

The Battle of Kasserine Pass: Defeat is a Matter of Scale

A Monograph

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Abstract

Kasserine Pass: Defeat is a Matter of Scale, by MAJ Eric Evans, 45 pages.

The Battle of Kasserine Pass is marked by history as an embarrassing defeat of American soldiers during their first major action against Germany in World War II; some historians even go so far as to anticipate defeat in the first battles of all major American wars. Does the battle of Kasserine Pass prove the conventional wisdom that America is doomed to defeat in its first battles? Martin Blumenson, a prominent military historian, characterizes the battle of Kasserine Pass as a crushing defeat. He cites inexperience, inferior technology, and poor doctrine as causation. This monograph challenges Blumenson's thesis. Scientific study of the battle of Kasserine Pass, inspired by Hans Delbruck, focuses on relevant technologies, the organization of opposing units, US doctrine, and the effects of the ULTRA program. Conclusions from the scientific analysis carry forward to a comparison of contemporary battles.

There are many similarities between the battle of Kasserine Pass and other battles, such as the Battle of the Bulge, which history characterizes as victories. To determine why, an in-depth study of the battle of Kasserine Pass is necessary to identify errors in the current history. This study uses Clausewitz's method of critical analysis and the application of historical scale to compare the battles of Kasserine Pass and St. Vith. When viewed at a similar scale, the results of Kasserine Pass are similar to the results from the actions around St. Vith during the Battle of the Bulge. Surprise, rapid penetration and isolation of friendly units, breakdowns in command, the eventual surrender of terrain, and successful Allied counter attacks characterize both battles. The similarities in outcome require similar classification.

Much study of the battle of Kasserine Pass has been done since Martin Blumenson wrote the original history in 1966. The ULTRA and MAGIC intercepts have been declassified and organizations such as the Combat Studies Institute have analyzed the battle thoroughly, adding information that was unavailable to Mr. Blumenson at the time of his writing. The need to keep the ULTRA program secret profoundly affected the historical narrative of each battle.

Conclusions from this study recommend the application of critical analysis of historical examples to identify lessons learned. The aggregation of ULTRA intercepts to determine why misinterpretations occurred is a worthy topic for future study.

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Acronyms

AGF	Army Ground Forces (US)
CC	Combat Command
KG	Kampfgruppe (Battle Group - German)
SLU	Special Liason Units
VG	Volks Grenadier (People's Grenadiers - German)

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Introduction

Theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war, to distinguish precisely what at first sight seems fused, to explain in full the properties of the means employed and to show their probable effects, to define clearly the nature of the ends in view, and to illuminate all phases of warfare through critical inquiry

Clausewitz, *On War*

On January 30, 1943 the German 5th Panzer Division attacked positions occupied by the American 1st Armored Division in Faid Pass. The 1st Armored Division counterattacked, only to impale itself on the well-sited anti-tank guns of the German Army; the same tactic that the German Army had employed effectively against the British. After more unsuccessful counterattacks, the 1st Armored was ordered to consolidate on February 2, effectively blocking Kasserine Pass. German forces attacked into the pass on February 19. The defense of Kasserine Pass was apparently a debacle for the American forces ending in a disorganized retreat. German forces captured the pass, but were checked when the US forces formed a defensive position near Tebessa. Axis commanders probed Allied lines and debated continuing their offensive but made no effort to exploit the previous success. Allied forces began a counter-attack on February 22 restoring Allied lines within 48 hours.¹

Martin Blumenson served as the historical officer of Seventh Army during the Tunisian campaign. The prominent historian wrote the official history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, the novel *Kasserine Pass: An Epic Saga of Desert War*, and contributed to *America's First Battles 1776-1965*. Blumenson characterizes the Battle of Kasserine Pass as a defeat. He blames inexperience, inferior technology, and poor doctrine for the outcome of the battle.² His thesis

¹ Martin Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass: An Epic Saga of Desert War* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1966), 283-287.

² Charles E. Heller, William A. Stofft. *America's First Battles 1776-1965* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 247.

ignores the successful Allied counter-attack, the effects of misinterpreted ULTRA intercepts, and the operational effects of the Battle of Kasserine Pass on the Tunisian Campaign. Blumenson's characterization of American technology is also incorrect. Scientific review of the opposing tanks proves the Sherman tank was superior to the Panzer II and Panzer III, and roughly equivalent to the Panzer IV.

Kasserine Pass was a shocking baptism of fire for US forces in the Mediterranean theater, however, the historiography of the battle does little to illuminate the context surrounding the Battle of Kasserine Pass, or what operational level effects the battle had on the Tunisian campaign. Charles Heller and William Sofft, in their book, *America's First Battles*, are content to condemn the US Army to defeat in the first battles of major conflict without probing deeply into causation beyond the immediate tactical action. In order to learn lessons from the actions that contributed to the defeat at Kasserine Pass we must examine the battle critically. Critical study includes the analysis of available scientific data and the establishment of historical scale to use for comparison.

John Gaddis describes the manipulation of time and space to create a representation of historical reality. Gaddis states that the only literal representation of the entity would be the entity itself, and therefore impractical. Historians select a scale to focus the reader on the event they are describing. Gaddis believes the scale of a historical event is similar to the scale of a map. The scale determines the amount of detail at the focal point and how much of the surrounding area will be depicted.³ This study defines scale as the amount of focus applied to events leading up to a battle, the activities of adjacent units, and the operational effects of the battle. The use of similar scales is important when comparing historical events because it allows comparative conclusions to be made.

If the same scale is applied to the Battle of Kasserine Pass as is applied to the Battle of

³ John Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 28-34.

the Bulge, the similarities are compelling. During each battle Axis forces surprised the Americans, rapidly isolated forward units, and frustrated attempts to counterattack. On December 16th, 1944 the German Army launched an offensive through the Ardennes, catching the Allies completely by surprise. The untested 106th Infantry Division, responsible for the defense of St. Vith, faced veteran German soldiers. The German 18th Volksgrenadier Division quickly encircled two of the 106th Division's infantry regiments, which were defending an exposed forward position. The remaining units of the 106th could not effectively counterattack to free them, resulting in the eventual surrender of the 423rd and 424th Infantry Regiments. The situation around St. Vith stabilized when the US 7th Armored Division arrived. The German offensive culminated without achieving its objective.⁴

Background to the Study

Historians highlight the Battle of Kasserine Pass as an example of American military failure in the first engagements of a war. Much is made of the decisions made by tactical commanders without examining events that occurred before the battle or those immediately following. Separating the February 19 - 20 defeat at Kasserine Pass from the successful February 22 counter-attack is an inappropriate use of historical scale. Studying any battle, without acknowledging the interdependence of events, leads to reductionism that clouds the historiography of an event.

The accepted historical analysis of the battle blames a lack of effective doctrine, inexperience, and inferior equipment for the poor performance of the US Army but ignores the successful counterattack, which restored allied lines within forty-eight hours of the German attack.⁵ No new doctrine was written and distributed during such a short period and the only

⁴ Peter Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 217.

⁵ Heller, *America's First Battles*, 247.

meaningful equipment changes was the fielding of the M4 Sherman tank, albeit to untrained crews. Historians cast blame on the poor leadership of Major General Lloyd R. Fredendall, the commander of US II Corps. This blame could easily be laid at the feet of other leaders such as Sir Kenneth Arthur Noel Anderson, commander of the British First Army, or General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Mediterranean Theater. The decision to launch Operation Torch before the Armored Divisions had converted to the M4 Sherman tank or an effective anti-tank weapon was developed for the infantry played, a large role in the initial setbacks suffered at the beginning of the battle. On the eve of the battle the reconnaissance battalion of the 1st Armored Division received replacements that had never fired a rifle and did not possess entrenching tools.⁶ The head-long rush to Tunisia left the 1st Armored overextended at the end of a tenuous supply line. The understrength 1st Armored became an enticing target for two crack German Divisions.

Compounding the problem of inexperience was the disagreement about the intentions of the German Army in Tunisia. Anderson believed that the German Army would attack in the north, which undoubtedly affected the disposition of forces. Fredendall correctly forecast that the pending German offensive would come in the south, but he was unable to sway Anderson. Major General Orlando Ward, commander of the US 1st Armored Division, had misgivings about the defensive positions assigned to his division, but could not ignore extremely prescriptive orders from Fredendall. General Ernest Harmon, who would briefly command II Corps during the battle, said, “the First Armored Division was not so much beaten as it was misused.”⁷

The misinterpretation of ULTRA intercepts was a major factor in the tactical surprise achieved by the Germans at Kasserine and St. Vith. The ULTRA program allowed the Allies to read intercepted German messages encrypted utilizing a mechanical coding device called

⁶ Heller, *America's First Battles*, 247.

⁷ Ernest Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 146.

ENGIMA. The ENGIMA device was similar to a typewriter; however, it produced an incredible number of possible permutations for each key stroke. The number of seemingly random permutations led the Axis Powers to believe their code was unbreakable throughout the entire war. The British started work on breaking the ENIGMA's code in 1939, building on the Polish and French "bomba" machine. Based in Bletchley Park, the British developed a faster decoding machine called the "Green Goddess."⁸

In 1940, the British established Special Liaison Units (SLUs) to pass the intelligence gathered under the ULTRA program to senior commanders. The program's classification prevented anyone except the most senior officers from knowing that the capability to decode ENIGMA encryptions existed. Eisenhower and Anderson knew about the ULTRA program but Fredendall did not. Anderson believed ULTRA intelligence confirmed his assumptions about the impending German offensive, he was incorrect.

The intelligence picture the Allied commanders had before the Battle of the Bulge is less clear than the intelligence estimate before the Battle of Kasserine Pass. All the copies of relevant intelligence reports compiled before the battle were destroyed at their locations in London and Versailles, presumably by Allied intelligence officials. A forty-eight hour media blackout instituted by Eisenhower at the onset of the battle prevented reports by parties without a vested interest from being available for study.⁹ The German use of landline communications before the Battle of the Bulge prevented the Allies from intercepting communications. Without records of intercepted communications, there is little recorded by ULTRA that is relevant to the study of the Battle of the Bulge. There is a record of the Allies receiving warning about an offensive in the west through MAGIC intercepts. MAGIC was the codename for the interception of Japanese

⁸ Charles Whiting, *Ardennes: The Secret War* (London: Century Publishing, 1984), 50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

communications.¹⁰

Purpose of the Study

The Battle of Kasserine Pass is incorrectly labeled as a defeat in comparison to other battles, such as the Battle of the Bulge, which are considered victories. More important than an unfair characterization, is the opportunity to determine if the historiography is correct. Errors in the historical record can generate incorrect conclusions made from study of the battle. According to Gaddis, history is the way human experience is generalized; once history is fused it is very difficult to separate.¹¹

Important lessons were learned from the fighting around Kasserine Pass. Many lessons, including those learned fighting German armor, were quickly adopted by troops in the field. Some of these lessons, such as the use of Tank Destroyers to support infantry formations closely rather than as a separate maneuver arm, were contrary to the doctrine of the time.¹² Proponents of air power champion Kasserine Pass as an example of what happens when aircraft are parceled out to ground forces. The Army Air Corps did not acknowledge the effects of closely coordinated Stuka attacks in support of German armored offensives. Army ground forces complained of limited tactical air support, but fail to give sufficient credit to the efforts to interdict Axis supply convoys in the Mediterranean Sea. In each case, the proponent of a specific narrative fails to use scale appropriately. Carl von Clausewitz, author of *On War*, cautions students of military history to avoid ceasing their analysis when they arrive at an arbitrary assumption or hypothesis without concluding the critical analysis.¹³

¹⁰ Charles McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Quill, 1985), 24-25.

¹¹ Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 30.

¹² Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, 129.

¹³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Trans. and ed. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 156.

In order to use Kasserine Pass as a historical example, a complete study, incorporating relevant events that helped shape the outcome of the battle, is required to separate true causation from historical cherry picking. By disciplining our own study of history, students can ensure that the lessons learned are useful in the future rather than reaction to historical anecdote.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is an analysis of the current historiography of the Battle of Kasserine Pass in a similar manner in which Hans Delbruck, a German historian known as the first modern military historian, analyzed other battles. The scientific nature of Delbruck's analysis is conducted through the process of critical analysis prescribed by Clausewitz. After conducting the scientific analysis, this study will offer reasons why history has recorded the outcome of Kasserine Pass as a defeat, using the theory of recorded history offered by Gaddis. Combining the scientific analysis of Kasserine Pass and the comparison of the battle to actions around St. Vith, this study will refute Blumenson's use of Kasserine Pass to prove the conventional wisdom that America is doomed to defeat in the initial battles of major conflicts.

Delbruck believed that historians should acquire and use detailed knowledge of the practical realities of war. Delbruck served as an infantry officer during the Franco-Prussian war; he credits this experience for his realistic view of warfare.¹⁴ He believed that "truth itself was unknown but understanding came in the interaction of practical experience and ideas." Delbruck posited that students of history should adopt a comparative approach to the study of warfare while acknowledging the uniqueness of each military action. He also cautioned against emotional analysis of battle; he favored a constructive, materialistic view of war.¹⁵ Using the scientific study of the Battle of Kasserine Pass conducted by the Combat Studies Institute, this study penetrates

¹⁴ Arden Bucholz, *Hans Delbruck and the German Military Establishment: War Images in Conflict* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1985), 24.

¹⁵ Bucholz, *Hans Delbruck and the German Military Establishment*, 19-34.

the emotional account given in Blumenson's history.

Clausewitz draws a distinction between a critical approach to the study of military history and the historical narrative. He states that the narrative is merely an arrangement of facts that establishes tenuous immediate causality. Clausewitz's critical approach is applied in three steps. The first step is the discovery and interpretation of facts. The second step is to trace effects back to their causes. Clausewitz believed this step was critical analysis proper, and the only method to determine if a historical event supported a theory. The final step in Clausewitz's method is to examine the means applied during the battle. Clausewitz stressed the necessity of the final step in applying criticism to commanders in defeat or victory. He believed that if a critic wanted to place blame he or she must first place themselves in the position of the commander, attempting to recreate everything the Commander knew at the time and ignoring what they did not.¹⁶

Clausewitz was skeptical of the use of historical examples by military historians. He said that "historical examples are seldom used to good effect, the use of them by theorists normally not only leaves the reader dissatisfied but irritates his intelligence."¹⁷

Blumenson penned the majority of the existent history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass and most historical accounts that follow cite his work directly. He wrote the official Army history of the battle, as well as the most popular novel describing the battle. His early documentation of the battle has colored all histories that followed. It is necessary to examine his arguments to determine if other authors have made their own analysis or are merely echoing Blumenson.

This study begins with an analysis featuring a brief overview of the battle, establishing a base for further comparison. The US 1st Armored Division will be compared to the German 10th Armored Division to demonstrate similarities and differences between the opposing organizations participating in the battle. The relevant technologies, such as tanks, are studied in order to

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 156-164.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

determine the effect of technological superiority on the battle. Comparisons of technology focus on armor, armament, and effective ranges against opposing vehicles. Contemporary US Army doctrine will be analyzed to determine what effect it had on the outcome of the battle.

The Battle of Kasserine Pass is compared to another famous battle to build a case for its reclassification. The analysis of the Battle of the Bulge will focus on the actions around the town of St. Vith to maintain an appropriate scale for comparison. The comparison of the two battles will focus on technology, doctrine, frontages, depth of enemy penetration, and the operational effects of the battle. Eliot Cohen and John Gooch offer a format for studying causal links called the failure matrix, in their book *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*. The failure matrix allows the graphic depiction of primary and alternate pathways that highlight links to interdependent events, helping to demonstrate the complex nature of establishing causation.¹⁸ Failure matrices will be constructed to demonstrate similarities or differences between the Battle of Kasserine Pass and actions around St. Vith. The comparison of the battles allows the study to determine if the Battle of Kasserine Pass' classification as a defeat in *America's First Battles* thesis is supported or refuted.

Research Question (Hypothesis)

Does the Battle of Kasserine Pass, as recorded by Blumenson, prove the conventional wisdom that the United States is doomed to defeat in the first battles of major conflicts? Subordinate questions include: Why is the Battle of Kasserine Pass characterized as a defeat when compared to other battles, such as the Battle of the Bulge? What does the current historical record give as an explanation? Does history view each battle from a perspective that allows comparison? Is the scale used to describe the Battle of Kasserine Pass appropriate? What effect does the declassification of the ULTRA intercepts have on the historiography of the Battle of

¹⁸ Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortune: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 55.

Kasserine Pass.

The history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass is largely inaccurate or, at least, incomplete. The historical record of the battle blames the implied failure at Kasserine Pass on the lack of experience of US Army Soldiers and leaders, inferior technology, and poorly crafted doctrine. Factors such as the German Army's own losses and leadership mistakes are largely ignored. Following the initial action at Kasserine Pass, the German Army was unable to exploit their success. Allied forces quickly reorganized, received additional M4 Sherman tanks, and launched an effective counterattack. The quick counter-attack discounts the utter defeat described in the recorded history of the battle.

The technological advantage enjoyed by the German Army was a significant contributor to the defeats suffered by the Allies before the fielding of the M4 Sherman tank. The Sherman was superior to the Panzer III and equal to the Panzer IV, however, the defeat of earlier tank models left an indelible impression on the recorded history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass. Potentially more important than technology, was the advantage of the initiative enjoyed by the German commanders. The Germans took the initiative by attacking Allied forces after they culminated in their race to Tunisia and before the Allies could mass to resume the offensive. The German advantage was magnified by the broad fronts the allies were forced to defend, allowing the Germans to isolate Allied units and destroy them. The effects of earlier technological superiority and the ability of German commanders to mass against isolated Allied units multiplied the psychological impacts of the defeat on the US Army and the US public at large. This magnification induced errors into the historiography of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Further errors in the historiography may be revealed by studying the ULTRA intercepts. Much of the history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass was written before the declassification of the ULTRA intercepts. Mr. Blumenson's book, *Kasserine Pass: An Epic Saga of Desert Warfare* was published in 1966, eight years before the public release of the ULTRA intercepts in 1974. Blumenson says the Allies were deceived about the direction the German forces would attack

before the battle of Kasserine Pass; however the messages analyzed before have not been published in aggregated form. The exact documents that the SLU passed to Eisenhower or Anderson are not known and any recreation of the intelligence picture would be conjecture.¹⁹ German Army commanders, like Erwin Rommel, habitually ignored orders from their superiors, which makes linking ULTRA intercepts to actions on the ground difficult. ULTRA intercepts may have been explicit about which direction the Germans would attack; however, Rommel maintained the freedom to make tactical decisions independently. The lack of data from the ULTRA intercepts makes the history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass incomplete. The misinterpretation of intelligence supplied by ULTRA, combined with the need to protect the secrecy of the program, features prominently in the Battle of Kasserine Pass and the Battle of the Bulge.

Section One: Overview of the Battle of Kasserine Pass

After the successful landings during Operation Torch, the Allies lost what Eisenhower described as the “pell-mell race to Tunisia.” The Allied forces consisting of the French, British, and Americans, moved into an area defense along the Grand Dorsal chain of the Atlas Mountains in Tunisia.²⁰ The Grand Dorsal chain runs from north to south through central Tunisia. The mountains themselves are nearly impassable requiring vehicles to move through a narrow series of passes. Kasserine Pass was not considered impregnable; however, a sizeable force in a prepared defense should have exacted a heavy toll on an attacker. The mouth of Kasserine Pass is less than a mile wide and devoid of cover. The Allies intended to use the natural barrier to contain the Axis forces while they built up the necessary combat power to conduct a deliberate attack.²¹

¹⁹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

²¹ George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1957), 446.

Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of Allied forces in Northern Africa. General Sir Kenneth Arthur Noel Anderson commanded the 1st British Army under which the British, French, and American forces would serve during the operation to capture Tunisia. The British V Corps, under Lieutenant General Sir C. W. Allfrey, defended the northern portion of the Allied line. The French defended a narrow section in the center with their XIX Corps under General Koeltz. The American II Corps, under Major General Fredendall, defended the southern area. The French were poorly equipped and required materiel support from the British and Americans. The American II Corps was still awaiting the arrival of the 1st and 34th Infantry Divisions when the Battle of Kasserine Pass began.

The battle of Kasserine Pass began on January 18, 1943 when elements of the German 5th Panzer Army attacked Fondouk Pass. Fredendall detached Combat Command B (CCB) from 1st Armored Division to reinforce the French position. Fredendall ordered the movement of CCB without consulting with Major General Orlando Ward, commander of the 1st Armored Division, exacerbating the rift between the two men.²² CCB, commanded by Brigadier General Paul Robinett, reported directly to the II Corps Headquarters, effectively detaching it from 1st Armored Division while also creating a complex parallel command structure. CCB performed well, helping to stabilize the front, but were unable to retake Fondouk Pass. Fredendall blamed the loss of the Pass on the poor condition of the French troops.²³

While CCB of the 1st Armored Division was assisting the French, Fredendall ordered Ward to move Combat Command A (CCA), with approximately one hundred tanks, eighteen artillery pieces, and twelve tank destroyers, to the Tunisian city of Sbeitla.²⁴ From this position,

²² Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 94.

²³ Mark T. Calhoun, "Defeat at Kasserine: American Armor Doctrine, Training, and Battle Command in Northwest Africa, World War II" (Monograph, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2003), 19.

²⁴ Howe, *Northwest Africa*, 378.

Ward could intercept German armored penetrations through the Eastern Dorsals. Fredendall further divided his forces creating Combat Command C (CCC), under Colonel Robert Stark, for the purpose of raiding Sened, an Italian outpost. CCC attacked Sened on January 24, destroying the defending force and capturing many prisoners. The success of the raid encouraged Fredendall to consider further offensive actions while he resisted calls for assistance from the French. Fredendall would remain focused on an offensive to Maknassey while the German Army was attacking through Faid pass. After an abortive attack by CCC toward Maknassey, Stark was ordered back to Sbeitla.²⁵

On January 30, the German 21st Panzer Division attacked French positions in Faid Pass. CCA of the 1st Armored Division, under Brigadier General Raymond Quillin, was ordered to restore the situation at Faid Pass without weakening his defenses at Sbeitla. Allied commanders at all levels grossly underestimated the strength of the German attack. After conducting a reconnaissance of Faid pass, CCA began its counter-attack. The assaulting forces suffered a severe attack from German aircraft immediately after the order to move forward. Nervous anti-aircraft gunners engaged US P-40 aircraft on their way to Faid Pass, which prompted the aircraft to bomb the CCA headquarters. Quillin ordered the counter-attack postponed while he reorganized his forces. He attacked the next morning but rough terrain and heavy defensive fires halted his attack.²⁶ Anderson released CCB from its defense at Fondouk and the force moved back to Tebessa. The German Army, commanded by General Hans-Jurgen Bernhard Theodore von Arnim, transitioned to the defense while he assessed the Allied strength to his front. After the initial engagements of the battle of Kasserine Pass the US 1st Armored Division was spread over a fifty mile front extending from the Fondouk Pass to the Mazilia Pass. CCB was more than one hundred miles north of Ward and still under control of II Corps.²⁷

²⁵ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 104.

²⁷ Howe, *Northwest Africa*, 387-389.

American intelligence, using information gained from ULTRA intercepts, reported that the German Army would attack through the Fondouk Pass and turn north to flank the British V Corps. II Corps believed they had sufficient evidence to indicate an attack from the south, contrary to what their higher headquarters was reporting.²⁸ Fredendall ordered the fortification of Faid Pass to stop a southern thrust by the German Army. Without conducting a personal reconnaissance, Fredendall indicated the exact positions from which the US 1st Armored Division would defend, gravely insulting Ward. Fredendall required that troops occupy defenses in mountainous positions near Lessouda and Ksaira; these positions were not mutually supporting and easy to isolate. The infantry securing the positions along the high ground received bazookas to augment their anti-tank capability but none of the soldiers knew how to operate the weapon.²⁹ The anti-tank doctrine of the time assumed that the infantry will be able to defend themselves, allowing tank destroyers to be held in reserve. This assumption proved disastrously false.³⁰

The German 10th and 21st Armored divisions attacked the positions of the CCA, US 1st Armored Division on February 14. The 10th Panzer Division quickly destroyed the ten M3 Stuart tanks of the 2nd Battalion, 168th Regimental Combat Team defending at Lessouda, stranding the infantry defending the high ground. Quillan ordered 3rd Battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel Hightower, to counterattack. Hightower's battalion consisted of fifty-one M4 Sherman tanks.³¹ Well-positioned German forces destroyed Hightower's force, which lost forty-four tanks, and succeeded only in delaying the German offensive. German tanks threatened the CCA headquarters causing it to withdraw. This complicated command and control

²⁸ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 121.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁰ Christopher Gabel, *Seek, Strike, Destroy: US Tank Destroyer Doctrine in World War II* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), 35.

³¹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 183.

of the on-going battle and stranded the infantry left defending Lessouda and Ksaira. Fredendall requested that CCB be moved to reinforce 1st Armored Division but Anderson declined, sending one tank battalion of CCB, under Lieutenant Colonel Algers, to reinforce CCA. Ward placed Algers under command of Colonel Stark, of CCC, and prepared to counter-attack.³² During the ensuing attack, German Panzers enveloped and destroyed Algers' tank battalion. The loss of Algers' tanks forced Stark to withdraw the remaining units of CCC. Unable to regain control of the Pass, Ward ordered the surrounded infantry to attempt a breakout on their own. Few survivors managed to link back up with the division. The remnants of CCA and CCC moved to Sbeitla to consolidate into positions that were more defensible.³³

1st Armored Division established a deliberate defense around Sbeitla on February 16, after conducting an orderly withdraw. Finally, Ward would have the opportunity to fight with his division consolidated. The next day, some of CCA inexplicably began to withdraw during a probe by the German Army. Ward quickly put the units back into line, but not without damaging the confidence of Anderson. Fredendall planned to withdraw Ward's division through Kasserine Pass to establish another defensive position. Ward's orders instructed him to hold Sbeitla until 1100 hours, February 17. Ward managed to hold until 1700, when German forces threatening his flanks forced him to withdraw.³⁴ 1st Armored Division successfully disengaged and withdrew through Kasserine Pass to establish another line of defense.

Fredendall ordered Stark to "go to Kasserine Pass right away and pull a Stonewall Jackson".³⁵ From February 18 to 20 the 19th Engineer Brigade, under Stark, fought a desperate action to delay the advance of the German 21st and 10th Panzer Divisions commanded by

³² Calhoun, "Defeat at Kasserine", 19.

³³ Ibid., 20

³⁴ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 207.

³⁵ Howe, *Northwest Africa*, 447.

Rommel.³⁶ The efforts of the engineers bought time for Allied forces to reinforce Kasserine Pass.³⁷ CCB occupied a defensive position near Hamra, and halted an attack by the Italian contingent of Rommel's forces. During this time, Fredendall's ability to maintain effective command of the battle began to break down. Eisenhower assigned Major General Ernest Harmon to assist him, with the provision that Fredendall could not use Harmon to relieve Ward.³⁸ Harmon was named the commander of the battle in progress, but not commander of II Corps. Harmon's presence and the arrival of new Sherman tanks reinvigorated II Corps. Harmon moved CCA of 1st Armored Division to Tebessa in order to block an enemy advance toward the critical supply node. No further attacks materialized and the German Army began to withdraw from Kasserine Pass on February 23. Within two days, Allied forces were in possession of their original defensive positions and the Fondouk and Faid Passes.

The objective of the German Army was to expand the bridgehead in Tunisia by seizing the Faid Pass and then punch a hole in the Allied lines. Once German forces breached the Allied defenses, additional forces following the lead elements could seize Tebessa. Tebessa was located deep behind the lines of the British First Army. The loss of Tebessa would make continuing an Allied offensive very difficult. The plan the Germans executed was not the original one. Commando Supremo, the Axis command responsible for the theater, called for the seizure of Le Kef. Rommel decided that seizing Le Kef would be a tactical rather than strategic victory and successfully lobbied Kesselring to allow him to alter the plan.

After the initial success in Kasserine Pass, the German offensive ultimately culminated short of its objective. Once American forces successfully sealed Kasserine Pass on February 22, the German command admitted it could not take Tebessa. Anticipating a British offensive against

³⁶ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 255.

³⁷ Howe, *Northwest Africa*, 448.

³⁸ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 288.

Mareth, the Germans were compelled to withdraw to their original positions. The Germans executed an orderly withdraw, causing Allied forces to lose contact with the German Army until March 6.³⁹

The United States 1st Armored Division

The US Army activated the 1st Armored Division on July 15, 1940 at Fort Knox, Kentucky. After an inconclusive exercise in Louisiana, the fledgling division reorganized. The Brigade Headquarters was eliminated and replaced with two Combat Commands, labeled Combat Command A (CCA) and Combat Command B (CCB).⁴⁰ During the Battle of Kasserine Pass, Fredendall organized the 1st Armored into as many as four Combat Commands. The Combat Commands were combined arms teams that possessed their own intelligence and operations capabilities, but relied on the division for logistics and administration. Each Combat Command formed around one infantry regiment and one armored regiment. The artillery assets within the division were consolidated at the division level. In order to combat the massed armored formations that the German Army employed during the blitzkrieg, the United States War Department created the tank destroyer.⁴¹ In 1942/1943 most tank destroyers were lightly armored half-tracks mounting low velocity 75mm cannons. Tank destroyer battalions were assigned at the division level, and generally attached to subordinate units. The creation of a specific tank destroyer branch highlights the United States Army's view that medium tanks were not the primary anti-armor weapon system in the US inventory. In May 1942, before the 1st Armored Division could codify its new organization, it was sent to Ireland to train for the upcoming invasion. The 1st Armored, under the command of Major General Orlando Ward, would go into

³⁹ James Lucas, *Panzer Army Africa* (London: Presidio Press, 1977), 161-171.

⁴⁰ Heller, *America's First Battles*, 234.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

battle in operation Torch with two battalions of light tanks, and three battalions of M3 medium tanks armed with a low velocity 75mm gun.⁴² At the beginning of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, the 1st Armored Division fielded approximately one hundred and thirty tanks.

The German 10th Panzer Division

The German 10th Panzer Division was formed in 1939 in Prague. The division participated in the invasion of France, and fought on the Eastern Front, before the German High Command ordered it to Tunisia. Generalluetnant Wolfgang Fischer commanded the 10th Panzer Division during the African Campaign. A landmine exploded underneath Fischer's staff car on February 1, 1943 killing him. Generalluetnant Freidrich von Broich replaced him as the division commander. The 10th Panzer consisted of one tank regiment, two motorized infantry regiments, a reconnaissance battalion, a tank destroyer battalion, an artillery regiment, an engineer battalion, and its own support elements. The 10th Panzer organized into Kampfgruppen (KGs) in similar fashion to the Combat Commands of the US 1st Armored Division. Each KG would have its own operational and intelligence capability but rely on the division headquarters for logistical support. The bulk of the tank units assigned to 10th Panzer division were equipped with Panzer IIIs and IVs, and the division received a company of the more advanced Tiger tank to assist the lighter tank formations. The anti-tank battalion was equipped with 88mm dual-purpose guns, and towed 75mm anti-tank guns. The 10th Panzer Division fielded approximately one hundred and ten tanks.⁴³

⁴² Heller, *America's First Battles*, 235.

⁴³ Combat Studies Institute (CSI), "Battle Analysis of Kasserine Pass" (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985).

Technology

Blumenson accused the Americans of building inferior tanks in both *America's First Battles*, and *Kasserine Pass*.⁴⁴ He is correct if he is comparing the diminutive M3 Stuart or the cobbled together M3 Grant/Lee to the German Panzer IV. The M4 Sherman was superior to the German Panzer III and roughly equivalent to the Panzer IV. The Allies never produced a contemporary tank that was truly equivalent to the Tiger, invalidating Blumenson's claim that inferior tanks were a major cause of tactical defeats specific to Kasserine Pass. Had the American Army ever produced a tank to rival the Tiger during World War II his accusation would have more merit. The notion that American tanks were inferior at this point in the war was carried over from the performance of the Stuart and Grant against German armor in earlier engagements in North Africa.

The Stuart, designated as a light tank from its inception, was more heavily armed and armored than the German Panzer I and II.⁴⁵ The M3 Stuart weighed 14.7 tons and mounted a 37mm main gun. The Stuart was well protected for a light tank, boasting 50mm of frontal armor, while maintaining a road speed of thirty-six miles per hour. In comparison, the German Panzer II weighed 8.9 tons, mounted a 20mm main gun, and was protected by 30mm of frontal armor. Thousands of Stuarts were provided to the British and Commonwealth forces through Lend Lease and saw extensive action in the North African campaign. The British respected the capabilities of the Stuart, the British nickname for the M3 was the Honey, but recognized they were no match for the Panzer III and IV they were facing. The Stuart was nearly obsolete by the time the Americans landed in North Africa. US armor units equipped with the Stuart fared poorly against the Germans in the initial engagements of Kasserine Pass.

⁴⁴ Heller, *America's First Battles 1776-1965*, 251.

⁴⁵ Michael Green, *American Tanks and AFVs of World War II* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 135-170.

The M3 Grant was designed quickly as an interim medium tank to fill a capability shortage in the American Army. The Grant, dubbed the M3 Lee by the British, who gave the name of Confederate Generals to all American produced tanks, featured a 75mm cannon mounted in the sponson and a turret mounted 37mm cannon. The M3 Grant was very tall compared to other tanks, but was superior in armor and firepower to the British Crusader. The Grant weighed 30 tons and was protected by 50mm of frontal armor. Although mechanically reliable, the bolts that held the armor plating in place had a tendency to add to the spalling effect when the tank was struck.⁴⁶ The Grant was the predominant medium tank in the US Army during Operation Torch before it was phased out by the M4 Sherman. At the battle of Kasserine Pass only the 2nd Battalion of the 13th Armored Regiment was still equipped with Grants.⁴⁷

The M3 Tank Destroyer was created by mounting a 75mm cannon on the M3 half-track. Lightly armored, but fast and easy to deploy, the M3 tank destroyer was designed to seek out the enemy's armored formations and destroy them; allowing the light and medium tanks to maneuver to the enemy rear. Of all the systems fielded by 1st Armored Division, the M3 tank destroyer was the most technologically deficient with respect to its German counterpart. The German 88mm dual purpose anti-aircraft/anti-tank gun had a fearsome reputation. The 10th Panzer division employed its long-range anti-tank fires to form a base of fire that could pin down Allied tanks, allowing the Panzers to maneuver.⁴⁸ The 88mm ammunition could penetrate the frontal armor of the Sherman at nearly 3000 meters and could penetrate the flank at 5000 meters.⁴⁹ The Germans

⁴⁶ Spalling occurs when fragments of the tank's armor are propelled into the crew compartment by the force of the projectile striking the tank.

⁴⁷ Steven Zaloga, *Armored Champion: The Top Tanks of World War II* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2015), 59-101.

⁴⁸ Combat Studies Institute, "Kasserine Pass Battle Analysis", 1-6.

⁴⁹ Green, *American Tanks and AFVs of World War II*, 208-213.

also used 75mm anti-tank guns which were comparable in performance to the main gun of the M4 Sherman.

The M4 Sherman was the most prevalent medium tank in Allied armies throughout the Second World War. The Sherman was a sturdy, mechanically reliable vehicle, equal to all but the heaviest German tanks at the time. The M4 mounted a 75mm main gun in a fully traversable turret. The Sherman weighed 30.3 tons and was protected by 76mm of frontal armor, but maintained a superior power to weight ratio over the German Panzers, allowing for a greater cruising range.⁵⁰ The gasoline powered Sherman tended to burst in to flames immediately after being hit, causing the diesel powered variant to be prized by commanders and tank crews alike. The Sherman out-classed the Panzer III in firepower and armor protection. The Panzer III weighed only 22 tons, protected by 50 mm of frontal armor and mounted a 50mm main gun. Despite being considered an inferior tank, Panzer IIIs, would knock out twenty of the forty-four tanks destroyed in the counter-attack by Alger's 2nd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment.⁵¹

The Sherman was roughly equal to the Panzer IV. The Panzer IV weighed 26 tons, protected by 65mm of frontal armor, and mounted a high velocity 75mm gun. The Sherman tank could penetrate the frontal armor of the Panzer IV at a range of 2600 meters and flank armor at 5000 meters. In comparison, the Panzer IV could penetrate the Sherman's frontal armor at 2100 meters and flank armor at 4600 meters.⁵²

The German Tiger was the only tank on the Kasserine Pass battlefield that was superior to the Sherman. The Tiger was a heavy tank built to lead armored formations against other tanks; the Tiger clearly outclassed the lighter Sherman medium tank. The Tiger variant that faced the US 1st Armored division weighed 55 tons, was protected by 100mm of frontal armor, and

⁵⁰ Green, *American Tanks and AFVs of World War II*, 58-78.

⁵¹ Combat Studies Institute, "Kasserine Pass Battle Analysis", 1-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1-6.

mounted an 88mm main gun. The Tiger could penetrate the Sherman's frontal armor at 2800 meters and flanks beyond 5000 meters. The Sherman could not penetrate the frontal armor of the Tiger at any range and could only penetrate the flanks within 1900 meters. Only a company of Tigers faced the 1st Armored Division, reducing the physical, but not the psychological impact of the weapon.⁵³

Despite technological parity, the 1st Armored Division fared poorly against the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions during their battle at Sidi Bou Zid, near Faid Pass. Between February 14 and 16 the 1st Armored Division would lose ninety-eight tanks and seventy-five half-tracks.⁵⁴ The initial counter-attack to free the infantry forces trapped on Lessouda and Ksaira was launched by Hightower. One company of Hightower's battalion was forward, covering the infantry force, leaving forty-one M4 Shermans and twelve M3 tank destroyers to counter-attack against the 10th Panzer Division. The intelligence picture was unclear when Hightower began his attack; Walters, at Lessouda, counted more than eighty enemy tanks around his position.⁵⁵ When Hightower saw the number of tanks around Lessouda, he reported that only a delaying attack would be possible. Hightower placed his tank destroyers in the center of his formation with his tanks on the flanks. He anticipated engaging the German armored formations with his tank destroyers, allowing him to maneuver his Shermans to the flank or rear of the enemy. Hightower's plan of attack was consistent with the US Army's doctrine at the time. The German forces facing Hightower were warned of his advance and had time to form a hasty defense. Units from the KG Gerhardt occupied defensive positions along the firm ground around Lessouda, forcing the American armor to struggle in the loose sand.⁵⁶ Hightower's force was quickly destroyed. KG Gerhardt's

⁵³ Combat Studies Institute, "Kasserine Pass Battle Analysis", 8.

⁵⁴ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 163.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁶ Lucas, *Panzer Army Africa*, 166-167.

force was comprised predominantly of Panzer IIIs, which were technologically inferior to Hightower's Shermans.

Alger's counter-attack would meet the same fate. The German commander's had prepared a defense and lured Alger's tanks into a trap. German aircraft and artillery fire disrupted Alger's attack and slowed his advance enough to allow German armor to begin to envelop the US force.⁵⁷ Alger responded to the artillery fire from Sidi Bou Zid, in the north, by ordering two companies of tanks forward; the Germans responded by moving a company of Panzer IVs forward to check Alger's advance. Reports of German tanks in the south near Lessouda caused him to commit his remaining company to meet the threat. Alger was reacting to attacks on both of his flanks when he was attacked in his center by tanks from the 21st Panzer division.⁵⁸ Alger lost forty-four tanks and any hope of rescuing the infantry trapped on the mountains of Lessouda and Ksaira.

US Army Doctrine

The rapid defeat of the American armored forces could easily be assigned to technological inferiority. Both Hightower and Alger's tank battalions were equipped with the M4 Sherman which was not inferior to the vast majority of German tanks on the battlefield. Of the forty-four tanks destroyed in Alger's command, only one was destroyed by an 88mm shell.⁵⁹ Roughly half of the Sherman's destroyed were killed by Panzer IIIs, negating the claim of technological inferiority. If the tools are not to blame, the manner in which they were employed must be questioned. Hightower and Alger were not defeated by superior tanks, however, they may have been defeated by superior doctrine. The dual nature of the tank, as both tank killer and

⁵⁷ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 161.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁹ Combat Studies Institute, "Battle Analysis of the Battle of Kasserine Pass", 7-8.

exploitation arm, conflicted with the doctrine published in the US Army's Field Service Regulations Manual, FM 100-5. Harmon, who temporarily relieved Fredendall during the battle, said "many boys died while we learned the proper weapon with which to kill a tank is another tank."⁶⁰

During the interwar years, the development of anti-tank doctrine labored beneath a competition for primacy between the infantry and artillery branches of the United States Army.⁶¹ The debate about the future construction of the US Army began during the First World War, pitting the champions of modernity against the traditionalists. As early as 1921, visionary leaders, such as Major Bradford Chynoweth, called for the US Army to embrace mechanization and combined arms warfare. Even after the German's successful use of mobile armored forces in 1940 some traditionalists maintained that mechanized forces could not replace cavalry mounted on horseback.⁶²

The initial doctrinal solution to countering armored forces was to consolidate anti-tank guns, and use them either as a reserve to meet armored threats, or distribute them down to units threatened by enemy armor. The concept of pooling resources fit well into the US Army's shift to the triangular division.⁶³ During an exercise between Second and Third Army, the concept of pooling appeared to work well, but many claim the rules of the exercise were slanted in favor of the anti-tank guns. Opposing forces could not kill the anti-tank gun by shooting it; instead they were forced to overrun them. This played into the hands of the anti-tank gunners.⁶⁴ One ominous

⁶⁰ Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 146.

⁶¹ Gabel, *Seek, Strike, Destroy*, 10.

⁶² Peter Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 42-44.

⁶³ Gabel, *Seek, Strike, Destroy*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

observation during a later exercise seemed to predict the future. An observer of maneuvers in Carolina noted “it is believed that the success of AT [anti-tank] units is due to piecemeal attacks rather than AT gun effectiveness”.⁶⁵

The Army, impressed by the results of the exercises, consolidated all tank destroyer battalions under War Department direction, effectively creating another quasi branch of service. This move spurred anti-tank development, but also removed large-scale anti-tank responsibilities from the purview of the major branches. Lieutenant General McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces (AGF) in 1942, said, “certainly it is poor economy to use a 35,000 dollar medium tank to destroy another tank when the job can be done by a gun costing a fraction as much.”⁶⁶

The tank destroyer battalions saw their role as a mobile reserve to strike tank forces, not as a static defensive force. Infantry would continue to defend front line positions and armored forces would be utilized in the offense. FM 18-5 Organization and Tactics of Tank Destroyer Units, published in June 1942, stressed the role of the tank destroyers as an independent force. According to FM 18-5, tank destroyer formations would function as a semi-independent force that would engage tanks while being supported by whatever artillery was close by. Infantry units were required to immediately come to the aid of the tank destroyers should they encounter enemy infantry.⁶⁷ Many assumptions made by FM 18-5 would never be realized in combat; such as tank destroyer units always having priority on roads, or that a perfect intelligence picture would allow them to determine where exactly enemy tanks would attack. Tactically, FM 18-5 incorrectly assumed that the tank destroyers would have a firepower and mobility advantage over their opponents. This assumption was colored by the belief that the tanks they faced would be constructed primarily for infantry support, similar to the tanks faced in World War I. FM 18-5 did

⁶⁵ Gabel, *Seek, Strike, Destroy*, 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

little to account for the enemy's use of combined arms. The German Army used combined arms effectively in its offensive operations in North Africa. Tanks and tank destroyers were forced to help defend which was contrary to their doctrine.⁶⁸

The open terrain of the North African desert was likely ideal for doctrine focused on massed anti-tank weapons that relied on fire and maneuver to be successful. The broad front defended by 1st Armored Division caused commanders to spread tank destroyers and field artillery assets thinly across their formation, by assigning them to subordinate units, rather than maintaining them at divisional level. To compound the problem of a broad front, the Axis forces had the initiative. Rather than face the massed counter-attack by anti-tank battalions envisioned in FM 18-5, German attacks faced small company-sized detachments that were easily defeated, such as the company attached to CCB of the 1st Armored outside of Sbeitla. In practice, medium tanks were used extensively to counter advances made by German armor; although FM 100-5 stated clearly that the primary purpose for armor is offensive actions within the enemy's rear area.⁶⁹ US Army forces learned bloody lessons on the importance of combined arms warfare in the deserts of North Africa.

Rebuttal of Blumenson's Argument

Much of the blame for the outcome of the initial engagements of the Battle of Kasserine Pass may be justifiably assigned to a poor intelligence picture, misunderstanding of time and space, and a piece-meal commitment of armor. The major deficiency in Blumenson's argument is the effect of the initial engagements, which Blumenson carries too far. The tactical defeats suffered early in the battle were temporary, and did not amount to the catastrophic defeat described.

⁶⁸ Gabel, *Seek, Strike, Destroy*, 35.

⁶⁹ Field Manual 100-5, *United States Army Field Service Regulation* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 263.

At the onset of the battle, Anderson, commander of the First British Army under which II Corps was assigned, remained convinced that the German's main attack would come from the north. He therefore denied requests by Fredendall and Ward to consolidate 1st Armored Division. Anderson believed he had confirmation through the ULTRA intercepts and dismissed the evidence of an attack through Faid Pass. The 1st Armored Division was spread out in an economy of force role to protect the flank of the Allied forces. CCA of 1st Armored Division held the majority of a fifty-mile front, and CCB was more than one hundred miles away when the battle began on February 16. Once the battle began, armored forces were committed as soon as they were available without developing a clear picture of what was happening. Hightower and Alger attacked enemy forces of superior strength in prepared defenses. Even with technological parity, the outcome of such an attack should have been obvious before it began.

The disposition of 1st Armored Division at the beginning of the Battle of Kasserine Pass reflects the state of the campaign in North Africa at the time. In the "pell-mell" race for Tunisia the 1st Armored Division had outrun the rest of II Corps. Fredendall was still waiting for the majority of 1st and 34th Infantry Divisions to move from Tunis when the Battle of Kasserine Pass began. The decision by Anderson to reinforce the French in the center of 1st Army's position compounded Fredendall's problems, as did Fredendall's insistence on conducting local offensive operations. The raids launched by II Corps did little to effect the operational capability of the Axis forces, but did cause Fredendall's forces to be further divided. At one point in the operation, 1st Armored Division was divided into as many as four combat commands.

The command and control structure inside the allied coalition was very complex, interfering with timely decision-making. One of Harmon's critiques of Fredendall was that he did not understand time and space.⁷⁰ Fredendall's placement of II Corps Headquarters so far to the rear, not only prevented personal reconnaissance, but also delayed message traffic. Some of the

⁷⁰ Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 111.

panic attributed to inexperience may have been the result of troops at the front trying to make a decision while there was still time to do so. The placement of the CCA's infantry in easily isolated positions is a prime example of failing to understand the speed of armored warfare or the ranges at which engagements took place. German armored formations simply flowed around the infantry's positions and then defeated two consecutive understrength counter-attacks. The counter-attacking forces did not effectively use combined arms and they attacked in a fashion that the British referred to as rat racing. A "rat race" occurs when tanks attack enemy forces unsupported by infantry or artillery, and inevitably ends in defeat.

The nature of coalition warfare may have had its own impact on the historiography of the battle. Eisenhower was forced to tread carefully to avoid angering his allies and potentially threatening the coalition. The tenuous relationship amongst the coalition forces was difficult to maintain. During the battle for Longstop Hill a combined force of the US 18th Infantry and the British 1st Guards Brigade, was repulsed by the Germans after difficult fighting. The after action report produced by the 1st Guards blamed the 18th Infantry Regiment for the outcome of the battle. Major General Terry Allen, commander of the 1st Infantry Division, ordered his own investigation of the actions at Longstop. Allen's report, predictably, found that the British had misused American forces leading to the near destruction of one of the battalions of the 18th Regiment, assigned to the US 1st Infantry Division. Allen threatened to publish the report if the equity in the treatment of American troops by British officers did not improve.⁷¹ It is impossible to tell if Allen was bluffing, however, the US 1st Infantry Division ceased to be parceled out amongst other Allied divisions. Anderson had not preformed much better than Fredendall. Harmon had to countermand Anderson's withdrawal so that the Allied defenses could be stabilized. Eisenhower was placed in a difficult position, Anderson and Fredendall could both be

⁷¹ Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa 1942-1943* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 260.

justifiably accused of losing their composure during the Battle of Kasserine Pass. He had the authority to relieve both Anderson and Fredendall; however, the relief of Anderson may have strained relations between the Allies.

Blame for what happened at Kasserine Pass could be shared at all levels. Eisenhower's intelligence officer's overreliance on ULTRA caused him to divert Allied attention to a northern thrust. The placement of II Corps before the battle and the misreading of the German commander's intentions can be attributed to General Anderson. II Corps was described as a sheep tied to a post by one officer.⁷² Anderson did not order aggressive patrolling to maintain contact with the enemy, or heed the warning given by Fredendall, resulting in the surprise achieved by the German thrust in the south. Eisenhower chose to relieve Fredendall, but did not relieve Anderson. Fredendall did not return home in disgrace. Eisenhower sent a letter to the President of the United States, praising Fredendall and recommending that he continue to occupy positions of great responsibility.⁷³ Fredendall received a hero's welcome, was promoted, and put in command of Second Army; a strange fate for a man, who according to Blumenson, nearly single handedly orchestrated the defeat of American forces at Kasserine Pass.

Many scholars believe that Blumenson's characterization of the Battle of Kasserine Pass is overstated. Dr. Peter Schifferle, currently serving as a professor for the Advanced Military Studies Program at Fort Leavenworth, and author of *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, describes the notion of defeat as "something of legend". History should characterize the Battle of Kasserine Pass as a temporary tactical defeat. The combination of misinterpreting ULTRA intercepts and the belief that the German forces would soon collapse, allowed the Germans to achieve surprise. Leaders constructed a narrative of defeat following the initial engagements of the Battle of Kasserine Pass

⁷² Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 227.

⁷³ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 305-306.

that protected the existence of the ULTRA program. The claim that morale was shattered is also only true in a temporary sense. Allied forces counter-attacked on February 20, effectively sealing the Pass, and preventing the German Army from achieving its operational objective. Allied forces continued to attack, causing the Axis forces on the African Continent to surrender in May of 1943.⁷⁴

Section Two: Overview of the Battle of the Bulge, St. Vith

The Battle of the Bulge followed the landings at Normandy and the ensuing break out. The US VIII Corps, commanded by Major General Troy Middleton, occupied defensive positions near the Ardennes forest. The restrictive nature of the terrain and the lack of enemy activity in the area, led Allied Commanders to use Middleton's VIII Corp in an economy of force effort. The Lorraine Gap is the only terrain in the area believed to be suitable for any offensive operation because the Our River restricts the movement of vehicles. Winter conditions compounded the effects of terrain making a large-scale attack through the Ardennes unlikely, although the Germans had launched offensives through the Ardennes in 1914 and 1940. Allied commanders believed this to be a quiet area where VIII Corps could rest the veteran 4th and 28th Divisions, who had been heavily involved in the bloody fighting in the Hurtgen Forest, and allow the 106th Infantry Division and 9th Armored Division to gain some combat experience. Middleton's Corps defended an eighty-five mile front, which was three times the doctrinal frontage of a US Army Corps.⁷⁵ VIII Corps defended its front with the 106th Infantry Division in the north, the 28th Infantry Division in the center, and 4th Infantry Division in the south. CCA of the 9th Armored Division was located between the 28th and 4th Divisions. Middleton held CCB of the 9th

⁷⁴ Schifferle, *America's School for War*, 4-5.

⁷⁵ Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, 217.

Armored in reserve.⁷⁶

The US 28th Division, commanded by Major General Norman Cota, occupied a twenty-five mile sector in the center of the VIII Corps defense. Due to the extended front, the division fought with its three regiments on line. The 112th Infantry Regiment secured positions on the left flank of the Division along the Our River. The 109th Infantry Regiment, on the Division's right flank, occupied positions behind the Our and Sauer River. The 110th Infantry Regiment defended the center of the 28th Divisions position, concentrated in strong points along Skyline Drive.⁷⁷ The 28th Division was a veteran unit, which had fought well in the Hurtgen forest. Despite suffering heavy losses, the division had the vast majority of its assigned equipment and sufficient ammunition when the battle began. Infantry replacements were scarce in the European Theater of Operations, and many of the personnel replacements were from anti-aircraft or other combat support units.⁷⁸

The 106th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Alan Jones, defended a twenty-seven mile front in the northern portion of the VIII Corps sector. The 106th Headquarters was in St. Vith. General Jones thought that the positions of the 442nd and 443rd regiments along the Schnee Eifel were too exposed, but was unable to convince his superiors to give up a German territory that the Americans fought hard to seize. Jones was also responsible for the defense of the Losheim Gap. He assigned the defense of the Losheim Gap to the attached 14th Cavalry Group. The 106th Division was new to combat and had not gathered the extra heavy weapons common for more experienced divisions, such as the unit they replaced.⁷⁹ The US Army reassigned many

⁷⁶ CSI Battle Book 4-A, "The Battle of St Vith" (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), 36.

⁷⁷ Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, 218.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁷⁹ CSI Battle Book 4-A, "The Battle of St Vith", 44.

of the personnel, who had trained with the 106th in the United States before its deployment, to other units as replacements to make up losses in units already fighting in Europe. James B. Giles Jr., a Platoon Leader in the 106th said, “we were a bunch of stragglers, not just in my company but all over the 106th Division. It sure didn’t help us any.”⁸⁰

The German 5th Panzer Army, commanded by General Hasso Eccard von Manteuffel, was tasked with isolating the 106th Infantry, seizing St. Vith, and attacking west to assist the German 6th Panzer Army, whose mission was to seize Antwerp.⁸¹ 5th Panzer Army was organized into three corps. The LXVI Corps’ mission was to isolate the 106th Division and attack St. Vith. The LVII and XLVIII Corps would attack through the 28th Division, isolate the town of Bastogne, and continue to the Meuse River. The German offensive began December 16, 1944 with an artillery preparation along the entire front of VIII Corps. The distance between the defensive positions of the US regiments was so great that General von Manteuffel chose to forego the usual artillery preparation of front line positions.⁸² Manteuffel believed that his forces could infiltrate through the positions of the 106th and 28th and avoid a protracted fight in the dense woodlands.

Two Volksgrenadier (VG) Regiments from the German 18th Volksgrenadier Division attacked the 14th Cavalry Group in the Losheim Gap. The 14th Cavalry was a lightly armed mechanized cavalry organization of eight hundred men.⁸³ Supporting the 14th Cavalry was the 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, armed with 105mm self-propelled howitzers, and elements of the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion with twelve three-inch towed guns. The 14th Cavalry Group repelled the initial assaults made by the German infantry, however, Colonel Mark

⁸⁰ Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, 218.

⁸¹ CSI Battle Book 4-A, “The Battle of St Vith”, 44.

⁸² McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 102.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 102.

Devine, commander of the 14th Cavalry, ordered the three-inch guns repositioned closer to his headquarters. Devine planned to counter-attack with his light tanks to restore his forward positions with the light tanks of the 32nd Cavalry. Unable to launch an effective counter attack, Devine received permission to withdraw to a more defensible position to the rear of the Schnee Eifel.⁸⁴ While Devine was attempting to meet with General Jones in St. Vith, a troop of the 32nd Cavalry Squadron withdrew to positions held by the 99th Division without orders.⁸⁵

The 18th VG Division attacked the positions of the 424th and 423rd Regiments of the 106th Division defending on the Schnee Eifel. General von Manteuffel ordered the positions of the American regiments probed by German patrols in order to prevent a counter-attack while the northern pincer of the 18th closed on their positions⁸⁶ The 66th VG Division attacked the positions of the 424th Infantry Regiment attempting to achieve a rapid penetration. After a determined fight, during which the infantry managed to destroy a few Panzer Mark IV tanks with anti-tank guns and bazooka fire, the numerical advantage of the 66th VG Division began to have an effect.⁸⁷ The 424th Infantry lost control of the critical town of Eigelschied but frustrated the German effort at achieving a quick thrust toward St. Vith. German forces had nearly encircled the 423rd and 424th Regiments on December 16.⁸⁸ Maintaining the position of the 14th Cavalry would not have prevented the isolation of the regiments. The 106th Division's northern flank was already exposed by enemy penetrations.⁸⁹ Jones requested that the two regiments be withdrawn;

⁸⁴ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 102 – 110; CSI Battle Book 4-A, “The Battle of St Vith”, 38. The Combat Studies Institute describes the German attack as merely brushing away the 14th Cavalry, but McDonald describes a more orderly withdrawal.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁷ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 119.

⁸⁸ CSI Battle Book 4-A, “The Battle of St Vith”, 40.

⁸⁹ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1965), 151.

Middleton denied his request. Later, General Middleton would say that he was afraid that if the two inexperienced regiments began to withdraw they might go half way to Paris.⁹⁰

Middleton ordered CCB of the 7th Armored Division to move to St. Vith. With the next morning, December 17, and the rest of the division to follow. Jones and Middleton discussed withdrawing 423rd and 424th Regiments on the evening of December 16. An interruption in telephone communications caused Jones to believe that Middleton wanted the regiments to stay in place, although Middleton had agreed that they should withdraw.⁹¹

After bringing up reinforcements throughout the night, the Germans attacked the 106th again on December 17.⁹² The attack broke through the American defenders despite reorganization into strong points prepared for encirclement.⁹³ The 32nd Cavalry Squadron withdrew under significant pressure when attacked by the 506th Heavy Panzer Battalion. Troops from the 18th VG Division quickly seized a bridge over the Our River effectively cutting off the 423rd and 424th and their supporting artillery.⁹⁴ The help Jones expected from the 7th Armored Division had not materialized due to poor road conditions and enemy activity. Jones realized that the Germans had cut off his infantry regiments and ordered them to attempt to breakout toward Schonberg; although he still believed that the arrival of the 7th Armored Division would allow him to counter-attack to reestablish contact with his lost units.⁹⁵

The US 7th Armored was dispatched from its assembly area in Holland to reinforce VIII Corps. The 7th Armored planned to utilize two routes of march to move a distance of

⁹⁰ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 123.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹² CSI Battle Book 4-A, "The Battle of St Vith.", 40.

⁹³ Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe*, 221.

⁹⁴ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 315.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 321.

approximately seventy miles to assist the hard pressed 106th. During the 7th Armored Division's march, the infamous Kampfgruppe Peiper commanded by Joachim Peiper, cut both lines of march immediately after the combat elements of 7th Armored had passed.⁹⁶ Enemy activity was not the only cause of the 7th Armor's slow advance; supporting units that had lost their infantry protection were streaming to the rear to avoid being overrun. Most of the units withdrawing were doing so under orders. The VIII Corps ranking artillery officer, Major General John E. McMahon, had ordered all Corps artillery assets around St. Vith to fall back.⁹⁷

When the Germans penetrated to the outskirts of St. Vith, General Jones turned responsibility over to General Clarke of CCB, 7th Armored Division. Clark was the most junior General officer on the scene creating a complicated command relationship. Clarke's Combat Command had yet to arrive on scene.⁹⁸ He began reinforcing the defenses of St. Vith as units of the 7th Armored arrived. By the evening of December 17, Clarke had three armored infantry companies, a company of M4 Sherman tanks, and a cavalry troop defending in front of St. Vith.⁹⁹ While the defense around St. Vith was consolidating, the 424th Infantry Regiment managed to withdraw the 591st Field Artillery Battalion and move to the west bank of the Our River.¹⁰⁰

By December 18, the 7th Armored Division was in position to defend St. Vith. Combat Command R (CCR) held the north, CCB was positioned in the east and served as the division reserve. St. Vith faced several attacks throughout the day. An early morning attack against CCR forced the unit to withdraw to Poteau but a counter-attack by the 17th Tank Battalion prevented the defense of St. Vith from crumbling. CCB had a similar ordeal when it faced a well-

⁹⁶ CSI Battle Book 4-A, "The Battle of St Vith", 44.

⁹⁷ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 326.

⁹⁸ CSI Battle Book 4-A, "The Battle of St Vith", 47.

⁹⁹ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 329.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 329.

coordinated attack by infantry and supporting tanks. A German attack forced CCB out of the village of Hunningen but it quickly counter-attacked, and restored its position. Aggressive armored counter-attacks would continue to define the defense of St. Vith throughout the battle.¹⁰¹ General Clarke was content to give ground rather than use his armored formations to counter-attack; he said, “this terrain is not worth a nickel an acre to me”.¹⁰² In spite of Clarke’s local successes, German forces began to encircle St. Vith. German units continued to probe the defenses of the town the next day looking for a weak point to exploit. During the night of December 20, a group of survivors from the 423rd and 424th Regiments reached St. Vith. They reported that both units had surrendered; the surrender of the two regiments was the largest capitulation of US forces in the entire European Theater of Operations.¹⁰³

The defenders at St. Vith endured a major assault on December 21. CCB suffered under several coordinated combined arms assaults. By 2200 hours, German units penetrated the defenses around St. Vith in several locations. Clarke ordered his units to withdraw to a more defensible position west of the St. Vith to avoid being surrounded. The defense of St. Vith ended at 2300 hours on the night of December 21 and Clarke’s forces began to withdraw through a series of road blocks established to allow the 7th Armored to pass. Clarke’s withdrawal was aided by frigid temperatures that froze the muddy roads allowing vehicles to move more rapidly. The 7th Armored conducted a fighting withdrawal passing through XVIII Airborne Corps’ lines on December 24.

Section Three: Comparison of the Kasserine Pass and St. Vith

The parallels between the Battle of Kasserine Pass and the Battle of St. Vith, fought by II Corps and VIII Corps respectively, are easy to draw. The frontages defended by each unit were

¹⁰¹ CSI Battle Book 4-A, “The Battle of St Vith”, 51.

¹⁰² McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 466.

¹⁰³ CSI Battle Book 4-A, “The Battle of St Vith”, 61.

well beyond the capabilities of the subordinate units assigned to them. The enemy was able to achieve surprise at the operational and tactical level. Both units suffered rapid penetrations and isolation of their front line units. Another commonality is that the Battle of Kasserine Pass and the Battle of St. Vith helped to stop enemy advances, creating the conditions for successful Allied counter-attacks. Despite the similarities, historians characterize the Battle of Kasserine as a defeat while the Battle of St. Vith is portrayed as a heroic stand that helped lead to victory in the Battle of the Bulge.

The front defended by II Corps during the Battle of Kasserine Pass extended more than fifty miles. Primarily a single Combat Command, CCA, of 1st Armored Division, defended this front. The 106th Infantry Division of VIII Corps defended a front more than 25 miles wide. Commanders viewed both II Corps and VIII Corps sectors as economy of force operations away from areas likely to bear the brunt of a concerted enemy attack. General Anderson, commander of the British 1st Army to which II Corps was assigned, believed that intercepts from the ULTRA program pointed to a German offensive in the northern portion of his sector rather than the southern portion that II Corps occupied.

Allied Commanders in the European Theater believed that the Germans were incapable of conducting offensive operations on the Western Front. A communication between the Japanese Ambassador to Germany and the Emperor was intercepted under a program called MAGIC.¹⁰⁴ The message indicated that the Germans were planning a major offensive in the west, which could be launched as early as November. Eisenhower was aware of the message, but did not alert units in the European Theater of Operation because it was not confirmed by ULTRA intercepts.

The incorrect assessment of enemy capabilities and intentions allowed Axis forces to achieve surprise at the operational level and cost II Corps and VIII Corps dearly. Poor weather at the time of the attack and innovative tactics helped the enemy to achieve tactical surprise as well.

¹⁰⁴ McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 24-25.

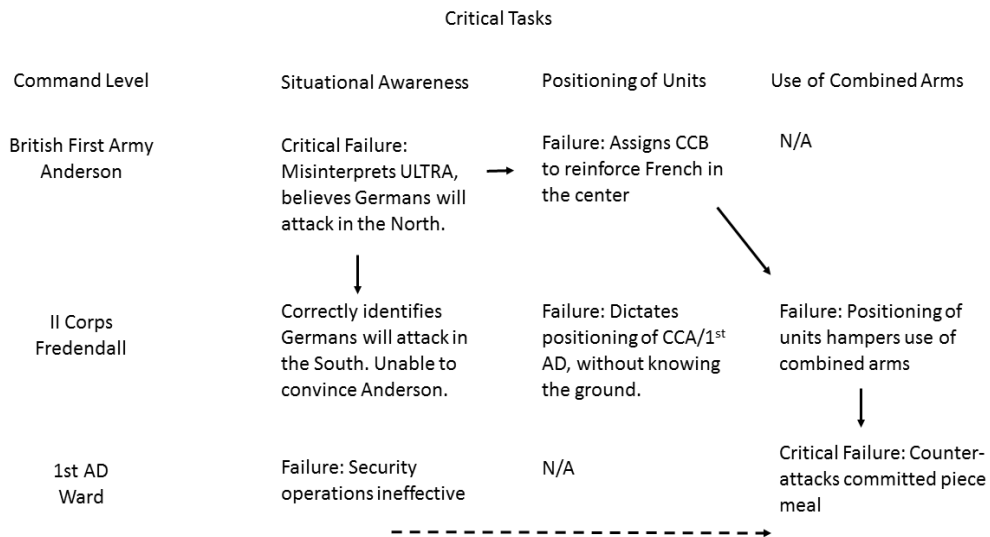
General Ward had misgivings about the mountain positions near Lessouda and Ksaira but could not ignore a direct order from Fredendall to occupy the positions. When the Germans attacked 1st Armored Division, they quickly destroyed the tank company in front of the 168th Infantry Regiment of CCA that occupied positions on the high ground, in accordance with Fredendall's order. As a result of their positioning, the 168th Infantry was surrounded by German forces and stranded in the mountains; and eventually attempted a desperate breakout. The 106th Infantry Division would suffer a similar fate. The 423rd and 424th Infantry Regiments defended from positions across the Our River and were quickly cut off from the VIII Corps defensive lines. Before the battle of St. Vith, General Alan W. Jones requested that he be allowed to pull those forces back but was denied. The 423rd and 424th would eventually surrender to German forces after exhausting their ammunition.

During each battle, major unit commanders were replaced. Harmon took command of II Corp from Fredendall and is widely credited with salvaging the situation in North Africa even as his superior officer, Anderson, lost his composure. Although the Germans eventually seized Kasserine Pass, they were unable to reach their ultimate objective of Tebbesa. The Battle of Kasserine Pass was the high water mark of German offensive actions in the North African campaign. Similarly, Jones turned over control of the Battle of St. Vith to Clarke even before his Combat Command of the 7th Armored Division arrived. Clarke is credited with conducting a brilliant defense of St. Vith and managing a difficult withdrawal that prevented 7th Armored Division from being surrounded. The German Army would seize St. Vith but fall short of their objective, which was Antwerp.

The declassification of the ULTRA program has profoundly affected the historiography of World War II. The need to keep the ULTRA program secret shaped the course of written history for years. The utility of the individual intercepts is limited in its current configuration, but the vast amount of data compiled illustrates ULTRA's significance to the war effort. The fact that a program the size of ULTRA remained secret until its official declassification is a testament to

the professionalism of those involved, as well as the power of the historical narrative. Keeping ULTRA secret forced Eisenhower, and other senior leaders, to allow the Battle of Kasserine Pass to be labeled a major defeat, when the evidence shows it is more fairly characterized as a temporary tactical setback.

The microscopic scale applied to the Battle of Kasserine Pass helped disguise the existence of the ULTRA program. The macroscopic scale of the Battle of St. Vith camouflages the intelligence failure within a story of ultimate triumph. Failure matrices demonstrate the cascading effects caused by incorrect interpretation of information provided by ULTRA.



Arrows indicate causal links. Solid lines indicate primary pathways; dashed lines, secondary pathways.

Figure 1. Battle of Kasserine Pass Failure Matrix
(created by author)

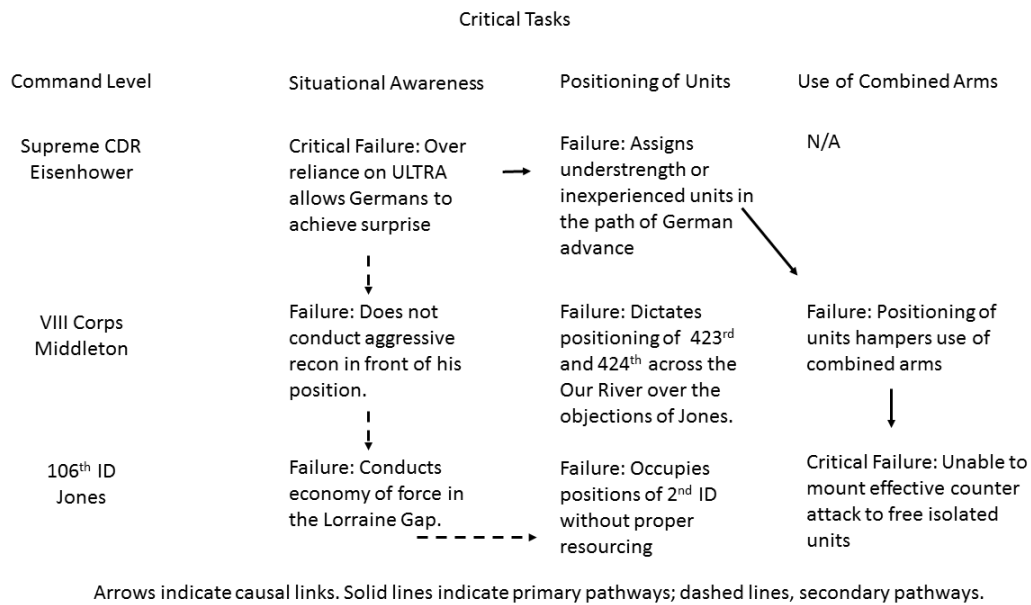


Figure 2. Battle of St. Vith Failure Matrix
(created by author)

As demonstrated in the above matrices, the loss of situational awareness, due to an over reliance on ULTRA, caused the poor positioning of Allied forces. 1st Armored Division and the 106th Infantry Division were both faced with fighting superior forces in isolation. Attempting to react to Axis attacks, both divisions became overextended and allowed subordinate elements to be cut-off. Ward and Jones lacked the available forces to effectively counter-attack to free the isolated units.

The history of each battle is remarkably similar in detail, but the treatment of each by historians is widely divergent. The scale under which each battle is studied, causes the divergence. Gaddis describes scale as the ability of historians to transition from microscopic to macroscopic.¹⁰⁵ Blumenson used the microscopic technique when he wrote the history of the Battle of Kasserine Pass. Blumenson's book *Kasserine Pass: An Epic Saga of Desert War* focuses on the 1st Armored Division's defense of Kasserine Pass on February 19-20, less than

¹⁰⁵ Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 25.

twenty pages describe what happened after the battle. Other authors wrote books that are more complete in the years that followed, but not in time to add depth to Blumenson's account. Movies such as *Patton* focus on Blumenson's microscopic view of the battle further reinforcing the narrative of defeat. Historians rarely study the Battle of St. Vith in isolation from the larger Battle of the Bulge. Rather, they take a more macroscopic view of the battle around St. Vith and consider it an integral part of the Battle of the Bulge. The actions of adjacent units had a greater impact during the Battle of St. Vith, which may induce historians to take a more macroscopic view.

If we use the same scale when comparing the Battle of Kasserine Pass with the Battle of St. Vith the evidence supports a similar characterization. The classification of the Battle of Kasserine Pass as a defeat is incorrect when viewed through the same lens that historians use to judge the Battle of St. Vith. The Battle of Kasserine Pass should be studied as a critical sub-component to the allied success in North Africa, like the Battle of St. Vith is studied as a sub-component of the Battle of the Bulge.

Conclusion

The current classification of the Battle of Kasserine Pass is incorrect. Critical analysis of the battle disproves the conventional wisdom that America is doomed to defeat in the first battles of major conflicts. Blumenson's characterization of the battle in *America's First Battles: 1776-1965* magnifies tactical difficulties to the level of institutional defeat. Other authors have categorized the initial results of the battle as minor setbacks. Gerhard Weinberg, author of *A World at Arms*, claims that the lessons learned were of great value and came at a fortuitous time. American forces took the necessary lessons forward, without meeting disaster.¹⁰⁶ Weinberg's

¹⁰⁶ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 436.

analysis of the battle challenges the narrative of catastrophe penned by Blumenson.

The characters in the story of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, such as Fredendall and 1st Armored Division, are held up like a punching bag for historians who do not appreciate the Battle of Kasserine Pass's proper placement within the history of the North African Campaign. Critics fail to put themselves in the place of these individuals, violating Clausewitz's prescribed critical analysis. Fredendall correctly identified the direction the German attack but suffers the wrath of historians for the results of a battle that may have been beyond his control. Harmon receives credit for salvaging the tactical situation, however, he assumed control after the front was stabilizing around Stark.¹⁰⁷ The establishment of complete causation for events within a battle is incredibly complex and potentially unknowable.

Published in 1966, *Kasserine Pass: An Epic Saga of Desert Warfare* was written with an incorrect working theory of the causation of the initial setback at Kasserine Pass. Blumenson blames inexperience, inferior technology, and poor doctrine. The inexperience of the American soldiers and the imagined technological disparity were not the only causation for 1st Armored Division's difficulties. The scientific study of the battle demonstrates the minor role technology played in the outcome of the battle. The rapid counter-attack of Allied forces demonstrates resilient morale and an incredible willingness to fight. Blumenson is correct when he identifies problems with US doctrine; however, the lack of any new doctrine before subsequent American victories invalidates any unique claim doctrine has on the Battle of Kasserine Pass. Blumenson falls into the trap Delbruck warned of by ignoring scientific data when writing a critical history. Blumenson also fails to extend his analysis to the ultimate objective. The Allies were successful in driving the Axis forces out of North Africa. If the Axis forces had managed to exploit their initial success, only then would Blumenson's narrative have been correct.

Clausewitz states that the deductions of the effects may be blocked by a lack of historical

¹⁰⁷ Howe, *Northwest Africa*, 448.

record or blocked intentionally by those in command.¹⁰⁸ These blockages produce gaps. A significant blockage for the historiography of the Battle of Kasserine Pass was the classification of the ULTRA program. The gap in the history is the effects of the misinterpretation of Ultra intercepts. Without the inclusion of Anderson's misinterpretation of ULTRA intercepts, and subsequent troop positions, Blumenson's account becomes a historical narrative rather than a campaign analysis. Enshrining the conventional wisdom that America is doomed to defeat in the first battles of major campaigns, requires more than a historical narrative to be deemed authoritative.

¹⁰⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 156.

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