Cavallero's death, which his British and later American interrogators generally accepted as truthful⁶⁸. Kesselring had been close to Cavallero, yet still had no idea of the various machinations.

As from the capitulation Kesselring's change of attitude towards the Italians grew from mere toughness and reasonable demands to a more hard line approach which eventually developed, as will be seen in the next chapter, into a ruthless brutality which he always brushed aside as military necessity.

The issue of taking over the Italian military had to be addressed, especially in Rome where the Italians resisted, and could have created serious problems for the Germans. The 2nd Parachute Division arrived, but on the 9th September General Carboni surrendered their arms⁶⁹. General Count Calvi de Bergolo and Colonel Count Montezemolo talked under a flag of truce with Kesselring and Westphal. Kesselring left it to Westphal to ensure that there would be an immediate demobilisation, and that the soldiers could then return home. Kesselring promised to be ruthless, telling the negotiators, if they did not agree, he would bomb Rome. Later Kesselring declared Rome an open city and 'sought with ultimate success, to preserve Rome as an open city, off-limits from destructive military conflict'⁷⁰. Kesselring has been portrayed by some as saving Rome, and although there may be a small degree of truth in this claim, he was utterly ruthless in his

⁶⁶ Dollmann, *Interpreter*, p.269.

⁶⁷ Origo, *War*, p.61.

⁶⁸ US-Army-Historical-Division-007718, pp.34-36.

⁶⁹ The American Maxwell-Taylor had landed in Rome to prepare a parachute drop, but swiftly decided it would be an error; some Germans seemed to know he was there. Dollmann, *Interpreter*, p.261 said 'Maxwell Taylor's name had an electrifying effect'.

⁷⁰ Salter Michael, *Nazi War Crimes, US Intelligence & Selective Prosecution at Nuremberg* (Oxford: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007) p.80.

military control, sending out the following public notice: *'Rome is under my command and is war territory, subject to martial law. Those organizing strikes or sabotage as well as snipers will be shot immediately - private correspondence is suspended. Telephone conversation should be brief as possible. They will be strictly monitored'*⁷¹. Kesselring issued threats to imprison or execute recalcitrant Italians, by whom he felt betrayed, which found their way into the London Times thereby increasing his reputation of being ruthless⁷². Kesselring also made an appeal over the radio, and through posters for the Italians to co-operate, and later appealed for Italian recruits to join the German forces, which many did⁷³.

The Germans were fortunate there was no serious backlash because the Italians were a substantial force and armed. Rommel demanded that Kesselring should have dispatched all Italian soldiers to Germany for manpower. This ruffled Kesselring's feathers as Rommel was acting as his superior. As it was, in North Italy many Italian soldiers deserted *en masse*, so later the partisan war found both men and arms because of Rommel's failure to collect in the weapons⁷⁴. According to an Italian historian, 'Kesselring's decision to disarm Italian soldiers and allow them to go home meant that Italian resistance was mainly focused in north-west Italy, in the area under Rommel's control'⁷⁵. Nevertheless, Kesselring's political and military measures clearly indicate a rapidly changing attitude towards his ex-Allies; the level of ruthlessness grew from this time.

However, under Kesselring there were no massacres as in the Balkans and Greek islands⁷⁶. Westphal wrote that Kesselring was reprimanded for not imprisoning the Italian soldiers but, as he noted, 'the surrender of their war material was carried out without friction. Nor was the fear that they would at once join the partisan movement justified by events.

⁷¹ Kurzman D, *A Special Mission* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2007)pp48/9.

⁷² Times, September 27th1943,p.3.

⁷³ Times-October 16th1943,p.3.

⁷⁴ Macksey, *Kesselring*,p.178.

⁷⁵ Battistelli, *Albert*,p.57.

⁷⁶ On Cephalonia the Acqui Division fought the Germans; after the battle an estimated 5,000 prisoners were massacred.

Everyone was pleased that this loathsome business was over at last.⁷⁷ There were incidents of resistance; General Don Ferrante Gonzaga was shot after an apparent show of personal resistance⁷⁸. 'Overall, it has been estimated that about 25,000 Italian officers and men were killed in fighting and roundups after the armistice' but in mainland Italy where Kesselring was in control it was done rapidly, there were no massacres and Italian soldiers were allowed to return home⁷⁹.

Later there was the conscription of Italian labour-battalions operating under Italian bureaucracy through German control; they were used for defence-construction and Kesselring claimed that 'the workers altogether were well cared for'⁸⁰. Perhaps Kesselring liked to think they were well cared for, but the workers would have felt otherwise. Later, after a major massacre of civilians on Monte Sole, Kesselring brushed it aside as just a 'military action'; this attitude of playing down the grotesque probably applied to his wishful thinking that conscripted workers 'were cared for.' It is also worth noting that 'Naples became the first European city to rise up against the Germans ... the *Quattro giornate* – the famous four days – started by Kesselring's attempt to deport 20,000 men'⁸¹.

Kesselring never really understood the Italian military command, failed to understand why all Italian soldiers did not want to fight, completely failed to foresee Mussolini's downfall and Italy's capitulation, after which event his attitude moved from the reasonable, to the ruthless and, as will be examined in chapter 7, became brutalized.

⁷⁷ Westphal, *German*, p.152.

⁷⁸ Hickey D & Smith G, *Operation Avalanche, The Salerno landings 1943* (London: Heinemann, 1983)p.50.

⁷⁹ Morgan, *Fall*, p.111.

⁸⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.190.

⁸¹ Mazower Mark, *Hitler's Empire, Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008)p.507.

Kesselring - Master of Defence?

There were occasions in the North African campaign when such was the admiration for Rommel that Montgomery and others were concerned that officers and men were using him as an excuse for failure. Although Kesselring never carried this reputation on the battlefield, his prestige started to develop in Italy among some Allied leaders, and most postwar historians praise him for his professional defence. Alexander, who suffered so many nervous moments at Salerno, Anzio, and Monte Cassino, commented that Kesselring 'showed very great skill'⁸². The American Bradley referred to him as 'the able Field Marshal'⁸³. Even the London Times stated that Kesselring 'is manifestly too short of reserves: yet the German defence remains stubborn and dangerous'⁸⁴.

Historians have continued in the same vein, with the exception of Richard Lamb, (who fought in Italy) and refers to Kesselring as 'a brute,' most praise Kesselring as a master of defence⁸⁵. His defence has been described as 'superb' (Hoyt); having the instincts of 'the true gambler' (Hapgood); 'bearing the stamp of genius' (D'Este); with 'few equals in the army' (Atkinson), and the 'master of delaying tactics' (Hickey)⁸⁶. Two respected historians refer to him 'as good a general as emerged from the German Army in the Second World War and certainly the best on either side in the Italian theatre'⁸⁷. He has been described as 'superior even to Rommel' (Roberts); the 'canny commander' (Macintyre); 'in the front rank of commanders' (Hastings); 'talented and experienced' (Harper); and Beevor noted that the 'Wehrmacht in Italy under Kesselring proved far more durable than even Hitler expected'⁸⁸. Most of these appraisals tend to paint a far too exalted picture, and there is a

⁸² Alexander, *Memoirs*, p.125.

⁸³ Bradley, *General's*, p.161.

⁸⁴ Times, May 24th 1944.

⁸⁵ Lamb, *War*, p.6.

⁸⁶ Hoyt Edwin, *Back Water War, The Allied Campaign in Italy* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole, 2007) p.122//D'Este, *Fatal*, p.86/Atkinson, *Day*, p.93/Hickey, *Operation*, p.293.

⁸⁷ Graham/Bidwell, *Tug*, p.38.

⁸⁸ Roberts, *Storm*, p.378/Macintyre, *Operation*, p.282/Hastings, *Hell*, p.668/ Harper G & Tonkin-Covell J, *The Battles of Monte Cassino* (Auckland: Allen & Unwin, 2013) p.125/Beevor, *Second*, p.568.

tendency to use the Kesselring image as a 'master of defence' to gloss over inadequate Allied opposition, and forget that defence in Italy was the better option than attack. When Douglas Porch described Kesselring as a 'tough no-nonsense German General' he was probably the closest to the truth⁸⁹. Kesselring was a solid professional commander, experienced and brought up in a militaristic tradition, but he was no 'genius' as D'Este and others claim⁹⁰.

This final part of this chapter will continue the theme started in the previous chapter, and be developed in the next to demonstrate that there were significant errors of judgement by the Allied command, poor planning, not least in the way they misunderstood Italy's geography and climate in military terms. It was these factors which increased Kesselring's reputation.

In many ways Kesselring's ability was assisted by poor Allied planning. As Bradley put it, 'astonishing as it seems in retrospect, there was no master plan for the conquest of Sicily'⁹¹. According to Bradley some Allied intelligence believed Italians would flee others 'that on home soil the Italians would resist fiercely'⁹². Eisenhower later criticised those critics who claimed they should have evaluated the 'low combat value of the huge Italian garrison' but few could have guessed how individual Italians would react; Kesselring failed to foresee this⁹³.

During the campaign Allied progress was tardy and 'most historians blame the failure on the lack of planning and coordination at the very top. Throughout the Sicily campaign, the board of directors was widely scattered: Alexander in Sicily; Tedder in Tunisia; Cunningham in Malta; Ike in Algiers'⁹⁴. After the war, referring to Sicily and Italy Montgomery 'admitted to the New Zealand commander Major General Sir Howard Kippenberger: 'We went in without a plan'⁹⁵. The fact that the Allies felt they

⁸⁹ Porch, *Hitler's*, pp422/3.

⁹⁰ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.86.

⁹¹ Bradley, *Generals*, p.161/p, 186.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.161.

⁹³ Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.181.

⁹⁴ Bradley, *General's*, -footnote, p.198.

⁹⁵ Harper, *Battles*, p.xix.

could simply invade and 'take Sicily,' as opposed to the possibility of making a direct and immediate attack on Messina, allowed Kesselring not only to create a defence, but also gave him time to extricate troops back to the mainland. In terms of Sicily, there was no coordinated plan to attack Messina even though the Allies were aware of the evacuation: 'it was left to Montgomery to belabour the obvious: 'the truth of the matter is that there is *no* plan'⁹⁶. Senger, Kesselring's best strategic general who controlled Monte Cassino, noted that 'when I look at the Allied plans ... I cannot refrain from criticism'⁹⁷.

Kesselring did not realise at the time that the Americans were almost hostile towards the Mediterranean theatre, cynical about the soft-underbelly, and suspicious of Britain's empire. Churchill was unhappy about an invasion across the English Channel and dismissive about the American idea of invading South France, and constantly applied pressure for the attack through Sicily and Italy. The major Allied political leaders were at variance, but, more to the point, their senior commanders were frequently in conflict with one another; Marshall distrusted the British fascination with the Mediterranean and suspected the USA was being used for colonial defence, and Alan Brooke was almost contemptuous about American military power. In terms of battle command all too often personalities were in open conflict, and this frequently played into Kesselring's hands, especially later when troops were removed for South France and Normandy.

Lower down the rung senior Allied commanders failed to cooperate, and their egocentricity soured relations. Montgomery and Patton behaved like competitive schoolboys, compounded by 'Alexander's unwillingness to take control of the campaign at its most crucial moment'⁹⁸. Alexander's failure to direct pressure and placing the 7th Army into a secondary role, allowed the evacuation of the German army and equipment across the Straits of Messina. Bradley found Montgomery impossible to work

⁹⁶ Atkinson, *Day*, p.167.

⁹⁷ Senger, *Neither*, p.196.

⁹⁸ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.26.

with, and despaired of Eisenhower when he supported Montgomery. Bradley's distaste was mild compared to the behaviour of Patton and Montgomery. 'If Montgomery did not push his men, neither did Alexander push him, nor in turn did Eisenhower push Alexander. The reason was that the Allies had not been able to readjust their thinking as quickly as the Germans'⁹⁹.

Poor Allied leadership made Kesselring's task easier. 'The British and American commanders despised each other for lack of drive, attacking in insufficient strength and lack of appetite for combat. In this they resembled two whores upbraiding each other for lack of chastity'¹⁰⁰. At Salerno Clark had decided not to prepare his landing beaches with naval-fire as an attempt to surprise what was already a well broadcast invasion¹⁰¹. Clark, ignoring British advice, being well known as a bitter Anglophobe, also believed that the Italians would 'stop the Germans' taking over the coastal defence and refuse them the use of road and rail traffic, a naivety that beggars belief. As it was Kesselring 'acted with amazing speed,' but probably because Allied security was lax¹⁰². Salerno and its hinterland was tough, the London Times grudgingly admitted that in Italy 'the German resistance has been skilful, stubborn, and fierce ... most of his {Kesselring} divisions are of high quality ... some ... are exceptionally good ... and his engineers have shown their customary skill'¹⁰³.

Throughout the Italian campaign there was a growing uneasiness between the Allies; senior officers were almost at war between themselves, and there was indecisiveness at the highest level. McCreery held Clark in utter contempt, and Clark often referred to Alexander as a 'peanut and feather-duster.' In Sicily Alexander had stood on the side-lines and allowed the egoists Montgomery and Patton too much freedom. Later Clark complained Montgomery was strolling up through Italy, yet the crisis at

⁹⁹ Ambrose Stephen, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Cassell, 1971)p.220.

¹⁰⁰ Graham, *Tug*,p.92.

¹⁰¹ As soldiers embarked in North Africa vendors were selling postcards of Salerno.

¹⁰² Hickey, Operation,p41/ Grace Edward, *The Perilous Road to Rome and Beyond* Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2007)p.75.

¹⁰³ Times-December 31st1943.

Salerno was traceable to a flawed invasion plan for which Alexander and Clark were responsible. Alexander 'was self-effacing and capable but utterly unwilling to assert his authority'¹⁰⁴. Alexander's superiors had their doubts about his ability, Alan Brooke writing that 'I am afraid that Winston is beginning to see some of Alex's shortcomings! It was bound to come sometime or other, but means difficult times ahead. I wonder how I have succeeded in keeping him covered up to now'¹⁰⁵! Montgomery complained that Alexander 'had a definitely limited brain and does not understand his business'¹⁰⁶. Clark was vain and inexperienced and no other officer was more openly ambitious; he had a public relations staff of nearly fifty men. The American Brigadier-General Wedemeyer reported to Marshall that Clark 'is self-seeking and ambitious; not a broad gauged man who would subordinate himself to the big picture'¹⁰⁷. These were prophetic words forecasting the prolongation of the Italian campaign when Clark, for personal glory and a paranoid distrust of the British, captured Rome allowing the German army to escape and defend in North Italy¹⁰⁸. Clark often refused to let Americans fight alongside the British and many of his plans were so poor they were noted by the opposition¹⁰⁹. Eisenhower admitted that the American commanders at Salerno 'lacked skills,' and Alexander admitted the British and Americans 'did not get along'¹¹⁰. The Allied leadership was distrustful, their planning poor, and their sense of direction confused: Montgomery complained he had been put ashore in Italy with no clear destination. There was a great deal of personal animosity, General Clark accusing the New Zealander Freyberg of having 'no brains', then behaving with Leese like a pair of prima donnas 'interested in their own personal agendas', and it was generally accepted that Clark and Alexander 'rarely agreed on anything and poisoned the atmosphere'¹¹¹. As the war progressed the Allied leadership played into Kesselring's hands, especially in the battles of Monte Cassino and Anzio. The

¹⁰⁴ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.49.

¹⁰⁵ Alanbrooke, *War*, p.519.

¹⁰⁶ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.55.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.60.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁹ Senger, *Neither*, p.196.

¹¹⁰ Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.207/Alexander, *Memoirs*, p.109.

¹¹¹ D'Este, *Fatal*, pp.257/337/329.

most serious weakness on the Allied side was between Clark and Alexander, as noted by Graham and Bidwell 'Alexander was the victim of the delusion he had created for himself that he could only coax and cajole but never command. Clark was obsessed with the capture of Rome, come what may'¹¹². In Salerno the Allied leadership was seriously weak, 'what we saw was ineptitude and cowardice spreading down from the command, and this resulted in chaos'¹¹³.

Only Marshall had the foresight to point out that in North Africa a small German force had fought an irksome rear-guard, but in Italy they 'might make intended operations extremely difficult and time consuming'¹¹⁴. In Italy the Allies had chosen a battle where the edge would always be with the defenders, who in the words of Churchill's Private Secretary 'were the best in the world' and led by professional military commanders¹¹⁵.

Kesselring had good subordinates, faced a divided and weak opposition; Mussolini had become a puppet, and the Italians were descending into a vicious civil war. After Salerno Kesselring's status as a defence commander continued to grow, but it was too often Allied ineptitude that built his reputation.

This command ineptitude became apparent in Sicily, and despite overwhelming Allied resources and the capitulation of many Italian soldiers, too many mistakes were made which cost lives and enhanced Kesselring's reputation as a formidable commander. Patton's useless thrust towards Palermo, and putting Bradley's army virtually on hold become insignificant compared to the sloppy preparation for the airborne drops¹¹⁶.

¹¹² Graham, *Tug*, p.270.

¹¹³ Hastings, *Hell*, p.451.

¹¹⁴ Atkinson, *Fatal*, p.20.

¹¹⁵ Colville, *Fringes*, p.498.

¹¹⁶ The poor planning and the individuality afforded to Patton and Montgomery gave a lack of cohesion. When Patton lost patience with his restricted role and turned north-west to Palermo, 'his thrust baffled Kesselring, because it was strategically futile.'-Hastings, *Hell*, p.447.

The Allies created this disaster by using airborne troops in an unforgiving situation and without appropriate preparation. General Browning planned *Husky* to start with the American 82nd Airborne division and the British 1st Airborne division. Many planes were thrown off course by high winds, and some pilots prematurely released gliders. 'The pilots of the 366 planes were green to combat and inexperienced in airborne and over-water operations'¹¹⁷. Only fifty-four gliders landed in Sicily¹¹⁸. Eisenhower claimed they feared a great loss of life, but in a weak postwar *apologia* claimed 'though statistics later showed that casualties were less than we feared, it was still a tragic incident'¹¹⁹. Another airborne lift was repeated on July 11th when Patton ordered up 144 C-47s carrying 2,008 soldiers to be dropped inland. One USA naval gunner mistook them as the enemy and most others opened fire. 'In all, twenty-three planes were lost and thirty-seven badly damaged. The airborne force suffered 318 casualties; 88 dead, 162 wounded, 68 missing'¹²⁰. On July 13th a third airborne left Tunisia with 1,900 members of the British 1st Parachute Brigade and disaster was repeated, 'of the 1,900 paratroopers ... only about 200 reached their objective, and that was too few to do the job properly'¹²¹. Inadequate training, poor weather and failure of communications were the main causes; it was a steep learning curve¹²². The Allied command had failed to give adequate preparation, failed to use experienced pilots, failed to communicate with the navy and unnecessarily lost some of the best fighting men. On July 12th Kesselring authorised German paratroopers to be dropped 'with great precision in zones south of Catania,' and as the historian Hoyt wrote, 'it was as if the Germans were showing the Allies how it should be done,' but Allied misjudgement certainly put Kesselring higher on his plinth¹²³.

¹¹⁷ Bradley, *General's*, pp.179-80.

¹¹⁸ Some blamed American pilots fresh to conflict, Hoyt, *Back*, p.22.

¹¹⁹ Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.191.

¹²⁰ Bradley, *General's*, p.184.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p.187.

¹²² 'the RAF pilots ... all had considerable experience ... British Glider Pilot Regiment crews had practised ... many of the Waco pilots had not completed their training ... while the C-47 pilots had little or no experience of glider operations and some had done little night flying' Corrigan Gordon, *The Second World War, A Military History* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012) p.399.

¹²³ Hoyt, *Back*, p.30.

The misjudgement at Messina did not cost the same lives as the parachute blunder, but it allowed an entire German army to escape and may have changed the face of the Italian campaign. Unlike the Allies Kesselring recognised the value of Messina and had selected General Hube who, with the help of his Chief of Staff von Bonin, and an 'unorthodox Colonel Ernst-Günther Baade' made Messina a heavily defended area¹²⁴. The naval officer, Baron von Gustav Liebenstein, extricated across the Messina Straits 60,000 of the 90,000 original German troops, 75,000 Italian troops, plus most of their equipment¹²⁵. It was achieved only because the Allies failed to attack the escape route. Ultra had flagged up Kesselring's intentions, but neither the air or naval forces intervened effectively; 'this was a shocking failure'¹²⁶. The Germans started at night but 'they soon found that Allied interference was so ineffective that they also moved by day'¹²⁷. Eisenhower claimed 'the narrowness of the strait allowed the evacuation,' nevertheless, Messina was a 'remarkable Dunkirk commenced on August 10th. It was carried forward over the next six days and seven nights with German efficiency'¹²⁸. Such was the German success it has led one historian to call '*Operation Husky* an abject failure'¹²⁹. Hindsight is an unkind tool to use on past decisions, but it seems incredible that the Allied planners had failed to recognise the importance of Messina given its close proximity to the Italian mainland, and more pertinently to virtually ignore the Ultra signals and not attack the escaping army.

Messina fell on 17th August and German resistance ceased the next day: many historians have acknowledged that although the Allies occupied Sicily it was not brilliantly achieved. The American historian Ambrose wrote that 'the Germans had won a moral victory:' although the Italians had capitulated in massive numbers for 38 days some 60,000 Germans had held

¹²⁴ Atkinson, *Fatal*, p.165.

¹²⁵ Many authorities have varying figures-these seem the most realistic.

¹²⁶ Hastings, *Hell*, p.449.

¹²⁷ Ambrose, *Supreme*, p.231.

¹²⁸ Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.196/Bradley, *General's*, p.198.

¹²⁹ Sloggett Dave, *Military History, Operation Husky* (Issue 39, Dec 2013) Sydney Herald Newspaper July 7th 2011.p.32.

off an Allied force of 500,000¹³⁰. The Messina evacuation did not deprive the Germans of their men or weapons, and although the Germans lost 12,000 the Allies lost an estimated 20,000¹³¹. 'It was a dismal conclusion to a campaign that had already taken too long'¹³². Eisenhower grudgingly wrote that 'the German garrison was fighting skilfully and savagely'¹³³.

Montgomery sacked the able Lieutenant-Colonel Lionel Wigram for his unfavourable report which concluded that 'the Germans have undoubtedly in one way scored a decided success in Sicily'¹³⁴. The failure at Messina was all part of the weak preparation planning. 'The American naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote: 'I cannot avoid the conclusion that the entire *Husky* Plan was wrong; that we should have attacked the Messina bottleneck first'¹³⁵. Allied failure enabled Kesselring to accomplish what Rommel and many others had claimed to be impossible, and thus enhance his reputation yet further.

Allied command problems were further compounded at Salerno. When General Clark's Fifth Army landed at Salerno on the 9th September the Germans had fourteen divisions ready, and by the end of October at least twenty-five. Kesselring recognised the value of the Foggia airfields because of their range into Germany and Austria, which was part of the reason for not falling back to Rommel's defensive-line north of Rome¹³⁶.

The invading Allied soldiers were aware of the Italian negotiations, and some troops were wildly optimistic, expecting 'they would dock in Naples with an olive branch in one hand and an opera ticket in another'¹³⁷. It was clear that from the very top of the Allied command to the fighting soldier there were misconceptions about the reality of what was

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *Supreme*, p.231.

¹³¹ Bradley puts Allied losses at 22,811 and suggests only a few thousand Germans were killed-Bradley, *General's*, p.200.

¹³² Ambrose, *Supreme*, p.228.

¹³³ Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.195.

¹³⁴ Hastings, *Hell*, p.450.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Bradley, *General's*, p.163.

¹³⁶ The value of these airfields is hardly touched upon in the Allied plans.

¹³⁷ Hickey, *Operation*, p.43.

happening in Italy. The strength of the gathering German military, and the divided Italian body was grossly underestimated, and since Arab merchants had been selling postcards of Salerno to the embarking troops it was equally clear that security was lax. Clark, as mentioned earlier, ignored Royal Naval advice and failed to bombard the shore first; he was further under the delusion that the Italians would stop the Germans taking over the coastal defence. It was a poor decision by Clark because it was too risky to make such an assumption.

The Salerno beachheads were dangerous for the Allied troops as Vietinghoff's Tenth-Army launched a serious counter-attack on the 13th September. It nearly worked; it came dangerously close to cutting the bridgehead in two, and the US 5th Army considered the possibility of evacuation. A British Colonel remarked with some degree of truth that 'this reminds me of Gallipoli,' and Alexander, with his usual understatement said the situation was unfavourable¹³⁸. Clark considered re-embarking, and to this day on a small monument in Salerno there are two quotations carved with Clark's words "*Prepare to evacuate the beach*" and the response by Major-General Middleton "*Leave the water and the ammo on the beach. The 45th Division is here to stay.*" 'It is rare indeed for a division to castigate publicly its army Commander for considering sailing away from the battle'¹³⁹. It was so bad at one stage that Vietinghoff sent this telegram to Kesselring and OKW:

'AFTER DEFENSIVE BATTLE LASTING FOUR DAYS ENEMY RESISTANCE COLLAPSING + TENTH ARMY PURSUING ENEMY ON WIDE FRONT + HEAVY FIGHTING STILL IN PROGRESS NEAR SALERNO AND ALTAVILLA + MANOEUVRE IN PROCESS TO CUT OFF PAESTUM FROM RETREATING ENEMY'¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁸ Hickey, *Operation*, p.18

¹³⁹ Whicker, *Whicker's*, p.85-6

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in *Hickey*, *Operation*, p.226

Göbbels proclaimed it a victory and 'Lord Haw Haw taunted the Allied troops and wished them *bon voyage*'¹⁴¹. However, the naval gunfire was powerful and accurate, and with air-superiority prevented Salerno becoming another Gallipoli. The figures of Salerno illustrate the near disaster: Germans inflicted 8,659 casualties whilst suffering 3,472 and the Germans took 3,000 prisoners whilst losing 630 themselves, mainly on D-Day from the beach¹⁴². In any seaborne operation against a defensive position the odds will be against the attackers, but there were too many misjudgements made, and only the overwhelming air and sea power saved the day. The close run nature of Salerno continued to enhance a misplaced respect for Kesselring.

One of the great weaknesses of the Allied planning was the apparent ignorance of the Italian weather and terrain. Kesselring and his staff had a thorough knowledge of Italian geography, whereas the Anglo-American forces 'were inexplicably and culpably ill-informed about the geographical, tactical, political and economic problems they would meet there'¹⁴³. There is next to no mention of terrain in the plans, yet throughout the Italian campaign it was one of the dominant features to cause problems¹⁴⁴.

This terrain caused Montgomery immediate problems as he faced considerable criticism for his slow progress from Calabria to Salerno. Kesselring had ordered the troops retreating from the south to destroy bridges, roads and booby-trapped anything of interest making it difficult for the British 8th Army to cover more than three miles daily. The terrain was such that these methods were easily accomplished at great cost to the attacker. This was the work of a sound military professional made easy by the terrain, but has led some historians to overly praise him: Hickey wrote that he had 'clearly demonstrated in his Panzer's withdrawal from Calabria that he was master of the art of delaying tactics'¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴¹ Göbbels was furious with Kesselring-Lochner, *Göbbels*, p.368/ Porch, *Hitler's*, p.501.

¹⁴² Graham, *Tug*, p.91.

¹⁴³ Hastings, *Hell*, p.443.

¹⁴⁴ 'The geography of the country is ideal for defence and the Germans, with their usual ingenuity and professionalism, were going to make full use of it. That the Allies were still fighting in Italy up to May 1945 tends to prove the point.' Corrigan, *Second*, p.409

¹⁴⁵ Hickey, *Operation*, p.293.

The same terrain of mountain and valley allowed Kesselring to build a series of in-depth defence lines across the breadth of Italy's 'leg', the first line ran through Monte Mignano called the Berhardt/Reinhard, and beyond this the Garigliano River to the Cassino line, the well-known Gustav line. Kesselring had the terrain on his side; Italy was long, narrow, mountainous, with narrow roads and cold winters it was easier to defend than to attack. Ernie Pyle the war correspondent wrote '...the war in Italy was tough. The land and the weather were both against us. It rained and it rained. Vehicles bogged down and temporary bridges washed out. The country was shockingly beautiful, and just as shockingly hard to capture from the enemy. The hills rose to high ridges of almost solid rock. We couldn't go round them through the flat peaceful valleys, because the Germans were up there looking down upon us, and they would have let us have it. So we had to go up and over. A mere platoon of Germans, well dug in on high, rock-spined hill, could hold out for a long time against tremendous onslaughts'¹⁴⁶. There was hostile weather, terrain, and experienced German forces who 'were never routed in battle. They generally withdrew in good order to planned and prepared defence lines'¹⁴⁷. As they withdrew they blew up bridges, blocked passes, flooded valleys, and left booby traps; in Salerno and some other towns there were 'fuses with a 42-day run'¹⁴⁸. Italy gave Kesselring the opportunity to exhibit how easy it was to defend such terrain.

Kesselring was never entirely in charge, as he claimed, and after his failure to understand what was happening under his very nose in Italian politics, he turned against his hosts in a way, which, as will be seen, became not just ruthless but criminally brutal. The difficulties experienced in Sicily and Salerno caused by Allied planning, weak decision making, a defender's terrain and inexperience multiplied exponentially on the way to Rome. This unjustifiably enhanced Kesselring's reputation for defence, excusing Allied ineptitude and inexperience.

¹⁴⁶ Lewis J (Ed), *World War II The Autobiography* (London: Robinson, 2009)p.448.

¹⁴⁷ Morgan Philip, *History Today, Italy's Fascist War* (Volume 57, Issue 3,2007)p.130.

¹⁴⁸ Hoyt, Back,p.98.

CHAPTER 6

ITALY (1943-1944)

Introduction

There are four points of exploration in this chapter, beginning with the ambiguous nature of Kesselring's command; especially in the light of the arrival of the SS with their brutality and deployment of biological warfare. Secondly, and briefly, Kesselring continued to be hampered by espionage and counter-intelligence a problem he never overcame. Thirdly, he tried, postwar to set his image as the saviour of Italian treasure, for which he had some justification, but in reality his policy of plundering industrial and economic resources, and the agricultural devastation caused by some of his troops, marred any hope he had of being seen as the saviour of Italy. Finally, and most critically regarding the general view of his status as the master of defence, the Italian campaign, far more than any other single factor, gave Kesselring his reputation. Therefore it is important to view him against the backdrop of four highly significant military events, the Luftwaffe attack on Bari, the attack on the Gustav line, the Anzio landings, and the fall of Rome¹. The Italian campaign was pivotal for Kesselring; what happened in Italy gave him among some military commanders and historians a reputation of heroic professionalism, but the same events also led to a death sentence, and although he survived this threat, what happened in Italy haunted him to his deathbed. This period will give further substance to the theme of Kesselring's reputation as a 'great' defence commander: Carlo D'Este wrote that Kesselring 'symbolised the German defence of Italy, and he became the bedrock upon which it was built. Where others would have drawn the wrong conclusion or over-reacted Kesselring remained composed and was quite literally (sic) the glue that held the German Army in Italy together'². This chapter will use these chosen campaigns to illustrate that Kesselring's reputation was more a myth to excuse the divided and anaemic Allied command which was the real

¹ Gustav-line the scene of Garibaldi's triumph over Neapolitans.

² D'Este, *Fatal*, p.132.

bedrock of Kesselring's perceived strengths. There needs to be some descriptive passages of how the Allied command reacted in order to illustrate how their weakness enhanced Kesselring's reputation in history. One of the most recent books on the Gustav line battle at Monte Cassino stresses as a 'core theme ... the reality of the impact of personalities:' this was true at the time and in postwar analysis³.

The Backdrop

To understand Kesselring it is important to try and unravel the complexity of what happened in Italy. Mussolini was restored in North Italy as Hitler's Quisling, and his German SS guard were both guardians and prison-wardens: he had become a tragicomic figure. The Germans controlled Italy, which is probably why the Allies used the word *Emperor* as Kesselring's code name⁴. The Allies, with huge resources were advancing with the ever-present threat of another invasion near Rome, and with an all-powerful air-force, making the Luftwaffe virtually ineffective. The civilian population was close to starvation, and Mussolini technically presided over a country divided by civil war, and uncertain as to who was the enemy. Between July 1943 and 1945 Allied bombing 'killed 64,000 Italian civilians,' although this general figure is unverifiable⁵. Italian soldiers were trained in Germany, and most were killed on the Eastern Front⁶. Of those called up '10,000 of them deserted within the first few weeks' of 1943: it was a time of mixed loyalties, total confusion and suspicion⁷. The south of Italy was under Allied control, parts of Northern Italy were ostensibly held by Mussolini, the Badoglio government and Royal Family were down south, partisans ranging from Communists to Catholics fought mainly in the north, the German military held sway north of the frontline: Italy was suffering a complex and bitter civil war. It was not just the Allies against Germany, but political

³ Harper, *Battles*, p.viii.

⁴ Kew, Ref-FO954/17AFile, Ref296.

⁵ 54,000 British civilians died by Luftwaffe 1940-45.

⁶ Farrell, *Mussolini*, p.444.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.445.

ideologies, religion, and geographical areas seeking self-government were all varying aspects of a multifaceted causation in the fighting.

The battleground of Italy had focal points which have since become household names. After Salerno the Allies pressed north through heavily defended river crossings until they came upon the Gustav line with its pivotal point at Cassino. The nature of the mountainous terrain demanded more amphibious landings, and although Kesselring believed the Allies would carry out another invasion Anzio still took him by surprise. He had preparatory plans; Operation *Richard* entailed having reserve divisions ready to swing into action across the breadth of Italy. Even after Anzio he remained convinced, with Allied deception, that there would be another landing around Leghorn. The Allies planned two major advances: General Clark's 5th Army in the west to enter the Liri Valley after eliminating Monte Cassino; Montgomery's 8th Army along the Adriatic; Kesselring's reserves would be rushed from one to the other when necessary.

Kesselring's Command and the SS

As mentioned earlier although Kesselring held the grand title of *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* he was answerable to many chiefs in Italy as well as Hitler and the OKW. As Italy disintegrated Kesselring's command became better defined and more embracing, but after Italy's capitulation Himmler's SS moved into Kesselring's sphere, and although he claimed to be their technical superior it was a misnomer, because they had their own command structure. There was also the Reich Foreign Labour Service, tasked to transport labourers, and which reported directly to Berlin. *Obergruppenführer* Karl Wolff was responsible for security, and the war against Partisans⁸. Wolff approached Kesselring with the idea that the SS did 'police' duties within the army-controlled area. From 1934 Kesselring had been living within a police state, 'a category of political regime in which the police, the security services and the special forces are authorised to bypass the normal procedures of the

⁸ 'Partisan derives from Spanish resistance to Napoleon'-Davies, *Simple*, p.317

law'⁹. As such Kesselring nearly accepted the offer, but was warned off by Westphal, who was more adverse to the SS than Kesselring. As Westphal noted, 'not even a field-marshal of the Army was permitted to punish a soldier of these forces with a single day's arrest. The Army authorities could do no more than make representations to Göring or Himmler'¹⁰.

There was command-confusion, and by May 1st1944 Kesselring demanded that Keitel send a signal defining his duties; Kesselring was made the highest authority, but the partisan war was given to *Obergruppenführer* Wolff and his guerrilla operations-staff. They were subordinate to Kesselring only for the sake of military appearances. Where the army was involved, the SS and the Police shared combat-roles, but not within a 19/20 mile zone from the front. The whole issue of the partisan war will be examined later. The communication problems meant that often 'SS deeds went unobserved' by the High Command, Kesselring sometimes only hearing about them through casualty reports¹¹. The SS was afforded the opportunity for independent action, and some of their reports simply read 'partisans put down' covering a massacre.

Himmler wanted Rome evacuated, but Kesselring refused on the grounds of potential starvation and riot. Then Kappler was ordered by Himmler to arrest 800 Jews, Kesselring had no authority to disobey, but, following a conversation with Kappler and Möllhausen he circumnavigated the order by not detailing troops to the task¹². The Jews in Tunisia had been ill-treated but not exterminated, and it was Kesselring's awareness that the Italians were not anti-Semitic, that meant he would have avoided the issue when possible. Up until July 1943 frontier officials were known to permit Jewish refugees to find sanctuary in Italy¹³. Once Himmler's SS arrived the situation changed. Kesselring was right-wing nationalist and undoubtedly anti-Semitic, but he never played an active role in the Holocaust.

⁹ Davies, *Simple*,p.303.

¹⁰ Westphal, *German*,pp55/6.

¹¹ Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.42.

¹² Kurzman, *Special*,p.165.

¹³ Bosworth, *Mussolini*,p.393.

Unquestionably, despite his denials, he must have known of these crimes against humanity, as they were later described, and his guilt, for which he was never convicted, lies not so much in his general anti-Semitism, but in his unquestioning support of Hitler who had made the Holocaust a priority. It is possible to be guilty without committing the crime by being in liaison with the one who does: this has long been embedded in English criminal law.

Rome had been declared an Open City, but the Pope, being concerned with a breakdown of law and order, had asked Kesselring to police the city. Some have argued that Kesselring's Open City was 'a mere pretence:' Kesselring had to use the city as a transport-communication area because all the roads led towards the Gustav line and Anzio¹⁴. Rome's citizens were anticipating the end of the war, but during April the city was reaching starvation level. There were bread riots and the SS reacted with brutality shooting 'ten women on a Tiber bridge' as an example¹⁵. No mention of this incident is ever made in connection with Kesselring, underlining that the SS were their own independent wing: they only paid lip service to Wehrmacht Field-Marschals. Himmler had reacted with equal ferocity south of Anzio where the Pontine Marshes had been drained by Mussolini for farming. Himmler had the area checked by 'hydrographers and malariologists, who by flooding knew it would revert to a larval nursery for *Anopheles Labranchiae*, which made the place dangerous and in many ways it was probably the first and only example of biological warfare'¹⁶. The perpetrators were Himmler's medical specialists from Himmler's 'Ancestral Heritage Research Organization'¹⁷. There is no available evidence that suggests Kesselring knew, and if there is no extant evidence it is best to give the benefit of the doubt. However, as will be discussed later, Kesselring was aware of the execution of American POWs, which no one believed possible at that time, and he committed perjury to avoid indictment. He may not have had total control as he wished, but his awareness of what was happening was undoubtedly

¹⁴ Trevelyan Raleigh, *Rome '44 The Battle for the Eternal City* (London:Pimlico, 2004)p.107.

¹⁵ Atkinson, *Day*,p.476.

¹⁶ *Ibid*,p.367.

¹⁷ Evans, *Third*,p.477.

comprehensive. As with the Holocaust, he may have disagreed, he may have had nothing to do with the deed, but he was working with and for the perpetrators; he was complicit.

Military Intelligence

Kesselring technically carried more responsibility than any other commander, though limited, as noted above by other command structures. He was also hampered by having his intelligence continuously breached. He tried to keep his new military HQ in Soratte secret because of spies, although in April 1944 it was seriously bombed¹⁸. His various Headquarters were bombed several times because of information fed through to the Allied forces. Kesselring eventually discovered a spy in his actual staff, 'an Italian operative ... an ardent Royalist who served as a liaison with the Fascist command in Rome, also secretly provided the German order of battle and details about the *Fischfang* counterattack'¹⁹. He was eventually shot after two months of torture failed to break him.

The SOE spy in Rome, Tompkins, was giving such detailed information about units; it was believed he 'was the mole in Kesselring's camp'²⁰. Kesselring was running a military campaign against an enemy who was more welcome in Italy than he was. Kesselring had his own spies, when the mustard-gas leaked after the raid on Bari, which the Allies had tried to keep secret, the Berlin radio through the voice of the *Berlin Bitch* was mocking the soldiers for poisoning themselves with their own gas. Kesselring became suspicious, doubting various Italian commanders, and, as already mentioned, there was the fear that the *Abwehr* chief was not reliable.

Occasionally Allied plans fell into Kesselring's hands, but he never knew that most of his orders were decoded in Bletchley, and dispatched to Allied command the same day. 'In central government circles the few who

¹⁸ Knappe, *Soldat*, p.249/pp.246/7.

¹⁹ Atkinson, *Day*, p.477.

²⁰ Katz, *Fatal*, p.165.

knew of their existence referred to them as 'Boniface'²¹. To the select wider world it was 'Ultra' and information to and from Kesselring was known to the Allies. Kesselring's orders to Mackensen regarding the attack on Anzio, was read by Ultra, and Carlo D'Este opined this was one of the most important Ultra intercepts of the entire war²². Typically, Mark Clark had 'set little store by the valuable information streaming from Bletchley Park' but the Anzio information changed his mind²³. Kesselring's strategies and plans were continuously breached, something he never realised even postwar.

The Policy of Plunder

Kesselring, an educated man who appreciated Italy's culture, contrasted with the infamous Göring who was plundering art throughout Europe. Kesselring alleged he questioned this, but acquiesced when informed it was for the Reich's museum of European Art: a naïve attitude, but more likely necessary compliance.

A Lt-Colonel Schlegel, who 'before the war had been an art historian and librarian,' was the true instigator behind saving the considerable treasures at Monte Cassino, and is still honoured there to this day²⁴. When Schlegel and a Lt Becker, members of the Herman Göring Division approached the Abbot, Dom Gregorio Diamare, suggesting they save the treasures and library, the monks were suspicious because of Göring's reputation as 'perhaps the most celebrated snapper-up of unconsidered trifles in the Second World War'²⁵. Eventually they accepted this once Weizsacker spoke with Kesselring, who, with Senger, authorised they be transported to the Vatican, a safe place²⁶. After the war Kesselring implied he was the true

²¹ Colville, *Churchillians*, p.59 Boniface was English known as the Apostle to the Germans.

²² D'Este, *Fatal*, p.184.

²³ McKay Sinclair, *The Secret Listeners* (London: Aurum, 2012)p.280.

²⁴ Atkinson, *Day*, p.399.

²⁵ *Militärgeschichtliches, Volume-IX/X*, p.907.

²⁶ Not until the German Ambassador Dr Rahn's memoirs were published few knew of Hitler's intention to have the Vatican 'fumigated' by German troops, Westphal, *German*, p.168 It was considered that the Pope should be imprisoned, and the Vatican robbed of its priceless treasures, Kurzman-*A Special Mission*.

saviour of the Cassino treasures; he may well have signed the order, but the initiative started with men like Senger and especially Schlegel.

Most of the art treasures of Naples had been placed in the monastery, and it took three weeks to pack; 'considering the precarious position of the German armies north of Naples, it was an extraordinary use of military effort'²⁷. It was suspected with some justification that not all the work arrived at the Vatican but an appeal 'was made to Kesselring himself, {and} the recalcitrant Göring Division finally agreed to return part of their holdings'²⁸. Some Italian treasures were purloined and some lost forever, but even Kesselring's most ardent critics acknowledged that this was not his doing.

According to von Weizsäcker, German ambassador to the Vatican, Rome's survival was due to the Pope and Kesselring²⁹. Later evidence indicated that it was Hitler's demand that preserved Rome. Kesselring had recognised the open city, but, as mentioned, there had been no withdrawal of 'military installations ... if only for geographical reasons, and because of the railway system,' it was difficult not to do otherwise³⁰. Despite accusations levelled against Kesselring many concur that Rome avoided disaster and, along with Cardinal Schuster, he was also credited with helping save Florence, Bologna and Milan³¹. His reputation at this stage was not one of villainy, he had interfered in the resurrected Italian fascist movement, and stopped the 'torture chambers,' and up to June 1943 his reputation in Italy was reasonable³².

Kesselring had once famously remarked that the Italian campaign was like 'waging war in a museum,' and although he could assume a modicum of credit for not totally destroying or plundering that museum, he

²⁷ Nicholas, *Rape*, p.241.

²⁸ Ibid, p.244.

²⁹ Weizsäcker von Ernst, *Memoirs* (London: Gollanz, 1951)p.293.

³⁰ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.25.

³¹ Salter, *Nazi*, p.186.

³² Dollmann, *Interpreter*, p.287 and re-confirmed in Salter, *Nazi*, p.80.

was ruthless with Italy's economic future³³. On the 20th September 1943 Kesselring issued a directive to retreating troops that industrial-machinery be sent north; and there be a demolition of communication-systems, power-plants, docks/water supplies. It was done ruthlessly, and when, for example, Benelli's, a motorcycle manufacturer tried to avoid this 'the Germans kidnapped and held a Benelli brother as hostage' until the cache was revealed³⁴. It ought to be noted that the Allies had organised a Task-Force of 'technical thieves' to purloin anything of military interest as Italy, France and Germany were invaded³⁵. Museums, churches, monasteries and hospitals were mainly spared. It has also been claimed that he ordered that 'milk-cows should not be killed because their milk was important for Roman children', but given the evidence of history this seems unlikely³⁶. This type of fighting-defence was horrendous on civilians. It is estimated 92% of all sheep and cattle in South-Italy with 86% of poultry was taken by the retreating army, there were delayed action-bombs, booby-traps, but, it must be recalled 'some Allied soldiers behaved no better than their enemies, vandalising priceless artefacts'³⁷. Nevertheless, despite the behaviour of some Allied troops there is no escaping the fact that Kesselring's retreating troops destroyed much of Italy, they 'fired the ricks and farmhouses, slaughtered the cattle, and murdered more than a few civilians'³⁸. Despite Dollmann's strange claim that Kesselring worked with Speer to avoid Hitler's burnt-earth policies he had little control over widespread troops³⁹. In mid-October 1944, Kesselring spent time with Albert Speer discussing making North Italy self-sufficient which was lacking reality. Kesselring's policy of removing industrial plants was for the salvation of Germany, not the survival of Italy.

³³ Dollman, *Interpreter*, p.310.

³⁴ Morgan, *Italy's*, p.145.

³⁵ Longden S, *T-Force* (London: Constable, 2009)p.9.

³⁶ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.240.

³⁷ Hastings, *Hell*, p.454.

³⁸ Atkinson, *Day*, pp.534/5.

³⁹ Dollmann, *Interpreter*, p.306.

The Four Battles

Bari

The raid on Bari is noteworthy because it underlines the degree of complacency that had crept into the Allied camp; the Luftwaffe raid was more a failure of the Allies than the brilliance of Kesselring and the Luftwaffe. The Allied superiority in the air was overwhelming, and the number of German planes was diminishing every month. In late November 1943 Kesselring held a conference at his HQ in Frascati with Richthofen, Pelz, Baumbach to discuss how to slow the inexorable Allied advance; the Foggia airfields were seen as the most viable option. Richthofen argued for Bari because of the huge number of supplies passing through the port, and Kesselring agreed. Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, (1st Allied Tactical Air Force) had claimed the Luftwaffe was finished, stating that 'I would regard it as a personal affront and insult if the Luftwaffe would attempt any significant action in this area'⁴⁰. Richthofen was informed by spies that such was their confidence the Allies were unloading at night with all the lights on in Bari. When the raid took place on December 2nd the complacency of the Allies was self-evident, and the port was lit up.

The raid was so successful it became known as the 'Little Pearl Harbour' or 'Second Pearl Harbour.' The Luftwaffe managed to sink seventeen ships, and damage many others, as well as the dockyards⁴¹. Amongst these vessels was a Liberty ship called the *SS John Harvey*: it was carrying mustard gas bombs which caused massive fatalities⁴².

Bari Port was out of commission for a long period of time, and was the second greatest shipping disaster for the Allies during World War II. Kesselring's raid had some serious effects on the Allied campaign; not least amongst the problems was lack of supplies to the 15th Air Force at Foggia

⁴⁰ Infield Glen, *Disaster at Bari* (New York: Bantam, 1988)pp.29/30.

⁴¹ 7 seriously damaged.

⁴² See Appendix 6.

which had been dependent upon Bari's imports. It 'prevented Mediterranean Allied Air Forces from attacking German airfields prior to the amphibious landing at Anzio'⁴³. Some historians believe the ramifications of the Bari raid stretched as far as Normandy⁴⁴. This may be putting too much weight on the German success, but it did cause serious problems for the Allied campaign and at the expense of many lives. From Kesselring's point of view it was an outstanding success, but it succeeded because the Allied air command was over confident and mistakenly thought the Luftwaffe was finished. Allowing the lights to stay on just a few miles from the enemy lines was a blunder, especially with so many merchant vessels side by side. This fatal error by Allied command was first hidden from the public, and then excused by admiring Kesselring's skill.

Gustav Line and Monte Cassino

There were many destructive battles before the major assault on the Gustav Line. Kesselring was surprised at the Allies' slow progress; it transpired that the Allied casualty rate was greater than the German, and there was a 'steady rate of attrition to which Montgomery contributed with the uninspired obstinacy of his methods'⁴⁵. The campaign had become a positional-war, and the British Official History speaks of Kesselring as a 'formidable commander,' whereas it might have been more accurate to question Montgomery's leadership, but at that time it would have been inappropriate⁴⁶.

Kesselring had competent commanders, especially Senger and Chief of Staff Westphal; Vietinghoff was back in command of the Tenth Army, with Mackensen as commander of the newly-formed Fourteenth Army. After the British widened the bridgehead at the Garigliano, and the American 36th Division arrived at the Rapido they were met by heavy German

⁴³ Infield, *Disaster*, p.237.

⁴⁴ Infield Glen, *Disaster at Bari*.

⁴⁵ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.193.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.194.

artillery⁴⁷. The German resistance was strong, and Alexander wrote to Churchill that 'the Germans are fighting magnificently. Never imagine they are crashing. Their staff work is brilliantly flexible'⁴⁸. However, there was poor planning by Clark; it was a slaughter and 'the officers and men of the 36th Division were unequivocal as to who was responsible ... it was entirely Mark Clark's fault'⁴⁹. There were some persuasive arguments that the 'bad show' was the responsibility of the local commander Walker, but either way the Allies made it easier for Kesselring and his subordinates to defend and earn Alexander's praise⁵⁰. Once again the admiration is given to Kesselring instead of questioning the leadership of the Allied command.

As the Anzio landings were being contained, Hitler issued *Order Number 52* in which he demanded that the fight had to be merciless not only against the enemy, but against any officers or units failing in their duty, referring to that 'hazardous enterprise which will be drowned in the blood of Anglo-Saxon soldiers'⁵¹. After the Anzio landing Hitler had sent a message to the troops demanding 'it must be fought with bitter hatred against an enemy who wages a ruthless war of annihilation ... without any higher ethical aims, and strives only for the destruction of Germany and European culture'⁵². Kesselring's first biographer claimed that Hitler's ruthless orders 'weighed on his conscience,' but given Kesselring's reaction to later events this seems problematical⁵³. There is no written evidence that Kesselring demurred from the orders.

The Gustav line was a series of battles, but the Allied victory on Monte Cassino was elusive and cost many numbers of lives⁵⁴. Kesselring

⁴⁷ It was during this time Kesselring was shot again down by Allied aircraft, crashing into a pond and turning up in Vietinghoff's HQ covered in mud.

⁴⁸ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.144.

⁴⁹ Harper, *Battles*, p.174.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.177.

⁵¹ The last Directive was No 51 - thereafter they were Orders/Trevor-Roper Hugh, *Hitler's*, pp232/3.

⁵² *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs 1939-45*, (London: Chatham Publishing, 1990)p.377.

⁵³ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.199.

⁵⁴ The hill was heavily defended, 'in November the Germans had put 100 steel shelters into the Cassino position, and they added more later, as well as 76 armoured casements and a

admitted the use of the 'natural features with concrete armoured positions and enfilading fire' made defence easier than attack⁵⁵. They had prepared their defence points and 'their skilled commanders were determined to hold out whatever ... they were assisted by Allied ineptitude in the first three battles'⁵⁶.

On February 3rd Alexander ordered the New Zealand 2nd Division and the 4th Indian Division under General Freyberg to join General Clark's 5th Army. Freyberg believed that Cassino and its surrounds were inviolate unless the Abbey were destroyed: he was convinced the Abbey was an observation point and demanded its destruction; this drastic thinking may have been influenced when he heard that his only son was missing at Anzio⁵⁷. The destruction of the Abbey is a point of contention to this day, but it played into Kesselring's hands as if he had been handed a victory.

Typically of the Allied command there were division of opinions, claims and counter-claims that continued after the war. Many argued Monte Cassino could be outflanked, including Major-General Tucker and the French Commander Juin⁵⁸. Tucker claimed Freyberg 'should never have been put in charge of a corps, he had not the tactical understanding' he nevertheless had Alexander's support⁵⁹. 'Tucker could not understand why Cassino town, monastery and point 593 be made point of attack' unless bombing could guarantee total destruction of resistance otherwise outflank along the northern route and Gari river - 'I went on arguing this from hospital by letter through my divisional headquarters.'⁶⁰ Later Alexander wrote that a misinterpretation of a German radio message prompted the Allies to think the Germans were inside the Abbey⁶¹.

number of armoured machine-gun nests.'Harper, *Battles*,p.7.

⁵⁵ Detweiler, Burdick, Rohwer (Eds), *German Military Studies WW II, Kesselring's remarks on Med Campaign 4th July 1948* Vol 14 (London: Garland, 1979)pp3/4.

⁵⁶ Harper, *Battles*,p.196.

⁵⁷ Atkinson, *Day*,p.432.

⁵⁸ Hoyt, *Back*,p.159 claims it was Tucker who asked Freyberg to bomb the abbey and recently two New Zealand historians have claimed the same, Harper, *Battles*,p16.

⁵⁹ Hodges Richard, *History Today, Tempting providence: The Bombing of Monte Cassino* (Volume 44, Issue 2, 1994)

⁶⁰ Carver Tom, *Where the Hell have you Been?* (London: Short books, 2009)p.144.

⁶¹ '...there now occurred a curious and slightly comical incident ... an American officer ... picked up on the wireless ... conclusive proof that the Germans were inside the

It is extremely unlikely that the Germans used the Abbey despite what the occasional spotter-plane and misunderstood radio-messages claimed. Kesselring refused the use of the Abbey, having 'given his assurance to the Vatican on the 11th December 1943'⁶². Westphal confirmed that Kesselring had the Abbey cordoned off by military police for its protection⁶³. The Abbot said the Germans had not broken the agreement; the Abbot's secretary, Don Martino Matronola's diary recorded that the Germans never entered the premises⁶⁴. Senger, a Lay-Benedictine attending mass said he was the only German present; and even Churchill later admitted that the evidence indicated there were no Germans⁶⁵.

The military theorist JCF Fuller described the bombing as 'not so much a piece of vandalism as an act of sheer tactical stupidity'⁶⁶. The Germans were dug in below the buildings on that formidable hill, and the antiquity of the religious site was a secondary consideration to Freyberg and Eisenhower who decided human life was more important; yet they were aware 'that as many as 3000 Italian civilians had sought shelter within the monastery's walls'⁶⁷. The Germans had declared a three-hundred yard wide non-combat zone around the abbey, which in terms of the sharp decline is still within the shadows of the walls. To preserve the Abbey meant avoiding the mountain, but it was militarily out of the question for the Germans, so whether the monastery was occupied or not was a fatuous debate - Monte Cassino dominated the area, and if they had declared it an 'open site' that would not bind the Allies⁶⁸.

monastery. The interpreted conversation ran: "Wo ist der Abt? Ist er noch im Kloster?" 'Abt' is the Germany military abbreviation for 'Abteilung' meaning a section. unfortunately 'Abt' also means Abbot, and since 'Abt' is masculine and 'abteilung' feminine, (sic) the conversation referred to the Abbott ... a little knowledge of a foreign tongue can be a dangerous thing." - Alexander, *Memoirs*, pp119/20.

⁶² Porch, *Hitler's*, p.522.

⁶³ Westphal, *German*, p.155.

⁶⁴ Hodges, *Tempting*, p.246.

⁶⁵ Senger, *Neither*, p.187.

⁶⁶ Harper, *Battles*, p.35.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.36.

⁶⁸ Today the Abbey sells an account and castigates the Allies for the destruction.

On the morning of the 15th February 96th Bombardment Group in Foggia read their brief which stated that the Abbey '*is a huge ancient monastery which the Germans have chosen as a key defence and have loaded with heavy guns ... the monastery has accounted for the lives of upwards of 2,000 American boys who felt the same as we do about church property and who paid for it because the Germans do not understand anything human when total war is concerned. The monastery MUST be destroyed and everyone in it as there is no one in but Germans*'⁶⁹. Later that day over four-hundred tons of bombs were dropped on the Abbey killing sheltering Italians and monks, and totally destroying the buildings: according to Senger no German was killed⁷⁰.

The bombing will always remain contentious and the Germans made propaganda from the 'Philistine' act. A Berlin diarist wrote that 'photographs of the battle of Monte Cassino are piling up. The destruction of that beautiful monastery is horrifying. What will happen to Florence, Venice, Rome⁷¹?' In Dublin de Valera took a brief moral advantage to send an appeal to the belligerent governments and to Roosevelt personally on behalf of Rome⁷². Kesselring said the bombing 'was not only quite unnecessary but prejudicial to the subsequent conduct on the battle'⁷³. In this Kesselring was accurate; the German parachutists, led by Major Rudolf Bohmler, used the rubble as a defence. Sengler wrote, 'now we would occupy the abbey without scruple, especially as ruins are better for defence than intact buildings'⁷⁴. Bohmler later wrote that if the Allies had attacked immediately with a flanking movement, they would have won the hill, but the paratroopers had time to turn the rubble into a fortress.⁷⁵ It created shelter, defence and advantage points; it is easier to fight from rubble than from a building. It has been said that from the Allied perspective 'there did not appear to be a glimmer of intelligent leadership anywhere from division up'⁷⁶. Questionable leadership by the Allied

⁶⁹ Hodges, *Tempting*.

⁷⁰ In the morning 257 tons of 500 lb bombs, 59 tons of 100 lb incendiaries; in the afternoon 283 tons each weighing 1000 lbs.

⁷¹ Vassiltchikov, *Berlin*, p.151.

⁷² Times, April 20th 1944, p.3.

⁷³ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.195.

⁷⁴ Sengler, *Neither*, p.202.

⁷⁵ Harper, *Battles*, p.54.

⁷⁶ Atkinson, *Day*, p.439.

command has been the subject of much investigation, especially with Mark Clark, - 'there is no doubt that the tactics adopted by Clark's 5th Army at Monte Cassino were poor'⁷⁷. The historian Ellis on his book on Monte Cassino concludes with the powerful indictment that both the 5th and 8th armies were 'poorly led during the Cassino battles'⁷⁸. The bombing which created defensive strong points and the late, untimed, infantry attack were indicators of this poor planning, and made the German defence easier, and helped create the image of Kesselring as the great commander of defence. It was a mistake which gave Kesselring a better platform than he deserved.

The debate will undoubtedly continue: the Germans appeared to respect the Abbey and its treasures, but they could not ignore the dominating mountain on which the Abbey stood, and the non-combat zone was pointless. The Allies were right to place lives before ancient monuments, but the bombing provided excellent defensive rubble for the paratroopers. Monte Cassino had an effect in that property of an historic nature such as the Ponte Vecchio in Florence and Venice, were spared by Kesselring, and on Feb 17th, forty-four days after the bombing, Alexander sent a belated letter to commanders about preserving 'property of historical and educational importance in Italy'⁷⁹. In the postwar period the debate intensified with Clark claiming he was always against the venture, but Freyberg, then New Zealand's Governor-General in a letter to Kippenberger, wrote that Clark had said 'nothing would do but to bring in the heavy fortresses'⁸⁰. Personality conflict in the Allied coalition during and after the war assisted Kesselring.

On Wednesday March 15th there was another bombing raid on Monte Cassino. Over 1,400 bombs were dropped but, because of the safety of the rubble from the initial raid, the parachutists were dug in, and although they could only move at night they still put up formidable resistance. Churchill complained about the failure to take Monte Cassino to Alexander, who in his reply wrote that lack of success was that the 'the tenacity of these

⁷⁷ Harper, *Battles*, p.64.

⁷⁸ Ellis John, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (London: Sphere Books, 1985) p.406.

⁷⁹ Hodges, *Tempting*.

⁸⁰ Harper, *Battles*, pp.52/3.

German paratroops is quite remarkable I doubt if there are any other troops in the world who could have stood up to it and then gone on fighting with the ferocity they have⁸¹. Despite warnings from Eaker the rubble created by the bombing stopped the proposed use of tanks, and again the infantry were sent in late and in small numbers, 'dribbled in' according to Kippenberger⁸².

The use of air superiority became questionable at this stage. Kesselring and his commanders had only a few aircraft at their disposal: in January 44 they had 370 planes whereas 'the Allies had close to 4,000'⁸³. It would appear the Allies failed at this juncture to use their supremacy appropriately; it was 'sadly inadequate'⁸⁴. The actual bombing raid on Cassino town damaged towns away from Cassino and killed Allied troops and hitting '8th Army HQ, General Juin's FEC HQ, Allied gun-positions, the 4th Indian Division's B Echelon and a Moroccan military hospital'⁸⁵. What planes the Luftwaffe had were used effectively, especially in shipping attacks with the new radio-guided bomb⁸⁶. Senger admitted the air attacks on their supply lines were disturbing, but they were never cut, and the aircraft came at enormous costs: 'some 315,000 men were needed to keep those thousands of aircraft operational - almost as many as the 5th or 8th Army'⁸⁷. It should also be noted that aircraft were frequently grounded because of 'appalling weather conditions,' and Anzio would not have survived without air support.⁸⁸ Regarding the Gustav line Churchill saw the 'air offensive as a failure'⁸⁹.

Alexander wanted to stop the frontal attacks, but Freyberg was insistent they could win, but on March 23rd Alexander called off frontal attacks for a time. 'The performance of commanders is critical to the outcome

⁸¹ Salmaggi C & Paallavisini A, *2194 Days of War – Chronology* (Milan: Galley Press, 1977)p.498.

⁸² Harper, *Battles*,p.149.

⁸³ *Ibid*,p.78.

⁸⁴ Ellis, *Cassino*,p.20.

⁸⁵ Harper, *Battles*,p.144.

⁸⁶ Fritz X - it sank Italian flagship Roma and disabled American warships at Salerno.

⁸⁷ Harper, *Battles*,p.92.

⁸⁸ Ellis, *Cassino*,p.32.

⁸⁹ Harper, *Battles*,p.163.

of any conflict' and this was more than apparent at Monte Cassino⁹⁰. The British official historians were condemnatory in their criticism of Wilson who they claimed 'lost touch with the realities of war'⁹¹. The poor planning by Clark, 'perhaps the most egocentric Allied general of the War,' and Alexander, who 'acquired a false reputation as a great commander in the field,' along with Freyberg's mistakes meant that Kesselring's defence strategy worked better than it should have done given the over-powering numbers⁹². 'On the whole both 5th and 8th Armies were poorly led during the Cassino battles, where operations were consistently marred by lack of strategic vision and slipshod staff work'⁹³.

As well as weak Allied leadership the Italian terrain of mountains, rivers, valleys and winter weather gave Kesselring the best defensive measures; it was the Allies who had the difficult task. In addition to this 'modern artillery and the invention of the machine gun meant there was a relative shift to the power of defence on the battlefield'⁹⁴. It has been described as a 'military campaign of consummate strategic stupidity - an offensive up the entire length of a long, thin, mountainous country.'⁹⁵ Kesselring's reputation was enhanced because the Allies were cautious: a criticism frequently made of Montgomery who was always vigilant on the grounds of maintaining his reputation. Kesselring's reputation was enhanced because he was defending and not attacking, and the opposition made too many mistakes: Monte Cassino was a bonus for Kesselring's reputation.

Anzio

The concept behind *Shingle*, the Anzio landing, was to break the deadlock of the Gustav Line and Monte Cassino. It was an effort to save

⁹⁰ Harper, *Battles*, p.99.

⁹¹ Molony CJC & Flynn FC, Davies HL & Gleave TP, *The Mediterranean and Middle East, Volume V* (London: HMSO, 1973) p.386.

⁹² Keegan J, *The Second World War* (London: Arrow Books, 1990) p.359/ Stated by Montgomery and quoted in Harper, *Battles*, p.105/Alexander and Wilson did not get on, Harper, *Battles*, p.110.

⁹³ Ellis, *Cassino*, p.475.

⁹⁴ Dandeker C, *Surveillance, Power and Modernity* (London: Polity Press, 1990) pp.82/3.

⁹⁵ Faulkner N, Military History, *The Second Front* (Issue 38 November 2013) p.27.

what Churchill called the 'stranded whale'⁹⁶. Unlike Salerno Kesselring was caught unawares, but Operation *Richard* meant reserves were prepared, and with considerable alacrity he drew in additional manpower. In postwar interviews Kesselring remained critical of the frequently criticised General Lucas who, having landed dug in even though the way inland was virtually undefended: 'the road to Rome was open, and an audacious flying column could have penetrated to the city,' Westphal wrote⁹⁷. It has been claimed that on the first morning an American Lt John Cummings of the 36th Engineer Regiment attached to Truscott's 3rd Division, ordered a reconnaissance along highway 7, the Appian Way to Rome, and it was all open⁹⁸.

At Anzio Kesselring recalled the Allies being cautious in the Great War, as well as Montgomery's failure to break through following his success at the Sangro⁹⁹. Lucas was initially supported in this caution by Clark and Alexander, who recalled the near failure of Salerno, and who prompted the need to build-up forces; Maitland Wilson called this the 'Salerno complex.'

News of the landings reached Kesselring by 3am, by 5am troops were heading to the beach, and by 7.10am orders were given for northern reserves to move south. Kesselring flew to the front in the early morning and returned late evening to avoid Allied aircraft¹⁰⁰. The situation stalemated, and as German numbers increased both Allied Commanders and Churchill criticised the hapless Lucas. Some argue the distance between Rome and Anzio was too long to defend, and Lucas had been made the scapegoat. Lucas found support in the memoirs of Major General Harmon, and Major General Temple who pointed out that 'the Germans produced seven Divisions in ten days with plenty of armour.'¹⁰¹ It is generally agreed that the breakout was delayed too long, and further contributes to the view that Kesselring was opposed by mediocrity.

⁹⁶ 22nd January 1944.

⁹⁷ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.266/Westphal, *German*, p.158.

⁹⁸ Katz, *Fatal*, p.151.

⁹⁹ Westphal, *German*, p.166.

¹⁰⁰ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.50.

¹⁰¹ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.404.

Kesselring was blinded by lack of aerial reconnaissance, and not helped by Admiral Canaris issuing a categorical denial of a planned invasion¹⁰². Canaris had just taken to the air when the invasion started¹⁰³. The policeman Schellenberg suspected Canaris of treachery, and Kesselring's ignorance of the invasion meant he had sent reserves to the southern front leaving Rome exposed¹⁰⁴. Kesselring was on the back foot, but the sluggishness of the Allied command saved the immediate fall of Rome and entrapment of major German arms. The German logistical strategy was efficient: Kesselring moved troops back and forth where they were needed like a 'mastermind controlling reserves to Anzio and Cassino ... who managed like a Chess Master to balance each front'¹⁰⁵. There was an initial sense of achievement in Anzio because in one day they had disembarked 50,000 soldiers with their equipment¹⁰⁶. However, even as Lucas dug in Kesselring ordered von Pohl to surround the beachhead, with a string of batteries strong enough to make it difficult for tanks, and other weapons to be rushed into the area; as Kesselring wrote, 'time was our ally'¹⁰⁷.

At the end of January, General Lucas attempted the first tentative breakout from Anzio, around Cisterna and Campoleone. Edward Grace, a Gordon Highlanders' officer, referred to this area as the bitterest fighting of the war, and more akin to the trenches of the Great War¹⁰⁸. For Kesselring it was a matter of anticipating the next move; he had reliable commanders such as Heidrich and Baade who constantly secured the area. Kesselring and his commanders were more able than the inexperienced Allied commanders; Lucas had the reputation of tending to stay in his shelter.

¹⁰² Head of Abwehr.

¹⁰³ Westphal, *German*, p.156.

¹⁰⁴ Schellenberg, *Schellenberg* (London: Mayflower, 1965)p.157-8

¹⁰⁵ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.255.

¹⁰⁶ Allies dropped two-million leaflets over Rome announcing liberation.

¹⁰⁷ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.194.

¹⁰⁸ Grace Edward, *The Perilous Road to Rome and Beyond* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2007).

At a critical stage Hitler interfered, ordering that the Infantry Demonstration (*Lehr*) Regiment be sent for the assault. As Kesselring noted this was a home-defence force with no battle exposure; they lacked experience and the time of attack meant they would be fighting in unfamiliar terrain in the dark. Hitler's interference cost 3,000 men and thirty tanks: Kesselring wrote 'they were thrown back disgracefully'¹⁰⁹. By March 1st Kesselring realised they had failed because of the sheer number of Allied tanks. They had failed for two reasons: the first was the sheer size of the Allied reserves, but secondly Hitler's inane interference: he had insisted the wrong regiment lead the assault, and Kesselring once again would not challenge him.

During this attack Lucas had been replaced by Truscott, with orders to breakout from the bridgehead. By March 11th there were some 90,000 Americans and 35,000 British ashore. Kesselring expressed the obvious concern that the Allied commanders were becoming battle-experienced and producing better combat-formations, and in an interesting insight Kesselring criticised German propaganda for goading the Allies for lack of initiative¹¹⁰. Kesselring ordered the strengthening of parts of the Gustav Line to enable defensive retreats, and also strengthened the switch-lines to the Hitler Line, renamed the Senger Bolt¹¹¹. The Anzio beachhead seemed frozen and 'Kesselring used this hiatus to create a new defensive line, the Caesar C Line, to contain the beachhead'¹¹². Although the defence scheme is often called a series of 'defence lines' this is a misnomer, it was 'a series of defended positions in depth,' a system Kesselring perfected¹¹³.

Kesselring was professional in his approach, as were his subordinates, but the Allied command was inexperienced. It would have been an interesting scenario had Patton and Truscott been put ashore first; as it was the final victory of Anzio was undermined by the initial failures and the

¹⁰⁹ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.192/*Kesselring*, p.196.

¹¹⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.198.

¹¹¹ Hitler did not want his name associated with a potential failure.

¹¹² Knight Nigel, *Churchill, The Greatest Briton Unmasked* (Cincinnati: David and Charles Ltd, 2009)p.251.

¹¹³ Alexander, *Memoirs*, p.117.

reason given was Kesselring's ability. It is true that Kesselring was a reliable and well trained military commander, but because of the inexperience and ineptitude of some of the Allied leaders he was given the credit.

Rome

On April 12th King Victor Emmanuel announced his abdication to son Umberto, who in an interview with the Times claimed his father had not opposed Mussolini's wish for war because he had the support of the people¹¹⁴. It was 'clear that the royal household would act against the interests of the Italian people in order to save the throne'¹¹⁵. Ten days later Badoglio established the first government of National Unity made up of the parties of the Committee of National Liberation (CNL).

Kesselring, however, was more concerned with his sparse resources and knowing his soldiers were continuously on duty: heavy casualties were being experienced by both sides in the continuous skirmishes but the two fronts appeared stable. Vietinghoff informed Kesselring that all was 'as usual,' and was called to Berlin to receive a medal; Senger went for the same reason plus a course on ideology; Westphal was in hospital. Allowing the absence of so many key commanders was a fault that Kesselring does not dwell on in his memoirs, because with his commanders away he was caught by surprise when the Allies erupted with a major offensive on May 12th in some 'fierce and costly fighting'¹¹⁶. Kesselring produced plans for Vietinghoff's Tenth Army to retreat from the Liri Valley which was eventually achieved¹¹⁷.

Kesselring's defence scheme had held months longer than the Allies had anticipated, but was now crumbling¹¹⁸. The German defence was being attacked at every point, and on May 22nd the French made some sudden

¹¹⁴ Times, April 20th 1944, p.4.

¹¹⁵ Mammarella, *Italy*, p.63.

¹¹⁶ Doherty Richard, *Eighth Army in Italy* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2007) pp.70-71.

¹¹⁷ Which Senger claimed could not be done.

¹¹⁸ Operation *Diadem*.

advances at Pico which some claim made 'Kesselring cry with rage'¹¹⁹. Kesselring asked for the 29th Panzer Grenadiers to be placed at the disposal of the Tenth Army, but Mackensen was unhappy about this because he was facing a serious breakout attempt at Anzio. Kesselring became critical of Mackensen who, when he offered Kesselring his resignation for the third time at the end of May, Kesselring accepted it and replaced him with Joachim Lemelsen: 'smiling Albert remained a tough no-nonsense German General'¹²⁰. He used Mackensen again, but it sent a warning to subordinates about reacting to orders without question. This contrasts with the American Mark Clark and his attitude to his superior Alexander, and more pertinently Alexander's reaction when, as shall be described, Clark deliberately disobeyed orders with incalculable consequences over his infatuation with conquering Rome.

Ultra had picked up Kesselring's message to Hitler asking permission for both armies to retreat, and for Rome to be evacuated without a fight¹²¹. In breaking out from Anzio General Clark had been instructed to entrap the Tenth-Army by encirclement, by making for Valmontone to stop the German supply route¹²². Instead, in one of the worse Allied blunders, he turned towards Rome to be met by Mackensen in the Alban Hills acting as a delaying line before the Caesar Defences. Clark was determined to take Rome at all costs, and take it before the British arrived to share any glory. In his postwar memoirs Clark admitted that he intended to be the first to take Rome from the south in fifteen centuries, 'but we intended to see that the people back home knew that it was the 5th Army'¹²³.

Clark's failure to close the Valmontone Gap, which could have entrapped the whole southern wing of the Tenth-Army, and forced some elements of the 14th to retreat, went against Alexander's orders in Operation

¹¹⁹ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.288.

¹²⁰ Porch, *Hitler's*, pp.422/3.

¹²¹ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.307 - To avoid Rome breaking out into civil discord and uprisings, as in Naples, Kesselring ordered that Lieutenant-General Mälzer attend a gala performance of Gigli to give the impression all was as usual. It almost beggars belief that Kesselring found time to deal with this sort of detail. Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.381.

¹²² A major point in Operation *Diadem*.

¹²³ Clark Mark, *Calculated Risk* (London: Harrup, 1951) p.332.

Buffalo, and, by so doing 'he deliberately committed what must be ranked as one of the most misguided blunders made by an Allied commander during World War II'¹²⁴. Clark was obsessed with ensuring the Americans arrived in Rome before the British, whom he believed were conspiring against him. Clark was an embittered Anglophobe and his 'growing disdain for his British colleagues in Italy began to affect his judgement'¹²⁵. Clark's planning was poor and at Salerno, the Rapido crossing and Rome he made gross errors of judgment¹²⁶. Truscott never changed his mind that Clark had made the greatest error for the sake of personal vanity. Had the Valmontone Gap been closed, and the Germans encircled, then Rome would have fallen probably more quickly than the circuitous route taken by Clark. Kesselring could see what 'Clark obsessed with his private goals could not see, that it was the combination of the Allied thrusts ... that posed the threat'.¹²⁷

Clark arrived in Rome as the all-conquering saviour, but the failure to capture an entire German army was a serious error. Alexander was too gentlemanly, and there were no personal consequences; Kesselring had sacked Mackensen for being tardy, 'Adolf Hitler would have had him {Clark} shot'¹²⁸. This major Allied blunder allowed Kesselring to continue the defence for which he was becoming famous; it could have been a very different history had Clark followed orders.

In the battle leading up to Rome the Allies lost 42,000 men and the Germans 25,000. It is apparent Kesselring was not faced with highly competent commanders on the Allied side. 'No important victory was achievable, certainly not by field commanders of such meagre abilities as Alexander and Clark'¹²⁹. It has been believed by many that Clark 'was unfit to be an army commander,' and there is little doubt by taking Rome and not

¹²⁴ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.365.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹²⁷ Graham, *Tug*, p.315.

¹²⁸ Whicker, *Whicker's*, p.183.

¹²⁹ Hastings, *Hell*, p.454/5.

entrapping the Germans forces, he gave Kesselring the means of prolonging the war in Italy to the bitter end¹³⁰.

Alexander wrote that 'every time we attacked Kesselring in Italy we took him completely by surprise; but he showed very great skill in extricating himself from the desperate situation into which his faulty intelligence had led him'¹³¹. Once again a senior Allied commander used Kesselring's growing reputation for failure of his own orders. In addition to the problem of outwitting Kesselring, Alexander admitted that 'I think we may well have underestimated the remarkable resilience and toughness of the Germans'¹³². Again on March 22nd he wrote to Brooke 'unfortunately we are fighting the best soldiers in the world - what men'¹³³! It is true that Kesselring had to order the paratroopers out of Cassino 'otherwise they would have fought to the death,' but the praise of the enemy covers the weakness of one's own side¹³⁴.

Kesselring has been admired by friend and foe for his ability in commanding fighting defences: he once claimed that his military strategy in Italy was 'simply to make the enemy exhaust himself,' and had it not been for the massive Allied resources Kesselring would have been successful¹³⁵. There is little doubt that once again the Allies lacked the true measure of their adversaries, and although much of Kesselring's military standing springs from this period, his reputation was assisted by the weak Allied command.

Conclusion to Mediterranean Military campaigns

The whole Italian campaign has been questioned, claiming that 'Churchill did not appreciate that landings in France were simply a better way to defeat Germany than fighting up the spine in Italy'¹³⁶. In Italy

¹³⁰ Hastings, *Hell*, p.530

¹³¹ Alexander, *Memoirs*, p.125

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Hastings, *Hell*, p.529

¹³⁴ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.274

¹³⁵ Atkinson, *Day*, p.518

¹³⁶ Knight, *Churchill*, p.255

Kesselring's reputation was enhanced by some serious blunders by the Allied leadership, and their uninventive predictable planning, but there were other factors which allowed the Germans to give such a sound defence. The Americans had felt propelled into Italy by Churchill, and after Salerno there was a distinct feeling they were a sideshow to Western Europe, and Marshall admitted 'to maintain morale under these conditions was very hard'¹³⁷. The American soldiers had learned a great deal since their baptism at Kasserine Pass, and had 'gone beyond being an army at dawn, {but they} still had much to learn'¹³⁸. On the other hand, it has been claimed that because of the Great War the British were forever conscious of avoiding 'unnecessary risk where possible'¹³⁹. 'In Italy' Marshall wrote, 'the fighting spirit and aggressive quality of British Divisions began to decline, and for the reason of the sheer factor of exhaustion'¹⁴⁰. The diary of a British infantry man, Rifleman Bowlby illustrates both the sense of exhaustion and the need to stay alive as being paramount, 'the ethics of desertion had a deeper pull'¹⁴¹. Bowlby faced danger throughout the latter part of the Italian campaign, 'the fear of disgrace' being his source of his courage, but not once does he appear to have fired a weapon'¹⁴².

To bring about the collapse of the Monte Cassino resistance it took the Polish brigade who bore utter hatred for the enemy, and similarly with the French under General Juin who created a breach in the line. All these factors are in the background of a mountainous country which by its nature is easier to defend than attack. Logistics were on the Allied side, but man to man it was a bare numerical superiority over the Germans 'at a slender one and one-quarter to one'¹⁴³. In effect the Allies were attacking the most effective army of the Second World War in terrain that favoured the defensive¹⁴⁴. The ineptitude of the leaders, the inexperience and exhaustion of many troops, the

¹³⁷ Harper, *Battles*, p.216.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.218.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.223.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.225.

¹⁴¹ Bowlby Alex, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* (London: Cassell, 2002) p.17.

¹⁴² Ibid, p.195.

¹⁴³ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.331.

¹⁴⁴ Harper, *Battles*, p.244.

sheer landscape were all in Kesselring's favour, so even after Rome the fighting in Italy 'limped on rarely on the front pages but always hard and bloody'¹⁴⁵. Kesselring's reputation stood high as an excuse for Allied failures.

¹⁴⁵ Parker, *Monte*, p.358.

CHAPTER 7

NORTH ITALY AND PARTISANS (1944-1945)

Introduction

This chapter will continue to evaluate Kesselring's loyalty to Hitler, and briefly outline the rest of the Italian campaign with Kesselring's near fatal accident, but the main thrust of the chapter will deal with the nature of the partisan war in Italy. First it is critical to understand what 'partisan' meant, and how it was viewed historically and in international law. Secondly, the reaction of the Allies to the partisans was complex and with hidden agendas, and illustrates the multifaceted nature of the civil war. Finally, the sheer brutality of partisan war must be viewed, and Kesselring's reactions. Some Allied commanders expressed sympathy for Kesselring; this thesis will argue that in reality he ordered, and was complicit in crimes against humanity.

Kesselring's Loyalty

There were rumours amongst the Allies that Kesselring was at odds with Hitler; 'Kesselring, whom Allied propaganda broadcasts had frequently suggested was not a strong supporter of Hitler, and who indeed often disagreed with the Führer' did not have the same reputation with the Italian civilians¹. When Hitler demanded his traditional 'last stand,' Kesselring claimed he gave a 'short and heated reply,' but this was stated in the safety of postwar memoirs². Hitler's adjutant wrote that the Italian theatre was in Kesselring's hands 'and Hitler hardly ever interfered there'³. Kesselring, who was the only Field-Marshal never sacked, remained loyal, and in the last 'bunker days' was listed by Hitler's aides as one of nine generals 'most loyal to Hitler'⁴.

¹ Nicholas, *Rape*, p.258.

² Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.207.

³ Below, *Hitler's*, p.182.

⁴ Eberle/Uhl, *Hitler*, p.207.

After the Stauffenberg bomb-plot, Kesselring claimed ignorance, but mentions that Dr Karl G rdeler had tried to 'approach me in 1942, but unsuccessfully, as I could not then be reached'⁵. Dollmann confirms this, referring to G rdeler as 'a ringleader'⁶. Certainly after the war Kesselring conceded to his son that he was aware 'that something was afoot'⁷. Westphal and Senger knew about the plot, and Senger had informed Kesselring's son that he owed his life to Kesselring's intervention at that difficult time⁸. It is certainly true that Senger's COS was a friend of Stauffenberg⁹. It also appears he saved another staff officer, two in all, it may have been Westphal¹⁰. The plot was probably organised because 'with Hitler the war {would} certainly be lost', but Kesselring was obedient to the fruitless end¹¹. The July 20th plot involved many executions, and Kesselring did not seem to come under suspicion because of his undoubted loyalty. This intense loyalty was evident during the rest of the Italian campaign, and especially in the end days in Western Europe where his ruthless streak, a point of admiration amongst some historians became lethal, in Lamb's words 'he acted like a brute'¹². This brutality reflected Hitler and was self-evident during the latter months of 1944 as the Allies pressed north, and the partisan war turned vicious.

Retreat North

As Kesselring retreated north he 'was slightly wounded while in the front line,' but carried on after a field dressing¹³. As early as November 1944 the Guardian newspaper referred to the Italian campaign as 'the toughest of all side-shows' and referred to Kesselring as the 'ex-airman' who transpired to 'be one of the most stubborn and least advertised of German generals'¹⁴. However, Kesselring was no longer master of events, 'no matter how skilled

⁵ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.209.

⁶ Dollmann, *Interpreter*, p.330.

⁷ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.217.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Senger, *Neither*, p.200.

¹⁰ Dollmann, *Interpreter*, p.330.

¹¹ Hassell von Ulrich, *The Von Hassell Diaries* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948) p.297.

¹² Lamb, *War*, p.6.

¹³ Guardian, July 26th 1944, p.8.

¹⁴ Guardian, Nov 28th 1944, p.4.

their conduct of defensive battles, the weight of Allied military power was wearing away the Wehrmacht's tactical advantages'¹⁵.

Kesselring knew he was fighting a battle without the numbers or reserves, but Alexander 'foolishly informed the Italian partisans in November 1944 that the exhausted Allies were taking a winter break on the Gothic line' so they could disband; the Italian fascists and German intelligence heard this with obvious consequences¹⁶. This announcement was made despite the fact that the massacre on Monte Sole of some 1800 civilians had occurred a month before¹⁷.

The Allies had advanced just over two hundred miles and paused for a winter-break, and both Germans and Allies contented themselves with the belief they were tying down the other side, Alexander writing that 'it was the Germans, not the Allies, who were contained in Italy'¹⁸. It could be argued that the Germans, with fewer troops, were holding considerably larger numbers, and Alexander commented to a journalist in 1950 that who was holding who 'permitted no easy answer, then or now'¹⁹.

On Wednesday 25th October Kesselring was on the main road from Bologna to Forli when his car crashed into a long-barrelled gun turning into a side road; it was a serious accident, fracturing his skull, cutting his face wide open and rendering him unconscious for twelve hours. Vietinghoff replaced him and contained the Allies until the end of the year. The Allies had decided to rest, but time and time again while Kesselring was still in hospital, he was given credit for conducting a brilliant defence.

In the New Year Kesselring returned to his staff HQ at Recoaro from which he had been absent for three months. The Italian campaign was at a standstill, and it was self-evident that Italy was a secondary theatre; the

¹⁵ Murray Williamson & Millet, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Harvard: University Press, 2001)p.374.

¹⁶ Morgan, *Italy's*,p.129.

¹⁷ Olsen Jack, *Silence on Monte Sole* (New York: An ibooks, 2002).

¹⁸ Alexander, *Memoirs*,p.159.

¹⁹ Guardian, June 12th1950, p.6.

OKW had withdrawn ten divisions for other fronts. Just before he had his accident, it is claimed he had secretly encouraged Wolff, one of the 'tamer SS generals' to contact the Americans in Switzerland, but it was Wolff and Dollman who took the initiative with Dulles²⁰. The Allies were wary that Stalin would suspect them of making a separate peace²¹. It was at this juncture, that in a top secret telegram relating to this situation, Alexander used the code 'Emperor', signifying the importance the Allies attached to Kesselring²². Wolff had wildly predicted that in a postwar Germany Kesselring would be President. On March 9th Kesselring was summoned to see Adolf Hitler, deep in his Berlin bunker, and the next day was made Commander-in-Chief of the Western theatre. In effect the Italian campaign would grind to a halt just before the final capitulation.

Introduction to Partisan War

Kesselring was well-known for his speed of reaction in organising an effective fighting-retreat; it was an aggressive retreat, 'by a series of rearguard actions which, inch by inch, opposed the Allied vanguard up to the definitive withdrawal on the Gothic line {leaving} a horrifying trail of massacres splitting the peninsula transversely'²³. What made this part of the war so appalling was Kesselring's reaction to increasing partisan activity, and the civil war in Italy, especially with a newly created army of Fascist Italian troops in Liguria under Graziani, who might well have ended up fighting the troops of the Badoglio government.

Partisan or Terrorist

It has been claimed that the word *partisan* derives from 'the Spanish resistance to Napoleon' but its meaning is more complex²⁴. Guerrilla, meaning 'little war' dates from the same period in Spain, but partisan can be

²⁰ Vassiltchikov, *Berlin*, p.214/ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.225.

²¹ Toland John, *The Last Hundred Days* (New York: Modern Library, 2003)p.246.

²² KNA, Ref-FO954/17AFile, Ref296.

²³ Battini, *Missing*, p.31.

²⁴ Davies, *Simple*, p.317.

traced back to the work of Johann von Ewald just a few years earlier²⁵. This involved raising troops from the local population in order to fight the invader, but, as with the partisans of the American Civil War, they were expected to wear a uniform or recognisable insignia. By the twentieth century this was not the practice, and the words guerrilla fighter, partisan and terrorist became confused, and not only took on different meanings, but attracted a wide variety of opinions.

One man's terrorist is another's patriot, and this phenomenon has become more prominent since the last world war. The terrorist/partisan emerges because his country has been invaded or oppressed. Churchill demanded that Europe be set alight, and Alexander asked Italians to kill Germans at every opportunity. Britain was the main external sponsor for resistance in Europe, though many senior officers believed this type of war not to be 'gentlemanly;' Air Chief-Marshal Portal objected to dropping civilian agents in order to kill Germans²⁶. The strategy was adopted because it tied down German troops, but Kesselring viewed it as his 'struggle against gangs with most severe measures'²⁷.

International Law and Attitudes

Guerrilla warfare played little part in German military theory, but in 1942 the Wehrmacht produced a booklet on guerrilla-warfare regarding partisan-war as illegal. The 'international law did not provide any unambiguous rules for dealing with guerrilla warfare. The 1907 Hague Convention was full of contradictions and open questions concerning the rights and responsibilities of an occupying force'²⁸. Partisan war was technically illegal from the point of view of the 1907 Hague Convention; the section dealing with the *The Laws and Customs of War on Land*, states that '*the laws, rights, and duties of war apply not only to armies, but also to militia and volunteer corps fulfilling the following conditions: to be commanded by a*

²⁵ Ewald, *Abhandlung über den kleinen Krieg*, 1789.

²⁶ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.289.

²⁷ KNA, WO204/11496.

²⁸ Neitzel/Welzer, *Soldaten*, p.77.

*person responsible for his subordinates; to have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance; to carry arms openly; and to conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war*²⁹. 'Article 50 of the Hague Convention allowed collective punitive measures against a civilian population if a connection between partisans and their general environment could be proven'³⁰. Between the wars 'hostages were deemed legitimate everywhere but in France'³¹. There were questions on whether hostages should be killed, and the German military lawyers took the extreme line; the 'point of hostage-taking required the community to make a choice' but it still permitted the innocent to suffer³².

Resistance and partisans are risky and reprisals were anticipated. In October 1941 de Gaulle broadcast a message prohibiting assassinations stating 'war must be conducted by those entrusted with the task' in case of retaliation³³. Beneš was warned that Heydrich's assassination would lead to catastrophe. If the Germans had invaded Britain there were plans to hide 'saboteurs.' It must be noted that partisans did not always invoke sympathy, 'although a rosy hue surrounds the deeds of the partisans, for many people they were only thieves who issued dubious promissory notes for the food they took, but a dangerous liability that brought indiscriminate German reprisals'³⁴. When in 1941 some communist partisans in Paris shot Germans on a Paris Metro Station 'even convinced patriots had their doubts about the morality of these random assassinations which met with reprobation among ordinary people'³⁵. On the other hand, in France, a Roman Catholic resistance movement called the *Défense de la France* wrote 'kill the German to purify our country, kill him because he kills our people ... kill those who denounce, those who have aided the enemy ... kill the policeman who has in any way

²⁹ Article 1.

³⁰ Neitzel/Welzer, *Soldaten*, p.78.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Morgan, *Italy's*, p.156.

³³ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.303.

³⁴ Ibid, pp.283/4.

³⁵ Ibid, p.216.

contributed to the arrest of patriots ... kill the *miliciens*, exterminate them ... strike them down like mad dogs ... destroy them as you would vermin³⁶.

In the East European war and Balkans the partisan war was very different from the resistance in France; reprisals were swift and unbelievably sadistic. Much of this was to be repeated in Italy. 'Together with the execution of prisoners, the battle against partisans was the framework in which German soldiers most frequently committed war crimes³⁷. This applies to Kesselring who was tried as a war criminal because of the partisan war.

The Italian Partisan

It is critical to explore the nature of the Italian partisans in order to 'to understand the preconditions for psychologically normal people to do things they would not otherwise do³⁸. After Mussolini's rescue the Badoglio/Royal government had fled south and Italy was fractured; as the Italian historian Claudio Pavone wrote, the 'armed resistance of 1943-1945 was, simultaneously, a national war, a civil war, and a class war³⁹. This war was complicated by a lack of national identity: it has been suggested there is no unified Italy, 'that those who are thought of as Italian regard themselves as Piedmontese, Tuscan, Venetian, Sicilian, Calabrian and so on, sometimes even fellow countrymen feel like foreigners⁴⁰. As the war moved north the partisans became more active, and were made up of every nationality, 'a band of partisans had formed in the neighbourhood, all nationalities, Italians, Poles, Yugoslavs, a few German deserters and some escaped Russian prisoners, they roamed the mountains looting the peasants' dwindling stocks of food, stealing their beasts and raiding towns, no quarter was asked or given⁴¹. In another contemporary diary, a wealthy American woman married to a landowning Italian, recognised that Italy had fallen into a complex civil war. Although helping the partisans she perceived the dangers they created. 'When some hot-

³⁶ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.276.

³⁷ Neitzel/Welzer, *Soldaten*, p.78.

³⁸ Ibid, p.9.

³⁹ Morgan, *Italy's*, p.178.

⁴⁰ Discovery Channel, *Insight*, p.77.

⁴¹ Ranfurly, *War*, p.364.

headed partisans would shoot at a *Carabiniere* from behind a hedge, or disarm two Germans in a village pub, disappearing themselves into the woods and leaving the hapless villagers at the mercy of German reprisals⁴². Her account ranges from incidents where German soldiers politely request permission to purchase sheep, when partisans become local robbers, and SS commit atrocities. She paints a realistic picture of a country torn by innumerable factions, human passions, and extreme human behaviour. It is reckoned that by September there were some fifteen-hundred partisans of which about a thousand were in the north and the rest around Rome and Abruzzi regions, and it was to grow to a speculated 250,000⁴³.

The partisan groups were sponsored by political parties looking to the postwar, especially the communists, equally feared by the Pope, the Allies and Germans. 'For the Communists the partisan movement was the vanguard of the revolution'⁴⁴. 'The ultimate goal of communism was not the liberation of France or Italy, but the merging of the working classes of all nations in a supranational brotherhood'⁴⁵. The Communists were the most aggressive, believing the 'blood of the martyrs' builds their foundation. In the via Rasella massacre the communist leader, Giorgio Amendola had been at a Meeting with De Gasperi of the Christian Democrats when the explosion occurred; it was precision timing for the communists to demonstrate their muscle⁴⁶. It provoked the reaction they sought, but to a greater extent than anticipated, even though Radio Rome had already announced that a 'ten-to-one reprisal had been inflicted in Florence' after the murder of a fascist official⁴⁷.

For most political parties the war provided them with a legitimacy denied under Mussolini. Some groups were disbanded soldiers loyal to the monarchy, many contained escaped Allied POWs; there would have been

⁴² Origo, *War*, p.12.

⁴³ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.38.

⁴⁴ Farrell, *Mussolini*, p.459.

⁴⁵ Lowe, *Savage*, p.279.

⁴⁶ Culminating in Ardeatine massacre.

⁴⁷ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.181.

many more POWs had the British officers not been instructed to remain as prisoners, to await the arrival of the Germans⁴⁸.

After considerable debate the partisans established the Committee of National Liberation, the CNL⁴⁹. It was a mixture of Communists, Socialists, a Republican Liberal Party (*Partito d'Azione*), Christian Democrats and others. There were constant tensions, and they eventually divided into three main groups, the communist Garibaldi Brigades, the *Giustizia e Libertà* Brigades (associated with the *Partito d'Azione*) and the *Matteotti* Brigades (socialists). There were also many other smaller groups, some Catholic based, some Monarchists, (i.e. *Di Dio* and *Mauri*) and some Anarchists. 'Apart from the PdA {Partito d'Azione} all existed before Facism⁵⁰. It was complex and at times they fought and betrayed one another; on one occasion some Communist partisans had killed some German soldiers and were 'on the run;' they were traded to a Fascist group by the *Azzurri*, a group of Monarchy partisans. 'Frequently the Fascists were more cruel than the Germans'⁵¹.

'In Italy the violence against political rivals was more extreme⁵².' The centre of this violence was what became known as the 'Red Triangle', or the 'Triangle of Death' - that area of Emilia-Romagna between Bologna, Reggio Emilia and Ferrara, the Germans were the centre of attraction initially, but it soon became a matter of political ideology. This aspect of Italy's partisan war continues to this day, 'one of the most controversial books to have been published in Italy at the beginning of the twenty-first century was Giampaolo Pansa's *Il Sangue dei vinti*, which attacked the heroic idea of the Italian resistance movement by describing in detail the murders that they carried out during and after liberation'⁵³. The book has caused outrage on the left as Pansa is seen as tapping into a new and growing right wing. The complexity of the right and left politics in modern Italy reverberate to this

⁴⁸ Order P/W87190, Carver, *Where*, p.139 - Montgomery's orders.

⁴⁹ *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale*.

⁵⁰ Mammarella, *Italy*, p.37.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.81.

⁵² Lowe, *Savage*, p.285.

⁵³ Lowe, *Savage*, p.161, -350,000 copies sold.

day: 'street battles over the coffin of a Nazi war criminal {SS Erich Priebke} have illustrated that Italy is still torn over the legacy of Fascism as it commemorated the 70th anniversary yesterday of the deportation of Rome's Jews'⁵⁴.

In the north-east the partisans were influenced by Tito and Mihailović establishing an irregular army to seek control postwar; they established political commissars with each unit. An almost deadly conflict arose between the *Partito d'Azione* and the communists. The partisans in the north tended to be left-wing and in Milan formed the Committee of National Liberation of Northern Italy⁵⁵. The *Osoppo* resistance wore green scarves while the communist *Garibaldini* wore red scarves; on one occasion the communists carried out a wholesale massacre of the *Ossopo*; the Garibaldi even linked themselves with the Slovenes, offering the NE of Italy as part of Yugoslavia so long as the *Garibaldi* leaders stayed in charge⁵⁶. They were eventually tried and convicted in Milan in 1951.

There is some duplicity in the Italian partisan debate. In 2005, the Berlusconi government inaugurated a new national day of remembrance for several thousand Italians killed during the war by Communist-Yugoslav partisans around Trieste. It has been cogently argued that 'Italian history has tried to overlook the Fascist war of 1940-1943 hoping that the partisan war of 1943-45 would put the emphasis on Italy as the victim' not the aggressor, and help ignore the previous twenty years of Fascism⁵⁷. Despite this there is no monument to the resistance in Italy⁵⁸.

It is often overlooked that Italian forces waged a 'violent counter-insurgency campaign against Slav and Greek resistance to Axis rule, attacking the civilians held responsible for protecting the partisans, and committing atrocities which emulated and sometimes even surpassed the occupation

⁵⁴ The Times, Oct 17th2013, p.42.

⁵⁵ CLNAI, in January 1944.

⁵⁶ Macpherson T & Bath R, *Behind Enemy Lines* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2010)p.171.

⁵⁷ Morgan, *History*.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

methods of their Nazi ally.⁵⁹ It is estimated that about '25,000 Slovene men and women were captured and deported to concentration camps in Italy and the Adriatic islands⁶⁰.

The Allies and the Partisans

Italy was complex and their politics 'was becoming a serious problem in the conduct of America's war in Italy,' who, along with the British, were as worried about Communist Partisans as they were Kesselring's forces⁶¹. When the Allied command extraordinarily announced a winter break, the situation escalated, and it has been suggested that the Allies hoped the communist partisans would lose heart; 'they were suspicious of communist-partisans; even at a personal level there was always the danger of betrayal⁶². The Allies were particularly concerned about the large powerful communist groups, in view of postwar politics. It was generally understood that the communists were still waging a class-war, based on Lenin writing that Socialists differed from the bourgeois because 'we understand the inevitable connection between war and class struggle⁶³. The same concern about communist motives was felt on the German side: Wolff, Dollman and Rahn believed that with French communists in the west, Tito to the east there would be a communist block and they believed 'the only solution was to arrange an orderly surrender of German forces⁶⁴.

The partisans were an embarrassment to the Allies; it was not a matter of incorporating them into the army, 'the problem was much more difficult, and military and political interests were more in conflict' as they moved north⁶⁵. Although numerous the partisans failed to stop Kesselring's one-hundred-fifty mile retreat towards the Gothic line. For the Allies the

⁵⁹ Morgan, *History*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Wellwood David, *Italy 1943-45* (Glos: Leceister UP, 1985)p.72

⁶² Noted in SOE Sir Robert Clark's obit, Times Jan-24th2013, p.47.

⁶³ Semmel Bernard, *Marxism and the Science of War* (New York: Oxford UP, 1981p.164

⁶⁴ Toland, *Last*,p.238

⁶⁵ Center of Military History, Card No62-60068, p.526.

partisan situation was complex, and there was no agreed policy, 'combat commanders were concerned with deriving maximum military advantages ... while the control commission was intent in minimizing political and social disorder'⁶⁶. There was no real control; the American spy in Rome, Peter Tompkins, for personal safety had to maintain a cautious eye not only on the Germans but on the different partisan groups⁶⁷. Some partisans were self-seeking and criminally inclined, but the main problems were the political motivations, especially the communists.

The OSS tended to find its Italian speakers from the American Mafia, and an OSS Major William Holohan, when dropped by parachute carrying large amounts of money, was poisoned and robbed by his own recruits⁶⁸. The Allies, aware of the partisan criminal elements, were interested in winning by any means. Alexander asked the CLN in Milan to extend their operations promising to help the non-political partisans, but not the *Garibaldi* brigades. The Communists frequently carried out operations to goad a German reaction hoping that the quiescent Roman population would join the partisans; it was a vicious circle which was successful. It was for this reason that Carla and Bentiregna attacked the Barberini cinema killing and injuring fifteen Germans⁶⁹.

The Italian *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana Militia*, the so-called Black Brigades, fought a savage war against the partisans. The complexity of the partisan civil war still defies any agreed analysis. It is hardly surprising that the Allies lacked perception of who was who, and today the Italian Ministry of Defence will not open all its archives.

Alexander's broadcasts on 19th/20th/27th July asked Italians to shoot Germans in the back so they lived to do it again. Kesselring replied that to answer such medieval methods demanded repressive counter-measures. In the London Foreign Office Archibald Ross wrote that 'it looks as if General

⁶⁶ Center of Military History, Card No-62-60068, p.1.

⁶⁷ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.107

⁶⁸ Lamb, *War*, p.210

⁶⁹ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.103

Alexander was not quite careful enough in his choice of words, and the Germans have not unduly distorted his appeal.⁷⁰ It was better for men to join the partisans than be deported as industrial labour, and German reprisals were certainly a motive as the partisans had anticipated.

Kesselring's Reaction to Partisans

Partisan war in Italy had not been anticipated, and when the Italians signed the co-belligerent agreement many Germans felt betrayed. In Trent Park prison in England, Oberstleutnant Kurt Kohncke, a one-time wealthy landowner and anti-Nazi, on hearing this said 'if I were commander of the German troops I would set alight every village and every town in Italy and withdraw slowly to the Brenner'⁷¹. Kesselring had misunderstood and underestimated the Italians, and 'the German troops felt furious with their former allies for their betrayal and took their revenge on civilians at the slightest provocation'⁷². This sense of betrayal extended to French partisans who proved uncooperative with their Italian counterparts, having not forgiven the Italians for their invasion. Initially Kesselring limited reaction when partisans bombed the Flora Hotel where he had been the same morning⁷³. Eight days later eight Germans were killed by a grenade attack, and again 'Kesselring refused to be goaded into retaliation'⁷⁴. It was only four months earlier he had issued an order that 'every German soldier now serving in the southern area conducts himself in a specially exemplary manner ... officers are again to be warned of the necessity for the sharpest supervision'⁷⁵. The year 1944 was a period of rapid change in partisan activity and Kesselring's attitudes.

As early as Salerno partisans had been busy, but especially in the north, where there had been some small attacks at hotels and cinemas frequented by Germans. Matters escalated when, on Thursday March 23rd,

⁷⁰ Lamb, *War*, p.65.

⁷¹ Neitzel, *Tapping*, p.171.

⁷² Mazower, *Hitler's*, p.499.

⁷³ Dec 10th1943.

⁷⁴ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.19.

⁷⁵ KNA, commandCX/MSS/2960/T10-HW1/1884.

Kesselring was informed by Westphal that a Company of the Police-Regiment Bozen, had been attacked in via Rasella, Rome, resulting in thirty-three (two died later)⁷⁶. 'These were middle-aged policemen, nearly half of them married with children, who had been recruited from South Tyrol, the disputed frontier area known as Bolzano in Italian, and their officers were Reich Germans'⁷⁷. They were half Italian and half German, 'that they were SS was a myth created by the partisans after the war ... these policemen did not belong to the SS as nearly every writer has claimed'⁷⁸. Amongst the carnage were dead Italians including children. The perpetrators knew the Germans had warned of reprisals, and that the *Gappists* 'may have calculated that the inevitable reprisals would be beneficial to their faction as the resistance hostages consisted largely of Trotskyites from the *Bandiera Rossa*, or members of another resistance group, the *Fronte Clandestino Militaire*;' they claimed they wanted to provoke an uprising⁷⁹. The action was condemned by the Vatican and other resistance groups, but the violent reprisal of 335 civilians killed in the infamous Ardeatine massacre soon became headlines. Kesselring's involvement will be examined in the chapter on his trial, but it ought to be noted that this incident typified a civilian war which permeated the war in Italy, scarred Italian society in the postwar years, and haunts Italy to this day. It became the iconic incident of the partisan war descending to barbarity. Pope Pius XII, who had asked for the presence of German/Italian policemen, and who feared the Communists appeared neutral, writing in the *Osservatore Romano* on 26th March that 'thirty two victims on the one hand, and on the other three hundred and twenty persons sacrificed for the guilty parties who escaped arrest... we call upon the irresponsible elements to respect human life...' implying the partisans were guilty⁸⁰.

On '9th August communist partisans in Milan had killed nine German soldiers as well as eight passers-by,' and Kesselring, who tended to apply the ten to one rule, relented to an appeal by Cardinal Schuster; however,

⁷⁶ March 23rd-25th anniversary of Fascist movement.

⁷⁷ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.308.

⁷⁸ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.41.

⁷⁹ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.309.

⁸⁰ Lamb, *War*, p.60; Kesselring did not see it as neutral and complained, Katz, *Fatal*, p.261.

a fascist firing squad executed fifteen political prisoners the day after⁸¹. To this day there is confusion as to whether the Fascists were under command by Germans or not, such was the complexity at the time. As Manstein argued, 'the Commander in Chief ... has only one interest, namely that rear areas remain quiet. To achieve this, he will do all in his power...' and Kesselring fitted in the same mould⁸².

International law at that time was not known for its clarity, and later a British MP and lawyer, Paget, would argue that a 'sovereign government has authority to give any orders albeit they infringe international law;' this aspect will be further explored in the chapters dealing with the trial⁸³. No amount of law can possibly give any justification for some cruelty. In October 1944 a Reichsführer-SS Division moved into Bologna, and committed a massacre at Marzabotto 'and perpetrated a massacre three times the size of Oradour and ten times the size of Lidice'⁸⁴. In his book *Silence on Monte Sole*, Olsen related these horrific details of the massacre of 1800 civilians living on the mountain in reprisal for the partisan group the *Stella Rossa* (which was not as later claimed a communist band), old men, women children and babies. Such was the atrocity that even if half of it was true the evil is still unbelievable, yet Kesselring felt justified in telling 'an Italian journalist nonchalantly that the Monte Sole/Marzabotto action was a 'war operation' neither more or less'⁸⁵.

Kesselring responded to the increased partisan activity with two orders (the '*Bandenbefehle*'), which are examined in the chapter on Kesselring's trial⁸⁶. Basically it was similar wording to a command issued by Keitel namely, '*the fight against the partisans must be carried on with all the means at our disposal and with the utmost severity. I will protect any command who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice of severity of the methods he adopts against partisans. In this connection the old principle*

⁸¹ Farrell, *Mussolini*, p.450.

⁸² Mungo, *Manstein*, p.437.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.477.

⁸⁴ Davies, *Simple*, p.318.

⁸⁵ Olsen, *Silence*, p.365.

⁸⁶ BA-MA-N432/931/N 422/15, pp. 42ff - see Appendix 1.

holds good, that a mistake in the choice of methods in executing one's orders, is better than failure or neglect to act.' Kesselring reconstructed the order as 'fighting against the guerrillas must therefore be conducted with the utmost rigour ... I shall protect any commander who, in the choice and severity of method... the old principle still holds good, that a wrong choice of method is used to achieve one's object is better than neglect and indolence'⁸⁷. The Ultra decoding note on this message is marked with a red-pen for attention; its ruthlessness was self-evident. Kesselring was not simply passing on OKW orders but rewording them to his style. He suggested that the Italian fascists should select hostages, and where the partisans were in abundance 'hostages will be taken from among the local population - relatives or able bodied sympathisers... and villages will be burnt down'⁸⁸. Although the SS behaved characteristically, Kesselring expected the same from the Wehrmacht, stating that 'anti-guerrilla warfare must in large measure be carried out by the army'⁸⁹.

Kesselring's new HQ at Monsummano left him remote, and whilst his critical interest was in holding the Anglo-Americans 'Northern Italy began to look like Byelorussia.'⁹⁰ Weizsäcker was later to acknowledge the 'terror and brutality left in the wake of the security police as they retreated,' but the Wehrmacht and Italian fascist groups all played a part⁹¹.

Alexander's broadcast to kill every German was unhelpful, but the Wehrmacht and SS responded with brutality. Following complaints by Mussolini through Ambassador Rahn, Kesselring was prompted to send further orders not to bring a bad reputation on the Wehrmacht for fear of the over-zealousness which would occur⁹². The new orders were signed 14th July but on the 11th orders were already signed by a local commander in Covolo encouraging massacres⁹³.

⁸⁷ KNA, HW1/2982.

⁸⁸ KNA, WO204/11496.

⁸⁹ KNA, HW5/474.

⁹⁰ Davies, *Simple*, p.190.

⁹¹ Guardian, May 23rd 1946, p.6.

⁹² Appendix 2.

⁹³ Appendix 3.

It has been claim that Kesselring rarely followed up reports on ill-discipline, but Panzertruppen General Traugott Herr, testified under oath that Kesselring did have soldiers shot who had raped or looted⁹⁴. Kesselring tried to heighten the deterrent effect by using posters to link the death of particular Germans to particular reprisals. In his trial Kesselring, claiming innocence, appeared shocked when witnesses spoke of the barbarity resulting from these orders. However, Ultra now reveals his reports to OKW, one on the 25th June reporting on an engagement with guerrilla group stating '*many guerrillas killed, village burnt down*' on the grounds that the guerrillas were '*in w/t contact with the British*'⁹⁵.

Kesselring always maintained he was innocent, but he must have been aware of the brutality of such orders: just after issuing the orders it was reported by the Chinese Chargé in Berne that Kesselring had recently 'commissioned a genealogist named FURICS to obtain proof that Kesselring's ancestors originally came from ARGOVIE (AARGAU) in Switzerland' also noting that in Swiss nationality law 'it is comparatively easy for all persons of Swiss ancestry to obtain citizenship by application'⁹⁶. Kesselring was a proud Bavarian, and the possibility of Swiss nationality probably occurred to him because he knew that Keitel's orders, which he had endorsed, would one day return to haunt him. 'Kesselring himself was a superb general, surprising Hitler with his success in slowing the Allied advance up in the peninsula;' but his brilliance as a commander went hand in hand with an utterly ruthless attitude towards the local population, for which, he may have foreseen, he would be held to account⁹⁷.

Cardinal Schuster or Mussolini sometimes persuaded Kesselring to rescind orders against recriminations, but were not always successful. Kesselring could be totally ruthless, and, as the witness Costa wrote in his affidavit regarding an execution in Milan, 'Kesselring would not change his

⁹⁴ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.44.

⁹⁵ KNA, HW1/3017.

⁹⁶ KNA, HW1/3007.

⁹⁷ Mazower, *Hitler's*, p.499.

mind'⁹⁸. This streak of ruthlessness was applied even to his so-called beloved pilots; in North Africa he had given an order that careless pilots who made mistakes would 'be punished, replaced and transferred to a Field Battalion in Russia'⁹⁹.

Kesselring always blamed the Italians and pointed out that his soldiers suffered death from hanging, drowning, freezing, crucifying and every kind of torture. It had, as Kesselring noted with some truth, 'involved both sides in committing the most abominable crimes with mathematical predictability'¹⁰⁰. He expostulated that 'my soldiers were ambushed; they were hunted; they were burned, the wounded soldiers in Red Cross ambulances were burned; their bodies nailed to window frames, their eyes struck out, their noses and ears were cut off, also their sexual organs; they were put into barrels which were filled with water and afterwards machine gunned, and, at last but not least, in Pisa as a sign of gratitude that we supplied the children with milk the wells were poisoned'¹⁰¹. As in any war neither side were clinically clean, John Bassett serving in Italy wrote in his diary that there had been an 'ugly rumour that Sgt Meier had lined up several Krauts on Mt Belvedere ... and shot them in a fit of rage,' but this was battlefield rage, not a calculated decision by a senior commander¹⁰².

The historian Klinkhammer suggested that '95% of soldiers in Italy' were not involved directly or indirectly with these mass murders, and it is known that most incidents took place near the front battle areas of the occupation zones¹⁰³. It is evident that some reprisals took place during retreat, when the troops felt most vulnerable, but still inexcusable. There are many references to the Italian campaign being a 'clean war' by both sides, and 'not until fifty years after the war had ended did the legend begin to crumble'¹⁰⁴. As recently as 2009 Kesselring's highly decorated Ordnance Officer, Josef

⁹⁸ KNA, WO204/11005.

⁹⁹ KNA, HW1/1034.

¹⁰⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.228.

¹⁰¹ Trevelyan, *Rome*, p.77.

¹⁰² Aldrich Richard, *Witness to War* (London: Doubleday, 2004)p.628.

¹⁰³ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.47.

¹⁰⁴ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.195.

Scheungraber, 'was sentenced to life imprisonment at Munich's No 1 State Court' for shooting four Italians, then ten more as a reprisal for partisans killing one of his NCOs and a sapper¹⁰⁵. Taped German POWs frequently revealed the extent of Wehrmacht behaviour, one German soldier who was a translator 'was outraged at how Wehrmacht soldiers had treated the civilian population' in occupied Italy¹⁰⁶. It was a vicious circle; the partisans inflamed the wrath of the Wehrmacht whose brutal reaction swelled the ranks of the partisans. The historian Bartov argued that NSDAP influence within the ranks meant their actions were 'unexpectedly accompanied by the irrational and nihilistic modes of behaviour typical of the regime'¹⁰⁷.

There were in Italy SS detachments who had been serving in Russia, including some *Totenkopf* and their *Unterführers* who would already have been brutalised¹⁰⁸. Thomas Kühne, a military sociologist found that the closer soldiers were to the front line the less there were normal controls, and 'excesses are committed under cover of the group'¹⁰⁹. This was certainly seen to be true in later wars, especially Vietnam. How much Kesselring knew of all the activities of the SS and the Wehrmacht can never be established, but as the Italian Minister of Pardon and Justice wrote in 1947, 'it is not likely that the Commander of the German Forces in Italy is ignorant of such a massacre {SS massacre at S. Anna di Stazzema} of which we still do not know the authors'¹¹⁰.

Ruthlessness breeds ruthlessness, and many times communist partisan leaders executed other partisans of differing persuasion. In places like Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy ...'much of the violence of the war had been directed not against Germans but against fascists and collaborators within their own population'¹¹¹. It was a bitter time, and 'revenge was a fundamental part of the bedrock upon which postwar Europe was rebuilt,' and 'to this day,

¹⁰⁵ Felton Mark, *The Last Nazis* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword books, 2011)p.146.

¹⁰⁶ Neitzel/Welzer, *Soldaten*,p.14.5

¹⁰⁷ Bartov, *Crimes*,p.61.

¹⁰⁸ Death's Head, sub-commanders.

¹⁰⁹ Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.49.

¹¹⁰ KNA, WO204/11005.

¹¹¹ Lowe, *Savage*,p.50.

individuals, communities and even whole nations still live with the bitterness born of this vengeance¹¹². Italians had been storing up resentment against the Fascists for over twenty years, and 'on one side were the Fascists, whose atrocities against their own people had only accelerated after the Germans had invaded'¹¹³.

After the war the ruthlessness continued, and it is estimated at a conservative level that some 30,000 may have been killed in this way, though such figures must always be suspect with the lack of records¹¹⁴. A civil war within an international war meant civilians suffered most; the statistics are still debated to this day, but currently it is estimated that between 1943 and 1945 nine thousand women, children and elderly died. Kesselring claimed there were more German deaths than partisans, and it is estimated that in the region of 15,000 Germans were killed by the partisans between June and August 1944¹¹⁵.

The partisans caused many problems, but failed to stop Kesselring conducting his defensive retreat, but in combating them Kesselring and the Wehrmacht were stained with the same criminality often associated with the SS. A form of voluntary collective amnesia regarding the role of the Wehrmacht swept over postwar Germany, who with the western allies used the SS as a scapegoat to turn the rest of Germans into victims. The trial of Erich Priebke in Rome on May 7th1996, illustrated that the 'Italian military judges could not have ignored the significance of the mechanism of terror that was put into effect by the whole army and not just by the specialized SS troops'¹¹⁶. Kesselring acted 'as if the existence of the Partisan movement were the fault of the civilian population'¹¹⁷. It is self-evidently a myth that Kesselring fought a chivalrous war as he contended, or that he was ignorant of

¹¹² Lowe, *Savage*, p.77.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.149.

¹¹⁴ In postwar retribution ... 'for every 100,000 people in each country, Holland saw only a single suspected collaborator killed in vengeance, while Belgium had more than three, France more than twenty-two, and Italy somewhere between twenty-six and forty-four.'- Lowe, *Savage*, p.150.

¹¹⁵ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.213.

¹¹⁶ Battini, *Missing*, p.33

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.38.

the massacres. His own commands are clearly written and reflect those of the OKW on the Eastern Front, and any sympathy Alexander, Churchill and hundreds of others expressed appear to neglect the suffering of the innocent.

CHAPTER 8

COMMANDER to PRISONER (1945-1947)

Introduction

Primo Levi wrote that in the last months of the war 'grey men, blind first and criminal later, frenziedly divided among themselves the tatters of an iniquitous and moribund authority'¹. The first part of this chapter will explore why Kesselring fought to the last, looking at his obsessive oath to Hitler, the influence of Hitler upon him, and his fear of communism. It will also explore why he irrationally threatened his subordinate Vietinghoff in Italy for seeking an end to a finished war, as well as the brutality of the 'drumhead' courts. The second part will look at the nature of his imprisonment, and how much Kesselring knew of the regime's inhumanity, specifically the Holocaust. This section will also, picking up from the last chapter, examine the way the Wehrmacht was white-washed in the postwar era by unloading guilt onto the SS, who could then become an alibi for the whole nation. Through the early interrogations Kesselring consistently maintained, as he did for the rest of his life, a claim of total innocence, and raised the concept of 'victor's justice.' Finally, it will examine how Kesselring's charm frequently won over his captors, but how they failed to influence him in reconsidering his views on what had happened.

Western Command

On March 8th as Wolff and Kesselring were discussing the future of the Italian campaign, Kesselring was ordered to Berlin to be given new orders and 'told to hurry'². 'Nothing since the July 20th plot had agitated Hitler so much as the capture of the bridge at Remagen,' giving him the excuse to sack Rundstedt 'who seemed only to want to retreat'³. Kesselring suggested he was needed in Italy and was suffering from his injury, but was

¹ Levi Primo, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus, 1989)p.49.

² Toland, *Last*, p.213.

³ Ibid.

told by Keitel this 'would hold no water with the Führer'⁴. Hitler had prided himself on the defences of the Western Wall but after Remagen was lost - 'the barrel flowed over'⁵. Hitler trusted Kesselring, stating at a Führer conference on Jan 9th 1945 that 'as you saw with Kesselring, if someone does it right, it does work'⁶. Kesselring had a reputation as a 'tough commander-in-chief ... a leader of high professional competence who took care to keep out of politics. He was an arch-loyalist, always exuding real or contrived optimism, however grim the military situation'⁷. Kesselring may have kept out of political wrangling, but he was loyal to Hitler. When Bradley heard of Kesselring's appointment he sensibly noted that 'Kesselring has always been considered a rather good general' but added 'he has arrived at this front at the wrong time'⁸.

On April 1st Kesselring sent a highly emotive message to all troops, reading *'I greet you, soldiers, the stake is Germany, our people, our children and their future. To throw in our hand now is to betray Germany. Those who have fallen with a triumphant faith in the future of Germany expect their sacrifices shall not have been in vain. I appeal to each and everyone of you, be a sworn brotherhood of warriors, rating honour higher than life, knowing only one thing: Germany'*⁹. Kesselring did not hesitate to reflect the Führer's melodramatic language of 'heroic final battles'¹⁰. He may not have been a party member, but he shared their views on communism, belief in German cultural superiority, supremacy in Europe and a soldier could not surrender. It was desperation, and Hitler's orders commanded them to fight 'in a spirit of holy hatred for an enemy who is conducting a pitiless war of extermination against the German people'¹¹. Nevertheless, recognising Kesselring's importance in Italy, Hitler kept Kesselring's transfer secret for 'security reasons'¹². This was the eschatological period for Hitler, and it defies credulity that men like Kesselring were prepared to engage in this Dantean

⁴ Toland, *Last*, p.221.

⁵ Westphal, *German*, p.191.

⁶ Heiber/Glantz, *Hitler*, p.585.

⁷ Kershaw-*The End*, p.303.

⁸ Times-March 24th 1945, p.4.

⁹ KNA-HW5/686.

¹⁰ KNA-HW1/3749.

¹¹ Mazower, *Hitler's*, p.525.

¹² KNA-HW5/706.

inferno. A Wehrmacht military judge remarked on the inevitability of defeat and queried why the leaders fought on, 'How long' he asked, 'will it take for the very last German to realise this¹³?' Even, the same diarist recorded, the 'most educated Germans' seem to believe Hitler's claim they could still win¹⁴. Kesselring and others, who should have known better, became even more Draconian as the eventual defeat became blindingly obvious. There is the argument that soldiers will fight to the bitter end as part of their tradition, but the best senior commander looks beyond the battleground to the people he is defending. According to Kesselring, Hitler was full of confidence, but the interview was unrealistic; there was pointless talk of new-fangled weapons, and 'certain expectations of fresh successes by new types of U-Boats ... effects will be felt in a foreseeable period'¹⁵. It is difficult to ascertain Kesselring's true feelings which he concealed then and later, but there was perhaps a degree of self-cynicism when he introduced himself to his staff with 'I'm the new wonder weapon'¹⁶! The tragedy was that 'research on the last phase of the war shows many Germans still invested improbable hopes' in such wonder weapons when in reality they were a fantasy and deceit¹⁷.

Nevertheless, Kesselring described Hitler as lucid with a penchant for detail: in Hitler's presence Kesselring seemed to lose his grasp of reality. Kielmansegg, an officer on the German General Staff, witnessed the motivating effect Hitler continued to possess, calling it 'the Wehrmacht high command bug'¹⁸. Another officer described Dönitz going in to Hitler depressed and returning as 'floating on a sea of emotion'¹⁹. Westphal too, described Kesselring as arriving in a cheerful fashion when he declared he was Hitler's new V3 weapon²⁰. It appeared that Kesselring had absorbed

¹³ Müller-Hill Werner Otto, *The True German, The Diary of a WWII Military Judge* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)p.130.

¹⁴ Ibid,p.21.

¹⁵ KNA-HW1/3054.

¹⁶ Battistelli, *Kesselring*,p.5.

¹⁷ Müller-Hill, *True*,p.xxiv.

¹⁸ Rees Laurence, *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler* (London: Ebury Press, 2012)p.375.

¹⁹ Ibid,p.377.

²⁰ Macksey, *Kesselring*,p.225:Westphal was Chief-of-Staff again.

Hitler's phantom troops and miracle weapons, but at the front-line the realities emerged.

Kesselring later claimed he fought on to allow those in the East sanctuary in the West, also arguing part of the army should not surrender whilst another fought²¹. This has a certain sense, but by capitulating in the West he may have found sanctuary for those in the East. There is no evidence that Kesselring was concerned about civilians, only the soldiers. A report to the British War Cabinet noted in July 1944 that 'fear of the Russians continues to dominate their thoughts, and there are indications of widespread anxiety that the threat from the East should be staved off at all costs'²². If, as one German military judge wrote in his diary, 'if we are bolshevized, then all of Europe will be ... so hurry up with your invasion you Western democracies'²³. It appears a middle-ranking military judge had better foresight than a Field-Marshal.

It was not just the fear of communist reprisal that kept Kesselring fighting, but his obsessive military-nature of staying loyal to one's oath. It could be argued that the oath to Hitler could be viewed as to the country through the figurehead of Hitler; Hitler was now finished and allegiance to the country demanded a change of attitude. Kesselring, regarded by many as a rational man, must have perceived that Hitler was interred in his bunker away from reality, and the war lost. The July 20th conspiracy had failed because Hitler survived; 'his physical presence on this earth was enough' and 'only death would destroy Hitler's hold over Germany' which applied to Kesselring²⁴. Kesselring continued to fight when most felt it was a waste of life, probably because Hitler was still alive, and partly, that 'disappointments scarcely altered soldiers' desire to perform their military tasks'²⁵. Even on April 1st Kesselring was sending orders to his troops to 'fight to the end'²⁶. His orders were brutal in that he stopped POW transports 'marching with white

²¹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.282.

²² KNA-CAB-66/53/8, pp.37-8.

²³ Müller-Hill, *True*, p.13.

²⁴ Rees, *Dark*, p.386.

²⁵ Neitzel/Welzer, *Soldaten*, p.318.

²⁶ KNA-HW1/3665.

flags as protection against fighter-bombers'²⁷. He warned his troops to ignore the enemy 'broadcasting reports about ostensible German peace offers ... intended to cause confusion'²⁸.

Kesselring must have known it was hopeless. He saw Hitler on the 15th March and was promised a full strength Division from Denmark, which never appeared. Kesselring read reports where some Americans had been quick to surrender having no intention 'of letting themselves be shot dead so near the end of the war'²⁹. Nevertheless, there was no opportunity for any defence; troops were exhausted, and the Luftwaffe virtually extinct, and Hitler still expected to win.

By the end of March Hitler's 'Grossdeutschland was pressed between two rivers - the Oder and the Rhine'³⁰. Even, Kesselring complained, 'the best General cannot make bricks without straw'³¹. The German jet-planes were too few and too late, the March/April weather was poor, and their sites under constant threat³². Yet Kesselring fought on, but later claimed he was conscious that Germany would need rebuilding. He had managed to get his hands on *Eclipse* which was the Allied plan to divide Germany into two zones³³. When Hitler issued his 'Destruction Order on March 19th the Nero Order, a scorched earth policy of Soviet style,' he claimed to have collaborated with Speer to avoid senseless destruction, but there is no evidence of such agreement³⁴. Kesselring was too obsessed with following Hitler's orders, and fighting to the last man to spare time for Speer, despite useful postwar claims.

On March 18th Kesselring reported that the population 'was playing a negative role in the struggle against the advancing American forces,'

²⁷ KNA-HW5/706.

²⁸ KNA-HW1/3740.

²⁹ KNA-HW1/3715.

³⁰ Toland, *Last*,p.267.

³¹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.249.

³² Volksjäger, Heinkel-162.

³³ Toland, *Last*,p.329.

³⁴ Kershaw-*TheEnd*,p.303.

in so far that town/village deputations were begging officers to go around them, and they were yielding to these desperate pleas³⁵. Hitler was not impressed, claiming 'that can't be any concern any longer, get them out,' and it was not until 'the Americans were advancing on all fronts, both Kesselring and Model now decided against any more destruction'³⁶. Westphal claimed that Kesselring ignored Keitel's and Bormann's instruction that every town/village should be defended, by commanding that positions be taken up outside the boundaries³⁷. If Westphal were correct in this statement, then it was probably the first time that Kesselring had accepted the sheer hopelessness of the situation, which was absurdly late.

Kesselring noted that 'I felt like a concert pianist who is asked to play a Beethoven sonata before a large audience on an ancient, rickety and out of tune instrument. In many respects I found conditions which contradicted all my principles, but events were moving too swiftly for me to have time to influence them much. My post was too important and my rank too high for me to shirk the responsibility³⁸'. He saw Hitler four times within the first six weeks of his new appointment, and followed his instructions admitting that he 'felt utterly at sea,' which must have been unusual for the continually optimistic Kesselring³⁹. The end was imminent, Kesselring's entire front had evaporated; from now on there could only be a bitter delaying action, which was pointless.

Meanwhile, in Switzerland SS General Wolff held secret meetings with Allen Dulles to finish the war in Italy for fear of a communist take-over⁴⁰. Harold Macmillan claimed that 'the first indications that some of Kesselring's officers wished to treat for terms had reached us on 8th March'

³⁵ Speer Albert, *Inside the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970)p.438.

³⁶ Sereny Gitter, *Albert Speer; His Battle with Truth* (London: Macmillan, 1995)p.485;p.487.

³⁷ Westphal, *German*,p.196.

³⁸ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.259.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ It is has been suggested that Wolff was not seeking peace, but working for Himmler to create problems with Stalin's paranoia that the West was making peace. When Wolff sent an optimistic message to Dulles that Kesselring was ready for further discussion it has been suggested it 'was intended for Stalin's agents.'-Padfield Peter, *Himmler Reichs Führer-SS* (London: Cassell & Co, 2001)pp574/6.

and that Wolff, together with OKW representative, was presumably from Kesselring's staff⁴¹. The British assumed that Kesselring was cognisant, and Dollman, postwar said he was⁴². Wolff visited Kesselring on the 23rd March to persuade him to allow Vietinghoff to surrender. Kesselring was obviously aware of this operation which the Allies had code-named '*Sunrise*'⁴³. Following a row with Wolff, Kesselring had 'backed the steps that were being taken and agreed to be associated with them' but added 'that an end only came into question for him if the Führer was no longer alive'⁴⁴.

Kesselring's hesitancy was obtuse; he dismissed Vietinghoff for surrendering because Hitler still lived, which given what was happening was, as Kershaw wrote, a 'graphic case' of following 'insane orders'⁴⁵. It was unlikely to be Kesselring's fear of Hitler's wrath, but his fanatical brutality in that not only did he dismiss Vietinghoff, but 'he ordered his arrest and execution'⁴⁶. The obsession with obeying Hitler was typical of the higher command, as von Hassell wrote in his 1943 diary, 'none of the Field-Marshals is acting as if he knew any higher concept of duty'⁴⁷. Originally it may have been that Kesselring was seeking an immunity deal from Dulles; he had investigated 'Swiss citizenship', but the delays were poor judgement⁴⁸. Kesselring undoubtedly still felt 'bound by his oath despite Hitler's death'⁴⁹.

Kesselring's relationship with Hitler bore a strange mystical hold which countermanded common sense. When on April 12th Kesselring last saw Hitler alive, he was still hopeful for victory. Kesselring was as optimistic as ever, but von Below unbelievably claimed that Kesselring 'was not deceived and probably decided that henceforth he would follow his own

⁴¹ Macmillan Harold, *The Blast of War* (London: Macmillan, 1967)p.707

⁴² Dollman, *Interpreter*,p.333.

⁴³ The Americans appeared to trust Wolff and when later 'Nuremberg prosecutors gathered three folders of evidence relevant to Wolf's administrative involvement in war crimes, including the extermination of European Jewry' he still found protection from Dulles-Salter, *Nazi*,p.25.

⁴⁴ BA-MA-N574-19-pp.53-54; & Kershaw,*TheEnd*, p.364.

⁴⁵ Kershaw, *TheEnd*,p.396.

⁴⁶ Raiber, *Anatomy*,p.180 Vietinghoff was released in 1947 and helped in West Germany's rearmament, by writing the Himmerode memorandum.

⁴⁷ Hassell, *Diaries*,p.272.

⁴⁸ KNA-HW1/3007.

⁴⁹ Kurzman, *Special*,p.238.

inclinations;' yet he fought to the bitter end⁵⁰. When to capitulate is a vexed question, but by the spring of 1945 it was unquestionably clear that soldiers and civilians were dying for a lost cause; there was no glimmer of hope for the tide to turn.

After the capture of Remagen Bridge Hitler ordered 'Flying Special Tribunals West' which were drumhead courts; Kesselring said they 'would weaken morale along the entire Western Front,' but apparently used them⁵¹. Gersdorff claimed that Kesselring 'complained to his general staff that nowhere on his journey through the army area had he seen a hanged deserter, a sure sign of ineffective military leadership'.⁵² Kesselring was fanatical enough not to recognise that this was all out of control, and 'the brutality of its repressive measures all moved to their peak precisely as the regime itself neared collapse'⁵³. Kesselring had organised a 'Field Raiding Detachment' but eventually admitted that it failed. He knew Hitler was furious at the 'number of soldiers allowing themselves to be captured in the west'⁵⁴. Kesselring was ruthless with deserters; most were hanged from lampposts. Together with Model, he had the officers who failed to destroy the Remagen Bridge executed, proclaiming 'the verdict to all their troops as a deterrent example, adding that the 'greatest severity' was expected of the courts martial'⁵⁵. Some '9,732 death sentences were carried out up to Dec 1944 with 8,000 in the army alone, possibly 15,000 to 20,000 in the whole war; by contrast, in the USA there were 146, France 102, Britain 40 and Soviets 994,300⁵⁶.

It was decided that should the German forces be divided, the southern area would come under Kesselring with a small OKW staff under General Winter, and in the north, Dönitz. Hitler's bizarre hope was pinned on a newly created 12th Army, *deus ex machina*, even Kesselring knew it was a phantom. Macmillan, in his war diaries, noted as late as May 4th that

⁵⁰ Below, *Hitler's*, p.233.

⁵¹ Toland, *Last*, p.222.

⁵² Fest Joachim, *Not Me* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012) p.335.

⁵³ Müller-Hill, True, p.xxv.

⁵⁴ Rees, *Dark*, p.395.

⁵⁵ Kershaw, *The End*, p.263.

⁵⁶ *Militär-geschichtliches-Vol-LX/X*, p.55.

Kesselring, through Wolff had 'sent Alex a message asking to be put in touch with Eisenhower - a very interesting development'⁵⁷. Kesselring, like other political and military leaders still saw himself in an important light, even in projected defeat: they were no longer living in the real world.

The question remains as to why Kesselring fought on to the end. It has been suggested by his son Rainer, that there was always in his mind the hope of at least some sort of negotiated peace with the Western Allies⁵⁸. 'The only faint rationality' was the hope that the 'unholy coalition' between the West and Soviets would collapse giving the Wehrmacht a 'new purpose,' but this was mere bunker fantasy⁵⁹. The terms of total surrender he understood meant the destruction of the Germany as he knew it, and he had argued that he would 'sell our skins dearly'⁶⁰. How it would help soldiers in the East is difficult to understand, unless his notion that a number could be saved by a series of forced-marches west. It is easy to judge from hindsight, but even a rational man like Kesselring may have hoped, albeit unrealistic, that a *deus ex machina* in the form of a German/Allied alliance might happen.

Unbelievably, on April 23rd the last football match took place between Bayern Munich and their local rivals – it was an unreal world. The hope for miracle weapons was prevalent amongst a few even at this late stage; others still expected the West would join forces to expel the Russians. There was no reason to keep fighting; the suggestion has been made that they fought because of the demand for total surrender, and the Morgenthau plan to turn Germany into a farm, but Kershaw in his study *'The End'* argues cogently that the reasons ran deeper than the traditional historical thinking. While Hitler persisted in living, the mentality of the day meant fighting on under some sense of misguided loyalty to what was a meaningless oath. It was not just personal loyalty to Hitler, but to the character of his rule and the debased mores the NSDAP had established. Whilst Hitler remained alive, professional soldiers like Kesselring fought on costing more lives.

⁵⁷ Macmillan Harold, *War Diaries* (London: Macmillan, 1984)p.750.

⁵⁸ Macksey, *Kesselring*,p.230.

⁵⁹ Kershaw-*TheEnd*,p.296.

⁶⁰ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.282.

Although the OKW South had been authorised, Kesselring's actual plenipotentiary powers were not activated. Efficient administrator to the end, even in this unreal world, Kesselring sent a Dr Hayler to Dönitz to regularise his appointment which was duly done. He had held a conference in Graz where Kesselring reckoned that Army Group South wanted to continue fighting, but issued orders to move towards the West, forced-marches where necessary. Postwar he claimed that by this action, thousands escaped Russian clutches, and blamed the Americans for not allowing this figure to be much higher.

Kesselring appointed General Foertsch to conduct negotiations at his HQ in Alm for the 1st Army to surrender, having received direction from Donitz⁶¹. There were no negotiations just dictation of terms, the unconditional surrender took place on May 4th at Salzburg. Kesselring had asked, and been sent a message by Dönitz authorising him 'to conclude an armistice with the 6th American Army,' but total surrender was the only option⁶². There was no point in not surrendering, 'there were clear signs of disintegration among the troops, and hostility towards the Wehrmacht by the civilian population in Bavaria and Austria'⁶³.

There was confusion over who was surrendering, and Kesselring complained that he was kept in the dark. By May 6th Kesselring's HQ staff, was the only official group technically not to have surrendered, Kesselring having transferred his reduced staff to Himmler's personal train at Saalfelden. He claims to have considered suicide like Model, but decided against it on the grounds that it would simply place the burden on someone else⁶⁴.

⁶¹ KNA-HW5/706-*You are authorised to conclude an armistice with the 6th American Army Group for the troops on the Western Front between the BOKHMER WALD and the Upper INN.*

⁶² Fuehrer-Conferences, p.488.

⁶³ Kershaw, *The End*, p.367

⁶⁴ BA-MA-N750/2-LondDiary, p.3.

Surrender and Prison

After offering Eisenhower his surrender he claimed his concern became the feeding of the troops and general population. This postwar statement of concern sounds more like a man trying to maintain status. Kesselring suggested to General Devers, whom he found very aloof, that his technical troops should not be disbanded but used in repairing bridges, communications systems and helping out in the ruined agricultural areas. He claimed to have 15,000 signals service men ready to repair the telegraph/telephone systems, but was ignored. Kesselring believed that this was due to the influence of Morgenthau plans having permeated the American mind. This was unlikely, no Allied general wanted a German Field-Marshal's advice and 15,000 German troops, even if they were just signals. Kesselring was still living in an unreal world.

An American Major of the 101st Airborne took Kesselring to Berchtesgaden permitting him to keep his weapons, medals and baton. Kesselring was at first unprepared to surrender to anyone because their rank was too junior: 'then in came Kesselring, the Supreme Commander South, accompanied by a long column of cars, all bearing white flags. Charming, but firmly, 'smiling Albert' refused to deal with anybody from the 101st Airborne Division, for they were all junior in rank to him. That the power he had once held was gone seemed not to have been realised⁶⁵. Dönitz's request that Kesselring be flown to join other German leaders was turned down. Kesselring was beginning to learn that as a captured enemy officer he would be given little respect.

Kesselring was interviewed by Allied journalists and made the acquaintance of Kurt Riess, who later played a part in his trial. Kesselring's request to speak to Eisenhower was refused. There was an interlude of freedom, but as German atrocities were uncovered, Kesselring's imprisonment became more restrictive. On May 15th he was taken to the camp at Mondorf

⁶⁵ Lucas, *Last*, p.217.

via Augsburg, where he had to leave his treasured medals and baton: he was now a mere prisoner of war.

Kesselring argued that officers stood above politics, and owed obedience to the legal government, and were bound by their military oath which enjoined obedience as a categorical imperative⁶⁶. In his memoirs he stated that ethical grounds could cause a departure from this norm, but he concludes with the theological allusion of self-pity, namely that it is a narrow path between 'Hosanna' and 'Crucify Him'⁶⁷! The next few months were to be very different, as he was obliged to come to terms with the reality of NSDAP crimes, begging the question as to why Kesselring failed to consider the question of ethics until defeat.

Did Kesselring know?

Kesselring experienced different prisons, some tougher than others, his guards having seen the results of German atrocities. Westphal wrote 'naturally one knew of the concentration camps. Nevertheless it was no more possible for the Army to know the number and nature of these camps and their occupants or their condition ... right up to the end of the war the majority had only heard of Dachau and Oranienburg. Names such as Auschwitz, Belsen, and Buchenwald only became known after capitulation'⁶⁸. Kesselring claimed he knew nothing, which is impossible to verify but viewed objectively, highly unlikely.

There has been considerable debate about the role of the Wehrmacht in crimes against humanity. The photographic exhibition in the late 1990s entitled *'War of Extermination: The Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941-1944'* opened up a difficult yet productive debate on the role of ordinary Germans in the murder of innocent civilians,' and Wette demolished any

⁶⁶ In fact 'it had long been German military tradition that officers did not even vote, in order to preserve at least the outward appearance of being apolitical.'-Herbet V G, *Hitler's Generals on Trial* (Kansas: Kansas Press, 2010)p.64.

⁶⁷ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.293.

⁶⁸ Westphal, *German*,p.11.

argument that the Wehrmacht always fought a clean war⁶⁹. He pointed out that serious scholars no longer drew a distinction between the SS and the Wehrmacht, and although it is impossible to simplify any distinct picture of the Wehrmacht, there is a growing perception to depict it as 'a real instrument of the National Socialist policy of extermination'⁷⁰. However, 'the majority of the Wehrmacht's crimes had been perpetrated in the East,' and Westphal's attitude may have validity for some⁷¹. Westphal argued in postwar Western Germany that relatively few were found guilty before the tribunals⁷². Yet postwar attitudes were changing for political reasons, some appalling perpetrators of cruelty escaped, the classic example being 'Barbie's extradition to France should have been completed ... but the change in the political atmosphere had changed the rules,' by the late 1940s⁷³. Many others also escaped justice for quite cynical political and military needs: the Americans grabbing rocket scientists such as Werner von Braun, and 'the British prevented Hermann Abs, head of the Deutsche Bank from being prosecuted by the Americans,' for their various expertise⁷⁴.

The British imprisoned senior German military officers in Trent Park, and professional eavesdropping revealed that knowledge of atrocities varied; 'the prisoners at Trent Park had been captured exclusively in North Africa, France and finally in Germany, therefore in the theatres of war where the 'fewest infringements of international law were committed' and utterly different from the way things had been done in Poland, the Soviet Union and the Balkans, but knowledge of massacres was still widespread⁷⁵. Some knew more than others, but some officers were astounded when German atrocities were brought to their attention. A study of German prisoners of war held in

⁶⁹ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.vii.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.275.

⁷¹ Priemel C & Stiller A Eds, *Reassessing the Military Tribunals* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012) pp.197/8.

⁷² Some 167,000 ex-professional soldiers, of all ranks, were brought before tribunals; of these 20 were convicted of major guilt in Class I, 61 of guilt in Class II and 325 of minor guilt in Class III; 15,363 were placed in class IV as accessories, while in Class V 94,458 were exonerated, and 41,217 were not graded having no case to answer.' Westphal, *German*, p.11.

⁷³ Bower Tom, *Klaus Barbie* (London: Corgi, 1985) p.199.

⁷⁴ Tipton, *History*, p.504.

⁷⁵ Neitzel, *Tapping*, p.53.

Britain showed that 'to British camp staff it appeared these men were genuinely appalled by the atrocities of the Nazis'⁷⁶. When they were shown the compulsory film about concentration camps 'some even tore off their decorations and stamped them into the ground as soon as they left the hut where the film had been shown'⁷⁷.

Those fighting in Africa and Italy experienced less atrocity than those in Eastern Europe, and subsequently a myth grew that Africa/Italy was a clean war. It has been suggested this myth was encouraged by Kesselring's defence counsel, but there have been myriad references to the clean war in Africa/Italy; as mentioned, Colonel von Luck refers to friendly exchanges with the British, including an attempted trade off with cigarettes for a cousin of a wealthy tobacco family, and a German doctor returned for medicine for malaria⁷⁸. The same German soldier on reflection wrote that it was a 'merciless but always fair war in North Africa'⁷⁹. It was never 'chummy,' but sordid civilian massacres occurred in the southern war to a lesser extent than in the East. Nonetheless, there were massacres in Northern Italy. It was unbelievable that a senior figure such as Kesselring could be ignorant of what was happening within and without his area of responsibility. During the subsequent Nuremberg Trials (SNP) the 'prosecution had offered a detailed and comprehensive exposition of the 'staggering enormity' of Wehrmacht crime'⁸⁰. It beggars belief that Kesselring could be ignorant of the barbarity of the Wehrmacht. In the SNP the prosecution 'described the cooperation between the Wehrmacht and the *Einsatzgruppen*' and simply blaming the problems on the SS might be useful for shifting the guilt, but it was far from plausible⁸¹. It has been argued with some insight that during the trials the SS were ideal for taking the blame; certainly 'the cooperation between the Wehrmacht and the SS was poorly highlighted'⁸². In fact, for many, including

⁷⁶ Jackson Sophie, *Churchill's Unexpected Guests* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2010)p.40.

⁷⁷ Ibid,p.155.

⁷⁸ Luck, *Panzer*,pp.148/149.

⁷⁹ Ibid,p.155.

⁸⁰ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.97.

⁸¹ Ibid,p.119.

⁸² Priemel, *Reassessing*,p.124.

Kesselring, 'the focus on the SS, which had resulted from the Nuremberg trials, bore all the marks of an *Alibi of a Nation*⁸³. Over twenty million Germans served in the Wehrmacht, and to shift the guilt to the SS may have helped in the reconstruction of a nation, and military leaders like Kesselring encouraged this line of scapegoat thinking. It 'offered solace and refuge to a people emerging from catastrophic defeat and living under the opprobrium of world opinion'⁸⁴.

The Nuremberg and SNP were a very definite attempt not only to try and outline what had happened, and where the responsibility could be found, but to educate those who were ignorant or pretending to be ignorant. Kesselring found himself going through this process and wrote that his 'life was now a bitter progress through every type of Allied camp and prison'⁸⁵. In Mondorf, known as the Ash Cage, Kesselring found the officer in charge, Colonel Andrus, unpleasant, but the officers/NCOs more sympathetic. At Oberursel he was well treated, but complained that too many emigrant Germans had been 'roped in' and they had no objectivity. The Allies relied upon German speakers, many of whom, for political/racial motives, had fled Germany pre-war. Kesselring was right in his belief that they would have had little sympathy for a German commander of the NSDAP regime. A senior figure like Kesselring could expect little sympathy, and his complaint that they lacked objectivity indicated a lack of understanding or care of what had happened.

All this begs the question of how much did Kesselring know about the industrial death camps? It has been suggested that he would have flown over them, but that would not show the brutality. In Trent Park, the listeners knew that apart from a very few, most senior officers had heard gossip of such places. Kesselring must have had some knowledge because he was aware that Himmler demanded the Roman/Jewish population be transported. This is just feasible when it is recalled that in Tunisia,

⁸³ Priemel, *Reassessing*, p.152.

⁸⁴ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.5.

⁸⁵ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.294.

Ambassador Rahn had suggested that instead of deporting Jewish people that they were given work, so Kesselring ordered the mobilization of Jewish workers for defence constructions; this artifice saved that Jewish community⁸⁶.

Kesselring was guilty of single-mindedness and turning a blind eye to anything not directly under his command. This attitude was endemic in Germany, but Kesselring should have asked questions, and the Allies were justified in exposing him and others to what the NSDAP had done. Kesselring was undoubtedly brutal, he was to be tried for massacres, but it is generally agreed that he was not guilty of any involvement in the Holocaust. Like many others he was guilty of turning a blind eye, and because of his senior position he could be regarded as morally and legally complicit. Manstein was aware of atrocities committed by the *Einsatzgruppen*⁸⁷. It will always remain a vexed question as to how far the majority of Germans knew what was happening: 'police reports monitored widespread awareness of the Final Solution as it was being implemented' and 'in 1942 an article in the local newspaper in Osterode mentioned the extermination of the Jews'⁸⁸. One educated middle-ranking German diarist noted five times in his short compilation that Jews were being 'gassed and then burned,' and the NSDAP had intended the 'liquidation of Europe's Jews'⁸⁹. Another diarist simply wrote 'everyone knew about the Concentration Camps'⁹⁰. Kesselring may not have been involved, but it is unbelievable he was ignorant of these events. At his trial when asked about Jewish soldiers, he simply said there was no such thing: it is inconceivable that a man in his position was totally ignorant of the Holocaust.

⁸⁶ Katz, *Fatal*, p.70.

⁸⁷ Mungo, *Manstein*, p.440 & p.446.

⁸⁸ Tipton, *History*, pp.469/70.

⁸⁹ Müller-Hill, *True*, p.104,150, also 142,151,155.

⁹⁰ Bielenberg Christabel, *The Past is Myself* (London: Corgi, 1984)p.135

Early interrogations and victor's justice

He attended the main Nuremberg trial as a witness for Göring, and was puzzled that when under oath he claimed something to be true or false, he was still questioned on the matter; he was accustomed to people fearing to doubt him. Although Kesselring regarded himself as a military man, the Allies saw in any German leaders the degenerate perpetrators of the worse crimes mankind had ever experienced.

Kesselring's first biographer suggested that Kesselring's presentation of the air-bombing charges regarding Warsaw and Rotterdam, stopped bombing-raids being an issue, but the Allies had previously agreed lists 'concerning their own policies and actions the defence was to be prohibited from raising in court such as *area bombing* and the Molotov-Ribbentrop *annexatio*.⁹¹ When the Soviets tried to blame Katyn on the defendants, such was the reply by the defendant's counsel that the Soviets dropped the matter instantly. However, the *tu quoque* argument, (*you as well*) did not work at any of the trials given the vast and incomparable atrocities committed by the German war machine⁹².

Göring wrote in the prison's psychologist's autograph book that 'the victor will always be the judge and the vanquished the accused,' prompting Norman Davies to note that 'in this way the fundamental dilemma of the Nuremberg Trials found expression even before the trials started'⁹³. Davies appears to imply it was impossible to have a fair trial under the circumstances of victor and vanquished, but such were the horrendous crimes against humanity this is questionable. The concept of victor's justice 'represents one of the fateful postwar legends,' and was frequently used in Kesselring's case⁹⁴. As a concept its roots are classical, as Plato through Thrasymachus claims 'everywhere justice is the same thing, the advantage of

⁹¹ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.545 under charge of waging an aggressive war Ribbentrop's counsel claimed Russia had to be charged under the same count: it was swiftly closed down.

⁹² With the possible exception of the Malmedy trial.

⁹³ Davies, *History*, p.1050.

⁹⁴ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, p.212.

the stronger⁹⁵. Victor's justice can lead to the concept of 'cleaning up the past,' but 'the scrupulous forgetting was an essential component of the great collective repression that Ralph Giordano has called the Germans' second crime'⁹⁶. It was assisted and compounded in the Wennerstrum Scandal when an American judge claimed 'the victor in any war is not the best judge of the war crime guilt'⁹⁷. It has been claimed, *supra*, that the clean war legend started with Kesselring who, despite the Wehrmacht's brutal behaviour, argued that the battle may have been gory, but was based on humane and cultural criteria - Kesselring 'even expected that the Italians would erect a monument to him'⁹⁸.

It has been claimed the 'Western press encouraged the idea of collective-guilt labelling all defendants as criminal even before verdicts'⁹⁹. An attempted argument was that the defendants were decent soldiers obeying orders, and ignorant of Hitler's criminality until too late. Another argument that the Soviets had started the brutality only rang true because 'the intensification of the Cold War proved a consistent and fertile context for these and other explanations'¹⁰⁰. 'Victor's Justice' can be argued both ways, but there is no question that post-1946, with the need to keep West Germany on side, it became a political balancing act. Jurists such as Shawcross saw it as justice, but politicians, even Eisenhower, started to view the situation differently in order to win German opinion. The question of victor's justice will be pursued in the next chapter in the context of Kesselring's trial.

Kesselring appeared dominant and arrogant in his self-assuredness, and was given five month's solitary confinement. He complained there was no table, no privacy, and he felt like a leper whether on exercise or in Church. In a prison interview in February 1946 he complained that his 'teeth were loose' and he was having 'moments of dizziness:' this was undoubtedly due a down-grading of diet and the way he was treated by the

⁹⁵ Plato, *The Republic* (New York: Basic Books, 1968)p.16.

⁹⁶ Wette, *Wehrmacht*,p.223.

⁹⁷ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.40.

⁹⁸ Wette, *Wehrmacht*,p.224.

⁹⁹ Davies, *History*,p.1055.

¹⁰⁰ Priemel, *Reassessing*,p.200.

Americans, of which he also complained¹⁰¹. He was now regarded as a minor war criminal, and by the 'London Agreement' his trial was to take place in the country where the alleged crimes had been committed.

Kesselring's charm

After solitary confinement Kesselring was sent to Dachau and along with five generals he was placed in a cell with others for ten days in pitch-darkness: it was time to reflect that 'their continued allegiance to the Führer before and during the war represented a lapse in moral and professional judgment that no circumstance could mitigate'¹⁰². In April 1946 Kesselring testified regarding Allied pilots who had been murdered, his task being to outline how enemy prisoners should be treated, in theory. Again Kesselring was squeezed in to a cell with Field-Marshal Brauchitsch and Milch, the Secretary-of-State Bohle, Ambassador Borgen and a troop commander. Kesselring found this demeaning, but his Allied captors deemed it necessary to drive home the moral corruption of the regime they had served.

Following his internment in Dachau, Kesselring returned to Nuremberg, then onto Langwasser where he met old comrades, and shared a heavily barred prison-hut with Skorzeny. During his time here Kesselring went with Field-Marshal List and Weichs to meet a Colonel Potter at Allendorf. Kesselring was impressed with the car, probably feeling it was suitable for his rank, and he noted that they were treated with some respect. Colonel Potter headed up the American Historical Division, compiling a study of the war. He appeared to like Kesselring, and sometimes referring to him as *the old boy*; later he opened the Allendorf facilities for the use of the German defence lawyers.

In the autumn of 1946 he was transferred to the London Cage in Kensington, run by Colonel Scotland. It was the centre for interrogating suspected war criminals, and postwar had a mixed reputation, one recent

¹⁰¹ Goldensohn, *Interviews*, p.317.

¹⁰² Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.135.

writer claiming 'it is certainly a sordid piece of British history'¹⁰³. Scotland, a hardened interrogator, found as did the American Colonel Potter, Kesselring charming, and assisted his defence. Scotland referred to Kesselring as *Kessie*, admitting he liked him, and wrote that he was the most 'blameless of all the German army leaders who ever set foot in wartime Italy'¹⁰⁴. Nevertheless, having read his evidence, Scotland explained to Kesselring he was likely to be tried as a war criminal. Scotland blamed it on Kesselring's pride, as he claimed being Commander-in-Chief he was responsible. Remarkably, Kesselring with one British Officer was permitted to explore the sights of London; few, if any other prisoner, was allowed this privilege.

From London Kesselring returned to Allendorf, where over the Christmas and the New Year of 1946 he spent some time with his wife. On January 17th 1947 Kesselring was removed via Salzburg to Rimini for his trial in Venice. Colonel Potter personally took him to Frankfurt, where he handed him over to what Kesselring described as two pleasant army officers. Kesselring had the ability to charm even his guards, and the imprisonment does not appear to have any effect on his attitudes towards all that had occurred. He was now to face a British military court, and the reality of what had happened in Italy, because despite time in prison, he still regarded his deeds as legal, and himself as innocent.

¹⁰³ Jackson S, *Churchill's*,p.100.

¹⁰⁴ Scotland, *London*,p.173.

CHAPTER 9

THE TRIAL (1947)¹

Introduction

This Chapter will deal with Kesselring's trial, the nature of the Court, the prosecution and defence, and the outcome. The introduction will briefly examine the Nuremberg context, and the way the British Trial of Kesselring reflected the Nuremberg Subsequent Proceedings. It will explore the legal issues; the competency of Court Official and the concept of Victor's Justice. It will also raise the issue that Wolff, a major potential culprit was given American protection; and the reasons for holding the trial in Italy. The second part will examine the Prosecution's first charge relating to Kesselring's conduct in the Ardeatine massacre, and Kesselring's defence. The third part deals with the second charge relating to Kesselring's orders, which the prosecution claimed gave rise to the killing of innocent Italians. After the Prosecution's evidence is outlined, the main defences to this charge will be examined. The fourth part of the chapter relates to Kesselring's defence that he managed to preserve much of Italy's cultural heritage. Kesselring's survival instinct is exposed in the fifth part, when research by Richard Raiber appears to show that Kesselring lied in Court about his whereabouts, in order that he would not be subject to the charge of executing American POWs. The last two sections deal with the nature of the Court's final verdict, and an overview of that verdict given the nature of a total war of extermination.

The Authority, Nature, Legal Issues, and Venue of the Trial

Nuremberg and Subsequent Proceedings

As the war drew to a close discussions had taken place as to how to deal with the enemy leadership, and although Churchill was aghast at Stalin's

¹ Trial -17thFebruary to 6thMay.

attitude of mass shooting he was, for a time, inclined to 'nothing more than a brief kangaroo court at which their identity could be verified' and 'then shot to death ... without reference to higher authority'². His belief that the fifty to a hundred top men should be treated as outlaws persisted for a time, but the legal process of the Nuremberg Trials eventually took shape. 'The validity of the Nuremberg Trials has been disputed both inside and outside Germany, especially on the grounds that new law was formulated to cover crimes already committed'³. Also, as noted by the German historian Gehler, the Nuremberg type of trial would always be questionable 'from the legal point of view,' because 'corporate crimes were a matter of debate'⁴. An American perspective stated that the trials were 'the very symbol of the new international order, a United Nations in miniature but for all the world to see and take hope from'⁵. In reality the Allies 'had to educate themselves. They knew something of the conditions in the Third Reich, but their collective view of Germany and the Germans bordered at times on caricature'⁶. The trial was not just about the Allies educating themselves, but about what they perceived as justice. The 'popular conception of the proceedings, the myth, is that they were a model act of justice in which those in the dock received their well-deserved fate'⁷. Despite such contentious views surrounding the Nuremberg Trial, the subsequent trials were soon identified as a cleansing process, and a means of educating the German people, as to what had happened in their name. It was often mooted, especially by the American Chief Prosecutor Telford Taylor, that the record of the trials 'constituted one of the most effective tools in the democratization of Germany'⁸. The British 'had a programme of moral rehabilitation which was targeted at youth,' and this concept of using trials to educate people continued into their own military trials, and most especially for the Americans, in what is known as the

² Overy Richard, *Interrogations, Inside the Minds of the Nazi Elite* (London:Penguin, 2001)p.6.

³ Flenley Ralph, *Modern German History* (London: Dent, 1968)pp.436/7.

⁴ Gehler Michael, *Three Germanies* (London: Reaktion, 2011)p.28.

⁵ Davidson Eugene, *The Death and Life of Germany, An Account of the American Occupation* (London: Cape, 1959)p.101.

⁶ Overy, *Interrogation*, p.xvii.

⁷ Owen James, *Nuremberg, Evil on Trial* (London: Headline Pub, 2007)p.1.

⁸ USFR, p.100 and p.106.

Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings (SNP)⁹. These trials, while genuinely trying to exhibit justice, inevitably had political ramifications. The Americans held a series of trials, (the SNP) which tried, as it were, 'Issues.' There was a trial relating to Doctors, one for Judges, one on the High Command and one on Hostages which this thesis will refer to later, twelve altogether. They were meant to be educative and informative, and Kesselring's did not reflect the American model. Kesselring, who had attended the main Nuremberg Trial as a witness, was taken to Venice for a British Military Trial.

The Legal issues

Kesselring's trial was based on the London Agreement, and many points of law were not anticipated. Amongst the first critics was Lord Hankey, a Civil servant who rose to Cabinet Secretary and Ministerial rank, well known for being opposed to War Trials and who wrote on the subject, *Politics Trials and Errors*. He thought it wrong that a designated prosecutor and judge should draw up the charter 'of the very court where they were to function'¹⁰. The subsequent trials based their legitimacy on The Charter of the International Military Tribunal to establish Nuremberg and had main three main headings: *Crimes against Peace*, *War Crimes* and the new *Crimes against Humanity*. Critics raised various objections ranging from those who objected to the final decisions, those claiming that the tribunals and military court proceedings 'had no jurisdiction in international law, and that it applied *ex post facto* law,' and some that the 'prosecuting states had been guilty of the same offences'¹¹. Despite these legal criticisms the demand for retribution was powerful.

Kesselring's trial concerned the death of Italian civilians, and was being held in Italy by a foreign power, against defendants from another foreign power. Today international law is more defined in having an acknowledged court for this purpose, but in the postwar period this *ad hoc*

⁹ Overy, *Interrogations*, p.537.

¹⁰ Hankey, *Politics*, p.18.

¹¹ Kinsella & Carr, Editors, *The Morality of War, A Reader* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2007)p.351.

situation was more acceptable. It has also been argued from the legal perspective that 'troops in time of war, fighting under the fog of war, are likely to do horrible things' but 'is it reasonable, then, to hold commanders legally responsible for the illegal actions of those under their authority'¹²? This arises because some legal scholars believe that to hold 'commanders responsible for the conduct of their troops when commanders are powerless to exercise precise battlefield control over their troops, simply stretches to breaking point the traditional link between criminal liability and criminal responsibility'¹³. It is the same argument that a Chief Constable would not be expected to resign when a uniformed constable is caught breaking the law. Anglo-Saxon law, British and American, has always held that *mens rea* (intention) with *actus reus* (the deed) is necessary. However, it could be argued that if the commander gives the orders (intention) to kill, the subordinate merely becomes his weapon.

The fundamental jurisprudential questions of the trial ranged around the nature of the laws governing the conduct of war, the lack of international agreement, the conflict of Allied views and practice, and the two principles of '*nulla poena sine lege*' (no penalty without a law) and closely related to the principle that law cannot be enacted in retrospect, '*nulla poena sine praevia lege poende*.' Some of these issues were never satisfactorily resolved; international law was in its infancy, and the British Military Court lacked the depth of jurisprudence that international law required.

Competency of Officials

This lack of legal depth led to criticism regarding the quality and nature of the Court's officers. The Court was presided over by Major-General Sir Edmund Hakewill-Smith and four Lieutenant Colonels. Colonel Richard Halse was the prosecutor, as he had been at Mackensen and Mälzer's trial. Many wondered whether the Court was senior enough to pass judgements on international law; Scotland, Kesselring's London interrogator, wrote a protest

¹² Kinsella, *Morality*, p.381.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.382.

about the court's constitution. A Colonel Preston Murphy, an American observer of the early proceedings, wrote a critique that the court consisted of a 'Major-General, who had commanded a Division in combat, and four officers of the rank of Lt. Colonel ...their services were on a relatively low level...I am of the opinion ... the officers could not envisage and properly evaluate the Field-Marshal's problems, actions and orders'¹⁴. This point was taken up by the Guardian newspaper, as well as the criticism that it was 'the British Army' who conducted the trial¹⁵. Since the trial raised questions of the legitimacy of hostages/reprisals, affidavits, and international law, it could be argued that such issues warranted the most senior judges. Decisions made at this Court could act as a precedent, influence international law or be overturned, and as such demanded the highest degree of legal expertise and experience. One of the dangers of a Military Court lacking legal depth was it permitted critics to raise the subject of Victor's Justice.

Siegerjustiz-Victor's Justice

For a long time this trial and other post Nuremberg military trials (SNP) 'were dogged by persistent criticism in Germany of being no more than an application of retro-active law and an exercise in double-standard victor's justice'¹⁶. However, 'there was little effort in German society to defend National Socialist Criminals ... having dragged the country into the abyss'¹⁷. Some British writers such as Hankey, Paget and Veale used victor's justice to attack the trials, but mainly on grounds of humanitarian principles.

A year after Kesselring's trial an American judge, Charles Wennerstrum, returning to America announced to a journalist that 'the victor in any war is not the best judge of the war crime ... the prosecution has failed to maintain objectivity aloof from vindictiveness'¹⁸. Many clergy were also active in the cause of victor's justice: 'in the immediate postwar years, the

¹⁴ Raiber, *Anatomy*,p.96.

¹⁵ Guardian, May 20th1949, p.6.

¹⁶ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.154.

¹⁷ Hagen William, *German History in Modern Times* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012)p.362.

¹⁸ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.40.

most concentrated and well organised source of criticism of the American war crimes trials was the German clergy¹⁹. The Vatican also requested the Allies to forgive and thereby forget the past, to put an end to the trials²⁰. It was received with a degree of coldness, the American Zone commander pointing out to a Catholic Cardinal that no 'death penalty has or will be exacted except where the evidence clearly sustains that the offense warrants the penalty'²¹. The Pope was backed by American and British Bishops. 'A constantly recurring theme in public responses to the trials was that all parties to the war, but especially the Soviets had committed similar abuses;' this criticism of Russia may have an element of truth but the West was not faced by *Vernichtungskrieg* - a war of total destruction²². In the next decade the diatribe surrounding victor's justice continued, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* claiming that in Korea 'the West's reputation was no more unblemished than the Germans'²³. Most of the arguments fell into the categories that all sides committed crimes, the victors applied *ex post facto* law, soldiers must follow orders, and there were no war crimes.

The question of victor's justice arose around Kesselring's trial mainly because Mälzer (Commandant in Rome) and General Mackensen had already been sentenced to death for the Ardeatine massacre²⁴. Because death sentences had already been passed on Kesselring's subordinates, it gave the appearance of a show trial. To add to this criticism of being victor's justice it was widely accepted that the SS General Wolff should have been in the dock.

¹⁹ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.41.

²⁰ New York Times, 16th April 1948.

²¹ Clay Lucius, (Ed Jean Edward Smith) *The Papers of General Lucius D. Clay*, Volume Two (London: Indiana University Press, 1974) p.962.

²² Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.154.

²³ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 18th August 1952.

²⁴ Kesselring had addressed a petition to George VI pleading that Mackensen 'is a personality of very deep feelings' and Mälzer 'softened the hardships of war for the population of Rome' 'they were doing nothing 'illegal and immoral.' KNA, WO32/15488.

Not all Culprits charged

Many felt that SS General Wolff was the major culprit for the German crimes in Italy. Research in *'US Intelligence and Selective Prosecution at Nuremberg'* indicates that Wolff was under the protection of Alan Dulles during Operation Sunrise, and recently 'declassified intelligence documentation provides direct evidence of Dulles' interventions within the Nuremberg process'²⁵. It is not surprising that in the aftermath of war many escaped justice. The powerful protection of the Americans meant that Wolff, unquestionably involved in the Ardeatine and many other massacres, avoided the British Military Courts. Wolff eventually died in his bed in 1984, accused of much, surrounded by rumours, but never indicted for the Italian crimes. Scotland, who interrogated Kesselring in London, and who was highly critical of the proceedings, pointed out in a letter after the trial, that he found it difficult to see how the guilty verdict could stand without a 'closer scrutiny' of the role played by the SS²⁶. His point was pertinent, but did not detract from Kesselring's involvement. Italy had made capital punishment illegal, and it was thought they wanted the British to try the case because they were prepared to carry out the death sentence with or without Wolff, but the decision to hold the trial in Italy was more complex.

Trial in Italy

Kesselring, who had always pretended he had no interest in politics, was now a focal point of various political forces, a feature which dogged him until his death. The British were conscious of the political instability of Italy, and were wary of the communist elements. There was a political consciousness of the need for better relationships between the two powers. The placing of the trial in Italy was received by the Italian media as their own 'Little Nuremberg,' described as 'Little' because they wanted major trials as at Nuremberg.²⁷ However, if the Italian government had participated,

²⁵ Salter, *Nazi*, p.123.

²⁶ KNA, FO 1060/493, petition to Foreign Office, May 1950.

²⁷ See Battini, *Missing*.

even in Kesselring's trial to the commission's work, 'it would have had to examine and judge not only the crimes committed by the Nazis against Italian civilians, but also the war crimes committed by the Italians themselves against Allied troops, and the population of the territories occupied by the Axis in the period prior to September 8, 1943'²⁸. The British remained conscious of the complex political situation, and its diplomatic relationships. The Deputy Judge Advocate General wrote: 'there is, at the moment, no doubt that a substantial percentage of the Italian people is hostile to such war crime trials, inasmuch as they also involve Italian citizens and, since the Italians have suffered so terribly at the hands of the Germans, presumably many months will have to pass before the German generals are tried. Do you think that adopting such a line of conduct could be a positive thing for the morale of the Italians'²⁹? The British were concerned about avoiding any choice that could 'favour even indirectly a mass mobilization, which would have been completely to the advantage of the most radical political alignment. It was certainly for this reason that the prospect of holding an Italian Nuremberg was definitively shelved'³⁰.

The Italians and Allies cooperated, but the British 'did not conceal their mistrust of the Italian authorities, a mistrust of which the Italians were painfully aware'³¹. The British were not prepared to share documents with the Italians, and there was the fear of a lynching, as had been the danger in the trial in Rome against Mackensen and Mältzer. When it comes to an excited mob 'it is not always easy to distinguish a desire for revenge from a commitment to justice'³². The trial was held in Italy for many reasons; but there was the hope that the trials might improve relationships between Britain and Italy, in fact the Italian Peace Treaty was signed in Paris on the day the trial started, 17th February 1947.

²⁸ Battini, *Missing*, p.69.

²⁹ KNA-WO 32/14556.

³⁰ Battini, *Missing*, p. 76.

³¹ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.79.

³² Kinsella, *Morality*, p.344.

Prosecution and Defence on the First Charge

The Prosecution called nine witnesses and produced 57 exhibits. Kappler, Head of Gestapo and Secret Service in Rome, was their key witness. The main witness for the defence was Kesselring himself supported by his staff-officers Beelitz and Westphal. The adversarial nature of the Court proceedings was somewhat alien to both the Germans and the Italians who did not understand the British legal tradition, and were irritated when Halse addressed Laternser as 'my learned friend,' and that Halse was polite when addressing Kesselring as 'Herr Feld-Marschall'³³.

Kesselring's defence was lead by Dr Hans Laternser, an expert in Anglo-Saxon law, and the 'the most right wing of the defence attorneys'³⁴. Laternser represented the General Staff at Nuremberg, and technically negated the Charge that the Wehrmacht leadership was criminal: he later assisted in representing Manstein, and wrote a major book on defending Wehrmacht commanders. Laternser was supported by Dr Frohwein, Dr Schütze and Professor Dr Schwinge, the last being the author of the German 1936 military penal code³⁵.

The Charge - Ardeatine Massacre

Kesselring faced two charges; the first was specific and related to the killing of 335 Italians in the Ardeatine caves. This incident is described in Chapter 7, but in terms of the trial it seems appropriate to relate the salient features of this crime. On March 23rd, and this date becomes highly significant, thirty-three policeman of the Bozen Regiment (not SS as is frequently claimed) were blown up in the Via Rasella by communist partisans

³³ It was also rumoured that Halse gave Kesselring tobacco, and on one occasion invited the defence team out to dinner.

³⁴ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.102.

³⁵ There was a general feeling that many of Kesselring's enemies wished him well. During the trial the German legal team was lodged with the German Franciscan Sisters in Venice, and given Church lodgings when obliged to visit Rome. All this was paid for by the British Army, and the lawyers noted, according to the German historian Lingen that they had the 'unconcealed sympathy of the British guards.' Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.107.

trying to provoke a German response, and illustrate their strength to other partisan groups. Kesselring was supposed to be visiting the Gustav Line on this date, and Hitler's demand that hostages should be shot at a ratio of fifty to one was reduced by Kesselring's subordinates to ten to one. The outcome was the massacre of 335 hostages in the catacombs known as the Ardeatine caves. Significantly, five more than the proposed 330 were killed, including prisoners and Jewish people. This incident was not the greatest barbarity committed in Italy, but is regarded as one of the most infamous, and still provokes anger. 'Street battles over the coffin of a Nazi war criminal have illustrated that Italy is still torn over the legacy of Fascism...' was written in 2013 relating to the funeral of SS Captain Erich Priebke, who drew up the infamous list and took part in the executions³⁶.

The Alibi Defence

Part of Kesselring's defence was that he alleged that on the 23rd March, the day of the incident, he could not be contacted, having flown to Monte Cassino. His argument was that by being out of touch he was out of the loop. Beelitz, in charge of Kesselring's Headquarters at the time, under cross-examination, claimed that because of Allied air-superiority he knew that 'the Field-Marshal is going to return in the evening at dusk;' in his absence officers managed to reduce Hitler's outburst from fifty reprisals per person, to a ratio of ten-to-one³⁷. Beelitz claimed he told the OKW officer, that Kesselring would never tolerate a ratio of fifty-to-one³⁸. Earlier, in September 1941 the OKW had proposed this ratio for 50 to 100 communists 'as suitable atonement for one German soldier's life;' in the Eastern war barbarity was unbounded³⁹. The ten-to-one ratio was well broadcast, and many German soldiers, such as Josef Lücking, believed it was 'permitted by the Geneva Convention'⁴⁰. The task of execution had been given directly to SS

³⁶ The Times, Thursday October 17th2013, p.42.

³⁷ LRWC, Trial transcript for 17thMarch.

³⁸ LRWC, Trial transcript for 17thMarch.

³⁹ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.88.

⁴⁰ Steinhoff, *Voices*, p.269.

Obersturmbannführer Kappler, to be carried out with immediate effect⁴¹. Kappler phoned Kesselring informing him that he had sufficient number of men already sentenced to death; known as *Todeswürdig*⁴². Kesselring's defence was that the whole incident was nothing to do with him, that it was an order for the SS not the Wehrmacht, his staff had managed to reduce the ratios to a 'reasonable' proportion, and he had established that the victims were already condemned.

Defence that Hitler ordered the SD

Kesselring's defence team further argued that Hitler had ordered the SD to carry out the executions immediately, and this order came through after the ratios had been reduced in the form of a second order. The Judge Advocate stated that in essence Kesselring's only defence was that he never carried out the orders, 'all I did was to pass along the chain of communication a message to the SD'⁴³. One of the problems for Kesselring's defence was the lack of material-evidence for this second order making the SD responsible; no copy has ever been found. It is curious that during the London cross-examination Kesselring never mentioned the order, but, conveniently, claimed he recalled it in Rome as a witness for Mälzer and Mackensen. Kesselring's claim that Hitler had directly commanded the SD was supported by Westphal and Beelitz, and corroborated by a clerk on oath, but his testimony was thought to be untrustworthy. The Judge Advocate was obliged to state that 'I feel there is some doubt in the law, the benefit of that doubt must be given to the Field-Marshal'⁴⁴. It was plausible that Hitler/Himmler would have ensured the deed was carried out by the SD, and a Count Ingelheim confirmed a telephone call that the reprisal had been ordered from over the head of the Field-Marshal, but no written evidence of the precise order has ever been identified. Kesselring was frequently at pains to insist that as Commander he was totally in charge even of the SS. He made no such claim during this part of the trial, and insisted that Hitler's order, if it existed, exonerated him. In his

⁴¹ Kappler was tried by an Italian Military Court and sentenced to life-imprisonment.

⁴² *Todeswürdig*-German word used for such people-Raiber, *Anatomy*,p.54.

⁴³ LRWC, Vol-VIII pp.10.

⁴⁴ LRWC, Vol-VIII pp.13.

summing-up the Judge Advocate said if 'you feel that it is right on the evidence as a whole that the shooting was clearly the responsibility of the Security Service and that all responsibility had passed from the Wehrmacht, then to my mind you are bound to acquit the accused'⁴⁵.

Defence - Was Kesselring humane?

Another line of Kesselring's defence which Latenser argued was that Kesselring deliberately omitted the word *hostages* in transmitting the order, to avoid anyone not already sentenced to death being selected. Kesselring argued he had simply communicated the message to the intended recipients, ensuring, as far as he was able, that only the 'already condemned' would die. 'Kesselring, Westphal, and Beelitz all claimed they felt relieved as a result of this information from Kappler, because it meant that only criminals, not innocent hostages as Hitler was demanding, would be executed'⁴⁶. Since Hitler had made it clear he wanted innocent hostages killed, by going down the route of killing the already condemned, Kesselring was knowingly breaching orders, and the Judge Advocate asked Westphal: 'I am not criticizing. Is not the position, quite clearly, that the Field-Marshal was deliberately and knowingly disobeying the oath he had made to Hitler'⁴⁷? The Judge Advocate was undoubtedly making the valid point that Kesselring could not stand by his oath to Hitler if he were not constant in its application. No one seems to have raised the question that a criminal, albeit a criminal, is not necessarily under a death sentence. It is extremely unlikely that Pietro Caruso, the head of the fascist police in Rome, who claimed he had cleared his gaols, held prisoners who were all under the death sentence, and the local German command would have known this. There had been insufficient prisoners to be shot, and, Pietro Caruso, offered Kappler the content of the jails including some Jews. As mentioned earlier there was a miscalculation, and the extra five who were executed still made the Ardeatine massacre a war crime, even if the shooting of hostages were found legally acceptable.

⁴⁵ LRWC, Vol VIII pp.13.

⁴⁶ LRWC, Trial transcript for 26th March.

⁴⁷ LRWC, Trial transcript for 31st March.

The defence requested from the Vatican a certificated copy of Kesselring's letter in which he stated that the Ardeatine killings involved only those already on death sentences. Such evidence would have been critical for *mens rea* as well as motive, but the request was declined, and the Vatican also forbade other affidavits⁴⁸.

Whether it related to Kesselring's alibi on March 23rd (which will be touched upon later in this chapter), or the command direct from Hitler to the SD to carry out the reprisal, or Kesselring's alleged assurance that he had checked that only the already condemned would die, Westphal, Beelitz and Lemelsen never deviated from the facts as outlined by Kesselring. Their main argument was that the responsibility was Hitler's; the orders had been transmitted to the SD, and were legal. It seems transparent that such was the degree of agreement between these witnesses it should have raised the possibility of complicity, but counsel never raised this likelihood. There seems little doubt looking back on the trial notes there had been collaboration. Later in this chapter the question of Kesselring's alibi will be raised again, when evidence will indicate that he committed perjury: as such his witnesses must have collaborated⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ There has been considerable controversy over the role of the Vatican; there are those who claim that Pius XII was vilified with 'communist inspired attempts to demonise him in the post-war years.' - Burleigh, *Moral*, p.468. Some have argued the Pope was indifferent to the Jewish disaster, fearing reprisals against German Roman Catholics, trying to hold the balance between the evils of fascism and communism; but 'he did little for the millions of Catholics killed by the Nazis.' Davies, *History*, p.1021. One historian accused the 'Pope of a Faustian pact.' - Katz, *Fatal*, p.245, in the postwar years the 'Pope himself called upon former Allied leaders essentially to 'forget the past, and give the Germans ... the hope of a better future in the sign of love.' Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.43

⁴⁹ Pietro Caruso was executed in Rome as soon as the war finished, but ironically, at Kappler's trial the Italian judiciary accepted the orders as legal, which implies that an Italian Court would have found Kesselring innocent of this charge. Obeying orders was apparently acceptable to the Italian court but unacceptable to the Allies following the Nuremberg decisions.

Prosecution and Defence on the Second Charge

Prosecution Evidence

The second charge related to Kesselring's Command Orders inciting his forces to kill civilians as reprisals against partisan activity. The prosecution outlined that on '1st May 1944 Field-Marshal Keitel, as Commander-in-Chief of all German forces, issued an order' which gave Kesselring total command in the war against partisans, and it was therefore his responsibility⁵⁰. Keitel had already issued Führer orders on partisans stating that since: 'this fighting has nothing to do with soldierly gallantry or principles of the Geneva Convention ... that it is therefore not only justified, but is the duty of the troops to use all means without restriction even against women and children as long as it ensures success ... any consideration for partisans is a crime against the German people... and no German employed against partisans will be held accountable for his actions ... and the contents of this order are to be strongly impressed on all officers of subordinate units'⁵¹.

The prosecution further stated that on 17th June 1944 Kesselring issued a similar written order: 'the fight against the partisans must be carried on with all the means at our disposal and with the utmost severity. I will protect any command who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice of severity of the methods he adopts against partisans'⁵². All this was very similar to the earlier 'Barbarossa Jurisdiction Order' which urged a war without mercy, and leaving it in the hands of officers on the spot⁵³.

The prosecution also outlined that Kesselring issued a radio threat on the 28th June, appealing to the Italians not to respond to Alexander and Badoglio's call for Italians to kill Germans at every opportunity. Kesselring

⁵⁰ LRWC-Vol-VIII pp.10.

⁵¹ LRWC-Document-UK-66, pp.572/582.

⁵² KNA-HW1/2982 and LRWC-Document-UK-66, pp.572-582.

⁵³ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.117 -see Appendix 1.

appealed to the Italians, claiming he respected human principles, but he would react fiercely whenever partisans were involved in their 'despicable and mediaeval method of fighting'⁵⁴. These orders were circulated throughout Italy on public notice boards and newspapers, some commands being more forthright than others⁵⁵.

On July 1st Kesselring sent another order stating his radio-broadcast was not an empty threat, and where large numbers of partisans were operating then male hostages were to be taken as a warning. The prosecution cited over twenty instances of indiscriminate killing by Germans based on submitted affidavit evidence, which accounted for killings of approximately a thousand Italian civilians. When in London, Kesselring had given a deposition during the committal proceedings 'that dramatically revealed the feelings of rancour he had been harbouring towards the Italian army and people that had been the premise of his policy'⁵⁶. As such the prosecution argued that Kesselring's orders incited his troops to commit excesses, which he later attempted to avert. This occurred following Mussolini's plea for leniency on the 24th September, in which Kesselring said 'the Duce has furnished me with fresh incidents which are revolting in the manner in which they have been carried out and are driving even the peaceful elements of the population into the enemy's camp or to the partisans'⁵⁷.

The prosecution concluded this evidence with: 'I say no more than this is an *incitement*, but in the order of the 1st July the accused goes further and *orders* his troops to take reprisals, and it is not until 24th September that he says 'this must stop.' That is the gravamen of this charge'⁵⁸. The issue on the second charge, as pointed out by the Judge Advocate, was whether Kesselring's orders were 'a definite incitement to kill Italians or just badly worded orders which were rather carelessly drafted'⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ LRWC-Vol-VIII pp.10.

⁵⁵ Typical example in Appendix 2.

⁵⁶ Battini, *Missing*, p.88.

⁵⁷ LRWC-Vol-VIII pp.11.

⁵⁸ LRWC-Vol-VIII pp.11.

⁵⁹ LRWC-Vol-VIII pp.12.

Defence -Not the Wehrmacht

In terms of defence Kesselring claimed the orders of the 17th June and 1st July were legal; that he had simply instructed his soldiers to be severe, but not to break the law. Kesselring's claim that he would protect commanders from political repercussions had nothing to do with reprisals, which seems somewhat specious. The defence questioned the validity of the affidavits taken by the British Military Police's SIB (Special Investigation Branch) long before the trial started, because most of the policemen could not be questioned as they were in England. These affidavits, given by Italians, were not always verifiable. It was upon these documents that the second charge indicted him for the death of over a thousand people, but the actual eye witness evidence of massacres left little room for doubt.

When reading about the question of the responsibility for these massacres being the SS or Wehrmacht, it is possible to sense the emotions, and to this day the proceedings still invoke feelings. The attitude of the Allies towards the SS was one of both distaste and fear, British soldiers being told that 'the SS are a more carefully selected and better drilled body of thugs'⁶⁰. However, the Italian historian Michele Battini claimed that the 'British elite' almost had a 'psychological necessity' to distinguish between the Wehrmacht and the NSDAP with its SS apparatus: 'it is an example of the desperate attempt to keep alive a cultural code common to the victors and the vanquished - of the way in which British Conservatism and Prussianism belonged to the same European tradition'⁶¹. This idea that the military culture of Prussia had a sympathetic parallel in British conservatism may have some element of truth, but the reality was beyond this. The SS were well known for being a formidable fighting force, and it suited Germans, not least Kesselring, to pass the blame onto the SS leaving the Wehrmacht as fighting the mythical 'clean' war. As will be noted in the following chapters, as the Cold War increased during this period it came to suit the Allies to adopt this attitude, but at Kesselring's trial it was secondary to Kesselring's charges of massacre.

⁶⁰ British Soldiers Book, 1944,p.13.

⁶¹ Battini, *Missing*,p.41.

There was considerable evidence of major massacres, for which there was a tendency to look towards the SS as the perpetrators more than the Wehrmacht. *Obersturmbannführer* Ekkehardt, head of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier, later claimed he was unaware of any of Kesselring orders; this may well have been true of much of the SS who had their own lines of command. Given the communication systems of the day it is probable that Kesselring's orders and counter-orders did not percolate to every area. Nevertheless, Kesselring gave orders which, for a time, evidently incited those inclined towards brutal behaviour, Wehrmacht and SS alike. Many massacres were done by Italian neo-fascist formations such as the *Brigata Nera*, and partisan elements some wearing German uniforms. There were undoubtedly many such crimes committed of which Kesselring would have been unaware, but he had authorised similar incidents through his orders, and unquestionably he was aware of others. Since he insisted he was in charge, and, as the Prosecution pointed out, Keitel had confirmed this, he must be held complicit in all these deeds. The whole question of legality focused on the question of hostages and reprisal victims, and any laws appertaining to this critical area.

Defence- Legality of Hostage/Reprisal

Kesselring never invoked the Nuremberg defence of obeying superior orders, which had been one of the main defence components at the major war trial in Nuremberg. The argument used by so many at Nuremberg and its subsequent trials was, that an action may have been criminal, but orders have to be obeyed which was declared unacceptable. Kesselring, on the other hand argued that his actions were legal. He may possibly have been aware that in 1921, a German court in Leipzig, applied the German military code which appeared to stipulate that even with knowledge of superior orders the subordinate 'ought to have known that the orders constituted crimes' and would therefore be guilty⁶². The German Military Penal Code of 1872 was used in the war, and declared that 'the obeying subordinate shall be punished

⁶² Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.71.

as an accomplice to an illegal order - if he exceeded it or if he knew the order was criminal⁶³. It is ironic that these codes outlawed the appeal to senior orders and criminal orders, but this would hardly have applied during the Hitler regime⁶⁴. This explains why Kesselring insisted his orders given and received were legal.

Latenser argued that the use of hostage/reprisal was legal, albeit unpleasant, and needed a better forum of legal experience than a Court Martial because of the legal complexity. There was a degree of truth in his argument; the problems of international law, the history of hostage/reprisal, demanded more than the judgement of a few British military officers.

The defence argued it was virtually impossible to communicate with partisans, making the hostage/reprisal system necessary; further arguing there was a pedigree of 'hostage-taking' dating back to the Franco-Prussian war. The prosecutor in Kesselring's case had 'pointed out that whereas there was authority for destruction of property and incarceration of nationals of occupied territory as reprisals, there was no authority for the taking of human life⁶⁵. In short, reprisals were seen as acts of retaliation to unlawful conduct, and for enforcing compliance with recognised rules of warfare. The Allies had apparently used the similar threat; when 'the French occupied Stuttgart in April 1945, it was announced that hostages would be shot in the ratio or 25 to 1 for every French soldier murdered by the German civilian population ... when the Americans entered the Harz district, execution was threatened in the ratio of 200 to 1,' though this was more a threat, and no one was actually shot under these circumstance⁶⁶.

That hostage/reprisal was widespread and complex was illustrated when the American and British army regulations were tabled. A brief reading of the trial notes between the Judge Advocate and Colonel Halse

⁶³ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.142.

⁶⁴ Müller-Hill, *True*, p.xviii indicates German Military judges mainly used 1872 Military Penal Code and 1898 Judicial Procedure.

⁶⁵ LRWC-Vol-VIII pp.12.

⁶⁶ Veale, *Advance*, p.292.

for the prosecution clearly indicates that Laternser's placing of the American manual of warfare as an exhibit, took them by surprise, revealing a deep ignorance of the issues⁶⁷. The defence quoted from the American Rules of Land Warfare, namely: 'Hostages taken and held for the declared purpose of ensuring against unlawful acts by the enemy forces or people may be punished or put to death if unlawful acts are nevertheless committed'⁶⁸. The British Manual at paragraph 454 stated that 'Reprisals are an extreme measure because in most cases they inflict suffering upon innocent persons. In this, however, their coercive force exists, and they are indispensable as a last resort'⁶⁹. In addition to this the defence team quoted from a commentary on German Military Law used during World War II in which the author wrote: 'hostages are held in a kind of safe custody. They vouch with their lives for the lawful conduct of the opponent. According to the usages of war it must be announced that hostages are being taken and for what purpose... if the opponent continues his unlawful conduct, the hostages can be killed'⁷⁰.

The Allied Army manuals appeared to give some legitimacy to the hostage/reprisal practice. The whole issue was confusing, and the Judge Advocate at the end of the trial said 'I have come to the conclusion that there seems to be on the part of writers a very deliberate attempt not to come out in the open and answer the very question that the Court wants answered and this is 'can you shoot, in certain circumstances, an innocent person by way of reprisal'⁷¹ ?'

Kesselring's trial had raised the issue of hostage/reprisal, and it failed to arrive at any agreement; even the term hostage and reprisal were not always clearly defined. Defence Counsel used hostage as the first step towards inflicting reprisal, the Prosecution used hostage where only reprisal

⁶⁷ Text of this part of trial in Appendix-6.

⁶⁸ US-Army-Field Manual-27-10/1stOctober1940-358d, Appendix-5 for text.

⁶⁹ LRWC-Volume-VIII, p.12.

⁷⁰ Waltzog, *Recht der Landkriegsführung* (Laws of War on Land) p. 83, and LRWC, Volume-VIII, p.12.

⁷¹ LRWC, Vol-VIII, p.12.

applied. 'Hostages are taken before the act of illegitimate warfare committed by the enemy whereas reprisals are inflicted after such an act'⁷².

There was a lack of clarity in this trial which the Americans attempted to resolve in 'Southeast Trial' (part of the SNP based on the Balkans and Greece) in which the Tribunal concentrated on the law of hostages/reprisals⁷³. It was eventually held that under extreme circumstances hostages may be taken, and as a last desperate remedy hostages may be sentenced to death⁷⁴. This hostage tribunal ruled 'that partisans could legally be shot, and anyway ... the Soviet partisans' particular cruelty amply justified the severity of the Wehrmacht's anti-partisan campaign'⁷⁵. This Tribunal concluded there was insufficient certainty in the law of hostages/reprisals, to justify a ruling that the killing of hostages could be legal in certain circumstances, and demanded an international agreement, since there was no mention in The Hague Regulations. Some, including Kesselring and many Germans, considered it part of the Hague Convention, the problem being that Articles 43 and 46 of the Convention did not expressly forbid such practices. Many German legal scholars had defended the notion of killing hostages as a necessary measure in extreme circumstances, and a few English and American writers have expressed sympathy, mainly on the grounds that it would be absurd to take hostages if they cannot be executed⁷⁶.

The Allied Courts, British, and later American (SNP), failed to define the hostage/reprisal situation as a war crime, apparently accepting that killing innocent people is legal so long as it is not excessive. The manuals of the Allied Armies did not constitute international law. There were acts of barbarity on all sides, but although the British and American manuals seemed to support hostage and reprisal it was only used as a threat. Kesselring could, by some interpretation, still be viewed as legally correct by the laws of the

⁷² LRWC, Vol-VIII,p.14.

⁷³ 'Southeast'-dealt with Southeast Europe, Greece, Balkans-Case, USA v Wilhelm List.

⁷⁴ United-Nations-War-Crimes-Commission-Vol-VIII-1949-Case-No/47.

⁷⁵ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.104.

⁷⁶ United-Nations-War-Crimes-Commission-Vol-VIII-1949-Case-No/47.

day, but his written orders went beyond the ruthless, and verged on crimes against humanity.

Defence - Illegality of Partisans

Latenser pointed out the illegality of partisans by international agreement; that is not wearing uniforms, no distinguishable badges, and the criminality of destructive activity to the rear of the occupier. This was again successfully raised in the SNP case on hostages.⁷⁷ The OKH had agreed early in the war that partisans were not to be treated as 'POWs but as criminals ... and if found guilty will be sentenced to death'⁷⁸. Kesselring had been told the Ardeatine victims were already guilty, and in his orders he was dealing with partisans, ergo criminals.

It has been argued that 'no commander in an occupied area can be expected to tolerate the ambushing and/or surreptitious killing of his soldiers or the sabotage of his industrial or military facilities behind the lines by civilians not in uniform'⁷⁹. In Italy some of the partisan warfare was brutal, and some take the view that 'it is difficult to see how Kesselring could have avoided inflicting stern penalties,' and there is little doubt that many Allied commanders then, and later, sympathised with him⁸⁰. Since the start of the European war Churchill had encouraged irregular warfare, encouraged any form of resistance, as noted, Alexander had openly encouraged their activities. The question of illegality had to be put aside, because the prosecution was the massacre of innocent Italians for which Kesselring was indicted.

Kesselring Saviour of Italian Culture

Latenser's defence had three headings; first, that Kesselring's orders had been legal, secondly, that the partisans had been immoral and internationally illegal in their conduct, thirdly he had always been a pro-

⁷⁷ Hébert, *Hitler's*, p.144.

⁷⁸ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.90.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.92.

Italian officer who had saved much of the Italian culture and many ancient cities/towns.

This third line of defence has attracted considerable criticism. It is apparent that Kesselring 'was, of course, perfectly aware of the need to protect buildings and works of art' and this has been acknowledged in *The Rape of Europa*, a study devoted to finding and returning stolen treasures⁸¹. 'Considering the precarious position of the German Armies north of Naples, it was an extraordinary use of military effort'⁸². Following the Allied destruction of Monte Cassino a number of reputable Italians came to Kesselring's support.

The reality was never quite as straightforward as Latenser wished. In any total war the cultural and historical background becomes secondary to staying alive. In Naples vengeful German soldiers destroyed 50,000 valuable books in the University library for no reason at all. It was a gratuitous act of sheer destruction. When the Allied troops arrived 'the University now endured a second wave of destruction. Allied soldiers ransacked the laboratories ... jeeps decorated with hundreds of fabulously coloured stuffed toucans ... from the zoological collection,' and many other acts of vandalism happened⁸³.

Both Kesselring and the Allied commanders were faced with the same problems when fighting in Italy's treasure trove, and being a western country, and the centre of Roman Catholicism, it was more under the public gaze of the wider world than Eastern Europe had been. In December 1943 Eisenhower was obliged to issue orders on the protection of monuments pointing out that 'the phrase 'military necessity' is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience'⁸⁴. Control over subordinates on the battlefield could never be watertight, although hundreds of notices with Kesselring's signature were placed in appropriate places, it was never a guarantee.

⁸¹ Nicholas, *Rape*, p.239.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.241.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.233.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.237.

Weizsäcker wrote 'that our troops rendered valuable services in preserving churches and works of art'⁸⁵. Rome was declared an open city, which has sometimes drawn a degree of scorn from historian and Italian veteran Richard Lamb, who noted that the Germans remained to deploy this critical communication hub, but when it came to frontline action Rome was preserved. Kesselring claimed credit for this both during interrogations and in his memoirs, but 'it was Hitler who forbade Kesselring to mine the bridges over the Tiber' and so when the Allied forces reached Rome Kesselring's troops had moved north⁸⁶.

According to Kesselring he arranged the timely evacuation of Pisa, and in July neutralised Parma, Reggio, Modena; Bologna was declared open when the local Mayor and Archbishop pleaded for its preservation. Venice was chosen as the place for depositing all the art treasure in eastern Italy, and Vicenza and Padua were completely demilitarised at the request of the Bishop of Padua. Kesselring received a letter from the Archbishop of Chieti: 'for eight months we, the people of Chieti, were only seven kilometres from the line of operations held by the Germans. During all this time I received no offensive treatment from the German commanders, especially not from Field-Marshal Kesselring or the generals under him. On the contrary, they, and particularly Field-Marshal Kesselring, supported and helped me in every conceivable way as far as the military situation permitted when the question arose of saving the town of Chieti and anything that could possibly be saved'⁸⁷. However, Kesselring was a professional soldier, and military necessity would ultimately dictate all that he did.

Italy was not just saved by Kesselring. According to 'one witness at Hitler's headquarters, he {Hitler} specifically declared that Florence itself was not to be a battleground,' 'and communicated this to the Allies through the Vatican'⁸⁸. On July 29th Alexander broadcast a message to the people of that city to defend their city's utilities; the historical and much

⁸⁵ Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*,p.291.

⁸⁶ Nicholas, *Rape*,p.247.

⁸⁷ Kesselring, *Memoirs*,p.310.

⁸⁸ Nicholas, *Rape*,p.257.

loved bridge of Santa Trinità was destroyed. 'As in the case of Monte Cassino, controversy as to who was to blame for these events went on for years'⁸⁹. Laternser's argument that Kesselring was the saviour of Italy was understandably not given the support he had anticipated. The Court Martial had the advantage of being intimate with the reality of war.

Kesselring claimed credit for the efforts of his subordinates as well as his superiors. The world would rather believe that Kesselring and not Hitler stopped the destruction of the Roman bridges making Rome an open city, but the order came from Hitler. From September 1943 Kesselring had established an 'Art Preservation Branch' set up under a Dr Hagemann, later called the Arts and Monuments Protection Squad, known as the *Kunstschutz*, and working without the Italians for fear of losing sight of the valuables, 'fearing entire collections would be sold in Switzerland.'⁹⁰ Kesselring was obliged to do this for the same reason Eisenhower had to react to monument destruction in the face of world criticism, but like many commanders he took the credit postwar making all these efforts sound personal to him. Kesselring pointed out the safe recovery of most of the Italian art stored in the north, but this was more to do with the SS General Wolff in his end of war negotiations with Allen Dulles; when Wolff, 'to the amazement of the OSS men, gave a list of almost all the Florentine works of art they had ever heard of, which Wolff claimed to be able to deliver them'⁹¹. It was for this reason that the depots were handed over directly to the Allies in 1945, rather than to the transitional Italian government, and not by Kesselring.

Nevertheless, an Allied investigation report felt that Italian cultural treasures had 'suffered relatively little war damage, and it attributed this primarily to the large scale allocation of Wehrmacht conveyances, as well as generous gasoline rations...German soldiers even rescued art treasures from buildings under fire'⁹².

⁸⁹ Nicholas, *Rape*, p.258.

⁹⁰ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.37.

⁹¹ Nicholas, *Rape*, p.247-in *Operation Sunrise*.

⁹² Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.37.

In a world where people had suffered so much, the preservation of Italy's cultural heritage did not register highly in postwar priorities. It has been claimed that Kesselring 'devoted far greater attention to supervising measures (for saving places and treasures) than he did to, for example, supervising the manner in which his troops treated the Italian civilian population'⁹³. Already mentioned was the fact that Kesselring authorised the removal or destruction of economic and industrial sites. The livelihood of Italy and innocent Italian lives comes a poor second to cultural treasures. Even to many Italians the saving of their cultural heritage was secondary to the brutality they had suffered, and it was Kesselring who was the understandable focus of their anger. Many Italians had hoped that the trial would give some recognisable retribution for the dead hostages. Even before the trial the court received a plea from the citizens of Versilia claiming Kesselring 'terrorized the whole Tuscany. We all the citizens of Versilia Town, bow reverently to the martyrs of the Ardeatine caves ... what about the persons killed in our country ... Rome suffered such a retaliation as some Germans had been killed by the partisans but in Versilia no German soldier was killed'⁹⁴. The court was confronting complex legal issues, and the desire for retribution sought by some Italians, could not be ignored by Kesselring's specious claims that he had preserved Italian culture, but how he treated the people.

Perjury

In 2000 an American historian and medical practitioner, Dr Richard Raiber was about to present a thesis, which demonstrated that Kesselring had perpetrated a major perjury during his trial. Unfortunately Dr Raiber died before the thesis was completed, but a friend has privately published his findings under his name⁹⁵. Raiber suggested that Kesselring had lied about his whereabouts on March 23rd, the day of the via Rasella bombing. He had set up a complex fabrication in order to be tried for the Ardeatine massacre, rather

⁹³ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.37.

⁹⁴ KNA-WO204/11005.

⁹⁵ Raiber, *Anatomy*.

than for confirming orders for some American/Italian commandos to be executed, from Operation Strangle, sometimes known as the 'Ginny incident'.⁹⁶ General Dostler, Kesselring's subordinate had already been executed for following Hitler's *Führerbefehl* and killing the Americans⁹⁷. Kesselring realised the shooting of hostages was more in the grey area of international law than killing POWs. Laternser's defence had already underlined this point establishing that when ex-POWs had been caught with the partisans, they were still treated as POWs. Kesselring knew the Allied courts showed no leniency in matters of killing POWs. In his estimation it was safer to be tried for massacring 335 Italian people than fifteen American soldiers.

Raiber's Case

Raiber's evidence while not conclusive is persuasive. He found evidence that the knowledge of the raid, the Ginny mission, was 'known to Kesselring's HQ,' and Kesselring was with Dostler and not at Monte Cassino⁹⁸. Dostler, a pro-Hitler general, always claimed the order to execute was confirmed from above, and Dostler claimed that Kesselring's HQ had asked whether it had been done, which conflicts with both Kesselring's and Westphal's testimony. Significantly an Ultra intercept from Ginny to Kesselring's HQ announced that the Americans had been liquidated⁹⁹. A reserve cavalry captain, Alexander Fürst zu Dohna-Schlobitten, noted in his diary his refusal to shoot the POWs, observing they were regarded as saboteurs. In his autobiography Senger, who attended Dostler's trial, postulated that Dostler would have received authorisation from HQ, and found it strange that Dostler's chief of staff could not be located, even though he was a POW¹⁰⁰. Senger also admitted to the court that Hitler 'gave out orders which in their way interfered with International law'¹⁰¹.

⁹⁶ Atkinson, *Day*, p.499.

⁹⁷ Appendix 8.

⁹⁸ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.104.

⁹⁹ Atkinson, *Day*, p.499.

¹⁰⁰ Senger, *Neither*, p.344.

¹⁰¹ LRWC-Vol-1, *Dostler Case*, p.8.

The written evidence remained evasive until Raiber checked telephone logs, and discovered Westphal noting that on the date he claimed to be at Cassino, Kesselring 'was still up in North Italy...complaining that the defences at Genoa are much too weak'¹⁰². Another document relating to Kesselring's itinerary shows that he arrived at an airfield north of Genoa, and was 'met by Dostler'¹⁰³. This was further substantiated by entries in the war diaries of 'Sea Commandant, Italian Riviera and the German navy Command, Italy'¹⁰⁴. The Ginny Americans had been moved to La Spezia at the same time Kesselring was there. The lack of written evidence is probably because, as confirmed later by several German officers, all records regarding the Ginny mission were destroyed, by order from Monte Soratte, Kesselring's HQ. It would appear from this research that Kesselring, Westphal and Beelitz were in cahoots, but it was not until 1997 that Beelitz 'admitted Kesselring had been in Liguria on 24th March 1944'¹⁰⁵. Dostler probably kept quiet because of *Korpsgeist*, knowing he was going to die anyway. Raiber hoped there might be evidence in the Ultra intercepts in London, but after an examination of some 300 such intercepts this research found nothing.

Raiber's work and Beelitz's later admission indicate that Kesselring and his officers were in cahoots at the trial, and deliberately lied on the grounds that they knew it would be fatal to be associated with the killing of American prisoners. What Raiber never raised was the critical question as to the ethos of the day, that it was considered safer to be tried for the death of 335 innocent Italians than fifteen American soldiers. The Italians had initially been the enemy, but the massacre of innocent civilians could not be regarded as less serious than shooting POWs. It has been suggested that 'one of the peculiarities of that postwar period that Allied officers felt an admiration for their German counterparts regardless of their criminal and unmilitary activities, so long as the victims were not British or American'¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.169.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.170.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.171.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.178.

¹⁰⁶ Bower Tom, *Blind Eye to Murder* (London: Little Brown & Co, 1981)p.244.

The Wehrmacht's behaviour to civilians was atrocious, but killing POWs was by law and attitude regarded as more serious - by both sides.

Verdict in Court

The Court in 1947, oblivious to the possibility of Kesselring's perjury, was disinclined to pay any attention to his defence of saving Italian culture; they were only interested in the two main charges. The Judge Advocate's summary outlined the difficulties. He noted that international law was ambiguous when it came to the legality of hostages/reprisals. He admitted the massacre at the Ardeatine Caves did not answer the question as to whether the responsibility was Kesselring's, or the SD. This still left the 'raw' question as to whether the Ardeatine killings were, by law, admissible reprisals, or a war crime; if it were not a war crime then the mistaken extra five killed constituted a war crime. He pointed out that Kesselring's orders were given at a time when feelings were running high, and added that the prosecution had failed to show whether the shootings were reprisals or shooting of hostages. The final question was whether Kesselring's orders incited the massacre of Italian civilians.

Undoubtedly there was ambiguity in the Geneva Convention, and, the so-called International Law, some of which (i.e. London Agreement 1945) was retrospective, leading to Kesselring's claim that he had considered himself subject to German law, and not 'some new Anglo-Saxon Law'¹⁰⁷. The Manual of Military Law in Britain, article 443 regarding 'actions pursuant to orders from a superior - was amended in April 1944 in anticipation of the planned trials for German and Japanese war criminals'¹⁰⁸. None of these factors made a final judgement easy to reach, and one American observer, a Colonel Murphy, believed the evidence had been insufficient; it was another American observer, Colonel Notestein who furnished Laternser with the American 'Rules of Land Warfare'¹⁰⁹. However, the British Court thought

¹⁰⁷ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.238.

¹⁰⁸ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.74.

¹⁰⁹ Raiber, *Anatomy*, p.85.

otherwise, and sentenced Kesselring to death by firing squad, as some 'Italians there booed and cried assassin'¹¹⁰.

Trial in long term Context

As a final note to this chapter it does not seem unreasonable to ask the question as to whether Kesselring was any different, from any other commander in terms of his conduct given the changing nature of this war. When Klemperer, a German Jew suffering in Dresden in 1941 claimed the 'last war was such a decent business' he reflected a fundamental problem of World War II in Europe, that genocide was being planned¹¹¹. When the enemy exterminates people then laws of conduct lose their priority.

It has been said that 'we can say that while all sides committed war crimes in World War II, some of the combatant nations were far more criminal than others,' and some military leaders were more criminal than others, some more ruthless¹¹². Telford Taylor, the American Chief Prosecutor in his account of the German trials, concluded with the statement that 'the laws of war do not apply only to the vanquished nations. There is no moral or legal basis for immunizing victorious nations from scrutiny. The laws of war are not a one-way street,' and crimes committed by the victorious side lend weight to the claim of Victor's Justice¹¹³. In Sicily, Italian POWs were twice massacred in groups of about thirty by Americans. In both incidents there were court-martials followed by acquittals, leading one historian to claim that 'Patton, whose military ethic mirrored that of many Nazi commanders, wrote that in my opinion these killings have been thoroughly justified'¹¹⁴. For fear of reprisals Eisenhower suppressed the information, but 'if Germans had been responsible, they would have been indicted for war crimes in 1945, and probably executed'¹¹⁵. It may have been the knowledge of such events which

¹¹⁰ Guardian May 7th-1947, p.5.

¹¹¹ Klemperer Victor, *To the Bitter End, The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1942-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999)p.47.

¹¹² Bartov-Grossmann, *Crimes*,p.xvi.

¹¹³ Taylor T, *Anatomy*,p.641.

¹¹⁴ Hastings, *Hell*,p.445.

¹¹⁵ Hastings, *Hell*,p.446.

prompted some to support Kesselring, when it came to a question of clemency. However, in Kesselring's case he gave the orders, Patton had not. Later, regarding the Malmedy case 'the commission had wanted to commute all the Malmedy death sentences, given that the massacre was a 'heat of battle offence for which no American guilty of a similar crime would have been put to death'¹¹⁶.

It was because of Italian partisans that Kesselring appeared in the dock. What made this war so different was genocide. Genocide was not just the Holocaust because 'the entire war against the Soviet Union was intended to be, and was, a genocidal campaign of colonization,' and some of the massacres, especially in Italy, seemed to reflect this policy¹¹⁷. It has been said that 'on the field of battle it becomes apparent that war is simply indecent and inhuman to the core. Brutality and insensitivity are the ways of war'¹¹⁸. This is true of the heat of battle, and probably in the immediate aftermath, but the systematic shooting of innocent people casts an entirely different meaning over war crime, transforming it into a crime against humanity.

It is in the overview of total war of extermination that the reaction of men must be viewed, in their historical context. Kesselring was a military man whose entire life was consumed by war and its preparation. By his authority and by his orders innocent men, women, children and babies had been slaughtered. He was rightly found guilty of issuing orders that unleashed sheer brutality, of being part of the command process that slaughtered the innocent in the Ardeatine Cave incident: because many others on all sides 'got away with it' does not negate Kesselring's sentence.

Latenser always claimed Kesselring was innocent, and Kesselring always maintained he was free of any guilt. But he secretly asked a 'genealogist named Furics to obtain proof ' of Swiss ancestry: this fact has

¹¹⁶ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.48

¹¹⁷ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*,p.163

¹¹⁸ Kinsella, *Morality*,p.382

only just come to light in this research¹¹⁹. The idea of fleeing to Switzerland in the event of defeat was undoubtedly stimulated by his fear that his conduct would be questioned; in the same vein Himmler in a last minute panic tried to conceal Holocaust crimes, 'obliterating any trace of the slaughter from posterity'¹²⁰. After the trial the verdict was questioned time and time again, but his argument that he fought a clean war was nonsense to the Court, which grew into a myth, and expanded in the years during his imprisonment, the reasons for this will be developed in the next chapter.

¹¹⁹ KNA-HW1/3007.

¹²⁰ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.154.

CHAPTER 10

PRISON (1947-1952)

Introduction

This chapter will examine the reasons why Kesselring's death sentence was commuted. The argument will be that this had nothing to do with his innocence, but mainly a political motive which sparked the myth of a clean war. Secondly, it will explore Kesselring's experience as a prisoner, the way prison life improved for him, and illustrate that he became a pawn in a power struggle. Thirdly, the chapter will try to explain the politics and motives surrounding his release which were driven by multifarious hidden agendas. Kesselring became a subject of debate, because the British and Americans were encouraging Germany as an Ally, and holding German commanders in prison was counter-productive. The Cold War necessitated the western Allies viewing the war in a reformed light, namely that Hitler was an aberration, the SS committed the crimes, and the Wehrmacht fought a clean war. It has been suggested that this provided the main impetus for Kesselring's release, and this release became one of the ingredients to successful international relations between Germany and the West. However, the thesis will show that whilst not entirely disagreeing with this theory, the motives of those seeking Kesselring's release were more mixed than some historians suggest.

Commutation of death sentence

News of Kesselring's death sentence created mixed reactions. Generals Lemelsen and Herr wrote a petition stating that Kesselring 'was always guided by the purest intentions. He always promoted proper conduct and not evil'¹. Feelings in Britain were more diverse. Alexander (then Governor-General of Canada) felt strongly about Kesselring, and had written asking for the commutation of the death sentence². General Sir Oliver Leese

¹ KNA, WO216/214.

² Roskill Stephen, *Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol III* (London: Collins, 1974)p.651.

was quoted as saying with reference to POWs that 'Kesselring, like Rommel, set a very good example - a far better example than the Italians'³. Leese also followed Alexander's line by writing that Kesselring was 'a gallant soldier who fought his battles fairly'⁴. Churchill led the faction seeking repeal from the death sentence, causing some concerned War Office personnel to seek advice from the Foreign Office⁵. Churchill wrote to Attlee 'regarding Kesselring...in my judgement it is a question of political policy: condemning to death the leaders of a defeated enemy has today ceased to have the usefulness which it could have had in the past'⁶.

Time was provided by Italy's abolition of the death penalty which they applied to the British. The Italians indicated that even in the fascist times death could only be imposed for premeditated murder, which they did not think applied to Kesselring on the evidence of the case⁷. The Daily Mail, which operated a European and British newspaper, published an article entitled 'Will it Help to shoot Kesselring⁸?' In the same month, May 1947 the Guardian printed an article which claimed 'that Kesselring is guilty is certain: that Kesselring is more guilty than other Germans who have escaped punishment is not'⁹. Newspaper articles were varied, one in particular pointing out that Kesselring may have been a gallant soldier and may have the support of Alexander, but that did not excuse him from 'murdering' the innocents at Ardeatine catacombs¹⁰.

Churchill was opposed by the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, and the Secretary of State for War, Frederick Bellenger, who were aware that Sir Hartley Shawcross (British Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg) held very strong opinions that convicted war criminals should not avoid the verdicts imposed on them. Churchill sought allies in the Church; he had regarded

³ Veale, *Advance*, p.287.

⁴ KNA, Prem 8/707 13thMay 47.

⁵ KNA, Prem 8/707 7thMay 47.

⁶ KNA, WO 32/15490 13thMay 47.

⁷ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.131.

⁸ Daily Mail 30thMay 1947.

⁹ Guardian May 17th 1947, p.4.

¹⁰ Daily Telegraph 16thMay 1947, letter to editor.

George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester as a nuisance nevertheless, Churchill used him in this appeal¹¹. He also had the support of his son Randolph who wrote a letter to the Telegraph appealing to Christian forgiveness¹². Hankey, some military leaders, de L'Isle and Dudley were Churchill's chief supporters.

Churchill encouraged a debate in the House of Lords on May 13th 1947 led by Viscount William de L'Isle and Dudley¹³. It was but a brief question because de L'Isle was informed the matter was 'still *sub judice*'¹⁴. His response was revealing: 'while thanking the Noble Lord for his reply, may I ask for an assurance that there will be an adequate interval between the decision of the reviewing authority, if adverse, and the execution of the sentence? Apart from purely judicial considerations, matters of high and important public policy are involved'¹⁵.

By saying that 'matters of high and important public policy' were involved it seems unlikely that de L'Isle, who had fought in Italy, was concerned about the ethical or spiritual aspects of public policy in supporting a death sentence for a German war criminal. In May 1947 the Cold War was taking shape; only a year before Churchill had publically used the well-known expression 'of the iron curtain descending' in his speech on *Sinews of Peace*; he was wary of the Soviets¹⁶. His animosity to the Hitler regime during the war was well documented, he had once announced to parliament that the German General Staff were a 'group of tight-lipped men who think it noble to use war' and 'the fewer Keitels, Kesselrings - yes, and Rommels - that are allowed to survive this war, the more secure'¹⁷. The war was finished and Churchill and others were alarmed at the perceived Soviet threat, and the need to keep Germany within the Allied fold was critical. It was probably the

¹¹ Bishop Bell opposed bombing civilians.

¹² Daily Telegraph 22nd May 1947, letter to editor.

¹³ Lord de L'Isle won V.C. fighting against Kesselring, Guardian, July 5th 1947, p.7.

¹⁴ Hansard, House of Lords, 13th May 1947 Col 657, time 2.40pm.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 5th March 1946 at Westminster College.

¹⁷ HC-Debate, -21st Sept 1943, Vol 392/cc69-170/69.

ramifications of the Cold War that prompted William de L'Isle to use the expression 'matters of high and important public policy are involved'¹⁸.

'The repeal of Kesselring's death sentence was solely due to domestic pressure exerted in the UK'¹⁹. It was commuted to imprisonment and this 'laid the foundation for the myth of the innocent Field Marshal Kesselring, who was unjustly condemned, a myth that quickly gained currency in the Anglo-Saxon world'²⁰. This was one of the ingredients for the popular myth that the SS was the evil component, and the Wehrmacht leaders, like Kesselring fought a clean war. The SS provided an alibi for the vast majority of German men who were not members, and that myth continued in Germany until 1995, and is still popular. This process of myth-building has some of its genesis in the Kesselring debate because of the timing in 1947. His rank and where he fought made him prominent in Western eyes, very much as Rommel would have been, had he survived. The Eastern European War was a Soviet matter and was notorious for its barbarity, whereas the barbarity in Italy was not against the British and Americans. The only strong protests concerning Kesselring's release from the death sentence came from the Italian National Partisan's Association. It suited Kesselring to have fought a 'clean war' and he undoubtedly believed he had; it suited most Germans to view it as chivalrous, and now it was suiting the British and Americans. The politics of the new world order of Soviet and Western Blocs meant adjusting some views of recent events, even if it offended some Italians, and needed some adjustment of memory.

Life in Prison

In October 1947 Kesselring was transferred to the prison at Werl, a British Military prison in Westphalia, where he was treated as a felon. According to a Guardian newspaper article he had a standard cell, 'containing bed table and a couple of stools', he had to rise at '5.30, breakfast and going to

¹⁸ House of Lords, 13th May 1947 Col 657, time 2.40pm.

¹⁹ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.135.

work at seven;' and they were 'not forced to do work which they dislike, but they had a limited range'²¹.

Prison life was intended to be dreary, and Kesselring's work was gumming paper-bags. He never mentions his faith in his memoirs, but attended Mass regularly. At one time the prison Chaplain, a Father Victor Kleyer secreted in newspapers, and acted as courier for Latenser and Scotland; these were unquestionably papers relating to Latenser's efforts for his release²². By the end of 1948 gluing paper-bags finished, and more comfort and personal freedom was granted; as in many prisons the early days were always made the hardest. Many times Kesselring made requests to the prison governor for seven day's leave to visit his family in Bad Wiessee where, he claimed, they were aging and destitute²³. He referred to one sister suffering from mental-illness, and said he was willing to have an escort. According to the memo the governor felt he was in no position to acquiesce, even though the family lived in the American sector²⁴. A newspaper stated he was later given parole to 'visit a sick relative,' but there is no evidence of this in the prison files²⁵. Other people tried to visit Kesselring, a mysterious Hildegard Kastner for example, but were turned down to protect Kesselring's wife, since he was only permitted one visitor every six weeks²⁶. Although Kesselring knew his death sentence had been repealed, it was not until February 1950 that his case review occurred, commuting his sentence to 21 years 'with effect from 6th May 1947'²⁷.

At an American request Kesselring assisted the American Historical Division, which gave him access to other senior German officers, better food and pay, and probably improved self-esteem. The Americans wanted German military opinion, and his work provided a German view of

²¹ Guardian, April 23rd 1951, p.5.

²² Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.148.

²³ KNA-FO1060/499.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Guardian, June 2nd 1952, p.4.

²⁶ KNA-FO1060/499-RefZW/48/34/5.

²⁷ KNA-FO1060/499-Legal Adviser's Zonal-Office.

the campaigns; his observations on Partisan warfare remained restricted for a time, perhaps indicating his views were of interest²⁸.

The American SNP and the British Courts were intended to be didactic, a process towards democratization by a cleansing of the past. Telford Taylor had written that 'nowhere can these records be put to more immediate or better use than in German schools and universities, and in German books and magazines. But the least we can do is to insure that the documents which expose the true nature of the Third Reich are circulated throughout Germany'²⁹. Some considered Kesselring did not need this education, and suggested him as a potential leader. Otto Lehmann-Russbüldt, (one time Peace Movement Chairman during Weimar Republic, then Secretary General to German League of Human Rights; fled to England where he edited a Refugee newsletter, returning to Germany in 1951) although opposed to Kesselring, thought he might be the person selected to become the new Chancellor of the Federal Republic³⁰. When the American/German investigator Hans Speier asked General Toppe about potential leaders in December 1951, he mentioned Kesselring³¹. It appears that despite the court's verdict Kesselring retained some respect in Germany, which indicates some of the cynicism about the trials. In Werl prison Kesselring, as with all prisoners, was forbidden to give interviews; his wife was also barred because she had once divulged his opinions. When he was later released from prison it was clear, as will be illustrated later in the next chapter, that prison had not changed him.

The Politics of Release - Introduction

During incarceration Kesselring was forever in the public eye, not so much because of *who* he was, but more *what* he was. A well-known and famous German Field-Marshal in a British prison, frequently linked with

²⁸ USAHD *The War Behind the Front: Guerilla Warfare*, MS C-032 – Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, 007720.

²⁹ USFR, p.106.

³⁰ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.273.

³¹ Speier Hans, *From the Ashes of Disgrace* (USA: Massachusetts UP, 1981)p.112.

Manstein, he became the centre of a political storm and the possible re-writing of history. It has been persuasively argued that the western powers needed Germany rearmed against the Soviet threat, and for German public opinion it became necessary to release high profile military leaders, of which Kesselring became the prime example. The Italian historian Michele Battini wrote that 'the Allies' aim was to bury the legal proceedings against the members of the Nazi troops that would have provoked reactions in German public opinion, putting at risk the process of reintegrating West Germany into the European community'³². The French Canadian historian Valerie Hébert wrote that German arms were again required, and 'despite the immediate postwar Allied injunction against Germany ever again possessing arms, the mounting fear of and hostility against the Soviets convinced Western powers of the Federal Republic's strategic importance as a military force'³³. The German historian Lingen wrote that the debate surrounding Kesselring's eventual release 'illustrated the manner in which the treatment of the war criminals was distorted by the debates surrounding German rearmament and integration into the Western Alliance'³⁴. Kesselring, one time Field Marshal, was a mere pawn in these politics, but he benefitted from the Western powers needing German rearmament. The main thrust of the campaign for freeing Kesselring revolved around the myth started in his trial that he had fought a clean war, and some believed that the commutation of his death sentence was an indicator of this alleged fact. There was a distinct 'distancing of the "people's army" (Wehrmacht) from the undeniably criminal agencies of the Nazi state such as the Party, the SS, and SD' ... exonerating the soldiers and provided an alibi for almost the entire nation'³⁵. Kesselring as a Field-Marshal of the Wehrmacht became something of a figurehead in this debate, perhaps even more so than Manstein, who had been known to award Iron Crosses to *Einsatzgruppen* men and had acknowledged that he knew something of the genocide³⁶. Kesselring had always denied knowledge of such events, and the British associated him mainly with the campaign in North Africa and Italy;

³² Battini, *Missing*,p.25.

³³ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.4.

³⁴ Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.174.

³⁵ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.5.

³⁶ *Ibid*,p.119.

few associated his name with the Luftwaffe, and fewer still showed any interest in the fate of Italian partisans.

In order to understand this complex situation it will be necessary to examine *de-Nazification* which almost exonerated Kesselring, then Laternser's plans, the situation within the German political structure, the responses of good-will people like the Churches, the mixed British attitudes, and the reality of the political necessity to keep Germany in the west. Despite the emphasis placed on the political issues surrounding Kesselring by historians such as Lingen, Battini and Hébert *supra*, it ought to be noted that because Kesselring was a British prisoner his release depended largely upon the British, and their motives, which, as will be illustrated, were mixed.

Entnazifizierung, de-Nazification

It is important to note that part of Kesselring's so-called rehabilitation started through the process called *Entnazifizierung*, namely de-Nazification, based on Eisenhower's demand that German administration be cleansed of NSDAP influence³⁷. The Allies had early on announced their intention to destroy German militarism and their plans involved the 'four Ds' of demilitarization, denazification, decartelization, and decentralization' and there were to be panels to establish a person's past in terms of the NSDAP.³⁸ *Entnazifizierung* was the 'eradication of the Nazi Party, the overturning of Nazi philosophy, laws and decrees, the abolition of Nazi symbols, street names and monuments,' and was meant to be a complete reversal of the Hitler period.³⁹ It was a broad spectrum, and originally these tribunals 'were accompanied by initiatives for democratic re-education, ranging from film screenings on such issues as wartime atrocities or the Holocaust'⁴⁰. It created an immediate problem because of the sheer numbers involved, 'speed seemed necessary to ensure a clean break with the past, but, on the other hand, a

³⁷ JCS Directive No 1067.

³⁸ Tipton, *History*, p.500.

³⁹ Gehler, *Three*, p.29.

⁴⁰ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.252.

slower process might be more thorough⁴¹. As one British administrator wrote 'amongst those returning evacuees were many official, lawyers, policeman, teachers, whom we needed urgently for the restoration of normal life'⁴². At the local level *Entnazifizierung* ran into problems because 'it denuded German local and provincial administration of personnel ... and impeded even the low level of reconstruction permitted by the Allied Control Council'⁴³. It was carried out with a great sense of haste, according to the American commander Lucius Clay 'in excess of 100,000 cases being settled monthly'⁴⁴.

By the time Kesselring was being processed the 'conflict between denazification and reconstruction, and the Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, meant that denazification in both the East and West became not an end in itself but a piece to be played in other more pressing games'⁴⁵. Long before Kesselring's case started in the process of denazification, the process itself had been reduced to a 'matter of individual self-justification, and was essentially wound up with few long-term effects by the early 1950s'⁴⁶. The Nazi past was not so much being forgotten or forgiven, but repressed.

The Munich Court in Kesselring's case argued major culpability, but withdrew because the affidavits exonerated Kesselring⁴⁷. By 1951 'the fact was, Germanised denazification rapidly descended into a farce ... Nazis, often comfortably situated and able to hire clever lawyers to represent them at hearings, ran rings around the untrained and often relatively uneducated members of the tribunals'⁴⁸. Denazification certificates were seen as valueless and called *Persilscheine*, because they naturally washed white⁴⁹. Kesselring had been a senior military commander within Hitler's regime, he must have

⁴¹ Tipton, *History*, p.501.

⁴² Ebsworth Raymond, *Restoring Democracy in Germany. The British Contribution* (London: Stevens and Sons, 1960)p.7.

⁴³ Williamson DG, *Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-63* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001)p.13.

⁴⁴ Clay, *Papers*, p.578.

⁴⁵ Tipton, *History*, pp551/552.

⁴⁶ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.227.

⁴⁷ 22nd November 1951.

⁴⁸ Taylor Frederick, *Exorcising Hitler* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)p.284/5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.285.

been privy to Hitler's designs, and unquestionably aware of the regime's brutality, and yet was exonerated; this illustrates how insipid the denazification tribunals had become.

Kesselring's Lobby Group

His lawyer, Laternser, was prolific in producing new arguments, new evidence, eliciting supporters and keeping the issues alive. Laternser made a name for himself in the postwar years, and his fees probably came from the Stahlhelms who raised funds in support of imprisoned comrades.

Kesselring's Officers Beelitz and Westphal were active, but if, as mentioned in the previous chapter, they had committed perjury with Kesselring they were in a sense bound together. The list of personal supporters grew, and it included Generals Lemelsen and Herr, Field-Marshal von Leeb, Generaloberst Blaskowitz.

Kesselring's British Lobby Group

Kesselring was a British prisoner and British support was necessary. There was an influential group who had opposed the continuation of the trials, and in reality their motives for freeing Kesselring were mixed, but viewed by some historians as always politically driven. Battini wrote that 'the strength of the interventions opposed to the holding of Field Marshal Kesselring's trial and to his conviction - Headlan, Churchill, General Alexander, Lord de l'Isle, Lord Hankley (*sic*) Stokes of the Labour Party, Archbishop (*sic*) G Bell and the writer T.S.Eliot - bears out how widely held, by then, was the intention of distinguishing clearly between the actions of the army and the responsibilities of the SS. Of course, all this demonstrates the complete lack of understanding of the nature of the total war put into practice ... and of the war waged against Italian civilians⁵⁰. There are elements of truth in his claim, but the thesis will

⁵⁰ Battini, *Missing*, p.117.

show the motives were mixed. Bishop Bell of Chichester was not seeking to define areas of responsibility, but seeking peace.

The key to this group was Lord Hankey and Manstein's defence lawyer, Paget. Hankey tended to stay in the back ground, but Paget had published a book attacking the war crime trials, and referring to the British trials as unjust; Lord Hankey wrote the preface⁵¹. In 1950 Hankey also wrote a book condemning not only Roosevelt's unconditional surrender, but the trials in general⁵². This was the core of the Hankey Group, a lobby for a reconciliatory pro-German policy led by Lord Hankey and backed by Paget⁵³. The result was a continuous discussion in the press with the Manchester Guardian often striking a positive note for the war-criminals⁵⁴. When German newspapers demanded there could be no German rearmament without the release of Kesselring and Manstein, Mr Paget responded in a 1950 Parliamentary debate arguing that the West needed 'the right sort of German in our defence forces' and then mentioned Kesselring and Manstein, claiming we will not get such men if we imprison 'their most honoured commanders;' in the same debate he argued that the Wehrmacht was not the SS, and despite Russian claims 'fought as decent soldiers'⁵⁵.

It was not always political and Cold War motivated; Hankey was seeking reconciliation, and amongst his group of associates was Kesselring's London interrogator, Scotland, who had remained in constant touch advising Laternser when possible. Scotland's involvement with Kesselring had little to do with placating the Germans; it was a friendship which developed during the London interrogations. Scotland later wrote that 'I count it a privilege to have played some part in gaining him his freedom'⁵⁶. Scotland and Kesselring had developed a friendship which lasted until Kesselring's death. During his

⁵¹ Paget Reginald T, *Manstein: His Campaign and His Trial* (London: Collins, 1951).

⁵² Hankey, *Politics*.

⁵³ Hankey established the Cabinet Secretariat in this century, and pre-war 'no one, Churchill included, could have advanced the defence program with more speed than did Hankey's experienced hand.' Naylor John, *A Man and an Institution* (London: CUP, 1984)p.250.

⁵⁴ Manchester Guardian, 23rd April 1951.

⁵⁵ HC Debate 1st Nov 1950-, Vol480/cc164/293/163.

⁵⁶ Scotland, *London*, p.180.

interrogation he was one of the few German imprisoned officers allowed to see the sights of London, and Scotland admitted 'I liked "Kessies's personality from the start'⁵⁷. Scotland remained convinced that Kesselring was fundamentally innocent, and assisted Laternser on grounds of personal friendship. Quite why Scotland found a friendship with Kesselring so easy is curious; Scotland 'had played a decisive role in the committal proceedings' both in terms of the orders and he had documented that Keitel had given Kesselring full authority⁵⁸. Kesselring could be a charming and easy going personality when he chose.

Another influential member of Hankey's pressure group was Basil Liddell Hart, who was sympathetic towards the German prisoners. Liddell Hart was ex-military, had written a book on military strategy and was a historian⁵⁹. He had a natural sympathy for men like Kesselring, and was outspoken on preparing for another war. He believed in German rearmament because they would be useful in a conflict with the Soviet powers⁶⁰. Liddell Hart had written an influential book called *The Other Side of the Hill* which gave a favourable image of the Wehrmacht leadership. That some felt this admiration for the Wehrmacht, came clear in a parliamentary debate on military training methods. In the light of Korea, one MP suggested that 'the Germans produced a pretty good army... that if the advice and experience of General Westphal who was Chief-of-Staff to Kesselring could be obtained, it would be invaluable'⁶¹. In this book Liddell Hart found it remarkable the way the German generals maintained 'a code of decency' and that the general behaviour of the occupying army - as distinct from the SS - was better than that of the Allied Armies which came to liberate them⁶².

⁵⁷ Scotland, *London*, p.173.

⁵⁸ Battini, *Missing*, p.86.

⁵⁹ His attack strategy was used by Guderian.

⁶⁰ Searle A, *A Very Special Relationship: Basil Liddell Hart, Wehrmacht Generals and the Debate on West German Rearmament, 1945-53*. Digital source at UEA: ISSN: 09683445; EISSN: DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/096834498668820603>, pp.331/2.

⁶¹ HC Debate 10th March 1952, Vol497/cc1084-210/1084.

⁶² Liddell Hart, *The Other Side*, p.12.

There were some who were deeply concerned with the jurisprudential issues. A Professor Smith who had recently retired from the chair of international law at the University of London, and had been a chief defending counsel at the Belsen trial (1945-6) expressed concern 'not to minimise the heinousness of the crimes committed at Belsen, but to demonstrate the illegality and therefore the injustice of such trials'⁶³. There were many who held this view, most notably FJP Veale, solicitor, writer and friend of Hankey.

Closer to Hankey's more altruistic reconciliation views was Bishop Bell of Chichester. Bell and Hankey 'joined forces and so began a collaboration and personal friendship that produced valuable results'⁶⁴. In fact Bell had written to Hankey as early as January 1943 over concerns in the conduct of the war⁶⁵. In 1944 he was apprehensive about what would happen at the end of the war, especially after a speech by Vansittart. In a letter from Lord Halifax, Bell found support for the Archbishop's plea that there was a 'distinction between revenge and just retribution'⁶⁶. Bell had argued that a politician like Vansittart disclosed a vested interest in showing all Germans were tainted by Nazism. It could be asked of Bell whether 'he himself was guilty of turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to credible accusations of guilt, simply to maintain his own argument that Nazis and Germans could be distinguished'⁶⁷. Bishop Bell had his critics then and since, Dr Lawson, in his book, 'The Church of England and the Holocaust' attacks Bell and others for their Nuremberg interventions⁶⁸. Nevertheless, Bell, in the House of Lords, reminded everyone 'that the trials raised issues of justice, humanity, and political wisdom.'⁶⁹ Bell was particularly concerned about 'the conditions under which many war criminals were imprisoned,' and about the length of

⁶³ Jasper RCD, *George Bell* (London: OUP, 1967)p.307.

⁶⁴ Ibid,p.308.

⁶⁵ Raina Peter, *Bishop George Bell - Letters* (Peterborough: CTBI, 2006)p.302, letter to Lord Noel Buxton.

⁶⁶ Ibid,p.332, letter from Lord Halifax.

⁶⁷ From yet unpublished MS by Dr Andrew Chandler, Director of George Bell institute and Reader in Modern History at Chichester.

⁶⁸ Lawson Tom, *The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity,Memory and Nazism* (London: Boyden Press, 2006).

⁶⁹ 5thMay 1949,House of Lords.

sentences and the long wait prior to being tried⁷⁰. 'Bell's actions were controlled by principle' and his involvement in politics was seen by most as based purely on his Christian principles, as he had done so in his opposition to strategic bombing⁷¹. Bell, right or wrong was convinced that Christianity could bring the nations together, and that the 'fundamental menace to our civilisations was 'Nihilism' - the attitude of destruction and negation which calls evil good and good evil'⁷².

Hankey and Bell were seeking reconciliation, Liddell Hart had a natural sympathy for the German commanders, but was also concerned about another war, Paget as a defence lawyer used both reconciliation and the fear of another war in argument, Scotland's efforts were based on personal friendship, and Churchill was possibly both reconciliatory and pragmatic about the Cold War dangers. The pressure group operated from a complete mix of motives, and was sufficiently demanding to make the issue a political matter.

German Reaction

The German public had not accepted that the military leaders were guilty, it 'had simply not penetrated public consciousness, and careful explanation and education were now seen to be pointless'⁷³. Chancellor Adenauer and the Bonn government were becoming significant, giving Kesselring some hope; Adenauer always raised POWs whenever possible. On a trip to America Adenauer wrote that 'I then turned to the subject of war criminals and commented that it was largely a psychological problem. The American occupation authorities had released the sentenced men in their custody more slowly and hesitantly than the British and French'⁷⁴. Shortly after the foundation of West Germany, 'the Adenauer Government announced its goal to request a general amnesty for persons sentenced by occupation

⁷⁰ Jasper, George,p.308.

⁷¹ Ibid,p.309.

⁷² HL Debate5th Series vol.134 c.341.

⁷³ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.185.

⁷⁴ Adenauer Konrad, *Memoirs 1945-53* (London: Weidenfeld, 1966)p.445.

government courts'⁷⁵. Adenauer pursued this issue with vigour because it was a vote catcher. In September 1949 when the Bundestag elected the Federal Chancellor, Adenauer was elected with the smallest majority 'of one vote (his own) to become first head of government'⁷⁶. Winning freedom for German prisoners was a political issue⁷⁷. Adenauer took the opportunity to visit the British prison in Werl to investigate the conditions⁷⁸. Adenauer's German biographer noted that he followed this prison visit by laying a wreath at Bismarck's grave: this was greeted with severe displeasure by the French President⁷⁹. It ought to be noted that this biographer, whose work appeared as late as 1991, stated that Kesselring 'had been locked away by the British as an alleged war criminal'⁸⁰. Nearly half a century after the guilty verdict a modern German writer was still referring to Kesselring's crimes as merely 'alleged.' As will be noted in the next chapter, German politicians seeking restoration turned to the device of treating themselves as the victims. They chose to see themselves as victims of the Hitler aberration, of strategic bombing, of the barbaric Russian invasion, of imprisoning innocent POWs; any blame for war horrors could be placed on the Nazi apparatus such as the SS, and this was their method of reconstructing memory to cope with the future. The issue of Kesselring and other POWs was part of this reconstruction: all victims together.

Kesselring's imprisonment attracted journalists during elections; the Free Democratic Party regarded itself as the prisoners' spokesmen, particularly a Dr Mende, who, under the headlines '*German Agitation for Release of War Criminals*' told one correspondent that 'he wishes to acquaint himself with conditions {in the prison} and hear the personal views of ex-Marshall Kesselring'⁸¹. Also active was the 'violently right-wing Socialist

⁷⁵ Priemel, *Reassessing*, p.203.

⁷⁶ Gehler, *Three*, p.77.

⁷⁷ 'the debate was mainly a German-American one,' they held most prisoners, Gehler, *Three*, p.77.

⁷⁸ KNA-FO371/104147.

⁷⁹ Schwarz Hans-Peter, *Konrad Adenauer* (Stuttgart: Berghahn Books, 1997) pp.75/6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.75.

⁸¹ *Guardian*, July 5th 1952, p.8.

Reich party of ex-General Remer and Dr Dorls' who 'appointed an action committee' for the release of those in Werl in the British zone⁸².

Many Churchmen, including prominent German Church leaders had taken on the issue of victor's justice, and continued to agitate for POWs and especially Kesselring. Originally their efforts were based on humanitarian grounds, and they had made direct contact with Laternser's defence team⁸³. 'Even the American secret service had noticed the interplay between churchmen and the war criminals' defence teams'⁸⁴. Bishop Bell through the World Council of Churches had established relationships with many German clergy leaders: including Bishop Otto Dibelius and Consistory President Martin Niemöller⁸⁵. Unlike Britain these senior churchmen took an active part in politics, and could influence votes as much as their Roman Catholic counterparts, of which Adenauer was well aware⁸⁶. All the German denominations came to the support of German war criminals, 'prompting one historian to declare the German Churches were the most effective helpers of National Socialist war criminals,' which was probably somewhat harsh given their Christian intentions⁸⁷. The Pope had tried to set the Christian tone as early as his Christmas Eve broadcast in 1945 saying: 'those who exact today the expiation of crimes and the just punishment of criminals for their misdeeds should take good care not to do to themselves what they denounce in others'⁸⁸. More often than not the Christian churches were, as Bishop Bell in Britain, trying to present a Christian perspective of reconciliation.

The Political Forum

It was a British Military Court that had condemned Kesselring, Werl was a British prison, and British attitudes were mixed towards Kesselring. As noted, those seeking his release did so for a variety of reasons,

⁸² Guardian, Nov27th1951, p.10.

⁸³ BA-MA N431/933.

⁸⁴ Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.154.

⁸⁵ Jasper, *George*,p.309.

⁸⁶ Schwarz, *Konrad*,p.23 and p.491.

⁸⁷ Hébert, *Hitler's*,p.41.

⁸⁸ Jasper, *George*,p.307.

but not all wanted him freed. There was tension between wanting Germany in alliance, and others upholding the courts' decisions. On the one hand the Berlin blockade had embodied the deteriorating relationships between East and West, and there was genuine concern about the Cold War⁸⁹. Korea was making many nervous and the French President, André Plevin had proposed a European Defence Community, and NATO, which began in 1949, was also looking towards a rearmed Germany. On the other hand men like Sir Hartley Shawcross and others were insistent that the courts should not be overruled. The disagreement was open, and later in parliament Mr Hamilton MP hoped that 'the release of all other German prisoners' is not 'a condition of German participation in a European Army;' there was no direct answer recorded⁹⁰. There was a fear that men like Kesselring may be reliable soldiers but too aggressive; in 1948 Kesselring had been quoted in parliament as claiming that 'Russian aggression' was 'the only military danger that at present threatens Europe'⁹¹. A similar debate in the House of Lords was repeated with the same arguments, and using 'von Kesselring' (sic) as evidence in the Commons a year later⁹². Despite pressure from Adenauer and the Bonn government there was a mistrust of men like Kesselring and reluctance to release him. The evidence seems to run contrary to the theory that the British were very keen to find an excuse to release Kesselring to encourage German rearmament. Lingen, Battini and Hébert make valid points, but the British reaction was much more mixed and sluggish than they suggest.

The pressure group, with its mixture of motives brought the debate into the political forum. It involved both British and German political alliances: the Labour MP Richard Stokes was contacted by Kurt Schumacher chairman of the SPD, and together they submitted a three page petition for Kesselring's release⁹³. Adenauer and many politicians realised that the question of locked up German officers and POWs was vote catching. The reluctance on the part of the British continued, the Cabinet Minutes of 19th

⁸⁹ Berlin Airlift 24thJune 1948-12thMay 1949.

⁹⁰ HC Debate, 12thNov 1952, vol 507/cc926-7926.

⁹¹ House Lords Debate, 24thNov 1948, Vol-159/cc544-616/544.

⁹² HC Debate 3rdMarch1949, Vol462/cc541/672/541.

⁹³ Stokes was well known for his pro-German, anti-Semitic attitudes, was opposed to carpet bombing and advocated a British peace with Germany, Lingen,*Kesselring*,p.212

Dec 1951 illustrated the problem; the concern was expressed that the release of prisoners 'would be unpopular' and the idea developed to shift the responsibility to a tribunal of one German, one Allied member and one neutral, 'Swiss rather than a Swede,' and that such a tribunal should be 'based solely on grounds of clemency'⁹⁴. The debate held no sign of immediate resolution, and the idea of a tribunal was unquestionably an effort to try and shift the responsibility away from the British political scene. There was a developing pressure for Kesselring's release.

Cold War and Politics of Memory

The British viewpoint varied between those who saw the trials as valid, a few wanting to exercise compassion, and those who perceived the dangers of the Cold War escalating. Kesselring was one of the better known pivots for focusing the debate. Cold War politics needed German rearmament, and it has been cogently argued that the 'interests of justice' were being 'cynically subordinated to political goals'⁹⁵. Although a major causation behind the interest in Kesselring, it was not publically presented this way. The British motives for his release were mixed, not everyone wanted Kesselring and other war criminals set free, but there was a political belief that German rearmament was necessary.

Lingen argued in her thesis that the need for German re-armament in the Cold War was the major factor in sanitising people like Kesselring and the Wehrmacht⁹⁶. Lingen argues it was all to do with the politics of memory, or to clarify this expression for this research, current day political pressures need us to review past-events in a particular light. Politicians could not say we are going to change our views of what happened in the war in order to win German alliance. It happened like a corporate public consciousness slowly evolving a new account of the past. As noted, Liddell Hart's book *The Other Side of the Hill* had been published in April 1948, and was widely read, being

⁹⁴ KNA-CAB128/23/18.

⁹⁵ Priemel, *Reassessing*, p.289.

⁹⁶ Lingen, *Kesselring*.

reprinted in November and revised and enlarged in 1951. In this book Liddell Hart paints the Wehrmacht in almost glowing terms, criticising the blind eye they turned to Hitler, but adding that 'I doubt whether generals of other countries, in similar circumstances, would have done more to overthrow such a regime'⁹⁷. Naturally he is critical of the Nazi regime, but paints a picture of an extremely efficient Wehrmacht which, on the whole, fought a clean war. The very argument used by Kesselring. The popularity of this book, demonstrated by its reprints, along with the developing belief that the SS had committed the atrocities, a forgetfulness of what had happened to Italian citizens, and the natural human need for reconciliation were a few of the many factors that helped changed the view of the past. This politics of memory put Kesselring into a different light; it was a gradual process, but it happened.

It was not just a British phenomenon, as will be explored in the next chapter; the German consciousness was self-evolving into that of the victim rather than the perpetrator. In America a change of view was happening as in Britain. Eisenhower, who had been highly condemnatory of the German commanders, and now viewing the world from political necessity, quite deliberately changed his view of the Wehrmacht and its officers. Adenauer had met with senior Wehrmacht officers in the monastery of Himmerode in the Eiffel, and produced a document which demanded that the 'western powers had issued a formal declaration rehabilitating the soldiers of the Wehrmacht' and demanding the release of prisoners⁹⁸. The 'Himmerode Memorandum', came to light in 1951 in Eisenhower's visit to Germany, when he signed a document declaring previous denunciations of the Wehrmacht as an error. This was the politics of memory, a self-conscious effort to keep Germany onside, because history is rewritten according to the needs of 'today'. The American Chief Prosecutor Telford Taylor, like his British counterpart Shawcross, was cynical about the changing attitudes; he wrote that 'I recommended that the important portions of the Nuernberg proceedings be published in both German and English. I pointed out therein that 'the

⁹⁷ Liddell-Hart, *On the Other*, p.12.

⁹⁸ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, pp.236/7.

United States Government has made a heavy moral investment in these trials, and this investment will not show a favorable rate of return if the records are left in the dust on the top shelf out of reach⁹⁹. The trials were never translated into German, and effectively thereby put on the top shelf. The Americans and British were sanitising the past to keep Germany within their fold but the motives remained mixed. Some members of the British public wrote asking for an end to the imprisonment, simply on grounds of finding a 'new and friendly Europe;' but others wanted Kesselring out of prison to encourage the Germans to oppose Soviet communism, even if it meant painting a different picture of the recent war¹⁰⁰. The British response was more complex than some historians suggest; the Cold War was very much in the background, but other factors of a humanitarian nature were involved.

Resolution

Clemency seemed the only way to release Kesselring legitimately and without too much dissent. There was further debate in the Lords just after George VI's funeral, with more discussion on the yet unresolved issue of blind obedience to orders¹⁰¹. Eden was opposed to clemency, but Churchill remained outspoken, claiming that 'the so-called war criminals, especially the people in High Command who had no more to do with many of the atrocities than President Truman with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki¹⁰². Adenauer, Churchill, Hankey, Liddell-Hart, Alexander, Bishop George Bell continued to plead for Kesselring; no one, it was argued, wanted the prisoners to die in prison. On July 16th 1952 Kesselring had been admitted for a throat cancer at the Bochum Hospital, Bergmannsheil: an operation was carried out by Kesselring's doctor, Bürkle de al Camp. The British expressed suspicion when Bürkle, having said Kesselring was recovering, was 'unfit for prison¹⁰³. On October 22nd 1952 Queen Elizabeth II under government direction, pardoned Kesselring. The French were somewhat underwhelmed,

⁹⁹ USFR, p.100.

¹⁰⁰ Morkill-letter to Editor-Guardian, May 20th1947,p.4.

¹⁰¹ May14th 1952.

¹⁰² Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.224.

¹⁰³ KNA, FO 1060/501-29 Aug 52.

and there was a hostile reaction in Italy, but parliament was informed that 'no protest has been received by Her Majesty's Government from the Italian Government'¹⁰⁴. Partisan associations, victim groups protested loudly, but not all the Italian press was anti-Kesselring's freedom. *Il Messaggero*, wrote that Kesselring's release would trigger trouble, but it was a gesture towards a sick man, and commented that Kesselring was neither a 'Nazi nor a cannibal,' but was an honourable man, who whilst guilty in the literal sense was, compared to other war criminals, innocent and not guilty of inciting troops to commit violence¹⁰⁵. It ought to be noted that the same paper had appeared for Kesselring's defence saying Kesselring had properly warned the population¹⁰⁶. The Italians, who had suffered most from Kesselring's command were as various in their views as the British. The British Legion wrote to the Under-Secretary of State deploring 'the premature release of war criminals'¹⁰⁷. The *Neue Zeitung* (American supported newspaper) wrote it was 'not possible to prove that Kesselring had personally prompted, and could not be held responsible for the shooting of hostages and excesses relating to the anti-partisan war in Italy,' whilst *Der Mittag* claimed it to be a 'moral acquittal'¹⁰⁸. The reactions to the release varied from country to country.

If the reactions were varied, the motives for the release were even more so. Laternser, quite cynically, had used the humanitarian arguments of the churches, but he also recognised that the British were the key to the outcome he sought. The Hankey group, with disparate members ranging from Bishop Bell to Liddell Hart, raised the issue so that press and parliament became involved. Lingen's argument that the Cold War necessitated a cleansing of history in order to release Wehrmacht leaders like Kesselring was undoubtedly correct; this must have influenced many politicians who wanted Germany rearmed. However, Kesselring's release was never straightforward; even though he was suffering from cancer some British questioned his liberation. How far the government's recommendation for the Queen's pardon

¹⁰⁴ HC Debate 12th Nov 1952, vol507/cc926-7926.

¹⁰⁵ Macksey, *Kesselring*, pp.250/1.

¹⁰⁶ Battini, *Missing*, p.84.

¹⁰⁷ KNA-FO371/104147.

¹⁰⁸ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.191.

rested on 'genuine humanitarian reasons' or Cold War pragmatism can only be a speculation¹⁰⁹. This research thinks the various motives for Kesselring's release were a tangled mixture of immense complexity which reflected British thinking at that time.

¹⁰⁹ KNA, FO1060/501-29thAug 52.

CHAPTER 11

POST PRISON POLITICS (1952-1960)

Introduction

While Kesselring was in prison *what* he was, had become more important than *who* he was. Once out of prison the man Kesselring became part of the limelight because of *who* he was; Field-Marshal Kesselring. According to his son Rainer, Kesselring was a shadow of the man he had been¹. This is understandable given his health, age, and seven years imprisonment, the first part of which was harsh, plus the psychological blow of falling from being a highly respected Field-Marshal to a common-criminal.

The Americans, whom Kesselring had helped in mapping out the German campaigns, provided him with an apartment in Bad Wiessee². 'His return to freedom was, in its day, a sensation that thrust him into the forefront of public notice ... at the very moment when moves to restore Germany's armed forces were well advanced³. He was joined by family; his wife helped Kesselring in receiving thousands of telegrams and congratulations, and requests for his appearance; he had become a celebrity at a time when his energies were low. 'None of the High Command case convicts expressed any remorse or contrition,' and Kesselring was no different⁴. On his release from Bochum hospital, he had informed a press conference he would have preferred to be released on grounds of *justice* rather than *clemency*. The reasons for his release were a matter of widespread speculation, even in Parliament a Mr. Anthony Greenwood, an important Labour Politician (later Baron Greenwood of Rossendale PC) asked whether 'the hon. Gentleman assure the House that Her Majesty's Government have no intention of paying compensation to Kesselring for inconvenience or loss.'⁵

¹ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.243

² Popular spa and scene of infamous 'Night of the Long Knives'.

³ Macksey, *Kesselring*, p.243.

⁴ Priemel, *Reassessing*, p.204.

⁵ HC Debate, 24th Nov 1952, Vol508/cc15-615.

This was sheer nonsense, but illustrates the considerable confusion even in Parliament, which itself had requested the Queen to release Kesselring on compassionate grounds; it was clemency.

This chapter will show why and how Kesselring's initial popularity on release dissipated through the 1950s until his funeral in 1960, by which time he was almost an embarrassment. First it will be necessary to outline the salient features of the new West Germany into which he was released, and the perceived need for rearmament. The chapter will explore Kesselring's relationship with the veteran associations, some incidents of how he misread the times, and finally, how he alienated himself both at home and abroad, by his insistence on supporting returning war criminals.

Germany post-1945

By the end of 1945 Germany was almost totally destroyed, huge areas lost, and the State of Prussia formally abolished: 'The Prussian State which from early days has been a bearer of militarism and reaction in Germany has *de facto* ceased to exist'⁶. The Military government regulations banned young people from aviation, parachuting, gliding, fencing, military or para-military drill or display, shooting with firearms⁷. Some historians have seen in these postwar years 'Western planning for vengeance against Germans and for the destruction of Germany' which 'began in England in August 1944, with its chief architects Morgenthau and Dwight D Eisenhower'⁸. It appeared to be a time of retribution, not only is it claimed that POWs were badly treated but there may have been 'atrocities against POWs'⁹. The American Commander noted that he might have to sign papers for the killing of over 500 POWs which he thought looked too much like 'a mass execution'¹⁰. He was relieved later to discover the figure was only 150¹¹. It has been suggested

⁶ USDS, Control Council Law no 46,p.151.

⁷ USDS, Military Government Regulations,p.585.

⁸ Bacque James, *Crimes and Mercies, The fate of German Civilians Under Allied Occupation, 1944-50* (London: Little, Brown, 1997)p.25.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.63.

¹⁰ Clay, *Papers*,p.658.

¹¹ *Ibid*,p.661.

that 'the dominant policy was vengeance through imposed starvation'¹². There was an immediate reaction to the discovery of the concentration camps, even long term POWs already in America, had their rations reduced, and Eisenhower on 8th May 1945 issued the command ... 'making it a crime punishable by death for German civilians to feed prisoners'¹³. Yet, within a few years (2nd March 1948) Lucius Clay insisted Germany must be restored 'if there is to be a stable Europe'¹⁴. During the period Kesselring was on trial, Germany was in an abyss, and suffering considerable moral and intellectual confusion.

By the time Kesselring's trial concluded Germany was changing rapidly. The emerging Cold War was formulating a new political shape in Germany. The experience of 'war and defeat led to the construction of different historical and political narratives, pushing some political alternatives (nationalism and revanchism, for example) off the agenda'¹⁵. The new Germany was deeply suspicious of extremes, especially communism; the Berlin Blockade had served as a 'marker of the division of the world by the Cold War'¹⁶. From the time of the blockade Britain, and especially America started to see the need for the reconstructing of Germany; the Cold War started to dominate the Allies' attitude and also that of most Germans. This Soviet threat represented 'a psychological and political opportunity for Germany to be counted among the free world against the communist threat'¹⁷. It is possible to trace 'a shift from hostility to the Germans as authors of the war and as criminals, to an emphasis on creating the conditions for recovery and stability'¹⁸.

Whilst Kesselring may have felt comfortable with the new Germany's attitude towards communism, there had been a distinctive

¹² Bacque, *Crimes*, p.89.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.41.

¹⁴ Clay, *Papers*, p.563.

¹⁵ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.179.

¹⁶ Tipton, *History*, p.505.

¹⁷ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.180.

¹⁸ Tipton, *History*, pp.503/4.

'marginalisation of nationalism' which was undoubtedly alien to him¹⁹. However, 'Adenauer's Germany was prepared to let Nazis in on the power structure of the Bonn Republic, so long as they behaved themselves and acted as if they were prepared to become democrats'²⁰. Many of the old military commanders were also reactivated, but this was not to be the case with Kesselring.

They were reactivated because rearmament had become a serious issue from the perceived threat from the Soviets. Initially West Germany had not been allowed its own armed forces, but the Cold War was principally influential in this respect. There was opposition to rearmament in several European countries, and even in Germany itself, but America was beginning to see it as essential. The French had suggested a European army but then turned against it. Germany was invited into NATO in 1955 and 'with its membership came the return to near full sovereignty'²¹.

By the time Kesselring was released West Germany had 'successfully absorbed most of the 12 million expellees from the lost eastern provinces and non-German central Europe'²². The return to economic power was underway despite objections from the French. Koenig, the French representative had told the Americans 'that Germany, and particularly the Ruhr, was being allowed to come back too rapidly'²³. The clue to economic recovery was the Marshall Plan which was 'supported by US anti-communist propaganda and was above all psychologically valuable for the growing self-confidence of Germans'²⁴. It was agreed at the Washington Three-Power Meeting (April 8th 1949) that the Federal Republic 'should participate as a full member in the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, thus becoming a responsible partner in the European Recovery Programme'²⁵.

¹⁹ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.186.

²⁰ Taylor, *Exorcising*, p.358.

²¹ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.184.

²² Hagen, *German*, p.365.

²³ Clay, *Papers*, p.914.

²⁴ Gehler, *Three*, p.39.

²⁵ USDS, Washington Three-Power Meeting, p.89.

During the 1950s there was sustained economic growth, and 'by 1951, West Germany had regained prewar levels of output'²⁶. Incredibly, 'between 1949 and 1953' 3 million housing units were constructed²⁷. The revaluation of the currency (the change from the Reichsmark to the Deutsche Mark) was an 'American precondition for the participation of the Western zones of Germany into the ERP (European recovery programme)²⁸. 'West Germany rapidly attained a secure place within the western club' - the formation of the European Coal and Steel Commission by the Paris Treaty of 1951²⁹. This was all part of the process of economic cooperation which eventually led to the formation of the European Economic Community in 1957. The growth of West Germany encouraged 'German leadership in economic recovery,' which meant 'facilitating German political responsibility'³⁰. By the time Kesselring was free the economic rise of Germany was apparent, and 'the main cement of the Federal Republic's social fabric' was this extraordinary and sustained economic growth³¹.

Kesselring had been moulded in the Wilhelmine period which held military status as important, and two World Wars had left him with a significant social status. However, by the 1950s 'the old military elite had disappeared'³². Germany was acutely aware that the outside world was deeply distrustful and watching the political pulse of Germany for fear of the rise of a new right wing. Adenauer's stand against Communism 'meant automatic support for United States policies'³³. Politics was almost a dirty word, and it became important for Germany's leaders to make sure that whatever young Germans were doing 'it should not be political'³⁴.

The main question in terms of Kesselring's life was not Germany's return to economic wealth, but how the Germans dealt with their past. First it

²⁶ Tipton, *History*, p.513.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.529.

²⁸ Gehler, *Three*, p.43.

²⁹ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.183.

³⁰ Flenley, *Modern*, p.442.

³¹ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.185.

³² Tipton, *History*, p.540.

³³ *Ibid*, p.542.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.539.

ought to be recorded that 'no single position dominates the politics of memory in contemporary Germany'³⁵. However, perhaps one of the most salient features of German recovery was their corporate psychological adjustment to the immediate past. The most horrific feature of the previous years had been the massacres, and in particular the industrialised Holocaust, but 'there was very little inclination among ordinary Gentile Germans to reflect on or ponder the meaning of the Holocaust'³⁶. For a long time the question has been asked as to how aware the German people were about what was happening, but there was a group consciousness that thought there were many things 'it was best not to talk about and not to remember'³⁷. It has been said that the 'soldier, whose deeds had appeared heroic during Nazi Germany's expansion, now needed to conceal what he had done'³⁸. There is no doubt that there was considerable obfuscation of the past, denial of involvement, 'indeed a conspiracy not to mention it. Most German people were unwilling to confront their role in Germany's crimes'³⁹. The Germans managed to refocus away from the memory of their victims and 'dealt with the legacy of Nazism at home by focusing on communism abroad'⁴⁰.

Within months of the war finishing, there was a conscious need for self-justification by their desire to reverse roles; the Germans became the victims not the perpetrators. Walter Ulbricht, as early as 31st December 1945, had said 'what unspeakable suffering has been brought upon our German homeland by nazism'⁴¹. This idea developed rapidly, and 'Germans now perceived themselves as victims of the "Nazis," now stylized as a fanatical minority'⁴². German leaders of all persuasions reversed the poles of responsibility; 'Germans were not guilty'⁴³. They were the victims of Hitler, his rise to power was the fault of the Western countries, they shared the

³⁵ Bartov, *Crimes*, p.190.

³⁶ Tipton, *History*, p.521.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.548.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.550.

³⁹ Fulbrook, *Twentieth*, p.187

⁴⁰ Bartov, *Crimes*, p.xxxi.

⁴¹ Ulbricht Walter, *Whither Germany, Speeches and Essays* (Dresden: Zeit im Bild, 1960)p.127.

⁴² Bartov, *Crimes*, p.136.

⁴³ Tipton, *History*, p.548.

depression, and now Germany was occupied by those same powers... 'both Adenauer (CDU) and SPD leader Schumacher refused to accept German responsibility for the war or for its outcome'⁴⁴. 'In their own memories of World War II Germans preferred to count themselves among the victims rather than among the perpetrators'⁴⁵. While he was in prison Kesselring could be viewed as a victim which suited this readjustment of the past, but once he was released this changed. In his memoirs, and in his interrogations, Kesselring never criticised or turned against Hitler as did the vast majority of commanders. His stubborn loyalty was probably based on his insistence that Hitler was the legitimate government of the day. This was not helpful in a Germany rising from the ashes, and trying to forget the past. The problem for Kesselring was as a Field-Marshal he personified what had happened, which was embarrassing for those who wanted to forget, and provocative for those who still felt an inclination that the past had not all been wrong. As will be illustrated later in this chapter, Kesselring needed to dwell on the past, trying to justify or explain his actions.

Rearmament Issue

One of the reasons behind Kesselring's release had been the need to appease Germans in order to encourage the rearmament of Germany, and its eventual merger into a defence force. This was typified by an article in the Guardian newspaper in December 1952, the year of Kesselring's release, in which the focus was on the developing relationship between West Germany and the Western powers, claiming that 'the most acute and superficially most dangerous of these is the question of German war criminals ... why should they {the Germans} be asked to take up arms when some of their own countrymen, condemned by courts which were based on no legal precedents, continue to sit in Allied administered gaols on German soil'⁴⁶. This issue dominated the early 1950s, and some senior officers of the old military command became part of West Germany's military, and although 'Adenauer's

⁴⁴ Tipton, *History*, p.548

⁴⁵ Bartov, *Crimes*, p.xix

⁴⁶ Guardian Newspaper, Dec30th 1952 article-T Prittie, Journalist and author on German/Israeli Histories.

Germany was prepared to 'let Nazis in on the power structure of the Bonn Republic,' Kesselring was never considered⁴⁷. His only official appointment was to the Medals Commission, and even this was challenged⁴⁸. His role under the Hitler regime had been high profile; he was a Field-Marshal and had been far too prominent; he was also prone to making gaffes. Several times in public he demanded that all prisoners be released whether they had committed crimes or not, arguing that this would be a small injustice compared to imprisoning innocent men 'for acts which they did not commit'⁴⁹. He appeared to refuse to let go of the past, frequently broadcasting that the term *Wehrmacht* was preferable to *Bundeswehr*; this started to tarnish any chance that might have existed for him to participate in the recovering Germany. On one occasion when there was a clash between the Stahlhelms and the communists in Bonn, on June 13th 1955, and Kesselring was not even there, the chanting was '*down with Kesselring*' even though the main issue was the communist party's concern with possible German rearmament⁵⁰. Kesselring was associated with rearmament because of who he was, or had been, even though he was never part of the official West Government agenda for rearmament.

Veteran Associations

Poor publicity encapsulated a problem which was to be a feature for the rest of Kesselring's life; he was quite insensitive to the changing world. Politicians like Adenauer needed men like Kesselring when they were in prison to make an issue of their continued imprisonment; POWs were a vote catcher, but once they had been freed some made their presence in public was unwelcomed because they reminded others of a past they were trying to forget. On December 12th 1952 Adenauer gave Kesselring a half-hour audience during which Kesselring raised the subject of POWs, a topic related to the question of 'soldier-hood and the issue of those convicted in connection

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Exorcising*, p.358.

⁴⁸ Denazification outlawed the NSDAP symbols including the swastika which Kesselring wanted on the medals.

⁴⁹ Manchester Guardian, 26th October 1952, Kesselring demands release of Comrades.

⁵⁰ Guardian, June 13th 1955.

with the war⁵¹. Adenauer gained good publicity through his constant campaigning for the release of men like Kesselring, but at the press conference, after this meeting, some government representatives 'made it clear that they were shocked at Kesselring's naïveté, and they suggested that he should exercise considerable restraint in the future'⁵². More outspoken than Kesselring was General Ramcke who supported the extreme right-wing movement the *Naumann-Kreis*, and told a group of former SS that they should be proud to be blacklisted⁵³. This was far more extreme than Kesselring, but along with Ramcke there was concern in England where it was noted that 'Kesselring was less obnoxious, but nevertheless, political'⁵⁴. The German public was beginning to believe in the future of economic growth, and did not appreciate extremists, or reminding of their past: during the rest of his life Kesselring failed to understand the major changes in Germany since the defeat.

Kesselring's relationship with the veteran associations was prolific and complex. The Chairman of the *Verband deutscher Soldaten* (VdS), Gottfried Hansen, had made many public announcements on Kesselring's behalf when he was in prison, had approached Adenauer and made contact with Hankey⁵⁵. Kesselring felt a loyalty towards the Veterans because they reflected the past, and respected him. During 1952 he accepted honorary positions in various ex-military associations, the honorary chairmanship of the *Luftwaffenring*, then the *Stahlhelm* followed by the *Verband Deutsches Afrikakorps*. He was also inducted into the *Ordensgemeinschaft der Ritterkreuzträger des Eisernen Kreuzes*, Order of the Knight's Cross. There is no record of Kesselring's personal views, but his inbuilt sense of soldierly loyalty was unquestionably his motivation.

It was the *Stahlhelm* which would cause Kesselring adverse publicity; the *Stahlhelms* (Steel Helmets) were traditionally right-wing, and

⁵¹ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 15th Dec 1952.

⁵² Searle, *Very*, p.168.

⁵³ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.262.

⁵⁴ Guardian Newspaper, May 8th 1953.

⁵⁵ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.189.

most Germans were trying to distance themselves from this extreme. The *Stahlhelms* were originally a paramilitary organisation which supported Hitler in the early 1930s. Franz Seldte, their 1933 leader, was a member of the government cabinet who had joined the Nazi Party and offered the headship to Hitler⁵⁶. The *Stahlhelms* had supported Kesselring in prison, and according to his first biographer this explains why Kesselring accepted their offer of being president. By July 1952 ten veteran associations had signed a joint manifesto demanding the release of the so-called war criminals. This was an agenda with which Kesselring easily associated, and which for a time was popular because it was part of that memory adjustment that made some feel the victims in the new world: POWs were victims.

The VdS was divided on many issues, and Generalleutnant Heinz Trettner, who served in Italy under Kesselring, attempted to persuade him to act as a spokesman for all the veteran associations, but he was obliged to refuse because he had accepted the presidency of the *Stahlhelms* which precluded similar appointments. However, he was often their unofficial spokesman, and in this capacity during February 1953, spent time with John Foster Dulles the American Secretary-of-State⁵⁷. As representing the VdS he was invited to visit an American airbase at Fürstenfeldbruck in 1954, viewing American jets from a helicopter. These social unions were not always welcome in the wider world. Earlier in 1953, in Hanover, he had attended a football match between former members of the *Afrika Korps* and the British 7th Armoured Division⁵⁸. This sort of appearance always raised interest which was often sceptical; as late as 1956 Mr F Maclean, Secretary of State for War, was asked if he were aware that 'senior serving British officers fraternised with and publicly eulogised convicted German war criminals at the *Afrika Korps* reunion on 29th Sept;' he replied that Kesselring was present and 'it would not be in the interests of Anglo-German relations for officers to boycott these reunions'⁵⁹. Kesselring had always managed to establish easy going

⁵⁶ Tipton, *History*, p.426

⁵⁷ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.264

⁵⁸ There was only one Desert Rat in the team... 2-2-draw.

⁵⁹ HC Debate 30th Oct 1956, Vol1558/c129W.

relations with the Americans, but his association with the British was never quite as straightforward.

In England, ex-service men from 27 nations gathered for the third general assembly of the Veteran Associations⁶⁰. Mr Newcomb, the Secretary-General spoke of those national veteran associations which pledged allegiance to such political systems as the Soviet Union, and referring to Ramcke and Kesselring, warned about the 'dangers of false nationalism'⁶¹. The need to avoid political extremism was prevalent in Germany, but it was also on the agenda of most veteran associations. Kesselring was still regarded as the old regime, and appeared to confirm this at the Stahlhelm Nuremberg convention when he appeared in a Stahlhelm uniform, complete with medals demanding social justice for all old soldiers. Kesselring was causing concern amongst the emerging leaders of West Germany, beginning with the medals commission when Kesselring argued that veterans should be allowed to wear their original medals with the swastika⁶². He argued that the swastika was a national not a political symbol which went some way to underline the fact that Kesselring had lost his way in the new world. In *Der Stahlhelm* paper of October 1956 he had argued that the new Bundeswehr uniform was too removed from the old Wehrmacht, stating that 'give our young soldiers a uniform in which they feel comfortable and of which they can be proud'⁶³. Kesselring had no grasp of the socially changing scene; the Stahlhelms were marginalising him; some members of the public and government were outraged, many wanting uniforms banned.

Yet at an earlier Stahlhelm convention (1953) Kesselring had appeared more accommodating to the new Germany, when he proposed ideas of reforming the association, advising replacing the black white and red of the swastika flag with the Federal black red and gold. He suggested the Stahlhelm greeting of '*Front heil*' be abolished, and that SPD members admitted, thus giving up the so-called fight against Marxism.

⁶⁰ Church House, London, 1952.

⁶¹ Guardian, *Governments Must Help Heal Wounds of War*, Dec 9th1952.

⁶² Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.269.

⁶³ *Der Stahlhelm*, October 1956 also quoted in Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.409.

Attitudes were changing rapidly in Germany, many veterans wanted to forget the past, and they split into two factions; the old Stahlhelms and the *Traditionsgemeinschaft der Stahlhelm*-(Association of frontline-soldiers) both factions sinking into political obscurity. Kesselring was eventually side-lined within the Stahlhelms, which itself was becoming marginalised in the new Germany. The Stahlhelms belonged to the past, as did Kesselring who made too many gaffs. Economic progress was affecting everyone, and a growing stability within Germany side-lined some of the issues the Veteran associations considered important.

Kesselring misjudges the times

On March 20th 1954 (virtually the 10th anniversary of via Rasella) Kesselring and his wife went on holiday to Austria, and visited veteran associations and charitable organisations looking after ex-servicemen. Kesselring had been asked to avoid such visits, to stay purely private, and to tread carefully over matters regarding the communists, who had, only a few months before, speculated publically that Germany could still threaten Austrian Independence⁶⁴. There was a degree of nervousness about a German ex-Field-Marshal arriving in independent Austria. Against advice, Kesselring persisted with a meeting with the organisation caring for relatives of those held in Soviet prisons. He appeared determined to publicise the state of ex-servicemen which caused uproar. In Salzburg he held a public meeting with the president of the Austrian association that looked after Wehrmacht soldiers. The left-wing press and the Soviet-backed press reacted with articles entitled ‘What does Kesselring want in Austria⁶⁵?’ The same newspaper claimed he was met with ‘flowers and marching tunes’ wherever he travelled; this was untrue, but Kesselring had supplied sufficient grist for their mill⁶⁶. The Austrian government wanted him to leave, and the local police chief asked

⁶⁴ Soviet Foreign Minister speaking at Berlin Conference, Jan 1954.

⁶⁵ Frankfurter Rundschau, 30th March 1954.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

him on behalf of the government to exit the country⁶⁷. The visit provoked debate in the papers at home and abroad, the Austrian government claiming he had conducted political talks which was hotly denied⁶⁸. The German government was approached by both Soviet and Austrian representation, but Kesselring persisted in being photographed at various memorials for fallen soldiers, provoking the headline, 'Kesselring Visit Unwanted'⁶⁹.

There were many who welcomed his attention and the press he brought with him. It was difficult to ignore Kesselring; he only had to speak and it was instantly in print for analysis and comment. This was the hub of the problem; the ex-Field-Marshal had lost the ability of diplomatic caution for which he had once been known. He tended to say what he was thinking, and he appeared completely lost in the new developing West Germany.

A further gaffe occurred later that year when during a BBC interview Kesselring expressed the opinion that the invasion of Britain failed, because the Germans had not planned it well enough in advance, not as a result of the willingness of the British to defend their country. He said 'that had the invasion succeeded, as I hoped, the war would have been over much sooner, which after all would have been a good thing for all of us'⁷⁰. It was insensitive and smacked of Wehrmacht arrogance. He was to repeat these claims in an American interview on August 30th 1955, adding that the failure to invade England had been one of the four major errors that lost Germany the war⁷¹. Discussing such issues postwar indicated insensitivity. Had he been more tactful he would not have shared his views with the BBC, but he had lost the diplomatic touch, and probably enjoyed irritating the British whom he blamed for what he perceived as his unjust imprisonment. It led one German newspaper to write: 'Kesselring did not pass up the opportunity to display a lack of political tact.'⁷² It is apparent in his trip to Austria and his interviews he was not simply out of touch in Germany, but also on the world stage; he

⁶⁷ Guardian, March 25th1954.

⁶⁸ Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 5thApril 1954.

⁶⁹ Süddeutsche Zeitung, 25thMarch 1954.

⁷⁰ Lingen, *Kesselring*,p.278

⁷¹ Guardian, August 30th1955.

⁷² Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 20thNovember, 1954.

was becoming an embarrassment, which with his insistence on the POW issue would soon turn to serious public discomfiture, if not mortification.

Returning Criminal POWs

Whenever there was reference to POWs Kesselring's name was frequently involved in any newspaper report. This was to be expected from a senior commander concerned for his men. It also, for a time suited the German self-image because POWs became part of the developing need to be victims. The weekly publication, the *Heimkehrer*, which claimed to represent those who fought in the war, frequently alleged that the British were keeping innocent German soldiers locked up. A Guardian newspaper report indicated that Kesselring, who the paper claimed was being considered as a candidate for the Presidency of the Federal Republic after Professor Heuss, had been making too many statements regarding these issues⁷³. Partly through such reports, Kesselring was seen as a man with a mission. At first Kesselring had concerned himself only with his old prison of Werl and its conditions, writing to Alexander and Eden out of what he called 'a feeling of moral obligation to assist those sharing my fate in their need and to make some contribution towards a more far reaching and more deeper understanding between our peoples'⁷⁴. This led to a letter exchange in the *Abendpost* by Herbert Koestlin and Sir Ivan Kirkpatrick over the Werl prisoners being 'innocent or murderers'⁷⁵. In the Foreign Office, a Mr Andrew wrote that 'I think that Kesselring, unlike Ramcke, is a reasonable being whom it would pay us to placate'⁷⁶. The response from the Secretary of State was immediate that he 'saw no reason to 'placate' FM Kesselring, who has behaved foolishly'⁷⁷. The foolishness undoubtedly related to Kesselring's outspoken and persistent criticism of the policy of holding some prisoners.

⁷³ Guardian, Jan 2nd1954.

⁷⁴ KNA-FO371/104147.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ KNA-FO371/104142.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

During the 1950s a series of *Kameradenschinder* trials started, indicting those who had brutalised their comrades while in Soviet POW camps. 'They were inextricably linked to West German efforts during the 1950s to come to terms with the past' ... shaped by the 'ideological parameters of the emerging Cold War'⁷⁸. 'It was easier for the West Germany public and the judiciary to address these issues with reference to a foreign, Communist dictatorship rather than to an indigenous Nazi dictatorship'⁷⁹. Kesselring started taking an interest in another type of trial, namely those of returning officers who during the closing months of the war had committed crimes against their own population. His unpopularity arose from his persistence in defending such soldiers who were regarded as war criminals even by most old comrades, mainly because they had ordered the death of Germans. There were many cases, but Colonel Berthold Ohm, General Tolsdorff and Field-Marshal Schörner were cases in which Kesselring became deeply immersed, losing him what popularity he had managed to retain. It was more than mere stubbornness, and there is little question that Kesselring would have approved of their actions. His obsession with freeing all prisoners, regardless of what they had done, dragged him into deeply hostile territory.

Kesselring became headlines when he acted as a witness in the case of a Colonel Berthold Ohm. This man had executed seven citizens of the town of Penzberg because they wanted to save their town from further destruction, by letting the Americans enter. These citizens realised the war was finished, and could see no reason for more death and destruction; in shooting these Pensberg citizens Ohm committed a serious crime, killing the very people he was supposed to defend. Kesselring argued that Ohm's decision was necessary for a proper retreat⁸⁰.

In the witness stand Kesselring made the error of coupling this issue with the new rearmament programme, asking who would join the Bundeswehr if years later they were to be prosecuted for following orders; he

⁷⁸ Bartov, *Crimes*, p.140.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁸⁰ *Der Mittag*, 26th November 1953.

was well known for his persistency on this theme. As early as 1950 he had been quoted in the *Guardian*, in a column entitled '*Sayings of the Week*,' that 'next time there is a war they won't be able to have soldiers in command. They will have to have lawyers'⁸¹. The press attacked Kesselring, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* writing 'that one cannot simply kill people with impunity as here'⁸². Kesselring probably felt it his duty to defend a man who had carried out similar orders to those issued by him in the closing months of the war. This serious anti-Kesselring backlash in the press continued, and it was probably this incident, more than any other, which ruled out any official postwar role for Kesselring. In 1952 he had been popular because he was a released prisoner, but each year his inability to come to terms with the new Germany made him less so.

Kesselring learned nothing from the public response to the Ohm trial, and in 1954 immediately became involved in another trial supporting a General Tolsdorff. Tolsdorff was being prosecuted for the execution of a sixty year old Captain Holzey on May 3rd 1945, whom he claimed had surrendered a village, when it was argued that all the Captain had done was put Red Cross flags out to protect the hospital. General Tolsdorff was not the sort of criminal that Ohm had been, but Kesselring again caused a stir by stating that it had been essential 'to fight to the end because it had been vital for the war'⁸³. This line of argument again ran counter to what Germans wanted to hear in the mid-1950s. The press attacked Kesselring again; no one wanted to be reminded of those closing days of the war in May 1945 when Germans killed Germans. Kesselring failed to understand the new world in which he lived, and added to this failure by ignoring public opinion.

In the same year (1957) his wife died, Kesselring was still busy as an expert witness, this time supporting Field-Marshal Schörner who had been released by the Soviets, and was promptly arrested and charged with the killing of those German soldiers, who in the last days had allegedly deserted.

⁸¹ *Guardian*, June 18th 1950.

⁸² *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21st November 1953.

⁸³ *Die Welt*, 23rd June 1954.

This was a well-publicized case because Minister Franz-Josef Strauss (chairman of the Christian Social Union, member of the Federal Cabinet in different positions and later long term president of Bavaria) used the negative public response 'to launch a general attack on the old Wehrmacht elite' which reflected similar attacks he had already made on Kesselring⁸⁴. The public was interested because it revisited the national trauma of being victims, victims of the old regime so critical to the German corporate psychology. Even the VdS allowed members to testify against Schörner⁸⁵.

Schörner was not popular, and nor was Kesselring by being supportive; the West German press was clearly indicating the feelings of the nation, which was a wish to distance itself from the old generals. By 1957/8 the destruction of war still blighted Europe, and especially Germany, but there was a growing desire to move away and look to the future.

Kesselring's Failure

Kesselring turned the public against him, the Soviets enjoyed the propaganda potential, and the West remained suspicious of the Field-Marshal who would not change. Earlier, in a British parliamentary debate following a Foreign Ministers' Conference in Berlin, Mr Hughes MP expressed concern that if the Germans joined NATO 'they will, in five years dominate the whole show ... the militarists are in evidence there already ... they have been standing as parliamentary candidates ... Kesselring is one of the leaders of the new regime'⁸⁶. No one questioned this even though there was no truth in the allegation; there was the assumption that Kesselring was a right-wing leader of the old school, and to be feared - but the German people had rejected Kesselring. Lord Russell of Liverpool referred to the reunions which Kesselring had 'been holding all over Germany, in which the speaker said this: we want to bring back to Germany the old spirit of the Prussians. All this talk of a democratic army is nonsense ... if the world wants our soldiers it

⁸⁴ Lingen, *Kesselring*, p.290.

⁸⁵ Searle, *Very*, p.247.

⁸⁶ HC Debate, 24thFeb 1954, Vol524/cc401-528/401.

must let us train them our own way'⁸⁷. German opinion was against such views: it tended to lean towards the idea of making a military contribution with other European nations, but, as ex-General Crüwell told some cheering *Afrika Korps* veterans, 'we shall never again be Hessian mercenaries'⁸⁸. A report in the *Guardian* illustrated how East Germany used the Kesselring image to attack the right wing stance of West Germany, asking 'What has this man been doing in West Germany since the last war'⁸⁹? Kesselring had become an embarrassment. Modern Germany wanted no reminder of its past, and Kesselring, the so-called non-party member, remained to the end the right-wing nationalistic military man he had always been. He died on Wednesday 20th July 1960 in the sanatorium in Bad Nauheim. The *Stahlhelms* fired a volley over his grave, though he was not given a military funeral. General Kammhüber spoke about Kesselring's leadership, but distanced himself from Kesselring's more recent activities. Westphal spoke of Kesselring's strength of character and the care he had shown for men of all ranks. The funeral closed in a heavy rain storm. The obituary in the *Guardian* mentioned that after prison 'Kesselring showed how irreconcilable and unteachable he was' which was both perceptive and reflected the opinion of many Germans.⁹⁰ At the time of his death he was both the last created and the last living German Field-Marshal, having outlived Manstein by twenty-three days. No Field-Marshals have been created since.

⁸⁷ House Lords, 23rdDec1954, Vol-189/cc185-88/1805.

⁸⁸ *Guardian*, Sept17th1951.

⁸⁹ *Guardian*, Sept14th 1960,p.12.

⁹⁰ *Guardian*, July18th1960,obits.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Introduction

Kesselring's latest biographer describes him as one of the most notable commanders of World War II, his first biographer as a master strategist and a patrician. As noted in the thesis many Allied commanders such as Bradley appeared to admire his military expertise, and Alexander approved the way he conducted his war. Many historians have referred to him as one of the best generals of the war and a master of defence. He was admired by many for his Luftwaffe strategy, and later viewed himself, as did the Allies, as the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean. He always saw himself as being innocent, not preparing for an aggressive war, not being involved in war crimes, and being non-political and ignorant of the bestiality of his political masters. After the war some saw him as a potential president of the new Germany, and a person who cared for his old soldiers still in prison. More recently some historians have started to review certain aspects of Kesselring's life in a different light, and this thesis has reappraised much of what has been written about Germany's last Field Marshal.

It is Primo Levi's words that 'grey men, blind first and criminal later, frenziedly divided among themselves the tatters of an iniquitous and moribund authority,' could be applied to Kesselring in 1945¹. This thesis has argued that Kesselring belonged to a national caste that saw war as a profession; that he knowingly prepared for an aggressive war, pretended to have no political leanings, and blindly served an iniquitous regime. His reputation as being a great commander is questioned, but his adherence to a moribund authority led him into a criminal court, surviving only because postwar politics needed him pro-tem, but not for long.

¹ Levi, *Drowned*, p.49.

Kesselring, a National Product

Military leaders frequently reflect their environment. Zhukov reflected Stalinism, Alexander upper-class England, Bradley middle-America, Kesselring reflected the German military class born at the end of the nineteenth century; he was a typical product of his background. Even Kesselring's birthplace Bavaria proved a fertile place for the growth of the NSDAP. Anti-Semitism was endemic throughout Europe, but growing rapidly in military Germany. The influence of right-wing nationalism which fed off the growing anti-Semitism was part of Kesselring's DNA. The militaristic Wilhelmine period cast Kesselring in a mould he never questioned. Not all historians would agree, but there is little doubt that in the Wilhelmine period military professionalism was too highly regarded, and because of the Kaiser's dysfunctional personality the military was a belligerent rather than a defensive force. During this time there was 'little understanding of democracy, and {soldiers} were bound to an institutional cult of obedience'². This context was determinate in the moulding of Kesselring, a moulding he accepted and never questioned.

The Great War was also a major contributory factor in the context of his development as a professional soldier. Following his meeting with the communists at the Düna, Kesselring developed a life-long hatred of communism. By the end of the Great War Kesselring had become a typical product of the German General Staff, anti-communist, undoubtedly anti-Semitic, a right-wing nationalist who saw war as a profession; the slaughter in the trenches received no attention in his memoirs; an early warning of his ruthlessness.

Kesselring's reaction to the Versailles Treaty was typical: the shock waves of defeat, revolutions and anarchy were a major context which shaped him. His right-wing nationalism was given full vent in the *Freikorps* activities during the period of the *Nachkrieg*, which nearly ruined him. As a

² Priemel, *Reassessing*, p.211.

consequence he developed the lifelong facade that he had no interest in politics, just compliance. This made him a willing tool for Hitler, to whom he retained a blind obedience. Kesselring concealed his politics, but they were an intrinsic part of his nature.

His enemies referred to him as *Smiling Albert*, held him in regard, and many historians, including his first biographer, place him on a pedestal, believing him to be non-political, and neglecting to note that his background and subsequent behaviour indicate that he was a prejudiced right-wing nationalist, with an uncompromising hatred of communists, undoubtedly anti-Semitic, and as a professional soldier, ruthless. By 1922 Kesselring's personality had taken shape which, for a time would elevate him, but would eventually destroy him.

Kesselring prepared for war

Despite the agreed terms of Versailles Kesselring worked throughout the *inter-bellum* years in the clandestine rebuilding of an aggressive war-machine, never questioning its morality or legality. It necessitated a cynical co-operation with the hated Communists, and German pilots were trained at Smolensk, and Lipetsk, disguised as Red Army officers. The same clandestine exercise was repeated with Italy, but this time disguised as South Tyrolean soldiers with the *Regia Aeronautica*. The use of the Soviets underlined the morally bankrupt nature of men like Kesselring, and his mentor Seeckt. Seeckt's insistence on surprise and speed combined with air power, and the harnessing of modern technology was a critical influence on men like Kesselring. His various appointments involved him at every level of military re-organisation and expansion; the military historian, Carlo D'Este, justifiably saw Kesselring as one of the originators of the *blitzkrieg*, and as one of the architects of the Luftwaffe³. Kesselring's introduction of aggressive parachute regiments; his initial support of strategic bombing; his insistence on night-fighters; training bombers and navigators for long distance navigation,

³ D'Este, *Fatal*, p.86.

and his concept of mobile control areas for the various Air Fleets are clearly indicative that Kesselring was preparing for aggressive war. This was a period of determined war preparation, and Kesselring's military generation accepted the NSDAP aspirations in the 1930s. During this period Hitler was of little significance, but the military machine prepared by men like Kesselring undermined the democratic Weimar state, and gave Hitler the tools for war.

Kesselring supported an Iniquitous Regime

Emulating Seeckt and most officers Kesselring never joined any political party, allowing him to pretend he had no interest in politics. By the time Hitler came to power Kesselring and his colleagues had prepared the military tools, and were willing servants. Kesselring remained loyal to Hitler to the bitter end, fighting on to the detriment of the German people. Unlike most senior officers, Kesselring never denied Hitler, never pretended he opposed him, and to the end of his days said nothing against the man who brought European devastation. Kesselring was Hitler's natural disciple, even if he did not sign the Party's membership book.

The Hitler oath of 1934 had strong precedents in European history and America, but was used by men like Kesselring as a reason to follow orders, and sublimate their personal will to authority. It enabled the process of sanitization by claiming, with Pontius Pilate, that they could wash away the blood; allowing Kesselring in his memoirs to pose the rhetorical question 'what else was the meaning of an oath⁴?

Hitler gave Kesselring a personnel gift of some 6,000 RM, which indebted him to the regime; he would have been aware of the implicit embryonic bribery. This was one of many 'blind eyes' that Kesselring developed as Hitler rose to power. During the formative years of the Luftwaffe, Kesselring must have known about Hugo Junkers being forced into

⁴ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, p.26.

partnership with Anthony Fokker, and the theft of Junkers' patents, and company. When questioned about Jewish officers being excluded from the army, his reply that 'Jewish officers did not exist' reflected an arrogance making him complicit⁵. Hitler's regime gave Kesselring all he needed, especially the restoration of military power, of 'drum and trumpet ... resulting in what the satirist Karl Kraus called cerebral concussion'⁶. The intense loyalty remained to the very last hours of the war in Europe where his ruthless streak, for some reason a point of admiration amongst many historians, became lethal, and 'he acted like a brute'⁷.

Kesselring knew War was planned

Kesselring's prepared an aggressive war-machine, and his expertise was behind the concept of *blitzkrieg*. The nature of German military activity, along with Hitler's political views, made it clear to an Australian academic in 1937, and some 12,000 miles away, that a major war was being planned⁸. Kesselring was involved in the preparation, and was senior enough to know what was happening. The 1938 Luftwaffe target maps discovered after the war, held tactical details of London and Hull indicating that Kesselring's plans were more than war-games⁹.

Kesselring was intelligent and informed, and it defies common sense that his cries of ignorance deserve the credibility they have frequently been given. He knew that Sudetenland's fate would be followed by the rest of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Kesselring would also have been aware of the international outlawing of aggressive war in the Kellogg-Briand Pact signed by Germany. He knew war was planned: he had prepared the war-machine for aggression, worked on *Blitzkrieg* and planned the attacks: the only aspect over which he probably had late knowledge was the precise timing.

⁵ Taylor, *Exorcising*, p.328.

⁶ Burleigh, *Moral*, p.26.

⁷ Lamb, *War*, p.6.

⁸ Roberts, *House*, p.363.

⁹ Mendelssohn, *Nuremberg*, p.203: *Ibid*, p.204.

Kesselring's ruthless tactical bombing

For a long time the Nuremberg claim that bombing Rotterdam was 'the first act of terrorism of the German Army in the West' soon became, along with Warsaw and London something of a myth, in order to justify the massive Allied strategic bombing of later years. The project of the Ural-bomber was shelved, and Kesselring produced the *Luftwaffe-Manual/16*, to bomb military targets, tactical bombing. As noted in a recent study, 'German air strategy was linked closely to the ground campaign'¹⁰. The Luftwaffe was to operate in short-range operations for the army which was entirely Kesselring's thinking. There were no long range strategic plans.

The bombing of Warsaw and Rotterdam were for tactical reasons, both intended to break resistance on the ground. Bombing in London was aimed at the docks, and it was not until later in the war some cities became direct targets. However, as the Allies were to discover, accuracy was impossible which meant indiscriminate bombing. Williamson Murray wrote, 'in these raids the Germans were not adverse to any collateral damage inflicted on the civilian population'¹¹. Tactical bombing was not made from any moral considerations; Kesselring frequently stated that he considered high level bombing imprecise, and saw the tactic as wasteful. The Condor Legion in Spain had caused considerable loss of civilian life without regret by the perpetrators; it was simply Kesselring's belief that the Luftwaffe was best used as a support for the ground war.

Kesselring as Luftwaffe Commander

Kesselring used the Luftwaffe in *Blitzkrieg* style, assisting ground forces, in Poland and again in France and later in Barbarossa. These attacks were successful in Poland, although myths emanated about the Polish air-force being instantly destroyed. The initial success in Poland, and earlier in Spain, created a sense of nervousness in France, but again the reality was

¹⁰ Overy, *Bombing*, p.60

¹¹ Murray, *Luftwaffe*, p.30

often different from the myth. The Luftwaffe lost a vast number of aircraft, and Kesselring's *Luftflotte-II* was exhausted and seriously diminished, losing 250 aircraft alone over Dunkirk: it was their image that remained a threat. The initial success in Barbarossa was because of surprise, but the sheer size of Russia was the termination of *Blitzkrieg*.

In the battle of Britain, for all his efficiency Kesselring was poorly served by his Intelligence Services. He believed the RAF had too few aircraft, encouraging the myth of the few against the many. Even at the height of the battle for France 1,200 RAF airplanes were retained in England for defence. His greatest intelligence error was underestimating the size of Fighter Command and its capacity to reinforce. With incredible arrogance he underestimated British radar, fighter planes and many other scientific advances. The British economy was smaller than Germany, but out produced Germany, and 'was ahead in aircraft from 1940 and in tanks in 1941-2'¹². Kesselring's constant reference to chivalry in his memoirs during this period indicates his attitude of seeing war as a national game, part of the Wilhelmine mentality. The British and its RAF did not share this view. He was shocked at the RAF pursuing Red Cross rescue aircraft and bombing on Christmas Day, and was forced to concede the British fighter-planes were superior. Hitler's claim that the British were 'realists, devoid of any scruple, cold as ice,' was a lesson Kesselring did not learn¹³. Kesselring was defeated by a larger, better equipped force which was ruthless in its determination to win.

Kesselring as Commander in Chief, South

Hitler needed to stabilize Italy and appointed Kesselring *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd*; a totally misleading title. Hitler regarded Kesselring as in charge, as did the Allies who gave him the code name *The Emperor*, but not the Italians who read the original Order, and saw him as a liaison officer¹⁴.

¹² Edgerton, *Britain's*, p.75.

¹³ Overy, *Bombing*, p.85.

¹⁴ Appendix 9.

Kesselring was subordinate to Mussolini, and obliged to tread with caution with the Monarchy, the Fascist Council, the *Supremo Commando*, and even the Vatican; he also had to report to Hitler and the OKW. After the surrender of Italy some of these complications disappeared, but were immediately replaced by Himmler's SS which had its own command structures, and reported directly to Berlin. Keitel was obliged to send a signal making Kesselring the highest authority because the partisan war was directed by SS *Obergruppenführer* Wolff, but it was only for military appearances. When SS troops massacred women following the Rome bread riots, and the Pontine Marshes were infected with malaria, it all happened on Kesselring's watch in a system with disorientated leadership. Kesselring was constantly hampered by Hitler's intrusions, minor ones about demanding particular troops be evacuated from Sicily, and many major ones, especially at Anzio where Hitler's interference gave the initiative to the Allies.

As noted in the thesis, Kesselring has, even recently in the Quantico Command and Staff College, been given considerable credit for his command in the South. His observations of Italians are morally redundant and misconstrued. Finding them unmilitary and angry at their surrendering, it never crossed his mind either in his memoirs or interrogations, that many Italians were uninspired by the war or even opposed to it, and that the inept leadership of Mussolini had left his troops badly equipped, poorly resourced and with weak leadership. As *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* he failed to understand that, as Ciano had said, 'our people have no faith in the war, or in our leaders ...they have lost their will to win'¹⁵. When he heard that Augusta Fortress had surrendered to the British without a fight, it must have dawned on him that his optimism was misplaced as Hitler had often said. Beleaguered by poor Intelligence, not realising the effectiveness of British Intelligence, and the arrogance of not believing the Enigma code could be broken, he frequently blamed the Italians. He was taken by total surprise at Mussolini's downfall and became instantly ruthless. First he pretended to love Italians, but his

¹⁵ Hansen, *Italian*,p.37.

ruthless orders issued in Rome showed his love had become contempt¹⁶. *Oberbefehlshaber-Süd* sounded grand, but it was more fiction, and was further hampered by Kesselring's inability to understand the Italian people.

Kesselring's failure with Rommel and Malta

Rommel and Kesselring have always been held in esteem even by the Allies, who during and after the war almost deified Rommel. They were both contemptuous of the Italian military, but Kesselring was more diplomatic. As Rommel's star faded Kesselring became more prominent; some historians claiming Kesselring was more able than Rommel, 'shrewd both tactically and strategically'¹⁷. Kesselring's understandable failure to supply Rommel was one of the main causes of friction, as was Ciano's point that 'Kesselring {was} running to Berlin to complain of Rommel'¹⁸. In Italy there had been the serious contention of Rommel's proposal that after the Italian capitulation that they should fight from the north, whereas Kesselring wanted to fight up the peninsular from the south. The relationship between Kesselring and Rommel is difficult to ascertain, there was some mutual respect, and much professional jealousy, the most contentious points being Malta and supply lines.

Kesselring complained during interrogation that Rommel vacillated about Malta¹⁹. On the other hand Rommel thought 'Malta should have been taken instead of Crete'²⁰. To Hitler it was inconsequential since Russia preoccupied him. However, Malta was like a port in the sea, and the proposed Hercules Operation was eventually given the go ahead²¹. It never occurred because the Italians could not agree on timing, and Rommel suddenly made his move towards Egypt. Kesselring failed to carry out the invasion and failed through the heaviest bombing of the war to destroy the port; as Montgomery

¹⁶ 'Those organizing strikes or sabotage as well as snipers will be shot immediately - private correspondence is suspended...'

¹⁷ Holland, *Italy*, p.37.

¹⁸ Young, *Rommel*, p.168.

¹⁹ USAH Division, 007718.

²⁰ Liddell-Hart, *Rommel*, p.120.

²¹ Hercules - invasion of Malta.

wrote, 'El Alamein could not have taken place if Malta had fallen'²². Kesselring's problem was that as a senior commander he could not convince Hitler, and could not keep Rommel under control. Although Rommel was promoted to Field-Marshal, Kesselring remained senior.

On Rommel's advice Kesselring was refused a single division from North Italy, and some historians argue that had Rommel sent troops 'events might have been very different in Italy,' and 'if Rommel had sent his eight divisions in the North of Italy to join Kesselring's in the south the beachhead would not have survived'²³.

Kesselring's failure in North Africa

Kesselring and Halder agreed that Rommel overreached himself, and supply lines stretched too far because the RAF controlled the skies; Kesselring was blamed for the failure of supplies. Kesselring failed to understand the powerful logistic build-up by the Americans, and the ramifications of Torch. He realised it too late as he recognised he had no counter-attack against four-engine bombers at a ceiling of 30,000 feet. The German inability to understand Vichy France, and their lack of perception of French attitude caused serious problems, especially regarding the use of French airfields and ports. Although a thousand US soldiers died from French fire near Casablanca, it was a brief time before they switched sides. As a well trained professional officer Kesselring was able to establish the Mareth defence line, but Arnim and Rommel had mutual difficulties, and clashed with Kesselring, undermining the myth that the German command always worked like a machine. The sheer logistics of overwhelming power, control of the skies and sea lanes meant failure, and although the Allies suffered 76,000 casualties they also captured 238,000 prisoners of war, a greater number than those who surrendered at Stalingrad, and yet Kesselring retained his reputation as a great master of defence.

²² Lucas, *Malta*, p.4.

²³ Holland, *Italy*, p.40/Nicolson, *Alex*, p.218.

Kesselring the Master of Defence

Kesselring's reputation as a master commander of defence evolved in Italy, but it had its origins in Africa, despite the campaign concluding in defeat. Montgomery's caution in pursuing the remnants of the *Panzerarmee* along the coast is well documented, allowing Kesselring time. The Kasserine Pass disaster must be shared by Anderson, Eisenhower and Fredendall, and led to the humiliating spectacle of some 4,000 Allied POWs being marched through Rome. Excessive caution, inexperience and ineptitude characterised the Allied leadership in North Africa, and it was expedient to praise the expertise of the enemy. This had happened earlier by elevating Rommel as the *Desert Fox*, and now Kesselring was receiving similar accolades. Even the Guardian newspaper referred to Kesselring as 'one of the most stubborn and least advertised of German generals'²⁴.

The inexperience and ineptitude of Allied leadership persisted in Sicily and later Italy with, as Bradley and Montgomery both acknowledged, a serious lack of planning. The egocentric and dysfunctional personalities of Patton and Montgomery, and the inability of Alexander to control his subordinates allowed Kesselring's evacuation at Messina to look uncomfortably like a Dunkirk victory. Both Clark and Patton were extreme Anglophobes, and Clark's near failure and behaviour at Salerno all made the German military, and Kesselring in particular, look superior. From Brooke, Eisenhower, Alexander, Clark, Patton, Montgomery right through the chain of command the leadership was mutually suspicious of one another, but the most serious defects were between Clark and Alexander. Having stowed gas-bombs in a ship at a highly illuminated Bari Port was incompetent, but the Monte Cassino bombing debacle resulted in worldwide condemnation, and created a defence structure for the German defence. The landing at Anzio was a near disaster because of inexperience and timidity, and when Clark ignored Alexander's orders by taking Rome he allowed the escaping Germans to regroup and fight to the end of the war. In addition to facing inexperienced

²⁴ Guardian, Nov 28th1944, p.4.

military commanders, Kesselring's efficiency in organising defence-lines across a landscape, which by nature was easier to defend than attack, meant the Italian war only concluded as Germany collapsed. It remains clear that the Allies had paid little attention to Italy's terrain and weather. Kesselring was acclaimed a genius of defence, but this praise helped cover up the inexperience and frequently inept Allied leadership, who used his so-called genius to account for their failings. It is always easier to praise the enemy than blame our own leaders. Kesselring was just a solid professional German officer who frequently faced an enemy which was lost and at odds with itself; he was no genius.

Kesselring was Ruthless

It could be expected that Kesselring, as a product of the German General Staff, would have been ruthless in times of war: this was his reputation, and it is frequently described with admiration. Kesselring also tried to enhance his image by being seen as the saviour of Italian culture, but his purloining of Italian industry and destruction of Italian agriculture during the retreat, puts a bitter perspective on such claims.

The thesis illustrates that Kesselring's ruthlessness finally descended to sheer brutality, which brought him within the ambit of war crimes and verging on crimes against humanity. As noted in the final chapters, postwar politics concealed the truth for the same reason that the Wehrmacht was seen in a different light from the SS. Kesselring's brutal reaction to the Italian partisan war condemned him. International law regarding the legitimacy of partisans, and hostages/reprisals remained a legal problem for some time. The Allies had supported the partisans to tie down Germans, but had failed to control them, and Kesselring viewed it as his 'struggle against gangs with most severe measures'²⁵, The Communists planned to provoke German reaction, such as the massacre of the so-called SS in via Rosella, and the subsequent Ardeatine reprisal.

²⁵ KNA, WO204/11496.

The massacre at Marzabotto was ten times the size of Lidice, and yet Kesselring dismissed it as a mere war operation. The SS were barbaric, but Kesselring stated that 'anti-guerrilla warfare must in large measure be carried out by the army,' and he was in charge²⁶. This research shows that many Ultra intercepts from Kesselring confirm his involvement - '*many guerrillas killed, village burnt down*' on the grounds that the guerrillas were '*in w/t contact with the British*'²⁷. It was a vicious circle; the partisans inflamed the Wehrmacht whose brutal reaction swelled the ranks of the partisans. Kesselring's orders reveal that he was not only cognisant, but the originator of some actions that could be classed as crimes against humanity, because in the words of the Italian historian Battini he acted 'as if the existence of the Partisan movement were the fault of the civilian population'²⁸. He probably committed perjury at this trial in collaboration with his staff-officers in the cynical knowledge that he might get away with killing civilians, but not American POWs. His investigation into possible Swiss citizenship is indicative that he was well aware as to how his actions would be viewed in the wider world.

His ruthlessness was not confined to Italy, although he joked that he was 'the new wonder weapon' he pursued the drumhead courts in Western Europe, proposed by Hitler²⁹. He even complained about not seeing hanged deserters, regarding it as 'ineffective military leadership'³⁰. After his release from prison he pro-actively defended German officers accused of killing their own countrymen in defence of the homeland.

Kesselring becomes Politics

It has been tempting for many historians to suggest that because Churchill and Alexander appealed against Kesselring's death sentence he must have been 'decent.' Churchill was the driving force, and his motives were

²⁶ KNA, HW5/474.

²⁷ KNA, HW1/3017.

²⁸ Battini, *Missing*, p.38.

²⁹ Battistelli, *Kesselring*, p.5

³⁰ Fest Joachim, *Plotting Hitler's Death* (London: Phoenix, 1997)p.335

partially politically based. The West needed Adenauer's Germany on side, and Adenauer needed to win the German POW argument as part of the means to retain power. The SS had provided the alibi for the majority, and the Wehrmacht's clean war myth started with Kesselring. The commutation of his death sentence and eventual release was partially motivated by Cold War politics. The word 'partially' is important because Kesselring was a British prisoner, and the British motives for his release were much more mixed than historians such as Battini, von Lingen and Hébert suggest. Cold War politics and the readjustment of memory were critical, but men like Bishop Bell, Hankey and Paget also argued from genuine humanitarian grounds, in seeking to heal the wounds of the past. Although he went through the denazification process parodied as *Persilscheine*, he never changed. The politics of memory, the need for German re-armament in the Cold War were a major factor in sanitising people like Kesselring and the Wehrmacht. Latenser's book, *Verteidigung Deutscher Soldaten*, added fuel to the fire of victor's justice, but the 'Himmerode Memorandum' and all it represented was the real truth³¹.

A few had once considered Kesselring as a potential candidate for the German presidency, but Kesselring never changed or adapted. Between his surrender in 1945 and his eventual release in 1952, Germany and its aspirations had changed dramatically in nearly every aspect of national life, and Kesselring was almost like a time-warped alien. His association with the *Stahlhelms* was not just poor judgment, but as with his ill-advised trip to Austria and his defence of Ohm, Tolsdorff and Schörner clearly indicate he was incapable of adapting to the new West Germany.

Kesselring, charming but ruthless, was a militaristic Wilhelmine product who eagerly served an evil regime, and who always turned a blind eye to serve his master's purpose. As Primo Levi wrote 'blind first and criminal later,' Kesselring died having failed to understand the new Germany who had rejected all he stood for and represented³².

³¹ Defending German Soldiers.

³² Levi, *Drowned*, p.49.

APPENDIX 1¹

Kesselring's 'Most Secret' orders dated 17th June 1944 to GHQ Staff, 10th Army; GHQ Staff, 14th Army; Army Group, V Zangen; General Plenipotentiary German Armed Forces in Italy; HQ Luftflotte 2; German Naval High Command, Italy; Supreme Head of SS and Police, Italy; General i/c CTPT Italy; Plenipotentiary of the Greater German Reich with the Italian Government, Ambassador Rahn:

Concerning: New Measures in connection with operations against Partisans.

1. The partisan situation in the Italian theatre, particularly in Central Italy, has recently deteriorated to such an extent, that it constitutes a serious danger to the fighting troops and supply lines as well as to the war industry and economic potential.

The fight against the partisans must be carried on with all the means at our disposal and with the utmost severity. I will protect any command who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice of severity of the methods he adopts against partisans. In this connection the old principle holds good, that a mistake in the choice of methods in executing one's orders, is better than failure or neglect to act. Only the most prompt and severe handling is good enough as punitive and deterrent measures to nip in the bud other outrages on a greater scale. All civilians implicated in anti-partisan operations who are apprehended in the course of reprisals, are to be brought up the Assembly Camps which are being erected for this purpose by the Quartermaster General C in C South West for ultimate despatch to the Reich as workers.

2. The combat against partisans consists of passive and active operations with centre of gravity on the latter. The passive combat consists of protection of important buildings of historic or artistic value, railways, and roads, as well as essential installations such as power stations, factories etc.

Even these passive operations must be conducted within the local boundaries for example, Recce Troops will constantly guard the foreground of an installation to be protected.

Active operations will be conducted especially in Partisan overrun districts where it is vital to maintain the lifeline of the Armed Forces. These partisans will have to be attacked and wiped out. Propaganda among partisans (as well as use of agents) is of utmost importance.

3. The responsibility for the entire operations against partisans in the Italian theatre and the fundamental instructions for same continue to be valid with the following amendments: GHQ 10 and 14 Armies are responsible for all operations against partisans within their Army Sectors and Army Group V

¹ BA-MA N 432/931 & N 422/15 pp42ff.

Zangen within the coastal belt to a depth of 30 kms. The task entrusted the GOC in C Operational Zone Adriatic Coast in connection with coastal defence (in accordance with Fuehrer Instruction No. 40) are not affected by this ruling. In the remainder of the Italian Theatre the Supreme Head of the SS and Police conducts the operations against Partisans on his responsibility, in accordance with my instructions. Details in connection with delineation of the 30 km wide strip along the coastal zones are to be settled direct between the Supreme Head of the SS and Police and Army Group V Zangen. The boundary between 14th Army, 10th Army and Army Group V Zangen Quercianella (North of Rosignano)-Certaldo-Figline-Sansepolora from there along road 73 to Fano (Road incl. to 10th Army)

4. Armed Forces for Operations against Partisans: Here one has to differentiate between:

(a) Military units (Police forces, Govt. Troops Bohemia and Moravia etc.) who are exclusively employed for active and passive operations against Partisans. These are subordinated to the Supreme Head of the SS and Police Italy.

(b) Task Forces and guard detachments: For this purpose Task forces are to be formed, armed and trained by withdrawn formations, staffs and units and these should be placed upon demand without any reservations, at the disposal of the local staff HQ, local Headquarters, combat commander, SS unit. Outside the Army sectors and the 30 km. wide coastal strip upon the request of the Supreme Head of the SS and Police, they are to be utilized to the fullest extent for operations against Partisans in so far as the position and their other tasks permit.

The local command of operations, within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Head of the SS and Police, where units of the Wehrmacht are utilized as well, depends upon the proportionate strength of the Wehrmacht and Police forces employed. The responsibility for the general conduct itself rests with the Supreme Head of the SS and Police Italy.

(c) Each local Commandant is responsible for the safeguarding of his locality and immediate surroundings and this applies as well to operations against Partisans. The military local HQ areas are to be subdivided into security sectors, to be placed under the order of the leader of the Armed Forces, SS or Police, whichever is the most suitable for the task. He is fully responsible for the security within his sector. All shock troops, task forces etc. are at his disposal upon request from the local Heads. Rapid action guarantees surprise and success. Such security Commandants are especially to be appointed along the main reinforcement routes within the Army Sectors and the 30 km. wide coastal strip by the Armies or Army Group V Zangen with definite tasks allotted to them. Within the rest of the area, the security commanders are to be allocated by the Supreme Head of the SS and Police in collaboration with Army Group V Zangen and the Plenipotentiary General. They will take their orders in this district from the Supreme Head of the SS and Police, notwithstanding their belonging to part of the Armed Forces.

(d) *Operations against Paratroopers* will be undertaken in addition to operations against Partisans.

5. The protection of the following lines of communication is of primary importance:

(a) Railway Sections (South of the PO) (b) Roads

Roads of No. 2 Priority Importance.

The relative needs of the various installations and buildings of artistic and cultural value to be guarded along the railway lines is to be agreed upon on the one hand by the Armies, Army Group V Zangen, the Supreme Head of the SS and Police and on the other hand by the General i/c Transportation, in direct consultations. The safeguarding of the buildings of artistic and cultural value along the roads within the Army Sectors and the coastal strip are the responsibility of the Armies or Army Group V Zangen, outside these limits the Supreme Head of the SS and Police Italy assumes responsibility. In this connection he is to be in close contact with the G.O.C. in C. South West/General i/c Pioneers.

6. So far as security of essential installations is concerned (Power Stations, Pumping Stations, Industrial undertakings etc.) G.O.C. Tech. Troops and the Staffs R.u.K. is to have liaison directly with the Supreme Head of the SS and Police Italy or the Armies or Army Group V Zangen.

7. To further security of the Appenines the Armies are to post, commencing forthwith, reinforced units, Field units, road blocks, etc. in accordance with operational instructions "Alarich". These are to be located along the main passes and principal lines of reinforcement.

The Supreme Head of the SS and Police Italy is requested to submit by 25th June to G.O.C. in C South-West, a map (scale 1:500,000) with markings showing location of his security sectors, security troops, local security sectors, Local Commandants (Operations against Partisans) etc.

Signed :Kesselring

G.O.C. in C. SOUTH-WEST Ia T. No.

0402/44

MOST SECRET

(Signed) [?I Oberstleutnant

APPENDIX 2

TOP SECRET.

KR WAAJ/C 00104/06 1/7 1210 To: Leitkommandantur, Bologna.
SUBJECT: Combating of Partisans. SOURCE: Telepring Ia Nr. 12099/44
SECRET

(After receipt to be treated as Top Secret) from 20. 6. 44.

In my appeal to the Italians I announced that severe measures are to be taken against the Partisans. This announcement must not represent an empty threat. It is the duty of all troops and police in my command to adopt the severest measures. Every act of violence committed by partisans must be punished immediately. Reports submitted must also give details of counter measures taken. Wherever there is evidence of considerable numbers of partisans groups, a proportion of the male population of the area will be arrested and in the event of an act of violence being committed, these men will be shot. The population must be in- formed of this. Should troops etc. be fired at from any village, the village will be burnt down. Perpetrators or the ring leaders will be hanged in public. Nearby villages to be held responsible for any sabotage to cables and damage inflicted to tyres. The most effective counter measure is to recruit local patrols. Members of the Fascist party will not be included in any of the reprisals. Suspects will be handed over to the prefects and a report sent to me. Every soldier will protect himself outside villages by carrying a fire-arm. District Commanders will decide in which towns it will also be necessary to carry fire arms. Every type of plunder is forbidden and will be punished severely. All counter measures must be hard but just. The dignity of the German soldier demands it.

-KESSELRING-

Bologna, 14. 7. 44.

APPENDIX 3

Area HQ Covolo

The Commander of the district of Covolo announces the following:

For every member of the German Armed Forces, whether military or civilian, who is wounded, *Fifty* men, taken from the place where the deed was committed, will be shot.

For every soldier or civilian killed, *One Hundred* men also taken from the locality of the crime, will be shot.

In the event of more than one soldier or civilian being killed or wounded, All the Men of the District Will Be Shot, the Houses Set On Fire, the Women Interned and the Cattle Confiscated, immediately.

THE COMMANDER: Cap DENDA. Covolo.
11.Jul. 44.

APPENDIX 4

RULES OF LAND WARFARE - FM 27-10 - 1st October 1940 US Government Printing Office, Washington

1. Reprisals.-a. Definition~.-Reprisals are acts of retaliation resorted to by one belligerent against the enemy individuals or property for illegal acts of warfare committed by the other belligerent, for the purpose *of* enforcing future compliance with the recognized rules of civilized warfare.

b. When and how employed.-Reprisals are never adopted merely for revenge, but only as an unavoidable last resort to induce the enemy to desist from illegitimate practices. They should never be employed by individual soldiers except by direct orders of a commander, and the latter should give such orders only after careful inquiry into the alleged offense. The highest accessible military authority should be consulted unless immediate action is demanded as a matter of military necessity, but in the latter event a subordinate commander may order appropriate reprisals upon his own initiative. Hasty or ill-considered action may subsequently be found to have been wholly unjustified, subject the responsible officer himself to punishment as for a violation *of* the laws of war, and seriously damage his cause. On the other hand, commanding officers must assume responsibility for retaliative measures when an unscrupulous enemy leaves no other recourse against the repetition of barbarous outrages.

c. Who-**may commit acts** justifying reprisals.-Illegal acts of warfare justifying reprisals may be committed by a government, by its military commanders, or by a community or individuals thereof, whom it is impossible to apprehend, try, and punish.

d. Subjects **of** reprisals.-The offending forces or populations generally may lawfully be subjected to appropriate reprisals. **Hostages taken and held for the declared purpose of insuring against unlawful acts by the enemy forces or people may be punished or put to death if the unlawful acts are nevertheless committed.** Reprisals against prisoners **of** war are expressly forbidden by the Geneva convention of 1929.

APPENDIX 5

Part of trial script relating to hostage/reprisal situation

Dr Laternser:

Before I continue with the evidence of this witness, I would like to put in a document to the Court. The Court might remember that, arising out of a question of the Court, the theme was touched when it was allowed that the life of a person can be taken as a reprisal measure and the Field-Marshal gave his opinion about it. Through the kindness of the American Observer, I got into the possession of a booklet "Rules of Land Warfare" in the American army and, in these rules, almost the same case is being dealt with, and I would like to put into evidence its paragraph 358, as an exhibit to the Court.

Judge Advocate:

(Interrupting) Is there any dispute between the prosecution and the defence as to what the law is?

Colonel Halse:

Quite frankly, as I understand it - my point is quite clear - you are entitled to take reprisals, but you are not entitled to take the lives of innocent people. That is my very short point.

Judge Advocate:

But, surely, Mr Prosecutor, you are not arguing, are you, that in a case of reprisal it is not permissible to take the life of perfectly innocent people?

Colonel Halse:

I do not quite follow that: I am sorry.

Judge Advocate:

I want you to consider only reprisals. Is it not permissible in international law, as a reprisal, to take the lives of perfectly innocent people, that is to say, people who have had nothing to do with any particular crime at all?

Colonel Halse:

I say not, it is not legal; quite definitely it is not legal to take the lives of any innocent people.

Dr. Laternser:

(Interjecting) And I say it is legal.

Judge Advocate:

Then I am quite wrong. There is a fundamental difference between the prosecution and the defence.

Dr. Laternser:

Well, to help my own case in this question of fundamental disagreement between the defence and the prosecution, I must apply again to be allowed to put this paragraph of American law with regard to land warfare, which says quite clearly that, in a reprisal, you are entitled to take the lives of innocent people, and I would like to emphasise that the conditions under which you are entitled to take the lives of innocent people are exactly the same which the Field-Marshal laid down in his order (relating to charge II); they are the same here in this booklet concerning American laws of land warfare.

Judge Advocate:

Mr Prosecutor, where do you get your authority for the statement that, supposing you cannot find the actual perpetrator of the offence, you cannot take a reprisal against innocent people? It is quite clear you can take a reprisal against innocent people in some way, is it not? Surely you agree that a reprisal can be taken against a perfectly innocent person.

Colonel Halse:

I entirely agree.

Judge Advocate:

Are you drawing the distinction that the reprisal cannot take the form of an execution?

Colonel Halse:

Yes; there are certain circumstances, I agree, when possibly - I say "possibly" - an innocent life might be taken as a reprisal.

Judge Advocate:

But you have just said the very contrary.

Colonel Halse:

But I say as a rule an innocent life cannot be taken as a reprisal.

Judge Advocate:

I put to you quite clearly that there was a fundamental difference between you and the defence and you agreed, and that the defence's contention was that, in a proper case, a reprisal could extend to the killing of an innocent person. I thought you said your view was quite the contrary, and that you could not kill innocent people by way of reprisal.

Colonel Halse:

That I what I said.

Judge Advocate:

I thought you were weakening from that and saying in some cases you agree.

Colonel Halse:

I am sorry if you misunderstood me. My case is that you cannot take the lives of innocent people as a reprisal.

Judge Advocate:

Are you prepared later on to give the court some legal authority on this?

Colonel Halse:

I am prepared to argue that ccase, yes.

Judge Advocate:

But you will agree that there can be no question at all that you can have a reprisal, a sort of execution, against innocent persons?

Colonel Halse:

It is quite clear that there can be reprisals take which would affect innocent people, burning of houses and so and so forth, and during such a reprisal an innocent person might lose his life, but I say it is quite illegal, during a reprisal, by execution to kill an innocent person. I make the distinction between a reprisal being taken against an area, such as bombing from the air where undoubtedly innocent people - it must be after a warning - where undoubtedly innocent people might lose their lives, and the deliberate execution of innocent people. I say the former may be legal, the latter certainly is not.

Judge Advocate:

I thought, Mr Prosecutor, the point you were directing us to was whether, when a reprisal was taken by way of execution, the number of people killed, for instance, was appropriate and not excessive in the sense of being an abuse of international law; I thought that was going to be your point.

Colonel Halse:

Well, that is another point. That is another part of my argument, that the reprisals, if taken, must be proportionate to what the enemy suffered, and I still say, and my argument is going to be, that you cannot take the lives of innocent people deliberately.

Judge Advocate:

There is undoubtedly a fundamental difference between the prosecution and the defence as to the law, and of course the court will remember that, in the long run, the responsibility of telling you what is the law is mine. You, of course, are the judges and will form own views as to what the law is, and yours will be the responsibility of deciding that, but when it comes to being advised that the law is, you will get that from me, and then you will consider it in the light of the arguments by the prosecution and by the defence. Now I see no point in having a legal argument at this stage of the case, and if you feel you would like to see Dr. Laternser's document, I suggest now you leave these arguments until after we have heard all the evidence.

(The court confers) -the President feels that he would like this document put in as an exhibit.

Dr. Laternser:

I shall of course provide the prosecution with this book. They are the laws of land warfare published in Washington in 1940, and the extract will be put in as an exhibit, and the original is shown to the prosecution.

The President:

No, the original will be put in as an exhibit.

Dr. Laternser:

I must ask the American observer, because it is not my own, whether he agrees to part with this document.

Judge Advocate:

Have you an objection?

Colonel Notestein (American Observer): - Not at all.

APPENDIX 6

Raid on Bari

Kesselring was fighting a retreating defence with some skill, and some historians have made the claim that 'Kesselring was one of the outstanding commanders of the war'.² Logistically the Allies were far better resourced than the German occupying forces. The Allies had air-superiority, their landing operations were protected by overwhelming naval guns, and American supplies seemed endless. Naples had been the main port for supplies, but Bari on the east coast of Italy was the main supply for both the air force and army battering away at the Gustav line.

In late November 1943 Kesselring had held a conference at his HQ in Frascati with von Richthofen, Dietrich Pelz, Baumbach and all his Luftwaffe senior officers. The discussion was how to slow down the inexorable Allied advance and the Foggia airfields were seen as the most viable option. However, von Richthofen argued for Bari because of the huge number of supplies passing through the port, and Kesselring agreed. Sir Arthur Coningham had claimed the Luftwaffe was finished, stating that 'I would regard it as a personal affront and insult if the Luftwaffe would attempt any significant action in this area'.³ Richthofen claimed that his spies informed him that such was the confidence of the Allies that Bari port was unloading at night with all the lights on. When the raid took place on December 2nd the complacency of the Allies was self-evident, and the port and town were so bright it was easy to see from above for the attack.

The Luftwaffe carried out a raid on the port so successfully it became known as the 'Little Pearl Harbour' or 'Second Pearl Harbour.' The Luftwaffe managed to sink seventeen ships, and damage many others, along with the dockyards.⁴ Amongst these vessels was a Liberty ship called the *SS John*

² Carlo D'Este, *Fatal*.

³ Infield, *Disaster*, pp.29/30

⁴ 5 American, 5 British, 3 Norwegian, 2 Italian, 2 Polish and 7 more seriously damaged.

Harvey, captained by Elwin Knowles; this ship was carrying mustard gas bombs.⁵ The port of Bari had been in a busy state of unloading, but Captain Elwin Knowles could not ask for priority because of the secrecy of what he was carrying. He was to die with his entire crew. Many of the crew had guessed of the vessel's contents because of the presence of an officer called Beckstrom who, with his men, were trained in the handling of such weapons. At least they were aware of the dangerous cargo, in *Husky*, the invasion of Sicily, ordnance officers mistakenly sent poisonous mustard gas to the Mediterranean and 'no one knew precisely where - in the holds of one or more ships bound for Sicily' they lay.⁶ Again at the battle for the Rapido American troops had 'to check shells for some gas ones had been issued by mistake.'⁷

This particular vessel's manifesto remained a secret for many years because she was carrying 2,000 M47A1 mustard bombs from Oran in Algeria; it is claimed that they were sent into a theatre of operation in case the Germans resorted to chemical warfare.⁸ It had been authorised by President Roosevelt even though the use of chemical weapons had been outlawed by the 1925 Geneva Protocol, though, ironically there was no ban on their manufacture and transportation until 1972. 'Ominous reports had begun to reach Washington and London that indicated Adolf Hitler ... was planning to resort to the use of poison gas.'⁹ It had also been rumoured that the Germans were storing up a quarter of a million tons of toxic munitions including a new colourless and almost odourless gas called Tabun, possibly of Italian manufacture. Roosevelt had stated that 'we shall under no circumstances resort to the use of such weapons unless they are first used by our enemies.'¹⁰ Eisenhower was aware of the presence but not the whereabouts of the gas bombs/shells, knowing that they would only be used as reprisal. In a total war one must suspect the enemy of any ploy, but hitherto there had been no reason to believe the Germans would do so for their own safety. The Axis had not used any toxic agents in any military theatre of war; the Americans had

⁵ Built in North Carolina and launched on 9th January 1943.

⁶ Atkinson, *Day*, p.34.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.340.

⁸ Each bomb held up to 100 lbs of mustard gas - a toxin known as dichlorethyl sulphide.

⁹ Infield, *Disaster*, p.14.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

trained their combatants in their use but 'few of the trainees took the schooling very seriously.'¹¹ It was generally believed by chemical experts that Hitler would not authorise its use because he had a personal antipathy to gas warfare, they were also aware that the Wehrmacht military training did not include toxic warfare, and it was believed that the German High Command would not want to outrage world opinion.¹² The Germans did hold toxic weapons, and it was particularly feared they had '*spitzen K-stoff*' which an officer noted 'presumably {meant} some especially important or virulent form of gas.'¹³ In mid-April 1945 ultra revealed that Hitler was retaining the right to order their destruction or removal to a safer place like the coast.¹⁴

When the SS John Harvey exploded the mustard-gas infiltrated both the water and air and the oil which soaked many fighting for their lives in the harbour area. In the Great War gas had been breathed in as vapour; this time much of it was mixed with oil and water: the effects had not been seen before. Many had commented on the strange smell of garlic, but there was total confusion over how to treat the victims. Many were left in their original contaminated clothes so they continued to breathe in dangerous fumes; those who stripped and washed increased their survival chances. A Captain Denfield, a medical doctor, was suspicious but came upon a brick wall of silence until a stevedore Sergeant told him that chemicals were sometimes in the holds. A Lt Col Stewart Alexander flew in and confirmed it was gas: Alexander was an expert from Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland; its equivalent in Britain was Porton. It still took medical teams a considerable time to realise what the main problem was with men going blind and in extreme pain. Some historians claim that over a thousand soldiers and sailors died as well as many Italians from the mustard-gas.¹⁵ Other sources are a more conservative, but even at the lowest end of speculated deaths it has been claimed there were 628 military victims, 83 fatal and many more civilian deaths from the gas-vapour that infiltrated the town. The HMS Bicester rescued some 30 survivors, but

¹¹ Infield, *Disaster*, p.135.

¹² Hitler had been temporarily blinded by British gas.

¹³ KNA-HW/1/3715-p.3.

¹⁴ KNA-18/4/1945-HW/1/3715-pp.1-2.

¹⁵ Beevor, *Second*, p.534.

had to be towed to Taranto because of damage caused in the attack; in Taranto they found that many of the crew were suffering from chemical burns and blindness.

In the early stages it was mooted that the Germans had dropped mustard gas bombs; they had, it was argued, first used in the Great War.¹⁶ It was not until a damaged M47A1 shell was found that it was realised the root of the problem was an Allied one. Some of the Allied commanders had worried that a 'retaliatory raid might be made by mistake before the rumour was discounted.¹⁷ There is no doubt that for several hours the military situation was precariously balanced. The British port authorities at first refused to acknowledge its existence and Churchill also refused, claiming that the symptoms were not the same, and finally demanding that the causes of the protracted deaths be put down as NYD dermatitis, or burns caused by the enemy.¹⁸ Unquestionably Churchill was concerned about public opinion, and not letting the enemy know of the existence of such toxic weapons, but the spy work was efficient and soon *Axis Sally*, sometimes known as the *Berlin Bitch* was broadcasting 'I see you boys are getting gassed by your own poison gas.'¹⁹ Sadly the statistics were appalling, 'of the 70,752 men hospitalised for gas in World War 1 only 2% died, as against 13% in Bari.'²⁰ Ironically, as a result of pathological tests carried out post-war on the many who died, medical research found in these toxins a help towards curing some forms of Hodgkin's disease and various leukaemia.

The port was out of action for many months, and the disaster was not given any publicity because of the censors. The event was well-known by those who were there, but it was kept out of the public eye in America and was only de-restricted in 1959 as it was a disaster and a major embarrassment. The secrecy cost Italian lives because the civilian hospitals were kept in the dark. The Washington Post mentioned the attack, but did not mention gas or

¹⁶ 22nd April 1915.

¹⁷ Infield, *Disaster*, p.194.

¹⁸ NYD - Not Yet Diagnosed.

¹⁹ Infield, *Disaster*, p.207

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.205.

the amount of damage for fear of stirring up opinions as to how the government was running the war. Eisenhower in his postwar memoirs wrote that 'fortunately the wind was offshore and the escaping gas caused no casualties. Had the wind been in the opposite direction, however, great disaster could well have resulted.'²¹ Churchill also had the records purged and the whole incident remained obscure until the late 1960s. As recently as 1986 the Times reported that some 600 contaminated British seamen would receive back-dated war pensions.

The Luftwaffe air raid put the port of Bari out of commission for a long period of time; it was the second greatest shipping disaster for the Allies during World War II, and Kesselring's raid had some serious effects on the Allied campaign. Not least amongst the problems was lack of supplies to the 15th Air Force at Foggia which had been dependent upon Bari's imports. It 'prevented Mediterranean Allied Air Forces from attacking German airfields prior to the amphibious landing at Anzio.'²² From Kesselring's point of view it was an outstanding success, but it succeeded because the Allied air command was over confident and mistakenly thought the Luftwaffe was finished. Allowing the lights to stay on when just a few miles from the enemy lines is almost beyond belief, especially with so many valuable merchant vessels parked side by side. Some historians believe the ramifications of the Bari raid stretched as far as Normandy.²³ This may be putting too much weight on the German success, but it did cause serious problems for the Allied campaign and cost far too much life.

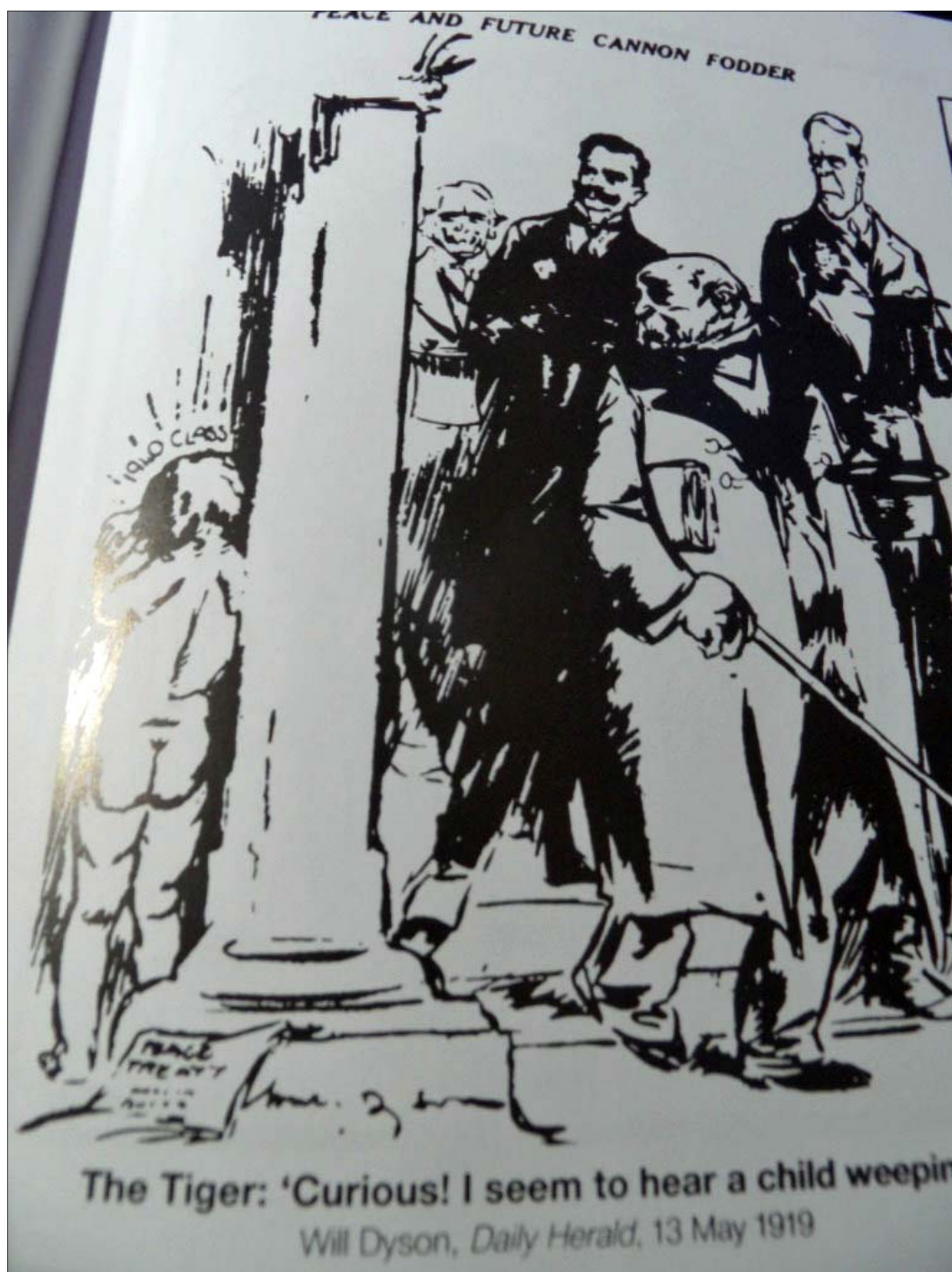
²¹ Eisenhower, *Crusade*, p.226.

²² Infield, *Disaster*, p.237.

²³ Glen Infield, *Disaster*.

APPENDIX 7

Perceptive Versailles Cartoon (15th May 1919) ...crying child is 1940 a conscript.



APPENDIX 8

THE TEXT OF THE FÜHRERBEFEHL AS PRODUCED IN THE TRIAL²⁴

The Führerbefehl of 18th October, 1942

1. Recently our adversaries have employed methods of warfare contrary to the provisions of the Geneva Convention. The attitude of the so-called commandos, who are recruited in part among common criminals released from prison, is particularly brutal and underhanded. From captured documents it has been learned that they have orders not only to bind prisoners but to kill them without hesitation should they become an encumbrance or p.34 constitute an obstacle to the completion of their mission. Finally, we have captured orders which advocate putting prisoners to death as a matter of principle,
2. For this reason, an addition to the communiqué of the Wehrmacht of 7th October, 1942, is announced that, in the future, Germany will resort to the same methods in regard to these groups of British saboteurs and their accomplices-that is to say that German troops will exterminate them without mercy wherever they find them.
3. Therefore, I command that : Henceforth all enemy troops encountered by German troops during so-called commando operations, in Europe or in Africa, though they appear to be soldiers in uniform or demolition groups, armed or unarmed, are to be exterminated to the last man, either in combat or in pursuit. It matters not in the least whether they have been landed by ships or planes or dropped by parachute. If such men appear to be about to surrender, no quarter should be given them on general principle. A detailed report on this point is to be addressed in each case to the OKW for inclusion in the Wehrmacht communiqué.
4. If members of such commando units, acting as agents, saboteurs, etc., fall into the hands of the Wehrmacht through different channels (for example, through the police in occupied territories), they are to be handed over to the Sicherheitsdienst without delay. It is formally forbidden to keep them, even temporarily, under military supervision (for example, in P/W camps, etc.).
5. These provisions do not apply to enemy soldiers who surrender or are captured in actual combat within the limits of normal combat activities (offensives, large-scale air or seaborne landings). Nor do they apply to enemy

²⁴ <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/WCC/dostler.htm>;

troops captured during naval engagements, nor to aviators who, have baled out to save lives, during aerial combat.

6. I will summon before the tribunal of war all leaders and officers who fail to carry out these instructions-either by failure to inform their men or by their disobedience of this order in action.

Appendix 9

Kesselring's initial Instructions in Italy

Führer Directive No. 38 – 2nd December 1941

I charge Field Marshal Kesselring with the command of all forces to be employed in the task of expanding and protecting Germany's position in the central Mediterranean, and herewith appoint him Commanding General Armed Forces, South. His tasks will be as follows:

- a) To obtain sea and air supremacy in the area between southern Italy and North Africa in order to establish safe shipping routes to Libya and Cyrenaica. It is particularly important to suppress Malta.
- b) To cooperate with the German forces and those of her allies which are deployed in North Africa.
- c) To paralyze enemy shipping traffic passing the Mediterranean as well as the transport of British supplies to Tobruk and Malta, in close cooperation with the German and Italian naval forces available for the task.

The Commanding General, Armed Forces South will be under the command of Il Duce and will receive his general instructions through the Italian High Command. As for matter pertaining to the Air Force, the Commander in Chief, Air will deal directly with the Commanding General Armed Forces, South; concerning matters of importance the Armed Forces High Command is to be informed at the same time.

The following will be subordinate to the Commanding General, Armed Forces, South:

1. All forces of the German Air Force which are deployed in the Mediterranean and in North Africa.
2. All Italian plane and anti-aircraft units which the Italian Armed Forces may place at his disposal in support of operations directed by him.

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