Squad Battles: Eagles Strike

Design Notes

Overcoming the Hell of the Hedgerows

By Wild Bill Wilder

In reading of the first weeks of fighting after the Allied invasion of France at Normandy, one is confronted with the words, “hedgerow country.” In order to get a good picture in one’s mind of just what that means, the term needs explanation.

Defensively speaking, the hedgerow, or "bocage," was as good as a brick wall. It was simply a monstrous hedge, left to grow unkempt for hundreds of years. It was initially planted to mark the boundaries of a landowner. Through the centuries it continued to grow taller and thicker.

Sometimes it reached a height of 12 feet. It was five or six feet thick at the base. If you have ever tried cutting through someone's yard, and force your way through their hedges, you have a very vague idea of what the Allies faced.

The heavy hedges served as boundary markers, windbreaks, cattle fences, and firewood providers for many generations of Frenchmen. The tracks or roads between them had been worn down until they became sunken roads. The hedgerow on either side would bend inward and form a canopy overhead, sort of like a green umbrella. So thick were they that an intense firefight among them was muffled to the point that it would be heard as just a breeze only a few hundred yards away.

The Germans quickly exploited the defensive possibilities of the hedgerows. They would burrow in halfway but offset the entrance so it could not be seen. They would place machine guns at the intersection of two fields, so that one weapon could cover either direction instantly. When they fired their mortars from these positions, it was impossible to tell where they were located. For attacking American tanks, it was a disaster. Wedged into narrow country lanes, they made perfect targets for short-range infantry antitank weapons, such as the "Panzerfaust." At this point in the war, allied tank-infantry coordination was poor - green infantry, green tankers.

The Sherman, though it weighted 30 tons, could not force its way through the hedge. Instead, it would rise above it, roll over it, and crash down on the other side. Occasionally a tank would get “hung up” on the hedge, a delightful target for enemy anti-tank guns. In most cases the turret would have to be reversed, so as not to damage the gun barrel when the vehicle dipped forward. It would thus rise up in front on impact, exposing its thinly armoured underbelly to all types of fire. This armour could even be penetrated by a heavy machine gun, and often it was. When the tank then came to rest, its crew was riddled. Even worse, an antitank round would cremate both tank and crew; “brew it up”, as the British say.

If it were successful in getting over with the turret reversed, it just might be face to face with a dug in Tiger, Panther, or 88 antitank guns. Being a tanker in those days was a short-lived experience. Advance through them was often measured in yards, or one field after another instead of miles gained. The geography of the land in Normandy slowed Allied advances to a crawl. Initially ahead of schedule, it would take the entire month of June to gain only an insignificant inroad into France. Something would have to be done. The invasion was bogging down in hedgerow country.

Something was done to vastly improve the situation when later in the campaign, a certain Sergeant Curtis G. Culin of the 102nd Cavalry Recon Squadron had a brilliant idea. He took scrap steel, cannibalized from the German beach obstacles, fashioned it into pointed metal “teeth”, then welded them solidly it to the front of a tank. This allowed the armor to gouge into the earth and dig its way through the hedgerow with relative ease.

The first experiment was a resounding success. The idea caught fire and in no time other tankers quickly adapted this simple apparatus, called the “Culin Device”. Soon three-fourths of the American tanks in France were transformed into “Rhinoceroses”, as the toothed vehicles were called. This simple makeshift invention by Sgt. Culin proved to be one of the greatest innovations in the campaign. It would thousands of lives and hundreds of tanks from destruction in Western Europe.

Flamethrowers and Napalm in WWII: ETO vs PTO

By Louie Marsh

When you think of WW 2 in the Pacific Theater pictures of soldiers and Marines assaulting the hidden enemy with flame-throwers often comes to mind. But what about Europe? Were napalm and flame-throwers used in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) and if so, why do they seem to have been used more prominently in the Pacific Theater (PTO)? To answer these questions, I did some research and found a surprising amount of evidence for the use of both in the ETO.

Flame-throwers

US Army troops did carry flame-throwers across the English Channel on D-Day. Rifle companies in the assault divisions were organized as assault teams with special equipment to deal with fortified positions. Each company was composed of two assault platoons and each platoon included rifle teams, wire-cutting team, a bazooka team, a flame-throwing team, a BAR team a 60-mm mortar team and a demolition team.[i]

Noted historian Stephen Ambrose cites several instances of men who carried them or saw them carried on that day. Among them was a Private Harry Parley of the 2nd Battalion of the 116th Regiment.

“He scared the hell out of his buddies by using a trick he had just learned. He could set off a small flame at the mouth of his flame-thrower, which would produce the same hissing sound as when the weapon was actually being fired, without triggering the propelling mechanism. Standing on the deck of the *Thomas Jefferson*, he calmly used the flame-thrower to light a cigarette, sending a score or more of men scurrying in every direction.”[ii]

Ambrose does not site any instance of a flame-thrower actually being used on D-Day. The ones he mentions were either lost to enemy fire or discarded. This isn’t surprising considering how rough the sea was on D-Day. The flame-thrower was an awkward weapon and would be very difficult to handle in such conditions.[iii] Apparently then there were no flame-throwers used on June 6th, 1944.

During the rest of the Normandy campaign however they were used. The 22nd Infantry Regiment was given the task of capturing Crisbecq and Azeville, which were protected by concrete fortifications. The two day battle for Azeville climaxed when Private Ralph G. Riley’s flame-thrower set off explosives in the blockhouse and forced the Germans to surrender.[iv]

Flame-throwers were again used to good effect in the clearing of Brittany. In late August Task Force B, commanded by Brig. General James A. Van Fleet, cleared the area around the fortress of Brest and secured the left flank using “flame-throwers, demolitions and tank destroyer and artillery fire to destroy pillboxes and emplacements.”[v]

Flame-throwers were also used in the street fighting that took place in Brest and St. Malo. The final stages of the battle of Brest were what General Robertson, the commander of the 2nd Infantry Division, called “a corporal’s war.” The concrete dugouts the Germans used were captured by assault teams of eight men. These teams included two flame-throwers, a bazooka and two BAR’s. Each position was flamed from behind until the Germans surrendered.[vi]

The British also used flame-throwers in support of their infantry operations. In early February of 1945 General Horrock's British 30 Corps opened Operation Veritable as part of their drive to the Rhine River. Vital to this effort was the town of Cleves, located near the border between Holland and Germany. The 15th Scottish Division used flame-throwers in their two-day battle to capture this strategic town.[vii]

Later that same month on the 26th the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions of the II Canadian Corps launched Operation Blockbuster. This operation was aimed at capturing the Kalkar-Udem Ridge, located just west of the Rhine. During a night attack they used flame-throwers to help flush out the entrenched German troops. They fought for six days in what was often brutal hand to hand combat to capture the Kalkar end of the ridge.[viii]

German Flame-throwers

I have found a couple of references to German use of flame-throwers against the Americans. In the fighting for the Siegfried Line (West Wall) the Germans used a flame-thrower improvised to fit on a half-track in a counterattack that overran and destroyed an entire infantry company. The Germans also carried flame-throwers into the Battle of the Bulge, but I haven't found a reference of them actually using them during that battle.[ix]

Napalm

Another instrument of war widely associated with the Pacific struggle that was also used in Europe is napalm. Napalm was used during the air phase of Operation Cobra. The napalm was dropped by fighter-bombers and was also used at St. Malo and Brest. [x]

Napalm was used again with great effect during the Battle of the Bulge. On December 23rd American fighter-bombers dropped napalm on all the villages within a mile or two of the 101st Airborne's perimeter and on the German armor that was surrounding Bastogne. "Before the day ended, there were fires all around the circle of American positions so that the smoke made it seem 'almost as if the fog were closing in again.' "[xi]

Flame-throwing Tanks

The first American flame-throwing tank was built during the First World War and was called the American Steam Tank. Its armament consisted of one flame-thrower and four machine guns. It was powered by steam because of the original belief that a steam jet would give more impetus to the flame-thrower. Only one Steam Tank was ever made, and it never saw combat.[xii]

In the Second World War the Americans were slow in developing a flame-throwing tank. Urgency was added to this endeavor partially because of lessons learned from the battle of Tarawa. As a result of a Fifth Amphibious Corps study Army, Navy and Marine Corps agencies began to cooperate in developing a flame-throwing tank.[xiii]

The outcome of this work was the "Adder".[xiv] The Adder was the M3-4-3 Flamegun, a device that was first used on Guam in July of 1944. Nearly 1800 of these were produced and supplied to units as a kit for fitting in the field.[xv] The Adder was mounted in the bow of the tank, replacing the bow machine gun. A few of these were employed in Europe but they were considered inferior to the British equipment.[xvi]

Demand for a main armament flame-thrower continued to be heard, mostly from the Pacific Theater. In September 1944, as the 10th army formed for the invasion of Okinawa, such a flame-throwing tank was created. It fired burning napalm through a 75mm gun tube and was called the POA-CWS-H1. This referred to its origin in the Pacific Ocean Area with the H indicating Hawaii. The POA-CWS-H1 carried 290 gallons of fuel in four hull tanks below the turret. It performed brilliantly on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. By war's end the design was improved by mounting the flame gun alongside the cannon instead of replacing it. Seventy-two of these tanks were ordered by the Marine Corps for the invasion of Japan and a few of them went on to be used in Korea.[xvii]

The British were quicker off the mark in developing a flame-throwing tank. Their first attempt was the "Oke." A modified Churchill I, the Oke was largely experimental, though three were sent to Dieppe but were lost before getting into action.[xviii]

The supreme British flame-throwing tank in World War II was a modified Mark VII Churchill tank which towed a trailer that held about 400 gallons of Napalm and has been called, "the most devastating and dramatic of all flame-throwers."[xix] This modification was called the "Crocodile," 800 were produced including 250 that were used in the Far East.[xx]

The Crocodiles were used in action during the Normandy Campaign. They fought against the 12 SS Panzer Division during the battle for Caen. The veteran SS troopers refused to retreat until they were burned out of their strongpoints by the Crocodiles. Crocodiles were also used on July 15th as part of a British night attack.[xxi]

Perhaps the most interesting use of the Crocodile was by the American Army during the battle for Brest. Realizing their need for help the VII Corps engineer requested a detachment of flame-throwing tanks. The 141st Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps was attached to the 116th Infantry Regiment, which was ordered to take fort Mountbarey. The 141st had 15 Crocodiles and went into action on September 14th. On that day two of the Crocodiles strayed from the cleared path and hit mines and one was destroyed by enemy fire. The attack was suspended for the day.

On the 16th three Crocodiles advanced at dawn under the cover of smoke and an intensive artillery barrage. They reached the moat and flamed the apertures, allowing the engineers to place 2,500 pounds of explosive at the base of the wall. The resulting explosion caused the garrison to surrender and the fort fell into American hands.[xxii]

The British Crocodile was widely admired by U.S troops who received support from these tanks wanted all they could get. In fact, U.S. interest in the Crocodile began long before D-day. After a demonstration of the prototype in March 1943 and a study it was recommended that 100 Shermans be fitted with the Crocodile apparatus with 25 trailers be acquired as a reserve. After successful tests in February 1944, a preliminary order was placed for six Sherman Crocodiles to be manufactured in Britain.

Unfortunately, interest in the Churchill Crocodiles waned and the U.S. Army, cancelled its order. However, four of the six Crocodiles in the preliminary order were completed and issued to the U.S. Ninth Army in late November. Here they outfitted a platoon in the 739th Tank Battalion (Special). The 739th employed their four flamethrower tanks in action with great effect and the troops wanted more of them. The Ninth Army tried to get additional Sherman Crocodiles, first requesting the remaining two of the original order and later, approximately 60 to equip a entire battalion. Both requests were rejected because of interference with British requirements and the belief that U.S. equipment would soon be available. Unfortunately it wasn't.[xxiii]

The British made several other modifications of the Flame-throwing Sherman, ending with the Ram Badger. It was a turretless Sherman with a Wasp flamegun replacing the bow machine gun in a ball mount. It appeared in early 1945 and saw action with the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade.[xxiv]

Both the British and the Americans found these flame-throwing tanks to be very effective weapons. The British recognized that when the Crocodiles were present the infantry working with them suffered greatly reduced casualties. The flame-throwers principally attacked enemy morale since men have an inborn fear of fire. The number of men who surrendered out of fear of the flame-throwing tanks greatly outnumbers those who were actually burned by them. [xxv]

Why The Difference?

The question remains then, why the difference between the ETO and the PTO in the use of the flame-thrower? There is no doubt that there was a difference. Troops in Europe used the

flame-thrower but preferred the bazooka. They felt the flame-thrower was too heavy and mechanically unreliable.[xxvi] There are several possible reasons why flame-throwers were more widely used in the Pacific than in Europe.

The later battles in the Pacific were essentially prolonged assaults on fortified positions. In such close quarter battles the flame-thrower (both man portable and tank) was in its element. The war in Europe was a stop and go fight, with close quarter fighting followed by breakouts and a war of movement. The flame-thrower would not be used very often in a war of movement.

The type of fortifications also makes a difference. One Marine Veteran wrote, "I think the nature of the fortifications that must be reduced and the terrain you are operating over control the kind of weaponry used and your assault tactics." He pointed out that flame-throwers were excellent against the fortified caves the Japanese often used. But against concrete pillboxes with steel door the bazooka was the preferred weapon.[xxvii] This goes a long way in explaining why the Army troops in Europe preferred the bazooka while Pacific soldiers and Marines favored the flame-thrower.

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The Great Crusade - A History of World War 2 in Western Europe - 1944-1945

By Wild Bill Wilder and Neil Stalker

Introduction

With this introduction, the two of us are beginning a joint effort of a special series of articles dealing with the war in Western Europe in some detail from the D-Day invasion to the German surrender in May 1945. There will be a total of seven articles that will take you from the planning stages of Overlord (the invasion of mainland Europe) into the heart of Germany. We hope you will follow these, download your own copy and keep them for future reference.

The Great Crusade that is used a title for this series was what Montgomery and Eisenhower named the reconquering of Europe and the defeat of Germany and its Allies. In this series of articles, we take the reader through the events that led up to the defeat and the reasons that the Western Allies finally vanquished the Axis powers. As you will see there were mistakes made on both sides some that caused a larger loss of life than was necessary. Politics and pride are two dangerous commodities when you have men's lives in your hands.

How did it all begin and why? - these are questions that historians have been arguing about for decades we will not attempt to provide a solution here but will list some of the reasons that have been thrown into the melting pot.

Europe becomes Restless

Elisabeth Wiskemann in the Rome-Berlin Axis (1949) wrote that "Hitler's fundamental intention was to dominate the world in order to establish his caste system' and this could not be achieved without a war to prove his dominance. It is also pointed out that to achieve his ideological aims he would have to expand and to do that he needed the manpower Germany had and its industrial might. Hence, he had to rouse the population by a mixture of nationalism, revenge for the Versailles agreement and the ancient German volks right that they were the natural rulers of the earth.

Proclamation of the Beer Hall Putsch "Proclamation to the German People! The regime of the November criminals is today declared deposed. A provisional German national government is formed. This consists of General Ludendorff, Adolf Hitler, General von Lussow, Colonel von Seisser."

It was obvious to anyone who observed Germany during the 30s that the Nazis were not a normal political party - the uniforms, street corner rallies, the fiery speeches and the violence.

The political machinations of Hitler and his cronies that final lead to his Chancellorship was not normal even in the slanted world of politics. Where were the leaders of the free world what were they doing - ' the guilty men' as they have been referred to. Churchill said, " There was never a war easier to stop." Germany should not have been allowed to rearm, the 1935 naval agreement should never have been signed and why did France not challenge the remilitarisation of the Rhine.

Hitler was in the early 30s not arming for war but was spending a large amount on civil expansion- autobahns, consumer products and self-sufficiency - this in itself could be a good tactic if thinking of war but first he had to win the people. The amount that Germany was spending on armaments still was greater than what Great Britain and France was spending.

The historian AJP Taylor argues that Hitler continued the expansionist policies of the previous German governments and because the Western politicians gave him the opportunity, he ceased on them by arguing the Germany was suffering because of the Versailles Agreement (incidentally America and Italy stop acknowledging the agreement in

1919) and the immense reparations they had to pay to France and the Allies (made with the financial support of the US). Hitler took advantage of orchestrated scenarios he created with internal help- the Austrian crisis of 1938, the Sudetan Crisis and Hitler new that Chamberlain's Munich Agreement of 1938 was not worth the paper it was written on and he did not believe Britain would go to war over Poland. This indirectly led to the Russo-German pact of August 1939.

An interesting reason for war was to solve the economic crisis that an overheated economy had caused. The historian Mason argues "To continue rearmament, Hitler had to find new sources of raw materials, food and labour. The agreement with the Soviet Union helped to solve some of these problems; the war helped to solve others." And " A war for the plunder of manpower (enslavement) and materials lay square in the dreadful logic of German economic development under National Socialist rule."

So why didn't the "superpowers" of the time stop him? In Preston's book General Staff's and Diplomacy Before the Second World War points out that the British Military were preparing for 3 different types of war in the 30s. The army was defending the Indian frontiers and occupying Palestine, the navy was planning for war against Japan and the air force was looking at bombing Germany.

The Military Chiefs warned Chamberlain they did not have the strength to fight against both Japan and Germany. Because of this he recognized that Britain was in no way prepared for an all-out war so he needed to keep the peace. France's strategy for war revolved around the Maginot line and a long war of attrition (like WW1) and the way their military was organized a long warning was needed to facilitate mobilization.

So, it is pointed out that these leaders were not so much "guilty" but men who dealing with a man without their old fashion ideals could play them easily. Chamberlain and Lavell wanted to prevent another disastrous war and they could have if they had been a lot firmer and not been so willing to kowtow to Hitler. It has been argued that if Britain and France had declared war in 1938 when the Czech crisis arose a whole different scenario would have evolved or if France had invaded the Ruhr when evidence of Germany's rearmament program was obvious to all.

But with all the argument and what ifs - World War 2 did commence as soon as Austria was occupied and when Czechoslovakia was invaded - the West only became involved on the 3 September 1939 with the invasion of Poland. Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand declared war.

Axis Forces March Triumphant

During the early period of the war Germany had caught the world by surprise and quickly established its superiority of tactics over Poland with the help of Russia who takes over the Eastern part of the country. Poland is lost within a month. Russia after signing a Treaty with Germany invades and conquers Finland.

Germany on April 8 invades Denmark and Norway. Denmark capitulates. Norway with assistance from British army and navy fight on until Norway is forced to surrender on June 9th, 1940. The Low Countries and France are invaded in May 1940 - the Netherlands surrenders on May 14th. The German Blitzkrieg diverts around the forts of Belgium and France and moves with lighting speed across France till it reaches Dunkirk on May24. British, French, Belgium troops are evacuated in a fleet of boats. France signs an armistice on June 22nd. Italy declared war on June 10th.

Germany begins to soften up Britain for the invasion by launching mass bombing raids on July 10th, 1940. Italy invades British Somaliland (July), Egypt (Sept) and Greece (Oct) - Greeks counterattack on Bulgarian border.

On October 7th, 1940, the Axis forces invade Rumania, who with Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Slovakia sign a treaty and become allies of Germany.

Operation Sealion, the plan to invade and conquer the British Isles is abandoned in October 1940.

The British counterattack the Italians in North Africa in December 1940 capturing Sidi Barrani and then the vital port city of Tobruk. During this period British forces enter Abyssinia, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. Italians are stung with a decisive defeat at Beda Fomm near Tripoli in early 1941. It was the first decisive victory for the British in the war.

Suddenly, Commonwealth forces are suddenly withdrawn from North Africa and sent to honour Britain's commitment to help in the defense of Greece against an Axis takeover.

In the meantime, a new German general appears. His star is on the rise, and it is here he will gain the respect of friend and foe alike. He is Erwin Rommel. Though sent with order of preparing a strong defense against further British incursions, Rommel's strategy is to immediately go to the attack. He captures Agheila on March 24th, 1941, and begins to relentlessly push back the Allies toward Egypt.

In central Europe the Yugoslav regent is overthrown - Germany is forced to come to Italy's aid and sends forces against Yugoslavia and Greece. This delays the Fuhrer's plans for the invasion of Russia.

In the Desert in April 1941 Rommel captures Bardia and starts the siege of Tobruk.

The Greeks surrender to the Germans on April 24th, 1941. Seven days prior to this catastrophe, Yugoslavia had also surrendered to the Germans.

May 30 sees German paratroopers land in Crete against overwhelming defences and force the British to evacuate the island. In June 1941 British and Free French troops invade Syria. A month later the Allies occupy Syria and Lebanon.

A stalemate follows during the rest of the summer in North Africa as Rommel attacks Tobruk again and again. It does not fall. Finally on November 18th, 1941, the British Crusader offensive lifts the German siege of Tobruk

Four days after the Japanese sneak attack on U.S. installations at Pearl Harbor, Germany and Italy honour their pact with Japan and declare war on the US.

The Tide of War Changes

During 1942 the battle in the desert continues to see saw between the two forces until the second Battle of El Alamein which shifts the impetus over to Montgomery's forces. The Battle of the Atlantic, which at the beginning saw massive shipping lost via U-boat swung over to the Allies by 1943 with new tactics and new detection devices.

In August 1942, Canadian and other Allied forces at Dieppe make a strong raid on the coast of France. It results in disaster but is a lesson learned for any future invasions of mainland Europe.

The Battle in the East following the commencement of Barbarossa is an ill-conceived project. Russia, though a tempting prize with its riches in oil and natural resources, was far too great to fall to a German blitzkrieg. Germany's involvement here would largely contribute to its eventual downfall.

The German war in the east was sucking up men and resources in greater numbers and with the coming of the severest Russian winter in nearly 100 years, the Germans were stopped in their tracks. The impetus of the war goes over to the Russian forces that with superior numbers begin using attrition as their main tactic against the Fascist invaders.

The year of 1942 proves to be the year of crisis for all of the Axis powers. With the tremendous Russian victory at Stalingrad over Germany and the shattering of the Japanese carrier fleet at Midway in June the initiative suddenly swings to the Allies of the free world.

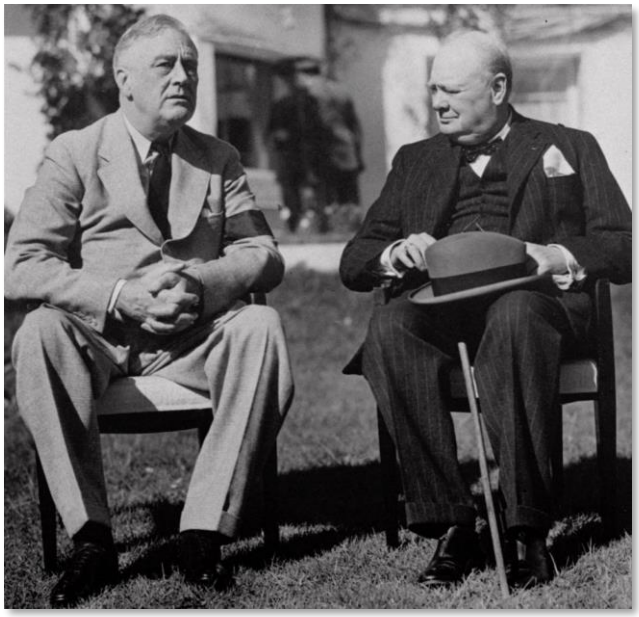
Now it is 1943 and our eyes fall on Italy and Europe. Germany still has a stranglehold over all of Europe. The Japanese still control most of the Pacific with their influence extending to the borders of India in the Far East. In spite of the early disasters of the war, the Allies feel that all is not lost, and the sleeping giant of America has powered up its industrial might.

The Axis forces in North Africa are no more. Germany finds itself in a war of horrible attrition in Russia in which millions of its young soldiers are no more. To win the war in the west, however, Europe must be invaded and set free. Now the stage is set for a triumphant return on the part of the Allies.

The Great Crusade - Part I

The Planning Stages – The Invasion of Western Europe

By Neil Stalker and Wild Bill Wilder



Priorities in Winning the War: 1943 Strategic Alliance

When Britain and the US met to discuss the strategy of defeating Germany in late 1941, they were operating from two different perspectives.

Britain was very cautious due to recent experiences against Germany and also the economic problems the war was causing. The enemy had a population of 110,000,000 against Britain's population of 48,000,000 and Germany's industrial capacity was superior to Britain's. So, Britain knew it could not match Germany on a campaign on the European mainland so it went for other options that might whittle away Germany's strength – North Africa and Greece. Also, Britain had to maintain its naval superiority or its supply lines would be choked and Britain's wealth had always come from its empire and now it was becoming heavily reliant on the US.

Meanwhile the US with its large population and industrial base took the other perspective, the only way to win the war was to invade the European mainland and overpower the Germans. At one stage the US estimated it could field an army of 334 divisions totaling 13,000,000 soldiers.

The US saw the Mediterranean and Italy as theatres with low priorities where Britain saw it as a way to leech away Germany's strength by forcing it to spread itself thinner. And Germany reacted to these threats of an Allied landing by stationing 12 divisions in Norway, 50 divisions in Southern France, Italy and the Balkans.

The US was right also that the only way to defeat Germany was to meet it on land and destroy its forces by both land and air power. The leadership of Germany was of a mind to fight to the last bullet, and it would never negotiate surrender.

Germany First

When Japan entered the fray by attacking Pearl Harbor all the current Allied Nations had a sphere of interest in the Pacific. It was decided as Japan was the comparatively weaker of the two major Axis powers and it was thought that they could be contained, and Germany was the strongest it was logical to go after Germany first. When Germany was defeated, Japan could have all the Allied resources brought to bear against it.

Operation Roundup

The US proposed to invade France in April 1943 with 48 divisions landing in Northern France unfortunately these plans was neither practicable nor feasible. The British took about three months to talk the Americans out of this idea for the good reasons that neither the British nor US commanded the sea or air, insufficient landing craft and insufficient trained

forces. Britain was to contribute 18 divisions, but Britain did not have anywhere near that many divisions.

Also, as stated control of seas and skies would be necessary before any invasion could take place in Northern Europe and the U-Boats were making large inroads into shipping. With the use of “Ultra” a method of decoding German radio signals some headway had been made at intercepting the U- Boats and their supply vessels. The Luftwaffe’s control of the skies over Europe would also have to be ended otherwise the invasion vessels would be destroyed before even getting to France.

So it was decided that the North African landings should go ahead on the 25 July 1942.

A Feeling of Distrust

At that time the Americans felt that Britain was trying to draw them into their traditional spheres of interest of the Mediterranean and Balkans. America could not see why they should get involved in freeing the Balkans from German control as this was tying up German divisions fighting partisans etc and by supplying just arms this was an economic way of fulfilling the aim without sending in troops. As far as Italy was concerned, they could see no point in getting involved there.

At Casablanca in 1943 it was agreed that after North Africa with the main aim of tying down German forces in the Southern and Southeast Europe areas an invasion of Sicily and Italy would be carried out. This hopefully would pull the Germans away from the area where the invasion would occur after 1943 and give the Allies a numerical advantage in forces.

Still America did not want the invasion of Italy to develop into any major theatre of the war and it would always be secondary to the main theatre in France.

Also, Britain was ambivalent towards Russia and still remembered well that they were once an Ally of Germany and had taken part in the invasion of Poland. Britain was certainly suspicious of the Russian’s intentions and what they would do in post war Europe to spread their web of control. America on the other hand was not worried about post war Europe and wanted to end the war.

Trident

May 1943 – plans had been made for the invasion of Sicily and the North Africa was drawing to a successful conclusion. Britain still wanted America to expand its operations in the Mediterranean and it wanted to invade Italy drawing on their estimation 24 enemy divisions from elsewhere into Italy. This would make the Soviets happy.

The Americans felt that instead of a drain on German resources it may be a drain on theirs and they wanted to concentrate their forces for France. Above all the US wanted Britain’s commitment to Operation Overlord (invasion of France) on or around the 1 May 1944 otherwise the US would only be interested in any further operations in the Mediterranean after the Sicily operation was completed if it would be “best calculated to eliminate Italy from the war and to contain the maximum number of German forces.”

During this period the air forces had been systematically destroying Germany’s oil refineries, oil stocks, aircraft factories and airfields in an effort to gain mastery over the skies. This would go on until at D-Day when there was virtually no air opposition.

Italy

On the 26 July 1943 despite having tried not to commit to Italy, the US had no choice at the time to exploit its gains in Sicily to open a three-pronged attack on Italy. This was due to the fact that the Allies could not at the time open up another theatre on the continent. The invasion of Sicily on the 22 July led to the arrest of Mussolini. Marshal Pietro Badoglio heading the Italian Government wanted to arrange an armistice with the Allies.

This was a story of opportunity lost and putting personal feelings before commonsense. Churchill wanted to win Italy away from Germany by offering soft peace terms. Anthony Eden the British Foreign Secretary on the other hand nursed a hatred of Italy following his humiliation by Mussolini in 1935 during the Abyssinia conflict. Eden lobbied the War Cabinet and managed to get them to apply the unconditional surrender that had been agreed for Germany and Japan.

So when in 25 July 1943 the anti-fascists toppled Mussolini the Allies were not ready to exploit the situation – Churchill had told Eden "Don't miss the bus". Rome was open with General Carboni and his mechanized forces defending Rome and Badoglio wanted to take on Eisenhower's offer of landing the 82 Airborne on the Roman airfields. But due to the surrender clause Carboni rejected the offer and Badoglio a weak link went along with it. So when the Italian leadership left Rome for Brindisi the Italian army with no leadership disintegrated and was taken prisoner by the Germans. The Germans were ordered to execute surrendering Italian soldiers this happened.

in Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania, and the Aegean area. Generals Lanz and Von Weichs were convicted at the Nuremberg Trials for these war crimes.

By missing the bus and not allowing the movement of troops into Rome – the axes of communications for Southern and Northern Italy, a lot of of Allied and Italian soldiers plus Italian civilians were needlessly lost. This has been supported by documents from the Germans found after the war.

The Germans had other ideas and wanted to keep Italy in the war as both a captive partner and as a battlefield. The elimination of Italy from the war and control by the Allies would leave Germany's back door open. Hitler after Mussolini's rescue set him up as a figurehead leader, but effective control was in the hands of the Gauleiters. By using Italy as a buffer Hitler bought time and continued in turn to wear down the Allies.

The Germans soon had stationed in Italy – Heersgruppe B in the North under Rommel and Heersgruppe C in the South under Kesselring approximately 15 divisions spread from Sardinia up the mainland to the German border. Hitler was aware of what would happen re the fall of Mussolini and the feeling of Badoglio, and the likelihood of a deal being brokered with the Allies. Hitler placed the Balkans ahead of Italy in importance, but it needed Italy's manpower and also to block the Allies from establishing a hold on Southern Italy where it could establish airbases and influence the Baltic's and the Adriatic Sea area and most important of all Southern German cities.

The geography of Italy made it a difficult proposition to hold Southern Italy with its long coastlines so it was decided that with the mountainous terrains, deep valleys and numerous rivers that the Northern Italy would be easier to defend.

In late 1943 Hitler had to prove Germany was still a force to reckon with to his Allies following the worst 6 months of the war – the defeats at Stalingrad, North Africa, Kursk, Sicily and the fall of Mussolini. Also, the inroads the Allies Air forces were making in Germany and also the balance of power changing in the Atlantic.

The Germans decided to defend Southern Italy and the Allies were unable to make any inroads into the solid German defences. Weather and terrain were the Germans greatest Allies. This gave the Germans time to demolish any useful port facilities in the South and also to allow defensive works to be completed in the North. The first line was at the Volturno.

The Winter Line

The Winter Line was positioned at Italy's narrowest point being between the Volturno and Gaeta on the Tyrrhenian Sea and Termoli and Ortona on the Adriatic. This line consisted of 6 major defence lines the main lines were the Gustav line and the Hitler line. By using these prepared defences, they could be held for a long time with minimal use of manpower and cause major delays and drains on manning for the Allies.

“Kesselring’s intention was to establish himself in positions that would ensure the security of the Aurunci Mountains and the huge Mount Cairo massif.” H.P.Wilmott

These positions allowed the Germans to dominate the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers, which blocked the route to Rome via the Liri Valley with Monte Cassino overlooking the area. The positions in this area were very strong and mutually supporting and because of the way they were laid out each position would have to be taken one by one.

When the defences were tested with attempt by the Allies 5th Army to break into the Liri Valley via the Volturno and Mignano Gap – the casualties incurred by the German 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division and the American and British Divisions practically ruined them and all reserves were exhausted. The Allied had a chance at this stage to press on into the Liri Valley because the Germans were exhausted, and they had a chance to break through the Winter Line. The opportunity was not seized, and it was to take a further 6 months to break through.

Reconfirmation

The Americans and British had agreed that seven divisions would be withdrawn from Italy after November in preparation for the invasion of France. This decision came about after heated discussions at the Trident and later at Quadrant meetings. The Americans wanted Britain to confirm that Overlord (the invasion of Northern France) was the primary theatre, and the Mediterranean was a secondary theatre and also for a second landing in Southern France (Operation Anvil) to be carried out.

At Quadrant the British reconfirmed the Overlord priority accepting the May 1944 timing and the Southern France operation. As part of the deal the Allies were to continue an unremitting offensive in Northern Italy. With the removal of seven divisions this would prove to be impossible – the Allies would be left 13 divisions in Italy.

Planning for the Future

In late 1943 and early 1944 the Allied High Command as well as the German High Command had a lot of decisions and plans to prepare and implement. The Allies faced the failure to breach the Winter Line and what do next and what resources to commit. They had to make any disposition of troops and plans in conjunction with Operation Anvil and the biggest plans involved Operation Overlord. The coordination and producing the supplies necessary, the men required, the shipping to transport and all importantly to keep the enemy guessing on when and where it was all going to come together.

The OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) had to decide on how to consolidate its success on the Winter Line and keep Italy under its orbit. The major decisions were on how to man the lines stretching from the Netherlands to the Winterline. Heersgruppe C (Kesselring) and Oberbefehslaber West (Field Marshal Gert Von Rundstedt) were responsible for overall defence in the case of Kesselring, Italy and in the case of Rundstedt, France, Belgium and Netherlands.

OKW (German High Command) had to decide how to deploy the troops and supplies – in France on 1 June – 24 front line divisions were deployed whilst in Italy 23 front line divisions were deployed. A further 4 divisions were moved to Italy to stabilize the theatre. So Italy had on the eve of Overlord over half of the available divisions, which would have otherwise been deployed against the Overlord forces.

As far as the Allies were concerned on the eve of Overlord you would have three major drains on available divisions – Overlord, Italy and Anvil plus commitments to the Pacific Theatre, the decisions in regards these resources were a little confused. The Americans would not consider any increases in men and materials in Italy or Anvil, as this would reduce the available resources needed for Overlord. Due to this problem, it was decided to postpone Overlord to a later date than the proposed month of May this decision was made by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff on 31 January.

Planning for Overlord

Overlord was assigned initially 653 LCT (Landing Craft Tanks) and 632 Transport Aircraft by Trident and the planning structure was set up under a Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (designate) (COSSAC). The initial plan for the invasion comprised a landing in the Bay of Seine by 3 divisions on a 25-mile front with 2 divisions in reserve to land at Lion-Courselles, Courseulles-Arromanches, and Colleville-Vierville. Two airborne divisions were to land in the Caen area.

The Allied High Command thought that the landing forces were inadequate, and this would lead to reduction of the reserve. General opinion didn't even view the amended plan as being workable. At the Sextant meeting in December 1943 the thought was that the forces should be increased but would be shared between Anvil and Overlord. It was envisaged that the forces from both landings would become a giant pincer with Anvil forces becoming the right flank. Landing forces for Anvil were to be 2 divisions plus follow up forces from Italy and 10 divisions shipped direct from the US. The Americans felt that the ports of southern France would be open before the ports of Northern France and just the ports of Northern France would be able to sustain the logistical needs for an invasion of Germany.

Overlord Supreme Commander was to be General Dwight D Eisenhower, his Deputy British Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder; Chief of Staff was to be American Major General Bedell Smith. Britain supplied Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory (Air), Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey (Sea) and General Sir Bernard Montgomery (Land). Montgomery was in command of landing forces before and after the landing.

It was agreed that the first landings would come ashore between Orne to Quinneville-Pouppeville – Eisenhower, Smith and Montgomery using 5 assault divisions agreed to this. Placing the forces in a position to push on Cherbourg rapidly. These landings were to be supported by airborne landings and only one airborne division was to be landed in support of amphibious landings near Caen.The Overlord plan in early 1944 look liked this: -

1) 5 seaborne divisions to land on either side of the Carentan and Isigny, 4 divisions on 1 side of the estuary and 1 on the northern side.
2) 3 airborne divisions were to land prior to the landings to secure bridges and towns.
3) Second assault wave to consist of 1 reinforced armored division, one artillery division, and a under strength infantry division. These were to land on the same day as the initial landings.
4) Day 2 – the balance of the under-strength division to land plus another infantry division.

This expansion on what was originally planned and the total forces to be landed on the first day were to be 174,320 men and 20,018 vehicles. Assault shipping was the only element that was missing at this point. Montgomery and Smith suggested canceling Anvil, Eisenhower and the Joint Chiefs opposed this. Postponement of Overlord was then suggested to allow more shipping to become available. Events in the Italian theatre was to lead to a change of timetable.

Anzio Landings

Operation Shingle was designed to break the stalemate that had come to pass with the Germans defence of the Winter Line. A landing was planned at Anzio 80 miles beyond the Liri Valley using 4 divisions of the VI US Corps who were to push forward and cut the enemy lines of communication south from Rome. Prior to this the US Fifth Army were to attack the Winter Line and force Kesselring to use his reserves. With the optimum outcome the destruction of the XIV Panzer Corps and the balance of the Germans forced back to the Pisa-Rimini Line.

But as with all good plans what the enemy should do and does is two different things. The 5th Army was unable to reduce the defences at Bernhardt Line till the 15th of January. This left the troops exhausted and a need to resupply before pushing ahead over muddy and difficult terrain against a well position enemy in prepared defences. The attack did force Kesselring to use his reserves, but it could not be said that it had put the Germans in a position to hold the forces close and allow none to be used to protect an attack from the rear.

When VI Corps landed with just 2 infantry divisions and no armor it had no hope of realizing the planned advance it had to use all its resources to protect its beachhead. 8 German Divisions hemmed it in after a week. The Germans had then moved the Fourteenth Army from Northern Italy to protect the rear of the Tenth Army.

Hitler knew that the destruction of the forces at Anzio would be profound benefit morale wise throughout Germany and drove in two assaults to destroy the beachhead but these failed, as did the Allies attempts to lift the siege.

This forced some decisions re Overlord – the Allies could not remove forces from Italy and it would seem that Anvil would have to be reduced. The British wanted to keep Overlord as it was, consolidate in Italy and not to carry out Anvil but make feints that would tie down forces in Southern France. The Americans want to cut the commitment to Italy and retain Anvil and not weaken Overlord. The two sides could not agree. Eisenhower was then given full power to work out a compromise; JCS still retained veto rights.

The British and Americans continued to disagree on a settlement over shipping allocations, but Overlord still held priority over all other theatres and the Allied Commander in the Mediterranean British General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson was to draw up operations plans, which would also include Anvil. The plans were to be reviewed on the 20th of March and a "moratorium on all shipping in and out of the Mediterranean was put in place".

In discussions with General Marshall on 26th February, Eisenhower suggested that Anvil be dropped.

Italy – Up to you

The command in Italy was more or less told that if you want to retain your forces do something with them. It is strange to think that there were no concrete plans in place all the different offensives were not planned well ahead, nor did one plan follow another plan there were general plans but no overall strategy (this seemed the case in Normandy also). General Alexander's Chief of Staff Lt General John Harding did develop a basic objective of the Italian Campaign

> *'…to force the enemy to commit the maximum number of divisions to Italy at the time Overlord is launched. It is obvious that the most effective way of making the enemy draw on other theatres for troops for Italy is not merely formations in Italy to such an extent that they must be replaced from elsewhere to avoid rout. Tactical plans should therefore be designed to bring about situations in which enemy formations can be destroyed or so reduced in strength as to be rendered non effective, rather than for the primary purpose of gaining ground."*

This would be a battle of attrition who had more war materiel to use against each other, instead of using manpower use firepower, the Allies had more planes, artillery and tanks and the industrial might to out produce the enemy in munitions. No further offensives would take place till the ground hardened and the Armies were reorganized and reinforced. Discussion took place between the Theatre Commanders in regards Harding's plan, JCS approved the plan with Anvil being put back to Mid-August.

Due to the time, it would take to reinforce the Fifteenth Army Group – Operation Diadem was put back to Mid-May. The Americans used the carrot of moving assault shipping from the Pacific to ensure Anvil would go ahead against British objections in June. The British refused the offer and would await the outcome of the Winter Line.

Diadem

The plan for Diadem revolved around tying up the German mobile divisions chasing down phantom landings at various points on the coast while 5 Allies corps against the German Tenth Army carried out a frontal assault. The II US Corps would be on the coast and the French Expeditionary Corps in the Aurunci massif while 3 Eight Army corps would break open the enemy front. The II Polish Corps was expected to take Cassino while the XIII British Corps broke into the Liri Valley with the I Canadian Corps exploiting it using armor. By doing this it would also relieve Anzio and open the road to Rome. The main aim but was to destroy XIV Corps and the Tenth Army forcing the enemy to commit resources from France.

Kesselring in an uncharacteristic lapse of judgment misread the Allies and gave them points for too much imagination; he did not expect another frontal attack on the Winter Line. The German forces were also weakened by long exposure to the fighting and lack of supplies. Allied air had gone on the offensive now that the clear spring skies had returned so interdiction of supplies and attacks on the ground forces had returned in strength.

With Hitler's normal orders of no ground given all the Germans could do is maintain fixed lines and keep moving reserves into lines as men were lost this was exactly what the Allies had planned for. The Allied breakthrough came through in the south this was unexpected as it was the hardest to move through, but the French moved through the Aurunci Mountains and turned the enemy's line cutting communications through the Liri Valley and the coast.

Kesselring managed to pull back most of his forces and the 90th Panzergrenadier Division and the 1st Parachute Division kept the road to Rome closed till the 28th of May. On the 25th of May units from the 2nd and 6th US Corps linked around Borgo Grappa effectively raising the siege on the Anzio beachhead.

A change to orders to the VI corps to concentrate along Route 7 instead of the dual attack along Route 7 and 6 in the Valmonte area made a serious tactical error in not cutting the escape route of the German Tenth Army. This let the remainder of the Herman Goering Panzer and the 92nd Panzer Divisions to reach Valmonte before the US forces could reach Valmonte this held up the US forces till the 2-3 June. The line collapsed and Rome was entered on the 4th of June. The main objective of the campaign had been missed with the Germans escaped in an orderly withdrawal to the Gothic Line.

Although the Germans in Italy were still to be totally defeated it was felt that one of the objectives the drawing of German reserves into Italy from Southern France had been achieved.

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The Great Crusade - Part II

Preparing for the Moment

By Neil Stalker and Wild Bill Wilder

The German Perspective

The Germans knew that an invasion was coming, they knew the country and the coast that would be invaded, the precise location was not known. They knew they could not prevent the landings occurring, as they no longer ruled the skies or seas around France. They also knew that if the landing's succeeded Germany was defeated.

The total forces available to the Kreigsmarine along the coast of France were 11 destroyers and torpedo boats, 34 Motor Torpedo Boats and 400 minesweepers and patrol boats. 49 U Boats were also available. The Allies had 105 destroyers, 284 escorts, 291 minesweepers and layers with 495 patrol vessels.

The Luftwaffe in France – Luftflotte B had at its disposal 400 fighters, 400 bombers and general aircraft but due to pilot shortages and fuel these were not on call at all times, and they were also shared with other areas.

The German command structure of OB West – Hitler was the top of the tree, and he distrusted his commanders so much that he had split up the lines of command to such a degree that it was like going through a maze to get something done e.g. the 88-mm antitank gun actually came under the Luftwaffe not the army. The Waffen SS came under Himmler's control and had priority for supplies and equipment over the Wehrmacht forces.

OB West in May 1944 had 9 armoured, 1 mechanized, 2 airborne, 13 infantry, 33 static and 4 Kreigsmarine security divisions in the Low Countries and France. The Navy controlled the ports and fortresses that some of these were made into. These came under Navy Group West and were responsible to Oberkommado Marine. The Waffen SS had 1 mechanized and 3 armoured divisions, the Luftwaffe 1 infantry, 2 airborne and 3 static divisions. Thus 21 of total of 62 German divisions were not part of the army. The static coastal defence divisions were second- rate divisions consisting of very young, very old, partly infirm or foreign troops.

German Forces as at April 1944

An inspectorate under General Heinz Guderian controlled the logistics and training of the armoured, mechanized and assault artillery these were outside the control of the General Staff. Hitler was paranoid re one group having total control of all elements of the army, so it was cutup into small slices.

The long years of fighting had forced the Wehrmacht to start digging in the bottom of the manning pool putting steadily older and less fit people into uniform. OB West had written of 5 divisions as being unfit out of the 42 available in May 1944. OB West was split into two commands Heeresgruppe B under Rommel covering Netherlands, Belgium, and France north of Nantes-Tours-Geneva (note Netherlands came under OKW command). Southern France came under Group G commanded by General Johannes Blaskowitz. Army Group G was the junior member of OB West having 17 Divisions (First and Nineteenth Armies) available to it as compared to Group B with 32 divisions. The Allies via radio activity had led the Germans to believe Southern France was not an objective. Army Group G in reality probably did not have the manpower to cover the huge coastline in its area let alone defend it.

Rommel's command of the Heersgruppe B did not apply to the theatre reserve Panzegruppe West also known as 1 SS Panzer Corps consisting of Panzer Lehr (stationed at Chartres), 1st SS Panzer (Brussels) and 12th SS Panzer (Evreux) and 17th SS Panzergrenadier (Tours) Divisions. This Corps came directly under SS command and hence Hitler's control.

Rommel did have the 2nd Panzer Division at Amiens, 116th Panzer Division at Rouen and 21st Panzer Divisions at Caen. All but the 21st were in a process of rebuilding after having come from the Eastern Front.

Heeresgruppe B

Colonel General Friedrich Dollmann commanded the Seventeenth Army stationed in Brittany and Normandy with 1 armoured, 2 airborne, 5 infantry and 7 static divisions. Colonel General Hans von Salmuth's Fifteenth Army was stationed in Belgium and Northeast France with 5 armoured, 4 infantry and 14 static divisions. Their common border was the Caen-Argentan-Le Mans- Samaur line. The force distribution was a reflection of the Germans uncertainty of where the Allies would land with OB West having more divisions to the west of the Seine than in northeast France.

The Germans favoured the Pas de Calais; as it was a logical point of attack with numerous ports, in fighter cover range and short march route to Belgium and Germany. But there were logical reasons also to rule Pas de Calais out – there were more embarkation ports in Southern England and also the Pas de Calais was shallow and did not have the sea room for the 5000 plus vessels required.

Still the problem with the Germans forces at hand was the frontage they would have to defend ranging from 50 to 100 miles had they wanted to prevent the enemy from getting off the beaches. They knew from experience that they had to have the forces in position or that naval gunfire and air would stop any forces from getting to the beaches. There was argument that all forces be positioned at the beaches even though it was very risky considering the possibility of the lines being breached. Rommel and von Salmuth agreed on this strategy because they knew how effective air power could be to prevent reinforcements from reaching the beaches. Guderian, von Rundstedt and Geyr disagreed. Von Rundstedt felt that coastal defences would break-up any attack allowing reserves held of the beach the opportunity to destroy them – ignoring Rommel and von Salmuth's point re reinforcements even getting to that behind the beach area. Von Rundstedt at the time was treated as a figure head and the old man whose intellectual capacity was thought be addled by alcohol and easy living at his mansion at St Germain outside of Paris and he used his Chief of Staff Blumenritt to speak for him.

Geyr wanted the Allies to move into the interior after the coastal defences had delayed them sufficiently so the German armoured forces could mobilise and then use the massed armoured crush and destroy the enemy with Luftwaffe support. This was knocked on the head, as the risks in allowing the Allies to move into the interior with little opposition were too risky.

Again, it was Hitler's decision and he waved like a feather in the wind between arguments until he decided no to mobile defence – kept the Army Reserve under his control and allowed 3 Panzer Divisions to be deployed a hour away from the beaches.

The Allies Problem – Where and When to Land

The Allies knew where they wanted to land and that was not the Pas de Calais as this had been ruled out for the reasons above. They now had to determine what beaches in Normandy would be best to use with things like tidal movements, sand that was easy to traverse, defences and what was the coastal terrain like off the beaches, the flatter the better for vehicular movement. And for interest the beaches in Pas de Calais were bordered by chalky cliffs with few exit points where as the beaches in Normandy were relatively sheltered

from the Atlantic gales, more open and had firmer sand to cross with little occurrence of clay patches.

Also, it was important from an air support point of view to be able to construct airfields in France sooner than later so they would need to get dry, flat ground to bulldoze.

It was felt that between the eastern side of the Cherbourg Peninsula and the River Orne estuary was the best spot due to the Atlantic Wall here being incomplete, the beaches were suitable, the Brittany ports were close by, and other suitable bays, the bridgehead could be easily defended while force deployment was carried out. The major point that the enemy would be used to counterattack – the gap between the Seine and Loire, near Chartres could be defended by airborne formations.

The only minus with Normandy was felt to be the bocage terrain although mostly flat – it had narrow winding roads with pastures and wood lands bordered by high banks topped by high hedges. Also, there small watercourses crossing roads and land plus the standard method of construction in Normandy was of stone. All of these factors made movement by large forces very difficult especially if against a well dug in enemy. Airfields also could only be constructed to the south and southeast of Caen away from the rolling hills.

Blindfolds

The Germans were practically blindfolded intelligence wise due to lack of air reconnaissance and most of their spies had been turned into double agents. They had for a while settled on Normandy and then they changed their minds to the Pas de Calais mainly due to misinformation and whichever way Hitler felt at the moment. Because of their indecisions and jumping to false conclusions the Allies had to keep pointing them in the wrong direction including planting that they would invade Norway and Pas de Calais at the same time.

On the morning of the invasion Germany's leading agent (turned by the British) fed the Germans the complete order of battle of the Normandy invasion force. He stated that this was a feint, and the real invasion was to happen in the Pas de Calais region and hence the Fifteenth Army was kept in the area and did not move into Normandy until it was too late.

This included the well know ploy of keeping Lt-General George S Patton, the Allies best General as far as the Germans were concerned, in England with the mythical First US Army Group. Also in the air, the US Air Force and British Bomber Command carried out operations to enforce the Pas de Calais as the target in German minds this alone cost the Allies 1616 bombers and crews. It is hard to calculate the amount of lives the air force and fighters of the resistance saved by keeping a German army in the Pas de Calais – many thousands and probably the whole operation.

Plans

The Landing

First US Army (Lt General Omar Bradley**) –** north and east of Vire Estuary

Right: VII US Corps (Major General J Lawton Collins)

Utah Beach **–** 4th U.S. Infantry Division followed by 90th, 9th and 79th Divisions.

Left: V US Corps (Major General L.T.Gerow)

Omaha Beach **–** 1st U.S. Infantry Division plus part of 29th Infantry Div followed by balance of 29th and 2nd Infantry Division

Second British Army (Lt General M.C.Dempsey**)** landing between Bayeux and Caen

Right: XXX British Corps (Lt General G.C. Bucknall)

Gold Beach – 50th Northumbrian Division and 8th Armoured Brigade followed by 7th Armoured Division and 49th Infantry Division

Left: I British Corps (Lt General J.T. Crocker)

Juno Beach – 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and 2 Canadian Armoured Brigade followed by Commandos of 4th Special Service Brigade

Sword Beach – 3rd British Infantry Division and 27th Armoured Brigade followed by 1st Special Service Brigade, the 51st Highland Division and 4th Armoured Brigade.

The 6th British Airborne were to land in the Caen Area. The US 82nd Airborne was to land west of Utah beach in the St Mere-Eglise area while the US 101st ten miles to west.

Following the initial landings – the second wave would consist of Third US Army (Lt General George S Patton), First Canadian Army (Lt General H Crerar), 2 French Armoured Division, 1 Polish Armoured Division, 1 Belgian Infantry Brigade and the Royal Netherlands Brigade.

There has been a lot of discussion in regards what happened after the landings and how the bridgehead was developed and the push on Caen and beyond.

General Montgomery was the commander of the land forces for the invasion and in briefings held in April 1944 he had outlined the priorities and how he seen the battle develop –

a) Capture of Cherbourg – a main priority due to the need for port facilities

b) Cut of Brittany – to seal the German forces inside and to secure ports.

c) Caen was the heart of the railway and communication network leading to Cherbourg and also needed so that airfields could be developed in the flat country to the south. Montgomery believed that the Germans would go all out to defend this area and hopefully draw away German reserves from the American front.

d) By drawing the German forces in this would allow the American forces to breakout in the Loire area and attempt encirclement.

Comparative Rate of Expected Force Build-up

By The Evening Of	D-Day	D-Day+1	D-Day+3	D-Day+7	D-Day+10
Number Of Allied Divisions	8	10	13	16	18
Number Of German Divisions	8	12	15	22	27

First Tasks – After landing

Form two bridgeheads – one between Rivers Virne and Orne (Isigny, Bayeaux and Caen) and the other on the coast of Cotentin, north of Vire to the Carentan Canal and beyond the river Merderet. Link up was expected by D-Day +1.

Within a week the bridgehead to be extended appreciably in the northwest, west and south and at a slower rate in the southeast and east. I British Corps was to hold Caen and to the south “as a pivot and bastion”, they were to hold against the attacks by the Panzer Reserves.

By D-Day + 9 the V US Corps and XXX British Corps were to attack and take the high ground on the St Lo-Caumont-Villiers Bocage this would protect the beachhead from artillery interdiction. VII US Corps to seal of the Cotentin and move north to attack Cherbourg. Bradley thought this would not be achieved to D-Day +15.

Bradley was to then drive southwards. By D-Day + 50 it was expected that the Brittany Ports down to Loire and east to Tours-Deauville line would be held. By D-Day +90 with reinforcements of divisions from the US, a line would extend along the Seine across the Loire Valley to the sea.

At the final briefing given on May 15th to the King and Prime Minister, Montgomery said.

> *"Last February Rommel took command from Holland to Loire. It is now clear that his intention is to deny any penetration: Overlord is to be defeated on the beaches." ……. "Rommel is an energetic and determined commander; he has made a world of difference since he took over. He is best at spoiling attacks; his forte is disruption; he is too impulsive for a set piece battle. He will do his level best to 'Dunkirk' us – not to fight the armoured battle on the ground of his own choosing, but to avoid it altogether by preventing our tanks from landing by using his own tanks well forward. On D-Day he will try to force us from the beaches and secure Caen, Bayeaux, Carentan… Thereafter he will continue his counterattacks. But, as time goes on, he will combine them with a roping-off policy and he must then hold firm on the important ground which dominates and control the road axes in the bocage country"*

His solution,

> *"We must blast our way on shore and get a good lodgement before the enemy can bring up sufficient reserves to turn us out. Armoured columns must penetrate deep inland, and quickly, on D-Day; this will upset the enemy's plan and tend to hold him off while we build up strength. We must gain space rapidly and peg out claims well inland. Once again, we get control of the main enemy lateral Granville-Vire-Argentan-Falaise-Caen and have the area enclosed in it firmly in our possession, then we will have the lodgement area we want and can begin to expand" And he went on the say that this was the beginning of a "great crusade".*

May to D-Day

The task of the Allies during these crucial months was to continue the disinformation so the Germans never knew where and when it was coming. The Airforce continued its interdiction and destruction of communication, roads and railway systems. This also included escalation of the bombing in Germany proper which led to the transfer of 50,000 Todt workers from transferred from the Atlantic Wall works to Germany to repair bombing damage. Bombing resulted also in the diminished production of planes and oil.

Radar stations along the French Coast were systematically destroyed all except some key ones around the Pas de Calais. A formula for bombing was developed so that if bombing was done in Normandy, bombing was carried out in the Pas de Calais.

Operation Bodyguard – the Deception plan was carried out by the construction of phoney army camps and plywood tanks in Northern England, Scotland and Ireland for the German recon planes that were allowed in this area. Phoney radio traffic was maintained, or radio traffic was rerouted to give a wrong picture of where divisions were located.

D-Day Embarkation – Operation Neptune

One of the worries for the planners of the invasion was the safety of 5000 plus ships and boats that would make the journey from England. The Germans with small naval forces at their disposal could still wreak havoc. The Royal Navy and the Royal Air Forces Coastal Command had the job of preventing of u-boats or any other enemy craft coming into the English Channel. The British patrolled and sortied from the Atlantic Seas near Norway covering the routes out from Brest and entrances to the Channel. The Coast Command

carried out 5,000 sorties in 10 weeks prior to D-Day and the Royal Navy laid mines off the Dutch coast, Calais, Le Havre, Cherbourg, and Brest.

Montgomery made a point to visit as many troops of all countries as well as factories and service industries waving the flag and making them all of a part of what was happening. This positively affected morale and General Bedell-Smith in a letter to Monty said:

> *"Confidence in the high command among the US troops is absolutely without parallel. Having spent my life with American soldiers and knowing only too well their innate distrust of everything foreign, I can appreciate far better than you what a triumph of leadership you have accomplished in inspiring such feeling and confidence. "*

From the 26 May all the troops in the initial assaults were moved into camps near their ports and isolated from the rest of the world. They were briefed and trained but not told exactly when or where they were going. The preparations for the invasion had included recon photo planes going in at wave height taking photos of the beach line and inland so each commander and landing craft coxswain knew what he was heading for looked like. The weight of the world descended on General Eisenhower's shoulders as his was the decision at what time the largest invasion ever to take place. He was the first commander since Julius Caesar to cross the channel to invade. The weather was the main preoccupation with the unpredictable weather whipped up in the South Atlantic causing the date to change from the 5 June to 6 June. Group Captain James Stagg had the weight of the world on his shoulders as Chief Meteorologist. Ships were already at sea having set out from ports in Scotland and the north of England on the 5th – they had to slow down or return to port. The men in the midget submarines could not turn back and had to sit on the bottom and wait in the cold sea.

Stagg announced that there would a 24-hour window of opportunity on the 6 June – Eisenhower asked Montgomery "Do you see why we shouldn't go on Tuesday?" Montgomery replied "No, I would say 'Go'." A further meeting was held on the 5 June and Stagg was firm "As I see it, the little that has changed is in the direction of optimism." Eisenhower announced with a smile "OK, we'll go."

The initial waves would consist of 4,126 landing craft (landing craft infantry, landing craft tank and others) 736 ancillary craft, 864 merchant ships and 70 block ships. The Great Armada had started to move.

24,000 paratroopers and glider borne troops of the British 6th Airborne, US 82nd and 101st Airborne was loading into their 1,200 planes and 700 gliders at 22 airfields.

The French Resistance alerted by radio had already started their role with rail links and communications to be destroyed or disrupted – the lines from Paul Verlaines poem "Autumn Song":

> *Blessent mon Coeur / D'une languer / Monotone* (Wound my heart with a monotonous languor)

…alerted them that the invasion was 48 hours away. 1,000 attacks took place that night.

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The Great Crusade - Part III

D-Day!

By Neil Stalker and Wild Bill Wilder

It Begins!

The Great Armada had begun its slow progression across the storm swept channel preceded by flotillas of minesweepers that ensured the paths they were to follow were free of any impediment. Patrolling ships and planes ensured there would be nothing to ruin the surprise. Little knowing that because of the storms the previous day all enemy ships had been confined to harbour and planes to airstrips.

The Air forces preceded the invasion with 1000 plane sorties against the coastal batteries all timed to perfection so as not to interfere with fleets of transport planes carrying the airborne divisions. The 6th British Airborne was to land its pathfinders and coup de main parties in Caen area at 0020 hours, the US 101st (Maj Gen Maxwell Taylor) and 82nd (Maj General Matt Ridgeway) were to land at 0130 and 230 on the Cherbourg Peninsula.

Airborne Landings

The first success of the day was the landing of the gliders of the 6th Airborne Division who carried out a coup de main on the Bénouville Bridge. This was a key bridge (Pegasus) over the Caen Canal, which was to be controlled to prevent enemy forces using it to disrupt the bridgehead. Major General Gale commanded the division, and the balance of the force would arrive some 4 hours later. His forces were to hold this bridge, take another key bridge over the Canal and the River Orne. Then eliminate the battery at Merville, which threatened the beaches and seize and destroy 4 bridges over the River Dives. After achieving this to secure the area against enemy encroachment. By dawn it achieved a major part of its orders. It would during the day have to withstand heavy counterattacks until the beach forces arrived to relieve it.

On the western flank the US divisions commenced landing on time – the 101 was to secure the narrow causeways across the flooded ground behind Utah, advance to the river Douve and capture the town of Carentan and finally link up with the 5th US Corps from Omaha beach. The 82nd landed in the river Merderet area and was to capture Ste-Mère-Eglise and bridgeheads across the river Merderet and link up with 7th US Corps.

Due to navigational difficulties created by the dog leg route they had to take to avoid enemy held territory – they ran into heavy weather and heavy anti-aircraft fire this created an attack of nerves in some of the green aircrews. Only 20 out 805 aircraft were lost but the more serious results were that the airborne troops were scattered over a wide area – the 101st had only 1100 of its 6600 troops at the rendezvous by dawn. The 82nd landed 1 Regiment on target and the town was captured by 0400 hours. The glider force had half its number go astray with its guns and signal equipment. The attempt to seize the bridges failed and the division was scattered in territory controlled by the German 91st Division. Skirmishing in the bocage country with the Germans on a wide front totally involved the Germans having the secondary result of drawing them away from the coast. By 0600 the 101st had secured exits from the bridgehead across the causeways. Although small in number they had occupied

area quickly. The German Seventh Army was slow to react to the reported airborne landings – a level of alert was posted for the Seventh and Fifteenth Armies. Naval Group West decided not even to put patrol craft out due to the sea conditions. Von Rundstedt dismissed reports of naval noises off the Cherbourg Peninsular.

Decoys

Kranke the Coastal Defence commander decided later to send out torpedo boats from Le Havre and Cherbourg to investigate and they came in contact with destroyers, damaging a destroyer - the torpedo boats returned to port with nothing major to report.

The Germans were also blinded with their radars being destroyed or rendered useless by Allied counter radar tactics. By selective leaving some radar stations active the Allies were ready to point the Germans away from where the action would take place.

Phony invasion forces Glimmer and Taxable were put into action whilst the real invasion forces made its crossing. Dummy parachute drops were made southwest of Caen, between Dieppe and Le Havre and in the St Lo area. The dummies had sound devices like rifle fire. Also, the aircraft dropped chaff to simulate fleets of aircraft over the Pas de Calais – this pulled German night fighters into that area between 0100 and 0400 hours.

The dummy fleets were motor launches in formation towing balloons with radar reflectors, emitting smoke and with radar jammers this combined with bombers flying overhead dropping chaff gave a picture of a large body of movement on radar. Also, to prevent the coastal guns from ranging in on the invasion fleets with radar launches mounted with equipment fed disinformation to the radars.

German Confusion

The Germans were preoccupied with the thought that all this activity could be a diversion from another point of attack and the Allies played on this fog of war to great advantage. No firm decisions were being made by the German High Command – the forces near the Allied Airborne landings would fight to eliminate these incursions but no overall strategy was put into play.

The German 91st and 709th divisions were to eliminate the airborne attacks – they were in action from 0235. The counterattacks against the British forces did not commence till 0700 with the release of the 21st Panzer Division.

The 12th SS Panzer Division was released at 1000 hours to move into a forward position for Lisieux when a stray group of British Airborne forces were detected in the area. Permission had come after a long delay from OKW (Hitler's HQ). Two other SS divisions were to hold their positions and would not be released unless Hitler did it personally.

Rundstedt was still not convinced this was the major landing and at the time the British were lowering their landing craft 7 miles of the beach and the heavy naval bombardment had commenced.

The Curtain Goes Up

The noise must have been deafening 100s of fighters providing a CAP while 1,300 bombers in waves of 36 abreast dropping 3000 tons of bombs onto the beaches whilst the heavy guns of the fleet pounded the beaches and behind the beaches.

The bombing of the coastal defences was not effective that is in destroying them but the shear noise and compression of exploding bombs must have had an effect of terror and shock on the defending enemy and this made it successful in saving Allied lives. Also, the minor defences such as wire and minefields were effectively eliminated along with telephone lines hamstringing the enemy's communication.

Due to the differing tidal times the scheduling of bombing and landings had to be staggered. Utah and Omaha were bombed for only 40 minutes whilst the British beaches were shelled for 2 hours prior to H Hour – US H Hour was 0630 and British was 0725.

US Landings

Anyone who watched Private Ryan could imagine what it felt like traveling in those small Landing Craft onto beaches for the most part swept by machine gun and mortar and shell fire. In some ways it was similar to the troops of WW 1 leaving the trenches and going over the top into waves of Maxim fire with no cover and if you stopped moving you were dead. The best cover was your enemy's positions.

Utah Beach

UTAH beach was east of Audouville la Hubert and St Germain de Varreville; General Lawton Collin's 7th US Corps were to link with the airborne forces. The objectives were clearing the main roads between Carentan and Ste-Mère-Eglise, bridgeheads over River Vire and canal and then link up with 5th US Corps from OMAHA.

The landing despite losses to sea mines went to plan with support from 29 DD tanks (amphibious) and obstacles were cleared quickly. Behind the beach the land had been deliberately flooded in some areas shallow in some 5 feet deep. The narrow causeways had to be used by vehicles, but the enemy covered all these. The 101st was attacking the western end of the causeways.

The 4th Division headed for Pouppeville and was taken at noon. At this time the landings had a front of 4000 yards and a depth of 4 miles. The division linked with the 101st at Hiesville. By days end the 7th US Corps had fallen short of the Merderet River with strong enemy resistance in areas around Ste- Mère –Eglise and Carentan. 23,000 men, 1,700 vehicles and 1,700 stores had been landed.

Omaha Beach

Omaha beach was located on curving area of beach, with rising shingle beach and 200 yards of marshland with a 100-foot bluff behind it. The bluff was the start of a plateau that extended to the river Aure valley. This was the most difficult beach to land on with obstacles at the tidal level in soft sand, the next set was at the base of the bluff with mines and wire and the marshland area was also heavily mined. The tracks up the slopes were also mined and covered by strong enemy positions as well as the whole beach with artillery observers able to call down strong defensive fire.

29th US Infantry Division on the right flank and 1st US Infantry Division on the left were the first forces to land, with 2 Ranger battalions to take the cliff top position of Point du Hoc. Seas were tolling to 3 to 4 feet high when the landing craft embarked 11 miles offshore. Due to the sea, tides and winds the order of landing was totally mucked up – only 5 of the 32 amphibious tanks crossed the beach. 8 were hit and destroyed before leaving the surf.

Heavy casualties resulted due to lack of tank support; lack of obstacle clearing (only 2 out of 16 dozers landed) and no specialist tanks were used. The only cover the men had been to try to merge into the shingle banks while the enemy above them rained down machine gun fire on them.

Sheer guts got the men moving climbing the slopes. Destroyers offshore seeing the situation closed the beach (11 in all) coming within 800 yards brought down 5-inch gunfire on the enemy's positions this relieved the troops enough and by 0900 some had reached the top of the bluffs. Some of the troops started to clear the enemy from the bluffs whilst others headed for Vierville-sur-Mere and St- Laurent-sur-Mere. Destroyers knocked out the last major enemy strongpoint at 0930. Elements of 1 US Division headed for Colleville-sur-Mere. The villages were defended by 352 German Division, who stopped the advance and the US forces had to wait for reinforcements.

3,000 casualties were sustained for a foothold of 2 miles in depth. The Rangers had captured Point Du Hoc discovering that the heavy guns had been moved they were later discovered in a valley behind the Point and were destroyed by the Rangers. By midnight 33,000 men had been landed. But due to the thinness of the bridgehead a strong counterattack would have rolled them back into the sea.

It has been noted that the veteran 1st US Division with its experience in Sicily and Italy helped inspire the relatively inexperienced 29th Division. Also, the cooperation of the naval forces was crucial in moving of the beach. Air support was minimal due to lack of communications as most of the radio equipment was lying at the bottom of the sea or damaged during landing. Also, the landing of troops against know heavy fortifications was not a very good tactic and if the troops had been landed between the strong points losses would have been reduced and the strong points could have been flanked. Also, the use of flail tanks and other specialist tanks may have saved a lot of lives.

The British Beaches

So, in fulfilment of a promise Churchill had made on October 2 1940,

> *"Remember we shall never stop, never weary and never give in, and that our whole people and Empire have vowed themselves to the task of cleansing Europe from the Nazi pestilence and saving the world from the new Dark Ages. Go night then; sleep to gather strength for the morning. For the morning will come."*

The morning was at hand.

The British beaches were different to the American beaches in that they were in open terrain with gentle slopes between Port-en-Bessin and the River Orne.

The obstacles described are similar to obstacles encountered on all the landing areas. The obstacles (2,500 were counted over 3 1/4 miles) were consistent between beaches in that there were underwater obstacles some with explosive charges in three layers from underwater at high tide, semi submerged and fully visible on any tide. 400 yards from the tide line were concrete emplacements with wire and mines, armoured gun emplacements with wire and mines, minefields 6 rows deep. There were also concrete walls from 6 to 12 feet high with machine gun emplacements. 155 mm guns were sited 1200 yards from the beach mobile or emplaced. Minefields were scattered everywhere.

A sampling of the firepower brought against the Allies in both sectors was on a 25 mile piece of coast – 124 88mm guns, 27 batteries of 75mm and 155mm guns, 21 heavy AA pieces and approximately 500 mortars and heavy machine guns in fixed positions.

Gold Beach

Lt General G. C. Bucknall's 30th Corps was to land at Gold at 0725 – 50 Infantry Division and 47 Commando were to land first. A Brigade was to take le Hamel, go through Arromanches to Port-en-Bessin and link with 5 US Corps. 47 Commando was to take Port – en-Bessin. The balance was to start expanding the bridgehead in depth.

Another Brigade was to advance to la Rivere cut it off and then advance to St Léger on the Bayeux-Caen Road. The reserve brigades were to fill the gap and make a thrust towards Bayeux – these were due to land at 1000.

Only major problem for the British landing was a 6-inch gun battery at Longues which survived air attack – HMS Ajax a British Cruiser duelled with it and managed to throw off the gun when the emplacements foundations were soundly rocked – the gun was useless after that. A high running sea caused some landing craft to be flooded and acute cases of seasickness were common.

The tanks landed with the troops and provided cover – the flail tanks and specialist tanks landed not long after. Hamel was defended in depth and the flail tanks cut a path through the minefields and allowed the troops to flank the gun emplacements. Other formations had less of fight going between major strongpoints all Hobart's funnies (specialist tanks) carried out their tasks flawlessly with flails blowing mines, carpet layers laying a carpet over soft sand, fascine tanks filling in holes, flamethrower tanks clearing pillboxes.

After an hour on the beach they had started to head towards Port-en-Bessin only to encounter strong defence by German 352nd Division troops at Arromanches - this was cleared with a combined arms operation in the afternoon.

The balance of 50th division in the eastern section found la Rivère severely damaged by bombardment – an enemy strongpoint of an 88 with support machine guns was encountered and a flail tank which using its Besa machine gun put the position out of action. The Germans were soon forced to withdraw from the village and the British advance to Meuvaines ridge.

The German defence at le Hamel was extremely tough and the German 352nd division was formidable in that they were surrounded and cut off from supplies and escape. Follow up British forces had started to land, and they pushed on to take Bayeux - the reserve brigades were now cleaning the rest of the beach up of remaining German forces.

By dark Bayeux had been effectively taken and the main lateral route between Caen and the west had been cut. 50th Division was the only division that reached its objectives for the day – it would be expected to as it was a veteran force and had fought from North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Also, it had a relatively easier landing. 30th Corps had a 6-mile gap between itself and the US forces with German forces in between. 47th Commando had still to take Port en Bessin having advanced 9 miles.

Juno Beach

Juno was in the middle of Gold and Sword extending over the river Seulles. It would be the Canadian forces attached to the British who would take this one. Due to reefs offshore the landings were delayed until the tide was higher at 0735 but this was further delayed due to high seas and winds and embarkation didn't take place till 0800. This had some benefits as it allowed the landing craft to ride over the obstacles and a low rate of loss resulted on the way in – on the way-out losses were high.

Two brigades of the 3rd Canadian Division one on the west and one on the east sides of the beach made the landings on Juno. The bombardments were found to not have damaged the defenses to any great degree. The western brigade supported by some amphibious tanks and soon fought their way of the beach. The lead battalions were 2 miles inland. The follow-up was delayed due to traffic jams on the beach. The eastern brigade had no tank support as the heavy seas forced them to be carried in by LCTs. Due to the height of the tide the troops were landed 100 yards short of the beach defenses.

At Bernières-sur-Mer the enemy defenses were intact, and the Canadians had to charge across 100 yards of open beach some companies loosing half their men. A landing craft came in shore and used its anti-aircraft guns to suppress some of the enemy fire. This was soon cleared for follow-up regiments and the next obstacle was Bény-sur-Mer 3 miles south. After two hours of fighting this was taken but the traffic jam took about 3 hours to clear. The target for the day was the Carpiquet airfield and by nightfall the advance forces were 4 miles from it.

Opportunities were lost due to the time it was taking units to get of the beaches – the Caen-Bayeux Road at Brettville was found to be free of enemy and if the 9th Canadian Brigade had been able to clear the beach they would have taken

Carpiquet the first day. This in turn would have led to Caen being easier to take but the advance forces had to return to Camilly.

Sword Beach

Sword was the beach furthest to the east, a hinge upon which movement south would depend greatly. This beach was opposite Lion-sur-Mer – one brigade of the 3rd British Division was to land and advance to Caen making a bridgehead over the River Orne taking Périers-sur-le-Dan enroute.

The landing went like clockwork with the bombardment being effective, 21 tanks landed with the infantry accompanied by the specialist tanks. The dunes had defences in depth with wire and mines but within two hours of landing Hermanville-sur-Mer a mile and half inland. 21st German Panzer Division with infantry and 88mm guns held the Périers heights. This forced discretion on the part of tanks and the infantry took cover.

4th Commando took Ouistreham after neutralizing strongpoints. A traffic jam ensued with the follow up Brigades and the final forces didn't land till late afternoon.

The initial impetus of the 3rd British Division slowed down and showed little flexibility in tactics – this partly due to the inexperience of the officers. The only forces between Caen and the beach were a coastal defence troops and a Panzer Grenadier battalion from the 21st Panzer Division, which was attacking the 6th Airborne. A special services brigade reached the River Orne and linked with 6 Airborne in the early afternoon. And then they commenced to move towards the Airborne troops at Merville.

3rd Division eventually reached the Benouville Bridge relieved the airborne troops. The balance of its troops was on a line between Biéville-Blainville 3 miles from Caen. This was late afternoon and the opposition that the British forces faced where infantry – but the complexion of this would change shortly as the 21st Panzer commander Major General Feuchtinger ordered his panzers to cross the Orne and concentrate at Colombelles about 90 tanks accompanied by 2 battalions of infantry. Allied air attacked any noticeable movement and could have been used to a greater degree against the German infantry but wasn't.

At 1600 hours tanks of Staffordshire Yeomanry spotted the German tanks south of Biéville. The Germans carried out a charge of 40 Panzers against the established British line consisting of a squadron of Tanks, 17 and 6 pounder Anti-tank guns. 4 enemies were quickly destroyed, the balance went into some nearby woods to be pounded by artillery and the Yeomanry pursued them. A Squadron of the Yeomanry ambushed them at trig point 61 knocking 13 out forcing them to withdraw. Any further advances halted, and the line was consolidated at Biéville for the night.

The 6th Airborne Division who was holding out against continual attack at the Benouville Bridge was reinforced with their heavy equipment arriving by glider that night. This doubled their force and resupplied them. At midnight the Royal Warwickshire Battalion relieved the airborne forces.

Further German Reaction

Hitler released the 12th SS Panzer Division stationed at Lisieux and Panzer Lehr Division at Chartres to von Rundstedt at 1400 and due to continual air harassment movement was slow and the forces were expected at Caen the next day. Meanwhile 21st Panzer Division was ordered to withdraw to a line from Cambes–en-Plaine to Caen canal.

At Day's End

A small foothold had been gained precarious as it was with the German forces only starting to mobilize. The key to the landing and the following days would be air power – during D-Day alone over 3000 aircraft was used for attacking and interdicting enemy forces – 14,000 sorties were flown with a lost 127 aircraft.

Enemy air was not an issue 21 enemy planes were seen and there were 16 shot down – calculated 36 sorties flown.

A total of 132,500 men were landed on the beaches by the end of the day. 30,000 shells were fired during the naval bombardments in the British Sector. On the British beaches 6,000 vehicles were landed including 950 tanks. Total Allied casualties were 2,500 killed, 7,800 wounded or missing these are approximations. The only set objective reached on D-Day was Bayeux, all beaches had not been linked, and weather was a worry, as it would affect the supply lines and reinforcements enroute from Britain and the US.

The Allied commanders were amazed at the lack of German counteroffensive on the first day but not until later did it come out that the different German commanders were giving no cohesive commands. As in the case of 21st Panzer Division commander, he was not sure if he came under 84th Corps or 437th Panzer Corps or under HQ Panzer Group West. He followed his standing instructions if invaded and dispatched Panzer Grenadiers to the River Orne. And then on his own initiative he dispatched his Panzers to back up his infantry.

He did not learn till 0845 that he came under 84th Corps. By the time the Panzers got moving, it was too late. They would present the only serious threat to a setback but were so uncoordinated in their attacks that the effort failed. This was a stroke of good fortune for the British as earlier action may have pushed them back into the sea at Sword beach. As Churchill said, the landings were “ the most difficult and complicated operation that has ever taken place.”

The Great Crusade - Part IV

Fighting through France – June-September 1944

By Neil Stalker and Wild Bill Wilder

The Orders

The Allies had established a tenuous bridgehead on D-Day and the Germans were starting to move in heavy forces to stop them. General Montgomery ordered General Bradley's First US Army to start the initial movements necessary to take Cherbourg – this was to be done by 7th US Corps. It had to move south from Utah capture Carentan and advance across the Taute-Vire canal to capture Isigny-sur-Mere and link with 5 US Corps. 7th US Corps had also to cut the Cherbourg Peninsula off by advancing to Barneville-sur-Mere. Second British Army was to advance and capture Caen and develop a bridgehead on the Caen-Bayeux Road. 5th US Corps had to consolidate its Omaha bridgehead.

This was all very urgent because it was known that 2 Panzer Divisions were heading in their direction – 12th SS Panzer Division was then south of Caen and Panzer Lehr was on the move. 17th Panzer Grenadiers was moving from Poiters. The RAF was maintaining interdiction and making the roads as impassable as possible by cratering major intersections and destroying rail junctions.

The Expansion

The German 352nd Division was fighting to prevent any linkups between the two US Corps but by the 10th of June the 29th US Infantry Division had taken Isigny and linked with 101st Airborne. The 5th US Corps had linked with 50th British Division near Port-en-Bessin following the capturing of Douvres. The 101st had captured Carentan on the 12 June and by the 12th the bridgehead was linked.

4th US Division had joined with the 82nd Airborne on 7 June at Ste-Mére-Eglise and had started to move north encountering heavy fighting around Montebourg. The 82nd advanced towards the west coast of the peninsula but was heavily engaged by the 91st German Infantry Division.

5th US Corps was still partly on Omaha beach and was still under artillery fire and some defended positions – 1st US Division advanced to the east and linked with British 47th Commando. The 29th US Infantry Division picked up its pace and captured Isigny after heavy fighting with 352nd Infantry Division. On 9 June they captured the river Vire crossing. Elements of the 101st Airborne were met. 2nd US Division advanced cutting the Bayeau to St Lo Road.

30th British Corps progress – Bayeux had been taken and now the 50th Division, 8th Armored Brigade and 7th Armored Division were advancing towards Tilly- sur-Seulles with the aim of reaching Villers-Bocage and a crossing across the river Odon. This in turn would threaten the communications for the enemy in Caen. 7th Armored moved into Tilly by a counterthrust by elements of 12th SS Panzer and Panzer Lehr pushed them back. The Germans had developed a series of defended villages on the La-Belle-Epine-Tilly-Brouay

line. General Dempsey with the 7th Armored moving on the right flank of 50 Division towards Villers-Bocage from the west decided on a switch of direction.

1st British Corp's main task was to capture Caen. The 3rd Canadian Division moving from the northwest and west and 3rd British Division from the north. The Canadians linked with British in the Brouay area. 3rd British Division attacked from the north with 12th SS Panzer, Panzer Lehr (190 tanks, 45 assault guns, 600 halftracks) and 716th Infantry Division strongly emplaced. The Germans were trying to destroy the 6th British Airborne's bridgehead also.

German Perspective

Still Hitler thought this was a diversion and was still expected the main attack in the Pas de Calais area. German High Command underestimated the numbers of Allies that had been landed. A comprehensive strategy to deal with the invasion did not seem to exist. Rommel still expected the main aims of the Allies attack was to capture Cherbourg and thrust towards Rouen in preparations for the landing on the Pas de Calais.

Due to the persistent air attacks the German forces could only be sent in bits and pieces always seeking cover or having to make long detours to find bridges or least damaged roads. Instead of using main roads they used secondary roads to move troops this was soon twigged to by Allied HQ and the air force started cratering these roads. By the 12th of June the Bridgehead was now 12 miles in depth with the main German counterattacks against the forces at Caen. 326,000 men, 54,000 vehicles and 104,000 tons of stores had been landed by the 6th of June. Montgomery moved his forward HQ to Creully in Normandy on the 12 June.

Second Week – D-Day +7 to +12

First US Army Area

The following US Forces had now joined the ones already mentioned - 19th US Corps and 8th US Corps. The 101st. 82nd and 90th Infantry division came under 8th US Corps command, and it was responsible for the southern half of the US area – the Utah area. 19th US Corps commanded 2nd Armored, 29th and 30th US division which was in the Omaha area.

US Advances

4 US Divisions captured Montebourg and Quineville on the Cherbourg Peninsular pushing the enemy troops back. A weakness was detected in the area northwest of Ste-Mére-Eglise and the US forces lead by 9 US Division with elements of 82nd Airborne pushed westwards. June 16th - the 82nd occupied St Saveur and moved to protect the left flank as the 9th advanced to the coast at Barneville-sur-Mer on June 18th. Cherbourg was now cut off from the rest of the German forces – 4 under strength German Divisions were penned in. The 82nd, 4th and 9th division turned north and facing south were the 8th, 18th and 5th US Corps. 1st US division was established at Caumont.

Rommel had in the meantime ordered the 17th SS Panzer Grenadiers to the Carentan area, but it did not arrive to the 11th of June – harassed by air attacks and it arrived without most of its assault guns. It was to split the US forces at the river Dive, but It was pushed back by the 101st and armor from 2nd Armored on the 13th.

29th and 30th US Divisions advance towards St Lo against stiff opposition and all canal bridges on the way had been blown. 29th US Division on the other side of the Taut-Vire canal made good progress.

Second British Army Area

The aim of this force was to encircle Caen with 30th Corps advancing towards Villers-Bocage. Against them were the 21st Panzer and 12th SS Panzer Divisions who were covering the northern side of the city. 51st Highland with 6th Airborne were to move southward in conjunction with 30th Corps in a pincer movement.

7th Armored was to seize high ground northeast of Villers Bocage and 50th Division was to take the town, but the 2nd Panzer Division had arrived from Amiens and counterattacked – 7th Armored withdrew. The British on the 13th held north of Tilly and Villers-Bocage.

14th June in the afternoon, 2nd Panzer again counterattacked pushing 7th Armored back and US Corps artillery had to be called to assist them. Over 4 days the battle raged and on the 19th of Tilly was taken. On the other side of the pincer the 51st Highland Division took Ste Honoire la Chardronnerette but was counterattacked by 346th German Division with a Kampfgruppe of 21st Panzer and pushed out of the village.

Further reinforcements could not come in from the beach due to bad weather. 8th HQ British Corps and 11th -Armoured Division were sitting in ships waiting to come ashore and at this time they were desperately needed.

D-Day +12

The Germans had moved the 3rd Parachute near to St Lo, 77th and 353rd Division into the Peninsular Area. A total of 4 Panzer divisions were in action against the British. Bad weather was interfering with Allied reinforcements and supplies, but this was offset by the interdiction of the enemy's reinforcements, supplies and communications by Air and sabotage by the Resistance and SAS forces.

Montgomery still aimed for 1st US Army to move south towards the Granville- Vire-Avranches area and with the scheduled arrival on the 24th of US 15th Corps it was to handle this advance. 2nd British Army was still to take Caen in a pincer movement the proposed bridgehead over the Orne bridgehead was subject to continuous shelling. It was planned for HQ 8th British Corps using 15th, 43rd and 11th Armored Divisions to move from the west and for 1st British Corps to advance north into Caen using 3rd British and 3rd Canadian Divisions.

51st Division was at the same time from its easterly position to move southwards with Caen on its right flank. A serve gale had damaged the Mulberry harbours and made landing next to impossible. The bad weather severely limited the air offensive and gave the Germans an opportunity to get its reinforcements.

Supplies of shells delayed the start from the 18th till after the 22nd.

D-Day +13 and the Fall of Cherbourg

It was decided that it was impractical for the US forces to start moving southwards until Cherbourg was taken as the Germans had reinforced the Carentan area with 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. The US 4th Division was advancing in the north of the peninsular and took high ground northwest of Montebourg and later in the day the town was taken – using the momentum created it also moved to Valognes outskirts. 79th US division advanced north between Valognes and Bricquebec whilst 9th US Division moved on the west flank to reach 8 miles from Cherbourg.

On the 22nd June the three divisions launched a coordinated attack preceded by air bombardment, the enemy defended strongly. The Fuhrer had ordered it be held till the last man.

The airfield at Maupertus was taken on the 23rd of June. The city was subject to heavy air and naval bombardment and on the 26 June the Germans surrendered Cherbourg. So on July 1st the Allies held the city and the northern peninsular.

The long and hard job of readying the port for shipping had begun. It was not ready till the end of August.

Operation Epsom

German troops positioned in the Caen area were the 12th SS and 21st Panzer Divisions with 716th Division covering the Caen approaches from the Orne bridgehead, Panzer Lehr and 2nd

Panzer Divisions were in the Tilly-Caumont area to resist any advances to take Caen from the south.

During the 23 rd June the 51st Division advanced and captured St Honouring, 21st Panzer counterattacked but was repelled. 3rd British and 3rd Canadian Divisions stage attacks against 12th SS Panzer Division. 30th Corps started its advance on the 25th of June followed the next day by 8th Corps, fighting continued to the June 30th when 30 Corps reached Array and Tessel. The bocage slowed the advance against the 2nd Panzer Division. During the 8th Corps advance over 2,000 tons of bombs were dropped on enemy positions while naval gunfire and artillery from two corps were concentrated on the enemy.

30 June

8th Corps secured a bridge over the Odon River expanding a bridgehead to 2½ miles in length and ½ mile in depth. The Germans further reinforced the Caen- Caumont area with 1st SS, 2nd SS and elements of 10th SS Panzer Division – 8 Panzer Divisions were now arrayed against the British and Canadian forces on a 20-mile front. 2nd British Army had to go on the defensive with the armor going into reserve and awaiting reinforcements. The storm front had stopped most landings and air support from the 18th through to the 22nd. 8th Corps had to stop its advance due to the thick armored defence (725 tanks concentrated in the British Sector while 140 tanks were in the US sector) the enemy had thrown in front of them.

Rommel and von Rundstedt planned to throw an impenetrable armored barrier against the Allies but due to air harassment this took a fortnight to do. 8th Panzer divisions were deployed but due to the German not forming a central HQ to manage these divisions they were deployed piecemeal, so a hammered fist changed into an open handed slap against a large area. The Germans had two other weaknesses – 1) in the bocage terrain a lack of infantry – due to Hitler retaining the infantry north of the Seine – in readiness for the Pas de Calais landing and 2) lack of petrol and artillery due to air interdiction enroute and bombing at the cracking plants in Germany.

Montgomery had another problem he wanted to dangle enough bait to keep all the German divisions in his area and away from the planned breakout by Bradley's forces. Also, senior commanders thought that the plan of attack was coming apart due to the failure to take Caen on the first day, which in itself would draw the German forces in, and make the Germans think that it was to be the main pivot for the breakout. Although the capture of Caen had not eventuated the drawing of the main panzer divisions into the Caen area had worked and left the US Army alone. Also, Montgomery wanted the Germans to keep putting their finger in the dike as holes appeared and not to flood them with a big push at a weak point.

The Break-Out - Operation Cobra

Planned date for the First US Army breakout was to be 3rd July. Execution of the plan had to happen when only a regimental group of Panzers faced the US forces (140 tanks). The idea was to burst through at Caumont pivot and swing on the line running through Vire-Montain-Foughres. After that part was done, advance to Mayenne-Laval and onto Alençon-Le Mans – a secondary push to Vannes on the coast cutting of Brittany and a number of German infantry divisions.

Before the plan could be executed General Bradley had to have a secure starting line so he had to advance to Périers-St Lô and came against aggressive defence by the German's stationed there. 3rd of July 8th US Corps attacked la Haye-du-Puits, 79th US Division took the town on the 8th of July. 7th US Corps advanced southwest of Carentan, 2nd SS Panzer Division, which had been moved from the Odon, counterattacked 83rd Division. This move worried Montgomery and intelligence indicated that Rommel was preparing a combined offensive to drive a wedge between the forces.

German disposition 25 July

Capture of Caen

On the 1st of July the Panzer Divisions –1st, 2nd, 9th, 10th and 12th, attacked the salient over the Odon River at Rauray but after several days of fighting they were forced to go on the defensive – it must be noted that the German forces were all under strength. Artillery was the deciding factor in the stopping of the advance. 39 tanks were lost alone by the 9th SS Division. Intelligence advised that two infantry divisions were being brought it the 16GAF (German Air force) in the Orne sector and 276th Division into Tilly-sur-Seulles sector.

Carpiquet Airport was captured on the 9th of July. Innovation was seen as a key to defeating the murderous German Defence so with Bomber Commands support a carpet-bombing run was made on an area 4000 yards and 500 yards deep which contained both defensive and HQ forces. On the 7th of July, 460 aircraft with 5 tons of bomb attacked the area successful knocking out of action most of the defensive works and HQ areas.

Operation Charnwood began with infantry advancing at 0420 this consisted of the 3rd and 59th British and 3rd Canadian Divisions and by 9th July Caen to the west of the Orne was captured. Voucelles was isolated. The bombing was found to have destroyed a whole regiment of the 16GAF and communications and supply lines were destroyed. This gain could now be exploited and relieve the forces holding the bridgehead east of the river.

The Germans had to maintain a strong force southeast of Caen to restrict the Allies movements towards the lateral supply routes to Falaise and Argentan and stifling any attempt at a thrust towards Paris or Rouen. A thrust from the River Odon to the River Orne south of Caen combined with an attack east of Orne from the bridgehead was needed. Second British Army was to move and take over the sector held by US 5th Corps so that Bradley would have more manpower for the breakout.

At the time Bradley's forces had nearly established their startline – on the 19th US Corps had advanced and captured St Lô and survived a counter offensive by Panzer Lehr. Bradley advised Montgomery he would not be ready till the 20th of July due to resupply being needed, which Montgomery understood.

The British had to keep up pressure now on the Germans to keep them in position, so a series of strong attacks were launched in the Tilly-sur-Seulles area using 6 divisions widely dispersed in the hope of forcing the Germans do the same so then breaking through a thin line towards the river Orne. 43rd Division captured Eterville on 10th July – strong counterattacks forced them back from Maltot. 49th and 5th Division advanced on the River Seulles while 51st Division advanced towards Colombelles hoping to draw the weakened 21st Panzer into action.

Movement Light was executed on the night of the 15th of July with an attack by 12 Corps using lighting supplied by bouncing searchlights on the cloudy skies. The aim of the attack was to capture Evrecy – this failed but Esquay-Notre-Dame was captured. These attacks had the desired effect of holding the 1st SS, 9th SS, 10th SS and 21st Panzer Divisions in the Eastern sectors and also kept them at the front and not allowed them time to refit or rest. Panzer Lehr and 2nd SS Panzer Division were in the Western Sector.

The 271st and 272nd German Infantry Division (frontline outfits) were on the move from Southern France, and it was also feared that the penny would drop with Hitler re Pas De Calais, and he would start to transfer troops from that area from the Fifteenth Army. Cloud cover and bad weather had given the enemy a rest from air attack. Montgomery decided to further tie down the enemy by doing a major thrust from the river Orne bridgehead bypassing Caen to create a salient in the Falaise area. He knew this was a risky operation against 5 defence belts but with air support he would further make the enemy think that the main allied thrust was to be from Caen.

Operation Goodwood

Montgomery got permission from Eisenhower for use of maximum air support for the advance. By interpretation of the outline given by Montgomery to SHAEF it was taken that this was to be a breakout similar to the US one planned in the West. Montgomery did not correct Eisenhower because he needed the air support, and it probably would be denied for a local operation.

The plan of attack was the 3 Armored Divisions – the Guards, 7th and 11th advancing line abreast with 4 infantry division following would move towards Bourgebous ridge – the 11th Armored to Hubert-Folie, 7th on Bourgebous and Guards to Vimont. The German strong points on the flanks were to be attacked by Bomber Command and the corridor was to bomb with impact fused shrapnel bombs. US 9th and 8th Air Force bombers were to bomb the Ridge area. The 8th was to destroy Troarn on the River Dives. Fighter-bombers would fly a supportive role.

Let's look at what the Germans had in opposition – the frontline was held by infantry, behind them was 21st Panzer Division (including 30 tigers) and elements of 1st SS Panzer Division. Behind this line were reinforced villages and behind

them a line of 78 88D.P. guns with artillery of 200 field pieces and 300 mattress mortar guns plus battle groups of 1st SS and 12th SS Panzer divisions spread along the lines. The Allies had seriously underestimated what was opposing them.

Rain called of the operation on 20th July – the Germans were now fixed on the British lines – Bradley despite weather problems could commence his advance on the 25th of July. Despite the heavy British casualties sustained during Goodwood it had achieved its purpose. German forces on the US lines consisted of 190 tanks and 85 infantry battalions. Whereas on the British Canadian they had 645 tanks and 92 infantry battalions.

Due to Montgomery's deliberate shading of the true purpose of Goodwood a lot of ill feeling was generated, and he did not even enlighten the Deputy Supreme Commander Tedder. Montgomery had put in writing his true intent and advised his Corps commanders. Tedder pushed for Eisenhower to take over as commander of the ground forces earlier than intended – his main worry was if Goodwood had succeeded as outlined, he would have had airstrips close to the front. Churchill supported Montgomery and congratulated him on his strategy.

The Breakout

The weather delays and waiting resupply for the US forces had allowed some German reinforcements to reach the Western Sector – 2nd SS Panzer Division at St Eny, 272nd, 276th, 353rd, 326th and 5th Parachute Divisions. 1st SS, 2nd SS, 21st and Panzer Lehr were in reserve and could have been moved anywhere but Operation Goodwood had placed them back in action. Panzer Lehr was the only one transferred to the Western Sectors. The First US Army had to advance across the marshy and soaked terrain of the Carentan region. On the 17th of July the forces formed up on the Lessay-Périers-St Lo line.

On the 25th of July, preceded by a devastating air and artillery bombardment General Lawton Collin's 7th US Corps – 3 infantry divisions advanced towards Marigny – St Giles and then turn to form the flanks of the corridor. Through the corridor two armored divisions and 1 infantry division would advance west towards Coutance and then to Canisy and then to Fervanches. 8th US Corp's 5 divisions would follow along the coast while 19th US Corps with 5th US Corps would advance to Vire on the left flank.

By the 27th of July the enemy was falling back, the German front had cracked. 2 Canadian Corps attacked towards the main Falaise Road but the German 1st SS, 9th SS, 12th SS and 21st Panzer supported by 88mm guns stopped the Canadian offensive. In the west the US forces were pushing south while the whole Allied front was pivoting on Caumont. The Eastern forces of Montgomery now had to pick up momentum so 8 British Corps (6

divisions) was to advance south towards Vire, and the remainder was to carry out demonstrations to hold the German forces attention – Operation Bluecoat. The US forces had by July 31st taken Avranches and Granville. By August 1st General Patton' s 3rd US Army Hq was operational and 8th US Corps came under its control.

The Germans Seventh Army was now starting to plug the holes in their lines by splitting units into Kampfgruppes (battle groups). In the Caen sector 1st SS, 9th SS, 10th SS and 12th SS and 346th, 272nd, 271st and 277th Infantry Divisions were not moved. South of Caumont the Panzer Divisions 21st along with 2nd SS, 116th and the undermanned Panzer Lehr were to face the breakout. The infantry divisions as equally battered as the Panzer Divisions – 17th SS Panzer Grenadiers and 243rd while 353rd was still fully manned. These forces had been fighting non-stop for nearly 2 months without respite and no air cover existing with insufficient supplies or reinforcements.

Patton with his usual flair pushed his forces forward at a rapid pace reaching Vannes on the 5th of August and Nantes on the 6th of August. On the 8th of August the German forces were fighting on Mortain to Vire line and on the river Orne south of Caen. Patton's forces were outside Le Mans, and he could move to Alençon with little trouble except for fuel.

First Canadian Army with reinforcement by the Polish Armored Division was advancing towards Falaise (Operations Totalize and Tractable) and had established a bridgehead at the river Dives. With the Germans south flank threatened by Patton and with the British-Canadian threatening their communication lines between Argentan to Viret it was thought that the Germans would withdraw to the river Orne. And then establish a rear guard allowing the rest of the forces to move across the Seine.

Montgomery on the 6th of August ordered all forces to continue forcing the enemy back against the Seine with a plan being looked at to drop airborne forces in the Chartres Gap to bottle up the enemy. First Canadian Army were to capture Falaise rapidly while the Second British Army would advance to Mantes- Gassicort with its right flank on the Argentan-l'Aigle line.

12th US Army Group –General Bradley (First US Army General Hodges and Third US Army General Patton) would advance on the Seine on a broad front with the right flank swinging towards Paris after reaching the Seine. Meanwhile the Germans had started to transfer forces from Pas De Calais region with 116th Panzer Division, 84th, 89th and 363rd Infantry Divisions and the 6 Parachute Divisions. The Allies could congratulate themselves on the success of their deception plans keeping a whole army pinned down for 2 months. The fault for this firmly fell on Hitler as his Generals had been pressing for the transfer of forces.

Mortain Counterattack – Operation Lüttich

To some extent the greatest ally the Allied Forces had was Hitler who had ordered all his reinforcements to enter the fray in bits and pieces instead of forming up concentrations of forces. He now was going to order a counterattack by his Panzer forces towards Avranches. The reasoning behind this is that he would drive a wedge between the US Third and First Armies. Hitler rightly said in his Fuhrer Order of the Day that this action would decide the future of the war in the west. His Generals were aware that this was a hopeless plan especially with no air support. Field Marshall Von Kluge who had replaced Von Rundstedt was over a barrel as he was fearful of incurring the Fuhrer's wrath.

The under-strength 1st SS, 2nd, 2nd SS, 10th SS and 116th Panzer Divisions with 84th and 363rd Infantry Divisions were to form the counterattack forces. The 30th US Division held the first push – weather was fine and good hunting was to be had by the air force. The Germans suffered annihilation from the air with scrap yards of armor and slaughterhouses of men lining the roads. The American forces reacted magnificently, and the Germans were lost before the day had ended.

The Closure

Bradley suggested that an inner encirclement be executed with the Third US Army sending a Corps north from Le Mans to Argentan and to Falaise meeting the 2nd Canadian Corps and Polish Armored Division and then this would trap the German forces left over from the Mortain operation. Montgomery agreed but also wanted Patton to keep advancing to the Seine when his fuel was resupplied.

The Germans fought desperately to hold the pocket open, and the Allies had problems with two spearheads from the Third US Army and the 1st British Corps heading for each other and it was purely navigational – the spearheads had to close on each other to leave no gaps. And also, they had to make sure that the air force could tell who was on the ground so no friendlies would be killed but due to the rapid pace some units were making this was not always possible.

Patton was to halt at the Argentan.

By the 19th of August the pocket was closed when the Americans met units of the 4th Canadian and Polish Armored Divisions. In this area remnants of 18 German formations were contained. A further two weeks of fighting would go on in the area with the German infantry forces fighting in the west while Panzer units tried to keep an escape route open. Allied forces were kept busy mopping up diverse formations in an ultimate road rage situation with piles of German equipment everywhere.

The Seine

Patton's 5th, 15th and 19th US Corps resupplied with fuel advanced rapidly to the Seine with little opposition through Dreux and Chartres on the 15th of August and Orleans on the 16th. The US forces were ordered on reaching the Seine to move westward to stop any Germany forces from escaping across the river. The first Allied forces to cross the Seine were via a catwalk bridge at Mante- Gassicort – D+75.

Canadian Army was to push towards Lisieux and onto the Seine while the 51st and 6th Airborne were to advance rapidly to the east. Facing these forces where the German 85th, 272nd, 331st, 346th, 711th Infantry Divisions and the 12th SS Panzer Division with the 17th GAF, 344th, 348th and 6th Parachute Divisions behind them. Some of these forces came from the Fifteenth Army. 21st Army Group had to push these forces towards the river while the Patton moved in behind them.

Patton moved back while the British and Canadians came forward meanwhile General Le Clerc's French Armored Division entered Paris. Patton found and took the undamaged bridge at Melun. It is thought that German forces evacuated across the rivers at Elboeuf and Le Havre by ferries.

At the end of August, 4 Allied armies were across the Seine and command of the Allied Ground Forces passed to General Eisenhower.

Summary of Normandy Battle

The successful conclusion of the Normandy battle depended on careful planning and execution of the air war, decoying, intelligence, logistics and the skill and bravery of veteran and green units.

The Allies were helped by the intervention of Hitler who overrode the trained Generals he did not trust. Fortunately for the Allies the German Generals feared him or were sick and tired of him and also, they did not understand the concept of tactical air power. German lost approximately 500,000 men, 240,000 killed or wounded and 210,000 taken prisoner. 3,500 artillery pieces and 1,500 tanks plus large amounts of other equipment were destroyed or taken. 43 entire divisions were eliminated or severely reduced.

At the Seine the Allies had 39 divisions facing them as far as was known was 2 Panzer Divisions and 9 Infantry Divisions in the low countries all not fully manned and in some state of retreat. South of the Ardennes were 2 Panzer Grenadier Divisions and 4 under strength Infantry Divisions. Operation Dragoon the landing in Southern France had 2 infantry divisions and half of a Panzer Division facing them. It was expected that most of Hitler's forces would be in the North to protect his rocket sites in the Pas de Calais area.

Allied Casualties - US forces Total 1,220,000; Casualties – 126,000 British/Canadian – Total – 830,000; Casualties – 84,000

September - Where to Go Next

Discussions had been held as to what to do when the forces reached the Seine. Montgomery wanted to make straight for the Ruhr with the First Canadian Army on the left flank with the job of taking Dieppe and Calais. The Second British Army and First US Army punching through to the Ruhr and the Third US Army on the right flank while the Seventh US Army headed towards The Saar.

Eisenhower's Plan was on the left flank, 1st Canadian Army would take Le Havre, Dieppe and Calais, the Second British Army would head for the Netherlands taking Antwerp, Arnhem and Brussels while the First US Army would head for Cologne and the Third US Army would go via The Saar to Frankfurt and Manheim and the Seventh Army would go via Dijon, Nancy to Karlsruhe.

August 31st - Eisenhower had taken command from Montgomery of the Land Forces now comprising the 21st and 12th Army Groups. Montgomery was promoted to Field Marshall and commanded the 21st Army Group while Bradley commanded the 12th Army Group. While the 6th Army group from Southern France also came under Eisenhower's command. Eisenhower had decided to move on a broad front as outlined in his plan of attack. Montgomery had planned to put the Third US Army in a supportive role, and this was politically unacceptable but militarily sensible. Eisenhower said to Montgomery, "The American public would never stand for it; and public opinion wins war." Montgomery replied. "Victories win wars. Give people victory and they won't care who won it." Also, on the other hand Eisenhower needed Antwerp and the channel ports to supply his forces.

The discussion has continued for years that if they had adopted Montgomery's plan the war would have been finished by Christmas and 10s of thousands of soldier's lives would have been saved and from what followed Montgomery was probably right. Judgement from hindsight is always easier.

The Allied forces were to move as follows – British Armies to move towards Antwerp accompanied by the 1st US Army (3 Corps under General Hodges) who would establish itself along the Brussels-Maastricht-Liége-Charleroi line. At the

same time, Third Army (Patton) was to move east as far as Rheims and Chalons-sur-Marne. When Montgomery's forces had taken Antwerp and the rocket sites – Patton was to advance to the Saar linking with the 6th Army Group in the Vosges.

One of the problems Montgomery was worried about happened he knew that holding Patton back would be neigh on impossible and because Dempsey's 2nd British Army was held up due to lack of bridgeheads across the Seine, he did not begin his advance till the 29th August. Patton's forces had taken Chalons and were now approaching Rheims. Petrol was the only thing that ended up holding Patton back he needed 400,000 gallons he got 32,000 gallons. And not further petrol to September 3rd. Patton told one of his Commanders "to continue until the tanks stop and then get out and walk". Patton's way was subtle, and he knew Bradley could not let his forces run dry.

Belgium

On August 29th VII US Corps (Collins) advanced from the Seine bridgehead at Melun to Soissons threatening to outflank the Somme line. Field Marshall Model was holding the line with remnants of infantry from many divisions the line Chalons-Rheims-Soissons was meant to hold the Third Army. Patton by moving against this line had tied up any opposition that the British forces might come across. Montgomery's commanders needed to move with speed and to island hop.

Horrocks commanded XXX Corps and he was known for his rapid advances – his 11th Armored was advancing towards Amiens against light opposition with orders to use moonlight and get to Amiens before the bridges are blown. By dawn on August 31st, they were in Amiens and found that the French Resistance had taken the three of the four bridges. Unknown to them German Seventh Army HQ with its new commander Eberbach was less than a mile away. Erbach was subsequently captured in his Volkswagen carrying maps of the German defences. The balance of the British forces moved up and on September 2nd, recon units crossed the Belgium border. The XXX British, XIX, and VII American corps were astride the Belgium frontier. On September 1st the Canadians capture Dieppe with its harbor installations intact. Supplies were the main problem with a fast-moving army out pacing the logistical supply lines, which stretched still back, to the Normandy beaches. The rail infrastructure and bridges had to be rebuilt not only to supply the Armies but also the civilian population.

Patton did have a bit of good luck when his forces captured 110,000 gallons of fuel, which he kept to himself.

The Advance Continues

A defence line was being established on the Moselle by 3rd and 15th Panzer Grenadiers along with 2nd SS Brigades these had been transferred from Italy and German. Patton needed to be fully supplied to break this line, but he only had sufficient to close with them but do nothing decisive. Hitler ordered Model to concentrate heavy panzer units on the Upper Moselle aiming to counterattack.

The British forces on September 3rd swept into Belgium the XXX Corps heading for Brussels and Antwerp against little resistance and assisted by the Belgium underground who prevented bridges being blown. Late afternoon Guards units entered Brussels. By September 4th 11th Armored Division entered Antwerp at a rapid pace and found the docks undamaged and unguarded. This rapid movement had cut of the 15th German Army on the coast. All the British had to do was clear the Scheldt Estuary. Montgomery still pressed Eisenhower to advance into the Ruhr and abandon the broad front approach and from what could be seen with the German forces in disarray this may have worked.

The Germans had lost about 2000 tanks in July and had only 1250 replaced and in August the replacement level fell to near 1100 with about 2200 lost, Hitler ordered all "all 88mm antitank guns, all Tigers and all Jagdpanthers" to the western theatre while all MkIVs, medium armor and 75mm assault guns to the East – a strange command considering that the Tigers were too cumbersome to keep up with the Sherman's and the Sherman's would avoid them also the Allied air would find them easy pickings. Meanwhile on the East Front you had the heavier Russian Armour coming across medium German armor another one of the Fuhrer's strange tactics.

Hitler on September 4th reinstated Von Rundstedt as Commander in Chief of the West – why – in all probability to provide a scapegoat when it all went pie shaped. Model was the best commander they had, and he was leading the defence of Belgium as Commander of Army Group B. What had Von Rundstedt walked back into – 74 divisions mostly undermanned and under equipped with Model estimation that it was really 25 full divisions were in the west defending a 400-mile front. And now the Allies were using the blitzkrieg to defeat them.

Model said to defend the line from Antwerp to the Franco-Luxembourg border he would need 25 fresh divisions and 5 Panzer divisions in support else the gates to Germany are open. This request was impossible as the Russians were hammering on the back door also. In fact what was happening 10 Panzer Brigades were being formed out of Divisional remnants, a brigade had an order of battle of 1 Panzer Grenadier Battalion, 33 Panthers and 11 assault guns, an engineer company some alternates where established with 48 Panthers or Mark IVs and another battalion of Panzer Grenadiers. Also, Himmler was forming 40 Volksgrenadier Divisions of 10,000 men each. Also, all cadets and trainees where converted into active units overnight – 135,000 men were found.

The Allies continued to push towards the German border with a gap of 50 miles between the 15th and 7th German Armies with men of the 15th escaping across the Scheldt to Walcheren. Goring came to the rescue providing from Luftwaffe manning 30,000 men forming the core of the 1st Parachute Army – 8 regiments of these were trained parachutists. Also, the various "stomach", "ear", fortress battalions were used to block the gaps under General Student a veteran of Crete. His line was to extend from Antwerp to Maastricht along the Albert Canal. The Germans were playing for time.

The only bright point on the whole German Line was in the upper Moselle where a force of 8 divisions was being concentrated. Patton's 6 divisions were brought to a stop on the Meuse; the fresh German forces had established a line from Thionville, Metz to Nancy to Epinal.

Meanwhile with the taking of Antwerp and Brussels a strategic advantage was waiting to be executed a strong thrust could be made into the Ruhr. Montgomery on September 4 sent a signal to Eisenhower the Land Commander who for some reason was 400 miles behind the fighting at Granville on the Cherbourg Peninsular, requesting that he authorize the British Forces to make this push into the Ruhr and onto Berlin. Eisenhower wanted to continue the way it was going and not change his plan – Monty was of the opinion that Eisenhower didn't understand the strategic situation or receive timely reports on what was happening at the front. The German commanders were normally within a few miles of the front and where aware of the situations as they developed. Urgent signals were taking two days to get to Eisenhower from the front.

Eisenhower issued a statement on September 5th 1944 – "I see no reason to change this conception <broad front>. The defeat of the German Armies is now complete, and the only thing needed to realize the whole conception is speed… I now deem it important to get Patton moving once again so that we may be fully prepared to carry out the original conception for the final stages of this campaign." Things were about to become complicated, however, for the Allies and their plans in the months to come.

The Great Crusade - Part V

Cracking the Wall - September-December, 1944

By Wild Bill Wilder and Neil Stalker

Introduction

It was September 11th, 1944, late in the afternoon, when a recon patrol of the 85th Reconnaissance Squadron, 5th US Armored Division, reached the west bank of the Our River. The Allied forces were jubilant. Paris had been taken and the forces that had invaded Brittany in southern France had linked up with Patton's Third Army. Things seemed to be going almost too well. Now they were at Germany's border. The five men in the patrol waded across the river.

On the other side, they climbed a small hill to a cluster of farm buildings. They were near the village of Stalzemburg. Around them they saw some twenty abandoned concrete pillboxes, part of the famed West Wall defense system. The commander of the group, S/Sergeant Warner Holzinger, hurried the men so that they could get back before darkness caught them. They became the first official group to walk on German soil. They were only the first of a number of tentative crossings on that day. All of these units were part of General Hodge's First US Army.

September: The Big Slow Down the General Situation

By now there were three massive Allied army groups approaching the German border. They stretched from the North Sea at their furthest northern extension to Switzerland in the south. Looking at them from north to south, there was Montgomery's 21st Army Group. In the center was General Omar Bradley's 12 Army Group. Furthest to the south were the 1st French and 7th US Armies.

On September 15th, the last two armies mentioned (US and French) would become the 6th Army Group, under the command of General Jacob Devers. The total Allied forces facing Germany had swelled to over 2,000,000 men, and nearly one half million vehicles of all types. They represented 26 infantry and 13 armored divisions. Of these 16 were British and Canadian. When the southern forces were incorporated into an army group, this increased the Expeditionary Force to 35 infantry and 14 armored divisions.

Facing them were 48 infantry and 15 armored German divisions. Reality was that most of these units were "paper" divisions. That is, they were listed as being in existence, but many were mere skeletons of what they should have been. Some armored units, with a normal complement of 300 tanks were down to a dozen pieces of armor or less.

At this point, Allied forces enjoyed a 20 to 1 superiority in tanks alone. Some German infantry divisions had through the attrition of battle been whittled down to battalion size. Hitler was fanatical in keeping a unit listed in his order of battle, even though it would have been much more feasible to merge pieces of units into a larger whole. It would have eliminated the

cumbersome administrative use of men to hold together the semblance of powerful forces. It was really nothing more than the Fuhrer's continuing his delusions of grandeur and his refusal to face the harsh reality that Germany was losing the war.

Germany's military situation was quickly becoming desperate. On the Eastern Front, the Soviet Juggernaut had pushed the Wehrmacht back to the Russian border and was retaking the Balkan States. The great German expansion during the years of 1940-42 had been shoved back into the heartland.

There was some advantage to this, however, as the German supply lines had been greatly shortened and the area to defend was becoming more concentrated. These factors, coupled with natural German feelings of protecting their homeland meant the fighting of the Allies in the future would not come close to resembling their rapid lightning-like advances through France in July and August.

In the northern sector around Pas de Calais and the channel ports, including Antwerp, the German 15th Army was in charge of the defenses. This was a quite sizable army and still full of fight. Many of the soldiers were paratroopers, with excellent training and high morale. In the center and south units were in the process of reorganization and refitting to prepare for the coming Allied invasion of the Reichland.

Now Eisenhower had to plan the strategy for getting into Germany. The personal preference of "Ike" was the "Broad Front" strategy. The idea was for a general advance on all fronts at the same time. It is rather like a bulldozer blade that shoves back or aside anything in front of it. General Montgomery, the second in command of the Allied armies, and the commander of the 21st Army Group in the north, preferred a "narrow" plan, or a knife like thrust with select units that would deeply penetrate enemy defenses. Once the penetration was successful, the units would spread out behind the enemy and cut him off.

A Daring Plan Falls Short

In early September, the situation with the Allied armies was reaching a crisis point. The most urgent matter to be dealt with was that of supply. At that time, all of the Allied supplies were being funnelled through the Normandy beachhead and the ports at Cherbourg. After arriving there, these supplies had to be transported hundreds of miles to the front in order to reach the troops.

A number of plans were being innovated to ease this growing need for supplies. A pipeline was being installed from England, under the channel waters to the coast of France. This would pump hundreds of gallons of fuel each minute to the ever-hungry Allied vehicles. A system of truck transportation, called the "Red Ball Express," (named after a railroad train in the US) was implemented. It would become a continuous chain of thousands of trucks moving from the supply depots at the coast across the highways of France to the front lines.

The principal highways eventually became open for one-way traffic only as the trucker’s rolled day and night. Hundreds of trucks were lost due to accident, enemy ambush, or mechanical failure.

These were simply pushed off the highway so that the other trucks could be kept rolling. Supply depots were being moved further inland, much closer to the front in order to shorten the distance between them and the troops on the Battleline.

Montgomery's Plan: A Startling Change

In the first week of September, General Montgomery dreaded the thought of becoming bogged down in the harsh fighting that would come in the capture of the Schelde Estuary. The estuary was the spit of land leading from the English Channel inland to the port of Antwerp. The docking facilities would be of no value as long as the Germans controlled the 60 miles of land from the channel to the port.

The British General, with a flair for the spectacular, was determined to be the great victor of World War II as were all the other Allied generals). In some respects, his ambitions were noble, but they eventually became degraded to the point of the waste of lives to achieve his own glory. In all fairness, however, it should be said that not only Montgomery, but also generals of other armies were guilty of the same sort of thinking.

Faced now with a bitter struggle for Antwerp and the estuary leading inland, it seemed that Monty's knife thrust would not become a reality. To be literally "bogged down" in fighting in the Netherlands was something that he did not relish. An alternative strategy would have to be forthcoming. And it was.

On September 10th, 1944, Montgomery buoyantly entered SHAEF Headquarters with the proposal of a new plan of action that was very different from his usual methodical, conservative approach. It was called "Operation Market Garden." The plan involved the laying of an infantry carpet of three airborne divisions in a narrow corridor through Holland that would find its end in Arnhem. Once the paratroopers were in place, the British Second Army would push northward along the main highway and link up with these paratroopers.

They would then be in a position to move into Germany north of the dreaded West Wall, or Siegfried Line. It was a far cry from what was occurring on the western front. It would utilize the only reserves remaining to SHAEF but if successful, could bring a much quicker end to the war.

Eisenhower, dubious at first, began giving the project some serious thought. Faced with the possibility of a major slowdown in the Allied advances, such a plan just might work. It could bring a much speedier end to the war. With some reservation that he kept to himself; Ike finally gave his assent. This would resolve the problem of supply for the Broad Front strategy. It would, of course, mean a total investment of Allied assets for the effort. All of the Allied "eggs" would go into the Market Garden basket.

Market Garden - Allied Hopes Fly High

For Market Garden to succeed, not only skill in battle would be required, but also some other factors were vital to the mission. First, enemy resistance would have to be minimal. Any confrontations with enemy armor for the lightly armed paratroopers would be a one-sided fight.

Next, the weather would have to cooperate. Such a sizable airborne force required more than one para drop. There simply were not enough transports to carry all of the three divisions into battle. It would have to be done in stages. Sudden bad weather could stop reinforcing flights from getting through.

Finally, the British ground forces would have to move quickly. Any unforeseen delays could mean a disastrous end for the American and British paratroopers.

A Strike from the Air

The Allied reserves in England were all airborne. They included the American 101st, 82nd, and the untried 17th (together known as the XVIII U.S. Corps, Airborne), the British 1st, and the Polish Brigade. In addition, there was an "air portable" division, the 52nd Lowland, which could be flown into battle, once an airfield had been secured.

They, along with other special units, including the Troop Carrier commands were place under the command of General L.H. Brereton. It was called the First Allied Air Army. General Browning led the British under his command. Browning was known for his loyalty to Montgomery, though many felt that his first loyalty was to his on rank and ascendancy in the ranks.

The nature of these reserves limited the choices that Eisenhower had as to the nature of a new offensive. His reserve was not conventional, but airborne. With this in mind, he

encouraged Allied planners to use "imagination and daring" to develop an attack. In response, 18 feasible air attacks had been devised.

Three of them had almost reached launching stage. One of the problems planners had to contend with was that the Allies were advancing so fast that by the time an airborne operation was completely set up, ground forces would have gained the objective, or be very close to doing so.

This would have to be a plan that would strike very deep into enemy lines. It would require holding a substantial area for perhaps even days, until land reinforcements could reach them.

General Omar Bradley, Commander of the American First Army, recalled vividly one morning when British General Bernard Montgomery strode briskly into SHAEF Headquarters on September 10th, and proposed a bold two-part operation aimed at entering well into Germany before the end of the month.

Montgomery was well known for being overly cautious on any offensive endeavor. His personality was the exact opposite of General George Patton. Montgomery was careful and precise; Patton, bold and daring. No wonder everyone at Allied Headquarters was shocked at Montgomery's proposition. Bradley stated, "Had the pious tee totalling Montgomery wobbled into SHAEF with a hangover, I could not have been more astonished than I was by the daring adventure he proposed."

The first part of the plan was named "Market." It involved the insertion of three and one half-airborne divisions along a northern route well into Holland. It would extend some 55 miles. The primary purpose of the drops was to secure certain key bridges and to keep open the highway. There were dozens of bridges along the route chosen, but the ones at the cities of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem.

It was at these locations that the spans covered large expanses of water. They would be difficult if not impossible to replace. And replacing them would take time, which was not a commodity available to the Allied forces. The timetable for the joining of the airborne elements with the assaulting ground forces was the key to making the project work. Thus, the bridges were the key to the operation.

The second part, called "Garden," called for The British 2nd Army, with XXX Corps in the lead, to break through German defenses near the border with Holland and proceed to link up with each airborne unit. It would be led by the British Guards Division straight up the highway.

Thus, a narrow, somewhat tenuous corridor would funnel large numbers of Allied troops and material toward the northern part of Germany. It would be a race against time, and the bridges would be a vital part of the carpet that the airborne troops would lay for the rapid movement of XXX Corps. If the operation were successful, it would be greatly advantageous for three reasons.

First of all, it would cut a key land exit for the German troops remaining in western Holland. Another large benefit would be the flanking of the West Wall, or Siegfried Line. This was a series of static defenses built along Germany's border to protect her from invasion. To punch a hole in this line would take time and cost casualties. Market Garden would eliminate this problem. Finally, it would position British forces for a quick drive into northern Germany, in an area called the Ruhr.

It was this part of Germany that produced most of the war machinery for the country. To take this area would effectively cut off any further supply of vehicles, munitions and equipment for the German Army. Without this resource, Germany could not stand. If successful, it would end the war in that same year. The two plans would work together. Thus, the Operation was named "Market Garden."

It was bold and imaginative. Many Allied leaders were opposed to it. Apparently, Montgomery favored it, because of a number of reasons, the first of which was the glory that would be bestowed upon the British Army in its drive to the heart of the Third Reich. Eisenhower also liked the idea. For him, its greatest benefit would be the liberation of the Schelde Estuary.

This land that controlled the use of the port of Antwerp was in German hands, thus denying the use of it to the Allies. As mentioned earlier, supply was the biggest slowdown to Eisenhower's forces in the fall of 1944. Once Antwerp could be used, the war effort could be greatly accelerated. Considering his present logistics, therefore, Eisenhower decided in favor of the operation.

The two biggest problems for the Allies in executing the project were weather and supply. Since there were not enough air transport for so many men, it would require almost four days to get all the airborne troops into the area. The piecemeal entry of forces into the battle would hamper the holding power of the airborne troops. And then reinforcements were at the mercy of the capricious fall weather in northern Europe. Good flying weather, over which the Allies had absolutely no control, would largely determine the success of the mission.

The date set for the beginning of the attack was September 17th. There were only seven days to get everything in place. It would be done in daylight. The night drops that had taken place in the Normandy invasion had been hampered greatly because they were done at night. The result had been a scattering of airborne forces, which in turn greatly diluted their strength.

The operational plan was simple. First of all, flak units would be suppressed by the Air Force prior to the drop. The airborne units would be divided into two groups that would go to the battle area in two columns. The first would carry troops to the areas around Nijmegen and Arnhem. The second (or southern column) would carry parts of the 101st Airborne Division to Eindhoven, which was the closest objective. It was imperative that a number of major bridges in each of these places be taken and held in order for XXX Corps to proceed expeditiously to Arnhem. The machinery was set in motion for the execution of Market Garden.

The Fates Play a Role

The Allies believed that the area that Market Garden would attack to be held by only remnants of German units. They did not foresee any immediate opposition of serious consequence. They did not know the extent of enemy units in the area. Two Panzer Divisions, the Ninth and Tenth, had been badly depleted during the summer battles of 1944 in Normandy. They had been sent north into Holland for rest and refitting.

General Model had ordered the 10th SS to move on into Germany, where the rebuilding process could be accomplished more swiftly. The 9th SS was then ordered to proceed south to counter the possible enemy assaults at Aachen. By the time the Allied airborne troops were loading, these two panzer divisions were both in the area around Arnhem. One was headed south; the other, north. Thus, without either the Allies or the Germans being aware of the other’s intentions, the foundations for a real battle was being put into place.

Also, during the early days of September, the German High Command, totally unaware of Market Garden, had seen the danger in Holland and rushed what reinforcements they could into the area. The first large enemy to settle into the area was a group of retreating German units under the command of General Kurt Chill. As he passed through Holland, he perceived the seriousness of the situation along the Albert Canal.

Acting with dispatch, he himself initiated a defense that incorporated any troops that were coming through. In his net he caught a conglomeration of Navy, Luftwaffe, and military government troops and men from every conceivable branch of the Wehrmacht. In a very

short time, he converted this hodgepodge of men into a strong defensive fighting force. It was enough to stop the first British probes toward the canal in the first week of September.

The major Army group to settle in and take over the defense was the First Parachute Army, under General Student. His forces included five new parachute regiments, and new parachute antitank battalion, some 5,000 service troops, and battalion of the 2nd Parachute Regiment and the veteran 6th Parachute Regiment. This latter group had distinguished itself admirably in the fighting in Normandy, acquitting itself with the impact of a full division. By the end of the first week, therefore, the German position in Holland had improved considerably.

Enemy Reaction to the Invasion

At 10:25AM on September 17th, 18 transports left England with the Pathfinder teams who would mark the landing zones. Behind them, 1,545 planes and 478 gliders took to the air from 24 different airfields. What a sight that must have been! Very few were lost in route. All of the initial airdrops proved to be a huge success. It would prove to be perhaps the most efficient airdrop in history.

It was from this point, however, that thing began to deteriorate. A glider, shot down near the First Parachute Army's Headquarters, carried on board the complete operational orders for all airborne activities. Within two hours General Student had it in his hands and was aware of all landing zones and objectives of the sky troopers.

Within a short period of time, General Model had barked out orders to the various units under his command in the area to contain the invasion. It would be the task of the First Parachute Army to contain the advance of XXX Corps, and to neutralize the activities of the 101st Airborne around Eindhoven. To handle the situation at Nijmegen, the Corps Feldt and 406th Division was to hold key positions until reinforcements from the II Parachute Corps could arrive.

The situation at Arnhem seemed the least dangerous. This was due to the fact that so many powerful units were at his disposal to control the situation. Model called upon Division Tettau, a collection of various units thrown together under General Hans von Tettau, to immediately attack from the northwest. Orders were then issued to General Bittrich's II SS Panzer Corps with the 9th and 10 SS Panzer Divisions to move toward Arnhem. Once the bridge there was secure, the 10th SS was to proceed to the south to Nijmegen.

The 101st at Eindhoven

The airborne aspect of the operation, or "Market," landed on the first day approximately one-third to one-half of each division. The drops were a huge success, with only 2 per cent casualties. This was in sharp contrasts with casualty estimates as high as 30 per cent. That is not to say, however, that this aspect of the operation was too easy.

Even after fighter bombers had led the way and levelled most of the visible antiaircraft emplacements, the transport aircraft were greeted by well-hidden batteries. As the C-47s flew over, camouflage netting was suddenly swung back hidden enemy positions. Some of the paratroopers told of seeing haystacks opening to disclose nests of 88mm and 20mm AA guns.

In some areas the flak became very intense. One paratrooper recalled being awakened by the firing and gazing out of the small window in his transport, watched horrified as one C-47 to his left burst into flames, and then another. He stated that he had never felt so helpless, and his entire body tightened, waiting for the next shell that would take him and his buddies in flames to the earth.

At that moment the jumpmaster called the men to hook up and line up. In a matter of seconds, the entire stick of paratroopers was in the air. As the soldier looked above him, the plane from which he had just jumped was in flames and beginning to dive to earth. Thankfully, this was the exception and not the rule.

The 101st Airborne would be dropped in the first of the targets of Market Garden. It was the drop zone closest to XXX Corps and they would be the first to link up with the British. The task of the division was the capture of the bridges at Zon, St. Oedenrode, Veghel and Eindhoven. They also had the responsibility of controlling 15 miles of the road, which they would soon rename "Hell's Highway."

General Maxwell Taylor, commander of the "Screaming Eagles," ordered that his first drop be mostly infantry. Artillery would help little, since it did not have the range to cover the area for which he was responsible. He was also counting on the speedy arrival of XXX Corps. He concentrated his drop zones together to avoid the scattering that had occurred during the Normandy invasion.

Three regiments, the 501st, 504th, and 506th, immediately spread out to secure their objectives. The next day more reinforcements arrived, including transportation in the form of jeeps, brought in by glider. The 506th proceeded south toward Eindhoven. When they reached the Wilhelmina Canal, the bridge was blown in their faces. They finally got across the canal and entered Eindhoven. In bitter street fighting, the city was secured. At about 7AM on the third day (Sept.19th), the XXX Corps began passing over a Bailey bridge set up across the canal.

Though this crossing was crucial to the success of the operation, the fiercest fighting for the 101st occurred around the city of Best. With the destruction of the main bridge, the 502nd immediately sought out other bridges that might be used. The German 59th Division was guarding these bridges and put up a spirited defense.

Attacks by two American battalions who rushed the bridges were beaten off. Timely air support from US P-47s and shortage of ammunition for the enemy stopped the attack. Col. Cole, commander of the 2nd Battalion was killed by a German sniper. Many other paratroopers also gave their lives in this area.

Another small unit, stationed near the Wilhelmina Canal was under constant attack by opposing forces. The platoon scout, Pfc. Joe Mann, had been wounded three times, and his arms were useless. As he lay among the wounded, a grenade was tossed in their midst. Seeing it, and with no use of his arms, Pfc. Mann cried, "Grenade!" and then lay back to take the explosion with his body. He would receive the Medal of Honor posthumously.

The only major air strike by the enemy came on D+2, when over 100 twin engine bombers attacked the center of Eindhoven at night. Over 1,000 civilians and a number of British troops were killed. During the third day, Germans attacked at various points within the boundaries of the 101st. The 107th Panzer Brigade almost overran the Division HQ. Timely use of a few antitank guns, brought in by glider, stopped the assault. This "Indian raid" style of fighting would continue throughout the Market Garden Operation as the 101st tried to keep the highway open for the Allies.

The 82nd at Nijmegen

Under the command of General James Gavin, the 82nd faced a formidable task. In addition to taking various towns, and six bridges, the hill mass southeast of Nijmegen would have to be seized. Most of the land was flat. The only sizeable hill was vital to controlling the area. This ridge completely dominated the area around the bridges. For this reason, Gavin opted for a battalion of small 75mm howitzers to airdropped on the first day. His forces would land to the east of Nijmegen and proceed directly to their objectives.

Even though lacking in manpower, Gavin sent his men toward the bridges at the Maas and Maas- Waal Canal, and the high ground nearby. He would thus secure an entry point for XXX Corps. The 505th Regiment would take Groesbeck and two bridges over the canal. The 508th would secure Nijmegen. It was the task of the 504th to capture the bridge at Grave, further to the south.

Even though a number of the bridges were destroyed before the paratroopers could capture them, a couple were taken so that XXX Corps could proceed. The key bridge was to the northwest, at the city of Nijmegen. Confusion in orders delayed a rapid advance to that point. This was to be deeply regretted later. By the time the Americans had arrived there, reinforcements were on hand.

The German 9th SS Reconnaissance Battalion had gotten through Arnhem before the British gained control of the bridge and moved south to Nijmegen. Bitter street fighting ensued. Efforts to fight their way through the city to the bridge were proving difficult. The enemy was resisting fiercely.

Also, during the period, the initial landing zones came under attack from German units emerging from the Reichswald forest. A timely charge by a battalion from the 505th caused the Germans to panic and retreat, just as gliders were being released to land in these zones.

By mid-morning of D+2, XXX Corps made its first connection with the 82nd. General Gavin met with General Horrocks and announced his intentions of sending 2nd Battalion, 505th, to attack the bridge from both ends at once. This meant sending part of the battalion in boats across the Waal River. It would be the next morning before the boats could be transported to the front lines.

Meanwhile, the 2nd battalion initiated attacks against the south end of the bridge. A battalion of tanks and artillery fire from the Guards Division supported them.

On the morning of the next day, after a fierce barrage against the north side of the river, American paratroopers got under way. The crossing was a nightmare. The waters were fierce and treacherous. German fire was taking a deadly toll of men and boats. Of the 26 boats that started out, only 13 made it to the far shore.

The remaining boats went back to ferry more men across, all the while taking casualties. Once ashore, the paratroopers charged the enemy, wiping out one strong point after another. Soon they were at the north end of the bridge. At the same time, units on the south end had finally broken through, and tanks began to cross the bridge.

Although charges had been placed to destroy the bridge, they did not go off. This was probably due to the rapid advance of the attackers, the skilful work of US engineers who dismantled charges, and Dutch snipers, who picked off German demolition teams as they prepared the charges. By now, however, it was D+4 and time was running out in Arnhem.

The British 1st Airborne Division

The "Red Devils", as they were known, made their initial landings some six miles to the northeast of the city of Arnhem. This was due to the terrain and buildings, which could prove deadly to landing paratroopers. The initial drops proved to be highly successful. The casualty rate was less than nominal, and landings were right on target.

Being so far away from the city, however, wasted valuable time and assets. Part of the initial landing force would have to remain at the landing sites to protect them. Thus, they could not participate in the actual battle.

Two main objectives were in front of the British. The first was Arnhem and its bridges. The second was the high ground to the north of the city. It would be vital to provide XXX Corps a bridgehead sizeable enough to pass through.

Thus, only three battalions were available for the assault. Two of them became immediately pinned down. One was heading for the northeast for the high ground; the other, directly east toward Arnhem. Both ran into the 9th SS Panzer Division. They were stopped dead in their tracks.

The final battalion, led by Colonel J.D. Frost, took a secondary road and avoided the Germans. An attempt to take the railway bridge failed, as it was blown in their faces. The

group proceeded to Arnhem itself. Other units later found their way into Arnhem, so that by that night, some 500 soldiers occupied the buildings and ground overlooking the north end of the bridge. Two attempts to take the south end of the bridge by Frost's men failed. One was a direct attack across the bridge. The other was by rowboat.

On D+1, the enemy had begun to react. Division von Tettau attacked the landing zones to the northwest. From the east units of the 9thSS and 10SS Panzer Division moved toward Arnhem to link up with the units in the north. Frost's position became surrounded, and any attempts to reinforce him ended in disaster.

Meanwhile, the XXX Corps, once across the Waal River, needed another day to consolidate and prepare defenses for that bridgehead. They then proceeded northward, fighting all the way. At Ressen, just eight miles south of Arnhem, a strong enemy force including tanks, infantry and 88 guns stalled the advance again. They would have a difficult time breaking out again (scenario Mktgdn05).

On D+3, September 20th, Colonel Frost's situation was desperate. No one could get through to him. His perimeter had continued to diminish. He now held only a few buildings. He had been wounded badly and was hardly able to control the situation. On that afternoon, tanks from the 9th SS rolled into the area, levelled their guns and began to fire at point-blank range against the remaining defenders.

It was becoming increasingly apparent with each passing hour that the pendulum of war was swinging toward the German side of the clock. Seeing that all hope was gone, Frost gave the order to leave the wounded, and for remaining paratroopers to break out the best way that they could. None would make it. The bridge now belonged to the Germans.

The rest of the Red Devils were in a similar situation around the drop sites. They were unable to break out. With each passing day, their defensive perimeter was growing smaller. A positive contribution was the insertion of part of the Polish Brigade, under General Sosabowski. Even though the weather was foul, 53 aircraft dumped their loads on the south side of the river. The Germans had destroyed the ferry they had hoped to use to cross the river. They used boats to cross and join up with the beleaguered British forces.

Stretched to the Limit

On D+5, the Germans were striking the corridor at various places in an attempt to sever the lifeline northward. It was bitter fighting for the British and Americans trying to hold the road open. A few recon units took long twisting routes and made some contact with the Red Devils on the north side of the river. Their advance was not of any consequence to the Germans, who now seemed to control the situation at Arnhem. By now the "Garden" part of the operation was still halfway between Nijmegen and Arnhem.

One last effort to resupply was made by XXX Corps. A long column of tanks and DUKWS (amphibious trucks) made its way to Driel, just southwest of Arnhem. They attempted to cross the Neder Rijn, but the mud on the banks was too deep. At last some 50 Polish soldiers made it across on rafts.

General Horrocks, Commander of XXX Corps was still determined to establish a bridgehead. He ordered the 43rd division to cross the river a few miles to the west at Renkum. A British armored brigade had established a strong position there. Hardly had he given the order, when the realization of its futility set in. He quickly rescinded these instructions, finally admitting the impossibility of the task.

On D+8, September 25, the orders were sent to General Urqhart and the remnants of the 1st Airborne Division to abandon his position. The wounded were to be left behind. Mercifully it was dark, with a heavy rain to protect their movements. A steel curtain of protective fire was given by artillery of XXX Corps to protect the survivors. As daylight came, some 300 men were still stranded on the north side of the river. Most of them would never make it. Of the

9,000 Allied soldiers who had fought on the north side of the river, only about 2,300 would return.

After the Fact

How should Operation Market Garden be classified? In the attaining of all of its objectives, it was a failure. There were, however, many positive contributions. A 65-mile salient had been created in German lines. Many key river crossings, cities and air bases had been taken. German units badly needed in other places, were now tied down in the Netherlands. The German forces around Arnhem, already debilitated from the fighting in Normandy suffered further horrendous losses.

They had taken 3,300 casualties, including over 1,000 killed in action.

On the debit side, the beginning of an immediate German collapse was not achieved. Losses for the Allies were extremely high. The air borne units had been used up. The 101st and 82nd would not be able to extricate themselves from the fighting for weeks. The British First Airborne Division had suffered catastrophic losses.

Of the original 10,000-man force, it had suffered 1,200 dead and 6,642 missing wounded or captured. It had, in fact, been almost wiped out. So grim had been its suffering that its "number" was retired. The British First Airborne Division was taken from the order of battle table and has never been reconstituted.

Whatever the verdict on the effort, the noble fighting spirit of both sides has been written indelibly into the pages of history. As in all desperate situations, the courage and tenacity of the human will was demonstrated time and again.

One Dutch civilian who had been witness to that which transpired in Arnhem wrote of the event, "...at the end of this hopeless war week the battle has made an impression on my soul. Glory to all our dear, brave Tommies and to all the people who gave their lives to help and save others."

Anyone who had the honor to participate in this operation would never have to be ashamed of his part in the endeavor, or consider his contribution useless.

The West Wall

With the partial failure of Market Garden, the emphasis shifted back to a general push into Germany. Eisenhower realized, however, that there were just not enough material and manpower to execute it. One of the army groups would have to get priority in men and supplies in order to break through to the enemy homeland.

After much discussion, it was decided that Montgomery's 21st Army Group would make the major drive. In order to ease the British general's mind, he assigned a part of Bradley's 12th Army Group under Montgomery's command. Its mission was to protect the southern flank of the 21st Army Group. To accomplish this, the armies to the south, including Patton and Devers would be lower on the list of available fuel and supplies. Needless to say, the American generals were outraged at being curtailed in their operations to give all that was requested to the British forces. Patton argued that he had proven that his men could do the job. All of these most persuasive arguments fell on deaf ears.

It should be noted that there was intense dislike and spirit of rivalry between Patton and Montgomery. In fact, each commanding general is a study of its own. There were men of varying temperaments, experience, and ability. The two outstanding ones, whose names are known even among those with little knowledge of military history, were Bernard Montgomery and George Patton.

In many respects they were different. Montgomery was quiet and cautious. He carefully calculated his every move and sought every assurance that he could succeed before undertaking any moves. Patton was loud and precipitous. He moved suddenly, often without

a carefully thought-out plan. He did not concern himself with what he considered unimportant factors. He relied upon himself and his men. If he could get help, fine; if not, he would do it alone.

The similarities of the two were that they were both arrogant, self-aggrandizing individuals. They loved the spotlight. The glory of war, and the accolades of the press and their comrades were food to their souls. As a result, they did not care for one another. Each saw the other as a self- aggrandizing person, who presented a threat to the other's career. This rivalry began in Africa, grew in Sicily, and became a real problem in France. It was the diplomat Eisenhower that used both to the best of their capabilities. The commanding General of SHAEF had to be both a politician and a military strategist.

The Brunt of breaking through the West Wall would fall neither to Montgomery or Patton. It would the 1st US Army, under the leadership of General Courtney L. Hodges that would have the honor and deal with the horror of punching holes through the German Siegfried Line or the West Wall. General Courtney was a veteran of war.

He had been a line captain in 1918 in France under General Pershing. Highly respected in the military, he was a man of detail. Someone said, "When you give a briefing for Patton (3rd Army), you talk in terms of regiments. When you brief Hodges, you must talk in terms of platoons." His thoroughness, mixed with a steely determination, made him the ideal man for the job.

Under his command were three Army Corps. In the center was the V Corps, commanded by General Gerow. It included the 3rd Armored and 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions. To the south was General Collins VII Corps, made up of the 5th Armored and the 4th and 28th Infantry Divisions. Finally, in the north, the weakest of the three Corps was the XIXth, under the leadership of General Corlett. Only two divisions formed the Corps, and both were on the bottom of the list for receiving supplies. They were the 30th Infantry Division and the 3rd Armored Division. They buttressed with Montgomery's 21st Army in the Netherlands.

Thus, General Hodges had responsibility for over 200,000 troops, 60 per cent of them combat infantrymen. His authority extended over 8 divisions, three of the armored, with nearly 1,000 tanks. It should be noted that many of these pieces of armor were literally worn out in the rapid move across France. Less than 50 per cent of them were in front line condition and ready for combat.

This would be the force that would begin the crossing into Germany from the Netherlands in the north to the Ardennes in the south. The First Army occupied nearly 300 miles of the front line in September 1944, a sizable chunk of real estate!

Other Activities in September

While Operation Market Garden took precedent over all other activities in Europe, the war was still going on elsewhere. American and French units were slowed somewhat due to the priority of Market Garden. Patton would not be held in place, however, and continued press forward. He ordered his commanders to make "patrols in force." If they found an opening for advance, of course they were to exploit it. All of this was done in a so called "defensive posture."

In a general meeting, Eisenhower gave Montgomery and his armies the green light to break through into Germany. Before doing so, however, he ordered that the British forces were to take Antwerp, the Schelde Estuary, and THEN proceed to the German border at the Ruhr. Patton would press onward to the Saar. Hodge would bring all of the First Army line abreast and then hold in place temporarily. Eisenhower was determined to have Antwerp and the channels leading to it in Allied hands before attempting the major assault on Germany.

As mentioned in the beginning, by September 11th the German West Wall was pierced at Aachen. The defenders were in panic at Americans inside Germany. It was only a reconnaissance in force, however, and the Americans withdrew. By this time most of the

French coast was in Allied hands. Eisenhower again pressured Montgomery to take the area around Antwerp, known as the Schelde Estuary, so as to facilitate the use of the port. Montgomery was so intent on getting the glory of crossing into the Ruhr, that he placed the Antwerp objective in a secondary role. He envisioned the Germans being conquered by British forces, with the other armies following in his wake.

Finally, after the failure of Market Garden, Eisenhower spoke very plainly, and made it imperative that the primary British and Canadian assaults be directed toward Antwerp and the Schelde Estuary. By the end of the month Calais, Brest, and most of the area around Antwerp were in British/Canadian hands. To the south, Patton and Hodge continued to launch minor attacks into Germany. By the middle of September, a broad front extended from north to south either at or close to the German border. Most of Belgium and Luxembourg were in Allied hands.

After the assassination attempt against Hitler in July 1944, he became even more paranoid, and exercised total control over the armed forces in every field of battle. This long range, inept leadership severely restricted the initiative and ingenuity of the German military leadership. Hitler, by his stupid decisions would unwittingly hasten the end of the war. During the month of September, the general idea of a strong German counteroffensive in the near future was forming in the Fuhrer's mind. It would eventually materialize in the Battle of the Bulge in December.

The Problems to be Overcome.

Various strongpoints and difficulties confronted the attackers against Germany. The terrain was formidable. At the northern end of the front lines where the British and Canadians operated, the waterways and marshy terrain of the Netherlands severely limited the advance of armor. In the area of the northern sector of 1st Army was the Aachen Gap. Heavily wooded, the corridor was narrow and protected by the Wurm River and the West Wall. To the south was the Eifel, or elevated mountainous terrain and was also heavily forested. It actually formed part of the Ardennes.

The Siegfried Line, or West Wall as the Germans called it, was a series of aging pillboxes, antitank devices, and other obstacles. At some points, it was over three miles in depth. In spite of a state of decay and disrepair, it was still a formidable defensive barrier. It was begun in 1936 as the mirrored face of the French Maginot Line. When the Blitzkrieg was so successful in 1940, the Siegfried Line was abandoned and left to sit there unattended. In August 1944, seeing that the Allies were rapidly approaching the German western border, Hitler gave orders that urgent reconstruction was to be begun on the neglected defenses.

In September, the West Wall was largely unmanned, due to severe losses inflicted upon the Germans. Through the years it had been stripped of all armaments and equipment. As the Allies drew nearer, a frantic effort was made by the Third Reich to get troops to the area. Slave labor was sent to the area and worked twenty-four hours a day to put things in order. Skirmishes on the 14th of September between reconnaissance forces of the US V Corps and the recently installed German soldiers frightened the enemy high command. They had gotten troops into the area just in the nick of time. They were, however, able to occupy enough of the line to say that they had won the race.

In reality, the Allies were unable to mount any major offensives, due to the supply problem. The Market Garden operation had drained Allied resources, and it would be a few weeks before the rest of the Allied armies would be resupplied sufficiently to continue the attack. In the meantime, these forces were forced to sit and wait.

In reality, Eisenhower feared the possibility of a major counterattack. He did not know that German forces at this point were very vulnerable on the American front. Two German panzer divisions in the area were little more than regimental in size and had only a few dozen operational tanks each! The Americans could do little, however, as they did not have the fuel for maneuver, or the ammunition for attack. The weather during this month was colder

than usual, and the need for heavier uniforms was becoming increasingly urgent. It was for that reason that permission was given for only probes and attacks no higher than battalion level to be executed. This, of course, would give the German forces just what they needed: time to reform and rebuild.

October: Breaking through the West Wall

The weather was rapidly changing in Europe. The warm summer months of Western Europe were now giving way too much cooler temperatures. The rains continued to increase. The days were short and dark, the nights, long and wet. The fall of 1944 brought three times the average rainfall to the area. Temperatures were dropping fast. It seemed that the Gods of weather had turned their backs for the moment on the Allied enterprise, so much so that General Patton gave orders to his chaplains to write appropriate prayers for good weather.

In addition, two major difficulties had arisen that tended to slow down the Allied march through France. One was a growing lack of sufficient manpower; the other, keeping those men on the field with adequate provisions: clothing, fuel, and ammunition were top priorities.

The Problem of Antwerp

Supplies were still a major problem; thus, the importance of capturing the port cities. When the British XXX Corps captured Antwerp, on September 4th, they found most of the port facilities intact. This was a great triumph, but the port was useless to the Allies. The reason was that to get to it, one had to pass from the sea through a 54-mile channel, called the Schelde Estuary. This area was shaped like a large mouth, open to the sea. In the middle was a tongue of land that split the channel in two. To get to Antwerp, shipping would have to go "down the throat" of the Schelde Estuary to get there. That area was stiffly held by the Germans. Until it was freed, no supplies could get to Antwerp.

General Montgomery, instead of taking this area, had simply ignored it. He preferred to head east for the Rhine. His ego demanded that his British and Canadian forces be the first units into Germany. He therefore tended to ignore SHAEF's pleas to clear the area, so that this vital supply link could be used. With the activation of Antwerp, all the British forces could be supplied from there, leaving the ports further south to supply the Americans. As it was, the existing ports had to supply the British first, since they would lead the brunt of the new offensive. The GIs were quickly running out of everything.

In spite of all this, by October 1944, Montgomery's 21st Army Group seemed stuck in a blind alley. Eisenhower had given priority to the British forces, including the Market Garden operation. He had gone so far as to assign various American armored and infantry divisions to British command.

None of this proved to give the results that SHAEF Headquarters desired. Monty had not gotten across the Rhine. His forces were making little progress. Furthermore, Antwerp still lay idle.

Eisenhower, usually the diplomat, went to a hard stance and took two important steps. He stated plainly to Montgomery that before anything else, he must get port of Antwerp open and operating. His words to the British general were, "I insist upon the importance of Antwerp...I am prepared to give you everything for the capture of the approaches to Antwerp."

He then switched his major offensive emphasis behind General Bradley's 12th Army Group to move to the Rhine. The American forces indeed had made the most progress. Even with the limitations of inadequate supply, the GIs had moved through France and were knocking on Germany's door. It seemed only natural, then, to back the troops that were making the most progress in the European campaign.

This was not to say that the American troops had it any easier. Quite to the contrary, they were faced with formidable terrain, and an enemy that was now going to fight within its homeland against enemy invaders. That was surely a motivation for them to fight even

harder. The invasion of one's own home is enough to make anyone make a life-or-death stand.

Eisenhower had previously stated to his generals in September that the primary objective of all efforts must be to take the area known as the Ruhr. It was the industrial heartland of Germany. Further, the land was ideal for rapid movement. Once that was taken, Berlin would be only a matter of days away. He called this, "...the main effort of the present phase of operation."

It would now be General Hodge's First Army that would initiate a drive to the Rhine River. Hodge was the worrier, the careful planner. He devised a four-fold plan. He would secure the high ground in the Monschau Corridor, including the Hurtgen Forest. He also would take Aachen, a pivotal German city. XIX Corps would then link with VII Corps. The Peel Marshes, a large area between the British 21st Army to the north, and the XIX Corps to the south had been bypassed. Both Americans and British had gone around it on either side. Thus, it was an enemy salient (or bulge), and it would have to be taken to maintain a broad even front.

The Americans Go Ahead

Of primary importance was the German city of Aachen was very important. It could serve as a hinge to swing toward the Rhine, and as a gateway to the Hurtgen Forest. It would have to be taken. The attack began towards the German city began on October 2nd. After a mini carpet bombing that was largely ineffectual, the US 30th Division got under way toward Aachen.

The Germans reacted slowly, because they could not believe that a major assault was taking place with only two US regiments. A hole was opened by the troops of the 30th, and the 2nd Armored Division shot through it. The 30th then drove to the south, as the 1st Division attacked northward. When they linked up on October 8th, an infantry regiment and a tank battalion were sent in take it. It would take 10 days and the support of 300 artillery pieces plus massive air strikes to secure the city. By that time, it was only rubble. This was to be the first German city to be taken.

A deep penetration was made by Collin's VII Corps into the Stolberg Corridor. Part of the Ninth Division was "out on a limb." They had penetrated both bands of the West Wall before the Germans could man them in any strength. Thus, they were extended miles ahead of the other Allied forces. They would hold to what had been gained as other units sought to come up to them. The Hurtgen Forest concerned Hodge very much. To take it, he ordered the rest of the 9th Division to move through the northern part of it. They were decimated and unable to break through.

Hodge then sent a reinforced 28th Division to do the job. This battle for the Hurtgen Forest would continue into November. Led by General Cota, of D-Day fame, it also would become completely undone in trying to achieve that which was demanded of them. The fighting in the Forest was perhaps some of the most intensive and costly in casualties to the American forces during the entire European campaign.

Patton's 3rd Army was largely inactive during October. This was caused by the above-mentioned problems, that of supply and manpower. Naturally, "Blood and Guts" chafed and ranted under these restrictions. He truly felt that he had the initiative and could reach the Rhine with his troops (and he may have been right). After a major battle north of Arracourt, severe losses were inflicted on the Germans. Hitler threw one division after another at the Americans, with horrendous casualties.

When the Germans finally broke off the battle, they had lost over 6,000 men, and 300 tanks and assault guns. Patton's troops were 600 combat casualties and 90 pieces of armor. He then concentrated on the fortresses at Metz. These were huge, well-built complexes. Like icebergs, they were mostly underground. With only 6 rounds for each artillery piece per day, little support could be given.

Hard Going in the North

The British forces, after the partial success of Market Garden, turned most of their attention toward securing the land areas in the channels leading to Antwerp. The entire month of October was given to taking one strong point after another in the area. The burden of the task was given to the Canadian troops. Some American units of Simpson's Ninth Army were assigned to the command of the British General to facilitate the job. Unable to resist the temptation, Montgomery also launched another attack toward the Ruhr from Nijmegen. They were still north of the Siegfried Line, and Montgomery felt that he just might be the first to get across the Rhine. This effort also ended in failure.

At the end of October, Eisenhower met again with General Bradley. He felt that under the circumstances, Bradley's 12th Army group had made the most progress. He told Bradley that his goals for the upcoming offensive would include the elimination of every enemy strong point west of the Rhine, establishing bridgeheads on the east side of the river, and making penetrations deep into Germany.

November: Hard Fighting and Bad Weather

The weather in Europe continued to deteriorate rapidly. Massive, allied air support for ground operations was constantly hampered by inclement conditions. Operation Queen was scheduled to begin with a carpet bombing similar to the one executed near St. Lo in July. Bad weather caused one postponement after another until November 16th. The problem of supplies was gradually improving. The port at Antwerp was still unavailable, however, as Canadian, and British troops fought for domination of the entrances to it. The German defenders all along the Schelde Estuary were obeying Hitler's constant "fight to the last man" edict.

Another Problem Arises

Manpower now loomed as a growing problem. The Allies by this time had 60 divisions in Europe, stretching from Holland to Switzerland across a broad front. Casualties, while lighter than expected, had been greater than the influx of replacements. The end result was that most units, from squad level upward were short of men.

One solution was the adaptation of large AA units into infantry units. With the Luftwaffe largely absent in the war, these men could be put to better use in the trenches. Eisenhower stated to General Marshall that to continue the drive, thirty more divisions were needed. Of course, this would again create another supply problem. At that moment, it was difficult to maintain the Allied armies already engaged in battle.

By November 1944, however, General Eisenhower felt that it was imperative to get a large offensive moving toward the Rhine River. The coming winter would create even more problems for the Allied forces.

Slugging it Out on All Fronts

The British, with the loan of various US divisions, would continue its push toward the Ruhr in the northern sector. They would also keep the capture of the entrances to Antwerp as a top priority. Fighting was hard in the area, and progress was dreadfully slow. US forces were still fighting the battle for the Hurtgen Forest. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the war. The 28th Division, under General Cota, had been cut to pieces, and withdrawn. The 4th and 9th continued the fight. One key area was around the city of Schmidt. Fighting in this area raged for weeks. It was taken, and then lost and finally retaken.

Meanwhile, US General Bradley opted to use the First Army (the largest Army group in the American command) to initiate a drive to the Rhine River. General Hodges, still the cautious commander, decided to use his VII Corps, under the command of General Collins to spearhead the attack. General "Lightning Joe" always seemed to live up to his name. His Corps could be counted on to get the job done, no matter how difficult. The original plan to

begin in early November continued to be postponed until the 16th, due to the weather. Gains again were limited due to the intense resistance.

General Patton's Third Army to the south was to neutralize the large German city of Metz. Patton had made efforts to take it in October, but a severe shortage of ammunition made this impossible. During November, a double envelopment of the city was initiated by three divisions (5th, 90th, 10th Armored). The 95th went in to take it. The final surrender came when Patton convinced the leaders of the resisting forces that it was far more honorable to surrender to him than to rear area support units that would follow him.

The Growing Allied Army

The Sixth Army Group was taken over in August 1944 by General Jacob Devers. It was the force farthest to the south in the allied line. General Devers was an arrogant man, which caused many to dislike him. When Bradley put him on a committee to make recommendations for promotions, Devers put his own name first on the list.

He also was very aggressive in battle. He pushed his troops hard. Thankfully, the terrain was somewhat easier; the enemy less resistant, and there was no great lack of supplies due to the proximity of Marseilles. His troops continued to advance to the German border. Lady luck seemed to smile on his efforts at this time. The American Seventh and the French 1st Armies were making large, rapid gains in their campaign. The French burst through the Balfour Gap and were knocking on the enemy's door.

On reaching the Rhine, the Black Forest stood before them on the other side. The industrial city of Colmar was nearby. Devers sent his Sixth Corps to attack it. The 36th Division fought through to the outskirts but was then ordered to halt. Politics had determined that the French be allowed to conquer the city itself.

The French 1st Army moved slowly to the attack, long enough for German reinforcements had gotten into the city to make it impossible to capture it with the forces available. A valuable opportunity had been lost. The city was then placed under siege. The area was called the "Colmar Pocket" (a "pocket" about the size of Rhode Island!) and it formed a large ugly salient sticking into the Allied right flank, similar to a huge thumb poked into the ribs, and just about as comfortable.

Germany's Response

Germany, in the meantime, had rebounded miraculously after the destruction of so much of their army in France. Every day that the Allied armies were slowed in their advance, Germany was growing stronger. Hitler had diverted his attention to the western borders and left the German forces in the east to fend for themselves.

The Fuhrer felt that all was lost in the war with Russia and any gains or impact would have to be made against the Allied armies encroaching Germany's borders in the west. In addition to maintaining a 500-mile front to the west, over 35 divisions that had been virtually destroyed were fleshed out. Restrictions for induction were lowered so as to include men hitherto unable to wear the uniform of the Third Reich. Weapons were still being produced, and technicians worked at a feverish rate in the development of even newer, deadlier arms. Armor still rolled off the assembly line and headed to the front. The critical shortages for Germany were fuel oil and communications equipment.

Besides holding the line, the Fuhrer's master plan of a huge counterattack was continuing. Three full Armies (two of them were Panzer Armies) were forming to the east of the Ardennes. Under no circumstances could they be used for anything else, even if ground had to be given up to the Allied attackers. This powerful new force belonged to Hitler. He alone controlled its actions. He was firmly convinced that this venture would change the course of the war in the west.

December: A Bitter Surprise

The month of December brought some of the hardest weather upon Europe in over 30 years. For the Allied armies, it was devastating. The cold was intense. There were cloudy skies three days out of four, and air support was cut to a minimum. Maneuvering along the treacherous, icy roads was a nightmare for the supply convoys that sought to keep the broad front supplied.

Still Slow Going

In the North, Montgomery's forces were plodding along ever so slowly. He attributed this to a lack of forces and kept pestering Eisenhower to put part of the US troops under his command. When the commanding General relented, it was still the same old story. Montgomery's moment of glory seemed to have passed.

To the South, Patton was forcing his way, even though all sorts of inclement weather and supply difficulties, ever closer to the Rhine River. The Rhine would be the last natural barrier into the heart of Germany, and all Allied commanders were seeking the glory of being the first to establish a firm bridgehead. In the III Army area, it seemed to be a private war between Patton and the Germans.

Various tributaries were crossed by Patton's forces, including the Eichel, the Roselle, and others. The intelligence people on Patton's staff noticed the buildup of the Sixth Panzer Army slightly to the north of them and deduced that a large German counterattack was in the making. SHAEF continued to largely ignore these warnings.

During the Battle of the Bulge, smaller, but intense counterattacks were directed against some of Patton's front-line troops. They were all repulsed. It would the III Army that would be called upon to pull a large portion of its units, turn left, and then head north toward the German salient. Patton had prepared for this eventuality and reacted in record time. It would the 4th Armored Division in reserve that would lead the way to Bastogne.

Farthest south, the Seventh Army was moving swiftly toward Strasbourg. The symbolic importance of this ancient city to Germans and French alike was almost as great as that of Paris. French tanks and troops would finally liberate it. By now they were also close to the banks of the Rhine, but before them lay the ominous Black Forest. The large industrial city of Colmar was still untaken. There were significant advances, but much to be done.

In the center, Hodges First Army had been involved in months of hard fighting. Many of his troops, such as the 28th Infantry Division, were badly in need of rest. Some units in his Army were at less than fifty per cent strength. Getting to the Roer had cost Hodges 47,000 casualties. Three months after crossing the Our River, American troops had advanced 22 miles into Germany. The Rhine was more than 30 miles away, and the enemy still held Schmidt, still controlled the dams and was still gutting U.S. regiments in the Hurtgen Forest. Bradley's winter offensive had failed.

The area of the Ardennes Forest was very quiet and seemed ideal for rest and training. Troy Middleton's VIII Corps was holding this part of the line. Thrust into it were units that needed a break from combat, refitting and resupply. Also sent to the area were brand new units, for training and preparation to enter the battle. These would be the units that would face the German blitzkrieg of 1944.

A Surprise Blitzkrieg

Three German armies, carefully hidden had been building for over two months in the area. When all was in readiness, and the weather became horrible, which greatly favored Hitler's troops, they struck with incredible furor. The few military prophets that had detected the possibility of the assault, Colonel Monk Dickson of the First Army, and Colonel Oscar Koch of the Third Army, had been ignored. Now well equipped, strongly motivated German tanks and soldiers drove hard into US lines.

The onslaught was more than the American forces in the area could handle. The line bent, then broke. The fighting would continue for almost a month. A huge salient or "bulge" was created in Allied lines. Hitler's dream of reaching Antwerp was far too imaginary to come true. Nevertheless, the Allied offensive was brought to a screeching halt. During the last two weeks of December, all efforts were directed to stopping the enemy offensive.

A Deep Penetration

For over seven days, the German army had relentlessly pushed westward through the Ardennes Forest in the last major Axis offensive of the Second World War. It came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge. In reality, it was a combination of over a hundred battles and many more minor skirmishes and firefights.

The idea had been borne in the mind of Hitler some three months earlier. Germany's last resources in manpower, munitions, fuel and armor had been carefully and secretly moved to the Ardennes sector of the U.S. First Army lines. In a sudden unexpected move, the Wehrmacht began moving hundreds of tanks and thousands of men forward like a tidal wave, and avalanche of firepower against the unsuspecting GIs in the supposed quietest sector of the line.

Early on December 16th, nearly 900 German artillery pieces orchestrated a rude awakening of the four American divisions defending the area. Behind the crescendo of steel they came, fighting and killing as they moved forward. When a particular U.S. position proved difficult, the tanks and troops simply poured around it and moved again. It was like a rush of water, that finding it cannot move the rock in its path, simply flows all around it and continues its mad rush.

Three German armies, the 5th Panzer, 6th Panzer and 7th Armies with over a quarter of a million men and nearly 1,000 pieces of armor in nine Panzer and fourteen infantry divisions were attacking. Before the struggle reached a climax around Christmas day, the Americans would field 400,000 troops and 1,100 tanks from 1st and 3rd Armies and the British XXX Corps to stop the enemy and begin to drive him back from whence he came. They included seven armored, two airborne, and eighteen infantry divisions.

The Germans had two points in their favor, surprise, and weather. Not only were the front-line troops guarding the "Ghost Front" taken completely by surprise, but also deeply overcast skies kept the USAAF on the ground. One of the biggest assets of the Allies, air supremacy, had been nullified by nasty weather.

What began as a bang, however, slowly became a sputter. Intense resistance at two main centers of advance, St. Vith and Bastogne, coupled with the failure to capture certain major American fuel dumps would prove to be major factors in the undoing of the effort.

By December 24th, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the final goal of the drive, Antwerp, would not be reached. The US hard driving 3rd Army moving in from the south, had penetrated the defensive lines of the enemy's Seventh Army and were on the verge of breaking through to the valiant paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division barely holding at Bastogne. In the north, Pieper and the 1 SS Panzer Corps were approaching stalemate.

In the center of the drive, however, the 5th Panzer Army commanded by General von Manteuffel, was within 15 miles of the Meuse River. It was the last big geographical obstacle to the advance of the panzers. If the Germans got across the river in strength, Antwerp could be in real danger.

Three German Panzer divisions closed in on the area around Dinant at the Meuse. Facing them was the American 84th Infantry division, stretched from the town of Marche to the Meuse.

Attached to them were various other units including some Cavalry forces. The German spearhead included the 2nd Panzer, 116th Panzer, and the Panzer Lehr Divisions. These were the troops and tanks upon which Hitler pinned his last hopes of success.

Allied Reaction

As the weather improved and units in the Allied camp got moving, the German hope for success diminished accordingly. The only ray of hope lay with Manteuffel's deepest penetration near Dinant and the Meuse. Seeing the opportunity, Hitler quickly switched the focus from the VI Panzer Army, bogged down in fighting and out of fuel to the northeast and placed on the V Panzer Army.

By moving in a northwesterly direction, the Panzer divisions had now entered the zone of control of the U. S. VII Corps, under the command of General "Lightning Joe" Collins. He was proving to be one of the most able Corps commanders in Ike's repertoire of leaders. He had already proven to be a wise and aggressive commander. He had received some of the hardest nuts to crack in the campaign and done a magnificent job of tackling them.

But a new problem had arisen. Since Bradley had refused to move his 12th Army Group headquarters back from possible danger to the south, there was a command problem that Ike anticipated early in the fighting. Fearing that communications with Hodges First Army would be difficult, he switched their control to British General Montgomery.

Monty was delighted. His first task was to report to 1st Army Headquarters and point out all their mistakes. But Monty was on the scene, and everything would be quickly put right. The British leader felt that the front lines needed to be "tidied up" and the first order of business was retreat in some areas. This rankled U. S. leaders no end. They just did not want to have to give up ground that they would have to fight for and die for later. The Americans much preferred a hold in place order.

Restraints were also put on Collins, which brought much displeasure to the fighting commander. When the 2nd Armored Division was transferred to his command, Collins saw a unique opportunity to deal the Panzer units a mortal blow and drive them back from the Meuse. He quickly conferred with General Harmon, commander of the 2nd. They began immediately to make plans to slug it out with the German armor and kick them all over the map.

At the last moment orders came down for a withdrawal of sorts, but Collins chose to tactfully interpret it to allow the attack to continue. Thus, the stage was being set for a major confrontation near the Meuse River.

In the meantime, the 84th Infantry Division was setting up defensive positions from Hotton in the east to Dinant in the southwest. Supporting the 84th were the light tanks and troops of the 4th Cavalry Group. The main three regiments of the 84th formed a line of company sized roadblocks all the way to the river. The main highway to Dinant ran in a northeast course.

The Germans would now have to fight along its route all of the way to the bridge they sought to take. They had already endured six days of non-stop struggle and showed signs of weakening under the strain. That fact, coupled with severe refuelling problems for their front line units (as fuel was sent from the rear of the columns towards the front, it was pilfered and stolen by needy transport and armor) brought further damaging delays.

Then an added dimension of terror faced the V Panzer Army. The inclement weather was clearing. This meant the dreaded "Jabos" (So the German's called them), the American fighter- bombers, would be out with a vengeance. Most movement, therefore, would be restricted to the nighttime. Naturally, this further slowed the advance. With each slowdown, the Allies strengthened themselves. The pendulum of war was swinging now in favor of the US and British forces.

Also rushing to the area was the British 29th Armored Brigade with the 3rd RTR and the 23rd Hussars and the American 75th Infantry Division. Behind them and enroute were the British 34th Tank Brigade and the 43rd Wessex Division. Also on the way was the 53rd "Welsh" Infantry Division. Finally, the mighty British Guards Division would be soon taking positions between Huy and Namur. The door was rapidly closing for the strained weary panzer commanders.

The unit that would be the most instrumental in saving the day, however, was the 2nd Armored Division. They would be the "Cavalry to the rescue" on December 24th and 25th. These were the critical two days that finally turned the tide of battle. They also spelled the final doom of the German effort to split Allied forces with a drive to Antwerp.

Hell on Wheels

The most immediate threat to the success of the German drive to the Meuse was approaching from the north. It was the United States 2nd Armored Division. It had always lived up to the name given it by the enemy, "Hell on Wheels." The Division had fought in nearly every major campaign of the war in Europe and was a seasoned outfit.

During the last days of November into the middle of December, the 2nd had taken a defensive posture along the Roer River. Plans were drawn up for a full-scale offensive to get across the river and toward the Rhine. Patrols sent out to find suitable crossing returned with reports that the enemy was feverishly building up strong defensive positions and that the 12th Panzer Division was present in strength in the Hambach Forest, directly opposite the 2nd Armored. In addition, other armored units were present and could possibly be used in a strong counterattack across the Roer. Estimates of enemy armored strength varied between 300 and 450 tanks.

In the meantime, the 2nd still prepared itself for the assault across the river. LVTs, amphibious armored vehicles used extensively in the Pacific Island assaults had arrived in great numbers to ferry the infantry across the river. The newest tank destroyer, the M-36 General Jackson was arriving to flesh out the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion. It was a strongly armored upgraded version of the M-10, with a much more powerful engine and a 90mm gun. It gave the tankers a much better fighting chance against the superior German armor. News filtered down of the arrival of a new model tank, speedier, more maneuverable, and with a bigger cannon. Some anticipated its arrival, while other diehards still wanted their old reliable Shermans.

When the German juggernaut was released in the Ardennes, word quickly filtered to the north of what was happening. General Harmon knew that Eisenhower had no reserve forces to speak of; all his units were on the line. The only solution to bolster the sagging middle was to shift his forces. Knowing that, Harmon ordered his men to be ready to move within hours.

On December 21st, the order came down. The 2nd was about to begin one of the most spectacular moves of the war. It would rival the move to the north accomplished by the 4th Armored Division under General Patton of the Third Army. Once again, as on earlier occasions, including Port Lyautey, Safi, Gela, Palermo, Saint Lo, Barenton, Mortain and the Siegfried Line, success, or failure of the Allied effort to deal with the enemy now rested on the turrets of the Hell on Wheels Division.

At 3:00 PM, the division was put on a one-hour alert. Harmon contacted all regimental commanders and told them to be ready to move within six hours. Harmon then reunited them that night and told them that the division would move to new positions near Moldave, Belgium, starting at 11:00 PM. The transfer would be conducted under blackout conditions and strict radio silence. The roads would be posted at intervals with guides from the 82nd Recon unit.

Moving the division meant that the more than 3,000 vehicles, following the standard fifty-yard interval would form a convoy over 100 miles long. Instead, they were divided into two

columns. Now they were racing against time and an energetic enemy who had a serious head start on them toward the Meuse. The weather was appalling. The roads were icy and snow fell continually. The temperature rarely got above freezing, even in the middle of the day.

It was the worst possible conditions for such a move, but the 2nd was determined to do it. Very few breakdowns occurred, and the columns rolled steadily onward. Within twenty-two hours, after a forced march in radio silence and complete blackout conditions, advance units had covered 100 miles and were arriving at Huy, Belgium. Enroute, they passed the 3rd Armored Division, who had to accede the road priority to them. Some GIs shouted out derisively as they passed, "Come to attention, you Joes, the 2nd Armored is passing by!"

Once the 2nd Armored Division arrived at its destination, they made immediate preparations to go to war again. General Harmon was known to the Germans and much respected. Harmon had never lost an armored encounter and the enemy realized that they faced a worthy foe.

At 11:AM on December 23rd, first contact by the 2nd was made by one of its recon patrols with the Germans. The enemy was passing with infantry laden tanks and hurt the recon unit badly in a short firefight. The patrol could not radio back and had to return to headquarters to give out the information.

General Collier, commander of CCA had gone to division headquarters for some hot coffee and little lunch when Harmon burst into the room. "How quickly can you get a tank company moving?" he shouted at Collier. Collier raced out and came to the nearest unit, Company D, 66th Armor. He was followed by Harmon. Collier asked the commander, Captain C. B. Kelly, how quickly he could get his unit together and moving. Kelly replied that if there were no radio ban, he could have things rolling within five minutes. "The ban is lifted, as of right now," replied General Harmon.

Company D hurriedly put things together within minutes and headed out to the town of Ciney to form a roadblock against the approaching Germans. They were soon followed by another force including 2nd Battalion, 66th Armor, 2nd Battalion, 41st Infantry, and a platoon each of A Company, 7th Engineers and A Company, 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion. They arrived at Ciney at 3:15 PM and by 5:00 O' Clock were emplaced and ready.

Numerous firefights took place for two days while the 2nd Armored Division moved in its entirety and took the 2nd Panzer Division under fire. Approaching from the southeast was the major force under the command of General Fritz Bayerlein. Hearing of the problems of the German 2nd, he ordered units of the reconstituted Panzer Lehr Division to go to their aid.

Facing the Germans now was CCB of the Hell on Wheels Division, under the command of Colonel White. He had organized his command into two task forces, and now was about to utilize this structure. Knowing that the Germans had wrested control of Celles from CCB, he planned to send each task force along a ridgeline on either side of the town, and then cut off the Germans at the far end.

Task Force A, under the authority of Lt. Col. Barry Gardiner would take the western ridge. As his 3rd Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment went forward, they ran smack into an armored force of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Panzer Regiment of the 2nd Panzer Division. Task Force A could proceed no further and was forced into battle. The same happened on the east ridge with Task Force B. After some fierce fighting the Germans withdrew from both ridges and Celles was taken.

From that point on, the Germans no longer had the initiative. A retreat began, by those who could retreat. As German forces grew weaker, the Allies grew stronger. The weary German soldiers began a long cold march back to the east of the Our River. Many of them would never make it.

Germany had lost its gamble. German troops were either dead, captured, or walking back to Germany. The waste of large amounts of German assets would help to bring the war to a quicker end. The stage was now being set for the final drives into Germany in 1945.

The Great Crusade - Part VI

Across The Rhine: January - March 1945

Introduction

The end of the war in Europe was now a little over four months away. Of course, no one knew that at the time. It is still sometimes hard to believe that in 11 months, the Allied armies would move from the beaches of Normandy to the heart of Germany. No greater tales of courage and bravery will ever be written than those penned in the blood of American, British, Canadian, French, Polish, Jewish, and yes, even German blood. The graves markers of many of these brave men still dot the landscape throughout the expanse of Western Europe today. Long after they are gone, the memory of them will live.

To better understand where we are going, we need to look back to where we have been. The invasion of France occurred on June 6th, 1944. From a bright, but bloody beginning, the Allies were bogged down for almost two months in hard fighting around Caen and St.Lo. While the invasion was a success, the breaking out of the beachhead perimeter was much more difficult. Toward the end of July, both Caen and St.Lo fell, and the way was open in the southern end of the Allied lines for a major push. It would be George S. Patton who gained the fame in the race for Paris. On August 25, Paris was liberated. German Armies limped back toward Germany, and the future looked bright.

More Problems for the Allies

September, however, brought new problems, as the Allies had to slow down and wait for supplies to catch up with them. In addition, the steady attrition of men was creating difficulties in maintaining the 450-mile front against Germany. The bright promise of an early end to the fighting in Operation Market Garden was tarnished when the British 1st Airborne Division was almost annihilated at Arnhem. It would not be again reconstituted. So much effort, manpower, and supplies had been devoted to this dagger thrust toward the Ruhr, that the Allies were forced to pause in their pursuit of the enemy.

Winter came early in 1944. By October, heavy rains had set in, which limited Allied Air support. As German forces drew nearer to their homeland, their resistance stiffened sharply. They were fighting to keep the invaders out of their country. With only limited help from the air, shortage of supplies and men, and sharply degenerating weather, the Americans and British were extremely curtailed in their activities. In November, the problems continued, as Montgomery dragged his feet in securing the channel leading to the port of Antwerp. While not desperate, the situation for General Eisenhower was difficult.

In the meantime, Hitler, who had survived an attempted assassination in July, was almost delusional. He had effectively (or perhaps ineffectively!) taken control of all Germany's armed forces and made on military blunder after another. As the vice grips of massive armies from the East and West closed on Germany, the future looked grim. Hitler was perceptive enough to see there was no answer for the East. He knew that the Russian armies were unstoppable. He did find a glimmer of hope in the West. His intelligence sources saw the many problems facing the Allies, and Hitler was quick to take advantage of them. Underestimating the strength of the American fighting man, he decided to take what dwindling resources remained and make a lightning thrust through the Americans that would end up almost at the coast.

Germany's "Last Hurrah"

The resulting action was the famous "Battle of the Bulge." For ten days, from December 16th to the 25th, it seemed that Germany was having her way. Deep penetrations were made by German panzers in a small recreation of the blitzkrieg through the Ardennes Forest.

American units in the area were either there for rest and refitting or were completely green and getting advanced training to get into the war.

They got into it all right!

Confusion reigned not only on the battlefield, but also among the Allied leaders. Montgomery, whose forces had really made any great contribution to the war since September, was adamant that he be put in charge of all land forces, subordinate only to Eisenhower. That meant he would control all ground action over all the armies. He painted a grim dime store novel type picture of the fighting in the Ardennes to British leaders. They in turn clamored for Montgomery to take charge and "bring order out of chaos."

At this point, Eisenhower was in a dilemma. He had given the American Ninth Army, under General Simpson to Monty, and now he was faced with the prospect of having to make Bradley, Patton and Devers with their respective Armies also subordinate to him. So angry were the American generals that they threatened to resign their commission all at once. Even the slow to anger Eisenhower was outraged at Montgomery's outspoken criticism of the American involvement and leadership in the war. General George C. Marshall, Chairman of the Armed Services, who never once questioned Eisenhower's strategies, even during this time, became adamant. Under no condition would Montgomery be given this authority. Eisenhower then prepared to fire the British general.

Winston Churchill, England's Prime Minister, and staunch supporter of Montgomery was also a politician. He realized the seriousness of the error his favorite general had committed. Word from Churchill to Montgomery was immediate. He would have to mend fences and quickly or the declarations of incompetence made by Monty would achieve could not with his attack on the Ardennes: a serious division between American and British forces. Once Montgomery got wind of what was about to happen, he quickly penned a message of apology and complete willingness to stay in his place and keep his mouth shut. He would do what he was ordered to do. Of course, he did not keep this promise, but it was enough for the moment.

As the British warily approached the Germans from the north, Patton's Third Army roared up from the south. By December 25th, it was evident that the situation was contained. The lackadaisical British leader's approach once again allowed many German troops to back out of the pocket they had created, instead of being cut off. Patton was furious. He calculated that each enemy unit that escaped back across the Rhine would be worth three times as much on the German side of the river. It would prove to be a rather accurate estimate.

By January 1st, the original lines had not been restored prior to the German attack, but they were falling into place. Hitler had not succeeded. Even worse, what remaining assets he had so carefully gathered for the most part lay smoldering throughout the Ardennes. Most of the German forces had ridden into battle. What remained, if it could, had to walk back home.

A New Year and a New Effort

The time was perfect now to bring this war to an end. There were three army groups with seven full armies facing the Germans. In the north was the British-Canadian 21st Army Group under General Montgomery. In addition to the Canadian First and the British Second Armies, the American Ninth Army was under his command. The Biggest Army Group was General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group, which included the First and Third Armies. To the south was General Dever's 6th Army Group, composed of the American Seventh and the French First Armies. From north to south they looked this way

21st Army Group (Montgomery)

1st Canadian Army (Crerar)

2nd British Army (Dempsey)

12th Army Group (Bradley)

1st US Army (Hodges)

3rd US Army (Patton)

6th Army Group (Devers)

7th US Army (Patch)

1st French Army (DeLattre)

Facing the Americans were also three German Army Groups, although they certainly did not match man for man the forces opposing them. In the north was Army Group H, under the command of General Blaskowitz. His responsibility was Holland and part of Northern Germany. Next was Army Group B, General Model commanding. His primary duty was the protection of the Ruhr, the open industrial heartland of Germany. His area of authority included the area of the Ardennes Forest and the borders with Belgium and Luxemburg.

Finally in the south was Army Group G, with General Hausser in charge. His boundaries included France and Switzerland. Independent of these three army groups was Army Group Oberrhein.

This was Heinrich Himmler's personal army and was preparing to make an assault in the south in the area of Lorraine similar to the Ardennes Assault in December 1944.

Their lineup was as follows

Army Group H (Blaskowitz)

25th Army (Blumentritt)

1st Parachute Army (Schlemm)

Army Group B (Model)

5th Panzer Army (Harpe)

15th Army (von Zangen)

7th Army (Felber)

Army Group G (Hausser)

1st Army (Foertsch)

19th Army (Brandenburger)

(Army Oberrhein)

Note: You may wish to refer to this list occasionally as you read to be oriented as to the location and relation of units one to another.

Eisenhower's strategy remained largely unchanged by the German Ardennes offensive in December. His plan was to maintain a broad front advance all along the German border, with penetrating thrust by first one army, and then another. Once the Siegfried Line was pierced, the next big step was getting across the Rhine River. This large waterway was the last major natural boundary that protected the Third Reich. Once across it, the Allied forces could move quickly and finish the task they had been given.

Due to the limitations imposed by supply problems and a manpower deficit, the major thrust would be in the north. The British 21st Army Group would move in a southeast direction. At the same time, the 1st Army would move assault the Rhine and head to the northeast. It was hoped that these forces would link up east of the Rhine and close off the Ruhr.

Once that was done, Germany would be largely bereft of her industrial capacity. In addition, a large German military force would be trapped within. The biggest challenge before SHAEF was getting across the mammoth Rhine River. They had to cross that river. Hitler was determined that it would not happen.

January 1945

The bitter weather continued. It was the coldest winter in Europe in over 30 years, and the troops suffered intensely. Trench foot took almost as many casualties as combat. Of course, the Germans suffered too. It was not an easy time (is there ever such a thing?) for war.

At the beginning of the year, the Americans were still fighting the Battle of the Bulge, although now it was a matter of reestablishing order, cleaning out German strongpoints, and reorganizing. The forces of SHAEF had now grown to over 3,000,000 men in 85 divisions, 23 of them armored. The German forces also had some 80 divisions on paper as being active on the Western Front. The truth, however, was that most divisions, except for the SS, were at about 50 per cent. Most divisions could only field about 5,000 men or less.

The once mightily feared "Panzer," or armored divisions, averaged 100 tanks or less. That was down to 33 per cent of combat efficiency. Even with the influx of the strong armored forces for the Ardennes offensive, which had been decimated in the fighting, the Germans were outnumbered by 10 to 1 in infantry, 5 to 1 in armor, and 10 to 1 in artillery. The Luftwaffe made only sporadic appearances in the air and was never a threatening factor after December 1944.

In spite of the constant entry of new divisions for the Allies, the manpower crisis was becoming greater than ever. There were 78,000 combat casualties in December, plus another 56,000 lost to non-battle conditions, primarily trench foot. In January, the losses went to 137,000. With the earlier hope that the war in Europe might be over by Christmas, American priorities had shifted to the Pacific. Now attention would have to be focused again on ending the European conflict.

On the German side, Hitler, now more into "medicinal" drugs than ever, deluded himself into believing that his December offensive had been at least partially successful. Even as von Rundstedt argued for a withdrawal, Hitler ordered more attacks. It would not be until the end of the first week of January that he would grudgingly admit that there was "little hope of success." At the moment, however, he was still enthused. Now he planned another attack in the south at the Allied Sixth Army Group. It would be called Nordwind.

The two armies that formed Sixth Army Group, the American Seventh, under General Patch, and the French First, under General de Lattre, were rather unstable in the command department.

Patch was in very poor health, and grieving over the death of his son, who had served in the artillery under him. The French de Lattre was proving to be somewhat difficult in the overall planning for the Army Group. He considered the French forces as completely independent. For him, it was a private war between his forces and the Germans opposing him. He found it difficult to toe the line to the bigger program from SHAEF.

The Germans struck fiercely on New Years Day. They fought hard to retake Strasbourg to the south, and Bitche to the north. From there, they could sweep around thousands of American troops and throw more confusion into the Allied circle. Below zero temperatures and two feet of snow made things very difficult for both sides. The Americans retreated reluctantly. The German forces were only gaining a few miles a day, and that at great cost. When American forces finally moved behind the Moder River, the Germans did not have the strength or manpower to make an amphibious assault. Nordwind finally blew itself out (See the scenario "Nordwind").

On January 15th, the American First and Third Armies linked up at Houffalize. Now Bradley wanted to chase the retreating Germans right to the Rhine. As soon as possible, Bradley

would have the First Army attack the area around the Roer Dams. It would cut behind the dams, and take them from the rear, thereby avoiding being swept away if the water were released.

Once that was done, Simpson's Ninth Army on the Roer could advance. The Ninth had been taken away from Montgomery and given back to Bradley. This would not last. Montgomery's cries for help eventually led to the American Ninth being re-attached to the British. While Bradley had them, however, he intended to make full use of them.

By January 27th, the Germans had finally been driven back to the "pre-Bulge" start line. Without allowing them to reconsolidate, Bradley ordered the attack. The offensive got under way on January 28th, and included the 1st, 30th, 87th, 7th Armored and 82nd Airborne Divisions. The weather did not cooperate. Huge winter storms deepened the snowbanks, and the attack was cancelled after three days. Eisenhower insisted that the Colmar pocket, a huge encirclement of German forces, be eliminated.

The French forces had struggled for months to eliminate this enemy stronghold but could not do it. Instead, they requested that four American divisions be sent to do the job. Bradley refused to turn over any more of his men. He had already relinquished 12 divisions to the British, and he would not give up another 50,000 men. His American subordinates backed him completely.

By now SHAEF had 4 reserve divisions to whom Eisenhower gave the task. The attacks began on January 25th. It turned out to be relatively easy. Once Nordwind had failed, Hitler no longer had any interest in holding Colmar, and had the troops withdraw back across the Rhine. Due to a lack of fuel and supplies, Patton was once again put on "active defense." Patton fumed at being held in place once again. He realized that this might be his last opportunity to get "the glory." It seemed very clear to him that his 3rd Army could get the job done. Eisenhower, however, was putting the major effort in the north with Hodges' 1st Army. Frustrated, Patton kept pestering his subordinate generals to "just sidle ahead," or "could you edge forward just a little?" All of this was done, of course, in the name of "active defense," or another "reconnaissance in force."

Thus, the month of January marked a time of continual, plodding progress toward the Rhine River. Eisenhower maintained his goal of having his armies in place on the Rhine, with a front that extended from the North Sea to Switzerland, a line of over 450 miles. Then there would be a period of consolidation and preparation for the final drive into Germany's heartland.

February 1945

Now that the failed German offensive in December had been fully dealt with, it was time to get the Allied offensive back in gear. The Rhine River continued to beckon. Eisenhower had long attempted to employ the strategy of destroying as many of the enemy as possible on the west side of the river, knowing that their defensive value would be doubled or tripled if they were on the eastern banks.

This strategy had paid off richly. Although Germany possessed great strength inside the boundaries of this natural barrier, many of her best would end their military career on the west banks of the Rhine and no longer be able to lift a weapon again.

In spite of all the difficulties encountered, it was time for action. Once more the main thrust for a new offensive would go to British General Bernard Montgomery. The more one studies the strategies in Europe in World War II, the more he becomes aware of the power of political

influence in military decision. Of course, this has always been the case (witness the fatal flaws in the Vietnam War), but one is not always aware of that fact.

The pressure of Churchill upon Roosevelt dribbled down to General Eisenhower and forced him once again to try to give the glory to Monty. He had demanded 35 divisions to attempt a

Rhine crossing. He was given 25, which included eight British, five Canadian, one Polish, and eleven American of Bill Simpson's Ninth Army. Yes, once again, the American Ninth was back under the authority of "Monty."

The operation was called "Veritable." It would feature two converging attacks. XXX Corps plus two Canadian divisions would drive south eastward toward Wesel. Two days later, Simpson's Ninth Army would begin a drive to the northwest toward the same goal. It was called "Operation Grenade." Wesel was a town on a bend in the Rhine River. It would be a 60-mile drive for the Americans, and it was some 40 miles away for XXX Corps.

Flooding of the area purposely by the Germans from one of the Roer River dams stopped the Ninth Army in its tracks. The original plan had been that the double drive by the British and Canadians from the north, and the Ninth Army from the south would dilute German defenses. With Simpson unable to advance, however, the double envelopment was stopped, and the Germans concentrated on stopping Montgomery. On February 23rd, Montgomery was in the same situation as in June 1944, when the Germans concentrated their forces against the British, thus allowing the American forces to the south to break free.

Simpson would not be held in place for long. Now, with Army engineers leading the way, his Ninth Army charged forward and crossed the Roer. German forces sent north to stop Montgomery were not in place to halt Simpson. On February 28th, with tanks thrusting into the bridgehead, the Ninth Army burst free. Its divisions drove into the rear of the Germans blocking the path of the British XXX Corps.

It broke the back of the enemy's defenses and sent them scurrying back to the Rhine. This German retreat would have serious consequences for von Rundstedt, commander of OB West. Simpson's forces were now in hot pursuit. In contrast to the British calm and collected advance, the GIs desperately searched for a bridge. As Montgomery's Veritable got going, the other armies to the south began to prepare for their own attacks to the Rhine.

German forces by this time numbered 73 Divisions, including eight panzer and panzer grenadier units. This was deceiving, since most divisions numbered only about 5,000 -7,000 men. Enemy armored units, while enjoying superiority in the quality of their inventory, were plagued with lack of numbers, shortage of fuel, and a high breakdown ratio. The Luftwaffe had its hands full trying to hold bombing raids over Germany at bay and offered little assault to the beleaguered ground forces.

To further von Rundstedt's defensive plans, a new directive from Hitler demanding that he be notified of any new plans on a divisional level, and that they could not be executed without his direct approval. The Fuhrer finally stated, "...Commanders must make sure that I have time to intervene as I see fit, and that my orders can reach the front-line troops in good time." He also warned that anything that might hinder this chain of command would be punished with "draconian severity."

By the end of February, the Allied units on the northern end of the front line, especially the US Ninth Army, had made significant inroads into Germany and were at the Rhine River

March 1945

German General von Rundstedt, who had been sacked from command of OB West at the end of June, was reinstated to the position at the time of Market Garden. Now at the end of February

1945, he indirectly authorized the withdrawal of part of General Schleem's First Parachute Army toward the Rhine. When Hitler heard of it, he went "ballistic." His standing order of "no withdrawal" was by now etched in stone. He immediately sacked von Rundstedt for the final time. The stately old General was by now accustomed to the Fuhrer's fits of rage and calmly left the battle scene. General Kesselring was brought from Italy and given the command. He was told to act anonymously, since his supposed presence in Italy was essential to the morale of the Germans fighting there.

The cold, hard winter was slowly coming to an end. The beginning of the thaw created new logistical problems, with widening rivers from the melting snows, huge quagmires of mud that stalled even the tracked vehicles. Tanks would sink to the bottom of their turrets. Smaller vehicles, such as Jeeps would disappear in rivers of mud. Even so, a change in the weather seemed to lift the spirit of the Allied forces. As Russian armies in the east crushed German resistance, the shadow of doom lengthened across the Third Reich. The war was coming to an end.

As the floodwaters from the Roer dams began to diminish, the Ninth Army rolled forward. Units of the 83rd Division, in a desperate search for a crossing of the Rhine, had an unusual regiment. It was the 330th Infantry. They enjoyed a special advantage. The men had collected and repaired a number of German vehicles including armor. They used them to move (it beat walking!).

During the course of the Allied advance, a number of men in the 330th collected and dressed in field gray uniforms. They then got into vehicles painted to look like German trucks and tanks as well as captured enemy armor and headed for the western suburbs of Dusseldorf. They found a bridge, but as they went for it at dawn on March 2nd, they were challenged.

A firefight erupted, and the group was forced to fight their way out. In another instance, forward units of the 2nd Armored raced flat out for another bridge farther south. Breaking through a feeble resistance, Sherman tanks rumbled onto the west end of the crossing, only to see the eastern half disappear in a ball of fire.

Simpson was convinced that the demoralized and defeated enemy could not stop his momentum. The moment had arrived, and he began setting up an assault across the river. He dutifully informed his immediate superior, Montgomery. The order came down quickly: stop where you are! Monty had planned a grandiose crossing with the appropriate media funfest, and no one was going to ruin his party! The men of the Ninth Army rolled up to the Rhine, gazed across, and wondered what might have been.

To the south, General Devers would execute "Operation Undertone," which attacked the industrial area of the Saar and take Mannheim. Then they too would be at the edge of the Rhine River. In Bradley's sector, everything was ready for the new offensive, "Lumberjack." The VII Corps once again took the lead and headed for Cologne. Spearheads of the 3rd Armored Division raced to the western suburbs of Cologne. The large metropolis actually straddled the Rhine. Sadly, every bridge across the river into the heart of the city had been demolished.

On March 4th Middleton, commanding the VIII Corps, turned the 11th Armored Division loose. In spite of ambushes and treacherous terrain, which included mud filled roads, dense woods, and plowed fields, they made good progress. It was the 4th Armored, however, that shot forward some 40 miles in two days. They also encountered resistance, and heavily timbered, mountainous terrain. Nevertheless, they reached Koblenz on the evening of March 6th. There was no bridge.

Early the next morning, recon units set out to the north, trying to link up with the 9th Armored Division. The 9th had fought its way into Bonn, but their search for a bridge brought no results.

Although a crossing had not been achieved. Bradley's forces had broken through to the great water barrier protecting the German heartland. He was more than pleased with the results. Now a small gap between the 1st and 3rd Armies remained to be closed. General Hoge led his CCB to the Ahr River, which flows into the Rhine. He hoped to find a way across there. In order to secure his left flank, he had an armored infantry battalion skirt the west bank and head for Remagen.

At mid-morning American half-tracks and armored cars, as well as a platoon of brand-new M-26 Pershing tanks reached a height overlooking the town. Below them, they saw a 1,000-foot

span, guarded at each end by two huge stone towers. It was the Ludendorf railroad bridge, and it was intact! A bridge for the taking!

When Hoge arrived about an hour later, he told his men to take the town, and then added in a quiet voice, "Oh, and by the way, it would be nice to get that bridge too, while we're at it." The GIs took the bridge and held it. Although damaged, it stood long enough for four divisions to get across. Hitler used every means at his disposal, including suicide attacks, artillery, V-1 rockets, Me-262 jet fighter-bombers and the planes of the Luftwaffe to bring it down. Though the bridge withstood all the direct attacks, the stress from near misses plus the original charges that had damaged became too much for the span. It suddenly collapsed into the Rhine.

When it did crash into the river, many brave American Engineers making repairs on the span were lost with it. The bridge, however, had served its purpose. Now there was a bridgehead across the Rhine. The enraged Hitler had four German generals killed for this failure. Even Hitler recognized what this would mean, a short time until Germany was completely overrun. Even with the good fortune, Eisenhower was pressing for other crossings. As good as this incursion had been, the terrain in that area of Germany was totally unsuitable for the rapid advance of mobile forces. Ike wanted a crossing in the north, where the terrain was open and ideal for armored warfare.

Bradley was very enthused about the crossing at Remagen and changed Patton's orders. He sent the 3rd Army to the south, to help the Seventh Army. Crossing the Moselle, Patton moved his forces behind the Germans holding off the 7th Army attacking the Palatinate. After this, Patton would not be held back any longer. He finally scrounged a reluctant "OK" out of Bradley to attack. That was all he needed. He headed straight at the Rhine. It would be the 5th Infantry Division, veteran of over 20 river crossings, which would lead the way.

On March 22nd, two days before Montgomery's theatrical crossing, the entire 11th Regiment was on the east bank in only two hours. By the next morning, all of the 5th was across, and the 90th was following close behind over a 1,000-foot treadway bridge that had been put into place during the night. With just a tiny bit of sarcasm, a Lieutenant Colonel from Patton's Third Army reported to a British liaison officer from Montgomery, "Without smoke screens, press agents, artillery concentrations, bombing fleets, or airborne armies, we have crossed the Rhine and are attacking eastward."

Seemingly unperturbed, Montgomery proceeded with his "pomp and ceremony" on March 24th. It was begun with an artillery barrage of over 3,000 big guns. Churchill and over 100 war correspondents watched in awe as XXX Corps crossed the Rhine. Soon after, it ran into a battalion of German paratroopers and was stymied for three days.

The American Ninth Army, still attached to the British 21st Army Group, was largely ignored during all the fanfare. It was to be an "all British" party and the only role the American Ninth Army would play was that of following the British forces as an afterthought. General Simpson was not about to have any of it. During this time, Operation Varsity was executed. The American 17th and British 6th Airborne Divisions were dropped into an area on the east of the Rhine eight hours after the offensive had begun. It was in broad daylight, and they landed in areas that some of the ground troops had already reached. What its ultimate purpose was has never been clearly defined. Perhaps it simply added to the spectacle.

At the town of Wesel, a strong bridge was constructed, and Dempsey's forces were told they could use it nineteen hours a day. Simpson's American Ninth Army could use it for only five. Then Dempsey decided the Americans could not use it at all, until all his 2nd Army was across. An enraged General Simpson had finally reached the boiling point. He had been shoved into a corner for the last time.

Angrily, he put American tanks at the approaches to the bridge and ordered his men to fire on any British vehicle that attempted to break into line. Dempsey backed down, and Simpson kept his five hours a day that he had originally been assigned. By the end of March, the

Americans were well entrenched across the Rhine River. It seemed that the war would end quickly now. Both east and west Allied forces looked with envy toward the final prize, the great city of Berlin.

After nine long hard months of fighting, it appeared that the war in Western Europe was swiftly coming to an end.

The Great Crusade - Part VII

Completing the Mission - April-May, 1945

By Wild Bill Wilder and Neil Stalker

Introduction

Toward the end of March 1945, the massive Rhine River remained a challenge only to the American and British engineers as they sought ways to get up enough bridges to keep the Allied juggernaut rolling ahead. At this point of the war the German Army was on the brink of total defeat. Before them on the western front was an Allied army of almost five million men, composing ninety divisions. Twenty-five of these were armored and five were airborne.

The Rhine had been broached in a dozen places and the GIs and Tommies were flooding across into the German heartland. The situation was worst on the eastern front. A Russian army of nearly ten million with over 10,000 tanks was rushing across the Oder River and preparing to assault the great bastion of fascism, Berlin.

The German Resistance Fades

Montgomery in the north now controlled thirty divisions, twelve of which were US and would soon come back under the control of General Bradley. Just to the south of the 21st Army Group was General Bradley's 12th Army Group, which at the moment included thirty-four divisions, including six in its new army, the Fifteenth, commanded by General Gerow. The final Army Group was General Devers 6th, which had twelve US and eleven French divisions. They would largely play a supporting role for the big drive by the 12th Army Group and also secure the Alpine front facing Italy. Adding the three US airborne divisions under the control of the First Allied Airborne Army, the total came to ninety.

The Air Force, with declining losses, and increasing replacements was everywhere dominant. The only threat was minimal, produced by the sporadic activity of the new German jet fighters. Even these were so few that they were no deterrent to the common 1,000 plane raids taking place.

During the first two weeks of April, German fighter pilots shot down only 18 American bombers.

On the 16th of April, General Spaatz, chief of the strategic Air Forces in Europe, declared that the strategic air war was already won. There were from that point on few targets worthy of any massive bombing strikes. Targets now consisted of interdictory raids against supply areas, marshalling yards or other targets of direct concern to the fighting on the ground.

The logistical problem of supply and demand, so critical toward the end of 1944 had been largely resolved. Had the present demands of April and May 1945 been made six months earlier, the situation would have been disastrous. Now, however, with the ports of Antwerp, Cherbourg, and Marseille to the south in full swing, supplies were for the first time ample and available.

Antwerp handled over a half million tons of supplies in March 1945. Fuel pipelines had been laid across the English Channel and were extended to even on the east side of the Rhine River. Rail construction was proceeding rapidly, and with no air intervention by the Luftwaffe, trains were running day and night almost to the front lines. Even previously unavailable perishable food items were provided for front line troops. It was called "The Meat Ball Express (a take on the name "Red Ball Express," so famous in 1944). Thousands of trucks moved in a steady stream across recently constructed highways of asphalt and Macadam. The only reason that the GI and tanker still complained of the monotony of a diet of canned

rations was that the armies were now advancing faster than the supply could catch up with them.

New Problems as the War Comes to an End

As is so often the case, the imminent ending of the war created problems for the Allied forces. One big difficulty was the fear of being the last man killed in the war. The fact that it might end at any time often created a certain reserve in men who might have otherwise not given thought to the certainty of survival.

Another was the matter of discipline. Strict orders were given and enforced as to the behavior of military personnel among the civilian population. Germany was still the enemy, and this included the non-military people of the country. It must be admitted that in a force of this size, not all soldiers were saints.

Remarkably, crimes committed by the military were less than one half of one per cent of the total amount of manpower in Europe. Seventy soldiers were executed during 1945, one for desertion, the others for murder, rape or rape associated with murder.

On the German side of the coin, things could not have been bleaker. The entire country of Germany was in a state of panic. Literally millions of German civilians fled before the oncoming brutal Soviet armies. Many of them arrived in Berlin and the refugee problem became a disaster. There was no lodging, no food, and thousands starved or died from exposure. Crime was rampant and people became more and more desperate.

The man at the top, Adolph Hitler, had become totally out of touch with what was really happening. He remained hidden either in the bomb-damaged Reich Chancellery or the "Fuhrerbunker," some fifty feet underground, beneath the garden of the Chancellery. Deluded with drugs and dreams of a miraculous salvation, he ordered the fight continued.

By the end of March, he confided to Josef Goebbels that assuredly a miracle was about to happen. Somehow the alliance between the east and west would fall apart. The Americans and British would suddenly become alienated from the Soviet powers and would come pleading for a long-suffering Germany to join them in a "holy war" against Bolshevism!

As far as the German military in the west was concerned, there was little communication from Berlin. Most units were isolated and fighting on their own. Many still adhered to Hitler's "no retreat" policy and died where they stood. Surrenders, however, were beginning to occur by the thousands as many German soldiers saw the utter futility of fighting a war that was now lost.

The new Commander in Chief of the West, Field Marshall Kesselring, felt helpless in the face of such odds. He stated that he "felt like a concert pianist who is asked to play a Beethoven sonata...on an ancient, rickety and out-of-tune instrument." The Field Marshall spoke with Hitler repeatedly about the desperateness of the situation. Strangely, Kesselring was one of the very few officers remaining that Hitler respected, and he treated him amiably. Kesselring saw clearly that Hitler still clung to a miraculous answer to the rapidly deteriorating situation "like a drowning man to a straw." No one really knew just what was going on in the west, not even its commander.

In February and March, over a quarter of a million Germans had surrendered. Adding that to the enemy killed and wounded, the SHAEF intelligence corps estimated that about an equivalent of 20 German divisions had ceased to exist during the first three months of 1945. Attempting to put together the remnants of what remained of German military might, it totaled about 25 divisions against the 90 under the command of Eisenhower.

Army Group H in the north still remained basically intact, since it had been bypassed by Montgomery in his drive westward. The shattered remains of Model's Army Group B in the center were about to be surrounded. The unit furthest south, Army Group G, was only a shell, with a total amounting to about three divisions. Draining the last of the manpower within

Germany, searching for equipment and armor in the shattered, silent factories, Hitler was forming a last group, known as the 12th Army, which would form a strong last stand against the western allies in Central Germany. This was the picture of the west as the war entered into its last eight weeks.

April-May, 1945

At the beginning of April, the Allied armies seemed to be on the verge of bringing the horrible hostilities in Europe to an end. Spearheading the British Second Army was the XVIII Airborne Corps, led by General Matthew Ridgeway. Twice a day, the Americans were forced to stop for tea. The British regarded their half an hour at mid-morning and mid-afternoon to brew tea as inviolate. Their fanaticism for tea was in sharp conflict with the American's fanaticism to move.

Finally, in frustration, Ridgeway requested that his forces be returned to the command of the American Ninth Army. He earnestly wished to help Simpson's forces to break out of their Rhine bridgehead. Montgomery indifferently agreed, and Ridgeway soon was rolling onto the edge of the north German plain and cutting around the northern boundary of the Ruhr. Further south, the 1st Army under Hodges ripped out of Remagen and began an encirclement of the Ruhr from the south.

At this point, Eisenhower returned the Ninth Army to Bradley and ordered him to main mission of driving into the heartland of Germany. Montgomery was assigned to guard his northern flank. The howls or rage from Churchill and Montgomery reached across the Atlantic. Eisenhower ignored the protests and explained his thinking in this way.

Now that the Ruhr was about to fall, the drive toward the Russians was imperative. It was evident that Montgomery was in no hurry. Since the forces on the move were American, they finally received the priority that they had long awaited. Once the Ruhr was encircled, US divisions would be massed to make a power drive across the center of Germany.

Further, the rapid thrust of the Third Army to the south from the Saar meant that Bradley's right flank would also be protected. By now, the Russians were 50 miles from Berlin. Eisenhower's forces had 200 miles to go. The further east the Western troops met the Russians, the better.

A Major Allied Coup

On April 1st, the Ninth Army linked up with the First Army at Lipstadt. This meant that the Ruhr was completely surrounded. It was an area about the size of Massachusetts. Inside that circle were close to a half million German troops of every sort, from the elite SS Panzer to the newly raised, ill-trained Volkstrum.

In the first two weeks of April, four US corps slowly squeezed the life out of the Ruhr. Tens of thousands of Germans gave their lives uselessly in the fighting. Finally, a mass surrender of 320,000 German soldiers ended the fighting in the area. To the south, Patton continued to push to the East. After taking Frankfurt, the Third Army moved toward Leipzig. Once that fell, they moved toward the Elbe River. Part of his army was diverted in Czechoslovakia.

During this period, Patton was involved in a new scandal, as he sent a special rescue team to extricate his son-in-law, Lt. Col. John Waters from a German POW camp. The mission failed, and the press attempted to exploit it. At that same time, however, President Franklin Roosevelt suddenly passed away while resting at Warm Springs, Georgia. The unexpected passing of the great leader was felt strongly all around the world. The war nevertheless continued.

It was as the war entered the last weeks of conflict that General Eisenhower began putting on the brakes. He knew that zones of occupation had already been drawn at Yalta. He would not, therefore, waste American lives to gain territory that later would be turned over to another country. The Elbe River was as far as he wished to go.

The 2nd Armored Division reached the river on April 11th. They narrowly missed taking a bridge intact. It had been shifted to Simpson's Ninth Army shortly before, and he had been pushing it to the maximum. Now within 50 miles of Berlin, Simpson could hardly wait. That same night three battalions of armored infantry crossed the river in DUKWs and carved out a small bridgehead. In the meantime, the 83rd Division had arrived and set about building a bridge. Simpson was now convinced he could get to Berlin in two days.

But city fighting was costly in lives. Bradley estimated over 100,000 casualties to conquer Berlin. Neither he nor Eisenhower felt that the prestige of accomplishing this feat was worth that much American blood. Since it was already decided how the city would be divided, Eisenhower decided to let the Russians pay the sacrifice to take the city. He knew that Stalin was more than willing to pay the butcher's price for that prize.

The Battle of Berlin ended on May 4th, with Hitler and other German leaders dead and all organized resistance crushed. It would be at Eisenhower's headquarters at Reims that representatives of the German Army would first try to surrender only to the Western powers.

General George Patton liked the idea. He felt that the Russians were a great danger. He countered no friendly moves toward the Soviets. Even though Patton was heartily in favor of such a move, Eisenhower knew that was impossible. The surrender would have to be unconditional, and to all Allied forces.

The Germans made a last effort to salvage something from the disaster. On May 5th, a German delegation met with Eisenhower's staff in Reims. The Allies made it clear that no separate surrender only to the west would be accepted. Admiral Doenitz, the new head of state for Germany, was startled by Eisenhower's adamancy and sent General Jodl, a strong dissenter on unconditional surrender, to deal with the matter.

On the next day, Jodl met with the Allies and within an hour send a telegram to Doenitz asking for authority to make a final and complete surrender on all fronts. Although Doenitz still felt that it was sheer extortion on the part of Eisenhower, Jodl's willingness to sign the surrender document indicated that all was indeed lost. Compelled to accede, he quickly dispatched that authority to Jodl.

Early on May 7th, the surrender was complete. Immediately afterward, the following simple communiqué was issued from SHAEF: "The Mission of this Allied Force was fulfilled at 0241, local time, May 7th, 1945." Actually, there was no way to adequately convey the depth and scope of the fighting that had taken place for nearly a year across the western European continent as free men sought to free others. It was V-E Day, the day of the final Allied victory in Europe! The Great Crusade in was finally at an end.

America's Armored Forces in the Ardennes

By Wild Bill Wilder

Totals

Of the total American divisions deployed throughout the world, on December 16th, 1944, there was a total of forty-three serving in the European Theater of Operations. This included two airborne divisions, ten armored divisions, and thirty-one infantry divisions. At that time, sixteen more divisions were enroute. One armored division had recently deployed and was on the way to the front.

Organization

The first real enlargement of US armored forces came with the institution of the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions in 1940. Prior to that, the largest formations were of regimental size and subject to the infantry. It was to be expanded by three additional divisions in 1941, nine in 1942 and another two in 1943. The units were "tank-heavy" originally, following an established pattern by European countries. This included an armored brigade of six light and three medium tank battalions, and an infantry regiment of two battalions.

In March 1942, the divisional organization was changed. Two combat command headquarters replaced the armored brigade HQ and armored strength was reduced to two three-battalion regiments. The infantry was expanded to include three armored infantry battalions. In actuality, there were three combat commands to each armored division. They were designated CCA, CCB, and CCR (reserve). This basic pattern would continue till the end of the war.

In this type of layout, there were a total of three tank battalions (each with three medium and one light tank companies), three armored infantry battalions, three eighteen-gun artillery battalions, a cavalry recon squadron (or battalion), and engineer battalion and divisional service units. The average totals in an armored division were 77 light tanks, 168 medium tanks, 18 M4 assault guns, 17 M8 (Stuart) assault guns, 54 M7 self-propelled 105mm howitzers (built on an M-3 Grant, medium tank chassis) and 54 armored cars. There was also a plethora of M-3 halftracks, trucks, jeeps, and other support vehicles. The staff for a division was usually 10,754.

The Independent Tank Battalion

In most cases an armored division would be assigned to a corps, thus giving it a balance. In addition, it was decided to form separate armored battalions that would be permanently attached to infantry divisions. This would give them inherent armored support. These tank battalions had within their force 17 light tanks, 58 medium tanks and six M-4 assault guns.

The purpose of the tank battalion as such was not the lightning advance of a full armored division. It was attached to the infantry division to support and protect the foot soldier. In most cases the tanks would be parceled out, usually a company of tanks being assigned to a full battalion of infantry. This would further reduce itself so that at company level there would be either a platoon or section of tanks to cover their advance. The most prevalent tank battalion was a “medium” tank battalion. America never had what might be considered a “heavy” tank until early 1945 with the introduction of the M-26 Pershing. A typical medium tank battalion include 53 M-4 Shermans, 18 specialized tanks (such as dozer tanks or those

equipped with a Flamegun) and six M-4 tanks with a 105mm gun to be used against enemy infantry and strong points. The personnel strength of the tank battalion was 724.

A few "light" tank battalions were formed but never enjoyed the success of the medium tank battalion. Neither their armor nor their firepower proved effective in the war against the heavier armored and more powerful enemy tanks. Their force included 56 light tanks and three M8 assault guns. Their head count was 532. Some of the medium tank battalions (such as the 70th) had extremely successful combat records during World War Two.

Weapons

The M-4 "Sherman" Medium Tank

In order to facilitate mass production, it was decided to standardize the types of tanks being produced, thus limiting the loss of time needed for the production of various types of armor. The standard medium tank for the US armored division was the M-4 "Sherman" tank. It was designed in April 1941, and the prototype was complete in September of that year. It was standardized a month later. Production began in February 1942.

At that particular time, the M-4 was a superior tank, compared with what existed in other countries, with the exception of the Soviet T-34. In less than a year, however, that would change. Germany's rapid modifications and development of armor produced a heartier breed of stock. The new tanks were far superior in armor protection and firepower.

The first gun of the M-4, the short-barreled medium-velocity 75mm gun was soon found to be unable to pierce the armor of German tanks. It was changed for a long-barreled higher velocity 5mm gun (sometimes mistaken for a 76mm). Its increased penetration capability along with its improved accuracy and tipped the scales a little more to the American side. The tank would end up with a number of plus and minus factors by its users.

It was reliable, fuel efficient, fast for a tank, and required little special maintenance. The wide tracks assured its maneuverability even in harsh terrain. The electric-hydraulic turret traverse allowed the tank to have a "fast draw" on the enemy. Gun stabilization, coming late in the war, allowed it to fire with some accuracy while on the move. Its armor always seemed to be deficient, however, and even the upgraded main gun often had difficulty piercing German tanks at considerable range.

The standardization of production allowed for the building of nearly 30,000 of them during World War II. A number of M-4s were customized for special tasks. Some were equipped with dozer blades. Others had mine-clearing equipment added to their bow. An assault gun variant for infantry support with a 105mm howitzer proved very effective. A heavier, larger model (M4A3E2), called the "Jumbo," had additional armor that made it an equal with the German panther in protection albeit the main gun still could not equate the Panther's firepower.

Probably the best version of the Sherman was the M4A3E8, later known as the "Easy Eight." It did not have the thickened armor of the "jumbo," but offered very good protection. It carried a 76mm long barreled cannon, with very high velocity and became the closest thing to an equal to German tanks during that period. The Easy Eight would continue to see service with the United States through the Korean conflict. It would further be used by other countries into the early 1980s. Its silhouette has always been readily recognizable through the years and has always been considered "the tank" until the arrival of the M1 Abrams.

The M-5 Stuart Light Tank

The standard light tank was the M-3 (later modified to the M-5) Stuart. It was the product of a long process of evolution from the armored tankette so popular in the period between the wars. It carried a 37mm cannon, capable of firing both armor piercing and high explosive

shells. This would make it extremely popular with the British. Their equivalent two-pounder gun was strictly an anti-tank weapon and offered no support for infantry.

Having this double-edged sword added to their tank inventory proved to be highly effective and a brutal surprise for the Axis forces in North Africa. Of course, by the end of 1942, the main gun was of no practical value for engaging German panzers, except for armored cars, armored personnel carriers, and the lightest of AFVs (Armored Fighting Vehicles).

If the gun were of little value, the defensive armor was even less. The Stuart's own main gun had the power to pierce the armor of the little tank. By 1943, an upgraded version was designated the M-5. Its main gun remained unchanged, but the protective armor had been slightly increased. The Stuart was a fast tank, extremely agile for its size. It served well in a reconnaissance role throughout the war and was still a terror to enemy ground troops who lacked the protection of armor.

Variants of the M-5 went into production, and some proved to be highly successful. One version, an assault gun, had an open topped turret and carried a 75mm howitzer as its primary weapon. Being self-propelled, it was readily available for artillery support for front line infantry. It did not have to be deployed or unlimbered. This gave it a readiness that towed artillery could not enjoy. This version and the M4-105 did much to spark the idea of self-propelled artillery that is so prevalent today.

Tank Destroyers

With the advent of World War II, and as a result of the successes of the German Blitzkrieg, it was special units with tank-hunting and killing capabilities. Leaders decided early on that towed anti- tank guns would not get the job done. A more mobile force was needed. Originally anti-tank units, the name was soon changed to "tank destroyer." This gave the unit an aggressive nature and not a defensive one. Their role would often be a defensive one, however, lying in wait for approaching enemy tanks.

The very first TD battalions were nothing more than modified halftracks, carrying 37mm anti-tank guns or old French 75mm guns. They were used first in the Tunisian campaign with varying degrees of success, but their lack of protective armor made them easy targets. Some were sent to the Pacific, where they enjoyed better results. By 1943, they were discontinued and for that year, the army went back to the idea of towed antitank guns, imitating the German practice. Then someone had the foresight to realize that Germany used this type of weapon out of necessity.

The preference of the Wehrmacht was for self-propelled antitank weapons. The reasoning was clear. Being on a tracked chassis, the tank destroyer possessed mobility and no time to unlimber and set up. It was always ready to fight. The experience of the United States in the first phases of the war proved that the day of towed weapons such as these had indeed passed. They were totally unsuitable in a modern mobile environment. They served best in fixed defenses and were of little use in tank vs. tank battles, where they were needed the most.

So it was that in 1944, the TD battalions in Europe were being converted back to mobile tank destroyers, or SP guns. This time however, technology and innovation had produced some formidable weapons. One was the M-10 Wolverine tank destroyer. Built on a Sherman chassis, it had an open-topped turret (nearly all US tank destroyers had this feature. Its purpose was increased ability to see the enemy) and a top-notch 75mm or 76mm gun. Its success prompted the manufacture of the M-18 Hellcat, a much lighter tank, with a minimum of armor protection, but

great speed and agility. It sported a powerful 76mm gun that was an equivalent of the 75mm gun on the Panther.

Then came the M-36, which would be the most powerful of all the tank destroyers. Utilizing the M- 10 and M-18 as the basis, the M-36 had speed, armor and power. It also carried a 90mm gun, which with the introduction of the HVAP anti-tank round, could kill anything the Germans had, with the exception of frontal hits on a few of the later monsters.

Strangely, perhaps due to the lack of German armor toward the end of the war, these tank destroyers were never used in mass for that for which they were created. In some instance, TD battalions were disbanded, their troops sent to other armored units, or converted to infantry status.

Summary

There can be no doubt that US tankers, outgunned and at times outnumbered, were very brave men. They took their Shermans, Stuarts, Chaffees, Wolverines, Hellcats and Jacksons, even the smaller Greyhound Armored cars and did battle with the Panzers. Never was their heroism more marked than during this difficult engagement.

The Highest Honor

By Wild Bill Wilder

Introduction

One of the strange anomalies of war is in the area of recognition of individuals who go "above and beyond the call of duty." It has always seemed that the people most deserving of special recognition were the ones most uncomfortable with it.

They either felt unworthy of the honor, or that someone else deserved it more. Nowhere has this been truer than the bestowal of the MEDAL OF HONOR, the highest military award that can be given to an American servicemanl.

The fact of its value is attested through statements of great leaders through the years. President Harry Truman, a veteran of World War One, once told a gathering of World War Two recipients, "I'd rather have this medal than be president." George Patton, in his usual extravagant manner of speaking, whispered to one recipient as he placed the medal around his neck, "I'd give my immortal soul for that medal."

Since the Civil War, out of the millions of men and women who have served the United States in combat as of 1990, only 3,398 had received this dignified affirmation of bravery and sacrifice.

Nineteen individuals have had this award given to them twice! Notice that I do not speak of Medal of Honor "winners." The word "win" is out of place here, as anyone who has received the medal would state most emphatically.

There was no competition between men to see who could be the bravest. Apparently, no one ever had the thought in the back of his head as he risked life and limb, "Wow! Maybe I'll get the Medal of Honor for doing this." No, "win" is not a good word. This, of course, in no way implies that these valiant warriors were not winners. It is simply to state that receiving a medal for their actions was not their intention. In most cases it was a much higher motive that prompted to perform heroic and sacrificial actions.

The Origin of the Medal

The Medal of Honor was an idea introduced in the first year of the Civil War by an Iowa senator named James W. Grimes. The bill stated that its purpose was "to promote the efficiency of the navy."

It authorized a "medal of honor" for sailors and marines who distinguished themselves in battle. Three months later, the Army, never to be outdone, prevailed upon a Massachusetts congressman to secure a similar award for them. The first medal was described thusly,

"A five-pointed star, one point down. On the obverse the foul spirit of secession and rebellion is represented by a male figure in crouching attitude holding in his hand’s serpents, which, with forked tongues, are striking at a large female figure representing the Union or Genius of our country, who holds in her right hand a shield, and in her left, the fasces. Around these figures are thirty-four stars, indicating the number of states in the union."

The medals were hung from a ribbon with a blue horizontal top band above alternating vertical stripes of red and white.

The navy's medal would be attached to the ribbon with a rope-fouled anchor. The armies was an eagle, wings spread, astride crossed cannon and cannonball stacks.

The History of the Medal

In the early days, certain restrictions were placed upon the award. Limited at first to the "present insurrection," it was extended after the War Between the States and eventually became a permanent award. For some time, it was limited to enlisted men only, while the American navy would award it to individuals in non-combat situations as well.

During the Civil War, the medal was given perhaps too frequently (1,520, nearly half of the total), but the guidelines for its bestowal became much more stringent at the end of the century.

The first medal was awarded to a physician, Army Lieutenant Bernard J.D.Irwin. On February 14, 1861. During the winter of 1860, the young surgeon volunteered to lead a relief expedition to rescue a patrol of cavalrymen trapped by Indians at Apache Pass, Arizona. Irwin took on a raging blizzard vicious Apaches and broke the siege, thus saving the beleaguered command from certain death.

During the Great locomotive chase through Georgia in 1862, six of the union soldiers who participated also received the medal. Later there were awards to Indian fighters, to men who were participants in the battles of San Juan Hill and Manila Bay during the Spanish American war and also at Peking in the midst of the Boxer Rebellion

After a time, it became necessary to more clearly define the regulations regarding the bestowal of the medal. It was decided that it would be given to one who performed an act of the most conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, FAR above and beyond the call of duty, in the presence of an armed enemy. It had to involve a personal risk of life. It also had to be a voluntary act which would not be subject to negative criticism. Finally, there had to be at least two eyewitnesses that could attest to the action. In this way, the medal would truly be the highest of awards that could be given.

To avoid the early abuses in the bestowal of the Medal of Honor, it was deemed imperative to create other awards for daring and courage that, while worthy of recognition and praise, did not meet the qualifications of the highest award. In this way the Medal of Honor was elevated to a "pinnacle" of a so-called pyramid of honor.

Lesser decorations, therefore, would reward varying degrees of heroism and meritorious service. Each medal would have its own requirements and eligibility criteria to be assured of the proper level of recognition for the deed. During the First World War, an echelon of awards was established. The army created the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), which ranked immediately below the Medal of Honor. Below the DSC was the Silver Star. The navy also used the Silver Star but substituted the Navy Cross for the DSC.

With the passing of the years, the design of the medal was brought under scrutiny and a change was decided upon. Since the Civil War had long been over, it was felt that the sentiments expressed upon it needed to be updated. The new design came from a Parisian jewelry firm of Messrs. Arthur, Bertrand, and Berenger. On November 22, 1904, a patent was issued to protect the new design.

The five-pointed star of the old medal was retained. At its center appears the head of Minerva that is surrounded by the words, "United States of America." An open laurel wreath encircles the star.

Above the star appears a bar emblazoned with the word, "VALOR." Finally, atop the bar is an eagle with wings spread.

The new ribbon for the medal is a light blue, watered-silk material. It is spangled with thirteen stars. Two versions were used: one with a neck ribbon' the other with a breast ribbon. The former finally became the official version. The breast ribbon medal continued to be awarded throughout the Second World War.

The Value of the Medal

It was in World War Two that the Medal of Honor achieved the status it deserved. To be sure that the recognition was given to the most deserving heroes, special boards were created by the Army and Navy to carefully review each recommendation.

Even within these groups there were varying levels through which each recommendation had to pass, beginning at the division level. For the Medal of Honor, approval would have to come from Washington, D.C., where senior combat-tested officers reviewed the supporting documentation with careful scrutiny.

This became a lengthy process, but it did help to uphold the highest traditions for the award. During the Second World War over 13 million men served in the military. Only 433 received the Medal of Honor. This included 294 from the Army, 57 from the Navy, 81 Marines, and 1 coastguardsman.

In this case posthumous awards outnumbered awards to living heroes. Only 190 of these recipients survived to have their medals placed around their necks. To further emphasize the importance of the medal, the recipient would be brought to Washington whenever possible so that the president could personally make the presentation.

This is not to say that the system of recognition was or is infallible. Undoubtedly there were hundreds of others who performed deeds just as heroic or perhaps even more so, without any sort of recognition. In battles where all involved were killed or totally incapacitated, there were no witnesses to testify to the courage of other men. Furthermore, some people who received the Medal of Honor perhaps just weren't that deserving.

Politics even gets into the arena of awards for valor. Douglas MacArthur received the Medal in World War II, but for the life of me I cannot find in any biographies on the man a particular act that would justify such an action. It might be well to say that those who did receive the award were just representative of many who should have gotten it and did not.

And then among those who were Medal of Honor recipients, some stand out more than others. Besides General MacArthur, there was also Audie Murphy, who later gained fame in Hollywood and died in a tragic plane crash. Walter Ehlers, whose deeds are portrayed in one of these scenarios, shared the speaker's podium with President Clinton in the 1994 50th anniversary of the landings at Normandy.

Some of these men have a special significance attached to their recognition, such as Lt. A.R. Nininger, the first recipient of World War II, or Corporal Melvin Mayfield who was the last to be so honored. It is quite interesting that both of these individuals performed their heroic actions on Luzon Island in the Philippines, with a little over three years between the two occasions.

Then there was Col. Robert Cole, who led the first bayonet charge in the European Theater of Operations. There was also the case of Capt. Matt Urban, who received his medal 47 years after he had his moment of testing in France. PFC Sadao Munemori, a Nisei of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, was the only Japanese American to so recognized.

But what about the rest of these heroes? Who were these individuals? Just plain people, men who came from all walks of life. They range from a president's son to some of the poorest and most obscure of families. They came from big cities and from the country. Some never entered a high school classroom; others held graduate degrees. They ranged in size from gargantuan to minuscule.

Each was different, yet they all seemed to possess a common trait. And what was it? It seemed to be the ability to overcome their fear in the face of overwhelming odds and very possible death with a courage that was above anything that could be expected of them. It was a courage that deserved recognition such as the Medal of Honor. Men of valor, we salute you, living and dead!

The 94th Infantry Division in the Rhineland

By Louie Marsh

In January of 1945 as the Battle of the Bulge was running down, George Patton ordered his 20th Corps (known as the "Ghost Corps") to blood its new divisions in combat and make a breach in the West Wall.

The 20th Corps was commanded by General Walton Harris Walker and received its nick name during its drive from Normandy to Metz. While interviewing German POW's it was learned that the Germans were calling the 20th the "Ghost Corps" because they moved so fast and so often that the Germans couldn't keep track of them.

The 94th Infantry Division arrived in the Saar-Moselle Triangle and become part of the 20th Corps on the 6th of January 1945. It was considered to be a new unit fresh from the rear. Actually, it had seen more combat time than its neighbor, the 95th Division, having fought with the 6th Armored and then keeping German troops invested in Lorient and Saint-Nazaire.

The 94th was commanded by General Malony and was commanded to begin its efforts to breach the section of the West Wall facing it soon after arrival in the line. The 94th faced the Orsholz Switchline, which ran along a ridge and contained several small but critical towns.

Due to supply difficulties the 94th was not allowed to use its full force in the early going. Attacks were limited to Battalion level attack only. In spite of this the division did well in very bloody fighting, setting the stage for the future US breakthroughs.

Nennig was captured after a very bloody fight by units of the 3rd Battalion of the 376th Infantry Regiment. On the night of January 19th, they were relieved by the 3rd Battalion of the 302nd Infantry Regiment.

Company K, commanded by Lieutenant Carl W. Seeby, was charged with holding Nennig, reinforced by a platoon from Captain John Smith's L Company.

The rest of Company L was to outpost the area between Nennig and the woods that overlooked the area. Over the next few days, the outposts were driven in or destroyed by the Germans, setting the stage for the battle.

Finally in February the entire Division was told to move forward, assisted by the 10th Armored. The result was a near rout as they drove forward, crossing the Saar quietly by night, and helping set the stage for the capture of Tier – a priority set for the 20th Corps by General Patton.

Shortly afterwards the 94th participated in the Allied drive to the Rhine, where they captured the Lampaden Ridge. On March 6th, 1945, they were attacked by the 11th SS Mountain Regiment “Reinhard Heydrich”, part of the 6th SS Mountain Division, “Nord.”

In the vicious fighting that followed units were cut off, the situation difficult to control because of the weather conditions and the Germans. But the 302nd Regiment of the 94th held firm and units of the Regiment were later awarded a Unit Citation for their valor.

The 94th went on to fight in the remaining weeks of the war, a little-known unit, as many were, yet vital to the Allied victory over the Nazis.

German Forces

Having lost the critical town of Nennig and others, the Germans hurriedly brought reinforcements into the area to take back the lost ground and restore the West Wall.

The 11th Panzer Division, commanded by General Von Wiertersheim, was called upon to accomplish this task and assumed control of the area on the night of the 14th of January.

The 11th Panzer was called the "Ghost Division," because early in the war it too had appeared and disappeared from it's enemies at will. It had nearly been destroyed on the

East front and had been rebuilt in the latter part of 1944 in Bordeaux, France. Having been in reserve during the Battle of the Bulge, it was one of the few relatively fresh formations left to the Germans on the West Front.

Nennig:

On the night of January 21st 3 companies of the 21st Panzer attacked Nennig. One Panzer, one infantry and one engineer company struck hard at the U.S. troops.

The battle raged all night long, as Company K called upon all of the 356th Field Artillery Battalion and other artillery support as well. But try as they might they could not drive the Germans out of Nennig.

This in spite of heavy artillery support and several counter attacks by all the troops available.

When day broke there were at least 2 German tanks and many troops roaming through the southern part of the town, and finally Company K withdrew across the stream and dug in to hold the southern part of Nennig.

Despite having lost part of the town, the Americans succeeded in keeping the Germans from driving them out completely and in the days to come held out against repeated Germans assaults. Finally, all of Nennig was retaken when the 94th received the armor support it needed against the 11 Panzer.

Over The Saar:

Having reached the Saar the 94th was ordered to cross the river – as were all the units on the Saar at that time. Company C, 1st Battalion, 302nd Infantry Regiment was selected to make the crossing at Taben.

In the rush of the Allied offensive units were often confused, thus the Saar crossing was almost stopped by the boats getting lost! The convoy carrying them had bedded down for the night when Major Albert R. Hoffman found them and ordered them on to the river. One hour after the designated assault time the boats finally arrived, and the infantrymen, aided by engineers, manhandled the boats down to the shoreline.

Let by TSgt. James Cousineau, company C crossed the river under the cover of darkness shortly before dawn covered by thick fog. Once ashore they quickly knocked out 3 pillboxes and climbed and secured Hocker Hill, a position that dominated the river in that area. All without the assistance of other forces or artillery using great skill and the element of surprise.

Rescue At Obersher:

One of towns cut off by the German's counterattack on the Lampaden Ridge by the 11th SS Mountain Regiment "Reinhard Heydrich was Obersher. Obersher was being held by elements of the 774th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 3rd platoon of the 302nd Infantry's Cannon Company.

During the first day of the confused fighting on the ridge those units were on their own, cut off from resupply. Their only contact with the Regiment or Division was via radio.

After an aborted attempt to relieve the town by a small group, which remained on a nearby hilltop. Lieutenant Col. Cloudt mounts a scratch force of infantry on two tanks and sends them to relive the troops in the town.

The tanks break into the town, completely surprising the Germans, who had depleted their antitank ammo by using it against building in Obersher. The relief forces united with the Americans already in town and turn the tide of battle, slowly clearing the town of all German forces.

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General G S Patton - Part I: His Second Chance

By Wild Bill Wilder

The coming invasion of Western Europe, Operation Overlord, was going to be a gamble. Hitler had so strongly fortified the coast of France (he had four years to prepare it!), that any invasion was at best a gamble. So many factors would contribute to its success or failure, that it was a very “iffy” situation. General Eisenhower now appointed Supreme Allied Commander of the new Allied Expeditionary Force that was to assault “Festung Europe,” desperately needed a man of the caliber of General George Smith Patton.

He wrote General Marshall concerning GSP, “I believe he is cured, not only because of his great personal loyalty to you and me, but mainly because he is so avid for recognition as a great military commander that he will ruthlessly suppress any habit of his own that will tend to jeopardize it.” Eisenhower, nevertheless, would limit the command power of GSP. He would never pass beyond the rank or authority of an Army commander. Marshall, after careful consideration, acceded to the request of Eisenhower. Patton would have a new command.

Patton’s career had been placed in jeopardy by his own impetuous and sometimes irresponsible actions. His constant feud with Montgomery (from the days of North Africa) and the incident in a field hospital in Sicily when he threatened the life of an American enlisted man suffering from battle fatigue had sidelined old “Blood and Guts.” He would have an entire “Army” under his command. George Patton was being given a second chance.

A moment of digression is needed to explain Army structure. A division is a basic unit on an operational level. It is usually composed of between 12,000 to 16,000 men. Two to six divisions together form a Corps. In turn, two to six corps united becomes an Army. Finally, two or more armies become an Army Group, which is the largest size unit organization in the Army.

There would eventually be three army groups participating in the war in Western Europe. They would be the 21st British Army (composed primarily of British, Canadian, and other countries troops, including some American divisions from time to time), the 6th and 12th Army Groups. The largest of the three was the 12th Army Group, commanded by General Omar Bradley. Patton would be chosen to command an army within the 12th Army Group. His force of attack would be the Third Army.

General Patton would not, however, participate in the invasion, however, as he had another task. The most feared American commander in the Allied Army, Patton was watched closely by German intelligence. When he was transferred to England in January 1944, the Germans assumed that it would be he that would lead the invasion force. The Allies created a fake army of nearly fifty divisions in northern England. Patton established a headquarters there and did not hide his movement. This caused the enemy to anticipate an invasion in northern France at Pas de Calais. The bulk of German Armor of Army Group West, therefore, was concentrated in that area. The German leaders were convinced that Patton would lead these imaginary divisions to the attack. Of course, that was precisely what the Allies wanted them to think. While Germany concentrated its strongest forces in the north, the Allies struck at Normandy.

After a relatively successful invasion on the coast of France at Normandy, and the forces from the five beaches were united into one front, a rapid advance was expected. That was not to be, however, as the Germans recovered from the ruse. Panzer divisions were sent into the treacherous hedgerow landscape, where the defenses proved to be very powerful. The Allies were bogged down for nearly two months.

Caen, a key city in the northern invasion sector was to have been taken on the first day. It would not be conquered until the middle of July. In the American sector, the town of St. Lo was the axis of defense along the southern part of the enemy's line. It too did not fall until nearly the end of July. By this time, the Allies were way behind their scheduled advance.

Once the outer crust of German defenses was broken, and the hedgerows conquered, there was open country. What was then needed was a fresh force, fully mechanized, and well led by an aggressive leader that was not afraid to move ahead. It was into this environment that General George Patton and the newly formed 3rd Army would be introduced. Patton came to Normandy on July 6th, 1944 to establish his headquarters.

He was elated beyond words at the opportunity. He would be given a fourth star to equate to his responsibility. Now finding himself under the command of his former subordinate, General Omar Bradley, (Bradley had been Patton's subordinate in both the North Africa and Sicily campaigns) proved to be no problem at all for old "Blood and Guts." He willingly accepted the subservient role. He wanted to fight, to lead men directly into battle. Now he had the opportunity.

The Moment Arrives

Patton's ride to glory was more than for a moment. It extended from August 1994 through the end of April 1945. It was during this period that the name of Patton and his men constantly captured the headlines just as it also captured one enemy held strongpoint after another. He would eventually have under his command four Army corps. Not all were initially present in France, but they were arriving rapidly. His forces included the VIII, XII, XV and XX Corps. The British and Canadians to the north had tied down the biggest part of German armor. A weaker, somewhat demoralized force faced the American armies. With the saturation bombing of St. Lo by hundreds of Allied heavy and medium bombers, the Panzer Lehr Division, the strongest enemy defensive force in the area, was in chaos.

The enemy's defenses had been shattered. Into this opening roared the Third Army, General George Patton commanding. He would get all the glory for which he had yearned as his troops went at top speed through southern and central France. Time that had been lost in the hard fighting at Normandy would quickly be made up as the Third Army literally blasted its way forward.

Brittany, to the south, would fall first. Its key ports, including St. Malo, Brest, St. Nazaire, Lorient, and others were essential to get vital supplies ashore to support the ever-increasing Allied forces. Patton's forces fought on the run. Once they had completed their sweep to the south and southwest, they turned and headed straight for the heart of France.

Even when Patton's extended flank was threatened at Mortain, he did not stop. Caught with the fever of battle, GSP was constantly urging, demanding, pushing his troops ahead. He gloried in his achievements and congratulated his troops. They both hated and loved their leader. He was ALWAYS at the front. He was not a general they read about in "Stars and Stripes." They actually saw him, saluted him, shook hands and talked with him. He was not afraid.

On many occasions, his life was in danger, and he came under enemy fire. He never flinched, never ran. The men were impressed with his willingness to stand with them. Long after the war, men who had been a part of the Third Army would not identify with the name of a unit. No, they would instead say, "Yeah, I served over there with Patton."

There were two great moments of glory for the Third Army. The first was the lightning Blitzkrieg, American style, that ripped across France. The second would be during the "Battle of the Bulge," in December 1944. Though located to the south of the actual fighting, and heavily involved in fighting around the Saar River, Patton whirled part of his units northward, and made a fatal knife thrust through the German flanks, breaking through to the besieged 101st Division at Bastogne.

The spotlight passed from the Third Army to the First Army under General Courtney Hodges in the fall and early winter of 1944, and the last months of 1945. That was a strategic decision, based upon the plan to strike and take the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland. Much to the dismay of George Patton to the south, and General Bernard Montgomery to the north, the glory would pass to the center of the Allied lines.

Ironically, however, Patton would reach out and grab his star one more time. When things were rapidly deteriorating for the Allies during the Battle of the Bulge, it was the 4th Armored Division of Patton's 3rd Army that would make the dramatic breakthrough to the beleaguered troops of the 101st Division at Bastogne. Though fighting in the Bulge would go on unabated for three more weeks, the dramatic breakthrough sealed Germany's doom. Its last bid to change the tide of the war in the west had been thwarted by Blood and Guts and his men.

It would be a document far too long for the Articles section to attempt to cover all of the operations of the 3rd Army in detail. Instead, I want to simply highlight some of the many dramatic actions that transpired during that period. These serve as examples of the courageous faithfulness of Patton's men.

Almost, but Not Quite

Patton and his Third Army roared into action on August 1, 1944. With the opening made at St. Lo, the thick crust of the German defenses had been broken. There was nothing but a hollow shell behind it. Patton had the strong opinion that the direction in which to head was east. The general followed three basic tenets in war: self-confidence, speed, and audacity.

Being a strong advocate of mobile warfare and the use of armor, he would take his tank divisions and make them the point of his spear. Bradley, Hodges, and other leaders in the

US Army were the methodical, meticulous types. They cleaned things up as they went. Patton, however, was bold and reckless. He worried little about the flanks. His objective was to keep the enemy running. That way he did not have time to attack. He stated, "a good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan next week." GSP knew the capabilities of armor, and he exercised them to the utmost.

In addition, the timing was perfect. Once free of the constricting entrapment of the Normandy hedgerows, the ground before the tanks was open, easy to traverse. The weather was good, skies were clear, and the troop count was growing every day, in spite of casualties incurred. There was never a more propitious moment to strike than now, and that was what 3rd Army did.

The first order of business was to get to Avranches, which would serve as an axis. From there, Patton's forces swung west toward the French coast. Brittany, almost a world to itself, was not well protected. 3rd Army advanced rapidly on the port cities of Brest, St. Nazaire, Lorient and others. Not all fell immediately, but they were encircled and put under siege. Hitler knew of the importance of supply to the growing Allied forces. By holding onto key ports, he would stifle the Allied initiative. His standing order to each port was to hold to the last man.

Patton, however, was not about to "dilly dally" around these areas. Once Brittany had been cleared, Patton whirled his troops and headed east. Across country they came, headed east toward the German border. These rolling forces covered hundreds of miles in both directions in France. Bets were made between commanders as to how far they could go in one day. German forces found themselves suddenly being enveloped on the south as British, Canadian and American forces pounded them from the west and north.

An attempted counterattack at Mortain by remnants of three German Panzer divisions proved futile. The Germans now had little with which to fight, and so they too headed for the German border. A retreat became a rout. Men ran for their lives. American aircraft slaughtered men and destroyed machinery in quantities too great to be believed unless one personally visited the battlefields.

The race was on. The northern and southern forces of the Allied armies sprung shut their steel pincers at Argentan, but a little too late to trap all of the Germans. Over 10,000 were captured, and another 20,000 killed. It was estimated, however, that an approximate 30,000 to 40,000 were able to escape. The hesitancy of Montgomery's advance from the north, and the reluctance to let Patton run headlong kept the door open just long enough for many German soldiers to get back to the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River. Though most escaped only with what they could carry, they survived to fight another day.

As August came to a close, Allied forces had liberated Paris and most of the country of France. American troops had crossed the Seine River in force and numbers of Allied units were approaching the vaunted German West Wall, known also as the Siegfried Line. In one month, most of France, except some areas to the south, was now free again.

Patton loved all his men, but realistically speaking, his heart went to the armored divisions. His particular favorites, and the two he counted on the most were the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions, General Wood and Grow commanding, respectively. These groups of men would do or die for old "Blood and Guts," and often did.

Other units, however, were just as devoted and ready to serve, On August 7th, the 5th Armored Division was approaching Brest; the 4th was closing in on Lorient and a unit of

the 8th Infantry Division was taking Dinant. One of Patton's strongest suggestions was the inclusion of engineers and bridging units in all armored divisions.

It seemed utterly ridiculous to have such a powerful arm held at bay by natural or manmade obstacles, whatever they might be. On one occasion he came upon some tankers who were studiously studying maps of the area to find a safe crossing. Walking away from them, Patton waded into the river, which was about two or three feet deep at its deepest point. A German machine gun fired wayward shots in his direction, which did not even come close.

Coming out of the water, he confronted the wide-eyed junior officers and in his words, "I repeated the Japanese proverb: 'One look is worth one hundred reports,' and asked them why in hell they had not gone down to the river personally. They learned the lesson and from then on were a very great division." Patton had a way of making a point.

Always looking for new places to cross rivers, word came into the headquarters of the Third Army of an intact bridge over the Mayenne at Angers. Instead of hours of planning and discussion, Patton ordered a couple of officers from his staff to grab some infantry and armor from the 3rd Division, form a combat team and get Angers as quickly as possible. Colonel Carter of the General Staff led the team and after a fierce firefight, gained access to the bridge. German units of the 3rd Panzer Group opposed them as best they could. Unable to stop the "fanatical Americans," the Germans blew the bridge at the last minute to avoid the passage across the river.

A New Enemy

The month of September brought a marked change to the war in Europe in the west. The rapid Allied advance and the influx of thousands of troops were beginning to create a logistical problem. The Allies were running low on everything. The lifeblood of a mechanized force was fuel. Fuel was in short supply. Without fuel, tanks, halftracks, and other motorized vehicles can't move. The problem was that there were not enough ports of entry to get the supplies on shore.

The supplies that did arrive had to be transported hundreds of miles to catch up with the tanks. This required additional transport and additional fuel. The problem simply compounded itself to the point that everything began to come to a stop. By the end of the first week of September, the quantity of fuel delivered to the 3rd Army had dropped from 400,000 gallons a day to 80,000. This was hardly enough to defend, let alone advance. Patton's fast-moving tanks began slowing down.

It was a tragedy, because at this point, German defenses were in a chaotic state. The loss of men and material, especially armor, left them stripped of significant defense power.

Their losses in Western Europe included 108,000 men, 433 tanks and SP guns, and 688 artillery pieces. Even with this great advantage, plus the fact that at the end of August, the Siegfried Line was largely unmanned, there was little that the Third Army could do.

Eisenhower feared German strength and wanted to proceed cautiously. There was nothing cautious about Patton. His rapid advance had not been jeopardized up until this point and he saw no danger in the near future.

In addition to the shortages, Montgomery's Market Garden plan, an airborne invasion of Holland to open a quick road into Germany, took top priority. This meant that the commanders of 1st and 3rd Armies were lower down on the list. Their objections were in vain. The Allied armies now had a new enemy, one called supply and demand. On this occasion, politics won over expediency, or so it seemed to old "Blood and Guts."

Patton tried everything he could to keep going. Some of his officers disguised themselves as First Army men and stole gasoline for their own tanks. A real boon was the seizure of 100,000 barrels of aviation fuel, which 3rd Army used to the last drop. The general gave standing orders to his men. They were to advance, fuel or no fuel. If a tank platoon ran dry, they would siphon the fuel from four tanks and put it in the fifth. It was to then continue until it was empty. Then the crew was to arm themselves, get out and walk. A day without an advance was a day wasted in Patton's mind.

On September 4th, Bradley did provide Patton's forces half the allotted amount of their requisition. New units were added to the 3rd Army, such as the 2nd French Armored, and the American 79th Infantry Division. The 6th Armored and 83rd Infantry, which were on temporary loan to 1st Army, would be soon returned to him. This movement of forces from one army to another was a frequent occurrence as the situation necessitated.

In one of his daily visits to the front, General Patton came across Colonel Bruce Clarke, commander of Combat Command B, 4th Armored Division. He told Patton about his attack on the town of Vitry in eastern France. When the tanks and infantry of his command encircled the town, they discovered that remnants of the German 353rd Infantry Division had control of the town. They had a battery of 88mm guns on a causeway east of a bridge in the town.

Clarke opted to enter the town, all guns blazing. They rolled through the area firing in all directions. While not accurate, the fire did disconcert the Germans and caused them to retreat. The only problem came when German tanks of the shattered 17th Panzer Division rolled in behind them. The rest of CCA took them on and eliminated the problem.

Victory is Costly

By the end of the second week in September 1944, the Third Army was poised to plunge into Lorraine and attempt to force a way through the Metz Gap. With a new impetus, Patton started issuing orders. Walker's XX Corps was to drive 30 miles east from Verdun and establish a bridgehead over the Moselle River near Metz. The XII Corps, recently taken over by General Manton Eddy, was to make a parallel advance from Commercy to Nancy and cross the Moselle there.

Clarke's Combat Command B learned from the French that an entire German Corps was defending Nancy. Clarke jumped into an aircraft to find a suitable detour to get around this

enemy force. In the meantime, the 80th Infantry Division attempted to assault the city, but was getting nowhere. To the south, CCB forced a crossing and stared moving.

Clarke found a suitable crossing at Arracourt, eight miles east of Nancy. It was crammed to overflowing with German vehicles. He radioed orders to his leading tank column, commanded by Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams to go and see what he could do. Abrams took the initiative and took on the enemy troops and armor. He won his battle and, in the process, captured the corps headquarters that commanded the three divisions defending Nancy.

With US Armor cutting across their rear and the corps headquarters destroyed, the defenders of Nancy headed east. The troops of the 35th marched into the city unopposed, behind the division band. Patton had his troops to the Moselle, but the pursuit stopped there.

On the 19th, the 35th Infantry and the 4th Armored Divisions found the going tough. A strong German counterattack pushed them to hold the ground they had recently gained. Patton, in spite of his brusque approach, had a tender side. Seeing that the new commander of the XII Corps, General Manton Eddy, was a little discouraged with all of the difficulties he had inherited, plus his units losing recently gained ground, the general related to him two quotes.

The first was from Ulysses S. Grant. “In every battle, there comes a time when both sides consider themselves beaten; then he who continues the attack wins.” The other was from General Robert E. Lee at Chancellorsville; “I was too weak to defend, so I attacked.” Patton related that after the conversation, Eddy regrouped his forces and took back the ground they had lost.

By now, the advance to Metz and Nancy had used up the windfall of supplies he had received, and he was forced once again to slow down. Much of the 3rd Army would survive for days on captured German stores, including canned fish and sauerkraut. In spite of all of this, Hodges and Patton stood on a line that invasion planners had not thought possible to achieve before May 1945. The pursuit had exceeded all expectations.

Companies B and C, plus a recon platoon of the 2nd Battalion, Combat Command B, had skirted the urban area, going across country. The tanks were equipped with “duck’s feet,” a special attachment to the treads of the tank that gave it much better traction. The Shermans received a radio message that Germans were headed their way. A column of Battalion Kromma came into view of the leading Shermans. The commander of B Company, Captain, Oscar P. Holsum, had his entire company of fourteen tanks split into two groups. Two platoons were near the road, while a third remained on the hills nearby.

The enemy column was easy meat. What Holsum did not realize was that tanks were escorting the convoy and were avoiding the road. 3rd Platoon, on the hill, caught their fury. Even as German trucks and horse drawn carts lay shattered on the highway, the tankers on the hill were radioing frantically for help. By the time the other two platoons got to them, only one of the four Shermans was intact. The battle then took a decided turn for the Americans, but by that time, it was a little late for the immolated tankers of 3rd Platoon.

Patton was Everywhere.

By the middle of October 1944, General George S. Patton was not very happy. For over a month he had run roughshod over the German “supermen.” He had kicked butt and enjoyed every minute of it. Patton was in his glory. He felt that he had been born for this moment. On one occasion, when speaking of the glories of war, he ended his thoughts by saying, “...God, how I love it!” And he did. The honeymoon, however, was quickly coming to an end. The failed attempt of Operation Market Garden had drained what resources the Allied armies had amassed to the extreme.

SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force) sent down orders to the Army commanders that for the most part limited them to a defensive posture or limited advances. They were to hold in place. There were shortages everywhere. It could only mean one thing.

The avalanche of advance was coming to a screeching halt. Without fuel, ammunition, food and warm clothing, the rampaging Third Army was stopped in its tracks.

There were other adversities that were affecting the war negatively. The weather was changing. The skies were cloudy every day. There was an abnormally large amount of rain that always hampers movement, especially across country. And the Germans were closer to home, which shortened their supply routes, making transit to the front more convenient. It had been a glorious summer. It was going to be a long hard fall and winter.

So, the Allied forces set about straightening and strengthening their front-line positions. It was becoming a time of consolidation and preparation for the next great offensive, which would begin at the end of the first week of November. In some ways, as far as Patton's forces were concerned, it was probably for the best, although it would not have been a good idea to say that to him. He had run the legs off of his men and the treads off his tanks.

The general was grief stricken, however, at the imposed halt. He stated in his writings, "The period from September 25 to November 7 was a difficult one for the Third Army. For the first time in our experience, we were not advancing rapidly, if at all. We were fighting, with inadequate means, against equal or superior forces in excellent defensive positions and the weather was against us."

As if to rub it in, one of his armored divisions was ordered north to help the British and two of his infantry divisions were assigned to the Seventh Army so they could be nourished from Marseilles. He was promised the 26th Infantry Division as compensation if he could move it into his area. Patton, in his unique way spoke of the incident. "I could always move any troops *given* me, but I had difficulty in moving those taken away."

The general's idea of defense was a hyperactive one. He kept urging his generals to make "extended reconnaissance" efforts. He would tell his generals to go just a little bit further, just a little bit. The Third Army had the fortresses in and around Metz under siege. Since Nancy had been taken, the Germans did little to relieve them. They expended huge amounts of manpower and equipment trying to win back Nancy.

The zone of control for the Third Army at this time extended from Luxembourg in the north to Perimont in the south. His troops had linked with both 7th and 1st Armies. GSP visited the front lines every day. He used all means of transportation, including aircraft, trucks, special armored cars, and even his legs to get to the front lines.

Occasionally he put himself in danger. On his way to visit the 2nd Infantry, he had the choice of going over a mountain on foot or using the road in the valley. He chose the road, even though it was under enemy artillery fire. He stated, "They must have practiced on that road, because driving back they dropped a salvo of four 150mm shells; the first was well beyond us, the second near enough to be uncomfortable, the third threw mud and rocks all over us, and the fourth lit about two feet from the left-hand running board of my jeep - it was a dud."

One of his limited attacks was for XII Corps to hit the area known as the Saar on October 8th. The purpose of it was not so much advance as to straighten the front lines, which in combat often become erratic. Gaps and salients form, which can potentially be dangerous. The operation was as follows: The 80th Division would attack to the east, taking three important hills. A battalion of the 35th Division, with a tank company of the 737th Tank battalion attached, was to attack northwest to clear the woods on the left of the division sector. Finally, two combat commands of the 6th Armored Division attacked north between the left of the 35th Division and the right of the 80th Division. For a "limited offensive action," it was quite a little scrap.

The 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry moved out smartly. The woods provided excellent cover for remnants of the 53rd Panzer Regiment and assorted armored units. Patton arrived at the point of departure and watched the advance. In all he was quite pleased with the performance of his troops. They often cursed him, but never hesitated to give their best for

him. Lt. Col. Ethan Walker was a commander of the same mold as Patton. He pushed his men hard, but he was always by their side. The enemy defenses were stout, but with the tank support, they took the woods.

A Green Light and Some new Troops

Finally, after six weeks of waiting, Patton was given the green light. The date for the beginning of the offensive of the Third Army was November 8, 1944. From September 25th until the first week of November, most of the offensive action had taken place further to the north, in Operation Market Garden and its aftermath, and the attempts of the American First Army to crack the German West Wall.

Actually, the days spent in marking time had been good for the men. There was time to consolidate, repair, refresh, and resupply. The Third Army was a much stronger force now that they had taken a "breather." The downside of the wait was that it had given time to the Germans to do the same thing. The army that had fled France in August and September had used the time to good advantage. The Siegfried Line had now been manned and strengthened.

A number of units had been moved from the eastern front to bolster defenses at the German border and along the Rhine. Ten new Panzer Brigades were formed and began to bolster the defenses of the Reich. Hitler had also used this respite to finish the preparations for his coming massive counterattack that would burst open in the Ardennes Forest in Belgium. It would follow the same track as the German Blitzkrieg had done four years earlier.

The weather had turned completely foul. The rain and early icy winter made life a misery for the American soldier. Sickness began to claim as many casualties as war. Trenchfoot was rampant and seemed unstoppable. Patton reported 39,000 casualties from battle and 24,000 from non-battle causes in the five weeks from November 8th through December 15th.

And of course, the weather slowed down the deadly air support from the XIX Tactical Command. The skies just were not there for the "Jabos" (German name for the deadly P- 47 Thunderbolt fighter-bomber). Observation planes were also often limited in what they could do. While supplies had been replenished, keeping them that way was another matter.

On one occasion, Patton was watching artillery batteries firing in support of an attack by the 90th Division. The artillery suddenly stopped their attack. Patton quickly ran up to the colonel of artillery and demanded to know why the firing had stopped. The young officer stutteringly explained that he was allotted 60 rounds a day for each gun. He had fired his allotment and had to stop. Almost apoplectic, the general made it clear to the leaders of the 90th that ammunition and anything else that was needed was to be used WHEN it was needed. If it did run out, then that was another problem that would be dealt with at that time.

Within an hour, the guns were up and firing again. It was part of Patton's character. Attack as long as you could, fire as long as there was ammo, drive as long as there was fuel, and then walk until you could not walk anymore. Preparing for unforeseen contingencies were not a part of the general's nature or his strategy.

The offensive kicked off as planned, but the promised air support was unavailable, due to the weather. One thousand artillery pieces thundered early on November 8th, kicking off the general advance. The incessant rains had flooded rivers, widening them 100 to 300 feet. Just before the new offensive began, Generals Eddy and Grow came to visit Patton. They argued for holding off the attack due to the weather. Patton's reply? "I asked them whom they wished to name their successors because the attack was to go as scheduled. They immediately assented and, as usual, did great work".

On the 9th, the weather cleared over Metz and it was hit by an air attack of 1,476 airplanes. The general was on hand to watch and was greatly impressed. Metz was an anchor to the southern part of the Siegfried Line as Aachen was to the north. The Germans looked upon it as a symbol of German strength and resistance. Under attack since late September, Hitler

had sent one group of reinforcements after another. It had become a fortress and withstood the attacks of air, artillery, tanks, and infantry. Finally, it was declared “secured” on November 18th, even though fighting there continued until the 13th of the next month. It was the first time it had fallen to enemy assault since the year 641 AD.

“Good Soldiers”

On October 31st, Patton visited the recently arrived 761st Tank Battalion, a predominately Black unit. Patton initially had reservations about Black troops, especially in armor. He felt that they did not have the mental quickness to react to the stresses of that type of combat. The general decided he would keep close tabs on this unit and its fighting ability. Happily, his initial evaluation of the black tankers was proven wrong.

The tankers were assigned to the 26th Division of the XII Corps. They were active in the offensive and fought well. On November 8th, the 26th attacked three regiments abreast seizing Vic-sur-Seille and its bridges intact. The 761st was instrumental in achieving that victory. On November 12th, the 328th Regiment, with tank support from the 761st stormed the strongpoint of Battalion Grenzel at the Berange Farm. The infantry moved ahead but was hit by intensive mortar and machine gun fire from the trees of the Koecking Ridge Forest.

Company C of the 761st, led by Captain Raymond Charles, rescued the 3rd Battalion from suffering terrible losses. German troops had laid a careful ambush with well positioned artillery pieces and a few carefully hidden pieces of armor. Antitank fire and close assaulting panzer-killer teams took out a number of the Shermans. Charles’s command tank was hit by a round from a Panther tank lurking in the shadows and caught fire, but he and his crew stayed with it until the heat became unbearable.

Bailing out, two of the crew were killed as they retreated. Captain Charles was horribly burned, which leaves hideous discolored skin on a dark-skinned man when it heals.

Picked up by another tank from his company, even in his agony he continued to give orders to his company and continued the fight. It was General George Patton who would later pin a Silver Star valor to the captain’s pillow when visiting the division’s hospital. As he left the bedside of the stricken tank commander, he commented to an aide, “The black man is as good as any soldier.”

On the 11th of November, Patton celebrated his birthday with his general staff. They drank what was available, which were “armored diesels,” a special beverage invented by the 2nd Armored Division. Conditions continued to deteriorate, tanks sinking to their bellies when moving off road. Eisenhower made a special visit to Patton’s area. The general was grateful to have him, and in order to provide him with the maximum comfort, Patton had a roaring fire built in his room at the hotel in the town. The fire was such a good one that the hotel caught fire and Eisenhower had to be rescued.

The rest of the month into the first weeks of December was marked by slow, hard progress. The line of the 3rd Army advanced steadily, but at a tremendous cost in men and equipment. The acute shortage of riflemen caused Patton to strip down Corps headquarters, quartermaster personnel and anyone else he could scrounge. By doing this he came up with 5,000 rather unhappy and reluctant replacements to flesh out his battered infantry divisions.

By that time his forces had breached the Saar River in numerous places and held a steady line from just south of Luxembourg to the north in a southeasterly direction to Saargemund, where it abutted with units of Seventh Army. One of the main thrusts of the 3rd Army was an attack by the XX Corps toward Saarburg. Some suggested this to be foolish, as it was known to be the strongest position of the Siegfried Line in the area.

Patton’s reply was “...apparent strength sometimes produces weakness, because people are inclined not to occupy strong positions with as many men as they should.”

Toward the end of November, tanks of the 4th Armored clashed with units of the reformed 130th Panzer Lehr Division, General Fritz Bayerlein commanding. Other German units, that were not supposed to be in the area, were sighted. They were all headed northwest. G-2 officers of the 3rd Army was picking up indications of a German buildup north of Patton's forces. When word of this was sent the SHAEF, it was largely ignored. Other reports similar to Patton's were received but it was felt by most Allied planners and logisticians that the enemy only had strength to defend. These had to be units headed into the Siegfried Line area to strengthen the sagging defensive positions there. The warnings were acknowledged but discounted.

Burning Bridges

The all-out offensive of the Third Army in the middle of November was what Patton had been longing for. After six weeks of relative inactivity, the commander languished and then fumed. He was used to moving and moving fast. The shortage of supplies and the attacks by Allied forces to the north had placed serious restrictions on him.

When the city of Nancy, fell, 12th Corps was in a great position to exploit the opening, but Hitler had rushed in reinforcements. Screaming, "Hiel Hitler," the Germans rode in on tanks, firing as they came. Only with the greatest effort did the US troops keep the town from being recaptured. The fighting had been intense and effectively stifled any hopes for a quick advance.

During the waiting period, the officers under Patton had to jump, and jump fast. He tended to take out his frustrations on those under him in command. The general was greatly loved by the enlisted men, but the leaders that served under him did not always share that feeling. Usually, when discovered, these officers found themselves enjoying a quick transfer to another unit. Patton did not expect them to hug him, but he did demand obedience.

On many occasions, he put them (and himself) in danger. His philosophy of command was that officers should be leading, not pushing. He often used the illustration of a strand of limp spaghetti. It will not go anywhere by pushing it. You have to grab it from the front and pull it along. Command was the same.

As a result, the casualty rate among officers was by far the highest in Patton's army. On October 25th, Colonel D.T. Colley's 104th Infantry Regiment of the 26th Division made an attack. They captured most of the hill they attacked but left a part of it to the Germans.

General Paul, commander of the 26th, felt that they had done enough, and was in the process of getting another unit to finish the task.

Colley heard about it and went to his leading battalion and told them that the honor of the regiment did not permit them to turn over an incomplete job. He took charge of the assault and led it himself. He fought gallantly, taking the final enemy position, but was shot in the right shoulder, the bullet progressing diagonally through both lungs and emerging from the lower part of his left lung. It miraculously missed his heart. Patton added an Oak-Leaf Cluster to the Distinguished Service Cross that Colley had received in World War One. He made a complete recovery and insisted on being returned to his regiment.

Another commander, specifically picked by Patton was Lt. Col. Bob Sears, who was three years older than Patton and a former classmate from West Point. He had been in command of a regiment of the 35th Infantry Division, but his health was in terrible shape. After visiting the regimental headquarters, Patton reluctantly relieved the man. The general said of him, "He had made a great reputation for himself and had actually killed seven Germans with his own hands. I believe this a record for a regimental commander in any war."

Again, he did not ask for more than he gave. On many occasions, he placed himself in harm's way. He endured many near misses from artillery attacks. When visiting the front lines, he was often fired upon. Men around him were hit, but never Patton. This fact, along with others, showed a parallel between Patton and his earlier nemesis, Erwin Rommel.

The Desert Fox also had many close calls during the fighting in France and the North African desert.

In late November, two Me-109s attacked his headquarters column on the road, just missing his command car, and destroying the following half-track. GSP loved every minute of it. He was showing his men that he could do just what he was ordering them to do. He was a general that was known by many of his men by sight, and not by second hand reputation. And in a unit the size of Patton's, that would require a lot of visits to the front.

The officers that served under Patton often were under double pressure: that of the enemy before them, and the general behind them. On one occasion, a young second Lieutenant requested permission from his company commander to withdraw. The reply was clear, "Negative, Fox-1. Star 3 is here." (Patton was at the company command post.). For the most part, they performed well.

A classic illustration of this took place during the November offensive with the 90th Division. The 358th and 359th Regiments fought their way across the Moselle River on November 9th. The assault was made with wood and rubber boats in the dark through floodwaters, near Malling and Cattentom. Many boats were capsized, and some troops were lost.

The crossing was a resounding success, however, catching the enemy off guard. The problem was that now that they were across, they had no way to move the heavier equipment and tanks to the east side of the river. The Germans counterattacked on the 10th but were driven back. American engineers worked frantically to get a pontoon bridge across, but the biggest problem was that the road itself at the riverbank on both sides was still five feet underwater!

Finally late on the 11th, the bridge was finished. Units of Panzergruppe Kaether, composed of some tanks and SP guns, plus troops of the newly formed 35th Grenadier Regiment were brought out of reserve and thrust at the bridgehead. The GIs were without armor support and were hard pressed to hold their positions. The road the Germans followed was the Kerling Petite Hettange highways. This was fast becoming the most critical area in the advance of the Third Army. With the bridge out, there was nowhere to retreat. The GIs of the 359th would have to fight and die where they stood. No retreat was possible.

The bridge was finally usable but had come under heavy German artillery fire. By dawn of the 12th, they succeeded in hitting it and punctured several pontoons. American engineers, renowned for innovating in adverse circumstance, responded quickly. Using small, powerful compressors, they were able to keep the bridge afloat. It was still a very tenuous situation on the east side of the river.

It was at that time that 1st Platoon, Company A, 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, began to cross the bridge in support of the 359th. They crossed cautiously, one at a time. Two made it across safely, but when the third was halfway across, the bridge collapsed, taking the TD with it. The two TDs that made it were on their way to support the 357th, but the commander of the 359th, Colonel Bell, stopped them as they passed his regimental command post. He countermanded the orders and sent them to support his own beleaguered forces.

Meanwhile the 2nd battalion supported by heavy machine guns and a 57mm antitank battery stationed in the crossroads nearby were fighting hard to stop the enemy. A platoon of Assault guns approached the position, where Lt. Colonel Booth commanded the antitank guns. They began firing at one another. Booth stood in the middle of the road and guided the fire of the guns. Shells and bullets whizzed around him, but he was not hit. The leading German assault gun had a low silhouette, and its front armor was heavy and slanted. Rounds from the 57mm gun hit the vehicle, but simply ricocheted into the air. The accuracy of the gun crew seemed to unnerve the German crew so that the assault gun hesitated in advancing. German troops continued forward, firing as they came.

At this point the American TDs were at the scene of the fighting. When they first came into view, a young, nervous bazooka gunner mistakenly took them for more German armor.

The battalion had no idea that American armor had made it across the Moselle. Just as he was about to fire on the lead M-10, a veteran sergeant who had recognized it as friendly tackled him.

The M-10s came down the highway, then skirted around some nearby buildings, coming out on the flank of the attacking German armor. They repeatedly fired into the Germans. The two leading German assault guns were taken out and a third was immobilized. The troops, greatly encouraged by the sight of the German tanks going up in flames, began firing with greater intensity and charged the attacking Germans. This new impetus on the side of the Americans stopped the German advance cold.

By the end of the battle, the Germans had lost five tanks and SP guns. Over 200 of the enemy soldiers were killed. The attack that could have cut off the bulk of the 90th had been thwarted by the determined resistance of the Americans and the timely arrival of friendly armor. The mission of the 35th Grenadier Regiment had been to split the bridgehead and cut it off. That they nearly succeeded was evidenced by the fact that in the attacks of the 10th and 12th, they had penetrated three fourths of the way to the river, and there was no opposition beyond Petite Hettange.

Patton was brought to the scene of the battle and was impressed with the performance of the 359th. He wrote in his memories, “I have never seen so many dead Germans in one place in my life. They extended for a distance of about a mile, shoulder to shoulder.”. He demanded to see the crews of the two M-10s to congratulate them personally. In typical Patton style, he told them, “You are true tankers and a credit to the 3rd Army. You have a lovely way of killing Germans, and that is why we are here.”

Patton’s Prayer

The advance of the 3rd Army under the leadership of old “Blood and Guts” had been difficult to say the least. The harsh European fall weather continued to hamper attacks. And the Germans were not about to cooperate. Instead, they maintained a tenacious fighting withdrawal. There were heavy US losses, but the GIs continued to advance on all fronts. Their progress was slow, often only a mile a day. It meant painful slogging through mud and rain toward the Saar River.

During that time, General Patton was forced to relieve an old friend and hard fighter. General John Wood, who had led the 4th since May of 1942, had come to the end of his string. Two- and one-half years of leadership and months of relentless combat had taken the edge off Wood’s fighting ability. Patton reluctantly relieved the tired general on December 2nd, and replaced him with General Hugh Gaffey, who had formerly been the Chief of Staff of the 3rd Army.

The problem of replacements to fill in the growing gaps of his divisions had gotten to the point that the there was a desperate need for more troops. Patton’s comments and reaction were, “The situation as to replacements was now extremely bad. In an army of six infantry and three armored divisions. We were eleven thousand men short, which, being translated into terms of riflemen - and they are the people who get hurt - meant that the rifle companies were at only fifty-five per cent of their strength.

We issued orders to take a second five per cent of corps and army troops and also for the divisions to cannibalize their non-essential units, such as anti-tank companies, to provide riflemen.” There were still plenty of M-1 rifles to go around.

Early in December the Saar River was breached in several areas by the 4th Armored, 35th and 80th infantry divisions around Saaralben. They moved quickly and were approaching the area of Bitche by December 15th. The weather, which continued to be deplorable,

exasperated General Patton to the point that he called for Chaplain O'Neill of the 3rd Army. The conversation as remembered by those who were there was as follows.

> *General Patton:* "Chaplain, I want you to publish a prayer for good weather. I'm tired of these soldiers having to fight mud and floods as well as Germans. See if we can't get God to work on our side."
>
> *Chaplain O'Neill:* "Sir, it's going to take a pretty thick rug for that kind of praying."
>
> *General Patton:* "I don't care if it takes a flying carpet, I want the praying done!"
>
> *Chaplain O'Neill:* "Yes sir. May I say, General, that it isn't usually a customary thing among men of my profession to pray for clear weather to kill our fellow man."
>
> *General Patton:* "Chaplain, are you teaching me theology or are you the Chaplain of the Third Army? I want a prayer!"
>
> *Chaplain O'Neill:* "Yes sir."

The Chaplain quickly left the headquarters and began preparing the prayer. Since it was near Christmas, it was decided to include a holiday greeting to the men. The card was prepared, printed and was to be distributed to the men by December 22nd. It had been composed to facilitate the next advance of the 3rd Army with the goal of reaching the Rhine River, scheduled to begin on December 21st. The sudden German offensive in the Ardennes put the brakes on this offensive. The content of the prayer was as follows.

> *"Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for Battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies, and establish Thy justice among men and nations. Amen."*

On the reverse side of card

> *"To each officer and soldier in the Third United States Army, I wish a Merry Christmas. I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We march in our might to complete victory. May God's blessing rest upon each of you on this Christmas Day.*
>
> *G. S. Patton, Jr.* Lieutenant General
> *Commanding, Third United States Army"*

Significant is the fact that on December 23rd, the day after the prayer was issued, the weather cleared and remained icily perfect for about six days. It was enough time to allow the Allies to break the back of the German counteroffensive and turn a difficult setback to a resounding victory. By that time, the headquarters of the Third Army had moved to Luxembourg to be closer to the battle area. Patton was all smiles. He told one of his aids. "God damn! Look at the weather. That O'Neill sure did some potent praying. Get him up here. I want to pin a medal on him."

The Chaplain arrived the next day. The general rose to his feet, came around his desk and shook hands with O'Neill. "Chaplain, you're the most popular man in this headquarters. You sure stand in good with the Lord and soldiers." Patton then pinned a Bronze Star medal on Chaplain O'Neill. After congratulations were offered, the 3rd Army quickly went back to work, killing more Germans, but now with good weather.

Another Innovative Tactic

At the last minute, General Weyland of the USAAF called General Patton and advised him that if the Air Force were going to be any help at all, the attack would have to be advanced one day, from December 2nd to the 1st. By this time, with the rapidly changing weather, the general was not going to let the opportunity to use this vital arm of offense go to waste.

He sent immediate orders for General Walker to initiate the attack of the 95th Division on the 1st. Walker protested, saying that the troops were not in the best position at that time to go to the attack. Patton was resolute. It would be done. This time the area to be bombed was to be cleared for 4,000 yards, or over 2 miles, to provide a buffer area. Too many Americans had lost their lives to friendly fire, and the Americans were trying to avoid this tragedy. Germans also knew this and would often move into the buffer zone to avoid the bombings.

To stop this, Patton had the commander of Combat Command B, 6th Armored Division, station tanks at intervals throughout the gap to stop any Germans moving into the area. The general felt that the chance of a direct hit on a tank was small, and fragmentation would have little effect against it.

The attack was begun on December 1st, but as Walker had warned, the 379th Regiment took a pasting. The pre-planned bombardment went off well, but as anticipated, German troops did filter into the buffer area. The result was a sharp fight between American tankers without infantry support, and desperate Germans seeking to avoid American airpower.

Three tanks were lost in the buffer area, two to German attackers and one to bombs. Even though the losses were minimal, that would be little consolation to the families of the tank crews that lost their loved ones. The advance continued, with the 379th finally overcoming the enemy resistance and entering Saarlautern that same day.

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General G S Patton - Part II: His Moment of Glory

By Wild Bill Wilder

It was becoming clear that the main thrust of the Allied armies would be to his north, by the American 1st Army into the area of the Ruhr as soon as the Rhine River was breached, and the broad front offensive had brought all units in line. Patton still intended to keep his men moving in the south. His thinking was that if he could not be where the spotlight was, he would bring the spotlight to him and his 3rd Army.

He was determined to get across the river first and thrust deeply into Germany. His men were pretty beaten up after over a month of hard fighting, the terrain, and the weather. Their advance had been costly in men and material, but Patton would not let up. More than one commander had been relieved due to the stress of combat and the constant pushing of their commander. The Siegfried Line had been reached and breached in the south, and now the 3rd Army leaned against it, wet, cold and tired.

The next big offensive would begin for the 3rd Army on December 19th. It would be straight into the area known as the Saar and the Palatinate. On December 12th, Patton's intelligence groups reported on the movement of large amounts of German units to the north. It made no sense to the general, considering the threat his forces made in the area. Something had to be going on with the enemy.

It seemed to the general that there would be some kind of enemy counterattack north of his area. He knew that the area of VIII Corps was thinly defended by units that were either hurt or green. General Middleton, its commander, had under his control the 4th and 28th Divisions, recuperating from the horrid fighting in the Hurtgen Forest.

There were also the newly arrived wet-behind-the-ears 106th Infantry and the 9th Armored Divisions. Hitler had certainly chosen the area of attack well. It was probably the poorest defended area of the Allied lines. Anticipating an attack in the area, Patton had his headquarters to begin drawing up contingency plans to send part of his 3rd Army north to bolster the V and VIII Corps.

Montgomery, whom Patton considered to be almost as serious a threat to the Allied advance as the Germans, was crying and complaining. In September, he had gotten the limelight and all the goodies for his attempt to thrust into northern Germany via Holland, called Operation Market Garden. He was then ordered by Eisenhower to concentrate on opening Antwerp as a viable port of entry for desperately needed supplies.

Now that Montgomery had accomplished that, he was anxious to be the one to get across the Rhine and take the lead. To do so, he was demanding more American soldiers, whom he still considered "second rate," to bolster the attacks of his British and Canadian troops.

In a bombastic statement issued hours before three German armies struck Allied lines, he told the press that the Germans were "...no longer able to mount any type of serious offensive action." Just as Patton, Montgomery's mouth often got him in trouble. Very shortly,

he would have a new opportunity to get the glory. His timidity and caution, however, would force him into a defensive posture, giving ground to the Germans as they advanced.

“Montgomery was mentally scarred. His generalship was limited by his exaggerated ideas of German abilities. He was limited by doublethink. His desire to get his hand on American troops didn’t alter his disdain for them. He couldn’t imagine they might actually stop three German armies in full cry.”

When the German offensive broke in all its fury against the V and VIII Corps in the Ardennes sector, Patton immediately began to put into operation the contingency plan of disengaging the bulk of his entire army of 350,000 men, turn them ninety degrees in the most disagreeable weather imaginable and head in another direction.

On December 19, 1944, Eisenhower met with the generals in the west and south to plan strategy to stop the enemy. He asked Patton just when he might be able to help the situation. When he rather nonchalantly stated “48 hours,” the rest of the generals were stunned, including Eisenhower. No one believed him. But, true to his word, his troops were ready to attack into the southern shoulder of the German attack by December 21st. Eisenhower inspected the troops with Patton and saw for himself that he indeed was ready to launch the counterattack northward.

Spearheading the advance of Patton’s third Army was the ever-reliable 4th Armored Division. Often referred to as “Patton’s favorite,” or “Pattons Best” the 4th had come through for Patton once and again. Now beaten up, short of tanks, and desperately in need of rest, the weary tankers and armored infantry lined up for the general, ready to do or die for him one more time.

One combat command of Patton’s 10th Armored, only just having arrived in combat, had been transferred to the command of 1st Army and was engaging massive German forces just east of Bastogne. After the 10th had gotten in, the Germans had closed the door, blocking Allied movement from the south with the 5th Panzer Army and the 7th Army.

It would be a long hard 100 miles that the 4th would have to cover, but time was of the essence. Bastogne was under siege, and the 101st Airborne division, along with remnants of other American units was holding on by their fingernails. Patton gave the order for the counterattack to begin on December 22nd at 0600 hours.

The plan of attack was simple. The troops would advance north towards St. Vith. Bastogne was in that path. The 80th Infantry Division, to the east would maintain contact during its advance with the left wing of the XII Corps. The 26th Division would form the center thrust while the 4th Armored Division would advance on the left.

Patton was worried about the 4th, after the month-long ordeal of constant fighting. He knew they were tired, short of men and tanks, and would be facing fresh, strongly supported enemy units, and had just received a new commander, General Hugh Gaffey. They were, with all these problems, the troops that would finally accomplish the breakthrough. They were, indeed, “Patton’s favorites.” If the 3rd Army were to be a ring on Patton’s finger, the armored units would be its diamond, and the 4th Armored Division would be the sparkle.

Fierce Opposition

On the division’s left western flank, Combat Command B pushed along the west bank of the Sure River and reached Chaumont on December 23rd. Stubborn resistance from paratroopers of the 5th Parachute Division halted the unit. No longer used as paratroopers, they were still fierce, well-disciplined fighters and put up a spirited resistance.

By the middle of the afternoon, elements of the 8th Tank Battalion and the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion fought their way into the village. Combat Command B was just finishing clearing the area around Chaumont when the Germans struck. The counterattack force,

comprising about a dozen assault guns of the Sturmgeschutz Brigade and the 26th Antitank Battalion, both supported by infantry of the 39th Fusilier Regiment, surprised the Americans.

One of the surprise assets for Kokott received was the arrival of five Ferdinands of the 653rd Panzerjaeger Battalion. Originally designated for fighting in Alsace, the German Colonel was delighted to have them and put them into action. Later at Chaumont, a fierce firefight ensued, and the US forces were slowly pushed back out of Chaumont. It was a bitter disappointment to Patton, who became quite discouraged at the news.

The trapped, hungry paratroopers of the 101st would have to hold on a little longer. No one was happy about the situation, but it was impossible to change. The 4th Armored was giving everything it had against an increasingly tough German resistance. General McAuliffe, commanding the Screaming Eagles, sent out a melancholy message to his rescuers, “Sorry I did not get to shake hands today. I was disappointed.”

The setback was temporary, however, as by this time, it was clear that the danger was slowly passing. The Germans would not advance much further in their march to the Meuse. Even a greater threat was the eroding collapse of the defensive walls set up along the flanks of the German advance. The walls of Allied resistance were slowly closing on the German forces and would soon squeeze the life out of them. Hitler’s hope of any sort of Pyhrric victory would die in the Ardennes with his soldiers.

Breakthrough

By December 23rd, the skies had begun clearing over Bastogne and troops of both sides stared into the icy blue air above them. The Allies looked with hope, the Germans, with dread. Both sides had their expectations met. The first planes were a steady stream of P- 47 Thunderbolts and P-38 Lightnings, or “Forked-Tail Devils,” as the Germans called them. They were followed by one flight after another of B-26 Medium bombers in an unending stream. The paratroopers in Bastogne watched them and cheered mightily. By the end of the day, more 1,300 sorties had been flown against the German forces in the Ardennes.

It was around noon that the C-47 transports appeared, growing larger in the sky by the second. They weren’t that high up, only 1,000 feet off the ground. German ack ack was tough and a few C-47s began to trail smoke and then drop suddenly from the sky. But the pilots never veered off course. Suddenly the sky was filled with parachutes of red, blue, white, yellow, and orange. During that day, 1,500 tons of desperately needed supplies were dropped. Over 90 percent of them were retrieved by the 101st. It was hope reborn for the American troopers.

Christmas Day came and went with the 4th Armored getting ever nearer to Bastogne. Combat Commands A and B were close but were tied down in heavy fighting around the Chaumont area. Even though Patton had sent a message to McAuliffe saying, "Xmas present coming up." Hold on,” it did not happen. Instead, the Germans launched their greatest attack till that time against the battered bastards of Bastogne. It came after a surprise air-raid the previous night by the Luftwaffe.

The Reserve formation of the 4th Armored Division, usually the source of quick tank and crew replacements for CCA and CCB, was now committed to battle. Its initial task was to protect the left flank of the advancing tanks of CCB. At that point in the war, CCR was the weakest of the three forces, both in manpower and armor. But even though it was not that powerful a force, it would have to be enough to do the job.

Early on the 26th, Colonel Blanchard took his CCR command, including tanks of the 37th Battalion and troops of the 53rd Armored Infantry Battalion down a secondary road skirting German defenses at Sibret. Having seen the C-47s passing over Bastogne dropping supplies to the defenders, Colonel Abrams, who commanded the tank battalion of CCR, was suddenly impressed with the urgency of the conditions within the battered town. The paratroopers had taken about all they could. A breakthrough of some sort was needed.

Something had to be done, no matter how initially tenuous it might be, to give hope to those fighting in Bastogne. A corridor had to be opened. It would have to be done today.

Once in position, Abrams called up the “C-Team,” a small task force consisting of the Sherman tanks of C Company and Infantry Company C of the 53rd. Captain Dwight, Operations Officer of the Battalion was put in charge of the C Team and ordered to push into Bastogne. A group of 10 tanks and about 100 infantrymen would make the last thrust to break through.

The fighting continued. So did the push. By the later afternoon of the 26th of December 1st Lieutenant Charles P. Boggess had his platoon of Shermans coming out of some woods when they spotted infantry attacking a pillbox. The attackers appeared to be Americans. Boggess had his gunner fire on the pillbox and take it out. As the startled troops making the assault stared at the tank incredulously, Boggess shouted, “Come here! This is the 4th Armored!”

Hesitantly the paratroopers approached, weapons at the ready. The Germans were still capable of a lot of tricks. The commander of the assault team, 2nd Lieutenant Duane J. Webster of the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion, climbed partly up on the hull of the tank and shook hands with Boggess. At 4:50 PM, December 26th, 1944, the siege of Bastogne had come to an end. A very slender and fragile corridor had been opened to the outside. It would not be lost. Patton and his men had done it again!

Contrary to the picture most people have in their mind, the Ardennes was not snowbound when the Battle of the Bulge was initiated. The weather, while extremely cold, was producing sleet and freezing rain. Cloudy skies had not allowed the terrain to dry out, and as a result, most of the earth was a sea of mud. This further hampered the German advance. Their mechanized forces, on a tight timetable, were limited to the use of the roads. Any cross-country advance quickly bogged down in the slime and muck.

If the ground had been frozen, the German forces would have had a much higher degree of success. The ground did freeze on December 23rd, as the skies cleared, and the temperatures dropped. By that time, it was too late. The German tanks and infantry were hopelessly behind schedule and Allied forces were closing in around them like angry ants converging on a multi-legged intruder.

The second error comes from thinking that by December 25th, the hard fighting in the Battle of the Bulge was over. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In actuality, the Germans were still making a thrust for the Meuse River, which was the first step to getting to Antwerp and effectively splitting the Allied forces. General Manteuffel fed in fresh divisions in a determined attempt to cut the corridor the 4th Armored had opened.

Eisenhower threw three divisions straight off the boat (the 11th Armored, 87th Airborne, and 87th Infantry) into the struggle to keep the corridor open.

Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton saw a unique opportunity here. Up until now, no one really knew what reserves the Germans had behind the Rhine River as a part of Hitler’s grandiose plan to bring some sort of victory out of inevitable defeat. There were no strategic points of any great significance in the Ardennes. Germany would not win by conquering the firs and pines of the forest. The enemy had taken no city or other important position. They were actually trapped in a no man’s land.

All German commanders pleaded for permission to withdraw, but the Fuhrer was insistent. The advance was to continue, no matter what the cost. The end result was that whatever strength the Wehrmacht possessed was being squandered in a futile effort to change the tenor of the war on the western front.

Even after the siege on Bastogne was broken, sealing the doom of the Nazi effort, the Germans fought tenaciously. They were fighting for survival now, not victory. Desperate men get an extra dose of adrenaline that makes them valiant heroes. This was the enemy that

American forces faced. The fighting would go on for another month before all vestiges of the enemy intrusion into Allied lines was completely erased.

The final cost to Third Army had been expensive: over 50,000 casualties. Patton, however, had been the savior of the situation. He was in his glory. He said of the participation of his troops, “The Third Army moved farther and faster and engaged more divisions in less time than any other army in the history of the United States, possibly the history of the world. The results attained were made possible only by the superlative quality of American officers, American men, and American equipment. No country can stand against such an army.”

As the pendulum of conflict definitely swung in favor of the Allies, Montgomery took the podium. He told anyone who would listen that it had been he, who once given control of the 1st Army, had brought control out of chaos. It was logical, therefore, that he be given charge of all land forces of the Allied Expeditionary Force. His bombastic pronouncements deeply and permanently scarred Anglo-American relations.

Eisenhower and Bradley, normally phlegmatic people, were furious. Patton was apoplectic. All threatened to resign. General Marshall took a firm stand with Eisenhower and gave him permission to fire Montgomery. Just as he was about to do so, Montgomery fired off a public apology and a promise (later broken) to keep his mouth shut and do what he was told to do. Control of the First and Ninth Armies reverted back to the 12th Army Group, under the command of General Bradley. Once Patton reached Bastogne with his 3rd Army, he was not about to stop. True, he was not advancing into Germany, but he was advancing. That was what he loved most. His soldiers were headed towards St. Vith and fighting all the way. As Patton said, they had “the lovely task of killing as many Germans as possible.” And as obedient children, they were fulfilling their military father’s dreams.

It would later be argued vehemently by the sky troopers of the 101st that they did not need rescuing. They felt that their noble defense of Bastogne had been blurred by the arrival of Patton’s tanks on the day after Christmas. They might be right, but no one cannot deny that Patton’s 3rd Army had accomplished a feat that no one had dreamed possible. For “Blood and Guts” it was the crowning moment of his military career.

General G S Patton - Part III: His Final Days

By Wild Bill Wilder

Patton's Spear Pierces into Germany

By the beginning of 1945, it was quite evident that the Bulge was no longer a threat, merely a nuisance. Patton again turned his thinking toward the east. On New Year's Eve, Patton celebrated in a unique way. "At midnight on the night of December 31, all guns in the Third Army fired rapid fire for twenty minutes on the Germans as a New Year's greeting. When the firing ceased, our forward observers stated they could hear the Germans screaming in the woods."

In early January, the Germans launched a mini version of the Bulge attack in the south against the 6th Army Group under General Devers. It was called "Operation Nordwind." The 6th had been stretched thin to take over Patton's area of responsibility when his forces headed north. Again, some penetration was made, but this offensive was also doomed to failure. The principal actions took place in the second week of January near Herrlisheim when an entire American tank battalion was cut off and wiped out. Even so, the German advance in the south did not have the depth needed to present a significant danger to the general Allied advance.

By the first of February the armies of the Allied Expeditionary Force were again on the attack. Hitler's vaunted Wehrmacht had been shattered again and was unable to resist the steamroller attacks on a broad front by American troops of the 1st and 3rd Armies. Then Eisenhower stopped all attacks by these two major forces. It was time to regroup and prepare for the crossing of the Rhine. Once that great river was crossed, the war would be quickly coming to an end. It was the last major obstacle in the path of advance. There were now more than 4,000,000 Allied troops poising on the border of Germany for the last great offensive.

Now the four Corps and thirteen divisions of the 3rd Army were abreast of the Moselle, Sauer and Our Rivers, ready to tackle the Siegfried Line from Saarlautern in the south to St. Vith in the north. In a series of one-two punches, Patton's troops launched their attacks: the VIII, on January 29th; the III on the day after; the XII on February 6th; and finally, the XX on the 19th. By the end of February, the whole army was attacking the Siegfried Line. The 4th Armored again took the lead, broke loose and reached the Rhine River on March 8th.

One of the key battles was the taking of the city of Trier. It was the responsibility of XX Corps. Trier was a key city in the Saar-Palatinate area and its capture would open the road to the Rhine. This battle would appear later in Patton's list of 34 most significant events during his time of military command. It would be number 31.

The 10th Armored Division, on loan from SHAEF Headquarters, was being used to spearhead the drive to Trier. By February 27th, 1945, Combat Command A was within six miles of the objective. By this time, however, time had run out on the loan by General Eisenhower to 3rd Army of the 10th Armored Division.

On March 2nd, the 20th Armored Infantry Battalion, supported by tanks of the 21st Tank Battalion, assaulted the town in two separate attacks; each aimed at securing a bridge intact across the Moselle River. When the team to the north found their bridge destroyed, they turned south to help the second team in its attack.

Fierce defenses in the town made a combined tank-infantry assault imperative. A few stragglers of the 11th Panzer Division, which had been ordered elsewhere, were still around and took on the Shermans and the M-36 Jackson tank destroyers. The second bridge was secured intact. Patton was delighted. The defenders of the city maintained a fierce pocket of

resistance in the southeast corner of the city. It would be the 1st Battalion, 376th Regiment, 94th Infantry that would eliminate this holdout.

The morning after Trier had been taken, orders were sent down reminding Patton of the need to return the 10th Armored Division. They also told him simply to bypass Trier. It accompanied another message from General Walker announcing that the 10th Armored and the 94th Infantry Divisions had taken the city. Laughing, Patton strode with his usual alert demeanor to his headquarters and dictated a reply to SHAEF. “Have taken Trier with two divisions,” the message read. “What do you want me to do? Give it back?” SHAEF did not reply.

Finishing the Job

By March 1945, Allied forces were at the Rhine. Rapid progress, but at serious cost, had been made to get there by all Allied forces. The 1st and 3rd Armies were in the vanguard of American troops in getting to this threshold to the heart of Germany. The clock was winding down for World War II in the European Theater of War.

Once the Rhine was breached, the fighting would not continue for long. Already Russian forces were approaching Berlin to the east. Germany had little left with which to fight. The vaunted elite units had been largely wiped out. Old men and boys were conscripted to build phantom armies. Germany was scraping the bottom of the barrel in a hopeless war. It was almost over.

Now speed was of the essence. Capture of terrain was the key to victory, even more than the killing of German troops. Patton clearly recognized this. In this war, taking ground was equivalent to victory. By wresting control of terrain from the enemy, he was being constricted into a smaller and smaller circle. It would eventually strangle him to death.

Sensing the moment, General Patton ordered, no, demanded, that the Rhine be crossed. Through a fortuitous event, the First Army already had a crossing of the Rhine in the capture of the damaged but intact railroad bridge at Remagen. On March 23rd, General Montgomery had planned a grandiose crossing of the Rhine in his sector.

It would involve overwhelming British, Canadian, and American troops. An airdrop, massive carpet bombing and an artillery barrage with over 2,000 guns would precede the actual crossing of the Rhine. Every dignitary imaginable was present, including the press of the world, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, all to watch the pomp and pageantry of Montgomery’s crossing.

Patton, who had no love lost for the British “prima-donna,” was absolutely determined that he, with far less resources would beat him, just as he had done in Sicily when he arrived and took Messina ahead of Montgomery. SHAEF was ordering the 10th Armored Division to be taken away from Patton’s 3rd Army. He had kept control of it far longer than was expected.

Orders were sent to Bradley to go to the general’s headquarters and return with the 10th in tow. Once he arrived, Patton was ready for him. He had the key commanders of his Corps present, and one by one they presented forceful arguments as to why the 10th should be left just a little longer to help the 3rd Army. Bradley was convinced. He left, telling Patton, that he would wait for further communication from SHAEF before removing the 10th, and he planned to make himself difficult to be found.

In spite of the fact that during the North Africa and the Sicilian campaigns, Bradley had been subordinate to Patton, the fact that the roles had been reversed made no impact on their friendship or mutual respect. Two entirely different personalities, yet they were close friends and devoted soldiers.

There were times when Bradley frowned on some of the unorthodox maneuvers of his fellow general, but he could not deny the results.

On March 10th, the 4th Armored Division was ordered to take the lead again. When the 5th Infantry Division forced a bridgehead over the Kyll River in the Saar-Palatinate area, the 4th was standing ready to exploit. Combat Command B was at the head of the advance. Germany artillery responded with serious pounding from big guns and nebelwefers, but the tanks continued onward. Their advance began to read like a bus or railroad timetable. 0845: Orsfeld; 11:35: Steinborn; 1350: Meisburg; and by the end of the day, Weidenbach, twelve miles from the bridge they had crossed that morning.

They had taken over a thousand prisoners and broken the back of the German LIII Corps. As the lead group, Task Force Weller, rolled toward the town, the first organized resistance manifested itself. Within Weidenbach was a tank repair shop. The crews were there, standing by to get their armor back into action. When fleeing German troops ran through the town, they screamed in panic that American tanks were right behind them.

Colonel Oscar Kepplinger, commander of the garrison quickly organized a team of tanks, most from the 2nd Panzer Division and some young troops (kids), equipped with panzerfausts and other antitank devices. They had little training, no experience, but were filled with the radical, almost maniacal Nazi fervor. They shouted and laughed as they climbed aboard the tanks.

The firefight took place at dusk, when the composite Group Kepplinger clashed with recon units and tanks of the 35th Battalion. The fight lasted about thirty minutes. The two Tiger tanks that entered the battle took out three Shermans. One, however, had an engine failure. The crew did not hesitate. Even a massive Mark VI immobilized is no match for American tanks. The Hitler youth that so enthusiastically entered the fight were killed and maimed. Some of the veterans of the 4th Armored Division tearfully looked at their mangled bodies and youthful faces frozen in the reality of the horror of war.

One grizzled sergeant stared down at a pile of German youth, shook his head sadly, and muttered, “I came here to kill these damn Germans, but not kids.” With a heavy sigh, he shifted his grip on his Garand rifle and starting walking again.

Across the Rhine

At 2200 on March 22nd, the 5th Infantry Division of the XII Corps rowed across the Rhine on schedule. There was no artillery preparation, no air blitz, no dropping of paratroopers. The crossing was made so quietly and quickly that it surprised both sides equally. By dawn of the 23rd, the day that Montgomery would make his move, Patton called Bradley and gave him the news.

Bradley sputtered and coughed over the cup of coffee he was drinking. He could not believe it. He hesitated to relay the message to SHAEF, in case Patton’s troops were be driven back across the river. Patton, however, was so exultantly happy that he wanted the world to know. He said to his superior, “Brad, for God’s sake, tell the world we are across. We knocked down 33 Krauts [aircraft] today when they came after our pontoon bridges. I want the world to know the Third Army made if before Montgomery starts across!” Bradley relayed the message to Ike.

The month of April produced some heavy fighting, but it soon became primarily a road march, or better said, a road race. Everyone was headed east, the Allies advancing, the Germans retreating. German reserves were easily overrun, rear installations were either crushed or ignored, and the civilian population awed at the strength of the American forces. Patton’s Third Army took Saxe, Coburg, and Gotha. In the south the Stolberg Corridor was secured and, in the north, the Ruhr was surrounded, with the capture of over a quarter of a million German troops.

Except for Italy, on all other fronts the situation was delightful. The 21st Army Group was sitting on the Elbe River; the 1st American Army, further south, was taking Dresden,

Nuremberg fell to the Seventh Army and the general's forces were deeply into Germany, approaching the Austrian border.

The biggest disappointment of the month was the death of their Commander in Chief, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who passed away on April 12th, 1945.

The last weeks of the war were marked by the Advance of the 3rd Army to the borders of Austria and Switzerland. The fighting was for the most part over. Only fanatical pockets of resistance offered any opposition. General Patton had begun to fight in Europe when America did. He had landed the first American troops in Africa on November 8th, 1942. He had conducted his men through three years of successful operations against the enemy.

He never issued a defensive order.

He obeyed religiously his basic tenet of modern warfare: attack, attack, attack; and when in doubt, attack again. His enemies never had a chance to organize enough to make a concerted attack against him. His argument was, "I never give the order, nor do I want to hear of a unit of my command giving an order to 'hold.' The only thing we want to hold is the enemy by the nose while we kick him in the ass!"

Patton Lays Down His Sword

On May 9th, the 3rd Army finally stopped fighting. They had gone farther, captured more prisoners, crossed more rivers, liberated more friendly territory and captured more enemy territory than any army ever before in American history. The troops under Patton's command had been recipients of 19 Medals of Honor, 44 Distinguished Service Medals, and 291 Distinguished Service Crosses. In its 231 days of fighting, it had liberated territory in France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. Altogether, they had captured 1,280,688 prisoners of war, killed an estimated 47,500 and wounded another 115,700 Germans.

Their own casualties totaled 160,692. Calling his command group, "Lucky Forward," was not too far amiss. Yet it was not luck, but leadership unparalleled in American history that had helped to achieve such impressive results. The 3rd Army was an extension of its leader, Lieutenant General George Smith Patton, Jr., old "Blood and Guts!"

The Tragic End of the Warrior

In the last months of the war, Patton's brash openness and his big mouth got him into trouble again, and he was given the role of military governor again. The war ended with Patton relegated to a rather unimportant secondary role in the occupation. He still stirred up controversy, however, with his brash statements about the so-called American allies, including the British (whom he disdained to the utmost as arrogant and slow) and the Russians, which he prophetically saw as the next great threat on the horizon.

On December 9th, 1945, Patton and his chief of staff, General Hap Gay, were going bird hunting. A large Army truck suddenly turned in front of them. Patton's 1939 Cadillac sedan crashed into the vehicle. While Gay and the driver only suffered minor injuries, Patton had his neck broken and was completely paralyzed. It was sadly ironic that such a man of action would spend his last days in a state of complete immobility.

Twelve days later, he died from an aneurysm while sleeping. It was December 21st, 1945. Patton had now become a military legend and an integral part of American history. The day of war, the day of his glory had come in battle, and he had risen to the challenge. He and his troops had done the impossible once and again, setting the pace of the advance across Europe.

His passing was the loss of a figure in American military history that has had no equal before or since. Not a perfect commander by any means, he was a man with certain liabilities; but there was never a more courageous, inspiring leader in the ranks of the US Army than George Smith Patton, Jr. He and his powerful 3rd Army in 9 months liberated over 12,000

European cities and towns and caused over 1,500,000 enemy casualties. Another legend had been added to the icons of American military history.

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The Tanker

By Wild Bill Wilder

Men in combat live under continual stress, even in the more mundane aspects of life. In fact, just staying alive is a task many set about to accomplish with a vengeance. Then there are the special services within the military that endure additional stress due to the uniqueness of their job.

The public is bombarded today with the image of the high-tech commando, blasting his way through doors, rescuing desperate hostages, or rappelling from high tech choppers into the inky foreboding darkness below. Profane and often exaggerated books are being published today by the dozens that tend to exalt these Special Forces types. True, their mission is uniquely dangerous, but the faithful day by day fighters are often left in the shadows by an over-emphasis on this type of combat.

In a day when special ops personnel are being glorified to an extreme, one tends to forget the grunt or tanker who daily faces death. Leaping from an aircraft or lunging out of the door of a helicopter into the unknown may have its terrors, but the tank crewman has his own unique nightmares. He places himself into the most confined space imaginable, a tight-fitting steel box, then rolls into battle with every type of warhead and ordnance available seeking to destroy him. That box in which he rides is a tinderbox. It is filled with live ammunition and fuel. His cargo is deadly, both to the enemy and to himself should be tank be hit by enemy fire.

Inside that cramped, at times very uncomfortable space, he and his vehicle become a target from distances of 3,000 meters to even point-blank range. Everybody shoots at a tank. One tanker commented, “I’ve often wondered if a bull’s eye, invisible to me, is seen by everybody outside the tank once we get going.”

Some mistakenly think that sitting inside that armor he is safe and warm. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. That seeming protection can turn into a moving coffin in an instant. Armor-penetrating rounds can slice through that protective steel cover and turn the insides of a tank into a death vault, filled with ricocheting white hot metal that can shred a man’s body in an instant. Even the reverberating concussion of a high explosive shell hitting the tank can leave the crew senseless from the blast.

Death is not always instantaneous for a tanker. In many cases a 60-ton tank becomes a 60-ton oven. The flames can quickly eat through the crewman’s flame-retardant coveralls and burn everything inside. Tank soldiers have to frantically try to escape a burning death (if they are able) through small hatches into the open ground. There they are again targets of murderous artillery and small arms fire. There is no easier target than the dazed and injured crewmen of a blasted tank lying there in the open and totally exposed.

Tankers then have to instantly convert into expert infantrymen just to survive and attempt to find a way back to the relative safety of friendly lines. And these are not super-heroes. They are simply men specially trained to handle a high-tech piece of equipment on the battlefield. They are usually simple, down to earth guys who are seeking to do their job, and do it well. Anyone who does not see them, however, as elite fighting men, exposed to unusual danger and an often-horrific death, is not seeing clearly. They are indeed very brave men.

The Thin Grey Line

By Neil Stalker

Normandy July/August 1944

A month and half after the landing on D-Day despite heroic fighting by the German forces they were being pushed to bursting point by the Allies. Their thin lines were being slowly eroded by both Allied land and air forces. Rommel reported to Hitler that, "Within a measurable time the enemy will succeed in breaking through our thinly held front, especially that of the Seventh Army. In my opinion it is necessary to draw the appropriate conclusion from this situation. "Hitler issued the order to Von Kluge "Starr Verteidigung" (Stand Fast).

The German Seventh Army (General Hausser) covered the area from the Brittany coast to around St Lo. The Seventh Army formed part of Field Marshall Von Kluges Army Group B along with Panzer Group West. The casualties of the Seventh Army and the adjoining Panzer Group West between the invasion and July 23rd totalled 116,863 casualties with only 10,078 replacements received. Most of the replacements were poorly trained. Of the tanks destroyed less than 10% were replaced although tank production was at an all-time high. The movements of supplies and reinforcements were being savagely attacked by the Allied Air Forces.

Strangely the Germans still at this stage of the campaign still expected another landing in the Pas de Calais and retained 18 Divisions covering the Le Havre to Antwerp Coast. The Germans still thought the Allies had another 40 divisions in England. Also the Germans misread what Montgomery was planning to do and took the British Forces to be the spear that would drive towards Paris via Falaise while the American forces were extending the flanks. So Von Kluge's forces were left thin while the forces around the Caen area were reinforced.

The Allied forces had now 36 Divisions landed, and their bridgehead was packed with troops and supplies literally bursting at the seams. So far 1,556,356 men, 332,645 vehicles and 1,602,976 tons of stores had been landed and this was with the impediment of storms and wrecked Mulberries.

On July 20th First U.S. Army had reached the St Lô-Périers Road and had taken the town after 6 weeks of fighting. The securing of the 4-mile stretch of road between St Lô and Vire now gave General Bradley a starting line for the stage of the campaign.

The Americans had literally "eaten the guts out of the German defences" (Monty) and the total reserve for the German Seventh Army was 3 infantry battalions. Hitler had virtually condemned his forces to being slowly annihilated by his stand fast order. The only area receiving reinforcements were opposite the British at Caen. There were 14 German divisions plus 600 tanks opposing the British 14 divisions. The Americans on the hand had 15 divisions plus 3 in reserve opposed by 9 German divisions (either exhausted or green).

Operation Cobra

Bradley decided to concentrate his forces along a 6,000-yard front, the infantry would breach the defences. The armor and motorised forces would spear through moving west between Coutances and Bréhal. The German 84th Corps was slightly ahead of the balance of the

German line and could easily be cut-off along the St Lô-Périers-Lessay road. This was a result of Hitler's order not to withdraw although Hausser was not withdrawing just realigning but in Hitler's mind this was the same. So, Hauser concentrated his forces at the road junctions and thinly hold the rest of the infantry line. The tactic being that armor could not manoeuvre in the hedgerows so by holding the road junctions the tanks were easy to get at. American ingenuity came to rescue with the development of the Rhinoceros (four steel teeth welded 2 feet above the ground). The teeth were used like a garden fork and used to lift the hedge and cut the roots at 10mph to 15mph. This allowed the armor to cut corners and break out around the roadblocks.

The Attack

Due to wet weather the attack was delayed till the 24th but wet weather closed with some bombers dropping their load before receiving the recall order. This alerted the already alert Germans that something was going on. Hauser moved the 2nd SS his mobile reserve to near St Lô. Von Kluge discounted the threat and allowed the 2nd Panzer Division to deploy to the Orne Valley.

The II Canadian in the British Sector and on the American Flank took on the 2nd Panzer on the 25th. Around St Lô the weather started to clear, and the fighter-bombers attacked along the St Lô-Périers and then bombers carpet-bombed a 6 square mile area, which held the entire German infantry.

VII Corps assault divisions (Collins) advanced at 11am under cover of continuous air attacks. Severe friendly casualties were suffered, and this resulted in a delay. As well as aerial bombardment 522 guns were used in the artillery bombardment also. The advance continued in line abreast from the right, the 9th Division, 4th Division and then the 30th Division towards the Marigny-St Gilles Road. In line with Bradley's plan of the infantry swinging the doors open for the armor these infantry divisions were the door openers while the spear would be the 2nd and 3rd Armored plus 1st Motorised Infantry Division. .

General Bayerlein's Panzer Lehr plus a paratrooper's regiment were in this bombed area. His tanks were what were thought to be in safe harbours along the hedge-lined roads. But as Bayerlein recounts, "The planes kept coming over, as if on a conveyor belt, and the bomb carpets unrolled in great rectangles. My flak had hardly opened its mouth, when the batteries received direct hits knocking out half the guns and silenced the rest. After an hour I had no communication with anybody, even by radio. By noon nothing was visible but smoke and dust. My frontlines looked like the face of the moon and least 70 percent of my troops were out of action- dead, wounded, crazed, and numbed. All my forward tanks were knocked out, and the roads were practically impassable."

The result of the bombing slowed the US forces with smashed hedges and cratered roads with smatterings of resistance, so they only gained two miles. Collins decided that evening to change plans and allow the armor to push ahead proceeded by bombers. The Germans resisted strongly at Marigny where the US 1st Division with a Brigade of 3rd Armored fought against the 2nd and 17th SS. The US 2nd Armored pushed through 3 miles to reach St Gilles and Canisy. Bayerlein had 14 tanks left so he withdrew.

The US 2nd Armored continued now to advance at night gaining another 4 miles and the high ground at Le Mesnil Herman which then provided protection for the eastern flanks. This allowed the forces to push south and southwest from the Marigny-St Gilles gap. So, by the 27th the Americans had a clear advantage and the bocage provided little opposition but the fighter- bombers were the decisive weapon along with the Rhinoceros equipped tanks.

On the 27th American forces (3rd Infantry and 3rd Armored) struck towards Coutances with the aim of cutting of the 84th Corps during its withdrawal from the Périers-Lessay area. Two SS divisions (2nd and 17th) were ordered to cut the American corridor and head of the forces heading to Coutances. On the 28th they halted VII corps but exposed themselves and were

attacked from the north. Two armored divisions (4th and 6th) of VIII US Corps busted through from Périers-Lessay and captured Coutances and devastated 6 German divisions.

This then allowed the Americans to advance rapidly down all the roads between Coutances and the River Vire some units moving 15 miles from the start line. The Germans were in disarray and with no reserves to call on. Meanwhile the Canadians had kept Panzer Group West tied up and it was not until the 27th that Von Kluge could send 2nd and 116 Pz Division to Vire. But they were continually under air attack, and this delayed them allowing the Americans to complete their breakthrough in strength.

Results

The result of the initial attack far exceeded what Bradley had expected. In the Cobra plan Bradley had allowed a consolidation phase after the initial attack but due to the outstanding results this now changed to “a vigorous attack period”. On July 28 orders were issued for VII Corps continue southward widening the breakthrough area in the Mortain area. Meanwhile VIII Corps under Patton pushed through a gap between the German flank and the Brittany coast. The 4th Armored Division pushed 25 miles in 36 hours reaching Avranches.

Von Kluge reported to Jodl, “ As a result of the break-through of the enemy armored spearheads, the whole western front has been ripped open … The left flank has collapsed. “ The Seventh Army was imploding with insufficient resources to prevent its demise. The next step was the unleashing of the Third Army.

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The Third Army and the Closing of the Falaise Gap

By Neil Stalker

Following the success of the first couple of days of Operation Cobra, Bradley had a fresh Army with a rampaging commander ready to be unleashed. Lt. General George S. Patton had been commanding VIII Corps as part of the 1st Army and now would assume command of his own Third Army, of which VIII Corps was a part.

Patton had been fulfilling an important role during the lead up to and the invasion. His phoney army of 45 divisions had completely fooled German Intelligence into believing this was the invasion force for Pas de Calais. Also, the Germans rated Patton very highly and knew he would have an important role to play.

The Third Army has a long history since it was first established on November 7 1918 under command of Major General Dickman. It was part of the army of occupation of Germany following World War 1 it's manning consisted of 9,638 officers and 221,070 enlisted men. The Third Army was partly disbanded after 1921. May 1941 to 1943, Lt General Kreuger had command and turned the Third Army into the best training army in the U.S. Under his command at the time were Dwight D Eisenhower and George S Patton. Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges took command after Krueger took command of the 6th Army in the Philippines. In December 1943 the Third Army had a manning level of 208,566 officers and men.

On the 15 January 1944 the Army was alerted for overseas movement. The Third Army at the time of Operation Cobra consisted of 4 Corps with 13 divisions. General Patton's Third Army HQ assumed operational command of the Third Army on the 1st of August 1944 – actual command started January 1944.

On August 1st General Bradley assumed command of the 12th U.S. Army Group, which consisted of the 1st Army (General Hodges) and 3rd Army (General Patton). General Montgomery was still the overall land force commander.

Patton's Charge

On the 4th August 1944, Patton's 4th Armored Division had in 36 hours travelled 40 km and had reached Avranches. Field Marshall Von Kluge warned OKW, "The left flank has collapsed." The 4th had captured the bridge at Pontaubault and freely interpreting Bradley's orders Patton ordered his VIII Corps (Major General T.H. Middleton) to continue his advance into Brittany.

To ensure there would be no traffic snarls in the narrow roads he had his staff officers scout and designate roads for each of his seven divisions. And within in 72 hours he had moved all his divisions down these roads, an extraordinary feat. Momentum was maintained as little opposition had been found in Brittany as most of the German troops were in Normandy. So, by August 4th Rennes had been captured and the 4th Armored had reached Vannes on the Brittany coast. The main objective was Brest and the 6th Armored (Major General Grow) were halfway there and Patton ordered him to not stop till he got there. The initial assault by the 4th began on August 7th but Brest was not to fall to September 18th after the combined effort of 3 infantry divisions.

The U.S. First Army's VII Corps captured Mortain and created a blocking position in the hills outside the town. This gave Bradley a hinge to swing his front. On August 3rd Patton was ordered to move his main force eastwards. Montgomery said, "Once a gap appears in the enemy front, we must press into it and through it and beyond it into the enemy's rear areas. Everyone must go all out all day and every day. The broad strategy of the Allied Armies is to swing the right flank towards Paris and to force the enemy back to the Seine. "

So, the gap was there and with no opposition to the eastward advance the U.S. XV Corps raced 75 miles to near Le Mans cutting into the rear of the Von Kluges forces. General Warlimont from Jodl' staff was sent to Von Kluge to order him to rebuild the front although Hitler had remarked there was probably little chance of success and a new line on the Somme would have to be established.

German Counter Offensive

Hitler in one of his famous change of minds decided the next day to order a counter offensive to be launched from Vire-Mortain area to Avranches. The force would consist of 8 panzer divisions and a thousand fighters.

Even with the arrival of the Panzer divisions the pivoting of the Allied forces caused problems. The newly arrived 9th Panzer Division had to be used to block the 6 Armored Divisions push to Le Mans. Also, the Panzer Divisions that were going to be moved from the British Sector found it hard to disengage and only the 1st SS could move – this then gave von Kluge 185 tanks and assault guns between his 4 divisions.

The proposed attack had been detected by Ultra and also air reconnaissance. This gave Bradley time to redeploy his forces to thwart the Mortain Attack (Operation Lüttich). The Americans deployed 3 divisions of the First Army, 3rd Armoured, 4th and 30th on either side of the river Sée valley that was to be main German road to Avranches.

Von Kluge was beset with problems especially trying to move his forces under constant air attack. The attack was set for midnight of August 6th, he signalled the Fuhrer, " I am pressed for time and have no guarantee that the infantry will hold the position for long against the British and American tanks. I must attack as soon as possible."

The Counterattack

At midnight with no artillery program the Germans started to move down the valley, the 2 columns from the 2nd SS Panzer on the south bank and one column from the 2nd Panzer on the north bank. The 2nd column of the 2nd Panzer waited for the 1st SS to arrive. The American roadblocks manned by the 30th Division were overrun. The Americans realising, they were outnumbered dug in on Hill 317 and then called in artillery onto the SS. This halted them and a US tank destroyer unit opened up taking out 14 German armored units.

The other column had an easier run and was 3 miles short of its objective when it ran into the U.S. 9th Division defence line. The balance of the 2nd Panzer with the 1st SS was now in a traffic jam and then the fog lifted. US Thunderbolts and RAF Typhoons attacked the crowded Germans.

columns. There were none of the 1000 Luftwaffe planes in sight –this was because they had been ambushed as soon as they took off by Allied fighters. Allied medium bombers were interdicting any movements towards the battle area.

Von Kluge reported the situation to the Fuhrer who then ordered 2 more SS Divisions to be deployed.

While the 30th was blocking the Germans around Mortain, Bradley ordered on August 7th the 4th Division and part of the 3rd Armored to "seal of the deep penetration in the center". This put the 116th Panzer Division on the defensive. It's commander von Schwerin was relieved by Hausser for dereliction of duty. Von Schwerin was one of the anti-Hitler conspirators and this may have led to his less than 100% commitment.

Envelopment

The threat to Avranches no longer existed so Bradley now put more pressure on the German's southern flank. On the 7th units of the 2nd Armored Division reached St Hilaire and Barentan.

The Germans were struck in the rear at Mortain and the Third Army made a "deep outflanking" movement to Angers and Le Mans.

In the British sector the Canadians attacked towards Falaise and between the Americans and Canadians there were only the 9th Panzer and an infantry division. On August 8th Von Kluge ordered the 9th Panzer to Avranches, Hausser said, "The withdrawal of the 9th Panzer Division at the moment when strong enemy tank units are thrusting into our flanks will deal a death blow not only to the Seventh Army but to the entire Wehrmacht in the West."
Von Kluge replied, "It is the Fuhrer's order."

Meanwhile Patton's Army cruised the lanes of France with little opposition sometimes a bridge was blown, or a village garrison would resist for a while then the forces would continue to "flood the plains beyond Avranches". On the side of the Mortain salient resistance was stronger with the Fifth Panzer Army (Eberbach) using the bocage to defend their withdrawal from the Mont Pinçon area to Orne. Eberbach had is forces dig in along the Bourguebus Ridge-the Orne- Thury Harcourt-Mont Pinçon-Vire line so protecting the flank and rear of the Seventh Army.

Road to Falaise – The British Sector

The key to the sector was the 1,200-foot steep sided Mont Pinçon. British forces took Mont Pinçon in a fierce battle and this opened the door further. To stem the tide Sepp Dietrich's Corp was moved to Bourgebous Ridge it was not strong in armor but had a formidable number of 88s and 75s. II Canadian Corps (Lt General Simmonds) was given the job of breaking through to Falaise. The operation was called Operation Totalize.

Initially the plan was going well with British forces 3 miles inside German lines. Then Meyer the 12 SS commander rallied his troops and counterattacked stopping the Allied forces at Cramesnil and Clintheaux. Simmonds maintained the pressure on the Germans by aggressive use of air, artillery and armored forces.

On August 9th, the Germans pulled back to the river Laison line and the Canadians were 7 miles from Falaise. Although stretched the Germans still felt they could recover the ground but then on August 10th, Kuntzen the Seventh Army southern flank Corps Commander advised, "The enemy has begun to push north and northeast from Le Mans. With my present force of 4 battalions, I cannot even delay this advance. We must count on Alençon being in enemy hands tomorrow". This was the Seventh's Army main supply base.

At Allied HQ Eisenhower and Bradley realized what was happening and with the Canadians pushing to Falaise and the Third Army advancing north from Le Mans the Germans would be cutoff and encircled. By the afternoon Patton had four divisions advancing to Argentan much to the German's dismay. Von Kluge knew what he was facing but could not issue orders for the Sevenths Army withdrawal without the Fuhrer's approval. Von Kluge used some guile to gain permission to justify moving Panzer Group Erberbach from the Mortain Area, but no approval came from the Fuhrer.

With the German positions crumbling around them, Von Kluge teleprinted Jodl on 11 August, "the offensive in the direction of Avranches is no longer practicable, since the enemy has brought up fresh forces. The thrust towards the sea will be a long, tough battle, to which the panzer troops are no longer equal." Later that day Hitler approved the withdrawal. But then another directive came that the withdrawal was to be a leadup to resuming an offensive westward. Von Kluge was thus prevented from defending Alençon and making of snap tactical decisions on a fluid battlefield was prevented by having to confirm everything to the

leader in East Prussia. It would be akin to the Allies having to ring up Churchill or Roosevelt for every move you made.

Unfortunately for Von Kluge the Allies did not follow the Fuhrer's plans and on the 12th the Americans captured Alençon and the Eberbach Group was now defending Argentan but within 48 hours the XV US Corps had flanked it on both sides. The jaws were now 20 miles wide. On August 14th the Seventh Army was ordered to pull back from "the western end of the pocket." Eberbach could not drive the Americans back and at the same time the Canadians launched a major drive towards Falaise. Simmonds again being a master of innovation used similar tactics to Totalize and under cover of air attacks and artillery smoke his armor drove forward like a steamroller. The Canadians were now 3 miles from Falaise.

A group from 12th SS stopped the Canadians at the last ridge before Falaise. The 2nd Canadian Division broke into Falaise from the west and by the next day nearly the whole town was taken. On the American side XV Corps (Major General W.H. Haislip) was ordered by Patton to continue to Falaise but Bradley ordered him to halt. There is some debate about whether Haislip's 3 divisions could have plugged the jaws; Eberbach had 3 panzer divisions defending. It would appear the Bradley's order was correct and at times Patton had to be prevented from overstretching himself.

There was still a ten-mile gap and Von Kluge on his own volition started withdrawing troops from the pocket. Von Kluge was aware that he could be arrested at any moment, and this weighed heavily on him. On August 15th von Kluge was replaced with Field Marshall Model.

Montgomery on August 17th ordered the US V corps to attack northwards towards Trun and Chambois and link with the II Canadian Corps. The Canadians and Poles had taken the Germans by surprise when they crossed the River Dives and established a defensive position along the River Dives ridges; the gap was 6 miles wide.

The Seventh Army was confined to an area 20 miles by 10 miles and the air forces bombed and the artillery pounded the 100,000 German troops that remained in the pocket. On taking command Model immediately ordered Hausser to withdraw his troops from the pocket. Hausser ordered his 2nd SS Panzer Corps to counterattack the Canadian's columns heading to Trun.

This desperate attack allowed 1,000s of their comrades to escape, the Polish armor won the battle.

But the escape was perilous for the Germans as an Allied pilot reported, " 1,000 plus motor transport, tanks and horse drawn transport in area…very little movement… facing east and southeast packed bumper to bumper. Much congested traffic moving east on road Vimoutiers- Orbec." A Later report indicated, "whole area burning".

By evening of the 18th of August, Canadians had captured Trun, and had advanced to within 2 miles of Chambois and the US forces were on the southern side of the town. August 19th, the Allies captured Chambois. The Falaise Pocket was closed. Hausser ordered his forces to break out to the northeast, but a wall of fire met them. Near the Dives River the 2nd Panzer Division broke through the Canadian line and kept this escape route open. Major D.V.Currie is worth mentioning for with a small force at St Lambert he managed to wreak havoc on the Germans by directing artillery fire and his own small forces fire onto the Germans. The corridor through St Lambert was closed that evening.

Hausser escaped badly wounded, Meyer the 12th SS commander escaped, a lot of generals got out. 50,000 men were captured, 10,000 died and a massive amount of ordinance was destroyed. The Germans made one last attempt to get their comrades out by an attack against the Polish positions by 2nd SS Panzer Corps, but this failed and Model had them withdraw. After the battle a lot of whatifs were tossed around, whatif Montgomery had closed the gap faster, whatif the XV corps hadn't been halted but in the end, this was one of the worst reversals during the war for the Germans. Von Kluge committed suicide.

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A Place to Start – Operation Plunder

By Wild Bill Wilder

March 24th, 1945, Hamminkeln, Germany

Even though both the 1st and 3rd US Armies had breached the Rhine, General Montgomery was determined to make a grand show of his crossing. It was called Operation "Plunder" and visiting guests for the event included Eisenhower and Churchill among others.

The airborne phase, codenamed "Varsity," involved two full divisions, the American 17th and the British 6 Airborne. Nearly 20,000 paratroopers would land east of the Rhine. The transportation of the Americans alone required the use of 72 C-46s and 226 C-47s for the airdrop. They would be closely followed by 610 C-47s towing 906 Waco gliders. Some C-47s towed two Wacos at the same time! It was an experiment that ended in tragic disasters for a number of gliders.

The drop was executed in broad daylight, but the smoke from the huge screen laid down at the river drifted to the east and blotted out the landing area. Men again were dropped sometimes miles from the designated drop zones. Glider pilots, unable to see till they were nearly on the ground, crashed into trees and buildings.

Still, the operation, by sheer weight of numbers and the dogged will of the sky troopers, was a success. Positions near the Issel River were taken and held till reinforcements arrived by land. It was the largest single airdrop in history. It was also the most expensive. The two airborne divisions suffered three times the casualties that were incurred on D-Day, nine months earlier.

The planes carrying the 2nd Battalion of the 513th was put under intense AA fire, losing a number of aircraft. Twisting and dodging, the Dakotas released the sky troopers inside the British 6th Airborne perimeter.

Even though disoriented and far from their objectives, the Americans quickly figured out which way they were to go and set out on foot to be where they were supposed to be. One young company commander, on hearing his men groaning about the hike ahead of them, silenced the gainsaying quickly, sharply telling them, "We start the fight where we are!"

By the time the men of the 513th reached their assigned landing zones, they had taken out two German tanks, one SP gun, and two 88mm gun batteries. Credit for one of the tanks was given to a team operating a 57mm recoilless rifle, the newest addition to the infantry list of anti-tank hardware. It was the first such kill for the new weapon.

A Threat at Son

By Wild Bill Wilder

The "Screaming Eagles," under the command of general Maxwell Taylor, were chosen to secure the southernmost leg of the long road to Arnhem. It was their job to preserve the major bridges in the area and control a 15-mile segment of highway from Eindhoven to the town of Grave, located to the south. This was essential to the timely advance of the British XXX Corps as it headed north to relieve the paratroopers of the British 1st Airborne Division.

It was the decision of General Taylor to count on the XXX Corps to break through to him within 24 hours. Because of that, he decided to bring most of his infantry in the initial drop. The artillery could come later. He would count on his infantry and mortars to do the job in the meantime.

All landings of the 101st occurred north of Eindhoven. Most of the troops landed in a triangle, with the towns of Zon, St. Odenrude and Best located at the 3 angles. It was a very tight landing pattern. General Taylor had been an eyewitness to the scattering of airborne troops at D-Day, and he was determined to see that it would not happen again here.

The 506th, under the command of Colonel R.F. Sink, was to secure a bridge over the Wilhemina Canal south of Zon. It was one of the key spans to the movement of XXX Corps and most important that it be taken intact. When that was accomplished, they would then proceed south to Eindhoven.

The task of the 502nd was to secure both landing zones for later drops, and for the arrival of the glider infantry. These troops were also to take the bridge over the Dommel River at St.

Oedenrode. In order to have a little insurance, General Taylor ordered Colonel J.H. Michaelis to send a company to other bridges over the Wilhemina Canal south of Best, four miles from Zon. The more bridges that could be taken intact, the easier it might be for the linkup.

This particular one would also offer access to another highway leading to Eindhoven from the west. The last regiment of the 101st Division, the 501st, was landed a little further to the north of the other two. It had the primary purpose of taking the highway and railway bridges over the Willems canal and the Aa River near Veghel.

The Germans, once aware of the danger, blew the main bridge over the Wilhemina Canal. Paratroopers had gotten to within 200 feet of it when it simply disintegrated before them in a loud explosion. Two officers and a sergeant waded into the canal and swam out to the bridge. A larger party followed in rowboats. Since the center trestle still stood, American engineers, aided by Dutch civilians who provided black market lumber, soon had a footbridge across the canal. By midnight, a large body of paratroopers had gotten across.

The problem was that the corridor at Zon was reduced to a single wooden footpath. It would not change until bridging equipment from XXX Corps could be brought forward to lay down a bridge. It was now more imperative than ever that the other bridges, including those around

the town of Best be held for the oncoming XXX Corps. The rest of the paratroopers of the 101st, in the meantime, sought to consolidate their gains and keep the highway open.

On the second day, the glider forces began coming into the drop zones. General Taylor had opted for jeeps in this landing instead of artillery. He felt that mobility for the large area he had to cover was imperative. Some antitank guns were also brought into the battlezone. Taylor hoped that the British would not be delayed, and that any artillery support he might need would come from them. A simple telephone call south by Dutch liaison officers revealed that XXX Corps would be arriving late. The paratroopers were to continue to hold their ground with what they had.

During the evening of that same day, the advance elements of the British ground forces arrived near Eindhoven. Strong opposition had slowed them. Already a day behind schedule, the tanks of the Irish Guard had to wait until a bailey bridge was put up across the canal. It was daylight of D+2 when the first tanks rolled into Eindhoven. They swept through it without major incident. Now they were 33 hours behind the original timetable. Time was slipping away far too quickly.

A serious problem developed on D+2, when a German armored column from the 107th Panzer Brigade, under the command of Major von Malzahn, struck at Zon. The purpose of the attack was to capture the Bailey bridge built by US engineers. Originally enroute to Aachen to defend the Siegfried Line, the Brigade had been urgently rerouted to the fighting around Eindhoven.

The paratroopers were hard pressed to hold their ground. Some armored units were able to break through to the Bailey bridge. As darkness began to fall, a few German tanks and armored cars began firing into the area. One truck was hit and set ablaze, casting an eerie light on the battle scene. The situation began to look grim, but the troopers rallied.

General Taylor took his headquarters personnel and an engineer company, along with a few glider troops to stabilize the situation. Wrestling a few 57mm antitank guns into place, they fired upon the lead German tank. After firing only two rounds, the tank was hit, and skewed off the road. As German infantry poured around the tank, a couple of well-placed machine guns and accurate infantry small arms fire seemed to drain the enthusiasm from the attackers.

The fighting continued sporadically during the night, but by daylight, the Germans had lost heart, and proceeded to withdraw. Throughout the Market Garden operation, however, the Germans would constantly make attacks against this vital lifeline for XXX Corps. The stretch of road through Eindhoven defended by the 101st Airborne would soon be aptly named "Hell's Highway."

Amphibious Airborne

By Wild Bill Wilder

September 20th, 1944, Nijmegen, Holland

No one bridge in the trail of spans across the heartland of the Netherlands was more important than any other. Like links in a chain, all were essential to the success of the bold gamble by the Allies in September 1944 called Market Garden.

General Bernard Montgomery, normally a highly conservative commander, shocked everyone with the boldest plan since Normandy to achieve a quick end to the war. It was a combined air- land assault, with three airborne divisions and an entire British Army Corps involved.

The airborne forces would be dropped northward near key bridges all the way to the Rhine River. They would take and hold these bridges, rolling out a carpet of protection for the advance of the British XXX Corps.

The entire operation was to take no more than four days. The northernmost units of the British First Airborne Division were definitely out on a limb. If the plan worked, XXX Corps would reach them at Arnhem, be across the Rhine and ready to exploit the open flank of the German army in the west.

The 82nd Airborne was the next to the last link in the chain of bridges leading to Arnhem. It was imperative that the main highway span across the Waal River be taken intact. At the same time the US paratroopers made their move through Nijmegen towards the bridge, recon units of the SS 9th Panzer Division entered the city from the north.

Fierce resistance kept the combined US and British forces from reaching the bridge. Already behind schedule, it was imperative that the way be opened with all expediency. The intermittent reports from Arnhem painted a grim picture. The British paratroopers were in desperate straits and need relief at once.

Only the 2nd Battalion of the British 1st Airborne Division, Colonel John Frost had reached the bridge at Arnhem. His dwindling force had control of only the northern end. It was up to XXX Corps to take the southern half of the span. Time, however, was working against them. That, combined with the bitter surprise of elements of two rebuilding Panzer divisions along the projected route, made it even more difficult.

General James Gavin, commander of the 82nd finally decided upon a flanking move with an amphibious assault to the northeast of the two primary bridges at Nijmegen. It would be executed by Major Julian A. Cook's 3rd Battalion, 504th. Ragged canvas boats were brought up by truck to the edge of the river. They arrived late, negating an earlier airstrike by British Typhoon fighter-bombers.

The boats were in pitiful shape. Their wooden frames were rotted, and so was the canvas. Many oars were missing requiring the paratroopers to paddle with their rifles. Someone asked

the big, cigar chewing Major if his men had been prepared for such a mission, "Nah," he laconically replied, "This is on the job training."

Tanks of the Irish Guard lined the bank above the embarking paratroopers to lay down smoke and covering fire. Silently, swiftly, the paratroopers reached the southern shore of the Waal and began their perilous journey across the swiftly moving waters to the German side.

Losses were heavy as they executed the ominous crossing. Once on the other side, however, the paratroopers soon fought their way to the northern end of the bridges. When a US flag was spotted flying on the enemy side of the river, those in Nijmegen made a mad charge to the southern end of the bridges. Soon British tanks were rolling across the intact span and moving north toward Arnhem.

The Germans tried frantically at the last moment to detonate the charges designed to drop the mammoth bridge into the waters of the Waal, but they failed to go off. For the Germans, the worst sort of tragedy had occurred! The Allies were now only a few hours away from Arnhem.

It would be another day before XXX Corps could consolidate and continue its passage to Arnhem. By then, it was D+5, and the 1st Airborne Division was in desperate straits. The clock seemed to be ticking far too fast for the way events were unfolding. Time was truly running out. The fact that Arnhem was not reached in time in no way, however, minimizes the valor of British and American troops in taking the key bridges at Nijmegen.

Holding on at Wiltz

By Wild Bill Wilder

December 19th, 1944, Wiltz, Belgium

The town of Wiltz, a few miles southeast of Bastogne, was not in the direct line of march of the advancing German columns headed to Bastogne. Even so, some of the German forces headed toward the town looking for shelter against the bitter cold. It was also hoped a quick way into Bastogne might be found from there.

General Cota, commander of the 28th Infantry Division had his headquarters located at Wiltz for one day, but as the Panzers rolled west from the Clerf River, Cota was forced to move further to the rear. A residue of infantry and engineers with a few tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion was ordered to hold the area. A battery of 105mm guns of the 687th FAB with only two guns remaining offered a semblance of support.

Part of the German advance swung into the town. Both units of the Panzer Lehr Recon Battalion and troops of the 5th Fallshirmjager Division moved down the road toward the town. Though some of the GIs at Wiltz had already withdrawn across the river, those who remained began to put up a serious resistance. It was going to be another one of many tough fights that would take place during the Battle of the Bulge.

Making a Run for It

By Wild Bill Wilder

March 1st, 1944, Trier, Germany

One uncleared sector around the Rhine River in the Third Army's area of operation was the Saar-Moselle triangle. Beginning at the juncture of the Moselle and Saar rivers, it extended southeast for about 16 miles, then west again to the Saar near the city of Trier. Within the triangle was a strong German force, occupying part of the Siegfried Line.

Opposing the Americans were elements of the 2nd Mountain, the 11th Panzer, and the 256 Volks Grenadier Divisions. This defense, bolstered with the dragon's teeth and concrete bunkers of the Siegfried Line posed a formidable obstacle to Patton's advance. The terrain was hilly and, in some places, deeply forested. The inclement winter weather made movement difficult. As a part of the Nordwind German counteroffensive in early January, parts of the 11th Panzer Division drove hard at the American lines. They ran straight into the recently arrived 94th Division. The fighting continued for four days, and the Germans, their strength depleted, were forced to withdraw back into the triangle.

In February, as Allied operations in the North began, things began to happen around the Triangle. Patton was determined to break through this obstacle. Using the 94th as the spearhead, XX Corps began attacking the Siegfried Line. This fighting would go on for almost three weeks.

On March 1st, Colonel Jack Richardson, commander of the 20th Armored Infantry battalion was ordered to take back roads and head to Trier, just north of the Triangle. The plan was to take two bridges there and get across the Moselle. Splitting his forces in a last-minute run, they dashed for the bridges. The northern force found their bridge blown. The southern force got to their bridge at Kaiserbruke, an old stone structure, built during the times of the Romans.

Richardson himself hurried to the site in his M-5 Stuart and found his men under heavy small arms fire. Sensing the urgency, he drove his tank forward onto the bridge. From the other side, a German major and five of his men raced onto the western end with dynamite and blasting caps. They were too late. Roaring ahead, the .30 and .50 caliber machine guns ripped the Germans apart. The colonel had his bridge.

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Making a Stand at the Sienne River – July 28th – 30th, 1944

By Wild Bill Wilder

With the failure of the German counterattack at Mortain, it was apparent to even lower echelon officers of the Wehrmacht that a strong danger of being cut off from any retreat existed for many units of Army Group West. The result was that most units began moving across France, headed for the German border and safety. The US 1st Army forces were going to do all that they could to keep that from happening. Combat Command B of the US 2nd Armored Division occupied the town of Gavry and the surrounding area. Their purpose was to deny the Germans an exit route across the Seine River.

On July 28th, at about 4:00 PM, units of the 82nd Reconnaissance Squadron were the first units to arrive at the river. Having beaten the Germans, they quickly began setting up defensive strongpoints. Colonel Merriam, their commander, checked each outpost along the river and found them ready to hold and fight. On returning to his command post, north of Notre Dame le Cenilly, he found it under attack by German forces. Two companies of the 275th Infantry Division were wildly assaulting the headquarters positions.

The battalion Sergeant-Major, Victor S. Prawdzik, was putting normally non-combatant personnel into the line. Prawdzik was the type of sergeant that the men feared more than the Germans. Big and thick, with a mean scowl, the sergeant used a phrase with his big booming voice, which could be heard above the din of small arms fire, and became famous among the 82nd Recon, "Dammit, trooper, get a move on; get a move on trooper!" The men would later echo the sergeant's words to each other in mock sternness, "Trooper get a move on; get a move on, trooper!" The American defenses held, and the Germans withdrew, looking for another way out.

Next it would be Combat Command B that would bear the brunt of the German desperation. On July 29th, at about four in the morning, CCB went about establishing a line of defenses along the St. Denis le Gast-Sienne River line. Then they waited to be hit. They did not have to wait very long. The Americans had an advantage in that the Sienne River flowed in a southwest to northeast direction. It is very wide, with extremely steep banks, which makes it very difficult to cross.

The defensive positions of CCB and the course of the river formed a funnel with the smaller end running into the town of Gavry. The defensive positions of the 2nd blocked entrance to the town and its bridge, so vitally needed by the Germans to get to freedom. It was a trap into

which many German troops would have to enter. The big question was could CCB hold out against the enemy?

Actually, there would be a number of battles around the town of Gavry, each one more intense than the one before it. Shortly after the US units were in position, two Mark VI Elephants came rumbling up to the defenses. Accompanying them were German soldiers of the 352nd screaming, "Heil Hitler," in a mad charge. The impetus of the assault almost broke the lines of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment. The German assault gun crews used the 88s with deadly efficiency, raking American positions with high explosive shells. Platoon Sgt. Robert Lopez saw the danger and with accurate fire from an M-1 rifle took out the periscope of one of the mammoth vehicles. When the commander opened the hatch to see what was going on, another .30-caliber round took off the top of his head. Panicking, the rest of the crew bailed out and joined the infantry. Later, after the fighting, the GIs found the motor on the gun still running and a shell loaded into its breech. As the sun began to peek over the horizon, the German attackers withdrew, leaving over twenty dead and 150 badly wounded men on the field. Both enemy self-propelled guns were also out of action.

A few hours later at Penetiere, another attack was launched straight at the 78th Artillery battalion near La Penetiere. The cannoneers were protected by four tank destroyers of the 702 TD Battalion. Rag tag units of the Panzer Lehr division, including some 300 infantry and 15 pieces of armor came straight at the American position. While one battery became dedicated to indirect fire, the other two lowered their barrels and fired in conjunction with the tank destroyers. It became a real melee for about thirty minutes, with the Germans taking one of the American batteries. The arrival of more infantry and tanks changed the tenure of the battle. Again, the Germans had to withdraw, with a loss of nine tanks and over 100 men.

At Midnight of the 29th, another German force of about 600 infantry and the remaining vehicles from a battalion of the 2nd SS Panzer Division attacked and overran the command post of the 2nd Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment near St. Hilaire de Harcouet. Lt. Col. Wilson D. Coleman was establishing his outposts when the attack began.

Grabbing a bazooka, he sighted in on a passing German Mark III tank and took it out with one shot. Jumping into his jeep, he returned to his headquarters and was busy parceling out his men to defensive positions when a large German artillery shell that landed right in the middle of his jeep killed him and others of his headquarters staff. The men were driven into a small perimeter but survived. The Germans flowed around them to the next American position.

The Germans continued to strike hard at the defenses set up at various points around the Sienne River. Other command posts were overrun throughout the area, as German troops and vehicles slammed against the steel wall hastily thrown up by the 2nd Armored.

The bloodiest fight of all occurred at Grimesnil on July 29th. Company I and the headquarters Company of 2nd Battalion, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, CCB, Company B of the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, two engineer platoons, an assault gun platoon of M-7 Priests and a few odds and ends vehicles were to face a fierce charge by nearly 2,000 mixed German units and ninety vehicles.

The German attack, though somewhat disorganized, was bold and desperate. Men trapped were frantically seeking their freedom from men equally determined to keep them in the trap. It was a hard fight. The tank outposts were overrun, and the Germans continued to close in on the main position. They were brought to a standstill by the actions of one man, Staff Sergeant Hulon B. Whittington, A Cajun from DeRitter, Louisiana, whose Medal of Honor citation reads as follows.

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. On the night of 29 July 1944, near Grimesnil, France, during an enemy armored attack, Sergeant Whittington, a squad leader, assumed command of his platoon when the platoon

leader and the platoon sergeant became missing in action. He reorganized the defense and, under fire, courageously crawled between gun positions to check the actions of his men.

When the advancing enemy attempted to penetrate a roadblock, Sergeant Whittington, completely disregarding intense enemy action, encountered a tank and by shouting through the turret, directed it into position to fire pointblank at the leading Mark V German Tank. The destruction of this vehicle blocked all movement of the enemy column, consisting of over 100 vehicles of a Panzer unit. The blocked vehicles were then destroyed by hand grenades, bazookas, tank, and artillery fire and large numbers of enemy personnel were wiped out by a bold and resolute bayonet charge inspired by Sergeant Whittington.

When the medical aid man had become a casualty, Sergeant Whittington personally administered first aid to his wounded men. The dynamic leadership and inspiring example, and the dauntless courage of Sergeant Whittington above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service."

The German attackers tried to overwhelm the American positions but were driven back by hand grenades and bayonets. At one point, Captain W.C. Johnson, I Company, 41st Infantry, radioed the 78th Artillery for fires support, but heard the commander there giving the order to his guns, "B Battery, fire direct," meaning that the artillerymen were fighting inside their own position. It seemed at that moment they were rather busy and had little help to offer.

One final attempt was made to get around the Americans by the desperate Germans. The infantry tried sneaking through a nearby swamp in order to attack them from the flanks and rear. The few remaining tanks of the US force were sent to meet them and early the next morning over 300 dead Germans were found in the murky slime. Dawn of the 30th revealed a gruesome scene, even for hardened veterans. Over 600 German dead were scattered throughout the American position, including three women and a German major general.

In addition, the defenders had taken over 1,000 German prisoners and nearly all the ninety plus vehicles. Major Jerome Smith called the scene, "the most godless sight I have ever seen." A veteran of all the fighting days of the 2nd, from the Moroccan landings to here, said that he had not seen such horrible carnage in all his combat experience. Bulldozers had to be called in to clear the roads and remove the dead. The remainder of the day was spent in cleaning up and hunting down German stragglers. The 2nd Armored Division had plugged the opening quite effectively, once again proving their worth in combat.

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One Tough Tanker

By Wild Bill Wilder

September 9th, 1944, Masstricht, Belgium

It took a hearty soul to man the M4 Sherman tank and go up against the superior firepower and armor of the Wehrmacht. Armor crew casualties were high. The Sherman, though a good, reliable tank, could not match the advantages of the firepower and thick Krupp steel armor plating of a Panther or a Tiger.

But some men were born to tank fighting. S/Sgt Lafayette G. Pool, of Odem, Texas was one of those. With the first name, "Lafayette," Pool grew up tough. He was a tall muscular young man. On hearing him speak, there could be no trouble identifying his Texas drawl. A golden gloves champ, he had accepted a challenge from Joe Lewis, who was visiting US troops in England, to spar a few rounds.

Pool was always ready for a fight. He was a natural as a tank commander. Serving with the 32nd Regiment, 3rd Armored Division, he found himself in France in late June 1944. The Texas sergeant always wore his cowboy boots while in his tank. A German Panzerfaust took out his first one, “In the Mood,” on his first day of combat.

Undeterred, he was given a second M4A3 and named it "In the Mood II." During an air attack on German positions, on August 18, 1944, at Fromental, France, an errant bomb from one of the attacking Thunderbolts damaged beyond repair his second tank. One man was injured, and Sergeant Pool leaped from his own tank, and while under heavy German small arms fire went to the man, loaded him on his shoulders and carried him to safety.

Once the remaining US tanks had been pulled back, Pool insisted on going back to look for another man who was missing. It was only because of direct orders of the company commander, Captain Burton W. Benz that the courageous sergeant did not venture again into the danger zone.

But the good Sergeant from Texas was quick to get another tank, this one a newer version of the M4A3 with the much more powerful 76mm gun. He and his crew, which was with him till the end, fought their way across France and into Germany.

During his short career Pool and his crew were credited with 258 enemy vehicles kills, from Kubelwagens to Panther tanks. The crew of "In the Mood" had taken over 250 prisoners and killed over 1,000 German soldiers.

The highpoint in the sergeant's exploits came at Namur, Belgium, when he and his regiment killed sixteen enemy tanks with a loss of only five of theirs. Pool was credited with 3 tank kills, including a Panther at close range.

Pool's adventures in a tank came to a tragic close on September 9th, 1944. While covering the right flank of his combat command, he and the other tanks in his platoon were engaged by tanks of the 9th Panzer Division between Maastricht and Aachen. Here the “Texas

Tanker” would end his fighting career. He would, however, continue to serve as instructor in armor for years afterward.

When his tank was hit, he tried to back out of the engagement, but a second shell slammed into the stricken Sherman, setting it afire. Pool was thrown out of the turret, with a severe wound to his right leg. His crew was able to escape and found aid for their commander. In spite of the emergency care given Pool lost his leg and his days of combat were at an end. This is the battle that is portrayed in this scenario.

Pool, however, did not quit. He continued to serve as instructor in the US Army in matters of armor for a number of years. After retiring, he became active in the church, pastoring a small congregation in Texas. So renowned were his armored exploits in Europe that Room 9312, a tank driving simulator at Fort Knox was renamed Pool Hall in 1993, two years after his death.

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Task Force Butler

By Wild Bill Wilder

August 21-23, 1944, Montelimar, France

The second invasion of mainland Europe took place a little more than two months after the monumental landings at Normandy. It was called Operation Dragoon. It was an operation that has met with mixed opinions before and after its execution.

Fiery Winston Churchill was against it. He preferred to continue to hammer up the Italian boot. To open another area of operation seemed to the cigar-chewing Prime Minister a waste of resources. The years instead have cast more question marks over the Italian campaign than the one on the French Riviera.

Earlier known as Operation Anvil, it was cancelled in the middle of June 1944 due to a lack of supplies and naval craft. By early July, however, the hedgerow fighting through Normandy has persuaded allied planners to reinstitute it. This time it would be known as Operation Dragoon.

The vanguard of the invasion force was composed of three experienced US divisions. A combined British American Airborne force, the infamous Canadian-American 1st Special Service Force, and the French Armored Regiment Sudre would complete the Allied attacking group. Soon after the landings were secured, six Free-French divisions would come ashore and take the major ports of Marseille and Toulon.

The landings were made with much less opposition than had been encountered on some of the Normandy beaches. This surprised Allied commanders and left them with a predicament. Due to a lack of transport, the leaders had opted for the higher priority to be given to firepower and ammunition. This left the units on the beaches suffering from a lack of other supply needs and transport. These needs would hamper the entire campaign and continually slow it down.

General Truscott, commander of the VI Corps, anticipated an end run. He knew that he would lose the armored support of the French Combat Command Sudre. He therefore improvised a large mobile task force under the command of the Assistant Corp Commander, General Frederick Butler.

This would be Truscott's "ace in the hole." Skirting German defenses, Task Force Butler would head north, ready to turn east when called upon and form a blocking force against retreating German units.

Many of its troops and tanks came from the 36 Infantry Division, the "Texas" Division. They included a mechanized infantry battalion, 2 companies of Sherman tanks, tank destroyers, a cavalry squadron and self-propelled artillery.

Their first destination was Grenoble, over 150 miles directly north from the beaches. On August 20th, Truscott ordered Butler to turn to the southwest and head for Montelimar. The French forces were smashing German defenses all along the coast. The result was a general

retreat of all German troops and armor northward back to the Reich. The tough, wily Corp Commander was now ready to spring his trap. At Montelimar, his troops would stop the fleeing Germans in their tracks.

Montelimar lay nestled against the east bank of the Rhone River. Most of the German forces were on that same side and the numerous blown bridges prevented them from crossing. Just north of Montelimar was ideal high ground in the form of three hills, 294, 430 and 300. The most important of the three was Hill 300, as it overlooked a main highway (N-7) and a secondary one (D-6).

Truscott order Butler to move into position quickly. He was to not allow the passage of a single German vehicle north of Montelimar. Naturally, TF Butler did not have the manpower to control a 50-mile square. They would need help. Truscott ordered General Dahlquist, commander of the 36th Division to send his troops to the area with all expediency and support Butler in his efforts.

What followed was a jumble of confused orders, changed objectives, lack of transport and general confusion. The 36th began arriving in small increments. Meanwhile the brunt of the German attacks to achieve a breakthrough to the north continued around Montelimar.

Again, and again the Germans hammered Hill 300. They even flanked the hill but could not hold their gain. After six hard days of fighting in 8 large battles, the Americans were driven from the west side of Hill 300. This allowed the bulk of the German army to continue its flight northward.

It had been a bitter series of battles, with both sides suffering heavy losses. Though partially successful, Task Force Butler, heavily outnumbered had not received the needed reinforcement. As a result, the cutting off of the enemy had not been achieved.

Unusual valor earmarked units on each side of the battle and proved to be one of the fiercest series of fights to take place in the campaign for southern France.

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The 82nd Airborne and Ste-Mere Eglise

By Neil Stalker

Origins of the 82nd

Overseas the development of armed paratroopers had already begun well before the United States inititiated its program. In 1938 France established a battalion of air troops but in 1939 the battalion was returned to normal infantry. Russia and Germany both had been developing air troops, Russia in 1930 and Germany in 1935.

Following the German successes in Holland, Belgium and Crete the Allies commenced raising their own airborne forces. In June 1940 Churchill established the Parachute Training School at Ringway for the purpose of developing a parachute corp. In October 1941 Major General F A M Browning DSO formed an Airborne Division.

Major General William Lee is seen as the father of the American Airborne forces. Between the wars he had seen the development of overseas air delivered forces and he understood the possibilities. The US Army took notice of the Germans use of airborne forces and Lt Colonel Lee was assigned to establish an experimental platoon at Fort Benning Georgia in 1940. They started from nothing having to design and build most of their equipment some of which is still used today – the jump towers.

By 1942 he had two parachute regiments the 502nd and 503rd. Then in August it was decided to create two airborne divisions the 82nd and 101st, Lee was promoted to Major General and given command of the 101st. Unfortunately for Lee he suffered a severe heart attack and would never lead his men into combat, General Maxwell Taylor replaced him.

The 82nd Airborne was created from the 82nd Infantry (All Americans) in August 15th 1942 and the 82nd was under command of General Omar Bradley. The All-American tag came from the diverse locations that its men came from. Major General Matthew Ridgeway assumed command of the Division when it embarked for North Africa in April 1943. The first airborne actions were during the invasion of Sicily (July 9) and Salerno (September 13). Many died during the Sicily landings, but airborne troops proved their worth and the divisions continued to build. In November 1943 they were moved to England to prepare for the D-Day invasions. The Germans on the other hand had decided to wind back airborne operations due to lack of aircraft and what was considered unacceptable casualties.

The Invasion

The 82nd Airborne Division at the time of the Normandy landings consisted of the 505th, 507th and 508th Parachute Regiments, the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 319th and the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion plus Engineering units. The 504th had been fighting as infantry in Italy and did not take part except for a detached battalion. Each Regiment consisted of 3 battalions plus a HQ company. Each Battalion had 2 Rifle, 1 SMG, 1 Heavy (Heavy Machine Guns, Light Machine Guns and 60 mm Mortars) company plus HQ. The companies consisted of 4 platoons, 1 being a heavy platoon. The artillery consisted of 12 x 75mm pack howitzers.

As light infantry landing in normally hostile territory that would be alerted by aircraft noise they would expect to come under fire before they landed although it was found during Normandy that only troops that landed near some form of illumination (burning buildings) were hit in the air. So the troops had to be prepared for anything and they had to carry everything with them so an average airborne trooper had the following to carry: - gloves, boots, helmet, .45 automatic pistol, rifle, trench knife, jump knife, hunting knife, machete, 1 cartridge belt, 2 bandoliers, 2 cans of machine gun ammo, 66 rounds of .45 ammo, 1 Hawkins mine (anti-tank), 4 blocks TNT, spade, 3 first aid kits, 2 morphine needles, 1 gas mask, water canteen, 3 days' supply K rations, 2 days' supply D Rations, 6 frag grenades, 1 Gammon grenade, 2 smoke grenades, 1 orange panel, 1 blanket, 1 raincoat, change of socks and underwear, 2 cartons of cigarette and last but not least a parachute, reserve parachute and a mae west. Also, you could have parts of a mortar or machine gun attached to your leg during the drop.

Each plane carried a stick of 18 men and the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing using C-47s would transport the 82nd to its destination. The 82nd was "to drop astride the Merderet River south and west of St Mére Elgise extend the flank protection westward by destroying two more bridges over the Douve, and secure the Merderet crossings, thus forestalling any attempt to contain the invasion forces behind the inundations and opening the way for an early drive to the west coast of the peninsula." The Allied High Command expected high casualties to aircraft on the way in but out of 805 planes only 20 were lost.

The Drop

The formations of planes flew tightly packed together at 500 feet to get under the radar but then went up to 1,500 feet near the coast and then down to 700 feet as they approached the Landing Zones. The planes flew in across the Cotentin Peninsula and flew into thick cloudbanks, which caused the pilots to spread themselves out and to try to avoid colliding with the other aircraft. This caused missing drop zones or even overflying them some aircraft came in under the safe altitude, which had the effect of not allowing the parachutes sufficient time to open.

The 82nd was spread out from the flooded areas to the coast some sticks drowned in the channel and others landed on Utah beach amongst the German defenses. Only the 505th landed on target its task was to take St Mére Elgise. Troops on their own in the dark some completely lost wandered around for hours looking for any friendly face. Others landed in the flooded valleys and were dragged under by weight of equipment and still others came across the enemy, some were lucky others weren't.

The Mission

Gradually dispersed units combined, mixtures of men from different regiments, battalions and companies into Kampfgruppes.

The 2 and 3/505th were dropped virtually on top of St Mére Elgise about 30 men were dropped on the town which was awake and alert due to a house fire. The German garrison fired on them killing most of them. Lt Colonel Krause commander 3/505th landed outside the town and quickly collected 2 companies and quickly surrounded the village. The German communication cable was cut, and the village was entered and after light fighting, it was taken at 6am.

The northern route into St Mére Elgise was to be held by Lt Colonel Benjamin Vandervoort and his 575 men he had collected. The Colonel had broken his leg when landing so he was chauffeured around in an ammo cart. Due to a communication breakdown his force was held up until the situation was clarified. A forward platoon at Neuville, which was astride Route 13, came under fire from German armor and infantry, the Americans put in a solid defense. The Germans outnumbered the 82nd force and started to outflank them so Lt Turnbull the platoon commander withdrew but he had given the defenders at St Mére Elgise enough time to consolidate their defenses.

The capture of the bridges across the Merderet River were an essential part of the 82 nd tasks. Without the bridges the 4th Division landing at Utah would find its line of advance cut. The 1/505th had two bridges to seize one at Chef du Pont and one at Le Manoir. The Le Manoir was being defended from a strongly built farm complex and after a frontal attack was attempted and failed it was decided to push a second company around behind the farm and outflank them. The German force was overcome. Soon after the battle elements of 1/507th met the 1/505th.

The Douve bridges were another vital link and a combined force 3/506 and 2/501st who had landed on top of the veteran German 91st Division was cut to pieces and out of 800 men only 117 got to the objective. On the way and at the objective a further 33 men joined them. They took the bridges against solid defenses but the linking force from Omaha beach was held up and all the other units were tied up. A further 40 men joined him giving him a force of 150 men. And to rub salt into the wounds American P51 bombers destroyed the bridges despite the orange panels being displayed.

The taking of the German Coastal Artillery Barracks designated WXYZ by a scratch force led by Staff Sgt Summers has to be an amazing example of one man's bravery. 15 men were to take the barracks and with Summers on his own a lot of the time and then with a Private and a machine gunner cleared all the buildings killing over 50 Germans. This had cleared another exit from the beaches.

With the dispersed airborne forces in the German 91st area they had effectively tied the Germans and stopped them from concentrating against the sea borne forces.

Summary

Despite the Airborne's misfortunes and casualties, they did in most cases achieve their objectives. They had put the enemy on the defensive and the overall objective of providing protection for the exits from the beaches had been achieved. Wilmot says, "In spite of the losses and confusion of the airborne landings, the battle of UTAH had been placed almost beyond doubt by the parachutists before a single infantryman set foot on shore."

This is true without the airborne forces blocking the movement of the Germans; the Germans would have moved all their infantry divisions seaward and would have effectively blocked any movement off the beaches. Then it would have got down to air and navy fire suppressing the Germans while the infantry and armor tried to push through exits. The casualties would have been enormous.

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The Adventure at Arracourt

By Wild Bill Wilder

September 19th, 1944, Arracourt

Reviews of American armored performance in World War II are mixed, depending on the historical commentator. Perhaps the facts should speak for themselves. Discounting individual engagements, and taking the entire conflict as a whole, it is a fact that the Allied powers won the war. American participation had a great deal to do with that. It is true that generally speaking, German armor had some superior features, such as heavier firepower and thicker armor. In spite of these factors, American armor won many of the engagements in which it was involved. Some attribute this to sheer weight of numbers. In some instances that might be true. Military history is dotted, however, with instances of outnumbered American tank units that did a superb job of stopping the Germans.

Toward the end of the war, the German armor suffered from three big deficiencies. The first was that there was never enough of it. Even though tank production in 1944 rose to its highest ever in Germany, they were always outnumbered on both fronts. The second was the inconsistency of German tanks. Instead of concentrating on a few tank marks or models, Germany experimented with a number of different designs, which diluted its manufacturing capacities.

Even when new and better tanks were designed, they were often sent to the front without adequate testing. The end result was that there were many breakdowns. The failure of the Mark V Panther and the Mark VI JagdPanzer Ferdinand in the battle of Kursk are classic examples of this fact. The final big problem to the success of German armor was that the well trained and experienced crews of the beginning of the war were all gone. Manning the newer, better tanks were young men who had no experience and limited training. They often were not able to cope with the stresses of armored warfare and avoided battle. To each of these deficiencies there are classic exceptions, but as a rule, these were the limiting factors to greater success of the panzers.

An example of the good work of the American armor is the rapid progress of Patton's Third Army through the heart of France in August and September 1944. The advance of these units after a month of being bogged down near the beachhead at Normandy was a marvelous change. Third Army moved so fast that the supplies could hardly keep up.

The 4th Armored division was at the forefront of the attack. Under the command of Maj. Gen."Tiger Jack" Wood, they had moved swiftly, bypassing enemy strongpoints, and finding its way around natural obstacles. Its characteristics were described as "...the ability to move and shoot, but above all to move. Movement became its middle name, constant momentum its trademark." The Combat Command Group A (CCA) of the 4th was Colonel Bruce Clark, who would later perform admirably in the fighting around St. Vith at the Battle of the Bulge.

Approaching the city of Nancy, his forces performed a classic maneuver around the city as part of its capture. It was likened to Jeb Stuart’s lightning attacks during the Civil War. As the division prepared to move on to Metz, the German forces made a bid to stop it.

This assault came from the 113th Panzer Brigade, part of General Hasso von Manteuffel's 5th Panzer Armee. The end result was some of the largest tank battles in which American forces were involved during the war. The primary German tank used in the fighting was the Mark V Panther, often classified as the best medium tank of the war. While that may be true, the deficiencies mentioned above were to plague the efforts of the panzers in their fighting with CCA.

The Panther combined the three essential qualities of a good tank. Designed to stop the deadly Russian T-34 medium tank, it possessed a remarkable balance of firepower, protection, and mobility. It had a road speed of nearly 30 miles per hour, which for a tank of this size was remarkable (twice as fast as the Tiger). It enjoyed a low silhouette. It was 29 feet long and stood 9.75 feet high. Its wide tracks gave it good mobility in the most awful terrain conditions.

The overlapping road wheels and a state-of-the-art suspension enabled it to traverse rough terrain at a high speed. It could move when other tanks floundered in mud or ice. It had a combat radius of 125 miles. Its main armament was a high powered 75mm antitank gun, which many claim to have been almost as deadly as the large 88mm gun. It was a natural tank killer. In addition, it was equipped with two or three machine guns.

Its debut at Kursk was a debacle. Over one half of the Panthers sent into battle broke down before they got there. Overheating engines, transmissions that locked up, and erratic turret control were all problems that hindered its performance. The difficulties were the result of trying to hurry to get it into the battle. These problems were eventually corrected. It quickly evolved into a fine fighting machine. It would have replaced the redoubtable Mark IV in time, but time ran out for the Germans.

Although there were a number of separate tank engagements around Nancy and Arracourt between September 17th through the 21st, one of the key struggles was the one between tanks of the American 37th Tank Battalion and the German 2nd Battalion, 113 Panzer Brigade between Chambrey and Arracourt.

Companies B and C were responsible for the protection of the Combat Command headquarters at Arracourt. A liaison officer headed to the headquarters was driving down the highway when he came up on the rear of a column of tanks moving in the morning mist. To his horror, he realized that they were German, and he quickly made a successful escape. By radio he advised the battalion commander, Col. Abrams, who immediately dispatched tanks under his command to the area. He also called upon units of the 704th Tank Destroyer battalion to join the battle.

The first encounter was near the town of Lezey. There an outpost of Shermans took on the lead Panthers. After a short firefight, the Germans lost two tanks and changed direction.

After proceeding a little further, the German column encountered the M-18 Hellcats of the 704th. Another short tank battle cost the Germans two more of their tanks. They were able to decimate the 2nd Platoon of Hellcats, but now became uneasy and spread out.

Making jabs and probes to find an opening in the American defenses, a series of tank encounters ensued. As Company B fought for its life, Company A was quickly dispatched to its aid. Lieutenant James Stuart, commanding the 1st Platoon of Company A joined his tanks with Company B and they set out in line to join battle with the German armor. Coming upon a bivouac of five Panthers, Stuart and his platoon took them all out, with the loss of two of their own. Stuart tried to radio Captain Spencer, commander of the company, but was unable to reach him.

Spencer's tank had been hit, and he was unconscious. Moving ahead, the American tanks ran into the larger group of German tanks and the battle was joined. Stuart and his crew would get three more armored vehicles before two rounds suddenly struck his own tank.

The first one slammed into the hull. It killed the loader and severely wounded the rest of the crew. Stuart sustained 18 separate shrapnel wounds, including a partially severed Achilles right tendon. The second round went through the turret and threw Stuart out of the tank. He managed to limp and crawl to another Sherman nearby to get help for himself and his men. He and his crew were soon evacuated from the action.

Stuart returned to the war just as it was coming to a close. He was able to participate in the final days of the conflict but had no further victories. In this one battle, however, his tank had taken out five German tanks and disabled three others, surely enough to qualify him as a tank ace of the war.

The Atlantic Wall

By Neil Stalker

"I am the greatest fortress builder of all time." Adolph Hitler

Hitler wanted to prevent the Allies from landing along the coast of Europe so like any medieval King he decided to erect a castle to protect himself and so only have to contend with the barbarians to his east. The defences had to stretch from Denmark down to the Spanish border. He chose one of his most able Field Marshall, Erwin Rommel to inspect his defenses and so at the end of 1943 through to February 1944 an inspection was made. Hitler had become fanatical about this especially since the defeat at Dieppe had shown the worth of strongly fortified positions.

In a 3-year period only 1,700,000 mines had been laid and the beach defenses were mostly ineffective. Rommel set himself a target of laying about 50,000,000 mines although in 4 months he had only managed to lay 4,000,000. A shortage of raw materials was a major problem, so he utilized 100s of thousands of old shells. Rommel felt that the defenses were insufficient and in line with his philosophy that the enemy must be defeated on the beaches he wanted a speedy build up to the defences. This was especially true in his Army Group B Sector, which stretched from the Pas de Calais to the Cotentin Peninsula. The scale of the fortifications that Hitler wanted in place was to Rommel and Von Rundstedt "a figment of Hitler's wolkenkuckucksheim (cloud cuckoo land) mind ". Because as had been demonstrated against the French Maginot line fixed defences could be either driven around or by force of physics, use of an overwhelming force of energy against any object will eventually destroy it.

Rommel's strategy was to build up his defenses to at least delay the landing and then the quick utilisation of his divisions plus the mobile panzer reserve, which was held close to the coast, and throw the invaders back into the sea. Von Rundstedt the overall commander for the area felt that the better tactic was to let the Allies land and move off the beaches and then attack.

Rommel well remembers the power of Allied air from his days in North Africa and fought against it.

Hitler felt he could stop them completely at his defences. So, Rommel drove his army and division commanders to thicken their defences and lay millions of mines on the beaches and the surrounding areas. Plus, he had large gun emplacements built, pillboxes, anti-glider and airborne defences, beach obstacles, automatic flamethrowers and every other type of defense his fertile imagination could conceive. Some of the nicknames for them described what they did, "tinopeners" –beams driven in below low water mark with mines on top with steelcutters, "nutcrackers" – mines in blocks of concrete.

In a short period of time a massive amount of work was done but a lot of it was never completed due to lack of manpower and man-hours plus a lack of raw materials although every ton of concrete that could be spared was sent to the Atlantic Wall. But with large scale bombing of the Reich men had to be transferred back to Germany to repair essential installations eg.

The Möhne Dam had to be repaired and so several thousand workers were transferred from the coast.

Hitler took such an avid interest in the building of the various defenses that he actually designed some of the pillboxes, which of course were built unchanged. His original plan was to have a line of pillboxes from Holland down the French coast each pillbox to mutually supportive of its neighbours.

This was impossible so a compromise of having pillboxes built around the major ports and in between observation bunkers would be built, 15,000 of these were required. The idea being during the bombardment by the invaders the troops would take cover in the bunkers and then come out fighting afterwards. The building of these defenses consumed 17,300,000 cubic yards of concrete and 1.2 million metric tons of iron was diverted from the armaments industry to the wall.

And when the landings at Normandy came on June 6, 1944, the Atlantic Wall was quickly driven through, blown up or simply flown over. The defences inflicted far less casualties than estimated and at UTAH and the British beaches the speed of advance was measured in hours. Omaha was the strongest defended beach, and it was either the scale of fixed defences or the crack troops that were positioned there or a combination of both. But they moved through the defensive belt and where of the beach that evening.

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The Supply Lines

By Neil Stalker

In the past the saying that an army travels on its stomach was true enough even in World War 1 but that was more of a combination of food and ammo. In World War Two, with the emphasis on mobility, petrol, oil, lubricants, spare parts plus food, water, clothes, shoes, and ammunition were needed and they had to keep up with the front wherever it was that day. The Quartermasters and Engineers were the backbone of the Allied armies and although to a degree unsung heroes they allowed the battles to be fought.

The Allies had also other problems to face with the large-scale bombing of French and German rail and road systems they had to supply locomotives, rolling stock, rails, earth moving equipment and all the other many items to get a countries transport infrastructure back up and working. Also getting the equipment into the country was a major problem as there were no major ports that were not garrisoned or destroyed by the German forces.

The Giant Supply Depot

Britain would serve as the staging depot for the enormous amount supplies that a force of 3,000,000 servicemen men would need. Plus, the liberating forces would be responsible for feeding the civilian populations of the liberated countries till they could feed themselves. This would entail 1,000,000s of ration packs. But before this could begin the Battle of the Atlantic had to be won so the fleets of ships from America could arrive. In 1943 the Battle started to turn to the Allies and the losses of ships started to drop and the sinking of U-Boats started to rise.

This was mainly due to technology and the increasing availability of small carriers and more escort vessels. Also, the Americans were producing 13 liberty ships per month by using a prefabricated process.

Operation Bolero was the name given to the task of moving the U.S. Forces and supplies to England. The volume of men and supplies that accumulated in Southeast England outnumbered the civilian population. Trucks, tanks, jeeps, ambulances, halftracks were hidden in forests or simply lined up along roads bumper to bumper covered with camo-netting. The green fields of Southern England grew huge crops of howitzers, AA guns, earthmoving equipment, and prefab buildings. In The Longest Day Ryan says the most amazing sight of all was the “one thousand brand new locomotives, and nearly twenty thousand tanker cars and freight cars” which filled the valleys these would replace the French equipment which at that moment were been blown to pieces. Then along with that were the shoes, clothing, 124,000 hospital beds, medical supplies and ordinance dumps.

Beaches had been cemented so that vehicles could be loaded on Landing Craft. Every port in England was crammed with ships and boats of every description. There was a total of 4,126 vessels with 1,173 vessels carrying tanks and armoured vehicles, 300 war ships, a total of 57,500 American and 75,000 Commonwealth troops plus 900 armoured vehicles and 600 guns were to go ashore on the first day. 165 airstrips had been built to handle the 13,743 aircraft that would take part and most of those strips were in Southern England to give greater range to the aircraft. It is interesting to note to service the forces it took 54,000 men

including 4,500 cooks. This also had to be done as secretly as possible. So at the most obvious points for departure for the Pas de Calais dummy forces were setup plus pump stations for fuel and store depots. The German Luftwaffe were allowed to fly over this part of the country and so report back exactly what the Allied Command wanted them to know and also by then all the Axis agents had been killed or turned. Dummy radio traffic was broadcast, and the real traffic was sent by landline to another site and then broadcast. Total radio silence in Southern England came into force prior to the landings.

To land the estimated 40,000 tons of supplies and 6,500 vehicles per week needed ports would be needed and as they knew Cherbourg would not be available, they would have to take their own. So, two giant harbours were built, they were called Mulberries and Churchill's foresight led to their development. They consisted of an outer breakwater made up of sinking old freighters and steel block ships. Then 145 200-foot long concrete caissons, which were sunk butt to butt, and this created a sheltered harbour. Liberty ships could offload to barges or dump them at floating piers where trucks could take them inshore. DUKWs were also used as amphibious lorries to ship the goods ashore from the piers.

Petrol, Oil and Lubricants (POL)

The modern army can't move without POL as Clemenceau remarked in WW1 that petrol was the "the red blood of war" and in WW1 they only used 40 million gallons of petrol. They did not have the massive mobile armies of WW2. In Operation Torch they used 10 million gallons and that was literally a drop in the ocean compared to the invasion of France.

It is interesting to note that it takes 3 pounds of gasoline to delivery one pound of bombs a Flying Fortress used two tons of gasoline on a bombing mission. 50 gallons of POL per servicemen is used per week. One third of POL produced in 1944/45 went to the military. 50 million gallons of POL were shipped daily to the Allied Armies. A mechanized division on the move uses 18,000 gallons of POL per hour. In charge of supplying all of this was the Quartermasters General's Fuel and Lubricants Division under Brig. Gen. H.L. Peckham.

This division came under control of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army-Navy Petrol Board under General Somervell.

When people think of POL they think of vehicles and what is needed to run them, but it is also a direct strategic weapon – petroleum fog oil is used to create smoke screens, it is used to make salves and ointments for the healing of wounds, used to power generators in MASH units, also used to cook with etc. And as weapons with Napalm and in flamethrowers.

POL in England and France.

Four main POL dumps were established in the South with total stocks of 80-octane gasoline, oil and grease kept at 1,000,000 gallons. 100,000 gallons per day was being consumed. 1250 men were charged with petrol handling.

The planning of petrol flow was that all vehicles would have full tanks plus extra 5-gallon jerrycans. Tankers were located offshore, and they would have floating pipes to shore. Petrol was to be distributed in 5-gallon cans till D+41. The plan also expected the campaign to go slowly, and that Cherbourg would be captured on D+15 allowing the engineers to lay 3 6-inch pipelines to Paris. These would hookup with Pluto (Petrol Under the Ocean).

Pluto consisted of several 3-inch pipelines prefabricated in 4,000-foot sections and butt-welded 30-foot joints and reeling onto 40-foot diameter spools. The spools were made buoyant and towed behind cable laying ships. Once the Allies had secured the coast of Normandy, the vessels pulled the large spools unreeling the pipe onto the ocean floor and much needed fuel was made available to the invasion forces. The fuel was pumped from various dumps on the coast of England.

What actually happened when the landings took place was as per plan with the packaged supplies being sufficient enough at the start but with the German resistance lighter than

expected the targets were accelerated. By D+21 177,000 vehicles and half a million tons of supplies came ashore. POL reserves were at 7.5 million gallons. But with the failure to take Cherbourg the petrol would have to be packaged in jerry cans.

When the Allies made their breakout in July Patton's Third Army was consuming 380,000 gallons per day. The First Army was on one day using 740,000 gallons. With the leaping ahead of the supply lines of both armies Ernie Pyle's comment on the situations was that it was a "a tacticians hell and a quartermasters purgatory". The armies were 300 miles from the base depots and all the petrol had to be packed and transported to them daily wherever the armies were.

The Red Ball Express

To get the supplies to the armies " a one way loop run highway system was born". This started on August 25th using 67 truck companies to start with and growing to 132 companies (6,000 vehicles). The highway ran from St Lo to Chartres. It was a combined effort of engineers maintaining roads and bridges, MPs to guide and control, mechanics, tow trucks, petrol handlers and planners. The convoys maintained a speed of 25 mph maximum, travelled 60 yards apart and at night they could use full headlights and each hour the drivers had a ten-minute break.

The logistical crisis came to ahead when Eisenhower gave the largest percentage of supplies to the First Army at the expense of the Third Army and Patton said, "My men can eat their belts but my tanks gotta have gas." The crisis resolved itself by September with reserves exceeding demand about 1,000,000 gallons per day. The Red Ball transported 500,000 tons of supplies and served as a stopgap until railways and pipelines could be constructed.

Rations

Ration development was country based, as the American forces did not like the British rations. The Americans did not like the British fondness for tea, bread, potatoes, and mutton. The American is also a heavy meat eater and likes his coffee. The American forces had to eat the British rations when they first moved to England. It was not until late 1942 that American forces ate wholly American rations.

Where a field kitchen was not available for feeding of the troops ration packs were used mainly consisted of either K, C, D rations which were designed to supply the necessary calorie units to keep a man going. The rations normally consisted of a meat component – stew, franks and beans, meat and beans and another can of a desert or candy plus toilet paper, cigarettes etc. Some were very unpopular like the early C ration, but they continued development during the war and gradually improved. They were bought in enormous numbers the D Ration - approximately 170,000,000 purchased.

The most popular ration was the K ration first developed for parachutists and produced in breakfast, lunch and dinner versions. The breakfast one contained canned meat product, biscuits, cereal bar, coffee, fruit bar, gum, sugar tablets, 4 cigarettes, water purification tablets, can opener, toilet paper and a wooden spoon. The dinner version had canned cheese product, biscuits, gum, candy bar, beverage powders, sugar, salt tablets, cigarettes, matches, can opener and spoon. 105,000,000 million were produced.

There were many styles of ration pack's purpose built for the type of operation that was being carried out. There were hospital rations, aircrew rations, parachute rations, mountain rations, spice packs, lifeboat rations and even a D-Day ration called the X Ration.

Clothing and Shoes

A lot of time and effort went into working out clothing requirements for the fighting man considering he could be fighting in the sweltering conditions of the Pacific or freezing his butt of in a European Winter. The clothing also had to look good and fit well. The Army went to a

lot of trouble to achieve this and in September 1943 they tabulated the sizes of 6,000,000 persons to get the right set of measurements needed. Then when the uniform was issued a tailor would then adjust it so it looked good. But even then, some people required special sizing either due to height or girth. Foot sizes could also be different with different foot sizes on an individual.

Shoes are the most important item for an infantryman considering all weather and terrain conditions must be taking into account. The Army had to supply shoes for 8,300,000 men by 1945 and 5,000,000 of these were overseas. 5 percent of the shoes went to Allies. Prisoners were given second hand shoes. Each soldier received two pairs, and these were reshoed twice before being replaced. It was found that in the South Pacific 2 pairs of shoes lasted 5 months. Also, any shoes not good enough for Army use are given to liberated civilians this totalled around 4,000,000 pairs.

Quartermasters

The QMG is responsible for these important aspects of an army on the move. They travel with the front-line troops or just a little behind they come under fire and die. As PFC James P. Hatchell said on Stars and Stripes August 10, 1944, “No one seems to ever to think a soldier in QM ever gets to smell any gunpowder, dig any foxholes, get into fighting, go without food, mail and the like. Our QM hit the beach D-Day right with when the heat was on, and more outfits are hitting the beach every day – to unload and load rations, ammunition, and all other equipment and supplies. Opening and running dumps under combat conditions is a tough job. We sleep in foxholes, wash and shave in helmets, dig slit trenches, eat in the open as other Army outfits. We also have bazooka men, machine gun men and operate twenty-four hours a day – about fifty percent of the time in the rain and mud. “

At Chateaudun the 35th Infantry expected a fight but instead found Major Charles W. Ketterman, CO of the Quartermaster Truck Battalion and Tech 5 Ernest A. Jenkins. They were performing a reconnaissance of the town and were met by machine gun fire and armed with a pistol and a 03 rifle they fought for 8 hours killing 3 Germans and wounding several more. Eventually forcing the garrison excepting for 15 to leave town. The two QMs captured the 15. Patton awarded them both the Silver Star. In is book War as I Knew it he talks about how a QM detachment "had the signal, and as I know, solitary distinction of capturing a German lieutenant general, General Hahm, commanding the 82d German Corps, together with a colonel, a major, a lieutenant, and seven privates.”

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Table of Comparative Ranks & Accepted Abbreviations

United States		German					
Army		Heer		Luftwaffe		Waffen-SS	
General of the Army	GA	Generalfeldmarschall	GFM	Generalfeldmarschall	GFM		
General	G	Generaloberst	GObst	Generaloberst	GObst	Oberstgruppenführer	Oberstgruf
Lieutenant General	Lt G	General der Infanterie	Gen	General der Flieger	Gen	Obergruppenführer	Ogruf
Major General	MG	Generalleutnant	GLt	Generalleutnant	GLt	Gruppenführer	Gruf
Brigadier General	BG	Generalmajor	Gmaj	Generalmajor	Gmaj	Brigadeführer	Brif
Colonel	Col	Oberst	Obst	Oberst	Obst	Oberführer	Oberf
Lieutenant Colonel	Lt Col	Oberstleutnant	ObLt	Oberstleutnant	ObLt	Obersturmbannführer	Ostubaf
Major	Maj	Major	Maj	Major	Maj	Sturmbannführer	Stubaf
Captain	Cpt	Hauptmann	Hptm	Hauptmann	Hptm	Hauptsturmführer	Hstuf
First Lieutenant	1Lt	Oberleutnant	Oblt	Oberleutnant	Oblt	Obersturmführer	Ostuf
Second Lieutenant	2Lt	Leutnant	Lt	Leutnant	Lt	Untersturmführer	Ustuf
Master Sergeant	MSG	Stabsfeldwebel	Stfw	Stabsfeldwebel	Stfw	Sturmscharführer	Stuscha
Technical Sergeant	TSG	Oberfähnrich	OFähnr	Oberfähnrich	OFähnr		
		Oberfeldwebel	OFw	Oberfeldwebel	OFw	Hauptscharführer	Hschaf
Staff Sergeant	S Sgt	Feldwebel	Fw	Feldwebel	Fw	Oberscharführer	Oscharf
Sergeant	Sgt	Unterfeldwebel	UFw	Unterfeldwebel	UFw	Scharführer	Scharf
Corporal	Cpl	Unteroffizier	Uffz	Unteroffizier	Uffz	Unterscharführer	Uscharf
Private First Class	PFC	Obergefreiter	OGefr	Obergefreiter	OGefr	Rottenführer	Rottenf
Private	Pvt	Gefreiter	Gfr	Gefreiter	Gfr	Sturmmann	Stur
		Oberschütze	Oschut	Oberschütze	Oschut	Oberschütze	Oschut
		Soldat	S	Flieger	F	Schütze	Schz