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-the first of five pages-

THE INVASION OF WESTERN EUROPE

6 June, 1944

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY ART AND ENGINEERING
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
WEST POINT, NEW YORK

1945

The following is a translation of a document issued by Field Marshal Rundstedt on 20 June, two weeks after the Allied landings in Normandy. It is of special interest as an authoritative statement of the German reaction to the Allied operation:

> The proximity of the English mother country and thus also of all the embarkation and supply bases afforded to the Anglo-Saxons in their first great land attack against the Western Bay of the Seine and against the peninsula of the Cotentin the opportunity of employment on the greatest scale so far of men, matèrial, and technical means. Systematic, almost scientifically conducted preparations in all fields for this attack were rendered more easy in every respect by a far-reaching network of agents in the occupied area of the west. The orders for the preparations and the carrying out of the landing are books with numerous enclosures.
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> The following most important battle experiences are to be passed on as the subject of instruction and drill in all fronts not yet attacked for the attention of the troops and command authorities in the battle area and for the instruction of all duty stations, protective forces, etc., in the entire protecting area.

I. Four Facts Which Must Be Emphasized

(1) The enemy's complete mastery in the air.

(2) The skillful and large-scale employment of enemy parachute and airborne troops.

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(3) The flexible and well-directed support of the land troops by ships' artillery of strong naval units ranging from battleship to gunboat.

(4) The rehearsal of the enemy invasion units for their task, most precise knowledge of the coast, of its obstacles and defense establishments, swift building up of superiority in numbers and material on the bridgehead after just a few days.

II. The Enemy Landing Procedure in Broad Outlines

(1) The enemy had hoped to be able to surprise us. He did not succeed. The beginning of landings from the air on the Western Bay of the Seine and in the Cotentin was on June 6, 1944, at about 0100, under conditions of cloudy, overcast weather with a rather strong wind, intermittent showers, and rough sea; at the same time at various sectors of the front strong enemy air formations delivered bombing attacks in the rear area. The enemy thereby wished to bring about an air raid alarm and make us take cover in order to be able to drop his parachute troops with as little risk of observation as possible. In several places parachutists turned out to be dummies (with boxes containing explosives). Purpose: splitting up of local reserves and withdrawal from the decisive spot, involving loss of time for the defender.

Airborne troops in many transport gliders of various sizes cut loose, in accordance with a precisely worked out plan, over the sea or at widely separated points over land, and on the whole they found their designated landing spots accurately. Nevertheless, these landings from the air were no surprise, since our own command and troops had counted on them for weeks and were prepared. Thus the enemy parachute and airborne troops suffered heavy—and in parts even extremely bloody—losses, and were in most places annihilated in the course of the battle. *They did not succeed in breaking up the coastal defense from the rear.* Only in the American bridgehead north of Carentan—by our own attack on three sides—were the enemy airborne troops compressed in the direction of the coastal defense after tough fighting for days, and thus they could link up with their own land forces which had already broken in and in this way were able to get reinforcement and relief.

The technique and tactics of the enemy airborne forces are highly developed. Training for battle was also on a high

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level—tough fighters, skilled in adapting themselves to the terrain.

We must reckon with the possibility that, apart from proper parachute troops, special troops with particular tasks will also be dropped (reconnaissance and reporting on command posts, munition depots, communications to the rear, etc., demolitions, disruptions, and attacks) or detailed from the airborne forces upon landing. These troops keep themselves perfectly quiet in order not to be discovered or involved in the battle. We must reckon with their exact knowledge of places and with employment of all possible means of assistance.

(2) The actual landing from the sea began four or five hours after the airborne landing. The enemy had changed his landing plans for coming in with the rising tide—plans which had hitherto been regarded by us as likely—and had adapted his landing operations to low tide because of the strong underwater obstacles along the beach, about which he had information.

This was recognized weeks before the actual landing by trial landings carried out in England. The enemy could thus discover gaps in rows of underwater obstacles along the beach, by-pass the obstacles with his tanks, and for the rest open up passages and overcome in part these beach obstacles by his own special troops.

Where these obstacles were not discovered because they were under water, heavy enemy losses in landing craft and in men resulted. But obstacles on the dry beaches also noticeably delayed the tempo of the landing and consequently increased the enemy's losses by our fire.

Time of the landings from the sea: starting from 0600 hours in the morning, fully visible. Before the landing there was a heavy bombardment of extraordinary intensity from the sea and the air, with weapons of all calibers. The consequence was that all field defenses were more or less knocked out and "ploughed down," so that for the most part only the solid fortifications remained intact. The enemy seeped in through the gaps without trying to attack the fortifications and big strong points. *These strong points held out in many cases for over a week and therefore split up enemy forces. By holding out to the last they helped their own leaders very much to gain time and to prevent a break-through of the enemy from the bridgehead.*

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(3) *Enemy Air Force.*—Almost unlimited in radius, it controls in numbers not only the main battlefield but also the approach and supply roads to a depth of 150 to 200 kilometers. Moreover, the enemy carries the battle right into the home battle front with his tactical bombers in order to destroy the large railway systems, especially railway junctions, marshalling yards, locomotive shops, bridges, and important works connected with the war industry.

Notwithstanding the highly developed railway system and the numerous good main and secondary roads, the enemy succeeded by attacking in force and uninterruptedly with his air force in interrupting supplies and replacements and in causing so many casualties in rolling stock and motorized columns that supply and replacements have become a very serious problem. The nearer the battle area, the more frequently appear the fighters and bombers employed in "road-chasing." By their attacks they interrupt all major movements in good weather by day and by using flares at night. The emphasis of the enemy air attacks lay at first on the main highways. But now they are attacking every form of movement, covering an area of at least twenty kilometers behind the main line of resistance, as well as byroads in the battlefield. Wherever the enemy's reconnaissance shows a disposition of troops, an attack by bomber formation follows within a short time. It is absolutely essential that motor vehicles keep long distances from each other within the columns.

Within two and a half days, at a depth from the enemy bridgehead of about sixty-five miles, 29,000 enemy sorties were counted; of these, about 2,300 aircraft a day dive-bomb and strafe every movement on the ground, even a single soldier.

(4) *Further Effects.*—Railroad transport which anyhow, because of the total traffic situation, has been reduced to a certain minimum can scarcely be brought nearer than 200-250 kilometers from the front; and this, too, without any planned schedule. The sections of railway lines change hourly, according to the weather conditions; the trains may be in close succession (buffer to buffer) or they may travel only at night. Also, as was at once recognized, violent air attacks often led to the blocking of transports within sections of railways lines. Railway terminals, and consequently the unloading of units or the setting up of supply bases, are constantly changing and require extraordinarily flexible leadership and mobile labor battalions for swift unloading the moment messages arrive.

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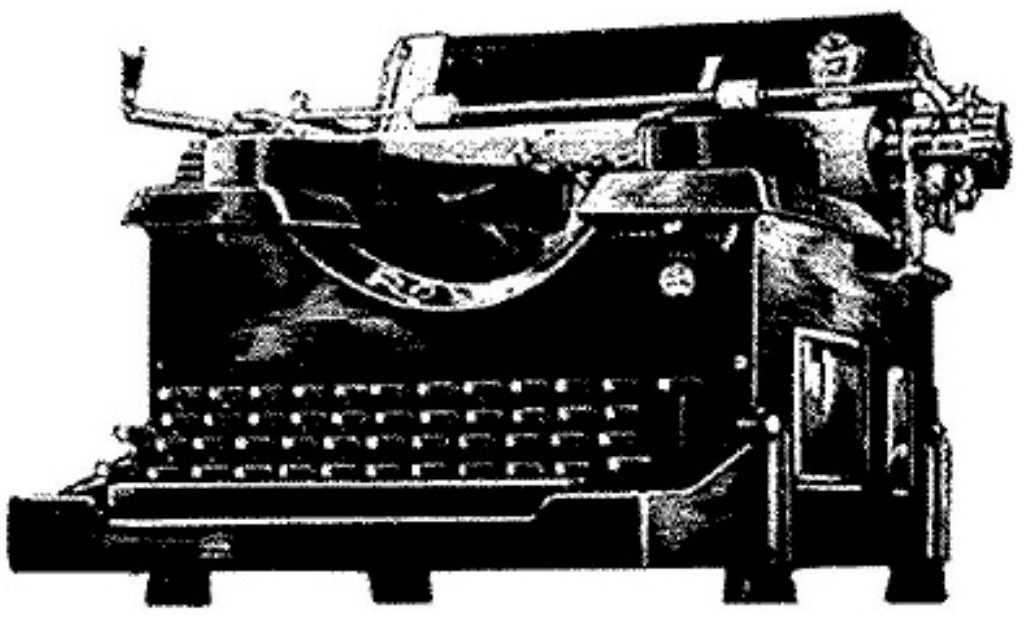
-the last of five pages-

Marches by day are obviously excluded in good weather. The short summer nights must be used from dusk to the morning shooting-light for exact reconnoitering of streets and crossings, for the preparation of smooth engagements, for quick marching in loose formation, for avoiding main streets and smoothly seeping into the rest areas where reconnoitering has been carried on. The troops must constantly be prepared for low-flying attacks so that all means of protection for them against air attacks can be immediately put into effect. Long overland marches of half-track units and the bringing up of supplies in marches over long stretches lead also to losses through enemy action, to great wear and tear, and to technical defects. The elimination of these must be carefully organized in order that the calculations made by the command may be at least adhered to in some degree and that troops, supplies, and replacements may be brought up to the appointed place in proper time.



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