

CHAPTER IV

The German Army In France

1940-1943

Organization of the West

German leaders in the fall of 1943 read their newspapers and pored over intelligence reports with special interest. Crisis in the east had been reached and passed; there would be no more massed German offensives. no decisive victories. Crisis in the west was approaching. In October, news of the military conference in Moscow convinced Hitler and his staff that the opening of the second front was imminent. The conclusion was modified later as press releases from the Tehran Conference were taken to indicate a postponement of the invasion for perhaps two or three months. The best guess then was that the Allies might attack any time after February 1944, but probably in the spring. Whatever the exact time schedule, most German leaders had little doubt that invasion was close at hand.

While the Moscow Conference was going on, Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, Commander in Chief in the West, was putting the final touches on a long, frank, pessimistic report on the state of his defenses. The burden of the report was that his army was not in any way prepared to resist the expected Allied attack. In three years of occupation little had actually been accomplished to make Fortress Europe a military reality.

With the conquest of France in June 1940, Hitler believed that he had won the war. He had no plans ready for the next step. He could not understand why any more victories should be necessary to convince Great Britain that it was hope less to prolong the struggle. But Britain's stubbornness, though inexplicable, was clearly a fact. Hitler noted in July that the British Government was apparently set on fighting to the finish, and he therefore began serious consideration of plans to deliver the coup de grace. The obvious and most convincing method was invasion.

The projected invasion was given the code name SEELOEWE (SEA LION) and Army and Navy planners set to work in a race against time to solve the manifold and unfamiliar problems of a large- scale amphibious operation. The first big problem was that there were no landing craft, and very little shipping of any description. By gathering up all the barges from inland waterways at the cost of paralyzing large sections of industry, the Germans could reckon on barely enough shipping space to put an effective force ashore in England. But towed barges at the mercy of the slightest wind-roughened seas were hardly ideal. The perils of improvisation, furthermore,

would be heightened by the lack of naval protection. The only way to guard the convoys seemed to be to mass all submarines and light surface vessels on the North Sea flank and at the same time mount a diversionary expedition on the Atlantic side to draw the British Fleet away from the main crossing. The Navy was decidedly cool toward the project. Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, the Navy Commander in Chief, as early as July had uncovered so many risks that he strongly recommended against the operation except as a last resort.

Hitler agreed. Quite apart from the dangers of SEELOEWE, Hitler did not like the political implications of conquering England by invasion. He saw that the defeat of England would be followed by disintegration of the British Empire. The beneficiaries of such a collapse, he thought, would be Japan and the United States, not Germany. He wanted not the destruction but the surrender of Great Britain. To force surrender, he believed it was necessary to deprive the British finally and completely of all hope in ultimate victory. They therefore must be confronted with a solid political front on the Continent embracing Spain, Italy, and a vanquished Russia. Defeat of Russia was particularly important. Hitler thought that England drew hope chiefly from the continued independence of the Soviet Union and the United States. By knocking out Russia, the Germans would remove one source of hope and considerably dim the other; Russia's defeat would leave Japan strong in the Pacific and would probably prevent the United States from becoming an effective ally of Great Britain in Europe. "With Russia smashed," Hitler argued, "Britain's last hope would be shattered." On 31 July 1940 Hitler decided that Russia's destruction "must therefore be made a part of this struggle [against England]. He set the spring of 1941 as the target date and ordered preparations made for a lightning blow to knock out Russia in not more than five months.

The decision to attack Russia resulted immediately in a reorganization and expansion of the Army. The goal set was to build up from 143 to 180 divisions. As all three of the army groups that defeated France, A, B, and C, were to be shifted to the Eastern Front by the spring of 1941, it became necessary to create a new headquarters to take over the occupation of France. This was Army Group D, formed during September and October under command of Generalfeldmarschall Erwin von Witzleben. In order to relieve the Army High Command at once for exclusive attention to the east, a theater commander, Oberbefehlshaber West (Commander in Chief West) was designated about the same time to take charge of all offensive or defensive operations that might be mounted in the west. Field Marshal Rundstedt, still in command of Army Group A (the force earmarked for SEELOEWE), was concurrently appointed Commander in Chief West with full command over Army Group A and tactical command over army Group D and Armed Forces Commander Netherlands (Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Niederlande).

While these command changes were being effected, the German commanders were rapidly becoming convinced that SEELOEWE was not a sound operation of war. The Navy had set the period 20-26 September as the earliest date on which it could be ready. But readiness even on this date hinged on the ability of Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering's Luftwaffe to knock out the British Royal Air Force. In the Battle of Britain Goering tried and failed as British fighter pilots demonstrated skill and courage that took heavy toll of the attackers. There followed a succession of postponements, which gained nothing; the Royal Air Force remained unconquered and the weather, the final insuperable obstacle, only became more stormy and unpredictable as the season advanced. With an improvised landing fleet, composed largely of river barges only a third of which were self-propelled, the Germans needed a relatively long period of almost flat calm. Such periods were rare in October and could not be forecast. By the middle of October SEELOEWE had been definitely called off. Preparations were to be continued for a landing in the spring but chiefly as a deception measure to keep up the pressure on the British.

Rundstedt thus remained in France with his Army Group A during the winter of 1940-41. In April 1941 he was moved out, and command in the west passed to von Witzleben, commander of Army Group D. Witzleben was left with three armies, the Seventh and Fifteenth occupying the long coast line from the Spanish border to Antwerp, and the First disposed in the interior with headquarters near Paris.

The threat of invasion or even of damaging raids by the English against the Continent in 1941 was so slight as to be negligible. Nevertheless, Witzleben began taking certain steps to put his defense in order. In June, the former Inspector of Western Fortresses was appointed Inspector of Land Fortresses in the West and attached for tactical purposes to OB WEST. His headquarters was moved from Metz to Paris near that of Witzleben, and his first task was the inspection of the defenses of the Channel Islands.

The military reason for defending the Channel Islands was chiefly to protect coastal traffic. Hitler, however, attached to the islands a far greater political importance. He believed the British would be forced to retake them for the sake of prestige. Conversely they were precious to him as the only British territory directly under his domination. In mid-summer 1941 the 319th Division, reinforced with machine gun, artillery, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft units to the strength of about 40,000 men, was ordered to the islands. This garrison comprising some of the best troops and best equipment in the west was to remain on Channel guard duty, inactive and useless for the rest of the war.

Up to the end of 1941 the only German-built fortifications on the French mainland were seven heavy coastal batteries between Boulogne and Calais emplaced for the shelling of England during preparations for SEELOEWE, a few other naval coastal batteries, and some U-boat pens. The coastal battery emplacements were built for the Navy by Organization Todt, the construction organization formed in 1938 to build the West Wall. After SEELOEWE was called off, Hitler directed Organization Todt to construct bombproof U-boat pens along the Atlantic coast, especially at Brest, Lorient, and St. Nazaire. That project, to protect what Hitler came more and more to regard as his principal offensive weapon against the Western Powers, absorbed most of the labor and materials available for fortification of the west. When Witzleben in September 1941 proposed that the Army begin work on permanent defenses, the Army High Command (OKH) had no construction battalions to give him and he had to make informal arrangements with the Navy to borrow such of their workers as were idle. Despite the difficulties, Witzleben at the end of 1941 ordered the armies, corps, and divisions under him to reconnoiter defense sites along the coast and begin construction.

This was the first step toward fortifying the west against eventual Allied invasion, but without the necessary allotment of labor and materials it could not accomplish much. The actual building of the Atlantic Wall cannot be said to have begun before the spring of 1942. By then the first Russian winter counter-offensive, coupled with American entry into the war, had forced Hitler to reckon more seriously with prolongation of hostilities and the consequent possibility of major action in the west.

Early in March 1942 Field Marshal Rundstedt was appointed Commander in Chief West to replace Witzleben.

Rundstedt was one of the senior officers and leading military personalities in Germany. He had been in charge of early planning for the Polish campaign of 1939 and had commanded an army group in that campaign. In 1940 in France he again commanded an army group. After the victory over France, he was placed in charge of planning and preparations for the invasion of England. On the abandonment of that project, Rundstedt participated in the first offensive against Russia as commander of Army Group South until the end of 1941, when he was relieved because of ill health. In March 1942 he reported to Hitler that his health was restored and a week later received the command in the west.

Two weeks after Rundstedt's appointment, Hitler issued his basic order for the defense of the west. Sole responsibility for the defense of all German-occupied territory in the west including the Netherlands was given to the Commander in Chief West, and he, along with the commander in Denmark, was placed directly under the Armed Forces High Command (OKW). This

extended a process begun earlier of splitting the theaters of operation between OKW and OKH, as though they were coequal commands. By the beginning of 1943 OKW had become directly responsible for all western theaters (France and the Low Countries, North Africa and Italy, the Balkans, and Scandinavia) while OKH devoted exclusive attention to the east. The division recognized, in the first place, that OKH had its hands full with the increasing difficulties of the war in Russia. It also, in part, reflected the fact that the defense of the west particularly called for co-ordination between the three services.

Co-ordination was effected, however, in name only. OKW, headed by Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, was no true joint staff. Naval and air force members were relatively junior officers. Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering and Admiral Raeder, furthermore, remained outside and above it in personal relationship with Hitler. Goering as Reichsmarschall outranked Keitel who, as chief of all the armed services, should have been his superior. In addition, Goering held a top Cabinet post as Minister of Aviation which further set him out of reach of OKW. Finally, the Army, wedded to the notion of Germany as a Continental power, had long opposed unification of the services on the basis of equal representation and authority. The effect of the Army view together with the independence of Goering and Raeder was to reduce OKW to the position of a second Army staff. As long as it had no direct responsibility for any one theater of operations OKW retained a certain perspective and capacity to co-ordinate the German war effort, even though the bulk of its co-ordination had to pass through Hitler himself. With the splitting of the western and eastern theaters, OKW, for all practical purposes, lost even that limited power to co-ordinate. Henceforth the only unity of command in Germany rested in the person of Hitler, who no longer had adequate machinery through which to exercise it.

In the various theaters of operations after 1940 no effective machinery was ever established to exercise unified command. In the west, during an actual enemy invasion, the army commanders in the battle areas were to have tactical control over the air force and naval units in their sectors. But the failure to give OB WEST a supreme command meant that co-ordination of the defense rested largely on such informal co-operation and liaison as the local commanders might choose to establish. The divided command would gravely handicap German preparedness. In the meantime, the chief positive result of the new top-level command organization was to free the OKW operational staff (the Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab, WFSt, under General der Artillerie Alfred Jodl) from responsibility for the war in Russia and so permit it to concentrate on the operational needs of the west, Italy, the Balkans, and Norway and Denmark.

Hitler's basic order sketched out the tactical doctrine that henceforth

governed all planning for the defense of France. He decreed that the coast defenses should be so organized and troops so that any invasion attempted could be smashed before the landing of immediately thereafter. The main defensive preparations were to be made in the places most suitable for large enemy landings. Beaches where only small surprise landings were possible were to be defended by strong points tied in, if possible, with the coastal batteries. The rest of the coast would be patrolled. All positions were to be designed for defense to the last man of the garrison. All should be equipped with weapons and supplies so that even if overrun by the enemy they would not be forced to surrender for lack of means to continue the fight.

Five days after the issuance of this order, Hitler was profoundly shocked by the successful British raid on St. Nazaire. The spectacle of British ships, including a destroyer, sailing with impunity up the mouth of the Loire reputedly made him furious and focused his attention on the inadequacies of the French coastal defenses. The only immediate outcome, however, was the relief of Generalleutnant Karl Hilpert, OB WEST Chief of Staff. Hilpert was replaced by Generalmajor Kurt Zeitzler, who was close to Hitler, and who afterward became Chief of the General Staff of OKH.

Later more sober study of the St. Nazaire experience showed even to Hitler that the responsible commanders in France did not have the resources to deal with determined enemy forays. While Allied strength was increasing, German strength had been gradually weakened to nourish the operations against Russian. Admiral Raeder told Hitler bluntly: "We have no means of repulsing an enemy attempt." Even better defenses at St. Nazaire, in the opinion of Raeder, would not have stopped a determined Allied attack; the only thing that could have helped would have been strong naval forces and adequate air reconnaissance. Then he ventured a prophecy: "In view of the shortages everywhere and the necessity of using numerous makeshift defense measures, experience will show that there will constantly be new shortcomings in our defenses and new demands made upon them." Despite this accurate forecast of things to come, Hitler was not then, and never would be, convinced that defense could not be made invulnerable if enough concrete and resolution could be poured into it. His retort to the St. Nazaire raid was to direct that submarine bases be so well protected that successful raids on them thenceforth would be impossible.

In August 1942 he expanded his notions of a concrete coastal wall. In a conference with Field Marshal Keitel and other high-ranking Army officers he proposed that fortress construction in France should proceed with "fanatic energy [Fanatismus]" during the coming winter. The object must be to build many small strong points to house from thirty to seventy men each, armed with machine guns and "a few other weapons," chiefly antitank guns. A continuous belt of interlocking fire must be created

emanating from concrete structures designed to be proof against Allied bombing and naval shellfire. Behind this emphasis on fixed defenses lay the realization of a grave shortage of troops. Already in the summer of 1942 Hitler estimated that ten to twelve more divisions were needed to establish a solid defense along the OB WEST coast J line, but reserves to make up this deficit were not available.

As the summer came to an end, prospects of victory in Russia were again clouded by the north winds. In the meantime the large-scale raid by Canadian troops at Dieppe in the latter part of August, though considered an absolute failure by the Germans, nevertheless forcibly called attention to the increasing threat of full-scale invasion by the Western Powers. On 29 September, Hitler called in Goering, Reich Minister Albert Speer (Chief of Organization Todt), Rundstedt, Generalleutnant Guenther Blumentritt (who had relieved Zeitzler as Chief of Staff OB WEST only a few days before), General der Pioniere Alfred Jacob (Chief Engineer of OKH), Generalleutnant Rudolf Schmetzer (Inspector of Land Fortresses for OB WEST), and certain other staff officers for a three-hour conference in the small Cabinet sitting room of the Reich Chancellery. The Fuehrer began by expressing his confidence that Russia would be defeated in 1943 by a German push in the spring toward Mesopotamia in the south. He then admitted grave concern over the possibility of the creation of a second front in the west. There was no question of capitulation, he said, " I must freely admit . . . that a major landing of the enemy in the west would bring us to a generally critical position." The gravest present threat was to Norway, he believed, but ultimately it was France that would be invaded because such an operation would require the least amount of shipping tonnage.

Hitler then went on to analyze the Dieppe experience. Even though the British field order for the raid, clearly specifying a withdrawal of forces after nine hours, was captured and studied by the Germans, apparently the German generals involved reported and Hitler believed that Dieppe was actually a major landing attempt that failed. On that premise he compared the introduction of large-scale amphibious operations at Dieppe to the introduction of the tank at Cambrai in World War I. In both cases, he pointed out, the British had failed through having planned only the meeting engagement, leaving the follow-up to the initiative of the field commanders who were too timid to exploit their advantage. After Cambrai both British and Germans drew the false lesson that the tank was technically a failure and so "they poured out the baby with the bath." He warned now against a false deduction on the German side that amphibious operations against the coast of France were proved impossible by Dieppe. This time, he said, the British cannot arrive at a similar conclusion, simply because they have no alternative but to try again.

The Germans must prepare the strongest possible defenses. The defenses must be prepared, furthermore, on the assumption that the Allies would enjoy air and naval supremacy. The crushing weight of Allied bombs and shells, he believed, could be withstood only by concrete. Not only that, but massive concrete works, he believed, had a psychological as well as a physical strength. Hitler pointed out that the very existence of the West Wall had deterred Daladier in 1938 from threatening military action during the Czechoslovakia crisis. The West Wall repeated along the coast would have the same deterrent effect on the Western Allies. Hitler asked for 1,000 concrete strong points for the new "Atlantic Wall" to be defended by 300,000 men. The goal was an impervious, permanent defense ring. Since the amount of time available to build it was uncertain, construction was to follow a strict priority. In Hitler's view, the most important job was to protect the U-boat bases. He listed for defense thereafter: harbors for coastal traffic, harbors suitable for enemy landings (a reflection of the Dieppe experience), the Channel Islands, and finally landing places on the open coast. Beaches deemed most likely to be used in a major invasion attempt were to be fortified first. But, as Hitler pointed out, since the Navy could not guarantee that any portion of the coast was safe, the whole would have to be walled up eventually.

It was an ambitious program. Hitler ordered that it be completed by 1 May 1943; Organization Todt thought it would be lucky to get 40 percent finished by that time. At such a rate the defense of the coast proper, having the lowest priority, became a very long-range program which would probably not be completed before the Allies struck. In any case it was fantastic to suppose that even a first-class military power could be strong everywhere along the entire coast line from the Mediterranean to Norway. It followed that defense preparations would be concentrated in accordance with estimates of Allied intentions. But German intelligence services notably failed to supply reliable information about the Western Allies. The sparseness of accurate intelligence, the plethora of rumors, and the natural jitteriness of being on the strategic defensive led to constantly revised guesses that at one time or another pointed out grave threats to virtually every section of the coast. Division commanders, corps commanders, army commanders freely contributed predictions that their own sectors had been selected for the enemy landings. They were moved sometimes by logic, more often by desire to compete for the limited supplies of troops and materiel. They seldom had any sure knowledge of what was being brewed across the Channel. Hitler's intuition was no less erratic: at various times he picked the Gironde, Brittany, the Cotentin, the Pas-de-Calais, and Norway. In late 1943 a captured British agent indicated that the Allies intended to strike in the Netherlands. He was not believed, and the Netherlands actually remained about the only sector in the west exempt from special attention as a threatened area.

Although the Germans could never be sure that any sector of the coast was safe, the necessity for concentrating their own forces led them to categorize roughly the degrees of danger. It was common consensus from the beginning that the sector of the Fifteenth Army from the Seine to the Schelde was most gravely if not uniquely threatened. This estimate, however, was based on reasoning, not on intelligence. It was thought the Allies would strike here because it was close to Germany and the Ruhr, and because the short Channel crossing would simplify the problems of air support and sea reinforcement. Strategically Allied success in this sector would cut off the whole of the German forces to the south.

The conclusion that the Kanalkueste was the most likely place for a major landing, arrived at in the early days of planning the Atlantic Wall, was never seriously shaken by any later information. Even when other sectors appeared threatened, the threats were deemed diversionary. Rationalization had a persuasiveness that the meager reports of fact never had. Furthermore, once the concrete was poured, the original estimate became peculiarly difficult to alter. During 1942, for instance, four times as much concrete was allotted the left corps of Fifteenth Army as to the LXXXIV Corps in Normandy and Brittany. By May 1943 the concentration of troops along the Fifteenth Army coast was almost three times as heavy as in Seventh Army-the army that would oppose the invasion.

In the summer of that year a new importance was given to the Pas-de-Calais area. It was here that Hitler planned to install his Vergeltungs (vengeance) weapons, the long-range rockets and pilotless of defense really was. The average coastal sector of a single division ranged from 50 miles in the Fifteenth Army sector to 120 miles in the Seventh Army sector and 217 miles along the Atlantic coast. The coastal divisions, moreover, were almost all understrength-a good many had only two regiments. Their armament, particularly in antitank weapons and artillery, was often inadequate for a maximum defense of their positions. Most serious of all, in Rundstedt's eyes, was their almost total lack of transport.

All these deficiencies were the direct result of the drain on the German war economy to maintain the Russian and Mediterranean fronts. The opening of the Russian front in 1941 had turned the west into a kind of replacement center. Toward the end of that year the Commander in Chief West was already complaining that his troops were being siphoned off at a dangerous rate. The complaint was futile; the process, in fact, had only just begun. From 1942 "the hard-pressed Eastern Front always short of forces looked with envy at the apparently sleeping army in the west, and at every crisis the higher commanders in the east . . . demanded that the reservoir be tapped. In the need of the moment these troops were usually conceded."

In 1942 the process of east-west troop exchanges was regularized. In May the Commander in Chief West issued an order concerning the reconstitution of divisions shifted from the Russian front to France emphasizing speed in re-equipping these divisions and the importance of maintaining the special toughness (Ost-Haerte) of the troops. In the same order Rundstedt warned against allowing the troops who had returned from the east to patronize those troops permanently stationed in the west. The latter, he pointed out, had done their duty and it was not their fault that they could not be used for fighting in the east. In short, it was made a matter of policy that the west should be permanently garrisoned only by troops who because of various disabilities could not be used in the hard fighting in Russia. OKH, in October, proposed a regular monthly exchange of two divisions between Army Group Center and OB WEST and one division between Army Group North and the Norway garrison. OKH listed ten infantry divisions under OB WEST command which were immediately suitable for exchange with the east. At the same time it was proposed not to transfer any mobile divisions (armored and motorized) until spring to avoid using them up in winter fighting in Russia. But that was like trying to hold on to a parasol in a hurricane. A month later, Hitler ordered the immediate transfer of the 6th Panzer Division from the west to the sector of Stalino-Volchansk. In the first eleven months after October 1942 the east-west exchange system took twenty-two infantry and six armored or motorized divisions out of the west. This was in addition to a constant weeding out of the best personnel and equipment from divisions considered unsuitable as a whole for east duty.

Thus in 1943, a year of increasing threats of attack from the west, the German armies in France had not even held their own. General Blumentritt, the OB WEST chief of staff, in September summarized the deterioration for the high command. A year ago, he pointed out, the Atlantic Wall had been garrisoned with twenty-two infantry divisions most of which had three regiments. In reserve were six infantry and seven fully mobile, first-class armored or motorized divisions. Now, he continued, in a much more dangerous situation, the garrison infantry divisions had increased to twenty-seven, but this increase was largely nullified by the reduction of most of the divisions to two regiments. In reserve were six armored or motorized divisions and seven infantry divisions, of which three were new organizations. In other words, though the holding strength remained about constant in numbers the quality had certainly declined; the striking power had decreased slightly in numbers and very substantially in mobility.

There was no appeasing the hunger of the Eastern Front. The continual protests of the Commander in Chief West and even Hitler's own resolution toward the end of 1943 to halt the weakening of the west were alike swept aside by the demands for more and more men to halt the tide of Russian victories. The German Army went into Russia in June 1941 with 3,300,000

men. By the spring of 1943, despite every effort to get replacements, the eastern army had been reduced by 600,000. Built back up to three million for the summer offensive, it suffered another net reduction of a half million by September. In 1943 alone, the Germans estimated that they had a total of 2,086,000 casualties in the east, of which 677,000 were permanent losses (that is, the killed and missing, unfit, and one-third of all wounded). The net losses continued to mount so that in the year from July 1943 through June 1944 the gap between losses and replacements amounted to 535,000.

Even these figures do not truly reflect the exhaustion of the German Army. Of 151 German Army divisions listed in the OKH order of battle for the Russian front in December 1943, ten panzer and fifty infantry divisions were "fought out" (abgekaempft) or, in other words, of negligible combat value. Eleven of the named infantry "divisions" were actually only Kampfgruppen. At the same time there were twelve full divisions in Italy, while OB WEST had forty-six divisions plus two regiments that were operational and another seven divisions in process of formation. These figures strikingly reveal the strain exerted by the Russian war: *the number of divisions in the east which needed replacement and reconstitution was greater than the total number of divisions in the two western theaters.*

The war in Russia was always the principal vacuum into which German resources were sucked and destroyed, but Allied attacks on North Africa in November 1942 and subsequent Allied Mediterranean operations superimposed an additional strain which contributed substantially to the weakening of the west. General der Artillerie Walter Warlimont of OKW concluded after the war that the invasion of North Africa, which came as a complete surprise to Hitler, was actually "decisive for the whole conduct of the war" for it established a "springboard for a thrust into the groin of Fortress Europe, the naturally weak and practically unprepared south flank." One immediate result of Allied landings in North Africa on 8 November 1942 was to force German occupation of the whole of France and add some four hundred miles of Mediterranean coast line to OB WEST's responsibilities.

Plans for the occupation of Vichy France were completed in July 1942. Troops were alerted on 7 November, the day before the Allied landings in North Africa. Ten divisions under two armies (the First and Army Felber) moved across the Demarcation Line on 11 November and, without opposition from the French, occupied the Spanish border and the Mediterranean coast as far as Toulon. The area from there east and as far north as a line between Lyon and the Swiss border was taken over at the same time by the Italian Fourth Army, which moved in with six divisions and three corps headquarters. In December the units under the German First Army withdrew and First Army responsibility was thereafter limited to the Atlantic coast line as far north as the Loire River. The Mediterranean

became the responsibility of Army Felber.

These arrangements lasted about six months. In June 1943 Rundstedt notified General der Infanterie Hans-Gustav Felber that Italian collapse seemed possible and he was therefore to prepare to relieve the Fourth Army. His local commanders were to try to get the Italians to continue fighting on the side of the Germans, but those who could not be persuaded were to be disarmed. Labor troops were to be formed of those willing to work, and the rest were to be regarded as prisoners of war.

During the campaign in Sicily and through the fall of Mussolini the Fourth Army held on in France. But on 10 August the Italian supreme command proposed withdrawal of the army to defend Italy against the expected Allied invasion of the mainland. Two days later Felber was relieved by General der Infanterie Georg von Sodenstern. During the next few weeks the command in the south was renamed the Nineteenth Army and preparations were completed to relieve the Italians. The relief, which absorbed four German divisions, was carried out early in September. Except for a brief fight at the Mount Cenis tunnel by units of the Italian 5th Alpini Division the relief was peaceful. But in the course of it about 40,000 Italian troops were made prisoner and sent into the interior of France as labor troops. No more than a handful volunteered to fight beside the Germans.

Southern France was only one of the vacuums created by Italian collapse. As soon as collapse seemed imminent the Germans made plans to shift troops into the Italian peninsula and into the Balkans. The total number required was not large, but the added strain was severe. The planned 1943 summer offensive in Russia (Operation ZITADELLE), becoming an exhausting defensive action, drew off so many troops that OKW in July could find only twelve divisions available for occupying Italy. All of these were already either in northern Italy or under OB WEST command. Impoverished by contributions to the Russian war, OB WEST was now to be beggared to nourish the Mediterranean. Before 1 September, Rundstedt had given up eight infantry and nine panzer divisions to Africa and Italy and one infantry and one panzer division to the Balkans. These comprised, moreover, some of the best-quality troops remaining in the west after earlier withdrawals for Russia.

Besides forcing direct contributions of troops, Allied attacks in Italy weakened the whole defense system of the west by creating invasion threats to southern France. Although Rundstedt never reckoned with a major landing on his Mediterranean coast, he did count as probable a diversionary attack tied in with a large-scale invasion in the northwest. In his October report he pointed out that the Rhone Valley was a natural invasion route to the north and that the ports of Toulon and Marseille

would undoubtedly be tempting to the Allies. General Sodenstern in August 1943 noted the clear strategic connection between thrusts from the north and south and recalled that the Rhone Valley had been a historic route to the upper Rhine for invading armies since the wars of Caesar.

The "three-front" war all but exhausted the normal German manpower reservoirs. The Germans then turned to extraordinary sources to fill up the decimated ranks of the west army. The principal last-ditch sources were foreign personnel (chiefly Russian), young recruits of the classes of 19 and 196, convalescents often with physical disabilities, organizational overhead, and troops in occupied areas comparatively safe from invasion threats, like Norway and Denmark. Divisions that remained in the west but had their rosters combed out for replacements for eastern service were replenished with men rated less fit for combat. Divisions transferred to the east were replaced with new formations, sometimes with good personnel, more often with a mixture of fit and unfit, experienced and green, German and foreign.

In June 1941 the German Army was entirely German and prided itself on its "racial purity." With the opening of the Russian campaign, German propaganda began to internationalize German war aims as a crusade against Bolshevism. At the same time the requirements for men to administer and defend vast occupied territories while well over two million men fought in the Russian battlefields made imperative the opening of almost any conceivable additional source of manpower. "Racial Germans" (Volksdeutsche), especially from Poland, were given conditional German citizenship and under this fiction made subject to the draft. As time went on the fiction was extended often to persons who could not even speak German. Recruiting was begun also in the occupied territories of Russia and units formed of the so-called *Freiwilligen* (volunteers). As the pressure for more and more men developed, the *Freiwilligen*, too, lost more and more of their volunteer character. In the late fall of 1941 Hitler authorized the employment of Russian prisoners in the German Army, formalizing a procedure already applied by field commanders. The majority of the *Hilfswillige* (auxiliaries) were employed as labor troops in war areas. Through increasing admixture with these three categories, *Volksdeutsche*, *Freiwillige*, and *Hilfswillige*, the "racial purity" of the German Army became more and more dilute. In 1944 the Army included as "volunteers" from occupied and allied territories: French, Italians, Croatians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Finns, Estonians, Letts, Lithuanians, North Africans, Negroes, Asiatics, Russians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Kazaks, North-Caucasians, Georgians, Azerbaijani, Armenians, Turkomans, Volga-Tatars, Volga-Finns, Kalmucks, Crimean Tatars, and even Indians.

The *Volksdeutschen*, drawn chiefly from territories which Germany intended to integrate with the Reich, were originally classified in four

categories according to the degree of their overt sympathy with the Nazi party. The majority were placed in the third category (Volksliste drei) comprising racial Germans who despite previous integration in the Polish national culture were deemed amenable to Germanization. Volksliste drei persons were given a ten-year probationary citizenship and drafted if of military age. Although integrated for the most part in the Army they were forbidden to rise above the rank of private first class.

Rundstedt, in October 1943, commented on the lower morale of the Volksdeutschen, due, he thought, not to ill will on their part but to the fact that their families were not being treated like the families of front-line German soldiers. But the reliability of the Volksdeutschen concerned him much less than that of the volunteer Russian combat battalions which his command had been forced to accept in the latter part of the year. The original idea back of the formation of the Ost (east) battalions was to employ anti-Red Russian peoples (generally prisoners of war) in the crusade against the Soviet Union. When the third great German summer offensive soured in 1943 and the German armies began a retrograde movement that had all the earmarks of final retreat, the anti-Bolshevik recruits became increasingly unreliable and it was decided to transfer them to the west in exchange for German troops. In September OKW ordered the exchange on the basis of two Ost battalions for one German battalion. At that time OKH reported that 15,800 Osttruppen were trained and that 2,000 more would be trained in November and December. During September and October, about forty-five Cossack, Georgian, North-Caucasian, Turkoman, Armenian, Volga-Tatar, Azerbaijanian, Volga-Finn, and miscellaneous Ost battalions were brought into the OB WEST sector. The original ratio of one German for two Ost battalions was considerably modified to the advantage of the Russian theater. Plans at the end of October were to exchange thirty-two more Ost battalions for twenty-six German battalions of which OB WEST would furnish twenty and Norway and Denmark the remaining six. By May 1944 Seventh Army alone had twenty-three Ost battalions of infantry. This represented about one sixth of the total number of rifle battalions in the Army. In the LXXXIV Corps sector in Normandy and Brittany, out of forty-two rifle battalions, eight were composed of Osttruppen.

Besides recruiting prisoners of war, the Germans added to their military manpower by relaxing physical standards. At the end of 1943 the physical fitness categories were cut down from four to three. The limited service classification was abolished and men were to be graded as fit for service at the front, fit for service in Germany, or totally unfit. Those with relatively minor ear, stomach, and lung ailments were to be sent to the front. Convalescence time was ordered cut down. No accurate picture of the physical state of the German Army in the west is possible. Physical standards were unquestionably much lower than in Allied armies. But

although the majority of troops in the west were considered unfit for combat in Russia, the cause of unfitness was often inadequate training, lack of transport, and lack of equipment rather than the physical condition of the men.

In the whole German Army the average age in 1944 was 31 years, four and a half years older than the average age of the German Western Front Army in 1917 and more than six years older than the U. S. Army in 1943. Of an Army of 4,270,000 in December 1943 more than a million and a half were over 34 years old. In the west the older-age classes as well as a large proportion of the relatively unfit were assigned to the static coastal divisions. Even so, repeated raids were made on the static divisions to sort out their best men for east duty. Eventually these divisions acquired a substantial number of the overage, the very young (classes of 192 and 1926), men with third-degree frostbite, Volksdeutsche (which were used up to 8 percent of division strength), and Osttruppen. The average age of the 709th Division which held the east coast of the Cotentin was thirty-six. The fact that one whole division was almost entirely composed of men suffering from stomach ailments is dramatic, if somewhat misleading, evidence of the lengths to which German leaders went to fill up the ranks of the Army. It is misleading because, in contrast to the static coastal divisions, the offensive divisions (infantry, parachute, armored, and SS) contained excellent personnel. Though relatively new organizations, most seem to have been adequately trained and equipped by the time of the invasion.

Many of the deficiencies of the German Army in the west at the end of 1943 were substantially made up in the first six months of 1944; others were chronic and could at best only be patched over with makeshift measures. The most serious of the latter was the lack of manpower and especially of first-class combat soldiers. It should be remembered, however, that this constituted primarily a strategic weakness. While it affected the strength of the Atlantic Wall defenses both in reducing the numbers and quality of the coastal garrisons, its real importance was not for the battle of the beaches but for the campaign to follow. In naturally strong coastal defenses even a relative handful of second-class troops could give good account of themselves. The drain of the three-front war meant above all that there were no strategic reserves. Losses could not be made up. The divisions in the west could not hope for replacement when they were fought out. The defensive crust could be thickened and spiked and made very formidable indeed, but only at the expense of putting everything forward. The enemy was hollow and he would be shown so in the later phases of OVERLORD.

Rebuilding the Western Defenses

Rundstedt's report of 25 October on the weakness of the western defenses was read by Hitler; his reply was the issuance on 3 November of Fuehrer

Directive No. 51, the second basic order dealing with the west. The order was, in fact, elicited not only by Rundstedt's bill of particulars but by the military reverses that the German armies suffered in the east and south in the course of the year and the growing conviction that the Allies would soon seek a decision in the west. The bitter and costly fighting of the last two and half years against Bolshevism, Hitler wrote, had strained to the utmost German military capacities. That strain had to be borne, but now while the danger in the east remained it was outweighed by the threat from the west where enemy success would strike immediately at the heart of the German war economy. Therefore, there should be no more weakening of the west in favor of other theaters. Threatened portions of the coast line were to be strengthened by the maximum emplacement of coastal artillery, fixed antitank weapons, dug-in tanks, mines, and so on. At the same time, as security against the possibility of any enemy eruption through the coastal crust, the maximum mobile reserves should be created for rapid counterattack.

The Army would submit a plan to equip every panzer and panzer grenadier division with ninety-three Mark IV tanks or assault guns and with strong antitank defenses by the end of December 1943. Reserve panzer divisions should be fully equipped; antitank guns and machine guns were to be delivered in quantity to OB WEST units. It was forbidden to transfer armored units out of the west without Hitler's specific approval. OB WEST would conduct exercises to plan the shift of partly mobile units from portions of the coast not threatened by attack. The Luftwaffe and Navy were ordered to strengthen their defenses. Hitler concluded with an exhortation to maximum effort in preparing for the expected "decisive struggle in the west."

The order against weakening the west could not, or at least would not, be strictly carried out. On 23 November OB WEST was directed to speed up the reorganization of the 60th Panzer Grenadier Division for immediate transfer to the east. On 3 December, 10,000 men of the class of 1925 were ordered pruned from divisions in the west to be replaced with men who had been previously deferred for occupational reasons. At about the same time the number of heavy weapons allotted to the west was reduced in favor of the east. During 1944 the troop transfers would continue.

These continued transfers, however, were in the course of the first half of 1944 more than made up. The failure to adhere to the letter of Directive 51 revealed the continuing pressure of the war in the east, but more striking was the vigor and success with which the rebuilding of the west was undertaken despite that pressure. November 1943 thus marked an important new beginning in German defense preparations in the west. The new beginning was signaled in the same month by the introduction of Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel, the famed desert tactician, into the

western scene. The circumstances of Rommel's selection are somewhat confused. Since the summer of 1943 Rommel had been in northern Italy at the head of Army Group B-the force that moved in when it became clear that the Mussolini partnership was on the point of collapse. Meanwhile, operations in Sicily and against the Allied landings in the south were directed by Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring (OB SUEW). At Hitler's wish, plans had been worked out and orders issued as early as August 1943 for the eventual assumption of command by Rommel over all German forces in Italy. The intention of making Rommel the theater commander in Italy was adhered to until the latter part of October, when, for reasons unknown, Hitler changed his mind and on the 25th appointed Kesselring instead. This choice in effect left Rommel and his staff surplus at a time when Hitler and OKW were seeking new means to strengthen the west against Allied invasion threats. Hitler himself had long been convinced of the desirability of having a high command in reserve and he seized this opportunity. Three days after Kesselring's appointment OKW had entered formal proposals for the constitution of a reserve army group headquarters under Rommel earmarked for commitment wherever the main Allied invasion should come. The new headquarters was formed from the staff of Army Group B less various special staff officers and about half of the enlisted personnel. The reduced headquarters thus formed was re-designated Army Group for Special Employment, subordinated directly to OKW and transferred temporarily to Munich pending the commencement of its new duties.

These were outlined in orders of 6 November. In preparation for his ultimate combat task Rommel was ordered to make tours of inspection of the coastal defenses of the west. He was to inspect first the defenses of Denmark and then those of Artois (roughly the Kanalkueste); thereafter he would on order examine the defense preparations in the Cotentin, the Netherlands, and Brittany. In each case he was directed to prepare operational studies for the employment of forces in defense and counterattack. He would examine the mobility, concentration, and combat readiness of all troops, but especially of the reserves. He would determine what units might be drawn from unthreatened portions of the coast, from reserve or school troops, and from home units to build a counterattacking force. He would make recommendations on the employment of armor in the operational zones.

Hitler seems to have had a number of reasons for assigning this mission to the Rommel staff. He saw it as a means of securing effective personal control of the all-important battle with the main forces of the Western Allies, and probably was responsible for the suggestion that the Rommel staff be committed directly under OKW, bypassing the theater command. Although OKW successfully argued that the proposal was not feasible in view of the smallness of Rommel's staff and the rank and importance of the

theater commanders involved, the later history of the Rommel command in France suggests that the idea was only scotched, not killed. When Rundstedt was informed of the new command, OKW was careful to point out that it was not intended in any way as an abridgment of Rundstedt's authority. On the other hand, it was a recognition of the increasing burden of operational, training, and administrative responsibilities that were heaped on OB WEST in its multiple role as a defense command, an occupying force, a training command, and the base for the V-weapon war on England. The particular selection of Rommel undoubtedly had an additional morale motive. For the long-neglected west garrison troops the appointment of a commander with Rommel's reputation in combat was a stimulant and a dramatization of the new importance assigned to the west. Finally, the reserve command, considered in context with Directive 51, expressed a shift in Hitler's tactical thinking away from exclusive dependence on an impregnable wall defense toward the traditional German reliance on mobile operations. Just how far Hitler intended to depart from his earlier insistence on a pure fortress defense, in which each inch of occupied ground was to be held to the last man and the last bullet, is not clear. It is clear and of considerable importance that this directive tended in that direction and that it was so interpreted by Rundstedt. Rundstedt was thereby encouraged to re-examine ways and means of shaking his army loose from the concrete of the Atlantic Wall, and the question of how the battle for France was to be fought was posed again with a new urgency.

German defense preparations in the west and the German conduct of operations in France can be understood only against the background of disagreement over tactics among the various commanders involved. In terms of abstract doctrine the disagreement was basic and clear-cut: it opposed the notion of linear defense to defense in depth, static warfare to mobile operations, the holding of ground to battles of annihilation, the primary dependence on concrete fortifications to the primary dependence on armored striking power. In practice, however, disagreements were blurred without being reconciled by the fact that few commanders believed in simple dependence on either alternative and that, since doctrine was a the mercy of limited means, it tended to shift in response to the expected availability of resources. It is extremely difficult therefore to line up the commanders on either side of the argument. But, although the line was neither clear nor fixed, it was nonetheless real and significant. Since Hitler and Rundstedt at the top of the hierarchy never arrived at clear-cut decisions themselves as to the basic tactics, shifting and relatively minor differences of emphasis in the lower command resulted in confusion and unworkable compromises particularly in the disposition and training of troops. The discussion of the varying points of view that follows can do no more than suggest the bases of that confusion without attempting to describe in full the stand of any one commander.

The problem of the defense of the west was immensely complex and perhaps insoluble. Hitler at least after the possibility of defeating Russia had faded in 1943, looked forward to the forthcoming struggle in the west as his last chance to gain a decisive victory. On the other hand, his obsession with political prestige and his consequent reluctance to surrender ground voluntarily in order to gain strategic or tactical advantage committed him to a policy of rigid terrain defense not only in France but throughout the occupied territories. This basic conflict over the purpose of defense, whether it was to hold ground in perpetuum or gain military advantage for victory at arms was never decided. Plans were made, for instance, to evacuate Norway and Denmark in case of an invasion of France. OKW recommended in late 1943 that the troops in Italy be withdrawn to the north to save divisions for the main battles to be fought in Russia and France. Hitler himself, as already noted, talked in his Directive 1 of the ruthless evacuation of coastal areas not under threat of attack to feed the main battle area when the time came. But when the time did come the evacuation was not carried out, probably both because Hitler no longer believed it possible and because he could not reconcile himself to the surrender of any portion of his conquests. The policy of rigid defense, meant, in the first instance, an impossible policy of defense for its own sake.

A certain rigidity of defense in the west, however, was required by purely military considerations. It was essential to hold the Allies at arm's length from the critical industrial areas of Germany, and it was highly desirable to take advantage of the strong position afforded by the sea barrier. These military arguments in favor of a stand at the coast line, however, were subject to interpretation, and the rigidity they seemed to dictate was only relative. The decision to build an Atlantic Wall was the initial admission that the elastic defense principles applied so successfully by the Russians in their vast territories could not be adopted in the west and that basically the German armies in the west must stand on a line. There was never any debate over the need for making this line as strong as possible through the construction of a system of permanent and field fortifications. The debate concerned only how the line was to be held: what dependence was to be placed on stopping the enemy at the line itself, and where reserves should be located and how employed.

Hitler believed in 1942 and probably again in 1944 that the line could be made so strong that the enemy landing attempt could be smashed at the water's edge within the first twenty-four hours. Rundstedt concurred that this was the ideal. He pointed out that the experiences of Dieppe and Sicily both confirmed that the enemy's weakest moment was at the time of landing. While still afloat he would be without cover and have reduced fire power. Later reports on the Salerno landings led to the same conclusion

through the observation that any other defensive course was foredoomed to failure. Generalmajor Viktor Marnitz reported that at Salerno the German reserves, although located near the coast (from three to five kilometers inland), had been unable to counterattack across the open terrain under heavy Allied naval artillery fire. Allied air attacks contributed to the difficulties of forming counterattacks. Strong points along the coast had held out well but for the most part the Allies had avoided them, landing between them and infiltrating inland to seize transportation junctions. Allied troops had not been held up by any kind of natural obstacles; on the contrary they had seemed able to take advantage of all kinds of unfavorable terrain. General Marnitz's recommendations were to smash the Allied attack before landing by holding the reserves close up and withholding coastal artillery fire to the last moment. If some troops got ashore they would be forced to spread out by stubborn resistance in a number of small resistance nests. Any of the enemy forces that pierced the coastal defenses should be counterattacked by local reserves after they were beyond the range of naval guns.

Rundstedt in forwarding this report concurred in its contents, but in a later communication he made one significant addition. Smash the enemy in his boats, if possible. If he lands, counterattack immediately with local reserves. But if, despite everything, he still succeeds in getting through the first line of defense, then hold him by fire from positions echeloned in depth long enough to permit counterattack by corps and army reserves. Counterattack by purely local reserves could be considered part of the concept of static defense. Riposte by corps and army reserves introduced the concept of flexible, mobile war, particularly when limited means made it impossible to achieve both an optimum strength on the first line and an adequate pool of reserves.

General der Panzertruppen Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, the armored expert in the west, wanted to push the mobile tactics thus adumbrated to the point of falling back entirely from the coast with all mobile units, leaving only the static defenses to stave off the enemy as long as possible and inflict maximum losses. He wanted to seek a decision in the interior with a massed armored counterattack. The Luftwaffe, he felt, should not be committed in the battle for the beaches but saved to cover the counterattack. Sodenstern agreed, with an interesting variation which he described in reflections jotted down in the summer of 1943. The relative weakness of German forces, he felt, required that they defend the coast only long enough to determine the center of gravity of the enemy attack. Strategic reserves should be assembled on both sides of the Seine northwest of Paris and on the upper Loire. The area between the Seine and Loire would be the battlefield. Since Allied air superiority would make extensive German troop movements impossible, the Allies should be compelled to maneuver into the area chosen for the battle by means of

switch lines contrived to canalize the Allied attack.

The notion of gambling everything on fully mobile defense with massed counterattacks mounted inland was never seriously entertained. Rundstedt seems generally to have conceived of the main battle as taking place in the coastal area. He vacillated chiefly in the reliance which he wanted to put on mobile counterattack within that area. To make such an attack possible, German forces, of course, had to be able to maneuver freely. Salerno and Sicily had shown that armor could not fight successfully within the range of naval artillery. Rundstedt pointed out to OKW that armor therefore could not influence the battle unless German aircraft, especially torpedo planes, could interfere with the firing of Allied warships. In addition, German mobility obviously depended on the quality and quantity of equipment and personnel. In his October report, Rundstedt admitted that the German divisions in the west had neither the men nor the machines to fight in open terrain against an enemy so materially strong as the Allies were sure to be. The conclusion was thus forced that the only hope of redressing Allied superiority lay in taking the maximum advantage of the water barrier. That was how the situation looked in October. After the Hitler directive in the next month, Rundstedt modified his view. If the promise to strengthen the west meant the provision of new troops and more mobile divisions, it might be possible to return to the idea of mass counterattack. He therefore proposed the formation, partly on paper, partly on the ground, of a central reserve. Specifically he suggested earmarking six infantry divisions to be withdrawn after the Allied landings from coastal zones not threatened by attack. Made mobile by vehicles contributed by each of the armies, these divisions would be organized under two corps controlled by an army headquarters. Existing panzer and panzer grenadier reserves would be commanded by a reserve panzer corps and the entire force put under the special army group headquarters that was being formed under Rommel.

There is no question that the Rundstedt plan considerably extended the ideas underlying Directive 51. OKW at once objected to the proposal to withdraw entire divisions from the unthreatened portions of the coast and suggested instead that only regimental Kampfgruppen be pulled out in order not to denude any section of its defenses. More basic objections were raised by Generaloberst Hans von Salmuth, who as commander of the Fifteenth Army defending the coast which the Germans thought most likely to be the scene of the major Allied invasion attempt occupied a key position in the command hierarchy. Salmuth criticized Rundstedt's suggestion as contravening all the hitherto accepted principles of defense in the west. It assumed, he said, that the Allies would break through the cordon defense and would succeed in establishing a bridgehead. If that happened, he believed the Allies pouring ashore unhindered would soon establish a superiority of force that would be tantamount to victory. The central reserves would take too long to assemble; it would be delayed and

partially destroyed by Allied air attack. It was probable therefore that it could never be committed in mass and that late and piecemeal commitment would be ineffective. All reserves, Salmuth believed, should be held as close as possible to the coast and should be under army control. The main objection to Salmuth's argument, as Rundstedt pointed out in reply, was that it relied too much on a correct guess as to where the Allies would strike. For Salmuth this was not a very grave objection since he was convinced that the Allies would make their main attack in his sector. Rundstedt agreed that the likelihood existed, but pointed out that it was by no means a certainty.

To Salmuth's argument that the central reserves could not be assembled and committed fast enough to be of use in a decisive mass counterattack, Rundstedt made no reply. His continued advocacy of such a reserve implied a belief that if victory was to be won the difficulties had to be overcome, though precisely how was never quite clear. Rundstedt's conviction, shared by most of the commanders in the West, was that no matter how strong the Atlantic Wall was made it could be broken. The only relevant questions were what dependence to put on the wall and how to divide the available forces between local and central reserves. The Nineteenth Army commander, Sodenstern, argued that the impossibility of establishing an unbreakable cordon defense vitiated the whole concept of the Atlantic Wall since a break-through anywhere would make all the fortifications useless. Rundstedt maintained that a rigid defense in a series of strong points held to the last could so splinter and weaken the enemy that his penetrations could easily be cleaned up and the whole invasion attempt thus be defeated before the enemy's superior material force could be concentrated and gain momentum. As far as the troops defending the coastal strong points were concerned, there should be no withdrawal. Each strong point should be fought separately. But this kind of resistance would only soften up the enemy for the decisive counterattacks. To be decisive they must be mounted in force. "No dispersion," said Rundstedt, "no piecemeal commitment and no thin water soup" Divisions should be committed intact to hit the flanks of the enemy penetrations.

General der Artillerie Erich Marcks, commander of LXXXIV Corps in Normandy, was persuaded by the weakness of his forces to embrace the same tactics. He told an inspecting officer from OKW in January 1944 that even a doubling of his present troop strength would make possible only a thin screen at the coast which could still be torn at any point by the enemy. Instead of a wall defense, he therefore proposed the construction of numerous small field fortifications with some depth whose mission was not to stop the enemy but to split the attacking forces and gain time for the bringing up of German reserves. He felt that a corps reserve of armor and mobile infantry could be built up behind the coast but near enough to be committed within twenty-four hours.

OKW generally remained skeptical whether, in view of Allied superiority in the air and the limited mobility of German units, large-scale counterattacks could be mounted. But, on the whole, Jodl and his staff concurred that depth of defense was desirable. In response to repeated pleas by Rundstedt in the summer of 1943 OKW authorized the construction, if practicable, of a secondary position still within the coastal zone. In June 1943 the Commander in Chief West ordered local commanders to reconnoiter rear areas for suitable locations for heavy weapons in accordance with their own estimate of the situation and enemy intentions. He also suggested that prepared positions for antitank guns and machine guns would be of considerable importance in delaying the enemy troops that might break through the first line of defense. At the moment there was little possibility of actually starting construction. Nothing was started until the end of October, when Rundstedt ordered further reconnaissance by corps and armies and the beginning of field construction. The secondary position was to be built with maximum flexibility to include prepared switch lines and to take in already established airfields, ammunition dumps, and shelters for reserves and staffs. Antiaircraft guns would be emplaced for ground firing and all-around defense. Some 31,000 French laborers were initially used on the job.

At the end of 1943 the discussion of defense tactics had produced no unequivocal decision. Rundstedt's own orders with their dual emphasis on holding coastal positions to the last and at the same time building mobile reserves, while in one sense perfectly consistent, were nevertheless subject to interpretation as supporting either primarily static or primarily mobile defense. Since the practical problem was the allocation of limited time and resources, insufficient for the full development of both fortifications and troop build-up and training, Rundstedt's pronouncements actually straddled the issue. In the closing months of the year the doctrine of decision by counterattack in force, though qualified and not unchallenged, seemed to have achieved general acceptance in OB WEST and the apparent endorsement of OKW and Hitler. The outline of the battle as sketched by the chief of staff of OB WEST, General Blumentritt, envisaged the fighting in four main stages: first, the fire fight while the Allies were still on the water; second, the struggle on the beaches; third, the battles in the coastal zone between German local reserves and Allied units that had penetrated the main line of resistance; and, finally, the decisive beachhead battle in which OB WEST would commit large motorized units to throw the Allies back into the sea.

In accord with this outline, Rundstedt ordered a winter construction program to step up work on the fortifications with special attention to casemating coastal artillery and antitank guns; at the same time, as already noted, he began planning for the formation of the central reserve. But the

latter plans would go awry chiefly because the man slated to command the reserves and conduct the battle against the invaders was to be Field Marshal Rommel. There was scarcely a general in the German Army less in sympathy with the grandiose scheme of massed counterattacks under the bomb sights of virtually unopposed Allied air fleets. Thus at the moment when the concept of mobile defense in the west seemed to enjoy highest favor, it was in reality on the point of most complete repudiation by a commander convinced that it was a dangerous fantasy.