

2 Aug 45

An INTERVIEW With
Gen Art Walter WARLIMONT



RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE
OF
EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HISTORICAL DIVISION
SPECIAL STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY
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Note to: ETHINT 3

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

As with the other oral interviews with General Warlimont, this oral interview was conducted entirely in English, which accounts for the fact that no record in German was available. As with the other oral interviews with General Warlimont, this does not represent a complete stenographic record of the questions and answers in the sequence. M/Sgt. Albert Kiralfy took stenographic notes of the more important points in this oral interview, as well as some direct quotes. Following the completion of the oral interview, we rolled together our notes, recollections, impressions, and conclusions, rearranged the data in a more logical and compact form, and used the end product as the report of the oral interview.

As with other oral interviews, General Warlimont protested that he was speaking from memory, without the assistance of any German maps, documents, or even an American OB book. Therefore, care should be exercised in using his statistics on number of divisions, his estimate of dates, and his naming of specific divisions. It is felt, however, that any inaccuracy in these figures or designations should not prejudice the reader in assessing the accuracy of his other remarks here or in other reports on General Warlimont.

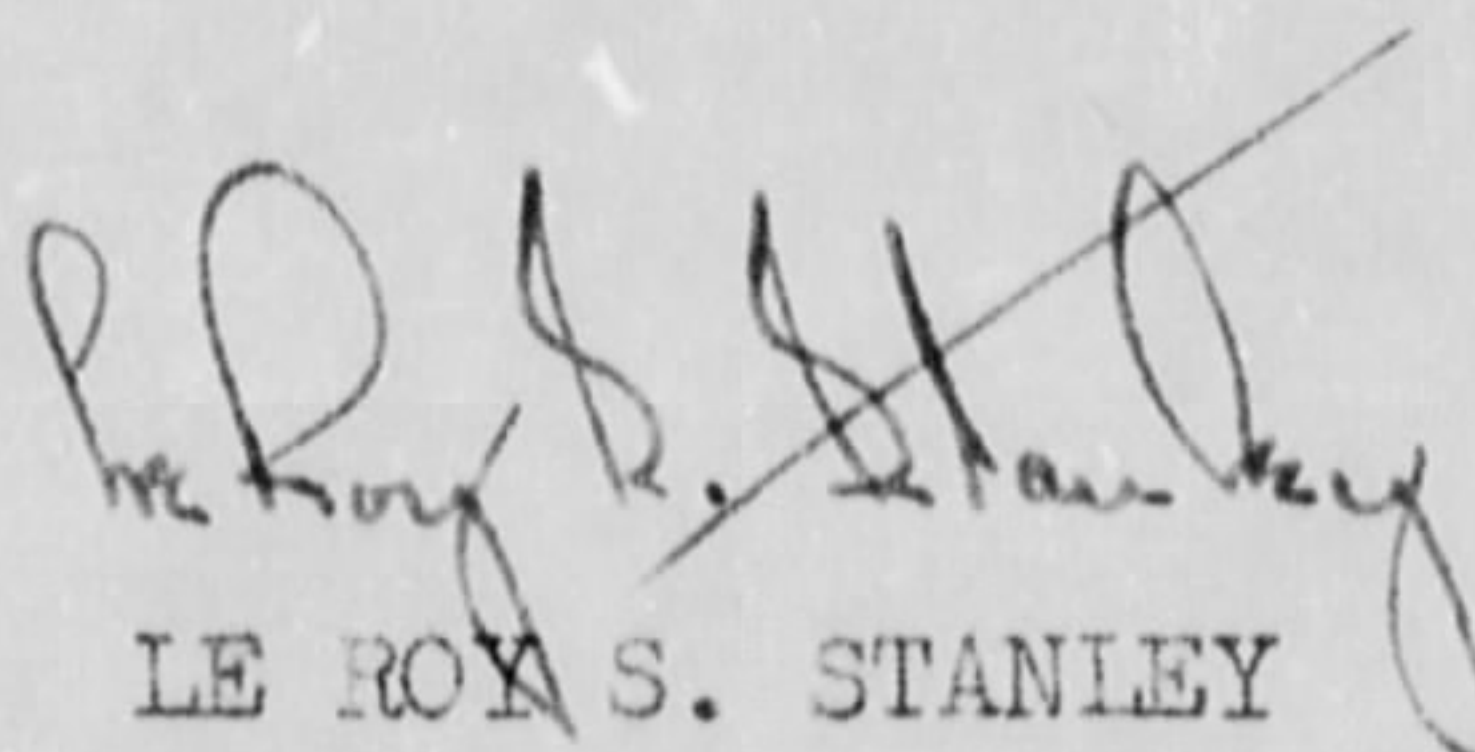
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Title : Reciprocal Influence of Eastern and Western Fronts
Source : Gen Art Warlimont, Walter
Position : Deputy Chief, Armed Forces Operations Staff
 (until 6 Sep 44, Deputy to Genobst Jodl -
 Chief, Wehrmachtsfuehrungsstab)
Date : 2 Aug 45
Place : Bad Mondorf, Luxembourg
Interviewer : Maj Kenneth W. Hechler

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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 quoted remarks and 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

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RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE OF
EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS

1. Q: Was there any competition between the officers in command of the Eastern and Western Fronts?

A: There was competition between Zeitzler, who controlled the Eastern Front, and Jodl, who controlled the Western Front. This competition arose not only because of the over-all shortage of reserves in the German Army, but also because of the peculiar command set-up after 1941. There was no single army man, except Hitler himself, who had over-all responsibility for both the Eastern and Western Fronts. The division of responsibility between Jodl and Zeitzler encouraged competition between them for troops and equipment.

2. Q: Upon what basis was the total number of divisions in the West allocated?

A: We had a general standard of 50 divisions in France toward the close of 1943. Eight to twelve more were added in the succeeding months in anticipation of landing operations.

In the fall of 1943, Hitler issued a Weisung (directive) to prepare comprehensive defenses against landing operations, which we felt would occur during the spring of 1944. It was indicated at this time that the earliest possible date for the Invasion would be 15 Feb 44.

3. Q: What made you think there was a possibility it would occur that early?

A: Political indications. The Russian press at that time was crying that the campaign in Italy hardly constituted a second front and, further, we figured that you would want to gain certain military advantages by invading before our defenses were completed.

The Hitler Weisung of the fall of 1943 also ordered that the divisions in France be equipped with stronger weapons. Each infantry division was assigned an assault artillery battalion, and old weapons were replaced with newer ones. Strict orders were given to make preparations in a more war-like fashion, to get the troops out of the "home atmosphere," and to improve communication facilities.

4. Q: Were defense preparations in the West handicapped by the situation in Russia?

A: A large number of divisions coming from the East were reformed, refitted, reinforced, and then sent to the Western Front. Movement from the Eastern Front was difficult, and refitting was delayed because of the high losses these divisions had suffered in the East.

It will clarify the situation to point out that the defenses in the West consisted of four distinct groups of divisions. These groups were:

(a) About 30 infantry divisions activated in France for the specific purpose of defending the French coast against

invasion. These divisions comprised about 50% of the total divisions in the West and were designed to stay in France after the Invasion;

(b) Divisions activated in France which could have been used in other theaters, but which were left in France because of the emergency there. For example, Pz Lehr Div, Hitler Jugend (Ed: 12 SS Pz) Div, and 17 SS Pz (Ed: Gren) Div were of this group;

(c) Divisions which originally had been in the East but had been withdrawn after they had been badly battered. They were reequipped and reinforced within Germany and then moved to the Western Front;

(d) Ersatz divisions, which were reserve or training divisions, such as the 158 and 159 Divs.

5. Q: Between the fall of 1943 and Jun 44, what changes were made in the proportionate percentages of these groups on the Western Front?

A: In the fall of 1943, group (a) constituted about 60% of the total and in Jun 44, constituted about 50%. The other three groups increased their percentages proportionately. Each of the other three groups constituted 15-20% of the total.

During the spring of 1944, the 9 and 10 (Ed: probably SS) Pz Divs, which had been activated in France, were shifted to Russia despite the impending danger in France. They were returned in Jun 44. Pz Lehr Div, trained specifically for operations in the West, was shifted to Hungary in Apr 44 against the advice of the western

commanders. It also returned later. The remnants of about five armored divisions, plus some infantry divisions and 2 FS Div, were shifted from East to West after having been refitted in Germany. In addition, Zeitzler demanded and received, in the spring of 1944, a large number of the younger troops from all divisions in the West.

6. Q: In view of your transportation problems, it seems rather senseless to keep shifting divisions back and forth between East and West.

A: This was done to meet special emergencies. When we needed a complete armored division in the East at once, we could not reactivate or reequip a division at that front since it would have required six weeks. Only a new, fresh division could meet the emergency. In addition, the movement from front to front provided rest and recreation for the troops.

Here, I should like to make a clear cut distinction between the situations in World War I and in this War. In the first War, it was possible to make a greater shifting of the center of gravity from West to East or vice versa. In this War, it is impossible to say which front in the over-all picture had immediate priority because forces were dispatched to those sections of the fronts where the danger was most imminent. The reason for this was both the lack of a top army man to plan in a long-range way the distribution of our forces, and also the shortage of reserves in 1944, which in itself prevented such long-range operational planning.

If Hitler was really convinced, as he frequently

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said, that the Invasion of Normandy was going to decide the whole issue of the war, then he should have given up some of his aims on the Eastern Front in order to gain a final decision on the Western Front.

7. Q: By "giving up his aims" do you mean retiring to the German border in the East?

A: I would mean retirement to the line of the Bug-San-Vistula Rivers, and retirement from the Baltic countries and Rumania. This would have left a line of demarcation against Russia, which we had after the Polish campaign.

8. Q: Was such a move seriously discussed in the German High Command?

A: Not in an organized fashion. In Sep 44, I gave an order on my own initiative to investigate the other theaters of war to determine whether it would be possible to relinquish several of our long-range objectives in order to reach a decisive victory on the others. Such an investigation never proceeded beyond the initial stages in lower portions of my staff. The reason for this was that such a retrenchment was directly opposed to Hitler's basic attitude and thus could never be carried through.

9. Q: What was the basis of Hitler's attitude toward retreat in Russia?

A: In regard to Russia, Hitler always took the stand on the principle of "everything or nothing." For this reason, he would never give in to the pleas of the army that propaganda as well as mil-

itary might was needed to conquer Russia. For example, Gen Wlassow, a Russian army commander taken prisoner in the Ukraine, offered to propagandize the Russian Army in favor of collaboration. Hitler became furious when he heard about this affair and refused to exploit it, whereas the army was very glad to have an offer of such a propagandist and wanted to put the idea to work immediately. Hitler also believed that to take such a man into the confidence of the Germans would diminish the hatred which he felt was necessary to maintain toward Russia. He never wanted to feel obligated in any way toward the Russian people, and refused any compromise.

Throughout the war with Russia, it was characteristic of Hitler never to decide upon retreat until the decision was thrust upon him and the German Army had lost the initiative. This happened repeatedly--in Crimea (which everyone foresaw except Hitler), the Kuban (Ed: region) (where the fight continued until the last man was thrown into the Black Sea), and in many other cases.

In summing up the influences of the Western Front on the Eastern Front, it must be borne in mind that 20 or 30 divisions from the West would not have been sufficient in themselves to swing the decision in the East; other considerations were involved, particularly Hitler's insistence upon everything or nothing. In addition, one must consider the influence of the fronts in Italy, Norway, and the Balkans.

10. Q: On the day of the Invasion, did Hitler ascribe any greater influence to the Western Front than he had theretofore held?

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A: On that particular day, the situation discussion was held in the Klessheim (an old castle of the Archbishop of Salzburg, where Hitler always went when foreign state guests were calling. The particular guest that day was the new Hungarian Prime Minister, Stojey.). Hitler came into the meeting with a very radiant face and said in a very strong Austrian dialect, "Anganga ist." ("It has finally begun." In correct German, this would be "Anfangen ist.") Hitler took the news of the Invasion very calmly and indicated that he had expected it for a long time. His whole attitude was that now the Invasion actually had begun, all measures were being taken to meet the crisis and the German troops would emerge victorious through counterattacks. He did not believe that it was possible to prevent the landings, but he did believe it was possible to throw the troops back into the sea within six or eight days.

11. Q: What was the background of the move of the 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs to Russia in Mar 44?

A: In Mar 44, the Russian attack had penetrated to Tarnopol (Ed: city) and Bucovina (Ed: region) in northeastern Rumania. Gen Hube's Army (Ed: First Pz Army) had been encircled at this time and Gen Jodl, on his own initiative, offered to shift these two divisions from the West to the East because he felt that the situation there was serious enough to warrant the transfer, and also because he was convinced that the Invasion of Normandy would not come until later in the spring.

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