AT ZERO HOUR: THE GOVERNMENT OF KARL DÖNITZ, WITH REFLECTIONS AS SEEN IN GERMAN LITERATURE

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With the suicide of Adolf Hitler at the end of April 1945, leadership of the Third Reich was passed, as per Hitler’s Testament, to Karl Dönitz. Dönitz had, up to that point, served as head of the U-boat or submarine fleet, and then as Grand Admiral of the entire German Navy, or Kriegsmarine.

Very little analysis has been offered in current literature regarding the impact of the Dönitz government. Indeed, history texts rarely mention it. This thesis set out to do just that, using both historically oriented works and insights as provided by German literature of the period such as Heimkehrerliteratur and Trümmerliteratur. By investigating the works of Dönitz himself and those of various other personalities associated with his government, primary documents of the period, and secondary works on the period as well as the aforementioned literature genres, several conclusions were reached.

The activities of the Dönitz government can be broken up into pre-surrender and post-surrender activities. Pre-surrender activities included the negotiations of surrender itself, which insofar as it was conducted in several stages, was not unconditional, as is often claimed. The other major pre-surrender activity was the decision to continue the war in the East while seeking peace with the West to allow evacuation of Germans from East Prussia. Post-surrender activities involved mainly the preliminary investigations that would be needed to begin a government, had the Allies not arrested Dönitz. The Dönitz government was therefore key in the transition from war to peace.
This impact has also been seen in German literature of the period, which functions as a collective analysis of the psychological impact made by the war. Particularly useful were Wolfgang Borchert’s *Draußen vor der Tür* and Uwe Timm’s *Die Entdeckung der Currywurst*. These works show the reader how the period is remembered and/or memorialized.

It was therefore concluded that far from being without impact, the Dönitz government served a crucial role in Germany’s transition from war to peace, and that this transition left distinct impressions in the minds of Germans, as reflected in German speaking literature.
This work is dedicated to my parents, without whose help I never would have been able to make it through college.
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INTRODUCTION

Most history books dealing with the World War Two period will mention that Adolf Hitler committed suicide on April 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1945. They will then go on to state that the war in Europe ended on May 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1945. Certainly the same books will mention the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the succession of Harry Truman to the presidency. Most in-depth books will also mention that Winston Churchill, despite his popularity and wartime leadership, was replaced by the Labour candidate Clement Atlee shortly after the war in Europe ended, but while the war against Japan was still being prosecuted. However, the fate of the German government is often overlooked. After Hitler’s suicide, Germany was not in a state of anarchy before the signing of the surrender. There was, in fact, a successor to Hitler, Karl Dönitz; one biographer has, though such is a misnomer, gone so far as to refer to him as the “Last Führer.”

Though he was only to serve as leader of Germany for a short time, not only was Dönitz the last wartime head of state in Germany, technically one might say that his was the first peacetime government as well, as the Allies kept him in place for some time after the capitulation. Yet, his government rarely receives mention in the history books, and if it is mentioned, it is generally only as a footnote. Secondary literature on the matter is also lacking. The two main primary sources available are the works of Dönitz himself, who details his actions in his \textit{Memoirs} and to a lesser extent in his subsequent \textit{Mein Wechselvolles Leben}, and the memoirs kept by his adjutant, Walter Lüdde-Neurath on the government in his \textit{Regierung Dönitz}, which is of doubly great value to the researcher in that the second half of the book is composed of primary documents and diary entries. So far as secondary literature goes, the author could find only one monograph to be available on the matter, Steinert’s \textit{Capitulation 1945} which, while very useful, is unsatisfactory for various reasons, chief among them being a general lack of
focus. Biographer Peter Padfield also covers the period in his comprehensive biography of Dönitz, the somewhat misleadingly titled *The Second Fuehrer*. There are a few other smaller articles on the period as well. In short, the information is available, but is difficult to access, and little analysis has been made about the impact of the government. On a related note, histories that mention Dönitz abound with relation to his role in the prosecution of the U-boat war, and his later tenure as head of the *Kriegsmarine*. As a general rule however, the U-boat war is treated separately in various monographs from the life of Dönitz himself, and his role as second leader of the Third Reich.

Interestingly, there has, in fact, been a fair amount of prose written by German authors about the very end of the war and the immediate post-war period, though little about the Dönitz government itself. Some authors did, of course, write at the time in question; others have written about the time from a more recent standpoint. This literature can function in two important roles. First, it can set the conditions prevailing at the end of the war in context; that is, how the period is regarded by observers at the time who were not in the government, and by latter day observers. Second, this literature can be compared to the primary works of Dönitz and Lüdde-Neurath in particular, where the works of those individuals are regarded not only as history, but as bodies of literature in and of themselves, to show the viewpoint of people in versus people out of the government, or, to put it another way, to provide a more objective point of view, at least so far as they remain divorced from Dönitz. Such works were written by people who were not involved in the Government, unlike the preponderance of memoirs and works about the period, and by people who were never put on trial, and ergo have no reason to feel defensive, but rather feel free

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1. The information contained in the book is generally quite good, but a bit difficult to process; for example, Steinert skips back and forth chronologically to detail military vs. civilian matters, to detail different personalities, and so forth, which makes a chronological reading difficult.
2. Dönitz never took up the title of Führer for himself.
to express themselves emotively. The works of Wolfgang Borchert and Uwe Timm are particularly insightful in this regard; they do things that history and historiography does not.³

Far from being entirely without impact, the Dönitz government served a number of important functions. It was key as a transition from wartime to peacetime, had impact both in civilian and military affairs of the time, and set the stage for Allied governance of Germany, which otherwise might have been far more difficult. Particularly in the matter of the surrender, the government and Dönitz himself played important, even crucial roles in a way often overlooked by historians. While the Allies sought unconditional surrender, and the general perception is that they got it, such is in fact not the case; rather, under Dönitz, a piecemeal surrender took place. In short, the claim that Germany surrendered unconditionally and immediately to all forces, both Western and Eastern is a myth. Dönitz’s policy toward refugees fleeing the Soviets is worthy of mention, as is his demobilization of the German military. However, before these issues can be examined, a bit of introduction on Dönitz himself is in order.

³ Though there are, of course, historical memoirs written by individuals showing every day life during this period, and while such histories are certainly open to interpretation, they do not provide the same psychoanalytical insight, and do not show how the event was remembered quite in the same way that literature does. Whatever an author’s reasons for writing, putting pen to paper to write a work of fiction suggests some emotional investment, as does the creation of any work of art. A history can much more easily be seen as a piece of pure research, devoid of emotion if not interpretation, particularly in the case of daily minutes or diaries. Literature therefore, while historically suspect, provides a wonderful example of the trajectory of memory and the perception of events, as opposed to the historical facts.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND ON KARL DÖNITZ

Karl Dönitz was born on September 16th, 1891, in Grünau-bei-Berlin to Emil and Anna Dönitz. His father worked at the Zeiss optic works; the family belonged to the aspiring middle class. He had one older brother, Friedrich. His mother died when he was three and a half, leaving Emil, who never remarried, alone to raise the family.\footnote{Peter Padfield, \textit{Dönitz: The Last Führer} (London: Cassel & Co., 2001). 10.}

It may seem surprising that Karl chose a career as an officer in the German Navy, or \textit{Kriegsmarine}, given his family background. He was not of the aristocracy, nor did his family have any appreciable military background, which were nearly pre-requisites for such a career at the time. It was, however, a period of German expansion. The Navy was just beginning its building up under Tirpitz; perhaps the young Dönitz saw it as a more attainable position than that of one in the more prestigious army; many middle class men of the period did. Perhaps his boyhood visits to the isolated Baltrum Island whet his appetite for the sea. He was later to cite a number of books written by maritime explorers of the time as having been a major influence.\footnote{Ibid., 20.} In any case, by the time he finished \textit{Gymnasium} he was set on the matter, and despite such a position testing the means of his comfortable, but not wealthy family, he became a naval candidate in 1910. After the typical training period, he was assigned to the cruiser \textit{Breslau}, where he saw service in the Mediterranean.

Dönitz was to remain in the Mediterranean through the early stages of World War One, as signal officer on the cruiser \textit{Breslau}, which was eventually bought by Turkey, serving in the Black Sea, but retaining much of the German crew including Dönitz. Though Dönitz was to gain fame due to his role in submarine warfare in World War Two, this experience with surface ships...
put him in good stead for later command of surface units, and eventually command of the entire
German Navy, the post he held just prior to (and indeed during) his time as leader of Germany.
Dönitz met his future wife, Ingebourg, at this time, and published his first book, *Voyages of the
Breslau in the Black Sea* in 1917.⁶ He also gained some experience as both a pilot and aerial
observer during the war, and was chosen by the captain of the *Breslau* to be his personal
adjutant. In short, he gained experience in virtually every area of command, from the more
clerically oriented work as adjutant, to commanding men in combat, to an appreciation of inter-
service cooperation (though air power was in its infancy). By all accounts he proved a very
capable officer, and was ordered back to Germany to train in the new U-boat arm in late 1916.

Some speculation has occurred regarding this move, in light of the fact that transfers to
the submarine force were common for young officers in Dönitz’s position at the time, in order to
gain earlier command opportunity and a greater chance for action. The Germany High Seas
Fleet was, after all, to remain in port for most of the war. Though the *Breslau* saw a good deal of
action in the war, such was the exception, not the rule for young officers and sailors in the
Kaiser’s navy. This desire to transfer does not appear to have been the case with Dönitz
however.⁷ Dönitz himself remarks on the matter, “Am 1. Oktober 1916 wurde ich nach
4jährigem Kommando auf der ‚Breslau‘ in die Heimat zur U-Boot-Waffe abkommandiert.”⁸
This would suggest that he was ordered to transfer, that he did not put in for the move himself.
He does, however, note that, “…mein [Herz] war sehr leicht: Ich kam zur U-Boot-Waffe, deren
entscheidende Rolle in der deutschen Seekriegführung immer mehr erkannt wurde.”⁹ So though
Dönitz may not have applied for this move, which was certainly a pivotal point in his life, he did

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⁶ Ibid., 50.
⁷ Padfield, for instance, notes that no documentation is available stating that Dönitz applied for such a transfer.
*Wechselvolles*.
⁹ Ibid., 108.
recognize the importance the U-boat was to play in war, and indeed was already playing. Certainly, he would not have been immune to the advantage of transfer to submarine duty, namely that one might gain command of one’s own craft at a younger age and rank than would be possible in the surface navy. He certainly recognized the potential for the submarine, though it would have been hard to miss, given the press the German U-boat received on both sides of the Atlantic. In any case, Dönitz went to submarine school in Germany, which was to last the better part of a year.

As a U-boat officer he returned to the Mediterranean and saw action in a number of posts, eventually including his own command of a comparatively small mine laying and torpedo submarine in early 1918. Awarded the Knight’s Cross in June for a daring penetration of a heavily guarded harbor and subsequent sinking of a ship, he received a larger command, albeit with an inexperienced crew. He was to undertake only one patrol in this new boat however; though accounts vary as to the details, his boat was sunk on the 4th of October 1918. It was a most violent encounter, with Dönitz and his crew barely escaping the sub with their lives. Picked up by a British destroyer, Dönitz thus became a prisoner of the British. In his time in the Kaiser’s navy, he had received a grounding in both surface and submarine tactics, including early pioneering forms of group or “wolf pack” tactics, which were to serve him well with his later appointment to Head of U-boats and later Grand Admiral of the German Navy.

After the end of the war and his subsequent release from captivity, Dönitz stayed on in the small peacetime German Navy, partly at the recommendation of his father-in-law. He did a tour with a torpedo boat squadron, and from 1924 to 1927 gained first-hand experience with naval administration, during a stint at Naval Headquarters in Berlin. Though he found the

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10 Padfield., 101.
political climate and duties associated with this post repelling,\textsuperscript{11} it did provide him with further experience in the realm of politics and administration, which he had previously been exposed to as adjutant on the \textit{Breslau}, but on a far smaller scale.

Though moving steadily upwards through the ranks, Dönitz was not universally praised; Admiral Canaris once remarked that he was restless and imbalanced, and of uncertain health; the United States Consul General in Berlin from 1930-4 later testified at Nuremberg that, “Karl Dönitz was not always well mentally balanced.”\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, after capturing him in 1918, the British sent him to Manchester asylum. Dönitz claims that he had been feigning madness in order to be among the first repatriated to Germany, but as biographer Padfield notes, to dupe the doctors, he “either feigned madness rather convincingly or was a shade unbalanced.”\textsuperscript{13} However, whether slightly unbalanced or not, the same obsessive drive and ambition which would worry captors might seem, especially to a nationalistic power-hungry nation to be desirable qualities. However one regards Dönitz, by the mid 1930’s, he was on the rise toward high office and greater favor among the higher echelons of the German Navy. Toward the end of his tenure at Wilhelmshaven and his tenure with the German Naval Staff, he received a much more favorable report than had previously been the case. Admiral Canaris said of him, “Ambition and the endeavour to distinguish himself remain outstanding characteristics…. In his whole manner he has become essentially calmer and balanced.”\textsuperscript{14} Possibly in light of this review, or at very least in consideration of it, Dönitz won the Hindenburg Travel Grant, which

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\textsuperscript{12} Padfield, 126.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 92-3.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 130.
\end{flushleft}
allowed him to visit the Far East in 1933, thus missing the terror marking the early days of the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{15}

The next year, he received command of the cruiser \textit{Emden}, and after a stay in England to better his English, took her on a cruise to the East Indies. Upon return, he was informed in July 1935 that he was to be the new \textit{Führer der U-boote}.\textsuperscript{16} He assumed his new post on October 1st, 1935.\textsuperscript{17} In short, he was tasked to completely rebuild the German U-boat arm, which had been destroyed under provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty, though some rebuilding had already begun. As a former submarine commander, with experience both in surface ships and naval administration, he was perfectly suited to this task; additionally, he had remained in the Navy throughout the interwar years, whereas most other submariners of the First World War had not. He was therefore not only one of the most logical choices for the post, but one of the only possible choices.

Dönitz delved into his new task, and within the constraints imposed by treaties (though generally ignored) and the realities of available building capacity, began to rebuild the undersea arm of the German Navy. He wrote a second book during this time, titled \textit{Die U-boatswaffe} in 1939.\textsuperscript{18} He arrived at a figure of three hundred U-boats as being necessary to prosecute a successful commerce war against Great Britain, though where he got this figure is open to some speculation.\textsuperscript{19} It was based on the idea that at any time, one third of available U-boats would be either training or undergoing repair or refit, or their crews would be on leave; one third would be en-route to or from the patrol areas, and one third would actually be available for operations.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{17} It is with this event that Dönitz’s wartime memoirs, \textit{Zehn Jahre und Zwanzig Tage} begin, after a few introductory pages.
\textsuperscript{18} Padfield, 170.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 174.
Though again, how he decided that one hundred U-boats on station would be the proper number is open to some debate. In any case, by the outbreak of war, he himself felt that the arm was well trained, but inadequately supplied, with only twenty-two sea-going boats available, as well as a number of smaller coastal defense boats, suited only to operations in the North Sea.

Despite a certain number of technical problems, chiefly concerning reliability of torpedoes, the U-boat war initially went well for Germany, largely due to Dönitz’s leadership and strategies. He was promoted from Führer- to Befehlshaber-der U-Boote or BdU in October 1940. By all records, Hitler was most impressed with the U-boat arm and its crew, especially given their early successes. The intricacies of the U-boat war are covered well elsewhere; suffice it to say here that the success of the U-boats, and later their failure, can be laid largely at Dönitz’s feet, in light of the strategy pursued. The “wolf pack” tactics he helped to pioneer, based both on his own experiences and thoughts from World War One, as well as on pre-war war games, called for individual submarines to hold off on attack upon sighting a convoy. They were instead to trail targets, radioing position back to BdU, the U-boat headquarters, and to Dönitz himself. A concentration of boats could thus be brought to bear on each convoy. In short, the BdU and Dönitz himself micromanaged the war. This policy brought great results early in the war but with increasing Allied material superiority, air superiority, and new tactics, the war turned against the U-boats. Dönitz and the German Naval Command failed to anticipate the need for new designs, and failed to accept that their codes to and from the wolf packs had been

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20 The number was based on a number of limited pre-war war games on one hand, and from practical experience from the First World War on the other, considering First World War successes per day per boat, and the known import needs of Great Britain. However, why Dönitz thought that the same or similar figures would prove useful with a combination of a larger British population, knew technologies such as sonar and better aircraft, and generally larger and more capable ships on both sides of the conflict is unclear.

21 Ibid., 188, 195.

22 Dönitz’s own memoirs are a very good source for this information. See also Peter Padfield’s War Beneath the Sea, Jak P. Mallmann Showell’s U-boats Under the Swastika, or any other number of works for more information on the subject.
broken. While Dönitz pressed for more air/sea cooperation, which might have helped a number of boats survive the perilous passage into the Atlantic, he failed to secure any real help; Göring held full control of the Luftwaffe, and was notorious for failing to coordinate efforts with other branches of the armed forces.

These miscalculations lead to a period of rising German losses, then a collapse of the U-boat war. Just as this shift in fortunes was occurring, Dönitz was appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the entire German Navy, on January 30, 1943, following Grand Admiral Erich Räder’s retirement over a number of reasons, both politically and policy driven. Räder favored keeping large, expensive surface units, while Hitler had become swayed to an “all U-boat” policy, given the far greater successes of the submarines compared with surface units. Hitler was to receive a surprise, however, as Dönitz, the submariner, was still Dönitz, the officer who had served on the Breslau and Emden, and the surface ships were to remain in service.

This change in leadership brought Dönitz into much more frequent contact with Hitler than had previously been the case, as he tried to make his point for re-allocation of materials to the Navy and specifically to the U-boats. He enjoyed a good relationship with Hitler, and was accorded a certain degree of independence in keeping the Navy free from Nazi influence. He did not try to convince Hitler to end the war, however, nor did he see it as his place to do so. This also meant he never tried to press for an end to the U-boat campaign. Indeed, it was a pure matter of statistics; as horrible as the ever-increasing losses of men and material in the U-boat war were, it was coldly figured that the more Allied effort that went in to battling the U-boats out in the ocean, the better. This would ensure that fewer resources could be brought to bear on the

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24 Steinert, Capitulation, 49.
25 Dönitz, Zehn, 425.
continent attacking Germany directly; and even if Germany could not match Allied ship production ship for ship, if one U-boat sunk one or two ships before it was sunk, economically, it was to be regarded as a success. Also, there was a matter of training and morale; the U-boat arm expected to see some benefit from the “wonder weapons” oft mentioned by Hitler. While these were only beginning to come into service at the end of the war, they were not entirely composed of empty promises. New U-boat types capable of remaining submerged indefinitely, with higher top speeds than then current Allied destroyers, and new more efficient torpedoes promised to help shift the balance of naval power back to Germany. Shutting down the U-boat war entirely due to high losses of older types would have meant a need to start from scratch, as it were, to make use of these new weapons; crews needed to remain in action or at least in the boats to remain in peak form. So the U-boat war continued.

Dönitz had risen as high as one could in the Kriegsmarine, U-boat oriented or otherwise; however, beginning in early 1945, he began to be given a certain amount of authority over civilian matters as well, foreshadowing his succession to Hitler. In January 1945, he was appointed “coal director,” being responsible for the allocation of this resource for all military purposes, and in April, he was appointed as head of all merchant shipping, which took this power away from the Reich Commissar for Sea Transport.26 Also in April, Hitler decided that, should advancing Allied forces split the Reich, authority over the northern half of such a split nation would be vested in Dönitz regarding civil affairs, and militarily as well if Hitler were to withdraw to the Southern sector.27 The letter to Dönitz stated, “…Ich erteile ihm [Dönitz] die Vollmacht, die für diesen Zweck erforderlichen Befehle an alle Stellen von Staat, Partei, und

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26 Steinert, Capitulation, 50.
27 Dönitz, Zehn, 428.
Kesselring would head the southern sector in civil affairs, and should the Führer remain in Berlin, also head up military matters there. It was in fact decided on April 20th that Hitler would make his way to the southern sector, though of course his plans shortly changed and he remained in Berlin. Dönitz took leave of Hitler on the 21st with this arrangement in mind.

In short, one can see a pattern emerging in Dönitz’s rise toward power; he was delegated continuously more power beginning in 1943, first as head of the Navy, and then, just before the succession, became effectively tied for second most powerful civil authority in Germany, after Hitler of course. Considering that Göring had long been officially the number two man in the Reich, and that any number of figures from Goebbels to Himmler had been seemingly more involved politically, this is most important; it shows a trend of increasing favor for Dönitz at the expense of favor for previously important Nazis. Some speculation as to why this was the case will be offered below, in Chapter Two, which details the appointment of Dönitz, but suffice to say here that it is obvious that for one reason or another, he was in Hitler’s favor up to the end.

This brings one up to date on Dönitz’s personal background just before Hitler’s suicide and the subsequent succession of Dönitz to the head of state. One might ask, however, what he was inheriting?

The Grand Admiral was about to take over a sinking ship, so to speak. Germany was, by the end of April 1945, falling apart. Below is a summary of his adjutant’s appraisal of the situation at the time, probably as accurate a picture as can be had.

1. War production had sunken to unacceptably low levels due to bombing and the overrunning of territory by the Allies.

2. The Army Group in Italy had surrendered.

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3. In the East, the South East Army was in organized retreat. Some units were intact, others falling apart.

4. Berlin was overrun, though not entirely occupied.

5. The armies fighting in the northeast, particularly in Prussia, were on the retreat or cut off. Troops as well as civilians were being withdrawn as fast as possible.

6. Ostfriesland and Schleswig-Holstein were still unoccupied. The same held true for Holland, Denmark, and Norway. Militarily, units in these areas were intact and ready for battle.

7. Millions of civilians were fleeing the Russian advance.

8. Most large naval units had been destroyed; the U-boats continued to be destroyed at an alarming rate. New types were just nearing the end of shakedown cruises, but due to fuel and supply shortages, only limited missions would be possible.

9. The Luftwaffe, due to fuel and manpower shortages, was basically ineffective.  

One can gather from this list that the Third Reich was defeated, the war lost. It was only a matter of how long the inevitable was postponed. To add to this list, Steinert points out that the German military had just over three million men left under arms and that only in Denmark and Norway were military formations in any sort of fighting trim. Despite difficulties, this is a large number of troops, and it must be assumed that had there been the political will, and had the troops not reached a breaking point, that at least pockets of resistance could have held out for a good while, especially in mountains and outlying regions such as Norway. But the war was lost; it was simply a matter of time. Even a pullback to planned redoubts in the Alps could only delay

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30 Steinert, Capitulation, 138.
31 Ibid., 142.
the inevitable, and with the complete occupation of greater Germany it is doubtful that any further resistance would have been offered. This was the situation as it stood shortly before Dönitz’s official appointment as successor. Chapter Two details those events with some analysis as to why he was chosen, and detail the creation of the interim Dönitz government.
CHAPTER TWO: THE SELECTION OF DÖNITZ AS SUCCESSOR

The matter of the selection by Hitler of Karl Dönitz as successor has left a number of historians puzzled, and perhaps rightly so. For the duration of the existence of the Third Reich, his name was not on the list of governmental hierarchy. It was only at the end that Hitler seems to have chosen him for the position. Indeed, officially the succession should have passed to Göring, though he was not chosen for reasons to be addressed below. Other figures close to Hitler, such as Himmler or Goebbels, seem to be more obvious choices. Certainly, any of these men were higher up in the Nazi Party than Dönitz was, despite his status as head of the *Kriegsmarine*. The fact is, given that Hitler’s state of mind cannot be assured even when considering him at normal times, much less at the very end of his life, the appointment could just as easily have been a spur of the moment decision, made in a bout of irrationality as a weighted decision. Whatever his state of mind however, Hitler’s testament of the 29th of April 1945 officially passed power to Dönitz. The first part of the Testament is a rant against Jews and justification of the decision to go to war, and a statement that Hitler planned to remain in Berlin come what may. The second part of the testament sets forth the provisions of the new government, as Hitler foresaw it. This is worth quoting at length, as it was the order that created the Dönitz government:


The testament continues after a list of governmental positions and their appointed heads with a statement to the effect that even though certain people, such as Bormann and Goebbels had decided to remain in Berlin, they should follow Hitler’s wishes and if need be, leave for the good of the nation, to continue the work of building a National-Socialist state. The testament ends with two demands of the German people. One is to continue the fight against world Jewry. The other is:

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32 Das politische Testament Hitlers. In Lüdde-Neurath, 125. The list of appointees goes on to list other positions, which the author has left out here, given that they were not accepted by Dönitz in any case. Those provided here are those relating to Dönitz himself, or to positions high in the hypothetical new government, given to people already of note in the Nazi Party.
…Von allen Deutschen, allen Nationalsozialisten, Männern und Frauen und allen
Soldaten der Wehrmacht verlange ich, daß sie der neuen Regierung und [ihrem]
Präsidenten treu und gehorsam sein werden bis in den Tod.\textsuperscript{33}

This document is interesting on a number of levels. First, in it, Hitler appoints his successor.
Recall that Paul Hindenburg in fact appointed Hitler to his position as Reichschancellor, in a
legal fashion, after the National Socialists had won a plurality of the votes in open election.
Theoretically, the Chancellor had no power to appoint his own successor. Indeed, under
paragraph fifty-one of the Weimar Constitution, the president of the Reich Court (Chancellor)
would have been in line for succession should the President, who appointed the Chancellor, be
unavailable.\textsuperscript{34} The trouble was that Hitler had assumed the power of both offices for himself.
So the succession was legally unclear. While such considerations are ludicrous given how the
Nazis had systematically destroyed the democracy of Weimar, it does mean one interpretation
that the Allies could have made was that Hitler had no power to appoint a successor, and any
successor could be regarded as illegitimate. Also worthy of note is that this document hints at
the reasons for Göring’s fall from favor, as well as Himmler’s.

Göring had, early in the war, been among Hitler’s favorites, particularly with the early
successes of the \textit{Luftwaffe}. With the continued failure to stop the Allies from gaining air
supremacy, however, he began his fall from Hitler’s grace, and by 1945 was no longer an
influential voice with Hitler. This does not explain his expulsion from the Nazi party, however;
indeed, Hitler commented as late as the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of April that Göring might be the perfect
replacement, as only a ‘cur’ would capitulate.\textsuperscript{35} This shows that even at that late date, while
Hitler had no love for Göring, the latter had yet to receive the final boot, as it were and that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] Ibid., 126.
\item[34] \url{http://www.zum.de/psm/weimar/weimar_vve.php}, as of 2/20/6.
\item[35] Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 22.
\end{footnotes}
Hitler had not given up the idea of the war continuing after his death. It also shows that Hitler had not yet chosen a firm successor, should he die. Göring was technically still second in command, a position he had held since June 29th, 1941. Hearing via a third party about Hitler’s statement regarding Göring’s suitability as a negotiator, derogatory though it was, Göring sent a telegram to Hitler as of April 23rd, enquiring whether he might begin to make such certain arrangements, i.e. feel free to open negotiations with the Allies. Should no reply be received, Göring stated, he would assume Hitler to no longer be free (i.e. dead or captured) and assume power. There were even indications that Göring was considering negotiations with Eisenhower himself. It is possible that Bormann, who was in Berlin, withheld this telegram from Hitler, and passed on only a second memo of similar content that Göring had intended for von Ribbentrop, which would further have aggravated Hitler, in an apparent circumventive move. This presumptive action by Göring infuriated Hitler; he even regarded it as a Putsch. Göring was stripped of all of his ranks and offices, and was, therefore, out of line for succession.

Given that the new head of the Luftwaffe, von Greim, was not well known, and that the head of the Army, Schöner, was also unknown and not very popular among the Wehrmacht hierarchy, if Hitler wished to appoint a military figure to the position, circumstance left him with Dönitz. To lend further support to this decision, in the final months of the war, not only did the U-boats continue the battle to the last man as Hitler had decided should be the case, but also proved to be some of the most steadfast troops on land, when pressed into such service. Speaking of the period from January 1943 through April 1945, several members of Hitler’s entourage have noted that the Großadmiral was received very warmly by Hitler, often given a

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36 Lüdde-Neurath, 41.
37 Steinert, *Capitulation*, 29.
Mercedes and SS escort for his visits. Hitler’s valet even claimed that the Führer said of Dönitz that he was the only one who had never deceived him.\(^{39}\) This respect for the Navy in general is even reflected in Hitler’s Testament, where he states “Möge es dereinst zum Ehrbegriff des deutschen Offiziers gehören- so wie dies in unserer Marine schon der Fall ist-, daß die Übergabe einer Landschaft oder einer Stadt unmöglich ist…”\(^{40}\) Ergo, the comments made by the valet seem quite plausible; if Hitler saw the members of the Wehrmacht, the Luftwaffe, and certain members of the Party as traitors, with only the Kriegsmarine unstained, the choice of Dönitz seems logical.

Another figure was eliminated from the succession at this time; in this case a non-military member of the party. Heinrich Himmler made a bid for a negotiated peace. On the night of the 23\(^{rd}\)/24\(^{th}\) of April, he entered discussions with the neutral Swedish government through the person of Count Folke Bernadotte, authorizing him to transmit a peace offer to the Allies in his, Himmler’s name. The news of this move paradoxically reached Berlin via a Reuter’s news flash, picked up by the Führer bunker all the way from the United States, on the 28\(^{th}\) of April.\(^{41}\) Hitler regarded this as treachery as well; his “true Heinrich” had betrayed him, hence his expulsion and condemnation to death.

So on one hand, to a certain extent, a number of previously likely candidates were excluded from the position of successor to Hitler, and on the other hand, Hitler still seemed to regard the Navy with a degree of respect already lost for the other branches of the German armed forces. While this explains why Hitler found a number of people to be unsuited to the task, it does not necessarily explain his choice of Dönitz, who apparently (and if one reads his memoirs, explicitly) had little to do with politics. After all, eliminating a number of other choices, and

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Hitler, Politisches, in Lüdde-Neurath, 125.
\(^{41}\) Padfield, 404.
having respect for the Navy does not necessarily mean that Dönitz would be a palatable choice, either. Dönitz himself says of the matter,

Am 30. April gegen 18 Uhr war ich wieder in Plön [where his command was based]. Dort fand ich den Marineoberbefehlshaber Ostsee, Generaladmiral Kummetz… Rüstungsminister Speer, anwesend, der sich schon seit längerer Zeit in Norddeutschland befand. In Gegenwart dieser beiden Herren legte mir mein Adjutant, Korvettenkapitän Lüdde-Neurath, ein Funktelegramm vor, das mit dem sicheren, geheimein Marineschlüssel aus dem Führerbunker in Berlin an mich gekommen war.  

This signal was a communiqué from Martin Bormann, notifying Dönitz of his appointment as successor. Hitler had named Bormann executor of his will, so it makes sense that such news would be sent by Bormann to Dönitz. There were, in fact, a series of three communiqués. The first was received in Plön as of 6:45 p.m on April 30th, and reads, “FRR Großadmiral Dönitz: Anstelle des bisherigen Reichsmarschalls ,Göring’ setzte der Führer Sie, Herr Großadmiral, als seinen Nachfolger ein.” It also mentioned that written confirmation was underway. The second message, received at 8:53 p.m., simply begins with “Testament in Kraft” thereby communicating the news of Hitler’s death, and assures Dönitz that Bormann was to come to him. The third message, received the next day at 3:18 p.m. laid out details of the new government’s cabinet as set out by Hitler.

Dönitz claims to have been completely taken by surprise upon receiving this news. He states that he had not spoken to Hitler except at large gatherings since July 20th, 1944. He goes on to stress that he had never even considered the possibility of being named successor, and

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42 Dönitz, Zehn, 433.
45 Dönitz, Zehn, 433.
while it was clear that Göring was likely out of the running, he had considered Himmler to be the next likely choice. Indeed, he may have been correct, at least on this last point, had Himmler not opened the aforementioned negotiations with the Swedes. Dönitz later mentions that some years later, Albert Speer told him that he had suggested the move of placing Dönitz in the line of succession to Hitler on the 23rd of April, when he had gone to Berlin to take his leave of the Führer. Dönitz did not yet know this, however, and presumed at the time that Hitler had made this move to allow a known officer of the Armed Forces to put an end to the war. Given that in the first part of the Testament, Hitler called for the war to continue, this seems improbable, but not impossible. Dönitz nonetheless stated:


A few lines further on, he states, “Mein Regierungsprogramm war einfach. Es galt, so viel Menschenleben zu retten wie möglich.” Lüdde-Neurath has little to add to the matter regarding the selection of Dönitz, but points out one past event that most interestingly seemed to put Dönitz in Hitler’s favor. When the question of the heavy surface ships came up, Dönitz refused to have them scrapped. Hitler gave in to Dönitz and his point of view. Lüdde-Neurath goes on to say that “Von diesem Zeitpunkt an wurde Dönitz von Hitler stets mit Höflichkeit und

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46 Ibid., 434. Speer later denied this, stating that he had only spoken highly of Dönitz, but had not recommended his being placed in line for succession.
47 Ibid., 434.
48 Ibid., 435. More will be discussed on this in the chapters detailing the actions of the government and the surrender policy.
Achtung behandelt. Er redete ihn nie anders an als Herr Großadmiral.” 49 This is surprising, as it was a case of someone telling Hitler “no” with regards to one of his wishes, and not only winning the argument, but also being treated better for it. Despite this apparent pull with Hitler, Lüdde-Neurath maintains that, as Dönitz himself states, Dönitz limited his activities to naval matters and did not get into politics. 50

Dönitz and his aide thereby paint a picture of apparent innocence; Dönitz was neither close to Hitler, nor had he considered the possibility that he might be named successor. While the latter point may be true, he seems to be either deliberately misleading his readers on the first point, as well as with his assertion that he had not spoken with Hitler in some time before the succession.

Records indicate that Dönitz was in fact a member of the Nazi Party, joining February 1 1944, with party number 9664999. 51 Considering that, for much of the war, members of the military were in fact prohibited from joining the Party, despite their loyalty oath, this late date of membership would impart no stigma. Despite Dönitz’s later claims to the contrary, he seems to have embraced Nazism and the Führer. Räder even went so far as to call him “Hitler-Boy Dönitz.” 52 He was certainly anti-Semitic; in one speech in March of 1944 he stated that had Hitler not united Germany under National Socialism, the result would have been “split parties, beset with the spreading poison of Jewry… we would long since have succumbed under the burden of this war.” 53 When asked to clarify this statement before the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal, he said, “I was of the opinion that the endurance, the power to endure, of the

49 Lüdde-Neurath, 39.
50 Ibid.
51 Grier, 185.
52 Ibid., 187. While Grier does not provide the original German term, one might suspect it to be “Hitlerjunge,” which would imply a sense of a lackey, or a follower, rather than “Hitlerbube” or something similar, which would be more neutral.
53 Ibid., 187.
people, as it was composed, could be better preserved than if there were Jewish elements in the nation." While there are no apparent records that Dönitz supported various Nazi racial programs, he did once comment that a soldier’s asthma endangered the Volkgemeinschaft. While no smoking gun exists pointing to his approval of the Holocaust, he knew and approved of the use of concentration camp labor in shipyards. He was certainly committed to the Führer. In one speech to a group of Germany’s youth on February 20, 1945, he stated

You have been so very fortunate as to be placed by destiny in the greatest era of our people….You must be attached body and soul and with all the forces of your heart and character to the Führer. You must regard yourselves as his children….This is the greatest thing in a man’s life- unconditional and loyal devotion to the great man who is his leader.

In another speech, given on April 11th, 1945, he states, “At the latest next year, perhaps even this year, Europe will recognize Adolf Hitler is the only statesman of stature in Europe.” Other speeches indicate that Dönitz was a supporter of Hitler’s policy of no retreat, whatever the cost, even praising Japanese defenders of Iwo Jima where only 180 soldiers were taken prisoner, while 14,000 were killed, as a useful model in defense against the Russians. Granted, the use of rhetoric in speeches is commonplace and not necessarily indicative of true belief. However, it is doubtful that Dönitz would have spoken so forcefully for a system if he did not support it; had he not been in favor of Nazi policies and personalities, he could have simply left out praises of

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55 Ibid., 188
56 Steinert, Capitulation, 45.
57 Grier, 189. While the author has attempted, wherever possible, to use quotes in the original German, in some cases such as this the use of the English translation is unavoidable, in that the German version was not provided in the works in question.
58 Steinert, Capitulation, 54.
59 Grier, 189.
the Führer and appealed to the various crowds’ patriotism or other emotions. In short, despite what Dönitz might have said to the contrary in his memoirs, which must be regarded with suspicion as an attempt to sanitize his record or at very least as a case of cognitive dissonance, it appears that he was a devoted Nazi, loyal to Hitler, supportive of the aims of National Socialism, at least somewhat anti-Semitic though not as extreme as Himmler or Heidrich, and a very competent soldier and leader in his own right. Temperamentally he appears suited to meet the requirements Hitler might desire in a successor. To close the chapter however, one last item needs to be addressed.

Recall that Dönitz stated that one of his reasons for being surprised at the news of his selection as successor was that he had not spoken with Hitler, except at large gatherings, since July 20, 1944. This seems to be another case of either a latter-day oversight or a deliberate piece of misinformation. The term “large gathering” would seem to indicate either a social function of some sort, or a meeting of a number of military and political personnel. Smaller meetings with just a few advisors would, one would think, be excluded by such language. Given the steadily increased power vested in Dönitz by Hitler, it is ludicrous to assume that such could be the case. Is Dönitz trying to convince his readers that Hitler never spoke to the head of his Navy, who, as we have seen, was one of the few men in whom he still placed some trust? Or that Hitler never spoke with his coal director, one of the two men he had tasked to run Germany should it be divided by Allied advances? Such a premise would be hard to accept. In fact, the prosecution at Nuremberg estimated that, in the last two years of the war alone, Dönitz and Hitler met on 119 days, to which Dönitz added that up to the end of January of 1945, he had had only 57 such interviews, with the rest being accounted for by daily attendance at briefing conferences. If we accept the Nuremberg figures as at least reasonably accurate, it would mean that Dönitz had 62
interviews with Hitler in the last three months of the war. Consider that the last time Dönitz saw Hitler was on the 21st of April,60 these meetings took place in a total of 80 days, which averages out to a meeting approximately every 1.3 days in February, March, and April. In fact, far from not having seen Hitler, it appears that Dönitz was at his side nearly every day. While one might assume that it is possible that Dönitz and Hitler were not alone with each other, such briefing conferences can hardly be seen as large assemblies; even if they are, surely Dönitz would have had one of the most influential voices in the room, given his status as Oberbefehlshaber der Kriegsmarine, not to mention his other positions. At the very least, the meeting with Hitler on the 21st of April would serve to prove that Dönitz had met with Hitler since 1944. Finally, Lüdde-Neurath mentions that, since the summer of 1943, prior to the movement of the headquarters to Plön in 1945:

…befand sich das Hauptquartier des Oberbefehlshabers der Kriegsmarine und der Seekriegsleitung nördlich von Berlin bei Bernau. Die Nähe der Reichshauptstadt... machten es zu einem idealen Führungsplatz.61 Would Dönitz have chosen such a location had he not wanted to meet with Hitler and other governmental officials on a regular basis? Lüdde-Neurath continues:

Er selbst entschloß sich, mit einem kleinen persönlichen Stabe in der Nähe Berlins zu bleiben, weil er in dieser kritischen Zeit als Chef eines Wehrmachtteils auf enge Verbindung mit der Staats- und Wehrmachtsführung nicht verzichten wollte... Während „Koralle“ [the nickname of his command post north of Berlin] geräumt wurde, begleitete ich mittags Dönitz zur Lage in die Reichskanzlei und von dort aus zum Zuge.62

60 Lüdde-Neurath, 29.
61 Ibid., 27.
62 Ibid.
So Dönitz specifically chose his new headquarters for its convenient location to the center of government, and initially he went there either every afternoon, or at least often enough to be considered habitual, given the use of “mittags.” Lüdde-Neurath’s discussion of this matter concludes with, “Dönitz fuhr nun zwei- bis dreimal in der Woche zur Lagebesprechung in das Führerhauptquartier.”

In short, Dönitz was a Party member, who both admired and supported Hitler and the aims of National-Socialism, including Hitler’s defense strategies and anti-Semitic feelings, and who was at Hitler’s side until the bitter end on an almost daily basis, offering advice and counsel. Unlike other potential successors, he never tried to convince Hitler to end the war, never tried to maneuver behind his back, and appeared to be ready to fight to the last man in defense of Germany. In this light, Dönitz’s selection as successor seems not only understandable, but also logical. Chapter Three details how he structured his short-lived government.

63 Ibid., 28.
CHAPTER THREE: THE CREATION OF A GOVERNMENT

As stated above, the radio messages sent to Dönitz on the evenings of the 30th and the 31st communicated that he was to be in charge. Initially, he did not know that Hitler was dead, merely that the Testament, or will, was in force. This could have meant a number of things, from Hitler’s death, to his capture, to being missing in action. News of the Führer’s death was to come a day later. In any case, Dönitz had already begun a number of preparations for his duties as Commander of the Northern area that were to carry over into his new government. His chief concerns at this time, that is after the 21st of April but before the late afternoon of the 30th of April, were the evacuation of both refugees and troops from the East. Given the well-documented barbarity of some Soviet troops, this is understandable; indeed, many German civilians had already taken to flight. Dönitz regarded the maintaining of the front for a period long enough for the German population of the eastern zones to evacuate to be the last important task remaining for the Wehrmacht.64 This meant not only maintaining the forces on land, but also the forces at sea. In a move that made the 1940 evacuation by Allied forces from Dunkirk look small by comparison, the German Navy did in fact succeed in evacuating over 2 million people from the East in 1945.65 To facilitate this aim, Dönitz had already instituted orders preventing scorched earth policies, and had had meetings with various key personnel who realized that, should Hamburg fall, the flow of refugees from the East would have nowhere to go. Dönitz therefore issued a Teletype to the Gauleiter of Hamburg, which stated in part:

1. Hauptsorge der militärischen Führung in der augenblicklichen Situation ist die Rettung deutschen Landes und deutschen Volkstums vor dem Bolschewismus… um

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64 Dönitz, Zehn, 424.
65 Ibid., 427.
den Abfluß der deutschen Menschen zu ermöglichen [to leave the Mecklenburg province].

2. Dieser Abfluß ist nur möglich, solange ein Tor nach Westen über die in Jalta vereinbarte Grenzlinie der Besatzungszone offen bleibt. Wird der Elbe-Trave Kanal jetzt durch die Engländer versperrt, geben wir über 7 Millionen wertvoller deutscher Menschen der russischen Willkür preis.

3. Es ist daher unumgänglich notwendig, die Elbestellung mit äußerster Zähigkeit gegen den Westen zu verteidigen...

Once evacuation was completed, the matter would be changed, and defense would no longer be required; Hamburg could surrender.

On the eve of his assumption of power, therefore, Dönitz had been tasked with the defense of the North, which he regarded as untenable, but necessary to accomplish the evacuations already underway. These preparations were also to concern his government.

One of the first matters to be dealt with by Dönitz upon assuming power was that of Heinrich Himmler. Though Hitler had condemned him, he remained at large, and a real danger, given his control of various paramilitary and military forces. Dönitz recognized that he needed to be dealt with, and asked him to come from Lübeck to Plön that very evening (the 30th). Himmler arrived at midnight, with an armed SS guard. Dönitz recalls that upon meeting, he had a pistol with the safety off hidden under some papers on his desk. Dönitz gave Himmler the telegram to read, which appointed Dönitz as the successor:


66 Ibid., 436.
67 Ibid., 436.
Himmler left without violence. The account given in Dönitz’s memoirs is, however, a bit misleading and melodramatic. It suggests that Himmler was to have nothing more to do with Dönitz or his government. It also suggests a brief meeting, lasting perhaps a few minutes at most. Such was not the case; in fact the two talked through the night, while their adjutants went to the base canteen and got drunk together. They parted after sunrise, apparently on good terms. Himmler was later to appear at Dönitz’s headquarters again to have breakfast with him on May 3rd, and it was not until May 6th that Dönitz actually stripped Himmler of his offices.

Even at this point, it appears to have been an amicable meeting based on realities of the situation, as Dönitz permitted Himmler and his men to leave with freshly issued papers identifying them as members of the Kriegsmarine, as it was far preferable to them to be caught with such papers than with those of SS members.

Regardless of what transpired on the night of the 30th of April/1st of May between Himmler and Dönitz, the latter secured his position from the only other potential source of opposition to his leadership. Dönitz could thus begin to build his government, short-lived though it was to be. Although Hitler’s testament had provided for the members of the new government, with following details and suggestions radioed on May 1st, Dönitz did not feel himself bound to accept these choices for several reasons. To begin with, Goebbels, whom Hitler had recommended as the new Chancellor, was dead by his own hand, taking his wife and five children with him in a macabre scene in the Berlin bunker alongside his Führer. Indeed, Hitler

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68 Ibid., 437.
69 Padfield, 409.
70 Ibid., 417, 423.
71 Ibid., 423.
had ordered him to leave Berlin, but in an addendum to Hitler’s Testament, he stated that he would stay and end his life at the Führer’s side, for “menschlichen Gründen und solchen der persönlichen Treue…” as well as for the reason that should he leave, he would feel a faithless cut-and-runner, one who abandoned his Führer at his time of greatest need.\textsuperscript{72} Bormann was to have been the Party Minister in the new government, but while he said he was going to attempt to reach Dönitz in Plön with written confirmation of the Testament, he never did; which incidentally means that Dönitz took up position as leader with only a radio message as authentication. Indeed, in the case of both Goebbels and Bormann, Speer relates that when Dönitz received the message detailing them to posts in the government, he stated, “I absolutely will not cooperate with them in any case.”\textsuperscript{73} So even if they had made an appearance in Plön (or later in the new headquarters at Flensburg) they may have been simply ignored. Other reasons also exist for Dönitz deciding to name his own choices to the new governmental posts. Most important among them were that Dönitz’s political concept for the ending of the war and future government were not possible with the selections as laid out by Hitler, and that he felt that if he truly was in charge he had no need to follow any previous orders; he was leader, the choices were his to make.\textsuperscript{74} Any orders written by Hitler could simply be regarded as suggestions, the writings of a dead man who had no power to enforce them. Additionally, the very practical concern existed that many of the appointees on Hitler’s list simply could not be found and contacted in the chaos that then reigned; even Dönitz’s first choice for Foreign and Prime Minister could not be found. So Dönitz created his own government and cabinet.

\textsuperscript{72} Anhang zum Testament Hitlers. In Lüdde-Neurath, 127.
\textsuperscript{74} Lüdde-Neurath, 48.
The creation of a government was a tricky proposition. The first question to be addressed was what form the new government should take. Though many sources speak of Dönitz’s National Socialist convictions, he did, according to his adjutant, recognize that the absolute power of a Führer wielding the full power that goes along with it (the Führerprinzip) was not ideal, in that success or failure would ride solely on his person. Dönitz apparently gave heartiest approval to the creation of a dualistic system similar to that of the 1933/4 Weimar period, with a Chancellor and President to check and balance each other, and a Parliament to make them answerable to the people.\textsuperscript{75} Such were to be long-term plans however. Governance was needed immediately, not after some future time of elections. While initial input was found largely among his staff, various naval personnel, and his adjutant, one of the men on whom Dönitz heavily relied was Albert Speer, who had served as Hitler’s Minister of Armaments since 1942. He agreed with Dönitz about forestalling a scorched earth policy, and attempting to evacuate as many refugees as possible from the eastern zones. He was to maintain this role in the Dönitz government, directing the business of the Ministries of Production and Industry, as well as dealing with some transport matters.\textsuperscript{76} He was very qualified for this posting, as he had, according to many, kept the German war machine rolling despite increasing tolls of bombing and war weariness. He also was to be one of the most successful at distancing himself from the odious politics of the Hitler regime.

In military matters, advice was sought from Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Jodl. Dönitz originally sought to replace Keitel with Field Marshall von Manstein, but as the latter proved impossible to track down, Keitel remained Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), a position he had held under Hitler; many regarded him at the time as Hitler’s lackey, and indeed, to a

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{76} Dönitz, Zehn, 462.
certain extent was a figurehead existing to rubber-stamp Hitler’s personal military choices.\textsuperscript{77} General Jodl, who Dönitz considered more capable, had been serving as head of the OKW operations staff since October 1939, and who often had come into conflict with Hitler; he made several statements to the effect that the war was lost and that peace should be sought.\textsuperscript{78} As Jodl threatened resignation unless Keitel was also kept on, both were to serve as advisors to Dönitz.

Directing the Finance and Foreign Ministries, and chief among the civilian advisors was Graf Schwerin-Krosigk. Dönitz was quick to recognize that the Foreign Minister would need to be a very capable individual, given the impending surrender, and should be someone reasonably untainted by Nazism to make him as palatable as possible to the Allies.\textsuperscript{79} Indeed, it was realized that the cabinet in general should be as “apolitical” as possible and that “nur reine Fachminister der alten Regierung verbleiben könnten.”\textsuperscript{80} How far this was accomplished is open to some debate, in that most members had Nazi pasts, but it was recognized by Dönitz at the time. He was hoping to secure the services of Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, who he had known since 1915, and who had previously served as Foreign Minister before the war, for the posts of Foreign Minister and Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister was really to have the same powers as the Chancellor of old, but with a different title for political reasons, with the post being created in reflection of Dönitz’s apparent desire to recreate a dualistic system of government.\textsuperscript{81} Not knowing von Neurath’s whereabouts, Dönitz contacted Joachim von Ribbentrop, who had long been Hitler’s Foreign Minister, hoping the latter would know something of von Neurath’s location.\textsuperscript{82} Ribbentrop, not willing to give up his post, came to see Dönitz personally to argue

\textsuperscript{77} Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 74.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{79} Dönitz, \textit{Zehn}, 439-40.
\textsuperscript{80} Lüdde-Neurath, 82.
\textsuperscript{81} Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 118.
\textsuperscript{82} Von Ribbentrop had replaced Neurath as Foreign Minister in 1938.
that he himself should have the position. Dönitz rejected his offer. Von Ribbentrop offered no light into the whereabouts of von Neurath (who was in Austria, in Vorarlberg at the time and likely could not have made it to the Baltic coast in any event), which left Dönitz with the choice of whom to appoint in his stead.

Dönitz had recently had a meeting with the man who was then serving as Finance Minister, Graf Schwerin-Krosigk; he had made a positive impression on Dönitz, and seemed to share similar views of the situation militarily and politically. Hence, failing to find von Neurath, Dönitz asked him to assume the post of political advisor, Foreign Minister, Finance Minister, and chairman of the Cabinet, i.e. overseer of all the new Ministers. Krosigk agreed to this on May 2\textsuperscript{nd}. Though he had been in the Hitler government, he was only a fringe Nazi figure in comparison to, say, von Ribbentrop, and therefore a reasonable choice given Dönitz’s goals.

Both Dönitz himself and Lüdde-Neurath record their praises of his service, and the similarity of von Krosigk’s and Dönitz’s views on the ending of the war; namely, that the war was lost and that the goal should be to save as many as possible from Bolshevism before the inevitable end.

The remaining members of the cabinet receive less mention in the literature, and so the reasons behind their choosing are less clear. The Ministry of Interior and Culture was to be directed by Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart, who succeeded Himmler as of May 3\textsuperscript{rd}. His was to be the second largest branch of the short-lived government, with twenty-two members.

In the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Forests, the previous Minister, Herbert Backe was retained. He was a staunch National-Socialist, and his choice appears to fly in the face of the previous declaration of an apolitical cabinet; however, as was generally the case with

\begin{footnotes}
\item Dönitz, Zehn, 462.
\item Lüdde-Neurath, 82.
\item Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 123. The largest office was to be the Intelligence office, which was not fully completed until the 13\textsuperscript{th} of May, i.e. after the war, which was to eventually have over two hundred members and employees.
\end{footnotes}
Dönitz’s choices, he was a capable Fachminister, if not exactly rein. His secretary was Hans-Joachim Riecke. Immediately prior to his selection by Dönitz, they had been engaged in trying to keep the Reich from starving. As early as the 24th of February, Backe had forecast a necessary thirty-five percent drop in rations for civilians, but had fought to keep supplies flowing even at the risk of upsetting military production.86 Given that food production and armaments production went hand in hand in terms of deciding priorities of transport, production, and distribution, and given that Dönitz also kept on Speer, it is perhaps not surprising that he also kept on Backe. He and Speer were both familiar with the situation and the system as it stood.

The Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs were to be directed by Dr. Fritz Seldte.87 He had previously served in the Ministry of Labor, often meeting with Speer, and was a conservative nationalist who had plotted with Himmler (among others) on the possibility of eliminating Hitler.88 He, along with Backe, Dorpmüller, von Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, Rust, and Krosigk, who were all Ministers of various departments, accompanied by a number of civil servants, left Berlin for Plön or other points north on the 21st of April. It is interesting to note that in fact, four of these men ended up in the Dönitz government, which says much for the idea that Dönitz simply chose those who were available to him for some of his postings.

The Ministries of Posts and Communications (other translations refer to it as Transport) were to be headed by Dr. Julius Heinrich Dorpmüller, with two secretaries under him, one for each of those offices. Not much can be said about him, as he was apparently appointed late and simply moved back home, with the Allies only being informed about his position on the 22nd of May.89

86 Steinert, Capitulation, 124-5.
87 Dönitz, Zehn, 462.
88 Steinert, Capitulation, 126.
89 Ibid., 125.
Herbert Klemm was placed in charge of the Ministry of Justice, provisionally, under Dr. Bumcke, President of the Reich Court, whose whereabouts were unknown. Klemm and his department are not even mentioned in Dönitz’s memoirs, perhaps because he also never did much, and was the only member of his department. In fact, he poses a certain difficulty in his very obscurity. Lüdde-Neurath does make brief mention of him, noting that he replaced Dr. Thierack as of the 7th of May, literally hours before the surrender. Interestingly however, Lüdde-Neurath refers to him as Herbert Klemm, while Steinert identifies him as Kurt Klemm. He does not even appear in William Shirer’s massive The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, or in either of Speer’s memoirs. Investigation into the Nuremberg trials shows that his name is, in fact, Herbert, though there was also a Kurt Klemm in Imperial German governmental history.

While such were the end of the cabinet or Minister level positions, also worth note is the Intelligence Office, set up by von Krosigk to:

…obtain and evaluate the necessary political, economic, and military information and reports, both external and internal, for the benefit of all members of the Reich Government and their offices. It will also distribute and publicise [sic] such speeches, announcements, and reports of all types as may be issued or desired by individual Reich ministers and their offices.

There also existed a Government Bureau, responsible for procuring daily supplies such as paper, food, etc., for the new government; it was headed by a man whose last name was Herrmann.

Finally, there existed Military and Private Civil Offices, not part of the government per se, but

90 Ibid., 126.
91 Lüdde-Neurath, 85.
93 Steinert, Capitation, 122.
who advised and served under Dönitz directly. These were headed by Wagner and Wegner respectively. The Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, the Ministry of Armaments and War Production, the Ministry of Aviation, and the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories were simply disbanded, most likely in light of the military situation, given that they would be of little use for a government that expected to soon surrender.

This then, was the general composition of the government headed by Dönitz. It was small, to be sure, never numbering over 350 members and staff, and did not come into being overnight. It was composed mainly of holdovers from the previous regime, some of which were in new or more positions than they had held previously; this despite Dönitz’s stated goal of an “unpolitisches Kabinett.” Many members such as Speer were well qualified, and certainly some were more palatable than their predecessors, such as von Krosigk replacing von Ribbentropp. Some parts of this government got to business fairly quickly; some did not. Indeed, some of the government was only created after the surrender, and some of it never did anything; some offices existed in name only. It is presented here so as to provide a framework for presenting the activities of the Acting Government, as outlined in the following chapters.

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94 Ibid., 127.
95 Ibid., 127.
CHAPTER FOUR: GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES BEFORE SURRENDER

Broadly defined, the activities of Dönitz and his government can be broken up into two groups: those before the surrender, including the negotiation of the surrender, and governmental activities after the surrender, up until the arrest of the members by the Allies. The pre-surrender activities of the government and the surrender negotiations ran more or less concurrently.

The first task for Dönitz upon assuming office was to solidify his position and declare it to Germany and the world. It would not, after all, have done much good for him to be named successor and leader of Germany, only to legislate inside of the “box” of Plön and Flensburg. As outlined above, on assuming office Dönitz already had the Navy engaged in the evacuation of East Prussia and Pomerania. One of the first actions he took, on the very night of receiving news of his succession and that the Testament was in force, was to secure his position from any possible threat or power grab attempt that might have been made by Heinrich Himmler. Similar moves to solidify his position with the people and military soon followed. The first such moves took place on May 1st, traditionally a day of celebration in Germany, in the form of two radio addresses, the first to the German people, the second to the German armed forces. The address to the German People reads in part as follows:

Deutsche Männer und Frauen, Soldaten der deutschen Wehrmacht!

Unser Führer, Adolf Hitler, ist gefallen... Frühzeitig hatte er die furchtbare Gefahr des Bolschewismus erkannt... Am Ende dieses seines Kampfes und seines unbeirrbaren, geraden Lebensweges steht sein Heldentod in der Hauptstadt des Deutschen Reiches. Sein Leben war ein einziger Dienst für Deutschland. Sein Einsatz im Kampf gegen die bolschewistische Sturmflut galt darüber hinaus Europa und der gesamten Kulturwelt.

Was das deutsche Volk in dem Ringen dieses Krieges kämpfend vollbrachte und in der Heimat ertragen hat, ist geschichtlich einmalig. In der kommenden Notzeit unseres Volkes werde ich bestrebt sein, unseren tapferen Frauen, Männern, und Kindern, soweit dies in meiner Macht steht, erträgliche Lebensbedingungen zu schaffen. Zu alledem brauche ich eure Hilfe. Schenkt mir euer Vertrauen, denn euer Weg ist auch mein Weg. Haltet Ordnung und Disziplin in Stadt und Land aufrecht, tue jeder an seiner Stelle seine Pflicht!... Wenn wir tun, was in unseren Kräften steht, wird auch der Herrgott nach soviel Leid und Opfern uns nicht verlassen.96

This interesting speech contains three distinct sections. In the first paragraph, Dönitz informs the German people of Hitler’s death. Note that he says Hitler has fallen, not that he has killed himself, and not that he has died. Heroes fall in battle, whereas men die. Granted, such was the language of the missive that informed Dönitz himself of the event, but it demonstrates that

Dönitz held Hitler in high regard. If there were any doubt on this matter, the references to a hero’s death and praising of his fight against Bolshevism would lay it to rest.

The second paragraph, which is the only one of the three Dönitz includes in his own memoirs, thereby attempting to cleanse his reputation as it is the most apolitical of the three, announces his succession and acceptance as leader and his plans to fight on for the goal of saving lives. This paragraph is most important however, in that it indicates that Germany would be willing to sign immediate peace with the Western Allies if they would do the same, so long as the war with the Soviets could continue, at least for a brief period. This declaration was to have great importance in the coming negotiations with Montgomery and Eisenhower.

The third paragraph seems to be more of a call to the people to endure just a bit more, as well as an appeal to give their support to the new government. Note that Dönitz addresses the people with the familiar ihr form, rather than the formal Sie. He was, therefore stressing that he was in the same boat as they were. Finally, the first and last sentences in the paragraph paint a picture that not only have the Germans done something historical, but that if they persevere just a bit longer, God will not forget them. This call to God seems a distinct break with Nazi ideology; no longer is Hitler seen as Germany’s savior, rather God resumes the role. Perhaps it was an attempt to justify continued struggle even with Hitler’s death. This was important, both to prevent an uprising or revolution on the home front, as well as to secure the loyalty and assurances of obedience of the troops.

The latter goal was further reached by a second speech, immediately following the address to the people. In his daily order of the day, he said:

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97 Dönitz himself later wrote of the matter that “Eine ehrenvolle Fassung der Bekanntgabe seines Todes schien mir daher richtig. Ihn nach seinem Tode sofort herabzusetzen, wie es zum Teil auch in meiner Umgebung fühlbar in der Luft lag, hielt ich für billig.” (Zehn, 438). Ergo, the praise of Hitler may have been either a wish not to denigrate the man immediately after his death, or the explanation defending the matter an attempt by Dönitz to cleanse his record.
“Deutsche Wehrmacht! Meine Kameraden!”

Der Führer ist gefallen... Mit ihm ist einer der größten Helden deutscher Geschichte dahingegangen...

Der Führer hat mich zu seinem Nachfolger als Staatsoberhaupt und als oberster Befehlshaber der Werhmacht bestimmt. Ich übernehme den Oberbefehl über alle Teile der deutschen Wehrmacht mit dem Willen, den Kampf gegen die Bolschewisten so lange fortzusetzen, bis die kämpfende Truppe und bis die Hunderttausende von Familien des deutschen Ostraumes vor der Versklavung oder Vernichtung gerettet sind. Gegen Engländer und Amerikaner muß ich den Kampf so weit und so lange fortsetzen, wie sie mich in der Durchführung des Kampfes gegen die Bolschewisten hindern.

...Ich verlange Disziplin und Gehorsam. Nur durch vorbehaltlose Ausführung meiner Befehle werden Chaos und Untergang vermieden...

Der dem Führer von Euch geleistete Treueid gilt nunmehr für jeden einzelnen von Euch ohne Weiteres mir als dem vom Führer eingesetzten Nachfolger.

Deutsche Soldaten, tut eure Pflicht. Es gilt das Leben unseres Volkes.98

The message to the troops therefore echoes many of the sentiments of radio address to the population in general, in calling for discipline and obedience. It is furthermore remarkable for the next to last paragraph, wherein Dönitz says that all members of the armed forces are now obedient to his person, as they had been to Hitler.99 As of August 2nd, 1934, partly due to Hitler’s purge of the SA, all military men were required to swear “I swear by almighty God this sacred oath: I will render unconditional obedience to the Führer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, and, as a brave soldier, I will be

98 “Dönitz’ Tagesbefehl an die Wehrmacht vom 1. Mai 1945.” In Lüdde-Neurath, 133.
99 Dönitz also conveniently leaves this out of his memoirs.
ready to stake my life at any time for this oath.\textsuperscript{100} Ergo, Dönitz was calling for soldiers not just to give their lives in defense of the country, but also to fight for his person, as they had sworn to do for Hitler. The implication of this is that he was truly assuming, at least in the military sense, the power of Führer, as in a non-totalitarian state such an oath would be to the state, not to the leader himself. It is, perhaps nonetheless understandable, in that Dönitz wanted to apply the most binding pressure possible on the troops, given the situation. It also makes a certain amount of sense; with Hitler’s death, the previous loyalty oath would have been null and void, much as a marriage contract is upon the death of one spouse. Technically, a new oath would therefore need to be sworn by the troops, pledging support to Dönitz, hardly possible under the circumstances.\textsuperscript{101}

With the people and military thus informed of the situation, further action was possible. To be sure, there were cases of mutiny, which were quickly met with the harshest punishment, but in general the armed forces and populace fell into line behind the \textit{Großadmiral}.

At this point in his memoirs, Dönitz turns immediately to the topic of negotiating the surrender vis-a-vis the Allies, and the end of the war. This makes a certain amount of sense, as the overriding considerations on the mind of the government were twofold: continued evacuation from the Eastern Front with a delaying action fought to this effect, and the surrender itself. This process was complicated by an almost immediate need to move the headquarters from Plön further north to Mürwik, near Flensburg. This need was brought on by Allied advances, and most likely delayed some governmental functions due to the difficulty involved in such a move. One advantage, however, of such a small government was that it could be moved quickly, and by May 3\textsuperscript{rd} Dönitz and the new government were safely ensconced in the \textit{Patria}, a

\textsuperscript{100} \url{http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/oath.html}, as of 2/8/6.
\textsuperscript{101} Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 136.
ship anchored in Flensburg harbor. Nonetheless, from May 1st through the end of the move, some action was already beginning to take place.

Dönitz’s ideas for surrender, as stated in his radio addresses, envisioned a possible peace with the Western Allies, while the war on the Eastern Front was to continue to allow evacuation of the military and civilian forces in those areas. The barbarity of the Russian advance, while perhaps exaggerated by some, was certainly a reality. One might consider a phrase spoken by Air Marshall Arthur “Bomber” Harris, who was addressing a concern that area firebombing was too violent a means of warfare, even against the Germans, and who lead the British bombardment effort against them. He said, “Germany has sown the wind, and so they shall reap the whirlwind,” or words to that effect.\(^{102}\) That is, Germany had, in its advance into Russia, committed atrocities on a staggering scale; Soviet troops were often out for revenge. Consider also that in contrast to the United States, the Soviet Union had a harsh rotation policy, which lead in some cases to mentally unbalanced, battle-fatigued troops remaining on the front line. Add to this revenge-driven, sometimes unbalanced group of people a dictator in the form of Stalin, who certainly would not have wept at seeing Germany ground into dust, and the risk of atrocity is quite clear. Records of these fears have even worked their way into German literature; it seems the fear of the Soviets and their brutal advance scarred the German collective psyche. Günther Grass, in his novel *The Tin Drum*, describes in a rather detached fashion the reaction of Oskar Matzerath to the Russian advance into Danzig, and into his home. Grass states:

> …They still had the same interests- potatoes and sugar- despite the men with the tommy guns who put other conquests first… Instantly, three of the rectangular uniforms turned their attention to Lina Greff, and that put some life into the hitherto static ensemble. La Greff, who after her long widowhood and the lean years preceding it, had scarcely

\(^{102}\) [http://www.junobeach.org/e/3/can-pep-gbr-harris-e.htm](http://www.junobeach.org/e/3/can-pep-gbr-harris-e.htm), as of 3/26/6.
expected such sudden popularity, let out a few screams of surprise but soon re-
accustomed herself to an occupation she had almost forgotten.\textsuperscript{103}

Padfield summarizes the situation effectively when he says that:

Germans in the East were reaping at the hands of the Red Army what Hitler and the SS
had sown: rape and crucifixion, hideous slaughter of all ages and sexes were no fictions
of propaganda, nor, in view of what Speer and his collaborators had done for the sake of
German war production, was the fear of enslavement just an emotive stimulus to
continuing the struggle. Dönitz and his advisors had every reason to believe it would be
a reality, and his remarks a few days later about the consequences of surrendering the
Eastern armies—hence the German civilians they were shielding—were not rhetoric.\textsuperscript{104}

Indeed, if one considers the Katyn Forest massacre of September 1939, the treatment of
prisoners in Gulags in Siberia, and Stalin’s purge of his own officer corps, such behavior was
likely expected, rather than simply feared. Dönitz, who while perhaps not privy to every detail,
fully understood the kind of behavior practiced by the German armies in the East and faced with
a vengeful enemy who had a past history of atrocities in the name of a dictator every bit as brutal
as Hitler, certainly was justified in expecting harsh retribution. Therefore, the desire to continue
the war for the contradictory reason of saving lives seems plausible, though weighing the number
of soldiers who would die in those last days of fighting, plus the number of civilians who would
die in the chaos of war on one hand, versus the number who would die if they had been left to the
Russians on the other hand is a calculation that cannot be made. Still, Dönitz felt it would be of

\textsuperscript{103} Günther Grass, \textit{The Danzig Trilogy: The Tin Drum, Cat and Mouse, the Dog Years}, (New York: Pantheon
Books, Inc., and Harcourt Inc. 1987). 307. This passage is singularly insulting to women in its detached, almost blasé nature toward the violent act of rape, but is nonetheless instructive in that the first act of Russian soldiers related by Oskar is of this rape. It demonstrates again how the images of rape and Soviet soldiers was and is still linked in the German psyche.

\textsuperscript{104} Padfield, 414.
overall benefit to try and withdraw from the Russian sector so far as possible. Though the American and British Commonwealth armies did not always conduct themselves perfectly, they seemed a preferable alternative.\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, if one considers the fate of German prisoners in the Soviet Union, it appears Dönitz was correct in his assumptions. Something like 1,952,000 were still in captivity or otherwise dead in the Soviet Union as late as 1950,\textsuperscript{106} though this number is uncertain as it takes those missing and never found on the Eastern Front into account. Foreign Minister Molotov gave the number at 890,535 in 1947, which might be regarded as a bare minimum figure.\textsuperscript{107} The title of one of Smith’s books, \textit{Der Vermißte Million}, tells a lot; Smith basically argues that something close to one million Germans simply disappeared into the Soviet Union, never to be heard of again. Out of all of the German prisoners taken by the Soviets, which numbered approximately 3.5 million, approximately 1.5 million did not survive captivity.\textsuperscript{108} Ergo, while Dönitz’s fears of the Soviets regarding treatment of civilians proved to be unfounded, his fear of the fate of the military personnel who were captured proved to be well grounded, and very real indeed, and thus the decision to continue a defensive fight on the Eastern Front to withdraw as many troops as possible is entirely understandable, if controversial.

With this goal of a delay in surrender to save German lives in mind, Dönitz set out to try to convince the Western Allies to accept Germany’s surrender, but with the war in the East to continue until necessary evacuations were made. Dönitz estimated that this would take eight to ten days.\textsuperscript{109} This was, incidentally, the amount of time for which coal and fuel stocks would

\textsuperscript{105} Interestingly, in the immediate post-war period, the general perception among many German officers was that the Soviet Union behaved in a less draconian manner toward the German command structure than did the Western Allies. This will be covered in more detail in the post-war governmental activities section.


\textsuperscript{109} Dönitz, \textit{Zehn}, 443.
suffice, so whether it was truly enough time or just a concession to reality is open to debate.\textsuperscript{110} The alternative to piecemeal surrender was to continue to fight on both fronts until the evacuation was complete, which was an unsavory and uncertain prospect.

This process was to be accomplished through a piecemeal or \textit{Teilkapitulation} and accordingly, on May 1\textsuperscript{st} a delegate was chosen to begin negotiations with the British Armies, in that they were the nearest Western Force to Dönitz’s own headquarters, and ergo the force which was poised to cut off German ports receiving refugees from the East. Admiral von Friedeburg, the new Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, appointed by Dönitz so that he himself might concentrate more fully on running the state, was picked for this task, initially with the goal of keeping open a land route to the West. However, by the very next day, May 2\textsuperscript{nd}, British Forces had closed the last gap, leaving a solid front from the Baltic to the Elbe. This meant two things. First, any further movement of evacuated refugees into western Germany beyond this line would be at the pleasure and discretion of the Allies. Second, defense of the Elbe area could stop, as such corridors no longer existed to be defended. Von Friedeburg was therefore ordered to offer surrender of northwest Germany to Montgomery, with negotiations for surrender in the West with Eisenhower to follow.\textsuperscript{111} At the same time, he was ordered to bring up the problem of the refugee columns, and fight most stringently for permission to continue the evacuation, unhampered by any occupying forces. Thus the myth of unconditional surrender begins to be broken.

As this was taking place, the German Army group fighting in Italy under Marshall Kesselring surrendered. While this receives little mention in Dönitz’s or Lüdde-Neurath’s memoirs, it would have been in line with the thinking that troops not shielding Germans from

\textsuperscript{110} Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 139.  
\textsuperscript{111} Dönitz, \textit{Zehn}, 446.
Soviets should lay down their arms, and stands in contrast to the surrender achieved in the North in that it was a more local, not State level decision.

Von Friedeburg reached Montgomery’s headquarters on the morning of May 3rd. Montgomery had sought Eisenhower’s instructions and was authorized to accept unconditionally the surrender of any troops in the Northwest, as well as Denmark, Holland, and a number of Baltic Islands. Any further offers should be passed on to Allied Command. The fate of refugees, however, was not open for discussion, as Montgomery had not been authorized to do so. Montgomery was willing to accept surrender at a tactical level, meaning that of the armed forces but not the German state, under the conditions that all soldiers in those areas would become prisoners of war, no discussion of refugees was to occur, and that Holland, Friesland, and so forth had to be included. When these stipulations were related back to Dönitz, all seemed well as it would allow evacuation in the East to continue, even if it meant a concentration of refugees in the Baltic ports still remaining him, i.e. those not occupied by British forces. Von Friedeburg returned to Montgomery’s headquarters, and signed the local surrender as of May 4th, 1945, with conditions to come into force the next day.

This partial surrender was of immense importance. It is easy to overlook however. German forces had, of course, surrendered en masse to the enemy before. Such were classic military tactical moves, though not state-ordered surrenders. Indeed, some, such as that of Field Marshall von Paulus at Stalingrad, were specifically against orders. But here was the leader of the Reich directing that his armies lay down arms and surrender to the enemy.

The British would have accepted any surrender of individual troops, and indeed had von Friedeburg taken it upon himself to surrender his own forces, the myth of unconditional

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112 Steinert, *Capitulation*, 146.
113 Ibid., 147-8.
surrender would not have been broken. But since Montgomery and Eisenhower agreed to permit part of the German armed forces to surrender at the German State’s wishes, without simultaneous surrender on the Eastern, Southern, and unoccupied fronts (Norway, for instance), it must be read that at the last minute, the Allies waffled on their oft-demanded unconditional surrender. Lest the impression be made that it was just a military surrender, state sanctioned or not, but that the state would remain free in those areas, consider the Instrument of Surrender itself, which contains seven points of surrender. While the bulk of the document merely lays out the areas in which the surrender will be valid and when, article five states:

This instrument of surrender is independent of, without prejudice to, and will be superseded by any general instrument of surrender imposed by or on behalf of the Allied Powers and applicable to Germany and the German armed forces as a whole.\(^{114}\)

The Allies realized that a general instrument of surrender was yet to be negotiated, and that such a document would not result from the negotiations between Montgomery and von Freideburg, yet they engaged a representative of the Dönitz government in debate and signed a partial surrender in his name. Ergo, unconditional surrender, while achieved in the end, was in fact achieved by conditional surrender and not by an utter end by any one stroke of the pen as the term unconditional surrender would indicate. German forces were informed of this treaty in the form of a radio address by General Keitel the same day:

Ab 5. 5. 45 08.00 Uhr deutsche Sommerzeit Waffenruhe gegenüber den Truppen des Feldmarschalls Montgomery. Sie umfaßt alle Verbände des Heeres, der Kriegsmarine, der Luftwaffe und der Waffen-SS im Bereich der Niederlande, Friesland einschließlich der west-und ostfriesischen Inseln und Helgoland, Schleswig-Holstein und Dänemark...

\(^{114}\) *Instrument of Surrender of All German armed forces in Holland, in northwest Germany, including all islands, and in Denmark.* In Lüdde-Neurath, 140.
Thus the surrender began, with no room for misinterpretation; troops were to lay down their arms peacefully, without their destruction. Keitel then sent out a rather longer message (too long to quote here) on May 5th, detailing exactly what consequences were implied and behaviors were necessary. The main points of this were however:

1. The surrender in the Northwest occurred as there was no longer reason to fight there. However, the fight in the East still continued as there was a need to save people.

2. Soldiers should be proud of their accomplishments, and do nothing to soil their good image.

3. Weapons are to be laid down.

4. All stockpiles of fuel, ammunition, etc., are to be guarded against plundering or destruction and handed over to the enemy.

5. This information is to be passed on to all troops as soon as possible.

6. Movement into Denmark is to continue [most probably of troops who were not currently on the front lines, given the next point]

7. The previous order also is binding for organizations attached to the Army.

8. All commanders are responsible for disseminating this information.\textsuperscript{116}

The other major military surrender that took place as of May 4th was the ending of the German naval war, which in practice meant the end of U-boat operations—though surface forces continued to operate in evacuation roles. Such was stipulated by article two in the surrender

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{OKW-Befehl zur Durchführung der Kapitulation im Nordraum.} In Lüdde-Neurath, 141.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{OKW-Erlaß zur Kapitulation im Nordraum.} In Lüdde-Neurath, 142-3.
signed with Montgomery, which required “All hostilities on land, on sea, or in the air by German forces in the above areas to cease...”\textsuperscript{117} As the remaining U-boat ports of importance were located in the area covered under the treaty, the operations of submarines could no longer continue. The surrender message went out to the U-boat captains as follows:

“Meine U-Boots-Männer!”

Sechs Jahre U-Boot-Krieg liegen hinter uns. Ihr habt gekämpft wie die Löwen.

Eine erdrückende materielle Übermacht hat uns auf engsten Raum zusammengedrängt.

Von der verbleibenden Basis aus ist eine Fortsetzung unseres Kampfes nicht mehr möglich.

U-Boots-Männer! Ungebrochen und makellos legt ihr nach einem Heldenkampf ohnegleichen die Waffen nieder...

Kameraden! Bewahrt Euch Euren U-Boots-Geist, mit dem ihr die langen Jahre hindurch tapfer, zäh und unbeirrt gekämpft habt, auch in die Zukunft zum Besten unseres Vaterlandes.

Es lebe Deutschland!

Euer Großadmiral\textsuperscript{118}

The U-boat war was finally over, after five and a half long years. This must have been a bitter pill for Dönitz to swallow, given that he had built the arm and that new weapons were literally about to be used which might, had they come a few months earlier, have helped Germany regain a certain amount of fortune. It was certainly received with ambivalence by the captains of the U-

\textsuperscript{117} Instrument of Surrender. In Lüdde-Neurath, 140.

\textsuperscript{118} Tagesbefehl Dönitz’ an die U-Bootswaffe anläßlich der Einstellung des U-Bootkrieges am 4.5.1945. In Lüdde-Neurath, 137.
boats, as further instructions dictated that no one was to scuttle their commands, though a few captains did just that; a few also traveled to South America and Japan on their own initiative.\textsuperscript{119}

Also worth note is that as of May 4\textsuperscript{th}, Dönitz finally, once and for all, put to rest the possibility of continuing the war from some other locale such as Norway, Czechoslovakia, or Bohemia, as he was unwilling to see the government function from foreign soil.\textsuperscript{120} General Kesselring was given permission to begin surrender negotiations with the U.S. Sixth Army in the South on this day, furthering the piecemeal surrender, but it was decided that the armies in Czechoslovakia must continue to fight. This decision came after a series of meetings with Karl Frank, Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, Minister of State and SS-\textit{Gruppenführer}, as well as with representative military personnel. Nonetheless, Prague was to be declared an open city, and preliminary negotiations authorized.\textsuperscript{121}

By the end of May 5\textsuperscript{th} the fighting had ceased in the Northwest and at sea. However, in the South and East fighting was still raging. Surrender of the remainder of Germany’s forces would have to await the unconditional surrender. Dönitz did not yet know that, however, and in accordance with his plans, now began to consider negotiations with Eisenhower, who was to prove far less tractable than Montgomery.

Eisenhower’s reply to Dönitz’s broadcast of May 1\textsuperscript{st}, which laid out the plan of fighting in the East to save lives, and in the West only if hindered in that goal, was regarded by Eisenhower as just another trick to try and split the Allies.\textsuperscript{122} Indeed, such had long been a goal of Germany, and in light of the later Cold War, one cannot dismiss the evaluation out of hand, that there was room for significant tension and even a break between the eastern and western

\textsuperscript{119} Padfield, 420.
\textsuperscript{120} Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 154.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{122} Dönitz, \textit{Zehn}, 454.
Allies. Even the Americans were not immune to this logic, and one reason for dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was to send the Soviets a message regarding American power. However, given that the U.S. was still in May 1945 expecting to need the help of the Russians in the invasion of Japan as per the Yalta Accords, the dissolution of the alliance was unlikely. Nor is it likely that Dönitz seriously considered such a break to be of use to Germany at this late date, though as shall be seen, he did see its potential for the post-war. With the Montgomery treaty in the bag so to speak, Dönitz sent a delegate to speak with Eisenhower.

Initially, General Kinzel and shortly thereafter von Friedeburg met with Eisenhower’s people to try and negotiate a surrender of all German troops then facing American troops, in a manner similar to that which had taken place with Montgomery. These talks began as of May 5th, but by the morning of the 6th it was clear that Eisenhower was firm in his refusal. No negotiation could be considered that did not involve simultaneous surrender on all fronts, including the Russian front. Other provisions Eisenhower demanded for surrender included immediate cessation of movements by all bodies of troops, cessation of operations by all ships and aircraft and assured good condition of the same (i.e. no scuttling or destruction), and cooperation of the German government in civil matters should such a surrender be signed. Additionally, should any troops fail to accept such conditions, the German government would be found at fault and the war would continue.\(^{123}\) Dönitz received this information that morning, and, unwilling to concede to all the demands, decided to send General Jodl back to Eisenhower’s headquarters at Riems with yet another counter proposal. First, he was to argue again that the German armies in the East should be allowed to continue to fight to save Germans, and with the understanding that any surrender order was likely to be ignored by the troops in the East, as it

\(^{123}\) Steinert, *Capitulation*, 158.
was felt that they would rather continue to fight than be taken prisoner by the Soviets. Should Jodl fail to convince Eisenhower of this need however, he was authorized to offer a general capitulation on all fronts with one provision; the surrender must take place in two phases. Phase one would see the end of hostilities but allow German troops some freedom of movement with the permission for individual soldiers to still surrender to the Americans. This would permit soldiers on the Eastern Front, with exception of the pockets cut off in East Prussia, to evacuate and stay out of Soviet hands. Phase two would see the freezing of German troop movements, but with German soldiers still allowed to surrender on their own accord. Jodl was instructed to attempt to negotiate the gap in time between phases one and two to be as large as possible, with a minimum of four days. If it should come to a matter of general capitulation, Dönitz ordered Jodl to inform him first. Thus instructed, Jodl flew to Eisenhower’s headquarters on May 6th.

Jodl did not get very far with Eisenhower, and was simply informed that a surrender was to be signed on that very day under the terms laid forth the day before. Should the Germans fail to agree, the bombardment of German cities would begin again, and the front lines closed to all soldiers seeking to surrender. The terms of the surrender would come into effect at midnight on May 9th, that is to say at the very end of the 8th, two days hence. Jodl, seeing no way out of the matter and given only thirty minutes to consider the ultimatum, contacted Dönitz and asked for power to sign the surrender. He felt there was no way out of it; the only options being “surrender or chaos.”

This created a certain amount of activity in Flensburg, as Jodl had been chosen for the mission as one of the most outspoken opponents of unconditional surrender. Dönitz regarded it

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124 Lüdde-Neurath, 69.
125 Dönitz, Zehn, 454.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 455.
as unwise, for reasons cited in his May 1st radio addresses, and felt that forty eight hours was not enough time to withdraw forces from the Eastern Front still engaging the enemy. Dönitz also saw it as blackmail on the part of Eisenhower, and a violation of the Geneva conventions in that the Americans pledged to refuse the surrender of German soldiers should Germany fail to sign. After two hours of debate, at 12:40 a.m., Dönitz sent word to Jodl by a special radio link authorizing him to sign.128

At 2:41 a.m., in the early morning hours of the 7th of May, 1945, General Alfred Jodl signed on behalf of the German government the instrument of surrender in the presence of a number of Allied officials, but not Eisenhower; though Jodl did have a brief interview with the Supreme Allied Commander shortly thereafter to ensure that he was clear on all provisions of the surrender. When Jodl replied in the affirmative, Eisenhower sent out the laconic message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, “The mission of the Allied force was fulfilled at 0241 local time on May 7th, 1945.”129 The peace treaty itself, which consisted of five paragraphs, dictated the expected terms; namely that all German forces on all fronts were to surrender, with no destruction or sabotage of material or equipment, with orders to disseminate the news and inform the troops, with the OKW responsible for any infractions. Finally, it was noted that the surrender was just to be seen as temporary, to be replaced by a general instrument of military capitulation.130

Despite this surrender, Dönitz explicitly ordered those troops on the Russian front to continue fighting, and withdrawing; this did not go over well with the Russians, who saw Dönitz as having signed a separate armistice with the Americans.131

128 Steinert, Capitulation, 161.
129 Ibid., 162.
130 Urkunde über die militärische Kapitulation, in Lüdde-Neurath, 144.
131 Steinert, Capitulation, 163-4.
Nonetheless, in a radio address, Dönitz empowered Keitel as head of the *Wehrmacht*, von Friedeburg as head of the *Kriegsmarine*, and Stumpf as head of the *Luftwaffe* to ratify the second treaty, to be signed by all of the major allied powers, including the Soviets, as of the 7th of May.\(^{132}\) This second statement of surrender was signed on the 8th of May, and basically reiterated the same terms as that signed by Jodl.

As these peace treaties were being signed, various arms of the Dönitz government began to transmit the news to the both the German armed forces and the German populace. A series of communiqués, radio messages, and newspaper ads were sent forth. The information of the surrender was sent out by Dönitz to his fourteen highest ranking commanders for dissemination as of the morning of May 7th, and a statement by von Krosigk was released the same day to the people of Germany. This broke the news of the surrender, praised German people for their heroic struggle, and explained again why Dönitz had waited to surrender for so long. Finally, in quoting the then third verse of the German national anthem, von Krosigk called for “*Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit.*” Only if Germany proceeded with such a bearing could the wounds of war be healed, and the atmosphere of hate then gripping the world begin to melt away. His statement ended with, “*Möge Gott uns im Unglück nicht verlassen und unser schweres Werk segnen!*” thereby echoing Dönitz’s own words calling upon God.\(^{133}\) Another statement was published by Jodl on the 8th of May informing the populace as well, threatening anyone who disobeyed and stating that it was binding even to those not in uniform.\(^{134}\) The official proclamation by Dönitz himself went out over the Flensburg radio transmitter at 12:30 in the afternoon on the 8th. Though rather long, much of it is worth quoting here, as it marked not only

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\(^{132}\) *Vollmacht zur Ratifizierung der Kapitulation*, in Lüdde-Neurath, 146.


\(^{134}\) *Die Einstellung der Feindseligkeiten*, in Lüdde-Neurath, 151.
the end of the war, but also the culmination of Dönitz’s activities as head of the armed forces and state. While the first paragraph merely recaps the information given in his radio address of the 1st of May regarding the death of Hitler, the second paragraph gets into the surrender. Dönitz said:


...Wir müssen den Tatsachen klar ins Gesicht sehen. Die Grundlagen, auf denen das Deutsche Reich sich aufbaute, sind zerborsten. Die Einheit von Staat und Partei besteht nicht mehr. Die Partei ist vom Schauplatz ihrer Wirksamkeit abgetreten. Mit der Besetzung Deutschlands liegt die Macht bei den Besatzungsmächten. Es liegt in ihrer Hand, ob ich und die von mir bestellte Reichsregierung tätig sein kann oder nicht. Kann ich durch meine Amtstätigkeit unserem Vaterland nützen und helfen, dann bleibe ich im Amt, bis der Wille des deutschen Volkes in der Bestellung eines Staatsoberhauptes Ausdruck finden kann oder die Besatzungsmächte mir die Fortführung meines Amtes unmöglich machen...

Wir haben alle einen schweren Weg vor uns. Wir müssen ihn in der Würde, der Tapferkeit, und der Disziplin gehen, die das Andenken unserer Gefallenen von uns fordert... Wir wollen ihn in der Einigkeit und Gerechtigkeit gehen, ohne die wir die Not
der kommenden Zeit nicht überwinden können. Wir dürfen ihn in der Hoffnung gehen, daß unsere Kinder einmal in einem befriedeten Europa ein freies und gesichertes Dasein haben werden.

Ich will auf diesem dornenreichen Weg nicht hinter Euch zurückbleiben. Gebietet mir die Pflicht, in meinem Amt zu bleiben, dann werde ich versuchen euch zu helfen, soweit ich irgend kann. Gebietet mir die Pflicht zu gehen, so soll auch dieser Schritt ein Dienst an Volk und Reich sein.\(^\text{135}\)

Through this address, the German people were formally informed by their leader of the surrender. It embodies a position Dönitz had stood by for some time, in that his main goal was out to save German lives. This desire must be taken in earnest, given that he had been saying this even before his appointment as successor, rather than be regarded a post-war attempt to cleanse his record as is the case with some points in his memoirs. The address is also significant in that it declares Dönitz’s first public utterance that he might be willing to continue to serve, at the pleasure of the populace or occupying powers as the case may be. As for the reaction of the populace, as one might expect, it was varied. There was of course relief at the announcement of the end of the war, though some surprise that the surrender was to hold with regard to the Soviets as well.\(^\text{136}\) There was open criticism of the Dönitz government by people who lived in or were to return to eastern zones, which is not surprising given the mindset toward the Soviets and Dönitz’s earlier pronouncements.

As this was more or less the last act of the Dönitz government before the surrender went into effect, it is worth considering for a moment just what Germany and the Allies had gotten themselves into. Dönitz was of the opinion that he was the legal leader of Germany, and that the

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\(^{135}\text{Dönitz' Ansprache vom 8. Mai 1945, in Lüdde-Neurath, 157-8.}\)

\(^{136}\text{Steinert, Capitulation, 174.}\)
surrender was binding to the conduct of the war, but not to the existence of the government. Ergo, the Allies would have no power to remove him from power, though such could be done by an election of the German people. In other words, unconditional surrender might have meant an end of the war, and perhaps even the eventual surrender of those territories overrun by Allied forces, but not an end to unoccupied Germany. Such had always been the case for the loser of a war. Such was not to be however, whatever one might think of the legality of the matter.

While the surrender negotiations were going on, various branches of the Dönitz government began to undertake their tasks, with varying degrees of success. Some of these did not really do anything, and some only began to function after the surrender; those will be covered in the next chapter.

The most active of these branches, excluding the military offices of the OKW, was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under von Krosigk. He had, as early as May 1st, been busy reporting the news as happening in Germany to the world and Germany’s ally Japan, as well as a few neutral states that had not yet broken off relations. Under von Krosigk’s auspices, talks were opened with Sweden by Walter Schellenberg through the German Minister Thomsen to work out the German withdrawal from Scandinavia. Dönitz signed a warrant giving Schellenberg power to negotiate this withdrawal. The surrender put an end to these talks, which thereafter were mediated through the Allies. The last diplomatic contact with Sweden occurred on May 13th, when the Swedish Red Cross cared for several hundred German refugees and repatriates.

Von Krosigk also had the dubious honor of informing Japan that the Germans were quitting the fight. Initial contact took place on the 5th of May. The Japanese foreign minister Togo immediately accused the Germans of failing to inform them of the various peace proposals

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137 Dönitz, Zehn, 436-4.
138 Ibid., 229.
then being brokered between the Dönitz government and the Allies, and that Japan might withdraw from the Tripartite Pact, hardly worrying to a German government about to surrender anyway. This never officially happened.
With the surrender complete, there remained the question of whether or not Dönitz should continue to function or should abdicate. Dönitz felt that the surrender had not stripped him of his powers, as it had unconditionally surrendered the military, but not the German state. Article Thirty-five of the Hague Convention states that even in the event of surrender, military dignity is to be respected, and that the state still exists. Therefore, he considered the reasons for and against abdication. Considering the reasons against abdication, he realized that though his main goal of ending the war was accomplished, and that Germany was mostly occupied, there were no possibilities for a new series of elections at the moment in light of this occupation. On the other hand, considering arguments in favor of stepping down, he knew that he was likely only to remain in power so long as it pleased the Allies. He also realized that stepping down would create a power vacuum and lead to possible chaos, particularly in matters of demobilization and providing food and daily necessities for the population, a task the occupying forces were not yet ready to undertake. He also realized that it was possible that the Allies might wish to make use of him and did, of course, consider himself as the legal and true head of Germany. Weighing these options, he did not abdicate or step down, but continued to attempt to build a working government. But the question was, what would such a government do?

As mentioned above, as of the 6th of May, Dönitz had stripped Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, of all rank and position. The SS had been in command of the concentration camp system. With Jodl’s return from Eisenhower’s command post at Reims on May 7th, a new

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139 Steinert, Capitulation, 211.
140 Lüdde-Neurath, 94-5.
141 The Allies did, of course, do this, though not for very long. Nor was Dönitz wrong in the concept that the head of a major Axis power might be kept on as a figurehead; consider the case of Emperor Hirohito, who was left in power as a figurehead for the Japanese by the occupying Americans.
problem came before the Dönitz government in the form of magazines brought back by Jodl that detailed the concentration camp system including pictures of the Holocaust. Some concerns about this matter had already arisen on May 5th, with the arrival of a ship from the East bearing a number of emaciated Camp victims. Though Dönitz denies in his memoirs any knowledge of the Holocaust, even Lüdde-Neurath puts forth the question, “Und somit erhebt sich die Frage: Wußte denn Dönitz wirklich nichts davon?” Whether Dönitz fully knew of the camp system and exactly what was going on there is a question that cannot be answered; though it is a stretch to imagine that Hitler’s handpicked successor knew nothing of the elimination of the Jews, there simply is no proof either way. Dönitz himself claims he knew nothing, at least in terms of the atrocities committed in the camps, as he spent most of his time in his military headquarters. Whatever his level of knowledge, the matter was to be one of the first items examined by his government after concluding the peace treaty. One might ask of Dönitz the same question put forth about Nixon: What did he know and when did he know it?

At the Nuremberg trials, the point came up that Dönitz had proposed the use of concentration camp inmates as labor in merchant marine shipyards, specifically the requisition of 12,000 for repair and construction purposes. It was also brought up by the prosecution that he had had meetings with Himmler, Fegelein, and Kaltenbrunner, who surely knew of the camps and their conditions. In fact, Dönitz admitted to knowledge of the camps, and said the whole of the German people knew of them. However, he maintained he only knew of Dachau and Oranienburg, and knew nothing of the conditions within. In his own defense, Dönitz stated

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144 Lüdde-Neurath, 91.
146 Dönitz, Zehn, 459-60.
147 IMT 5: 254.
147 IMT 13:342.
that he had no power over merchant ship construction at the time, he was merely suggesting a possible course of action to speed up production, and did not even know if his suggestion was acted upon. He further stated that he was assured that camp inmates would be happy for such opportunities in shipyard work, as rations would be increased.\textsuperscript{148} Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, arguing for the prosecution at Nuremberg, then asked Dönitz,

\begin{quote}
Are you telling this Tribunal that when you ask for and you may have got 12,000 people out of concentration camps, who work alongside people not in concentration camps, that the conditions inside the concentration camps remain a secret to the other people and to all the rulers of Germany?\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

Dönitz replied:

\begin{quote}
First of all, I do not know whether they came. Secondly, if they did come, I can very well imagine that they had orders not to talk; and thirdly, I do not even know what camps they came from and whether they were not people who had already been put into other camps on account of the work they accomplished. At any rate, I did not worry about the execution or methods, et cetera, because it was none of my business; I acted on behalf of the competent non-naval departments which required workmen in order to carry out repairs more quickly, so that something could be done about repairs for the merchant navy. That was my duty, considering the arrangements which I had to make for the re-transport of these refugees. I would do exactly the same thing again today. That is the position.\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

It was also pointed out in the course of the hearings that Dönitz subscribed and sometimes contributed to a publication entitled \textit{Die Lage} and that it discussed the elimination of Hungarian

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 343.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 344.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
Jewry in its August 1944 edition, stating that by “19 July, the Hungarian province was without any Jew.”

It is therefore certain that Dönitz knew of the concentration camps, and that Jews were among those who made up the prisoner population and their deportation. However, nowhere is there a “smoking gun” pointing to his knowledge of the conditions therein, or the scope of the system. He was surely an anti-Semite, as outlined above, and surely knew of the Nuremberg Laws and prejudice against Jews. Odds are he knew of the system and atrocities, at least to some extent, but was merely engaging in damage control to save his own skin when denying such knowledge. However, it cannot be proven whether or not he knew of the Holocaust itself.

Regardless of his prior knowledge or lack thereof, after seeing the atrocities in the *Stars and Stripes* magazine brought back from Reims to his headquarters, Dönitz began to consider an investigation. Von Krosigk and Dönitz were in agreement that the matter was strictly German and that it should be dealt with by Germans. If he truly knew nothing of the Holocaust, then this is a most understandable desire for justice. If he was informed on the true situation however, it must be seen as an attempt to cleanse the record or cover up the matter. Von Krosigk submitted an ordinance for Dönitz’s approval to allow the German high court to take up the investigation, and Dönitz himself requested of Eisenhower, via his representative Ambassador Murphy, that this be permitted. Murphy promised to help with the matter, but apparently it went nowhere.

On the 15th of May, Dönitz drew up a statement condemning the camps, decreeing those who had contravened the laws and principles of decency and morality would be tried and sentenced. Three days later, in his order of the day to the *Wehrmacht*, which was still in the process of surrender and disbandment, he stated that he was horrified by the news of the camps,

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151 *IMT* 22:188.
152 Dönitz, *Zehn*, 461.
153 Padfield, 428.
stating that most Germans had known nothing of them.\textsuperscript{154} So Dönitz was prepared, theoretically, to grasp this very difficult problem and deal with it. The Allies of course, had other ideas, and whether a fair hearing and sentencing would have occurred under the auspices of Dönitz’s government is at best debatable, but it was one of the first matters to be discussed.

One of the largest duties of the Dönitz government in the post-capitulation period was to oversee the demobilization and surrender of German forces. Though not on the same scale as the Allies, German troops were spread literally all over the world, from a few U-boats in Japan and on station in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, to troops in the occupied countries of Norway and Denmark, to the Channel Islands; and of course, in Germany itself. The Allies recognized that making use of the current chain of command would be the easiest way to get these troops to surrender and demobilize. Hence, Dönitz was useful and was therefore kept on in the immediate post war period. The Germans were largely responsible for this transition to peacetime and occupation; the Allies merely supervised.\textsuperscript{155} To maintain order, some Germans were even ordered to keep weapons. As demobilization was going on, Dönitz issued explicit orders that no demolition was to take place, no guerilla or so called “werewolf” activity was to be undertaken (although some was, even as late as 1948), and naval units were once again instructed not to sink or destroy their ships, unless they were damaged beyond repair.\textsuperscript{156} The actual implementation of surrender was problematic; Dönitz proved most prescient in his prediction that German troops would not lay down their arms in the face of the Soviets, and despite the official time of the cease-fire, as late as 11 p.m. on the 9\textsuperscript{th} some fighting was still occurring in Czechoslovakia; an order by Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (S.H.A.E.F.) through Jodl

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Steinert, Capitulation, 178.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 179.
eliminated this, but fighting continued in East Prussia until the 14th of May.\textsuperscript{157} There were, of course, also cases of dispute over command jurisdiction, particularly concerning islands in the Baltic, where Red Army Units claimed control of islands apparently covered under the treaty signed with Montgomery.

One seemingly trivial but sticky point of contention occurred over German troops in Denmark. Some difficulty existed on what could and could not be taken from German troops in Denmark, who were leaving to return to Germany, and what German troops might take with them. This largely involved whether Allied soldiers might take souvenirs from German soldiers in the form of rings, pens, weapons, etc., and whether the Germans might take personal items such as bicycles or horses out of Denmark. In the end it was stated that the Germans could take nothing from Denmark, but also that the Allied soldiers must respect German personal property, including officers’ sidearms. Nonetheless, despite these difficulties, evacuation of the \textit{Wehrmacht} proceeded fairly smoothly under the direction of General Lindemann, until in June he was arrested, long after the Dönitz government itself had ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{158} Similar problems occurred in Norway, but all in all, those in command of the situation, whether German or Allied did a remarkable job, given that Allied forces were generally outnumbered by former Axis forces ten to one; no serious outbreaks took place.

Other such demobilizations headed by German officers took place, some of whom were occasionally reprimanded by the Allies for overstepping their given authority. The British, in particular, were in favor of using German personnel for such work, as it was felt that while the British Army could do the work, it would result in delays and more hardship for the German people. On several occasions, Dönitz himself communicated orders to such officers, ordering

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 188.
them and their men to follow the demobilization orders without creating problems.\textsuperscript{159} The end of the war did necessitate a reorganization of OKW and the German government, not the least of which was replacing Keitel with Jodl when the former was arrested on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of May. However, both organizations continued to function so long as some German forces were still armed and demobilizing.

A great amount of bickering went on regarding the rights of the German military to keep its status symbols, such as flags, medals, badges, and so forth, and whether the Hitler salute was to be permitted. Dönitz ordered the re-introduction of the regular military salute, but was firm on the matter of decorations; according to Article Five of the Prisoners of War Convention of 1929, insignias were not to be removed.\textsuperscript{160} It was felt of some rights.

This prompted a backlash from the Allies, who felt that the Germans were just attempting to be needlessly difficult, and that the Hague Conventions only applied to prisoners, not to those whose state had already surrendered. Still, a compromise was reached. All National-Socialist insignias were to be removed, or altered to remove Swastikas, but other decorations could be kept. Additionally, papers and valuables of German soldiers and officers were to be respected.\textsuperscript{161} In short, there were various tensions, but things proceeded apace, with various protocols between the conquered military and the conquerors worked out on an as needed basis.

The various branches under Dönitz also began some tentative studies and plans for the future. Backe, Minister of Food and Agriculture, opened initial talks with the Allies as of May 11\textsuperscript{th}. The upshot of this discussion was that Backe showed conclusively that the part of Germany occupied by the Western powers would be dependant on imports of agriculture from the Eastern part of the nation. Other branches and representatives of the Government also got into the food

\textsuperscript{159} Steinert, \textit{Capitulation}, 193.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 206.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 208.
debate, including Stuckart and Jodl, who recommended quick repatriation of prisoners of war to work the fields. Backe then flew to Reims to meet with Eisenhower’s headquarters over the food situation on the 15th of May and was arrested. All in all, the Ministry of Food did little more than express concern and crunch a few numbers.  

Similarly ineffective was the Ministry of Transport, which did little more than evaluate rail and canal conditions and compute timetables for reconstruction.

Slightly more active was the Ministry of Finance, which recommended introducing emergency money to cover the Reich’s abysmal financial conditions. This was decided against, despite only ten days’ reserves of cash on hand to pay for the refugees streaming in from the East. Time caught up with the Ministry, but some of their reports did prove useful to the Allies in terms of setting out a picture of the monetary and fiscal situation in Germany at the time.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to communicate with Japan even after the surrender, communicating with the German ambassador there. He reported that the Japanese viewed the German surrender much as the Germans had viewed Italy’s surrender under Badoglio. A few other small discussions took place between the foreign office and various governments, but nothing else of import. Von Krosigk and Dönitz did, in a most prescient realization, come to the conclusion that one day Britain would want to see Germany rearmed as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, and to this end even discussed if it would be possible for Germany to join the British Commonwealth, though of course nothing came of it.

Finally, the Dönitz government undertook a study into the matter of hegemony. Should surrendered Germany attempt to ally itself more closely with the East or the West? Given the rhetoric espoused by Dönitz regarding the Soviets, his views on the matter can be taken as a

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162 Ibid., 221-3.
163 Ibid., 226.
164 Steinert, Capitulation, 256-7.
given. He was for alignment with the West. However, he did try to divorce himself from his prejudices and objectively think about the matter, especially in light of the fact that post-surrender, reports from the East indicated the Soviets were behaving far less barbarically than had been feared, and that the western Allies were behaving in a far more draconian fashion, if not outright abusively, than had been expected. Several specific points were considered. It was recognized that while Germany had long claimed to be a bulwark against Bolshevism, with the surrender such a goal was no longer an issue. In the event of another war, it was felt the Eastern powers would have greater strength on land, and if Germany were to align, it might as well be with the best protector. Similarly, now that Russia had influence in Europe, it was not likely to give it up. The food situation was dependent on imports from parts of Germany occupied by the Soviets, and it was felt that the Soviets would be more in need of and better able to benefit from German technical and military know-how than would the British and Americans. Finally, though Communism was the antithesis of National Socialism, for a country apparently so against democracy as Germany had been against the democratic Weimar state, the authoritarian structure seemed appealing. It was also seen that an overcrowded, unemployed, hungry mass of refugees was the perfect place for Bolshevism to thrive, and it was felt that once it gained a foothold, Bolshevism might not leave. It was felt the West did not seem to understand the danger of alienating the Germans, whereas the Russians were taking every opportunity to court them, particularly the young officers then still in uniform. Dönitz met with representatives from the western Allies about this on the 17th of May and again on the 20th. He told them that while the western powers had strict non-fraternization rules, repeatedly accused the German populace of complicity in heinous war crimes such as the concentration

165 Lüdde-Neurath, 102.
166 Ibid., 102-3.
167 Ibid., 104.
camp system (which he saw as propaganda), and generally treated the people like criminals, the Russians were playing German music and giving out cigarettes. Such behavior might, he felt, be sufficient to switch loyalties of the people to the Russian side.

Dönitz’s concerns, whatever their motives were pointless given the later division of Germany; Germans had no say in the orientation of the country, and of course, it was divided between the Eastern and Western powers.

The end finally came for the Dönitz government on May 23rd, 1945. For reasons covered below, the Allies finally decided to arrest the Admiral and his provisional government. On the 22nd, Dönitz and his staff were told to report the following morning to the Patria, which General Rooks had taken over as his own headquarters. Dönitz, suspecting the nature of the summons, told his staff simply, “Koffer packen.” Upon reaching the ship, they found a large number of photographers waiting, hinting at what was to come. General Rooks met Dönitz, and delivered the following speech:

Gentlemen, I am in receipt of instructions from Supreme Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, from Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, to call you before me this morning to tell you that he has decided, in concert with the Soviet High Command, that today the acting German Government and the German High Command, with the several of its members shall be taken into custody as prisoners of war. Thereby the acting German government is dissolved… In conformity with instructions, each of you is to consider yourself a PW from this moment. When you leave this room, an Allied officer will attach himself to you and escort you to your quarters where you will pack, have your lunch and complete your affairs, after which they will escort you to the airfield

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168 Padfield, 430.
169 Lüdde-Neurath 113.
at 1:30 for enplaning. You may take the baggage you require. That is all I have to say.\textsuperscript{170}

Rooks then asked Dönitz if he wished to enter a protest, or say anything. Dönitz replied with the curt, “Es erübrigt sich jedes Wort!”\textsuperscript{171}

Thus ended the twenty-three day government of Karl Dönitz.

One might ask then, why it took so long for the Allies to arrest Hitler’s successor, leader of the U-boat war, and head of the German Navy. Were they truly contemplating leaving Dönitz in his post? If not, why did they take so long to arrest him and his government?

As early as May 1\textsuperscript{st}, with Dönitz’s broadcast announcing his succession, President Truman authorized General Marshall and through him, General Eisenhower, to publicize the news of Hitler’s death in such a way as to prevent his martyrdom among Germans in occupied areas, and to refute the claims and legitimacy of Dönitz. Allied solidarity would also be thus reinforced.\textsuperscript{172} Orme Sargent, deputy under-secretary of the British Foreign Office, sent a note to Churchill on May 2\textsuperscript{nd}, noting that it would be doubtful that Dönitz could hold the situation together. Churchill, however, preferred to simply let the matter set for a bit, with a wait and see attitude. It was the beginning of some support on his part for Dönitz. The Soviets on the other hand were in favor of not recognizing Dönitz as head of state, and dealing strictly with the German military.\textsuperscript{173} In a follow-up telegram to Churchill, Sargent raised the question of whether or not the signature of Dönitz would be desirable to have on a document of surrender; such would legitimize his position. Finally, there was no sure knowledge about the fate of Hitler,


\textsuperscript{171} Dönitz, Zehn 466.


\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 653.
which while largely settled, still occasionally raises speculations to this day. As of the 11th of May, no decision had been reached. Churchill was in favor of a meeting among the big three to discuss the matter, and saw possibilities of Dönitz being used as a figurehead to pass on Allied orders and policy. Such a move would certainly have been possible, given the later use of the Emperor in Japan, but would have angered the Soviets. Churchill, writing to Sargent on the 14th of May, said,

I neither know nor care about Dönitz. He may be a war criminal… The question for me is, has he any power to get the Germans to lay down [sic] and hand over quickly without any more loss of life? We cannot go running into every German slum and argue with every German that it is his duty to surrender or we will shoot him… You seem to be startled at General Busch giving orders. The orders seem to be get [sic] the Germans to do exactly what we want them to do… Sometimes there are great advantages in letting things slide for a while. It must of course be remembered that if Dönitz is a useful tool to us, that will have to be written off against his war atrocities… Do you want to have a handle with which to manipulate this conquered people, or just to have to thrust your hand into an agitated ant-heap?

In speaking to the British people, Churchill had to be a bit more careful, but still spoke out in favor of Dönitz in some capacity:

I am not sure whether any machinery of government, whether central or regional, can be said to exist at present in Germany, and in any case I should prefer… to speak of administration rather than government. In general it is our aim that Germans should

174 Ibid., 654.
175 Ibid., 655-6.
administer this country in obedience to allied directions. We have no intention of undertaking the burden of Germany ourselves.\textsuperscript{176}

Other functionaries who were dealing with the Dönitz government on a more interpersonal level, such as the American General Rooks, felt similarly. They reasoned that the government and OKW should function as long as they were useful to the Allies, even if that were only as a post office to pass along orders.\textsuperscript{177} Finally, in line with Churchill’s statement, it was recognized that the input of the French and Soviets would clearly need to be sought out. It was one thing for the Soviets to say that they did not want to deal with Dönitz, and another matter to go and preemptively arrest him without their knowledge.

It was recognized through this procedure that in the future, a German government would have to be free of Nazi “hacks” such as Dönitz, and that by attempting to actually govern Germany, Dönitz was setting himself and his government up as indispensable and legitimate. Such a situation would seriously harm Allied intentions at de-nazification and it was recognized that the home front would be incensed if he and his government were allowed to remain in power. S.H.A.E.F. therefore issued statements to the effect that Dönitz was only being used temporarily, and Ambassador Robert Murphy further clarified that the Allies had never recognized his legitimacy.\textsuperscript{178} General Clay further added that Dönitz was still free only because the application for his arrest had to be made and approved; which government would get him?

It was finally on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of May that S.H.A.E.F. informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff (C.C.S.) that Dönitz was to be arrested, pending Russian agreement. When Marshal Zhukov communicated that the Soviet Government had nothing against such a move, Eisenhower

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 656.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 657.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 658. This is of course a debatable point. Jodl had signed surrender terms on Dönitz’s orders, as had von Friedeburg. This might be construed as de facto, if not de jure recognition.
informed the C.C.S. and issued the needed orders. Churchill was still against the move, and felt
the Allies were cutting off the limb on which they were sitting, leaving no one to deal with in
Germany.\(^{179}\)

Still, it was decided that Churchill’s will would not prevail, and as of the 21\(^{st}\) of May,
General Bedell Smith announced the 21\(^{st}\) and 12\(^{th}\) U.S. Army groups were ready to arrest the
OKW staffs in the North and South, including the Dönitz government. The formal approval of
this went out on the 22\(^{nd}\), with backing by the U.S. State Department and War Department. Thus
came the arrest on the 23\(^{rd}\).

Sargent noted on the next day that the worst of both worlds had been achieved; by first
dealing with the Dönitz government, suspicions were aroused in Moscow. By abolishing it, the
Allies condemned themselves to undertaking German governance, without even a kernel with
which to start a new system. Anthony Eden penciled in his agreement on the matter in a
telegram printout.\(^{180}\)

The arrest of Dönitz, therefore, was delayed for several reasons. First and probably most
importantly was bureaucratic inertia. It took time for all the Allies to agree to the move.
Second, it was recognized Dönitz was valuable, even if only in a rubber stamp function. This
line of thinking had its limits, however, as Dönitz was certainly not treated like Emperor
Hirohito. Finally, whether the Allies wanted to recognize Dönitz’s legitimacy or not, he was no
mere military man or political functionary. His arrest meant cutting the head off the
organizational tree of both the German military and civil system, a move that the Allies were

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 660. Other British personalities such as Montgomery and Cunningham were also doubtful of the wisdom
of the arrest, given that some forty U-boats were either in unoccupied Norway or at sea, and that millions of German
troops still had possession of arms. All this could have caused quite a lot of difficulty for the Allies.
\(^{180}\) Ibid., 662.
understandably reluctant to make until demobilization of the *Wehrmacht* had begun and Allied supervisory troops were in place.

Thus concludes the discussion of the activities of the Dönitz government and its arrest. Before turning to a final analysis and postscript however, it is worthwhile to consider the impressions made by the Dönitz government and this period in time on the German psyche. An excellent way of doing this is to examine German literature of and about the period.
CHAPTER SIX: GERMAN LITERATURE AND THE END OF THE WAR

As one might imagine, the war and its end made a great impact on the German populace and left its imprint in German literature. Indeed, whole genres such as Trümmerliteratur, Heimkehrerliteratur, and related topics such as “Stunde Null” or zero hour, indicating a reset of time so to speak, deal precisely with such periods. Due to the enormity of the scope of World War Two and its relatively recent status in time, much of the literature in these fields revolves around it, though certainly examples can be found referring to World War One and its aftermath, as well as a number of other wars. This literature has been largely disregarded or overlooked as a possible source of historical research, but in fact can be regarded in the same vein as memoirs or even public opinion polls, and therefore brings a new dimension to an examination of this time period.

A number of pieces of fiction have been written about the transition to peacetime and the immediate post war. Few of these make much mention of the Dönitz government specifically, but do set his writings, those of Lüdde-Neurath, and others such as Speer’s in context. For instance, much of Dönitz’s own writings, when not dealing with the day to day minutiae of the actual events, i.e. daily orders and so forth, mention frequently that his goal was to save lives by a temporary continuation of the war. This is a top-down “big picture” view; is it representative of the day to day concerns of the populace or soldiers at the time? Writers who were working at the time (or immediately thereafter, having lived through the period themselves) such as Wolfgang Borchert provide insight into contemporary thought on the transition to peace from a more bottom-up perspective. Those who have written works about the time from a more modern perspective, such as Uwe Timm, show how the events of May 1945 can be regarded with several decades of historical perspective. They show both the lasting resonance and how memory has
worked its way into national consciousness, as well as how the events of May 1945 have inspired the imagination. Such works are most germane to the Dönitz government discussion in that, even if they do not discuss how his government impacted Germany, they do show what the mood in Germany was like at the time in which he ever so briefly ruled. Though problematic as historical sources, they are excellent as emotive documents.

Borchert’s works fall into two broad categories, namely those that show some hope for the future and those that do not. Borchert had served in the German *Wehrmacht* on the Russian Front, the same front that Dönitz wanted to keep open. He was arrested for political reasons, and eventually released largely due to his sickly constitution. After Germany was overrun, he made his way back to Hamburg to be with his parents, but eventually was sent to Switzerland for medical treatment, where he died in September 1947.\(^\text{181}\) He did, therefore, have a very personal perspective on the war, and his writings demonstrate just what was being asked of German soldiers when Dönitz commanded them to continue their fight, as well as his overall impressions of the time. His emotions are mapped through his work, his psyche is laid open to the reader.

His largest work, “Draußen vor der Tür,” falls into the category of a story with a rather dark, pessimistic view of the future. The first page of text repeats several times that a man is coming home to Germany, but then never makes it because there is no longer any home for him. His home is now outside, in the rain, on the street.\(^\text{182}\) The story then elaborates on this point. Beckmann, who is returning home after the long war, finds a series of insurmountable difficulties. The story opens with Death belching from overeating, and Beckmann trying to drown himself. His wife, of whom he had dreamt for three long years while a prisoner in


\(^{182}\) Ibid., 102.
Siberia, has found another man, and the rest of his life in Hamburg has disappeared. Even the personified river Elbe will not have him, denying his attempt at suicide.

Despite this opening, several times in the story the reader is convinced that Beckmann is about to have a change in fortune. Throughout the work, Der Andere, who may be a figment of his imagination, keeps encouraging him to keep working, keep trying, that things will get better. Indeed, so it seems that they will; first a girl finds him, washed up on the banks of the Elbe. She has also lost her husband, and the reader thinks, perhaps things will work out between them. Then her husband returns, and Beckmann must once again go out on the street.¹⁸³

Beckmann goes to see a former commanding officer, to return a unique burden; the Oberst had given Beckmann the responsibility over mens’ lives, men who died; Beckmann wants to rid himself of this burden or responsibility. He tells the officer of his view of the military profession, as he has seen in a dream:


¹⁸³ Ibid., 116.
¹⁸⁴ Borchert, 124. These were popular marching songs of the German military at the time.
Beckmann leaves, without getting much from the General, though he does steal some bread and wine. The wine is the only brief moment of comfort he receives, and its succor is only temporary. Though Beckmann has laid his burden at the General’s feet, the General never picks it up, so Beckmann must continue on as a wanderer. He auditions in a Cabaret show; and is told that people now only want entertainment, not Beckmann’s reality, and only want to see celebrities, not some nobody from nowhere like himself.\textsuperscript{185} With this rejection, Beckmann tries to go to the home of his parents, only to find they recently committed suicide. Der Andere, throughout all of this, keeps encouraging him on, but with each rejection and each difficulty, Beckmann loses a little bit more of himself, and is harder to console. Even God, of whom Beckmann dreams, offers little consolation; people have no more use for God, just for death.\textsuperscript{186} Beckmann then reflects, that all his life, he was brought up to be ready for war, and look where it has gotten him:


Dönitz can easily be regarded as a member of this “sie” of whom Beckmann speaks, given that he was himself a First World War veteran, who never denounced the war and had, in his capacity as an admiral, sent young men into such a hell.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 132, 136.  
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 149.
Again, Beckmann’s list of acquaintances passes before his eyes; the girl even says that she loves him, and they will be together, but again her husband comes. The story ends ambiguously, with Beckmann ranting and asking where der Andere is, where God is, what he is to do, and why no one knows.\textsuperscript{187}

This very depressing example of Heimkehrliteratur is both an anti-war statement and a very real acknowledgement of the difficulties facing troops returning home from war to a ravaged homeland. Particularly the exchange between Beckmann and the General shows how Borchert felt betrayed by the military culture in which he had grown up, a culture that, thanks to Hitler, waxed philosophical about World War One and lost opportunity, despite the all-too-real reality of the mud and death in the trenches. Given that most German cities had been devastated by aerial bombardment or urban warfare, or both, the picture painted by Borchert of a hopeless wasteland with no one left to comfort the returning soldiers must have proved true for thousands upon thousands. Beckamann’s prospects have been systematically closed to him; the military was unpalatable due to the onerous burden imposed on him, and is no longer open to him any way. Family life is closed to him through the triumvirate of his dead parents, faithless wife, and the loving but married girl. Profession opportunity is denied him at the cabaret, and even death is denied him by the Elbe, personified along with Death in his suicide attempt. He is a man with no future, he literally has nowhere to go; the only fate he has left is to wander outside of peoples’ doors.

The story, which appeared first in 1947, recognizes that only then was the former soldier returning; he had been in Soviet prison camps the whole time. Indeed, many remained in Soviet captivity as slave labor into the 1950s, which lends some credence to Dönitz’s fears. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, the story shows that the average person on the street had very

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 165.
different and more immediate concerns than did the government, namely those of daily survival. Dönitz was not immune to this line of thinking. He recognized that people often look out for their own interests first, and offers as example the mayor of Hamburg seeking to surrender the city to the British when Dönitz felt the city needed to be defended as a corridor through which evacuees could pass. For this reason, he felt the government was still needed, namely to avoid chaos and an every-man-for-himself attitude. Still, while recognizing this, Borchert’s story shows that Dönitz was not fully in touch with reality; he may have had an appreciation of overarching concerns, but seems to have had no feel for popular opinion; while those in the East might have been indoctrinated or educated to fear the Soviets, and probably therefore wanted to continue the war to escape, those in the West would more than likely have been happy with an earlier surrender. This sentiment is echoed by Ambassador Robert Murphy, who wrote of the Dönitz government, “[a] motley array of individuals who under Grand Admiral Dönitz style themselves the Acting Government of the Reich… a melancholy group… quite detached from the atmosphere of desolation and destruction.”

For every life saved by the brief prolonging of the war, others suffered.

Other Borchert stories, while often equally as dark, are not quite so hopeless in their outlook. They speak more to the idea of Stunde Null, a resetting of time, a new beginning and a new chance.

One of these is Borchert’s short story “Die Drei Dunklen Könige.” No names are given the characters in the story; they are simply referred to as der Mann, seine Frau, and the three soldiers, or die Fremden. The story opens with the man looking for firewood in a burnt out, bombed out city. He feels powerless due to the circumstance, and Borchert says of him several

188 Dönitz, Strategie 162.
189 Steinert, Decision, 659.
times, “Aber er hatte kein Gesicht für seine Fäuste.” The war has taken away all his power; he has no one to blame, no one to whom he may turn for help. He is one of the nameless mass, given no name by Borchert, robbed of power and identity by events he could not control, with no way to release his tension or voice his concerns about the matter. He returns home to his wife and newborn child, only an hour old, but apparently healthy, but with only a piece of rotten wood and some oatmeal flakes to provide as sustenance and warmth.

Three former soldiers see the light from the fire and come to the door. The soldiers have problems; one has no hands. They were frozen off. One has bad nerves and shakes. The third man’s feet are swollen with water due to malnutrition and hunger. Yet these three miserable figures produce gifts for the family in the form of a wooden donkey as a toy for the baby, two bonbons for the woman, and tobacco for the man.

The child screams and the soldiers leave. The man refers to them as “sonderbare Heilige” and later “schöne Heilige.” Three strange, heavenly “kings” have come and gone. It appears that all will go well with the family:

Kuck mal, wie lebendig es ist, sagte sie stolz. Das Gesicht machte den Mund auf und schrie.

Weint er? Fragte der Mann.

Nein, ich glaube, er lacht, antwortete die Frau....

Heute ist ja auch Weihnachten, sagte die Frau.

Ja, Weihnachten, brummte er und vom Ofen her fiel eine Handvoll Licht hell auf das kleine schlafende Gesicht.

There are obviously some Biblical models at work here; the three soldiers function as the wise men, the man and his wife as Mary and Joseph, the baby as Jesus, born on Jesus’ birthday. Just

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190 Borchert, 187.
as Christ’s birth marked the beginning of a new era for man, so does this child’s birth mark a
new beginning for the family, and indeed for the world. There is still hope, despite all that has
happened; it is zero hour, just as it was with Christ’s birth and the transition to the year zero, on
the border between b.c. to a.d. Just as Christ’s birth and this border in time marked the salvation
of mankind, so does the border in time between war and peace make possible a new beginning
and a salvation for Germany. The disfigured, wounded soldiers are apropos for a disfigured,
wounded Germany, the powerless man who has no one to blame, no “faces for his fists” is
apropos for a nameless mass of Germans who had no one to blame for their condition except
Hitler, who was dead, and from whom no recompense could be found.

With this story then, Borchert is voicing some hope. The war is over, it was horrific for
those involved, but the new generation will grow up in spite of it and be healthy, with none of
the wounds or difficulties of the old. There is a possibility of a return to Christian values, the
possibility for renewal in a belief in God, as opposed to Hitler as savior. Ergo, this story
compares well with Dönitz’s writings in hoping that the new era will mark a better future for
Germany and the world.

Similar views of hope found in destruction can be seen in Borchert’s other short stories,
such as “Nachts Schlafen die Ratten Doch,” in which a small boy is guarding a pile of rubble,
under which he says lies his brother. He must protect his brother from the rats, which he fears
will eat his brother’s body. An old man comes upon the boy and tells him, “Nachts schlafen die
Ratten doch.”\footnote{Borchert, 218.} The man has a basket with greens in it to feed his rabbits, and promises the boy
a rabbit if he leaves the ash heap. It is therefore safe for the boy to leave the bombed out rubble
and return to his parents, who were visiting an Aunt during the disaster.
Again, Borchert plays with Biblical metaphors in which the boy, his dreary surroundings, death, and colorless world represent the imperfect sins of man and life with his parents at his aunt’s as the Promised Land, a life after the death surrounding him, to be reached only by a savior. He is transported out of his world of darkness and sin through the old man, a Christ figure, who represents life, greenness (albeit somewhat soiled from the war), and hope. Therein, Borchert is saying that although life at end of the war, in the rubble or Trümmer of Germany might seem hopeless, a better day can and perhaps will still come. All that the Germans need is to be led away from this rubble, the remains of war, as the man leads away the boy in the story. They needed a Christ-figure, a savior. Dönitz, in creating the transition to peace, functions much like the man in the story, though he offered no concrete and sure path to such a salvation. Whether his path would have worked is purely a matter of speculation, as is whether he, as a former leader of the war, could have continued in such a role, but without his role in the transition, there may have been no metaphorical helper, or to paraphrase Churchill, no “handle” for the Allies to grasp Germany and begin to help rebuild in the important initial phase of transition from war to peace. Given that the idea of Stunde Null begins with the end of a war, at zero hour, Dönitz was in any event there for the moment, for the beginning of rebuilding, for the first steps toward a green world free of dead brothers, bombs, and rubble. Though Dönitz, as one of the instigators of such destruction, could never take on the metaphorical role of the old Man or savior as in Borchert’s story, he was a step in the right direction, in that he was not Hitler and was willing to allow the transition to peace to begin.
Uwe Timm’s *Die Entdeckung der Currywurst* is another work written about the end of the war, but in contrast to Borchert, from a more modern perspective. It is a case of a more positive story, showing that despite the difficulty in Germany, the turning point of the end of the war also provided new hope, new opportunity. The fictional story revolves around the narrator and his talks with a Mrs. Brücker, who claims to have invented curried sausage in Hamburg right after the end of the war, and her remembrances of the period including her love affair with a soldier who had gone absent without leave.

Mrs. Brücker begins her story, or rather her remembrance, with Sunday, April 29 1945. She intertwines genuine historical events with her fictional story, demonstrating that memory is not always limited to fact, and that memory and narration are fallible. She provides a series of events:

2.00: Hitlers Trauung mit Eva Braun. Trauzeugen sind Goebbels und Bormann. 3.30: Hitler diktiert sein politisches Testament. Großadmiral Dönitz soll seine Nachfolge als Staatsoberhaupt und Oberfehlshaber antreten.

5.30: Die Engländer gehen bei Artlenburg über die Elbe. Hamburg soll als Festung bis zum letzten Mann verteidigt werden.

On that day, Lena Brücker, who is married, meets Werner Bremer, a soldier happening to stand in line behind her. One thing leads to another, and the two begin an affair. He stays with her, rather than go on and fight a useless battle, where he anticipates dying. In talking about the war and Lena’s twenty-year-old daughter who is working as a nurse in Hannover, Lena says,

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192 Curried sausage or *Currywurst* is a popular item at curbside food stands in Germany, and indeed in much of Europe. It consists of a bratwurst-like sausage fried, covered in ketchup and curry powder, served generally with a roll or piece of bread.

“Hoffentlich gabs keine Vergewaltigungen.” He replies, “Nein, nicht bei den Engländern.”

Therefore, the contrast between the conduct of British and Soviet troops is established early on. British troops are gentlemanly, well mannered, and safe. There is no need to fear mistreatment. This sentiment jibes well with Dönitz’s.

Time passes. May 1st comes and the announcement of Hitler’s death, made by Dönitz, is broadcast. Timm recaps the decision to try and hold Hamburg, as made by Dönitz against local wish to the contrary. Brücker reports to Bremer that Hitler is dead and that the Großadmiral has succeeded. An interesting exchange then takes place between them:


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194 Ibid., 38.
195 Ibid., 103.
196 The Narvik Shield and Iron Cross, Second Class (EK or Eisenkreuz) were medals of the German military at the time.
“Klar” sagte Bremer, “Dönitz macht das... endlich ist Churchill aufgewacht.”


Timm thereby gives voice to the oft-hoped for break between the Allies, expressing Bremer’s faith that Dönitz would carry on the war against the Soviets; which is one reason why Hitler chose him. Dönitz was not the cur Göring, Dönitz was in favor with Hitler to the end. Given that Hitler called for continued resistance in his political testament as outlined above, he apparently took it as a given that Dönitz would continue the war. For Bremer however, such a proposition would have been problematic. As a deserter, even if a break between the Allies occurred, Bremer would be trapped in Brücker’s apartment indefinitely. Were he to go out, he would be court-martialed. Timm thereby creates an interesting and poignant paradox; if Germany got its long awaited for break between the Eastern and Western Allies and gained an ally in Britain, one of the main protagonists of the story would be doomed. Such can be seen as a metaphor for Germany as well. After nearly six years of war, such an alliance, extraordinarily unlikely though it would have been, might have won Germany the war, but would have meant terrible privation for many more years for the populace.

Bremer goes on hiding with Brücker. She does not tell him when the city is captured, and does not tell him when the war is over for a variety of reasons, mainly selfish. She does, however, note how the British troops behaved. “Die Stadt war von einem kommandierenden General in grauer auf einen anderen in khakibraunder Uniform übergegegen. Es hatte ein paar Plünderungen gegeben, aber Frauen waren nicht belästigt worden.”¹⁹⁸ This again shows the East vs. West distinction in the mind of the Germans, at the time, a distinction obviously with enough

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 125-6.
¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 119.
force to be known to Timm writing forty years after the fact. The differences between the
Eastern and Western Allies and their behaviors have now become, as this piece of literature
shows, a part of Germany’s national memory. The truth of the historical event does not matter
so much as the memory of it; asking a survivor from the time, can one be sure they are
remembering the event, or a memory of a memory, burnt into their minds by the national
acceptance of a certain interpretation?

The story continues in this fashion, with Brücker informing Bremer of some of the
events, such as Dönitz’s speech calling for order, but leaving out the main details of the city’s
occupation and eventual end of the war. When discussing a small matter of sabotage, another
interesting exchange takes place between Bremer and Brücker:

“Brandstiftung,” sagte Bremer, “bestimmt die SS.”

“Woher weißt du das?”

“Natürlich,” sagte er, “klar, die SS. Es wird Auseinandersetzungen geben
zwischen der SS und der Marine, sowie Wehrmacht, klar doch, sonnenklar. Dönitz wird
mit denen aufräumen. Die Marine hat ihre Pflicht getan, war an keiner der
Schweinereien beteiligt, weder an dem Attentat auf den Führer, noch an irgendwelchen
Erschießungen von russischen Kriegsgefangenen.”

Hitler often said that the Navy was the only branch that did its duty. Dönitz himself constantly
referred to himself as a career military man, above politics. Dönitz was seen therefore as a clean
soldier, not involved in the sordid past of Himmler’s SS. In general, as it came out in the
Nuremberg trials as discussed below, German naval troops were generally less guilty of war
crimes than their Wehrmacht counterparts, though Dönitz himself is, as will also be covered
below, a bit more ambiguous.

199 Ibid., 144-5.
Finally, Brücker tells Bremer that the war is over, but only after the latter has dismissed the pictures of the concentration camps as enemy propaganda. Bremer leaves and never returns, though Brücker’s husband comes home, he eventually also leaves.

It is at this point in the story that Lena Brücker begins to rebuild her life, out of the devastation of the very war that took it away. She re-sews Bremer’s uniform, which he left behind, into a nice business suit. Intending to open her own sausage stand, she makes a series of barters, beginning with Bremer’s medals. In the end, she ends up with a tin of curry powder, a move that she begins to regret; she has tasted it and found it inedible. However, when by chance she spills some ketchup into the powder, she is shocked. The result is delicious. So she begins to sell curried sausage, using a tarpaulin left by Bremer to cover her stand. Out of the chaos of war, she has built herself a new future, using the remnants of the war (the uniform, medals, and tarp) to do so. In fact, she has even benefited by the war, and gained a greater degree of autonomy and power, both societally and from her unloving husband. The end of the war and concurrent events are, for her, horrible yet wonderful, truly the best and worst of times; best in her relationship with Bremer and the beginnings of a new, successful life, worst in the general conditions prevailing, if not in her own life, in Germany. Perhaps then, she was experiencing the best of times during the worst of times. The story shows, therefore, that there was hope left for Germany, despite difficulties, and that the experience and privation of the war could still be channeled into the future. Though Dönitz of course never considered the future of Germany through curried sausage, he did, in the immediate post war, begin to plan for Germany’s future in attempting to restart industry, in bringing war criminals to justice, and in trying to figure out what to do with the German military and refugees. Whether his plans would have born fruit, had the Allies permitted him to continue, is difficult to say. However, in that

\[200\] Ibid., 211, 213.
both Timm’s and Dönitz’s writings reflect such a possibility, they compare well- with the aforementioned caveat that Dönitz was worrying about matters from the top down, and Timm’s protagonists have the worm’s eye view, from the bottom up. That Lena Brücker manipulates historical fact in real time during her dictation to the narrator is a given; as she relates, she is knitting, a clear reference to the Greek Fates, measuring out life, and therefore defining history, just as Brücker defines the history she is telling. For Brücker, the true events of history have been personalized by emotional attachment and memory, set out for the narrator as one might set out a meal. She is calling history into being with her narration to make it accessible to the narrator, who could look up historical events but who can only understand the past once he understands Brücker’s emotions and insights into minor details not in the history books. Perhaps Brücker wants or needs to remember the events of 1945 in a certain way. In any case, her narration often flows seamlessly into the narrator’s own narration, making it difficult to divorce his own feelings from the tale, demonstrating again how the process of creating memory is so complex.

Again, such literary works do not necessarily deal with Dönitz, but do deal with the time period in which he was operating most explicitly. How this period is depicted and remembered reflects, however briefly, on his leadership. On one hand, such works show that his policies had a positive effect, if ever so small. If he had not offered Montgomery piece-meal surrender, for instance, would Lena Brücker have been able to succeed, or would the city of Hamburg have been destroyed, possibly with Bremer dead? Or rather, would such a literary statement as Timm’s have been possible? Would the war have continued, breaking down into chaos, resulting with a complete destruction of Germany and a lack of a “handle,” as Churchill called it, to act as a bridge to demobilize the German army? One cannot know. Surely the literature as literature
would have been different, as a different post war Germany would have meant a different post war for returning soldiers, and would have caused memory to be shaped in a different way, with a different national consciousness created.

On the other hand, such works show that Dönitz was, most likely, a bit divorced from reality. The characters in the stories examined are, to a one, consumed by daily concerns of life rather than overarching ideas of Bolshevism and refugees. Therefore, a final evaluation of Dönitz and the impact his government had is in order.
CHAPTER SEVEN: POSTSCRIPT ON DÖNITZ

After the arrest aboard the *Patria*, Dönitz and his staff were stripped of souvenirs, photographed, searched, and sent to a prison camp in Bad Mondorf, in Luxembourg. The Allies officially declared that they had taken over governance of Germany as of June 5th, though it is unclear what, if anything was assumed to be in force between the 23rd and this declaration.

Eventually, Dönitz was sent to Nuremberg. Most of the charges leveled against him there concerned his conduct of the war at sea. In comparison, little discussion took place about his role as successor, though the matter did come up briefly, as outlined below. Dönitz, tried with the major war criminals including Göring, Speer, and Hess, was indicted on counts one two and three; he was accused of conspiracy to commit crimes against peace and humanity, planning and initiating wars of aggression, and of waging aggressive war.\(^1\) He was not accused of the fourth point, waging crimes against humanity.

It was found that he was not guilty under the first indictment, as he was not present for the planning conferences that launched the war. Dönitz was therefore not guilty of crimes against peace. He was, however, in his capacity as *Befehlshaber der U-boote* and later as *Oberbefehlshaber der Kriegsmarine*, guilty of waging aggressive war.\(^2\)

On the matter of war crimes, a bit of a sticking point arose. On one hand, the conduct of German submarines under Dönitz was clearly in violation of prewar treaties. On the other hand, it was recognized that both U.S. and British submarines operated in much the same manner as German subs, and that despite an ambiguous order given in 1942, Dönitz never explicitly ordered survivors in the water to be fired upon.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Padfield, 442.
\(^2\) *IMT* 1:311.
\(^3\) The debate concerned the so-called Laconia order. One whole chapter of Dönitz’s *Zehn Jahre und Zwanzig Tage* is devoted to the incident that lead to this order. In September 1942, a German submarine torpedoed an Allied
It was also discussed in the course of the proceedings just what Dönitz’s attitudes towards Jews were, as well as his attitudes toward the Nazi party. It was not, however, really established what his crimes were. Dönitz was convicted on counts two and three, as although he had not ordered the mass killing of shipwrecked sailors, and had not been responsible for the few atrocities that were committed by the Navy during the war, neither did he abolish orders under which they could exist when he became head of the Navy and later head of state. This was seen as a crime of inaction or omission. As it could not be proven that he knew of the atrocities in the camps, even if he admitted knowledge of the camps’ existence, it was felt that while he was guilty, he was not as heinously guilty as others such as Himmler (who had in the meantime poisoned himself). As for waging aggressive war, could the Allies, who had firebombed Germany into ashes, and overrun its borders, claim innocence themselves? Surely the matter of who instigated the war must be considered, but as Dönitz rightly pointed out, some decisions, such as the firebombing of Dresden in February, 1945, had little military value and could therefore be seen as Allied war crimes, and are indeed denounced as such today by many. If the matter does return to who was the instigator in defining aggressive war, Dönitz bears little blame, since, as the Allies themselves ruled, he was not in a position of sufficient power at the

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204 The one main incident concerned the execution of a British Torpedo boat crew, whose members were dressed in civilian garb (and therefore regarded as spies as per the Geneva Convention) and who were captured by a German Admiral who at the time was under command of a General in Norway, and thereby not under Dönitz’s control directly.

205 Dönitz, Wechselvolles 213.
beginning of the war to be blamed for the war. He simply was not a Hitler, Göring, or Räder in
1939, and therefore his guilt in waging aggressive war as opposed to following orders to wage
war in general is somewhat ambiguous.

It is a most interesting question. The transcripts of the trials in summary state why
Dönitz is not guilty of count one, and why he is not guilty of count two, but that he is nonetheless
convicted on counts two and three. About the only solid crime the prosecution had him on was
breaking the Washington Protocol of 1936, where it was stated that a submarine officer must
allow a ship to pass unmolested if the safety of its crew cannot be guaranteed. This was of
course ludicrous in light of reality; Dönitz’s defense argued as much. One might say, the only
concrete evidence against Dönitz as a war criminal was that he gave constant advice to Hitler and
was therefore guilty of waging aggressive war; though again, given the circumstances of 1943,
the first time he had sufficient power to carry out this task as head of the Navy, he could not be
censured too strongly for this. It was also argued, particularly by the Russians, that he had
prolonged the war by not surrendering immediately after assuming power. Dönitz insisted again
that his only goal was to save lives.

Dönitz also made a good case on his own behalf regarding his involvement in politics.
Though politically opinionated, he had never operated politically until assuming the head of state
position; previously, he had been purely a soldier. It was, his defense argued, possible to be a
National Socialist and not a war criminal. Nazism was, after all, distasteful, but was not
illegal. No one could argue that Dönitz had ordered Germany to fight to the last man; indeed, he
had taken steps to contact the Allies the day after assuming power.

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206 IMT 1:312.
207 Ibid., 13:396.
208 Ibid., 18:370.
In short, Nuremberg established that while Dönitz was unequivocally guilty of waging aggressive war, which was the least damning of the charges given the circumstances, he was unequivocally as innocent of planning the war. So far as war crimes, he had blemishes on his record, such as the recommendation of using concentration camp inmates as laborers in shipyards and giving various damning bits of advice to Hitler. He never personally issued orders that could be construed as orders to murder or abuse either enemy combatants, prisoners, or workers, concentration camp oriented or otherwise. Though he violated prewar principles of submarine warfare, so did the Allied powers. While convicted on this point, the evidence was not overwhelming. It was certainly felt that while there was no one legal point of overwhelming weight on which to convict him, surely the head of the German *Kriegsmarine* and successor to Hitler was deserving of punishment for something. But, given the lack of damning evidence, he therefore got off with a fairly light sentence: ten years imprisonment in Spandau.

This verdict sat poorly with Dönitz. He later wrote that the principles set forth in Nuremberg were never applied to other wars, such as Korea or in the Suez Crisis (he overlooks obviously the Tokyo trials) but that it was merely a chance for the Allies to seek revenge on the Germans.\(^\text{209}\) His arrest, he maintained, was purely political. He did, however, recognize that Germany might have done the same, had roles been reversed. To quote William Buckley, “History is the polemics of the victor.”

Dönitz and the other high-ranking criminals who were not executed were sent to prison. He felt he was only there because the Allies could not conscience letting Hitler’s successor go free.\(^\text{210}\) He characterizes his own behavior in prison as reserved. He apparently got along well with von Neurath, whom he had known since 1915, when von Neurath had visited the *Breslau.*

\(^{209}\) Dönitz, *Wechselvolles,* 212.
\(^{210}\) Dönitz, *Strategie,* 192.
He did not, however, even as late as 1969, want to discuss the matter much, so long as Rudolf Hess remained in prison.211

Albert Speer, however, did keep a diary in Spandau, and mentions Dönitz in several places. The picture he paints is anything but flattering; while he and Dönitz had enjoyed a good relationship during the war, such was not the case in Spandau.212 Also, he notes, there was much tension and mutual placing of blame between Dönitz and Räder while in prison.213

While Speer was almost certainly also attempting some damage control of his own, and while one must be cautious regarding his memoirs just as with Dönitz, he notes that Dönitz felt Nuremberg to be a mockery of justice, while Speer merely remained quiet, feeling it would be pointless to bring up the pictures of corpses and atrocities, implying that he, Speer, felt Nuremberg necessary.214 Dönitz still saw Hitler as having been the legal head of state, whose orders were rightly followed,215 with speech against him treasonous.216

The relationship between Speer and Dönitz improved somewhat, but never reached the point of good terms. Their mindsets were apparently too different. Probably the best citation of Dönitz’s views found in Speer’s book is the entry for January 10th, 1953:

Funk tells us in the garden: “A plot has been uncovered. Skorzeny, the man who liberated Mussolini, is said to have wanted to kidnap us, using two helicopters and a hundred men. Along with this there was to be a Putsch. All of us were going to serve as a new government, headed by Dönitz as Hitler’s successor.217

Dönitz’s reaction to this was:

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211 Ibid., 195.
212 Speer, *Spandau*, 131.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid., 47.
215 Ibid., 88.
216 Ibid., 89.
217 Ibid., 242.
“What nonsense… I condemn Hitler’s system, and I never had anything to do with SS men like Skorzeny.” There was a short pause. “But I am still and will remain the legal chief of state. Until I die!”

I pretend astonishment. “But there has been a new chief of state for the longest time. Heuss was elected, after all.”

“I beg your pardon,” Dönitz insists, “He was installed under pressure from the occupying powers. Until all political parties, including the National Socialists, are permitted to function and until they elect someone else, my legitimacy remains. Nothing can change that one iota.”

Even at this late date, Dönitz saw the Führer’s decision naming him as head of state binding, and was notably unrepentant.

One incident in Speer’s book lends credence to the veracity of Dönitz’s claims that he fought the last few days of the war to save lives. On March 4th, 1953, when shown a news photo of himself with the caption “The man who saved the lives of hundreds of thousands,” Speer writes that he seemed “several years younger.” Apparently, when a poll was taken in 1952, Dönitz came out at the top of former Nazi leaders in terms of those whom the populace still respected. Dönitz saw this as a sign of his imminent release; he was mistaken.

He was apparently in favor of Adenauer, but against the structure of the new Bundeswehr, feeling it should have been based more on previous examples. It finally came out that just before his release, Dönitz blamed Speer for his arrest; he felt that had Speer not recommended him to the post of successor, he never would have been arrested or at least not

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218 Ibid.
219 Ibid., 245.
220 Ibid., 247.
221 Ibid., 277.
222 Ibid., 284.
Speer countered that he never recommended Dönitz per se, but had praised his job in the northern sector just before Hitler drafted his testament; ergo the appointment. Dönitz maintained that Speer had told him otherwise; it’s a case of one former Hitlerite’s word against another’s.

As of September 30, 1956, Dönitz’s prison sentence was up and he was free. He and Speer parted on rather bad terms, though Dönitz comes up again in Speer’s diary; Speer read Dönitz’s first set of memoirs in 1959 and found that while the parts pertaining to U-boat warfare were quite accurate, those pertaining to Dönitz’s attitude toward Jews and insights on National Socialism were childish; he felt Dönitz had learned nothing, and was merely whitewashing his past. Further, he felt it a deliberate lie when Dönitz distanced himself from Hitler; according to Speer, Hitler trusted Dönitz more than any other, and said so on numerous occasions as shown by personal courtesy and special treatment, such as an armored limousine.

After release, Dönitz wrote several sets of memoirs but granted interviews only carefully; he refused to be drawn into discussions about Hitler, but freely talked about tactics and strategy. His only remaining child, Ursula, noted that he grew more and more withdrawn, especially after the death of his wife in 1962. He came out for a united Europe as early as 1969 as a front against Communism, and became religious in his later years. He tried for some time to clear his name with the Federal Republic of Germany’s government, without success. He died at ten minutes past seven on Christmas Eve, the date on which Germans celebrate Christmas, in

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223 Ibid., 327.
224 There was some dispute on this; American and British law counted time served before sentencing toward the total, meaning Dönitz should have been released some months earlier, counting the time from May, 1945 until the trial ending in September, 1946 as part of his sentence. The Soviets, however, saw it otherwise, and he served ten full years in Spandau, in addition to the time spent in Bad Mondorf and Nuremberg beforehand.
225 Ibid., 368.
226 Ibid., 369-70.
227 Padfield, 486.
228 Dönitz, Strategie 209.
He was buried by a cadre of former U-boat men and others who had served in the war, many in uniform despite the state’s refusal to permit a state funeral. After a singing of the forbidden first verse of the Deutschlandlied, the national anthem of Germany, Karl Dönitz was laid to rest on January 6, 1981.

\[229\] Ibid., 490.
CHAPTER EIGHT: EVALUATING DÖNITZ

It comes, therefore, to a question of significance. Dönitz obviously had a great impact on the course of the war, and left a lasting contribution in terms of tactics and strategy regarding submarine warfare. It is in this connection that he is usually remembered; even a brief search in a library or online will turn up dozens of references with regards to Dönitz and the U-boats, or Dönitz and the war at sea, or similar topics. Given his short tenure as head of state, and his long service in the Navy, it is understandable that such is the case. That he was chosen by Hitler as successor is not entirely surprising, given that he was (despite his claims to the contrary in his memoirs) a devout believer in National Socialism and anti-Semite. Furthermore, it is probably correct to say that in terms of power, with the dismissal of Göring and Himmler, the death of Goebbels in the bunker, and the failure of Bormann to make an appearance in either Plön or Flensburg, he and Jodl were probably the only figures with sufficient clout to successfully and credibly take command of the entirety of the German military and be accepted by the Wehrmacht as its new head. Therefore, he was the best choice for the job, if not an ideal one.

Though he is remembered by historians mainly for his efforts in the naval war, this is not to accurate say that Dönitz’s tenure as head of state was without impact. In general, the pre-capitulation activities of the government, including those revolving around the capitulation itself, were of greater import than those following.

The most important act undertaken by Dönitz’s government was, of course, the surrender and end of the war. Though he did not sign the surrender documents himself, he empowered plenipotentiaries to do just that, mainly through the persons of von Friedeburg and Jodl. The manner in which he did so is most important; he could easily have ordered the troops to fight to the last man. Whether they would have obeyed is doubtful; odds are that after some more weeks
or months, particularly after the complete occupation of Germany, the remaining troops would have begun to mutiny. Nonetheless, in such a scenario, with no head to tell troops to surrender, postwar or werewolf resistance would have been much more widespread. On the other hand, Dönitz could have surrendered immediately upon assuming office. Whether one agrees with his assessment of Soviet intentions to enslave Germans or not, such would have had a great impact. In the last week of the war alone, something like two million refugees made their way to American or British zones of occupation. In the same period, out of 1,850,000 soldiers on the Baltic Eastern Front, 1,490,000 of them were captured by the Russians, with the remaining 200,000 evacuated. Additionally, after the surrender another 109,205 soldiers, 6287 wounded, and 5379 refugees were transported by sea to the West. The situation in Czechoslovakia was a bit different, where the Wehrmacht succeeded in withdrawing to the American demarcation line almost intact. Taken as a whole, in the last week of the war, 55% of the soldiers operating on the Eastern Fronts were able to retreat, thanks to Karl Dönitz. In retrospect, his fears of the enslavement of the German civilian population proved largely false, though in general those German soldiers captured by the Soviets were treated far more harshly, and held for far longer than those captured in the West, and far fewer survived captivity.

This huge mass migration of people, which must number at least 4 million, with 2 million having been transported or having fled on their own in the last week of the war and its immediate aftermath dwarfs Dunkirk, but has received little attention by historians. Admittedly, a large number of these were evacuated over land or simply fled on their own volition, but of the 4 million, about half were evacuated by ship, and even after the capitulation something like

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230 Lüdde-Neurath 73.
231 Dönitz, Strategie 178. Note that while the figure appears in a book written by (or at least based on interviews by) Dönitz, and might therefore well be seen as suspect, Dönitz is himself quoting another book, written by historian Reimer Hansen, making the figure far more acceptable.
232 Ibid.
120,000 refugees were still at sea.\textsuperscript{233} The impact of such a mass migration cannot be calculated, but it surely represented a massive drain of manpower and know-how from what became East Germany. Thus, Dönitz’s goal of the continuation of the war to save lives succeeded, though what the alternative would have been is open to conjecture.

Also successful was his oft-cited attempt to avoid chaos. He was thinking specifically of the end of World War One in this case; had the Navy or Army mutinied as had then been the case, it is doubtful that the surrender and demobilization would have occurred as smoothly as it did. While there was little fear that a myth would be sown similar to the famous “stab in the back” legend that had come into being after the First World War, it was entirely possible for the chain of command to break down. Such a breakdown had occurred in October and November of 1918, when a group of sailors had refused to follow orders they interpreted as suicidal. The situation rapidly spread to shore installations, and quickly along the Baltic coast, leading to a breakdown in military discipline that lead to a revolution of sorts in Germany. Large numbers of sailors armed themselves and fought both military and police forces by the tens of thousands, a situation that eventually reached Berlin and did not really stabilize until late 1919 with a brutal crackdown by the new government on malcontents and protesters. This revolution had important implications, as the new government installed immediately after the revolution had the dubious honor of signing the Armistice and later Versailles Treaty, and led to the feeling that a mob of traitorous left wing revolutionaries had overthrown the Kaiser to sign their own peace treaty; though such was not the case, that was how it was interpreted by many Germans in the 1920s and 1930s. The rise of Hitler himself can be traced in part to this event. It was obvious, then, on political, professional, and humanitarian levels that firm control needed to be maintained until the surrender was concluded. Having been a loyal naval officer at the time of the 1918

\textsuperscript{233} Dönitz, \textit{Strategie}, 177-8.
Revolution, Dönitz certainly also had a personal stake in seeing that history did not repeat itself. Had a breakdown in discipline in the military similar to that of 1918 happened in 1945, Dönitz’s government surely could have been toppled. The result would have been chaos. The Allied powers would have had no “handle,” to use Churchill’s words, to grab onto. Again, guerilla warfare, lack of central command, and difficulty in signing a peace would have followed. By providing a centralized and recognized authority, Dönitz assured a reasonably smooth surrender both in that he was a figure the command structure would obey, and provided a system for demobilization, as well as care of refugees, dispensing food and supplies, and so forth. Though the Allies may never have officially recognized his government, they most surely dealt with it. Had the Dönitz government not existed, again as Churchill mentioned, the Allies may have found themselves going into every “rat hole,” trying to convince every last soldier to surrender. Chaos was therefore avoided, and if for no other reason, the Dönitz government was most important.

While the postwar activities of the Dönitz government had less historical impact, they were nonetheless important. By maintaining a reliable system for passing on orders, providing supplies, and lending weight to Allied directives, the Dönitz government ensured a fairly easy transition to peace and therefore proved a valuable tool for the Allies in the immediate postwar. Whether his government would have proven successful if it had exercised power for more time is doubtful at best, given his Nazi ties, but it proved a functioning, if not perfect, transition from Hitler’s Reich to occupied Germany.

Dönitz’s evaluation of the relationship between the West and East proved most prescient, if rather premature. It is true that the Soviet Union was viewed with much distrust by the West, but Stalin’s Russia was an ally which the United States in particular had to court until the war
with Japan was settled. Though the atomic bomb was under development, it was not known in May 1945 if it would work, and even if it did, if it alone would have proven sufficient to end the war with Japan. In the case of an invasion, Russia’s participation would have proven invaluable. Eisenhower could not, therefore, be baited into arguments regarding Soviet barbarity or occupation of Berlin as being a negative. Keeping Russia and Stalin happy were prerequisites to the Eastern Allies’ participation in a Japanese invasion, as per the Yalta accords. Ergo, that Dönitz succeeded in a partial surrender in the West vis-à-vis Montgomery is remarkable; certainly many German and British soldiers’ lives were saved in the West by this move.

Though German literature of or about the end of the war does not mention Dönitz specifically, other than in passing, it is key in that much of it recognizes that it was possible to begin anew after the surrender, as shown in Borchert’s short stories and the works of Uwe Timm. Had Dönitz failed in preventing a degeneration of the situation into chaos, these stories might have been much different, and the occupation of Germany in both East and West much harsher. Naturally, many soldiers returning home faced an uncertain future; for many there was no home, as illustrated by Beckmann’s plight in Draußen vor der Tür. Such is, however, more to be blamed on the war itself, rather than on Dönitz’s government, and was a difficulty faced by soldiers of all nations.234 The literature shows very well the impact of the war on the German collective psyche, and serves as an interesting comparison in the creation of memory, particularly when compared to the writings of Dönitz and others in the government with regards to differing attitudes.

In conclusion, the Dönitz government did the best it could under very difficult circumstances. It brought the war to an end with a minimum of difficulty, oversaw the important

234 Consider for instance William Wyler’s film adaptation of The Best Years of Our Lives, where returning American GIs face many of the same problems as those seen in Borchert’s works; uncertain futures, difficulties in finding employment, shattered relationships, and so forth.
beginnings of demobilization of German troops, and began the transition to peacetime. Had it not existed, had no one taken up the reigns of the failing Reich after Hitler’s suicide, things may have gone far worse than they did. Karl Dönitz might not have been the savior of Germany, but he certainly helped save it from destruction.
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