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These Anvil Blows

Once again the Allies have demonstrated their mastery in combined operations. Their invasion yesterday of the south of France was another triumph of careful planning, extraordinary co-ordination of all arms, and effective execution in the speed and efficiency with which it was carried out. If the operation was on a smaller scale than the attack upon the beaches of Normandy on June 6, it was almost as impressive and loses nothing by comparison with that other Homeric event.

The dispatches have it that this incursion in the south was the worst-kept secret of the war. Yet it appeared to achieve complete tactical surprise. The truth may be that the Nazis were not so much taken by surprise as they were stunned and weakened by the fury of the preliminary onslaughts that marked the operation. So thoroughly had the objectives been bombed that little of enemy coastal defences remained intact, and relatively few Nazis were to be seen when Allied ground troops swept on to the beaches. At any rate, the resistance of the enemy was not strong and Allied casualties were light as a result. The German Luftwaffe was not present, and the few enemy planes that were observed did not have a chance to do much. In thus saving lives and rendering the enemy largely impotent along the coastal areas, the Allied command displayed strategy of a high type. It is the foe that is paying a costly price in men and weapons; it is his strength that is being sapped, his armies which are being destroyed. That way lies the readiest path to an Allied victory.

Paratroopers again played an important part in this attack. Large numbers of them were conveyed inland before dawn by gliders and transports. They were dropped behind the coastal defences and apparently accomplished much in the way of hampering the enemy before the main assault forces landed a few hours later. The aerial blows that were inflicted also offer further testimony to the value of overwhelming air power when employed during the critical phases of a sea-borne attack. These Allied planes came just ahead of the invaders to wipe out any shore defences

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which might have survived the days of pounding that preceded the joining of the battle. They were especially helpful in setting off enemy mines concealed on the beaches and at the water's edge, a stroke which probably contributed to the lightness of Allied casualties. Those beach mines are deadly traps for men leaping with battle equipment from landing barges, and quite a number of the liberators were caught by them as they swept ashore at Normandy. The heavy bombardment by warships was another factor in the success of the invasion. These large naval rifles can be fired with amazing accuracy at targets miles inland, and their devastating missiles seldom go wide of the mark once the range has been obtained.

The Germans were supposed to have had between four and seven divisions in this area of the south of France. That is not a large force, not for a Hitler who used to vaunt in military terms of millions of men. Those Nazis who were encountered on Tuesday by Allied soldiers did not have much fight left in them and many were glad to surrender. The situation is a surprising one and tends further to support those observers who submit that Hitler's pool of man power has been drained in the blood and slaughter of combat. No Luftwaffe, no central reserves left, with the German heart showing signs of faltering at home and in the field, is it too much to say that the great German military machine is crumbling, and the end is not far off?