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GENERAL WALTER WARLIMONT
on
THE INITIAL ATTEMPTS OF A MILITARY COOPERATION
BETWEEN GERMANY AND FRANCE (1940/41)

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12/9/45GENERAL WALTER WARLIMONTon
THE INITIAL ATTEMPTS OF A MILITARY COOPERATION
BETWEEN GERMANY AND FRANCE (1940/41)I. SOURCE

Name : WARLIMONT, Walter
Rank : General der Artillerie
Interned : 23 May 45, GMUND am TEGERNSEE
Interrogated : 14 Jul 45, "ASHCAN"

II. PREAMBLE

In the course of recent interrogations General WARLIMONT revealed that he had attended several conferences of military character following the defeat of FRANCE. WARLIMONT made the statement that Marshal PETAIN had really NOT collaborated with GERMANY. WARLIMONT was asked to prepare a paper outlining his knowledge of German-French relations after 1940.

The following report was written in English by WARLIMONT and should prove of general interest in view of the present trial of Marshal PETAIN.

For additional information on source, see Report CCPWE # 32/DI-18, dated 29 Jun 45.

III. WARLIMONT's EXPOSEA. Introduction

This survey only covers the "official" collaboration which resulted from the agreements made during the military discussions in PARIS and was determined by the two governments.

Besides these main topics of cooperation, there was gradually developing a "semi-official" collaboration, carried out under the supervision of the Armistice-Commission or the local military authorities. It consisted mainly

a) of facilities which the French Navy placed at the disposal of the German Navy in the harbor and coastal service.

b) of agreements concerning the production and mutual exploitation of the French Airforce-industry.

A complete summary of these activities can best be given by the former Armistice Commission.

B. The Armistice and the Meeting at MONTAIGNE

As main principles of the armistice between GERMANY and FRANCE in June 40, I would consider the German intention to insure safety against further French attacks without inflicting any humiliation upon the French nation. This

principle was upheld even in the midst of the setting at COMPIEGNE which was to make amends for the events of Nov. 1918, at the same spot, but left all the military honors to the French representatives headed by General HUNTZIGER.

To sum up the main consequences of this principle, it may be emphasized that more than half of the French territory in Europe was to remain unoccupied under an independent French Government, - that the French Navy was to disarm and be confined to certain bases, but otherwise left unmolested, - while the French Army and Airforce were to be reduced to a limited strength for a transitory period. No recriminations or accusations were brought forward by the German authorities, as far as I know, leaving the French completely free to draw any consequences they deemed necessary.

The fact that the French colonies were still less affected by the treaty, was of particular importance, as the Italian claims on Tunisia were impending, if not already made. German and Italian control-commissions with the mission to watch over the stipulations of the armistice outside of European France, were posted only in the Mediterranean French territories.

In the meeting at MONTAIGNE in Sept. 40, in which I did not take part, HITLER - as I heard later on - was primarily interested to find out whether the French Government would be willing to consent eventually to a transfer of Tunisia to Italy, as against the prospect of obtaining certain advantages to France in the further political European development. The meeting is said to have taken place under the auspices of a chivalrous courtesy - a quality in which HITLER excelled, when he was willing to do so - to all appearances destined to win prospective French sympathies. As is known, the Marshal remained deaf to HITLER's soundings with the result that, whatever may have definitely been planned, eventually had to be dropped.

If any items of a military kind did come up during the conversations, which was not attended on either side by military representatives, they probably have not surpassed the stage of intimations or hints of a possible collaboration. Any proposals, if such were made at all, most probably came from LAVAUL. For in all the later development - as may be said in advance - it was the political rather than the military leadership of the French Government which was the driving force for a military cooperation with GERMANY; hoping apparently to get rewarded later by political advantages from a German Government morally indebted to France.

On the other hand, the German policy consisted, apart from general distrust, in rather evading political consequences, and therefore followed French military propositions only reluctantly. However, the German military leadership, not knowing the political situation thoroughly nor ^{the} ostensive unwillingness of the French military circles, including Marshal PETAIN, to cooperate, felt strongly in favor of gaining an ally who, in spite of his poor showing during the campaign just finished, seemed in the long run, more promising than all the other ones together.

These fundamental diversions between the aims of the military and political circles on both sides continued as characteristic marks throughout the attempts of a Franco-German collaboration and seemed to me to fore-shadow an eventual failure. It was only an exception of the rule in the first stages after MONTAIGNE, ^{that} a German politician - ABETZ - and a French general - HUNTZIGER - spun the thread, - ABETZ acting this way out of his personal political conviction, - HUNTZIGER, in his position then held at WIESBADEN, very probably on political orders only.

In this connection the incident of MERS-el-KEBIR (July 40) may be remembered which, however, in spite of all its seriousness, did not visibly change the French military attitude.

C. Preliminary Conversations in Paris (Nov/Dec. 40)

I hardly knew anything of the diplomatic discussions which had preceded, when during the second half of Nov 40, I was ordered to represent the OKW in military conversations with the French. The meeting was to be held at Paris apparently, and was arranged by ABETZ and LAVAL in their mutual endeavors to come to an agreement with GERMANY. My instruction read, not to bind myself but rather to confine myself to a receptive attitude. In addition, the fact that I was designated as German representative could not be interpreted but as significant of an only slight German interest in the matter. (General HUNTZIGER later on, referring to this nomination, drew a comparison to another historic meeting of a German General, bearing a French name, with a French General, bearing a German name: VERDY du VERNOIS and WIMPFEN at SEDAN in 1870).

The atmosphere I encountered in the German Embassy in PARIS, was that of a semi-official affair. ABETZ had invited the French to dinner which was to be followed by rather informal conversations. On the French side were present: LAVAL, General HUNTZIGER, in the meantime nominated French Minister of War, Admiral DARLAN and a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Airforce (former attache in BERLIN, whose name I do not recall), while I was accompanied only by the Chief of Staff of the German Military Governor in France, Colonel SPEIDEL.

ABETZ passed the word to General HUNTZIGER who explained at length the unfavorable situation in the French territories in Africa, which resulted mainly from the DE GAULLE - movement. He dwelt especially upon the TSCHAD-Lake-District, the focal point of French military and commercial communications in Central - Africa, which had been invaded by military forces hostile to the VICHY - Government. This region, he demonstrated, also was of vital importance to the Axis-powers as it offered the best bases in view of the sea-air-and land-route then under construction by the allies, and running from the mouth of the CONGO to the upper NILE-zone, - a route which, in his opinion, would eventually have a strong influence upon the East-Mediterranean situation. Therefore, the French Government's viewpoint considered it of equal interest to French and Germans alike to regain control of that area, as speedily as possible.

Military forces at the disposal of the French command in West Africa not being sufficient for this task, HUNTZIGER asked for German consent to effect a shipment of native troops and of Airforce units from Southern France and French North Africa to DAKAR. He, furthermore, asked for German support in building up some 5 to 9 special French battalions for this purpose. He also suggested that several thousands of white and colored French soldiers, incl. officers and especially NCO's, accustomed to the climate of these zones, be released from German prison camps. Modern weapons of various kinds as well as motorized vehicles and gasoline were especially needed and should be taken partly from French stocks under German supervision, partly be furnished by the German Army.

In the ensuing discussions, DARLAN pointed out that, in such a case, the defense installations of DAKAR would be increasingly exposed to a British attack by sea from FREETOWN. He demanded accordingly some reinforcements for DAKAR. The question whether DAKAR could not better be defended by a preventive French land attack on FREETOWN, thus eliminating at the same time an important British Naval-base, required, it was said, a thorough study. Later on, this consideration was confirmed.

Many other questions regarding details of strength and disposition of the French forces in North and West Africa, were brought up during the discussion and were answered likewise at the next meeting in December.

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Finally, in compliance with plans put forward by General HUNTZIGER already when at WIESBADEN, a project concerning SYRIA was taken into consideration which aimed at disturbing or destroying the British pipeline running from Iraq to HAIFA, by means of sabotage or air-attack.

LAVAL, who at several times during the conversation had succeeded in eliminating deadlocks, added some requests of minor importance only with regard to conditions in France under the German military occupation, as for instance postal traffic across the line of demarcation.

When I returned to BERLIN, HITLER did not pay much attention to my report. He only consented to a detailed examination of the French suggestions by the OKW, all final decisions to be postponed until after such scrutinizing.

When on about 10 Dec. 1940, once more upon French invitation, the second conference took place in PARIS, almost under the same circumstances as the first one, the French furnished all the data which had been asked for, while I had been authorized only to hold out a prospect of yielding to some minor demands. My general impression at this occasion, however, was that a foundation for mutual confidence had been reached, and that a military collaboration on broader lines could be gradually envisaged. As a particularly striking incident, I remember the enthusiastic interest taken by Admiral DARLAN in supposed German preparations for an impending attack on Gibraltar by way of SPAIN.

However, before the plans of a German-French military collaboration could gain any further information, the sudden fall of LAVAL on December 13 put an end to this promising development. This dismissal of the "man of German confidence" was taken very seriously by HITLER, - the more so, since one of those days the ceremony of transporting the bones of the Duke of REICHSTADT from VIENNA to the DOME DES INVALIDES was to take place. This had been intended as a further gesture of goodwill towards FRANCE, but now - as matters had developed - lost all its planned significance.

D. The "PARIS PROTOCOL" of May 1941

It took almost half a year before the military conversations could be continued. After the campaign in the Balkans and in Greece which had once more demonstrated the German military power, DARLAN, in May 41, presented himself as Prime Minister at the BERGHOF, accompanied by BENOIST-MECHIN. While most probably the discussions with HITLER centered only on political objects, I, apparently on the urging of the French as well as of ABETZ, was sent another time to Paris to continue the military conversations broken up in Dec. 1940.

Yet, when I asked for instructions they scarcely were given to me. It was to be expected that the French would renew their former demands for the release of several thousands of prisoners and for the delivery of some stocked French material of ancient type, since these concessions, had been carried out only to a small degree. Striving at expanding the military collaboration further, I had to make it an affair of my own to gather the combined wishes of the three component forces with regard to a further German-French cooperation on broader lines. For that very reason, I asked that the 1st Naval officer of the staff (Capt. JUNGE) should accompany me and, in addition, had a Gen. Staff officer of the German armistice commission detailed to me. Besides, I had made up my mind this time not to leave Paris before having accomplished a fixed agreement.

According to this plan, the discussions, taking place once more in the German Embassy, took a more official form. The French delegation, headed by DARLAN, was composed of HUNTZIGER, BENOIST-MECHIN and the Minister of Colonies, Admiral PLATON who were accompanied by several other officers with colonial experience.

During the sessions lasting about 10 days, the following points were established in a protocol ("PARISER PROTOKOLL") and mutually agreed upon:

1) SYRIA

It was conceded to the French to transfer to SYRIA from the homeland men and material of the Army and Airforce in an unlimited strength. In addition, arrangements were made to give German aid, if necessary, as far as railway transports and harbor facilities were concerned, in order to secure these reinforcements for SYRIA against an impending British attack. Direct German aid in the form of German Air Force units was NOT asked for.

2) BIZERTE and FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

At German request, the French agreed upon opening the harbor of BIZERTE for German and Italian supplies to the Axis armies in the CYRENAICA, strictly excluding any troop shipments. In this way it was hoped to avoid further heavy losses, both of tonnage and goods, brought about continually by the shipping of war material to TRIPOLIS.

As a counter concession the French renewed and enlarged their own demands for personnel and material reinforcements in North Africa by pointing out the hostile reactions which were to be expected on account of the shipping of Axis supplies to BIZERTE.

While the French thus apparently took in consideration the defense of North Africa by French troops which was in agreement with German-Italian interests, they were once more asked to relieve General WEYGAND as C-i-C of that area because of the German distrust for him. (This demand was finally agreed upon, but not mentioned in the protocol).

3) DAKAR

As an entirely new topic of the discussions, DAKAR, at the request of the German Navy, was to be considered as a German Submarine and Air Force base. The French opposition against this demand was strong but was finally overcome. Proper preparations were, however, to be made and, as was pointed out, could not be finished before the fall of 1941. Any German aid thereto was declined by the French and it was not deemed practicable, even by the German Foreign Office, to send a German Control Commission or at least a civilian Consulate to DAKAR, taking due regard of the critical attitude of the U.S.A.

The discussions of French plans to regain the TSCHAD-Lake-District and considerations how best to protect the zone of DAKAR against FREETOWN were continued and limited German aid agreed upon as compensating French concessions at DAKAR.

Looking back at the general French attitude during the conference, it may be stated that DARLAN and especially BENOIST-MECHIN appeared as the broad-minded politicians who, as LAVAL did before, succeeded at several times in overcoming difficult situations, usually created by the anxiety and professional correctness of HUNTZIGER and PLATON. HUNTZIGER, in the course of these slight interferences, once underlined the psychological difficulty of the arrangements when he pointed to the attitude of the average French officer who, in his opinion could but gradually be won for a military cooperation with the former enemy. VICHY, under the influence of the Military Cabinet, certainly stuck to a similar point of view, giving only little, if any support to its Prime Minister who, in addition to that - as he complained to me personally - was severely hampered by the official German policy in Paris.

If this general attitude seemed to confirm once more the characteristic elements of the Franco-German military discussions, mentioned in

the beginning, there was another proof thereof given by the political agreement which, after all, was determined to go with the Protocol as a general cover and a mutually acknowledged special provision to para (3), referring to DAKAR. In this short note which caused much difficulty and time in drafting, the French were assured once more, but in general terms only, that the military agreements formed but a part of an ample general understanding which was to be developed in due time.

After my return, the Protocol was generally approved of at BERCHTESGADEN, though it was emphasized that the French concessions regarding BIZERTE and DAKAR were rather highly paid for by the German compensations. My own stand point that the reinforcements for French North Africa were by no means sufficient to prevent an attack on one or the other point of the long stretched coast, found just as little consideration as another, that no ample and honest French cooperation could be seriously expected as long as many hundreds of thousands French soldiers were kept back in German prison camps. The German Foreign Minister appeared the least interested, and tried, for instance, to persuade HITLER, but in vain, to adopt his entirely unreasonable opinion that "General ROMMEL with his armored divisions will accomplish all that (BIZERTE - defense of French North Africa - DAKAR) much better for you than the French".

The Italians, up to that time, had been kept out of the Franco-German discussions though HITLER's consideration for the Italians had been another obstacle in the way of German concessions to the French in the Western Mediterranean zone. Now, the Italians were informed of the Protocol and gave their subsequent consent, however not without asking rather pointedly to have a part in any further conferences of that kind.

E. Collaboration at Work in Syria and North Africa

Hardly two weeks after my return from PARIS, the British attack on Syria was initiated and put the collaboration to the test.

French troops, to the astonishment of the German people, were carried by rail through Southern Germany to SALONIKA while French ships lying there, were ready for their transport to Syrian harbors and French destroyers were to await the transports somewhere off the Dodecanese. The common endeavors, however, did not meet with success. As far as I remember, the destroyers were not able to break through the British blockade off the Syrian coast, so that shipping of troops proved impossible. The troops had to return to France, with the exception perhaps of a few specialists for whose transport French or German aircraft from Greek bases had been made available.

The same airports served as intermediate bases for units of the French Airforce going to Syria.

While the British invaders could be held in check for awhile by the French in Southern Syria further endeavors were made by the German side to support the French and thus to prevent the British troops to penetrate farther. That, however, was not the result of a sudden zeal of collaborating but of the direct German interest in keeping the British away from the Southern border of TURKEY and in securing the land connection with IRAQ. Apart from that, any general strengthening of the British position in the Eastern Mediterranean, resulting from the occupation of Syria was to be avoided.

Notwithstanding the consent of VICHY, it took some time, until General DENTZ in SYRIA could be won over to accept even active German support, offered by the German special Envoy (RAHN) in unison with the German control commission, and to let the German Airforce participate in battle against the British fleet off the Syrian coast and against the landing attacks. By this attitude, DENTZ and

the majority of his officers corps, at first, confirmed the remark made by General HUNTZIGER a few weeks before at PARIS, regarding the willingness of the French soldier to partake in active collaboration.

While this attitude, in the course of events, changed rather quickly in favor of German aid, it became apparent very soon that the conditions, under which the German Airforce had to fight in SYRIA, were rather unfavorable. Since no sensible preparations could have been made and only a few small Airforce units were available, a real relief of the French situation could hardly be reached even temporarily. When TURKEY refused the supply of gasoline and the revolt in IRAQ broke down, the collaboration at the East end of the Mediterranean theatre found its early end.

Still, the consequences went further and affected also the situation at BIZERTE and in North Africa. Once the French had experienced that German military power, far from the homeland, was more limited than in Central Europe, they became increasingly cautious in exposing themselves to new dangers. Thus while the losses of tonnage and freight on the way from Italian harbors to TRIPOLI and the supply problem in the CYRENAICA became more and more disquieting, the French tried by every means to evade their obligation resulting from para (2) of the Protocol.

At first, they pointed to the political cover note which had not yet been followed up by any signs of a modified German attitude in the general political situation between the two countries. When finally yielding to the German argument that the political agreement did only apply to the military stipulations regarding DAKAR, not BIZERTE, and that the German concessions for the reinforcement of French North Africa were in full swing, technical difficulties of an ever increasing size came to the foreground. They concerned the question whether French or German tonnage should be used, the Italian tonnage being excluded from the beginning, - whether ships for BIZERTE should be loaded in French or Italian harbors, - how the control of unloading at BIZERTE should be executed etc.

In the end, as a matter of fact, no ship for the German Army in Africa has ever been unloaded at BIZERTE Harbor, that is before, Nov 42, when the situation changed completely. Instead of that, the French in the fall of 1941, offered to put stocks of war material, motor trucks, gasoline and agricultural products which were at hand in North Africa at the disposal of the Germans. This method was adopted and carried out on the spot by German military commissions, which bought the goods and had them transported directly to ROMMEL.

As mentioned above, troops and war-material had been shipped in the meantime according to agreements made in order to guarantee a better protection of French North Africa. But in addition to their remaining utterly insufficient, the French willingness to defend these territories, if attacked, was very questionable. The French also informed us from time to time that they did not consider our "concessions" what they ought to be, since, in their opinion, it was as much in the German interest as in their own to get the indispensable means for the defense of the North African coast. Further French demands in this direction were impending.

Among the reinforcements arriving in North Africa from Europe, the French, in accordance with agreements made, were shipping other troops, mostly Senegalese from there to French West Africa, thus preparing their plans regarding the TSCHAD-Lake-District as well as reinforcing the zone of DAKAR. The intended military compensations in favor of German submarine and air bases in French West Africa, however, have never been carried out. HITLER did not uphold his claims on this point, since apart from the political provisions, never seriously considered, he had every desire to avoid any action which might cause the U.S.A. to enter the war.

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F. Last Attempts and the End

The execution of the "Protocol" thus left both sides unsatisfied while the entry of the U.S.A. in the war in Dec. 41 created a new situation, also with regard to the German-French relations.

At this moment it was ABETZ again who forced an issue when he arranged a visit of General JUIN to BERLIN. JUIN, who at the request of Marshal PETAIN, had been released several months before from a German prison camp, had succeeded WEYGAND as C-in-C in North Africa. JUIN was received by GOERING, whom I informed about the situation by a few remarks, while JUIN already was waiting in the antechamber.

This time, military discussions were restricted to North Africa only, but without getting any better results. On account of the strained situation in Russia, Germany neither was willing nor able to place any more essential military means at the disposal of the French, while the French on their side had nothing to offer but their questionable willingness to defend the North African coast. Besides, the assumption that they would fight still depended on the Germans complying with their political aims, but these continued to be without any better prospect.

This conference between GOERING and JUIN was the last one in the sequence of military discussions with the French, I know of.

I am convinced, however, that the German Ambassador in PARIS, ABETZ, has never ceased to pursue his political aims. Later on, I occasionally heard from him for instance that a "preliminary peace" with FRANCE - as he called it - could still lead to a French declaration of war against England, though certainly not against the U.S.A. Without trying to evaluate whether this pretext was justified or could be made practicable at all during that rather late stage of the war, I just wanted to mention it, because it probably was the cause of the widespread belief in the German Army, that PETAIN once had offered a French military alliance to Germany which had been rejected.

The Anglo-American landing operation in French North Africa on 8 Nov 1942 put the German-French military collaboration to its final test. One month before, in a strategical survey, I had pointed out that such an action was very probably to be expected within the next period of time and that the French defense should be much more reinforced to be able to withstand it with eventual success.

The course of events which followed the landing is known. Since all the endeavors from both the German and the French side, to improvise a common defense of Tunisia, under the new situation and thus to make up for former omissions, remained unsuccessful, the German-French military collaboration had come to its definite end.

31 Jul 1945.

For the A.C. of S. G-2, USFET,

Ivo V. Giannini
IVO V. GIANNINI,
Major, Infantry

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