***Albert Speer Oral History***

***23 June 1970***

Tape 1:

**Take 1:**

*Interviewer*: Asks him to talk about that time. What was it about Hitler that drew him to you, and people like you. Then go up through your relations up until the time you were ill. When you even thought about assassination and your last meeting.

*Speer*: This is the most difficult starting place. I think Hitler was really a fascinating man. In history we have several thousands of importance which are well known for their fascination. Now by the means of mass communication with the gift of Hitler to receive in his hands an entire nation. I was fascinated by Hitler when I saw him first in a meeting with students. After this meeting in which he was hailed by all his students, in which no opposition would be remarked, I felt that Hitler will be the person who shall help Germany to get out of the difficulties of this time. This was 31. A great part of the population was out of work, I as an architect had no hope ever to get any important errand. Then 3 years later, I was already Hitler’s architect. And there came a new thing which was conquering me, which was putting aside all the thoughts I should have had about Hitler’s aims. This was that Hitler’s architect, that at the age of 28 or 29 I got to design buildings that were of importance which was unheard of at this time in the whole world. Of course this was such a temptation that it was even more than the fascination of Hitler’s. Years passed, Hitler started his war, I was to be his Minister of Armaments, one of his personal choices which one could not understand because I was only an architect but I succeeded to my own surprise. The war was going worse and worse and in the beginning of 44 I was very sick, horrible sick by exhaust. At this time, I was in the sick bed for several weeks. I was put out of the influence of Hitler. And when I came back again I saw for the first time, he really looked ugly. I had never seen this before but now, now a days, I think this was a sign for a certain distance I had won against Hitler during my sickness. Hitler ordered to destroy all the industry in France.

**Take 2:**

*Speer:* In September 44, Hitler gave the orders to destroy everything in Germany. At this time the English and Americans were going so fast, they thought that the Americans were going to occupy Germany. I succeeded to convince Hitler, that industry shouldn’t be destroyed. Winter 44-45, there were other signs that Hitler really means when he said the German people have no right to survive when the war is lost, because we lost the war and in the Yalta conference he gave strict orders to his Chief to insult the people of Yalta that they would find it impossible

**Take 3:**

*Speer*: Hitler wanted the statesmen in Yalta, to make no offer to the German people. I saw thought that this move in Hitler, that he wants to go to the bitter end. Made a few memorandums and those memorandums told him that the war is finally lost and it’s the duty of him and the government and him to try everything to ease the lives of the German people after the lost war. He got one of these in March 45, he became furious, he said again, in one of the letters I wrote to Hitler, if the German people didn’t win the war, that’s no use to give them any chance to survive. Those who survive are only the weaklings. The brave ones will die in battle. I don’t like to tell but it’s necessary to show my attitude of this time that I was so despaired that I tried to kill Hitler. Of course this plan can’t be compared with those of 20th of July 44, because they at this time wanted to do something fundamental what I tried to do was only escape a situation which was fretful. Hitler made strict orders to destroy everything that I had argued with him, finally he gave me the right to fulfill his orders that I thought was right and of course I didn’t do anything and Germany’s industry was not destroyed. I admit that I had pity for Hitler personally even though I should not have. I flew into Berlin when it was almost completely surrounded by Russian troops. He was very icy when he saw me. There was a lot of excitement when Goebbels said he would take over the government. Hitler was not moved that I made attempts to see him for the last time. He said goodbye in a very icy way and did not even make any greetings towards my family. This was my last interaction with Hitler.

*I*: What if Germany had won the war. What would the world be like what would’ve happened

*S*: Of course it was only a supposition, because Hitler could not have won the war. His government would have led to sterile life. Hitler’s success was only possible because he had with him the support of all souls important leading men in the administration in the so called Wehrmacht. In the industry that were already selected by the democratic system before 33. I had the impression that those who were coming after this generation, that were still leading before 33, were chosen after principles which would have led to a sterile life of civilization. And that after 20 or 30 years life in Germany would’ve been even more unbearable that it was in Hitler’s time. Hitler would’ve also fulfilled all his plans in architecture, he would’ve made huge buildings. Those plans which I planned frighten me a little bit today. Hitler would have [betrayed] Germany. He was only up to enlarge Germany in Russia but also take great parts of France and Belgium into the hands of German administration. The other parts of Europe would’ve been crippled.

Tape 2:

**Take 4:**

*S*: Hitler’s plans to get some men who [inaudible] were certainly not the end of his aims. I tell in my book that one day he had changed the sign which was on the [Capulla] of the huge assembly hall in Berlin about 1000 ft high. This sign was in these days before the first war world, the emblem of the Hitler party and eagle in his claws a swastika. But he told me, change that please I want the eagle sitting on the globe. I was accustomed to many such remarks of Hitler which I’m describing in my book but this certainly was the most remarkable one, this showed that he was clearly aiming to be the emperor of the world. And I think that if he would’ve succeeded with his plans in WWII, in Europe he would’ve made other steps towards United States and other countries together with the Japanese of course.

**Take 5:**

*S:* the day after the lost war, after 20 years imprisonment in Spandau, plus 3 years together with my family. Of course I am shocked that I am able to tell you something like that. But I have to admit at the time when I was working with Hitler as an architect, I was one of the people that was working with him to fulfill his aims. And my buildings would have been for times it would’ve come in hundreds of years, so he thought, that monuments to glorify these times of Hitler’s. and then afterwards when I was minister of armament. I hid everything to strengthen Hitler’s armies and was on the more important point the man who helped Hitler.

*I*: At Nuremberg you made the statement that if Hitler would’ve had a friend it would’ve been you. Can you comment on that, can you tell us a little bit about your personal relationship with the man.

*S*: in Nuremberg, I stated that

**Take 6:**

*S*: In Nuremberg, I made a statement that would have had any friends, I would’ve been one of them. I wanted to say that Hitler wasn’t able to have any friends. I was close to him because he thought he was an architect too, and in some way we were colleagues. He admitted that and he was discussing problems of science, that I brought him to him and we were discussing this as colleagues. But he never came closer to a certain point. If it ever came to a certain point he shrank back and was again a stranger to me. I asked once in the Spandau prisoner, Hess his experiences with Hitler. And he just said the same. He said he could never get close to Hitler. He was always shunning away when I tried to be a good friend to him. It was obvious to me that Hitler couldn’t have any friends probably he was not a character which could have any close contact to any human being. And probably this sign was one of the fundamental to his character.

*I*: could you give me your feelings about the people around Hitler, about the personalities, about Hess why he went to England, about Bormann. If you could speak a few minutes about the personalities around Hitler. Hitler had no friends, but to speak about these individuals as people. You could start with Hess. Again in your book, it is one of the people in your book you’ve described quite thoroughly.

*S*: Hitler has had in his time, not a kind offer to society, as usual in other higher circles. Different important people around Hitler were surrounded by circles of their own. Hess had one. Goering or Goebbels. In the center of this circle was always the VIP. Of course he was flattered by his circle. That wouldn’t have been the case if they would’ve all been together because they would’ve been equals and they didn’t like to be equals with each other. Hess in his way was a stubborn character. He was so stubborn that he was giving away more months to get very close to Hitler because he obviously didn’t want to interfere. He was in some ways too proud to do it or some other reasons. But Bormann succeeded very skillfully to more and more influence on Hitler even in the time when he was only an official of Hess. I think that Hess felt that he was more and more in the corner by Bormann and by Hitler himself which was in some ways.

**Take 7:**

*S*: In September 45, a few months after the Third Reich was brought down, I was brought to Nuremberg prison and the trial started against 21 people who were the most important, considered the most important, of Hitler’s government of Hitler’s party. There were discussions amongst us, who to defend the government and what to tell. It was obvious after a few of those discussions that almost everybody was aiming to show that he didn’t do anything. And said the responsibility was left to those who were already dead. Like Hitler or Himmler. Or absent like Bormann. I considered this a great mistake and I thought that I have to stand for what was done in Hitler’s regime. I made, and I was the only one who did it, a statement that I don’t feel only responsible for all the orders in my ministry, but I am responsible in my opinion for everything which happened during the time I was minister, which means after 42, in Hitler’s government. This included of course all of the terrible crimes, which were witnessed in the Nuremberg trial.

**Take 8**

*S*: I made the statement to the judges of the International tribunal, because I feel that in every government, in and out of authoritarian one, leading people are responsible for everything that happens. They have the duty to see things are going the right way and not the wrong way. And think afterwards and say I was under a dictator and I had just to do what I ordered. My lawyer was against it because he said that if you’re saying this to the tribunal this is your death sentence. But at this time, I was so shocked by everything which I heard in this tribunal, accusations that were brought up by the prosecution, which were right and nobody of the accused denied them, I thought it’s not important what happens to me, it is important to have made such a statement. I got a sentence of 20 years imprisonment. 7 of us that were surviving, the trial were brought to Spandau in a prisoner where were kept alone, a huge place, and we were there in a few cells among hundreds of cells which were empty. I was more or less now in the situation to prove if my testimony was right or wrong. That means I insist 20 years was still saying to myself that the sentence of 20 years deserve me right. Of course that is a cruel thing to say when you think about your family who is separated from you for so many years which are suffering. In some way I was a split person because thinking of my family I highly regretted very much to be in Spandau, thinking only of myself I thought to myself you should be here because you are giving an example to the future and that was worth it. I don’t want to say anything about the legal point of the sentence, first of all I don’t understand anything about legal points. And also my lawyer and other lawyers that the sentence was too harsh. That’s not a legal question, that’s a question of moral that also can be sentenced and since the question of moral is, I was failing so much in morality, in a strong mute point, that this alone gives a right to keep me in Spandau in 20 years. But its this attitude that helped me survive those 20 years. Certainly I felt easier than my colleagues who were kept in prisoner with me, that were always blaming the churches of having done something. During this time in Spandau I was thinking what was happening to my 6 children when they were investing their faith in their father. There was a danger that they were getting bitter, about my fate that they would turn to some rightish wing…

Tape 3:

**Take 9**

*S*: I was afraid that my children are getting bitter about my fate, that they will perhaps will turn to a rightish wing. So I made up my mind to write them my story as I saw it after so many years. Luckily enough I found a good friend who obviously to take out everything from the prisoner to take out what I was writing because it was not allowed to write your memoirs at this time. It was not my intent to write a memoir to be published but to write to my children to show them what and how it happened and what was my [fehler] and attitude at this time. And so in hundreds and hundreds of pages, developed a kind of a discussion between my 6 children and myself about my past which was certainly more frank than I should have written for publicity. In October 66,

**Take 10:**

*S*: in October 66 after those 20 years in Spandau I returned home in a family who was intact and I felt after a very short time really at home. I was asking my children what they think about publishing all those letters about my life. Because I thought it was only up to them if they decide If these letters, which in some way property of them, were published to give knowledge of the wider circles and as it looks now the whole world. They said well, we agree with you because what you told us was important for us to know because our future

**Take 11**

*S*: I asked my children what they would think about publishing what I wrote them and unanimously they said this would be good. Because we are young people we think that this book will help our generation to learn something from the past which is important. I too think its important what I wrote there in this book and am very satisfied that in Germany, the younger people are writing me many, many letters about the importance of this book.

*I*: lets now go to Spandau and a little bit of the routine of Spandau and I think the area. The most difficult thing you had books but you couldn’t see your family

*S*: in Spandau, life wasn’t too bad. The first years we didn’t get more food than the German population, and this was very little. But it improved we had plenty to eat we had all the books we wanted we could choose our books from the most important and largest library of the Berlin town. And it was allowed to me to choose more books of the technical university of Berlin. So I was able to read every day four or five hours and my [whole-ism ]was enlarging. I say this because my education was an education of a technical person. In my youth I didn’t have the time to study philosophy, psychology, or history and it’s probably because of this lack of knowledge that I was a victim of Hitler’s fascination. And also this [inaudible] reading, I was also changing to another personality and I was able to see things from another point of view than before. And this certainly helped to write the book as it is now. The worst in Spandau was the visits of the family. It was only allowed every month and only of half an hour. And with my 6 children and my wife, it turned out my children were only able to see me once every year because the other 6 visits I had to use to discuss family matters which were urgent and couldn’t be discussed in such a visit. To a child only once a year is a tremendous effort. Because entering the visit room, I am realizing I am seeing this child only a year afterwards and I’m setting an impression that will last 1 year. If I am failing in this visit, if I would have breaked down for instance, this child would have this impression for an entire year. I know this thinking of such an impossibility was already hindering on how I could speak how I would have liked to speak. I think on both parts for both me and the child, I think it was really hard to get through this half hour. When I was a free man again, I was astonished that also the distance between my family and myself were put away in an second and we met each it was if we were never separated

*I*: what did you talk about in the half hour. Did you talk about terribly important or terribly unimportant things

*S*: When I was talking in this half hour, I avoided all topics which could have caused emotional feeling. Because I had the feeling that neither the child nor me could not bear it. So we were mainly talking about nonsense. School life, teachers, etc. but we never got to the point which was really [bothering] us because it wouldn’t have been possible in this environment.

*I*: I would like to talk about Hitler’s reason to start the extermination of the Jews. Why this particularly and your feelings about it. Starting perhaps with Hitler’s reasons. What first started this

*S*: Hitler was hating the Jews. But, he allowed them to go out of the country until 39 when the war started, he made a speech in the Reichstag, and with this speech.

**Take 12**

*S*: Hitler always hated the Jews and he made no secret about it. But, to 39 he was allowing them to go abroad to leave the country. After the declaration of war he obviously changed his attitude because in the first Reichstag session after the declaration of war, he said more or less that the Jewish people of Germany will be the hostages of everything that happens now to Germany. When things went on, the war was getting [crueler and crueler], and I think that Hitler made true what he was explaining in this first session of the Reichstag that the extermination of the Jews esd one of the consequences he drew out of this war who is going to be lost. I personally was warned by a friend of mine a who was a upper guard leader of [Iglesia] who told me once my office that I shall never visit a concentration camp he didn’t mention the name but as a I know now it must have been Auschwitz because he said that dreadful things were happening there and I can’t forget what I have seen. Those few seconds in which this friend warned me were in my opinion now a days, those seconds of my life in which I failed the most. Because in those few seconds, I shouldn’t have shunned away what he told me in my mind but I should’ve asked him what you mean by that. What happened, what can you tell me. I didn’t do that and I what would’ve been the next step and go to Hitler, ask him what’s up no in the concentration camp. I didn’t do anything like that and I think that when I put responsibility on everything that happened in Hitler’s time as a statement to me in Nuremberg trial the cause of this statement that I felt from this moment on guilty for all those terrible things which happened in Hitler’s time. Mainly the extermination of the Jews.

**Take 13**

*S*: It’s difficult to write a book which is objective because a writer always has his own point of view and my point of view was inside the events, inside the government. To express this I first had made up my mind to give the model of the book to some words of Monroe in his which he used in his [\_\_\_ imaginare] those words are saying a fish swimming in this aquarium, he can’t see the outside of his environments and so it is with me. And also there is one point which I wouldn’t like to miss. My point of view is in some way more favorable to Hitler than it should be because I was his architect and as his architect he certainly more friendly and more charming than to other people that were working in important positions. I think I am covering a part of what was Hitler’s personality, I was lucky to cover him as an artist and as a minister. But it is not covered the most important and this is the angle which was seen certainly like a man like Himmler. Himmler must have had discussions about the extermination. He must have seen how cold blooded Hitler ordered this and how it was received when Himmler made certainly his reports about his successes in this account.

Tape 6

**Take 25:**

*S*: Hitler’s parlay was here and he went directly into this huge building for his speeches. But here something that we didn’t think about. In such a huge thing, the man in the middle who should really be in the middle he is so minimized in scale he was really a nothing. Of course Hitler did not like this but there is nothing we could do. This whole front of this building, at the top is this globe which Hitler ordered shortly before the end of the second world war. He we see only a detail of the corner to see how huge this [Capula] would have been more like a small mountain because the whole thing was over 1000 ft. here in the foreground is the Brandenburg gate, the Reichstag.

**Take 26:**

*S*:If I’m talking about inhuman dimensions. I mean something else. Those buildings are inhumane in themselves they are expressing the humanity of the whole system. When we see now a days what is left of Hitler’s time, we have an example of what he was like to do before the war started. Those things are only understandable connected with his will to be a powerful man in Europe and in the end to conquer Europe and to govern more or less the world. Hitler made designs himself. It is well known that he was aiming to be an architect and said towards the end of his life, he was always complaining that he didn’t succeed as an artist and an architect. One of the things he was drawing himself, was his own house over Salzburg. One day he asked me to give him tools necessary to be an architect, it was a ruler and a t-square he was designing this thing. Which is obviously what his house looked like afterwards. One things was significant, he approached this building which he wanted to build, not as a normal architect which is supposed to start some analyses and approach the problem before its decided from different angles. But obviously we see here one characteristic and fundamental lines of Hitler’s character. He couldn’t divulge from different angles, when he had once an idea he followed this idea and had only small variations. We see one sketch, here is another which is basically the same, here another one and a fourth one and another one. They all are the same only with little variations. When Hitler was designing his plans, he also had me ordered to build an [inaudible] so he could come and correct my plans my designs over Salzburg. It is still there in Salzburg as seen in this photograph. Hitler was a fanatic as an architect, he was also a fanatic with opera houses, this was always closely connected everything dramatic, with Wagner, and what happened on the stage was also in some way emphasized in what happened [inaudible] it was always one atmosphere of drama. He now was seeing that [inaudible] of an opera and I can show very shortly, and the sketches always had the same idea over many years. There is not a new idea and now we come to one of his sketches he made over the plan with an architect and it is the same. In this sketch we see something typical of Hitler, this man had will power, he was shaping out things, with pencil, getting closer to what he wanted. The energy and resoluteness he had in other things. Here again there are 2 sketches for opera houses but more or less didn’t change at all

**Take 27**

*S*: So we have seen that Hitler was obviously not able to change his approach to problems when he had made up his mind. That was 2 years later, his minister of armament, I again had to find out that also that was his approach to military problems. That he was always going on in one way, he couldn’t think for instance that defense is very good in Russia, he always wanted to be in the offensive side, even when his generals told him to go on the defensive side, but to lead his war to the bitter end.

**Take 28**

*S*: those buildings, they are the expression of Hitler’s time. Every period has in my opinion, has an artistic work with the expression it deserves. And when I was designing those buildings for Hitler, I in voluntary gave my pencil to make monuments that were to Hitler’s aims. Not just Hitler’s aims, but also the cruelties that were behind those aims. It’s the same that we have it now a days, we are in the industrial age, the buildings are an expression of this age. It sounds ridiculous, but it is the truth, that in some way Hitler with his buildings, he wanted to buy the glory of the future of his emperor, by spending a few billion marks and make the monuments to glorify his victories that were far away, by erecting monuments to place the victories that weren’t already fulfilled.