



restriction to the true necessities for the life of our nation, the subjugation of almost all of Europe was carried out under the pretext of reordering the continent. The defeated nations were enslaved and exploited, rather than won over through wise consideration for their national pride, their will for freedom, and their vital interests, thus building bridges to permanent understanding. In this way, the government disregarded the clear lessons of history, which condemn such an approach to failure, and everywhere sowed hate instead of trust. Without restraint, it blocked the way to a permanent peace in the near future.

We do not wish for other nations to be enslaved. The freedom for which our fathers wrestled for Germany in the last century as a precious asset of national life and which we must protect with the same enthusiasm must also be granted to all other nations. For only on this basis can the gulf be bridged that was torn open by unrestrained policies intoxicated on power. Another factor threatens to rob you of the success of your victories, which you have fought and won under the leadership of trained and experienced men: Hitler's "commander's genius," which he arrogated to himself in crazed delusion and which idolizing sycophants imputed to him in the most revolting manner. If a man wants to sole a shoe, he has to have learned the trade. If a man wants to lead an army of millions, he has to have learned and proven the ability to do so on the various rungs of tough military service. Since Hitler conferred himself supreme command in the winter of 1941/42, obstinacy, incompetence, and exorbitance have put the Wehrmacht into situations against which experts had warned and which have cost the most severe and avoidable sacrifices. The fall of the 6th Army at Stalingrad, the collapse of the ill-considered undertaking in North Africa, and the vain sacrifices on Sicily are solely due to incapable, unconscionable leadership. Hundreds of thousands of good soldiers paid for one individual's presumptuousness and vanity with their lives, their health, or the loss of their freedom. With a merciless, cold heart, this leadership has brought unspeakable suffering, which could have been avoided, upon countless families. Many high-ranking leaders have already resigned, some abandoned this life, because they were not willing to take responsibility for such unscrupulous, incapable leadership. Others were removed from office because they had the courage to raise their voices in warning so that precious blood might be spared and not wasted. Never in German history has a military leadership showed greater lack of scruples in disregarding the noble institution of universal conscription and the trust that soldiers have placed in it. While you are fighting far from the homeland in order to defend it, countless German towns and cities, which Göring had presumptuously boasted to protect, have been reduced to rubble; irreplaceable works of culture, countless places of work, and

### Appeal to the Wehrmacht

Soldiers!

Bravely and utterly fearless in the face of death, you have fought through four years, never failing, defying all dangers, regardless of all troubles and suffering, steeped only in an iron sense of duty and burning love for your nation and fatherland. No task was too hard for you, no sacrifice too great. Animated by the belief that the war was just and necessary in order to make amends for the injustice incurred after the First World War and to ensure our freedom, you went into battle. On land, in the air, and at sea, you have achieved great feats and pinned the laurels of insuperability to your flags. And yet an end to the war is not in sight. Your return to your wife and

children, to your house and home, to peaceful work seems nothing but a remote possibility. You will have asked yourselves often enough how this can be explained. You have found no answer. For a propaganda that does not stop short of any lie, that plays unscrupulously with your heroic courage and your lives, has blurred your vision. In reality, the answer is clear and simple: a government that no longer regards politics as the art of the possible and does not strive to achieve its goals with the most sparing use of energies, but revels in fanciful plans of boundless conquests, that acknowledges no moral ties, either to its own or to other nations, can never reach a peace with other nations. Your leaders can do nothing to change this; with such a form of government, all they obtain is more and more immoderate wishes. Instead of a prudent

hundreds of thousands of homes have been destroyed; many families of brave soldiers have been killed and wiped out forever. Never before has anything as horrific taken place in the German fatherland.

Soldiers! It must not go on like this! Your return home must not one day lead you to a field of rubble on which the youth, robbed of their education, lose not only their land and parental homes but also their souls, where material desires threaten to suppress and suffocate all noble feelings for honor and freedom, for human dignity and brotherly love. Do you want the sanctified orders of discipline and morals to be destroyed by sin and vice? Do you want the youth one day to condemn us for not summoning up the courage for responsibility, for the salvation of the fatherland, in good time? Perhaps we have hesitated too long already, but we must wait no longer. For now the most unscrupulous blow is being prepared, in order to blame the leaders of the Wehrmacht for the whole disaster. We must take action because—and this counts the most—crimes are being committed behind your backs which stain the German nation's shield of honor and besmirch the good reputation that it has attained in the world. Self-empowered creatures in high and highest positions have permitted them or even committed them. They have used the war to enrich themselves shamelessly at the cost of their own and foreign nations and to draw benefit from the misery of the poor and the suffering of the misfortunate. These men have not shied away from boasting with the glory of your heroism, without ever having felt the effects of the war in their own lives. You will learn of the details in due course. We will take public measures with unrelenting rigor. The worst is that this shameless behavior was ordered or condoned by Adolf Hitler. Such a leadership, be it delusional or fully responsible, has lost its claim to obedience to God and the people, for it has broken the oath it once swore itself to the fatherland, to which it is subject like every citizen, and thus trampled underfoot the loyalty it owes to those who have sworn oaths. It could only lead the nation and the fatherland into a disgraceful and awful catastrophe. We are determined to prevent this. We vouch for this before God. For this aim, we take you up on your pledge and duty. In consent with your eldest soldierly leaders and my staff, I have therefore assumed the political and military command. I am assured of your trust. Outstanding men from all classes of the nation have given their approval and pledge selfless dedication and loyalty. I will take measures that everywhere ensure leadership and administration through expert men of impeccable character.

Soldiers! As yet, the hour has not come to indulge in the thought of peace. As yet, we must fight to defend and to rescue what is dear to us, until an honorable outcome to the war has been secured. However, I promise you many things at this point:

First: Only such sacrifices will be demanded of you that are deemed absolutely necessary, after conscientious consideration, to defend ourselves and to bring the war to a good end.

Second: Trustworthy, expert German men will do all they can to come to a lasting settlement with all nations, securing our future.

Third: Behind you and under your protection, law and justice, decency and cleanliness, knowledge and selfless fulfillment of duty will rule once again.

Fourth: After the war, all of the nation's energies will be deployed to create homes, household goods and food, and true social cohesion. We shall have a clear goal in life of calm and solemn work. We will all have to work hard and live simply, but we will rediscover in return the strength and wealth of the soul.

I trust that the front and the homeland, united in joint strength, will continue to do their duty to the extreme in humility to God, for honor and freedom, for nation and fatherland.

German soldiers!

More than four years of the bravest struggle lie behind you! Millions of our comrades have fallen on the battlefields of Europe and Africa, in the air, and on the seas. Hitler's unscrupulous leadership has sacrificed entire armies in the prime of their youth in Russia and on the Mediterranean for the sake of fanciful plans of boundless conquests. The reckless deployment of the 6th Army at Stalingrad and their pointless abandonment starkly illuminate the cruel truth. Capable officers who opposed this crazed behavior were removed from office, the General Staff pushed aside. Hitler's arrogant genius as a commander is driving us, despite your heroism, toward a catastrophic outcome. In the homeland, more and more places of family life and work are being destroyed; six million Germans are already homeless. Behind your backs, corruption and crime, tolerated or even ordered by Hitler from the very outset, are assuming unprecedented proportions.

In this hour of direst need and danger, German men have done their duty to God and the nation; they have taken action and given Germany an experienced leadership aware of its responsibilities.

The man who warned in good time, who took determined steps against this war and was therefore dismissed by Hitler, is [name omitted; Ludwig Beck is meant]. He has taken on the provisional leadership of the German Reich and the supreme command of the German Wehrmacht. A government has been formed out of tried and tested men from all classes of our nation, all parts of our fatherland. It has commenced its work. I have been entrusted with the chief command of the entire Wehrmacht. The commanders in chief on all fronts have accepted subordination to me. The German Wehrmacht now obeys my command.

Soldiers! Our objective is to secure a just peace that enables the German people a life in freedom and honor, and the nations voluntary and fruitful cooperation. I give my word that from now on only those sacrifices will be demanded of you that are necessary to achieve this goal. All of the energies of the nation will now be expended uniformly for this task. An end has come to the pointless frittering of energies, to the halfhearted, delayed decisions that have cost so much blood.

Wherever you are, on the front or in the occupied territories, I hold you to the law of unconditional obedience, soldierly male discipline, and honorable, chivalrous behavior. Anyone who has shown a lack of this or who abuses these laws in the future will be unrelentingly brought to account. In the homeland, too, we are fighting for justice and freedom, for decency and cleanliness. I expect each of you to continue to fulfill your duty in loyalty and bravery. The fate of our fatherland, our and our children's future, depends upon this.

Soldiers! At stake are the existence and honor of our fatherland, a true community within our own nation and with the nations of the world.