



ENGLISH COPY

THE BATTLE IN NORMANDY 1944

Genfeldm ROMMEL:

HIS GENERALSHIP, HIS IDEAS, AND HIS END

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Born 28 October 1897, Metzingen in
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General SPEIDEL joined the German Army as a lieutenant in November 1915 and remained in military service until September 1944. During World War II he served as Chief of Staff in various headquarters in France, Italy, and Russia, and from 15 October 1943 to 5 September 1944 was Chief of Staff, Army Group B. On 5 September he was removed from his post and was arrested by order of Himmler two days later, remaining in custody until released by the advancing First French Army on 29 April 1945. The reason for his arrest was his participation in the plot against Hitler that failed on 20 July 1944.

As Chief of Staff of Army Group B, General SPEIDEL is eminently qualified to write about the last days of Field Marshal Rommel, who was Commander-in-Chief of that army group, and at the same time about the part played by the army group and Rommel during the Allied invasion of Western Europe.

Furthermore, as an experienced writer and a student of philosophy his ability to marshal his facts and to recognize decisive features is far above average.

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Estimate of the Situation in the West Prior to the Invasion1. The Enemy Situation

On 1 April 44 the question was discussed on the Obersalzberg whether the Western Allies would really attempt to launch a large-scale invasion. A Gp B never doubted that the invasion, as an offensive operation which was bound to determine the outcome of the war, would soon take place.

In Great Britain there were approximately 75 strong divs, 65 of which according to A Gp's opinion, were made up chiefly of regular army officers and men who could, having been trained for several years, immediately be employed in landing operations. Of the divs in question 40 to 45 were British and 20 to 25 American. All units were extensively motorized or mechanized (armored divs); moreover, there were seven airborne divs among them. They were organized in one British and one US A Gp, and each of the A Gps was composed of two armies.

If, thus far, doubts on the launching of an invasion had been justified, those doubts definitely had to be dismissed when, in Mar 44, information was received to the effect that highly qualified British and US units (1 and 7 British Armd Div, 1 British Airborne Div, 51 British Inf Div, 1 and 9 US Inf Div, one special landing force and the corresponding shipping space) had been transferred from the Mediterranean and from Southern Italy to Great Britain. Thus the point of main effort had been shifted from the Mediterranean area to the British Isles. Italy became a secondary theater of war. Armament and equipment of the Allied divs were excellent. None of the latest technical devices i.e. artificial harbors, steel landing strips for improvised air fields

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or prefabricated bridges were lacking. According to reliable reports, tank production in the U S A had surpassed the figure of 2 000 a month in spring 1944.

The US Navy and the British Navy were concentrated in the harbors and bays of the British Isles. The shipping space available for landing operations was sufficient for the simultaneous transport of 20 divs, and speedy shuttle traffic was to be expected in view of the excellent air protection and the proximity of the ports of embarkation.

The Allied air force, with 17 000 first line planes, could muster sufficient strength to carry out strategic air attacks against the rear areas and the Z I as well as for cooperation in a large-scale landing operation.

The Allies had at their disposal a reliable espionage net, built up in peace time, which efficiently supported the resistance movement in France. However, though its activities had increased since winter 43/44, the resistance movement played only a minor part in France north of the Loire. Thus far, no major acts of sabotage had occurred at any place.

All indications of an imminent invasion were carefully recorded and marked on maps by A Gp* particularly after the start of the Allied air offensive late in April or early in May 44. Air penetrations, bombing attacks, surprise raids by enemy naval forces, mining and mine sweeping activities, and acts of sabotage on the part of the resistance movement, all pointed to the area between the Somme and the line St Malo - Orleans.

The difficulty to form an estimate of the enemy situation was aggravated by the fact that the pertinent material was made available to A Gp only after it had been "processed" by the following command hqs: OB West, OKH (Foreign Armies

* Army Group

West Division) and OKW (Operational Division). Direct cooperation of A Gp with "counterintelligence", the source of information, was prohibited by an order of OB West. A Gp had, for instance, no data at its disposal concerning the resistance movement in France, nor could it tell to what extent the latter would cooperate with the Allied forces in the event of an invasion. It received this information second hand. A Gp Hq did not have any trained intelligence officers.

Information of a military as well as political nature had to be procured secretly. Even the Field Marshal received no official information on the progress of operations in Italy and in the East. Only through "good connections" was it possible for him to obtain such information. Telephone and other means of signal communications could only be used for such a purpose with extreme caution.

The lack of information also made it difficult to assess the possibility of a second landing.

It was for this reason that Genfldm Rommel in order to establish a powerful centralized military authority, had requested the creation of a unified command which was to include all Wehrmacht branches and command hqs in his zone.

After the assembly of the invasion forces of all three branches of the service in Great Britain seemed to have been completed late in April, the main interest centered about the presumable time of the invasion. Travel restrictions in Great Britain, the strain laid on the British economy by the calling up of the Home Guards and, furthermore, the intensification of

the air offensive suggested an early beginning of the battle; all these indications were supported by the weather forecast. After OKM ^(Navy High Command) had submitted an opinion on the subject, OKW called 18 May the "definite" day of the beginning of the invasion. After this key date passed uneventfully, OKM did not expect the attack to be launched until August.

A Gp was of the opinion that the invasion could be launched any day and kept the troops prepared accordingly. Genfldm Rommel welcomed, however, every delay because it gave him additional time to conclude military and political preparations as well as to increase the striking power of the troops. He repeatedly proposed to ascertain, through reconnaissance in force, what stage the assembly of the enemy invasion forces had reached and suggested that these forces be harassed, for instance, through attacks launched against the British ports by U-boat formations, through air raids on the assembly areas into which men and materiel were flowing and finally through the employment of V 1 weapons, the completion of which had been delayed time and again.

In Apr 44 the Field Marshal regarded the estuaries of the Somme, Bresle, Arques and Seine with the ports of Abbeville and Le Havre, the Calvados coast and the Cotentin Peninsula with Cherbourg as prospective landing areas. At that time he considered the speedy capture of an adequate harbor a vital necessity for the invasion armies. He could not foresee the significance of an "artificial harbor" such as the one which was effectively put into operation off the Calvados coast. Whatever happened, the prerequisite of Allied air superiority was ensured.

The assumption that landings might take place in the Seine bay and along the Calvados coast was contrary to the opinion of OKM, which considered an enemy landing operation, especially on the Calvados coast, unlikely because of the reefs present there. This was also the reason why there were only minor fortifications in that part of Normandy.

When, in May, reports on the enemy situation confirmed that a landing in Normandy was probable Genfldm Rommel demanded that III Flak Corps, which was scattered all over Central and Northern France, be placed under his command and be employed between Orner and Vire. This demand was rejected by Reichsmarschall Goering. Toward the end of May, the OKM dispatched a few artillery carriers to the Vire estuary.

On the basis of reports on the enemy situation, since early May, Genfldm Rommel considered an enemy landing at the Channel front (Cape Gris Nez) less likely. He reasoned that the enemy, in spite of the proximity of the jump-off harbors would not want to batter his head in by running it against the strongest point. An attempt by the enemy to stage an invasion in Brittany was, despite the favorable harbor situation, also considered unlikely in view of the limited strategic possibilities.

The assumption, voiced by OKH, that the enemy would land in force on the Belgian coast and at the Scheldt estuary was viewed skeptically by A Gp. The concentration of the bulk of the shipping available for landing operations, in the ports of Southern England, Western England and Wales contradicted any such intentions, as did the pattern of enemy air activity.

Genfldm Rommel was of the opinion that several landings would be staged

simultaneously or successively in several strategically connected areas and that also the possibility of a diversion had to be taken into account. In this respect he considered the coast line between the Somme and the bay of St Malo particularly endangered.

Outside A Gp's zone, reports were received to the effect that the Allies intended to launch invasions on both sides of the Gironde and along the Mediterranean coast. A landing in the Bordeaux area was considered unlikely. An invasion along the Mediterranean coast with subsequent operations on both sides of the Rhone, to unhinge the Atlantic front, was taken into consideration as a secondary possibility and included in strategic studies.

As to the further s t r a t e g i c i n t e n t i o n s of the Allied command, the Field Marshal expected the enemy, after a successful landing either north or south of the Seine (and after sealing off Brittany), to try and reach as his first objective, the a r e a of P a r i s and then to launch a concentrated attack against Germany from there. For strategic, political and psychological reasons Genfldm Rommel considered the capture of the Paris area a decisive objective for the Allies.

"Lewy met"
Lewy met

2. The German Forces

Hitler's combat directives for the West said that the decisive battle had to take place at the Atlantic Wall. This meant that the MLR was the coast, which had to be held at any price. Enemy invasion attempts were to be smashed prior to or during their landing; forces which succeeded in establishing local beachheads were to be annihilated in "automatic counter-thrusts".

As far as the Western Front was concerned, there was to be no operational initiative; the order to hold every inch of ground was established as a principle. Operational studies, dealing with possible enemy operations in the interior, which could follow a successful landing, were prohibited. Independent thinking was accordingly banned. Experience in the other theaters of war, however, had clearly demonstrated that a renunciation of operational initiative would necessarily prove detrimental.

The supreme command of the British armed forces had, after the defeat on the continent and the evacuation of Dunkerque in June 1940, worked out operational plans to resist a German landing on the British Isles, which were very different. The basic ideas regarding the strategy to be employed had been conceived by Winston Churchill.

The organization of the German forces, in spring 44, was as follows:

a. Army:

Subordinate to A Gp B were:

The Wehrmacht Commander Netherlands with one inf corps (LXXXVIII), two inf divs (347,709) and one Lw feld div (16).

The commander in chief, Gen Fl (Air General) Christiansen, whom his soldiers used to call "Krischan", had distinguished himself during World War I as the commander of an auxiliary cruiser and had been awarded the Pour le Merite.^{*} Subsequently he became a naval aircraft pilot. After 1933 he was recalled to duty, given the rank of a Generalmajor and employed in high command posts of the Luftwaffe. He was a frank and straightforward seaman, but as far as experience, training, intellectual qualities, and bearing were concerned, he did not have the stature of an army commander and he could not understand land warfare. By having him appointed as Wehrmacht commander, Goering with an utter disregard of military considerations placed a trusted favorite in a key position, and, to say the least, such an appointment was very unusual. The chief of staff, Genlt von Wuehlisch, who had served with the cavalry and the General Staff, tried to make up for the incompetence of his commander, who very generously gave him a free hand.

Fifteenth Army, commanding four infantry corps (LXXXIX, LXXXII, LXVII, LXXI) with six infantry divisions, the 170 Stomach Div**, the 47, 49, 344, 348, 711, and two Luftwaffe field divisions, the 17 and 18, in the front line, and eight infantry divisions, the 64, 712, 182 (reserve) 326, 331, 85, 89, 346, and one Luftwaffe field division (the 19) in the interior of the country.

The Commander in Chief of Fifteenth Army, Genobst von Salmuth, had, in peace and wartime, acquired a great deal of tactical and operational experience. During the Western campaign of 1940 he had been Genfldm von Bock's chief of staff and during the Eastern campaign of 1941 he had led XXX Inf

* Translator's note: A German order originally instituted by a Prussian King.

** " " : Composed of men suffering from gastric troubles.

Corps to the Crimea and later had been in command of Second Army at Kursk during the critical winter 1942/43. There he was relieved of his command after unjustified doubts had been raised as to his loyalty. He was an enemy of the Nazi system and had foreseen the approaching catastrophes, but could not make up his mind to oppose the system actively.

Seventh Army with three infantry corps (LXXXIV, LXXIV, XXI), to which was added later the II FS Corps, controlling altogether eight infantry divisions, the 716, 352, 709, 243 (elements only), 319 (on the Channel Islands), 266, 343, 265 in the front line, and two infantry divisions 84, 353, one LL* division(91), later also two FS** divisions 32, 38, in the interior of the country.

The Commander in Chief, Genobst Dollmann, had served with the artillery. He was a noble and gallant soldier and thoroughly experienced in all General Staff and command positions, but the only campaign experience he had, dated from the 1940 Western campaign and was restricted to the crossing of the Upper Rhine, an operation of no decisive strategic importance. He lacked mental flexibility and physical vigor, the essential qualities for high command posts in the East as well as in the Mediterranean area. The methods employed by the supreme command had hurt him deeply. On 29 Jun he died of heart failure at his command post in faithful performance of his duty. A few days before, Hitler had demanded his dismissal from Genfldm Rommel, but the Field Marshal had refused to comply with this demand.

Of Pz formations there were in the area of A Gp the General of the Pz

* LL Division: Airborne division

** FS Division: Paratrooper division

Forces West with one SS Pz corps (ISS Pz Corps) and five pz divs (2, 21, 116 and 1 and 12 SS Pz Div).

In France, south of the Loire, there was LXIII Pz Corps with 9 and 11 Pz Div and 2 SS Div and 17 SS Pz Div, partly in the process of rehabilitation and reorganization.

The "General of the Pz Forces West", Gen Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, was in Paris with a training staff; he was slated to head the tactical staff. He was, as far as training and organization was concerned, subordinate to the Inspector General of the Pz Forces, Genobst Guderian, as far as commitment was concerned, subordinate to OB West. Gen Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg was a personality above the ^average; he was outstanding in the military political field and in the theoretical evaluation of modern warfare. While in London as military attaché, he had warned calmly and fearlessly that Germany was headed for disaster. He was relieved from his post as a result of his warnings.

Approximately sixty "static" inf divs were employed along the 4 000 km long stretch of the Atlantic front. They were composed of men in older age classes and the seasoned cadres were extremely weak. Their training, conducted by officers of all grades who were too old for the job, was insufficient for the task awaiting them. Their equipment was utterly inadequate; they resembled the type of inf divs in existence at the end of World War I. Due to a lack of horses, they were almost immobilized and hardly able to handle their own supplies. They could never be a match for the expected motorized and highly mobile opponent if and when the battle should develop into a war

of movement. Genfldm Rommel had repeatedly reported these shortcomings to OKW and also informed Hitler in person on the absolute unfitness of these divs for commitment in a modern war. All his arguments were rejected. Hitler pointed to the combat directives according to which a man had to let himself be killed in his "fortress", but did not have to be "mobile."

The pz formations had not yet been quite rehabilitated; their training had not yet been completed. There was a lack of trained officers and material. However, the fighting quality of the pz divs was higher than that of the pz divs of the years 40 and 41. The chief lack in their training was cooperation with the Luftwaffe, which had been repeatedly requested and which, on the enemy side, had been developed in an ideal manner.

The German Luftwaffe failed to appreciate these requirements and, in the absence of a unified Wehrmacht command, it was not possible to arrange joint training maneuvers, especially in the field of radio operations, for both officers and enlisted men.

b. Navy:

Throughout the war the Navy was in a tragic dilemma, torn between its desires and limitations. In view of its strength and the strategic situation, it could be no more than an auxiliary arm. However, owing to the magnitude the war assumed, it had to perform additional tasks beyond the duties Hitler had originally assigned to it. These duties had been restricted to continental waters.

After the dismissal of Grand Admiral Raeder, Dr.h.c., the Navy lacked the necessary counterpoise it had had in that expert. To a higher degree than the

Army, the Navy had subscribed to the ideas of the political leadership; this became manifest when, later on, Gr Adm Doenitz was appointed Hitler's successor. The conspicuous overrating of the Navy revealed a lack of understanding of the problems affecting the conduct of the war as a whole and this was bound to have adverse effects. The Navy existed on a plane of its own, its command showed little understanding for the requirements of a unified Wehrmacht command. The OKM, which had decided Party leanings, jealously guarded its prerogatives, although many subordinate command posts displayed practical comradeship in direct, independent cooperation with the Army.

The Commander of Naval Group West, Adm Krancke, (Chief of Staff to Adm Hoffmann) was extremely independent and could not make up his mind to lend large scale assistance when the disaster was at hand. Instead of making his naval security detachments - approximately 5 000 men -, who were billeted in Paris, available for commitment at the endangered front, Adm Krancke, on 20 Jul 44, offered to use them to liberate the SD (Translator: SS-Security Service), who had been arrested by the military commander in France, i.e. he offered to use his units against the Army.

In the West the navy consisted of few destroyers, 10 - 15 torpedo boats, some E-boat flotillas, a number of mine sweepers, patrol vessels, tankers, transports and repair vessels. Forty U-boats were to put to sea from the Atlantic base if and when the invasion was launched. Actually only 10 - 15 U-boats did leave the base subsequently; however, owing to the overwhelming enemy superiority at sea and in the air, they were not able to score striking

successes. Besides, the achievements of the U-boats had, for a long time not been commensurate with the losses; naval reconnaissance failed for the same reasons.

An enemy air attack on 14 Jun destroyed 38 surface vessels - among them 4 destroyers - at the pier and in the U-boat pens of Le Havre. Thus, nearly all torpedo boats and E-boats were put out of commission. The attacking enemy wings had approached at a very low altitude and remained unhampered in their destruction work, because the antiaircraft fire was opened too late.

The considerable number of naval command posts, which was warranted neither by the strength nor by the actual tasks of the Navy, was bound to result in further difficulties between the respective command hqs, particularly since relations between commands were muddled anyway. An example of this situation was the fire direction of the coast artillery. The Navy claimed the command in the artillery battle as long as the enemy had not reached the shore. As soon as it became clear that a landing had been effected, the Army was to take over the fire direction of the entire artillery. Even during the preparation this order led to disagreements on account of the different tactical principles adhered to by the naval and army artillery (selection of gun positions, observation posts, issue and use of ammunition). A Gp B had repeatedly made efforts to have this order cancelled, however, Genfldm Rommel was rebuffed by Hitler.

The Naval Group Command had misjudged the range of the enemy ship-based artillery; it had been estimated at 15 km where steep coasts were present and 20 km for flat coasts; in reality, however, the range was 30 to 40 km.

This range power was demonstrated, particularly during the battle for Caen.

c. Luftwaffe:

The Luftwaffe, its commitment and its possibilities had become a crucial problem in the West as well as in the Reich. Unequivocal information on its mission, the strength of its formations, its possibilities could be obtained neither from OKL nor from Third Air Fleet in Paris. Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering evaded any discussion or, when he answered a question, his answers were always ambiguous. During the crucial month he never took the trouble to obtain a personal impression, but tried to command from Karin Hall (Translator: Goering's country estate near Berlin). It was never possible to discuss matters on a professional level particularly since Goering appeared to be inadequately informed on his own branch of the Wehrmacht.

The Third Air Fleet - Commander in Chief: Genfldm Sperrle (Chief of Staff Genlt Koller; later on Genmaj Plocher) - was subordinate directly to Reichsmarschall Goering, with OKW having only limited authority to give direct orders to this unit. The Commander in Chief of Third Air Fleet, Genfldm Sperrle, was a man of unusual energy, to which he gave vent in bitter sarcasm when he saw the disastrous course the leadership was taking. He tried to help wherever he could, especially since he shared Rommel's opinions. On 18 Aug Hitler dismissed him as a "scapegoat" for Goering.

According to reliable information, received from Third Air Fleet, only 90 bombers and 70 fighters out of a total of approximately 300 airplanes were ready to take off; in early June owing to the enemy air superiority, however, they never had a chance to join battle. The first instalment of

1 000 Turbo fighter planes, promised by Hitler to A Gp's chief of staff on 1 Apr 44, had failed to arrive. The enemy, on 6 Jun, supported his landing operations by 27 000 flight missions.

The British and the US air forces had had control of the air since spring 1944 and neutralized all German air activity. Adequate air reconnaissance, aerial photographs of the British Isles, particularly of the situation in the ports and of the section of the Atlantic Ocean adjoining the front could not be obtained. Fighter formations for defense against the constant enemy penetrations and to establish temporary reconnaissance could not be made available, not by concentrating forces. The enemy fighter bombers, which were excellent both technically and in their personnel, disrupted to an ever increasing extent all daytime traffic and caused high losses. Bomber formations destroyed rail-road junctions, road centers and installations so thoroughly that, in the event of an invasion, the supply problem was bound to become extremely grave. Since the middle of May, destructions of rail communications west of the line Brussels- Paris- Orleans had made normal supply by rail impossible; it was also impossible to bring up supplies on the roads because of the lack of trucking space and gasoline. As in Africa in 1942 and in the East in 1943, the lack of gasoline was one of the main causes of the catastrophe, which took place during mobile warfare in the West. All Seine crossings below Paris and all Loire bridges below Orleans had been destroyed by air attacks prior to 6 Jun 44. In spite of repeated requests, submerged bridges had not been built. Materials for the construction of emergency bridges were not available in sufficient quantities.

The enemy strategic air force constantly increased its attacks on the Z I and the occupied territories. It deserves, however, to be mentioned that, in spite of overwhelming enemy superiority, the few remaining German planes still took off, even though their missions were hopeless as far as it was possible to take off at all after the airfields had been plowed under by the Allied air forces.

Prior to the invasion, Genfldm Rommel, in oral and written reports to Hitler, repeatedly stressed the importance of warfare in all three "dimensions" and the inferiority of the Luftwaffe as a decisive factor. He made reference to the experience gained during combat and supply operations in Africa. He told Hitler that, "in the fifth year of the war it should finally have become clear even to the supreme command of the Wehrmacht that the Luftwaffe's cooperation with the Army would determine the outcome not only of individual battles but of the entire war." All requests and warnings remained unheeded. The only result was promises of new weapons and thousands of Turbo fighter planes. Genfldm Rommel was not satisfied by promises of coming "miracle weapons" and requested the Speer* Reich Ministry to advise him how far work on the latest inventions had progressed and when the new weapons would be available for use. It then became clear that if the atom bomb had been fully developed by us, we would have lacked the industrial facilities for its production, while for its employment, the necessary air force to escort and protect the bomb carriers was not available.

Furthermore the Field Marshal repeatedly objected, orally and in writing,

* Translator: Reich Ministry for Armaments and War Production.

to the enormous staff of the Luftwaffe, which maintained in the West an unjustifiably large communication net with 60 000 men. The strength of the rear services of the Luftwaffe, whose total personnel in the West amounted to more than 300 000 men, was, instead of ten times the number of the flying personnel, which used to be the customary ratio in an air force, a hundred times that figure. The explanation for this disproportion in the respective strengths can be found only in Goering's desire to establish, like Himmler, a body guard for himself, a phenomenon which is characteristic of all revolutions. Subordinate to the Luftwaffe was, contrary to all sound reasoning and to the demands of A Gp, the III Flak Corps, which received orders directly from Paris (Third Air Fleet) or from East Prussia (Goering). The Flak Corps was, at the start of the invasion, stationed in the wrong place and could not be shifted fast enough. The concentrated employment of the Flak Corps' considerable fire power during the first days of the invasion would have been of extreme importance. Under the prevailing circumstances, however, it was impossible to establish a coordinated fire direction and active air defense at the points of main effort. During the battle of Normandy, for instance, the commanding general of III Flak Corps was ordered to see Reichsmarschall Goering and was absent for days without the knowledge of A Gp.

In the air the events of the African and Italian campaigns occurred again on a larger scale. The enemy controlled the air over the front, the occupied territories and the ZI, German fighter planes had disappeared from the skies. Owing to mistakes in planning, organization and leadership the Luftwaffe was worn out before the decisive battle had even started. All in-

dependent efforts to engage in a "strategic air war" had been failures! The air war over England following the escape of the bulk of the British Expeditionary Army from Dunkerque, the "annihilation of the British Armada", the battle over the Atlantic, the defense against the Anglo-American air offensive against the Z I, the failure to effectively supply Stalingrad, Cherkassk, the Crimea and Africa from the air, all these are sad chapters in the history of this war. The brave fliers became the victims of their command.

In contrast, the Anglo-American air force through its operations in the West and the Z I, determined the outcome of the war.

d. The Atlantic Wall:

The "A t l a n t i c W a l l" was a linear coastal fortification of varying strength. Construction work had reached a rather advanced stage at the points where OKW expected landings and at points where the enemy might be expected to attack in force (along the Channel, particularly at Cape Gris Nez, the Somme and Seine estuaries, the northern tip of Cotentin, Channel Islands, Brest, Lorient).

In 1941 Hitler ordered the beaches prepared as MLR. In view of the length of the coast line, however, only a system of strong points could be constructed. According to a work schedule extending over a period of 8 years, the Channel coast and the Channel Islands off St Malo were to be transformed into the "most powerful fortresses of the Continent." This was Hitler's will and accordingly, the "offensive battery group" around Cape Gris Nez with the Lindemann (four 360 mm guns), Grosser Kurfuerst (four 280 mm guns), Todt (four 380 mm guns) and Friedrich August (three 303 mm guns) batteries came into

being as support for the Channel front.

In spring 1944 eleven batteries with 39 guns were ready for action on the small group of the Channel Islands while, at the same time, along the entire front from Dieppe to St Nazaire, a distance of more than 1 000 km, only the same number of batteries with 37 guns were ready for action. One reinforced inf div with one pz regt and one flak regt was assigned as garrison; no air fields were constructed! Only as aircraft carriers could these islands possibly have gained importance. Genfldm Rommel was a vigorous opponent of the idea of fortifying the islands and demanded the withdrawal of the garrisons which were condemned to idleness there.

The entire construction work on the fortifications suffered from a lack of materials, particularly, however, from problems in connection with the attribution of authority which was an unavoidable result of the muddled command situation.

In 1944 only fortifications along the open coast line were strong points with radar stations, observation posts and battery positions. Most of the shelters were field type structures and, due to a lack of materials, only few of them were reinforced with concrete. Between the individual strong points there was sometimes an interval of several kilometers.

The Navy was of the opinion that the coastal stretch between the Orne and Vire was not dangerously exposed to landings on account of its geological peculiarity (reefs). One and a half inf divs were employed in this 50 km wide sector.

After his first general inspection which took place, in winter 1942/43, Rommel, who was disappointed over the condition of the Atlantic Wall, tried to

make up for past negligence by having the troops carry out construction work. This work was done mainly on the coast of Normandy. He considered new way of making it difficult for the enemy to effect a landing.

The execution of all measures concerning coastal defense, i.e. planning and construction of fortifications, was in charge of an engineer who not only lacked tactical and operational training but also the necessary insight and experience. Owing to the conflicting opinions of Army, Navy and Organization Todt on the principles of coastal defense, particularly on the employment of batteries, a coordinated construction plan failed to come into being during the years 1941 - 1943.

Rommel brought about a basic change in the treatment of these problems. He not only took a keen personal interest, but also displayed an unusual technical knowledge, which made the experts uneasy. His orders were provided with sketches which he drew himself; new inventions and suggestions were eagerly snapped up.

To render an enemy landing more difficult, new obstacles were placed on the beaches, a kind of artificial "coral-reefs"; the anticipated approach routes in shallow waters were mined. Preparations were made for the destruction of the ports.

The high-water mark of the beaches, the future MLR, became a mined stretch of strong points along the coast. Due, particularly, to a lack of fire control equipment, the artillery fire power - there was only one battery to every 18 - 20 km - could not be increased to any considerable extent.

But here too the Field Marshal sought a makeshift remedy and accepted a suggestion made by the troops, to improvise multiple tube rocket launchers

(similar to the Russian type called Stalin - Orgeln by the Germans) whose fire was effective for water targets. However, the execution of these plans came too late.

In view of the increasing danger of concentrated air attacks quarters for the troops were dispersed and protected. As a precaution against expected air landings in land front positions were constructed, sealing off the coast defense belt of 3 - 5 km in depth from the interior of the country. This was to prevent an enemy force attacking from the sea from uniting with enemy airborne troops in the rear area. As a further precaution against parachutists and gliders, the Field Marshal had trunks of trees rammed into the ground and had them connected by wires to which mines were attached. However, this work, which required a great deal of time and material, could be done only in areas which were considered particularly exposed to air landings.

Rommel had a clear conception of air landing operations, even under unfavorable flying weather, and had the troops trained accordingly. He requested the Navy to mine the sea; however, the Navy laid its first mines in the Gironde instead of in the Seine Bay.

For most of the work the cooperation of the French population was imperative. In view of this, Genfldm Rommel issued an order to the effect that, as a principle, no French national should be forced to work, but that voluntary work should be paid for generously. French workers were, in every respect, to receive the same treatment as Germans. In connection with the construction of anti-air-landing obstacles, Rommel pointed out that cooperation was to the population's own advantage, because wherever such obstacles

existed, the likelihood of an air landing which would injure, their land would decrease.

The question of whether or not to flood the country was decided by the nature of the terrain. Preparations to store up fresh water were being made only in the "land front" of Le Havre, in the Dive valley and along the eastern coast of the Cotentin. Salt water damage, which would, according to the experiences of World War I, require more than 10 years to repair was to be avoided at all costs.

The Atlantic Wall propaganda started when, in 1942, the Anglo-American test raid at Dieppe was presented as a "defensive success on a gigantic scale", although, on the basis of captured orders, the temporary and local character of this surprise raid must have been clear beyond any doubt. Unfortunately OB West also took part in this propaganda in order to draw attention to the West at a time where the major operations were taking place in the East.

In order to conceal the inadequacy of the fortifications and to deceive the enemy, Goebbels, mindful of the experience gained with the West Wall in late summer 1938, started, at home and abroad, a "propaganda campaign" concerning the Atlantic Wall, in the conduct of which he was determined to employ all means at his disposal. The "offensive battery group" around Cape Gris Nez, which was the one most strongly reinforced with concrete, furnished the material for a newsreel. In order to gain time for his preparatory political work as well as for the augmentation of the defensive strength, Genfldm Rommel also tolerated the exaggerated publicity given his new defensive installations, i.e. the foreshore and anti-air landing obstacles. In line with the afore-mentioned

purpose, Rommel also condoned the publicity given him in motion pictures and press. When, however, it became known that Dr Goebbels had instructed the reporters not to mention Allied air superiority, Rommel protested against this concealment of enemy strength, which was bound to shake the German people's confidence in its leadership.

The following diversion and camouflage tactics were applied by command and units:

The arrival of fictitious new formations, the issuance of pertinent instructions to kommandanturas and to the population, regarding these formations, the appearance of new staffs and of "personnel sent in advance", the theoretical processing of shipments by rail of new formations in the customary manner by all headquarters, including the French railroad authorities, the moving of motor transport columns by day and night and the construction of dummy installations.

Rommel did not deceive himself as to the effect of these measures, however, he welcomed every method by which time could be gained. But, due to the methods employed by the Reich Minister for Propaganda, it was impossible to determine the final effect of such propaganda or whether it might not backfire.

The Top-Level Organization

The top-level organization in the West was in accordance neither with the timeless laws of warfare nor with logic and the necessities of the hour. Hitler thought that in the conduct of the war he could adhere, in his customary manner, to the revolutionary principle of dividing authority and of playing off one person against the other to serve his own ends. This policy was bound to lead to confusion in leadership and even to chaos in the command agencies.

Subordinated to OB West were A Gp B (Genfldm Rommel) in the sector extending from the Netherlands to the Loire estuary and A Gp G (Genobst Blaskowitz) in the sector extending from the Loire estuary to the Spanish border - Mediterranean Sea - Alps.

Naval Group West (Adm Krancke) was subordinated directly to OKM, Third Air Fleet (Genfldm Sperrle) was subordinate to Goering. Thus neither OB West nor A Gp B could conduct or coordinate operations at sea or in the air. The commanders in chief were only occasionally informed of planned operations and frequently such information reached them too late. They could make requests but were never sure these requests would be complied with.

Genfldm Rommel had, in addition to his other functions, received a special "Fuehrer order" to inspect the entire Western Front, extending from Denmark via the Bay of Biscay, the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean Sea up to the Alps, with regard to its preparedness for defense and to coordinate defense measures. He had no authority to give orders, but it was his duty to report to Hitler or directly to OKW. OB West was to be informed. The military commanders of France (Gen Inf Heinrich von Stuelpnagel), of Belgium/Northern France (Gen

Inf Alexander von Falkenhausen) and of the Netherlands (Gen Fl Christiansen) were, in military matters, subordinate to OB West; however, as far as questions which had to do with exploitation of the resources and administration of the respective countries for the benefit of the war effort were concerned, they were subordinated to OKW. Since spring 1942, the executive power in the occupied territories was exercised by the Senior SS- and Police Officers through the SD: they received their orders direct from Himmler and failed to enlighten the military commanders on their nature. Thus, as far as deportations and executions were concerned - to single out the most important questions - OB West was usually confronted with accomplished facts.

Moreover, SD agents, acting on orders of the Senior SS- and Police Officer, kept the Wehrmacht under surveillance.

The political situation in France was particularly unpleasant because of the fight for power among agencies of the Party and the SS. The German Embassy in Paris under Ambassador Abetz was a contradiction in itself because a peace treaty between Germany and France had not been concluded and, because, in spite of many infringements, the legal status of an occupation existed. Abetz received his instructions from Ribbentrop and collaborated with the Vichy-Government. He was, however, disavowed whenever Hitler and Himmler considered it expedient. Aged Marshal Petain felt betrayed by all political agencies and said so repeatedly in conversation with German soldiers.

The Organization Todt also worked independently in accordance with so-called Fuehrer orders and instructions received from the Reich Minister for Armament and War Production and the OKW, respectively. Here too OB West could

not give orders, but only advice. The lack of uniformity in the construction of the fortifications along the coast and on the Channel Islands is eloquent proof of this. The A Gp B itself could not give any orders regarding the construction of fortifications in its defense area, which extended over 2 000 km, but had to convey its requests through channels. This method was definitely not promising. All requests remained unheeded. The Organization Todt was overorganized and overstaffed; as a result, construction work was frequently done for the sole purpose of keeping the personnel occupied, while essential military requirements were neglected. When Reich Minister Speer tried to remedy the situation it was too late.

During the retreat from France the highest SS-headquarters and Luftwaffe command posts regardless of the situation, withdrew their respective formations to rearward areas in Germany under the pretext of reorganizing them. The withdrawal of these formations gave the appearance of a rout, a situation which the troop commanders at the Western Front who were ready to sacrifice themselves were trying to avoid in their respective areas. Under such unfortunate command conditions the strategic directives of the supreme command in the West, which frequently were issued only at the last moment, could not be put into practice.

On the basis of experience gained in the Mediterranean area, and the examples set by the Allies in World War I and II - all three branches of the Armed Forces of the United States and Great Britain had been placed under the command of the American Commander-in-Chief, General Eisenhower - Genfladm Rommel requested that within his command area all three branches of the Wehrmacht as

well as the Organization Todt be subordinated to him for the crucial mission of defense.

After repeatedly renewing it, his request was brusquely rejected. Hitler wanted to maintain unstable command conditions, he did not want too much power concentrated in one hand, particularly not in the hand of Genfldm Rommel. The actual necessity was disregarded because of the suspicion of the supreme leadership.

Due to the policy of "divide et impera" (divide and rule), the West too lost unity of action and was open to the forces of decomposition.

Genfldm Rommel and the Staff of A Gp B

Headquarters of A Gp B had been established close to the front in the castle of La Roche Guyon, located at the western edge of the Ile de France on one of the large northern loops of the Seine between Mantes and Vernon, 60 km below Paris. The castle of the Dukes de la Rochefoucauld was a Norman estate, which had been in existence since the year 1 000; the rear of the building was built into the rock. The castle ruins with its dojon (chief tower) were visible from a great distance and picturesquely dominated the hill. Only the key personnel of headquarters' staff was billeted in the castle because the Field Marshal had not had it evacuated, but had permitted the ducal family to remain. In the salle des gardes (guard room) there hung a painting of the famous Duke of Rochefoucauld, the Marshal and author of the "Maxims", who, however, had not worked in the castle. The Duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, the philanthropist and politician was born in the castle.

The Field Marshal occupied a modest apartment on the ground floor which led to a rose-covered terrace. The dignified study furnished with magnificent Gobelins and the Renaissance style desk, its top adorned with in-laid work, at which, in 1685, Louvois had signed the abrogation of the Edict of Nantes, represented ancient French culture. When, after the start of the invasion, the enemy air attacks increased, Rommel, in agreement with the Duke, ordered the safekeeping of these art treasures in the rock chapel. There they remained safe.

The staff of A Gp had been organized as a small working staff only. It was made up of the Chief of Staff, Genlt Dr Hans Speidel, the I a, Obst von

Tempelhoff, the I C, Obst Staubwasser, the II A, Obst Freyberg, the generals of the different branches of the service, Obst Lattmann (arty), Genlt Dr Meise (enr), Genlt Gehrke (sig c), and the naval adviser, Vz Adm Friedrich Ruge; in addition, there was a general staff officer of the Luftwaffe, a few indispensable special missions staff officers and the keeper of the war diary. The supply group, which had no command, was disbanded prior to the start of the invasion; all supply matters were centralized and handled by the supply chief for France. There was no National Socialist political officer assigned to A Gp's staff. This became a cause for reproach when the chief of staff was interrogated by the Gestapo. Genfldm Model, immediately after he had assumed command, installed this "organ of political control", who had the right to report directly to Himmler and Bormann.

The work of the staff was marked by harmony and calm; as much initiative as possible was left to the individual staff members. For the Field Marshal the days, during the "quiet" weeks prior to the invasion, were filled with ceaseless work. Nearly every day he went to inspect the troops, accompanied only by a few persons; usually only his special missions staff officer and frequently also Adm Ruge went with him. He used to leave between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning, after he had had breakfast with his chief of staff and discussed the most important current problems with the latter. Except for a short noontime recess, at the quarters of one or the other unit, he kept on travelling all day. Upon his return he listened to reports until supper, a plain meal which was like that of the subordinate personnel. The Field Marshal used to eat in the midst of his closest advisers, usually 10 - 12

officers, whose number however was augmented by guests. He was extremely moderate, did not drink much and never smoked. During the meals he encouraged any kind of conversation. After supper he went, frequently accompanied by the chief of staff and Adm Ruge, for an evening walk in the romantic castle park and enjoyed, standing under two gigantic cedars, his favorite view of the picturesque Seine valley and the western skies. After listening to further reports he went to bed early.

During his visits to the front he explained the situation and his own intentions to officers and enlisted men; he always knew how to maintain a happy medium between commendation and reprimand. He attached special importance to the behavior of the troops toward the indigenous population. Repeatedly he pointed to the eternal laws of humanity in war and peace and pledged strict observance of the obligations which international law placed upon him. He adhered to notions of chivalry which in view of the times, were somewhat outmoded.

Strategic Considerations Prior to the Invasion

When the newly appointed chief of staff reported to Hitler on the Obersalzberg prior to his departure to the West, on 1 Apr 44, he asked for a strategic directive for the command. Hitler and Genobst Jodl refused to issue such a directive, which they called "superfluous". OB West and A Gp B had received strict orders to put up a stiff fight at the coast; freedom of strategic decisions was out of the question. In the event of a local landing the enemy was to be hurled back into the sea in the "battle of the beaches". No mention was made of the experience gained in Salerno and Nettuno. If and when the danger of an invasion should become imminent, the following reinforcements were contemplated: the timely assignment of additional full strength armored units (8 - 10 divs) new Turbo fighter planes (1,000 was spoken of as an initial figure), naval units, especially U-boats, and finally, the employment of V- weapons. As at Stalingrad, at the Don fronts, on the Crimea, on Sicily and in Italy, prestige considerations determined Hitler's decision to defend the coast at any price. But, "he who would hold all will lose all", for, "defense lines take up more terrain than the available troops can cover" ... "small minds would hold all, whereas reasonable men keep only the main objective in view" (Frederic the Great). The German strength in strategy was sacrificed in favor of a rigid linear coastal defense. Through this fact alone the risk the Allies were exposed to in a major landing operation was already reduced; in addition, the British and Americans controlled the seas. A combat-worthy German fleet did not exist. The German Luftwaffe had been put out of commission; an essential element of danger to the invasion was thus

eliminated. The Atlantic Wall, on account of the distribution of troops stationed there and its construction, was a cordon which lacked depth and substantial reserves. In numbers and equipment, but particularly in mobility the Allied ground troops were far superior to the defenders.

Former landing operations in history had taken place under entirely different circumstances.

Napoleon, during the Egyptian campaign, had to reckon with a superior enemy fleet, which eventually destroyed his own fleet at Aboukir.

In 1854, the Russians had a strong fleet, but surprisingly enough, they failed to commit this fleet when the Allied forces approached the Crimea.

In 1904, the Russians also had a strong fleet. The Japanese, however, limited this fleet to landing at Korea Bay by launching a surprise attack on the harbor of Port Arthur, similar to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

As far as sea power is concerned, only the situation of the Southern States during the American Civil War was similar to that which confronted Germany in 1944, inasmuch as the Northern States had a superior navy.

On the basis of the latest experience gained in Italy, Genfldm Rommel realized that, in the course of a landing operation, the enemy would safely overcome the usually critical period of the first three days, unless the comparative strength in all three "dimensions" should undergo a basic change.

Field Marshal Rommel examined the strategic problem of how to thwart the anticipated plans of the Allies after a successful landing (capture of the Paris area as a line of departure for a massed attack against the Reich; secondary operations along the Belgian coast aiming at the Ruhr area and from

the Mediterranean coast northwards) without deviating, in the beginning, from Hitler's order to put up a rigid coastal defense. This line of reasoning assumed that adequate strategic reserves in armor would be available around Paris. The following possibilities were thoroughly scrutinized:

Enemy landing between Seine and Loire, counteroperation: wheeling back on the Seine - line, which was to be held; Attack south of the Seine from the East and South aiming at the annihilation of the enemy. Enemy landing between the Seine and Somme, counteroperation: taking up rear positions along the line Amiens - Vernon and at the Oise; Counterattack between the rivers, which, however, would lead to a frontal battle of attrition.

Enemy landing north of the Somme (not very likely for strategic, tactical and terrain reasons). Counteroperation: attack from the South toward the North.

In the event of an enemy landing south of the Loire and on the Mediterranean coast it was planned to abandon Southern France and to defend the Loire line. A strategic group, made up of 2 - 3 armies with as many armored formations as possible, was to be assembled between the Loire salient and the Jura for independent operations.

If the enemy succeeded in carrying out simultaneous landings south of the Seine and on the Mediterranean coast, Southern France was to be abandoned, - the line Seine - Yonne-Canal de Bourgogne to be defended and a strategic group to be assembled in the area of Troyes - Dijon - Langres - St Dizier.

Several variations of these possibilities were included in the scrutiny. In each case it was assumed that the armored formations would be supported by

adequate air forces.

Furthermore, for special reasons, the possibility was examined and a general plan made for carrying out the evacuation of the entire West and for a strategic withdrawal first behind the Meuse and subsequently behind the West Wall either under combat conditions or after the conclusion of an armistice (strategic possibilities, technical necessities, time and manpower requirements etc).

If, after the success of the invasion, Hitler had made strategic decisions such as, for instance, to evacuate Southern France in time, to hold the Seine - line, to organize a strategic reserve for a counterblow, the disastrous events of the summer 1944 would not have occurred so rapidly. On 17 Jun and toward the end of Jun 44 Rommel submitted these ideas to Hitler; however, the result was the strict Fuehrer order of 2 Jul 44, which contained a reminder of the Stalingrad winter 1943: "Every enemy attempt at a break-through must be thwarted by a tenacious defense of the terrain; any shortening of the front line is forbidden; there is no freedom of strategic decision".

When the battle had reached its climax, Genfldm Rommel was about to adopt, against Hitler's will, a flexible conduct of battle. The decision would have come late, but not too late, i.e. still prior to the decisive break-through at the invasion front, prior to Avranches!

Destiny denied him the opportunity of putting this redeeming decision into effect.

The Question of the Strategic Reserves

The conduct of battle in the West had to be based on the rigid order to defend the coastal line at any price. The only mobile reserves available at the outset were one pz corps and six pz divs.

Genfldm von Rundstedt thought in strategic terms in accordance with the old school and did not take into account the latest experiences in the East and in the Mediterranean area. He proposed to assemble this small reserve group in the area south and east of Paris where it would be ready for action in the event of an enemy landing. He thought in this way to retain freedom of action and make use of the alleged superiority of German leadership and troops in mobile operations. This plan would have been good if Navy and air fleet had been equal or at least almost equal to the enemy. However, von Rundstedt lacked a clear conception of the combat methods employed by the Anglo-Americans. In view of the comparative strengths of the opponents and the defensive strength of the coastal fortifications, preparations for such an operation and its execution required time. The limited troops protecting the coastal line, made a delaying action of this nature unfeasible. The props of any such operation would accordingly have collapsed prematurely.

Rommel, in view of existing conditions and on the basis of the latest experience in Italy, wanted to bring the six pz divs close to the presumed invasion beaches. Without mobile armored reserves it was impossible to eliminate major local penetrations by landing forces. A force of one or two pz divs as shock troops (Translator: author uses the term "Feuerwehr", the German equivalent for the English fire-brigade) was not sufficient in

view of the air situation and, also, in view of the inadequate transfer facilities. Rommel was of the opinion that at least five pz divs were needed to accomplish the combat mission. These pz divs had to be prepared for any eventualities of combat such as counterattacks, defense against major enemy airborne formations, lateral movements to other fronts (across the Seine sector) and a retirement. They likewise had to cooperate in fortifying the zone of resistance and in the construction of anti-airlanding obstacles in their respective areas.

If a defender whose forces were largely non-motorized and who lacked an air force and navy was to accomplish these tasks with any measure of success against a fully-motorized attacker with overwhelming superiority on the sea and in the air, he would need at least five to six pz divs, immediately available for action.

On the basis of the enemy air offensive and its results since April 44, it could definitely be foreseen that the reserves would always arrive too late if they were assembled too far in the rear zone as for instance in the Paris area. In the course of a discussion the Field Marshal said: "In view of the enormous air superiority of the enemy, any unit not in touch with the enemy during the initial phase of the landings will never be able to fulfill its mission If, in view of our combat mission, we do not succeed in defeating the Allies on the sea or in driving them into the sea within the first 48 hours after a landing has been effected, the invasion will have succeeded and, due to the lack of strategic reserves and the complete breakdown of our Navy and Luftwaffe, the war will be lost".

The lessons of Salerno and Nettuno were unequivocal! In addition, the experience gained in this war had proven that only those divs which were on the spot and subordinated to the commander of the area could really be considered ready for immediate action. As to the so-called OKW-reserve the commitment order usually arrived too late and the units were due to the desultory and "intuitive" orders of the supreme command, frequently thrown into the battle in a scattered and improvised manner and thus sacrificed.

Military and political reasons too made it appear advisable to the Field Marshal to have reliable armored units at his disposal for future eventualities.

For Rommel in particular it was a severe strain to have to visualize combat on a strategic plane in theory, while in practice he was restricted to tactical preparations along the coast; in Africa he had given an impressive example of strategic leadership of modern armored formations. However, he clearly realized that no operation in or from the interior of France would be feasible if the flank was torn up at the critical point north or south of the Seine. Frequently he suggested the moving into assembly positions of adequate strategic reserves, approximately six - eight pz divs and five - seven mtz inf divs under the unified command of Pz Army West, in the area of Paris and to the East of it, as the Chief of Staff of A Gp had been promised by Hitler on 1 Apr 44.

In addition he suggested the reconnoitering and the construction, as a precautionary measure, of lines of resistance in the interior of France, and in this respect in accordance with his strategic conceptions, he thought primarily of the Seine and Yonne line.

After carefully defining the scope of the two differing views, Genfldm

von Rundstedt approved the ideas and the suggestion submitted by Genfldm Rommel. The available pz formations were to be moved up close to the front behind the coastal sectors north and south of the Seine which were considered most endangered.

The Inspector General of Armored Forces, Genobst Guderian, who, like Gen Freiherr Geyr v. Schweppenburg, had supported Rundstedt's solution raised no objection against the assembly and planned employment of the available pz divs after he had, during his visit at A Gp's hq, listened to Rommel's concise report on the situation. He too intended to request from Hitler the assignment of an adequate armored strategic group.

Despite all promises of the OKW no motorized and armored reserves were assigned to the West.

Rommel's provisions were borne out by subsequent developments. As a result of the enemy air superiority and the flexible command of the enemy air forces, a timely shifting of pz divs from the interior of France to the coast and their commitment as a unit was not feasible. The forces were battered before their arrival at the Normandy front.

If however, as had been suggested by Rommel, more armored units had been available, their commitment within the first 3 critical days after the landing would have substantially changed the situation.

Political Conclusions and Preparations

In the evening of 15 Apr 44 Genfläm Rommel, after having listened to the first evening report of his chief of staff on his impressions in the Fuehrer hq and on the situation in the East, elaborated on basic ideas regarding warfare and politics.

The Crimea was lost, the front had been moved back to the Eastern part of Roumania. In view of the increased Russian potential, which benefited considerably by the British and American deliveries made under the Lend Lease Act, decisive Russian operations could be expected for the summer. According to Hitler's "basic order No 1", dated 13 Jan 40, not even CiCs could be briefed on the situation. A Gp had to resort to neutral sources, especially to the Swiss press and foreign broadcasts, to receive information on the results of the political discussions among the Allies and their possible consequences.

Rommel's tactical and strategic experience was based on the raid of his "Ghost Division" (7 Pz Div) in the West in 1940 and on his experiences in North Africa. He never had a chance to gain experience in the East, but he made great efforts to analyze and evaluate the experience obtained there. His military and political thoughts centered around the events of the summer 1942. The small German-Italian Africa Army had at that time, after the swift seizure of Tobruck, reached a point only 100 km from Alexandria-Cairo and was ready to break through toward the Suez Canal and the Nile and to cut thus a life line of the British Empire. For this purpose the Field Marshal asked that this attack be strengthened, since its decreasing power manifested itself alarmingly, and that the supply lines be protected through the employment of adequate

Italian naval and air forces. The support thus requested was not forthcoming. The Italian Navy and Air forces through their passive attitude, aided the Allies. Following Hitler's statement: "I believe Mussolini more than my German generals" Rommel urged Hitler to obtain a personal impression. But, as always in this war, Hitler failed again to go to the front. The far superior British mechanized army under Montgomery launched its counterattack from a secure supply base, supported by an overwhelming air force, which in cooperation with the British Navy, prevented the arrival of any supplies. When Rommel, conscious of his responsibility, proposed to withdraw from El Alamein, Hitler radioed: "Attack on Cairo, victory or death". Rommel, however, to save the troops entrusted to him, gave the order to withdraw. Numerous "missions aimed at world conquest" had been assigned to the Field Marshal, however the promised means to carry out those missions were never forthcoming. During the African campaign Rommel developed a high esteem for England as a world power and contempt for the Italian Ally. The British troops as well as those of the Dominions appeared to him fully efficient as far as officers, morale and performance were concerned; He considered the quantity and quality of their equipment superior to that of the Germans.

Repeatedly and in good time Rommel had, orally as well as in writing, warned against the Italian Ally. His objections were based not only on Italian foreign and military policy, which had plunged us into the Balkan adventure, but also on an intimate knowledge of Italy's political, military, intellectual and economic structure.

By this the Field Marshal placed himself in opposition to Adolf Hitler

in the OKW, where the trend was toward belittling and ridiculing of the British opponent and systematically overrating the Italian Ally. This controversy grew more intense when, in winter 42/43, Rommel suggested that the African front be abandoned and the troops dispatched to Stalingrad in order to establish a point of main effort at a decisive spot and give up unimportant theaters of war.

In Africa, the Field Marshal was confronted with the French problem. The negotiations conducted by the OKW and the Foreign Office, in winter 40/41 and during 1941, with Admiral Darlan and General Huntzinger, aimed at the establishment of a rear cover for the German Africa Army. These negotiations failed to produce results due to a want of moderation on the part of Hitler, who presented demands which France could not possibly comply with. In spite of Mussolini's demands, a farsighted German politician could, in agreement with France, have brought about an inclusion of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in the European - African security system as early as 1940. A few days after El Alamein US forces landed in French North Africa, the French resistance ceased and the effects on the Africa Army became evident.

His stay in France offered the Field Marshal an opportunity to study the country and its inhabitants. He loved the French landscape and respected the French people. He considered it unjustifiable to maintain, for four years, the status of an armistice and thus to systematically discredit at home and abroad the position of Marshal Petain as Chief of State.

He believed in France's mission and therefore considered it imperative to seek peace in a spirit of reconciliation and to cease treating the French

as enemies. In Margival, during the afternoon of 17 Jun he voiced his objections against the official policy toward France to Hitler in person and warned him against the rule of the SD (SS-Security Service) and the methods based upon the Sauckel program (Translator's note: Labor conscription programm).

On 15 Apr the military situation presented itself to the Field Marshal as follows: in the West invasion was regarded as certain. A successful defense against it with the available forces appeared doubtful. In the East the general offensive of the Red Army was expected to be launched soon. In Italy the Allied offensive slowly but steadily gained ground toward the North, and wore down the German forces. On the basis of a precise knowledge of the terrain and the tactical situation, he suggested that Central and Southern Italy be abandoned and an alternate position be occupied along the line of Pisa-Florence - Ravenna. The OKW told him to restrict his attention to his own sphere of duties, and his ideas were rejected. Thus the defense of the open Italian coast was split up and weakened and the coastal line exposed to enemy attacks.

The hopelessness of the military situation was even surpassed by that of the political situation. Germany stood alone, Italy had become an enemy because Mussolini's pseudo-dictatorship in Northern Italy could no longer be counted on. The desertion of Finland, Roumania and Bulgaria was imminent. An attempt to come to an understanding with one opponent in order to eliminate the other was never made. Germany's foreign policy was lacking in constructive ideas and flexibility to the same extent as its military leadership.

The subjects discussed at the Field Marshal's included also the ideas of Dr Goerdeler, which, on 14 Apr, were conveyed to the chief of staff for the Field Marshal by the Mayor of Stuttgart, Dr Stroelin, and estimates of the situation by Gens Wagner, v. Treschakow and Stieff. Unanimity existed as to the urgency of finding ways and means to bring the war to an end before the unavoidable catastrophe would eliminate the last chance to negotiate. A first examination of political ideas showed that complete agreement existed with the Field Marshal, who, on this occasion, spoke in the impulsive manner peculiar to him about Hitler's want of moderation in the military and political sphere and his contempt of European concepts and genuine humanitarianism.

A series of important discussions, aiming at clarification and preparation for action, followed.

The military commander in Belgium/Northern France, Gen Inf Alexander von Falkenhausen, who had been awarded the Pour le Merite during World War I, was outstanding both as a thinker and an individual. Genfldm Rommel had been subordinated to him when von Falkenhausen was commander of the Infantry School in Dresden; he admired this truly wise man. Having been military attaché to Japan prior to World War I, Falkenhausen became, in 1934, military adviser to Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, thus succeeding Gens von Seeckt and Wetzell. He knew the Anglo-Americans as well as the peoples of the Far East. This calm and broad-minded man liked to quote the words of Confucius: "Power of any kind is a temptation to man, but absolute power demoralizes him completely". In spite of unimaginable difficulties he successfully tried to frustrate Hitler's directives in Belgium/Northern France and to administer these countries in an

exemplary manner. Postwar developments in Belgium speak for him. On 15 Jul 44 he was replaced by Gauleiter Grohe and, following 20 Jul 44, he was arrested. Gen von Falkenhausen, though he was of the opinion that the culmination point for a successful coup d'état had already passed, nevertheless considered the attempt imperative, primarily in order to bring the war to an end and to protect the homeland from further misery. An "awakening of the conscience" appeared necessary also for spiritual, ethical and political reasons.

The military commander in France, Gen Inf Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel, shared the views of his colleague, in Belgium; it was he who, in every respect, in theory and practice, had gone further than anyone else in making preparations for a change of conditions. Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel was a chivalrous personality with high strategic and tactical abilities. On orders of the former Chief of Staff, Genobst Beck, he had worked on a service manual "Die Truppenfuehrung" (Principles of Tactics) which was written in a masterly fashion. His political intuition was as outstanding as his military abilities and his judgement. He had a fine sense of proportion. He had a philosophical background as well as diplomatic abilities which he utilized in performing his duties as chief of the Foreign Armies department of the General Staff and also as President of the Armistice Commission. He was a German and a European in the best sense of the word. His keen awareness of ethical principles made him feel personally offended by the complete absence of morality which characterized the system. Since the days they had spent together at the Dresden officer candidate school he was a close friend of Genfldm Rommel's. On 15 May 44, following preparatory

talks with the chief of staff, a thorough discussion took place in the presence of the two chiefs of staff on the subject of measures necessary to bring about a termination of the war in the West and the overthrow of the National Socialist regime. Following a review of the political and military situation, particulars as to the theoretical and practical preparations were agreed upon.

Both military commanders repeatedly voiced their anxieties to OB West, Genfldm von Rundstedt, and to Genfldm Rommel and found an open ear for their worries. Genfldm von Rundstedt, though he strongly expressed his contempt of Hitler and the regime, remained apathetic and refused to take any steps to remedy matters.

In May the Army Quartermaster General, Gen Art Eduard Wagner, went to AGp's headquarters in order to coordinate the measures taken in the West and the preparatory work done by the OKH. He reported on the strength of the active resistance movement within the OKH, the mobilization-like preparations for a rebellion and, for the first time, on intentions for an attempt on Hitler's life. The Field Marshal was opposed to such plans because he did not want Hitler to become a martyr. His idea was to have reliable panzer formations seize Hitler and to place him before a German tribunal to be tried for his crimes against the German people and against humanity. The same people that had chosen him were to adjudge him!

Nearly every day several personalities, many of them holding leading positions, came from the Reich in order to express, far from the henchmen of the Gestapo, their opinions and to seek ways and means to remedy the situation which

was becoming more and more hopeless. Among them were Reich Minister Dr Dorpmueller and Kauffmann the clear-sighted Hamburg Gauleiter. Letters arriving from persons belonging to all walks of life proved that people shared the opinions held by Rommel and his staff and gave evidence of the great amount of confidence which Rommel, the man and soldier, enjoyed among the population.

Early in May Ernst Juenger, who as Hptm was attached to the staff of the military commander in France, brought his treatise on peace, the basic ideas of which he had developed in winter 41/42. Genfldm Rommel was deeply impressed by these ideas, particularly by his constructive plans which included a demand for a United States of Europe, established in the spirit of Christian humanity. He planned to publish and widely distribute this document of historic importance at the appropriate moment. In this apocalyptic area and under the terrible strains it imposed, Juenger's ideas on peace affected the mind with an almost mythical force and accordingly had great influence.

Dr Stroelin, mayor of Stuttgart, speaking also on behalf of the former mayor Dr Goerdeler, had, on 14 Apr, expressed a desire to have a joint discussion with the former Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs, Freiherr Constantin von Neurath.

The Field Marshal respected Baron von Neurath as a chivalrous diplomat of the old school, who, if only because of his aristocratic way of thinking rejected National Socialism; furthermore he felt closely related to his Swabian compatriot. Neurath's son had been a member of his staff in Africa for some time. However, a visit by Genfldm Rommel to Neurath and Stroelin would not

have escaped the attention of the Gestapo. Therefore the chief of staff was authorized to discuss matters with Freiherr von Neurath and Dr Stroelin. The talk took place in Freudenstadt on 27 May 44 and served to exchange information on the respective situations in the West and the ZI. The chief of staff dealt with the military situation prior to the invasion. On behalf of the Field Marshal he requested to be told what consideration the people at home were giving to the problem of saving the German nation from ruin. Freiherr von Neurath described the course foreign policy had taken since 4 Feb 38, when he as well as Genobst Freiherr von Fritsch were removed from office, and told how he had repeatedly, but vainly warned Hitler. Mayor Dr Stroelin, speaking on behalf of the resistance forces at home, pointed out that the main problem centered around the person of Adolf Hitler, because the Allies would refuse to enter into political negotiations with him. His removal was therefore a prerequisite for a new policy. Stroelin went on to state that, in his opinion, Genfldm Rommel was the only person who could be entrusted with the command of the combined armed forces because he was not only popular in Germany where he was known as an honest man, but also highly respected abroad as a chivalrous military commander.

Both men asked the chief of staff to appeal to the Field Marshal to save the Reich by placing himself at the nation's disposal either as Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht or as provisional head of state.

Although outstanding personalities like Genobst Beck and Mayor Dr Goerdeler available for the task of reorganizing the Reich and carrying out the revolution, at the outset the inspiring personality of Genfldm Rommel, who was

to the Allies acceptable for the purpose of entering into negotiations, would be indispensable to both the German people and the Army. The question of what facilities existed for entering into negotiations with the Western Allies, for instance through the British Ambassador to Madrid, Sir Samuel Hoare, and through Swiss contacts was also discussed. Initial steps to sound out the enemy had been taken through Madrid and Lisbon without, however, having led to any definite results.

Ten days later Freiherr von Neurath submitted a detailed report on the situation and the possibilities in the field of foreign policy; however these possibilities still appeared rather limited.

Hitler's elimination was thoroughly discussed. The Field Marshal's idea, which was to seize Hitler and have him tried by a German tribunal was opposed by Dr Stroelin, who pointed out that the resistance forces at home considered Hitler's assassination imperative. Plans for the conduct of a propaganda campaign at home and at the front were outlined.

In the course of a second discussion closer contact was established between the two camps of the resistance movement and a method of communicating with A Gp's headquarters was agreed upon which proved to be efficient and was never discovered.

The Field Marshal approved the decisions reached at the discussions and informed Freiherr von Neurath and Dr Goerdeler that preparatory steps had been taken and that he had no personal demands and would be ready for any task assigned to him.

An American attempt to establish contact with him never came to the Field

Marshal's knowledge and was learned about only after the end of the war.

The American Colonel Smart, who was shot down over Vienna on 10 May 44, stated during his interrogation that he had been given the unofficial mission to contact Genfldm Rommel for the purpose of having the latter put an end to the war on his own responsibility. Copies of the minutes of the interrogation, which took place in the camp for officer PWs at Oberursel/Taunus, were submitted to Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, Reich Minister Dr Goebbels and to the Reich Ministry for Aviation. Genfldm Rommel was not informed, which furnishes yet another example of the methods employed by the political leadership and of the nonexistence of cooperation among the separate branches of the Wehrmacht.

Thus, during the weeks preceding the invasion the thoughts of all centered around the question of how to save the Reich. Only he who has had to make a decision at the turning point of an epoch and a decision affecting human, political and military problems of historical importance, not alone for his own nation and not alone for Europe, but for the entire human race can understand the mental stress to which a military leader is exposed. The problems of a Prince of Homburg, of a Louis Ferdinand and of a York cannot be compared with those of the military commanders under Hitler. Genfldm Rommel agreed with Napoleon in the latter's demand that, at crucial moments of historical significance the strategist should realize that preference must be given to thinking in a statesman-like manner rather than a military manner. The Field Marshal was not a subservient nature of the type that Schlieffen has described as "Spezial", whom Hitler like Robespierre, could order to see two alternatives, namely the enemy in front and the hangman's noose behind. In addition there was Moltke's ethical principle

that, in the final issue, the man as such must be valued higher than the soldier, and humanity higher than principles. During the evening talks in the park Rommel liked to quote from Hitler's "Mein Kampf" those sentences which the dictator in the course of his career, had contradicted most openly: "When a nation is led toward ruin, by its government, the open resistance of every single member of that nation is not only his right but his duty. Human rights are more important than state constitution ". And "Diplomacy should not be concerned merely to see to it that a nation perish in heroic fashion, but rather to ensure the preservation of that nation. Every method employed to serve this end is good and failure to employ such methods must be considered a crime against loyalty".

Rommel struggled for recognition of the fact that for the military leader obedience must end there where the sense of responsibility for the fate of the nation and conscience calls for rebellion. He was well aware of the difference between obedience toward God as against obedience toward man. For the sake of the nation he had to resort to extraordinary measures when all other means had been exhausted. He had one more opportunity to submit his ideas, both orally and in writing, to Hitler, and endeavor to convince him and induce him to reverse his policy. When, however, like all preceding appeals, this appeal too remained unheeded, Rommel's oath was no longer binding. Then it was his duty to take action in the fulfillment of his duties toward the fatherland. He clearly realized that only the supreme military leader could have the means, the authority and the obligation to take such action and to assume the responsibility and not the individual officer and soldier, who could not possibly have

the proper discernment. Genfldm Rommel took it upon himself to make decisions; he refused to have the scope of his responsibility limited to purely executive tasks, as was demanded by Hitler. It was his desire to protect his country and the world from further bloodshed and to prevent the destruction of the cities and fertile fields of the homeland. Not even the harshest terms of a merciless adversary could have made him change his determination to stop the war from being fought on German soil.

Rommel saw clearly that the action envisaged would require the sacrifice of his life and perhaps also lend support to another "stab in the back legend". However, the Field Marshal had always been ready to sacrifice his life.

Rommel, von Falkenhausen and von Stuelpnagel informed the OB West, Genfldm von Rundstedt quite frankly on the situation, the discussions and plans.

Relations between Rommel and Genfldm von Rundstedt and the latter's chief of staff, Gen Inf Blumentritt, were marked by mutual confidence. In Genfldm von Rundstedt, Rommel admired the experienced soldier of the old school, the Schlieffen-disciple. There was complete agreement of opinion with regard to the over-all conduct of the war. Genfldm von Rundstedt was definitely a "strategic mind", who had a sovereign command of the military science. However, due perhaps to his age, he lacked creative genius, determination and a clear conception of his duty toward the nation. Apathy and embittered resignation characterized him to an ever increasing extent. Though he had only contempt for Hitler, whom he called the "Bohemian corporal", he seemed to consider "remonstrations" and earnest reports to be the supreme wisdom and left it to others to take action. During a preparatory discussion he said to Rommel: "You are young,

you are popular and the people like you, you must do it!"

Thus von Rundstedt "resigned" not only as a military leader but also as a personality and this at a moment which called for decisive action. His mental and physical inertia also made itself felt in combat. At the front he remained generally unknown, while Rommel's ^{extraordinary} culous leadership qualities never ceased to personally inspire his soldiers, and then himself tirelessly into his task to set an example for his men.

The attitude which Genfldm von Rundstedt, who during the afternoon of 4 Jul 44 had told Rommel that he would never again assume a command, subsequently took is hard to understand; especially the fact that, after 20 Jul, he served on the so-called Court of Honor, which through the expulsion of comrades-in-arms from the Wehrmacht made their trials before the People's Court possible; and also his renewed assumption of the command on 5 Sep 44; the launching of the Ardennes offensive, an operation which had to be paid for in more blood and through which decisive results could not possibly be achieved since it newly postponed the end of a war which had already been given up as lost; finally, the fact that he represented Hitler at the state funeral of the dead Field Marshal in Ulm on 17 Oct when fate had given him an excellent opportunity to emulate Marc Anthony's speech. Von Rundstedt remained sunk in a moral inertia.

In cooperation with Gen Inf Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel the following ideas were given consideration in the form of a mobilization schedule and in oral agreements:

West: Discussion of the terms for an armistice with General Eisenhower

and Montgomery w i t h o u t Hitler's participation. For the negotiations Genfldm Rommel had designated:

Gen Inf Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel,

Gen Pz Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg,

Genlt Dr Hans Speidel,

Genlt Graf Gerd von Schwerin,

Vz Adm Friedrich Ruge,

Obstlt (Reserves) Dr Caesar von Hofacker.

It was contemplated to conclude an armistice on the following basis:

Evacuation of the occupied western territories, withdrawal of the armies in the West behind the Westwall, transfer of the administration of the occupied western territories to the Allies, i m m e d i a t e c e s s a t i o n o f t h e e n e m y a i r w a r against the ZI. The armistice-not unconditional surrender- was to be followed by negotiations for peace which was to pave the way toward the establishment of order instead of chaos - Genfldm Rommel expected the Allies to give him this opportunity.

Proclamation to the German people broadcast by all radio stations in the West: Frank and accurate information on the political and military situation as well as on the crimes committed by the Hitler regime.

Instruction of the troops to the effect that all measures taken had been necessary in order to avert a catastrophe.

At home: Seizure of Adolf Hitler in order to place him before a German tribunal for trial. This plan was to be carried out by the supporters of the resistance movement within the OKH or by reliable armored formations. Genfldm

Rommel stuck to his plan not to assassinate Hitler, but to have him tried by a German tribunal. Overthrow of the Nazi regime. Assumption of the governmental power in Germany by adherents of the resistance movement from all walks of life under the leadership of Genobst Beck, Mayor Dr Goerdeler and the former Hesse Minister of the Interior and union leader Leuschner.

Genfldm Rommel did not personally aspire to the control of the Reich, however he was prepared to assume the supreme command of the Army or the Wehrmacht. No military dictatorship. Preparations for a creative peace. Cooperation of all those willing to work on reconstruction.

East: Continuation of the battle, for this purpose a shortened Eastern front, extending roughly along the line Roumania, Lemberg, Vistula, Memel was to be held; evacuation of Courland and other "fortresses".

The preparations were to be finished by the end of June.

The Invasion

Hitler postponed his long promised visit to the West time and again. Genfldm Rommel accordingly wished to make one more personal report on the military and political situation as it presented itself prior to the invasion which was imminent and to request the taking of logical political measures. In addition he wished to request the abandonment of the untruthful "Atlantic-propaganda to which, without being conscious of the fact, he had himself frequently lent support. In agreement with Genfldm von Rundstedt and after he had made the necessary arrangements with Hitler's adjutant, Genlt Schmudt, he went by car - in view of the enemy air superiority high ranking commanders were strictly prohibited from traveling by plane - to the Obersalzberg on 5 Jun in order to report during the afternoon of 6 Jun. The night from 5 to 6 Jun he wanted to spend with his family in Herrlingen near Ulm.

The 5th of Jun passed quietly. As had frequently happened in the past, OB West released intelligence reports to the effect that it appeared possible that the invasion would be started between 5 and 16 Jun. Intercepted code messages made mention of various days, later on, however, they indicated a postponement of the date. The FFl- forces of resistance in France became active mainly in Brittany where leaflets were distributed the contents of which could be interpreted as an appeal to start of active resistance. From the beginning of June A Gp had, as a precautionary measure, ordered an alert for its entire front.

On 5 Jun at 22:00 hours Fifteenth Army again intercepted a code word which justified the conclusion that the beginning of the invasion was at hand. The Fifteenth Army, of course, had alerted its troops. OB West, who was informed

of the coded report, decided not to alert the entire front.

Due to enemy air superiority, air and naval reconnaissance also remained ineffectual during the days preceding the invasion. The reconnaissance units of the Navy did not put out because the sea was too rough.

On 5 Jun, shortly before midnight, A Gp's chief of staff received reports to the effect that parachute jumps had taken place in the area of Caen and in the southeastward section of the Cotentin peninsula. At first there was doubt as to whether major airborne formations had been committed or strong liaison troops had been dropped to reinforce the resistance movement in France. In the region between Seine and Orne especially, the parachute jumps were scattered over a wide area. Nevertheless readiness for action was ordered by telephone everywhere. Between 0300 and 0400 hours the reports on parachute jumps became more definite. In addition bombing attacks on coastal fortifications were carried out and the approach of strong enemy air forces was reported. The pz divs which had been held in reserve were alerted. The I SS Pz Corps, which was not placed under A Gp's command, was immediately ordered to establish communication with the corps of Gen Art Erich Marcks, who was in command along the Calvados coast and on Cotentin, and with the divs committed there. The 21 Pz Div received the order to move into its assembly areas south of Caen. OKW and OB West were informed. At 0530 hours, the bombardment of the Calvados coast by hundreds of naval guns began. Defense measures, prearranged long ago, were carried out automatically. The orders prepared for Operation Normandy were issued.

The chief of staff of A Gp B reported on 6 Jun between 0600 and 0630 hours by telephone to Rommel in Herrlingen on the situation and the first measures

which had been taken. He received the CIG's unqualified approval. Genfldm Rommel immediately cancelled his trip to Berchtesgaden and was back at his headquarters in la Roche Guyon on 6 Jun between 1600 and 1700 hours.

The issuance of strategic directives was not possible during the first hours pending clarification of the situation through reports and reconnaissance elements, which had been immediately dispatched everywhere. One had to be in full control of one's nerves to be able to wait. Constant calls of the OKW and OB West demonstrated the nervousness prevailing at supreme headquarters. Genobst Jodl was repeatedly informed on the situation by the chief of staff.

Beginning at 0600 hours reports concerning the debarkation of troops became more definite. All these reports came from Army sources since not a single German plane was able to reach the Normandy area. The Allied air force had, on 6 Jun, thwarted the attempts of the 70 bombers and 90 fighters, then available in the West, to take off and had ploughed the air fields under. During the afternoon of 6 Jun the point of main effort of a major landing was observed to be situated between Orne and Vire. The situation between Seine and Orne and in the Southeast corner of Cotentin, where Allied parachute units in unknown strength had jumped was obscure.

Genfldm Rommel, realizing that after an enemy landing, every hour would count in the effort to annihilate the vanguard of the enemy landing forces, to prevent reinforcements from joining the enemy and to prevent the enemy from gaining ground, had issued a combat directive to 21 Pz Div in the Caen area to take advantage of the enemy's critical moment of weakness in the course of the landing operations by immediately launching a counterattack. Preparations

had been made in map exercises for all possibilities with due consideration given to terrain and available forces. It was Rommel who employed 21 Pz Div at this crucial point, but additional armored units were denied him. During his telephone conversation in the morning the Field Marshal had emphatically pointed out once more that the immediate launching of a counterattack by 21 Pz Div and all reserves available in its area under a unified command was likely to become necessary. Since Hitler failed to authorize the commitment of any further reserves at that time, 21 Pz Div, carrying out the order of the commanding general of LXXXIV Inf Corps, Gen Art Marcks, launched a counterattack on both sides of the Orne on 6 Jun at 1000 hours. The armored forces pressed forward to the coast and established contact with elements of 716 Inf Div which were still holding their strong points. When the enemy landed additional airborne units right among the attacking troops and mainly in the area east of Caen, the divisional commander decided on his own initiative, to break off the attack and to relieve the rearward elements. Thus a service was rendered the enemy and the initial success remained unexploited. How harassing the attack of 21 Pz Div was to the enemy is clearly indicated by the commitment of his airborne formations against these armored forces. Genfldm Rommel had repeatedly, but in vain requested the moving of I SS Pz Corps with 12 Pz Div "Hitler Youth" and Pz Lehr Div into assembly positions in the area between Caen and Falaise. It had been his intention to once more make a request to that effect when he saw Hitler on 6 Jun. The immediate commitment of this pz corps with its three pz divs during the critical moment of weakness in the course of the enemy landing operations could have brought about a decisive local success.

On 6 Jun, at night, the enemy, whose control of the air and of the sea was undisputed, had succeeded in establishing a bridgehead between Orne and the area north of Ryes which had a width of 25 km and a depth of up to 10 km. Another bridgehead had been established in the southeast corner of Cotentin in a width of 15 km and a depth of 4 km.

In the first-mentioned landing area along the Calvados coast, Second British Army had landed one to two airborne divs and approximately five to six armd and inf divs respectively. The forces landed by First US Army at the southeast corner of Cotentin included about two airborne divs and three to four armd and inf divs respectively. The troops of 716 and 352 Inf Divs, fighting gallantly to the last in their linear pillbox line and in their assembly areas, had been holding out in a hopeless position in a ruin of fire from the air, from the sea, and finally from the land, which reached a fierceness never experienced before. The barrage from the sea by medium and heavy calibers of the united Anglo-American armada virtually cut off the area from the interior of France. During landing operations on 6 Jun the Allied air force carried out 27 000 missions. Only a person who has witnessed the fire of all three branches of the Allied armed forces can appreciate the actual physical and moral effect. Hitler refused to admit this effect in defiance of all oral and written reports. His first reaction took the form of reproaches and meddling motivated by suspicion. Once more he was looking for "scapegoats"; by orders of the supreme authority a number of commanders were to be relieved.

The commitment of I SS Pz Corps was authorized only in the afternoon, toward 1500 hours; a movement in daytime was no longer feasible due to

the enemy air superiority. In the evening the point of main effort of the Allied forces appeared to be in the area between Orne and Vire. Developments supported the assumption that the enemy intended to launch an attack on Paris.

Early on 7 Jun I SS Pz Corps took over the Caen sector; its task was to carry out, with the concentrated forces of 21 Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div, the attack which, on 6 Jun, had been unsuccessfully launched by 21 Pz Div and to drive the enemy who had come ashore in the Caen - Bayeux area into the sea. Although time and approach routes had been carefully defined, the constant enemy bombing attacks on communication lines and particularly on road junctions rendered it impossible to move up the formations and their supplies in time during those short June nights.

The attack of I SS Pz Corps was launched on 9 Jun, the third day of the invasion. The enemy's critical moment of weakness had passed. Area bombings and constant fire from enemy naval guns had prevented I SS Pz Corps from assembling in the designated area at the proper time. German losses in men and materiel, especially in radio equipment, were very severe. Thus the task of the commanders was rendered even more difficult because, after the elimination of the Luftwaffe, the means to obtain an estimate of the enemy situation became increasingly inadequate. The attacking forces met an opponent who was already able to defend himself and who was already superior on the ground too; after initial local successes the attack came to a stop.

At that time Second British Army had on its beachhead already about ten mtz or armd divs, while First US Army had on Cotentin eight to nine divs. The Allies had linked up the individual landing beaches along the Calvados coast by taking possession of the area north and west of Bayeux. The Allied reinforcements arrived more speedily than the German reserves, which had to be moved up without any

air protection and off the roads which, at many points were disrupted. The first three days had shown that cooperation between the Allied landing forces and their two other branches of armed forces was marked by great precision.

During the rapidly changing situation of the first three days, A Gp B submitted urgent requests to OB West and OKW.

During the afternoon of 7 Jun it was suggested that elements of Fifteenth Army which were immediately available across the Seine be shifted in southerly direction. By order of OKW the CiC of A Gp B was strictly prohibited from shifting even one single division on his own responsibility. Further suggestions were:

Weakening of the Channel front, shifting of the divs employed in the rear area of Fifteenth Army in night marches (the railroad system was disrupted and motor transport columns were not available) toward the invasion front and thus to relieve the pz divs committed there for mobile operations. At first these requests were rejected, later on they were granted only hesitatingly and piecemeal. This was due to the fact that Hitler and OKW stuck to the assumption that a second enemy landing at the Channel coast was likely. The question of a second landing played an important part during the first six weeks of the invasion. Strategic, tactical and political considerations led Genfldm Rommel to believe that a second landing was not likely, although daily for a period of more than five weeks, according to the data, furnished by higher commands "in small doses," the presence of sixty units in division strength on the British Isles was reported. This group, of course, could not be overlooked in estimates of the overall situation. In accordance with his previous estimate, Rommel described the coastal sector between Somme and Seine as a potential landing area. However,

after the middle of June, A Gp considered a landing of Patton's army north of the Seine, especially at the most strongly fortified Channel front unlikely because, by that time the enemy had established adequate beachheads between Orne and Vire and on the eastern coast of Cotentin and these were about to be linked up. However the OKW rejected the request to move up the divs of Fifteenth Army and refused to grant A Gp freedom of action. Later on, Genobst Jodl himself called this decision a mistake. It was not until late in July that OKW ordered the shifting of the divs of Fifteenth Army from the Channel front, where they had been idle, to Normandy. But at the time the question had already come up whether these forces should not be used establish a line of defense along the Seine, if the policy to refuse freedom of strategic decisions in the West was to be continued.

Genfldm Rommel continued to request the shifting of the bulk of the divs from Brittany and the Channel Islands to the Normandy front. In Brittany defense could be limited to the protection of the coasts; strategically the peninsula was untenable in any case and, the U-boat base had, as far as the number and practical usefulness of the U-boats was concerned, lost its importance. This has been borne out by subsequent experience.

Stationed on the British Channel Islands was 319 Inf Div, reinforced by a pz regt, a flak brig and other units, altogether about 35 000 men, who had to surrender without a fight in May 45. As early as 1944, soldiers called this div, in view of its unavoidable fate, the "Canada Div". After the request had been rejected in writing, Hitler ordered on 17 Jun than no further suggestions of this kind were to be offered.

A further request was made to strip the Mediterranean front, "because it

was impossible to hold everything", and to shift to Normandy, from their stations in Southern France, LVIII Pz Corps with four pz divs (9 and 11 Pz Divs, 2 and 17 SS Pz Divs) which, however, were in the process of being rehabilitated. For fear of an enemy landing in the Mediterranean area Hitler and OKW rejected this request also. It was not until July and August that the pz divs were shifted into the area south of the Seine i.e. to a point which was strategically unsuitable.

It was obvious that the Mediterranean front, in view of the forces committed there and in view of the nature of the terrain, would never be able to withstand a major enemy attack. If, however, an invasion should be launched here too, it was imperative to conduct the battle on a large operational scale: complete evacuation of Southern France, withdrawal of the forces behind the Seine/Yonne-line, assembly of all available reserves behind the eastern wing.

Neither OB West nor OKW granted these requests; Rommel's attention was drawn to his own sphere of duties and thinking on a strategic plane was once more prohibited.

Thus the first phase of the invasion ended with the success of the Allies. They had overcome the first critical days, thanks to the excellent cooperation between the branches of their armed forces and to their technical performance during the landing operations, without encountering major difficulties or suffering major reverses and had succeeded in consolidating their position.

It had become obvious that the Allied forces could be thrown back into the sea or contained in their beachheads for a longer period of time only if a strong German Luftwaffe and adequate naval forces were to join in the battle. The

tactical failure of the units which had launched the counterattack was not the fault of the local commanders nor did it result from a lack of aggressiveness on the part of the troops; the actual reason was rather the efficiency of Allied air and naval forces, which, even in the first days had caused a serious lack of fuel and ammunition on the German side.

The Allies had the initiative.

Period 9 Jun to 24 Jul 44

The military events

This was the phase during which efforts were made to throw the enemy from his beachheads back into the sea.

The staff of Pz Army West, commander Gen Pz Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, with headquarters in Paris, was, upon request, assigned to A Gp on 7 Jun; it was, however, not until the evening of 8 Jun that he was able to take over the command in the sector extending from east of the Orne to Tilly. In this area elements of the inner wings of Fifteenth and Seventh Armies with I SS Pz Corps were placed under his command. The combat mission was: commitment of all available pz units in a drive to chase the enemy from the continent. After the failure of I SS Pz Corps, Gen Freiherr von Geyr made preparations for an attack which he planned to launch during the night of 10 to 11 Jun.

After the orders had been issued at Pz Army's headquarters in the presence of A Gp's CiC Pz Lehr Div reported an enemy penetration from the West. It was one of those exaggerated reports which are unavoidable during a war; it necessitated, however, the taking of countermeasures. Shortly after this report had been received, headquarters of Pz Army West were almost completely destroyed as a result of area bombings; the enemy probably had, by the use of radio detectors, found the location of the newly established radio stations. The chief of staff and the I A of Pz Army West were killed, the sig bn was eliminated, and only the CiC, who suffered minor injuries, and a few others survived. Only on 26 Jun was he able to resume his command with a new staff which showed all the shortcomings of an improvisation. No concentrated counterattack could be laun-

ched during the next few days since, as a result of the ever increasing pressure of the British arm'd divs. the pz units too had to remain on the defensive. Day by day Hitler and the OKW interfered with the command and, as so often before, wanted to frustrate all enemy operations at the same time. The following combat tasks were assigned: to take measures to preclude any possibility of an enemy attack through Caen toward the South, to prevent a thrust from Bayeux toward the South, to hold Cherbourg at any price and to preclude any possibility of the Cotentin peninsula being cut off and any possibility of enemy operations against Brittany. Finally a Fuehrer order was received, demanding the "destruction", sector by sector, of the beachheads between Orne and Vire. The order went into details such as, for instance, the commitment of a werfer brigade* east of the Orne.

While the afore-mentioned events took place between Orne and Vire with the sector Caen - Bayeux apparently being the enemy's point of main effort, the US forces endeavored to consolidate and to widen their beachheads in the south-eastern part of Cotentin. At the outset the following forces were committed against the American beachhead: elements of 243, 91, 77 Inf Divs, 3 FS Div, 17 SS Pz Gren Div and 30 Inf Brig. But here too, in spite of the prudent leadership of Gen Art Marcks, one of the best soldiers in the German Army, no concentrated counterattack could be launched and this for the same reasons as at Caen. Here too the piecemeal arrival of reserves had prevented the organization of an attack group of combat efficiency. The following date may serve to demonstrate the piecemeal manner in which the reserves arrived: arrivals in the combat area: the 12 SS Pz Div on 7 Jun, Pz Lehr Div on 8 and 9 Jun, 346 Inf Div on 8 and 9 Jun, 77 Inf Div on 11 Jun, 2 Pz Div on 13 Jun, 3 FS

* mortar brigade

Div on 13 Jun and 1 SS Pz Div on 18 Jun. A similar situation prevailed with regard to the moving up of special units like assault-gun units and werf brigs, but here the situation was perhaps even worse due to the growing destruction of the railroad lines.

Only a rigorous stripping of the coastal sectors north and south of Normandy could have made up to some extent for the disadvantages resulting from the superiority of the enemy air force. The reasons why such measure was not taken are to be found in the estimate of the enemy situation by the OKW, which still stuck to its belief that a second landing was imminent.

The counterattack against the US forces on the Cotentin was dissipated in individual localized thrusts; the arriving forces had to be committed mostly in defensive action because of the critical situations which, in the course of the battle, developed.

Weather conditions on 9 and 10 Jun had reduced the enemy's activity in the air to some extent, however no advantage could be taken of this situation either.

It became apparent that the American CIC planned to cut off the peninsula and to take Cherbourg first. Hitler, in his directives, called the defense of Cherbourg "decisive for the outcome of the war". However, Cherbourg's landward fortifications as well as the forces available for its defense were inadequate. OKW ordered the units designated for the defense of Cherbourg, namely 709 Inf Div, 91 Inf Div, 247 Inf Div and 77 Inf Div, to resist the enemy as long as possible and, eventually, to "conduct a fighting withdrawal" to Cherbourg. In spite of A Gp's repeated representations, this order was never cancelled. While carrying out this twofold task the non-motorized inf divs, which lacked supplies,

were, during their retreat, overrun by enemy tanks and, for the greatest part, annihilated by the enemy air forces. A land and sea defense area which was so vast in extent was untenable without adequate land forces and without support from the air and on the sea. A Gp supported requests, made by LXXXIV Inf Corps and Seventh Army, to commit the forces on Cotentin in such a manner as to prevent their being annihilated. However all these requests were sacrificed in an attempt to hold Cherbourg and rejected. Orders which never varied, demanded: tenacious resistance and the holding of every square inch of ground. The result of OKW's orders and counter orders was the American break-through at St Sauveur, which caused the loss of four divs. At this point Genfldm Rommel, acting on his own responsibility, decided to shift all available forces to the South and to seal off Cotentin. A combat group of 77 Inf Div, under the command of Obst Bacherer, succeeded, after a bold break-through toward the South, in closing a gap in the Cotentin front. Cherbourg fell on 25 Jun and the last German pockets of resistance surrendered on 30 Jun.

The capture of the Cherbourg naval base was, of course, not as essential for the supply of the Allied forces as had been originally assumed by the Germans. The construction of artificial harbors and the use made of them off the Calvados coast was a far more decisive factor. The effect of the fall of Cherbourg on morale appeared more significant. Despite his superiority the enemy did not attain his objectives on schedule. A captured American map, showing schedules and objectives of the invasion armies, disclosed that, according to expectations, Cherbourg should have fallen on 6 Jun and the line Avranches - Domfront should have been occupied on 10 Jun. Thus it is evident that the

operations were executed at a considerably lower speed than was called for in the Allied plan and that the employment of more troops than originally intended had become necessary.

After the fall of Cherbourg A Gp considered it likely that First US Army, whose assault forces had become available for new tasks, would shift its point of main effort to the area of St Lo - Carantan in order to take the line Coutances - St Lo as a jump-off position for a break-through toward the South and to ensure liaison with Second British Army's beachhead in Normandy.

In the Bayeux area Second British Army had failed to realize the existence of a dangerous breach in the German line of defense which had been wide open for a period of several days. A break-through toward the South or Southeast could, at that time already, have been of decisive importance and might have resulted in the shattering of the front south of the Seine. However the British offensive had been directed eastward in order to unhinge, in an ordinary frontal attack, the front at Caen. Employing all available reserves, the newly committed XXXXVII Pz Corps, with 2 Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div, succeeded in closing the gap south of Bayeux.

Due to enemy superiority in the air and on the sea, however, and since a flexible conduct of battle had been definitely prohibited and a tenacious defense of every inch of ground, including that of the bridgehead across the Orne at Caen, which was tactically valueless and incurred murderous losses, had been ordered by Hitler, the defensive battle as a whole resulted in severe attrition of German strength.

This tactical patchwork not only gave initiative entirely to the enemy, but

was also the weaker decision in every respect.

The Conference with Adolf Hitler in Margival on 17 Jun

Such was the situation when, finally, Hitler decided to comply with the urgent requests constantly made by Field Marshals von Rundstedt and Rommel by going to the West to examine the situation on the spot and, perhaps to make new strategic decisions. During the evening of 16 Jun a call was received according to which the two Field Marshals with their chiefs of staff were to report at headquarters "WII" near Margival north of Soissons on 17 Jun at 0900 hours to give an account of the situation. The Field Marshal had to travel 200 km into the rear area after he had returned on 17 Jun at 0300 hours from a 21 hours visit of the Cotentin front.

Fuehrer Headquarters "WII" had been built on historic ground in 1940. The nearby cross of the "Laffaux Corner" commemorates the point where, in World War I, the front veered from an East - West direction toward the North. From there the Chemin des Dames, which was hotly contested in World Wars I and II, extends between Aisne and Oise- Aisne- Canal toward the East. Headquarters was located 8 km northeast of Soissons in the deep cut of the railroad landing to Laon immediately in front of the entrance of a tunnel which could shelter the special train. Headquarters consisted of spacious, well camouflaged concrete bunkers. Located on a hill was the mess hall which afforded a beautiful view of the distant Cathedral of Soissons. On the ground floor of the Fuehrer bunker there was a spacious study, a bedroom with bath, rooms for the adjutants, and air raid shelters especially furnished for work and rest. This headquarters had

been designed to serve as "command post" for the duration of the England-operation 1940, however, up to 17 Jun 44, it had never been used.

Hitler, who was accompanied by Genobst Jodl, Gens Buhle, Schmundt, Scherff, Adms Voss and von Puttkammer and Obst von Below had arrived early in the morning of 17 Jun by car, coming from Metz where he had arrived by plane from Berchtesgaden. He looked unhealthy and overtired. He played nervously with his spectacles and the colored pencils which he held between his fingers. He sat on his chair bent forward while the field marshals remained standing. His former suggestive power seemed to have disappeared. After brief and cool greetings Hitler, speaking in a loud voice, sharply expressed his displeasure over the success of the Allied landings, tried to find faults with the local commanders and ordered the holding of "the fortress Cherbourg" at any price.

Genfldm von Rundstedt, after a brief introductory speech, asked Rommel, in his capacity as CIG in command of the invasion front, to give a report on the situation. Rommel frankly pointed out what he considered to be the cardinal point of the defense against the invasion: the hopelessness, stressed prior to the invasion and emphasized every day since, of fighting against tremendous enemy superiority in all three "dimensions". Due to the failure of our air and naval reconnaissance, Rommel went on to state by the superior fire support of his air and naval forces, succeeded in carrying out landings from the air and from the sea along the weakly protected and thinly garrisoned coasts of the Calvados and the Cotentin peninsula. The divs employed along the coast had, contrary to an enemy report which had been readily accepted by OKW, not been caught napping, but had defended their poorly constructed strong points to the

last; the performance of officers and men in this unequal struggle had been superhuman. Based on his estimate of the tactical situation on Cotentin and on the comparative strengths of the opposing forces, Field Marshal Rommel predicted the fall of Cherbourg almost to the day and demanded that the battle be conducted accordingly. Another question that was raised was that of Hitler's so-called fortresses, meaning towns and strong points with field fortifications improvised ad hoc. Their usefulness was unequivocally denied by Rommel. He warned against the useless sacrifice of men and materiel, but in vain, because during the invasion and the subsequent operations the following places were declared "fortresses": IJmuiden, the Isle of Walcheren, Dunkerque, Calais, Cape Gris Nez, Boulogne, Dieppe, Le Havre, Cherbourg, St Malo, Brest, Lorient, St Nazaire, La Pallice, Royen and the Gironde estuary. About 200 000 men as well as precious materiel were tied up there. The enemy, in proper appraisal of the situation, merely disregarded these "fortresses" and did not even leave any considerable forces to besiege them. The fortresses fell, some of them only as late as May 45 and as a result of the unconditional surrender. The troops were taken to PoW camps. Hitler had learned nothing from the experiences of Stalingrad, Tunisia, the Crimea, Tarnopol etc.

Field Marshal Rommel explained the strategic plans the enemy was likely to carry out: break-through from the areas Caen - Bayeux and from the Cotentin peninsula southward toward Paris with a secondary operation directed toward the area beyond Avranches to seal off Brittany.

The Twenty-First Allied Army Group (Eisenhower), under whose command the British and US invasion forces had been unified, Rommel continued, had already

landed twenty-two to twenty-five armd and mtz divs, eleven to thirteen of them being British and ten to twelve US divs. Reinforcements continued to arrive at the rate of two to three divs a week. In view of the strength of all three branches of the Wehrmacht at that time, a successful defense could not be counted on and the consequences for the whole West were unforeseeable, particularly since neither the Seine line nor any other rear positions had been prepared for defense. Although enemy leadership seemed methodical and slow at the outset, the enemy was, nevertheless, bound to succeed in view of his superiority in every field.

At this time Rommel no longer believed in a second major landing north of the Seine and renewed his request for unrestricted freedom of action in the West and for reinforcements by first class pz units as well as air and naval forces. As most urgent at that moment from a tactical point of view he asked for a directive in view of the expected break-through of First US Army toward the western coast of Cotentin and requested the withdrawal of the Caen front behind the Orne. Genfldm von Rundstedt supported these requests.

However, in spite of this estimate of the enemy situation and in spite of the fact that combat efficiency was decreasing day by day, Hitler failed to see the facts and, in a long autosuggestive speech he predicted that the "V weapon", the employment of which had begun on 16 Jun, would have a decisive effect on the outcome of the war against England. He interrupted the discussion in order to personally dictate to the representative of the Reich Press Chief the contents of an announcement, to be published by press and radio, concerning the employment for the first time of the V weapons. The discussion, into which the two

Field Marshals had entered with great expectations gave way to a monologue by Hitler, which had hardly any bearing on the subject.

The Field Marshals demanded the employment of the V weapon against the beachheads, so that the Commanding General of the V Weapons, Gen Art Heinemann, who had been called to attend the meeting, had to stress the incalculable dispersion of these missiles (15 - 18km) and to the danger that would result for the German troops. Controlled employment of V weapons against the invasion armies on the continent was therefore unfeasible. The employment of V-weapons against the ports of Southern England, where all shipments of men and materiel to the invasion troops were handled, was rejected by Hitler, who stated that he wanted London bombed in order to make the British people "desirous of peace".

When Genfldm Rommel once more referred to the failure of the Luftwaffe, Hitler replied that he had been "deceived" by the command and technicians of the Luftwaffe. A great variety of types had been developed at one and the same time, but no practical results had been achieved.

Since, throughout the meeting, Hitler refused to believe Rommel's appalling report on the effectiveness of enemy weapons, the latter pointed out that thus far no important personality belonging either to the Fuehrer's personal staff or to the OKW, the OKL or the OKM had visited the front to get acquainted with the actual situation and the effect of enemy weapons. Orders were given from the conference table and situation estimated without actual front experience. Rommel added: "You demand that we should have confidence, but we are not trusted ourselves!" Hitler turned pale at this reproach, but he remained silent.

Thereafter Genobst Jodl disclosed what additional army, naval and air force

units would be assigned and at what moment these units could be expected to arrive. Subsequently Hitler spoke of the imminent employment of "swarms of Turbofighters" which would spell the end of enemy air superiority at the front as well as over the ZI and promised an increasing employment of the V-weapon. He said the situation in the East and in the Southeast had been consolidated and indulged in paraphrases regarding the imminent collapse of England as a result of the employment of the V-weapon and the Turbo-fighters.

The reported approach of enemy air force formations made it necessary to retire into the air raid shelter of the Fuehrer bunker and to conclude the discussion there. Only Hitler, the two field marshals with their chief of staff and Gen Schmundt were present in the small room. Rommel availed himself of the opportunity now that the military situation had been covered, to explain Germany's political situation and in doing so he minced no words. He predicted the collapse of the invasion front, an unpreventable break-through to Germany, the disintegration of the Italian front - Rome had been lost on 4 Jun - and also expressed doubts that the Eastern Front could be held. Referring to the foreign situation he pointed to Germany's complete isolation which, despite propaganda to the contrary, was bound to fatally weaken Germany's defense. He concluded this grave estimate of the situation with an urgent demand to bring the war to an end. Hitler, after some arguing, ended the discussion with the words: "Do not concern yourself with the conduct of the war, but concentrate on your invasion front."

On 6 Jun 46 Genobst Jodl stated in Nuremberg: "Several generals, among them Rommel and Rundstedt, tried time and again, to explain to Hitler Germany's criti-

cal situation, but Hitler would not listen to them."

In view of the situation both field marshals pointed to the urgent necessity of at last modifying the policy toward France and especially discontinuing the Sauckel - Action (Translator's note: Labor conscription program) and the rule of the SD (Translator's note: Security service of the SS). Hitler rejected these ideas too.

The conference had lasted from 0900 to 1600 hours, with a short interruption. The rift between Field Marshal Rommel and Hitler had widened and Hitler's suspicion, one might even say hatred, seemed to have increased.

Prior to his departure Hitler's Chief Adjutant, Gen Schmudt, who had been impressed by the Field Marshal's repeated warnings that the High Command's lacked front experience, instructed the Chief of Staff of A Gp B to make preparations for a visit by Hitler on 19 Jun, to La Roche Guyon or any other suitable place and to summon front line commanders of the most diversified duty posts to personally report to Hitler on the situation. The necessary steps were taken immediately. On the trip back from Soissons to the command post, Gen Inf von Stuelpnagel the military commander in France, was informed on the result of the conference with Hitler.

When, early on 18 Jun, the chief of staff of A Gp B phoned the chief of staff of OB West in order to fix a time for Hitler's planned visit to the front, he was informed that Hitler had returned to Berchtesgaden during the night of 17 - 18 Jun. This hasty departure was due to the fact that on 17 Jun, shortly after the field marshals had left, a V - missile had hit the Fuehrer headquarters. Due to failure of their gyrotors several V - missiles, after being launched in the coastal area had turned toward the East without, however, causing any damage

worth mentioning. The hit which occurred in the proximity of the Fuehrer bunker had no effect and caused no casualties.

In proportion to the effort expended the effect of the "miracle weapon" was negligible. Intelligence and PoW statements confirmed that similar observations had also been made as to the effect on the British Isles.

The result of the conference with the Fuehrer was unsatisfactory from a military, political and personal point of view. Hitler and Jodl failed to live up to their promises concerning the assignment of reserves, especially of air force units. Contrary to Hitler's confident statement of 17 Jun, the Soviets had launched, on 25 Jun their offensive against A Gp Center, which front collapsed on both sides of the highway Smolensk - Minsk. In an unhampered drive, the Russian assault forces pushed ahead toward the frontiers of the Reich. All available reserves of the OKW and particularly those of the Replacement Army were hurled eastward to fill the breach. Even at this moment it was not possible to obtain clear information on the actual situation from the OKW; this information had to be gathered from other sources.

In Normandy Second British Army seemed to be assembling its forces for a concentric attack on Caen in order to achieve a break-through in the direction of Paris and thus to gain the open terrain, favorable to mobile warfare. The attrition of the German forces which was steadily increasing was due particularly to the fire of heavy enemy naval guns from more than 300 units of the united armada, which was directed from observation planes; the relentless air attacks also contributed essentially to this attrition. On 17 Jun Hitler had rejected

a suggestion to evacuate the Orne bridgehead at Caen where excellent combat elements were being relentlessly annihilated. In order to overcome the gradually developing crisis of the battle at Caen and to restore the situation, II SS Pz Corps was brought in from Hungary; however it had to be detrained, parts of it even east of Paris, and had to continue by road. It was placed under the command of the Pz Gp West which had been committed again and which, the concentrated forces of III Pz Corps was to thrust into the deep flank and the rear of the enemy forces fighting at Caen and to cut off the British from the sea and then to annihilate them. However, due to the development of the situation and the effectiveness of the enemy weapons, the attack could not be carried out in the concentrated manner necessary to achieve a decisive success. It had not been possible to relieve, by inf divs, the pz divs of I SS Pz Corps and XXXXVII Pz Corps, partly because the inf divs could not be brought up in time on account of the air attacks, and partly because these divs were, due to the poor composition of their personnel, and to their equipment and their command, no match for the highly mobile and armored enemy, who, supported by fire of every description, could rapidly shift his point of main effort.

The attack of II SS Pz Corps - 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs - which finally had to be launched with only limited support by other divs, was, on 29 and 30 Jun stopped by the concentric fire of the armed units, the medium and heavy artillery, the naval artillery and the enemy air force. The attack had failed to reach its objective, but it had consolidated the situation at least locally. At the time these divs were accused of lack of aggressiveness, experience and efficiency. There is no justification for this; the corps did everything in its power.

Signs of attrition rapidly became noticeable in this new corps too.

It had been the command's intention to relieve the pz divs by inf divs in order to employ the pz divs in mobile warfare, if possible on an operational scale. This was, of course, contrary to Hitler's prohibitive order and his directive according to which every inch of ground had to be held. Nevertheless an effort was made to realize the afore-mentioned plan, but nothing could be accomplished due to the inadequate combat efficiency of the inf divs and to the aggravation of the situation.

After the capture of Cherbourg by First US Army, the other point of main effort at the invasion front was the area St Lo - Carantan. Here the American divs tried to take the line Coutance - St Lo in order to thus gain a favorable jump-off position for further operations. As at the Caen front, a battle of attrition also developed in the St Lo area, where the ground troops had to hold out without any support by the other branches of the Wehrmacht, without relief and without replacements.

Between 1 and 24 Jul Twenty-First Allied Army Group tried to force a breakthrough both at Caen and at St Lo.*

At Caen, Second British Army, employing three inf divs and four to five armd brigades, launched, on 8 Jul, an enveloping attack from the North and West against Caen, after the entire area on both sides of the Orne had been plowed up by land and ships artillery and by area bombing during the night of 7 to 8 Jul. Most of the German tanks which had been kept in reserve were eliminated; they were flung into the craters like toys. After a two days struggle the British succeeded in taking Caen; a break-through across the Orne, however,

* This is the German conception

was prevented by throwing the last reserves into the battle and by the exceptional bravery of the defenders. After their efforts at Caen the British regrouped their forces and moved them into assembly positions. Radio silence and smoke screening prevented any ground reconnaissance and the few reconnaissance planes which managed to take off were unable to penetrate behind the smoke screen. Thus, once more, it was made impossible for the command to properly estimate the situation. Some local attacks were made, apparently to improve positions.

On 18 Jul the enemy launched his major attack. The point of main effort was east of the Orne. The attack was preceded by a concentrated barrage fired by all types of artillery, which lasted for several hours, and in addition by bombing attacks involving more than 1 000 bombers; the attack itself was supported by 2 200 heavy bombers. In a fierce battle lasting four days, the British, who committed five inf divs, three pz divs and three pz brigs - involving more than 1 000 tanks in an extremely small area -- advanced seven km, but failed to achieve the intended break-through. Despite their heavy casualties and complete exhaustion German pz grens and riflemen stopped this attack too.

On 20 Jul 44 the defensive battle in the Caen area reached its climax, and finally resulted in a defensive success.

Meanwhile the inferior forces of Seventh Army fought against First US Army on Cotentin peninsula and at St Lo. Here too the wearing down tactics of the Allies, through concentrated employment of all means of combat, led to attrition of the weak German forces. During the time from 3 to 7 Jul four US divs attempted to break through toward the South between the Prairies Marecageuses

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de Gorges and the western coast. They were stopped after they had made gains up to a depth of five km. In the western part of Cotentin fighting of a merely local character at first took place; on the other hand, the Americans were concentrating their forces in the area of St Lo and between Vire and Taute. During the night from 18 to 19 Jul the enemy through an enveloping attack succeeded in taking the ruins of St Lo, the site of the command post of LXXXIV Inf Corps, which was in command in this sector. The commanding general, Gen Art Erich Marcks, who in the course of the Russian campaign had already lost a leg, was killed in the front line. After the capture of St Lo the enemy shifted his point of main effort to the area west of the Vire and, on 24 Jul, after an indescribably heavy barrage, launched a major attack which was to bring about the collapse of the front between Vire and the sea: the b r e a k - t h r o u g h began to take shape. The few reserves which could be brought up came too late and were committed only in scattered groups.

Thus, while, on 24 Jul, a break-through was still being prevented at the eastern sector of the invasion front, it had definitely been achieved west of St Lo. The way was open for First US Army to move forward into the interior of France in mobile warfare.

The Allied Army Group had about forty divs on the continent, all of them armored and motorized; additional units were steadily arriving.

The German command expected Second British Army to continue its break-through attack with the point of main effort west of the Orne in order to gain the area of Falaise as a jump-off position; the First US Army was expected to widen the breach and to push forward beyond the line Domfront -

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Avranches toward the heart of France; elements of Second British Army were expected to join the Americans at the western wing.

An offensive operation to clear the enemy out of Normandy, such as had been ordered by Hitler, was now out of the question. It appeared doubtful whether the invading forces could be sealed off.

On 12 Jul the CIO of A Gp reported that, the enemy had already nearly accomplished its objectives, wearing down the German forces. Genfldm Rommel's report of 15 Jul on the situation, which was in the nature of an ultimatum, will be discussed at a later stage.

The Political Events

The tactical and strategic development of the situation up to 24 Jul has been discussed first because it is the basis for an evaluation of the political events and the changes in personnel which took place during this period.

During the days following the discussion in Margival the CiC and the chief of staff of A Gp informed the CiCs of the subordinate armies as well as several commanding generals, divisional commanders and chiefs of staffs on the result of the conference with the Fuehrer and on the conclusions which had to be drawn therefrom. Genfldm Rommel informed the individual commanders more or less outspokenly, depending upon their respective political leanings, that as a result of the military events it might become necessary for the Wehrmacht to act independently in the West. Genobst von Salmuth, Genobst Dollmann and Gen Pz Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg agreed with the Field Marshal's estimate of the political and military situation and assured the CiC of A Gp of their confidence in him. They were ready to obey the Field Marshal's orders even if they ran counter to Fuehrer orders.

The 25 Jun appeared to be of particular importance in view of the political and military events and discussions which took place on that day.

In the East the Soviets had launched their great offensive against the A Gp Center. At the Normandy front the enemy, employing superior armed formations, attacked at Tilly and made a penetration up to a depth of five km on a five km wide front, thus creating a dangerous situation in the Caen area.

Acting on orders of the Quartermaster General, Gen Art Wagner, the new Deputy Chief of the General Staff in the West, (Oberquartiermeister) Obst iG

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Finckh, reported at A Gp's command post on the preparations which had been made for the elimination of Hitler and on the planned revolution through which the homeland was to be saved. He went on to report on the failure of previous attempts on Hitler's life and on the preparations for another attempt which was to be carried out at Berchtesgaden. Those present were informed once more that, for reasons known to them, Rommel deemed it inadvisable to eliminate Hitler by assassination and insisted, instead, on his arrest and trial before a German tribunal. Rommel instructed Obst Finckh to collaborate with the Quartermaster General in making preparations for the coordination of all measures headquarters as well as in the ZI which was urgently necessary and to report to him on this matter as soon as possible. It was Rommel's opinion that this vital problem was handled by too many agencies at the same time.

It was, in Rommel's opinion, imperative to fix the time for the start of a revolt far enough in advance to ensure a thorough preparation of all measures and thus its success. Rommel himself planned another trip to Hitler in order to repeat his demands in the form of an ultimatum.

Unit commanders also voiced their opinion. The commander of 116 Pz Div, Genlt Graf Schwerin, an eminent authority on England, submitted a memorandum on the political - military situation and, on behalf of the troops, demanded an end to the war and a change in the form of government. His reliable pz div, he went on to state, could be counted upon also if employed against internal. A similar memorandum was written by the commander of 2 Pz Div, Genlt Freiherr von Luettwitz.

Field Marshals von Rundstedt and Rommel, who frequently discussed the situation, realized that the latter was rapidly deteriorating not only in the

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West, but on all fronts, and once more requested conference with Hitler. On 28 Jun the two field marshals were ordered to report at Berchtesgaden on so short a notice that they had to travel to Upper Bavaria by car even during the night since the use of a plane was prohibited. The field marshals, who arrived at Berchtesgaden on 29 Jun late in the forenoon, were not received by Hitler until evening. The conference was attended by many prominent personalities. However the request of the two CiCs that the war should be ended in view of the over-all situation was left unanswered by Hitler, who, instead, elaborated at length upon the further conduct of the war with the employment of new "miracle weapons". In the same way as the death of the Russian empress influenced the outcome of the Seven Years War in favor of Frederic the Great, the new weapons would now bring about a "miraculous turning point in the war". Their employment would lead to "total victory". Hitler's speech ended in idle fancies. Despite their repeated request, Hitler did not permit the two field marshals to speak to him alone, he also failed to invite them for dinner and curtly dismissed them. Rommel, therefore, gave another account of the situation to Genfldm Keitel and expressed his opinion approximately as follows: "A total victory, such as Hitler spoke of, cannot be achieved in view of the rapidly deteriorating situation. Instead a total defeat must be expected. Previous gains must be sacrificed and all wishful thinking must be abandoned in an all-out effort to immediately ^e end the war. This will have to be done first in the West in order to hold the Eastern Front and to save Germany not only from chaos, but from complete destruction by the enemy air warfare".

After he had listened to Rommel's personal report, Keitel promised to

report on the situation to Hitler accordingly and concluded in resignation: "I also know that everything is lost!" This statement appears particularly interesting because Keitel, when, after 20 Jul as a member of the so-called "Court of Honor of the German Wehrmacht," he tried his old comrades and expelled them from the Wehrmacht. He had completely changed his mind in regard to the estimate of the situation.

The field marshals returned to their respective command posts without having accomplished anything.

Meanwhile Seventh Army had lost its commander. On 29 Jun Genobst Dollmann, who had untiringly attended to his duties day and night, succumbed to heart failure. He never knew that Hitler had demanded his recall. The Commanding General of II SS Pz Corps, SS Ogruf Hauser, was ordered to take over his command. Rommel was not consulted prior to this decision. Hauser had to leave his corps just when it was about to launch an attack to shatter the enemy front at Caen.

SS Ogruf Hauser, who had originally served with the Army and the General Staff, had joined the SS at an early date. He was a soldierly personality and had displayed forcefulness and exceptional bravery. Politically he was very difficult to understand; he was two-faced. The news of the appointment of this CiC, whose seniority was below that of many other CiCs and especially below that of the CiC of Pz Gp West, was received with mixed feelings.

Two days after his return from the conference with the Fuehrer, von Rundstedt was, "for reasons of health," relieved of his command as OB West. Hitler had not considered it necessary to inform the senior field marshal personally of his recall, but had dispatched his second adjutant, Obstlt iG Borgmann, to

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St Germain with a letter and the oak leaf cluster to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. When Rundstedt, on 4 Jul, bade farewell to Rommel in La Roche Guyon, he said that he was grateful that he would not have to witness the catastrophe in a position of command.

On 5 Jul the C1C of Pz Gp West, Gen Pz Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, was without previous notice, relieved of his command and replaced by Gen Pz Heinz Eberbach. The Pz Gp West was now called Fifth Pz Army.

Gen Pz Freiherr von Geyr was held responsible for the failure of the counterattack which had been launched by II SS Pz Corps. According to information received by telephone, Hitler reproached him with increasing defeatism. After the failure of the attack, Freiherr von Geyr had submitted a clear estimate of the situation, in addition he had suggested the local evacuation of Caen and the area west of the Orne and requested freedom of action. He had concluded his report as follows: "A clear choice must be made between tactical patch work which necessarily involves rigid defense, leaving the entire initiative to the enemy and flexible combat, in which the initiative would at least temporarily be regained. It is Pz Gp's opinion that flexible combat is not only the more advantageous mode of warfare, but also represents a more forceful decision than to defend the present line in a rigid manner."

Genfldm Rommel transmitted this report verbatim, gave it his unqualified support and once more emphatically requested freedom of action. When the recall of Freiherr von Geyr became known, Rommel immediately intervened on behalf of this C1C; however, he was sharply rebuked by Keitel.

Freiherr von Geyr's successor, Gen Pz Eberbach, was a brave soldier who had a thorough knowledge of tank warfare. By virtue of his character and his deport-

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ment he was a particularly valuable leader.

Contrary to the expectations of both officers and men in the West, the OB West, Genfldm von Rundstedt, was not succeeded by Genfldm Rommel, the battle-tried CiC of A Gp B, who thoroughly knew the front, but by Genfldm G u e n t h e r v o n K l u g e . Hitler's distrust of Rommel had already become too strong.

Guenther von Kluge had served with the artillery and, at various times, had been active in all positions in the General Staff. During the Western Campaign 1940 he had particularly distinguished himself as CiC of Fourth Army; as a unit commander in his army, Rommel carried out the famous drive of his "Ghost Division" toward the sea. As CiC of A Gp Center in the East von Kluge had proven himself an exceptionally resourceful and determined soldier. He was a Prussian officer, his bearing and deportment were reminiscent of ancient Rome, where the well-being of the state took precedence over that of individuals. He was energetic, quick-witted, courageous, and unsparing toward himself. He was ruthless in his demands that his subordinates do their utmost day and night. The cold eyes in his sharply chiselled face hid suppressed emotions. In his conversation he displayed a strong love of nature and a keen interest in military problems as well as in questions pertaining to recent history. He hated Hitler, but never ceased feeling bound to him, and this was due, perhaps, to his acceptance of the honors and favors bestowed on him by Hitler.

He had recovered from a severe automobile accident, which had occurred in winter 43/44, (he had suffered a skull fracture when his car turned over on the highway Minsk - Smolensk), and appeared to be full of vigor and elasticity. He had not only been briefed for his task by Hitler in Berchtesgaden for two weeks,

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but had also been convinced that the events in the West were the result of mistakes and shortcomings on the part of officers and men. He arrived at A Gp's command post in the afternoon of 5 July. After a rather frosty exchange of courtesies von Kluge addressed those present in the Salle des Gardes of la Roche Guyon approximately as follows: The recall of Genfldm von Rundstedt had to be interpreted as an expression of Hitler's dissatisfaction with the leadership in the West; even Genfldm Rommel did not enjoy the Fuehrer's unlimited confidence. At headquarters, von Kluge went on to state, the impression prevailed that, as in Africa, Rommel was too easily impressed by the "allegedly overwhelming effect of the enemy weapons" and that he was therefore inclined to take too pessimistic a view of the situation. Moreover he (Rommel) had continuously displayed an obstinate attitude and carried out Hitler's orders only halfheartedly. Von Kluge concluded his address with these words. "From now on, you too, Genfldm Rommel, will have to obey without reservations! I am giving you a good advice." This reproach led to a sharp dispute between the two field marshals in the course of which Rommel repeatedly and emphatically drew attention to the over-all situation and the necessity of drawing the proper conclusions from it. Rommel protested energetically against the unjustified reproaches expressed by Hitler and the OKW. In the course of the heated discussion von Kluge asked the chiefs of staff and A Gp's I A, who had been present up to that moment, to leave the room.

Rommel asked the new OB West orally as well as in writing to withdraw his accusations within a specified time, and reported to the OKW accordingly. In addition he firmly suggested that any evaluation of the situation should be pre-

ceded by discussions with the army commanders and combat officers as well as by gathering personal experiences and impressions at the front.

Great disappointment prevailed after the conclusion of this discussion, in the course of which von Kluge had failed to refer to the over-all situation. Rommel was particularly disappointed because, on the basis of confidential information, he had reason to expect that von Kluge, who had been in contact with the resistance movement in Germany for years, would be more receptive to questions pertaining to the salvation (Translator: of Germany). Now von Kluge appeared as Hitler's mouthpiece and expressed his opinions in the "Berchtesgaden style" without knowing local conditions at the front.

On 6 Jul von Kluge visited the front in accordance with an itinerary worked out by A Gp; he spent two days there and spoke to all commanders and troops who were within reach. Saul was converted to Paul. He found it impossible to escape the crushing weight of facts, the unanimous opinion held by all commanders and, after he had recovered from his temporary confusion, he had to give in to the compelling force of logic.

He withdrew his accusations and apologized for his previous attitude which was prompted by inaccurate information received from Hitler, Keitel and Jodl. He commented that, despite all the accounts, telephone calls and reports which he received, Hitler refused to see the hard facts. Instead, he indulged in wishful thinking and when his dreams failed to materialize he looked for scapegoats: This too, was a repetition of his own experiences in the East.

On 9 Jul 44 Obstlt d R Dr. von Hofacker, acting on instructions of the military commander in France, Gen Inf von Stuelpnagel, reported at La Roche Guyon.

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Hofacker was the son of the Wuerttemberg commanding general under whose command, during World War I, Rommel had been awarded the "Pour le Merite" for the capture of Monte Matajur (Italy). He was a cousin of Obst iG Graf Klaus von Stauffenberg, who had also announced his visit to the chief of staff. The stress of circumstances which made the action of 20 Jul imperative prevented the latter from coming. Caesar von Hofacker was definitely a politically minded man, a chivalrous and dynamic personality gifted with an unusually persuasive eloquence. In peace time he had held a prominent position in the steel industry, and for several years, he had been the trusted adviser of Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel. He was to provide Genobst Beck and Stauffenberg with final evaluation of the situation at the invasion front. In accordance with the contents of a well-written memorandum he expressed the opinions held by the military commander and by himself, stating that the political and military situation made swift and determined action imperative; he finally urged the Field Marshal on behalf of the resistance movement to end the war in the West by independent action as soon as possible. He shared the opinion of the resistance forces in Berlin that the Allies would never negotiate with Hitler or one of his "paladins" - Goering, Himmler or Ribbentrop - and that for this reason not only a change in the form of government but also the removal of these leaders was necessary. The immediate cessation of the enemy air war, for the sake of relieving the homeland morally and economically, which Rommel had already included in the basic terms for negotiations, was particularly stressed. Caesar von Hofacker raised the question of how much longer the invasion front could hold, because the Berlin decisions would largely depend on the answer. The Field Marshal replied: "No longer

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than two to three weeks at best, then a break-through must be expected which we will be unable to cope with."

Following his report to OB West, von Hofacker was to go to Berlin, to inform Genobst Beck and the other leaders of the resistance movement and to make preparations for the coordinated timing of all measures having to do with the overthrow of the government. On 15 Jul he was to report to Rommel again.

On the occasion of the exchange of female medical personnel at Cherbourg, it had been established by Freiherr von Luettwitz at the sector of 2 Pz Div that a crossing of the lines by delegates authorized to negotiate a local armistice was practicable. This occurrence had especially aroused Hitler's anger and suspicion.

On 12 Jul, Genfldm von Kluge came again to La Roche Guyon. A discussion of the strategic and tactical situation and the questions resulting therefrom proved the two CIGs to be in complete agreement. Once more von Kluge requested a statement as to how much longer, in view of the decreasing fighting power and the complete lack of reserves, the invasion front could be held. Rommel agreed to consult all army commanders as well as the majority of the commanding generals and suggested that Hitler be informed on the result and, simultaneously, confronted with an ultimatum. He then expressed his opinion as to what steps were to be taken when Hitler, as was to be expected, refused. He made reference to Obstlt von Hofacker's mission and informed von Kluge that Hofacker would report upon his return from Berlin. Rommel added that, within the next few days, the Quartermaster General would personally report on the situation in the East and at headquarters.

Von Kluge, who at first maintained a purely receptive attitude, later on

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sanctioned Genfldm Rommel's ideas in general and stated that his decision would be determined by the result of the consultation of the front commanders. Rommel instructed his chief of staff to inform Gen von Stuelpnagel on the situation, on his intentions and on the discussions with von Kluge. He was also to mention that Rommel was prepared to act even in the event that von Kluge should refuse to collaborate. The briefing took place in Paris late in the evening of 13 Jul. The military commander had just received word that the socialist leaders of the resistance movement in Berlin had been arrested and that this might make immediate action imperative. He suggested to await Hofacker's return. Preparations in the area under his command were complete.

Genfldm Rommel visited the front on 13, 14 and 15 Jul and discussed the situation with commanders of all ranks, among others with SS Ogrufs Sepp Dietrich and Hausser, whose reports gave particular cause for alarm. They were also unreservedly frank. Rommel did not expect the Waffen-SS to oppose him in the event that independent action in the West should become imperative. The commanding General of I SS Pz Corps and future CiC of Fifth Pz Army, SS-Ogruf Sepp Dietrich, on the occasion of a visit to A Gp's command post, had expressed his indignation over the supreme command to the CiC as well as to the chief of staff and had demanded "independent measures in the event that the front should collapse". The gallantly fighting combat units of the Waffen-SS could be relied upon by their commanders, who made it clear that they did not want to have anything in common with the SD and its methods.

The military commander was convinced that he could, whenever it should become necessary, easily neutralize the SD in Paris and France. Rommel was deeply impressed after his visit to the front. The talks with front line sol-

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diers had corroborated and supplemented the reports of the CiCs and commanding generals. Wherever the Field Marshal appeared, he was anxiously asked whether there was any possibility to bring about a change in the situation through "some act of salvation" by the military commanders. The Field Marshal explained his intentions when he deemed it advisable and returned firmly convinced that officers and men of all ranks had confidence in his leadership.

After all possible sources of information had been exploited and after it had become obvious that the promised reinforcement would never arrive and that the only thing that had been accomplished was increasing ill-feeling and suspicion, the Field Marshal warned Hitler once more, this time however his report was unequivocal and in the nature of an ultimatum.

On 15 Jul he submitted a memorandum, comprising three typewritten pages, as a "KR-Blitz" teletype letter to Hitler via OB West. It read approximately as follows: "According to repeated oral and written reports the situation at the invasion front will develop in such a manner that the front can be held only another two or, at best, three weeks. After that time the enemy must be expected to break through in the Caen area or on Cotentin between St Lo and Avranches with capture of the Paris area and the sealing off of Brittany as his objective. Due to the lack of strategic reserves of all branches of the Wehrmacht the roads to Germany will be open to the enemy and his air bases will be moved closer to the ZI and the vital centers of the armament industry (Ruhr district). All previously given promises as to the assignment of reinforcements and reserves have not been lived up to; the casualties of the first month following the invasion include 28 generals, 354 commanders and approximately 250 000 men, while, during the same period of time, only 30 000 recon-

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valescents have rejoined the fighting forces. On the basis of these facts, it can be clearly predicted when and where the front is going to collapse. In view of the fact that the enemy's strength is increasing day by day, while our own strength is rapidly dwindling, the consequences are incalculable; they will be decisive for the outcome of the war and may lead to catastrophe. The Field Marshal concluded with a handwritten postscript: "I must request you to immediately draw the political conclusion from this situation. Rommel, Field Marshal."

When the report was transmitted, the word "political" was omitted because the word "conclusions" was meant to include everything rather than to refer only to political matters. The word "political" would have had the same effect on Hitler as a red rag on a bull. Genfldm von Kluge supported Rommel's statements and demands. (The original copy of this teletype letter, bearing the Field Marshal's initials, had to be destroyed when, later on, A Gp's chief of staff was arrested).

For the last the Field Marshal had given warning: after the dispatch of the ultimatum he stated: "I have now given Hitler a last chance. If he fails to draw the conclusions, we are going to act."

The most beautiful of the German towns were not yet destroyed, the Field Marshal's beloved Swabian homeland was almost unscathed, and the greater part of the German territory had, up to that time, been spared the full fury of the war. Unnecessary and unjustifiable sacrifices, the death of thousands of people of all nations, the horror of a final struggle on German soil could still be avoided.

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The Field Marshal fully realized the final consequences of his decision to take independent action and did not entertain any illusions as to the severity of the expected peace terms, he hoped however for a reasonable understanding and for a new political setup. Late in the evening of 15 Jul Rommel expressed his thoughts to this effect to Vz Adm Ruge - this chivalrous and highly cultured man was particularly close to him - and to his chief of staff.

In these days, however, it was to become clear to all those committed to the idea of salvation that a higher power does not allow its unfathomable intentions to be thwarted by the planning and efforts of humans. The act that was to save Germany was frustrated.

The situation in the Caen area had grown more critical by the hour; deep enemy penetrations were sealed off only at the cost of great efforts and heavy sacrifices: the decisive Allied break-through toward the Paris area was imminent. Early on 17 Jul the Field Marshal went, as he had done so frequently in his military career, to the focal point of the battle on both banks of the Orne in order to give orders here, and regulate or encourage there. He informed selected commanders of his demand on Hitler and the expected consequences. Prompted by a telephone call of his chief of staff, he intended to return earlier than usual; a local battle crisis however seemed to him to demand his personal attention. He visited the commanding general of I SS Pz Corps, SS Ogruf Sepp Dietrich at his command post and left for his own headquarters around 1600 hours. On the road Livaroth - Vimotiers, near the Montgomery farm, enemy bombers chased the Field Marshal's car which, as usually, was unescorted. Shortly before the protective cover of a group of poplars could be reached, the car was hit by the machinegun fire of three low-flying planes. The driver was killed, the Field

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Marshal so seriously wounded that his recovery appeared doubtful.

The Field Marshal had been eliminated at the very hour when army and nation needed him most.

"The wound received by the Field Marshal on the Livaroth road on 17 Jul 44 deprived the plan of the only man who could have borne the double strain of civil war. It robbed the plan of the only man who had enough ingenuity to counterbalance the terrifying simplicity of those who were to be attacked. It was an unmistakable omen."

(Quotation from Ernst Juenger: Preface to "Strahlungen").

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Genfldm von Kluge Takes Over as Commander-In-Chief

of Army Group B

The 20 Jul 44

Temporarily A Gp B was without a commander in chief. Hitler's chief adjutant, Gen Schmudt, suggested that SS Ogruf Hausser, who, only three weeks before, had taken over the command of Seventh Army be made Rommel's successor. SS Ogruf Sepp Dietrich was to take over Hausser's post as army commander. It became obvious that it was Hitler's policy to assign to commanding positions in the West only strong supporters of the regime. Genfldm von Kluge firmly rejected Gen Schmudt's suggestion and, in the evening of 19 Jul, assumed the post as CIO of A Gp B himself in addition on to his post as OB West. He took over the command post at La Roche Guyon, while the chief of staff of OB West, Gen Inf Blumentritt, who remained at St Germain, continued to devote himself to tasks which did not concern A Gp B.

Early on 20 Jul Genfldm von Kluge went to the command post of Fifth Pz Army where the CIOs and commanding generals of the Normandy front were to report. He outlined to them the tactics to be employed in the battle, especially at the two points of main effort, Caen and St Lo; no political questions were discussed.

At 1700 hours A Gp's chief of staff received a telephone call from Gen Blumentritt and Obst IG Finckh, who informed him of Hitler's death. When, between 1800 and 1900 hours, the Field Marshal returned, the news had already been broadcast that the attempt on Hitler's life had failed. Headquarters confirmed this and gave particulars on the plot by telephone.

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Between 1900 and 2000 hours Genfldm Sperrle and Gens von Stuelpnagel and Blumentritt came to the command post. Gen Stuelpnagel and Obstlt Dr von Hofacker, who accompanied the former, tried desperately to persuade Genfldm von Kluge to take a hand in these fateful events. They pointed out that, even though the attempt on Hitler's life had failed. Genobst Beck had taken over the command in Berlin. The eventual success of the revolt, which had failed thus far, could be brought about only through the immediate cessation of hostilities in the West or, even surrender if necessary.

Prior to his departure, Gen von Stuelpnagel, through the security detachments of the army under the command of the commanding general in Paris, Genlt Freiherr von Boineburg, had arrested the Senior SS and Police Officer in Paris, Ogruf Oberg, with his staff and the entire SD, without firing a shot. This measure was explained to the troops by a statement to the effect that Hitler had been eliminated by SS formations and that a rule of terror by the SS was to be feared.

Genfldm von Kluge however, even after he had had personally contacted Genobst Beck, Genobst Hoepfner, Genobst Fromm, Gen Warlimont and Gen Stieff by telephone, could not make up his mind to assume the responsibility for the Western Front and, by so doing, to change the course of events. It was his opinion that after the failure of the attempted revolt in Berlin and at Hitler's headquarters, an independent solution in the West was no longer possible; above all he did not feel sure, that, under the prevailing circumstances, officers and men would remain loyal to him.

After he had contacted Hitler's headquarters and Berlin by telephone once more, von Kluge instructed the military commander to release the SD.

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Gen von Stuelpnagel gave the pertinent instructions by telephone to his chief of staff, Obst von Linstow, who, meanwhile, had been approached by Adm Krancke, Ambassador Abetz and others.

During these dramatic evening hours the situation at the Caen and St Lo sectors of the front had become critical. CiCs and chiefs of staff, who through radio-broadcasts had learned about the events in Berlin and at Hitler's headquarters, telephoned for reserves and asked for further enlightenment on the situation. The chief of staff had to answer these questions and to make the necessary decisions.

The Field Marshal invited the military commander and Obstlt Dr von Hofacker to stay with him for supper. The few persons who were present ate their meal silently by candle light; none of the three survivors will ever forget the atmosphere which prevailed at this crucial hour. Gen von Stuelpnagel, who later in the evening returned to Paris, was recalled from his post before the night had passed and replaced by Gen Inf Blumentritt. Genfldm Keitel requested Karl Heinrich von Stuelpnagel by telephone to go to Berlin "to report". Von Stuelpnagel left Paris on 21 Jul without notifying the Field Marshal prior to his departure and attempted to commit suicide somewhere near Verdun. Blinded, as a result of this attempt, he was taken to the base hospital in Verdun and treated as a prisoner of the Gestapo. When, after he had undergone an operation, he regained consciousness, he called out for Rommel. Even before he had recovered, the General was dragged before the People's Court in Berlin, sentenced to be hanged until death and was executed simultaneously with Obst IG Finckh and Obst Linstow on 30 Aug. Obstlt von Hofacker suffered the same fate on 20 Dec; he appeared calm and

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composed when the chief of staff saw him for the last time in the Gestapo cellar of Albrecht Street in Berlin.

Genfldm von Kluge had received Mayor Dr Goerdeler at his headquarters at Smolensk for the first time in April 1942; this visit was followed by an exchange of thoughts with Dr Goerdeler, Genobst Beck, ambassador von Hassel and others. Allegedly von Kluge had, in 1943, declared his readiness to take part in the overthrow of the Nazi tyranny in Germany under two conditions: (1) Hitler's death and (2) his own appointment as CiC of the entire front either in the East or in the West. While the second of these two prerequisites had been complied with since 4 Jul, the decisive condition had failed to materialize. When, on 4 Jul, von Kluge became OB West, he was to take as his chief of staff Genmaj von Treschkow, who for years had been his I A with A Gp Center; von Treschkow's assignment had been recommended by Hitler's chief adjutant, Genlt Schmunt, who was unaware of the former's antagonism to the Hitler regime. However von Kluge refused to replace his chief of staff by von Treschkow. Thus Treschkow, one of the most ardent antagonists of the Hitler regime and a man of superior intellect, never came to the West. As chief of staff of Second Army in the East he took his own life in order to escape Hitler's henchmen. In his testament he stated: "Now everybody will be down on us and rail against us. But now as before, I am firmly convinced that we were right. I consider Hitler to be the arch enemy not only of Germany but of the entire world. When, in a few hours, I shall stand before God to answer for what I have done and for what I have omitted to do I know I shall be able to justify with a clear conscience what I have contributed

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in the struggle against Hitler. Since the Lord once promised Abraham not to destroy Sodom if only ten righteous persons could be found there, I hope the Lord will spare Germany for our sake. None of us has the right to complain about death; whoever has joined our circle has, by doing so, put on the shirt of Nessus. The moral value of a person is proven only if he is ready to sacrifice his life for his conviction."

Before assuming his post as OB West, von Kluge had seen Obst von Boeselage, who was, later on, killed in action. Boeselage had come to see von Kluge to convey Treschkow's appeal to act in accordance with previously made arrangements.

When, on 20 Jul, the attempt on Hitler's life was actually carried out, the news of the event came as a complete surprise to von Kluge. The Quartermaster General, Gen Art Wagner, and Obst iG Graf Klaus von Stauffenberg, who had announced their visits, failed to appear for reasons unknown at that time.

Von Hofacker had returned from Berlin in the evening of 17 Jul and at the railroad station he had learned about Rommel's accident. For unknown reasons neither he nor Gen Inf Stuelpnagel had informed von Kluge of the imminent attempt on Hitler's life.

During the forenoon hours of 21 Jul the National Socialist Political Officer attached to OB West, acting on instructions received from Goebbels and Keitel, appeared in the company of representatives of the Propaganda Department France in Paris to force Field Marshal von Kluge not only to send a telegram, the contents of which they had already drawn up, to Hitler,

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assuring him of his loyalty, but also to deliver a radio speech to be broadcast over all German radio broadcasting stations. While it was possible to prevent the radio speech from being made, the telegram had to be dispatched, though in a somewhat modified form.

After 20 Jul 44, Hitler and the OKW's distrust of von Kluge grew stronger; this was due partly to statements which had been forcibly extracted from those who had been arrested. Von Kluge's operational measures were not only sharply criticized but even sabotaged by the "Obersalzberg" (Translator: Hitler's residence above Berchtesgaden). Adding to the difficulties was von Kluge's personal opposition to the newly appointed chief of staff, Genobst Guderian, who, as von Kluge believed, had himself once nursed the idea of overthrowing the regime. In agreement with the CiC, A Gp's chief of staff did not pass on Guderian's order concerning the implication of the General Staff in the preparations for and the execution of the attempt on Hitler's life to the subordinate command headquarters.

Dr Ley's speech against nobility and the officer's caste, however, was broadcast. Gens Freiherr von Funk, Freiherr von Luettwitz and Graf von Schwerin protested and demanded the withdrawal of the accusations. SS-Ogruf Sepp Dietrich acted as their mouthpiece.

The introduction of the so-called "German salute", which was imposed upon the Wehrmacht at a moment when every soldier felt that collapse was imminent, was not understood anywhere.

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3. Period 25 Jul to 19 Aug 44

Avranches - Mortain

The Pocket of Falaise

When the OKW pointed out on about 24 July that the decision in the West would depend on successful defense against the enemy's attempts to break through on Cotentin, the pertinent directive sounded almost ironical because it contained, once more, the order prohibiting freedom of action.

General Patton, CIG of Third US Army, which had just arrived on Cotentin and which the OKW had expected to land elsewhere, aimed at gaining open terrain. It had finally become imperative for the German Command to make far-reaching strategic decision. In view of the complete lack of reserves, especially as far as the Luftwaffe was concerned, orders "to defend every inch of ground under all circumstances" and to prevent an enemy break-through were senseless.

The point of main effort at the invasion front had been shifted to the western wing where the two US armies were committed. Here a break-through toward the South and the Southeast, which would simultaneously seal off Brittany, was to be expected within the next few days. Such break-through was likely to lead not only to an envelopment of Seventh Army and Fifth Pz Army in Normandy from the West, but would also open the way for decisive operations aiming at Paris and, beyond, at Germany. The situation could now only be mastered by far-reaching measures, i.e. by abandoning the Mediterranean front, withdrawing the entire A Gp G toward the North, while simultaneously assigning all mobile reserves for operational commitment and preparing the

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Seine line for defense.

However, Hitler and the OKW could not be persuaded to make a decision.

When the news of the American break-through at St Lo was received, Genfldm von Kluge saw the most immediate danger in the possible loss of the base of the western wing of Seventh Army on the Gulf of St Malo. He said Avranches was a key point, which had to be held until counter-measures could become effective. He clearly realized that this was the utmost which could be demanded in view of the condition of the troops, which had been fighting an embittered defensive battle for seven weeks, and also in view of the deadly effect of the enemy air force, which, in excellent cooperation with the American ground forces, had forced the break-through at St Lo.

All reserves of Seventh Army had been brought up to the Cotentin front; the antitank units promised by the OKW however failed to arrive. A renewed request to move up XXV Inf Corps, comprising five inf divs, from Brittany, was rejected by the OKW. The front between Caen and St Lo too was stripped to the limit. The bow was overstrained.

The XXXXVII Pz Corps, comprising 2 and 116 Pz Divs, was ordered to assemble in the area west of the Vire in order to thrust into the flank of the enemy forces which had achieved the break-through.

Meanwhile Seventh Army, acting independently, had ordered its forces on the western wing, which, as a result of the break-through at St Lo, had been cut off, to withdraw toward the Southeast and to join the forces of XXXXVII Inf corps, which were being assembled for the counterattack. On 29 Jul Genfldm von Kluge quickly cancelled this order because it would have left the key point of Avranches to the enemy without a fight. However the counterorder arrived

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too late because of the tremendous speed of the onrushing enemy armd units and air forces. During the night of 30 to 31 Jul 44 armd forces of Patton's army took Avranches. The strategic break-through of the enemy was close at hand, the culminating point had been reached. The cohesion of the front between St Lo and the Gulf of St Malo was disrupted. Combat elements under the command of gallant officers still served to hold the tide back. However, it could be a question only of days or even hours before they, too, were submerged. Von Kluge personally spoke to Genobst Jodl by telephone, he drew the latter's attention to this battle crisis and requested permission to report to Hitler at once. He reminded Jodl that the French Army had rallied during the battle of the Marne in 1914. In vain: instead of making a far-reaching decision or issuing an operational directive, Hitler, on 1 Aug 44, gave the following order to A Gp B: "Under no circumstances must the enemy be allowed to gain open terrain. A Gp B will make preparations for a counterattack, in which all pz formations take part, with a break-through toward Avranches and the cutting off and the annihilation of the enemy forces which had broken through as its objective. For this purpose all available pz formations will be relieved from their present commitments, without being replaced there, and placed under the command of Gen Pz Eberbach. The outcome of the campaign in France depends on the success of this attack."

Genflm von Kluge immediately protested against this order, the execution of which was bound to lead to the collapse of the Normandy front from the Orne up to the area south of St Lo and to hasten the catastrophe. Von Kluge demanded that Hitler should immediately be informed of his opinion. Hitler replied that he insisted upon the execution of his order. Once more von Kluge

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dutifully drew attention to the consequences which were likely to result from Hitler's order, he particularly stressed the fact that the Normandy front opposite Second British Army was certain to collapse if the pzs which had been the backbone of the defense should be withdrawn from the front. Again he suggested strategic decisions, especially withdrawal and defense behind the Seine and the abandonment of Southern and Central France. Jodl bluntly rejected the strategic ideas advanced by A Gp B, and spoke of an "annihilation of the enemy in Normandy through the planned pz attack" and "of the certain final victory".

The attack group under the command of Gen Pz Eberbach was made up of XXXXVII Pz Corps, comprising 2 and 116 Pz Divs, and I SS Pz Corps, comprising 1 and 2 SS Pz Divs; it had been planned to move up II SS Pz Corps, comprising 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs; due to later developments, however, it was not possible to carry out this plan in time. The enemy air forces, which relentlessly attacked the pz formations, forced repeated postponement of the attack.

In the evening of 6 Aug the moving of the assault forces into assembly positions, which had been carried out under unimaginable difficulties, was finally completed and it was possible to launch the attack shortly before midnight, before the enemy air forces could continue their deadly attacks. Von Kluge himself had rushed to the focal point of the combat. Until daybreak the attack was successful. The 2 Pz Div penetrated to a depth of 10 km and in doing so overran considerable American forces, including armor formations. However, at dawn, the enemy bomber formations appeared, carried out relentless attacks and hindered every movement. 300 German fighter planes had been brought up from everywhere to the West in order to support the assault forces.

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Not a single German plane however, appeared over their spearheads, all of them having already been attacked and destroyed before they could manage to take off. Thus this pz operation was frustrated solely by the Allied air forces, which were supported by extremely efficient ground radio personnel.

In the evening of 7 Aug the pz divs, which had suffered heavy casualties, returned to their jump-off positions. Hitler ordered the renewal of the attack on 8 Aug. The assault, which was launched principally by 1 SS Pz Div, was repulsed by US arm'd formations and air forces which inflicted heavy casualties upon the attackers.

With adequate support by the Luftwaffe the counterattack, aiming at Avranches situated at a distance of 25 km could have resulted in a breakthrough and, time could have been gained for strategic decisions. In view of Hitler's mentality, however, it appears doubtful whether such decisions would have been made. How thoroughly Hitler still misjudged the situation, is shown by his order, of 7 or 8 Aug, to follow up the attack of Group Eberbach "by rolling up the Allied invasion front from West to East".

On 5 Aug US forces had almost sealed off Brittany; for that reason the commanding general of XXV Inf Corps, Gen Art Farnbacher, who had his headquarters in Rennes, was appointed commander of Brittany. He too was ordered first to "stop the enemy with all available forces", then to conduct a fighting withdrawal toward the "fortresses" and to hold out there to the last man. This was reminiscent of Cherbourg.

Thus XXV Inf Corps with its inf divs was sealed off and therefore unable

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to influence the further course of events in any way, even by tying up enemy forces.

After the failure of the counterattack, von Kluge again requested the abandonment of Southern France and proposed to immediately withdraw A Gp G into the line Seine - Loing- Loire from Gien to Nevers and from there extending to the Swiss border near Gex. As far as the sector of the lower Seine was concerned, defensive measures had been prepared and ordered since the middle of Jul. The OKW postponed the decision.

As a result of the counterattack launched from the Mortain area toward Avranches, as ordered by Hitler, the German pz formations of the West were tied up south of the Seine and were being worn down there. Hitler's order was contrary not only to all the rules of strategy, but also to plain common sense. Thus an unexpected service, which turned out to be of decisive importance, was rendered to the enemy.

An example of dashing armd warfare was set by the C1C of Third US Army, General Patton, who, during the night of 9 to 10 Aug, pushed forward beyond Laval and the line Alencon - le Mans toward Paris. The 9 Pz Div, which, in defiance of Hitler's strict order, had been hurled into the area south of Alencon, managed at least to slow down the forceful advance of Third US Army toward the coast and to tie up enemy forces. The absence of XXV Inf Corps, which was uselessly engaged in insignificant encounters in Brittany, was felt again. New enemy reinforcements, superior in equipment and mobility, were arriving in a steady flow. A Gp reported that it appeared likely that the enemy would attempt to envelop Fifth Pz Army and Seventh Army west of the lower Seine and accordingly requested authorization to retreat behind the

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Seine and the withdrawal of A Gp G in order to establish contact eastward. Hitler did not concur in the appraisal of the enemy's forces. The OKW spoke only of "enemy armed spearheads", which were to be put out of action by "improvised fighter formations".

Hitler still maintained a hesitating attitude and demanded a renewal of the attack toward the coast by the badly battered Pz Gp Eberbach, although the situation as well as the fighting power of the troops concerned rendered such operation impossible.

In order to induce Hitler to give up the idea of launching this senseless attack and to gain time, Genfldm von Kluge suggested to the OKW, on 10 Aug, to make preparations for the launching of an attack by Pz Gp Eberbach toward the South "aiming at relieving the southern flank, provided further developments would warrant such action". When it became evident that developments had rendered this operation impossible too, von Kluge, acting on his own initiative ordered Fifth Pz Army to withdraw, sector by sector, behind the Orne and, later on, behind the Touques sector, while Seventh Army was to cover its flank along the line Domfront - Alencon and to the East. On 12 Aug Hitler reluctantly agreed, but failed to make a decision. A Gp G, with First and Nineteenth Army, was still standing idly by at the Bay of Biscay and along the Mediterranean coast.

Since the events of 20 Jul, Genfldm von Kluge had lost his energy and, at times, awaited the unavoidable collapse with the inertia of a fatalist. After having missed his opportunity on 20 Jul, he racked his brains in search for a saving solution. However, despite repeated prompting, he could not make up his mind to abandon the front south of the Seine, while there was still

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time; to withdraw A Gp G and to employ new tactics through which the still available forces could have been employed more sparingly. When strong enemy forces wheeled beyond the line Domfront - Alencon in a northern direction toward Falaise in order to envelop the two armies in Normandy and when, at the same time, other enemy formations pushed ahead toward Paris, von Kluge went, on 12 Aug, to the area south of Falaise in order to discuss the situation with the army commanders and commanding generals. Since his radio equipment had been put out of operation as a result of a direct hit, communications with him were interrupted. Genobst Jodl, acting on Hitler's orders, repeatedly contacted the chief of staff by telephone, inquiring whether it was considered possible that Genfldm von Kluge had left his post in order to get in touch with the enemy. When the Field Marshal returned to his command post, the following teletype letter had been received: "Field Marshal von Kluge will leave the Falaise pocket and direct the battle in Normandy from the command post of Fifth Pz Army." This order, which, from a military point of view, appeared absurd, manifested the suspicion and fear of the CIG of the Wehrmacht. Officers and men everywhere had lost confidence in view of the contradictory orders which clearly demonstrated Hitler's indecision.

Even though von Kluge could not conduct the operations of the entire front from the pocket, his presence there was of high value for the troops. Furthermore, when the need arose, he could authorize his generals to break out eastward and withdraw behind the Seine.

On 13 Aug headquarters of First Army was moved from the Bay of Biscay to the North in order to take over the command of the "front" between the southeastern wing of Seventh Army and the Loire near Orleans. The only troops

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available there were command headquarters and administrative offices of the rear area, but two divs of Fifteenth Army and two SS training brigs were to be moved up.

On that same day first reports were received on the shipment of troops from Algiers: The Mediterranean landing was imminent.

Even now Hitler and the OKW refused to withdraw A Gp G, which was made up of nine divs, the combat efficiency of which, however, was rather low because of their lack of mobility. They refused to believe that such a landing would be carried out and that it would be coordinated with the Allied operations between Seine and Loire.

On 14 Aug Genfldm von Kluge called the CiCs of Naval Group West and Third Air Fleet, the new military commander in France, Gen Fl Kitzinger, and the newly appointed "commanding general of Greater Paris", Gen Inf von Choltitz, to St Germain to discuss with them the defense of Paris. Hitler had given the order to defend the city to the last man, to make preparations for the destruction of the 68 bridges across the Seine and of all structures of importance to the war effort. A directive concerning the evacuation of the civilian employees attached to the Wehrmacht was agreed upon; their evacuation was carried out smoothly. Less orderly was the departure of the numerous Party and State officials, who had established themselves on an independent basis and in many instances had, through their behavior, discredited Germany.

No fit for combat troops were available for the defense of the French capital. There were only emergency units (Alarmeinheiten) for security and

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reconnaissance duties. Moreover, it was obvious to everybody that the supply problem alone rendered it impossible to hold Paris for any considerable length of time. In 1940 idealistic as well as material reasons had also prompted the French to surrender Paris.

Meanwhile the concentric pressure of the US forces had increased, principally from the South and West against the front Trun - Argentan - Pertuis, although the British forces did not launch a major attack at this time. German pz formations in the pocket saw to it that a gap toward the East remained open. Instead of strategic directives or perhaps even reinforcements, a teletype letter, bearing Hitler's signature, was received on 15 Aug. Hitler attempted to put the blame for the enemy break-through at Avranches and for the failure of the pz attack Eberbach on Genfldm von Kluge. It was one of Hitler's customary orders, which was intended solely for his war diary and, though of no military value, was considered necessary for the "writing of history".

The teletype letter arrived on the day the Allied forces came ashore at the Cote d'Azur near St Tropez - Cannes and St Raphael. Hitler's estimate of the situation was proven wrong; the weak Mediterranean front collapsed. It was not until 17 Aug that the OKW made up its mind to order the withdrawal of A Gp G toward the line Orleans - Bourges - Montpellier, but this operation had already been rendered impossible as a result of the deep and sometimes enveloping thrusts of the armored spearheads of the two invasion fronts. Also ordered was the defense of "fortresses", namely of the strong points north and south of the Gironde and of La Rochelle.

The 14 Aug request of A Gp B to order Fifth Pz Army and Seventh Army to break out of the constantly tightening Falaise pocket was again rejected by

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Hitler on 15 Aug. Genfldm von Kluge now decided to order the breaking out on his own responsibility.

In the afternoon of 16 Aug Genfldm Model arrived at the command post at La Roche Guyon in order to take over the command in the West. No word on Model's assignment had been received from the OKW prior to Model's arrival. Up to this time, Model had been CiC of A Gp Center in the East, his entire front had collapsed on 25 Jun and he had been forced to withdraw into East Prussia. On the occasion of his new assignment Hitler had bestowed on him the diamonds to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. Model produced a letter written by Hitler, in which the latter stated that he had decided to appoint Genfldm Model OB West and CiC of A Gp B because he was under the impression that, due to the strain of the preceding weeks, Genfldm von Kluge was no longer able to properly discharge his duties as CiC.

Von Kluge maintained a dignified attitude when he met Model; during the discussion of particulars connected with the assumption of the command by Model, von Kluge spoke of the responsibility which leadership involves. The only thing, he went on to say, which he regretted, was the fact that he had to leave his troops, who, as a result of Hitler's order, were being senselessly slaughtered in the Falaise pocket and to whom he would have wished to remain loyal to the last.

On 18 Aug at 500 hours, after a moving farewell scene, von Kluge took leave of his small operations staff in La Roche Guyon, which was already under the shellfire of the approaching spearheads of First US Army. Between Verdun and Metz the Field Marshal took his own life by poison. A sham trial

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and death by hanging, the penalty instituted by Hitler for field marshals and generals, would have been his fate. His son and son-in-law were taken into "Sippenhaft"* custody.

In a letter to Hitler, dated 18 Aug 44, Genfldm von Kluge dealt with the causes and the inevitability of the collapse of the invasion front. In this letter von Kluge stated that the break-through at Avranches could not possibly have been prevented because of the superiority of the enemy forces in all three "dimensions" and added that his own strategic suggestions had been rejected. The counterattack at Mortain, which, against his advice, had been ordered by Hitler had caused a decisive deterioration in A Gp's situation. The new chief of staff, Genobst Guderian, who had regarded him as his enemy, had on account of the strained relations, never complied with his (von Kluge's) urgent requests for the assignment of pz units and pz replacements. Von Kluge concluded: "If your new weapons should fail to bring success, particularly in the air, you must bring the war to an end The German nation has suffered so greatly that it is high time to end this terror."

* "Sippenhaft" Hitler had ordered that the next-of-kin be held co-responsible in all cases of this type.

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Period 19 Aug to 5 Sep 44

Breaking out of the Falaise pocket

Withdrawal to the West Wall

The new OB West and CiC of A Gp B, Field Marshal Model, began his military career as an infantry man and was soon assigned to the General Staff. At the beginning of the war, he had served as chief of staff of Sixteenth Army in the West. In the East, during the embittered winter campaign 1941/42, he distinguished himself as commanding general and CiC of Ninth Army by bravery and an unusual ability to improvise. In 1944 he became CiC of A Gp Center and remained at that post until he was ordered to take over the command in the West. His appearance was inconspicuous and plain, his mental and physical elasticity outstanding. He hardly needed any sleep and was without fear when he met the enemy. He had a clear conception of tactics, but lacked the ability to properly evaluate possibilities. He overestimated himself, was inconsistent and had no sense of proportions. He was inclined to seek popularity among the soldiers at the expense of the officers. He was primarily a soldier and took no interest whatsoever in arts. In his bearing and conversation he aimed at originality. He was a passionate man. He had frequently challenged fate and was confident that, through his proven ability to restore a situation by improvisation, he would succeed in the West too. Despite his operational experience, he could not prevail upon himself to leave the task of working out tactical details to his subordinate commanders. The principle that "insignificant matters should not be brought before the highest authority" (Minime non curat practor") seemed to be unknown to him.

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Due to his unbalanced character he had, sometimes against his better judgment, subscribed to Hitler's ideology.

When Model assumed his duties as OB West, his attitude toward the members of his staff and the CiCs of the armies resembled the one Field Marshal von Kluge had displayed on 4 Jul; he was prejudiced and reproachful. He gave the order to continue the resistance south of the Seine, meaning the Falaise pocket, thus insisting on the senseless defense of every inch of ground without reinforcements or relief. Only if and when this combat mission could not possibly be carried out any longer, was a withdrawal to the Somme - Marne line to be effected and this line was to be held "under all circumstances". However the Somme - Marne line had neither been reconnoitered nor prepared for defense. The avalanche could not be stopped in this way. Heeding the example and following the instructions of the OKW, Model refrained from making strategic decisions, although the situation made decisions on an operational scale imperative.

After a preliminary survey of the situation, Model made a written request for thirty additional divs and 200,000 men as replacements. He must have realized that this request could never be complied with, for, as CiC of A Gp Center, which had suffered a decisive defeat on 25 Jun, and after making his report to Hitler, he had been informed of the strength and the condition of the OKW reserves.

On 18 Aug the command post of A Gp B had to be evacuated under the mortar and artillery fire of First US Army and was moved to "Hitler's command post in Margival" north of Soissons.

On that same day Hitler - as usual too late - gave his approval to the withdrawal of A Gp G behind the line Marne - Saone - Swiss border; He ordered,

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however, that Marseille and Toulon should be held as "fortresses" and that additional troops as well as materiel be assigned to the defense of the two cities. The LXIV Inf Corps, which had been employed on the Bay of Biscay, was to be withdrawn in "march groups" (Marschgruppen) across Central France in order to join A Gp G. Due to the lack of mobility of the German troops, it was an easy task for the US formations, which pushed forward toward the North, not only to exert frontal pressure on the retreating columns, but also to envelop and split them up.

Meanwhile the "Falaise pocket" had become daily narrower; the pressure exerted by the US forces from the West, South and Southeast was stronger than that of the British.

Two armies comprising four inf corps with a total of nine inf divs and approximately five pz divs were crowded into an area of ten to fifteen sq km between Falaise and Argentan and subjected to concentric artillery fire of all calibers as well as to relentless air attacks by day and night. The moving up of supplies, especially fuel, was rendered impossible by enemy fighter bombers. Nevertheless, the local commands remained calm and, during the night of 19 to 20 Aug, started, in accordance with the confidential instructions which they had received from Field Marshal von Kluge, an attempt to break-through toward the Northeast. The II SS Pz Corps supported this operation and provided cover for those breaking through. It was a miracle that elements of these formations, although they suffered heavy casualties and were forced to leave the bulk of their heavy equipment behind, still succeeded in forcing their way out of the encirclement toward Rouen and in warding off the enemy.

Meanwhile First US Army had launched a large scale enveloping attack between Dreux and Paris and its spearheads had crossed the Seine between Vernon and Mantes.

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Fortunately the American command failed to exploit this success. A thrust along the northern bank of the Seine would undoubtedly have enabled the enemy to cut off and annihilate the bulk of A Gp B. It was due to the enemy's failure to exploit the situation that the German forces were able to escape capture or annihilation.

Under the local command of Fifth Pz Army the crossing of the Seine was effected despite unimaginable difficulties and heavy casualties inflicted on the troops by the enemy air force, which, at times, literally darkened the skies. Although hundreds of heavy weapons as well as vehicles fell into the hands of the enemy, this river crossing, which took place during concentric enemy attacks under terrific fire concentration and air attacks, and held only by units we improvised on the northern bank, must be regarded as an outstanding accomplishment on the part of both officers and men. The morale of the troops was, in spite of the mental and physical strain, excellent. However, it was no longer possible to hold the Seine line as had originally been ordered by Hitler.

The OKW intended to rally and rehabilitate the pz units in the area Beauvais - Compiègne in order to employ them in a "decisive blow against the flank of the enemy who was pushing forward across the Seine." But this was merely wishful thinking which could never be realized, especially since the total strength of six pz divs had been reduced to hardly 100 tanks. A later plan to move the pz units into the area between Marne and Seine and to employ them in a thrust toward the Southeast which would simultaneously facilitate the retreat of A Gp G under Genobst Blaskowitz, was just another

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illusion. A prerequisite of either operation was a firm defense of the Seine line which however, for strategic reasons as well as in view of the comparative strengths, was impracticable.

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The Fall of Paris

Even before First Army - comprising emergency units and rear services which were supported only by the following combat units: 48 Inf Div, elements of 338 Inf Div and the assault bn of First Army - was able to prepare, at least to some extent, the defense of its far-stretching front, Patton's army had already forced a crossing of the Seine between Melun and Fontainebleau, and its reconnaissance cars patrolled as far as Troyes.

Below Paris the enemy moved forces to the northern bank of the Seine on both sides of Mante and reconnoitered in the direction of Beauvais.

A Gp C was still engaged in rear-guard actions north of Orange.

No combat units were stationed in Paris. There were only the emergency units of the administrative and supply services; an especially organized brigade was stationed in the western and southern outpost area, however, it had no heavy weapons and could serve only as a reconnaissance and security unit. On 23 Aug A Gp B received Hitler's order to blow up the bridges and other important objects in Paris "even if, thereby, residential quarters and monuments of art were destroyed". A Gp's chief of staff did not pass on this order; however the commanding general of Greater Paris, Gen von Choltitz, had received the order directly from the OKW via OB West. Gen von Choltitz telephoned for instructions concerning execution of the Fuehrer order. In view of the danger of interception, the chief of staff replied that von Choltitz should use his own judgment, he added that A Gp had not transmitted the Fuehrer order and, finally made reference to previous discussions. Gen von Choltitz disregarded Hitler's order and thus saved precious sectors of the city from destruction.

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On 24 Aug, 2 Armd Div (French) under the command of General Leclerc entered Paris from the South. The resistance of individual weak support points did not last long. Gen von Choltitz surrendered the city and became a PW. An evacuation of the city at an earlier moment, coupled with the withdrawal of all forces stationed there toward the North would perhaps have been a more advantageous tactical solution; it could however, at that time, easily have led to the hanging of the commanding general. After the surrender of the city Model brought in an indictment against Gen von Choltitz, accusing him, in his absence, of cowardice and endeavored to take still further measures against alleged "traitors".

As soon as the news of the loss of Paris had reached the OKW, the order was given by Adolf Hitler to employ the long-range artillery (which was still possible at that time), the V-weapon and all available Luftwaffe units against Paris. Hitler regarded his order to destroy the city as a means of undermining French morale. The execution of his order would have resulted not only in the death of many thousands of people, but also in the destruction of irreplaceable treasures of art in the "Ville Lumiere".

From a military point of view, Hitler's order was unjustifiable. Even the defense of the city, which after strong enemy forces had crossed the Seine above and below Paris, had lost all military importance, could never be justified by any strategic or tactical considerations. After its fall the city was definitely no longer of any military importance whatsoever.

The chief of staff of A Gp B prevented the transmission and the execution of the "destruction order" against Model's will.

Thus Paris was saved from destruction at the last hour.

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During the last week of August the flow of events had tremendously accelerated and could no longer be stopped by any means. Fifteenth Army took over the western sector of the front between the coast and Amiens; Seventh Army attempted, after it had regrouped its scattered elements north of the Seine and had been reinforced by 275 Inf Div, which had been transferred from Fifteenth Army, to establish a defense line between Somme and Oise; Fifth Pz Army, meanwhile, covered the retreat of the "wounded lion" between Seine and Somme.

The 1 Guards Armd Div(Br) succeeded in effecting a break-through toward Amiens and thereby captured, on 30 Aug, in Deleux near Amiens the CiC of Seventh Army, Gen Pz Eberbach, together with the high command of Fifth Pz Army during a change in the command. The CiC of Fifth Pz Army, SS Obstgrf Sepp Dietrich, and the chief of staff of Seventh Army, Obst von Gersdorff, just managed to escape at the last minute. A few days later Gen Inf Brandenberger assumed the command of Seventh Army.

The avalanche rolled on and swept everything away with it.

In the Compiègne - Soissons area, elements of A Gp B had still been holding out stubbornly. On 28 Aug however the enemy succeeded here too in effecting a break-through; A Gp's command post, consequently, had to be transferred to Havrincourt Castle, near Cambrai. This transfer, similar to the previous one of 18 Aug, was carried out under the fire of enemy tanks and artillery.

The enemy had reached the Somme, the Aisne and at Chalons, the Marne; the "fortresses" along the coast were encircled one after the other.

After A Gp's staff had arrived at the new command post, an OKW directive concerning the further conduct of operations was received. This directive finally did away with the principle of defending "every inch of ground" and

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contained an order to yield ground whenever it was necessary in order to avoid encirclement and thus preserve fighting power. The armies were to "fight their way back", meaning that they should only yield to enemy pressure, and withdraw to the line of the Scheldt bridgehead near Breskens - Antwerp - Albert Canal - Hasselt - the area west of Maastricht - Meuse - western edge of the Argonne - plateau of Langres (contact with A Gp G) - Chalons sur Saone - Swiss border. This line which was to be held "under all circumstances".

However, an orderly retreat had become impossible. The motorized Allied armies overran the non-mobile and exhausted inf divs which marched in disorganized groups and put them to rout. Considerable elements of retreating German formations, which were massed near Mons, were annihilated by the Allied armored formations which had overtaken them. Only weak elements of Fifth Pz Army and Seventh Army reached the Meuse on 5 Sep and only 100 tanks and assault guns, constituting all that remained of the pz formations, finally crossed the river. Such resistance as was actually offered was made possible by the initiative of the command staffs which, from A Gp's staff down to the lower staffs, had remained in close touch with the enemy and, employing every method of improvisation, succeeded in delaying the enemy, though only for a brief period.

Fifteenth Army retreated with the bulk of its units across the Scheldt and managed to retain most of its heavy weapons. This army, however, was not battered and pressed by the enemy to the same extent as the other armies.

It was impossible to hold the Meuse front since Namur had fallen on 5 Sep and Liege on 8 Sep. The lack of troops made the defense of these former fortresses impossible.

A new OKW directive concerning the further conduct of operations called

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for a fighting withdrawal aimed at gaining time to carry out the armament of the West Wall. As a final MLR the following line was to be held "to the last man": Dutch coast including the Scheldt estuary - Luxemburg - western borders of Lorraine and Alsace.

Now an unexpected "miracle" occurred: The extremely strong pressure of the pursuing Allies decreased suddenly. This could not have been caused by supply problems because the Allies had at their disposal excellent supply lines which they could use without enemy interference; also "the decreasing power of the attack" could not have been the cause for this respite because new first - class combat units were arriving in a steady flow. The methodical conduct of the operations by the Supreme Allied Command must be regarded as the main reason. Perhaps also the illusory strength of the West Wall once more influenced the enemy's decision. The enemy moved into assembly positions and made preparations to pierce this alleged line of fortifications. If the British and US forces had continued to maintain close contact with the enemy, they could have continued their advance and thereby shortened the war by six months, because there were no German forces worth mentioning on the ground or in the air to oppose them. Besides, the battles in East Prussia and Hungary had reached their climax and it was therefore impossible to transfer any forces.

On 5 Sep the chief of staff of A Gp B, at that time in La Chaudefontaine east of Liege, was recalled and replaced by Gen Inf Krebs; no reasons were given for this recall. On 7 Sep the chief of staff was arrested on Himmler's orders and taken to the cellar of the Head Office for the Security of the Reich (Reichsicherheitshauptamt) in the Albrechtsstrasse, Berlin.

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During the brief period he worked with Genfldm Model, the chief of staff repeatedly had the opportunity to discuss the over-all situation and the political and military conclusions which, in his opinion, had to be drawn from it. Model clearly realized the hopelessness of the situation, especially since, in the field of foreign policy, events of particular importance had taken place in the East and Southeast at that time; Turkey had sided with the enemy and Rumania, Bulgaria and Finland had arrived at an agreement with the Allies. Model refused to approach Hitler because such an action did not fall within the sphere of his duties. He also rejected the idea of making a strategic decision in the West on his own responsibility, although the CIGs of the armies as well as commanders of all ranks repeatedly urged him to make such a decision. In his answer he referred to the sham trials which followed on the 20 Jul attempt.

All personal appeals, during which attention was called to the fact that he was morally responsible to the nation, its soldiers and to history, failed to produce any result. With the military situation steadily deteriorating, Model increased his efforts to ingratiate himself with the political leadership.

This was demonstrated by the immediate appointment of a National Socialist political officer - a measure which A Gp had managed to avoid thus far - and that of a special missions officer of the SS. Thus it became obvious that neither political nor strategic decisions could be expected to be made by this CIG. It was his desire to be responsible only for the execution of decisions made by his superiors; an "awakening of conscience" was not in his nature.

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The Elimination of Genfldm Rommel

In the air attack of 17 Jul, Genfldm Rommel suffered, besides numerous wounds of the head, caused by splinters, and injuries of his left eye, a severe fracture at the base of his skull as well as fractures of his temples and cheek bones. As a result of a severe concussion of his brain he remained unconscious for some time. When, early on 20 Jul, his chief of staff visited him at the Luftwaffe hospital at Bernay, he had regained consciousness. He was anxious to obtain information on the critical situation at the front, on his soldiers and on the events of 20 Jul. He discussed the political consequences, which he too considered unpredictable.

When the break-through at Caen became imminent, Rommel was transferred to the base hospital at Le Vesinet near St Germain. Despite detailed reports which had been submitted to the OKW and to the press, neither the latter nor the radio made any reference to the Field Marshal's injury. However, in view of the situation at the Normandy front, for which Hitler wanted to hold him responsible, Rommel insisted on public announcement of the injuries which he had suffered on 17 Jul.

After the break-through at Avranches - i.e. three weeks later - a bulletin appeared in the press and was announced over the radio, informing the public about "an automobile accident" suffered by the Field Marshal; the date of the accident was not specified in the bulletin. Thereafter no further announcements were made. In vain the Field Marshal demanded a correction of the statement in which, on orders of a higher authority, the facts concerning his injury were misrepresented.

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On 8 Aug the Field Marshal, was, upon his request, transferred to Herrlingen near Ulm on the Danube where he was to be taken care of by his wife and treated by Professor Dr Albrecht and Professor Dr Stock of Tuebingen. This measure proved very helpful; in his native surroundings the Field Marshal recovered more speedily than had been expected.

When, on 6 Sep, his chief of staff visited him at Herrlingen, he found him in good spirits. His left eye, which had been closed, was beginning to open. He hoped to recover within four weeks, or at least, to be able to take up his duties again by that time.

Commenting on the situation the Field Marshal said: "Hitler, this pathological liar, has now definitely become insane. In dealing with the men of 20 Jul he has shown himself to be a sadist. We have not reached the end yet." He still tried to find a way out of the situation, which was rapidly heading toward catastrophe. Hope for an end which could be considered acceptable at least to some degree had all but vanished since the early summer of 1944 and particularly since the failure of the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 Jul.

The Field Marshal instructed his chief of staff, on the occasion of his report at Hitler's headquarters which was scheduled for 8 Sep, to advise Genobst Guderian that the war in the West should be ended on any acceptable terms while the West Wall and the Rhine were still in German hands and vast sections of German territory had yet been spared the full fury of the war. All forces were to be shifted to the East where the approach of winter, the Red Army's favorite season, gave rise to serious apprehensions. The elimination of Hitler was more urgent than ever before. The Field Marshal refused to accept the dictums of fate. He would, after his recovery, be ready to take the initiative

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regardless of the consequences and to accept any responsibility.

The Field Marshal realized, of course, that, in view of the suspicious Hitler and the OKW, his assignment to the post of CiC was in doubt.

The question of Hitler's elimination seems to have intensely occupied the Field Marshal's mind during those weeks; however he was unable to find a practical solution. Three weeks later he told Obst Lattmann: "Immediately after my recovery I will go to Hitler and tell him: Too many millions of decent people who believed in the righteousness of our cause have died for Germany, now it is time for you to step down." One week prior to his death he remarked to his attending physician: "I am afraid that Hitler, in his madness, will sacrifice the last German before he himself dies".

For a year information had been received by the Field Marshal to the effect that he was watched by the SD, especially during his stays in Herrlingen. The SD is said to have reported to Himmler in spring 1944 that the Field Marshal was a defeatist.

On 13 Oct he visited Obstdt d R Oskar Farny an old friend and comrade who had served in the same regiment with him, in Duerren near Wangen in Allgaeu (Bavaria). On the occasion of this visit he remarked: "I am in serious danger. Hitler wants to do away with me. The reasons are: My ultimatum of 15 Jul, my frankness in general, the events of 20 Jul and the reports of the Party and the SD. In case something should happen to me, please look after my boy." When Farny pointed out that, for psychological reasons, Hitler could not possibly drag his most popular general into court, Rommel replied: "Yes, you will see, he is going to have me killed. As a politician you should know these criminals

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better than I. He would not even stop at that."

The following particulars concerning the Field Marshal's death are contained in the report of his wife, Frau Lucie Maria Rommel, and in the minutes of the interrogation of the former Genlt Maisel:

On 7 Oct the Field Marshal received an order by telephone to come to Hitler's headquarters for an "important conference". Since, according to the opinion of the attending physicians, he was not sufficiently recovered to travel, Gens Burgdorf and Maisel, acting on Hitler's orders, went to Herrlingen on 14 Oct. After a brief talk between them and the Field Marshal, the latter went to see his wife in an abstracted manner he told her, "In 15 minutes I shall be dead. On Hitler's order, I am given the choice of either poisoning myself or being dragged before the People's Court."

During the talk, Gen Burgdorf had explained to the Field Marshal that statements, allegedly made by persons under arrest, indicated that he was implicated in the plot of 20 Jul 44 and, moreover, even designated to become the head of the state after the overthrow of the Hitler regime. It has not been ascertained as yet how the Field Marshal reacted to his accusation, the contents of which he rejected; it is known that, after this talk, he took leave of his relatives and his adjutant and left the house, accompanied by the two generals.

Meanwhile, SS guards, equipped with automatic weapons, were placed at the town exits and around the house. After a short ride in a car, driven by an SS man, the two generals brought the corpse of the Field Marshal to the Wagner School general hospital in Ulm.

Gen Burgdorf instructed Dr Mayer the ward officer of this hospital, not to

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perform an autopsy, saying: "Do not touch the corpse, all necessary arrangements have already been made by the authorities in Berlin".

Rommel's death was explained to his wife as resulting from an embolism. On the face of the dead Field Marshal was an expression of the deepest contempt.

Regardless of the manner in which Rommel's death was actually been brought about, it is established by the statements made by Keitel in Nuremberg, that the order which Burgdorf had received was issued by Hitler personally; Hitler maintained the fiction of an embolism even when talking to his immediate associates like Goering, Doenitz, Jodl and others.

The telegram to A Gp B read: "Genfldm Rommel died as a result of his automobile accident". This was a lie!

If he really did die by his own hand, the Field Marshal probably regarded his "S o c r a t i c e x e c u t i o n" as a sacrificial death and a clarification call to the nation (in the evening of 13 Oct he remarked to Frau Farny: "If anything should happen to me, never believe that I had raised my hand against myself.")

The circumstances of Rommel's death were supposed to be kept from the nation. Hitler attempted to camouflage the crime and to wipe out its vestiges by ordering a state funeral for the Field Marshal which took place in the city hall of Ulm on 18 Oct; it was a "unique" political desecration. Neither Hitler nor any other top-ranking National Socialist leader attended the ceremonies, only the Chief of the Head Office for the Security of the Reich, Dr Kaltenbrunner, was present to supervise the state funeral personally. After the funeral Ministerial director Dr Berndt of the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda told Frau Rommel with a "prophetic" look: "The Reich Leader of the SS (Reichs-

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fuehrer SS) did not participate (sic), he is deeply moved!"

Genfldm von Rundstedt, representing Hitler, read a speech which contained the pathetic statement: "His heart belonged to the Fuehrer."

Rundstedt did not attend the cremation which took place immediately afterwards; he also did not enter the house of mourning in Herrlingen. To those present, the old soldier appeared broken and unaware of his surroundings.

Several months after the state funeral, Frau Lucie Marie Rommel received the following letter:

The Director of Public Works
Section German War Cemeteries.

Berlin Grunewald
Lassen Street 32/31

(13 b) Schloss Leut-
stetten,
7 Mar 45
near Starnberg/Upper
Bavaria.
Tel. 2388 Starnberg
Gen/Gt.

Frau

R o m m e l

Herrlingen near Ulm

My dear Frau Rommel!

The Fuehrer has given me the order to erect the monument for your late husband, Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel, and upon his request I have asked several sculptors to cooperate with me in working out sketches for this monument.

However, since, due to its size, the monument can neither be erected nor shipped for the time being, only a model of the monument will be made. It appears however appropriate to immediately erect, at the grave, a simple memorial in the

form of a large stone plaque on which name and emblems will be engraved. This memorial plaque will have an approximate width of one meter and a length of 1.80 meters. The Field Marshal's highest decoration will appear above the inscription.

I have considered it appropriate to use the figure of a lion to symbolize the Field Marshal's courage and greatness. Professor Thorak has prepared a model of a dying lion, while Professor Brecker and another sculptor, Herr Loehner have worked out models of a roaring lion and a lion about to attack, respectively. I have chosen Loehner's model because, in my opinion, it is most impressive on the plaque. But if you desire, however, the figure of the dying lion, as worked out by Professor Thorak and as shown on one of the pictures, can be placed on the plaque.

Work on this memorial plaque can start at once since I have obtained Reich Minister Speer's special permission to carry out this project; generally, the erection of memorials, made of stone, in honor of soldiers, including even those who have been awarded the Knight's Cross, is not authorized. However I have been authorized to erect such monuments in special cases and, if you approve of it, I will avail myself of this authorization for the first time for the purpose of honoring Rommel, the hero, and I will see to it that the monument is placed on the Field Marshal's grave as soon as possible.

Heil Hitler!
(signed) Dr Kreis, Director of Public Works.

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Throughout Germany the rumor spread: "Our Rommel did not die a natural death, Hitler has killed him".

The reasons why Hitler had ordered Field Marshal Rommel's elimination can be traced back to the African campaign and even more so to the events of the early summer 1944.

The development of the Field Marshal's political attitude accordingly is important.

Goebbels, in the weekly periodical "Das Reich", once called Rommel one of the first SA leaders; but Rommel never left the Army and was therefore never a member of the SA.

During the first two years of the National Socialist regime the Field Marshal's opinions differed strongly from those held by Hitler. After the arbitrary measures of 30 Jun 34, especially the unavenged shootings of Gens von Schleicher and von Bredow, he said to his friend Oskar Farny: "Now would have been the time to throw Hitler and his entire gang out of office."

After the right of the army to expand had been proclaimed in March 1934, Rommel's respect for Hitler grew steadily; he called Hitler the "man who unified the nation" by ending the disastrous quarrelling of the political parties, he and the "man who had freed the nation from the shameful terms of the Versailles Treaty" and the "man who had done away with unemployment". Rommel began to believe in Hitler's "peaceful aims and ideals". He welcomed the restoration of military sovereignty as a token of the restoration of the Reich's sovereignty in general; he was firmly convinced that the Western Powers would be glad to have Germany "as a buffer against Bolshevism".

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At the outset, Rommel did not realize, that war is not merely a military event, but principally a political and diplomatic matter. Following the conclusion of the Western Campaign, Rommel began to view the National Socialist regime's conception of a state and its conduct of war with misgivings. These misgivings were borne out by many sad experiences. In the course of the African campaign the Field Marshal had, for the first time, opposed, Hitler's dreams of conquering the entire world. Since that time Hitler distrusted Rommel; in dealing with the German people, however, he continued to take advantage of the Field Marshal's reputation as "the decent Rommel". Rommel gained experience not only in the political and military sphere but also in the humanitarian sphere. He realized the growing amorality of the regime which degraded the state and the Wehrmacht to mere executive organs of the Party.

Repeatedly he warned against the insecurity prevailing in regard to the administration of justices which he regarded as a short-cut toward self-destruction of the state. As Hitler's mistakes and crimes followed each other in rapid succession, Rommel realized with a feeling of horror "the terrible power of ambition, that accumulation of senseless greed in its most brutal form, excessive desire for glory, power, conquest, murder and destruction, of haughty arrogance, of paralyzing fear, thirst for revenge and of boundless despair" (Quotation from Walter Nestle, Stuttgart 1944). Hitler was a demonic tool of all those passions.

Unlike most of the other military leaders, Rommel refused to resignedly accept the facts; on the contrary, a realization of the seriousness of the situation strengthened the elasticity of his mind, his courage and his determination to act independently. He displayed courage not only when writing to Hitler, but also when facing him, he minced no words in clarifying the situation and deman-

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ded that the necessary conclusions were drawn. Since he was aware of the failure of all his arguments to convince Hitler and since he valued the dignity and the welfare of his people higher than his personal well-being, he made preparations for an action similar to that taken by York during the Napoleonic wars. Himmler and his henchmen had, as revealed by the minutes of subsequent interrogations, no knowledge whatsoever of his intention.

It is true that Field Marshal Rommel can perhaps be blamed for not realizing the true nature of Hitler's regime at an earlier time. However, when he became fully aware of the gravity of the situation, he strove with all his strength to liberate the Reich from tyranny.

Rommel had no part in the glorification of the "greatest general of all times!" Hitler instinctively became aware of this attitude; this was proven in Margival on 17 Jun 44. Hitler's political and military advisers prejudiced him, openly as well as indirectly, against Rommel. They did not want the Field Marshal to become a menace to the dictator. In Hitler's theocracy no hero was to be worshipped by the people but Hitler himself.

The desired opportunity to get rid of the only possible rival or successor offered itself on 30 Jul 44. Through a skillful propaganda the people's hatred was directed in a masterly manner and their attention diverted from the crucial events which foreshadowed the approaching catastrophe. No person was permitted to exist in Germany who could have taken Hitler's place. Rommel, the most popular man in Germany during the war not only because of his military successes, but also because of his humane attitude, was ready to take the initiative in order to prevent chaos. Hitler would never have dared to have the Field Marshal tried by a court;

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it is therefore unlikely that, regardless of what the Field Marshal decided to do, on that fateful 14 Oct in Herrlingen, he would ever have reached Berlin or Hitler's headquarters alive. Murder was the only political means Hitler had to attain his ends without being forced to show himself in his true colors.

Niccolo Machiavelli wrote 400 years ago: "The general who, through his proficiency, achieved victory and success for his ruler, will necessarily enjoy the high esteem of the soldiers, the people and the enemy to such an extent that his victories become a cause for the ruler's anxiety. The ruler is forced to protect himself against his general. He must either eliminate him or deprive him of his popularity."

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Genfldm Rommel's Generalship

The Field Marshal:

According to Clausewitz, generalship requires highly developed mental faculties as well as "will-power" and "spiritual courage".

"Each operation has to be guided by a clear and simple idea." As far as tactics are concerned, Rommel's book "the Infantry attacks" is sufficient proof of his talent for reducing complicated matters to a simple formula. He also displayed this talent while serving as officer in the intermediate and higher grades.

He was less familiar with strategic planning and leadership than with tactical and technical matters which he handled with an inborne faculty to see and solve complicated matters in a simple manner.

He demanded uncompromising clarity in the estimate of what could be achieved and truth in reporting what actually had been achieved. He detested the palliating as well as the exaggerating statements of propaganda, which, since 1941, had found their way from the political sphere into the communique terminology of the Wehrmacht.

The Field Marshal possessed i n t u i t i o n and the knack of "assessing the situation at a glance". He conducted operations not merely in accordance with existing plans, but took "events and circumstances" into careful consideration. Thanks to his gift to foresee the course of events and to his initiative he was a master at improvisation. In practical and technical fields, he was full of ideas.

During the African campaign the enemy stressed the "flair" of the "Desert Fox".

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He also proved that he possessed the necessary steadfastness in the ever changing fortunes of the war and during the critical moments of battle. Thanks to his sound judgment he never indulged in self-deception and this gave an accurate feeling for the culminating point of a battle and the climax of the war.

Moltke demanded that a u t h o r i t y and c o n f i d e n c e should supplement each other. Although Rommel was perhaps inclined to demand too much and to be too severe, he had the understanding of a true leader for his subordinates, the gift to inspire the troops and, finally, that miraculous influence which a commander exerts upon his troops. All soldiers sensed the abundance of his noble qualities as well as his devotion to them. Thus the Field Marshal was able to deal with situations and to handle his subordinates. He had displayed these qualities already in 1915 during the battle of the Argonne. When, in those days it was Lt Rommel who led the adjacent company in the adjoining sector, one felt just as safe as later on, during World War II, when the commander of the "Ghost Division" dashed across France or across the African desert of El Alamein or Tobruk. The troops used to say: "Where Rommel is there is the front". Napoleon once said: "One cannot direct an army from the Tuileries". This rule is valid even in this era of highly developed technique. Rommel was the modern "Marschall Vorwaerts" *, who conducted operations from the front line as well as from the command post. He was untiring and could be found wherever the situation called for his presence to inspire the troops. He loved the front line atmosphere, the constantly fluctuating situations, the harsh life and the contrasting emotions of the soldiers. Hitler lacked this intimate relationship with

*) The popular name of Marshal Bluecher, a Prussian leader during the Napoleonic wars. "Vorwaerts" being the command to advance.

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the soldiers. Rommel, in contrast to him, possessed that faculty of handling people and leading his troops which Wallenstein is praised for by Schiller's Max Piccolomini:

" The ableness inherent in each man
he uncovers, fosters and promotes,
leaving each man as he is, unchanged,
but watchful when occasion doth demand
that then the man be Wallenstein; thus Wallenstein
makes everything that others have his own."

The M a n :

Graf Schlieffen formulates as a requirement of generalship that mind, heart and will shall unite in forming character of a general. Non videri, sed esse- to be more than one appears to be. When reason meets with the unreasoning force of war, where knowledge and action are in the balance, that is where the human qualities in the general will be put to the test. Uninfluenced by the glory of his own rise, the Field Marshal remained "always the same Rommel," who performed his duties, no matter how difficult a situation he was confronted with. He was a soldier, possessing "civic courage," whose love for his country was founded on sincerity and a deeply rooted connection with the soil of his home land and the forces of nature. He was upright and unambiguous, straight forward toward friend and foe; at heart he was a free man. To him only that was honorable which was in accordance with his conscience.

His face, with the clear blue eyes, expressed not only energy and audacity,

* Translator: The term "general" is used for the German term "Feldherr."

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but also humane qualities and inspired confidence. Without consideration for himself, a Spartan in his way of life, he nevertheless did not despise the amenities of life. Though not artistically minded and, sometimes giving the impression of soberness and reserve, in his own circle he was a comrade among comrades with a happy sense of humor.

His chivalry was proverbial; it is still alive in numerous anecdotes; the enemy respected the "dashing general".

Genfldm Rommel is an embodiment of the virtues of the German soldier. His life and work until his sacrificial death constitutes an everlasting, noble and humane legacy for his country.

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Reflections on the Battle in Normandy

Since toward the middle of 1942, when the Western Allies began to prepare for the invasion, they regarded this operations as decisive for the outcome of the war. The technical preparations with regard to inventions and their application were extraordinary. The Allies calculated with truly mathematical precision what part chance should be allowed to play. The inventors and technicians of two hemispheres achieved results which, up to that time, had been considered unlikely. Throughout the use of artificial harbors, landing and supplying operations were to become independent of the capture of continental ports. The "Pluto" pipe line across the Channel, facilitated the fuel supply in a manner which left nothing to be desired. Thus the abundant resources of the whole world could be bent toward victory. Artificial landing strips on improvised airfields on the beachheads enabled the three branches of the armed forces to coordinate operations in a truly unsurpassed manner.

During the years of preparation the Allies had all the advantages of local and long-range reconnaissance for themselves. While the German forces had to rely almost exclusively on radio communications, the Allies made full use of their air force for local as well as for long-range reconnaissance. The Allies combined reconnaissance missions and raids on targets behind the German lines whose destruction they considered essential for the success of the invasion.

The British and US intelligence service had at their disposal not only the highly developed communication net of the entire world, but also the forces of the resistance movement in the invasion country itself, who furnished invaluable data concerning the German forces and kept the Allies posted on pertinent

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developments.

Prior to the war, the establishment of an intelligence service in England had been forbidden by Hitler. When, at the last hour, he finally changed his mind, it was too late.

The US and British forces attacked with an overwhelming superiority in all three "dimensions". Particularly the employment of their air force, which was technically highly developed, well trained and efficiently commanded, proved decisive for the success of the invasion and subsequent operations. However, it must also be admitted that collaboration, especially between army and air force had been practiced in an exemplary manner and, consequently, stood the supreme test. Also of importance were composition, equipment and supply of the army formations, all of which were highly mobile. The British and US divs entered the combat in peacetime strength with well-rested troops. They had profited by the experiences gained during five years of war. The German Army, in contrast, had gone through the campaign in Poland, Norway, France, Africa, Italy, the Balkans and Russia and was exhausted. Food and supplies were inadequate. Particularly the Stalingrad Winter had broken the backbone of the German Army (casualties amounted to approximately half a million). The Luftwaffe was worn down and modern requirements had not been taken into consideration in its development.

Even according to Clausewitz's statement on moral factors in war, the Allies had the advantage: "Physical force is comparable to the wooden haft of the weapon, while moral force is like the noble white steel". The moral forces on the enemy side were stronger than those on the German side. Hitler's principles with respect to state and military leadership had created a moral

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vacuum on the German side.

The great technical preparations and achievements were not matched by the purely military leadership of the Allies. It had proven itself to the highest degree by the manner in which the problems of organization and execution of the invasion itself were handled, especially with regard to the grouping and the command of the individual branches of the armed forces. The unavoidable friction and tension between allies of a coalition war has hardly ever before affected military command in such a limited extent as during the invasion.

On the continent the Allied command worked methodically in regard to tactics and strategy. It was guided by Marshal Foch's principle of "sûreté de la manœuvre" (security of maneuver); it tried to eliminate all risks, to keep losses down to a minimum and to launch an attack only if its success appeared sure ("coup sûr"). The Allied invasion forces were thus comparable to an unyielding line which pushed the enemy back, or to a steam roller, which slowly but surely crushed to opponent.

The Allied command failed to fully exploit the great strategic possibilities which offered themselves, otherwise the war would have ended in 1944. Some examples of missed opportunities are: The failure to roll up the Seine front after the battle of the "Falaise pocket" and the failure to pierce the West Wall in Sept 44 for a thrust across the Rhine into the interior of Germany.

Only General Patton with his army attempted to deviate from the principle of absolute security in favor of large-scale operations, however he was not able to prevail upon the Allied Supreme Command to accept his own bold conceptions of warfare.

However there can be doubt that the invasion was of decisive importance

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for the outcome of the war. It resulted in the smashing and rolling up of the Western Front. It greatly relieved the Soviet Union from enemy pressure and thus made it possible for the Red Army to score its successes in 1944/45. These Russian successes must, of course, also be attributed to the technical aid received from the USA. The Russian model T 34 was equipped with engines made in the United States, where, even before the start of the invasion, the monthly production of tanks had passed the 2 000 mark.

The invasion will always be remembered in military history as an operation of paramount importance, especially in view of the fact that, for the first time, a concentration of the forces of all three branches of the armed forces and their coordinated employment in a large-scale operation was successfully accomplished.

On the German side it had not fully realized that warfare in three dimensions necessitated adjustments in strategy and tactics.

The "Commander - in - Chief", Adolf Hitler, thought along continental lines, his train of thought was still restricted by reminiscences of position warfare of World War I. He failed to grasp the conception of warfare in three dimensions with machines on the ground and in the air playing the dominant part. Divs similar to those used in former wars with inadequate means of traction had to engage in combat against a mechanized world. Foreign coasts and frontiers extending over 4 000 km were to be defended in linear position by sixty divs which were organized in an obsolete manner. A Luftwaffe comprising (at the time of the invasion) 90 fighters and 70 bombers was to fight for control of the air, to reconnoiter and to support the army in its defensive operations.

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The unscrupulousness of the highest command was matched by its dilettantism.

"Fuehrer" and OKW directed operations, during the first weeks of the invasion, from Berchtesgaden, later on from East Prussia. Since it was impossible to maintain liaison by air, this distance occasioned great difficulties which surpassed those encountered by the much criticized German High Command (OHL) which, during the battle of the Marne of 1914 was established in Luxembourg. While, on the German side, none of the military or state leaders was seen at the front, on the Allied side, Winston Churchill was among the first who stepped ashore during the invasion.

The revolutionary chaos in the command, which was created by rivalries among the individual branches of the armed forces and Party office, prevented the issuance of clear directives and undermined the command's authority. The front line soldier had to pay for it.

Confidence between officers and men had given way to coercion, falsehood and condemnations by political courts or courts martial. The willingness to assume responsibility and the initiative of the subordinate commanders - once a proud attribute of the German soldier -- had been stifled. In view of the situation and the comparative strengths, the only way to avoid catastrophe - apart from political decisions - was to operate on a large scale. Instead, only minor operations were conducted on all fronts. Strategic decisions, made in time, could have averted the destructive blow of the enemy in the West. In the East the situation demanded: radical shortening and fortifying of the front and organization of combat efficient reserve units; in the South: a stand

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along the line Pisa - Florence - Adriatic coast, and later on, at the Alps; in the West: evacuation of France south of the Seine while an operational group (Operationsgruppe) was being organized on the eastern wing; the precautionary construction of defense positions in the rear area and other measures.

However, Hitler, in his uncompromising attitude and complete lack of sober judgment, demanded the defense of every inch of ground at any price and the abandonment of 200 000 men in the so-called fortresses. As a result, the physical, psychic and moral strength of the front line soldier was greatly overtaxed. As in the East during the winter 1942/43, the German forces were gradually worn down. A defensive battle was to be fought without effective fire power and without support by the other branches of the Wehrmacht. It was a beggar's war.

In directing the operations, Hitler failed to issue far-reaching directives; instead, he gave individual orders of a purely tactical nature, thereby interfering with the work of even the lowest commands. By the time these orders arrived, they were usually outdated by the course of events. Such methods and a complete disregard for the dignity of the soldier prevented the development of the confidence which a soldier needs to stand the strain of battle.

Casualties of the 1944 campaign in the West, including the elements tied up in the fortresses, amounted to a total of approximately half a million. The loss in materiel cannot be estimated.

In the West too, Hitler was not able to "perceive, in proper judgment of the situation, the development of the culminating point" (Clausewitz). He deceived others; but especially himself, when he attempted to conceal inevitable facts instead of drawing the political conclusions.

Even as late as 1944 Hitler deluded himself into an undervaluation of the

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enemy's strength in the West. "No prudent warrior will underestimate his opponent". (Quotation from Goethe's Iphigenie). Lacking sense of proportion and overestimating his own will power, Hitler continued to live in a world of his own imagination and, acknowledging no limits whatsoever, he sacrificed the flower of the nation through the senseless and authoritative manner in which he directed defensive and offensive operations in Normandy, and especially at Avranches.

An army ceases to be an army when it is no longer fit for combat. In former wars, military and political leadership, aware of its responsibility, used to draw from this fundamental truth the necessary conclusions as, for instance, France did by ending the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 or Germany, through Hindenburg and Ludendorff, by bringing to an end World War I.

Adolf Hitler, however, instead of suing for peace, ordered retaliation through V L, a weapon which, in view of its stage of development and the existing possibilities for its employment could not come up to expectations.

The events of 20 Jul 44 did not have an immediate effect on the front; motives, outcome and consequences of the plot became known only at a much later time.

Field Marshal Rommel's orders, aiming at the conclusion of the war and the salvation of the Reich, by independent action, would probably have been obeyed by officers and men at the Western Front.

The German divs, in performance and morale have, live up to (Gen von) Seeckt's demand "that the soldier should display calm courage in the face of disaster".

That this courage was sacrificed for an illusion, is the tragedy of every decent German soldier and at the same time, the tragedy of recent German history.

(Signed) Dr Hans Speidel
Genlt (retired)

A P P E N D I X I

The following account of the death of General Field Marshal Rommel was not written by the author of this manuscript but obtained through Military Government sources. It is a copy of a sworn statement of GFM Rommel's son Manfred and is added as an item of interest.

I, Manfred Rommel, born 24 December 1928 as the son of Captain Erwin Rommel (later Feldmarschal) declare as follows:

My father, Genfldm Erwin Rommel did not die from natural causes on 14 October 1944 but was liquidated by order of Adolf Hitler.

My father had been wounded, his skull being fractured during a bombing attack at Livarot in France on 17 July 1944. After treatment in a hospital near Paris he was brought to his own home at Herrlingen near Ulm as soon as possible. His life was not in danger and the fracture could be considered healed.

My father was able to take walks and I had been ordered by my unit to place myself at his disposal in order to assist him, to read to him and so forth. At the time, his left eye was paralyzed. He was attended by Professor Dr Albrecht and Professor Dr Steck, both of the Tuebingen University.

On 7 October, I had to return to my unit but was allowed to visit my father again on 14 October 1944. I arrived by train at six o'clock in the morning. My father was well and took breakfast with me, after which I accompanied him on a walk until 11 o'clock. On this occasion he told me that two Army generals, General Maisel and General Burgsdorff, would come to see him, and that he did not believe in the statement that they were coming to discuss his further employment with him, but that this might be merely a pretext to eliminate him.

At twelve o'clock the two generals arrived and my father received them, asking me to leave the room. About one-and-three-quarter hours later I saw my father coming from my mother's room. He told me that he had said Good Bye to mother and that Adolf Hitler had placed him before the alternative of taking poison or being tried by the Peoples' Court. Hitler had also informed him that in the case of suicide his family would remain unmolested, in fact that he, Hitler, would take care of them. We had noticed meanwhile, that the house was under observation from four or five automobiles. It appeared that armed civilians were in these automobiles so that our own guard of eight men, who had only two sub machine guns, could do nothing against them. My father said Good Bye to the officer in charge of the guard and left the house in full uniform, wearing a leather coat and carrying his marshall's baton. We accompanied him to the car where the generals gave the "Heil Hitler" salute. We noticed that the car was driven by an SS-trooper. The two generals followed my father into the car, which left in the direction of Blaubeuren. Fifteen minutes later the Wagner Schule Hospital at Ulm telephoned the information that father had been brought there by two generals and that he had died as a result of an apoplectic stroke.

In our first conversation my father had informed me as follows:

He had been accused of participation in the 20 July 1944 plot. *Wow.*

His former chief of staff, Generalleutnant Speidel, had declared that father was one of the leaders in the attempt on Hitler's life on that day, and that it was only his wound that had prevented him personally taking an active part in the attempt. The same statement denouncing my father had been made by General von Stuelpnagel, who committed suicide, or at least attempted to do so on his way back from France after having been relieved of his post by Genfldm von Kluge.

In this attempted suicide General von Stuelpnagel lost an eye. He was found by the SD, who took him to hospital in order to obtain information from him. Later he was hanged. My father's name was also on the list of Oberbuergermeister Goerdeler as future Prime Minister.

Hitler did not wish to impair my father's prestige in the eyes of the German people and for this reason had given him the chance to commit suicide by taking the poison tablet which the two generals gave him on the way. He was dead within three seconds. If father had refused to commit suicide he would have been arrested immediately and brought to Berlin for trial before the Peoples' Court.

I herewith declare under oath and before witnesses that all my above statements are true.

Witnesses: 1. Paul REEB, _____ Notary and mayor,
Cuebverliers Alezeien Deports
2. Direktor Fritz PEROLD, Riedlingen, Markt-
platz 3 (Buergermeister).

signed: Manfred ROMMEL