

22 SEPT 93

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*Intelligence cables covering the
capitulation of the Nazi armies
in northern Italy.*

MEMORANDA FOR THE PRESIDENT: SUNRISE

Among the William J. Donovan papers are five volumes entitled *OSS Reports to the White House* containing carbons of memoranda predominantly transmitting or paraphrasing intelligence reports for the President's personal attention. They are characteristically introduced by a note to the President's secretary, Miss Grace Tully: "Dear Grace: Will you please hand the attached memorandum to the President? I believe it will be of interest to him." They begin in modest quantity, the first volume covering a full two years and including some administrative matters such as requests for draft deferment; but those for the nine months beginning with July 1944 occupy three volumes, almost exclusively intelligence. After President Roosevelt's death and the end of the war in Europe they taper off in the fifth volume—bound, curiously, in reverse chronology—and again include non-substantive material, particularly concerning the formation of a peacetime central intelligence agency.

The reports are for the most part not the finished intelligence that the President might now be expected to examine personally. They do include summaries of some Research and Analysis Branch estimates—of the age distribution of German casualties, for example, or the Soviet Union's population in 1970—but the bulk of them are unedited reporting from individual case officers on subjects of particular importance or of particular interest to President Roosevelt. For the historian this minute but choice fraction of the total of OSS raw reporting constitutes a pre-selected documentary source of considerable value.

Some of the historical developments that can be traced through the collection are the evolution of monarchist Yugoslavia into Tito's, German resistance culminating in the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life, German peace feelers

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through U.S. intelligence channels climaxed by the German surrender in northern Italy, the Nazi planning for post-occupation resistance and its collapse, Japanese peace feelers and delicate maneuvering toward surrender before Hiroshima, the Thai maintenance of independence through Japanese occupation and postwar politicking, the beginnings of the Indochina problem still with us. The papers also reflect some episodes of more exclusively intelligence interest—reporting by the famous German agent Cicero, probes for the secrets of the V-weapons, some spectacular infiltration and rescue operations, OSS's collaboration with the Soviet NKVD, the mystery of a Himmler postage stamp, the OSS struggle for operational independence from British intelligence.

In this issue we reproduce the story, as it unfolded before Roosevelt's and Truman's eyes, of the negotiations that led to "Sunrise," the surrender of the German forces in Italy. The documents have been edited only to omit repetitious and peripheral material.

Stirrings

9 February 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following information has been transmitted by the OSS representative in Bern¹:

Alexander Constantin von Neurath, German Consul at Lugano, has just returned from a meeting with Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Commander of German Army Group "C," Italy; Rudolph Rahn, German Ambassador to the Mussolini regime in North Italy; and Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen SS Karl Wolff, the Higher SS and Police leader in Italy and chief of Himmler's personal staff.²

¹ Allen W. Dulles.

² Earlier memoranda had reported Von Neurath in contact with British representatives in Switzerland, seeking to arrange peace negotiations on behalf of SS Generals Wolff and Harster. Rahn had been mentioned early in December in connection with a Catholic Church plan for an understanding with the Partisans to facilitate the anticipated withdrawal of German forces from Italy with a minimum of war damage.

Von Neurath declares that he did not gain the impression at the meeting that an immediate withdrawal of German forces in Italy was planned. According to Neurath, even high German officials in Italy appear to be somewhat surprised that the bulk of the German reinforcements for the Eastern Front have been coming from the west rather than from the south. Neurath feels that a possible explanation for this is that the German Army in Italy is being kept largely intact for eventual protection of the southern flank of the German "inner fortress" which would be based on the Bavarian and Austrian Alps. . . .

Neurath also reports that Kesselring recently saw Field Marshal Gert von Rundstedt. The two men are on friendly terms, Neurath declares, but neither is yet ready to come over to the Western Allies. . . . Neurath has a contact with Generalleutnant Siegfried Westphal, Rundstedt's Chief of Staff, but was advised by Kesselring not to attempt to see Westphal immediately in view of the suspicions which such a trip might arouse.

24 February 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following information, transmitted by the OSS representative in Bern, has been supplied by a source of uncertain reliability, but appears plausible in the light of information from other sources available to the representative:

An official of the German Embassy in North Italy whose name source did not disclose has come to Switzerland to convert to Swiss francs some marks belonging to members of Marshal Kesselring's staff. This official declares that Marshal Kesselring and Rudolph Rahn, Ambassador to the Mussolini regime in North Italy, are ready to surrender and even to fight against Hitler, if the Allies can make it worth their while. Kesselring, according to the official, feels that under present trends he is destined to retire to the Alps and, subordinate to SS officials, to die in the final resistance or be killed for not resisting the Allies. As long as Kesselring is still in Italy he feels he still has power and is willing to use that power to surrender, in return for concessions. The official did not make

it clear as to whether concessions to Kesselring and his staff or to Germany in general are desired.

26 February 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following information, transmitted by the OSS representative in Bern, is a sequel to a memorandum dated 9 February:

Alexander Constantin von Neurath, the German Consul at Lugano, while visiting his father (the former Foreign Minister and Protector of Bohemia and Moravia) near Stuttgart on 10 February, received a telephone call from Marshal Kesselring, advising him to go to a secret rendezvous where he found Lieutenant-General Siegfried Westphal, chief of staff to Rundstedt, and Marshal Johannes Blaskowitz, former (?) commander of Army Group "G" on the Western Front. Von Neurath knew Westphal well, having served with him for two years as liaison officer in North Africa; he knew Blaskowitz less well.

The three frankly discussed the possibility of opening the Western Front to the Allies. Westphal and Blaskowitz questioned the value of taking such a step, if they were merely to be considered as war criminals. They added that it was increasingly difficult to organize any large-scale move to open the front because of the technical difficulties presented by the SS and the state of mind of the troops. They said that their armies included large elements of Germans from East Prussia and eastern Germany whose fighting qualities had been stiffened by the Soviet occupation of their home areas. These troops, they explained, motivated by the feeling that they have lost everything and having no homes or families to which to return, consider it better to stay on and fight. Westphal even declared that the troops sometimes refuse to obey orders from headquarters to retire, stating that since they are holding good positions and may not find as good ones in the rear, they prefer to fight it out where they are.

Neither Westphal nor Blaskowitz made definite suggestions. They appear however, (a) to be working with Kesselring, (b) to have uppermost in their minds the idea of opening up the Western and Italian Fronts to the Allies, and (c) to be ap-

proaching the point where they might discuss such an arrangement on purely military lines with an American Army officer. Prerequisites to such a discussion would be adequate security arrangements and personal assurances that they would not be included in the war criminals list but would be granted some basis to justify their action, such as an opportunity to help in the orderly liquidation and to prevent unnecessary destruction in Germany.

Von Neurath, now back in Switzerland, plans to report to Kesselring his conversation with Westphal and Blaskowitz and to determine whether a routine reason can be found for Westphal to visit Kesselring.

[The OSS representative comments that while von Neurath may obtain further direct access to Kesselring without arousing SS and SD suspicions, he must exercise the greatest care. The representative doubts that von Neurath will be guilty of indiscretion, since his own life is apparently at stake and since his background is non-Nazi. The representative describes von Neurath as not brilliant but a reasonably solid type who has excellent relations with the Reichswehr as a result of his long liaison work in North Africa. If Westphal makes the trip to Italy he could probably stay only a very short time without arousing suspicion, since Kesselring himself is already the subject of press rumors which may result in his elimination by Himmler.

[(The London *Daily Dispatch* on 24 February carried a story from its Bern correspondent stating that Kesselring has offered secretly to the Allies to withdraw under pressure, leaving North Italian cities intact and preventing neo-Fascist destruction, in return for which he has asked for assurances that he would not be considered a war criminal and would be allowed to retire his troops to Germany to maintain order.)

[The OSS representative declares that while he cannot predict the chances of successfully persuading Westphal and Kesselring to open up the Italian and Western Fronts simultaneously, he judges them to be sufficient to justify careful consideration of the idea. He believes that no political *quid pro quo's* or impairment of the unconditional surrender principle would be involved if conversations were held between an American officer and these German officers. Such conversa-

tions, which could be held in the Lugano area on the Swiss side of the Italo-Swiss border, would have to await the outcome of von Neurath's forthcoming meeting with Kesselring.]

(The OSS representative in Caserta reports that AFHQ is interested in obtaining positive and authentic confirmation of Kesselring's disposition to negotiate with the Allies. AFHQ feels that if Kesselring wishes to dispatch an emissary with an official message, he could find means to do so.)

First Action

8 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following information, transmitted by the OSS representative in Bern, is a sequel to memoranda dated 9 and 26 February:

Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen SS Karl Wolff, the Higher SS and Police Leader in Italy, and a German High Command representative presumably from General Kesselring's staff, arrived in Lugano, Switzerland on the morning of 8 March. They are allegedly prepared to make definite commitments in regard to terminating German resistance in North Italy.

The OSS representative in Bern believes that, if Wolff is really working with Kesselring, the two Generals might effect an unconditional surrender. Absolute secrecy is essential to a successful surrender, and the OSS representative is ready to arrange with complete secrecy for the entry into Switzerland in civilian clothes of fully authorized representatives of the Supreme Allied Mediterranean Command.

It is not clear whether this move is separate from the Neurath negotiations [described in the memoranda of 9 and 26 February] but the OSS representative in Bern believes they will merge in so far as the North Italian situation is concerned. Wolff is accompanied by Standartenfuehrer Dollman,³ who has in the past claimed that he represented Kesselring, Rahn, Wolff, and Harster. Dollman and his aide, Zim-

³ The correct spelling is Dollmann.

mern,⁴ had made indirect contact with the OSS representative on 2 March, and promised to return on 8 March with credentials and definite proposals. On the earlier date the suggestion was made to Dollman that he bring with him an important Italian partisan leader as evidence of his good faith and ability to act. Dollman has reportedly brought along Ferruccio Parri, chief of the North Italian Patriots Unified Command.⁵

The above information has been given to AFHQ by our Caserta representative.

9 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The OSS representative in Bern has transmitted the following information, a sequel to my memorandum of 8 March:

Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen SS Karl Wolff has shown willingness to attempt to develop a program to take the German forces in North Italy out of the conflict. He considers simple military surrender difficult and prefers that capitulation be preceded by a statement by German leaders in North Italy informing the German people that the struggle is hopeless and will merely cause needless bloodshed and destruction. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring has not yet been won over, and his adherence is essential. Wolff is proceeding immediately to try to sell the program to Kesselring, and will maintain contact with the OSS representative in Bern. Wolff states that Rudolph Rahn, German Ambassador to Mussolini's regime in North Italy, is in accord with the program.

Wolff apparently controls all police and border forces on the entire Swiss-Italian frontier and can arrange quick contact with top German personalities in North Italy. Wolff, who in his SS and Police capacity is directly responsible to Himmler, claims that Himmler is unaware of his activities. [The OSS representative comments that this may or may not be true.]

The Italian partisan leader, Ferruccio Parri, whose delivery in Switzerland was requested as an evidence of good faith, was turned over unconditionally to the OSS representative even

⁴ Correctly Guido Zimmer.

⁵ And Prime Minister after liberation.

before the latter saw Wolff. Parri is in good health and does not know the reason for his release.

A further meeting with Wolff was to take place during the day, 9 March.

[AFHQ and SHAEF have been informed of the above.]

10 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . General Karl Wolff, who has arrived in Zurich to discuss a definite program for taking German forces in North Italy out of the war, is accompanied by the two men who made the preliminary contact with the OSS representative (Standardenfuehrer Dollman and his aide, Zimmern) as well as by Wolff's military expert, Sturmbandfuehrer Wenner, and an Italian intermediary, Baron Pirelli.⁶ The OSS representative consented to see only Wolff, who came to the former's apartment with a Swiss intermediary on the evening of 8 March. The OSS representative and an associate, a former German Consul in Zurich,⁷ then talked with Wolff alone. The former Consul later saw Wolff and Dollman together.

Wolff is a distinctive personality, and evidence indicates that he represents the more moderate element in Waffen SS combined with a measure of romanticism. He is probably the most dynamic personality in North Italy and, next to Kesselring, the most powerful.

Wolff stated that the time had come when some German with power to act should lead Germany out of the war in order to end useless human and material destruction. He says he is willing to act and feels he can persuade Kesselring to cooperate, and that the two control the situation in North Italy. As far as the SS is concerned, Wolff states that he also controls Western Austria, since his authority includes the Vorarlberg, Tyrol, and the Brenner Pass with both its northern and southern approaches. Wolff declares that joint action by Kesselring and himself would leave Hitler and Himmler

⁶ Baron Luigi Parrilli.

⁷ Gero von Gaevernitz, who had emigrated to the United States in the thirties and was now one of Allen Dulles' principal assistants. There seems to be no record, however, of the consular service here credited to him.

powerless to take effective countermeasures like the ones they employed in the 20 July crisis. Also Wolff feels that joint action by Kesselring and himself would have a vital repercussion on the German Army, particularly on the Western Front, since many Generals are only waiting for someone to take the lead. Wolff made no request concerning his personal safety or privileged treatment from the war criminal viewpoint.

Wolff envisages the following procedures to bring about action: (1) He will meet Kesselring during the week-end of 10 March in order to obtain a definite commitment to joint action. Wolff says he has had the closest possible personal relations with Kesselring for several years, and indicated that Kesselring's problem was to reconcile such action with his oath of allegiance. Kesselring has insisted that, after a long military career throughout which he had always kept his oath, he was too old to change. Nevertheless Wolff believes he can be won over to see the senselessness of the struggle and admit that his duty to the German people is higher than that to the Fuehrer.

(2) With Kesselring, Wolff will draft an appeal to be signed by themselves, Rahn . . . , and others. The appeal will set forth the uselessness of the struggle and the signers' responsibility to the German people to end it, will call on military commanders in particular and Germans in general to disassociate themselves from Himmler-Hitler control, and will state that the Germans in North Italy are terminating hostilities.

(3) Wolff will make preparations to get this message to the German people and military commanders via radio and wireless.

(4) Provided Kesselring is won over, Wolff believes that he and Kesselring would come clandestinely to Switzerland within the week in order to meet Allied military men and coordinate purely military surrender moves with the appeal. Apparently no one on Kesselring's immediate staff is suited to represent him for this purpose, his chief of staff not yet having been acquainted with the plan.

As evidence of his ability to act, Wolff has already unconditionally delivered Ferruccio Parri . . . and Major Usmiani, a

former OSS agent in Milan, to the OSS representative in Bern. Parri had been imprisoned in Verona, Usmiani in Milan. . . . Both men assumed at the time they were taken away by the SS that they were being led to execution. Neither yet knows the reason for the release. Wolff fully realizes Parri's importance, and remarked to an intermediary that he was giving up his most important hostage.

Wolff is prepared to demonstrate further his ability to act by: (1) discontinuing active warfare against Italian partisans, merely keeping up whatever pretense is necessary pending execution of the plan; (2) releasing to Switzerland several hundred Jews interned at Bozen (Bolzano); Wolff claims he has refused any ransom money offered in this connection, although some has possibly already been swallowed up by intermediaries; (3) assuming full responsibility for the safety and good treatment of 350 British and American prisoners at Mantua, of whom 150 are in the hospital and 200 on the southern outskirts; Wolff claims that these are all the British-American prisoners held in North Italy, since they had been currently transferred to Germany; (4) releasing to Switzerland, if he can be found, Sogno Franci, an Italian patriot working with CLNAI and the British; his release is particularly desired by Parri; (5) facilitating as much as possible the return to North Italy of Italian officers presently held in Germany, who might be useful in the post-hostilities period.

In reference to Alexander Constantin von Neurath, the German Consul at Lugano . . . , Wolff will welcome von Neurath's help since he feels that von Neurath has considerable influence on Kesselring. Wolff will invite von Neurath to join him in Italy on 10 March.

Wolff claims that Himmler knows nothing of his present activities. He saw Himmler and Hitler early in February and advised them of the general hopelessness of the North Italy situation, but received no definite instructions from them.

The OSS representative has made no commitments, merely listening to Wolff's presentation and stating, with no refutation from Wolff, that unconditional surrender was the only possible course. The OSS representative comments that, if the results of the Wolff-Kesselring talks are favorable, this

plan may present a unique opportunity to shorten the war, permit occupation of North Italy, possibly penetrate Austria under most favorable conditions, and possibly wreck German plans for establishment of a maquis.

The OSS representative in Caserta has advised AFHQ of the information transmitted by the OSS representative in Bern. General Alexander has outlined to Marshal Brooke⁸ the procedure which AFHQ proposes to follow, including a plan for two senior staff officers to go to Switzerland to meet with German representatives. Apparently Alexander has furnished this information to Brooke as a matter of courtesy and will go ahead on his own initiative, although he will cooperate with Brooke if London wishes to send other people to join in the meeting. OSS has been directed to submit a plan to carry out all necessary steps, including arrangements for a Swiss meeting place, transportation to and from that place to the French-Swiss border, as well as transportation from the Annemasse airport or vicinity to French-Swiss border. In addition, OSS will be called upon to provide communications, clerical assistance (including interpreters), and all necessary safeguards for the security of operations. The OSS representative in Bern will select a safe meeting place, arrange transportation from Annemasse to and from that place, and issue appropriate instructions to secure and provide arrangements for meeting the party at the Annemasse airport and supervising arrangements to and from the French-Swiss border. The total number of the party is unknown at this time, but all plans are being made to include arrangements for 15 to 20 people. OSS is withholding all these plans from the German representatives until directed by AFHQ to suggest a date for the meeting.

William J. Donovan
Director

The following note is added by hand: If it looks feasible I plan to go to Italy as our OSS group has been designated to set up communications etc.

⁸ Chief of the British Imperial Staff.

12 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . Acting under instructions from AFHQ, OSS is going ahead with plans for the impending meeting between German and Allied representatives to discuss a definite program for taking German forces in North Italy out of the war. OSS Bern has been requested to secure from Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen SS Karl Wolff statements that Wolff and his associates, equipped with acceptable credentials, will proceed to the Bern meeting-place when AFHQ selects the date.

Final word has not yet been received from Wolff, and success in the operation depends on assurance of Marshal Kesselring's cooperation.

Complications

13 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The OSS representative in Bern has transmitted the following information, a sequel to my memoranda of 10 and 12 March:

The Italian intermediary, Baron Pirelli, has just returned with word from Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen SS Karl Wolff, that Kesselring has just gone to Hitler's headquarters. Wolff expects Kesselring back in three days, but there is a chance that he may never come back. [The OSS representative surmises that, unless Kesselring convinces Hitler and Himmler that he will cooperate in their plans for North Italy, Kesselring will be given a new command or will be imprisoned.] Therefore, the meeting with Allied representatives has been postponed pending information from Kesselring, although AFHQ had decided to move at once and at noon 13 March dispatched two representatives⁹ (accompanied by an OSS representative) for Lyon.

The OSS representative in Bern suggested to Baron Pirelli that Wolff indicate (1) what he proposes to do if Kesselring does not return; (2) what he will do if he is ordered to re-

⁹ General Lyman L. Lemnitzer and British General Terence Airey.

port to Hitler; (3) if he should refuse an order to report to Hitler, what are his plans and the forces with which to carry them out; (4) what areas he could temporarily control for possible contact with Allied forces even if the principal German Army commanders did not cooperate.

Upon his return to Italy, Wolff received a telegram from Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Chief of Security Police and Security Service, advising him to avoid establishing contact with the Allies in Switzerland since it would hinder, perhaps catastrophically, Kaltenbrunner's plans. Wolff discovered upon investigation that Generalleutnant der Polizei Wilhelm Harster, commander of the Security Police in Italy and Wolff's subordinate, had telegraphed Kaltenbrunner that an attempt to make contact with the Allies in Switzerland was probable. According to Pirelli, Wolff believes Harster is dependable and was merely trying to cover the tracks of Wolff's intermediary, Standartenfuehrer Dollman.

[In November 1944 Alexander Constantin von Neurath, the German Consul at Lugano, declared that he was acting as intermediary for Harster, who had been given a special assignment by Himmler to contact the Allies. It appeared significant at that time that such a mission should have been given to Harster rather than to his superior in the SS hierarchy, Karl Wolff.

[At the end of February 1945, an Austrian industrialist in contact with Austrian SS leaders, asserted that Kaltenbrunner had asked him to make contact with the Allies in Switzerland. According to this source, Kaltenbrunner claimed that he and Himmler were extremely anxious to end the war and were contemplating the liquidation of ardent Nazi "war mongers."]

16 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . The OSS representative in Bern understands that the plans, under way for some time, for Carl Burckhardt, retiring president of the International Red Cross and Swiss Minister-designate to France, to discuss with Himmler internee and possibly prisoner-of-war questions, may very shortly result in a meeting between the two men in the vicinity of

Feldkirch, on the northeastern Swiss frontier with Germany. The OSS representative comments that Himmler may seek to use this occasion for peace feelers.

The representative has learned that Fusto Pancini, an old friend of Mussolini, recently has arrived in Switzerland with letters from Mussolini to his daughter, Edda Ciano, and to the Papal Nuncio. Pancini indicated to Edda that Himmler wishes the Nuncio to advise the Vatican that Germany desires peace and is disposed to facilitate the entrance of Anglo-American but not Soviet troops.

. . .

The representative states that while he has no definite proof, he believes that Kaltenbrunner's telegram to . . . Wolff, advising the latter not to establish contact with the Allies in Switzerland, was prompted by the prospect of a meeting between Burckhardt and Himmler. . . .

21 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following information . . . is a summary of statements made by Wolff to OSS representatives and representatives of Field Marshal Alexander at a place near Locarno on 19 March. Marshal Alexander's representatives gave no name or rank but represented themselves to Wolff as advisors of the OSS representative. The OSS representative makes no attempt to predict whether Wolff's plan can be realized, but reports that Wolff, himself, appeared determined and that those who have had close contact with Wolff since he made his first approach ten days ago are inclined to believe that he is sincere in his expressed desire to effect an immediate German surrender. Wolff has stressed particularly that it would be a crime against the German people if the "reduit plan"¹⁰ were realized, since it would merely cause untold further useless destruction and slaughter.

This information has been transmitted by the representatives in Switzerland of Field Marshal Alexander by direct radio to AFHQ.

¹⁰ For continued resistance from a fortified redoubt in the Bavarian Alps.

Wolff stated that as a clear duty to his country he had been prepared to proceed with his plans to effect the surrender of the German Armies in Italy. The absence of Marshal Kesselring, however, compelled him to change his course of action. . . . Wolff said that his next step now depends upon the time at his disposal for action. If he had virtually no time at all, he would be forced to see what he could do alone. If he had less than a week, he would deal directly with Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, who was returning to Italy to take over Kesselring's command and probably reached his Italian headquarters on 19 March. If he had seven days or more, Wolff said he would go at once to Kesselring, whom he more than ever considered the key to the situation both in Italy and on the Western Front.

Kesselring, Wolff reported, has been assigned to Marshal von Rundstedt's command in the West, and had not even been allowed by Hitler's headquarters to return to Italy to pack up his effects. Thus Wolff had not been able to see Kesselring since Wolff's first meeting with the OSS representative ten days ago.

Vietinghoff, who acted as deputy commander in Italy for Kesselring while the latter was recovering from his injuries, had gone to Germany on leave in mid-January, and subsequently had held a brief command in Kurland on the Eastern Front. After a brief conference at Hitler's headquarters he was ordered to return to Italy to assume command.

Wolff said that if he were compelled to act alone he had only the following heterogeneous forces, equipped only with light arms and a few old tanks, at his disposal. In his capacity as Higher SS and Police leader, a post which he has held since 1943, he commands some 15,000 Germans; 20,000 Soviet troops, mostly Don and Kuban Cossacks and Turkomans; 10,000 Serbs; 10,000 Slovenes; 5,000 Czechs; an Indian legion; and 100,000 Italians. As *Bevollmaechtigter General der Deutschen Wehrmacht* (plenipotentiary for the German Wehrmacht), a post which he had held since the 20 July putsch, he is in direct command of 10,000 Germans, and has under his tactical command some 55,000 German services of supply and similar troops, all north of the Po River.

Wolff admitted frankly that the non-German forces under his command are not very dependable, and that were he to take action alone, without prior coordination with the OKW, he would probably be caught between German armies to the north and south of his forces.

Asked whether a direct approach to von Vietinghoff might meet with success, Wolff said that von Vietinghoff is a non-political soldier who would not take political action without support from others in the Wehrmacht. Wolff declared his relations with von Vietinghoff to be excellent, but said he had not prepared the ground with von Vietinghoff as he had with Kesselring. Hence, Wolff proposed that he proceed at once by car to Kesselring's headquarters, since he could not fly there for technical reasons, and seek to persuade Kesselring and Generalleutnant Siegfried Westphal to join him in common action. If they agreed to do so, Wolff said he felt sure that von Vietinghoff would cooperate.

If he were successful, Wolff said that he hoped to bring back with him within a week qualified military representatives of both Kesselring's and von Vietinghoff's headquarters to discuss the details of a military surrender. Wolff declared that he realized that the rapidly developing military situation left him little time for action. He added that German Headquarters in Italy expected an Allied offensive there before the end of the month (to one person he said the attack was expected by 25 March). Wolff crossed back into Italy on the evening of 19 March.

29 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . No further word had been received from Wolff by the night of 26 March. . . . Wolff's aide, Zimmern, however, reports that both Rudolph Rahn and Generalleutnant der Polizei Wilhelm Harster . . . have been recalled to Germany for conferences at Hitler's headquarters. Harster probably has some knowledge of Wolff's activities. . . . The OSS representative comments that it is becoming increasingly apparent that Hitler intends to use the bulk of the German forces in Italy for the defense of the German "redoubt."

Desperation

1 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following triple priority dispatch has just been received from the OSS representative in Bern relating to the most recent developments in connection with the possible surrender of German Forces in Northern Italy:

"1. Wolff arrived Fasano ¹¹ Friday morning and immediately summoned Parrilli and Zimmer to Fasano where they spent Friday afternoon together. Zimmer was then sent here by Wolff, Parrilli remaining Fasano.

"2. Wolff endeavored contact Vietinghoff before he went to see Kesselring, but was unable to reach him.

"3. Trip to Kesselring most difficult and when he reached Kesselring's headquarters, he had already broken loose. First conversation took place only 15 km. from our advancing forces. Wolff presented his plan for Italian surrender and Kesselring advised him to go through with it. He, Kesselring, regretted he was not also in Italy.

"4. In a second conversation with Kesselring, latter again expressed his agreement with Wolff's plan and that he should so advise Vietinghoff, but said that on his front he could not go along (*mitmachen*). Kesselring found himself largely surrounded by strangers whom he did not trust. Zimmer gained impression from Wolff Kesselring was half a prisoner (Our representative in Bern comments that no mention was made of Westphal).

"5. Immediately on his return, Wolff had tried to reach Glazier ¹² but he was on an inspection trip at the front and was returning to his headquarters only night of 31. Wolff proposed to see him immediately and would spend Sunday with him. Wolff gave this message to Zimmer for our representative in Bern: I am ready to come to a final conversation in order to arrange matters. I hope to

¹¹ His headquarters on Lake Garda.

¹² Vietinghoff, inadvertently left in code.

come with Rahn, Dollman and either Vietinghoff or a staff officer.

"6. Rahn had been called back to Germany but avoided the trip by alleging serious strike conditions North Italy which he had to handle. Harster did return Germany, but apparently on account of a row with Gauleiter Hofer of the Tyrol. Neither summons believed to be connected with the main subject in question.

"7. While in Germany and one of the reasons for delay, Wolff was summoned by Himmler, who asked him to explain his surrender of British agent Tucker. Wolff replied that he was arranging an exchange and he wanted to give the Fuehrer Wuensche¹³ as birthday present. Himmler also accused him of having been in Switzerland and asked the reasons. Wolff answered that he had a contact in Milan who promised to bring him in touch with Allies and that he was acting pursuant Fuehrer's recent secret order to seek any possible contact with Allies. Wolff had heard that many efforts had failed and wanted to see what he could do. Himmler ordered Wolff to wait around for couple of days as he wanted to think the matter over. However, Himmler was suddenly called urgently to Hungary and referred Wolff to Kaltenbrunner. Himmler told him that he should now¹⁴ leave Italy and particularly that he should not go to Switzerland. Wolff did not see Kaltenbrunner but left for Italy.

"8. In his conversation with Kesselring, latter said to Wolff our situation is desperate, nobody dares tell truth to Fuehrer who surrounded by small group of advisors who still believe in a last specific secret weapon which they call 'Verzweiflungs'¹⁵ weapon. Kesselring believed this weapon can prolong war but not decide it, but might cause terrible blood bath on both sides. Kesselring said if Fuehrer gave him order to use weapon he would surrender his command. End of Zimmer report.

"9. Under foregoing program and assuming no further delays which may be inherent in situation, Wolff should

¹³ A German general close to Hitler.

¹⁴ Typo for "not."

¹⁵ "Desperation."

come to a meeting sometime Monday or early Tuesday. Any action by Kesselring via Wolff seems excluded. Whether Wolff will win over Vietinghoff is still matter of conjecture, despite Wolff's apparent optimism. Zimmer understands Wolff has support of one of Vietinghoff's chief subordinates."

4 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . An Italian emissary, Parrilli, arrived in Switzerland on 3 April with the following report from . . . Wolff, who is currently at his headquarters in Fasano:

Himmler has returned to his German headquarters from his urgent trip to Hungary, and on 1 April peremptorily ordered Wolff by telephone under no conditions to leave North Italy. Himmler told Wolff that he would telephone him periodically. Himmler chided Wolff for having moved his family to the vicinity of Brenner, and declared that he had moved Wolff's family at once back to St. Wolfgang, near Salzburg, and could take "better care" of it.

Wolff is convinced that if he were now to make a false move or to leave his headquarters for Switzerland, his whole project for a surrender in North Italy would fail and he would be liquidated. He believes that Himmler has given special instructions that he be watched. Accordingly, he feels it is impossible for him to come to Switzerland now.

Wolff has discussed the whole surrender plan with Rudolph Rahn . . . and declares that Rahn is in full agreement. On the night of 1 April he conferred with . . . von Vietinghoff . . . and Generaleutnant Roettiger, von Vietinghoff's Chief of Staff. Wolff claims that both agreed with him, and quotes von Vietinghoff as saying that "it is nonsense to go on fighting." Wolff declares that von Vietinghoff has been instructed, in the event of a general Allied attack, to carry out a "fighting" and scorched-earth withdrawal to the Alps. Wolff reported fully to von Vietinghoff on his recent conference with Kesselring, and told him that in Kesselring's judgment the fighting on the Western Front might last ten or fifteen days longer, and that Germany is facing catastrophe.

Wolff instructed Parrilli to tell Allied representatives that, given ten more days, he and von Vietinghoff and Rahn would be able to hand over North Italy.

Parrilli has returned to Wolff's headquarters with a message from Allied representatives acknowledging receipt of information that Rahn and von Vietinghoff have been won over to the plan, but stating that if there is to be a military surrender, it must be effected quickly. With the approval of AFHQ representatives, the OSS representative also asked Parrilli to remind Wolff (1) that it is vital that he and von Vietinghoff prevent the destruction of North Italy as ordered by Himmler and Hitler; (2) that he (Wolff) had previously promised to restrain action against Italian partisans and to protect Allied and partisan prisoners and hostages in his hands; (3) that he (Wolff) and his associates now have a last opportunity for action and that action alone counts, and (4) that further delay would not help but might even complicate the picture, since from the "redoubt" Himmler may exercise an increasingly terroristic influence.

(The OSS representative comments that Wolff and his associates probably want to wait in the hope that complete chaos will develop in Germany, enabling them to act in Italy without serious risk to themselves and their families. The threat to Wolff may be real. In view of the time which has elapsed since the original approach from Wolff, the number of meetings which have been held relating to the surrender proposal, and the number of persons who have been brought into the picture, some inkling of the plot has probably reached Himmler's ears. The OSS representative cannot predict what action Wolff and von Vietinghoff will now take, but declares that everything possible has been done to impress the Wolff group with the realities of the situation and the need to act at once.)

10 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following information, transmitted by the OSS representative in Bern, is . . . a summary of a more comprehensive report which has been communicated to AFHQ.

Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen SS Karl Wolff, the Higher SS and Police Leader in Italy; Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, Commander of the German forces in Italy; and Generalleutnant Roettiger, von Vietinghoff's Chief of Staff, have requested the text of the Allied surrender formula, but have made certain stipulations regarding "military honor" and the disposition of forces to be surrendered.

Wolff reports, through his emissary, that he held long conferences with von Vietinghoff and Roettiger on 5 and 7 April at which the principle of unconditional surrender was not questioned provided such surrender be "honorable." All three recognize that since the German armies in Italy soon will be isolated, von Vietinghoff is justified in acting on his own initiative. Wolff recognizes the futility of further fighting, but reports that von Vietinghoff, an old-line soldier, insists that the surrender be "dressed up" so as to be compatible with his "military honor" and to avoid placing him in the position of a traitor.

Subject to solving this "military honor" problem, the three men have proposed a point on the front lines through which Allied representatives may pass safely to conclude the surrender, and they have promised again to do everything possible to prevent destruction, to limit warfare against Italian partisans, and to protect prisoners and hostages. They state, however, that Admiral Doenitz has ordered marine destruction and they doubt whether they can effectively prevent this.

18 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . .
One of Wolff's emissaries, Zimmer, arrived at Lugano on 18 April with a three-page letter from Wolff to the OSS representative written in Wolff's own handwriting and dated 15 April. In this letter Wolff expressed his regrets at President Roosevelt's death and assured the OSS representatives that, no matter what may happen, the OSS representative may count upon him . . . and that in spite of difficulties which have delayed the achievement of results, he is convinced of final success of the joint effort.

Zimmer reported that he arrived at Wolff's headquarters in Fasano on 11 April (from his last trip to Switzerland) and left immediately with Wolff to visit Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff Von Vietinghoff received them coldly, stating that he had been informed by the Ligurian Corps at Genoa that a British official, whose name he did not know but whom he understood to be an officer, had made contact with a Ligurian Corps staff officer named Vogel, and had asked Vogel to be presented to von Vietinghoff to discuss surrender. Von Vietinghoff said that the Englishman referred to the fact that negotiations had already been started between von Vietinghoff and the OSS representative in Bern and gave the correct name of the OSS representative.¹⁶

Von Vietinghoff told Wolff that he did not see the Englishman. Believing he had been betrayed, von Vietinghoff prepared a letter to Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff of the OKW, stating that Wolff was in contact with the Allies and that Allies wished to press negotiations.

Von Vietinghoff added, however, that he did not want to enter into negotiations until he had received Jodl's approval.

Von Vietinghoff suggested to Wolff that he carry the letter to Jodl, but was persuaded by Wolff, Generalleutnant Roettiger (chief of staff to von Vietinghoff), and Rudolph Rahn . . . not to send the letter at all.

On the night of 13 April, Himmler telephoned Wolff and ordered him to leave at once for Berlin by the fastest possible means. Wolff did not do so, but instead sent a letter by special courier in which he reminded Himmler (1) that at their last meeting he had told Himmler that since an Allied invasion of Germany would be completely successful, it was futile to continue to sacrifice the German people, and (2) that Himmler had then insisted that the West Wall would hold. Since he (Wolff) now had been proved right, the letter continued, no purpose could be served by his seeing Himmler. Instead he advised Himmler to come to see him and to arrange for the surrender of all of Germany through the Allied contact which

¹⁶ This approach is presumed to have been a provocation engineered by Himmler or Kaltenbrunner.

he (Wolff) had already established. Wolff further stated in his letter to Himmler that if Himmler were not prepared to follow this suggestion, he (Wolff) would dissociate himself completely from Himmler.

Himmler telephoned both the morning and afternoon of 14 April to ask why Wolff had not arrived. In each case one of Wolff's aides took the call and reported that Wolff was not at his headquarters but had sent a message via special courier to Himmler.

. . . Wolff's letter reached Himmler on the evening of 15 April. Later that night Himmler called Wolff several times and Wolff finally decided to leave by plane for Berlin to see Himmler.

Before he left, Wolff sent a message to the OSS representative, explaining that he was going to Berlin because he thought he had an opportunity to do something for the German people, and that he expected to return to his headquarters at Fasano on 17 April. Wolff also instructed his emissary Zimmer to remain at the Chiasso frontier to await developments.

(The OSS representative comments that Himmler apparently plans either to eliminate Wolff or to use Wolff to establish contact for himself with the Allies. The OSS representative believes that there is still a chance that Wolff, if he is not eliminated by Himmler, could be used to effect a general capitulation or one for the Italian theater only.) . . .

Last Hurdle

20 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have today directed that all contact with the German emissaries mentioned in my memorandum to you of 18 April 1945 be terminated.

This action came about as the result of dispatch by the Combined Chiefs of Staff of a message to the Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theater, stating that in view of (1) their belief that the German Commander in Chief, Italy did not at this time intend to surrender on acceptable terms and (2) complications which had arisen with the Russians

on the matter it had been decided by the Governments of the United States and Great Britain that the contact should be broken off.

Orders to this effect were immediately forwarded by this office to the OSS representative in Bern.

28 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . Wolff reached Berlin on 16 April. After conferences with Kaltenbrunner, Himmler and Hitler, he returned to his Fasano headquarters on 19 April. On 21 April, he called on Generaloberst von Vietinghoff, Commander of the German forces in Italy, and on Franz Hofer, Gauleiter of Tirol, and received assurances of their full support. He arrived in Switzerland on 23 April with his adjutant, Wenner, and with Lieutenant-Colonel Victor von Schweinitz (who had powers to act for von Vietinghoff).

Meanwhile, on 20 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed OSS to break off all contacts with Wolff, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved a message to this effect to SACMED, stating that von Vietinghoff clearly did not intend to surrender his forces on acceptable terms at that time.

On 20 April, the OSS representative was unable to comply with these instructions since no representative of Wolff was at hand. On 23 April, an emissary arrived, and the OSS representative told him, in the presence of Swiss intelligence officers, that the matter was no longer of interest to the Allies. Wolff's intermediary stated that Wolff and von Schweinitz had come to Switzerland to negotiate a surrender, and said that another emissary had been sent to Marshal Kesselring to try to persuade him to surrender simultaneously.

As a result of the OSS representative's refusal to see him, Wolff returned to North Italy on 25 April, leaving Wenner with full powers to sign or act in his behalf. Wolff declared to Swiss officers that his presence in Italy was imperative in order to control the situation there, and to persuade von Vietinghoff, Rudolph Rahn . . . , and Gauleiter Hofer to join him in a joint proclamation to the German forces in North Italy. The proclamation would announce that since the Italian

theater now is separated from the High Command, independent action will be taken to end hostilities.

On 26 April, the CCS directed SACMED to instruct the OSS representative to hold no conferences but to re-establish contact, and that arrangements would be made for Wolff and von Schweinitz to proceed at once to AFHQ. Wolff was already enroute to his new headquarters in Bolzano, but Wenner and von Schweinitz were intercepted in Switzerland. . . .

28 April 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . Weather permitting, Lieutenant-Colonel von Schweinitz [von Vietinghoff's deputy, with full power to act for his superior] and Sturmbannfuehrer Wenner [Wolff's adjutant, with full powers to act for his superior] were scheduled to arrive in Caserta on 28 April.

There have been no discussions with von Schweinitz or Wenner in Switzerland, except in regard to communications. The OSS representative believes that von Schweinitz is capable and that Wenner, although not a forceful character, might be useful to "rubber stamp" the surrender of Wolff's forces. OSS representatives are being sent to Buchs [on the Swiss-Liechtenstein frontier], and preparations are made to infiltrate a communications unit to Bolzano [headquarters of Wolff and von Vietinghoff], if required.

A message from Buchs via Zimmer [one of Wolff's intermediaries] states that Wolff had reached Bolzano safely on 27 April [after leaving Switzerland on 25 April], and had a long talk with his associates, all of whom adhere to the previous decision to surrender. They are awaiting results of the trip to Caserta by von Schweinitz and Wenner.

2 May 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

. . . After every possible vicissitude, the surrender negotiations appear again to be progressing. There is some prospect of results within the next 48 hours or less. OSS Bern has been in almost hourly contact with AFHQ on almost all details and has played a vital part in keeping up essential lines

of communication. OSS Bern has succeeded in getting Lieutenant-Colonel Victor von Schweinitz (von Vietinghoff's deputy) and Sturmbannfuehrer Wenner (Wolff's deputy) back to Bolzano with the surrender terms which they had signed at Caserta for their respective commanders. Final acceptance and execution of these terms now rests with von Vietinghoff and Wolff.¹⁷

¹⁷ They had in fact been executed, after tense days of uncertainty on Allied side and confusion on the German, by the time this memorandum was written. The full story is told in Forrest Davis' "The Secret History of a Surrender" in *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 22 and 29, 1945.