

= Albert Kesselring =

Albert Kesselring (30 November 1885 ? 16 July 1960) was a German Luftwaffe Generalfeldmarschall during World War II . In a military career that spanned both World Wars , Kesselring became one of Nazi Germany 's most skilful commanders , and one of the most highly decorated , being one of 27 soldiers awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds . Nicknamed " Smiling Albert " by the Allies and " Uncle Albert " by his troops , he was one of the most popular generals of World War II with the rank and file .

Kesselring joined the Bavarian Army as an officer cadet in 1904 , and served in the artillery branch . He completed training as a balloon observer in 1912 . During World War I , he served on both the Western and Eastern fronts and was posted to the General Staff , despite not having attended the War Academy . Kesselring remained in the Army after the war but was discharged in 1933 to become head of the Department of Administration at the Reich Commissariat for Aviation , where he was involved in the re-establishment of the aviation industry and the laying of the foundations for the Luftwaffe , serving as its chief of staff from 1936 to 1938 .

During World War II he commanded air forces in the invasions of Poland and France , the Battle of Britain and Operation Barbarossa . As Commander in Chief South , he was overall German commander in the Mediterranean theatre , which included the operations in North Africa . Kesselring conducted an uncompromising defensive campaign against the Allied forces in Italy until he was injured in an accident in October 1944 . In the final campaign of the war , he commanded German forces on the Western Front . He won the respect of his Allied opponents for his military accomplishments , but his record was marred by massacres committed by troops under his command in Italy .

After the war , Kesselring was tried for war crimes and sentenced to death . The sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment . A political and media campaign resulted in his release in 1952 , ostensibly on health grounds . He was one of only three Generalfeldmarschalls to publish his memoirs , entitled *Soldat bis zum letzten Tag* (A Soldier to the Last Day) .

= = Early life = =

Albert Kesselring was born in Marktsteft , Bavaria , on 30 November 1885 , the son of Carl Adolf Kesselring , a schoolmaster and town councillor , and his wife Rosina , who was born a Kesselring , being Carl 's second cousin . Albert 's early years were spent in Marktsteft , where relatives had operated a brewery since 1688 .

Matriculating from the Christian Ernestinum Secondary School in Bayreuth in 1904 , Kesselring joined the German Army as an Fahnenjunker (officer cadet) in the 2nd Bavarian Foot Artillery Regiment . The regiment was based at Metz and was responsible for maintaining its forts . He remained with the regiment until 1915 , except for periods at the Military Academy from 1905 to 1906 , at the conclusion of which he received his commission as a Leutnant (lieutenant) , and at the School of Artillery and Engineering in Munich from 1909 to 1910 .

Kesselring married Luise Anna Pauline (Liny) Keyssler , the daughter of an apothecary from Bayreuth , in 1910 . The couple honeymooned in Italy . Their marriage was childless , but in 1913 they adopted Rainer , the son of Albert 's second cousin Kurt Kesselring . In 1912 , Kesselring completed training as a balloon observer in a dirigible section ? an early sign of an interest in aviation . Kesselring 's superiors considered posting him to the School of Artillery and Engineering as an instructor because of his expertise in " the interplay between tactics and technology " .

= = World War I = =

During World War I , Kesselring served with his regiment in Lorraine until the end of 1914 , when he was transferred to the 1st Bavarian Foot Artillery , which formed part of the Sixth Army . On 19 May 1916 , he was promoted to Hauptmann (captain) . In 1916 he was transferred again , to the 3rd Bavarian Foot Artillery . He distinguished himself in the Battle of Arras , using his tactical acumen to

halt a British advance . For his services on the Western Front , he was decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd Class and 1st Class .

In 1917 , he was posted to the General Staff , despite having not attended the Bavarian War Academy . He served on the Eastern Front on the staff of the 1st Bavarian Landwehr Division . In January 1918 , he returned to the Western Front as a staff officer with the II and III Bavarian Corps .

= = Between the wars = =

At the conclusion of the war , Kesselring was involved in the demobilisation (as mandated by the Treaty of Versailles) of III Bavarian Corps in the Nuremberg area . A dispute with the leader of the local Freikorps led to the issuance of an arrest warrant for his alleged involvement in a putsch against the command of III Bavarian Corps and Kesselring was thrown into prison . He was soon released but his superior , Major Hans Seyler , censured him for having " failed to display the requisite discretion " .

From 1919 to 1922 , Kesselring served as a battery commander with the 24th Artillery Regiment . He joined the Reichswehr on 1 October 1922 and was posted to the Military Training Department at the Reichswehr Ministry in Berlin . He remained at this post until 1929 , when he returned to Bavaria as commander of Wehrkreis VII in Munich . In his time with the Reichswehr Ministry , Kesselring was involved in the organisation of the army , trimming staff overheads to produce the best possible army with the limited resources available . He helped reorganise the Ordnance Department , laying the groundwork for the research and development efforts that would produce new weapons . He was involved in secret military manoeuvres held in the Soviet Union in 1924 and in the so @-@ called Great Plan for a 102 @-@ division army , which was prepared in 1923 and 1924 . After another brief stint at the Reichswehr Ministry , Kesselring was promoted to Oberstleutnant (lieutenant colonel) in 1930 and spent two years in Dresden with the 4th Artillery Regiment .

Against his wishes , Kesselring was discharged from the army on 1 October 1933 and appointed head of the Department of Administration at the Reich Commissariat for Aviation (Reichskommissariat für die Luftfahrt) , the forerunner of the Reich Air Ministry (Reichsluftfahrtministerium) , with the rank of Oberst (colonel) . Since the Treaty of Versailles forbade Germany from establishing an air force , this was nominally a civilian agency . The Luftwaffe would formally be established in 1935 . As chief of administration , he had to assemble his new staff from scratch . He was involved in the re @-@ establishment of the aviation industry and the construction of secret factories , forging alliances with industrialists and aviation engineers . He was promoted to Generalmajor (major general) in 1934 and Generalleutnant (lieutenant general) in 1936 . Like other generals of Nazi Germany , he received personal payments from Adolf Hitler ; in Kesselring 's case , RM 6 @, @ 000 , a considerable sum at the time .

At the age of 48 , he learned to fly . Kesselring believed that first @-@ hand knowledge of all aspects of aviation was crucial to being able to command airmen , although he was well aware that latecomers like himself did not impress the old pioneers or the young aviators . He qualified in various single and multi @-@ engined aircraft and continued flying three or four days per week until March 1945 . At times , his flight path took him over the concentration camps at Oranienburg , Dachau , and Buchenwald .

Following the death of Generalleutnant Walther Wever in an air crash , Kesselring became Chief of Staff of the Luftwaffe on 3 June 1936 . In that post , Kesselring oversaw the expansion of the Luftwaffe , the acquisition of new aircraft types such as the Messerschmitt Bf 109 and Junkers Ju 87 , and the development of paratroops .

Like many ex @-@ Army officers , he tended to see air power in the tactical role , providing support to land operations . In the historiography of the Luftwaffe Kesselring and Hans @-@ Jürgen Stumpff are usually blamed for neglecting strategic bombing while over @-@ focusing on close air support for the army . However the two most prominent enthusiasts for the focus on ground @-@ support operations (direct or indirect) were actually Hugo Sperrle and Hans Jeschonnek . The two men were long @-@ time professional airmen involved in German air services since their early careers . The Luftwaffe was not pressured into ground support operations because of pressure from the army

, or because it was led by ex @-@ army personnel like Kesselring . Interdiction and close air support were operations that suited the Luftwaffe 's pre @-@ existing approach to warfare ; a culture of joint inter @-@ service operations , rather than independent strategic air campaigns . Moreover , many in the Luftwaffe command believed medium bombers to be sufficient in power for use in strategic bombing operations against Germany 's most likely enemies ; Britain and France .

Kesselring 's main operational task during this time was the support of the Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War . However , his tenure was marred by personal and professional conflicts with his superior , General der Flieger Erhard Milch , and Kesselring asked to be relieved . The head of the Luftwaffe , Hermann Göring , acquiesced and Kesselring became the commander of Air District III in Dresden . On 1 October 1938 , he was promoted to General der Flieger (air general) and became commander of Luftflotte 1 , based in Berlin .

= = World War II = =

= = = Poland = = =

In the Polish campaign that began World War II , Kesselring 's Luftflotte 1 operated in support of Army Group North , commanded by Generaloberst Fedor von Bock . Although not under von Bock 's command , Kesselring worked closely with Bock and considered himself under Bock 's orders in all matters pertaining to the ground war . Kesselring strove to provide the best possible close air support to the ground forces and used the flexibility of air power to concentrate all available air strength at critical points , such as during the Battle of the Bzura . He attempted to cut the Polish communications by making a series of air attacks against Warsaw , but found that even 1 @,@ 000 kg (2 @,@ 200 lb) bombs could not guarantee that bridges would be destroyed .

Kesselring was himself shot down over Poland by the Polish Air Force . In all , he would be shot down five times during World War II . For his part in the Polish campaign , Kesselring was personally awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross by Adolf Hitler .

= = = Western Europe = = =

Kesselring 's Luftflotte 1 was not involved in the preparations for the campaigns in the west . Instead it remained in the east on garrison duty , establishing new airbases and an Air Raid Precautions network in occupied Poland . However , after the Mechelen Incident , in which an aircraft made a forced landing in Belgium with copies of the German invasion plan , Göring relieved the commander of Luftflotte 2 , General der Flieger Hellmuth Felmy , of his command , and appointed Kesselring in his place . Kesselring flew to his new headquarters at Münster the very next day , 13 January 1940 . As Felmy 's chief of staff , Generalmajor Josef Kammhuber , had also been relieved , Kesselring brought his own chief of staff , Generalmajor Wilhelm Speidel , with him .

Arriving in the west , Kesselring found Luftflotte 2 operating in support of von Bock 's Army Group B. He inherited from Felmy a complex air plan requiring on @-@ the @-@ minute timing for several hours , incorporating an airborne operation around Rotterdam and The Hague to seize airfields and bridges in the " fortress Holland " area . The paratroopers were General der Flieger Kurt Student 's airborne forces that depended on a quick link up with the mechanised forces . To facilitate this , Kesselring promised von Bock the fullest possible close air support . Air and ground operations , however , were to commence simultaneously , so there would be no time to suppress the defending Royal Netherlands Air Force .

The Battle of the Netherlands commenced on 10 May 1940 . While initial air operations went well , and the German fighters and bombers soon gained the upper hand against the small Dutch air force , the paratroopers ran into fierce opposition in the Battle for The Hague and the Battle of Rotterdam . On 14 May 1940 , responding to a call for assistance from Student , Kesselring ordered the bombing of Rotterdam city centre . Fires raged out of control , destroying much of the city .

After the surrender of the Netherlands on 14 May 1940 , Luftflotte 2 attempted to move forward to

new airfields in Belgium while still providing support for the fast moving ground troops . The Battle of France was going well , with General der Panzertruppe Heinz Guderian forcing a crossing of the River Meuse at Sedan on 13 May 1940 . To support the breakthrough , Kesselring transferred Generalleutnant Wolfram von Richthofen 's VIII . Fliegerkorps to Luftflotte 3 . By 24 May , the Allied forces had been cut in two , and the German Army was only 15 kilometres (9 @. @ 3 mi) from Dunkirk , the last channel port remaining in Allied hands . However , that day Generaloberst Gerd von Rundstedt ordered a halt . In his memoirs , Kesselring described that decision as a " fatal error " . It left the burden of preventing the Allied evacuation of Dunkirk to the air force , hampered by poor flying weather and staunch opposition from the Royal Air Force . For his role in the campaign in the west , Kesselring was promoted to Generalfeldmarschall (field marshal) during the 1940 Field Marshal Ceremony .

Following the campaign in France , Kesselring 's Luftflotte 2 was committed to the Battle of Britain . Luftflotte 2 was initially responsible for the bombing of southeastern England and the London area but as the battle progressed , command responsibility shifted , with Generalfeldmarschall Hugo Sperrle 's Luftflotte 3 taking more responsibility for the night @-@ time Blitz attacks while Luftflotte 2 conducted the main daylight operations . Kesselring was involved in the planning of numerous raids , including the Coventry Blitz of November 1940 . Kesselring 's fleet failed to achieve a decisive victory . Instead , the Luftwaffe employed the inherent flexibility of air power to switch targets .

= = = Invasion of the Soviet Union = = =

Although earmarked for operations against the Soviet Union , Luftflotte 2 remained in the west until May 1941 . This was partly as a deception measure , and partly because new airbases in Poland could not be completed by 1 June 1941 target date , although they were made ready in time for the actual commencement of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941 . Kesselring established his new headquarters at Bielany , a suburb of Warsaw .

Luftflotte 2 operated in support of Army Group Centre , commanded by Fedor von Bock , continuing the close working relationship between the two . Kesselring 's mission was to gain air superiority , and if possible air supremacy , as soon as possible while still supporting ground operations . For this he had a fleet of over 1 @, @ 000 aircraft , about a third of the Luftwaffe 's total strength .

The German attack caught large numbers of Soviet Air Force aircraft on the ground . Faulty tactics ? sending unescorted bombers against the Germans at regular intervals in tactically unsound formations ? accounted for many more . Kesselring reported that in the first week of operations Luftflotte 2 had accounted for 2 @, @ 500 Soviet aircraft in the air and on the ground . Even Göring found these figures hard to believe and ordered them to be re @-@ checked . As the ground troops advanced , the figures could be directly confirmed and were found to be too low . Within days , Kesselring was able to fly solo over the front in his Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 189 .

With air supremacy attained , Luftflotte 2 turned to support of ground operations , particularly guarding the flanks of the armoured spearheads , without which the rapid advance was not possible . When enemy counterattacks threatened , Kesselring threw the full weight of his force against them . Now that the Army was convinced of the value of air support , units were all too inclined to call for it . Kesselring now had to convince the Army that air support should be concentrated at critical points . He strove to improve army ? air cooperation with new tactics and the appointment of Colonel Martin Fiebig as a special close air support commander . By 26 July , Kesselring reported the destruction of 165 tanks , 2 @, @ 136 vehicles and 194 artillery pieces .

In late 1941 , Luftflotte 2 supported the final German offensive against Moscow , codenamed Operation Typhoon . Raids on Moscow proved hazardous , as Moscow had good all @-@ weather airfields and opposition from both fighters and anti @-@ aircraft guns was similar to that encountered over Britain . The bad weather that hampered ground operations from October on impeded air operations even more . Nonetheless , Luftflotte 2 continued to fly critical reconnaissance , interdiction , close air support and air supply missions .

= = = Mediterranean and North Africa = = =

In November 1941 , Kesselring was appointed Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief South and was transferred to Italy along with his Luftflotte 2 staff , which for the time being also functioned as his Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief South staff . Only in January 1943 did he form his headquarters into a true theatre staff and create a separate staff to control Luftflotte 2 . As a theatre commander , he was answerable directly to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) and commanded ground , naval and air forces , but this was of little importance at first as most German units were under Italian operational control .

Kesselring strove to organise and protect supply convoys in order to get the German @-@ Italian Panzer Army the resources it needed . He succeeded in establishing local air superiority and neutralising Malta , which provided a base from which British aircraft and submarines could interdict Axis convoys headed for North Africa . Without the vital supplies they carried , particularly fuel , the Axis forces in North Africa could not conduct operations . Through various expedients , Kesselring managed to deliver an increased flow of supplies to Generaloberst Erwin Rommel 's Afrika Korps in Libya . With his forces thus strengthened , Rommel prepared an attack on the British positions around Gazala , while Kesselring planned Operation Herkules , an airborne and seaborne attack on Malta with the 185 Airborne Division Folgore and Ramcke Parachute Brigade . Kesselring hoped to thereby secure the Axis line of communication with North Africa .

For the Battle of Gazala , Rommel divided his command in two , taking personal command of the mobile units of the Deutsches Afrika Korps and Italian XX Motorized Corps , which he led around the southern flank of Lieutenant @-@ General Neil Ritchie 's British Eighth Army . Rommel left the infantry of the Italian X and XXI Corps under General der Panzertruppe Ludwig Crüwell to hold the rest of the Eighth Army in place . This command arrangement went awry on 29 May 1942 when Crüwell was taken prisoner . Lacking an available commander of sufficient seniority , Kesselring assumed personal command of Gruppe Crüwell . Flying his Fieseler Fi 156 Storch to a meeting , Kesselring was fired upon by a British force astride Rommel 's line of communications . Kesselring called in an air strike by every available Stuka and Jabo . His attack was successful ; the British force suffered heavy losses and was forced to pull back .

Kesselring and Rommel had a disagreement over the latter 's conduct in the Battle of Bir Hakeim . Rommel 's initial infantry assaults had failed to capture this vital position , the southern pivot of the British Gazala Line , which was held by the 1st Free French brigade , commanded by General Marie Pierre Koenig . Rommel had called for air support but had failed to break the position , which Kesselring attributed to faulty coordination between the ground and air attacks . Bir Hakeim was evacuated on 10 June 1942 . Kesselring was more impressed with the results of Rommel 's successful assault on Tobruk on 21 June , for which Kesselring brought in additional aircraft from Greece and Crete . For his part in the campaign , Kesselring was awarded the Knight 's Cross with oak leaves and swords .

In the wake of the victory at Tobruk , Rommel persuaded Hitler to authorise an attack on Egypt instead of Malta , over Kesselring 's objections . The parachute troops assembled for Operation Herkules were sent to Rommel . Things went well at first , with Rommel winning the Battle of Mersa Matruh , but just as Kesselring had warned , the logistical difficulties mounted and the result was the disastrous First Battle of El Alamein , Battle of Alam el Halfa and Second Battle of El Alamein . Kesselring considered Rommel to be a great general leading fast @-@ moving troops at the corps level of command , but felt that he was too moody and changeable for higher command . For Kesselring , Rommel 's nervous breakdown and hospitalisation for depression at the end of the African Campaign only confirmed this .

Kesselring was briefly considered as a possible successor to Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel as Chief of Staff of the OKW in September 1942 , with General der Panzertruppe Friedrich Paulus replacing Generaloberst Alfred Jodl as Chief of the Operations Staff at OKW . The consideration demonstrated the high regard in which Kesselring was held by Hitler . Nevertheless , Hitler decided that neither Kesselring nor Paulus could be spared from their current posts . In October 1942 , Kesselring was given direct command of all German armed forces in the theatre except Rommel 's German @-@ Italian Panzer Army in North Africa , including General der Infanterie Enno von

Rintelen , the German liaison officer at Commando Supremo , who spoke fluent Italian . Kesselring 's command also included the troops in Greece and the Balkans until the end of the year , when Hitler created an army group headquarters under Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm List , naming him List Oberbefehlshaber Südost .

= = = Tunisia = = =

Operation Torch , the Allied invasion of French North Africa , precipitated a crisis in Kesselring 's command . He ordered Walther Nehring , the former commander of the Afrika Korps who was returning to action after recovering from wounds received at the Battle of Alam el Halfa , to proceed to Tunisia to take command of a new corps (XC Corps) . Kesselring ordered Nehring to establish a bridgehead in Tunisia and then to press west as far as possible so as to gain freedom to manoeuvre . By December , the Allied commander , General Dwight D. Eisenhower , was forced to concede that Kesselring had won the race ; the final phase of Torch had failed and the Axis could only be ejected from Tunisia after a prolonged struggle .

With the initiative back with the Germans and Italians , Kesselring hoped to launch an offensive that would drive the Allies out of North Africa . At the Battle of the Kasserine Pass his forces gave the Allies a beating , but ; in the end strong Allied resistance and a string of Axis errors stopped the advance . Kesselring now concentrated on shoring up his forces by moving the required tonnages of supplies from Sicily but his efforts were frustrated by Allied aircraft and submarines . An Allied offensive in April finally broke through , leading to a collapse of the Axis position in Tunisia . Some 275 @, @ 000 German and Italian prisoners were taken . In return , Kesselring had , however , held up the Allies in Tunisia for six months , forcing a postponement of the Allied invasion of Northern France from the middle of 1943 to the middle of 1944 .

= = = Italian Campaign = = =

= = = = Sicily = = = =

Kesselring expected that the Allies would next invade Sicily , as a landing could be made there under fighter cover from Tunisia and Malta . He reinforced the six coastal and four mobile Italian divisions there with two mobile German divisions , the 15th Panzergrenadier Division and the Hermann Göring Panzer Division , both rebuilt after being destroyed in Tunisia . Kesselring was well aware that while this force was large enough to stop the Allies from simply marching in , it could not withstand a large scale invasion . He therefore pinned his hopes on repelling the Allied invasion of Sicily on an immediate counterattack , which he ordered Colonel Paul Conrath of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division to carry out the moment the objective of the Allied invasion fleet was known , with or without orders from the island commander , Generale d 'Armata Alfredo Guzzoni .

Kesselring hoped that the Allied invasion fleet would provide good targets for U @-@ boats , but they had few successes . U @-@ 953 sank two American LSTs and with U @-@ 375 sank three vessels from a British convoy on 4 ? 5 July , while U @-@ 371 sank a Liberty ship and a tanker on 10 July . Pressure from the Allied air forces forced Luftflotte 2 , commanded since June by von Richthofen , to withdraw most of its aircraft to the mainland .

The Allied invasion of Sicily on 10 July 1943 was stubbornly opposed . A Stuka attacked and sank the USS Maddox ; a Bf 109 destroyed an LST ; and a Liberty ship filled with ammunition was bombed by Ju 88s and caught fire , later exploding without loss of life . Unaware that Guzzoni had already ordered a major counterattack on 11 July , Kesselring bypassed the chain of command to order the Hermann Göring Panzer Division to attack that day in the hope that a vigorous attack could succeed before the Americans could bring the bulk of their artillery and armoured support ashore . Although his troops gave the Americans " quite a battering " , they failed to capture the Allied position .

Kesselring flew to Sicily himself on 12 July to survey the situation and decided that no more than a

delaying action was possible and that the island would eventually have to be evacuated . Nonetheless , he intended to fight on and he reinforced Sicily with the 29th Panzergrenadier Division on 15 July . Kesselring returned to Sicily by flying boat on 16 July to give the senior German commander , General der Panzertruppe Hans @-@ Valentin Hube , his instructions . Unable to provide much more in the way of air support , Kesselring gave Hube command of the heavy flak units on the island , although this was contrary to Luftwaffe doctrine . In all , Kesselring managed to delay the Allies in Sicily for another month and the Allied conquest of the Sicily was not complete until 17 August .

Kesselring 's evacuation of Sicily , which began a week earlier on 10 August , was perhaps the most brilliant action of the campaign . In spite of the Allies ' superiority on land , at sea , and in the air , Kesselring was able to evacuate not only 40 @,@ 000 men , but also 96 @,@ 605 vehicles , 94 guns , 47 tanks , 1 @,@ 100 tons of ammunition , 970 tons of fuel , and 15 @,@ 000 tons of stores . He was able to achieve near @-@ perfect coordination among the three services under his command while his opponent , Eisenhower , could not .

= = = = Allied invasion of Italy = = = =

With the fall of Sicily , OKW feared that Italy would withdraw from the war , but Kesselring remained confident that the Italians would continue to fight . OKW regarded Kesselring and von Rintelen as too pro @-@ Italian and began to bypass him , sending Rommel to northern Italy , and Student to Rome , where his I Parachute Corps was under OKW orders to occupy the capital in case of Italian defection . Benito Mussolini was removed from power on 25 July 1943 and Rommel and OKW began to plan for the occupation of Italy and the disarmament of the Italian Army . Kesselring remained uninformed of these plans for the time being .

On the advice of Rommel and Jodl , Hitler decided that the Italian Peninsula could not be held without the assistance of the Italian Army . Kesselring was ordered to withdraw from southern Italy and consolidate his Army Group C with Rommel 's Army Group B in Northern Italy , where Rommel would assume overall command . Kesselring was slated to be posted to Norway . Kesselring was appalled at the prospect of abandoning Italy . It would expose southern Germany to bombers operating from Italy ; risk the Allies breaking into the Po Valley ; and was completely unnecessary , as he was certain that Rome could be held until the summer of 1944 . This assessment was based on his belief that the Allies would not conduct operations outside the range of their air cover , which could only reach as far as Salerno . Kesselring submitted his resignation on 14 August 1943 .

SS Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff , the highest SS and police Führer in Italy , intervened on Kesselring 's behalf with Hitler . Wolff painted Rommel as " politically unreliable " and argued that Kesselring 's presence in southern Italy was vital to prevent an early Italian defection . On Wolff 's advice , Hitler refused to accept Kesselring 's resignation .

Italy withdrew from the war on 8 September . Kesselring immediately moved to secure Rome , where he expected an Allied airborne and seaborne invasion . He ordered the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division and 2nd Parachute Division to close on the city , while a detachment made an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Italian Army staff at Monterotondo in a coup de main . Kesselring 's two divisions were faced by five Italian divisions , two of them armoured , but he managed to overcome the opposition , disperse the Italian forces and secure the city in two days .

All over Italy , the Germans swiftly disarmed Italian units . Rommel deported Italian soldiers , except for those willing to serve in German units , to Germany for forced labour , whereas Italian units in Kesselring 's area were initially disbanded and their men permitted to go home . One Italian commander , General Gonzaga , refused German demands that his 222nd Coastal Division disarm , and was promptly shot . A significant part of the 184 Airborne Division Nembo went over to the German side , eventually becoming the basis of the 4th Parachute Division . On the Greek island of Kefalonia ? outside Kesselring 's command ? some 5 @,@ 000 Italian troops of the 33 Mountain Infantry Division Acqui were massacred . Mussolini was rescued by the Germans in Operation Oak (Unternehmen Eiche) , a raid planned by Kurt Student and carried out by Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny on 12 September . The details of the operation were deliberately , though unsuccessfully ,

kept from Kesselring . " Kesselring is too honest for those born traitors down there " was Hitler 's assessment .

Italy now effectively became an occupied country , as the Germans poured in troops . Italy 's decision to switch sides created contempt for the Italians among both the Allies and Germans , which was to have far @-@ reaching consequences .

= = = = Salerno = = = =

Although his command was already " written off " , Kesselring intended to fight . At the Battle of Salerno in September 1943 , he launched a full @-@ scale counterattack against the U.S. Fifth Army landings there with Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff 's Tenth Army . The counterattack inflicted heavy casualties on the Allied forces , forced them back in several areas , and , for a time , made Allied commanders contemplate evacuation . The short distance from German airfields allowed Luftflotte 2 to put 120 aircraft over the Salerno area on 11 September 1943 . Using Fritz X anti @-@ ship missiles , hits were scored on the battleship HMS Warspite and cruisers HMS Uganda and USS Savannah , while a Liberty ship was sunk on 14 September and another damaged the next day . The offensive ultimately failed to throw the Allies back into the sea because of the intervention of Allied naval gunfire which decimated the advancing German units , stubborn Allied resistance and the advance of the British Eighth Army . On 17 September 1943 , Kesselring gave Vietinghoff permission to break off the attack and withdraw .

Kesselring had been defeated but gained precious time . Already , in defiance of his orders , he was preparing a series of successive fallback positions on the Volturno Line , the Barbara Line and the Bernhardt Line . Only in November 1943 , after a month of hard fighting , did the Allies reach Kesselring 's main position , the Gustav Line . According to his memoirs , Kesselring felt that much more could have been accomplished if he had access to the troops held " uselessly " under Rommel 's command .

In November 1943 , Kesselring met with Hitler . Kesselring gave an optimistic assessment of the situation in Italy and gave reassurances that he could hold the Allies south of Rome on the Winter Line . Kesselring further promised that he could prevent the Allies reaching the Northern Apennines for at least six months . As a result , on 6 November 1943 , Hitler ordered Rommel and his Army Group B headquarters to move to France to take charge of the Atlantic Wall and prepare for the Allied attack that was expected there in the spring of 1944 . On 21 November 1943 , Kesselring resumed command of all German forces in Italy , combining Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief South , a joint command , with that of Army Group C , a ground command . " I had always blamed Kesselring " , Hitler later explained , " for looking at things too optimistically ... events have proved Rommel wrong , and I have been justified in my decision to leave Field Marshal Kesselring there , whom I have seen as an incredible political idealist , but also as a military optimist , and it is my opinion that military leadership without optimism is not possible . "

The Luftwaffe scored a notable success on the night of 2 December 1943 when 105 Ju 88 bombers struck the port of Bari . Skilfully using chaff to confuse the Allied radar operators , they found the port packed with brightly lit Allied shipping . The result was the most destructive air raid on Allied shipping since the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 . Hits were scored on two ammunition ships and a tanker . Burning oil and exploding ammunition spread over the harbour . Some 16 ships were sunk and eight damaged , and the port was put out of action for three weeks . Moreover , one of the ships sunk , SS John Harvey , had been carrying mustard gas , which enveloped the port in a cloud of poisonous vapours .

= = = = Cassino and Anzio = = = =

The first Allied attempt to break through the Gustav Line in the Battle of Monte Cassino in January 1944 met with early success , with the British X Corps breaking through the line held by the 94th Infantry Division and imperilling the entire Tenth Army front . At the same time , Kesselring was receiving warnings of an imminent Allied amphibious attack at Anzio . Kesselring rushed his

reserves , the 29th and 90th Panzergrenadier Divisions , to the Cassino front . They were able to stabilise the German position there but left Rome poorly guarded .

Kesselring felt that he had been out @-@ generalled when the Allies landed at Anzio . Although taken by surprise , Kesselring moved rapidly to regain control of the situation , summoning Generaloberst Eberhard von Mackensen 's Fourteenth Army headquarters from northern Italy , the 29th and 90th Panzergrenadier Divisions from the Cassino front , and the 26th Panzer Division from Tenth Army . OKW chipped in some divisions from other theatres . By February , Kesselring was able to take the offensive at Anzio but his forces were unable to crush the Allied beachhead , for which Kesselring blamed himself , OKW and von Mackensen for avoidable errors .

Meanwhile , costly fighting at Monte Cassino in February 1944 , brought the Allies close to a breakthrough into the Liri Valley . To hold the bastion of Monte Cassino , Kesselring brought in the 1st Parachute Division , an " exceptionally well trained and conditioned " formation , on 26 February . Despite heavy casualties and the expenditure of enormous quantities of ammunition , an Allied offensive in March 1944 failed to break the Gustav Line position .

On 11 May 1944 General Sir Harold Alexander , commanding the Allied Armies in Italy , launched Operation Diadem , which finally broke through the Gustav Line and forced the Tenth Army to withdraw . In the process , a gap opened up between the Tenth and Fourteenth Armies , threatening both with encirclement . For this failure , Kesselring relieved von Mackensen of his command , replacing him with General der Panzertruppe Joachim Lemelsen . Fortunately for the Germans , Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark , commander of the U.S. Fifth Army , obsessed with the capture of Rome , failed to take advantage of the situation and the Tenth Army was able to withdraw to the next line of defence , the Trasimene Line , where it was able to link up with the Fourteenth Army and then conduct a fighting withdrawal .

For his part in the campaign , Kesselring was awarded the Knight 's Cross with oak leaves , swords and diamonds by Hitler at the Wolfsschanze near Rastenburg , East Prussia on 19 July 1944 . The next day , Hitler was the target of the 20 July plot . Informed of this event that evening by Göring , Kesselring , like many other senior commanders , sent a telegram to Hitler reaffirming his loyalty .

Throughout July and August 1944 , Kesselring fought a stubborn delaying action , gradually retreating to the formidable Gothic Line north of Florence . There , he was finally able to halt the Allied advance . Casualties of the Gothic Line battles in September and October 1944 included Kesselring himself . On 25 October 1944 , his car collided with an artillery piece coming out of a side road . Kesselring suffered serious head and facial injuries and did not return to his command until January 1945 .

= = = = Actions impacting population and cultural objects = = = =

Kesselring , during the campaign , attempted to avoid the physical destruction of many artistically important Italian cities , including Rome , Florence , Siena and Orvieto . In some cases , historic bridges ? such as the Ponte Vecchio (literally " Old Bridge ") ? were booby trapped rather than blown up . However , other historic Florentine bridges were destroyed on his orders and , in addition to booby @-@ trapping the old bridge , he ordered the demolition of the ancient historical central borough at its two ends , in order to delay the Allied advance across the River Arno . Kesselring supported the Italian declaration of Rome , Florence and Chieti as open cities . In the case of Rome , this was in spite of there being considerable tactical advantages to be had from defending the Tiber bridges . These declarations were never agreed to by the Allies as the cities were not demilitarised and remained centres of government and industry . Despite the repeated declarations of " open city " , Rome was bombed more than fifty times by the Allies , whose air forces hit Florence as well . In practice , the open city status was rendered meaningless .

Kesselring tried to preserve the monastery of Monte Cassino by avoiding its military occupation even though it offered a superb observing point over the battlefield . Ultimately this was unsuccessful , as the Allies believed the monastery would be used to direct the German artillery against their lines . On the morning of 15 February 1944 , 142 B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress , 47 B @-@ 25 Mitchell and 40 B @-@ 26 Marauder medium bombers deliberately dropped 1 @,@ 150

tons of high explosives and incendiary bombs on the abbey , reducing the historic monastery to a smoking mass of rubble . Kesselring was aware that some artworks taken from Monte Cassino for safekeeping wound up in the possession of Hermann Göring . Kesselring had some German soldiers shot for looting . German authorities avoided giving the Italian authorities control over artworks because they feared that " entire collections would be sold to Switzerland " . A 1945 Allied investigation reported that Italian cultural treasures had suffered relatively little war damage . Kesselring received regular updates on efforts to preserve cultural treasures and his personal interest in the matter contributed to the high proportion of art treasures that were saved .

= = = = War crimes = = = =

On 22 ? 23 March 1944 , a 15 @-@ man American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Operational Group landed in inflatable boats from US Navy PT boats on the Ligurian coast as part of Operation Ginny II , a mission to blow up the entrances of two vital railway tunnels . Their boats were discovered and they were captured by a smaller group of Italian and German soldiers . On 26 March , they were executed under Hitler 's " Commando Order " , issued after German soldiers had been shackled during the Dieppe Raid .

In Rome on 23 March 1944 , 33 policemen of the SS Police Regiment Bozen from the German @-@ speaking population of the Italian province of South Tyrol and three Italian civilians were killed by a bomb blast and the subsequent shooting . In response , Hitler approved the recommendation of von Mackensen , who was responsible for the sector including Rome , that ten Italians should be shot for each policeman killed . The task fell to SS Obersturmbannführer Herbert Kappler who , finding there were not enough condemned prisoners available , made up the numbers using Jewish prisoners and even civilians taken from the streets . The result was the Ardeatine massacre .

The fall of Rome on 4 June 1944 placed Kesselring in a dangerous situation as his forces attempted to withdraw from Rome to the Gothic Line . That the Germans were especially vulnerable to Italian partisans was not lost on the British General Harold Alexander , who appealed in a radio broadcast for Italians to kill Germans " wherever you encounter them " . Kesselring responded by authorising the " massive employment of artillery , grenade and mine throwers , armoured cars , flamethrowers and other technical combat equipment " against the partisans . He also issued an order promising indemnity to soldiers who " exceed our normal restraint " . Subsequently , massacres were carried out by the Hermann Göring Panzer Division at Stia in April , Civitella in Val di Chiana in June and Bucine in July 1944 , by the 26th Panzer Division at Padule di Fucecchio on 23 August 1944 , and by the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division Reichsführer @-@ SS at Sant 'Anna di Stazzema in August 1944 and Marzabotto in September and October 1944 .

In August 1944 Kesselring was informed by Rudolf Rahn , the German ambassador to the RSI , that Mussolini had filed protests about the killing of Italian citizens . In response , Kesselring issued another edict to his troops on 21 August , deploring incidents that had " damaged the German Wehrmacht 's reputation and discipline and which no longer have anything to do with reprisal operations " and launched investigations into specific cases that Mussolini cited . Between 21 July and 25 September 1944 , 624 Germans were killed , 993 wounded and 872 missing in partisan operations , while some 9 @,@ 520 partisans were killed .

Kesselring used the Jews of Rome as slave labour on the construction of fortifications ? as he had earlier done with those of Tunis . When ordered to deport the Roman Jews , Kesselring resisted . He announced that no resources were available to carry out such an order . Hitler then transferred responsibility to the SS . About 2 @,@ 000 Roman Jews were ultimately deported between October 1943 and June 1944 , half of them on 16 October 1943 . During the German occupation of Italy , the Germans were believed to have killed some 46 @,@ 000 Italian civilians , including 7 @,@ 000 Jews .

= = = Central Europe = = =

After he recovered from the car accident , Kesselring was summoned by Hitler to relieve

Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt as OB West on 10 March 1945 , following the disastrous loss of the still @-@ intact Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine during the Battle of Remagen . On arrival , he told his new staff , " Well , gentlemen , I am the new V @-@ 3 " , referring to the Vergeltungswaffe (" vengeance " weapons) . Given the desperate situation of the Western Front , this was another sign of Kesselring 's proverbial optimism . Kesselring still described as " lucid " Hitler 's analysis of the situation , according to which the Germans were about to inflict a historical defeat upon the Soviets , after which the victorious German armies would be brought west to crush the Allies and sweep them from the continent . Therefore , Kesselring was determined to " hang on " in the west until the " decision in the East " came .

Kesselring endorsed Hitler 's order that deserters should be hanged from the nearest tree . When a staff officer sought to make him aware of the hopelessness of the situation , Kesselring told him that he had driven through the entire army rear area and not seen a single hanged man .

The Western Front at this time generally followed the River Rhine with two important exceptions : the American bridgehead over the Rhine at Remagen , and a large German salient west of the Rhine , the Saar ? Palatinate triangle . Consideration was given to evacuating the triangle , but OKW ordered it held . When Kesselring paid his first visit to the German First and Seventh Army headquarters there on 13 March 1945 , the army group commander , Oberst @-@ gruppenführer Paul Hausser , and the two army commanders all affirmed the defence of the triangle could only result in heavy losses or complete annihilation of their commands . General der Infanterie Hans Felber of the Seventh Army considered the latter the most likely outcome . Nonetheless , Kesselring insisted that the positions had to be held .

The triangle was already under attack from two sides by Lieutenant General George Patton 's Third Army and Lieutenant General Alexander Patch 's Seventh Army . The German position soon crumbled and Hitler reluctantly sanctioned a withdrawal . The First and Seventh Armies suffered heavy losses : around 113 @,@ 000 Germans casualties at the cost of 17 @,@ 000 on the Allied side . Nonetheless , they had avoided encirclement and managed to conduct a skilful delaying action , evacuating the last troops to the east bank of the Rhine on 25 March 1945 .

As Germany was cut in two , Kesselring 's command was enlarged to include Army Groups Centre , South and South @-@ East on the Eastern Front , and Army Group C in Italy , as well as his own Army Group G and Army Group Upper Rhine . On 30 April , Hitler committed suicide in Berlin . On 1 May , Karl Dönitz was designated German President (Reichspräsident) and the Flensburg government was created . One of the new president 's first acts was the appointment of Kesselring as Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of Southern Germany , with plenipotentiary powers .

= = = Chaotic surrender = = =

Meanwhile , Wolff and von Vietinghoff , now commander of Army Group C , had almost concluded a preliminary surrender agreement with the OSS chief in Switzerland , Allen Dulles . Known as Operation Sunrise , these secret negotiations had been in progress since early March 1945 . Kesselring was aware of them , having previously consented to them , although he had not informed his own staff . He did , however , later inform Hitler .

At first he did not accept the agreement and , on 30 April , relieved both Vietinghoff and his Chief of Staff , Generalleutnant Hans Röttiger , putting them at the disposition of the OKW for a possible court martial . They were replaced by General Friedrich Schulz and Generalmajor Friedrich Wenzel respectively . The next morning , 1 May , Röttinger reacted by placing both Schulz and Wenzel under arrest , and summoning Lemelsen to take Schulz 's place . Lemelsen initially refused , as he was in possession of a written order from Kesselring which prohibited any talks with the enemy without his explicit authorization . By this time , Vietinghoff and Wolff had concluded an armistice with the Allied Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Theatre , Field Marshal Alexander , which became effective on 2 May at 14 : 00 . Lemelsen reached Bolzano , and Schulz and Wenzel regained control , this time agreeing with the officers pushing for a quick surrender . The German armies in Italy were now utterly defeated by the Allies , who were rapidly advancing from Garmisch towards Innsbruck . Kesselring remained stubbornly opposed to the surrender , but was finally won

over by Wolff on the late morning of 2 May after a two @-@ hour phone call to Kesselring at his headquarters at Pullach .

North of the Alps , Army Group G followed suit on 6 May . Kesselring now decided to surrender his own headquarters . He ordered Hausser to supervise the SS troops to ensure that the surrender was carried out in accordance with his instructions . Kesselring then surrendered to an American major at Saalfelden , near Salzburg , in Austria on 9 May 1945 . He was taken to see Major General Maxwell D. Taylor , the commander of the 101st Airborne Division , who treated him courteously , allowing him to keep his weapons and field marshal 's baton , and to visit the Eastern Front headquarters of Army Groups Centre and South at Zeltweg and Graz unescorted . Taylor arranged for Kesselring and his staff to move into a hotel at Berchtesgaden . Photographs of Taylor and Kesselring drinking tea together created a stir in the United States . Kesselring met with Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers , commander of the Sixth United States Army Group , and gave interviews to Allied newspaper reporters .

In his post @-@ war memoirs , Kesselring claimed he envisioned making a start on the rehabilitation of Germany following the end of the war . Instead , he was arrested . On 15 May 1945 , Kesselring was taken to Mondorf @-@ les @-@ Bains where his baton and decorations were taken from him and he was incarcerated . He was held in a number of American POW camps before being transferred to British custody in 1946 . He testified at the Nuremberg trial of Hermann Göring , but his offers to testify against Soviet , American , and British commanders were declined .

= = Post @-@ war = =

= = = Trial = = =

By the end of the war , for many Italians the name of Kesselring , whose signature appeared on posters and printed orders announcing draconian measures adopted by the German occupation , had become synonymous with the oppression and terror that had characterised the German occupation . Kesselring 's name headed the list of German officers blamed for a long series of atrocities perpetrated by the German forces .

The Moscow Declaration of October 1943 promised that " those German officers and men and members of the Nazi party who have been responsible for or have taken a consenting part in the above atrocities , massacres and executions will be sent back to the countries in which their abominable deeds were done in order that they may be judged and punished according to the laws of these liberated countries and of free governments which will be erected therein . " However , the British , who had been a driving force in moulding the war crimes trial policy that culminated in the Nuremberg Trials , explicitly excluded high @-@ ranking German officers in their custody . Thus , Kesselring 's conviction became " a legal prerequisite if perpetrators of war crimes were to be found guilty by Italian courts " .

The British held two major trials against the top German war criminals who had perpetrated crimes during the Italian campaign . For political reasons it was decided to hold the trials in Italy , but a request by Italy to allow an Italian judge to participate was denied on the grounds that Italy was not an Allied country . The trials were held under the Royal Warrant of 18 June 1945 , thus essentially under British Common Military Law . The decision put the trials on a shaky legal basis , as foreign nationals were being tried for crimes against foreigners in a foreign country . The first trial , held in Rome , was of Mackensen and Mälzer for their part in the Ardeatine massacre . Both were sentenced to death on 30 November 1946 .

Kesselring 's own trial began in Venice on 17 February 1947 . The British Military Court was presided over by Major General Sir Edmund Hakewill @-@ Smith , assisted by four lieutenant colonels . Colonel Richard C. Halse ? who had already obtained the death penalty for von Mackensen and Kurt Mälzer ? was the prosecutor . Kesselring 's legal team was headed by Hans Laternser , a skilful German lawyer who specialised in Anglo @-@ Saxon law , had represented several defendants at the Nuremberg Trials , and would later go on to represent

Generalfeldmarschall Erich von Manstein . Kesselring 's ability to pay his legal team was hampered because his assets had been frozen by the Allies , but his legal costs were eventually met by friends in South America and relatives in Franconia .

Kesselring was arraigned on two charges : the shooting of 335 Italians in the Ardeatine massacre and incitement to kill Italian civilians . Kesselring did not invoke the " Nuremberg defence " . Rather , he maintained that his actions were lawful . On 6 May 1947 the Court found him guilty of both charges and sentenced him to death by firing squad , which was considered more honourable than hanging . The court left open the question of the legality of killing innocent persons in reprisals .

The planned major trial for the campaign of reprisals never took place , but a series of smaller trials was held instead in Padua between April and June 1947 for SS Brigadeführer Willy Tensfeld , Kapitänleutnant Waldemar Krummhaar , the 26th Panzer Division 's Generalleutnant Eduard Crasemann and SS Gruppenführer Max Simon of the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division Reichsführer @-@ SS . Tensfeld was acquitted ; Crasemann was sentenced to 10 years ; and Simon was sentenced to death , but his sentence was commuted . Simon 's trial was the last held in Italy by the British . By 1949 , British military tribunals had sentenced 230 Germans to death and another 447 to custodial sentences . None of the death sentences imposed between the end of 1946 and 1948 were carried out . A number of officers , all below the rank of General , including Kappler , were transferred to the Italian courts for trial . These applied very different legal standards to the British ? ones which were often more favourable to the defendants . Ironically , in view of the repeated attempts by many senior Wehrmacht commanders to shift blame for atrocities onto the SS , the most senior SS commanders in Italy , Karl Wolff and Heinrich Himmler 's personal representative in Italy , SS Standartenführer Eugen Dollmann , escaped prosecution .

= = = Commutation , pardon and release from prison = = =

The death verdict against Kesselring unleashed a storm of protest in the United Kingdom . Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill immediately branded it as too harsh and intervened in favour of Kesselring . Field Marshal Alexander , now Governor General of Canada , sent a telegram to Prime Minister Clement Attlee in which he expressed his hope that Kesselring 's sentence would be commuted . " As his old opponent on the battlefield " , he stated , " I have no complaints against him . Kesselring and his soldiers fought against us hard but clean . " Alexander had expressed his admiration for Kesselring as a military commander as early as 1943 . In his 1961 memoirs Alexander paid tribute to Kesselring as a commander who " showed great skill in extricating himself from the desperate situations into which his faulty intelligence had led him " . Alexander 's sentiments were echoed by Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Leese , who had commanded the British Eighth Army in the Italian campaign . In a May 1947 interview , Leese said he was " very sad " to hear of what he considered " British victor 's justice " being imposed on Kesselring , an " extremely gallant soldier who had fought his battles fairly and squarely " . Lord de L 'Isle , who had been awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry at Anzio , raised the issue in the House of Lords .

The Italian government refused to carry out death sentences , as the death penalty had been abolished in Italy in 1944 and was regarded as a relic of Mussolini 's Fascist regime . The Italian decision was very disappointing to the British government because the trials had partly been intended to meet the expectations of the Italian public . The War Office notified Lieutenant General Sir John Harding , who had succeeded Alexander as commander of British forces in the Mediterranean in 1946 , that there should be no more death sentences and those already imposed should be commuted . Accordingly , Harding commuted the death sentences imposed on von Mackensen , Mälzer and Kesselring to life imprisonment on 4 July 1947 . Mälzer died while still in prison in February 1952 , while von Mackensen , after having his sentence reduced to 21 years , was set free in October 1952 . Kesselring was moved from Mestre prison near Venice to Wolfsberg , Carinthia , in May 1947 . In October 1947 he was transferred for the last time , to Werl Prison , in Westphalia .

In Kesselring 's memoirs , he said that in Wolfsberg he was approached by a former SS major who had an escape plan prepared . According to Kesselring , he declined the offer on the grounds that it

would be seen as a confession of guilt . Other senior Nazi figures did manage to escape from Wolfsberg to South America or Syria .

Kesselring resumed his work on a history of the war that he was writing for the US Army 's Historical Division . This effort , working under the direction of Generaloberst Franz Halder in 1946 , brought together a number of German generals for the purpose of producing historical studies of the war , including Gotthard Heinrici , Heinz Guderian , Lothar Rendulic , Hasso von Manteuffel and Georg von Küchler . Kesselring contributed studies of the war in Italy and North Africa and the problems faced by the German high command . Kesselring also worked secretly on his memoirs . The manuscript was smuggled out by Irmgard Horn @-@ Kesselring , Rainer 's mother , who typed it at her home .

An influential group assembled in Britain to lobby for his release from prison . Headed by Lord Hankey , the group included politicians Lord de L 'Isle and Richard Stokes , Field Marshal Alexander and Admiral of the Fleet The Earl of Cork and Orrery , and military historians Basil Liddell Hart and J. F. C. Fuller . Upon re @-@ gaining the prime ministership in 1951 , Winston Churchill , who was closely associated with the group , gave priority to the quick release of the war criminals remaining in British custody .

Meanwhile , in Germany , the release of military prisoners had become a political issue . With the establishment of West Germany in 1949 , and the advent of the Cold War between the former Allies and the Soviet Union , it became inevitable that the Wehrmacht would be revived in some form , and there were calls for amnesty for military prisoners as a condition for German military participation in the Western Alliance . A media campaign gradually gathered steam in Germany . Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung published an interview with Liny Kesselring and Stern ran a series about Kesselring and von Manstein entitled " Justice , Not Clemency " . The pressure on the British government was increased in 1952 , when the German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer made it clear that West German ratification of the European Defence Community Treaty was dependent on the release of German military figures .

In July 1952 , Kesselring was diagnosed with a cancerous growth in the throat . During World War I , he had frequently smoked up to twenty cigars per day but he quit smoking in 1925 . Although the British were suspicious of the diagnosis , they were concerned that he might die in prison like Mälzer , which would be a public relations disaster . Kesselring was transferred to a hospital , under guard . In October 1952 , Kesselring was released from his prison sentence on the grounds of ill @-@ health .

= = = Later life = = =

In 1952 , while still in the hospital , Kesselring accepted the honorary presidency of three veterans ' organisations . The first was the Luftwaffenring , consisting of Luftwaffe veterans . The Verband deutsches Afrikakorps , the veterans ' association of the Afrika Korps , soon followed . More controversial was the presidency of the right @-@ wing veterans ' association , the Stahlhelm , Bund der Frontsoldaten . Leadership of this organisation tarnished his reputation . He attempted to reform the organisation , proposing that the new German flag be flown instead of the old Imperial Flag ; that the old Stahlhelm greeting Front heil ! be abolished ; and that members of the Social Democratic Party of Germany be allowed to join . The response was very unenthusiastic .

Kesselring 's memoirs were published in 1953 , as Soldat bis zum letzten Tag (A Soldier to the Last Day) . They were reprinted in English as A Soldier 's Record a year later . Although written while he was in prison , without access to his papers , the memoirs formed a valuable resource , informing military historians on topics such as the background to the invasion of the Soviet Union . When the English edition was published , Kesselring 's contentions that the Luftwaffe was not defeated in the air in the Battle of Britain and that Operation Sea Lion ? the invasion of Britain ? was thought about but never seriously planned were controversial . In 1955 , he published a second book , Gedanken zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (Thoughts on the Second World War) .

Interviewed by the Italian journalist Enzo Biagi soon after his release in 1952 , Kesselring defiantly described the Marzabotto massacre ? in which almost 800 innocent Italian civilians had been killed ?

as a " normal military operation " . Since the event was considered to be the worst massacre of civilians committed in Italy during World War II , Kesselring 's definition caused outcry and indignation in the Italian Parliament . Kesselring reacted provocatively , claiming that he had " saved Italy " and that the Italians ought to build him " a monument " . In response , on 4 December 1952 , Piero Calamandrei , an Italian jurist , soldier , university professor , and politician , who had been a leader of the Resistance , penned an antifascist poem , *Lapide ad ignominia* (" A Monument to Ignominy ") . In the poem , Calamandrei stated that if Kesselring returned he would indeed find a monument , but one stronger than stone , composed of Italian Resistance fighters who " willingly took up arms , to preserve dignity , not to promote hate , and who decided to fight back against the shame and terror of the world " . Calamandrei 's poem appears in monuments in the towns of Cuneo , Montepulciano and Sant 'Anna di Stazzema .

After release from prison , Kesselring protested against what he regarded as the " unjustly smirched reputation of the German soldier " . In November 1953 , testifying at a war crimes trial , he warned that " there won 't be any volunteers for the new German army if the German government continues to try German soldiers for acts committed in World War II " . He enthusiastically supported the European Defence Community , and suggested that the " war opponents of yesterday must become the peace comrades and friends of tomorrow " . On the other hand , he also declared that he found " astonishing " those who believe " that we must revise our ideas in accordance with democratic principles ... That is more than I can take . "

In March 1954 , Kesselring and Liny toured Austria ostensibly as private citizens . He met with former comrades @-@ in @-@ arms and prison @-@ mates , some of them former SS members , causing embarrassment to the Austrian government , which ordered his deportation . He ignored the order and completed his tour before leaving a week later , as per his original plan . His only official service was on the Medals Commission , which was established by President Theodor Heuss . Ultimately , the commission unanimously recommended that medals should be permitted to be worn ? but without the swastika . He was an expert witness for the " Generals ' Trials " . The Generals ' Trials were trials of German citizens before German courts for crimes committed in Germany , the most prominent of which was that of Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner .

Kesselring died in a sanatorium in Bad Nauheim in West Germany , on 16 July 1960 at the age of 74 , following a heart attack . He was given a quasi @-@ military Stahlhelm funeral and buried in Bergfriedhof Cemetery in Bad Wiessee . Members of Stahlhelm acted as his pall bearers and fired a rifle volley over his grave . His former chief of staff , Siegfried Westphal , spoke for the veterans of North Africa and Italy , describing Kesselring as " a man of admirable strength of character whose care was for soldiers of all ranks " . Josef Kammhuber spoke on behalf of the Luftwaffe and Bundeswehr , expressing the hope that Kesselring would be remembered for his earlier accomplishments rather than for his later activities . Also present were the former SS @-@ Oberst @-@ Gruppenführer Sepp Dietrich , the ex @-@ Chancellor Franz von Papen , Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner , Grossadmiral and former Reichspräsident Karl Dönitz , Otto Remer , SS Standartenführer Joachim Peiper , and former Ambassador Rudolf Rahn .

In 2000 , a memorial event was held in Bad Wiessee marking the fortieth anniversary of Kesselring 's death . No representatives of the Bundeswehr attended , on the grounds that Kesselring was " not worthy of being part of our tradition " . Instead , the task of remembering the Generalfeldmarschall fell to two veterans groups , the Deutsche Montecassino Vereinigung (German Monte Cassino Association) and the Bund Deutscher Fallschirmjäger (Association of German Paratroopers) . To his ageing troops , Kesselring remained a commander to be commemorated .