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

Date of Interview : 2 August 1945  
Interviewer : Major Kenneth W. Hechler  
Place of Interview: Bad Mondorf, Luxembourg

RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE OF EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS

Q: Was there any competition between the officers in command of the Eastern and Western Fronts?

A: There was competition between Zeitzlar, who controlled the Eastern Front and Jodl, who controlled the Western Front. This competition was aroused not only because of the overall shortage of reserves in the German army, but also because of the peculiar command set-up after 1941. There was no one army man, except Hitler himself, who had overall responsibility for both the Eastern and Western Fronts. The division of responsibility between Jodl and Zeitzlar encouraged competition between them for troops and equipment.

Q: Upon what basis was the total number of divisions in the West allocated?

A: We had a general standard of 50 divisions in France towards the close of 1943. Eight to twelve more were added in the succeeding months in anticipation of landing operations.

In the fall of 1943 Hitler issued a Weissung to prepare comprehensive defenses against landing operations, which we felt would occur during the spring of 1944. It was indicated at this time that the earliest possible date for the invasion would be 15 February 1944.

Q: What made you think that there was a possibility it would occur that early?

A: Political indications. The Russian press at that time was crying that the campaign in Italy hardly constituted a second front. Further we figured that you would want to gain certain military advantages by invading before our defenses were completed.

The Hitler Weissung of the fall of 1943 also ordered the divisions in France to be equipped with stronger weapons. Each infantry division was assigned an assault artillery battalion and old weapons were replaced with newer ones. Strict orders were given to make preparations in a more war-like fashion to get the troops out of the "home atmosphere," and to improve communication facilities.

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Q: Were defense preparations in the West handicapped by the situation in Russia?

A: A large number of divisions coming from the east were reformed, refitted, reinforced and then sent to the Western Front. Movement from the Eastern Front was difficult, and refitting was delayed, by reason of the high losses of these divisions in the east.

It will clarify the situation to point out that the defenses in the west consisted of 4 distinct groups of divisions:

- (1) About 30 infantry divisions activated in France for the specific purpose of defending the French coast against invasion. These divisions, comprised about 50% of the divisions in the west, were designed to stay in France after the invasion.
- (2) Divisions activated in France which could have been used in other theaters, but which were left in France because of the emergency there. For example, of this group are Panzer Lehr Divisions, Hitler Jugend Division and 17th SS Panzer Division.
- (3) Divisions originally in the east which were moved from the Eastern Front after they had been badly battered, then reequipped and reinforced within Germany and moved to the Western Front.
- (4) Ersatz Divisions - which were reserve or training divisions such as the 158th and the 159th Divisions.

Q: What changes were made between the fall of 1943 and June 1944 in the proportionate percentages of these groups on the Western Front?

A: In the fall of 1943 Group I constituted about 60% of the total and in June 1944 constituted about 50%, the other three groups increased their percentages proportionately. The other three groups each constituted 15 to 20 percent of the total.

During the spring of 1944, in spite of all the impending danger in France, the 9th and 10th Panzer Divisions, activated in France, were shifted to Russia. They were returned in June 1944. The Panzer Lehr Divisions, trained specifically for operations in the west was against all advice of western commanders shifted to Hungary in April, 1944. It later returned also. The remains of about 5 armored divisions, some infantry divisions, and the 2nd Parachute Division were shifted from east to west after having been refitted in Germany. In addition Zeitzler demanded and received a large number of the younger troops from all divisions in the west in the spring of 1944.

Q: It seems rather senseless, in view of your transportation problems, to keep shifting divisions back and forth between east and west.

A: This was done to meet special emergencies for when we needed a complete armored division at once in the east, we could not reactivate or reequip a division in the east, as that would have taken 6 weeks. Only a new, fresh division could meet the emergency. In addition the movement from front to front provided rest and recreation for the troops themselves.

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A: (Cont'd)

I should like here to make a clear cut distinction between the situation in the first World War and this war. In the first World War, it was possible to make a greater shifting of the point of gravity from West to East or vice versa. In this war, it is impossible to say which front in the overall picture had immediate priority, because forces were dispatched to those sections of the fronts where the danger was most imminent. The reason for this was both the lack of a top army man to plan in a long range way the distribution of our forces, and also the shortage of reserves in 1944 which in itself prevented such long range operational planning.

If Hitler was really convinced, as he said frequently, that the invasion of Normandy was going to decide the whole issue of the war, then he should have resigned some of his aims on the Western Front in order to gain a decisive decision on the Western Front.

Q: "By resigning his aims" do you mean retiring to the German border in the east?

A: I would mean retirement to the line of the Bug-San-Vistula Rivers, and retirement from the Baltic countries and Rumania. This would have left a line of demarcation against Russia which we had after the Polish campaign.

Q: Was such a move seriously discussed in the German High Command?

A: Not in an organized fashion. In September, 1944, I gave the order on my own initiative to investigate ~~the~~ the other theaters of war to determine whether it would be possible to resign on several of our long range objectives in order to reach a decisive victory on the others. Such an investigation never proceeded beyond the initial stages in lower portions of my staff. The reason for this was that such a resignation was directly opposed to Hitler's basic attitude, and thus could never be carried through.

Q: What was the basis of Hitler's attitude toward retreat in Russia?

A: In regard to Russia, Hitler always took the stand upon the principle of "Everything or nothing." For this reason, he would never give in to the pleas of the army that propaganda as well as military might was needed to conquer Russia. For example, General Wlassow, a Russian army commander taken prisoner in the Ukraine, offered to propagandise the Russian army in favor of collaboration. Hitler became furious when he heard about this affair and refused to exploit it, whereas the army was very glad to have an offer of such a propagandist and wanted to put him to work immediately. Hitler also felt to take such a man into the confidence of the Germans would diminish the hatred which he felt was necessary to maintain toward Russia. He never wanted to feel obligated in any way toward the Russian people, and refused any compromises.

Throughout the war with Russia it was characteristic of Hitler that he would never decide to retreat until the decision was thrust upon him, and after that the German army had lost the initiative. This happened repeatedly -- in Crimea (which everybody foresaw except Hitler himself), Kuban (where the fight continued until the last man was thrown into the Black Sea) and many other examples.

In summing up the influences of the Western Front on the Eastern Front, it must be borne in mind that 20 or 30 divisions from the west would not have been sufficient in themselves to swing the decision in the east. Other considerations were involved - particularly Hitler's insistence upon everything or nothing. One must also consider the influence of the fronts in Italy, Norway, and the Balkans.

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Q: On the day of the invasion did Hitler ascribe any greater influence to the Western Front than he had theretofore held?

A: On that particular day the situation discussion was held in the Klessheim (An old castle of the Archbishop of Salzburg, where Hitler always went when foreign state guests were calling. The particular guests that day was the new Hungarian Prime Minister Stojey). Hitler came into the meeting with a very radiant face and said in a strong Austrian dialect "Anganga ist." ("It finally has begun", in correct German this would be "Angefangen ist"). Hitler took the news of the invasion very calmly, and indicated that he had expected it for a long time. His whole attitude was that now that the invasion had actually begun, all measures were being taken to meet the crisis and that the German troops would emerge victorious through counter-attacks. He did not believe that it was possible to prevent the landings but he believed that within 6 or 8 days it was possible to throw the troops back into the sea.

Q: What was the background surrounding the move of the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions to Russia in March, 1944?

A: In March, 1944 the Russian attack had penetrated to Tannepol and Buchovina in northeastern Rumania. General Hutter's army had been encircled at this time, General Jodl offered on his own initiative to shift these two divisions from the west to the east because he felt convinced the invasion in Normandy would not come until later in the spring, and he felt that the situation in the east was serious enough to warrant the transfer.

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