

Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, Speech on Germany's Situation in the Fourth Year of the War (October 17, 1917)

Abstract

General Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934) was appointed Field Marshal after the military victory of the 8th Army under his command over the Russian army in East Prussia (Battle of Tannenberg). In August 1916, Hindenburg and his chief of staff Erich Ludendorff jointly took over the Supreme Army Command (OHL). Under their leadership the OHL gained enormous political influence and effectively determined not just Germany's military strategy, but also its economic and domestic policy. When, on July 19, 1917, faced with a drawn-out war, strikes, and continuing food shortages, the Reichstag passed a resolution (on the initiative of the SPD, the Center Party, and the Progressive Party) calling for a peace settlement, this was met with vehement rejection by the OHL, who continued to claim that they could still achieve their expansionist war aims. Meanwhile, labor strikes had been spreading in the arms industry since 1916, and in August 1917, the first peace demonstrations and mutinies among German sailors against the senseless continuation of the war took place. As the war dragged on, Hindenburg's role as the "Hero of Tannenberg" increasingly consisted of maintaining the morale of the war-weary and hunger-stricken home front. Here you can hear an excerpt from a speech by Hindenburg on the war situation, recorded on October 17, 1917, at the Army High Command headquarters located in Bad Kreuznach at the time. The recording was made for the collection of the audio department of the Prussian State Library. In this speech, Hindenburg not only repeats the official propaganda of a successful defensive war, but also claims that the increasing unrest and protests were incited by enemy influence – a claim resembling the "stab-in-the-back myth" with which Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and the rest of the military leadership later attempted to evade responsibility for the defeat.

Source

Germany stands unshaken militarily and economically in the fourth year of war. A world of enemies has not been able to bring it down. The solution to this riddle lies in the good conscience of the German people. The struggle has been forced upon us. Every German knows that it is a matter of life or death. And so, both at the front and at home, everyone is performing almost superhuman feats. The best defense is a good offense. That is why, not out of a thirst for conquest, we have taken the war to enemy territory and saved our homeland from the horrors of war. Since weapons and hunger could not break Germany's will to win, the enemy resorted to treachery. It sought to sow discord and divide the people from their emperor. But his poisoned arrows bounced off German loyalty. Thus, the German oak will withstand any storm. We await the outcome of the struggle with calm confidence. A just God is with us. "Cling to the land, the dear land of thy sires, Grapple to that with thy whole heart and soul! Thy power is rooted deep and strongly here" (Friedrich Schiller, William Tell) Translation: Theodore Martin

Source: Paul von Hindenburg, Ansprache zur Lage Deutschlands im vierten Kriegsjahr. Recorded at the General Staff Headquarters at Bad Kreuznach, October 17, 1917. Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv

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