

Western flank, using for this task the American armies under General Bradley, and pivoting on Caen; this attack was to be delivered Southwards down to the Loire and then to proceed Eastwards in a wide sweep up to the Seine about Paris. This would cut off all the enemy forces South of the Seine, over which river the bridges were to be destroyed by air action. This general plan was given out by me to the General Officers of the field armies in London on the 7th April, 1944. The operations developed in June, July and August exactly as planned; I had given D+90 as a target date for being lined up on the Seine; actually the first crossing of the river was made on D+75.

The Normandy beaches were selected because they offered a better shelter for shipping and were less heavily defended than other possible beach areas along the Channel coast. They satisfied the minimum requirements of the Air Forces, in terms of their distance from home bases, for the provision of air cover.

The absence of major ports was overcome by the gigantic engineering feat of constructing two artificial ports in the United Kingdom; these were towed across the Channel in sections and erected, one in the United States sector and one in the British sector. In spite of considerable damage during the unprecedented June gale, the port at Arromanches in particular proved a great success.

The invasion operations may be said to have begun with the action of the Air Forces. The first stage was the gaining of air superiority, an essential preliminary always to all major offensive operations. This task was admirably accomplished. As D Day drew nearer, attacks were delivered against coast defences along the whole length of the Atlantic Wall. Meanwhile, prevention of enemy air reconnaissance during the period of concentration of the invasion forces was highly successful, and contributed towards the gaining of tactical surprise.

Combined naval and air operations were intensified against E-boats and U-boats as the great day approached.

The Enemy Situation.

The German commander in France and the Low Countries was Field-Marshal von Rundstedt; his title was Commander-in-Chief West. Under his command were two Army Groups: the larger comprising more than two-thirds of the operational troops available, was Army Group "B", commanded by Field-Marshal Rommel, which consisted of Seventh Army (Normandy and Brittany), Fifteenth Army (Pas de Calais and Flanders), and 88 Corps (Holland). Rommel was appointed to this command in February, 1944, at the direct instance of Hitler. It was his first operational command since he had left Tunisia nearly a year previously.

Army Group "G", commanded by Blaskowitz, had the First and Nineteenth Armies, stationed on the Biscay coast and in the Riviera respectively.

There was a third headquarters in France of Army Group status, called Panzer Group West: under General Schweppenburg. It was responsible for the administration and training of the Panzer formations while they were operationally under command of the other Army Groups. It was originally intended

to command them in battle. This system later led to some confusion in the handling of the enemy armour.

These Army Groups at D Day comprised some sixty divisions, or about one quarter of the field force of the German army. From the end of 1943 their strength was conserved, and even increased in anticipation of the Second Front, and in spite of losses in Italy and Russia. The only formation which left the theatre in 1944 was an S.S. Corps, which was despatched to Russia in April, but returned to Normandy within two months.

There was considerable variation in the quality of the German divisions in the west. The equipment, training and morale of the S.S. and Panzer divisions was of the highest order; the infantry formations varied from low quality static coast defence troops to fully established field formations of normal German type.

For several years the Germans had been developing the coastal defence organisation which was known collectively as the Atlantic Wall. The enemy assumed that an invader would have to secure a port either in the initial assault or very quickly afterwards, in order to land the heaviest types of equipment and organise maintenance and supply. Port areas were therefore given first priority for defence and by 1944 had become virtually impregnable to seaward assault. After the ports, attention was turned to the Pas de Calais, which bordered the narrowest part of the Channel and was considered the most likely area we would choose for the assault.

Elsewhere defences were on a less organised scale, for by the beginning of 1944 the enemy had not had the resources or transport to put the whole coast line in a uniform state of defence. From March, 1944, however, there was a most noticeable intensification of the defences in Normandy: following a tour of inspection by Rommel.

The coastal defence of the Baie de la Seine was based on a system of linear defences arranged in strong points which were manned chiefly by static coastal troops of low category. The gun positions and localities were protected by concrete and armour from naval gunfire and air attack; extensive use had been made of minefields, wire entanglements, and other obstacles to strengthen the layout. Extensive flooding of the low-lying areas in the coastal belt had been effected, particularly in the marshy country round the Carentan estuary. Existing sea walls had been strengthened and prolonged to form anti-tank obstacles behind the beaches, which themselves were extensively mined. On the beaches, and extending over varying distances below high water mark, were belts of under-water obstacles, the purpose of which was to halt and impale landing craft and to destroy or cripple them by means of explosive charges attached to the individual obstacles. Types of under-water obstacles included "Element 'C'" with Tellermines on the forward face, the ramp type wooden obstacle with Tellermines on the top of the ramp, wooden posts with Tellermines attached, steel hedgehogs and steel tetrahedra.

The enemy artillery defence consisted of long range coast artillery and field artillery. The former was sited well forward, covering in particular the entrances to Cherbourg, the Carentan estuary and the Seine. Heavy gun