



For Kaiser and Hitler: From Military Aviator to High Command - The Memoirs of Luftwaffe General Alfred Mahncke 1910-1945

Jochen Mahncke

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The memoirs of General der Flieger a.D. Alfred Mahncke are the first from a former General of the German Luftwaffe to be published in the English language since those of Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring in 1953. Since then, thousands of books have been written on every aspect of the Luftwaffe's history, development, personalities, aircraft, campaigns, operations and ultimate defeat. But the historiography has lacked a fresh, detailed and personal insight into the leadership and command of the Luftwaffe from its earliest years through to the period of crisis which ensued after the tragedy of Stalingrad. Alfred Mahncke's *For Kaiser and Hitler* rectifies this omission, providing those with an interest in the history of the German military machine with an absorbing, detailed, highly readable and evocative account of life within the Luftwaffe at senior command level. Yet Mahncke's account is much more than that – for as he states, his is a story spanning '...the national autocracy of the Monarchy and the unsuccessful parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic, to the failed National Socialist dictatorship.' It is also a chronicle of the very beginnings of military aviation. Mahncke was among the first German military aviators and flew with the Kaiser's fledgling air unit in 1911, witnessing and experiencing the exhilaration – and dangers – of flying in some of the earliest military planes. He met the Kaiser, the German Crown Prince and various members of the Imperial royal family, as well as Hindenburg and many prominent German political and military figures. He flew in an early Zeppelin airship. By the outbreak of the First World War, Mahncke was an experienced pilot and he flew subsequently over the Western and Eastern Fronts, before assuming staff positions in France and Russia where he controlled tactical air operations. He went on a dive in a German U-boat in 1915 and later traveled to Palestine. He also suffered, and describes in highly graphic and emotional terms, the carnage and horror of the trench warfare on the Western Front in 1917. In the 'dark years' of the interwar period following in the wake of the Versailles Treaty, Mahncke served in senior positions with the military police and his writing offers a valuable insight into life in the Weimar Republic and of the uncomfortable rise of National Socialism and Adolf Hitler – whom he first met in 1933 – from the viewpoint of the German conservative middle classes and the military. He met Charles Lindbergh and attended the controversial 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin as well as the Nuremberg rallies where he shared a podium with the Führer. In 1935, he joined the fledgling Luftwaffe, experiencing – from his position as overseer and champion of air sport in the Third Reich – at firsthand the politics, personalities and measures of stealth used to rebuild German air power under Nazi control. He witnessed, and describes vividly, the emergence of an awesome – but not flawless – new force in aviation and its eventual deployment in Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941, culminating in the drive into the Caucasus and Crimea and the advance on the Volga. Mahncke was deeply involved in Luftwaffe operations at Stalingrad and later in the Kuban in 1943, before moving to Italy, where he coordinated the desperate German air defense of Sicily ahead of the slow, tenacious defense and ultimate retreat through the Italian mainland throughout 1943 and 1944. Mahncke met and worked with Göring, Udet, Milch, Kesselring, Jeschonnek, von Richthofen and many other senior commanders of the Luftwaffe and German armed forces. He describes their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their vision – or lack of it. *For Kaiser and Hitler* is unapologetic, honest, readable and engaging. It provides an intriguing insight for those with an interest in the air power and military history of the First World War and the Third Reich and forms an important resource for scholarship. Translator Jochen O.E.O. (Jo...

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