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# Operational Pause vs. Offensive Culmination: Lessons in Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy

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26 April 1988

UNCLASIFIED
SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

| | |
|---|---|
| 1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION<br>UNCLASSIFIED | 1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS |
| 2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY | 3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT<br>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<br>School of Advanced Military Studies, USACGSC<br>6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)<br>ATZL-SWV | 7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION |
| 6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)<br>Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900 | 7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) |
| 8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION<br>8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) | 9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER |
| 8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) | 10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS<br>PROGRAM ELEMENT NO. / PROJECT NO. / TASK NO. / WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO. |

11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)
Operational Pause vs. Offensive Culmination: Lessons in Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy (U)

12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)
MAJ Daniel J. Roh, USA

| 13a. TYPE OF REPORT | 13b. TIME COVERED | 14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) | 15. PAGE COUNT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Monograph | FROM _____ TO _____ | 88/4/26 | 47 |

16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION

| 17. COSATI CODES | | | 18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) |
|---|---|---|---|
| FIELD | GROUP | SUB-GROUP | ETO, Culmination, Operational Pause, Eisenhower, European Theater of Operations, Broad Front, WW II |
| | | | |
| | | | |

19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)

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This monograph evaluates the concept of offensive culmination in the context of the Allied effort against Nazi Germany on the western front in World War II. During the conduct of this campaign, General Eisenhower forced a pause in the midst of successful pursuit because he feared culmination. Many criticized this decision accusing Eisenhower of unnecessarily extending the war at great cost. This criticism grew into the still unresolved broad front-single thrust debate.

(Continued on reverse)

| 20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT | 21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION |
|---|---|
| ☒ UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED ☐ SAME AS RPT. ☐ DTIC USERS | UNCLASSIFIED |

| 22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL | 22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) | 22c. OFFICE SYMBOL |
|---|---|---|
| MAJ Daniel J. Roh | (913) 684-2138 | ATZL-SWV |

DD Form 1473, JUN 86 *Previous editions are obsolete.*

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE
UNCLASSIFIED

19. Abstract cont.

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This monograph seeks to expose those issues which run common through theory, doctrine, Allied invasion planning, and Eisenhower's decision process from June to September 1944. Hopefully, weight of this evidence will aid future operational planners when deciding whether to choose an operational pause or risk offensive culmination.

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88-2890

School of Advanced Military Studies
Monograph Approval

Name of Student: Major Daniel J. Roh
Title of Monograph: Operational Pause vs. Offensive Culmination: Lessons in Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy

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Accepted this 7th day of May 1987.

## ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL PAUSE VS. OFFENSIVE CULMINATION: LESSONS IN EISENHOWER'S BROAD FRONT STRATEGY by MAJ Daniel J. Roh, USA, 47 pages.

FM 100-5 cites the theoretical concept of the culminating point as one of the essential considerations in campaign design. In his work On War, Clausewitz introduced this concept to the lexicon of operational theory. In doing so he advised that even though it is critical to offensive campaign design, the point of offensive culmination is very difficult to determine and should be approached with discriminative judgement.

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Through close inspection of this debate factors emerge which prompted Eisenhower to choose an operational pause to avoid offensive culmination. These same factors are clearly evident in theory and current U.S. doctrine as essential to good campaign design. Not surprisingly, they were key to the design of the initial Allied invasion of the continent, OPERATION OVERLORD.

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# INTRODUCTION

In September 1944 newspapers around the world trumpeted the impending destruction of the Nazi Reich. The German nation was pressed on several fronts. Her alliances were threatened. Her armies suffered repeated disasters in the field. The most recent and dramatic evidence of Nazi collapse was the success of the Allied Expeditionary Force on the western front in Europe.

Just a month before, the prospects of an early peace were not so bright. Following the most ambitious amphibious invasion in history, the allied armies sat stalled barely forward of their initial invasion beaches. They were thirty days behind planned advances.[1] Then, with stunning quickness, the allies broke out, shattered enemy forces in western France, and raced for the German frontier. This free wheeling pursuit on a broad front captured territory in thirty days that was expected to take seventy.[2] Then suddenly, as the world rejoiced and prepared to celebrate victory, the armies stalled on the very doorstep of the German frontier.

General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, determined that his forces were simply too weak to finish the job. The rapid gains of his combat units had far outraced the ability of his logistics support to keep up. He declared a pause in offensive operations and set about rebuilding his strength. Later, with consolidation complete, he would continue across the frontier on a broad front, complete the destruction of German forces in the

west, and render total defeat to the Nazi Reich.

Few actions in the history of World War II have engendered more debate than Eisenhower's decision to pause and then continue with a broad front strategy. Critics charge that, following massive German defeats in western France, Eisenhower ignored an opportunity to pursue a sustained single thrust into the heart of the Reich which would have ended the war. Variously accused as being timid, politically-minded, and even lacking in basic operational insight and skill, Eisenhower maintained that such a single thrust effort, far from ending the war, would invite destruction.

The argument survives to this day, not in the context of victory vs. defeat, but instead as angry recriminations of how inevitable success may have come sooner or at less cost. Hidden in the confusion of this conflicting rhetoric is the salient issue of the entire debate. It is the theoretical concept of the culminating point.

FM 100-5 states that a vital consideration for operational commanders is sensing culminating points.[3] Although this appears relatively straightforward, it is not so simple. There is no prescription for identifying this point. When introducing this concept to the lexicon of operational theory Clausewitz observed that, considering how many factors contribute to an equation of forces, it is difficult to determine which side holds the advantage. Consequently, when anticipating culmination it is often ". . . entirely a matter of the imagination. What matters

therefore is to detect the culminating point with descriminative judgement."[4]

Eisenhower paused because he feared culmination before victory was assured. Like others, he enjoyed the quick cheap victories of pursuit. But he alone still considered how best to achieve his ultimate task while avoiding defeat.

Long regarded as a supreme diplomat who held together a tenuous coalition of egocentric but highly talented warriors, Eisenhower may actually have been the single great architect of the Allied victory. The record of his conduct of pursuit operations reflect a fundamental grasp of the requisite balance between offensive culmination and the operational pause. Although culmination does not mandate defeat, it does invite increased risk of failure. This risk can only be measured in the dynamic balance of opposing forces and against the benchmark of the desired end state. Throughout the broad front-single thrust debate, Eisenhower alone kept these issues in perspective as he balanced available means against desired ends. In doing so he may have avoided an Allied tragedy.

This monograph will seek to determine those considerations which run common through theory, doctrine, the Allied invasion planning (OVERLORD), and Eisenhower's decision process from June to September 1944. Perhaps weight of this evidence will provide light to guide future planners when deciding to seek operational pause or risk offensive culmination.

## RESTATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORY, THEORY, AND DOCTRINE.

It was Eisenhower's subordinates, Montgomery, Bradley, and Patton, who first criticized his judgement for a continued broad front strategy. Long before the ultimate defeat of Germany, these men imagined a quicker way of gaining success. Each in turn saw the means at hand and the threat imposed and found a different path to the desired end state.

This, then, provides the most valuable context for the debate. It is important to understand how each of these great leaders saw the same situation and then drew different conclusions. Somewhere in the decision process of each, similar issues surfaced. These issues concerned the use of means to achieve ends. How each interpreted the means and ends is exposed in the debate over ways. The single thrust-broad front controversy becomes superfluous when one discovers basic disagreement over what is possible, what can be achieved with the means at hand. At the bottom line, each side of the issue viewed a different end state. One had the political objective in sight, the other did not.

Closer inspection reveals that this entire argument is bound up in the elusive fabric of the operational art. It is not a debate over competing strategies at all. Instead, the conflict evolves one level below in the careful measure of means and ends essential to campaign design.

Consequently, it is necessary to restate the problem.

FM 100-5, OPERATIONS defines operational art as

> . . . the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations. . . . [it] involves fundamental decisions about when and where to fight and whether to accept or decline battle. [The manual states further that] reduced to its essentials, operational art requires the commander to answer three questions:
>
> (1) What military condition must be produced in the theater of war or operations to achieve the strategic goal?
>
> (2) What sequence of actions is most likely to produce that condition?
>
> (3) How should the resources of the force be applied to accomplish that sequence of actions?[5]

In each case the commander is asking in what way he must use available means to achieve the desired end.

## RELATIONSHIP OF MEANS TO ENDS

Operational art requires a careful understanding of the relationship of means to ends. The commander's job is to determine the best way to employ available means to secure the desired end state. Although this relationship remains constant, these means and ends assume various characters within and between the different levels of war. The commander must grow more vigilant as this seemingly simple concept weaves an increasingly complex mosaic at higher echelons of command up into the operational and strategic level of war.

At the strategic level, the desired end state is the policy objective, the strategic goal which the nation (or

coalition of nations) wishes to achieve. The military means available to achieve this end are the resources of the nation evidenced by trained soldiers and the materiel implements of war. These means go on a circuitous route through the levels of war and take on many forms before returning to accomplish the strategic goal.

Recall that the first question the commander asks in the design of his campaign is what military condition he must produce in order to achieve the strategic goal. The successful campaign becomes the means that secures that end. But, this is not simply soldiers and equipment, the forces referenced above. It is also not just an intellectual exercise of the commander. The commander must first conduct the campaign. Its successful execution becomes, at once, a desired end, as well as the means to the strategic goal.

Consequently, the second question the commander asks is "what sequence of actions is most likely to produce that condition".[6] These actions are the battles and major operations he must conduct. They are linked in time and space, consecutively or sequentially. Each sets preconditions for the next until, finally, they achieve the campaign objective. Again, they are both an end in themselves and the means to a subsequent end.

Finally, the commander asks himself "how should the resources of the force be applied to accomplish that sequence of actions?."[7] These resources are the soldiers and equipment, the organizations, that will fight

those battles.

But the conduct of battles is not the sole concern of the campaign planner or his subordinates. An implicit emphasis in this planning process is setting the preconditions for tactical success. This suggests, above all, that the commander must ensure the means are available to achieve success. As he spends units in battle or other operations and uses up strength, he must replace those resources. This is the role of sustainment. FM 100-5 states that "The sole measure of successful sustainment has always been the generation of combat power at the decisive time and place."[8] Of course this does not simply happen. It costs resources also. The generation of combat power becomes itself an end. The sustaining resources which contribute to this effort, although integral to combat power, are not themselves combat units.

Thus, through every level of command, while matching means to ends, the commander must balance how much of his resources to spend in combat power for today's battle and how much to spend in building combat power for tomorrow. This is essential, not only to set the preconditions for tactical success, but also to ensure sufficient strength remains to meet the campaign objective.

Implicit in this exercise is an appreciation for the true potential power these forces represent. Throughout the long conduct of campaign, many factors affect the potential strength of each belligerent relative to the other. The operational commander must carefully plan for and then

monitor this balance of power potential. He must be sensitive to those subtle shifts in advantage which may signal opportunity or counsel caution. As Clausewitz warned, he must detect these culminating points with descriminative judgement.

## CULMINATING POINTS

Clausewitz maintains that, by their nature, offense and defense manifest predictable trends in their ability to generate power. Generally, over time, the force of the attack will diminish. Conversely, the force of the defense will increase.

Clearly, motivated to secure some positive aim, the attacker must begin with the strength sufficient to impose his will. Even when not superior everywhere, he will seek to overwhelm his opponent, perhaps through a series of battles, but at least at some decisive point which will secure the desired end. The concept of the culminating point is intimately bound up in this dynamic. It concerns not only the relative strength of the opposing forces, but also the ambitions of each commander- that is, what military end state he must achieve.

FM 100-5 says of the culminating point:

> Unless it is strategically decisive, every operation will sooner or later reach a point where the strength of the attacker no longer significantly exceeds that of the defender, and beyond which continued offensive operations therefore risk overextension, counterattack, and defeat.[5]

The point of culmination represents where the attacker

must stop and defend his gains if he wishes to avoid the risk of losing them. Of course this is not a problem if the attacker reaches operationally decisive objectives before culmination.

The defender can frustrate this ambition for early decision. If he enjoys considerable depth to his rear he can trade space for time. Given the advantage of waiting, he may select the battles he will fight. He may bleed the attacker's strength faster than his own while protecting his main source of power. Eventually, he will reach a defensive culminating point. At this point he no longer benefits from waiting; his own losses no longer yield increasing relative advantage over the attacker.[10] At this point he may revert to the offense. Perhaps he has become strong enough to secure a decision in his favor. But, this is not guaranteed. The issue is not the defender's strength relative to his own fortunes. The issue remains the relative strength of each belligerent.

This distinction is critical to the broad front-single thrust debate. The apex of the defender's (German) strength is not an issue for the attacker (Allies) unless, by pursuing the offensive beyond culmination, the attacker influences the ratio of power in favor of the defense. This action may present his force for destruction.

Clausewitz puts the culminating point into perspective by relating it to an evaluation of the desired end state. Implicit in his evaluation is an understanding of the concept of strategic (operational) success. He observes

that "part of strategic success lies in timely preparation for a tactical victory; . . . the rest of strategic success lies in the exploitation of a victory won."[11]

If that tactical victory results in the total destruction of the enemy force then the enemy no longer possesses the military means to resist. But, when culmination threatens the attacker prior to decisive combat, the commander must determine how that condition defines the military end state and what impact previous gains hold for securing the political objective. He warns that ". . . when a strategic attack is being planned one should from the start give very close attention to this point- namely, the defensive that will follow."[12]

This statement appears to contradict Clausewitz's claim that "in war, the subjugation of the enemy is the end, and the destruction of his fighting forces the means."[13] But, this is not so. Clausewitz admits that total destruction of the enemy is not often possible.[14] Offensive culmination therefore is inevitable. The commander must halt while he can still defend his gains. These limited gains may then serve as leverage in subsequent negotiations. Clausewitz calls this phenomenon the culminating point of victory.[15] Although total subjugation is not possible, the military end state still presents some means which contribute to the political objective.

If the commander stops short of the limits of his potential, he forfeits a portion of this leverage. On the

other hand, if he overshoots this point, although he may gain new advantage, he risks losing everything. Consequently, "the natural goal of all campaign plans . . . is the turning point at which attack becomes the defense."[16]

But this concept of limited aims short of the destruction of the enemy force is a red herring. The military end state that contributes to the political aim is still all important. That condition must still be accomplished. Given sufficient strength, the attacker may continue to spend forces to win battles and gain objectives without regard to his diminishing power. But, only in rare instances will the attacker possess such overwhelming power that the culminating point in victory is avoided and total domination of the enemy state is possible.[17]

However, without sufficient strength to reach uninterrupted toward the desired miltary end state the attacker is not destined to failure. He has other options. Even as he fights battles today, he may spend a portion of his resources to build strength for continued efforts tommorrow. Although he may not advance as rapidly, he will push the point of culmination further into the future. Proper balance of such combat and sustaining efforts may eventually place his desired end state within reach.

This problem becomes more difficult when total subjugation of the enemy is the political goal. A culminating point of victory, which permits the existence of a viable enemy force remaining in the field, is no

longer an acceptable military end state. In this case the commander cannot make that point of culmination the object of his campaign. He cannot risk equilibrium, let alone risk moving beyond it. As he links battles and major operations, he must ensure that he builds sufficient strength to continue the offensive until the enemy is destroyed. Only then can he be confident of imposing his will, unconditionally, on the defeated nation. Of course, as stated above, many factors converge at the strategic level to define victory. The military end state is only one. But, clearly, possession of a potent military force can bolster the arrogance of an otherwise defeated nation and frustrate the conditions for peace.

Consequently, when the attacker resolves that he cannot have his gains or his total will threatened then culmination is a condition to avoid at all cost. This is the problem faced by Eisenhower.

FM 100-5 provides counsel in this regard. It states that

> from a planning perspective, the attacker must seek to secure operationally decisive objectives before the force reaches its culminating point. If this cannot be anticipated, the attacker must plan a pause to replenish his combat power, and phase his operation accordingly.[18]

## THE PLAN

The threat of culmination in September 1944 was not unanticipated. In their planning, the Allies never expected they could mount and sustain an uninterrupted offensive drive, on the continent, ending only in the defeat of

Germany. Indeed, at first, they had no conventional power on the continent at all. Therefore, long before any ways were found to bring about the destruction of Germany, the Allies had first to develop the initial means.

Clearly, the Allies possessed the combat potential to defeat Germany. Much of this capability was amassed in England. Much more lay in the divisions still training in the United States as well as the awesome potential of a fully mobilized U.S. war industry. But this potential had to be translated into combat power on the continent. This was the mission of OPERATION OVERLORD.

The challenge was clear. The Allies must not only field the forces to win battles, but also build the strength to sustain the long series of battles necessary for final victory. First, they must jump the channel, a formidable obstacle, in the face of German power. The strategic offensive would really begin somewhere on French soil.

Consequently two major issues faced the OVERLORD planners. First, they had to secure a foothold through successful seaborne assault. This phase of the operation, also involving airborne landings, became OPERATION NEPTUNE. The second (and by far most dominant) issue was providing adequate build up and maintenance. Inherent in the build-up was expansion of the beachhead into a lodgement of sufficient size and character to receive, organize, and sustain large combat formations.[19]

Briefly, and with the end state always in mind, what were these sustainment considerations that characterized

the planned OVERLORD lodgement? Theater sustainment, on the continent, had to support combat operations all the way from northern France to the very heart of Germany. Germany's defeat had to be total. This meant that many more divisions had to arrive in the theater after the initial landings. These units would consume hundreds of thousands of tons of supplies. Replacement troops and equipment would be in demand to rebuild shattered units. Medical service and equipment maintenance would be essential for the treatment and repair of battle casualties and the damaged implements of war.

This sustainment function could not operate sufficiently or indefinitely over the initial assault beaches.[20] Consequently, a large theater sustainment structure had to be built. Deep-water ports were necessary for the discharge of deep draft Liberty ships from the United States. Large depots had to be moved from Great Britain to the continent and kept in proximity to the attacking armies. Service and transportation units, in large numbers, were essential to this purpose. Road and rail networks, the critical lifeline to this total system, would require improvement, maintenance, and security. Mature rail and pipeline networks would free up transportation truck units for closer support of combat units.[21]

It was this final character of the lodgement that defined success for OVERLORD. And it was logistics necessity more than tactical opportunity that would

determine the battles which would be fought to achieve that success. Thus, the OVERLORD planners wrestled with the balance between sustainment and combat operations.

Clearly, combat troops were needed to secure the beaches and expand the lodgement as they fought inland. Tactical sustainment was necessary to support these operations. Both competed for scarce sealift and then space once ashore.

To complicate matters, reinforcing combat units as well as service troops and depot stocks had to get on the continent. Such depth in operational sustainment represented the full potential power of the Allied armies. This depth was essential for continued success long in the future.

Ports became the critical linchpin of this complex problem. Nothing could proceed at acceptable speed or capacity without them. After detailed study, the Normandy beaches were selected for the initial assault with Cherbourg the first great prize. The smooth, flat beaches provided the most acceptable tactical opportunity. More importantly, these beaches allowed the best conditions for tactical sustainment to flow over the shore.[22] Of greatest importance was the proximity to Cherbourg. Though insufficient to fully sustain the campaign in Europe, it did promise the early start of the rapid build up necessary to complete the OVERLORD lodgement.

Next would come the Brittany or Seine ports. The Brittany group, to the west, promised adequate capacity to

permit build up of forces, sufficiently maintained, to then proceed with the capture of Paris and a passage of the Seine.[23] The Seine ports would then add to the logistics structure. Sustainment depth would grow commensurate with tactical success.

On the other hand, the Allies could choose first to proceed east from Normandy against the Seine ports. The decision would depend on how the Germans arrayed their strength in the defense. However, planners believed the enemy would defend most strongly in the east. Worse, the assault must carry beyond the Seine in order to protect and develop those ports. Such an undertaking, with limited preparation, would risk overextension and defeat.[24] Clearly, this early fear of culmination anticipated the actual crisis that would occur.

Consequently, Allied planners expected a series of battles reflecting the first option. From the beaches they would capture Cherbourg. They would then push east to secure the left flank of the beachhead, while attacking west to clear Brittany and secure the ports. This would complete the lodgement and accomplish the OVERLORD objective. The operation was expected to take 90 days.[25] Fearing an overextension of their LOCs, the allies would halt (or at least reduce operations) at the Seine. At the same time roads, rails, and airfields would be improved and depot operations established inland.[26] This pause at the Seine was expected to take at least a month.

Following the concentration the Allies expected to proceed across the Seine and into the strength of German frontier defenses. A double axis on a broad front would take the allied armies into the Ruhr in the north and the Saar in the south.[27] (Map A) The logic for this multiple lines of operation on a broad front was simple.

The Ruhr was the industrial heart of the Third Reich. Allied possession of this area would destroy the German ability to sustain war economically. But, more importantly, the Ruhr was not the single great prize. Its value meant the Germans must defend it. Thus, it became the bait that would attract the mass of German forces in the West. It was the logical decisive point, that once threatened, would present the German center of gravity for destruction. The destruction of these forces, as Clausewitz suggests, was merely the means to the end. With them no longer a threat, the route to Berlin, indeed the entire German interior, lay open. German resistance would be forfeit; their unconditional surrender would be assured.

The Saar, on the other hand, presented no such strategic importance to the Reich. Consequently, it did not promise the same operational leverage as the Ruhr for attracting German mass. It did, however, play a critical role. The Saar lay astride traditional invasion routes into Germany. German forces could not ignore the presence of strong Allied armies in this area. Unchecked, they could drive on Berlin and split the country. Worse, they could threaten German forces in the Ruhr from the South.

Consequently, from the German point of view, the Saar also required heavy defenses. This would tie up forces and make Allied efforts in the North that much easier.

With this reasoning, SHAEF adopted the broad front strategy for post lodgement operations. But, none of this was possible if the Allies jumped the Seine tired and depleted. Success in the OVERLORD lodgement would ensure this did not occur.

Thus, the lodgement phase of OVERLORD was an exercise in logistics. Its object was not the destruction of enemy forces but merely the precondition for that destruction later in the campaign. It was a critical initial step in a linkage of operations that would eventually rid western Europe of German forces and contribute to Germany's ultimate defeat.

But OVERLORD did not proceed as anticipated. The carefully planned balance in operational depth was disrupted first, in early failures to move inland; next, by the success of breakout and pursuit. Future sustainment paid the bill as the Allies capitalized on tactical opportunity. Successful pursuit in August planted the seeds of supply crisis and lost opportunities in September.

## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

Almost from the beginning, the Allied plan began to unravel. Following successful landings, operations were quickly stalled. The difficult '<u>bocage</u>' terrain frustrated American progress on the Allied right flank as heavy German

resistance around Caen delayed the British on the left. Operations against Cherbourg took longer than expected. When the city finally fell, the port had suffered such destruction it could not meet required discharge capacity on time.

Despite these problems two factors operated in the Allies' favor. First, receipt and discharge of cargo over the beaches exceeded the planning figures. In addition, the limited advance served to shorten significantly the LOCs over which these supplies had to move to reach the combat units.

Consequently, despite the dramatic departure from the plan, forces were receiving necessary support for day to day operations. Unfortunately, this "blessing" was the down payment for a far more serious future problem. Support to combat operations came at the expense of theater build up.

In late July, the breakout occurred. Eisenhower never expected the chance of a major battle west of the Seine. He always intended the priority capture and development of deep-water ports. Consequently, Third Army was soon activated for this purpose and raced into Brittany.

German resistance on the right flank soon crumbled. Some German forces fell back to the coast and resolved to provide stubborn defense of the Brittany ports. Meanwhile, the enemy massed his power in the area of Mortain in an attempt to drive to the base of the Cotentin at Avranches and sever the Third Army LOCs.[29]

This chance to destroy several German Armies could not

be ignored. With freedom of maneuver on his right flank, General Eisenhower chose a broad departure from his planned line of operations. He decided to send the bulk of Third Army east into the rear of German forces massed on the Allied left. General Patton, leaving a single Corps to seize the Brittany ports, wheeled the remainder of his army toward the Seine.

Already Patton's rapid armor thrusts were placing tremendous strain on the tenuous LOCs running back through Avranches and up the west side of Cotentin to Cherbourg and the beaches. In the bargain, the capture of Brittany ports was delayed. Meanwhile, the allies were supporting forces west into Brittany, east to the Seine and the remaining U.S., British, and Canadian units south out of Normandy.[29] These divergent lines of operations magnified the strain on the weak logistics system.

British and Canadian success on the left, along with Patton's advance, trapped elements of the German 7th Army and 5th Panzer Army in the Falaise-Argentan pocket.[30] This controversial and hard fought action destroyed large numbers of German forces. Still, many escaped only to be trapped again by Patton's advance to the Paris-Orleans gap.[31] What German forces finally survived and crossed out of Normandy were incapable of immediate resistance.[32] Consequently, they could provide no cohesive defense at the Seine.

Clearly, Eisenhower's diversion of Patton away from Brittany was a brilliant move. By sacrificing the ports he

turned the combat power of Third Army against the vulnerable flank and rear of disorganized German forces. In one short month the Allies engaged four German Armies and threw them out of western France.[33] These victories did not annihilate German forces in the West. They did, however, put the allies back on schedule, and they so greatly disrupted German cohesion and strength that defense of the Seine was no longer possible.

The value of Brittany was overcome by events. These ports, now so far from the action, were no longer urgently needed for battles west of the Seine.

Consequently, as the Allies maneuvered to capitalize on opportunity, any hope of establishing a balanced theater sustainment structure in the lodgement area received a devastating blow. The deliberate development of Allied sustaining depth, so carefully planned for in OVERLORD schedules, could not compete with the urgent needs of daily combat operations. The entire structure from ports, to LOCs, to depots, to transport priorities was disrupted in an effort to keep pace with the advancing armies.[34]

The Normandy beaches and Cherbourg remained, for a time, the only theater source of sustaining support. The deep rapid movement of Patton's Third Army as well as the increased cost of a major battle in the Falaise pocket consumed resources not planned for this early in the campaign.[35] Consequently, as they cleaned up at Falaise and approached the Seine, the Allies were operating on a shoestring.

They reached the general line of the Seine on D+79. This was their D+90 Objective phase line and the limit of their planned lodgement. OVERLORD planning had anticipated that by then the Brittany ports would be available and that a mature theater sustainment structure would be in place. The Allies expected to pause, concentrate and build strength before continuing in the face of sure German resistance. Instead they still relied on the Normandy beaches and Cherbourg.

When the Germans did not stop and defend on the Seine as expected, the Allies kept going. Again Eisenhower could not ignore this stroke of fortune. Again, operational sustainment took a back seat to operational opportunity. Again, the logisticians struggled to keep up.

The major German defeat in Western France and the subsequent forfeit of the natural defensive barrier of the Seine eliminated the last of the OVERLORD planning assumptions. The fact that critical sustainment depth, predicated on these assumptions, was forfeit in the process did not immediately dampen enthusiasm.

Facing no immediate resistance, the Allies had to continue. Although complaining bitterly that daily supply receipts were woefully short of demands, army group commanders strained to exploit the German disintegration. Intoxicated by the success of pursuit, these great battle captains overlooked the impact such pursuit had on logistics capabilities. Although they did understand that they were not receiving the supplies they wanted; they did

not see the future danger. Consequently current success encouraged them to expect continued success and an early end to the war. Over time, Montgomery in the North and Bradley in the South both felt they held the key to victory, if only they had priority in supply.

Eisenhower took a different view. His actions from mid-August on indicate that he understood that current successs did not mandate final victory. In August he wrote his wife, Mamie, "Don't be misled by the papers. . . the end of the war will come only with the complete destruction of the Hun forces."[36] Still in August he told reporters ". . .Hitler would either hang himself or be hanged, but before that he would fight to the bitter end, and most of his troops would fight with him."[37] Clearly, Eisenhower harbored no illusions of a quick victory. The Germans still represented a potent force. Sooner or later they would turn and fight.

Furthermore he was aware that continued pursuit threatened total breakdown of the supply structure. Following the capture of Paris Ike observed

> . . . in long term estimate we were weeks ahead of our schedule, but in the important matter of our supply capacity we were badly behind. Because almost the entire area had been captured in the swift movements subsequent to August 1, the roads, military lines, depots, repair shops, and basic installations required for the maintenance of continuous forward movement were still far to the rear of front lines.[38]

Allied divisions in the field were of little value if even minimum daily requirements could not reach them.

Consequently, Eisenhower would continue East. He would take the easy victories. But sooner or later he must stop and concentrate as he rebuilt his power and sustainment depth. He was groping for the point to pause. It is in this context that the great debate between single thrust vs broad front strategy took shape.

In late August and early September the victories did come easily. The Allied exploitation ran from the Seine to the very frontier of Germany. Eisenhower had prevailed in placing his armies across a broad front facing the Rhine. Although not on the Seine as anticipated, he had adhered to the basic SHAEF intent. Here he declared the pause that would build the strength for one last sustained offensive drive, again on a broad front, aimed at Germany's defeat. His clear intent is evident in a letter to General Marshall in mid-September when he says

> . . . we are stretched to the absolute limit in maintenance both as to intake and as to distribution after supplies are landed. From the start we have always known that we would have to choose . . . some line which would mark a relative slackening in offensive operations while we improved maintenance facilities . . . but due to the decisiveness of our victory below the Seine I determined . . . to continue the drive . . . up to . . . the Rhine before we began the process of regrouping and refitting.[39]

Throughout this period of pursuit, colored by mounting debate, the full range of Eisenhower's considerations becomes apparent as he wrestles with Montgomery, Bradley, and Patton to ensure victory while avoiding defeat.

## THE BROAD FRONT VS SINGLE THRUST DEBATE

As early as 14 August Montgomery proposed the first of his single thrust options. He expected the German disintegration (which, as seen, did occur). Also, as he expected, the Allies lacked the strength for the planned broad front push through the Saar and the Ruhr. Consequently, he proposed a single axis of advance employing both 21 and 12 Army Group to the northeast.[40] By 23 August, sensing increased supply constraints, Montgomery modified his plan. He proposed that Eisenhower halt Patton's Third Army in place and concentrate remaining Allied resources under his command. With such priority and power he was confident he could penetrate the German frontier, envelop, and then seize the Ruhr.[41] Somehow, he believed this would compel German surrender.

However, at this early date Montgomery was still held in Normandy while Patton was running wildly into the German rear approaching the Seine. Moreover, Eisenhower believed that the Germans were disorganized but not defeated. Montgomery's proposal served to simplify the German's problem by removing any doubt over where to defend.[42] The proposal seemed, in Ike's words, "fantastic" and he would not even consider it.[43]

Rather than halt Patton, the 'Red Ball Express' was instituted to overcome his growing supply crisis and ensure continued progress.[44] Eisenhower held to the original SHAEF intent of a broad front push both north and south of

the Ardennes. Ike insisted that the Allies first gain the Rhine on a broad front and in strength, before he would discuss the final campaign to defeat Germany.[45]

Eisenhower did agree, however, that Montgomery should have supply priority as well as the benefit of Hodges' 1st US Army protecting his right flank north of the Ardennes. But he remained firm on Montgomery's immediate objectives. He must concentrate not against the Ruhr, but in the capture of Antwerp.[46] Having just authorized pursuit past the Seine, Eisenhower was already looking for the port necessary to provide the requisite capacity and shortened LOCs critical to consolidation on the German frontier.

Meanwhile, Patton and Bradley were well into the debate. Convinced that priority to Montgomery's northern group of armies was denying them easy access to an empty shell of the Siegfried Line(West Wall), they petitioned Eisenhower for increased priority. Bradley intended that his entire 12th Army Group could cross the frontier and into the Saar before German resistance stiffened.[47] Patton was more ambitious. He remarked

> . . . the great chance of winning the war would be to let the Third Army move with three corps . . . to the line Metz-Nancy-Epinal. It was my belief then and still is, that by doing this we could have crossed the German boarder in ten days. The roads and railways were adequate to sustain us.[48]

Apparently, Eisenhower alone believed that getting to Germany was not enough. The Allies must still fight costly battles before victory was assured. Cautiously, he let Patton continue east on reduced rations. Bitter and

pouting, but ever the bold and superior warrior, Patton continued to advance. Facing limited opposition and several times capturing enemy fuel stocks, Third Army raced to the West Wall purchasing gains that otherwise they could not afford.

By early September it was clear that the Supreme Commander's decision to postpone build up had paid off. The pursuit continued across the front far beyond what logistics planners thought possible.[49] Despite clear priority in the north, Patton sat on the very doorstep of Germany. Devers, anchored on the port of Marseilles, raced north from his Mediterranean landings. Not expected until mid-November, he would actually link up on Patton's right by 21 September. His rapid advance placed additional pressure on the Germans along the frontier and kept them from reinforcing against Allied priority in the north.[50]

Montgomery, meanwhile had not squandered the resource priority granted him in mid-August. His 21st Army Group with Bradley's 1st Army traveling abreast had jumped the Seine, raced across France, and was into the heart of Belgium. The Channel ports along the way were invested and Antwerp, critical for future operations, was captured practically intact. Just when Patton hoped priority would return to Third Army, Montgomery had drawn abreast of him.[51]

In the midst of this success, Eisenhower entered another round of strategic debate with his subordinates. On

2 September Eisenhower met with Bradley and Patton. On that very day, Third Army fuel receipts were down to 25,000 gallons against a daily requirement of 350,000-400,000 gallons.[52] On the recent evidence that so much had been accomplished with so little, the two convinced Eisenhower that he must increase Third Army allotment of tonnage so that they could seize the Saar while the frontier covering that sector still remained open.

Ike agreed. He told Bradley that as soon as supplies became available he was to occupy the West Wall covering the Saar and proceed to take Frankfurt.[53] He did insist, however, that Montgomery retain priority in the north.

Within a week Third Army fuel receipts were averaging 400,000 gallons a day,[54] although total tonnage remained less than half of requirements.[55] On 10 September Patton was authorized to proceed. He was warned, however, that if he encountered stiff resistance Third Army must halt and defend.[56]

Clearly, Eisenhower sensed the pursuit was nearing its end and that he should prepare for harder times. Looking ahead he still believed the ultimate priority route into Germany lay through the Ruhr, but he remained committed to a second thrust through the Saar. As he balanced supply priority against growing enemy resistance in the short run, he felt forward to a limit of advance that would not overextend and endanger his forces while he paused to rebuild strength. On the other hand, he wanted to be in the

best position to continue operations once concentration was complete. Following the meeting with Bradley and Patton he wrote,

> I now deem it important, while supporting the advance on eastward through Belgium, to get Patton moving once again so that we may be fully prepared to carry out the original conception for the final stages of the campaign.[57]

Meanwhile, Montgomery renewed his quest for a single thrust in the north. On 4 September, the day Antwerp fell and just as Patton was receiving conditional directive for an increase in supply, the new Field Marshal detailed his most recent vision to Eisenhower. He coyly admitted that sustaining depth precluded continued offensive on a broad front. Nonetheless, he insisted the Allies now possessed such means and opportunity that " . . . one really powerful and full-blooded thrust toward Berlin is likely to get there and end the German war."[58] This effort should have all necessary resources to ensure success and all other operations must make do with what remained. He allowed that two possible axes existed- one through the Ruhr, the other via Metz and the Saar. Of course, the one most likely to yield quick success was the northern route through the Ruhr.

Much of this appears simply ambitious and overly optimistic, characteristics normally of some value in a combat commander. But Montgomery was too highly placed and capable of influencing campaign design. Where he should have at least understood Eisenhower's motivations, he drew totally different conclusions from the current situation.

In closing his proposal, Montgomery betrayed a complete failure to comprehend the very serious concerns that had plagued his Supreme Commander since the Seine crossings. He stated that failure to concentrate resources now would prolong the war, and he viewed the total problem as very "simple and clear cut."[59]

Clearly, Eisenhower was convinced the war was far from over. The Allies grew weaker daily even as the Germans fell back on their strength. Though it is arguable to this day whether Eisenhower was overly cautious and perhaps political, he still had firm, fundamental reasons for his balanced approach. That Montgomery viewed his most recent petition as simple and clear cut indicates at best a naive, perhaps dangerously cavalier, attitude about the mission. At worst, it indicates that he and Eisenhower suffered a serious failure to communicate. This alone justified increased caution in the context of strategic alternatives.

In any event, Eisenhower was unimpressed. He characterized the proposal by saying "Monty's suggestion is simple; give him everything, which is crazy"[60]. Ike did, however, proceed to educate his subordinate on reality as he saw it. On 10 September, at Montgomery's headquarters, he reminded the Field Marshal that Antwerp was essential to any sustained drive into Germany. (At this time the Allies still operated no ports of any consequence save Cherbourg and the beaches. The approach of autumn weather would quickly reduce their value. Worse, in capturing Antwerp, Montgomery failed to clear the Scheldt

Estuary of German forces therby denying approaches to the port and rendering it useless.) Ike went on to elaborate that without railway bridges over the Rhine and without increased sustainment depth, it was not possible to maintain a force in Germany sufficient to penetrate to Berlin.[61]

On the other side of the equation was the growing German threat. A strengthened enemy made improved sustainment depth and increased caution that much more critical. About this issue Eisenhower said of Monty's plan--

> There was still a considerable reserve in the middle of the enemy country and . . . any pencillike thrust into the heart of Germany such as [Montgomery] proposed would meet nothing but certain destruction.[62]

Although Montgomery persisted for a time without effect, this put to rest the issue of any immediate single thrust strategy. Broad front, as SHAEF had always intended, would be the design of any continued Allied campaign. But this does not end the story. If victory was not possible now in a single thrust, it was less sustainable on a broad front without pause.

Eisenhower had hoped to take that pause with the Allies sitting on the Rhine. More importantly, the Seine ports and Antwerp were to have been operational to allow the consolidation and build up to proceed at an acceptable rate. Far from any uninterrupted push into Germany, the AEF lacked sufficient strength to accomplish even this.

By mid-September German resistance stiffened. Finally, the pursuit ended. The Allies had covered 260 planned phase

line days in just 19 days of operations.[63] They had not, however, pushed to the Rhine. Eisenhower slowed the pace of operations and concentrated on opening ports and shortening his lines of communication.[64] He alternated priority along his front to keep pressure on the enemy and to gain position, while he rebuilt strength for a subsequent sustained offensive which would end only in Germany's defeat.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

As Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force Eisenhower was charged to enter the continent of Europe, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany, and destroy her armed forces.[65] He understood that this military condition must support a political end state which demanded complete and unconditional surrender of Germany. Although his was only one of several fronts operating against the Reich, he could neither risk defeat, nor a state of equilibrium or stalemate which permitted Germany to concentrate and defeat allies on other fronts.

Possessing no power on the continent, he was required to force an entry into France, to build up strength, and then to conduct a series of battles and major operations that would lead to the decisive destruction of German forces. This promised to be no easy affair. As he spent forces in the conduct of this series of battles, he also had to spend resources in preparation for continued success.

Consequently, the original plan was to conduct a deliberate phase of operations in Normandy and Brittany to

set the logistics preconditions for a sustained offensive into Germany. Following the build up Eisenhower intended a two pronged offensive-- a priority effort through the Ruhr hoping to find the mass of German strength and destroy it; a secondary effort through the Saar hoping to draw German forces from the main effort and possibly assist that effort from the south or ultimately to threaten the German interior. Eisenhower never expected to fight a major battle in western France.

When the opportunity for a major battle west of the Seine developed, Eisenhower forfeited his build up and took it. The Allies achieved great success and threw four German armies out of France.

But there was also a dark side to these victories. Eisenhower had traded future sustainment for current success. This alone was not a problem. Depth in operational sustainment does not necessarily win wars. It is essential however to avoid premature culmination. Was culmination possible? As long as German forces could not threaten the Allied advance, Eisenhower faced no fear of future danger or stalemate, no need to defend his gains short of total victory. However, if such danger did threaten, then sooner or later the AEF would pay.

This unanswered question plants the seed that would grow into the running debate over alternative future strategies. The basic issue lies in whether the German defeat in Western France was decisive. The Germans suffered terrible loss, but they were not destroyed. Although their

cohesion was ripped apart, their center of gravity disrupted in France, significant pieces of those shattered armies still escaped to fight again. They fell back on the strength of defensible terrain and the sustaining depth of the German nation. If they could regain their cohesion, they could still threaten Allied ambitions.

The principle Allied commanders each took a different view of this event. Montgomery, at first cautious, rapidly grew to believe that the German defeat was complete. He would come to insist that a single massive drive deep into the heart of Germany would exploit this victory, and end the war. Patton and Bradley, on the other hand, realized the Germans still posed a problem. However, they believed that a quick narrow thrust of a single army toward Berlin would end the war before the Germans could recover. Eisenhower was still more pessimistic. He not only believed that the Germans were still dangerous; he further believed that any premature entry into the German heartland without proper preparation would only expose these forces to destruction. He did recognize however that near term gains were possible through immediate pursuit, while the Germans were still disorganized.

Thus, while Eisenhower's subordinates insisted that the military objective was in sight, he still expected at least one more major battle somewhere in the future was necessary. But, he would take easy gains when he could get them. Thus, all four agreed that continued pursuit across the Seine without pause was essential.

But what would this pursuit accomplish? Clausewitz advises that "the real fruits of victory are won only in pursuit."[66] He would have Eisenhower chase the Germans to the very ground if necessary, never allowing them to recover, until their destruction was complete. Even then, what would the fruits of this victory gain? It was a long road past the Ruhr to Berlin. Every mile would sap Allied strength which they still did not possess sufficient means to replace. Somewhere in the interior of the Reich Germany retained the power to threaten an overextended force.

Eisenhower operating at both the operational and strategic level of war saw this threat. He suspected that defeat of German armies in France did not destroy, indeed did not seriously threaten, the German center of gravity in the West. It merely shifted it closer to Germany where it would grow increasingly stronger. At the operational level he saw that the decisive battle would still be fought closer to the German frontier, probably as always planned, near the Ruhr. He set about to build his strength for that encounter.

Eisenhower's subordinates, from their operational perspectives saw a defeated and demoralized opponent. Anticipating that relentless exploitation would complete the destruction, they imagined all that remained was the occupation of the German interior. The Reich had no choice but to capitulate.

At this point the concept of culmination gains clearer focus in the context of operational planning. It is an

implicit consideration as the operational planner asks those three salient questions which drive his campaign design. It remains a consideration for the commander throughout the conduct of the campaign.

First, the operational planner must understand the military condition that will support the strategic goal in the theater of war. This was stated by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to Eisenhower in their directive appointing him Supreme Commander-- ". . .undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."[67]

Apparently, it was easier to define the military end state than it was to recognize it if it occurred. All senior Allied commanders saw the German defeat in France differently. Montgomery saw this as destruction of the German center of gravity in the West. All that remained was to exploit the victory and end only with the possession of the German capital. Admittedly, he realized some forces remained, but insisted a deep, concentrated thrust had "nothing to fear".[68] He believed the last battle was already won.

Bradley and Patton thought the battles in France could be decisive. German power remained in the West. But, they believed another major battle was avoidable if they could seize Berlin quicky. They reasoned that this would end the war before German military potential could rally, gain cohesion, and pose a threat.

Montgomery, Bradley, and Patton failed to look beyond

the shattered mob they were chasing across Belgium and France. Only Eisenhower considered the fanatical commitment of Hitler's government and the moral strength of the German nation. Perhaps these conditions too were a factor in the strategic center of gravity for the German Western Front. (History would prove that Germany was not easily beaten. Despite later defeats on both the eastern and western fronts, she still resisted enemy armies on the doorstep of Berlin.)

Therefore, Eisenhower alone insisted that at least one major battle remained. He saw this battle would be fought closer to the Reich and it must destroy her power without any hope of immediate recovery. But this alone did not rule out a single thrust. Eisenhower's next step was to determine how to make that battle happen. He always expected the Ruhr, once threatened, would attract the mass of German power. If he could get at it in strength, he could destroy it. But this sounds like Montgomery's plan. Would not a thrust through the Ruhr to Berlin accomplish this fact?

On the face of it, this appears so. But Eisenhower had to consider the final question-- how must he apply the resources of the force to set the preconditions for success. This is where he and Montgomery parted company. The implied question is how much does success cost?

Again Eisenhower believed the Germans were daily growing stronger and, regardless, would not give up easily. In the original plan, Patton's threat to the Saar would

bleed off some of the German strength. But, to launch Montgomery meant to freeze Patton and take him out of the equation. That meant a single line of operations remained. In this case the Germans, with meager resources, could meet Montgomery on their terms with no fear of Third Army and Sixth Army Group. Besides, in early September Patton was moving on captured fuel. The 25,000 gallons he received daily from Allied sources would not have taken Montgomery far. If he started with sixteen to eighteen divisions many would not make the 650 kilometers to Berlin.[69] As Montgomery grew weaker, the Germans would grow stronger. Sooner or later Montgomery would be vulnerable to destruction.

Eisenhower knew he would be halted short of strategic victory. He saw no choice but to plan a pause. Even then he only slowed operations as German strength stiffened, but before it posed a threat. While in pursuit, he set the preconditions for success in future major battles. He ensured that when the cheap victories of pursuit ended he would not have risked defeat for the greed of an early end to the war. He always intended to attack on a broad front but with priority through the Ruhr. Here he hoped to meet the mass of German forces and destroy them. His patient approach ensured that this remained possible.

## CONCLUSION

What is the relevance of this broad front-single thrust controversy for contemporary practitioners of the operational art? Clearly, it does not lie in the surviving

rhetoric of how inevitable victory could have come sooner or at less cost. On the contrary, the most dominant message in this debate is that, from Eisenhower's perspective, victory was not inevitable. Failure to attend to the full spectrum of operational planning considerations could have yielded superiority to the Germans which otherwise they could not achieve.

FM 100-5 requires that the commander must understand the military condition which. once produced, will achieve the strategic goal. For the Allies this condition was entry into Germany and destruction of her armed forces. Encouraged by victory in the pursuit, Eisenhower's lieutenants believed that the German army was destroyed in France. Consequently, they dismissed the other operational planning considerations. They simply assumed that remaining German strength was of little consequence in the near term. Therefore no more great battles were necessary. Thus, the Allies need not waste time, in a pause, to build the strength to continue.

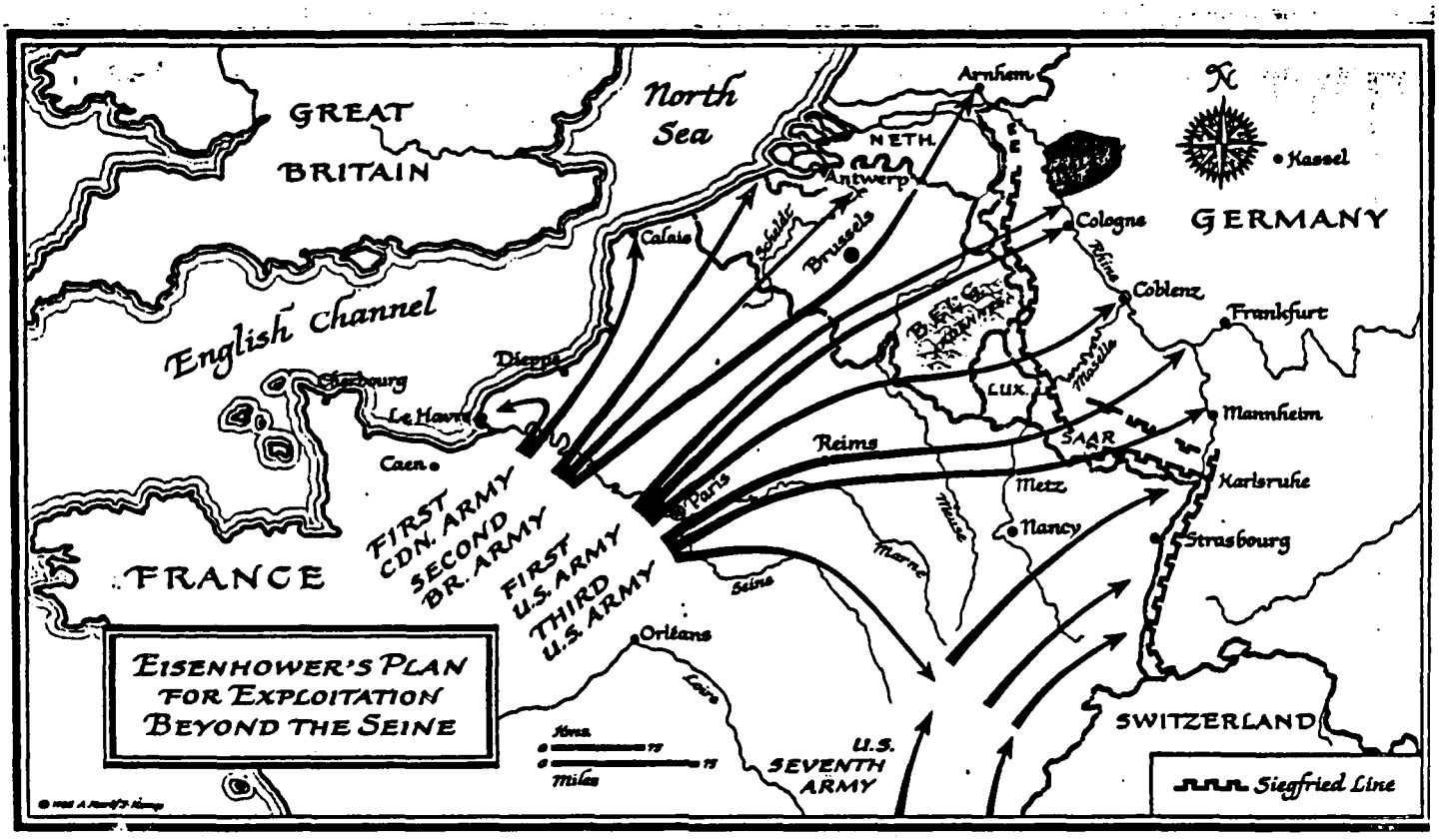
Although the Allies did possess combat potential superior to the Germans, Montgomery, Bradley, and Patton failed to distinguish the difference between potential and combat power. As they spent resources in the pursuit at the expense of logistics build up, they grew weaker daily. Meanwhile the Germans, growing stronger, would only benefit from an isolated threat on a narrow, single thrust.

The Allied potential stretched from Normandy to the German frontier. But in September, the power they could

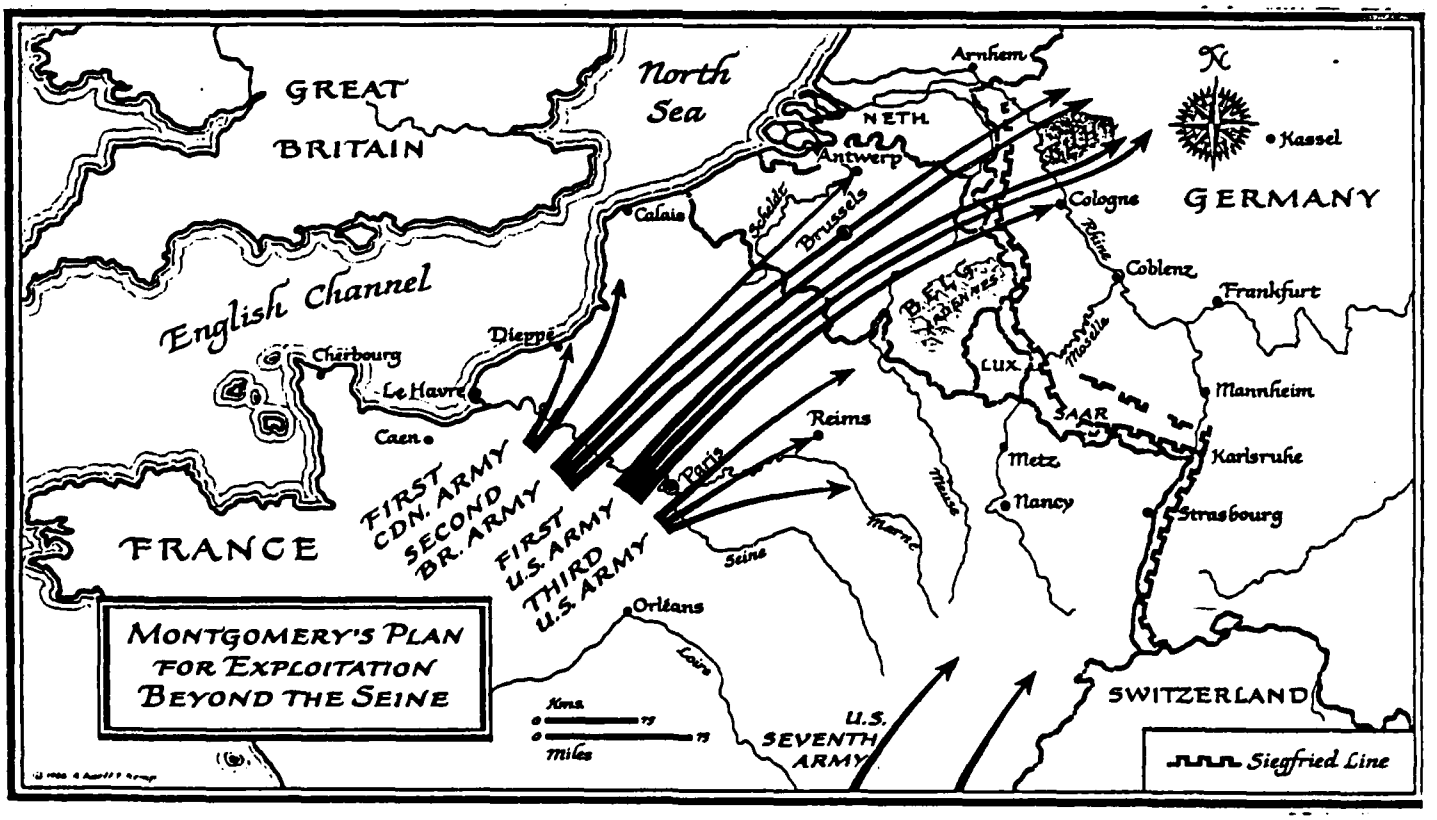
bring against the Germans was considerably less. The sum of Allied divisions on the continent and the ledger of recent gains counted little in the greater scheme of things. If Eisenhower exposed a force through the Ruhr or the Saar, a superior mass of German power could destroy them. As Clausewitz warns when speaking of the diminishing force of the attack, ". . . one should never compare all the forces in the field, but only those facing each other at the front or at decisive points."[70]

Eisenhower saw this threat and expected another battle. He grasped implicitly the advice of FM 100-5 that the commander ". . . must know when and where to fight and whether to accept or decline battle."[71] This demands that he identify the enemy center of gravity and place superior combat power against it to achieve decisive success.[72] An ambitious single thrust would not only risk placing an inferior force against the German threat, it would force them to create this potential superior center of gravity by relieving pressure elsewhere on their front.

Eisenhower could not risk destruction of one of his army groups or even stalemate in a major battle. His mission demanded total defeat of the Reich. Consequently he declined a major battle in the near term and forced a pause short of culmination. By maintaining a clear focus on the desired military end state, he alone still considered how to manage available resources to ensure that eventual success.




MAP A: Eisenhower's Broad Front Plan[73]




Map B: Montgomery's Single Thrust Plan[74]

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