

The intensity of war in the Mediterranean is striking. In early 1943, for instance, a modest proportion of the German armoured divisions – a little over 10 per cent – were deployed in the Mediterranean. The same proportion of the U-boat force was active in the sea. Yet nearly half the bomber forces were to be found in the theatre. At the height of the battles for Stalingrad the Luftwaffe shifted its offensive air forces to the Mediterranean. Less apparent, but just as striking, is the fact that the intensity of the British air effort was less than that of the Germans. The Mediterranean power par excellence had a lower ratio of bomber squadrons to armoured divisions. These ratios were obscured, at the time and since, by the superiority in absolute numbers enjoyed by the Imperial-US forces, and by the assumption that the British were making more effort in their ‘main theatre’.¹⁴¹

Even British commentators spoke of the eye-popping air-power efforts made by the Germans in the Mediterranean in the context of diverting forces away from their main theatre in the East. It was argued but rarely that the Russians were diverting resources from the main theatre in the Mediterranean. In order to survive, however, the Axis had to defeat Britain and give the Americans such a bloody nose that they would withdraw their forces to the West. The failure to concentrate resources in the Mediterranean was the ‘fundamental mistake’ identified by Kesselring. As it was, the Axis was dismantled in the summer of 1943 in the Mediterranean. Even Hitler – at the height of his success in the spring of 1941 – had feared such an eventuality. Mussolini’s ouster and Italy’s defection deprived German of any half-credible ally, reducing it to, in Churchill’s phrase, ‘utter loneliness’. Even worse – and at the same time – Germany itself was reduced to the operational status of a second-class power – unable to fight a sophisticated war in three dimensions – also in the Mediterranean.

¹⁴¹ Denis Richards and Hilary Saunders, *Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, vol. II: *The Fight Avails* 6 vols., London: HMSO, 1954), pp. 380–402; H. F. Joslen, *Orders of Battle: Second World War, 1939–1945* (London: HMSO, 1990 [1960]).

The war in the West, 1943–1945

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In discussing ‘The War in the West, 1943–1945’, historians frequently choose specific events as foci of their analyses: the Allies’ decision to invade Italy in 1943; Allied and German preparations before Normandy; the debates among Allied commanders about how to achieve and then how to exploit victory in Normandy; the shortcomings and abilities of senior generals; and Eisenhower’s final decision not to attack Berlin.¹ The key points around which this narrative is shaped, however, are the underlying factors that shaped the individual decisions made by the participants: timing, location, exploitation and completion.

In the Pacific theatre, 1943 was a year of Allied victories in New Guinea, Guadalcanal and in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. In Europe, however, 1943 was the year of decision. By May, German and Italian troops in North Africa had surrendered in numbers greater than the total loss suffered at Stalingrad. Allied forces captured Sicily and landed in Italy, prompting the Italians to change sides. Above all, 1943 marked the beginning of the end for German forces on the Eastern Front.² After the Battle of Kursk in July, a coordinated series of Soviet offensives began a process of driving the Germans back to the Reich that ended in Berlin and on the Elbe River.³

¹ Recent examples of these shopping lists include Philip Bell, *Twelve Turning Points of the Second World War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012); and Paul Kennedy, *Engines of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (New York: Random House, 2013).

² See Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 196–233, 273–303; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 408–70, 587–666.

³ See David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *The Battle of Kursk* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Dennis Showalter, *Armor and Blood: The Battle of Kursk: The Turning Point of World War II* (New York: Random House, 2013).

Three factors dominate any narrative of the war in the West during this period. First, up to this point, the German military was strong on all fronts. Timing, location, exploitation and completion had come together as if the stars were aligned in Germany's favour, and the Wehrmacht had reaped the benefits. Second, the battlefields reflected fluidity – the give and take of the opposing forces, the fog and friction that is at the heart of war. Finally, the initiatives of both sides dictated the ways in which the battles/campaigns played out.⁴ The chapter will focus on the Anglo-American preparation for a return to the Continent in the West, on D-Day and the campaigns that began in France and drove into Germany; on the Soviet steamroller's simultaneous advance from the East; and on the final defeat of Nazi Germany in May 1945. But the context is key to understanding those developments. It is correspondingly important to examine the Second Front debate. This controversy affected the Allies' relationships during and after the war; it influenced Allied operations in North Africa, Sicily and Italy before the Western Allies established what Stalin considered to be a true second front.

Since the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Josef Stalin had called upon his Western Allies to create a 'second front'. Though what he meant by a second front has been debated, the consensus is that Stalin called for an immediate invasion across the English Channel into France. Both the British and the Americans temporized. When British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt met at the ARCADIA conference in December 1941, they agreed that a cross-Channel invasion in 1942 was not yet feasible. In June 1942, at the Second Washington Conference, the 'Second Front' debate continued. While the Americans advocated a cross-Channel invasion before the end of the year, the British did not think it was feasible and argued instead for an invasion of North Africa. American agreement to launch Operation TORCH – the North African campaign – solidified the postponement of the cross-Channel invasion until 1943.⁵

On 8 November 1942, Operation TORCH began with an Allied landing in Morocco and Algeria, in conjunction with a British offensive near El Alamein in Egypt. As British forces pushed westward from Egypt, Anglo-American troops pushed German and Italian forces eastward into Tunisia. As the Allied offensive in North Africa reversed the balance in the Mediterranean, the

4 See Robert M. Citino, *The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012).

5 Mary Kathryn Barbier, 'SECOND FRONT: Should the Second Front Have Been Opened Earlier than June 1944?' in Dennis Showalter (ed.), *History in Dispute*, vol. 17, *World War II* (New York: St. James Press, 2000), pp. 208–11.

Soviets succeeded in crippling the Germans' strategic position on the Eastern Front by a series of major offensives, culminating at Stalingrad.⁶

The victories of 1942 nevertheless presented the Allies with a paradox – a paradox that dominated the conversation when Churchill, Roosevelt and the Combined Chiefs of Staff met in Casablanca, 14–24 January 1943. While the next logical step seemed obvious, the successes in North Africa supported an alternative path. Although the Americans, in particular General George Marshall, pushed for an invasion of France in 1943, the British made a different argument.⁷ According to the British, the Allies would be better served taking advantage of the North African victories and of the presence of Allied troops in the Mediterranean. Consequently, they advocated additional offensives in the region – in Sicily first and then in Italy – to knock the Italians out of the war, even though such action would delay the establishment of the 'Second Front' in Northwest Europe. German U-boat activity in the Atlantic was delaying the movement of American troops and materiel to Britain, to a degree guaranteeing that an operation across the English Channel in the spring of 1943 would be a small-scale one – too small to draw German troops from the Eastern Front during the upcoming Soviet summer offensive.⁸

The plan advocated by the British did not sit well with the Soviets. In addition to citing Soviet victories against the Germans, Stalin suggested that his allies were not fulfilling their agreement. He went a step further and intimated that the Soviets were 'virtually fighting alone'. Stalin's suggestion gave Roosevelt and the Americans pause. The failure of the Western Allies to launch the cross-Channel assault in a timely fashion would lend credence to a possible post-war scenario that would favour the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union could also claim all of the credit for the defeat of Germany and be in a correspondingly strong position to determine the state of the post-war world. These factors weighed heavily on the Americans. Marshall opposed the British proposal and argued for a cross-Channel offensive in 1943. The Casablanca Conference ended in compromise. The Americans agreed to the implementation of the British plan, and the British agreed to

6 Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942–1943* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), pp. 69–115, 301–38; Peter Calvo-Crossi, Guy Wirt and John Pritchard, *The Penguin History of the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 347–95.

7 Murray and Milllett, *A War to Be Won*, pp. 299–300.

8 Mary Kathryn Barbier, *D-Day Deception: Operation Fortitude and the Normandy Invasion* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007), pp. 2–3.

determine a firm date for opening a second front in Europe – in other words in France. The decision to continue operations in the Mediterranean meant two things. First, the 'Second Front' would not occur before 1944. Second, Sicily would be the site of the next Allied offensive.⁹

In May 1943, prior to the invasion of Sicily, British and American military and political leaders met in Washington at the TRIDENT conference. The British reiterated their advocacy for operations in the Mediterranean theatre; the Americans ultimately recognized the validity of their ally's argument that building on their momentum enabled taking advantage of both timing and location. Once they accepted that premise, the Americans agreed that following a successful operation in Sicily, the next logical step was to take the war to Italy. Their acceptance of the British plan did not come without a price. The British were forced to agree that the invasion of France would occur in May 1944.¹⁰

'The invasion of Sicily was the largest amphibious operation of the war, at least on the first day'.¹¹ As such, it was a dress rehearsal for the amphibious operation against France now slated for May 1944. The invasion caused the overthrow of Benito Mussolini, the first step toward Italy switching sides in the conflict. Operation HUSKY was also the first Allied offensive that had a direct impact on the Eastern Front.¹² Following the invasion of Sicily, the Germans ended Operation ZITADELLE (CITADEL), the Reich's last major offensive in Russia. Concerned that Allied successes would have an adverse effect on Italy's commitment to the Axis cause, the Germans transferred troops from Austria to Italy. Even as the Germans prepared to shore up the defence of Italy, King Vittorio Emanuele III ordered Marshal Bodoglio, who replaced Mussolini, to explore avenues to extricate the country from the conflict. In fact, an Italian envoy conducted talks with Allied officials in Portugal beginning in August 1943.

Meanwhile, the Allies continued their preparations for the invasion of Italy – Operation AVVALANCHE – with landings at Salerno and Taranto.¹³ September 1943 began with a bang. On 3 September, the Allies landed a small force at Reggio, on the toe of the Italian boot, and Italy surrendered.

⁹ Ibid.; Barbier, 'SECOND FRONT', pp. 210–11; Mark A. Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America Against the Axis Powers* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 86–96.

¹⁰ Stoler, *Allies in War*, pp. 117–21; Weinberg, *A World At Arms*, pp. 439–41, 591, 611–12.

¹¹ Murray and Millert, *A War to Be Won*, p. 302.

¹² Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, p. 13. See Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).

¹³ Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, pp. 180, 184, 197–203, 206; Murray and Millert, *A War to Be Won*, pp. 377–81; Calvocoressi et al., *History of the Second World War*, pp. 401–3.

avalanche proper commenced on 9 September 1943, with Allied landings at Salerno. Thus began the contest for control of Italy, a contest that was long and hard. For the Germans, if British and American troops were engaged in battle in Italy, they could not initiate a campaign elsewhere. For the British and Americans, if the Germans were tied down in Italy, they could not send more troops to the Eastern Front. In fact, they might withdraw even more troops from Russia to enter the fray in Italy, which would help the Soviets, in particular, and the Allied cause in general. Both the terrain and the staunch German resistance made it difficult for the Allies to exploit their successful landings. The Germans established a series of defensive lines so effective that the Allies did not succeed in entering Rome until 4 June 1944, two days before the first Allied soldiers stormed the beaches at Normandy. The commencement of the Normandy invasion demanded a commitment of resources that subsequently became unavailable for the Italian campaign. As a result, this further delayed the successful completion of the battle to wrestle the Italian boot from the Germans. (For a more detailed discussion of campaigns in North Africa and the Mediterranean theatre, see Chapter 12.)¹⁴

As Allied forces struggled to advance north on the Italian peninsula, German troops impeded that advance. The campaign demanded more and more resources and made Stalin's vision of a second front in 1943 increasingly unlikely. Stalin fumed about the delay, and his Western Allies knew it. For many reasons, and not just to satisfy Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt and their military advisors remained committed to the invasion of France. Above all, they recognized that the invasion of France would be a way to bring the war to Germany and defeat to Adolf Hitler.

The Second Front was a major topic discussed by the Big Three – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin – and their military and political advisors at the Tehran Conference, 28 November to 1 December 1943. During the meetings in Tehran, the Allied leaders reached crucial agreements about the invasion of France and the Soviet spring offensive. Two factors influenced the decisions made by the Big Three. First, was the way that the war was progressing: post-war planning, however, also affected the decisions.¹⁵

The situation really began looking up for the Allies in 1943. The Soviets stopped the Germans at Stalingrad in February and at Kursk in July. After

¹⁴ Murray and Millert, *A War to Be Won*, pp. 375–87; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, pp. 565–79, 583–4; Calvocoressi et al., *History of the Second World War*, pp. 406, 553.

¹⁵ See also Lloyd Clark, *Anzio: Italy and the Battle for Rome – 1944* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, pp. 3, 12, 18–19, 63.

halting the German operations, the Soviets were able to go on the offensive all along the front. That eliminated the immediate Soviet need for a 'second front'. According to Marshal Georgii K. Zhukov, 'By the end of 1943, we had finally overcome our grave situation and means of war, firmly held the strategic initiative and, generally speaking, no longer needed a second front in Europe so much as we had during the earlier two grim years. However, desirous of seeing the speediest possible defeat of Nazi Germany and the earliest possible termination of the war we all looked forward to the Second Front being opened in the immediate future'.¹⁶

What the Soviets viewed as good alarmed their Western Allies. Anglo-American strategists feared that the Soviets would be able to expand westward unhindered when Germany collapsed. The British and American perspectives, however, were not the same. While Churchill and the British did not want to see an expansion of Soviet influence in Europe, Roosevelt took a different position. The establishment of a second front would open the door to better East-West relations. In addition, the United States would be firmly rooted in Europe and in a position to prevent post-war Soviet domination of the continent. In effect, Roosevelt viewed this as a compromise in establishing a post-war balance of power in Europe.

The bulk of the decisions that the Big Three reached at Tehran involved the Allied invasion of France: Operation OVERLORD. From the first day of the meetings, Stalin insisted that the primary operation in 1944 should be OVERLORD, even if the Allies had to shift to a defensive position in Italy and delay the liberation of Rome. British and American military leaders simultaneously continued their ongoing conversation about planning for OVERLORD and their concerns about its possible success. To demonstrate their commitment, Churchill and Roosevelt announced the selection of General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander for the invasion. Allied intelligence correctly indicated that the Germans had concluded that their enemy would land a large number of troops in northwest France in the summer of 1944. In addition, they acknowledged that weather conditions would limit exactly when the amphibious assault could occur. The only real question for the Germans was where on the coast of France the enemy would land.

The location of the invasion was the subject of much discussion by the Allied planners, as was the exact date for the landings. A shortage of landing craft forced a delay until June. The importance of the landing craft was indubitably etched in the plans. As Winston Churchill noted: 'The letters "L.S.T." (Landing Ship, Tanks) are burnt in upon the minds of all those who dealt with military affairs in this period'.¹⁷ The need for low-tide conditions and a full moon dictated the Allies' narrow invasion windows. Equally important was location. Several factors influenced this decision. Crucial to the plan was air cover. Consequently, the invasion site had to be in range of Allied air forces. It had to be easily accessible to naval forces. Finally, the planners understood that they had to have access to established port facilities in order to support the invasion effectively.

The Dieppe raid in August 1942 demonstrated the difficulty in landing an amphibious force near a fortified, well-defended port. The establishment of beachheads anywhere along the French coast would be correspondingly difficult, if not impossible. Enemy forces would greatly outnumber the invading troops and could prevent Allied forces from gaining a foothold in Normandy. Therefore, Allied planners, particularly the British, concluded that Operation OVERLORD needed an insurance policy, a cover plan that would mask the invasion and possibly persuade the Germans to fortify the wrong place. They had to keep the Germans from moving reinforcements into Normandy for as long as possible, both before and after the commencement of the invasion. Even before the meeting in Tehran, efforts to design such a cover plan, eventually called Operation FORTITUDE, had commenced. Not until the Tehran Conference, however, did Allied leaders agree on an overall policy of strategic deception. Only one aspect of the ultimate strategic deception plan specifically provided cover for OVERLORD. That was Operation FORTITUDE. The rest of the strategic deception plan was designed to tie down German forces elsewhere in Europe.

Following the meeting of the Big Three in Tehran, the real work began - finalizing OVERLORD's plans, the massing of sufficient troops, equipment and landing craft, and launching the amphibious assault that would return Allied forces to France - over four years after the evacuation of British and French troops from Dunkirk. The Western Allies were not the only ones making preparations. The Germans, in an effort to thwart their enemy, made plans of their own. In the spring of 1942, Hitler had given orders for the

¹⁶ Marshal Georgii K. Zhukov, quoted in Olivier Wievorka, *Normandy: The Landings to the Liberation of Paris*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 33.

¹⁷ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. v, *Closing the Ring* (6 vols., New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), p. 226.

erection of an Atlantic Wall extending from Norway to the Bay of Biscay. He believed that once it was completed, only a small number of troops would be needed to man the fortifications. After the Dieppe Raid, Hitler ordered the construction of 15,000 additional fortified positions along the Channel coast by the summer of 1943. Allied victories in the Mediterranean led Hitler in November 1943 to accelerate construction further.

As *Oberbefehlshaber West* (Supreme Commander of German armies stationed in the West), Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt had major reservations about the capabilities of the Atlantic Wall, particularly in light of its state of completeness and the number of troops available for its defence. Because he believed both were insufficient to stop an Allied invasion, Rundstedt requested that an operational reserve of nine armoured and motorized divisions be placed under his command. Both Rundstedt and Hitler recognized the need to defeat the landing as soon as possible. In March 1944, Hitler informed his generals about the need for a quick, decisive victory in the West:

The destruction of the enemy's landing attempt means more than a purely local decision on the Western front. It is the sole decisive factor in the whole conduct of the war and hence in its final result. The 45 divisions which we now have in Europe, excluding the Eastern front, are needed in the East, and will and must be transferred there so as to effect a fundamental change in that situation as soon as the decision in the West has been reached.¹⁸

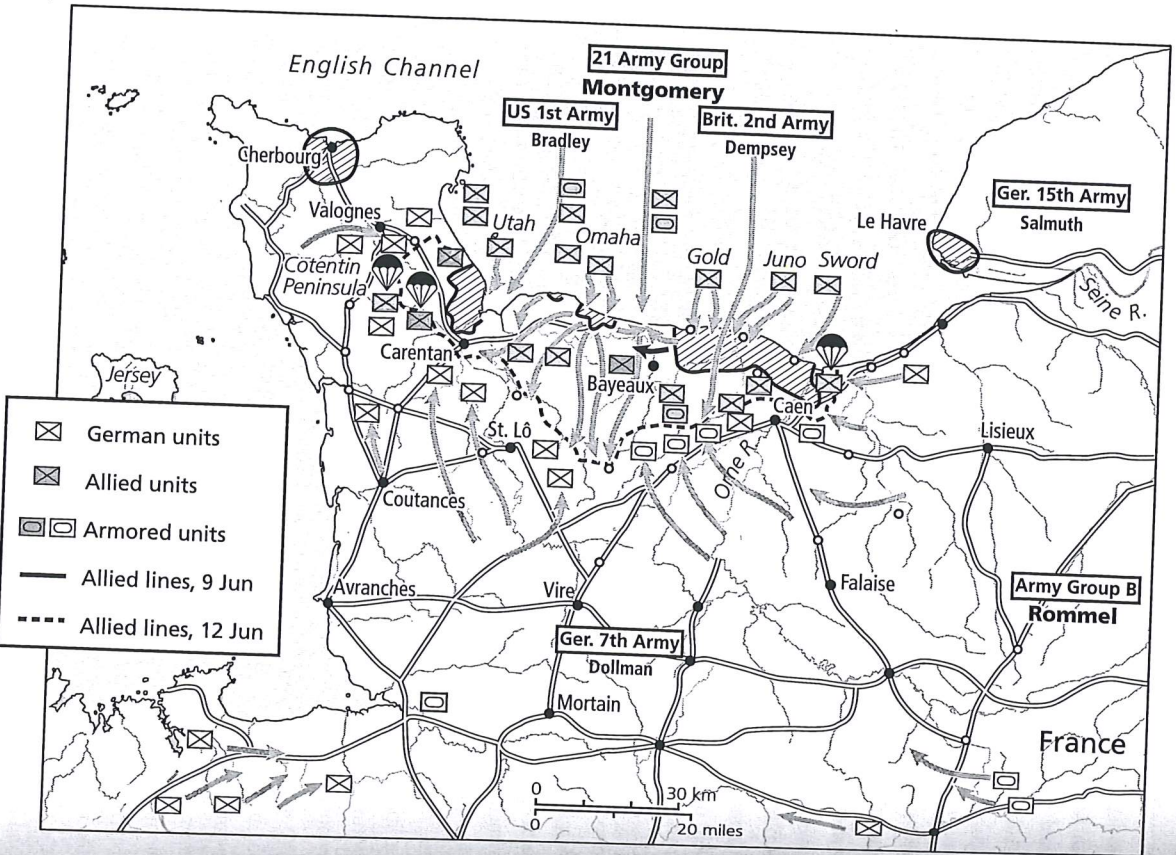
After another alarming assessment of the Atlantic Wall by Rundstedt in October 1943, Hitler assigned the task of strengthening the Atlantic Wall to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. In addition to overseeing construction of the Wall, Rommel received command of Army Group B. His evaluation of German defences and Allied intentions led him to disagree fundamentally with Rundstedt regarding the disposition of German front-line and reserve forces. While Rundstedt argued that the Allies would land in Pas de Calais and try to seize the Calais port, Rommel expected the Allies to do the unexpected, which they had done so many times before. Therefore, he believed that the Allies would land anywhere on the coast between Dunkirk and Cherbourg. Both the Pas de Calais and the Normandy beaches fell between these parameters. In addition, recognizing the importance of Cherbourg, he stressed that the defence of that port city was vital.

The generals also disagreed over the placement of the German central armoured reserve. Arguing that the reserves should be centrally located, Rundstedt advocated that they be based near Paris. This would allow the rapid deployment of the forces to any endangered location along the French coast. Rommel, on the other hand, contended that the reserves should be located closer to the coast in order to prevent the Allies from gaining a foothold. The Germans would be able to push the Allies back into the English Channel and, consequently, stop the invasion before it had actually started. Hitler therefore made the final decision, which ultimately proved disastrous because it rendered both strategies ineffective. Hitler placed three Panzer divisions – the 2nd, 21st and 116th – under Rommel's direct command. He also assumed direct control of three other divisions – 1st and 2nd SS Panzer and Panzer Lehr, the best of the armour. Only Hitler could order them into battle. On the one hand, Hitler eliminated Rundstedt from the equation; on the other, he also tied Rommel's hands because only Hitler could order these divisions into battle.

While the Germans tried to guess the exact location of the looming Allied invasion, strengthen their defences and eventually thwart their enemy, Allied preparations for Operation OVERLORD continued. General Sir Frederick Morgan, Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander, and his staff had spent a year working on the OVERLORD plan. Drawing upon lessons learned from the 1942 Dieppe raid and intelligence that indicated an enemy focus on Pas de Calais, Morgan chose the Normandy beaches as the invasion site, even though Allied forces would not have immediate access to port facilities. Although the invasion forces would be tasked with the immediate capture of Cherbourg and Le Havre, the Allies would need to land additional troops and supplies in the meantime. Consequently, they would construct two artificial floating harbours, or MULBERRIES, that would be towed to the beaches after the landing. According to Morgan's plan, three divisions would make the initial landing. Air and naval bombardment would cover their disembarkation from landing craft. Prior to the infantry assault, airborne troops would be dropped and would secure key exits from the home troops would be dropped and would secure key exits from the beaches. Once the beaches were secure and reinforcements had landed, the troops would break out of the beachhead and move into Brittany and the western part of France. Securing key cities, including Caen, Cherbourg and Le Havre was paramount.

With his appointment as commander of the landing force in early January 1944, General Bernard Montgomery immediately – and predictably – argued that certain amendments be adopted. According to Montgomery, the

¹⁸ Adolf Hitler, quoted in Wieworka, *Normandy*, p. 152.



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landings of British and American forces should be separate. In addition, he contended that the landing force should be increased to five divisions – two Americans, two British and one Canadian. Each division would land on separate, but connected beaches. From west to east, the beaches were UTAH (American), OMAHA (American), GOLD (British), JUNO (Canadian) and SWORD (British). Montgomery also recommended that the airborne forces be increased from two brigades to three divisions. Two American airborne divisions would drop along the Vire River at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula, while one British airborne division would land along the Orne River, to prevent the Germans from driving the invading forces off the beaches. Allied navies would transport the ground troops.¹⁹

Once the revised plan received approval, Great Britain became the site of a great deal of activity. Training commenced. The Allies amassed the troops, equipment, ships, landing craft, aircraft, ammunition and other supplies needed for the largest amphibious landing ever attempted. Another aspect to the planning must be acknowledged – the cover plan. The Allies recognized that the Germans expected and were preparing for the invasion. In an effort to focus German attention away from Normandy, they implemented Operation FORTITUDE. FORTITUDE had two parts: FORTITUDE NORTH, which was the smaller of the two plans, suggested an assault against Norway, with landings at Narvik and Stavanger. FORTITUDE SOUTH was not only much larger, but was also much more ambitious than its northern counterpart. The goal of FORTITUDE SOUTH was to keep German attention focused on Pas de Calais, which the Germans thought was the most likely site of the Allied invasion. In fact, FORTITUDE NORTH eventually merged with FORTITUDE SOUTH. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 22 – Intelligence.)²⁰

In many respects, the same resources were utilized for both OVERLORD and FORTITUDE. For example, troops training for OVERLORD in south-east England also participated in the FORTITUDE deception. Prior to D-Day, Eisenhower authorized implementation of the Transportation Plan, which accomplished two goals. First, the bombing of railways and bridges hindered enemy reinforcement of the Normandy area. Second, because

¹⁹ Both the air forces and the navies would play crucial roles in the invasion. For a more detailed assessment of Allied strategic air operations, see Chapter 17. See also Chapter 19 – Armies, navies, air forces: the instruments of war.

²⁰ Barber, *D-Day Deception*, pp. 1-40; Mary Kathryn Barber, *Deception and the planning of D-Day*, in John Buckley (ed.), *The Normandy Campaign 1944: Sixty Years On* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 170-84.

some of the targets were in the Pas de Calais region, bombing them also supported the deception plan. In fact, in the months before D-Day, the Allies dropped approximately twice as many bombs in the Pas de Calais area than in Normandy.²¹

Originally slated to occur in May 1944, Operation OVERLORD was delayed a month because of a shortage of landing craft. As D-Day neared, however, the pieces came together nicely, or so both sides thought. Under Operation NEPTUNE, Allied navies amassed almost 6,500 vessels, 4,000 of which were landing craft, for the cross-Channel assault. Tasked with destroying the Atlantic Wall's coastal batteries, the battleships and destroyers would provide a pre-dawn bombardment to prepare the way for the landing force. British and American air forces, numbering 12,000 planes, would support the landings from the air. Almost half of the aircraft were fighters. The Allies' overwhelming air superiority gave them a major edge on D-Day.²²

The Allies were not the only ones who were preparing for the big assault. The Germans constantly constructed appreciations of Allied troop strength and of where they expected the assault to land, and adjusted their defences and troop deployments accordingly. By early June 1944, they had sixty-two divisions for the defence of the Channel coast. The Germans recognized the importance of Brittany, Normandy and the Cotentin Peninsula, but, because of its proximity to the Ruhr, they thought that Pas de Calais was the most likely site for an enemy landing. Although they concentrated fifteen divisions in northeast France, the Germans placed seventeen west of the Seine River. Apparently, 'this division of German forces reflected an indecision within the German high command that recognized that north of the Loire only Normandy and the Pas de Calais offered themselves as possible landing areas'.²³ Although for months, German officers, especially Rundstedt, thought that the most likely landing site was Pas de Calais, as D-Day neared, the Germans acquired an increasing amount of intelligence that suggested another target

area - Normandy. In early May, several German commanders, including Commander-in-Chief West, assessed intelligence reports and concluded that the Allies would land between Cherbourg and Le Havre - in other words, in Normandy. As late as 1 June 1944, General Erich Marcks predicted an enemy landing in Normandy within a few days. His prediction, however, did not receive support. After the war, Major Anton Straubwasser acknowledged that the movement of landing craft in English southwestern coastal ports had been observed by German reconnaissance planes a few days before the invasion commenced. Unfortunately for the Germans, the prevailing appreciation did not agree with these assessments or with the intelligence. In fact, because the Germans overestimated Allied troop strength and because they believed that the Allies might launch more than one invasion, the Germans anticipated a second landing in Pas de Calais after the enemy forces invaded the Normandy beaches.²⁴

While the Germans tried to guess the enemy's invasion plans, the Allies were finalizing their preparations. In early May, Eisenhower set the new target date - 5 June - but the weather would not cooperate. By 3 June, the landing forces were loaded on ships. By 4 June, weather conditions threatened to cause another delay. Eisenhower met with his staff and they discussed options. That evening, Group Captain James Martin Stagg, the chief meteorologist, suggested that there might be a window of opportunity - a thirty-six-hour break in the weather. On the morning of 5 June, Eisenhower received confirmation of Stagg's prediction, and he ordered the invasion to start the next day. Timing was everything. The invasion had to begin before the Germans got wind of it. Ships put to sea. The Eastern Naval Task Force carried British Second Army troops (including the 3rd Canadian Division) slated to land on SWORD, GOLD and JUNO beaches, while the Western Naval Task Force headed for UTAH and OMAHA beaches with the US First Army. Vessels loaded with 130,000 men and 20,000 vehicles would disembark in three waves. Sailing with the Task Forces were fifteen hospital ships that carried 8,000 doctors, 450,000 litres of plasma, and 600,000 doses of penicillin. Paratroopers completed their final checks in preparation for departure. Aircraft, transporting paratroopers and towing gliders, would release their loads in the early morning hours of 6 June.

As the invasion troops headed for their targets, the Germans evaluated current weather and forecasts. They determined that conditions would force

²¹ The Transportation Plan was a component of the British-American strategic air campaigns. For an in-depth assessment of the Allies' strategic air operations, see Chapter 17.

²² Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, pp. 144, 177-9, 181, 190-1. See also Arthur William Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown & Company, 1966); Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York: Dial Press, 1979); W. W. Rostow, *Pre-Invasion Bombing Strategy: General Eisenhower's Decision of March 31, 1944* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); and Vincent Orange, 'Arthur Tedder and the transportation plans', in Buckley (ed.), *The Normandy Campaign*, pp. 147-57. See also Chapter 17 - Anglo-American strategic bombing, and Chapter 19 - Armies, navies, air forces: the instruments of war.

²³ Chester Willmott, *The Struggle for Europe* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 357.

²⁴ Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, pp. 152, 158-9, 163-4.

the Allies to postpone their invasion. Therefore, several commanders, including Rommel, were not at their posts when the invasion began. This affected the Germans' ability to react in the early morning hours, as advance Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy. In addition, General Alfred Jodl's unwillingness to wake Hitler, when the first reports and requests for assistance arrived, further delayed the Germans' commitment of key forces to the battle for over twelve hours.²⁵

Before dawn on 6 June 1944, hundreds of Allied aircraft crossed the Channel and flew toward their target areas. Paratroopers of the British 6th Airborne Division and the 82nd and 101st American Airborne Divisions leaped from the aircraft and slowly descended to the ground. Many did not land in their designated areas. Confusion reigned, but the men linked up and proceeded to carry out their tasks. In the pre-dawn hours, the guns from the Naval Task Forces opened fire in an effort to neutralize the beaches and facilitate the landing. Landing craft headed for the beaches. The battle was on. Allied troops landed on five different beaches. While not walkovers, the attacks on four of the five beaches - UTAH, JUNO, GOLD and SWORD - went well. The invaders established secure positions relatively quickly and with relatively light casualties. On OMAHA beach, a number of problems plagued the landing. The navy launched the landing craft too far from shore. Rough seas swamped many of the landing craft and caused heavy casualties in men, tanks and artillery. Once ashore, soldiers of the US 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions faced fierce resistance when they encountered the German 352nd Division, an experienced unit that had recently arrived in the area. The Germans pinned down the Americans on the beaches for hours. Late in the day, however, the Americans succeeded in establishing a secure position.

Despite this early success, none of the Allied forces succeeded in achieving their first-day goals. That ultimately contributed to a much slower progress in Normandy than had been anticipated. In particular, the British were unable to seize Caen, where a key communications centre was located. German resistance prevented liberation of Caen until early July. The Allies continued to land forces. During the first two days of the battle, approximately 100,000 Allied soldiers came ashore. Ten days later, five times that number were in Normandy. Almost a million Allied soldiers were inside the

beachhead by 1 July. During that same period, German troop strength increased to fourteen divisions. Nine of them were Panzer divisions.²⁶ Two distinct battles emerged in Normandy. In both, the German defenders faced overwhelming firepower, air power and armoured resources. The British and Canadians fought in the eastern sector, while the Americans engaged the enemy in the West. As the struggle for Caen raged, American forces tried to achieve their first objective - pinching off the Cotentin peninsula and capturing Cherbourg intact. German resistance stymied the American efforts just long enough. Cherbourg finally fell to the Americans on 27 June, but not before the Germans had blocked the harbour, which was not cleared completely until late September.

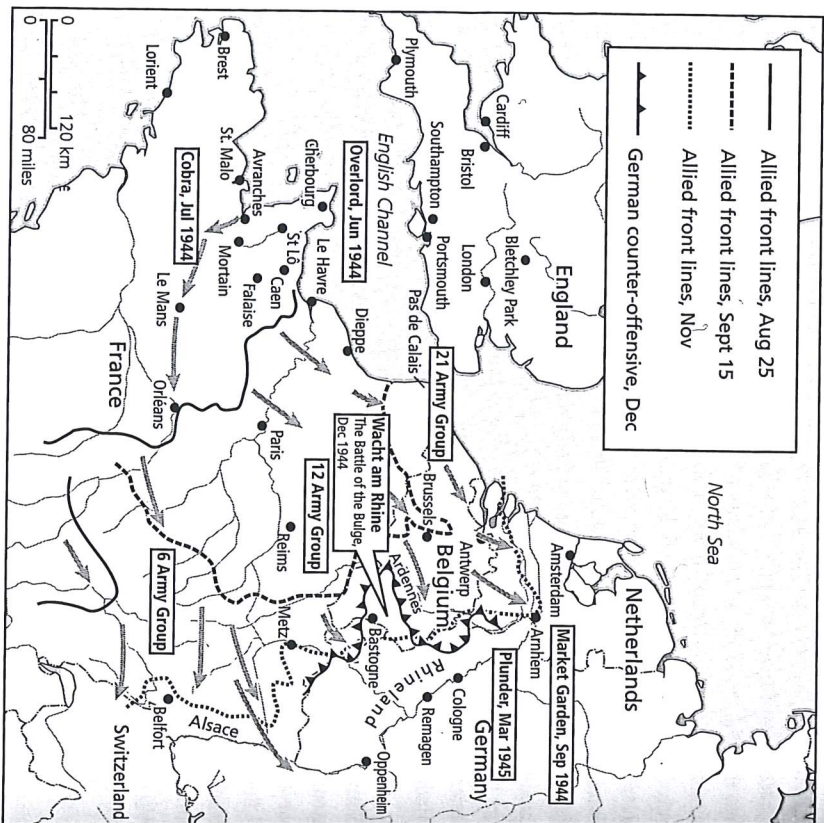
Across the front, the fighting was brutal. It was made extremely difficult by three factors. First, the experience and determination of the soldiers involved - German, British, Canadian and American - defined the nature of the fighting. The Allies were determined to land, establish a beachhead and break out into France. The Germans were equally determined to throw the invaders back into the sea. Second, the terrain made the fighting more difficult. The thick shrubs and sunken lanes of the bocage country gave the defender the advantage. The mechanized Allied forces found that the soft ground limited their mobility. The hedgerows divided Normandy into a series of rectangular boxes. With limited entrances and exits through the hedgerows, the Germans established strong defensive positions and utilized snipers to increase the number of enemy casualties. Allied ingenuity levelled the playing field, but not before both sides paid a heavy cost in terms of casualties. Finally, the weather had an impact on the battlefield. July 1944 was one of the wettest and windiest in fifty years. These conditions limited both air support and mobility on the ground. In spite of these factors, the growing Allied strength in Normandy by the end of July resulted in the establishment of two army groups - the Twenty-First Army Group commanded by Montgomery, and the Twelfth Army Group commanded by General Omar Bradley.²⁷ Several factors hindered the German ability to reinforce the battlefield quickly enough to achieve their primary goal - the defeat of the enemy.

²⁶ D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, pp. 107-19; Wiewiorka, *Normandy*, pp. 190-200; Stephen Badsey, 'Culture, Controversy, Caen and Cherbourg: The First Week of Battle', in Buckley (ed.), *The Normandy Campaign*, pp. 48-65.

²⁷ Badsey, 'Culture, Controversy', pp. 48-65; Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), pp. 133-59; Michael D. Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp. 31-62.

²⁵ Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), pp. 107-19; Wiewiorka, *Normandy*, pp. 185-90.

Before the first Allied troops had landed on the beaches at Normandy, Allied aircraft had destroyed or heavily damaged all rail and road bridges across the Seine River north of Paris, which limited German reinforcement from the east. As soon as the invasion commenced, Allied bombers had another task - destroy the rail and road bridges across the Loire River south of the battlefield. In addition, the Germans immediately encountered difficulty in moving mechanized forces during daylight hours. When weather permitted, Allied aircraft attacked enemy forces as they advanced toward Normandy. Because of these obstacles, the Germans committed their forces as advance units arrived. They did not have time to mass their forces for a counter-attack in force, which ultimately limited their ability to defeat their enemies. Furthermore, Allied aircraft destroyed Panzer Group West's headquarters, which hindered the coordinated movement of Panzer forces.



14.2 The campaign in Northwest Europe, 1944

As the Allies' position in Normandy strengthened, they prepared for the breakout phase. Timing and location aligned, and the Allies were ready to exploit their success in Normandy. On 25 July, the Americans launched Operation COBRA - a thrust west of Saint-Lô to break out of the bocage country and to cut off the Cotentin Peninsula; while the British, a few days earlier, had unleashed Operations GOODWOOD and ATLANTIC - to complete the liberation of Caen and tie down seven of the nine German Panzer divisions in Normandy. Two days later, the Germans began to retreat under pressure from the Americans. The Americans drove the Germans to the south and then east, and the British advanced south from Caen. As the American First Army moved eastward around the German southern flank and the British pressured them from the north, the Germans realized that they were in danger of being surrounded. In an effort to entrap the Germans, Bradley sent elements of the First and Third Armies north through Argentan, to link with the Canadian First Army that was advancing south toward Falaise. As the noose tightened, the Germans counter-attacked, but in vain. By the evening of 15 August, with Canadian forces only a couple of miles from Falaise, German troops fled eastward - a gap the Allies just failed to close. Although cadres succeeded in escaping, the Germans lost over 60,000 troops killed or captured, and large quantities of irreplaceable equipment.²⁸

While opposing forces fought in the Falaise pocket, the Allies launched other operations, in particular the invasion of southern France. Although originally slated to coincide with Operation OVERLORD, the shortage of landing craft forced a two-month delay. Originally called ANVIL, the operation received a new name - DRAGOON - by the time it commenced on 15 August. Elements of US Seventh Army forces, commanded by General Alexander Patch, and General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny's First French Army, mostly African troops, landed between Toulon and Cannes. German opposition was weak. German defenders in France were stretched thin by the Allies' push to exploit their successful return to France. As combined American-French assaults led to the liberation of Toulon and Marseille, ULTRA intercepts indicated that German forces in southern France had received orders to retreat northward. The Allies pursued rapidly; the so-called (and misnamed) Champagne campaign linked up with the US Third Army north of Dijon on 12 September. Although critics suggest that ANVIL/

²⁸ Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy*, pp. 57-8, 79-84, 229; Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, pp. 158-70, 180, 263, 270; D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, pp. 337-46, 358, 364, 384, 390, 400-6, 507.

DRAGOON prevented the Allies from fully exploiting the situation in Italy, the capture of Marseille more than made up for it. During the period September 1944 to January 1945, the Allies unloaded more supplies for the war effort at the port of Marseille than at any other port.²⁹

The German situation in the West continued to deteriorate. The closing of the Falaise pocket signalled the complete collapse of the German defence in France. Allied armies – tanks and mechanized troops – rushed east against little opposition. Although the US First Army advanced toward Paris, Eisenhower did not initially plan to liberate the French capital. Because he did not think that the Germans would relinquish the city easily, Eisenhower envisioned intense street fighting. Liberation of Paris could result in destruction of the city and heavy casualties. Furthermore, Eisenhower understood another reality of liberation: the Allies would become responsible for feeding the French residents of Paris, which would be a logistical nightmare.

The French – both Parisians and non-Parisians – forced Eisenhower to alter his plans to bypass the capital. When French Forces of the Interior revolted against the Paris garrison, General Charles de Gaulle demanded that the Allies provide military support for the Resistance units because they were insufficiently armed to liberate Paris from the Germans. While Eisenhower pondered his response, General Jacques Philippe Leclerc, Commander of the Free French 2nd Armoured Division, took matters into his own hands. Disobeying orders, he ordered troops to Paris. Giving in to the apparently inevitable, Eisenhower approved Leclerc's orders. When the French advance was delayed by their celebrating countrymen, Bradley diverted American units to aid in the liberation of Paris. French and American forces liberated Paris on 25 August.

The liberation of Paris only briefly slowed the Allies' rush to the east. The steamroller unleashed by the breakout forced the Germans to retreat. Exploitation of the Allies' success in Normandy continued. Three armies – the British Second, the Canadian First and the US First – pushed through Belgium. Patton's Third Army advanced into northeastern France. By 15 September, most of Belgium and Luxembourg were in Allied hands. Advance forces rapidly approached the German border. As the Allies surged forward, however, cracks in their partnership emerged. The Allies had outrun their supply lines. Shortages, particularly of fuel, began to cause problems of prioritization.³⁰

These issues, along with differing visions regarding the nature of post-war Europe, coloured the debate as Eisenhower and his staff discussed the next step. Montgomery advocated a 'single thrust' approach. He argued that the British Second and US First Armies should push toward the Rhine River and the Ruhr industrial region. In order to conserve supplies, however, this would require that Patton's Third Army, which was running wild across France, stop its advance eastward. Arguing that both army groups advance simultaneously along a 'broad front', Eisenhower and his American subordinates disagreed. Rejecting Montgomery's argument for a single thrust, Eisenhower compromised by agreeing to the English general's ambitious plan to cross the Rhine River in several locations in the Netherlands – Operation MARKET GARDEN. In advocating this operation, Montgomery emphasized two points. The Rhine River provided a formidable border for Germany. Crossing it would result in a breach of the German defences beyond repair. Allied forces were poised to exploit a breach. MARKET GARDEN would allow the Allies to get round the northern part of the West Wall that lined the German-Dutch border. Furthermore, the Allies could put the German V-2 rocket-launching sites located in the Netherlands in jeopardy.

Montgomery's plan was both complicated and ambitious. Four other rivers and three canals had to be crossed before advancing to Arnhem and the Lower Rhine – a distance of over sixty miles. MARKET GARDEN was a high-risk plan, but sufficiently promising that, despite ULTRA intelligence reports indicating that two SS Panzer divisions were refitting near Arnhem, neither Eisenhower nor Montgomery favoured cancelling it. First in was the US 101st Airborne Division, whose most important objective was the bridge across the Maas/Meuse/Mass River. The target of the US 82nd Airborne Division, next in line, was the bridge spanning the Waal River, a branch of the Rhine near Nijmegen. The British 1st Airborne Division, the Red Devils, received the most important – and difficult – assignment: the bridge across the Lower Rhine at Arnhem. The British xxx Corps had orders to advance through the resulting corridor to link up with the airborne troops in Arnhem and open the way to the North German Plain.

MARKET GARDEN commenced on 17 September and, from the beginning, faced obstacles that adversely affected its chances. Some were beyond the Allies' control. Bad weather delayed the arrival of some of the paratroopers, and it prevented timely air reinforcements and supply during the battle. Fog and friction contributed as well. The Germans succeeded in retrieving a complete battle plan from a glider that had crashed, killing all on board,

²⁹ Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, pp. 174-5, 269, 271.

³⁰ Murray and Millert, *A War to Be Won*, pp. 432-3, 450; Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, pp. 160, 170-2, 180, 256; Calvocoressi et al., *History of the Second World War*, pp. 542-5; John Buckley, *Monty's Men: The British Army and the Liberation of Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 169, 177, 181-3. See D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*.

German military leaders formally agreed to the surrender terms. The war in Europe was finally over.³⁷

The tide, which began to shift in 1942, flowed against the Germans on all fronts in 1943. What caused the shift, the flood that overwhelmed the Germans by May 1945? To say that the Soviet steamroller, combined with the Western Allies' industrial and military might, overwhelmed the Axis Powers is too simplistic an answer. A deeper evaluation reveals that, by 1943, the Allied war effort had coalesced. The British and Americans had figured out how to work together. Their combined arms operations clicked and allowed them to achieve success on the battlefield. Their timing in launching offensives worked. As the Normandy invasion demonstrated, the British and Americans got location right. Once they gained a beachhead in Normandy, the Allies successfully exploited their foothold. Although their advance was not as rapid as planned, the Allies were able, slowly and steadily, to force the Germans to retreat. Pressed in the East by the Soviets and in the West by the Allies, the Wehrmacht collapsed. As their momentum built, the Allies increased the pressure on their enemy and brought the offensive that began in Normandy to completion. While the Germans had the advantage in timing, location, exploitation and completion at the beginning of the war, the pendulum had swung in the other direction by 1943. With one exception, the Germans were no longer on the offensive on any front - Mediterranean, Eastern or Western. That one exception was the Battle of the Bulge. Here, the Germans got the timing and location right. They succeeded in catching their enemy off-guard and in gaining ground at the beginning of the offensive. The Germans failed, however, in exploiting their early success and in completing the offensive with a victory.

The Allies achieved victory in the West by becoming better than their opponents in timing, location, exploitation and completion. Historians agree that the first critical step was the Normandy invasion, which was a close-run offensive. Maintaining secrecy prior to commencement was crucial. Eisenhower agonized over postponement. Should the delay be a day, two weeks, a month? The longer the delay, the less certain there was that the Germans could be caught off-guard. Despite extensive planning, the massing of personnel, materiel, armaments and munitions, ships and aircraft, the outcome

of the landing was not a certainty. Evidence of this concern was the speech that Eisenhower prepared to deliver in the event that the amphibious assault failed. In it, he assumed full responsibility for the failure. The success of the invasion forestalled Eisenhower's delivery of the speech - permanently. Because the Normandy invasion, which has been romanticized and perceived as easy, was a success, there is a tendency not to acknowledge that it was the culmination of intense planning, training and orchestration. It was an amazingly successful solution to an extraordinarily hard problem and reflected the excellence of Allied strategy and decision-making. The Allies found a game-winning plan at the very time that the Germans, who were pressed on all fronts, no longer had the resources - personnel, materiel, aircraft - needed to achieve victory. When the Allies gained a foothold on the Normandy beaches, it marked the beginning of the end for the Germans on the Western Front. Russian forces exerted pressure on the Germans in the East and prevented the high command from transferring sufficient units to meet the larger than anticipated threat in the West. Although it took longer than expected or planned, from this point on, the Allies assaulted the Germans on multiple fronts. They exploited the foothold that they had gained in Normandy and brought the offensive to a successful completion on the Elbe River, where they linked up with their Russian allies, who had assaulted and captured Berlin. During the Battle of the Bulge, materiel and personnel shortages impeded their counter-attack. By the spring of 1945, the German war effort was in a state of collapse. Historians frequently contend that Hitler's interference hampered the German war effort. Equally, the Germans had not entertained the possibility of defeat, and when defeat stared them in the face, they were unable to recover and to return to the strategy and decision-making that had brought them success in the early years of the war. The strategy and decision-making of the Allies, however, improved during the same period as the German decline, and culminated in ultimate victory.

37 Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941-1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 361-96; Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), pp. 630-69; Buckley, *Monty's Men*, pp. 265-95; Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, pp. 246-8; Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, pp. 387-426.