The 1st Cavalry Division is to occupy northern Holland and capture the north-eastern IJsselmeer Dam. Next, the 1st Cavalry Division could be deployed to form a bridgehead to the west of the IJsselmeer for the attack on Fortress Holland from the northeast.

This was the Divisionsbefehl for the 1st Cavalry Division, which, commanded by Generalmajor Kurt Feldt, crossed the borders of the provinces of Groningen, Drenthe and north-eastern Overijssel on 10 May.

The division was viewed as an anachronism by many, even within the German armed forces themselves. Its core comprised four regiments of cavalrymen who dismounted at the front and fought as infantrymen. These modern-day dragoons were the sole propagators of the illustrious cavalry tradition within the German army. They were strongly bound up in tradition in other ways too: the officers and NCOs were chiefly from old Prussian military families and the majority of the ranks were recruited from East Prussia, an area well-known for its horsemanship. Yet the division had only been created in its present form on 1 November 1939. That was when it had been decided to expand the 1st Cavalry Brigade, which had earned its spurs during the campaign in Poland, into the 1st Cavalry Division.

In the second half of November, the fledgling division had been moved to an assembly point near Ankum, not far from the Dutch border, as a result of the order from the Oberkommando des Heeres to Army Group B “to occupy the province of Groningen using only weak forces”. From the end of November, the division staff had been busy building and training the unit as well as preparing the assault on the northern Netherlands. As has already been described in Chapter 4, the German plans of attack were continually subjected to change during the winter months. This had several consequences for the 1st Cavalry Division.

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In the first phase of the German plan, when the intention had not yet been formed to occupy the whole of the Netherlands, the capture of the West Frisian Islands of Schiermonnikoog, Ameland, Terschelling and Vlieland was a major target for the operations to be carried out in the north. The driving force behind this was the Luftwaffe, which wanted to use these islands for “air warning purposes.” For transferring troops from the coast of Groningen and Friesland to the West Frisian Islands, the Kriegsmarine created a Sonderkommando under the command of Korvettenkapitän Stein which was to carry out its mission using commandeered boats. Neither the Kriegsmarine nor Army Group B was particularly enthusiastic about this assignment, which after all only served the interests of the air force.

On 25 January 1940, the Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres, Generaloberst Walther von Brauchitsch, informed the staff of Army Group B that the whole of the Netherlands was to be occupied. For the 1st Cavalry Division, this change of plan meant that the West Frisian Islands were no longer considered important by the leadership and that the original assignment was eventually cancelled. The commander of the 18th Army, General der Artillerie Georg von Küchler, under whose command the 1st Cavalry

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3 Idem, 18 November 1939.