

Survey into the response of 100 German soldiers and officers to a number of questions, April 1945

By the First Canadian Army Intelligence

FIRST CANADIAN ARMY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY NUMBER 308

PART II

I AFTER THE FUHRER

Some idea of the reactions of the German soldier to the death of HITLER and the accession of DONITZ was gained by a survey of PW opinion in the cage. A random group of 100 PW was questioned with results shown below, and from the officers' pen four were selected, two full Colonels and two Naval Lieutenant-Commanders.

To take the officers first, all four had heard the news, one Colonel saying "A heroic life has come to its end." Their reactions to the event varied but were surprisingly apathetic. One Colonel thought that HITLER's death was not a disaster, as DONITZ, who is a capable man, will act in a soldierly manner with a soldierly instinct. The other Colonel was more resigned and foresaw the possibility of Civil War, the SS fighting against other groups and parties. Of the Lieutenant-Commanders, one disclaimed any interest in or knowledge of politics but eventually said he felt that HITLER's death

was a grave blow to GERMANY because he was a strong man. The other said that, Fuhrer or no Fuhrer, he would as a soldier hold out, if ordered to do so, as long as possible. He stressed the immense confidence placed in HITLER who was the most suitable man to master a situation of such difficulty as the present. These officers appeared to have little to say of DONITZ as a politician or Chief of State. They regarded him as a competent professional sailor, with strong common sense as his main characteristic.

The opinions expressed by the Other Ranks interrogated produced the interesting fact that a very large majority considered themselves no longer bound to their military oath of loyalty to HITLER, whereas the majority, though by a smaller margin, stated that HITLER's death made no difference to their feelings about the war. As a leading political figure von PAPPEN dies hard, though perhaps the fact that both he and MODEL were considered as possible successors to HITLER merely bears testimony to the scantiness of the news at present reaching the front line troops.

The questions asked and the answers given were as follows:

(i) Had you heard the news of HITLER's death before you were captured?

Yes	35
No	65
	<u>100</u>

(ii) Do you believe the story?

Yes	96
No	2
No idea	2
	<u>100</u>

(iii) Do you know that DONITZ is his successor?

Yes	48
No	52
	<u>100</u>

(2)

(iv) Would you have expected DONITZ to follow HITLER?

Yes	11
No	89
	<u>100</u>

GORING	29
GOEBBELS	4
von PAPIEN	1
MODEL	1
LEY	1
Nobody, as HITLER's death would end war and regime	10
Don't know	5
	<u>100</u>

(vi) Have you heard much of DONITZ? What do you think of him?

Answers varied widely but can be roughly graded as:-

Generally favourable	13
Generally unfavourable	24
No opinion	63
	<u>100</u>

(v) If not DONITZ, whom would you expect?

HIMMLER 49

A selection of the comments passed on him by those who had opinions to offer includes the following:

"Heard a lot of him, but put no faith in him."
"The only man after HIMMLER who could carry on the war."
"The right man for GERMANY as he will surrender."
"Must be a good man or he would not have been given such a post."
"The only officer left who thinks that GERMANY can be saved."
"No good - too strict."
"OK for the Army."

(vii) Does HITLER's death make any difference to your feelings about the war?

Yes	42
No	58
	<u>100</u>

(viii) Do you feel bound to DONITZ by the oath that you made to HITLER?

Yes	9
No	90
Don't know	1
	<u>100</u>

(ix) Do you think that the war will last much longer?

In reply to this question most PW merely answered "No". Where a period was given the estimates varied between a minimum of two days and a maximum of two months.