

47. Despite sizeable losses of ground at several places Army Group G continued making preparations for the attack demanded by OKW. By evening the opponent had passed through Luxembourg and further south gained two bridgeheads across the Mosel above Metz. 17 SS Pz Gren Div was charged with attempting to eliminate the bridgeheads (W.D. O.B. West, 10 Sep). To bolster the meagre substance of 17 SS Pz Gren Div, on 8 Sep SS Reichsführer Himmler had given order for the immediate dissolution of 26 and 27 SS Pz Divs, all elements of the two fledgling formations to be absorbed by 17 SS Pz Gren Div forthwith (Gen Pz Tps West, Report on Activities, op cit, Appx 29, Pz Offr West, No. 1631/44, 9 Sep 44, quoting SS Main Operations Office, II Org, Ops No. 2786/44, of 8 Sep 44). In another one of the many measures designed to bring order into confusion and convert weakness into strength, Rundstedt on 9 Sep had admonished Army Group G to release to First Parachute Army the elements of that Army still in the Nancy-Luneville area (W.O. O.B. West, 9 Sep). This was cutting things rather fine, for while the situation map West for 9 Sep shows the presence in that general area of several of the newly created panzer brigades, the war diary of Gen Pz Tps West shows clearly that they were not ready for combat and that much personnel, armament and equipment were still in transit. (Gen Pz Tps West, Report on Activities, 8-16 Sep, passim)

11 Sep

48. An important step in the race to establish a new front was taken by O.B. West on 11 Sep in an order compelling all Air Force, Navy, O.T. and army elements east of the Rhine (except ground forces in overhaul) to yield-up 100% of their machine guns and 90% of their rifles, pistols and automatic weapons. For all troops between Rhine and Westwall the quota was set at 50% (W.D. O.B. West, 11 Sep). Armeegruppe G, now getting set to control the operations of three Armies on a continuous front, was upgraded to Heeresgruppe G (Army Group G) (see para 10fn above). (Ibid, 11 Sep)

49. According to the day's tactical reports, at Army Group B's front Fifteenth Army was under pressure from the South, and ferrying operations were being hampered from the air; in the area of First Parachute Army the opponent had widened his bridgehead at Neerpelt; in the area of Seventh Army there was very heavy defensive fighting SW Aachen, 1 SS Pz Corps was forced to fall back to the line Malmedy-Dorscheid and a major breakthrough was barely prevented. At the front of Army Group G the right wing of First Army was taken back to the Mosel line with rear elements on the far shore. Strong Allied concentration were noted west of Metz and south of Nancy. At the northern wing of Nineteenth Army there was heavy enemy traffic in easterly direction and

at the southern front of the Army the German lines were pierced on several places in the general area of Vesoul. There was again severe pressure on 11 Pz Div (W.D. O.B. West, 11 Sep). From the point of view of the higher direction the sorest spots therefore were Seventh Army and Nineteenth Army, and the latter in particular because it was slated to protect the rear and flank of Fifth Panzer Army during the latter's projected attack. As the day went on and the situation of Nineteenth Army was growing worse, Rundstedt -- carefully maintaining the fiction of a forthcoming attack towards the Northwest -- told Army Group G that the strong pressure from north and northeast of Besancon might make it necessary for Fifth Panzer Army to deliver first of all a thrust towards the South in order to gain a firm grip on the areas forward of the Vosges. Blaskowitz (who had to be doubly careful because Hitler detested him as much as he needed him) asked for confirmation. Well aware of Blaskowitz's precarious position, O.B. West recorded solemnly that once again Army Group G had been given confirmation of the fact that it had been given a free hand in deciding whether or not Fifth Panzer Army to begin with should move southwards. (W.D. O.B. West, 11 Sep)

12 Sep

50. At the mouth of the Scheldt the day was relatively uneventful; on the Albert-Canal Second British Army was exerting pressure; further east Seventh Army came under severe pressure in the latter part of the day. Apparently the two Allied Army Groups intended to advance northwards past the Westwall and then turn right towards the Ruhr (Sitwest, 12 Sep). In the area of Army Group G Allied forces enlarged their bridgehead at the Upper-Meuse and continued to reduce the salient of Nineteenth Army. After capturing Charmes they passed with armoured forces through the newly made gap in the Northwest and were engaged by 21 Pz Div. Further south Vesoul was lost. The Führer reiterated that the Army was not to yield any further ground and, above all, was to hold Nancy. The assembly of Fifth Panzer Army was to be speeded up to ensure that it would be able to deliver a thrust against the rear of the advancing enemy rather than spend itself in frontal fighting. The general idea was that the opponent might advance in the direction of Epinal or Rambervilliers, in which case he would be attacked from the area between Nancy and Neufchateau. 3 and 15 Pz Gren Divs, as well as 106 Pz Bde were to be despatched to Fifth Panzer Army forthwith. (Der Westen, 139-140)

13 Sep

51. At Army Group B the transfer of Fifteenth Army to the area north of Antwerp was continuing, First Parachute Army had given up the eastern portion of the Albert-Canal position. Seventh Army was unable to prevent penetration of the Westwall between Hergenrath and Aachen. Between Aachen and Eupen the opponent had reached the Westwall. At Army Group G the reality of increasing American pressure had washed out all plans for the early delivery of a strategically significant attack by Fifth Panzer Army. To prevent the worst of all possible disasters - having the front torn asunder beyond repair - Rundstedt decided to use the available forces as local fire brigades at the most critical spots:

Due to the beginning of the concentric American attack north and south of Nancy, and the continuing prosecution of the strong enemy attacks against the northern and southern fronts of Nineteenth Army, the execution of the attacks by the massed forces of Fifth Panzer Army from the area of Epinal towards the Northwest at the moment seems no longer possible. Should this attack have to be carried out at a later date, it will be imperative to keep Nineteenth Army's area forward of the Vosges as large as possible. In view of the enemy superiority this cannot be done with the forces presently committed. O.B. West intends, therefore, to commit the formations of Fifth Panzer Army to individual actions in order to restore the situation on both sides of Vittel and at Vesoul. Not before this has been done can further thought be given to the larger operation.

(W.D., O.B. West, 13 Sep)

14 Sep

52. The day's most serious threat to the German efforts to create a new front developed in the fortress area south and southeast of Aachen, where American forces obtained a breakthrough of considerable width. Various stop gap units were being thrown into the battle and the movement of 12 Inf Div to the area was speeded up. At the joint between First Parachute Army and Seventh Army the Germans lost Maastricht (W.D. O.B. West, 14 Sep). In the area of Army Group G the protruding arc of Nineteenth Army was taken back to the line Charmes-Epinal. Nancy was still in German hands,

but Allied troops had appeared in the rear of the troops at Nancy (Der Westen, p. 140). With regard to the situation at large:

to prepare for the counterstroke being projected now as before, Hitler gave orders for the creation of a Headquarters Staff Sixth Panzer Army under SS Col Gen Dietrich, who was to direct the re-organization of all armoured formations that had been withdrawn from the front in the Western Command. (Loc cit.)

15 Sep

53. On 14 Sep O.B. West had reported that the leading elements of the forces reducing the salient [Vittel area west of line Charmes-Epinal] were now separated by a mere 40 km. He had asked permission for Nineteenth Army to fall back to a line Charmes-Epinal east of Belfort, and for Fifth Panzer Army to deliver a thrust from the area east of Vesoul into the flank of the enemy advancing on Luneville. Early on 15 Sep the Führer concurred and added that the forces about to be committed in the Vittel area were to be strengthened by moving in 11 Pz Div and an additional Panzer Brigade, otherwise a success could not be expected (Der Westen, p. 141). The day passed without major developments on the Western Front.

16 Sep

54. On this day there was some loss of ground northwest of Lachen; southeast of the city the situation was relieved by the arrival of 12 Inf Div. In the area of Army Group G, Nancy was completely encircled and Luneville was lost. At the southern front of Nineteenth Army the situation was becoming less acute. O.B. West now issued orders for the attack against the deep flanks of the American forces which had pushed on beyond the Meuse between Pont à Mousson and south of Charmes. After dispersing the enemy forces at Luneville the advance was to be carried forward towards Pont à Mousson (on the Meuse, approx 50 miles NW Luneville). In order to make the armour still engaged further south available as quickly as possible, the withdrawal of Nineteenth Army to the line Nancy-Epinal-Reniremont-Swiss border west of Belfort was to be speeded up (Der Westen, p. 142). In many sectors of the Western Front the fighting had now reached German soil. Hitler made this fact the subject of a strong exhortation to all troops. There was no more room for

strategical manoeuvre, he said, every man was to stand fast or die on his post. This message is adequately known; a translation appears in: Führer Directives, op cit, Vol II, p 181; a full citation of the German text in: A Gp B, Führer Orders and Misc Docs, op cit, A Gp B, Ops No. 7466/44, 2355 hrs 16 Sep 44.

55. There was now every prospect that the worst gaps in the front would be closed; Fifteenth Army, which might have been cut off but was not, would stand fast in the North, Nineteenth Army, which might have been cut off but was not, would stand fast in the South. There were no signs of an imminent breakthrough of major importance. Perhaps the front would hold until a counterstroke could change the picture. It was the end of a phase, but on the next day the situation was given a new complexion by the descent of the First Allied Airborne Army in the Eindhoven-Nijmegen-Arnhem area.

DEFENCE OF THE NEW FRONT
UP TO THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE

(17 Sep - 16 Dec 44)

Scheldt Estuary under German Control (up to 7 Nov)

17 Sep

56. Shortly after 1400 hrs 17 Sep O.B. West began to receive reports about Allied air landings in the Arnhem-Nijmegen-Eindhoven areas (W.D. O.B. West, 17 Sep). Once again, therefore, Fifteenth Army was in danger of being cut off, and there was the dangerous possibility that the enemy might succeed in advancing towards Münster (Der Westen, p. 182). Particularly at Arnhem, however, the landings were somewhat of a descent into a hornet's nest. For at Arnhem were the headquarters of Army Group B (Student, op cit, p. 10; Sitmap West, 17 Sep 44), while at Doetinchem, some 16 miles to the East, were the headquarters of 2 SS Pz Corps and nearby a battle group of 2000 men from 9 SS Pz Div (C.R.S. - 180/47, Apps to W.D. O.B. West, 11 - 20 Sep 44, Appx 2237, 17 Sep 44) (Hist Sec (GS) Microfilm Reel No. 69). True, there were in the area none of the formidable formations encountered in Normandy, but nevertheless by 1640 hrs a host of assorted smaller units was converging on or making ready to move to the scene of the airborne landings. Coming from the Northwest were units of the Armed Forces Commander Netherlands, from the Northeast and East elements of 2 SS Pz Corps, from the Southeast hastily alerted forces of and from the Military

District No. VI (Westphalia and Northern Rhine Province)*.

18 Sep

57. Hitler's reaction to the sudden development was threefold. Firstly, O.B. West was told over the telephone that 180 and 190 Inf Div were being transferred to A Gp B from Military District X (Hamburg), while a battle group of 361 V.G.D. was being despatched by Military District VI. Secondly, O.B. West was directed to report on the measures taken with regard to the Breskens bridgehead. This because the Scheldt estuary "was to be kept in German hands in all circumstances". Thirdly, he was empowered to order at his own discretion the destruction of the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. (W.D. O.B. West, 18 Sep)

58. Inf Divs No. 180 and No. 190, now coming from Military District X, had served for long as training and replacement divisions. At the same time they had been kept at full strength and ready to move off immediately in the event of a call for field duty (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS-B-195, Lt Gen Hammer, Report on 190 Inf Div, p. 2) (981SOM(D208)); U.S. Army Order of Battle of the German Army, op cit, pp. 195 and 198). As we know, the two formations in question later became useful and experienced divisions, but the fact that the German High Command was beginning to devour the regenerative apparatus of the Army, for all to see was clearly the handwriting on the wall.

19 Sep

59. According to O.B. West's situation report for 19 Sep the situation in the West presented the following picture:

(Condensation)

In the area of Fifteenth Army the First Canadian Army had launched an attack against the Terneuzen bridgehead and forced 712 Inf Div to fall back on shorter lines.

*When the significance of the increasing traffic in the air had become clear, counter-measures were taken quickly. The present report is not designed to deal with tactical detail, but it might be noted in passing that information on the German units alerted or set in motion during the early hours of Market Garden is to be found in the Appendices for 17 Sep 44 to the War Diary of O.B. West, op cit, (Historical Section (GS) Microfilm No. 69).

In the area of First Parachute Army the First Allied Airborne Army had not been reinforced materially from the air, but 30 Brit Corps had established contact with 101 U.S. Airld Div north of Eindhoven. This presented to the enemy the possibility of advancing to the Maas as far as west of Nijmegen by crossing the Veghel bridge which he had captured on 17 Sep. In consequence on the evening of 19 Sep several enemy tanks had appeared at the Nijmegen bridgehead. Counter-measures from west and east were under way and would be continued on 20 Sep.

Progress was being made in the elimination of the enemy forces west of Arnhem as a result of the concentric attack being carried out by Division **von Tettau** (i.e. an ad hoc group despatched by Armed Forces Commander Netherlands) and 2 SS Pz Corps.

At Nijmegen there had been little change in the situation but the attack would be continued on the arrival of the alert units from 2 Para Corps.

At the inner wings of First Parachute and Seventh Armies the enemy had gained ground and the forward elements of the newly inserted division had not yet succeeded in closing the new gap.

German attacks east of Aachen and at Bitburg had failed.

At the front of Army Group G there had been heavy seesaw fighting in the area between Metz and Epinal, with the main action in the Luneville sector.

Nineteenth Army was under pressure in all sectors and the enemy was approaching Epinal from all sides.

(Sitwest for 19 Sep)

60. Schramm noted that Hitler's continuing insistence on the defence of the Scheldt estuary was keeping Fifteenth Army from committing forces strong enough to cut the tank lanes to the American Airlanding Division. Considering the action to be taken if the situation at Eindhoven could not be restored, Hitler on this day was thinking of holding a line Maas-Nijmegen-Waal, which would make it possible later on to execute a thrust from Aachen via Hasselt into the enemy pocket in Holland. (Der Westen, p. 183)

20 Sep

61. At the higher levels this day was one of watchful waiting, for the future course of action would depend on the outcome of the fighting now in progress. To bolster the forces in the Netherlands, Hitler ordered the immediate despatch to Army Group B of 504 Hy Tk Bn (Tigers) and 471 GHQ A. Tk Bn. To guide the operations of the Divisions No. 180 and No. 190, the headquarters staff of 12 SS Corps was being called back from the Eastern front. North of Eindhoven the attack of 59 Inf Div from the West towards St. Odenrode failed. The formation had been unable to cut the Allied corridor and join hands with 107 Pz Bde, which was advancing from the East but had been brought to a halt by the enemy east of Son. Second British Army expanded its penetration in northerly direction and captured the railroad bridge across the Waal at Nijmegen. (W.D. O.B. West, 20 Sep)

21 Sep

62. Waiting for the outcome of the various local operations, O.B. West took time out to re-assess the situation. His own forces had a total combat value of 21 VGD and 6-7 Pz Divs. Against this the Allies had committed 39 Inf, 20 Armd, and 3-4 Airb Divs, and still in England there were approximately 22 Inf, 9 Armd, and 3 Airb Divs. Main danger points were the Nijmegen-Aachen sector, where the opponent intended to make a thrust towards the Rhenish-Westphalian industrial area, and the Metz-Luneville sector, where he intended to advance in the industrial area of the Saar and to the Rhine - Main plain. The immediate goal was to gain time, but the ultimate objective must be the decisive defeat of the enemy by means of an attack at one specific spot. (W.D. O.B. West, 21 Sep)

63. For Army Group B the most important task at the moment was to close the gap in the front north of Eindhoven, to prevent a further enemy advance north of Nijmegen, and to consolidate the situation in the entire area. In view of the fact that fresh forces could not be made available in good time, First Parachute Army would be permitted to fall back to the line Antwerp-Turnhout-Tilbourg-Veghel-Helmond-Weert. The Western Scheldt was to be held. A blocking line was to be created between Rhine and Waal as well as on the north bank of the Rhine. For Army Group C the most important task at the moment was to restore a firm link between First Army and Fifth Panzer Army in the area east of Nancy, and to prevent an enemy breakthrough to the Saar region. (Ibid)

22 Sep

64. A Gp B: With the exception of 64 Inf Div, which had been left behind to defend the Breskens bridgehead, all formations of Fifteenth Army had now crossed the Scheldt (for details see H.S. Report No 69, para 95f). - A start had been made on 21 Sep with the demolition of the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam.* Strong pressure from Nijmegen towards Arnhem had been repelled by pulling together local reserves. East and west of Eindhoven the enemy had penetrated German lines. O.B. West notified A Gp B of a telephonic communication from OKW according to which the Führer desired that on both sides of Eindhoven the withdrawal movement of First Parachute Army be carried out only in the event of enemy pressure. The purpose of this was to maintain as long as possible a situation that the enemy had admitted to be unpleasant. (W.D. O.B. West, 22 Sep)

65. A Gp G: Command of the Army Group had passed from Col Gen Blaskowitz** to General of Panzer Troops Hermann Balck. - The enemy was exerting pressure on many points. The Führer had concurred with O.B. West's plan for an attack by Fifth Panzer Army towards Nancy. However, the ground which had already been taken to safeguard the assembly area of the Army, had been lost again in the meantime. (Ibid)

* Demolitions virtually countermanded by O.B. West on 23 Sep as deleterious to German S-boat and supply operations. (W.D. O.B. West, 23 Sep)

** Col Gen Blaskowitz, a high-minded representative of the old army, had been tolerated only because he was needed. He had been openly in disfavour since 1939, when he had submitted pointed reports on German administrative practices in Poland (Zimmermann, A Study in Command, p. 58). Despite good work in difficult circumstances he was now being made the scapegoat for the reverses of Army Group G. - On or about 20 Sep he was abruptly relieved of his command (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS - A999, von Mellenthin, A Gp G, 20 Sep - 8 Nov 44, p. VIII) (981AGpG (Dl)). Records show that Rundstedt had been unable to prevent his recall:

In a renewed report to OKW, OB West set forth the developments in the situation of Nineteenth Army which forced it to give up the salient forward of the Vosges. He stressed in particular that no blame could be attached to the commander of Army Group G. (W.D. O.B. West, 19 Sep)

23 Sep

66. Major activities remained confined to the area of the airlandings. With the situation still fluid and an improvement in the weather predicted, O.B. West was apprehensive of renewed landings from the air. Indeed, in the afternoon British forces west of Arnhem were supplied from the air, two battalions landed between Arnhem and Nijmegen, others SE of Nijmegen, and about 480 cargo-gliders SW of Nijmegen. The latter descent was obviously a reaction to the German threat to the corridor, but the landing SE Nijmegen might indicate a forthcoming attack on the area between Rhine and Maas. In view of this aggravation of the situation, O.B. West ordered the immediate transfer of 108 Pz Bde to the area of Goch. (W.D. O.B. West, 23 Sep)

24 Sep

67. Uttering strident cries of alarm had ever been Model's way of getting reserves. But Rundstedt's concurrence with Model's views at the time indicates that at the Western command at least the descents of 23 Sep had created a state of acute concern. At 1300 hrs Model communicated his fears and suggestions to Rundstedt. He said the situation on the northern wing of A Gp B had deteriorated since 17 Sep because the enemy had been able to reinforce himself whilst German reinforcements had been inadequate. In consequence the opponent had been delayed, but not definitely prevented from acquiring a base for a thrust to the Ruhr. Unless First Parachute Army was made strong enough to hold the endangered sector, the new airlandings might lead to critical developments. The opponent was reinforcing the operation for the purpose of breaking also into the area between the Rhine and Maas in a sector where there were no permanent fortification. It was necessary therefore to move additional German forces to that sector, if necessary from other parts of the front. Model then described in detail the action suggested and the forces required. (A Gp B, Weekly Reports and Misc Docs, op cit, A Gp B, Ops No. 7743/44, 24 Sep 44, signed Model)

68. Rundstedt in turn advised OKW that he was supplementing his recent appreciation of the situation in the following sense:

(Note: Narrator's condensation)

Encountering strong enemy concentrations Fifth Panzer Army's attack had bogged down; a resumption was without promise and could only lead to further waste of strength.

On the other hand the renewed strong airlandings in the afternoon of 23 Sep had strengthened the surmise that the enemy intended a quick capture of the area between Maas and Rhine and a subsequent pincer movement from that area and from Aachen to the Rhenish-Westphalian industrial

district. This was the point of acute danger, by comparison all other aspects had receded in importance.

As it was therefore necessary to renounce all other plans, particularly the unpromising attack by Fifth Panzer Army, O.B. West was requesting authority to transfer parts of Fifth Panzer Army (47 Pz Corps, 111, 112 and 113 Pz Bdes) behind his threatened and decisively important right wing.

The consequent further weakening of Army Gp G would demand a step by step withdrawal to the Vosges position.

Recent developments indicated that the situation of Fifteenth and First Parachute Armies would become progressively more difficult. In view of the relatively small forces available, the defence of the German area demanded the preservation of these two Armies. A gradual withdrawal behind the Maas, Waal, and the extended Westwall seemed therefore necessary; the Scheldt estuary was to be defended in any case.

In the opinion of O.B. West the suggested withdrawals were necessary to insure a timely gathering of reserves for the big battle to be expected in the Arnhem-Aachen sector.

(W.D. O.B. West, 24 Sep)

69. Still on the same day OKW told the western command over the telephone that the Führer had turned down the requests contained in the appreciation of the same day. The order for Fifth Panzer Army's attack towards Nancy was to remain in force. Additional verbal advance orders were issued during the latter part of the day (ibid), and early on 25 Sep the whole complex of questions was covered by a Führer Order (para 70 below). At the hour when Model and Rundstedt translated their vision of an immediate Rhineland attack into jittery recommendations, they did of course not know what the day would bring. But Hitler, particularly at the time of issuing his formal directive, had learnt from the day's reports (Sitwest for 24 Sep) that there had been no major attacks and no new landings from the air.

25 Sep

70. The Führer's Order was transmitted at 0500 hrs 25 Sep. In essence Hitler demanded:

- (a) destruction of enemy in Arnhem - Nijmegen area;

- (b) southern front of Fifteenth Army and western front of First Parachute Army to be held in present lines; and enemy bridgehead south of Helmond to be eliminated or sealed-off at least;
- (c) gap between Fifteenth Army and First Parachute Army at Veghel to be closed;
- (d) Army Group G to stand fast forward of Vosges position. To permit mobile operations in area Duss-Nomeny-Luneville no panzer divisions, panzer brigades or panzer grenadier divisions to be taken away from Army Group;
- (e) in addition to formations already made available, 9 and 116 Pz Divs to go to First Parachute Army [from Aachen area];
- (f) Chief of Replacement Army to locate strongest possible forces in Northern Holland.

(A Gp B, Führer Orders and Misc Docs, op cit, O.B. West Ops No. 839/44, citing in full: Adolf Hitler, WFSt Ops No. 773518, Top Secret, of 25 Sep 44, dispatched 0500 hrs) (981AGpB(D2))

A photostatic reproduction and a translation of this order appear at Appendix "D" to the present report.

71. Instructions to carry out the Führer's demands had already been issued on 24 Sep on the basis of telephonic advance information from OKW. Nowhere during the day, however, did the German make any substantial progress. 256 and 361 VGD's were being transferred to Northern Holland, but to begin with they would be under O.B. West only for supply and in the event of an enemy landing from the air. (W.D. O.B. West, 25 Sep)

26 Sep

72. Heavy pressure against Fifteenth Army was continuing. Further east 2 SS Pz Corps reported the elimination of the last elements of 1 Brit Airb Div, thus having defeated the attempt to cross the Neder-Rijn. British pressure against the blocking line south of Arnhem was being maintained. The German attempt to destroy the Allied forces between the Neder-Rijn and the Waal was set for 30 Sep; 9 and 116 Pz Div were to participate. There were no signs of an early attack in the Aachen area. Fifth Panzer Army's attack was making progress; Nineteenth Army was still under strong pressure. (W.D. O.B. West, 26 Sep)

27 Sep

73. From the point of view of the orthodox strategist the delivery of the Allied coup de grace in the West was overdue. Once again, however, the strange combination of intuition, calculation and courage of despair in Hitler's mind had made him sense a flagging of the enemy's drive at a time when his own generals could see nothing but black clouds. - More than that, he had just set his staff to calculate the forces required for regaining the initiative by a massive thrust at the time when bad flying weather would make it possible to establish a state of local superiority in a suitable sector. (Der Westen, 255-256)

74. Whereas the two Field Marshals had been thinking of defensive action, Hitler's order of 25 Sep had demanded attacks in widely separated sectors. Rundstedt examined the situation to see what was possible, and on 27 Sep reported the following intentions for the northern wing:

- (1) 2 Para Corps to compress the enemy bridgehead at Nijmegen;
- (2) 2 SS Pz Corps (with elts 9 and 116 Pz Divs under command) to destroy the forces between Neder-Rijn and Waal;
- (3) upon completion of (1) and (2) both Corps to attempt reaching the line Waal - Maas-Waal Canal.

Circumstances forbade any other tactics than individual thrusts by strong assault groups. For an attack of the right wing on Veghel his forces were not strong enough.

(W.D. O.B. West, 27 Sep)

75. In the meantime H.Q. 12 SS Corps had arrived and assumed command of First Parachute Army's elements west of Arnhem, thus making it possible for HQ 2 SS Pz Corps to devote itself exclusively to the conduct of the operations between Arnhem and Nijmegen. OKW had given orders to transfer 256 VGD, 361 VGD, two SS MG Bns and the Recce Bn of 1 SS Pz Div to North Holland as on OKW Reserve. 766 G.H.Q. Arty Bde was to move to the Wesel - Emmerich area, 363 VGD was to follow as soon as its first battle group would be fully organized.

(Ibid, 27 Sep)

28 Sep

76. OKW told O.B. West the enemy seemed no longer bent on enveloping the West Wall from the North, but rather on cutting off Fifteenth Army and the Armed Forces Command Netherlands. With an eye to future operations, and considering the present paucity of forces, the Führer had concurred with O.B. West's suggestion to desist from an attack against the deep flank of Second British Army in the Veghel area. Accordingly O.B. West's immediate next tasks were:

1. to defeat the enemy between Rhine and Maas in the area Wageningen-Arnhem-Nijmegen-Grave;
2. to make Fifteenth Army strong enough to hold its present front;
3. to protect the life lines of Fifteenth Army against any kind of attack.

(Ibid, 28 Sep)

77. In the day's tactical developments First Parachute Army lost its bridgehead at Wageningen; in the Aachen area 116 Pz Div had been relieved by 246 VCD; on the southern wing Fifth Panzer Army's attack had met with some initial success but held no further promise. The right wing of Nineteenth Army had gained some firmness as a result of Fifth Panzer Army's attack, but in the Belfort area a premature withdrawal to the Vosges positions could be avoided only by moving-in additional forces. To mitigate that situation, 106 Pz Bde and the Pz Gren Div were given orders to move from First Army to Nineteenth Army.

(Ibid, 28 Sep)

29-30 Sep

78. Developments during the last two days of September are of interest mainly to the student of individual operations. -- O.B. West took steps to divert a considerable number of replacement battalions to depleted Army Group G (W.D. O.B. West, 29 and 30 Sep). Looking back on the events of September, the Allies could find satisfaction in having virtually ejected the Germans from France, while the Germans may have found some fleeting solace in the thought of having extricated themselves from a situation fraught with the danger of sudden collapse.

1 - 8 Oct

79. During the first week of October the Allies maintained steady pressure against all German Armies in the West, but the Germans were able to prevent any major losses of ground. In the area of Fifteenth Army, Walcheren Island was being flooded by waters coming in through dykes that had been breached from the air. First Parachute Army's counterattack in the Nijmegen sector bogged down and was abandoned. Seventh Army was under severe pressure in the Aachen area and expected an immediate Allied assault. Army Group G was under pressure at various points but managed to maintain a coherent front by yielding further ground. (C.R.S. - 75144/27, W.D. O.B. West (A Gp D), October 1944, 1 - 8 Oct, passim) (981CW(D60))

80. In the meantime much thought had been given at the highest German quarters to the strategical counter-stroke under contemplation. Since the beginning of October the sector east of Liege had come to be regarded in growing measure as the area most suitable for such a thrust. It was the same area where the breakthrough had been made in 1940; suitable reconnaissance and experience reports were on hand as far as they had not perished in the fire at the Archives in 1941. Calculations had been made of the forces that could be made available if there would be no further serious deterioration in the situation. Alternative plans for thrusts from the Netherlands, from the Liege-Aachen area, from Luxembourg, from Lorraine, and from Alsace had been weighed. A thrust from Venlo towards Antwerp had been rejected as too risky, the three last named possibilities had found no favour, but orders had been given to prepare planning papers for a thrust from the Liege-Aachen area. Almost immediately it became apparent that alternatives one and two would have to be combined. The end result was a plan whereby the entire British Army Group and the American forces in the Aachen area were to be cut off by means of a thrust towards Antwerp from the area south of Aachen and northern Luxembourg. (Der Westen, 257-260)

9 Oct

81. At the fighting front in the meantime the situation was being aggravated by the clearly discernible intention of First Canadian Army to gain control of the Scheldt estuary by all means, thereby enabling the Allies to make use of the port at long last. Considering this serious aspect in conjunction with the threatening double envelopment of the Aachen region and the fact that Army Group G was being bled more and more without receiving adequate reinforcements, O.B. West reported his situation to Jodl with the significant request that the Führer be informed of his views (A Gp B, Weekly Reports and Misc Docs, op cit, O.B. West, Ops No. 850/44, of 1130 hrs 9 Oct 44). O.B. West made the following points and requests:

[Condensed]

In the area of Fifteenth Army the most dangerous situation was north of Antwerp where the enemy wanted to seize the land bridge to Walcheren.

As the enemy's strength in the Arnhem-Nijmegen sector and at Aachen precluded the transfer of forces to Fifteenth Army, that Army would have to strengthen its right wing at the expense of its left wing. This meant a shortening of the front between Tilburg and Hertogenbosch. The right wing of First Parachute Army would have to assume a defensive posture, particularly so because the situation at Aachen might make it necessary for 2 SS Pz Corps to divert more of its own forces to that area.

Authority was therefore requested for the evacuation of the Arnhem bridgehead.

The point of greatest danger for the entire Western front as a whole was at the right wing of Seventh Army, where a double envelopment of the greater Aachen area was clearly indicated. Constant disruption of the rail communications was delaying the arrival of reinforcements. It would hardly be possible to eliminate the dents in the front on both sides of Aachen; to the contrary, the enemy might tighten his grip on the city. In accordance with the Führer's orders and at the risk of losing 246 Inf Div, orders had been issued to defend the city to the last.

At the front of Army Group G the enemy was endeavouring to unhinge Metz from the South and to gain possession of the Vosges defiles by attacks on a broad front between Luneville and Lure. Army Group G would have to continue offering delaying resistance with a minimum of forces, thereby buying time for the improvement of the Vosges position. It might become necessary to take back the Metz bridgehead to the Moselle.

The principal reason for the recent successes of the enemy had been the lack of operational reserves, which had prevented the timely concentration of defence forces where the need would arise. Quiet sectors had already been weakened greatly and could not be further denuded. It was necessary, therefore, to request the transfer of the recuperating troops of Sixth Panzer Army to the area Enschede-Borkon-Haltern-Hamm-Münster-Rhine.

In addition O.B. West asked for the immediate despatch of seven replacement battalions and for an increase in the flow of anti-tank weapons and ammunitions to his command.

10 Oct

82. The condition of temporary stalemate was plainly evident as an uneventful day at the fronts was rounded out by an uninspired routine reply to Rundstedt's situation report. O.B. West was directed to consider as his most important tasks:

- (1) to keep the enemy from gaining entrance to the port of Antwerp;
- (2) to maintain contact between Fifteenth Army and First Parachute Army;
- (3) to keep the enemy from invading the industrial region of Aachen; the city to be defended till it lay in ruins.

In addition the Führer forbade the evacuation of the Metz bridgehead for the reason that this would lead quickly to the loss of the entire Moselle line. North of Metz some ground might be yielded under pressure but with due regard to the importance of gaining time for the improvement of the rearward lines of defence. (DOR Weston, 210-211)

11-13 Oct

83. In the various active sectors of Army Group B Allied pressure was continuing; at the front of Army Group G comparative quiet prevailed. O.B. West noted in the war diary that Army Group B had no operational reserves of any kind and thus would be unable to intervene at the focal points of the expected attacks. It was therefore important to free for this purpose at least a part of the armoured formations committed at the front of Army Group G. The first formation to be shifted from the southern to the northern Army Group would be 15 Pz Gren Div. Moreover, Army Group G would have to prepare itself for the transfer elsewhere of the headquarters staffs of Fifth Panzer Army and 47 Pz Corps. (W.D. O.B. West, 11-13 Oct 44)

84. From late October to 16 December 1944 the war diary of O.B. West carried some rather cryptic remarks. This was due to the strict security regulations surrounding everything connected with the forthcoming offensive. Unavoidable entries were sometimes couched in such vague language that only after the beginning of the Ardennes offensive it was possible to discern their true meaning. During the period in

question the prospective operation was being referred to as "Abwehrschlacht" (Defensive Battle). A few hours before the beginning of the offensive, however, a special entry in the war diary placed earlier statements into their true perspective. With regard to a certain order issued in the early part of October, Schramm noted:

Special circumstances existed in the case of an order issued by Chief OKW on 12 Oct, for it served to explain and camouflage the imminent assembly of troops for our own offensive from the Eifel area, for which operation the basic outlines had become firm by that time. The [various] command headquarters in the West were told by Chief OKW that the opponents had mentally prepared their peoples for an early victory, and that it was not yet possible to shatter the enemy's expectations by means of an offensive. It was therefore all the more important to position the [strategical] reserves in a manner that would ensure full success for the impending defensive battle. In the meantime day to day casualties at the front would be made up by means of stop gap measures. (Der Westen, 211)

85. According to Schramm, in the same order the prospective activity in the rear areas was explained to the various command authorities in the sense that the Führer had decided to assemble the operational reserves about to arrive (Sixth Panzer Army, V.G. Divs, Arty and Mortar Bdes, G.H.Q. troops) as an OKW reserve behind the northern part of the western front.

- (1) The bulk of the forces would be assembled left of the Rhine behind the southern wing of First Parachute Army and the northern wing of Seventh Army.
- (2) One Panzer Corps and two to three mobile formations would be withdrawn from Army Group G by 31 Oct and placed as an OKW reserve in the area Trarbach-Trier-St. Wendel-Kaiserslautern. Two V.G. Divs would also be despatched to that area.
- (3) Uncommitted formations were to remain OKW reserves and not to be employed except in grave emergency for a counterthrust and then as a compact force.
- (4) Supplies of ammunitions, fuel, signal and engineer materials were to be accumulated in certain particularly endangered sectors and considered as OKW reserves.

(Ibid, 212)

86. On that same 12 Oct Rundstedt made a request for a third Army Group Headquarters for the West "to free Army Group B [HQ] for the focal area" (for translation of relevant war diary entry see Historical Section (GS) Report No. 69, para 142). The order for the transfer of 15 Pz Gren Div to Army Group B (para 83 above) was issued on 13 Oct. On 13 and 14 Oct the headquarters of O.B. West were transferred to Ziegenberg (appx 8 km W Bad Nauheim, in the general area of Frankfurt a/M) (W.D. O.B. West, 11-13 Oct). The O.B. West portion of the OKH Schematic Order of Battle of the German Armies as on 13 Oct 44, appears as Appendix "E" to the present Report. (C.R.S. - OKH, Periodic Schematic Orders of Battle of the German Army) (Photostat of complete document: 981.045(D1))

14-16 Oct

87. On 14 Oct O.B. West issued orders for the immediate transfer of headquarters Fifth Panzer Army with its Army troops from Army Group G to the area east of Aachen. On 15 Oct there was considerable fighting at the Beveland isthmus and near Aachen. O.B. West indirectly foretold coming events by noting that the depleted division in the Breskens pocket would be unable to hold the bridgehead without outside help. While at Aachen the situation was beyond remedy unless Allied air activity was curbed, seasoned formations moved in and sufficient ammunitions and replacements brought up (W.D. O.B. West, 14 Oct), all of which could not be done at the moment. - OKW in the meantime was quietly pursuing its own designs and announced the forthcoming despatch of 18 VG Div to Army Group B, where it was to relieve 2 SS Pz Div for rest and refitting under Sixth Panzer Army. The day was characterized by very heavy fighting at the two main focal points: mouth of the Scheldt and Aachen. The land connection with Walcheren was now considered lost, at Aachen the German corridor to the city had been narrowed to a width of 300 metres, which meant that a further reinforcing of the garrison was no longer possible. Army Group G reported growing pressure in the Dierenhofen-Metz sector and at the centre of Nineteenth Army. (Ibid)

17-18 Oct

88. The battle of Aachen was drawing to a close. German attempts to regain access to the city failed. Street fighting was in progress in the southern quarters of the city. The German garrison reported that its strength has been reduced to 1200 men. O.B. West replied by drawing attention to the Führer's order to defend the city to the last man. The Breskens Pocket was under pressure from east and south. The flooding of Walcheren forced the Germans on the island to regroup. The appearance of additional strong Allied formations in the Nijmegen area and at the Maas bridgehead was taken to

indicate the enemy's intention of eliminating the Maas bridgehead and delivering a thrust from Nijmegen towards the Southeast. (W.D. O.B. West, 17-18 Oct)

19 Oct

89. In the absence of any unexpected developments at the front, O.B. West tackled OKW on the question of reinforcements. At that time he was not fully aware of the plans for the Ardennes offensive and may well have been anxious to learn more precisely what OKW intended to do with the forces it was hoarding while he was pleading for troops. During the early part of the day he had already informed OKW about the urgent needs of Nineteenth Army; later in the day he despatched a new over-all estimate in which he made the following points:

For a front of about 1000 km he had 41 infantry divisions and ten mobile divisions with a total combat value of 27 full infantry divisions and 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ panzer divisions.

They were facing enemy formations amounting to 42 infantry divisions, 18 panzer divisions and 11 panzer brigades, all being constantly reinforced to full strength.

Casualties in the West from 1 Sep to 15 Oct had been appx 150,000 men. Transfers to other fronts and to the rear area for rejuvenation had absorbed another 86,000 men. During the same period he had received 152,000 men, so that on balance his strength had been reduced by 84,000 men. The forces on hand would not suffice to hold the front for long. What he needed was an additional ten infantry and four panzer divisions. Moreover, the formations of Sixth Panzer Army ought to be moved up in good time and not wait for the critical moment when demolished bridges and railway installations would prevent their timely arrival.*

(Ibid, 19 Oct)

20-23 Oct

90. Fighting continued at the previously reported pressure points. Allied attacks against the southern front of Fifteenth Army and air attacks on the bridges in the rear area of that Army were taken to indicate that the opponent was endeavouring to clear the rear areas for a projected eastward thrust. Moderating more far-reaching demands from A Gp B, and granting limited exemptions in special cases,

*It is possible that this demand prompted Hitler to break his silence regarding the planned offensive. In any case, the records show that the Chiefs of Staff O.B. West and A Gp B departed for Hitler's headquarters on 21 Oct and were informed of the pending plans on 24 Oct (paras 91 and 93 below).

O.B. West gave orders for the troops in the rear area to deliver 75% of their pistols and German machine guns, as well as 50% of their rifles to the troops in the fighting zone. (Ibid, 20 Oct)

91. At 1130 hrs 21 Oct the wireless station of the Aachen garrison reported for the last time and signed off. Henceforth the most important immediate tasks would be the endeavours to retain control of the Scholdt Estuary and to keep the enemy from gaining possession of what would be the rear areas for a thrust from the Aachen area. General Westphal (C. of S. O.B. West) left for a conference at the Führer's Headquarters. (Ibid, 21 Oct)

92. On the next day the commander of Army Group B issued a report in which he stressed once more the great need of strengthening Fifteenth Army and mentioned the complete failure of the "stomach" troops who had been made available as reinforcements. The report was to be relayed to C. of S. O.B. West "who is still at the Führer's Headquarters". In the meantime Fifth Panzer Army had assumed command of 12 SS Corps and 81 Corps (both forward of the Düsseldorf-Cologne line). The transfer of HQ 47 Pz Corps to A Gp B was in progress. Except for the area of Fifteenth Army, the western front was quiet. (Ibid, 20-23 Oct)

24 Oct

93. Fighting on 24 Oct followed the current pattern of pressure on Fifteenth Army and engagements of merely local nature at the balance of the front. The return of General Westphal from the Führer's Headquarters was recorded without any reference to the subjects discussed (Ibid, 24 Oct). It is generally known, however, that Westphal and Krebs were received by Hitler on this day and given a certain amount of information on the forthcoming offensive in the West. Westphal relates how in September and October the main question had ever been the time of arrival of the strong reinforcements promised by Hitler.

Despite all urgings and promptings OKW wrapped itself in a deep silence, and it was not until October 24 that the veil of secrecy was lifted. On this day I was ordered to report to Hitler's Headquarters in East Prussia, together with the Chief of the General Staff of Army Group B, General Krebs. There we were told verbally that about twenty infantry and ten panzer divisions, each with ten artillery corps and mortar brigades, would reach the West by the end of November or the beginning of December, together with numerous other army formations... but these forces were intended solely for offensive action. (General Siegfried Westphal, The German Army in the West, Cassell and Company Ltd, London, 1951, p. 178)

94. With Fifteenth Army in urgent need of support and no other practical solution in sight, it was decided to shift a battle group of 10 SS Pz Div from 2 SS Pz Corps to the left wing of Fifteenth Army. This was an acceptable risk because the opponent was known to have removed valuable divisions from the Nijmegen-Arnhem area for the attack against Fifteenth Army. Another plan to bring some relief to Fifteenth Army was suggested by A Gp B in the form of a thrust by 47 Pz Corps from the area of 86 Corps. O. B. West approved in principle. (W.D. O.B. West, 24 Oct)

95. During the day OKW announced the forthcoming transfer to O.B. West of 4 and 15 Mort Bdes and one artillery Corps. O.B. West directed that one of the brigades and the arty corps be placed in the rear area of First Parachute Army for ready intervention in the event of a major attack against the Arnhem-Aachen sector. The remaining mortar brigade was to join Fifth Panzer Army. (Ibid)

96. Allied regroupings at the front of First Army seemed to herald a forthcoming major attack. In view of the devastating effects of the first assault on the troops in the main line of resistance it would be important to form reserves. The arrival of 361 VG Div had freed 11 Pz Div for this purpose, but more strength was needed. Army Group G was asked to examine whether 21 Pz Div could be withdrawn from the right wing of Nineteenth Army, where the enemy was not very strong in numbers. (Ibid)

97. As of 1200 hrs 25 Oct the headquarters staff Naval Group West (Marine Gruppen Kommando West) would carry the designation Naval Command West (Marine Oberkommando West: M.O.K. West). At the same time the Channel Islands and the isolated fortresses would fall under its command except for operations on land, for which O.B. West would remain directly responsible. (Ibid)

23-26 Oct

98. OKW told O.B. West that a strengthening of the German airforce was not possible at the moment. In the event of a large scale enemy attack, however, strong fighter formations would be made available. O.B. West noted glumly that the extent of this support would decide the outcome of the operations in the West. Fifteenth Army remained the main target of Allied pressure. Ground was lost at Woensdrecht, south of Rosendaal and at 's-Hertogenbosch. In view of the urgent necessity of easing pressure on the Fifteenth Army, O.B. West gave the signal for executing 47 Pz Corps' relief attack from the Venlo bridgehead towards the West. Army Group B had intended to carry out the attack with 9 Pz Div alone, but O.B. West directed that the bulk of 15 Pz Gren Div be moved to the west side of the Maas for quick exploitation in case of success. (Ibid, 25 Oct)

99. O.B. West was informed that for the "Abwehrrschlacht" (para 84 above) thirteen VG Divs would be sent to the West in November, while two Para divs would be placed at his disposal. Rundstedt renewed his request for a third Army Group Headquarters, or at least a Special Staff to direct the operations of Fifteenth Army, First Parachute Army and the Armed Forces Commander Netherlands. For commander he suggested Col Gen Blaskowitz. (Ibid, 26 Oct)

27-28 Oct

100. Events of interests were mainly confined to the area of Fifteenth Army. (The principal developments have been related in Historical Section (GS) Report No. 69. paras 169-176.) Seeing that the Fifteenth Army was yielding further ground, the Führer demanded that the necessary withdrawals of the Army be carried out at the slowest tempo possible. O.B. West pointed out that the land front of Fifteenth Army was defended by troops with a total combat value of 2¹/₂ full divisions, facing enemy forces of six infantry divisions, three armoured divisions and five armoured brigades. Failure to withdraw would mean the extinction of forces that were indispensable for the re-establishment of a new front north of the Waal. Further east the attack of 47 Pz Corps had bogged down without having attracted large forces from the front of Fifteenth Army. (Ibid, 27-28 Oct 44)

29 Oct

101. On this day all attention was focussed on the plight of Fifteenth Army (H.S. Report No. 69, paras 177-184). There had been deep penetrations at Breda and Molenstraat, and at mid-morning C. of S. O.B. West asked Jodl over the telephone to obtain the Führer's consent for a withdrawal of Fifteenth Army across the Waal. Hitler indicated that the Army should remain south of the Waal, but finally gave permission to fall back on large bridgeheads in the event that enemy pressure left no other choice. Later in the day Army Group B reported further deterioration in the situation, and O.B. West in his turn notified OKW of the development and asked for new orders. (Ibid, 29 Oct)

102. A copy of the resulting directive to O.B. West has been preserved in a file of the German Naval Operations Staff (Sk1). (O.N.I., Tambach Collection, Microfilm Reel No. T 5 B, German Naval Operations Staff (Sk1). File "North Sea - Norway", OKW/WFSt/Ops No. 773955/44, Top Secret, of 29 Oct 44) (981HCN(D16)). A reproduction and translation of document appears as Appendix "F" to the present report.

On closer inspection, however, the directive turned out to contain a good deal of empty bombast. The troops were to fight to the last, large non-existing reinforcements were promised, sometime soon the Fifteenth Army would receive seventeen pieces of artillery.

103. Earlier in the day Field Marshal Rundstedt had paid renewed attention to a problem that filled his mind with uneasiness. As early as 19 Oct he had advocated that Sixth Panzer Army be moved closer to the front (para 89 above). Now he pointed once again to the enemy's obvious preparations for attack and to the difficulties of moving up reserves at the critical time. He added that subordination of the Army under O.B. West was necessary to afford him an insight into the condition of the Army and some influence on its reconstruction.* (W.D. O.B. West, 29 Oct)

30 Oct

104. The authorized withdrawals of Fifteenth Army were carried out and a new line established with some difficulty. Continued enemy pressure was expected as a certainty. The attack of 47 Pz Corps had come to an end, and 15 Pz Gren Div was returning to its role of operational reserve. Since the opponent for one reason or another had actually withdrawn one infantry division and one armoured brigade from the front of Fifteenth Army, the attack was judged to have obtained some slight success. In the Vonlo area in the meantime the projected new command arrangements had come into force, and Fifth Panzer Army was in command of 47 Pz Corps, 86 Corps and Corps Feldt. (Ibid, 30 Oct)

31 Oct

105. In the area of Army Group B all signs were pointing to an early attack on Walcheren. In the area of Army Group G the usual attacks in the direction of the Vosges passes were continuing. In addition to this the enemy had now launched an attack south of the Rhino-Marne Canal. All available units of 21 Pz Div were being moved to that area (Ibid, 31 Oct). The month of October had been uneventful, but on both sides of the fence plans had been made to break the stalemate by a mighty effort.

*When this request seemed destined to remain unanswered, O.B. West renewed his representations on 3 Nov. Finally, on 6 Nov he was notified that Sixth Panzer Army would be transferred to his command area between 7 and 25 Nov, but would remain an OKW reserve. (C.R.S. - 75144/28, W.D. O.B. West, Nov 44, 3 and 6 Nov) (981CW(D61))

1-7 Nov

106. The first week of November was the end of a phase. The two-months struggle for control of the Scheldt Estuary came to an end, Walcheren was lost Fifteenth Army was taking up positions north of the Maas and Waal, the Allied forces at the front of Fifteenth Army were being thinned out for the benefit of the Armies facing east.

107. First Parachute and Fifth Panzer Armies facing west at the Maas might have to meet the next major onslaught of the Allies. If the opponent at the Waal-Maas front showed no signs of intending to push on towards the North, considerable forces would become free for transfer to the Maas-west front. To have at least some sort of operational reserve, O.B. West gave orders for 47 Pz Corps (with 9 Pz Div and 15 Pz Gren Div under command) to assemble between Rhine and Maas in a manner permitting intervention at the western front of First Parachute Army as well as in the Aachen area. The headquarters staff of 58 Pz Corps was en route from First Army to the Fifth Panzer Army. There was incipient pressure against the Venlo bridgehead and north of Aachen. In the area of Army Group G enemy sorties against the front NE Dierenhofen were taken as forerunners of an impending attack on First Army. Good progress in construction work allowed Nineteenth Army to plan for a withdrawal to the Western Vosges position by mid-month. (C.R.S. - 75144/28, W.D. O.B. West, Nov 44, 1-7 Nov) (981CW(D61))

108. On orders from O.B. West, Army Group H would assume command on the Maas-Waal front on 10 Nov, thus making it possible for Army Group B to devote itself fully to "its real tasks in the München-Gladbach - Trier area". For the purpose of forming an Army Group H headquarters, the headquarters-staff "Armeegruppe Kioffel", including signal regiment and supply troops, would be moved-in from the East. Considered as a special danger was the presence of 600,000 able bodied Dutchmen in the area of Army Group H. On orders from OKW they would be removed to Germany. On 3 Nov Rundstedt repeated his request to have Sixth Panzer Army moved forward and placed under his command. On the same day he noted in the war diary that the enemy was bound to notice the movement of troops to the western front. To keep him guessing on the details at least, he imposed radio silence on all formations and units not actually at the front. (Ibid)

109. With Antwerp in his possession the enemy would soon deliver a massive thrust towards the Rhine. The timely assembly of operational reserves behind the prospective focal points was now a matter of urgency. On 6 Nov OKW finally gave orders for the transfer of Sixth Panzer Army to the area of O.B. West. The movement was to begin on 7 Nov and completed by 25 Nov. Under command of Army Group B the Sixth Panzer Army was to be held in locations permitting intervention in several directions. With regard to commitment, however, the Army retained the character of an OKW Reserve. (Ibid, 6 Nov)

110. On 7 Nov O.B. West issued his first directive to Army Group H. Fighting at the Scheldt and south of the Maas was at an end, what mattered now was to keep the enemy from advancing past the river barrier, On the right he must be denied access to Rotterdam and Amsterdam. On the left, contact with Army Group B must be maintained in any event, the area between Maas and Waal defended, the remaining Maas bridgehead held as long as possible. The forces available for the task were extremely scanty. They were not large enough to permit a defence of the islands of Schouwen and Goeree however desirable that might be in itself (s.a. para 111 below).
(Ibid, 7 Nov)

Scheldt Estuary under Allied Control (after 7 Nov)

8-15 Nov

111. That Rundstedt was a commander-in-Chief in name only was brought home to him once more on 8 Oct, when Hitler forced him to countermand his directive for desisting from a defence of Schouwen and Goeree. The Führer demanded the immediate strengthening of the garrison of Voorne, Schouwen and Goeree to one fully combat-worthy reinforced battalion with corresponding flak and arty elements for each island (Ibid, 8 Nov). On the same day Hitler turned down Rundstedt's request for emergency powers to commit the OKW reserves without prior consultation in the event of sudden critical developments. Except in the case of major landings from the air, he was not to commit even a single one of those units without the prior concurrence of OKW (Der Westen, 244). Nevertheless, from Rundstedt's point of view the day was not a total loss, for he was finally freed from any further direct interference by high command authorities other than OKW, and his Army Groups were instructed henceforth neither to communicate directly with any command authorities above O.B. West, nor to accept any orders not reaching them through O.B. West. (W.D. O.B. West, 8 Nov)

112. On the next day Jodl advised O.B. West of the Führer's order that above all the forces earmarked for the attack were not to be touched. Losses of ground would have to be accepted if it could not be helped, but this was not to become known below Army levels. To be held at all costs were:

the Maas position astride Venlo; the air defence area on both sides of Dueren; the Moselle position astride Diedenhofen; the fortress Metz, with contact with the Nieth position, which was to be sought also if Metz should be surrounded; and, the Nieth position as far as the border. (Der Westen, 245)

113. In addition to the injunction against committing OKW reserves, various other measures taken at that time were related to the coming offensive in the Ardennes. At Rundstedt's headquarters the projected attack was still being referred to as the "Abwehrschlacht"; at the highest quarters, however, it was known as operation "Wacht am Rhein" (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., OKW Ausarbeitung Schramm, Die Western Front, 16 Dec 44 - 28 Feb 45, p. 1) (981SOM(D93)); (Jodl Diary Notes, op cit, p. 41). One of the most important changes in command arrangements made at this time was the transfer of the Fifteenth Army Staff to Army Group B:

In connection with the further preparations for the Abwehrschlacht, beginning at 2400 hrs 14 Nov, the Fifteenth Army Staff will be withdrawn from its present assignment and transferred to Army Group B. Its former area will be taken over by the Armed Forces Commander Netherlands who, for reasons of deception, will carry on under the designation Fifteenth Army. In its new area the Fifteenth Army Staff will operate under the cover name "Gruppe von Manteuffel", whereas the Fifth Panzer Army Staff (the continued presence of which at the right wing of Army Group B will be simulated by the Fifteenth Army Staff) will be known as Feldjäger Kommando z.b.V. To veil the new role of the Armed Forces Commander Netherlands, a small staff will remain at his old headquarters and carry on current business under the old designation. (W.D. O.B. West, 13 Nov)

114. To meet the need for command staffs for the additional divisions soon to arrive in the West, O.B. West gave orders for 85 Corps Staff to be transferred from Nineteenth Army to Army Group B, and for the rehabilitation of the 30 and 53 Corps Staffs, which had been wrecked in the East (Ibid, 8 Nov, 10 Nov). 3 and 6 Para Divs, though not yet in the area of Army Group B, were placed under its command with regard to preparation and training for the Ardennes offensive (Ibid, 9 Nov). O.B. West repeated a previously issued order for the immediate and complete delivery of all captured American outfits and equipment. (Ibid, 10 Nov)

115. In the meantime, on 10 Nov, Headquarters Army Group H had assumed command over Fifteenth Army, First Parachute Army and the Armed Forces Commander Netherlands, while Army Group B was keeping a wary eye on the Allied build-up at the Maas-east front. The fact that dead Canadian soldiers had been seen at the front of First Parachute Army was taken to confirm the suspected arrival of Canadian formations in the general area of Nijmegen. O.B. West, concluding from this that 50 Brit Div and probably also 43 Brit Inf Div would be shifted further southward, instructed Army Group H to react to these measures by further thinning out Fifteenth Army for the benefit of the areas now likely to become focal points. (Ibid, 11 Nov)

116. On 11 Nov O.B. West's Intelligence Section had reported as follows:

Confirmation of the transfer of Canadian units to the area on both sides of Nijmegen begins to shed light on the whereabouts of the First Canadian Army formations that have become free. The presence of elements 2 Cdn Corps S Nijmegen, of elements 2 or 3 Cdn Inf Div at Groesbeck, and of 2 Cdn Army Tk Bde [sic] at Dreunel, confirms the expected transfers from the Antwerp area to the East. It can be assumed that First Canadian Army has taken over the entire Maas-Waal front, and that the forces of Second British Army hitherto in that sector are being relieved. Consequently two British infantry divisions and two U.S. airborne divisions will be free for commitment elsewhere, presumably at the eastern Maas front. Regroupments in the area of Second British Army are apparently still in progress, but the preparations for the attack on the Maas bridgehead seem to have been completed.

(C.R.S. - 75809, O.B. West, Int Repts
26 Sep - 31 Dec 44, Int No. 7428/44,
11 Nov 44) (981 CW(D34)).

117. Two days later it was reported that there was now a clearly recognizable enemy concentration at the front of First Parachute Army. It was thought to consist of at least five infantry divisions, four armoured divisions and four armoured brigades. Adjoining in the North was the Canadian Army with at least four infantry (resp airb) and at least one armoured division, whereas at the front of Fifteenth Army there were now only three infantry and two armoured divisions. Concluding that an acute danger to the Netherlands area did no longer exist, O.B. West supplemented his instructions of 11 Nov with orders for the immediate and thoroughgoing weakening of the forces of Fifteenth Army for the benefit of First Parachute Army. This he considered all the more urgent as the expected attacks against the Parachute Army might be accompanied by a new large-scale attack in the Aachen area. (W.D. O.B. West, 13 Nov)

118. With regard to this expected attack at the Venlo bridgehead and north of Aachen the Führer informed all command headquarters concerned of the measures he considered most important in this connection:

1. Spare own troops but inflict heavy casualties on enemy,
2. deploy artillery in depth,

3. prepare for extensive demolitions, lay mine fields and construct tank traps,
4. select locations for headquarters in such a manner that command apparatus will not be paralyzed by armoured break-throughs,
5. reconnoitre by force to obtain clear enemy picture,
6. make certain that no Maas bridges will be captured intact,
7. strengthen West Wall right up to last sector [obscure; presumably means north end],
8. thin out Fifteenth Army to gain reserves (for this purpose 10 SS Pz Div and 363 VGD to be withdrawn from front).

(Der Westen, 246)

119. While Army Group B was thus bracing itself for the expected onslaught, Army Group G was under severe pressure at Metz and on both sides of it. The Metz salient from south of Trier to east of Lüneville was defended by First Army with 82 Corps in the northern part, 13 SS Corps in the centre and 89 Corps in the southern part. Early on 8 Nov OKW told O.B. West over the telephone that the Führer wanted Metz to be made a fortress for all-round defence. The garrison was to be strengthened to a point where it could hold out for a long time if it should become isolated. Following intensive Allied artillery fire on the entire First Army front, 13 SS Corps SE of Metz came under heavy attack. On the next day pressure against 13 SS Corps continued while a companion attack was launched NE Metz. According to several critical entries in the War Diary of O.B. West, Army Group G apparently was making light of the initial losses of ground. O.B. West noted that without any doubt the enemy was about to encircle Metz and would succeed in doing so unless he was thrown back without delay. By the evening of 10 Nov it was clear that the enemy could no longer be dislodged and, indeed, was gaining further ground. In one of the rare instances of critical comments about subordinate headquarters, Rundstedt recorded the opinion that the local command authorities had failed to deal with the initial attacks in a manner in keeping with their importance. (W.D. O.B. West, 8-10 Nov)

120. On 11 Nov it was recognized that the enemy pincers movement would succeed unless the bridgehead north of Metz was eliminated. O.B. West gave orders to move-in additional units, mainly artillery, but by 12 Nov the strength of the enemy artillery had become so great that a successful outcome of a counter-attack north of Metz was out of question. At the same time further south, in the sector of 13 SS Corps,

the situation was also deteriorating, a counter-attack by 11 Pz Div had failed, and 21 Pz Div was still too weakened from recent engagements to be suitable for a serious counter-attack. O.B. West, therefore, gave orders to assume a defensive posture, yield no more ground, and maintain the line of communications with Metz. For such a purpose 36 VGD and 21 Pz Div could be used in support of the units in the area (Ibid, 12 Nov). On the next day O.B. West informed OKW of his plans for the defence of Metz. Not counting air force flak, the garrison would have a strength of 11,500 men, and ammunition for at least four weeks (Ibid, 13 Nov). When the situation showed further deterioration late on 14 Nov, O.B. West conferred with the commander of Army Group G and afterwards reported to OKW that an early encirclement of Metz was to be expected as well as a continuation of the enemy attacks from the Diederhofen bridgehead. Fighting strengths at First Army were very small, 11 Pz Div had only 800 men forward of the regimental headquarters. O.B. West had no troops to improve this situation, a further weakening of Nineteenth Army was not practicable because it would shortly come under attack itself. In consequence O.B. West was unable to withdraw 25 Pz Gren Div, 17 SS Pz Gren Div and 21 Pz Div as required for the preparations for the Abwehrschlacht. Neither could 36 VGD and 401 Volks Arty Corps be returned to Army Group B at the moment. (Ibid, 14 Nov)

121. At the front of Army Group H a certain increase in fighting activity at the Venlo bridgehead was taken as a possible forerunner of Allied major action. O.B. West therefore gave orders for the alerting of 47 Pz Corps for quick intervention in the Venlo and/or Erkelenz areas. At the front of Army Group G the attack on Metz proper had begun. O.B. West demanded that the city be held as long as possible, above all, however, First Army was to preserve an unbroken front. Intelligence had not as yet noted any drastic changes in Allied dispositions; the right wing of Second British Army was apparently being strengthened, the enemy concentrations on both sides of Metz were being maintained, despite a resurgence in fighting there was no evidence of new enemy concentrations in Burgundy. With regard to command arrangements for the Abwehrschlacht, Fifteenth Army Staff, fully camouflaged (para 113 above), had relieved Fifth Panzer Army Staff in the latter's former area, H.Q. 30 Corps was en route to Army Group H to relieve H.Q. 2 SS Pz Corps for transfer to A Gp B. (Ibid, 15 Nov)

16 Nov

122. The beginning of the last month before the launching of the German Offensive in the Ardennes was characterized by the determined widening of Allied efforts to soften up and wear down the German forces in the West. On the right wing of Army Group G, First Army was under growing pressure at Metz and lost further ground NE and SE of Metz;