

and raw materials to the Ruhr district to be worked up there. Along with the transport system generally, the post, which had previously carried on fairly well, naturally also suffered delays. I have received ordinary letters which have taken from three to four weeks from Austria to central Germany. I am also convinced that 90% of the letters we write from here don't arrive at their destinations.

Now I should like to touch quite briefly on how this utter failure of the GAF came about. If our leaders had realized at the end of 1942 that we hadn't finished with Russia, we had to reckon with the American Air Force, and that we must, therefore, change over to the defensive not only on the ground, but also in the air, then it would easily have been possible to quadruple the fighter arm in one year. By the middle of last year we could easily have had a force, not of 1000 or 1200 fighters as we did have, but of 4000. It would have been possible for us to inflict right at the coast such heavy losses on all enemy air forces that they would never have penetrated into Reich territory. It would have been impossible for the enemy to start the invasion. Our Fatherland would have been spared this fearful devastation which is its lot, not only by night but now also by day. The fighter program which I have mentioned did not get under way until towards the end of last year. It was started in the middle of the year, and was halfway completed by the end of the year. Not until towards the end of last year did we take steps to retrain the bomber pilots we had into fighter pilots, as far as they were suited to it, because we could no longer manage the training. It was not until last year in November that an attack by about 2000 to 2500 fighters was to be mounted against a penetration into Reich territory.

The planning was wonderful. The proportions were magnificent but it was never carried out because the air leaders had lost their nerve and had already withdrawn three Geschwader from the west before then. They were wiped out, decimated, in no time. Then the remaining 'Geschwader' were also withdrawn and the great blow which it was supposed to be, the turning point in aerial warfare, again failed to materialize. I am convinced that if this operation had been flown, in which for once we should have appeared in numbers equal to the enemy's about 1000 fighters act as escort to round about 1000 to 1200 American bombers, so there would have been one of our fighters to each enemy aircraft. I have guaranteed that we would have shot down at least 300 to 400 bombers, and that would have been the shock the enemy needed to make them cease their penetration, at least into the heart of Germany. Our command lacked the adaptability which I have described in the case of England in 1940. Above all, we failed in sending the formations into this new type of battle inside the Reich without giving them any sort of tactical training beforehand. The experience the fighter pilots gained in the west attacks from the front, etc., was simply ignored, and I have already described the result of this adherence to old customs.

The complete collapse of the defense of the Reich came about during Rundstedt's offensive when, in consequence of the enormous losses we sustained, for little gain, we simply gave up the fight against the four engine aircraft. They were allowed to fly wherever they pleased and nobody did anything about it. It's shattering that things had to reach that pitch. The change of tactics which also took place only last November namely that everything which came along was to be attacked, regardless of whether it was an enemy fighter or bomber also failed to make its effect felt, due to the occurrences I have previously mentioned. The order was duly

issued but it no longer achieved its effect. It's a tragic fatality in German history; whatever we did was too soon or too late. One felt almost ashamed to go out in GAF uniform at home. The civilian population with their confidence and trust the new GAF is coming with their questions: "Well, when are the new aircraft, the fast ones about which we were told so long ago, coming out, and the good ones which are better than any others and which will shoot down masses; when are they really coming out? It must be soon. It's high time. If things go on like this we shall cease to believe that the outcome can be good." These questions were so difficult to answer, especially for us airmen who had been through the whole thing what could we tell the people? That in the end we hardly even left our own airfield. If I say, for instance, that I took off with seventeen aircraft that was in the Spring of last year and of those two had to turn back on account of engine and undercarriage trouble one of them could not retract its undercarriage, and the engine of the other one was not in order.

As leader of a battle formation with these fifteen aircraft I tackled an enemy division with some sixty aircraft and then when I say that of these fifteen aircraft not a single one returned, but all were shot up half of them killed or severely wounded, and the other half had made crash landings and were wounded then you can form a fairly accurate picture of the severity of these battles. Then when the following day I took off again with the remaining eight aircraft which we had raked together, and was then the only one to return home because I was the oldest and most experienced pilot, that only makes it clearer still.

At a conference at Corps' at which this attack on 1 January was briefly announced, General Pelz and General Schmidt said: "If we don't at last succeed in driving the fighter bombers from our Reich territory, then after three weeks our remaining industries will have no coal left, and in about as many weeks the industries in the Ruhr district will have no ore." These three weeks have now passed, and I have been told by a 'Hauptmann', who was only just recently taken prisoner, that there are a great many factories in which the workers no longer have anything to work on because there is no coal and no raw material there. Particularly the GAF, which is such a highly developed technical arm, has special need of far sighted planning. Measures which are adopted only take effect in the available aircraft about four to six months later. You have to arrange for the necessary training and provide the necessary material. Unfortunately, we lacked this far sighted planning, so that, as a member of the GAF, I have to admit that the war which we are now waging has been lost by the GAF.

The End

