



edited by Mad Dog

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Bodo Zimmermann  
Generalleutnant z.V. a.D.

Mr. Frank C. Mahin  
Capt. Inf.  
Chief, Operations Group Historical Division, U.S. Army

Dear Capt. Mahin:

I hasten to answer your letter of 5 September 1947.

The questions you formulated have also aroused my attention and occupied my thoughts for a long time. You will be able to observe from my manuscript later that during the critical time from the end of August until the beginning of October 1944, when describing the development of the situation, the question was broached by me several times. Why did the enemy at that time not exploit the existing situation for large-scale operational decisions and actions? - This, however, is a question, which at this time can be answered only by making conjectures on the German side. For, undoubtedly, the time from the end of August until the beginning of October 1944 represented a moment of greatest weakness for the West Army (Westheer) and in my opinion could have been exploited for a "knock out."

Within this period of time a distinction must be made between the local operational (örtlich-operativen) crisis in the West owing to the shattering of the center of H. Gr. B (Fifth Panzer Army) in the area between the Maas, Sambre, (the Mons trap) and southeast of Lille, and the simultaneous operational separation from the rest of the Westfront of Army Group G, which withdrew in the direction of Dijon.

The date of this local operational crisis of the German Westheer can be



set approximately as from 25 August to 1 September 1944. It was the preliminary condition leading to the decisive strategical crisis on the German side which began thereafter, and which in my opinion could have caused the collapse of Germany as early as in the fall of 1944. You will find my train of thought in this connection briefly stated in the attached treatise.

With best wishes for a pleasant vacation, I remain

Very truly yours

(Signed) Edo Zimmermann

Genlt. z.V. a.D.

1 Enclosure

Bodo Zimmermann  
Genlt. z.V. a.D.

Enclosure to Letter of 10 September 1947  
to Capt. Frank C. Mahin

Question 1:

"What could the Germans have done to stop a thin, knife-like thrust to the Ruhr and Berlin in the period 25 August - 1 October 1944 by the 21 Army Group, plus some forces from 12 Army Group? This presupposes the 3 US Army is halted at Paris. Would such a thrust have forced the evacuation of Walcheren Island and the Scheldt Estuary? Would such a move have caused a German collapse?"

Brief Answer:

As early as the end of August 1944, OB West reckoned with the beginning of the then decisive blow of the Western Allies (Westalliierten) owing to the shattering of the Fifth Panzer Army, for which the way was being paved, and the splitting of the H. Gr. B at the operationally decisive point (general area (Grossraum) south of Brussel. Large-scale operational airborne landings were expected in the rear of the defeated center of H. Gr. B (approximately the area Brussel-Aachen), against which there was no defense available that would have been adequate in at least a small measure. In connection with this operational airborne landing, the following operations of the Western Allies were expected in the northern part of the front:

(a) A quick breakthrough of the masses of the forces of the 21 Army Group of elements of the 12 Army Group (with the front being opened from the rear by the airborne forces) in a northeast direction toward the Ruhr District (Ruhrgebiet) and the North-German lowland (Tiefebene).



This breakthrough, if successful, - and it would have been successful - would have resulted in the collapse of the northern portion of the Westwall, which was in the process of rearmament (Wiederarmierung) and was not even occupied. There were no forces worth mentioning available either behind the front of OB West, or in Germany, much less forces equal to those of the Western Allies as far as weapons, equipment and mobility are concerned.

To be sure, in Germany there were a number of shattered divisions in the process of refitting (Auffrischung) and a number of Volks Grenadier divisions, Panzer Brigades, etc. in the process of organization; however, there was a lack of the absolutely necessary concentrated central reserves of the Supreme Command, trained in the conduct of defense (führungsmässig vorbereitet), which could have been employed operationally effectively against such a strategical breakthrough as "ultima ratio."

Under these circumstances a local resistance at different points in Germany (Rhine, Weser, Harz and Elbe) might have been attempted indeed against the breakthrough, although narrow, toward the Ruhr and - finally - toward Berlin, by the forces of the Replacement Army (BdE), but with the employment of the air forces of the Western Allies, which dominated everything, and against the armored superiority, this resistance would not have been of any importance anywhere.

On the other hand, in my opinion a successful breakthrough alone would not have resulted in the immediate abandonment of the mouth of the Scheldt, the islands lying in front of it, or of Holland, in view of the generally known amateurish idea of Hitler "to hold on" (Festhalteidee Hitlers).

(b) Envelopment and cutting off of the Fifteenth Army, pressing it toward the coast until it was annihilated or until it capitulated.

This possibility existed especially after the capture of Antwerp (4 September), where a quick seizure and cutting off of the area around the mouth of the Scheldt would have prevented the withdrawal of the Fifteenth Army. and would have made the entire problem of cutting off the mouth of the Scheldt by defending a bridgehead south of the mouth of the Scheldt and holding the Walcheren Island illusory.

Why this was not done at that time, remains an unsolved question for the German side.

In my opinion, which is shared by the then Chief of the General Staff, OB West (Gen. Blumentritt), both moments (a and b) together would have caused the final German military collapse as early as the fall of 1944. The fact that these moments remained unexploited, was called almost a miracle by Feldmarschall von Rundstedt in September 1944.

The catastrophe could have become a final one even on French soil, if the Third U.S. Army had been put in line at the same time as the masses in the general direction of Dijon, to cut off the forces of Army Group G.

Question 2:

What is the German evaluation of the failure of the Allies to seal the trap at Falaise?

Brief Answer:



The failure to seal the trap for the Seventh Army (völlige Einkesselung) in the area southeast of Falaise can really be explained only by the difference in opinions as to the conduct of battle of the command? (Verschiedenartigkeit von Führungsauffassungen), and the tactical differences in the joint operation (cooperation - Zusammenwirken) of the British and American forces resulting from it.

These differences became obvious in the course of the Normandy battle (also later) in the following main points:

- (a) American Command and Troops: Alert, very nimble, and prepared to make use of this agility in every situation. Very thorough and appropriate evaluation of all combat experiences, by the command as well as by the training. A very pronounced swing - in attacking.
- (b) British Command and Troops: Less alert! To be sure, very hardy and tough in battle, especially in the defense, but, as far as the conduct of battle is concerned, (führungsmässig), not exploiting the available superior means to the point of complete exhaustion, but acting methodically and cautiously even in success and the exploitation of success. Therefore, a certain inclination for inserting a "factor of safety" which prevented the complete exploitation of a success or a favorable situation.

Only by referring to this difference in opinion and aims in the conduct of battle and the training of the troops of the two Allies can an explanation be given on the German side for the fact that the trap of Falaise was not sealed tightly enough, and, on the whole, that the area south of the lower Seine did not become a "Tannenberg" for the entire Fifth Panzer Army and the Seventh Army.

Question 3:

The historian in Washington working on the invasion period has run across the name of an Oberst Hoefner, who was reportedly Transportation Officer at OB West. Apparently he was interrogated shortly after the war. We have no record of him here. Do you know any of him?

Brief Answer:

According to my knowledge, Oberst Hoefner was at first in an American Prisoner of War Camp in France (1945) and was then brought to England to answer questions of war historical interest. In the year 1946 he is certain to have been in Dachau, from then on his whereabouts cannot be determined with certainty. Perhaps an inquiry in Dachau will provide some information as to where he was taken or dismissed?

(signed) Rodo Zimmermann

Genlt. z.V. a.D.