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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

HISTORICAL DIVISION

O B WEST

(ATLANTIC WALL TO SIEGFRIED LINE)

A STUDY IN COMMAND

MS#B-308 GENLT ZIMMERMANN

MS#B-672 GENMAJ VON BUTTLAR

MS#B-718 GENLT SPEIDEL

MS#B-633 GENFLDM VON RUNDSTEDT

MS#B-344 GEN INF BLUMENTRITT

Volume I, II, & III

GERMAN REPORT SERIES

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ACCESSION NO

OB WEST

(Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line)

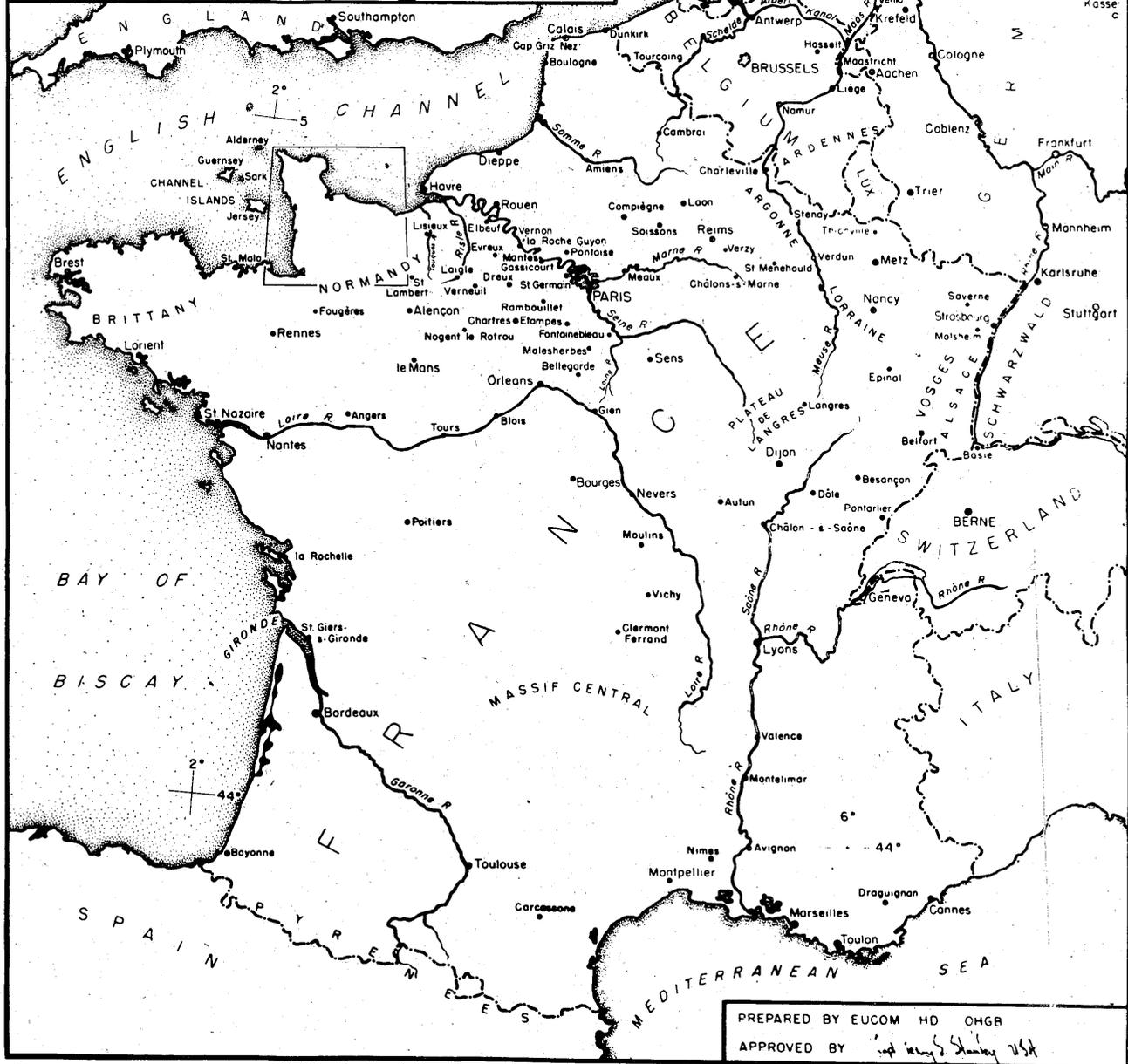
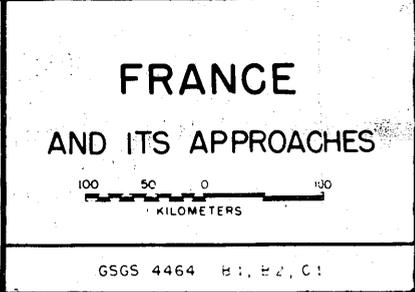
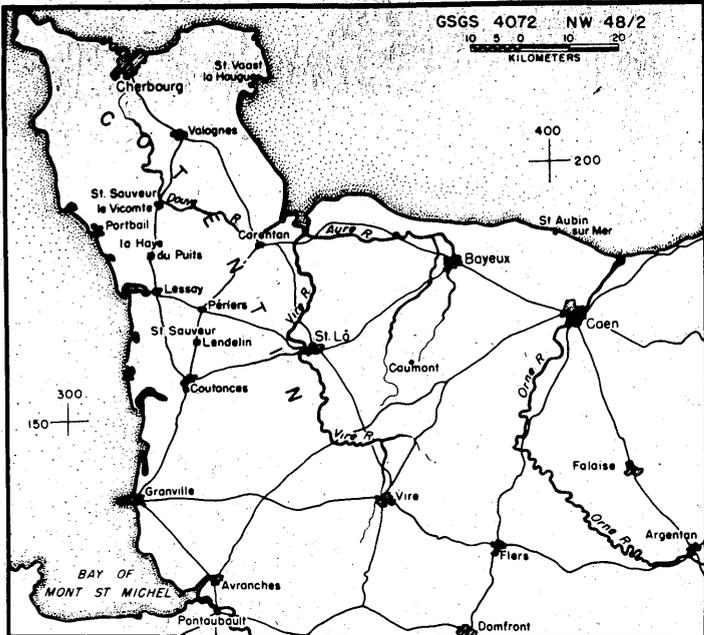
A STUDY IN COMMAND

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Volume I

EUCOM : HD : OHGB : FILE - DA



O B W E S T

(Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line)

A STUDY IN COMMAND

C-in-C West

Chief of Staff

Ia (Operations Officer)



von Rundstedt
von RUNDSTEDT

Blumentritt
BLUMENTRITT





Zimmermann
ZIMMERMANN

MS # B-308

Title : OB WEST, Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line, A Study
in Command

Author : Genlt zV Zimmermann, Bodo

Position : Ia, OB WEST, 26 Oct 40 - 11 May 45

Date of MS : Oct 46

Place : HDIE, Allendorf, Germany

Prepared for : Mr F. Monroe Ludden

Translator : Mrs Elisabeth S. Hartsook

MS # B-672

Title : Commentary on MS # B-308

Author : Genmaj Frhr Treusch von Buttlar-Brandenfels, Horst
(commonly known as Von Buttlar)

Position : Chief of Army Operations, Armed Forces Operations
Staff (WFSt), 12 Jan 42 - 15 Nov 44

Date of MS : 20 Oct 47

Place : HDIE, Neustadt, Germany

Prepared for : Capt Frank C. Mahin &
Capt James F. Scoggin, Jr

Translator : Miss Dawn E. Thompson

MS # B-718

Title : Commentary on MS # B-308
Author : Genlt Dr Speidel, Hans
Position : C of S, A Gp B, 15 Apr - 1 Sep 44
Date of MS : 5 Dec 47
Place : Freudenstadt, Germany
Prepared for : Capt Frank C. Mahin &
Capt James F. Scoggin, Jr
Translator : Miss Dawn E. Thompson

MS # B-633

Title : Commentary on MS # B-308
Author : Genfldm von Rundstedt, Gerd
Position : C-in-C West, 1 Mar 42 - 3 Jul 44 & 5 Sep 44 - 9 Mar 45
Date of MS : 5 Aug 47
Place : PoW Camp 11, United Kingdom
Prepared for : Capt Frank C. Mahin &
Capt James F. Scoggin, Jr
Translator : Miss Dawn E. Thompson

MS # B-344

Title : Three Marshals, National Character, and the 20 July
Complex

Author : Gen Inf Blumentritt, Guenther

Position : C of S, OB WEST, 25 Sep 42 - 8 Sep 44

Date of MS : 15 Feb 47

Place : HDIE, Allendorf, Germany

Prepared for : Prof Dr Kurt Hesse

Translator : Herr E. R. Mysing

O B WEST

(Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line)

A STUDY IN COMMAND

Preface

As long as the campaigns of World War II are discussed, there will be disagreement and controversy between the adherents of Eisenhower, of Montgomery, of Bradley, of Patton; Allied strategy will be studied and reappraised and the reputations of the leading Allied commanders will fluctuate accordingly. Yet how much more intricate is the problem of evaluation in the German camp, where strategic possibilities were drastically limited by Allied superiority, where the chain of command had become a net, where politics and machinations overrode military considerations, and where even tactical decisions were reserved to Hitler. A definitive study of the German command relationships and strategy in the West, therefore, could be made only after thorough consideration of the views of several hundred German officers and careful investigation of a high percentage of the German military records still extant.

The following study is less ambitious. It is a composite of the opinions, ideas, and memories of five German officers who helped shape the course of the War in the West--three from OB WEST, one from OKW, and one from A Gp B. This study is not a comprehensive disk, but a three-spoked wheel which, when laid upon the discussion table, covers a part completely, a part inadequately, and a part not at all.

The hub of the wheel is MS # B-308, fashioned from memory by Genlt Bodo Zimmermann, Ia (Operations Officer) of OB WEST, in the Historical Division Interrogation Enclosure, during a four-month period in mid-1946. The three spokes are the three commentaries on Genlt Zimmermann's MS # B-308: one (MS # B-672) by Von Buttlar, Chief of Army Operations in the Armed Forces Operations Staff (WFSt); one (MS # B-718) by Speidel, Chief of Staff of A Gp B; and one (MS # B-633) by Von Rundstedt, C-in-C West. Each commentator worked independently from a typed copy of MS # B-308 which did not include the appendices. The commentaries were prepared in widely separated locations at approximately the same time, with no opportunity for consultation or collusion among their three authors. Each commentary was prepared in a brief period of time--one month, on the average--and each was largely a product of the author's memory, with the significant exception of MS # B-672, whose author had available a copy of the semi-official war diary of the WFSt (MS # B-034 or OUSCC Document 1793-PS). The rim of this historical

wheel was not really prepared as a manuscript at all, for it (MS # B-344) consists of an exchange of personal correspondence between the OB WEST Chief of Staff and an indigenous employee of the Historical Division. Nevertheless, it caps the spokes by providing an analysis of the core of the problem, by one well-qualified observer.

In assembling the five manuscripts which make up this study, the editor has treated Genlt Zimmermann's MS # B-308 as the basic account and, after subdividing the three commentaries according to their content, has inserted the remarks of the three commentators at the appropriate places in MS # B-308. The reader of Volume I, therefore, will find Gen Zimmermann's treatment of each controversial aspect either amplified, endorsed, or contested by one or more of the commentators. In Volume II, the editor has placed ten brief discussions by Von Buttlar, which were too detailed and too independent to be merged with MS # B-308 without impairing the continuity of that account; Volume II is concluded by Gen Inf Blumentritt's MS # B-344--a debatable, but interesting discussion of why things were as they were. Volume III comprises the 18 maps and charts prepared by Gen Zimmermann as appendices to MS # B-308. Volumes IV and V contain the German texts of the five manuscripts.

It has been possible to resolve, with a fair degree of satisfaction, all the translation problems encountered in the editing of this report. Only one of them need be discussed at this point: the German term, "Oberbefehlshaber West," which may mean either the C-in-C West or his headquarters, has been rendered as "C-in-C West" when it seemed to refer to the person, and as "OB WEST" when it seemed to refer to the headquarters.

In these five volumes, then, the editor presents an interim study in command, an attempt to fix truth through the controversies of those who shaped history.

James F. Scoggin, Jr.

JAMES F. SCOGGIN, JR
Capt Sig C
Historical Editor

JUL 20 1948

O B W E S T

(Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line)

A STUDY IN COMMAND

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V o l u m e I V

(Included only in DA and Cam sets)

MS # B-308 (German Text)

V o l u m e V

(Included only in DA and Cam sets)

MS # B-672 (German Text)

MS # B-718 (German Text)

MS # B-633 (German Text)

MS # B-344 (German Text)

INTRODUCTION

1. In conformity to the mission of OB WEST, this presentation is confined to strategic matters within the Western Theater of War. Details of the execution of military operations were the concern of subordinate commands and are not treated here.

2. The period during which Genfldm von Kluge (and, later, Genfldm Model) was C-in-C West I have been able to discuss only in broad outline because each of these men also commanded A Gp B, remained at Army Group, and used its staff to direct operations. Thus, the real staff of OB WEST, practically excluded from the control of operations, had to limit its activities to the transmission of orders, the maintenance of communications, and the direction--in so far as possible--of A Gp G. The constantly increasing physical separation of the headquarters of OB WEST and A Gp B made it more and more nearly impossible for the staff of the former to exert advisory influence on the decisions of Von Kluge and Model. Why OKW made an arrangement so definitely unusual and so prejudicial to the conduct of battle is unknown to me.

3. It is uncertain what Genfldm von Rundstedt or his Chief of Staff would say to this treatise and whether or not their views would agree in all particulars with this personal delineation of mine, especially since Genfldm von Rundstedt accepted reports from and conferred

with no one but his Chief of Staff. My information, therefore, is often third-hand.

Mistakes and inaccuracies, especially in dates, are possible, because none of my own documents and records have been available to me.

4. I was Ia on the staff of OB WEST, subordinate to the C of S, and had no command authority. I am not a professional officer, nor even a reserve officer; I was "drafted" in Dec 39.

5. This work--as originating with me--may be published only in a literal and unabridged form. I reserve all rights in this respect.

Pt 1 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

In general, my personal knowledge permits me to comment only on those sections of Genlt Zimmermann's report which deal with the views of OKW, or with the contrasting views of OB WEST and OKW. It should be mentioned at the outset that OKW did not, in itself, have any command authority, but was really only the working staff of the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, Hitler. In decisive and important questions, therefore, it would be clearer and more appropriate to speak of views, and divergencies from the views, of Hitler. On the other hand, my lack of adequate documentary material makes it impossible for me to give a considered opinion on the actual course of the operations described, and on the situation within the staff and area of command of OB WEST.

As a whole, the report gives a clear, easily grasped, and vividly drawn picture of the course of operations in the West, together with the evolution of the ideas of the responsible operations staff which influenced this course of events, as they appear in the memory of the Ia of OB WEST. It is understandable that the writer--seeing only the difficulties and needs in his own sphere--does not always do justice to the fact that the battle in the West was only one part, though indeed an important one, of the over-all struggle of the German people. Without sufficient reference material at my disposal, I cannot judge how far the descriptions of operations correspond with the actual facts, thus giving the report value as a historical document. The descriptions of OB WEST's ideas, however, do give the definite and constant impression that the writer has presented, as views of OB WEST, many realizations which later, in the course of events, became evident,

and which may even at the time have been the subject of internal consideration at OB WEST Headquarters, but which never came to the knowledge of the Supreme Command at the time stated and with the clarity emphasized in the report.

I have the impression that the writer has tried, by citing numerous good intentions and well considered proposals which were all, ostensibly, frustrated by the Supreme Command, to draw attention away from the fact that--especially in the preparation for, and the first weeks of, the Invasion battles--OB WEST did not know how to assert itself successfully either on lower or on higher levels, and that it did not make any serious attempts to do so. I shall deal with this question in more detail later in my commentary.

Pt 5 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

It has not been possible for me to prepare a detailed exposition of the many problems encountered in preparing for the Invasion and in the Invasion battles, as presented by the author, nor--without absolutely reliable and complete reference material--to refute conclusively and convincingly his accusations against the Supreme Command and OKW. In my commentary, therefore, I have limited myself to the selection of a few problems, in order to demonstrate from these that--according to my knowledge of the facts, which is of course largely based on memory--the writer has been laboring under false impressions with regard to several matters he describes, perhaps due to the fact that he was not in a position to have the perspective necessary for a just evaluation of the measures taken by the Supreme Command or OKW.

Pt 1 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

My short commentary is not intended to shift or to fix responsibility. The multitude of questions, the proximity of the events, and the lack of source material, preclude, as yet, a valid judgment of the period. Only the historian, observing things clearly from a greater distance, will be justified in making such an attempt, after interpreting and evaluating all the historical data.

Genlt Zimmermann's report gives a comprehensive but often one-sided survey of events and personalities in France in 1944. It presents a justification and a defense of OB WEST, and is perhaps also intended as such for Genfldm von Rundstedt. The distribution of praise and blame, not always historically tenable, may unintentionally encourage a new German legend: that the Invasion succeeded through the work of traitors. As Genfldm Rommel and others had informed Hitler, the enemy superiority in all three dimensions--especially in the air--made it quite impossible for the available German forces and operational resources to check the Invasion for long.

The author has composed his presentation of events without knowledge of what occurred at A Gp B, and without appreciating the important political and military factors. Thus his descriptions and estimates of the leading personalities and events do not always correspond to the facts and the historical background.

The political aspect of this "apology" appears particularly unreliable. (Among other things, the behavior of Genfldm von Rundstedt!) The shifting of responsibility to A Gp B, in certain events, and especially to Genfldm Rommel, whose death was brought about by Hitler, is not in accordance with the facts of the case, nor with the usual procedure. It is doubtless intended to exonerate OB WEST, but may just as well have the opposite effect.

The very careful but extremely theoretical report demonstrates, in many instances, the lack of familiarity with the front of the staff of OB WEST.

The author was not present at the frequent exhaustive* discussions between the field marshals, so that his presentation cannot take full account of the considerations weighed at the time.

Pt 1 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

Genlt Zimmermann's work gives an excellent survey of the tremendously difficult situation which confronted OB WEST from 1942 onward, and will promote understanding of the factors which facilitated so greatly the Allied Invasion and the final, total victory. As far as my memory goes, in the complete absence of any reference material and with my mind in poor condition because of illness, old age, and my long captivity, I can agree with the writer on almost every point. Any differences of opinion, or any additions which I have felt it necessary to make, are to be attributed to the fact that the Ia of OB WEST was not informed of certain things at all, and of others only partially and at third hand.

I esteem the author as a soldier, as a man, and as a general staff officer. I can assure the reader that his treatise deserves the most serious consideration and has great historical value.

Chapter One

CHAIN OF COMMAND AND ORGANIZATION IN THE WEST
DURING AND AFTER THE SUMMER OF 1943

6. C-in-C West : Genfldm von Rundstedt

C of S : Genlt Blumentritt (Ed: promoted to gen
inf 1 Apr 44)

Headquarters: St Germain (near Paris), both before and
immediately after the Invasion.

OB WEST--a supreme headquarters in name only--did not
have complete authority of command within its area, although it had
tactical control over Holland, Belgium, France, and the Channel Islands,
and although its mission was the defense of this area against any at-
tack whatever. OB WEST was subordinate to OKW; however, in the fields
of personnel, materiel, organization, and supply, OKH was also a supe-
rior headquarters. Strategically and tactically the area of OB WEST
was an OKW Theater of War.* In the early summer of 1943, OB WEST was

*Ed: As the war with Russia developed, Hitler made OKH directly re-
sponsible for operations on the Eastern Front, while OKW remained re-
sponsible for operations in all other theaters.

in command of Fifteenth Army, Seventh Army, First Army, and Army Felber
(provisional)--later redesignated Nineteenth Army. (See App 1.)

I. Major Elements Incompletely Controlled by OB WEST

7. The Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber in den Niederlanden (Wehrmacht District Netherlands) was subordinate to OB WEST only as far as the preparation of coastal defense was concerned. It was to come under the operational control of OB WEST in case of an enemy attack, but otherwise it was directly subordinate to OKW. Because of this situation, a corps headquarters of the German Army (LXXXVIII Inf Corps), designated Befehlshaber der Truppen des Heeres in den Niederlanden (Commander of Army Troops in Holland), was made responsible for training, equipment, and general administration of army staffs and troops. It discharged these responsibilities in accordance with directives from OB WEST and Fifteenth Army.

8. OB WEST had a similar relationship with the Militaerbefehlshaber in Belgien und Nordfrankreich (Military District Belgium & N France) and with the Militaerbefehlshaber in Frankreich (Military District France). As territorial commands, these two were under the direct control of OKW*; in many respects they were also subordinate to

*Pt 20 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

I did not know this. To the best of my recollection, the military districts were under the tactical control of the theater commanders; in all other matters they were subordinate to the Supreme Commander of the German Army, and they received their directives through the Generalquartiermeister of OKH.

the Generalquartiermeister of OKH (Ed: general staff officer in charge

of all matters relating to the supply and administration of the armies in the field). OB WEST had tactical control over these commands only under "threat of danger"--for example, in the event of an enemy landing, in the execution of anti-invasion preparations, and in case of threats to order and security in the occupied countries. In general, OB WEST could merely submit requests to these commands, which, in turn, often had to wait for a decision from OKW.

9. At this time, forces of the Fifth Italian Army* (Generale

*Ed: Actually, Fourth Italian Army.

d'Armata Vercellino) were stationed along the coast of the French Riviera, adjacent to the left flank of Army Felber (prov). In matters of coastal defense in the sector west of the Franco-Italian border, these forces were under the tactical control of OB WEST; in all other matters they were naturally subject to the Italian military authorities. A frontier area east of the Rhone, including the Alpine passes, constituted an Italian sphere of influence and was occupied by the Italians. Neither OB WEST nor Military District France had any prerogatives or influence there.

It was obvious that such an arrangement would work smoothly only so long as there was no fighting, for it was difficult for OB WEST even to impart a clear understanding of its tactical views concerning coastal defense. Liaison staffs were exchanged in order to facilitate cooperation. Nevertheless, OB WEST had no real influence on the Italian forces in France, especially because the Italian commander

had his command post on Italian soil. It was a foregone conclusion that, regardless of the situation, he would always act in accordance with the orders of his Italian superiors and with the interests of Italy. Outwardly, however, relations were good.

10. All Waffen-SS units located in the OB WEST area were assigned to OB WEST for operations and supply, only; for discipline, administration, etc, they remained under the control of RF-SS Himmler.*

*Pt 18 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

The regulations for the subordination of the Waffen-SS were not issued especially for the OB WEST area, but were consistent with the general system governing the subordination of troops of other arms of the Wehrmacht.

11. Ersatzheer (Replacement Training Army) staffs and troops, such as reserve divisions and reserve corps, located in the OB WEST area were under the Commander of the Ersatzheer. The desires of OB WEST as to the tactical subordination and employment of these organizations had to be forwarded to the Ersatzheer through OKW. Only in case of threatening danger were they at the tactical disposal of OB WEST.*

*Pt 19 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

In considering the position of the staffs and troops of the Ersatzheer, one must remember that these units, regardless of their transfer to France, had to continue to fulfil their training missions for the Ersatzheer. They were stationed in France, not as combat troops, but only to improve internal security by augmenting the occupation forces. During quiet periods, they had to be withheld from employment by OB WEST, in order that they might perform their primary mission--the training of replacements.

12. The Luftwaffe (Third Air Force: Comdr, Genfldm Sperrle; C of S, Gen Koller, succeeded by Gen Flocher) was not under the command of OB WEST! In its role as an arm of the Wehrmacht, it was subordinate to OKL, both operationally and administratively. OB WEST and Third Air Force were to "cooperate" with each other: The former could request combat missions, reconnaissance, etc, of the latter, which then weighed the requests and performed those which it could reconcile with its own over-all mission. Ground elements of the Luftwaffe employed in the coastal defense (strongpoints, flak detachments, intercept and direction-finding stations) were under the operational control of OB WEST or of an appropriate coastal sector commander.

13. The German Navy (Navy Gp West: Comdr, Adm Krancke; C of S, Adm Hoffmann) was in no way subordinate to OB WEST as far as nautical matters were concerned (naval movements, convoys, naval security and reconnaissance, operations at sea, naval mine-laying, submarine warfare, etc). All such matters were arranged by direct contact between Navy Gp West and the Seekriegsleitung (Directorate of Naval Operations, OKM) in secrecy which was sometimes very strict and often complete, even from OB WEST. Only those naval elements employed in coastal defense on land--chiefly in harbor areas or in naval signal installations--were under the operational control of OB WEST or of an appropriate coastal sector commander. In the case of land-based naval artillery, however, the Navy retained control of fire on water-borne targets. This control was not to be transferred to the German Army until there was a definite landing.

This arrangement gave rise to continuous disagreements between the tactical conceptions of the Navy and the Army (Heer), which were evident even in the choice of firing positions.*

*Pt 17 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

The regulations for the subordination of the coast artillery, and the directive for its conduct of fire missions, were disapproved by the Army commanders-in-chief in almost all theaters. The Navy, however, cited its combat experiences against naval targets and rejected all compromise. In the face of the very firm stand and bitter opposition of the Navy, it proved impossible to modify the arrangements.

14. Continual attempts by OB WEST to modify, through OKW, its command framework (which had been imposed from above and which was clearly faulty) were to no avail. Although it was obvious that OB WEST could never achieve, under existing arrangements, a strict and unified control of operations in the West, all such proposals, as well as numerous oral discussions with representatives of OKW, were fruitless.*

*Pt 16 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

It must be admitted that the chain of command in the West was not an ideal one; it was further complicated by very involved conditions (authority to issue directives, instructions to cooperate, authority to give orders in special fields) in the relationships of numerous other agencies and organizations which are not even mentioned. It corresponded, however, to our high-level organization and to the internal influences and interplay of forces within this system of command. The chain of command in the West was thus no special handicap for the western command, but rather a burden to which the commanders-in-chief in all theaters of war had to resign themselves--in some cases, as in the Balkans, in far more difficult conditions.

II. The "Strategic Directorate" Proposal

15. One last attempt at modification, made by OB WEST in the summer or autumn of 1943, proposed to OKW that OB WEST, with a reduced staff, should become the strategic brain and nerve center of the Wehrmacht in the West. Relieved of all other responsibilities, OB WEST could have concerned itself solely with preparing and ensuring a unified operational command in the event of an invasion. The proposed organization of the staff was approximately as follows:

- a. Commander-in-Chief, Chief of Staff, IIa (Chief Personnel Officer), and Rechtsberater (Chief Legal Adviser).
- b. Fuehrungsabteilung (tactical group of general staff sections) comprising the Ia (Operations Officer), Ia/F (Assistant Ia), Id (Training Officer), Flieger-Verbindungsoffizier (Air Liaison Officer), and the Marine-Verbindungsoffizier (Naval Liaison Officer). The foregoing were to be responsible for all tactical matters. The Ic (Intelligence Officer) was also included in the Fuehrungsabteilung.
- c. Nachrichtenfuehrer (Chief Signal Officer), in charge of signal communications and signal troops.
- d. General der Pioniere und Inspekteur der Landesbefestigung, Organisation Todt (Chief Engineer Officer and Inspector of Fortifications and OT), in charge of all engineer matters and permanent fortifications.

e. Oberquartiermeister (general staff officer in charge of supply and administration).

f. General der Artillerie (Chief Artillery Officer), also responsible for artillery training.

g. General der Panzertruppen (Chief Armored Officer), in charge of employment and training of all panzer units.

h. General des Transportwesens (Chief Transportation Officer), responsible for all railway matters, including railway operating troops.

i. Miscellaneous deputies and representatives concerned with special missions and with administrative problems important to the conduct of war: Deutscher General in Vichy (German General in Vichy), Vertreter der Militaerbefehlshaber des Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in den Niederlanden (Representative of the Military Commander of Wehrmacht District Netherlands), and others.

j. Kommandant des Hauptquartier (Headquarters Commandant).
For reasons unknown to me, this proposal was not approved by OKW, and the authority of OB WEST remained inadequate, as previously described.

III. The C-in-C West

16. Both as a soldier and as a man, Von Rundstedt was a superior personality. He was unpretentious and personally above reproach, uncompromisingly just, deeply religious. In his integrity of character he was the arch-type of the imperial officer. Respected by

officer and private soldier alike, he was often called the "last knight." He had a splendid military training and was truly a great captain (Feldherr), with all-encompassing prescience, outstanding strategic judgment, and bold concepts.

17. Since he saw completely clearly in all matters, he always judged correctly what lay within the realm of possibility. If, despite advanced age and many vexing experiences during the War and despite his own misgivings and inner reluctance, he returned to duty when called, he did it not from loyalty to the regime, but from deep love for his people and his country and from a soldier's sense of duty. He made no secret of his antipathy toward the representatives of the system in power. He was sharply opposed to OKW and to "Bonzentum" (undue influence of party favorites), showing openly—often too openly—his aversion. Those closest to him anxiously tried, therefore, to protect him from spies and informers. His name influenced the morale and behavior of the troops as did no other. Taken all in all, as a man and as a great soldier and expert he was the phenomenon among the field marshals of the Army.* **

*Pt 2 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

Genfldm von Rundstedt was not only a disappointment for the soldiers, he was embittered and exhausted by what he had lived through and experienced in the Third Reich. He had a definite head for strategy and enjoyed full command of the tools of his profession. He appeared to lack creative drive, as well as mental clarity in his attitude toward the people. Many of our best generals continually pressed for a positive political stand against Hitler, to whom Genfldm von Rundstedt referred in all confidential discussions as the "Bohemian lance corporal." Yet the power of decision was lacking. Thus he failed

not only as a great captain (Feldherr), but also as a personality, at a moment which required the last, utmost effort.

In par 270, below, the writer himself admits that "ending the War would long ago have been the most logical thing to do." If this was also the opinion of the C-in-C West, then why was the battle prolonged, with the sacrifice of Germany's last resources (in the Ardennes Offensive, for example)? Was it really the duty of the highest military leaders to use every means to delay the end of a war which was known to be lost? A detailed appraisal of all these problems should not be neglected.

**Pt 3 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

My estimate of the leading personalities in the West corresponds, on the whole, to that of the author. I must mention here, however, that my personal acquaintance with the commanders described was limited to a few official occasions. In this part of his report too, it seems to me that the writer's definite bias against OKW has led to a few exaggerations. It was, for instance, known to Hitler as well as to OKW that Genfldm von Rundstedt often expressed himself in very drastic terms concerning the measures of the Supreme Command and the person of Hitler. In spite of this, Hitler was convinced of Von Rundstedt's loyalty, which had indeed been demonstrated in various emergencies, and accordingly kept on using him in important positions. In this connection, Hitler once said, "As long as the Field Marshal grumbles, everything is all right."

18. OB WEST staff work followed the usual pattern of work on such higher staffs, with the exception that some staff sections were almost continuously overworked, whereas others, less important, had very little to do. (The proposal of OB WEST to convert its staff into a strategic directorate would have remedied this condition and drastically reduced the size of the staff.) Genfldm von Rundstedt himself usually worked only with his Chief of Staff and dealt directly only with the IIa, in personnel matters; the Rechtsberater, in legal matters; and the five generals named under section IV, below.

19. In his private life, Von Rundstedt lived within the narrowest circle. Except on special occasions, he dined only with his Chief of Staff, the IIA, his personal aide, and often the Headquarters Commandant. Occasionally, senior officers reporting in stayed for a meal, which was extremely simple--usually only one course. He made it his personal concern to see that the civilian population received all surplus food. He moved among them completely alone and unarmed. Von Rundstedt can be termed a Francophile; in conversations he emphasized again and again that he considered it a great mistake not to live in peace and amity with the French, that is, not to make peace with France.

20. Von Rundstedt's Day

He received his first report from his Chief of Staff about 1000 each day, the second report about 1300, the third about 1630, and the fourth about 1930. When anything important arose he received reports during the night as well. Prior to the Invasion, Von Rundstedt made a trip to the front approximately every two weeks. Depending on the itinerary and the distance involved, these trips lasted from one to eight days.*

*Pt 3 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

Trips to the front should have been made during combat; in the periods of quiet in the West these journeys were not so essential. Neither the C-in-C West nor the members of his staff, with the occasional exception of the Chief of Staff, were at the front during combat in order to establish personal contact with the front-line commanders and see conditions with their own eyes. On the whole, therefore, Genfldm von Rundstedt remained unknown at the front. Genfldm Rommel, with his pronounced gift of leadership, made his personal influence felt at the front almost every day, exposed himself unsparingly, and lived with his soldiers.

IV. Dual Subordination of Certain Staff Sections

The staff of OB WEST had the normal organization of an army group staff, but the scope and importance of its mission necessitated the addition of a number of specialized staff sections, which were, for the most part, dually subordinate.

21. General des Transportwesens (Genlt Kohl, succeeded by Obst Heefner on 1 Feb 44). On the one hand he was dependent on the Chef des Transportwesens (Chief Transportation Officer, OKH) and on his directives, an arrangement which was essential because of the centralized direction of all transportation for all theaters of war; on the other hand he was the adviser of OB WEST on transportation and on railway techniques, and the agent of OB WEST in the employment of rail transportation in Belgium and France. As a troop commander, he was subordinate to OB WEST. His directives, moreover, required that he cooperate with the French and German civil rail systems.

22. Inspekteur der Landesbefestigung West (Genlt Schmetzer, succeeded by Genlt Eberle--killed in action at the Rhine). From the General der Pioniere (Chief Engineer) of OKH, he received--through technical channels--instructions concerning techniques and materiel employed in the construction of coastal fortifications and concerning the supply of fortification materiel (armor plate, barbed wire, interior fittings for the fortress installations, etc). In order to make it possible for him to accomplish his mission of fortifying the coast, he

controlled a number of fortress engineer commanders and staffs. Tactically, he was subordinate to OB WEST, whose subordinate commands made tactical recommendations concerning construction sites to him. Though in the construction phase he was to cooperate with Organisation Todt and the Reichsarbeitsdienst, to the extent that the latter was available, he had no command authority over these forces because they were subordinate to Reichsminister Speer or to Reichsarbeitsfuehrer (Chief, Reich Labor Service) Hierl. From planning to execution there were thus many stages of appeal'

23. General der Panzertruppen West (Gen Pz Frhr Geyr von Schweppenburg). On the one hand he was subordinate to the General Inspekteur der Panzer Truppen (Inspector General, Armored Forces), Genobst Guderian, in all matters of training, organization, and equipment of the panzer forces. On the other hand he was the adviser of OB WEST on the use of panzer-type units, and the officer responsible for determining the status of their training and equipment, as well as the soundness of their employment by the commands exercising tactical and logistical control over them. His mission was particularly difficult.

24. General der Artillerie bei OB WEST (Gen Art Meyer-Buerdorf). The artillery adviser of OB WEST was responsible for inspecting artillery coastal defenses and artillery training (tactical employment, selection and construction of gun positions, organizational questions, etc). Under his direct control were only those artillery units which, as OB WEST reserves, were not attached to some

other command; it very rarely happened that there were any such unattached artillery units. One of his primary missions was cooperation with the German Navy concerning the naval artillery employed along the coast. Because of the Navy's different conceptions of the employment and fire tactics of coastal artillery, this was a very difficult job, and in spite of all efforts no satisfactory solution was reached.

25. Deutscher General des OB WEST in Vichy (Genlt Frhr von Neubronn). After the German occupation of southern France, OKW created this post at the suggestion of OB WEST in order to secure liaison with the French Government in Vichy. In general, this officer received his instructions directly from OKW, for OB WEST was forbidden to participate in any political activities. Accordingly, this officer usually transmitted requests of the French Government to Military District France. Now and then Genlt von Neubronn briefed the C-in-C West personally. This position completely lacked any inherent political significance; it was simply a mouthpiece.

26. Mention is also to be made of the dual function of the Oberquartiermeisterabteilung (supply and administrative group of general staff sections) of OB WEST. Even its designation (O Qu West) indicated that it worked not for OB WEST alone, but also served Military District France. Hence it was simultaneously an agency of the Generalquartiermeister of OKH, whence it received instructions directly.

To complete the picture it should also be mentioned that even the IIa, Adjutantur (personnel group of general staff sections), was dually subordinate from 1943 on. It was simultaneously an agency

of the Heerespersonalamt (Army Personnel Office) and therefore directly subordinate to it.

27. Seen as a whole, then, the same thing may be said of the staff work of OB WEST as of the command framework in the West: No full and adequate command authority, no independence in any important decisions. Nevertheless, OB WEST was responsible for the success or the failure of the coming decisive battles in the West!

Chapter Two

PREPARATION OF COASTAL DEFENSES AGAINST INVASION

28. As early as 1943, OB WEST was entirely aware that, in conformity with the development of World War II, the Western Allies would soon also seek a decision in the West, perhaps even during 1943, but more likely in 1944. A decision could be brought about only by means of an invasion. Two factors, lacking on the German side, more and more clearly enhanced the possibility of an invasion: Mastery of the Air and Mastery of the Sea. To these were added the fact that we were surrounded, and the resulting continuous expenditure of forces and materiel in the East and in Italy. It was all the more urgent, then, that we make the best use of the time remaining--that we bring the coastal defense to the very highest possible level of effectiveness, by increasing still more the rate of all types of construction and by improving the training, equipment, supply, and combat efficiency of the field forces. OB WEST was aware that many of our deficiencies were due to the fact that thus far the "West" had been constantly neglected in favor of the "East."

I. Organization of Coastal Defense

29. All beaches were occupied. The degree of concentration and the strength of the defending troops and fortifications depended upon the forces available, the seriousness of the threat, and the nature of the coast. Since the forces available were insufficient for a uniform cordon defense of the entire coast, we had to organize a system of points of main defensive effort. Vulnerable coastal sectors, particularly those near the southern coast of England, were occupied as densely as possible. Sectors not suitable for a landing were thinly occupied and, depending on the nature of the coast (cliffs, surf), were generally watched only by security detachments. Naval experts were consulted as to landing possibilities, although the German Navy, of course, could judge only by its own methods and equipment because it lacked practical knowledge of enemy tactics and technique.

30. On the basis of the foregoing evaluation, organization of the coastal defense began as early as 1941, when Genfldm von Witzleben was still C-in-C West. In the course of time, the coastal defenses were augmented in accordance with the following considerations:

a. Within the individual army sectors, harbors at river mouths and in bays were singled out for especial defensive emphasis, which varied with their importance and their size. Harbors

were classified as large harbors (Grosshaefen); military harbors (Kriegshaefen), most of which were U-boat bases; or smaller harbors (kleinere Haefen).

b. Within the framework of the whole coastal defense problem, OB WEST began in 1942 to designate important large harbors and military harbors as "Fortified Areas" (Festungsbereichen) and to prepare them for all-around defense. Their fortifications, mostly field works at first, were later reinforced by Organisation Todt construction.

c. In 1943, OKW furthered these measures by designating as "Fortresses" (Festungen) all important harbors whose construction as fortified areas had progressed sufficiently. These fortresses were assigned specially tried and tested commandants, each of whom took a solemn oath to defend his fortress to the death. As I remember, the fortresses were:

- Hook of Holland
- Dunkirk
- Calais
- Boulogne
- Havre
- Cherbourg
- St Malo
- Brest
- Lorient
- St Nazaire
- Gironde Estuary, north and south
- Channel Islands

The following retained the designation of "fortified areas," inasmuch as their fortifications and their troop strength were still inadequate for their defense:

Texel
la Rochelle
Bayonne
Marseilles
Toulon

d. Between these fortresses and fortified areas, there lay a system of strongpoint groups (Stuetzpunktgruppen), individual strongpoints, and resistance-points (Widerstandsnestern).

e. As a result of various orders and of the lessons learned from Dieppe, it was directed that battery positions, as a matter of principle, could not be left half-isolated, but had to be protected by infantry strongpoints or else had to be built up as strongpoints themselves, with an all-around, close-in defense.

f. Most of the strongpoints--and all the resistance-points--consisted of field fortifications; they were reinforced by a skeleton of Organisation Todt construction. As a matter of principle, coast artillery was, in the course of time, to be protected by concrete fortifications. On orders from OKW, in 1943 Organisation Todt intensified its construction activities along the Fifteenth Army front and in the fortresses. Antitank ditches were prepared along the landward sides of the fortresses by excavating wherever natural obstacles were inadequate. Time, manpower, and materiel, however, were all insufficient to fortify the entire front.

g. Thus, of the total construction program, only the most urgent parts could be undertaken or completed. The French

Mediterranean coast, not occupied until late in the summer of 1942*,

*Ed: Unoccupied France was invaded by Germany and Italy on 11 Nov 42.

fared the worst. There the field forces could do little with the rocky ground, and Organisation Todt did not complete its work. (Of the thousand permanent installations planned, only about 85 were finished at the beginning of the Invasion and an additional 200 were in the early stages of completion.)

Pt 2 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

The Atlantic Wall was an enormous bluff, less for the enemy, who of course knew all about it through his agents and many other circumstances, than for the German people. Hitler never saw the Atlantic Wall, not even one part of it! After the summer of 1940 he was in the West only once (Jun 44), and then he did not go as far as the coast. He was satisfied if Organisation Todt, or any other agency employed in the construction, reported that as many tons of steel and as many cubic meters of concrete as possible had been employed. Of these quantities, the lion's share went to the Navy, then came the Luftwaffe, and what was left over was given to the German Army for its coastal defenses.

Altogether, the needs of the Army were always considered last, although Hitler himself was Supreme Commander of the Army. We once said, "He usually decides against himself!"

Because of the increasing air raids on Germany, units of Organisation Todt often had to be sent home suddenly for pressing emergency work. The structures which had been begun then usually remained unfinished.

In conclusion it may be said that in the opinion of reasonable experts an "Atlantic Wall," as it was represented by propaganda, could not have been built to cover such an enormous extent of coast in less than ten years.

II. Enemy Capabilities and German Countermeasures

31. The different invasion possibilities had been analyzed and considered in progressively greater detail from 1942 on. Each individual possibility had received a numerical designation and appropriate mobilization countermeasures had been planned. The invasion possibilities were:

Case 1 - Holland

Case 2a - Fifteenth Army, northern sector

Case 2b - Fifteenth Army, southern sector

Case 3a - Normandy

Case 3b - Brittany

Case 4 - First Army

Case 5 - Army Felber (prov), later Nineteenth Army

32. For each of the seven cases, preparations were made to facilitate the transfer--by road or by rail, depending upon the distance--of units from less endangered coastal sectors. In addition, it was planned to move First Army Headquarters forward for possible emergency use. For the mobile panzer-type units, routes were selected and rest and refueling stations were mapped out. Road priorities (for flak, etc) were established in writing and the necessary signs and markings were prepared. Road commanders and traffic control units were provided for all major roads near the coast. Bypasses around larger towns were reconnoitered and charted. The various signs and route markings, which

were to be posted only after the beginning of active combat, were gotten ready. Important towns in and behind the coastal areas received combat commanders.

33. Map exercises, terrain studies, training maneuvers, and frequent alerts were used in an effort to achieve smooth functioning in the event of an invasion. The entire garrison of a strongpoint or resistance-point were required to live within their installation. Officers up to regimental commanders were allowed to wear only enlisted men's uniforms while in position, and all visible means of identification such as decorations and map cases had to be dispensed with.

34. Since 1943, OB WEST had placed especial emphasis upon a warning system against airborne attacks and upon rapid counteraction against air-landed forces. There were several exercises against airborne operations, in which Third Air Force actually landed both glider troops and parachutists. The results of these exercises were evaluated in a special pamphlet. Protection of railroads and railway installations was provided as far as the available security forces of the military districts permitted. The warning system was tested in several communication exercises.

III. Inspection of the Coastal Defenses (1943)

35. OB WEST was gravely concerned because it felt that neither the combat efficiency of the field forces nor the fortification

of the coast was adequate. Furthermore, from all appearances, the Luftwaffe was in a state of utter inferiority. In the early summer of 1943, therefore, OB WEST decided to ascertain precisely the defects and weaknesses of the entire coast and its defenses by carrying out a complete and detailed inspection. The results of this inspection were to permit the resubmission to OKW of a concise estimate of the state of defense and of the defensive possibilities within the OB WEST area.

36. The cardinal points of this inspection were:

a. Field forces: their condition, actual strength compared with required strength, age distribution, physical condition, nationality, weapons and equipment, level of training, and mobility. From these factors it was to be determined whether the field forces were completely ready for offensive action, completely ready only for defensive action, only conditionally ready for action, or not ready for action.

b. The tactical and technical soundness of both permanent and field-type coastal defenses.

c. Coastal sectors, including changes needed in the following: coastal garrisons; organization of defense, including reserves; fire distribution; and cooperation of all weapons against a landing.

d. Emergency food stocks. The norm was about one week for resistance-points, two weeks for strongpoints, four weeks

for strongpoint groups, and at least three months for fortresses.

The Channel Islands were to be able to hold out indefinitely.

e. Signal communications net, as well as all types and channels of message transmission, particularly alarm systems and airborne warning systems.

f. Preparations for counteraction against air landings.

37. For this inspection, which began about the end of May 43, the armies had to set up special teams including experts on all types of military matters. The German Navy and the Luftwaffe furnished representatives. OB WEST sent its general staff corps officers and the chiefs of its special staff sections (Waffengenerale) to all the investigations. The inspection was made in meticulous detail and required a great deal of time, as it lasted from the end of May until about the beginning of Oct 43. Each detailed report was immediately examined for deficiencies which OB WEST itself could remedy. Then, from all these reports, OB WEST in the autumn of 1943 completed a very detailed memorandum for OKW.

IV. Deficiencies of the Coastal Defenses

38. The coast was so garrisoned and so spotted with fortifications that one could speak of a limited defensive readiness only in the Fifteenth Army sector, chiefly along the narrowest parts of the Channel--along both sides of Cap Gris Nez. Except for local

fortresses, all the other coastal sectors were only weakly garrisoned and were extremely deficient in fortifications. The deficiency was greatest along the French Mediterranean front.

39. The divisional sectors were never narrow enough or arranged in sufficient depth for defense in a major battle--as had often been reported to OKW. In Fifteenth Army, the sectors averaged 30 - 40 km in width; in Brittany, for example, they were sometimes as wide as 200 km or more. On the average, each division employed on the entire 4,000 km front of OB WEST had a sector almost 100 km wide. As a result the forces of OB WEST, almost without exception, were deployed for a cordon defense; all tactical disposition in depth was lacking, not to mention a strategic disposition in depth!

40. Improvement of coastal fortifications suffered from the width of the sectors, the resulting expenditure of forces, and the lack of mobility.

41. The field forces were, it is true, close to their authorized strength, but most of the soldiers belonged to older age classes and were not physically fit. On some three separate occasions the units and staffs in the West had been "combed out" for the sake of the Eastern Front. In return the West received Volksdeutsche (Ed: racial Germans, citizens of a country other than Germany), soldiers with second and third degree frostbite, and in some cases even men suffering from malaria and stomach ailments; a whole division of the

latter, 70 Div*, was formed. Soldiers with heart trouble or other

*Ed: Throughout MS # B-308, Genlt Zimmermann habitually omits the type designations of those German corps and divisions which were basically infantry units. The editor has been unable to remedy this deficiency because of the lack of pertinent official German documents in the European Command. The reader, however, may confidently assume that no unit whose type is omitted differed significantly from an infantry unit.

physical defects, and even officers with artificial limbs, were not infrequent. By contrast, the Waffen-SS replacements were young and in strikingly good physical condition. (OB WEST had in previous reports clearly pointed out this disparity, which weakened the fighting power of the infantry.) In the light of these conditions--to which the panzer units were the only exception--the subsequent achievements of these soldiers must be given special credit.

Furthermore, the requirements of the Eastern Front caused OKW in 1943 to order OB WEST to release 20 more German battalions in exchange for 60 "Osttruppen" battalions. (Ed: "Osttruppen" consisted of non-German "volunteers" and prisoners of war from Eastern Europe.) On orders from OKW, or rather OKH, most of the latter became organic to some division.

On paper, then, the field forces approximated their authorized strength. OB WEST, however, had no delusions as to its combat strength (particularly that of its Eastern troops) as compared with that of the Western Allies, and had often expressed its sharpest concern to OKW.

42. There was grave anxiety over the lack of self-propelled assault guns (Sturmgeschuetze), the entirely inadequate supply of antitank guns, and over the artillery because of the enormous variety of weapons and ammunition used. Along with German guns of all kinds, there were also used along the coast French, Danish, Belgian, Polish, Dutch, Russian, Jugoslavian, and Italian guns of miscellaneous calibers. In some cases these guns had only half an issue of ammunition (Munitionsausstattung) and there was no prospect of more. It should also be mentioned that the caliber and range were inferior to those of the enemy naval artillery. Furthermore, OB WEST did not think command missions had been properly assigned in the choice of gun positions and in fire direction. (OB WEST had often brought this highly important question to the attention of OKW, but had always received Hitler's unequivocal decision to leave the German Navy in control of artillery firing as long as the enemy was on the water.) Finally, the divisional artillery was only partially mobile. A number of divisions had only horse-drawn artillery, and in some cases the fourth battalion (Ed: 150 mm howitzer bn) was entirely lacking.

43. The field forces were not mobile enough. A whole series of "static" divisions were assigned only enough motor vehicles to transport their supplies. Unit trains and artillery were horse-drawn. Everything else used in the coastal defense in the service of the so-called fixed weapons ("anti-landing" guns, fortress machine guns, etc) was completely immobile and remained so.

44. The POL supply was inadequate. For a long time the Western Front's fuel allotment had been drastically curtailed. Fuel restrictions were carried to the point where severe punishments for unauthorized use of motor vehicles and frequent controls (patrols) were established. The fuel allotment was cut so low that regimental commanders could leave their positions via motor vehicle only a few times each month. They and their subordinate officers were forced to resort to horses and bicycles; their work suffered as a result. These measures were adopted because of the belief that enough fuel reserves must always be available to insure the necessary movement and operations of units during the first days of an invasion. As far as possible, the storage of the fuel reserve was decentralized.

45. Our complete inferiority in the air was a particular source of worry to OB WEST. This inferiority, apparent at the beginning of 1943, became steadily more marked during the course of the year. Wholeheartedly supported by Third Air Force, we stressed this point and begged OKW to send adequate reinforcements in time. Precisely during the first phase of an invasion was the strongest possible commitment of our own air forces imperative. If the enemy fleet and landing craft could not be attacked from the air just as soon as an invasion definitely began, the enemy would have a decisive advantage by the time he reached the shore.

46. OB WEST's lack of a fully mobile strategic reserve was, however, the cardinal weakness. This preeminent need was given very special emphasis in the report of OB WEST. OB WEST had

contemplated assembling its strategic reserve in the area directly east and south of Paris (astride the Seine). From such a position of readiness, the reserves would be able to join in fighting either north or south of the Seine, as the situation demanded. The report of OB WEST concluded that, on the average, the units in the West were only "conditionally ready for action," but that with the elimination of the deficiencies listed it was hoped we could cope with an invasion.

V. Results of the Inspection

47. This report which was presented, or at least submitted, to Hitler got results. True, at this point OKW could not do anything about changing the personnel of the field forces, but it did improve the supply of weapons and equipment. In addition, in the autumn of 1943 OKW began sending OB WEST a number of units which were to be either rehabilitated or reorganized. Since OKW had already expressly designated the Channel Coast (Fifteenth Army) as the defensive center of gravity*, most of these units were sent to Fifteenth

*Author's Note: Fuehrer Directive 51, issued by OKW in the autumn of 1943, informed OB WEST that the German Supreme Command expected an invasion in the West in 1944 at the latest. Inasmuch as the Invasion would probably be launched at the Channel Coast (Fifteenth Army), the point of main defensive effort should be unequivocally located in that sector. Upon the success of the defense against this invasion would depend not only the fate of the occupied territory in the West, but also the outcome of the War as a whole.

Army.

48. Reinforcement of the Luftwaffe on the first day of the Invasion was definitely promised to OB WEST and Third Air Force. (Unfortunately, this reinforcement was not effected until about three or four days after the Invasion--too late to be decisive.)

49. OKW also promised to create a strategic reserve for OB WEST and ordered headquarters and troops of the Ersatzheer (Replacement Training Army) quickly and systematically brought up in the event of an invasion. (Of course, these never arrived, since they were used in the East; in any event, with their organization, equipment, and mobility--as well as their level of training--they would never have been able to fulfil the mission of a strategic reserve.)

50. Italy's defection in the autumn of 1943 weakened OB WEST anew, for three divisions had to be stationed between Marseilles and the Franco-Italian border. Furthermore, it was always possible that developments in the East would make it necessary for OB WEST to release divisions which were ready for action. Thus new problems arose again and again to aggravate the difficulties of overcoming an invasion.

51. Genfldm von Rundstedt was convinced that

- a. the western Allies would attack with tremendous technical and materiel superiority,
- b. their preparations for the attack would be made very meticulously and their training would be thorough, and
- c. the impending invasion would be decided on the first day.

Thus, everything depended on destroying the enemy on the day they landed--if it could possibly be done. Genfldm von Rundstedt remained very skeptical on this point because of the ratio between our resources and those of the enemy. He had, however, to take the proper measures to do as much as possible with what was available.

VI. Counter-Invasion Preparations Continued

52. OB WEST next proposed to OKW that it authorize a zone along the coast in which the combat troops would have full command authority. The expression "Kuestengefechtsgebiet" (Coastal Combat Zone) was selected and approved as the designation for this area. In general, the Coastal Combat Zone was to be only as deep as the expected range of enemy naval artillery. Its depth would vary with the terrain and the nature of the coast; its precise boundaries would be determined as a result of reconnaissance and proposals made by the armies. OB WEST planned to displace the rear boundaries of this Zone into the interior, 50 km at a time, in case of progressive engagements. Headquarters and agencies of the military districts and of Wehrmacht District Netherlands already located in the Zone were to remain in order to perform their territorial functions, but the tactical requirements of the field forces had priority in this Zone. The Coastal Combat Zone approved by OKW averaged about 20 - 30 km deep along the coast. In Holland and along the Atlantic coast it was considerably less deep, while along the French Mediterranean front it

was sometimes much deeper because the mountains behind the coast blocked observation and made this necessary for security reasons. OB WEST insisted that all higher headquarters, convalescent homes, and hospitals be evacuated from the coast. This was not always accomplished without friction.

53. During the autumn and winter of 43/44, every possible effort was made to improve the coastal fortifications and to further the training of the field forces. To be sure, the one objective was in conflict with the other! For the demands of construction work required the energies and the transportation of the field forces, and training always suffered accordingly. The concentration of troops along the Channel Coast permitted Fifteenth Army to accomplish most in the construction line by virtue of its relative great labor supply.

54. The stronger the defenses of the Channel Coast, the greater the possibility of Normandy as an invasion target. OB WEST, however, was in no position to reinforce Normandy to a strength comparable to that of the Channel Coast. And to deplete the Channel front in favor of Normandy was contrary to OKW's repeated instructions to concentrate, unconditionally, on the former. Because of this situation, it would have been all the more important for OB WEST to have a large strategic reserve available in the area south of Paris.

55. About the beginning of 1944, OB WEST decided to give OKW another thorough estimate of the situation. This estimate contained approximately the following ideas:

- a. The year 1944 will bring the Invasion in the West, and with it the decision of the War.
- b. The Invasion may take place in winter, but it is more likely to come after the middle of March, and it is most likely to come in June.
- c. Where will the Invasion take place? The most likely possibilities are:

- (1) Along the English Channel (Fifteenth Army).*

*Pt 4 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genflm von Rundstedt:

In my opinion, the Allies would give first consideration to a landing on the Channel Coast, although in that sector the fortifications were the strongest and they might expect the stiffest resistance. My opinion was based on several reasons:

Since the Channel Coast was the nearest to them, the landing could be executed with the greatest element of surprise. Supply would be easiest. Uninterrupted aerial support was possible. The launching sites for V-weapons could be destroyed (we set completely vain hopes on the effect of these weapons on England). Above all, however, the Channel Coast was the beginning of the shortest way to the Rhine and the Ruhr! Success there, even if won at great sacrifice, would have very early results and a decisive effect on the War, for no German forces were available between the Channel Coast and the Rhine.

- (2) Astride the Seine estuary (Fifteenth Army).
- (3) Along the east coast of Normandy (Seventh Army).
- (4) Less likely possibilities are Brittany and Holland; still less likely, the Atlantic coast.

- d. A landing on the French Mediterranean coast must be considered possible; such a landing can take place before or after

the Invasion from the West. Deceptive maneuvers are always possible and likely.

e. The primary objective of any invasion from the West will be Paris. He who has Paris, has France!

f. OB WEST lacks a strong, mobile strategic reserve with which to meet any situations that may arise!

g. Since it is impossible to judge whether or not OKW is in a position to furnish such a reserve, OB WEST submits the following points for consideration:

(1) OB WEST cannot in any event defend the entire coast in the West and South with the men and materiel at hand. With the exception of the fortresses and certain sectors of concentration, the coast is for the most part so thinly occupied that its defending forces can be termed mere "security detachments." These, however, will be of no avail against a major attack.

(2) Only the large harbors will have any strategic importance for the enemy in the event of an invasion. This fact should be given more attention.

h. Therefore, OB WEST proposes that the field forces be withdrawn from all sectors not in danger of major landings (Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts), so that the more important fortresses and fortified areas can be reinforced. On the French Mediterranean coast the only points left to be considered are Marseilles and Toulon. The other stretches of the coast need only be watched. All forces made

available by these measures will be used to form a central strategic reserve for OB WEST.

In connection with its repeatedly disapproved proposals, OB WEST requests reconsideration of the possibility of reducing the Channel Islands garrison, at least in men and materiel. In the event of an invasion, this garrison will become a "dead post," by-passed by the enemy.

56. In brief, OB WEST believed, on the basis of practical military knowledge, that the enemy aerial supremacy, naval supremacy, and technical and material resources would make the first attempt to get ashore a success. Thus everything depended on attacking and destroying the enemy during the weak moments when he was getting his first foothold on land. This could be done only if OB WEST had an adequate, mobile, strategic reserve available for rapid commitment. Measures taken after a successful landing had been effected, would come too late.

OKW rejected this proposal.

57. A second OB WEST proposal--a major deceptive maneuver to simulate, at least, the presence of a strong reserve--was, on the other hand, approved by OKW. The Ersatzheer had to furnish reconnaissance detachments and advance parties for a number of fictitious divisions, including three panzer divisions. These groups were accordingly fitted out with uniforms in Germany, sent to OB WEST, provided with orders, and sent on to the armies. As far as I remember, these advance parties were assigned to the Seventh, First, and Nineteenth Armies; they received billeting areas there, reconnoitered, signed papers,

negotiated with the agencies of Military District France and the French authorities, and, in general, made preparations for the accommodation of their units. The advance party personnel themselves, as well as the civilian population, expected the units to follow. Obviously, this deception would be effective only for a limited period; it was actually intended only as a means to gain time.

58. Meanwhile, each army, as ordered by OB WEST, had made arrangements to release a number of divisions in the event of an invasion in another sector (Cases 1 - 5). These divisions were trained, and, in a makeshift way, rendered mobile at the expense of the forces remaining in the coastal defense. In some cases--265 Div and 266 Div, for example--nothing more than kampfgruppen (combat teams) were formed.

Ed: At this point in his commentary, Genlt Speidel, apparently not in full accord with pars 51 through 58, refers the reader to the complete text of MS # B-720, his discussion of the ideas and views of Genfldm Rommel on defense and operations in the West in 1944. A summary of MS # B-720 follows:

The mission assigned to OB WEST and A Gp B was unyielding defense of the coast. They were to prevent the enemy from making any landing, or to annihilate immediately any elements which might land. Freedom of operation in the West was prohibited.

Genfldm Rommel was convinced that the enemy would invade with markedly superior ground, air, and naval forces, and that the critical point would occur within the first three days. Probable invasion areas were the Somme estuary, the Seine estuary, the Calvados coast, and the Cotentin Peninsula; less probable were the Channel Coast and Brittany. After a successful invasion, attainment of the Paris area seemed to Genfldm Rommel to be decisive for the Allies.

The organization and the chain of command of the major commands in the West was somewhere between confusion and chaos; it corresponded to neither the timeless laws of warfare nor the demands of the hour. Rommel, therefore, proposed that, within his sector, Organisation Todt

and all three arms of the Wehrmacht be subordinated to him for his decisive defensive mission. The proposal was sharply rejected by Hitler.

Since Hitler and OKW were completely uncompromising in their insistence that the fighting be done at the Atlantic Wall, Genfldm Rommel decided that the disposition of the few available reserves had to be based upon his assigned mission. He was convinced that landings of fairly great local significance could not be eliminated without the use of panzer reserves--at least five panzer divisions. In addition, he feared that concentration of these reserves near Paris would result in their arriving at their area of commitment too late, principally because of enemy mastery of the air. As they became available, the panzer divisions were concentrated behind the threatened stretches of coast. Nevertheless, Rommel felt it highly important that there be a strategic reserve of panzer and motorized units in the Paris area; although this strategic reserve was approved by Hitler, OKW, and Genobst Guderian, it never came into being.

VII. Gen Pz Frhr Geyr von Schweppenburg

59. The General der Panzertruppen West (Chief Armored Officer, Gen Pz Frhr Geyr von Schweppenburg) rendered OB WEST valuable service in supervising and training the panzer units. His job was by no means easy because not all the commands accepted the concept for which he strove--a mobile, basically strategic employment of panzer units. Like Genfldm von Rundstedt, Gen von Geyr recognized that the cardinal weakness in the West was the absence of a strategic reserve for OB WEST. At the risk of being considered a nuisance, he repeatedly expressed his apprehensions in this decisive matter, pointing out the possibility of strong enemy air landings to the rear of the invasion sectors. As a panzer specialist he represented the fundamental point of view of fluid employment of all panzer units. When, as a result of

the many tactical requirements of A Gp B, he could not make his point, he tried at least to assemble a number of panzer units and other motorized forces as a mobile strategic reserve for OB WEST in the area south of Paris. Genfldm von Rundstedt was entirely in sympathy with the idea. Unfortunately, this sound idea was never carried out; the last panzer-type units available were requisitioned by OKW and placed in OKW reserve (Pz Lehr Div, 12 SS Pz Div, and 17 SS Pz Gren Div), an occurrence which was due to Genfldm Rommel's persistent attempts to encroach on the theater organization as conceived by OB WEST.

60. Nothing remained for Gen von Geyr but to refer again and again to his own proficiency, and above all to his impressions gained from foreign political reports. However, in order to have a suitable staff ready for concentrating and directing a number of panzer units, OB WEST had Gen von Geyr assemble an improvised panzer operations staff (designated "Pz Gp West"), which became the ancestor of the later Fifth Pz Army staff. Genmaj von Dawans (killed in Normandy) was selected as Gen von Geyr's Chief of Staff.

61. As a person, Von Geyr was one of the "intellectual" generals, and different from most of the others in his versatility, cosmopolitanism, and sophistication. From the impressions and knowledge he gained during his tour of duty as military attache in England before World War II, he derived new ideas and a wider outlook. To the best of my knowledge he had, specifically on the basis of this knowledge, warned against a second world war and had relayed a completely accurate picture of the true English position in his reports. Whether,

and if so to what extent, this was held against him in authoritative circles, I am unable to judge. In any case, Gen von Geyr knew that his reports were always carried to the highest authorities. In his position with OB WEST, besides being a champion of the correct use of panzer units, he was a keen analyst of foreign political news. Because of this and because of his stubborn fight over the correct employment of panzer units, he often got into serious, pointed controversies and conflicts with other commands, especially with A Gp B. Later events proved Gen von Geyr to have been right.*

*Pt 4 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

I know nothing of "serious, pointed controversies and conflicts" between A Gp B and Gen von Geyr. Genfldm Rommel and Gen von Geyr had practical and objective discussions on the use of tanks and the organization of the reserves. (I refer the reader to the reports prepared by Gen von Geyr.*)

*Ed: Genlt Speidel probably refers to MS # B-466, Gen Pz von Geyr's account of the activities and operations of Pz Gp West in Normandy, for a copy of MS # B-466 was in Gen Speidel's possession when he prepared MS # B-718. Throughout MS # B-466 and all the other writing that Gen von Geyr has done for the Historical Division, Von Geyr has emphasized the magnitude and the seriousness of his disagreements with Genfldm Rommel; he has often described his professional relationship with Rommel as a "cock-fight controversy." In particular, Von Geyr's commentary on MS # B-720 (summarized in an editor's note at the end of par 58, above) characterizes Rommel as the strongest personality in the West and the man who most courageously supported his views at higher headquarters, but as a pure tactician and the strongest motive force behind an inept use of the panzer arm.

If there had really been any serious personal differences of opinion between Genfldm Rommel and Gen von Geyr, Rommel would not have chosen Von Geyr for a special appointment which he was to receive in the event of the measures taken to save the Reich being successful. (I refer the reader to MS # B-721, my account of the events leading up to 20 Jul 44.*)

*Ed: According to MS # B-721, Rommel, as a popular hero, was selected by the anti-Hitler forces to be the commander of the Army, or perhaps the Wehrmacht, after the elimination of Hitler. Rommel, though strongly opposed to any assassination attempt, was convinced of the advisability of negotiating a separate peace with the Western Allies and had tentatively selected Gen Pz von Geyr as one of the principal negotiators. He planned, however, to institute such negotiations only after exhausting every possibility to convince Hitler of the utter hopelessness of the military situation in the West.



Hr. Gev. von Schweppenburg

GEYR von SCHWEPENBURG

Chapter Three

INSERTION OF A GP B

I. Rommel Ordered to Inspect Invasion Defenses

62. Near the end of 1943 or the beginning of 1944, OB WEST received a directive from OKW in which Genfldm Rommel and his staff were commissioned by Hitler to examine the coasts of Denmark, Flanders, the English Channel, Normandy, and Brittany, as to their defensive capabilities. The results of the inspection were to be reported directly to Hitler. Genfldm Rommel was to furnish OB WEST pertinent sections of this report. Naturally this directive seemed a trifle strange, for in the review of the essentially older officer, Genfldm von Rundstedt, by the significantly younger Rommel, there actually lay a certain lack of confidence--or at least it could be so construed. However, the generous and chivalrous Genfldm von Rundstedt, with his wealth of experience and wisdom, overcame all inner reluctance in the interest of the project at hand.

63. During the winter of 1943-44 the headquarters of A Gp B was transferred by OKW to the Munich area after its usefulness in upper Italy had passed. At the beginning of Jan 44, Genfldm Rommel suggested that he be transferred to France to carry out his mission in order to save travel and to be able to devote himself more intensively

to his job. OKW agreed, and OB WEST had Fontainebleau assigned to A Gp B as its headquarters.* Genlt Gause was Rommel's Chief of Staff.

*Pt 5 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

When Rommel came to France, Keitel told me on behalf of Hitler that I should not draw any false conclusions from his arrival. Rommel would never be considered as my successor. With all his capabilities, he was not up to that job. Should a replacement for me become necessary, it could only be Genfldm von Kluge.

64. Genfldm Rommel made his initial visit to OB WEST from Fontainebleau sometime during the first half of Jan 44. On this occasion Genfldm von Rundstedt personally oriented him as to the general situation and, referring to the map, pointed out emphatically that only the tactical front along the Channel Coast (Fifteenth Army) was to some extent able to defend itself; for all the rest of the coast, such was not the case! Genfldm Rommel would, of course, find out for himself, but with the men and equipment provided by OKW there was simply no more that could be done. The field forces, moreover, were bound to be more labor troops than combat troops because their training would be inadequate.

65. Genfldm von Rundstedt further emphasized his apprehension over the lack of a strategic reserve of our own, and over the failure to construct strategic rearward defensive positions in France. For, although on orders from OKW one rearward position had been reconnoitered in 1943 and two layouts for it had been mapped and even the construction materials had been allotted to the corps sectors, specific

orders from OKW forbade any progress beyond the reconnaissance stage, including construction of any sort.* The position reconnoitered

*Pt 21 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

Hitler's prohibition of the construction of rearward positions, against which all responsible commanders constantly struggled, arose from his belief that such positions exerted a magical attraction on troops and their commanders, drawing them back to the rear. Even the arming of the West Wall, after the breakthrough at Avranches, was ordered without Hitler's approval, by the Chief of the WFSt, on about 28 Jul 44.

extended somewhat as follows: from the Somme (anchored there with Fifteenth Army) to the Marne, along the Marne to the Saone, and from there to the Swiss border. See App 3. In addition, OB WEST, on its own initiative, made a supplementary reconnaissance: Albert Kanal--Meuse--west of the Argonne, with the junction along the Marne in the vicinity of Chalons-s-Marne. Later, during the withdrawal actions through France, the field forces referred to this position as the "Kitzinger Line" because Gen Fl Kitzinger, having become surplus as the Militaerbefehlshaber in France, became responsible for preparing this defense line.

Rommel made his first inspection trips to the coast from Fontainebleau in approximately the following order: Flanders, the Channel Coast, Normandy, and Brittany.

II. Command Status of A Gp B

66. Very soon--about Feb 44--Genfldm Rommel proposed to OB WEST (apparently also to OKW) that Seventh and Fifteenth Armies be placed under his command. Soon afterward, he asked to have his command extended to include Wehrmacht District Netherlands. His justification for these requests was that he could not implement quickly his observations and suggestions for improvement unless he had powers of command. Again, Wehrmacht District Netherlands belonged tactically under the same command as Fifteenth Army because of the Schelde estuary.

67. This proposal was in itself quite plausible and might also have worked out well in practice if it had resulted in a complete subordination of A Gp B to OB WEST. In the event, however, this was not the case! A draft of such an OB WEST directive, providing for strict and complete subordination of Rommel to OB WEST, was turned down by both Genfldm Rommel and OKW as being inordinate in its demands. Since it had to be moderated to the extent that Rommel retained freedom of action within his area, actually a "Gummibefehl" (elastic directive) resulted, which in subsequent combat engagements proved a decided handicap to OB WEST's conduct of operations.

Sometime in Mar or Apr 44 the new A Gp B installed its headquarters in La Roche Guyon (Lower Seine) and moved there.

III. Differences of Opinion between Von Rundstedt and Rommel

68. Thereafter, a burden was imposed on the very much older Von Rundstedt which only his greatness enabled him to bear, for very soon it became evident that there was considerable divergence between the tactical and strategic views of the two field marshals, but that those of Genfldm Rommel were closer to the views of OKW. This divergence became especially apparent in the tactical disposition of forces for the coastal defense. Genfldm Rommel represented the tactical view that as many forces as possible should be concentrated in the coastal defense itself. Even advance detachments of panzer divisions and most of the reserves, especially panzer units, were to be brought up just as close as possible, in order to defeat an enemy landing force while it was still afloat and prevent the gaining of a foothold on land. In pursuance of this idea A Gp B almost daily sent OB WEST one proposal or another which, on the basis of Rommel's tactical views, advocated change in the measures already taken by OB WEST--particularly in the Fifteenth Army sector and on the right wing of Seventh Army. Thus the reserves in the A Gp B area were systematically pushed right up to the coast. In many instances even the divisional artillery of divisions having no sector responsibilities was brought up to the coast. The same thing was done with the army (Heer) artillery in so far as it was available and, in the end, OB WEST was not able to carry out a project which it had fervently advocated--the formation of a mobile artillery

corps (two artillery divisions) as an OB WEST reserve. Genfldm Rommel claimed even this artillery for employment near the coast, and he secured the concurrence of OKW.

69. In this way the coastal defenses in the Fifteenth Army area and on the right wing of Seventh Army (eastern coast of Normandy) were indeed strengthened numerically in the forward area, but the disposition in depth of the reserves and the possibility of shifting forces were both materially weakened. Rommel may have reasoned this way: The enemy will employ such a mass of fire power when he lands that it will not be possible to bring up any reserves at all from the rear through the fire curtain. Everything will be smashed except that which stands ready at the front.

70. Genfldm von Rundstedt was, and remained, of another conviction. Having studied every major landing that had occurred, he had come to the conclusion that:

- a. The enemy would succeed in making the landing under any circumstances.
- b. There was absolutely no way to keep the enemy from making an air landing.

On the basis of these two facts he reviewed the counter-measures and concluded that the success or failure of a landing would be decided within the first 24 hours (in the event of particularly favorable circumstances, within 48 hours). For he considered the success of the initial landing a foregone conclusion--though heavy enemy losses might be incurred--in view of the enemy's overpowering use of all technical

means, in view of the heavy fire from long-range naval artillery, of incessant air attacks, and of anticipated enemy air landings in the rear. He felt, however, that the enemy's weak moment would come directly after this when he was clinging to still weak, isolated beachheads and suffering losses, and when his supply was still not assured. This, Von Rundstedt believed, would be the moment to strike. The reserves should be readied accordingly. And, of course, at that time he still had the assurances that our air force would be reinforced in time.

71. In any case the concept of OB WEST, as contrasted with that of Genfldm Rommel, implied that the reserves were to be brought only so close to the coast as to enable them to take part in the first day's combat, while at the same time they would, prior to their commitment, remain out of reach of the long-range artillery and the first heavy firing and bombing. Disposing the reserves in this way constituted, at the same time, an effective measure against air landings. But, above all, the possibility of shifting or withdrawing reserves, particularly panzer units, was always to be kept open.

72. The basic difference between the views of the two field marshals was:

Genfldm Rommel prematurely tied up the bulk of the forces in the coastal defense in a linear tactical disposition.

Genfldm von Rundstedt approached the matter from the strategic angle and wanted to do everything possible to preserve freedom of action.

73. Since there was no complete subordination of A Gp B to OB WEST, it often became necessary to call on OKW to resolve conflicts in tactical views. For the most part--though not unequivocally--OKW at that time inclined to Genfldm Rommel's theory.*

*Pt 6 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt;

The difficulties in the building up of reserves in the rear were less the fault of Rommel than of OKW. Even before Rommel came, when divisions or even smaller units arrived OKW indicated exactly the localities to which they should proceed, regardless of protests from OB WEST. Nor were we allowed to undertake, without permission, the displacement of divisions already present.

IV. Lessons from African and Italian Campaigns Applied by A Gp B

74. One of the techniques that soon found practical application in the western defense system was the construction of tree-trunk palisades, partially mined, along sectors of the coast in danger of sea or air landings. They were placed in front of the MLR (the shore line at high tide) and were visible at low tide, under water at high tide. There was, of course, no guarantee that the posts would stand up under a rough sea, and trials with heavy, flat barges proved that the posts could be pushed aside. Nevertheless they had a deterring and--seen as a whole--perhaps terrifying effect. Behind the coastal front, areas particularly susceptible to air landings were likewise thickly interlaced with posts. This could, of course, be done only in certain limited areas because the required lumber and transportation were both

exceedingly scarce and also because labor forces were inadequate. Evidence of the practical value of this technique is not available, but it can be assumed that the enemy determined the location and extent of these obstacles by aerial reconnaissance and modified his tactics accordingly.

75. Another A Gp B technique was to increase tremendously the laying of mines in front of, behind, and around the strongpoints and especially the unoccupied areas. A Gp B's request for the delivery of at least ten million mines a month could not be even remotely complied with. Still, the mine-laying program was stepped up feverishly and much was achieved. In this program also, the sector of main effort (Channel Coast) received primary consideration. In conjunction with the increase in mine laying, the construction and camouflage of defense installations was furthered. There is no doubt that A Gp B accomplished a very great deal in these matters, but the troops were completely exhausted by the terrific amount of labor they had to do and they consequently received very little or no training.

76. A third technique was the flooding or soaking of extensive areas in order to conserve forces, render terrain impassable, and bring about a frightening effect. Out of consideration for the civil population and its food problem, OB WEST did not want to adopt these measures, particularly that of flooding the land with sea water. OKW heard of these proposals of Rommel, liked them, and ordered that they be presented directly. As far as I remember, OKW ordered that fresh water be dammed up in the region southeast of Dunkirk--Calais,

while additional fresh-water floodings of a more or less local nature were undertaken in the Somme lowland just behind the coast, utilizing some lagoon-like depressions there. The same thing was done in Normandy, where the swamp areas were utilized, and the landward fronts of fortresses were flooded as a reinforcement of the antitank obstacles. In Holland, careful preparations for flooding the low islands as well as the so-called Polder area around the IJssel Meer were begun. OB WEST also opposed this measure because it felt that the harm to the food supply outweighed the tactical advantages. Here again, however, OKW later gave the order indicated. Whether and to what extent this technique of flooding actually handicapped the enemy, is uncertain. In this case, too, air reconnaissance must have furnished definite information to enable the enemy to draw his own conclusions and take the necessary countermeasures.*

*Pt 6 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

Genfldm Rommel was the first to encourage practical training by personally conducting field exercises. His untiring activity disturbed the quiet which had hitherto prevailed in the West. The technical side of the defense preparations and of the ideas of Genfldm Rommel are discussed in Adm Ruge's report, MS # A-982. (Ed: The report of Vz Adm Friedrich Ruge, Naval Liaison Officer to A Gp B, discusses in some detail the measures taken by Rommel to improve the coastal defenses. The report also states that Rommel was open to new ideas and very much interested in technical progress.)

77. In conclusion, the following may be said concerning these measures of A Gp B: The palisade construction, especially along the coast in front of the MIR, may have gained time for the defense; it is a fair assumption that after finding out about these obstacles the

Western Allies selected new methods to use in their initial landing (landing in the period just after low tide, using advance engineer demolition parties to remove post obstacles and mines) and perfected their new techniques. In any case, however, Rommel's ideas received very ready approval from Hitler, whereas Genfldm von Rundstedt treated these ideas as being only secondarily important. His opinion was that the enemy's technical means and resources would make short work of these expedients, so secondary to the problem as a whole.

V. Rommel's Personality

78. Rommel was a very brave dare-devil of a man, heedless of danger. His private life was completely above reproach. He did not smoke, drank very little, and went to bed very early so he could get up early. He was not easy-going in his demands on his staff.

79. He commanded a panzer unit in this war with great success, and certainly he was just the man for the forays of the North Africa Campaign. But as soon as his missions expanded into the field of higher strategy, his limitations became evident. He seemed to lack the fundamental prerequisites, especially the strategic foresight, for directing higher strategy as required of a great captain.

80. On the other hand, the popularity he had won in Africa probably heightened his assurance and confidence in his own judgment and ability, especially since at the time of his assignment to the West he still had access directly to the Supreme Command. This led

to the well-known basic conflict with OB WEST and naturally affected the whole system of command relationships in the West. However, further experiences in the West soon caused even Rommel to reverse his views in regard to OKW and also to change his sentiments concerning Hitler--these altered feelings, of course, being at that time unknown except to a few intimates.*

*Pt 5 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

The writer was never in a position to be able to give, now, a well-rounded evaluation of Rommel's personality. I intend to publish later an estimate of Genfldm Rommel as a man and a soldier. The writer makes no mention of Rommel's preparations for ending the War in the West and terminating the dictatorship of Hitler. A report will also be prepared, in due time, on the political conversion of Rommel, which occurred much earlier.



ROMMEL

Chapter Four

ACTIVATION OF A GP G

81. Very soon after A Gp B assumed command, Genfldm von Rundstedt recognized the danger that A Gp B would acquire a preeminent, excessively favored position. He therefore decided, about the end of Mar 44, to propose the creation of an army group for the southern part of his command (First Army and Nineteenth Army) as well. This would serve to "balance" the command relationships in the West and to take care of various practical matters in connection with Rommel's ambitions and personality. The Commander of A Gp G was to be the experienced and trustworthy Genobst Blaskowitz (until then, First Army Commander). OKW approved this proposal about the beginning of April, but with the restriction that for the time being the new headquarters was to be designated an Armeegruppe*. No reason was given for this pro-

*Ed: In the Wehrmacht, an Armeegruppe was normally a temporary, provisional organization, intermediate in status and responsibilities between a Corps and an Army. Armeegruppe G, however, was an exception to this general rule, for it corresponded very closely to a Heeresgruppe-- the equivalent of an American or British Army Group.

viso, but it probably had a close connection with the individual proposed as commander.

82. As scheduled, A Gp G became operational on 10 May 44. Its staff was made up of officers furnished by OB WEST and subordinate

commands. Subordinate to A Gp G were First Army and Nineteenth Army. Its headquarters was at Rouffiac, near Toulouse. Genmaj von Gyldenfeldt (Ed: promoted to genlt 1 Nov 44) was named Chief of Staff.

OB WEST now had two headquarters functioning under its direction, instead of five as was the case before A Gp B became operational. At the time, this seemed to simplify the command problem.

83. In his concepts and his mode of life, Genobst Blaskowitz was similar to Genfldm von Rundstedt. Like the latter, he was a representative of the old imperial army, with a strong spiritual and religious turn of mind. Rigorously just and high-minded, at the very beginning of the War he could not reconcile himself to conditions as he found them in the Generalgouvernement (German administration of Central Poland, 1939) and submitted very pointed reports to the Supreme Command. On this account, RF-SS Himmler and the Supreme Command hated him. The consequences are well-known--he was relieved of his position and was in open disfavor. (Ed: Blaskowitz never became a genfldm, although he was promoted to genobst on 1 Oct 39.) Genfldm von Rundstedt, who esteemed him both as a soldier and a man, defended him at every opportunity and made efforts to get him into positions he could fill. Blaskowitz was constantly pursued by hatred, but he always remained the straightforward soldier who wanted to do his duty simply for the sake of his Fatherland and his people.*

*Pt 7 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

It was a great mistake that Hitler suddenly recalled Blaskowitz and his Chief of Staff, in Sep 44, and replaced them with

men from the East. I believe that if Blaskowitz had remained, the loss of Lorraine and Alsace would not have followed so quickly. When he returned, at my instance, it was too late to repair the damage.

84. Blaskowitz gave renewed proof of his leadership ability in his successful withdrawal from the Mediterranean to the Vosges despite overwhelming difficulties. From the German point of view it is only a pity that in the critical days of the Invasion he was not in the position he could have filled: A Gp B!*

*Pt 7 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

The comparison of Rommel and Blaskowitz seems inappropriate. From the military standpoint, Blaskowitz had behind him only the brief experience of the very different campaign in Poland in 1939; politically, his difficulties in Poland required that he restrain his views. Gen Blaskowitz' traits of character are described correctly. Genfldm Rommel's person and prestige among the Army and the people, and abroad, were of decisive importance for the rescue of Germany--in the last analysis, the most important objective!



BLASKOWITZ

Chapter Five

OB WEST ORDER OF BATTLE AT THE BEGINNING OF JUN 44

(See App 2 and App 2a.)

I. A Gp B

85. Wehrmacht District Netherlands

Hq, LXXXVIII Corps
347 Div
16 Lw Feld Div
709 Div
275 Div (in the rear, undergoing reorganization)

86. Fifteenth Army

Hq, LXXXIX Corps
Hq, LXXXII Corps
Hq, LXVII Corps
Hq, LXXXI Corps

a. The following nine divisions were committed along

the coast:

70 Div ("stomach" division)
136 Div (zbV), at the entrance to the Schelde estuary
18 Lw Feld Div
47 Div
49 Div
344 Div
348 Div
17 Lw Feld Div
711 Div

b. The following 11 divisions were stationed directly behind the coast:

19 Lw Feld Div
64 Div
712 Div
182 Res Div
326 Div
331 Div
85 Div
89 Div
346 Div
2 Pz Div
116 Pz Div

c. The following were stationed within the Fifteenth Army area:

Hq, I SS Pz Corps, with corps troops
1 SS Pz Div

87. Seventh Army

Hq, LXXXIV Corps
Hq, LXXIV Corps
Hq, XXV Corps
Hq, II FS Corps (attached for operations only)

a. The following were committed along the coast:

716 Div
352 Div
709 Div
243 Div (elms)
30 Brig (headquarters, with Eastern battalions and bicycle-mounted replacement battalions)
319 Div (Channel Islands)
77 Div (less uncommitted elements)
266 Div
343 Div
265 Div

b. The following were stationed behind the coast:

91 LL Div
84 Div
353 Div
3 FS Div (attached for operations only)
2 FS Div (attached for operations only)
6 FS Regt
21 Pz Div

c. The following, stationed within the Seventh Army area or immediately to the rear thereof, were in OKW reserve:

12 SS Pz Div
Pz Lehr Div

II. A Gp G

88. First Army

Hq, LXXX Corps
Hq, LXXXVI Corps

a. The following were committed along the coast:

158 Res Div
708 Div
159 Res Div

b. The following were stationed behind the coast:

276 Div (elements committed on the southern wing
of First Army)
11 Pz Div (undergoing rehabilitation)

c. Stationed in the First Army area, but in OKW reserve:

17 SS Pz Gren Div

89. Nineteenth Army

Hq, IV Lw Feld Corps
Hq, Corps Kniess (subsequently designated LXXXV Corps)
Hq, LXII Res Corps

a. The following were committed along the coast:

272 Div
277 Div
271 Div
338 Div
244 Div
242 Div
148 Res Div

b. The following were stationed behind the coast:

(1) Hq, LVIII Pz Corps, directly subordinate to A Gp G and controlling 11 Pz Div (at first located behind the First Army front) and 9 Pz Div.

(2) In addition, a Turkish division, comprising Eastern troops, was stationed on the southern slope of the Massif Central. The Division was engaged in training Eastern troops, was not subordinate to OB WEST, and was available only in a grave emergency and then only with the approval of OKW.

(3) In the A Gp G area and undergoing rehabilitation was 2 SS Pz Div.

III. Other German Army Troops in France

90. Security forces controlled by the military districts and by Wehrmacht District Netherlands.

91. The following Ersatzheer (Replacement Training Army) staffs and troops were at the tactical disposal of OB WEST in case danger threatened:

Hq, LXVI Res Corps, controlling 189 Res Div (elements deployed in the Pyrenees and the Garonne valley for "blocking" missions, other elements located in the vicinity of Clermont-Ferrand.

157 Res Div, located in the Franco-Italian Alps and tactically controlled by Military District France.

165 Res Div, in the vicinity of Nancy.

5 FS Div (organizing), in the vicinity of Nancy-Dijon, later near Paris.

In addition to the above, a number of training classes and service schools, controlled by OKH or the Ersatzheer, were situated in the OB WEST area. In case of impending danger, OB WEST could call on some of them--the artillery schools, for example. These schools, therefore, were to be rendered mobile in a systematic fashion. Though small in number and tactically unimportant, these reinforcements were particularly outstanding in quality.

IV. Troop Dispositions Unbalanced in Favor of Channel Coast

92. The strong and unbalanced concentration of force along the Channel (Fifteenth Army) was clearly discernible in the pre-Invasion disposition of forces. In accordance with numerous orders from the Supreme Command, Fifteenth Army--as compared with the other armies--had the bulk of the larger units (approximately twenty divisions, including two panzer divisions). This biased concentration of force, strongly supported and furthered by the measures of A Gp B, prevented an adequate or even a compensatory reinforcement of Normandy.

93. The OB WEST estimate--the stronger the Channel front, the more likely an invasion of Normandy--could not alter the conviction

of OKW and A Gp B that the Invasion had to come along the Channel.* **

*Pt 8 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

As I have already stated in MS # B-720 (Ed: summarized in the editor's note at the end of par 58, above), Genfldm Rommel never considered that the Channel front would be the point of main effort, and therefore the measures ordered by OKW were not "strongly supported and furthered" by him. Had it been otherwise, he would certainly have placed his panzer divisions behind this front also.

Because of the chaos at the very top of our command organization, the data required by A Gp B for an estimate of the enemy situation and intentions were received only after "adaptation" and perhaps "retouching" by OB WEST, OKH (fremde Heere-West, agency for intelligence concerning foreign armies in the West), and OKW (Fuehrungs-abteilung, tactical staff group). Direct contact with the intelligence agencies was forbidden. Thus, for example, A Gp B had no data on the resistance movement in France and its cooperation with the Allies, especially in case of an invasion. All information was received second-hand. This was the reason that Rommel requested a unified, authoritative command in his sector. The proposal, as we know, was very sharply rejected by Hitler.

Genfldm Rommel expected landings on both sides of the mouths of the Somme and the Seine, and along the entire coast of Normandy. He disposed and organized his reserves accordingly and made preparations for their rapid displacement in any direction.

**Pt 8 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

I refer to my remark to par 55, and add the following. I absolutely agreed that the reinforcement of Fifteenth Army was urgently necessary. When, however, this had been accomplished on an adequate scale and, through our intelligence services, the possibility of a landing in Normandy came to the fore (about the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944), we strove by every means--as did OKW, also--to strengthen the forces there. That they remained inadequate is another question.

But it would have been a mistake at that time, before the Invasion, one-sidedly to weaken Fifteenth Army for the benefit of Normandy. It was enough to take precautionary measures to regroup the reserves behind Fifteenth Army, so that in the event of a landing in Normandy they could immediately be transferred there. That this was not done afterwards was a decisive mistake.

94. Rigid adherence to a preconceived idea on the part of A Gp B, and above all on the part of OKW, together with our own complete air inferiority, OB WEST's inadequate command authority, and OB WEST's lack of a strategic reserve, are the basic factors which, from the beginning, made the defensive strength of Normandy a negative quantity and accounted for the quick success of the Invasion. When this miscalculation was finally recognized by everybody it was too late to take any effective countermeasures. Thus the Seine became an "iron curtain" and a strategic auxiliary of the Western Allies.

Pt 6 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

The above conclusions concerning the preparations against the Invasion do not, according to my memory, correspond to the opinions held at the time.

The Channel Coast was indeed regarded by Hitler as well as by the WFSt, and without contradiction by OB WEST, as the most critical defensive area, especially on a strategic basis. Nevertheless, Hitler pressed for the reinforcement of Normandy, from the end of Apr 44 onward, because after that time he constantly expected the initial invasion attempt in Normandy, although he believed that this would be only a feint or a diversion. The doubling of the forces in the Cotentin and Normandy beginning at the end of April is to be attributed solely to the continual demands of Hitler, and OB WEST did not fulfil these with enthusiasm at the time, as the report would have us believe, but only with much delay.

According to the war diary of the WFSt, OB WEST reported on 4 May 44 that A Gp B could not carry out the ordered reinforcement of Normandy. At 1900 on 6 May 44, the Chief of the WFSt (Ed: Jodl) pointed out to the Chief of Staff of OB WEST, by telephone, that the Cotentin Peninsula would be the first enemy objective, and demanded--on Hitler's orders--that the required reinforcement be executed. The WFSt proposed that the following be used as reinforcements: 91 LL Div, 243 Inf Div, and 6 FS Regt of 2 FS Div. OB WEST requested, on the contrary, that 91 LL Div be transferred to the Nantes area and not into the Cotentin, but this request was refused and Hitler demanded even more forces for Normandy. It was only on this further demand that OB WEST made available 10 Werf (projector) Regt and 100 Pz Ers

Bn. (Ed: The latter unit is shown as a panzer brigade on App 4. According to Genlt Zimmermann, 100 Pz Brig comprised captured French tanks and obsolescent German armor. It had been stationed near Paris since 1942, for the purpose of preventing riots. In the spring of 1944, all of the Brigade's tanks were reorganized into a task force and moved to the Cotentin Peninsula. Gen Zimmermann is not sure whether 100 Pz Brig operated as a unit in the Normandy battles, or whether LXXXIV Inf Corps split it up among various infantry units.)

Chapter Six
INDICATIONS OF THE COMING INVASION

95. Since early spring of 1944, enemy air activity against the OB WEST area had increased greatly. Not only was the zone of the interior attacked by day (mostly American forces) and by night (mostly English forces) in countless flights of heavy bomber formations; but rail junctions, railroad repair shops, industrial installations, and military camps in the OB WEST area were systematically destroyed. At times the coastal fortifications were also attacked, either as a feint or to draw out the defense and test its strength. Fighter-bomber activity increased significantly, attacks on moving trains multiplied, and the number of disabled locomotives grew alarmingly. The number and type of flight missions and attacks and their effects were followed daily, and accurately plotted on maps. The general picture that developed was one of a fundamental destruction of the main supply lines, without any concentration point being clearly indicated, however. Up to this time the Paris ring of rail communications had not been effectively attacked, although it had a very special significance as the center, or "turntable," of the French rail system. The opinion of OB WEST was: If the Paris ring is destroyed, the Invasion is at hand.

96. The constant growth of the resistance movement in France was followed with special attention, as was the rising incidence

of sabotage of all kinds. But here, too, conclusions could not yet be drawn as to the objective of the Invasion. Radio monitoring established hundreds of key words and expressions directed to agents and members of the resistance movement. In many cases we succeeded in analyzing these messages so that on the whole the defense could form a picture of their meaning. Parachuting of agents, weapons, ammunition, and explosives at night--as well as the exchange of signals between planes and the ground--were observed and charted. Here, too, no conclusions as to the invasion objective could be drawn because these activities usually occurred in thinly patrolled rear areas. Paris itself remained strikingly quiet.

97. Particularly significant was the transfer (ascertained by radio intelligence) of enemy combat units toward the southern English coast. We knew that enemy invasion forces, after completing great landing exercises, were standing ready. In North Africa, too, we knew that a great many more enemy units were in readiness than were needed to feed the battle in Italy. A particularly notable indication was the enemy radio silence. When this was ascertained, increased vigilance was ordered.

Thus, the decisive month of June approached.

98. In the first days of Jun 44, OKW brought up Hq, XLVII Pz Corps, which was placed under A Gp B. OB WEST planned to attach 2 Pz Div and 116 Pz Div to this Corps. The early days of Jun 44 were critical ones for Normandy and the bay of the Seine, not only because

of weather conditions but also because low tide occurred just before dawn.*

*Pt 9 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

The fact that in May I had arranged to begin, on 6 Jun 44, a trip of several days to what later became the Invasion front, may be taken as an indication that we expected the Normandy Invasion in the near future.

Chapter Seven

THE INVASION ALERT

99. At 2115 on 5 Jun 44, the Ic of OB WEST reported the receipt of an urgent alarm message to the effect that the enemy radio had several times repeated a code word summoning the resistance movement to arise immediately throughout France. Practically, this signified the mobilization of the resistance movement for the following night; the report was therefore taken very seriously. OB WEST decided to transmit this fact, with a general warning, to all units and agencies concerned in its area.

100. A Gp B, which was already aware of the above report, was ordered by OB WEST to comply with all the requirements of Alarmstufe II (Alert II) throughout its entire coastal area (Wehrmacht District Netherlands, Fifteenth Army, and Seventh Army); all other agencies including the military districts received warning and orders for increased vigilance. The order was sent by officers via telephone to A Gp B, Third Air Force, Navy Gp West, and Military District France. A Gp G was informed by telephone and then the order was repeated by teletype, with officers checking on the high-precedence transmission (Blitz-Fernschreiben). The headquarters receiving the order last, acknowledged receipt of the teletype message on 6 Jun 44 at about 0120 hours.

101. At about 0215 on 6 Jun 44, A Gp B telephoned the report of strong parachute landings in several places in Normandy, and of continuing heavy flights including both towed and free gliders. Fighting was already in progress on the Cotentin Peninsula with enemy air-landed forces. In one place wooden dummies dropped from planes were also discovered, apparently booby-trapped. In the opinion of OB WEST this was definitely the opening phase of a landing to be expected at dawn. Since the fortress of Cherbourg and the western coast of Normandy would scarcely be involved, it was plain that the landing could be expected on the east coast of Normandy, probably near the Orne and Vire estuaries or perhaps farther east in the southern part of the bay of the Seine.

102. OKW, as well as Third Air Force and Navy Gp West, was informed; and OB WEST ascertained, by checking, that Alarmstufe II had been put into effect as ordered and that all headquarters concerned had a clear picture of the situation. About 0230, OB WEST, whose entire staff was alerted and ready for action, gave the following orders-- on its own initiative, without consulting OKW first--to A Gp B, 12 SS Pz Div, and Pz Lehr Div:

Air landings in Normandy; fighting in progress. Enemy landing on the east coast of Normandy is probable.

- a. 12 SS Pz Div will proceed immediately toward Lisieux, to be under command of A Gp B.
- b. Pz Lehr Div will get ready immediately at emergency assembly areas for movement, to be under command of A Gp B.

OKW was then informed by telephone of these measures and at that time made no objection to them!

From then on, OB WEST had to rely upon the automatic execution of measures prescribed and the additional measures taken by A Gp B, with which OB WEST was in constant telephone communication.

Between 0615 and 0630 on 6 Jun 44, A Gp B reported that enemy landings were underway on the east coast of Normandy. (See App 4, OB WEST Dispositions in Normandy, 5 Jun 44.)

Chapter Eight

THE LANDING

I. Invasion Day

103. The landing report was relayed immediately, without additional details at first, to OKW and to all headquarters in the OB WEST area down to division level, with the additional order for the latter: "Continue increased vigilance!" To supplement Alarmstufe II, which had been ordered for A Gp B, the military districts' security area behind the front of A Gp B was put under Alarmstufe I up to a depth of 50 km (all of Normandy!).

104. Third Air Force was urged to commit all available forces against the landings, especially ships and landing craft, and to reconnoiter naval movements between England and the Continent. A Gp B was to transmit its requests for aerial support to Third Air Force. Unfortunately, the Third Air Force reinforcements promised by OKW and OKL had not yet arrived. (They did not arrive until the third or fourth invasion day, and were incomplete as well as too late.) Our own meager air forces--as far as I can remember, about 90 usable fighters and 70 bombers--could do nothing in the face of the uninterrupted, stunning enemy air superiority (air umbrella over beachheads and ships) and suffered severe losses.

105. Between 0630 and 0700, OKW telephoned OB WEST and objected violently to OB WEST's arbitrary employment of OKW reserves, 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div. Both were to be stopped immediately!* The

*Pt 10 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

It is correct that OKW stopped the reserves. Genobst Jodl himself gave me the order at the time. A Gp B had already, on its own initiative, alerted the panzer divisions in question and reported accordingly.

12 SS Pz Div could close in the vicinity of Lisieux, but Pz Lehr Div was not to move at all. Furthermore, we were to await Adolf Hitler's decision. When we objected that if this procedure were followed the Normandy landing would succeed and unforeseeable consequences would follow, we were told that we were in no position to judge, that the main landing was going to come at an entirely different place. OB WEST stood its ground and tried to explain that if such were the case it was all the more logical to first destroy one landing, so as to be able to meet a possible second one with all available forces. Moreover, the enemy would certainly concentrate on the successful landing. If the Normandy landing were successful, it would become the main invasion effort. OKW stuck to its guns--the Fuehrer had to decide first. In spite of all OB WEST's urging, this decision was unobtainable during the morning of 6 Jun 44!*

*Author's Note: About two or three days after the beginning of the Invasion, OKW, acting in the name of the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht (Ed: Hitler), required of OB WEST a detailed report on the following points:

a. Was OB WEST informed of the enemy radio summons to the resistance movement on 5 Jun 44?

b. If so, when was OB WEST informed, and what measures were taken by OB WEST as a result? Exact times required for all details.

OB WEST, in a very exhaustive report, seized the opportunity to present as the decisive factor leading to the rapid success of the Invasion of Normandy the fact that OKW had halted the OKW reserves (Pz Lehr Div and 12 SS Pz Div), which OB WEST had alerted and set moving at the proper time. OB WEST never heard anything more from OKW about this report.

106. (Here it should be noted that misty, foggy weather prevailed on 6 Jun 44 until about 1100, eliminating any significant fighter-bomber activity during this time. This would in all probability have enabled the combat echelon of 12 SS Pz Div to reach the Caen area, while at least the combat echelon of Pz Lehr Div--which at that time, it is true, had only a few tanks ready for action--could have reached an area halfway between Chartres and Caen.) Thus the objective for which OB WEST was struggling, to attack the enemy during his moment of weakness and smash his landing attempt, was already unattainable. For even if the panzer units were released without further delay, they could not march until dusk because of the intensification of enemy air activity during the day. The first critical day was lost! The success of the Invasion was already decided!

107. A second circumstance that had fateful consequences was the absence of Genfldm Rommel, Commander of A Gp B! After a discussion with the Fuehrer he had, with OKW's permission, gone to his home town, Ulm! The Chief of Staff of A Gp B (at this time Genlt Dr Speidel, who

had relieved Genlt Gause*) reported that Genfldm Rommel had been in-

 *Ed: Genlt Speidel replaced Genlt Gause on 15 Apr 44.

formed of the situation and was expected back on the evening of 6 Jun 44. In accordance with orders from Rommel, the Chief of Staff would not be able to issue an estimate of the situation until after Rommel's return and then only with his approval! Obviously this circumstance at the very least constituted an obstacle to the staff of A Gp B and its work.* **

 *Pt 22 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

Rommel's absence from his command post when the Invasion began was known neither to the Chief nor to the operations division of the WFSt. He must have been given permission by Hitler in person, and the latter failed to so inform the Chief of the WFSt. It is even more difficult to understand the fact that, as the report would imply, OB WEST did not succeed in getting its own way with the staff of A Gp B, despite the absence of the Army Group Commander.

 **Pt 11 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

The first sentence of par 107 is incomprehensible. The actual situation was as follows:

In line with his preparations for independent action in the West, as described in MS # B-721 (Ed: briefly summarized in an editor's note following par 61, above), Genfldm Rommel wished once more to expound to Hitler the military and political facts of the situation and demand a change in the top-level organization and the bringing up of the reserves of all three arms of the Wehrmacht. Having obtained the approval of Genfldm von Rundstedt and having made arrangements by telephone with Gen Schmudt, Rommel drove by car to Obersalzberg on 5 June, intending to make his statement on the afternoon of 6 Jun 44.

On 6 June, between 0100 and 0200, the Chief of Staff of A Gp B received reports of strong enemy air formations flying in over the Normandy coast and the Cotentin Peninsula. As further news was received of the intensification of the enemy aerial activity and

of a possible landing, the units in reserve, particularly the panzer divisions, were ordered to get ready to move. The I SS Pz Corps was ordered to make contact at once with Gen Marcks' Corps (Ed: LXXXIV Inf Corps), which was in command on the Calvados coast and in the Cotentin Peninsula, and with the divisions committed there. The measures which had long been prepared went into effect automatically and the necessary orders were issued. OKW and OB WEST were kept constantly informed. At 0630 on 6 Jun 44, the Chief of Staff reported to Rommel by telephone at Herrlingen, near Ulm, where he was spending the night, informing him of the situation and the first steps which had been taken; the A Gp B Commander gave his full approval. Genfldm Rommel put off his further journey to Berchtesgaden and between 1600 and 1700 on 6 June he arrived at the Command Post in la Roche Guyon.

From 0630 until his return between 1600 and 1700, Rommel could no more have issued operational instructions than could OB WEST and OKW. One had to have the nerve to wait until the situation was clarified by reports and by the statements of those who had been sent out in all directions. Continual telephone calls from OKW and OB WEST revealed the nervousness reigning at high levels. I repeatedly informed Genobst Jodl and Gen Blumentritt of my estimate of the situation, but I refused to be disturbed by the many pointless telephone calls from other agencies.

The staff of A Gp B was not hampered in its work, but pursued it without friction or excitement. Genlt Zimmermann's remarks to the contrary are therefore not in accordance with the facts.

108. OB WEST's impression of the situation was clarified during the morning of 6 Jun 44 by numerous individual reports. In the interior of Normandy, one air-landing division had landed in the area south and southeast of Valognes and another in the area northwest of Carentan. According to front-line reports these were American forces: the northern group was 82 Abn Div, the other was 101 Abn Div. Some airborne troops had likewise parachuted near the mouth of the Orne, but their strength had not yet been established (combined English formation?). Water-borne landings, with strong naval support, had taken place just west of the Orne estuary, on both sides of St Aubin sur Mer,

north of Bayeux, and east of the Vire estuary. The coastal sector northeast of the Vire was also attacked from the sea, but the battle for the coast did not seem to be going unfavorably there. The enemy suffered heavy losses there, and our artillery, especially the regular coastal artillery, seemed effective. Here, then, was still hope of holding the coast, if the airborne forces behind the coastal defenses could be destroyed and their attack from the rear toward the coast prevented. OB WEST expressed this conviction in several orders to A Gp B. At this moment, 82 Abn Div (US) seemed to be in a very tight spot, for it was the object of concentric attacks and was being squeezed into a very small area. From individual radio reports from fortification garrisons of 716 Div, we ascertained that English forces were fighting there. Accordingly, it seemed incontestable that we were dealing with a large-scale landing--probably the spearheads of an English army and an American army. At that time, we took the mouth of the Vire to be the dividing line between the two armies, but it later turned out that the dividing line lay west of Bayeux.

109. At any rate, strong elements of 352 Div still held the MIR along the coast, from the east bank of the Vire to about 12 km east of the Vire estuary. A number of bunkers and bunker groups in the 716 Div sector were also still holding, according to radio reports. Now would have been the moment, along toward evening, to attack the still narrow beachheads with strong mobile forces, roll over them, and crush them. For this operation, however, the two panzer units delayed by OKW were lacking. True enough, they were finally released about

1415 on 6 Jun 44, after Hitler's decision was obtained, but because of the air situation they could not proceed until after dusk had set in. The decisive day was lost.

110. Therefore, 21 Pz Div standing ready south of Caen had to initiate the counterattack alone. This it did during 6 Jun 44 in the direction of the coast (west of the Orne) via Caen. The thrust went as far as the coast, in some places between our bunkers that were still holding, when the enemy threw new airborne forces against the rearward elements of the division. The Division Commander (Gen Feuchtinger) thereupon decided to break off the attack in order to rescue the rear elements of the Division. It remains a question as to whether this decision was the right one. For the situation must doubtless also have been critical for the enemy—locally at least—otherwise he would not have committed airborne forces against a panzer unit.*

*Pt 12 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

I share the view expressed on the leadership of 21 Pz Div. It was, of course, impossible to intervene because the Division Commander's alteration of the decision became known too late.

If, as planned, 12 SS Pz Div had gone into battle along with 21 Pz Div, with Pz Lehr Div echeloned to the left rear, at least part of the beachhead could presumably have been destroyed. Whether or not the enemy would have repeated his landing attempt at this locality is a matter for speculation.

111. After the 21 Pz Div attack had failed, OB WEST realized that it would no longer be possible to smash the landing. For within

a short time the individual landing areas would be extended and deepened and consolidated into one big beachhead. The enemy would continually bring up new forces. Tactical landing fields, at first for pursuit planes and later for close-support air units, would be set up as quickly as possible and our position would be greatly weakened.*

*Pt 13 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

The conclusion resembles a defensive brief for OB WEST and an attempt to identify the guilty. It gives too little attention to the wider implications of the situation. In par 119, an attempt is made to blame Rommel; my comments have been inserted at the end of that paragraph. It may be emphasized that superior headquarters reserved to themselves the decision to displace any division of Fifteenth Army toward the south. This insufferable type of command was, in fact, the cause of bitter disagreements between Rommel and the Hitler-Jodl combination.

II. OB WEST Estimate of the Situation

112. In the opinion of OB WEST, the enemy has gotten ashore successfully and the invasion of France is developing from the initial landings. OB WEST lacks the strength and resources to resist this invasion and its extension for any length of time. We doubt whether OKW will be in a position to guarantee us adequate assistance. Expedients will be too late to help the present situation. The only course possible for OB WEST under the existing circumstances is to attempt a delaying action in Normandy. The enemy will be hampered in his large-scale supply and hence in the tactical development of his forces as long as:

- a. he does not have Cherbourg, and
- b. his exit from the narrow Normandy peninsula for "Operation im Freien" ("operations in the open") is still blocked.

113. The next objectives of OB WEST are clearly the following:

- a. to prevent the fall of Cherbourg or to delay it as long as possible, and
- b. to defend every foot of the Normandy peninsula as stubbornly as possible--employing counterthrusts and mobile warfare--in order to deny to the enemy as long as possible the maneuver room necessary for large-scale operations. For, if the enemy once gains freedom of action outside of Normandy, the campaign in France is lost.

114. Since OB WEST has no strategic reserve, the only alternative is to extract from other coastal fronts all the forces that can possibly be released. Above all, A Gp B should immediately begin to free its available forces and throw them into Normandy, especially those massed behind the coastal front of Fifteenth Army. This should be done as quickly as possible, for we can still bring units by rail at least as far as the Paris area even though detours caused delays. Any day this situation may change.

115. For the time being, OB WEST no longer anticipates a landing from the west at another place. The enemy will in any case exploit his Normandy success with every means at his disposal. If he

succeeds in this, he will shift the strong forces assembled in England (approximately one army group) into Normandy as he needs them.*

*Pt 10 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

Considered in retrospect, this estimate of the situation by OB WEST seems entirely comprehensible, but in that form and at that time it was certainly not made known to OKW or to Hitler. It can also, in my opinion, hardly have existed in the mind of the C-in-C West at that time, because:

a. The writer observes, on the second day of Invasion, that: "OB WEST lacks the strength and resources to resist this invasion and its extension for any length of time." On the second day of Invasion, when about ten enemy formations had been confirmed, such a conclusion sounds quite as astonishing as the second observation, that the only possibility open to OB WEST was a delaying action in Normandy. According to the war diary of the WFST, it was only on 11 Jun 44 that the C-in-C West reported for the first time that he had been temporarily forced to take the defensive, but intended, after regrouping, to attack the enemy between the Orne and the Vire.

b. The writer states, "For the time being, OB WEST no longer anticipates a landing from the west at another place." Even the OB WEST estimate of 13 Jun 44 reported that "a second landing must be considered possible; four airborne formations and 20 to 30 combined-arms units are available for such an operation, and the target may be either the Somme district or Belgium."

III. The Decisive Mistake

116. The OB WEST estimate was at this time, however, still in sharp conflict with the interpretation and estimate of A Gp B, while OKW was probably still uncertain in its estimate. OB WEST was convinced that there would be no landing on the French Mediterranean coast until the strategic moment for such an operation arrived:

- a. when the Mediterranean front was weakened still further by the withdrawal of forces, and
- b. when the Allies had won freedom of action outside of Normandy.

In essence, then, OB WEST wanted to act in accordance with a principle it had often discussed with OKW and which the latter had approved: Ruthless stripping of unattacked fronts in favor of the one attacked. Whole-hearted measures! This consideration made OB WEST decide to throw still more forces into Normandy than had been envisaged in the planning for the various "cases". For in this way not only could the battle be fed by the units released, but a strong reserve could also be built up behind the front and with its help a system of field fortifications in depth could be established.

117. There were various forces available for this course of action:

- a. The A Gp B forces in Holland, along the Channel Coast, and in Brittany could be considerably reduced. In particular, strong elements of Fifteenth Army should be released immediately. OB WEST estimated that the Army should give up at least six to seven infantry divisions and one, if not two, panzer divisions. The details would have to be left to the Commander of A Gp B.

- b. From A Gp G:

- (1) From First Army--276 Div and 708 Div, LXXXVI Corps Hq, and 17 SS Pz Gren Div (having been released meanwhile from

OKW reserve). To be sure, the latter Division was not fully equipped with armored vehicles.

(2) From Nineteenth Army--271, 272, and 277 Divs to be made available by thinning the coastal defense forces and by substituting other troops; in addition, 9 Pz Div, but only if 11 Pz Div, not yet completely ready for action, were shifted behind Nineteenth Army. These releases were facilitated by the OKW transfer of 198 Div from Rumania to A Gp G in the first days of the Invasion. Furthermore, OB WEST also gave to A Gp G the elements of 189 Res Div not in the Pyrenees (those near Clermont-Ferrand), and some security forces of Military District France.

118. During later fighting in Normandy, 165 Res Div (Nancy area) was moved up to A Gp B for Fifteenth Army. In addition, OKW had 226 Div and 245 Div moved up to free combat divisions of Fifteenth Army for Normandy. For the same purpose, OB WEST made available a mobile kampfgruppe (equipped with tanks, armored scout cars, and antitank weapons) and a security regiment from Paris, belonging to Military District France. (Paris was almost completely stripped of troops by this measure.)

119. Thus, as a result of the OB WEST estimate of the situation summarized above, an order was sent to A Gp B (apparently on the second Invasion day, if not earlier) to move seven of its divisions immediately to Seventh Army in Normandy. Genfldm Rommel, however, was convinced that the enemy main attack was still impending against the Channel Coast. He was vigorously supported in this belief by Fifteenth

Army, which likewise still feared attack along its coastal sector and therefore wanted to remain as strong as possible. OKW at this time also seemed to share the same opinion. In any case, Genfldm Rommel objected to the order to release the forces, and, as far as I remember, he was upheld by OKW. Thus, as a result of this objection, the only correct strategic measure was not taken. This was the decisive mistake, as was soon shown!* ** ***

*Pt 9 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

As early as 7 Jun 44, Genfldm Rommel wanted to transfer to the south the available forces of Fifteenth Army. See MS # B-122, Genmaj von Gersdorff. (Ed: Genmaj von Gersdorff was Chief of Staff of Fifteenth Army's LXXXII Inf Corps during the period 1 Feb - 29 Jul 44. MS # B-122 is in full accord with this statement by Genlt Speidel.)

Genfldm Rommel very soon advocated that Brittany and the Channel Islands be evacuated by the combined-arms units and that the forces left in these areas be limited to coastal security detachments. Brittany was strategically untenable anyway, and experience had shown that the U-boat base was operationally insignificant.

Genfldm Rommel also urged that the Mediterranean front be stripped, "as it was impossible to hold everything," and that LVIII Pz Corps be brought up from southern France. This Corps had four panzer-type divisions, whose rehabilitation, however, had only just begun.

The execution of the three proposals above was disapproved by both OB WEST and OKW. (Ed: This statement is also supported by MS # B-122, Genmaj von Gersdorff.) Not a single division of Fifteenth Army could be moved without OKW permission.

Strategic, tactical, and political considerations made Genfldm Rommel believe a second landing improbable, despite the fact that, for more than five weeks, the reports "dished out from above" continued to report the presence in England of an operational group of about 60 combined-arms units. As a result, the possibility of a second landing was taken into account in the estimates of the general situation. Genfldm Rommel did not consider such a landing as certain, but as possible though improbable. In weighing this possibility, the Somme--Seine area was involved in the deliberations, not the Channel

Coast. Should it become necessary to strengthen the defense of the Channel Coast, this could be accomplished later by OKW reserves, but for the time being not a man should be left aside unnecessarily. Such was Rommel's attitude. He personally expressed these ideas to Hitler on 17 Jun 44 in Margival and at the end of June in Berchtesgaden. I was present at the first conference and Rommel informed me about the second.

**Pt 11 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

It never came to my knowledge that the C-in-C West really seriously attempted, without compromise, to carry out the great regrouping movement against the Invasion front, which he had planned and scheduled before the Invasion.

According to the war diary of the WFSt, the operations division (Operationsabteilung) of the WFSt submitted to Hitler on 13 Jun 44 a brief estimate of the situation, expressing misgivings concerning the inactivity of the command in the West and urging the execution of the planned measures of concentration in the West and the bringing up of forces from other theaters. The WFSt would not have submitted such an estimate if corresponding proposals from OB WEST had already been disapproved or blocked. I am convinced that if the C-in-C West had taken a more active, personal stand, he could certainly have obtained what, according to the report, he desired.

The "decisive strategic mistake" therefore, taking all in all, really lay with the C-in-C West himself.

***Pt 10 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

I believe that OKW was responsible for not releasing these divisions in time, and not so much Rommel. I still remember exactly how, on one of the first days, a division which was already on the march toward Normandy was not only held up at the order of OKW, but even had to march back to where it came from!



SPEIDEL

Dr. Hans Speidel

Chapter Nine

FORCES BROUGHT UP DURING THE NORMANDY BATTLE

120. At the command of A Gp B or Seventh Army, the following were moved up to Normandy from the A Gp B area:

77 Div, from the vicinity of St Malo;
 12 SS Pz Div, from the vicinity of Lisieux (after
 release by OKW);
 Pz Lehr Div, from the vicinity of Chartres (after
 release by OKW);
 17 SS Pz Gren Div, of First Army (after release by
 OKW);
 II FS Corps Hq and 3 FS Div (Seventh Army area,
 with OKW approval);
 346 Div, of Fifteenth Army;
 XLVII Pz Corps Hq, of A Gp B; and
 LXXIV Corps, of Seventh Army.

Therefore, A Gp B at the critical moment gave up only one division (346 Div) of its main body, whereas according to OB WEST's estimate it could have released at least seven divisions.

121. The following were readied for an early transfer:

353 Div, of Seventh Army;
 Kfgr 265 Div, of Seventh Army;
 Kfgr 266 Div, of Seventh Army;
 9 Pz Div, of Nineteenth Army; and
 I SS Pz Corps Hq and 1 SS Pz Div, of A Gp B.

122. The following were alerted to anticipate transfer:

LXXXVI Corps Hq, of First Army;
 LXXX Corps Hq, of First Army;
 LVIII Pz Corps Hq, of A Gp G;
 16 Lw Feld Div, of Wehrmacht District Netherlands;
 276 Div, of First Army;

708 Div, of First Army;
271 Div, of Nineteenth Army;
272 Div, of Nineteenth Army;
277 Div, of Nineteenth Army;
338 Div (in the gravest emergency), of Nineteenth
Army; and
2 SS Pz Div, of A Gp G.

123. In the further course of the Normandy battle, it also became necessary to move to Normandy 85 Div and 89 Div from Fifteenth Army, and 84 Div from Seventh Army, after they had been readied for combat. The same was done with 2 FS Div of Seventh Army (after it had been readied for combat) and the elements of 5 FS Div that were ready for action.

124. During the first days of the Invasion, Genfldm Rommel still thought he could not release 2 Pz Div and 116 Pz Div, which were standing by in the area between the lower Somme and the Seine. He was unwilling to release them because of his well-known opinion in regard to a second major landing along the Channel Coast with its main effort near the Somme estuary. Apparently at this time his belief was still supported by OKW and Fifteenth Army.*

*Pt 14 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

I have already discussed this matter.

125. During June, OKW brought up to OB WEST from the Eastern Front II SS Pz Corps Hq, with 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs, and later on, 363 Div, for the Normandy battle. Both of these panzer divisions had to be unloaded from their trains at about the Verdun--Nancy--Dijon line because of the transportation situation, and proceed to Normandy by road

march. (This was at the end of June.) It is easy to understand what that meant, in view of the difficult fuel situation, and what it did to the condition of the armored vehicles! Nevertheless, this large-scale movement went off comparatively smoothly, due to careful organization and planning as to the routes, halt areas, and antiaircraft defense. Rail transportation, on the other hand, was no longer dependable or predictable in any way. Only in the very first days of the Invasion might the forward displacement of units by rail still have been perhaps "conditionally" feasible--particularly of Fifteenth Army units to, or via, Paris. Due to the conflict of opinions already mentioned, this valuable time and opportunity was not utilized, and the enemy was given a unique strategic opportunity. In subsequent days and weeks, the condition of roads, railroads, and important bridges changed increasingly to our disadvantage.*

*Pt 15 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

The principal cause was the enemy superiority in the air.

Chapter Ten

DECISIVE INFLUENCE OF ENEMY AIR FORCE

126. As the Invasion began, a definite concentration pattern began to emerge in the attack objectives of the enemy air force. No direct conclusions as to the Invasion objective could be drawn from the numerous strong, but rather evenly distributed, pre-Invasion attacks upon the rail system and the war effort in general in the OB WEST area, and the serious consequences thereof. Now, however, these calculated deceptive measures by the enemy appeared to have been superfluous, for the crushing superiority of Allied pursuit and attack planes covered Normandy and its rail and road approaches like an umbrella.

127. The Paris "ring" was systematically destroyed by heavy bombing attacks--first the outer ring and then the inner one--and all repairs were closely observed. The wave of destruction swept ever deeper into France--strategic rail connections through the Rhone valley, rail junctions and bridges along the Loire, important junctions in Belgium and Northern France. In short, strategic trunk rail connections were no longer available. Airfields were likewise destroyed--first, all those near the front, and later most of those in the interior. The pulverizing large-scale air attack on about the third Invasion day against the lower Seine bridges between Paris and Rouen was particularly symptomatic. In this attack, all of the bridges were either destroyed

or so heavily damaged that they were of no use for tactical purposes. Thus, the previously mentioned "iron curtain" was lowered between the Normandy battlefield and the strong reserves available north of the Seine. OB WEST, it is true, immediately appointed a senior engineer officer (Hoehrerer Pionier Offizier) and assembled a staff to attempt the repair of the damaged bridges and to establish a ferry service across the Seine below Paris at numerous appropriate sites. A Gp B was to express its tactical requirements in this respect. Obviously, however, in such a transfer of units across the Seine--constantly handicapped and delayed by enemy air attacks--there was an enormous amount of time lost, and, in addition, units had to be committed piecemeal.

128. We now had to pay for not promptly shifting to Normandy the forces OB WEST considered necessary. Units like 16 Lw Feld Div from Holland, for instance, now had to be moved in several echelons. Elements had to travel via Germany, be reloaded several times enroute with intervening road marches, and proceed the last part of the way (approximately from Paris onward) to Normandy by night marches. Panzer divisions wore out their valuable equipment on the highways before getting into battle. More and more vehicles broke down, and the continual fighter-bomber attacks multiplied the losses. The major highways to Normandy were soon strewn with wrecked vehicles, and traffic on these roads was still possible only at night and at a snail's pace.

129. The movement of all types of supplies came to a virtual standstill and could be effected only inadequately and with the greatest difficulties. This was true of strategic supply as well as tactical

supply; the effect of this on combat power and the tactical situation is obvious. On major railway sections, particularly near the borders of the Reich, there was an enormous jam of rolling stock. After about three weeks of invasion the number of supply trains (POL, weapons, equipment, ammunition, etc) stalled there was sometimes as high as two thousand. Packets of replacement troops had to march on foot all the way across France and thus, regardless of how urgently they were needed by the fighting forces, arrived at their destinations far behind schedule and often after having suffered heavy losses enroute. Control over supply partially disintegrated because trains were separated or turned back because of rail traffic conditions and ended up by getting to the wrong destination. A large amount of rolling stock was jammed on French-Belgian railway sections and could go neither forward nor backward. Time-consuming shifts to truck transport had to be made; the supply of fuel, already scarce, was further diminished by using it for these purposes. In about the third or fourth week of the Invasion, only 30 - 40 trains got through daily in the whole OB WEST area, whereas the normal daily complement was about 210 trains. In this total freight capacity, the needs of the civilian population for coal, food (for urban populations), and other domestic necessities had to be considered. Though every effort was made to improve the situation and the rail jam on some days sank to only 1300 - 1400 trains, on the average, as far as I remember, the number of stalled trains remained at around 1800. Under these circumstances an orderly conduct of operations was no longer possible for any length of time.

130. Here I must note that about the end of Feb 44 OB WEST presented to the Generalquartiermeister (OKH) in Paris a map study presupposing a landing in Normandy and along the southern bay of the Seine as the initial phase of an invasion; further, the study assumed the employment of two enemy airborne units. The purpose of this map study was to prove that in the event of an invasion the Paris "ring" would immediately be eliminated as a main supply base and that the supply of the field forces, especially POL and ammunition, was not assured. OB WEST wanted to decentralize the supply set-up, move it forward and arrange it parallel to the coast, and increase the reserve supplies of the armies. To the best of my recollection, these ideas were disapproved by the officer who was then Generalquartiermeister--possibly from conviction, possibly from lack of means. In any case, the general impression at the time was that the highest command echelons in the zone of the interior were unable to realize how France was going to look when very powerful enemy air forces went into action.

131. The only possible expedient in the exceedingly critical rail situation described above, was the employment of a high-capacity motor-transport system, a measure already envisaged in the pre-Invasion preparations. Naturally this transport system had to be created at the expense of staffs and troops, and naturally it weakened the mobility of the units themselves. The short circumference of the combat zone (approximately a semicircle: lower Seine--Paris--Chartres--le Mans) was now scarcely passable during daylight or during good flying weather, on any of the roads leading to Normandy, particularly not on any of the

main highways. The increasing disorganization of the supply service was counteracted by setting up a system of precisely classified supply roads and by increasing the number of road commanders, road-section commanders, road repair detachments, and vehicle recovery parties. Auxiliary roads and routes for the two-way flow of supplies, provisions, and troops were reconnoitered, selected, marked, and rigidly controlled. This was done for every corps sector in Normandy; detours and amount of time lost were considered in each case. During daylight hours, everything had to be concealed from aerial observation; there could be no visible movement. All the time lost as a result and the slow tempo of all movements had to be included in our calculations in order for us to be able to do any fighting at all. Nevertheless, it was clear that for this very reason the enemy enjoyed the initiative.

132. As it was in the rear, so it was at the front. The combat troops were completely powerless against the constant enemy air attacks, especially against large-scale bomber attacks, because of the absence of the Luftwaffe. In the initial phases of enemy attacks, our forces were pulverized by the bombings; we suffered tremendous losses in men and materiel without being able to do anything to defend ourselves. From a purely psychological point of view, the morale of German combat forces was severely strained by this feeling of utter helplessness in the face of a battle technique which the enemy completely monopolized and employed at will. Their behavior and achievements in these hard battles should be appraised all the higher because of it.

Chapter Eleven

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BEACHHEAD

133. A Gp B's hope of being able to destroy the two American airborne divisions that had landed in the interior of Normandy (82 and 101 Abn Divs) was not realized. As early as the afternoon of 6 Jun 44, reports testified to the seriousness of the battles. (Whether fresh reinforcements via parachute or glider landings had anything to do with this, OB WEST was unable to say.) In any case, despite all our attempts to encircle and compress the enemy forces, they succeeded in gradually fighting their way toward the east coast of Normandy and establishing contact with sea-landed forces there. Thus the fall of the coastal defenses north of the Vire (approximately from the mouth of the Vire to a point south of St Vaast la Hougue) likewise became only a matter of time.

134. To OB WEST, however, this situation portended the cutting off and subsequent fall of Cherbourg. On about 8 or 9 Jun 44, OB WEST issued an order to A Gp B that went something like this: "Maintaining contact with the fortress of Cherbourg is of decisive importance for the further course of the battle in Normandy. Cherbourg must be held no matter what the circumstances." For, as long as we still held Cherbourg, the enemy's supply problem was not fully solved, regardless of how much he exploited his technical resources. This was

especially true as far as conducting operations outward from Normandy was concerned. Thus, the enemy had to try to take Cherbourg as quickly as possible; OB WEST had to try to prevent this.*

*Pt 16 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

It was just as great a mistake to hold Cherbourg, which was inadequate in every type of strength, as to hold, later, the localities which were arbitrarily designated "fortresses." Genfldm Rommel did not want to put anything more into Cherbourg and he told Hitler this quite clearly on 17 Jun 44. Incidentally, he then ordered on his own initiative that the forces in the Cotentin Peninsula be brought down, at the very last moment, to rescue and close the front.

The extent to which OB WEST made independent decisions with regard to the conduct of operations in the Cotentin, is a matter for speculation.

135. Since OB WEST had no reserve, A Gp B had to draw on its reserves in order to bring up as quickly as possible the necessary forces for the battle for Cherbourg. In this situation, it was demonstrated that inserting A Gp B as an authoritative headquarters, with very extensive powers over the conduct of operations in Normandy, had not been a practical idea. A Gp B had its own opinions, for it still expected a second landing along the Channel Coast; furthermore, A Gp B, in turn, had to give its orders to Seventh Army, a time-consuming process because of the distance involved and the signal communications situation.

136. The Seventh Army Commander (Genobst Dollmann) had his command post deep in the interior of Brittany, near le Mans. From this location he could not direct operations, let alone act quickly, in Normandy, considering the uninterrupted pyramiding of events there.

Realizing this, on 7 Jun 44 he had set up an advance command post in Normandy in the area northeast of Granville and placed a small operations staff there. OB WEST even considered the desirability of transferring tactical responsibility for Normandy from Seventh Army to a provisional army (Armeegruppe) under Gen Art Marcks, Commander of LXXXIV Corps. (Gen Marcks, later killed in action in Normandy, was a very capable and, in spite of an artificial leg, very efficient officer.) This solution, however, was rejected because the battle was too far advanced and because it might have given rise to friction in several ways, particularly in the field of supply.

137. OB WEST had hoped that the order to A Gp B to maintain contact with Cherbourg at any cost would cause A Gp B to withdraw strong forces from the Channel Coast (Fifteenth Army) in favor of Normandy. OB WEST hoped in vain. Only 709 and 243 Divs, already engaged in Normandy, got orders to strip ruthlessly all unattacked coastal sectors, leave only one battalion in the fortress of Cherbourg, proceed from these defenses toward the east coast of Normandy, and attack the enemy in cooperation with 91 LL Div. Up to this time, by way of reinforcements, Seventh Army had sent only 77 Inf Div (from the St Malo area) and one flak regiment to northern Normandy. In addition, the following had begun moving: 17 SS Pz Gren Div (toward St Lo), 346 Div (from Fifteenth Army toward the mouth of the Orne), 12 SS Pz Div (toward Caen), and Pz Lehr Div (toward the area west of Caen).

138. The ever-increasing concentration of enemy pressure on the Orne estuary pointed threateningly at Paris and a possible rolling

up of our coastal defenses along the southern bay of the Seine (the sector between the Seine estuary and the Orne). If the enemy succeeded in accomplishing the latter, the way to Paris would be open, for there were no forces worth mentioning south of the lower Seine and west of Paris. Added to this was OKW's insistence--apparently for considerations of political prestige--on the unconditional holding of Caen to the very last. Two missions, which were simply not feasible with the forces available, presented themselves automatically. They may be summed up in two words: Orne and Cherbourg!

139. Withdrawing the forces from the fortress of Cherbourg, together with all movable heavy weapons and their ammunition, in the long run resulted in these forces being destroyed out in the open and in Cherbourg being weakened too much for a prolonged defense. In any case, the fortress's land front was not yet completely built up and the terrain did not particularly favor the defender. The land front had been planned and constructed on the assumption that it would be manned by three full divisions. The enemy, however, kept landing additional forces and his air force made itself felt with increasing intensity. At this time, a number of isolated bunkers and strongpoints were still holding out between the Orne and the Vire in the midst of enemy-held beachheads. According to radio reports, some held out as long as eight days, always hoping for relief. But relief could not be brought to them. As it was, 716 Div collapsed first, and 352 Div was seriously battered. The panzer units, instead of being used properly as mobile task forces (Kampfgruppen), were sent into the line to serve as "fire

departments" for the infantry. Thus they got tied down in one spot, a situation which grew more and more pronounced as time went on.

140. Probably without taking these matters sufficiently into account, OKW on about 12 Jun 44, to relieve the pressure on Cherbourg, ordered preparations for a large-scale attack to free the coast north-east of the mouth of the Vire. The Carentan area was considered the key to this operation. Theoretically, the idea was doubtless sound. But--as was so often asked by OB WEST on receipt of orders from the Supreme Command--had time, space, and strength been calculated? Sober evaluation would have shown that this attack involved both the greatest time and the longest distance for assembling and moving up the necessary units; that the complexities and friction which would arise from the air situation and supply difficulties could only work out to the advantage of the enemy; and that it was impossible to withdraw the essential panzer forces from the rest of the Normandy front.

141. It would have been much more advisable at this juncture to consider a stiff local attack from the south, southeast, and east, against the enemy bridgehead on the east bank of the Orne; the success of such an attack would have relieved pressure on Caen and simultaneously lessened the threat to Paris. It would have been more nearly within our capabilities to carry out this undertaking in a shorter time and with the forces available. So far as I remember, OB WEST made this counter-suggestion to OKW, but it was turned down.

142. In the event, the major attack that OKW intended to make in the Cotentin Peninsula did not materialize, for reality quickly

out-distanced planning. As the isolation of the Cotentin Peninsula became more and more imminent in the course of the following days and the penetration force of the units committed in the attack there proved to be insufficient, OKW ordered all available forces in the Peninsula (709, 243, and 77 Divs, and 91 LL Div) to defend a deep outpost area south of the Cherbourg fortress (approximately from St Vaast to the west) at any cost. The combat power of these units, which had already been weakened severely by the strong enemy superiority in the fighting on the Peninsula, corresponded on about 12 Jun 44 to that of one and a half full divisions, at most. Opposing them were at least five full divisions, with tanks. The German units thus found themselves hopelessly outnumbered.

143. The A Gp B Commander had also realized our disadvantage here, and was confronted with the problem as to whether the units should still fall back to the north (Cherbourg) or whether they should withdraw to the south and link up with Seventh Army. It can no longer be ascertained whether the OKW order for the units listed above to withdraw with all forces and defend the outposts of Cherbourg, was received by all addressees. Psychologically, it was only natural that these units leaned more toward a southward withdrawal than to letting themselves be bottled up in Cherbourg. Undoubtedly the early fall of Cherbourg can partly be explained by the fact that, during the battle for the Peninsula, 77 Div, 91 LL Div, and elements of 243 Div were pushed back, or fell back, toward the south. OB WEST at this point still sought--vainly, it is true--to turn back additional elements of

the divisions mentioned, to Cherbourg. It was too late, however, to carry this out practically.

144. From a tactical point of view, stripping the fortress of Cherbourg of the forces provided for its defense and the subsequent depletion of these units in battle, led inevitably to the loss of Cherbourg. If Cherbourg was to be held at all, its garrison could never be made too strong. From a strategic point of view, it remains an open question whether--considering the state of our own forces--any attempt to hold Cherbourg would have been of value. At the time, OB WEST estimated that an early fall of Cherbourg would:

- a. free enemy forces,
- b. make the Cherbourg harbor usable for the debarkation of troops and supplies in about three or four weeks,
- c. result in strong new enemy forces appearing on the northern part of the battle front within a few weeks, and
- d. permit these forces to be used in a breakout from Normandy and for further operations in the open.

145. At that time it was still uncertain where this breakthrough would be attempted, and as far as the general estimate of the situation was concerned it did not make much difference. For any strategic breakthrough would not only make the whole front waver, but would also threaten all the forces in Brittany and all of A Gp G with being cut off. Elimination of these forces would split the Western Front and lay the foundation for a strategic thrust to the Rhine, somewhere between Karlsruhe and the Swiss border. With that, the Allied

Armies could wheel to the left in echelons and execute a strategic envelopment across the rear of the entire coast north of the Seine. See App 4a, OB WEST Estimate Of Enemy Intentions After Normandy Break-through.

146. What was there for OB WEST to do in the face of this situation? All forces south of the Loire, including all of A Gp G, should be promptly relieved of coastal defense duty, but the Loire and Gironde estuaries were to continue to be defended as important harbor entrances. Brest also was to be defended. Preparations for the defense of Marseilles and Toulon on the southern coast were so incomplete that it seemed pointless to sacrifice forces in their defense. Furthermore, any attempt to resist there could last only a few days because the overwhelming numerical superiority of the civilian population would preclude a fully prosecuted battle.

Thus, the answer was Retrenchment! A Gp G, unhampered by the enemy, would withdraw all its troops and as much materiel as possible in order to establish contact with the left wing of A Gp B on the Saone and the upper Loire. A Gp B, in turn, would build up a defense of the Seine (from its mouth to the Loire near Gien). If this were done promptly, two-thirds of the entire previous front would be maintained, adequate reserves would be gained, more rear positions could be built without hindrance from the enemy, and we would have a continuous front and freedom of action again. For, behind the first line of resistance mentioned above the enemy would have to make frontal attacks

on a system of positions increasingly strong in depth--the last of them the Rhine.*

*Author's Note: Compare Genlt Walter Wollmann's manuscript dealing with the preparation of rearward positions, including the West Wall and other permanent fortifications. (Ed: Gen Wollmann's manuscript is included as an annex to Genlt Zimmermann's comprehensive narrative history of OB WEST--not absolutely complete as of 1 May 48.)

See App 5, OB WEST Planned Rapid Countermeasures Against Normandy Breakthrough.

147. But permission from OKW was necessary for all this! In view of the disapproval of the OB WEST proposal at the beginning of 1944 (Ed: see par 55 above), it was to be expected that permission would not be granted. But OB WEST kept bringing up the subject, both in correspondence and in telephone conversations, because it represented the strategic solution. Granted, OKW had to think beyond this situation. It was worried about Italy! But why could it not have made a similar decision there? Withdrawing to new positions, first to the Po line and later to the Alpine front, would have gained time and conserved forces there, too, which could have been used strategically. For in this way a strategic central reserve would have been gained. In any case, we did not succeed in convincing OKW of the wisdom of this idea and in getting a favorable decision. As far as I remember, we were consoled via telephone with promises of a "later" decision.*

*Pt 8 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

The necessity of creating a strategic reserve for OB WEST, as well as the matter of a central reserve for the Supreme

Command, was always appreciated by Hitler, and he strove to achieve results in that direction.

In considering this question one must realize that since 1942 the heavily engaged Eastern Front, which was always short of combat forces, had looked with envy on the--as it believed--sleeping army in the West, and at every crisis the higher commanders in the East pointed to the reservoir of forces in the West, which to their eyes appeared to have no object, and demanded that the reservoir be tapped. In the moment of emergency, most of these demands were granted. Nevertheless, from the moment when the danger of Invasion became acute, the WFSt strove by every means to ensure that approximately 55 to 60 combined-arms units, including six to eight panzer divisions, which were regarded as necessary in the West, should be made available to OB WEST.

Both OB WEST and Hitler knew from the beginning that only a part of these formations could really be used in operations. Most of them could only be regarded as static troops, or at best as troops which were mobile through improvisation. This situation was neither the result of underestimating the mission assigned to OB WEST, nor of a lack of organization, but was decreed simply by the limitations of our armament production. These limitations were to be compensated by the installations of the Atlantic Wall.

OB WEST had to form its strategic reserve from these forces in the West, which could not, because of the over-all situation, be augmented in either strength or quality. If OB WEST held, at that time, the clear views on strategic reserves set forth in the report, then Genfldm von Rundstedt would certainly have fought for these reserves by addressing himself in person to A Gp B and, if necessary, also to Hitler. What really happened, however, as far as I remember, was that, under the influence of A Gp B, one panzer formation after the other was transferred into the area close behind the coast, and then, in certain cases, elements were even committed in the coastal defense. The Chief of the WFSt, who agreed entirely with OB WEST in advocating as strong a strategic reserve as possible, did not succeed in intervening directly with Hitler against these transfers desired by Genfldm Rommel, but he succeeded at least in having certain formations held back as OKW reserves. Left in the hands of the C-in-C West, these formations also--though, I admit, against his personal convictions--would have been local reserves for certain sectors at the beginning of Jun 44, but probably not strategic reserves for OB WEST.

The reasons for the refusal to release the OKW reserves on the morning of 6 Jun 44 are explained in Annex Five. Seen in retrospect, this withholding of the reserves was a mistake, but it was an even greater mistake for the C-in-C West--if he really, at the time, held the views on the scope and importance of the Normandy landing

which are stated in the report--not to address himself in person to Hitler on this decisive question.

In regard to the question, touched upon by Gen Zimmermann, of the formation of a central reserve for the Supreme Command, it must be observed that large-scale attempts were made in this direction at least two or three times during the years 1942 - 44. The situation then developed in such a way that the formations intended for this reserve had to be thrown in on crucial fronts shortly after the completion of their reorganization or reconditioning, and the reserve was thus very rapidly dissipated. There was never any doubt as to the absolute necessity of such a reserve for the Supreme Command. The fact that it never came into being is proof that the extension of the War, at least after 1941, surpassed our military potential.

The writer's opinion that it might have been possible to gain these reserves by withdrawing fronts, is perhaps theoretically correct. In practice, however, apart from exceptional cases, hardly one withdrawal of a front, even when it shortened the line, led to a real economy of force. In most cases, pressure by the pursuing enemy on the shortened front was so much greater than before that it necessitated a greater concentration of troops to hold the new line.

148. This unresolved decisive problem, together with OB WEST's inadequate command authority and the feeling of being constantly dangled on a string by OKW, were probably factors which led Genfldm von Rundstedt to think more and more intensively about his recall and to request it when the opportunity arose. He clearly foresaw the coming development of the situation and, if he had had freedom of decision and action, would doubtless have chosen the correct strategic solution. But strategic solutions were precisely what the Supreme Command did not seem to want. I still remember (though I no longer recall the date) how OKW, during the battle of Normandy, because of OB WEST's various deliberations and estimates, sent us an order in which Adolf Hitler said he did not want to read or hear expressions like "maneuver," "operations," etc, from OB WEST--everyone was to fight where he stood

or where he was put. Thus OB WEST had to let the enemy have a monopoly on "operations."*

*Pt 7 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

The question of conducting mobile warfare, or fluid operations, is one of the few basic problems in which OB WEST and the WFSt actually did hold opposite views. This problem is touched upon elsewhere in my commentary, but it is so important that its essential points should also be expounded here.

The WFSt entirely agreed with OB WEST that operations are generally preferable to a rigid defense. In order to be able to conduct operations, however, the following are required: (1) troops whose organization, arms, equipment, and training fit them for mobile combat, and (2) an air force capable of giving troop movements--which are, of course, the essential element of an operation--sufficient protection to ensure their successful execution even by daylight.

Both prerequisites existed on the enemy side, but not with us. Hitler had decided to build the Atlantic Wall because he realized clearly that Germany was unable, with respect to both men and materiel, to maintain an army capable of mobile operations, and protect it from the air, in the West and in the East. For the main body of the forces in the West, the Atlantic Wall installations were to be a substitute for the mobile equipment which could not be procured, the modern weapons which were frequently in short supply, and even a partial substitute for the physical freshness and agility which the men were losing. Behind these installations was to stand a mobile army, limited in size but equipped with up-to-date materiel, ready to intervene at the critical points. In a conference with the Chief of the WFSt at the end of Jan 44, Hitler had approved a maximum strength for this army of about eight panzer divisions and an unspecified number of completely mobile infantry divisions. This was not the desired solution, but an extremely unwelcome emergency solution imposed by the circumstances.

In the light of the unalterable composition of the forces in the West, the WFSt feared that any attempt to carry out operations with these forces, in the face of the enemy superiority in mobility and in the air, could only lead, at best, to an organized flight which the greatest efforts of the command would be able to stem only with difficulty. For this reason, the WFSt believed that everything should be done to prevent the development of an operation in the open for as long as possible. Here it must be admitted that, after the Avranches breakthrough, Hitler was unable to realize quickly

enough, and to readapt himself to the fact, that the last moment had come to begin the organized flight to the West Wall, in order to forestall the danger of its becoming a disorganized flight.

Chapter Twelve

FROM THE BEACHES TO THE BREAKTHROUGH

149. The battle of Normandy developed in a series of seven clear-cut operational phases, shown in Appendices 6 - 12, inclusive.

I. First Phase of Invasion (6 Jun 44)

150. The enemy came ashore between the Orne and Vire estuaries in separate landing groups and established small and insignificant beachheads, which were not yet consolidated. (Ed: See App 6.) Northwest of the Vire estuary the landings, as a whole, seemed to have failed for the moment. The air landings in the interior of Normandy were promptly identified and attacked.

This was the decisive phase for a counter-operation.

II. Second Phase of Invasion (about 7 - 12 Jun 44)

151. During this period, constant fighting, with local German counterattacks and losses on both sides, enabled the enemy to consolidate his separate beachheads into one great beachhead (Brueckenkopf). (Ed: See App 7.) In so doing, he gained ground to the northwest (northwest of the Vire) and on the east bank of the Orne, and also advanced

southward. Thus, the major beachhead was established, new Allied units were thrown in, and the enemy air force had tactical air fields on French soil!

152. In this phase, a counterattack could have retained some prospect of success only if undertaken with very strong forces, principally tanks, and with very strong air support. It should have been directed against the boundary between the English and American forces (west of Bayeux) in order to separate them and defeat them in detail. OB WEST made plans and some map preparations for such an operation. It was impossible to carry them out, however, because the combat situation constantly forced us to throw all arriving units, especially panzer units, into the line. The enemy had the initiative!

III. Third Phase of Invasion (13 - 18 Jun 44)

153. The enemy strove to separate the fortress of Cherbourg from the main body of the German forces in Normandy. (Ed: See App 8.) Thanks to his superiority both on land and in the air, he crushed 77 Div, 243 Div, 709 Div, and also 91 LL Div, causing these units heavy losses in men and materiel. By 18 Jun 44, the enemy thrust reached the west coast of the Cotentin Peninsula and cut the Cherbourg area off from the rest of Normandy. The remnants of 77 Div and 91 LL Div and elements of 243 Div folded back on the left wing of LXXXIV Corps (approximately in the St Sauveur--Portbail area). The 709 Div and other elements of 243 Div withdrew, fighting delaying actions and suffering continual

additional losses, to the southern outpost area of the fortress of Cherbourg. At the same time, during constant reinforcement of the enemy Invasion beachhead, there was continued stiff fighting for every meter of ground, with the Orne estuary and Caen, the Caumont area, the St Lo area, and the area south of Carentan the focal points of the action.

154. The sudden arrival of Hitler (sometime between 15 and 20 Jun 44), with selected elements of the WFSt (Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab, Armed Forces Operations Staff), at the command post prepared for him years before between Soissons and Laon, falls in this phase. He arrived by airplane and in greatest secrecy. Nevertheless, the rumor quickly spread that he was going to assume personal command in the West. As a matter of fact, however, his visit was probably only a matter of discussing the situation with Genfldm von Rundstedt and Genfldm Rommel, who were both summoned to him under strictest secrecy. I do not know the details of the discussion, but it may be assumed that, among other things, an attempt was made to resolve basic conflicts between the C-in-C West and Genfldm Rommel. I do not remember whether further operational instructions were given or not. An attempt is supposed to have been made in the course of the discussion to obtain a clarification of Hitler's position in regard to the general situation and inferences about the continuation of the War, but the attempt is supposed to have failed.

155. Genfldm von Rundstedt must have taken advantage of this opportunity to ask Genfldm Keitel to inform Adolf Hitler of his desire to be relieved of his post. Neither practically, nor from the stand-

point of his health, was he able to bear his responsibility any longer, let alone perform his mission with success. Keitel is supposed to have promised him to bring up the matter at a more opportune moment. After staying about two and a half days, Hitler flew off again as suddenly as he had come. (There were whispers of an attempt on his life, but we never discovered any tangible evidence of such an attempt.)* **

*Pt 17 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

The tenor of the conference with Hitler on 17 Jun 44 is not described correctly. I was present (in the bunker, as well) and took notes, which will be published at a later date. The C-in-C West scarcely spoke.

There was no attempt on Hitler's life on 17 Jun 44, but a V-1 ran off its course due to a defective guiding mechanism and came down on the Fuehrer's Headquarters in Margival, without causing any particular damage.

**Pt 11 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

On repeated pressure, Hitler appeared for an oral discussion with Rommel and myself early on the morning of 16 or 17 Jun 44, in a bunker near Soissons. We described to him exhaustively the dreadful gravity of the situation and demanded that he issue new directives for the conduct of operations in the West. The Invasion had succeeded and the enemy could no longer be driven from the Continent. Also, something must now happen politically. Rommel and I shared the same idea on the further conduct of operations: evacuation of southern France and operations as described in par 146.

Hitler insisted again and again that Cherbourg must be held with everything we had, for as long as possible. For the rest, he would not agree, was strikingly calm, and promised new directives. The next morning he left again by air, after he had experienced the landing of a V-1 near the bunker. The discussion had had no success.

156. At any rate, nothing was changed in principle in the mode of conducting the battle, except that the flow of reinforcements for Normandy from the Fifteenth Army area was now to be intensified.

Effective implementation of this measure--by prompt, speedy, and mass introduction of large units into Normandy--was, however, no longer achievable due to the reasons already mentioned.

IV. Fourth Phase of Invasion (about 20 Jun - mid Jul 44)

157. (Ed: See App 9.) This phase includes the battle for the fortress of Cherbourg, which because of the inadequate manning of its defense was defensible only to a limited extent from the very start. The thin defensive front was broken through locally again and again and the defenders were gradually forced back into an increasingly constricted area. Heavy air attacks contributed additional difficulties. When the enemy entered the city on 26 Jun 44, the fall of the fortress was already certain, even though individual strongpoints and coastal batteries still resisted bravely for several days. Minor elements of 243 Div, along with detached Luftwaffe and German Navy battle groups (kampfgruppen), held out several days longer on the peninsula of la Hague, until there, too, the battle--with their backs against the sea--ended in defeat. Thus materialized the consequences so dreaded by OB WEST: Within a short time the port of Cherbourg would be usable for large-scale troop and supply landings, the enemy forces previously tied down by the battle for Cherbourg were freed, and in the near future (OB WEST calculated about three weeks) a dangerous new concentration would form on the northern Normandy front to ensure the loss of Normandy. If the

enemy broke through there, the whole Normandy front would be attacked from the rear and lost.

158. Since we were not permitted to mount any "operations," we had to try to defend the narrowest part of the Cotentin Peninsula as tenaciously as possible in several positions, echeloned in great depth. We needed, therefore, to select and construct the positions in accordance with the terrain; we needed sufficient forces and, above all, heavy weapons! Did we have these? No! For again the remnants of 77 Div and 91 LL Div, 6 FS Regt, the weak kampgruppe of 265 Div, and one other unit (elements of 353 Div) had to bear the brunt of this task, including the construction work as well as the defense. It was an astounding achievement for these weak forces, which had only inadequate antitank weapons, to defend the Marais de Gorges--la Haye du Puits--Lessay--Periers area in tough delaying resistance until beyond the middle of July. The only reinforcements that could be brought up were elements of 5 Lw Feld Div (Ed: probably 5 FS Div), still incomplete and without combat experience, and, for support against breakthroughs, elements of 2 SS Pz Div.

159. On the rest of the Normandy front, it is true, we could not prevent a continual step-by-step advance, in local attacks, of the enemy front; however, the important highway centers of Caen and St Lo still held. OB WEST was particularly concerned about the left wing of its Normandy front, where a threat was forming. According to all reports, the introduction of new American forces--taken from Allied

strategic reserves in readiness along the southern English coast and apparently earmarked as reinforcements--was imminent there.

160. On 28 or 29 Jun 44 an OKW order arrived for Genfldm von Rundstedt and Genfldm Rommel to come via a special train to a conference with Hitler in his field headquarters (Fuehrerhauptquartier) on 30 Jun 44. The details of this discussion I do not know. Apparently, however, the main object of the discussion was to get an answer from Hitler to the question both commanders put to him as to how he envisaged the further prosecution of the War in view of the general situation. Hitler is supposed to have spoken at great length about the continuation of the War--as he visualized it--and about the impending introduction and effect of new inventions (the so-called miracle weapons!), from which he expected a change in the war situation. Thus the primary reason for the discussion must have been to inject new stamina and enthusiasm into the battle, regardless of whether the so-called miracle weapons really materialized or merely existed in the imagination. As far as I know, Genfldm von Rundstedt on this occasion repeated his request for release from his post.*

*Pt 12 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

I shall discuss this matter more thoroughly below. The conference, in which Genfldm Sperrle also took part, was restricted, at my request, to the smallest possible number of participants. After Rommel and I had given an exhaustive exposition of the complete untenability of the situation, no clear decision was reached. Always: Hold! Hold! New weapons are coming, new fighter planes, more troops--and the same old talk. Here again we said that now something political must happen. Icy silence.

I left the conference without any hope, arrived in St Germain after 18 hours journey by automobile, and found the situation there had become still more acute.

The next day I was dismissed!

161. The Seventh Army Commander, Genobst Dollmann, had been visiting the front almost daily since the beginning of the Invasion. This, along with his feeling of responsibility for the Invasion's success, was too much of a physical and nervous strain for the ordinarily tough and robust army commander; on 29 Jun 44 a heart attack ended the life of this extremely loyal, distinguished, and deeply religious officer. Genfldm von Rundstedt attended the solemn burial rites for him near Paris on 2 Jul 44. Genobst Dollmann's successor was Ogruf (later Obstgruf) Hausser.

162. On about 2 or 3 Jul 44 Genfldm von Rundstedt received word that his request for release had been granted. Genfldm von Kluge was named his successor. As far as I remember, he arrived on 5 Jul 44 and took over very speedily.*

*Pt 3 of 14 pts of MS # B-633, Genfldm von Rundstedt:

Among my closest collaborators I certainly often mentioned that in view of the constant tutelage exercised from "above," and of my age and state of health, I did not feel inclined to retain my position for long. I never made a request for retirement, in the West.

On the occasion of the Berchtesgaden conference with Hitler on 30 Jun 44, to which I went by automobile and not in a comfortable, special train (I travelled from 29 June to 1 July--a very great exertion), and after I had had to wait another six hours beyond the time appointed for the meeting, I let Keitel know--in my annoyance--that they need not be surprised up "above" if I too, an old and sick man, fell dead one day, like Genobst Dollmann. On the strength of

that I received, the very day after my return to Headquarters, a handwritten letter from Hitler in unusually friendly terms, requesting, in consideration of my health and of the increased exertions to be expected in the near future, that I turn over my command to Genfldm von Kluge. The latter arrived at our headquarters as early as 3 Jul 44. I myself was just as surprised as my officers. In the prevailing situation I would never have asked to be relieved, of my own accord, just as during the tense situation in Mar 45 (Ed: after Remagen), but I would have continued to do my duty as a soldier until the end.

I believed that because of the unsatisfactory general situation this welcome excuse was taken to relieve me, in order to have a scapegoat, just as in Mar 45 after the failure of the Ardennes Offensive, with which, quite unjustly, my name is always linked. On the occasion of my reporting off duty in Berlin in Mar 45, Keitel mentioned of his own accord that my assumption was correct.

163. Genfldm von Kluge, like Von Rundstedt and Blaskowitz, was still a representative of the old army of the Kaiser. A man of lofty convictions, he was also very distinguished in bearing and appearance. He was somewhat sensitive personally because of a certain vanity, but with all his curtness and energy he was always proper. As a high-class military leader, exact, clear, and very definite in his judgments and his orders, he knew how to grasp every detail in a matter. He demanded the utmost of his co-workers and subordinates, day and night. Travelling most of the time, he exerted himself physically a great deal and was unmoved by any danger. He was reserved in his personal relationships, lived a very retiring private life, and gave the impression of being unapproachable and enigmatic. As a military leader, he stood far above Rommel, and, in a different way, also above Model. His experience on the Eastern Front had already placed him in basic disagreement with the opinions of OKW and the Supreme Command. His experience in

the West, especially in regard to the battle of Avranches and its consequences, greatly intensified this conflict.* **

*Pt 18 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

It may be observed that a "high-class military leader" cannot regard himself solely as a technical official of the Supreme Command, without any feeling of personal responsibility for the fate of all, particularly if his experience on the Eastern Front has already "placed him in basic disagreement with the opinions of OKW and the Supreme Command."

**Pt 4 of 31 pts of MS # B-672, Genmaj von Buttlar:

It is not clear to me on what Genlt Zimmermann bases his assumption that Genfldm von Kluge's "experience on the Eastern Front had already placed him in basic disagreement with the opinions of OKW." As early as the winter of 1941-42, OKW ceased to be concerned with the conduct of operations in the East and therefore could not maintain any opinions concerning that theater. Perhaps, in this case too, the author really means "Hitler" when he mentions "OKW," in which case the differences of opinion could be judged only by a member of the General Staff of the Army.

164. Shortly after Genfldm von Kluge assumed command, OKW issued an order very decisive for the subsequent conduct of operations in the West. On the basis of the rapid fall of Cherbourg, Hitler, through OKW, ordered that henceforth every fortress in the West must have an adequate and definitely specified garrison (which even in combat should never be allowed to be forced out of the fortress area), a garrison which would absolutely guarantee that the fortress, self-sufficient, would hold out as long as conceivably possible. For OB WEST this meant not only reexamining the strength of each fortress, but above all it also meant the commitment of additional forces for their local defense. These forces were thus lost to OB WEST and to any

mobile, strategic conduct of operations, for OKW further ordered that, if the occasion arose, every fortress on the coast must let itself be encircled, even if the remainder of the front were forced back from the coast. Influencing this OKW order, along with the desire to gain time by delaying the freeing of the large harbors for operational purposes as long as possible, was Hitler's preconceived idea of thus tying down more and more enemy forces and withholding them from the main decision. Involuntarily one is inclined to feel that likewise OKW's command to defend to the last every sizable town, by combat commanders (Kampfkommandanten) with "alert" units (clerks, supply troops, etc), is a corollary of the Supreme Command's belief or hope of thus eventually absorbing enough enemy forces so that finally only the famous "one German battalion"* would be left. This may sound

*Ed: This refers to a remark in one of Hitler's speeches to the effect that it did not matter so much how the war was fought or who won the battles, if at the end the one battalion left were German.

absurd, but it is difficult to find any other explanation for these tactics.

165. It is estimated that holding these fortresses and subsequently losing them cost OB WEST a total of 180,000 to 280,000 men, plus all their equipment. As it turned out, the enemy was perfectly free to simply encircle the fortresses loosely, keep watch on them, and starve them out. He did not need to hurry, the fortresses could not run away in any case. If these lost German forces had been used as intact units, as a covering force in the rearward defensive positions

or as replacements or to build up a strategic reserve, they could have played an important role in the further battle for France. Holding villages and localities with "half-soldiers," inadequately trained, without sufficient artillery and antitank support and helpless against air attack, was a definite psychological mistake. In obedience to OKW orders, it was repeated over and over again.

166. OB WEST again suggested that now, at least, the Channel Islands garrison (319 Inf Div) be decreased and an attempt be made to transfer forces from there to Brittany, but OKW turned the suggestion down. Three weeks later, during the battle of St Malo, OKW released the Channel Island troops--but it was impossible to evacuate them.

Originally intended by the Supreme Command as the "Helgoland of the Channel," the Channel Islands were important for the Western Front so long as they aided convoy traffic along the coast and served as the basis for small-scale naval missions. With the loss of Cherbourg, their significance vanished. The enemy had absolute sea and air supremacy, and the strong Channel Islands garrison was hopelessly "frozen" there, just waiting for the enemy to come for it. No enemy forces whatsoever were fixed by the garrison of the Islands; they simply kept out of range of their guns and went around them. The subsequent loss of this garrison (approximately 30,000 men with all their weapons, including heavy coastal guns, one battalion of 210 mm howitzers, about 80 medium antiaircraft guns, one tank battalion, etc) was also to be put on the debit side of the OB WEST strength account. (OB WEST's battle against too strong a garrison for the Channel Islands

began as early as the spring of 1942 under Genfldm von Witzleben. The question of decreasing the garrison was also brought up again and again by Genfldm von Rundstedt, but was always rejected completely by OKW.)

167. Ogruf Hausser had assumed command of Seventh Army at the beginning of Jul 44. After he was wounded (23 Aug 44), Gen Pz Eberbach, who had commanded Pz Gp West (which later became Fifth Pz Army) since 5 Jul 44, assumed command of Seventh Army. (Gen Eberbach was taken prisoner near Amiens at the beginning of Sep 44 and was replaced by Gen Pz Brandenberger.)

V. Fifth Phase of Invasion (mid Jul - end of Jul 44)

168. (Ed: See App 10.) The sequence of events became increasingly dramatic! During a visit to the front, Genfldm Rommel met with an accident on 17 Jul 44. As a result of a fighter-bomber attack on his car, he suffered a bad skull fracture and his chauffeur bled to death. Rommel was taken to a hospital near Paris, his condition serious. His recovery would take several months, at least. A Gp B would have to have a new commander.*

*Pt 19 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

For political reasons, the fact that Rommel had been wounded was not made public by the press or radio, and it was only after three weeks--and hence after the breakthrough at Avranches--that a false statement appeared concerning an automobile accident involving Genfldm Rommel, with no date mentioned. Then there was again silence, particularly about his convalescence. Genfldm Rommel vainly sought

correction of the false representation of the way in which he had been wounded, which had been published on superior instructions. The intention was that Rommel should not become still more popular at that moment, and in addition he was already singled out as a future scapegoat.

169. OKW came to the following conclusion: the C-in-C West (Von Kluge) will also assume command of A Gp B. At first glance, in view of the previous well-known essential differences of opinion between the C-in-C West and the A Gp B Commander, this might seem logical enough. For now C-in-C West as Commander of A Gp B could, if necessary, give orders in the latter's realm without any opposition. But—and here we have the phenomenon resulting from this dual position—it followed quite automatically that the C-in-C West as Commander of A Gp B would devote himself primarily to the latter organization and its mission, and that therefore his mental and his practical efforts would be concentrated in that direction. Other tasks and interests would naturally take second place. Genfldm von Kluge drew his own conclusions and moved immediately to A Gp B Headquarters at la Roche Guyon.* Thus he was separated not only physically, but also mentally,

*Pt 20 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

Genfldm von Kluge moved to a new location because, as he personally stated, the staff of OB WEST was too far behind the front.

from the real staff of OB WEST. As time went on, this separation was very injurious to the whole War in the West; for it was natural that the work of OB WEST, too, was now done mainly by the staff of A Gp B and that Genfldm von Kluge's thoughts and deliberations were no longer

directly accessible to the Chief of Staff of OB WEST, as they would ordinarily have been. True, there was constant telephone communication and, now and then, personal conversations. It was clear, nevertheless, that here lay the germ of a "dissension in command," which later gave rise to the ever-increasing general desire on the part of staffs and troops to bring Genfldm von Rundstedt back. The regular staff of OB WEST was thus, for the most part, eliminated from operational activities from 18 Jul 44 until the beginning of Sep 44.

Psychological Effects of 20 Jul 44

170. What Genfldm von Kluge's thoughts and deliberations were when he heard about the assassination attempt upon the Fuehrer and his associates, no one on the staff of OB WEST knew. In any case, the radio report came as a complete surprise to the staff of OB WEST and was altogether puzzling, since it made no mention of the instigators. Only a very few individuals surmised any of the particulars, which were not released until afternoon. In general, it can be said that the first news came like a bomb-shell. As in the case of any sudden, unexpected event, a certain paralysis set in at first. Soon, however, groups formed everywhere in the area of OB WEST (behind the front) and discussed the event. One could see the impression it made on Paris. Certainly the first thought of all these people, whether soldiers or civilians, was: Is fate taking a new turn? Is this the end? And surely many thought: It is scarcely believable that this man is unharmed, even that he is still alive. Instinctively perhaps, the wish was father to the thought. Shrewd people who ever since the beginning of the War had followed events with anxiety and apprehension and who sensed the approach of destiny, as well as those who simply wished that the War would finally end--all would have breathed freely and hoped anew for a change. Opposed to these were the great majority who thought otherwise--whether from inner conviction or from caution or perhaps from opportunism.

171. Friend and foe alike, however, were at this moment primarily interested in the burning question: What are the men at the front saying and doing? For there, above all, the effect of this news must be noticeable. Would the front still hold? Would the men keep on

fighting as before? What would be the effect later in the day when further details were known? It could mean the collapse of the front. And now came the psychologically baffling aspect, understandable only on closer examination: The front kept right on fighting as though nothing had happened. How did this happen? Why did not thousands and tens of thousands lay down their arms and end the War? The answer is simple. It was because in the high emotional tension of battle, in this physical and moral over-exertion, this murderous struggle, the individual was so completely and intensely pitched to the moment of combat, to the "you or me" of fighting, that any convulsions outside the focus of this tension, no matter how strong they might be, only touched him on the fringe of his consciousness. Figuratively speaking, the combat soldier was in another world. With certain individual exceptions, troops in battle are scarcely touched by other events. They did not have the time nor were they in a mental state to concern themselves with matters beyond the perimeter of their struggle.

172. Behind the front, things were different. There was more time, quiet, and opportunity to deal with the matter. Everyone, especially the officers, felt or realized that something had occurred which affected every soldier very, very deeply, and which for a moment had illuminated a precipice. Everyone anxiously felt that this beacon had revealed to the world, and particularly to the enemy, the fragile structure of the System and other conflicts still greater than had been surmised. In addition, there were the instinctive apprehensions of the consequences, which would probably be frightful.

173. Thus, the first general psychological effect was definitely a feeling of moral oppression and worry. Then, as the details--distorted by propaganda, naturally--could be reviewed and shaped into a more or less accurate picture in individual minds, one could, by and large, ascertain two schools of thought on the subject. The far-seeing thought: This is the beginning of the end, a terrible signal! The die-hards thought: It is good that the treacherous reactionaries have been unmasked and that we can now make a clean sweep of them. For, we cannot win the War until we are rid of all "saboteurs."

This became the theme of the Party propaganda, which stepped in dexterously and depicted the assassination scheme as the attempt of the "reactionaries"--the Junkers and the General Staff--to seize power and put an end to Socialism. Since the bulk of the German Army came from the professional and working classes, this idea naturally met with response. It was precisely the worker who had a favorable position before the War; he had more rights than duties, he had an adequate and assured income, unemployment had disappeared, and he was constantly offered the prospect of a still higher standard of living as a reward for his war efforts. With bitterness in his heart, he heard the propaganda that his rights were threatened by assassins, that these were the traitors who wanted Germany to lose the

War which he was making so many sacrifices to win, not only at the front, but also at home where new towns and thousands and tens of thousands of men fell victim daily to the air raids everyone considered so criminal. All this should now be in vain? Now, when within a very short time, according to what everyone said, the new "miracle" weapons were to appear and change the whole outcome of the War. Now, just now, the assassins had planned a "stab in the back," with consequences much worse than those of 1918. This "stab in the back" story of 1918 had been hammered into people's heads too well by propaganda for it not to exert a definite influence upon the soldiers' determination to hold out. On top of this was the enemy intention--as our propaganda emphasized over and over again--of destroying this time not only the German leaders, but the whole German people.

174. Thus, it was natural and understandable that at that time at least part of the soldiers unconditionally disapproved of the deed. Certain groups in particular loudly expressed their hatred for the Army, the General Staff, and the nobility. They were supported by a wildly inflammatory speech of Dr Ley. A strong whispering campaign arose: "The generals and the General Staff are to blame if we don't win the War." For this reason, it is astounding, and indicative of the really good discipline and finer instincts of the soldiers at the front, that no attention was paid to this vicious report ("Spalt-pilz-Parole") and that the authority of the German officers over their men did not suffer. The only strange thing is that propaganda should be directed "officially" against a part of Germany's own Wehrmacht. What did they actually hope to gain? They were only cutting off the limb on which they were sitting.

175. The subsequent proceedings against the accomplices of 20 Jul 44, particularly the type of accompanying publicity, may have had the desired effect on the masses at home, but not on the troops--to the contrary, in fact. One heard at the front and read in the newspapers nothing but diatribes and invective about the proceedings. Naturally every thinking man asked himself: Why not get to the point? Why never any whole truth about the motive? After all, when such highly placed persons undertake a deed of this nature there must be deep-seated reasons for it. Without some such reasons no one would risk his life and assume the odium of high treason--least of all an officer, and particularly not a man like Genfldm von Witzleben, always considered in the West until now as a gallant, distinguished officer. What could really be at the bottom of it all? A purely factual explanation was never published; everything that was made known was obviously dictated by hate. Thus the honest soldier, deeply perplexed, could only turn away from this obvious "mock trial"; he could not and he would not believe that these men were criminals and scoundrels in the ordinary sense.

176. Of course, neither the officers nor, probably, most of the soldiers could reconcile themselves to the way in which the attempt was made. At that time a great many did not understand why officers, above all, had chosen such a treacherous form of assassination and why the chief culprit tried to save himself. One must know the traditional historical development of the officer corps of the German Army to understand this point of view. Never before in its history had such a thing occurred. Chivalry instinctively opposed the method used. One could have understood it much more easily if the assassin had approached the deed fearlessly with his pistol in his hand. (We will not discuss here the expediency of performing the deed.) Everyone agreed that the assassination attempt and putsch had not been sufficiently prepared and that, above all, immediate seizure of the communications net had been overlooked. To what extent Germany's ultimate fate might have been changed--had the attempt succeeded--is a matter for speculation.

177. A strong and increasing mistrust from "above" of the Army (generals and the General Staff) was perceivable during the period following. This mistrust was apparently encouraged vigorously by influential Party sources. It is not strange that under these circumstances spying and informing appeared more often than before; nor is it strange that attributes of leadership were evaluated by the Supreme Command, even more emphatically than before, according to one's "attitude" and that the practical suitability and the moral qualities of the individual receded into the background. It speaks well for the military spirit of the German Army that by far the great majority of all the soldiers remained free and clear of all this and disdained anything corrupt.

178. If one seeks an end result of 20 Jul 44, it can perhaps be summarized as follows: From this event the field forces learned the extreme gravity of Germany's position. At the same time, however, they also saw with their own eyes that conditions of power within Germany were still such that any further attempt at a change there would let loose another Saint Bartholomew's Massacre. Everyone, officer as well as soldier, was tightly bound by the threat of ruthless vengeance through attack on his family (Sippenhaftung). So the Army silently went on doing its duty, though with the bitter subconscious knowledge that an unavoidable catastrophe was impending.

Pt 21 of 24 pts of MS # B-718, Genlt Speidel:

Genlt Zimmermann's discussion of the 20 Jul 44 reveals ignorance of the circumstances, motives, objectives, and effects of this undertaking.

His statements in par 173 about the effects of propaganda on workers and soldiers, and the psychological attitude of these

classes, seems inappropriate. The common man usually had clearer judgment and a stronger aversion to the Party and its organizations than, for instance, the half-educated man, among others. The worker and the soldier did not fight for the victory of the system, but followed orders because they could do nothing else. A part of par 174 seems inconsistent with certain preceding statements of the author.

The accusation against Graf Stauffenberg in par 176 seems unfounded.

Paris and 20 Jul 44

179. In Paris, the 20 Jul 44 brought with it a brief episode which, in spite of its unique character, was symptomatic. Gen Inf (Ed: Heinrich) von Stuelpnagel, Commander of Military District France, had somehow received information, apparently from the Commander of the Ersatzheer, that the official radio announcement saying Hitler was unharmed, was false. Hitler was dead. On the strength of this, Von Stuelpnagel ordered the immediate disarming of all SS and SD (Sicherheitsdienst, SS Security Service) agencies and units in Paris. This was done, without any opposition whatsoever. Unfortunately, Von Stuelpnagel had not informed the staff of OB WEST about this measure nor had he inquired first as to whether the news of Hitler's death was verified; the staff of OB WEST already knew that Adolf Hitler was actually unharmed. Because of this oversight, Gen von Stuelpnagel met his doom.

The staff of OB WEST (Genfldm von Kluge, of course, was not at OB WEST but at A Gp B!) did not learn anything of what transpired in Paris until about the evening of 20 Jul 44. As far as I know the measures taken in Paris were reversed by Genfldm von Kluge on the evening of 20 Jul 44. Gen von Stuelpnagel was suspended from duty. The further consequences are well known: Near Verdun, while en route to OKW where he had been summoned as a result of what had happened, Gen von Stuelpnagel tried to shoot himself. But he only shot both his eyes out, and was taken to a hospital in Verdun and from there, still wounded, to Berlin for trial, which ended in his death by hanging. A number of his officers were likewise jailed and tried. It is a deplorable coincidence of fate that the above-mentioned inquiry of the staff of OB WEST was overlooked--the lives of good officers could have been saved. (Von Stuelpnagel's successor was Gen Lw Kitzinger, who, however, held the position only five weeks.)

180. What happened in Paris had a further consequence: The civilian population had noticed that something was wrong and had doubtless drawn conclusions about the situation and about conditions in Germany. The event also probably gave considerable stimulus to the underground movement.

181. To return to the further development of the fifth phase of the battle of Normandy, the fighting raged on without pause, forcing A Gp B to constantly expend forces at the front, so that there could never be any real formation of a large reserve, let alone any planned relief and rehabilitation of units behind the front or any extensive construction of positions for sealing off Normandy. The field forces suffered incredibly under the massed air attacks, which we were powerless to engage in the air. Supplies were stalled, delivery of fuel had become particularly difficult, and, in the last analysis, all tactical measures of the panzer units were dictated by the amount of fuel available. These were the factors at the end of Jul 44 which were to determine the outcome of the Normandy battle for the Western Allies.

182. In the course of the fighting in Normandy, the main effort shifted more and more definitely to the western Allied wing during the second half of July. Very gradually, through the steady endurance of the American units, particularly Third US Army, the whole front of the Western Allies was pivoted from the south to the southeast. The breakthrough to "operations in the clear" was beginning. Should the enemy gain entrance into Brittany near the Bay of Mont St

Michel, the battle in Normandy would be hopeless for OB WEST, despite all sacrifices.

183. Strategic reserves of our own (the old weakness) for a counter-operation "in the open" were not available; hence, a large-scale encirclement of Seventh Army and Fifth Pz Army could develop from the left. Paris would then be directly threatened and its loss would impend. OKW had also recognized this danger, and pointed out several times that a breakthrough would give the enemy operational freedom. Therefore, such a breakthrough had to be prevented regardless of cost. The whole decision in the West hung in the balance! But how was OB WEST to prevent a breakthrough? True, 708 Div, released from First Army, tried in widely dispersed march groups to get across the Loire in the general direction of le Mans. But they were like a drop of water on a hot stove, and were literally pulverized in separate groups north of le Mans.

184. On 30/31 Jul 44, the enemy succeeded in a surprise thrust on Avranches--Pontaubault, where the bridge fell into his hands unharmed. German resistance seems to have been very weak there; apparently the local forces let themselves be pressed against the coast, leaving the way open to the south. Thus the first assault penetration, with its "view of the open," had succeeded and the danger of a strategic breakthrough had become enormous. This enemy success, which was a complete surprise, forced A Gp B to transfer hastily all mobile forces still available from the St Malo area toward Pontaubault, with the

mission of retaking the bridge and destroying it. They tried, but they were too weak.

185. OB WEST, now confronted with the question of what to do, did not believe it could conduct a powerful counterattack on the Avranches--Pontaubault line from the east and southeast, in order to plug the gap and cut off forces that had already gotten through. The forces for such a counterattack were simply not available. Withdrawing, by phases, to the Seine would have been a good operational move if a reception position had been prepared there (but this had been forbidden by OKW). Nevertheless, we had to attempt to build up a defense there, even though no reception position existed. But this plan, in turn, depended logically on reducing A Gp G's forces, and forced the latter to withdraw men from the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts in order to bring them up to the left wing of A Gp B. How far Genfldm von Kluge went along with these ideas and whether he made another suggestion along these lines to OKW, I do not remember. But even without withdrawing the forces of A Gp G it would have been easier to avoid encirclement by fighting a delaying action and withdrawing, perpendicular to the front, to the Seine. Resulting losses might have been heavy, but they still would not have been comparable to those in the subsequent encirclement battle at Falaise. However, the OKW command, "hold at any price," opposed such a suggestion.



von KLUGE

Chapter Thirteen

SIXTH PHASE OF INVASION

(1 - 10 Aug 44)

186. (Ed: See App 11.) On 1 Aug 44, OKW sent Genfldm von Kluge an order that went approximately like this:

Under no circumstances is the enemy to be allowed to gain freedom of action "in the open." OB WEST will get ready immediately, with all available panzer units, for a large scale counterattack, in order to push past Avranches to the coast, cut off the enemy, and destroy the forces that have already broken through. All available panzer units, regardless of their present commitment, are to be taken from the other parts of the Normandy front, joined together under one specially qualified panzer operations staff, and sent into a concentrated attack as soon as possible. The outcome of the whole campaign in France depends on the success of this attack.

187. This order reached Genfldm von Kluge--as far as I remember--while he was on a visit to the front in Normandy, probably at the Seventh Army Command Post. He had just gotten a fresh view, with his own eyes, of the tensivity of the whole situation, of our inferiority, of our complete lack of air support, of our faulty supply service, and of the condition of our troops. This command struck him like a thunderbolt. He knew very well that carrying out this order meant the collapse of the Normandy front and probably catastrophe. After thinking

it over for a short time and after definitely confirming once more that the command came from Hitler, he answered something like this:

I report that, to the best of my knowledge and conscience, the execution of this order means the collapse of the whole Normandy front. Tanks are the backbone of our defense. Where they are withdrawn, our front will give way. Because of the air situation, tanks can cross behind the front only at night, complete confusion will arise, and, above all, the supply of motor fuel is completely inadequate for effective movements. If, as I foresee, this plan does not succeed, catastrophe is inevitable. You are urgently requested to re-examine the matter and bring it to the Fuehrer's attention.

Soon after this came OKW's reply that Hitler insisted on the execution of the order. Only in timing was some leeway allowed. Genfldm von Kluge had to submit to the situation, but, if I remember correctly, made one more very serious report pointing out the possible consequences.

188. By drawing on other units, Gen Pz Eberbach's staff was set up in an improvised fashion to direct the attack. Tactically, the following were subordinated to him for this purpose: 116 Pz Div, Pz Lehr Div, 2 Pz Div, 1 SS Pz Div, 2 SS Pz Div, and 17 SS Pz Gren Div. Movements and preparations were completed on 6 Aug 44, after tremendous difficulties had been overcome. The attack began on 7 Aug 44, shortly after midnight (this time was chosen on account of the enemy air superiority). The 2 Pz Div, generally speaking, had gained approximately eight km and overrun a number of enemy positions and tanks by early morning. Then visibility improved and enemy air activity began. Our attack was stopped, the tanks suffered heavy losses, and on the evening

of 7 Aug 44 only a part of them returned to their jump-off positions. Another assault on 8 Aug 44 (chiefly 1 SS Pz Div) likewise failed.

189. Thus, despite surprising initial success, the big panzer attack had collapsed, but--and this is the decisive point--it could never have succeeded in drawing strong enemy forces to itself and in hindering the flow of additional enemy forces into Brittany. On the other hand, the resisting power of the rest of the Normandy front had been decisively weakened by the withdrawal of the tanks. With this action began the isolation of Brittany and envelopment, from the left, of Seventh Army and Fifth Pz Army. By 10 Aug 44, according to all reliable reports, about ten large enemy units, including at least three armored divisions, were pressing forward into Brittany. Their main objective was the wide envelopment of the left wing of the German battle front, approximately via le Mans. In the execution of this operation, the Loire line was merely blocked and patrolled by the enemy. Brittany, too, was already lost.

190. Neither OB WEST nor Seventh Army could still influence the conduct of operations in Brittany, so the Commander of XXV Inf Corps, stationed in Brittany, was designated commander in Brittany. He was to continue independently the battle for the resisting fortresses and their approaches, and was finally to withdraw to one of the fortresses (Lorient) and from there continue fighting as best he could. This was in conformity to the OKW order that all fortresses were to hold out and fight to the very last, even if the situation were hopeless. In Brittany these fortresses were: St Malo (which was already heavily

engaged), Brest, Lorient, and St Nazaire. In the course of fighting in these fortresses, the following were subsequently lost: elements of the 265, 266, and 343 Divs; strong elements of 2 FS Div; and security troops, elements of navy and air force units, "alert" units, and all materiel. For a defense of the Loire, at least from the coast to Tours, no forces were available. Therefore, A Gp G was ordered to block the Loire crossings, with forces from 158 Res Div and local security troops. This defensive mission was to be executed by the Commander of 158 Res Div (later redesignated 16 Inf Div). On about 9 Aug 44, A Gp G was ordered to send the headquarters of First Army, with army troops, immediately to A Gp B in the direction of Fontainebleau and to subordinate them to the latter in order to build up a Seine defense southeast of Paris. LXIV Res Corps Hq, with OKW approval, assumed command of the remaining forces of First Army (Command Post: Poitiers). At the moment, this was the only "operational" assistance OB WEST could possibly give the left wing of A Gp B and the deep left flank of the collapsing Normandy front.

191. As far as I remember OB WEST once more repeated its old suggestion of withdrawing A Gp G immediately to the approximate line: upper Seine southeast of Paris to the Loing River--along the Loing--along the Loire from Gien to Nevers--astride the Saone to the Swiss border in the vicinity of Bellegarde. If these forces could be released even at the last minute, without being harassed by the enemy, there was hope of building a new front along the suggested line. In this new front, a prolongation of the A Gp B front, we could again offer resistance. However, if the enemy should attack first on the French Mediterranean

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coast--and this had to be expected momentarily--disengaging the forces could take place only with severe losses and settling into the proposed line would probably no longer be possible. OKW, however, could not definitely make up its mind, and the decision was postponed.

Chapter Fourteen

SEVENTH PHASE OF INVASION

(11 - 30 Aug 44)

192. (Ed: See App 12.) Grave worries concerning Paris now arose even at OKW, worries based not only on operational, but also on political considerations: The sensation of "Paris liberated" would make a powerful impression all over the world, would have strong repercussions on the French people, and it would publicize Germany's defeat. Thus OKW ordered Paris defended to the last no matter what happened; preparations were to be made accordingly. This matter will be referred to later. To prevent, or at least to delay, an enemy advance eastward in the area between Paris and the Loire, OKW ordered tank destruction detachments organized, given hurried training by a panzer officer specially sent out by OKW, equipped with suitable weapons and explosives, and assigned to areas suitable for armored operations which were occupied only thinly or not at all. This procedure was consistent with the judgment repeatedly expressed by OKW and its representatives, that the enemy advance was only a matter of armored spearheads which one could dispose of by employing the proper combat technique. That these spearheads were followed by large units which we could not dispose of because of our weakness, was something OKW did not want to admit or hear about.

193. About 10 Aug 44, OB WEST ordered a gradual withdrawal, facilitated by delaying actions, of the Normandy battle front to the Touques sector, later to the Risle sector. It thus became necessary to maintain the southern flank of Seventh Army in approximately the Domfront--Alencon--Nogent le Rotrou line, and, if at all possible, to strengthen it. (The latter was effected only very imperfectly, but led to a separation of forces.)

194. OB WEST had realized that the encirclement of Fifth Pz Army and Seventh Army was imminent, with the objective of destroying these German forces south of the lower Seine. It was thus especially important to keep Paris open to traffic and not lose the lower Seine with its bridgeheads and crossings. The greatest danger lay in the Dreux--Chartres area which could not be bolstered adequately toward the south and southwest because of lack of forces. And so it happened that, while the battle front was daily pushed farther back and penetrated locally again and again because of the lack of panzer forces (which on the southern wing had had to attack Avranches, as ordered by OKW), the enemy's great encircling movement around the southern flank of A Gp B was completed with astounding speed. By 14 Aug 44 the enemy had gotten approximately as far as the Avre in the Verneuil area. His objective--pushing forward to the Seine between Dreux and Paris, crossing it wherever possible, and arranging another "Tannenberg" for the Normandy forces south of the lower Seine--became more and more apparent. Genfldm von Kluge saw all this very clearly. Now, since operations of any kind

were indeed no longer possible, his place was at the side of his struggling troops, holding out so valiantly in an apparently hopeless situation.

195. The combat troops--though squeezed into an increasingly narrow space; constantly under fire from artillery and fighter-bombers; and inadequately supplied with food, ammunition, and especially gasoline--fought sullenly and stubbornly; they would not yield. Supplies had been completely stalled for days. They could be brought forward only at night on roads just south of the Seine, and the roads were often hopelessly jammed. Whole columns were destroyed by fighter-bombers. True, the lower Seine was utilized as much as possible for moving supplies via water as far as Rouen, but this method, too, became more and more difficult. The evacuation of wounded was obstructed. Crossing the Seine by bridge was still feasible only at Paris; all other crossings had to be by ferry.

196. At this time Genfldm von Kluge was, for a while, missing in action. He took his own radio with him into the encirclement forming around Falaise, in order to remain in communication with the outside world. I no longer remember the exact date of his departure for the front, but it must have been around 11 or 12 Aug 44. For about 48 hours after this he was missing, and considered dead. As his command post he had designated a small chapel (I no longer remember the name) where radio communication with him was to be kept open, but all attempts to contact him were to no avail. The Armies knew nothing of his location. OKW became more and more perturbed and inquired almost hourly about his

location. Finally, after about two days, he reported again. Both his automobile and his radio car had been destroyed by bombs, and he could move neither forward nor backward. Naturally he could not exercise any influence on the battle. Soon after receipt of this news OKW sent this order:

Genfldm von Kluge will leave the pocket immediately, go to the command post of Fifth Pz Army and conduct the battle from there.

The tone of this order attracted our attention. A certain lack of confidence on the part of OKW was unmistakable.

197. First Army (Command Post: Fontainebleau) had taken over command in conjunction with Seventh Army, and attempted to build up a front between Pontoise (right flank) via the western edge of Paris-- Rambouillet--Etampes--Bellegarde, with a loose connection with the Loire somewhere between Orleans and Gien. The Seine and the Loing sector constituted a supporting line to the rear. Hardly any forces were available. The 48 Div (Fifteenth Army) was being brought up to the area south of Paris and advance elements of 18 Lw Feld Div were moving in the direction of Pontoise. Remnants of 352 Div and 17 SS Pz Gren Div, which like other elements of panzer divisions had been directed to the Paris bridges, were still in the area west of Paris. In the process of being brought up toward Chalons-s-Marne from Germany were two SS panzer brigades (replacement-training units), which were tactically subordinated to First Army in order that they might be used to rehabilitate 17 SS Pz Gren Div. First Army had brought along its assault (Sturm) battalion and committed it as a security force in the Etampes area. Farther south

(approximately between Malesherbes and Bellegarde), 1010 Sicherungs (Security) Regt (Military District France) served as a covering force. In addition, OB WEST ordered the transfer of 338 Div from A Gp G (Nineteenth Army), beginning about 13 Aug 44, to First Army in the area south of Paris, in order that it might be employed on the Loing River, south of Fontainebleau. It came from the Mediterranean coast through the Rhone valley via rail; the movement involved transfers and road marches that required a great deal of time. However, only seven trains with several infantry companies and antitank guns had arrived when this movement was halted by OKW on account of the situation on the Mediterranean. Along the Loire, the Sperrsicherung (security line reinforced with obstacles and field fortifications) of 158 Res Div (16 Inf Div) had to be extended to the east via Orleans because of the rapid enemy advance toward the east. Continuous and reliable communication between these forces and First Army no longer existed, but at times it was still possible to communicate, in a roundabout way, with Orleans.

Chapter Fifteen

A GP G ALERTED

I. Invasion of Southern France Imminent

198. On 13 Aug '44, OB WEST was informed, by OKW if I remember correctly, that great troop embarkations had taken place in North Africa (principally at Algiers) and that large troop convoys with escort vessels lay under steam there and in other North African ports. A landing attempt on the French Mediterranean coast had to be expected. OB WEST immediately relayed this information to all agencies concerned, ordered Alarmstufe II (Alert II) for A Gp G along the French Mediterranean coast, and requested Third Air Force to execute continuous reconnaissance of the Mediterranean, especially in the direction of Corsica and Sardinia. It was obvious that during this critical phase in Normandy, the second invasion would certainly come from the south. According to reports received at OB WEST and according to aerial reconnaissance, strong naval units, including transports, had put to sea from the North African coast. Aerial reconnaissance gave the course of these units as north, toward the French Mediterranean coast, and reported the same course for them on 14 and 15 Aug 44. The landing was at hand.

199. Even as late as 13 Aug 44, ordering A Gp G to withdraw to the north would doubtless have been better and more apropos of the situation than further stubborn clinging, without any prospect of

success, to the Mediterranean coast. OKW, however, still could not bring itself to make the necessary decision to abandon southern France, particularly because such a step would have entailed incisive disadvantages for the Italian Front. OKW did not consider, or else consciously ignored, the fact that these results would shortly follow in any case, and under much more disagreeable circumstances.

200. The forces of A Gp G at the time of the Southern Invasion on 15 Aug 44 were:

a. Hq, LXIV Corps, with the following two divisions along the Atlantic coast and the Loire:

158 Res Div (redesignated 16 Inf Div)
159 Res Div

b. Nineteenth Army (Gen Inf Wiese)

Hq, IV Lw Feld Corps (subsequently redesignated XC Corps)

Hq, LXXXV Corps (Corps Kniess)

Hq, LXII Res Corps

716 Div

189 Res Div (elms)

198 Div

338 Div (main body, since the transfer to First Army had been halted by OKW on 13 Aug 44)

244 Div

242 Div

148 Res Div

II. Evacuation of Paris

201. On 14 or 15 Aug 44, Genflm von Kluge briefly visited OB WEST Headquarters at St Germain, near Paris, in order to confer with

the Commander of Military District France, the newly appointed Wehrmacht Commandant of Paris (Genlt von Choltitz*), as well as the commanders of

*Ed: Promoted to gen inf 1 Aug 44.

Third Air Force (Genfldm Sperrle) and Navy Gp West (Adm Krancke) or their chiefs of staff. A general staff officer of First Army was also supposed to be there, but due to signal communication difficulties he arrived too late.

202. The discussion concerned the defense of Paris. As was well known, OKW had given orders to hold Paris to the very last and to prepare the bridges within the city limits (about seventy of them) for demolition. Specifically it was ascertained that Paris could not be defended for any length of time at all with the forces at hand--for the most part, flak units, security battalions, and "alert" units. The idea of house-to-house fighting within the city, above all along the Seine, was deliberately abandoned in order to avoid destruction and loss of life. The plan to destroy the bridges was also turned down so as not to injure the city. (Genfldm von Rundstedt had already ordered that no demolition preparations be made inside Paris.) Only the great arterial roads could be blocked with obstacles and antitank weapons. The outer ring of Paris was ordered divided into sectors, defended in the main by flak artillery with flak combat elements. Gen von Choltitz, as Commandant of Paris, was to resist as long as possible and to remain in Paris until the end. Higher staffs were informed that they could not leave the city of Paris without the express authorization of Genfldm von

Kluge; this proviso derived from an OKW order that the highest command echelons of arms of the Wehrmacht in the West could move their command posts only with the specific permission of OKW. This OKW requirement often aggravated difficulties with the chain of command during critical situations, since rearward command posts were not improved as ordered and, even more important, were not provided with signal communication facilities soon enough.

203. The following were selected as new command-post locations and were submitted to OKW for approval:

OB WEST - Verzy, south of Reims

A Gp B - the Fuehrer's Command Post, between Laon and

Soissons

Third Air Force - Reims

Navy Gp West - Reims (High-power radio station and rear elements, however, were near Saverne in the Vosges.)

204. Genfldm von Kluge further ordered the precautionary evacuation of German followers of the Wehrmacht (women's auxiliary forces, etc), as well as all transportable sick and wounded, from the Paris area. Those who could not be moved were to be left in Paris with attendants and, if necessary, turned over to the enemy.

205. The above measures were taken because it was certain that the enemy would stand before Paris in a few days and that Paris could not be held, because, in addition to the weakness of its defense, the supply problem for so great a city was insurmountable. Paris, thus, was bound to fall quickly.

Genfldm von Kluge returned to A Gp B at la Roche Guyon after the conference. The staff of OB WEST never saw him again.