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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY  
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Study of the Situation in the High Command  
of the Wehrmacht shortly before, during  
& after the Allied Landing in French North  
Africa, 1942



HEADQUARTERS  
EUROPEAN COMMAND  
OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN CHIEF

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I. Introduction.

1.) The following contribution to the writing of the history of the North African Campaign should not be regarded as a factual report. No data were at the disposal of the author. Consequently he was only able to rely upon his memory of events 4 1/2 years old, in which he merely occupied a position as an observer, while serving as a General Staff Officer in operations section of the headquarters of the Chef der Wehrmacht hoeherer Fuehrungsstab [of the chief of the Armed Forces High Command]. The writer is certain in his own mind that in addition to possible material errors and mistakes, one's own subjective viewpoint can influence the picture that has to be sketched. For this reason he regards the present report only as a supplement to documents already available, such as war diaries, etc.--that is to say, a personal impression.

II. The Military Situation of Germany.

2.) [sic] The military situation of Germany at the beginning of November 1942, following a series of great military successes without any reserves worth mentioning till then, showed the greatest extent reached in the war of territory occupied by German troops. Likewise the Allied Axis powers had reached widely separated objectives in their various theaters of war. To the limit of their mobilizable forces and as far as German assistance was available



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the smaller Allies were employed chiefly on the eastern front in wide sectors of their own.

However, aside from the political aspects, no military purposes were served.

3.) East front.

On this front to be sure we had succeeded in no small measure in carrying out the second summer offensive. However the anticipated objectives were reached neither in time or taken as a whole.

In the western part of Stalingrad fighting was still taking place and great sacrifices being made. We failed to overcome the Caucasus on the Terek and the breakthrough to Tuapse on the Black Sea miscarried. In consequence further advance south for the purpose of influencing Turkey and the Arab world politically and of diverting British forces to the Near East was blocked.

In the north Leningrad continued to resist investment and starving out. As a result the fortress still represented an obstacle to the long-sought junction with the Finns and to the repeatedly demanded line of supply by sea for the left wing of the Army.

The most important objective of the entire offensive however was not reached at all, namely, the smashing of the vital strength of the Soviet Union, the destruction of the Red Army. In contrast to the offensive of the previous year the Russian troops had evaded almost every encirclement and at least had saved a great part of their personnel.

In the last days of October the German troops and their Allies stood opposite the Russians on the entire East front in a thinly drawn out line. The troops were exhausted, materiel was worn out or used up, supplies were flowing after the troops in inadequate amounts over slender lines. The dreaded Russian winter again stood at the door and with it worry over a Soviet offensive on a grand scale. This was expected by the Army High



Command to be delivered from the general area south of Moscow, while Adolf Hitler himself looked for it against the Rumanian front west of Stalingrad, as actually happened later. Every possible means was employed to strengthen the sectors of the front that were in danger but because of the general lack of troops and the inadequacy of the available transportation, this could be only partially done. For reasons that were basically political however, Adolf Hitler could not bring himself to a decision to abandon the Caucasus front at a proper time.

An objective evaluation of the situation at the close of October 1942 showed that, following a string of great victories in the East, events had come to a crisis.

#### 4.) Southern Front.

On this front conditions had developed in a similar way. The German-Italian offensive into the Nile valley had bogged down in front of El Alamein. The breakthrough in the British position in September had miscarried. In the last week of October the British 8th Army had passed to the offensive and in heavy fighting had effected a breakthrough of the German position and forced the German-Italian Panzer Army to retreat. Field Marshal Rommel's decision to do so inadvertently came to Adolph Hitler's notice hours too late. His order to fight in place therefore failed to take effect and consequently had to be revoked. Those German and Italian troops that had not been cut off were in full retreat to Cyrenaica.

So the great plan - to reach the valley of the Nile, block the Suez Canal and, in loose cooperation with a group executing a diversionary thrust across the Caucasus, to cripple the British base of operations in the eastern Mediterranean including their oil supply - all this had proved abortive.

Instead of this plan measures had to be considered and initiated to get reserves of troops and matériel to the sorely-pressed Army in Africa. These had to be taken from the German potential, since the general morale



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of the Italian troops was criticized and Adolf Hitler distrusted the Italian Supreme Command (Kommandeur Supreme [sic]) and particularly the Italian royal house.

Great stress was laid on stepping up communications by sea and air transport to the African theater of war to meet the increased requirements of supply, In this too, German organization and means had to be used, the Italian being too sluggish and failing to function.

Even the second air offensive against the British stronghold of Malta [Stuetzpunkt], while crippling it for a certain time, had not been able however to blockade it entirely. During the days of October the Malta air base [Luftstuetzpunkt] was restored to activity and had been reinforced especially by fighter planes. The most important point on the positive side for the enemy however was the patent air superiority attained by him in the meantime and the control of the sea exercised by the British in the eastern and western Mediterranean.

Similar to the situation on the East front, operations in the South which had initially been successful had come to a standstill and following a brief period of defense of the positions reached had slipped into the phase of delaying action, using inadequate improvisations.

#### 5.) West Front.

In the High Command of the Armed Forces it was expected that the first landing attempts at Dieppe would be followed by other Allied raids of a similar character, with a full-scale invasion to come later. Although this last was not looked for before the summer of 1943 at the earliest, still time was considered scant for mtheodical defensive measures. The establishment of the so-called Atlantic Wall made slow progress, as did the reorganization and equipping of the mobile and mechanized troops that were to meet the invasion. Moreover these troops constantly had to be exchanged for tired divisions coming from the East Front.

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Almost all negotiations were conducted in a dilatory manner by both sides. Thus it was that the matter of the extradition of General Giraud who had escaped from German captivity came to nought.

#### 6.) North Front.

Except for surprise raids against our oversea supply lines and parallel actions against the Allied convoys on the Murmansk run all was quiet on the northern front. We failed not only on the open sea but on the Murmansk railway as well, to put a complete stop to the constantly growing deliveries of military stores to the Russians.

At the same time Adolf Hitler most feared an Allied landing on a large scale on the 2500-kilometer Norwegian coast and used vast quantities of matériel and equipment urgently needed on other fronts to improve the defenses there and stock them.

#### 7.) Atlantic.

In the Atlantic German submarine warfare, after great initial successes on the east coast of America, was pushed farther and farther back to the open sea by the rapidly growing defense on the water and in the air. On the other hand, spotting the C-J's \*) and organizing the submarines for action against them was rendered difficult by the almost complete absence of long-range reconnaissance. Because of the constant threat from the air, our losses suffered while running into and out of our bases constantly mounted.

In this too it was necessary to apply special measures in equipment, training, tactics, etc.

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C - J: Abbreviation referred to Maritime Commission, U. S. Shipping Board, and Navy for comment. First two believe it refers to a type of merchant vessel, Series "C" (speed about 13 - 14 knots). The "Liberty" and "Victory" ships were separate series. They cannot interpret the "J".

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8.) Air Situation

However it was in the air situation that the greatest shift in emphasis was becoming noticeable. Our air force detachments were in action with hardly any interruption at all, while it was impossible to set aside operational reserves, or maintain a system by which the flow of replacements in equipment and trained men would be kept at an adequate pace. At the same time the Allies were creating a fast-growing, well-trained, modern air power. However, this air power was considered as the most dangerous threat only in air force circles, proper defense against it would have required a shift of emphasis in the entire war industry, giving priority to equipment for the air force. It was admitted to be true that the German air force had played a decisive role at the beginning of the war, just as the Allied air forces had done at El Alamein or in the Atlantic. But attempts to increase the contingent of equipment apportioned to the air force out of the overall armaments production failed because of the urgency of simultaneous requirements on all sides.

III. The Crisis in the High Command of the Wehrmacht.

9.) The crisis due to lack of confidence among the top-ranking commanders of the Wehrmacht made itself felt particularly during the period covered in this report.

10.) Tension between Adolf Hitler and General Jodl.

A deep split had come about between Adolf Hitler and General Jodl ever since the latter, before a large audience, had refuted the reproaches brought against the High Command [Oberkommando] of Army Group A because of the failure of the Caucasus offensive by citing orders given by Hitler himself. As a consequence, Hitler personally kept completely in the background and for the next months he limited his relations with his military staff to strictly official matters, adhering to the curtest possible form.

11.) Relations between Adolf Hitler and General Zeitzler.

Conversely the mutual feeling of confidence between Hitler and the new Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres [Chief of Staff of the Army] General Zeitzler,



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increased, especially because Hitler liked General Zeitzler's quick and resolute manner of acting.

12.) The Top-Level Organization of the Wehrmacht.

During the weeks under consideration these discrepancies in personal relations and the dual position Adolf Hitler was occupying as the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht and simultaneously as the Commander in Chief of the Army brought about that form of top-level organization of the Wehrmacht which was criticized so severely later on. Adolf Hitler at the very top. Directly responsible to him, for the East the Army High Command [Oberkommando des Heeres], for all other theaters of war the Wehrmacht High Command [Oberkommando der Wehrmacht], and besides the Commanders in Chief of the Navy and of the Air Force acting and reporting more or less independently at the same time.

However, while the Army High Command was taking care of all measures for the East in a fully responsible manner, the Wehrmacht High Command determined only the [original text missing] on the other theaters of war, and issued exclusively general instructions with regard to all other matters. The Army High Command was the authorized agency for the execution of the necessary measures, for instance those relating to organization, equipment, training, supply, transportation, etc., naturally, such a delimitation of responsibility had to lead up to arguments about proper competence, to lack of clarity, and to the constantly increasing so-called "decisions by the Fuehrer".

13.) Transfer of the Fuehrer's Headquarters

Finally it seems to be worth mentioning that the Fuehrer's headquarters was transferred in the first days of November from the Ukraine back to East-Prussia, a fact which meant a considerable additional burden for the entire apparatus necessary for giving orders and receiving reports.

IV. Allied Landing Preparations.

14.) The overall military situation described in the preceding paragraphs, and the doubtlessly increasing friction on numerous other topics was probably



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not as clearly visualized at that time as is done today, in retrospect. At any rate, conditions certainly were not\*) conducive to a full utilization of every resource available within the Wehrmacht Command, in trying to overcome all the constantly supervening difficulties. Consequently it may be understood readily that all attention was concentrated upon those main problems which were most urgent, and that events were overlooked which did not seem to fit into a given train of thought, that is to say, from the point of view that we would continue to take the initiative as in the past. This was shown to be a grave error by the surprise invasion of French North Africa by the Allies.

15.) The assembling of landing forces.

Approximately during the course of October reports were received from obscure sources and through round-about channels) stating that ships were being drawn together at the western coast of England, and that troops were being concentrated in western England. As far as their composition and equipment were concerned, they were said to have all the earmarks of landing forces.

Similar information, most of which however was still unclear, was being submitted from North American ports.

16.) Evaluation.

Because of their vagueness little attention was paid to these reports. For the time being air reconnaissance was ordered to investigate the situation in the Irish Sea. Warnings were forwarded to the Commander in Chief West [Oberbefehlshaber West] and to the Army High Command Norway [Armeo-Oberkommando Norwegen].

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17.) Agent's Activity in French North Africa.

At the same time more and more frequently mention was made by all kinds of offices in French North Africa, especially by the German Control Commission there, of increased activity of American agents in that territory. In this case too, the full significance of these reports was not perceived.

18.) No countermeasures.

Infiltration by elements of the German Counterintelligence service as well as the introduction of any countermeasures in general was considered, but decided against mainly because of political considerations.

19.) Reinforcement of the Sea and Air Forces in Gibraltar.

The concurrent fact that fighter plane detachments and sizable fleet units were being stationed in Gibraltar was noticed as a matter of course, but it was connected up mainly with the increased convoy activity in the eastern Atlantic and with the current supply of Malta.

20.) Attitude of the Vichy Government.

Observing the French Government, and closely watching General Giraud did not bring forth any facts which would have given rise to distrust.

21.) Keeping the Landing Operation Obscure.

Consequently the preparations made by the Allies for an invasion of French North Africa remained obscure as to size and intention, even though they were not completely unnoticed, to be true. As a matter of fact, some voices were raised in warning, stating that a second front might be established in the French colonies, but in the Wehrmacht High Command the opinion generally prevailed that, at most, operations against Tripolitania might be in the offing.

V. The Invasion of French North Africa.

The landing in French North Africa hit the Wehrmacht Command at a particularly critical moment.

22.) First Reports.

Even though reports had been received about the putting to sea of a convoy from Great Britain, about the movement of additional convoys from



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the U S A to Europe, and about the putting to sea of a strong warship convoy from Gibraltar to the west, no particular importance was paid to this information.

In the morning of 7 November the first message came in stating that a large-scale convoy with strong escort of battleships and aircraft carriers had passed through the straits of Gibraltar. Air reconnaissance was started immediately and confirmed the report. Already during the morning a second large-scale convoy was sighted behind the first one.

The first deduction in the Wehrmacht High Command was: Supply of Malta on a large scale.

23.) Hitler's Trip to Munich.

In the meantime, that is to say about noon, Adolf Hitler had left the Fuehrer's headquarters, going to Munich on his special train. The only top-ranking commanders of the Wehrmacht traveling on the same train were Field Marshal Keitel, General Jodl, and Admiral Krancke of the Navy.

24.) Supplementary reports.

By evening the air reconnaissance had reported all together 4 strong convoys, some of them including landing craft. Whenever the two first convoys slowed up noticeably, the ones behind closed up. The escort proper, except the ships immediately guarding the convoy, had pushed far ahead toward the northeast.

25.) Situation Report on Board of the Train.

As soon as the report on the situation had been submitted by telephone, a conference with the Fuehrer took place on board of the train, at about 1900 hours.

26.) Estimate of the Situation by General Jodl.

After summing up the facts, General Jodl expressed his opinion on the intentions of the enemy, in the sequence of their probability, as follows:

a) After breaking through the straits of Sicily, landing in the rear of Rommel, in the ports of Cyrenaica. Purpose: Cutting the connections to



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- a) After breaking through the straits of Sicily, landing in the rear of Rommel, in the ports of Cyrenaica. Purpose: Cutting the connections to the rear, and destruction of the African Panzer Army.



- b) Simultaneously, or main objective: Taking the Island Crete. Purpose: Reinforcing the British system of bases [Stuetzpunkte] in the eastern Mediterranean, thereby cutting the direct supply line by sea. Moreover current threat from the air to Rommel's flank.
- c) In conjunction with a) or with b), or in conjunction with a) and b) simultaneous supply of Malta.
- d) Less probable: Landing in Sicily or Tripolitania.
- e) Improbable: Landing in the French territory.

Reason given: Such a measure would definitely throw the French into our arms.

27.) Admiral Krancke's Opinion.

The liaison officer of the Navy believed in a landing in Sicily or Tunisia, possibly simultaneously in both places, with the purpose of blocking the straits of Sicily, thereby gaining almost unlimited supremacy on the sea and free movement in the Mediterranean.

28.) Adolf Hitler's Interpretation.

Adolf Hitler agreed, in general, with General Jodl's exposition but considered it quite possible that a landing might be attempted in Sicily, perhaps even in Sardinia and Corsica, with the objective of preparing for operations against Northern Italy. He considered such a plan as a daring one, but, if successful, it would mean a deathly blow for Italy and for the war theaters there.

29.) The Enemy's Intention is Finally Perceived.

Only toward the end of the one-hour conference did the correct opinion and interpretation crystallize from the study of the position of the convoy between Algiers and Oran in conjunction with the slowing up of the leading ships. As a matter of fact, by carefully recalculating the course of the convoy it had been noticed that the lowered speed with which the ships in front were proceeding would not permit passage through the straits of Sicily during the night, therefore making such a move improbable. In view of our



b) Simultaneously, or main objective: Taking the Island Crete. Purpose: Reinforcing the British system of bases [Stuetzpunkte] in the eastern Mediterranean, thereby cutting the direct supply line by sea. Moreover current threat from the air to Rommel's flank.

c) In conjunction with a) or with b), or in conjunction with a) and b) simultaneous supply of Malta.

d) Less probable: Landing in Sicily or Tripolitania.

e) Improbable: Landing in the French territory.

Reason given: Such a measure would definitely throw the French into our arms.

27.) Admiral Krancke's Opinion.

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large Italian islands was also discarded as erroneous.

And so it happened that only at about 2000 hours on 7 November the enemy's intention to invade French North Africa was fully perceived, or at least, accepted as probable.

30.) The Landing is Confirmed.

Confirmation of the actual landing in North African ports arrived at about 0200 hours on 8 November.

VI. Countermeasures.

31.) From then on, the countermeasures, which are not to be described in the present report, required quickest decisions in the fields of politics, military matters, propaganda, and others. Initial steps were taken immediately after the invasion had been confirmed, while the train stopped for two hours on a railroad station in Thuringia. They concerned mainly: containing the rest of France, prevent the French fleet from putting to sea, calm down the Italians and the other allied powers. Furthermore the immediate establishment of a bridgehead Tunisia, questions of the High Command, diversion and speeding-up of reinforcements originally scheduled for Rommel, organization of march [casual] units, etc., pushing to the utmost the efforts of the air force--and of submarines--against enemy landings, intensifying transportation on the water and in the air, and other matters.

32. Issuing the Orders Rendered Difficult.

Giving these orders was rendered difficult by the compulsion of proceeding on the special train, the small number of available personnel, the restricted working space, and the limited possibilities of communication.

VII. Conclusion.

33.) In conclusion it may be stated that the Allied invasion of French North Africa came as a full and complete surprise for the High Command of the Wehrmacht. This was made easier for the Allies because the general situation was absorbing the entire attention. On the other hand, countermeasures were rendered difficult by the limited working efficiency of the top-level of the



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Wehrmacht Command, the lack of operational reserves, and the fact that a system of substitutions had been in force already for some time.

signed: Eckhard, Christian.

HISTORICAL DIVISION SEAL.

[Translated: Pages 1 - 5: Lt.Col. H.F.K. Cahill;]  
[ Pages 6 - 13: M. Bauer ]  
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