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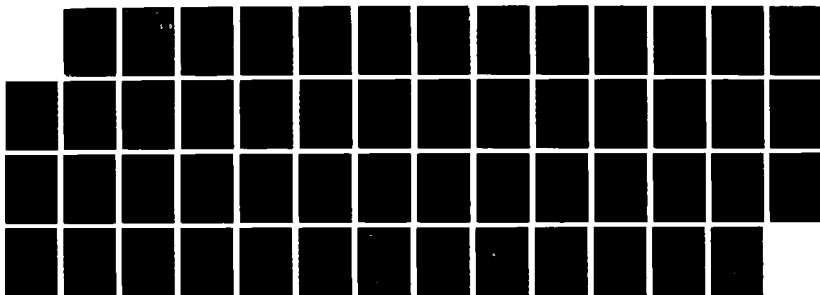
THE CONDUCT OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS(U) ARMY COMMAND
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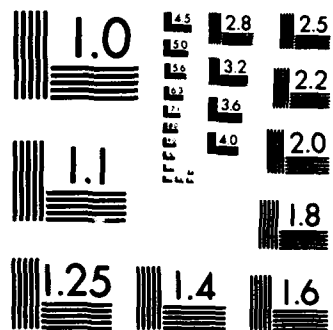
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THE CONDUCT OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS

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Major Michael T. Johnson

Armor

School of Advanced Military Studies
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

30 April 1987

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE				
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION School of Advanced Military Studies, USAC&GSC		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) ATZL-SWV	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900			7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)			10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) The Conduct of Continuous Operations (U)				
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) MAJ Michael T. Johnson, USA				
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Monograph		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 87/04/30	15. PAGE COUNT 50
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION				
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Operations Operational Maneuver Continuous Operations	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP		
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Success in modern warfare is no longer the product of a single decisive battle, rather, success is the result of a decisive campaign. The great campaigns of World War II all ended prior to the conclusion of the war because the armies involved were unable to conduct continuous combat operations - operations that concluded only with the decisive defeat of the enemy. This monograph discusses the theoretical basis for the conduct of continuous operations and compares the theory to the experience of the Third U. S. Army's attack across France in August of 1944. The paper begins with an examination of modern military theory and doctrine on continuous operations. The body of available theory readily supports a doctrine of continuous combat and supports the use of continuous combat as a means of decisively defeating an enemy. Analysis of Third Army's (continued on reverse)				
20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL MAJ Michael T. Johnson			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (913) 684-2138	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL ATZL-SWV

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The paper concludes with observations on the key factors in the conduct of continuous operations.

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Accepted this 11th day of May 1987

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ABSTRACT

THE CONDUCT OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS by MAJ Michael T. Johnson,
USA. 50 pages

Success in modern warfare is no longer the product of a single decisive battle, rather, success is the result of decisive campaign. The great campaigns of World War II all ended prior to the conclusion of the war because the armies involved were unable to conduct continuous combat operations - operations that concluded only with the decisive defeat of the enemy. This monograph discusses the theoretical basis for the conduct of continuous operations and compares the theory to the experience of the Third U. S. Army's attack across France in August of 1944.

The paper begins with an examination of modern military theory and doctrine on continuous operations. The body of available theory readily supports a doctrine of continuous combat and supports the use of continuous combat as a means of decisively defeating an enemy. Analysis of Third Army's August, 1944 offensive, that took Third Army from Avranches to Verdun confirms the efficacy of the theory, and offers additional insight into the conduct of continuous combat.

The paper concludes with observations on the key factors in the conduct of continuous operations. ←

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THE CONDUCT OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

The great campaigns of the twentieth century have one thing in common: at least one operational pause occurred between the commencement of the campaign and its successful conclusion. A variety of different factors caused these pauses, among which were enemy action, orders from superior headquarters, command and control difficulties, and the inability of logistics systems to sustain armies throughout periods of continuous combat. This paper will examine the concept of the conduct of continuous combat operations by large organizations--armies and army groups--and how that concept has evolved in both theory and practice.

II. THE NATURE OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS.

Continuous combat operations are necessary for success on the modern battlefield. The size, strengths, and capabilities of modern armies derived from the impact of technology on warfare, make the results of a single battle rarely decisive in determining the outcome of a war. The conduct of successful campaigns has replaced the decisive battle as the most important instrument in warfare. This conclusion is not new. In 1936 the U. S. Army's Command and General Staff College presented this point when it taught that:

"An army under modern conditions will rarely

be able to accomplish at a single stroke the destruction of the armed forces of a modern nation. Final victory will be achieved only through a succession of operations or phases. Each succeeding phase will generally be dependent on a prior successful operation."

Current U. S. Army thinking on the importance of continuous combat follows the path established by the Command and General Staff College in 1936: "The object of all operations is to impose our will upon the enemy-to achieve our purposes. To do this we must throw the enemy off balance with a powerful blow from an unexpected direction, follow up rapidly to prevent his recovery and continue operations aggressively to achieve the higher commander's goals."

The commander who wishes to plan and conduct a campaign that is characterized by continuous combat operations needs to keep in mind the complexity of the task he has set for himself. Warfare has progressed from the fighting of decisive battles that ended wars to the conduct of campaigns which link the results of battles in order to accomplish the decisive defeat of the enemy. The inability of armies to exploit rapidly the results of one

1. THE PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR AN INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1936. page 16

n. b. In 1936 the U. S. Army used the term "strategy" in the same fashion that we use "operational art" today. The term applied to the conduct of military operations in a theater of war.

2. Field Manual 100-5, OPERATIONS; Washington, D. C.: Dept. of The Army, 1986. page 14

battle into the defeat of the enemy in a second and third battle has tended to prolong the duration of the campaign and thus the war. Factors that hinder the conduct of continuous combat during a campaign include the inability of an organization to keep its fighting elements supplied, the inability to concentrate combat power rapidly against enemy weakness, and the inability of the attacking army to prevent the enemy from regenerating its combat power. These factors cause an army to reach its culminating point,³ which is the root of the operational pause. Theorists have devoted much thought to the avoidance of these factors.

III. THEORY OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS.

American, British, and Soviet writers of the post World War I era have pondered the reasons for pauses in the conduct of campaigns, and reached conclusions on how to avoid these pauses. One of the earliest writers on the theory of large unit operations was V. K. Triandafillov, a Soviet theorist in the 1920's. Triandafillov established his basic thesis quite plainly: "...an army intended for action in the sectors of the main blow, must be organized so that it will be capable with its own forces of conducting a series of successive operations from start to finish. It must have the resources that will allow it to surmount any enemy resistance, both at the outset of and during operations

undertaken." Additionally, Triandafillov recognized the importance of movement planning in the waging of war by large units:

"Movement is complicated by the circumstance that, even under conditions whereby armies have significant attached artillery and tank assets, selection of movement frontage when organizing the approach march to an operational engagement still will depend upon very many conditions. One must move on as wide a front as possible for convenience and rapid movement, for convenience of positions for rest, for more rational and fuller employment of local resources, and to retain freedom of maneuver. The broader the movement frontage, the smaller the march formation columns, the faster the march maneuver progresses, the easier it is to hide forces from aerial observation, the fewer the inconveniences in positions for rest, the more food and especially forage that can be delivered, and, consequently, fewer supplies and logistics. Broad movement frontage provides greater opportunities for envelopment and turning the enemy flanks. But, a desire for very broad frontages may lead to complete loss of the offensive power of the forces, the pursuit of conveniences in movement and positions for rest may lead to an operational cordon unable to accomplish any offensive missions at all. When organizing the march formation of large masses of forces, one must find that movement frontage threshold from which it will be possible rapidly and easily to transition to frontage dimensions that the offensive capabilities of a given group of forces allow without loss of time, without extraneous regroupings." 5

This emphasis on movement planning is not unique to Triandafillov. During this same period(1920's-1930's) U.S. Army

4. Triandafillov, V. K., NATURE OF THE OPERATIONS OF MODERN ARMIES; Moscow-Leningrad, 1929; Translated by William Burhans, RUSS-ENG Translations, Inc., Woodbridge, VA. page 109

5. IBID. page 115

theory on large unit operations mirrored similar concerns. The Army's Command and General Staff College published a series of books on the conduct of war by armies and army groups. Common themes in these works were: the importance of movement planning; the need to sustain logistically the operation, as opposed to sustaining the component parts of the army; the need for the large unit commander to plan constantly for future operations; striking at the enemy's decisive point; and the inseparability of logistics and tactics. These themes were driven home unequivocally.

The link between logistics and tactics was clearly established: "Logistics cannot be separated from tactics or strategy. It is not a branch of either, but is inextricably interwoven with both."⁶ and "In considering a plan of operation involving a concentration by rail it is impossible to separate strategy or tactics from logistics. What may be an excellent solution from a tactical point of view may be utterly impracticable from a transportation standpoint."⁷ The Command and General Staff College's premier work on large unit operations, PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR AN INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS, makes the link between tactics and logistics even clearer: "... success or failure will depend largely on the skill and completeness with which preparations have

6. THE DETACHED CORPS; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1925 chap. II, page 1

7. LOGISTICS OF AN INDEPENDENT CORPS; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff School, 1923 page 58.

been made to insure that supplies will be adequate; on the surprise achieved, and the vigor, daring, rapidity, and tenacity⁸ with which the maneuver is carried out."

To be able to sustain continuous operations an army on the offense must also select the right target for its attack, concentrate forces for the attack, and pick the focal point of the attack. The Command and General Staff College taught that the fundamental law of strategy was: "BE STRONGER AT THE DECISIVE⁹ POINT." Achieving superior strength at the decisive point requires concentration of the army. Principles of strategic (operational) concentration include: the plan of concentration should be based on the plan of campaign; the concentration should be so located that it can be carried out without interruption from the enemy; sufficient time should be available for placing troops in relative positions suitable for the next step in the campaign, i. e., as advance deployments etc.; and, piecemeal concentrations should be avoided and all plans should be based on a coordinated and concentrated action by the whole force in a decisive blow.¹⁰ The focus of the concentration, however, should be on assembling sufficient force for the decisive

8. THE PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR AN INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS. page 289

9. IBID. page 37. The emphasis is that of the source document.

10. IBID. page 31

blow. "In the case of large armies one cannot wait until the whole force is concentrated before beginning the advance. Otherwise strategic surprise will be lost. Reserves will then be the last units to arrive."¹¹

The Command and General Staff College during the period between World War I and World War II placed special emphasis on two particular aspects of large unit operations. These were movement planning/execution, the source of an army's ability to concentrate combat power, and the sustainment of operations. The Command and Staff College recognized that while a fully deployed field army was an ungainly organization, its component parts were capable of rapid movement, and thus allowed the army to exercise a high degree of operational maneuver. "An army is an enormously complicated mass of personnel and materiel. As a unit it will always be slow in movement. It can not easily shift its ground or change its direction of movement. However, if proper arrangements are made, rapidity of movement may be given to any of the units which comprise it."¹² An army gains considerable advantage from being able to move its fighting elements rapidly about the battlefield. "The ability to switch combat power in turn from one strategic (operational) objective to another is the equivalent to an increase in the numerical aggregate of the force.

11. THE PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR AN INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS. page 33

12. IBID. page 29

This transference, however, lays a heavy burden on the transportation and marching power of the troops which must be foreseen and provided for. Otherwise it may result in a reduction¹³ in the combat power of the force employing it." Here lies one of the keys to the conduct of continuous combat in the practice of the operational art: the ability to maneuver subordinate elements about the battlefield rapidly, taking advantage of operational opportunities as they occur, is a function of movement planning.

Movement planning thus becomes an important factor in the conduct of continuous operations. However, an important point must be made: at large unit level the emphasis is on moving the aggregate power of the organization; it is not necessarily on moving all of the sub-elements of the organization. "Corps orders prescribe the movements of divisions in general and the movements of corps troops in detail. ... In any event Corps orders must definitely insure by march tables or otherwise that there will be no interference between columns(divisions). In determining this point sufficient careful calculations must be made to insure that¹⁴ movements directed are practicable." Operational maneuver, therefore, is the movement of tactical units to the locations where they will engage in combat. This is a clear link between

13. THE PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR AN INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS. page 28

14. LOGISTICS OF AN INDEPENDENT CORPS. page 3

logistics and operations.

Methods of moving the operational maneuver element with a minimum of confusion include moving forward less mobile elements prior to the movement of combat elements, and ensuring that march serials are composed of elements with like mobility.¹⁵ Additionally, selection of subordinate unit rest areas and assembly areas so that they are along the route of march, and moving forward only those elements needed for the initial stages of an operation also contribute to the rapidity of operational maneuver.¹⁶

Another benefit of sound movement planning is that it contributes to a large unit's ability to sustain logistically its forward movement. The anonymous authors of the Command and General Staff College's works of the 1920's and 1930's also considered this aspect of large unit operations. PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR AN INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS strongly links movement planning with logistical sustainment when it states that the formation of the unit, as it advances or retreats, can facilitate the sustainment of its constituent parts. In its discussion of movement formations this reference maintains that movement on a broad front frees the lines of communication for logistics traffic, as do echelonned formations, while column

15. THE DETACHED CORPS. page 5

16. IBID. page 20

17
formations hinder the sustainment effort. These conclusions are
18
remarkably similar to those reached by Triandafillov in 1929.

The Command and General Staff College works of the era from WW I to WW II provide a second key to the conduct of continuous operations by large units. Two references strongly emphasize planning for future operations: "Time and space elements and the nature of control force the commander of large units to give to the battle the character of a preconceived idea.",¹⁹ and "A force as large as a corps seldom can be defeated completely in one day, hence the commander of the attacking forces must consider carefully the probable locations and dispositions of his forces at the end of the first day's attack. Such foresight increases the chances of advantageously employing all units in continuing the attack until the enemy is defeated."²⁰

Fort Leavenworth and the Soviet Union, during the period between the world wars, were not the only places where theorists were considering the problems of large unit operations. In the United Kingdom, Major General J. F. C. Fuller plowed new ground

17. PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR THE INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS. page 66

18. NATURE OF THE OPERATIONS OF MODERN ARMIES. page 115

19. PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY FOR THE INDEPENDENT CORPS OR ARMY IN A THEATER OF OPERATIONS. page 28

20. THE DETACHED CORPS. chap V, page 1

when he devised a theoretical basis for waging modern war. Fuller felt that the large scale mechanization of armies had fundamentally altered the nature of war:

"The decisive point of attack will once again become the rear of the enemy's army. Not only will shock weapons disappear but also small missile-throwing weapons. The approach will be made rapidly not only by road but also across country, consequently the nature of strategy will be changed. Area warfare will replace linear warfare, and fronts may be anywhere. The attack will be divided into the act of demoralization which is more and more likely to be waged against the command of the enemy, the brains of his army, then against the nerves of his men. The act of decision will aim more at restricting the mobility of the enemy's main force than at the physical destruction of his organization. Once the enemy is held, that is, mobility is denied to 22 him, the act of annihilation will take place."

In this passage Fuller provides a third key to the conduct of continuous combat: strike the defender's ability to command and control his forces, thus paralyzing his ability to interfere with your offensive. This paralysis is induced in the enemy force primarily through the speed of the offense. Fuller felt that a sustained advance of 40 to 50 miles per day would introduce so much confusion in the enemy's ranks that all matters of importance would vanish. He saw the velocity of the attack as a weapon in 23 its own right.

21. J. F. C. Fuller, MACHINE WARFARE; Infantry Journal Inc., Washington, D. C., 1943. Though copyrighted in the US in 1943, an UK edition appeared in 1942.

22. IBID. page 67

23. IBID. page 151

Having prescribed an attack in depth on the enemy's command system and rear areas as the way to victory in modern war, Fuller also recognized that the attacker's rear area and sustainment effort were also subject to destruction: "Bases must therefore be systematically protected against mechanized and motorized attack."²⁴ Fuller felt that an attacking army should establish a string of supply bases as it advanced. Combat forces not a part of the main effort would be centered on these bases and would patrol the routes between them. No effort would be made to secure the surrounding area; rather the security of the communications²⁵ between the bases would be the objective. The benefits of this approach to rear area security are easy to see: combat power is preserved for the main effort against the enemy's army, and the attacker's logistics are kept secure. If the enemy launched a counterattack against one or more of these supply bases the resultant massing of the enemy's forces would either expose a fatal defensive weakness to the attacker, or would allow the attacker to defeat his enemy in a decisive battle. The drawbacks to this method of rear area security are equally apparent: a protracted withdrawal by the defender into the depths of his country would cause the attacker to dissipate his strength in garrisoning his supply bases. It appears that Fuller's solution to the problem of logistics security for the attacker is feasible

24. MACHINE WARFARE. page 80

25. IBID. page 82

only in a war of short duration. But Fuller, in "MACHINE WARFARE" was describing exactly how to bring about such a war.

Modern American and Soviet thought on sustained operations, while not contradictory, emphasize different approaches to the solutions of the problems posed by continuous combat. The current edition of the U.S. Army's FM 100-5, "OPERATIONS", stresses more the contribution to continuous operations made by logistical support, than it stresses the impact that the method of combat can have on the ability of a large unit to maintain its forward momentum. "Campaigns or battles are won by the force that is most successful in pressing its main effort to conclusion. To sustain the momentum of early successes leaders must deploy forces in adequate depth and arrange for timely and continuous combat support and combat service support at the outset of operations. Then they must accept risks and tenaciously press soldiers and systems to the limits of endurance for as long as necessary.",²⁶ and "Culminating points occur because the attacker must consume resources and commit forces as he moves into enemy territory fighting successive battles and engagements."²⁷ FM 100-5 exhorts commanders to sustain the momentum of the attack through visualizing the entire course of a major operation while planning specifically for the phase that is underway, and by ensuring that

26. FM 100-5, OPERATIONS. page 24

27. IBID. page 109

during operations the committed forces receive continuous supply and services." ²⁸ The manual also offers specifics on how continuous support is provided to the main effort. Prior planning and the identification of alternate route and potential base areas can accomplish the shifting of lines of communication with minimum impact on the maneuvering force. ²⁹ Additionally, the method of distribution, the size and composition of unit basic loads, and the use of controlled resupply rates(CSR's) and required resupply rates(RSR's) can control the pace of ³⁰ sustainment.

The primary Soviet work on offensive operations, "THE OFFENSIVE", emphasizes tactical solutions to the problem of conducting a continuous operational offensive. The author, A. A. Sidorenko, stresses that in World War II Soviet units were able to reduce the duration of their operations, even though attacking in great depth, through the method of increasing their rate of ³¹ attack. Attacks into the operational depth of the Germans were characterized by frequent changes in tactics and methods, by the acceptance of open flanks and of gaps between attacking units, and by the use of high rates of advance and rapid change from combat

28. FM 100-5, OPERATIONS. page 62

29. IBID. page 70

30. IBID. page 72

31. Sidorenko, A. A., THE OFFENSIVE, Moscow, 1970; Translated and published under the auspices of the U. S. Air Force.

formations to march formations, and back again. Sidorenko provides a particularly important insight in the conduct of the operational offensive when he states that:

"Conduct of the pursuit at high rates does not mean that it develops into an unceasing, forceful march. Pursuit is not simply forward movement after the enemy or parallel to him, but the conduct of battle. A withdrawing enemy now possesses broad capabilities for counteraction. Pursuing troops will have to fight not only against the withdrawing enemy grouping, but against his approaching reserves who will attempt to hold up the attacker's advance by counterattacks or counterblows or by shifting to the defense on intermediate positions. Therefore the pursuit may grow into a meeting engagement or into an attack on a defending enemy, and then renew again as soon as the reserves which have arrived are defeated."

33

Sidorenko provides another key to the conduct of continuous operations. It is the concept that the operational offense into the depths of an enemy can consist of many apparently unrelated activities, all of which are linked together by the operational objective of the offensive--the destruction of the enemy's ability to resist.

IV. THE PRACTICE OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS.

The experience of the Third U.S. Army during the Allied offensive from Normandy across France to the vicinity of the

32. THE OFFENSIVE. page 34

33. IBID. page 162

Sigfried line in the summer of 1944 serves as a useful example of a large unit conducting a continuous combat operation. During the period 1 August 1944 to 31 August 1944 3d Army fought a continuous action from Brittany on the west coast of France to the Meuse river in eastern France; a straight line distance of 400 miles. As a result of this offensive 3d Army prevented the Germans from establishing a coherent defensive line west of the Moselle river and inflicted almost ten times as many casualties on the Germans as it received from them.³⁴ This examination of 3d Army's drive across France is an attempt to isolate the factors that either hindered or made possible its rapid eastward advance to such great depths.

Any discussion of Third U.S. Army's actions in France, however, would be incomplete without some preliminary treatment of the design of the U.S. Army organizations that fought in World War II. The U. S. Army in WW II was raised and organized to be an offensive instrument. Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair, commanding general of the Army Ground Forces, was the architect of this army, and its accomplishments are a credit to his vision.

The infantry division was the basic fighting element of the army. Considerations in the design of the infantry division included: the amount of service support to be found in the

34. REPORT OF OPERATIONS 1 AUG 44 - 9 MAY 45; Headquarters, Third U. S. Army, 15 MAY 45; Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS. page 53

division and the degree to which the division in the interests of its own mobility and striking power should depend on corps and army for supporting services and reinforcing weapons.³⁵ GEN McNair's leading idea was to concentrate a maximum of men and material in offensive striking units capable of destroying the enemy's capacity for resistance. He wanted to minimize non-combat soldiers and units in the divisions to the number required.³⁶ McNair's divisional structure enhanced the battlefield agility of the divisions by placing the majority of the logistical units under the command of the field army. Driving this operational concept was the realization that supply depots, hospitals, and maintenance units became immobile once they commenced work. Therefore, they were commanded at a high level, not in the corps or division. When the corps or division moved it did so unencumbered by a large logistical element. The field army supported the move by assigning new logistics units to support it,³⁷ while the old logistics units emptied their shops of work loads. Corps and divisions were not in the channel of supply except in an emergency; regiments and battalions hauled their own supplies from the army supply points.³⁸ The field army headquarters was responsible for pushing the supply points within reach of the

35. Palmer, Robert R , REORGANIZATION OF GROUND TROOPS FOR COMBAT; Historical Section, Army Ground Forces, Washington, D. C., 1945; Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS. page 5

36. IBID. page 6

37. IBID. page 17

front line units.

GEN McNair was determined that the divisions were to be as maneuverable as possible. He was especially interested in keeping to a minimum the number of administrative vehicles found in a division. McNair had observed that "The advent of war, and the need of conducting operations on the far side of oceans, brought to light a paradox by no means new in military history, viz., that ³⁹ armies may be immobilized by their own means of transportation." The motivation for this comment was the inability of the U S Merchant Marine, in 1943, to provide sufficient shipping space for the newly formed divisions -primarily for their trucks, and the supplies required to sustain the trucks.

The situation faced by the Allies in France, 1944, establishes the validity of this observation for the deployed armies. In order to sustain the American offensive in late August of 1944 the Communications Zone(COMMZ) of the U S Army's European Theater of Operations(ETO) established a special ⁴⁰ purpose ground transportation system called the Red Ball Express. During the period of late August to mid-September 1944 the Red Ball Express delivered badly needed supplies of fuel and ammunition to

38. REORGANIZATION OF GROUND TROOPS FOR COMBAT. page 26

39. IBID. page 10

40. Ruppenthal, Roland G., LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE ARMIES. VOL I MAY 41 - SEP 44; Washington, D. C.: Office of The Chief of Military History, Dept. of The Army, 1953 page 496

the field armies in France. However, at a time when daily fuel deliveries to Third U. S. Army were often less than 150,000 gallons, the Red Ball Express was consuming 300,000 gallons of gasoline on a daily basis.⁴¹ COMMZ units supporting the two American armies in France, 1st Army and 3d Army, required twice as much fuel as did the most successful of those two armies.

By restricting the number of trucks found in a division McNair intended to prevent the division from immobilizing itself because of the very presence of the trucks. At the same time he felt that the number of trucks found on the division's table of equipment provided sufficient reserve supply capability for the division. McNair put a new light on the concept of what constituted the basic load of a division: "...the reserve of ammunition or any other supply, for that matter, is mainly in the hauling capacity of its motor transportation."⁴² The implications of this concept are clear: if this idea is sound then there is little need for combat units to carry large quantities of supplies into battle, thus increasing the unit's battlefield agility.

The commanding principle behind the organization and employment of the U. S. Army in World War II, therefore, was that the corps and divisions were tactical units, meant only for combat. The army was a tactical and administrative unit. In

41. LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE ARMIES; VOL I. page 509

42. REORGANIZATION OF GROUND TROOPS FOR COMBAT. page 12

exercising its administrative functions it by-passed the corps in every way possible in order that the corps could devote itself to tactical and training functions.⁴³ Lieutenant General George S. Patton jr. employed Third U. S. Army in the manner intended by Leslie J. McNair.

On 25 July, 1944 a massive joint effort of Allied air power and American ground power, called Operation COBRA, struck the German defensive positions in front of the U. S. 9th Infantry division, in Normandy, and tore a hole in the German lines that was six miles wide by one mile deep. On the next day infantry widened the gap to eight miles by four miles, and two combat commands of the U. S. 2d Armored division moved into the gap as an exploitation force. By the 27th of July the breakthrough of the German defense was essentially complete, as the rest of the 2d Armored division drove to a depth of eleven miles, and infantry⁴⁴ expanded the gap to a width of sixteen miles. The force that Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, commanding general of the U.S. Twelfth Army Group, had been holding in reserve for just such an occasion, Third U. S. Army, was about to be committed. As a means of easing the commitment of Third Army, GEN Bradley ordered

* HQ's Third Army did not officially come into existence until 1 August, 1944. However, Patton and his headquarters arrived in Normandy in mid-July.

43. REORGANIZATION OF GROUND TROOPS FOR COMBAT. page 80

44. Blumenson, Martin, BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT; Washington, D. C. Office of The Chief of Military History, Dept. of The Army, 1961 page 286

Patton to supervise the VIII Corps(First U. S. Army) exploitation of COBRA. "To enable Patton to supervise the VIII Corps Bradley had asked him to serve as his deputy for the forces on the right. Though Patton remained in the background of command to the best of his ability, his presence was unmistakable, and his imprint on the operation that developed was as visible as his shadow on the wall of the operations tent." ⁴⁵ At the conclusion of Operation COBRA the defending German LXXXIV Corps was destroyed and the neighboring II Parachute Corps was beaten. The German Seventh Army had been defeated. The way into France was open.

On 1 August 1944 Twelfth Army Group activated Third U. S. Army, and ordered it to move through the COBRA penetration and exploit into Brittany. Twelfth Army Group assigned to Third Army the following headquarters and divisions: Headquarters, VIII, XII, XV, and XX Corps; Fifth, the Eighth, Twenty-Eighth, Thirty-Fifth, Seventy-Ninth, Eighty-Third, Ninetieth Infantry divisions, and the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Armored divisions. By the 10th of August the Third Army troop list included the Eightieth Infantry division, the U. S. Seventh Armored division, and the French Second Armored division. Headquarters, XIX Tactical Air Command(TAC) was also activated on 1 August. Its headquarters co-located with Third Army headquarters. To supplement the combat power of the divisions, Third Army had a large number of combat,

combat support, and combat service support units that could be
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assigned to the corps on an "as needed" basis:

- 5 tank battalions
- 8 cavalry reconnaissance squadrons
- 7 tank destroyer battalions(SP)
- 9 tank destroyer battalions(towed)
- 5 field artillery battalions(SP)
- 47 field artillery battalions(towed)
- 23 anti-aircraft artillery battalions
- 20 combat engineer battalions
- 71 ordnance companies(ammo, repair etc.)
- 11 medical battalions
- 26 supply and service companies
- 27 truck companies

The presence of these army level units both significantly aided and hindered the Third Army operation that was to follow.

Third Army entered combat with the VIII Corps passing through Avranches into Brittany. XII, XV, and XX Corps assembled their forces in Normandy and prepared for combat. Patton's plan for the drive into Brittany called for an attack to the southwest from Avranches through Rennes to Quiberon bay(map #1) in order to cut off the Brittany peninsula at its base and prevent the Germans from either receiving reinforcements or escaping. VIII Corps would then open up Brittany's interior lines of communication by clearing the central plateau and seizing the Breton ports. Third Army would then turn to the east where Patton felt the decisive
47
battle for France would be fought. "Patton saw his immediate objectives far in advance of the front, for his intent was to

46 AFTER ACTION REPORT; AUG, SEP, OCT 1944, Headquarters, Twelfth Army Group; Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

47. BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT. page 348

slash forward and exploit not only the mobility and striking power⁴⁸ of his armored divisions but also the German disorganization"

VIII Corps attacked into Brittany with two armored divisions abreast, each followed by an infantry division. The corps formed a special organization called Task Force "A", composed of a cavalry group and a tank destroyer group, and gave it the mission of advancing along the north coast of Brittany in order to secure the main railroad line. VIII corps took seven days to fight from Avranches to the western Breton ports, a distance of about 150 miles. The methods employed by Third Army in making this rapid advance possible are worth noting.

Third Army formed its corps into air-ground combined arms teams and employed these teams by striking deep. For example, as VII corps attacked through the Avranches corridor, on 2 August, the XIX TAC provided armored column cover for the assaulting spearheads, performed armed reconnaissance to the front and flanks,⁴⁹ and covered bridges in the corridor. Supply convoys in support of the attacking divisions were escorted by 40mm self propelled anti-aircraft guns.

Third Army ensured its ability to conduct operational maneuver in Brittany by mounting a deep battle program unusual

48. BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT. page 349

49. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 19

in its innovation. The French Forces of the Interior (FFI) played a major role in this effort. On 4 August, 1944, a company of 150 U. S. Army Special Airborne Services Troops from the United Kingdom parachuted behind enemy lines to assist the FFI in protecting the railroad trestles at Morlaix until Task Force A⁵⁰ could link up with them. On 5 August Third Army had ten gliders deliver armored jeeps, weapons and ammunition to FFI forces who planned to seize the Vannes airfield in advance of the arrival of the Fourth Armored division.⁵¹ That possession of intact railroad lines and airfields allowed rapid massing of combat power was a fact not lost on Headquarters Third Army. Patton accomplished the lunge into Brittany by moving two armored divisions through the Avranches corridor in forty-eight hours,⁵² an impressive feat.

By 5 August the Third Army's offensive into Brittany had resulted in a widespread disorganization of the German forces. Recognizing this fact, the Twelfth Army Group ordered Third Army to attack east from the line of the Mayenne river to secure crossings of the Sarthe river from Angers to Le Mans and to be prepared to push strong armored forces in the direction of the Orleans - Paris gap; the reduction of Brittany was to be conducted

50. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 20

51. BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT. page 355

52. IBID. page 356

with minimum forces (VIII Corps) (map #2). On 8 August these orders were amended to include a Third Army attack into the flank and rear of the Germans in the direction of Argentan. GEN Bradley intended to encircle and destroy the German Army west of the Seine river; Third Army was the enveloping force.

XV Corps made Third Army's main effort when it attacked along the axis Le Mans - Alencon - Sees. XX Corps covered the southern flank of the army while Headquarters XII Corps remained on the Normandy beaches organizing and moving forward Third Army elements as they arrived in France. XIX TAC's main effort centered on knocking out German airbases north and east of Paris. Le Mans fell to the Americans on 8 August.

The effects of XV Corps swing north from Le Mans toward Alencon were significant. The Germans had formed a panzer group, called Panzer Group Eberbach, in order to continue their counterattacks toward Avranches (launched on 7 August) in reaction to the "Cobra" breakout. The XV Corps attack toward Argentan, in conjunction with the First Canadian Army's attack toward Mortain, threatened Panzer Group Eberbach and its parent command, the German Seventh Army, with encirclement. The German counterattacks

53. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 21

54. LETTER OF INSTRUCTION NUMBER FOUR; Headquarters, Twelfth Army Group, 8 AUGUST 1944. Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

55. BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT. page 485

were called off. The Germans were forced to commit Panzer Group Eberbach to the defence of Argentan. The rapid advance of Third Army prevented the Germans from even attempting to regain the initiative in France.

On 14 August, 1944, Twelfth Army Group ordered Third Army to hold the southern jaw of the Falaise pocket at Argentan and to continue its drive to the east. XV Corps halted momentarily at Argentan while XII and XX Corps continued the attack. By the end of the next day XX Corps had entered Chartres and St Calais, while the now operational XII Corps had advanced toward Chateaudin and Mayenne. More importantly, the rapid advance of Third Army made unnecessary Operation Transfigure --a plan to use airborne forces south of the Seine to prevent a German escape to the east.

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By the 16th of August Third Army had captured Orleans, thus preventing the establishment of any effective defense of the Paris - Orleans gap, and continued to attack with XV Corps toward the Seine river, north of Paris. On 18 August XV Corps reached the Seine in the vicinity of Mantes Gassicourt. On the next day XV Corps crossed the Seine while XII and XX Corps attacked south of Paris, toward the east.

Overextension of the American logistics system had significant effect on Third Army's offensive at this point. Bradley

had originally limited Third Army's advance to the vicinity of Dreux, Chartres, and Orleans because the COMMZ was starting to have problems in delivering the tonnages of supply required by the armies.⁵⁷ Third Army's supply status was indicative of the problem. Class II supplies were badly needed -clothing, individual equipment, water cans, tents, cleaning and preserving material. Additionally, repair parts for medium and heavy weapons were scarce.⁵⁸ Third Army's requests to Twelfth Army Group on 21 August reveal the source of the problem. Patton asked that railway operating and construction battalions follow closely behind the army and restore the rail net. He also asked for more truck companies.⁵⁹ COMMZ had the supplies in the quantities needed by the armies but its transportation system could not deliver them.⁶⁰

The 23d of August was a significant day for Third Army. The Supreme Allied Commander, GEN Eisenhower, ordered that First Army was to support the 21st Army Group's offensive to the Ruhr. Additionally, he ordered that the majority of Twelfth Army Group's POL allocations be given to First Army.⁶¹ On this day Third Army

57 BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT page 572

58 THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT page 37

59 IBID

60 LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE ARMIES page 490

61 BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT page 659

had about one week's supply of fuel on hand.

The enemy situation invited a strong continuation of the Third Army attack. The army G-2 estimated that the Germans were capable of delaying or defending in the Third Army zone with only about one division.⁶² Third Army's corps and divisions were still strong; however, fuel was beginning to be a problem as receipts of gasoline no longer equalled requirements. The opportunities posed by the weak state of the German army out-weighed the logistical concerns; on 25 August, 1944 Twelfth Army Group ordered Third Army to continue the offensive to the east by seizing bridgeheads across the Marne river along the line Reims - Chalons sur Marne - Vitry Le Francois.⁶³ On the next day Twelfth Army Group expanded its order to Third Army by instructing it to be prepared to seize⁶⁴ crossings of the Rhine river on a line from Mannheim to Koblenz.

Third Army responded rapidly. By 28 August XII Corps had crossed the Marne six miles south of Chalon sur Marne and had captured Vitry Le Francois, while XX Corps captured Epernay on the Marne.⁶⁵ The fuel situation, however, was becoming critical. Daily receipts were consistently below requirements. Only the capture of 37 rail car loads of German gasoline allowed the

62. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 41

63. IBID

64. IBID page 43

65. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 46

66

commencement of Third Army operations east of the Seine (map #3).

After securing bridgeheads over the Marne, Third Army attacked east to seize crossings over the Meuse from St Mihiel to Verdun. By the end of August XII Corps and XX Corps were across at the Meuse at St Mihiel and Verdun respectively. In making the drive to the Meuse, Third Army started consuming its basic load of supplies on 30 August.⁶⁷ Third Army received no fuel on the 31st of August.⁶⁸

The lack of fuel could not have come at a worst time. German resistance in France was still disorganized, but the army G-2 had indications that the enemy was trying to establish a defensive line on the Moselle, only 25 miles away.⁶⁹ Third Army was forced to halt in the vicinity of its Meuse bridgeheads as it worked to rebuild its stocks of POL. When Third Army resumed the offensive on 4 September, 1944 the situation had changed. The Germans had established a coherent defense on the Moselle. The pursuit was over.⁷⁰

Third Army's ability to conduct continuous combat over a 31

66. BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT. page 666

67. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 48

68. IBID

69. IBID. page 47

70. IBID. page 64

day period, to such a great depth - Avranches to the Moselle- was the product of several factors. Patton recognized the advantages to be gained from a rapid, deep thrust into the enemy when he told Third Army "If the American troops met pockets of resistance, they were to go around them. Don't stop."⁷¹ Third Army fought the battle in depth. Use of the Special Airborne Services Company and the FFI in Brittany to secure the vital rail road trestles at Morlaix,⁷² and the use of FFI troops to secure the Third Army rear area while the corps attacked east⁷³ are prime examples of understanding the impact of deep battle on operational maneuver. Additionally, Third Army's logistical organization made possible much of Patton's success in August. Third Army's employment of combined arms teams that included the XIX TAC was a significant contributor to the successful drive across France. Finally, the very organization of the army fielded by LTG McNair was a key contributor to Third Army's ability to succeed.

XIX Tactical Air Command and Third Army's logistics organizations were key factors in Third Army's ability to conduct thirty-one days of continuous combat in August. XIX TAC paved the way for ground units and prevented German interference with the

71. BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT. page 433

72. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 20

73. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 438

advance of the corps, while the logistics organizations, the quartermaster units and the ordnance units, allowed the army to maintain its forward momentum.

As Third Army attacked across France it enjoyed a degree of air support from XIX TAC that cannot be overestimated. The Allied air forces enjoyed total air supremacy, and XIX TAC exploited this control of the air to the utmost. For example, on 14 August, 1944, in the vicinity of Argentan, 400 German soldiers surrendered to pilots of the XIX TAC by waving white flags at the fighter-bombers as they turned to attack;⁷⁴ on 17 August XIX TAC reported that fighter-bombers operating over the Falaise pocket had to wait in line in order to attack German units because so many Allied aircraft were operating over the pocket;⁷⁵ on 22 August XIX TAC destroyed 20 enemy aircraft in air to air combat;⁷⁶ and on 25 August XIX TAC destroyed 127 German aircraft on the ground in attacks on enemy airbases.⁷⁷ Allied control of the air was so complete that Third Army's After Action Report does not contain a single reference to any American losses attributable to enemy aircraft in August or September of 1944. XIX Tactical Air Command allowed Third Army to maneuver at will across France.

74. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 30

75. IBID. page 34

76. IBID. page 40

77. IBID. page 42

"Continuous hammering by the XIX TAC, coupled with thrusts by 3d U. S. Army's armor and infantry destroyed all enemy hopes of restoring the line of the Seine river. The line of the Somme - Marne rivers was turned before it could be occupied and in the resulting confusion the enemy withdrew toward Germany, not only on the 3d U. S. Army front but also in the zones of the 1st U. S. Army and 21st Army Group . . . The speed of the 3d Army advance forced the enemy into headlong retreat across the Marne, Aisne and Meuse rivers without 78 an opportunity to occupy their natural defenses."

While XIX TAC paved the way for the rapid advance across France, Third Army Quartermaster and Ordnance units kept the advance moving. Ordnance units(maintenance) were task organized into forward groups and rear groups. The forward groups supported the committed divisions, while the rear groups supported the army as a whole. In a successful effort to maintain the momentum of the attack, Third Army sent companies from the rear groups to the forward maintenance collection points. Forward and rear companies in the collection point worked on equipment until the forward group moved on. The rear group arrived, and resumed work on disabled equipment. When the army rear group moved forward, COM12 maintenance units moved up and completed the work. Thus, a piece of damaged equipment could be evacuated through direct support to general support to depot support without leaving the original collection point. The savings in down time and transportation

78. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 52

79 Mayo, Lida, THE ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT: ON BEACHHEAD AND BATTLEFRONT; Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept of The Army, 1968 page 280

were considerable.

The efforts of the quartermaster supply and transportation units of both Third Army and the COMMZ, stood on their own merits. By the end of August, 1944, 90% to 95% of all supplies on the continent were in the COMMZ depots in the vicinity of the Normandy beaches. There were no stocks between these base depots⁸⁰ and the army depots which were 300 miles away. The quartermaster units were under enormous strain. For example, Third Army's cost of hauling supplies from Paris to Toul, about the same as the distance from Normandy to Paris, was 693,000 truck miles and 139,000 gallons of gasoline per day.⁸¹ Yet the quartermaster units were able to do this for a full month (map #4).

The COMMZ, supplemented by field army transportation units, delivered supplies to the field army depots. The most famous of the COMMZ efforts was known as the "Red Ball Express". This system, established in late August, operated on a net of one-way roads that were reserved for its use. By 29 August it reached a peak strength of 132 truck companies, with 5958 vehicles, and⁸² delivered 12,342 tons of supplies that day. The Red Ball Express was not without its problems, however. The COMMZ lacked adequate

80. LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE ARMIES: VOL I. page 491

81. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 84

82. Huston, James A., THE SINEWS OF WAR: ARMY LOGISTICS 1775-1953; Washington, D. C., Office of The Chief of Military History, Dept. of The Army, 1966 page 526

military police for traffic control; the management of the system hindered internal coordination; and over-use of the system led to poor vehicle maintenance and driver fatigue.

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The COMMZ also used air transport to deliver supplies to the armies. At times up to 1200 tons per day were delivered to First and Third Armies, but the average was about 500 tons per day. Two factors tended to limit the ability of the Air Transport Command to support the armies. One was a conflict in priorities for airfield use: at Orleans a forward field was developed for supply operations in support of Third Army. However, once it was ready, fighter-bomber units took it over. A second impediment was that the Priorities Board at SHAEF established the priorities for aerial resupply. Decisions were usually compromises that often resulted in the full capabilities of Air Transport Command not being used.

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In short, the efforts of the COMMZ and Third Army quartermaster units made possible August's dash across France. However, the inability of this logistics system to maintain that advance beyond the Meuse river brought Third Army to a halt. Third Army maneuvered its corps and divisions in a masterful manner; however, operational maneuver involves more than the movement of the combat elements. For an army to conduct continuous operations

83. THE SINEWS OF WAR: ARMY LOGISTICS 1775-1953. page 528

84. IBID

it must regulate the movements of its entire force. Clearly, the ability of the COMMZ, Twelfth Army Group, and Third Army to synchronize the movements of the logistical organizations with the movements of the combat units declined as the operation progressed.

A final major factor in Third Army's ability to engage in continuous combat across France in August of 1944 was its very structure, the combination of combat, combat support and combat service support units that comprised the army. The daily rapid advances of the divisions required the efforts of combat engineer units that cleared obstacles and bridged rivers; maintenance work performed by the ordnance companies; and long miles driven by the drivers of the truck companies. However, not all of the units in the Third Army troop list contributed to the advance, and the presence of some even hindered the ability of the army to maintain its momentum.

There is no mention in the Third Army After Action Report of any role played in the August offensive by the 9 towed tank destroyer battalions, 23 anti-aircraft artillery battalions, and 52 non-divisional field artillery battalions that were on the Third Army troop list. The exploitation from Avranches to Verdun was a rapidly moving affair not well suited to employment of towed anti-tank guns. Yet they were there. The XIX TAC had complete control of the air; yet the anti-aircraft artillery battalions were part of the advance. The German resistance from Avranches to Verdun consisted mainly of isolated road blocks, easily bypassed;

yet the non-divisional artillery battalions moved with the army. These extraneous battalions consumed as many resources as did the maneuver battalions, and also competed for road space. They also required logistics support, and thus caused the number of logistics units to be greater than that necessary for the operation. If the tank destroyer battalions and anti-aircraft artillery battalions are assumed to be equal to maneuver battalions in support requirements (they had about the same number of soldiers as did infantry battalions, and only a few less vehicles than did a tank battalion), then these 31 battalions consumed almost as many resources as did three divisions. Add in the supply requirements of the 52 artillery battalions and the total consumption probably exceeded that of three divisions. The drive across France was made by nine divisions (five divisions, under VIII Corps were fighting in Brittany). If three divisions worth of logistics resources had been available to Third Army at the end of August, how far could it have advanced?

V. CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

Both theory and practice support the utility of the conduct of continuous offensive as a means of inflicting decisive defeat on an enemy. Military theory offers at least four keys to the problem of how an army engages in continuous offensive combat. First is the recognition that operational maneuver is primarily a function of movements planning and execution. This is logical

since the essence of operational art is "...the identification of the enemy's operational center-of-gravity -his source of strength or balance- and then concentration of superior combat power against that point to achieve a decisive success." ⁸⁵ Third Army's ability to shift its forces so rapidly that the Germans consistently were unable to establish defensive lines along the upper Seine, the Marne, or on the Meuse, substantiates this concept as does the later inability of the COMMZ to shift its logistical contribution to combat power quickly enough to maintain Third Army's forward momentum.

A second key is the need to fight today's battle with tomorrow's in mind. Both pre-World War II Leavenworth publications and the more modern FM 100-5(OPERATIONS) emphasize this aspect of the operational art. Patton's exhortations to his soldiers to maintain the momentum of the advance as a means of preventing the enemy from being able to offer effective future resistance, and the opportunities opened to Third Army because it followed his lead, illustrates both Patton's appreciation of this point and the advantages gained from observing it. Additionally, Third Army's employment of Special Forces and FFI to seize the rail road trestles at Morlaix and the airfield at Vannes is an excellent example of the use of a deep strike designed to aid the future operations of an army.

85. FM 100-5, OPERATIONS. page 10

A third key is the idea of the attack into the enemy's rear.
86 87
J. F. C. Fuller and A. A. Sidorenko are the principal advocates of the deep attack. Their belief that a deep attack prevents the enemy from readily restoring his defenses is fully substantiated by Third Army's ability to preempt successive German defensive lines in eastern France.

The fourth key, offered by Sidorenko, is the idea that not all elements of the army need to be engaged in the same type of combat activity.
88
An offense into the depths of the enemy might find one corps guarding a flank, a second corps containing an enemy force, a third corps attacking a defending enemy, while a fourth corps continues to exploit to the enemy's rear. The Corps are performing separate functions, but the army is still executing its operational offensive. Indeed, the preceding situation is
89
exactly that of Third Army on 14 August 1944.

Analysis of Third Army's August offensive reveals one other key to the conduct of continuous operations: the importance of a task organization tailored to the mission. The combat teams of armor, infantry, artillery, engineers, logistical units, and XIX TAC air support that made up the fighting corps allowed the

86. MACHINE WARFARE. page 67

87. THE OFFENSIVE. page 148

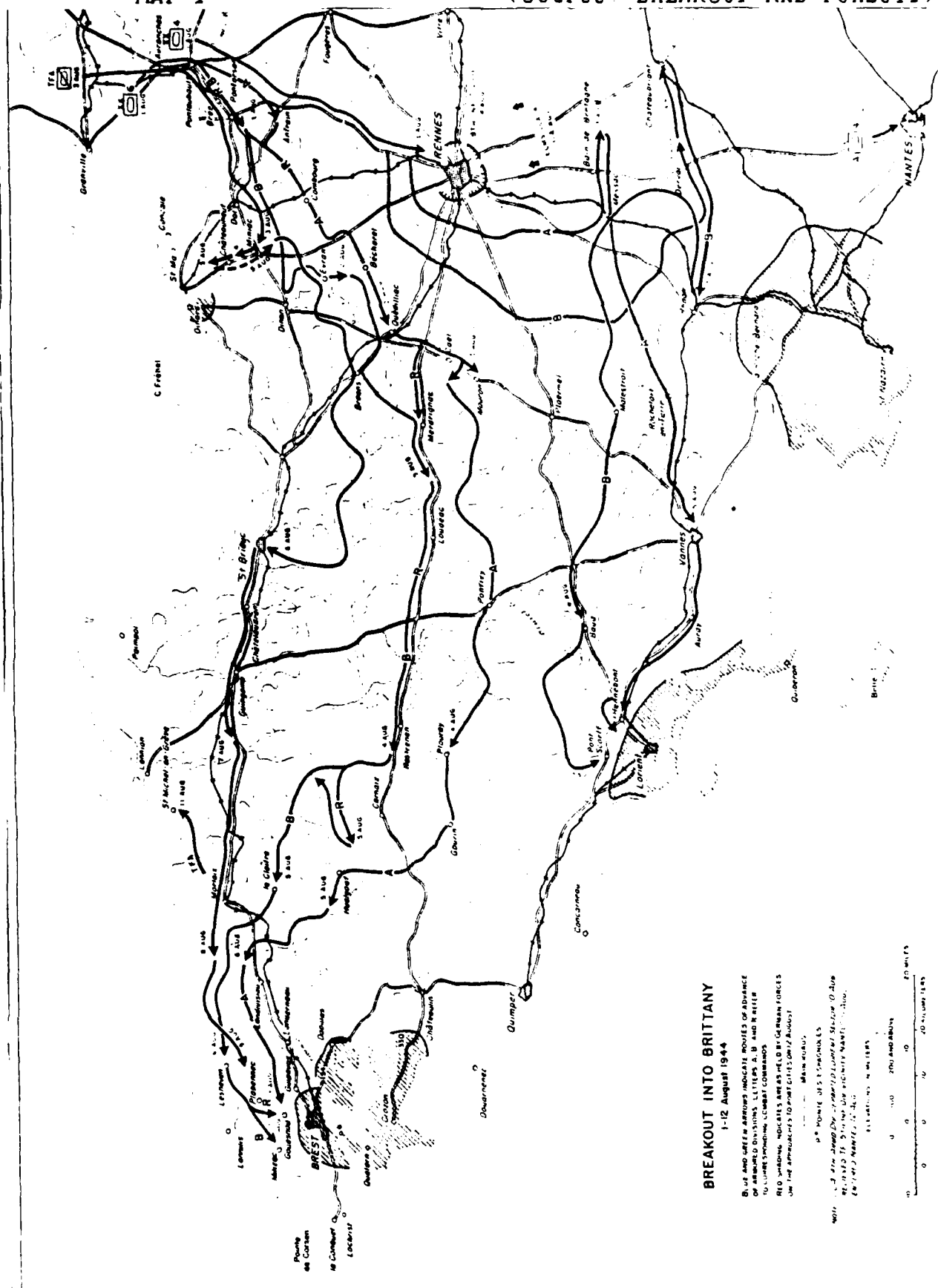
88. IBID. page 162

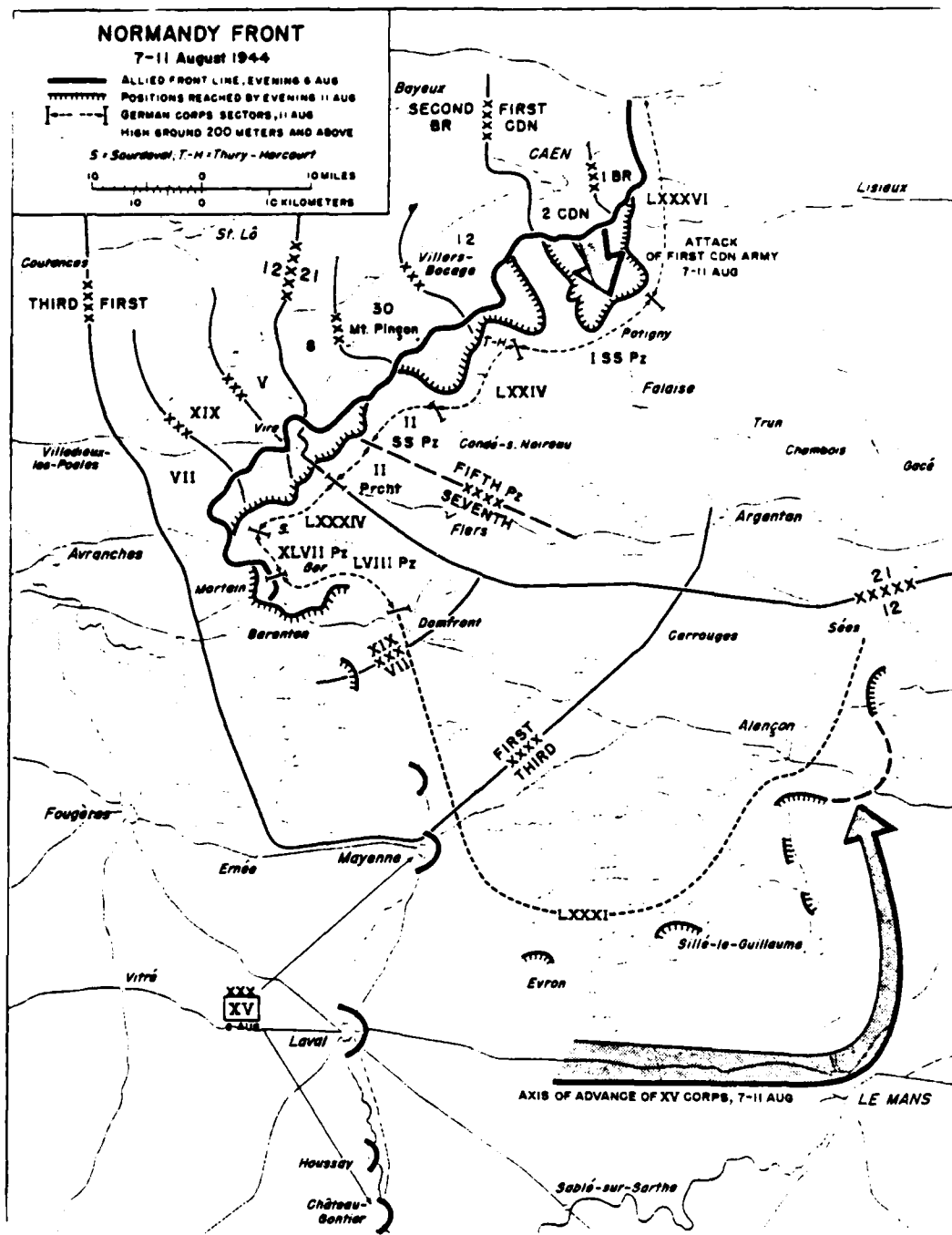
89. THIRD ARMY AFTER ACTION REPORT. page 29

stunning advance to the Meuse. However, the presence of combat, combat support, and combat service support units that contributed little or nothing to the forward movement of the army exacerbated a situation of supply shortage. There may exist times when the overall effectiveness of an organization can be improved through the removal of combat elements, as opposed to the addition of more units.

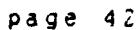
The conduct of a continuous offensive operation requires precise movement planning that is well executed; a task organization of combat, combat support and logistics units that is tailored to fit the operation; tactics that involve a series of deep attacks into the enemy's operational rear area; and a higher echelon logistical system that is capable of providing support with the same agility as that of the attacking army. A final conclusion of this paper is that the factors that were identified as significant keys to the conduct of continuous operations are subjects that are worthy of further development as individual topics.

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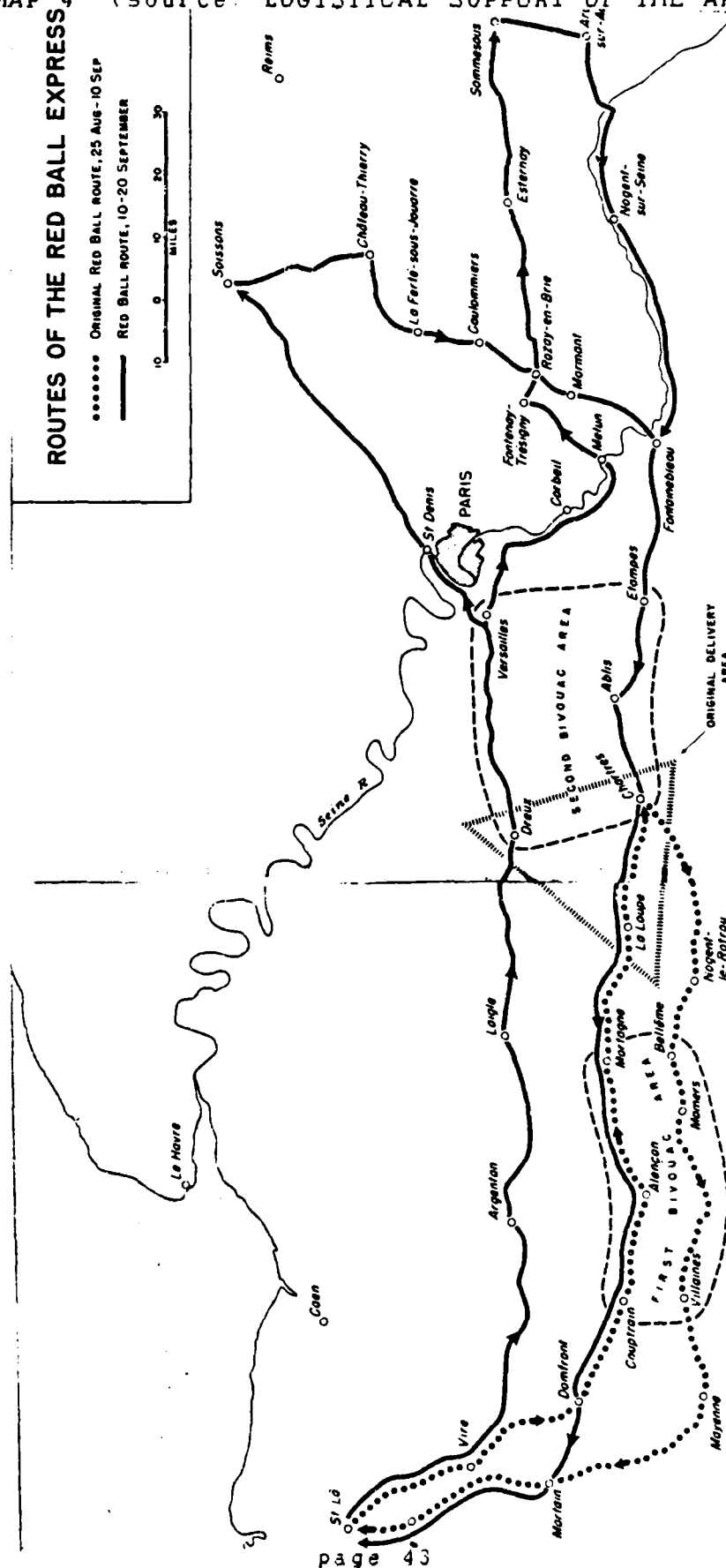


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