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THE NARROW FRONT VERSUS THE BROAD FRONT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE NARROW FRONT PLAN
AND THE FACTORS AFFECTING ITS SUCCESS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Bobbie G. Pedigo

May 1973

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of The Graduate College of the
University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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INTRODUCTION

When the United States entered the Second World War General Bernard L. Montgomery of Great Britain believed the war in Europe could be concluded by the end of 1944. He maintained this view during the ensuing months and in August 1944 recognized an opportunity to end the war in accordance with his timetable. His plan, which called for a narrow front approach to Berlin, was refuted in favor of the previously planned broad front approach of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The conduct of the campaign in northwestern Europe under the broad front approach versus the narrow front has remained a subject of controversy since that time.

During the conduct of the war in Europe events appeared to flow in a coherent and connected pattern under the guiding hand of Eisenhower. One great milestone followed another: first, the unbelievable success of the landing in June and the capture of Cherbourg. Then, through July and August, the long anxious battle of the bridgehead ending with the American breakout through St. Lo and the encirclement and destruction of the German Army in the Falaise pocket. Following this were the days of pursuit, the fall of Paris and Brussels, and the line-up with the new American army sweeping up from southern France. The German resistance was crumbling and each day brought talk of ending the war.

Each event of the war appeared to follow logically and inevitably,

but this was not so. Grave divisions of opinion developed in the Allied High Command. Personal jealousies flared up and there were many moments of serious doubts and hesitations. Vain and ridiculous emotional national rivalries clouded the issues. Prejudices took root through lack of information and the unavoidable confusion of war. Mainly because the Allies were winning, and very largely through the patience and determined tact of Eisenhower, these animosities never reached the point of open revolt. The Command of this war was far more steady, far more complete and unified than the Command in the previous war. Rivalries and minor cross-currents between nationalities erupted, but were subdued by the Supreme Commander or lost in the shock and movement of the fighting. There were British officers in the combined headquarters who favored the American strategy and Americans in the same headquarters who could see the British position with equal clarity. Those were difficult days for all concerned.

The most famous and long lasting difference of opinion between Eisenhower and Montgomery was the narrow front versus the broad front approach to Berlin. General George C. Marshall supported Eisenhower's position while General Sir Alan Brooke and Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported Montgomery. Eisenhower, while agreeing with the general axis of advance of the narrow front plan, would not approve its implementation because of the inherent risks attached. The logistical situation was such that he believed all other operations in the European Theater of Operations would have to be suspended in order to support Montgomery's plan.

The purpose of this work is to determine whether, given all the variables, the narrow front approach could have succeeded. In order to

present the situation in clear perspective and as it actually existed at the time of the disagreement, it is necessary to review the overall planning for the cross-channel attack and look at the situation as it developed. This early planning was to affect directly the personal attitudes and command relationships in the months ahead.

The personalities and characteristics of the leaders involved coupled with their nationalistic chauvinism and sensitivity to public demand, could not be isolated from the decision-making processes. This led to charges and countercharges of putting public opinion ahead of tactical considerations, favoritism, and devious planning to circumvent the orders received. The major participants in the controversy are examined to determine whether or not these charges were contributing factors in the decision to implement the broad front instead of the narrow front approach. Finally, the question of whether or not the narrow front could have succeeded is addressed; could Montgomery have successfully fought his way to Berlin and possibly ended the war in Europe five months earlier?

To answer this question the following parameters have been used in this analysis:

1. When Montgomery presented the plan to Eisenhower on 23 August 1944, the earliest date it could have been implemented was 1 September. Selection of this date provided the period of least resistance for the advance across France, Holland, Belgium and Germany.
2. The time-frame established for the completion of the thrust was 1 September to 31 December 1944.
3. The forty divisions requested by Montgomery were the same divisions that were in contact with the enemy on 1 September 1944--all

were combat tested and proven.

4. Airpower has been given the same capabilities it demonstrated during the period 1 September-31 December 1944.

5. Due to the near emergency logistical conditions existing in the autumn of 1944, the logistical support capability has not been changed.

6. The German ability to build additional divisions and refit others during the autumn of 1944 remains the same.

7. As the thrust entered the heartland of Germany it would have brought the same defensive measures around Berlin as those taken in 1945 when the city was attacked.

No psychological advantage has been given to either side as the will-to-win of the Allies nearing the heart of Germany would be offset by the determined resistance of the enemy fighting for his homeland.

CHAPTER I

NORMANDY TO BELGIUM

I. PREINVASION PLANNING

The greatest armada of ships and airplanes in the history of the world converged on the Normandy Coast on 6 June 1944.¹ The invasion of the continent of Europe had begun and was of such magnitude that only the men who laboriously planned the operation could grasp its scope. Initial planning for a cross channel invasion started as early as July 1940, when Winston Churchill ordered the organization of raiding forces to hit the coasts of countries occupied by the enemy.² These plans were primarily to conduct raids on the mainland and then withdraw; however, in September 1941, General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (IGS), directed the British military planners to formulate a plan for a permanent return to the Continent. He further instructed General Sir Bernard Paget, Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, to prepare an outline for an invasion and conduct of combat operations on the Continent. General Paget was to review the plan periodically "with a view to

¹Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), p. 3.

²Forrest C. Pogue, The Supreme Command, US Army in World War II, European Theater of Operations; (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1954), p. 98. See also: Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: Their Finest Hour (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949) pp. 249-51.

being able to put it into effect if a sudden change in the situation should appear to warrant such a course."³

Numerous plans were prepared before the actual invasion occurred. At the suggestion of the Chief-of-Staff of the US Army, General George C. Marshall, the Combined Chiefs of Staff ordered a study made of the possibilities of landing and maintaining forces on the Continent in 1942 with an invasion to follow in early 1943.⁴ In April 1942, General Marshall and Presidential Advisor Harry Hopkins went to Great Britain to discuss the strategy for 1942 and 1943. While they were in London the first definite plan for a large-scale cross-channel operation was presented to the British Chiefs of Staff. Marshall approved the plan and proposed to build the United States force to one million men for an invasion of the Continent by 1 April 1943.⁵ In case of an emergency, created by a serious weakening of Russia or the probable collapse of Germany, a force was to be put in readiness to enter the Continent in the fall of 1942.

Prime Minister Churchill was uncertain that a cross-channel operation could be put into effect in the near future. He did not believe the Allies had sufficient combat power to gain and hold a landing area on the Continent. He asked that the possibilities of an American attack in North Africa be explored.⁶ Meanwhile, Joseph Stalin was clamoring for a second front to relieve the pressure on Russia. President Roosevelt had promised Stalin an invasion of the Continent by 1942 and

³A.H. Head, "Amphibious Operations," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, XCI (November, 1946), p. 488.

⁴Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 100.

⁵Ibid., ⁶Ibid.

a second promise was given for 1943 but Churchill insisted that any force landed across the Channel would be defeated in detail. Roosevelt relented and the American participation in the North African Campaign was launched in late 1942.⁷

The Selection of the Supreme Commander

In January 1943, at Casablanca, Roosevelt and Churchill selected General Marshall as the Supreme Allied Commander for the cross-channel invasion (Operation OVERLORD). General Marshall worked well with the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the British favored him for the position. One year previous to this selection the American and British Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed that one Allied commander should have supreme command in each theater of operations. The first Supreme Commander was General Sir Archibald P. Wavel who commanded the air, sea, and ground forces of Australia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States in the Southwest Pacific.⁸ The need for this command soon disappeared but the principle was retained and other Supreme Commanders were chosen for areas of the Pacific, Middle East, Mediterranean, and European theaters.⁹

From January to December 1943 it had been accepted that General Marshall would be the commander; however, President Roosevelt did not want to lose the advice and assistance of Marshall through his

⁷Ibid.

⁸Gordon A. Harrison, US Army in World War II, European Theater of Operations: Cross-Channel Attack (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1951), p. 106. General Wavel was to have the same position in the India-Burma Theater at a later date.

⁹Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 41.

appointment to a combat command, and asked Marshall to remain as Chief of Staff of the United States Army.¹⁰ Marshall agreed and the search for another commander stopped at Eisenhower who had been Supreme Commander for the Mediterranean area. The announcement of Eisenhower's selection to direct the Allied invasion of the Continent was made on Christmas Eve by the President of the United States. Another milestone had passed as the invasion was now confirmed by the appointment of a supreme commander.¹¹

General Morgan as Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Command (COSSAC)

In March 1942, Lieutenant General Frederick E. Morgan was ordered to report to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff for an interview. He was immediately assigned the position of COSSAC and directed to draw up plans for numerous contingencies which involved crossing the Channel for an invasion of the Continent. Morgan was under the impression that the Supreme Commander would be a British officer and the staff was established accordingly. He was given broad powers to act in the name of the commander and made many decisions which affected the forthcoming operation. He, in fact, served as commander for ten months while waiting for the Supreme Commander to be appointed. The cross-channel attack was to be a joint operation; therefore an American was named to the COSSAC staff to present the US views. Major General Ray W. Barker became deputy to Morgan and the two generals complemented each other in

¹⁰ William D. Leahy, I Was There, (Kibdibm Bollancz, 1950), pp. 191-92.

¹¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1948) p. 208.
See also: Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 45

staff work and planning. A highly efficient and congenial staff was formed that worked together as the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) staff until the war ended.

Major General Walter Bedell Smith served as Eisenhower's Chief of Staff in the Mediterranean Command and when Eisenhower assumed command of SHAEF he wanted to retain Smith on his staff. This meant that Morgan, who had done a superb job, was to be replaced. Morgan was offered a command in Italy but refused it to remain with the OVERLORD plan and insure its successful completion. He was appointed to the position of Deputy Chief of Staff to Smith and served in that capacity until the end of the war.¹²

II. MONTGOMERY AS LAND FORCE COMMANDER

The matter of the ground command was settled temporarily in 1943 by Morgan during a visit to Washington. He obtained General Marshall's views on the matter and discussed them with the Allied naval and air commanders. Shortly thereafter, Morgan, acting in the name of the Supreme Allied Command, issued a directive to the 21 Army Group (British) commander. This officer, then General Paget, was made jointly responsible with the Commander, Allied Naval Expeditionary Force, and the Commander, Allied Expeditionary Air Force, for planning the assault. When so ordered, the Commander of 21 Army Group was also to be responsible for its execution "until such time as the Supreme Allied Commander allocates an area of responsibility to the Commanding General, First Army Group."¹³

¹²LTG Sir Frederick Morgan, Peace and War: A Soldier's Life, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961) pp. 155-79, Passim.

¹³Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 45

The 21 Army Group Commander was informed that the assault would be made by two corps under the Commanding General, First US Army, who would remain in charge of land operations until such time as the British commander felt that a second headquarters should be brought into the theater.

Later, when the enlargement of the assault force and the area to be attacked required the landing of two armies instead of two corps, the 21 Army Group Commander was charged with the task of commanding land operations. He was thus designated de facto commander of the ground forces in the assault, but not given the title of Ground Commander. Further, because his tenure in this temporary position was not clear, it was certain that the arrangement could be changed when the Supreme Commander decided to do so.¹⁴

When it became apparent that 21 Army Group would command the Allied forces in the assault, it became necessary to place a seasoned combat officer in command. For this post General Montgomery was chosen. His selection was announced on Christmas Day, 1943. Eisenhower was not consulted on the selection as it was solely a British decision; however, he had earlier expressed a preference for General Sir Harold Alexander who could not be spared from the Mediterranean.¹⁵

On 3 January 1944 General Montgomery was formally briefed on the OVERLORD plan and he was critical of the narrow front of the assault. He favored supporting assaults in Brittany, around Dieppe, and on the west coast of the Cotentin. He had approval to act in the name of Eisenhower and by his disapproval the OVERLORD plan was changed to

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, p. 211.

include more forces and a wider frontage, but not the supporting attacks. Other reasons for broadening the attack were that it would be harder for the enemy to define and locate the limits of the attack and conversely easier for the Allies to break out of the initial bridgehead. A wider frontage would give the Allies a larger number of vehicle exits from the beachhead and so facilitate the penetration inland and subsequent build-up. Montgomery had insisted that it was essential, in order to avoid confusion of administration and supply, that armies and corps go in on their own fronts and not through bridgeheads established by other units.¹⁶ Events were to prove him correct when the units went ashore.

III. EISENHOWER AS SUPREME COMMANDER

On 13 January 1943 Eisenhower flew to London and studied the original OVERLORD plans vetoed by Montgomery two weeks earlier. He immediately agreed that the attack needed more divisions in the initial assault. He recognized that the landing needed to be broadened to insure initial success, to secure beaches for the build-up, and to have enough strength to get to Cherbourg quickly to capture and control a port. Eisenhower was in agreement that a supporting attack was necessary to engage some of the enemy forces elsewhere. An attack on Southern France had been planned to coincide with OVERLORD and to insure its success. Eisenhower considered this supporting attack essential.¹⁷ The additional troop requirements carried with it the need for over-water

¹⁶Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, The Memoirs of Field-Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G. (London: Collins, 1958) p. 212.

¹⁷Stephen E. Ambrose, The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), p. 336.

transportation and here Eisenhower faced a dilemma. In order to provide transportation for OVERLORD the attack on Southern France, code name ANVIL, had to be reduced in strength. The supporting attack was discussed with Marshall at length before Eisenhower went to London and the Chief of Staff of the Army was emphatic that ANVIL should be launched. Many British, including Montgomery, were not so firm on the splitting of forces and suggested that ANVIL be dropped to provide the necessary transportation and forces for OVERLORD. Eisenhower used the same arguments for the defense of ANVIL as he had used in broadening the base of OVERLORD and the operation remained as a supporting attack.

The final OVERLORD plan consisted of two armies under command of 21 Army Group (see map 2). The First US Army was composed of the VII Corps with three divisions: 4th Infantry, landed at UTAH Beach, and two airborne divisions. The 82nd Airborne and 101st Airborne were dropped west and east respectively of Ste. Mere-Eglise. The V Corps had two divisions: 29th Infantry (minus) and 1st Infantry (plus); both divisions went ashore over OMAHA Beach.

British forces consisted of the Second Army with two corps. The 30 Corps with the 50th Infantry assaulted over Gold Beach. The 1¹⁸ Corps with the 3rd Canadian Infantry went ashore over JUNO beach and the 3rd British Infantry over SWORD Beach. The 6th Airborne Division was dropped astride the Orne River in the British 1 Corps zone.¹⁹

¹⁸The British system of unit identification used arabic numbers to designate both Corps and Divisional units. The US Army system used Roman numerals to designate corps and arabic numbers for divisions.

¹⁹United States Military Academy, A Military History of World War II: Atlas. (West Point, New York, 1953) p. 174.

The Allies were ashore on the Continent and the final phase of the War in Europe had begun with General Montgomery commanding the land forces.²⁰

IV. COMMAND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EISENHOWER AND MONTGOMERY

Eisenhower remained in England and commanded the troops from his headquarters located in Bushey Park while the commander of 21 Army Group exercised local command on the ground in France. Montgomery moved his tactical headquarters to France on 8 June 1944. This method of command was little different than the normal dispersion of command except that a body of water, the English Channel, separated the commander from the troops. Channels of communication were opened between SHAEF and Montgomery's headquarters with the same degree of effectiveness as was later established when both headquarters were located on the Continent.

For control of ground forces no special appointment as "Ground Forces Commander" was contemplated. Since the amphibious attack was on a relatively narrow front, with only two armies involved, one battleline commander had to be constantly and immediately in charge of tactical coordination between the two armies in the initial stages. Montgomery was charged with this responsibility. Plans called for the early establishment of separate British and American army groups on the Continent and it was logical that when the army groups were of sufficient force to accomplish a decisive breakout and begin an advance through Europe the land force in each natural channel of march would have its own commander that reported directly to SHAEF.²¹

²⁰Harrison, Cross-Channel Attack, p. 116.

²¹Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, Despatch (New York: British Information Services, 1946), p. 5.

On 25 July, General Eisenhower directed that the US Ground Forces on the Continent be regrouped into the First and Third Armies under the control of 12th Army Group which Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley was to command. The new army group was to remain under the command of the Commander-in-Chief of 21 Army Group until the Supreme Commander allocated a specific area of responsibility to the 12th Army Group. The existing command structure had been adopted because it was impossible to move Supreme Headquarters to the Continent until an adequate communications network could be secured to connect the United Kingdom and the Continent. While waiting for this development, Eisenhower found it necessary to make one person responsible for the temporary control of ground forces in Normandy and had chosen Montgomery on the basis of seniority and experience. This was the second time Montgomery was de facto ground commander of the Allied forces. In carrying out that task, the British commander worked under plans approved by Eisenhower, who made his influence felt by frequent visits to the battlefield. This situation was less than ideal because the Supreme Commander was needed on both sides of the Channel. Toward the end of August the small town of Jullouville was found suitable as a headquarters site and Eisenhower announced he would assume direct operational control on 1 September with General Montgomery and General Bradley as commanders of the Groups of Armies.²² The other units, which were even then engaged in the battle for Southern France, were shortly to be incorporated into Eisenhower's command as the 6th Army Group.

²²Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 264.

CHAPTER II

THE PERSONALITIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR CONFLICTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The personalities and character traits of the participants cannot be ignored in the conflict of ideas which emerged after Eisenhower assumed operational control of the forces on the ground. Montgomery was a successful combat veteran from North Africa who, like the knights of old, carried the colors of his lady--the United Kingdom. He was a colorful and confident leader who provided Great Britain with a hero at the time of her darkest trials following a string of defeats. Having led the land forces on the Continent for almost three months during the toughest fighting to be encountered, it was natural that he should have firm ideas about the conduct of the war and the direction it should take.

Eisenhower was looked upon as a staff man who had never commanded combat troops and was therefore unproven. He was a product of the US Army schools and was not overly popular with the British Imperial General Staff who believed the command of such a large force was beyond the American's capabilities.¹

The experience he gained in the Mediterranean found favor in General Sir Alan Brooke, British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who

¹Arthur Bryant, Triumph In The West, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 139.

believed the selection of Eisenhower was best because Marshall never had a command in combat except a company in the First World War.² Eisenhower soon proved himself an able commander in the Mediterranean Theater.

Bradley first encountered Montgomery in North Africa and again in Sicily. To the British, Bradley seemed inexperienced and too jealous of his own reputation and independence of command.³ On the other hand, the British staff officers liked the quiet and confident way he spoke to his commanders and encouraged them with simple words of praise.⁴ He was accused of presenting Major General George S. Patton's views to Eisenhower when Montgomery was trying to effect the single thrust and of disobeying orders from Eisenhower to stop Patton's ground movements.

Patton, a commander of a lesser organization and subordinate to Bradley, must be included in this analysis of individuals because of the boldness with which he acted and the effect his actions had on the military situation. Secondly, he captured the imagination of the American public and any restraint placed upon him was open to a tremendous American outcry. He was colorful, attacked with zest, and had a keen sense of mobile action which elevated him to the status of worthy opponent and respected commander.

²Ibid. p.74.

³Hanson W. Baldwin, Battles Lost and Won: Great Campaigns of World War II (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 494.

⁴MG Sir Francis DeGuingand, Operation Victory (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 436.

II. EISENHOWER

Personality and Character Traits

On 6 June 1944, only a few hours after the Allied troops landed on the Continent, a correspondent asked Eisenhower if he was nervous. The Commander, "who did not reveal any outward signs of nervousness replied that he was so nervous that he was boiling over inside."⁵ During the wait for information from the landed forces Eisenhower appeared outwardly calm, perfectly poised, and absolutely confident. Few men know that he had a rough-draft communique in his pocket drawn up the day before the landings. The text of the message showed how he instinctively assumed responsibility if anything went wrong with the invasion. It read:

Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the air and the navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.⁶

Eisenhower once said, "The worst part of high military command is the loneliness which prevents comradeship."⁷ The nature of this

⁵Kenneth S. Davis, Soldier of Democracy: A Biography of Dwight Eisenhower, (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 494.

⁶Captain Harry C. Butcher, My Three Years With Eisenhower (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), p. xxix.

⁷Davis, Soldier Of Democracy, p. 3.

loneliness was chiefly that where other men had an external human standard against which to measure their conduct he, in his hours of supreme decision making, had none. For the most part the men who served under him shaped their decisions within a pattern already laid down, but often it was for him to determine the final shape of the pattern which guided them. He had to dominate and be the arbiter of right and wrong, and of truth and error.

In his role of Supreme Commander he showed himself to be the military statesman; he devoted himself to the task of ending the war; he never forgot the human aspects tied to the war. His staff was a team of trusted and loyal men who worked smoothly and efficiently together, not only to end the war, but because of their admiration for the commander. As General Morgan stated after his first meeting with the new Supreme Commander, "Right from the first moment it was clear that here was a man that one would follow gladly wherever he should go."⁸

Eisenhower's Opinion of Montgomery

The personality differences between Eisenhower and Montgomery were significant factors in their often difficult relationship, but what mattered more was their fundamental disagreement over strategy and tactics. Eisenhower's military theory, reflecting that of Marshall and the traditions of the US Army, was straightforward and aggressive. He favored constant attack and became disturbed if any substantial part of his force was not gaining ground. He was an advocate of the direct

⁸LTG Sir Frederick Morgan, Overture To Overlord (London: Hoddard & Stoughton, 1955), p. 149.

approach and put his faith in the sheer smashing power of great armies. This was one reason he concentrated on logistics, on the orderly flow of goods from America's factories to the battlefield. He was once accused of having a mass production mentality, which was true, but beside the point.⁹ He simply wanted to use his nation's strengths on the battlefield.

Given the contrasts between Eisenhower and Montgomery it was almost inevitable that the two men would have difficulty in dealing with one another. Eisenhower was gregarious, while Montgomery lived in isolation. Eisenhower mixed easily with his staff and discussed decisions with his subordinates; Montgomery established himself in a lonely camp where he slept and ate in a wood-paneled trailer captured from Rommel.

There was no question of Montgomery's professional competence.¹⁰ He had proven his ability to command in the 1940 campaign in France and in North Africa during 1943. The Normandy invasion was the type of operation in which Montgomery excelled, a "set piece"¹¹ carefully planned assault with overpowering forces at his disposal. By the time the Allied forces broke out of the Cherbourg peninsula certain idiosyncrasies of Montgomery were becoming apparent to the members of SHAEF, especially the Americans. Paramount of these traits was Montgomery's caution when, to the belief of the free-wheeling Americans, aggressive action was needed. Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton were associated with Montgomery

⁹ Ambrose, Supreme Commander, p. 425.

¹⁰ John S. D. Eisenhower, The Bitter Woods (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), p. 48.

¹¹ Ibid.

since early 1943 in the Mediterranean Theater and among these three he achieved a reputation for caution and for requiring an almost unreasonable superiority before launching an attack. This caution in military philosophy seemed inconsistent with his personality, which could be described as cocky; nearly to the point of arrogance.

Eisenhower commented in his book Crusade In Europe:

General Montgomery has no superior in two most important characteristics. He quickly develops among British enlisted men an intense devotion and admiration--the greatest personal asset a commander can possess. Montgomery's other outstanding characteristic is his tactical ability in what might be called the "prepared" battle. In the study of enemy positions and situations and in the combining of his own armor, artillery, air, and infantry to secure tactical success against the enemy he is careful, meticulous, and certain.¹²

One outstanding and undeniable fact about Montgomery's World War II career which gained him world fame is that he never won a battle in which he had not first built up an overwhelming superiority of force, both in men and material.¹³ His admirers reply that the quality only proved that he was a great general.

Eisenhower had supreme confidence in Montgomery as a tactical commander, and despite newspaper coverage charging that Montgomery was too slow moving to the attack in Normandy, there was no criticism of Montgomery's tactics.¹⁴ A remark Eisenhower made to Major General Francis DeGuingand, Chief of Staff, 21 Army Group, after the battle of the Falaise Gap shows that there had been no major disagreement with Montgomery's conduct of the land battle to that point. Eisenhower was

¹²Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, p. 211.

¹³Ansel E. Talbert, "Report on Field Marshal Montgomery: Part I--Does the Record Back Monty?" Army, Navy, Air Force Register (29 November 1958), p. 1.

¹⁴DeGuingand, Operation Victory, p. 398.

discussing an alteration of boundaries between the Second Army (British) and the First US Army which established the boundary between the two nationalities when he said, "This is the first time when I have ever had occasion to question a tactical decision made by Monty."¹⁵

Eisenhower continued to regard Montgomery highly even though there were misunderstandings between the two men. When Supreme Headquarters was disbanded at the end of the war Eisenhower wrote a letter to Montgomery which included the following:

This great experiment of integrated command, whose venture was cavilled at by some and doubted by many, has achieved unqualified success, and this has only been made possible by the sympathetic, unselfish and unwavering support which you and all other commanders have wholeheartedly given to me. Your own brilliant performance is already a matter of history. . . .¹⁶

III. MONTGOMERY

Personality and Character Traits

Those who got close to Montgomery knew him as an intense little man who never raised his voice, never used expletives or abuse. When he was angry he spoke with a tight-lipped and waspish contempt.¹⁷ To the subordinate, it sounded like a statement of contemptuous conviction when he was told that he was "utterly useless." There was no argument with Montgomery on his decisions and no hope of appeal to any human weakness in his character. With those he liked he was affable, easy to get along with, and startlingly clear in saying what he wanted. His

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 390.

¹⁷ Major H.A. Deweerd, Great Soldiers OF World War II, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1944), pp. 102-25, passim.

Chief of Staff said he was a "magnificent master to work for" and that he never had a 'row' with his commander.¹⁸ He had personal idiosyncrasies which no one dared violate. He detested coughing during a briefing and when a significant number of persons coughed he would stop the briefing for three minutes while everyone coughed.¹⁹ Anyone coughing after this caught the full impact of his look of reproach. He did not smoke and would not permit anyone to smoke in his presence before breakfast. After breakfast limited grants were permitted to a very small number of people. Eisenhower, who was practically a chain-smoker, was a constant irritation to him. Even the indomitable Churchill deferred when in his presence. He drank no alcoholic beverages and excused himself after dinner when drinks were served. Card playing held no interest for him either so he vacated the mess as early as possible. Montgomery had one trait which shows his self-confidence; that was his ability to sleep in the face of momentous challenges and impending battles. He retired early and arose shortly after dawn. The business of running the war was arranged to be included in time for the evening meal.²⁰

He had the ideal temperament for a soldier. Nothing appeared to worry him, he accepted responsibility with complete ease, and he was not a complainer. He had a clarity of mind which permitted elimination of the inessentials and isolation of the necessary facts. Once the facts were identified he simplified the problem and arrived at decisions which

¹⁸DeGuingand, Operation Victory, p. 189.

¹⁹Alan Moorehead, Montgomery: A Biography (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1946), p. 104

²⁰Ibid.

provided enormous dividends. His knowledge of the military art was unique. Early in his career he studied the art of command, the psychology of war, and the tasks of the various arms of the service. He could talk with exact and technical knowledge with either an engineer or artilleryman as easily as someone from his own arm--infantry.

Montgomery never got excited, never lost his temper, and never changed a decision once it had been made. He gave tasks to his staff and permitted work without interference in routine assignments, but frequently penned replies to the Supreme Commander and sent "Monty-grams" to his commanders in his own handwriting.²¹ He supervised the tactical movements closely and paid particularly close attention to Lt. Gen. Miles C. Dempsey's Second Army (British). He was accused of commanding the Second Army through Dempsey and in view of the direct contact he had with that Army the charge seems justified; however, Dempsey was with Montgomery in North Africa²² and was one of the few men to whom he felt close. It was natural that he would turn to someone he knew and trusted from the former campaign.

The 21 Army Group had an air of austerity surrounding it that was deliberately cultivated by Montgomery as a means to an end. He realized that unless he lived reasonably hard, he could not keep in the condition necessary for his task, and in addition, such arrangements would prevent stories of his staff living in luxury as had been reported about field headquarters in World War I. Morale of the troops during

²¹DeGuingand, Operation Victory, p. 189

²²R.W. Thompson, Montgomery: The Field Marshal (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 36.

engagements was of prime importance and he kept abreast of its state at all times.²³ He worked incessantly to maintain a high state of morale among the fighting men and they never disappointed him. His physical bravery was common knowledge among the fighting men as he was frequently seen in the danger areas of the battlefield. The black beret, his personal symbol to the men, was worn for ease of identification and the beret with two badges became known far and wide among the troops. Soon after its appearance on the battlefield the news spread that Montgomery was present, and the men were reassured. His appearance on the battlefield was said to be worth a division when produced at the right moment.²⁴

For every strength in a man's character there is usually a corresponding weakness and Montgomery had his share of both. His supreme confidence in himself led to firmness of decision, but it also reduced his flexibility and prevented change to better plans when such change might have provided a superior solution. He was very outspoken and at times somewhat indiscreet with the press. He caused discord between the British and Americans by announcing British successes which were in fact joint Allied accomplishments. There was the element of showman and actor in him which accompanies most great leaders and the charges of "egotistical and vain" were results of these traits. He believed success in battle was the ultimate triumph and he tried to capitalize on his past successes. When he released information to the press he never called a press conference, he commanded one.²⁵

²³Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 83.

²⁴DeGuingand, Operation Victory, p. 178.

²⁵Baldwin, Battles Lost and Won, p. 495.

Montgomery was a small man who spoke in what has been described as a "bird like voice" by his biographer²⁶. Reflective and soft-spoken, he was a diplomatic and devious man to attain his ends. He was the paragon of ascetic men, who neither smoked nor drank, and had no apparent interest in women after the death of his wife. Mild and deliberate, he projected the figure of the military intellectual; the general who out-smarted the enemy as the result of careful study, rumination, and preparation.²⁷

Montgomery's Opinion of Eisenhower and Their Conflicts

The second chief conflict between Eisenhower and Montgomery was over the role of the Ground Forces Commander. Historically, the British always employed three commanders, one each for sea, land, and air. The decisions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff to make one man responsible for all actions in a Theater under the title of Supreme Commander obviated these three positions. Montgomery was placed in command of the land forces during the cross-channel operation and again on 25 July when, by virtue of being the senior commander, he commanded both the newly formed 12th Army Group and his own 21 Army Group. He still clung to the idea of a Ground Force Commander and proposed to Eisenhower that he be assigned to fill that position, or in the absence of himself, that Bradley fill the position and he would serve under Bradley.²⁸ The latter was a

²⁶J. Eisenhower, The Bitter Woods, p. 48.

See also; Moorehead, Montgomery: A Biography, p. 56.

²⁷Martin Blumenson, "Patton and Montgomery," Army, (June 1972), p.16,

²⁸Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 269.

conciliatory gesture as he would never have been placed under the command of a junior officer.

This line of thought was not Montgomery's alone.²⁹ As the result of a dispatch made to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on 18 August to an inquiry regarding future operations, Montgomery was visited by the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff who advocated retention of the system of command then in effect. The matter came to the attention of Marshall who told Eisenhower to "take direct command as soon as possible in order to end public acrimony."³⁰ Eisenhower took operational command of all forces on 1 September. On that same date Montgomery was promoted to a rank above Eisenhower's--Field Marshal. The subject was dropped after Eisenhower took operational command but was raised again during the Ardennes offensive when the Allied Force was split. The results were devastating to Montgomery who choose the wrong time to press his point. Eisenhower issued a directive on the conduct of future operations derived from a meeting with Montgomery and Bradley. Montgomery's letter arrived the day after the directive was released. He phrased the letter in terms which left the Supreme Commander no latitude and Eisenhower accepted the proposition as a challenge to his authority.³¹ Eisenhower was so upset with Montgomery that he prepared a telegram to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff requesting the removal of Montgomery. General DeGuingand, Chief of Staff, 21 Army Group, recognized the severity of the

²⁹ Joseph Patrick Hobbs, Dear General: Eisenhower's Wartime Letters to Marshall (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 166.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ J. Eisenhower, Bitter Woods, pp. 381-82.

situation and asked Eisenhower to hold the message until he could talk with Montgomery. After a hurried trip to Montgomery's headquarters an apology was immediately sent to Eisenhower and the text of the cable was destroyed.³² DeGuingand said the matter of being the land force commander was the only time he ever seriously disagreed with his "Chief".³³

On the point of overall command of the European Theater of Operations, Montgomery said in later years that he never had any argument with Eisenhower; that on the whole he was in agreement with the Supreme Commander. This appears to have been a mellowing in the aftermath. He was critical of Eisenhower from the beginning. He disdained Eisenhower's broad use of the staff and commented that if the war was to be fought by committee action it would never be won.

At Supreme Headquarters Montgomery's adherents in higher echelons were greatly outnumbered by his opponents. General Bedell Smith tried to be absolutely fair, but found it difficult to conceal his dislike for Montgomery. General Morgan, his British deputy, made no secret of his personal antipathy and his critical attitude. Montgomery did enjoy the confidence of Maj. Gen. J. F. M. Whiteley and the impartial and considered support of Maj. Gen. Kenneth W. D. Strong, the Chief of Intelligence. But in general, Montgomery's churlish attitude to Eisenhower, his bluntly phrased criticisms of strategy, his failure, more often than not, to attend conferences in person, his ill-timed criticisms of the command structure and the strategy of the Supreme Commander, coupled with the

³²Ibid. p. 384.

³³Personal Letter, DeGuingand to B. Pedigo, dated 24 October 1972.

aloof austerity of his military life, earned him dislike and ill will.³⁴

Eisenhower knew Montgomery would not comply with orders to which he objected until the very last moment. Montgomery wanted to have a complete independence of command and to do what he wanted. This was a minor difficulty, but one which caused the Supreme Commander much chagrin. When, following some minor infraction, Eisenhower asked him why he never obeyed orders, Montgomery replied that if he did not like the orders he would go as far as he could in disobedience and try to bluff his way through, but if he could not get what he wanted, then he would submit in the end.³⁵

The general disagreement on the strategy taken after crossing the Seine is brought out in the following comment by Montgomery:

The rightness or wrongness of the decision taken is, of course open to argument. But what cannot be disputed is that when a certain strategy, right or wrong, was decided upon, it wasn't directed. We did not advance to the Rhine on a broad front; we advanced to the Rhine on several fronts, which were un-coordinated. And what was the German answer? A single and concentrated punch in the Ardennes, when we had become un-balanced and unduly extended. So we were caught on the hop.³⁶

There were other points which tried the patience of Eisenhower not the least of which were Montgomery's press conferences. He was frequently quoted out of context and the rivalry between the British and American press corps intensified the problem. The enemy propaganda machine took full advantage of the situation to drive a wedge between the two

³⁴Thompson, Montgomery: The Field Marshal, p. 225.

³⁵Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis, The Alexander Memoirs: 1940-1945, John North (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1961), p.16.

³⁶Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 286.

nationalities when it broke in on a BBC broadcast to imitate the broadcast and criticize the handling of a battle by the US commanders.³⁷

A final point of conflict was Montgomery's apparent caution. At a lunch with the Prime Minister on 26 July, Eisenhower commented that he was worried about the outlook the American press had taken on the fighting during the breakout from the St. Lo area. The press had surmized the British were not taking their share of the fighting and of the casualties. Eisenhower quoted casualty figures to Churchill to emphasize his point and the Prime Minister agreed.³⁸ The following day Montgomery received instructions through the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to move more boldly,³⁹ but he steadfastly refused to attempt to breakout until he was satisfied the time was correct.⁴⁰ The differences between American and British thought was succinctly stated by Field Marshal Sir William Slim in 1952, "The big difference between American and British forces is that Americans act before they think and British think too long before they act."⁴¹

³⁷Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 388.

³⁸Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 260.

³⁹Bryant, Triumph In The West, pp. 180-82, passim.

⁴⁰Major L.F. Ellis, History of the Second World War, Victory In the West: The Battle of Normandy, Vol 1, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), p. 358. Hereinafter referred to as Victory In The West.

⁴¹Address to US Army Command and General Staff College by Field Marshal Slim on 8 April 1952. Located in U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

IV. BRADLEY

Personality and Character Traits

General Bradley has aptly been described as the soldier's soldier. He was admired, respected, and even adored by those he led in combat.⁴² His career began quietly in 1915 upon graduation from the United States Military Academy and continued in the same vein until the beginning of World War II. Appointed in 1941 as Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, he became the first man in his class to reach the rank of General.⁴³ He had not served outside the United States when chosen by Eisenhower to be his assistant in the Mediterranean Theater. He worked quietly in that position until Patton requested him as Assistant Corps Commander for II Corps.⁴⁴ The command of II Corps passed to him when Patton was elevated to command Seventh Army. When Eisenhower selected commanders for the American ground forces Bradley was chosen to command the US First Army in the cross-channel assault and 12th Army Group when it was activated in August.⁴⁵ Patton became involved in the celebrated slapping incident and was passed over for the position.⁴⁶

Bradley was a stabilizer for Patton and the shock absorber between Eisenhower and the armored forces leader. He was quiet, studious,

⁴²Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, p. 262.

⁴³Biographical sketch of General Omar N. Bradley, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

⁴⁴Ladislas Farago, Patton: Ordeal and Triumph, (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1963), p. 245.

⁴⁵Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, p. 215.

⁴⁶Farago, Patton: Ordeal and Triumph, pp. 342-359.

and unassuming, a commander who gave his staff tasks and did not interfere while they were being accomplished. The time spent under Montgomery in Normandy was served as a willing subordinate who followed orders.⁴⁷ His astute planning of the battle around St. Lo, coupled with unheard of "carpet bombing"⁴⁸ by the Bomber Command, was the key to the breakout from the bridgehead area. For two days the aircraft bombed immediately in front of the Allied troops and literally churned up the terrain over which the Americans advanced. The breakout was successful and Bradley continued to move eastward.

In the conduct of commanding his army group Bradley did much of his planning on the intelligence maps in his headquarters. Each evening he received a formal briefing from his senior staff officers on the enemy's capabilities as well as the capabilities of his own command.⁴⁹ By knowing the enemy's logistical and tactical situation he could effectively deduce their next tactical moves. This ability to perceive immediately the true situation and the objectives of the attacking forces permitted Bradley to assess correctly the German primary objective during the Ardennes offensive.⁵⁰

His quiet manner led many to a false assessment of his abilities. Some called him "farmer" because of his deceptive appearance and the lack of a personal gimmick such as Patton's ivory-handled pistols or General

⁴⁷Montgomery, Memoirs, pp. 251-271, Passim.

⁴⁸Combat Operations Data, First Army: Europe 1944-1945, (Unpublished, 1946), pp. 13-14.

⁴⁹12th Army Group, Report of Operations, G-3 Section, (Final After Action Report), Vol. V, Part II, (Unpublished, n.d.), Passim.

⁵⁰General Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier's Story, (New York: Holt, 1951), p. 469.

Mark Clark's carbine and hand grenades. There was nothing remarkable about Bradley except his achievements. Even these were accomplished quietly and efficiently without fanfare. Eisenhower observed during the campaign in Sicily that Patton dashed for ephemeral glory in Palermo while Bradley was fighting his way through the forbidding heights toward more valuable objectives. He concluded that "Bradley with his faithful adherence to the less spectacular, but more practical, design in the face of overwhelming odds was the real hero of the campaign."⁵¹ The quiet, calm man from Missouri was to exercise these qualities many times over in the months ahead.

Bradley's Opinion of Montgomery and Their Conflicts

Following the breakout at St. Lo the American forces swept through the Cherbourg peninsula to the south and quickly cleared the Peninsula. Patton was given the mission to swing his Third Army in a left turn to the north and close the escape route in an encirclement of the engaged enemy forces. He reached Argentan which was only a few kilometers away from the British forces on the other side of Falaise.⁵² Bradley ordered him to stop where he was and build up his forces in preparation for a counter-attack to breakout. The gap had not been closed and Patton was furious with Bradley because he was told to stop. Montgomery's Canadians had the task of linking up with Patton but failed to do so due to enemy resistance.⁵³ On the second day Patton asked

⁵¹Farago, Patton: Ordeal And Triumph, p. 314.

⁵²Ellis, Victory In The West, p. 427; See also: Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 376.

⁵³12th Army Group, Report of Operations, (Final After Action Report), p. 5. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

permission to close the gap with his forces, but Bradley denied this request. Nineteen German divisions were inside the pocket⁵⁴ and Bradley did not think Patton's forces, who were already holding a forty mile front, could stop the Germans. His forces could have been severely mauled in the effort and rendered ineffective for the pursuit that followed.

One week later the gap was closed by the Canadians and sixty thousand⁵⁵ men of the German Army were trapped in the 'Falaise Pocket.' More escaped than had been anticipated, yet the completion of the encirclement ended the effective German power in France except for the border areas. Throughout June and July Bradley loyally obeyed the British ground commander, and fully acknowledged his directives. But with the appearance of Patton on the battlefield and his own promotion to 12th Army Group Commander, which set him on the same command level as Montgomery, a change began to show itself. The Falaise affair was the first sign of what was to come.

After halting Patton at Argentan, and thus perhaps aborting a greater capture of enemy troops than actually took place, Bradley began to wonder whether he had done the right thing. He was infuriated at the slowness of Montgomery's advance and his apparent inability to get the Canadians moving more quickly. From this point Bradley began to be critical of Montgomery and suspicious of his tactics. The start of a

⁵⁴ Bradley, A Soldier's Story, pp. 377-379.

⁵⁵ Martin Blumenson, Breakout And Pursuit, US Army in World War II, European Theater of Operations, (Washington: 1961), p. 145. See also: United States Military Academy, The War In Western Europe: Part I (June to December, 1944), (West Point, New York: 1953), p. 145. Hereinafter referred to as USMA, War In Western Europe.

definite break between Bradley and Montgomery had begun.⁵⁶

It was not only the Falaise Gap episode which helped to begin this break between the two major allied commanders. At the same time, the American correspondents greeted Bradley's assignment to command 12th Army Group with comments that the American should have a separate command. As a result, the correspondents began to take up narrow nationalistic positions with the Americans often openly critical of Montgomery and the British, on the defensive, trying to vindicate the hero of Alamein. Both sides overlooked the fact that the balance of power had changed within the Allied camp; for not only had the command structure changed, but also the ratio of British to American divisions, with the American formations outgrowing the British rapidly.⁵⁷

A second encirclement by the Americans which cleared the German resistance from the front of a stalled Second British Army caused Bradley to bristle. After obtaining an admission that the Second Army did not have sufficient troops to close the encirclement, Bradley proposed that his 12th Army Group turn north into the British sector and cut the enemy off on the left bank of the Seine. General Dempsey, commander of the Second Division, agreed and Montgomery "noded agreement."⁵⁸ Eighty thousand Americans crossed in front of the British line of advance and forced the Germans into a narrow crossing on the mouth of the Seine where Allied aircraft strafed and bombed at will. Dempsey advanced with almost negligible resistance to occupy the front cleared for him by the

⁵⁶Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 377.

⁵⁷Blumenson, Breakout And Pursuit, p. 36.

⁵⁸Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 381.

US troops and crossed the river on a ready-made bridgehead⁵⁹ established by the Americans. Removal of the Americans from the British sector required close traffic coordination of crossroads and bridges. An agreement was reached for a system of two-hour clearances on the roads. The British and Americans were to pass columns through these junctures for alternating periods of two hours each until the forces were unraveled. Several days later when Dempsey was questioned by the press on his advance to the Seine, he complained that "the movement could have gone faster but for the US traffic that snarled his front." To this Bradley commented:

Although we were probably unduly sensitive to any reflection on US command, I was piqued to learn that our diversion had been characterized as an obstruction by its chief beneficiary. I had to remind Monty that Dempsey's half-time use of roads in a sector cleared by Americans was vastly preferable to a full-time claim on roads still occupied by the German.⁶⁰

After Montgomery visited Bradley on 17 August and they discussed the proposed single thrust in the north, he stated he had Bradley's complete approval for his plan. There seems little chance that Bradley would have agreed to stop 12th Army Group in its tracks to advance the British to the Ruhr. On the contrary, he proposed a thrust from the south with Patton leading, and a supporting attack in the north by 21 Army Group. Nowhere, except in Montgomery's accounts, did Bradley indicate approval of the single thrust in the north.

The greatest rift came following the Ardennes offensive and the view in some circles that Montgomery had saved the day for the Americans. At the same time, Montgomery began clamoring for the title of Ground

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Commander again. Bradley felt that he had been severely undermined by Montgomery's remark to the press, and that he would suffer a loss of confidence among the subordinate commanders who had been placed under Montgomery's temporary command. When Bradley raised the issue of the ground commander to Eisenhower he received a reassuring reply that it would not occur. To emphasize the degree of separation between the two men, and how deeply Bradley felt about it he told Eisenhower:

Nevertheless you must know after what has happened I can not serve under Montgomery. If he is to be put in command of all ground forces, you must send me home, for if Montgomery goes in over me, I will have lost the confidence of my command.⁶¹

Several days previously Bradley indicated to Patton that he would feel obliged to ask for relief rather than submit 12th Army Group to Montgomery's command and Patton replied, "If you quit, Brad, then I'll be quitting with you."⁶²

Quite often during the war Bradley disputed Montgomery's views, challenged his decisions, and questioned the wisdom of his moves. Unlike his British associates, he says, "I was never so intimidated by the legend of Montgomery that I could unhesitatingly accept his judgement as infallible. Like the rest of us, Monty is mortal; and being mortal, he has made mistakes."⁶³

V. PATTON

Personality and Character Traits

Few generals have been more praised, hated, honored, and misunderstood than George S. Patton, Jr. A man of many masks, he was the great combat leader of the war who commanded the Third Army in Germany.

⁶¹Ibid. ⁶²Ibid. ⁶³Ibid.

He was unpredictable, capricious, paradoxical, and complex while at the same time being dependable, loyal, brutal yet sensitive with an astonishing mixture of arrogance and humility.

After successfully completing a campaign he invariably gave the credit to his subordinates and personally thanked God for guiding him. He was capable of complete reversal of character at any time and could deliver a tempestuous tirade, either to a group or an individual, or he could praise the same audience, and make them feel they were the most important persons on earth.⁶⁴

Much of what Patton did seemed outrageous by ordinary standards, but often was a studied attempt to work on the imagination and curiosity of the soldiers. An important part of this was his apparent contempt of cold, discomfort, land mines, and shellfire. He never seemed to consider his own safety or comfort when in the presence of the troops. He believed men were born with luck and could develop it like any other gift. Luck could wear out, or perhaps a man counted on it too much and was not psychologically as careful. He said luck was a psychic quality, an ability to recognize a winning chance and take it before it really emerged. On the other side of luck was the law of averages, and that the luck of a frontline infantryman wore out faster than the luck of a rear echelon cook.⁶⁵

General Patton was an unusual mixture of a profane and highly religious man. At one time in Europe a group of clergy visited his headquarters and were surprised, because of his reputation as a rough-spoken

⁶⁴George S. Patton Jr., War As I Knew It, (New York: Pyramid Books, 1947) p. 84.

⁶⁵Harry H. Semmes, Portrait of Patton, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), p. 16.

soldier, to be treated in a dignified and decorous manner. As the visit was nearing an end one of the clergymen saw a Bible and asked if he read the Scriptures. Patton replied with an oath of profanity that he read them every day.⁶⁶

In matters of discipline he maintained stringent rules and enforced those rules diligently. He demanded that his regulations on the wearing of the uniform be rigidly enforced and fined the men and officers for failure to wear helmets and other items of the uniform. He expected and received prompt and willing obedience in all matters of discipline.⁶⁷

His hold on the men and officers under him was not only that of strict discipline; a large factor was admiration for the man himself. He was unstinting in his efforts to improve the fighting units and to look out for those who worked under him. He often said that it was as culpable not to praise a man when he did well as not to discipline him when he did poorly.⁶⁸

In the popular mind, he was a flamboyant swashbuckler blessed with boldness, courage, drive, and luck. But it took more than that to become a general officer. The showmanship to impress the public with his toughness and the braggadocio that assaulted the ears of his troops only camouflaged his high professional competence. Constantly interested in technological advance, he strove to anticipate the effect of new weapons and equipment on the methods of waging warfare. He had a wide range of

⁶⁶Semmes, Portrait of Patton, p. 6.

⁶⁷Ibid, p. 8.

⁶⁸Robert S. Allen, Colonel, Lucky Forward: The History of Patton's Third US Army, (New York: Vanguard Press Inc., 1947), p. 28.

interest, a sharp discernment of the contemporary scene, and a profound sense of history.⁶⁹

He dressed immaculately and expensively. His normal uniform was riding breeches with a specially made English combat boot topped off with sheepskin-lined leather jacket, helmet, and his famous ivory-handled pistols.

He lived his life with utter contempt for conventions with which he did not agree. Politics was a low form of life to him, but when his position demanded that he receive congressional committees he could be gracious and charming. They did not talk his language or know his way of life and were, therefore, in his view, an interference with the successful conduct of the war.

He was first and always an exhibitionist. He played to the galleries; his dress and ivory-handled guns were largely stage props that became his trademark in the public mind. He was spontaneously bold and witty in his sayings, and again this was part of the show. Quick repartee was his stock in trade; he strove for it and for the most part was amazingly good at it. Sometimes he overreached and was pathetically inept. He was quick to anger and equally quick to realize when he made a mistake. The slapping of a soldier hospitalized for nervous disorder almost ended Patton's military career. He thought the man was malingering and ordered him back to fight with his organization. As a direct result of this incident Patton was not selected to command the US First Army forces in Operation OVERLORD or subsequently to command 12th

⁶⁹Martin Blumenson, The Patton Papers: 1885-1940, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), p. 15.

Army Group.⁷⁰ He was not even considered for the positions as public sentiment was running too high against him at the time.

Patton was basically a cavalryman, imbued with the spirit of mobility and shock action. He seemed to prefer the direct smash and the lightning thrust; he was the slasher and the master of the ad hoc operation. The aggressive action demonstrated by his Third Army was a direct reflection of its commander.

Patton's Opinion of Montgomery and Their Conflicts

What seems to be a dichotomy of personalities between Montgomery and Patton were in fact similarities. Both were showmen and both were commanders who supervised combat operations far below the normal command level. Each demanded free rein in order to conduct the battle in their own fashion. Yet neither permitted the same degree of freedom within his command. The tight control exercised by both commanders was a result of the intense rivalry between the men as individuals. Montgomery, while on a higher command level than Patton, was in direct competition with him for headlines and glory. Patton's ground gains and lightning advances, coupled with steam-roller tactics and large numbers of prisoners taken, were grabbing headlines away from Britain's hero. The British and American press aligned behind their standard bearers and intensified the nationalistic rivalry.

The first conflict between the two men was in Africa and was not a face to face disagreement. Eisenhower invited Patton to Tunis for a victory celebration but did not invite him to sit on the reviewing platform which included Montgomery and other dignitaries. Patton told

⁷⁰Farago, Patton: Ordeal And Triumph, p. 367

Bradley, who accompanied him to Tunis, that he was sorry he had gone as "the celebration turned out to be a Franco-British show dedicated to the glory of Montgomery and the rebirth of the French Army."⁷¹ The second encounter was over planning for the invasion of Sicily. Montgomery caused the plans of Patton to be cancelled even before they were completed because he did not like them. He proposed to General Sir Harold Alexander, the 15 Army Group and Mediterranean Commander, plans which were more favorable to his forces and Alexander called a conference to solve the difference of opinion. Patton said after the conference that Alexander called the conference to influence the invasion in Montgomery's favor, in accordance with Montgomery's demands, and to justify giving him everything he asked for on a silver platter.⁷² The Montgomery plan called for Patton's Seventh Army to conduct a supporting attack for Montgomery's Eighth Army. The tasks outlined for Seventh Army was almost an impossible task that held the seeds of disaster. Alexander and Eisenhower agreed to the plan; however, Alexander was quite frank as to the difference in the missions. He stated in his report of the operation:

The risk was unevenly divided and almost the whole of it would fall on the Seventh Army. In other ways also it might well seem that the American troops were being given the tougher and less spectacular task: their beaches were more exposed than the Eighth Army's and on some of them there were open sand bars, they would have only one small port for maintenance and the Eighth Army would have the glory of capturing the more obviously attractive objectives of Syracuse, Catania, and Messina, names which would bulk larger in press headlines than Gela or Licata or the obscure townships of central Sicily. Both I and my staff felt that this division of tasks might possibly, on⁷³ this understandable ground, cause some feeling of resentment."

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 262. See also: Patton, War As I Know It, p. 52.

⁷² Farago, Patton: Ordeal And Triumph, p. 275.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 279. See also: Alexander, The Alexander Memoirs, p. 108.

Patton was furious with the changes but told Alexander "I only obey orders,"⁷⁴ implying that he would not question the orders as British commanders frequently did.

Montgomery was not through yet. He also wanted to be the overall ground commander with sole jurisdiction over his own as well as Patton's Seventh Army. After getting ashore he told Alexander, "It is clear that coordination, direction and control should be undertaken by one Army commander and a joint staff."⁷⁵ Patton disagreed violently and told Alexander there would be two Armies, both under Alexander's command and not Montgomery's.

When Montgomery got to Mt. Etna the eastern route around the mountain was blocked. He decided to go around the other side only to find the road had been assigned to the 45th US Division who was already moving on it. Montgomery demanded that Alexander stop the 45th Division and let his Eighth Army proceed. Alexander promptly did as requested and the 45th Division was then withdrawn back to the beaches over which they entered and moved to the opposite flank of the American forces. In the next two days the British assault lost its momentum and Eighth Army went on the defensive. Patton now had the opportunity he wanted. He intended to beat Montgomery at his own game and capture Palermo, one hundred miles distant, in only five days.⁷⁶

Sicily sharpened the cutting edge of the rivalry. It became acute when Patton's contribution to the conquest of Sicily was obscured by an

⁷⁴Farago, Patton: Ordeal And Triumph, p. 279

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 302.

⁷⁶Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 64.

apparently deliberate design to minimize his achievements lest the publicity cast a reflection on Montgomery's part in the campaign and shadow his prestige.

Europe was a continuation of the rivalry. Before Patton arrived in France he said, "I am afraid Monty doesn't want me because he's afraid I'll steal his show."⁷⁷ On 1 August 1944 the Third Army was activated and thereafter Patton tried to regain his position and his fame. In early July Patton told Bradley that he was in the doghouse and apt to die there "unless I pull something spectacular to get me out."⁷⁸ Bradley later commented, "I've often wondered how much this nothing-to-lose attitude prodded Patton in his spectacular race across the face of France."⁷⁹

The march across France had not escaped the attention of Montgomery. His proposed narrow front thrust demanded that certain units assume a static role. Patton's counterproposal for a thrust on the southern axis was his effort to reverse the roles; however, he was as unsuccessful with Eisenhower as Montgomery had been.

Patton exerted pressure on Bradley to let him advance when supplies were being routed to 21 Army Group for an advance in the northern sector. Bradley permitted reconnaissance in force and Patton created emergency situations whereby he received gasoline and ammunition to save the trapped force. In this manner he was able to divert gasoline and ammunition to Third Army and at the same time continue its advance across France at the expense of Montgomery.⁸⁰ Montgomery accused Patton of

⁷⁷Farago, Patton: Ordeal And Triumph, p. 447.

⁷⁸Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 357. ⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 125.

of trying to subvert the 21 Army Group mission and after the war was over Patton admitted that was his goal.⁸¹

There was a touch of the nebulous in the rivalry of Montgomery and Patton to the distinct detriment of realism and logic in the war. Both men were military virtuosos in their own different ways, but had all the whimsy and vanity of matinee idols.

⁸¹Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 293.

CHAPTER III

THE NARROW FRONT PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

On 12 September 1944 the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved Eisenhower's recommendations for an advance on a modified broad front to secure the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam. Simultaneous with the approval the importance of securing the ports and the advantages of the northern routes of advance into Germany were underlined. Montgomery opposed the Combined Chiefs of Staff in favor of his own alternative. Where the difficulties of supply led Eisenhower to favor the strategy of a broad front, they caused the British commander to advocate a single thrust in the north. In his view, the recent success had merely postponed the moment for decision between the two policies. The supply of a general advance, difficult in August, would soon prove critical; meanwhile, he argued, a strong attack in the north could throw the Germans back over the Rhine north of the Siegfried Line, and, if given enough support, could penetrate the Ruhr and the northern plains of Germany as far as Berlin.¹

It is not surprising that Montgomery opposed the broad front approach across Europe. He was a student of military history and both

¹John Ehrman, Grand Strategy, Vol. V, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), p. 525.

the British and the Germans had been unsuccessful in every broad front offensive operation conducted during both World Wars. In the campaigns of 1914 the German advance in Western Europe was checked on a broad front that consisted of a series of trenches extending from Switzerland to the coast. Heavy casualties occurred as the machine gun and barbed wire made the persistent infantry charges obsolete. On the western front the Germans at Verdun and the Allies at the Somme failed in their attempts at a major breakthrough. The losses were immense--the Somme offensive cost the British 400,000 casualties. In 1917 the Russians collapsed and the Germans concentrated their entire forces on the western front. The French morale cracked when their offensive failed and the British and Canadians were left to hold off the Germans in Flanders.

In the Second World War the German ground and air blitzkrieg overwhelmed the land forces of Europe in 1939-40. Germany's main strike forces were concentrated on a narrow front and relied on speed, mobility, shock action, and tremendous firepower to carry the situation. With the blitzkrieg in the west, the power of the German Wehrmacht dispelled any illusions about the conflict being fought in the static trench warfare of the previous war.

On 10 May 1940, Germany attacked France through Belgium and the Netherlands, thereby outflanking the Maginot Line where the French and British attempted to establish a defensive line. The Dutch and Belgian armies capitulated, and within two weeks the Germans had penetrated the line of the dispirited French armies at Sedan and reached the Channel, trapping the British Expeditionary Force and some French units to the north. The surrounded troops turned what could have become a major disaster into the incredible evacuation of Dunkirk. Most of

Britain's soldiers were saved but nearly all their equipment was lost. Hitler stopped the rapid advance of the German armor on narrow frontages short of the Dunkirk beaches.²

Another example of failure of the broad front was Germany's attack launched on Russia in June 1941. Success depended on immediate and decisive victory following the attack. One hundred and fifty divisions attacked along a 1,600 mile front and were met with unprecedented resistance. By the end of the year the objectives, Moscow and Leningrad, still remained in possession of the Russians.

Until the summer of 1942 the British Army in North Africa alternated between defeat and victories on every front. General Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps had driven the British almost to Cairo. Alexander and Montgomery entered the fray against Rommel, and in October 1942 the British won their first decisive battle of the desert war at El Alamein. This battle was conducted on a comparative narrow front--as were his subsequent victories in Sicily, Italy, and Normandy.

II. STRATEGY OF THE PLAN

Eisenhower sent a message to the commanders of 12th and 21 Army Groups on 4 September 1944 stating that the armies had advanced so rapidly that further movement in parts of the front, even against very weak opposition, was almost impossible.³ This situation was due to

²The theme has been advanced by Count Ciano in his Diary, pp. 266-7, that Hitler stopped his army in order to save the British Army. Hitler's belief at the time was that Great Britain was too great a power to completely destroy her army. The heritage and history of England had to be preserved in her army and there was no glory in destroying a force he had already beaten into the sea.

³Message, Eisenhower to All Commanders: MSG 13765; SHAEF SCS 381, Post Overlord Planning. Located in U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

extended supply lines and the possibility of becoming inactive due to lack of materiel. His instructions were to keep the enemy engaged all along the line of contact. This would prevent reorganization of the bits and pieces for a defense along the Siegfried Line or the Rhine river. This message was the clue for Montgomery to urge that the drive to the Ruhr be given full backing on a narrow front in the north. The disorganized condition of the German Army coupled with its loss of mobility through the destruction of over 15,000 trucks since D-Day⁴ presented just the situation Montgomery wanted. It demanded an advance on a narrow front as that would accentuate the restricted mobility and enforce dispersion of the Wehrmacht while enabling the Allies to exploit their greatly superior capacity for concentration and movement. There was every likelihood that if he were to make a single powerful thrust, he could cut through the over-extended and straggling German armies to the Rhine. Such a course, in his opinion, would involve no real risk. For the next month the enemy was likely to possess neither the mobility to launch a counterattack nor the reserves to form a substantial counter-concentration of force. The southern flank could be held by airpower as Patton had already demonstrated in his drive toward Metz.⁵

Even before the Allies reached the Seine Montgomery had foreseen the scope and nature of this unique opportunity. On 17 August he suggested to Bradley that the 12th and 21 Army Groups should be kept together as a

⁴12th Army Group Report of Operations, G-2 Section, (Final After Action Report), Vol. I, Part II. (Unpublished, n.d.) p.6. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁵General H. H. Arnold, Global Mission, (London: Hutchinson, 1951), p. 351.

solid mass of forty divisions to advance northwards.⁶ When this plan was first proposed to Bradley he expressed complete agreement with it.⁷ On 18 August Montgomery wired General Alan Brooke the above information and was visited by the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Lt. Gen. Sir Archibald Nye. Montgomery gave a summary of his views concerning the strategy and the organization of command to be followed:

1. The quickest way to win this war is for the great mass of the Allied Armies to advance northwards, clear the coast as far as Antwerp, establish a powerful air force in Belgium and advance into the Ruhr.

2. The force must operate as one whole, with great cohesion and so strong that it can do the job quickly.

3. Single control and direction of the land operations is vital for success. This is a whole time job for one man.

4. The great victory in N.W. France has been won by personal command. Only in this way will future victories be won. If staff control of operations is allowed to creep in, then quick success becomes endangered.

5. To change the system of command now, after having won a great victory, would be to prolong the war.⁸

General Alan Brooke was visiting the Italian front with the Prime Minister when the message arrived, but there is little doubt that when General Nye supported the five points he spoke for General Alan Brooke as well as for Churchill.⁹

⁶Chester Wilmot, The Struggle For Europe, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952) p. 460.

See also: Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 267.

⁷Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 267.

⁸Ellis, Victory In The West, p. 460.

⁹Personal Letter, DeGuingand to Pedigo, 24 Oct 1972. Letter in author's possession.

III. ROUTES OF ADVANCE AND COURSES OF ACTION AVAILABLE

The plan Montgomery presented to Eisenhower was for "one powerful full-blooded thrust of approximately forty divisions across the Rhine and into the heart of Germany, backed by the whole of the resources of the Allied Armies."¹⁰ He believed it would be likely to achieve decisive results and possibly end the war by the close of 1944. The success of such a plan would be dependent upon the ability to concentrate sufficient strength, supported by adequate combat support and combat service support,¹¹ to ensure continued momentum after the Seine river was crossed. The plan called upon the combined Allied resources in the widest sense, and entailed stopping the Allied forces in certain sectors and giving them a static role in the fighting.¹²

There appeared to be two feasible axes of advance along which such a thrust into Germany could be mounted (see map 3). The first was the northern axis through Belgium to the Rhine, crossing the river north of the Ruhr industrial region; once over the Rhine, this route led into the open plains of northern Germany. The alternative axis through Metz and the Saar area led into central Germany. Montgomery favored the northern route since it would enable the Allies to exploit their greater mobility and strength of armored forces in the plains of northern Germany

¹⁰ Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, Normandy To The Baltic, (Germany: British Army of the Rhine, 1946), p. 149.

¹¹ Combat support is defined as the operational assistance furnished combat elements by other designated units. In this situation it covers the artillery, engineer, signal, and intelligence functions. Combat service support is the service provided by units in the fields of administration and other services. Here it includes the medical services, supply, maintenance, transportation, and other logistical services.

¹² Montgomery, Normandy To The Baltic, p. 149.

with greater affect than would be possible in the more rugged terrain to the south. The northern route was also the shortest, most direct route to Berlin--the final objective.¹³

Phasing of the Operation

The operation envisioned by Montgomery required five phases for successful completion:

Phase I: Crossing the Seine.

The Seine river formed an obstacle of tremendous military consequence and the necessity for establishing bridgeheads on its eastern bank was a factor of overriding importance in Montgomery's plans for finishing the war. It would be necessary to maintain the combat strength and relative combat power, as well as the impetus of the attack, to keep the enemy sufficiently on the withdrawal straight through to the Rhine.

Phase II: Crossing the Rhine.

The crossing of the Seine was planned as a deliberate river crossing and the crossing of the Rhine as a hasty crossing.¹⁴ It was Montgomery's intention to "bounce"¹⁵ his way across the Rhine before the enemy succeeded in reforming a front to oppose the advance and check its progress; the army would become involved in determined combat west of

¹³Montgomery believed that Germany would fall when Berlin was threatened, and that a battle for the city would not be necessary.

¹⁴A deliberate river crossing is a crossing opposed by all the defensive power available to the enemy force. It is a crossing conducted under fire against an entrenched force. A hasty river crossing is characterized by speed of approach and seizure. It too is an opposed crossing, but the enemy is in a withdrawal posture and conducting delaying actions to gain time for space.

¹⁵This is intended to imply a hasty river crossing while in pursuit of the retreating enemy.

the Rhine. Moreover, should the enemy establish proper defenses on the Rhine the crossing would become a deliberate crossing which would consume more time and lives.

Phase III: Isolation of the Ruhr.

Assuming success to this point because of the concentration of combat power to gain bridgeheads east of the Rhine, the force would have an area from which to launch operations into the heart of Germany. By directing the thrust over the river north of the Ruhr the immediate objective became the Ruhr industrial region without which the German capacity for waging war would dwindle away within six months.

Phase IV: Fixing the Forces in the Open Plains.

Once the Ruhr was isolated the Allies would be free to develop operations in the open plains of northern Germany. Since the Ruhr was the enemy's prime industrial region, it was logical that he would concentrate his available military resources in the north to defend it. When this occurred the German Army in the north could be brought to battle, fixed, and destroyed in terrain suitable for the superior mobility of the Allies.

Phase V: Seizure of Berlin.

The drive to Berlin would be practically unopposed after the German Army was destroyed in the northern plains. Montgomery believed that Germany would surrender when Berlin was surrounded. If the city did not surrender it would require only short work to reduce it against the resistance it was capable of producing. Historically, the city had surrendered when threatened and with the city's capitulation this time the nation would stop fighting.

A second course of action, providing that the essential prerequisites of speed and concentration of maintenance resources could be effected, was a drive into Belgium with the clearance of the Channel coast as far as Antwerp. Sufficient airfields would be obtained to establish the air forces in Belgium for air support in the succeeding phases of the operation. Once this phase was accomplished, phase II would continue with emphasis placed on getting across the Rhine river.¹⁶

IV. THE EXPECTED GERMAN ORDER OF BATTLE

Enemy resistance on the entire front showed signs of collapse. The bulk of the remaining enemy forces, estimated as the equivalent of two weak panzer divisions and nine infantry divisions, were northwest of the Ardennes but they were disorganized, in full retreat, and unlikely to offer any appreciable resistance if given no opportunity to reorganize. South of the Ardennes the enemy forces were estimated as the equivalent of two Panzer Grenadier and four poor infantry divisions. The heterogeneous force which was withdrawing from southwest France numbered approximately 100,000 men but its fighting value was estimated as the equivalent of about one division. The equivalent of one-half Panzer and two infantry divisions were being driven northward up the Rhine river by the US Seventh Army.¹⁷

During the advance to the Siegfried Line in the months following September 1944, there was only sporadic contact with the enemy along the fronts of the armies. Only in a few instances did the Germans try to

¹⁶ Montgomery, Normandy To The Baltic, pp. 150-51.

¹⁷ SHAEF, Intelligence Estimate, 31 August 1944, SHAEF G-2 Reports, Aug-Nov. 1944. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

make a stand and these were usually at river crossing sites. The inadequacy of the German forces, their lack of communications, their drastic shortages of equipment, and what seemed to be command confusion on the lower levels, led to the abandonment of any pretense of re-establishing a line anywhere except at the West Wall¹⁸. Resistance was spotty and without consistent plan. Many bridges were abandoned intact and few cities or towns were defended. "Road marches punctuated by occasional skirmishes of short duration and involving a company or at most a battalion for only several hours was the action."¹⁹

The intelligence summary of SHAEF, dated 9 September 1944, stated the condition of the German army:

The whole wreck of the Balkans and Finland may yield up perhaps half a dozen divisions. These will go no way to meet the crying need for more divisions to man the West Wall; moreover, a line in Transylvania will need to be manned. Where, then are more divisions to be found? Not in Norway, withdrawal would take too long. . . . Denmark might still supply one division, and a dozen or more may yet be formed in Germany, given time, from training units, remnants, and so forth. The Italian and Russian fronts risk collapse if anything more is withdrawn from them. . . . In short, C. in C. West²⁰ may not expect more than a dozen divisions within the next two months to come from outside to the rescue.²¹

The German General F. W. von Mellenthin commented on the thrust through the Ruhr and said that while it would have "simplified the Allied supply problem, it would also have simplified the German defense

¹⁸The German name for the Ziegfried Line was the West Wall.

¹⁹Blumenson, Breakout And Pursuit, p. 689.

²⁰Commander-in-Chief West. A position similar to Eisenhower's in the German command structure. At this time it was occupied by Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt who assumed command on 5 September 1944.

²¹SHAEF G-2 REPORTS, Aug-Nov. 1944. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

problem."²² It was his contention that the divisions assembling on the Moselle to stop Patton could have been diverted to Belgium to stop Montgomery. Opposing Patton was Army Group G composed of three separate panzer brigades.²³ During August 1944, the Germans wondered why the Allied command did not immediately push forwards across the Moselle and cut off Army Group G as it retreated north. Later developments revealed Eisenhower's strategy when Aachen and the bend in the Lower Rhine were attacked. It is a straight line from Normandy to Berlin, via Aachen and the Ruhr. Lieutenant General Bodo Zimmerman, Chief of Operations, Army Group D, believed that had the strategy of Montgomery succeeded in the autumn of 1944, there would have been no need to fight for the West Wall, not for the central and upper Rhine, all of which would have fallen automatically.²⁴

V. ORDER OF BATTLE TO SUPPORT THE PLAN

Montgomery sent a message to Eisenhower on 18 September 1944 in which he again outlined the narrow front plan and the administrative and logistical problems associated with it. He presented what he felt were the advantages of the northern route and then told Eisenhower that, if he accepted the suggestions, a force consisting of the 21 Army Group and the US First Army of nine divisions would be adequate to obtain the desired result. Such a force would require full support in the matter of

²²General F. W. von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), p. 315.

²³Ibid, p. 315.

²⁴Seymour Freidin and William Richardson, ed. The Fatal Decisions, (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1956), p. 238.

maintenance supplies; other Armies would have to do the best they could with what was left over.²⁵

The composition of 21 Army Group as of 15 September 1944 is shown in Chart 1. It consisted of seventeen divisions mixed between five corps of three divisions each and two divisions held in Group Reserve. The reserve was one armored division and an airborne division that became non-operational on 18 September 1944. In each corps there were normally two infantry divisions and one armored division.

The US First Army was composed of three corps and its composition is shown in Chart 2. The United States Army switched divisions between corps frequently; however, the assignment shown is correct as of 15 September 1944 and, furthermore, transfers would not have altered the total number of divisions in the First Army. The First Army was made up of three corps of three divisions, each corps consisted of one armored division and two infantry divisions.²⁶

The total combat power of the combined force consisted of twenty-six divisions: nine armored and seventeen infantry. It will be noted that this number is fourteen divisions below the forty divisions Montgomery said he would need to accomplish the thrust.²⁷

²⁵Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 279.

²⁶USMA, War In Western Europe: Part I, p. 226.

²⁷On 4 September Montgomery's message to Eisenhower stated he would need forty divisions to make the thrust. By 18 September he had lowered this requirement to the 21 Army Group plus the First US Army of nine divisions. In Montgomery's later speeches and writings he reverts to the original figure of forty divisions with no mention of the lesser number.

CHART 1

ORDER OF BATTLE 21 ARMY GROUP

Composition of 21 Army Group (British) as of 15 September 1944.

21 ARMY GROUP

Group Headquarters

British 79th Armored Division

British 6th Airborne Division (non-operational on 18 September)

Canadian First Army

British I Corps

British 49th Division

British 51st Division

104th Division (arrived 7 Sept: in combat 24 Oct)

Canadian II Corps

Polish 1st Armored Division

Canadian 4th Armored Division

Canadian 2d Division

Canadian 3d Division

British Second Army

British VIII Corps

British 11th Armored Division

British 3d Division

British XII Corps

British 7th Armored Division

British 15th Division

British 53d Division

British XXX Corps

British Guards Armored Division

British 43d Division

British 50th Division

Source: A Military History of World War II with Atlas, Vol 1, Operations in the European Theaters, ed by T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent J. Esposito, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1953 pp. 635-36.

CHART 2

ORDER OF BATTLE FIRST US ARMY

Composition of First US Army as of 15 September 1944.

FIRST (US) ARMY

Headquarters

V Corps

5th Armored Division
4th Division
28th Division

VII Corps

3d Armored Division
1st Division
9th Division

XIX Corps

2d Armored Division
30th Division
29th Division (not assigned until 21 Sept)

Source: A Military History of World War II with Atlas, Vol 1, Operations in the European Theaters, ed by T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent J. Esposito, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1953 pp. 639-37.

VI. LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AND ITS AVAILABILITY

The demands of four rapidly advancing armies required as much as a million gallons of gasoline daily and overtaxed the Allied lines of communications, which extended in some cases as far back as Cherbourg and the invasion beaches. These limitations certainly made it impossible to launch any number of drives through the Siegfried Line and also made the success of a single thrust beyond the Rhine doubtful. From the

beginning of OVERLORD planning various staffs had recognized supply difficulties as one of their major problems.²⁸ They stressed the necessity of capturing sufficient ports to provide adequate and easily accessible stores, and emphasized the vital importance of Cherbourg, Le Havre, and the ports of Brittany if a drive into Germany was to be sustained. The planners assumed that the rate of the advance beyond the Seine would be much less rapid than the rate actually achieved by the land forces.²⁹

In mid-August as the tremendous possibilities of a rapid advance became evident, Allied supply organizations made great efforts to provide support for the campaigns which were developing. Communications Zone³⁰ troops were laying pipelines for carrying fuel, constructing at the peak as much as thirty to forty miles a day. Special emphasis was placed on the rapid restoration of railroad lines so that overburdened truck companies could be used more economically. In the last week of August at the height of supply difficulties an emergency airlift and the Red Ball Express truck line³¹ were established to deal with gasoline shortages which became more acute as the advance continued beyond the Seine.³²

²⁸OVERLORD Logistic Annex: Port Operations. Passim. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

²⁹Operation OVERLORD, First Army Tactical Plan. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

³⁰Communications Zone by definition is the rear part of the theater of operations behind the combat zone which contains the lines of communications, establishments for supply and evacuation, and other agencies required for the immediate support and maintenance of the field forces.

³¹The Red Ball Express was a group of truck companies formed into long range transportation assets. They operated twenty-four hours daily between the Cherbourg port areas and Paris on one-way roads to transport supplies to the combat units. Primary loads were food, ammunition, and gasoline.

³²USMA, War In Western Europe: Part I, p. 177

Despite the superhuman efforts of the logistical commands, the total tonnage received for the month of August was lower than the two previous months.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROAD FRONT PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

In both the American and British armies it was understood that proposed tactical plans might be debated and various viewpoints developed. General Eisenhower encouraged this type of discussion and often invited criticism of his plans.¹ It is possible that he added to his own command problems by failing to make clear to Montgomery when the discussion stage ended and the execution stage began. Associates of the British commander emphasized that he never failed to obey a direct order, but that he would continue to press his viewpoints as long as he was permitted to do so.² Eisenhower, accustomed to more ready compliance from his American army group commanders, delayed too long in issuing positive directions to Montgomery. In his efforts to give full voice to the British he was more tolerant of strong dissent from Montgomery than he should have been. Many observers have interpreted this toleration as indecisiveness on the part of Eisenhower and thought him too slow in issuing final orders stopping further discussion on questions of command and strategy.

¹General Eisenhower conducted conferences on the following dates to discuss future strategy with his army group commanders: 22 August, 22 September and 7 December 1944. While there is no evidence indicating Eisenhower accepted any plans other than those he proposed, he did use the commanders as a "war gaming" panel to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed actions.

²Alexander, The Alexander Memoirs, 1940-1945, p. 16.

It is difficult to sustain the charge that Montgomery willfully disobeyed orders. It is plausible to say that he believed he was representing firmly the best interest of his country and attempting to set forth what he and his superiors in the United Kingdom considered to be the best strategy for the Allies to pursue in Europe.³ When his statements on these matters were accompanied by what appeared to be a touch of patronage or cocky self-assurance, some staff members of SHAEF viewed them as approaching insubordination.⁴ There is no evidence that Eisenhower shared these views. Critics of Montgomery say that he was trying to continue the position he occupied as land force commander.

On 1 September 1944, the day General Montgomery was promoted to the rank of Field Marshal, Eisenhower assumed operational command of all forces in the European Theater.⁵ Montgomery conducted operations under supervision of the Supreme Commander up to that time; now the time had arrived for Eisenhower personally to direct the land battle. He had a definite plan for the conduct of the campaign and as operations were proceeding exceptionally well as a result of the long range planning conducted before the invasion, he saw no reason to alter the well thought-out plan. This plan, which both the British and American Army group commanders wanted to alter in their favor, was the broad front plan.

³Bryant, Triumph In the West, p. 205-06.

⁴Wilmot, The Struggle For Europe, p. 489.

⁵Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 270.

See also: Pogue, The Supreme Command, pp. 253, 264-65.

II. STRATEGY OF THE PLAN

General Eisenhower's mission, as laid down by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, was to "enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."⁶ Operation OVERLORD was the first phase of the operations to accomplish that mission; the plans for subsequent operations were to be made after the lodgment area was seized. Nevertheless, Eisenhower made his basic decision prior to the invasion. The SHAEF planners, at least a month before D Day, outlined general strategy to be followed for the defeat of Germany after capture of the lodgment area.⁷

The planners selected what they considered to be the chief target area of Germany and the best route by which this objective could be reached. They recognized Berlin as the ultimate Allied goal but held that the city was too far east to be the objective of a campaign in the West. The decision was made that the Ruhr, the nearest industrial area vital to German economy, would be the primary Allied intermediate objective; but even if it should succeed in eluding the Allies, the loss of the Ruhr and its heavy industries should virtually seal the fate of the

⁶The exact wording of Eisenhower's mission created a problem for the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The Americans wanted broad sweeping statements while the British wanted more positive statements of his mission. The final revised directive was issued on 12 February 1944. See: Pogue, The Supreme Command, pp. 53-55.

⁷SHAEF Planning Staff Draft, Post NEPTUNE Courses of Action After Capture of the Lodgment Area, Main Objectives and Axis of Advance, I, 3 May 1944, Post OVERLORD Planning I. Hereinafter referred to as SHAEF Planning Staff Draft, Post OVERLORD Planning I. Located in the U.S Army Command and General Staff College Library.

Wehrmacht.⁸ The second most important industrial area in western Germany was the Saar Basin on the southern route around the Ardennes. Within these two areas was the bulk of Germany's war-making power (see map 1).

III. ROUTES OF ADVANCE AND COURSES OF ACTION AVAILABLE

Once the Allied forces were securely established on the Continent four general courses of action would be open for their advance across Europe.⁹ The first was southeast from the lodgment area in an effort to cut off the German units in southern France and defeat the enemy forces in detail. The second was eastward from the lodgment area with the main threat directed toward Metz and the Saar; that is, to make the main effort south of the Ardennes. A third course of action was in a north-easterly direction with the object of striking directly in the Ruhr by the route north of the Ardennes. The fourth course open to the planners was a combination of the second and the third courses of action.

The first course of action was discarded almost immediately as it did not fulfill the requirements of Eisenhower's mission orders; it avoided the main German forces and did not lead to the strategic objective of Berlin.

Considerations Of The Courses Of Action

1. The route south of the Ardennes: The advantages were that the first part of the advance would be over terrain favorable for the use of

⁸The Wehrmacht was the German Armed Forces.

⁹T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent J. Esposito, ed. A Military History of World War II With Atlas: Operations in the European Theater. 2 Vols. (West Point, New York: United States Military Academy, 1953), Vol. I, p. 432. Hereinafter referred to as Stamps and Esposito, Military History.

armor and for the construction of advanced airfields; consequently a quick approach to Metz was believed possible. Among the disadvantages were the following: it was not a direct route to the Ruhr; both flanks would be exposed; communications would be extended over the width of France.

2. The route north of the Ardennes. An advance along this, the most direct route to the Ruhr, would have the left flank protected by the Channel; the country contained good airfields and some excellent ports, particularly Antwerp: The advance through this region would capture the V-weapon sites nearest England and the terrain was better favored for offensive action than the southern route. The disadvantages were that there would be nothing to prevent German forces in Southern France from escaping and taking part in the fighting to the north and there were numerous water obstacles that would have to be crossed.

3. Simultaneous advance on both axes. An advance on a broad front would force the defender to extend his front and would leave him in doubt as to the direction of the attacker's main thrust. The latter would have opportunities for surprise and maneuver. The disadvantages was that the use of two axes would require the maintenance of two widely separated lines of communication.¹⁰

From the beginning, therefore, there was a SHAEF plan to angle the attack from the Seine in the direction of the Ruhr.¹¹ This plan

¹⁰SHAEF Planning Staff Draft, Post OVERLORD Planning I. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

¹¹Leahy, I Was There, p. 262 covers events for strategic direction of the campaign worked out at the Second Quebec Conference. At that time there was agreement between Churchill and Roosevelt that the main thrust would go north of the Ardennes. Churchill was most emphatic that the main attack proceed along the previously agreed upon axis. Therefore, the decision to make the main attack on the northern axis was not Eisenhower's alone.

was based on the idea of a slow advance after a careful build-up at the Seine and a series of actions which would push the enemy forces back to the German frontier north of Aachen by D Day plus 330 (2 May 1944).

It was considered dangerous to attack by a single route and thus canalize the advance and open it to a concentrated enemy attack. SHAEF decided in favor of a broad front both north and south of the Ardennes which would give the Allies the advantages of maneuver and the ability to shift the main weight of attack. If the enemy could be forced to extend his forces to meet threats in the Metz Gap¹² and the Ruhr area while maintaining his coastal defenses along the Channel coast, his hold would be weakened along the whole front. In this circumstance, a deep penetration on both sides of the Ardennes or north of that area would force an enemy withdrawal from the Ardennes west of the Siegfried Line for a concentration to meet the Allied main thrust. In light of these conclusions, the SHAEF planners recommended that the main line of advance be along the route north of the Ardennes with a supporting attack on the route south of the Ardennes through Verdun to Metz and the Saar Basin (see map 3).

IV. ALLIED ORDER OF BATTLE TO SUPPORT THE PLAN

When the enemy began to retire from Normandy in confusion after mid-August, Eisenhower returned to the pre-D-Day concept for the advance into Germany. While favoring a major thrust into the Ruhr area, he still

¹²The Metz Gap is the plains south of Luxemburg and north of the Swiss border. This was the natural route for an advance into Germany from the west as the Aachen Gap north of the Ardennes was the entrance from the northwest, and the Belfort Gap permitted passage into south-eastern Germany from the south.

wanted a secondary attack to the south of the Ardennes.¹³ Some SHAEF Staff members believed that in holding to this view he was overlooking the fact that the bulk of the enemy forces, once held east of the Seine, had been committed in the Mortain and Falaise Gap areas during the breakout from the Normandy peninsula, and were no longer available to threaten any single line of advance which might be made to the northeast or to the east. To them, as well as to the commanders, speed was needed to destroy the enemy before shattered elements could be pieced together for a defense of the Siegfried Line or the Rhine river.¹⁴

In mid-August, before it was clear that the German collapse west of the Seine would be as sweeping as it proved to be, Generals Bradley and Patton discussed a scheme for sending three corps across the Rhine near Wiesbaden, Mannheim, and Karlsruhe to end the war speedily. To them this was the shortest route into Germany and one that promised the best dividends. General Bradley thought that both First and Third Armies should execute the maneuver,¹⁵ whereas Patton believed that the Third Army alone,¹⁶ if given sufficient supplies, could move to the Metz--Nancy area and cross the German border in ten days.

Thus the British and the US commanders, each conscious of the opportunities on his own front and desirous of seizing them quickly, favored single thrusts into enemy territory. One would have swung nearly

¹³The secondary attack had a two-fold mission. It was to secure terrain to the east and provide a link up with the Seventh Army fighting up the Rhone valley from southern France.

¹⁴Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 250.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 110.

all of the Allied force to the northeast; the other would have thrust the main US forces almost due east. On 22 August 1944, Eisenhower considered the various plans of his subordinates. He expressed his intention eventually to direct 21 Army Group north of the Ardennes while 12th Army Group advanced beyond Paris and prepared to strike just south of the Ardennes.¹⁷ At the moment there were certain tactical requirements to consider. In order to aid the 21 Army Group in carrying out its immediate mission of destroying forces between the Seine and the Pas-de-Calais, it was necessary to reinforce the British army group with an entire airborne command and such other forces as were required. He added that 12th Army Group's rate of advance east of Paris would depend on the speed with which ports in Brittany could be cleared and the Allied supply situation improved.¹⁸

General Montgomery notified Eisenhower on 23 August that to sweep through the Pas-de-Calais region to Antwerp he would need an entire US Army moving on his right flank.¹⁹ General Bradley argued that one corps would be sufficient for this purpose.²⁰ General Eisenhower, although believing the British commander overcautious, acceded to his request in order to ensure success. At the same time, he ordered Bradley to use his remaining forces to clear the ports in Brittany, defend the lines of

¹⁷Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 250.

¹⁸12th Army Group, Report of Operations, G-3 Section, Final After Action Report, Vol V, Part II. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

¹⁹Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 269.

²⁰Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 399.

communications against possible attacks from the Paris area, and amass supplies for an advance eastward toward Metz.²¹

When Eisenhower was told by the service support personnel that they could support the British advance through northern France and Belgium, Eisenhower wrote Montgomery:

All of us having agreed upon this general plan, the principal thing we must now strive for is speed in execution. All of the Supply people have assured us that they can support the move, beginning this minute--let us assume that they know exactly what they are talking about and get about it vigorously and without delay.²²

In supporting Montgomery's attack with the US First Army, Eisenhower also allocated the bulk of 12th Army Group's gasoline to that army, thus depriving Third Army of the means of making a rapid drive to the east. It was a blow to the hopes of Patton, who felt that Montgomery had won in his attempts to strike for Berlin from the North.²³

In explaining his decision to General Marshall, Eisenhower said that he had temporarily changed his basic plan for attacking both to the northeast and the east in order to help Montgomery seize tremendously important objectives in the northeast. He considered the change necessary even though it interfered with his desire to push eastward through Metz, because 21 Army Group lacked sufficient strength to do the job. He added that he did not doubt 12th Army Group's ability to reach the France-Germany border, but saw no point in getting there until the Allies were in a position to do something about it.²⁴

²¹Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 251. ²²Ibid.

²³Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 112.

²⁴Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and Stephen E. Ambrose, The Papers of Dwight Eisenhower: The War Years: IV, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 2092-94. Hereinafter referred to as Papers of Eisenhower, IV.

Patton still had seven divisions going to the east and he still had eight days in which to advance before the fuel supply led him to a temporary halt. Bradley directed Patton to complete the reduction of Brittany, protect the south flank of 12th Army Group, and prepare for a continuation of its advance to seize crossing sites over the Rhine between Mannheim and Koblenz.²⁵

V. KNOWN GERMAN OPPOSITION AND ITS LOCATIONS

The logistical difficulties which persisted until December and prevented the Allies from mounting a sustained offensive gave the Germans an opportunity to regroup and reorganize. This period was used to stiffen the resistance and as a result the fighting along the 500-mile front from Switzerland to the North Sea turned into the hardest kind of infantry struggle in the months that followed. Advances were slow and laborious, and gains were usually measured in yards instead of miles.

On 8 September 1944, Field Marshal von Rundstedt compared his combat strength to that of the Allies in a report to the German High Command:

Our forces comprise forty-eight infantry divisions and fifteen panzer divisions; of these only one-fourth are at full combat strength, so that their total effectiveness can be estimated as twenty-seven infantry divisions and six or seven panzer divisions at most. To these are opposed some sixty²⁶ enemy units at full battle strength.²⁷

²⁵USMA, War In Western Europe, Part I, p. 150.

See also: 12th Army Group Letter of Instruction #6, dated 25 August 1944, 12th Army Group Report of Operations, Vol V. pp. 85-87. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

²⁶Field Marshal von Rundstedt took command of Army Group West on 5 September 1944 and apparently his intelligence was in error or he was deliberately wrong as there were only forty-seven Allied divisions opposing him at that time.

²⁷USMA, War In Western Europe, Part I, p. 180.

In spite of the demoralized condition of his troops, Rundstedt took advantage of the Allies' critical logistical situation and his strong defensive position to reorganize his armies. General Walter Model's Army Group B took over the sector from the mouth of the Scheldt to the Moselle with the following armies from north to south; the Fifteenth, First Parachute, Fifth Panzer, and the Seventh Army. Army Group G under General Johannes Blaskowitz held the front from the vicinity of Trier, Germany to Switzerland with the First and Nineteenth Armies. With their defensive positions within the Siegfried Line Rundstedt's remnants were to be a formidable force when encountered in the Ardennes at the Huertgen Forest. The Volksgranadier divisions were formed of Air Force and Navy personnel, given rifles and practically no training and rushed into the front lines to man the defenses. These divisions were usually battle tested in a quiet sector of the line and then moved to areas of heavier fighting.²⁸

Rundstedt established his main line of resistance along the Maas River in the north, the German border in the center, and the western edge of Lorraine and Alsace in the south. The line ran west of the frontier in the south in order to protect the coal region of the Saar and to keep it in production as long as possible. In that region the front extended generally along the line Thionville-Metz-Nancy-Epinal and on to the Swiss border. Rundstedt's development of his defensive positions has been described by Martin Schulman in Defeat in the West as follows:

²⁸Ibid.

Having been given carte blanche to withdraw his forces to the borders of the Reich, the old man set about his task with the coolness and efficiency of a man who knew what he was about. Deciding that the Maas River in the north, the Siegfried Line in the center, and the Moselle and Vosges Mountains in the south offered the most effective geographical barriers, he ordered his armies to take up sectors along these lines as quickly as they could. Immediately behind these positions he set to work filling up and reorganizing the shattered remnants of the divisions beaten in Normandy. As soon as a unit was even a semblance of its former self, it was shoved into the Siegfried Line, where it completed its training and reformation. By the end of September his front line looked neat enough to pass an examination of the General Staff College.²⁹

VI. LOGISTICAL SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

Early estimates of developments beyond the lodgment area had visualized a pause by the Allied forces on the line of the Seine for a period of approximately three months as a likely necessity. This halt was anticipated in order that the forces might be reorganized and reinforced and their logistical situation strengthened before initiating the next phase of the campaign³⁰ (see map 4).

In procurement estimates of June 1944, which were designedly optimistic for purposes of planning, D plus 90 (4 September 1944) was set for reaching the Seine, D plus 200 (23 December 1944) the Belgian frontier, D plus 330 (2 May 1945) the surrender of Germany. Both the first and last of these dates proved pessimistic. The Third Army reached the Seine on D plus 75 (20 August 1944) and the surrender came on D plus 336 (8 May 1945).³¹

²⁹Martin Shulman, Defeat In The West, (New York: E.P. Dutton, Co., Inc. 1948), p. 263.

³⁰USMA, War In Western Europe, Part I, p. 148.

³¹Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 257.

Communications Zone logistical personnel who just days before assured Eisenhower they could support Montgomery's drive through northern France and Belgium now found their position critical. The fact was that on D plus 97 (11 September 1944), one week after they were expected to reach the Seine and almost seven months before they were supposed to reach the German border north of Aachen, the Allies actually sent units across the German frontier.³² It was in this period of the pursuit between the Seine and Germany that supply and transport facilities proved hopelessly insufficient for the slashing attack which developed.

The failure of the Allies to realize their hopes of victory in late August may have resulted, in part, from a lack of optimism on the part of the OVERLORD and SHAEF planners. The means of communication, built for a slower, more ponderous drive than that which developed, could not sustain the ten or twenty-day pursuit that opened the way to the smashing of the enemy short of the Rhine.³³ The original supply estimates emphasized the opening of the Brittany ports and Le Havre and the amassing of supplies west of the Seine before beginning a drive toward the Ruhr. The Brittany ports were still judged to be of primary importance as late as 1 September 1944.³⁴ But on 9 September when Bradley and Patton discussed the port situation they believed Brest was too far away and too badly damaged to be of assistance to the 12th Army Group.³⁵

³²US Army, 3d Armored Division: Spearhead In The West, (Germany, 1945), p. 211. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

³³Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 259.

³⁴Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 121.

³⁵Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 365.

In hardly any respect were the Allies prepared to take advantage of the opportunity offered to destroy the German forces before winter. The build-up of men and critical supplies in Great Britain, the arrival of divisions in France, the rebuilding of rail lines, the laying of pipelines, and virtually every other function was geared to a slower rate of advance than that required in late August. Unfortunately the period of the great opportunity lasted for only a few weeks and there was not sufficient time to make the necessary readjustments in the logistical machinery which would insure speedy victory.

CHAPTER V

OPPOSITION TO MONTGOMERY'S NARROW FRONT PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

During the months August through December 1944 there was a breakdown in communications between Eisenhower and the American commanders Bradley and Patton. Bradley knew of Montgomery's plan for a single thrust in the north and Eisenhower's refusal to implement the British commander's plan was also known. However, the events which occurred during the months that followed indicated to Bradley that the narrow front plan was being implemented in bits and pieces. Over a period of months Montgomery received the forces and logistical support, originally requested in August, to implement the plan. Even though these forces and supplies were for missions other than the single thrust, the Americans looked upon the allocations as evidence that Montgomery was getting what he wanted at their expense.

General Eisenhower failed to convince the American commanders that he was not favoring the British plan.¹ Repeatedly, both Bradley and Patton opposed the allocations made to the 21 Army Group and it is clear that, both, they did not understand the broad front concept, and that professional jealousy marred the relations between the British and American leaders.

¹Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 400; Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 112.

Eisenhower's practice of inviting comments on future operations resulted in the repeated presentation of the narrow front plan on practically a monthly basis. When asked for comments, Montgomery would resubmit the narrow front plan updated to conform to existing conditions. This caused suspicion by Bradley and Patton and was the primary reason they believed Eisenhower was favoring the northern route of advance. Montgomery, on the other hand, was well aware the plan had been refused time after time.

As noted earlier, the broad front concept provided for a double envelopment of the Ruhr with primary consideration given the northern advance. Fulfillment of this plan required additional support to assure capture of the Channel ports, obtain airfields, and overrun the launching sites for the V-weapons² which were falling on Great Britain. The 21 Army Group was astride the northern axis of advance and, therefore, received priority in men and materiel. Such priorities were based on both a tactical consideration and political objectives. During the Second Quebec Conference Prime Minister Churchill and Sir Alan Brooke were insistent that the northern route be the primary route of advance.³ They believed the V-weapon attacks were having such severe effect on the morale of the British subjects that an early capture of these sites were necessary to lift the sagging spirits of the English people. Eisenhower, as an Allied commander, was bound tactically and politically to support

²The V-weapons were rocket-propelled missiles with wings which were commonly called "Buzz Bombs" because of the sound the rocket motors made. There were two models used, the V-1 which was used until September 1944, and the improved version, the V-2, which was considerably more accurate.

³Supra, p. 35.

the view, but his American subordinates, who apparently did not understand the reasons behind his support of Montgomery, viewed the actions as victories for Montgomery.

II. THE CONTROVERSY OF ACCEPTANCE

Montgomery

On 20 August 1944, Eisenhower held a staff meeting at his headquarters to discuss the future conduct of the war. One of the decisions reached was to send 12th Army Group south of the Ardennes. Montgomery disagreed and on 22 August sent his Chief of Staff, DeGuingand, to discuss the merits of his narrow front plan with Eisenhower. In a two hour session DeGuingand was unsuccessful in his attempt to change Eisenhower's position and so reported to Montgomery. The British commander then requested that Eisenhower visit him, and at a conference on 23 August, Montgomery outlined his views and plans to Eisenhower. It was to no avail, and the British leader was turned down again. Eisenhower agreed, however, that 21 Army Group alone was not strong enough to undertake the tasks on the northern axis and told Montgomery that whatever American assistance was necessary would be provided. Montgomery wanted an American army of twelve divisions on his right flank, and under his command, but Eisenhower said American public opinion would not permit 12th Army Group to be reduced to only one army.⁴ Montgomery recognized that he had failed to get the narrow front plan approved.⁵

Montgomery's talk with Eisenhower did have some influence on the

⁴At that time the US Ninth Army had not been formed.

⁵Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 269.

Supreme Commander as his letter to General Marshall on 24 August 1944 indicates:

For a considerable time I was of the belief that we could carry out the operation to the northeast simultaneously with a thrust eastward, but later have concluded that due to the tremendous importance of the objectives in the northeast we must first concentrate on that movement. The general distribution of troops will be as follows: The Army Group of the North will operate toward the northeast generally westward of the line Amiens-Lille with its principal mission as given earlier in this letter.⁶ Bradley will be directed to clean up the Brittany Peninsula, protect our right rear and to thrust forward with the bulk of his offensive units along the right boundary of 21 Army Group so as to assist in the rapid accomplishment directed to begin the accumulation of forces east of Paris⁷ to take up the eastward advance south of the Ardennes.⁸

After his promotion to Field Marshal on 1 September, Montgomery said, "The more I considered what we were setting out to do, the more certain I was that it was wrong."⁹ He decided to make another approach to Eisenhower and sent a message on 4 September in which he asked for another visit to discuss his second proposal which included the following points:

1. I consider we have now reached a stage where one really powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin is likely to get there and thus end the German war.
2. We have not enough maintenance resources for two-full-blooded thrusts.

⁶Those missions were for Montgomery to capture the LeHavre Peninsula as well as the city and fortress, and Bradley was to complete the conquest of Brittany to provide maintenance areas and accelerated flow of divisions into the theater.

⁷The force to be accumulated east of Paris was to be built up from divisions enroute to the theater from England.

⁸Alfred D, Chandler Jr. and Stephen E. Ambrose, et al., The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), IV, 2093.

⁹Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 270.

3. The selected thrust must have all the maintenance resources it needs without any qualification and any other operation must do the best it can with what is left over.
4. There are only two possible thrusts: one via the Ruhr and the other via Metz and the Saar.
5. In my opinion the thrust likely to to give the best and quickest results is the northern one via the Ruhr.
6. Time is vital and the decision regarding the selected thrust must be made at once and para. 3 above will apply.
7. If we attempt a compromise solution and split our maintenance resources so that neither thrust is full-blooded we will prolong the war.
8. I consider the problem view as above is very simple and clear cut.
9. The matter is of such vital importance that I feel sure you will agree that a decision on the above lines is required at once..¹⁰

Eisenhower replied on 5 September by stating, "While agreeing with your conception of a powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin I do not agree that it should be initiated at this moment to the exclusion of all other maneuvers."¹¹

While it was clear to Montgomery that the 21 Army Group would not be allowed to make a single thrust in the north, for the Americans in the south such a view was harder to accept because he started receiving priority in logistical support for Operation MARKET/GARDEN less than one week later.

Bradley and Patton

When Montgomery approached Bradley on 17 August about the single thrust in the north,¹² Bradley felt that Montgomery was using the same tactics he had used in Sicily when he recommended that the United States forces sit out the campaign on a defensive front while Eighth Army went

¹⁰Ibid, p. 272.

¹¹Chandler and Ambrose, The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, IV, 2120.

¹²Supra, p. 35.

on alone to take Messina.¹³ Anxious lest Montgomery gain an advantage, Bradley proposed a counter plan for a double thrust which was, in effect, a restatement of the broad front plan.¹⁴

Bradley believed the narrow front plan had been accepted as the following shows:

On August 23 Eisenhower decided tentatively in favor of the single thrust. In a letter to 21st Group he directed that Montgomery make the main effort up in the Channel coast. Monty had won the initial skirmish. I was ordered to support the British effort with all nine divisions of First Army.

Third Army was not to be benched but our recommendation for a five-corps thrust in the south through Metz had been watered down to a feint by three. With this priority in troops, Montgomery was also to have top priority in supply. As a result, the First Army was to be given priority over the Third Army in 12th Army Group tonnage.¹⁵

Both Eisenhower and Montgomery stated on 24 August that the single thrust was not approved, yet Bradley and the army commanders in 12th Army Group did not receive these facts after their meeting. The mission of 21 Army Group, as approved by Eisenhower, was the clearing of the Channel coast and securing Antwerp, but Bradley and his subordinates saw it another way.¹⁶

When Eisenhower accepted Montgomery's view that the northern thrust of advance should be "powerful and full-blooded" he also committed himself to the logistical support of the 21 Army Group at the expense, if necessary, of the Americans. To assure that the principal logistical effort would be in support of Montgomery, Eisenhower revised the supply

¹³Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 399

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 400.

¹⁶Ibid.

tonnage between the First and Third Armies, and required the bulk of the supplies to be shipped to First Army. Third Army was to continue just as far as it could in advance toward Germany, but in the event of a shortage of logistical supplies Montgomery and the First Army were to be supplied, even if Patton had to be halted.¹⁷

Patton was to meet Bradley on 25 August at 12th Army Group Headquarters at Chartres. Upon arrival he was briefed on the situation and directed to continue his advance to the east with the seven divisions remaining under his command. He stated in his book, 'Monty had won again, and the weight of the operation was to be turned north rather than east.'¹⁸ On 29 August Patton felt the first shortage of supplies when a scheduled shipment of 140,000 gallons of gasoline failed to arrive. At first Patton thought "it was a backhanded way of slowing up the Third Army. I later found that this was not the case, but that the delay was due to a change of plan by the High Command, implemented, in my opinion, by General Montgomery."¹⁹ On the same day Third Army's XII Corps captured nearly 100,000 gallons of aviation gasoline at Chalons (see map 1), "but this was only a drop in the bucket for a corps which during the past month had become accustomed to consuming 200,000 gallons a day. For all practical purposes XII Corps was out of gas."²⁰ Not to be outdone by

¹⁷Ibid, p. 403.

¹⁸Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 112.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 114.

²⁰Colonel Robert S. Allen, 'Lucky Forward: The History of Patton's Third US Army', (New York: Vanguard Press, 1947), p. 136. See also: George F. Dyer, Ed by, XII Corps, Spearhead of Patton's Third Army, Unpublished Corps History, 1947, p. 198. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

Montgomery, Patton ordered his XII Corps to "continue until the tanks stopped, and then get out and walk"21

In essence, the decision that emerged from the 23 August meeting resulted in a temporary shift of the main effort to the northern route. Yet the shift was more tactical than strategic in that it was made for the purpose of gaining intermediate objectives vital to a final offensive along the lines of the original strategic concept. But to Bradley and Patton it seemed to indicate acceptance of British views at the expense of those held by commanders in the 12th Army Group.

III CONTINUING CONFLICTS

Securing the Port of Antwerp

Success in the land battle on the Continent rested on the ability of the allies to support their forces. Until the first of September all the ports captured except Rouen were on the Cherbourg Peninsula and too far in the rear to support the advance planned for 21 Army Group. The port of Antwerp was a prize worth gambling for and Montgomery was given orders to capture it. The British commander stated he would require assistance and the US First Army was assigned to support the attack.²² The city of Brussels and the port city of Antwerp fell to the British on 4 September (see map 5). The port was captured intact with only minor damage caused by the defending Germans.

The tremendous good fortune of capturing the Antwerp port undamaged was the result of help received from a Belgian engineer who met the advancing British troops outside the city and offered to guide them by a safe route to the center of the city.

²¹Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 115.

²²Supra, p. 68.

He directed the force down side streets, through narrow corridors, and over flimsy bridges which barely supported the weight of the tanks. Gaps through the German minefields were known to the engineer and the British column was led safely through them to the dock area. The engineer directed that the sluice gates be taken first as they were the key to the whole port. The important areas were captured without serious challenge and during the night forces to consolidate the position were transported along the same route. The following morning the city was captured with minimum fighting due to the surprise attack from within the city's center.²³

Militarily, the capture of Antwerp was of greater value than that of Brussels; what the Allies needed more than anything else was a fully equipped deep-water port. Antwerp provided an even better answer to this requirement than any of the Channel ports still in German possession. The approaches to the port, miles down-river, however, were still occupied by the Germans and it took another sixty days to clear the estuary. It was then necessary to clear silt and mines from the channel and the port began operations under allied control on 28 November 1944.²⁴

Early September Disagreements

Eisenhower's reply to Montgomery's message of 4 September denied for the second time, permission to make the single thrust in the north. Montgomery immediately requested another meeting to discuss logistics,

²³Geoffrey Dennis, ed., The World At War, (London: Caxton Publishers Limited, 1951), Vol. IV, p. 268.

²⁴Mary H. Williams, Chronology 1941-1945, The US Army In World War II: Special Studies, (Washington, 1960), p. 339.

V-2 rocket sites near Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and "a reallocation of present resources of every description that would be adequate to get one thrust to Berlin."²⁵ The meeting on 10 September saw another attempt on Montgomery's part to get the single thrust approved and another refusal by Eisenhower. As Montgomery recalled:

It was essential for him (Eisenhower) to know my views; the decision about the action to be taken was then his. It was obvious that he disagreed with my analysis. He repeated that we must first close to the Rhine and cross it on a wide front; then, and only then, could we concentrate on one thrust. We parted without any clear decision, except that, as I understood it, the "broad front" strategy was to remain in operation. But Eisenhower agreed that 21st Army Group should strike northwards towards Arnhem as early as possible²⁶

The next day, 11 September 1944, Montgomery sent Eisenhower another message saying that if the northern thrust towards the Ruhr was not to have priority over other operations the large scale operations scheduled for Arnhem could not begin before 23 September and maybe not until 26 September. The message produced immediate results. Eisenhower's chief of staff, General Smith, went to see Montgomery on 12 September to tell him Eisenhower had decided to give priority to his drive in the north. The thrust of Third Army to the Saar, which had been approved a week earlier, was to be stopped. Three American divisions were to be grounded and their transportation used to supply extra transport to 21 Army Group.²⁷ The bulk of the logistical support of 12th Army Group was to be reallocated to the First Army and Montgomery was to coordinate directly with First Army to secure his right flank.

²⁵Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 274. ²⁶Ibid, p. 275.

²⁷The transportation for 21 Army Group was obtained by taking the transportation assets of three newly-arrived divisions and transferring those vehicles to the British. The divisions were still on the beaches at Cherbourg and LeHavre when they were stripped of their vehicles.

On 13 September, tanks from the 3d Armored Division broke through a soft spot in the Siegfried Line ten miles south of Aachen. No sooner had the troops crossed the frontier than they were halted because of a shortage of supplies. The priority of supply to 21 Army Group emptied 12th Army Group's supply depot and destroyed its ability to continue the attack. It was to be two months before the momentum could be regained. Montgomery's attack to Arnhem was destined to use the entire logistical backlog and to empty storage depots until the logistical tail could be shortened by obtaining ports for closer supply. Communication Zone personnel were maintaining lines of communication on two axes and each forward area was over three hundred miles from the port serving it. The British condition was made worse by wide spread defects in their three-ton trucks which rendered many of them inoperative until replacement components could be secured from Great Britain.²⁸

IV. OPERATION MARKET/GARDEN

On 17 September 1944 a bold attempt was made to loosen the stiffening resistance in Northwestern Europe by dropping three airborne divisions behind the German right flank in Holland with a view to clearing the way for a drive by the British up to and across the Lower Rhine. By dropping the airborne forces in successive waves over a sixty-mile corridor of Holland behind the German front a foothold would be gained on all four of the strategic areas needed to cross the interval; the passage of the Wilhelmina Canal at Eindhoven, the Maas (Meuse) at Grave, the Waal

²⁸This shortcoming was overcome by the action stated in #27, above.

at Nijmegen, and the Lower Rhine at Arnhem.²⁹ The airborne troops consisted of three divisions; the British 1st Airborne Division was dropped at Arnhem, the US 82nd Airborne Division at Nijmegen and Grave, and the US 101st Airborne Division north of Eindhoven at Zon and Veghel (see map 8).³⁰

The plan to seize the bridges was a double one. The airborne operation, known as MARKET, had as its purpose the capture of the vital bridges in each area of operation. In rapid support of the airborne troops, armor and infantry of the British Second Army were to advance northward from the line established generally south of the Dutch frontier. The plan was for the armored divisions to pass over the bridges held by the airborne troops and cut off the land exit of enemy troops from western Holland. The land operation, known as GARDEN, was to take place on a very narrow front with only one road available to serve as a line of communication for most of the attack. The axis of advance lay through Eindhoven, Veghel, Uden, Grave, Nijmegen, Arnhem, and Apeldoorn to the Zuider Zee.

The first landings of the main airborne forces were made on 17 September and follow-up troops and reinforcements continued to be flown in on succeeding days in spite of unfavorable weather on several occasions. Initial losses, enroute and at the drop zones, were very light and tend to support the airborne commander's contention that heavy bomber attacks on anti-aircraft gun positions immediately preceding an airborne operation

²⁹Major General H. Essame, The North-West Europe Campaign 1944-1945, (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Limited, 1962), p. 56.

³⁰Charles B. MacDonald, The Siegfried Line Campaign, The US Army In World War II: The European Theater of Operations, (Washington, 1963), pp. 140-73 Passim.

would greatly reduce casualties. Such attacks were undertaken by heavy bombers of both Bomber Command of the Royal Air Force and the US Eighth Air Force neutralizing enemy airfields in the vicinity of the drop zones and anti-aircraft gun positions enroute. On 19 September ground forces of the British Second Army advanced from the south and made contact with all of the airborne forces except those to the north of the Lower Rhine in the Arnhem area. Here the isolated British division was holding out against greatly superior forces, including a panzer division.³¹

Operation MARKET/GARDEN was characterized by bungling on the part of the Intelligence Officers. They apparently ignored current information transmitted by the Dutch Underground about the presence of German armor in the area and planning officers dealing with the Arnhem phase of the operation were influenced by SHAEF intelligence reports which estimated that the Germans could produce only eleven infantry divisions and four armored divisions to defend on in that sector.³² In spite of the fact that SHAEF Intelligence, on 16 September, reported that they thought two SS Panzer Divisions might be refitting in the Arnhem area, no revisions in planning resulted.³³ When the airborne troops jumped from their aircraft, on Arnhem, under marginal weather conditions, they descended on "some 2,500 German troops, mainly belonging to the 9th SS

³¹CP Stacey, The Victory Campaign: The Operations In North-West Europe 1944-1945, (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1960), p. 314.

³²Essame, North-West Europe Campaign, p. 57.

³³Stacey, The Victory Campaign, p. 314.

Panzer Division."³⁴ Within ten minutes the remainder of 9th SS Panzer Division was enroute to Arnhem and the 10th SS Panzer Division was sent to Nijmegen.³⁵ The initial assault forces were dropped in three waves and, before reinforcements could be brought over from the English air-fields, the weather closed in and further drops were cancelled. An exception was the Polish 1st Paratroop Brigade, determined to get into the war, which jumped at low altitudes, in near impossible weather conditions, at Arnhem on 21 September and linked-up with the British division two days later.³⁶

The days that followed were marked by confusion and heavy fighting in the area between Nijmegen and Arnhem. It was not until 24 September that British infantry reached the Lower Rhine in force and artillery began supporting the beleaguered British forces on the northern bank of the river. The situation was grave and permission to withdraw had been given the previous day. The airborne troops were forced into a steadily diminishing perimeter, which by 24 September measured only 1,000 yards by 1,500 yards. Montgomery finally ordered the withdrawal of all forces from across the Lower Rhine which was effected during the

³⁴Essame, North-West Europe Campaign, p. 57.

³⁵Montgomery, Normandy To The Baltic, p. 184, says there were remnants of four panzer divisions: the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions and 9th and 116th Panzer Divisions. The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War by Colonel C. P. Stacey, The Victory Campaign: The Operations In North-West Europe 1944-1945, (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1960) p. 313, agrees with the number of divisions but says they were four panzer divisions no longer fit for action who were in process of refitting and re-grouping.

³⁶Stacey, The Victory Campaign, p. 314.

night of 25-26 September³⁷ when 2,228³⁸ men, under cover of darkness, infiltrating in small groups the enemy lines, withdrew across the river. Casualties were heavy--the division lost over 7,000 men; killed, wounded, and missing-in-action.³⁹

The MARKET/GARDEN operation was significant primarily because it was planned, executed, and failed under the leadership of Montgomery. It was the first operation planned to prepare the way for his single-thrust in the north scheme. The operation failed to secure a bridgehead beyond the Lower Rhine, had not effectively turned the north flank of the Siegfried Line, had not cut off the enemy's land exit from Holland, and had not positioned the 21 Army Group for a drive around the north flank of German defenses in the Ruhr region. The hope of attaining these stated objectives had prompted the ambition and daring that went into Operation MARKET/GARDEN. The failure to obtain such important objectives would mean that his other plans would be questioned, and that the operation had failed.⁴⁰

V. MID-SEPTEMBER CONFLICTS

The day after Operation MARKET/GARDEN was launched Montgomery sent a message to Eisenhower stating his disagreement with the Supreme

³⁷Montgomery, Despatch, p. 50.

³⁸Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 295.

³⁹Report by The Supreme Commander To The Combined Chiefs Of Staff On The Operations In Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force 6 June 1944-8 May 1945. Dated 13 July 1945. p. 68. Hereinafter referred to as: Report To The Combined Chiefs of Staff. Located in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁴⁰Montgomery's record states he never lost a battle after he assumed command of 8th Army in Africa. The MARKET/GARDEN operation did gain limited objectives; however, the failure to accomplish the assigned mission and the loss of over 7,000 men must be classed as a failure.

Commander's letter of 15 September outlining plans for a general advance of the Allied Armies to the Rhine and into Germany. Montgomery submitted twelve paragraphs, seven pointing to the advantages of letting him advance on the northern route with his own 21 Army Group and the US First Army,⁴¹ and five dealing with the disadvantages of the proposed broad front advance. Eisenhower replied that he did not see any difference in their basic concepts, but violently disagreed that all the divisions, except those of the 21 Army Group and nine of First Army "could stop in place where they are and that we can strip all these additional divisions from their transport and everything else to support one single knife-like drive towards Berlin. This may not be exactly what you mean but it is certainly not possible."⁴² To this Montgomery replied that Eisenhower should give 12th Army Group an order to halt and that if the order was not obeyed the Allies would get into greater difficulties.⁴³

On 22 September Eisenhower summoned a conference at SHAEF headquarters to decide upon strategy for the conduct of the war after Germany was invaded. Montgomery, as always, did not attend and sent DeGuingand to represent him again. DeGuingand carried with him the plan Montgomery had presented to Eisenhower on 18 September and introduced the plan for further consideration. That night DeGuingand sent a message to the effect that Eisenhower had supported Montgomery's plan one hundred percent,⁴⁴

⁴¹Montgomery, Memoirs, pp. 278-80. Previous to this time Montgomery said he would need a force of forty divisions to make the thrust to Berlin. This is the first time he ventured doing it with only nine divisions in the US First Army plus his 21 Army Group.

⁴²Ibid, p. 281.

⁴³Chandler and Ambrose, The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, IV, p. 2164.

⁴⁴Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 282.

and that the northern thrust was to be the main effort and get full support. Montgomery commented, "on 23 August when I had asked him to take the decision to support my plan he had refused. Now at last, on the 23rd of September, I was told he had agreed and would support my plan. He had taken the decision exactly one month too late."⁴⁵

DeGuingand was overly optimistic when he wired Montgomery that his plan had been given complete support. Eisenhower's apparent change of mind was verbal only; he said Montgomery should have priority but he refused to implement the single thrust to Berlin. Montgomery wanted control of First Army; all he got was permission, limited largely to emergencies, to communicate directly with its commander. Captain Harry Butcher, USNR, Eisenhower's aide, believed Montgomery had reduced his aims from Berlin to the Ruhr and was attempting to get operational control over the US First Army. He further said that Montgomery wanted 12th Army Group stopped and the support provided to his forces, otherwise the Allies would not get the Ruhr. According to Butcher, "With change in concept of object, Ike found himself in agreement so far as emphasis to the 21 Army Group was concerned, but not for command."⁴⁶

Had Field Marshal Montgomery been present for the conference it is possible that later misunderstandings over operational priorities might have been avoided. The Supreme Commander, while interested in future drives into Germany, asked early in the conference for "general acceptance of the fact that the possession of an additional major deep-water port on our northern flank was an indispensable prerequisite for

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Butcher, My Three Years With Eisenhower, p. 675.

the final drive into Germany."⁴⁷ Further, he asked that a clear distinction be made between logistical requirements for the present operations, aimed at breaching the Siegfried Line and seizing the Ruhr, and similar requirements for a final drive on Berlin.⁴⁸

In the course of the conference, Eisenhower declared that the envelopment of the Ruhr from the north by 21 Army Group, supported by the US First Army, was the main effort on the next phase of operations. Montgomery's mission was to open the port of Antwerp and develop operations culminating in a strong attack on the Ruhr from the north. General Bradley was to support Montgomery by assuming responsibility for the British VIII Corps sector and by continuing to thrust, as far as current resources permitted, toward Cologne and Bonn. The 12th Army Group was to seize any favorable opportunity to cross the Rhine and attack the Ruhr from the south when the supply situation permitted. The remainder of 12th Army Group, reduced now to the Third Army, was to take no more aggressive action than that permitted by the supply situation after the full requirements of the main effort had been met.⁴⁹

Through a misunderstanding, Montgomery thought Eisenhower had approved his single thrust plan when, in reality, nothing more than supplies and maintenance priority had been given. Logistical priority was essential to secure the fully usable port of Antwerp, and to properly position the Allied troops for a continuation of the broad front drive into Germany when the supply situation permitted.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 294.

⁴⁸Post OVERLORD Planning I, SGS 381. Meeting at SHAEF Foreword 22 Sep 1944. Located in National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁹Ibid, MSG FWD 15510, Eisenhower to Bradley.

⁵⁰Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 294.

VI. LATER ATTEMPTS AND THE AFTERMATH

October began with Eisenhower urging Montgomery to clear the Schelde estuary in order to put the Antwerp port into operation. After some delay, during which clearing of the area around Nijmegen was effected, Montgomery directed that priority be given to clearing the Schelde estuary. After much hard fighting by the First Canadian Army the mission was accomplished in early November.

Meanwhile, General Marshall, while on a visit to the European Theater of Operations, met with Montgomery on 8 October at the British Commander's headquarters. Montgomery told Marshall of his unhappiness with Eisenhower's leadership, and said that since Eisenhower had taken personal command of the AEF the armies had become separated nationally and not geographically; that there was a lack of firmness; and that operational direction and control were lacking.⁵¹ Montgomery was maneuvering for the position of Land Force Commander, but Marshall, who had previously directed Eisenhower to establish his headquarters on the Continent and assume operational control as soon as possible, was diametrically opposed to his views.⁵² The results of the meeting were discussed with Eisenhower upon Marshall's return to Rheims, and Eisenhower finally moved to end Montgomery's complaining. Eisenhower brought the issue into the open in his message to Montgomery dated 13 October 1944 in which he stated:

In order that we may continue to operate in the same close and friendly association that, to me at least, has characterized our work in the past, I will again state, as clearly as is possible, my conceptions of logical command arrangements for the

⁵¹Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 284.

⁵²Supra, p. 26.

future. If, having read these, you feel that you must still class them as "unsatisfactory" then indeed we have an issue that must be settled soon in the interests of future efficiency. I am quite well aware of the powers and limitations of an Allied Command, and if you, as the senior commander in this Theater of one of the great Allies, feel that my conceptions and directives are such as to endanger the success of operations, it is our duty to refer the matter to higher authority for any action they may choose to take, however drastic.⁵³

To this Montgomery replied, "You will hear no more on the subject of command from me. I have given you my views and you have given your answer. I and all of us here will weigh in 100 percent to do what you want. .

. ."⁵⁴ Contrary to what he said this was not his final word on the subject of command; he would remain a critic until after the Ardennes fighting was concluded.

In the same letter, Eisenhower directed that a meeting of Army Group commanders would be held on 18 October to discuss the capabilities of the Army Groups, and the timing of the attack by US First Army and Second British Army to gain the Rhine.⁵⁵ Knowing of Montgomery's reluctance to leave his tactical headquarters Eisenhower suggested that the meeting could be held at Montgomery's tactical headquarters. Bradley said, "By convening the conference on Monty's home grounds, SHAEF made it impossible for him not to attend."⁵⁶ The outcome of the meeting was

⁵³Chandler and Ambrose, The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, IV, p. 2220.

⁵⁴Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 317. It was in fact 31 December 1944 before the issue died. Montgomery gained information from DeGuingand that Marshall had telegraphed Eisenhower saying the President of the United States and himself (Marshall) had complete confidence in him and that the appointment of a British officer to hold operational command of control over Bradley would be entirely unacceptable in America. p. 319.

⁵⁵Chandler and Ambrose, The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, IV, p. 316.

⁵⁶Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 433.

a decision that the Allies would continue hammering at the enemy with all possible force in an effort to destroy the morale of the Reich and bring the war to an end.⁵⁷

Eisenhower's decision to resume the fall offensive in November resurrected the perennial dispute over strategy. During the meeting Montgomery advanced his plan for a concentrated attack toward the Ruhr north of the Ardennes in spite of the decision already issued by the Supreme Commander. The date set for the attack by 12th Army Group was 5 November; the 21 Army Group was still in the midst of clearing the Scheldt estuary and would be engaged there for the next two weeks.⁵⁸

The next meeting of the Supreme Commander with his army group commanders was held on 7 December at Maastricht. Montgomery argued that "the Ruhr must be our strategic objective; that our main effort must be made in the north as it is there, and only there, that suitable country exists for a mobile campaign, i.e., to the north of the Ruhr."⁵⁹ His plan consisted of a single thrust plan with the additional suggestion that the 12th Army Group be divided into two groups--the northern portion, consisting of ten divisions, was to be used to support 21 Army Group's right flank north of the Ardennes. The 21 Army Group was to re-group and launch a strong offensive from the Nijmegen area with the object of securing all ground between the Rhine and Meuse rivers, after which it would penetrate into Germany, reinforced by American divisions as necessary. Montgomery raised the issue of command again by stating:

⁵⁷ Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 316.

⁵⁸ Montgomery, Normandy To The Baltic, p. 191.

⁵⁹ Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 302.

I considered that one commander should be in operational control and direction of all forces north of the Ardennes. That commander must either be myself or Bradley. I would willingly serve under Bradley.⁶⁰

The statement of his willingness to serve under Bradley was obviously a subtle move to block Bradley's objections to serve under him again. Bradley was still a Lieutenant General, while Montgomery as a Field Marshal, was equivalent in rank to a General of the Armies. Aside from political objections from the British government, military protocol would not condone such a command structure. The national prestige of Great Britain would have suffered humiliation beyond repair had such an event occurred.

The ill-will and nationalistic feelings stirred up over the statements issued by Montgomery after the German's Ardennes Offensive are referred to earlier in this thesis⁶¹ and do not require repeating. The circumstances surrounding the incidents demand more explanation. When the Germans attacked on 16 December 1944, the main thrust came in the center of 12th Army Group and divided the Group into two elements--the First and Ninth Armies were on the northern flank of the salient and Patton's Third Army and Bradley's headquarters on the south. To facilitate control of the divided Army Group, the forces in northern Belgium were placed under temporary command of Montgomery. The British commander fought the battle for the Ardennes with two American Armies backed up by four British divisions in reserve. The total British force committed against the enemy in the Ardennes fighting was one brigade.⁶² The resentment of the Americans was tremendous when Montgomery's statements were

⁶⁰Ibid, p. 304. ⁶¹Supra, p. 35-36.

⁶²A brigade is approximately one-third of the fighting forces in a division.

misconstrued to imply the British had saved the day for the Americans.⁶³
The American armies remained under his command only long enough to restore the original offensive line and then reverted to 12th Army Group control.⁶⁴

When the Allied offensive was resumed the US Ninth Army was deployed north of the Ruhr and the US First Army was south of the industrial complex. On 1 April 1945 the two armies made contact and the encirclement of the Ruhr was completed. The operation constituted the largest double envelopment in history and signified the successful completion of Eisenhower's broad front policy. Inside the pocket were trapped the whole of German Army Group B and two corps of Army Group H.⁶⁵
The object of Montgomery's attention for eight months was now in Allied possession. The next month was spent in pursuit to the Elbe river where the Russian Armies from the east met the Allied Armies advancing from the West. Soon after the link-up of the Russian and Western armies the war ended in Europe.

⁶³Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 483.

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 486.

⁶⁵Report To The Combined Chiefs of Staff, p. 104.

CHAPTER VI

FACTORS AFFECTING THE NARROW FRONT PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

When Montgomery envisioned the single thrust through Europe to Berlin in August 1944, he clearly believed the war in Europe could be concluded by the end of the year.¹ The crumbling German Army in front of his troops was practically defeated, and German commanders were recommending surrender to save their country. Those recommendations were ignored by the German High Command and were never presented to Der Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler.

During the early fighting in France, Eisenhower commuted across the Channel. Eisenhower's absence from the battlefield caused Montgomery to believe the Supreme Commander was out of contact with the realities of the situation. This was not true, however, for Eisenhower kept abreast of the tactical progress by daily situation reports and visits to the fighting units.² In addition to the daily tactical reports, Eisenhower received information on the land, sea and air logistical support capabilities.

Logistical support was already presenting problem areas by mid-August, and in the midst of the supply crisis Eisenhower arrived with

¹Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 266.

²Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, p. 265. See also: Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 198.

his headquarters to assume personal command of the troops in the field.³ It had been long ordained that this would occur at some point after the lodgment area was secure, but it was unfortunate for Montgomery that it occurred when it did. Decisive action was needed at the time change of command took place and the controlling headquarters was almost four hundred miles behind the front lines. At the urging of General Marshall, Eisenhower established his headquarters on the Continent as soon as a suitable location was found and minimum essential communications were established.⁴ The problem of personal supervision was compounded on 2 September when Eisenhower's plane made a forced landing and injured his knee. The injury required that he remain in bed for a short period and restricted him from visiting the field commands.⁵ At the time resistance was melting away the Supreme Commander's mobility was restricted, but he was not out of touch with the current situation.

What was the possibility for success of a single thrust on a narrow front to reach Berlin and end the war by the close of 1944? To answer this question three categories of facts must be considered-- the combat power of the Allies, the enemy situation, and logistical support. In this chapter these factors will be considered for the period 1 September - 31 December 1944 as they would have affected Montgomery's progress across Europe.

³Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 264.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, p. 306.

II. THE ALLIED SITUATION

When Montgomery said he would need forty divisions to make one "full-blooded thrust" to the Ruhr and Berlin he would have used all Allied divisions in north-west Europe. The 21 Army Group was composed of seventeen divisions that included one airborne division, six armor divisions, and ten infantry divisions. Twelfth Army Group had the preponderance of combat power with twenty-one divisions, of which seven were armor divisions, twelve were infantry divisions, and two were airborne divisions.⁶ Numerous other United States divisions were arriving on the Continent every day and by 8 September there were forty-seven divisions ashore. Most of these new divisions did not go into combat for a month or more after their arrival.⁷

All divisions available for the single thrust were combat-tested and proven. Some participated in the invasion at Normandy, and others arrived shortly thereafter to participate in the hard fighting for the lodgment area and the breakout at St. Lo. The rush to reinforce the divisions already on the Continent brought the Third Army over on 5 July and into the fighting on 1 August.⁸ Artillery support would be provided by five battalions of artillery assigned to each division, and the twenty battalions of artillery in each of the five British corps and seven American corps that made up the fighting

⁶USMA, The War In Western Europe, p. 180.

⁷Ibid, pp. 221-22.

⁸Third Army Action Against Enemy Reports, Narrative account 1 Aug 44 - 9 May 45, Vol. I Operations, dated 15 May 1945. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

force. There was a multitude of special artillery and assault weapons under control of each corps.

Air support for the single thrust would be provided by the US Ninth Air Force with one medium bomber division, two tactical air commands, and one troop carrier command. The US Eighth Air Force would provide long range strategic bomber support with three divisions of bombers. The Royal Air Force had three commands: the coastal command to protect the coast and the sea lines of communication, the fighter commander for use in the United Kingdom and limited use on the Continent, and the bomber command.⁹

It is not necessary to trace the long and complicated story of how the heavy bomber forces of the Allies increased in strength, technical efficiency and operational skill until they constituted a powerful offensive force. Within the wide terms of their directives they were largely free to select targets which they favored and to frustrate attempts to divert them to others which they regarded as less rewarding. The air power enabled the Allies to win complete superiority of the skies over England, the lines of communication to the Continent, and over the battlefields in France. To a large part, the Allied Air Forces gained air superiority over most of Germany. This advantage to the land forces grew in the months that followed and provided a marked tactical advantage for the Allies.

Tactical air power played a large part in winning air superiority, but the foundations of air victory were laid by the strategic bomber forces. It was the growing danger of their attacks on Germany

⁹USMA, The War In Western Europe, pp. 223-24.

that led to the German concentration on air defense with the resultant neglect to develop a strong offensive bomber force. This failure alone provided a tremendous advantage to the Allied land forces. Even the landings in Normandy were comparatively unmolested by heavy bomber attacks.¹⁰

By 31 August, apart from fighter-bombers and dive-bombers designed for ground attack, the total number of bombers shown in the German air strength returns for both the eastern and western fronts amounted to only 881 planes. Of this total only 649 were serviceable, and many of that group were non-operational for various reasons. Additionally, there were 2,429 fighters of all classes; 422 in the west and 1,192 deployed for the defense of Germany.¹¹

The combined Allied air strength operating from bases in the United Kingdom and France included 5,509 American bombers, 3,728 American fighter planes, 5,104 combat aircraft in the Royal Air Force, and hundreds of additional miscellaneous types for reconnaissance, liaison, and transport.¹²

The capabilities of these forces, particularly the bomber forces, were vividly demonstrated numerous times, perhaps the most spectacular action was when General Bradley ordered the "carpet bombing"

¹⁰First Army Report of Operations, 6 June - 1 August 1944, Located in the US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

¹¹Ellis, Victory in The West, p. 486.

¹²Hugh M. Cole, The Lorraine Campaign, United States Army In World War II: The European Theater, (Washington, 1950), p. 4.

to the immediate front of his forces in the St. Lo breakout. The bomber's ability to protect Third Army's exposed southern flank during its advance across France to the Seine was another example of their many talents.

During the period 6 June to 31 August 1944, Allied aircraft flew 480,317 individual sorties. Of this total 255,428 were flown by the Americans and 224,889 by British fliers.¹³ Bombers were used during this period to provide aerial resupply to the Allied forces, yet they slowed the war production in Germany and drove it underground for protection. For all its previous efforts the most devastating period was yet to come for Germany. During the next eight months, German territory was to receive twice the tonnage of bombs received in the first five years of the war.¹⁴

III. THE ENEMY SITUATION

Forces Available

In June 1944 there were fifty-nine German divisions in north-western France. Eight of these divisions were in Holland and Belgium and slightly over half the total were coast-defense or training divisions.¹⁵ Of the twenty-seven field divisions, only ten were armored divisions--three of these were south of the Seine river, one was near Antwerp, and the remainder were in Belgium and Holland. In the battle to close the Falaise pocket, eight German divisions were destroyed and

¹³Ellis, Victory In The West, p. 487.

¹⁴Ibid, p. 488.

¹⁵Liddell-Hart, The Other Side Of The Hill, p. 397.

approximately sixteen divisions suffered crippling losses necessitating refitting and regrouping.¹⁶

From the beginning of the invasion until the German Army withdrew to the Siegfried Line, the campaign in the west cost Germany about one-half million men. Of these, approximately 200,000 remained in the coastal fortresses, on the Channel islands, and in other "last ditch" positions; the remaining 300,000 comprised the killed, captured, and wounded.¹⁷

The panzer remnants saved themselves at the expense of the infantry who were left in the Falaise pocket, and although badly mauled, the panzer forces conducted delaying actions for the next three months. They were used in an infantry support role, employed singly as antitank weapons, or used as roving single artillery weapons. This was due more to the limited number of tanks available than for other reasons.¹⁸

When Montgomery proposed the single thrust to Eisenhower in August the German Army was practically a beaten force. Although there were numerous paper headquarters responsible for defensive sectors, the forces available to the commanders were battle-worn divisions of the Falaise pocket and untried training divisions.

The German forces in the West were under command of Field Marshal von Rundstedt after 5 September 1944. Rundstedt was Commander-In-Chief

¹⁶T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent J. Esposito, ed, A Military History Of World War II, 2 vols; Vol. I: Operations In The European Theaters, (West Point, New York, 1953), p. 428. Hereinafter referred to as Stamps and Esposito, Military History.

¹⁷USMA, The War In Western Europe, p. 158.

¹⁸Charles B. MacDonald, The Siegfried Line Campaign, United States Army In World War II: The European Theater, (Washington, 1963), p. 620.

West; below him in the chain of command were Army Group B, commanded by Field Marshal Walter Model, and Army Group G, commanded by General Herman Balck. Under Army Group B were the following armies located in Holland and extending to Luxembourg: Fifteenth Army, First Parachute Army, Fifth Panzer Army, and Seventh Army. Under Army Group G in the south were First Army and Nineteenth Army stretching from Luxembourg to Switzerland (see map 7).¹⁹

Divided between these armies, according to von Rundstedt on 8 September, were forty-eight infantry and fifteen panzer divisions equivalent to twenty-seven infantry divisions and six or seven panzer divisions in fighting capabilities.²⁰ As September began, the American estimate of the German capability in the west was 700,000 men or 49½ divisions with supporting troops.

The heavy losses suffered in the West and the continued high rate of attrition on the Eastern Front forced Hitler to provide a program for reinforcing the two main fronts with new or reconstructed divisions. In early July, while the Allies were still held in check in Normandy, Hitler ordered the formation of fifteen new divisions to strengthen the German lines. Of these new divisions two were assigned to the West, one to Norway and the remainder to the Eastern Front.²¹

During the early summer of 1944, Hitler and his closest military

¹⁹Vincent J. Esposito, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), Vol. II, Map 56.

²⁰USMA, The War In Western Europe, p. 180.

²¹H.R. Trevor-Roper, Blitzkrieg To Defeat: Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 201.

advisers showed more concern with the collapse of the central section of the eastern front and the Soviet threat to East Prussia than with the Allied drive toward the boundaries of western Germany. The number of divisions engaged on the eastern front was much greater than the number engaged in the west. The Eastern Theater had been draining German resources since 1941. On the eastern front there were no barriers between Germany and the advancing Russian Army except the German Army. In the west, the West Wall gave the Germans a psychological advantage. Nevertheless, the rapid disintegration of Germany's western forces during August forced Hitler to turn his attention from the east and consider ways and means of building up the armies in front of the West Wall.²²

On 2 September Hitler gave instructions for the creation of an operational reserve of twenty-five divisions to be available between 1 October and 1 December 1944.²³ Some of these divisions were assigned new number designations, but most were to carry designations belonging to divisions that were totally wrecked or destroyed.²⁴

The fifteen divisions raised in July and August and the twenty-five reserve divisions to be made available by 1 December 1944 were called volksgrenadier divisions. The personnel strength of each was 10,000 men, or 7,000 less than the standard infantry division. This

²²Walter Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-45, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), pp. 298-320 Passim.

²³Ibid, p. 329.

²⁴Cole, The Lorraine Campaign, p. 33.

deficiency was offset by providing more automatic weapons, field artillery, antitank weapons, and assault guns to each division.²⁵

Mobility and Firepower

Early in August Hitler ordered that the Western Front was to be given priority on the tanks coming off the assembly lines. Contrary to the advice of his armor experts he ordered that the new Panther tanks would not be used to refit the depleted and worn out panzer divisions in combat, but would go straight from the factory to the new panzer brigades. He envisaged these forces as mobile reserves capable of immediate commitment in the front lines. Other drastic steps were taken to meet the crisis in the west by sending approximately a hundred "fortress" infantry battalions made up of the older military classes that were normally employed in the rear areas. These divisions were hastily formed, poorly equipped, and rapidly sent forward to the field armies. By the end of September many of these ill-prepared divisions were occupying defensive positions on the line of contact.²⁶

On 4 September the German High Command assigned priority on all new artillery and assault guns to the Western Theater and ordered a general movement of the artillery units in the Balkans back to the western front. Continuous pressure in the East, and the West, made it impossible to strip one front in order to reinforce the other. The

²⁵12th Army Group Report of Operations, Vol. I, p. 15. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

²⁶First United States Army, Report of Operations, 1 August 1944-22 February 1945, p. 57. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

great Allied air offensive against the railroad systems of Central Europe prevented any rapid and direct large-scale movements.²⁷

On 24 August General Model mistakenly reported to his higher headquarters that the Allies had sixty-one divisions on the Continent supported by 16,400 aircraft and that one-third to one-half of the aircraft could be considered operative at any given time. Five days later he reported the worsening condition of his retreating troops; they had few heavy weapons and were armed with carbines and rifles. Replacements and new weapons were lacking. The eleven German armored divisions would have to be refitted before they could equal the strength of brigades. A few of the divisions had no more than five to ten operational tanks. The infantry divisions were down to single pieces of artillery and the armored division's artillery seldom had more than one battery of guns. Approximately three-fourths of the divisional transportation was horse-drawn. The horse-drawn artillery and transportation made the struggle between the Germans and the fully motorized Allies an uneven match. One German unit, the Fusilier Battalion, was equipped with bicycles to provide mobility for the troops.²⁸ German troops in the west were thoroughly depressed by the superiority in planes and tanks employed by the Allies.

On 4 September Model sent his request for additional troops to the German High Command and requested that it be placed before Hitler in its original text. Previous messages had been changed before being

²⁷Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters, p. 335.

²⁸Cole, The Lorraine Campaign, p. 39.

shown to Hitler. In this message he outlined the true situation on the Western Front and gave its strength as an estimated three and three-fourths panzer divisions and ten infantry divisions. He said his Army Group B would need a minimum of twenty-five infantry divisions and five or six panzer divisions. He never got a reply to his cable as he was replaced by von Rundstedt the next day.²⁹

Eisenhower's message to all commanders on 4 September estimated the remaining enemy forces northwest of the Ardennes as two weak panzer divisions and nine infantry divisions. These divisions were thought to be disorganized, in full retreat, and unlikely to offer any appreciable resistance if given no respite.³⁰ General Gunther Blumentritt, Chief-of-Staff West Front during the Allied pursuit to the German border, had this to say about the period:

The best course for the Allies would have been concentrate a really strong striking force with which to break through past Aachen to the Ruhr area. Strategically and politically, Berlin was the target. Germany's strength is in the north. South Germany was a side issue. He who holds northern Germany holds Germany. Such a break-through, coupled with air domination, would have torn in pieces the weak German front and ended the war. Berlin and Prague would have been occupied ahead of the Russians. There were no German forces behind the Rhine, and at the end of August our front was wide open.³¹

After hostilities ceased in Europe, Sir B.H. Liddell-Hart interviewed several German generals for his book The Other Side of the Hill and all interviewed were of the opinion the Allied Supreme Command missed a

²⁹Ibid, p. 40.

³⁰Chandler and Ambrose, ed, The Papers of Eisenhower, IV, p. 2117.

³¹Liddell-Hart, The Other Side Of The Hill, p. 428.

a great opportunity to end the war with Germany in the autumn of 1944. They agreed with Montgomery's assessment that this could best have been achieved by concentrating all possible resources on a single thrust in the north towards Berlin. General Kurt Student, commander of the 1st Parachute Army, was in charge of the north flank through which the attack would have gone, had this to say about the disposition of his forces:

The sudden penetration of the British tank forces into Antwerp took the Fuhrer's Headquarters utterly by surprise. At the moment we had no disposable reserves worth mentioning either on the western front or within our own country. I took over the command of the right wing of the western front on the Albert Canal on September 4th. At that moment I had only recruit and convalescent units and one coast-defense division from Holland. They were reinforced by a panzer detachment--of merely twenty-five tanks and self-propelled guns.³²

With this force General Student was to defend a battle-front that stretched for over one hundred miles.

Army Group B was the army facing 21 Army Group in Holland and the US First Army in Belgium. Not only were the forward units in dire need of replacements of personnel and equipment, they also had no reserve units to add depth to their fronts. Montgomery assessed the German tactical situation correctly when he wanted to make the single thrust--there was nothing behind the front lines.

In contrast, General Eisenhower stated in his book Crusade in Europe:

In the late summer days of 1944 it was known to us that the Germans still had disposable reserves within his own country. Any idea of attempting to thrust forward a small force, bridge the Rhine, and continue on into the heart of Germany was completely fantastic. Even had such a force

³²Ibid, p. 429.

been able to start with a total of ten or a dozen divisions--and it is certain no more could have been supported even temporarily--the attacking column would have gradually grown smaller as it dropped off units to protect its flanks and would have ended up facing inescapable defeat. Such an attempt would have played into the hands of the enemy.³³

The post-war revelations by the German generals on the Western Front indicate Eisenhower's statement was not a true estimate of the enemy capabilities. At the end of August the Germans did not have the combat divisions that were later formed and shoved into the defensive lines. When the Allies stopped at the German border for logistical reasons, the German High Command was given the opportunity to build additional divisions. The volksgrenadier divisions and the panzer divisions used in the Ardennes Offensive were results of this delay for logistics.

In the last months of 1944 various types of semi-military units were shoved into the front lines. These units were comprised of men too old or too young to have been used before. The civilian police, composed chiefly of men in their early forties, were given a few weeks' training and put into action wherever they were needed most. German Labor Service units, composed of youths seventeen and under, were taken from their tasks of road building and construction, given rifles and ammunition, and put in the front lines.³⁴ Their construction work was turned over to convict and prisoner labor service units.

³³Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, pp. 292-93.

³⁴Milton Shulman, Defeat In The West, (New York: E.P. Dutton Co. Inc., 1948), p. 269.

The fact that these organizations succeeded in holding the Allies on the German border was a striking testimony to the recuperative power of the German High Command. But there is little doubt that this stand would have taken place if Montgomery had advanced on the single axis in the north. The fortified positions of the Siegfried Line and the weather conditions that restricted Allied aircraft later in the year were factors that would have to be accepted in either event.

IV. A CONSIDERATION OF ALLIED LOGISTICAL SUPPORT CAPABILITIES AND REQUIREMENTS

The subject of logistics (or supply) was the underlying cause of friction between commanders and led to suspensions or alterations of tactical operations. The catastrophic logistical situation during the autumn of 1944 was the result of an unexpectedly rapid pursuit across France that destroyed the carefully laid plans of the logisticians. To assess the impact of logistics on the proposed single thrust, it is necessary to examine the logistical operations that developed in the European Theater of Operations.

Support Capabilities

Ports

An exasperated staff officer summed up his frustrations over the problem of ports in a parody of the invasion plan called "Operation OVERBOARD." He wrote, "The general principle is that the number of divisions required to capture the number of ports required to maintain those divisions is always greater than the number of divisions those

ports can maintain."³⁵ The logistical planners had ample reason to suspect that this statement contained more than an element of truth. From the start, port discharge capacity had been the major single cause for concern in the planning for support of the land force on the Continent. Logistic planners had predicted a deficit beginning by the first of October, even assuming that operations proceeded as scheduled before the invasion. By July 1944, the port discharge problem appeared to constitute the very root of future supply difficulties. This was mainly because the course of operations in the first weeks was tied inseparably with the proposal to accelerate the flow of divisions to the Continent.

The initial plan anticipated meeting requirements of the Allied forces by development of the beaches, and envisaged the capture and development of Cherbourg and six smaller ports within one month of the invasion. Together these facilities were planned to have a discharge capacity of about 27,000 tons per day which was sufficient to support twelve divisions. Within another month three more ports were to have been captured and brought into use. This was to have brought the total capacity to approximately 37,000 tons per day. Of this, 33,000 tons were allocated for United States use to provide the 30,700 tons required for the maintenance and reserves built-up for sixteen divisions.³⁶

Yet at the time of the breakout late in July, Cherbourg had been in operation only a few days and nearly ninety per cent of all supply support was still coming in over the beaches. The total dis-

³⁵ Roland G. Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, United States Army In World War II: The European Theater, 2 vols, (Washington: Vol. I 1953, Vol. II 1959), Vol. II, p. 46.

³⁶ Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 463-64.

charged to the American units averaged between 20,000 and 25,000 tons per day, as against previously estimated requirements of 30,000. The deficiency was not immediately serious because requirements were not as large as predicted. But weather was expected to close out the beaches in late September, and a delay in capturing the Brittany ports was already an established fact. Before the end of July the logistical planners took action to compensate for the expected delay of the Brittany ports by projecting an increase in the capacity of Cherbourg and the minor Normandy ports. This was accomplished by seeking a larger allotment of coastal vessels so that small ports could be used to fuller advantage.³⁷

In the last two weeks of August the Brittany ports were recognized as improbable assets due to the continued delay in their capture. Attention was turned once again to the small channel ports and on 25 August five ports were selected for development. A total of 20,000 tons capacity was set for the five ports, three of which were scheduled to meet their goals within ten days.³⁸

Meeting port discharge requirements was not a simple matter of adding up the total capacity of every little inlet along the coast and balancing this against the total tonnages it was desired to import. Port capacity not only had to be adequate in quantity but of the kind suitable for handling various types of shipping and cargo. On paper the Allies had sufficient port capacity to handle all imports scheduled for the next

³⁷Ibid, Vol. II, p. 47.

³⁸Ibid.

weeks, but they were actually in very short capacity of the type suitable to unload such commodities as coal, boxed vehicles, and heavy equipment. Beginning in September a larger portion of supplies was scheduled to be shipped directly from the United States, loaded so as to reduce broken stowage to a minimum and thus use space more economically. Such conditions meant that practically every ship coming from the United States would contain either boxed vehicles or other heavy equipment. In August the only port in Allied hands that possessed facilities even partially adapted to handling such cargo was Cherbourg, and it was obvious that it lacked sufficient capacity to handle all the shipping coming directly from the United States.³⁹ Proposals to handle heavy troop movements through Cherbourg already threatened to cut into the limited cargo-handling capacity of that port. Some boxed vehicles and other awkward loads were received at the beaches and minor ports, but the major portion of the US port discharge requirements could be met only through the development of the larger deepwater ports.

Tactical developments in the next weeks radically altered the entire outlook on the port situation, and eventually led to a re-evaluation of the port development program. On 4 September, as already noted, Antwerp was captured intact. On 12 September the stubbornly-defended and badly-damaged port of Le Havre, 225 miles to the rear, also fell to British troops. Rouen port had been occupied by the British on 30 August. The advantages of these ports over the Brittany ports were obvious. Logistic planners turned their attention to them as possible

³⁹Ibid, Vol. II, p. 40.

solutions to the discharge problems. An example of their advantage was that for every 5,000 tons discharged at Le Havre rather than the Brittany ports, an equivalent of seventy truck companies would be saved because of shortened shipping routes.⁴⁰

The logistical support of Allied forces reached its lowest ebb in the month of October. At no time during the eleven months of the continental operations did the supply situation appear so unfavorable in all its aspects. This can be attributed in large measure to the unsatisfactory port situation.

In October, when Montgomery would have been in the attack if his plan had been approved, bad weather set in as expected. Its adverse effect on operations was felt most at the beaches and the smaller ports, because the shallow-draft ships could not be dispatched across the Channel. Cherbourg's reconstruction was far from complete and its worst bottleneck, clearance, remained unsolved. The small Brittany ports were making only a minor contribution to total needs. Consequently, in the first three weeks of October, unloadings averaged less than 26,000 tons per day against an estimated requirement of about 45,000 tons. The theoretical discharge capacity of ports then in operation was only 28,000 tons.⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid, Vol. II, p. 44.

⁴¹Ibid, Vol. II, p. 96.

TABLE 1
DAILY PORT DISCHARGES IN TONS

	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
Beaches	17,300	13,100	6,300	900
Cherbourg	8,500	10,400	11,800	14,000
Normandy and Brittany	4,300	5,800	4,400	3,700
Le Havre	-	-	2,000	4,800
Rouen	-	-	900	4,100
Total discharged	30,100	29,300	25,400	27,500
Tonnage required	34,100	38,300	45,400	47,500
Approximate deficit	4,000	9,000	20,000	20,000
Original SHAEF estimate	30,700	37,600	38,600	51,200

Source: United States Military Academy, The War In Western Europe, (United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1952), p. 177.

These, then, were the port discharge and clearance problems when Montgomery proposed massing forty divisions for a single thrust to Berlin.

Transportation

Since the OVERLORD operation developed quite differently from what was expected, the assumptions on which the schedules were based were essentially incorrect. For the first seven weeks the advance was much slower than anticipated, and the Allied forces were confined to a shallow beachhead on the Continent. From the viewpoint of logistic support the lag in operations was not immediately serious, for it resulted in short lines of communication and gave the service forces added time to develop the port facilities. But the long restriction to this area developed into serious matters for the future. The ports and beaches severely limited the force which could be maintained during the following months.

The temporary advantage gained from the short lines of communica-

tion and low maintenance requirements in Normandy quickly disappeared after the breakout from St. Lo at the end of July. By D plus 79 (24 August) Allied forces had closed to the Seine eleven days ahead of schedule despite a lag of approximately thirty days at the beginning of the breakout. Tactically, and to some extent logistically, the spectacular encircling drive of early August at the Falaise pocket brought definite advantages to the Allied forces. It resulted in the almost complete destruction of the Seventh Army, and more important to the logistician, facilitated the capture of the Seine ports and Antwerp. From the point of view of logistic support, the rapid advance to the Seine also had its less favorable aspects, even at D plus 79 gave indications of serious complications. The fact that the Seine was reached on D plus 79 rather than D plus 90 was in itself not serious, for the supply structure was sufficiently flexible to accommodate itself to a variation of eleven days. The departure from the scheduled advance had actually been more serious.⁴²

Because of the initial lag in operations, Allied forces were at the D plus 20 line on D plus 49 and between D plus 49 and D plus 79, a period of thirty days, they advanced a distance which by plan was to have been covered in seventy days (see map 4). The lines of communication could not be developed beyond St. Lo in the period before the breakout, and in the subsequent period could not be developed at the speed with which tanks and other combat vehicles were able to reach the Seine. The result was that the armies used up their operational reserves by

⁴²Ibid, Vol. II, p. 5.

the time they reached the Seine. Since rail lines and pipelines could not be built forward quickly enough, motor transport facilities were strained to the breaking point attempting to meet even the barest needs of the armies. The Communications Zone consequently found it impossible to establish stocks in forward depots.⁴³

The arrival at the Seine marked only the beginning of supply difficulties. Despite the logistic complications which the rapid advance clearly forecast, the decision was made to cross the Seine and to continue the pursuit without pause. On purely tactical grounds this decision was sound, but on logistical considerations it was a disaster.

From the standpoint of logistics the decision to cross the Seine and continue the pursuit while implementing Eisenhower's plan to advance on two axes constituted a radical departure from earlier plans. The decision carried with it a supply task out of all proportion to planned capabilities. The tasks were much more far-reaching in their effects than was apparent. With the supply structure already severely strained by the speed with which the last two hundred miles were covered, this decision entailed the risk of a complete breakdown of the logistical system. The main problem was the deficiency in transportation which only worsened as the lines of communication extended farther and farther eastward. Despite great efforts, the reconstruction of damaged railways did not progress as rapidly as necessary. Motor transport therefore continued to bear the principal burden of forward movement and was unable to deliver daily maintenance needs, to say nothing of stocking inter-

⁴³Ibid.

mediate or forward supply depots.⁴⁴ It can now be understood why the Communications Zone planners told Eisenhower in August they could support a drive on both axes, but could not support even one axis two weeks later unless Patton's drive across France was halted.

Could this system be stretched across Europe to Berlin? Each division used about 600 to 700 tons of supplies per day of active operations; losses of ordnance equipment required replacement each month of about 36,000 small arms, 700 mortars, 500 tanks, 2,400 vehicles, and about 100 field artillery pieces; artillery and mortar ammunition was consumed at a rate of about 8,000,000 rounds a month and 66,400 miles of just one type of field wire was used each month.⁴⁵

The Communications Zone personnel made heroic efforts to keep the armies going. They took over the main highway routes in France and, using most of them for one-way traffic, installed the Red Ball Express system to meet the requirements. Trucks were on the road continuously; every vehicle ran at least twenty hours a day; relief drivers were scraped up from every unit that could provide them; and the vehicles were allowed to stop only for necessary loading, unloading, and servicing.⁴⁶ The Express reached the height of its performance within five days after beginning operations. On 29 August, 132 truck companies with 5,958 vehicles delivered 12,342 tons of supplies forward, and by 5

⁴⁴Ibid, Vol. II, p. 6.

⁴⁵USMA, The War In Western Europe, p. 176.

⁴⁶Stamps and Esposito, Military History, Vol. I: Operations In The European Theaters, p. 463.

September had delivered about 89,000 tons.⁴⁷ Deficiencies in preventive maintenance, deterioration of the highways, and constant rains that turned roads into rivers of mud brought the Red Ball Express project to a close on 16 November. But in about eleven weeks it carried over 412,193 tons of cargo to the front. At its peak it used 7,000 trucks, (about 140 truck companies), and moved an average of 5,800 tons of supplies per day.⁴⁸ Its round trip distance was 686 miles on the northern route and 590 miles for the southern route. During its lifetime there were over 122,000,000 miles logged on the system's trucks.⁴⁹

The burden on the truck transport system was relieved to a considerable extent by the use of pipelines for gasoline. The pipeline was constructed across the center of France initially, and if the thrust on the northern axis had been approved, it would still have been necessary to transport the gasoline hundreds of miles from the pipeline.

Despite the activity of the Red Ball Express, the pipeline for gasoline, and tonnages hauled by the using organization, (First Army hauled 158,424 tons between 1 August-12 September),⁵⁰ it was impossible to meet demands of the combat forces. As the Allied armies reached the German border, artillery ammunition requirements rose sharply and gasoline requirements dropped, but the decrease in gasoline tonnage in

⁴⁷Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 560.

⁴⁸Stamps and Exposito, Military History, Vol. I: Operations In The European Theaters, p. 463.

⁴⁹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 137.

⁵⁰First United States Army, Report of Operations, Vol. I, p. 89. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

no way offset the increased tonnage for ammunition. Truck transportation was stretched to the breaking point and maintenance, deferred by necessity, caught up with the truck companies as trucks began to breakdown. One hundred trucks were taken off the Red Ball route every day.⁵¹ As Eisenhower recalled,

All along the front we felt increasingly the strangulation on movement imposed by our inadequate lines of communication. Regardless of the extraordinary efforts of the supply system, this remained our most acute difficulty. All along the front the cry was for more gasoline and more ammunition. Every one of our spearheads could have gone farther and faster than they actually did. . . . Nevertheless we had to supply each force for its basic missions and for basic missions only.⁵²

Aerial Resupply

To alleviate the desperate shortage of transport in the period of the pursuit it was natural that air transport, like other movement facilities, would be exploited as fully as possible. Supply by air, however, was no magic solution. The advantages of speed and freedom of movement were offset by many limitations, including low volume and tonnage capacity, uncertain availability of suitable aircraft, inadequate ground facilities at both loading points and landing fields, enemy interference, and hazardous weather. In recognition of the costs involved using troop carrier and transport aircraft for routine large-scale supply, field service regulations specified that supply of ground units by air was intended only as an emergency expedient. This regulation was quickly changed and attempts to supply the Continent by aerial

⁵¹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 236.

⁵²Eisenhower, Crusade In Europe, pp. 308-310.

means were made shortly after the invasion.⁵³

The use of air transport in June and July barely indicated the extent to which it was later to be developed, although the movement of both supplies and personnel by air filled an important gap in the meeting of emergency needs even in the first two months. The first supply by air in the OVERLORD operation consisted of prescheduled movements to the airborne units in the Cotentin Peninsula and immediately revealed some of the difficulties inherent in the use of air for that purpose. Of 208 aircraft dispatched to the 82d Airborne Division on 7 June, 64 returned with their loads due to the sudden development of bad weather enroute. There were 250 tons dispatched, 155 tons dropped, and 90 per cent were recovered by the ground units. Other aircraft flew successful on-call missions to the 82d Airborne Division during the first week and delivered supplies by either parachute or glider; the gliders carried mainly 105-mm howitzers and heavy machineguns.⁵⁴

On 10 August twelve aircraft successfully dropped loads of food, ammunition, and medical supplies on a hilltop east of Mortain, France, but of twenty-five aircraft dispatched the following day less than half made successful deliveries; the remainder dropped their cargo one-and-one-half miles short of the area as the result of poor visibility.⁵⁵

In the meantime, aviation engineers opened emergency landing strips in the area making it possible to air-land supplies on a large scale. Small shipments of supplies began in the third week of June.

⁵³Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 572.

⁵⁴Ibid, Vol. I, p. 573.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Air transport was used most heavily during the week of 18-24 June when a channel storm caused port operations to virtually cease. Approximately 1,400 tons of supplies, mostly ammunition, were shipped to the Continent by air that week. By the end of July the IX Troop Carrier Command had flown approximately 7,000 tons of supply to Allied forces on the Continent.⁵⁶

Although the cumulative tonnage transported to the Continent in the first two months was not large, air transport had proved its worth. First Army was anxious to establish air service on a scheduled basis. In fact, there was suspicion in July that the Army was already making unauthorized use of air transport, for the First Army supply services began to call regularly for delivery of over four hundred tons per day by mid-July. By informal agreement with Ninth Air Force these demands were reduced to a maximum of two hundred fifty tons.⁵⁷

As this attempt was made to keep the use of air transport within prescribed bounds, steps were taken to develop the theater's airfreight capacity to its full potential. In mid-June Supreme Headquarters directed the Allied Expeditionary Air Force to prepare and submit plans for supply by air at the rate of 1,500 tons per day by D plus 30-35, and 3,000 tons per day by D plus 45. The main problem involved in developing such capacity lay in the provision of landing fields on the Continent, and within a few days the Allied Expeditionary Air Force responded with a plan outlining the requirements for fields, supplies,

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷12th Army Group, Report of Operations, G-4 Vol. V, p. 133. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

and units needed to build them. SHAEF approved the plan and on 11 July directed the 21 Army Group Commander and the Air Force Commander to provide airfields and other facilities as early as possible.⁵⁸ By mid-July plans were initiated to provide landing facilities on the Continent capable of receiving 3,000 tons per day, half in the British sector and half in the American. To accomplish this goal six landing strips were built in each area. The average landing strip was capable of receiving and clearing only 500 tons per day. Delivery of 1,500 tons required 600 sorties of C-47 aircraft in each area.⁵⁹

Delivery improved over the next weeks and additional aircraft were assigned the mission of hauling supplies to the Continent. Third Army was resupplied by aerial means to relieve an emergency situation on 15 August⁶⁰ and during the next few days critical supply situations developed in all forward areas. Delivery averaged less than 600 tons per day and the entire logistic situation was worsening. Both First Army and Third Army were existing on minimum daily maintenance requirements.⁶¹

Scarcities bred scarcities. Airfields for both tactical and administrative use were urgently needed. To restore captured fields and build new ones, engineer materials were shipped in transport desperately needed for other supplies. To meet the needs for airfields, 12th Army

⁵⁸Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 574.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Third Army Action Against Enemy Reports, Narrative account 1 Aug 44-9 May 45, Vol. III, G-4 Supply, dated 15 May 1945, p. 5. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁶¹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 576.

Group allocated as much as 2,000 tons of cargo per day for forward air-field construction.⁶²

The scheduling of airborne missions necessitated the recall of troop carrier aircraft and measures were instituted to find substitute aircraft. The use of bombers for supply purposes had been considered earlier, although somewhat unfavorably. On 17 August it was proposed that 250 B-24s be used to replace the troop carriers. Over several objections because of modifications necessary to convert bombers to cargo carriers, twelve bombers were converted on 24 August.⁶³ By 28 August there was no longer any question about using bombers for supply purposes as urgent calls for aerial resupply were received from all commands.

By the use of bombers, supplemented by C-47s of the air force service commands, SHAEF planned that supply by air would continue at the rate of 500 tons per day. Meeting the increased urgent requirements for aerial supply, the peak was reached on 26 and 27 August when deliveries totaled nearly 2,900 tons each day. Thereafter daily tonnage fell off as more C-47s were withdrawn and the rate was limited to the capability of the bombers.⁶⁴ Although it filled an immediate need, the use of bombers was not to be continued. They consumed 4.5 tons of gasoline while transporting 4.5 tons of cargo from the United Kingdom to France. By comparison, the C-47s consumed 4 tons of gasoline while

⁶²Ibid, Vol. I, p. 577.

⁶³Ibid, Vol. I, p. 578.

⁶⁴Ibid, Vol. I, p. 579.

transporting 10 tons of cargo the same distance.⁶⁵

Even with the use of bombers and troop carrier aircraft the tonnage was only an augmentation to surface transportation. Their efforts kept the supply system, which was operating under emergency conditions, from complete collapse. To believe that any long range drives could be supported by aerial resupply, except under emergency conditions for short periods, was utter foolishness. Not only was it inefficient to use bombers as cargo aircraft, they were removed from their primary support role.

Support Requirements

Petroleum

The Allied breakout from the Normandy beachhead, and the pursuit of German forces retreating across France and Belgium, left planning for supplies far behind. As a result the Allied armies resorted to improvisation, which was justified in a great gamble to bring the war in Europe to a rapid close. When the German army did not collapse after its defeat in France, the attacking armies had to wait for the development of more effective methods of supply.

The task of furnishing one of the most important types of supply, gasoline and other petroleum products, fell into two main categories: delivery to the Continent, and distribution to the armies in the field. OVERLORD planners devised three principal ways of transporting gasoline and other petroleum products to the French coast. For the first three weeks after D Day, the armies were supplied by packaged

⁶⁵Ibid, Vol. I, p. 578.

gasoline and oil.⁶⁶ It was hoped that after three weeks the Minor system would be in operation. This was a system whereby motor and aviation gasoline would be delivered to British-controlled ports east of Omaha Beach by tankers, which would discharge their gasoline through six-inch pipelines to hastily-installed tanks a short distance inland. Next, the Major system would be ready to function. Basic to this system was an untried venture, a cross-channel underwater pipeline consisting of ten three-inch flexible pipelines stretching from the Isle of Wight to Cherbourg sixty miles away with a theoretic capacity of three hundred tons of gasoline daily. The extensive tank facilities of Cherbourg were expected to be destroyed, but when invasion forces entered the city they found the "tank farms" intact.⁶⁷ The tanks were quickly cleaned out and made available for storage of 500,000 barrels.⁶⁸

The gasoline shortage that developed was not one of delivery to the Continent, but of transportation to the armies in the field. Engineers began building pipelines inland from Cherbourg. The lines were hastily constructed and had many leaks and breaks. Some leaks were the result of sabotage efforts. The numerous breaks caused trucks to travel an additional 160 miles for their loads on 29 August.⁶⁹ At

⁶⁶"A Narrative Resume of the Activities of The Petroleum & Fuel Division. Office of The Chief Quartermaster, ETOUSA 1943 to 1945." p. 3. Located in the US Army Command and General Staff College Library. Packaged gasoline was fuel in five gallon cans.

⁶⁷Ibid, p. 15.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 511.

the height of the gasoline crisis, some of the armies were over 250 miles from the end of the pipeline. The situation improved and by the middle of September the pipeline was dispensing gasoline at Chartres. Subsequently the line was extended beyond the Seine another ten miles, but it was not built further eastward until later in 1944. The pipeline's final destination was Mainz, Germany, a distance of approximately 600 miles. Two other pipelines were subsequently laid, one following the 21 Army Group in the north starting at Antwerp and one following the invasion force from Southern France.⁷⁰

Motor transport, railroads, and airplanes also carried gasoline as well as other supplies to the rapidly-expanding front. Critical shortages developed in motor transportation after the breakout, and until the slowdown at the German border hasty improvisation usually replaced careful planning.

Gasoline consumption was computed a multitude of ways depending upon who needed the information. The most frequently used methods were by gallons per-mile per organization, gallons per man per day, by barrels, and by tonnage. To have meaningful figures, two methods are used below, gallons per organization per day, and tonnage per organization per day. A representative corps usage factor is shown below.

⁷⁰Final Report of the Chief of Engineers, European Theater of Operations, 1942-1945, p. 30. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

TABLE 2

GASOLINE CONSUMPTION DATA
6 June - 1 December 1944

Unit	Gallons		Tons	
	Day	Week	Day	Week
Corps Hq	47,300	331,100	142	993
2nd Armd Div	76,600	536,200	230	1,608
29th Inf Div	26,500	185,500	80	565
30th Inf Div	25,500	178,500	76	532
TOTAL	175,900	1,231,300	528	3,708

Source: Letter, "Quartermaster XIX Corps to Ninth Army Quartermaster," dated 14 December 1944. Located in the US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

Gasoline consumption data compiled by SHAEF for the various United States armies during a twenty-eight day period is shown in the following table.

TABLE 3

GASOLINE CONSUMPTION DATA--12TH ARMY GROUP
(28 Day Period)

	First Army	Third Army	Ninth Army	Total for 12th A G
Tonnage on hand start of period	9,588	11,088	18,959	39,635
Tonnage delivered	71,987	73,475	45,503	190,965
Total	81,575	84,563	64,462	230,600
Tonnage on hand end of period	6,464	11,093	9,972	27,592
Tons consumed	75,111	73,470	54,490	203,071

Source: Consumption Rates U.S. Forces, prepared by Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4 Division, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, dated 11 May 1945. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

AMMUNITION

In the entire eleven months of operations on the Continent no supply problem plagued the Allied forces more persistently or constricted their operations more seriously than the shortage of ammunition. Restrictions on expenditures were imposed shortly after the Normandy landings because of unloading difficulties at the beaches. Such restrictions continued with little relaxation until the end of hostilities because resupply from the United States was uncertain.⁷¹

Most of the trouble over ammunition supply arose not so much from excessive or unexpected expenditures, but from delivery of inadequate tonnages to the Continent. Ammunition was not shipped in sufficient quantities and the number of ships hauling ammunition was inadequate. Artillery ammunition supply schedules did not meet requirements. Ammunition supply became serious at the very start of the invasion. Scheduled landings of ammunition were upset by the loss of key personnel, vehicles, and equipment on the beaches. Fortunately, the artillery did not engage in heavy firing in the first days as naval gunfire gave good support to ground forces. Expenditures were actually below estimates. But ammunition did not arrive at planned rates, and it was almost immediately necessary for General Bradley to take emergency action in order to give high priority to the beaching of ammunition loads.

By mid-June restrictions on ammunition expenditures were imposed for the first time when First Army rationed ammunition by limiting the number of rounds per gun which could be fired each day by the two corps.

⁷¹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 247.

Stocks were low partly because of nondeliveries. Rationing was initiated mainly because corps and divisions violated army directives by creating excessive unreported unit ammunition dumps at artillery positions. Lower units stocked excessive amounts forward which reduced reserve stocks in army dumps.⁷²

A more serious threat to the whole ammunition position came in the period of the Channel storm when unloading virtually ceased. The shortage of artillery ammunition was alleviated somewhat by using tank destroyer and antiaircraft battalions in indirect fire roles for long-range harassing and interdiction support. At the same time there was a plentiful supply of 90-mm and 3-inch ammunition in those battalions.⁷³ The ammunition supply improved somewhat after the storm and rationing was lifted, but controls were maintained to insure no abuse would result in the more liberal system.

By mid-July the situation worsened and a strict rationing was imposed in order to rebuild reserves for the offensive operations being planned. An allowance was established for specific numbers of rounds per weapon on a day-to-day basis and permitted no accumulation from one day to the next.⁷⁴ From that point onward expenditures were actually less than rationing permitted. Firing was light, for the bulk of the

⁷²First Army Report of Operations, 6 June-1 August 1944, Located in the US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁷³First United States Army, Report of Operations, Vol. I, pp. 123-24. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁷⁴Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 447.

artillery was held silent in new positions in preparation for an attack on 25 July.⁷⁵ The shipping and discharge situation also improved in this period, and as a result of the demand for additional ammunition ships, there were approximately twenty-nine vessels with a capacity of about 145,000 tons awaiting discharge by the end of the month.⁷⁶

Ammunition supply prospects appeared favorable for a short time early in September, and the 12th Army Group, although increasingly skeptical of the Communication Zone's optimistic forecasts, made relatively liberal allocations to the armies in the hope of crashing through the Siegfried Line on the momentum of the pursuit. By the middle of the month this policy left deep holes in the theater's reserves, reducing reserve levels in the major types of ammunition by an average of twenty days of supply from the previous month.⁷⁷ Exhaustion of some categories was expected within two weeks. Inadequate discharge facilities continued to account for much of the delay in deliveries.

Increasing uncertainty over ammunition availability characterized the last two weeks of September as the armies attempted to widen the breaches in the German defenses. Twelfth Army Group continued to allocate ammunition for eight-day periods, and the armies fired at substantially higher rates than in the preceding month.⁷⁸ But the alloca-

⁷⁵First United States Army, Report of Operations, Vol. I, pp. 94-95. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁷⁶Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 448.

⁷⁷Ibid, Vol. II, p. 247.

⁷⁸Ibid, Vol. II, p. 248.

tions reflected the hand-to-mouth supply situation and fell far short of the desired supply rate. The allocation for the period 27 September-5 October, for example, permitted daily expenditures of only 3.8 rounds per gun for the 240-mm howitzer and 3.1 rounds for the 8-inch gun.⁷⁹

On 15 October the ammunition officer at First Army showed that the allocation was completely unrealistic, for the ammunition which the army had been authorized to expend did not exist in army depots and could not be obtained from the Communications Zone.⁸⁰ There appeared to be two main causes for the situation that had developed: inadequate discharge of ships, and a recent decision authorizing First Army to increase its reserve of non-critical ammunition items by forty per cent.⁸¹ This decision drew most of the ammunition into the First Army area, but even there severe restrictions still existed.

During the period 1 August to 12 September, First Army established a five hundred ton mobile ammunition supply point. This rolling supply point closely followed the troops it was serving and vehicles returned to the ammunition dumps as soon as they were empty. The problems of the day are brought out by the following entry in the First Army Report of Operations:

During this period of rapid displacement, transportation continued to be the most serious problem. Turn-arounds were extended and the supply of gasoline to the motor vehicles was in itself a difficult problem. Ammunition

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰First United States Army, Report of Operations, Vol. IV, Annex 9, p. 3. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁸¹Ibid.

expenditures during this period dropped to approximately eight hundred tons per day for the Army.⁸² This fact contributed substantially to the success of the operation.

On 11 September, First Army had reached the Siegfried Line and because of the fact that its supply lines were extended over great distances, it was not possible to bring forward sufficient supplies immediately to continue a large-scale offensive.⁸³

Ammunition constituted the bulk of tonnage transported to the combat units. As railroads were bombed constantly during the weeks following the invasion few were capable of supporting traffic without extensive repair.⁸⁴ Therefore, the primary means of transporting ammunition was by trucks. The immensity of the task quickly becomes evident when the eight hundred tons for one day, used by First Army, is multiplied by four to meet the combined requirements of 21 Army Group and 12th Army Group.

Other Classes of Supply

In this section the classes of supply will be dealt with in the same terminology and with the same definitions of classes of supply as used in the Second World War. The reference to a class of supply will include all items within that class.

There were five classes of supply divided as follows: Class I was food; Class II was those items of equipment an organization was

⁸²At this time the First Army was engaged in closing the Falaise pocket and the race across France to the German border.

⁸³First United States Army, Report of Operations, Vol. IV, p. 4. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁸⁴Over nine hundred locomotive engines and thirty-three per cent of all rolling stock were imported from the United States to replace the destroyed equipment. As the American engines were built for wide gauge tracks, two sets of tracks were laid on the roadbed--the narrow gauge inside the wide.

authorized to keep and replace as required (tanks, trucks, clothing); Class III was petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL); Class IV was all items of supply necessary to accomplish the mission not included in the other four classes of supply; Class V was ammunition, pyrotechniques, mines, and explosives. Classes II and IV are usually combined in tonnage reports although each was unique in its application. Food (Class I) was never a problem to the Allied forces except in variety. When Paris was liberated on 23 August, the food supply in Paris was critically low. Food was diverted from depots to Paris, which reduced reserve levels of the armies. Emergency aerial resupply was begun at the expense of other badly-needed supplies until the situation improved in Paris.⁸⁵

Class II and Class IV were supplies and equipment most frequently delayed by lack of transportation. First movement priority was given to either Class III or Class V supplies depending upon which was needed the most. In the pursuit, gasoline was first priority for transportation, and when the battle slowed, ammunition received priority. Food was second to the above essential followed by Class II and Class IV, the lowest priority. With the exception of a few critical items, the shortages in Class II and Class IV supplies in the combat zone, like the shortages in other classes, could initially be laid to the deficiencies of inland transportation.

Starting on 4 September a system of daily tonnage allocations was initiated and the period 4-12 September was the most critical period

⁸⁵Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. I, p. 577.

of supply faced in the campaign.⁸⁶ The following table illustrates the average allocations and receipts from the Communications Zone:

TABLE 4
FIRST ARMY ALLOCATION AND RECEIPT OF SUPPLIES
(6-12 September 1944)

Class	Allocation in tons	Receipts in tons
Class I	993	533
Class II and IV	415	289
Class III	2,028	1,954
Class V	64	413

Source: First Army Report of Operations, 1 August 1944-22 February 1945, p. 45. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

With priority given to gasoline and ammunition, replacement of worn-out equipment was postponed as long as possible. There was some improvement in October, but of an allocation of 5,880 tons, Class II and Class IV supplies were assigned less than 1,000 tons, and deliveries came to only 637 tons.⁸⁷

Other factors besides transportation and unloading inadequacies were at work as well. The unexpectedly heavy attrition of many items in the first three months of invasion caused shortages in the theater. At the end of August, General Eisenhower highlighted some of the more serious losses for the Commanding General, Army Services Forces. In response to the latter's request for forecasts of future materiel needs,

⁸⁶First United States Army, Report of Operations, Vol. I, p. 45. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁸⁷Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 215.

Eisenhower noted that in the first seventy days of operations more than 2,400 automatic rifles, 1,750 one-quarter ton trucks, 1,500 mortars, 2,000 planes, and 900 tanks were lost in battle. Additionally, he emphasized the imperative need for more and more "trucks of all kinds and sizes."⁸⁸

One major item in which an onimous shortage developed was the medium tank. First Army sustained large tank losses in the assault and in the subsequent hedgerow fighting in Normandy. In June it reported 187 tanks losses, or 26.6 per cent of its strength of 703, and in July 280 were reported lost, equivalent to 24.4 per cent of the average authorized strength of 1,153. These figures indicate that losses were running at a rate at least three times as great as the seven per cent replacement factor used by the War Department with the result that the theater reserve was quickly drained.⁸⁹

Combat vehicle replacements were critical items of equipment at all times. Tanks were a constant need in the armored units, and some organizations had roving teams of "scroungers" as the following report indicates:

General Patton maintains an unofficial tank retrieving outfit which calls itself the "scroungers." Their sole mission is to retrieve for reconditioning and re-use any tanks found abandoned--American or German. Actually the "scroungers" never hesitated swiping undamaged American tanks whenever they found them without their crews around. The activities of the "scroungers" got around to the other Armies and they were careful to route tank truck convoys away from Patton's territory. The "scroungers" had no table of organization. Their retrieving equipment con-

⁸⁸Ibid, Vol. I, p. 522.

⁸⁹Ibid.

sisted of a huge trailer with a crane that hoisted the forward part of the tank up to a drop ramp.⁹⁰

Early in November SHAEF provided the War Department with statistics to illustrate the rate at which supplies were being expended in the European theater. Each day 1,200 small arms weapons, 1,300 bayonets, and 5,000 tires were lost. Every month 700 mortars, 375 medium and 125 light tanks, 900 2½-ton trucks, 1,500 ¼-ton trucks, 100 artillery weapons of various sizes, and 150 barrels for artillery weapons had to be replaced. In the latter category were 100 2½-ton trucks which were taken off the Red Ball Express route every day.⁹¹ Lack of spare parts for these vehicles and of adequate maintenance and repair facilities resulted in a rising number of deadlined vehicles. These totaled 15,000 in November.⁹²

Losses in the first three months were considerably above the existing replacement factor, and thus tended to confirm the theater's earlier assertions that the War Department's projections of loss rates were too low. In mid-August the European theater reported that its reserves were exhausted, and by mid-September it was finding it increasingly difficult to keep armored units at their authorized strength levels. Losses in September came to 16.5 per cent of the theater's authorized strength as compared to 25.3 per cent in August. In October the rate fell to 9.8 per cent. During November the rate advanced to 11.2

⁹⁰Technical Intelligence HRPE Report No. 994, Army Service Forces, dated 15 Jan 45. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

⁹¹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 236.

⁹²Ibid.

per cent, and in December rose to 22.8 per cent reflecting the greatly intensified combat activity.⁹³

Not only was there a shortage of equipment, but there was no way to transport available equipment to the combat troops. Tanks were shipped by rail whenever possible, but not only did the cargo get misdirected or lost entirely, it took an excessively long time to reach the front. Early in December, Major General Leroy Lutes was directed to conduct an inspection of the Communications Zone and report his findings directly to Eisenhower and Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell, Commanding General, Army Services Forces. The following comments are taken from Lutes' final report dated 24 January 1945. On the subject, "Movement of Supplies From Depot to Using Unit," the inspection team queried logistic managers from First Army and Third Army and received these selected comments:

- (b) Regulating Officer, Third Army--"Railroad wagons often get lost in the shuffle so that priority moves are best handled by our own trucks."
- (e) Ordnance Officer, First Army--"Eighty wagons of ammunition on November calls arrived on 13 December. In following one of our shipments, we found it took five days for it to move seven miles across Paris. I keep 100 people following my shipments."
- (g) Surgeon, First Army--"We have experienced considerable delay in receiving medical shipments. On the average such shipments are three, four, and five weeks old, with some shipments six or seven weeks old. For highly critical shipments we can't locate cars."
- (h) Quartermaster, First Army--"Two of our trains, which pulled out of Rheims the same day, arrived five days apart. If possible we try to send men to ride our trains in."

⁹³Ibid, Vol. II, p. 237.

- (i) Chemical Officer, First Army--"Twenty-one days' shipping time is required for movement of supplies from Normandy."⁹⁴

Not only was there difficulty in getting supplies into the ports, cleared through the port area, and providing transportation movement to forward areas, but the shipments got lost enroute or took excessive time to reach their destination whether by truck or rail. The logistical system accomplished miracles in support of the fighting forces, but there were limits to what it could do.

V. SUMMARY

In this chapter an attempt has been made to present the tactical and logistical situation as it existed when Montgomery wanted to implement the single thrust, and project it through the remaining months of 1944. In order to assess the situation properly, the disposition of enemy forces and their defensive capabilities were addressed as well as the capabilities of the Allied command. No army can move farther than the logistical situation will permit, and an examination of the capabilities and limitations of the Allied logistical machinery revealed there were two wars being fought--the land battle against German enemy and the battle of supply.

There has been no attempt to justify any course of action in this chapter. The effort has been directed to a presentation of facts for logistical considerations, and to the tactical capability of the

⁹⁴Memorandum for Supreme Commander, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, dated 25 December 1944, subject: "Report on Supply Situation-Northern France," from Major General Leroy Lutes, p. 7. Located in US Army Command and General Staff College Library.

Allies. The defensive capability of the German Army blocking the route to Berlin was addressed and found to be seriously deficient during the late summer months.

CHAPTER VII

EVALUATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

I. THE HUMAN FACTORS

Field Marshal Montgomery came from command of the British Eighth Army in the Mediterranean Theater a national hero and military figure who commanded public attention. He went to the OVERLORD operation with a reputation in Great Britain as a tactician without peer. Generals Bradley and Patton, on the other hand, entered the war late and were connected with secondary efforts in the Mediterranean. In so far as the public was concerned their achievements were over-shadowed by those of their British allies. United States troops had fought well in North-Africa, Sicily, and Italy, but Montgomery looked upon them as unproven troops. Conversely, Montgomery had supreme confidence in himself and the British troops he commanded. He knew his own as well as his army's capabilities. When Sicily was invaded he sought to assure success of the campaign by having the major communications centers assigned as British objectives.¹ This nettled the Americans, not only because of the necessity of supporting the United States forces over the beaches, but because they were assigned sectors with no significant objectives.²

¹Supra, p. 41; Farago, Patton, Ordeal and Triumph, p. 275.

²Supra, p. 41; Farago, Patton, Ordeal And Triumph, p. 279,
See also: Alexander, Memoirs, p. 108.

When Montgomery went ashore at Normandy as the Allied ground forces commander he accepted the position as his rightful due. In his view, it was logical that a successful combat veteran should lead the Allied armies on the Continent. This attitude of superiority marked his service during the fighting in Europe. It was to be expected that such an experienced and successful leader would have definite plans for the strategy to be employed in the final stages of the long war. Eisenhower's tactful refusal to accept such plans resulted in Montgomery's allegations of indecisiveness and led to his charge of lack of direction in the war effort.³

Bradley was able to work harmoniously with Montgomery until elevated to command 12th Army Group. From that time relations deteriorated to a point where Bradley refused to serve under Montgomery.⁴ Throughout the campaign Bradley's antagonism toward the British commander was fed by Patton's dislike for Montgomery.⁵

After the slapping incident in Sicily and his ill-timed public utterances, Patton felt he had to redeem himself by performing some spectacular military feat.⁶ He feared that Montgomery would garner the attention and glory that was desperately needed for such redemption.⁷ The long thrust, begun before Montgomery presented the narrow front plan to Eisenhower, was threatened with stagnation by Montgomery's proposed drive

³Supra, p. 28; Montgomery, Memoirs, p. 286.

⁴Supra, pp. 33, 36.

⁵Supra, pp. 41-42; Patton, War As I Knew It, p. 52.

⁶Supra, p. 43; Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 357.

⁷Supra, p. 43; Farago, Patton, Ordeal and Triumph, p. 477.

in the north. In order to assure the needed successes, Patton could not help but oppose Montgomery's plan. He had to prevent the British commander from making the main effort of the war. He attempted to do this in three ways: first, by obtaining the available supplies to continue his drive, second, by keeping his forces constantly engaged and thereby draining off supplies destined for Montgomery, and third, by advocating that he be permitted to make a thrust to Berlin, with ten divisions, along the southern axis of the Allied advance.⁸ General Bradley supported Patton's proposal and forwarded it to SHAEF where Eisenhower rejected it. The plan for a southern thrust was a counter-proposal to Montgomery's plan and would have enhanced the role of United States forces if approved. From a tactical standpoint, it did not have as much chance of success as Montgomery's plan for the northern axis.⁹

Eisenhower was caught in the middle. He weighed both sides and favored neither one. As the Allied Commander he was bound to respect the views of the senior British field commander, but he could not support his narrow front plan. Not only would such a plan have placed Bradley and Patton in a subordinate role to Montgomery for the duration of the war, but it would have relegated Eisenhower to a lesser role and given Montgomery the laurels due the Supreme Commander. In spite of Eisenhower's impartiality in most matters he was obligated to accept the guidance of Marshall, the US Chiefs of Staff, and needed to be concerned by United States public opinion. Neither of these would have allowed

⁸Supra, p. 43.

⁹Ten divisions would not have been sufficient to drive from the Seine through Metz, the Saar, Frankfurt and thence to Berlin. The bulk of Germany's armored force was opposing Patton's army and it was expecting a thrust from the US Third Army.

Patton's pursuit to be stopped to support the British thrust, nor would they have permitted the long-time retention of Montgomery as overall ground forces commander, especially after United States forces greatly outnumbered those of the United Kingdom.

II. PROBABLE TACTICAL PLAN TO SECURE BERLIN

On 26 August the Allied army had reached the Seine river and were across it at many points (see map 7). To support the single thrust of Montgomery, all forward movement of 12th Army Group would have then stopped and been oriented northeast to support 21 Army Group. The tasks to be accomplished by the advancing armies would have included crossing the following major rivers: the Seine, Somme, Meuse, Rhine, Ems, Weser, and Elbe. Each crossing would have encountered stiff resistance as the Germans fought delaying actions.

Along the main axis of attack the communication centers of Antwerp, Brussels, Liege, Aachen, Cologne, Hanover, Brunswick, Magdeburg, and Berlin would have to be captured or contained. North of the sector, the cities of Bremen and Hamburg were capable of supporting an attack on the flank of the attacking force, as were the cities of Koblenz, Kassel, and Giessen to the south, and thus would need to be isolated. Containment of the enemy in each city would require a large force, and the Ruhr industrial area would demand an even larger increment of troops for its isolation (see map 1).

Starting with forty divisions, divided into four armies, Montgomery would have assigned missions to each army in accordance with his five-phase plan to encircle Berlin. The composition of the armies under

Montgomery on 1 September was the following:¹⁰ 21 Army Group kept two divisions in reserve, First Canadian Army had seven combat divisions, and Second British Army commanded eight divisions. The US First Army had nine divisions under its control on that date. The remaining fourteen divisions of the forty-division force would probably have been placed under one army headquarters. The logical choice for this was the combat-proven headquarters of Third Army under General Patton.

The missions to be given to the four armies would have differed during each phase of the operation. In the first phase, the primary effort would be directed to the crossing of the Seine river. All four armies would also receive additional instructions: First Canadian Army would secure ports on the coast, the Schelde estuary, and forward air-fields in its sector; Second British Army would secure Antwerp and Brussels; the US First Army would secure Liege and Aachen; Third Army would protect the south flank and "follow and support"¹¹ the main attack of 21 Army Group.

During the second phase the First Canadian Army would attack and secure Rotterdam and crossing over the Lower Rhine river; Second British Army and US First Army would secure crossing sites over the Rhine river in Germany; Third Army would be directed to relieve the main force before all contained areas and reduce the resistance in those areas, additionally, it would conduct crossings over the Rhine and position itself to participate in a dual envelopment of the Ruhr industrial area.

¹⁰Supra, p. 57-58.

¹¹When given a follow and support mission the force is primarily engaged in those tactical operations required to hold, widen the shoulders of a penetration, and to secure lines of communications behind an exploiting force. The follow and support force will relieve elements of the exploiting force left behind to contain bypassed enemy forces and destroy or eliminate those enemy forces.

In phase three, First Canadian Army would secure the remainder of Holland and contain the enemy forces in that area. Second British Army would continue the attack onto the northern plains of Germany to fix the forces there while US First Army and Third Army would conduct a double envelopment of the Ruhr industrial complex and isolate it. Third Army units would relieve First Army troops of the containment responsibility when the encirclement was complete.

In the fourth phase the First Canadian Army would secure Bremen and Hamburg; Second British Army and US First Army would attack to secure Hanover, Brunswick, and Magdeburg and contain all enemy forces with the forces organic to the two armies. Third Army would reduce the Ruhr pocket and secure Koblenz, Giessen, and Kassel.

In the final phase, First Canadian Army would continue the attack through northern Germany; Second British Army and US First Army would isolate Berlin and reduce its defenses; Third Army would complete the destruction of enemy forces in the Ruhr pocket and protect the lines of communication against local attacks designed to sever the supply lines. According to Montgomery's calculations the German forces would then surrender and the nation would lay down her arms.

The tactical success of this plan can almost be reduced to mathematical certainties. The German Luftwaffe was no longer an effective fighting force; it had only 649 operational bombers, of which approximately half could have been used against 21 Army Group, and 1,614 fighter aircraft available for use in the heartland of Germany.¹² Opposing this meager force were 3,728 fighters and 5,509 bombers of the

¹²Supra, p. 102; Ellis, Victory In The West, p. 486.

Americans, and 5,104 aircraft of various types of the Royal Air Force. Air superiority, already established by the Allies, would continue without serious challenge.¹³

German ground forces included fifteen volksgrcnadier divisions formed in July and August¹⁴ and twenty-five volksgrenadier divisions formed between 1 October and 1 December. Of this force, the first fifteen divisions would have been used up in the early fighting and the other twenty-five divisions would have been engaged between the Rhine and Berlin. As stated earlier,¹⁵ these divisions had 10,000 men dredged up from fortress battalions, non-essential personnel from the navy and air force, and men too old or too young to have been drafted earlier. Thus, the twenty-five divisions provided only 250,000 men to defend against nineteen combat-seasoned divisions of 325,000 men; the estimated force remaining for the thrust from the Ruhr to Berlin. It was believed that the firepower and mobility of the Allied army was capable of destroying or isolating these volksgrenadier divisions without great difficulty.

Approximated time factors in the advance would have been the following: begin the attack on 1 September, cross the Seine by 15 September (phase 1), cross the Rhine by mid-October (phase 2), envelope the Ruhr industrial area not later than 15 November (phase 3), destroy the enemy in the northern plains of Germany (phase 4) and capture the city of Berlin (phase 5) by 31 December. As seen in the planning, the advance from the

¹³ Supra, p.101; Cole, The Lorraine Campaign, p.4.

¹⁴ Supra, p.105; Trevor-Roper, Blitzkrieg to Defeat, p. 201.

¹⁵ Supra, p.106.

Ruhr to Berlin would take approximately forty-five days.¹⁶ From a tactical viewpoint, Montgomery could have gotten to Berlin by 31 December if the single thrust had been initiated on 1 September 1944.

III. LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During the pursuit across France in 1944 the Communications Zone maintained a steady flow of supplies to the armies averaging between 12,000 and 16,000 tons per day. The lines of communication were short and turn-around times were minimal.¹⁷ As the armies moved farther from the port facilities, delivery tonnages dropped and round trip times lengthened. SHAEF supply planners studied the consumption experience of the period June-October 1944 and arrived at the maintenance factors shown in the following table.

TABLE 5

COMBAT ZONE MAINTENANCE FACTORS, JUNE-OCTOBER 1944 Long Tons Per Divisional Slice Per Day

Supply Class	Normal Combat	Rapid Advance
I	100	100
II and IV	117	117
III	144	180
V	180	65
Total	541	462

Source: SHAEF G-4 Study, 27 October 1944, Subject: "Maintenance". Located in SHAEF G-4 file 400.22 Maintenance, National Archives, Modern Military History Department.

¹⁶When the Allied Army enveloped the Ruhr on 1 April 1945, it took 32 days to advance to the Elbe river, or thirteen days less than allocated here.

¹⁷Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 431.

All divisions in Montgomery's proposed single thrust would have consumed supplies at the normal combat rate for the first three months, or until the passage of the Siegfried Line. The supply tonnage required each day to support the four armies was estimated to be: First Canadian Army--3,787 tons; Second British Army--5,410 tons; US First Army--4,869 tons; Third Army--7,574 tons. The total requirements of 21,640 tons exceeded the tonnage delivered to the four armies in 1944 by an average of 7,000 tons daily.

The capability of the Allies to move supplies during the period selected for implementation of the single thrust was 8,491 tons per day by trucks, and less than 10,000 tons per day by rail to the east of Paris.¹⁸ Bad weather and lack of forward airfield affected the air deliveries during the autumn, and for about two-and-one-half months, deliveries averaged only about 675 tons per day.¹⁹ The aggregate transportation capability of 19,141 tons daily was 2,500 tons per day below that required to sustain four armies in normal combat.

After the Ruhr area was encircled the First Canadian Army and the US Third Army would require 11,361 tons per day at the normal combat rates, and British Second Army and US First Army would require 8,778 tons per day while in the pursuit. As no railroads extended intact outside the French border,²⁰ trucks would be required to transport the supplies

¹⁸Ibid, p. 148. See also: "SHAEF Logistical Support for a Rapid Thrust to Berlin" plan. Located in SHAEF G-4, File 13, in National Archives, Modern Military History Department. Computations from this plan are within twenty tons of Ruppenthal's computations on requirements, but are optimistic on aerial capabilities (2,000 tons daily versus actual delivery averages of 650 tons daily) and railroads (estimated 30,000 tons and actual delivery was less than 10,000 tons daily).

¹⁹Ruppenthal, Logistical Support Of The Armies, Vol. II, p. 163.

²⁰Ibid, Vol. II, p. 148.

and requirements exceeded capabilities by two hundred tons per day. Field Marshal Montgomery could not have logistically supported the single thrust to its destination; therefore he would not have reached Berlin by the end of December.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

By the end of August relations between Montgomery and the American commanders had deteriorated to a point where continued leadership by Montgomery was unacceptable to them, to Marshall, and to the American public. General Bradley commanded an army group equal in size to 21 Army Group and the cohesion between the two commanders was gone. The American press clamored for equal status for Bradley while British opinion pressed for continued single leadership under Montgomery. As a result, with nationalistic feelings rising on both sides of the Atlantic, Eisenhower was ordered by Marshall to take direct command of the forces on the Continent without delay.²¹

For nearly two months after D Day, ground gains on the Continent were measured in yards. On 1 August Third Army, with General Patton commanding, was activated and began its drive across France. Advances changed from yards to miles and for the first time in the European Theater, an American leader was making newspaper headlines. Eisenhower did not dare incur the displeasure of the American public by stopping such an advance, especially if such action might be construed at home as a step towards promotion of a British plan at the expense of American arms.

The German defensive capability by 1 September was reduced to the conduct of minor delaying actions in preparation for a "last ditch

²¹Supra, p. 99.

stand" at the Siegfried Line. There were no reserves immediately available to the commander of the German Army of the West, and only the timely action taken in early July that produced fifteen divisions of volksgrenadiers prevented a general collapse of the army in the west. Montgomery's proposed force of forty divisions could have easily beaten the remnants and untried divisions defending Germany. The Allies had superior manpower, mobility, and firepower, marked by high morale; while the German forces were severely limited, lacked mobility, were reduced in firepower, and most seriously, were "green" and of poor morale.

By the end of August the Allied supply situation had deteriorated from what might be called serious to critical. Previous plans were being implemented, but the advances across France had been too rapid for the Communications Zone to keep up an orderly and adequate flow of supplies to the combat units. Improvisations were implemented that temporarily sustained the movement of supplies, but the results were too costly.

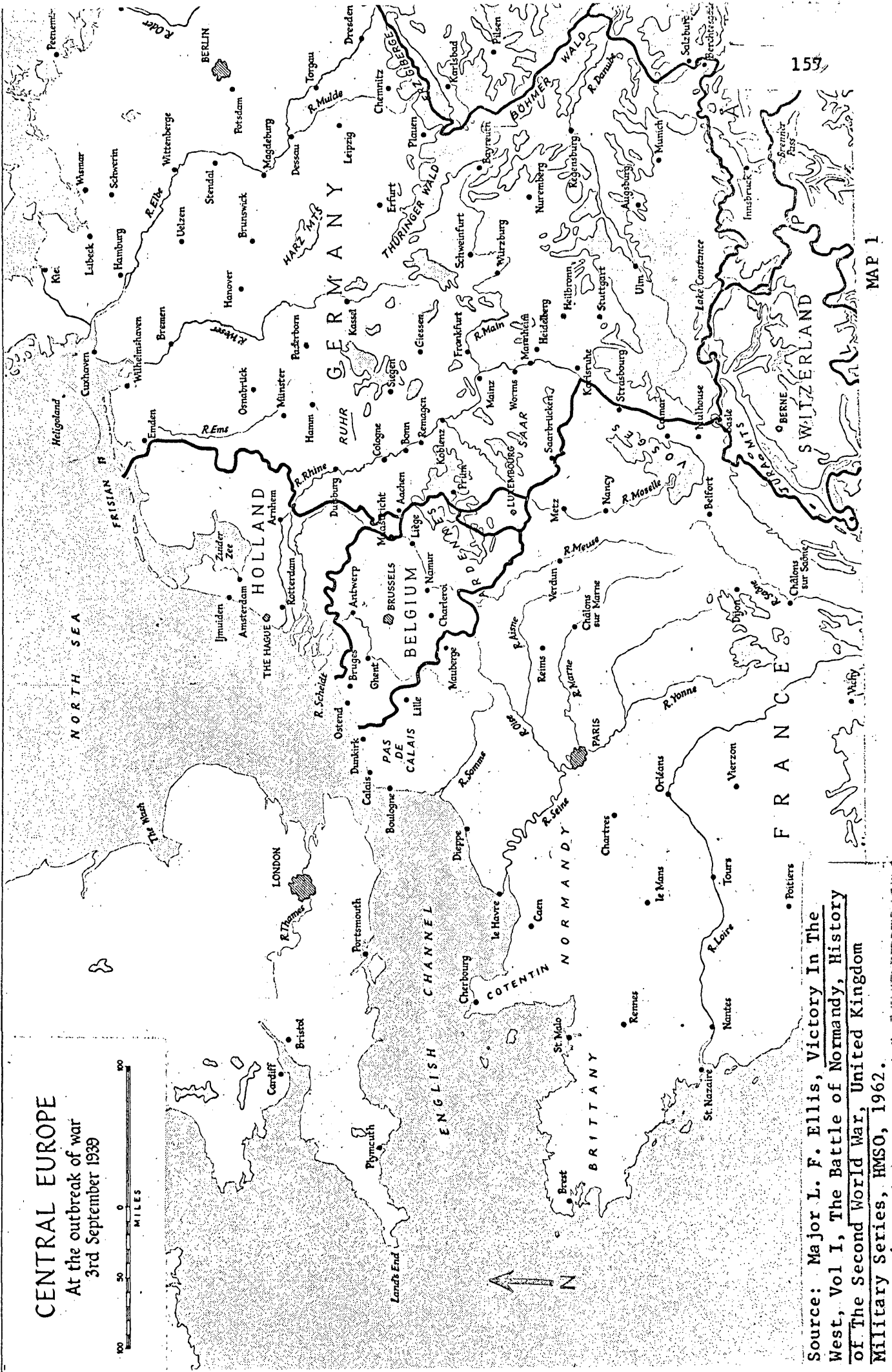
Initially, Montgomery might have received sufficient supplies to sustain a combat thrust of forty divisions. However, as such forces moved eastward, the volume of supplies would have dwindled below minimum requirements and such a force would have been slowed down. The German defensive effort would then have been able to react as it did in 1945 by manning defensive lines with the twenty-five divisions of volksgrenadiers. Had the attacking force been slowed, the German divisions perhaps could have been employed in attacks upon the flank of the advancing forces, or even used to sever its supply line. Aerial resupply might have sustained Montgomery's force for a limited time, but its progress would have stalled and the objective not have been achieved.

Montgomery's single thrust plan was, therefore, not logistically sound and would have failed to achieve his objective. Although tactically feasible, the mission would have ended in failure and placed the whole Allied campaign in jeopardy.

It might be argued that an early Allied capture of Berlin might have brought about an earlier end to the war and insured a more favorable Allied role in the immediate post-war period. This is a matter of speculation and conjecture. The occupation zones and the four-power occupation status of Berlin, with tenuous Allied communication routes to the city, were already too well set to have been much affected by an early Allied entry into Berlin. All that can be said with any certainty was that the decision of the Supreme Commander to advance on a broad front brought the war in Europe to a successful close without risking a major portion of his force in what, at best, could be called a gamble. Furthermore, the strategy employed was successful and in keeping with General Eisenhower's instructions when he assumed the Supreme Allied Command.

CENTRAL EUROPE

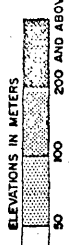
At the outbreak of war
3rd September 1939



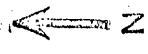
Source: Major L. F. Ellis, Victory In The West, Vol I, The Battle of Normandy, History of The Second World War, United Kingdom Military Series, HMSO, 1962.

THE FINAL OVERLORD PLAN

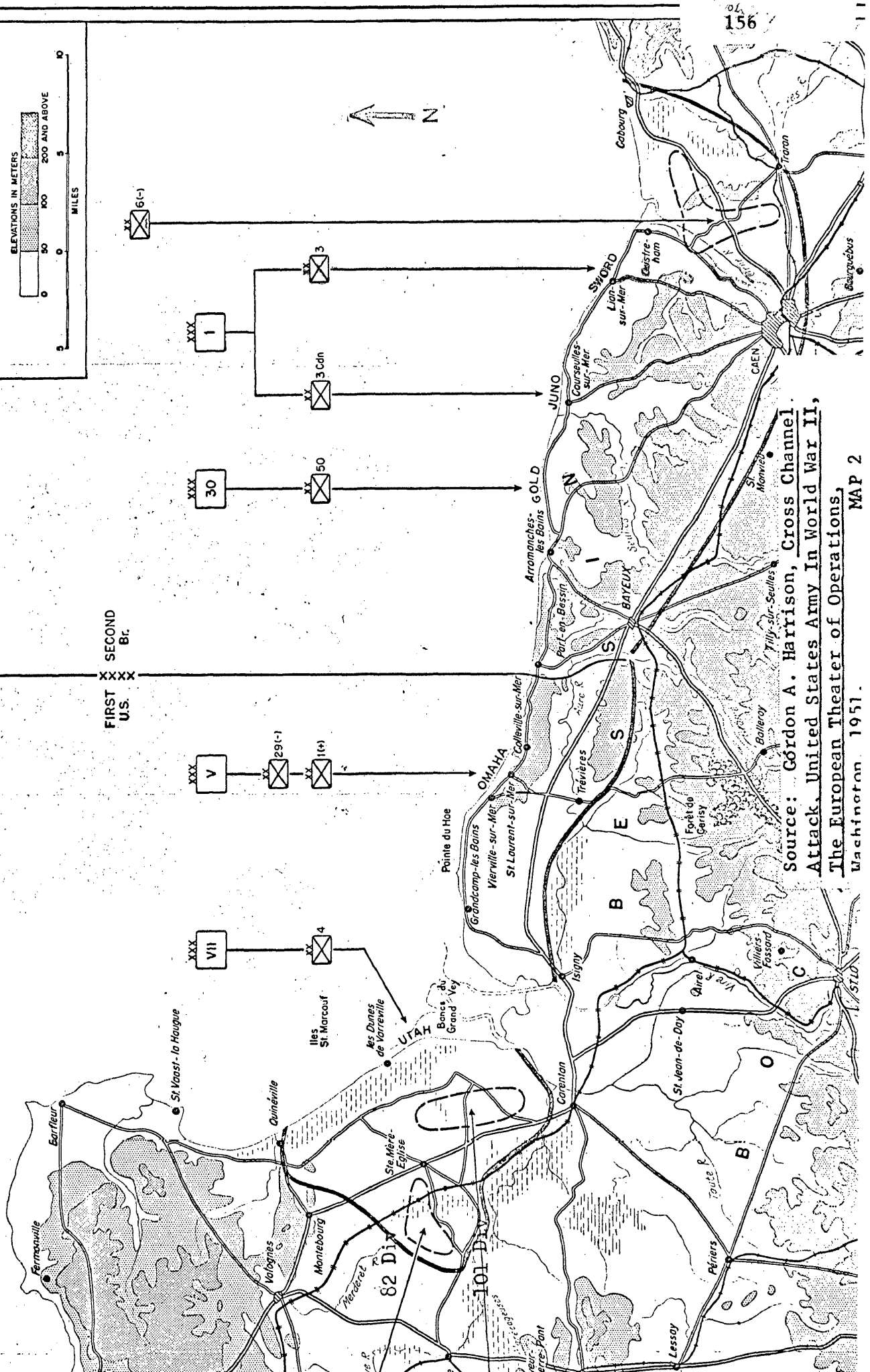
- DROP ZONES
- D DAY PHASE LINE
- INUNDATED AREA



MILES

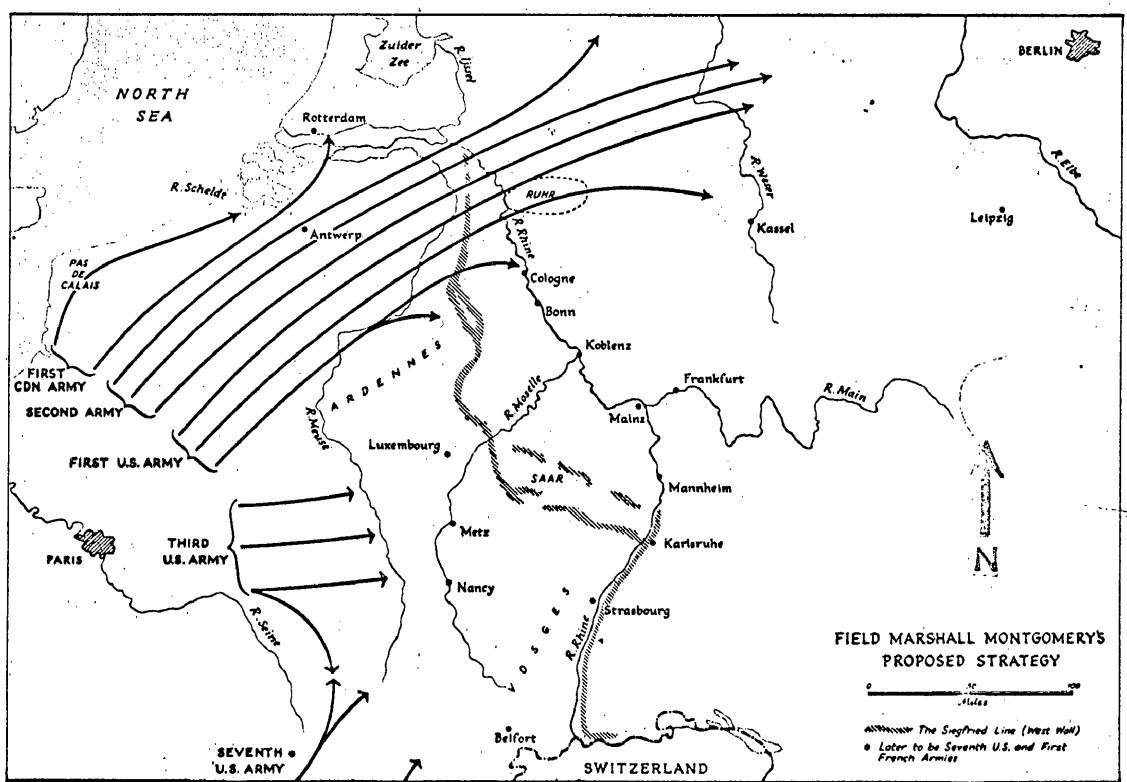
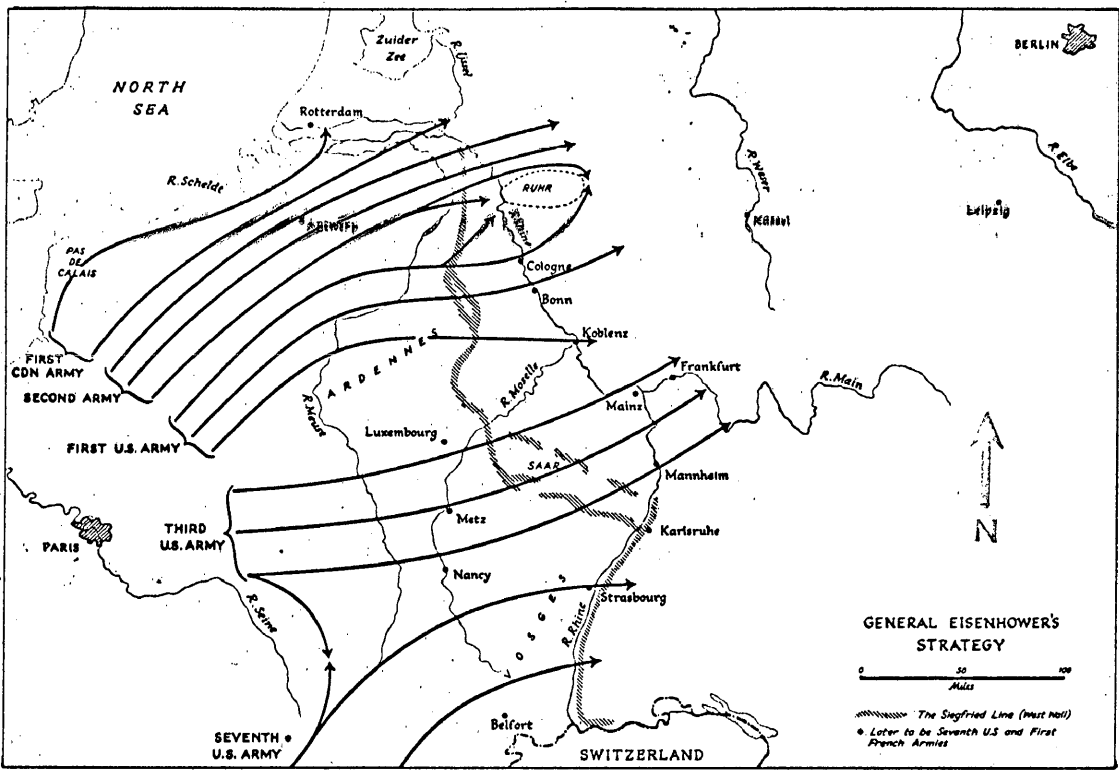


FIRST U.S. Br. SECOND U.S. Br.



Source: Górdon A. Harrison, Cross Channel Attack, United States Army In World War II, The European Theater of Operations, MacIntosh 1951. MAP 2

THE BROAD AND NARROW FRONTS

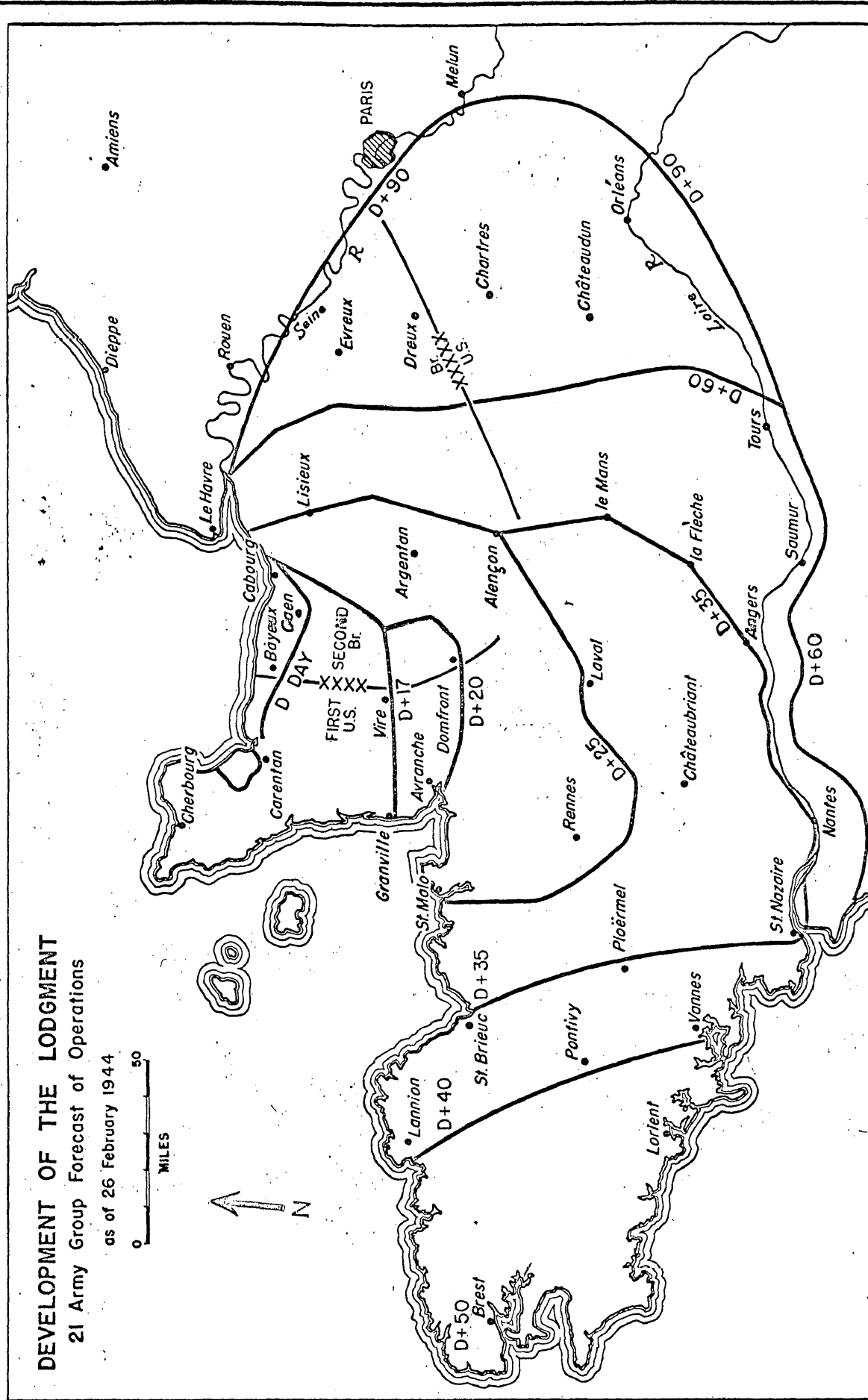
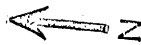


Source: John Ehrman, Grand Strategy, Vol IV: History of The Second World War, United Kingdom Military Series. HMSO 1956.

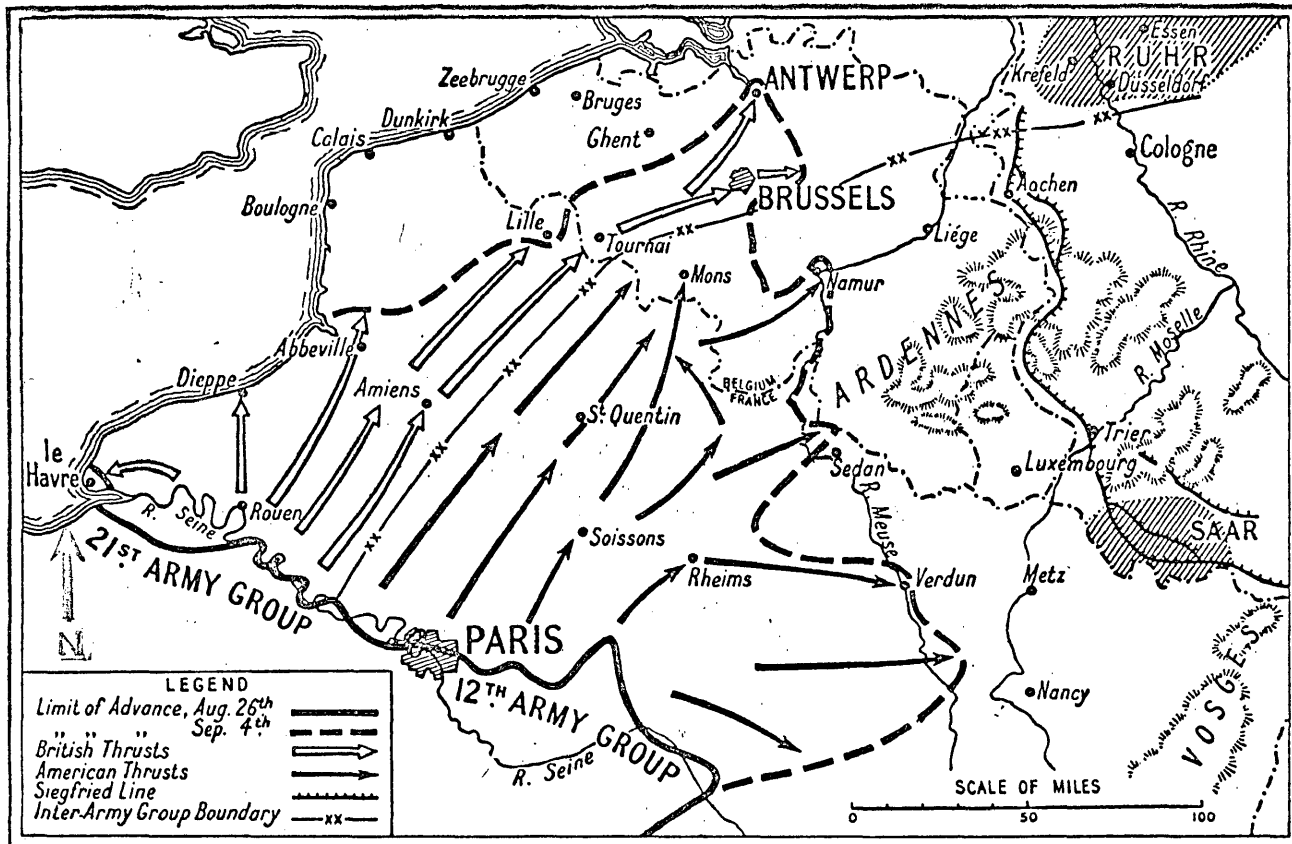
DEVELOPMENT OF THE LODGMENT

21 Army Group Forecast of Operations

as of 26 February 1944

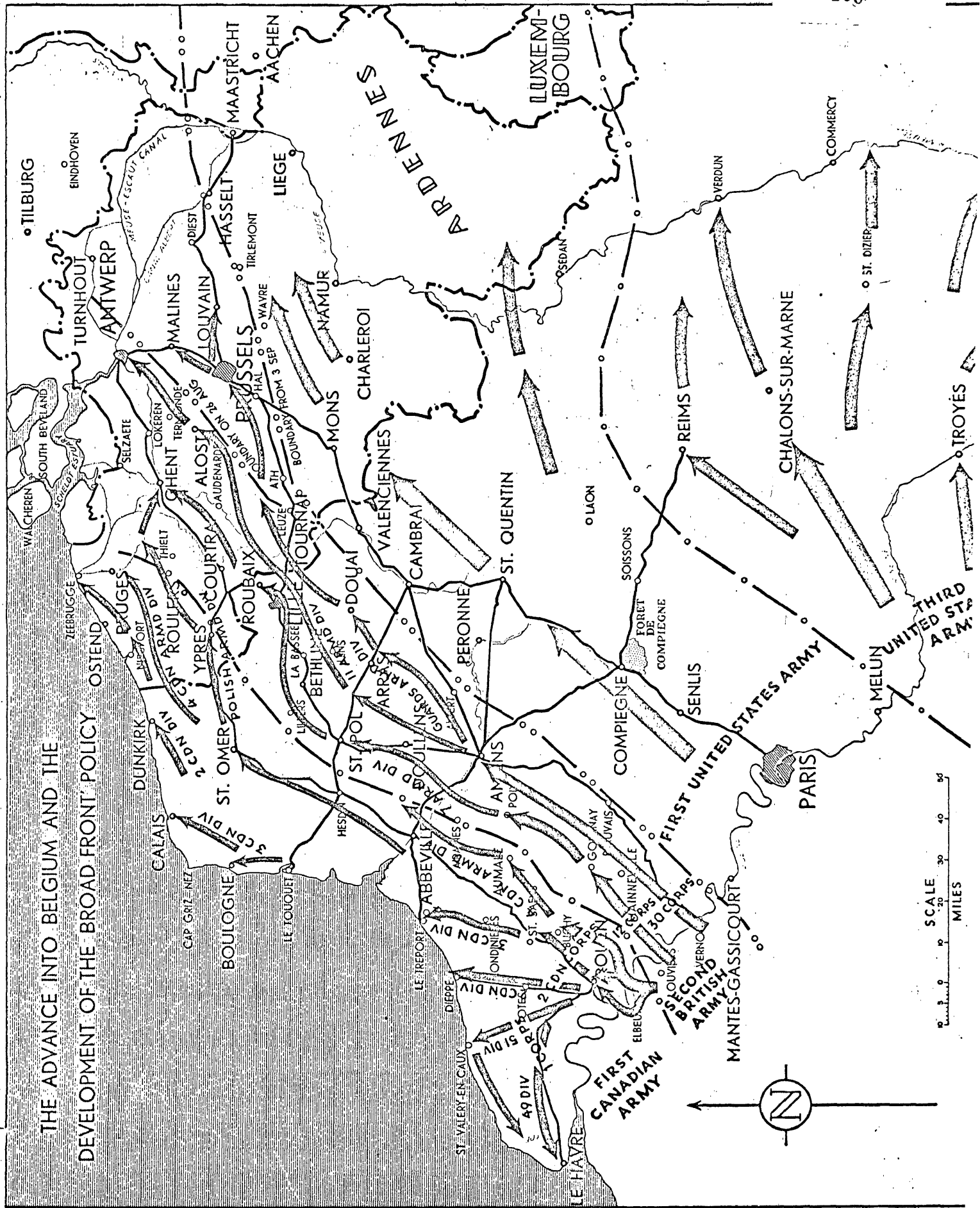


Source: Gordon A. Harrison, Cross Channel Attack, United States Army In World War II, The European Theater of Operations, Washington, 1951.



THE ADVANCE TO ANTWERP.

Source: Chester Wilmot, The Struggle For Europe. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1952



Source: Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, Normandy To The Baltic, British Army of Rhine, 1946.

MAP 6

PURSUIT TO THE GERMAN BORDER

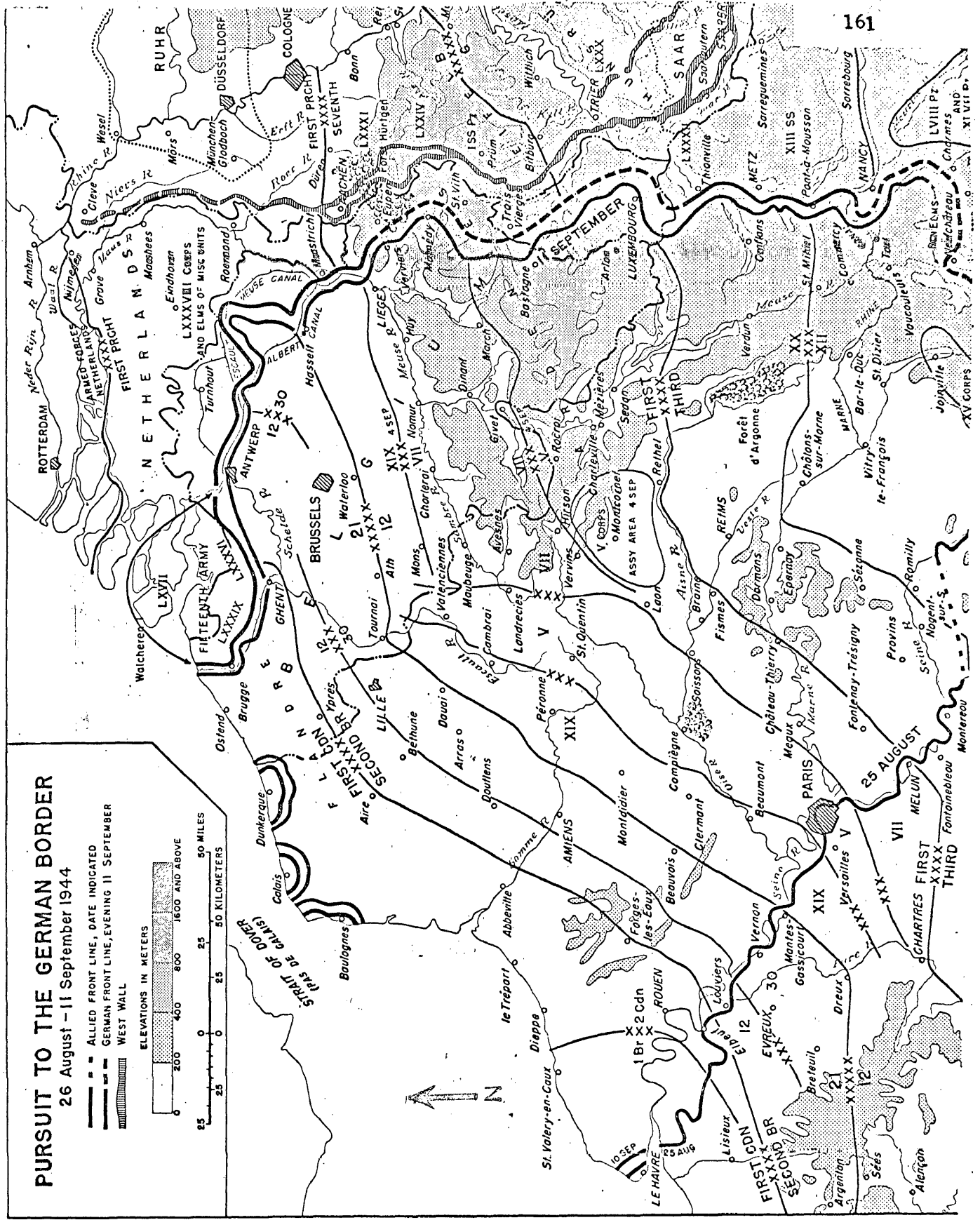
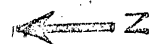
26 August - 11 September 1944

- ALLIED FRONT LINE, DATE INDICATED
- - - GERMAN FRONT LINE, EVENING 11 SEPTEMBER
- ▨ WEST WALL

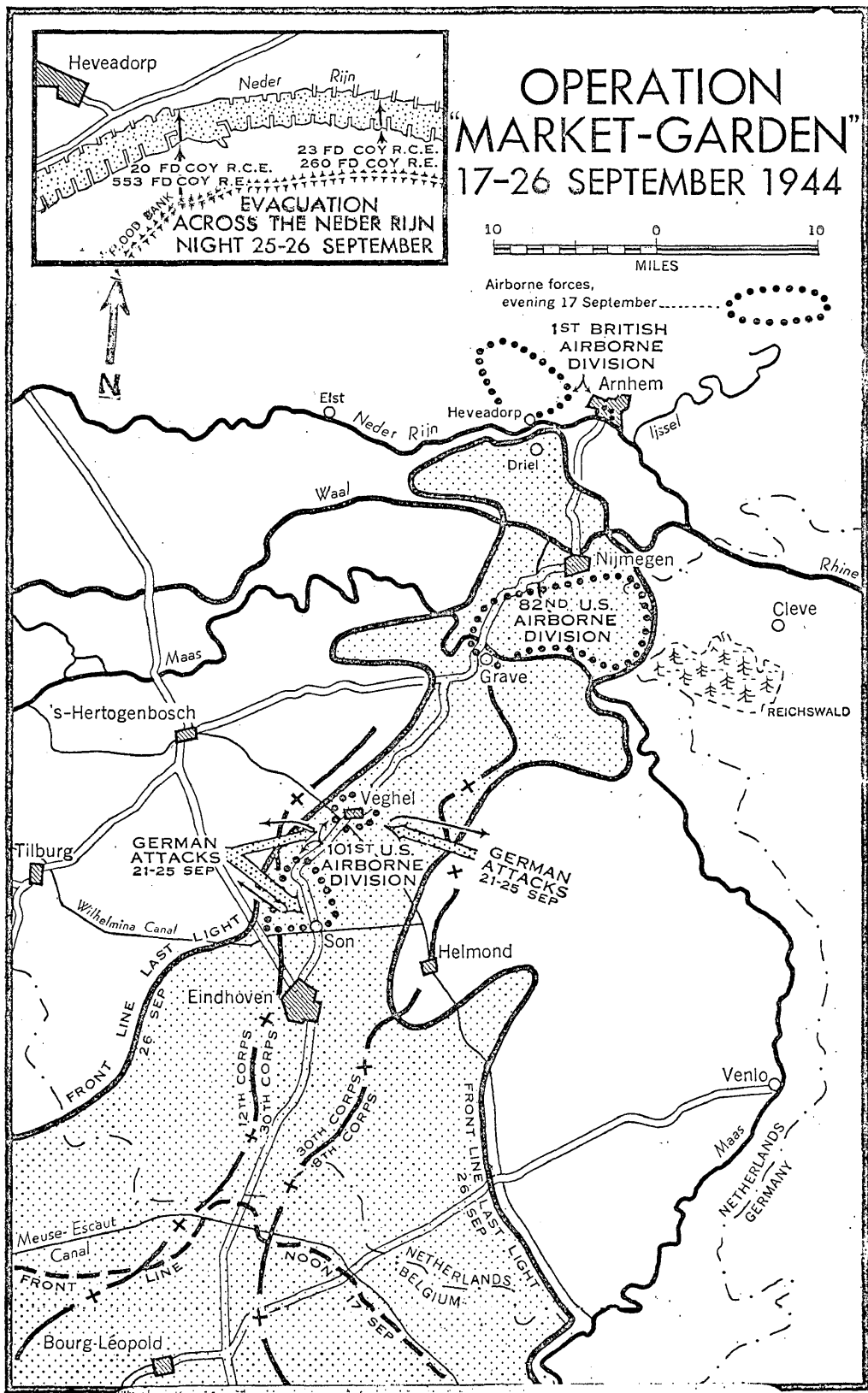
ELEVATIONS IN METERS



50 MILES / 50 KILOMETERS



Source: Charles B. MacDonald, The Siegfried Line Campaign, United States Army In World War II, The European Theater of Operations, Washington, 1963.



Source: Col. C.P. Stacey, The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945. Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. Ottawa, 1960.

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