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INTERVIEWS WITH GENERAL der ARTILLERIE, WALTER WARLIMONT, DEPUTY CHIEF of
WEHRMACHTFUHRUNGSTAB
(Second in command to General Jodl of Armed Forces Operations Staff up to
6 September 1944

Dates of interviews: 19 - 20 July 1945
Interviewer: Major Kenneth W. Hechler
Place of interview: COCEN # 32 ("Ashcan")
Circumstances: Gen. Warlimont received a brain concussion on 20 July 1944 which forced his retirement on 6 September 1944. He appears unusually well-informed on the war in the West up to this time. He has been most cooperative 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.

PART I. THE INVASION

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 1944 he ordered that anti-aircraft and anti-tank 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 both sides of Wales, consisting mainly of U.S. troops.

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

A. Up to May, 1944, 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 mainly built up in the zone of the 15th Army.

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.

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?

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A. We generals figured along the lines of our regular military education but Hitler figures as he always did, out of intuition. (1) We figured on the Channel zone because 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. (4) Your Air Force had better possibilities to support the attack closer to its bases.

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

A. Besides his observations from troops 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.

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

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 hinterland and tried to determine the place of landing by noting where most parachute baskets &c were dropped, but as time went on this became so widespread that it no longer gave us any help.

We also managed to get in to 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 used 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.

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

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and better communications and no one had thought of Normandy much before. The Norman fortifications were just the same as those of other parts of the French coast, with one big position every 10-30 km.

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. 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.

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

A. We should have built more standing fortifications ~~which were~~ built by the troops ~~and not~~ by the 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.

Q. What troops did you have available to repulse the invasion?

A. By about 2 May 1944 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 711th Division, a static division, and the 245th in front of Bayeux, to cover a coasting of at least 60 or even 80 km. The next one, which you hit very hard, was the 353rd around the mouth of the Dive. There was a special force in Cherbourg. (The 245th and 353rd were on the North coast of Normandy on D-day.)

We had three divisions on the North coast of Normandy, another one, (709th) around Cherbourg and the 243rd on the West coast of Normandy. On 2 May 1944 Hitler put in the reinforcements of anti-aircraft and anti-tank 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 he ordered the 2nd German Parachute Division, then on the Eastern Front, to be transferred to the West. One regiment of this division which was already in Germany when the order was given, the 6th Parachute Regiment, came at once to Normandy somewhere near St.Lo.

Hitler then ordered that the 91st Division, one of the very few reserve divisions we had in Germany as an operative reserve, 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 was sent in as we had no operative reserve to dispose of.

Rundstedt, as Oberkommando 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 and one division of the 15th Army, the Luftwaffe Felddivision (number not known) had even to be sent to Italy.

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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. Once you knew where the enemy was going to strike this was of course possible 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 his armored divisions, attached to him as Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in Western Europe (Netherlands HQ) in Army Group "B" extended right down to La Rochelle. Rommel had a reserve of armored divisions and, in accordance with his line of thinking, he now put in the 21st Armored Division somewhere near Caen, the 12th SS Armored Division around Falaise, the 2nd Armored Division around St. Lo (or a little East of it).

Rommel had one Armored Division left. He had two in Normandy, one quite close to the coast, two just 40 to 50 Km. behind it. He had one Division behind the 15th Army. This took place about the middle of May. Rommel took no infantry divisions from the 15th Army. Maybe this was due to uncertainty as to the division of the 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 the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. Two were in the neighborhood of Paris, the Panzer Lehr Division and the 2nd SS Panzer Division.

Q. Did you expect us to land only where there were ports and harbors, or did you know about our artificial ports? Why did not you 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 the places where you landed more effectively the answer is that our Air Force was unable to break through your defenses in order to find and hit the targets at all.

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

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 June. Our chief intelligence source was the radio, and our intercepts revealed that the invasion would take place on the morning of 6 June. This information was relayed to headquarters on the afternoon of 5 June. Hitler knew it, and General Jodl knew it, but the information was not made available to the troops in Normandy.

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Q. Was this considered a great mistake by Hitler?

A. In Hitler's eyes, General Jodl, unlike other men, did not make military mistakes. General 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.

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 was rather difficult also; it was difficult to keep boats in the open sea when the British Navy dominated that area.

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 1 P.M. 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. We cannot win a static war in the West for the additional reason that each step backward means a broadening of the front lines across more of France. 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."

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

A. Rommel was not there.

Q. Why not?

A. I should prefer not to mention this, but he had gone to der 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, General Dohmann, Commanding

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General of the Seventh Army, was serving in Rommel's place.

PART II. THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY

Q. What was the initial plan which the Germans applied after the invasion struck?

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 the 15th Army sector, significant of the "half-measures" which were taken on 6 June 1944 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 armored 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 the 15th 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 Loire were destroyed. Thus it took much more time than we had ever expected to get these divisions to the battle zone.

Even the armored 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 armored divisions against your main beachhead could not be carried out.

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.

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

A. Rundstedt, when asked for the disposition of Oberkommandowehrmacht reserves, reported on 6 June that the first armored division would reach the coast on the same night of 6 June 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 armored divisions were

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supposed to strike in a general north west direction from Caen and to wipe out one beach-head 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 counter attack with these divisions as we had planned. We had all we could do to contain you on the beach-head and keep a connected line of defense.

On 7 June I left Headquarters on a trip to General 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 7th to 12th of June. During that time, probably on 8 June it had been decided to transfer two armored divisions, the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions 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 June I was informed that there was no talk of counter attacks any more. We had had heavy losses bringing the armored divisions up to the line and we were occupied maintaining the line we had then reached.

Q. After you returned from Italy 12 June, what was the general plan for containing the beach-head?

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 armored 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 4 or maybe 6 armored 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 a 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 a small bridge-head 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, 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 armored divisions to carry through this attack. The infantry divisions did not arrive soon enough. The armored 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 armored divisions had had such losses that their strength was no longer equal to the task given them.

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

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way Cherbourg would be safe and an attack from the beach-head prevented. Suddenly you broke through and established a line from the East to the West of the peninsula.

Q. After the stabilization of the front along the beach-head and the fall of Cherbourg, what was the German plan of defense in July?

A. First I might mention one of Hitler's main ideas brought forward at the meeting which he held with Commander in Chief West and his top commanders at Barchtesgaden on 25th to 26th June 1944. At this time Hitler advanced the suggestion for better protection against your air force raids on the battle front. He emphasized that in order to protect the main routes, anti-aircraft weapons should not be dispersed all over the zone but concentrated along the main roads and at key points.

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, 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.

Q. Did you still have hopes of containing the beach-head during early July?

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 swingen), so as to contain you where you were.

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, shifts were made, but the total number of troops was not increased. We tried again and again to get the armored divisions out of the defense line in order to carry through counter attacks at least of a local character.

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

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Q. Did the situation appear any brighter for you at any time during early July?

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 the armored divisions did also. The situation on the eastern front did not allow enough infantry divisions to be withdrawn; railway transport was bad; bridges were destroyed; it was hardly possible for me to move from place to place in a car by daytime.

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

A. The 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions, due to move to the western front when the invasion struck, did not arrive, because of transportation difficulties, until 20 June.

Q. Were there any other difficulties which you experienced, which prevented strengthening of the beach-head line?

A. When we started to move divisions from the 15th 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.

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

A. We were never fully satisfied during July 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 necessitate less troops. Even with this, we were always jittery about our line west of St. Lo.

PART III CHERBOURG

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

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A. Now a big mistake was 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 was 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.

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 June 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 American Army advancing on Cherbourg and relieve Cherbourg".

The Commander-in-Chief, 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. Hitler 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 these opinions. He went on with his orders but in the meantime Cherbourg was captured and the plan fell to pieces again. The plan had been Hitler's own.

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. Now we had only about 20,000 men on a front of 20 to 40 Km. and this force had to meet the attack of an entire American Army. This was due to (a) the necessity of defending a place on an extended line, a long land front, and (b) 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 should soon have run short of supplies there. Certain calibers of ammunition were also out of stock and short.

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.

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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, just a few positions on a line of almost 40 Km. The defenses were originally constructed on the assumption of an attack from the sea.

Q. Toward the end of June, 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. 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.

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, so that we never thought that Cherbourg would be taken by you as quickly as it was.

Q. Do you believe that General 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 General von Schlieben and his higher officers appreciated the importance of Cherbourg. Here is the reason I am convinced: in March or April of 1944, Hitler called a meeting of the commanders of all the big ports, at Berchtesgaden. The purpose of this meeting was to look over each of these commanders to judge ~~their~~ 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 Toulons, Marseilles, Sets, Gironde, St. Nazaire, Lorient, Brest, St. Malo, the Channel Islands, Cherbourg, Le Havre, Boulogne, Calais, Dunkerque, Antwerp, and the port for Amsterdam.

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.

Q. Which commanders were changed at the meeting?

A. I cannot be exact on that detail. But to illustrate the way in which der Fuehrer chose his commanders, let me point out the way General Ramcke was selected

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to command Brest. When he brought his 2nd Parachute Division into Brest, Hitler shortly heard about the fact that General Ramcke was there. He knew General 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 subordinated to General Ramcke as second in command.

Q. Did that raise any embarrassments in rank?

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

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 General von Schlieben had put up a very determined defense of the port. Many times thereafter he held up General 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 as St. Malo and Brest.

PART IV REPLACEMENT OF VON RUNDSTEDT (28 June 1944)

Q. Why did General von Kluge replace General von Rundstedt as Commander in Chief West?

A. A second meeting took place between Hitler and the Commander in Chief of the West about the 25th to 26th June at Berchtesgaden. The first meeting had been about the middle of June in the neighborhood of Soissons. Rundstedt was still commander at the time of this meeting and perhaps the impression he made (health &c) on this occasion was the reason for his being replaced by von Kluge. Rommel also took part in this conference; Sperrl was there (Commander in Chief of 3rd Air Force Fleet).

On 28 June Field Marshal 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 would perhaps be better on the spot at that time. Rundstedt was not actually blamed for your successes.

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 and 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 August.

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PART V. NORMANDY BREAKTHROUGH and MORTAIN COUNTERATTACK

Q. Where did you expect, prior to 24 July, 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 break-through 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.

Q. What interpretation was placed on the Allied bombing on 24 July near St. Lo?

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

Q. When the break-through 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 17th SS Panzer Division, 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".

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, General 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, and we were fooled when you turned east toward Laval and Le Mans.

Q. What operational plan was instituted after the breakthrough?

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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.

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 July, when the penetration had already taken place, we had no reserve lines in France at all. The only preparation that had been made was that a reconnaissance was conducted some months before; the Oberkommando Wehr 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 Saone Rivers. On one of the days between 25 and 31 July, General Kitzinger reported to Hitler to receive instructions in his role as military governor of Paris. The appointment of General Kitzinger marked the end of the conception of Paris as an administrative center alone, and the start of its role in the military sense. In addition to governing Paris General Kitzinger was instructed that in addition to his duties as governor of Paris he would be responsible for building up the defenses with the assistance of Organization Todt of the Somme-Marne-Saone Line.

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

A. Yes. In the Wehrmachtsfuehrungstab 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 all was being done to reconstitute our shattered front on our left wing. I was selected for the mission to go to Normandy and see General von Kluge. By this time, Rommel had had his serious accident.

Q. When was that accident?

A. It happened on 18 July 1944, when his car was strafed and ran into a tree. The accident occurred close to Briouze, between Fiers and Argentan. After the accident, von Kluge assumed the dual role of Commander in Chief West and Rommel's former position in command of Army Group "B".

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

A. On the night of 31 July, the night before I left, Hitler called in General 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 interior 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

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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 make 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; (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 cars 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.

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 back. I might add that Hitler also instructed the 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 nothing but of going back to that line".

Q. Did General Jodl give any further instructions before you left?

A. No.

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

A. I left by plane on the afternoon of 1 August. 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 Commander in Chief West, I proceeded to La Roche Guyon on the Seine, where von Kluge had his headquarters in his capacity as commander of Army Group "B". That is about an hour's drive from St. Germain by car, and I arrived there just before midnight on 2 August.

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

A. He was of course greatly concerned with the situation at Avranches. He

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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 General Eberbach in charge of the 5th Panzer Army, which was still holding our intact right wing near Caen. I also talked with Sepp Dietrich in that area.

Q. What was the general feeling there?

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

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

A. Early on the morning of 4 August, I received a call to come to General von Kluge's headquarters. General 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 reconstitute a defense line with our left wing close to Avranches.

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 July from Berchtesgaden to Rastenburg in East Prussia.

Q. What was General von Kluge's reaction to the idea?

A. He had considered the possibility of making such an attack himself; it was a natural consideration. But he felt he could not hold the line and at the same time launch the counterattack. It was an easy thing to see on the map, looking at the small bottleneck through Avranches through which your forces had advanced. Hitler made his decision obviously 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, General 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.")

Q. How did General von Kluge organize the counterattack?

A. General von Funck, Commander of the XLVII Panzer Corps, was initially placed in charge of organizing the counterattack. At the last minute, however, after von Funck had familiarized himself with all the plans, knew the terrain, and was all set to attack on the morning of 7 August, von Funck was replaced by

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General Eberbach. This was done on direct order of Hitler to von Kluge.

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 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 counterattack toward Avranches he discovered that von Funck was in command and ordered him replaced.

Q. What was General Eberbach's background?

A. General Eberbach had commanded the 5th Panzer Army. He was originally on the staff of General Freiherr von Geyer, Inspector of the Armored Forces in the West. Geyer was made Commander in Chief of the Panzergruppe West. Geyer's staff was almost completely wiped out during the first days of the invasion, somewhere around Caen. Geyer tried to persuade Rundstedt (Commander in Chief West) that it would be impossible to maintain the line for a long time. Already in June Geyer advised withdrawing to rear lines in France. Rundstedt unfortunately reported this opinion to Headquarters. Geyer was at once relieved of his position and General Eberbach took his place. He was reputed to be a successful leader of Armored troops. Shortly afterwards this command, originally created to meet the invasion, was made a regular command and received the name of the 5th Panzer (Armored) Army.

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 General von Kluge telephoned General Eberbach, who was then holding the right flank near Caen, told him of the plan and asked him what troops he could supply. General 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 the Seventh Army (General Hausser).

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

A. At noon of 4 August, a conference was held at the Seventh Army Headquarters of General Hausser. There I learned that two main proposals were under discussion, one coming from Hitler himself and the other from General 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 directly eastward. Von Funck argued for assembly in the vicinity of St. Hilaire because of two factors: (1) it was felt that

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assembly in Sourdeval was dangerously close to the center of the front, and might be broken up by air attack; (2) in von Funck's opinion, we 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.

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.

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 dribbles it would be held back until 1,000 pursuit planes could be utilized on a grand scale. Such a number was promised for the counterattack.

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).

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 August, von Kluge and I went to St. Germain, where we conferred with Field Marshal Sperrler, Chief of the Luftwaffe in France, the Commander in Chief of the Navy, and the military governor of Paris, General Kitzinger. 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 August, I was called to the telephone by General Jodl, and 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 directed that the counterattack would achieve more success if it waited until

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every plane and armored car had been assembled; he said not to worry about the spread of the American penetration, because that would mean that 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.

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

A. General von Kluge maintained that it was impossible to wait any longer than 7 August or he would be encircled by the American drive to the East.

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 August 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."

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

A. Hardly one of the armored divisions employed was up to strength. For example, the 2nd Panzer Division had only 12 to 15 armored cars. The divisions had suffered many casualties and had had little opportunity to be reorganized.

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

A. On 8 August when I returned to headquarters in East Prussia, General 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, but this time 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 go back. Buhle left on the evening of 7 August when the failure of the attack had been recognized. He reached von Kluge on the morning of the 8th, 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 the remnants of the same forces which had failed in the drive towards Avranches in the Foret Andine near Domfront and strike from here in a southeast direction to 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 Andine. This contrasted with his impatience before.

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He made his objection probably on the day he received the order, 8 August. I do not believe he ever succeeded in assembling more than a few small units of the divisions involved in the plan to form an "Attack group". Your drive through Le Mans to Alençon made it impossible to carry out the plan.

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 only and not seeing the movements of the enemy, tried to have this assembly area much farther Southeast. Hitler was right in maintaining it would be good to extend our left wing as far South as possible to prevent you pressing our left wing into the main front.

When your drive turned North and reached Alençon 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 counterattack, telling his "advisers" that now that you had turned North its success would be much greater, if only von Kluge would finally start if 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 counter attack of these dimensions (importance).

Hitler still persisted in his idea of a counterattack until the British at Caen met you coming from Alençon. 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.

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.

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 then to all the French ports.

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

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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.

Q. Were any reinforcements brought up to check an anticipated eastward drive after we reached Le Mans?

A. Fresh combat troops were brought up to hold up your drive East from Le Mans. General Kuntzen (81st Corps) came with one or two divisions from the 15th Army which were committed between Alençon and Le Mans, fronting West. Another was dispatched up from the South. So the left wing was greatly extended to the South.

One division ~~came~~ 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.

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 July. 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 changed your plans and committed all your forces there.

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

A. Our intelligence service 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 Kanaris was head of the Intelligence. Early in 1944 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. Kanaris 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 Kanaris' trail for a long time and tried to prove some fault in him. In the summer of 1943 Himmler charged him with financial irregularities, but Kanaris was cleared by the end of 1943. An intelligence agent in Turkey went over to the enemy and on this pretext Himmler replaced Kanaris, who got another job in the Oberkommandowehr. On 20 July 1944 Kanaris was arrested and in February or March 1945 was murdered by the SS.

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PART VI. THE FALL of PARIS and the RETREAT TOWARD THE GERMAN BORDER

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

A. On 6 August I had a discussion with General Kitzinger, the Military Governor of Paris. He had just arrived, after reporting to Hitler and receiving 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-Saone.

On this day Kitzinger had just concluded discussions with the 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 August when I met him. So, when your troops came to the Somme-Marne-Saone line in the second half of August 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 had been appointed, General von Choltitz. 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 August. 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, preparing to blow up the Paris Seine bridges. He was also ordered 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 installations and personnel of army, navy and air force (never before attempted in Paris). The navy had its High Command in the Ministry of Marine on the Place de la Concorde, opposite the Hotel Crillon, ever since the beginning. It had Headquarters personnel, 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.

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.

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 you getting the routes leading North from Paris and from a fear that you would push

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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 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 but did not want to remain in Paris itself as we had very few and 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, and thought it would help in the defense of Paris. Several times a day he asked what point this machine, which had been lost somewhere in Germany, reached.

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

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 the 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 the material 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).

Q. What specific orders were issued?

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

On the middle Seine the First Army, from the Bay of Biscay, under General von der Chavallerie 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 the 15th Armored Division 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 the fall back to the line of the Somme-Marne-Seone.

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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 August. Von Kluge flew to Metz and was dead when the plane arrived. 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 losing of the Battle of Normandy. I never saw this letter but this is the information I extracted from Jodl.

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, 3 or 4 divisions of the total of 8 had been taken from the Mediterranean Coast. Almost all armor, artillery, anti-aircraft, 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 August, 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 August to withdraw from the South Coast.

Q. What was the general plan utilized during the August retreat?

A. General Blaskowitz, Commander in the South, was ordered to assemble the Nineteenth Army from the Mediterranean, consisting of 3 to 4 divisions. (One had been sent to protect the Italian border), and the LXIV Corps from the Bay of Biscay, around the Plateau de Langres, 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 August General Model was directed to withdraw from the Seine line to the Somme, hold the Headquarters fortress North of Soissons and to assemble all the armored 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 the Fifteenth Army not left to hold the fortress ports were to prepare a defense on the right, next the Seventh Army further Southeast, then the First Army with a number of units ~~from~~ from Germany. The left wing was composed of Eberbach's armored divisions and troops from Blaskowitz's forces in the South, and some other troops arriving from Germany.

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

On 31 August the word "West Wall" was used for the first time. This demonstrated that even in this situation nobody had thought thus far of going back and giving up all of France.

The Somme-Marne-Saone line was now out of the question. It now seemed

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necessary 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 the Oberkommando Wehr had to ring up the General of Fortifications, General Jakob, and ask him about the condition of the West Wall at the time. This may be explained by Hitler's attitude: never to let anyone look behind him but always ahead. To have mentioned the West Wall before this time would probably have cost you your head.

Q. Who finally did mention it?

A. I believe Jodl mentioned it finally. Jodl was able to do these things and had the courage to do it, and Hitler would permit him to get away with it.

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 way away from Antwerp, 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 and suddenly one or two of your armored divisions were at the gates of Antwerp.

We had nothing but a few recruiting regiments. Even the installations for destroying the harbor were not put into action. The organization might have been there, and the material was certainly there as it was surveyed for, and it was standard operational procedure with us to conduct such destruction. But we had not expected any breakthrough so quickly and nothing was ready. Every port has to be destroyed if in danger of capture. When the news came early in September it was a bitter surprise.

Q. Why did you leave the Armed Forces Operations Staff?

A. When the explosion occurred on 20 July 1944, 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 August. 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 sense of balance, Hitler on the doctor's insistence ordered me into retirement on 6 September 1944.

END

SECRET