

Vice Adm. M. E. Murphy, U. S. N., Ret.  
191 Frederick Court  
Los Altos, California

21 December 1958

Mr. H. Keith Thompson  
Box 254, Wall Street Station  
New York 5, New York

Dear Sir:


As a generalization, it can be said that a military commander carries out the orders of his superiors, and that these orders are presumably in consonance with the national policies of his government. When a commander goes outside the bounds of his overall instructions and commits an act contrary to the accepted rules of warfare, then it appears reasonable that he should be held accountable to some court of justice. However, a military commander should not have to answer for the political and military decisions of his political leaders.

It does not appear that Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz was guilty of anything more than carrying out directives which in the last analysis stemmed from Hitler. In this he acted as any loyal military man would have done. Therefore, his conviction at Nuremberg is, in my opinion, a grave injustice.

Time brings many changes. Today Americans have an obvious friendship for the Germans and Japanese, and this friendship is reciprocated. It is interesting to speculate what the results would have been if it had been possible (by some miracle in which witnesses and evidence are preserved) to postpone the War Crimes Trials for ten years, even five. One thing is certain: calmness and objectivity would have been more evident and justice would have been better served.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,

  
M. E. Murphy,  
Vice Admiral, USN, Ret.