CHAPTER SIX

‘FALL FESTUNG’: A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE HAGUE

Introduction

During the night of 9 May, bombers, fighter planes and transport aircraft took off from German air bases for the surprise attack on the airfields of Ypenburg, Valkenburg and Ockenburg. The plan was as follows: first, the airfields would be bombed and machine-gunned to disrupt the defences, then paratroops would be dropped and, finally, the aircraft carrying the air-transportable troops would land on the terrain which had by then been captured by the paratroops. The barracks in The Hague were also to be bombed to prevent the units billeted there from moving to the airfields.

The attack on The Hague was entrusted to the 22nd Air Transportable Division, which was under the command of Generalleutnant H.E.O. Graf von Sponeck. The division consisted of some 10,000 men, of whom, according to the plan, 4,902 would land at Ypenburg, 3,313 at Valkenburg and 1,049 at Ockenburg. Six companies of Fallschirmjäger had been assigned to the division from the 7th Air Division, while the 22nd Air Transportable Division had had to lose several units to the 7th Air Division.

Once the airfields were in safe hands on the first day of battle and enough troops had been flown in, the Germans would break out and advance on The Hague from three sides. Queen Wilhelmina, the cabinet and the top military leaders would then fall into German hands. The airborne troops were expected to operate aggressively and quickly occupy the main junctions on the access roads to the airfields. The possibility of attacks by the British air force in the afternoon of the first day of battle was taken into account, so orders were given to entrench and set up air defences. Because speed of action was paramount, the division commander had also decided that his men should try to seize civilian motor vehicles in The Hague. Lists of garages in The Hague were distributed for this purpose. Throughout the fighting, therefore, German soldiers made constant attempts—some of which were successful—to seize vehicles. While it could be said that the whole operation was spectacular, it was also something of a gamble. The
An anti-aircraft machine gun of the Hussars-Motorcyclist (left); the defence of Ypenburg airfield was supported by Landsverk M-36 armoured vehicles (below).