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A BALLANTINE WAR BOOK



THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE LUFTWAFFE

GERMANY'S "LOST VICTORIES" OF THE AIR
—BY THE COMMANDER OF BOMBER FORCES

WERNER BAUMBACH



The Life and Death of the Luftwaffe

is the story of Germany's bomber forces in World War II—the counterpart to the story of German fighter forces told by Adolf Galland in *The First and the Last*.

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FOREWORD TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE LUFTWAFFE is in many ways an unusual and compelling document. As a personal narrative it neither seeks to glorify war nor to disclaim responsibility for Nazi crimes; it is the story of an officer who served his country with distinction and risked reprisals to speak his mind. As history—of the Third Reich in large and the Luftwaffe in particular—it is as objective, reliable, and revealing as any written at the command level. And most important, as an analysis of defeat it throws alarming light on the problems of preparedness now plaguing the democratic West.

Werner Baumbach shows how Hitler was trapped by his decision for the quick war; that almost from the first Germany, geared to win with what it had, could never successfully adjust to delays in timetable and changing needs. Blitzkrieg settled into a long, chaotic struggle between planning and expedience; and step by step Germany fell victim to overcentralized control and erratic policy, red tape and inefficiency, inter-service rivalry and political favoritism, shortages of raw material, depletion of manpower, destruction of facilities, and finally the onslaught of overwhelming numbers and production. If Germany would have been defeated in any event, Baumbach leaves no doubt that Allied victory could have been far more costly.

Today, with the United States and the Soviet Union in possession of weapons that can start and perhaps end the next war in an hour, the pressure to reconcile the short term with the long has increased manifold. For the Luftwaffe it was always "too late." It may not be too late to learn by its example.

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Designated General of the Bombers—the highest post in the Luftwaffe bomber command—Werner Baumbach saw combat as a dive bomber pilot at Narvik and Dunkirk. Later he commanded the Luftwaffe forces in Norway, attacking Allied convoys on the Murmansk run, and led Germany's bomber fleets on the Russian front and in the Mediterranean.

An outspoken critic of the Luftwaffe blunders committed by Goring and Hitler, Baumbach was saved from dismissal only by his extraordinary record of leadership and courage. In *The Life and Death of the Luftwaffe*, he presents a rare inside view of German decisions and strategy, based on personal combat experience and official Luftwaffe files— from the blitzkrieg in Poland and the fall of France to the Battle of Britain, the siege of Stalingrad, and the collapse of German air power under the torrent of American bombing at the end of World War II.

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The Life and Death of the Luftwaffe

BY WERNER BAUMBACH

GENERAL OF THE BOMBERS

TRANSLATED BY FREDERICK HOLT

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NOTE BY THE GERMAN PUBLISHERS

The publishers are fully conscious of their responsibility in producing this book. The air war, and everything associated with it which is described in this book, can be a provocative subject for militant minds. The risk must be taken if we are to know the true course of events which brought our nation to the political, military, economic and moral catastrophe of 1945. The reader cannot avoid gazing into the abyss. No one with a real sense of responsibility who goes deeply into all this can escape the conclusion that there can be no forgetting some of the things that happened in the years 1939 to 1945. Hitler's name, the NSDAP [Nazi Party. (Tr.)], the Gestapo, the S.S., and, unhappily, much that the German Wehrmacht did, will for ever fill us with shame. But that does not prevent the truth being told or truth and honour being separated from lies and fraud. Foreign countries have done justice to Baumbach's character as it deserves.

This book is the product of an almost unique wealth of events and experiences which befell the author at an age which is ordinarily regarded as too young for the moral evaluation of such impressions. Yet there is a surprising maturity in his work and personality. Hence the subjective character of the book, particularly in the extracts from his diary, which strikes readers very forcibly.

But his reflections are more than mere memories. Their documentary value is as great as the author's insistence on objectivity and truth. The book is not only the most comprehensive specialist work on the German Luftwaffe to date, but a convincing refutation of all the legends about sabotage or "a-stab-in-the-back."

Baumbach is a half-way house to subsequent historical investigation and judgement, and his book serves, as Friedrich Meineke once said, as a preliminary to future attempts to understand our fate. In getting together the rich store of documentary material the author had the help of the well-known historian, Professor Bruce C. Hopper, at whose suggestion this book was written.

It provides no sort of encouragement to nationalistic or militant tendencies. The whole story of the tragedy of a service, and the diary extracts, reports and letters, will cure even the most adventure-loving young minds of the idea of "blithe and jolly" wars. The shades of the past which made the author tell a reporter from the publication *Quick* that he loathed war and would never drop a bomb again speak too eloquent a language. The book is also a more effective exposure of dictatorship than a hundred well-meant speeches from modern democrats.

Every era is a puzzle which only the future can solve. National Socialism was "the St. Virus Dance of the Twentieth Century" (Rauschning). It denied individual freedom of conscience. But Man is its representative, not its product. He possesses freedom of decision—that is his eternal right as long as he lives. But he is also faced with the necessity of making decisions—and that is the price he has to pay for his freedom. In a few pages Baumbach draws the conclusions for an uncertain future. He pleads and warns that in the age of the technician "too late?!" must not become a real "too late!"

THE AUTHOR

Werner Baumbach, one of the most striking figures in any Air Force in the Second World War, was thirty-four years old when this book was written. At the end of the war he had attained the rank of colonel—and held the post of General of the Bombers. He was born on the 27th of December, 1916, in the little town of Copenburg in Oldenburg. He came to the Luftwaffe via gliding.

Scapa Flow, Firth of Forth, Narvik, Dunkirk are the first steps in his unexampled career as a dive-bomber pilot. After a lengthy period of service in the east he was employed as commander of the bomber fleet in northern Norway, scene of the attacks on the Arctic convoys, and subsequently in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Through his friendship with Jeschonnek, the Chief of Staff, and Udet, the Quartermaster-General (Air), he, with a number of other junior front-line officers, was able to bring about a reorganization of the bomber arm. For his services in action he was awarded—the first to be so honored—the Oak Leaves with Swords to the Knights Cross, the highest distinction to be given to a bomber pilot in the Second World War. He was subsequently commissioned to test new weapons, such as guided bombs. In that capacity he was in almost daily contact with the men at the top. He became a close personal friend of Speer, the Minister of War Production.

In the last phase of the war, in conjunction with Speer, he was able to avert appalling destruction in Germany by his skill in argument, his personal integrity and courage in conferences with Himmler, Goring and Goebbels. At the Nuremberg trials Speer said when giving evidence, "Baumbach, Colonel Knemeyer and I were able to make certain that the latest technical developments in air warfare were brought to the West and their exploitation by the Soviets prevented."

The capitulation found Baumbach in Flensburg-Miirwik. In August, 1945, he was brought to England. He spent nearly six months in an English interrogation camp. He was told that he would be charged as a "war criminal" on the ground that he had fired on shipwrecked people and had been the commander of No. 200 Bomber Group. After unending cross-examination and investigation Baumbach was able to prove conclusively that throughout the war neither he nor any unit under his command had committed any violation of the Hague Convention.

In February, 1946, after further inquiry by American Headquarters, he was released. Professor Dr. Bruce C. Hopper, the Harvard University historian, asked him to assist him in his work. For a whole year they laboured together on studies on the course of the Second World War. Then Hopper suggested to Baumbach that he should write this book.

It was thus that this airman, who since schooldays had had a passion for history and writing, became an author. He was helped by the fact that he had performed the deeds of which he writes so graphically at an age at which "a young company officer hardly dared open his mouth at mess," as Bernard Shaw once put it.

In the spring of 1948, with Allied permission, he emigrated with his wife and son to South America and became technical adviser to industrial firms.

His many-sided activities during the war have given rise to many legends, rumours and conjectures about him, particularly after the war ended. The English Press called him "the German Lawrence of the Second World War." The only true element in them all is that in all his

work and actions Baum-bach regarded the human side as the only one that mattered, and both during and after the war spoke his mind without regard to any consequences to himself.

When a German reporter called him after the war he remarked, "I am still an enthusiastic flyer, but only for pleasure. I loathe war and will never drop a bomb again. My military ambitions are a thing of the past."

His ideas about the future development of armaments and war in the air made him one of the accepted international experts on air strategy.

In the Argentine Baumbach pursued research into the problems of remote-controlled flight. During an experiment in an obsolete aircraft he crashed and was drowned in the Rio de la Plata. The Argentinian Government sent his remains to his home town of Coppenburg in Oldenburg, Germany. At the time of his death Baumbach was thirty-six years old.

PREFACE

Once again I am glancing through my flying log-book to find a thought fitted to serve as an introduction to this book.

I have written about the war. The facts line up, naked, remorseless. The technical side often seems to thrust the human aspect of the great catastrophe into the background. It soberly and fittingly prefers to leave to the expert and the airman the proper conclusions to be drawn from the questions and problems raised in our exclusive domain. Yet this book has been written not for experts only, but a wider circle whose interest in the nature and development of aviation calls for a popular treatment of a highly complex matter. This compels me to make known my own standpoint as a human being.

In this ticklish undertaking I should not wish to weary the reader with my own short, if eventful, career. Some notes in the last pages of my war diary may enlighten him as to my mental outlook:

"Surely the earth is a Whole only for one who is himself a Whole; it is disrupted and dismembered only to those who are themselves disrupted and dismembered.

"The modern seven-league boots of my beloved bird bore me over blood and mud, pettiness and infamy, from fathomless depths to wondrous heights. Amidst lacy cloudbanks, the fierce storms of the North Sea, the scented dreams of Sicilian nights, the all-knowing smile of the moon, the starry spheres, I began to learn what God is.

"In this twentieth century Dance of Death the door to damnation, the collapse of Western culture, has been forced wide open. Life remains only in the life within, the timid beating of the heart and the painful sting of the heart's longing. And yet Mother Earth will not be wrenched from her moorings nor her framework burst apart: for God still lives and His fires still burn.

"In these years of decision the young airman that I was has greatly changed, and matured far beyond his years. A necessary preliminary was his whole youth, his restlessness, his wanderings, his eagerness for the laurels of heroism, his consuming love, his struggle with his own soul, his travail and despair, his yearning for harmony and salvation."

In this book I am trying to offer a critical commentary on the war in the air, seen within the framework of the war as a whole, with the object of assisting in a subsequent historical examination of the catastrophe to my nation by a truthful relation of the facts. By the title of the

babies cowering by the roadside, prisoners from the concentration camps being driven like cattle in the darkness. Roads of death.

"And God is silent?"

"My mind is made up, all doubts and fears are banished. I will go to Himmler and tell him frankly what I think, as I always have. Until day dawns I sit up writing a letter to my wife and son. An officer is sent specially to Bavaria to find Galland.

"Then I drive off. It is the 28th April, 1945. I have been told that at the moment Himmler is at Güstrow in Mecklenburg. Here again the roads are blocked with refugees. There is no traffic going east. In the faces of the thousands of poor wretches whom I pass I can see that unspeakable misery which Dante tried to put into words in *La Grande Tristezza*. Here it has become flesh and blood.

"After five hours' driving we reach Güstrow. S.S. patrols show us the way. They had been told of our coming. My friend Knemeyer sits silent next to me. He has not deserted me. We drive to a country house. An S.S. sentry takes us into the house and tells us to make ourselves comfortable in the living room. The Reichsführer will send for us at once.

"I throw off my heavy cloak and look around. Everything here is simple and dignified and one feels at once that the furniture, pictures and lamps have been lovingly created by real artists. I cannot escape the contrast with overloaded Karinhall, but why it comes to mind I do not know. I mention it to my companion. Knemeyer smiles and points to two photographs in front of a mirror. I have a closer look and no one could have been more surprised. The two portraits are in silver frames. One is autographed as follows:

**Sir Henry Deterding—in the name of the German people, for your noble donation of a million reichs-marks.
Adolf Hitler.**

"Under the second photograph, which shows the Com-mander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe in a mediaeval German stage costume holding a large hunting-knife, the astonished visitor read:

**To my dear Deterding, in gratitude for your noble gift of Rominten Reichs Hunting Lodge.
Your Hermann Goring.**

"Now we know where we are—at Krakow, in Sir Henry Deterding's Mecklenburg country place.

"The life of this great man of business passed before my eyes. A few days ago I happened to be talking to an old friend of Sir Henry. And now I have come across these photographs with their inscriptions. I can hardly refrain from stuffing these two historical documents into my brief case to add to my collection to witness the fact that in this world only money really counts and Might is Right.

"Henry Deterding was knighted by King George V on New Year's Day, 1920, and a book about him, *The Victory of Shell over the German Empire*, appeared the same day. It was the same Deterding who built up his oil trust with the old Paris banking house of Rothschild and changed the name of his company from Royal Dutch to Shell. It was under the same Deterding, who was nicknamed 'Napoleon', that Shell became the main pillar of the British world empire. The *Entente* powers had swum to victory on the great streams of oil he poured out for them.

"Then he became the sworn foe of the U.S.S.R. and the 'red oil', which he had lost at Maikop, Grosny, Baku and in the Urals and Turkestan. Had he not once written that a permanent solution of the oil crisis would never be possible before there was a satisfactory solution of the Russian problem? Was that the reason why he had backed National Socialism, or was there some other explanation of these donations and charities? He alone could clear up all the political background. But Sir Henry Deterding is dead.

"And now the Deterding dream itself is about to fade away for ever. In a few days the Russians will be here to occupy the German country place of a Knight of the British Empire. Are the Russians stronger than National Socialism and Deterding put together?

"The voice of the A.D.C. breaks in on my musings. 'The Reichsführer will receive you.'

"I am taken along a narrow corridor and up a winding staircase guarded by S.S. sentries to Himmler's study. The room seems to have been left as it was, but in one corner there is a machine-pistol within range. Its safety-catch is off. Himmler, in high black boots, field grey uniform of some coarse material and with the skull and S.S. insignia on the collar, is sitting at a desk alone. His sleeves are much too long and half conceal the hands, which have something uncanny about them. There is a forlorn, cheap ring on the little finger of Ms left hand. It must be a memory of the past. Himmler's face, which I have often studied, has nothing special about it. It looks unhealthy, somewhat puffy, wax coloured, and the chin is too small. Two cold, indifferent eyes size me up from behind pince-nez. He seems very overtired, but his greeting is emphatically friendly. His handshake is not that of a man of energy. Everything about him is curiously soft and he seems almost harmless. Is he not known as 'soft Heinrich'? And yet his impenetrable personality fills the room.

"He motions me to sit down. 'I've sent for you to clear up some Luftwaffe problems. In the very near future I must expect to be negotiating with our enemies, probably through some neutral country. The war has entered the final stage and there are some very important decisions I shall have to take. The Führer is isolated in Berlin. I shall be the only man to prevent chaos in Germany and I think that foreigners will not negotiate with anyone but myself.'

"Himmler speaks in his strong Bavarian accent and his voice is as level as if he were discussing something of no importance whatever. He enlarges on the possibility of continuing the war in Mecklenburg and Schleswig-Holstein. He will form Freikorps, as in the old days of the War of Liberation. The position is far from hopeless. Himmler talks as if he were Hitler's successor already— not in so many words, but with broad hints. Then he continues less enigmatically and I am at last told why I have been sent for: 'I've already told you that in the very near future I shall probably have to negotiate through a neutral country. I've heard that all aircraft suitable for the purpose are under your command. What possibilities are there?'

"I gazed out at the well-kept park through the broad windows. I knew about Himmler's vain peace-feelers to the West back in 1940 and others in the late autumn of 1944 through Switzerland; now there appeared to be an approach through Sweden. What was the 'Truest of the True' up to now? 'Reichsführer,' I answered after a pause, 'I was examining the map of the world yesterday to see where we could fly to. I have planes and flying-boats ready to fly to any point of the globe. The aircraft are manned by trustworthy crews. I have given instructions that nothing is to take off without a verbal order from myself.'

"Himmler's voice is a tone lower as he replies: 'I think you have misunderstood me. What I mean is that if I have to start negotiations I shall probably need some aeroplanes. Have you got some?'