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THE INVASION OF FRANCE
MAY - JUNE 1940

INTRODUCTION

25 June 1940 was the blackest day in modern history for the people of France. This day marked the end of hostilities between the Republic of France and the Axis Powers consisting of Germany and Italy; an end accomplished in forty-five days of lightning warfare by the Nazi Juggernauts' complete defeat of the once glorious French Army.

This monograph deals with the events leading up to this sadly remembered day, 25 June 1940; specifically: The Invasion of France, May - June 1940.

In order to orient the reader it is deemed advisable to mention briefly the events in Europe leading up to 10 June 1940 when the German Army attacked and began its invasion of France. This orientation must of necessity be rather brief as a complete and detailed resume would be a history text in itself.

In 1933 after a long series of plots and much political intrigue, Adolf Hitler, the former sub-corporal of the German Army, became supreme dictator of the German Reich. (1) Historians have argued pro and con as to Hitler's sanity but one thing is certain. He was ruthless and utterly without scruples, and he had but one goal, German domination of the world. As witness to this statement are several quotes from speeches Hitler made at various times: "My purpose is the

(1) A-1, p. 62

subjugation of all races and to set up our master race to rule the world Empires are made by sword..... by theft and robbery..... by brute force..... I have no conscience We have no scruples..... Promises, agreements, treaties are sheer stupidity..... they are made to be broken..... There is no such thing as an army to preserve peace, but only for the victorious conduct of war..... We may fail, but if we do, we shall drag the world down with us..... a world in flames." (2) Led by a dictator guided by these doctrines, the German nation moved rapidly forward through a series of events which were to soon engulf the entire world in "Total War".

The Nazi machine proceeded on a reign of terror within Germany to destroy all opponents to its domination of the German people. This was paralleled by the building up of a powerful army and the gearing of the entire nation to rearmament and preparation for war. In the first four years of the Nazi rule Germany spent 12 billion 5 hundred million dollars on war armaments. (3)

Germany's first move came on 8 March 1936. On this day, in direct violation of the Locarno Treaty, Hitler sent his armies marching to occupy the demilitarized Rhineland area. These armies were neither well enough equipped nor trained to face a war with France and had orders to withdraw if opposed. This bluff worked and the first step of German domination of

(2) Direct Quote A-1, p. 62-63; (3) A-1, p. 71

Europe was complete. A characteristic of the German method of expansion was to use every means to gain her ends without resort to war--at least until she herself was ready for it.

Austria was the first country of Europe to fall under the Germans. After a series of broken treaties, broken promises, and internal political intrigues engineered from Berlin, German troops crossed the Austrian frontier unopposed and a puppet government was set up to be guided by Berlin. This happened in March 1938. (4)

Czechoslovakia followed in March 1939 as the second European nation to fall under German domination. This fall of the Czechs was preceded by the so-called Munich Pact in which Great Britian and France allowed Germany to make certain demands on the Czechs regarding the Sudetinland. These and similar demands were conceded by the Allies in a futile effort to maintain peace in the world.

The fuze was already fixed in the European "powder keg". On 1 September 1939 the match was applied. On this date, without warning and without a formal declaration of war, the German Blitzkreig struck at Poland. (5) This invasion was in direct violation of the Ten-Year Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and Poland and was strictly in keeping with the old German custom of tearing up treaties as "scraps of paper". (6) Great Britian and France declared war on Germany, thus upholding their treaty with Poland. The Allies were un-

(4) A-1, p. 104; (5) A-1, p. 120; (6) A-1, p. 120

able to bring force to bear in time to be of material aid to the stricken country, and in October Poland fell after only thirty-five days of fighting. (7)

Germany followed the conquest of Poland with invasions of both Denmark and Norway. This in the face of a ten-year non-aggression pact with Denmark and a statement of strict neutrality made by the Scandinavian countries only a few weeks previously.

This introduction has of necessity been brief. Details have been left purposely incomplete, but it brings us up to the general political situation at the time of the Invasion of France 10 May 1940: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, and Norway are under "the heel of the Nazis". (See Map A) France and Great Britain are in a state of war with Germany. However, outside of minor patrol action along the Franco-German frontier and the minor participation of Allied Troops in the Scandinavian theater, no major engagements have been fought between Germany and the Allies since the declaration of war 1 September 1940.

Much has been written on the invasion and subsequent fall of France in 1940 and in these writings there have been many explanations given for the Germans phenomenal success. Most of these so-called explanations dwell at length on the internal political situation in France and attribute a considerable part of the debacle to intrigue and political manipulations within France itself. While certain of these

(7) A-1, p. 125

allegations may be true, no attempt will be made in this monograph to evaluate political considerations, and the material covered will be strictly military in nature. The military operations during the period 10 May to 25 June 1940 offer much opportunity for discussion and there is much to be gained in military lessons and knowledge from a careful perusal of the material available. With these thoughts in mind, let us turn our attention to the facts at hand.

GENERAL SITUATION PRIOR TO 10 MAY 1940

The declaration of war on Germany by the Allies caused a great wave of controversial discussion amongst experts and "self-styled experts" of military science. The reason behind these arguments were the so-called impregnable defensive lines which both France and Germany had built along their common border. Each country was placed about in the same position as two little boys who run home after becoming angry at one another and lock the door. Then they both stand inside the house and hurl dire threats at each other, each knowing that the other cannot come through the locked door. This was the sort of stalemate which appeared imminent between France and Germany.

The French had their Maginot Line (see Map B) extending from the Swiss to the Belgium borders along the Franco-German frontier. This was an extensive line of subterranean fortifications complete not only with strong defensive works and extensive armaments but also with underground barracks for troops manning the line.

The line did not completely cover the French frontiers, only that portion which faced Germany. The line was not continued along the Swiss border because it was believed by French military experts that the rugged Alps Mountains were enough protection on that frontier. Another factor was the neutrality of the Swiss; a neutrality which had never been violated. Along the Belgium frontier was a string of lesser fortifications known as the "Little Maginot Line". (See Map B) (8) Because of political consideration for the Belgian Government, which emphasized repeatedly its complete neutrality towards all European countries, (9) this line was never made as strong as the line facing Germany. (10)

Along their side of the Franco-German frontier on the east side of the Rhine River, the Germans had built a similar line of fortifications. They called their positions the Siegfried Line and having no particular thought of their neighbors' feelings, extended it to the North Sea. (11) (See Map B)

Both opposing lines were occupied at the beginning of hostilities with the French and British on the Maginot Line, the Germans behind their Siegfried Line and a "No-Man's Land" of varying widths between.

It appears to have been the strategic plan of the Allies to establish an effective sea blockade and to stalemate the war in the west thereby forcing Germany to attack or risk being starved out of the war. At least that seems to have been

(8) A-2, p. 8; (9) A-1, p. 193; (10) A-2, p. 8;
(11) A-1, p. 193

the plan carried out during the early months of the war.

(12)

From the beginning of the war in September 1939 until 10 May 1940 this stalemate was maintained along the Western front. A small amount of active patrolling and a number of artillery duels were the only means used to relieve the monotony of defensive warfare.

The only real action during this entire period took place on the third day of the war. On 6 September French troops crossed the Franco-German border and in less than a week fought their way into the outskirts of Saarbruecken. This action caused the entire front to flare up and for a time it seemed as though a major engagement was in the offing. Soon, however, for reasons never fully explained, the French withdrew suddenly from German soil and remained content behind their fortifications. (13)

People all over the world started referring to it as a "phoney war" (14) and in France itself there was much discontent among the populace because of the large number of men being held in arms and apparently doing nothing towards winning the war.

This period of inactivity should have provided a wonderful opportunity for both Germany and the Allies to strengthen their defenses and raise the state of training of their troops. It was an especially good opportunity for France to gear her peacetime industry to wartime production. It is interesting

(12) A-2, p. 7; (13) A-1, p. 194-195; (14) A-1, p. 196

at this time to note and consider, in light of later developments, what use each side made of this opportunity.

The French evidently did little or nothing in any direction during this period and the morale of the troops suffered through inactivity. (15) The French were not too anxious to go to war in the first place and the poor spirit of the troops weakened with the inactivity. They complained about the absence of drill or other forms of activity behind the lines, and the combination of inactivity and military discipline raised havoc with morale. (16) In addition to these personnel troubles, the French Army was faced with political bickerings on the Home front which delayed production of necessary materiel.

It would seem as if the Allies did not realize how serious the situation really was, and it is probable that they were little better prepared to go into battle in May 1940 than they were in September 1939. (17)

The German actions, meanwhile, were exactly opposite those of the French. They made every possible use of their time to improve their army both as to state of training and equipment. Equipment and personnel of units which had suffered losses during the Polish Campaign were brought up to strength, and training in preliminary movements for the invasion was continuous. (18) Members of the various units were given complete information as to the nature of the obstacles which would confront them on the borders of Luxembourg and Belgium. (19)

(15) A-39, p. 3 & 6, A-2, p. 12; (16) A-30, p. 3; (17) A-2, p. 12
(18) A-2, p. 12; (19) A-9, p. 6-7

The Germans realized, also, the value of using combat aviation to supplement artillery in a fast moving situation where motorized and mechanized units were employed. Realizing this they made detailed plans for air-ground cooperation.

(20)

It is known that for six months during this lull the Germans spent their time training troops to perform their various tasks to perfection. It has been reported by reliable observers that this preparatory training involved so great a degree of psychological tension for the troops that the order to cross the border brought them a sense of relief.

(21) During this period the French reported two serious alerts on 12 November and 15 January which were probably the result of "dress rehearsals" for the invasion. (22)

In April 1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. This action served for a time to relieve the tension for it appeared as though things were starting to happen. However, little effect was felt on the Western front, because only three light French divisions were sent to Norway from French soil. The British sent troops from England but did not remove any from the British Expeditionary Force serving in France. (23)

According to reliable information received at Allied Headquarters beginning 15 April, an offensive by Germany on the Western Front seemed definite. This information increased until by 3 May a blow against Belgium and Holland appeared imminent.

(24)

(20) A-9, p. 8-9; (21) A-9, p. 4; (22) A-2, p. 12;
(23) A-2, p. 12; (24) A-1, p. 12

COMPARISON OF ALLIED AND GERMAN FORCES ON THE WESTERN FRONT
AS OF 10 MAY 1940

Before attempting to discuss any military operation, it is well to consider the means available to both forces at the onset of hostilities. Only after those means have been considered is it possible to make an intelligent study of the use of the means available and the final result, and thus arrive at a logical conclusion.

The student of military history finds himself in a peculiar situation when attempting to trace the course of the Battle of France and all its ramifications. The very nature of the action has resulted in diverse opinions as to detailed action. Many valuable records were lost because of the complete defeat and wide scattering of the Allied Forces in France. This is especially true as regards the strength and organizations of opposing forces. Most writers on this subject have had a tendency to exaggerate or belittle facts depending on from which point of view they were writing. This writer makes no claims as to the accuracy of figures down to the last man or weapon, however, the figures as we will now consider them are the result of a comparison of several sources. With this in mind let us compare the Allied and German forces as they were on 10 May 1940.

The total Allied forces in France at the time of the Invasion consisted of approximately 104 French divisions, (25), 13 British divisions, (26) and one Polish division. (27) In addition to these troops the French had 14 divisions

(25) A-10, p. 2; (26) A-5, p. 9; (27) A-5, p. 7

scattered throughout her colonial possessions and in Norway. (28) Of these we will not take further notice as they were never active in the campaign under consideration. We will not consider the 7 French divisions on the southwest front either. These divisions were watching Italy, who although not actively engaged in the war at this time, was allied to Germany. (29) These figures give the Allied Forces a total of 111 divisions available on the northeastern front where the action covered in this monograph took place. This figure does not include the 21 divisions of the Belgians or the 9 divisions of the Dutch. (30)

In as much as the actions of the Belgians and Dutch had only an indirect bearing on the campaign in France they will be given no further consideration. It might be said that had the Belgians and Dutch held their lines, the position of France might have been less precarious, however, that is beside the point as any nation must be prepared to defend her borders. For that reason the actions of the Belgians and Dutch are considered as having only an indirect bearing on the final result.

Let us now consider the Allied Forces more closely and see what types of troops were contained within the 111 divisions and what their state of training and equipment was.

The 13 British divisions consisted of 5 active infantry divisions who were well equipped and trained; 5 territorial divisions (corresponding to our National Guard) who were fairly

(28) A-2, p. 3; (29) A-2, p. 3; (30) A-5, p. 10

well equipped but only partially trained; (31) and three training divisions which were short of essential artillery and administrative units and which had not completed their training. (32) The British troops were known as the British Expeditionary Force and were commanded by General Lord Gort.

(33)

The French Forces were divided approximately as follows: 29 active infantry divisions which were regular army units brought up to strength; 20 series "A" reserve divisions; 16 series "B" reserve divisions; 13 fortress divisions; 3 armored divisions; 3 light mechanized divisions; 5 light cavalry divisions; GHQ reserve of 5 divisions; and 34 tank battalions which could be attached as needed. (34)

The equipment and training of these French divisions varied from superb to mean. The active divisions were well trained and well equipped according to the French tables of organization. More mention of that will be made later. The series "A" reserve was composed of men from 24 to 40 years of age and the series "B" reserve of men from 40 to 48 years of age. Both types of reserves had undergone from one to two years of active service plus short periods of refresher training. (35) The equipment of these divisions was not complete. The fortress divisions were in the process of reorganization and lacked heavy artillery components and services. The armored divisions were very new and lacked training. They were composed of 2 battalions each of medium and light tanks

(31) A-10, p. 7, A-2, p. 3; (32) A-5, p. 9;
(33) A-2, p. 1; (34) A-2, p. 3-4; (35) A-5, p. 5-6

making a total of 160 tanks per division. The light mechanized divisions were converted cavalry units equipped with light tanks. The light cavalry units were approximately one-third mechanized with light tanks and two-thirds horse cavalry. (36)

The air forces of the Allies consisted of approximately 710 modern pursuit planes; 31 day-bombing planes; 224 miscellaneous day and night bombers, mostly obsolete; and 300 French plus an unknown quantity of BEF observation planes. In addition they could count on some reinforcement from the RAF stationed in England. (37)

In considering German strength it is of value to note the difference in strength as reported from various sources with the French estimate of that strength.

The Germans had between 6 and 7 million men mobilized by May 1940. (38) Because of the flexibility of German organization and the tendency to shift units from one headquarters to another an exact estimate as to number of divisions is difficult. One reliable source says 240 divisions plus service and supporting troops. (39) These were divided into 200 or more infantry, 10 or 12 armored and mechanized, and 20 or more special divisions (Mountain, Cavalry, etc.). Of these 240 it is estimated that Germany had about 150 divisions available on or near the Western Front on 10 May 1940.

The French estimated German strength at 180 infantry divisions and 10 armored divisions. They also estimated that between 110 and 127 were on the Western Front. (40) One

(36) A-2, P. 3-4; (37) A-2, p. 4; (38) A-2, p. 5;
(39) A-2, p. 5, A-5, p. 14; (40) A-10, p. 12

German source placed the figure at 190 infantry and 10 armored divisions. (41)

As for air force, the Germans had approximately 9000 combat planes available. (42) These were all of modern design and included a high percentage of dive-bombers. The French estimate of enemy air-strength was 3,500 bombers and 1,500 pursuit planes or a total of 5,000 of all types. (43)

All the German units were well trained and many had had combat experience in Poland. Their combat equipment was complete and was nearly all new. It must be recalled at this point that Germany was forced by the Treaty of Versailles to scrap her armament, thus when the Nazis started to rearm, they had all new equipment for their armies. Another important factor was that much of Germany's armament had been battle-tested during the Spanish Civil War before being put in quantity production.

Up to this point we have discussed the number of divisions and general comments about organization and equipment. Let us dwell for a short time on some specific comparisons between the two forces.

The French infantry division contained 2549 more men than a similar type of German division. However, the firepower of the French unit was considerably less, especially in infantry mortars and howitzers. The Germans evidently placed great faith in mortars and had 81 light and 51 heavy mortars per division as against 29 light and 24 heavy in the French division.

(41) A-10, p. 39; (42) A-2, p. 5; (43) A-10, p. 13

The French, on the other hand, had a top-heavy advantage in number of machine guns. French figures were 360 and 180 heavy as against 342 light and 100 heavy machine guns in a German division. Artillery was relatively equal except that German artillery was much newer and had better transport.

(44)

Especially significant in a comparison of strength is the relative numbers of tanks and anti-tank guns.

The Germans who had used tanks with brilliant success in their Polish "Blitzkrieg" realized the importance of anti-tank defense for their infantry units. Each division was equipped with 72 AT guns of the latest design and very mobile. On the other hand the French had good AT guns and their T/O called for 71 per division. The only trouble with the French was that production was not up to the point where it could provide enough guns to fill that T/O. When these weapons finally started to reach front line units it was a case of "too little--too late".

(45) General Eon of the French Army estimated in a book written after the war that if the guns available at the time on the Sedan front were emplaced according to French training manuals, there was one and a fraction AT guns per mile of front.

(46)

The situation as regards armor was about the same as with AT guns. The French tanks generally compared favorably with German armored vehicles but again it was a case of great numerical superiority for the Germans. A German armored division

(44) A-2, p. 6; (45) A-2, p. 6, A-10, p. 7;
(46) A-6, p. 27

contained 416 tanks of which approximately three-fourths were light. Compare this figure with the 160 tanks of the French armored division and one can easily see that there was very little comparison in fire-power between the two organizations. The infantry components of the two divisions were relatively equal both as to number and transportation. (47)

The exact degree of motorization of the French units is not known but it was considerably less because of the French reliance on their railroad system.

As to the disposition of these forces on the eve of battle, let us turn to Map B. No attempt is made here to breakdown the armies into divisions. For purposes of study the armies as shown on the map can be assumed nearly equal in size.

COMPARISON OF ALLIED DEFENSIVE PLANS AND GERMAN OFFENSIVE PLANS

Allied and German plans for action along the Western front were diametrically opposed. The Germans had their Siegfried Line guarding their frontier, but they considered this only a protective line which could be held by a relatively weak force while their main bulk of forces was engaged in offensive war elsewhere. The French on the other hand looked to their Maginot Line as a strictly defensive position from which they could win the war by defensive action alone.

The allied strategic plan seems to have been to fight a completely defensive war and to win that war by starving Germany to her knees. To implement this strategic plan they

(47) A-2, p. 6

counted on the strong defenses of the Maginot Line to force a stalemate between the opposing military forces while the British sea-blockade cut off German supplies. (48) This plan might have had a chance for success except for one important factor. That factor was the neutrality of Belgium and Holland. Because of this neutrality and certain other political considerations, the Maginot Line was never completed along the Franco-Belgian border. This left a weak link in the Allied defensive lines. (See Map B) Also, this same neutrality prevented close cooperation between the Allies and Belgium-Holland for the planning of strong defensive action in case of an invasion. (49)

At the beginning of hostilities in September 1939 there appeared to be three courses of action open to Germany as her next step toward World domination:

1. An offensive on the Northeastern French front, west of the Rhine.
2. Intervention in Southeastern Europe.
3. An attack on France through Switzerland, with or without aid from Italy. (50)

There was nothing to indicate which course of action Germany would choose. However, any doubt was soon erased as Germany started moving troops west. By early November she had sufficient troops massed west of the Rhine to make an attack generally along the line Holland--Belgium--Luxembourg. All these movements were general in nature and there was no

(48) A-2, p. 7; (49) A-2, p. 9; (50) A-2, p. 8

indication that preparations were being made for an assault of the Maginot Line.

An estimate of the situation made by French G-2 seemed to indicate one of two possibilities for German action:

1. The Germans might attack Belgium and Holland and thus outflank the Maginot line from the north and conquer bases from which to attack England.

2. The Germans might attempt a similar operation through Holland alone. The advantage of this plan being the possibility of securing bases without British and French intervention necessarily taking place. (51)

It is interesting to note that the Allies believed Germany's main effort would be to secure bases to attack England. No apparent serious thought was given the possibility of a German assault on France itself.

Basing their decision on this G-2 estimate, the Allies had only two logical choices:

1. Remain in their present positions (see Map B) and abandon Belgium and Holland; or

2. Move up to support the low countries. (52)

In comparing the advantages of the two courses of action we must keep in mind the Allied belief that Great Britain was the threatened country rather than France. With this thought in mind, the disadvantages of the first plan are apparent. Abandonment of the low countries would give channel ports facing England to Germany with very little difficulty. The possession of such ports would make England's position pre-

(51) A-10, p. 23; (52) A-2, p. 8

carious indeed and would also increase the difficulties of enforcing the sea-blockade. Further, this plan would not make any use of the 20 Belgian and 9 Dutch divisions to bolster the Allied cause. The only advantage to the plan would be that any future invasion of France could be defended from the prepared positions on the Maginot--Little Maginot Line.

The main disadvantage of the second plan was the neutrality of the lowlands which made impossible any coordinated plans of defense. However, cooperation became better with Belgium after an alert in November 1939, which was probably caused by a German rehearsal of their movements.

After lengthy discussions, the Allies decided to adopt the second plan and made preparations to implement it. Remember at this time that no positive action could be taken to reinforce the Belgian lines with Allied troops because of Belgium's neutrality. The plan as finally adopted could only be carried out after the German invasion started and Belgium requested Allied aid.

General Gamelin, Commander-in-Chief of the land forces, studied several plans before he finally adopted the Dyle River line as the best location for his defensive line. The Belgian first line of defense was along the Albert Canal to Liege and down to the Belgian Ardennes, but General Gamelin deemed it inadvisable to attempt to reinforce this line. Another plan contemplated and later discarded was a defense line along the Escout River. (53)

(53) A-2, p. 9

Let us at this point refer to Map C and study the final Allied plan in detail:

1. The combined Franco-British line would pivot on Revin and the left of the line move north.
2. The Ninth French Army would hold a line along the Meuse River south of Namur.
3. The First French Army would center on Gembloux.
4. General Lord Gort's BEF would hold along the River Dyle.
5. The Belgian Army would extend the line from Louvain to Antwerp which was a fortified position.
6. The Seventh French Army, held in reserve, would be ready to support the extreme left of the formation.

As a follow-up to this plan, General Gamelin planned to reinforce the main Belgian line from the Dyle positions if circumstances deemed this advisable. (54)

While the Allies were planning defensive moves, the German High Command was equally as busy planning an offense. In their planning the Germans also took into account the fortifications of the Maginot Line. They finally decided that a frontal assault against these positions would be too costly and the wide frontage would scatter their forces over too large an area. After lengthy discussion they narrowed their possible courses of action down to two:

1. A long encircling movement through Belgium and then south around Paris. The biggest disadvantage to this plan is that the drive would push the Allies together and resistance

(54) A-2, p. 10

would increase as the pressure was increased. (55)

2. A drive through the Ardennes Forest to hit the hinge of the Maginot--Little Maginot Lines. From here the drive would be toward the sea thereby splitting the Allied Forces. The biggest disadvantage to this plan was the risk of counter-attack against the flanks of the greatly extended spearhead. (56) There were two great advantages to this plan and they were the deciding factors in the adoption of it. The first advantage was that the area behind the Ardennes was well suited to armored operations and had a minimum of water courses to cross. Secondly great surprise could be gained because of the French belief that the rough terrain of the Ardennes made large scale operations impracticable. At this point it is deemed worthy to quote an article published in the Deutsche Wehr, an authoritative German military journal, "Some years before the present war, a certain French General published a careful and elaborate study in which he embodied his thoughts regarding methods of warfare suited to the border between Germany and Luxembourg and to the southeastern tip of Belgium, which pushes out between France and Luxembourg. After careful analysis, he had reached the conclusion that this region, stretching out on both sides of Charleville and in front of the Meuse, was as nearly unsuited to movement of troops on a large scale as any region could be..... especially.....and in the Forest of Ardennes.....every reason for agreeing with the General's decision..... Realizing this..... German Supreme Command

(55) A-2, p. 10; (56) A-2, p. 16

decided to capitalize upon it in the attack of 10 May 1940. They felt..... that French High Command..... was certain to be taken by surprise." Unquote (57)

The final German plans were simple (see Map D) and depended mainly on mass, mobility, and surprise to achieve their objective.

The plans called for a secondary attack through Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg in an attempt to draw the Allies into a trap and to deceive them as to the location of the main effort. The main attack was to be a penetration with great mass concentrated on a narrow front in the Ardennes area. These attacks were to be launched simultaneously and the proper timing was to be achieved by the longer time necessary to penetrate the difficult terrain of the Ardennes. After breaking through, the spearhead was to advance to the sea with the following troops taking up positions facing south generally along the Somme-Aisne River lines. The next move was to attack north from this line to encircle the Allied forces with the help of the forces moving through Holland and Belgium. After these northern forces were reduced it was planned by the Germans to launch a main attack south from the Somme--Aisne line moving to the east of Paris with the mission of outflanking the Maginot Line and taking it from the rear. At approximately the same time a secondary attack was to be launched south around the west side of Paris. (58)

In order to insure the success of these operations the Germans had done two things. First they had greatly increased

(57) A-9, p. 1-2; (58) A-2, p. 11

the fire-power of their infantry by adding a great number of mortars, infantry howitzers and anti-tank weapons. Secondly they had motorized or mechanized a large part of their troops so they could exploit the breakthrough and maintain the momentum of the attack. One authoritative German source stated that 45,000 motor vehicles took part in this action. This figure is probably exaggerated but it is known that the figure was tremendous. (59)

As far as tactics went, the Germans planned to make the fullest possible use of the principle of mass in the attack. This was accomplished by having the von Kleist group, consisting of 5 armored divisions and 3 motorized divisions, spearhead the attack followed by the 12th and 16th Armies abreast with the 9th and 2d Armies abreast behind these two. As can be seen from such a formation, there was tremendous mass concentrated on a very narrow front. One other thing done to increase the fire-power of the armies was the use of dive-bombers to act as super-long-range artillery when the speed of the attack made close artillery support difficult.

Army Group B under Colonel General von Bock was to make the attack through the Low Countries and Colonel General von Rundstedt was in command of Army Group A which consisted of the forces already discussed and was to make the main penetration and subsequent drive to the sea.

BLITZKRIEG IN ACTION--THE GERMAN DRIVE TO THE SEA AND
THE SUBSEQUENT BATTLE OF FLANDERS

Note.--For easy reference and to insure an exact under-

(59) A-9, p. 4

standing of the Allied and German maneuvers it is suggested that Map E be followed closely in conjunction with the following resume.

The German forces attacked according to schedule and von Bock's Army Group B moved forward early in the morning 10 May 1940 across the borders of Belgium and Holland. (60) Fifth Columnists who were neither Germans infiltrated into the Allied countries or Allied citizens turned traitor proved invaluable to the German military forces by assisting parachute troops dropped behind the lines to seize bridges and disrupt communications.

Within an hour of the initial attack, King Leopold of Belgium requested aid from the Allies and immediately the pivot of the Allied line to the North and East was started. (61) Throughout the campaign Allied Headquarters underestimated the speed of movement of their attackers. A good example of this was the initial move by the Allies in which they allowed themselves three days to occupy the new defensive lines. They believed that such a length of time would be ample to properly organize the position before German forces reached the Dyle River line.

One change was made in the original plans and the Seventh French Army was removed from reserve and sent around the Allied left (north) flank northwest of Antwerp in the direction of Breda. The purpose of this change was to help insure the security of the lower Escaut River and to furnish liaison

(60) A-4, p. 43, A-13, p. 2; (61) A-9, p. 18

between the Belgians and the Dutch. This action may have resulted in serious consequences later in the campaign as no other unit was designated to replace the Seventh as reserve for the Allied left flank. (62)

While these maneuvers were being executed by the French and British, the Germans had captured bridges over the Albert Canal and one at Maestricht over the Meuse. The capture of this important bridge at Maestricht enabled the Germans to outflank the main Belgian positions on the Albert Canal.

(63) Faced with the threat of encirclement, the Belgians withdrew during the night 11-12 May to their second line of defense, Antwerp-Louvain. (64)

The French Seventh Army moving up around the Allied left flank reached Breda late on 11 May and by 12 May had reinforced the Dutch line east of Breda.

The remainder of the British and French forces were in the meantime completing their maneuver and late on the afternoon of the 12th, we find the Allies on a line reaching from Antwerp south through Louvain, Wavre, Gembloux, Namur, Givet, Sedan, and down along the Maginot Line. The disposition of troops along this line was as follows: The Belgians held the line from Antwerp to Louvain, generally along the Dyle River; the BEF was on the Belgian right and extended along the Dyle to Wavre; south of the British were the French First, Ninth, and Second Armies in that order with boundaries between armies generally in the vicinity of Namur and Sedan. (65) French Cavalry and mechanized forces were out in front of the line

(62) A-2, p. 10; (63) A-4, p. 43; (64) A-2, p. 13
(65) A-2, p. 13

acting as covering forces.

The main German attack, under von Rundstedt was launched simultaneously with von Bock's and at 0530 10 May von Kleist's mechanized group moved into Luxembourg. The German's relied on the speed of their mechanized units to achieve surprise in the initial stages, and once the enemy was off balance, to maintain this advantage. By late evening of the first day of battle, von Kleist's Group had crossed Luxembourg, passed the Belgian first line of defense and were generally along a line about 60 kilometers from their starting positions of the morning. Even with this swift advance the German Army was 25 kilometers behind the time-table set for it. (66) Forces behind von Kleist's advanced elements completed the mopping up in Luxembourg and by 12 May all of the little country was in German hands. (67)

Next morning the advance was resumed and, although the terrain became more difficult and some resistance was met from French Cavalry units, one German armored division advanced another 40 kilometers and by nightfall was in the vicinity of Bouillon. The close cooperation between the ground and air forces was paying dividends and a large share of the credit for the rapid advance must go to the dive-bombers for their close support. (68)

The Blitzkreig maintained its momentum and by nightfall of 12 May, German troops held the Semois valley as far west as Vress and occupied the crest of the Semois--Meuse ridge

(66) A-2, p. 14; (67) A-13, p. 2; (68) A-2, p. 14, A-32, p.4

overlooking the Meuse River to the south. Fighting was still going on in the area passed through by the spearhead, but as was planned, the armored columns had pushed on at all possible speed and left the mopping-up operations to be done by the armies following.

An interesting conception of the immense forces concentrated on this front can be gotten from a German report that at dark on the 12th, one of the divisions of the motorized column was only then moving out of their initial assembly area east of the Rhine. (69)

As early as the 11th, French GHQ realized that the main effort was being made in the vicinity of Sedan at the hinge of the Allied lines. Orders were issued for three infantry and one armored division to reinforce the threatened portion of the line. In connection with this reinforcement, two points are worthy of note: First is that while nothing definite is known about this reserve, it is very probable that they were to come from the east in rear of the Maginot Line and depended on the railroads for their movement. These railroads were very vulnerable to German air attack and the Germans took every advantage of their opportunity. Secondly, French GHQ evidently underestimated the speed of the German attack because the original order for movement of these reinforcements called for the last group to be in position six days after the order was issued. (70)

(69) A-9, p. 11; (70) A-10, p. 25, A-2, p. 15

As early in the campaign as the morning of 13 May events were taking place along the front which were later to prove to have been the beginning of the end for France. Already, at this early stage of the war, the Dutch army began to disintegrate in the north and the Dutch along with the Seventh French Army were retreating toward Breda. Note--- Dutch forces capitulated 14 May 1940 and their Commander-in-Chief issued an order that fighting was to cease. (71) Further to the south the situation was no better and, although pressure against the British and Belgians remained light, the main German forces moved up into contact with the Allied defensive line all the way from Antwerp to Namur. (72)

South of Namur things were even more critical and here the Fourth German Army under von Kluge established bridgeheads across the Meuse River at Dinant and just to the north. Premier M. Reynaud, in a statement concerning this action, blamed commanders in this area for not blowing the bridges across the Meuse. He stated that this mistake allowed the Germans to establish bridgeheads. (73) It is doubtful whether these mistakes had any appreciable effect on the final outcome. French officers who saw the action stated that the German forces were concentrated in a sector about 5 miles wide. As a preparation, 300 to 400 planes in 3 or 4 waves attacked the sector; then hundreds of tanks attacked followed by motorcyclists with sub-machine guns and infantry in cross-country carriers. Motorized divisions followed these. (74) This breakthrough came in the French Ninth Army area and as a result

(71) A-4, p. 47; (72) A-2, P. 15; (73) A-4, p. 49

(74) A-32, p. 4

General Corap was relieved of his command on 15 May. However, in light of subsequent developments, it would seem as though General Corap were no more to blame than other commanders. In fact this breakthrough was not even the main attack. According to the German plans, the main penetration would be made against the French Second Army which was occupying its peacetime positions around Sedan. As a matter of fact, when the actual penetration was made, it hit at the junction of the Ninth and Second and hit only the left (north) side of the Second and the right (south) side of the Ninth. (75) It was against this sector that the powerful von Rundstedt Group was concentrated. As has been mentioned, von Rundstedt's advance troops under von Kleist had reached and occupied the crest of the Semois-Meuse Ridge late on the 12th. On the morning of 13 May, these forces moved up to the Meuse and after extensive aerial bombardment lasting for four hours, crossings were attempted in several places beginning at 1600 hours. Not all of these crossings were successful, but several bridgeheads were established around the vicinity of Sedan and extended during the night.

Two features of these crossings stand out: von Kleist forced the crossings with his armored divisions and their armored infantry. Had he waited for regular infantry units to come up and establish bridgeheads for his armor, he would have lost the advantage of surprise he had over the French. It was an unorthodox tactical use of armor, but it succeeded by its very boldness. (76) Armored vehicles were used in a direct

(75) A-9, p. 17; (76) A-9, p. 13

fire role to support the crossing. This was the first time they were so used in modern war. (77)

As a result of crossings by von Rundstedt's forces on the south and von Kluge to the north, by the night of 13 May German forces had crossed the Meuse and achieved a partial breakthrough from Dinant to Sedan. The situation was becoming critical for the Allies.

The French High Command was also realizing by this time that the situation was acute. Accordingly, they decided to commit their reserves and attempt to reunite the broken front. General Touchon was placed in command of these troops, but it was apparent at once that the Germans were moving too fast for the French to intercept them and that a better course would be to remain on the south flank of the German advance and prepare to attack. (78) This was precisely in line with what the Germans had anticipated and provided one of the main missions for the four armies following von Kleist's group; to guard against attacks from the flank.

During daylight of 14 May von Kleist's left (south) wing under General Guderian pushed its bridgehead as far as Flize and seized two bridgeheads on the Ardennes Canal; however, their attempts to expand south in the direction of Stonne were stopped by stubborn French resistance.

While the south wing was moving west, von Kleist's right (north) wing was by no means idle. Although General Reinhardt was unable, during the early part of the day, to expand his

(77) A-36, p. 21; (78) A-10, p. 26

bridgehead against the French resistance at Montherme, he finally committed all his available tanks and broke through to Liart 30 kilometers away. (79)

While these events were transpiring along the southern portion of the line, the situation to the north against the Allied line remained unchanged during 14 May although considerable pressure developed on the First French Army in the vicinity of Namur.

Late on the 15th the French First Army and the BEF began a retreat back to the line of the Charleroi Canal. They were hampered considerably by parachute troops who had been dropped behind their lines as well as by the strong frontal pressure maintained by the main German troops. However, in spite of these difficulties, they were able to withdraw without too much confusion. Prior to this retreat and earlier on the 15th, the French were badly defeated in a tank battle near Hannut in front of the French First Army and the front had been broken in many places following this defeat. (80)

To add to the seriousness of the Allied situation, the Ninth Army was in full retreat back to the Sambre and the Dutch had capitulated thus freeing the German 18th Army to join in the action in France and Belgium. (81)

The German breakthrough was nearly complete by this time but the French High Command made one more futile attempt to reunite the front. They withdrew nearly the entire Seventh Army from north of Antwerp and ordered them south to reinforce

(79) A-2, p. 16; (80) A-2, p. 17; (81) A-4, p. 47

the line on the right of the First Army. (82) Also an armored counterattack force consisting of the 1st and 2d Armored Divisions reassembled on the left of the Ninth Army; however, this attempt was doomed to failure because of the disorganization of these divisions. In the meantime General Touchon's forces were having great difficulty assembling because of the uninterrupted bombings of rail lines by the German air force. (83) The Nazi juggernaut continued moving, led by von Kleist's armor and by evening 16 May were as far west as the line Vervins--Rehethel--Stonne. (84)

On the 16th an armored force known as the de Gaulle Groupment, composed of GHQ tank battalions, was added to the Touchon group and on 17 May this group was given an attack mission. They were to attack and seize as their objective the important road junctions from Hirson to Chateau-Porcien. This group attacked as planned but because of lack of equipment and supplies, they made little more than a demonstration on an unoccupied sector of the German south flank.

Events were moving swiftly to a climax and it seems as though 17 May was the date that the front between the Aisne and Sambre Rivers completely collapsed and allowed the German spearhead to take off in its rapid drive to the sea. (85)

There was no longer any doubt in the minds of the French High Command as to whether the Germans would drive to the sea or swing south toward Paris and the rear of the Maginot Line. On the night 16-17 May a document was captured by the French which showed that von Kleist's route of advance was to be

(82) A-10, p. 27; (83) A-10, p. 28; (84) A-2, p. 17
(85) A-13, p. 3

straight west to the sea. (86) This information was of little use to the French because the terrific force of the German drive kept the Allies off balance on nearly every front and the German air force continued pounding rear areas. (87)

It would be well to mention at this point the important part refugees played in adding to the general confusion. These people streamed down into France and Belgium from the battle areas to the north and east. They came by the tens of thousands and clogged roads to an extent unimaginable in their pitiful attempts to find safety for themselves, their families, and their possessions from the horrors of war. That the Germans realized the military value of having these people clog the roads is evidenced by the fact that Fifth Columnists accompanied these lines of refugees to keep them stirred up and German planes bombed and strafed to further add to the general confusion. All of this did nothing to aid the already disorganized Allied communication lines. (88)

The Belgians, the British, and the French First Army continued to fall back and by evening of the 17th they were back to the line Ghent--Ath--Mons--Maubeuge. All efforts to rebuild a front south of Maubeuge failed and the Ninth Army, now commanded by General Giraud, could do nothing to stop the von Kleist spearhead in its march to the sea. On the 18th this armored juggernaut occupied St. Quentin and drove on to Peronne. By 19 May one wing of this group had reached Doullens due north of Amiens; and by the 21st Amiens had fallen and

(86) A-10, p. 40; (87) A-2, p. 18; (88) A-15, p. 19, A-2, p. 18, A-7, p. 100-103

advanced elements had reached Abbeville. (89) The drive to the sea was nearly complete and the Allied forces were split.

To add to the precariousness of the French situation, the passing German armor had seized bridgeheads across the Somme at Peronne and Amiens to be used in the second phase of the campaign when the drive south would take place.

The extreme speed of the German advance seems to have stunned the French High Command and while various plans were formulated to ease the situation, no concentrated effort seems to have been made in any one place. This may have been due to piecemeal commitment of forces during the confusion or else due to the disrupted lines of communications. More than likely a combination of these reasons was responsible plus the fact that the German advance opened up so many critical points it was impossible for the French to mass enough troops at any one place to gain an advantage.

The Sixth Army was formed in the vicinity of Reims and a new Seventh Army was forming farther west. (90) These organizations were made up mostly of reserve troops and possibly some taken from the 2d Group of Armies to the south. This Sixth Army was to attack, along with the de Gaulle armored groupment, north from the vicinity of Laon in an attempt to slow down the enemy advance. This attack was launched on 19 May but was uncoordinated and moved only 10 kilometers before it was forced to fall back by heavy bombardment.

On the 19th the French Government relieved General Gamelin and appointed General Weygand as Supreme Commander. (91)

(89) A-12, p. 4; A-2, p. 19; (90) A-10, p. 29;
(91) A-2, p. 19, A-4, p. 53

If ever a commander was faced with a difficult situation, it was Weygand. Two things were evident from the start: First, the Armies in Flanders were cut off from the rest of France and in danger of encirclement. Secondly, the new front along the Somme and Aisne Rivers must be held to prevent a German drive south.

For General Weygand there was no decision to make as regards his armies north of the Somme. The only course of action they had was to attempt to extricate themselves from the rapidly closing encirclement and rejoin the forces south of the Somme. It was merely a question as to how best attempt this.

A counter-offensive was planned to drive south from Arras. This was planned as a joint British-French operation, but because of the terrific pressure on all sides, it was known to be an extremely difficult operation. At this time the Allied lines were located as follows: The Belgians were on a line through Ghent along the Escaut River to Audenarde; the British lines extended from Audenarde to Maulde; the French First Army was along a line from the vicinity of Valenciennes to Maubeuge; and intermingled units of the First and Ninth Armies were scattered west to Arras. The attack was finally launched on 21 May, but, because of the necessity for reinforcing the line from Arras to the east, only one British infantry regiment and a tank brigade plus supporting artillery finally made the assault. Although the attack was gallantly executed, it was doomed to failure from the start. --Again it was a case of "too little--too late". (92)

(92) A-2, p. 20

As regards his armies south of the Somme and Aisne, General Weygand had two choices: he could either mass all available forces and drive north in an attempt to cut the German corridor and extricate the Flanders Armies; or he could use all available forces to reinforce the Somme-Aisne line and leave the Northern Armies to save themselves as best they could. He did not have enough forces left to do both with any reasonable hope of success.

On 21 May, General Weygand visited the French Headquarters north of the Somme. His plan was for a simultaneous attack by the British-French Forces south from Duvai and Ypres and a French drive north from the Somme. These attacks were doomed to failure because the newly formed Third Group of Armies operating along the Somme and Aisne Rivers was not even able to reduce the German bridgeheads between Peronne and Abbeville, nor were they able to capture any passages across the Somme for the projected attack north to Albert and Bapaume. On 23-24 May, French forces attacked in the Cambrai--Bapaume area and reduced the corridor to 12 miles but could not close it.

(93)

As was mentioned before, German forces reached Abbeville 21 May (94) and completed the entrapment of the Allied armies against the sea. The remaining days of the Battle of Flanders will be dealt with very lightly here as they have very little bearing on the big picture of the Invasion of France. For

(93) A-4, p. 57; (94) A-12, p. 4

practical purposes, the armies entrapped in this area were no longer in a position to influence the final outcome and were now fighting only to save themselves.

The Germans attempted to drive north along the sea to completely encircle the Allied Armies and cut off their escape routes on the sea. That this encirclement did not succeed is due mainly to the bravery of 3000 British and 1000 French defenders who held Calais until 27 May. Of these 4,000 only about 30 escaped but they had held long enough to allow the retreating British and French forces to reach the sea. (95)

At 0400 hours 28 May, the Belgians surrendered. There has been much criticism of the Belgians for this; but their situation was hopeless, and conditions being what they were, it is extremely doubtful whether this surrender made any appreciable difference in the ultimate results.

The British and French continued their retreat and on 29 May the evacuation at Dunkirk was commenced. It is enough to say of this operation that it was one of courage and cooperation and that approximately 340,000 troops were finally evacuated to England. (96)

It has been estimated that France lost 24 infantry divisions, 1 armored division, 2 cavalry divisions, and 3 light mechanized divisions in Flanders. These were either killed or captured. (97)

The Battle of Flanders was over and now the Germans had added Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and that portion of France
(95) A-4, p. 61; (96) A-8, p. 234; (97) A-8, p. 234

north of the Somme-Aisne Rivers to their growing string of occupied countries.

BATTLE OF FRANCE--THE GERMAN DRIVE SOUTH
FROM THE SOMME-AISNE

On 4 June 1940 the outlook for the French Army was any thing but "rosy". According to a French report, there remained to General Weygand, after the debacle in Flanders, only a fraction of the troops he needed to defend France. There were only 43 Infantry divisions, 3 Armored and 3 Cavalry divisions to hold the entire Somme-Aisne line from Longuyon to the sea. (See Map F) To the east of Longuyon, the Maginot Line was held by 17 divisions of series B troops. (98) No evaluation has been made of the combat efficiency of those troops remaining to Weygand, but it is safe to assume that France committed her best troops in the effort to prevent the initial breakthrough at Sedan. If this is true, the remaining forces must have been considerably inferior to those used in Flanders; because we must remember that quite a large percentage of France's original army was composed of Series B Reserves whose age was between 40 and 48 years. (99) The Armored divisions were certainly not in first class condition as they had lost considerable material in action during the breakthrough.

It was obvious to General Weygand from the first that he did not have sufficient troops to properly occupy the Somme-Aisne line in strength enough to defend it. (100) In addition

(98) A-2, p. 23; (99) A-5, p. 6; (100) A-10, p. 32

all French war preparations had been made for a defensive war behind the strong fortifications of the Maginot Line and little thought had been given to the preparation of other defenses within France. This fact alone probably had considerable influence on the final outcome.

Knowing the difficulties his armies faced, General Weygand made plans which would enable him to use his meager forces to the best possible advantage. Knowing the Somme-Aisne line would be thinly held, he prepared what constituted in effect a second line. This was composed of counterattack forces in the sectors of the front line that seemed likely to be broken. These counterattack forces were composed of hastily organized infantry divisions and the remnants of the armored forces.

(101)

Although this front had seen little activity after the Battle of Flanders, the German air force had continued pounding rear areas and lines of communication. This greatly hampered the movements of the French Forces. Some units were from four to five days late moving into position. (102)

For a discussion of the disposition of French Forces, let us refer to Map F. On the extreme left flank one British infantry and part of a British armored division held the line. These were a part of the French Tenth Army, but the composition of the remainder of the Tenth is not known. To the east from Peronne to Coucy was the French Seventh Army with about 7 infantry divisions. The exact strength of the Sixth Army is

(101) A-10, p. 32-33; (102) A-2, p. 23

not known but they occupied the section of the line along the Ailette Canal and the Aisne River from Coucy to Neufchatel. These three armies constituted the Third Group of Armies.

(103) The Fourth Group of Armies composed of the Fourth on the left and the Second on the right occupied that portion of the Aisne line from Neufchatel to the junction with the Maginot Line at Longuyon. As stated before, the Second Group of Armies composed of 17 fortress and series B divisions held the Maginot Line. These then were the thinly spread forces which France had available to oppose the German Blitzkrieg when it started rolling south on 5 June 1940.

As has been discussed earlier in this monograph, the German organization was very flexible and it was customary to attach units to a headquarters and thus make up a larger organization to fit a particular situation. Because of this shifting around of forces, it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly which units comprised the forces along the Somme-Aisne Line. Some Armies which were engaged around Dunkirk on 4 June were found attacking 5 June along the Somme. It is believed that in this case Army Headquarters were moved and units already present along the Somme were attached to them to reform armies. (104) However, in spite of these changes, the approximate disposition of German Forces are shown on Map F. Army Group C still faced the Maginot Line. From Longuyon to Bourg was Army Group A composed of the 16th, 12th, and 2d Armies in that order from left to right. From Bourg to the

(103) A-10, p. 34; (104) A-5, p. 46

sea in order were the 9th, 6th, 18th and 4th Armies comprising Army Group B.

The German plan for attack remained much as it had been prior to the original invasion. (See Map D) These original plans were to be carried out commencing 5 June.

It was planned that on 5 June the secondary attack would be launched by Army Group B with the mission of sweeping south along the coast west of Paris. The main attack was scheduled to start 9 June, four days later, and would consist of a drive south on the east of Paris by Army Group A. The mission of the main attack was to split the French Armies and attack the Maginot line from the rear. Included in the plan were holding attacks on the front of the Maginot line by Army Group C.

(105)

For ease of understanding we will consider these two attacks separately and then discuss the actions of both forces in the closing days of the war.

On 5 June Army Group B under General von Bock attacked along the front from Bourg to the sea and two armored spearheads starting moving south. In his book "An Atlas History of the Second Great War", John F. Horrabin estimates that 4000 tanks were used in this drive. (106) This is obviously a gross exaggeration but it is known that a goodly portion of the entire German armored strength was committed in this attack. It must be recalled at this time that the Germans already held several bridgeheads across the Somme which were

(105) A-2, p. 25; (106) A-4, p. 69

established during the initial drive to the sea.

One of the spearheads moved out through the bridgehead near Quesny and early on the morning of 6 June really started to roll. By midnight of the 7th, this rapidly rolling force had reached Rouen (See Map G) and early the next morning moved out and swung to the Northwest. Late the same day they reached Venettes on the coast. Within this circle the entire left side of the French Tenth Army was trapped and after a few days of mopping up, the Allied troops were forced to surrender. This occurred 13 June at St. Valery en Caux. (107)

The other spearhead of Army Group B's attack struck the left of the Seventh Army near Peronne. The first day, 5 June, this attack made little progress but during the night of 7-8 June the French Seventh was forced to withdraw to a line approximately Montdidier--Noyon. This left a salient in the French lines from Ham to Chauny and it was necessary to withdraw these forces to straighten the line. On 9 June the Germans continued their attack and a serious break in the left of the French Seventh forcing them to withdraw behind the Oise River. (108) Even in retreat the French forces experienced terrific difficulties due to German pressure. German air power bombed bridges and German tank forces outraced the French and seized bridges before the French could use them. Although they were forced to leave a large number of men and a great amount of materiel across the river, dark found the Seventh across the Oise on a line from Creil to Compiègne.

(107) A-5, p. 47; (108) A-2, p. 25

The situation for the French was already desperate and the main attack had not even started.

The beginning of the end of organized French resistance started on the morning of 9 June when General von Rundstedt started his Army Group A forward in the main attack against the Somme-Aisne Line. The main force of the attack came in the Fourth French Army sector.

It was apparent from the start that French defense in this portion of the line depended on their holding the Germans from crossing the Aisne. Once across the Aisne, the Germans would reach the Plains of Champagne which were ideally suited to the German style of armored attack. The next position which offered good anti-tank obstacles to stop the Germans was the Aisne-Marne Canal running through Reims southwest to Conde-Sur-Marne.

When the attack came, General Requin's Fourth Army was able to offer some of the most stubborn resistance the Germans had encountered since the original invasion. However, it was not long before the overwhelming weight of numbers began to turn the tide in Germany's favor. The Fourth Army was composed of 6 infantry divisions plus corps and army troops. The Germans in turn had 6 infantry divisions plus 4 armored divisions of 400 tanks each and later two more armored divisions were added. (109) General Requin had three divisions in the front lines plus one (82d) in reserve on the high ground east of Reims and another (235th Light) protecting the Army's left flank in case

(109) A-43, p. 4

of an attempted envelopment in that direction. All bridges between the Aisne and the Marne were prepared for demolitions and another division (53d) was in position along the Marne River from Conde-Sur-Marne to Vitry-Le-Francois. Also available for his use was an armored group consisting of the 3d Armored division, 7th Light Mechanized division and one tank battalion. These units had been assembled by the Army Group Commander and were located south of Vouziers. These forces were sadly equipped and had only about 150 tanks. In addition a reserve division (3d Motorized) which was supposed to support this armored group had no vehicles and could move only on foot.

The attack was launched at daybreak 9 June and followed a terrific artillery preparation. Although heavy mist made artillery observation very difficult, the numerous German attacks across the Aisne were driven back except for one place, Chateau-Porcien. Here the Germans were able to establish a bridgehead and by late afternoon, it was 5 kilometers deep. To add to the Fourth Army's difficulties, the right flank of the Sixth Army was forced back as far as the Suippe River and the Fourth's left flank was exposed. (110)

To General Requin the situation still was not entirely hopeless and after he received word that the Armored Group was being sent to reinforce him, he made plans to counterattack the next morning (10 June) to reduce the bridgehead.

The sad lack of French air power at this stage is very

(110) A-5, p. 49-50

apparent. Also apparent is the importance of air superiority in any military operation. General Requin said in a report that if he could have had only 15 minutes of air superiority, he could have destroyed the bridges across the Aisne over which tanks could cross. Once the bridges were destroyed, the destruction of German forces already across would have been rather simple. No air power was available.

Meanwhile, difficult as the French position was, the German attack was also in a critical state. Only one bridge (instead of many as planned) was available for the crossing of the armored forces, and even this bridgehead was thinly held as only one division had crossed up to this point. Two plans were open to the Germans: one was the very dangerous plan of converging their entire armored force to cross the one bridgehead and attack in the morning. The other plan was to attack again in the morning with infantry and attempt to secure other crossings. The first and more dangerous plan was adopted and tanks commenced crossing under cover of darkness. (111) During the night the bridgehead was extended and the French defense were penetrated forcing the French to withdraw to the Retourne River. Finally late on the afternoon of 10 June, the German forces were temporarily halted south of the Retourne. This delay was accomplished through the stubborn resistance offered by the Fourth Army and the added strength of the armored group which had come under General Requin's control. However, the armored attack came too late and lacked sufficient strength

(111) A-14, p. 13

to be decisive.

While this action was going on, the right of the Sixth Army was in full retreat toward the Marne, and the complete withdrawal of the Fourth became necessary. (112) It was hoped that the Marne could be held because French forces were holding all bridges and passages across the river. (113)

The time schedule planned by General Requin called for breaking of contact at night and fighting by day until the Marne would be reached on 13 June. Constant German pressure made this a very difficult task to carry out. During all these operations, German Aviation never ceased to support the armored and mechanized columns. French pursuit aviation never once opposed these activities. (114) Refugees became a major problem again and General Requin had this to say concerning the problem: Quote "The highways became useless for all military requirements even to effect liaison. The dissociation of retreating units ended in a now descript rout; there was nothing on the highways except intermingled civilians and military fugitives." Unquote. (115)

At 1000 on 12 June a heavy armored attack (probably 4 divisions) swept down and by noon had reached Chalons. The Fourth Army was practically cut off and, because of the German advances on the left, was not able to offer any substantial resistance. This day marked the end of organized French resistance. Some units were so cut up by German armor that they were actually forced to fight through German units to

(112) A-2, p. 28; (113) A-15, p. 17; (114) A-15, p. 17, A-43, p. 2; (115) A-15, p. 19

retreat to their defensive positions. (116)

From 12 June to the end of the war it is extremely difficult to follow the operations. French Forces were so terribly cut up and scattered that it is impossible to trace any particular unit. The German drive continued generally as planned with side thrusts to destroy existing French Forces.

The Tenth Army, having lost its left wing, retreated southwest toward Rennes; and the Seventh retreating east of Paris had both flanks open as a result of the retreat of the Tenth and Sixth. (117)

The French High Command had two courses open to it and either one would only delay the end:

1. Remain united as far as possible and pivot in retreat on Longuyon, the left flank of the Maginot Line.

2. Abandon the Maginot Line and endeavor to retreat with these entire forces, covering the heart of the country as far as possible. (118)

The later plan was adopted but even this was doomed because two penetrations of the Maginot Line, one in the Saar area 14 June and one in the Colmar sector 15 June, split the Second Group of Armies and disorganized the French even further. Also the armored force which had originally penetrated the Fourth Army in the Champagne area continued its lightning thrust south and reached Belfort on 17 June thus surrounding the Maginot Line troops.

(116) A-43, p. 4; (117) A-2, p. 29; (118) A-10, p. 36

Troops were moved out of Paris 14 June, and to prevent its destruction, Paris was declared an open city. German forces occupied it early on 15 June 1940.

Only three groups of French Forces retained any semblance of organization (see Map H) and even these consisted of intermingled remnants of different armies. The Third Group of Armies contained remnants of the Sixth and Seventh Armies and was retreating toward Limoges. The Fourth Group of Armies containing remnants of the Fourth and Sixth Armies was attempting to hold along the Allier River. The Second Group of Armies (remnants of the Maginot Line troops) were covering the north flank of the Army of the Alps which was engaged with Italy who had entered the war 10 June. (119)

No mention has been made of Italy except that she entered the war 10 June. (120) The only item worthy of note concerning Italy is that hostilities continued after the Franco-German Armistice on 21 June until 25 June when an Armistice could be concluded with Italy. During the time she was in the war Italy was not able to force the Isere River line against the French troops and the Army of the Alps was the only French unit to finish the war intact. (121)

On 16 June the Reynaud Government resigned and Marshal Petain became Premier of France. He requested an immediate armistice and on 21 June French and German delegates met in Compiegne. The papers were signed in the same railway coach as the Armistice of World War I. There was only one difference,

(119) A-10, p. 38; (120) A-14, p. 73; (121) A-10, p. 38

the positions of France and Germany were reversed from what they had been in 1918.

On 25 June the Armistice was signed with Italy and hostilities ceased--

France had fallen! (122)

General Requin estimated the French losses during the war as:

Prisoners: 1,500,000 - 1,600,000

Killed: 200,000

Wounded: 800,000 (123)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A careful study of this campaign brings to light many interesting and important facts. From the standpoint of the student of the science and art of War, this campaign brings the Principles of War very graphically to mind. In spite of what has been written in various newspapers and periodicals, both here and abroad, there was nothing radically new in the German conduct of the war. True, there were several new versions of old machines used and there was a new use of old principles; but was there anything radically new? A careful consideration of events makes the answer to this question an emphatic NO!

The tank and the combat airplane were both products of World War I and both saw action in that war. It is true that the airplanes as used by the Allies and the Germans were

(122) A-13, p. 9; (123) A-43, p. 5, A-37, p. 3

radically improved over those used in World War I. They fly faster and farther, carry bigger loads and more armament; but basically the airplane as used during the campaign under consideration was the same as that plane which first flew at Kittyhawk. The same is true of the tank. In spite of many improvements, it still remains basically a track-laying vehicle capable of carrying armament and the crew to operate it and is so designed as to offer armor protection to that crew.

Much has been written concerning the political considerations of the fall of France. It seems unnecessary to drag in other influences which at the most were only indirect, although they may account in part for the French Army's state of unpreparedness. Purely military causes amply suffice to account for France's defeat. The writer of this monograph does not believe that any but military considerations are especially pertinent nor that they had any appreciable effect on the final outcome. Rather let this be a strictly military study.

The Principles of war are as old as war itself and the basic concepts have changed very little down through the years. True, it is only in relatively modern times that these principles have been defined exactly; but even in ancient times, they were applied.

With these thoughts in mind it is well at this point to consider specific points of the German campaign in France in order to see whether the facts bear out the premise.

The Germans certainly made the best possible use of MASS. One of the best examples in the entire war was the tactical use

of mass during the initial invasion. The von Rundstedt group of armies consisted of the von Kleist armored group leading, followed closely by four armies in column of twos. The initial penetrations of the main attack were made against only two points, Montherme and Sedan, only about 15 miles apart. In other words, the Germans used terrific mass concentrated on a very narrow front. The great depth of the attacking forces made the penetration possible; but more important, this depth insured that, once the penetration had been made, the momentum of the attack could be maintained. Facing this attack were only two French armies, and even then the penetration was over such a narrow frontage that the main attack force hit only the left (north) side of the French 2d and the right (south) side of the French 9th Army lines.

(124)

Even within divisions the principle of mass was followed diligently by the Germans. The German Armored division contained approximately 416 tanks compared with approximately 160 in a comparable French division. The same superiority was evident in Infantry support weapons and anti-tank guns within the German organizations. The German air force was also far superior to the Allies both in numbers and quality of airplanes.

Another important factor must be considered when discussing mass. That factor is type and condition of equipment. The entire equipment of the German Armies was new and had been built

(124) A-9, p. 17

for the express purpose of waging an offensive war of aggression. On the other hand the French, British, Belgian, and Dutch equipment was of varying degrees of modernness. Some of it was very modern but for the most part the Allies equipment was not too much improved over that used during World War I.

The OBJECTIVE of any army in the field is to destroy the enemy. The German High Command never lost sight of this mission. The entire conduct of the war was pointed toward the complete destruction of the Allied Forces. The initial drive to the sea was designed to divide France and make it possible for the Germans to pound the Northern Allied Armies to pieces between two gigantic pincers and at the same time prevent the armies in the south from having any influence on the final outcome in Flanders. In the second phase of the war, the two German drives south again divided Allied Forces and helped complete the destruction. The pursuit during this phase was outstanding. To quote from a reference published by the United States Military Academy in 1945, "The German pursuit that concluded the operations in France will long stand as one of the foremost examples of a pursuit to destruction. It is approached only in scope by Napoleon's pursuit after the Prussian defeat at Jena. Unfortunately, no reliable figures are available as to the French losses from 9th to the 20th of June. From the little that is available, it is clear that the French forces almost entirely melted away, and that the final stages more nearly resembled guerrilla warfare than actual military opera-

tions." Unquote (125) One estimate of losses sustained during this pursuit was made by the Commander of the French Fourth Army who stated that in the last ten days of the war, his army lost 90% of its effectives. (126)

SURPRISE and SECURITY must of necessity be considered simultaneously in this analysis. As has been discussed before, the Germans made their main attack through the difficult terrain of the Ardennes Forest. The French had given rather limited consideration to this area believing that the natural obstacles precluded a main attack through that portion of the line. Too much faith was also given the impregnability of the Maginot Line. As regards these considerations, two very important facts were overlooked by the French High Command. One is that in the light of the means available to an army commander today, an obstacle not properly defended becomes only a hindrance. Second is that no defense is impregnable to a determined enemy willing to pay the price. One thing all observers to this campaign agree on is that the Germans did not hesitate to use men. (127)

Contained within the principle of security should also be the element of preparation. During the lull from the declaration of war in September 1939 until the invasion 10 May 1940, the French made very poor use of their opportunities. This should have been a period of intensive training and re-equipping. Instead the French seemed content to sit behind the Maginot

(125) A-5, p. 59; (126) A-43, p. 4; (127) A-37, p. 2

line and do nothing. The Germans, however, took all possible advantage of this period of waiting to perfect training and to re-equip units needing it.

The Germans took every advantage of the Allied mistakes and continued to exploit their initial success. For instance, when von Kleist reached the Meuse with his armored units, he had two choices. One was to wait until the infantry in the Armees behind him caught up and could establish a bridgehead across the Meuse for his armor. Another choice was to force a crossing with the means available to him at the time.

von Kleist chose the second course of action. Had he waited for infantry units to cross the Meuse, the French would have had ample time to move reserves into position and delay the crossing if not stopping it entirely. By a bold decision, von Kleist was able to out-distance any timetable the French had prepared for possible action to plug gaps in their lines.

COOPERATION between the different arms was superb in the German Army and was of great importance to the final outcome. Of noticeable effect was the use of dive-bombers to supplement artillery for the front line troops and in some cases to provide the only artillery support the troops had when the speed of the advance outdistanced organic artillery. In all branches of the German Army splendid cooperation was evident. This had been achieved through continuous training of units in specialized operations.

Considerable advantage is obtained by the force which is on the OFFENSIVE. This was particularly true in France where

the frontage to be defended was very long. The attacker has a wide choice of points at which he can concentrate his force while the defender, on the other hand, must hold all points of a long line and rely on reserves reaching a threatened point in time to reinforce that sector. Because of these reasons, the attacker is able to seize and maintain the initiative. In addition, when the action is on a broad front, the attacker can choose the terrain over which he wishes to fight. This is especially true of the determined attacker who is willing to pay the price of breaking the defensive line at the point behind which lies the terrain over which he desires to fight. The Germans were willing to pay the price and for this reason were able to choose the terrain generally along the Somme and Aisne Rivers for their main drive. This terrain was best suited for the type of warfare waged by the Germans. Also their air activity prevented French reserves from having an influence on the battle.

As a general rule morale is better in an organization on the offensive than in one which is fighting a defensive war. It would not be a true evaluation to say that the high morale of the German Army was entirely due to the fact that they were on the offensive. There were other considerations affecting German morale which have no place in this monograph. These were ideologies and political indoctrinations which went much farther back than military actions. One thing is certain, however, the morale of the German troops was high. It has been reported by a fairly reliable source that in February 1940 there were only 38 deserters and 102 AWOL's out of an

army of nearly 5,500,000 men. (128)

While it is agreed improper to attribute the high morale of the Germans to offensive combat, the low morale of the average French soldier can definitely be traced to the inactivity of defense. The overall plan of the Allies was to fight a defensive war and to force a stalemate with the ultimate decision to be decided by the British sea-blockade. As a result of the plans, the holding together of large armies was necessary. The Maginot Line had to be manned by a considerable number of troops. This necessity for continuous mobilization and subsequent idleness of the mobilized troops soon had its effect on morale. The morale of the troops suffered and there was a noticeable loss of morale and increase in dissent on the Home Front. On the other hand, the continued offensive and victories in Poland and Norway helped to raise the morale of the German Army and to gain popular support within the homeland.

As has been mentioned before, the equipment of French units was sadly incomplete. This shortage was particularly evident in motor transportation, and some of the so-called "motorized divisions" of the French Army had no vehicles worthy of mention. Much of the MOBILITY of the Allied Armies, especially the reserves, depended on railroads and these were very vulnerable to German air attack. The movement of thousands of refugees also helped to choke the already over-burdened transportation system. That the Germans realized the hindrance the

(128) A-34, p. 2

civilians could be to the French Army is evidenced by the bombing and strafing of columns and the efforts of Fifth Columnists to keep these masses of people disorganized.

On the other hand the Germans had realized the need for adequate motor transportation both for troops and supplies and had provided very well for it. They also realized that any shortage of fuel would render the armored units useless. That plans had been made to avoid this is seen in the fact that one of the main missions of the four armies following von Kleist's group was to protect the extended supply lines.

And lastly, when considering the principle of mobility, it must be kept in mind that defensive warfare by its very nature limits mobility.

The reconciliation of the principle of mass with the principle of ECONOMY OF FORCE is a matter open to wide discussion. The French did not mass sufficient forces at any one point, many times, to be able to force a favorable decision. Some of these failures were due to lack of forces available but many were the result of piecemeal commitment. As a result, much of the French manpower was wasted. On the other hand, the Germans massed sufficient troops to force a favorable decision and by this action saved a great deal of manpower in the long run. The Germans had realized from the start that in a war of aggression such as they were fighting, economical use of manpower might well be a deciding factor in the final result. In order to make this economy possible, the whole German Army organization was geared to flexibility.

In short, their system of organization provided for the shifting of specialized units from one headquarters to another to form the type and size organization needed for a particular operation. This feature is exemplified by the action during the closing days of the Battle of Flanders. Armies which were engaged until 4 June around Dunkirk, attacked 5 June along the Somme. In other words, army headquarters were moved and other units assigned to make up the armies while units formerly a part of these armies continued to fight at the same point and became part of another army with no apparent loss of control.

SIMPLICITY of plan was the watchword of the German Army. There was no complicated plan for this campaign. Briefly: two phases. First a drive to the sea and subsequent destruction of the Northern Allied Forces. This was accomplished by a secondary attack through the lowlands and a main attack through the Ardennes. Second phase was a coordinated attack south from the Somme-Aisne line with the main attack east and the secondary attack west of Paris.

The Allied plans were much more complicated. Had the French not been hampered by the neutrality of Belgium and Holland, stronger initial defense lines could have been set up. As the situation existed, it was necessary for French and British troops to move forward and occupy defensive lines after the attack started. Also situations arose which had not been anticipated and as a result confusion existed many times due to changes in plans and orders.

Several other factors and smaller details could be dis-

cussed in this analysis but every attempt has been made to refer to generalities rather than actions of specific units.

One point has been discussed pro and con by various writers and in closing this analysis it might be well to mention it. It has been stated by many persons that the Allied position would have been stronger had they remained on the so-called "Little Maginot Line" rather than moving forward to the Dyle. There is no disputing this statement in view of the fact that defensive positions had already been prepared on the "Little Maginot" . It must be recalled, however, that the Allied estimate of the situation interpreted that the main German effort would be directed toward securing channel ports from which to attack England. It was not expected that the conquest of France would be the main object at that time. In view of these beliefs, the movement to the Dyle should not be condemned.

In conclusion, it is the opinion of this writer that France's downfall can be attributed to three factors, all closely related:

1. A marked deficiency in equipment, particularly aircraft, tanks, anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons.
2. The strict adherence by the Germans to all the principles of war.
3. The violation, either avoidably or unavoidably, of certain principles of war by the Allies.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Never underestimate an enemy's capabilities.
2. An obstacle becomes merely a hindrance unless properly defended.
3. No defense is impregnable to a determined enemy willing to pay the price.
4. Combat aviation can supplement artillery in support of front line troops and can even substitute for artillery in rapidly moving situations in which artillery cannot keep up.
5. Supporting weapons of infantry units are very important and have a great bearing on the final outcome of battle. This is especially true of infantry mortars and howitzers and an army possessing superiority in these weapons has a good chance for victory.
6. Although armored units are designed primarily to exploit a breakthrough made by the infantry, aggressive action at opportune times can force a favorable decision.
7. In modern warfare, maintenance of mobility is of the essence.
8. All possible advantage must be taken during lulls in battle to improve the state of training and equipment of all units. This is true from the smallest unit up to and including the entire Armed Forces of a nation.
9. Adequate well trained reserves both tactical and strategic must be maintained and positive provisions must be made for their movement. Reserves which reach a battle area too late to influence the result are worthless.

10. Thought must be given to the possible effects of civilian population on military operations. This includes friendly as well as hostile populations. Plans must be made for orderly civilian evacuation without interference with the military operation.

11. Cooperation between all arms of the service leads to victory. The closer the cooperation the better is the chance of victory.

12. In any defensive position, anti-tank obstacles, properly covered by fire, are a must.

13. A bold (even unorthodox) plan involving calculated risks, may be justified under certain circumstances in order to maintain initiative or obtain surprise.