

TRANSLATION

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THE GENERAL BEELITZ TESTIMONY

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(recorded by Michael Hesemann)

A few years ago I had the opportunity of a long phone conversation with the retired Major General (German: Generalmajor) Dietrich Beelitz, because I wanted to know from him why Himmler on October 16, 1943 at 2.00 PM so suddenly gave order to stop the arrest of the Roman Jews immediately, for the strange reason "due to the special circumstances of the City of Rome."

This had always remained an open question to me and I wanted to hear from him whether he was able to provide me with factual and certain information. Beelitz, at that time, was a Colonel in the General Staff and the liaison officer between the Headquarter of Field Marshal General Kesselring here in Italy on one side and the Fuhrerhauptquartier (Adolf Hitler's Headquarter) on the other end (he was later promoted to Major General). When the Field Marshal General spoke with the Fuhrerhauptquartier by phone, Beelitz had to listen to the whole conversation and talk himself when Kesselring, once again, was away at the frontline. Major General Beelitz had always refused to write his autobiography or even meet with journalists and so it was originally not easy for me to get in contact with him. What Beelitz told me during this conversation over the telephone was the following:

On my question why Himmler suddenly gave the above mentioned order on October 16, 1943, General Major Beelitz replied:

"As I was aware before, the town commander of Rome, Major General Rainer Stahel, was suddenly discharged by the end of October and sent to the Eastern frontline, to Russia. He then made a farewell visit at the Headquarter of Field Marshall Kesselring. On this opportunity, I had asked him personally about the reason and background of his sudden and unexpected discharge. General Major Stahel replied that it was a retaliation measure by Heinrich Himmler against him, since Himmler had realized in the meantime that Stahel had persuaded him to cease the persecution of the Jews in Rome. "

What had really happened was the following:

Major General Stahel had first sent his adjutant Nikolaus Kunkel to the German Ambassador at the Holy See at that time, Ernst von Weizsäcker, with the urgent request that the ambassador should try to stop the campaign against the Roman Jews. Kunkel had given an interview on this to the German Catholic News Agency KNA in the year 2000, which was also published in the Vatican newspaper "Osservatore Romano". Here he confirmed that he had indeed received this order by Major General Rainer Stahel but that von Weizsäcker just gave him a closed letter for the Major General and replied verbally that he unfortunately was not able to do anything in this affair. As Kunkel later confirmed, the Major General was indignant at this reply and decided to take this matter into his own hands. In the presence of then-lieutenant Kunkel, Stahel requested a direct call to Heinrich Himmler, but when Stahel started to talk, Kunkel had left the office and was not able to tell what was said on phone.

When he spoke with Beelitz, Rainer Stahel explained that he had pointed out in plain words that he, as town commander of Rome, was responsible for the supply of the German divisions involved in combats in the south of Italy and that he had the duty to maintain this supply. So he told Himmler that at daytime these transports became more and more difficult due to the air supremacy of the Anglo-American Forces while at night the increasing number of partisans disturbed the supply. Therefore, the Major General told Himmler in all openness that in the case that the campaign against the Jews would be continued, he would have to fear revolts of the population which could spread in the south of Rome and endanger the supply of the German troops who would be lost in this case. At this opportunity, Stahel seems to have threatened Himmler directly by stating that in this case he would have to take the responsibility for all consequences. Himmler, who was quite ignorant about military affairs, was obviously so impressed by this that he immediately ordered his SS Forces to stop the arrests.

Of course in reality the risk of a revolt of the Roman population was non-existing; the Romans were much too worried about their personal safety, their own food supply etc. Therefore, the whole statement by Stahel was not based on any real concern, what Himmler had learned after a few days, when he took vengeance and managed that Stahel was removed and sent to Russia. This basically was what Major General Dietrich Beelitz had told me. On my request if I could publish his statement, he replied that he did not want this but he would give me permission to quote it in the so-called Positio for the Beatification Process of Pius XII for whom he had a great personal admiration. At that time, I had to promise Major General Beelitz not to publish his statement as long as he was alive and of course I kept this promise. However, since Major General Beelitz died in 2002, the text of the interview could be published in the Positio for the Cause of Beatification of Pope Pius XII (printed in 2004), and there is no reason why it should not come to the knowledge of a wider public.

THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 16, 1943:

The Razzia took place in the night from October 15 to 16, 1943. A woman, whose name is unknown to me, heard the noise, looked out of her window and saw what happened. Immediately she informed Princess Pignatelli Aragon Cortes, since she knew that the

Princess had access to Pope Pius XII. I personally interviewed the Princess who confirmed all this to me. She contacted a young German diplomat, a certain Wollenweber, and asked him to drive her in a German Embassy car to the Vatican, since Rome was under martial law and no civilian was allowed to be on the streets at that time, 7 AM. This young German diplomat was willing to drive her to the Apostolic Palace where the Princess indeed managed to get to Pius XII who had just ended to say the Morning Mass in his private chapel. When he heard what had happened, the Pope was shocked and repeated several times that the SS had promised not to bother the Jews of Rome, so they had acted contrary to their promise. Still in the presence of the Princess, he called his Secretary of State, Cardinal Maglione, and ordered him to call the German Ambassador at the Holy See, Ernst von Weizsäcker, into the Vatican immediately. About the following conversation between Cardinal Maglione and von Weizsäcker, the Cardinal wrote a protocol on the very same day, which was published in the "Actes et Documents". Weizsäcker urgently advised Maglione against any public protest since this would only cause further damage. Instead, he promised to do everything possible to stop the campaign against the Jews. In reality, Weizsäcker didn't do anything and when his son Richard von Weizsäcker, the former German president, claims today that his father had recommended Maglione that the Pope should launch a protest, this is just not true; the opposite is true, as the original protocol by Maglione proves.

Still, the Pope did not leave it with this but sent his nephew Carlo Pacelli to the above mentioned town commander Major General Rainer Stahel, but not only to him but also to the Austrian Bishop Alois Hudal, who was a persona non grata at the Vatican but at least had best contacts to the Nazis. As a third measure, the Pope took the opportunity to send his confidant and intermediary, the Superior General of the Salvatorians, Father Pankratius Pfeiffer, to Stahel and this indeed might have moved Stahel eventually to interfere personally in this affair, what he did with success, as mentioned before. I say with success since due to the immediate stop of the arrests, it was eventually possible to invite thousands of Jews to take refuge in buildings of the Church like universities, parish houses, monasteries, convents, cloisters and other institutes, so that thousands of Jewish lives were saved, as it was confirmed repeatedly by Jewish individuals and organizations.

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