

THE SURRENDER

During the spring of 1945, as the sky grew darker over Germany, the Nazi leaders had struggled desperately, by every means in their power, to whip their people into a last supreme effort to stave off defeat, hoping against hope that it would be possible, if only they could hold on long enough, to save the day by dividing the Allies. Blinded as they were by their own terror and hatred of "bolshevism," they were incapable of understanding the strength of the bond of common interest existing between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

As soon as it became clear that a war on two fronts had become impossible to maintain, the Nazi government set itself to obtain, if possible, a truce in the west in order that all its remaining forces might be concentrated in an attempt to check the rolling tide of the Russian advances in the east. In March an approach was made to this end through the British Embassy in Stockholm, but the offer was, of course, rejected out of hand.

Even after this rebuff, however, the Germans clung to their fond hopes of an Allied rift, and a last desperate attempt to create a schism between the Anglo-Americans and the Russians came as late as the last week in April, Himmler, claiming that he spoke for the German Government because Hitler was now "incapacitated," approached the Swedish Government, through Count Bernadotte, with an offer to surrender all the forces now fighting on the Western Front. Once more the Allies replied that the only acceptable terms were of immediate and unconditional surrender on all fronts simultaneously. Whereupon Himmler disappeared from the scene until, after the final capitulation, he was apprehended as a fugitive from justice and met his death by suicide.

Hitler and his close followers determined to carry on the fight. They personally had everything to lose, nothing to gain, by peace now. Amid the disillusionment of their armies and the ruins which daily multiplied in Germany, they deliberately chose to sacrifice the remnants of their country.

Not all of their henchmen, however, followed their lead. Waffen SS General Karl Wolff, the chief SS officer in northern Italy, in mid-February approached Allied representatives with a view to a capitulation in the Mediterranean Theater. Negotiations with AFHQ made clear to the Germans that the

Allies would discuss no terms and would accept unconditional surrender only. By 26 April the deterioration of the enemy's position which followed the Allies' splitting of his armies in Lombardy and Venetia led to renewed approaches; and, on the 29th, German representatives signed the terms of surrender, by which all hostilities in Italy were to cease on 2 May.

This capitulation by the German armies facing south in the Alps led inevitably to an abandonment of the struggle by those who, behind them, had been driven back into the mountains before the Allied 6th Army Group offensive. On 2 May, Wolff asked with whom the surrender of the North Alpine area should be negotiated. He was told to apply to General Devers, but warned that only unconditional submission would be acceptable. On 5 May the representative of General Schulz, commanding Army Group G, accepted the Allied terms at Haar, in Bavaria, and the German First and Nineteenth Armies accordingly laid down their arms. The surrender was officially to take effect at noon on 6 May, but both sides at once announced the termination of hostilities in order to obviate further loss of life.

Rumors of an impending local capitulation in the north also reached the Allies in mid-April. Field Marshal Busch, commanding the Hamburg area, was stated to be anti-Nazi and willing to surrender, but unable to do so until the Western Allies reached the Baltic and cut him off from the possibility of the arrival of die-hard SS formations from central Germany. General Lindemann, the commander in Denmark, was also understood to be ready to yield at the same time as Busch, and on 30 April an emissary appeared in Stockholm to confirm this. It was urged that the British Army should make all speed to reach the Baltic before the Russians did so, for the Germans would under no circumstances surrender to the Red Army.

By 3 May, however, when the capture of Lübeck had severed Denmark and northwest Germany from the remainder of the country, more important figures came within our reach. As the Red Army had drawn nearer to the Western Allies, Admiral Doenitz, upon whom the mantle of the Führer had now fallen, had instructed his armies which had been facing east to turn about and surrender to the Anglo-American forces.

While thousands of Germans fleeing

westward gave themselves up daily, Admiral Friedeburg, the new head of the German Navy, accompanied by Field Marshal Busch's chief of staff and two other officers, appeared at Field Marshal Montgomery's Headquarters on 3 May. They asked to be allowed to surrender the Third Panzer, Twelfth, and Twenty-first Armies, which had been fighting the Russians, and to be permitted to pass refugees through the Allied lines into Schleswig-Holstein. Their sole desire was to avoid the necessity of surrendering to the Russians. Field Marshal Montgomery, however, refused to discuss capitulation with them on these terms, though he informed them that individual soldiers who gave themselves up would be treated as prisoners of war. The German representatives then sent back to Field Marshal Keitel, the Chief of the German High Command, for further instructions, meanwhile urging the Allies to follow the retreating German armies closely to avoid chaos.

On 4 May, Friedeburg announced that he had received permission from his superiors to make unconditional surrender of all German armed forces, land, sea, and air, in the northwest Germany (including the Frisian Islands, Heligoland, and all other islands), Holland, Schleswig-Holstein, and Denmark. I had instructed Field Marshal Montgomery that a capitulation covering these areas might be regarded as a tactical matter and, as such, be dealt with by him. It was arranged that a Russian officer should be present to accept the German submission on behalf of his government. The instrument of surrender was accordingly signed on 4 May, and it became effective at 0800 hours on 5 May.

As laid down in my directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff, no commitments of any nature were made on the Allied side in accepting these local capitulations, and their terms were made subject to the provisions of the subsequent general unconditional surrender of all the German armed forces. The time for this final yielding had now arrived; unlike Hitler, Admiral Doenitz was ready to bow to the inevitable.

On 4 May, it was learned that Doenitz was sending a representative to my Headquarters on the following day, and that he had already ordered the German U-boats to return to port in earnest of his intention to bring the war to a close as speedily as possible. I at once notified the Russian High Command of this fact, and they agreed with my suggestion that a Red Army officer should be appointed to join with me in handling the surrender in order that a simultaneous capitulation on all fronts might

be arranged. Maj. Gen. Ivan Suslparov was accordingly delegated to act on behalf of the Soviet High Command for this purpose.

At the same time that Doenitz's emissary was coming to Reims, Field Marshal Kesselring, as Commander-in-Chief West, transmitted a message stating that he desired to send a plenipotentiary to discuss terms of capitulation. He was informed that unless his surrender covered all German forces facing east as well as west, in addition to those isolated elsewhere, negotiation was out of the question.

Meanwhile Admiral Friedeburg arrived at my Headquarters on the evening of 5 May. He began by stating that he wished to clarify a number of points, but was bluntly told that only unconditional surrender was acceptable. To this he replied that he had no power to sign any document of capitulation. The hopelessness of the German military position was pointed out to him, and he was shown the act of military surrender which had been drafted.

Friedeburg cabled a report of his interview to the government, and was informed by Doenitz that General Jodl was on his way to assist in the negotiations. Jodl arrived on the evening of 6 May. It was at once obvious that the Germans were merely playing for time so that meanwhile they could evacuate the largest possible number of soldiers and civilians from the Russian front to behind our lines. They persisted even now in attempting to surrender the Western Front separately, going so far as to say that, whatever my answer might be, they intended to order their armies to cease firing upon the Anglo-Americans. They asked for an adjournment for 48 hours before signing the final surrender, allegedly to enable them to get the necessary orders to their outlying units, but actually, it was clear, only to gain further respite for the purpose above mentioned.

They were informed that unless they agreed to my terms forthwith I would break off all negotiations and seal my front, preventing, by force if necessary, any further westward movement of German soldiers and civilians. They then drafted a cable to Doenitz, asking for authority to make full surrender, but specifying that actual fighting would cease 48 hours after signing. Since this solution obviously placed the decision as to when fighting should cease in the hands of the Germans, I refused to accept it; and finally told them that unless all hostilities should terminate on both fronts within 48 hours of midnight that night, my threat to seal the western front would be carried out.

This declaration at last had the desired effect. Doenitz gave his approval for acceptance of my terms, and at 0241 hours on 7 May the act of surrender was signed by Jodl on behalf of the German High Command. My Chief of Staff signed for me, and General Suslaparov signed for the Soviet High Command. General Savez of the French Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for National Defense, signed as witness. The terms were to become effective at midnight, 8-9 May.

In addition to the act of military surrender, Jodl signed an undertaking that the Chief of the German High Command, with the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, would appear at a time and place to be designated by the Soviet High Command

and myself for the purpose of executing formal ratification of the unconditional surrender on behalf of the German High Command. This meeting was held in Berlin on the night of 9 May, when Air Chief Marshal Tedder signed in my behalf, and Marshal Zhukov for the Soviet High Command. General Spaatz of the United States Air Forces and General deLatre de Tassigny (representing the French Government) were present as witnesses.

With this final capitulation by the German leaders, the mission of the Allied Expeditionary Force placed under my supreme command on 14 February 1944 was accomplished.