

**Background:** Hitler was nearly killed by an assassination attempt on 20 July 1944. This is Goebbels' reaction. He uses this article to call Germans to the utmost exertions in support of the war effort. This is part of a long series of articles and speeches in which Goebbels promoted "total war."

**The source:** "Der Befehl der Pflicht," *Das Reich*, 6 August 1944, pp. 1-2.

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## The Call of Duty

by Joseph Goebbels

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The one good aspect to 20 July was that it brought each of us to attention. Suddenly the nation stood before an abyss and peered into its terrifying depth. Everyone realized what the failed attempt against the Führer and his top military advisors would have meant. The whole nation realized that its very existence might have ended had the plans of the traitorous Putsch clique succeeded. It is easy to sit in judgment of this or that measure when a strong government is in control. That does not necessarily mean one does not support the government. A nation realizes what such a government means only when it for a moment faces the possibility of losing it. Only then does the nation see the real value of an authority that everyone takes for granted, and to which everyone, without exception, gives the right to rule and to decide. What would these nitpickers do if that authority suddenly disappeared? At such a time as this, a strong hand at the helm is the most important prerequisite to keep things going, and ultimately to win the victory. Few successes are the result of luck or accident; nearly all have to be won in a hard battle with fate. The historical burdens bound to such successes can only be mastered by a personality of historic scale. If that personality is lacking, the struggle is hopeless from the start.

The German people made major decisions on 20 July and the days following, and the leadership could not and did not hesitate to carry them out. None of these decisions weakened us; all of them were aimed at increasing and concentrating our war effort. There is no more eloquent proof of the level of German war morale. A nation that after five years of such a war has no thought but to work harder and fight more bravely than ever before, and that responds to such an attack on the life of its Führer, and thereby its own life, with such a wave of confidence and faith, is certain of victory. It need only work resolutely and loyally, undismayed by the dangers and difficulties it faces. At the end of the war, the balance will be drawn. Victory can be won neither by cheating nor swindling; the nations must win it honestly, and each action or lack of action is a step toward it or away from it. If 20 July has any larger meaning it is this: It brought each one of us back to the essence of our struggle for existence and reminded us that we have overcome many obstacles in the past, but there are things still worse that could not be overcome.

The total war that is to be realized step by step has both a moral and a material side. It is true that the duties and obligations of each German toward the war effort are laid out more extensively than before in laws, regulations and rules. However, there remains room for individual initiative. It is more than a matter of bringing to bear the not yet fully used reserves of German fighting and working strength. The war is more than a military, political and economic matter. It is also a matter of morale and worldview, and we must deal with them along with the material issues. Each of us must start with himself, if he wants to change the course of the war in the way each of us longs for. Many of us have given ourselves too much consideration, and have not become stronger and firmer as a result. One individual passed along the hardest burdens of the war to another, who in turn decided he was not up to them either, and that the war could and would be won without him. This viewpoint is as despicable as it is ominous. We find ourselves in no bed of roses, and must use our full strength if our chances of victory are to remain

undiminished. More than ever before, we are a fighting community on board the same ship that is plowing through stormy seas. It will either bring us all safely to the secure harbor of a happy peace, or we will all go down together with it.

If we are to take total war seriously, as more than an empty phrase, each must draw the proper conclusions both for his work and for his personal life style. Up until now we boasted about all left over from peace that was still ours in this fifth year of the war. Now we must learn to boast about what we have thrown overboard. A simple, spartan lifestyle does not have to be unhealthy. The more we adjust our lives to the realities of war, the more we benefit our cause, which we all want to see triumph.

It is no great honor for us that one hardly notices the war in public life, save in those areas suffering air attacks. In the future, the war should be everywhere evident. Every foreign visitor should encounter the war everywhere, and see that he is in a nation that is fighting for its life and future, and that is determined to make every necessary sacrifice. Only fools think this will diminish our national prestige. Rather, our friends will admire us and our foes will fear us. The more we bow to the demands of the war, the sooner it will bend to our will. An old proverb says that a nation should think only of war during peace. How much more true is this during war! Nothing takes precedence over the war effort. The more consistently we realize this, the easier it will be to give up the last remnants of peace and serve only the war effort.

We have often said that this is not a matter of fundamentals that we want to maintain forever. We are the last to call for primitivizing public and private life. When, however, there is no other alternative, we must have the courage to toss overboard all the old comforts and conveniences. We will soon see how little we miss them. We know that there are countless millions in our nation who are ready to make any sacrifice, as long as they do not have to fear that their neighbor will fail to join them, leaving them looking like a fool. They do not need to worry. The total war we are waging is on the one hand a matter of each individual doing what obviously has to be done, but it is also a matter of law and penalties. We cannot allow millions of German women to work ten or twelve hours a day while a few thousand do no work at all, for example. And they may not believe that they can meet their duty to the nation by some sort of make-work for their father or uncle. We will take the necessary action against such elements. They sin not only against the material requirements of the war effort, they also harm our morale.

We are happy to enjoy the full support of our nation in these measures. One can truly say that this is what the people want. It has often enough made plain its resolve to give its full efforts for the war and victory, and to make every sacrifice necessary in the successful struggle for our life and freedom. There are only a few who from laziness, a lack of readiness and duty to the community, in part also because of comfort, are not willing to join in, or who do so half-heartedly. They must be helped along, not only for the sake of the countless millions who are doing their duty conscientiously, but also for their own good. More people perish from laziness than from diligence. Especially during a war in which a nation is fighting for its existence, everyone has the duty to join in. In the future, we must see anyone who seeks to escape his duties as a deserter, and anyone who knows and helps him as an accomplice to desertion. Let there be no doubt. From now on things will be different, and a sharp, fresh new breeze is blowing.

This requires a whole series of measures that will reorganize our government and all of public life. One can hardly expect that this will happen overnight, and that things people have long complained about will vanish by tomorrow. We need some time. But that is not a bad thing. The army and war production can absorb only a limited number of new people, so the process must be rapid but organic. We know where the difficulties are and will work to eliminate them. The problems they cause will vanish with them. The measures affecting public life will be as flexible as possible and take account of the situation. We have no intention of eliminating the last forms of pleasure and relaxation for the overwhelming majority of the nation who work very hard. Small pleasures and comforts will be

eliminated only where they serve a larger goal. Our actions will be in balance with their results. If for example I can keep the radio going with fewer people, I will do so. It provides pleasure for millions of people. But radio also must take account of the war situation, and get rid of everything that is not necessary.

In short, we must all see the war as our first priority, giving ourselves body and soul to it, and avoiding every attempt to escape its demands or hide from it for a while. We must prove ourselves worthy of the great age in which we live so that even in the gravest moments we need never reproach ourselves. Thereby we will master all the problems the war confronts us with. We must never do too little too late. We will make no excuses, nor accept any. We will never forget that our behavior during the war will determine not only our future but that of our children and our children's children. They place demands on us that we must fulfill if we do not want to lose the right to be part of the long history of the generations of our people. We want to pass on that inheritance to our posterity. Fate gave us a sign on 20 July. Forces were at work that wanted evil, but brought about good. We will not be idle. We will obey the call of duty, wherever and whenever we hear it, and know that our actions will bring about victory. It cannot be otherwise. This is a unique war effort, unprecedented in its length and hardness. We have grown through it such that we can master the growing difficulties.

We have never believed so firmly in victory as in this hour. Our path is clear. None of us hesitates to follow it. Freedom and life are waiting at its end. There may be crises and difficulties along the way. We do not fear them. If we use our strength, we will overcome them. Our enemies are boasting too soon. They are only showing us what we must do. We do not care if they gloat today. The victor will not be the one who reaches too soon for the laurel wreath, but rather he who bravely and loyally does his duty, who is not shaken by the storm, who at the end of the war is still standing upright on the battlefield.