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OPERATION «REICHSKANZLEI» (22–27 APRIL 1945): A WHITE SPOT OF THE BATTLE FOR BERLIN

To the blessed memory of Kostiantyn Yukhymovych Hlomezda — my teacher and scientific mentor, without whose advice, support, and noble dedication a full-fledged study of the operation «Reichskanzlei», would not have been possible.

Abstract. *The purpose is to attempt a comprehensive study of the German transport and logistics operation «Reichskanzlei», which aim was to deliver Kriegsmarine units by air to the besieged Berlin. The main objectives are to highlight the preconditions, course and results of the operation «Reichskanzlei» in the context of the Battle of Berlin and studying the practice of using «alarm» units in a critical situation at the front. **Methodology.** General scientific methods are used: synthesis, analysis, induction, deduction, as well as historical methods: problem-chronological, historical-reconstruction, historical-critical and social grid method. **Scientific novelty.** In this research were used German archival documents from the Second World War, which were captured by the Red Army and taken to the Soviet Union, where they are still stored in the branch archives of the Ministry of Defense and the FSB of the Russian Federation. Also, the testimonies of German army soldiers who were directly involved in the operation were used and introduced into scientific circulation. To accomplish the research tasks were used the works of Günter Ott and Tony Le Tissier, which are little known in Ukrainian historiography. On the basis of these sources was made the first attempt in historiography to comprehensively study the preconditions, course and consequences of the operation «Reichskanzlei». **Conclusions.** The study analyzed the prerequisites for the start of the operation «Reichskanzlei», the personal factor of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz as the executor of the operation, the personnel of the Kriegsmarine units that were selected as reinforcements for the Berlin garrison, the process of creating an air bridge to the besieged city, and the direct participation of Kriegsmarine soldiers in the Battle of Berlin. Operation «Reichskanzlei» is an example of a little-studied military logistics operation of the last days of the war in Europe. It showed that the German military machine, even when on the verge of collapse, could organize and implement decisive military operations. In addition, it reveals the personal factor of Grand Admiral Karl*

Dönitz as one of the main executors of the operation, which adds new touches to his historical portrait. The study of the experience of creating and using «alarm» units in a critical situation at the front is quite important and relevant in view of the events of the Russo-Ukrainian war, which have shown that the practice of using such units continues to this day. Nevertheless, based on the results of the study, it can be stated that such units have the potential to perform only certain short-term local tasks, such as eliminating an enemy breakthrough or organizing a counterattack, while the main role in combat operations should be played by appropriately trained, armed and coordinated units.

Key words: *Battle of Berlin, operation «Reichskanzlei», Karl Dönitz, Kriegsmarine, «Alarm» units, battalion «Grossadmiral Dönitz», storm of the Reichstag.*

The problem of poorly researched events of World War II remains relevant even 79 years after its end. One of these «white spots» can be considered the operation «Reichskanzlei» carried out by the German High Command during the Battle of Berlin. Its purpose was to organize an air bridge to Berlin, besieged by Soviet troops, to deliver reinforcements which should consist of the Kriegsmarine sailors. Despite the fairly good state of scientific research of the Battle of Berlin itself, the events of operation «Reichskanzlei» have been neglected by researchers. Currently, there is only one study in historiography, conducted by the German scholar Günter Ott, based on oral history testimonies of the operation participants¹. However, despite the scientific value of the German scholar's publication, it covered only the immediate process of the air bridge's functioning, while the preconditions, the process of preparing the operation, and the combat actions of Kriegsmarine's units in the besieged city were left out. That is why it was decided to attempt a comprehensive study of this operation and to highlight its preconditions, course and consequences.

The scientific novelty of the chosen topic is due to the fact that since the publication of Günter Ott (1955), historians have not made any attempts to study it comprehensively. German researcher Werner Haupt in his study «The Battle of Berlin» mentions only the fact that planes with Kriegsmarine sailors on board landed in the city, but considers it a purely situational case, not a pre-planned operation². The same can be said of the authors of the study «The Air Battle for Berlin», which also mentions in passing the deployment of one of Kriegsmarine's units to the city³. The world-famous historian Anthony Beevor,

¹ Ott G. Unternehmen «Reichskanzlei» Teil des Reports über die Transportflüge von und nach Berlin im April 1945. Jet & Prop 4, 1995.

² Хаунт В. Сражение за Берлин. Штурм цитадели Гитлера. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2014.

³ Дегтев Д., Зефирова М., Зубов Д. Воздушная битва за Берлин. Последнее сражение Люфтваффе 1945. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2017.

in his work *World War II*, the Ukrainian translation of which was published in 2022, mentions the events of the operation in one sentence, making a factual error⁴. The English historian Barry Turner, in his work «Karl Dönitz and the Last Days of the Third Reich», also completely ignores the role of the German admiral in the operation «Reichskanzlei»⁵. The base of ego-sources written by people involved in the direct execution of the operation is extremely limited⁶, which once again further emphasizes the relevance of this study.

The research of the preconditions, course, and consequences of the operation «Reichskanzlei» was made possible only by the use of documents of the Kriegsmarine High Command that were captured by the Red Army and taken to the Soviet Union, where they are still stored in the branch archives of the Ministry of Defense and the FSB of the Russian Federation. These documents form the source base of the study and are introduced into scientific circulation.

Additional relevance of the article is added by the fact that during the Russo-Ukrainian war, the media repeatedly published information about the forced use of technical specialists, military support personnel, etc. not for their intended purpose, but as infantry. That is why the study of the German experience of using mixed units will be able to refute or confirm the effectiveness of such measures, as well as formulate certain recommendations that will increase the effectiveness of such tactics.

On the morning of 16 April 1945, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian and 1st Belorussian Fronts launched an offensive on the Oder Front. The main attack was launched from the Küstrin bridgehead by four combined arms and two tank armies. As of the evening of 16 April, German troops were still holding defensive positions on the Seelow Heights, but on 17 April, Soviet troops managed to break through the German front line at the junction of the 101st Army Corps and the 11th SS Corps. This contributed to the fact that already on

⁴ Бівор Е. Друга світова війна. Київ: КМ-БУКС, 2022. С. 786.

⁵ Turner B. Karl Doenitz ant the last days of the Third Reich. Icon Books, 2016.

⁶ In the memoirs of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, the direct executive of the operation (*Donitz K. Memoirs: Ten Years and Twenty Days*. Greenhill Books, 1990. P. 435–437), and Admiral Walter Lüde-Neurath, one of Dönitz's closest collaborators, the events of Operation Reich Chancellery are not mentioned in any way. Even in his post-war publication on the last days of the war in Europe and his role in the Dönitz administration, Admiral Lüde-Neurath ignores any military operations carried out by the Kriegsmarine High Command (*Lüde-Neurath W. Unconditional surrender: a memoir of the last days of the Third Reich and the Dönitz administration*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2010. P. 22; *Людде-Нейрат В. Конец на немецкой земле. Итоги Второй мировой войны. Выводы побежденных*. Москва: Полигон, 1998. С. 568–588).

18 April the defence line on the Seelow Heights ceased to exist⁷ and the front line began to approach the capital of the Third Reich, Berlin, in a threatening manner.

Even a cursory analysis of the balance of power on the eve of the Battle of Berlin allows us to conclude that the advantage was not on the side of the German High Command: against the 1st and 2nd Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts, which were approaching the city and had 2.5 million soldiers and officers, 41,699 artillery guns and 6,250 pieces of armored vehicles, the German High Command could only field 1 million soldiers and officers, 10,400 artillery guns and about 1,500 pieces of armored vehicles⁸.



The Berlin Volkssturm units receive weapons.
All of them are holding Italian Carcano model 1891/38 rifles.

The situation with defense of the Reich capital was also quite threatening. On paper, the order to begin construction of the «Festung Berlin» was given on February 1, 1945, but in practice it turned out that an adequate number of reinforced concrete fortifications that could stop the Soviet offensive had not been built⁹, and the few anti-tank ditches that were dug around the city

⁷ Куровски Ф. Битва за Рейх. Последние бастионы Гитлера 1944–1945. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2015. С. 343–344.

⁸ Там же. С. 343–344; 342–343.

⁹ Хаунт В. Сражение за Берлин... С. 59.

hindered the transfer of German army units more than helped to stop the Soviet troops¹⁰.

To provide the defence of the city, the command of the Berlin garrison could only rely on the forces of the 56th Panzer Corps, which, according to the memoirs of its commander, General Helmut Weidling, consisted of the Müncheberg Motorized Division, the 23rd and 11th SS Motorized Divisions Nederland and Nordland, the 18th and 20th Motorized Divisions, the 9th Fallschirmjäger-Division, and the 408th Volkartilleriekorps, with a total of about 50,000 soldiers and officers¹¹. Moreover, even these relatively small regular forces, which constituted the main backbone of the Berlin garrison, were significantly weakened: the motorized divisions lacked armor and personnel, the Fallschirmjäger-Division and the Nederland Division were almost reduced to battalion size, and the main source of support, the Volkartilleriekorps, had almost no ammunition for its guns¹². Moreover, even the fact that the 56th Panzer Corps, despite its name, did not have a single tank unit in its ranks clearly demonstrates its extremely limited combat potential. The German High Command had the quite logical impression that it was completely impossible to adequately counter the Soviet offensive with these forces. At the initial stage, the German Command tried to compensate for the lack of regular troops by creating units of the Volkssturm, i.e., the people's militia, but the lack of weapons in Berlin's arsenals made it impossible to arm these troops more or less adequately¹³. As a result, the Volkssturm were armed with either ersatz samples or trophy weapons made in Italy, France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, which were not suitable for German ammunition, and the stocks of trophy ammunition, as can be guessed, were extremely limited¹⁴. It also requires no further explanation that children and the old people¹⁵, who had no relevant combat experience and did not even always know how to use the weapons they received, could not tip the scales in favor of the German army.

¹⁰ This was further facilitated by the fact that the defence of Berlin was to be led by Wehrmacht generals, while the construction of fortifications around the city was controlled by NSDAP officials. This «dual power» led to the fact that some fortifications and defences were built in the wrong places from the point of view of military strategy. Див. Хаунт В. Сражение за Берлин. С. 70–71.

¹¹ Протокол допроса командующего обороной Берлина немецкого генерала Г. Вейдлинга, сдавшего в плен 2 мая 1945 г. № 39. Май 1945 г. Центральный Архив Министерства Обороны РФ (далі — ЦАМО РФ), ф. 233, оп. 2374, д. 154, л. 122–131.

¹² Хаунт В. Сражение за Берлин... С. 77–78.

¹³ Yelton D. Hitler's Volkssturm: the Nazi Militia and the fall of Germany, 1944–1945. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2002. P. 108–109.

¹⁴ Carruthers B. Gotterdammerung: The last days of the Wehrmacht in the East. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2012. P. 110–111.

¹⁵ See Carruthers B. Gotterdammerung: The last days of the Wehrmacht in the East... P. 107.

The only exceptions were people of those age groups who had served in the German army during the Great War and had basic military skills¹⁶. Nevertheless, thanks to these measures the Berlin garrison was replenished with approximately 30 battalions of Volkssturm¹⁷.

Despite all the measures taken to form the people's militia, they could not, for obvious reasons, cover the shortage of experienced personnel in the ground units. There was an urgent need to mobilize soldiers who had military experience or had served in paramilitary structures. By 1945, most of the trainees of the Hitler Youth and League of German Girls had already served in military units or in the Luftschutz air defense organization, so the capabilities of these organizations were largely exhausted. That is why the German command drew attention to the personnel of the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe. Given the fact that by 1945 the Germans had lost air superiority and almost all of their large ships, the High Command decided that soldiers and officers of the air and naval forces should be transferred to the ground forces.

This practice began in 1942, when Luftwaffe ground personnel were first used to create air field divisions, which, despite the fact that they officially continued to be part of the air force, were actually ground units¹⁸.

The same was true for the Navy, whose ground personnel were used to form a «naval division». An admiral was appointed commander of this formation, with only one ground forces officer attached to his headquarters as an adviser on tactics of warfare¹⁹. According to the memoirs of



Kriegsmarine Officer learns how to use the Panzerfaust. An image from the chronicle.

¹⁶ Die Deutsche Wochenschau Nr. 750 (25.01.1945). URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyWiT-WGIPs> (дата звернення 30.03.2024).

¹⁷ Собственноручные показания генерала артиллерии Гельмута Вейдлинга. 4 января 1946 года. Центральный Архив ФСБ РФ (*дали* — ЦА ФСБ РФ). Арх. Н-21146, т. 1, л. 75–126.

¹⁸ Ruffner K. Luftwaffe field divisions 1941–1945. Oxford Osprey Publishing, 1990. P. 3–7.

¹⁹ Beevor A. Berlin: the downfall. London: Penguin Books, 2003. P. 159–160.

Grand Admiral Dönitz, about 50,000 Kriegsmarine troops were mobilized to defend the eastern borders of the Reich²⁰.

However, the Kriegsmarine personnel were used not only as part of purely «naval» subunits, but also as a replenishment for ground formations. For example, about 2,000 sailors were sent to the 20th Panzergrenadier Division, which was stationed in Seelow²¹.

Paradoxically, such mixed units of Wehrmacht soldiers, Volkssturm, Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine ground personnel in some cases proved to be quite battle-worthy and demonstrated excellent results. For example, during the battles for the city of Königsberg, these units demonstrated exceptional resilience, courage and high morale. Despite the total superiority of the Soviet troops, they not only managed to hold their positions and repel the first assault on the city, but also launched a successful local counterattack in certain areas of the front. The most famous of these operations is the raid deep into Soviet positions under the command of the Königsberg kreisleiter, which resulted in the regaining of control over the Neuhausen airfield²². In general, the combined garrison of Königsberg demonstrated exceptional resilience, and some of its units continued to resist even after the city's surrender²³.

Obviously, the German High Command appreciated the experience of using such mixed units quite highly²⁴, because, by Hitler's order, about 30 battalions from the personnel of the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe were to be formed to strengthen the defence of Berlin²⁵. Interestingly, the weapons for these battalions were to be taken from the Berlin Volkssturm units, which indicates that the High Command prioritized the formation of these 30 battalions over the arming of the Volkssturm.

Of course, the personnel of the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine were not up to the level of a fully trained infantryman, but in the conditions when the old and children were sent to the front in the ranks of the Volkssturm in large numbers, any reinforcement had a great importance for the situation at the front. In addition, the Navy and Air Force had basic skills in handling weapons, knew

²⁰ *Donitz K.* Memoirs: Ten Years and Twenty Days... P. 433–434.

²¹ *Altner H.* Berlin dance of death. Havertown, PA: CASEMATE, 2005. P. 22, 28.

²² *Yelton D.* Hitler's Volkssturm: the Nazi Militia and the fall of Germany... P. 122.

²³ *Ibid.* P. 133.

²⁴ This can be seen in the fact that the commander of the Königsberg Volkssturm battalion, Ernst Tiburzy, was awarded the highest honour of the Reich, the Knight's Cross. He was the first of only four members of the Volkssturm to receive this award during the entire war. Die Deutsche Wochenschau Nr. 755 (22.03.1945) URL: [https://archive.org/details/1945-03-22-Die-Deutsche-Wochenschau-755_\(дата_звернення_30.03.2024\)](https://archive.org/details/1945-03-22-Die-Deutsche-Wochenschau-755_(дата_звернення_30.03.2024)).

²⁵ *Yelton D.* Hitler's Volkssturm: the Nazi Militia and the fall of Germany... P. 126.

the military subordination, and were more stress-resistant than the Volksturm, who spent most time of their military training by digging fortifications²⁶.

Nevertheless, despite all the measures taken by the German High Command to increase the number of Berlin garrison the city was completely surrounded on April 23–24, and the land route for the transfer of potential reinforcements was cut off. The only available option for the German High Command was to create an air bridge. With this in mind, Hitler initiated an order to airlift battalions of Kriegsmarine troops to Berlin. This order was conveyed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, during his telephone conversation with *Kapitän zur See* Assmann, which took place at midnight on April 22, 1945²⁷. These events marked the beginning of Operation «Reichskanzlei».

The question of why Kriegsmarine's units were chosen to be airlifted to Berlin is worthy of separate consideration. After all, despite the Wehrmacht's difficult situation, it still had the remains of elite units that would have been much more useful as a replenishment for the Berlin garrison than sailors. Moreover, in the Third Reich, the Waffen-SS troops were considered to be the most fanatically loyal to the Führer. Given the almost hopeless situation of the Berlin garrison, which had to fight in conditions of complete encirclement, such fanaticism could ensure that these units would fight «to the last bullet». Finally, we should not forget about the airborne units, whose main function was airborne assault, and who had good fighting skills and were better armed than conventional infantry units.

Nevertheless, Hitler chose the Kriegsmarine as reinforcements for the «Festung Berlin». In my opinion, several factors could have influenced the reasons for this choice.

First, the trust that Hitler had in the officers and men of the navy was evident. For example, when in February 1945 Admiral Friedrich Hüffmeier was appointed Commandant of the Channel Islands instead of a Wehrmacht general, Hitler himself explained his personnel decision as follows: «Many fortresses have surrendered, but no ships were ever lost without fighting to the last man»²⁸. In other words, against the backdrop of the defeats of the ground forces, some of Hitler's hopes were pinned on the navy and its personnel.

Secondly, it is worth mentioning that the SS troops discredited themselves in Hitler's eyes because of their failure in the Balaton Counteroffensive. This

²⁶ Carruthers B. Gotterdammerung: The last days of the Wehrmacht in the East... P. 112–113.

²⁷ Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine (OKM) in der Zeit vom 21. April bis 1. Mai 1945 und die russische Übersetzung. ЦАМО РФ, ф. 500, оп. 12453, д. 31, л. 4.

²⁸ O'Hara V. Defiant until the end. *World war II*. 2005. P. 48.

strategically important operation, which took place in the area of Lake Balaton, was intended to drive Soviet troops away from Hungarian oil fields, which, in the face of a total fuel shortage, were vital for the continuation of the war. Another goal of the operation was to ensure Hungary's continued participation in the war as an ally of the Reich. An elite formation, the 6th SS Panzer Army, was allocated to participate in the operation. Nevertheless, despite the initial success of the operation, the tank army was forced to retreat after encountering strong resistance from Soviet troops. Adolf Hitler regarded this failure as an unauthorized retreat without his order²⁹. Given the fact that Hitler was the initiator and ideological inspirer of this counteroffensive, this failure contributed greatly to discrediting the SS troops in his eyes. As a confirmation of this assumption, we can recall Hitler's order obliging all SS soldiers to hand over their cuff titles, which were a sign of their belonging to these elite units³⁰. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the SS men did hand over their cuff titles, but sent them to Hitler in a night pot, thus demonstrating their disdain for his orders and insignia. It is not known for certain whether Hitler received this «parcel», but the significance of the precedent itself is difficult to deny.

Thirdly, it can be assumed that the personal factors of the commanders-in-chief of the three branches of the German armed forces and Reichsführer SS also played a role in Hitler's decision.

For example, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler compromised himself in Hitler's eyes as a commander-in-chief of the Vistula Army Group. During his tenure operation «Sonnenwende», a counteroffensive by the German armies in Pomerania, failed and favourable defensive positions along the Vistula River were lost³¹. In addition, Himmler devoted only a few hours a day to his direct duties as commander-in-chief, spending the rest of his time settling personal matters³². Such a negligent attitude of the Reichsführer to his duties could not contribute to further confidence in him in military matters on the part of the High Command. Realizing this fact, on March 16, 1945, Himmler faked an

²⁹ *Beevor A. Berlin: the downfall... P. 151.*

³⁰ These cuff titles were placed on the left sleeves of Waffen-SS uniforms and bore the name of the division or regiment in which the wearer served. See *Michaelis R. Insignia of the Waffen-SS. Atglen: Schiffer Publishing, 2016. P. 54–65.*

³¹ Without prior consultation with the High Command, Himmler ordered the withdrawal from the cities of Torn, Kulm, and Marienwerder without a fight. Siehe: *Guderian H. Erinnerungen eines Soldaten. Neckargemund: Kurt Vowinkel Verlag, 1960. P. 368.*

³² For example, the Reichsführer would not begin his duties as commander-in-chief until 10:30 a.m., after taking a bath and visiting a personal masseur. Officers were also forbidden to disturb Himmler's sleep, even if it was required by an urgent deterioration of the situation at the front. See *Beevor A. Berlin: the downfall... P. 130.*

illness and went to the hospital in order to actually remove himself from the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Vistula Army Group³³.

Moreover, in the mid-April 1945, Himmler had almost completely withdrawn from «big politics», travelling between Schloss Ziegen, the sanatorium in Hohenlinden, and the city of Flensburg, where the headquarters of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz was located³⁴. In other words, the Reichsführer lost Hitler's trust as a result of his complete incompetence in the conduct of hostilities and his negligent attitude to his duties.

On 20 April, the head of the Luftwaffe, Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, left the Reich capital for Austria, where he waited for the outcome of the Battle of Berlin in order to become the head of the Third Reich and begin negotiations on surrender, in accordance with his rights as Hitler's successor. The actual leadership of the Luftwaffe was taken over by General Karl Koller, who remained in Berlin until 23 April³⁵.

Taking into account the fact that Hermann Goering, despite his arrogant statements, demonstrated his inability to protect the territory of the Reich from bombing³⁶ and his ineffectiveness as the Luftwaffe commander-in-chief, his role was reduced to that of a «wedding general» — a mere representative figure whom Hitler also considered as a potential candidate for negotiations with the Allies after his death. In particular, on 23 April 1945, during one of the meetings, Hitler explicitly said that «despite all this [all the negative qualities of Goering], he only has to negotiate the surrender»³⁷. Thus, Reichsmarschall Goering was seen by Hitler as his successor at a time when the Führer himself would be dead and Germany would have to start negotiating the surrender. In other words, the Reichsmarschall was a candidate for the role of surrender, not a fighter to the last.

Wilhelm Keitel, who was the chief of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), had a reputation as an extremely compliant and uninitiative man who would never object to Hitler on any issue³⁸. Nevertheless, Keitel himself did not enjoy authority among the military and could not boast of Hitler's trust in

³³ Macksey K. Guderian, Panzer general. London: Greenhill Books, 1992. P. 200.

³⁴ Padfield P. Himmler: Reichsführer-SS. London: Macmillan, 1990. P. 590, 593–595.

³⁵ Керсоди Ф. Герман Геринг. Второй человек третьего рейха. Москва: Эксмо, 2014. С. 665.

³⁶ At the beginning of the war, Goering said: «Not a single [enemy] bomber will reach the Ruhr area! If even one does, don't call me Goering, call me Mayer». Given the fact that German cities were being bombed in the final stages of the war, the citizens of the Reich nicknamed the air raid sirens «Mayer's sirens». Див.: Бівор Е. Друга світова. Київ: КМ-БУКС, 2022. С. 489.

³⁷ Керсоди Ф. Герман Геринг. Второй человек Третьего рейха... С. 801.

³⁸ Ширер В. Злет і падіння Третього райху. Київ: Наш Формат, 2017. Т. 2. С. 526.

his person. In fact, Keitel's role was reduced to that of a silent secretary in uniform. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the «generals' conspiracy» and the «July 1944 assassination attempt» caused Hitler's total distrust of the Wehrmacht generals³⁹.

A completely different situation developed around the personality of Karl Dönitz, the Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine. His own subordinates called him «the lion»⁴⁰, and army generals called him «Hitlerjunge Dönitz», similar to the popular film *Hitlerjunge Quex*⁴¹. This film tells the story of a young man named Quex, who, being loyal to the ideas of national socialism to the end, eventually raised his hand even against his own father, who held pro-communist views. In other words, it was the image of Hitler Youth that was exploited in the Third Reich as a collective image of the ideal National Socialist. It should be noted that an analysis of Karl Dönitz's behaviour and key decisions as Commander-in-Chief of the Navy suggests that he was indeed the best fit for his nickname.

Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine demonstrated exceptional initiative in his post. For example, having lost the ability to wage war at sea with large ships, Grand Admiral Dönitz launched an unrestricted submarine war. At the same time, when the Western Allies improved the technology of radar detection and destruction of German submarines, on the initiative of Admiral Hellmuth Heye was organised the K-Verbande which personnel were to operate midget submarines and included unit of frogmen — special forces soldiers trained to conduct sabotage activities behind enemy lines. At that time, the technology of production and layout of these boats was far from perfect, and the soldiers of this unit actually agreed to test prototypes of this equipment in combat conditions, which led to serious losses. Given the voluntary nature of the unit, as well as the exceptional degree of self-sacrifice of its members, combined with its good performance⁴², its activities could not but delight the command.

There is even an opinion that the personnel of this unit were chosen by Hitler as personal guards for his bunker in Berlin instead of the discredited SS soldiers. However, this will be discussed in more detail later.

³⁹ For example, even the officers of the general staff had to submit their briefcases for inspection and hand over their personal weapons before attending a meeting with Hitler. See *Beevor A. Berlin: the downfall...* P. 58.

⁴⁰ *Lüdde-Neurath W. Unconditional surrender: a memoir of the last days of the Third Reich...* P. 19.

⁴¹ *Beevor A. Berlin: the downfall...* P. 154.

⁴² According to German statistics, one of the K-Verbande units equipped with Seehund submarines inflicted 93,000 tonnes of losses on the enemy, and according to English statistics, 120,000 tonnes. See *Blocksdorf H. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military*, 2008. P. 111.

At the end of the Second World War, Karl Dönitz was one of the few military officers who had not lost Hitler's respect and trust. As a result, it was the Grand Admiral who was appointed commander of the German army in the north⁴³. The fact that a field marshal or a Wehrmacht general was not appointed to this position speaks volumes about Hitler's disappointment with the ground forces. At the same time, this fact also clearly demonstrates the Führer's attitude and confidence in Dönitz. A similar opinion was shared by CIA Director General Brian Conrad, who noted in his letter that «Dönitz's appointment reflected Hitler's growing distrust of the army leaders and Himmler. As a military officer, Dönitz was given command of the armed forces because, as a naval officer, he was able to avoid the distrust that Hitler had felt in the army since 20 July 1944»⁴⁴.

Thus, it can be concluded that against the background of the discredited commanders-in-chief of the Army, Air Force, and SS, Grand Admiral Dönitz looked like a pillar of National Socialism, who, even in a rather difficult time, was able to demonstrate loyalty to the oath, initiative in his position, and a resolute refusal to surrender. Moreover, Kriegsmarine's performance in comparison to the systematic defeats of the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe proved the Grand Admiral to be a competent person in military matters.

It is difficult to say for certain what Hitler was guided by when he ordered Dönitz to send Kriegsmarine reinforcements to besieged Berlin by air. Nevertheless, through the prism of historical and anthropological analysis, it can be assumed that by addressing his order to the Kriegsmarine and to Dönitz as their commander-in-chief, Hitler had the best chance of having his order not only heard but also executed. At the very least, the German Grand Admiral's personality suggested that he would definitely try to take the necessary measures to ensure the formation of battalions and the creation of an air bridge.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Hitler's order had been communicated to Dönitz, the Grand Admiral faced an extremely difficult task: to form pre-fabricated units of Kriegsmarine soldiers and, in the face of total enemy air superiority, to organise an air bridge to besieged Berlin to bring their reinforcements.

As mentioned earlier, Operation «Reichskanzlei» began on 22 April. It was also the day of the last meeting was held in the Führerbunker in Berlin. One of its participants, Hitler's personal stenographer, makes no mention of Hitler's order to move Kriegsmarine's units to the city. Nevertheless, an important

⁴³ *Villatoux P., Aiolfi X.* Final archives of the Fuhrerbunker. Philadelphia & Oxford: Casemate Publishers, 2020. P. 117.

⁴⁴ Письмо директора разведки США Брайона Конрада 1945 год. ЦА ФСБ РФ, ф. К-10с, оп. 4, д. 16, л. 28–38.

outcome of the meeting was that Hitler firmly decided that he would stay in Berlin and personally lead the defence of the capital of the «millennial Reich»⁴⁵. Given the fact that the meeting ended at around 8 p.m.⁴⁶ and that Karl Dönitz's telephone conversation with *Kapitän zur See* Assmann took place at midnight, it is quite possible to assume that at that time Hitler, having familiarised himself with the situation in Berlin, decided to urgently strengthen the city's garrison. Nevertheless, whenever the Führer decided to launch Operation «Reichskanzlei», he would have been able to inform the Grand Admiral, through Herr Assmann, no earlier than late in the evening. The fact is that Dönitz himself, according to Admiral Lüdde-Neurath's recollections, arrived at his new headquarters in Plön and connected to the communication system only late in the evening⁴⁷. Unfortunately, Herr Assmann himself left no memories, and Grand Admiral Dönitz makes no mention of this phone call in his memoirs. Nevertheless, the analysis of archival materials gives us the right to assert that it was *Kapitän zur See* Assmann's phone call that launched the Operation «Reichskanzlei».

First of all, it is necessary to provide some explanation about the name of the operation. The fact is that no specific name for the operation is recorded in archival documents, but its first researcher, Günter Ott, dubbed it the «Reichskanzlei» to distinguish it from other similar efforts to create an air bridge to further supply the Berlin garrison⁴⁸. That is why the author decided to use this name to demonstrate that both studies refer to the same operation.

It is worth noting that the Kriegsmarine High Command was quite committed to the operation and prepared the following units for deployment to Berlin:

- the Alarmbataillon, whose personnel were stationed in different locations. 288 soldiers were to be flown to Berlin by seaplane from the naval aviation base in Pütznitz (near the town of Ribnitz). Another 175 soldiers were to be flown from Tutow Airport (in the region of Western Pomerania)⁴⁹. Hereafter — Unit A.

⁴⁵ Электронная библиотека исторических документов. Из воспоминаний стенографиста рейхсканцелярии Г. Херргезеля о последнем совещании у А. Гитлера 22 апреля 1945 года. URL: <https://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/191717-iz-vozpominaniy-stenografista-reyhskantselyarii-g-herrgezelya-o-poslednem-soveschani-u-a-gitlera-22-aprelya-1945-goda#mode/grid/page/1/zoom/1> (дата звернения 22.04.2024).

⁴⁶ Там же.

⁴⁷ *Lüdde-Neurath W.* Unconditional surrender: a memoir of the last days of the Third Reich... P. 22.

⁴⁸ *Ott G.* Unternehmen «Reichskanzlei» Teil des Reports... P. 43.

⁴⁹ Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine (OKM) in der Zeit vom 21. April bis 1. Mai 1945 und die russische Übersetzung. ЦАМО РФ, ф. 500, оп. 12453, д. 31, л. 4.

- A battalion, which consisted of 472 soldiers and was based in Rostock. The flight to Berlin was planned to be made from the city's airport⁵⁰. Hereafter — Unit B.

It was planned to transfer these units to Berlin on the night of 25–26 April because only during this period the Kriegsmarine Command would have the necessary number of transport aircraft at its disposal. Nevertheless, obviously aware of the fact that 935 soldiers would not be enough to significantly strengthen the Berlin garrison, the Kriegsmarine command decided to bring in more forces and additionally allocated another unit. This combined battalion was to consist of 1,000 sailors stationed on the island of Fehmarn (north of the city of Lübeck, 18 km off the Danish coast) — hereafter — Unit C. They were to be transported to the city of Wismar and then to Rerik Airport, from where they were to be flown to Berlin. The deployment of this unit, apparently due to the large number of personnel, was scheduled for the night of 26–27 April⁵¹. However, apparently due to the critical situation at the front, the plan underwent significant changes and 800 soldiers from this unit were sent to the command of the Vistula Army Group. Thus, the personnel of the battalion from the island of Fehmarn was significantly reduced, and instead of 1,000 soldiers, the Berlin garrison could count on only a modest replenishment of 200 soldiers. *(For a better understanding of the location of all units, at the end of this article there is a map of the operation. Units of the first wave of the reinforcements are marked with letters from A to C).*

Unfortunately, no clear information on the personnel of the above-mentioned units has been found yet in the archival documents. However, in his testimony given in Soviet captivity, the Commandant of the Berlin Defence, General Helmut Weidling, recalled that on 26 April, during a telephone conversation, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Krebs, informed him that Grand Admiral Dönitz would send reinforcements from the best units of the fleet to Berlin — personnel from submarine schools in the amount of 3 marching battalions⁵².

The German researcher Werner Haupt provides slightly different information. Thus, according to him, it was the marines battalions that were to be delivered to Berlin⁵³. It should be emphasised at the outset that the name «marines» should not be taken literally, as under normal circumstances it is used to refer to units whose main task is to conduct combat operations as part

⁵⁰ Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine (OKM) in der Zeit vom 21. April bis 1. Mai 1945 und die russische Übersetzung. ЦАМО РФ, ф. 500, оп. 12453, д. 31, л. 4.

⁵¹ Dort.

⁵² Из записок коменданта Берлина генерала Вейдлинга о последних днях третьей империи. *Военно-исторический журнал*. 1961. № 10. С. 89–98, № 11. С. 83–92.

⁵³ *Хаупт В.* Сражение за Берлин... С. 119.

of a naval assault force. The fact is that the German army simply did not have any marine units, and during the landings from the sea, its role was performed by regular Wehrmacht units⁵⁴. Therefore, it is necessary to critically analyse the available information on the personnel of these units.

Unfortunately, the documents of Kriegsmarine's headquarters do not contain information about personnel of the consolidated units. However, knowing their locations, we can try to make assumptions on this issue. For example, based on the above statement by General Krebs about the personnel of the submarine schools, we can try to identify these training units.

Thus, in the immediate vicinity of the location of Grand Admiral Dönitz's headquarters, there were at least two training units of the Kriegsmarine submarine fleet: the submarine school in Mürwik and the 24th (training) submarine flotilla based in Eckernförde⁵⁵. Given the fact that this flotilla was disbanded in March 1945, it is quite plausible to assume that its personnel-instructors and their students-could have been used as infantry.

Also can not be ignored the fact that the 26th Submarine Flotilla was based in Rostock, where the aforementioned Kriegsmarine Battalion (Unit B) was based, and that two training flotillas were operating near the Fehmarn island (Unit C). The 19th submarine flotilla was based in Kiel, and the 25th in Travemünde. All three flotillas remained operational and continued their activities until the surrender of Germany⁵⁶.

That is why it is likely that the data provided by General Krebs is correct and that the personnel of the battalions consisted at least partly of cadets from the Kriegsmarine submarine schools.

It is difficult to determine what part of the personnel of the units could have been submariners. There is evidence that the 24th Flotilla (during its entire existence) included 53 submarines, the 26th — 7, and the 19th — 4. The 25th Flotilla did not have submarines in its composition, as it was actually a torpedo school. Given the approximate number of the crew on a German submarine — about 50 people⁵⁷ — it is possible to calculate how many servicemen were in a particular flotilla. However, it is worth repeating once again that these calculations are approximate and should not be relied upon completely.

⁵⁴ For example, the German occupation of the Channel Islands was carried out by the Wehrmacht units, not the Kriegsmarine.

⁵⁵ *Залесский К.* Кригсмарине. Военно-морской флот Третьего Рейха. Москва: Яуза, 2005. С. 29.

⁵⁶ Там же. С. 29–30.

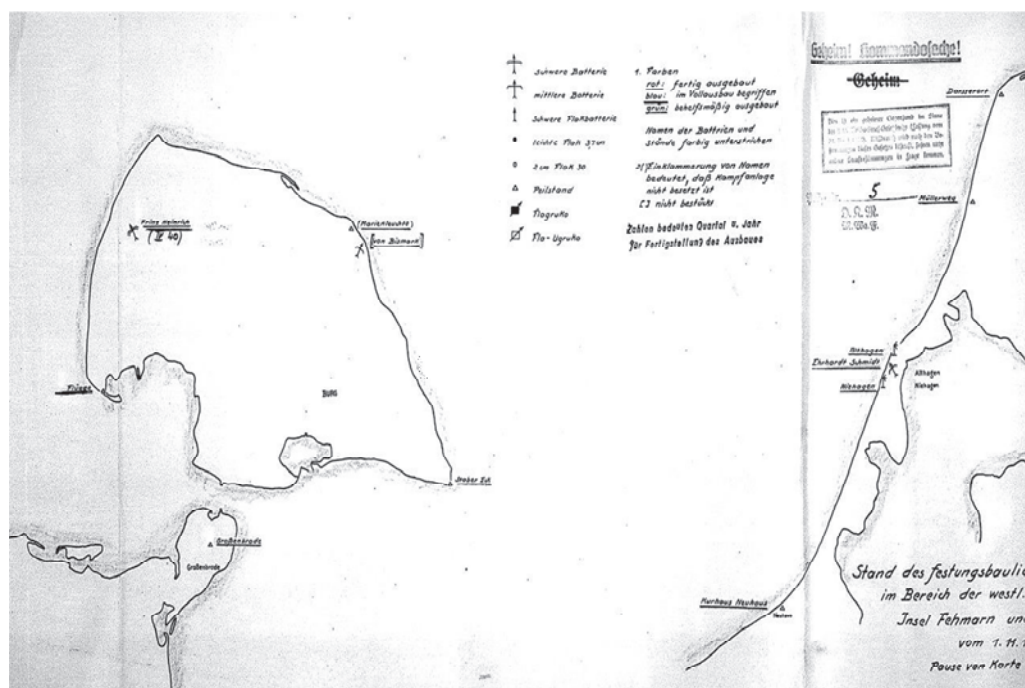
⁵⁷ The number of crew on the most common submarine model in Kriegsmarine U-Boot-Klasse VII was taken as an example.

Nevertheless, assumptions about the personnel of the battalions can be made not only from General Weidling's memoirs.

In his research, Tony Le Tissier notes that «Alarmbataillon» from Tutow (unit A) consisted of three companies of the naval trainees, a company of officer cadets and a headquarters. The commander of the unit, which received the name «Grossadmiral Dönitz», was Franz Kuhlmann⁵⁸.

The state of this battalion can also be judged by its name, because the very classification of this unit as a «Alarm» indicates that it was created in a hurry in the critical situation at the front and consisted of any units that were in the area. This was also true for this unit, as its commander, Franz Kuhlmann, did not even have time to add the names of his subordinates to the personnel lists⁵⁹.

Usually, such «Alarmbattailon» included military personnel from headquarters and logistics and supply units, i.e. people who under normal circumstances were not supposed to take direct part in hostilities⁶⁰.



Kriegsmarine map of the Fehmarn island.

⁵⁸ Tissier Le, T. Race for the Reichstag. Pen & Sword Military, 2010. P. 68.

⁵⁹ Дегтев Д., Зефирова М., Зубов Д. Воздушная битва за Берлин... С. 161–162.

⁶⁰ 1945-05 Intelligence Bulletin. Vol. 03. № 9. P. 48. <https://archive.org/details/1945-05IntelligenceBulletinVol03No09-nsia/page/47/mode/2up> (дата звернення 30.03.2024).

Most often, such units were created to achieve a specific goal: to conduct a local counteroffensive or to «plug holes at the front». The quantitative composition of these «Alarm» units was not constant, but rather situational, as it depended on which units were in the right place at the right time. This thesis can be at least partially confirmed by the fact that the unit's size is not very significant — only two units of 288 and 175 people, respectively.

Another purpose of creating such units was garrison service. According to Hitler's order, all German cities were to become fortresses on the way of an enemy offensive. Since regular units were needed by the High Command at the front, the aforementioned battalions were most often created to provide them with garrison service. These battalions were supplied with weapons and uniforms from the arsenals of the cities in which they were stationed.

To start characteristic of the personnel of the battalion from the island of Fehmarn (C), it must be said that the first thing that catches our eye is the rather large number of soldiers that were part of it. Unfortunately, no information was found in the specialized literature on what kind of unit was stationed there. Nevertheless, the author managed to obtain from foreign colleagues a fragment of the Kriegsmarine map, which shows the island of Fehmarn. In particular, it shows two batteries of coastal artillery installed on the island — the heavy battery «Prince Heinrich» and the medium battery «von Bismarck». It can be assumed that the personnel of these batteries were mobilized into the combined battalion. Given the fact that the advantage in the Baltic Sea at that time was already fully owned by the Soviet fleet, the combat potential of the two batteries, one of which was armed with only 105 mm field guns⁶¹, was low for the Kriegsmarine Command. In his research, Ukrainian historian Andriy Haruk notes that the personnel of the coastal batteries were composed of soldiers from the Wehrmacht, Kriegsmarine, and Luftwaffe⁶². Most often, such units included soldiers who were unable to serve in frontline units due to their health condition⁶³.

In addition, the close proximity of the island of Fehmarn to the coast of Denmark, occupied by German troops, gives reason to believe that this area of warfare was not a priority for the German High Command and, as a result,

⁶¹ This is the «von Bismarck» battery, as evidenced by its marking on the map. About the meaning of the German markings see: German Military Symbols 1944. Washington (War Department): Military Intelligence division, 1944. P. 350.

⁶² Wehrmacht and Kriegsmarine soldiers were to operate the batteries' guns and perform coastal defence functions, while Luftwaffe soldiers operated anti-aircraft artillery to protect the coastal batteries. Див.: Харук А. Артиллерия вермахта. Москва: Эксмо, 2010. URL: http://loveread.cc/read_book.php?id=75965&p=16#gl_14 (дата звернення 17.04.2024).

⁶³ Там же.

these units were most likely really manned and equipped on a residual basis. These facts convincingly demonstrate the combat value of such units.

However, the two batteries of coastal artillery were not the only German units stationed on the island. On the aforementioned map we find the markings of two «Peilstations». In a reference book on German topographic markings and their decoding, we find information that this word means «direction finding station»⁶⁴.

According to the memoirs of German pilots, it was on the island of Fehmarn that radar installations were operating to help guide night fighters to their targets⁶⁵. This is also confirmed by Russian researchers who claim that these radars were Freya radars, whose operators were used to create this battalion⁶⁶. However, given the fact that it is unlikely that the radar operators numbered 1,000 people, it can be assumed that in addition to them, the combined unit included soldiers from the island's two coastal batteries, as well as personnel from two of the Kriegsmarine training flotillas (the 19th and 25th), which were located near the battalion's formation site. The latter assumption can be supported by the results of a study by Günter Ott, who claims that the battalion also included sailors-cadets and candidates for naval officers born in 1926–1927, who were persuaded to enlist in the battalion for «personal protection of the Führer»⁶⁷.

Thus, according to the plans of the Kriegsmarine High Command, 1135 soldiers with varying degrees of combat training were to be sent to the besieged Berlin. In the case of the Freya radar operators from the island of Fehmarn (Unit C), these were purely technical specialists whose main advantage was their ability to operate radars, not to participate in combat. The same applies to submariners, whose skills allowed them to conduct successful combat operations at sea as part of the crews of German submarines. As for the young cadets, the fact that they agreed to take part in such a risky operation clearly indicates the degree of their ideological convictions, but the fact that they had not even received basic infantry training reduces their combat value to almost nothing. Only the Kriegsmarine coastal defence units, which, by virtue of their duties, actually served as ground units, could have had more or less adequate combat training (Unit C).

Moreover, the Berlin garrison was not so much short of personnel as it was short of weapons, ammunition, food, and medicine, so the reinforcement of

⁶⁴ German Military Symbols 1944... P. 338.

⁶⁵ *Йонен В.* Ночные эскадрильи люфтваффе. Записки немецкого летчика. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2005. С. 113.

⁶⁶ *Дегтев Д, Зефирова М, Зубов Д.* Чудо-оружие люфтваффе. Битва из будущего 1945. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2016. С. 104.

⁶⁷ *Ott G.* Unternehmen «Reichskanzlei» Teil des Reports... P. 46.

1,135 Kriegsmarine soldiers, although not superfluous, could not significantly strengthen the Berlin garrison and tip the scales in the battle for the city in favour of Germany.

It can be concluded that Hitler thought the same, because on April 25 at 19:00 he sent a radio message to Admiral Dönitz demanding that additional units be brought into the operation⁶⁸. As in the previous case, Kriegsmarine's High Command acted quickly and by 9:30 p.m. had already decided to allocate the necessary units. The second wave of reinforcements included:

- Two fortress regiments (festungregiment) from the city of Kiel — 3500 soldiers;
- Fortress battalions (festungbataillon) from the island of Sylt — 2500 soldiers;
- A battalion of cadets and recruits from the non-commissioned officer school in Eckernförde — 600 soldiers;
- crews of the ships — 1500 sailors;
- From the personnel of the units that were subordinate to the Chief of the Transport Service in Kappeln (K.d.K.) — 1000 soldiers.

It is worth explaining right away that the so-called «Festung» battalions are conditionally related units to «Alarm» battalions, with the only difference being that their main task was to perform garrison service. As for the unit formed from the personnel of ship crews, this practice was used by the Army High Command due to the realization that the German advantage at sea was lost forever and because of the urgent need for reinforcements on the Eastern Front. In his memoirs, Karl Dönitz noted that such units were most often staffed by crew members of submarines and boats whose construction could not be completed in the near future⁶⁹. In the case of the personnel of the Kappeln transport service, we are most likely talking about units whose composition and armament were approximately equal to those of the Volksturm (*On the map in the end of the article these units are marked with letters from D to G*).

As part of this characterization, should be also taken into account the fact of a catastrophic shortage of weapons for these battalions. This question was discussed at the meetings of the Kriegsmarine. In particular, attempts were made to find a way to adequately arm the units by any means necessary. That is why it was decided to requisition the necessary weapons from the personnel of

⁶⁸ Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine (OKM) in der Zeit vom 21. April bis 1. Mai 1945 und die russische Übersetzung. ЦАМО РФ, ф. 500, оп. 12453, д. 31, л. 11–12.

⁶⁹ *Donitz K. Memoirs: Ten Years and Twenty Days...* P. 433.

the coastal defence and anti-aircraft artillery units⁷⁰. Nevertheless, it seems extremely unlikely that these units did receive full-fledged weapons, because, as you might guess, the largest number of infantry weapons were available to the ground forces, which needed them most in the face of the collapse of the front in April–May 1945.

As of April 25, only the fortress battalions from Kiel Fortress and the personnel of the non-commissioned officer school in Eckernförde were fully operational and ready to go into battle. However, just like the Volkssturm fighters, they were armed with foreign-made rifles and machine guns, which severely limited their combat capabilities⁷¹.

As far as can be understood from the documents, the units of the second wave of reinforcements were to be delivered to Berlin by land, as no mention of their relocation to airfields or the allocation of aircraft for their transportation was found in the source. This assumption was partially confirmed by the research of Earl Ziemke, who notes that according to Hitler's order to Dönitz of April 25, reinforcements for the Berlin garrison were to be sent by air, and reinforcements for the units holding the front around the city were to be sent by water and land⁷².

Thus, despite the fact that these units, compared to the battalions of the first wave, were supposed to provide the Berlin garrison with a fairly solid replenishment of 8,100 soldiers, the state of their logistics and training left much to be desired. In addition, this number of real reinforcements existed only on paper, as only two units, consisting of 4100 soldiers, were ready to enter the battle.

Nevertheless, counting the total number of personnel in all units of the two waves of projected reinforcements, it can be stated that the Kriegsmarine High Command planned to send about 9,235 soldiers to defend Berlin.

However, for Karl Dönitz, finding the troops to carry out operation «Reichskanzlei» was only half of his task. The main problem was the possibility of airlifting them to Berlin.

As mentioned earlier, the Kriegsmarine units were scattered at Rerik, Tutow, Pütnitz, and Rostock airfields. On the one hand, this complicated the logistics of the operation, as it would have been much easier to concentrate the required number of transport aircraft at one airfield rather than scattering them across three different airfields. On the other hand, this increased the chances of

⁷⁰ Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine (OKM) in der Zeit vom 21. April bis 1. Mai 1945 und die russische Übersetzung, ЦАМО РФ, ф. 500, оп. 12453, д. 31, л. 12.

⁷¹ Dort. Л. 12.

⁷² Ziemke, E. The battle for Berlin: end of the Third Reich. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968. P. 94.

success of the air bridge, because transport aircraft, which cruising speeds was not very high, were easy targets for enemy fighters not only in the air but also at airfields, which could no longer be adequately protected by German air defence. Given the total air dominance of the anti-Hitler coalition, a large concentration of transport aircraft at an airfield could have attracted the attention of Allied fighters or bombers, which in turn would have led to the destruction of the aircraft on the ground and the collapse of the entire operation. The fact that each unit had to be redeployed from a different airfield could have been a key factor in the success of the air bridge.

Luftwaffe transport planes had to cover a not-so-long distance. For example, the distance from Rerik to Berlin was 234 kilometers, from Tutow 180 kilometers, from Rostock 220 kilometers, and from Pütznitz 235 kilometers. Never the less, given the fact that the maximum speed of the Luftwaffe's main transport aircraft, the Ju-52, was only 250 kilometers⁷³, they would have had to spend about an hour in the air before successfully landing at one of Berlin's airfields. Taking into account the fact that all the planes would have to be loaded with troops and ammunition, it becomes clear that their already low top speed would be reduced, and, as a result, the time required to fly to Berlin would increase proportionally.

It is not difficult to guess that in the conditions of air dominance of the Allied and Soviet air forces, every extra minute spent in the air threatened the transport planes with possibility destruction. Obviously, it was for these reasons that the Kriegsmarine High Command decided to conduct this transport operation on the night of April 25–26⁷⁴, as the darkness allowed at least partially reduce the threat of destruction of transport planes by enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft fire. However, on the other hand, the task assigned to the Luftwaffe pilots was also complicated, as they were required to land their airplanes with troops in the darkness of night.

Nevertheless, such difficulties did not frighten the Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine, Grand Admiral Dönitz, who wanted to fulfill his Führer's task at all costs. That is why, as of April 25, transport planes of the Luftflotte Reich began to concentrate at the aforementioned airfields:

⁷³ This is the data provided by researcher Morten Jessen in his study. See *Jessen M.* The Junkers Ju 52: the Luftwaffe's workhorse. London: Greenhill, 2002. P. 5. The official website of the industrial concern Junkers, which produced the Ju-52 transport aircraft, states that its maximum speed was 290 kilometers per hour. Obviously, the speed of the aircraft depended on the engines that were installed on it. URL: <https://hugo.junkers.de/blog/flugzeuge/junkers-ju-52-3m/> (дата звернення 20.04.2024).

⁷⁴ Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine (OKM) in der Zeit vom 21. April bis 1. Mai 1945 und die russische Übersetzung. ЦАМО РФ, ф. 500, оп. 12453, д. 31, л. 4.

- TGr 30 and Gruppe Uhl squadrons were based at Rerik airfield. They were armed with 27 He-111 H-20 twin-engine heavy bombers.

- Tutow airfield was home to the Grossraumtransportstaffel (literally «transport squadron for the transportation of large cargo»), which included 23 three-engine Ju-352 transport aircraft. There was also at least one Fw-200 from K.G. 40 at this airfield.

- At the naval base in Pütznitz, there were 15 Ju-52s of the «M» modification (adapted for landing on the water surface), which were part of TG 1⁷⁵.

It was these units that were to take on the task of delivering Kriegsmarine's soldiers to besieged Berlin. As can be seen, already at this stage the number of reinforcements decreased significantly, because, for unknown reasons, the German High Command allocated no transport aircraft for the combined battalion from Rostock⁷⁶. All other units of the first wave of reinforcements were to be delivered to Berlin. The units of the second wave, as predicted earlier, did not receive transport aircraft and had to reach the Berlin area by land. Their attempts, if any, were unsuccessful, because, as General Weidling recalled, «the marching battalions that General Krebs had spoken of never arrived. They were unable to get through or were intercepted by other command authorities outside Berlin. It was impossible to determine where they went»⁷⁷. Thus, the second wave of reinforcements, which consisted of 8,100 soldiers, failed to reinforce the garrison of the city. At the beginning of the Battle of Berlin, there were two airports under German control — Tempelhof, located in the central part of the city, and Gatow, on its western outskirts. However, on April 22, the Tempelhof airfield was captured by Soviet troops⁷⁸, and as of April 26, the last airport in the city, Gatow, remained under German control. Nevertheless, it was only conditionally possible to call the Gatow airport suitable for landing aircraft, as fierce fighting was taking place on its territory. Only thanks to the efforts of combined units of the Volkssturm and Luftwaffe cadets⁷⁹, as well as the support of the guns of the Flakturm (air defense tower) in the Zoo area⁸⁰, did German troops manage to keep the runway under control. Nevertheless, Soviet troops continued their attacks and

⁷⁵ Peg M. *Transporter Volume Two: Luftwaffe Transport Units 1943–1945*. Classic Publications, 2007. P. 178.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Из записок коменданта Берлина генерала Вейдлинга о последних днях третьей империи...

⁷⁸ Baur H. *I Was Hitler's Pilot. The Memoirs of Hans Baur*. Yorkshire: Frontline Books, 2013. P. 122.

⁷⁹ Дегтев Д., Зефиров М., Зубов Д. Воздушная битва за Берлин... С. 175.

⁸⁰ Куровски Ф. Битва за Рейх... С. 346.

the airport was under heavy artillery fire, making it difficult for transport aircraft with troops to land there. The only available alternative for German pilots was to land on Berlin's avenues, which were wide enough for airplanes. In other words, German pilots had to choose between two options: landing at an airport that was being fought over and under artillery fire, or landing on one of Berlin's avenues, which, as can be guess, were not adapted for use as a runway.

At first glance, the task facing the German pilots may seem completely unrealistic. However, in the practice of the German command, there have already been cases of quite successful operations of this kind. An example is the experience of creating an air bridge to the fortress city of Breslau. When the city was besieged by Soviet troops and needed reinforcements, Hitler ordered the construction of an improvised airfield on Kaiserstraße⁸¹. Given the fact that the fortress city was subjected to daily bombardment by Soviet artillery and air raids, such a measure may seem unrealistic. Nevertheless, the airfield fully fulfilled its task and during the entire period of its operation, about three thousand tons of cargo were delivered to the city and about 6,000 wounded were evacuated⁸².



Charlottenburgstraße. View from above.

That is why, apparently relying on the successful experience of Breslau, the German High Command ordered the construction of a runway on Charlottenburgstraße. Hitler's personal pilot, General Hans Baur, was to supervise the work and began to perform this task on April 25⁸³. Thus, in the event that it was impossible to land at the Gatow airport, German pilots could try to land on Charlottenburgstraße.

Early in the morning of April 26, the first 5 transport aircraft involved in operation

⁸¹ The street was 1500 meters long and wide enough to land a Ju-52 transport aircraft. Див.: Дегтев Д., Зубов Д. Воздушные извозчики вермахта. Транспортная авиация люфтваффе 1939–1945. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2013. URL: http://loveread.ec/read_book.php?id=52786&p=49 (дата звернення 21.04.2024).

⁸² Заблотский А., Ларинцев Р. «Воздушные мосты» Третьего Рейха. Москва: Вече, 2013. URL: http://loveread.ec/read_book.php?id=52868&p=57 (дата звернення 21.04.2024).

⁸³ Baur H. I Was Hitler's Pilot... P. 125–126.

«Reichskanzlei» took off from the Tutow airfield. Three Ju-352s carrying fighters of the «Grossadmiral Dönitz» battalion (A) successfully overcame all difficulties and managed to land at the Gatow airfield. Despite heavy shelling by Soviet artillery, the Luftwaffe pilots were able not only to successfully land the Kriegsmarine sailors but also to take on board the wounded. The entire loading operation took about 20 minutes, after which all three planes returned to Tutow Airport⁸⁴.

Two other transport planes came under heavy anti-aircraft fire and were forced to turn back. One of them was heavily damaged and forced to make an emergency landing, while the pilot of the other successfully landed his plane in Tutow. The pilot explained his refusal to fulfill the task by saying that he could not find a place to land — obviously, this explanation did not satisfy the military police and the pilot was arrested on charges of cowardice⁸⁵.

It is worth noting that the pilot's explanation is quite plausible, because according to Manfred Kudell, who also flew over Berlin, navigation over the city was hampered by smog clouds from the fires that were burning in the city. Only pilots who were from Berlin could recognize the neighbourhoods they were flying over and navigate over the city⁸⁶. Nevertheless, even such quite obvious factors could not save the German pilots if they failed to fulfill the task of the High Command.

There is no mention of subsequent attempts to send reinforcements to Berlin in the archival documents known to science, and there is a lot of confusing information in the literature. That is why it was decided to use the research of Günter Ott, who, as his article shows, personally communicated with the participants of the operation «Reichskanzlei».

The next attempt to land in the city was made by an Fw-200 plane that took off from Tutow at around 4 am. Despite the fact that the four-engine bomber was an excellent target for Soviet anti-aircraft gunners, the pilot still managed to land at the Gatow airfield and then return to his home airfield⁸⁷.

As far as we can tell, the above-mentioned 6 planes were the only ones that took off from Tutow in the direction of the city. Only 4 of them managed to land successfully in Berlin — 3 Ju-352s and 1 Fw-200.

Also on the night of April 26, planes were to take off from Rerik airfield. The squadron stationed there was armed with He-111 heavy bombers, which were not adapted for using as transport planes. For this reason, a unit of the so-called «Führer's Squadron» (Die Fliegerstaffel des Führers), which included

⁸⁴ *Peg M. Transporter Volume Two... P. 177.*

⁸⁵ *Дегтев Д., Зефиоров М., Зубов Д. Воздушная битва за Берлин... С. 161.*

⁸⁶ Там же. С. 190.

⁸⁷ *Ott G. Unternehmen «Reichskanzlei» Teil des Reports... P. 47.*

aircraft used by the Reich's top officials, was partially redeployed to Rerik. A total of three planes were transferred to the airfield: Fw-200, Ju-290, Ju-352⁸⁸.

At approximately 11 p.m., a Ju-290 with 50 Kriegsmarine sailors on board took off, but 15 minutes later it was forced to return to the airfield due to a malfunction of the third engine. The crew of this plane made no other attempts to reach Berlin⁸⁹.

The next in line was an Fw-200, which took 17 Kriegsmarine soldiers on board. As far as we can tell, this Condor was one of Hitler's two personal airplanes⁹⁰. Perhaps that is why during the flight the sailors were very impressed by the luxurious interior of the plane, and the crew hurried to cover the leather passenger seats with a tarpaulin. As the Fw-200 approached the city, it was spotted by an anti-aircraft searchlight and the plane came under heavy anti-aircraft artillery fire. The plane was heavily damaged and caught fire. The pilot tried to make an emergency landing near the town of Wilhelmhorst, but crashed into a house. Three crew members and five sailors were killed in the crash⁹¹.

The last plane to take off from Rerik airfield at 23:40 was a Ju-352 carrying 25 Kriegsmarine sailors (Unit C). The plane successfully reached Berlin, but managed to land at Gatow Airport, which was under heavy fire, only on the third attempt. At the request of the air traffic control center, the pilot had to wait before making the return flight to take on board a group of seriously wounded soldiers. Despite the fact that the plane was severely damaged on the way back, the pilot managed to get the plane to Rechlin Airport, where he landed⁹².

As far as can be understood from archival sources and literature, the second unit, which was part of the Alarmbattailon (A) and was stationed at the Pütznitz, did not even attempt to reach Berlin. Most likely, this was due to the fact that the planes of the unit based there were seaplanes and could land only on the water surface. Given the street fighting in Berlin and the fact that none of the city's canals were wide enough for Ju-52s, we can conclude that their crews did not consider it possible to accomplish this task. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the unit may have simply lacked fuel or parts to repair the aircraft.

⁸⁸ *Ott G.* Unternehmen «Reichskanzlei» Teil des Reports... P. 47.

⁸⁹ Günter Ott reconstructs these events on the basis of Ingo Eckern's testimony. Dort.

⁹⁰ *Williamson M.* Fliegerstaffel des Führers (F.d.F.) 1945. URL: <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2016/11/21/fliegerstaffel-des-fuehrers-f-d-f-1945/> (дата звернення 22.04.2024).

⁹¹ The fate of this Condor and its passengers is reconstructed on the basis of the memoirs of Eginhart Schmiechen, Willy Hummel, Bernhart Lacher, and Gerhart Jakob. *Ott G.* Unternehmen «Reichskanzlei»... P. 45, 47.

⁹² Dort. 50.

Thus, in the end, only one Ju-352 with 25 Kriegsmarine sailors on board was able to land.

The next day, on April 27, at 12:30 a.m., at a regular meeting of the Kriegsmarine High Command, was decided that further delivering reinforcements to Berlin via the air bridge were impossible due to the extremely low probability of a successful landing in the city. Instead, the High Command planned to prioritize the operation to supply the Berlin garrison with ammunition, which clearly demonstrates the greater need of German units in Berlin for ammunition than for reinforcements. Another conditional advantage of the ammunition supply operation was that it did not require pilots to land in the city, because it could be dropped in containers over the city by parachute.

Despite the decision to abandon further attempts to bring reinforcements to Berlin by air, Hitler, on his own initiative, ordered the transfer of K-Verbande troops to the city. They were to replace the Führer's personal security unit, which consisted of SS soldiers, in whom Hitler no longer had any confidence⁹³. On April 27, 30 soldiers of this special unit arrived at the Rerik airfield, where 3 Ju-52s were already waiting for them. However, by that time, the Gatow airfield had already been lost, and the planes sent to reconnoitre the possibility of landing on the Charlottenburg Straße found that landing there was impossible. Then, the German High Command proposed to eject the fighters of the special unit by parachute, but it was rejected by the unit's headquarters as absolutely insane⁹⁴. That is why the K-Verbande fighters did not get to the besieged city (*K-Verbande Unit is marked on the map in the end of the article as K*).

Thus, out of the 9 aircraft involved in the operation «Reichskanzlei», only 5 were able to land in the city: 4 Ju-352s and one Fw-200. Given that the Junkers transport could accommodate a maximum of 22–25 people, and the Condor, which was not adapted to transporting only 15–17 roops, it can be argued that approximately 110 Kriegsmarine soldiers were delivered to besieged Berlin as a result of the operation «Reichskanzlei».

Despite the fact that the number of Kriegsmarine soldiers delivered to Berlin was quite small, it is still worth trying to establish their combat path during the defence of the city.

Tony Le Tissier, analyzing the memoirs of the battalion commander Franz Kuhlmann, notes that after arriving in the city, the sailors walked to

⁹³ Беккер К. Люди отряда «К». Диверсионный корпус немецких ВМФ во Второй мировой войне. Москва: Центрполиграф, 2004. URL: http://loveread.ec/read_book.php?id=54083&p=43 (дата звернення 24.04.2024).

⁹⁴ Там же. URL: http://loveread.ec/read_book.php?id=54083&p=44 (дата звернення 24.04.2024).

Heerstraße, where trucks were already waiting for them. The unit was transported to Wilhelmstrasse and housed in the basements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁹⁵.

The American researcher Michael Peg notes that the main task of the arrived sailors was «the defence of the Reich Chancellery and the protection of the Führer»⁹⁶; a similar opinion is shared by a group of foreign authors⁹⁷. These data are also confirmed by the testimony of General Weidling, who stated that «the Fuhrer ordered this battalion to be sent to defend the Reich Chancellery. Thus, the battalion was lost as a reserve for the defence area»⁹⁸. Russian researcher Grigoryi Kiselev notes that upon their arrival in Berlin, the Kriegsmarine sailors were lined up in front of the Führerbunker, where Hitler personally addressed them⁹⁹. Nevertheless, the direct «residents» of the Führerbunker, Wilhelm Keitel¹⁰⁰, Nikolaus von Below¹⁰¹, and Hans Baur¹⁰², make no mention of this incident in their memoirs. Taking into account the fact that Hitler's last confirmed exit from his bunker to the surface took place on his birthday on April 20¹⁰³ and the sailors arrived on the night of April 25–26, the factual error of the Russian researcher becomes clear.

It is also worth noting that despite his disbelief in the SS and his desire to have a personal bodyguard from the Kriegsmarine, Hitler did not use this unit as his personal guard. At least until April 30, the day Hitler committed suicide, the Führerbunker was guarded by SS soldiers led by Sturmbannführer Franz Schädle¹⁰⁴.

Most likely, this consolidated unit of Kriegsmarine was included in the Kampfgruppe Mohnke, whose task was to defend Sector Z («Citadel»), which included the government quarter where the Reich Chancellery was located¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁵ *Tissier Le, T.* Race for the Reichstag... P. 68.

⁹⁶ *Peg M.* Transporter Volume Two... P. 177.

⁹⁷ *Дегтев Д., Зефирова М., Зубов Д.* Воздушная битва за Берлин... С. 162.

⁹⁸ Из записок коменданта Берлина генерала Вейдлинга о последних днях третьей империи...

⁹⁹ *Киселев Г.* Неудобная правда о взятии Рейхстага. Поиск, исследование, реконструкция. Калининград: Живем, 2017. С. 271–272.

¹⁰⁰ *Keitel W., Görnitz, W.* In the service of the Reich. New York: Stein and Day, 1979. P. 211–224.

¹⁰¹ *Below von N.* At Hitler's side: the memoirs of Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant, 1937–1945. London: Greenhill Books, 2004. P. 235–241.

¹⁰² *Baur H.* I Was Hitler's Pilot... P. 120–127.

¹⁰³ *Joachimsthaler A.* The last days of Hitler. London: Cassell, 2007. P. 98.

¹⁰⁴ Письмо директора разведки США Брайона Конрада 1945 год. ЦА ФСБ РФ, ф. К-1ос, оп. 4, д. 16, л. 31.

¹⁰⁵ *Бернаж Ж.* Берлин 1945. Агония «Тысячелетнего» Рейха. Москва: Эксмо, 2007. С. 122.

Finally, this version is confirmed by the data provided to the aforementioned Tony Le Tissier by Theodor von Duvfing, the chief of staff of General Weydling, who participated in the Battle of Berlin. In particular, he notes that the «Grossadmiral Dönitz» battalion, along with the SS regiment «Anhalt,» were indeed subordinate to SS-Brigadeführer Mohnke¹⁰⁶ and were located in the sector between the Brandenburg Gate, the Moltke Bridge, and the Reichstag¹⁰⁷. And Willy Rogman, commander of the «Anhalt» Regiment's mortar platoon, said that among other units, 250 sailors from the battalion «Grossadmiral Dönitz» were in their area¹⁰⁸. This information suggests that Kriegsmarine's unit was relocated from the Reich Chancellery to the Reichstag area. It is quite possible that this was done on the orders of Brigadeführer Mohnke, who was in charge of the sector's defence.

The only thing that raises questions is that Rogman mentions that the battalion consisted of 250 soldiers, because the 4 planes that were able to land in the city could not possibly accommodate that many people. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the battalion was assigned replenishment not only from among the sailors, but also from other units located in the city.

On the evening of April 28, the battalion's soldiers helped two companies from the «Anhalt» Regiment repel a nighttime attack by Soviet troops trying to break through the Moltke Bridge to the other side¹⁰⁹.

Several Soviet sources describe the combat actions of the Kriegsmarine unit. For example, Major General Shatilov, whose 150th Infantry Division was fighting in the Reichstag area, recalled that on the morning of April 30, Kriegsmarine sailors attempted to launch a counterattack to break through to the Moltke Bridge and blow it up, but the unit suffered losses from direct fire from artillery and retreated¹¹⁰. Despite the fact that the author greatly overestimates the number of sailors (this will be discussed in more detail in the next article) the fact that this attack really took place is quite possible.

A slightly different version of the morning attack is presented by Willie Rogman. According to him, on April 29 at 7 a.m., the «Anhalt» Regiment launched a surprise counterattack against the 150th Infantry Division near the Moltke Bridge in order to break through a corridor for about a hundred encircled paratroopers of the 9th Airborne Division. The counterattack was successful and took the Soviet troops by surprise. That is why German troops decided to continue their success and tried to blow up the Moltke Bridge.

¹⁰⁶ *Tissier Le*, T. Race for the Reichstag. ... P. 106.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* P. 147.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* P. 147–148.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* P. 158.

¹¹⁰ *Шатилов В.* Знамя на Рейхстагом. Москва: Воениздат, 1975. С. 118.

However, the power of the charges was not enough to destroy the bridge completely, and only three of its spans were destroyed¹¹¹. Given the fact that some units from the «Anhalt» Regiment and the Battalion «Grossadmiral Dönitz» occupied adjacent positions, it can be assumed that the sailors did participate in this attack.



German POWs after the battle of Berlin. Kriegsmarine sailors are clearly seen among them.

At noon on April 30, Soviet troops began the final storm of the Reichstag. According to the English historian Anthony Beevor, sailors were among the units defending it¹¹². The assault lasted intermittently until May 2, when the soldiers in the building's garrison surrendered. It can be assumed that among them were sailors from the Kriegsmarine. In particular, one photo taken after the Battle of Berlin shows captured Kriegsmarine sailors, but since their uniforms lack any insignia, it is impossible to identify which unit do they belong to.

Even if the sailors had managed to avoid the fate of the Reichstag defenders and made their way to General Moncke's troops, this would not have affected their fate, as they surrendered on May 2¹¹³.

¹¹¹ *Tissier Le, T.* Race for the Reichstag... P. 159.

¹¹² *Бівор Е.* Друга світова війна... С. 791.

¹¹³ *Sayer I.* Hitler's last general. London: Bantam, 1989. P. 310–312.

In conclusion. In a critical situation at the front, the Wehrmacht widely used the tactic of creating «Alarm» units. Most often, they were created to achieve a situational goal in a particular area of the front. Such method of forming units led to their extremely heterogeneous composition and limited combat capability. At the last stage of the war in Europe, the Volkssturm and members of the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe began to be massively involved in the «Alarm» units. Despite the heterogeneous composition and low level of combat training of most of the fighters, they were able to demonstrate some local successes during the defence of Königsberg and other German cities. The German High Command continued to use «Alarm» units in the most critical areas of the front.

Given the clear superiority of Soviet troops in the Battle of Berlin, the German High Command took a number of measures to increase the number of garrison troops in the city. After the Soviets surrounded Berlin, the only available way to bring in reinforcements was by air. The sailors of the Kriegsmarine were chosen as reinforcements for besieged Berlin, and Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz was to be in charge of training the units and controlling their transfer. This marked the beginning of the transport and logistics operation «Reichskanzlei».

As a result of the efforts of the Kriegsmarine High Command, 7 «Alarm» units were formed with a «motley» personnel totalling 9,235 soldiers, who were limitedly combat-ready due to a lack of weapons. For a number of reasons, only 9 planes could be used to directly organise the airlift to Berlin, of which only 5 were able to land in the city. Thus, as a result of operation «Reichskanzlei», about 110 Kriegsmarine sailors were transported to Berlin. It has been established that these units were later included in General Moncke's battle group and took part in battles with Soviet troops near the Moltke Bridge and the battles for the Reichstag.

The available visual sources made it possible to assert that at least some of the sailors did not participate in the attempt to break through the German troops from the city, but were captured by Soviet troops.

The impact of the Kriegsmarine unit on the Battle of Berlin was rather insignificant. This was due to both the small size of the unit deployed to the city and the general situation of the German troops, which as of April 26 had almost completely exhausted their combat potential.

In turn, operation «Reichskanzlei» is an example of a little known military and logistics operation of the last days of the war in Europe. It showed that the German military machine, even when on the verge of collapse, could organize and implement decisive military operations. In addition, it reveals the personal factor of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz as one of the main executors of the operation, which adds additional touches to his historical portrait. In the works

of foreign historians on the activities of the Grand Admiral in the final stages of the war, attention is focused mainly on his role in organizing the evacuation of German troops and refugees to the West¹¹⁴. Nevertheless, the events of operation «Reichskanzlei» showed how easily the Grand Admiral was ready to send 9,235 Kriegsmarine soldiers under his command to their deaths in order to fulfill Adolf Hitler's order. It could be concluded that the German Grand Admiral should have been guided not by blind faith in the ideals of National Socialism, but by a much more complex set of feelings, including an understanding of the futility of further defending the besieged capital of the «millennial Reich» and a sense of responsibility towards his own subordinates, whose lives he was ready to sacrifice in the last days of the war in Europe.

The study also examined the practice of using «Alarm» units in a critical situation at the front. Such units can indeed be successfully used to perform urgent tasks, such as conducting a counterattack to eliminate an enemy breakthrough or, on the contrary, organising the defence of an important point.

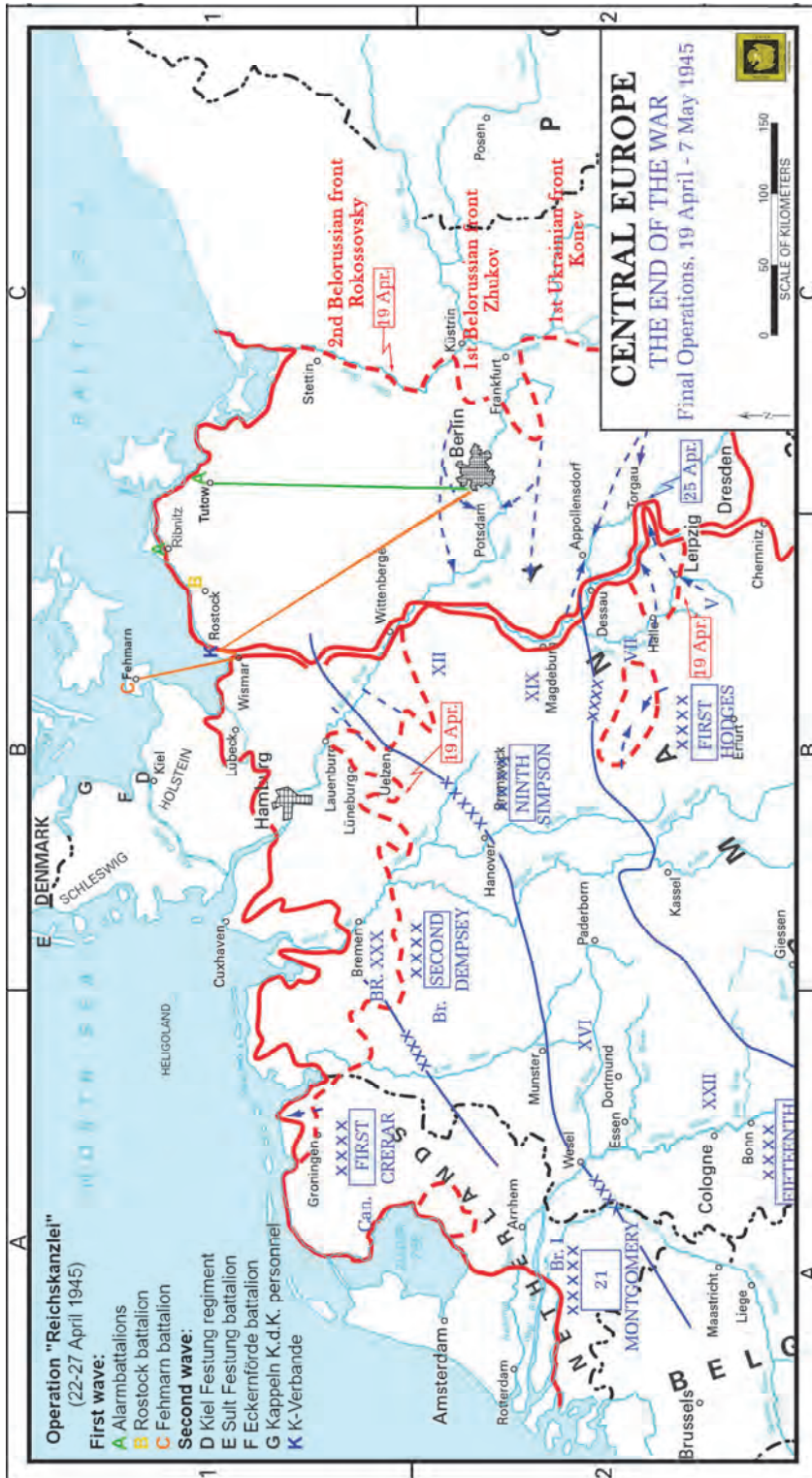
Based on the analysis of the German experience, it can be concluded that the creation and use of mixed units should be viewed as a forced and temporary step that can ensure the fulfilment of short-term and local combat missions. It is worth emphasising the fact that such «Alarm» units, whose personnel have neither the appropriate weapons nor the necessary combat skills to handle them, will in no way be able to demonstrate the same coordinated and effective work as a fully trained unit.

Thus, it is worth emphasising that «Alarm» units should be disbanded after completing the tasks for which they were created and stabilising the situation on the frontline where they were used. Only then this practice can demonstrate maximum effectiveness on the battlefield. Abuse of this practice can lead to unnecessarily high losses of personnel in such units and the deaths of valuable technical specialists or support personnel, which in turn undermines the combat value of the units to which they belong.

This undoubtedly useful and relevant experience of the Second World War in Europe should be kept in mind in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, during which the ability to use all subordinate soldiers as efficiently and correctly as possible, regardless of their combat speciality, is essential for a professional commander.

¹¹⁴ For example, see *Turner B. Karl Doenitz ant the last days of the Third Reich*. Icon Books, 2016.

* The basis for the map on the next page was taken from the United States Military Academy West-Point. URL: <https://www.westpoint.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/digital-history-center/atlas/wwii-european-theatre> (дата звернення 25.04.2024). The author of the article has corrected some mistakes made by American researches and applied marks for the operation «Reichskanzlei».



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ОПЕРАЦІЯ «РАЙХСКАНЦЕЛЯРІЯ» (22-27 КВІТНЯ 1945 р.): БІЛА ПЛЯМА БИТВИ ЗА БЕРЛІН

*Світлої пам'яті мого викладача та наукового наставника
Костянтина Юхимовича Гломозди без порад, підтримки та шляхетної самовіддачі
якого повноцінне дослідження операції «Райхсканцелярія» було б неможливим.*

Анотація. *Мета* полягає в спробі комплексного дослідження німецької транспортно-логістичної операції «Райхсканцелярія», ціллю якої була доставка підрозділів Крітсмаріне повітряним шляхом до оточеного Берліна. Основними завданнями є висвітлення передумов, перебігу та результатів операції «Райхсканцелярія» в контексті битви за Берлін та вивчення практики застосування «пожежних» підрозділів в умовах критичної ситуації на фронті. **Методологія.** Застосовано загальнонаукові методи: синтез, аналіз, індукція, дедукція, а також історичні методи: проблемно-хронологічний, історико-ретроспективний, історико-критичний та метод соціальної мережі. **Новизна.** В науковий обіг вводяться німецькі архівні документи часів Другої світової війни, що були захоплені Червоною армією та вивезені до Радянського Союзу, де зберігаються дотепер у галузевих архівах Міністерства Оборони та ФСБ Російської Федерації. Також залучені свідчення військовослужбовців німецької армії, які були безпосередньо дотичні до виконання операції. Для виконання поставлених дослідницьких завдань використані маловідомі в українській історіографії праці Гюнтера Отта та Тоні Ле Тісьєра. На основі названих джерел здійснена перша в історіографії спроба комплексного дослідження передумов, перебігу та наслідків операції «Райхсканцелярія». **Висновки.** У результаті проведеного дослідження проаналізовано передумови початку операції «Райхсканцелярія», особистісний чинник гросс-адмірала Карла Дьоніца, як виконавця операції, особовий склад підрозділів Крітсмаріне, що були обрані у якості підкріплення для гарнізону Берліна, процес створення повітряного мосту до обложеного міста, а також безпосередню участь військовослужбовців Крітсмаріне у битві за Берлін. Операція «Райхсканцелярія» є прикладом малодослідженої військово-логістичної операції останніх днів війни в Європі. Вона показала, що німецька військова машина навіть перебуваючи на межі колапсу могла організовувати та втілювати в життя сміливі з точки зору стратегії військові операції. До того ж, у ній розкрився особистісний чинник гросс-адмірала Карла Дьоніца, як одного з головних виконавців операції, що, в свою чергу, додало нових штрихів до його історичного портрету. Дослідження досвіду створення та застосування «пожежних» підрозділів в умовах критичної ситуації на фронті є доволі важливим

та актуальним з огляду на події російсько-української війни, які показали, що практика застосування подібних підрозділів триває досі. Тим не менш, враховуючи результати дослідження, можна констатувати, що такі підрозділи мають потенціал виключно для виконання певних короткотривалих локальних завдань таких, як ліквідація прориву супротивника чи організація контратаки, в той час як основну роль у веденні бойових дій мають виконувати відповідно треновані, озброєні та злагоджені підрозділи.

Ключові слова: *Битва за Берлін, операція «Райхсканцелярія», Карл Дьоніц, Крігсмаріне, «пожежні» підрозділи, батальйон «грос-адмірал Дьоніц», штурм Райхстагу.*