**Farm Hall transcripts**

The Farm Hall transcripts are the result of Operation Epsilon, a programme in which the British detained ten of the most important German scientists and interned them at Farm Hall, a wiretapped house in Godmanchester, England.

The British target was to determine whether the Germans had been trying to build an atomic bomb during World War II, and in general how much they knew about how to do so, by listening to the conversations among the scientists during their stay at Farm Hall.

The documents of this operation and the recorded conversations between the scientists were kept secret for a very long time and were only published in February 1992.

The first thing to say about the published transcripts of Farm Hall is that it is such a big volume, which makes it almost impossible to study it as a whole and find a clear answer to some questions that are often asked, such as determining how important Werner Heisenberg's role was in the German atomic programme. Anyone who reads them may come to his own, personal interpretation of what might have occurred during these days at Farm Hall.

The following explanations are based on the transcripts of the evening of August 6th, 1945 (the very day the atomic bomb was thrown on Hiroshima) and the following morning of August 7th, 1945.

On reading this part of the Farm Hall recordings one can notice in fact 3 themes that often recur and of some importance and which can be related to the play:

- **The German scientists seem to be glad that they didn't provide the bomb to Hitler**

  According to the records and to the British officers who observed the German scientists, they seemed to be very sceptical and shocked by the news of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. On the one hand, some of them repeated several times that they were glad that the Americans had the bomb rather than that Hitler; on the other hand they often talk about moral objections which allegedly have prevented them from using the bomb. This may actually be one of the reasons why most of them never really tried to build a bomb.

- **The struggle to build the bomb, the fear of the consequences**

  They didn't know if THEY would have been able to build it: they seem to have known how to do so, but didn't know whether the Naziregime would provide the necessary amount of money and material. The decision whether to continue with the research on the bomb was in their hands: if they had told the regime that there was a possibility and that they would have liked to go on, they might have got the necessary support from the Nazis. This support of the regime depended on how likely the programme was to succeed.

At one point Harteck says:
"One would have needed an extensive staff; and we had only insufficient resources at our disposal. ... But we were aware of how it had to be done."

At another point we find this exchange between Weizsäcker and Hahn:

Weizsäcker:
“I think we didn't succeed in it, because every physicist did not want it to succeed. If we had wanted Germany to win the war, we would have been able to succeed."

Hahn:
“I don't think so, but I am grateful that we didn't succeed."

So one is inclined to come to the conclusion that the Germans knew very well how to build a bomb (they understood the principle, but they calculated the critical mass wrongly), but were unable to do so, because they didn't have the necessary resources. They would have needed huge amounts of money, a greater number of staff, the necessary material and maybe more time to find certain things out.

Another point which has to be underlined is that some of the scientists were hostile to the Nazi regime (for example Weizsäcker: "... we rather have to admit that we didn't even want the programme to succeed"... "One can say, it would have been a bigger catastrophe if Germany had had the bomb."). So one can believe that they did their best in order to slow the German programme down. They could imagine/were afraid of what might happen once the Nazis were in possession of nuclear power and thus they didn't want the programme to succeed or rather wanted the Americans to succeed first.

But apparently none of them (not even those who wanted the programme to succeed) had the courage to inform the Nazis clearly about the progress and the needs, because they were frightened of the possible response to such demands for help, and the consequences this might have led to. For example Heisenberg says:

“The relationship between scientists and state in Germany were such that on the one hand we weren’t convinced 100% to do it, and on the other hand the state didn’t trust us at a high level."

“We wouldn’t have had the moral courage, in spring 1942, to suggest to the government to employ 120 000 people, only to build it up.”

In a certain way, one can say that they were playing with their lives. They were somehow afraid to build the bomb: they expected their deaths if the bomb wouldn't work.

Bagge:
"If the Germans had invested 10 billion Mark and the thing didn’t work, one would have condemned all physicists to death”.

- How far was Werner Heisenberg involved in the research of the possibility of building a bomb?

The Farm Hall recordings don’t really allow us to find a conclusion concerning Heisenberg’s implication in the German ‘atomic programme’.

Jean Halter, Luc Boever and Daniel Berchem