

MOSS VALE MENS PROBUS

BATTLE OF BRITAIN MILITARY HISTORY STUDY GROUP WAR GAME MAY 26 2005

NARRATIVE 1 (FOR GERMANY)

The overall task of launching Sealion, the invasion of Britain, was given to Field Marshal von Rundstedt and his Army Group A.

Late in the day on 2 July von Runstedt and his senior operations staff reported to OKW at Berlin to participate in the plan being prepared for Hitler by the general staff at OKW. Of the total British strength of fifty infantry divisions, OKW estimated that only twenty-eight regular infantry divisions and eight territorial infantry divisions were now available for the defence of Britain. Of the remaining fourteen infantry divisions, two had been lost (killed or taken prisoner) in France, six were in Egypt, four in Malaya and Singapore and two in Burma. The dispositions of the 36 infantry divisions available for the defence of Britain were presently spread throughout Britain.

Whilst about 500,000 British soldiers were able to escape the trap set in France by von Runstedt, they did so with only their personal arms. Supporting arms equipment left behind in France was equivalent to twenty-seven regiments of 25 pounder field artillery, twelve regiments of medium artillery and at least four armoured regiments and six armoured car regiments. From this information the staff concluded that the supporting arms available for the defence of Britain were now reduced to twelve armoured regiments (four armoured divisions), thirty-six armoured car regiments, fifty-four 25 pounder field artillery regiments and twelve medium artillery regiments. This was sufficient artillery support for only two armies.

The order of battle for Army Group A was;

16th Army with under command 2nd Airborne Division commanded by General Busch.

9th Army with under command 4 Corps (taken from 6th Army) commanded by General Strauss

Army Group A now comprised thirty nine infantry divisions, six armoured divisions, three motorised divisions and one airborne division

Army group A was disposed as follows;

16th Army was located in the Pas de Calais area opposite Dover.

9th Army with 4 Corps were both located to the south-west in the areas CHERBOURG-LE HAVRE opposite Portsmouth.

DISCUSSION POINT 1

As Field Marshal von Runstedt be prepared to give your outline plan for the invasion of Britain by Army Group A.

NARRATIVE 1 (FOR BRITAIN)

You are General Viscount Lord Gort, until recently the Commander of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France. On 20 May, the Prime Minister (PM) directed that you be evacuated with all haste from Dunkirk to organise the defence of Britain against a possible German invasion after the fall of France.

After a quick meeting with the PM you were taken to the Ministry of Defence to be briefed by the combined chiefs of staff. The chief of general staff (CGS) conveyed an air of confidence and sense of purpose when you both met despite the seriousness of the situation. “John, Well done on the way you handled things in France and congratulations on your appointment. The Navy’s best estimate is that they could recover about 500,000 men from Dunkirk before it falls in about ten days, which really will be nothing short of a miracle. But even so the cost has and will be high. Our overall casualties to date have been equivalent to one division and we will surely lose another, the Highland Division, which is defending the perimeter at Dunkirk. To this must be added all our supporting arms equipment, which must be left in situ. This all means that out of the 50 divisions we had nine months ago that only thirty – six infantry divisions will be available for the defence of Britain. And of this total, eight will be territorial divisions all of which have little or no experience. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps we should bring home the twelve divisions in the various colonies but we finally agreed not to do this because of the imminence of the threat.”

“ We have sufficient armour to form four armoured divisions but only sufficient artillery for six corps. Oh, and don’t forget the Home Guard. There’s nearly 300,000 spread across the country and they could be useful for guarding key points and communication centres. Finally, the PM announced conscription yesterday but these men will take 3 months to train.

The CGS then briefed Lord Gort on the German forces likely to be used in the invasion. Army Group A under the command of Field Marshal von Rundstedt was the most likely force. This comprised the 16th Army which was probably located in the area Pas de Calais and the 9th Army almost certainly located to the south-west in the area of Cherbourg and Le Havre. These two armies comprised 36 infantry divisions, six armoured divisions, three motorised divisions and one airborne division. Morale was extremely high. The good news for us is that to date aerial reconnaissance reports no sightings of invasion equipment including the assembly of landing craft in any of the Channel ports which means that we have at least two months to prepare for the invasion but we will need every minute. By the way, men recovered from Dunkirk will all receive 48 hours leave before reporting back to their units.

“ My entire operations staff is at your disposal to start your organisational and tactical planning and will be until your own staff become available. You can also discuss with the AG Branch your choice of subordinate commanders and if you do include Montgomery and Horrocks I shall arrange to get them out of Dunkirk tonight. Think about it and let me know. Any immediate questions John?”

DISCUSSION POINT 1 As Viscount Lord Gort be prepared to discuss the following;

1. The re-organisation of the British Army into one or more armies?
2. Your appreciation of where and how Army Group A will invade Britain?
3. The dispositions of the British Army (includes the territorials) to meet the threat?
4. How your armoured formations would fight in this defensive situation?
Whilst in France you had been impressed by the way the Germans used their armoured formations en masse and used infantry in a supportive role by forming them into motorised infantry divisions. In contrast, the British practice in France, having no motorised infantry divisions, had been been to split up their armoured divisions and use them piecemeal by allotting squadrons to the various infantry formations in a supportive role.
5. Your ideas on the integration or otherwise of the Territorial Army (TA).
Should the TA be integrated into the regular army formations or should they fight as territorial divisions in a reserve capacity?

NARRATIVE 2 (FOR GERMANY)

OKW's plan for the invasion of Britain by Field Marshal von Rundsted's Army Group A was accepted by Hitler, but the general staff was then able to convince Hitler, much to the relief of the army and navy chiefs, that the destruction of the RAF was a prerequisite for the invasion of Britain, a task willingly accepted by Reich Marshal Goering who needed to restore his image, particularly with the army after his Luftwaffe had failed to prevent the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk.

When Goering accepted the mission of destroying the RAF his Luftwaffe comprised three air fleets. Luftflotte 2 commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring which was located in the areas PAS DE CALAIS and the low countries opposite DOVER. Luftflotte 3, commanded by Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle which was located further south in the areas GHERBOURG-LE HAVRE opposite PORTSMOUTH and Luftflotte 5 commanded by General Stumpff was located in Norway and Denmark.

Luftflotten 2 and 3, which were co-located, had a combined strength of 929 fighters, 875 high-level bombers and 316 dive-bombers. Luftflotte 5 had 123 high-level bombers. Aircraft production factories in the midlands were within range for these bombers but not so for German fighters.

It was a sore point with Goering's air staff that Hitler had recently stopped all research and development into a radiotelephonic air control system which meant that once aircraft were committed plans could not be changed during the course of the engagement. The only communication system available was pilot to pilot once aircraft were airborne. On the other hand German air intelligence was aware of tall masts above the British south east coastline but was not able to confirm their use but concluded they were to control airborne aircraft.

German intelligence which did not have an effective air photographic reconnaissance service had still managed to target, reasonably accurately, the majority of RAF fighter airfields and fighter production factories in southern England and the Midlands.

The intelligence staff estimated that the RAF which had lost 400 fighters in France was now reduced to a fighter force of 650 Hurricanes and Spitfires.

DISCUSSION POINT 2 (FOR GERMANY)

Be prepared to discuss the following

1. How do you see the battle developing? This will include the priority of target engagement.
2. What tactics will you use to destroy the RAF. Surprise low level attacks by fighters against airfields or concentrated bomber attacks against airfields, with a view to luring fighters into the air or a combination or some other tactic.
3. If you decide to provide a covering fighter screen for your bombers will this be close or distant.
4. Use of your dive-bomber force and whether protection would be provided.
5. Whether you will use Luftflotte 5 operationally from its present position.

6. Your method for planning operations. Will overall control come from Goering's HQ or will you continue to use the accepted Luftwaffe practice of each Luftflotte making its own plans prior to seeking approval from Goering?

GERMAN MILITARY PLAN FOR THE INVASION OF BRITAIN

16th Army to establish a beach-head in the areas LYMPE-FOLKESTONE-DOVER-RAMSGATE.

9th Army to establish a beach-head in the areas BRIGHTON-PORTSMOUTH SOUTHAMPTON..

The invasion at first light was to be preceded by the night-time drop of 2nd Airborne Division at H-6hrs to capture the cliff tops from DOVER to FOLKESTONE.

Operation Sealion was to be launched in four waves. The first wave comprised a force of ten divisions, which was to land in the two areas described above between D Day and D+4. From D+5 to D+7 this force would advance inland in the form of a pincer movement with 9th Army advancing north from PORTSMOUTH and 16th Army advancing east along the Thames Estuary with the eventual objective of both armies linking up to isolate London.

The second wave would be a mobile exploitation force composed of six armoured and three motorised divisions in three corps. This would be followed by a third wave of nine infantry divisions and a fourth wave of eight infantry divisions.

A subsidiary operation was to be conducted by 4th Corps which would sail from CHERBOURG and land at LYME BAY (near PLYMOUTH). Its task was to push northward to the SEVERN Estuary.

The German Naval Staff estimated that the cross channel conveyance of the first wave alone which comprised 250,000 men (excludes the airborne division) would require

155 transports totalling some 700,000 tons and 3000 smaller craft (1720 barges, 470 tugs, and 1160 motorboats.

As planning did not start until July the German Naval Staff soon declared that such a large quantity of shipping could not be assembled ready to launch Sealion before the middle of September. This was contrary to Hitler's directive that preparations were to be completed by mid-August. Hitler eventually accepted this later launch date.

NARRATIVE 2 (FOR BRITAIN)

The chief of the air staff met with Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, officer commanding RAF Fighter Command, soon after the army's evacuation from Dunkirk to discuss the next phase of the war. The Chief said "The PM's still convinced that Herr Hitler will invade but I have to say there is no indication of this at the moment. Nevertheless, you, Harris and I need to meet with Lord Gort to go over the army's defensive plans to determine where the RAF will be deployed if we are invaded. My own view is that it would be madness for Hitler to invade until he first achieves total air superiority. Therefore, I believe the next phase of the war will be a battle for air supremacy over Britain and this places you in the box seat. I would like you to join me tonight at the PM's nightly meeting in the war room at 2200hrs to emphasise that very point and to tell the meeting, which will include Gort and Beaverbrook, just how you see the battle for Britain's air space developing and how you plan to win it despite the odds. Now, let's go over the essential facts.

The Chief and Dowding looked first at the Luftwaffe. It comprised three air fleets, two in France and one split between Denmark and Norway. They knew that each air fleet was a self-contained force of all components including fighters, bombers, dive-bombers, repair and recovery. This self-containment even extended to operational planning. They both agreed this type of organization was advantageous when the primary role of the German Air Force had been to support the army as it had in Poland and in the West but whether this was suitable for an all out air battle was another matter. The required changes in organization for a pure air battle would be a test of German flexibility.

They then discussed relative strengths. The Luftwaffe's strength was estimated to be 929 fighters but a number of these were Messerschmidt 110's fighter bomber which were slow and which could require 109 escorts, 998 high-level bombers and 316 dive bombers. On the other hand the RAF having just lost 400 fighters fighting in France was reduced to 650 Hurricanes and Spitfires. They both agreed the longer Hitler stalled the more chance Beaverbrook had of increasing this number.

They discussed the characteristics of the Messerschmidt. Its operational radius was about 100 miles which meant it could just reach London. Put another way it had only a 90 minute flight duration and consequently only a 75 to 80 minute tactical flying time. There was no armour protection for the pilot, no ground to air control system, only radio-telephony between pilots in flight. It was less manoeuvrable than the Spitfire but did have an improved rate of climb.

Dowding thought that our ground to air control system and early warning radar along the SE coast of Britain would compensate for our shortage of fighter aircraft. The Chief agreed and then said "How do you propose to fight the battle? When I spoke to Air Vice Marshal Park at 11 Group the other day he said he believes he should get his aircraft into the air as quickly as possible and attack the enemy as soon as they come into range on a first in first served basis. This way we had a greater chance of breaking up the attack before it reached its target. On the other hand, I understand Leigh-Mallory of 12 Group wants to first concentrate his squadrons, which will take

time, and then fight as a concentrated wing. You might be prepared to take questions from the PM if this comes up because he's met both of them recently.

They then discussed what form the presentation should take and agreed that it include

1. Group Boundaries for 10,11, 12 and 13 Fighter Groups.
2. Where and how the Luftwaffe were likely to attack and when. Surprise low level attacks by fighters against airfields or attacks by high level bombers against airfields to lure the RAF into the air etc?.
3. Positioning of forward airfields in the south east. Stay where they are or relocate further back and or north of the Thames estuary.

DISCUSSION POINT 2 (FOR BRITAIN)

As Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding be prepared to give the briefing.