



**STRATEGY  
RESEARCH  
PROJECT**

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

**THE FALAISE – ARGENTAN GAP:  
DYSFUNCTIONAL UNITY OF EFFORT**

**BY**

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSEPH B. LOWDER**  
United States Army

**DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:**  
Approved for Public Release.  
Distribution is Unlimited.

USAWC CLASS OF 2001



**U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050**

**20010608 021**

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE FALAISE – ARGENTAN GAP:  
DYSFUNCTIONAL UNITY OF EFFORT**

by

LTC JOSEPH B. LOWDER  
United States Army

Colonel David R. Brooks  
Project Advisor

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:  
Approved for public release.  
Distribution is unlimited.



## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Joseph. B. Lowder

TITLE: Falaise – Argentan Gap: Dysfunctional Unity of Effort

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 10 April 2001

PAGES: 33

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

In August 1944, LTG Omar N. Bradley, commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group, abruptly halted the advance of XV Corps of LTG George S. Patton's Third Army. In doing so, he prevented its movement northward through Argentan toward a juncture with Canadian forces coming south from Caen toward Falaise. As a consequence, the Allies failed to close the Falaise-Argentan pocket. The surrounded German forces in Normandy avoided encirclement and almost certain destruction. How did the Allies miss an excellent opportunity to destroy the German forces in Normandy and possibly bring a quick end to the war? This paper will examine the lack of unity of effort established by the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
PREFACE .....	vii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	ix
FALAISE – ARGENTAN GAP: DYSFUNCTIONAL UNITY OF EFFORT .....	1
BACKGROUND .....	1
COBRA .....	3
BREAKOUT .....	4
CREATING THE GAP .....	6
GERMAN RESPONSE .....	6
THE POCKET .....	8
COMMANDERS DECISION .....	10
OPERATIONAL ART .....	10
CENTERS OF GRAVITY .....	11
GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT .....	12
TECHNOLOGY .....	12
RISK .....	13
COMMAND AND CONTROL .....	14
COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS .....	15
CONCLUSION .....	16
ENDNOTES .....	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	23



## PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my Faculty Advisor, Colonel David Brooks with his patience and invaluable assistance in organizing the thoughts and structure of this paper. Additionally, I acknowledge the help of Ms Bobbie Norcross, the Communicative Arts Program Point of Contact for computer help. Ms. Norcross provided outstanding support in formatting the body of this paper.



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1 OVERLORD PLAN .....	2
FIGURE 2 SITUATION MAP 10 JUNE 1944.....	2
FIGURE 3 SITUATION MAP 9 JULY 1944 .....	3
FIGURE 4 HAISLIP'S SWERVE TO THE LEFT.....	5
FIGURE 5 MORTAIN COUNTERATTACK .....	7
FIGURE 6 FALAISE – ARGENTAN POCKET .....	9
FIGURE 7 COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS .....	14



## FALAISE – ARGENTAN GAP: DYSFUNCTIONAL UNITY OF EFFORT

In August 1944, LTG Omar N. Bradley, commander of the 12th U.S. Army Group, abruptly halted the advance of XV Corps of LTG George Patton's Third Army. In doing so, he prevented its movement northward through Argentan toward a juncture with Canadian forces coming south from Caen toward Falaise. As a consequence, the Allies failed to close the Argentan-Falaise pocket. The surrounded German forces in Normandy, escaping through the Argentan-Falaise gap, avoided complete encirclement and almost certain destruction.<sup>1</sup> Although a significant number of German soldiers, material, and equipment were captured or destroyed, a large number of German soldiers and cadre were able to slip out of the gap. Within weeks, Germany was able to rebuild entire new divisions and corps around these cadres.<sup>2</sup>

How did the Allies miss an excellent opportunity to complete the destruction of the German forces in Normandy and possibly bring a quick end to the war? This paper will examine one vital reason – the lack of unity of effort with the allies and their key leaders. That General Dwight D. Eisenhower failed, as the Supreme Allied Commander, to properly exercise strategic leadership and ensure that unity of effort existed between his subordinate general officers, LTG Omar Bradley and Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery during a critical point in the campaign.

### BACKGROUND

You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.

—Combined Chiefs of Staff Directive

With this mission statement, allied soldiers under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces, crossed the English Channel, executed Operation Overlord, and landed in Normandy on June 6, 1944. The objective of Overlord was lodgment of the Allied forces in roughly that portion of northwestern France that lies between the Seine and the Loire Rivers. The allies were concerned with two preliminaries, getting soldiers on the continent and gaining a sufficient foothold in order to launch an all-out battle on the approaches to Germany.<sup>3</sup>

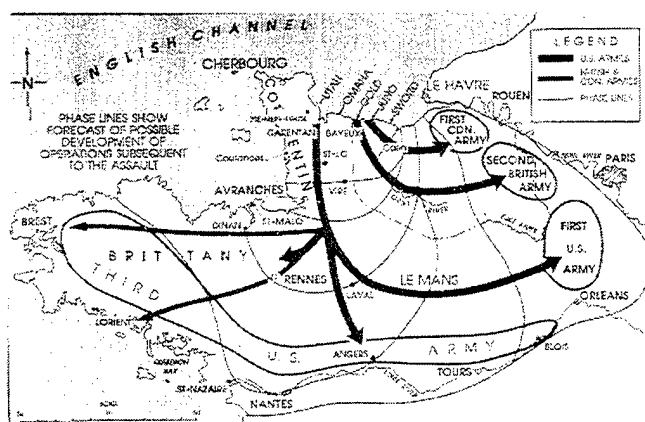


FIGURE 1 OVERLORD PLAN

The German high command was split on how to stop the allied invasion. Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, Commander in Chief West, counted on a mobile defense in depth, striking power, and a battle of annihilation. Once Rundstedt distinguished among the various feints and diversions, he advocated a mobile strategic reserve, centrally located, ready to strike the main invasion force in a swift counterattack to destroy the invaders before they could reinforce their beachhead. Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, Commander Army Group B, advocated a static linear defense complete with concrete fortifications that would hold stubbornly. Rommel wanted to turn back the allies as they were landing, when they were weakest. He counted on his coastal batteries, obstacles, and massed troops along the shoreline to smash the invasion within the first twenty-four hours.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to security, deception, and most of all to the weather, the Germans were surprised by the assault.<sup>5</sup> Allied units fought long and hard to establish the lodgment and as the combat divisions fought their way inland, the build-up of supplies on the beaches slowly gained momentum and the artificial harbors were built.<sup>6</sup>

The German military command, having believed before June 6 that the invasion must strike the Pas de Calais, refused to change their minds. They convinced themselves that the Normandy invasion had to be a mere feint, designed to draw their strength away from the more vital Kanalkuste north of the Seine, and they were determined that they would not be misled.

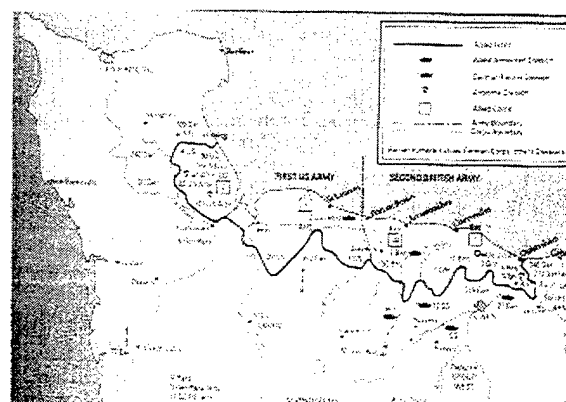


FIGURE 2 SITUATION MAP 10 JUNE 1944

Hitler strangely abandoned his pre-D-Day intuition about Normandy and applauded their

resolve-an instance in striking confirmation of Albert Speer's judgment that the Fuhrer's leadership deteriorated when he forsook intuition for reason.<sup>7</sup>

The Allies encountered difficulty as they fought to expand the beachhead. Thanks to the success of the airborne landing, the flanks of the beachhead were firmly held. Efforts to break out were frustrated by fierce German resistance and counterattacks, particularly around Caen in the British-Canadian sector. A British armored thrust at Villers-Bocage was defeated on June 13. A large-scale infantry offensive west of Caen, called Operation "Epsom," was also defeated on June 25-29.

The Germans were also depressed, for their bitter defense was using up men and equipment that could not be replaced. The Americans were able to profit from the deployment of most of the German armored units against the British to break into the base of the Cotentin Peninsula and advance on Cherbourg. The heavily fortified city fell on June 28, and clearance of the port began at once.<sup>8</sup>

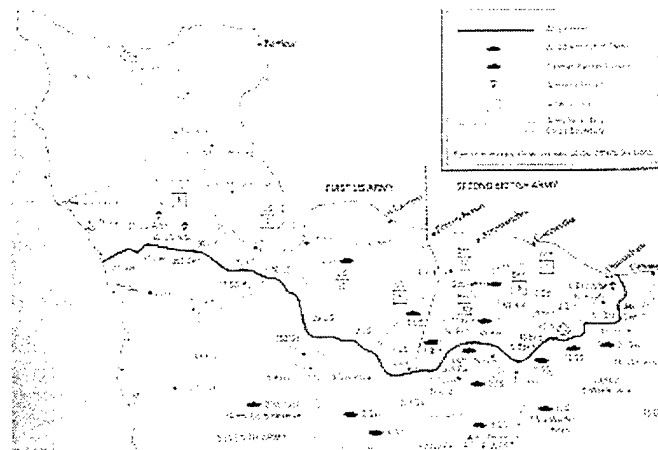


FIGURE 3 SITUATION MAP 9 JULY 1944

## COBRA

The Allies had to break out of the slow hedge fighting that dominated this portion of the invasion. Bradley developed Operation Cobra, which called for a concentrated and heavy attack. The plan was relatively simple. There were to be three acts: bombers to blast a three-mile gap in the German defenses; two infantry divisions to enter the gap side by side, then draw apart and press against the sides of the hole to keep the break open; three mobile divisions moving abreast to speed through the opening, swing to Coutances, and go a few more miles to

the Cotentin west coast. Taking German prisoners was not Bradley's main purpose. His real intention was to gain precious ground.<sup>9</sup>

## **BREAKOUT**

The Breakout in Normandy started when the First U.S. Army under General Bradley broke out of the confinement imposed by the Germans in the hedgerow country of the Cotentin and streamed toward Avranches. As General Patton's Third Army became operational, General Bradley relinquished command of the First Army to LTG Courtney Hodges and assumed command of the 12th Army Group. Allied ground forces in western Europe then comprised two U.S. armies under Bradley, and a British and a Canadian army, both under General Montgomery's 21st Army Group. Until General Eisenhower assumed personal direction of the ground campaign on the first day of September, Montgomery functioned as the commander of the land forces.

According to pre-invasion plans, the Allies hoped to gain the lodgment with Patton's Third Army going westward from Avranches to take Brittany and its vital ports; Hodges' First Army was to protect the commitment of Patton's forces into Brittany, wheel on the right of the British and Canadian armies to the southeast and east, and then move eastward with those armies to the Seine River.

Patton started his drive into Brittany as the main effort of the 12th Army Group. The scarcity of enemy forces in Brittany, the disorganization of the German left flank forces near Avranches, and the fact that in driving to Avranches the Americans had outflanked the German defensive line in Normandy quickly led to a change in plans. On 3 August, the Allies decided to clear Brittany with a "minimum of forces" (one corps), while the remainder wheeled eastward with their eventual sights on the Seine. The new Allied intention was to swing the right flank toward the Seine in order to push the Germans back against the lower part of the river, where all the bridges had been destroyed by air bombardment. Pressed against the river and unable to cross with sufficient speed to escape, the Germans west of the Seine-the bulk of the forces in western Europe-would in effect be encircled and face destruction.

The XV Corps, commanded by MG Wade H. Haislip and under Third Army control, had by this time been committed to action near Avranches-between the VIII Corps of the Third Army (clearing Brittany) and the VII Corps of the First Army (expecting orders to drive eastward from Avranches). Because the XV Corps was already around the German left and oriented generally southeastward, Haislip drew the assignment of initiating the sweep of the Allied right flank

toward the successive objectives of Laval and Le Mans, the first objectives of what presumably was the encircling maneuver eastward to the Seine.

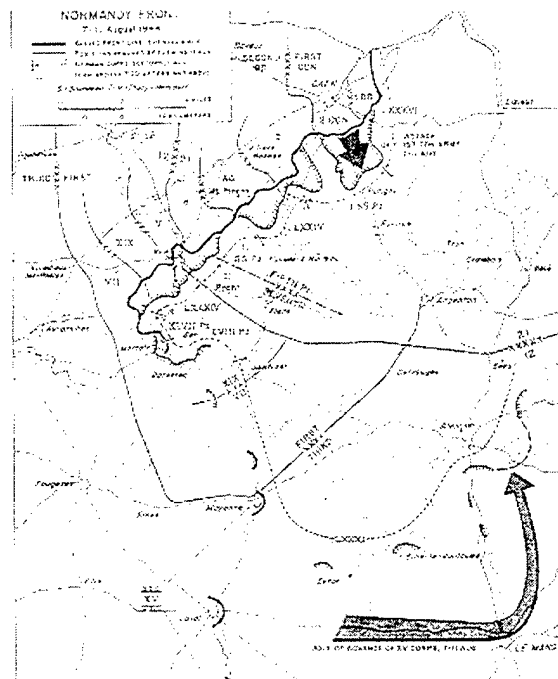


FIGURE 4 HAISLIP'S SWERVE TO THE LEFT

Montgomery's analysis of the situation produced by the breakout determined that "the only hope" the Germans had of saving their armies was a "staged withdrawal to the Seine." By swinging the Allied fight flank "round towards Paris," Montgomery hoped to hasten and disrupt that withdrawal. If Montgomery could act quickly enough and drive south from Caen to Falaise, he would cut behind this first stage of the German withdrawal he anticipated and place the Germans "in a very awkward situation." Although the broad Allied intent was to pin the Germans back against the Seine, the immediate opportunity was present to "cut off the enemy...and render their withdrawing east difficult-if not impossible."

Montgomery believed the Germans faced terrifying alternatives in making their withdrawal to the Seine, which seemed to be the only course of action open to them. Not only on the basis of the troops available but also in the absence of established alternate lines in the rear, the Germans could neither hold any long front in strength nor let go both ends of their defensive line. If they persisted in holding near Caen on the right they offered the Allies the opportunity of swinging completely around their left and cutting off their escape. If they reinforced their encircled left flank near Vire and thereby weakened the pivot point near Caen, they gave the

Allies access to the shortest route to the Seine. Either way, they invited destruction of their forces west of the Seine River.

Montgomery planned to unhinge the German withdrawal by robbing the troops of their pivot point near Caen. LTG Henry Crerar's First Canadian Army was to accomplish this by driving southward to Falaise from positions near Caen. LTG Miles Dempsey's Second British Army, which had been attacking southeast from near Caumont since 30 July, was to continue to push out in an arc and drive eastward through Argentan on its way to the Seine. On the Allied right, Bradley's 12th Army Group was to make its main effort on the right flank by thrusting rapidly east and northeast toward the Seine near Paris.<sup>10</sup>

### **CREATING THE GAP**

Montgomery believed the Germans had no choice but to withdraw to and across the Seine. He wanted to pursue and harass their retreat into a rout, and destroy their forces while they were still west of the Seine. On this basis, LTG Crear prepared to jump off toward Falaise, Dempsey made ready to push southeast toward Argentan, Hodges displaced part of his forces for a drive generally eastward from Avranches toward Alencon, and Patton sent the XV Corps southeastward from Avranches toward Le Mans. That was the Allied frame of reference on the day before the Germans launched what became known as the Mortain counterattack.<sup>11</sup>

### **GERMAN RESPONSE**

Once the Allies had established their lodgment, the German generals favored a withdrawal from Normandy and from France. Hitler disagreed. He decided otherwise. Tormented by the disloyalty to his person and leadership in the July 20 attempt on his life, Hitler ever more distrusted his military leaders, particularly those in France.<sup>12</sup> Increasingly, it appeared to him, he had to direct the war himself. The obvious step, to withdraw, presented considerable disadvantages. Retiring would jeopardize the German armed forces, for their dependence on horse drawn transport made them less mobile than the Allies and consequently vulnerable to mechanized pursuit. The lack of major ports, in Hitler's view, was the weakest segment of the Allied achievement. Hitler met with Field Marshal von Kluge on 31 July. He decided to tell von Kluge only enough of Germany's future plans to carry on immediate operations. Hitler stressed the problem of leadership. He asked that brave men, regardless of rank, be selected to hold the Channel and Atlantic ports and not "big mouths" like the commander at Cherbourg who had issued bold declarations and then had surrendered at the first Allied blow.<sup>13</sup> Concluding that the imminent development in the west would decide Germany's destiny, and that von Kluge could not assume such an immense responsibility, Hitler

ordered a small operations headquarters established which could serve him later when he expected to go to Alsace-Lorraine or western Germany to assume the direction of operations in the west.<sup>14</sup> He told von Kluge to forget the Americans entering Brittany. There was no way of stopping them. Hitler charged von Kluge with preventing the Allies from moving eastward to the Seine River. While holding firmly in place all along the front, von Kluge was to prepare a bold offensive thrust. By striking to the west to Avranches, Kluge was to rebuild the German left flank.<sup>15</sup>

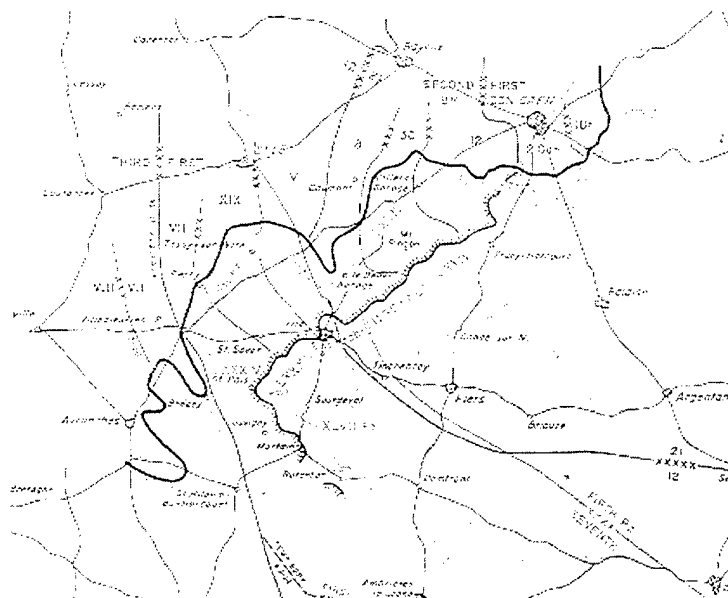


FIGURE 5 MORTAIN COUNTERATTACK

Hitler's orders to von Kluge included: (1) if German forces had to withdraw from the French coast, all major ports were to be held by garrisons under carefully picked commanders who would hold their positions to the last; (2) all railroad equipment and installations and all bridges were to be destroyed in territory that was abandoned; (3) the Commander in Chief West was to provide certain specific units with organic means of transportation and with mobile weapons; (4) no withdrawing from the line then occupied could be tolerated-the ground had to be held with fanatical determination. It was better to stand than to withdraw, Hitler pointed out, since any retreat confronted the Germans with the disadvantages of mobile warfare in an area where the Allies had air superiority. Further, the Germans lacked prepared positions to which they could pull back.<sup>16</sup>

Hitler issued his official order on August 2. He specified Avranches as the goal, nothing more. Hitler later expanded this idea as a two-step plan to seize Avranches, then turn north to tear the Americans apart.<sup>17</sup>

## **THE POCKET**

It suddenly became apparent to the Allied commanders that the Germans in Normandy, by attacking westward toward Avranches, had pushed their heads into a noose. The bulk of their field forces, two field armies amounting to more than 100,000 men, were west of a north-south line through Caen, Falaise, Argentan, Alencon, and Le Mans. If the Canadians attacking from the north took Falaise and if the XV Corps attacking from the south took Alencon and both armies pressed on and met at Argentan, the allies could close the gap and trap the German forces.

The prospect of doing just that caused the Allies to suspend the drive to the Seine in favor of encirclement in the Falaise-Argentan area. Instead of continuing eastward toward the Seine, the XV Corps was to turn north toward Alencon after reaching Le Mans (see Figure 4). On 9 August, the Canadian attack bogged down in the Caen-Falaise corridor eight miles north of Falaise.

Montgomery made a new analysis of the situation on 11 August and attempted to anticipate the probable consequences of the juncture of Canadian and American troops. As the gap between the Canadians and Americans narrowed, he estimated, the Germans could bring up additional divisions from the east, or more probably, could move their armored and mobile forces eastward out of the pocket toward ammunition and gasoline supplies. Expecting the Germans to mass stronger forces in defense of Alencon than Falaise, Montgomery concluded that it would be easier for the Canadians to make rapid progress. The Canadians could probably reach Argentan from the north before the XV Corps could attain Argentan from the south.

General Montgomery ordered the Canadians to continue their efforts to capture Falaise and proceed from there to Argentan. The XV Corps was to advance through Alencon to the army group boundary just south of Argentan, a line drawn by Montgomery to separate the zones of operation of the American (12th Army Group) and the British-Canadian forces (21st Army Group).

As the Canadians resumed their attack toward Falaise, the XV Corps attacked north from Le Mans on 10 August and secured Alencon two days later. Patton had set his corps objective at the army group boundary-north of Alencon and just south of Argentan-so Haislip's forces

continued their attack. Since Patton's order had also directed preparation for a "further advance" beyond the army group boundary, Haislip established Argentan as the new corps objective. As the XV Corps attacked toward Argentan, General Haislip requested authority to proceed north of Argentan if the Canadians were not yet there. He suggested that additional troops be placed under his command so that he could block all the east-west roads under his control north of Alencon. Patton's response to Haislip was to go beyond Argentan-to "push on slowly in the direction of Falaise." After reaching Falaise, Haislip was to "continue to push on slowly until contact is made with our Allies," the Canadians.

Attacking toward Argentan on the morning of 13 August, the XV Corps was halted temporarily. As the corps was preparing to make a renewed effort to get to and through Argentan, a message came from Third Army. General Bradley had forbidden further movement northward. General Patton had to order General Haislip to stop. Instead of continuing to the north to an eventual meeting with the Canadians, the XV Corps was to hold in place.<sup>18</sup>

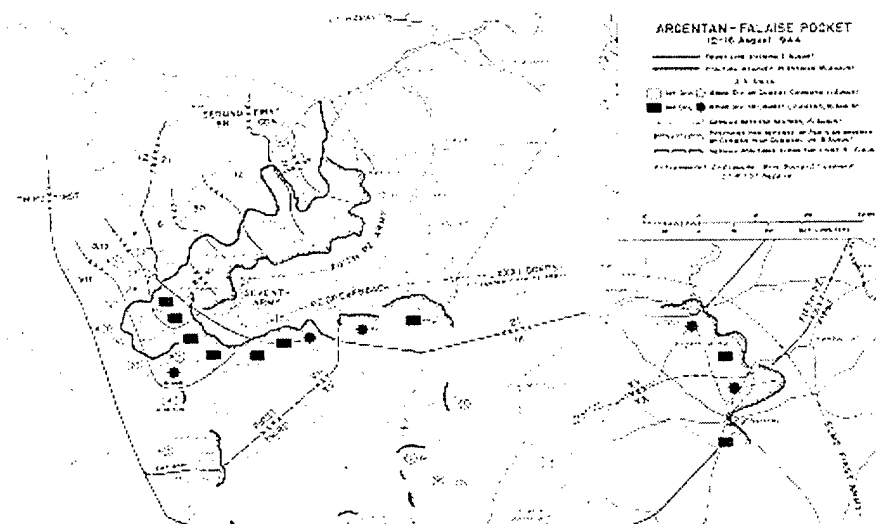


FIGURE 6 FALAISE – ARGENTAN POCKET

## **COMMANDERS DECISION**

Looking back, the key day was Sunday, 13 August 1944. The critical decision facing the Allies was whether to execute the long envelopment and trap the Germans near the Seine or to seize the opportunity and conduct a short envelopment at the Falaise-Argentan gap.

Eisenhower, Montgomery, and Bradley were all aware of the opportunity presenting itself and the associated risks with closing the Americans from the south to meet the Canadians in the vicinity of Falaise. Both Eisenhower and Bradley favored the short envelopment and Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs that Montgomery "agreed the prospective prize was great and left the entire responsibility in Bradley's hands."<sup>19</sup> General Bradley makes it clear that the decision rested with him. Bradley had 3 courses of action to consider. He could move out beyond Argentan toward Falaise (close the gap); he could wait until reinforced by units of the Third and First Armies moving east from the Avranches-Mortain sector; or he could strike quickly east towards the Seine, while continuing to hold the Argentan shoulder temporarily with a smaller force.

With the Canadians still stalled north of Falaise and Bradley's intelligence officers telling him that the Germans had already begun to breakout to the east, Bradley listened to General Patton's advice,

George helped settle my doubts when on August 14 he called to ask that two of Haislip's four divisions on the Argentan shoulder be freed for a dash to the Seine. With that, I brushed aside the first two alternatives and sided with Patton on the third. If Montgomery wants help in closing the gap, I thought, then let him ask for it. Since there was little likelihood of his asking, we would push on to the east.<sup>20</sup>

Bradley's decision signaled an end to the Allied opportunity. Montgomery, the Ground Force Commander, did not push the issue because the short envelopment did not fit in with his concept of the battle. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, did not step in and influence the decision. At the strategic level, there are several areas that should have influenced this group of senior leaders in their decision making process.

## **OPERATIONAL ART**

First, strategic leaders employ operational art together with strategic guidance and direction received from senior leaders in developing campaigns and operations. As the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower was responsible for employing all facets of operational art to ensure mission accomplishment. Operational art requires broad vision, the ability to anticipate, and effective joint and multinational cooperation. General Eisenhower had

to answer the following questions: 1) What military conditions must be produced to achieve the strategic goal (Ends); 2) What sequence of actions is most likely to produce that condition? (Ways); and 3) How should the resources of the invasion force be applied to accomplish that sequence of actions? (Means).<sup>21</sup> General Eisenhower accomplished these by bringing to England in 1944 a reputation for dealing satisfactorily with the British, French, and U.S. forces. Eisenhower established the basis for close cooperation with the heads of the Allied governments and the Combined Chiefs of Staff.<sup>22</sup> Eisenhower was, in a sense, performing the job of a current day Commander in Chief (CINC). He would determine how the Allies would fight Operation Overlord on the continent of Europe.

### CENTERS OF GRAVITY

An aspect of operational art the strategic leader must clearly understand when making a decision is what the enemy's center of gravity is and how to attack and destroy that center of gravity at the strategic and operational level. In order to understand the actions of both the allies and Germany, one can look at the centers of gravity for each side. Joint Publication 3-0 describes centers of gravity as those characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight. Enemy centers of gravity will frequently be well protected, making direct attack difficult and costly.

The strategic center of gravity for Germany was their leader Adolf Hitler. Hitler was what Clausewitz called "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends."<sup>23</sup> Hitler controlled every aspect of every important decision his government would make. As previously discussed, due to the recent attempt on his life, Hitler became even less trustful of his military leaders. The strategic center of gravity for the Allies was their coalition. Germany had to determine how to separate and isolate each member of the coalition. Germany had a chance of victory if they could only fight one Allied coalition member at a time. Indeed, Hitler thought the best way to dislodge the Allied beachhead was by a masterstroke around Bayeux. That was the purpose of the Mortain counterattack. Hitler wanted to split and separate the Allies on the beaches, then dispose of each partner in turn.

Germany's operational center of gravity was identified in the mission statement to General Eisenhower from the Combined Chiefs of Staff the German Armed Forces. The one resource that Germany could not replace was the soldier lost in battle. The operational center of gravity of the Allies at this time was their logistics system. The Allies ability to sustain the invasion force that crossed the English Channel was the key factor in their survival. Again, this was the purpose of the Mortain counterattack – to deny the Allies the use of the port of Avranches.

Hitler enunciated a two-point policy directed against Allied logistics. He ordered his force to deny the Allies ports of entry on the Continent and, if a withdrawal from France became necessary, to destroy the transportation system there by demolishing railroads, bridges, and communications.<sup>24</sup>

## GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT

There were, I believe, domestic political influences that impacted the decisions in Normandy in August of 1944. 1944 was an election year for President Roosevelt. Supporting the Allied plan of "Germany first" carried political risk at home. The U.S. public viewed Japan as the real enemy that should be the primary focus of our military forces. With the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, the Roosevelt administration had to demonstrate to the voters that the U.S. military was in the fight. The United States finally had forces gain combat experience in North Africa in 1943 and later in Sicily. United States print media obviously followed the events in both the European and Pacific theaters. There were strong demands in the United States for greater pressure on Japan and the Navy in particular was reluctant to take additional forces from the Pacific theater for operations.<sup>25</sup>

## TECHNOLOGY

Technology played a vital role in providing the Allied leaders valuable insights in order to make their decisions during the Falaise-Argentan gap. Allied situational awareness was unique during this time of the war. Since the time of the Battle of France in 1940, progressively more and more of the coded radio messages sent by the German high command (including Hitler) as well as those transmitted by senior staff officers were being deciphered by the British.<sup>26</sup> The German method of delivering orders and instructions to its field units was through the Enigma cipher machine. Ultra was the term given by allied efforts in "breaking" the transmissions of the secret German teleprinter Geheimschreiber.<sup>27</sup> At this time, unprecedented amounts of Enigma traffic were being intercepted, and most of it was decoded by Ultra with such rapidity that signal after signal could be prepared so close to the German time of origin. Unexpected quantity brought no decline in quality. These were some of Ultra's most prolific of the war. Twice in three days, Ultra had given information of unsurpassable quality; first, sufficient advance warning of the Mortain counterattack to nullify it completely and to assist in turning Operation Cobra from victory into triumph and to make an orderly German withdrawal to new defense lines impossible, and (at least twenty-four hours in advance) the certainty that the Mortain attack would be persisted in long enough to ensure the almost total dissolution of von Kluge's forces. The allies intercepted orders issued by von Kluge that called for a renewal of the attack

“probably on the 11th” although there might be a postponement. German forces would not retreat for at least 24 hours. Bradley would have almost as much time as he needed, and the allies could proceed in the confident expectation that if they acted quickly they would be able to surround most of the German troops in northern France.<sup>28</sup>

## **RISK**

Risk is inherent in all military operations. In combat, commanders carefully identify conditions that constitute success—both for the envisioned end state and for the major operations that lead to that end state.<sup>29</sup> The Allied operational end state was the destruction of the German forces. Without the front line German forces, Germany's hopes of winning the war vanished. Closing the Falaise-Argentan gap, however, involved strategic and operational risk.

The strategic risk level was enormous. The breakout plan for the Normandy peninsula sought to establish the conditions to implement the “broad approach” on the march to Germany. The gap was created when General Patton took advantage of success by rapidly advancing to the east at the same time the German forces executed their attack on Mortain. The Allies had been on the continent a little over two months when this situation presented itself. The lodgment was established and ports secured to facilitate the resupply of the invasion forces. The Allies had just succeeded in breaking out of their lodgments and would risk their tenuous position by closing the gap. Failure would mean the loss of their second front in Europe. The Allies' ability to man, equip, train, and resource another cross channel invasion would take years. Having to start over from the beginning, the Allies would not be able to maintain the secrecy that was so critical to forming, training, and embarking the first invasion force.<sup>30</sup>

Closing the gap involved substantial operational risk as well. To close the gap, General Patton's forces would expose their flanks as they moved north from Argentan to Falaise. The inter-allied boundary existed to prevent incidents of fratricide between the U.S. forces in the south and the Canadians in the north. Closing the gap could have been disastrous in terms of additional fratricide. Although successful in facilitating the breakout, Operation Cobra had just demonstrated the difficulty of coordinating close air bomber support with ground maneuver. The allies suffered casualties from friendly fire because of the lack of training in executing such a difficult and complex joint operation. The experience level and the training of both armies – one U.S. and one Canadian - would not have allowed them to execute that type of maneuver without similar results. All of these factors would have contributed to an early failure on the part of the allies.

The risk of failure would also have a strategic and operational risk with Allied morale. Strategically, the morale of the Allies and their coalition efforts would suffer. Defeat in Normandy could signal a turn of events for the allied war effort. Failure of the second front could send shock waves through Russia. They would understand that they would be fighting the Germans alone on the continent for some time. Think of the strategic morale boost this would have on the Germans. Germany would gain precious time to increase their development of the V-1 and V-2, their jet fighter, their main battle tank, and possibly regenerate their industrial base that was heavily damaged by the allied bombing campaign. Additionally, defeat of the Allies on the Normandy coast would significantly solidify Hitler's grip on his country and his control of the military. Although it is difficult to speculate whether Hitler would begin to negotiate a peace, success in Normandy would strengthen his strategic position to negotiate with the Russians – the same ploy he used in 1939.

Although risk to the operation was primarily at the strategic level, it is important to mention the risk at the operational level. Operationally, the risk would hit every organization, every unit, and every soldier. Morale would suffer and decline throughout every soldier of the coalition. This failure would set back the psyche of each soldier gained in Allied victories in North Africa and the Mediterranean.<sup>31</sup>

## COMMAND AND CONTROL

If officers desire to have control over their commands, they must remain habitually with them, industriously attend to their instruction and comfort, and in battle lead them well.<sup>32</sup>

—Stonewall Jackson

The command and control relationship that existed with the Allied invasion force allowed General Eisenhower to develop control over the forces put under his command without being hampered by restrictions.<sup>33</sup> The directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff left Eisenhower great freedom in exercising command and in outlining the details of his operations against Germany.<sup>34</sup> Supporting the invasion, Eisenhower retained control of the Allied Naval Forces under British Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay and the Allied Expeditionary Air Force under British Air Chief Marshall Leigh-Mallory.

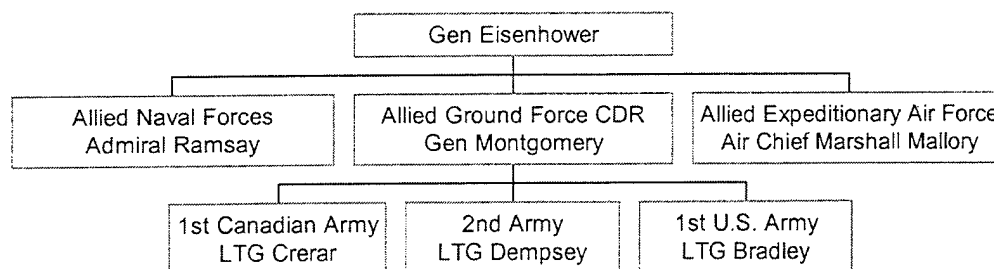


FIGURE 7 COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Eisenhower believed that until several Armies were deployed on a secure beachhead and until the situation required a re-organization, all ground forces on the continent [would be] under the Commander in Chief, 21st Army Group, General Montgomery.<sup>35</sup> General Eisenhower approved the campaign plans and General Montgomery coordinated all ground operations, including timing the attacks, fixing local objectives, and establishing boundaries. At the same time, Montgomery retained the position of Commander, 21st Army Group. General Montgomery was, in current doctrine, the Joint Force Land Component Commander.

During the invasion and up to 1 August 1944, General Bradley was subordinate to Montgomery, the Land Component Commander. Based on the build up of U.S. forces in theater, Eisenhower activated the 12th Army Group and placed General Bradley in charge. Although both Montgomery and Bradley commanded army groups, Montgomery retained overall control until Eisenhower would move his headquarters on the continent on 01 September. Throughout the month of August, Montgomery continued to issue operational instructions to the U.S. forces, but he consulted General Bradley increasingly as a partner instead of a subordinate. Montgomery gave Bradley great latitude in directing the U.S. forces.<sup>36</sup> This relationship was valuable because it permitted one commander, General Montgomery, to coordinate the Allied forces during the period of the breakout. This same relationship existed during the battle of the Falaise-Argentan gap.

## **COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS**

The personalities of the three principle leaders: General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Sir Bernard Montgomery, and General Omar N. Bradley, influenced the command decisions at the Falaise-Argentan gap. On 29 November 1943, at the Allied Summit in Tehran, it was Soviet Dictator Joseph Stalin who pressed Churchill and Roosevelt to name the commander of the Operation Overlord that would set in motion their relationship in France in August 1944.<sup>37</sup> Both Roosevelt and Churchill were not willing to give up their valued Army service chiefs (General Marshall and Sir Alan Brooke respectively) and Churchill informed Stalin that the British were willing to serve under a U.S. commander in the Overlord Operation.<sup>38</sup> Churchill stated that President Roosevelt could name the Supreme Commander provided he accept the British offer to serve under a U.S. commander.<sup>39</sup> Most people, including General Eisenhower, expected General Marshall to be named the Supreme Commander. President Roosevelt, however, thought him too valuable to let go. Marshall could better press the needs of the U.S. with the Combined Chiefs Staff, handle the delicate nature of the Pacific Theater, and could work with members of Congress better than Eisenhower. President Roosevelt notified General

Eisenhower of his selection as the Supreme Commander on 07 December 1944. This selection completed a rapid rise that saw Eisenhower start as the Chief of Staff of IX Corps in Fort Lewis, WA with the rank of temporary Colonel in March of 1941.

The decision to appoint General Montgomery the commander of all allied land forces during Overlord was purely a British one to make. General Eisenhower would have preferred General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of Allied ground forces in Italy. Writing to Marshall on 17 December, Eisenhower described his concept of a "single ground force commander" for Overlord and that he hoped the British would select Alexander.<sup>40</sup> Eisenhower found Montgomery abrasive and difficult to control.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the war, the relationship between Eisenhower and Montgomery was formal and businesslike. There was none of the warmth or comradeship Eisenhower felt for Alexander. The British, alarmed that the easygoing Eisenhower was chosen over the tough, no-nonsense Marshall, chose Montgomery over Alexander to become the ground force commander<sup>42</sup>.

Montgomery never considered Eisenhower anything more than an amateur soldier who lacked vital command experience that he had attained. Montgomery's professionalism and dedication to the art of war left him suspicious of Eisenhower's capabilities as a commander. Ability was the foundation upon which Montgomery judged others. Experience and performance were the acid tests of a commander's ability and, in Montgomery's opinion, Eisenhower had not passed this rigid standard. Montgomery considered it unthinkable that a man who had never commanded anything larger than a battalion in peacetime should be directing a critical operation like Overlord.<sup>43</sup>

The command relationship that existed between Eisenhower and his two key subordinates was not effective. On the one hand, Bradley clearly understood his relationship with Eisenhower, and on the other, Montgomery treated him with professional politeness but not with the respect due his position. Montgomery would go so far as to not include Eisenhower in meetings he would have with his senior field commanders

## CONCLUSION

In multinational and interagency operations, unity of command may not be possible, but the requirement for unity of effort becomes paramount.

—Joint Publication 3-0

Failure to close the Falaise-Argentan gap allowed tens of thousands of German soldiers and leaders to escape and assist in the reconstitution of new units that would eventually prolong the war until June of 1945. Closing the gap would certainly have ended the war earlier,

however, it would not have ended in August of 1944. Germany, with Hitler firmly in charge, would have continued to fight all the way to Berlin.

Did the Allies make the correct decision to not close the gap? An armchair strategist with the benefit of hindsight may argue that the leaders should have done better – that the gap should have been closed. My research indicates that if there is to be an “armchair strategist” and blame is to be assigned – then it should rest with the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower. The task given the Allied invasion force was to destroy German forces. Closing the Falaise-Argentan gap would do just that. Closure would have targeted the operational center of gravity, destruction of the enemy forces that was identified by the command directive sent by the Combined Chiefs. If General Bradley was the commander to make the decision about closing the gap, Eisenhower was still the Supreme Allied Commander. The risks, as I have mentioned above, were enormous, but Eisenhower understood the risks and he should have stepped in and either agreed with the decision or directed Montgomery to close the gap. Eisenhower was in charge and those are the critical decisions the Supreme Allied Commander must make on his own.

A fix to the command and control relationship would involve two courses of action. First, General Eisenhower could have deployed to the theater and commanded Operation Overlord from the continent of Europe, not from England. Second, he could have taken a page from our current doctrine. Eisenhower was successful at the strategic level of command - that is where he should have maintained his energy and focus. Eisenhower should have made Montgomery a Joint Task Force Commander and given him all the resources to accomplish the mission. With the second option, I do not think the decision would have changed – the Allies still would not have closed the gap, however, there would not be three senior leaders looking at the other to make the call.

Did General Eisenhower have the necessary training to be the Supreme Allied Commander? He was well suited for his role at the strategic level. Eisenhower was adept at working with the Combined Chiefs of Staff and strengthening the coalition. However, at the operational level, it was Eisenhower's responsibility to recognize the potential benefit from closing the pocket at Falaise and influenced his subordinate leaders to do so. To this end, General Eisenhower failed to achieve unity of effort. Although somewhat challenging, unity of command was never an issue. Montgomery was in charge of all land forces at the Falaise-Argentan gap. General Eisenhower was his superior. If the purpose of the operation was to destroy German forces, it was Eisenhower's responsibility to ensure the military forces under his command were focused on that common goal. Eisenhower understood the desired ends,

destruction of the enemy forces, however, by not properly achieving unity of effort, he did not synchronize his ways and means to achieve the desired results.

Word Count = 6300

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Martin Blumenson, "General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944)," available from [http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/70-7\\_17.htm](http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/70-7_17.htm); Internet; accessed 31 January 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of German soldiers who escaped the Falaise – Argentan Pocket and later formed the nucleus of future German units was taken from a lecturer who participated in the Commandant's Lecture Series.

<sup>3</sup> Blumenson, "General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket-The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 94.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Army War College, Case Study, Operation Overlord: Volume 1, (New Jersey: Avery Publishing Group, Inc, 1984), 53.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>7</sup> Russell G. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944-1945 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 112.

<sup>8</sup> John Keegan, "Normandy: 1944, The Drive to the Seine, August 1944" available from <http://normandy.eb.com/normandy/week4/breakout.html> Internet; accessed 05 March 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket-The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II, 112.

<sup>10</sup> This discussion of the Breakout is taken entirely from Martin Blumenson's work from "General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944)". I accessed this website on 31 January 2001.

<sup>11</sup> This discussion of Creating the Gap is taken from Blumenson's "General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944)". Accessed on 31 January 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket-The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II, 173.

<sup>13</sup> Forrest C. Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Military History Department of the Army, 1954), 202.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket-The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 203.

<sup>17</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket-The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II, 175.

<sup>18</sup> This discussion of the pocket is taken entirely from Martin Blumenson's work from "General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944)". I accessed this website on 31 January 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Carlo D'Este, Decision in Normandy (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1983), 445.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 446.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Doctrine for Joint Operations. Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 01 February 1995), II-3.

<sup>22</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 35.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Doctrine for Joint Operations. Joint Publication 3-0, III-20.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit: United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations. (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1993), 420.

<sup>25</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 51.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Army War College, Case Study, Operation Overlord: Volume 1, 10.

<sup>27</sup> D'Este, Decision in Normandy, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Keegan, Ultra in the West: The Normandy Campaign of 1944-45. (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1979), 119.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Doctrine for Joint Operations. Joint Publication 3-0, III-28.

<sup>30</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 168.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 168. This discussion of risk was taken from Pogue's remarks concerning the risks associated with postponing Overlord due to bad weather. I interpreted these impacts for a failed invasion effort.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures. (Joint Publication 5-00.2. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 13 January 1999), IV-1.

<sup>33</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>35</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 180.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>37</sup> Nigel Hamilton, Monty: The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery (New York: Random House, 1994), 195.

<sup>38</sup> Pogue, The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, Monty: The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, 198.

<sup>41</sup> D'Este, Decision in Normandy , 50.

<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, Monty: The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, 199.

<sup>43</sup> D'Este, Decision in Normandy , 50.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bennett, Ralph. Ultra in the West: The Normandy Campaign of 1944-45. London: Hutchinson and Company, 1979.
- Blumenson, Martin. The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Breakout and Pursuit: United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944)." Available from [http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/70-7\\_17.htm](http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/70-7_17.htm). Internet. Accessed 31 January 2001.
- D'Este, Carlo. Decision in Normandy. New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1983.
- Fuller, J.F.C. The Second World War 1939 – 1945. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1949.
- Keegan, John. "Normandy: 1944, The Drive to the Seine, August 1944." Available from <http://normandy.eb.com/normandy/week4/breakout.html>. Internet. Accessed 05 March 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Six Armies in Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris. New York: The Viking Press, 1982.
- Hamilton, Nigel. Monty: The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. New York: Random House, 1994.
- Jacobsen, Hans Adolf, and J. Rohwer, eds. Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View. Translated by Edward Fitzgerald. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965.
- Pogue, Forrest C. The Supreme Command, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1954.
- Weigley, Russell, F. Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Strategic Leadership." Lecture. Carlisle Barracks, PA, U.S. Army War College, 29 January 2001. Cited with permission of Mr. Weigley.
- United States Army War College. Case Study, Operation Overlord: Volume 1. New Jersey: Avery Publishing Group, Inc., 1984.
- U.S. Department of Defense. Doctrine for Joint Operations. Joint Publication 3-0. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 01 February 1995.
- U.S. Department of Defense. Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures. Joint Publication 5-00.2. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 13 January 1999.