

LIBERATION AND FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS  
IN POST-WAR CHERBOURG

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GABRIELLE M. MADDALONI, MAJ, USA  
B.S., United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1994

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Name of Candidate: Major Gabrielle M. Maddaloni

Thesis Title: LIBERATION AND FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN POST-  
WAR CHERBOURG

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Thesis Committee Chair  
Stephen A. Bourque, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_, Member  
Christopher R. Gabel, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_, Member  
LTC Frederick V. Godfrey, MALA

Accepted this 13th day of June 2008 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

LIBERATION AND FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN POST-WAR  
CHERBOURG, by Major Gabrielle M. Maddaloni, 121 pages.

Prior to World War II, the port of Cherbourg was a premier deep-water European port for large trans-Atlantic vessels. Throughout World War I, Cherbourg was a hub of activity for the French and was a main base for repair of all naval vessels in northern France. On June 19, 1940, German armored vehicles rolled into Cherbourg. Throughout four years of occupation, the city population decreased from 40,000 to 5,000 before June 6, 1944. The international deep-water port was integral to the logistics support plan of the American forces. Throughout the Air Campaign in Normandy, the Allies dropped 1,000 tons of bombs in and around the city of Cherbourg. On June 25, 1944, the Allies captured the city after five days of fighting. The Germans achieved almost total destruction of the port facilities. It took the engineers three weeks to open the port, and five months passed before it was handling large amounts of cargo. Thus, the central research question is: Did the American military get it right concerning post-war renovation for the city of Cherbourg? The American military lived and worked in the city alongside the French. The American military commanders recognized that the actions of one soldier had potential consequences for the American presence in the city. The Americans made tremendous contributions to the restoration of the port. The Americans also repaired essential services in the city, employed the French, and renovated the buildings they occupied. The American military played an integral role in the liberation and renovation of the city of Cherbourg.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father's father, United States Army Private Louis Anthony Maddaloni, who served his country during World War II. He was a member of the 507<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment and jumped safely into Normandy in the early morning hours of June 6, 1944. He fought honorably with his fellow paratroopers until they returned to English soil in August, 1944. When my father was only two years old, my grandmother received a letter from General Matthew B. Ridgway, Commander of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, that her husband had died honorably serving his country. In remembrance of my Grandfather, I appreciate every detail I read about World War II and Northern France. Every visit to the region is a chance for me to take in the French culture and converse with the French, aware that my grandfather experienced similar encounters sixty-four years ago.

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## ACRONYMS

AAF	United States Army Air Forces
ADSEC	Advance Section, Communications Zone
Barge	A flat bottom boat designed to transport large or heavy cargo
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CinC	Commander in Chief
COMZ	Communications Zone
Crawler Crane	A large crane on a mobile tracked platform
CROSSBOW	Code name for the Allied operations targeting German missile launching sites pointed at the British mainland
DA	Department of the Army
D-Day	The day the invasion is planned to commence
DUKW	Amphibious truck
E-boat	Enemy boat, small German torpedo boat
ETO	European Theater of Operations
ETOUSA	European Theater of Operations, United States Army
FUSAG	First United States Army Group
H-Hour	The hour the invasion is planned to begin
NBS	Normandy Base Section
NOBALL	Code name for targets of German missile launching or V-weapon sites
LCT	Landing craft tank
Liberty Ship	Cargo ships built in the United States during WWII
LSD	Landing ship dock
LST	Landing ship tank

LSV	Landing ship vehicle
OVERLORD	Code name for the Allied invasion of Normandy
POINTBLANK	Code name for the Allied Combined Bomber Offensive
RAF	Royal Air Force
Rhino Ferry	A long, wide raft that draws three feet of water, designed to allow military vehicles to drive from an LST ramp directly onto the rhino ferry, and drive off the rhino ferry onto a beach
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force
Stevedore	One who is responsible for loading and unloading ships at port
TUSAG	Twelfth Army Group
U-boat	Submarine
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
Victory Ship	Cargo ships built in the United States during WWII to replace shipping losses due to German submarines, based on an earlier design for the Liberty ship

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# CHAPTER 1

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Located at the northern extremity of the Cotentin Peninsula, Cherbourg has a long and generally peaceful history. Far from France's border with its aggressive neighbors, it was able to survive and prosper, essentially untouched by Napoléon's Wars, the Franco-Prussian War, and the Great War of 1914-1918. The city lies at the base of a high plateau that descends to the coast and opens into a protected anchorage on the English Channel, called *La Manche* in French. The city sits in a bay embraced by Cap Levi on the eastern coast and Cap de la Hague on the western coast, directly facing England seventy miles away. Cherbourg is eighty miles from Caen, 145 miles from Rouen, and 220 miles from Paris. Renowned for the world's largest artificial harbor, it has four ports: a marina, a fishing harbor, a naval port, and a commercial port. Cherbourg and its suburbs form the second largest urban area in Lower Normandy, after Caen. Its remoteness from the heart of France, and even from most of Normandy, gives it a history somewhat unique from the rest of the country. Centered on maritime commerce, on the edge of global conflict, and for the first time in its history, Cherbourg was in the heart of modern war.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous accounts of the Normandy invasion and the logistics strategy in Northern France include military descriptions of the battle for the city and port of Cherbourg.<sup>2</sup> Yet, these accounts are incomplete as the city, its citizens, and environment are essentially absent from most of these discussions. This manuscript seeks to rectify that omission and integrate the French narrative into the standard American study. In addition, Cherbourg's experience in the Second World War goes far beyond the battle discussions in most battle histories. It was essential as a logistics hub for the American

war effort and its experience is generally not understood or appreciated by soldiers and civilians alike. For the French who remained in the city, the war was a complex experience. There was the horror of the German invasion, fear and resignation during the occupation, terror as the Allies intensified their bombing, and confrontation with the Germans in proximity to their city. Then came the American occupation as Cherbourg joined the Allied logistics effort in the last year of the war. What were the effects of the German occupation and Allied reconquest? How did the city contribute to the Allied war effort? How did the *Cherbourgeois*, with Allied help, recover from the effects of war? What does this narrative mean to Americans, especially military officers conducting reconstruction and restoration operations around the world today? This manuscript seeks to answer these questions. This chapter describes the context for Allied invasion and introduces Cherbourg's history, its experience in the era of the First World War, and the city's capture and occupation by the German forces.

### A Maritime Heritage

Although Cherbourg was able to avoid being involved in most of France's early conflicts, it has a long and interesting history in military and naval affairs. It begins with the Celts who named the city *Kerburg*, from the old Celtic *ker* for city and *burg* for fortress. The Romans occupied and fortified it in the 4th century and constructed a castle. The selected location, at the bottom of the bay and at the edge of the Divette estuary, was the ideal placement for a fortified port. The Romans changed *Ker* to *Cor* or *Coria*, and replaced *burg* with *vallum*, fortress in Latin. The city name became *Coriavallum* or *Coriallum*. The name *Coriallum* appeared for the first time on the document "la carte théodosienne," also called "Table de Peutinger." Later names for the

city were *Carusburc*, *Carusbure*, *Chierisburch*, *Coesarisburgi*, *Coesarisburgus*, *Keresburg*, *Cheresburg*, and *Chierebourg*. Throughout the Pax Romana, the port city and the castle, later known as the Château de Cherbourg, formed an important trade center. After the fall of the Roman Empire in 476, the region suffered through several hundred years of invasion and occupation, beginning with the Saxons, followed by the Franks, and then various Viking tribes who raided the northern coast of France throughout the ninth and tenth centuries until they settled around the modern cities of Caen, St. Lo, and Falaise. The Duke of Normandy, Richard II, founded a church within the ancient Château fortress in 998, and dedicated the church to Saint Benoit. When first mentioned in a deed of donation by Duke Richard II to his future wife in 1026, the city of Cherbourg was a growing fishing port. It belonged to the Anglo-Norman Kingdom after the Norman conquest of England, under the rule of English kings until the 13<sup>th</sup> century when control passed in 1204 to the King of France, Philippe Auguste.<sup>3</sup>

Cherbourg changed hands six times during the Hundred Years War, beginning in 1337, until the French crown finally secured it for good in 1450. Reconstruction of the château and fortifications, along with its natural harbor, made it an important trading center in France's developing global empire for the next two centuries. Neglected during the French Wars of Religion, the once mighty château and city fortifications were in a state of major disrepair by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1686 King Louis XIV ordered his famous engineer, Maréchal Sébastien Le Preste de Vauban, to develop defenses to protect the vulnerable city. However, three years later the minister of war, François Michel le Tellier Louvois, countermanded his sovereign's orders and suspended the defense plans, demolished the castle and constructed a harbor in its place, to take

advantage of the developing trade with America. In 1776, on the eve of France's war with England in support of the American Revolution, Louis XVI sent General Charles-François du Périer Dumouriez to the post of Commandant of Cherbourg to design a military port to protect the city from the sea and facilitate shipbuilding. Construction began in 1783, but the revolution of 1789 resulted in the suspension of its construction as with most projects across France. Napoléon Bonaparte's assumption of power, along with his desire to invade England, reinvigorated construction. In 1802 he began a port construction project the ultimately required fifty-six years to complete.<sup>4</sup>

The French paddle steamer *L'Union*, carrying 150 passengers, was the first transatlantic steam liner to call on the port of Cherbourg on 22 June, 1840. Following the construction of a new terminal in 1853, it was now the largest artificial harbor in the world, and a major port for travel to and from the United States. Exactly 100 years after the last English attack on the city, Cherbourg's naval port, initiated by Napoleon I, was completed on 7 August, 1858, and the ceremony was hosted by Emperor Napoléon III in the presence of Queen Alexandrina Victoria of England. It covers 289 acres with an entrance channel sixty-four meters wide. The port has an outer harbor and three dock areas named for Napoléon, Charles X, and Napoléon III. The railway line connecting Cherbourg to Paris became operational in 1858, at a ceremony presided over by Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie, providing the city with a high-speed link to the rest of France and increasing its importance as a transportation center. Soon after the Emperor directed the construction of three artificial seawall forts to protect and defend the military harbor: le fort de l'Ouest, le fort Central, and le fort de l'Est. Thereafter, improvements to the central harbor consisted of four artificial seawalls: l'île Pelée,



Querqueville, le Homet, and Flamands. Therefore, on the eve of the Great War, Cherbourg was one of the most important harbors in the world, indicated by the British Liner *Titanic* using it as its embarkation port on her last voyage to America on 10 April, 1912. In addition to shipping, Cherbourg was also a shipbuilding center and from 1898 onward, its shipyard specialized in design and production of submarines. The port was also the first large base for French Navy destroyers, built at Saint-Denis, le Havre, and England (see figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

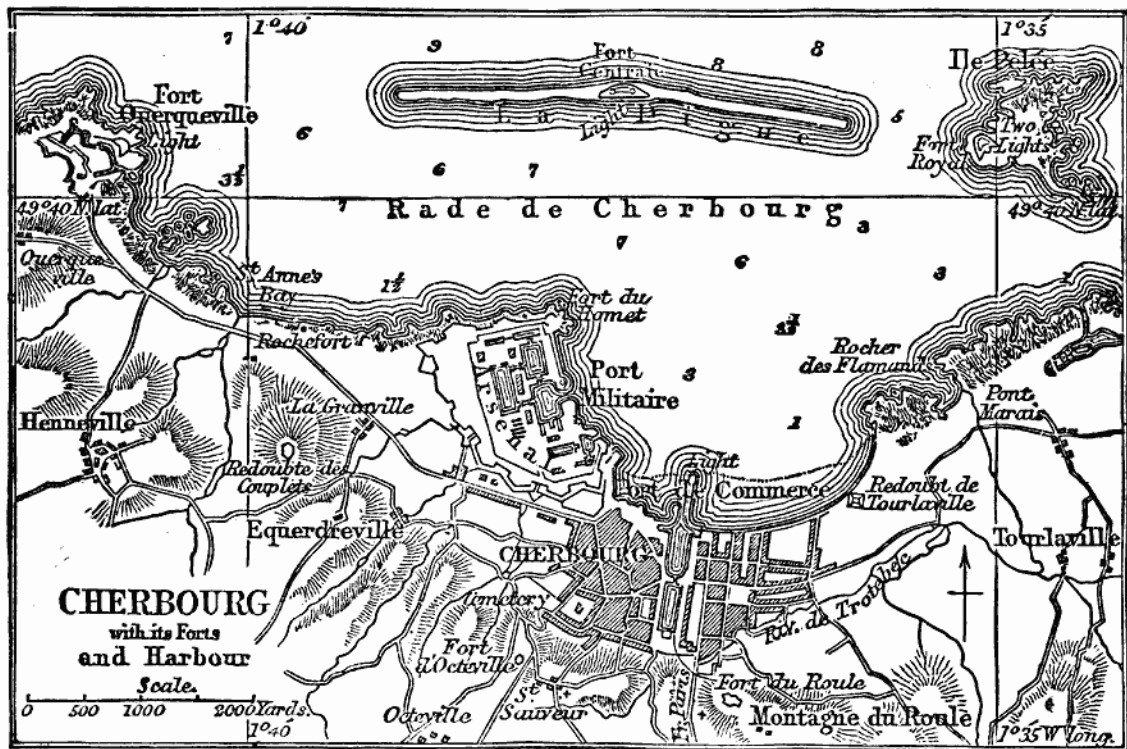


Figure 1. Cherbourg with its Forts and Harbor, 1919.

Source: University of South Florida (Map, University of South Florida, Educational Technology Clearinghouse, Maps ETC, [www.etc.usf.edu](http://www.etc.usf.edu)).

## On the Edge of Conflict

World War I interrupted further improvements and throughout the war Cherbourg was a hub of activity. It was the main base for repair and reconstruction for all naval vessels on the northern French coast and the port used by naval convoys travelling to all French and British ports. It became a coal port in 1917 and a fuel port in 1918. After the war, ten ex-German captured submarines were re-armed and re-fitted in the shipyard. Cherbourg was an unimportant port of embarkation for returning American troops after the armistice, accounting for a mere 10% of total cargo discharged through French ports during the war.<sup>6</sup>

In November, 1918, the Great War came to a close and France faced an uncertain future. It began for Cherbourg on a joyous note as the *25e Régiment d'Infanterie* (25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment), the Cherbourg Regiment, returned home in September, 1919, to a hero's welcome. However, it was a bitter sweet homecoming. Although specific statistics for this regiment are not available, the French infantry suffered horribly in this conflict. If this regiment was similar to others, one in six of its original contingent was dead and twice that number badly wounded. Those that returned were physically older and would have the scars of that experience for the rest of their lives.<sup>7</sup>

After 1918, concern about the French population size became an issue. Despite an initial climate of nationalism and triumph, France's post-war mood reflected pessimism and uncertainty. France wondered if it could recover from the loss of so many lives. In total, 1.3 million Frenchmen died and France's birthrate started to decline. In 1920, the French natalists increased the penalties for abortion and prohibited the sale of contraceptive devices and the dissemination of birth control information. During the war,

women contributed to victory in the factories. But official war propaganda celebrated motherhood and portrayed women as ‘Marianne’ and ‘Victory,’ or as nurses, wives, and mothers.<sup>8</sup>

Extensive port improvements began in 1923 under the design of architect René Levavasseur. Construction began in 1926 for the unique *Gare Maritime* (seaside rail station), a large rail terminal at the port where passengers transferred from transatlantic liners to railcars under a single roof. Inaugurated by French President Albert Lebrun on July 30, 1933, the terminal was operational after seven years of construction. Opened in 1926 adjacent to the port, the emigration *Hotel Atlantique* could house up to 2,000 third class passengers departing to America. The passengers spent twelve days at the *Hotel Atlantique* for health and customs controls. The hotel closed in 1934 due to the decline in emigration to America, between 1922 and 1935 the number of emigrants fell from 41,000 to 8,000 each year.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally in 1926, on July 29 the city police commissioner petitioned the mayor to begin preparations for securing the city in case of an eventual war. Three years later, the local military and city authorities created a plan in the event of the mobilization for the housing of troops. Three years later, on December 31, 1929, the city established an urban commission to discuss the protection of the people and local industry from aerial bombings and the signals to alert the population. No further action occurred until seven years later, when the mayor of Cherbourg established an urban plan for passive defense of the city in March 1936, which included persons designated as responsible liaisons for emergency services, police, fire, water services, and hospitals. The plan

included dispersion of the population and generated more questions than answers. The city was divided into nineteen sectors and individuals were designated as sector chiefs.<sup>10</sup>

In 1939, the port of Cherbourg was thriving, conducting merchandise import and export and fishing. As one of the fishing centers between those of the east coast and the northwest coast, Cherbourg fishermen caught fish primarily for the local regional population and for Paris. Through its port food products, agriculture phosphates, coal, and construction material entered France. The port's most important import was coal from England, used for local energy consumption and ship building. It shipped agriculture products and butter. It was also a premier post for the total quantity of transatlantic mail shipped from France. It was a growing center for transatlantic emigration, with the Cunard White Star Line and the Hamburg America Line (Hapag) stopping in Cherbourg before sailing to New York. The Royal Mail Steam Packet handled passengers traveling to South America, and the Canadian Pacific Line traveled to Montreal. There was an aerial port network consisting of the naval airfield of Querqueville, where the German airline Lufthansa flew civil aviation flights direct to Cologne. Six kilometers west of the city, the French Air Force occupied the airfield of Gonneville-Maupertus, ten kilometers to the east. Additionally, Cherbourg was a base for navy seaplanes.<sup>11</sup>

The summer of 1939 was typical for "*les Cherbourgeois*," who bathed at the beaches of the Cotentin and yachted along the coast. The *Gare Maritime* passenger terminal received more and more voyagers and celebrities, including Charles Lindbergh and President Teddy Roosevelt's son, James. The city celebrated the twenty years since

the end of the Great War, celebrated being French, and celebrated the strength of the French Military.<sup>12</sup>

### Cherbourg as a Battle Ground

After Germany invaded Czechoslovakia in 1938, the city accelerated preparations in the event of war with Germany. Starting on March 22, 1939, it began a policy of lights out every night to prevent aerial observation. Meanwhile, the people lived through the dark nights in order to maintain a semblance of normal life inside their homes. The two Cherbourg military regiments mobilized and local commands developed a plan for aerial defense. The large tunnel complex below *Fort du Roule*, located on high ground at the entrance to the city, was stockpiled with hundreds of torpedoes. In addition, after ten years of construction the large explosives factory at Brécourt was completed.<sup>13</sup>

Everything changed in Cherbourg on September 3, 1939, when the first aerial raid alarm sounded. The almost 40,000 citizens became more and more fearful with every alarm. Increasing the fear, each evening the city turned off its lights to avert enemy aerial bombing, forcing the people to stay indoors and listen to the radio for information. After the initial fears, the people soon became used to the regular sirens. Cherbourg's citizens would not experience bombing for almost two years, and then at the hands of the British and Americans.<sup>14</sup>

The British government sent its Expeditionary Force to France to take over the Lille sector of the French defenses along the Belgian frontier, in order to block the German advance to the sea to maintain contact with the remainder of the French forces. This fully mechanized army began arriving the first week of October, 1939, through the

principal landing ports of Cherbourg, Nantes, and St Nazaire. With naval and air cover escorts, over 160,000 men and 22,000 vehicles crossed the English Channel.<sup>15</sup>

The German High Command's plan for '*Operation Yellow*,' was to feint the northern flank of the western front through Luxemburg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The main effort, with most of the German army's tanks, would be through the weakly defended Ardennes Forest, with the aim of isolating the Anglo-French force in the low countries. On May 10, the German forces, preceded by an intense air attack, advanced against the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg. Their governments appealed to London and Paris for assistance and soon. That same day in the early afternoon, British and French troops were moving into Belgium.<sup>16</sup>

The speed, force, and depth of the German offensive caught the Allies by surprise. As their advance into Belgium slowed, it became clear that *Wehrmacht's* first objective was the sea and the Channel ports and not Paris. On May 20<sup>th</sup> the panzer spearhead passed Amiens and Abbeville, severing the Franco-British front. The British began to withdraw towards Dunkirk and the Channel ports. The plan was to embark all personnel from the port of Boulogne, Calais, Cherbourg, and Dunkirk. Boulogne fell on May 25, and Calais the next day. Only Dunkirk was left and '*Operation Dynamo*,' commenced that evening. A total of over 200,000 British and 50,000 French troops escaped to Britain. The German Army achieved its aim in the north and eliminated nearly forty British and French divisions.<sup>17</sup>

The Allies hoped to repeat their performance in World War I and establish a new defensive line across France. As recently evacuated British units refitted in England, Britain ordered the commander of the evacuated British II Corps, Field Marshal Alan

Francis Brooke, to Cherbourg. He was to organize and command a new British Expeditionary Force, with units returned to the continent from England and the combined British and Canadian forces south of the German breakthrough. What the British did not anticipate was the rapid advance of the German troops through northern France, the disintegration of the French troops along the Maginot Line, and the need to organize a second evacuation of British troops.<sup>18</sup>

The war now arrived in Cherbourg on June 12, 1940 with the arrival of the British 52<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. This port was a key logistics facility for the intended front. Its cranes were sufficient to handle all military equipment except heavy tanks. Returning British troops began arriving to set a new defensive line in the Cotentin, called the Carentan line, against the German forces moving west from Caen. Almost immediately, the line of British troops broke at Saint-Sauveur-de-Pierrepont, and they retreated overland back to Cherbourg. They began embarkation on June 16 and the last ship departed June 18. Before their final departure, the British destroyed hundreds of their vehicles, weapons, and supplies in the arsenal. Meanwhile, the German 7<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division headed toward Cherbourg, arriving on the heels of the departing British. Fighting ended at 1430 hours on June 19, 1940.<sup>19</sup>

The first weeks of occupation were intense as armed German soldiers patrolled the streets to control movement, all businesses remained closed, driving was not permitted, and many were forced to house German soldiers in their homes. These guests often took French cars, money, and supplies. The occupiers did not permit Cherbourg's citizens to gather or leave the city, and the nightly curfew began at 2200 hours. There was no gas or electricity in the city for several weeks, and overnight 6,000 people lost

their jobs. By June 23, the German occupiers began encouraging the people to reopen their shops, businesses, and restaurants. However, the difficulty of rationing signaled the beginning of a long summer. On June 24, the library and schools re-opened, and people could use bicycles within the city for transportation. Under conditional freedom, the population continued to live their lives in a city under constant surveillance from German military vehicles on the streets. The Germans used local citizens as laborers at the arsenal and the port. Throughout the month of August, four German infantry divisions trained regularly on the beaches of the city to prepare for a coastal landing in England.<sup>20</sup>

German occupation imposed many restrictions, and the majority of the population accepted their fate and maintained a semblance of peace. Early on, a small minority in the city resisted the occupation, some passively and some actively. Another group actively collaborated with the occupiers. Initially the German occupiers did not allow the fisherman to go out to sea. More than one month passed before they allowed fishing to resume, but restricted it to specific zones with an armed German soldier on each boat. Rationing also affected the fishing industry, limiting fuel and replacement parts. In addition, all the restrictions made it difficult to maintain the fishing industry and the local fish market.<sup>21</sup>

Most French people experienced the period of occupation as a time of uncertainty and loneliness. The war and the subsequent defeat separated relatives and friends. The army call-up took husbands and fathers from their families. The French expected the war to be a long and grueling war of attrition, and the nature of the defeat was unexpected. It was widely believed that the Germans would be held at the Maginot Line, and that the German economy was weakened and would eventually collapse. Although the Germans



initially were less brutal in France than they were in the invasions of Poland and the Soviet Union, they sometime enforced rules ruthlessly. The Germans handled the French workers and peasants more roughly. Frenchwomen feared rape as a result of German behavior during the First World War. And although not reported to the extent anticipated, the Germans did rape women in the summer of 1940. The definition of rape was sometimes ambiguous, the language barrier added misunderstanding, and the national stereotypes about the sexual availability of French women created problems.<sup>22</sup>

How they should deal with the Germans was always an issue with the *Cherbourbois*. Initially, they emphasized silence and avoided eye contact. The Germans required laborers in the areas they occupied, most significantly at the ports and aerodromes. The German presence at the port destroyed the existing sources of employment and created new ones. German military port projects replaced fishing and civilian trade. The number of people employed increased sharply in 1941 when Hitler decreed that fortifications will be built on the coast to resist future Allied invasion. The Todt organization, responsible for large-scale construction projects, was the largest single employer of labor. Employment by the Germans meant long hours of back-breaking work and the risk of being killed by Allied bombing, directed at the sites where the most people worked.<sup>23</sup>

The population of Cherbourg decreased from 40,000 to 5,000 people throughout the occupation.<sup>24</sup> On July 17, 1941, three thousand men were taken as forced labor prisoners to Germany. The German occupiers also removed the small population of Jewish people in the city. There were several thousand who arrived from Europe and North Africa to work in the factories as part of the 'Nazi machine.' A majority of the city

departed from exasperation under occupation, mostly women, children, and the elderly. Cherbourg became a ghost town, devoid of life, with the remaining population awaiting a liberation they believed imminent. Throughout the four long years of occupation, the remaining inhabitants of Cherbourg wanted nothing more than a normal life and a return to order in the city.<sup>25</sup>

From the summer of 1941 on, the Allied air campaign began to raise French civilian apprehensions. Targeting airfields, ports, factories, and transportation routes, the results usually included the loss of French lives and the destruction of property. By the end of 1942, the United States joined the British by invading North Africa, sinking French naval vessels, and bombing French targets. The spring of 1943 saw the greatest push to evacuate all women and children to elsewhere in France. In addition to children, the French officials also encouraged the evacuation of women and the elderly to the interior of France. According to the German occupiers, all those considered to be of no economic value could evacuate. Depending on the area and the availability of community assistance, the children stayed with families, parishes, charities, and lay school organizations.<sup>26</sup>

In the early days of occupation, the behavior of the German forces was unusually good for an occupying army. Allied success in distant theaters raised the hopes of the French people. Throughout the occupation, the main concern for the French people was food. France eventually became the most undernourished of the western occupied nations. Anti-German feelings grew with the scarcity of food, especially in the cities where rations allotments were hard to obtain due to diminished production and transportation, and the German requisitions. Within France, the occupation divided

families and restricted movement and information. Without importation and due to the fact that the Germans administered the rich fields of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, only thirty-five percent of the coal of pre-war years was available. Oil supplies became only one-tenth their pre-war level and electric power fell drastically.<sup>27</sup>

The Allied bombings raised apprehensions as Allied success increasingly appeared to always involve French loss. The French increasingly blamed the Allies for food and fuel shortages. Industry fell to a range of one-half to one-third of pre-war levels, although much had been redirected to support the German war effort. Public opinion also shifted from Gaullism to support of the Vichy regime, due to the charge that de Gaulle was simply giving the French Empire to the British. Also, the black market grew due to hoarding the extreme scarcity of goods. And in a completely unexpected manner, Frenchmen decided to have more children and contribute to a post-war baby boom.<sup>28</sup>

By late 1942, Cherbourg was now in its second year of war. Many citizens had adjusted to the occupation and the pace of life. But things were changing. Many of the original German soldiers had rotated from France to other theaters of operations, and their replacements were a bitter collective of survivors of battle on the Russian front and a collection of foreign soldiers pressed into German service. For those paying attention, the war's character was beginning to change. Bombings, raids, and resistance activity were beginning to intensify. The citizens of Cherbourg were now going to become part of the front line in the struggle between the west and the *Nazi Reich*.<sup>29</sup>

1 Contre-amiral (R) Lepotier, *Cherbourg, Port de la Libération*, (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1972), 37-39.

2 The numerous accounts include: Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day: June 6 1944*; Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*; Michael D. Doubler, *Busting the Bocage: American Combined Arms Operations in France, 6 June-31 July 1944*; David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower: at War 1943-1945*; Ladislas Fargo, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph*; Richard Hargreaves, *The Germans in Normandy*; Gordon A. Harrison, *The European Theater of Operations: Cross-Channel Attack, United States Army in World War II*; and Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*.

3 Ibid., 39-68.

4 Ibid., 68-216.

5 Ibid., 217-373.

6 Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), *Cherbourg D+20 - D+177, 26 June to 30 November 1944*, (SHAEF, G-4 Statistics Section, at the direction of the A.C of S., G-4, 20 January 1944), 4.

7 Winter, Jay, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-2; and Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck, eds., *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 250-251.

8 Julian Jackson, *France, The Dark Years 1940-1944*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31-34.

9 Lepotier, 373-409.

10 Patard, Frédéric, *Une Ville, un pays en guerre, Cherbourg et le haut Cotentin, Novembre 1918 – Mai 1944*, (Cherbourg-Octeville (Manche): Éditions Isoète, 2004), 10-12.

11 Société Nationale Académique de Cherbourg, *Le Cotentin et les îles de la Manche dans la tourment 1939-1945*, (Cherbourg: Imprimerie La Dépêche Communication Conseil, 1987), 112-115.

12 Patard, 21-39.

13 Patard, 14-19.

14 Patard, 21-39.

15 Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle, France 1940*, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1969), 581.

16 Ibid, 584-590.

17 Ibid, 590-596.

18 Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 131.

19 Patard, 49-51.

20 Patard, 58-65.

21 Patard, 132-134, 155-171.

22 Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French, Life Under the Occupation*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 15-25.

23 Vinen, 113-117.

24 According to numerous American military sources, the population of Cherbourg was almost 40,000 and when the Americans liberated the city the population was down to 5,000. French sources convey differing numbers for the population of Cherbourg. According to Thibault Richard in *Les Normands sous l'Occupation, 1940-1944, Vie quotidienne et années noires*, the population of Cherbourg and its major suburbs on May 1, 1943, was 51,580, and the population on February 1, 1944, was down to 31,598. He also has 19,982 persons that were evacuated from the city after May 1, 1943.

25 Patard, 177-187.

26 Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 292-293; and Patard, 88-93, 109.

27 Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1972), 237-238.

28 Paxton, 239-377.

29 Thibault Richard, *Les Normands Sous L'Occupation, 1940-1944, Vie Quotidienne et années noires*, (Condé-sur-Noireau (France): Éditions Charles Corlet, 1998), 187-194.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHERBOURG AND THE ALLIED CAMPAIGN

In the spring of 1940 in a railcar in Compiègne, France, the German conquerors dictated their terms to the defeated French government. They divided the country into two sections. In the north and west, German forces occupied and controlled a zone of occupation. In the south, from the spa town of Vichy, eighty-four year-old Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain controlled a right-wing government that sought accommodation with Hitler's government. Meanwhile, Frenchmen divided along a number of political and societal lines that had their roots in pre-war France. Some willingly accepted the Vichy-Nazi arrangement and joined the new fascist French Army or police forces. Others followed General Charles De Gaulle into exile and waged a long-term campaign against the government in power. Many soldiers remained in German prisoner of war camps, and still others found themselves forced to work in German industry. Finally others, in growing numbers after 1942, actively or passively resisted the Nazis and worked to sabotage their war effort.<sup>1</sup>

By the middle of 1943, the British and American forces were beginning to take some of the pressure off their beleaguered Soviet allies in the east. They defeated Rommel's Africa Corps in North Africa, captured Sicily, and landed troops onto mainland Italy. Meanwhile, the Allied air forces were launching increasingly daring raids against Axis targets in Europe. Throughout 1943 and the first half of 1944, France felt the weight of thousands of tons of bombs and lost between 56,000 and 60,000 civilians to Allied air attacks.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in June, Allied forces, including elements of De Gaulle's Free French Army, stormed ashore at Normandy. From the beginning,

Cherbourg figured prominently in Allied plans. This chapter concentrates on the Allied offensive in Europe and evaluates the importance of Cherbourg, how its citizens weathered the pre-invasion bombardments, and the dynamics and effects of the land battle.<sup>3</sup>

### The Allied Air Campaign

Initially the bombing of German military targets was not integrated between United States and British air forces through 1942. In Casablanca, June 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed to a Combined Bomber Offensive for United States and British strategic air forces based in Europe and North Africa. Its objective was to progressively destroy and disrupt Axis military, industrial and economic systems, and undermine morale to weaken the capacity for armed resistance. Divergent doctrines existed between the American and British air forces. The Americans believed dislocating the economic system and paralyzing the German war machine could be accomplished through daylight precision bombing. The British believed daylight bombing too costly and night area bombing could destroy whole critical industrial and military areas. The selected systems identified were: submarine construction yards and bases, aircraft industry, ball bearings, oil, synthetic rubber and tires, and military transportation infrastructure. The planners believed the projected destruction would eliminate eighty-nine percent of the enemy's submarine industry, forty-three percent of fighter aircraft production, sixty-five percent of bomber production, seventy-six percent of the ball bearing industry, forty-eight percent of refined oil products, fifty percent of synthetic rubber, and all tire production. Between July 1 and November 15, 1943, the Eighth Air Force dropped 22,667 tons of bombs, but only 1,903 tons hit the enemy aircraft industry.

Bad weather and the location of aircraft plants beyond Allied fighter range led to a relatively insignificant effort. By June 1944, Allied bombers had virtual air superiority and could bomb strategic targets at will.<sup>4</sup>

As D-Day approached, the leaders worked to identify the best use of the strategic bombs. After consideration between targeting of the German oil industry and the French railroad system, General Dwight David Eisenhower decided on March 25 to strike the French rail systems with the intent of delaying and disorganizing enemy movement. British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill raised the issue of killing French civilians in the proposed rail attacks. Even after General Eisenhower declared the rail plan essential to the military success of *Operation Overlord*, the British War Cabinet withheld approval until President Roosevelt sided with Churchill. Planners estimated that civilian casualties might be as high as 160,000 with twenty-five percent killed. Generally located close to the centers of population were the rail marshalling yards. On April 18, after the British Chiefs of Staff cited military necessity, the British War Cabinet cleared all rail targets except two in the Paris area. Prime Minister Churchill requested of General Eisenhower to consider targets for bombing that would not kill more than 100 Frenchmen per target. At the end of April, General Eisenhower suspended twenty-seven targets in highly populated districts. Officials created a system of warning the civilian population to keep civilian casualties below the estimates.<sup>5</sup>

For *Operation Overlord*, therefore, the mission of the strategic air forces was first to destroy the German air force, and second to destroy and disrupt enemy rail communication, with priority to enemy movement toward the *Operation Overlord* lodgment area. Targets in eastern France and Belgium were under the Eighth Air Force,



the Bomber Command had western France and the area around Paris, while the Army of Europe Air Forces concentrated on northern France and Belgium. During the first half of 1944, the Eighth Air Force had as its chief primary targets the fighter aircraft airframe and components and ball bearing factories. Added as additional targets were marshalling yards, airfields, and airdromes. As the time for the invasion drew nearer, considerable bomb tonnage was also to be dropped on *Operation Crossbow* and other military installations in the Pas de Calais and Cherbourg Peninsula regions. *Operation Crossbow* was the Allied code name for operations against German missile launching sites pointed at the British mainland. *Operation Pointblank* was the code name for the Combined Bomber Offensive of American and British air forces against the German air force and aircraft industry. One month before D-day, the priorities for the air forces were: (1) *Operation Pointblank* targets, the code name for Allied targeting of German air force and aircraft industry; (2) railroad centers in occupied countries; and (3) airdromes in occupied countries.<sup>6</sup>

According to official accounts of the bombing campaign from 1942 to the end of 1943, Cherbourg and the surrounding peninsula were targeted by Allied bombers five times. The first strike was planned for the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force on September 26, 1942. However, adverse weather cancelled the mission. For the second mission on October 21, 1942, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force had eight heavy bombers strike at the Cherbourg Maupertus airfield. The next strike by the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on October 30, 1943, had five A-20s again bomb the Cherbourg Maupertus airfield. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on November 11, 1943, targeted with 157 B-26s to bomb military installations and targets of opportunity in the Cherbourg area. On December 2, 1943, the Allied Expeditionary Air Force authorized

the attack of V-weapon sites in the Pas de Calais and Cherbourg Peninsula, which RAF photography and British Intelligence identified as missile-launching sites.<sup>7</sup>

From early 1944 to June 5, 1944, for Cherbourg and the surrounding peninsula, the bombing of targets increased (see figure 3). The first mission was for the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on January 7, when thirty-five B-26s bombed the Cherbourg Maupertus airfield. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on February 15 used 194 B-26s to bomb V-weapon sites, the Cherbourg Maupertus airfield, and targets of opportunity during the morning mission; and 122 B-26s again bombed V-weapon construction sites in coastal areas of Northern France during the afternoon. On March 26, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force had nearly 500 B-17s and B-24s bomb V-weapon installations and targets of opportunity in the Pas de Calais and Cherbourg areas. On April 20, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force had 566 heavy bombers attack V-weapon installations and targets of opportunity in the Pas de Calais and Cherbourg areas. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on May 22 had around 330 B-26s and A-20s bomb airfields and other targets in the Cherbourg, Calais, and Paris areas. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 1 bombed with around 100 B-26s airfields and coastal defense batteries from the Belgian border to the Cherbourg peninsula. On June 5, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force had 629 heavy bombers attack six coastal defense installations in the Cherbourg-Caen area and eight in the Pas de Calais area, along with three V-weapon sites and a railroad bridge. During the last mission, six bombers were lost.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 2. American A-20 Havoc bombers attacking railways behind German lines in Normandy, France, June 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, June 1944).

From June 6, the day of the Normandy invasion, through June 26, 1944, the Allied air forces attacked the Cotentin peninsula every other day for ten days of bombing (see figure 4). The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 14 had over 500 B-26s and A-20s attack rail and highway centers between Paris and south of the Normandy beachhead area. Junctions, bridges, marshalling yards, gun emplacements, and various defensive strong points were included. Over fifteen fighter groups attacked numerous ground targets, including highway traffic in the Cherbourg peninsula and south of the beachhead to the Loire. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 15 used over 550 B-26s and A-20s to attack fuel and

ammo dumps, rail and highway communications, and an armored division headquarters south of the bridgehead. Additionally on June 15, the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force ran a mission with over 1400 fighters flying armed reconnaissance in the Valognes-Cherbourg Peninsula, and along communication lines south to the Loire. The fighters also attacked shipping between the Channel Islands and the Cherbourg Peninsula. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 16 had more than 500 fighters strafe and bomb rail lines, bridges, and highway traffic in the Cherbourg Peninsula. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 18 continued with about 130 A-20s and B-26s bombing fuel dumps at Foret d'Andaine and Conches and marshalling yards at Rennes and Meudon during the morning, and *Operation Noball* targets in the afternoon. *Operation Noball* was the code name for targets consisting of German missile launching sites, also called V-weapon sites. Fighters, in addition to escort duty, continued strafing and bombing rail lines, troop concentrations, and highway traffic in the Cherbourg Peninsula. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 20 had about 370 B-26s and A-20s bomb nine V-weapon sites in France and a coastal defense battery at Houlgate. Also, over 1000 fighters operating over frontline areas, the Cherbourg Peninsula, and south to Dreux, bombed and strafed rail lines, marshalling yards, bridges, troop concentrations, and other targets.<sup>9</sup>



attacked marshalling yards, fuel dumps, and a German headquarters. Fighter-bombers flew armed reconnaissance over various railroads and bombed rail facilities, trains, road traffic, and gun emplacements. Twenty-five fighter bombers were lost during the operation on that day. On June 24, 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force had 430-plus B-26s and A-20s attack targets in France, including four gun positions, three V-weapons sites, three fuel dumps, two marshalling yards, and a railroad bridge. Over 200 transports flew supplies to the continent. Eleven fighter groups provided escorts, attacked fuel dumps, rail targets, and bridges west of Paris and south of the Loire, and flew armed reconnaissance south of the Cherbourg Peninsula and southwest of Paris. The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force on June 26, due to adverse weather, cancelled all missions save a few fighter sorties that resulted in claims against a few military vehicles and three airplanes as ground forces captured Cherbourg. During the mission, three fighters were lost.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Eighth Air Force Statistical Summary, between June 5 and 7, 1944, the Eighth Air Force bombed a total of forty-three targets in the Cherbourg Peninsula. The targets included coastal installations, coastal batteries, strong points, defended localities, rocket emplacements, and choke points. The total number of sorties was 1,829 sorties with 5,045 bomb tonnage on target. Within the city of Cherbourg, fourteen sorties targeted the Arsenal strong points with thirty-nine and a half bomb tons on target.<sup>11</sup>

According to Cherbourg city accounts, which differ from the Allied records, throughout forty-nine months of occupation, Allied bombers targeted Cherbourg on more than fifty-eight occasions, and the alert sounded over 997 times. There was a constant anxiety among those who lived in the city during these events. Each siren brought

uncertainty whether the alert signaled surveillance planes or an imminent attack. From June 5, 1940 to April 15, 1944, in Cherbourg proper, these attacks resulted in 122 civilians dead, 107 seriously wounded, and 137 wounded. Additionally, the bombers destroyed 158 buildings and damaged 1,125 more. After the invasion until the liberation of the city on June 27, 1944, Allied aircraft attacked the city sixty-five times and prompted 1,064 bomb alerts. These attacks left another 1,805 buildings uninhabitable. The primary city targets were the arsenal, the military port, German ships at the port, the rail system, the gas factory at Equeurdreville, the large explosives factory at Brécourt, and the Bucaille quarter where most of the German military lived. German antiaircraft defenses kept the planes from flying too low, and thereby increased the chances of collateral damage to the city.<sup>12</sup>

### The Ground Campaign: the German Defense

By the end of June 1944, Germany was assaulted by military operations on four fronts. The Soviet drive in the east, the partisan warfare in the Balkans, the Allied operations in Italy, and the Allied offensive in Western France, all sapped Nazi strength. The *Wehrmacht's* strategy in the west rested on stopping an Allied invasion near the coast to protect the Reich and the heart of Germany. German leadership anticipated that the cross-channel attack would occur on the northern French coast closest to England. Therefore, they heavily fortified the Pas de Calais region, the area north of the Seine estuary, and the most direct invasion route across the channel. To feed this anticipation, Allied air attacks concentrated more often on the Pas-de-Calais area than any other area on the northern French coast. However, about one month before the planned invasion, Adolf Hitler intuitively felt unease about the Normandy region. Admiral Theodor

Krancke, Commander of Navy Group West, also considered an invasion likely to occur between Boulogne and Cherbourg, thereby eliminating the Pas-de-Calais sector between Boulogne and Dunkirk. He researched his theory further and in late April concluded that Cherbourg and Le Havre were prime objectives for the invasion, specifically because these two major French ports alone were spared from heavy Allied air attack.<sup>13</sup>

To continue Hitler's delusion, the Allied deception *Operation Bodyguard* fed information of a notional British army group, the British 4<sup>th</sup>, slated to invade Norway, and the notional First United States Army Group, slated to invade France near Calais. A stream of erroneous information fed to Nazi intelligence effectively enhanced this scenario. The deception plan worked, as the high command stationed a special force of submarines off the coast of Norway and focused the 15<sup>th</sup> Army at Calais. Therefore, the Nazis decided that their best plan was to defend the northern ports and deny the Allies the ability to supply their invasion forces. They massed their artillery and fortifications on the coast of France and Belgium concentrated at the ports. The Germans wanted to deny the Allies a major port, and without a port to bring in supplies and reinforcements, the beachhead could be destroyed.<sup>14</sup>

In June 1944, the German forces in France were under the command of *Oberbefehlshaber West* (Command-in-Chief West), *Generalfeldmarschall* (Field Marshal) Gerd von Rundstedt. Under his command were two subordinate headquarters, *Heeresgruppe B* (Army Group B) and *Armeegruppe G* (Army Group G). Field Marshal Erwin Rommel commanded Army Group B, comprised of the Fifteenth Army, deployed between the Dutch border and the Seine estuary with its main strength in the Pas de Calais, and the Seventh Army in lower Normandy and Brittany. Army Group G



controlled the First Army on the Atlantic coast south of Brittany, and the Nineteenth Army in the south of France. The German LXXXIV Corps defended the Cotentin and was commanded by an experienced Russian front veteran, *General der Artillerie* (General of Artillery) Erich Marcks. However, eight days before the start of the Battle of Cherbourg, Allied aircraft killed Marcks on June 12. His replacement was *General der Artillerie* Wilhelm Fahrmbacher, moved over from the XXV Corps. Three divisions of the LXXXIV Corps occupied the northern Cotentin, the 243<sup>rd</sup> and 709<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, *Bodenständige* (static), and the 91<sup>st</sup> Airlanding Division. The 709<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, commanded by *GenLt* Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben, had the mission to hold and defend Cherbourg and the fortifications in the eastern Cotentin. The strength of the division was 12,320 men on June 1, 1944.<sup>15</sup>

On May 6, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, German Army Group B Commander, who had captured Cherbourg several years before, notified the German Seventh Army of Adolf Hitler's concerns, and one parachute regiment and two separate battalions were sent to the immediate vicinity of Cherbourg. The 6<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment defended the general area of Lessay-Périers. The 206<sup>th</sup> Panzer Battalion, a separate tank battalion equipped with Russian, French, and German light tanks, dug in between Cap de la Hague and Cap de Carteret. The 7<sup>th</sup> Army Sturm Battalion went to La Haye du Puits, and later shifted to Le Vast, southeast of Cherbourg. Throughout the same timeframe, Adolf Hitler reinforced his defenses in Normandy, consisting of two divisions in the peninsula, with a third mobile division. Enroute from Germany to Nantes, the 91<sup>st</sup> Division was diverted to the Cotentin and took control of the 6<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment on 14 May. On 9 May, Field Marshal Rommel committed the 101<sup>st</sup> Stellungswerfer Regiment to the Cotentin, splitting

it between the east and west coasts. The 17<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion moved to Cap de la Hague, and the 795<sup>th</sup> Georgian Battalion moved south to Brucheville, northeast of Carentan. The 100<sup>th</sup> Panzer Replacement Battalion south of Carentan was prepared for action against airborne troops. The Cotentin was therefore reinforced to defend against Allied airborne assaults. However, German leadership did not anticipate it as part of the main Allied effort. The Germans used the many existing French fortifications to defend Cherbourg, massed on the seaside approach to the city. The city had comparatively little defense for a landward Allied attack, because the Germans believed that the Allies could not approach Cherbourg through the Cotentin Peninsula. However, history should have prepared Rommel for a landward avenue of approach, as he himself had approached the city from the southeast four years earlier.<sup>16</sup>

Rommel planned the defense of Cherbourg with two divisions, the 709<sup>th</sup> and the 243<sup>rd</sup>, with the 77<sup>th</sup> Division to move to defend the American westward advance. Should the peninsula be cut or a break-through threatened in the Valognes sector, the 709<sup>th</sup>, 243<sup>rd</sup>, and 91<sup>st</sup> would fall back on Cherbourg. LXXXIV Corps divided the Cotentin forces into two groups, Group von Schlieben, charged with the defense of Cherbourg and the Montebourg line, and Group Hellmich, the 77<sup>th</sup> Division and all troops south and west of the Merderet responsible to build a defensive line along the Prairies Marécageuses north of la Haye du Puits. Group Hellmich was completely cut off from supplies and Hitler forbade Group von Schlieben from withdrawing from Cherbourg.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the occupation in Cherbourg, its citizens had to work with their occupiers as laborers on several German defensive projects. The two main projects were the construction of the Atlantic Wall at the port and the construction of a multitude of

anti-tank obstacles throughout the port zone. The naval arsenal was the main target for the majority of the Allied bombs. In turn, the Allied bomb damage generated additional work for the French citizens working alongside the Germans to repair the damages to the arsenal.<sup>18</sup>

### The Ground Campaign: the Allied Offensive

The design of *Operation Overlord* was to liberate German-occupied Western Europe and to defeat the armies of Nazi Germany, thereby destroying Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. The Allied plans for the cross-channel attack called for the capture of the port of Cherbourg immediately after the initial landings to complete phase I. Phase I was the assault and capture of the initial lodgment area, including the development of airfields in the Caen area and the capture of Cherbourg. The early capture of the deep-water port of Cherbourg was essential to support the massive logistical requirements of the Allied armies and allow the front to move eastward into Germany. Phase II of the operation was the enlargement of the area captured in Phase I, to include the Brittany peninsula, all ports south of the Loire and the area between the Loire and the Seine (see figure 5). A terrain study of the Cotentin area and the anticipated reaction of the Germans shaped the plans for the VII Corps capture of Cherbourg.<sup>19</sup>

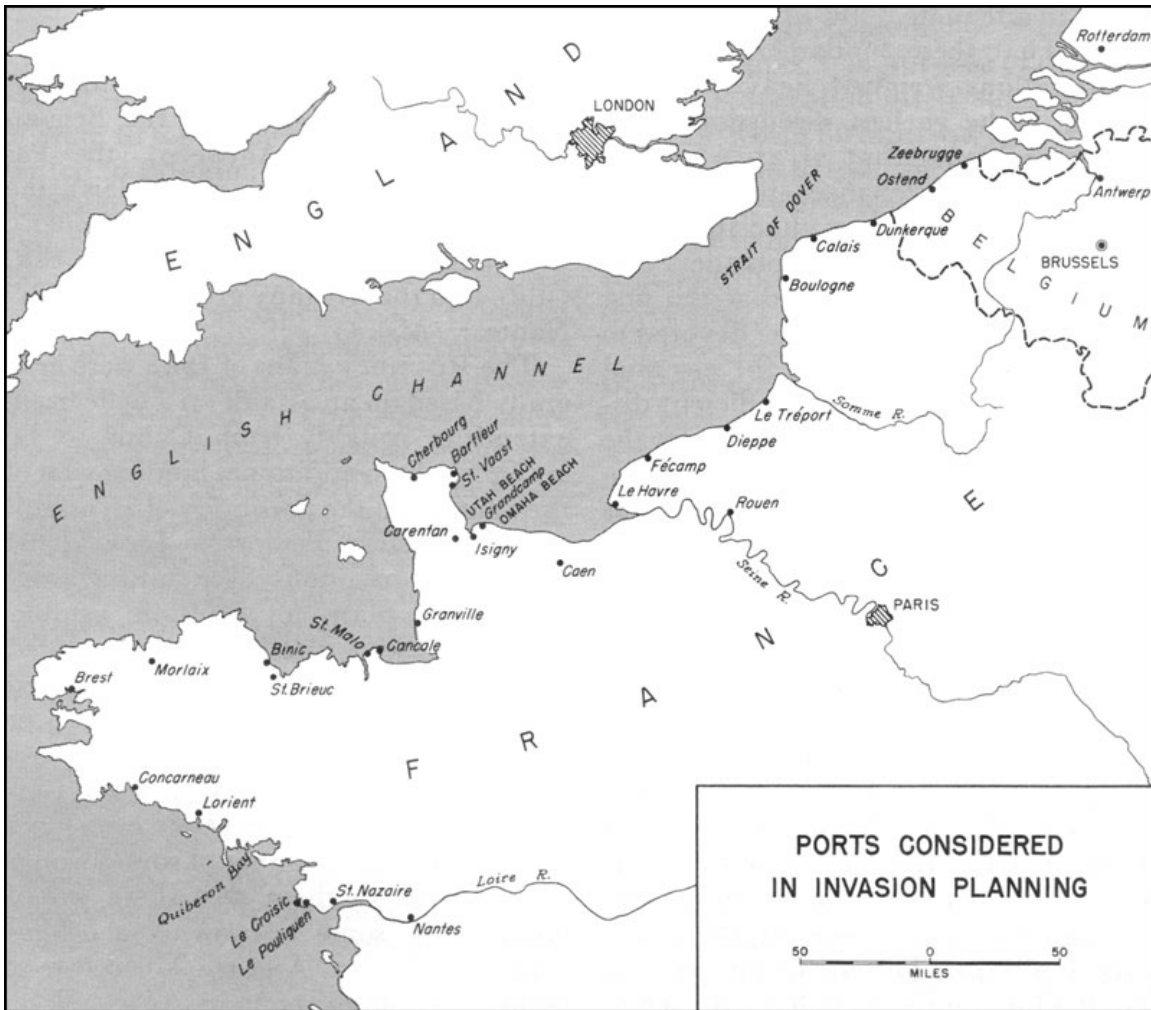


Figure 4. Ports Considered in Invasion Planning.

Source: Ruppenthal, Roland G., *Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume 1: May 1941-September 1944, United States Army in World War II*, (Photo, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1953, Reprint, U.S. Army Center of Military history, 1989), 180).

Allied plans for the cross-channel attack required securing a lodgment area significant enough to assemble enough men and material on the continent to allow offensive operations against Germany. The selected lodgment area consisted of northwest France bounded on the north and the east by the Seine and the Eure Rivers and on the south by the Loire River, an area encompassing almost all of Normandy, Brittany,

and parts of the ancient provinces of Anjou, Maine, and Orléans. The lodgment area would allow adequate maneuver room for ground troops, provide terrain suitable for airfields, and be within range of air and naval support based in England. The ocean coastline of more than 500 miles contained port facilities to receive and nourish the Allied forces. The anticipated primary ports were Cherbourg, Rouen and Le Havre on the Seine, St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, and Vannes in Brittany, and St. Nazaire and Nantes at the mouth of the Loire. The Allies were counting on a friendly civilian population in France to assist with security of the Allied rear areas. Long before the invasion, the Allies reconstituted French military forces in England and fostered the growth of underground resistance to increase French support. By the summer of 1944, one French division in England prepared to participate in *Operation Overlord*, and an estimated 100,000 men inside France had arms and ammunition to support sabotage and diversionary activities.<sup>20</sup>

After securing the lodgment area on D plus 1, VII Corps' next objective was Cherbourg. The VII Corps Commander, Major General Joseph Lawton Collins, attacked with four of his divisions' regiments abreast, the 505<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry and the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry west of the Montebourg highway, and the 12<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiments in the zone east to the coast. After ten days of hard fighting, VII Corps finally broke the ring the Germans pressed around the D-Day beachhead.<sup>21</sup>

On June 16, Hitler flew from Berchtesgaden to Metz and drove to Soissons where he met Rundstedt and Rommel on the morning of the seventeenth. The meeting place was a concrete bunker that was designed and built in 1940 at the height of Hitler's success to serve as his headquarters for the invasion of England. Field Marshals

Rundstedt and Rommel wanted to convince Hitler that a revision of the German defense plans was necessary, to allow for freedom of action and permission to draw reserves from coastal areas not involved in the fight. They predicted the fall of Cherbourg, to which Hitler's response was to hold Cherbourg at any cost.<sup>22</sup>

On June 18, VII Corps succeeded in cutting off the Cotentin, thereby splitting the German Seventh Army. General Collins now directed the 4<sup>th</sup> Division to attack Valognes, and the 79<sup>th</sup> Division to move through the 90<sup>th</sup> Division sector and continue north (see figure 6). The movement was fast and the divisions encountered only straggler units of a disorganized enemy. Collins increased the weight of his attack to take advantage of German disintegration. The new plan had all three divisions attacking abreast. Collins' advance benefitted from the 9<sup>th</sup> Division's gift of a set of German orders that gave him a picture of German defenses in the peninsula and the plan for General Schlieben to withdraw on the Fortress Cherbourg. The VII Corps intelligence estimated enemy delaying actions and a defense of Cherbourg on the line of hills ringing it to a depth of five miles. The total enemy forces for the defense of Cherbourg were estimated at between 25,000 and 40,000 troops.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 5. View of the town of Valognes, devastated by Allied bombing during the Cherbourg battle, 24 June 1944; note jeep 'Always Ruth' in foreground  
*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 24 June 1944).

The early capture of Cherbourg was even more critical after the four-day English Channel storm struck on June 19 and destroyed the artificial port at Omaha Beach. One of the most important factors for abandoning the artificial port project was the belief that Cherbourg would soon be opened and replace Omaha as the supply entry in the American zone. Before the storm ended on June 21, General Collins issued orders to resume the attack on Cherbourg. The VII Corps Commander emphasized the urgency of the situation and the fact that Cherbourg was the American Army's major effort. General

Collins made a request to General Bradley for a saturation bombing of the German defensive perimeter, with the primary objective of weakening the already failing morale of the defenders and inducing surrender (see figure 7). The entire IX Bomber Command and large numbers of American and British fighter-bombers dropped 1,100 tons over a wide area in a pattern designed to constitute a rolling barrage in advance of the ground attack<sup>24</sup>



Figure 6. Aerial reconnaissance photograph of Cherbourg city and harbor, taken on 21 June 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives, (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 21 June 1944).



Only the 4<sup>th</sup> Division encountered organized resistance, and VII Corps realized that General Schlieben was carrying out his orders to fight his way back to Fortress Cherbourg. VII Corps faced German defenses consisting of a belt of concrete and field fortifications disposed in a semicircle four to six miles from Cherbourg. The German positions covered every approach route to Cherbourg, placed in commanding ground along the collar of steep hills. Although the combat efficiency of the German troops was extremely low, they had plenty of ammunition as a result of airdrops and U-boat (*unterseeboot*, undersea boat, German military submarine) and E-boat (enemy torpedo boat) deliveries. German artillery and small arms fire all along the VII Corps line yielded the possibility of a hard enemy fight everywhere. On the evening of June 21, VII Corps readied for the final assault on Cherbourg. General Collins broadcast a multilingual demand for immediate surrender and pointed to the hopelessness of the German position. General Schlieben disregarded the 0900 hour surrender deadline on the morning of June 22.<sup>25</sup>

The final assault on Cherbourg called for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> Divisions to attack while the 4<sup>th</sup> Division sealed off the city from the east (see figure 8). The 9<sup>th</sup> Division on the left seized Octeville while the 79<sup>th</sup> Division captured the high ground terminating at Fort du Roule, overlooking Cherbourg from the south. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division on the right captured Tourlaville and sent patrols to the sea. H-hour was 1400 hours and the bombing began at H-hour minus eighty minutes on June 22. The first twenty minutes consisted of four squadrons of RAF Typhoons targeting antiaircraft positions, then strafing the area. During the last hour prior to H-hour, twelve groups of American IX Air Force fighter-bombers hit strongpoints ahead of the troops. The 375 planes relentlessly bombed six

principal targets: Flottemanville-Hague, Martinvast, les Chevres, la Mare à Canards, Fort du Roule, and a defended locality just west of Octeville. Simultaneously, artillery shelled enemy anti-aircraft batteries and enemy defenses. According to enemy testimony, the air attacks successfully weakened the German will to resist.<sup>26</sup>

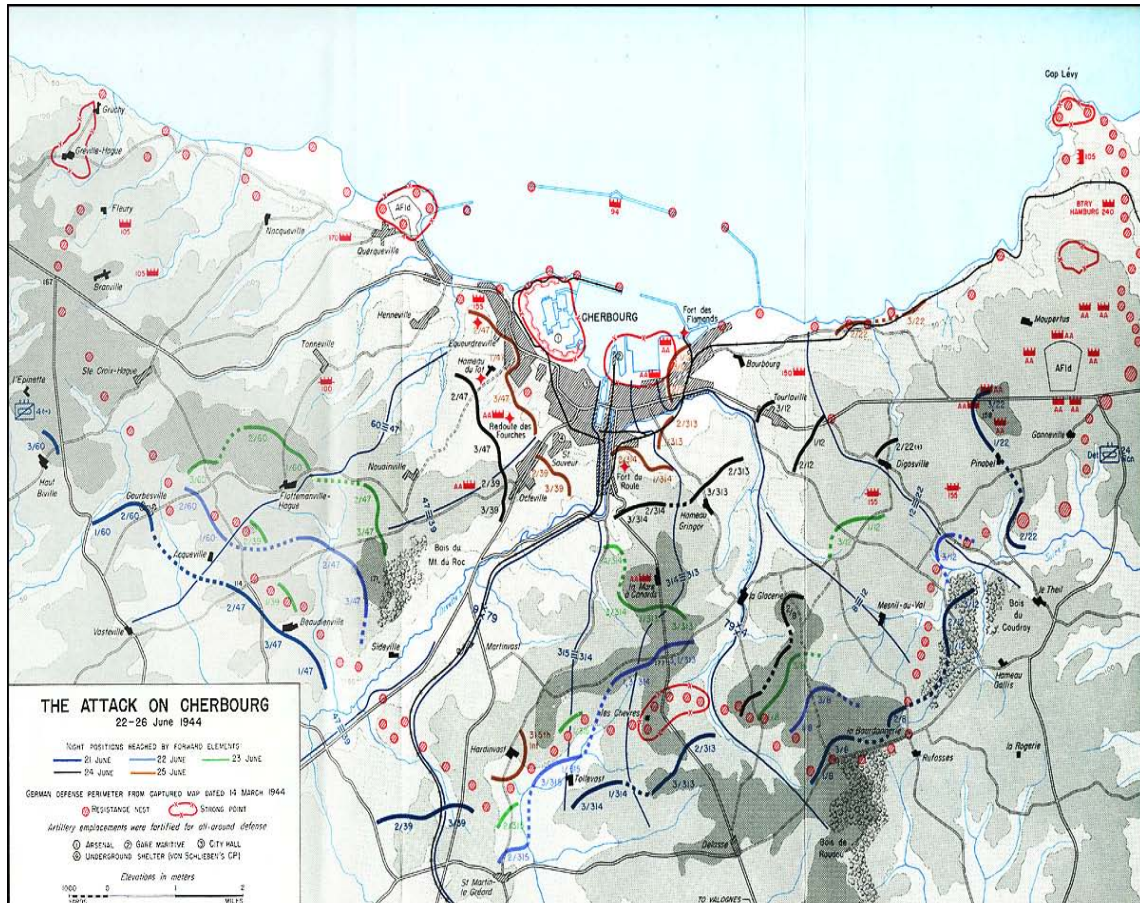


Figure 7. The Attack on Cherbourg, 22-26 June 1944

Source: Harrison, Gordon A., *The European Theater of Operations. Cross-Channel Attack. United States Army in World War II*, (Map, Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History United States Army, 1951).

Throughout the afternoon, the three divisions advanced slowly. June 22nd ended with VII Corps gaining against desperate and loosely organized enemy resistance. The

situation pointed toward signs that continued pressure might soon crumble the Cherbourg defenses. On June 22, Hitler ordered General Schlieben to fulfill his duty of defending the city and in the worst-case scenario, destroying the harbor to leave nothing to the enemy. General Schlieben requested reinforcements. He also considered and cancelled the airdrop of the German 15<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment in Brittany. Hitler requested of the Cherbourg troops, “to defend the last bunker and leave to the enemy not a harbor, but a field of ruins. . . The German people and the whole world are watching you fight.”<sup>27</sup>

All three American divisions endured heavy fighting and penetrated significant positions in the German line on June 23. The penetrations into the outer ring of the Cherbourg fortress moved the battle for the port into the final phase. General Schlieben reported on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> that he had no reserves and ordered his men to fight to the last ammunition cartridge. On June 24, VII Corps closed in on the city (see figure 9). The 9<sup>th</sup> Division overran three Luftwaffe installations to hold established positions in front of Octeville. The 79<sup>th</sup> Division cleared la Mare a Canards and pushed on within sight of Fort du Roule. The Cherbourg defense was collapsing, but VII Corps met with some bitter last stands. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division encountered heavy resistance, losing two battalion commanders killed, while capturing 800 German soldiers and occupying Tourlaville.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 8. A US Army major looked over Cherbourg from one of the concrete pillboxes above the city, 26 June 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 26 June 1944).

On June 25, the U.S. Navy bombarded the Cherbourg batteries in preparation for the final ground assault. Responding to a late request by General Collins, Rear Admiral Morton L. Deyo brought in the battleships *Arkansas*, *Texas*, and *Nevada*. Along with their four cruisers and screening destroyers, the vessels dueled with the guns of the three German shore batteries. In a contest against Battery Hamburg, the *Arkansas* and *Texas* destroyed one of the four 280mm guns protected by steel and concrete casemates. The *Texas* fired 206 14-inch shells, the *Arkansas* fired fifty-eight 12-inch shells, and five

destroyers fired 552 5-inch shells on the Battery Hamburg. The ships escaped undamaged, but had to maneuver violently at times to avoid German salvos.<sup>29</sup>

General Collins altered the division boundary to allow the 4<sup>th</sup> Division to share in the capture of the city. Another 350 Germans surrendered when the 4<sup>th</sup> Division took the Fort des Flamands, and the division entered the city during the evening and cleared the city streets. The Equeurdreville fort was a formidable defensive position on top of a hill surrounded by a dry moat like a medieval fortress. The 9<sup>th</sup> Division fought in the suburbs during June 25<sup>th</sup>, took the fortress at Equeurdreville, and received over 1,000 prisoners. The 79<sup>th</sup> Division eventually took Forte du Roule, the most formidable of the Cherbourg bastions that was built into the face of a rocky promontory above the city. The fort housed coastal guns that commanded the entire harbor area and on the upper level mortars and machine guns in concrete pillboxes defended the port from landward attack. The key to capturing the fort was the courage and initiative of small groups, lowering demolitions from the top levels, by antitank fire from guns in the city, and by assault of a demolition team (see figure 10).<sup>30</sup>

Now the VII Corps cleared the city. They faced a stubborn German defense in the northwest section of the city at the thick-walled arsenal whose parapets had antitank, antiaircraft, and machine guns. Artillery support was difficult due to bad weather, smoke, and dust from enemy port demolitions. Postponed to the morning of June 27, a three-battalion assault took place after a psychological warfare unit broadcast an ultimatum. Shortly thereafter, white flags appeared and the Cherbourg fortress deputy commander surrendered with his 400 men.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 9. Fort de Roule located at Cherbourg's inner harbor showing damage from Allied bombardment, 8 July 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 8 July 1944).

One day earlier a more dramatic surrender occurred after a German prisoner told of General Schlieben's position in an underground shelter at St. Sauveur on the southern outskirts of the city. The 9<sup>th</sup> Division's 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion sent a prisoner into the St. Sauveur tunnel entrance to demand surrender, but the Germans refused. Tank destroyers fired into two of the three tunnel entrances, and after a few rounds, 800 Germans came out, including General Schlieben and Admiral Hennecke, Naval Commander Normandy.

While they surrendered personally, they declined to make a general surrender of the Cherbourg fortress.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the 9<sup>th</sup> Division's 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry pushed its attack northward into the city, where 400 troops in the city hall surrendered. On June 27, resistance in the city ended at the naval arsenal in the port area. The arsenal had a high surrounding wall, partially protected by a moat, with mounted antitank and anti-aircraft guns on its parapets. After tanks took out two of its guns, and with the surrender of General Schlieben the day prior, the surrender of his deputy on that morning, organized resistance in Cherbourg ceased (see figure 11).<sup>33</sup>





Figure 10. US Army troops marched German prisoners of war through Cherbourg, 28 Jun 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 28 Jun 1944).

Cherbourg fell, but this was not the end of fighting. The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division took over the security of Cherbourg. On the east, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion fought against heavy resistance to finally take the Maupertus airfield on June 27. Some 6,000 Germans continued to fight in the Cap de la Hague area. The 9<sup>th</sup> Division undertook the sweep of Cap de la Hague, and on the morning of June 29<sup>th</sup>, attacked and took 250 prisoners in a period of only two hours. The division continued to



attack the German defense line running from Gruchy across the cape to Vauville. The enemy's last defense of the Cherbourg peninsula netted 6,000 prisoners, twice the number planners estimated. The last harbor forts in the Cherbourg area surrendered on June 29.<sup>34</sup>

The first campaign of the VII Corps ended decisively with a secured beachhead, a vital port seized, and an entire garrison of a key enemy coastal bastion captured or destroyed. In the operation, VII Corps took a total of more than 39,000 prisoners, against the cost of 2,800 Americans killed, 13,500 wounded, and 5,700 captured or missing.<sup>35</sup>

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16 Harrison, 259-260.

17 Department of Army, *Utah Beach to Cherbourg (6 June-27 June 1944), American Forces in Action*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1947. Reprint, U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1984), 5-7.

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21 Department of Army, *Utah Beach to Cherbourg (6 June-27 June 1944), American Forces in Action*, 150-159.

22 Harrison, 412-413.

23 Department of Army, *Utah Beach to Cherbourg (6 June-27 June 1944)*, *American Forces in Action*, 150-159.

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25 Department of Army, *Utah Beach to Cherbourg (6 June-27 June 1944)*, *American Forces in Action*, 159-169.

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27 Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 105.

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31 Ibid.

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34 Ibid., 224-225..

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## CHAPTER 3

### CHERBOURG PORT OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS

General Collins signified the VII Corps liberation of Cherbourg with a ceremony for the French citizens on June 27, 1944. At the town center, *Place Napoléon*, the equestrian statue of Napoléon stood with his hand stretched imperiously toward the sea, still surrounded by German barbed wire, where beyond stood the damaged buildings of the harbor and the *Gare Maritime*. An honor guard of soldiers ceremoniously stood from each of the Divisions, the 82<sup>nd</sup>, 101st, 4<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 79<sup>th</sup>, and their commanders, Major General Matthew B. Ridgway, Major General Maxwell Taylor, Major General Raymond O. Barton, Major General Manton S. Eddy, and Major General Ira T. Wyche. Arriving in an armored car and dismounting without ceremony, General Collins greeted the city Mayor, Paul Reynard, on the steps of the war damaged *Hotel de Ville* and presented him a French tricolor made from American parachutes. Several hundred American soldiers and officers, and the few local townspeople, stood on the streets and the balconies around the square. The ceremonious group of generals, staff officers, and French officials stood under the British, French, and American flags. General Collins made a speech in French, telling all how proud the Americans were in returning to the French Republic the first city liberated by the Allies. The mayor followed eloquently with a speech expressing the gratitude of his townspeople for freeing them from Nazi control and pledging eternal friendship of France for America. He invited General Collins and all the dignitaries into the town hall for a celebratory glass of champagne. Outside, the band played and the French danced in the streets (see figure 12).<sup>1</sup>



Figure 11. A US Army colonel and a French civilian in Cherbourg during the playing of the American National Anthem, 28 June 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 28 June 1944).

Prior to the final planning for the invasion, the Allied staff studied fifty-four ports throughout Europe to select the one that could reasonably be opened immediately after capture. Included in the port selection were the various tonnage capacities upon opening and thirty and ninety days after opening. The figures calculated the capacity of the harbor, the size of the docks, and the clearance facilities available at each of the ports. Also included were the estimated destruction to the facilities and the ease of

reconstruction and development. The closer the port was to England, the shorter the supply lines, less danger from submarines, and a smaller channel to sweep for mines. The northern beaches of the Brest peninsula were considerably more than 100 miles from England, and the Pas de Calais region was considered to have the maximum enemy strength and defenses. The logical deep-water port with the best facilities was Cherbourg. Based on the Allied experience of damage and repair assessment at the port of Naples, the estimated time to open the port after capture was three days. Therefore, the landing on the Normandy beaches was developed into a turning movement to the west in order to first isolate and then capture Cherbourg. Then, the campaign plan included the sequential capture of the ports of Brest and Le Havre, to secure three major ports for Allied forces for the battle of Europe (see figure 13). This chapter will describe the extensive damage to the port of Cherbourg at the hands of the Germans, the assessment and plan for structural repair of the port, and the logistical capabilities of the port and the supply system from Cherbourg to the frontlines.<sup>2</sup>

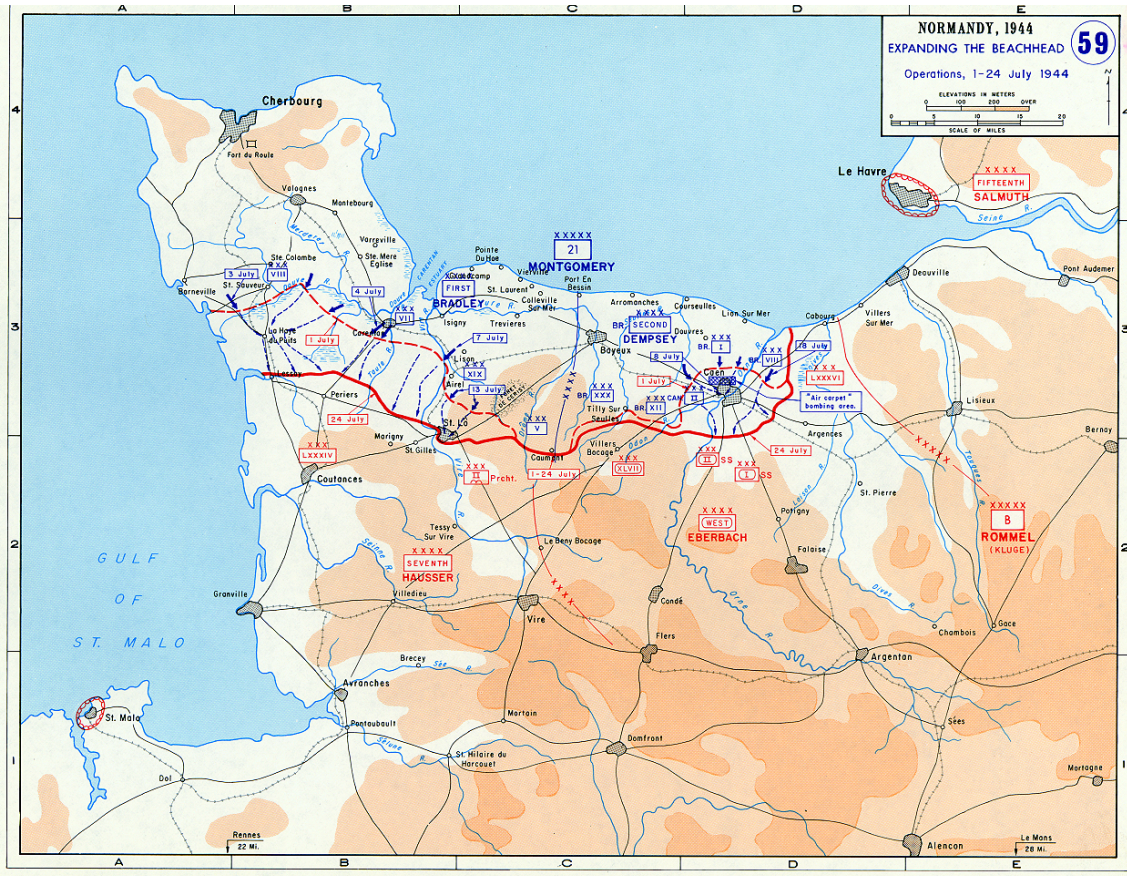


Figure 12. Map depicting the Allied attempt to expand the beachhead at Normandy, France, 1-24 July 1944

Source: United States Military Academy (Photo, New York: United States Military Academy, July 1944).

### Port Damage and Assessment

Allied planners appraised the expected condition at the port of Cherbourg based on experiences extending four years earlier. The Allied engineer planners predicted that the Germans would repair any damage to the port while under their occupation. Aerial photographs prior to the invasion in 1944 indicated the principal damage to Cherbourg from Allied bombing was the leveling of several structures flanking basins in the arsenal area. The engineers, however, predicted wholesale destruction at the hands of the

Germans with mine fields in all waterways, blocking of water entryways with sunken vessels, and destruction through mining and demolition of quays, docks, port equipment, bridges, and access roads. Nevertheless, in spite of being prepared, the first American port reconnaissance parties to reach Cherbourg encountered destruction beyond all expectations. The Germans had told the world exactly what they had done at Cherbourg on a radio broadcast June 28. Two days earlier, Hitler awarded the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross to *Konteradmiral*, (Rear Admiral), Walther Hennecke as an expression of praise for planning and carrying out the strategic destruction of the port.<sup>3</sup>

On 26 June, Colonel Cleland C. Sibley arrived in Cherbourg with the advance detachment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Port Command. He immediately began a reconnaissance of the port facilities and established his headquarters in the *Hotel Atlantique*. The main body of the port command arrived early in July. Because in peacetime the port was mainly a passenger terminal and only discharged small amounts of cargo, the damage assessment required planning and innovation to handle large amounts of supplies and rolling stock. Adding to the difficulties, the naval base area was cramped, the rail facilities were inadequate, and the streets and access roads in the city were narrow. The harbor itself was entirely artificial with two anchorages, an exposed outer roadstead, the *Grand Rade*, and an inner roadstead, the *Petite Rade*, an all-weather ship working area. Two jetties protected the *Petite Rade*, which had 12,000 linear feet of quayage and ample berthing space. The *Petite Rade* comprised three main sections: the arsenal on the west; in the center the *Nouvelle Plage*, the *Darse Transatlantique*, and the old commercial port; on the east the sandy filled-in land known as *Terre Plein* and Reclamation areas.<sup>4</sup>



Assessment of the damage to the port facilities at Cherbourg was a joint effort. The Cherbourg Port Commander, Colonel Sibley, and Navy Commodore William A. Sullivan, initially evaluated the damage, to which Colonel Emerson C. Itschner, Engineer Headquarters, remarked:

The demolition of the port of Cherbourg is a masterful job, beyond a doubt, the most complete, intensive and best planned demolition in history. However, the destruction of existing facilities encountered is, in a degree, approximately the same as estimated in the original studies, except the damage to railway is relatively light and will quickly be repaired. In the dock areas the bulk of the damage was effected by enemy demolition; however, some damage from our own action exists.<sup>5</sup>

The port was in shambles (see figures 14 and 15). The harbor had wreckage strewn throughout and sunken craft blocked all approaches. In the *Petite Rade*, the entrance to the *Darse Transatlantique* was completely blocked by a 350-foot coaster resting on a submerged 12,346-ton whaling ship. Submerged and capsized ships, tugs, barges, and floating cranes blocked the entrances to the commercial port and the arsenal area. Additional sunken vessels rested alongside berths in the *Grande Rade*. Deadly mines were everywhere, all cranes wrecked, and all utilities inoperative.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 13. Dock facilities destroyed by the Germans before the city was captured by the Allies, Cherbourg, 17 July 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 17 July 1944).



Figure 14. View of the railway ferry terminal in Cherbourg harbor, 29 July 1944  
*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C., United States National Archives, 29 July 1944).

All was not negative, as the Cherbourg city assessment revealed several positive discoveries. The damage to the rail system was relatively light, with the destruction of one main rail tunnel the most serious. The city was practically undamaged and the road network within the city could quickly be cleared. Initial planners estimated that half of the houses in the city would be damaged, and their rubble would cause delays in the clearance of the road network. When the Americans arrived, they estimated that only 5,000 of the 40,000-city population braved the battle and remained in the city. A steady

flow of returning city residents entered the city with each day (see figure 16). Civil affairs officers were pleasantly surprised that two of their initial estimates for the first French city liberated could be revised, the people were not starving and nor were there refugees clogging the approaches to the city.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 15. View of the market at the Place du Chateau, Cherbourg, 7 July 1944  
*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C., United States National Archives, 7 July 1944).

### Allied Port Renovation

Port repair crews had to work simultaneously until the day when rehabilitation ended and port operations began functioning 100 percent. Created by the naval, engineer, and transportation officers at the port on June 28, a four-point priority program initiated the operation and rehabilitation plans. First, the *Nouvelle Plage* beach area between the Arsenal and the entrance to the commercial port would be repaired with landing hards or concrete aprons to support DUKW<sup>8</sup> operations. Second, the *Bassin-a-Flot*, wet dock of the commercial port, would be repaired for barge operations. Third, the Reclamation Project, filled-in land at the southwest corner of the *Petite Rade*, would be repaired for the discharge of railway rolling stock from Landing Ship Tanks<sup>9</sup>, LSTs, by rolling ramps. And fourth, the *Digue du Homet* northwest breakwater of the *Petite Rade* would be rehabilitated for the berthing and discharge of Liberty ships and seatrains. Most of the engineer and transportation equipment required for repair operations was already stowed on the ships that could not get into the harbor. The Navy had to clear the harbor entrance to precede the admission of any craft into the port.<sup>10</sup>

On July 24, Colonel Sibley developed a plan for the port to handle a daily 20,000-ton capacity. His plan included additional equipment required for the complete reconstruction and utilization of discharge facilities. He cited four factors that would postpone reaching full target capacity by September 14. The first was the unexpected difficulty encountered by the Navy in mine clearance and removing underwater obstacles. The second and third were delays in port construction and in the program to ferry railroad rolling stock. And the fourth was inadequate rail unloading facilities to the south of the

port. Overall, Colonel Sibley concluded that the plan to move 20,000 tons of cargo a day through the port was feasible.<sup>11</sup>

The intense work required between capture and utilization of the port of Cherbourg rested on close cooperation between the Army and the Navy. The Army Corps of Engineers had the task of dredging channels and rebuilding dockside facilities. The Navy's salvage operations had to clear all mines and sunken ships from the waterways and port areas. The engineers employed a port reconstruction and repair group with the mission of swift rehabilitation of damaged wharves, cargo-handling machinery, ship repair facilities, and warehouses. The engineer group comprised a combination of several other units from the theater, such as the engineer general service regiment, quartermaster truck company, quartermaster service battalion, and engineer port repair ship crews. The headquarters company had a corps of structural and mechanical engineers to design and plan the specialized work, as well as skilled machinery operators and divers for underwater demolition, rigging, burning, and welding. The engineers had two floating critical pieces, the port repair ship and the dredge. The port repair ship moved around the harbor for underwater cutting, welding, and rigging required for the removal of sunken debris from berths and anchorages. The port repair ship also assisted with the Navy salvage operations. The port repair ship had a floating repair and machine shop, generators, welding machines, compressors, pneumatic tools, and cranes that could supplement shore dockside projects. The dredge vessels had a capability of cutting through silt and small rubble to a depth of forty-five feet, to ensure harbor channels were not too shallow for heavily loaded troop and supply ships.<sup>12</sup>

On July 16, the 4<sup>th</sup> Port Command received the first four ships that dropped anchor in the *Grande Rade*. With the lack of completed deepwater berths, the discharge began immediately by the one DUKW unit, the 821<sup>st</sup> Amphibian Truck Company. The DUKWs carried cargo from the anchorages to the *Nouvelle Plage* transfer point. Barges arrived shortly after the first Liberty ships, and carried cargo from the ships to the Commercial Port and later to the Reclamation Project and the *Terre Plein* dock. From the DUKWs and barges, crawler cranes moved cargo onto trucks. LCTs and rhino ferries, brought from the beach areas, unloaded deck cargo. Rhino ferries were barges made by assembling pontoons into a craft 175 feet long and seventy-five feet wide, powered by two pontoon barges. Tugs, floating cranes, and other marine equipment also assisted with the ship to shore operations. Most of the initial cargo arriving at the port consisted of port reconstruction material, material for building railway lines into the interior, and material for the erection of fuel pipelines. In mid-July, the seatrains *Lakehurst* and *Texas* brought locomotives and railway rolling stock to operate a railway grand division (see figure 17). Until rail facilities were operational, all port clearance occurred entirely by motor transport.<sup>13</sup>

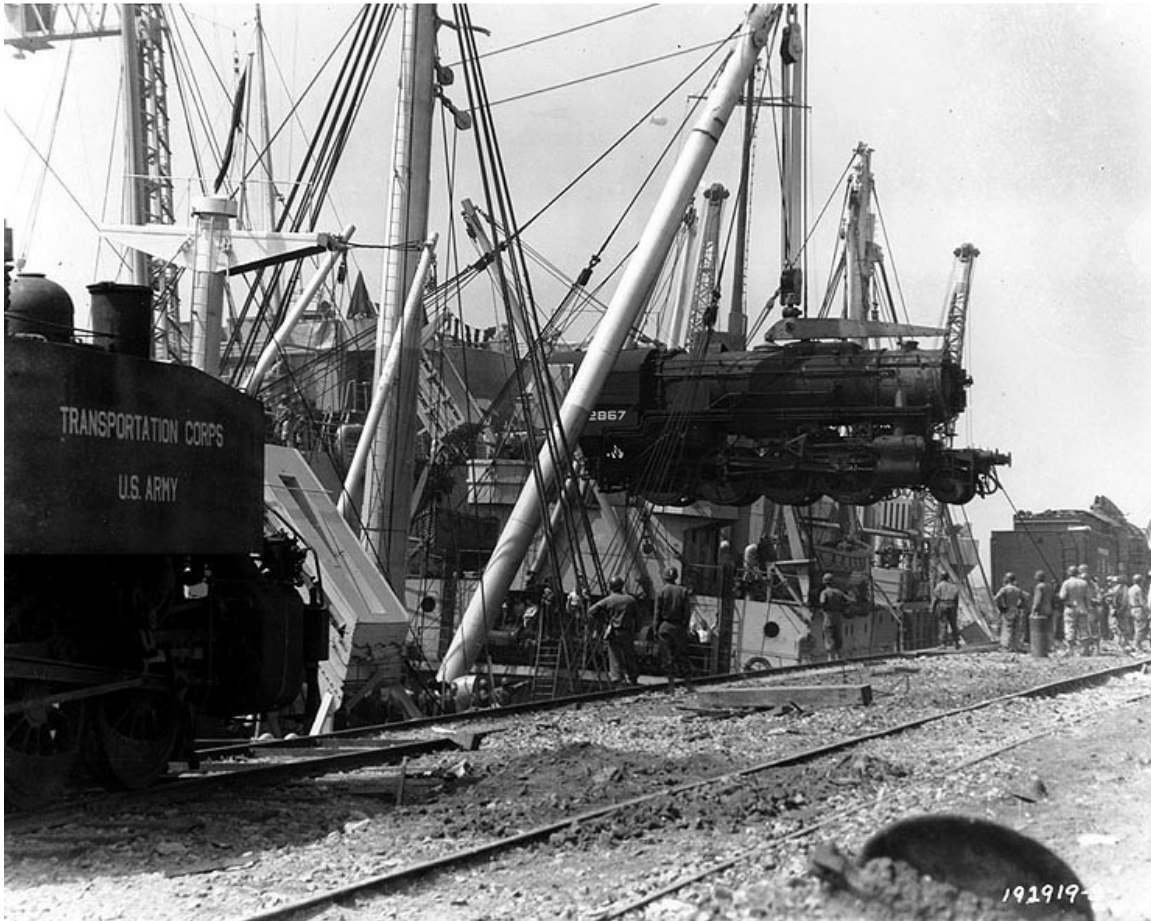


Figure 16. An American locomotive was transferred from SS Seatrain Texas, Cherbourg, 13 July 1944, to replace one of the many destroyed during the Allied invasion of Normandy

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 13 July 1944).

Adding to the difficulties with unloading, the cargo handling gear did not arrive as scheduled. Forklift trucks arrived promptly, but the French dock workers had to learn how to operate them and the language barrier hampered the training. As a result, during the first fifteen days, the port discharged only 31,600 long tons of cargo. Ships arrived from the United Kingdom according to the original schedule, creating a backlog of cargo to be unloaded. To improve port logistics, late in July another unit, the 12<sup>th</sup> Port



Command, arrived at the port of Cherbourg to assist with operations. On July 25, the first troop transport entered the Cherbourg harbor (see figure 18).<sup>14</sup>



Figure 17. American troops leaving the first troop transport to enter Cherbourg harbor, 25 July 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 25 July 1944).

Until the end of July, principal motor transport activities involved beach and port clearance with short haul distances to forward areas and Army depots. The Motor Transport Division, the primary Army transportation unit in the Communications Zone, was located at Valognes, France. By July 30, there were more than ninety Quartermaster

truck companies and parent group and battalion headquarters assigned to the division. The truck units were attached to the port commands at Cherbourg. As road movements increased over the Normandy highway network, Transportation Corps personnel manned traffic control points at Cherbourg, Bricquebec, Valognes, and Montebourg.<sup>15</sup>

The port reconstruction plan required eighteen engineer units, led by the 1056<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group, which arrived in Cherbourg the day after the Germans surrendered. Describing the ingenuity of the engineers responsible for the reconstruction, Colonel Emerson C. Itschner discovered that the engineers turned one overlooked enemy mistake to their advantage. The engineers used the numerous one meter steel beams left by the Germans to bridge the seawall. The engineers had to repair the damage to the seawall to improve the port facilities. The seawall was a hard coastal defense constructed on the inland part of the harbor to reduce the effects of strong waves. All the beams bore the name of a single steel mill, Hadir in Differdange, Luxembourg. Colonel Itschner made the decision to head for Luxembourg and find the mill. The Hadir plant was intact and the citizens were eager to reopen the mill. After repair and a little cannibalization, the Hadir plant once again produced the one-meter beams that reconstructed the port and built railroad bridges across the Rhine River.<sup>16</sup>

The Allied port reconstruction plans required French civilians and German prisoners of war to increase work capabilities. The French citizens of Cherbourg admired the American renovation of the port facilities that they had viewed as completely unrepairable. They considered the soldiers' energy and execution of the repairs a victory over the enemy's resolution to destroy the port. The French citizens viewed the circumstances of the Allied renovations as a demonstration of the essential and important

contribution Cherbourg represented for the future. The adaptability of the port facilities that resulted from the European conflict made the port essential to future commerce for France. Cherbourg became a valuable port for merchandise, a role it did not have before the Allied renovation of the port facilities. The new hangars built for storage of imported items, the new electronic cranes, and all the renovations performed by the Allies were born of the war and created new work for the people. The fishing port was again reconstituted and modern installations existed for local air traffic. Overall, the port became a more modern facility that generated work for the local citizens and commerce for France.<sup>17</sup>

#### Allied Port Logistics

The port of Cherbourg's significance became even greater to the Allies when their plan to seize and use additional ports on the continent materialized into one disappointment after another. The most important single factor holding the Allies back from a rapid advance into Germany was the supply situation. August did not result in the opening of additional ports for the Allies. Brest did not fall for several months and the port was so thoroughly destroyed that it was not reopened for many months. German garrisons continued to hold all significant northern ports under order to hold on and deny the use of the port facilities to the Allies. The Germans destroyed the great harbor of Marseilles almost as significantly as Cherbourg, and it did not reopen for several months. The major port of Antwerp fell into the Allies hands almost intact, but was not operable because the Germans controlled the channels to the port facilities. Therefore, Cherbourg remained the one significant deep-water port and the Allied armies had to be supplied over hundreds of miles to the front. The challenges associated with supplying the troops

rested with two difficulties inherent with the invasion and made worse with the slowness in renovating the ports. The partially cleared harbors at Cherbourg and the use of the beaches were time-consuming processes that caused shipping to be a great bottleneck by tying up ships for inordinate lengths of time. Secondly, the enormous distances from the factories in the United States to the front created a factor of four months for an item in the supply chain to reach the battlefield. This long supply delay translated into two thousand tanks in the pipeline from the factories to the front.<sup>18</sup>

In the last days before their departure, the Germans destroyed docks built over a period of two centuries. Although repairs would take longer than the few days it took to destroy the port, American ingenuity immediately turned the area into an open beach port. Port battalion gangs, all African-Americans, worked seven days a week during early operations. Nearly 800,000 tons of cargo was discharged during the months of October and November, representing a total almost four times as great as any other single American operated port or beach. Approximately two-fifths of all cargo shipped directly from America to the continent during November passed through Cherbourg. Utah and Omaha beaches closed November 13 and 19, and Antwerp opened on November 29. During the late summer and early fall, Cherbourg was the only Allied bulk coal port on the continent, with thirty percent of total cargo unloaded coal and rolling stock. In addition to coal, rolling stock, and general stores, over 657,000 tons of bulk fuel were discharged from the opening of the port until December 1st. Of all the rolling stock landed, both American and British, through December 1st, eighty-five percent passed through Cherbourg. Half of all the American army cargo moving from ports during the month of November came from Cherbourg. As the rail network throughout France

gradually improved, more and more supplies clearing the port traveled by rail until in November, only one-third of all supplies leaving Cherbourg went by truck.<sup>19</sup>

The reconstitution and rehabilitation of Cherbourg by American Forces was a major achievement and an essential element in contribution to the success of the Allied drive across France and into Germany. One only needs to consider the prospect of Hitler's December 1944 offensive if Cherbourg had not been in operation.

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1 Joseph Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe, An Autobiography*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 225; and Army, Department of, 4th Infantry Division Special Report Cherbourg, (After Action Report, July 1944), 1-3.

2 Department of Army, *Cherbourg D+20 - D+177, 26 June to 30 November 1944*, (Prepared by Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), G-4 Statistics Section, at the direction of the A.C of S., G-4, 20 January 1944), 2-3.

3 Department of Army, *Cherbourg D+20 - D+177, 26 June to 30 November 1944*, 8.

4 Department of Army, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas. United States Army in World War II. The Technical Services*, (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1957), 279-280.

5 Department of Army, Memorandum by Colonel E.C. Itschner, Engineer Headquarters, Advance Section, Communications Zone, Subject: Port & Port Area Rehabilitation Plan Cherbourg, 5 July 1944.

6 Department of Army, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas. United States Army in World War II. The Technical Services*, 281.

7 Department of Army, *Cherbourg D+20 - D+177, 26 June to 30 November 1944*, 9.

8 A DUKW is a six-wheel-drive amphibious truck designed by General Motors Corporation during WWII to transport goods and troops over land and sea. The D signified a vehicle designed in 1942, the U was for utility amphibious, the K indicated all-wheel drive, and the W indicated two powered wheel axles.

9 LSTs were naval vessels created to support amphibious operations by carrying significant quantities of vehicles, cargo, and landing troops directly onto an unimproved shore.

10 Department of Army, *Cherbourg D+20 - D+177, 26 June to 30 November 1944*, 22-23.

11 Ibid.

12 Department of Army, *The Corps of Engineers: Troops and Equipment. United States Army in WWII. The Technical Services*, (Washington D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1958), 391-392.

13 Department of Army, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas. United States Army in World War II. The Technical Services*, 281.

14 Department of Army, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas. United States Army in World War II. The Technical Services*, 282-285.

15 Ibid.

16 Alfred M. Beck, "Temporary Restoration of French Port Facilities, Normandy Invasion – Summer 1944 (Cherbourg, LeHavre, Brest)," *The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Germany*, (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1985), 11-12.

17 Société Nationale Académique de Cherbourg, *Le Cotentin et les îles de la Manche dans la tourment 1939-1945*, (Cherbourg: Imprimerie La Dépêche Communication Conseil, 1987), 129-135.

18 Weinberg, 760-761.

19 Department of Army, *Cherbourg D+20 - D+177, 26 June to 30 November 1944*, 24-32.

## CHAPTER 4

### POST LIBERATION

When the VII Corps liberated Cherbourg, its Civil Affairs Detachment allowed the French to reestablish the city's administration. The earliest civil affairs reports described the practical action to restore public services, ensure relief and supply, and bring about public order. They indicate surprise at finding a relatively wealthy, undisturbed and well-fed countryside, when they expected to find a ravaged country that suffered under Nazi oppression. Surprisingly, Cherbourg's citizens, apart from a small politically conscious group, did not express any political preferences between Pétain and de Gaulle. The Resistance had been active in Cherbourg and its largest wholesale grocer turned out to be its head. He was especially helpful as he introduced the civil affairs officers to many important citizens. Therefore, the Americans concluded that there was no fear concerning the reaction of the communist left to the Americans and the new administration.<sup>1</sup>

While the French restored the local bureaucracy, the civil affairs detachment in Cherbourg concerned itself with the recruitment of labor, salvaging of war material, and organizing transport. Initial problems concerned drunkenness among the French citizens and Allied troops, and the security of the released Todt organization workers. These civil construction laborers were often from Ukrainian Russia or North Africa, and were often resented by the local population.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of September 1944, however, civil affairs reports noted that the enthusiasm which had generally greeted the arrival of the Allied troops was replaced with a more weary coexistence. Disillusionment set in when the French realized the

Liberation meant neither the end of the war nor the return of improved economic conditions. Citizens complained that the soldiers were undisciplined and displayed drunken behavior. There was some resentment towards black American troops, and they were blamed for many incidents.<sup>3</sup>

The picture that emerges from the reports indicates that the situation in post liberated France was far more complicated than most Americans, or Frenchmen, understand. This chapter, therefore, explores the relationship between the citizens of Cherbourg and the American soldiers, examines the recovery of the Cotentin society and infrastructure, and describes the lasting effects of this period on Franco-American relations.

#### American Contributions

The Americans had done all this before, and they had not done it well. In the preceding year, *Operation Avalanche*, the invasion of Italy, officially ended with the capture of the port of Naples and the Foggia airfield on October 1, 1943. Naples and the Foggia airfield were key objectives in the Allied plan to continue the drive north through Italy. The capture of Naples yielded a virtually destroyed city and port. Before capture, the Allies bombed and shelled the city, and German demolition teams ruined the port. The departing Germans also removed or destroyed all communications, transportation, water, and power grids. Additionally, they burned hotels, mined buildings, collapsed bridges, and ripped out railroad tracks. At the port nothing was operative. The Germans blasted all the buildings, dynamited the gantry cranes, rubble blocked the roads, fires burned the piles of coal, and they sunk every ship to add to those already destroyed in the harbor. Notwithstanding intense German air raids, the Allies overcame the odds and



reopened the port to military traffic within a week. The Corps of Engineers and Transportation Corps transformed the devastated ruins into the busiest Allied port in the theater when the Italian campaign ended on May 2, 1945.<sup>4</sup>

Rebuilding the port was only half of the puzzle. The significant piece that did not go well for the Americans was civil-military relations in the city of Naples. When the Allies first entered the city, the initial assessment was that the city was quiet and there were no indications of disease or disorder. This assessment proved to be sadly mistaken. Throughout the German occupation, only half of the city's one million residents remained. The liberation of Naples began to go sour on October 7, when the first of many German time bombs exploded in the city killing and wounding seventy, half of them American soldiers. Bombs continued to explode for three weeks, creating panic among the population. Neapolitan life after liberation was marked with grief, hunger, thievery, beggary, harlotry, and inflation increased pricing. The black market flourished, and a third of the food for the people in the initial shipments was stolen.<sup>5</sup>

As thousands of Allied soldiers arrived in Naples, thousands of Italian women gravitated to prostitution to avoid starvation. Naples became a haven for soldiers on leave from the front, who arrived on trucks called "passion wagons" for some "I&I", intercourse and intoxication. Soldiers behaved badly and a strain of Neapolitan gonorrhea resistant to sulfa spread rampantly. The venereal disease rate exceeded one in every ten soldiers. As battles continued in Cassino and Anzio, fifteen percent of American hospital beds in Italy were occupied by soldiers and another five hundred beds reserved for infected prostitutes. Famine, pestilence, and death increased in the city as winter approached. For two months a virulent strain of typhus infected more than two

thousand Neapolitans, killing one in four. Typhus was spread by lice, and ninety percent of the population in Naples harbored head lice. Army physicians eventually quarantined Naples and conducted mass delousing with the insecticide DDT. Given the high stakes involved in *Operation Overlord*, and the importance of Cherbourg to that operation, the U.S. Army could ill-afford a repeat of the Naples debacle. The Allied planners took to heart all these lessons as they prepared for their liberation of France.<sup>6</sup>

Establishing Cherbourg as the logistical base of operations required moving the headquarters staffs forward from England to the continent. Under the organization of the American Forces in the European Theater, the European Theater of Operations, United States Army (ETOUSA) was the higher headquarters for the First United States Army Group (FUSAG) in England. Once the headquarters staff became operational in France on August 1, 1944, the group was redesignated the Twelfth Army Group (TUSAG) and commanded the First and Third Armies. Support for Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley's American Twelfth Army Group was the responsibility of the Communications Zone, or COMZ, commanded by Major General John Clifford Hodges Lee (see figure 19). The COMZ responsibilities were to plan and operate the supply, transportation, and administrative services to serve the Theater as a whole, including procurement, receipt, storage and issue of supplies and equipment; salvage and maintenance operations; construction; quartering; training of personnel; graves registration service; army postal service; evacuation and hospitalization of sick and wounded; recreational facilities; claims; Army Exchange Service and fiscal operations. The COMZ Headquarters included the four general staff sections: G1 (personnel), G2 (intelligence and public relations), G3 (training), and G4 (supply), in addition to technical service chiefs. It

exercised command through three headquarters: the advance section, the forward echelon, and the base sections. Advance Section, Communications Zone (ADSEC) controlled army supply dumps, roads, ports, rail nets, and operated in the rear of the combat zone. ADSEC's detached Base Section Number Three (Cherbourg Command) became the Cherbourg Base Section.<sup>7</sup>

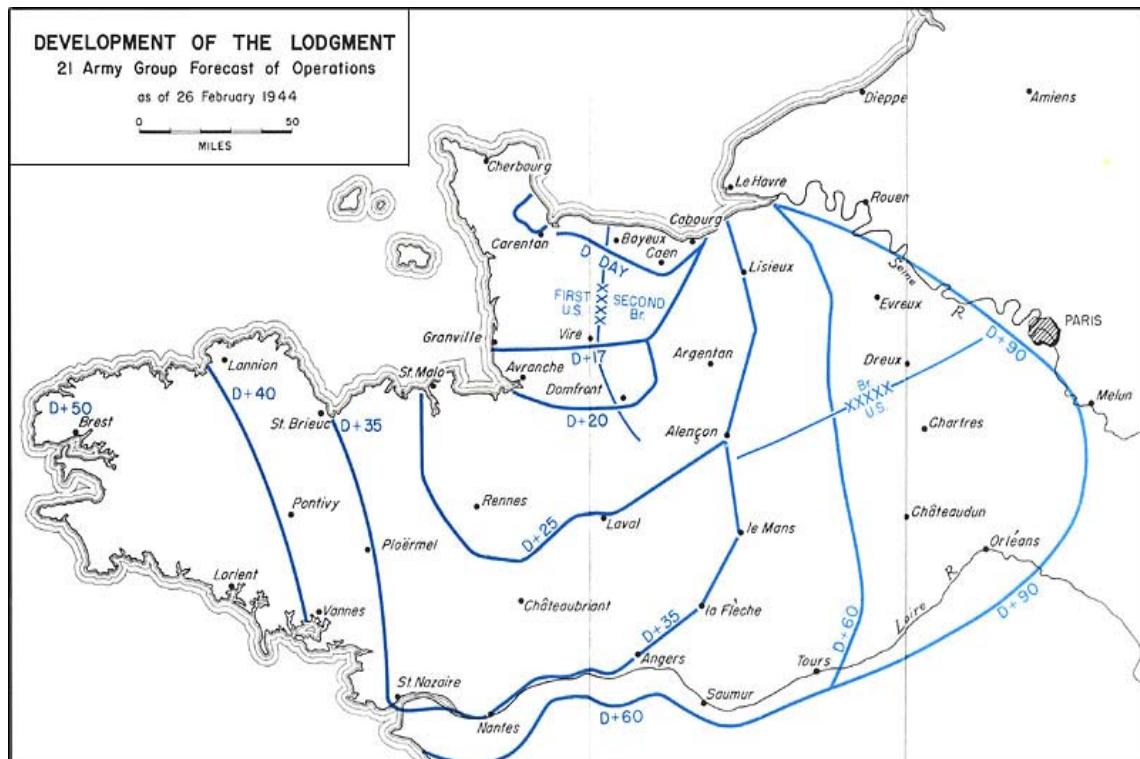


Figure 18. Development of the lodgment, 21 Army Group forecast of operations  
 Source: Harrison, Gordon A., *The European Theater of Operations. Cross-Channel Attack. United States Army in World War II*, (Map, Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History United States Army, 1951).

The Advance Section, Communications Zone, on July 11, 1944, designated the command of the city of Cherbourg and immediate vicinity to the 4<sup>th</sup> Major Port Commander, Colonel Cleland C. Sibley. The Advance Section, Communications Zone,

was divided into several areas. Cherbourg was designated Area No. 1 and Colonel Sibley was the Area Commander. The area commander was responsible for ground and air defense, fire prevention, civil affairs, civilian labor, medical service, military sanitation, billeting, special and summary courts-martial jurisdiction, Army Exchange Service, religious activities, supply discipline, and American Red Cross and recreation activities. On July 21, 1944, the Port of Cherbourg and Area Command No. 1 were combined to establish the Cherbourg Command (Provisional). Previously the District Commander marshalling troops and equipment at Southampton, England, Colonel Theodore Wyman, Jr., was appointed the commanding officer. On August 7, 1944, Base Section No. 3 (Cherbourg Base Section) of the Communications Zone was established with the headquarters at Cherbourg. The new mission of the Cherbourg Base Section was to develop the ports of Cherbourg, St. Vaast, and Barfleur; develop the camp at Carteret; develop and operate Communications Zone installations and activities within the designated base area; and command the Communications Zone troops within the designated base area. Base Section No. 3 became the Normandy Base Section on August 16, 1944. The Normandy Base Section expanded its territory rapidly as the Allies advanced and the lines of communication grew. Added to the base area were the Granville area and the Utah and Omaha beaches. To handle the large numbers of troops and equipment arriving to the continent, the Normandy Base Section created the Valognes Staging Area. By September, the tonnage of supplies moved by rail equaled the tonnage moved by truck. Located at Valognes since arrival from the United Kingdom, the Communication Zone Headquarters moved to Paris on September 14th. While Cherbourg increased the tonnage handled daily, Grandcamp closed on September

16<sup>th</sup>, and the minor ports of Isigny, St. Vaast, and Barfleur ceased operations on October 17.<sup>8</sup>

Within the city, the Cherbourg Command Headquarters occupied the College for Girls at *32 Rue Bucaille*, located three blocks from the arsenal. From the beginning, billeting was a serious problem concerning the space required for all of the troops. There were several occasions where the right of occupancy had to be settled between the Mayor and the Allied headquarters. Two of the city's best hotels became transient billeting for officers. The Cherbourg Command Headquarters leased the hotels through a contract basis and they could accommodate over one hundred officers. A former convent converted into an enlisted billet capable of housing over one thousand men. To house several hundred transient men, the command established a camp at the Cycle Race Track. The Utilities Section of the headquarters had the task of maintaining and renovating all buildings. The command established two mess halls, one for officers and one for enlisted, on the first floor of the College for Girls. The two officer billet hotels established officer messes and a transient officer mess at the *Café Paris*, a former restaurant. To staff the numerous billets and mess halls, civilian labor was necessary and the Army hired two hundred citizens and paid them according to French law. Additionally, the headquarters later occupied the *Chateau de Tourlaville*, a historic landmark on the outskirts of Cherbourg. Shortly after liberation, the Navy occupied the Chateau, which had been a museum and an object of local pride for many years.<sup>9</sup>

As the American engineers cleared the port, the Cherbourg Command Headquarters organized the military infrastructure to begin to receive supplies for the war effort. Cherbourg port operations officially began when the first transport ship arrived at

the port on July 16. At that time, the Cherbourg docks unloaded 10,000 tons of cargo per day while the engineer and transportation units worked furiously to repair the bridge, lay track, and restore the railroads leading out of the city. Expansion of the base area continued as the American forces approached the German border. Major General Lucius D. Clay became the Commanding General, Normandy Base Section, from October 30 to November 26, 1944. The base section reached its peak in supply tonnage the first ten day period of November.<sup>10</sup>

Lieutenant General Henry S. Aurand succeeded Clay as Commander of the Normandy Base Section on December 14, 1944. Previously, he had served as the Deputy to Major General Henry B. Sayler, Chief Ordnance Officer, ETO and COMZ. General Eisenhower directed General Aurand to investigate the chronic ammunition shortages in the ETO. Aurand concluded that the timely delivery of ammunition was flawed because of feuding between General Bradley and General Lee over who controlled logistics on the continent. Due to his conclusions, Eisenhower placed Aurand out of reach of Generals Bradley and Lee, as the command in Cherbourg was far removed from Paris.<sup>11</sup>

The Normandy Base Section had the mission of returning to the French Government and people all facilities no longer required by the Army; of forwarding an estimated 15,000 tons of civilian supplies through the port; and of assisting in all other ways possible in the restoration of the normal life of the inhabitants of its area, within the policies established by higher authority. General Aurand expected the port of Antwerp to eclipse Cherbourg as the principle Allied port. His initial assessment concluded that there was much work to be done in the areas of troop discipline, prisoners of war, and public relations problems. The mission of the base section changed to include five parts:

port clearance, depot clearance, evacuation of wounded personnel, security, and termination of functioning of the Normandy Base Section. General Aurand implemented the direct discharge of supplies from the ship to railcars to expedite port clearance and save labor and time. Under General Aurand, the base section improved its efficiency and staff coordination. When Cherbourg began losing port units to Antwerp, the command hired local French stevedores, and directed the formation of German POW labor companies. Aurand observed that the hard-working German soldiers showed the same prowess with a pick and shovel as they had displayed with their machine gun and rifle. The German soldiers worked side by side with the American soldiers in all areas of the Normandy Base Section, to include ferrying new jeeps and trucks to the front, all except the handling of ammunition.<sup>12</sup>

The Normandy Base Section Army Exchange Section established a central facility in the city to service the more than 30,000 troops. Initially established at hospitals and rest areas, exchanges handled the gratuitous issue of items for distribution to all organizations. The Army Exchange Service contracted the *Brasserie le Cerf* in Cherbourg for beer for the troops. This was the only brewery available for the supplying of the civilian population. The military contract supplied not more than half their monthly production of beer to the Army. Three locations in Cherbourg became beer bars for the troops: *Café La Regence*, on the *Quai de Caligny*; *Café du Grand Balcon*, on *Quai Alexandre III*; and *Hotel Pottier*, situated at the corner of *Rue Alex Biedage Nel* and *Rue Touville*. Coca Cola dispensing machines allotted to the base section were added to the hospitals and beer bars in Cherbourg.<sup>13</sup>

While expecting a relatively uneventful holiday season at the port, on the evening of December 24, 1944, the Naval Port Commander asked the Normandy Base Section for help. The troopship *Léopoldville*, carrying the first contingent of an infantry division, had either struck a mine or been torpedoed several miles off the coast from the Cherbourg breakwater. The Army boat crews went onto the high seas to perform rescue operations. As a result of their efforts, 762 of the 2,236 men on the ship perished – a number that could have been much higher. General Aurand spent Christmas morning visiting hospitals and the camp established for survivors. At the COMZ staff and commander's conference later that week, General Lee presented Aurand the Distinguished Service Medal for his command's rescue efforts. As Antwerp restored itself to full capacity, Cherbourg became the primary ammunition and ordnance port and storage area for American armies in the theater.<sup>14</sup>

The American Red Cross had its first groups of field directors, hospital workers, clubmobile, and field club workers in Cherbourg beginning in July. Its Continental Headquarters occupied the *Hotel de France* and the *Victoire Club*, moving to Paris in September. Cherbourg remained an important area because of the beaches, the staging areas, and port. All Red Cross supplies, such as hospital, field service, and donut flour came through its port. The city had two enlisted clubs and one officers' club. The Red Cross field services covered cases involving health and welfare reports both on service men for families at home who had not heard from him or vice-versa. The family reports concerned conditions at home, financial matters, allotment and allowance problems, family mix-ups, divorces, illegitimate children, and the delivery of birth and death messages. The Red Cross also handled cases where they helped service members locate



brothers, relatives, or close friends. Every hospital had two to five Red Cross workers assigned, all supplies originated at the Cherbourg American Red Cross warehouse, and donuts requested regularly from the Cherbourg Donut Kitchen located at the *Hotel de France*. Services to the wounded included serving hot coffee, donuts, cigarettes, candy, matches, chewing gum, comfort articles, *Stars and Stripes*, magazines, books, and newspapers to the wounded being evacuated from the hospital trains to the ships. A representative of the Red Cross worked with the *Stars and Stripes* office to administer the *Stars and Stripes* War Orphans Fund Program. Two Red Cross representatives worked in conjunction with the Civil Affairs Section to establish local clothing and supply distribution channels. In addition, the Chaplains Section coordinated with the French local authorities for Christmas parties for French orphans, where approximately ten thousand children received donations from the troops.<sup>15</sup>

One set of statistics troubled the Section Commander: its rape rate was the highest in the COMZ. What puzzled Aurand was that the venereal disease rate was the lowest, and this indicated that something was wrong. Eventually he discovered that the question of rape and race were closely related in the Normandy Base Section. Black soldiers made up over fifty percent of the Normandy Base Section enlisted strength. The General removed a Red Cross canteen from the Normandy Base Section who refused to serve black G.I.s. Shortly after his arrival in Cherbourg, five of his men were tried for the crimes of murder and rape. During his first month in command, seventeen others were convicted of the same crimes. The death row at the Loire Disciplinary Center filled with men after approval of their sentences in Washington. Whether due to the actual criminal behavior in the Normandy Base Section or the quality of the Army justice system, nearly

all who awaited execution were black. General Aurand enlisted the assistance of the only black general in the army at the time, Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, assigned to the Office of the Inspector General in Washington. General Davis spent two weeks in the field with General Aurand's units. The final report contained few surprises. Many commanders complained that Frenchmen filed rape charges against black soldiers who as much as looked at a local woman or girl. The living conditions for the black soldiers were poor, black labor battalions were overworked and underfed, and there were almost no recreational facilities for the black soldiers in the Normandy Base Section. General Davis concluded that the problem had been misrepresented and exaggerated, and that the Normandy Base Section should start treating black G.I.s like soldiers. General Aurand carried out the recommendations and improved morale and discipline with improved work hours, better food, recreational activities, and new housing. As a result, the number of crimes reported dropped steadily throughout the first months of the New Year.<sup>16</sup>

According to the Normandy Base Section Judge Advocate Section, the record of military success of the Allied Armies ended in a wave of violent crime. After thorough investigation, the legal opinion was that the troops initially were quartered in the fields adjacent to the homes of peasant farmers. Eventually, the French farmers were curious and invited the soldiers into their homes to offer hospitality and cider and *calvados*, a local strong distillate of tremendous potency made from apple juice and understood to have the effect of an aphrodisiac. Accordingly, a common after effect of consumption of *calvados* was an apparently uncontrollable sexual desire. The troops, overcome by the desire, brandished arms and sometimes committed rape and occasionally murder. Recognized by the military officials, crimes of passion and violence occurred with

dismaying frequency in the Normandy region. The French populace, at first hospitable and gracious, became hostile toward the troops. Local newspapers commented on the problems and encouraged the population to bear arms to protect their families. The problems continued until the military authorities published Circular No. 45, which set a curfew for all military personnel at 2200 hours and prohibited the sale, gift, or barter of strong spirits such as *calvados*, cognac, or hard cider. The results from the enforcement of Circular No. 45 were almost immediate. Crime showed a sudden and marked decrease throughout the region. Also recognized was the fact that there remained a small percentage of wayward troops who committed crimes not under the influence of spirits. For all trial cases involving offenses against civilians, theater policy required the trial to be carried out within a reasonable distance from the scene of the alleged crime.<sup>17</sup>

The Normandy Base Section command continually improved logistics efficiency and productivity and soon added responsibility for almost all of northwestern France. In February 1945, the COMZ commander added Brittany and the southern half of the Channel Base Sections to the Normandy Base Section. General Aurand's West Point classmate, General Dwight Eisenhower, arrived by train to visit Cherbourg on the morning of February 22. After inspecting a port company unloading ammunition and making the rounds at the Normandy Base Section tent hospitals, the Supreme Commander returned to his train. After dinner, the two men discussed General Aurand's experiences in the Normandy Base Section and compared notes on their sons' army careers. The next day they toured the Red Horse Staging Area, where General Eisenhower planned to see his son John, an infantry platoon leader in the 71<sup>st</sup> Division.

Unfortunately, Ike learned that Lieutenant Eisenhower had been left behind in England to complete a machine gun course.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of February, the Normandy Base Section Command headquarters transferred from Cherbourg to Deauville. Besides the advantage of a more central location, the seaside summer resort accommodations were luxurious. The *Normandy Hotel* offered first-class billeting for the officers, the *Royal Hotel* provided palatial offices, and the casino housed the movie theaters and both officer and enlisted clubs. Enlisted men lived at the *Golf Hotel*, a comfortable tourist inn. As the front lines moved eastward, the Normandy Base Section expanded its area of responsibility. The Section Commander spent a great deal of his time entertaining visiting congressmen, officials from various government agencies, and generals from Paris wanting some salt air. The official visits included a reception on the steps of the *Royal Hotel*, lunch in the officer's mess, an afternoon tour with one pilot and one passenger each in the general's Piper Cubs, dinner and a movie, and ended with brandy and cigars in General Aurand's quarters.<sup>19</sup>

Although the move went well, all was not satisfactory concerning Franco-American relations. With a doctorate of literature from the Sorbonne, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Palfrey arrived to take over the Normandy Base Section G-5 Military Government Section. General Aurand required the assistance as his relations with the French had been shaky from the beginning. Cadet Aurand had not excelled in his French classes, and what he learned deserted him over the years. His relations with the Communist Mayor of Cherbourg, Paul Reynard, never cordial, took a turn for the worse when he ordered his Military Police to search French longshoremen for stolen goods as they left the port.

Also, the Prefect of Manche complained of the lawlessness of American soldiers, especially the black G.I.s. The Mayor of the small village of Coutances claimed that the town treasury was empty now that the Americans liberated it. The Mayor also commented that the Germans paid the fines imposed on them when they broke the local laws, while the G.I.s did not. The G-5 Section directed most of its time processing claims against the Army for damage to French property. After the move to Deauville, relations with the French authorities improved. Progress arrived with returned property to the French citizens, restored public utilities and transportation, and repaired roads. Lieutenant Colonel Palfrey and the Prefect of Calvados, formerly the Rector of the University of Caen, developed a warm friendship and organized a formal dinner for the thirteen prefects of French departments under the Normandy Base Section jurisdiction. The dinner founded a more cordial working relationship between civil authorities and the Normandy Base Section.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Normandy Base Section Public Relations Section, March 1945 saw the development of improved relations with the French. The Public Relation Section began publishing Civil Affairs items of interest in the local papers. The section hired a civilian employee to read every daily newspaper for every item dealing with Franco-American relations. The command countered items of a sensitive matter by releasing to the French press statements prepared by the command through an Allied Information Coordinator. Additionally, the section sponsored more than eighty war correspondents visiting Allied operations in Cherbourg. The section activities included hometown and general news stories, radio broadcasts and interviews, and special news stories concerning “Yankee ingenuity” and tire conservation. At the request of *Popular*

*Mechanics Magazine*, a feature story covered the repair of the port of Cherbourg by the American Army Engineers. Mr. Ralph Morse and Miss Eitingon acquired information and photographs on the return of normal French life to the battle areas of 1944. In April 1945, the section covered the first group of recovered Allies from prisoner of war camps who were brought by air to Cherbourg. The section interviewed the liberated Americans and released their stories to the press agencies.<sup>21</sup>

### French Participation

The French authorities continued the Vichy practice of opening private letters and tapping telephone calls after the liberation. The goal was to obtain public opinion and attitudes toward the Allies. The authorities also reported this information to the Allies. The investigations focused on a relatively small sample of French citizens, as the upper class were more likely than the general population to have telephones and write letters. Also, only a minority within this minority population expressed an opinion reference the Allies. Throughout France, the opinion was unfavorable to the Americans and favorable to the British. In Normandy there were more opinions, suggestive of the greater presence of the Allies and also the intense fighting. Blame fell on the Americans for the casualties caused by bombing, the damage caused by troops, the harassment of Frenchwomen, and generous treatment of the German prisoners. Some French compared liberation by the Allies with occupation by the Germans. Unlike the Germans, the Allies did not seize workers, they paid good wages for labor, and the Allies did not shoot local officials if the population did not behave. The Allies did not impose their time zone on the French, although in Cherbourg the port ran on what the locals called ‘American Time’, an hour ahead of the town. Allied commanders in France, concerned with their troops having

sexual relations, placed all legal brothels off limits to their soldiers. In contrast, the basic French lessons provided in an American army newspaper were: ‘Are you married?’, ‘Would you like to go for a walk?’, and ‘I will miss you.’ Another area of concern was French complaints concerning the sexual delinquency of black soldiers. The Americans punished sixty-eight soldiers for rape in France between June 1944 and June 1945. The military authorities executed twenty-one men for rape, and all except three of the men were black.<sup>22</sup>

The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force Psychological Warfare Division’s intelligence section had a survey unit with the mission of making a definitive report for military and propaganda purposes of the reactions of the Normans to the landings and to the presence of the Allied troops. Staffed by British and American personnel, the teams arrived in Cherbourg on July 1, 1944, to start their mission. For four weeks they operated from a building in Cherbourg that ten days prior housed the German “propaganda shop.” The combat survey teams hired ten French civilians as the interviewers to ensure unbiased opinions on matters of Allied relations with the populace. Of the over 1,000 interviews conducted, fewer than three percent refused to be interviewed. The survey area contained the Cotentin Peninsula and the American occupied zone north of a line drawn from Port Bail on the west coast to Carentan on the east. The surveyed were one-third the Department de la Manche, with a pre-war population of approximately 150,000. The estimated population of Cherbourg was six or seven thousand below the pre-war population of 39,000. City officials estimated that during the interview window less than half of the population returned to their homes.<sup>23</sup>

The survey results yielded a picture of what total war does to a population. Thirty-four percent had evacuated their homes, fifty-seven percent were living in homes visibly damaged, sixteen percent lived in areas that suffered heavy damage, sixty-five percent with slight or medium damage, and nineteen percent in undamaged areas. Forty-five percent had immediate family members in German prisoner-of-war camps and eleven percent reported casualties in their families from Allied bombings. Regarding the effect of liberating armies upon the civilian population, seventy-five percent reacted positively to the news of the Allied landings, seventeen percent expressed reservations, five percent gave miscellaneous comments, and three percent had no opinion.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding contact with the Allied troops, the significant majority reported agreeable contact and only ten percent mentioned no contact with the troops. Some of those interviewed mentioned open-armed welcomes for the troops, others gave them food and drink, several provided information on the enemy, and others fed hidden parachutists. Some civilians recalled stories of the troops helping the population or sharing rations. One in five Normans complained that the Americans were lacking in discipline or drank too much. Considering that the Liberation damaged houses in the Cotentin Peninsula, unavoidably killed cattle, and disrupted transportation and communication lines, the population was very optimistic. A bread shortage was the greatest complaint of the people, followed by anxiety over friends and relatives in evacuated areas, the absence of public utility services, and shortages of clothes, soap, and shoes. There was an acceptance of these shortages as necessary to give priority to war materials. The combat survey team talked to the people, observed their reactions to the liberating forces around them, and noted the consistency of their responses. A similar sense of relief and gratitude



toward the liberating forces existed within the young and old, rich and poor, farmer and city dweller.<sup>25</sup>

Civil affairs planning for the U.S. First Army and 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group included SHAEF Civil Affairs Handbooks for each intended area. The material stressed the overall control of the Supreme Commander, but also urged that the maximum possible amount of civil affairs activity be left to the French. The standing operations and administrative instructions insisted that there would not be a military government, but that the local military commander should assume responsibility if the local authorities were uncooperative. Every civil affairs officer commanding a group had explicit instructions cooperation with local civil and military authorities. Political guidance had an appendix in the form of a 'white list', indicating the Resistance members and other loyal personalities, and a 'black list', indicating collaborators and people under suspicion. The overall effect of the instruction was to ensure the Allied officers gave authority to representatives of the provisional government or the Resistance. Some commanders reminded their men that it was their job to restore the French '*tricolore*.' Twenty-seven civil affairs units worked in the Allied Military Zone to report detailed information, including political information, and to judge the reaction of the French, once the initial delight of the landings and liberation were over.<sup>26</sup>

The Civil Affairs Detachment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Frank O. Howley with British Major Rupert L. H. Nunn as his deputy, achieved recognition for the administration of Cherbourg, the first large city to be returned to the French. The detachment arrived in the city on June 27<sup>th</sup>, added a French liaison officer to the team, and set up their headquarters in the Cherbourg Chamber of Commerce. The team

immediately met with the mayor, Monsieur Renault, to assess the situation and the personalities involved, the food situation, economic position, population, and administration. The civil affairs responsibilities included the care of refugees, reestablishment of local government, provision of emergency supplies for the needy, public health and sanitation, organization of auxiliary police, the issuance of passes for necessary civilian travel, procuring of labor for the Army, assistance to the Army in its relations with the civil population, and restoring to as nearly normal as possible the life of the community.<sup>27</sup>

The detachment determined that the city was only about twenty-five percent damaged from the bombardment, the water supply was not functioning, the police were functioning to a limited extent, there was no real breakdown of law and order, sufficient food was available for thirty days, and the population had dwindled to a low of five thousand (see figure 20). On July 3<sup>rd</sup> the water was restored and the local paper, *La Presse Cherbourgeoise*, resumed production as the first French newspaper printed in Free France. The *Stars and Stripes* began publishing for the first time on July 4<sup>th</sup> from Cherbourg as a continental edition, and Radio Cherbourg began broadcasting. On July 7<sup>th</sup> the Law Courts opened and the first two alleged spies tried and condemned to a long term of imprisonment. The mayor and his staff, the police, and the leading bankers, legal and other officials returned to the city and gave wholehearted cooperation to the detachment. All accepted the provisional government with enthusiasm, except for the Sous-Prefect, Monsieur Bourdin, who had been appointed by the Vichy Government and was ordered to leave the city.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 19. French civilians gathering in front of the ruins of Notre Dame des Voeux, Cherbourg, France, 22 August 1944

*Source:* United States National Archives (Photo, Washington, D.C.: United States National Archives, 22 August 1944).

The Civil Affairs Detachment had twelve specialty sections: supply, civil defense, public safety, public health, public utilities, public works, finance, legal, relief, economics and labor, communications, and transportation. One of the most difficult

problems they encountered concerned accommodation in the city. Many citizens returned to the city and found their houses occupied by Allied troops. The detachment handled the acquisition of important property in the city by the Allied authorities. After considerable negotiation between the detachment and the proprietor, the largest store in the city, *Rattis*, became a Red Cross Club for the troops. The Army wished to use the large factory, *Usine du Maupas*, as the Army Post Office and distribution center. After careful consideration, the detachment sided with the French that the factory was critical for the city and the manufacture of agricultural implements.<sup>29</sup>

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, fishing resumed after a period of prohibition. Celebrated for the first time since 1939, Bastille Day, July 14<sup>th</sup>, included a parade with French military, Naval, and civilian services, American Army units, and British Army and Royal Air Forces. The Mayor, Monsieur Renault, led the ceremony to rename the *Place Pétain* to the *Place Général de Gaulle*. On July 20<sup>th</sup> the first American Red Cross Club on French soil opened, and on the 21<sup>st</sup> the Pasteur Hospital returned to French control.<sup>30</sup>

Some of the French were not able to understand why the Americans occasionally imposed stricter restrictions than had the German occupiers. Sometimes they failed to understand the difference between the relatively peaceful occupation by the Germans and the intensive work necessary for the Americans to establish a large supply base. Telephone lines and the postal system were two areas where the Americans imposed stricter restrictions than the Germans. The city and metropolitan area of Cherbourg had four separate police bodies, each functioning independently. At first, systemic looting of the evacuated German premises occurred, followed by the looting of abandoned French houses, then the removal of property by the Allied forces. The French citizens discussed

the matter with the detachment and obtained an order prohibiting the removal of any property without written authority. The city officials established a fine system of fifteen francs for violations of curfew, travel, transportation, and the proclamations. The one prison in Cherbourg initially housed sixty-six prisoners, but arrests overcrowded the prison at one-hundred and sixty-eight prisoners. Eventually the French Naval authorities agreed to allow the maritime prison for civilians.<sup>31</sup>

Assisted by the Political Warfare Division and the Civil Affairs Unit, there emerged a regular Liberation press, the *Presse Cherbourgeoise*, the *Renaissance du Bessin*, and the single sheet *Libération*. As symbols of the first sign of political revival, the press turned out to be friendly to the Allies and very patriotic. The reorganization of the main port workers union, the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, greatly helped clear and restore the docks. In August, civil affairs units reported that the Cherbourg citizens were calm, everything was running smoothly, and there were no political developments. Overall, reports concerning the liberation of Cherbourg noted the efficiency, dispassionate political stance, and cooperative manner of the French administration. Additional reports commented that relations with the French authorities improved daily, the French legal system restored, the police worked effectively to ensure public safety, city officials worked to resolve the supply and refugee problems, and conferences between Allied representatives and French officials were cordial and effective.<sup>32</sup>

The Allied conclusions were that the civil affairs detachment afforded the inhabitants of Cherbourg a feeling of security and a sense of direction following the battle. The detachment worked closely with city officials to bring about law and order and essential services. It also served as a buffer between the city officials and the Allied

military, to ensure fairness for the city and the military effort. The detachment handled diplomatic relations successfully and the city officials cooperated readily. The main misunderstanding between the French and the Allied military was that the Germans occupied the city relatively peacefully, while the circumstances differed greatly under Allied military occupation. The Joint American and British civil affairs teams liaised delicately and diplomatically with the French authorities. Overall, the Cherbourg city officials appreciated the vital cooperation provided by the civil affairs personnel.<sup>33</sup>

### The Population of Cherbourg Recovers

On January 15, 1945, the French established the French Military Base of Cherbourg to handle all material destined for the French units operating within France. In May 1945, the American port commander continued to increase the civil cargo area at the port to accommodate civilian supply needs. The French increasingly benefitted from the generosity of the American authorities and the powerful renovation of the port facilities. Cherbourg benefitted from the American restoration and adapted to more intense and new port traffic. The war and the American exploitation of the port adapted the port for any task deemed essential during the European conflict, and pleased the people of Cherbourg by creating the image of their city as a significant merchandise port. Completely transformed, the valuable new port reconstructed the French economy in Cherbourg through increased commercial traffic and improved port conditions (see figures 21 and 22). The people adapted under difficult circumstances born of the war. The fishing industry in Cherbourg was completely reconstituted. Modern installations increased the aerial activity in the Cotentin Peninsula. The 4<sup>th</sup> Port Command boldly

worked to help the French exploit the activities that were possible for the city of Cherbourg.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 20. A view from the military arsenal of the protective harbor forts  
*Source:* City of Cherbourg website (Photo, Cherbourg-Octeville website, [www.ville-cherbourg.fr](http://www.ville-cherbourg.fr), 2008).



Figure 21. A view of the Cherbourg port liner terminal

*Source:* City of Cherbourg website (Photo, Cherbourg-Octeville website, [www.ville-cherbourg.fr](http://www.ville-cherbourg.fr), 2008).

A grand ceremony on October 14, 1945, returned the port of Cherbourg to France. In attendance were French and American officials to include the COMZ Commander Lieutenant General Lee, the Port Commander Colonel Crothers, the Mayor of Cherbourg, the Préfet de la Manche, the French Military Port Commander, the Cherbourg Chamber of Commerce, the Municipal Council, the French Honor Guard, and the British Minister of War Transport. The port was rebuilt under exceptional circumstances and improved to handle an enormous amount of merchandise (see figure 23). The American contribution to the port restitution created a total of 2,220 meters of deep water quayside from the existing 1,400 meters in 1938. In total there were thirteen large ship bays for Liberty and



Victory ships plus one large petroleum ship bay. The port equipment and cranes were an improved quality to those that existed in 1938. The rail lines and rail access improved to the city and the port. New covered storage hangars added to the port capacity. In 1946, the port of Cherbourg recovered transatlantic traffic previously interrupted by the war. At the end of 1947, passenger traffic once again resumed at the port. Throughout the winter months, it received pre-fabricated American and Canadian houses destined for Normandy. Also, 500 train cars arrived from America for the Normandy region. After hard times, Cherbourg benefitted from the ingenuity and boldness of the American forces who contributed to the victory and the renovation of France.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 22. The Port of Cherbourg

*Source:* City of Cherbourg website (Photo, Cherbourg-Octeville website, [www.ville-cherbourg.fr](http://www.ville-cherbourg.fr), 2008).

Concerning the recovery of France upon the conclusion of WWII, France desired a large reconstruction loan from the United States. Meanwhile, Washington sought the freedom to export American films to France, a more liberal policy on American investments, to dispose of American war surplus materials in France, and commercial access to the French Empire. The terms of the 1946 Blum-Byrnes accords awarded the French \$650 million in loans. An economic catastrophe in the form of a wheat shortage faced France in February 1947. There was a shortage of grain worldwide and the French received 362,000 tons of American grain, short of the required 500,000 tons through June to meet the 250 grams per day bread ration. From 1948 through 1950, Franco-American relations involved a conventional diplomatic relationship, an American role in directing and planning the growth of the French economy, and activity by United States government and private agencies on the internal French political scene. The American diplomatic strategy used the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the Military Assistance Pact to ensure France was the focal point of European strategy. The American strategy institutionalized an American role in the internal politics and economics of the European nations. Following the establishment of NATO, the Mutual Defense and Assistance Pact involved a Military Advisory and Assistance Group in Paris to oversee the use of American armaments. The French Mission emphasized proposed projects with the widest publicity and broad human interest and public appeal.<sup>36</sup>

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## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

The port city of Cherbourg was the first French city liberated after the Normandy assault. Although sixty-four years have passed since then, the livelihood of the people has always revolved around the seaport. This thesis evaluated the role the Americans played in the liberation and renovation of the port city of Cherbourg. The focus was on the actions of the American military living and working alongside the people of Cherbourg. The core of the study was the individual and collective experiences of the people of Cherbourg and the American military. For the French who remained in the city, they lived through a period of euphoria at the end of WWI, endured the sudden end to freedom and four long years of occupation, and welcomed the liberation that came with the long-awaited American presence. How did the city recover from German occupation and the Allied bombings, and did the American military get it right concerning post-war renovation for the people and the city? How did the city contribute to the Allied war effort? How did the *Cherbourgeois*, with Allied help, recover from the effects of war? What does this narrative mean to Americans, especially military officers conducting reconstruction and restoration operations around the world today? Although all was not perfect, the American military did get it right concerning post-war renovation for Cherbourg. As a consequence of maintaining a large military presence in Cherbourg, the American military generated valuable insight into post-war renovation and civil affairs operations. Cherbourg is a unique study for post-war civil-military relations.

In contrast with the other cities in the Normandy and Cotentin areas, Cherbourg was relatively undamaged from the Allied bombing campaign. The city was not shattered, as were the cities of Saint-Lô, Coutances, Valonges, Montebourg, Caen, Le Havre, Brest, and certain sections of Rouen. The city did have bombing damage to the forts surrounding the city and several buildings in the vicinity of the forts and the port. However, the center of the city was amazingly intact with only minor damage. Then again, the section of the city that suffered the most damage at the hands of the German military was the seaport. Throughout the occupation, the population of the city decreased from almost 40,000 to 5,000 at the time of the battle of Cherbourg and the arrival of the American liberators. Immediately following the liberation, the citizens returned to the city in increasing numbers. There was an average of 30,000 troops working in the city and living in billeting throughout existing local city buildings.

The American military accomplished many firsts and managed to get it right concerning post-war civil military relations in Cherbourg. The first challenge they performed correctly was immediate recognition of the city authorities and a willingness to work with them concerning security and essential services. They also managed to reconstruct a port severely damaged at the hands of the enemy and eventually hand-over an improved and modernized port facility that greatly increased future commerce. Additionally, the American military authorities recognized the importance of peaceful cohabitation with the local population and took steps to continuously improve Franco-American relations. This involved both monitoring soldier behavior and improving relations with the French. The American officials recognized the value of allowing the

French to regain their freedom and once again have their families, livelihoods, and community back.

The first priority for the American officials in the city was the clearing of the streets and the reestablishment of the local infrastructure to include the hospitals, water, and electricity. This greatly assisted the local population and positively reflected on the actions of American troops. Several subsequent priorities were established and carried out by the civil affairs detachment. Working with the French, the civil affairs detachment reestablished the printing of the Cherbourg local newspaper and the broadcasting of the local radio station. The Americans repaired and maintained the buildings they occupied. They also employed hundreds of local citizens to work in the port, the dining facilities, the living quarters, and the clubs for the troops. A contract with the local brewery reinvigorated the brewery owner's business and eventually expanded his production capabilities.

Concerning the port, the American reconstruction transportation and engineer teams employed former port employees and French engineers to jointly repair the port facilities. The Americans and French worked side by side cordially. At the conclusion of reconstruction, the port expanded its capabilities to handle large amounts of rolling stock cargo and hold cargo in large covered warehouses. Eventually, the French began receiving commercial supply ships alongside Allied supply ships. The French citizens were grateful to the Americans for the renovation and improvements to the port. The resulting port capabilities allowed the citizens to once again establish the port as their primary industry.

Whenever complaints surfaced from the French concerning soldier matters, American officials recognized the problem and took action to resolve the situation. One example of a serious nature was the increase in accusations by the French of American troops committing theft, rape, and murder. The American officials investigated many of these accusations and took steps to resolve them. The conclusions of these investigations were that the American troops drank local strong liquor at the invitation of the French and the troops sometimes misbehaved. This sometimes led to soldiers behaving in an immoral or unethical manner. The officials also recognized that there were a few soldiers who did behave unlawfully or inappropriately, but these behaviors did not reflect on the majority of the American troops. The solution was to open a theater and establish Red Cross clubs to allow the troops to occupy their free time in a resourceful manner. The French were invited and welcomed to participate in the local recreational activities. The troops were authorized to drink in the clubs and socialize with the local population in a controlled environment. Additionally, American officials recognized that trying and punishing troops in the presence of the French was important to maintaining respect and law and order. In Cherbourg, five soldiers were hanged for their crimes after military trials. Immediately after taking corrective action, the number of monthly French accusations declined and relations improved. In the end, the American officials maintained positive control of the troops and created a mutually agreeable arrangement for living and working alongside the French in their city.

Although there were occasional language barriers and disagreements, the American authorities worked diligently to rectify any situations that arose. They continuously positively engaged with the French and improved relations toward the best



possible working and living environment. The work environment established and maintained at the port was one of joint cooperation to accomplish the goal of restoring and improving the port infrastructure and capability to handle cargo. The American officials recognized the significance of allowing the French the freedom to regain control of their daily lives, family, fishing, markets, and local businesses.

Concerning the opinion of the French, the Allied bombings did have a lasting effect on Franco-American relations. Although a small minority in Cherbourg, those directly affected by the bombing have had a lasting effect on negative opinions concerning the Americans. The French in this category appear to either have lost a loved one to the Allied bombing campaign, or lost their home to the bombing. The negative memories concerning the Americans have been passed to those families from generation to generation. To this day there exists a minority of the Cherbourg population who were affected by the bombing campaign and do not view the Americans in a positive light.

The majority of the French citizens of Cherbourg welcomed the American troops with gratitude for the liberation of their city after four long years under German occupation. Accounts of the initial encounters of the French and Americans document the French recalling that the Americans helped the French and provided them food and water, and occasionally chocolate and cigarettes. The Americans saw to the basic needs of the troops, the population, and the city. In addition, the Americans immediately worked with the French city authorities in order to jointly establish security and law and order throughout the city. This was not the case in every city that was liberated by the Allies. Recognizing and working with the French authorities was a significant accomplishment for civil-military relations in Cherbourg. Eventually, American officials

recognized the importance of a return to normalcy and allowed the population to reopen the bakeries, resume fishing, and reestablish basic commerce, communication, and public transportation.

Once the Americans settled into the community, the French observed that the American soldiers were less disciplined than German soldiers. The French commented that the American soldiers drank too much. There were occasional accounts of troops looting wine, liquor, and other family possessions. A strong point of contention was the view of the French toward the American handling of German prisoners of war. The French regarded the handling of the prisoners of war as too gentle, when they should have been punished severely for their actions throughout the occupation. Another point of contention was that the Americans took over many public and private residences in the city. As the French returned to the city, many were surprised to find their homes and public buildings occupied. The civil affairs detachment worked closely with the city mayor to resolve population returning to their homes issues. In addition, some of the local citizens regarded the Americans as initially imposing more restrictions than the Germans. Immediately after liberation, the Americans initiated a city curfew, vehicle and travel restrictions, and limited communication. However, the Americans overcame this perception through an understanding of the desires of the French to return to a normal livelihood concerning fishing, local shops, city markets, family, and community.

In the sixty-four years that have passed, the French families that recall positive experiences with the Americans concerning the liberation of Cherbourg pass those memories on from generation to generation. For those families who recollect negative experiences with the American troops, they also convey their opinion to subsequent

family generations. Overall, the majority of the French in Cherbourg regarded the Americans as liberators with a genuine concern for the French. However, a small minority of the population does not have fond memories, and they still regard Americans today as occupiers who bombed and killed without regard for the civilian population.

Although the situation today in Iraq and Afghanistan is far different from Cherbourg in 1944, many of the lessons learned from Cherbourg could have been applied in the two countries. As a result of military actions in Cherbourg, military officials gained valuable insight for post-war renovation and civil affairs operations. The most important lesson learned was the American decision to immediately recognize the local city authorities and work with them to restore security and essential services. The port was reconstructed beyond its pre-war capabilities, and a greatly improved future commerce port was handed back to the city. The American authorities continuously dedicated time and resources to improve relations with the French. Although by no means perfect, the American military did get it right concerning post-war renovation for Cherbourg. To the best extent possible, a living and working environment was created and maintained to allow the French and Americans to cohabitate side-by-side and accomplish the mission in the city the *Cherbourgeois* considered home.

### Recommendations

There are numerous avenues that can be approached to enhance the essence of this manuscript for further research into Franco-American relations in post-war Cherbourg. For further analysis concerning the French perspective, the city of Cherbourg and the *Société Nationale Académique de Cherbourg* have numerous documents and personal accounts from the French perspective. Details ought to exist for the French that

were employed by the Americans at the port, the billeting hotels, and the dining facilities. The researcher must find a way to devote time and resources to travel to the city and uncover documents from the city resources, libraries, museums, and universities in Cherbourg and the surrounding Cotentin and Normandy regions.

For further analysis concerning the American Soldier perspective, first-hand accounts of the Soldiers working in Cherbourg should be researched at the National Archives. In addition to officer perspectives, Soldier accounts of interaction with the French in the city will add to the depth of the study. Reports from the perspective of the civil affairs Soldiers would be of a critical nature. However, all first hand accounts from a military perspective are supportive to further analysis

The Red Cross documents at the National Archives should also be thoroughly analyzed for additional information concerning civil-military relations in Cherbourg. Other sources for information might include the Army Exchange records, contracting officer's accounts, and U.S. Naval personnel accounts.

Concerning lessons learned for the U.S. Army and the situations the Army is involved in today, there was a great deal of information concerning civil-military relations collected on Cherbourg after the liberation. This city and other cities should be analyzed once again by the Army to improve current and future military operations concerning civil-military relations.

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Stephen A. Bourque, Ph.D.  
Department of History  
USACGSC  
100 Stimson Ave.  
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

Christopher R. Gabel, Ph.D.  
Department of History  
USACGSC  
100 Stimson Ave.  
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

LTC Frederick V. Godfrey  
Department of Logistics and Resource Operations  
USACGSC  
100 Stimson Ave.  
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

Merrie Archer  
Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS)  
2121 Virginia Avenue, NW  
Suite 71000, State Department Annex 3  
Washington, DC 20037