

Britain and Germany 1934-1939

J.G. Purves

BRITISH ESTIMATES OF GERMAN MILITARY
STRENGTH AND INTENTIONS
1934-1939

J.G. Purves

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of History
McGill University
MONTREAL

August 1966

Preface

When research was begun on this thesis, the object was to evaluate the British estimates of German military strength and intentions and then to determine the effect of these estimates on British policy. This has proved impossible largely because of the length of time that would be required to complete the study. As a result, the thesis has been strictly limited to an evaluation of British estimates of German military strength and intentions. Wherever possible, the estimates made by Government officials have been compared and contrasted with those made in Parliament and in the British press. The major primary source of information about the Government estimates was the standard Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939 edited by Woodward and Butler, which is incomplete for the years between June 1934 and February 1938. This source has been supplemented by reference to the official histories of the war, the Parliamentary debates and various memoirs. Other original sources are as yet unavailable. The official report of the debates in the House of Lords and in the House of Commons and three

newspapers, The Times (of London), The Manchester Guardian and The Observer, have been used to illustrate public estimates of German military strength and intentions. Generalizations about the attitude of the "British press" are based solely on these three representative newspapers.

An examination of the above sources has led to the conclusion that contrary to many accounts, both the British Government and the public were well-informed about most aspects of German rearmament and about her possible intentions. A second conclusion is that the Government estimates, particularly about the strength of the German Air Force or Luftwaffe, were usually closer to the truth than those appearing in the press or made in Parliament by private Members.

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Part I

January 1934 - March 1935

CHAPTER 1

ESTIMATES OF GERMAN REARMAMENT

Introduction

Public opinion in Great Britain received the first of repeated shocks in October of 1933 when Germany not only withdrew from the Disarmament Conference but also announced her decision to leave the League of Nations. On January 23, 1934, the Berlin correspondent of the Times reported:

There can be no doubt of her intention. The remarkable intensification and improvement in the methods of training, disciplining, controlling, uniforming, and organizing manpower since National Socialism came to power have surprised even close observers. Rearmament in materiel, overt or covert, is not likely to lag behind. The increase in Germany's potential strength is already great.¹

A Member of Parliament, Captain Guest said, "...if one looks the situation fairly in the face one is bound to recognize that Germany has every intention of rearming as quickly and as best she can."²

¹The Times (London), (January 23, 1934), p. 14. Hereafter cited as The Times.

²House of Commons Debates, 5th Session, Volume 286, column 2050, (March 8, 1934). Hereafter cited as H.C. Deb., vol., col.

Some Britons were convinced that not only did Germany intend to rearm, but that she was rearming. Shortly after Captain Guest spoke, Winston Churchill described the situation in terms both colourful and foreboding:

This terrible new fact has occurred. Germany is arming, she is rapidly arming, no one will stop her. None of the grievances between the victors and the vanquished have been redressed. The spirit of aggressive nationalism was never more rife in Europe and in the world. Far away are the days of Locarno....³

Soon, public knowledge of Germany's active rearmament was almost as widespread as it was undisputed. Discussing the possibility of regulating German rearmament, an editorial in the Times of April 27, 1934 stated:

There is ample testimony that in the meantime Germany is rearming as fast as she can. The only doubts that exist are how far that rearmament has already proceeded, and how far it is intended that it shall go. Has Germany already provided herself with tanks, and big guns, and military aeroplanes? Few persons well acquainted with the revival of German ambitions will confidently answer in the negative.⁴

The change which had come over Europe with such apparent speed, and perhaps the sense of bewilderment that this

³Ibid., col. 2073.

⁴The Times, (April 24, 1934), p. 15.

change evoked, is echoed in the words of yet another Member of Parliament with a service background, Captain Cazalet:

It is only some three years ago that members of all parties in this House were advocating in their constituencies the cause of disarmament and trying to rival each other with regard to what had been done to reduce our armaments.... But there is a great change to-day. Why? Let us face it. It is very largely because of the new situation which has arisen in Germany.⁵

Between 1934 and March of 1935, few observers believed that Germany would or could launch an unlimited arms race. Germany's basic "national determination" with respect to the size of her armed forces seemed to be to win acceptance as a great power, free of external restrictions. Qualitative, not necessarily quantitative equality seemed to be desired.⁶ There were no tangible signs that she was seeking the military domination of Europe. Both the French General Staff and the British War Ministry knew that German armaments factories were not working on a war production scale. Economically, Germany was not considered to be in any position to engage in an arms race with Britain and France, or to win it if she did.

⁵ H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 289, col. 2090, (May 18, 1934).

⁶ The Manchester Guardian, (February 5, 1935), p. 10.

Even the current rearmament programme might be retarded by the worsening economic conditions:

Although Germany has recovered considerably, she is not yet a great military power and she is beginning to find it impossible to finance her rearmament sufficiently to make her one. At present the pace of her rearmament is slowing down. She may be able to disregard international treaties with impunity, but she cannot disregard the laws of economics....⁷

While the Manchester Guardian correspondent's optimistic view of the inviolability of economic law was not shared by all, many British observers in Germany felt that economics, if nothing else, would lead to arms limitations, tacit or negotiated. This hope seemed to be borne out by the estimates of Germany's military strength.

German Air Strength

German naval estimates in the years before 1914 caused much concern and antagonism in Great Britain but the First World War saw the large-scale introduction of a new weapon - the airplane - and the consequent addition of a new dimension to warfare. While the early fighters and bombers did relatively no damage by present day standards, their effect on military theorists was extensive.

⁷Ibid., (April 2, 1935), p. 9.

For centuries Great Britain had only to worry about attack from the sea; now she also had to fear attack from the air. This new fear was greatly increased by the theories of air power developed shortly after the War.

The senior officers of the British Air Force were among the first to elaborate the theory that the bomber would be decisive in future wars.⁸ This concept of the primacy of air power was strengthened by the publication of The Command of the Air by the Italian, Douhet, in 1921 and by the published articles of Brigadier-General Groves and other air polemicists. By 1934, there were few people in Great Britain who did not have an exaggerated idea of the oft-mentioned 'threat from the air.' Commentators stressed two main aspects of air power, the lack of defence against aircraft, and the speed with which a nation could be defeated. A Manchester Guardian editorial expressed a widely-held opinion when it stated:

For the first time in the world's military history a weapon has been invented to which there appears to be no adequate reply.... With the coming of the aeroplane attack seems to have permanently outrun defence.⁹

⁸H.S. Dinerstein "The Impact of Air Power on the International Scene 1933-40" in Military Affairs vol. XIX, (Summer 1955), p. 65.

⁹The Manchester Guardian, (February 9, 1934), p. 8. Editorials of March 2 and August 16 said substantially the same thing.

Mr. Atlee, an important member of the Labour Party, stressed the 'overwhelming' power of air forces during the March 1934 debate on the Air Estimates:

I take it that it is now an established fact that in any future war the decision will be reached in the air. It is, of course, impossible to argue about that.... It seems to me perfectly obvious that in the next war, if there should be another war, you may have your Air Force disarmed before you can get your Navy or Army into action.... At the present time scientific developments are such that air forces can destroy whole cities with comparative ease, and also vessels, whether armoured or mercantile vessels.¹⁰

"In case of air war," so stated an editorial in the Observer, "the lack of equal power and readiness on the first day would mean Britain's last judgement."¹¹

Under these circumstances, it was natural that some officials and segments of Parliament and of the Press were concerned about the rapid establishment and expansion of a German air force. As early as the summer of 1933, reports received by the British Foreign Office and the Air Ministry had suggested that Hitler intended to accelerate the illegal air rearmament of Germany. The British Government had known for some time that Germany

¹⁰H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 286, col. 2044, (March 8, 1934).

¹¹The Observer, (March 11, 1934), p. 18.

was building military aircraft in anticipation of the revision of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. In fact, at the beginning of 1933 the British Air Ministry estimated that Germany already had at least 127 high-power aircraft suitable for military use.¹² "The new factor in the situation," wrote Sir R. Rumbold from Berlin, "is that the German air authorities make little or no endeavour to conceal, in conversation with the air attaché, the fact that this construction is taking place."¹³ On the tenth of June, Herr Bolle, Ministerialrat in the German Air Ministry, told Group Captain Herring, the British Air Attaché, "...it was useless to try to keep the fact that Germany was arming in the air a secret; mistakes were bound to occur and it was inevitable that a rearmament programme such as that now in progress should become known." At the same time, Herr Bolle admitted that the Arado aircraft firm had never built anything other than high-powered types of single-seat airplanes.¹⁴ Although Herr Bolle later repudiated these statements when the British Government protested, the air attaché remained

¹²Documents on British Foreign Policy ed. Woodward and Butler (London: 1946), series 2, volume 6, document 313, p. 474. Hereafter cited as DBFP ser., vol., doc., p.

¹³Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 223, pps. 377-8.

¹⁴Ibid., pps. 378-9.

convinced that the interview had been contrived by the German Government. The attaché felt the unreserved statements were in the nature of a trial balloon to gauge the British reaction to open German rearmament.¹⁵ The German Government seemed to assume that the construction of military prototypes was not of sufficient importance to call forth a protest to the League of Nations because their total was so small.¹⁶

While these June and July reports of increased German violations of the air clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and the Paris Air Agreement did not suggest any sense of urgency, such a feeling was more apparent in the Foreign Office memorandum of February 1934 on the illegal German Air Force.¹⁷ Instead of 127 aircraft of military type Germany now had a total of 338. In existence were 167 fighters, 67 bombers, and 42 general purpose or reconnaissance airplanes; and additional 41 fighters and 21 bombers were under construction. There was also an unconfirmed report that the German Air Ministry had ordered

¹⁵Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 223, encl. 3, p. 502. The Foreign Office also felt that the purpose of the interview might have been to have Great Britain "connive" at German rearmament. Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 253, pps. 424-425.

¹⁶Ibid., doc. 223, p. 378.

¹⁷Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 313, pps. 473-475.

300 three-engined Junker 52's. According to the British Air Ministry, the performances of the German service aircraft so far produced were not very satisfactory nor were the service airplane engines particularly good. Over the years, the German aircraft industry had been unable to keep abreast with the advances made in aircraft design, partially because the efforts of the Defence Ministry to subsidize it had been continually harassed by the "left wing" parties in the Reichstag, and partially because those who could have insured its progress, were indecisive. However, despite the apparent technical 'backwardness' of the German planes, the British Air Ministry believed that their performances would soon equal the performances of the latest British models.¹⁸

Summarizing the changes in Germany's air position after one year of National Socialism, Group Captain Herring wrote:

...it is no exaggeration to describe them as fundamental; the former cleavages, though never important, have now closed, every section of aviation has become a hive of energy, something very like a war spirit appears to have found its way into all those in any way connected with the air, and changes are now carried out and new schemes started without a

¹⁸Ibid., p. 474 and annex 3, p. 479.

whisper of criticism. There is no doubt that the year has brought a remarkable accession of strength to Germany's potential air power, the morale of all those connected with the air has improved out of all recognition, the aeronautical industry's production has increased very substantially, and a certain purposefulness is now evident that was formerly lacking.¹⁹

This concluding paragraph to the air attaché's annual report was quoted in the Foreign Office Memorandum on the Present State of the Illegal German Air Force. The Memorandum probably marks the beginning of the divergence between the Foreign Office and Air Ministry estimates of the strength of the German Air Force.²⁰

The difference in the reaction of the two departments to German air rearmament was at least partially the result of their different sources of information. Aside from the routine sources of information available, The Permanent Head of the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, gradually built up an "intelligence network" of his own in Germany. He wrote:

A few brave men there knew that I realized a war to be nearing. They thought that if they fed me with sufficient evidence, I might have influence enough to arouse our Government and so stop it. They would not have worked

¹⁹Ibid., p. 479

²⁰Ibid., p. 475. These differences became apparent in June 1934.

for a foreign intelligence, but they hoped to serve Europe by revealing the German conspiracy One of my sources was in the German Air Ministry. From him I got the German Air Estimates and particulars of construction.²¹

The members of the Foreign Office were not alone in their concern about Germany's growing air power or in their scepticism of the Government estimates of the potential and current strength of the German Air Force.

An article entitled "Disarmament Means War" in the Daily Mail of November 14, 1933 stated in part:

It is a most significant fact that side by side with Herr Hitler stands at the head of this state General Goering, who served in the war in the world-renowned Richthofen 'circus' as an airman and is now German Air Commissioner. The rapid expansion of the German Air Force as a result of his influence may be taken for granted.²²

Late in January 1934, the Observer predicted that unless Great Britain "woke up" she would lose her position as the sixth largest air power in the world to a Germany determined to create a first rate air force.²³ The Berlin correspondent of the Times noted that the manufacture of

²¹Quoted in Ian Colvin Vansittart in Office (London: 1965), pps. 125,6.

²²Vicount Rothermere My Fight to Rearm Britain (London: 1939), pps. 32-33. Underlined sentence printed in italics.

²³The Observer January 28, 1934, Editorial.

military aircraft had been "progressively intensified by a German aircraft industry potentially equal to that of other countries."²⁴

It is difficult to know how much information the Foreign Office passed on to certain newspapers and Parliamentarians; however, it is certain that some information was passed on, frequently to the embarrassment of the Government. During 1934 Ralf Wigram, Head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, briefed some newspapermen on the more disturbing reports of German air strength.²⁵ Mr. Wigram was also one of Winston Churchill's more valuable sources of information.²⁶ On one occasion Sir R. Vansittart admitted, "Of course I tell him (Churchill) whatever I know. It is so important that a man of Churchill's influence be properly informed."²⁷ Vansittart also authorized an official leak to newspapers of Hitler's claim to air parity with Great Britain. In this case, he acted without the authorization of the Government.²⁸ These

²⁴The Times January 24, 1934, p. 12.

²⁵Colvin, op. cit., p. 93.

²⁶Winston Spencer Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Canada: 1948), pps. 80-81.

²⁷Colvin, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁸Ibid., p. 45.

official leaks reinforced the information that newspapers and Parliamentarians were receiving from foreign correspondents, the foreign press, and private correspondence.

One of the important areas of controversy in the estimates of German air strength was the degree to which commercial aviation could reinforce military air power. Forbidden to build a military air force, the governments of the Weimar Republic had heavily subsidized civilian flying in all its aspects. By 1933, this policy was paying dividends because Germany was acknowledged as being supreme in European civil aviation, and as being second only to the United States in the world.

Of the features of civilian air strength that could be exploited for military purposes, 'convertible' aircraft seemed to pose the greatest short-term threat. Germany was known to have many airplanes designed or usable as war planes which were being employed on commercial air routes. Once when the British Air Attaché pointed to the new Heinkel and Junkers express postal aircraft, the wife of a German aeronautical official replied, "Oh, those will be two of the new single-seater fighters, I suppose."²⁹ Estimates of the number of these 'convertible' airplanes

²⁹DBFP ser. 2, vol. 5, doc. 223, p. 379.

varied, depending on the standards employed to differentiate between civilian and military craft. The Air Ministry believed that about 250, or roughly one-fifth of Germany's licensed commercial planes could be used for military operations.³⁰ Mr. Cocks, a Member of Parliament, quoted figures alleging Germany had 500-600 transport planes which could quickly be transformed into bombers, and the same number of light planes belonging to various Air Sport organizations which could be used as fighters.³¹ Another Member of Parliament, Captain Guest, placed the total aircraft ready for 'instant' conversion from civilian to military uses at 1,099 in March of 1934, and at 1800 in July of the same year.³² The highest estimate of these convertible aircraft was probably that quoted in the Rothermere newspapers; at roughly 2400, this estimate was one-third larger than Air Ministry estimates of the licensed German air fleet.³³

Toward the end of 1934 and early 1935, interest

³⁰Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 313, p. 478.

³¹H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 285, cols. 1021-1023, February 6, 1934.

³²Ibid., vol. 286 cols. 2052-2053; vol. 292, col. 2387. Captain Guest also contributed an article to The Observer February 24, 1934, p. 19 on the same subject.

³³Viscount Rothermere op. cit., pps. 84-85.

in 'convertible' airplanes began to decline. Commenting on Brigadier-General Grove's book Behind the Smoke Screen, an editorial in the Manchester Guardian claimed that the 'threat' of German converted civilian aircraft could be dismissed.³⁴ At the same time, the Air Ministry seems to have lost what interest it had had in Germany's civilian aircraft, probably because the middle 1930's were witnessing a revolution in military aircraft design and production, as well as a growing divergence between civilian and military types.

In addition to furnishing 'convertible' aircraft, the commercial aviation of Germany could provide the basis of organization for a military air force. Throughout 1933 the British Air Attaché in Berlin reported on the systematic organization of Germany's civil air establishment to serve the purposes of the Nazi state. Early in the year an Air Commissariat under Captain (later General) Göring was split away from the Air Section of the Ministry of Transport, which previously had been responsible for all aeronautical activities. By April the Air Commissariat had been replaced by the German Air Ministry (Reichsluftfahrtministerium) whose functions were parallel to those

³⁴The Manchester Guardian March 9, 1934, p. 8.

of the British Air Ministry.³⁵ In June the attaché noted that the various branches of German aviation were being united under the direction of the new Air Ministry and that the wearing of a military-style uniform was being encouraged to promote discipline.³⁶ Furthermore, an increasingly professional cast was being given to this organization by encouraging members of the army, navy, Storm Troops, and the police to take up flying.³⁷

Counting pilots trained by commercial air companies and those trained by the huge Air Sport organization, the attaché estimated that Germany had several times the number of qualified pilots that could be absorbed by airline companies.³⁸ The British Air Ministry estimated that Air Sport alone had trained 500 pilots in 1933 and would train some 1,000 in 1934.³⁹ Altogether, Germany appeared to have at least 3,000 trained airplane pilots and an additional ten to thirteen thousand glider pilots who could quickly be turned into war pilots.⁴⁰ Civilian air concerns

³⁵ DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 313 Annexes 2 and 3.

³⁶ Ibid., vol 5, doc. 223, enclosure 3, p. 380.

³⁷ Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 313, pps. 476, 478.

³⁸ Ibid., annex 2, p. 478. ³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 478.

according to British estimates, could also supply the thousands of trained ground crew so essential in war time; to maintain one air plane on a war time basis required the services of several trained technicians. This superiority in trained personnel, a result of Germany's emphasis on civil aviation, was frequently stressed both in Parliament and in the columns of the Observer. Ground installations such as airfields and hangers built for commercial purposes had obvious military uses. According to the estimate of Captain Guest, Germany had over two hundred and fifty airfields and more were being built as fast as possible.⁴¹ Churchill perhaps best summarized the importance of German civilian aviation to Great Britain when he said:

They already have a civil aviation which is called "Air Sport" and which is, I believe, on a gigantic scale, with aerodromes, trained pilots and so forth. All they have to do is to give that vast plant a military characteristic. It may take a long time but it will not take anything like as long as it would take us, with our very limited aviation, to develop our air armaments.⁴²

Air Sport and commercial air lines between them had another

⁴¹H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 292, col. 2387 (July 30); vol. 295, col. 943 (Nov. 28); vol. 285, col. 1156 (Feb. 7); vol. 286, col. 2052 (March 8). Figures given for Great Britain; 1500 war pilots and 1000 reserve pilots. (Capt. Guest vol. 292, col. 2387 (July 30) glider pilots 350 or 580 (vol. 285, col. 1156; 286, col. 2052).

⁴²Ibid., vol. 292, col. 734 July 13, 1934.

very important indirect value; they immensely stimulated the German aircraft industry.

Estimates of the capacity of German factories to produce military airplanes were obviously crucial in arriving at an estimate of her potential as an air power; yet, estimates of this capacity varied tremendously. On November 11th and December 6th of 1933 Colonel Heywood reported that the French General Staff believed the German aircraft factories were making every effort to mass produce airplanes, something neither Britain nor France were capable of doing. If these factories began to work on a war time basis they could very rapidly reach a monthly production of 2500 airplanes a month.⁴³ At this time, an editorial in the Daily Mail stated: "In the opinion of expert authorities in the closest touch with her present conditions she (Germany) could create an air fleet of 10,000 or more machines in eighteen months."⁴⁴ The figure of 2500 planes a month was to be quoted consistently by both the French officials and the newspapers controlled by Viscount Rothermere. According to the British Air Ministry, as of February 1934, Germany was producing sixty

⁴³DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 48, p. 49; doc. 103, p. 160.

⁴⁴Quoted in Rothermere, op. cit., p. 65.

complete aircraft a month and could increase this production to 600 within half a year.⁴⁵

Differences in the estimates of Germany's potential air strength were reflected in estimates of her then current strength in military planes and the rate at which this strength would increase. On February 6, 1934, Mr. Cocks gave a detailed estimate of German air power. As of May 1934, Germany would have an air fleet of between 1,750 and 2,100 planes. In addition to 1,000 to 1,200 'convertible' aircraft she would have:

- (3) Experimental planes and new construction of the big airplane factories, which can be estimated as between 50 to 100.
- (4) Military planes which are stored in the foreign 'daughter' firms of the German factories. Careful estimate, about 300.
- (5) War airplanes of all kinds which are being built in Germany itself and whose number is not too highly estimated at 400 to 500.⁴⁶

A Foreign Office Memorandum prepared six weeks later by Sir John Simon put the strength of Germany's air fleet at 600 military planes.⁴⁷ It is not possible to say whether this figure represents the Foreign Office or the War Ministry estimate. However, it is probably the latter because

⁴⁵ DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 313, Annex 2, p. 474.

⁴⁶ H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 285, cols. 1021-1023, February 6, 1934.

⁴⁷ DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 363, p. 575.

if either Germany's 250 'convertible' airplanes or the 300 Junker 52 transports reportedly on order are added to the February Air Ministry estimate of 338 military planes, the total is about 600.

Foreign Office and Air Ministry differences of opinion about the expansion of the German Air Force became apparent at least as early as June 1934. Anthony Eden remarked on an Air Ministry note outlining the future organization of a regular German Air Force, "I share the prevalent scepticism of Air Ministry estimates." The general trend of comments by the Foreign Office was that the Air Ministry was underestimating Germany's potential strength.⁴⁸ At this time, the Air Staff believed the German plans for expansion involved the production of 480 first-line aircraft by the autumn of 1935, with two further expansions, 480 aircraft each to reach a first-line strength of 1,440 airplanes by 1942. Later, in the fall of 1934, the Air Ministry produced a revised estimate forecasting a German first-line strength of 1300 by the fall of 1936 and an eventual strength of between 1500-1600 aircraft. This estimate represented a much more rapid expansion of the

⁴⁸The Right Honourable, The Earl of Avon The Eden Memoirs vol. 1, (London: 1962), p. 182.

German Air Force than the Air Ministry's original estimate.⁴⁹ This official opinion differed radically from that expressed by Sir Edward Ellington, Chief of the Air Staff. He believed that Germany could maintain a force of 800 aircraft with reserves in six months' time and "could, if she wished, build up rapidly in peace time to a force of two thousand aircraft, and that the preparations she is now beginning to make may within, say, five years enable her to maintain such a force at practically its full strength in war." Sir Edward Ellington's minority opinion was not sent on to the Cabinet because it was considered "unduly alarming."⁵⁰

Following these minuted expressions and memoranda of disagreement, the discussion spread to Parliament. Stanley Baldwin, Lord President of the Council, in replying for the Government during a debate on armaments, admitted that it was difficult to estimate the German strength and continued:

but we have little doubt that it is her intention - and we have always recognized that - the moment she feels free to rearm, the air will be one of her principle considerations.⁵¹

⁴⁹C. Webster and N. Frankland The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945, vol. 1, (London: 1961), pps. 68-69; The East of Avon, op. cit., pps. 184-185.

⁵⁰Webster and Frankland, op. cit., p. 69.

⁵¹H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 292, col. 2329, July 30, 1934.

Even if allowance is made for the understandable reluctance of the Government to affront a sensitive foreign power, particularly while they still hoped to extract some form of air limitation agreement from the wreck of the disarmament talks, Mr. Baldwin's speech was nevertheless misleading. The Government intended to increase the strength of the Royal Air Force from 844 to 1,304 first-line planes over a five year period. There is an obvious parallel between the British plan for expansion and the Air Ministry estimate of the German plan. If the Air Ministry estimate proved realistic, the Royal Air Force would barely maintain its superiority over the German Air Force. The reasons given for the plan to expand the Royal Air Force were the difficulty in negotiating an air convention, the unrest in Europe that might make disarmament impossible, the intention of other European powers to renovate or increase their air forces. Aside from a vague reference to the Rhine as being Britain's frontier, the only reference to Germany was the suggestion that she intended to carry out air rearmament some time in the future when she felt free to do so.

If Mr. Baldwin hoped to calm the fears of some Parliamentarians, he was not notably successful. Shortly after his speech, Mr. Churchill, in support of the RAF

expansion plan, made several predictions about the strength of the German Air Force:

I first assert that Germany has already in violation of the Treaty created a military air force which is now two-thirds as strong as our present home defence air force

The second is that Germany is rapidly increasing this air force.... By the end of 1935 the German air force will be nearly equal in number and efficiency ... to our home defence air force at that date even if the present proposals are carried out.

The third statement is that if Germany continues this expansion and if we continue to carry out our scheme, then, some time in 1938 ... Germany will be definitely and substantially stronger in the air than Great Britain.

Fourthly, and this is the point which is causing anxiety, once they have got that lead we may never be able to overtake them.⁵²

Mr. Churchill and Mr. Baldwin publicly clarified the issue of the strength of the German Air Force in a debate on November 28, 1934. Mr. Churchill sparked the discussion by moving an addition to the Address, expressing lack of confidence in the adequacy of the national defences, particularly in the air. In his speech he elaborated the four statements made in July. He altered his prediction of Anglo-German air parity by November of 1935 to claim that if the fastest of Germany's 'convertible'

⁵²Ibid., col. 2374, July 30, 1934.

aircraft were taken into account, the German Air Force would be substantially stronger than the British by that time.⁵³

Mr. Baldwin's reply was naturally based on the information supplied him by the Air Ministry, rather than on the assessment of the Foreign Office. The Germans, he said, were "engaged in creating an air force - creating an air force." Hence, most accounts of German strength given in Britain and in the press were "very much exaggerated." The number of service aircraft was variously estimated at between 600 and 1,000 while the French Government placed the figure at 1,100. So far as the Government knew, no service units had been formed, but the Germans were showing great haste in preparing airfields and the capacity of the air industry had increased markedly within the last six months.⁵⁴ Summarizing the difficulties of reestablishing an air force, Mr. Baldwin pointed out that it took three years to train a good aircraft mechanic, one year to train a pilot, and even longer to teach a pilot night flying, navigation, and gunnery.

⁵³ Ibid., vol. 295, cols. 257-258, 266-267, November 28, 1934.

⁵⁴ Ibid., cols. 875-876, November 28, 1934.

Germany can produce the aircraft rapidly, if she chooses, and she can rapidly produce men, if she chooses; but a country which has for years possessed no military air force starts under a very heavy handicap, and it must necessarily be some time before, from a military point of view, such a force can be equal in efficiency to a force which would have behind it, ever since the War, the whole of the technique of its training under which men were trained in the War and have been trained ever since.⁵⁵

Turning to Mr. Churchill's statements, Mr. Baldwin reassured the House:

It is not the case that Germany is rapidly approaching equality with us Even if we confine the comparison to the German air strength and the strength of the Royal Air Force immediately available in Europe, Germany is actively engaged in the production of service aircraft, but her real strength is not 50 percent of our strength in Europe to-day.

Furthermore, he stated that at the current rates of expansion, Britain would still have a fifty per cent superiority in November 1935.⁵⁶

This assurance that Great Britain enjoyed a fifty per cent superiority was based on the Air Ministry estimate that Germany had 1,000 service aircraft. Allowing for reserves on the British scale, this would leave some 250 airplanes available for front-line units as opposed to a

⁵⁵Ibid., col. 880, November 28, 1934.

⁵⁶Ibid., col. 882, November 28, 1934.

British front-line strength of at least 560 home defence aircraft.⁵⁷ The prediction that Great Britain would still have a fifty per cent superiority in November of 1935 was based on an estimate that Germany planned to reach a first-line strength of about 500 airplanes in November 1935. However, Mr. Baldwin's statement seems to have ignored the revised estimate reflecting the triplication of the German Air Force by October 1936 to a first-line strength of 1,300 aircraft.⁵⁸ This oversight was to prove embarrassing to the Government, to say the least, when news of Hitler's own claim of air parity became public in March of 1935.

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The estimates of German air strength made in Parliament and in the newspapers between July 1933 and March 1935 were generally exaggerated but their value was undeniable if only because they countered pacifist pressure against any increase in the size of the Royal Air Force and publicly pricked the complacency of the Air Ministry.

⁵⁷ G.M. Young, Stanley Baldwin (London: 1952), p. 182.

⁵⁸ The Air Ministry used the term "first-line strength" to designate aircraft organized into squadrons at operational air fields and backed by an aircraft reserve of at least 200 per cent. The term did not include aircraft attached to training units.

A major reason for the great difference between official and unofficial estimates lay in the different aspects of German air power stressed by the 'amateur' and 'professional' air experts. The 'amateurs' were obsessed by the 'raw materials' - the capacity of German industry, the size of her commercial and sport air organizations - which were available to speed expansion. They had little interest in, or knowledge about, the number of military aircraft organized into squadrons - the tactical unit of air warfare. Air ministry officials, on the other hand, were primarily interested in the number of fully operational squadrons Germany possessed and how quickly German air resources could be organized to add to them.

The objects of the first stage of the German expansion plan as laid down by General Milch and General Göring were to force the German aircraft industry to expand as fast as possible and to provide enough planes to train pilots. In January of 1934, the German Air Ministry ordered 4,021 aircraft for the years 1934 and 1935. German industry, which had only produced an average of thirty-one aircraft per month in 1933, raised this average to one hundred and sixty-four in 1934. Of the 1,968 aircraft produced, eight hundred and forty were military types.⁵⁹ By

⁵⁹Derek Wood and Derek Dempster, The Narrow Margin (New York: 1961), pps. 42-43.

the spring of 1935, Germany was probably producing over two hundred airplanes a month. It is impossible to say what the 'war production' capacity of the aircraft industry was between 1933 and 1935, but it was not a fraction of the 2,500 airplanes a month quoted in the Rothermere press and by French officials. This figure of 2,500 was based on German World War I production of relatively simple airplanes and was completely irrelevant in the early 1930's. When war broke out in 1939, Germany had just reached a production rate of seven hundred aircraft a month.

Strangely enough, even the Air Ministry's November estimates of the strength of the German Air Force were slightly high. At the end of 1935 twenty-two of the forty-eight squadrons envisaged for the first stage of the German expansion plan had been formed on paper. These squadrons had an average of six or seven aircraft each, against a planned average establishment of eleven. In all, the German Air Ministry had five hundred and sixty-five military aircraft suitable for first-line squadrons and many of these aircraft lacked engines or other components.⁶⁰ The German Air Force certainly did not pose an immediate threat

⁶⁰Basil Collier, The Defence of the United Kingdom (London: 1957), p. 27.

to anyone, and the first 'round' in the controversy between 'amateur' and 'professional' estimates was won by the professionals.

The Position of the German Army

Rapid expansion was in many ways much easier for the German Army than it was for the Luftwaffe. General Goring and General Milch inherited no detailed plans for expansion and no expert planning staffs; these were improvised as time went on and necessity arose. The Reichswehr, on the other hand, had been organized with the possibility of rapid expansion in view. All the German General Staff lacked before 1933 was the opportunity to put their plans into effect; Hitler gave them this opportunity.

The British War Office summary of infractions of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, made in July 1933, did not, however, suggest the immediate implementation of any plans for the rapid expansion of the Reichswehr. There were unauthorized but "minor" changes in the army establishment and scales of equipment. German troops were being trained on and were using certain unauthorized types of light artillery pieces and machine guns, and stocks of munitions exceeded the established quantities. Reports also

indicated the large-scale manufacture and export of war material, not to mention the production in Germany of war gas. Both the German police and the 'associations' (Stalhelm and Storm Troops) either received military training or took part in military matters. The reconstituted and illegal German General Staff had also made preparations for military and industrial mobilization.⁶¹ Most of these statements are similiar to other descriptions of German infractions of the Treaty between 1920-1932, and their general sense is in contrast to the information received by the military attaché in Paris later in the year.

The French estimates placed the strenght of the Reichswehr, excluding reserves, at 140,000 in October and at about 165,000 in December of 1933.⁶² Computing and weighing the military value of the various reserves available to the Reichswehr was a fruitful source of disagreement among analysts of German military power. To begin with, there was the mass of well over a million ex-service-men of the Imperial Army who had not joined any of the various semi-military associations. Although now in their thirties, these men had received at least their basic

⁶¹DBFP ser. 2, vol. 5, doc. 253, annex 1, pps. 426-428.

⁶²Ibid., doc. 508, p. 736. Also, summary of French dossier, The Times, December 15, 1933, p. 15.

training and most had seen action in the First World War. Roughly 100,000 policemen were being given intensive military training for two months each summer and they formed what could be considered an immediate reserve. In addition to these men, there were about one million members of the Nazi and Nationalist organizations undergoing military training for periods varying from one night a week to several months. In the opinion of Colonel Koeltz, head of the Deuxième Bureau at the French War Ministry, this latter group formed a force quite similar to the British Territorial Army.⁶³

The French Ministry of War believed that Germany possessed enough small arms to equip at least sixty-four, and possibly as many as eighty divisions. However, the Germans would not be able to furnish all these divisions with their full allotment of Army, Corps, and divisional guns and howitzers. French information was not precise about the exact number of divisional artillery guns the Reichswehr possessed but they were certain that this number was at least two thousand and that it included the normal establishment of 155 millimeter or heavy weapons.⁶⁴

⁶³Ibid., doc. 508, p. 736. The Times December 15, 1933, p. 15. DBFP vol. 6, doc. 48, p. 49. Ibid., doc. 103, pps. 159-160.

⁶⁴Ibid., doc. 48, p. 49; doc. 103, appendix A, p. 165.

All told, the Germans had sufficient artillery for at least seven army corps or twenty-one infantry divisions. As far as the other 'illegal' weapons were concerned, General Gamelin believed that Germany had passed through the stage of making prototypes to small-scale production of equipment for experimental units.⁶⁵

According to information received from Colonel Koeltz, the French General Staff thought the German General Staff were working on a three-stage expansion plan - initially by January of 1934 Germany projected possible mobilization of twenty to twenty-five infantry divisions; possibly as early as the summer of 1935, forty to fifty infantry divisions, and lastly, by 1938, sixty to seventy infantry divisions. During each stage of this expansion Germany would also be able to mobilize four to five cavalry divisions, one or two mechanized formations, and forty to fifty Grenzschutz or frontier defence divisions. The Grenzschutz divisions would have very little or no artillery and would be used to screen frontiers and to protect lines of communication. At this time, apparently, the French General Staff did not think the number of cavalry divisions or of mechanized forces would be increased to any appreciable

⁶⁵Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 508, p. 736.

extent.⁶⁶ These figures suggested a more rapid rate of expansion than the estimate of Germany's plans given by General Gamelin to the military attaché a month earlier on October 24, 1933. Then, the military attaché had been told that Germany could equip twenty-one divisions with field artillery. These divisions could be supported by thirty Grenzschutz divisions at short notice. General Gamelin thought the German General Staff intended to produce, in the future, a force whose strength on mobilization would be fifty divisions plus fifty Grenzschutz divisions. Of the fifty regular divisions, twenty-five to thirty would be used as a striking force, ten would help the Grenzschutz divisions hold defensive fronts, and the remainder would be held in reserve.⁶⁷

Summarizing the French estimates of German plans for the expansion of the Reichswehr, the military attaché Colonel Heywood wrote:

In short, the French General Staff estimate that by 1938 Germany will have recruited a powerful army approximately equal to the French Metropolitan Army in the number of its divisions, superior in numbers owing to the Grenzschutz divisions, and the larger supply of men which can be drawn from its larger

⁶⁶Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 103, pps. 161-162.

⁶⁷Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 103, p. 164.

population, superior in its armament as it will all be new and of later pattern than the French, superior in the ability of its mobilised industry to maintain this army in the field in case of war, not to mention its probable superiority in aircraft and in chemical warfare. In fact, an army far more powerful than the Germany Army of 1914.⁶⁸

Colonel Heywood's concluding remarks about the information received from the French General Staff are interesting because they illustrate the problems of evaluating such information. He said:

... it must be remembered that the French at the beginning of the last century underestimated the capacity of Prussia to rearm and to resuscitate its army after the latter had been crushed at Jena, whilst at the beginning of the present century they again underestimated the number of fighting formations which the German Empire could put into the field. The French General Staff have not forgotten their lessons, and it may safely be assumed that their latest estimate does not err on the side of under-estimation.⁶⁹

Neither the British newspapers nor the Members of Parliament took as much interest in the expansion of the German Army as they did in the re-establishment of a German Air Force; however large it became, the German Army posed no immediate threat to Great Britain. In addition, both the British War Office and the newspapers tended to

⁶⁸ Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 103, p. 164.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

be conservative in their estimates of the expansion of the Reichswehr. The Berlin correspondent of the Times, commenting on the French charge that the strength of the Reichswehr was 165,000, felt that it would be difficult to prove the existence of the extra 65,000 men supposedly incorporated into the Reichswehr. He did admit, however, that the triple-unit system of three platoons to a company, three companies to a battalion, etc. used by the Reichswehr was an admirable basis for a sudden expansion during an emergency.⁷⁰

By the spring of 1934, the British War Office was still not convinced that the peace strength of the Reichswehr was being increased. This does not mean to say that either the War Office or the British newspapers did not realize that a great potential for such an expansion existed. The rapid improvement in the appearance, discipline, and training of the Storm Troops was noted by the correspondents of both the Manchester Guardian and the Times. Companies of Storm Troopers were alleged to be undergoing exactly the same rifle, machine gun, and field gun training as the Reichswehr.⁷¹ The War Office had information that

⁷⁰The Times, January 24, 1934, p. 11.

⁷¹Ibid., also, The Manchester Guardian, March 7, 1934, p. 11.

200,000 selected men from the Schutz Staffeln (S.S.) and Storm Troops had been or were being trained by the Reichswehr for periods of three months. As a result, the War Office noted, "... it seems probable, therefore, that Germany is now or will shortly be in a position to expand the regular army of 100,000 to the proposed peace establishment of 300,000 by the addition at the shortest notice of trained personnel." At the time, Germany could mobilize three or four cavalry divisions, twenty-one infantry divisions, thirty-three Grenzschutz groups, the equivalent of strong mixed brigades, and eleven police regiments for the Rhineland.⁷²

The War Office believed that the cavalry and infantry divisions would have artillery on a low scale but would be greatly deficient in the "very important" medium artillery. Stocks of artillery shells were not sufficient for prolonged intensive fighting and tanks were just coming into large scale production. Lack of materiel other than uniforms and small arms would probably prevent the raising of additional mobile units until five or six months after mobilization. Despite the efforts to increase the number of officers by increasing the number of

⁷²DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 363, annex 2, pps. 580-581.

officer cadets, lack of experienced officers presented a definite limitation. For these reasons, the British War Office believed that the German General Staff were working on a relatively long-range programme of expansion.⁷³

The rather optimistic assessment of the German military situation by the War Office was contradicted by the account of a conversation between Colonel Heywood and General Gamelin in June 1934. According to the French General Staff, the German military situation was improving much more rapidly than they had believed possible at the beginning of 1934. They now thought that Germany would have carried out most of the work necessary to mobilize a full-size army by the end of 1935 instead of by 1938. The twenty-one divisions which the German General Staff were known to want as the peace-time establishment of the army, were already in existence. By June, the German Army had about 220,000 men and would probably have 300,000 in October. This figure included the original 100,000 men of the Reichswehr in addition to men being enlisted for eighteen months.⁷⁴

British newspapers centred their attention on

⁷³Ibid., pps. 581-582.

⁷⁴Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 456, pps. 757-758.

the conflict between the Reichswehr on the one hand and the Nazi Party forces, the S.A. and S.S., on the other. The conflict had its roots in the struggle over how the army was to be expanded from 100,000 to 300,000 men. The Reichswehr was prepared to enlist individual members of the S.A., but refused to enroll whole units. Tension grew during the spring and culminated in the 'preventative' execution of the senior officers of the S.A. and other Germans hostile to the regime on June 30, 1934. After a lull of a few months, additional reports indicated a similar conflict between the Reichswehr and the S.S., Hitler's bodyguard, over the efforts of the latter to be equipped with heavy weapons.⁷⁵

Throughout the summer and autumn, the German Army continued to grow. In the Times of October 4th, it was admitted that there were reasons to believe that the Reichswehr had already been increased to about 300,000 men.⁷⁶ Both Mr. Baldwin and Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, referred to the expansion of the German Army during the debate on November 28, 1934.

⁷⁵The Times, May 7, 1934, p. 15; December 3, 1934, p. 14. The Manchester Guardian, December 4, 1934, p. 12, December 5, 1934, p. 6. The Observer, January 6, 1935, p. 19.

⁷⁶The Times, October 4, 1934, p. 13.

Mr. Baldwin admitted:

The rumours that have been prevalent about the formation of the army we believe are founded on fact - that Germany is in course of expanding her long-service army of 100,000 men into a short-service peace-time army of 300,000 To what extent that task has been completed I cannot say for certain, but undoubtedly it is proceeding and undoubtedly it will be accomplished.⁷⁷

Speaking of the armaments of the German Army, Sir John Simon was equally noncommittal. "We are bound to assume," he said, "that this expanded, reorganized army is being equipped with a range of modern weapons, but as to the calibre of the guns, I am not able to make a statement."⁷⁸ Here the question rested until there were reports of hints in German newspapers that Germany would reinstitute conscription as of April 1, 1935. The Observer, at least, felt that Hitler was unlikely to introduce conscription, because German youth was already being trained in various organizations and because of the adverse effect its introduction would have on negotiations for arms limitation.⁷⁹

The British and French estimates of the capability of the German Army were as sharply divergent as their

⁷⁷H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 295, col. 875, November 28, 1934.

⁷⁸Ibid., col. 978, November 28, 1934.

⁷⁹The Observer, February 24, 1935, p. 17.

estimates of its mobilization strength. According to the French General Staff, by 1935 the German Army of roughly one hundred divisions would be able to fight an offensive war on either the Polish or Czechoslovakian fronts, or both. In the west, it would be able to maintain an offensive on a front roughly one hundred and fifty miles long.⁸⁰ Virtually all British observers believed that the German Army was not strong enough to prevent French intervention in German affairs, and that in particular, the German Army could not prevent the occupation of the Rhineland. This opinion was shared by the War Office, the Foreign Office and the newspapers. In March of 1934 a memorandum prepared by the War Office stated that reports tended to show that the German military authorities were still "oppressed" by a feeling of insecurity; their forces, they believed, were still not adequate to prevent the occupation of the Rhineland by France and still less adequate to fight Poland and France simultaneously.⁸¹ The very rapid expansion of the Reichswehr and its virtual 'revolution' into a mixed long and short service army was bound to have an impact on its overall effectiveness. One observer went

⁸⁰DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 456, p. 758.

⁸¹Ibid., doc. 363, annex 2, pps. 580-581.

so far as to report, as of early 1935, that the German Army was probably less formidable than it had been when the Nazis came to power. The Reichswehr had then been a compact mechanized force with great mobility and striking power; by 1935 it had much better weapons but had become diffuse, lacking sufficient staff officers and upset by the reorganization.⁸² Concluding his report, the correspondent wrote:

It is true that German rearmament has advanced very far, but it is doubtful whether it will be possible to class Germany among the great military Powers for some time to come. To achieve full "preparedness" will be a slow and difficult process.⁸³

How long would it be before the new German Armed Forces 'jelled' and Germany took her place as a great military power? Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador at Berlin thought that Germany would not be ready for a war until 1944 or probably later.⁸⁴ The British War Office was convinced it would be 'several years' before the German Army would be fit to "initiate a new war," and speculated that the ten year truce with Poland might indicate the length of time which the Reichswehr needed.⁸⁵ In Paris,

⁸²The Manchester Guardian, January 30, 1935, p. 12.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 241, p. 365.

⁸⁵Ibid., doc. 363, annex 2, p. 582.

Colonel Heywood got the impression, whatever the exaggerations of the French intelligence, that by 1938, "... the German General Staff will have built up, and will hold at the disposal of whatever Government is in power in Germany, a practically unequalled instrument of force wherewith to support its policy."⁸⁶ In Parliament, Mr. Boothby mentioned the year 1937 which, he said, Members should remember. By 1937 the strategic roadway in the south of Germany and her armament programme would be finished.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Ibid., doc. 103, p. 164.

⁸⁷H.C. deb. 5s vol. 295, col. 962, November 28, 1934.

CHAPTER 2

ESTIMATES OF HITLER'S INTENTIONS 1934 - 1935

If estimates of Germany's immediate rearmament plans tended to suggest that these plans were limited to the de facto abrogation of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, estimates of German territorial ambitions showed few such limitations. In the House of Commons, Mr. Cocks, who was a persistent critic of Germany, told the Members:

The aim of the German Government is to build up again her forces and to make herself the strongest military power in Europe. That is the meaning of the suggestion that she must increase her army because of her long and indefensible frontiers. That is the reason why she seeks to make herself the strongest military power in Europe, to enforce her will on her neighbours, whether they be little unarmed Denmark or Austria, to tear up the Treaty of Versailles which Herr Hitler some years ago said it was his intention to do, and to enlarge her territories to accomodate a growing population, as General Goering has said is the policy of Germany. She intends to carry out these designs by naked brutal force, by armed forces; and that is war.¹

This opinion is similar to one expressed by the British Ambassador soon after Hitler came to power. "The present German Government," he wrote, "have to rearm on land, and, as Hitler explains in his memoirs, they have to lull their

¹H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 285, col. 1020, February 6, 1934.

adversaries into such a state of coma that they will allow themselves to be engaged one by one."² A year later, in January 1934, another ambassador was reporting that "Nazi Germany believes neither in the League nor in negotiation."³

Neither Hitler nor his chief lieutenants made any secret of their ambitions. From their speeches, these ambitions seemed twofold - the formation of a greater Germany to include all the German minorities in countries adjacent to the Nazi state, vague and not so vague references to expansion towards the East. The first objective was pictured in British newspapers as a revival of the pre-war philosophy of Pan-Germanism. Commenting on the German re-occupation of the Saar in the spring of 1935, the editor of the Manchester Guardian suggested that the Nazi revolution was nothing less than a "Pan-German movement in plenitude of power."⁴ Among the nations endangered by Hitler's Pan-German plans would be Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Denmark, Belgium, France, and Italy.

While virtually every country bordering on Germany seemed threatened by Hitler's Pan-Germanism, Austria

²DBFP ser. 2, vol. 5, doc. 36, p. 53, April 26, 1933.

³Ibid., vol. 6, doc. 241, p. 362.

⁴Manchester Guardian, March 2, 1935, p. 12. The Observer, April 22, 1934, p. 18, editorial.

was considered to be his primary objective. Fusion with Austria was listed by the British Ambassador to Berlin as the first aim of German foreign policy in January 1934.⁵

A correspondent of the Manchester Guardian reported from Austria:

Germany is not strong enough as yet to face the probable consequences of what would, in reality, be the German conquest of Austria If Germany were strong enough to ward off international intervention, the Austrian Nazis would, with German help (in arms and money discretely supplied) seize power. Austro-German union would then be an accomplished fact⁶

Thus, while an attempted Nazi putsch in Austria was expected at some time in the future, its occurrence on July 25, 1934 was unexpected. "This, then," ran the account of the putsch in the Survey of International Affairs for 1934, "was the ferocious guise in which the German beast of prey presented itself, after an absence of sixteen years, in its old European hunting grounds."⁷ Aside from heralding the return of the German 'beast of prey,' the putsch proved that Germany was indeed not strong enough to force through

⁵DBFP vol. 6, doc. 24, p. 362.

⁶Manchester Guardian, April 2, 1934, p. 9.

⁷Survey of International Affairs, 1934 A.J. Toynbee, ed., (London:1935), p. 326.

the anschluss with Austria against the threat of active intervention from Italy. After the failure of the putsch, newspaper reports suggested that Hitler had adopted a new plan to subjugate Austria. Emphasis was to be placed on short-term 'legality' and long-term subversion by the Austrian Nazi Party; temporarily, the ballot box was to be substituted for the bomb.⁸ There was even the hope that Germany might sign a joint guarantee of Austrian independence in order to win peace and security in which to rearm and find allies.⁹

Poland was the second of the most frequently mentioned targets of German revisionism. With the exception of the German socialists, Germans of all political parties bitterly resented the loss of territory to Poland as a result of World War I. Therefore, the German-Polish Non-Agression Pact was greeted with as much scepticism as it had caused sensation in European capitals. A report of Sir Eric Phipps five days after the announcement of the Non-Agression Pact stated that rectification of her eastern frontiers was a major aim of German foreign policy.¹⁰

⁸ The Observer, July 29, 1934, p. 15.

⁹ Manchester Guardian, October 9, 1934, p. 11.

¹⁰ DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 241, p. 362, January 31, 1934.

Correspondents of the Manchester Guardian were among the most sceptical commentators on the rapprochement. On February 15th, one reported that the very existence of Poland was incompatible with the ultimate aims of German foreign policy because Poland was the chief stumbling block to any German ambitions of carving an eastern empire out of Soviet territory.¹¹

A Foreign Office memorandum of April 7, 1934, drew attention to the continuity in the attitudes of the Weimar Republic and of the Nazis - both before and after the German-Polish agreement - toward the Polish Corridor and Polish Silesia. Sir R. Vansittart, who drafted the memorandum, reviewed the evidence suggesting that Germany would not accept the Polish borders as final. In 1931 the British ambassador in Berlin had reported that "a war against Poland to rectify the eastern frontiers would be in the nature of a crusade." Shortly after the conclusion of the German-Polish agreement, Hitler was reported to have remarked to the Yugoslav Minister in Berlin: "Don't think that I have forgotten the Polish Corridor." Moreover, the intentions of the Nazis had been underlined in several confidential memoranda and speeches by Party leaders

¹¹The Manchester Guardian, February 15, 1934.

to the Storm Troops. These memoranda and speeches stressed the temporary and expedient nature of the agreement; at a 'propitious moment,' Hitler would bring strong pressure to bear on the Poles to revise the Polish-German frontiers.¹²

The Berlin correspondent of the Manchester Guardian put the same construction on the Polish-German agreement as did the Nazis and the British Foreign Office; two of his observations are particularly pertinent; in February, and later, in October 1934, he wrote:

Until she has completed her military preparations, Germany is bound to do all and is doing all in her power to placate the Poles and to avoid giving them any kind of provocation.
(February 1934)

Later on, when Germany is fully rearmed herself and at the head of a coalition of Powers, the question of the "Corridor" and of Austria ... can be considered afresh.¹³
(October 1934)

An editorial in the Manchester Guardian drew a historical parallel between the thirteenth and the twentieth centuries. "Towards the middle of the thirteenth century," commented the editorial, "Poland allied herself with the Teutonic Knights who were to prove her deadliest enemies. If the Third Realm ... becomes a friend of Poland, is it not so

¹²DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, appendix 3, pps. 979-980.

¹³The Manchester Guardian, February 15, 1934, p. 6; October 9, 1934, p. 11.

as to become a deadlier enemy later on? If the Polish-German understanding were a reconciliation and not a manoeuvre it would not arouse concern in Paris, suspicion in Geneva, fear in Moscow, and hopeful expectancy in Tokyo."¹⁴

There is one element in the British estimate of German military intentions between 1934-1937 that is, as yet, virtually impossible to assess. This element is the degree of control which British diplomats and attachés believed the Reichswehr had over German foreign policy. Under the Weimar Republic, General von Seeckt, de facto if not de jure Chief of the General Staff between 1920-1926, had raised the Reichswehr above politics and had made it the final arbiter of the fate of the various governments. Having played a considerable role in the events that led to the final collapse of the Weimar Republic and to the takeover of the Nazis, the Reichswehr was expected at least to maintain, and probably to improve, its position of authority in the state.

Ironically, even those most opposed to the spirit of German militarism began to look on the leaders of the Reichswehr as a 'moderate' and stabilizing influence in

¹⁴ Ibid., September 14, 1934, p. 8.

Nazi Germany. The 'cool' leaders of the army, so the attachés and newspaper correspondents reported, realized that the German Army would not be ready for war for a long time; consequently, they would act as a brake on the rash impulses of the Nazi Party. If anything, the influence of the army was pictured as having been greatly enhanced by the 'Blood Purge' of the Storm Troops on June 30, 1934. Mr. Sargent and Sir Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office minuted an account of the 'Blood Purge' by the Berlin ambassador as follows:

What is important is that the upshot of the whole matter is the emergence of the Reichswehr as the dominant force in Germany to-day. From now onwards, when we try to estimate the future course of German policy we will have to consider it primarily from the cold-blooded and strictly material point of view of the German Generals and German military opinion¹⁵

To a greater or lesser degree, the newspapers echoed this opinion; Hitler, they believed, had been forced to destroy the radical elements in the Nazi Party which could have counterpoised the influence of the army. An editorial

¹⁵DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, appendix 1, no. iii, p. 969. Minute by Mr. Sargent; Vansittart minuted his agreement and added, "We may live to regret the Nazi regime, despite its flagrant faults and vices, as the smaller of two evils." Exactly what the other "evil" was, is not mentioned. Presumably he was referring to a military dictatorship; possibly, he was referring to a Communist takeover should the Nazi regime collapse.

in the Observer said that, far more than before June 30th, the army was now the decisive factor in the entire German situation, and a report from Berlin was headed "Real Rulers of Germany / Old Gang Back Again."¹⁶

As the volumes of Documents on British Foreign Policy dealing with German affairs between July 1934 and March 1938 have not been published, it is impossible to know exactly what form, if any, the diplomats and attachés expected the 'moderation' of the German generals would take. Newspapers tended to suggest that the generals would not be rushed into risking another defeat, hence would not permit any dangerous foreign adventures.¹⁷

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In summary, British estimates of German military strength from 1934 to the spring of 1935 suggested that Germany might shortly reach the military status of a great power, that given her manpower and other resources, she might in time become the preponderant military power of Western Europe. The German Air Force was becoming increasingly formidable in numbers of modern aircraft but was seriously deficient in experienced personnel and organization.

¹⁶The Observer, July 8, 1934, p. 16 and 17.

¹⁷The Manchester Guardian, January 30, 1935, p. 12.
The Observer, March 3, 1935, p. 18.

The German Army, had lost some of its strength because of its very rapid expansion and the consequent lessening of its mobility, cohesiveness, and the dilution of its very highly trained personnel. Few British observers believed that either the German Air Force or the German Army posed more than a limited immediate threat to the Western Powers; many considered that the German forces were not yet sufficient to fend off a determined French effort to reoccupy the Rhineland. As far as future expansion was concerned, economic considerations alone seemed to suggest some possible limitation. The German Air Force generals seemed to have set parity with France as their immediate goal while the army generals gave every indication that they would be satisfied with an army peace-strength of twenty-one divisions. In addition, the full equipment of both the air force and the army would take considerable time, particularly as the German armaments industries were not working on a war-time basis.

Estimates of Hitler's ultimate intentions boiled down to a frank disbelief in his pacific assurances (on the basis of almost overwhelming but basically verbal evidence to the contrary) on the part of the professional diplomats, some Members of Parliament and newspaper correspondents. Yet editorials welcomed with various degrees

of optimism each new 'peace offensive' launched to coincide with the latest infraction of the Treaty of Versailles. If, or when, Germany decided to use force, it was felt that she would likely move east rather than west. In any event, serious military action was improbable for several years; the period of grace could possibly extend into the middle 1940's.

Part II

March 1935 - November 1937

CHAPTER 3

THE EMERGENCE OF GERMANY AS A GREAT MILITARY POWER

German rearmament became official in March of 1935. By this time Hitler had decided that the announcement of Germany's intention to build up her armed forces openly would not precipitate effective British, French or Italian intervention to enforce the Treaty of Versailles. Once large-scale German rearmament had become publicly acknowledged, British newspapers and to a degree Parliamentarians, lost some interest in the details of German rearmament. Outside events, the Abyssinian crisis, the Spanish Civil War, and the renewed Japanese intervention in China, diverted considerable attention from the course of German rearmament and from Hitler's military intentions. As a result, information about these aspects of Germany, particularly of her armed forces, is somewhat spotty between 1935-1937. What information about the German Armed Forces did find its way into British newspapers clearly mirrored the consolidation of German rearmament and the emergence of Germany as a first-class military power.

Instead of levelling off or declining as hoped, the pace of German rearmament was spurred on even faster between 1935 and 1937. In Parliament the expansion of

German fighting power was called "unprecedented probably in the whole history of any country."¹ Government officials increasingly referred to the dangers posed by the subordination of almost the whole of German industry to arms production. Mr. Baldwin outlined the dangers to Great Britain and the "tremendous power" that munitions manufacture on a "war basis" would bring to a country, if it were the only nation having the advantage.² While Mr. Baldwin did not specifically mention Germany, the reference was obvious. The Secretary of State for Air, the Marquess of Londonderry, was more blunt. On the same day that Mr. Baldwin spoke, May 22, 1935, he told the House of Lords that the organization of German industry was "perhaps still more menacing to the peace of the world and the safety of this country than the actual steps she has taken, or is at present taking towards the development of her Air Forces."³ According to Lord Lloyd and others, every material necessary for war production which was unavailable to Germany either naturally or synthetically was being imported in

¹House of Lords Debates 5th Session, volume 96, columns 996-997. Speech of Lord Lloyd on May 22, 1935. Hereafter cited as H.L. deb 5s, vol. col. date.

²H.C. Deb 5s, vol. 302, cols. 369-370, May 22, 1935.

³H.L. Deb. 5s, vol. 96, cols. 1015-1016, May 22, 1935.

great volume. The Rhineland "coup" of 1936 stimulated the general fear about German rearmament and the militarization of her economic life. Winston Churchill claimed that since Hitler had come to power, Germany had spent the equivalent of £ 1,500,000,000 sterling on preparing for war.⁴ All the productive and distributive trade of Germany had been co-ordinated with these preparations, and industrial programmes and plans had to be sanctioned by the Ministry of War. The General Staff also had control over public works such as railways and canals.⁵ Churchill claimed, and many would have agreed with him, that much of German industry was already working on a de facto war basis. German military equipment was being designed with two objectives in view; mass production, and simplicity of construction so that unskilled or women workers could be used in war-time.⁶ Speaking of German rearmament during the debate on the 1936 Defence White Paper, Sir Samuel Hoare said:

... there is the fact that no one can deny, not even the best friend of Germany, that the central factor in the European problem is German rearmament, that the central problem in our defence programme is German rearmament, and that what every Member in every part of the House is thinking this afternoon is

⁴H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 309, cols. 2006-2007, March 10, 1936.

⁵Ibid., vol. 315, cols. 1924-1925, Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher on July 31, 1936.

⁶H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 312, col. 1445, May 21, 1936.

German rearmament. It is significant ... that Herr Hitler has been able, in the course of so short a period as two years, to re-create Germany into a great military power⁷

By 1936, it was becoming increasingly common to describe German power as formidable, gigantic, overwhelming, etc. Yet some men tried to put Germany's overall strategic position into perspective and show that she was relatively weaker than she had been in 1914. Thus Mr. Lloyd George summed up his estimate of Germany as: "Germany, small; Germany with no allies; Germany with France, Russia and part of Austria against her."⁸ The Marquess of Lothian supported Lloyd George's estimate. He told the House of Lords:

Germany, whatever you say, is immeasurably weaker than she was before the War. Then she had not only the resources of much larger area, but could also draw on the immense Austro-Hungarian Army; she had an extra 45,000,000 people at her disposal as well as her Turkish and Bulgarian allies. At the end of the war she was denuded of the whole of her Western frontier fortresses; they are now in the hands of France. She is entirely cut off from East Prussia and a large part of Eastern Silesia; she has a great deal of territory taken away. The only friends she now has in Europe are small and obscure Powers.

The balance of this combination is overwhelmingly on the side of France, Russia,

⁷Ibid., vol. 309, col. 1867, March 9, 1936.

⁸Ibid., cols. 2034-2035. The "part of Austria" referred to was Czechoslovakia.

Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Italy
as against a diminished Germany.⁹

Lord Lloyd quoted figures to illustrate the overwhelming military strength of the nations opposed to Germany. These few voices trying to counter exaggeration about the relative armed strength of Germany and her neighbours went virtually unheard. Meanwhile, Germany continued to rearm and the military balance in Europe continued to shift in her favour; the most dangerous aspect of this process, from the British standpoint, was the continued and accelerated expansion of the Luftwaffe.

In March and April of 1935, Hitler repudiated those clauses of the Treaty of Versailles denying Germany a military air force and a conscript army, and further informed the Western Powers that Germany was to begin her naval rearmament by building submarines. Because the British had been well briefed on the growth of an illegal German Air Force, the announcement that it would be officially reconstituted as of April 1, 1935 did not cause too strong a reaction. However, the sudden news of Hitler's claim that Germany had already reached parity in first-line

⁹ H.L. Deb. 5s, vol. 100 cols. 204-205, March 24, 1936.

strength with Great Britain and soon intended to have parity with France caused a furor. During conversations, Hitler had showed the British Foreign Secretary and Anthony Eden a diagram giving the British a total strength of 2100 airplanes, including reserves, and implied that German strength was close to this figure.¹⁰ Although Churchill had predicted on March 19th that the declared strength of the new German Air Force would be at least 600 first-line aircraft and possibly double that figure, Parliament and the newspapers had accepted Mr. Baldwin's categorical statement of continued British superiority which he had made the preceding November.¹¹ Consequently, Hitler's boast led to considerable confusion in British estimates of German air strength.

Once again, a sharp divergence appeared in the respective estimates of German air strength put forward by the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office. Officials of the Air Ministry flatly contradicted the German assertion. Reliable secret information of their own as well as that of high officials in the German Air Ministry suggested a much lower figure, in the vicinity of 1,375 military

¹⁰The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 183.

¹¹H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 299, col. 1054, March 19, 1935

aircraft.¹² Further efforts to "correct" Hitler's statement led to greater confusion. The British air attaché in Berlin was told that the precise meaning of Hitler's statement was that Germany's first-line strength equalled the strength of the Royal Air Force including the squadrons stationed abroad and the naval air arm. This would give the Germans a first-line strength of some eight hundred to eight hundred and fifty aircraft, a thirty per cent superiority over the total number of squadrons stationed in Great Britain.¹³ The British Air Ministry maintained its opinion that the German claim was essentially a hollow boast; Germany did not have 800 - 850 aircraft organized into squadrons at operational air bases and supported by adequate reserves. In the House of Lords, the Marquess of Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air, explained the means by which Germany could claim such a large first-line strength:

Germany, as it appears from Herr Hitler's words, has decided to push forward into her first-line ... a larger proportion of her available air resources; for the German

¹² Derek Wood and Derek Dempster, The Narrow Margin (London:1961), p. 91, and The Earl of Avon op. cit., p. 184. The Foreign Office gave the figure of 1,375 as the Air Ministry estimate.

¹³ The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 183. Webster and Frankland op. cit., p. 69.

Government have informed us that they now claim to be already near parity with this country on the basis that their first-line strength is between 800 and 850 aircraft ... I must not be taken as accepting that figure as a reliable basis for comparison between the air strengths of our two countries as they stand to-day. I myself think they can only be justified, even superficially, by Germany including in her figures of first-line aircraft a greater proportion of her total air resources than is justifiable or compatible with what is necessary to provide and maintain an effective combatant force.

The Secretary of State further stated that Germany did not have nearly as many military aircraft as Britain.¹⁴

Unlike the Air Ministry, the Foreign Office generally accepted the German claim to parity. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister MacDonald on April 10th, the Foreign Secretary said he could see "no likely motive for the German Air Ministry deliberately to exaggerate to our air attaché the figure of their present air armaments."¹⁵

During the interval between Hitler's interview with the British officials and the Marquess of Londonderry's speech in the House of Lords, British newspapers published their own sources of information about German air strength. Many of the reports were both very accurate and at the same

¹⁴H.L. Deb. 5s., vol. 96, col. 1010, May 22, 1935.

¹⁵The Earl of Avon, op. cit., pps. 183-184.

time misleading. They were misleading because they did not differentiate either between a total number of planes and first-line strength or between war planes, military trainers and reserve aircraft. For example, on April 4th, the Berlin correspondent of the Manchester Guardian gave a figure of 1,800 war planes as the most frequently mentioned estimate of Germany's air strength. A month later, figures of 1,500 to 1,600 appeared in the same paper. This time, the source of the estimate was the diplomatic correspondent.¹⁶ This second estimate, although apparently smaller, could be considered as being much larger because the term 'first-line' suggested considerable numbers of airplanes in reserve. The Observer meanwhile, contented itself with the assertion that Germany had a two-to-one superiority over the British Home Air Force whose first-line strength was 500.¹⁷

The real strength of the German Air Force in March of 1935 was 1,888 aircraft; however, a very high proportion of these were military trainers. Hence, the total number of military aircraft in Germany organized in squadrons was probably less than the Air Ministry estimate

¹⁶The Manchester Guardian, April 4, 1935, p. 6 and May 10, 1935, p. 6.

¹⁷The Observer, April 28, 1935, p. 19 and p. 23.

of 1,375, or roughly half the number of airplanes Britain possessed at the time.¹⁸ Although the Air Ministry estimates of the number of military aircraft Germany possessed were the most accurate, the Air Ministry was forced to admit that its critics' assessment of German aircraft production was the more realistic.

Once again, as in 1934, much of the public concern about German air rearmament centred on the sheer scope of the German effort which gave every indication of being limited only by German technical, financial and human resources. Many critics of the Government estimates quoted figures showing the number of men employed in the German aircraft industry, and the rate at which this figure was increasing, to illustrate the scale of aircraft production. No one placed the number of men actively employed in aircraft production at any fewer than 100,000 as of May 1935, while one estimate placed the number of men employed by one aircraft factory at 132,000.¹⁹ The Foreign Office letter to Prime Minister MacDonald estimated that between the autumn of 1933 and the autumn of 1934, the number of

¹⁸Wood and Dempster, op. cit., p. 91 and The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 185.

¹⁹H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 302, col. 453, May 22, 1935; H.L. Deb. 5s., vol. 96, col. 996-7, May 22, 1935.

men employed in the aircraft industry had doubled and since then had increased by a further 83 per cent.²⁰

Another aspect of German aircraft production that caused increasing concern was the method of production. It had become obvious to some correspondents and Members of Parliament that the Germans had already begun to mass produce airplanes in at least some factories. According to Captain Balfour, a single requisition had called for 27,000 castings of a particular pattern sufficient to supply 3,000 engines of a particular type. Furthermore, orders of such size were frequent.²¹ Winston Churchill described the operation of the mass production principle at Dessau, one of the four or five main air factories in Germany, as follows:

... owing to the fact that the Germans had to prepare their air force in secret and unofficially, there has grown up a somewhat different method of producing aircraft from that which obtains in this country and in France. Much smaller elements are actually made in the main factories than are made over here. Nuts and bolts and small parts are spread over an enormous producing area of small firms, and then they flow into the great central factories. The work which is done there consists in a rapid assembly, like a jig-saw puzzle or meccano game, with

²⁰The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 184.

²¹H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 302, col. 412, May 22, 1935.

the result that airplanes are turned out with a rapidity which is incomparably greater than in our factories, where a great deal of the finer stages of the work are done on the spot.²²

Captain Balfour put the matter more succinctly when he said: "Aeroplane parts go in at one end and come out of a large sort of shed at the other as finished aircraft, four or five abreast."²³ At the same time, estimates of German production ranged from a low of 100 airplanes a month to more than 200. The figure of 125 a month was supported by the knowledge that at least five of the German aircraft factories were capable of producing one airplane a day. On this basis the minimum rate of production would be 120 aircraft a month.²⁴ However, the Foreign Office believed they had reason to estimate German production at "at least 200 per month and very probably more."²⁵

There is little doubt that the officials of the Air Ministry underestimated the capacity of the Germans to increase the rate of aircraft production and the rate

²²Ibid., col. 1058.

²³H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 302, col. 412, May 22, 1935.

²⁴H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 299, col. 1058 March 19, 1935; The Manchester Guardian, April 4, 1935, p. 6.

²⁵The Earl of Avon, p. 184, quoting from Foreign Office letter to Prime Minister MacDonald.

at which a determined regime could develop this capacity. The Foreign Secretary, explaining the apparition of a German Air Force apparently equal to the British said: "The rate of production of aeroplanes in Germany has increased very much more rapidly than our advisors thought likely when these calculations as to the future (strength of the German and British Air Forces) were presented last autumn."²⁶ The Marquess of Londonderry himself obliquely admitted the error of the Air Ministry, acknowledging in his memorandum on the state of the German Air Force that "there is reason to believe that the organization of the aircraft industry for war purposes in Germany is already in advance of that in this country" and that "the future, as opposed to the present, must cause grave concern."²⁷

The Foreign Office estimate of Germany's aircraft production, "200 per month and very probably more" was very close to the mark; Germany actually produced an average of 265 airplanes a month during 1935.

Nonetheless, "concern" about the future did not penetrate into the minds of the British Air Staff. On May 22, 1935 General Göring stated that Germany hoped to

²⁶H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 301, col. 683, May 2, 1935.

²⁷The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 185; Webster and Frankland, op. cit., p. 69.

achieve a first-line strength of 2,000 by the end of the year. The British Air Staff analyzed their information about the German Air Force and concluded that Germany might have 2,000 military pilots and airplanes by December 1935, but could not attain a first-line strength of 2,000 by British standards.²⁸ Instead, the Air Staff reasserted the estimate of the German expansion plan made in the fall of 1934; Germany planned to have a first-line strength of 1500 by April of 1937. The reasons for this stubbornness were not realistic, being based on estimates of intention and not on estimates of capacity. Germany was proclaiming her right to equality with France, which would have 1,500 first-line aircraft by 1937. In addition, the Air Ministry had circumstantial evidence relating to the German programme which suggested a figure of 1,512 as the objective for early 1937.²⁹ Contrasted to this optimistic prospectus were reports that when completed, the German Air Force would equal the combined French and Russian Air Forces.³⁰

²⁸Basil Collier, The Defence of the United Kingdom (London: 1957), p. 46 and 117-8.

²⁹Ibid., The Earl of Avon, op. cit., pps. 184-185.

³⁰The Manchester Guardian, May 10, 1935, p. 6.

Increasingly rigid military security and brutal treatment of informers in Germany made it difficult for newspaper correspondents and Members of Parliament to get reliable information about the German Air Force in 1936 and 1937. There was a tendency therefore, to calculate German first-line strength on the basis of the size of the German aircraft industry; hence the conviction throughout 1936 that Germany's first-line strength had already considerably surpassed that of Great Britain. Reports in the Observer spoke of the strength of the Luftwaffe trebling and then doubling on the basis of the size of the German aircraft industry, commercial air force, national discipline and determination. In March, the Times stated that Germany had a first-line strength of 800 aircraft, probably the most accurate estimate. The Manchester Guardian estimated that Germany had 1,200 first-line airplanes at the beginning of 1936 and that all the available evidence left no doubt that Germany had surpassed Great Britain in the air.³¹

Two of these reports deserve elaboration especially because they were similar in many respects. On

³¹H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 135, March 19, The Observer April 19, 1936, p. 19; The Manchester Guardian, June 3, p. 5; The Observer, June 21, 1936, p. 20.

June 21, 1936 the diplomatic correspondent of the Observer reported that the Luftwaffe had been doubled in the three previous months and that a "well-informed source" had predicted on a "conservative" basis, a German first-line strength of 3,000 aircraft with an equal number of second-line airplanes by the end of 1936.³² A report from the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian a week later gave the following information: the first-line airplanes of the Luftwaffe were organized into two hundred and ten squadrons and by 1937 the Germans intended to have a first-line of 3,300 and a reserve of 2,800.³³ Estimates of German aircraft production differed considerably; the Observer report stated that the German aircraft industry would be capable of producing 200 airplanes a month by the end of 1936 while the Manchester Guardian report stated that production had been increased to two hundred and fifty a month in March.

On the surface at least, 1936 completely vindicated the estimate of German expansion plans made by the British Air Ministry in the autumn of 1934 and obstinately maintained thereafter. In the autumn of 1936 the Air

³²The Observer, June 21, 1936, p. 20.

³³The Manchester Guardian, July 1, 1936, p. 11.

Ministry informed the Government that the second stage of the German expansion programme was almost completed. They credited Germany with a first-line strength of 1,100 aircraft organized into one hundred and fourteen squadrons. The first-line strength was less than the Air Ministry had anticipated in 1934 because the Germans had decreased the number of first-line aircraft in a squadron from twelve to nine. Although this estimate was confirmed by a confidential statement from the German Government, the Air Ministry had to warn the Government to expect a progressive expansion of the German Air Force to a first-line strength of at least 4,000 aircraft.³⁴

When the Government estimate of Germany's first-line strength became public, it was greeted with considerable scepticism, but the critics could not agree among themselves about the strength of the Luftwaffe. The two most formidable of these sceptics were Brigadier-General Groves and Winston Churchill. Of the two, Churchill made by far the better case. Writing in the Observer, Brigadier-General Groves quoted the Marquess of Londonderry's 1934 estimate that Germany had 1,000 military planes and continued:

³⁴Basil Collier, Barren Victories (London: 1964), pps. 46, 117, 118.

In view of Germany's colossal expenditure on armaments during the past two years, her great aircraft industry considerably expanded in the same period - her air transport system which is by far and away the largest and most highly developed in Europe, her network of aerodromes, and her hundreds of flying clubs, can it seriously be maintained that she has added no more than 200 machines in two years?

He placed the German first-line strength at 2,500 war-planes instead of the 1,200 estimated by the Government. Brigadier Groves' most glaring inaccuracy was the equation of a figure representing the total number of military planes with one representing a first-line strength.³⁵

Winston Churchill began his criticism with the assumption that Germany had at least one hundred and fifty formed squadrons. He then speculated on whether the difference between his and the Government estimate might not be his count of twelve German planes to the squadron. The German squadron was organized on the basis of three flights of three planes each with three aircraft in reserve.

These reserve planes were the same quality as the others and had first-rate pilots.³⁶ Churchill had already claimed that the Germans did not need any great pool of reserves because they could feed their squadrons directly from the

³⁵The Observer, November 15, 1936, p. 20.

³⁶H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 319, col. 1014, January 27, 1937.

factories and testing grounds.³⁷ Consequently, the full twelve airplanes of the German squadron could be included in her first-line strength giving her a first-line strength of 1,800 planes instead of 1,350. If the immediately available squadrons of Lufthansa, the German state airline, were added, Germany would have a first-line strength of 2,000, the figure quoted in the French Chamber.³⁸

A report of the Manchester Guardian's diplomatic correspondent illustrates the often contradictory nature of the unofficial estimates of the German Air Force. In July 1936 the correspondent had placed German first-line strength at a minimum of 1,200 aircraft organized into two hundred and ten squadrons as of the beginning of the year. On February 19, 1937 he reported that Germany had had about fifty squadrons with 750 first-line airplanes a year earlier. At the time of writing his later dispatch, he credited the Luftwaffe with 2,060 first-line airplanes, organized into a hundred and thirty-seven squadrons.³⁹

³⁷Ibid., vol. 309, col. 2014-2015, March 10, 1935.

³⁸Ibid., vol. 319, col. 1014, January 27, 1937.

³⁹The Manchester Guardian, July 1, 1936, p. 11; February 19, 1937, p. 15.

Few reports in British newspapers touched on either the composition of the Luftwaffe or on the quality of its equipment. In common with most of the European air forces, at least half, if not more, of its squadrons were known to consist of bombers but beyond this, little information found its way into the newspapers or was mentioned in Parliament. These bombers were thought to be both relatively slow and to have a relatively limited range of about four hundred miles. According to the Manchester Guardian the speed of the German bombers was 186 mph and the speed of the fighters was 211 mph and the speeds of both the Spitfire and the Hawker Hurricane were over 300 mph.⁴⁰ Press opinion of the performance of German planes was further lowered by the poor showing of German airplanes in the Spanish civil war. This apparent British superiority in quality was deceptive because obsolescent German airplanes were being compared to the most modern British types which were only available in very modest numbers. New German bombers were known to be on the way. There were some references to 'special bombers of a heavy type' and to faster bombers which were being produced in "vast

⁴⁰The Manchester Guardian, July 1, 1936, p. 11. The Spitfire and Hurricane were then "proto-types" and were not on issue to RAF Units for another two years.

quantities" but few if any references were made to any specific airplane. Once these more modern aircraft were sent to Spain, they made short work of their opposition.⁴¹

The most serious criticism made about the German airplanes in British newspapers concerned their sloppy construction caused by continued efforts to increase the production of German aircraft factories. Reports indicated a very large number of airplane crashes and equally high casualties among German military pilots, particularly those in training. These accidents killed as many as three or four German airmen a day and resulted, reportedly, in a waning enthusiasm for the Luftwaffe among young Germans.⁴²

The numerical strength of the German Air Force surpassed that of the Royal Air Force during the summer of 1937. It was perhaps ironic that after two years of either proclaiming or predicting German air supremacy, the critics of the RAF expansion plans should apparently

⁴¹H.L. Deb. 5s., vol. 100, cols. 133-134, March 19, 1935. Lord Strabolgi referred to German bombers with a speed of 250-300 mph. H.C. Deb. 5s, vol. 319, col. 968, reference to the Junkers J.U. 86. The Manchester Guardian February 19, 1937, p. 15.

⁴²Especially The Manchester Guardian, June 3, 1936, p. 5; also The Observer, June 21, 1936, p. 20, and Liddell Hart Europe in Arms (London: 1937), pps. 14-15.

fall silent while the event occurred: there was no worthwhile mention of the strength of the Luftwaffe in the three newspapers or in Parliament during the summer and fall of 1937.

The effect of the Air Ministry's warning that the British Government had to face the possibility of a further expansion of the Luftwaffe to a first-line strength of 4,000 aircraft was disastrously weakened in early 1937. A British air mission visited Berlin and Air Chief Marshall Sir Christopher Courtney, Director of Operations and Intelligence was shown the supposed German plan of expansion. Far from projecting an immediate increase to a first-line strength of 4,000 aircraft, the plan showed that Germany's first-line strength would only be 1,755 aircraft in September 1938 as opposed to a British strength of 1,736. Shortly before the visit to Germany, the Air Ministry had assured the Government, on the basis of their own information about the German expansion plan, of a continued British superiority, both in numbers as well as in overall quality, until the middle of 1938. Now, the Germans had thoughtfully supported the Air Ministry estimate. However, two other reports cast a pall on this optimistic forecast: the Foreign Office had calculated that Germany would have

a first-line strength of at least 2,500 airplanes with 1,700 bombers by April 1939 and a secret Defence report also showed that Germany would have 800 long range bombers by May 1937 while Britain would have 48.⁴³ There was more bad news to follow.

The Air Ministry's cherished illusions about the rate of future German expansion began to collapse in April 1937 when Vansittart forwarded reports from his informants showing that the old programme of Luftwaffe expansion which was to have been completed by 1938 had been replaced by one of greatly increased size. The new programme had already been introduced and supplementary construction in factories had started on March 15th.⁴⁴ Taken by surprise, the Air Ministry, in October 1937, was forced to revise its estimates of the future strength of the German Air Force. The Government was warned that the Germans would have a first-line strength of 3,240 first-line aircraft including almost 1,500 bombers by the end of 1939.⁴⁵

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⁴³The Earl of Avon, op. cit., pps. 483-486.

⁴⁴Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office (London: 1965), p. 135.

⁴⁵The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 492.

British estimates of Germany's air power between 1935-1937 present many paradoxes. On a day to day basis, the Air Ministry estimates were suprisingly accurate, yet the British Air Force was eclipsed by the German Luftwaffe. Most of the public pronouncements about German air power grossly underestimated actual German aircraft production, yet their estimates of Germany's first-line strength were usually exaggerated.

The Air Ministry made two major errors when calculating German strength. Air Staff officers did not take into account the tremendous expansion in the capacity of German industry to produce aircraft. Vansittart passed on to the Air Ministry very accurate reports estimating German potential production capacity at 500 airplanes a month. After analysis, the Air Staff concluded that the estimate was slightly exaggerated, but was not fundamentally at variance with their own views.⁴⁶ Yet, when presenting estimates of the future strength of the Luftwaffe, the Air Ministry does not seem to have taken this capacity into account. The second Air Ministry mistake was to assume that General Goring and the other officials of the German

⁴⁶Colvin, op. cit., p. 133. German monthly production did not exceed 500 per month until 1939.

Air Force would be governed by the spirit of the German General Staff and that the German Air Force would be built up rapidly but systematically with due attention paid to adequate reserves, careful organization, etc. Hence the Air Ministry held to their opinion that the Luftwaffe would reach a strength of about 1,500 by spring of 1937 with no further expansion for at least two years. These two years would be used, so the Air Ministry believed between October 1934 and June 1937, for consolidation and preparations for war instead of for further physical expansion. Unfortunately, the Luftwaffe was a Nazi creation, and its political leaders were as radical as the army generals tried to be conservative. Being themselves "professionals" the leaders of the Royal Air Force too often failed to realize that they were dealing with revolutionaries, prepared to organize German resources ruthlessly whatever the cost in human lives or economic efficiency. The objective of the Nazi Air Force leaders was primarily to give the Luftwaffe an aura of overwhelming strength, not to build up a perfect military machine. The British Air Ministry was consequently caught off guard and was unprepared for the German decision to continue to accelerate the formation of new units.

Critics of the Air Ministry estimates more accurately reflected the scale of the German effort in the air

and the spirit of the Luftwaffe in their estimates. As a result, they proved correct in the long run but generally made inaccurate estimates of Germany's first-line strength. A glance at the actual German production and allocation figures for 1935-1937 will show a major reason for the critics' exaggeration.

German factories produced a total of 3,183 airplanes in 1935, 5,112 in 1936 and 5,606 in 1937. Average monthly production each year increased from 265 airplanes in 1935 to 426 and 467 aircraft in 1936 and 1937 respectively. These actual figures of production were considerably higher than any British estimate of them. However, more than fifty per cent of these airplanes were trainers, not military airplanes. Many British observers failed to make allowance for the need to supply thousands of aircraft for training purposes. For example, of the first 3,000 or so aircraft produced under the expansion plan 2,168 were allotted to training while only 1,085 aircraft were allotted to operational units with training duties and a further 115 were supplied to Lufthansa.⁴⁷ Other reasons for exaggerating Germany's first-line strength were the difficulty in getting reliable information, the

⁴⁷Figures taken from Wood and Dempster, op. cit., pps. 41-43.

difference between various methods of calculating first-line strength and the failure to compensate for the very large number of aircraft smashed up in accidents.

By the end of 1937, the German Air Force was unquestionably the second largest air force in Europe (the Russian Air Force was numerically the largest) and perhaps the strongest on an overall basis. Furthermore, its margin of superiority over the French and British Air Forces was increasing. To outstrip the air power of the two western democracies in the incredibly short time of four years (roughly the time it took to design and produce a new airplane in quantity) was no mean feat and the menace of this 'miracle' was all the greater because the German General Staff was obviously trying to accomplish a similar feat.

The Expansion of the German Army

- I. Service in the Wehrmacht is based on compulsory military service.
- II. The German Army in time of peace, will comprise 12 army corps and 36 divisions.
- III. The complimentary legislation, regulating the introduction and operation of compulsory military service, will be submitted to the Cabinet as soon as possible by the Minister of Defence.

Adolf Hitler, decree of conscription
March 16, 1935

Hitler's announcement of a new Army law embodying the conscription of German youth and the expansion of the peace-time basis of the German Army surprised Great Britain because the magnitude of the expansion was unanticipated. Most commentators had expected the announcement of a mixed long and short service army of twenty-one divisions. In this way the strength of the Reichswehr could be built up, considerable reserves of trained men could be accumulated, all without too seriously dulling the cutting edge of the military machine built up by General von Seeckt. Full conscription, it was argued, would swamp the original 100,000 highly trained officers and men of the Reischwehr in tens of thousands of half-trained

recruits. Consequently, the news of Hitler's intention to introduce conscription and expand the German Army to thirty-six divisions instead of twenty-one came as a considerable shock to correspondents because it ran counter to what was known of the wishes of the German General Staff. The timing of the announcement caused a diplomatic shock as well, coming as it did on the eve of the Foreign Secretary's departure for Germany.

Initial analysis of Hitler's proclaimed intention of building up the German Army to twelve corps and thirty-six divisions, led to conflicting estimates by British correspondents of the man-power strength necessary for the 'new' German Army. The lowest estimate was made in the dispatch of the Berlin correspondent for the Manchester Guardian. As the German Propaganda Ministry placed the strength of the German division at 9,000, he estimated that the new divisions would have a total strength of 324,000, not much above the then current strength of the Reichswehr. The figure quoted by the diplomatic correspondent was "roughly half a million men."⁴⁸ Correspondents of the Times provided more detailed analyses, which were also considerably at variance. Their reports stated

⁴⁸The Manchester Guardian, March 18, 1935, p. 9.

that the new establishment of the German Army was a framework for expansion and did not represent a fait accompli. The correspondents calculated the likely strength of the German Army in different ways. Liddell Hart, the military correspondent, estimated the full-strength German division at 18,000. Thus thirty-six divisions would need at least 650,000 men as well as large numbers of corps and army troops. However, he considered it unlikely that the peacetime strength of the division would be more than 12,000 men or 440,000 for thirty six. Provision for corps and army troops would increase the total to between 500,000 and 600,000 men, perhaps more.⁴⁹ The Berlin correspondent made his calculations on the basis of 40,000 troops to a corps or 480,000 in all. While this figure included provisions for 120,000 long service technical troops, it made no adequate provision for corps or army troops.⁵⁰ In later dispatches the Berlin correspondent reassured readers that:

All available information tends to support the view that it would be foolish at present for foreign public opinion to take the German military service law as a reason for serious apprehension, whatever vague mis-

⁴⁹The Times, March 18, 1935, p. 14.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 12.

givings the general tendency towards rearmament in Europe may arouse.

He believed that the peace strength of the army was going to be 500,000 and no more, if only for financial reasons. At the time of writing he considered it more than doubtful that Germany had enough so-called defensive armaments to completely equip 400,000 men. The provision of adequate armaments was bound to take considerable time "in view of financial and raw material limitations from which even the army in Germany to-day is not entirely free."⁵¹

Another area of disagreement was in the respective estimates of the degree of professionalism they believed could be maintained in the expanded German Army. Liddell Hart considered that the Reichswehr was reverting to a mass army from a qualitative professional army. To him, the re-introduction of conscription was essentially a renouncement of von Seeckt's doctrine of quality and mobility.⁵² The Berlin correspondent reported that the German General Staff would make every effort to maintain "quality" as well as "quantity." This would be accomplished initially by resorting to 'selective' rather than mass conscription and later by dividing the army, once it had

⁵¹Ibid., March 19, 1935, p. 16 and March 20, 1935, p. 16.

⁵²Ibid., March 18, 1935, p. 14, see also L. Hart. op. cit., p. 24.

reached its essential maximum of 500,000 into a "spearhead" force of 200,000 long-service technical troops and an annual conscript force of 300,000.⁵³

It was immediately clear to all the correspondents that if Germany applied her right to "equality" arithmetically, as she seemed to be doing, she would eventually become the strongest single military power in Europe. The annual German class would number 300,000 once the contingent system was fully working, compared to a French contingent of 230,000. The French metropolitan army consisted of 25 divisions and about 400,000 men. Just before Hitler's announcement, she had had to increase the length of service for conscripts from eighteen to twenty-four months just to keep up her strength of 400,000. Germany, as a Times editorial said, was deliberately planning to have an army, not just equal to the largest non-Russian army, but bigger.⁵⁴ In fact, the attitude taken by the newspapers as well as officials in London was that it was just a matter of time before Germany became the dominant power on the continent. Few would deny the contention of the Survey of International Affairs for 1935 that,

⁵³ The Times, March 20, 1935, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., March 18, 1935, p. 13; The Manchester Guardian, March 18, 1935, March 29, 1935, pps. 10&13; The Observer drew attention to Germany's eventual preponderance from the spring of 1934.

... if this enormous expansion of Germany's armed forces was to be carried out, with all the weight of the German man-power and machine-power behind it, at the moment when France was entering upon her 'lean years,' then the military hegemony in Europe seemed bound to pass from France to Germany at some date between 1935 and 1939.⁵⁵

Estimates of both the immediate strength of the German Army and its eventual strength continued to escalate. Figures quoted in the French Chambre and mentioned in British newspapers, placed the strength of the German land forces at 800,000 men in November 1935. Aside from the regular army of 530,000 there were 30,000 military police, 40,000 auxiliary troops and 200,000 partially trained members of the labour corps. This total could rise within a few months to 900,000 - 1,000,000.⁵⁶ Yet, when the few months had elapsed reports indicated that by the end of 1936 Germany would have completed the organization of her thirty-six divisions and would be able to put 1,600,000 men in the field. This force would consist of 550,000 regulars, 250,000 conscripts and 800,000 graduates of a special eight week course.⁵⁷ The major difference in

⁵⁵Survey of International Affairs, A.J. Toynbee ed. (1935), vol. 1, p. 144.

⁵⁶The Times, November 20, 1935, p. 13.

⁵⁷The Manchester Guardian, February 4, 1936, p. 12.
The Survey ... op. cit., 1936, p. 123.

the two estimates was the appearance of these 800,000 men whose military value was very low. When the conscription scheme was introduced into Germany, in November 1935, the German General Staff had many more potential conscripts than they could hope to train adequately. One way of maintaining a degree of professional quality in the army and still providing it with mass reserves, according to the Manchester Guardian, was to train all those men who should have been called up for service between 1920-1933 (when conscription was not in effect) outside the regular army in special reserve battalions, where they could receive instruction for two months each summer.⁵⁸ While the object of doing this was to build up Germany's reserves of trained men, the 800,000 could not be compared in military value to the French reservists.

Two further increases were made in the size of the German Army during 1936. The length of service was doubled from one to two years in August. In theory, this would increase the size of the peace time German Army to 800,000 at least, and possibly to a strength of 1,200,000 if the extra reserves being trained were included.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The Manchester Guardian, January 8, 1936, p. 13.

⁵⁹ The Times, August 26, 1936, p. 11; p. 12. The Manchester Guardian, August 26, 1936, p. 13.

Most British correspondents believed that the new measure would be exploited qualitatively and not quantitatively because Germany did not have either the officers, non-commissioned officers, or the necessary weapons for even 900,000 or a million men.⁶⁰ The extra men would be used to maintain an even flow of about 300,000 recruits a year during the 'lean years' when the low birth rate during World War I would mean a substantial decrease in the number of men becoming of military age between 1935-1939. Despite the belief that the German General Staff would try to limit the influx of recruits, the continued construction of barracks, and the orders and promotions of the German Army suggested strongly that the number of divisions and corps in the army would be increased beyond the thirty-six originally announced.⁶¹

The announcement in October 1936 of the formation of three armoured divisions not only confirmed in part the suspicions of the correspondents about increases in the establishment of the German Army; it also confirmed the contention of the Paris correspondent of the Times that:

⁶⁰ The Manchester Guardian, August 26, 1936, p. 13; The Times, August 26, 1936, p. 11.

⁶¹ The Times, August 26, 1936, p. 11, October 21, 1936, p. 14.

A glance at the stages of development since German rearmament began - long before it was openly admitted - points to the conclusion that Germany will have precisely the military forces she wants as she wants them and can organize them, and that increases will be made known, if at all, precisely when and as it may seem expedient for reasons of home or foreign policy, or both.⁶²

Once again estimates of the eventual size of the German Army were thrown into confusion. The establishment seemed to be thirty-six infantry and three armoured divisions. Yet some authorities were suggesting that the ratio between armoured divisions and infantry divisions should be one to three. This would mean a German Army of some forty-eight divisions.⁶³ On February 19, 1937, the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote that two new army corps and fifteen new infantry divisions had been formed since the beginning of the year. The report could be interpreted as suggesting that these divisions, or the majority of them, were in addition to the thirty-six authorized by Hitler's decree.⁶⁴

Concerned almost solely with the mass of the German Army, few correspondents made any effort to assess the

⁶²Ibid., August 26, 1936, p. 12.

⁶³Ibid., October 21, 1936, p. 14.

⁶⁴The Manchester Guardian, October 31, 1936, p. 17.

state of its organization or of its weapons. The result was not only an exaggerated picture of the number of men and divisions in the German Army but also a rather lopsided picture of strength during 1935 and 1936. It took the German General Staff until October 1936 to organize twenty-eight divisions. At this time the skeletons of a few other divisions existed but the headquarters staffs of the eleventh and twelfth corps had just been formed.⁶⁵ In early 1937 the British Chiefs of Staff reported that Germany would be able to mobilize thirty-six infantry divisions and three armoured divisions by May of that year.⁶⁶ While this was a conservative estimate, it was a much more accurate assessment than those that had appeared in the press and had been quoted in the French Chambre.

The manoeuvres held by the German Army in September of 1935, 1936 and 1937 furnished foreign observers some opportunity to gauge the progress of German training and to witness again the organizational genius of the German General Staff. All the foreign guests were impressed by the spirit and enthusiasm of the troops taking part in

⁶⁵J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power (London: 1961), p. 349.

⁶⁶The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 486.

the exercises; and a report referred to the "almost fanatical spirit of military devotion and technical keenness amongst both officers and men."⁶⁷ Discipline, camouflage and small tactics also drew favourable comment. However, the chief interest of the 1937 manoeuvres was in the use of tanks on the battlefield.

As a relatively new formation, the armoured divisions of the German Army drew more attention than the infantry divisions. On February 19, 1937 the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian reported that the German cavalry was being absorbed into the armoured divisions and was to be used as the nucleus of future divisions. One of the armoured divisions was supposed to consist of a regiment of artillery, a motorized detachment, a regiment of cavalry and two regiments of tanks with two hundred and fifty tanks each.⁶⁸ This account of the organization of an armoured division differed only slightly from that given by the military correspondent of the Times in his book Europe in Arms which was published in 1937. According to this book, the armoured divisions had three parts: one for probing, one for hitting, and one for holding. The offensive

⁶⁷The Manchester Guardian, January 13, 1936, p. 9.

⁶⁸The Manchester Guardian, February 19, 1937, p. 15.

"punch" was concentrated in a tank brigade which was supposed to consist of three regiments with a total of six hundred tanks. Fast but light tanks armed with two machine guns in their turrets were the basis of the armoured division.⁶⁹ Reports from Spain, where Germany was testing her new weapons in the civil war, indicated that these tanks were only a limited success; they had not proved adequate for attacks on strongly fortified positions and were easily damaged.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the handling of the German tanks was not considered to be too good. In the manoeuvres of 1936, although tank attacks were parried by anti-tank guns instead of other tanks, "the tank units still betrayed the newness of this unit in Germany."⁷¹ Another report from Spain indicated that the handling of tanks in battle was equally poor. Nevertheless, the German General Staff apparently tended to regard tanks chiefly as a weapon for achieving a "break through" against strongly fortified lines and were coming to believe that decisive battles could only be won by massed formations of tanks, airplanes, artillery and infantry.⁷²

⁶⁹Liddell Hart, op. cit., p. 27.

⁷⁰The Manchester Guardian, March 30, 1937, p. 9.

⁷¹The Times, September 28, 1936, p. 11.

⁷²The Manchester Guardian, March 30, 1937, p. 9. This was the general view of how tanks should be used as opposed

Unlike the period from 1933-1935, reports in the three newspapers between 1935-1937 showed a surprising agreement in the amount of time it would take Germany to complete her rearmament. No date later than 1940 was mentioned and the usual estimate was either 1938 or 1939. This was a significant change from the earlier estimates and was essentially a tribute to the determination of Hitler, the expansion plans laid down by General von Seeckt and the organizational abilities of the German General Staff.

While very few estimates of the capability of the German Army to launch an offensive were made in either the newspapers or Parliament, it was obvious that the German Army was not yet ready for a major war by the end of 1937. In Europe in Arms Liddell Hart wrote:

Against a country with an open frontier or an army inadequately equipped with anti-tank guns, their new armoured divisions might prove a formidable factor in the opening phase of a war, but there is cause for doubt whether the German Army has yet developed the equipment or the tactics to solve the problems created by a strong and thoroughly modern defence.⁷³

⁷²to the theories of Liddell Hart, Brigadier General Fuller, Charles de Gaulle, General Guderian, etc.

⁷³Liddell Hart, op. cit., p. 28.

General Ironsides, a senior officer in the British Army who attended the German manoeuvres in September 1937, was equally convinced of the unpreparedness of the German Army for a major conflict. Two entries in his diary probably reflect the views he reported to the war office.

He wrote:

I am quite sure that they are nowhere near ready for war, even at the tempo they have been going. If I were to hazard a guess, I might say 1940 When they have had several more manoeuvres and exercises they may go a little quicker

The second quotation lacks neither irony nor the grim humour of professional soldiers. When General Ironsides was drinking with three German generals:

In the end Reichenau wanted to drink to "brotherhood with England but only for two years." Most amusing, and I don't think that any of the three villains saw any humour in their toast, which I drank enthusiastically. I wonder if there is anything prophetic in 1940 or 1941? There is no doubt that these people are not ready. Not for a big foe. I am sure of that. But will they try it out on the dog first?⁷⁴

A further question would be, what 'dog' was the most likely victim?

⁷⁴Colonel R. Macleod and D. Kelly, The Ironside Diaries (London, 1962), p. 27.

CHAPTER 4

ESTIMATES OF HITLER'S MILITARY INTENTIONS 1935 - 1937

For a short time after Hitler's announcement of conscription, there was some concern lest he be tempted to follow his success in repudiating the military clauses of Versailles with an attempt to repudiate some territorial clauses of the Peace Treaties. . Initially at least, the Austrian Nazis were known to hope that if Germany were strong enough to repudiate the military restrictions imposed on her, she would be strong enough within six months to force through Anschluss. However, none of the newspaper correspondents believed that there would be any serious trouble in Austria for some time. The Austrian Nazis were badly disorganized and it would probably be another two or three years (1938--or 1939) before Germany was strong enough "to make her weight felt in Europe." As yet, she was still too weak to risk incurring war with France and Italy over the Austrian question.¹ Articles in both the Observer and the Manchester Guardian showed that Austria was the key to Hitler's Pan-German ambitions and that his policy of gradual subversion might easily

¹The Manchester Guardian, March 27, 1935, p. 14; July 27, 1935, p. 10; January 11, 1936, p. 13.

prove successful in the end. The article in the Observer on March 31, 1935 suggested that after economic and political union with Austria had been achieved, Czechoslovakia would be disrupted by her "exulting minority of three and a half million Germans"; Hungary would be up in arms "at once or soon after" and Germany would demand the return of Upper Silesia and the Corridor from Poland offering her compensation, "which she would not receive," at Russian and Lithuanian expense.² In the Manchester Guardian L.B. Namier, a distinguished historian, stressed the strategic and political importance of Vienna to Central and Eastern Europe. The loss of Austria to Hitler would mean the loss of Czechoslovakia which in turn could lead to attacks on both flanks of Yugoslavia and Rumania by the Magyars and Bulgars.³ Editorials in both newspapers stressed that if Austria disappeared as an independent country, so would Czechoslovakia and possibly Poland and at least one editorial in the Manchester Guardian admitted that it was doubtful whether the Anschluss could be averted.⁴

Germany's other Pan-German ambitions were also

²The Observer, March 31, 1935, p. 18.

³The Manchester Guardian, June 28, 1935, p. 11.

⁴The Manchester Guardian, July 27, 1935, p. 10; November 25, 1935, p. 8; January 11, 1936, p. 13; The Observer, February 9, 1936, p. 16.

affected by her military weakness. This fact was stressed over and over again in the Manchester Guardian. Poland was putting economic pressure on the increasingly Nazi-dominated regime in Danzig and editorials in the newspaper warned that if and when German rearmament was completed she would not remain indifferent to the fate of the German Danzigers. For the time being Poland, as Germany's only friend, could afford to blackmail her. While Poland maintained her armed neutrality, she afforded Russia automatic protection from German attack but she herself had to fear Russo-German collusion.⁵ Czechoslovakia was being increasingly threatened by the growth of the Sudeten Nazi Party. A report from the diplomatic correspondent in February 1936 said that the Pan-German agitation among the Sudetens was so great that it was rapidly becoming a matter of national survival to Czechoslovakia itself:

It leaves no room whatever for doubt that it is the intention of Hitlerite Germany to dismember Czecho-Slovakia when the occasion arises.⁶

Throughout the latter part of 1935 Hitler was assumed to be marking time in foreign affairs until he saw how the

⁵Manchester Guardian, March 19, 1935, p. 10; July 5, p. 10; July 25, p. 8; August 3, p. 10; August 10, p. 10.

⁶Ibid., February 6, 1936, p. 14; also May 21, 1935, p. 10.

'collective' system of security and the League of Nations withstood the shock of the Italian attack on Abyssinia. At this time, it was not expected that Hitler was contemplating more than the Abyssinian crisis and Austria.

The Rhineland 'Coup'

The re-occupation of the Rhineland by German troops on March 7, 1936 'surprised' the British and French without any plans for a military countermove although they had had ample warning and information about German activities in the demilitarized zone. Early in 1934, the Italian Military Attaché in Berlin informed his British counterpart that work on field fortifications in the demilitarized zone east of the Rhine had already been secretly started.⁷ Vansittart's April Memorandum on the future of Germany warned:

The French are right as regards the demilitarized zone. It is only a question of time, at most until Germany is strong enough to prevent re-occupation, before some overt break of treaty obligations occurs there⁸

A year later at the Stresa Conference, the French tried to

⁷DBFP, ser. 2, vol. 6, appendix iii, p. 979.

⁸Ibid., doc. 347, p. 545.

table a detailed summary of illegal military activities in the Rhineland. Rhenish para-military troops were receiving intensive training, a large military camp had been established outside Cologne and fortifications were under construction west of Coblenz. This and other information had led the French to believe that the pace of the reoccupation was being speeded up and that unless some action were taken, the Western Powers would be faced by a fait accompli.⁹

Shortly after the reintroduction of conscription, an editorial in the Manchester Guardian speculated on the possibility that Hitler might decide to sweep aside the demilitarized zone. A few months later, another editorial commented on the German charge that the Franco-Russian Agreement shook the validity of the Treaty of Locarno; if the Treaty of Locarno were invalid, the editorial pointed out, so were the clauses governing the demilitarized zone.¹⁰ When the Agreement came up for ratification, German newspapers began to hint that Germany might be forced to reoccupy the Rhineland. These hints of drastic action became stronger as time went on.

⁹The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 180. Both the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Locarno forbade the remilitarization of the Rhineland.

¹⁰The Manchester Guardian, March 18, 1935, p. 8; June 4, p. 10.

The first reaction in British newspapers to reports of the possible re-occupation of the demilitarized zone was one of scepticism. This reassuring view was shared and probably encouraged by the British Government. The diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian reported in two articles on the 15th and 20th of January 1936 that nothing was known in London of any German intention to send troops into the Rhineland. Germany not only had no valid excuse for doing so, but for awhile at least, she had every interest in respecting the Locarno pact which protected her as much as it did France.¹¹ The report of the Times Berlin correspondent confirmed the view that Germany was unlikely to take direct action but did stress that there was strong pressure to recover military freedom in the Rhineland.¹² Although Germany was not expected to openly violate the Treaty of Locarno, none of the reports suggested that she would continue to accept the demilitarized zone forever. In this respect, the editorial in the Guardian of February 1, 1936 is interesting particularly because it claimed that no military action would be taken against Germany even if she did unilaterally denounce the

¹¹Ibid., January 15, 1936, p. 12 and January 20, p. 11.

¹²The Times, January 18, 1936, p. 12.

demilitarized zone. The editorial stated in part:

It is officially assumed that Germany will not challenge "Locarno" for a long time to come. But for how long a time? One year? Five years? Ten years? We cannot tell; it is not inconceivable that the challenge will come in a few months. It may take one of several forms. Germany may occupy the bridge-heads with military forces and then, finding nothing very disastrous ... happens, proceed to occupy the rest of the Rhineland. Or she may occupy the whole of the demilitarized zone at once and dare the Western Powers to do their worst, which whatever it may be, will not be war.¹³

Altogether it was a strikingly accurate assessment of what proved to be the Western reaction to Hitler's 'coup.' Nevertheless, both this editorial and other reports suggested a more likely course for Hitler to take.

As an alternative to sending troops into the Rhineland, Hitler was expected to negotiate a legal re-entry or symbolic remilitarization in return for a new Western settlement which would preserve the bilateral parts of the Treaty of Locarno and which would be based on equality between France and Germany. If these negotiations failed, then Germany might act unilaterally.¹⁴

¹³The Manchester Guardian, February 1, 1936, p. 12; The Times, January 18, 1936, p. 12.

¹⁴Ibid., and the Times, Feb. 1, 1936, p. 12. This was the gist of a conversation between the British and German Foreign Ministers. See the Earl of Avon op. cit., p. 332.

After February 4th, reports from the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian indicated both the impatience of the German Government and the reluctance of some German leaders to gamble on the reaction of Britain and France. On February 5th he reported that there was no evidence of a German intention to raise the question of the demilitarized zone in the near future. The next day he wrote that Germany would demand the right to remilitarize the Rhineland much sooner than expected despite the fact that the military leaders and many political leaders of Germany doubted that Germany should risk a crisis when they had no ally to support them.¹⁵ This was the only suggestion in the three newspapers prior to the event that the German generals were profoundly disturbed by, and opposed to, Hitler's intentions.

It was not until early March that the possibility of immediate German action in the Rhineland was discussed.¹⁶ By March 7th, however, there were reports that Hitler had been in consultation with his senior cabinet ministers and the chiefs of the armed forces and would likely denounce the clauses of the treaties of Versailles

¹⁵The Manchester Guardian, February 5, 1936, p. 6; February 6, 1936, p. 14; February 7, 1936, p. 7.

¹⁶The Times, March 3, 1936, p. 13.

and Locarno dealing with the demilitarization of the Rhineland. The article in the Times also stated that Hitler was not expected to announce immediate remilitarization, "but with Herr Hitler the unexpected often happens."¹⁷

Judging from the Parliamentary debates and the three newspapers there was little discussion of the strategic importance of the demilitarized zone to Central and East European security from German attack. In the middle of February 1936, the Foreign Office informed the Cabinet:

... the disappearance of the demilitarized zone will not merely change the local military values but is likely to lead to far-reaching political repercussions of a kind which will further weaken France's influence in Eastern and Central Europe, leaving a gap which eventually be filled either by Germany or by Russia.¹⁸

The diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote that, "... in no case can she (Germany) be expected to move in the east, or even in Austria until she has secured her rear - that is to say, until she has reoccupied and refortified the demilitarized zone."¹⁹ An article in the Observer was more explicit. The Paris correspondent noted that fortifications built on Germany's

¹⁷ Ibid., March 7, 1936, p. 12; The Manchester Guardian March 7, 1936, p. 13.

¹⁸ The Earl of Avon, op. cit., p. 335.

¹⁹ The Manchester Guardian, March 9, 1936, p. 14.

western frontier could be made impregnable with 300,000 troops "while the rest of her armed forces would be perfectly free to start a war of conquest in the east." In the French view, according to the report, German fortifications on the Rhine would greatly increase the danger of war because only Germany's relatively exposed position in the west restrained her military ambitions elsewhere.²⁰

After the German Army had marched into the Rhineland it was once again the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian who drew attention to the obvious military advantages Germany had gained. If Germany were allowed to maintain full sovereignty over the Rhineland, she would have an enormous strategic advantage over France. The Rhine river was an almost impassable barrier in the rear of the German 'centre' and 'right' and it protected the front of her 'left.' France had no similar natural defence and the Maginot line encouraged a German plan to advance on Paris through Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg. In summary:

... Germany by reoccupying the Rhineland achieves the double aim of making herself impregnable in the west and of achieving her maximum offensive power in the west also.

²⁰The Observer, February 23, 1936, p. 12.

She thereby secures a free hand against the Eastern and Central European Powers, for France would have the greatest possible difficulty in coming to their help without inviting self-destruction.²¹

Although Parliament met on March 9th and 10th and the Rhineland was discussed, it was not until March 26th that any reference was made to the strategic consequences of Hitler's action. Mr. Eden, the Foreign Secretary, speaking on the foreign situation said: "Few people in this country realize the immense significance to certain parts of Europe of that demilitarized zone."²² While its importance to France and Belgium was occasionally brought home, only two or three backbenchers, among them Brigadier-General Spears and Winston Churchill spoke in some detail. The rest of the House avoided the military implications of the Rhineland 'coup' to Austria and Czechoslovakia.²³ Less than two weeks later, Churchill informed the House that Germany was fortifying the Rhineland and predicted that a barrier of "enormous" strength would be built within three to six months. Again he emphasized the strategic impact these fortifications would have on Western and

²¹The Manchester Guardian, March 9, 1936, p. 14.

²²H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 310, col. 1445, March 26, 1936.

²³Ibid., cols. 1509-1510 and 1527-1528.

Central Europe. Other reports supported his information. While they did not approach the strength of the Maginot Line in France, the fortifications did include a series of strong points, permanent trenches and fieldworks with machine gun and anti-tank posts.²⁴ By the time the Survey of International Affairs for 1936 was published in late 1937, the importance of a refortified Rhineland had become more obvious; the absorption of Austria by Germany seemed "inevitable" and the next most likely victim would probably be Czechoslovakia.²⁵

Speculation about possible German intentions after the Rhineland crisis followed a pattern set by the German Propaganda Ministry; the various 'crises' instigated by German newspaper attacks were reflected by newspapers in Great Britain. Between March and July of 1936 it was the turn of Austria. There were repeated hints of impending German action to end Austrian independence. Hitler had made no mention of Austria when proposing non-aggression pacts to Eastern and Western neighbours and the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian reported:

²⁴Ibid., col 2484, April 6, 1936 and The Manchester Guardian, May 15, 1936, p. 15.

²⁵The Survey of International Affairs 1936, (London: 1937, p. 478.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the reoccupation of the Rhineland is in its method a precedent and in its accomplishment a prelude to the invasion of Austria²⁶

This was the common view, both in Austria and in Great Britain before the first shock of Hitler's move into the Rhineland wore off.²⁷ Although Austria's continued independence seemed in continual jeopardy during April and early May it was still doubted whether the disorganized, ill-armed Austrian Nazi Party could overthrow the government by itself and equally doubted that Hitler would risk another exploit so soon after the Rhineland and while German rearmament was still incomplete.²⁸ Thereafter the pressure eased and an Austro-German Agreement emerged in July; Hitler had apparently put off the absorption of Austria for an indefinite period.

No sooner had conjecture about the possibility of a sudden coup de main against Austria died down, than a German press offensive was launched against the separation of Danzig from Germany. Here too, dispatches in the newspapers gave reasons both for and against German inter-

²⁶ The Manchester Guardian, March 9, 1936, p. 14.

²⁷ The Times, March 11, 1936, p. 15; The Observer, March 8, 1936, p. 24.

²⁸ The Manchester Guardian, April 18, 1936, p. 16; April 28, p. 6; April 29, p. 6; April 30, p. 7. The Times, May 1, 1936, p. 15.

vention. German military and naval officers saw Danzig as a potential base for operations in Northeastern Europe. If Danzig were seized, Germany could then secure the Lithuanian territory of Memel which also had a Nazi dominated German majority. Germany would then expand along the Baltic and if Russia intervened, she could be pictured as the aggressor.²⁹ Intervention in Danzig was also less likely to precipitate a general war than was Anschluss with Austria. Finally, Germany feared Poland, the 'protector' of Danzig, much less than she feared the military power of Italy.³⁰ The evidence against such a move was less conclusive. Ordinarily, there was a long period of warning before the Germans acted, so the press attacks probably were the opening 'bombardment' in a long campaign that would not reach its climax until at least 1938, when the German General Staff might be prepared to risk war with Poland.³¹

Toward the end of 1936 and during 1937 the emphasis of German propaganda, and hence of British estimates of German intentions, shifted from the problems of Danzig

²⁹The Manchester Guardian, July 3, 1936, p. 10, July 13, pps. 8,12.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹The Times, July 6, 1936, p. 13.

to those of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia and the problem of the Sudetenland Germans were considered to have become the major obsession of Hitler and the most likely cause of a possible Central European war some time in the future. The feeling of impending crisis was stimulated by reports that Hitler was on the verge of action but had held his hand because German rearmament was not sufficiently advanced.³² Because Germany was not thought to be strong enough to force a direct confrontation, some British critics felt he would adopt a policy of indirect attack. Czechoslovakia would become another Spain where Germany would intervene with volunteers to assist the Sudeten Germans in a revolt while maintaining the appearance of non-intervention.³³

Military evidence, rather than speculation about a possible German intention of attacking Czechoslovakia, was reported only in the Manchester Guardian. In January and again in April, a special correspondent wrote that German military activity on the Czechoslovakian frontier was more of an offensive than a defensive nature.³⁴

³²The Manchester Guardian, December 15, 1936, p. 14, January 13, 1937, p. 6.

³³H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 321, col. 221, March 2 1937; vol. 328, col. 365, Oct. 27, 1937; Survey op. cit., 1936, pps. 479-80; The Times, Jan. 29, 1937, p. 15.

³⁴The Manchester Guardian, Jan. 15, 1937, p. 6; April 13, p. 6; July 20, pps. 6, 10.

Germany had built a large number of permanent fortifications opposite Poland, but the fortifications on the Czechoslovakian frontier were not of a particularly defensive character and indicated that the German General Staff thought in terms of a holding action opposite Poland and an offensive against Czechoslovakia. Other evidence supported this conclusion. Garrisons in the frontier regions had been increased and so had the number of irregular troops. Munich had become the centre of an extensive system of strategic roads and supply dumps being built to service the large numbers of air bases and barracks near the frontier. The positioning of heavy long-range guns behind the German lines suggested to the correspondent siege operations against Czech defences instead of protection of what German defences there were. Nevertheless, all those suggestions could be considered defensive, having become necessary because of Czechoslovakia's alliances with France and Russia. However, the notable lack of haste in constructing permanent defensive fortifications on the Czechoslovakian frontier tended to contradict Hitler's claim of a 'Bolshevik-Czech' threat to Germany.

While the threat of a German attack on Czechoslovakia mounted during 1937, the belief that Germany intended to launch a crusade against Soviet Russia (if such a crusade

became possible) wavered. Many observers felt that the German General Staff would not encourage a life and death war with a Soviet Russia whose military leaders and military power they respected. This view can be illustrated by the speeches of two Members of Parliament, Mr. Boothby, speaking on March 26, 1936, and Mr. Grenfell, speaking a year later, on March 2, 1937. The major fallacy of those who wanted to make unlimited concessions to Germany, Mr. Boothby said, was the idea that Germany and Russia would fight each other. The German General Staff, he thought, was unlikely to choose the "hardest military road" when they had

stretching before them the most alluring road which they have trod before with great success, which begins at Vienna, goes on to Belgrade, and finishes up at Bucharest - Prague would be very early in the line, almost before Vienna.³⁵

Mr. Grenfell believed that the danger of a joint Polish, German, and Japanese surprise attack on the Soviet Union had faded, at least for the time being.³⁶

In 1937, several reports indicated that even some leading Nazis had lost their enthusiasm for a "super-

³⁵H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 310, col. 1497-1498, March 26, 1936.

³⁶Ibid., vol. 321, col. 201, March 2, 1937. L.B. Namier had dismissed the possibility of a Polish-German attack on Russia as "mere bubbles"; see The Manchester Guardian, June 28, 1935, p. 11.

Napoleonic march on Moscow." The great Stalinist purges of the Soviet political, military and industrial leaders had begun and the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote that the National Socialist Party hoped that imminent internal conflicts would eliminate the Bolsheviks and Stalin as well as weaken Russian military strength. The Conservatives (army generals, diplomats and industrialists) on the other hand, thought that Russia was evolving into a nationalistic, militaristic state dominated by General Voroshiloff, and not into a communist state.³⁷ There was also a conviction that the supposedly violent antipathy expressed in public by Russian and German political leaders was more superficial than real and could ultimately change into a spirit of collaboration.³⁸

While the British strongly distrusted the military intentions of Germany with respect to Central and Eastern Europe, few believed in the possibility of a German attack in the west against either Great Britain, France or the Low Countries. Germany seemed perfectly satisfied with her western frontiers and the issue of the restoration

³⁷The Manchester Guardian, November 26, 1936, p. 6; March 3, 1937, p. 11; April 5, 1937, p. 6..

³⁸The Observer, November 26, 1936, March 14, 1937.

of her pre-war colonies was not regarded as a likely cause of war. Opponents of the policy of the British Government could only point to the possibility of an overt and covert German and Italian occupation of Spain. They feared that if victorious, General Franco, the leader of the nationalist-fascist revolt, would be forced to surrender to any German or Italian demands for air and naval bases in return for the support Franco had received. In July 1937 several Members of Parliament insisted that General Franco was mounting heavy howitzers on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar with German help. These howitzers were supposed to have sufficient range to close the Straits and to make the Gibraltar dockyard and anchorage untenable. While men like Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Churchill saw a strong ulterior motive in the emplacement of the guns, other Members were equally convinced that the gun emplacements had been constructed to protect nationalist territory from bombardment by Loyalist warships. The government admitted the existence of some guns "of smallish calibre" capable of firing over the Straits but denied that they constituted a menace to Gibraltar.³⁹ The episode showed

³⁹H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 326, cols. 1917-1922, July 19, 1937. Debates on Spain were not without irony. The government turned a blind eye to increasing overt intervention by Italy and Germany while the Liberal and Labour

how deeply German intentions were suspected and how anxious some people were to prove that the Nazi regime posed a direct threat to Great Britain.

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The so-called "Hossbach Memorandum"⁴⁰ of a conference between Hitler and his senior military and diplomatic advisers offers an insight into both the General Staff's estimate of the relative strength of the German Army and into Hitler's military priorities. His reasons for calling this meeting are obscure. The most popular interpretation has been that Hitler was irrevocably determined to go to war at this time.⁴¹ Recently, however, there has been a tendency to downgrade the "Hossbach Memorandum" and to consider it the outcome of an impasse between Hitler, who wanted to continue full-scale rearmament, and Hitler's Minister of Economics, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, who

³⁹Opposition became intensely concerned about the menace a Fascist Spain could pose to Imperial communications. It was one of the few times after the World War that the Labour Party allowed the "old discredited idea" of military strategy to impinge upon a question of foreign policy.

⁴⁰Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, series D, vol. 1, pps. 29-39.

⁴¹William L. Shirer in: The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, Crest Books, (1962), p. 422 says: "Hitler had communicated his irrevocable decision to go to war." The Survey ... for 1938 vol. 2, p. 2 states, "from 1937 onwards, The Second World War was being actively engineered by Hitler." There are numerous other examples.

was worried about the effect of continued massive rearmament on the German economy.⁴² Neither explanation seems particularly adequate.

As a "blueprint of aggression," the Memorandum was a complete failure. Beginning with the assumption that the German people needed more space to secure self-sufficiency, particularly in foodstuffs, Hitler then assessed the strengths and weaknesses of Germany's two "hate-inspired antagonists," Britain and France. To this point, the Memorandum bears some resemblance to a military 'operations order' - both the 'situation' and the 'mission' had been set forth and discussed; but the core of an operations order, the 'execution' or the means by which Germany would impose her will on her neighbours, was weak and almost entirely passive. The process of expansion "could only be carried out by breaking down resistance and taking risks," and had to be accomplished by 1943-1945 at the latest, before the weapons of the German Army became obsolete. Yet military operations against Czechoslovakia could only be undertaken if the French Army were effectively neutralized, either through internal strife or in a war with Italy. The only way Hitler offered to bring about

⁴²A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London: 1961), p. 97.

this condition was to keep the Spanish pot boiling as long as possible and hope for the best. If Germany herself became embroiled in the west, Czechoslovakia and Austria would have to be attacked simultaneously to remove their threat to the German flank. This event too, was unlikely because the only likely casus belli between Germany and France was a German attack on Czechoslovakia or Poland, French allies. Finally, when General von Fritsch, Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, suggested that he should not take his annual leave after the conference, but draw up plans instead, he received no encouragement from Hitler. While the minutes of the conference do not bear the stamp of a blueprint for aggression, it seems unlikely that the sole purpose of the meeting was to isolate Dr. Schacht from his fellow Conservatives. Dr. Schacht's opposition was an embarrassment to Hitler but Hitler generally preferred to play his men off against each other in private or find more direct ways than a conference. Perhaps the major reason for Hitler's intervention in the meeting was to assert his belief that events would continue to break in favour of the Nazis, and that his string of seemingly impossible 'coups' had not reached its end with the reoccupation of the Rhineland twenty months earlier.

The Hossbach Memorandum did, however, confirm

some of the British estimates of German strength and intentions. Germany had reached the end of her vulnerable period and had reached the status of a great power but not the greatest power. Militarily, both Hitler and his generals were agreed that the German Army could deal with the Czechs provided - and the generals stressed this much more strongly than did Hitler - the French Army did not intervene. Also confirmed was the growing conviction that Czechoslovakia was the most likely victim of attack; the 'Bolshevist menace' was not mentioned nor were possible moves in Danzig or in the west. Hitler was waiting on events but felt that Germany was strong enough to act if an opportunity appeared.

Part III

December 1937 - September 1939

CHAPTER 5

THE ABSORPTION OF AUSTRIA AND NEUTRALIZATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Almost to a day of the second anniversary of his Rhineland 'coup' Hitler ordered the German Army to occupy Austria: as in the past, France and Great Britain were faced with a fait accompli, having had little advance knowledge of Hitler's impending military action. Austria had been slipping steadily downhill into the hands of the Nazis and overt military action was not believed necessary to eventually end her independence. On February 12, Hitler had forced the Austrian Chancellor to sign an agreement and to give Dr. Seyss-Inquart, the Austrian Nazi leader, control of the police as Minister of the Interior. When news of the Agreement leaked out a few days later, press comment in both the Times and the Manchester Guardian virtually wrote off Austria as an independent country. The Vienna correspondent of the Times wrote that if Dr. Seyss-Inquart were given control of the police, "the complete subordination of Austria to Reich policy, if not the annexation of Austria, could not be long delayed."¹ Two days later, an editorial in the Manchester Guardian

¹The Times, February 15, 1938, p. 4.

claimed the agreement was "designed ... to start the work of converting Austria into a Nazi State which will, at a time to be chosen by Herr Hitler, join Nazi Germany."²

Increasingly as more was learned of the Berchtesgaden meeting, concern focused on the methods Hitler had used to extort an agreement favourable to Germany. Press reports indicated that three German generals had made their presence next door obvious while the 'negotiations' were in progress and that large-scale troop movements in Bavaria as well as an air force demonstration near the Austro-German frontier had been used to speed ratification of the Agreement by Austria.³ Recording Austrian reaction to the Agreement, the Times Vienna correspondent wrote:

The ultimate reason for the feeling of some depression among Government supporters - a feeling which incidentally is shared by the Austrian Monarchists - is the belief that force lay behind the arguments which led Herr von Schuschnigg to make the Agreement of Berchtesgaden and that the same argument would be used again if need be, irrespective of undertakings to respect Austrian sovereignty.⁴

The Austrian Government had been given the alternative of

²The Manchester Guardian, February 19, 1938, p. 8.

³Ibid., February 15, 1938, p. 11; The Times, February 16, 1938, p. 12; The Manchester Guardian, February 16, 1938, p. 10.

⁴The Times, February 17, 1938, p. 14.

a "gradual or a sudden loss of her independence"; Hitler appeared prepared to absorb Austria slowly, but the absorption had to be sure.⁵

The crisis that ended with Anschluss and the disappearance of Austria as a sovereign state began, reached its climax and was ruthlessly brought to a conclusion in the course of a few days. If there was little advance warning of Hitler's military moves, it was primarily because these moves were largely improvised at the last minute. He spoke to his generals on March 10th and by the evening of the 11th, the British Consul General in Munich had informed the British Ambassador in Berlin that he had seen German armoured units moving up to the frontier. The reaction of the Ambassador was to become typical; he denied that these movements could exist because General Keitel had assured him that there were no troop movements.⁶ German Army units began to move into Austria on March 12th, despite the fact that the Austrian Government had cancelled the plebiscite called for March 13th and had complied with Hitler's ultimatum to make Seyss-Inquart, Chancellor.

Three days after the Anschluss, the Ambassador

⁵The Manchester Guardian, February 16, 1938, p. 10; March 5, p. 12.

⁶Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office (London: 1965), pps. 196-197.

to Czechoslovakia predicted that Hitler would next foment trouble with Czechoslovakia and that Herr Henlein, leader of the Sudeten German minority, might be used as a "Seyss-Inquart."⁷ Lord Halifax, the new Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, admitted to the House of Lords that no one who looked at a map could be blind to the new position of Czechoslovakia or to the significance Hitler's action might have for Czechoslovakia and for Europe.⁸ A great many other Members of both Houses of Parliament had looked at maps and had also concluded that Czechoslovakia was endangered. Churchill's speech in the Commons was again the highlight of the debates of both Houses, cogently describing the importance to Europe of Hitler's latest acquisition. Possession of Austria, he pointed out, gave Germany economic and military control of the road, rail and river communications of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and of other countries to the south-east of Europe. Geographically, the 'Little Entente' had been split apart, leaving Germany in a position to dominate a hinterland containing 200,000,000 people. Czechoslovakia had been

⁷ Documents on British Foreign Policy ed. Woodward and Butler, (London: 1946), Series 3, Volume 1, Document 86, p. 55. Hereafter cited as DBFP ser., vol., doc.,

⁸ House of Lords Debates, 5th Session, Volume 108, Column 181-182, March 16, 1938. Hereafter cited as H.L. Deb. 5s., vol. col. date.

isolated both economically and militarily and could be cut off from her sources of raw materials and from her markets.⁹ Militarily, as Mr. Mander said, Czechoslovakia's position had been radically changed for the worse. Before the Germans occupied Austria, the Czech frontiers facing Germany were well-fortified, but afterwards, German troops could pour across the almost undefended Austro-Czechoslovakian border at will.¹⁰ The Bohemian fortress that juts into the heart of Germany had German troops stationed on either side of the narrow "neck" joining the predominantly Czech and the predominantly Slovak territories.

Throughout the summer and early autumn of 1938, British estimates of Hitler's intentions were contradictory, reflecting reports from Germany suggesting on the one hand that Hitler had no intention of attacking Czechoslovakia in the near future, and on the other hand that he was going to attack on the first opportunity he had. Between March and May 1938, both Churchill and the Guardian diplomatic correspondent stated quite clearly that they felt a German attack on Czechoslovakia in the near future to be unlikely.¹¹ They, and many others, thought that

⁹House of Commons Debates 5th Session Volume 333, Columns 96-98, March 14, 1938. . Hereafter cited as H.C. deb 5s., vol., col., date.

¹⁰Ibid., cols. 109-110.

¹¹The Manchester Guardian, March 18, 1938, p. 6;

Hitler could reduce Czechoslovakia to a state of vassalage with a combination of military, political, economic and propaganda pressure. The military-attachés, in general, and Colonel Mason-MacFarlane (Berlin) in particular, supported this view.

There were essentially two major reasons for believing that Germany would not attack Czechoslovakia and hence that Hitler's threats were a bluff. Czechoslovakia had defensive agreements with two major European Powers, France and Russia; consequently, German aggression would precipitate a major European war.¹² Secondly, in the opinion of the attachés, Germany did not appear capable either economically or militarily of waging a major campaign. Already overtaxed with problems of training a new mass army, the German Army had suddenly been ordered to undertake the considerable task of organizing a 'march on Vienna,' and of occupying the rest of the country. This operation naturally had interfered to a great extent with the training schedules. Furthermore, to their own forces that had to be trained, there were added eight or nine divisions of the Austrian Army to reorganize and absorb.¹³ While the

¹¹ May 9, p. 14; May 16, p. 6. H.C. deb 5s., vol. 333, cols. 1447-1448

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Documents on British Foreign Policy ed. Woodward

addition of the Austrian divisions represented a long-term advantage, the German War Office admitted to the military attaché as late as August 8, that the forthcoming attempt to mobilize some of them was ambitious, and that they considered the Austrian Army far from perfect.¹⁴ Despite the fact that it was two years since Germany had reoccupied the Rhineland, her defences in the west needed considerable strengthening before they could be expected to hold a French attack while the bulk of the German Army attacked Czechoslovakia. For these reasons, the German High Command, the industrialists and other groups considered 'conservative' or 'moderate' were known to have no desire to see Germany precipitated into a war with Czechoslovakia if there were any danger of a general conflagration. The British Attaché in Rome reported on September 16th that his German counterpart,

was certain that he was expressing the views of the whole German Army when he said that the last thing in the world they wanted was war, and particularly war with Great Britain. He personally had been so worried that he had not slept for two nights.¹⁵

¹³ and Butler, London 1946 -. Series 3, Volume 1, Document 129, p. 122; Volume 2, Document 553, p. 16. Hereafter cited as DBFP ser. vol. doc.

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 2, doc. 593, p. 63.

¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, doc. 899, p. 356.

The essential question about the German 'opposition's' attitude toward a major war was whether it could or even would act as an effective brake on Hitler and his more militant followers. In early January of 1938 the British War Office circulated a long memorandum on the world situation. The authors of this document believed that unless Germany's internal situation made a foreign adventure imperative, the German Army would prevent Hitler from risking war.¹⁶ On the heels of this declaration of faith in the power of the German General Staff, Hitler purged the High Command and tightened Nazi control of foreign and economic policy.¹⁷

Just before this purge the diplomatic correspondent of the Guardian wrote a summary of the reasons for the then current tension between the army and the Nazi Party. According to his information, some military commanders, particularly Major-Generals Beck and von Fritsch were dissatisfied with certain aspects of Nazi policy and had expressed themselves in very strong terms. The chief bases of contention were the Nazi attack on Christianity,

¹⁶Colonel R. Macleod and D. Kelly, The Ironside Diaries (London: 1962), p. 44.

¹⁷The reports of the military-attaché and the opinion of the War Office on the 'purge' are unavailable.

the rearmament programme, and the generals' assertion that it would take Germany four years, not two, to reach full preparedness. The article concluded with the observation that "generally speaking, the always latent conflict between the so-called 'moderates' ... and the 'radicals' ... has gone in favour of the 'radicals'"¹⁸ This same correspondent initially suggested that the resignation of General von Blomberg was instigated by the more conservative officers because von Blomberg willingly accepted Nazi action and orders.¹⁹ However, when the full extent of the changes became known, all three newspapers admitted that whatever influence the 'conservatives' had exerted in the realm of foreign policy had been severely curtailed. An editorial in the Times of February 7, 1938 said in part:

Most important of all, in the realm of foreign affairs it was believed at the time that the re-occupation of the Rhineland was ordered by Herr Hitler in face of cautious warnings from the Army; there was strong and successful resistance in the Army last summer to military adventures in Spain; and a number of officers have been said to be doubtful about the policy of the Rome-Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact.²⁰

Editorially, the Manchester Guardian, which had never

¹⁸The Manchester Guardian, February 2, 1938, p. 12.

¹⁹Ibid., February 3, 1938, p. 11.

²⁰The Times, February 7, 1938, p. 15.

believed in the existence of an organized opposition in Germany, simply said that the "realities of the German situation have not changed, they have merely emerged; the Third Realm stands before us in starker nudity than before."²¹

For a short time after the senior 'conservative' generals and officials were forced into retirement, there were some rather extreme rumours of disorders in the Rhineland, Pomerania and East Prussia; these were treated with scepticism by both the Times and the Manchester Guardian. The Berlin correspondent was brutally clear:

The stories of revolts in the Army or of resistance on the part of high officers to the Government are in the highest degree unlikely, because they are not in a position to resist by force even if they wished to.²²

His counterpart for the Times stressed the acceptance of the Nazi decision by General Keitel, the new War Minister, and General von Brauchitsch, the new Commander-in-Chief. For the time being at least, Hitler had apparently split the Officers Corps. The correspondent concluded: "The

²¹The Manchester Guardian, February 7, 1938, p. 8. Also August 19, 1935, p. 8, and September 17, 1935, p. 8.

²²Ibid., February 11, 1938, p. 11. The correspondent mentioned the officer class' loss of power and the strength of Herr Himmler's secret police as reasons for the lack of resistance.

disunity in the Army should, accordingly, effectively safeguard the Government against a serious crisis, even if feeling in the officers' corps went much deeper than it is supposed to go."²³

After the middle of February there were few if any references in the newspapers to active military opposition to Hitler's foreign policy until a report suggested on September 9th that General Beck had resigned because Hitler's policy would involve Germany in war with France, England and Russia.²⁴ Between February and September discontented German officers occasionally suggested to Colonel Mason-MacFarlane that the army might oppose Hitler with more than verbal confidences to foreign attachés. One of the most concrete of these suggestions came from the acting head of Attaché-Gruppe. Discussing the partial "Test Mobilization" planned for the autumn, "he privately agreed that the intentions of the High Command were deplorable" but that:

there was a limit to the extent to which General von Brauchitsch, could refuse to comply with the Government's demands. The army was not yet in a position to stand up to the party and go into active opposition.

²³The Times, February 11, 1938, p. 14. Underlined portion printed in italics. The Observer, being a Sunday paper could not comment before the 'crisis' had died out.

²⁴The Manchester Guardian, September 9, 1938, p. 11.

They might never succeed in doing this.²⁵

Nine days before Munich, when Western diplomats were scrambling to preserve peace, the military-attaché in Paris reported:

The situation is another triumph for Hitlerian diplomacy. There is every reason, moreover, to suppose that once more it has been achieved in defiance of the opinion of his military leaders, and it cannot fail to increase enormously his prestige with the army²⁶

In brief, the military attachés as well as the newspaper correspondents agreed that the German High Command would do everything in its power short of overtly opposing Hitler to prevent a German attack on Czechoslovakia. No one believed that the High Command's opposition was based on anything but military expediency; there was no suggestion in any of the reports that the German Army would not march if ordered to do so by Hitler.

As in so many other European crises, there were clear indications that if Great Britain would declare herself, there would be no aggression. In Parliament, most critics of Prime Minister Chamberlain's policy of appeasement claimed that if Great Britain guaranteed Czechoslovakia

²⁵DBFP ser 3, vol. 2, doc. 575, p. 44.

²⁶Ibid., vol. 2, doc. 1012, p. 454.

or otherwise made it clear that she would not remain neutral, Hitler would not attack. Appeals to history and to the events preceding the First World War were not infrequent. Major Milner on one occasion told the House of Commons:

In my submission war would be less likely if the Government of this country to-day would speak with the necessary firmness.... I would remind the House that it is now the considered opinion of the great majority of authorities that the Great War itself would not have occurred if the Government of this country had stated its position with firmness.²⁷

The more usual claim in the latter stages of the crisis was that a war between Germany and Czechoslovakia was certain if Hitler felt he could assume British neutrality. If he could not count on British neutrality, then the risk of going to war with Czechoslovakia, would probably appear excessive, even to Hitler.²⁸ Some of the reports of the military attachés supported the view that decisive British action could prevent a possible war. In Belgrade on September 8th the German Military Attaché told Colonel Stronge quite bluntly that the Nazi leaders cared little about the

²⁷H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 333, col. 1442, March 24, 1938.

²⁸Especially The Manchester Guardian, July 20, 1938, p. 11; July 21, p. 6; H.C. Deb. 5s., vol. 338. debate on Supply July 26. This matter naturally became a subject of much greater debate when the Munich Agreement was being discussed. H.C. deb. 5s., vols. 339-340.

Sudeten problem and in reality wanted Czechoslovakia itself for economic reasons. He believed that Hitler's policy was in effect largely one of bluff, and that he would not then risk a world war.²⁹ This opinion was in harmony with an observation Colonel Stronge had made in March when commenting on the possibility of war: "But a declaration of Great Britain to stand by France and Russia would probably prevent it."³⁰ Colonel Mason-MacFarlane naturally received a great deal of similar information in Berlin. It was obvious that the Germans had a "keen desire" to find out what the attitude of Great Britain would be to a possible German attack on Czechoslovakia.³¹ One of his contacts, apparently an officer, said on August 21st that Hitler had definitely decided to attack Czechoslovakia in late September, but that:

If by firm action abroad Herr Hitler can be forced at the eleventh hour to renounce his present intentions he will be unable to survive. Similarly, if it comes to war the immediate intervention by France and England will bring about the downfall of the regime.³²

²⁹DBFP ser. 3, vol. 2, doc. 805, p. 268.

³⁰Ibid., doc. 120, p. 107.

³¹Ibid., doc. 631, p. 101 August 17

³²Ibid., doc. 651, p. 126.

Three days after receiving this information, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane himself reported that there was an "outside possibility" (in another place he said "it is quite possible") that war could be prevented or postponed if Great Britain clearly stated that she would fight. Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador at Berlin, agreed that Hitler would not go to war in 1938 if he were certain Britain would intervene forcibly, but Sir Neville's opinion was coloured by his belief that to stop Hitler in 1938 would gain Britain, "mere postponement and a rising market."³³

Often in the same dispatches with the above evidence that Germany would not attack Czechoslovakia in the near future, was evidence that she would. Troop movements can be construed either as training exercises or as preliminary steps to aggression; it is frequently difficult if not impossible for a detached observer to tell where the one leaves off and the other begins. In practice, the interpretation usually depends on which side of a disputed frontier the observer stands. From the time of the Anschluss there were constant troop movements in Austria and between Germany and Austria. At no given time could it be certain

³³Ibid., vol 2, doc., 692, pps. 162-163; doc. 613, p. 83; doc 665, pps. 131-132.

that these forces would not suddenly concentrate and attack Czechoslovakia before she could mobilize. At first, the Czech Government protested about the excessive number of German troops in Austria without being too worried. The Czech General Staff felt that war with Germany within the next two years over the Sudeten minority was a probability, and the British Attaché, Colonel Stronge, agreed with them.³⁴ It was not until May that the first serious crisis unfolded, when the Czech General Staff reported that the Seventh and Seventeenth German Infantry Divisions were advancing in the direction of the Bavarian-Czechoslovak frontier and that additional air force squadrons had been sent to Saxony.³⁵ The consulates in both Dresden and Vienna provided additional information about supposed German troop concentrations against Czechoslovakia. As a result, the Czechoslovakian Government called up some 170,000 reservists, assuming that Germany was going to force a settlement of the Sudeten problem in her favour. By May 24th, however, it was obvious that there had been no German concentration. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane had made an extensive round of the German frontier areas, finding no signs of troop movements. His conclusions were that the Czech General Staff had drawn

³⁴DBFP ser. 3, vol. 1, doc. 120, p. 107.

³⁵Ibid., doc. 245, p. 327.

many false deductions and had been guilty of "much exaggeration and of invention as well." Nevertheless, the May crisis had driven home two possibilities: the first, that in the future, a real attack, or preparations for an attack, might be concealed by apparently ordinary troop movements; and secondly, that there was the possibility that if another crisis arose, enough half-correct information might be gathered to make the Czech General Staff start a "call-up" again.³⁶

Such contrasting explanations of German military activity clashed during the summer. A series of three reports exchanged between Mr. Strang of the Foreign Office, and Colonel Mason-MacFarlane at Berlin is the best example of this difference of opinion. On July 5th, the military attaché had suggested that the German military activity was not necessarily for the immediate purpose of an attack on Czechoslovakia, but because the German General Staff intended to be prepared for all eventualities.³⁷ Mr. Strang disagreed with this interpretation.³⁸ The best German pilots were being withdrawn from Spain; construction of fortifica-

³⁶ Ibid., doc. 316, pps. 380-381.

³⁷ Ibid., doc. 530, p. 610. This had also been stressed in a report of June 7. Ibid., doc. 380, p. 451.

³⁸ Ibid., doc. 530, pps. 610-611.

tions in the west was proceeding with great haste. One source said that there was a definite plan for an attack on Czechoslovakia when the crops had been harvested. According to this source, "Everything, however, was very uncertain and the Fuhrer was reported to have been in a depressed mood and to have been inaccessible recently."

Autumn had been chosen, among other reasons, because British and French air rearmament would not become effective until 1939. If there were a war, Hitler hoped for a quick victory over Czechoslovakia and that Britain would then persuade France to make peace. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane agreed with most of the evidence quoted (he had supplied some of it) but disagreed with the conclusions. He had never had any doubt that the German General Staff had a plan ready for attacking Czechoslovakia;³⁹ he did doubt that this plan was being put into effect as yet. Sometime in February (according to his information), Hitler had told his service chiefs that they might have to fight a war in 1938, and that in consequence they had to speed up their military preparations. For this reason, the armed forces were doing everything short of actual mobilization to prepare themselves. The dictum that Colonel Mason-MacFarlane had used

³⁹Ibid., doc. 380, p. 450.

in June still applied: there was nothing to indicate that Germany was surreptitiously staging any military operation against Czechoslovakia "of the type which they would have to undertake should such action be almost certain to provoke intervention by France."⁴⁰

For the two months following the May crisis, few hints of any extraordinary military preparations going on in Germany appeared in the three newspapers. In late May and early June two editorials of the Observer foresaw the possibility of a major crisis of peace or war much sooner than had been generally expected with the Czech 'problem' reaching its boiling point sometime in August or September of 1938 instead of one or two years later.⁴¹ The possibility of a major crisis became a probability when Germany announced that reserve units would take part in the autumn manoeuvres and furthermore declared a belt approximately thirty-five miles deep along the Belgian and French frontiers a prohibited area to foreign attachés.

Both the newspaper correspondents and Colonel Mason-MacFarlane became increasingly alarmed at the German 'crash programme' of refortification in the Rhineland. For

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹The Observer, May 29, 1938, p.16; June 12, p. 14.

two years the rearmament of the western frontiers had proceeded at an unexpectedly leisurely pace, but on August 1st, the Times Berlin correspondent reported:

It is common talk here, however, that the pace has been speeded up tremendously since the Czechoslovak crisis of May last disclosed the international dangers to which the Sudeten German question can give rise.⁴²

Throughout August the work on the fortifications was further intensified. Various estimates placed the number of men involved in the construction at between fifty and two hundred thousand: masons, carpenters and other skilled construction labourers were being sent from Berlin and even German nationals living on the French side of the border were being conscripted.⁴³ Reports from the military attaché indicated that work on the fortifications had proceeded 'hurriedly' at first and then at 'hectic speed.' These fortifications, while not estimated to be as elaborate as the "Maginot" line, were of considerable depth. Less emphasis was being placed on massive works and more on the construction of mutually supporting pill boxes for machine guns and on anti-tank defences.⁴⁴ Both the Reuters correspondent and Colonel Mason-MacFarlane considered that

⁴²The Times, August 1, 1938, p. 10.

⁴³The Manchester Guardian, August 12, 1938, p. 13; The Times, August 1, 1938, p. 10; August 6, p. 9.

⁴⁴DBFP ser. 3, vol. 2, docs. 575, 580, 635.

these defences constituted a serious obstacle and that any effort made to breach them would be costly.⁴⁵ While the construction of very strong frontier defences to counter the French 'Maginot' line had been regarded as inevitable, their construction as a work of emergency, suggested that the German Army was working to a fixed schedule.

It was the knowledge of the German Army plan to hold a "test mobilization" on a large scale in September and of their intention to delay the release of second year conscripts until November that caused Colonel Mason-MacFarlane the greatest concern. In the first place, he regarded both these measures, and particularly the decision to delay the release of one conscript class for which there was no excuse, as "most dangerous" and politically "desperately provocative."⁴⁶ Faced with a large "test mobilization" of one division per corps area along her frontier with Germany, and with the Austrian Army completely mobilized on her flank, Czechoslovakia would have to mobilize; otherwise, Germany would be an extra four or more days ahead of Czechoslovakian mobilization and Hitler might not be able to resist the temptation to strike.⁴⁷ Secondly,

⁴⁵ Ibid., and The Manchester Guardian, August 26, 1938, p. 9.

⁴⁶ DBFP ser. 3, vol. 2, doc. 575, p. 43; doc. 564, p. 564.

⁴⁷ Ibid., doc. 575, pps. 43-44.

Colonel Mason-MacFarlane saw, in the proposed partial mobilization, evidence of the increasing domination of the General Staff by Hitler. This caused him to write on August 4th:

I wish to make it quite clear that although I am still of the opinion that it does not necessarily follow that Herr Hitler has made up his mind irrevocably to employ force against Czechoslovakia this autumn, the possibility that he may do so has now in my opinion become more real.⁴⁸

British diplomats and military attachés alike believed that the crisis over the Sudetenland would come to a head some time after August 15th when a good portion of the German Army was mobilized. The period between the harvest and "the end of the military year" (September - November) was a traditional time for launching European wars and the regular Nazi Party rally in early September would give Hitler the opportunity to spring another of his diplomatic surprises. Increasingly, German officers and officials spread the news that Hitler had announced his intention of attacking Czechoslovakia towards the end of September, a report reaching the News Chronicle correspondent even mentioned an exact date, September 28th, that apparently had been passed on indirectly by the German

⁴⁸Ibid., doc. 577, p. 46.

Commander-in-Chief.⁴⁹ Another unnamed informant told the military attaché that opposition from the generals had been half-hearted when they learned of Hitler's intentions and that the progressive mobilization already begun, was to be completed by September 15th.⁵⁰

The "Test Mobilization," as many observers had feared, gradually began to resemble a progressive general mobilization. Preliminary steps toward mobilization were reported in all three British newspapers between August 13th and August 15th. Civilian vehicles were being requisitioned, the annual leave of some Government workers, including railwaymen, had been cancelled, and reservists had begun to join their units. None of the reports found much consolation in the assurance that there would be no mass manoeuvres; instead, it was pointed out that there would be such a large number of small manoeuvres as to constitute "big" manoeuvres or a partial total mobilization. Nevertheless, there was no suggestion in the articles on German military moves of a German intention to fully mobilize.⁵¹

⁴⁹Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office, (London: 1965), pps. 218-221.

⁵⁰DBFP ser. 3, vol. 2, doc. 651, pps. 125-126.

⁵¹The Times, August 13, 1938, p. 10; August 15, p. 10; The Observer, August 14, p. 13; The Manchester Guardian, August 15, 1938, pps. 9, 13.

Soon afterward, however, evidence rapidly began to accumulate in the dispatches of the military attachés that Germany was nearly fully prepared for an immediate war against Czechoslovakia. Colonel Gauché the Head of the 2^e Bureau (French military intelligence) reported to the British Military Attaché that two German reserve divisions had been definitely recognized and that the formation of five more was suspected.⁵² Yet, even while it was obvious that the German Army was mobilizing, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane could find no evidence of a build-up along the Czechoslovakian frontier up to the time of Hitler's speech at Nuremberg on September 12th and Prime Minister Chamberlain's first trip to Germany. By September 10th although a large number of troops were absent from their barracks, there was still no military evidence that the German Army had begun its concentration against Czechoslovakia.⁵³

The evaluation of the Czechoslovakian position by British observers was as important as the assessment of German military intentions. Should Great Britain be forced to support France and Czechoslovakia in a war against Germany, and should Czechoslovakian resistance suddenly col-

⁵²DBFP ser. 3, vol. 2, doc. 721, p. 190.

⁵³Ibid., doc. 820, p. 281.

lapse, Britain and France would either have to make a hurried peace, or face the prospect of fighting a Germany with only one front to defend. Unfortunately, British estimates, and those of the military attachés in particular, did not hold out much hope for protracted Czech resistance. This did not imply a criticism of the Czech Army itself, which was considered to be the best among the smaller states of Europe; but, though basically well-trained, well-equipped and efficient, the army could not overcome the vulnerable strategic position of Czechoslovakia itself, nor could it remedy its own deficiencies sufficiently to meet a German attack.

Czechoslovakia was surrounded by enemies. Bohemia was almost surrounded by German territory and both of Czechoslovakia's other neighbours, Poland and Hungary, had their eyes on pieces of Czechoslovakian territory. In one form or another the three newspapers stressed that Czechoslovakian survival might well depend on her ability to satisfy the grievances of Hungary and even more, those of Poland which was equally threatened by Pan-Germanism and Hitler's Eastern ambitions. An editorial in the Manchester Guardian of August 17th summed up the Polish-Czechoslovakian dilemma.

Poland has her grievance, too, against Czechoslovakia, and it is highly desirable that there should be "justice for the Poles of

Teschen" no less than for the Sudeten Germans. Poland cannot be expected to engage in strong partisanship against Germany in Czecho-Slovakia's behalf, and, it is only human that she should feel relief because the long expected blow which a rearmed Germany was almost sure to deliver threatens not her but Czecho-Slovakia. But Poland cannot be interested in the defeat, least of all in the disappearance, of Czecho-Slovakia. It is as sure as anything can be sure in politics that her turn would come next.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, throughout the crisis Poland kept up a steady stream of vilification, and both Colonel Stronge and Colonel Mason-MacFarlane felt that the possibility of a Polish-Hungarian attack on the rear of Czechoslovakia had to be taken into account. Such an attack, if it occurred, could have a disastrous effect on Czech military morale.⁵⁵

Not one of Czechoslovakia's allies, and on paper they were many, had a common frontier with her and only France could apply direct pressure on Germany and divert a considerable portion of the German Army. However, on numerous occasions during 1938, officers of the French Army suggested to the British Military Attachés that France might abandon Czechoslovakia in the event of a German attack. On March 29th Colonel Stronge reported that

⁵⁴The Manchester Guardian, August 17, 1938, p. 8. The use of the hyphenated form of Czechoslovakia, which stressed Slovak partnership, is interesting. Until the Munich settlement the form Czechoslovakia was in general use.

⁵⁵Polish attitude summed up in reports of Kennard to Halifax June 1-June 14, 1938; DBFP vol. 1, doc. 196, p. 271, May 9, 1938.

he was doubtful whether France would in fact honour her obligations "to the full." The French Military Attaché in Belgrade had told him that the French peasants would fight for none but their own soil.⁵⁶ Ordinarily, such a report would not carry much conviction but this one received startling confirmation a month later when General Gamelin told the British Secretary of State for War that it was impossible for France to give military assistance to Czechoslovakia.⁵⁷

French support for their ally during the May crisis ended these hints for the time being but the doubts returned at the height of the September crisis. General Gamelin, asked about the possibility of war, replied: "Of course there will be no European War, since we are not going to fight." About the same time General Dentz did not reply directly to the obliquely worded charge of the British Attaché that France did not intend to fight, and he left the attaché with the impression that he regarded the virtual annexation of Czechoslovakia by Germany as a fait accompli. The generals claimed that the German Air Force would lay French cities in ruins and that France was

⁵⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, doc. 120, p. 108. March 29, 1938.

⁵⁷ R.J. Minney, The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha (London: 1960), p. 120.

incapable of dealing with it.⁵⁸ Even if the French did honour their treaties, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane believed there was a chance that relatively few German troops could hold them. The Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia's other great power ally, did not have a common frontier with either Germany or Czechoslovakia. The problem of how the Soviet Union's military strength could be brought to the defence of Czechoslovakia was not discussed in the three newspapers although they generally believed that at least France and probably the Soviet Union would come to the aid of Czechoslovakia.⁵⁹

The state of Czechoslovakia's defences facing Germany were a source of worry to Colonel Stronge, the British Attaché in Prague, as they were to the Czechoslovakian General Staff which had been caught unprepared by the swiftness of Hitler's Austrian 'coup'. While the defences on the old German frontier were patterned after the Maginot line and were strong enough to hold out at least until mobilization had been completed, the defences

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DBFP vol. 2, doc. 1013, p. 454, September 21, doc. 1034, p. 474, September 22

⁵⁹

The Manchester Guardian's special correspondent did made an effort to weigh Russia's ability to help Czechoslovakia. He concluded that this ability was "slight." August 20, 1938, pps. 11-12.

on the Austrian frontier, where the major German attack was expected, were considered less than satisfactory. On this flank, unprotected by major natural barriers, there were few extensive systems of fortifications. Work had gone on night and day since Anschluss, with the result that the newly exposed frontier had been covered with a network of fieldworks, machine gun and artillery positions, and some concrete works on the more likely approaches. These fortifications were not considered strong enough to stop a German attack or to prevent Germany from cutting Czechoslovakia in two.⁶⁰

The Czechoslovakian armed forces themselves presented both strengths and weaknesses. The military attachés agreed that after mobilization, the Czech Army would consist of between thirty-three and forty divisions. Interestingly enough because of the relative position of the two newspapers vis-à-vis the policy of appeasement, Robert Leurquin writing for the Times, placed the mobilized strength of the Czech Army at forty divisions while the military correspondent of the Guardian only credited the Czechs with a potential strength of between twenty-four

⁶⁰Ibid., August 20, 1938, p. 11; September 15, 1938, p. 13; The Times, September 28, 1938, p. 12; DBFP ser. 3, vol. 1, doc. 120, p. 106, March 29, 1938.

and twenty-six divisions.⁶¹ One of the greatest strengths of the army was the very highly developed armaments industry supporting it. The famous Skoda factories and others had provided the army with much equipment which was of equal or of better quality than the German. However, the attaché in Prague reported that the Czechoslovakian General Staff had been slow to decide on the designs for new weapons. Consequently, there were production shortages as late as September 3rd for anti-aircraft guns, heavy artillery and trucks, although these shortages were rapidly being overcome.⁶² The military attachés do not seem to have taken any account of the Czechoslovakian Air Force other than to say that it was not strong enough to protect either the army or the cities. This was essentially the conclusion of the military correspondents, one of whom reported that it was doubtful whether the Czechs had sufficient personnel, airfields, repair shops and spare parts even to maintain sizeable air force reinforcements from Russia.⁶³

⁶¹The Times, September 27, 1938, p. 13 and the Manchester Guardian, September 15, 1938, p. 13.

⁶²DBFP vol. 2, doc. 794, pps. 258-259.

⁶³The Manchester Guardian, August 20, 1938, pps. 11-12, September 15, 1938, p. 13; The Times, September 28, 1938, p. 12.

The Sudeten Germans were as much a potential threat to the defence of Czechoslovakia as they were a constant threat to European peace. Scattered around the fringes of Czechoslovakia in areas adjacent to Germany and frequently just behind the frontier fortifications, the Sudetens posed two military problems. With the weapons being smuggled in they were in a position to reduce the efficiency of any defence that Czechoslovakia might offer by deliberate acts of sabotage such as blowing up bridges, blocking roads and attacking various defence installations. Sudetens comprised a considerable portion of the Czechoslovakian Army and reserves, and here again, their opportunity for abstention or sabotage was virtually unlimited.⁶⁴ Colonel Stronge believed the decision to respond to or to ignore call-up orders would be made on an individual, not a mass basis. In the minds of Sudetens, race and German nationalism would be balanced against the military oath of allegiance the Sudetens had taken to Czechoslovakia and by the traditional German respect for such oaths. In effect, Colonel Stronge could not predict the exact attitude of the Sudetendeutschen toward their military obligations, but he did report of the whole

⁶⁴ The attitude of the Sudetens is discussed in DBFP ser. 3, vol. 1, docs. 120, 129, 196, 365.

internal situation:

In view of the increased aggressiveness of the Sudetendeutschen and the facilities they will have for sabotage on a large scale I am personally doubtful as to the true efficiency of the defence which it will be possible to offer.⁶⁵

Strangely enough, the military attachés apparently did not comment on the loyalty of the Sudetens during the autumn crisis. Military correspondents for both the Times and the Manchester Guardian were convinced that the Sudetens in the Czechoslovakian Army would serve loyally, even if unwillingly. Two reasons were given for this view. During the May crisis the recall order had been obeyed by all and there had been no sabotage or passive resistance. Secondly, the Czechoslovakian General Staff, being themselves well versed in the "art" of planning mass desertions, had taken precautions against similar desertions from the Czechoslovak Army. Ninety-eight per cent of the officer corps was Czech, the reserve officers corps had been carefully screened to remove those of doubtful loyalty, and eighty-five per cent of the non-commissioned officers were Czech; the special corps such as the artillery, armoured forces, air force, etc., like the General Staff, were exclusively Czech. The Sudetens had been spread among the infantry

⁶⁵Ibid., doc. 120, p. 106.

divisions where they were powerless and could be watched. Because of these measures, the Czechoslovakian Army was expected to maintain its cohesion even in a war with Germany.⁶⁶

Colonel Mason-MacFarlane and Colonel Stronge disagreed in their estimates of how long the Czechs could hold out against Germany. Some time before the May crisis, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane considered that the confidence of the Czechoslovakian General Staff in their ability to hold off a German attack was based on "sweeping and false deductions" drawn from the German occupation of Austria. This operation had been exceptional in many ways, and the Czechs had greatly exaggerated the shortcomings of the German Army. He further suspected that Czech military confidence was largely artificial, designed perhaps to make Great Britain and France think more seriously about a preventive war, and he concluded: "It would in my opinion be most dangerous to embark on hostilities on the assumption that the Czechs would be certain to hold up the Germans completely or even for a very considerable time."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The Times, September 28, 1938, pps. 11-12; The Manchester Guardian, September 15, p. 13. Such measures as these aggravated the Sudetens, deepening the bitterness of racial relations which Hitler exploited.

⁶⁷ DBFP vol. 1, doc. 196, p. 272, May 9, 1938.

Colonel Stronge, on the other hand, tried to counter the assertion that Czechoslovakia would necessarily collapse very quickly. He believed that if the Czechoslovakian defences held and if she were supported at least by French mobilization along the Rhine, the army could and probably would offer protracted resistance to a German attack and inflict heavy casualties. "Herr Hitler," he reported, "is supposed to have said that such a war [one in which Czechoslovakia fought single-handed] would be over in three weeks I do not know if he has, in fact, calculated upon so rapid a victory, but would like to point out that, if that is the case, he is counting upon an achievement altogether without precedent in modern times."⁶⁸ Colonel Stronge did stress that the extent of Czech resistance depended very heavily on their morale. Resistance might collapse after one or two weeks if the Germans succeeded in overrunning or outflanking the Czech defences at the onset, if their mobilization were either delayed or disrupted, or in the event of a Polish-Hungarian "land-grab" in their rear.

The question of Czech resistance and of Czech morale came up again between September 26th and September

⁶⁸Ibid., doc. 794, p. 258, September 3, 1938.

28th just prior to the Munich Conference and at a time when a European war seemed almost a certainty. At this time the Czech General Staff believed that if France co-operated, Germany would be able to spare only about seventy-five divisions for an attack on Czechoslovakia; the French, however, believed that the Germans would concentrate forty divisions against Czechoslovakia, keep twenty and fifty divisions on the Polish and French fronts respectively, and still have an additional ten in reserve.⁶⁹ On September 26th, General Gamelin spoke to Prime Minister Chamberlain about Czechoslovakia's powers of resistance and Chamberlain told the British Cabinet that the Czechoslovakian Army would give a good account of itself and would continue to exist as a fighting force even if forced to retire to the eastern part of the country, but he apparently did not give the Cabinet an estimate of the duration of Czech resistance. A Foreign Office instruction of the next day reported General Gamelin as being convinced that Czech resistance to an immediate German attack would be "of extremely brief duration," but did not say whether it would be brief in terms of days, weeks, or months. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane supported this view: he

⁶⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, doc. 1130, p. 567, September 27, 1938, and doc. 1202, p. 610 September 28, 1938.

considered Czech morale to be poor and that resistance would be futile. The Foreign Office document concluded the estimate of the military situation of Czechoslovakia with:

If therefore our efforts for peace fail and instead German troops enter Czechoslovakia on Thursday [September 29] , as now seems probable, we may expect to be faced in a very short time with a fait accompli, so far as Czechoslovakia is concerned. No declarations or actions of France or ourselves in the meantime can prevent this sudden and overwhelming result⁷⁰

The question of Czech resistance would seem to have been settled, but Colonel Stronge refused to let the matter rest. In a dispatch of September 27th he dissented from Colonel Mason-MacFarlane's estimate of Czech morale and asserted that the Czechs had "confidence in their cause, their leadership and their equipment."⁷¹ Likewise, Colonel Fraser, the attaché in Paris, questioned the accuracy of the Foreign Office appraisal of General Gamelin's estimate of the Czech military situation. Colonel Fraser had just spoken to Colonel Gauché, head of the French intelligence, and Colonel Petitbon, General Gamelin's Staff Officer. Both considered Czech morale high, and Colonel

⁷⁰ Ibid., doc. 1143, pps. 575-576.

⁷¹ Ibid., doc. 1148, pps. 581-582. Colonel Stronge was commenting on an earlier report of Colonel Mason-MacFarlane Ibid., doc. 1113, pps. 551-552.

Petitbon doubted whether the Germans would overrun Czechoslovakia quickly and without hand fighting and heavy losses. This report, written on September 28th, only reached the Foreign Office on September 30th, when the die had been cast and Chamberlain had left for Munich.⁷²

In summary then, the European situation did not appear at all favourable from the British standpoint. Czechoslovakia could not be defended; she could only be restored after a German attack by a protracted and successful Anglo-French war against Germany. If the German Armed Forces were not considered ready for a major war, neither were those of the powers likely to oppose them. The public did not become fully aware of this relative British and French unpreparedness for war until after the September crisis.⁷³ The possibility that the German General Staff might depose Hitler if faced with the certainty of effective Franco-British intervention was balanced by very great doubts about the willingness of France to fight an aggressive war in the west or the ability of Czechoslovakia to maintain a second front long enough for Anglo-French

⁷²Ibid., doc. 1203, pps. 609-610.

⁷³In Britain public and parliamentary concern centered on the lack of anti-aircraft defence. In France the chief concern was the negligible monthly output of aircraft in addition to the defenceless state of the cities.

pressure in the west to become effective. On the other hand, the consequences of a surrender to German pressure were made adequately clear in Parliament, the press and in the reports of the attachés. Many believed that complete Sudeten autonomy or even worse, the absorption of the Sudeten regions into Germany would place the Czechoslovakian defence system in German hands and make Czech resistance to further German demands impossible. The special correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote a series of articles claiming that complete autonomy for the Sudetens would spell the end of Czechoslovakia. One of these articles, appearing on August 24th, maintained:

The present conflict is part of a struggle between Prague and Berlin for the possession of the mountain ranges that divide Bohemia from the Reich. Full Home Rule for the Sudeten Germans would hand these ranges over to the Reich.⁷⁴

After the Munich crisis, many Parliamentarians who opposed the settlement were agreed that Czechoslovakia would be unable to preserve its independence. As a result, Germany would dominate directly or indirectly Czechoslovakia's war potential. The reports of the military attachés, while agreeing with the major contention of the critics of the Government, that Czechoslovakia would effectively be

⁷⁴The Manchester Guardian, August 24, 1938, also August 19th, 20th.

neutralized as a factor in the Central European balance of power, denied that the cession of the Sudetenland would leave Czechoslovakia defenceless. The main Czech defences were situated behind the predominantly Sudeten German areas and would not be lost. Nevertheless, the effect of autonomy or outright separation would make resistance to further German demands unlikely.

As 1938 drew to a close, the military attaché in Berlin and other correspondents began to submit their summaries of German military progress during 1938 and on this basis their estimates of Hitler's possible courses of action in 1939. By the end of 1938 and throughout 1939, the three branches of the German armed forces, the Navy, the Army and the Air Force, were still at quite widely separated stages of rearmament or of expansion and consequently of preparedness for war.

CHAPTER 6
ESTIMATES OF THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES
1938 - 1939

The German Navy was the service the least prepared for war in 1939. Severely limited both quantitatively and qualitatively by the Treaty of Versailles so as never again to pose a threat to British naval supremacy, the German Navy was relatively the 'cinderella' of the German defence budgets which were dominated by the requirements of Hitler's rearmament programmes for the army and the air force. Consequently, signs of German naval revival did not become obvious until almost two years after Hitler came to power. Some three months after Hitler had denounced the military restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, Britain tried to forestall a naval race by concluding an agreement with Germany.

The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 was central to British estimates of German naval rearmament, whatever its other merits and drawbacks. Together with a later agreement, it maintained some quantitative and qualitative restraints on the size of the German Navy. Germany was permitted to build a fleet equal to thirty-five per cent of British strength while the recreated

German submarine fleet was fixed at forty-five per cent of Commonwealth strength. There was, however, an escape clause permitting construction of up to one hundred per cent of Commonwealth submarine tonnage if Germany so desired and after prior consultation with Britain. Almost as important as the actual limitation agreements was the arrangement to exchange advance information about naval programmes and details of construction and armament. Perhaps these exchanges of information partially explain the virtual absence of naval attaché reports in the third series of Documents on British Foreign Policy.

The major reason for concluding the Anglo-German Agreement was the knowledge that Germany had already begun her naval rearmament and was building forbidden warships, including submarines. It is not clear just when the British Admiralty first realized that Germany had begun her naval rearmament. A summary of the military infractions of the Treaty of Versailles in July 1933 only mentioned the 'possibility' that the gunnery training ship "Bremse" could be considered as a cruiser and that the fishery protection ships "Weser" and "Elbe" could be classed as destroyers.¹ As late as March 11th, 1935 Mr. Baldwin,

¹DBFP ser. 2, vol. 5, doc. 253, p. 428.

reviewing the increased construction programmes of Japan, the United States, France and Italy, made no mention of German plans to build forbidden naval vessels.² According to the First Lord of the Admiralty, the British Naval Attaché in Berlin was informed on April 26, 1935 of a government order for the machinery and armament of twelve two hundred and fifty ton submarines. This order had been given the previous Christmas while construction of the hulls and assembly of the component parts had begun about the middle of April 1935.³

More interesting than the secret manufacture and assembly of submarines was the announcement that Germany's two new 10,000 ton warships were in reality 26,000 ton battleships or battle cruisers. These came to light when the German building programme for 1935-1936 was made public and again it is difficult to say when the Admiralty learned of their existence. In April of 1934, the Chief of Staff to Admiral Raeder, head of the German Admiralty, told the naval attaché that if Germany had the choice they would decide to build battleships of between twenty and twenty-five thousand tons with eight or nine thirty centimeter (11.8") guns. At the time, the Chief of Staff said that

²H.C. deb., 5s., vol. 299, col. 52, March 11, 1935.

³Ibid., vol. 301, col. 346, May 1, 1935.

no decision had been made and no plans drawn up for these warships.⁴ A year later, a report from an Italian source claimed that the German naval programme for 1935-1936 would include two battleships of twenty thousand tons, armed with nine eleven inch guns and having a speed of thirty-two knots.⁵

These possible lapses aside, the fault of British Admiralty estimates of the German Navy lay not so much in an underestimate of its strength, as in a miscalculation of the threat posed by the various parts of the German fleet. Assuming that, despite the advent of air power, Great Britain could only be overrun by seaborne troops, the Admiralty considered that there was little possibility of a decisive Anglo-German fleet action or of an attempted German invasion.⁶ Limited to thirty-five per cent of British strength, the German surface fleet would be unable to risk an open encounter and to challenge British control of the home waters. Less than six months before the outbreak of the World War, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty assured the House of Commons

⁴DBFP ser. 2, vol. 6, doc. 389, p. 626.

⁵'Giornale d'Italia' quoted in The Manchester Guardian May 1, 1935, p. 11.

⁶B. Collier The Defence of the United Kingdom (London: 1957), p. 49.

that the British fleet was so strong that it could accept a direct challenge in battle from "any combination of foes."⁷ If the British Navy could keep the number of ships required to protect supply lines to a minimum, this optimistic assessment would be valid. If, however, a very large part of the fleet were required to protect British commerce, the margin of safety over the "combination of foes" could become non-existent. After 1937, the Admiralty increasingly feared that the German Navy would be used almost exclusively for attacks on British sea communications.⁸

British commerce was threatened, so the Admiralty believed, by airplanes, mines, submarines, and surface raiders. Geographically, Germany was well placed to harass vital British supply routes while she herself was relatively immune from the direct weight of the British Navy. If the powerful new warships of the German Navy were employed as surface raiders, they could inflict very heavy casualties on British merchant shipping. In fact, the First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy believed that nothing would paralyze the British supply system and seaboard

⁷H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 345, col. 653, Mr. Shakespeare, March 16, 1939.

⁸Collier op. cit., pps. 58-59; S.W. Roskill, The War at Sea 1939-1945, vol. 1 (London: 1954), p. 35.

trade "so certainly and immediately as successful attack by surface raiders."⁹ While Admiralty attention was focused on surface raiders, the threat posed by submarines was consistently underestimated. It was expected that the submarine menace would not be as great as it had been in World War I when the convoy system had proved effective in reducing the loss of cargo tonnage to tolerable limits. In addition, the development of 'asdic' and other scientific devices for hunting, detecting and killing submarines led to overconfidence. Lacking the Admiralty's knowledge of these scientific developments, some Members of Parliament and newspapers more accurately evaluated the relative threats posed by the German fleet, surface raiders and submarines.

There seems to have been relatively little public concern about the eventual re-emergence of a German surface fleet thirty-five per cent as strong as the British. Many of the bitter memories of Anglo-German naval rivalry were laid to rest by Hitler's willingness to accept British naval supremacy. According to the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, the naval agreement could almost be called a capitulation made in the interests of German

⁹Roskill, Ibid., p. 35.

foreign policy. Success for German policy in Austria and in the east depended (or so the Germans thought) on at least British neutrality. As a result, the pressure from German naval quarters for a limit of fifty per cent of British strength had been ignored.¹⁰ However, a number of commentaries on the Agreement brought attention to a possible German qualitative advantage. There was a strong fear that by rapid construction of modern ships, Germany could reach her agreed ratio while the bulk of the British fleet was still obsolete. In this case, the German Navy could far exceed thirty-five per cent of the actual fighting strength of the Royal Navy. It was not forgotten that into the ten thousand ton limit of the Treaty of Versailles, the Germans had poured sufficient speed and firepower to enable the 'pocket battleships' supposedly to escape anything that could sink them and sink anything that could catch them with the exception of the three British battle cruisers. The two battle cruisers being built for Germany were expected to be faster than their British equivalents and to be capable of overhauling and destroying almost every cruiser Britain possessed.¹¹ With

¹⁰The Manchester Guardian, July 3, 1935, p. 12.

¹¹H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 302, cols. 417-418; col. 439, May 22, 1935. The Observer, June 23, 1935, p. 16; The Times, July 10, 1935, p. 15; The Observer, July 14, 1935, p. 20.

the expectation that Germany would build her new capital ships expressly for commerce raiding rather than for fleet action, visions of legions of super 'Emdens' running amok on the high seas excited the fears of many outside the Admiralty.

Between 1935 and the Czechoslovakian crisis of 1938, the German building programmes do not seem to have excited much adverse comment in either the newspapers or in Parliament. The Germans agreed to some qualitative limitations, particularly with regard to heavy cruisers. More important than this was the knowledge that Germany was building a balanced fleet at a relatively moderate pace. According to a report in the Manchester Guardian, the German fleet would consist by 1942 of five battleships of thirty-five thousand tons or less, four armoured cruisers, three of ten thousand tons and one of twenty-six thousand tons, two aircraft carriers, thirteen cruisers and forty destroyers.¹² An almost identical summary of German building plans was printed in a German newspaper, the Boersen Zeitung, some six months later and was quoted in the Times of July 7, 1937.¹³

¹²The Manchester Guardian, December 5, 1936, p. 17.

¹³The Times, July 7, 1937, p. 15. The German newspaper only mentioned three 'pocket battleships' but referred to fourteen cruisers instead of thirteen.

In August of 1938, just prior to the Czechoslovakian crisis, the naval correspondents of both the Observer and the Manchester Guardian wrote articles about the German Navy. Neither of them suggested that it posed any serious threat to Britain. According to the naval correspondent of the Observer, the German Navy was still substantially under the tonnage permitted by the Anglo-German Agreement in each of the categories. Germany was one hundred thousand tons under the limit for capital ships, about an equal amount under the aggregate tonnage for cruisers, destroyers, etc., and could build two more aircraft carriers of twenty thousand tons. Not only was the rate of construction slower in Germany than in Britain, but in the opinion of the correspondent, the German fleet was "far from assuming alarming proportions."¹⁴ However, if Britain's position vis-à-vis the German surface fleet was considered sound, newspapers and Parliamentarians exerted increasing pressure on the Government to counter the growing threat of the German submarine fleet.

The experience of World War I, when German submarines had come within measurable distance of blockading Britain, had taught the British to regard the submarine

¹⁴The Observer, August 21, 1938, p. 9; The Manchester Guardian, August 25, 1938, p. 5.

not only as a weapon of aggression, but as a weapon of aggression directed specifically against Great Britain. Reaction to the announcement that Germany would soon have twelve submarines was varied. The Times contented itself with a simple statement of fact, the Manchester Guardian editorial said that the news might be "extremely disagreeable" but was not "surprising," while the editorial in the Observer was entitled "New German Challenge."¹⁵ Understandably, the sections of the Anglo-German Agreement most heavily censured were those allowing Germany forty-five per cent of the submarine strength of the British Empire and the right to build to one hundred per cent if she first notified Britain.

Once again there were fears that Germany would immediately "mass produce" the long-range ocean type of submarine. Even men as experienced as Mr. Churchill spoke of the possible construction of forty to fifty thousand tons of submarines by August 1937.¹⁶ As the naval correspondent of the Manchester Guardian reported, the large number of submarines being constructed, twenty-eight for 1935-1936, was not as serious as it seemed because most

¹⁵The Times, April 29, 1935, p. 14; The Manchester Guardian, April 29, p. 8; The Observer, April 28, p. 19.

¹⁶H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 309, cols. 2017-2018, March 10, 1936.

of them were small, intended for the defence of the Baltic coast. Only eight of the twenty-eight were to be of ocean-going size.¹⁷ Other reports submitted by the naval correspondents suggested that Germany intended to reach her allotted strength in submarines by 1942 in fairly even stages after the first large programme. This estimate proved to be correct, for only seven more ocean-going submarines were started in 1936 according to the Times Berlin correspondent.¹⁸ Another example of the relative moderation of the German submarine building plan was the report that only four submarines were scheduled for completion in 1937.¹⁹ Most of the correspondents estimated that as of August 1938 Germany had launched about twenty-four small submarines of two hundred and fifty tons and about twelve to fifteen submarines of between five and seven hundred tons. The aggregate tonnage of submarines built and building was estimated at roughly twenty-six thousand tons, some six thousand tons less than forty-five per cent of British Empire Tonnage.²⁰

¹⁷ The Manchester Guardian July 9, p. 11. The plan called for six five hundred ton submarines and two seven hundred and fifty ton submarines.

¹⁸ The Times, September 20, 1937, p. 11. In all, fifteen submarines were started in 1936 according to the report. Of these fifteen, eight were part of the 1935-1936 programme.

¹⁹ The Manchester Guardian, December 5, 1936, p. 17.

²⁰ The Observer, August 21, 1938, p. 9; The Manchester Guardian, August 18, 1938, p. 13; December 31, p. 11.

While the relative moderation of the German submarine programme and the high proportion of small coastal submarines had quietened British distrust of German naval intentions, Hitler's decision to build to one hundred per cent of British strength revived all the old fears and suspicion. The German claim that the Bolshevik threat necessitated the increases was greeted with polite disbelief. The diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote "... it is France and Britain that have to reckon with the consequences of this increase, and most of all Britain"²¹

The first casualty of Hitler's decision was the accuracy of the public estimates of German submarine strength. To reach equality with Great Britain, Germany would have to build forty to forty-five thousand more tons of submarines, or so the British estimated. In March of 1939, Winston Churchill suggested that a large proportion of this extra tonnage had already been built in sections and had only to be assembled.²² His suggestion found some support in information coming out of Germany to the effect that Germany was preparing to speed up submarine construction

²¹The Manchester Guardian, January 3, 1939, p. 15.

²²H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 345, cols. 676-677, March 16, 1939.

by assembling them in various parts of the country.²³ Other estimates of German submarine strength ranged from seventy-one to the possibility of some one hundred and fifty in the "comparatively near future."²⁴ Growing public concern about the apparently very rapid expansion of the German submarine fleet after 1938 was reflected by the tremendous pressure exerted by members of all parties in the Commons and by newspapers for a vastly increased destroyer programme. During the March 1939 debate on the naval estimates, nearly every speaker urged the necessity of building more small, fast destroyers.²⁵

A final question when dealing with British estimates of German naval rearmament is the effect which British observers expected this rearmament to have on the naval balance in Europe. There was little doubt that German naval rearmament would consolidate German control of the Baltic Sea. In 1935, the Manchester Guardian ran a series of articles on the naval situation in the Baltic. A major conclusion drawn from these articles was that the German navy, once its rearmament was complete, would have a decisive margin over the combined fleets of the other Baltic

²³Ibid., col. 391, March 15, 1939.

²⁴Ibid., col. 970, 931, March 20, 1939.

²⁵Ibid., cols. 668-973, March 16, 1939.

naval powers, Sweden, Poland, and Russia.²⁶ However, the moderate rate of construction between 1935 and 1939 meant that the bulk of the German Navy would be required to protect the Baltic coast of Germany and to ensure the continued supply of iron ore from Scandinavia. As a result, the German surface fleet was not expected to pose a threat to British domination of the major seas, even the North Sea. Because the majority of the German submarines were too small for operations in the oceans, they seemed to pose only a limited threat to British trade and commerce. However, some Members of Parliament and newspapers drew attention to the possibility that Germany would force General Franco to permit small German submarines to operate out of Spanish ports or from Spanish islands. Operating from Cadiz, Vigo, or the Canary Islands, which were close to British sea routes, the German coastal submarines might take a heavy toll of British shipping.

The Army

The post-Munich reports of the military attachés and other correspondents dealing with the strength and

²⁶The Manchester Guardian, April 29, 1935, p. 9; July 4, p. 8; August 2, pps. 9-10.

basic preparedness of the German Army still did not suggest the imminence of large scale war. Rather, they suggested that the strength of the German Army was rapidly increasing but would not reach its peak in 1939. Early in 1938 correspondents of the Manchester Guardian had learned of German plans to increase substantially the number of divisions and to correct some of the more obvious weaknesses of the army. The dispatches suggested a future 'regular' strength of some forty-five infantry and seven mechanized divisions. These increases had been foreshadowed in late 1937 but now it was expected that at least skeleton units would be formed in the near future. Scarcity of available manpower, as well as a shortage of both raw material and equipment were given as reasons for the belief that these new formations would not be "fleshed out" until circumstances permitted.²⁷ Two major steps were also being taken to reduce the chronic shortage of officers. All officers had been made liable for indefinite service, including those regular officers who had been discharged or retired from the Imperial Army or from the Reichswehr. In addition, some of the best conscripts were being offered the opportunity of spending an additional

²⁷The Manchester Guardian, February 24, 1938, p. 9, and March 1, p. 14.

year in the army after their two year period and thus of qualifying for an officer's commission in the reserve.²⁸ Churchill, with his own private sources of information, arrived at an estimate roughly the same as that of the correspondent for the Guardian. As of June 1st, he believed the German Army consisted of thirty-six regular and four armoured divisions. The non-armoured divisions could be duplicated and were rapidly acquiring the power to be triplicated, but the Germans only had enough artillery for seventy divisions. By October, Churchill expected there would be no fewer than sixty fully equipped and armed divisional formations supported by enough trained men for thirty-six additional divisions. Equipment, small arms, and a very low establishment of artillery could be found for these extra divisions, "if a lower standard were accepted for part of the active army." The western democracies, then, might expect to face about ninety-six German divisions exclusive of the Austrian Army by the autumn of the year.²⁹

²⁸The Times, April 21, 1938, p. 13, The Manchester Guardian, March 1, 1938, p. 14.

²⁹W.S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Canada: 1948), p. 236. Letter to M. Daladier, the French Prime Minister. Germany actually mobilized 105 divisions in September 1939.

The regular end-of-year summary of Germany's military position, prepared by the military attachés, confirmed these reports of expansion to a degree and also summarized the effects of the year's events (which had already been discussed in Parliament and in the newspapers) on the German Army. Anschluss with Austria and the annexation of the Sudetenland had tremendously improved the strategic position of the army in the east and had provided a large reserve of manpower, while the intensive fortification work along the Rhine had considerably improved its strategic position in the west.³⁰ By the end of 1938, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane estimated that the peacetime army had been expanded to thirty-six infantry divisions, four armoured divisions, two light divisions, and two mountain divisions. As of November 30th, an additional four divisions were in the process of formation, including a fifth armoured division, and two or three more infantry divisions were being motorized. There had also been a very large increase in the number of specialized units, such as machine gun battalions, paratroop regiments, and

³⁰ Because Hitler had refused to allow the Czechs to move out their heavy guns from the Sudetenland, Germany also supplemented her heavy artillery. However, these guns were not the same calibre as the German and hence would pose a problem of logistics.

independent tank battallions and regiments. If the Austrian Army were included together with the élite paramilitary troops, they would add another eight divisions. According to the attaché, Hitler had mobilized some ninety divisions at the height of the Sudeten crisis.³¹ The incorporation of Austria and the Sudetenland meant that future expansion would no longer be limited by the number of conscripts available, but by the capacity of German factories to arm them. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane calculated that the German armaments industry could produce enough weapons and equipment to outfit about fifteen divisions a year. On this basis Germany would be able to mobilize roughly one hundred and five divisions by the fall of 1939. (This was the actual number that Germany did mobilize on September 1, 1939.)³²

A considerable number of new weapons had also made their appearance during 1938, and had been issued in large numbers. Among these weapons were a machine gun which could be fired from the shoulder or mounted on a tripod, heavy artillery and a new heavy infantry gun. In April, the correspondents of both the Guardian and the

³¹DBFP ser. 3, vol. 3, doc. 389, pps. 368-373.

³²Ibid., and J.R.M. Butler Grand Strategy vol. 2 (London: 1957), pps. 50, 57.

Times had noted the appearance of some new tanks in a parade. These tanks seemed to weigh about twenty tons each and to be armed with either a 37 millimeter or a 77 mm gun as well as a machine gun.³³ Quoting from the German Army Yearbook, the Times correspondent calculated that on the basis of two light divisions with about one hundred tanks each and five armoured divisions each having two regiments of about two hundred tanks apiece, Germany had approximately 2,000 medium tanks and four hundred light tanks.³⁴ While this estimate was exaggerated to some degree, it was reasonable, unlike the wild estimate of Lloyd George who repeated a claim of a "prominent authority" that the Germans had, "tens of thousands of tanks, certainly about 20,000."³⁵ The relative military value of tanks was still a source of disagreement among the military observers. Neither Colonel Stronge in Prague nor Colonel Mason-MacFarlane in Berlin gave much importance to the German armoured divisions, even as late as October 1938. Colonel Stronge was particularly emphatic, believing "the

³³DBFP ser. 3, vol. 3, doc. 389, pps. 368-373; The Times, April 21, 1938, p. 12; The Manchester Guardian, April 21, p. 11.

³⁴The Times, November 30, 1938, p. 13.

³⁵H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 347, col. 1817, May 19, 1939.

claim made for the tank arm as being a decisive factor in modern warfare to be the greatest delusion of post-war times." In his opinion, modern infantry, with the immense fire-power and mobility resulting from motorization, was still the most decisive factor.³⁶ Colonel Mason-MacFarlane was extremely doubtful that the Germans would have used their armoured divisions to spearhead the offensives against Czechoslovakia: "their main tank resources would have been kept up their sleeve to deal with what the Germans consider to be their principal task - namely, the exploitation of success."³⁷ The correspondent of the Manchester Guardian on the other hand considered the mobile and armoured divisions an essential part of Hitler's policy of bluff and extortion. With their capability of rapid concentration, they were an ideal complement to his diplomacy. Germany built no heavy tanks to match French and Russian models of seventy tons because,

Germany, in accordance with her belief that the war of the future will be one of movement, builds no weapons of so heavy a type. For German tank units with the maximum size of 18 to 25 tons are offensive weapons to be used as a form of attacking cavalry, as distinct from infantry-supporting arms as in the French Army.³⁸

³⁶DBFP ser. 3, vol. 3, doc. 286, p. 254.

³⁷Ibid., Appendix 3, p. 628.

³⁸The Manchester Guardian, April 21, 1938, p. 11; November 16, 1938, p. 9.

Equally divergent conclusions were drawn about the efficiency of the German Army in action during the occupation of Austria and the Sudetenland.

Colonel Mason-MacFarlane considered that despite the lack of preparation the move into Austria had progressed satisfactorily and that the value of this experience was demonstrated in the autumn. Whereas the occupation of Austria had been marked by a number of difficulties, particularly with motor transport and vehicle breakdowns, the move into the Sudetenland had been accomplished without many serious problems. The General Staff work appeared to Colonel Mason-MacFarlane to have been smooth and efficient despite "the hurry with which the critical movements had to be started." On this occasion, the motor transport had been "strikingly" efficient, and few if any cases of vehicle breakdowns had been seen by observers.³⁹ Writing in October, a correspondent called the invasion of Austria a military debacle, the road from Lidz on the frontier to Vienna having been blocked for a day and a half by vehicles in trouble. The Austrian officers apparently had been astonished at the poor quality of German equipment and at the lack of training displayed by German officers. This report contrasts with that filed by the

³⁹ DBFP ser. 3, vol 3, doc. 191, p. 166.

Times Vienna correspondent. "In my wildest dreams," he wrote, "I had not seen anything so perfectly organized, so brutal, so ruthless, so strong. When this machine goes into action, it will blight everything it encounters like a swarm of locusts."⁴⁰ Both these reports were considerably exaggerated, but the German Army still had its weaknesses.

Colonel Mason-MacFarlane reported that prior to 1943, when the German High Command intended to have the army working at maximum efficiency, there would be two periods when war would catch them at a disadvantage.⁴¹ These periods would be the winters of 1938-1939 and 1939-1940, when the army would be disorganized by the simultaneous effort to train a new class of recruits and to carry out

⁴⁰The Manchester Guardian, November 16, 1938, p. 9. History of the Times Part 2, 1921-1948 (London: 1952), p. 917. This report was not published probably because it asserted that the ultimate Nazi objective was the destruction of England.

Not even the German generals can agree on what percentage of Germany's mechanized forces broke down on the march into Austria. General Jodl's figure of seventy per cent was denied by General Guderian, who commanded the armoured troops. Heinz Guderian, Penzer Leader (London: 1952), pps. 53-56.

⁴¹DBFP, ser. 3, vol. 3, doc. 389, p. 372.

the expansion programme. Other European mass armies that had already reached their maximum peace strength would not be in quite so disorganized a state. Until the German Army reached its maximum peace strength in the autumn of 1939, a new mobilization plan would have to be prepared each year to take account of its increasing size. As a result, the German Army could only be mobilized between winter and spring by means of a temporary and complicated tinkering with the previous mobilization plan. The German Army had a number of deficiencies, most of them brought about by its tremendously rapid expansion. With the formation of each new division, the already limited proportion of experienced officers and non-commissioned officers was further reduced. The very atmosphere of tension and uncertainty in which the army existed was detrimental to training. In 1938, the army had twice been ordered to mobilize, and according to Mason-MacFarlane, it had been "forced to run before it could, in theory, walk."⁴² A number of units, particularly those stationed in East Prussia, had been short of certain types of weapons, such as mortars and machine guns, when the military attachés had attended their manoeuvres in September of 1938. The training of individuals and of units had been impressive, but their collective per-

⁴²Ibid., p. 371.

formance had been poor and the scale of weapons-issue had been low. In addition, the tank units had been badly handled.⁴³

The German High Command, according to the attaché, still did not feel completely confident that the German Army would be ready for a major war before 1943. By that time, the army would have had four years of training without the handicap of rapid expansion and would have a sufficient reserve to mobilize at least one hundred and fifty divisions.⁴⁴ For this reason, as well as for economic reasons, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane was convinced that Hitler did not envisage a long war. He also assumed that the army probably would not encourage any policy that might precipitate any war before June, because the new class of conscripts had not joined the colours until December. In 1939, the best time for a war from the standpoint of the army would be the autumn, when it had again worked itself into a state of peak efficiency. However, if Hitler said differently, the army would not oppose the man "who has proved them wrong in every major situation where their opinions have clashed."⁴⁵ In addition, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane believed

⁴³Ibid., vol. 2, doc. 943, p. 408.

⁴⁴Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 389, pps. 368-373.

⁴⁵Ibid., doc. 505, p. 547.

that Hitler had been "bitterly disappointed" when deprived of a small war with Czechoslovakia.⁴⁶

The Air Force

One of the reasons that the military attachés were convinced that Germany would commit aggression in 1939 was based on their estimates of the strength of the German Air Force. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane wrote in December that the German Air Force was the most "uncertain military factor" in an appraisal of possible German intentions for 1939.⁴⁷ Group Captain Vachell, the air attaché, reported in February: "... if Germany does decide that war is necessary for her aims, the year 1939 is the most suitable from the air point of view."⁴⁸

Most British observers exaggerated the strength of the German Air Force during 1938. Early in the year, the German Air Force was estimated to have a first-line strength of between three thousand and thirty-five hundred airplanes. General Weygand of the French Army placed the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 550.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., vol. 4, doc. 117, pps. 117-119. Estimates of Hitler's intentions follow the discussion of the Luftwaffe.

relative strengths of France, Great Britain and Germany at one thousand, fifteen hundred and three thousand respectively. His figures carried a considerable amount of authority in Great Britain, being accepted by the Observer and by Churchill among others. Hence the belief that the Luftwaffe was at least twice as strong as the Royal Air Force, if not stronger.⁴⁹ Concern about the relative strengths of the RAF and the Luftwaffe found its outlet in strong criticism of the Air Estimates by Members of both Houses in May. Once again the critics of the Government's air policy strongly stressed German production and her additional capacity. At the time, Germany seemed to be producing about three hundred and fifty airplanes a month but had not reached her full capacity by any means. Sir H. Seeley estimated conservatively that German factories could produce four to five hundred airplanes a month if they worked at full capacity. Mr. Dalton suggested that this reserve capacity existed because the German factories were working only one shift and were using only about sixty percent of their available floor space. Another Member of Parliament predicted that Germany would have increased her output from three hundred and fifty to twelve hundred air-

⁴⁹The Observer, April 3, 1938, p. 16; H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 332, col. 1601, March 7, 1938.

planes a month by 1940.⁵⁰ On the basis of these estimates, Germany was expected to have a first-line strength of between six and eight thousand machines by 1939 with the productive resources to supply reserves and to maintain this number of first-line airplanes at war strength.⁵¹ Fears of an imminent and extensive increase in the Luftwaffe, an increase which could not be matched by the RAF, were supported by a report of the Manchester Guardian's diplomatic correspondent in July. His information was that, as a result of the May crisis, the entire military establishment in Germany was united in its approval of Field Marshal Göring's long-time ambition to double the Luftwaffe's first-line strength of between twenty-five hundred and three thousand.⁵² However, there was no indication either in Parliament or in the three newspapers that this plan to double the strength of the Luftwaffe had begun to be implemented by the time of the September crisis.

The amount of information available about the official British Air Military estimate of the German Air

⁵⁰H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 335, cols. 1752, 1853, May 12, 1938; vol. 336, cols. 1238-1239, May 25.

⁵¹H.L. deb. 5s., vol. 108, col. 1071, May 12, 1938; H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 335, col. 1752, May 12, 1938.

⁵²The Manchester Guardian, July 9, 1938, p. 13.

Force in 1938 is scant. Reports reaching the Prime Minister early in the year, however, indicated that the expansion of the air force was being accelerated, but how fast this expansion was thought to be is unclear.⁵³ Group Captain Vachell, the air attaché in Berlin, wrote in February 1939 that the year 1938 "was one of steady though not spectacular progress." Hitler's orders to further expand the Luftwaffe in March 1938 appeared to Group Captain Vachell to have been slow in bearing fruit because no new Luftwaffe units were discovered until late in the year; even when an air base seemed to have been completed, there had been a noticeable delay before it was occupied.⁵⁴ While this report contradicts the sense of the reports reaching the Prime Minister, it is not known whether the attaché realized the unspectacular nature of the Luftwaffe expansion at the time, because none of his estimates of German air strength are included in the Documents ... for 1938. A brief comment by the British Ambassador at the end of a private letter written to the Secretary of State on October 12, 1938 suggests that Group Captain Vachell did note the

⁵³Basil Collier, Barren Victories (London: 1964), p.121; The Defence of the U.K. (London: 1957), p. 66 does not give any details of the Air Ministry estimate.

⁵⁴DBFP ser. 3, vol. IV, doc. 117, p. 118.

difference between German expansion plans and accomplishments in 1938. The Ambassador, Neville Henderson, wrote in part:

I am afraid from what I have heard directly and indirectly that our authorities still do not grasp the immensity of the German air effort. The expenditure of huge sums in aeronautical research, the mobilization of industry, the almost unlimited resources in personnel and the truly Herculean labour of the air chiefs and staffs have worked a miracle

According to my information the Germans have a first-line strength which is at least double ours. In design and performance they are far ahead of us. They have, for example, bombers which are not only faster than some of our fighters, but have a much longer range than our bombers

Meanwhile - and this is the most disturbing thing - German production is proceeding in full swing. I believe that the total production is about 1000 aeroplanes a month and new orders are constantly being placed⁵⁵

This estimate of German air power was one of the most extreme especially as it also included an equally high estimate of the quality and quantity of the German ground defences which would rob the RAF bombers of much of their raison d'être, their deterrent effect. The report concluded, however, with the admission that the air attaché did not agree with this summary of German strength. The major disagreement between Ambassador Henderson and Group

⁵⁵Ibid., vol. 111, Appendix 1, p. 616.

Captain Vachell was probably one of degree; the latter did not believe that the Luftwaffe either was or would remain overwhelmingly strong.

In his analysis of the condition of the German Air Force as of February 1939 Vachell concluded that the Luftwaffe would be relatively stronger than the British and French Air Forces during the year but that thereafter it would become relatively weaker for a few years. While a steady formation of new units was to be expected, a further rapid expansion, such as had occurred after 1935, appeared impossible, unless there was some "radical change in conditions." Production of airplanes had accelerated during 1938 but by February 1939 most of the new factories were working at close to their full capacity and were unlikely to increase their output in the near future. If anything, production might temporarily fall off slightly because new jigs and tools were being introduced to produce new types of airplanes. On the other hand, production in both France and Britain was rising and Germany could not hope to match their combined output if these factories were permitted to reach their full production. Thus the relative numerical superiority which Germany had, would gradually disappear. Until the middle of 1939 the German Air Force would also have a relative superiority

in overall quality because all of her units would be equipped with airplanes first produced in 1936 and the British still had units equipped with planes first produced in 1933 and 1934. Newer aircraft such as the Junkers 88 medium bomber and the twin-engine Messerschmitt 110 were beginning to be issued to German units. The new French and British planes, because they were of more recent design than the German, would give better performance; consequently, the attaché estimated that qualitative superiority would favour Great Britain and France by the end of the year. Although the British, and probably the French pilots were better trained than the German, the attaché did not consider that "any doubts about the standard of training reached by the German Air Force would cause any hesitation to put it to the test."⁵⁶

Both Group Captain Vachell and Mr. Henderson were agreed, however, that faced with certain loss of its qualitative and quantitative superiority after 1939, that year would be the best time for the Luftwaffe to fight a major preventative air war. Both men also agreed on the importance of the Luftwaffe in any plans Hitler might have for the year. In October 1938 Mr. Henderson had written the

⁵⁶Ibid., vol. IV, doc. 117, pps. 117-119.

Foreign Secretary that "Hitler's intransigence and readiness to embark on war was solely due to the conviction that Germany as a result of Goering's efforts possessed (1) an air force which in quantity and quality far surpassed anything which France and England could put up (2) an immeasurably superior ground defence."⁵⁷ In 1939, he cautioned that "the efficiency and commanding superiority of the German Air Force during 1939 are only one of the many factors which would have to be taken into consideration by the German Government in the event of the embarkation on any war."⁵⁸ Finally, neither the Ambassador nor the attaché believed that the Luftwaffe had been built up to attack any particular enemy; its organization, equipment, and general deployment gave little evidence of any strategical design and its role seemed primarily to be to cower nations that might resist German aims.⁵⁹

Estimates of German air strength made in Parliament and in the newspapers did not lead directly to the conclusion that 1939 would be the most favourable year for a

⁵⁷Ibid., vol. 3, Appendix 1, p. 616.

⁵⁸Ibid., vol. 4, doc.117, p. 116, preface to Group Captain Vachell's report.

⁵⁹Ibid., pps. 116, 119; ibid., vol. 3, Appendix 1, pps. 616-617.

war as far as the Luftwaffe was concerned, but some of their information suggested this was so. Even reports of some of the most staunch critics of official estimates of German strength suggested that at least the relative strengths of the Luftwaffe and the RAF had not altered in Germany's favour. Hence, while Sir Hugh Seeley was very critical of those who suggested that Germany had "shot her bolt in the air," his estimate showed that the Luftwaffe had maintained, but not increased, its two-to-one superiority over the RAF and that contrary to his prediction of May 1938, it would not have six thousand first-line planes by May of 1939 but nearer thirty-five hundred.⁶⁰ Other Members of the House of Commons were convinced that Britain was catching up to Germany in aircraft production. Lieutenant-Colonel Moore Barbazon admitted that for the first time in his Parliamentary career he was, "broadly speaking, satisfied on the question of air rearmament."⁶¹ Mr. Grant-Ferris believed that if British production were four hundred a month, then the 'gap' in production was fast closing, for although German production was reputed to be very high, difficulties of procuring raw materials and labour were certain to slow

⁶⁰H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 344, col. 2414, March 9, 1939; ibid., vol. 335, col. 1752, May 12, 1938.

⁶¹Ibid., vol. 344, col. 2469.

it down.⁶² Even the Observer, perennially pessimistic about Britain's air strength vis-à-vis Germany, contained a report from the air correspondent on July 9th claiming that Great Britain, making 750 planes a month, was outproducing Germany for the first time. The report cautioned, however, that once the Germans had re-organized the recently acquired Czech factories, they might re-establish their lead.⁶³ There were also a few references to Germany's declining qualitative superiority but Parliament and the press generally remained obsessed with the quantitative aspect of air power, paying little attention to the relative quality of German and British airplanes.⁶⁴

While the trend of public estimates of German air strength was cautiously optimistic in 1939 there were reports that contradicted this optimism. One of these, from the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian on May 1st, stated that information from German sources indicated a rise in German production from about

⁶²Ibid., col. 2469, March 9, 1939.

⁶³The Observer, July 9, 1939, p. 18; in January German production had been estimated at between four and six hundred; in March at between five and six hundred. Ibid., January 29, p. 12; March 19, p. 21.

⁶⁴The Times, March 3, 1939, p. 13; H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 344, col. 2414.

nine hundred to a thousand aircraft a month in August 1938 and a further increase to twelve hundred a month after January of 1939. Furthermore, German front-line strength was put at about three hundred squadrons of which some one hundred and seventy were bomber squadrons. Having a total of nine regular and six reserve airplanes each, those squadrons gave a first-line strength of 4,500-5,000 planes and were supported by an equal number of machines in reserve, complete but unassembled.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, public estimates of the strength of the German Air Force end rather abruptly in May of 1939. Therefore, these sources give no further idea of what size air force the Parliamentarians and correspondents expected would face Great Britain when war broke out in September. Perhaps one of the reasons for this lack of information was that by May Britain was rearming as fast as possible and had already committed herself to oppose any further German expansion. Britain had committed herself to oppose Germany because some of the predictions that had been made about Hitler's political intentions following the Munich settlement had come true.

⁶⁵The Manchester Guardian, May 1, 1939, p. 14.

CHAPTER 7
ESTIMATES OF GERMAN INTENTIONS
OCTOBER 1938 - AUGUST 1939

The Lull: October - March

The Sudetenland is the last territorial claim
I have to make in Europe.

Adolf Hitler, September 26, 1938

For the second time in our history, a British
Prime Minister has returned from Germany bring-
ing peace with honour. I believe it is peace
for our time.

Neville Chamberlain, September 30, 1939

A great many people believed these statements.
The reports of the correspondents of the Manchester Guardian
and those of the military attachés show that they, and many
other people, did not. They spent the next five months
speculating and collecting information, not on "if" Hitler
would march, but "when" and "where" he would march.

Immediately following the Munich settlement, the
reports of the diplomatic and Berlin correspondents of the
Guardian reflected the widespread fear that Hitler would
proceed to break up the rest of Czechoslovakia in the near
future. On September 30, 1938 the diplomatic correspondent
of the Guardian reported a prediction current in London:

the European crisis was believed to be at an end but,

The end is regarded as no more than provisional, but it is believed that whereas Germany would have made herself master of all Czecho-Slovakia almost at once under the terms of Hitler's ultimatum, it will now take her the whole winter and perhaps the spring to get what she wants, though some unofficial observers believe this view to be rather optimistic.¹

Churchill, in the Commons debate of October 5th, also expressed the view that the remnants of Czechoslovakia would be 'engulfed' in the Nazi regime within "a period of time which may be measured by years, but may be measured only by months."² Nevertheless, fears of an imminent German move into Czechoslovakia gradually died down and the attention of British observers began to centre on how parts of Czechoslovakia might be used to further German plans.

An immediate goal of Germany seemed to be to prevent Ruthenian Czechoslovakia, which separated Hungary and Poland, from slipping into the control of either of these countries.³ The possible purpose of this German action was expressed succinctly in a Manchester Guardian editorial of November 5th:

¹The Manchester Guardian, September 30, 1938, p. 11.

²H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 339, cols. 365-366, October 5, 1938.

³The Manchester Guardian, October 26, 1938, p. 6.

An independent Ruthenia, however divided and impoverished, robbed and misused, will make an admirable base from which to plan the partition of Poland and Soviet Russia.⁴

Germany was expected to exploit the ever-present Ukrainian nationalism in Russia, Poland and Rumania in order to carve out an independent Ukraine which she could dominate. This intent seemed to be borne out by a reportedly steady worsening of German-Polish relations. On November 24th, a report in the Guardian suggested that German-Polish friendship, which had been "nothing more than a piece of transient political opportunism," was coming to an end over the question of Ruthenia, and that the Germans were seriously planning to treat Poland "à la Czechoslovakia." The dismemberment of Poland and the establishment of an independent Ukraine would be the prelude to the dismemberment of and colonization of Russia.⁵

During the first two weeks of December there were strong suggestions that Germany might make an eastward move as early as February 1939. Two reports in the Observer as well as continuing reports in the Manchester Guardian, suggested the possibility of a new 'dynamic surge' east.

⁴Ibid., November 5, 1938, p. 12. An earlier report also described fundamental German-Polish antagonism, ibid., October 20, p. 6.

⁵Ibid., November 24, 1938, p. 16; November 28th, p. 8.

Supposedly, the German plans were so far advanced that a 'Ukranian Commissar' had been selected to organize a school for training future Ukrainian military instructors.⁶ The British press reported rumours about German activities in Ruthenia such that Mr. Dalton, speaking in the House of Commons on December 18th, felt it would be "a matter of weeks" before there might be changes in the German border with Poland.⁷ The possibility of early military action by Germany also figured strongly in the despatches of the attachés and other diplomatic representatives, so strongly in fact that Viscount Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, wrote on January 27th, "... it is remarkable that there is one tendency running through all the reports."⁸

Colonel Mason-MacFarlane prefaced his Memorandum on possible German military action in 1939 with the admission that there was insufficient evidence to make "definite prophetic deductions" about Hitler's intentions.⁹ It was quite possible that Hitler had not yet decided how to use his army during the next year. However, if he had done so,

⁶The Observer, December 11, 1938, p. 18; December 18, p. 14; The Manchester Guardian, December 12, p. 12; December 19, p. 12; December 31, p. 15.

⁷H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 342, cols. 2508-2511; December 18, 1938.

⁸DBFP ser. 3, vol. 4, doc. 40, p. 39.

⁹Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 505, p. 546, December 26, 1938.

all evidence suggested early action, perhaps as early as February. Most of the officers in the German War Ministry were not planning to take their usual skiing holiday in January or February, and there were rumours that no leave would be granted to members of the air force after January 1st. Warning orders had been sent out to all of the reservists, and a considerable amount of transport had been requisitioned.¹⁰ Toward the end of January, other measures of a minor nature were reported which could be interpreted as signs that Hitler might march in the near future. Officers in Berlin began to decline invitations in the evenings, and the Chief of the Operations Section of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht was suddenly ordered away on duty.¹¹ Colonel Mason-MacFarlane reported his impression that the German Army was preparing for possible action on a large scale. However, by the end of January, the reports of the military attachés still gave no certain indication as to where Hitler would strike next.

After Hitler's speech of January 30th, which was considerably milder than had been expected, the prevailing assumption that Hitler would launch another aggression in 1939 wavered somewhat. Colonel Vitrolles, who a few weeks earlier

¹⁰Ibid., p. 547.

¹¹Ibid., vol. 4, doc. 23, p. 24, January 24, 1939.

had insisted that Hitler must expand or face internal collapse, told his British counterpart that Germany did not intend war during 1939. The economic situation, according to Vitrolles, was such that war would be a precarious gamble; if Hitler did not win a quick victory, he would be defeated.¹² Very few others shared Colonel Vitrolles' optimism. A day after Hitler's speech, Colonel Stronge reported a conversation with the Yugoslavian Military Attaché, who had assured him that "there was no doubt that Germany was making thorough and speedy preparations for a major war."¹³ There followed a month of quiet during which the Germany Army continued to work at high pressure preparing for action - exactly when and where no one knew. Hitler was waiting for the situation to "clarify itself." German armament continued apace, showing no signs of slackening. A week before the German occupation of Czechoslovakia the Polish Military Attaché told Colonel Mason-MacFarlane that his information pointed to an acceleration in the pace of the German armament programme in the previous six weeks. Particular emphasis was being placed on a still further expansion of aircraft production, with the

¹²Ibid., vol. 4, doc. 79, p. 74, February 1, 1939.

¹³Ibid., doc. 69, p. 65, January 31, 1939.

object of eventually increasing the number of air divisions from six to eighteen.¹⁴

Another interesting possibility frequently mentioned in the January 1939 reports of the attachés was that of an indirect attack on Great Britain through occupation of Holland. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane suggested on December 26th the possibility of a German attack on Great Britain, but considered the odds against it to be ten to one.¹⁵ A few days later, Colonel Gauché the Head of the 2^e Bureau, told Colonel Fraser that in a future war Germany would probably attack neither France nor Belgium. Instead, she would seize all Holland north of the Rhine, thus securing control of the whole river, plus an excellent line of defense in the north, and bases from which to launch submarine attacks against the British coast.¹⁶ On January 13th, the Chief of the Belgian General Staff told much the same story to the military attaché in Brussels and added that a "sure source" had reported a recent study conducted by German Staff Officers to weigh the possibilities of such an attack. He estimated that the Germans would take about eight days to overrun Holland.¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., doc. 181, p. 186, March 6, 1939.

¹⁵Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 505, p. 549.

¹⁶Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 509, p. 556.

¹⁷Ibid., doc. 535, p. 583.

The belief in an imminent attack on Holland was based not only on a certain amount of evidence, but also on reasoning that was strategically sound. All of the sources agreed that the German Army was not yet the equal of the French, and that it had little chance of turning the Maginot line by attacking through Belgium.¹⁸ Nor was the spring the most favourable time for the German Army to attack, even if its objective was only to seize Holland and then stand on the defensive. However, spring would be an ideal time for the German Air Force to attack, and the seizure of Holland would bring the air force into range of both France and Great Britain; once he had gained this strategic position, Hitler could do one or all of three things. He could launch an all-out aerial attack on Great Britain and France before they achieved air superiority. Both Colonel Mason-MacFarlane and Colonel Gauché knew that Ribbentrop at least had advocated this course, partly because he believed that Great Britain would crack under heavy bombing attack.¹⁹ Colonel Gauché had also told Colonel Fraser that an air attack was the only conceivable way that Hitler could hope to win in the west in 1939.²⁰ As a second choice

¹⁸Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 553, p. 609; vol. 4, doc. 29, p.30.

¹⁹Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 506, p. 549; doc. 511, p. 556.

²⁰Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 553, p. 609, January 18, 1939.

open to Hitler, Colonel Gauché suggested that Hitler could demand Belgian and French neutrality, and attack Great Britain unless she returned the German colonies lost after the World War. This course of action might conceivably break up the Anglo-French understanding, for the French according to Gauché, would be loath to risk Paris for a few British colonies.²¹ Hitler's third choice was to blackmail both France and Great Britain with the threat of the German Air Force. In this case the object would be to give the British and French public the clear choice between the destruction of London and Paris, and the surrender of overseas possessions.²² In addition to these military considerations, there would be an economic advantage in occupying Holland since Germany was reputed to be running short of foreign exchange. However, from February on, interest in the possibility of an attack in the west declined.²³

²¹Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 522, p. 570, January 4, 1939.

²²Ibid., vol. 3, doc. 553, p. 609, January 18, 1939.

²³There were few references in the three newspapers to a possible German attack in the west except in the Manchester Guardian. On January 7th, p. 12, Liddell Hart wrote in The Manchester Guardian that as a result of the Munich settlement, Germany was free to concentrate all her power in the west. At the end of January, another article claimed that Hitler had still not decided whether to turn east or west (January 26, p. 6); the fear of an attack on Holland occasioned by the attachés reports, called forth a report from the diplomatic correspondent, (January 27, p. 11).

According to many of the attachés' dispatches, a German attack in the east would probably be Hitler's next move. In his report of December 26th on possible German action in 1939, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane, suggested "if there is no intervention from the west, Hitler is probably convinced that he is strong enough to deal with Poland and any Russian opposition so long as the objective in the Ukraine is limited."²⁴ The lure of the Ukraine for Hitler would be his desire to increase German living space and the urgent economic necessity of gaining control of the Ukrainian resources to stave off economic collapse. Colonel Vitrolles told the British Air Attaché on January 12th that Germany could not afford the luxury of a war in the west for colonies or imperial pride; she had to gain control of the Ukraine.²⁵ No direct military evidence could be found by the British attachés to confirm this possibility; however, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane found "much evidence consistent therewith, and none to refute it."²⁶ There were persistent rumours in Berlin to the effect that progressive mobilization would begin in February with a view to a summer concentration in the east. In addition, Colonel Mason-

²⁴DBFP ser. 3, vol. 3, doc. 505, p. 550.

²⁵Ibid., doc. 536, p. 584, January 12, 1939.

²⁶Ibid., doc. 505, p. 550.

MacFarlane had a "definite" report of a German Air Force Officer reconnoitering in Slovakia and Ruthenia, and the information from the Lithuanian Military Attaché that Germany was urging Poland to join in an attack on White Russia but would attack Poland if Poland refused to co-operate.²⁷

Speculation by the attachés and newspaper correspondents about an immediate German military operation against Poland died down toward the end of January, following a meeting between Colonel Beck and Hitler. To a greater or lesser extent, these observers believed that Hitler's attention had shifted to the south and west. Dispatches of both Colonel Mason-MacFarlane and Colonel Stronge drew attention to possible German attempts to push France and Italy into a Mediterranean war.²⁸ The Times Warsaw correspondent was inclined to discount the likelihood of a German

²⁷Ibid., pps. 546, 548. In November 1938 the Times Berlin correspondent suggested the possibility of joint Polish-German action to exploit a Soviet internal collapse, or of joint military action to cause such a collapse. The Times, November 10, 1938, p. 16.

²⁸Ibid., vol. 4, doc. 23, p. 23, January 24, 1939, and doc. 100, p. 102, February 10, 1939, express the view that immediate action was unlikely; also, The Times, January 18, p. 12; January 19; The Manchester Guardian, January 24, p. 5, agreed but stressed continued attempts to subvert Ukrainian groups.

attempt to create a 'Great Ukraine' because of the difficulties involved. Rather, Hitler was expected to maintain a policy of 'good will' toward Poland thus securing his Eastern frontier and freeing the Axis powers for 'adventure' elsewhere.²⁹

Although most estimates of German intentions mentioned the possibility of German intervention in Czechoslovakia, its outright occupation almost came as a surprise. Reports of unrelenting German pressure on Czechoslovakia, both internally and externally, were frequent, but such information was generally interpreted as part of a continued programme to dominate Czechoslovakia without the necessity of occupying the country. As late as March 11th, editorials in both the Times and the Manchester Guardian contained no hints that Hitler would take advantage of the internal crisis over Slovak independence to occupy the country.³⁰ However,

²⁹The Times, January 19, 1939. The correspondent believed it would take Germany two to three years to prepare for the creation of a Great Ukraine. An editorial in the Manchester Guardian of January 30, p. 8, also implied the possibility of axis intervention in disputes over Tunis, Spain or colonial matters.

³⁰A whole series of reports about German pressure on the Czechs appeared between February 15 - March 11, among others: The Manchester Guardian, February 15, p. 10, 11; 15th, p. 5; March 2, p. 13; 11th, p. 12; the editorial of the 13th referred to "a calm" occasioned by German "indecision": The Times, February 20, p. 11; March 11, p. 13. Other possibilities for German action were also discussed, including a German 'tropical' expedition. The Manchester Guardian, February 4, p. 11.

a day earlier, on March 10th, the Czechoslovak Military Attaché in Berlin had told Colonel Mason-MacFarlane that Germany would probably push the Slovak claims for independence to the point of "civil disturbances" and then send in troops to "preserve" order.³¹ Three days later there were reports that German troops were moving toward Vienna. Colonel Fraser reported that the French General Staff considered the alerts to the army and S.S. police, and the movement of troops, as "reminiscent of those which preceded the Anschluss."³² By March 14th, the newspapers were full of reports about German troop movements toward the frontier with Czechoslovakia.³³ Prague was, in fact, occupied by the Germans by March 16th and furthermore, within a week of its occupation Lithuania was forced to evacuate Memelland.

These two further 'coups' by Hitler were to have profound results. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane at once sent three major memoranda.³⁴ In brief, these dispatches gave

³¹DBFP ser 3, vol. 4, doc. 197, p. 218. Possibility of an end to Czech independence also mentioned in doc. 201, p. 221 of same date.

³²Ibid., doc. 227, 228, p. 236, March 13, 1939.

³³The Times, March 14, 1938, The Manchester Guardian March 14th, p. 11.

³⁴DBFP ser. 3, vol. 4, docs. 434, March 18, 1938, doc. 522, March 25, Appendix 1, March 28.

his analysis of the new situation and his conclusion that Great Britain and France should declare war on Germany as soon as possible. The Germans had captured sufficient weapons and equipment in Czechoslovakia to arm about forty divisions and the attaché expected the Germans to form special divisions of Sudeten Germans supplied and maintained independently of the German Army. Thus the potential strength of the German land forces would be increased by at least twenty-five per cent.

Colonel Mason-MacFarlane felt the only sure way to bring about the defeat of Germany was to force her to fight a two-front war while she was at the same time blockaded. In his opinion, Germany and the German Army were not yet sufficiently strong to fight such a two-front war and at the same to conquer and hold the economic resources necessary to resist a blockade. However, this might become possible in another two or three years. It might also be possible if Great Britain and France could not succeed in forming an active "Eastern" front, without which a British blockade could not be effective. Hitler would then in effect be fighting only a one front war. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane warned that:

The situation from our point of view looks black. The chances of establishing an "eastern front" farther west than the frontiers of

Russia, Turkey, and Greece are receding daily.³⁵

The first military priority was then to convince the small countries adjacent to Germany that Great Britain and France would fight, and that Germany had to be defeated if they were to maintain their independence.

The second military priority was to declare war on Germany within three weeks of March 28th, even if such a war had to be deliberately provoked. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane reported:

I consider that provided we can now secure the eastern front that we desire, the present would be the most unfavourable moment for them (i.e. the Germans) becoming involved in general hostilities.³⁶

At the time, much of the German Army was scattered throughout Czechoslovakia. Other units were either demobilized or under strength. The effort of equipping units with Czech arms would add to the troubles of an already overworked General Staff and training cadres, and add to the disorganization caused by the regular training and expansion programmes. Colonel Mason-MacFarlane predicted that if Great Britain and France waited on events and permitted Germany to gain her Lebensraum and the German Army to reach its

³⁵Ibid., vol. 4, doc. 555, p. 535, March 18, 1939.

³⁶Ibid., doc. 522, p. 506.

peak of strength, "... it may well be the end of France and ultimately of ourselves."³⁷

The German Intentions and The Eastern Front

Any successful 'active' Eastern front that Colonel Mason-MacFarlane proposed, would depend on the strength of the Polish and Russian Armed Forces. The reports of the attachés and correspondents however, were as depressing as they had been in the case of Czechoslovakia.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sword saw little chance of Poland offering more than a limited resistance to a large-scale German offensive.³⁸ After general mobilization, he estimated the Poles could put fifty-four infantry divisions, two cavalry divisions, and twelve armoured battalions in the field.³⁹ Nevertheless, to an even larger extent than the Czechoslovakian Army, the Polish Army, in his opinion, suffered from the combination of a virtually impossible strategic position and serious deficiencies in weapons,

³⁷Ibid., Appendix 1, p. 626. Group Captain Vachell disagreed with Colonel Mason-MacFarlane. Vachell advocated that Britain and France avoid war in 1939, if possible.

³⁸Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 12, p. 42, April 5, 1939.

³⁹Ibid., and vol. 4, doc. 498, p. 479, March 22, 1939.

equipment and personnel. The attaché considered that Germany would control both the Baltic Sea and the Polish Corridor from the onset of any war.⁴⁰ Thus Poland would be completely land-locked and it would be impossible to supply her with any military aid from the west. The only other means of communication Poland had with the outside world was a single railway line to Rumania which crossed Russian territory.⁴¹

The equipment of both the Polish Army and the Polish Air Force was considered poor. The army lacked heavy weapons, particularly heavy artillery, anti-aircraft guns and all kinds of armoured fighting vehicles. As a result, a Polish infantry division would have much less firepower and mobility than a corresponding German division.⁴² Colonel Sword and Group Captain Vachell were agreed that the Polish Air Force was totally incapable of protecting the Polish Army, cities or industry, all of which were particularly vulnerable to devastating air attack. Group Captain Vachell estimated that Poland had about fifty modern bombers; the rest of the air force was obsolete, and their fighters in particular were "quite

⁴⁰Ibid., vol. 4, doc. 498, p. 479.

⁴¹Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 12, p. 41.

⁴²Ibid.

ineffective." Despite these deficiencies he did not recommend that Britain re-equip the Polish Air Force because it was "no more obsolescent than the Army."⁴³

The contrast between the reports of the attachés and of the correspondents was marked - so marked indeed that one wonders whether they refer to the same armed forces. With one exception, a report by Robert Leurquin for the Times of July 5th, 1939, these estimates were superficial. A typical example, taken from the Manchester Guardian read:

Materially and morally, the Polish Army of to-day is the most formidable she has ever had and should without any exaggeration be ranked with the finest modern armies in Europe.⁴⁴

The correspondent for the Observer wrote that Poland could mobilize five million men in twenty-four days and that the army was mechanized and up-to-date; yet, according to the report, military plans depended on the feet of the soldiers and the feet of horses (since one third of the army consisted of cavalry).⁴⁵ Poland's Air Force was estimated

⁴³Ibid., pps. 43-44.

⁴⁴The Manchester Guardian, March 8, 1939, p. 11. Essentially the same remark was made in the January 26th issue, p. 14.

⁴⁵The Observer, May 7, 1939, p. 21.

at about two thousand first-line aircraft, of which some five hundred were modern fast bombers.⁴⁶ In Parliament, Mr. Lloyd George realistically analyzed Poland's military position during one of his more devastating criticisms of Government policy. He concluded that without Russian aid British support of Poland was worthless.⁴⁷

While the only way of keeping Poland on her feet in a war with Germany was to arrange for Russian support, the Polish diplomats rejected the pleas of the British Government to allow Russian troops to cross Polish soil to attack Germany; the Polish General Staff turned an equally deaf ear to the arguments of the attaché in favour of Polish-Soviet military collaboration. Politically, the Poles feared that once permitted entry, the Soviet troops would not leave; militarily, they had absolutely no faith in Stalin's intention of taking the offensive in a war, or in the capacity of the Red Army to mount an offensive.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid., and The Manchester Guardian, March 8, 1939, p.11; The Times, April 3. Leurquin's article appeared in the Times on July 5th, p. 17 and gave a detailed description of the army's organization and defence measures.

⁴⁷H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 345, col. 2507, April 3, 1939.

⁴⁸For efforts of attachés to convince Polish General Staff to collaborate with Red Army see DBFP ser. 3, vol. 7, doc. 155, August 22, 1939, and doc. 156, August 21.

The Polish doubts of the military capabilities of the Soviet Union were no different than those which the British attachés and correspondents had been relaying to London ever since the spring of 1938. The first problem was both geographical and political; Russia had no common frontiers with Germany. To make contact with Germany the Red Army would have to pass through either Poland or Rumania, both of which refused to allow Russian troops to cross their land. The second problem was military.

On paper, the Red Army was extremely formidable. Both the attachés and correspondents agreed that its peacetime basis was between one hundred and one hundred and ten infantry divisions, thirty to thirty-five cavalry divisions and five mechanized corps. Behind these divisions stood a virtually unlimited man-power reserve whose utility was limited only by the capacity of Russia to equip and maintain armies in the field.⁴⁹ Perhaps the strongest facets of the Russian land forces were their artillery, traditionally strong, and the large number of armoured fighting vehicles supporting them. Colonel Firebrace, the attaché in Moscow, estimated that the Soviet Union possessed nine

⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, doc. 148, p. 167, April 18, 1938; vol. 4, doc. 183, p. 194, March 6, 1939; The Times, February 23, 1938, p. 16; August 11, 1939, p. 9.

thousand tanks of high quality even though their armour was too thin to resist modern anti-tank defences.⁵⁰ There was no doubt that the Russian troops were very well armed and equipped, while the individual training of men and units was frequently good. Industrialization, which had been ruthlessly accelerated since 1928, meant that the Red Army was supported by a much larger armaments industry than the old Imperial Army of 1914-1917.⁵¹ Yet, despite the great potential strength of the Red Army, few military attachés or correspondents of any nation considered it capable of mounting or maintaining an offensive.

The two major reasons for doubting the Red Army's offensive power were the effects of the great purge of 1937-1938 and the lack of adequate communications on Russia's western front. The Russian High Command had been almost wiped out as a functioning body. Colonel Firebrace reported that about sixty-five per cent of the office corps, from the rank of divisional commander up, had disappeared. As a result, the attaché doubted whether the new high command

⁵⁰DBFP ser. 3, doc. 183, p. 194, March 1939; vol. 6, appendix 1, p. 786; The Times, February 23, 1938, p. 15, credited Russia with 8,000 tanks.

⁵¹DBFP vol. 1, doc. 148, p. 162, April 18, 1938; vol. 4, doc. 183, p. 194, March 6, 1939; The Manchester Guardian, November 9, 1938, p. 11; The Times, February 23, 1938, p. 15. August 11, 1939, p. 9.

could conduct an offensive and equally doubted the ability of junior commanding officers to carry out their orders adequately, especially since the authority of the commanding officers had been disastrously weakened by the introduction of military commissars.⁵² The other severely limiting factor on the offensive power of the Red Army was the general lack of transport and communication facilities. The Russian railway system was in very poor condition; there was not enough rolling stock or locomotives, and what the Russians had was in poor condition. Roads in the vicinity of her Western frontier were inadequate, and the Russians were known to have very little mechanical transport. Therefore, even a limited offensive would be brought up short by the inability of the Russians to keep the advancing troops supplied either by rail, or by road.⁵³

The air attaché, Wing Commander Hallawell, and the correspondents evaluated the Red Air Force somewhat differently. The attaché considered that it was capable

⁵²DBFP vol. 1, doc. 148, p.163; vol. 4, doc. 498, p. 478. The Manchester Guardian, November 9, 1938, p. 11, warned that the adverse effects of both the purges and the commissar system should not be overestimated. The Times, February 23, 1938, p. 16; the article of August 11, 1939 p. 9, warned that the Russian Army had shown it could make a sudden disconcerting offensive.

⁵³DBFP vol. 4, doc. 183, p. 197 and vol 6, Appendix 1, p. 776, p. 786; The Times, August 11, 1939, p. 9.

of developing little offensive power against Germany without Polish cooperation and that even with this cooperation, the offensive would be limited. Although Russia had an impressive number of airplanes, he estimated that only about one thousand modern short-range fighters and four hundred and fifty medium bombers could be expected on Russia's Western frontier. These could reach vital German centres only if they were based on Polish soil; but if they were so based, their efficiency would drop because of administrative and supply difficulties. All in all, the attaché believed the Red Air Force could probably sustain air operations "for a few months."⁵⁴

Newspaper accounts of Russian air strength tended to dwell too much on the numerical strength of the Red Air Force and too little on its possible effectiveness against Germany. Dispatches of the Times correspondent gave figures of between four and six thousand for its first-line strength while the Guardian quoted figures showing that the Soviet Union would soon have an air force of twenty thousand airplanes. None of the articles expressed the same doubts about its effectiveness as did those of the attachés.⁵⁵

⁵⁴DBFP ser. 3, vol. 4, doc. 183, p. 195, March 6, 1939, and vol. 6, appendix 1, pps. 787-789. It must be remembered that a considerable portion of Russian military strength had to be deployed facing Japan.

⁵⁵The Times, February 23, 1938, p. 15; August 19, 1939, p. 9; The Manchester Guardian, February 27, 1939, p. 8.

However, once Britain was committed to the defence of Poland, there was a natural inclination to stress the more positive side of Russian strength; no one else but the Russians could possibly help the Poles. Nevertheless, the authors of the Instructions to the British Military Mission to Moscow had to conclude that "any substantial and rapid Russian military support to Poland is out of the question."⁵⁶

Poland: March - August

The two countries the most obviously threatened, first by the German occupation of Czechoslovakia and secondly by the Italian occupation of Albania, were Poland and Rumania. In the opinion of the Observer during March and early April, Rumania was the next most likely victim because of its oil and because its demise probably would not precipitate a European war. An editorial of March 19th continued:

German policy aims at the absolute domination of all Eastern Europe between the Baltic and the Black Sea; at the mastery of Rumanian oil and wheat in the next phase; and at the breaking of Russia as a further objective.

⁵⁶ DBFP ser. 3, vol. 6, Appendix 1, p. 786. This memorandum is a useful summary of British strategic and political thinking about a possible war and the forms it might take.

Hitler's ultimate aim was German supremacy in the world.⁵⁷ An editorial on April 9th was even more explicit about the danger to Rumania. "Rumania," it stated, "and no other country, is regarded as the decisive objective by the Axis Powers. Poland is not in the front-line of danger Poland can wait."⁵⁸ In the Times, however, it was Poland that was considered to be in the greatest danger. An editorial of March 18th commented that no one believed Hitler would ever give up his claims to Danzig, the Polish Corridor, or to Upper Silesia. The Berlin correspondent noticed an increasing impatience in German references to Poland. Stories of Polish maltreatment of the Germans in the Corridor were being featured in the press, and the correspondent quoted one particularly menacing warning:

The responsible factors in Poland will certainly not overlook the peculiar geographical position of their State, which has determined the policy hitherto followed of maintaining independently - that is to say, without tension - good relations with Poland's neighbours on all sides.⁵⁹

⁵⁷The Observer, March 19, 1939, p. 16, p. 17. While the editorial stressed Rumania, the diplomatic correspondent mentioned the Polish Corridor as well: the Berlin correspondent admitted there was no concrete clue as to Germany's immediate intentions or where she would march but he thought the Ukraine the most probable target.

⁵⁸Ibid., April 9, 1939, p. 10.

⁵⁹The Times, March 28, 1939, p. 10, p. 14; March 29, p.16.

It was not a coincidence that this warning came just as the time for Colonel Beck's visit to London approached.⁶⁰

In Parliament, while most of the concern focused on the threat to Poland and to a lesser degree, to Rumania,⁶¹ there was a growing fear that Germany might attack in the west and that Hitler's ultimate objective was the destruction of Great Britain. Mr. Nicholson told the House on March 15th that Czechoslovakia was the last "episode" for the time being in the 'drama' being played in Central and Eastern Europe. When the "curtain" next went up, it would be in the west, Holland might be occupied, Switzerland intimidated, or France embroiled with Italy. Mr. Attlee felt that the Axis Powers would wait until the disintegration of south-eastern Europe was complete before they turned west.⁶² Other Members from all parties believed that sooner or later, Hitler would turn on the British Empire. Thus Sir A. Sinclair warned the House that the "ultimate goal" and "richest prize" sought by the Axis

⁶⁰ Chamberlain issued an unconditional guarantee to Poland on March 31, about two weeks before Colonel Beck's visit.

⁶¹ H.C. deb. 5s., vol. 345, col. 447, March 15, and cols. 2490, Sir A. Sinclair and Mr. Dalton, April 3.

⁶² Ibid., vol. 343, col. 509, March 15, 1939, vol. 345, cols. 17-18, April 13.

was nothing less than "the possessions, resources and trade of Britain." Colonel Wedgwood noticed that German propaganda had been concentrated on Great Britain since the declaration of the Polish guarantee.⁶³ However, these speculations about a possible German attempt to dismantle the Commonwealth were remote. Poland was becoming the focal point of another crisis.

Throughout April and until the middle of May, the military attachés believed that Hitler was fully capable of suddenly ordering the occupation of the city state of Danzig, or alternatively, of launching a surprise attack on Poland itself. The Italian invasion of Albania in the first week of April had left the European military situation somewhat unsettled. This uneasiness was heightened by the constant German troop movements in Czechoslovakia and toward the Polish frontiers. In Berlin, the Polish Military Attaché told his British colleague that a state of readiness had been ordered throughout Germany. Various units had been identified that were apparently headed for Silesia, and there had also been reports of increased military activity on the Polish frontier.⁶⁴ In addition, the

⁶³Ibid., vol. 345, col. 21, and 59,60, April 13, 1939.

⁶⁴Ibid., vol 5, doc. 31, p. 67, April 8, 1939.

build-up of German troops in East Prussia continued. By the middle of April, Polish intelligence estimated that there was the equivalent of eight or nine divisions on the Western frontiers of Poland. The German divisions in Bohemia and Moravia were in a state of flux. Of the thirteen "mobile" German divisions, Major de Linde reported that two armoured, two light and four motorized divisions were still in Czecho-Slovakia by April 8th. Another three were seemingly withdrawing, while two had never moved from their normal peace stations in Germany.⁶⁵ Polish intelligence placed the number of German divisions occupying Bohemia and Moravia at between eleven and twelve.⁶⁶ While the Polish General Staff were not inclined to consider these troop movements as an imminent threat, they were aware that additional troops could be moved from Berlin to the frontier over-night.⁶⁷

Colonel Gauché told the British Military Attaché on April 7th that according to his information, Hitler had intended to occupy Danzig by April 1st. The visit of Colonel Beck to London had so infuriated him that he was

⁶⁵Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 34, p. 72, April 8, 1939.

⁶⁶Ibid., doc. 168, p. 204, April 14, 1939.

⁶⁷Ibid., and doc. 31, p. 67, April 8, 1939.

perfectly capable of attacking Poland "in the next few days."⁶⁸ In early May, "a military source that had given correct military advance information about the invasion of Czechoslovakia," suggested that all preparations were being made to invade Poland through Lithuania within two weeks. If this plan were dropped, any invasion would be postponed for four months.⁶⁹ At the same time, a member of Göring's staff told the Polish Military Attaché that war in 1939 was inevitable, and that British and French interference would not prevent the rapid destruction of Poland.⁷⁰

Another possibility was discussed by Colonel Mason-MacFarlane and the Ambassador in Berlin. They had received information that the German Government was contemplating the seizure of Danzig by Hitler's birthday on April 20th. The method used would be an internal revolt, staged by the Nazi-controlled Senate, and followed by military occupation by German troops. By presenting both Poland and the Western powers with a fait accompli, the Germans believed that they could avoid a clash with Polish

⁶⁸Ibid., vol. 5, doc. 34, April 7, 1939.

⁶⁹Ibid., doc. 334, p. 390, May 2, 1939.

⁷⁰Ibid., doc. 377, p. 433, May 5, 1939.

troops and that Great Britain would not intervene. However, neither the Ambassador, nor the Military Attaché, could envisage such a coup without active Polish, and thus British and French, intervention.⁷¹ While the attaché was mistaken about the date of this 'coup' he proved correct about the lever Hitler would use to put pressure on Poland.

As spring wore into summer, Europe watched and waited; waited for the results of the Anglo-French talks with the Russians and watched the steady and obvious militarization of Danzig. Regular German troops, storm troops, and armaments were reportedly being smuggled in from East Prussia. Reports of these shipments appeared very frequently in the press. Various reasons were given for the German action. In the Manchester Guardian it was suggested that Germany was occupying the city from within and that when the time came, the Danzigers would liberate the city and then hold off Polish attack until German forces could arrive.⁷² The Poles, according to the Times correspondent, considered the military hustle and bustle in Danzig an effort to provoke Poland rather than a serious strategic measure. They were convinced that the city could be "blown

⁷¹DBFP vol. 5, doc. 163, p. 199, April, 14, 1939.

⁷²The Manchester Guardian, May 26, 1939, p. 6.

to pieces" at the outbreak of hostilities.⁷³ The Observer correspondent in Berlin also doubted that the Germans would make a 'coup' in Danzig and wrote that a peaceful method for the incorporation of Danzig was being sought.⁷⁴

In the middle of July the military crisis over Danzig, which had been limited to the occupation of the city from within by German soldiers, entered a new phase. Increasingly, reports indicated that military measures were being taken against Poland itself.⁷⁵ On July 11th, the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote that Germany was modifying the character of her military preparations. These preparations suggested that the main attack on Poland, if carried out, would be made against the concentration of Polish war industry in the south.⁷⁶ A further dispatch indicated a military "build-up" in Czechoslovakia: Prague had become an armed camp with German staff officers occupying the larger hotels; Czech trans-

⁷³The Times, June 20, 1939, p. 14.

⁷⁴The Observer, May 28, 1939, p. 11.

⁷⁵Prime Minister Chamberlain mentioned the strategic and economic importance of Danzig to Poland and specifically included Danzig in the British guarantee.

⁷⁶The Manchester Guardian, July 11, 1939, p. 6.

port had been commandeered and troops were moving east through Moravia.⁷⁷ At the same time, the Ambassador to Berlin was notifying the Government that:

the fact cannot be overlooked that the number of reservists now under training and, indeed, the general military preparations in this country mean that the mobilization of the German army could be effected at the shortest possible notice and practically without warning.⁷⁸

By early August, reports of German mobilization measures were in all the newspapers. Between August 5th and 8th, the Berlin correspondents all predicted that Germany's military preparations would reach their climax by the end of the month. Autumn manoeuvres were being held two weeks earlier than in 1938 and the Germans were making every effort to ensure that the harvest would be collected by August 15th when some two million Germans were expected to be under arms.⁷⁹ This information was very close to that furnished by the attachés. Their reports showed that there were two periods of concentration against Poland. August 14th marked the beginning of the first stage and Colonel Mason-MacFarlane's replacement in Berlin estimated

⁷⁷Ibid., July 15, 1939, p. 17.

⁷⁸DBFP ser. 3, vol. 6, doc. 335, p. 369, July 17, 1939.

⁷⁹The Times, August 5, 1939, p. 12; The Observer, August 6, p. 13; The Manchester Guardian, August 9, p. 5.

that between two and two and a quarter million men in Germany were under arms. "Germany," he noted, "is making every preparation which would accelerate and facilitate a rapid mobilization."⁸⁰ In East Prussia, which because of its separation from the Reich was usually almost a week ahead in its military preparations, signs indicated that the reserve divisions were beginning to be formed. Everywhere in Germany, divisions were returning from training and were concentrating in their home areas. Units of field bakeries and gendarmeries, as well as ambulance convoys, began to form.⁸¹ According to the dispatches, actual concentrations of troops against Poland did not begin until August 18th, but even by August 21st, the exact concentration areas were not known.⁸² The next day, the Polish General Staff told the military attaché that a maximum of twenty divisions had been moved toward the Polish frontier. Of these twenty divisions, five were in East Prussia, and only two were mobile.⁸³ At this point, there was a noticeable hiatus of four days when the military concentrations were suspended, and Hitler gauged the reaction to his latest

⁸⁰DBFP ser. 3, vol. 6, doc. 660, p. 693, August 14, 1939.

⁸¹Ibid., vol. 7, doc. 14, p. 14, August 15, 1939.

⁸²Ibid., doc. 100, p. 97, August 21, 1939.

⁸³Ibid., doc. 99, p. 96 and doc. 143, p. 126, August 21, 22.

diplomatic coup, the Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact.

Speculation about a possible German-Soviet rapprochement had been rife in the newspapers starting in January 1939.⁸⁴ The resignation of M. Litvinoff stimulated this speculation to a large degree, and the possibility of such a move was never discounted, particularly when it was noticed that German propaganda attacks on Russia were dropped.⁸⁵ There were also strong indications that Hitler was awaiting the outcome of the Anglo-French talks with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the worst that was envisaged was the failure of the talks or Soviet neutrality in the event of war;⁸⁶ the British press, like the Foreign Office, regarded an outright alliance between Germany and Russia as (to use the words of the Foreign Office)

⁸⁴The Times January 26, 1939, p. 10. Paris was jittery about impending trade talks between Russia and Germany.

⁸⁵Ibid., May 5, 1939, p. 14; on May 6, p. 12. These were two articles, one from Rome, one from Tokyo. The attitude of the two axis partners toward an German-Soviet rapprochement was decidedly different. The Manchester Guardian May 8, p. 14, considered the possibility "barely conceivable."

⁸⁶The Manchester Guardian, June 20, 1939, claimed that Germany wanted Russian neutrality and discussed German reactions to successful or unsuccessful Anglo-French talks with Russia; the Times, July 5, p. 16; The Observer, July 23, p. 15.

"inherently improbable."⁸⁷ When the news of the Soviet-German Non-Agression Treaty "broke," on August 22nd, there was little doubt that an important step toward war, a west European war at least, had been taken.

Four days later (August 26-28), the concentrations which had apparently slackened off between August 22nd-26th rapidly came to a completion. During the first period of concentration, the mobile divisions, the cream of the German Army and an essential factor in any attack on Poland, had remained inert. Now, the missing eleven mobile divisions (4 armoured, 4 light, 3 motorized) were reported to be moving in "an easterly direction," and were expected on the Polish frontier by August 26th.⁸⁸ On that day it was obvious that the general mobilization of Germany had been ordered. Reports indicated that first-line reservists had begun to join their units, and that certain personnel of the army and air ministry were leaving Berlin to join General Headquarters.⁸⁹ Preparations for action against Poland were reported to be reaching their final stage; on August 28th, the Germans had concentrated enough

⁸⁷DBFP vol. 5., doc. 413, p. 462, footnote 2, May 8, 1939.

⁸⁸Ibid., vol. 7, doc. 197, p. 160, August 23, 1939.

⁸⁹Ibid., doc. 325, p. 266; doc. 333, p. 276, August 26, 1939.

divisions for the attack. The military attaché in Paris predicted that the final concentration would be finished by September 1st-2nd and that there was little chance of an attack before then.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Ibid., doc. 443, p. 376, August 26, 1939.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Between 1934 and 1939 British newspapers and Members of Parliament displayed an unprecedented peacetime interest in the military intentions, and in some aspects of the armed forces of a foreign power. Hardly a word, for example, was written about the strength of the Italian armed forces, less was written about Japanese strength, and the armed forces of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia were discussed solely for the purpose of weighing them against the German.¹ As far as military intentions were concerned, Italian and Japanese adventurism intermittently aroused concern, but British attention always returned to speculation about German intentions, whether in central Europe, Russia or in Spain.

In the earlier sections of this paper, we saw that there was a strong tendency among Parliamentarians and newspaper correspondents alike to over-state the strength of the German armed forces and to credit Hitler

¹Strangely enough, little public interest was shown in the French armed forces until after Munich. Even then only the weakness of the French Air Force was mentioned. It was generally assumed that the French Army was at least as strong as the German, and probably stronger.

with designs for which he had no military plans. An examination of the actual growth of the German armed forces in 1938 and 1939 shows that the British were still, in many important respects, overestimating the forces which Hitler had available to support his diplomacy.

Germany's Navy was not prepared for war with Great Britain in September 1939, and it does not seem to have been taken into consideration by the British during the September crisis of 1938. In 1935, when the German Navy was just beginning to expand, Admiral Raeder understood from Hitler that he intended to maintain friendly relations with Britain, Italy, and Japan; only France and Russia were envisaged as likely German enemies. Guaranteed the neutrality of the major naval powers, (presumably Hitler did not consider the United States a potential enemy), the German Admiralty could base their expansion on the feasibility of a fleet action against the Russian and French fleets.² This decision, affecting the strategic presuppositions of the German fleet, was not understood by the British public which assumed that any large fleet built up by a foreign power, particularly by Germany, was destined to oppose British control of the seas; hence the

²A. Martienssen, Hitler and His Admirals, (New York: 1949), p. 11.

confusion when the Germans began building a balanced fleet instead of concentrating on ships built primarily for individual action. The relatively slow rate of construction of new ships resulted from the German Admiralty's belief that Germany would not become involved in a major war before the middle of the 1940's and also because the naval authorities, unlike the General Staff, were allowed to carry out their expansion plan without undue interference, and were not hurried by Hitler and constant demands for quicker and more formidable results.

Until 1938, the expansion of the German Navy was carried out the way the General Staff would have preferred to expand the army and the way the air force should have been established - gradually, and systematically. Navy plans for rational and balanced expansion had to be shelved when the basis of the program, the assumption of British neutrality, was reversed in 1937-1938 and Britain came to be considered one of Germany's potential enemies.³ While Hitler promised there would be no war with Britain before 1943-1944 at the earliest, the German Navy would have to bear the brunt of such a conflict, if it occurred.

³Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, series D, vol. I, pps. 29-39. The Hossbach memorandum quotes Hitler as including Britain with France as one of Germany's "hate-inspired" enemies.

Accordingly, Plan "Z" was drawn up to provide Germany with thirteen battleships, thirty-three cruisers, four aircraft carriers and two hundred and sixty-seven submarines by 1948, a force large enough to cripple British sea communications and to risk a fleet action. Less than a year after its inauguration, Plan "Z" had to be radically altered when it became clear that war with England might come much sooner than 1942, and the role of an unprepared German Navy would consequently be restricted to attacking British shipping while avoiding a fleet action.

The measure of the German Navy's unpreparedness for war with Britain lies in a comparison of the strength of the navy on September 1st 1939 with the strength thought necessary by the German Admiralty for an Anglo-German naval war. Of the two hundred and sixty-seven submarines envisaged, only twenty-six of the fifty-seven in service were ocean-going; five light and three heavy cruisers were available instead of thirty-three; three "pocket" battle ships of ten thousand tons, two of twenty-six thousand tons, and two of thirty-five thousand tons were ready or nearly completed instead of thirteen.⁴ Both the legions of "super Emdens" and the schools of submarines had failed to

⁴Martienssen, op. cit., p. 13.

materialize, contrary to British fears.

While the German Army was better prepared for war than the Navy, it was not as well prepared as some reports suggested. The dispatches of the newspaper correspondents were quite accurate in their estimates of the number of divisions Germany had, and quick to stress increases and the formation of new units; but they also gave an exaggerated impression of the real numerical strength of the German Army. Hence, the awareness of the unpreparedness of that army for a major war was somewhat compromised. By the spring of 1938, the lowest British estimate of the German Army gave it a peace-time strength of thirty-six infantry and four armoured divisions. At this time, according to General Jodl, about twenty-seven or twenty-eight divisions were complete in respect to equipment and personnel. Of the specialized divisions, this figure included only one Panzer division (the others being unequipped, skeleton formations), one cavalry division, and one mountain division.⁵ By the autumn of 1938, some thirty-nine regular divisions were ready, together with about fifteen reserve divisions. Not all of these divisions were either

⁵Trial of the Major War Criminals, Nuremburg Proceedings (Nuremburg: 1948), Vol. 15, May 29-June 10 testimony of General Jodl, p. 425.

fully manned or fully equipped; in particular, two of the armoured divisions were not completely prepared for war. In all, General Jodl testified that the General Staff could "set up approximately fifty-five divisions - including reserve divisions."⁶ Even if the seven or eight Austrian divisions are added to the fifty-five mentioned by General Jodl, the total is only two-thirds of the number that Colonel Mason-MacFarlane estimated had been mobilized during the September crisis. Either the attaché badly overestimated the number of divisions mobilized, or, as is more likely, he included in his estimate "formations" which the German General Staff would not equate with "divisions" in terms of equipment, training, and personnel.

A much more detailed glimpse of the real strength of the German Army in 1938-1939 than that afforded by General Jodl's testimony, is given in a record of General Thomas' lecture on May 24, 1939. The peace-time strength of the German Army then stood at eighteen Corps Headquarters, twenty-two independent machine gun battalions and fifty-one divisions. Four of the thirty-nine infantry divisions had been fully motorized and there were in addition twelve

⁶ Ibid., p. 426, also B.H. Klein, Germany's Economic Preparations for War, (Harvard, 1959), p. 20 and E.M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans 1933-1939, (London: 1963), p. 134.

special divisions including three mountain, five armoured, and four light. A large number of full-time (standiger) frontier defence units (Grenzschutzformationen) supported the peace-time army. General Thomas was obviously trying to impress his German Foreign Office audience with the strength of the German Armed Forces. He did not mention the army's chief material weaknesses, a shortage of all types of artillery and equipment for the reserves, while extolling the armaments of the peace-time army.⁷ Nor did he give any idea of what strength the German Army would have after mobilization. General Jodl claimed that Germany had only seventy-five divisions in the autumn of 1939 and spring of 1940.⁸ A month before the outbreak of war, the British General Staff estimated Germany's potential mobilization strength at one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty divisions, two-thirds of which, or about eighty-two divisions, would be fully armed and equipped.⁹ If General Jodl was referring to first-line divisions only, the British estimate of first-line units was within ten per cent of his figure. Nevertheless, as a whole, the

⁷ Trial of the Major op. cit., Nuremburg Documents, number 028-EC, pps. 114-115.

⁸ Ibid., Nuremburg Proceedings, vol. 15, testimony of General Jodl, p. 425.

⁹ DBFP, ser. 3, vol. 6, appendix 1, pps. 770-771

British estimate was misleading, largely because it had to take account of the twenty to twenty-five divisions that might have been completely outfitted with Czech weapons and equipment, but were not. Thus Germany was credited with some fifteen or twenty-five more divisions than she actually had.

On September 1, 1939, the Germans mobilized one hundred and five divisions in three "waves." The regular army of fifty-two divisions (a sixth armoured division had been formed) comprised the first wave; eighteen divisions of young reservists who could be relied on for large-scale operations formed the second; and thirty-five divisions of over-aged or semi-trained troops constituted the third. Germany committed some fifty-four divisions to the attack on Poland, including all of her mobile and mountain divisions and all but ten or so infantry divisions from the first wave. The Western front was held by the remainder of the first-line troops and by frontier troops - a total of thirty-three divisions of all sorts.¹⁰ Although the British Chiefs of Staff correctly supposed that Germany would use some sixty divisions against Poland, they assumed that between fifty and fifty-five would be avail-

¹⁰J.R.M. Butler, Grand Strategy, (London:1957), vol.2, pps. 50, 57.

able in the west (forty on the frontier, ten to fifteen in reserve).¹¹ In reality, Germany had only some seven divisions which could 'mask' Rumania and/or act as a central reserve. German strength in the west was therefore vastly over-estimated both numerically and in terms of quality. However, the over-estimation of the German Army by the British General Staff was without much importance; whether Germany had ninety or a hundred and thirty divisions, Britain could offer France fewer than half a dozen. The over-estimation of Germany's air power, on the other hand, was a matter of much greater importance to Great Britain.

The German Propaganda Ministry did everything in its power to cause Britain and France to over-estimate the size and power of the Luftwaffe; the visit of Charles Lindbergh to German aircraft factories was a prime example of the Ministry's methods and success. During 1938 and 1939, the Luftwaffe had many real strengths, but also suffered from some extraordinary weaknesses. Retooling, and the introduction of new types of aircraft into the assembly lines caused a very severe drop in total production in some months of 1938 and contributed to an overall drop in

¹¹DBFP ser. 3, vol. 6, appendix 1, pps. 770-771.

production of some 400 aircraft (from 5,606 in 1937 to 5,235 in 1938) for the year. At the same time, the aircraft industry was increasingly devoting itself to producing combat planes. Hence, while Germany produced an average of two hundred and twenty combat planes a month in 1937, this figure rose to two hundred and eighty a month in 1938.¹² The year 1939 saw a very large increase in German output which averaged six hundred and ninety aircraft of all types each month; production of combat aircraft showed an even greater relative increase, from two hundred and eighty to five hundred a month, or six thousand a year.¹³ Thus the fears, expressed in many British quarters, of Germany producing six to eight thousand "first-line" airplanes a year, did not come true until late 1939.

The actual strength of the Luftwaffe during August and September 1938 was much less than estimated by the British public and slightly less than the Air Ministry estimated. German air force units had a total of approximately three thousand aircraft of all types. According to the

¹²Wood and Dempster, op. cit., p. 50.

¹³Ibid., and B.H. Klein, Germany's Economic ... op. cit., p. 19. Klein suggests that British intelligence believed that German production of combat types was about 830 a month, a 40 per cent over-estimate. The British probably estimated the total production at 830 a month, still a 20 per cent error.

figures quoted by Woodward and Dempster, of the 1,669 aircraft that were serviceable on August 1st, only four hundred and fifty-three were fighters and seven hundred and forty-one were bombers or dive-bombers.¹⁴ On September 26th, according to Basil Collier in The Defence of the United Kingdom,¹⁵ some twenty-eight hundred aircraft were serviceable, including 1040 bombers and two hundred and twenty dive-bombers. At this time, the British Air Ministry believed that Germany had twelve hundred bombers.¹⁶

Air Ministry estimates of available German long-range bombers just before the outbreak of war were less accurate than those of 1938. In August 1939 they estimated that Germany had 1,750 long-range bombers, three hundred short-range bombers, and 1,175 fighters, with a total first-line strength of forty-two hundred.¹⁷ The Luftwaffe actually had 1,180 long-range bombers, of which 1,008 were serviceable, and four hundred short-range and ground attack bombers, for a total first-line strength of thirty-six hundred.¹⁸ The extra six hundred heavy bombers that

¹⁴Wood and Dempster op. cit., p. 51

¹⁵London 1957, p. 66.

¹⁶R. Higham The Armed Forces in Peacetime (Britain: 1962), p. 186.

¹⁷DBFP ser. 3, vol. 6, appendix 1, p. 778.

¹⁸Collier, the Defence ... op. cit., p. 77.

British intelligence 'gave' Germany in effect increased the supposed striking power of the Luftwaffe by thirty per cent.

British intelligence made other serious errors in assessing German air power. Germany was believed to have ample reserves behind her first-line strength, so ample in fact that in comparing British and German strength, the Air Ministry "rolled up" several British squadrons, thus providing reserves on the supposed German level.¹⁹ In reality, German reserves were only twenty-five per cent of her first-line strength or less than one thousand aircraft. British intelligence, then, over-estimated German reserves by five hundred per cent.²⁰ Nor had the Germans bothered to build up an adequate recovery and repair system for damaged aircraft, a factor which went unnoticed. The Air Ministry assumed that Germany would concentrate her bombing on densely populated areas and on vital links of supply and distribution. In the spring of 1939 they had calculated that with 1,650 long-range bombers, Germany could drop seven hundred tons of bombs a day for the first two weeks of a war.²¹ Both these assumptions proved wrong.

¹⁹DBFP vol. 6, appendix 1, p. 778, footnote.

²⁰Collier, The Defence ... op. cit. p. 77.

²¹Ibid.

Germany struck first at her victim's air power and military communications, in other words at tactical targets, not at strategic ones. With few more than a thousand long-range bombers, the Luftwaffe could presumably deliver less than five hundred tons of bombs a day for the first two weeks. In fact, the Luftwaffe was not organized or equipped for long strategic warfare but for short intense campaigns with a respite between them. At the onset of war it was not even capable of prolonged terroristic attacks on civilian populations, for the Germans had not built up adequate bomb-producing facilities or reserves.²²

Nevertheless, 1939 was the best year for the Luftwaffe to fight a major war. As Group Captain Vachell, the air attaché, pointed out when disagreeing with Colonel Mason-MacFarlane's plea for immediate war in March 1939, time would favour Great Britain and France and reduce German superiority.²³

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Reaching a final evaluation of British estimates of German military intentions is difficult. On the surface at least, they were accurate; Hitler after all did send

²²Testimony of General Milch Nuremburg Proceedings

²³DBFP vol. 5, doc. 51, p. 102.

German troops into the demilitarized zone, into Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia and, somewhat more reluctantly, into the Low Countries and France as many had predicted he would. Furthermore, these attacks took place between 1938 and 1941 as the British Foreign Office, the War Office and many others estimated they would. The predominating strain in the speculations about German intentions revolved around pan-Germanism in the east - a possible Nazi intention of incorporating with the Reich those territories or countries with a German majority. There was little fear of a German attempt to include the German minorities on her Western borders, in Denmark, Belgium, France and Italy.²⁴ In addition to these more immediate objectives, it was suspected that Hitler intended eventually to attack and to occupy large parts of Russia. Many of the estimates of German military intentions suggested the existence of a long-term military plan of aggression drawn up soon after Hitler came to power. Judging by the military evidence, Hitler never had any such master plan. His decisions were frequently made on the spur of the moment in reaction to an opponent's move, or without prior

²⁴On one or two occasions there were indications that the German minority in Denmark might follow the example of the Sudeten Germans, Danzigers, etc. However, no trouble developed.

consultation with his senior diplomatic and military officials. Since these officials supplied much of their confidential information, British correspondents as well as diplomats were often taken by surprise in the timing of some of Hitler's attacks on the status quo. When Hitler was working to a military timetable, as was the case during the Czechoslovakian and Polish crises, his major interest was to make a final decision only at the very last moment. As will be seen, Hitler himself was as much plagued by the necessities of military timetables as were the leaders of more democratic countries.

Until late 1937 the orientation of German military planning was strategically defensive, with the object of protecting Germany from French intervention during her 'vulnerable period' when the German armed forces were at their weakest as a result of expansion. After 1935, a war with France was also likely to involve at least two of her Eastern allies, Russia and Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia, jutting as it did into the heart of Germany, was a particular threat for geographical as well as political reasons; hence the origin of the first plan for a surprise attack on her, a directive code-named Schulung.²⁵ The object of

²⁵E.M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans (London: 1963), p. 90.

Schulung would obviously be to remove a threat from the south-east in order to concentrate on stopping a French invasion from the west.

Later German plans of June 1937 were still largely defensive but one assumption had been changed. An attack on Germany was likely to be the result of a German attempt to exploit the fluid European situation, rather than a French attempt to enforce German disarmament. The major emphasis of the new plan was still defence against French attack (Concentration Red) while the purpose of Concentration Green, a surprise attack on Czechoslovakia, was to deprive Russia of forward air bases.²⁶

With the November Conference of 1937, German planning entered a new phase. For the first time Hitler and his senior military officers considered the feasibility of a simultaneous attack on Czechoslovakia and Austria as an end in itself, not as part of a strategic plan of defence against a French attack. Even then, as was noted in the previous discussion of the Hossbach Memorandum, the written record of this conference, the very possibility of the attack depended on a hypothetical and ideal political situation in Europe. Following the Conference, a supplement

²⁶Ibid., pps. 90-91.

to the military directive of June 1937 gave 'Operation Green' precedence over 'Operation Red' but only a qualified priority for it stated:

When Germany has attained full preparedness for war in all spheres the military conditions for an offensive against Czechoslovakia will have been established and with it the problem of Germany's living space can be solved victoriously even if one or other Great Power should intervene against us.²⁷

There was also a reference to the "primary importance" of the fortifications opposite France and Belgium. Even when these were strong enough to hold off many times the number of troops required to hold them, the Government, i.e. Hitler, was expected to avoid the risk of a two-front war or any situation to which Germany was not equal economically or militarily. Here the military planning rested until Anschluss with Austria led to more.

Germany's absorption of Austria came with a suddenness that surprised everyone. Hitler gave his generals less than twenty-four hours in which to prepare for a march on Vienna. Consequently, they had only time enough to 'dust off' an old contingency plan drawn up for use in the event of a Habsburg restoration. Hitler took another obvious military step in the direction of Czechoslovakia on April

²⁷Ibid., pps. 108-109.

21st, five weeks after the annexation of Austria, when he ordered General Keitel to work out the basic plan for 'Green.'²⁸ On May 20th the revised 'Draft Directive for Operation Green,' much more detailed than the first draft, was presented by General Keitel to Hitler for his approval. While it did contain a general strategic plan for an attack on Czechoslovakia, it gave no date for this attack. On the contrary, it began with the assurance that Hitler did not intend to "smash" Czechoslovakia in the "immediate future without provocation."

From the available evidence, it seems likely that Hitler determined to reduce Czechoslovakia to military impotence following the May crisis. On May 30th he reversed the opening sentence of the revised draft to read that it was his "unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future."²⁹ General Keitel was also warned that the execution of the Directive had to be assured by October 1, 1938 at the latest. Thus, far from discouraging an attack, the action of the Czechs in May precipitated the detailed preparations for one. Nevertheless, the question of whether Hitler was "bluffing"

²⁸ Documents on German Foreign Policy series D, vol. 2. Operation Green pps. 239-240 and revised draft pps. 299-303.

²⁹ A. Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny (Odhams, 1952), p. 447.

or was determined to attack Czechoslovakia is as surrounded by controversy to-day as it was in 1938. The traditional interpretation of the September crisis is that Hitler was bluffing, that faced with determined Anglo-French defiance at Munich, he would have backed down. More recently, however, a contrary argument has been put forward.³⁰ This interpretation deserves detailed elaboration both because of its uniqueness and because of the weight of evidence supporting it.

According to E.M. Robertson's argument, Hitler was not bluffing in the fall of 1938. His decision to attack Czechoslovakia was based on the belief that Germany could overwhelm Czechoslovakia before France and Britain could develop effective pressure against the very weak forces defending Germany's Western frontier.³¹ Britain and France were thus expected to accept the fait accompli and Hitler would have won his major objectives - the elimination of the Czechs as a military factor in Central Europe, and the incorporation of the Sudeten Germans in the Third Reich. If Neville Chamberlain was able to snatch

³⁰The chief exponent of this view is E.M. Robertson, op. cit., pps. 136-142.

³¹German plans assumed that Czech resistance could be broken in about four days and that the French would not fight until four to eighteen days after a German attack on Czechoslovakia. E.M. Robertson, op. cit., pps. 128.

"peace" out of the series of conferences with Hitler, collectively called the Munich Settlement, he may have done so against the wishes of Hitler. There is evidence to suggest that Hitler's own intentions were foiled, not by Chamberlain's dramatic visits to Germany, but by political miscalculation and rather inflexible military plans.³² The plans of the German General Staff envisaged an attack at the end of September or in the first few days of October as decreed by Hitler in late May. Somehow, the activities of the Sudeten Germans were not co-ordinated with this timing because the Sudetens broke off negotiations and revolted on the twelfth of September, more than two weeks ahead of the military schedule. For a while, the border areas of Czechoslovakia were badly disturbed while Czech police and troops were moving in to restore order. This was the perfect political casus belli, but one that Hitler could not exploit: German mobilization had been planned for 21st-30th September and these dates could not be advanced because work on the defences facing France would absorb essential railway facilities until September 20th. Hitler was trapped between political expediency which dictated an immediate attack and military necessity which

³²Ibid., pps. 136-138.

ruled out premature action. As a result of this failure of co-ordination between the political and military cli-
maxes, Hitler was forced to stand aside while the Czechs quickly put down the Sudeten disorders. Nor could he issue an ultimatum during his speech at the Nuremburg rally on September 12th, or reject Mr. Chamberlain's first offer to visit him. Thus, the initiation of negotiations was necessary to win time and to keep the situation fluid.

The above interpretation of Hitler's intentions does not necessarily mean that there was nothing Britain and France could have done to make Hitler change his mind, but it does suggest that verbal threats would not have been enough. On the other hand, if Britain had adopted military conscription in March or June of 1938 instead of a year later, the effect might have proved decisive.

Whatever the intentions of Hitler between the beginning of June and the middle of September, thereafter he seems to have been oscillating between his emotional need to physically smash and overrun the whole of Czechoslovakia, and his desire to drive up the price of peace and thus pull off another "bloodless" coup. He made the latter choice, probably influenced by the signs that Great Britain and France were mobilizing on sea and land, by the knowledge that the Czechs had not lost their nerve and one

million of them were calmly awaiting his decision, and by the obvious lack of enthusiasm shown by the German Army and people as well as by Mussolini, for a general war.

Following the Munich settlement, British estimates were again inaccurate in that they assumed Hitler had a grand design; they also mistakenly predicted that Hitler would probably try to annex the Ukraine. The reports of the attachés did, however, correctly assume that Hitler had freedom of action and could next attack in the west, the north-east or the south-east. Instead of outlining an ambitious programme of conquest, Hitler's military plans were "bush league" opportunism compared to estimates of them. The German Army was to be held ready either to liquidate the rump of Czechoslovakia or to occupy Memel or Danzig.³³ As with the Austrian crisis, the rapid success of his efforts to undermine the remnants of Czechoslovakia caught Hitler by surprise. He had been urging the leaders of the semi-autonomous Slovak state to assert their independence. They did, but the Czech Central Government still had sufficient self-confidence to reassert its authority. The disturbances in Czechoslovakia quickly gave Hitler an excuse for intervening, as the Czech

³³Bullock, op. cit., p. 447.

military attaché had feared they would.

From the beginning of 1939, and more urgently after the final dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, British observers considered that Danzig and the Polish Corridor were the obvious focal points of a future German-Polish conflict. While this assumption proved correct, the general belief that Hitler intended to use these issues as an excuse to smash Poland and to occupy the Polish Ukraine is more doubtful. Hitler was unquestionably determined to settle the question of Danzig on his terms and to establish at least an extraterritorial link with East Prussia through the Polish Corridor, but destruction of Poland does not seem to have been his chief motivation at first. Even following the Polish refusal to make concessions over Danzig and the Corridor, General von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, was told by Hitler that no immediate solution of the Polish question was envisaged other than under "exceptionally favourable conditions." Then Poland would be so badly mauled that "it need not be taken into account as a political factor for the next few decades."³⁴ At this stage, then, Hitler probably intended to explode Polish "Great Power" pretensions, but did not

³⁴Ibid., p. 497.

necessarily intend to destroy the Polish state. The British guarantee to Poland and the increasingly close connections between London, Paris and Warsaw furnished Hitler with a powerful incentive to strike Poland down. In early April, Hitler issued instructions that the preparations for "Operation White," the plan to eliminate the Polish armed forces, be finished by September 1st at the latest. These preparations were supposedly precautionary, in case Poland should reverse her non-aggressive policy toward Germany and adopt a threatening attitude. In the meantime, Hitler's policy was to be based on avoiding trouble.³⁵ The decisive steps in the direction of war with Poland were taken in May. Orders were sent to the army to prepare for the capture of the economic installations of Danzig. Nevertheless, Danzig was no longer the centre of the dispute; Hitler had decided that Poland would always be on the side of his enemies.³⁶

On May 23rd Hitler told his generals that while Germany would not be forced into war, war could not be avoided because there could be no more bloodless successes. Somehow Poland, like Czechoslovakia the year before, had

³⁵Documents on German Foreign Policy series D. vol. 6, Docs. 149 and 185.

³⁶John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy, (London: 1948), pps. 385-386.

to be isolated, for "there must be no simultaneous conflict with Britain and France."³⁷ Poland could be isolated in two possible ways. The most obvious would be to get France and Great Britain to withdraw their guarantee from Poland. "Danzig is not worth a European war" was to be the catch-word of German propaganda. Hitler himself felt that neither Great Britain nor France would, in the final analysis, fight. "Our opponents," he said, "are poor creatures (little worms). I saw them at Munich."³⁸ This opinion was eventually to lead to disaster for the Third Reich. The other possibility was to come to an arrangement with Russia. At the meeting on May 23rd, Hitler suggested that "it is not impossible that Russia will show herself disinterested in the destruction of Poland."³⁹ During the summer, Hitler waited either for the nerve of Great Britain and France to break, or for their negotiations with Russia to fail. Either occurrence would give him the opening he wanted.

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British estimates of German military strength seem generally to have varied, with the public over-estimating

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Taylor, op. cit., p. 212

³⁹Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, op. cit., p. 386.

her capabilities by twenty to forty per cent, and the official estimates being somewhat more conservative, but also frequently attributing greater capability to the German armed forces than they possessed, at least on paper. British estimates of German's military intentions seem to have been relatively well-founded, judging by the events which occurred after 1939. There can be no doubt that these estimates played a considerable part in influencing the opinions of the leading British statesmen, and that they therefore played a considerable role in shaping British policy towards Germany during the period. It may be that, on further examination, this influence on British policy was not always very fortunate, and that British statesmen did not always agree with their professional military advisers and follow their advice. The examination of a relationship between the British estimates of German military strength and British policy towards Germany is a subject which needs much further investigation.

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