

Protocoll of my meetings with Adolf Hitler  
September – December 1943 and his order to  
Occupy the Vatican and to kidnap Pope Pius XII  
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Immediately after the end of Italy's military alliance with Germany was announced, I, with the rank of an SS Obergruppenführer and General of the Waffen SS, was ordered by Hitler to become the "Highest SS and Police Führer in Italy". When I passed the border at the Brenner on Sep. 9, 1943, I had received general instructions about the organisation of my offices in Italy and the order to personally report to Hitler at the earliest date, but no order about a possible action against the Vatican.

When 2-3 days later, after a night flight from Italy to (the Führerheadquarter in) East Prussia, I first reported to (Reichsführer SS) Himmler, he revealed to me that Hitler wanted to meet me urgently to give me a personal order for an important secret mission, namely the occupation of the Vatican and the removal of Pope Pius XII to Germany or Liechtenstein. "The Führer" already had several choleric outbreaks because of the so-called "Badoglio treason" and its unforeseeable military and political and military consequences and had made sinister threats against the Italian king and the Vatican. Therefore I was asked to be careful with my report and spare Hitler's precious nerves. When Himmler asked me especially to take care that during an occupation of the Vatican, its archives and subterranean vaults would be secured and preserved from destruction, which allegedly contained old teutonic manuscripts and cultural treasures, he, as the "Keeper, Protector and Renovator of the ancient faith", desired, I was worried what to expect from Hitler.

Deeply worried I drove to the Führerheadquarter "Wolfsschanze" to receive my secret orders. During the 45-minutes long ride I had the time to prepare for a discussion with Hitler which would not only be dangerous for the Vatican but also for myself.

For an easier understanding of the following, may I shortly add a note on my relationship with Hitler.

During the last difficult years I had learned a lot about the personality and the eccentricities of Hitler. I knew that

1. difficult and uncomfortable things had to be shared with him under four eyes to be successful and to allow him to step back from an opinion once expressed impulsively;
2. under four eyes, you could tell him anything, even the worst news, as long as it was
  - a. true and provable
  - b. presented in a correct, not complaining or whining form
  - c. the responsibility was not shift onto another unit.

After the end of my report on the situation in Italy, the following dialogue between Hitler and myself developed, which I am still able to quote nearly literally and in any case rather precisely:

(Hitler): Now I have a special order for you, Wolff, which because of its international importance I only wanted to give you personally. I expect you not to talk to anyone about it, except the Reichsführer SS (Himmler), who was already informed, until I allow you. Do you understand?

(Wolff): Yes, my Führer!

(Hitler): I want that you with your troops as part of the German counter measures against this incredible “Badoglio Treason” as soon as possible occupy the Vatican and the Vatican City, secure the unique archives and art treasures of the Vatican and bring the Pope (Pius XII), together with the Curia, “for his protection” to the North, that he cannot fall into allied hands or get under their pressure and influence. Depending on the political and military situation, I will accomodate the Pope if possible in Germany or in the neutral Liechtenstein. When is the earliest possibility for you to do this?

Wolff (trying to win time): This is difficult to say, my Führer. My SS and Police troops are still in movement. At the moment I try to recruit voluntary forces from the southtyrolean population and the fascist Italians to enforce our troops, but even with greatest activity this takes time. How long can you give me to prepare this mission?

Hitler (with a slightly disappointed face): Under these conditions I have no other choice than to wait until you completed your march up and preparations, Wolff. Since besides the fact that at the momentary turbulent situation in Italy I need any available German soldier for the fights at the Southern front, also for political reasons I cannot use units of the Wehrmacht to perform such a tricky mission. I better trust in my SS units. How long you think you will need for the planning and preparation?

Wolff: May I assure you, my Führer, that for a careful and scrupulous performance of your mission because of the immense archives and irreplaceable art treasures for their unproblematic safeguarding a certain minimum number of experienced specialists is necessary who not only speak Italian and the most important foreign languages, but also master Latin and Greek in spoken and written form. These competent experts I have to find due to the momentary lack in Germany for the greatest part in the south tyrolean population, which first have to be found and checked. I assume that I need at least 4-6 weeks for that, probably a little longer.

Hitler (impatient): This sounds too long! Hurry up with the most important preparations if possible and report to me under 4 eyes every 2 weeks about the progress and state of the matter. I would prefer to deal with the Vatican immediately and tidy up.

With a certain feeling of relief I left Hitler’s office. At least I had won several important weeks time without any clash with the highly nervous “Führer”, which undoubtedly would have been the case if I would have opposed Hitler’s plans for whatever good reason. The result would have been, because of the well-known dictatorial personality of Hitler, who, during a “situation meeting in the Führerheadquarter”, according to the preserved protocols, in his anger about the “Badoglio treason” had already announced his step against the Vatican, my impeachment or release from my position due to “incapability” or even “lack of ideological reliability” which would exclude me from all possibilities to help and save human lives on the Italian theater of war. Since in the background already enough ambitious high-ranking SS Leaders waited desperately to find Hitler’s recognition, followed by decoration and promotion, through the fast and unscrupulous execution of such a special mission.

In consequence, I managed further delays in my Vatican order during my 6-8 personal reports to Hitler. The time I won I used to investigate the real power situation in Italy carefully and to use any possible opportunity to get in a good relationship with high-ranking dignitaries of the Church in Italy by several unexpected interventions in their favour and my policy of the “easy hand”. In Rome, with the help of the German ambassador Dr. Rahn, I got in contact with the

former General of the Salvatorian Order, Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, who regularly requested the release of arrested antifascist priests and active Catholics and eventually of a certain death candidate, the leftist Youth leader Vaselli, in an explicit order in the name of Pope Pius XII, who knew Vaselli's father, a famous Italian lawyer, rather well.

Salvatorian General Pfeiffer eventually managed to get me as "Highest SS and Police Führer in Italy" in May 10, 1944 a one-hour-long personal audience with Pope Pius XII, with whom I discussed my plan to end the war in Italy through negotiations with the Allies. (...)

When in early December 1943, Hitler's Plan to kidnap the Curia and the Pope entered the decisive stadium, I asked the German Ambassador at the Vatican, Weizsäcker, to bring me in contact with a personality close to the Vatican. Eventually he invited me to a several hours long discussion with the Jesuit Father Dr. Ivo Zeiger, at that time director of the Collegium Germanicum in Rome. As Ambassador von Weizsäcker assured in his affidavit, these conversations had the purpose to prevent a dislocation of the Pope and the Curia (...) At the end of our discussion, I asked the worried Dr. Zeiger to assure the Pope under strictest confidence my binding assurance that his person and the Curia don't have to fear any step from the German side as long as I am in the position of the "Highest SS and Police Führer in Italy" and that under no circumstances I would dishonor my name with the political and historical stigma of an ordered abduction of the Vatican.

A few days after my talks with Mr. von Weizsäcker and Dr. Zeiger I could no longer keep the more and more impatient Hitler waiting, but had to report the end of my preparations. The following conversation between Hitler and myself developed in the beginning of December 1943 in the Führerheadquarter "Wolfsschanze":

Wolff: My Führer, I report the conclusion of the preparation of the execution of your secret order against the Vatican. May I, before I receive your final order, make some remarks regarding the momentary situation in Italy?

Hitler: Yes, please.

Wolff: Since the coup d'état against the Duce (Mussolini) on July 25 of this year, with no Fascist sacrificing his life for his defense, according to my estimate in the German occupied Central Italy, only 5, maximum 10 % of the Italians were nominal Fascists including their family members. Only a small percentage of idealists is today willing to fight for the Duce. The majority of Italians is tired of the war, especially after the end of the series of German Blitz victories, and especially after the war was taken from Africa into the Italian motherland. The mood of the Italian population towards the Germans is not yet directly hostile, but they consider us, due to the continuous destructions on Italian soil and the losses among the civil population, as unpopular prolongers of the war. The only undisputed authority is the Catholic Church, which has an incredible influence through the deeply religious Italian women even on their not necessarily Church-oriented men, brothers and sons. After I recognized this, I immediately and at any given opportunity – mostly requests for mercy from the high Clergy for condemned and arrested Italians – tried to establish a good contact to high ranking dignitaries of the Church and at the Vatican, which eventually lead to my proposal: "I protect your ecclesiastical institutions, your authority among the Italians and the German occupying forces, your property and your life and you in your areas keep the population quiet and discourage them from actions against the German authority."

My Führer! This policy of the "easy hand" and common sense bore rich fruits during the last three months. I have to admit that only this way, keeping the population quiet, I could fulfill

my mission, in spite of the lack of Forces, since the SS and Police Units under my command are not enough to control the supplies for the hard fighting southern front on the long way through two thirds of Italy from the continuously adding sabotage actions of the many partisans. As I already reported during my bi-weekly reports, I not only have to deal with the 39.000 yugoslavian POWs which escaped from the camps unguarded by the Italians into the mountains but also with the regular Elite Units of the Royal Italian Army unwilling to surrender. Additionally I have to deal with closed socialist and communist partisan units of about 150.000 to 200.000 men, which I can hardly keep under control.

Since the Reichsführer SS is momentarily unable to send me more SS and Police units to Italy and because my own provisional units are not fully efficient yet, I am able, my Führer, to perform my Vatican Mission fast and successful, but I won't be able to control the certainly violent reaction of the indignant Italian population on a longer range and guarantee Field Marshall Kesselrings necessary supply at the same time with my limited forces. As I estimate the situation, I have to expect great strikes and mass demonstrations, which I can certainly suppress with the force of weapons, but which would still have the collapse of the arms production as consequence and will certainly change the general situation in Italy in a negative way for us. Without any defaetism, I cannot withhold this from you before you make your final decision!

On the other hand, with my momentary forces, I can guarantee to uphold law and order in the hinterland of the South Front when you give up your Vatican-Plan and allow me to act with determination when necessary but to continue my policy of the "easy hand" with Italy, which, after the restitution of the Duce by you once again is an ally of us.

Hitler (who originally listened to my report with inner resistance, then with interest and eventually with a certain relief): Thank you, Wolff, for your open words. These details were for a great part new to me and need to be evaluated carefully. As someone who knows Italy, what would you recommend?

Wolff: I would give up the execution of the Vatican plan, born out of an understandable anger about the Badoglio treason, and chose the second, positive solution. As I see the situation, the occupation of the Vatican and the abduction of the Pope would have so many negative repercussions as well among the German Catholics at home and at the front as well as among Catholics in the rest of the world and in the neutral countries which are in no relation to the momentary advantage of a removal of the Vatican from policy and the capture of the Vatican archives and art treasures. It should rather be considered that we might be able to use the international influence of the Pope in the future if now, unexpectedly, we do not take advantage of his situation but fulfill him even some of his wishes.

Mein Führer! With all obedience I ask you to trust me to solve the momentary Vatican problem in a positive way. The success will show that I am right and will release you from your worries regarding the supplies and the order and security on the Italian theater of war!

Hitler (grinning): Fine, Wolff, do it as you as an expert on Italy consider it right. But don't forget that I have to make you responsible in case you cannot uphold your optimistic "guarantee". Good luck, Wolff!

Wolff: Thank you, my Führer!

