

WAR

DEPT HIST. COM. (Major Heckler)
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INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL der ARTILLERIE, WALTER WARLIMONT, DEPUTY CHIEF of
WEHRMACHTSFUEHRUNGSTAB
(Second in command to General Jodl of Armed Forces Operations Staff up to
6 September 1944)

Dates of Interview: 28 July 1945
Interviewer : Major Kenneth W. Heckler
Place of Interview: CCFWE # 32 ("Ashcan")

PART I. FRENCH RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Q. In what different ways did the French Resistance Movement attempt to help the American forces prior to the invasion?

A. As you know, the French Resistance Movement received many radio sets by parachute from your planes. We captured many of these sets, gained knowledge of the special code words which you used to communicate with the French Resistance Forces, and tried to maintain communication with those and of the other people who were sending messages to the Resistance.

Q. Of what value was this information which you intercepted?

A. We got a hint of your intentions, and the various steps of your build-up prior to the invasion, but never quite knew the reliability of this information.

Q. In what other ways did the French Resistance Movement manifest itself?

A. First we had the definite impression that there were a number of unreliable French workmen in the Organization Todt, it was constructing the defenses along the coast line. We knew from captured British maps that you had fairly accurate knowledge of many of these fortifications which could only have been supplied by a person very familiar with them. Therefore, we felt that someone in the Organization Todt must have supplied this information.

Q. In what way did the French Resistance Movement intercept the German troops in France prior to the invasion?

A. Both before and after the invasion, sabotage of locomotives, traffic, streams, and canals, etc., were flaring up in all parts of the country. During the last months before the invasion all of this grew much stronger.

Q. Where was the greatest damage?

A. It was done mostly in the zone of Belgium and northern France. Secondly, in the zone of the Rhone Valley. Still another field of activity of the Resistance Movement was designed to keep German troop concentrations in certain localities. For example, by small raids, barring important crossroads, and catching small groups of soldiers by surprise the French Resistance forced us to concentrate a greater number of troops than we ordinarily would have had to maintain in certain localities. The main regions of this activity were in the southeastern part of France, south of Grenoble, in the Area of the Sea Alps, Auvergne, the district of Limouge and Toulouse. After the invasion the Resistance Movement developed much more strongly in the Brittany Peninsula.

Q. What actual effect did this have in interfering with the German defense plans?

A. I do not believe that the French Resistance Movement was strong enough to modify any defense plans except in local situations. The only actual effect was to force us to send two or three more divisions of troops to France.

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Q. Were any unusual measures used to suppress the Resistance Movement?

A. Aside from the usual measures of hunting down and executing the leaders, we achieved considerably success by listening to your broadcasts and ascertaining when you would drop supplies by parachute. In this way we took many stores of weapons which you tried to drop to the Resistance. We always expected the French Labor Service of being behind a great deal of the Resistance in France. This was an idealistic organization with a nationalistic dream, with an avowed purpose of ~~driving~~ the youth off the ~~front~~. However, when we recognized its danger to the German occupation we ordered that it be dissolved in the fall of 1943.

Q. Did Hitler have any particular policy to the French Resistance Movement?

A. No, he merely tried to get rid of them by dispatching more troops to France.

Q. Did you say that the Resistance got stronger after the invasion?

A. Naturally it came more out in the open. During the second half of June the 11th Panzer Division was ordered from Avignon to march to the Bordeaux-Toulouse area and to attack the Marquis in the valley of Dordogne on route. About the same time parts of other divisions were used to fight against a flare-up of the Resistance Movement in the Limousin region. It cannot be said however, that this handicapped our plans very seriously because we actually used troops which were in southern France.

PART II. GERMAN AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1939 - 1941

Q. What was the German estimate of American war potential prior to the declaration of war against the United States?

A. This did not loom very large in Hitler's mind. Initially he thought very little of the United States capabilities. Later, after the Russian situation became more serious, he was preoccupied with that. Furthermore it was always impossible to bring forward to Hitler unfavorable news regarding his enemies. After war with Russia started, that was his entire interest for at least a year. He did not want to see or talk about any information regarding America's growing strength. He regarded anybody who tried to show him such information as a defeatist.

While General Doettlicher was military attaché in Washington he assembled reports of America's great potential almost every week until December. I remember in particular that he reported in 1941 that your airplane production was taking on immense proportions and indicated that the airplane output in 1942 and 1943 would come up to figures hardly conceivable and far beyond a measure we could reckon with. We had similar reports regarding your shipbuilding and also less detailed reports in the training of your army. The reports on the army merely indicated that the increase on the size of your army was proceeding very rapidly.

Q. Was it believed, then, that you could conclude your campaign in Europe before the United States could interfere?

A. That was the universal opinion. Particularly, we were in a hurry to get rid of the war in Russia and then deal with our other enemies. Hitler must have believed that this was possible because all operations were based on such a course.

Q. It has always puzzled me why Germany declared war first on the United States on December 8, 1941?

A. In the fall of 1941, after German successes at Bryansk and Viasma, all of the propaganda was directed to trying to get Japan to enter the war against Russia, and basically the decision to declare war on the United States was made in order to please Japan.

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Q. Did you hope Japan would open a second front directly against Russia, or to have Japan proceed with her aims towards the Dutch East Indies and Singapore, and thereby embarrass England and the United States?

A. I believe that the Japanese army and navy were a little divided in opinion on that score. The army was more interested in China and the area to the south, whereas the navy's primary interest was occupied with Russia's ^{Vladivostok}.

Q. Did you have a definite agreement with Japan, or how did you discover these things?

A. There was very little direct conversation between the German and Japanese Governments. Many things were "sounded out" with Oshima, the Japanese ambassador in Berlin and from him we gained our information. Hitler never inclined to talk any more directly with the Japanese because he did not consider it good to interfere in their sphere.

Q. That is wholly incomprehensible. Your interest was a global one, and ^{didn't} you have a direct interest in what Japan's intentions were?

A. The question came up many times during 1941, and the army general staff practically urged Der Fuehrer to approach the Japanese directly and get them definitely lined up against the Russians. He still felt that we should not take a direct step with the Japanese and they should know themselves what was best for them. Nevertheless, our official propaganda was ~~obviously~~ beamed in an effort to influence the Japanese that the time was ripe for her to gain her targets in the far east. This background is necessary to appreciate why Germany declared war on the United States - in order to make a bid for Japanese friendship.

Q. Nevertheless, it was an unnecessary declaration, and a very foolish thing from your propaganda point of view?

A. Looking back on it there was an element of impracticability about it. But Hitler was carried away emotionally by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I remember that he passed Champagne around to everyone and took several drinks himself the day the news reached him of the attack. (NOTE by KWH: General Oberst Alfred Jodl related this same story that Hitler drank champagne, when General Jodl was interviewed on 28 July 1945). That was a very unusual thing for Hitler to do since he hardly drank a drop himself and it was indicative of his emotional excitement with the attack.

Q. Was there any treaty obligation to Japan which justified Germany to declare war on the United States?

A. The only treaty extended provided for our entry in case Japan was attacked. However, Hitler interpreted this treaty in a rare, ~~romantic~~ way, leading us into the same foolishness which had impelled the Kaiser to support the Austrians in 1914. What did a treaty mean anyhow, even if ~~it~~ were stipulated in the treaty that we should support Japan as an aggressor, ^{since} it is always possible to "explain a treaty when the time comes to act." Many times prior to 1941 Hitler proclaimed, "I will never be as foolish as the old Kaiser and declare war on anybody." However his declaration of war on the United States was due to these causes: (1) Fidelity to his part of the treaty with Japan, (2) His ~~romantic~~ feeling of wanting to support a soldier-like nation such as Japan was, (3) The continued hostile attitude ~~against~~ of the United States.

Q. How did the hostile attitude of the United States affect Hitler's final decision?

A. There his answer is somewhat psychological. As the hostility of the United States increased, Hitler resolved to make no overt act against the United States. This resolution on Hitler's part caused him to suffer many annoyances and much abuse in patience after each statement and each act - from the Lend Lease Act to "shoot on sight" words of President Roosevelt. ~~consequently~~, Hitler's anger mounted within him. Having suppressed this anger for many months it was released with a ~~massive~~ blast on 8 ~~day~~ December 1941. This was definitely a contributory cause.

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I might parenthetically add that this actual declaration is even less understandable from a logical viewpoint when you consider the following: For some months after war started in 1939 there was no state of war officially admitted anywhere in the German Government in order to carry out certain provisions regarding the movement of troops, payment of soldier's salaries, and the paper work in connection with military operations, a special expression had to be invented and applied to replace what was actually a state of war - "Besondere-Einsatz." It was a long time before this expression was abandoned and it was finally officially admitted that Germany was in a state of war.

Q. It seems peculiar that Germany should try and adhere to legal forms in one way, and still denounce them emphatically in another way?

A. That is an interesting problem and perhaps General Reinecke, who dealt more directly with these matters can give you more information on the difficulty involved in ~~simulating~~ ^{SIMULATING} that we were not at war when we actually were.

Q. Do you believe that Hitler might have been influenced by the feeling that we would bring the entire weight of our campaign against Japan rather than against Europe?

A. This might have influenced his decision, however, we soon concluded that you were going to concentrate your forces in Europe.

Q. What led you to this conclusion?

A. I was called to the telephone by General Jodl, and asked to assemble the facts for a quick decision on where you would concentrate your main power, the Far East or Germany, ~~which~~ I concluded that you would concentrate on Europe because the British already had most of ~~the~~ ^{the} forces entangled in this sphere and ~~the~~ ^{the} seemed to be the ~~center~~ ^{center} of gravity. Furthermore, you had already put your forces in Iceland, thereby indicating that you were very much interested in the European zone. Very shortly thereafter open declarations by both Britain and the United States confirmed our opinions.

Q. How long did you estimate it would take the United States to bring its military machine to a point where it could assert a definite influence?

A. Just about a year. We figured that you could prepare more quickly than in 1917, particularly in the industrial field.

Q. After the outlook began to be a little ~~poor~~ ^{poor} in Russia, did Hitler switch his intentions ~~more~~ ^{more} to the West in 1942?

A. By September 1942, after the failure of the campaign in the Caucasus, Hitler should have realized that he could not accomplish his mission in Russia. However he did not realize or would not admit this fact, and continued his preoccupation with destroying Russia.

PART III. DIEPPE

Q. Did Dieppe or the Commando raids on the coast interest him at all?

A. Not very greatly. From captured British orders we learned that the Dieppe raid was an attack with limited objectives. We observed that several transports remained in the channel without landing their troops because the first troops to land had failed to reach their objectives.

Q. Did you change your defenses any as a result of the Dieppe raid?

A. We were of the opinion that our defenses at Dieppe worked out very well, that the reserves (part of an armored division) came up to the coast very quickly according to plan, and that communications worked very well. Notwithstanding our

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success in repelling the raid several consequences resulted from Dieppe: (1) We instituted a better means of reconnoitering the sea lanes by the navy. (2) We strengthened our field fortifications which were found to be insufficiently strong to stand the heavy fire of British man-of-war and replaced them by thicker concrete buildings. It was determined to strengthen the fortifications along the whole coast line. (3) Despite the success of communications, a new complete network of signal communications was devised as a result of Dieppe.

In the late summer of 1942, Hitler became afraid that similar raids on the French coast perhaps with broader objectives, could be repeated. Over the objections of his military advisers, who ~~thought~~ it was unnecessary, two panzer divisions were transferred from the zone of the Caucasus to France in August and September, 1942. We felt that these divisions were needed more in Russia at that time.

To answer your question about the Commando Raids, Hitler was much more bothered personally by these raids than with anything else. He regarded it as a question of prestige to wipe them out ~~out~~ completely. He did not want his troops to lose their self confidence.

Q. Were any special measures ordered by Hitler to suppress these raids?

A. Illustrating Hitler's desire to direct small details he went over the entire list of coastal areas where we had troops and weapons and decided in each case whether we had enough hand grenades, pistols, and machine-guns, and ordered specific increases of these weapons in these cases.

Q. Was anything done locally in order to protect against Commando raids?

A. There was an increased amount of reconnaissance instruction ⁱⁿ and methods of dealing with individual attackers, and that was the time dogs were greatly in vogue to accompany the sentries on their night patrols.

PART IV. SITZKRIEG, 1939 - 1940

Q. What was the reason for the German war of nerves on the Maginot Line, and why was the attack on the Western Front delayed until late spring of 1940?

A. It was not originally intended to be a "war of nerves", but propaganda simply termed it that. The reason for it was that we could not begin operations in the West any earlier, primarily because of weather. To appreciate this, one has to go back to the events of the autumn of 1939. During the last 3rd of ¹⁹³⁹, when Hitler returned from his advance headquarters at Zoppot, near Danzig, one day Field Marshal Keitel came into the headquarters and informed me that Hitler considered attacking France. Keitel was quite excited with the news. It was a tremendous surprise inasmuch as scarcely a month before Hitler stated that neither France nor England would fulfil ~~their~~ obligations to Poland and therefore, they would have no war with France or England. It was amazing news because France and its military power was at that time considered an insurmountable obstacle in the west. Our ideas of France's military power were based upon actual factors of military strength: the number of tanks, artillery, trained reserves, fortifications, and airforce.

Q. Upon what did you base your estimate of France's strength?

A. Most of us in the general staff regarded the French and German as the best soldiers in the world.

When Hitler returned to Berlin in the last days of September, he announced a meeting in the Reich Chancellery. Before an open fire, holding ^{3 or 4} slips of paper upon which he had written certain catch words, Hitler announced that within 6 weeks he would invade France. Everybody counted to himself and figured that the 12th of November would be the date when 6 weeks had elapsed and the attack on France ~~would~~ ^{WOULD START}. After his announcement, Hitler dramatically tore his slips into scraps and threw them into the fire.

Q. Who else was present at the meeting?

A. Goering, Raeder, Brauchitsch, and their chiefs of staff.

Q. Was there any opposition followed to Hitler's declaration?

A. Nobody spoke or showed any sign of opposition before we left the Reich Chancellory.

Q. Was there any indication of an attack on Norway at that time?

A. Hitler gave no word of Norway.

Q. Was there any indication of the route to be taken or the point of attack?

A. As a whole, the attack was to go through Belgium and the southeastern part of the Netherlands - in other words along the lines of the Schlieffen plan. During the next few weeks most of the army was transferred from the east to the west and placed in position for launching the attack.

On 5 November, I was again at a meeting at the Reich Chancellory, representing General Jodl. It was a Sunday. Brauchitsch came in from his own headquarters outside of Berlin and went in to speak to Hitler personally. He spoke with Hitler for 25 minutes. After a short while Keitel was called. Then Keitel came back and told me what had happened. 2-

Brauchitsch had reported to Hitler with a written statement. This statement was made up from his judgement of the situation, along with the opinions of his subordinate commanders in the west whom he had seen shortly before. He told Hitler that Germany would not be able to launch an attack on France. Hitler interrupted Brauchitsch and prevented him from continuing his report when Brauchitsch came to a point in which he voiced the opinion that German infantry in Poland had not shown the same spirit of attack as had been shown during the last war. This annoyed Hitler to no end.

Q. Why?

A. Hitler regarded it as an offense against the youth of Germany, whom he had taken pains to prepare to be war-minded to a much greater extent than the German youth had ever been prepared before him.

It so happened that the 5th of November was to have been the day when a definite decision had ~~to be~~ announced on whether 12 November would be "X Day" (the day for the attack on France). However, Brauchitsch's statement created such a furor that everyone started to leave the Reich Chancellory before a decision had been reached. He had to ask Keitel whether a decision had been reached regarding "X Day." Keitel had forgot^t it and he had to return to Hitler and get a confirmation that the attack really would begin on 12 November.

Two days later the order had been rescinded because of bad weather. From then until May 1940 there was no good weather sufficiently good enough to launch an attack.

The subsequent ^{events} ~~events~~, developments and changes in plan, constituted the most fascinating part of German military history but that is another story.