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

Dates of interviews: 19 - 20 July 1945
Interviewer : Major Kenneth W. Hechler
Place of interview : CCPWE #32 ("Ashcan")
Circumstances : Gen. Warlimont received a brain concussion on 20 July 1944 which forced his retirement on 6 September 1944. He appears unusually well-informed on the war in the West up to this time. He has been most cooperative in discussing these affairs and appears to be broad and intelligent. His observations of the background and considerations involved in military decisions seem to be particularly penetrating.

PART I. THE INVASION

Q. Did you anticipate that the invasion would take place where it actually did?

A. Hitler was the first one who decided for himself that this was the most probable spot for landing. On 2 May 1944 he ordered that anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons were to be reinforced all through Normandy and Brittany, counting mainly on an invasion in Normandy. Hitler's view was based on intelligence received as to troop movements in the British Isles. Two main troop concentrations had been noticed there, one in the southeast with mainly British troops and one in the southwest, in Wales, and both sides of Wales, consisting mainly of U.S. troops.

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

A. Up to May, 1944, when Hitler first spoke of it, we were all prepared for a landing in the Channel zone between the Seine and the Somme, by Abbeville and Le Havre. Therefore throughout 1942-43 the coastal defenses were mainly built up in the zone of the 15th Army.

Q. At what particular point?

A/ I cannot say that we expected the landing at any particular point in Normandy. ~~We expected it all along the coast, with special reference to the small~~ ports (which are mainly in the Bayeux area). We were not quite convinced that Hitler was right in expecting that attack but he kept harping on it and demanded more and more reinforcements for that sector.

Q. Why did the generals predict that the invasion would strike at a different point than Hitler predicted? You both had access to the same sources of information, did you not?

A. We generals figured along the lines of our regular military education but Hitler figures as he always did, out of intuition. (1) We figured on the Channel zone because it is the shortest crossing from the British Isles. (2) Once across the Channel it is the shortest way to Germany and its industrial Ruhr. (3) It has at least one big harbor, Le Havre, better situated than Cherbourg and with better routes and lines of communication into the interior. (4) Your Air Force had better possibilities to support the attack closer to its bases.

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

A. Besides his observations from troops movements Hitler based his theory on the idea that you would aim to build up a stable front including one big harbor and there was no better place on the whole coast than the Cotentin Peninsula for this purpose.

Q. Did the regular army officers and high command lean any more toward Hitler's view as the invasion date approached?

A. We recognized too that a landing in other parts of Europe further north was becoming more and more improbable as the British troops were grouped more and more to the south. The position of the U.S. troops especially led Hitler to anticipate an attack launched against the west coast of Normandy.

Q. We of course did our best to deceive you into thinking that we would land in the Pas de Calais area, and after the landing in Normandy we still carried out elaborate deception plans in order to tie down your Fifteenth Army in this sector. What led you to feel that we would land in the Pas de Calais area?

A. The first air attacks were against fortifications of the Seine and since we had many standing fortifications in this sector we took it as further evidence of your plans.

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

We also managed to get in to some of your radio nets. Radio transmitters were dropped from planes to be used by your agents in France to inform you about our movements. We intercepted some of these and got into your radio nets and used them ourselves and used to communicate with your stations. We had the impression that this action of ours had passed unnoticed by you. We found out that there were special catchwords with which you prepared your operations and by means of which you were going to inform the French underground as to the day and hour of your attack.

Q. To what extent was it possible to complete the fortifications along the Normandy coast where the invasion was later made?

A. The fortification of Normandy was not at all complete; such fortifications require a long time. In Picardy we had more workers from occupied countries

and better communications and no one had thought of Normandy much before. The Norman fortifications were just the same as those of other parts of the French coast, with one big position every 20-30 km.

Q. Was it a case of shortage of troops or shortage of materials for the fortifications?

A. Not many more troops could have been put in there but we could have done much more in the way of fortifying. Materials, such as cement, were also rare, having to be divided among all the Armed Forces. Furthermore, railway transportation was getting worse all the time, as a result of air attacks on the big junctions. So we were well aware that the fortifications were by no means complete, but it was too late to complete them as we should have liked.

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

A. We should have built more standing fortifications built by the troops and not by the Organization Todt. As it was too late by this time all we could do was to put more troops in Normandy and improve their equipment.

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

A. By about 2 May 1944 we had, so far as I can remember without diaries, maps or operation books, one division of old men (comprising two regiments around the mouth of the Orne) the 711th Division, a static division, and the 245th in front of Bayeux, to cover a coastline of at least 60 or even 80 km. The next one, which you hit very hard, was the 353rd around the mouth of the Dive. There was a special force in Cherbourg. (The 245th and 353rd were on the north coast of Normandy on D-day.)

We had three divisions on the north coast of Normandy, another one, (709th) around Cherbourg and the 243rd on the west coast of Normandy. On 2 May 1944 Hitler put in the reinforcements of anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons which were given to the units, with a view in particular to their being better able to combat Paratroop and Airborne units.

On 4 May he ordered the 2nd German Parachute Division, then on the eastern front, to be transferred to the west. One regiment of this division which was already in Germany when the order was given, the 6th Parachute Regiment, came at once to Normandy somewhere near St. Lo.

Hitler then ordered that the 91st Division, one of the very few reserve divisions we had in Germany as an operative reserve, be transferred to Normandy also as a reserve. Most of this strength was on the base line of the Cotentin. So actually only one parachute regiment and one division was sent in as we had no operative reserve to dispose of.

Rundstedt, as Oterkommando West, tried to send reinforcements but had no reserves either and could do nothing worth mentioning. All our troops were required to defend the various coastlines and your attack in Italy was making great progress and one division of the 15th Army, the Luftwaffe Felddivision (number not known) had even to be sent to Italy.

Rommel, at the next echelon, had always fought for a more tactical defense of the coast. He wanted to put in reserves as close to the coastline as possible. Once you knew where the enemy was going to strike this was of course possible but when you did not know and had a coastline of thousands of kilometers it was too hazardous to risk. As soon as Hitler decided that Normandy was the likely spot Rommel had his way and sent his armored divisions, attached to him as Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber in Western Europe (Netherlands HA) in. Army Group "B" extended right down to La Rochelle. Rommel had a reserve of armored divisions and, in accordance with his line of thinking, he now put in the 21st Armored Division somewhere near Caen, the 12th SS Armored Division around Falaise, the 2nd Armored Division around St. Lo (or a little east of it).

Rommel had one Armored Division left. He had two in Normandy, one quite close to the coast, two just 40 to 50 km. behind it. He had one division behind the 15th Army. This took place about the middle of May. Rommel took no infantry divisions from the 15th Army. Maybe this was due to uncertainty as to the division of the spheres of Rommel and Rundstedt. I am not sure whether Rommel and Rundstedt were convinced Hitler was right.

Rommel claimed it made no difference where the attack came, as his defenses were now so good all along the coast.

There were four more armored divisions farther east which were reserved for the disposition of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. Two were in the neighborhood of Paris, the Panzer Lehr Division and the 2nd SS Panzer Division.

Q. Did you expect us to land only where there were ports and harbors, or did you know about our artificial ports? Why did you not bomb our artificial ports after you discovered how much we were using them to land supplies?

A. We always expected your attack with the aid of harbors and if we had known more about your artificial ports we should have done more to stop it. If you ask why the Air Force did not bomb the places where you landed more effectively the answer is that our Air Force was unable to break through your defenses in order to find and hit the targets at all.

Q. Were you able to estimate the rate at which we could build up supplies and troops on the beaches after the initial landing?

A. We knew the capacity of the small (natural) harbors, but, now knowing about the artificial ports, we could not estimate your rate of supply. We were able later to gauge the rate at which you were landing troops but confined ourselves to strength figures, number of divisions, as our reconnaissance did not give us much information on your troops, and still less on your supply circumstances.

Q. Did you suspect that the invasion would take place on the date which it did?

A. The weather was right for an invasion, and we had been alerted to the possibility for some weeks prior to 6 June. Our chief intelligence source was the radio, and our intercepts revealed that the invasion would take place on the morning of 6 June. This information was relayed to headquarters on the afternoon of 5 June. Hitler knew it, and General Jodl knew it, but the information was not made available to the troops in Normandy.

Q. Was this considered a great mistake by Hitler?

A. In Hitler's eyes, General Jodl, unlike other men, did not make military mistakes. General Jodl knew the state of alarm or alert under which the troops in northern France were operating and did not consider it necessary to give out another order. Furthermore, there had been a number of other false alarms prior to this one.

Q. Was your reconnaissance hampered any in the days immediately prior to the invasion?

A. Unfortunately we had no regular air reconnaissance because of the superiority of your air power over the area. Air reconnaissance was made perhaps every fortnight, and even then was confined to photographs of possible points of embarkation. Sea reconnaissance was rather difficult also; it was difficult to keep boats in the open sea when the British Navy dominated that area.

Q. Do you recall any of Hitler's specific comments immediately prior to the invasion?

A. More and more in recent months, since Hitler had assumed his role of military expert, he would talk at great length and in broad terms at the semi-daily operational meetings. These meetings, attended by up to 20 high officers, would be held at 1 P.M. and close to midnight. Hitler would speak honestly, but seldom directly to any individuals or individual. He would speak "out of the window." To answer your question, just before the invasion his line was that the impending invasion of France would be the decisive event of the coming year. Hitler said: "It will decide the issue not only of the year but of the whole war. If we succeed in throwing back the invasion, then such an attempt cannot and will not be repeated within a short time. It will then mean that our reserves will be set free for use in Italy and the east. Then we can stabilize the front in the east and perhaps return to the offensive in that sector. If we don't throw the invaders back we can't win a static war in the long run because the materiel our enemies can bring in will exceed what we can send to that front. We cannot win a static war in the west for the additional reason that each step backward means a broadening of the front lines across more of France. With no strategic reserves of any importance it will be impossible to build up sufficient strength along such a line. Therefore, the invader must be thrown back on his first attempt."

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

A. ~~Rommel was not there.~~

Q. Why not?

A. I should prefer not to mention this, but he had gone to der Fuehrer's headquarters, and as it was his wife's birthday he stopped by his home in Stuttgart to see her. Therefore, when the invasion struck, General Dohlmann, Commanding General

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

PART II THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY



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

A. After the landing in Normandy we applied our plan. We had a plan for the possibility of invasion in each case - Netherlands, Northeast France, Normandy, Brittany, Biscay - which would come into operation at the moment of invasion. The plans were mainly concerned with shifting reserves from one sector to another.

During the first fortnight no troops were shifted from the 15th Army sector, significant of the "half-measures" which were taken on 6 June 1944 to meet the attack.

The pursuit units of the Luftwaffe situated in Germany for the defense of the homeland were to be transferred to the west. There were 14 pursuit groups which had to be transferred from Germany. This and the movement of the four armored divisions were carried out.

The third measure, the shifting of infantry divisions from other sectors was only carried through reluctantly and far behind the plans we had made. We still expected another landing against the 15th Army where most of the infantry divisions were collected. Another landing in Brittany was feared.

At first two and later as many as four divisions were ordered up to Normandy but this took weeks, because the railroads were damaged and the bridges over the Seine and Loire were destroyed. Thus it took much more time than we had ever expected to get these divisions to the battle zone.

Even the armored divisions including those which Rommel had put in at Falaise and around St. Lo, did not come up to the coast during the time we expected, since, in spite of poor weather, it was hardly possible to move more than 20 km a night. In our plan we had anticipated that we would make 100km per night. The nights were very short in June. Thus our entire plan to concentrate these armored divisions against your main beachhead could not be carried out.

Q. To what extent were communications disrupted by the paratroop landings?

A. Communications suffered from local interference, but on the whole I recall no report of it; it was taken as one of the usual hazards of war. They were hampered always by your Air Force, not paratroops.

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

A. Rundstedt, when asked for the disposition of Oberkommandowehrmacht reserves, reported on 6 June that the first armored division would reach the coast on the same night of 6 June and promised to get more as soon as he could. They never reached the coast and it took them three to four days to reach the vicinity of Caen.

So our first plan of meeting your attack failed. The armored divisions were

supposed to strike in a general northwest direction from Caen and to wipe out one beachhead after another. After your two forces joined between Caen and Bayeux I had the impression that your forces coming from the British Isles could reinforce quicker than our forces coming from the rest of France. Our armor came up too slowly for us to counter attack with these divisions as we had planned. We had all we could do to contain you on the beachhead and keep a connected line of defense.

On 7 June I left Headquarters on a trip to General Kesselring in Italy which had been arranged before your landing and had to be carried out as he was in a pretty bad position, so I am not precisely informed on the events of 7th to 12th of June. During that time, probably on 8 June it had been decided to transfer two armored divisions, the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions from the east, to meet the attack. This shows that already on this date the forces we had originally assembled there were insufficient to meet the attack.

When I came back on 12 June I was informed that there was no talk of counter-attacks any more. We had had heavy losses bringing the armored divisions up to the line and we were occupied maintaining the line we had then reached.

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

A. Of course I was not the only one dissatisfied, and consultations went on as to how to meet the new situation. Hitler asked Rundstedt for a plan. The main theme of the solution was that the armored divisions which your attack had compelled us to commit on the line, contrary to their original function, should be relieved as soon as possible by infantry divisions which were coming up to the front; that at least 4 or maybe 6 armored divisions including those coming from the eastern front were to be assembled in the region southeast of St. Lo in the big forests, in order to carry out a counter attack in a northeast direction and separate the American and British forces in the vicinity of Bayeux.

First, we now knew how long it took to move even a short distance. Then Hitler repeatedly ordered the wiping out a small bridgehead of the British over the Orne near Caen. Hitler wanted this done first. Then we were to push forward out line of defense on the Orne while making the main effort toward Bayeux.

In mid-June, Hitler went to a meeting with Rommel and Rundstedt in France at a fort just north of Soissons, where he had a Headquarters prepared for the eventuality of an Allied invasion. The plans made there were never carried out as we failed to get out enough armored divisions to carry through this attack. The infantry divisions did not arrive soon enough. The armored divisions were still in the line and even the two from the eastern front were committed in the line. By the time the infantry came up the armored divisions had had such losses that their strength was no longer equal to the task given them.

Q. What efforts were made to prevent our cutting off the Cotentin peninsula?

A. At first we thought we should be able to keep your airborne units on the west of the Cotentin from joining the main force on the east and hoped to annihilate the troops on the west side while containing you on the east. In this way Cherbourg

would be safe and an attack from the beachhead prevented. Suddenly you broke through and established a line from the east to the west of the peninsula.

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

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

Q. Was this actually done, and where?

A. Hitler left the details of execution to the commanders. However, when I came to the battle front in early August, I discovered that the commanders had not accomplished this because most of the weapons had been lost enroute, and no main routes any longer existed because of the breakthrough in Normandy.

Q. Did you still have hopes of containing the beachhead during early July?

A. It was regarded as rather a success that a month and a half after your invasion operation we had been able to limit your advances. This was not losing sight of the fact that the loss of Cherbourg was a heavy blow to us, increasing our disadvantage. I recall after the fall of Cherbourg Hitler once said: "Look at the space they occupy now; what does it mean in comparison with the whole of France?" But Hitler may have been deluding his staff and it may not really have been his conviction. He had not convinced me, for it was evident that your forces would not have been satisfied to keep this small part of France but on the contrary you were doing everything to enlarge it and launch an operation with far-sighted objectives. Yet Hitler's orders always spoke in terms of pinning you down (zu Boden swingen), so as to contain you where you were.

Q. What measures were taken regarding disposition of your troops?

A. Troops were brought up from the Mediterranean coast although a landing was also expected there. Fresh divisions were brought up to relieve others, shifts were made, but the total number of troops was not increased. We tried again and again to get the armored divisions out of the defense line in order to carry through counterattacks at least of a local character.

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

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

A. We knew that large reserves could be shifted from the United States, and that you were able to build up your supplies rapidly. Thus we were prepared to expect a strong attempt of your forces to break through to the interior of France. No, the situation never got very much brighter for us. The average strength of our infantry divisions seemed to decline, and of course, the armored divisions did also. The situation on the eastern front did not allow enough infantry divisions to be withdrawn; railway transport was bad; bridges were destroyed; it was hardly possible for me to move from place to place in a car by daytime.

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

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

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

A. When we started to move divisions from the 15th Army sector, it was often found much easier to commit them around our right flank near Caen and the Orne River, rather than moving them additional distances to reinforce our weakening left flank opposite the American forces. The left wing got very few reinforcements, and those came from troops moved down from the Brittany peninsula. The losses which the left wing suffered in the east-west drive which your forces made across the Cotentin peninsula were very great, and it can be said that the left wing never recovered sufficiently from these losses.

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

A. We were neverfully satisfied during July with our situation on the left wing. We always felt that we would need more time in order to regroup our forces there. In an attempt to shorten our line, we tried to make maximum use of natural obstacles, such as the inundated and swampy ground near Carentan. Likewise, we tried to anchor our left flank on the inlet near Lessay, which would further shorten the line and necessitate less troops. Even with this, we were always jittery about our line west of St. Lo.

PART III CHERBOURG



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