

John M. Steiner collection
Interviews with former members of the SS, other Nazi officials, and witnesses to Nazi Germany
RG-50.593

The following is a draft English-language summary of an interview in German from the John M. Steiner collection. The translation has been not been verified for accuracy, and therefore, may contain errors. Nothing should be quoted or used from this summary without first checking it against the taped interview. Moreover, the description of events in the summary may not match the sequence, time-code, or track number of the audio files.

Interview with Wilhelm Bittrich

These tapes cover conversations during a meal, at the home of Bittrich. Also present is a woman, perhaps the wife of Bittrich. Some of the conversation is small talk about food, drinks, and other people.

Bittrich expresses his thanks to the interviewer. He talks about ongoing friendships and about his soldiers who still care about him. He also talks about Germany today and the importance of teaching the young to love their beautiful country. Following all of this, he reads a poem.

Bittrich talks about his health and his medical care. The interviewer points out that most of the important personalities from the past are also doing well in the present. Bittrich adds that Germans today still do not have the strength to reexamine the past. He discusses Himmler, who was against him and wanted to kill him.

Bittrich talks about his love for Germany. Everything that he did was for the love of country and was honest and decent, but that people are jealous of him and tell lies about him as a result. He talks about his need for a lawyer to arrange his will, and discusses what he would leave and to whom.

Bittrich talks about his relationship with Karl Wolff and the disagreements between them. Wolff claimed that he was the major SS general, which is what Bittrich also claimed for himself. He rages against Himmler, who dared to interfere in his private life.

He claims that both Hitler and Himmler were cowards who could not look at dead people. He talks about what got him to follow Hitler in the beginning and the disintegration of the party when the war broke out. He was 38 years old when he took his battalion into Poland against his conviction.

00:09 Bittrich talks about talking to Hitler in September 1944 after Arnhem where he beat the British. He told Hitler that he thought that the war for him was finished. He would just

defend the Rhineland against the Russians. Field marshal Mohl, who was his friend, wanted to commit suicide, and he talked him out of it.

06:08 Talks about infighting in the SS when the war fell apart. The two sides of Himmler's personality. His contacts with Sweden.

09:54 The Germans knew about the poor economic situation in Russia. His negative evaluation of Russia.

13:09 His thoughts about Israel and Jews. Russians and Jews want to rule the world. Hitler was an anti-Semite because of this. Too much misery has been caused by the Jews already.

16:20 He did not read *Mein Kampf*. He has an aversion to Hitler and Göbbels.

18:05 Himmler wanted to kill Streicher. He also accused Bittrich of being a communist.

23:10 Talks about his relationship with Karl Wolff whom he was angry with. He knew that the war was going to be lost, not by the soldiers who were good, but because there was no one sensible in the headquarters.

00:23 Talks about his relationship with Mühl (?) in October 1944.

05:04 Talks about Field Marshal Muldower (?) and about saving injured soldiers.

06:13 His relationship with Cerff (?) and why he does not trust him.

14:00 His relationship with Felix Steiner.

17:07 Talks about the army not being ready because Hitler did not want to wait.

20:40 Talks about Westfal (?) who also wrote a book.

27:00 Talks about himself, and his conviction that war is an instrument of cruelty, and he is against it.

Track 1

- 00:23** Talks about his childhood and what influenced him. He was a member of a youth group from age seven years on, and was influenced by the positive values taught there. Bismarck was a strong influence.
- 05:57** He joined the army in WW I, was a lieutenant in the air force.

Track 2

- 00:14** He was devastated when he was fired when he discovered misdeeds of a leader who was a homosexual, and he accused him of it.
- 01:20** The Russians befriended Jews because they were partners in their aim to rule the world. Talks about Brezhnev, Russia today, and the erosion of the communist ideology.

Track 3

- 01:25** Talks about Hitler not understanding the enormity of his position.
- 02:15** His thoughts about the ignorance of the U.S. and England with examples of Vietnam and Cuba. His thoughts about Eisenhower.
- 06:45** His thoughts about the importance of culture. The minister of culture is more important than the head of the military.
- 07:57** The failures of Adenauer, and his conviction that the youth are the most important element to take care of.

Track 4

- 00:16** Austria's ties to Germany.
- 01:48** National Socialism and how it helped the German population out of the Depression.

Track 1

00:27 He is 83 years old at the time of the interview. He says that what he and soldiers say they thought and felt is only what they thought they felt, memories are not correct, they are just literature.

06:58 Talks about childhood. From ages 14-16, he was in a paramilitary unit. He was injured. He learned to fly and became a pilot. Later, he was in the infantry. He always thought about the casualties and the human price paid.

Track 2

00:15 Talked about the hunger in 1917 and the disparity between the “Haves” and the “Have Nots”.

04:53 He was shaken by the collapse after WW I. He made money in the (stock) market industry but lost his job after the “Black Friday”.

09:52 He got a job as a pilot and a trainer for the military. In 1925-1930, he trained pilots for the army.

Track 3

02:35 Talks about the development of the National Socialism movement and Stenitz (?)

05:50 Talks about Mohl (?) who knew what was important, and who was one of the few generals during the British invasion who knew what needed to be done. Hitler wanted to give him divisions to fight the British, but he said that he needed divisions to fight the Russians.

Track 4

01:38 How shocked he was at the sight of his dead soldiers.

<https://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection