

# Footnote in History: Sixth Army Group Operations in the Second World War and Lessons for Contemporary Planners

A Monograph

by

MAJ Rebecca E. Beard  
United States Army



School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Name of Candidate: MAJ Rebecca E. Beard

Monograph Title: Footnote in History: Sixth Army Group Operations in the Second World War and Lessons for Contemporary Planners

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Stephen A. Bourque, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, Seminar Leader  
Randall Hoffman, Lt Col

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 10th day of May 2016 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

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## **Abstract**

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Operations by Sixth Army Group are not as familiar to Americans for a variety of reasons. For most Americans there tends to be more attentiveness with the literature on the landings in Normandy and subsequent operations. This monograph investigates operations conducted by the Sixth Army Group during the Second World War and its effective contribution to Eisenhower's broad front strategy as measured by how they integrated the French First Army into operations, arranging its logistic support, and resolving the inevitable nationalistic disagreements. As one of four Army Groups operating in Europe, Sixth Army Group coalition operations in World War II were secondary operation to Overlord and dependent on the integration of the French Army to be successful. In addition, Devers provided the French leadership, led by Charles de Gaulle, with an important element of reestablishing the French State. The conclusion of the monograph identifies several ways for today's planners working in a joint and combined operational environment to apply the six joint tenets for coalition operations and deal with the inevitable problems that will arise from national differences.

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## Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
ETOUSA	European Theater of Operation, U.S. Army
FFI	French Forces of the Interior
FM	Field Manual
G-3	Operations section
G-4	Supply section
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JP	Joint Publication
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force

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## Introduction

History often reminds us that powerful people seldom forget insults that they receive. For example, when General George C. Marshall was the Secretary of Defense, French General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny asked if he would endorse his nomination as the ground forces commander for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Both men worked together during World War II, de Lattre as the commanding General of the First French Army and Marshall as the Army Chief of Staff for the United States. Unwilling to support the endorsement based on his previous encounters with the Frenchmen, Marshall replied, “You are no man to command any allied thing because you are a politico.”<sup>1</sup> In this case, Marshall was thinking back to one incident that occurred when the French general commanded under General Jacob L. Devers, Sixth Army Group Commander. On this memorable occasion, Marshall and Devers were in eastern France to visit de Lattre’s headquarters. The French Commander seized the opportunity to accuse General Lucian King Truscott’s Seventh Army of taking the fuel allocated for his force, thereby impeding their ability to maneuver. De Lattre made this accusation in front of officers from both sides and in the presence of news panel reporters. Marshall not wishing to lose his temper in front of such an audience terminated the conversation and walked out. Years later the incident still burned fresh in his mind. In his memoirs after the war, Marshall would describe the incident telling de Lattre, “what you did was a most culpable performance for a man who had any idea of how allied forces must get along.”<sup>2</sup> In his book, *The History of the French First Army* de Lattre describes the event in a more diplomatic manner, and mentions that he sought to take advantage of Marshall’s visit and took the opportunity to “acquaint him with the inadequacy of [French] supplies.” He describes Marshall’s reaction as one of surprise, as the comment was unexpected at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory 1943-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 476.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 476.

However, he mentions that the American recognized the complaint as being well founded and made a promise that he would address the grievance. No mention of Marshall ending the conversation and walking out makes it into the French Generals account.<sup>3</sup>

This incident tell us much about the complicated nature of coalition operations, which is a common aspect of warfare. Coalition operations are military actions conducted by forces from different nations with a common aim, in spite of often-pronounced national differences.<sup>4</sup> These variances include dissimilar national narratives, operational and logistic requirements, and domestic political situations that can have an effect on the outcome. In this instance, the disagreement over logistical support became a political issue when de Lattre later sought Marshall's endorsement after the war. During the war, the issue created conflict because of the way that de Lattre approached the problem in a public setting, rather than addressing the problem through his immediate commander, Jacob Devers, or in private. As the commander of the Sixth Army Group, Devers faced similar problems with his French subordinates that complicated his military operations. The experiences of his command illustrate the difficulties of combined operations during war. However, despite the often-tenuous relationship between the US Army and French Forces in southern France, Devers managed to accomplish his operational objectives that contributed to the Allied victory over Nazi Germany.

Sixth Army Group operations covered eight hundred miles across southern Europe over a nine-month period. Units first landed on the coastal beaches of the French Riviera 15 August,

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<sup>3</sup> Marshal de Lattre de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1952), 194-195.

<sup>4</sup> The United States Department of Defense defines a coalition as “an arrangement between two or more nations for common action. Coalitions are typically ad hoc, formed by different nations, often with different objectives, usually for a single event or for a longer period while addressing a narrow sector of common interest. Operations conducted with units from two or more coalition members are referred to as coalition operations.” Joint Publication (JP) 3-16: *Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007).

1944 and rapidly advanced inland up the Rhone River and into the valley after the retreating Germans. They fought their way along routes marked by rivers, towns and mountains. After the initial landings, Sixth Army Group paused on the west side of the Vosges Mountains in order to establish lines of supply and prepare for an assault to seize the passes at Belfort and Saverne. Fighting through the mountains was fierce and Sixth Group did not manage to secure passage to the eastern side of the Vosges until the middle of November 1944. However, after securing of the mountain passes the Allies now found themselves faced with a fierce pocket of German resistance in the French zone around Colmar and a pending German counteroffensive in the New Year. The Germans launched operation Nordwind in order to counterattack into the Allied line starting on 31 December 1944. Also known as, the New Year's Eve offensive the Germans launched a series of attacks over a three-week period against the Allied lines with little success. Following the German offensive the French First Army set to clearing out the resistance in the Colmar pocket in order to reduce the Allied lines and continue the offensive across the Rhine. Allied offensive maneuvers in February 1945 were successful and Sixth Army Group found itself postured along the west bank of the Rhine River. The remaining months of offensive action to breach the Siegfried Line into the heart of Germany were subject to the goals of both French and American political leadership as they used the military to set conditions for post war settlements. Operations in the spring of 1945 evolved into eventual zones of occupation for the Allies along national lines. On 5 May 1945 Devers accepted the unconditional surrender of the German Army Group "G", ending the offensive for the Sixth Army Group and marking the start of the occupation of Germany in the Sixth Army Group area of operations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Yeide and Mark Stout, *First to the Rhine: the 6th Army Group in World War II*, (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007); G3, Headquarters Sixth Army Group, Final Report Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: July 1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library; Jeffrey Clarke and Robert Smith. *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1993).

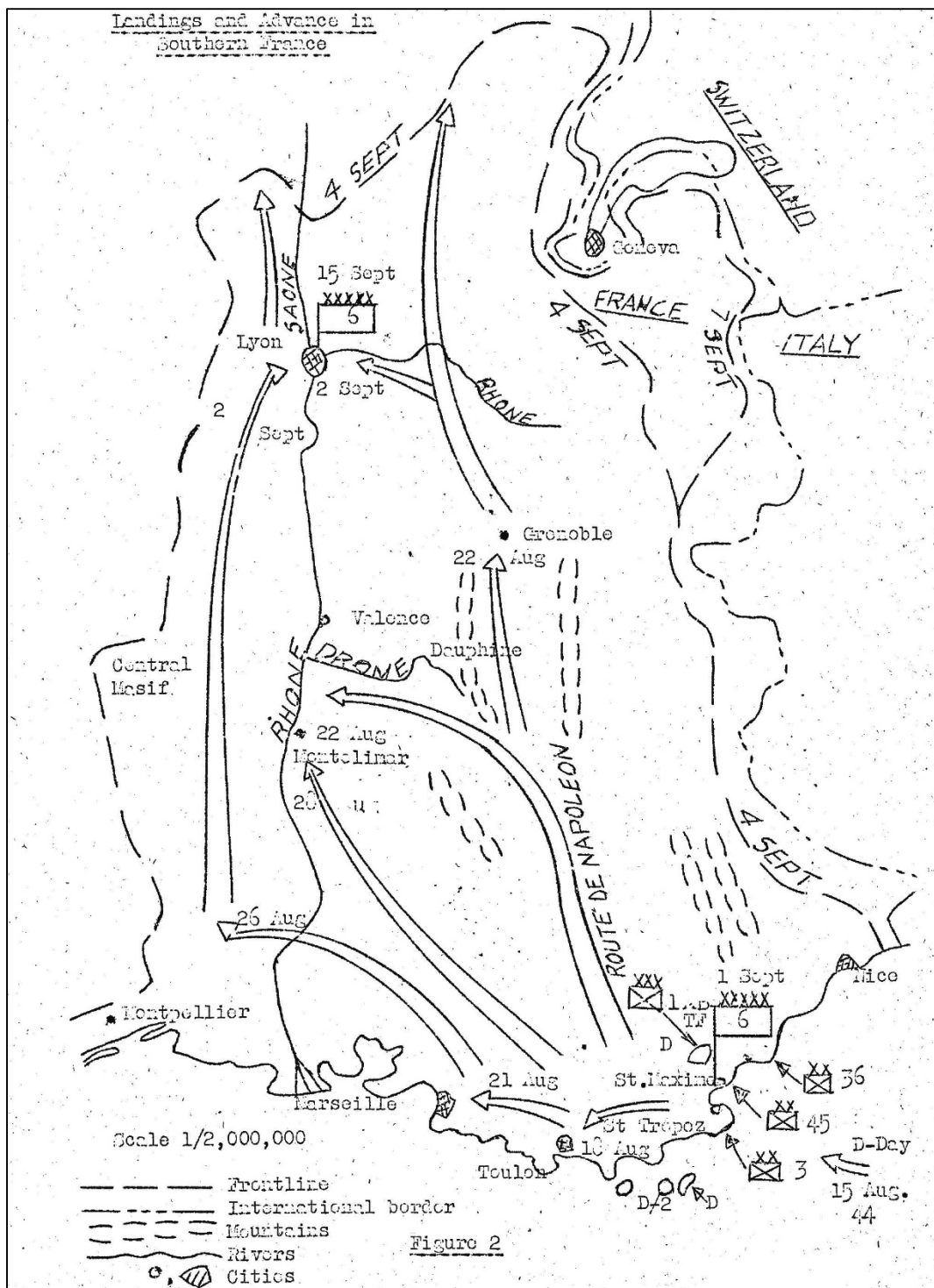


Figure 1. The Invasion of Southern France

Source: G3, Headquarters Sixth Army Group, Final Report, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: July 1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. 13.

Operations by Sixth Army Group are not as familiar to Americans for a variety of reasons. For most Americans there tends to be more attentiveness with the literature on the landings in Normandy and subsequent operations. Although a number of scholars have written about operations in southern France, there remain deficiencies in the literature regarding the scope and significance of the Sixth Army Group. The Second World War provides a wealth of examples frequently studied operations such as Overlord, Market Garden and Cobra. In contrast, events in southern France, beginning with operation Dragoon,<sup>6</sup> have not received the same level of attention as other major actions in the European Theater. No single reason can account for the lack of coverage in historical texts. The most comprehensive account of Sixth Army Group actions during World War II is found in *Rivera to the Rhine*, published by the Center for Military History. The work highlights the importance of the Sixth Army Group conducting military operations in southern France, spanning the early planning phases to the eventual capitulation of Nazi Germany. A more recent publication, by Harry Yeide and Mark Stout, titled *First to Rhine*, highlights the achievements by creating a comprehensive picture of operations in the southern area of Europe. General Devers biography, published in 2015, titled *General Jacob Devers World War II's Forgotten Four Star* and is the first biographical account of Devers. By contrast, better known Generals such as Patton and Bradley have several biographical accounts already published.

While some references focus on the tactical actions of the Sixth Army Group, others are more encompassing of the European Theater of Operations and mainly relate the effect of the

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<sup>6</sup> Anvil was the original operational name for the invasion of southern France. Once the plan was cancelled, delayed and restarted several times it was renamed for security reasons to Dragoon on 1 August 1944. For this monograph the operation will be referred to by its final name Dragoon in order to cover any planning, execution and follow on tactical actions. Headquarters, Sixth Army Group Narrative History, Box 1, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: Narrative History, 1944-1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 1.

relationship between Devers and Eisenhower. Russell Weigley argues in *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* that Eisenhower's coolness toward Devers went beyond the usual explanation that he was not an old friend like George S. Patton, commander of Third Army or Omar N. Bradley, commander of Twelfth Army Group.<sup>7</sup> Rick Atkinson summarized Eisenhower's opinion of Devers more succinctly, "Eisenhower sold him short."<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the relationship between the two men did impair the historical perspective of Devers, and Sixth Army Group by association. While coverage exists in varying degrees, one thing is clear, the Sixth Army Group can teach us much about the way that they incorporated a rebuilt French Army and conducted coalition operations as a part of Eisenhower's broad front strategy to defeat Nazi Germany. Before examining the actions of the Sixth Army Group, it is important to understand the environment in which they operated.

The French political situation in 1944 contributed to the complexity of Dever's operation in regards to the effects of the 1940 defeat, the leadership of Charles De Gaulle, and the formation of a new French Army. France retained the ability to resist German forces in 1940 despite having been operationally defeated. However, after suffering massive casualties in the First World War the French no longer possessed the political will to resist, which left the nation politically and geographically fractured.<sup>9</sup> Under the Armistice of 1940, the German occupation of northern France, to include Paris forced the French government to relocate. Under Marshal Philippe Petain, the new government established itself in the town of Vichy.<sup>10</sup> The Vichy

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<sup>7</sup> Russell Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 580.

<sup>8</sup> Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 366.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1959), 8.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Sweets, *The Politics of Resistance in France 1940-41* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1945), 1.

government tried in vain to extricate France from the war. Germany would eventually occupy the entirety of the French mainland after operation Torch in 1942 and impose reparation demands on the Vichy.<sup>11</sup> A small contingent of Frenchmen led by Charles de Gaulle opposed the idea of negotiations with Germany and sought to keep France in the war. This faction survived abroad in London and became formally known as the French Committee of National Liberation. Informally, they would be known as Free French.<sup>12</sup> In June of 1940, four days before the signing of the Franco-German armistice, Charles de Gaulle made a historic speech over the BBC to the people of France, urging them to continue fighting. From London, he broadcast the words “this war has not been settled by the Battle of France. This war is a world war....whatever happens the flame of resistance must not and will not be extinguished.”<sup>13</sup> He called on all free Frenchmen able to join him on British soil to do so and continue the fight against German occupation. It was within this complex political environment that the United States would integrate the Army of Free France to liberate occupied French territory from German control. French forces previously fought in Northern Africa and Italy as part of the coalition. That prior combat experience set conditions for them to fight in France again and regain territory taken by the Germans in 1940.<sup>14</sup> Further complicating the situation was the differences in operational goals between the Allies.

Several complex factors effected the planning for an invasion of southern France. This complexity was manifest in three ways. First, British reluctance to return to France. Second,

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<sup>11</sup> Gerhard L. Wienberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 138-140.

<sup>12</sup> Marcel Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, (Washington: Center for Military History, 1957), 9.

<sup>13</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 86.

<sup>14</sup> G3, Headquarters Sixth Army Group, Final Report Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: July 1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 5.

agreements made at the Tehran conference about a southern invasion. Third, a shortage of landing craft to accommodate multiple amphibious assaults. A question over the necessity of the invasion of southern France permeates Allied strategic planning conferences in 1943 and 1944. The Allies debated the best way to utilize the large number of forces they had available in the Mediterranean. The debate centered around which operation would engage German forces and relieve pressure on the Soviet Union fighting along the eastern front.<sup>15</sup> Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill favored expanded operations in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations and made no effort to conceal his disdain for the invasion of southern France. After a series of exchanges between Eisenhower and Churchill, over a period of several months, planners on the combined staff completed the invasion plan, approved for execution in August of 1944.<sup>16</sup> At this point in the war, North Africa had been liberated from German control, and Allies were preparing to invade Sicily. The military leaders disagreed over the next phase objectives. The American Chiefs of Staff favored the transfer of resources to invade France, while Britain sought to knock Italy out of the war. The British prevailed, delaying the invasion of France. The concept for an amphibious invasion of southern France would resurface at the Quadrant and Cairo/Tehran conferences. It was at the Tehran conference that British and Americans promised the USSR that the operation would take place.<sup>17</sup> Planners intended to use the southern invasion as a compliment to Overlord. However, limited resources such as landing craft forced Allied planners to shelve their ambition of a southern invasion till after Overlord was completed. After multiple cancellations in favor of other objectives, in the summer of 1944, the Combined Chiefs of Staff began preparations that

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<sup>15</sup> Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, 126-128.

<sup>16</sup> Eisenhower to Marshall, March 27, 1944, in the Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, the War Years: IV, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: the John Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, 413.



would set conditions for the invasion of southern France.<sup>18</sup> The operation was renamed Dragoon because planners feared that due to multiple delays the operation name may have been compromised.<sup>19</sup>

With the success of Operation Overlord in Normandy and the impending breakout in July of 1944, Eisenhower's staff finalized the plans for Dragoon that included the creation of operational objectives, creating an appropriate headquarters, and integrating French Forces into the organization. Operation Overlord had been successful at obtaining a lodgment for the Allies on the European Continent. Eisenhower, as the Supreme Allied Commander, recognized the opportunity to conduct operation Dragoon, which he believed would secure the additional ports that allied operations in Europe required.<sup>20</sup> Almost the entire Army of Free France would serve in southern France, presenting a different array of problems for both planners and the commanders involved. The broad action plan for the invasion was the insertion of three reinforced American combat divisions to assault the beachheads in southern France. Follow on actions would include the expansion of the lodgment to increase combat power and the seizure of ports at Toulon and Marseilles.<sup>21</sup>

The headquarters placed in charge of the invasion was General Alexander M. Patch's Seventh Army. Patch was an extremely gifted commander who had already commanded the XIV Corps at Guadalcanal in the Pacific theater. His contribution to the defeat of the Japanese garnered the attention of General Marshall who assigned him to serve in the European Theater.

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<sup>18</sup> Sixth Army Group, Final Report, 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Headquarters, Sixth Army Group Narrative History, Box 1, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: Narrative History, 1944-1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Clarke and Robert Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1993), 19.

<sup>21</sup> Sixth Army Group, Final Report, 6-7.

It was in southern France that Patch would assume the dual role of an army and an army group commander.<sup>22</sup> The combined forces of France and the United States would provide Patch with three separate armies to coordinate. The follow on operations, after Dragoon, were a massive undertaking that only became more complex with success. Every mile advanced only increased the Seventh Army lines of communication and incorporated new liberated territory that required restoration of civil services. Army planners realized that in order to coordinate these complicated actions they would be required to create a headquarters element capable of managing the operational and logistical requirements within the southern theater of Europe.

Planners recognized the need to activate the Sixth Army Group Headquarters in order to coordinate the operations of two Army's in southern France; one army headquarters would be French and the other would be American.<sup>23</sup> They led a combined force, which provided Eisenhower with additional resources necessary to end the war against Germany. A major component of this force was the First French Army, reorganized in 1944 and given the opportunity to participate in the liberation of France. Sixth Army Group would begin organizing on 1 August 1944, and activate on 15 September 1944.<sup>24</sup> They would not play a large operational role in Dragoon, but continue the important task of establishing a headquarters element and the logistics base necessary to sustain operations inland. As one of three army groups operating in Europe Sixth Army Group would make significant contributions to the eventual defeat of Germany.

In July 1944, Eisenhower employed four army groups in action in Western Europe, each with a different purpose. Along the English channel, Montgomery's twenty-first Army Group

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<sup>22</sup> Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 1993, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Sixth Army Group, Narrative History, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Devers, "Operation Dragoon: The Invasion of Southern France," *Military Affairs*, Summer 1946, 41.

occupied Eisenhower's left flank, integrating Commonwealth and other national forces into the campaign, with the primary purpose of seizing the ports along the coast and leading the liberation of Belgium and the Netherlands. In the center, Bradley's Twelfth Army Group projected power into the French heartland and spearheaded the attack toward the Rhine.<sup>25</sup> In Italy, General Harold R.L.G. Alexander, of Fifteenth Army Group, molded a collection of American and commonwealth forces to capture Italy and maintain pressure on Germany's southern flank.<sup>26</sup> Between them, bridging the Mediterranean and Atlantic fields Dever's Sixth Army Group had several tasks. On the one hand, he had the simple mission being the right flank of the broad advance. On the other, he had the important role of integrating the growing French Army into the campaign.

Sixth Army Group coalition operations in World War II were secondary operation to Overlord and dependent on the integration of the French Army to be successful. Operations in southern France are just as complex in terms of environment, sustainment, and political or social importance as other operations conducted by the Allies during the war. Confounding the situation was the competition between three Army Groups operating in the European Theater of Operations. As a secondary effort Sixth Army Group would not only have to fight the Germans, but compete with fellow allied commands for resources and operational objectives as a part of Eisenhower's broad front strategy.<sup>27</sup> However, without a third Army Group on the continent the two northern groups, commanded by Bradley and Montgomery would have been stretched further and forced to coordinate the operations and logistical support of three additional corps and twelve divisions. The majority of those additional units were part of the largest contingent of the French

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<sup>25</sup> Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1996), 249-251.

<sup>26</sup> Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, 471.

<sup>27</sup> Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 249-25.

Army fighting in Europe and commanded by Devers.<sup>28</sup> We should not forget the actions of Sixth Army Group in one of the most effective coalition wars in history. This monograph will highlight the contributions of Sixth Army Group in order to draw lessons for contemporary planners, ultimately addressing the question: just how effective were Sixth Army Group operations in support of Eisenhower's broad front strategy?

Devers provided the French leadership, led by de Gaulle, with an important element of reestablishing the French State. Many armed factions existed in 1944 that had the potential to disturb France's reintegration into the family of nations. Resistance fighters, including communists, who cooperated against the Nazi but had the potential to turn on one another after the enemy was gone. Former supporters of the Vichy regime who realized it was time to openly support the new government, veterans of the campaigns in North Africa and Italy, and a host of confused young men who had come of age during the occupation. Having grown up in the shadow of the Paris commune and having participated in the Great War and its aftermath, this group sought to restore national unity.<sup>29</sup> Its new army, under Dever's command, would blend these various armed factions into a national force. While not one of Eisenhower's favorites, Devers was effective in resolving national disagreements between the American and French commanders, sustaining the French force in the field, and integrating its combat units into the Allied operation. Accordingly, the current generation of US Army planners can learn how army group commanders and staffs planned for combined actions in this complex, combined and joint environment through careful examination of Sixth Army Group operations in the Second World War.

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<sup>28</sup> Allied Forces. Record of Progress, 6th Army Group: 15 May 1945 (United States: STAT Division, Office SGS 6th Army Group, 1945), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 22-23.

## Resolving Nationalistic Disagreements

When Lord Louis Mountbatten, a British naval officer, became the Supreme Allied Commander for South East Asia Command in August of 1943, he received a letter from General Eisenhower that contained sage advice regarding the nature of coalition command from one allied commander to another. Eisenhower advised him, “It will therefore never be possible to say the problem of establishing unity in any allied command is ever completely solved. This problem involves the human equation and must be met day by day. Patience, tolerance, frankness, absolute honesty in all dealings, particularly with all persons of the opposite nationality, and firmness, are absolutely essential.”<sup>30</sup> When he wrote those words, Eisenhower had experience as the leader of a coalition and understood the complex nature of coalition operations, to include the intricacies involved that make them work. Eisenhower’s assessment that the human element of leadership effects coalition operations came from personal experience. Eisenhower commanded a coalition and had direct experience with the requirements the job demanded. A few months after the invasion of France, Eisenhower had three Army Groups under his command with leaders from different nations. The twenty-first Army Group commanded by British General Montgomery, the Twelfth Army Group under command of General Omar Bradley and the Sixth Army Group under General Devers.<sup>31</sup> The Sixth Army Group consisted of both French and American subordinate units in the command and required Devers to resolve conflict. He was successful in finding resolutions to nationalistic disagreements regarding the unity of his command, unauthorized French occupation of Stuttgart and Ulm, and the defense of Strasbourg.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Memorandum for an Allied Command. For Lord Louis Mountbatten, September 14, 1943, in the Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, the War Years: IV, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: the John Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>31</sup> Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, Appendix D.

<sup>32</sup> The operation of all forces under a single responsible commander who has the requisite authority to direct and employ those forces in pursuit of a common purpose. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0: *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), A-2.

The ability of a commander to resolve nationalistic disagreements is an important aspect of coalition warfare. There are several reasons why this ability is so important. First, the post war political goals of the nations involved in a coalition can often be in direct conflict with one another, causing friction.<sup>33</sup> Second, disagreements can arise from the way in which forces are organized and how those forces achieve military objectives related to political post war goals. Lastly, the ability of the commander to facilitate unity between those individuals involved in the coalition is important to create a shared sense of purpose for operations. Devers wrote that the first task of a coalition commander is to establish harmony with and between the individual leaders in the organization.<sup>34</sup> As the commander of Sixth Army Group, Devers demonstrated this ability to understand the complicated nature of coalition operations and to resolve the differences in order to achieve his military objective. He encountered several nationalistic disagreements that could have resulted in the separation of the unit. However, he reacted in a way that kept the unit together and working toward a common goal.

Coalition warfare is a tenuous and complex activity, which requires commanders to confront and solve the problems of organizing and leading complicated organizations. Coalitions are short in duration, having been formed out of necessity in response to a particular situation. This hasty formation makes them politically fragile in nature, further complicating the situation. This political fragility may cause problems at the strategic and tactical levels as members seek to work toward a common goal while receiving conflicting directives from different political leaders. The level of military participation will also vary across the partnering components.<sup>35</sup> For

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<sup>33</sup> Jacob L. Devers, "Major Problems Confronting a Theater Commander in Combined Operations", *Military Review*, 77, no. 1 (Oct 1947), 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Scales, "Trust, Not Technology, Sustains Coalitions." *Parameters* (Winter 1998), 6.

example, some members may only participate in a symbolic manner due to the weak nature of their national military. The political environment shapes the level of participation for each member. In southern France, the participation of the First French Army was more than just symbolic. French forces made significant contributions on the battlefield, but political constraints complicated the situation.

The French political situation was the source for one aspect of nationalistic disagreements. It was not until 26 August 1944, two weeks after Operation Dragoon that authorities in France and the United States reached a formal civil affairs agreement. This agreement authorized General Eisenhower, as the Supreme Commander, to deal with the French Committee of National Liberation as the authority to make decisions on behalf of France.<sup>36</sup> The French Committee of National Liberation was led by a dynamic French leader named Charles de Gaulle. He sought to strengthen the position of his political body through military action. When France went to war with Germany in 1940, it had done so as a divided state. The resulting defeat only served to strengthen this divide.<sup>37</sup> This created conditions for French leadership that made it particularly sensitive to the dynamics of the coalition. Because of this, Devers, as the commander of Sixth Army Group, had to balance French national goals and war aims against his tactical objectives. This tension presented itself in multiple ways over the course of the war, to include the task organization of Sixth Army Group and selection of military objectives for coalition units. The issue of command over the Sixth Army Group would be one way that France and the United States had a disagreement that required resolution.

The first nationalistic disagreement that Devers had to face was over the unity of command with Sixth Army Group. The urgency over unity of command for Devers arose from

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<sup>36</sup> Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 319-320.

<sup>37</sup> Sweets, *The Politics of Resistance in France 1940-1941*, 3.

the political desire to keep the French from taking the lead, commanding an Army Group in Europe. For Sixth Army Group the formation and organization of the unit rose out of necessity after French political considerations helped to shape the conditions. The presence of two field armies in southern France, and the preponderance of those forces being French, led to the call by De Gaulle to identify a senior French ground commander to lead the army. The Allies were reluctant to agree to this proposition and rejected the idea. They reached a compromise with the French that resulted in the formation of Sixth Army Group, which would command the First French Army and the US Seventh Army.<sup>38</sup> The French would settle for an independent Army Command under the leadership of a US Army Group. Additionally, the lack of French experience in amphibious landings and limited supply capabilities were additional factors in the decision to create a US Army Group to command both French and American forces in southern France. This step kept key support activities such as civil affairs, logistics and major tactical decisions in the hands of American Forces while enabling the French to contribute significantly in a symbolic and tangible way.

De Gaulle displayed reluctance in subordinating military forces to a coalition led by the United States. The loss of immediate control over those forces presents a problem for nations that contribute military forces to coalitions in general. This was especially true for the Sixth Army Group working in southern France. France and the United States would disagree on multiple levels and over multiple issues; however they had the same final goal in mind to defeat Germany and liberate France.<sup>39</sup> Disagreements over tactical decisions between the military and political leaders of France and the United States created friction within the command. This friction shaped operations for General Devers as he pursued military objectives. Devers did a superb job of keeping his forces focused on the final goal of defeating Germany. However, there would be

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<sup>38</sup> Clarke and Smith. *Riviera to the Rhine*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 26.



multiple obstacles along the way. While the First French Army was under his command, Devers often had to contend with conflicting guidance provided by the French government directly to the French First Army.<sup>40</sup> However, Devers would face multiple challenges during the campaign over unauthorized French occupation of German territory.

During the course of operations against Germany, the disagreement over the French occupation of Stuttgart and Ulm demonstrate the unique tensions in Sixth Army Group when military objectives conflicted with political goals. The French First Army was not just a part of the Sixth Group coalition; it was still an instrument of the French government's post war political agenda. In the spring of 1945, the First French Army, under pressure from de Gaulle seized the town of Stuttgart in a double envelopment. De Gaulle sought to expand French post war occupation of German territory and issued orders to the French commander, de Lattre to seize the town using the French First Army. General Devers planned to use Stuttgart to support the US Seventh Army and urged de Lattre to advance with caution and ensure that allied flanks were secure. De Lattre ordered one French Corps to seize the town of Stuttgart while the other occupied the Black Forest.<sup>41</sup> Most of this maneuver did not meet military necessity, but was strictly supporting the Free French Organizations post war agenda. De Lattre would later state that he did not deem it advisable to discuss the occupation of Stuttgart with Devers. He reasoned that their rights to the city were unquestionable and that the town should belong to the French since their soldiers were the ones to capture it.<sup>42</sup> Afterward Devers assessed the situation and deemed that Stuttgart would better serve the needs of the US Seventh Army as a base for logistics. Devers ordered French soldiers out of the city and the Seventh Army to occupy in their

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<sup>40</sup> Jacob L. Devers, interview by Forrest C. Pogue, August 12, 1958. Tape 68, Copy 2 Transcript, George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, VA.

<sup>41</sup> John A. Adams, *General Jacob Devers World War II's Forgotten Four Star* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 364-365.

<sup>42</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the First French Army*, 490.

place.<sup>43</sup> This incident prompted an exchange of responses that eventually rose to the national level.

To resolve the situation in Stuttgart, both Devers and de Lattre exchanged correspondence with one another while simultaneously appealing to their higher headquarters. Upon receiving the order, de Lattre immediately appealed to de Gaulle as the chief of the French Provisional Government for direction. De Gaulle's response was direct. He ordered de Lattre to maintain a French presence in Stuttgart, implement a military government and communicate the French policy to maintain control over all occupied territory until the Allies agreed to a French zone of occupation.<sup>44</sup> De Lattre let Devers know that the city was available to meet the needs of the Sixth Army Group, but that occupation of the city would remain with the French. For Devers, the situation was no longer about the utility of the city in a purely military sense. The violation of orders by a subordinate military commander in direct conflict with Devers own orders presented a situation that he deemed unacceptable.<sup>45</sup>

Further complicating the situation were reports from the press of mass looting, rape, and general dysfunction in the city of Stuttgart. Devers traveled to the city on 27 April 1945, accompanied by Henry Lodge, the Sixth Army Group Liaison for the French First Army, to assess the situation. After his visit, once Devers determined that the city was of no use for his original plans, he admonished de Lattre to gain control of the allegation of abuse that had arose in the media. With French soldiers firmly in place, Devers adjusted the boundaries to legitimize the

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from General Jacob Devers to General de Lattre de Tassigny, 28 April 1945, Box 1, Reel2, Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>44</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 432.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from General de Lattre de Tassigny to General Jacob Devers, 26 April 1945, Box 1, Reel 2, Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

move by the French First Army.<sup>46</sup> In Stuttgart, the French had established a foothold from which they would further carve out a zone of occupation.

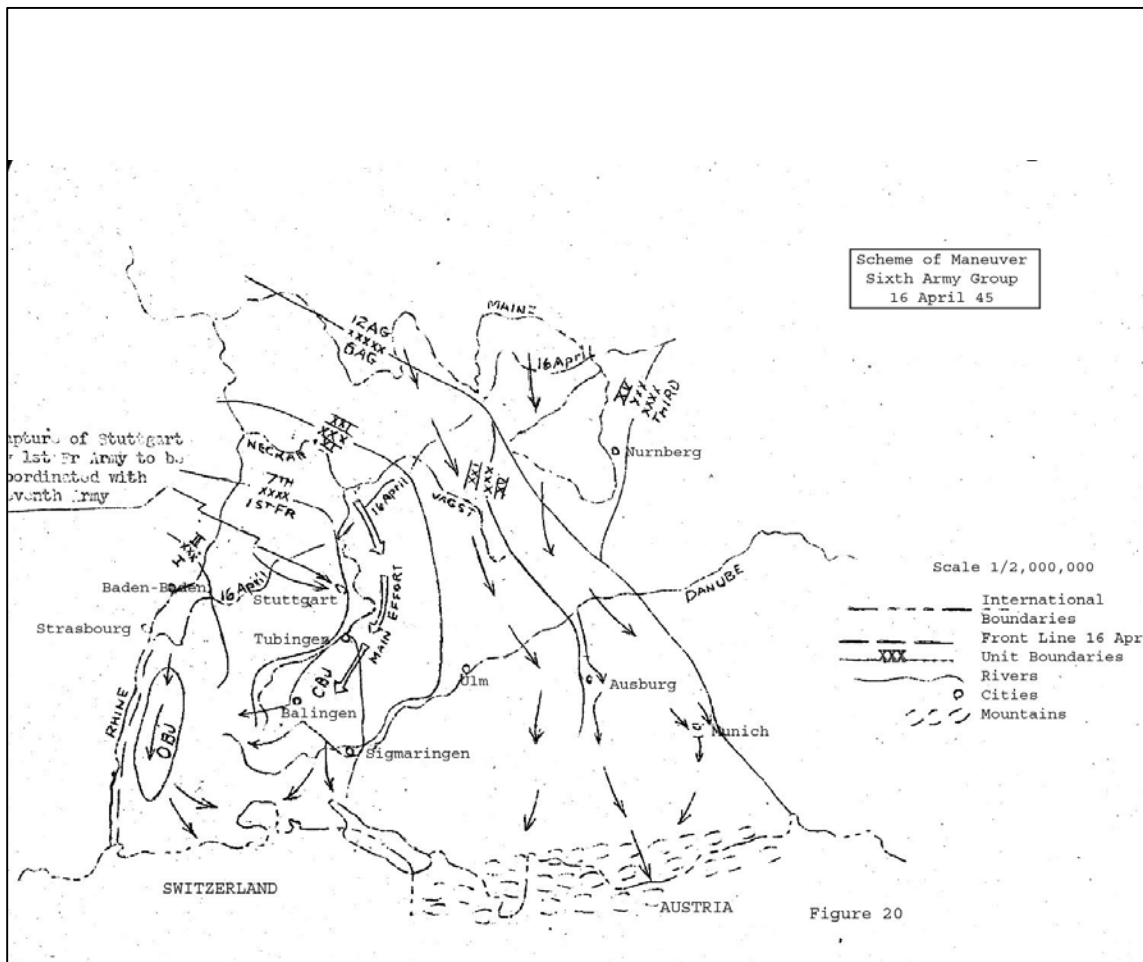


Figure 2. The capture of Stuttgart and Ulm

*Source:* G3, Headquarters Sixth Army Group, Final Report, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: July 1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. 78.

French intransigence again prevailed in the city of Ulm, as Sixth Army Group advanced further east against Germany. The city was the center state for Napoleon’s triumph over the Austrians in 1805, effectively ending the war of the Third Coalition. The original boundaries

<sup>46</sup> Adams, *General Jacob Devers*, 364-365.

drawn by General Devers did not include Ulm in the French boundary; in fact, it was a full forty miles east of the boundary. The American 44th Armored Division was supposed to capture it. De Lattre ordered elements of his unit to attack Ulm against orders. Fortunately, the American and French armored units recognized each other and there was no bloodshed between the units. The French helped to capture the town and once again the French flag flew over the city.<sup>47</sup> When Devers found out that the French First Army had sent units deep into what was a Seventh Army area of operations he angrily ordered De Lattre to withdraw out of the city and back to his own lines. General de Lattre wrote to Devers, “in view of the fact that my chief of government has given me precise terms in my actions to be taken, I can exert no initiative of my own on the matter.”<sup>48</sup> Unable to resolve the situation at his level, Devers appealed to the Supreme Allied Commander to resolve the situation. His frustration over the situation is evident in his letters to Eisenhower, in which he stated that he could not tolerate “such interference with [Sixth Army Group’s] tactical operations by the chief of the French Government and the Commanding General.”<sup>49</sup> Devers requested Eisenhower’s headquarters to take action to correct the situation. Devers once again adjusted the boundary to keep the lines of communication clear for his subordinate units. To further ease transition, Devers set objectives for the French in the south rather than in the east. The French First Army quietly withdrew and moved on to future objectives. Devers said, regarding the incident, “Ulm was another Napoleonic thing de Lattre had to take.”<sup>50</sup> However, while Devers was adjusting to the situation at the tactical level, the strategic

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<sup>47</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 430-431.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from General de Lattre de Tassigny to General Jacob Devers, 26 April 1945, Box 1, Reel 2, Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from General Jacob Devers to General Eisenhower, 28 April 1945, Box 1, Reel 2, Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, *General Jacob Devers*, 366.

level leaders continued to engage one another.

The response to the situation in Stuttgart and Ulm required military and political dialog from leaders within both France and the United States to address the situation. While Devers appealed to SHAEF for support from the Supreme Commander, Eisenhower submitted his official protest over Stuttgart to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and De Gaulle. In a letter to De Gaulle, Eisenhower assured the French politician that General Devers and Eisenhower did not consider French occupation zones when they made military decisions as they were outside of their scope of influence. The ultimate goal for Eisenhower and Devers was the military defeat of Germany. Eisenhower further stated that circumstance forced him to accept the situation, as he was unwilling to take action that would jeopardize the military effectiveness of the Sixth Army Group.<sup>51</sup> De Gaulle blamed the lack of agreement between France and the Allies on post war policies, specifically the occupation of German territory. This may have been the product of the planning efforts by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, which had no French representation and therefore did not consider French National political interests when making decisions. The failure to obey a direct military order by French forces was a violation of the agreement between the United States and France in exchange for equipping the French military with US equipment. De Gaulle used his position to influence the Allies and in May 1945, the French and Allies agreed on a French zone of occupation and the definitive role the French would play in the establishment of post war policy.<sup>52</sup> These exchanges between two armed forces over a military objective resonated at the highest level and changed policy for each sides respective governments. While the issue over Stuttgart and Ulm tested the limits of Devers patience, his actions to support the French at

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<sup>51</sup> Letter to General Alphonse Pierre Juin from General Eisenhower. January 24, 1945 in the Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, the War Years: IV, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>52</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 433.

Strasbourg stand as a testament to his ability as a coalition commander.

Finally, in dealing with the possible withdrawal from Strasbourg, Devers demonstrated the ability to balance the requirements between tactical principles and political objectives in order to appease members of the coalition. The capture of the town of Strasbourg was important, but the terrain north of the town provided Sixth Army Group a location at which they could potentially cross the Rhine River and attack deeper into German territory. After a series of successful attacks, the Sixth Army Group held the German town of Strasbourg and stood postured to attack across the Rhine river into the heart of Germany.<sup>53</sup> Eisenhower's original plan had his forces advancing into Germany in a broad front. He wanted General Bradley's Twelfth and General Montgomery's Twenty-first Army Group to advance abreast in wide columns. Montgomery would attack north through Belgium and capture the Ruhr industrial area. Bradley would advance south of the Ardennes Forest and seize the Saar industrial region. Sixth Army Group in the far south protected Patton's right flank<sup>54</sup>. Politically, this strategy kept the two northern Army Groups advancing together and did not favor one country over the other. Eisenhower could not permit one general or army to receive all the credit for defeating Nazi Germany if he was going to keep the coalition together. Eisenhower's strategy was in jeopardy when the Sixth Army Group was the first to reach the Rhine River and began planning operations to cross into the heart of Germany. In an effort to maintain his own coalition Eisenhower ordered the Sixth Army Group to pull back out of Strasbourg, a city in the Alsace region that held great symbolic importance for the French.

For the French, the liberation of Strasbourg held great importance politically and strategically. Strasbourg was in the Alsace region, a contested area that Germany and France had

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<sup>53</sup> Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 495-496.

<sup>54</sup> David P. Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg: Ike's Strategic Mistake to Halt the Sixth Army Group at the Rhine in 1944* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 45-46.

annexed. It had been conquered and exchanged several times in the last 50 years. It was in the city of Strasbourg that the French national anthem, the Marseillaise was first sung in 1792.<sup>55</sup> The occupation of the city of Strasbourg made significant gains in restoring French national honor and prestige. The day after allied occupation of the city, Eisenhower was visiting Sixth Army Group when he learned that Devers intended to cross the Rhine. Devers proposed that he be given additional forces to accomplish this. Eisenhower did not grant him additional forces and even went so far as to order Devers not to attack across the Rhine. Montgomery and Bradley had not made the same level of progress in the north, and Eisenhower wanted Devers to shorten his defensive line in order to make additional forces available to assist the north if they were required.<sup>56</sup> It was in this context that a series of decisions made by Eisenhower created friction for Devers and Sixth Army Group with the French as they held the city of Strasbourg.

In order to maintain his broad front strategy, Eisenhower ordered Devers to pull his forces back and form a defensive position on the eastern slopes of the Vosges Mountains.<sup>57</sup> This action would force Devers and his Sixth Army Group to abandon the city of Strasbourg to German reoccupation, something that would be nothing short of a political disaster for the French and subject the citizens living there to harsh German retribution. Devers was reluctant to obey the order and managed to artfully delay the actions of his Army Group. Devers ordered General Patch to have one of his Corps prepare a series of withdrawal positions that they could occupy “only in the face of heavy attack.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time, Devers began to argue his case with Eisenhower, sending his chief of staff to SHAEF headquarters to try to get the order changed.

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<sup>55</sup> Franklin Louis Gurley, “Policy Versus Strategy: The Defense of Strasbourg in Winter 1944-1945,” *The Journal of Military History* 58, (1994): 481.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 483.

<sup>57</sup> Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 495-496.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 496.

As predicted, the French objected violently to any withdrawal from the region that would leave Strasbourg undefended. De Gaulle learned of the plan almost immediately and had his chief of staff, General Juin, protest to SHAEF in writing, even offering three additional divisions of French Forces of the Interior (FFI) to help defend the city of Strasbourg if required. De Gaulle sent a message to the First French Army under de Lattre and ordered him to defend Strasbourg even if the Allies withdrew from the region. De Lattre now had two orders, one from Devers to pull the First French Army line back to the Vosges by 5 January 1945, and the other from de Gaulle to defend Strasbourg at all costs. He could not do both. In a display of loyalty to Devers, de Lattre sent a message to de Gaulle stating that the decision to defend Strasbourg was a matter that could affect the overall Allied Strategy. He needed the French government and SHAEF to resolve the situation.<sup>59</sup> However, de Gaulle was prepared to go so far as to remove the First French Army from Allied control and fight against Germany alone if necessary. In response, Eisenhower threatened to withdraw all American logistics support to French Forces. De Gaulle responded, “the outraged French people forbid the use of its railroads and communications.”<sup>60</sup> Realizing that the situation required further consideration, the supreme commander modified his order to Devers and canceled the withdrawal. Devers initial delay on the order to withdrawal had bought him six days in which de Gaulle was able to effectively argue for the cancellation of the original order. For his part, de Lattre demonstrated a considerable amount of loyalty toward Devers, who was reluctantly ordering him to withdraw his soldiers out of Strasbourg and into defensive positions. In doing so de Lattre was in direct conflict with de Gaulle, who insisted on following only Allied orders that were in accordance with French national interests. The controversy over the town of Strasbourg stands as another example of when national interests do

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<sup>59</sup> Gurley, “Policy Versus Strategy”, 502.

<sup>60</sup> Adams, *General Jacob Devers*, 308.



not align with military objectives. Fortunately, for Sixth Army Group, Devers was willing to delay the order from Eisenhower in order to plead his case and resolve the situation without losing the support of the French.

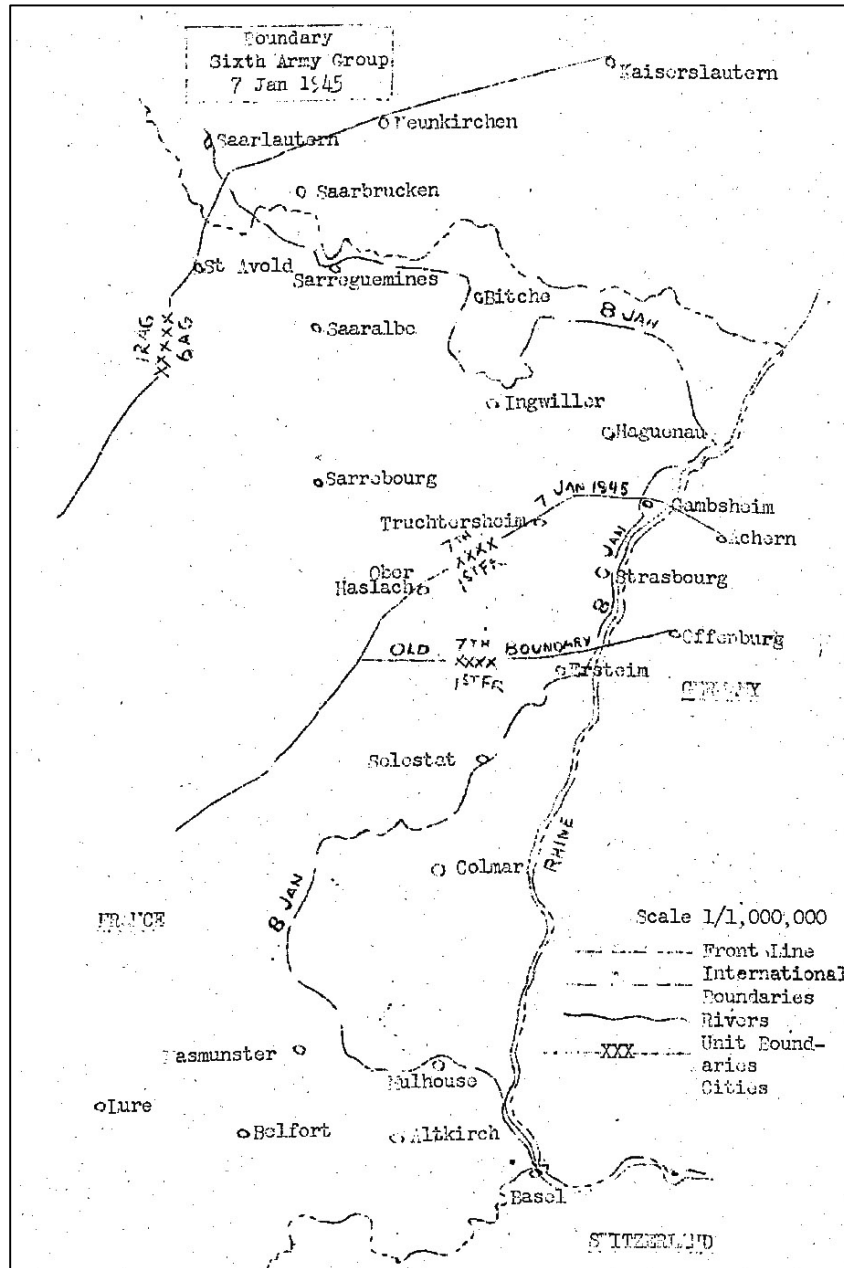


Figure 3. The defense of Strasbourg

Source: G3, Headquarters Sixth Army Group, Final Report, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: July 1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 46.

The operations conducted by Sixth Army Group in southern France demonstrate what can happen at the operational level when the members of a coalition fail to agree on political goals. The subsequent operational objectives can often lead to conflict as members each strive to influence the situation in their favor. The formation of Sixth Army Group and subsequent operational experiences in Stuttgart and Strasbourg were significant problems for General Devers. He had to balance his military objectives with political interests while maintaining the trust of his subordinate commanders. At times, Devers had to deal with direct disobedience of orders as the French sought to use their military to achieve postwar political objectives. Devers had to manage the differences that arise when two armies work together from different nations under the stress of war. He did a tremendous job working with the French and demonstrated that he was a commander who understood the need to resolve nationalistic differences in order to achieve military success. De Lattre would write of Devers after the war that, despite the situation, his “even temper never deserted him.”<sup>61</sup> Devers possessed all the abilities and characteristics that Eisenhower wrote a coalition commander should show. Even though he was unable to adequately solve the problem of unity within the Sixth Army Group, Devers made it work between the American and French units under his command. Dever’s ability to resolve the conflict was critical to the success of Sixth Army Group operations.

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<sup>61</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the First French Army*, 301.

## Sustaining Operations

In the Fall of 1943, Charles de Gaulle recognized that the success of Allied landings in Europe and the liberation of occupied territory provided the French people with an opportunity for national unity fighting against Nazi Germany. As a result of the invasion, Frenchmen from recently liberated towns and cities sought to join the French Army and fight for their homeland. De Gaulle estimated that the number of men rallying to the flag would constitute another seven divisions for the French Army. To accommodate the number of volunteers expected, he ordered the Minister of War to call up draftees from the classes of 1940-43, to replace losses at the front and reopen military schools in France. Many of these volunteers were already fighting in the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). This was a chance for de Gaulle to incorporate the FFI into the official military and continue their service. These visions became reality. The Minister of War called up draftees, and military schools opened for training. Unfortunately, the problem was not the number of willing participants, but one of providing the necessary equipment for such soldiers. There no longer existed within France a place that was capable of manufacturing the weapons, vehicles and uniforms for additional forces. The resistance fighters, integrated into the French Army, would bring with them small arms and even a few vehicles, but in order to fight the Germans these new French units would require heavy armament. As a result, the French government was reliant on the United States to furnish the necessary weapons and supplies required to operationally employ these forces. This dependence created animosity between France and the United States as French expectations exceeded the capacity and willingness of the Americans to provide the amount of supplies requested. De Gaulle would famously describe the goodwill of the United States as “scanty”.<sup>62</sup> De Gaulle’s description of American support to his military seemed misplaced since the United States would equip and train eight French divisions

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<sup>62</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, translated by Jonathan Griffin and Richard Howard, (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998), 699-703.

abroad with three additional divisions trained in France before the end of the war.<sup>63</sup> French soldiers marched off to war in 1940, dressed in French uniforms and carrying French equipment. When the French Army returned with the Allies, to liberate France from German occupation, they were wearing dyed uniforms and carrying a variety of US equipment, to include captured German weapons and ammo.<sup>64</sup> In the span of a few years, elements of the French Army were routed, captured or destroyed. They returned with the Allies reequipped and trained to defeat Germany. The logistical sustainment of the Sixth Army Group relied on the rehabilitation of the French First Army and the establishment of a supply system in southern France that would facilitate sustained operations against Germany. Despite this, the French First Army struggled to adapt to an American logistics system, which at times hindered operations in southern France.

French attempts to regain combat strength, within their military, led to the rebirth of the French Army without sufficient consideration for how they would logistically support the force; causing several problems for the Allies. First, the lack of service soldiers, within French units, had an effect on their ability to conduct lengthy operations independent of allied supply networks. Second, in order to supply military forces over long distances, Sixth Army Group and the Allies took advantage of existing infrastructure, within southern France, sufficient to enable operations for both American and French Units. Third, shortages of critical supplies, such as artillery ammunition, were often the result of differences in doctrinal employment and effected both sustainment and operations for the Allies. Finally, the ability to meet French demands for logistic support proved difficult as French leaders and units struggled to succeed in a quartermaster system designed and run by the US Army.

Before the French Army could become a contributing member of the coalition it would

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<sup>63</sup> Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Gen. Jacob Devers, interview by Dr. Maclyn Burg, 4 February 1975, Transcript, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

have to be rehabilitated. To do this it would have to overcome political constraints, created by the competing factions within the French government and reach a feasible solution for rearmament with the Allies. France would have more men than the Allies were able or willing to logistically support. Early difficulties arose out of a divide for French loyalty between de Gaulle and General Henri Honore Giraud. The rivalry between the two men often caused difficulty for the Allies when deciding which leader they would support. De Gaulle established himself as the head of the Free French, in London, while Giraud remained in command of French colonial forces, in North Africa. After the Allied invasion of North Africa, the two men joined forces and formed the French Committee of National Liberation. Eventually the United States would recognize the French Committee of National Liberation, as a political body with limited functions.<sup>65</sup> The British started as early as 1940 supplying French resistance forces. For the next two and a half years, these forces would be British equipped and trained.<sup>66</sup> Initial attempts by de Gaulle to engage the United States on large-scale rearmament were unsuccessful. The invasion of Africa brought a large number of French soldiers into the United States sphere of influence and began to sway US policy. The United States gradually began to provide equipment to the French Army under an expanded lend-lease program. By doing this, the United States was able to furnish equipment to soldiers already on ground rather than solve the problem of shipping soldiers into theater from North America.<sup>67</sup> The question, for the United States, was how to best accomplish the rearmament and at what scale. Planners realized that the support provided to French units would

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<sup>65</sup> Pogue, *Supreme Command*, 142.

<sup>66</sup> Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Robert W. Coakley and Richard M. Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943*, United States Army in World War II Series: The War Department (Washington, DC: United States Army, Chief of Military History, 1955), 512-15.

have an adverse effect on production for other Allied units.<sup>68</sup> France and the United States reached an agreement to equip eleven French Divisions, within the limits of US production and shipping. Out of this agreement, the First French Army would come into existence and assume a more significant role in the military defeat of Nazi Germany, in Europe.

French units would fight in North Africa and Italy, but the First French Army fighting in southern France would come to symbolize the rearmament process. However, the lack of service soldiers in direct support of combat units presented problems for Sixth Army Group during extended operations. The First French Army initially contained two corps with seven divisions. Some of the divisions had already experienced combat in Italy. The Army consisted of a collection of colonial, infantry and armored divisions to include specialty units, such as reconnaissance regiments, engineers, tank destroyers, and service units. The force totaled over 250,000 soldiers and presented a large number of the allied strength in southern France.<sup>69</sup> However, the French army would never contain the support forces necessary to sustain operations independent of Allied support.<sup>70</sup> To maintain such a force required more service units than the French leadership were willing to divert from combat roles. This would be a consistent problem throughout the war. The majority of service units that would support the coalition would be American, especially early on in the invasion. Many of the colonial units lacked the skills or education necessary to perform their duties outside of the infantry. Devers knew he could not sustain Sixth Army Group operations, without increased French logistics capabilities and offered to support French operations at the port and base service units. However, the Army would be required to provide its own support at the corps level and below. Despite this attempt to force

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<sup>68</sup> Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, 54-55.

<sup>69</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the First French Army*, 28-29.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 28-29.

French organization, the United States estimated, based on eight divisions, that the French Army would be short approximately 60,000 service personnel. Realizing that in order to operate as a coalition, the US would be required to provide the necessary support to combat soldiers on both sides. In a compromise, the US declared that service units could be employed in indirect support of French combat units under specific circumstances. This could occur only when French units were working as a part of a coalition, under a US command, and when such support was required by US combat units to accomplish mission objectives.<sup>71</sup> These criteria were met within Sixth Army Group and allowed for Devers to arrange his forces to support both French and US units. However, the shortage of service personnel would remain a consistent problem for Sixth Army Group and at times effect operations.

Sixth Army Group was able to use and repair existing French infrastructure such as highways, railway and ports to facilitate operations in southern France. The presence of the ports of Marseilles and Toulon were important factors in the initial decision to invade southern France. Having these two ports operational would significantly increase Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces Command (SHAEF) ability to support additional forces in the European Theater. Marseilles was the main objective, with ten basins and thirteen miles of quay, most of which were supported by rail. Basins are wider bodies of water which allow cargo ships to turn and a quay is a platform made of various material that allows for the unloading of ships.<sup>72</sup> These features made Marseilles ideal to facilitate the influx of supplies and sustain operations in the south, increasing the amount of equipment flowing into the theater. Initially supplies would flow over the beachhead, but with the capture of the ports, the engineers set to work repairing facilities

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<sup>71</sup> Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 167-168.

<sup>72</sup> Roland G. Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume II* (Washington, DC: United States Army, Chief of Military History, 1959), 117-119.

first, in order to increase the flow of logistics.<sup>73</sup> Freight from the ports moved in a combination of rail and road networks. Rail operations began in limited form, as early as August 17, 1944. Two days after the invasion, supplies began to move to the forward lines by rail and then by truck. By mid September, the rail lines extended some 220 miles inland from the beachhead. A shortage of rail cars and qualified personnel to operate the line limited the ability of the rail networks to provide their operational capacity of 14,000 tons a day.<sup>74</sup> The transportation corps delivered the majority of supplies, collected at the railhead, to the front lines. By December 1944, over 700 trucks delivered supplies daily to both armies of Sixth Army Group.<sup>75</sup> The ability of Sixth Army Group to capitalize on existing logistical support systems, in order to conduct operations, was a major factor in their success against Germany.

Despite efforts to support French units during operations, the logistical issues that plagued Sixth Army Group remained, as French personnel were unable to operate effectively within the American supply system. Initially the success of the invasion exceeded expectations and strained the lines of supply. General de Lattre did not hesitate to relay his displeasure with the adequacy of supplies provided to his Army. He addressed the issue saying that his Army had received 8,715 tons of supplies, while Patch's Seventh Army had received 18,920 tons, at the end of September 1944. This problem required a conference between the commanders in order to resolve the conflict. Devers determined that there was a discrepancy in the amount of supplies provided; with the Americans receiving an increased allotment over the French. He ordered the Seventh Army to meet the immediate logistical needs of the French Army. Moreover, Sixth Army Group logistics personnel recomputed the allocations in order to increase the French allotment; in

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<sup>73</sup> Seventh Army History, 328.

<sup>74</sup> Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume II*, 156-160.

<sup>75</sup> Record of Progress, 6th Army Group, 26.



addition, they provided 60,000 gallons of extra fuel to meet the short-term needs of the Army. The first rail shipments began to arrive in early October and the staff was able to meet the short-term requirements until they arrived. These types of problems would continue to occur within Sixth Army Group. American units out performed their French counterparts because of the inadequacy of French supply systems and the knowledgeable personnel to run them. The Seventh Army was familiar with the system of logistics in theater and overall better at requisitioning the necessary equipment. The result was that Sixth Army Group logistics section would have to fill in the gaps and approve special supply considerations for the French Army, in order to continue operations.<sup>76</sup>

One of the major problems that Devers consistently faced was the availability of artillery ammunition. In the early phases of the invasion, the Sixth Army Group possessed adequate supplies to keep field artillery guns firing in support of combat operations. However, the effect on future operations became clear when the Sixth Army Group Headquarters identified the differences in expenditure between French and American units. In November of 1944, Sixth Army Group went on the offensive against the Germans. This offensive consumed a high amount of artillery ammunition, in the early phases, and tapered off as the German lines were broken and breaches exploited by infantry soldiers on the ground. While American units practiced this type of reduction in artillery ammunition expenditure, the same attentiveness was not evident in the French First Army. The French continued to fire their artillery shells at a “lavish” rate, much longer into the offensive operations than their American counterparts. French consumption rates caused the Sixth Army Group to resupply the French from the artillery ammunition reserve held at the headquarters, to include part of the December supply. In order to reduce this type of outflow in the future, the Sixth Army Group Headquarters resorted to providing artillery

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<sup>76</sup> Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 299-301.

ammunition to the French, only for specific operations for the remainder of 1944.<sup>77</sup> Devers commented on the situation, saying that there was always plenty of rifle ammunition; it was the artillery ammunition which Sixth Army Group was short.<sup>78</sup> The problems of allocating ammunition would become a theater wide issue and SHAEF would assume oversight of the forecasting process in the middle of December 1944. It was then that SHAEF assumed control of all ammunition resources in France and provided allocations based on the number of guns, average firing rate and the creation of a reserve for major operations.<sup>79</sup> With SHAEF in charge of artillery ammunition, it did not solve the ammunition shortage. However, it did make the issue a theater level problem and allowed Sixth Army Group to focus on operational plans.

The rehabilitation and operational employment of the French Army constitutes a significant achievement for the Allies during the war. Despite obstacles along the way, this set conditions for the French First Army to participate in the liberation of France. France was able to field an Army, securing a position to negotiate post war settlements, because of assistance in rebuilding the French Army provided by the United States. Only the large-scale reentry of France, into the war, placed her in a position to negotiate settlements and participate in a meaningful way to the security of the European Theater.<sup>80</sup> While problems may have seemed insurmountable, the rehabilitation of the French Army was completed in a relatively short period of time and provided the French government with the military and political leverage necessary to contribute to the final victory over Germany.

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<sup>77</sup> Sixth Army Group, Final Report, 95-96.

<sup>78</sup> Jacob L. Devers, interview by Forrest C. Pogue, 100.

<sup>79</sup> Sixth Army Group, Final Report, 97.

<sup>80</sup> Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 400.

### **Integration of the French First Army**

In the summer of 1944, during the final planning phase for Operation Dragoon, General Patch, Commander of the Seventh Army, made the decision that immediately after securing a foothold on the southern coast of France he would send US forces north towards the Durance River in order to block any German advance from the north and protect the beachheads. The Third Infantry Division would carry out this mission with the purpose of allowing French forces, led by General de Lattre, the opportunity to capture key ports at Toulon and Marseilles. The capture of the ports was critical to the success of the invasion, by providing allied forces a significant lodgment from which they could bring in additional forces and supplies. When hearing of this plan de Lattre's response to the American commander was, "General Patch, you are giving me a tremendous task. Do you expect my army to accomplish both these missions?" At which point General Patch replied, "Well, General, I feel that since Toulon and Marseilles both are French ports and French cities of such great importance, the honor of their capture obviously should go to the French Army."<sup>81</sup> De Lattre replied, "I will capture both Toulon and Marseilles...and I'll have them both in two weeks." The actual capture of both ports took the French only ten days.

This story tells us the importance of incorporating forces into a coalition, in order to effectively capture military objectives and create unity towards a common purpose. Additionally, it speaks to the way in which political considerations can influence decisions at the tactical level. In this specific case the French Forces were still relatively untested in amphibious operations by comparison to their American counterparts. The Third Infantry Division was a battle hardened unit with several amphibious landings on their record. Patch demonstrates his understanding of

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<sup>81</sup> Jacob L. Devers, "Operation Dragoon: The Invasion of Southern France", *Military Affairs*, Summer 1946, 31.

the political characterization of the conflict. Patch uses his experienced unit the, Third Infantry Division, to act as a blocking force in the north in case of a German counter attack. He gave the mission to capture the port to his French Forces and they did not disappoint him. De Lattre and his Army capture both ports in less than ten days when planners originally thought it would take upwards of two weeks.<sup>82</sup> The integration of the French Army, through established operational and administrative systems, the willingness of individuals in key staff and command positions to make the coalition work, and the contributions of the French Forces of the Interior leading to their eventual integration, were major factors in the success of Sixth Army Group coalition operations.

The integration of the French Army into the Sixth Army Group was important for several reasons. First the French government was able to provide a military force that made up forty percent of the Sixth Army Group overall available forces.<sup>83</sup> This number only grew as the Allies moved east across Europe towards Germany. As they liberated France, the FFI already fighting in the European Theater were absorbed into the ranks, increasing the number of soldiers available and the level of intelligence that forces familiar with the local area were able to provide. Second the relationships between the staff and commanders, within the Sixth Army Group Headquarters, affected operations and influenced decisions. This relationship was greatly influenced by those individuals in key positions, such as the liaisons within the various staff section and even the selection of the commander for the French Army. Third, the operational systems, that Sixth Army Group used to incorporate French Forces, were instrumental in providing the ability to communicate, organize forces and establish a unity of effort. This was important not only for tactical operations, but to sustain the level of logistics required for combat operations and the communications between headquarters to identify objectives. Finally, the patience that General

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<sup>82</sup> Devers, "Operation Dragoon: The Invasion of Southern France," 34.

<sup>83</sup> Record of Progress, 6th Army Group, 1.

Devers demonstrated in the integration of French forces allowed the Sixth Army Group to achieve success while faced with opposing views of the French government. Devers integrated French soldiers at the tactical level and identified the ways to ensure they were also represented in his own headquarters.

The state of the French army created significant obstacles for the Allies. The French had soldiers operating in three different organizations. French citizens were fighting as a part of the French Resistance operating in occupied France, as part of French colonial units fighting in other theaters such as North Africa, and a third element of organized forces of the Vichy regime under German occupation.<sup>84</sup> Under terms of the 1940 armistice, the French Army, under Vichy France, was reduced to approximately 100,000 soldiers with a similar number for the overseas colonies in Africa.<sup>85</sup> The Free French Forces, under de Gaulle, now in exile were able to produce about 100,000 men for military service. By the end of 1942, de Gaulle could also include in the forces under his control the soldiers in French colonial Africa. De Gaulle began organizing his manpower into an Army, creating a staff as well as naval and air assets. His forces would eventually begin to incorporate the Resistance fighters operating in France into his organization and oversee some of their operations in support of allied forces. Without a functional government to oversee their equipping and training, the Free French Forces remained under the supervision of the British government, which was responsible for equipping and training them from the time they formed until the end of the Tunisian campaign in the spring of 1943.<sup>86</sup> The integration of French Forces into the coalition was challenging, yet critical for both the Allies and for the recovery of France as a sovereign nation. The defeat of the French at the hands of the Germans, in

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<sup>84</sup> Adams, *General Jacob Devers*, 141.

<sup>85</sup> Vigneras, *Rearming the French*, 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

six short weeks, had damaged French pride. It was this fractured and ill-equipped force that the Allies would incorporate into their coalition to eventually defeat Germany.

Despite its fractured state, the First French Army contributed to Allied army operations and supported the French government's postwar aims. A significant portion of the Sixth Army Group combat power consisted of French forces. Within the Sixth Army Group, the French forces made up eight of the twenty Divisions that were present for duty at the end of the war.<sup>87</sup> The French Army possessed a strong regimental tradition, which resulted in a assortment of units from various locations in the French Empire. The First French Army consisted of soldiers from almost every place imaginable within the fabric of French society. Some soldiers were veterans of the free French forces, fighting since the armistice with Germany in 1940. Others escaped from Europe to join the French Army abroad or were from French colonial Africa.<sup>88</sup> These forces gave the French government, under de Gaulle, considerable advantage when negotiating post war conditions. De Gaulle knew that if he could contribute soldiers, then he would have the ability to ensure that postwar France was in possession of a working, organized military, which he commanded and utilized for both domestic and international security. Without a presence of soldiers on the ground, in France, de Gaulle's ability to consolidate power would be diminished and jeopardize political postwar negotiations.<sup>89</sup> De Gaulle understood that if France did not contribute to the military defeat of Germany with the presence of a French Army, then the Allies could possibly have a greater bargaining power in the postwar settlement and dictate a postwar settlement without consideration for French desires. While the First French Army made contributions as an organization, it was the individuals, both French and American that were able

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<sup>87</sup> Record of Progress, 6th Army Group, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Harry Yeide and Mark Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 22-23.

<sup>89</sup> Douglass Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 591-592.

to come together and make the coalition function.

The Sixth Army Group and the First French Army relied heavily on the individuals involved, at both the staff and command levels, to conduct military operations as a coalition. The compatibility of leaders and staffs in the coalition was more important than the compatibility of doctrine or material.<sup>90</sup> Devers selected Lieutenant Colonel Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr as his primary liaison with the French Army. Lodge spoke and understood french fluently. Adding to his effectiveness, Lodge understood the military and political situation that Sixth Army Group operated in, and selected liaisons, to assign within each Division, in order to help him manage communication and operations. Despite the strain that often arose between them, the relationship between Devers and de Lattre remained sound.<sup>91</sup> Devers allowed de Lattre to command his organization without interfering in his daily operations. When de Lattre's First French Army landed in southern France one of his first acts was to relieve Lieutenant General Edgard de Larminat, commander, of French Second Army Corps. De Lattre made this decision when his forces were responsible for capturing the ports of Toulon and Mariselle, causing some friction within his own ranks. Devers went to the French headquarters to speak with de Lattre and reminded him of his assigned military objectives. He did not fully understand the reason that de Larminant was relieved, however when asked about it years later he replied, "I don't have all the details of how it was done. You just have to trust people."<sup>92</sup> It was Devers ability to trust his subordinates that made his relationship with de Lattre and his French forces work. While Devers and de Lattre were able to work together, de Lattre was not the United States preferred choice to command the French Amy.

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<sup>90</sup> Robert H. Scales, "Trust, Not Technology, Sustains Coalitions.", 5.

<sup>91</sup> Gen. Jacob Devers, interview by Dr. Maclyn Burg, 173.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 194.

The debate over a French commander was a point of contention for both the United States and France. De Gaulle desired de Lattre to be the commander and the United States preferred General Alphonse Juin. For his part De Gaulle sought to limit the influence of a commander that would present themselves as a potential political hero by his rivals.<sup>93</sup> Juin commanded forces in Italy and earned recognition in doing so. Devers wrote of him, “[his] corps was as good as there was in Italy. They did a good job and they were well trained to do it.”<sup>94</sup> In contrast, Devers and his staff found de Lattre to be more difficult to work with. De Gaulle knew that Juin was popular with the United States and might present himself as a rival to de Gaulle for the leadership of the French Army. De Gaulle planned to use the French Army to grasp power in mainland France and utilize the soldiers for domestic security; all reasons that the commander of the French Army could not have more political influence than de Gaulle<sup>95</sup>. De Lattre became the commander of the First French Army and Juin became de Gaulle’s chief of staff. In this new position, Juin would still have the ability to influence operations with the United States, but he would no longer have the power of an Army commander, reducing the risk to de Gaulle’s position as head of state.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the selection of de Lattre as commander, Devers began to work with him and build the rapport he thought necessary between commanders of a coalition. While the two commanders would disagree, during the course of operations in southern France, de Lattre would come to respect and trust Devers. He wrote of meeting with Devers in the United Kingdom, “[he] showed me the most friendly confidence from our first meeting.”<sup>97</sup> While the relationships

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<sup>93</sup> Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 595.

<sup>94</sup> Adams, *General Jacob Devers*, 146.

<sup>95</sup> Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 592.

<sup>96</sup> Adams, *General Jacob Devers*, 146.

<sup>97</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the First French Army*, 24.



between the staffs and commanders had a bearing on military operations, the operational systems that Sixth Army Group employed enabled those relationships to flourish.

The lack of adequately trained French officers meant that the staff sections within Sixth Army Group were largely represented by American soldiers. To overcome this, the staff was supported with a liaison staff section that allowed it to perform routine actions consistent with its mission. Devers desired to keep the headquarters unit small. He believed that a larger organization would overwhelm the mission. He wanted his staff to have the ability to effectively carry out policy.<sup>98</sup> He intended for his staff to remain focused on the larger picture and provide brief letters of instruction, leaving details for the field armies. For this reason the headquarters did not possess some of the special staff functions that might often have been found in other Army group headquarters at the time, but it did contain a very well developed liaison section that allowed Devers to effectively command. The Sixth army group organized in accordance with field regulations of the era, which provisioned limited supply and administrative functions with no territorial jurisdiction.<sup>99</sup> Integral to the organization of the headquarters and their ability to work with French forces, was the presence of a liaison staff section led by Lodge. Because the French lacked the personnel to augment the Group headquarters, Devers relied heavily on Lodge to coordinate actions. He organized his staff by placing available qualified liaison officers in the various staff sections, maintained an adequate staff of translators to make all routine translations, and developed detachments of specially qualified French speaking American officers who would remain with the French military and maintain close contact with the foreign commander. Within the liaison section, Lodge created redundancy by having personnel that spoke French, at least one officer who had served in the French Army, and a non-commissioned officer with a fluent

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<sup>98</sup> Jacob L. Devers, interview by Forrest C. Pogue, 58.

<sup>99</sup> Field Manual (FM) 100-15, *Field Service Regulations Larger Units* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 50.

command of French, German, and Russian on duty. The last two languages were important in the later stages of the campaign. Having personnel that were familiar with the language and culture allowed for better communication between the French and American headquarters. Some words would directly translate from French into English or vice versa and required a thorough understanding of the intent behind the message in order to effectively convey the message.<sup>100</sup> Devers would use Lodge and his liaisons in order to receive information and make decisions, without providing too detailed instructions to his subordinates.<sup>101</sup> The focused mission limited size, and proficiency of the headquarters staff created the conditions necessary to integrate French forces at the Army level and provide instructions that could be understood in order to accomplish their mission.

The presence and integration of FFI into the French First Army was both problematic and beneficial for Sixth Army Group. Resistance forces in France had been fighting the Germans as a fragmented force since the occupation. In order to leverage the members of the resistance in aiding military operations they needed to be reorganized under a single headquarters. In the weeks before the invasion of Normandy, the French Committee of National Liberation asked General Marie-Pierre Koenig, commander of the French Forces in the United Kingdom, to organize the FFI operating in France under one headquarters and serve as the liaison to Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander. This change was made in order to better coordinate attacks with coalition partners and exercise control. The resistance soldiers fighting on the mainland were recognized as vital members of the French Army and afforded all the rights and responsibilities of regular French soldiers.<sup>102</sup> It was under this concept, of organizing the FFI,

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<sup>100</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. Command and General Staff College Lecture. July 1, 1948, "Some observations on American Command of Foreign Armies and Army Detachments." Box 1, Reel 4, Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>101</sup> Adams, *General Devers*, 149.

that resistance units were later incorporated into the French First Army. These FFI forces greatly aided operations in southern France, especially during the early stages. Primarily the FFI conducted operations that were focused on disrupting German military counter attacks and disrupting communications. However, this was not the only way that they assisted. In many instances the FFI were able to tell the Sixth Army Group units the location of German positions and the best way to bypass German defenses, in order to attack the enemy from the rear. In the more geographically isolated region of Masif Central, the FFI was especially important in the capturing of remaining German units that were unable to escape the allied invasion.<sup>103</sup>

While the FFI was helpful as an independent organization, elements were integrated into the French Army as a part of Sixth Army Group. This integration would not be a comprehensive immersion into the French Army by the FFI. Rather, the FFI would integrate voluntarily as groups or individuals. The FFI were not nearly as well equipped and the wholesale integration of large numbers of men, in order to create new French divisions, was not feasible for Devers to support. To aid in the transition, de Lattre appointed three men in his command to oversee the FFI affairs department within the French Army headquarters. This department was charged with acquiring supplies and establishing training centers for the FFI. The meager systems that de Lattre was able to set up were quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of FFI, that sought integration into the Army. By mid-September 1944, 40,000 FFI had joined the French First Army.<sup>104</sup> While the integration increased the size and scope of the French First Army, it did create some problems when FFI units revealed their lack of discipline and training, when faced with German army counterparts.<sup>105</sup> However, despite the obstacles, the amalgamation of FFI into

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<sup>102</sup> Pogue, *Supreme Command*, 236.

<sup>103</sup> Sixth Army Group, Final Report, 9.

<sup>104</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the First French Army*, 169-173.

the French Army legitimized the politicized nature of the resistance and brought them in line with de Gaulle and his plans for a post war French state. It would allow de Gaulle to consolidate the military and provide security for a government, which he oversaw.<sup>106</sup> He would be able to claim victory for France on behalf of the new government. The role of the FFI in achieving that victory was noteworthy, as FFI assisted Sixth Army Group military operations as independent units and later as members of the French First Army.

Integration of the French First Army was a major factor in the ability of the Sixth Army Group to operate successfully in southern France. The presence of a French Army gave the Allies access to the FFI as occupied French territory was liberated. The French also represented a large percentage of soldiers available to fight within the Sixth Army Group. By organizing the headquarters effectively, Devers was able to command a diverse organization and effectively employ French combat soldiers against the Germans. The integration of the French Army relied heavily on the willingness of individuals to set aside differences, systems within the headquarters that made routine actions function, and the adaptability to integrate new forces into the military structure. Despite the problems of organizing French forces under one command, Devers was able to utilize his headquarters staff to communicate effectively and accomplish his mission objectives.

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<sup>105</sup> Adams, *General Devers*, 231.

<sup>106</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, 699.

## Conclusion

Sixth Army Group actions in southern France during the Second World War provide an excellent study of coalition operations for today's military planners by examining the way that General Jacob Devers contributed to his higher headquarters mission and incorporated his coalition partners. The actions of the Sixth Army Group during the Second World War were integral to the overall defeat of Germany and played an important role in Eisenhower's broad front strategy. Although the Allies opposed the initial plans to expand military operations into southern France, operation Dragoon set the conditions for future success by incorporating the French Army. This effectively increased the number of combat divisions available to Eisenhower in the European Theater and opened key ports at Marseille and Toulon, increasing the amount of supplies and soldiers for operations. Of critical importance was that Devers provided an additional group headquarters with multiple combat divisions, sustained by his own line of supply at a time when the other two groups fighting in Europe had effectively reached their limit.<sup>107</sup> As a coalition, the Sixth Army Group encountered multiple problems in dealing with its French counterparts, inherently making operations much more difficult. In dealing with the French First Army, it did not allow complex factors such as politics, logistics and national disagreements to affect the outcome of its operations. The experiences of Sixth Army Group demonstrate the difficulties involved to plan, sustain and operate as a member of a coalition, especially when the members of the coalition fail to have the same goals.

This monograph answered the question of how effective Sixth Army Group was in contributing to Eisenhower's broad front strategy by examining three specific areas and raising questions about the historical record. First, this paper studied the ways that Devers incorporated the French First Army into his operations. Second, it examined how the group was effectively able to sustain itself in order to conduct military action. Third, it evaluated the ways in which Devers resolved nationalistic differences. It questioned the reasons why the history of Devers and

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<sup>107</sup> Clarke and Smith, *Rivera to the Rhine*, 561.

his actions do not maintain a more prominent place in the historical record of the Second World War. It also claimed that the relative obscurity of the Sixth Army Group record is not reflective of its actions or contributions to the war. In doing so, the monograph focuses on the actions of Sixth Army Group and its commander Devers, within the context of the war. This monograph is not meant to be the last word on the effectiveness of Sixth Army Group, as it operated in the European Theater. However, the efficiency with which Devers operated in a complex environment is evident when examining each of the three major contributions to the broad front strategy.

First, the integration of the French First Army into Sixth Army Group operations set conditions for military success against Germany and ensured the preservation of the coalition for future operations. The systems that Devers used to organize his forces enabled communication through a robust liaison element. The staff organization effectively planned and supported operations, and the incorporation of the French Forces of the Interior contributed to the efficiency of the Sixth Army Group military operations. Devers desired to keep his headquarters staff organized with current doctrine. He limited its size and ensured that effective communication would take place between the staff elements, especially as it pertained to mission orders to subordinate units. In order to increase efficiency, he placed key leaders in critical positions such as the G4 and liaison office to the French.<sup>108</sup> Finally, the ability of the Sixth Army Group to integrate French Forces of the Interior into the ranks did cause some problems with logistics; however, it filled some critical shortages of personnel and solved some of France's internal security problems by incorporating armed resistance fighters into the standing army.<sup>109</sup>

The second major contribution to Eisenhower's broad front strategy was that the logistic support provided to sustain Sixth Army Group operations also took into account French

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<sup>108</sup> Jacob L. Devers, interview by Forrest C. Pogue, 55-57.

<sup>109</sup> Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 603-604.

requirements as it planned military actions. The supply lines for Devers did not come at the expense of the other Army groups operating in the European theater. The seizure of the ports of Toulon and Marseille effectively provided Devers with a supply line that would adequately support his forces and even the other Army groups to a limited extent. A lack of service soldiers within French units created an additional burden for American supply operations as they struggled to support the coalition and improve existing infrastructure.

Finally, the ability to resolve nationalistic disagreements and preserve the coalition was evident in the way that Devers interacted with his subordinate commanders. This became readily apparent on occasions when French postwar political goals were in direct conflict with planned US military action, such as the occupation of Stuttgart or the defense of Strasbourg. During each of these occasions, Devers was able to resolve the conflict in a way that ensured continued military operations without the disbandment of the coalition.

Current military planners can learn much from Sixth Army Group operations by studying the ways in which commanders and staffs planned for combined actions in a complex, combined and joint environment. As a part of Eisenhower's broad front strategy, they were able to defeat German forces by integrating the French First Army into operations, arranging logistic support, and resolving the inevitable nationalistic disagreements. By employing and planning for a coalition today, planners can expect to face many of the same challenges that Devers encountered as the commander of a large coalition tasked to defeat a military opponent.

While no standard template currently exists for ways in which to conduct these types of large-scale coalition operations, joint doctrine does establish a list of tenets that can guide action and facilitate success for today's military planner. The six tenets for coalition operations as outlined in *Joint Publication 3-16* include: respect, rapport, knowledge of partners, patience, mission focus and trust and confidence. As members of a coalition, Devers and Sixth Army Group demonstrated many of these tenets. Respect and rapport complement one another. Devers

employed both principles as he dealt directly with the French First Army. Respect involves taking into consideration coalition partner's national honor and prestige, opinions, culture and history. Rapport requires direct personal relationships with counterparts in order to work through issues. Devers demonstrated both these tenets over the issue of the defense of Strasbourg. He understood the cultural significance of the town to the French and was willing to support its defense without directly disobeying orders from his higher commander. The concept of knowledge of partners refers to the ability to understand the values, customs and capabilities of coalition partners in order to effectively integrate them into the operation. While Devers did not speak French, he was able to demonstrate understanding through his chief liaison officer, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr, who was educated in France, spoke fluent French and understood the culture. This understanding helped Devers as he made decisions and encountered problems that arose from national differences. Devers was able to translate this understanding into the effective integration of the French Army.

In conclusion, the actions of Sixth Army Group in the Second World War are a part of disused history and deserve increased exposure. The coalition that fought in the Second World War stands as an example for today's planners. While coalition warfare has changed in regards to technology, scale and capabilities one fact has remained constant: the interaction of men from different nations working together towards a common goal. This interaction affects operations at all levels and is just as difficult today as it was for Sixth Army Group and the French. Planners would be remiss if they did not learn from the lessons present in Sixth Army Group operations in support of Eisenhower's broad front strategy.



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