

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HISTORICAL DIVISION  
SPECIAL STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY  
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Note to: ETHINT 1

By: Kenneth W. Hechler  
Major, Infantry (Res)

This was the first oral interview which I held at C.C. P.W.E. No 32 ("Ash Can") at Bad Mondorf, Luxembourg. Actually, this report covers a series of conversations held with General Warlimont on 19 and 20 July. One of the regular interpreters at "Ash Can" brought General Warlimont upstairs from his room, and we had an opportunity to sit around a table, and from time to time General Warlimont moved over to a comfortable, upholstered chair. M/Sgt Albert Kiralfy was present during the oral interview, and took extensive stenographic notes on General Warlimont's remarks. At my instruction, Sgt. Kiralfy did not make a complete stenographic record of the oral interrogation. M/Sgt. Kiralfy was able to identify the more important parts of the oral conversation, which he took down word for word, and he relaxed during the periods of lighter conversation which had little or nothing to do with the issues involved. For example, if I digressed during the oral interview to ask General Warlimont some questions about his American wife and other personal matters, these things of course did not enter the record.

After a few minutes, the interpreter who had introduced General Warlimont excused himself, leaving the three of us to carry on the oral interview. From time to time, Sgt. Kiralfy at my previous direction would wander out of the room to sharpen his pencil or to perform some other minor errand, all of which lent an additional air of informality to the conversation.

Very little German was spoken during this conversation, except where General Warlimont wished to use a German word or phrase which was difficult to translate into English.

On the night of 20 July, after the conclusion of this series of oral interviews, I edited the notes of M/Sgt. Kiralfy, rearranged the order so as to make them in sequence (frequently our conversations rambled along and topics were discussed out of order), and added a considerable number of remarks of my own from my recollection of the past 2 days' conversation.

ETHINT 1 - (       )

Title : From The Invasion To The Siegfried Line

Source : Gen Art Warlimont, Walter

Position : Deputy Chief, Armed Forces Operations Staff  
(until 6 Sep 44, Deputy to Genobst Jodl -  
Chief, Wehrmachtsfuehrungsstab)

Date : 19 - 20 Jul 45

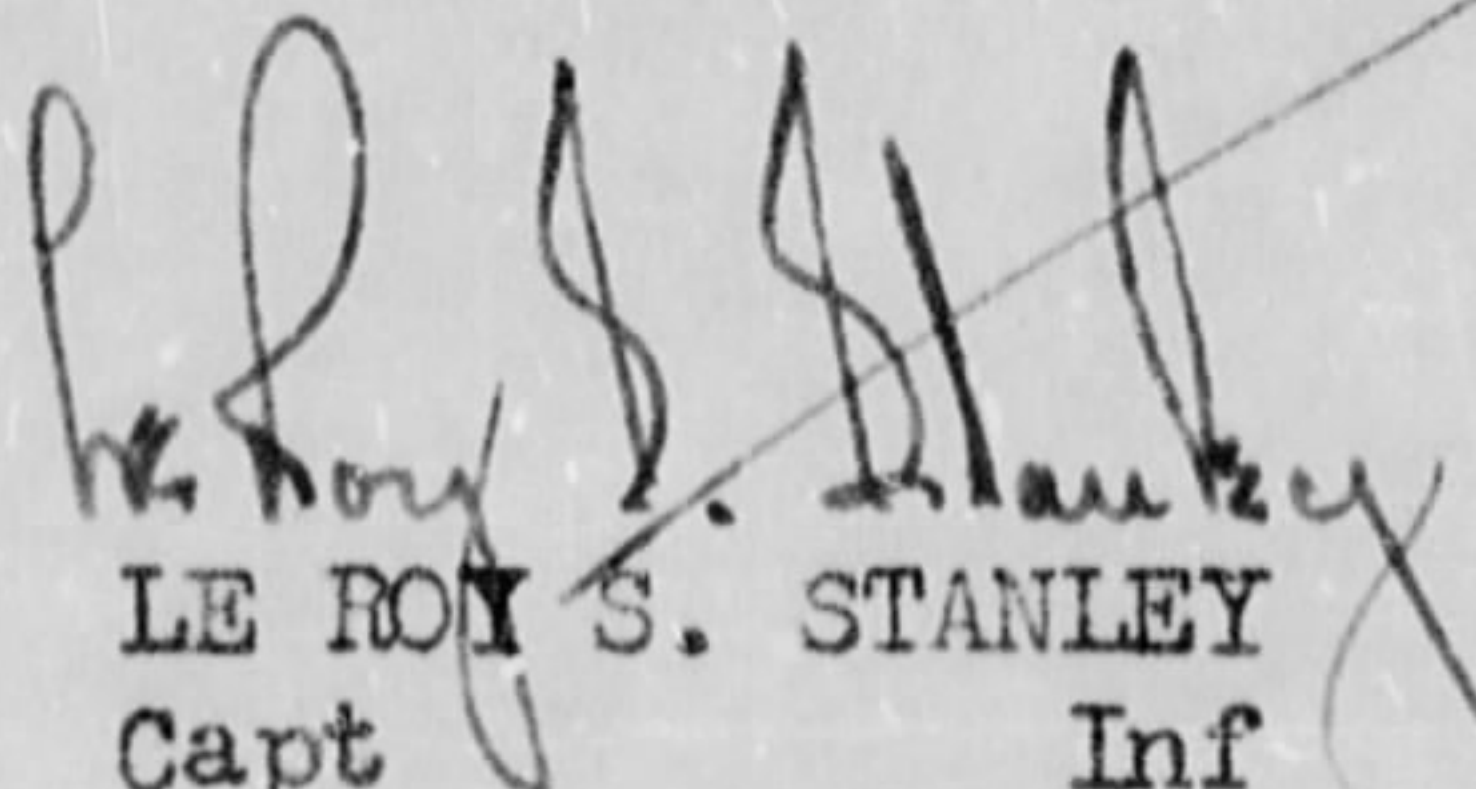
Place : CCPWE # 32 ("Ashcan")

Interviewer : Maj Kenneth W. Hechler

Circumstances : Gen Warlimont received a brain concussion on  
20 Jul 44 which forced his retirement on 6 Sep 44.  
He appears unusually well informed on the War in  
the West up to this time. He has been most co-  
operative in discussing these affairs and appears  
to be broad and intelligent. His observations of  
the background and considerations involved in  
military decisions seem to be particularly  
penetrating.

Foreword

This interview is one of a series conducted by the Historical Section, ETOUSA. Unfortunately, only a typed record in English is available for editing. It is not known whether a record in German was made at the time of the interview nor, if one was made, can the accuracy of the translation be determined. Therefore, no absolute guarantee can be given as to the authenticity and completeness of this version of the interview. Only obvious errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammatical construction have been corrected. All parenthetical statements, except those of the editor, which are identified as such, are as they appear in the available record.

  
LE ROY S. STANLEY  
Capt                      Inf  
Historical Editor

DEC 1 1947

F R O M   T H E   I N V A S I O N  
T O   T H E   S I E G F R I E D   L I N E

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I. The Invasion

1. Q: Did you anticipate that the Invasion would take place where it actually did?

A: Hitler was the first one who decided for himself that this was the most probable spot for landing. On 2 May 44, he ordered that antiaircraft and antitank weapons were to be reinforced all through Normandy and Brittany, counting mainly on an invasion in Normandy. Hitler's view was based on intelligence received as to troop movements in the British Isles. Two main troop concentrations had been noticed there: one in the southeast with mainly British troops, and one in the southwest, in Wales and on both sides of Wales, consisting mainly of US troops.

2. Q: Where did most of the other high-ranking officials believe that the Invasion would take place?

A: Up to May 44, when Hitler first spoke of it, we were all prepared for a landing in the Channel zone between the Seine and the Somme, by Abbeville and Le Havre. Therefore, throughout 1942-43, the coastal defenses were built up mainly in the Fifteenth Army zone.

3. Q: At what particular point?

A: I cannot say that we expected the landing at any particular point in Normandy. We expected it all along the coast with special reference to the small ports (which are mainly in the Bayeux area). We were not quite convinced that Hitler was right in

expecting that attack, but he kept harping on it and demanded more and more reinforcements for that sector.

4. Q: Why did the generals predict that the Invasion would strike at a different point than Hitler predicted? You both had access to the same sources of information, did you not?

A: We generals figured along the lines of our regular military education, but Hitler figured out of intuition as he always did. We figured on the Channel zone because (1) it is the shortest crossing from the British Isles, (2) once across the Channel, it is the shortest way to Germany and its industrial Ruhr, (3) it has at least one big harbor, Le Havre, better situated than Cherbourg and with better routes and lines of communication into the interior, and (4) your air force had better possibilities to support the attack closer to its bases.

5. Q: Upon what else besides intuition did Hitler base his conviction that we would invade Normandy?

A: Besides his observations from troop movements, Hitler based his theory on the idea that you would aim to build up a stable front including one big harbor and there was no better place on the whole coast than the Cotentin Peninsula for this purpose.

6. Q: Did the regular army officers and high command lean any more toward Hitler's view as the Invasion date approached?

A: We recognized too that a landing in other parts of Europe further north was becoming more and more improbable as the British troops were grouped more and more to the south. The position

of the US troops especially led Hitler to anticipate an attack launched against the west coast of Normandy.

7. Q: We, of course, did our best to deceive you into thinking that we would land in the Pas de Calais area, and, after the landing in Normandy, we still carried out elaborate deception plans in order to tie down your Fifteenth Army in this sector. What led you to feel that we would land in the Pas de Calais area?

A: The first air attacks were against fortifications of the Seine, and, since we had many standing fortifications in this sector, we took it as further evidence of your plans.

We attached great importance to the Resistance movements in the interior and tried to determine the place of landing by noting where most parachute baskets, etc, were dropped. As time went on, however, this became so widespread that it no longer gave us any help.

We also managed to get into some of your radio nets. Radio transmitters were dropped from planes to be used by your agents in France to inform you about our movements. We intercepted some of these and got into your radio nets and used them ourselves and also used them to communicate with your stations. We had the impression that this action of ours had passed unnoticed by you. We found out that there were special catchwords with which you prepared your operations and by means of which you were going to inform the French Underground as to the day and hour of your attack.

8. Q: To what extent was it possible to complete the fortifications along the Normandy coast where the Invasion was later made?

A: The fortification of Normandy was not at all complete. Such fortifications require a long time. In Picardy we had more workers from occupied countries and better communications and no one had thought of Normandy much before. The Normandy fortifications were just the same as those of other parts of the French coast, with one big position every 20 to 30 kilometers.

9. Q: Was it a case of shortage of troops or shortage of materials for the fortifications?

A: Not many more troops could have been put in there, but we could have done much more in the way of fortifying. Materials, such as cement, were also rare, having to be divided among all the armed forces. Furthermore, railway transportation was getting worse all the time as a result of air attacks on the big junctions. So, we were well aware that the fortifications were by no means complete, but it was too late to complete them as we should have liked.

10. Q: What would you have liked to have done in the way of better fortifications on the Normandy coast?

A: We should have had more standing fortifications built by the troops and not by Organization Todt. As it was too late by this time, all we could do was to put more troops in Normandy and improve their equipment.



11. Q: What troops did you have available to repulse the Invasion?

A: By about 2 May 44, we had, so far as I can remember without diaries, maps, or operation books, one division of old men (comprising two regiments around the mouth of the Orne), the 711 (Ed: Inf) Div which was a static division, and 245 (Ed: Inf) Div in front of Bayeux, to cover a coastline of at least 60 or even 80 kilometers. The next one, which you hit very hard, was the 353 (Ed: Inf) Div around the mouth of the Dive. There was a special force in Cherbourg. (The 245 and 353 Divs were on the north coast of Normandy on D-Day.)

We had three divisions on the north coast of Normandy, another one (709 (Ed: Inf) Div) around Cherbourg, and the 243 (Ed: Inf Div) on the west coast of Normandy. On 2 May 44, Hitler put in the reinforcements of the antiaircraft and antitank weapons which were given to the units with a view in particular to their being better able to combat paratroops and airborne units.

On 4 May 44, he ordered 2 FS Div, then on the Eastern Front, to be transferred to the West. One regiment of this division, 6 FS Regt, which was already in Germany when the order was given, came at once to Normandy, somewhere near St Lô.

Hitler then ordered the 91 (Ed: LL) Div, one of the very few divisions we had in Germany as an operative reserve, to be transferred to Normandy, also as a reserve. Most of this strength was on the base line of the Cotentin. So, actually only one parachute

regiment and one division were sent in as we had no operative reserve to dispose of.

Rundstedt, as C-in-C West, tried to send reinforcements, but had no reserves either and could do nothing worth mentioning. All our troops were required to defend the various coastlines and your attack in Italy was making great progress. One division of Fifteenth Army, the Lw Feld Div (number not known) even had to be sent to Italy.

Rommel, at the next echelon, had always fought for a more tactical defense of the coast. He wanted to put in reserves as close to the coastline as possible. This was possible, of course, once you knew where the enemy was going to strike. But when you did not know and had a coastline of thousands of kilometers, it was too hazardous to risk. As soon as Hitler decided that Normandy was the likely spot, Rommel had his way and sent in his panzer divisions, which were attached to him as Wehrmachtbefehlshaber (Ed: Military District Commander in Occupied Territory) of Western Europe (Netherlands Headquarters). A Gp B extended right down to La Rochelle. Rommel had a reserve of panzer divisions and, in accordance with his line of thinking, he now put in 21 Pz Div somewhere near Caen, 12 SS Pz Div around Falaise, and 2 Pz Div around St L<sup>o</sup> (or a little east of it).

Rommel had one panzer division left. He had two in Normandy, one quite close to the coast, and two just 40 to 50 km behind it. He had one division behind Fifteenth Army. This took place about the middle of May 44. Rommel took no infantry divisions

from Fifteenth Army. Maybe this was due to uncertainty as to the division of spheres of Rommel and Rundstedt. I am not sure whether Rommel and Rundstedt were convinced Hitler was right. Rommel claimed it made no difference where the attack came as his defenses were now so good all along the coast.

There were four more armored divisions farther east which were reserved for the disposition of OKW. Two were in the neighborhood of Paris, Pz Lehr Div and 2 SS Pz Div.

12. Q: Did you expect us to land only where there were ports and harbors, or did you know about our artificial ports? Why did you not bomb our artificial ports after you discovered how much we were using them to land supplies?

A: We always expected your attack with the aid of harbors and if we had known more about your artificial ports, we should have done more to stop it. If you ask why the air force did not bomb more effectively the places where you landed, the answer is that our air force was unable to break through your defenses in order to find and hit the targets at all.

13. Q: Were you able to estimate the rate at which we could build up supplies and troops on the beaches after the initial landing?

A: We knew the capacity of the small (natural) harbors, but, not knowing about the artificial ports, we could not estimate your rate of supply. We were able later to gauge the rate at which you were landing troops, but confined ourselves to strength

figures and the number of divisions as our reconnaissance did not give us much information on your troops and still less on your supply circumstances.

14. Q: Did you suspect that the Invasion would take place on the date which it did?

A: The weather was right for an invasion and we had been alerted to the possibility for some weeks prior to 6 Jun 44. Our chief intelligence source was the radio and our intercepts revealed that the Invasion would take place on the morning of 6 Jun 44. This information was relayed to headquarters on the afternoon of 5 Jun 44. Hitler knew it and Gen Jodl knew it, but the information was not made available to the troops in Normandy.

15. Q: Was this considered a great mistake by Hitler?

A: In Hitler's eyes, Gen Jodl, unlike other men, did not make military mistakes. Gen Jodl knew the state of alarm or alert under which the troops in Northern France were operating and did not consider it necessary to give out another order. Furthermore, there had been a number of other false alarms prior to this one.

16. Q: Was your reconnaissance hampered any in the days immediately prior to the Invasion?

A: Unfortunately, we had no regular air reconnaissance because of the superiority of your air power over the area. Air reconnaissance was made perhaps every fortnight and even then was confined to photographs of possible points of embarkation. Sea reconnaissance also was rather difficult; it was difficult to keep

boats in the open sea when the British Navy dominated the area.

17. Q: Do you recall any of Hitler's specific comments immediately prior to the Invasion?

A: More and more in recent months, since Hitler had assumed his role of military expert, he would talk at great length and in broad terms at the semi-daily operational meetings. These meetings, attended by up to 20 high officers, would be held at 1300 and close to midnight. Hitler would speak honestly, but seldom directly to any individuals or individual. He would speak "out of the window." To answer your question, just before the Invasion his line was that the impending invasion of France would be the decisive event of the coming year. Hitler said, "It will decide the issue, not only of the year, but of the whole war. If we succeed in throwing back the Invasion, then such an attempt cannot and will not be repeated within a short time. It will then mean that our reserves will be set free for use in Italy and the East. Then we can stabilize the front in the East and perhaps return to the offensive in that sector. If we don't throw the invaders back, we can't win a static war in the long run because the materiel our enemies can bring in will exceed what we can send to that front. With no strategic reserves of any importance, it will be impossible to build up sufficient strength along such a line. Therefore, the invader must be thrown back on his first attempt."

18. Q: Was there anything not previously mentioned which handicapped your efforts on the day of invasion?

A: Rommel was not there.

19. Q: Why not?

A: I should prefer not to mention this, but he had gone to the Fuehrer's headquarters, and, as it was his wife's birthday, he stopped by his home in Stuttgart to see her. Therefore, when the Invasion struck, Gen Dollman, Commanding General of Seventh Army, was serving in Rommel's place.

## II. The Battle Of Normandy

20. Q: What was the initial plan which the Germans applied after the Invasion started?

A: After the landing in Normandy, we applied our plan. We had a plan for the possibility of invasion in each case--Netherlands, Northeast France, Normandy, Brittany, Biscay--which would come into operation at the moment of invasion. The plans were mainly concerned with shifting reserves from one sector to another.

During the first fortnight, no troops were shifted from Fifteenth Army sector, significant of the "half-measures" which were taken on 6 Jun 44 to meet the attack.

The pursuit units of the Luftwaffe situated in Germany for the defense of the homeland were to be transferred to the West. There were 14 pursuit groups which had to be transferred from Germany. This and the movement of the four panzer divisions were carried out.

The third measure, the shifting of infantry divisions from other sectors, was only carried through reluctantly and far behind the plans we had made. We still expected another landing against Fifteenth Army where most of the infantry divisions were collected. Another landing in Brittany was feared.

At first, two, and later as many as four, divisions were ordered up to Normandy. But this took weeks because the railroads were damaged and the bridges over the Seine and the Loire were destroyed. Thus, it took much more time than we had ever expected to get these divisions to the battle zone.

Even the panzer divisions, including those which Rommel had put in at Falaise and around St Lo, did not come up to the coast during the time we expected since, in spite of poor weather, it was hardly possible to move more than 20 km a night. In our plan, we had anticipated that we would make 100 km per night. The nights were very short in June. Thus, our entire plan to concentrate these panzer divisions against your main beachhead could not be carried out.

21. Q: To what extent were communications disrupted by the paratroop landings?

A: Communications suffered from local interference, but on the whole, I recall no report of it. It was taken as one of the usual hazards of war. They were hampered always by your air force, not paratroops.

22. Q: Was there anything additional on the measures taken by you after the landing?

A: Rundstedt, when asked for the disposition of OKW reserves, reported on 6 Jun 44 that the first panzer division would reach the coast on the night of 6 Jun 44 and promised to get more as soon as he could. They never reached the coast and it took them three to four days to reach the vicinity of Caen.

So, our first plan of meeting your attack failed. The panzer divisions were supposed to strike in a general northwest direction from Caen and to wipe out one beachhead after another. After your two forces joined between Caen and Bayeux, I had the impression that your forces coming from the British Isles could reinforce quicker than our forces coming from the rest of France. Our armor came up too slowly for us to counterattack with these divisions as we had planned. We had all we could do to contain you on the beachhead and keep a connected line of defense.

On 7 Jun 44, I left headquarters on a trip to Gen Kesselring in Italy which had been arranged before your landing and had to be carried out as he was in a pretty bad position. So, I am not precisely informed on the events of 7 - 12 Jun 44. During that time, probably on 8 Jun 44, it had been decided to transfer two panzer divisions, 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs, from the East to meet the attack. This shows that already on this date the forces we had originally assembled there were insufficient to meet the attack.

When I came back on 12 Jun 44, I was informed that there was no talk of counterattacks any more. We had had heavy losses bringing the panzer divisions up to the line and we were



occupied in maintaining the line we had then reached.

23. Q: After you returned from Italy on 12 Jun 44, what was the general plan for containing the beachhead?

A: Of course, I was not the only one dissatisfied and consultations went on as to how to meet the new situation. Hitler asked Rundstedt for a plan. The main theme of the solution was that the panzer divisions which your attack had compelled us to commit on the line, contrary to their original function, should be relieved as soon as possible by infantry divisions which were coming up to the front; that at least four or maybe six panzer divisions, including those coming from the Eastern Front, were to be assembled in the region southeast of St Lo in the big forests in order to carry out a counter-attack in the northeast direction and separate the American and British forces in the vicinity of Bayeux.

First, we now knew how long it took to move even a short distance. Then Hitler repeatedly ordered the wiping out of a small bridgehead of the British over the Orne near Caen. Hitler wanted this done first. Then we were to push forward our line of defense on the Orne while making the main effort toward Bayeux.

In mid-June 44, Hitler went to a meeting with Rommel and Rundstedt in France at a fort just north of Soissons, where he had a headquarters prepared for the eventuality of an Allied invasion. The plans made there were never carried out as we failed to get out enough panzer divisions to carry through this attack. The infantry divisions did not arrive soon enough. The panzer divisions

were still in the line and even the two from the Eastern Front were committed in the line. By the time the infantry came up, the panzer divisions had had such losses that their strength was no longer equal to the task given them.

24. Q: What efforts were made to prevent our cutting off the Cotentin Peninsula?

A: At first, we thought we should be able to keep your airborne units on the west of the Cotentin from joining the main force on the east and hoped to annihilate the troops on the west side while containing you on the east. In this way, Cherbourg would be safe and an attack from the beachhead prevented. Suddenly you broke through and established a line from the east to the west of the Peninsula.

25. Q: After the stabilization of the front along the beachhead and the fall of Cherbourg, what was the German plan of defense in Jul 44?

A: First, I might mention one of Hitler's main ideas brought forward at the meeting which he held with the C-in-C West and his top commanders at Berchtesgaden on 25 and 26 Jun 44. At this time, Hitler advanced a suggestion for better protection against your air force raids on the battle front. He emphasized that in order to protect the main routes, antiaircraft weapons should not be dispersed all over the zone but concentrated along the main roads and at key points.

26. Q: Was this actually done, and where?

A: Hitler left the details of execution to the commanders. However, when I came to the battle front in early August 44, I discovered that the commanders had not accomplished this because most of the weapons had been lost enroute and no main routes any longer existed because of the breakthrough in Normandy.

27. Q: Did you still have hopes of containing the beach-head during early Jul 44?

A: It was regarded as rather a success that a month and a half after your invasion operation we had been able to limit your advances. This was not losing sight of the fact that the loss of Cherbourg was a heavy blow to us, increasing our disadvantage. I recall after the fall of Cherbourg Hitler once said, "Look at the space they occupy now. What does it mean in comparison with the whole of France?" But Hitler may have been deluding his staff and it may not really have been his conviction. He had not convinced me, for it was evident that your forces would not have been satisfied to keep this small part of France, but, on the contrary, you were doing everything to enlarge it and launch an operation with far-sighted objectives. Yet Hitler's orders always spoke in terms of pinning you down (zu Boden zwingen) so as to contain you where you were.

28. Q: What measures were taken regarding disposition of your troops?

A: Troops were brought up from the Mediterranean coast, although a landing was also expected there. Fresh divisions were brought up to relieve others and shifts were made, but the total

number of troops was not increased. We tried again and again to get the panzer divisions out of the defense line in order to carry through counterattacks of at least a local character.

When we tried to prepare a counterattack in the direction of Bayeux, the intention was to pull out also all paratroopers on the front in order to accompany the attack with an airborne attack on the main points of your beachhead and therefore support the ground attack of the panzer divisions. This remained an idea and was never put into effect. Goering was behind the plan, but it was not practicable.

29. Q: Did the situation appear any brighter for you at any time during early Jul 44?

A: We knew that large reserves could be shifted from the United States and that you were able to build up your supplies rapidly. Thus, we were prepared to expect a strong attempt of your forces to break through to the interior of France. No, the situation never got very much brighter for us. The average strength of our infantry divisions seemed to decline and of course that of the panzer divisions did also. The situation on the Eastern Front did not allow enough infantry divisions to be withdrawn as railway transport was bad and bridges were destroyed. It was hardly possible for me to move from place to place in a car by daytime.

30. Q: Do you think of any more specific examples regarding delay in the movement of divisions during this period?

A: The 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs, due to move to the Western

Front when the Invasion struck, did not arrive until 20 Jun 44 because of transportation difficulties.

31. Q: Were there any other difficulties which you experienced which prevented strengthening of the beachhead line?

A: When we started to move divisions from the Fifteenth Army sector, it was often found much easier to commit them around our right flank near Caen and the Orne River rather than moving them additional distances to reinforce our weakening left flank opposite the American forces. The left wing got very few reinforcements and those came from troops moved down from the Brittany Peninsula. The losses which the left wing suffered in the east-west drive which your forces made across the Cotentin Peninsula were very great and it can be said that the left wing never recovered sufficiently from these losses.

32. Q: Could you employ any expedients to strengthen your left wing?

A: We were never fully satisfied during Jul 44 with our situation on the left wing. We always felt that we would need more time in order to regroup our forces there. In an attempt to shorten our line, we tried to make maximum use of natural obstacles such as the inundated and swampy ground near Carentan. Likewise, we tried to anchor our left flank on the inlet near Lessay, which would further shorten the line and require less troops. Even with this, we were always jittery about our line west of St Lo.

III. Cherbourg

33. Q: What plans were made to prevent our forces from moving on Cherbourg after the Cotentin Peninsula had been cut?

A: A big mistake was now made. The local commanding officers had been ordered that the troops were to move towards Cherbourg in order to aid in its defense in case the Cotentin Peninsula were threatened with being cut off.

They were unable to prevent the troops retreating south to avoid encirclement. If this had not happened, there would have been another division to defend Cherbourg. There was probably no official decision to move south, just the circumstances of the situation. None of the higher officers ever accepted responsibility for it. It had been assumed the troops would retreat north and help defend Cherbourg.

34. Q: Was there any plan to counterattack and break through to the troops cut off in the Cotentin Peninsula?

A: At this time, you carried through your attack on the west coast and cut off the Cotentin Peninsula. On 24 Jun 44, Hitler gave the following order: "In addition to the plans which are to be made for the Bayeux attack, you must strike into the rear of the First US Army advancing on Cherbourg and relieve Cherbourg."

The C-in-C West, Rundstedt, reported at once that he did not think such an attack was possible at all as all routes to the Cotentin were under observation and the fire of your planes. Rundstedt said it would be impossible to bring the necessary supplies

even to prepare for such an attack into this region and it would be more difficult the further it progressed. But these remonstrations were not taken into consideration by Hitler. He asked to see Rommel. Even Rommel came to the same conclusion and declared that he was of the same opinion as Rundstedt and that it would be entirely impossible to carry through this attack. Hitler was not convinced by the opinions; he went on with his orders. In the meantime, however, Cherbourg was captured and the plan fell to pieces again. The plan had been Hitler's own.

35. Q: In view of the later experience with the defenders of ports such as Brest, Cherbourg was surrendered after a relatively short fight. Why wasn't the siege prolonged?

A: It was assumed that Cherbourg, like any other fortress, would hold out for a long time. We had only about 20,000 men on a front of 20 to 40 km at that time and this force had to meet the attack of an entire American Army. This was due to (1) the necessity of defending a place on an extended line, a long land front, and (2) lack of troops, as we could not have a bigger garrison there and still defend the entire coast line.

Headquarters assumed the Cotentin troops would fall back on Cherbourg, but it had not planned on any supplies for such additional troops. Even had the other troops fallen back on Cherbourg, we soon should have run short of supplies there. Certain calibers of ammunition also were short or out of stock.

36. Q: Could any supplies be brought in by sea to Cherbourg?

A: Supplies were brought in from St Malo and the Channel Islands on E-boats.

37. Q: Were you satisfied with the extent to which the fortifications at Cherbourg had been completed?

A: The fortifications of Cherbourg toward the sea were good and almost complete, but the land defenses were far from complete, having just a few positions on a line of almost 40 kilometers. The defenses were originally constructed on the assumption of an attack from the sea.

38. Q: Toward the end of Jun 44, were any additional efforts made to reinforce the garrison at Cherbourg?

A: We made several plans to reinforce the forces defending Cherbourg, but we did not succeed. Hitler did not want to take any forces from the Channel Islands and we had no air field left on which to land forces from the air. The navy offered to ship troops from St Malo, but this was already too late.

39. Q: Did the fortress itself fall quicker than you had anticipated?

A: We reckoned that Cherbourg would behave as a fortress and that it would require a certain kind of attack. We felt that with all its fortifications, a great delay in time would follow; therefore, we never thought that Cherbourg would be taken by you as quickly as it was.

40. Q: Do you believe that Gen von Schlieben, the Military Commander of Cherbourg, fully appreciated the tactical significance of



the port and how urgently we needed it in order to ship supplies? Perhaps if he had fully appreciated this fact, he might have defended Cherbourg more vigorously.

A: I am convinced that Gen von Schlieben and his higher officers appreciated the importance of Cherbourg. Here is the reason I am convinced: in March or April of 44, Hitler called a meeting at Berchtesgaden of the commanders of all the big ports. The purpose of this meeting was to look over each of these commanders to judge his appearance and loyalty and to impress them with the paramount importance of holding their ports and harbors. To illustrate the high value which Hitler placed on this, several of the commanders were removed after the Berchtesgaden meetings. Present there were the commanders from Toulon, Marseilles, Sete, Gironde, St Nazaire, Lorient, Brest, St Malo, the Channel Islands, Cherbourg, Le Havre, Boulogne, Calais, Dunkerque, Antwerp, and the port for Amsterdam.

41. Q: At this meeting were any special instructions given regarding Cherbourg?

A: No, because we were not yet convinced that it would play a major role in your invasion.

42. Q: Which commanders were changed at the meeting?

A: I cannot be exact on that detail. But to illustrate the way in which the Fuehrer chose his commanders, let me point out the way Gen Ramcke was selected to command Brest. When he brought his 2 FS Div into Brest, Hitler shortly heard about the fact that Gen Ramcke was there. He knew Gen Ramcke better than the officer in

command, so he said, "Certainly there can be no better man than Ramcke; put him in command immediately." So, the former commanding officer was made second in command to Ramcke.

43. Q: Did that raise any embarrassment in rank?

A: Rank or seniority, so far as command was concerned, never made any difference to Hitler in choosing his commanders.

44. Q: What was Hitler's reaction upon the fall of Cherbourg?

A: He regarded it as a heavy loss to the cause. He did not feel that Gen von Schlieben had put up a very determined defense of the port. Many times thereafter, he held up Gen von Schlieben as an example of a poor commander and constantly pointed to von Aulock and Ramcke as examples of great commanders who had fought determinedly to hold out as long as possible at St Malo and Brest.

#### IV. Replacement Of Von Rundstedt (28 Jun 44)

45. Q: Why did Gen von Kluge replace Gen von Rundstedt as C-in-C West?

A: A second meeting took place between Hitler and the C-in-C West about 25-26 Jun 44 at Berchtesgaden. The first meeting had been about the middle of Jun 44 in the neighborhood of Soissons. Rundstedt was still commander at the time of this meeting and perhaps the impression he made (health, etc) on this occasion was the reason for his being replaced by von Kluge. Rommel also took part in this

conference as did (Ed: Genfldm) Sperrle (Cmdr, Third Air Force).

On 28 Jun 44, Gen von Kluge took over the command. One had the impression at headquarters that Rundstedt was tired and worn out, considering his age, and that a younger man perhaps would be better on the spot at that time. Rundstedt was not actually blamed for your successes.

46. Q: What was the difference in military philosophy between von Kluge and von Rundstedt?

A: Von Kluge's ideas were no different and represented no sharp break in philosophy. He had been in the East up to that time, and on his way back from the East he had been taken to Hitler's headquarters for a number of days. At a number of conferences there, von Kluge got the same ideas Hitler had been urging. This, then, was a continuity of command from von Rundstedt. However, as I shall tell you, von Kluge later fell into disfavor with Hitler during Aug 44.

#### V. Normandy Breakthrough And Mortain Counterattack

47. Q: Where did you expect, prior to 24 Jul 44, that our troops would break out of Normandy?

A: Despite the fact that we had the constant feeling that our left flank was weak, we expected your breakthrough on the eastern wing of the whole front, near Caen. We had observed a strong concentration of British troops and not such a big concentration in west Normandy. We recognized that the second most important point might lie south of the base of the Cotentin. I cannot

pin-point any more specific place where we expected the Cotentin attack.

48. Q: What interpretation was placed on the Allied bombing on 24 Jul 44 near St Lo?

A: I have no reaction to that question. Perhaps you can get an appraisal from the commanders in the field.

49. Q: When the breakthrough started, it was our intention to cut southwest to the coast and cut off your left flank facing our VIII Corps. There was a feeling around VIII Corps Headquarters that you had succeeded in breaking contact and extricating some troops from the trap. Do you know how many?

A: When the objective of your attack became apparent, as it did early in the operation, orders were given to our troops to withdraw along the flank facing your VIII Corps. How many of them succeeded in escaping from the pocket is not known to me. However, there is one significant fact: the 17 SS Pz Div (Ed: 17 SS Pz Gren Div), which was the only available Seventh Army reserve and which was supposed to be the backbone of our defense from Vire west to the sea, was virtually swallowed up in the breakthrough. Nobody ever knew or could figure out what happened to it, despite frantic inquiries. Naturally we were even more interested in this Division because the subject of the fighting qualities of an SS division was a "hot iron"--something you could not touch. Hitler was inclined to believe everything which was favorable about his SS troops. He never permitted any reproach against his "blackguards."

50. Q: After the breakthrough had started, in which direction did you feel it was heading, and what measures were taken in an attempt to block it?

A: When you approached Avranches, Gen von Kluge was given urgent orders to prevent any penetration into Avranches. Everybody saw that the whole front in Normandy was breaking up. Troops from Brittany were rushed in an effort to bar the way into Avranches. Considerable troops were lost trying to stop the way into Avranches. We felt that your primary objective was then going to be Brittany. We were fooled when you turned east toward Laval and Le Mans.

51. Q: What operational plan was instituted after the breakthrough?

A: We had no over-all operational plan in mind. Our sole aim was to keep down the breakthrough at any point as early as possible.

52. Q: What reserve defense lines were available to fall back on?

A: Up until this point, all commanders who mentioned the possibility of constructing a line along the Seine were laughed off. Now, on 31 Jul 44, when the penetration had already been made, we had no reserve lines in France at all. The only preparation that had been made was that a reconnaissance had been conducted some months before. OKW had reconnoitered the Seine as a possible defense line and concluded that it was unsatisfactory because of the many windings along the lower river. It had been further concluded that the

best line could be constructed along the Somme-Marne, southeast of Paris, and Saône Rivers. On one of the days between 25 and 31 Jul 44, Gen Kitzinger reported to Hitler to receive instructions in his role as Military Governor of Paris. The appointment of Gen Kitzinger marked the end of the conception of Paris as an administrative center alone, and the start of its role in the military sense. Gen Kitzinger was instructed that in addition to his duties as governor of Paris, he would be responsible for building up the defenses of the Somme-Marne-Saône Line with the assistance of Organization Todt.

53. Q: Did Hitler have any reaction to the breakthrough in Normandy?

A: Yes. In the Wehrmachtfuerungsstab (Ed: Armed Forces Operations Staff), we had always maintained that it was necessary to send someone to the front to see the army staff and get a better picture of what was going on. Finally, after the breakthrough, Hitler decided to send someone. However, Jodl then had to virtually extract instructions from Hitler for this mission. All he initially directed was to look and to report back and in general to see that everything was being done to restore our shattered front on our left wing. I was selected for the mission to go to Normandy and see Gen von Kluge. By this time, Rommel had had his serious accident.

54. Q: When was that accident?

A: It happened on 18 Jul 44, when his car was strafed and ran into a tree. The accident occurred close to Briouze, between Flers and Argentan. After the accident, von Kluge assumed the dual

role of C-in-C West and Rommel's former position as Commander of A Gp B.

55. Q: Did you receive any additional instructions from either Hitler or Jodl before you left for Normandy?

A: On the night of 31 Jul 44, the night before I left, Hitler called in Gen Jodl, myself, and one of the others of the staff and explained considerations as a whole concerning the campaign in the West. He now spoke more cheerfully about the possibilities of retreating into the interior of France, in contrast to what he had initially stated about the broadening of our lines as a result of such a withdrawal. He stated that there were certain advantages to falling back to the line in the interior of France, provided that all the services of the occupied territory of France could be put to the fullest use for duty with the combat troops. He then spoke in more general terms of the necessity of stabilizing the front in the East and in Italy, even if it were necessary to fall back behind the Apennines. Then he spoke of what a difficult decision it was to fall back from the coast, for the following reasons: (1) it would mean the abandonment of the submarine bases along the French coast, (2) certain minerals, such as wolfram, would be given up, and (3) communications with Spain and Portugal would be weakened. He commented that most of the divisions in the coastal area, or in any part of France, were difficult to move because of the shortage of motor vehicles and horses. He stressed again that the only way to move troops was to take the means of movement from the occupied country, a policy which, as you know, had been repeatedly applied on previous occasions. He

granted that the Luftwaffe was hardly strong enough to protect the movement of German divisions in France.

56. Q: Did Hitler give any instructions on the establishment of defense lines in interior France?

A: He was quite definite and emphatic on that subject. He gave strict orders to me not to speak a word to von Kluge about any movement backwards. "Look only to the West" was the constant theme of his discourse. Hitler further ordered that if von Kluge questioned me about these defense lines, I should reply that von Kluge should not worry himself about such details and that higher headquarters would take care of building up any necessary lines in the rear to which the army might have to fall. I might add that Hitler also instructed Armed Forces Operations Staff to set up a special sub-unit for the purpose of building up the defense of interior France. Of course, Jodl did not do that because we already had the means and the organization to do it. Before I left for Normandy, Hitler further warned that von Kluge not be told about the defense preparations in interior France. Hitler made the further comment on this subject, "whenever a line of defense is built back of the front line, my generals think of nothing but going back to that line."

57. Q: Did Gen Jodl give any further instructions before you left?

A: No.

58. Q: When did you leave and where did you go?

A: I left by plane on the afternoon of 1 Aug 44. To



illustrate the extent to which your air force had superiority, I was not allowed to take a plane beyond Strasbourg and had to proceed by car from there to Paris. After reporting briefly at St Germain, headquarters for C-in-C West, I proceeded to La Roche Guyon on the Seine, where von Kluge had his headquarters in his capacity as Commander of A Gp B. That is about an hour's drive from St Germain by car, and I arrived there just before midnight on 2 Aug 44.

59. Q: What were von Kluge's plans concerning the breakthrough?

A: He was, of course, greatly concerned with the situation at Avranches. He thought he might be able to keep the corridor to Avranches small and at the same time attempt to prevent further penetration into the Brittany Peninsula. My first day was spent at La Roche Guyon and then I went on to visit Gen Eberbach, in charge of Fifth Pz Army, which was still holding our intact right wing near Caen. I also talked with "Sepp" Dietrich in that area.

60. Q: What was the general feeling there?

A: All the commanders were discouraged by your overpowering air force. They said that whatever they planned was impossible to execute and control because your air force spotted and attacked every movement.

61. Q: What seemed to be Gen von Kluge's plan for checking the breakthrough?

A: Early on the morning of 4 Aug 44, I received a call to come to Gen von Kluge's headquarters. Von Kluge was quite

excited because he had just received an order from Hitler to concentrate all the armored divisions he could muster along any sector of the front, to assemble them somewhere east of Avranches, and to attack west and cut off the American forces which had in meantime penetrated at and east of Avranches. Von Kluge was further ordered to restore a defense line with our left wing close to Avranches.

62. Q: Did this order come from Berchtesgaden?

A: No. Because of the critical situation which was then developing in the East, Hitler had moved his headquarters on 14 Jul 44 from Berchtesgaden to Rastenburg in East Prussia.

63. Q: What was Gen von Kluge's reaction to the idea?

A: He had considered the possibility of making such an attack himself. It was a natural consideration. However, he felt he could not hold the line and at the same time launch the counter-attack. It was an easy thing to see on the map, looking at the small bottleneck through Avranches through which your forces had advanced. Hitler obviously made his decision from a map without taking into consideration the difficulties involved in the field of executing the decision. The idea itself was sound, but Hitler's insistence on supervising the smallest details of the counterattack caused it to turn into a disaster for us. (At this point, Gen Warlimont leaned back in his chair and mused to himself: "Again and again the same thing. Hitler grasps an operational idea without giving any consideration whatsoever to the necessary means, the necessary time and space, troops and supplies. Those are the fundamental elements of strategy

which are necessary for success, but Hitler rarely took them into consideration.")

64. Q: How did Gen von Kluge organize the counterattack?

A: Gen von Funck, Commander of XLVII Pz Corps, was initially placed in charge of organizing the counterattack. At the last minute, however, after he had familiarized himself with all the plans, knew the terrain, and was all set to attack on the morning of 7 Aug 44, von Funck was replaced by Gen Eberbach. This was done on direct order of Hitler to von Kluge.

65. Q: Why was von Funck replaced at the last moment?

A: It is a long story, but indicative of the way in which Hitler operated. After Graziani's severe defeat at Mersa Matruh at the end of 1940, it behooved the German army to bail out the Italians in Africa. Von Brauchitsch (Ed: Genfldm, former Commander-in-Chief of German Army) sent von Funck to Africa as the first German reconnoitering officer. When von Funck returned, he had to report to Hitler. Hitler then discovered that he had at one time been a personal staff officer of General von Fritsch, who was in disgrace with Hitler. Therefore, von Funck was replaced by Rommel, who became the hero of Africa. Likewise, when Hitler took a personal interest in the counter-attack toward Avranches, he discovered that von Funck was in command and ordered him replaced.

66. Q: What was Gen Eberbach's background?

A: Gen Eberbach had commanded Fifth Pz Army. He was originally on the staff of Gen Frhr von Geyr, Inspector of the

Armored Forces in the West. Geyr was made Commander of Panzergruppe West, but his staff was almost completely wiped out during the first days of the Invasion, somewhere around Caen. Geyr tried to persuade Rundstedt that it would be impossible to maintain the line for a longer time. Even as early as Jun 44, Geyr advised withdrawing to rear lines in France. Rundstedt, unfortunately, reported this opinion to headquarters. Geyr was relieved at once of his position and Gen Eberbach took his place. He was reputed to be a successful leader of armored troops. Shortly afterwards, this command, which was originally created to meet the Invasion, was made a regular command and received the name of Fifth Pz Army.

67. Q: What other considerations were involved in launching the counterattack?

A: Every individual commander involved in planning for the operation took a broad-minded view and pulled together for the success of the plan. First, Gen von Kluge telephoned Gen Eberbach, who was then holding the right flank near Caen, told him of the plan, and asked him what troops he could supply. Gen Eberbach said it would be possible to send down forces amounting to a division and a half. Von Kluge then pulled other forces out of the center sector which was under control of Seventh Army (Gen Hausser).

68. Q: What plans were discussed for the counterattack and why was the final plan chosen?

A: At noon on 4 Aug 44, a conference was held at the Seventh Army Headquarters of Gen Hausser. There I learned that two

main proposals were under discussion, one coming from Hitler himself and the other from Gen von Funck. The difference centered on where the assembly area was to be. Hitler's proposal (which was eventually adopted) was that the assembly area be in the vicinity of Sourdeval-Mortain for a thrust eastward. Von Funck argued for assembly in the vicinity of St Hilaire because of two factors: (1) it was felt that assembly in Sourdeval was dangerously close to the center of the front and might be broken up by air attack, and (2) in von Funck's opinion, we (Ed: you?) would be expecting an attack from the east and an attack from the southeast would achieve greater surprise. The main reason why the Sourdeval-Mortain area was picked was that time was precious and it would take longer to move the necessary divisions down to St Hilaire.

69. Q: Captured information seems to indicate that one plan considered called for an attack from the northeast. Why was this abandoned?

A: In none of the discussions in which I participated did I understand such a plan had been considered. The only suggestion I can offer is that someone felt such an attack could be carried out even quicker through an earlier arrival of divisions from the north.

70. Q: Was anything new added to reinforce the attack?

A: Hitler made the promise, which I relayed, that he would do his utmost to reinforce the Luftwaffe to support the Mortain counterattack. He authorized me to state that for the purposes of the counterattack he had decided to set aside his idea that the primary

use of the Luftwaffe should be in defense of the homeland. At that time it had been decided that instead of employing the Luftwaffe in dribblets, it would be held back until 1,000 pursuit planes could be utilized on a grand scale. Such a number was promised for the counter-attack.

71. Q: Did this make the assembled commanders feel any better in view of our recent demonstrations of air superiority?

A: No, it did not make them feel very much better because they had been deceived so many times in the past and they felt that they would probably be deceived again (as they were).

72. Q: Was there anything in the planning and execution of the counterattack which influenced its failure?

A: Von Kluge was very much concerned that he would come too late with the counterattack. He quickly recognized that your Third Army was turning eastward and heading toward his main supply base at Le Mans, thereby endangering the entire front in Northern France and not along the assembly area. So, he wanted to launch the counterattack as early as possible. On the afternoon of 5 Aug 44, von Kluge and I went to St Germain where we conferred with Gen Sperrle, Chief of the Luftwaffe in France; the Military Governor of Paris, Gen Kitzinger; and the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy. The purpose of the meeting was to talk over what support could be given to the counterattack which, in the opinion of all concerned, would decide the fate of the German Army in France. On 6 Aug 44, I was called to the telephone by Gen Jodl, and, from the conversation, it was apparent

that those in command back at headquarters did not fully appreciate the extent of the American breakthrough and did not exactly take a realistic view of the difficulties under which von Kluge was operating. I was ordered to say that Hitler believed that the counterattack would achieve more success if it waited until every plane and armored vehicle had been assembled. He said not to worry about the spread of the American penetration because that would mean we could slice off that much more. He directed that no effort be made to gain time by starting the counterattack before everything was in complete readiness.

73. Q: What was von Kluge's reaction to these orders?

A: Gen von Kluge maintained that it was impossible to wait any longer than 7 Aug 44 or he would be encircled by the American drive to the east.

74. Q: Do you feel that Hitler's interference caused the failure of the counterattack?

A: Kluge and all the other men I spoke to during those days were possessed by the feeling that everything depended on the success of this counterattack on Avranches. All the generals gave up troops for it with the conviction that it would decide the issue in Normandy and in the whole of France. It was a crushing blow to me when I came back to East Prussia on 8 Aug 44 to report my experiences to Hitler. Hitler listened to me for almost an hour and after I had tried to point out the striving by everybody to make it succeed, he only said, "He did that deliberately (meaning von Kluge). He did it to show me that my orders were incapable of being performed."

75. Q: Were any of the divisions employed in the Mortain counterattack below strength?

A: Hardly one of the panzer divisions employed was up to strength. For example, 2 Pz Div had only 12 to 15 armored cars (Ed: tanks?). The divisions had suffered many casualties and had had little opportunity to be reorganized.

76. Q: What was the German plan after the failure of the Mortain counterattack?

A: On 8 Aug 44, when I returned to headquarters in East Prussia, Gen Buhle had just been sent away to Kluge in order to find out whether he would be able to continue the counterattack after the first failure or what other plans he could suggest to restore the situation. His mission was similar to mine. He was to go and inform himself. This time, however, Buhle was sent by Hitler himself. I was angry because it would have been easier to telephone to me and instruct me (while I was still in Paris) to go there. Buhle left headquarters in East Prussia the same day as I left Paris to return. Buhle left on the evening of 7 Aug 44 when the failure of the attack had been recognized. He reached von Kluge on the morning of 8 Aug 44 and went from La Roche Guyon to Alencon where Kluge had his temporary headquarters for the counterattack. At the time of the attack, Kluge and Hausser were near Flers.

The idea of the new plan was to assemble, in the Foret<sup>d</sup> Andine<sup>2</sup> near Domfront, the remnants of the same forces which had failed in the drive towards Avranches. They were to strike from



there in a southeast direction, hit your columns which had broken through towards Le Mans, and cut their communications. The plan was never carried out. Kluge objected that it would take him a week to carry through such an assembling of troops in the <sup>a</sup>Andine. This contrasted with his impatience before. He made his objection probably on the day he received the order, 8 Aug 44. Of the divisions involved in the plan, I do not believe he ever succeeded in assembling more than a few small units to form an "Attack Group." Your drive through Le Mans to Alencon made it impossible to carry out the plan.

77. Q: Were there any other personal interferences by Hitler with the projected counterattack toward Le Mans?

A: Von Kluge wanted to stay in the region east of Domfront whereas Hitler, seeing once again his own point of view and not seeing the movements of the enemy, tried to have this assembly area much further southeast. Hitler was right in maintaining it would be good to extend our left wing as far south as possible to prevent your pressing our left wing into the main front.

When your drive turned north and reached Alencon, it became clear that our counterattack could not be carried out, but it also became clear that the danger for the whole front had become almost insurmountable. Hitler still clung to the idea of a counter-attack, telling his "advisers" that now that you had turned north, its success would be much greater, if only von Kluge would finally start it off.

Once Le Mans had been taken, von Kluge could not

carry out the operation. He had insufficient men and insufficient time to prepare a counterattack of these dimensions (importance).

Hitler still persisted in his idea of a counter-attack until the British at Caen met you coming from Alencon. Had it not been for this idea, the Commander-in-Chief could have done what one would expect and pull back his front in time thus avoiding the heavy losses we had afterwards.

78. Q: What steps were taken in the Loire region as our troops swung north toward Argentan?

A: The region north of the Loire was gradually evacuated, troops being withdrawn to the east as you advanced. Troops were kept on the south bank to protect the bridgeheads and river crossings and the main towns.

There had not been many troops north of the Loire, mostly administrative installations and very few combat troops.

All the troops in Brittany which had not been sent to Avranches were withdrawn into the ports.

79. Q: What instructions were given regarding the ports?

A: Before the Invasion, the idea had been to fortify the harbors completely. But the idea that they were to be held after the rest of the country had been evacuated only came up at the end when we had to retreat. At first, the order applied to Brittany only, but later included all the French ports.

80. Q: What about the Channel Islands?

A: Hitler thought it was the primary British aim to

recover the only British territory under German rule. He made a point of prestige to keep it. His second reason was that they were well suited from a military point of view to protect the west coast of Normandy against direct attack, but this was only secondary.

No forces were ever withdrawn from the Channel Islands to reinforce Normandy. Rundstedt suggested it several times, but it was declined emphatically by Hitler.

The Channel Islands were the first places to be really fortified with every means at our disposal.

81. Q: Were there any reinforcements brought up to check an anticipated westward drive after we reached Le Mans?

A: Fresh combat troops were brought up to hold up your drive east from Le Mans. Gen Kuntzen (LXXXI Corps) came with one or two divisions from Fifteenth Army. These were committed between Alencon and Le Mans, fronting west. Another was dispatched up from the south. So, the left wing was greatly extended to the south.

One division from the north and another from the Mediterranean had come up and they were lined up on a front facing west between the Sarthe River and the Loire. Kuntzen's forces were assembled so as to build up a thin line against your possible drive to the east.

82. Q: Precisely when did you become convinced that no further landing would take place?

A: The conviction that no further landing on the Channel was coming developed gradually as we saw that more and more divisions

were brought over by you to Normandy and the number of divisions remaining in England was no longer enough for an independent landing in another direction. This was realized prior to your penetration to Le Mans. It came in the course of Jul 44. We were able to identify (count) every division as soon as it came over (e.g. from prisoners). We had the impression that at first you might have had it in mind to start another operation, but, after finding so much resistance in Normandy (it took you almost two months to get through), perhaps you had changed your plans and had committed all your forces there.

83. Q: What kind of intelligence of our movements did you maintain in England?

A: Our intelligence had some bases in England, but to be entirely frank, I could not tell you what kind they were. During the first years of the war, Admiral Canaris was head of the intelligence. Early in 44, all intelligence services were turned over to Himmler, who was in charge. These men had no military education and were unable to evaluate the meaning or importance of military information that came in. Canaris was an officer of long standing and very well informed and knew the value of the information he got. The transfer of intelligence to the SS did us a lot of harm.

Himmler was on Canaris' trail for a long time and tried to prove some fault in him. In the summer of 43, Himmler charged him with financial irregularities, but Canaris was cleared by the end of 43. An intelligence agent in Turkey went over to the enemy and, on this pretext, Himmler replaced Canaris, who got another

job in OKW. On 20 Jul 44, Canaris was arrested and in Feb or Mar 45 was murdered by the SS.

VI. The Fall Of Paris And The Retreat Toward The German Border

84. Q: Did Paris ever play a key part in your general defense plan?

A: On 6 Aug 44, I had a discussion with Gen Kitzinger, the Military Governor of Paris. He had just arrived after reporting to Hitler who had given him general orders for the whole administration in France and a special mission beyond his general activities, namely, to build up the fortification line of the Somme-Marne-Saône.

On this day, Kitzinger had just concluded discussions with Organization Todt and other people for their employment in this task. It is clear that it was much too late to begin such an undertaking at all. Plans were made in a hurry between his report to Hitler several days before and 6 Aug 44 when I met him. Therefore, when your troops came to the Somme-Marne-Saône line in the second half of Aug 44, nothing had been done or could have been done by that date.

On this occasion, I learned from Kitzinger that a new Commandant of Paris, Gen von Choltitz, had been appointed. This had taken place during my absence from headquarters. The idea behind this appointment was to make Paris defensible against attack. Up to that time, the Commandant of Paris was more or less an administrative officer. Choltitz probably had not yet arrived, but took charge

possibly 7 or 8 Aug 44. Choltitz had more complete authority, much more than his predecessor. His main task was to prepare defenses for Paris by building field fortifications on the main routes into Paris from the west, and making preparations to blow up the Paris Seine bridges. He was ordered also to suppress the resistance movement of the Paris population with all the military force he could muster for the purpose.

Choltitz had ample authority over all army, navy, and air force personnel and installations (something never before attempted in Paris). The navy had had its high command in the Ministry of Marine on the Place de la Concorde, opposite the Hotel Crillon, ever since the occupation. It had headquarters personnel and communication units and there were always large numbers of navy men in Paris.

Thus Choltitz, as was so often the case, now got all the obligations but no forces with which to carry them out. Therefore, he was unable to defend Paris with any prospect of success.

85. Q: Was he given any authority to make a truce with the Resistance Movement or to surrender the City?

A: He was authorized to do neither.

86. Q: What was Hitler's object in holding on to Paris? Prestige value?

A: His object in holding on to Paris was not so much prestige as to prevent your getting the routes leading north from Paris and from a fear that you would push north before it was possible

to evacuate the coastline between the Seine and Somme. Thus, the retention of Paris was to some degree militarily justifiable.

Hitler believed your main effort would be directed against Paris and retaining Paris would in itself influence your drive along the whole Seine front.

Model (Ed: Successor to Gen von Kluge) believed it was impossible to defend Paris with the modest means and weak forces at his disposal. He proposed to build up a line of defense to the north and east of Paris to bar the main routes running out of Paris. He did not want, however, to remain in Paris itself because we had only a few old men from guard and occupation units who would be unable to resist an attack or even to suppress the revolution which was brewing in Paris at that period.

Hitler was obsessed with a single machine, a mortar mounted on a full track vehicle that had been made for the siege of Stalingrad, which he thought would help in the defense of Paris. Several times a day he asked what point this machine, which had been lost somewhere in Germany, had reached.

On 16 Aug 44, the high staffs which had been in Paris throughout the occupation were given permission from headquarters in East Prussia to leave Paris. There were recognizable signs of dissolution, especially as non-combat headquarters troops retreated back to the German frontier.

87. Q: After the encirclement of many of your troops and the closing of the gap between Falaise and Argentan, how many of them

were able to escape across the Seine?

A: After the closing of the Falaise Gap, the main point was that some of the troops which were coming in from Fifteenth Army over the Seine were retained on the east bank of the Seine to build up a rally line (aufnahmelinie) for the troops retreating from the west. I recall that every possible means was used to get the troops across the Seine, as all the bridges were destroyed. No particular point was used as a crossing more than any other.

I don't know how many men succeeded in crossing the Seine, but taking into account the magnitude of the disaster which had struck us, we were rather satisfied that so many had been able to cross. We had no doubt that only men had been saved and that the materiel had been left on the battlefield. There was a special order that where the Seine made a long peninsula with its base line on the west bank, the troops should defend the short base line and not withdraw to the long east bank (north of Elbeuf).

88. Q: What specific orders were issued?

A: The situation was very fluid and few orders were issued. Taken as a whole, Seventh Army and the Eberbach Group had the order to withdraw to the Seine, including Paris, using the small forces which came down from Fifteenth Army and those which retreated from Normandy.

On the middle Seine, Gen von der Chevallerie's First Army, from the Bay of Biscay, was taken back to a defense line on the Seine. He had one or one and one-half divisions between



La Rochelle and the Spanish frontier. His staff was moved back to build up this line. On his left wing was 15 Pz Div (Ed: 15 Pz Gren Div) from Italy. The first aim was to build up a line of resistance on the Seine southeast of Paris which was to be held only for a short time while units were regrouped and then fall back to the line of the Somme-Marne-Saône.

89. Q: What happened to von Kluge?

A: Von Kluge was relieved by Field Marshal Model, who was at that time in command of the East Prussia Group. Model went to La Roche Guyon about 12 Aug 44. Von Kluge flew to Metz and was dead when the plane arrived. (Ed: In a subsequent interview, Gen Warlimont amended this statement to the effect that Gen v. Kluge died in his car en route to an airfield near Metz and that poison was found on his corpse.) He left a letter to Hitler that he could not live any longer after losing Hitler's trust and he could not believe that Hitler would trust him any more in the future after the loss of the Battle of Normandy. I never saw this letter, but this is the information I extracted from Jodl.

90. Q: Looking at the entire picture, what chances do you figure you had to hold France?

A: It was clear that Hitler could not hold France. To meet your attack in Normandy, three or four divisions of the total of eight had been taken from the Mediterranean coast. Almost all armor, artillery, antiaircraft, etc, had been taken away to the Normandy front. This was done with a full realization of the impending attack

in the South of France. When this attack came on 15 Aug 44, we had no alternative but to retreat, especially when the first paratroop and airborne operations proved immediately successful.

This was the only occasion I can recall when Hitler did not hesitate too long before deciding to evacuate territory. He consented on 16 or 17 Aug 44 to withdraw from the south coast.

91. Q: What was the general plan utilized during the Aug 44 retreat?

A: Gen Blaskowitz, Commander in the South, was ordered to assemble around the Plateau de Langres the LXIV (Ed: Inf) Corps from the Bay of Biscay and Nineteenth Army from the Mediterranean, which consisted of three to four divisions (one had been sent to protect the Italian border). With these units he was to build up a left wing of a new front stretching from the mouth of the Somme, continuing along the right bank of the Marne, and reaching the Swiss frontier somewhere near Lake Geneva.

On 29 Aug 44, Gen Model was directed to withdraw from the Seine line to the Somme, hold the headquarters fortress north of Soissons, and assemble all the panzer divisions he could spare between the Seine and Marne, near the Chaumont-Troyes line, for a counterattack in a northwest direction. The right wing would retreat up the coast to the mouth of the Somme. The balance of Fifteenth Army not left to hold the fortress ports was to prepare a defense on the right, as was Seventh Army on the flank further southeast. Next to Seventh Army was to be First Army with a number of units from Germany.

The left wing was composed of Eberbach's panzer divisions and troops from Blaskowitz's forces in the south in addition to some other troops arriving from Germany.

All troops which were unable to continue fighting because of losses in personnel and materiel had to be withdrawn to the West Wall to rest there (erfrischen).

On 31 Aug 44, the word "West Wall" was used for the first time. This demonstrated that even in this situation no one had yet thought of going back and giving up all of France.

The Somme-Marne-Saône line was now out of the question. It seemed necessary now to prepare the West Wall for defense, too.

Up to this time, no preparations had been made for the use of the West Wall. I remember that we of OKW had to telephone the General of Fortifications, Gen Jacob, and ask him about the condition of the West Wall at the time. This may be explained by Hitler's attitude: never let anyone look behind him, but always ahead. To have mentioned the West Wall before this time would probably have cost you your head.

92. Q: Who finally did mention it?

A: I believe Jodl mentioned it finally. Jodl not only was able to do these things and had the courage to do it, but Hitler would permit him to get away with it.

93. Q: It has always puzzled me why the port installations at Antwerp were not destroyed the way they were at Cherbourg and Brest.

A: Antwerp had no defenses like Cherbourg. The fortifications were some distance away from Antwerp, being closer to the coast on Walcheren and the Lower Scheldt.

We did not expect your breakthrough to Antwerp as speedily as it happened. You had barely crossed the Somme when suddenly one or two of your armored divisions were at the gates of Antwerp.

We had nothing there but a few recruiting regiments. Even the plans and installations for destroying the harbor were not put into action. The organization might have been there and the material certainly was, as it was surveyed for. Although it was standard operational procedure with us to conduct such destruction, we had not expected any breakthrough so quickly. Therefore, nothing was ready. It was a bitter surprise to us when the news came early in Sep 44.

94. Q: When did you leave the Armed Forces Operations Staff?

A: When the explosion occurred on 20 Jul 44, I had no outward marks of injury, but soon began to notice I was losing my equilibrium. It was particularly noticeable during my flight to Normandy early in Aug 44. Because of the gravity of the military situation, I kept to my job against the doctor's advice. Finally, after I had keeled over and lost my sense of balance, Hitler, on the doctor's insistence, ordered me into retirement on 6 Sep 44.

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