

Extract from a report that includes interrogation statements from captured German soldiers

Catalogue ref: DEFE 2/490

716 A tk Bn (716 Inf Div). Three PW interrogated. Feldwebel of 1 Coy age 27, believed in German victory. Unteroffizier 2-Coy age 28, very intelligent peasant. Said his tp's 7.5 cm guns were all destroyed by bombardment and his sgt said it was more reasonable to surrender since they could not fight any more (captured 7 June near Caen). Some Volksdeutsche in his coy. Third, an Obersoldat 2 Coy age 38, a Polish cobbler, tells the following story. "At 2 o'clock one morning the Alarm Stufe 2 was given and he was sent forward to Craye-sur-Mer (presumably Craye-sur-Mer) to a gun section. He had been trained as an infantryman and had no anti-tank experience. When the Allies appeared off the beach his platoon commander, a Stabsfeldwebel, a very decent fellow in PW's opinion, said 'This is it, boys. We give up now' and the platoon never fired a shot." PW stated that 1 Coy was composed entirely of Germans, 2 Coy had about 80 Poles in a total strength of 150.

What is this source?

This is part of a report that includes interrogation statements from captured German soldiers. One of these soldiers is Polish.

What's the background to this source?

By late 1942 the tide began to turn against Germany. From 1943 to 1944, British Empire and US forces began a build up of troops and equipment to drive the Germans out of the lands they had invaded in 1940. The landings took place in June 1944.

It may seem obvious but one of the key factors in any battle is the quality and commitment of the troops who were fighting. Many of the German troops facing the Allies at D-Day were not German. They were conscripted into the German army from territories that the Germans had conquered.

It's worth knowing that...

There were major differences in terms of the quality of German troops the Allies faced on D-Day. American units faced SS Panzer Divisions on D-Day, for example, and these were well trained, well equipped, committed and very formidable opponents. However, not all German units were so committed.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: D-DAY

By 1944 the vast majority of German soldiers in the German army were fighting on the Eastern Front against the USSR. Possibly, as many as five out of six German soldiers were not German. Recruiting from occupied lands made up the numbers. As this shows, these troops were not cowards but they were not strongly committed to the German cause.

How does this source help us to understand why D-Day was successful?

1. What is the attitude of the troops in this source?
 2. Why were the German troops in this source less committed than other German troops?
 3. Were the German troops well trained?
 4. Is it possible to say whether the role of the ground troops was more or less important than the role of the other forces on D-Day?
 5. How would you sum up the main value of this source to the historian?
- Will you include this source (or part of it) in your storyboard?
 - If you do use it, what are the main points you will make in your caption?