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Enemy Reaction to Overlord: Allied Intelligence Assessment, 6 May 1944

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Enemy Reaction to Overlord

Allied Intelligence Assessment

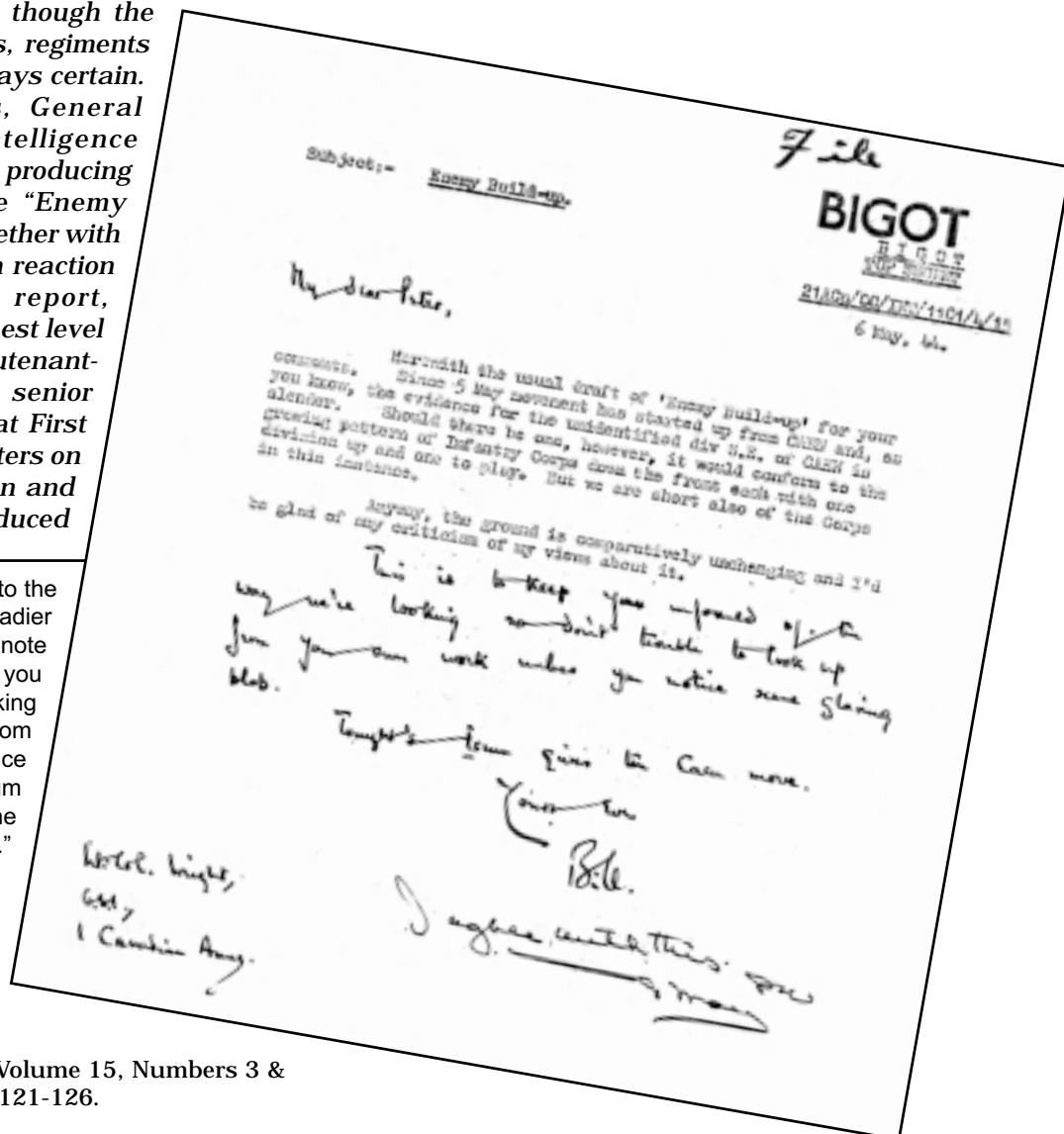
6 May 1944

Editor's Note: In the months leading up to Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, Allied planners invested heavily in their attempts to learn about German dispositions. Much has been written about the "failure" of the Allies to detect the German 352nd Division which nearly doomed the American landings at Omaha. However, this was only one small piece of the intelligence picture. Ultra decrypts based on German wireless messages provided Allied planners with details of the German Order of Battle in France though the exact location of battalions, regiments and divisions was not always certain. Brigadier Bill Williams, General Montgomery's senior intelligence officer, was responsible for producing a monthly update on the "Enemy Build-up" in Normandy together with an estimate of the German reaction to the invasion. This report, stamped "BIGOT," the highest level of secrecy, was sent to Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Wright, the senior intelligence officer (GSO1) at First Canadian Army Headquarters on 6 May 1944 for information and comment. The letter reproduced

below is the covering letter to the report, while the report itself follows on the next page. This report represents the best knowledge the Allies had of German troop dispositions and intentions prior to the invasion. In hindsight, it is remarkable just how perceptive, detailed and correct this intelligence assessment turned out to be in regards to German capabilities and reactions to the invasion. Perhaps it is time to concentrate on Allied successes rather than alleged "failures."

This is the covering letter to the intelligence report. Brigadier Williams added a hand-written note stating: "This is to keep you informed of the way we're looking so don't trouble to look up from your own work unless you notice some glaring blob. Tonight's Isum [intelligence summary] gives the Caen move. Yours ever, Bill."

Below that, Lieutenant-Colonel Wright initialed his acceptance, "I agree with this. 8 May."





ENEMY REACTION TO OVERLORD: LAND FORCES

(This paper replaces those of the same reference of 28 Jan
and 15 Mar and is based on information up to 5 May)

1. GROUND VITAL TO THE ENEMY

(i) The enemy will attempt on the beaches to prevent our landings and our build-up. Throughout, whether in the initial counter-attacks, in carefully reconnoitered and comprehensive counterattacks or in the subsequent attempt to rope us off, certain commanding ground which governs nodal centres and through-routes is essential to his enterprise. We may expect him to hold it with infantry in a series of firm bases forming pivots of manoeuvre for his Panzer divisions.

(ii) The following roads (all Routes Nationales) are essential to him:-

LISEUX - CAEN
FALAISE - CAEN
FLERS - CAEN
VIRE - CARENTAN
VILLEDIEU - CAEN
AVRANCHES - VALOGNES
COUTANCES - BAYEUX

And the lateral Granville-Flers-Argentan (with its parallel railway) beside which his main NEPTUNE dumps are dispersed.

(iii) Following on this there nodal points are vital:-

1. CAEN
2. FALAISE
3. ARGENTAN
4. THURY HARCOURT
5. VILLERS-BOCAGE
6. CAUMONT
7. BOUVIGNY
8. VIRE
9. ST LO

10. CARENTAN
11. LA HAYE DU PUTTS
12. COUTANCES
13. VILLEDIEU

(iv) To hold these the following zones are necessary:-

(A) The East bank of the DIVES valley; to force in our Eastern boundary.

(B) The high ground (with Mt. Pincon as its peak) from North of FALAISE running in a semicircle to St. Lo and controlling 2-9 above

(a) Through here run the routes of reinforcement and nourishment;

(b) From this ground he will counterattack;

(c) On it he must try to stem our advance South.

(C) The high ground from the West of the VIRE and VILLEDIEU to ST. SAUVEUR LENDELLIN:-

(a) To safeguard the valuable lateral linking his whole front;

(b) As a firm base from which he can attack North towards the peninsula or N.E. towards BAYEUX;

(c) Eventually to prevent our advance South after the peninsula has been lost.

(v) Forward of these are five vital centres which he must prevent our capturing and which so long as he holds them will prevent our deployment:-

1. CAEN
2. BAYEUX
3. CARENTAN - ISIGNY
4. LA HAYE DU PUTIS
5. VALOGNES

The first four would split up our assaults and enable the enemy to tackle them in detail. We may expect then his immediate attempt to secure them. The fifth, VALOGNES, is the key to CHERBOURG which would be condemned to perimeter defence once VALOGNES had been lost.

2. ENEMY BUILD-UP AND LIKELY ACTION

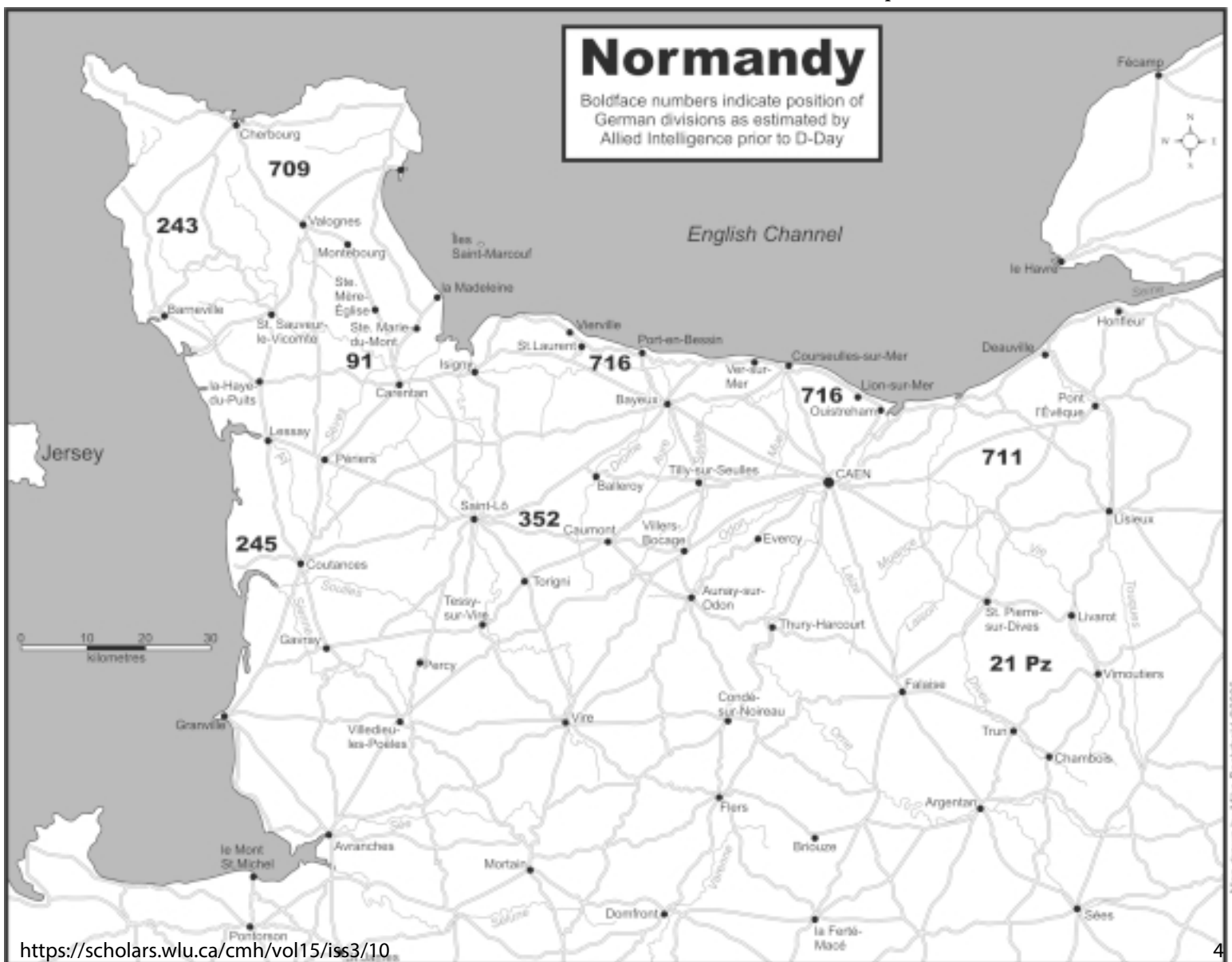
(i) Phase I: D-1 and the Assault on the Neptune area

By D-1 the enemy, having watched our ports fill up, is likely to have adjusted his dispositions

to meet a general threat. No substantial change in infantry dispositions is likely since his infantry divisions are already under command of their respective Armies. C-in-C West will have under his command some 60 divisions of which 10 will be Panzer type, the rest infantry of varying quality (some in a coastal role, some with airborne training) but nearly all of a pace conditioned in action by the fact that their artillery is horsedrawn.

On D-Day we shall meet three coastal divisions (709, 716 and the fringe of 711); possibly three infantry divisions (243, 352 and a division suspected to be S.E. of CAEN) the task of which is probably to seal off any immediate break in the crust; and probably 21 and 12 SS Panzer Divisions: 8 divisions.

Early morning bombing, our airborne troops and our naval craft all point to the NEPTUNE





Prior to D-Day, Allied Intelligence predicted that two Panzer divisions could intervene on the day of the invasion, but that as many as five additional Panzer Divisions could arrive by D+2. This photo shows a Panzer Mark IV, likely of 12th SS Panzer Division, moving towards the beaches in the early days of the invasion.

area. It will not be certain that this is our main assault but it will be evident that the NEPTUNE area is being assaulted in strength.

We shall meet immediately three infantry divisions (709, 716, 243) and it is probable that 352 Division will make for ISIGNY and BAYEUX; the unidentified infantry division for CAEN. 12 SS Panzer Division must recce our Eastern limit before plunging but must be expected to move rapidly on CAEN and push on, if possible to BAYEUX. The reports of our airborne troops dropping across the neck of the peninsula should force 21 Panzer Division to take the coastal route towards LESSAY to make for LA HAYE DU PUIITS. The enemy cannot afford to have CHERBOURG isolated. He knows we need a port quickly.

On D day he will try

- (a) to force us from the beaches; and
- (b) to secure -

CAEN with 12 SS Panzer Division and the suspected infantry division S.E. of CAEN

BAYEUX, ISIGNY and CARENTAN with 243 and 352 Divisions

LA HAYE DU PUIITS with 21 Panzer Division

The tasks of these divisions are dispersed; not only must they plug the holes in the coastal crust but also secure vital points meantime.

By evening the width of our frontage and the approximate number of our assaulting divisions are evident: it is a major assault.

(ii) Phase II: First Reinforcement of the NEPTUNE area

His two nearest Panzer divisions probably already concentrating for a move, will be summoned. 17 SS from THOUARS (South of the LOIRE) which may be expected to travel North via ARGENTAN; 116 Panzer which may be expected to leave area MANTES on the LISIEUX route. In addition, 711 Infantry Division must prepare to hold the East bank of the DIVES helped to its South by 84 Infantry Division which can move up from ROUEN. 12 SS Panzer Division must be left free to punch. (We are unlikely to make effective contact with 711 and 84 Infantry Divisions at this stage).

D+1 Counterattacks will continue:

(a) To hold onto or to regain CAEN, BAYEUX and CARENTAN;

(b) To drive a wedge between the American landings; and

(c) To keep open the Western entrance to the peninsula.

By evening 17 SS and 116 Panzer Divisions can have arrived, 17 from ARGENTAN moving either North towards CAEN or via the lateral turning N.W. towards St. Lo; 116 coming in initially behind 12 SS.

(iii) Phase III: General concentration against OVERLORD

By D+2 OVERLORD has become an overriding menace requiring the concentration of all available formations. FORTITUDE is unlikely to prove a tug much longer as the shape and weight of OVERLORD become clearer. ANVIL remains an unreleased threat; it may pin down one Panzer Division (9 at NIMES) to the

Mediterranean coast. Eleven divisions may begin moving to counterattack OVERLORD:

Five Panzer (from AMIENS, TOULOUSE, BORDEAUX, (?) NANCY AND BELGIUM)

and six infantry (from W. BRITTANY, the PAS DE CALAIS and Eastern FRANCE)

By D+5 though some may not yet have arrived, the enemy is beginning to have the necessary ingredients for a full scale counterattack after proper recce and deployment: with infantry holding essential ground and 8 Panzer divisions available or nearly ready.

The full blooded counterattack is likely at any time after D+6.

We may expect therefore the three vital zones mentioned in para 1 (iv) above to be taken over by infantry to leave Panzer divisions free to operate through them in an all-out attempt to return us into the sea. The infantry may possibly

Allied Intelligence correctly noted that much German transport was horse-drawn. The German photo shows German troops marching to meet the Allied invasion shortly after D-Day



be disposed as follows: 243 Division involved in the peninsula possibly supported by 3 Parachute Division from West Brittany if 21 Panzer Division has managed to keep open the entrance to the peninsula; 352 Division forward from St. Lo; and of the remaining seven, 84 Infantry Division in zone A supporting 12 SS and 116 Panzer Divisions as before; four of the remainder holding zone B; perhaps two firm in zone C.

(iv) Phase IV: More Infantry

During this counterattack which is likely to last four to five days before a wound-licking respite, arrangements must be made to corral us. The remaining Panzer Division in the West and Goering Panzer Division from Italy are likely to be demanded. It is probable, as a first step, that Goering Division will take over the ANVIL responsibility by moving into Mediterranean France to free the Panzer Division at NIMES for the NEPTUNE area.

The crust of coastal divisions outside the NEPTUNE area will probably remain intact but the uncommitted inf reserve of other Armies under C-in-C West will be sent to the NEPTUNE area:

276, 326 and 344 Infantry, 19 German Air Force, 157, 182 and 189 Training Divisions.

Estimated timings become increasingly schematic but by D+25 all these divisions may have arrived: to make the total 30, incl 10 Panzer Divisions.

In this phase we shall see an alternation of large scale counterattack and the attempt to rope us off. Demands will have been made to Germany for troops from other theatres and it is estimated that four divisions (two from Italy, incl Goering

division, two from Scandinavia) will become available. At least one should be Panzer, possibly two.

The total may become 34, incl possibly 12 Panzer.

(v) Phase IV: The Allied advance from the bridgehead

We come progressively into contact with infantry divisions in BRITTANY (721, 266, 353, 343, 265 and 273 Infantry divisions) and the total number of divisions with which we clash may reach 40.

It is appreciated that 319 Infantry Division in the CHANNEL ISLANDS will be left there as a suicidal nuisance. It may, however, have been partially evacuated earlier to reinforce CHERBOURG; or, in this phase, attempt to make the ports of North BRITTANY.

The growing Allied bulge towards the LOIRE must surmount the threat of ANVIL. The enemy will begin to sell out of the BISCAY coast, U-Boat bases notwithstanding, and thin out dangerously from his Mediterranean holdings. Seven infantry divisions may thus become available (271, 272, 277, 338 and 708 Infantry Divisions with 158 and 159 Training Divisions). Further, a few infantry divisions North of the SEINE may have to be extracted from the coastal crust. By D+60 the enemy total build-up against OVERLORD may rise to 50 divisions, leaving some 15 inferior formations holding the coastline North of the SEINE.

GSI
21 Army Group
6 May 1944