CHAPTER FIVE
THE GENERALS’ DUEL: FIVE DAYS OF WAR
AT THE MILITARY STRATEGIC LEVEL

_Düsseldorf, Friday 10 May 1940_

The night before 10 May 1940 was a quiet one for the staff of Army Group B. The orders had been given and the troops were taking their positions according to plan. For the time being, there was nothing left for Generaloberst Fedor von Bock and his staff officers to do except wait for the break of day. That night, the operations division of Armeeeoberkommando 18 moved from Wuppertal to Wesel, where a command post was set up. Von Bock received word from the divisions on the front line that explosions had been heard in Dutch territory. That led the army group to conclude that, despite the strict secrecy measures, the Dutch were expecting the German attack. At 03.55 hrs that night, the commander of the 18th Army, General der Artillerie Georg von Küchler, was present at the 256th Infantry Division to witness the start of the offensive in person. Von Küchler returned to his own command post at 05.00 hrs.

At 04.00 hrs, the Luftwaffe reported to Army Group B that all aircraft that were to be involved in the attack on the Netherlands had started and that the airborne divisions of Generalleutnant K. Student and Generalleutnant H.E.O. Graf von Sponeck had entered Dutch airspace without having come under fire. The mist had lifted and the weather was excellent. The good news that the railway bridge at Gennep had fallen into German hands undamaged reached Army Group B as early as 04.50 hrs. A setback, however, was the report that all the other bridges across the Maas which the 18th Army had intended to use had been destroyed in time by the Dutch. This was not considered to have catastrophic consequences for the execution of the attack, because Army Group B had taken this eventuality into account and provided extra bridge-laying equipment. Five of the bridges over the Juliana Canal in the path of the 6th Army’s advance had been taken without damage. By around 06.20 hrs, Army Group B had been informed that the air-landing operation at the Belgian Fort Eben
Emael near Liège was proceeding according to plan and that the Belgians had only destroyed the bridge over the Albert Canal at Kanne in that sector. At the same time, it was reported that troops had broken into the Peel-Raam Position near Mill.

Von Bock then went to the IVth Corps, where the focus of Army Group B’s operations lay, to see for himself the progress being made at Maastricht. He informed his staff of his findings by telephone at 10.10 hrs. The 4th Panzer Division, which was part of the IVth Corps, was at the time in the process of crossing the Maas at Maastricht and von Bock pointed out that it was imperative that the operation be completed in the night of 10 May. Von Küchler’s 18th Army had been informed by 10.20 hrs that the para operations at the Moerdijk bridges and at Rotterdam had been successful. Although the 18th Army did not have any detailed information, it was assumed that Von Sponeck’s operation near The Hague, conversely, had not succeeded.