

WORLD WAR II

THE WAR AGAINST

GERMANY AND ITALY

With the invasion of North Africa (Operation TORCH), the U.S. Army in late 1942 began a European ground offensive that it would sustain almost without pause until Italy collapsed and Germany was finally defeated. For the next two-and-one-half years, more than a million Americans would fight in lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea and close to 4 million on the European continent, exclusive of Italy, in the largest commitment to battle the U.S. Army had ever made. Alongside these Americans marched British, Canadian, French, and other Allied troops in history's greatest demonstration of coalition warfare; on another front, massed Soviet armies contributed enormously to the victory. In company with these allies, after a shaky start in North Africa, the U.S. Army came of age. Taking advantage of its strengths in mobility, artillery firepower, and close air support and forcing its way back onto a continent from which the Axis had driven the Allies four years before, American ground forces did their part to defeat the most vaunted military machine in the world at the time.

North Africa, November 1942–May 1943

Although the Allies made the decision to launch Operation TORCH largely because they could not mount a more direct attack against the European Axis early in the war, they also had more specific and attractive objectives: to gain French-controlled Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia as a base for enlisting the French empire in the war; to assist the British in the Libyan Desert in destroying Axis forces in North Africa; to open the Mediterranean to Allied shipping; and to provide a steppingstone for subsequent operations.



*Insignia of the 1st Armored Division,
the First American Armored Division
To See Combat*

The Germans and their Italian allies controlled a narrow but strategic strip of the North African littoral between Tunisia and Egypt with impassable desert bounding the strip on the south. (See Map 3.) Numbering some 100,000 men under a battle-tested German leader, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the German-Italian army in Libya posed a constant threat to Egypt, the Near East, and French North Africa and by controlling the northern shores of the Mediterranean denied the Mediterranean to Allied shipping. Only a few convoys seeking to supply British forces on the island of Malta ever ventured into the Mediterranean, and these frequently took heavy losses.

Moving against French Africa posed for the Allies special problems rooted in the nature of the Armistice that had followed French defeat in 1940. Under the terms of that Armistice, the Germans had left the French empire nominally intact, along with much of the southern half of Metropolitan France; in return the French government was pledged to drop out of the war. Although an underground resistance movement had already begun in France and the Allies were equipping a "Free French" force, that part of the regular French Army and Navy left intact by the Armistice had sworn allegiance to the Vichy government. This pledge had led already to the anomaly of Frenchman fighting Frenchman and of the British incurring French enmity by destroying part of the fleet of their former ally.

If bloodshed was to be averted in the Allied invasion, French sympathies had to be enlisted in advance, but to reveal the plan was to risk French rejection of it and German occupation of French Africa. Although clandestine negotiations were conducted with a few trusted French leaders, these produced no guarantee that the French in North Africa would cooperate.



General Alexander



An air transport plane flies urgently needed supplies over the pyramids of Egypt en route to the battle zone.

Partly because of this intricate situation, the Allies designated an American, Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, to command the invasion to capitalize on the relative absence of rancor between French and Americans by giving the invasion an American rather than a British complexion. American troops were to make up the bulk of the assault force, and the Royal Navy was to keep its contribution as inconspicuous as possible.

The operation would coincide with an Allied counteroffensive in western Egypt, where the British Commander in Chief, Middle East, General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, was to attack with the veteran British Eighth Army under Lt. Gen. Bernard L. Montgomery against Rommel's German-Italian army. Coming ashore in French Africa, General Eisenhower's combined U.S.-British force was to launch a converging attack against Rommel's rear.

In selecting beaches for the invasion, U.S. planners insisted upon a assault on the Atlantic coast of Morocco lest the Germans seal the Strait of Gibraltar and cut off support to landings inside the Mediterranean. Because both troops and shipping were limited, a landing on the Atlantic coast restricted the number and size of potential assaults inside the Mediterranean. Although a landing as far east as Tunisia was desirable because of vast overland distances (from the Atlantic coast to Tunis is more than 1,000 miles), the proximity of Axis aircraft on Sicily and Sardinia made that course too perilous.

Making the decision on the side of security, the Allies planned simultaneous landings at three points: one in Morocco near the Atlantic port of Casablanca and two in Algeria near the ports of Oran and Algiers. Once the success of these landings was assured, a convoy was to put ashore small contingents of British troops to seize ports in eastern Algeria while a ground column headed for Tunisia in a race to get there before the Germans could move in.



Map 3





Troop Quarters in the Hold of a Transport

Having been given the assignment to invade North Africa only at the end of July 1942, the U.S. Army faced enormous difficulties in meeting a target date in November. Troops had received little training in amphibious warfare, landing craft were few and obsolete, and much equipment was inferior to that of the Axis forces. So few U.S. troops were available in England that troops for the landing near Casablanca had to be shipped directly from the United States in one of history's longest sea voyages preceding an amphibious assault.

After soundly defeating an Axis attack, Montgomery's Eighth Army on October 23 auspiciously opened an offensive at El Alamein, scoring a victory that was to be a turning point in British fortunes. A little over two weeks later, before daylight on November 8, the U.S. Navy put U.S. Army forces ashore near Casablanca, while the Royal Navy landed other U.S. troops and contingents of British troops near Oran and Algiers. The entire invasion force consisted of over 400 warships, 1,000 planes, and some 107,000 men, including a battalion of paratroopers jumping in the U.S. Army's first airborne attack.

Although the invasion achieved strategic surprise, the opposing French in every case but one fought back at the beaches. Dissidence among various French factions limited the effectiveness of some of the opposition, but any resistance at all raised the specter of delay that might enable

the Germans to beat the Allies into Tunisia. Three days passed before the French agreed to cease fire and take up arms on the Allied side.

French support at last assured, the Royal Navy put British troops ashore close to the Tunisian border while an Allied column began the long overland trek. The British troops were too few to do more than secure two small Algerian ports, the ground column too late. Over the narrow body of water between Sicily and North Africa the Germans poured planes, men, and tanks. They met no French resistance. Except for barren mountains in the interior, Tunisia was for the moment out of Allied reach.

The Tunisia Campaign, November 1942–May 1943

Rommel, recoiling from the defeat at El Alamein and aware of the allied landings to his rear in November, withdrew his German-Italian army by January 1943 to the Mareth Line, old French fortifications near the southern border of Tunisia. There, he confronted Montgomery's Eighth Army while more than 100,000 enemy troops under General Juergen von Arnim faced westward against General Eisenhower's Allied force. Although the Italian high command in Italy exercised loose

control, the Axis nations failed to establish a unified command over these two forces.

The Allied plan to defeat Rommel by converging attacks having been foiled, General Eisenhower had no choice but to dig in to defend in the Tunisian mountains until he could accumulate enough strength to attack in conjunction with a renewed strike by Montgomery against the Mareth Line. Before this could be accomplished, Rommel on February 14 sent strong armored forces through the passes in central Tunisia against the U.S. II Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall. Rommel planned to push through the Kasserine Pass, then turn northwestward by way of an Allied supply base at Tébessa to reach the coast and trap the Allied units.

In a series of sharp armored actions, Rommel quickly penetrated thinly held American positions and broke through the Kasserine Pass. Although success appeared within his grasp, the lack of unified command interfered. Planning an attack of his own, General von Arnim refused to release an armored division needed to continue Rommel's thrust. Concerned that Rommel lacked the strength for a deep envelopment by way of Tébessa, the Italian high command directed a northward turn, a much shallower envelopment.

SIDI BOU ZID AND KASSERINE PASS



Artillery Firing at Night, *Gary Sheadan, n.d.*

On February 14, 1943, two German panzer divisions attacked elements of the 1st Armored Division, defending the village of Sidi Bou Zid at the western end of the strategically important Faid Pass in central Tunisia. Two battalions of the 168th Infantry were cut off and later forced to surrender. The attacking Germans continued to advance eastward until they encountered the main body of the 1st Armored Division at Sbeitla. Although delayed by a day's hard fighting, the Germans overcame the American defense and continued to press on toward the main Allied supply depot at Tebessa. The 19th Engineers, reinforced by a battalion each from the 26th, 39th, and 6th Armored Infantry, conducted an uncoordinat-

ed but stubborn defense of Kasserine Pass against the Africa Corps for two days until forced to retreat. Facing increasingly superior Allied forces, the Germans retreated from Kasserine on February 23. General Fredendall's slow counterattack three days later cost him his command; he was replaced by General Patton.

The turn played into Allied hands, for the British already had established a blocking position astride the only road leading north. At the height of a clash between Rommel's tanks and the British, four battalions of American artillery arrived after a forced march from Oran. On February 22 these guns and a small band of British tanks brought the Germans to a halt. Warned by intelligence reports that the British Eighth Army was about to attack the Mareth Line, Rommel hurriedly pulled back to his starting point.

The Axis offensive defeated, the U.S. II Corps, commanded now by Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., after the relief of General Fredendall, launched a diversionary attack on March 17 toward the rear of the Mareth Line. A few days later Montgomery's Eighth Army struck the line in force. By the end of the first week of April, the two forces had joined.

With all their forces now linked under the tactical command of General Alexander, the Allies opened a broad offensive that within a month captured the ports of Bizerte and Tunis and compressed all Axis troops into a small bridgehead covering the Cape Bon peninsula at the northeastern tip of Tunisia. The last of some 275,000 Germans and Italians surrendered on May 13.

Although the original Allied strategy had been upset by the delay imposed by French resistance and the swift German buildup in Tunisia—resulting in postponement of the launching of the “Second Front” in northwest Europe from 1943 to 1944—Allied troops achieved victory in six months, impressive in view of their limited numbers and long lines of communications. A few days later the first unopposed British convoy since 1940 reached beleaguered Malta.

American troops in their first test against German arms had made many mistakes. Training, equipment, and leadership had failed in many



Hill 609—Tunisia, *George Biddle, 1943*

instances to meet the requirements of the battlefield; but the lessons were clear and pointed to nothing that time might not correct. More important was the experience gained, both in battle and in logistical support. Important too was the fact that the Allied campaign had brought a French army back into the war. Most important of all, the Allies at last had gained the initiative.

The Sicily Campaign, July–August 1943

The next step after North Africa had already been decided in January 1943 at the Casablanca Conference. That step, Operation HUSKY, the invasion of Sicily, followed from the recognition that the Allies still were unready for a direct thrust across the English Channel. Utilizing troops already available in North Africa, they could make the Mediterranean safer for Allied shipping by occupying Sicily, perhaps going on to invade Italy and knocking that junior Axis partner out of the war.

As planning proceeded for the new operation, General Eisenhower (promoted now to four stars) remained as supreme commander; General Alexander, heading the 15th Army Group, served as ground commander. Alexander controlled Montgomery's Eighth Army and a newly created Seventh U.S. Army under Patton (now a lieutenant general).

How to invade the Vermont-size, three-cornered island posed a special problem. The goal was Messina, the gateway to the narrow body of water between Sicily and Italy, the enemy's escape route to the Italian mainland. Yet the Strait of Messina was so narrow and well fortified that Allied commanders believed the only solution was to land elsewhere

GEORGE S. PATTON, JR. (1885–1945)

A descendant of Revolutionary and Civil War heroes, Patton became the Allies' foremost practitioner of armored warfare in World War II. In North Africa, Sicily, and Northwest Europe, he won fame for his speed, intuitive sense of the mobile battlefield, and sheer audacity. His volatile personality—devoutness, profanity, sensitivity, loudness, interest in history, belief in reincarnation, compassion, and shameless self-promotion—has fascinated generations of scholars and enthusiasts. But the opening scene of the 1970 movie "Patton" (featuring George C. Scott in gleaming helmet, stars, and riding boots in front of a huge American flag) completed his transformation from legend to folk hero.



Patton Inspecting the Troops in Sicily

and march on Messina by way of shallow coastal shelves on either side of towering Mount Etna.

Applying the principle of mass, Alexander directed that all landings be made in the southeastern corner of the island, with the British on the east coast and the Americans on the southwest. A brigade of glider troops was to capture a critical bridge behind British beaches, while a regiment of U.S. paratroopers took high ground behind the American beaches. After seizing minor ports and close-in airfields, Patton's Seventh Army was to block to the northwest against Axis reserves while Montgomery mounted a main effort up the east coast.

Because Sicily was an obvious objective after North Africa, complete strategic surprise was hardly possible, but bad weather helped the Allies achieve tactical surprise. As a huge armada bearing some 160,000 men steamed across the Mediterranean, a mistral (a form of unpredictable gale common to the Mediterranean) sprang up, so churning the sea that General Eisenhower was for a time tempted to order a delay. While the heavy surf swamped some landing craft and made all landings difficult, it also put the beach defenders off their guard. Before daylight on July 10, both British and Americans were ashore in sizable numbers.

As presaged in North Africa, poor performance by Italian units left to German reserves the task of repelling the invasion. Although a pre-attack bombardment by Allied planes and confusion caused by a scattered jump of U.S. paratroopers delayed the German reaction, a panzer division mounted a sharp counterattack against American beaches before the first day was out. It came dangerously close to pushing some American units into the sea before naval gunfire and a few U.S. tanks and artillery pieces that had landed drove off the German tanks.

To speed reinforcement, the Allies on two successive nights flew in American and British paratroopers. In both instances, antiaircraft gunners on ships standing offshore and others on land mistook the planes for enemy aircraft and opened fire. Losses were so severe that for a time some Allied commanders questioned the wisdom of employing this new method of warfare.

When the Germans formed a solid block in front of the British along the east coast, the latter took over one of the main routes assigned to the Seventh Army, prompting General Patton to expand his army's role. Cutting the island in two with a drive by the II Corps, commanded now by Maj. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, Patton also sent a provisional corps pushing rapidly through faltering Italian opposition to the port of

FRATRICIDE AT SICILY

On the night of July 11, 1943, scores of Americans died in one of the worst combat accidents of the war. Hard-pressed by Axis counterattacks, General Patton decided to reinforce the beachhead with a night-time parachute drop. Despite efforts to make sure that everyone was informed of the impending operation, when the planes arrived, someone opened fire. Within minutes virtually every Allied antiaircraft gun ashore and afloat was blazing away at the hapless aircraft. Twenty-three of the 144 transport planes were shot down and another 37 damaged. The paratroopers suffered 229 casualties.

Palermo and the northwestern tip of the island. Having accomplished this within fourteen days of coming ashore, Patton turned to aid the British by attacking toward Messina along a narrow northern coastal shelf.

As both Allied armies in early August readied a final assault to gain Messina, the enemy began to withdraw to the mainland. Despite the Allied command of sea and air, the Germans managed to evacuate all their forces, some 40,000 troops. When on August 17, thirty days after the invasion, U.S. patrols pushed into Messina, the Germans had incurred some 10,000 casualties, the Italians probably more than 100,000 (mostly prisoners of war). The Allies lost about 20,000.

The American force that fought in Sicily was far more sophisticated than that which had gone into battle in North Africa. New landing craft, some capable of bearing tanks, had made getting ashore much quicker and surer, and new amphibious trucks called DUKWs eased the problem of supply over the beaches. Gone was the Grant tank with its side-mounted gun, lacking a wide traverse; in its place was the Sherman with a 360-degree power-operated traverse for a turret-mounted 75-mm. piece. It was reliable and effective armored weapon. Commanders were alert to avoid a mistake often made in North Africa of parceling out divisions in small increments, and the men were sure of their weapons and their own ability. Some problems of coordination with tactical air remained, but these soon would be worked out.

The Surrender of Italy

Even as the Allies had been preparing to invade Sicily, the Italian people and their government had become increasingly disenchanted with the war. Under the impact of the loss of North Africa, the invasion of Sicily, and a first bombing of Rome, the Italian king forced Mussolini to resign as head of the government.

Anxious to find a way out of the war, a new Italian government made contact with the Allies through diplomatic channels, which led to direct talks with General Eisenhower's representatives. The Italians, it soon developed, were in a quandary: they wanted to pull out of the war, yet they were virtual prisoners of German forces in Italy that Hitler, sensing the potential for Italian defection, had strongly reinforced. Although the Allies had drawn plans for airborne landings to secure Rome coincident with an announcement of Italian surrender, the plans were canceled in the face of the Italian vacillation and inability to guarantee strong assistance in fighting the Germans. The Italian government nevertheless agreed to surrender, a fact General Eisenhower announced on the eve of the principal Allied landing at Salerno.

The Italian Campaign, September 1943–May 1945

Since the Allied governments had decided to pursue after Sicily whatever course offered the best chance of knocking Italy from the war, an invasion of the mainland logically followed. This plan also presented an opportunity to tie down German forces and prevent their employment either on the Russian Front or against the eventual Allied attack across the English Channel. Occupying Italy would also provide

airfields close to Germany and the Balkans and might even induce Turkey to join the Allied cause.

How far up the peninsula of Italy the Allies were to land depended almost entirely on the range of fighter aircraft based on Sicily, for all Allied aircraft carriers were committed to the war in the Pacific, operations in the Indian Ocean, and the battle of the Atlantic. Another consideration was a desire to control the Strait of Messina to shorten sea supply lines. On September 3 a British force under Montgomery crossed the Strait of Messina and landed on the toe of the Italian boot against almost no opposition. Following Eisenhower's announcement of Italian surrender, a British fleet steamed brazenly into the harbor of Taranto in the arch of the Italian boot to put a British division ashore on the docks, while the Fifth U.S. Army under Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark staged an assault landing on beaches near Salerno, twenty-five miles southeast of Naples.

Reacting in strength against the Salerno invasion, the Germans mounted a vigorous counterattack that threatened to split the beachhead and force the Allies to abandon part of it. For four days, the issue was in doubt. Quick reinforcement of the ground troops (including a regiment of paratroopers jumping into the beachhead), gallant fighting, liberal air support, and unstinting naval gunfire at last repulsed the German attack. On September 17 the Germans began to withdraw, and within two days patrols of the British Eighth Army arrived from the south to link the two Allied forces. Two weeks later American troops took Naples, thereby gaining an excellent port, while the British seized valuable airfields around Foggia on the other side of the peninsula.

Although the Germans seriously considered abandoning southern Italy to pull back to a line in the Northern Apennines (a fact the Allies learned from ULTRA, the interception and decryption of high-level German radio transmissions by British intelligence), the local commander, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, insisted that he could hold for a considerable time on successive lines south of Rome. He was right. The Allied advance was destined to proceed slowly, partly because of the difficulty of offensive warfare in rugged, mountainous terrain and partly because the Allies limited their commitment to the campaign, not only in troops but also in shipping and the landing craft necessary if the enemy's strong defensive positions were to be broken by other than frontal attack.

ULTRA

Until the publication in 1974 of F. W. Winterbotham's *The ULTRA Secret*, even most historians were unaware of the degree of success of British efforts to read German messages sent via ENIGMA machines. The British Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park decoded more than 80,000 German messages per month from late 1943 until May 1945. Britain, viewing ULTRA as its most secret weapon of the war, temporarily ceased providing President Roosevelt decoded messages after an ULTRA message was carelessly tossed into an office trash can in the White House. ULTRA provided the Allies an unparalleled view into some of the innermost secrets of the German war-fighting machine.

Because the buildup for a cross-channel attack—the main effort against Germany—was beginning in earnest, the Allies could spare few additional troops or ships to pursue the war in Italy. Through the fall and winter of 1943–1944, the armies would have to do the job in Italy with what was at hand, a total of eighteen Allied divisions.

A renewed offensive in October 1943 broke a strong German delaying position at the Volturno River, twenty miles north of Naples, and carried as far as the so-called Winter Line, an imposing position anchored on towering peaks around the town of Cassino. Casting about for a way to break this line, General Eisenhower obtained permission to temporarily retain from the buildup in Britain enough shipping and landing craft to make an amphibious end run. General Clark was to use a corps of his Fifth U.S. Army to land on beaches near Anzio, some thirty miles south of Rome and sixty miles behind the Winter Line. By threatening or cutting German lines of communications to the Winter Line, the troops at Anzio were to facilitate the Allied advance through the line and up the valley of the Liri River, the most obvious route to Rome.

Provided support by a French corps equipped with American arms, General Clark pulled out the U.S. VI Corps under Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas to make the envelopment. While the VI Corps (which included a British division) sailed toward Anzio, the Fifth Army launched a massive attack aimed at gaining access to the Liri valley. Although the VI Corps landed unopposed at Anzio on January 22, 1944, the attack on the Winter Line gained little. As General Lucas waited on the beachhead to build up more supplies before striking inland, the Germans reacted.

Rushing reserves to Anzio, Field Marshal Kesselring quickly erected a firm perimeter about the Allied beachhead and successfully resisted every attempt at breakout. Through February Kesselring launched determined attacks to eliminate the beachhead. Only a magnificent defense by U.S. and British infantry supported by artillery, tanks, planes, and naval gunfire at last repulsed these attacks. However, the attempt to break the stalemate had failed.

Through the rest of the winter and early spring, the Fifth and Eighth Armies regrouped and built their combined strength to twenty-five divisions, mainly with the addition of troops from France, Great Britain, New Zealand, and the British Empire (India). General Eisenhower, meanwhile, had relinquished command in the Mediterranean early in January to go to Britain to prepare for the coming invasion of France. He was succeeded by British Field Marshal Sir Henry M. Wilson.

On May 11 the Fifth and Eighth Armies launched a new, carefully synchronized attack to break the Winter Line. Passing through almost trackless mountains, French troops under General Clark's command scored a penetration that unhinged the German position. As the



Soldiers enter the town of Caiazzo after crossing the Volturno River.

Germans began to fall back, the VI Corps attacked from the Anzio beachhead but at Clark's direction turned north toward Rome, away from the enemy's routes of withdrawal. On June 4 U.S. troops entered the "Eternal City."

With D-Day in Normandy only two days off, the focus of the Allied war against Germany shifted to France; with the shift came a gradual diminution of Allied strength in Italy. Allied forces nevertheless continued to pursue the principle of the offensive. Reaching a new German position in the Northern Apennines, the Gothic Line, they started in August a four-month campaign that achieved penetrations; but they were unable to break out of the mountains. This period also saw a change in command as General Clark became commander of the Allied army group and Lt. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott assumed command of the Fifth Army.

In the spring of 1945 the Fifth and Eighth Armies penetrated a final German defensive line to enter the fertile plains of the Po River valley. On May 2 the Germans in Italy surrendered. Less generally acclaimed than other phases of World War II, the campaign in Italy nevertheless had a vital part in the overall conduct of the war. At the crucial time during the Normandy landings, Allied troops in Italy were tying down perhaps as many as twenty-six German divisions that well might have upset the balance in France. As a result of this campaign, the Allies obtained airfields useful for strategic bombardment of Germany and the Balkans; the conquest of the peninsula further guaranteed the safety of Allied shipping in the Mediterranean.



African-American troops cross the Arno during the drive to the Gothic Line.

Cross-Channel Attack

Even as the Allied ground campaign was proceeding on the shores of the Mediterranean, three other campaigns were under way from the British Isles: the campaign of the U.S. and the Royal Navies to defeat the German submarine; a U.S.-British strategic bombing offensive against Germany; and, intricately tied in with the other two, a logistical marathon to assemble the men and tools necessary for a direct assault.

Most critical of all was the antisubmarine campaign, for without success in that the two others could progress only feebly at best. The turning point in that campaign came in the spring of 1943, when the full effect of all the various devices used against the U-boat began to appear. Despite the subsequent German introduction of an acoustical torpedo that homed on the noise of an escort's propellers and later of the *schnorkel*, a steel tube extending above water by means of which the U-boat could charge its

batteries without surfacing, Allied shipping losses continued to decline. In the last two years of the war the submarines would sink only one-seventh of the shipping they had in the earlier years.

In the second campaign, the Combined Bomber Offensive the U.S. and British chiefs directed at Casablanca, the demands of the war in the Pacific and the Mediterranean slowed American participation. Not until the summer of 1943 were sufficient U.S. bombers available in Britain to make a substantial contribution, and not until February 1944 were U.S. airmen at last able to match the thousand-plane raids of the British.

While the Royal Air Force struck by night, bombers of the U.S. Army Air Forces hit by day; both directed much of their attention to the German aircraft industry in an effort to cripple the German air arm before the invasion. Although the raids imposed some delays on German production, the most telling effect was the loss of German fighter aircraft and trained pilots to oppose the Allied bombers. As time for the invasion approached, the German air arm had ceased to represent a real threat to Allied ground operations, and Allied bombers could shift their attention to transportation facilities in France in an effort to restrict the enemy's ability to move reserves against the invasion.

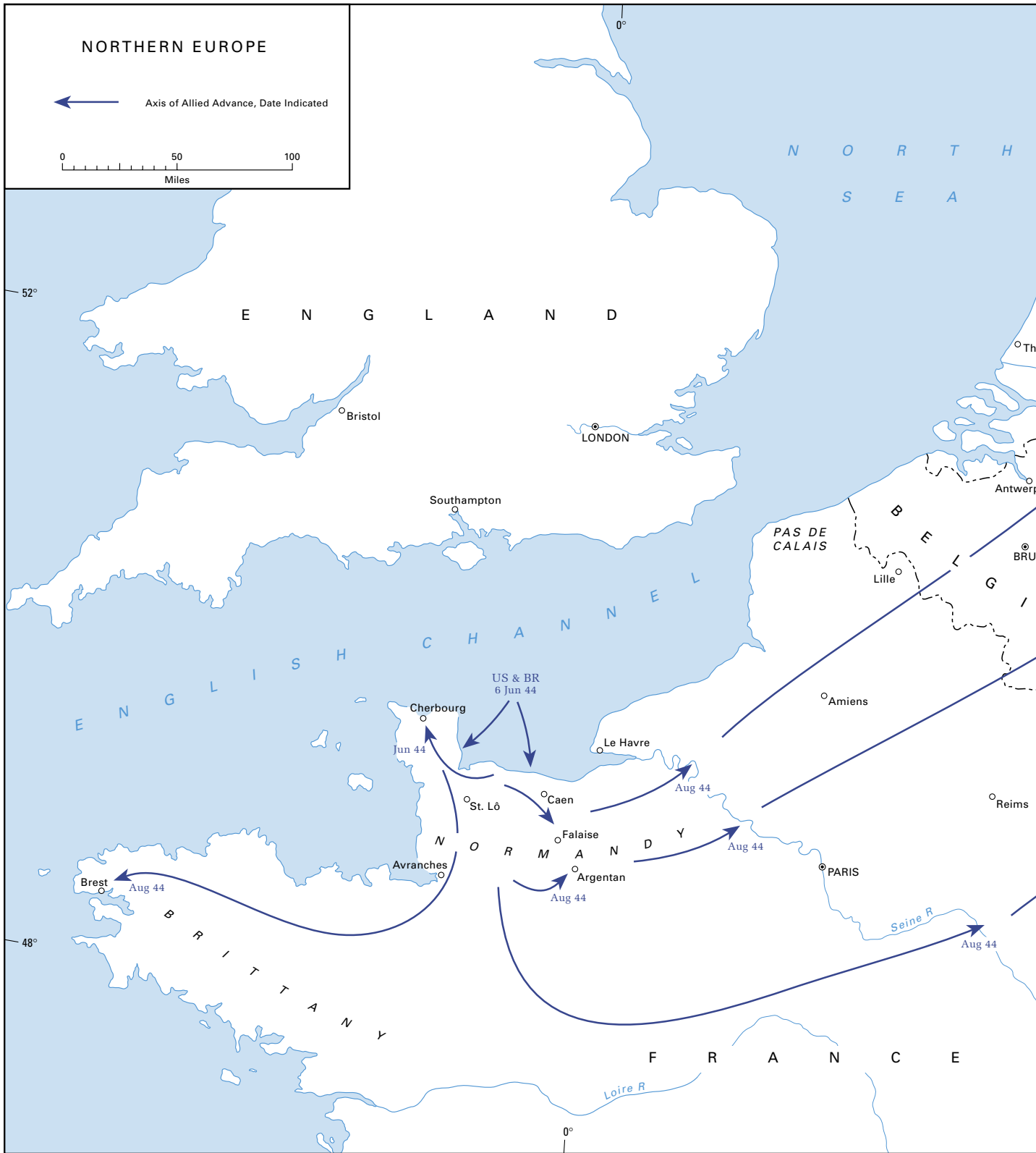
The logistical buildup in the British Isles, meanwhile, had been progressing at an ever-increasing pace, one of the greatest logistical undertakings of all time. The program entailed transporting more than 1.6 million men across the submarine-infested Atlantic before D-Day and providing for their shelter, hospitalization, supply, training, and general welfare. Mountains of weapons and equipment, ranging from locomotives and big bombers to dental fillings, also had to be shipped.

Planning for the invasion had begun long before as the British, standing alone, looked to the day when they might return to the continent. Detailed planning began in 1943, when the Combined Chiefs of Staff appointed British Lt. Gen. Frederick E. Morgan as Chief of Staff

As time for the invasion approached, the German air arm had ceased to represent a real threat to Allied ground operations.



Eisenhower gives the order of the day, "Full Victory—nothing else."



Map 4



to a Supreme Commander yet to be named. Under Morgan's direction, British and American officers drew up plans for several contingencies, one of which, Operation OVERLORD, anticipated a large-scale assault against a still-powerful German Army. This plan served as the basis for a final plan developed early in 1944 after General Eisenhower, designated as the Supreme Commander, arrived in Britain and established his command, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, or SHAEF.

The overall ground commander for the invasion was the former head of the British Eighth Army, General Montgomery, who also commanded the 21st Army Group, the controlling headquarters for the two Allied armies scheduled to make the invasion. The British Second Army under Lt. Gen. Sir Miles C. Dempsey was to assault on the left, the First U.S. Army under Bradley (promoted now to lieutenant general) on the right.

The choice of invasion beaches was sharply limited by numerous requirements. They had to be within easy range of fighter aircraft based in Britain and close to at least one major port and usable airfields. The state of German defenses and the need to fool the enemy into thinking that the main invasion was yet to come in another location further narrowed the selection, leaving only one logical site: the base of the Cotentin peninsula in Normandy, southeast of Cherbourg. (See *Map 4*.) To facilitate supply until Cherbourg or some other port could be opened, two artificial harbors were to be towed from Britain and emplaced off the invasion beaches.

Despite a weather forecast of high winds and a rough sea, General Eisenhower made a fateful decision to go ahead with the invasion on

OMAHA BEACH

The landing on OMAHA Beach of the U.S. 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions and U.S. Army Rangers was the most difficult of the Normandy invasion. Seven thousand yards long and backed by bluffs that stood up to 170 feet in height, the beach ranged from 18 feet in width at high tide to 900 at low. Putting those advantages to good use, the Germans had laid a tangle of underwater obstructions just offshore to sink incoming landing craft and had dug positions into the cliffs to place any troops who landed under deadly cross-fires. Unknown to the Americans, the enemy's highly disciplined 352d Infantry Division manned many of those defenses. The defenses were so effective that for a time General Bradley contemplated withdrawing. Even so, brave young Americans slowly fought their way across the sand and through the cliffs. By nightfall, first in a trickle and then in a stream, some 34,000 soldiers had made their way ashore.



American soldiers land on the coast of France under heavy fire from the Germans, June 6, 1944.

June 6. During the night over 5,000 ships moved to assigned positions; at two o'clock on the morning of the sixth the Allies began the operation for which the world had long and anxiously waited. One British and two U.S. airborne divisions (the 82d and 101st) dropped behind the beaches to secure routes of egress for the seaborne forces. Following preliminary aerial and naval bombardment, the first waves of infantry and tanks began to touch down at 6:30, just after sunrise. A heavy surf made the landings difficult but, as in Sicily, put the defenders off their guard.



U.S. Troops Moving Ashore at OMAHA Beach on D-Day

The assault went well on the British beaches, where one Canadian and two British divisions landed, and also at UTAH, westernmost of the U.S. beaches, where the 4th Infantry Division came ashore. The story was different at OMAHA Beach. Although ULTRA had pinpointed most of the German divisions manning the coastal defenses, it had missed a powerful enemy division that occupied the high bluffs laced with pillboxes overlooking the landing beach. When Allied intelligence detected the *352d Division's* presence, it was too late to alter the landing plan. Only through improvisation, personal courage, and accurate naval gunfire support were the men of two regiments of the 1st Division and one of the 29th at last able to work their way up the bluffs to move slowly inland. Some 50,000 U.S. troops made their way ashore on the two beaches before the day was out. American casualties were approximately 6,500, British and Canadian 3,000—in both cases lighter than expected.

The German command was slow to react to the invasion, having been misled not only by the weather but also by an Allied deception plan that continued to lead the enemy to believe that this was only a diversionary assault and that the main landings were to come later on the Pas de Calais. Only in one instance, against the British who were solidly ashore, did the Germans mount a sizable counterattack on D-Day.

Buildup and Breakout

While ULTRA monitored the success of the Allied deception plan and Allied aircraft and French resistance fighters impeded the movement of those German reserves that did move to Normandy, the Allies quickly built up their strength and linked the beachheads. U.S. troops then moved against Cherbourg, taking the port after bitter fighting, three weeks following the invasion. Other Allied forces had in the meantime deepened the beachhead between Caen and the road center of St. Lô, so that by the end of June the most forward positions were twenty miles from the sea. The Germans still had been able to mount no major counterattack.



Olive Drab Field Jacket of the 104th Infantry Division, 1945

Commanded by Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, the enemy nevertheless defended tenaciously in terrain ideally suited to the defense. This was hedgerow country, where through the centuries French farmers had erected high banks of earth around every small field to fence in livestock and protect crops from coastal winds. These banks were thick with the roots of shrubs and trees; and in many places, sunken roads screened by a canopy of tree branches ran between two hedgerows. Tunneling into the hedgerows and using the sunken roads for lines of communication, the Germans had turned each field into a small fortress.

For all the slow advance and lack of ports (a gale on June 19 demolished one of the artificial harbors and damaged the other), the Allied buildup was swift. By the end of June close to a million men had come ashore, along with some 586,000 tons of supplies and 177,000 vehicles. General Bradley's First Army included four corps with two armored and eleven infantry divisions. British strength was about the same.

Seeking to end the battle of the hedgerows, the British attempted to break into more-open country near Caen, only to be thwarted by concentrations of German armor. General Bradley then tried a breakout on the right near St. Lô. Behind an intensive aerial bombardment that utilized both tactical aircraft and heavy bombers, the First Army attacked on July 25. By the second day American troops had opened a big breach in German positions, whereupon armored divisions drove rapidly southward twenty-five miles to Avranches at the base of the Cotentin peninsula. While the First Army turned southeastward, the Third U.S. Army under General Patton entered the line to swing through Avranches into Brittany in quest of ports.

The arrival of the Third Army signaled a major change in command. General Bradley moved up to command the 12th Army Group, composed of the First and Third Armies; his former deputy, Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, assumed command of the First Army. Montgomery's 21st Army Group consisted of the British Second Army and a newcomer to the front, the First Canadian Army under Lt. Gen. Henry D. G. Crerar. General Montgomery continued to function as overall ground commander, an arrangement that was to prevail for another five weeks until General Eisenhower moved his headquarters to the continent and assumed direct command of the armies in the field.

In terms of the preinvasion plan, General Eisenhower intended to establish a solid lodgment area in France extending as far east as the Seine River to provide room for air and supply bases. Having built up strength in this area, he planned then to advance into Germany on a broad front. Under the 21st Army Group he would concentrate his greatest resources north of the Ardennes region of Belgium along the most direct route to the Ruhr industrial region, Germany's largest complex of mines and industry. Bradley's 12th Army Group, meanwhile, was to make a subsidiary thrust south of the Ardennes to seize the Saar industrial region along the Franco-German frontier. A third force invading southern France in August was to provide protection on Bradley's right.

The First Army's breakout from the hedgerows changed that plan, for it opened the German armies in France to crushing defeat. When the Germans counterattacked toward Avranches to try to cut off leading columns of the First and Third Armies, other men of the First Army

stood firm, setting up an opportunity for exploiting the principle of maneuver to the fullest. While the First Canadian Army attacked toward Falaise, General Bradley directed mobile columns of both the First and Third Armies on a wide encircling maneuver in the direction of Argentan, not far from Falaise. This caught the enemy's counterattacking force in a giant pocket. Although the Allies closed the fifteen-mile gap between Falaise and Argentan only after many of the Germans escaped, more than 60,000 were killed or captured in the pocket. Great masses of German guns, tanks, and equipment fell into Allied hands.

While the First Army finished the business at Argentan, Patton's Third Army dashed off again toward the Seine River with two objects: eliminating the Seine as a likely new line of German defense and making a second, wider envelopment to trap those German troops that had escaped from the first pocket. Patton largely accomplished both objectives. In the two pockets, the enemy lost large segments of two field armies.

Invasion of Southern France

Even as General Eisenhower's armies were scoring a great victory in Normandy, on August 15 the Allies staged another invasion, this one in southern France. Operation DRAGOON, originally code-named ANVIL, sought to establish a supplementary line of communications through the French Mediterranean ports and to prevent the Germans in the south from moving against the main Allied armies in the north. It also provided an opportunity for the Allies to bring to bear in France the troops from the Mediterranean Theater, including the sizable Free French forces in North Africa and Italy. Lack of landing craft had precluded launching this invasion at the same time as OVERLORD.

Under control of the Seventh U.S. Army, commanded now by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch, three U.S. divisions, plus an airborne task force and French commandos, began landing just after dawn. The defending Germans were spread too thin to provide much more than token resistance, and by the end of the first day the Seventh Army had 86,000 men and 12,000 vehicles ashore. The next day French troops staged a second landing and moved swiftly to seize the ports of Toulon and Marseille.

Faced with entrapment by the spectacular Allied advances in the north, the Germans in southern France began to withdraw on August 17. U.S. and French columns followed closely and on September 11 established contact with Patton's Third Army. Under the 6th Army Group, commanded by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, the Seventh Army and French forces organized as the 1st French Army passed to General Eisenhower's command.

Pursuit to the Frontier

As Allied columns were breaking loose all over France, men and women of the French resistance movement began to battle the Germans in the streets of the capital. Although General Eisenhower had intended to bypass Paris, hoping to avoid heavy fighting in the city and to postpone the necessity of feeding the civilian population, he felt compelled

Men of the First Army stood firm, setting up an opportunity for exploiting the principle of maneuver to the fullest.

to send help lest the uprising be defeated. On August 25 a column including U.S. and French troops entered the city.

With surviving enemy forces falling back in defeat toward the German frontier, General Eisenhower abandoned the original plan of holding at the Seine while he opened the Brittany ports and established a sound logistical base. Determined to take advantage of the enemy's defeat, he reinforced Montgomery's 21st Army Group by sending the First U.S. Army close alongside the British, thus providing enough strength in the northern thrust to assure quick capture of ports along the English Channel, particularly the great Belgian port of Antwerp. Because the front was fast moving away from Brittany, the channel ports were essential.

Ports posed a special problem: with the stormy weather of fall and winter approaching, the Allies could not much longer depend upon supply over the invasion beaches; Cherbourg had only a limited capacity. Even though Brittany now was far behind the advancing front, General Eisenhower still felt a need for the port of Brest. He put those troops of the Third Army that had driven into the peninsula under a new headquarters, the Ninth U.S. Army commanded by Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson, and set them to the task. When Brest fell two weeks later, the port was a shambles. The port problem nevertheless appeared to be solved when on September 4 British troops took Antwerp, its wharves and docks intact; but the success proved illusory. Antwerp is on an estuary sixty miles from the sea, and German troops clung to the banks, denying access to Allied shipping.

The port situation was symptomatic of multitudinous problems that had begun to beset the entire Allied logistical apparatus (organized much like Pershing's Services of Supply but called the Communications Zone). The armies were going so far and so fast that the supply services

RED BALL EXPRESS

With supply deliveries to the Allied armies slowing to a trickle beyond the Seine, and the military desperate for a solution, Red Ball's trucks began rolling on August 25, 1944. Four days later the Red Ball Express had 132 truck companies, the majority being African-American units, operating 5,958 vehicles. Working almost around the clock and ignoring black-out rules at night, they moved over 12,000 tons of critical materiel—especially fuel and ammunition—from St. Lô to Chartres. This was the peak of the operation. When the Red Ball Express finally suspended activity in mid-November, it had averaged 7,000 tons of supplies every day and, contrary to initial expectations, was operating east of the Seine in support of the advance.



An MP waves on a convoy of the Red Ball Express near Alençon, France.

were unable to keep pace. Although enough supplies were available in Normandy, the problem was to get them to forward positions sometimes more than 500 miles beyond the depots. Despite extraordinary measures such as establishing a one-way truck route called the Red Ball Express, supplies of such essential commodities as gasoline and ammunition began to run short. This was the penalty the Allied armies would have to pay for the decision to not to pause at the Seine.

The logistical crisis sparked a difference over strategy between Generals Eisenhower and Montgomery. In view of the logistical difficulties, Montgomery insisted that General Patton's Third Army should halt to allow all transportation resources to concentrate behind his troops and the First Army. This allocation, he believed, would enable him to make a quick strike deep into Germany and impel a German surrender.

Acting on the advice of logistical experts on his staff, Eisenhower refused Montgomery's request. Such a drive could succeed, his staff advised, only if all Allied armies had closed up to the Rhine River and if Antwerp were open to Allied shipping. The only choice, General Eisenhower believed, was to keep pushing all along the line while supplies held out, ideally to go so far as to gain bridgeheads over the Rhine.

Obstacles other than supply stood in the way of that goal. Some were natural, like the Moselle and Meuse Rivers, the Vosges Mountains in Alsace, the wooded hills of the Ardennes, and a dense Huertgen Forest facing the First Army near Aachen. Other obstacles were man-made: old French forts around Metz and the French Maginot Line in north-eastern France, as well as dense fortifications all along the German border (the Siegfried Line, or, as the Germans called it, the West Wall). By mid-September the First Army had penetrated the West Wall at several points but lacked the means to exploit the breaks. Meanwhile, Patton's Third Army was encountering tough resistance in its attempts to establish bridgeheads over the Moselle near Metz and Nancy.

Although General Eisenhower assigned first priority to clearing the seaward approaches to Antwerp, he sanctioned a Montgomery proposal to use Allied airborne troops in a last bold stroke to capitalize on German disorganization before logistics should force a halt. While the British Second Army launched an attack called Operation GARDEN, airborne troops of the recently organized First Allied Airborne Army (Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton) were to land in Operation MARKET astride three major water obstacles in the Netherlands: the Maas, Waal, and Lower Rhine Rivers. Crossing these rivers on bridges to be secured by the airborne troops, the Second Army was to drive all the way to the IJssel Meer (Zuider Zee), cutting off Germans farther west and putting the British in a position to outflank the West Wall and drive into Germany along a relatively open north German plain.

Employing one British and two U.S. airborne divisions, the Allies began the airborne attack on September 17. On the first day alone approximately 20,000 paratroopers and glider troops landed in the largest airborne attack of the war. Although the drops were spectacularly successful and achieved complete surprise, the presence near the drop zones of two panzer divisions—which ULTRA spotted but Allied planners discounted—enabled the Germans to react swiftly. Resistance to the ground attack also was greater than expected, delaying a quick link-up with the airheads. The combined operation gained a salient some

fifty miles deep into German-held territory but fell short of the ambitious objectives, including a bridgehead across the Lower Rhine.

At this point, Montgomery (promoted now to field marshal) concentrated on opening Antwerp to Allied shipping, but so determined was German resistance and so difficult the conditions of mud and flood in the low-lying countryside that it was well into November before the job was finished. The first Allied ship dropped anchor in Antwerp only on November 28.

As a result of a cutback in offensive operations and the extraordinary efforts of the supply services, aided by the availability of the Mediterranean ports, the logistical situation had been gradually improving. In early November resources were sufficient to enable the U.S. armies to launch a big offensive aimed at reaching the Rhine; but, despite the largest air attack in direct support of ground troops during the war (Operation QUEEN), it turned out to be a slow, arduous fight through the natural and artificial obstacles along the frontier. Heavy rain and severe cold added to the difficulties. By mid-December the First and Ninth Armies had reached the Roer River east of Aachen, twenty-three miles inside Germany, and the Third Army had come up to the West Wall along the Saar River northeast of Metz; but only the Seventh Army and the 1st French Army in Alsace had touched any part of the Rhine.

Having taken advantage of the pause imposed by Allied logistical problems to create new divisions and rush replacements to the front, the Germans in the west had made a remarkable recovery from the debacle in France. Just how remarkable was soon to be forcefully demonstrated in what had heretofore been a quiet sector held by the First Army's right wing.

It turned out to be a slow, arduous fight through the natural and artificial obstacles along the frontier.



Dismal Weather at Metz, Gary Sheadan, n.d.

The Ardennes Counteroffensive

As early as the preceding August, Adolf Hitler had been contemplating a counteroffensive to regain the initiative in the west. Over the protests of his generals, who thought the plan too ambitious, he ordered an attack by twenty-five divisions, carefully conserved and secretly assembled, to hit thinly manned U.S. positions in the Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg, cross the Meuse River, then push on northwestward to Antwerp. In taking Antwerp, Hitler expected to cut off and destroy the British 21st Army Group and the First and Ninth U.S. Armies and thereby turn around the whole course of the war.

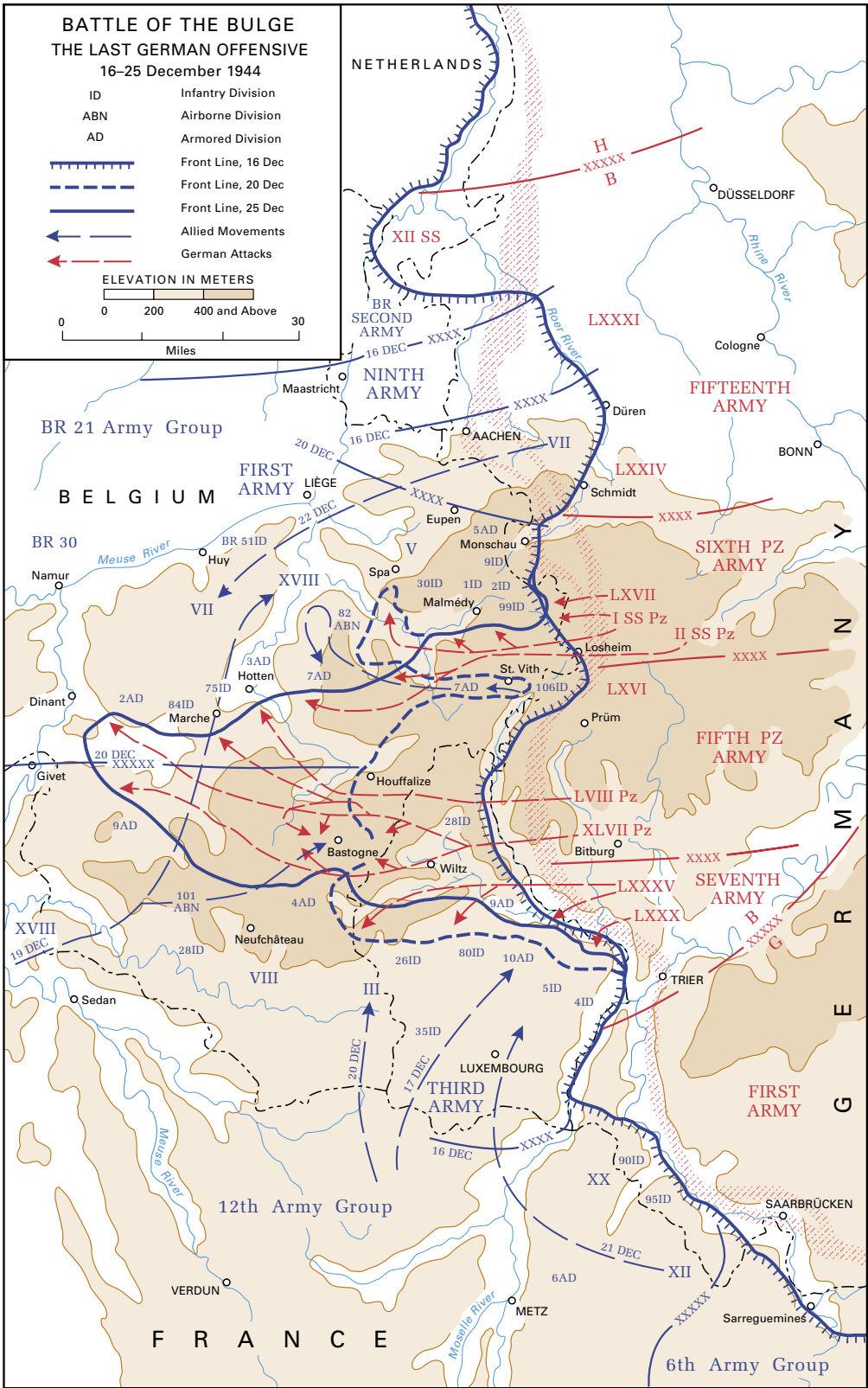
Under cover of inclement winter weather, Hitler concentrated his forces in the forests of the Eifel region, opposite the Ardennes. Although in hindsight ULTRA and other Allied sources of intelligence gave some clues of the coming attack, the indicators did not stand out enough from other data to allow Allied intelligence agencies to forecast the coming offensive. Before daylight on December 16, the Germans attacked along a sixty-mile front, taking the VIII Corps and the south wing of the V Corps by surprise (*See Map 5*). In most places, German gains were rapid; the American divisions were either inexperienced or seriously depleted from earlier fighting, and all were stretched thin. In one instance, two inexperienced regiments of the 106th Infantry Division were forced to surrender in the largest mass surrender of U.S. troops during the course of the war in Europe.



American Infantrymen of the 290th Regiment Fighting in Belgium in January 1945



German Planes Strafe Road in Belgium, Gary Sheadan, n.d.



Map 5

The Germans nevertheless encountered difficulties from the first. Cut off and surrounded, many small U.S. units continued to fight. At the northern shoulder of the penetration, divisions of the V Corps refused to budge from the vicinity of Monschau, thereby denying critical roads to the enemy and limiting the width of the penetration. At St. Vith, American troops held out for six days to block a vital road center. To Bastogne in the southwest, where an armored detachment served as a blocking force, General Eisenhower rushed an airborne division that never relinquished that communications center even though surrounded. Here, Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe delivered a terse reply to a German demand for surrender: “Nuts!”

Denied important roads and hampered by air attacks as the weather cleared, the Germans fell a few miles short of even their first objective, the Meuse River. The result after more than a month of hard fighting that cost the Americans 75,000 casualties and the Germans close to 100,000 was nothing but a big bulge in the lines from which the battle drew its popular name.

Faced with a shortage of infantry replacements during the enemy’s counteroffensive, General Eisenhower offered African-American soldiers in service units an opportunity to volunteer for duty with the infantry. More than 4,500 responded, many taking reductions in grade in order to meet specified requirements. The 6th Army Group formed these men into provisional companies, while the 12th Army Group employed them as an additional platoon in existing rifle companies. The excellent record established by these volunteers, particularly those serving as platoons, presaged major postwar changes in the traditional approach to employing African-American troops.

Although the counteroffensive had given the Allied command some anxious moments, the gallant stands by isolated units had provided time



Pamphlet for Bastogne, Olin Dows, 1945

BASTOGNE

General Eisenhower’s strategy of pursuing offensive operations on a broad front left him with scant reserves when the Germans launched their Ardennes offensive on December 16, 1944. Eisenhower ordered one of his two reserve divisions, the 101st Airborne Division, to the Belgian crossroads town of Bastogne. Its mission was to block the German advance, winning time for Eisenhower to mass forces for a counterattack on the German flanks. They held out against four German divisions and inflicted a fatal delay on the enemy. The siege ended on December 26, when the U.S. 4th Armored Division broke through the encirclement.

for the First and Ninth Armies to shift troops against the northern flank of the penetration and for the Third Army to hit the penetration from the south and drive through to beleaguered Bastogne. A rapid shift and change in direction of attack by the Third Army was one of the more noteworthy instances during the war of successful employment of the principle of maneuver.

By the end of January 1945, U.S. units had retaken all lost ground and had thwarted a lesser German attack against the 6th Army Group in Alsace. The Germans had expended irreplaceable reserves, and the end of the war in Europe was in sight.

The Russian Campaigns

Much of the hope for an early end to the war rested with the tremendous successes of Soviet armies in the east. Having stopped the invading Germans at the gates of Moscow in late 1941 and at Stalingrad in late 1942, the Russians had made great offensive strides westward in both 1943 and 1944. Only a few days after D-Day in Normandy, the Red Army had launched a massive offensive that by mid-September had reached East Prussia and the gates of the Polish capital of Warsaw. In January 1945, as U.S. troops eliminated the bulge in the Ardennes, the Red Army started a new drive that was to carry to the Oder River, only forty miles from Berlin.

Overall, far greater masses of troops had been employed over the truly vast distances of the German Eastern Front than in the west. Even as late as December 1944, over 3.5 million Germans struggled against the Russians along a 700-mile front compared with fewer than 1 million on the Western Front along a much narrower frontage. Yet the Soviet contribution was less disproportionate than would appear, for the war in the east was a one-front ground war, whereas the Allies in the west were fighting on two ground fronts (Western Europe and Italy) and conducting major campaigns in the air and at sea, as well as making a large commitment in the war against Japan. At the same time, the United States was contributing enormously to the war in Russia through Lend-Lease, almost \$11 billion in materials: over 400,000 jeeps and trucks; 12,000 armored vehicles (including 7,000 tanks, enough to equip some twenty-odd U.S. armored divisions); 11,400 aircraft; and 1.75 million tons of food. While Russian casualties against the Germans dwarf American and British losses, it should be clear that only the Allies working together won World War II.

THE REMAGEN BRIDGE

On March 7, 1945, a 9th Armored Division platoon discovered a bridge over the Rhine left standing to accommodate retreating German forces. Owing to misplacement of explosives, German engineers failed to destroy it as the Americans rushed across. General Eisenhower redirected troops toward Remagen and shifted the weight of his offensive from the northern to a central axis. Quick exploitation by U.S. forces resulted in rapid encirclement of the Ruhr, eliminating Germany's heavy industrial heartland, along with a 325,000-man army, from the war.

The Final Offensive

Soon after the opening of the Soviet January offensive, the Western Allies began a new drive to reach and cross the Rhine, the last barrier to the industrial heart of Germany. Exhausted by the overambitious effort in the Ardennes and forced to shift divisions to oppose the Russians, the Germans had little chance of holding west of the Rhine. Although Field Marshal von Rundstedt wanted to conserve his remaining strength for a defense of the river, Hitler would authorize no withdrawal. Making a strong stand at the Roer River and at places where the West Wall remained intact, the Germans imposed some delay but paid dearly in the process, losing 250,000 troops that could have been used to better advantage on the Rhine.

Falling back behind the river, the Germans had made careful plans to destroy all bridges, but something went amiss at the Ludendorff railroad bridge in the First Army's sector at Remagen. On March 7 a task force of the 9th Armored Division found the bridge damaged but passable. Displaying initiative and courage, a company of infantry dashed across. Higher commanders acted promptly to reinforce the foothold.

To the south, a division of the Third Army on March 22 made a surprise crossing of the Rhine in assault boats. Beginning late the next day the 21st Army Group and the Ninth U.S. Army staged a full-dress crossing of the lower reaches of the river, complete with an airborne attack rivaling in its dimensions Operation MARKET. The Third Army then made two more assault crossings, and during the last few days of March both the Seventh Army and the First French Army of the 6th Army Group crossed farther upstream. Having expended most of their resources west of the river, the Germans were powerless to defeat any Allied crossing attempt.



*Former Concentration Camp Prisoners
Headed to a Hospital for Medical Attention*

LIBERATING THE CAMPS

As American troops advanced deeper into Germany, they encountered grim evidence of atrocities the Nazi regime had committed. In addition to numerous small concentration camps, Americans liberated the main camps of Dora-Mittelbau, Flossenbürg, Dachau, and Mauthausen, Austria. U.S. Army units also freed more than 20,000 prisoners in the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany, on April 11, 1945. The soldiers of thirty-four U.S. divisions involved in liberating these camps confronted unspeakable conditions; piles of corpses often lay unburied. The surviving inmates resembled skeletons because the Nazi death machinery had systematically starved them while forcing them to perform hard labor. Many were so weak that they could hardly move. Disease was an ever-present danger, and the Allies had to burn down many of the camps to prevent the spread of epidemics.



American servicemen celebrate news of the German surrender with civilians at Piccadilly Circus, London, May 7, 1945.

As the month of April opened, Allied armies fanned out from the Rhine all along the line with massive columns of armor and motorized infantry. Encircling the Ruhr, the First and Ninth Armies took 325,000 prisoners, totally destroying an entire German army group. Although the Germans managed to rally determined resistance at isolated points, a cohesive defensive line ceased to exist.

Since the Russians were within forty miles of Berlin and apparently would reach the German capital first—which in any case lay within their already arranged postwar zone of occupation—General Eisenhower decided against sending his troops to join a costly battle for the city. Instead he put the main weight of his offensive behind the U.S. armies moving through central Germany to eliminate a remaining pocket of German industry and to link with the Russians. The 21st Army Group meanwhile sealed off the Netherlands and headed toward the base of

the Jutland peninsula, while the 6th Army Group turned southeastward to obviate any effort by the Nazis to make a last-ditch stand in the Alps of southern Germany and Austria.

By mid-April Allied armies in the north and center were building up along the Elbe and Mulde Rivers, an agreed line of contact with the Red Army approaching from the east. First contact came on April 25 near the town of Torgau, followed by wholesale German surrenders all along the front and in Italy.

With Berlin in Soviet hands, Hitler a suicide, and almost every corner of Germany overrun, emissaries of the German government surrendered on May 7, 1945, at General Eisenhower's headquarters in Reims, France. The next day, May 8, was V-E Day, the official date of the end of the war in Europe.

The Situation on V-E Day

As V-E Day came, Allied forces in Western Europe consisted of 4.5 million men, including 9 armies (5 of them American—1 of which, the Fifteenth, saw action only at the last), 23 corps, 91 divisions (61 of them American), 6 tactical air commands (4 American), and 2 strategic air forces (1 American). The Allies had 28,000 combat aircraft, of

which 14,845 were American; and they had brought into Western Europe more than 970,000 vehicles and 18 million tons of supplies. At the same time they were achieving final victory in Italy with 18 divisions (7 of them American).

The German armed forces and the nation were prostrate, beaten to a degree never before seen in modern times. Hardly any organized units of the German Army remained except in Norway, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, and the Balkans; these would soon capitulate. What remained of the air arm was too demoralized even for a final suicidal effort, and the residue of the German Navy lay helpless in captured northern ports. Through five years of war, the German armed forces had lost over 3 million men killed, 263,000 of them in the west, since D-Day. The United States lost 135,576 dead in Western Europe; while Britain, Canada, France, and other Allies combined incurred after D-Day approximately 60,000 military deaths.

Unlike in World War I, when the United States had come late on the scene and provided only those forces to swing the balance of power to the Allied side, the American contribution to the reconquest of Western Europe had been predominant, not just in manpower but as a true arsenal of democracy. American factories produced for the British almost three times more Lend-Lease materials than for the Russians, including 185,000 vehicles, 12,000 tanks, and enough planes to equip four tactical air forces and for the French all weapons and equipment for 8 divisions and 1 tactical air force plus partial equipment for 3 more divisions.

Although strategic air power had failed to prove the decisive instrument many had expected, it was a major factor in the Allied victory, as was the role of Allied navies; for without control of the sea lanes, there could have been no buildup in Britain and no amphibious assaults. It was nonetheless true that the application of the power of ground armies finally broke the German ability and will to resist.

While the Germans had developed a flying bomb and later a supersonic missile, the weapons with which both sides fought the war were in the main much improved versions of those that had been present in World War I: the motor vehicle, the airplane, the machine gun, indirect-fire artillery, the tank. The difference lay in such accoutrements as improved radio communications and in a new sophistication in terms of mobility and coordination that provided the means for rapid exploitation that both sides in World War I had lacked.

From North Africa to the Elbe, U.S. Army generalship proved remarkably effective. Such field commanders as Bradley, Devers, Clark, Hodges, Patton, Simpson, Patch, and numerous corps and division commanders could stand beside the best that had ever served the nation. Having helped develop Army doctrine during the years between the two great wars, these same men put the theories to battlefield test with enormous success. Some indication of the magnitude of the responsibilities they carried is apparent from the fact that late in the war General Bradley as commander of the 12th Army Group had under his command 4 field armies, 12 corps, and 48 divisions, more than 1.3 million men, the largest exclusively American field command in U.S. history.

These commanders consistently displayed a steady devotion to the principles of war. Despite sometimes seemingly insurmountable obsta-

Having helped develop Army doctrine during the years between the two great wars, these same men put the theories to battlefield test with enormous success.

cles of weather, terrain, and enemy concentration, they were generally able to achieve the mass, mobility, and firepower to avoid a stalemate, maintaining the principles of the objective and the offensive and exploiting the principle of maneuver to the fullest. On many occasions they achieved surprise, most notably in the amphibious assaults and at the Rhine. They were themselves taken by surprise twice, in central Tunisia and in the Ardennes; yet in both cases they recovered quickly. Economy of force was particularly evident in Italy, and simplicity was nowhere better demonstrated than in the Normandy landings, despite a complexity inherent in the size and diversity of the invasion forces. From the first, unity of command abided in every campaign, not just at the tactical level but also in the combined staff system that afforded the U.S. and Britain a unity of command and purpose never approached on the Axis side.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What mistakes did an inexperienced U.S. Army make in North Africa? Should it have played a more subsidiary role to the British until it acquired more experience?

2. Did the campaigns in the Mediterranean justify the investment in resources?

3. Why did the Allies invade in Normandy rather than another part of France or Europe? How did they achieve their breakout in July and August 1944?

4. Which was the proper strategy for the Allies in the late summer and fall of 1944: Montgomery's single thrust or Eisenhower's broad front? Defend your answer in light of both MARKET-GARDEN and the Battle of the Bulge.

5. Why did the Allies encounter logistical problems in the fall of 1944? Should General Eisenhower have done more to consolidate his logistics prior to continuing his pursuit of the Germans toward the frontier?

6. What factors contributed to the success of American arms in the war against Germany and Italy during World War II? In your opinion, which ally contributed most to the eventual victory? Which branch of the armed services? Explain.

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