

# **“The Crux of the Fight”: General Joseph Lawton Collins’ Command Style**

**A Monograph**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

“THE CRUX OF THE FIGHT”: GENERAL JOSEPH LAWTON COLLINS’ COMMAND STYLE by LTC Theo K. Moore, U.S. Army, 48 pages.

This monograph examines General J. Lawton Collins’ career and argues that his command style was characterized by technical and tactical competence, the practical ability to lead from the front and sound judgment. This monograph examines these key factors in three subsections. General Collins gained his technical and tactical competence by theoretical preparation as a student and instructor. He first demonstrated the ability to position himself at the critical point on the battlefield as the commander of the 25th Infantry Division during the Guadalcanal Campaign in January 1943. As the commander of the VII Corps during the Allies’ Campaign in northwest Europe from 1944 to 1945, he refined this ability. Finally, he developed sound judgment while performing key postings both during the interwar period and during the Second World War. This monograph shows how General J. Lawton Collins’ command style translated into action and made him such an effective combat leader.

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## Introduction

General J. Lawton Collins sensed that something was wrong. Based on his judgment and experience, two armored divisions from adjacent corps, emerging from the breakthrough zone west of St. Lo, were racing towards the intersection at Coutances. When they both arrived, the result would be gridlock with thousands of vehicles backed up for miles. The only beneficiary of such a calamitous event would be the Germans who were racing to escape their American pursuers. On the afternoon of July 28, 1944, Collins clipped his portable phone into a line connected to his higher headquarters and checked with his boss, General Omar Bradley, and was told to change the boundary giving Coutances to the adjacent VIII Corps. He then moved forward to implement the order finding that there were no senior leaders from the 3rd Armored Division at the front. He took charge and provided the direction the situation required. In the end, the 4th Armored Division of the VIII Corps was allowed to pass, Collins' VII Corps continued its pursuit, and one division commander, who had a record of ineffectiveness, was on his way back to the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Lawton Collins did not arrive at that intersection in western France by accident, but by solid preparation and experience. The product of a middle-class upbringing<sup>2</sup>, he graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point just as the United States was entering the Great War in 1917.<sup>3</sup> Like other officers of the interwar Army, he balanced attendance and instructor duty at the service schools with peacetime command and staff assignments.<sup>4</sup> What marked him for his future leadership positions was his excellent performance during several key periods of his developing career. The interwar Army school system progressively trained officers from the lowest to the highest levels of the service hierarchy, and Collins thrived within this system as a student, an instructor, and most notably a member of Colonel George C. Marshall's select group of instructors.<sup>5</sup> His second element of preparation was in staff and command assignments, most notably as a corps chief of staff during

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 245.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> U. S. Military Academy, 1917 Official Registrar of the Officers and Cadets (West Point, NY: U.S. Military Academy Printing Office, 1917), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1989), 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Forest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: The Education of a General, 1880-1939, Volume I* (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1964), 268-269.

the large scale maneuvers leading up to the war, and as a division commander in the Pacific Theater of War.<sup>6</sup>

The important aspects of Collins' theoretical preparation during the interwar years were, as a student and instructor at the Infantry School, and as a student at the Command and General Staff School (CGSS) in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In retrospect, his career pattern during the interwar period was typical of officers of his era. As the United States Army was small and there were few tactical units, the Army used its school system as a means to train and develop its officer corps for future conflicts. As a result, Collins and the majority of his peers, served as either students and or instructors during the majority of the interwar period.<sup>7</sup>

Several important aspects of Collins' career enabled him to prepare more rapidly and thoroughly than his peers.<sup>8</sup> One aspect, was his assignment as a student and instructor at the Infantry School under the tutelage of, then Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, who was the Deputy Commandant of the Infantry School. Marshall taught and mentored him, which enabled him to excel as a student at the CGSS and effectively apply his theoretical knowledge as a staff officer and commander in subsequent assignments.<sup>9</sup> Further, his joining Marshall's trusted inner-circle, opened doors for him to gain experience in key staff and command positions.<sup>10</sup> Another aspect of Collins' theoretical preparation occurred while he was a student at the Command and General Staff School, where he learned the tactics, doctrine, and staff procedures for division and corps-level units. These two assignments provided him with the theoretical framework necessary for him to be successful. What set him apart from his peers, was his ability to apply his theoretical knowledge while performing subsequent assignments as a staff officer and ultimately as a commander in combat during the Second World War.<sup>11</sup>

During the Guadalcanal Campaign, he first developed his practical ability to lead soldiers in combat while commanding the 25th Infantry Division in January 1943. Taking command of the

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher R. Gabel, *U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1992), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 11

<sup>9</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 11. Collins graduated the Command and General Staff School ranked twenty-second of 125 students in 1933, well within the top twenty percent of his class.

<sup>10</sup> Pogue, George C. *Marshall: The Education of a General, 1880-1939, Volume I*, 268-269, 285.

<sup>11</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Papers: Pre-Presidential, 1916-52, Principle File, Box No. 133*, (Abilene, KS Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, 1945), 1-2. This box contains General Eisenhower's formal recommendations for promotions to the grade of General and Lieutenant General. The message was classified secret, From Eisenhower to Marshall for eyes only, the date of origin was April 11, 1945.



25th Infantry Division in May 1942, he trained the division intensively for amphibious and combined arms offensive operations for six months on the island of Oahu. The 25th Division, which had performed a defensive role in Hawaii, consisted of the 27th, the 35th active infantry regiments, and the 161st National Guard Regiment. While training the division, he culled the dead wood from the 25th Division, changing several commanders and hand picking his assistant commander and key staff members.<sup>12</sup> The United States' defeat of the Japanese at Midway set the conditions for offensive operations in the Pacific Theater in June 1942.<sup>13</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided in November 1942 to send the 25th Division to the South Pacific to relieve the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal. Collins applied his theoretical knowledge of tactics and doctrine to the planning and execution of a highly successful division attack during the XIV Corps' first January offensive in 1943.<sup>14</sup>

His success continued when he led the 25th Division once again as the XIV Corps main effort, during the second January offensive. Collins developed the ability to visualize what was likely to unfold during the fight and position himself where he could best make timely, correct decisions. His aggressive, forward leadership of the 25th Division resulted in breaking the Japanese resistance on Guadalcanal.<sup>15</sup> Collins' corps commander Major General Alexander Patch, wrote in his evaluation, that the 25th Infantry Division had performed "brilliantly."<sup>16</sup> Based on his' success, General George C. Marshall, then Chief of Staff of the Army, recommended to serve as a corps commander for the cross-channel attack into the European Theater of Operations.<sup>17</sup>

Collins continued to refine and improve his forward style of leadership, while commanding the VII Corps from the cross-channel assault onto UTAH Beach to the Allies defeat of Germany in May 1945. He took command of the VII Corps in England on February 14, 1944.<sup>18</sup> As he had done with the 25th Division, he began maneuver and live-fire training and rehearsals to prepare his subordinate units for the cross-channel attack and combined arms offensive

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<sup>12</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 134-140.

<sup>13</sup> H. Paul Jeffers, *Taking Command: General J. Lawton Collins from Guadalcanal to Utah Beach and Victory in Europe* (New York: New American Library, 2009), 39.

<sup>14</sup> John Miller Jr., *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive* (Historical Division, Department of the Army. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 212, 305.

<sup>15</sup> J. Lawton Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, original likely published in 1943 (Fort Monroe, VA: Training and Doctrine Command, reprint, 1994), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 305.

<sup>17</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier's Story*, 228.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Army, *Mission Accomplished: The Story of the Campaigns of the VII Corps, United States Army in the War Against Germany, 1944-1945* (Leipzig, GE: J.J. Weber, 1945), 11.

operations. He focused initially on his designated amphibious assault element, the 4th Infantry Division.<sup>19</sup> While training in England, he also handpicked officers to fill vacancies or replace those who did not measure up to his exacting standards, including his chief of staff, operations officer, and artillery commander.<sup>20</sup> On D-Day, he led the VII Corps seize a lodgment including UTAH Beach on the east coast of the Cotentin Peninsula between Varreville and the Douve River.<sup>21</sup> With aggressive personal leadership, he led the VII Corps to achieve numerous successes including, seizing Cherbourg, leading the First Army breakout during Operation COBRA, and defeating the German spearhead during the Battle of the Bulge. By the end of the Second World War, he had commanded the VII Corps in combat for eleven straight months. His combat performance led to high-level staff positions eventually including Chief of Staff of the United States Army.

Collins' judgment and decision-making ability, was initially developed through experience in performing key postings during the interwar period, but were honed to a fine point while commanding soldiers in combat during the Second World War. Upon graduation from West Point, he commanded from the company to battalion-level in the United States and as part of American Forces Germany. Then following twelve years as either a student or instructor, he returned to troops during a three-year assignment to the Philippine Department. While assigned as a brigade executive officer and operations officer for the Philippine Department, he applied his theoretical knowledge to create defense plans for war with Japan and to plan and conduct training. His next assignment with troops was as the Chief of Staff of the VII Corps, where he was integral to the planning and execution of large-scale maneuvers. The real proof of his judgment and decision-making ability, however, became evident by the decisions he made while leading at the division and corps-level in combat during the Second World War. This monograph will explore his decision-making ability in more detail in a subsequent section, first however, it will address command style as an overall framework for understanding what made him successful.

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffers, *Taking Command: General J. Lawton Collins from Guadalcanal to Utah Beach and Victory in Europe*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 184-185.

<sup>21</sup> Carlo D' Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983), 111, 113. See also Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981); Gordon Harrison, *Cross Channel Attack* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1951); Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1961); and Omar N. Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier's Story*.

Clearly, there are different command styles. The doctrinal lens through which J. Lawton Collins viewed command and leadership was the *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923 (FSR 1923)*. This document provided the doctrinal framework while he attended the CGSC, and this aspect of doctrine did not change in subsequent editions published prior to the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> In sum, the doctrine of his day specified that, “Command and leadership are inseparable.”<sup>23</sup> The *FSR 1923* outlined the Army’s expectations of a commander, specifying that, a commander must maintain close personal contact with his subordinate units in order for him to understand the condition of his soldiers, the environment, his soldiers’ needs, views, and accomplishments. Further, that only by leading in this personal way, can the commander reward accomplishments, provide assistance and ensure that the requisite effort is applied to mission accomplishment.<sup>24</sup> Today’s current doctrinal definition is not much different, “Commanders lead by example and personal presence. Leadership is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization. Leadership inspires soldiers to accomplish things that they otherwise might not. Where the commander locates within the area of operations is an important consideration for effective C2.”<sup>25</sup> Despite the doctrinal prescription for personal, forward leadership,

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<sup>22</sup> Peter J. Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 48.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923* (Washington, DC: U.S. Infantry Association, 1924), 4.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923*, 4. Following are doctrinal command definitions from Collins’ era:

“Command is the authority which an individual in the military service lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment.”

“Command and leadership are inseparable. The qualities of leadership are inseparable to a commander. Whether the command be large or small, and whether the exercise of the functions of the command be complex or simple, the commander must be the controlling head, his must be the master mind, and from him must flow the energy and impulse which are to animate all under him.”

“ In the practice of his task, the commander must keep in close touch with all subordinate units by means of personal visits and observation; it is essential that he know from personal contact the mental, moral, and physical state of his troops, the conditions with which they are confronted, their accomplishments, their desires, their needs, and their views, and that he promptly extend recognition for services well done, extend help where help is needed and give encouragement in adversity, but never hesitate to exact whatever effort is necessary to attain the desired end. Considerate and devoted to those whom he commands, he should be faithful and loyal to those who command him.”

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Manual 5-0, The Operations Process*, (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2010), 1-11. Further the definition of C2 or Command and control is defined as: “Command and control is the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of a mission. Commanders perform command and control functions through a command and control system. (FM 6-0). Throughout the conduct of full spectrum operations, commanders exercise C2 to integrate the other warfighting functions (intelligence,

command styles during the Second World War varied. Some commanders were aggressive and led from a forward position, and as a result visualized and understood the fight and made correct decisions. By contrast, other commanders led from their command posts, and trusted others to provide information to enable them to visualize and understand the situation. Thus, those commanders who led from their command posts, made or failed to make decisions, based not on personal observation but on second hand information.<sup>26</sup> Collins achieved many significant successes during his extraordinary career, most notably serving as the Chief of Staff of the United States Army.<sup>27</sup> Which leads one to ask, what was J. Lawton Collins' command style?

Over the course of his career, Collins developed an effective command style, which he continued to refine. He gained competence through intensive preparation as a student and instructor during the interwar period. What set him apart from his peers was his ability to apply his knowledge while performing a host of active assignment. His drive and personal style of forward leadership enabled him to cut to the heart of any problem, tactical or otherwise. Through his varied experience, he developed and matured his judgment and decision making ability. In the end, it was obvious that his command style was characterized by technical and tactical competence, the practical ability to lead from the front, and sound judgment.

## Technical and Tactical Competence

The instructors chose easy tests for the non-artillery "visiting firemen" like me, but gunnery tradition was said to require that no student, however experienced, would get through the course without at least one failure. Apparently no one had paid much attention to my record until after my last test, when it was discovered, to the horror of the artillerymen, that I had not had a single failure.<sup>28</sup>

Joseph Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*

Collins' hundred percent score on all of the gunnery tests at the field artillery company-level course was typical of his performance as a student while attending different Army schools. When he received orders in August of 1921 to report to the United States Military Academy at

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movement and maneuver, fires, protection, and sustainment) to synchronize the activities of forces in time, space, and purpose." 1-3.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Blumenson and James L. Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1975), 368-372. See chapter V, Some Related Problems, Relieved of Command for discussion of the dynamics of command interaction and styles.

<sup>27</sup> Gary Wade, ed., *Combat Studies Report Number 5: Conversations with General J. Lawton Collins* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff College, 1991), Introduction.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 46.

West Point, New York, he would be a student or instructor until the beginning of the Second World War, interrupted only by a three-year tour in the Philippines. As historian Robert Berlin has argued in his analysis of the background and development of all U.S. Army corps commanders in the Second World War, Collins' career path was representative. The interwar period provided military officers the time to study and teach, and the robust Army school system prepared most of them for high-level command. An illustration of this fact is that twenty-five out of the thirty-four corps commanders in the Second World War spent over ten years in the classroom, either as students or as instructors.<sup>29</sup>

The important role of the interwar school system was not a coincidence. As historian Peter Schifferle has argued extensively in *America's School for War*, it was caused by the profound change the First World War had on the U.S. Army. Upon evaluation of their experiences, leaders in the United States Army realized that the Great War had caught them "grossly unprepared."<sup>30</sup> After the war, the army's leadership, General Pershing in particular, realized the need for professionalism, a General Staff, and, above all, education. Therefore, "all other priorities, including unit readiness and equipment procurement, were secondary to the maintenance of the officer corps,"<sup>31</sup> even with the tight budget constraints in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although all of his experiences in this robust Army's school system were important for Collins' performance as a successful corps commander, three of his assignments in particular were most crucial: first, as a student of the company-level infantry and artillery courses. Second, as a weapons and tactics instructor at the Infantry School in Fort Benning, Georgia, and third, as a student at the CGSC. After a four-year long assignment as a chemistry instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, which he did not consider professionally rewarding, Collins was assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia in 1925. Subsequently, he was a student of the company-level branch courses of the infantry and artillery, and a weapons and tactics instructor at the Infantry School.

While a student at the Infantry School, he developed necessary technical expertise at the battalion level and below. Earlier in his career, following the conclusion of the First World War, he already had performed company and battalion-level commands, without the benefit of

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<sup>29</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders A Composite Biography*, 3-12.

<sup>30</sup> Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 9. For a discussion on the lack of preparation, see: John Patrick Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974)

<sup>31</sup> Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 21.

having attended a branch school. The company-level course at the Infantry School filled his theoretical technical and tactical knowledge gaps. The course program of instruction placed great emphasis on marksmanship and weapons training, and students were required to qualify expert on all organic individual infantry weapons systems.<sup>32</sup> Though not all students were able to attain this high standard, he qualified expert on all of the weapon systems. In fact, his marksmanship was so good that his future boss, then Major Courtney Hodges, attempted to recruit him for his national-level marksmanship team. Collins demurred, however, as he was more interested in the tactics and organization of Army units.

Collins' weapon skills were another example of his technical competence. During the time he attended the infantry course, students actually took machine guns home with them so that they could practice mounting them for employment. He recounted that he could set up a gun in just ten seconds. Later as the Chief of Staff of the Army, he observed an infantry division conducting machine gun drills in preparation for the Korean War. He became so frustrated with the soldiers' lack of ability to perform the drill that he personally demonstrated how to perform the weapons drill to the non-commissioned officer in charge.<sup>33</sup>

His performance as a student at the infantry course earned him an offer to remain as an instructor at the Infantry School. He accepted the offer and elected to attend the company-level officer course at the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.<sup>34</sup> This artillery course provided a technical foundation of field artillery knowledge, which enabled him to become an expert in the tactical employment of artillery as well. He excelled in the artillery course as well, passing all of the gunnery exams, and proved that he was a technical expert in the employment of artillery. More importantly, he used his field artillery knowledge to develop techniques and tactics to integrate artillery with his maneuver elements on the battlefield. Years later, Collins observed that the Field Artillery School usually positioned observers on hills and did not address where the observers were in relation to the supported maneuver unit. Later in his career, Collins learned through experimentation while training the 25th Division and during his early combat experience, that infantry units fighting on rugged terrain required artillery observers forward with the unit. By positioning forward, observers not only knew the location of the supported unit, but also were able to bring fires well within minimum safe distances of front line troops.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> J. Lawton Collins, "Elements of Command," from *J. Lawton Collins Papers* (Abilene, KS: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, 30 August 1971), 11, 13. This is a speech given by General Collins, on August 30, 1971 at the Command and General Staff College.

<sup>34</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 46, 137-138.

Another example of Collins' field artillery proficiency was the employment of the so-called "time on target" technique. He was among the first to employ this technique during the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> On Guadalcanal, the 25th Division fired their first time on target mission at a location called the watering hole, catching the Japanese forces by surprise with multiple rounds landing at the same time.<sup>37</sup> Finally, during Operation COBRA in 1944, he directed the massing of twenty-one Field Artillery battalions at known German strong points to supplement the massive bombing preparation for the penetration.<sup>38</sup> This combination of bombing and artillery fire in a concentrated area achieved the desired effect of disrupting German command and control, which facilitated the breakthrough achieved two days later.

In sum, Collins gained a high level of technical field artillery knowledge, which enabled him to develop and implement effective and innovative fire support plans. Later in his career, he proved his expertise in employing field artillery and air in support of combined arms offensive operations by his success in combat during the Guadalcanal Campaign and the Allies Campaign in northwest Europe. Further, reflecting on his career in 1991, he believed that an infantry officer should develop expertise outside his branch especially with respect to field artillery and tactical air, "The infantry is no good without good artillery and without good air. Just can't get anywhere."<sup>39</sup>

Also important, is that soon after Collins arrived at Fort Benning, Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall took over as the Deputy Commandant of the Infantry School. Because of this, he later became a member of what Marshall's biographer Forrest C. Pogue called "Marshall's Men." The future Chief of Staff of the Army taught him how to think, rather than what to think. Marshall viewed tactical problems as unique, and as such, each requiring thorough analysis and development of solutions tailored specifically to the problem under consideration. He encouraged innovative and adaptive ideas, rather than strict adherence to school solutions.<sup>40</sup> Under Marshall's mentorship, he developed the ability to analyze complex problems and write brief one to two page written recommendations for solutions.<sup>41</sup> Further, Marshall taught him to "cut to the heart of the situation, recognize its decisive elements and

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<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Perret, *There is a War to be Won: The United States Army in World War Two* (New York: Ivy Books, 1997), 234. See also Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 264.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 264.

<sup>38</sup> Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, 101.

<sup>39</sup> Wade, *Combat Studies Report Number 5: Conversations with General J. Lawton Collins*, 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939. Vol. I*, 256 and 269.

<sup>41</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 96.

base his course of action on these.”<sup>42</sup> Also important, he was a key contributor to the transformation of infantry tactics, techniques, and organization that Marshall was to begin leading as the Deputy Commandant of the Infantry School.<sup>43</sup>

As an instructor at the Infantry School, Collins developed the theoretical knowledge required to solve tactical problems. He spent the first two years at the Infantry School as an instructor in the weapons section. During this period, Marshall was transforming teaching methods and course material at the Infantry School.<sup>44</sup> Marshall, from his experiences during the First World War and following, understood that the nature of warfare had changed with the significant advances in technology. The emergence of aircraft, tanks, machine guns, communications, and the overall mechanization of military forces all pointed to a more mobile type of warfare. Marshall also emphasized the development of original and creative solutions to tactical problems. Therefore, he expanded the charter of the Infantry School to include innovating, experimenting, and writing doctrine.<sup>45</sup>

An example of the doctrine Marshall developed while at the Infantry School is *Infantry in Battle*, which argued, “the art of war has no traffic with rules, for the infinitely varied circumstances and conditions of combat never produce the same situation twice.”<sup>46</sup> Marshall stressed that tactical problems were never the same, therefore they could not be solved by wrote school solutions. Further, that the leader must personally assess variables such as the mission, terrain, weather, disposition, and numerous other factors, in order to develop a solution particular to the problem.

These passages reflect Marshall’s emphasis on flexible and adaptive solutions to tactical problems. The scope of what Marshall accomplished while at the Infantry School, however, would extend far beyond experimentation and the development of field manuals. The true result was the creation of the, “Spirit of Benning” under the officers who studied under and instructed for Marshall. In fact, it was the virtual creation of the American Second World War military character and high command. Simplicity, innovativeness, and mobility would be the

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<sup>42</sup> C.T. Lanham, *Infantry in Battle* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 1.

<sup>43</sup> J. Lawton Collins, “A New Infantry Drill,” *Infantry Journal*, Volume XXXVIII, July-August 1931 (Harrisburg, PA: US Government Printing Office), 323. See also Pogue, *General George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939, Vol. 1*, 268.

<sup>44</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939. Vol. 1*, 253, 256, 268.

<sup>46</sup> Lanham, *Infantry in Battle*, 1.



hallmarks of the U.S. Army from 1941-45, and the leadership of the army would consist overwhelmingly of “Marshall’s men” from Fort Benning.”<sup>47</sup>

Further, Collins also learned how to perform staff work to Marshall’s exacting standards, which enabled him to contribute to Marshall’s initiatives. Following his initial instructor time in the weapons section, he transitioned to instruction within the tactics section. This transition and his performance undoubtedly moved him closer to Marshall’s inner circle of trusted officers. Marshall would have him conduct analysis on various topics and present written and or oral reports. As an example of this, Marshall directed him to study and develop a new “combat field drill” to replace the Army’s antiquated “close order drill.”<sup>48</sup> Advancements in technology, particularly the increased firepower of the machine gun and modern artillery, had rendered the close order drill of the time obsolete.<sup>49</sup> Using French regulations of the time as a basis for modification, he drafted a new combat field drill. The Infantry School board approved his version of the drill and Marshall submitted it to the Chief of Infantry.<sup>50</sup> The Chief of Infantry disapproved the new infantry drill; however, Marshall soon after becoming the Deputy Chief of Staff, had them adopted as the Army standard.<sup>51</sup> Thus, his staff work contributed to Marshall’s doctrinal transformation.

Collins’ relationship with Marshall was important, not only because of what he learned from him, but because it provided him with opportunities later in his career. He became close enough to Marshall to become one of “Marshall’s men.” Not only was he one of Marshall’s men though, but probably one of his best and brightest. His evaluation of Collins was revealing. Marshall wrote, he “has a bright mind and a natural aptitude for logical and constructive thinking. A superior type.”<sup>52</sup>

Collins and Marshall remained in contact later, and exchanged letters. He worked for Marshall again following his posting as an instructor at the War College. Marshall had him detailed to his Secretariat of the General Staff in the spring of 1940, when he suspended the

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<sup>47</sup> Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman of the American Century*, 56. The author continues, *In all, 200 future generals passed through the school during his years there, 150 as students and 50 as instructors.*

<sup>48</sup> Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939. Vol. I*, 256, 268. See also Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 95.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 54.

<sup>50</sup> Collins, “A New Infantry Drill,” 322-326.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Efficiency report for September 18, 1925 to June 30, 1926, Collins’ file, National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). As quoted in Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 53.

War College in preparation for Army participation in Second World War.<sup>53</sup> Years later, Marshall, while Chief of Staff of the Army, would recommend him as a corps commander for the European Theater of War.<sup>54</sup> In the words of Marshall's biographer, "when in 1940 and 1941 the Chief of Staff looked for division and corps commanders, he knew intimately scores of officers who had worked with him at Benning and who valued the same essentials of battle leadership."<sup>55</sup> Besides him, this group of men also included Bradley, Ridgway, Van Fleet, Huebner, Eddy and Cook.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, his relationship with Marshall was crucial for him to become the youngest American corps commander in the Second World War.<sup>57</sup>

Collins' next important interwar assignment was his student time at the CGSS in 1931. He further expanded his competence and learned the tactics, doctrine and staff procedures required for leading operations at the division and corps-level. In his own words, "It was at Leavenworth that Eisenhower and Bradley and most of our senior commanders in that war, few of whom had ever commanded a combat unit larger than a battalion, learned the techniques of large units." For this reason, he described the instruction as the most important within the United States Army Education System.<sup>58</sup>

Collins, along with his peers, learned and practiced the doctrine developed by the United States Army following the conclusion of the First World War. The doctrine focused on the role of the commander, offensive combined arms warfare, and large unit sustainment. The development of understanding of these three subjects, during his time at Leavenworth, would significantly affect the characterization of his command style. <sup>59</sup>

During the interwar period, CGSS was the next level on the professional military education system of the U.S. Army after the company-level branch courses Collins had just

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<sup>53</sup> Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Education of a General 1880-1939 Vol. I*, 285. See also Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 98, 117. Marshall released Collins to serve as the Chief of Staff of the 7th Corps which gave Collins the opportunity to get the experience he needed as a Chief of Staff at the corps-level. This assignment positioned him to serve as the Chief of Staff of the Hawaiian Department and eventual command of the 25th Infantry Division. See also Jeffers, *Taking Command: General J. Lawton Collins from Guadalcanal to Utah Beach and Victory in Europe*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Education of a General 1880-1939 Vol. I*, 269.

<sup>56</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 9

<sup>57</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 56-7.

<sup>59</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 56-7. See also Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 50. For the doctrine Collins was taught, see U.S. Army, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923*, all.

completed.<sup>60</sup> In the 1930s, its mission was to train middle-grade officers for their next assignments at the division and corps levels.<sup>61</sup> During his time CGSC, the course in Leavenworth was two years long. This provided time for a thorough review of the basics of combined arms operations at the level of the independent brigade.<sup>62</sup>

Collins characterized his first year of instruction at Leavenworth as “stereotyped,” with “rigid adherence to approved solutions.” The context of his career might be an explanation for the evaluation. He had just spent four years working in the innovative and adaptive environment that Marshall fostered at the Infantry school, and had to get used to being a student. Regardless, he learned how to plan and conduct division and corps-level combined arms operations, including infantry, artillery, armor, engineers, and aircraft while solving map problems. In contrast with his experiences in the first year, he personally found this second year of instruction at Leavenworth exceedingly rewarding, as he learned a great deal about the sustainment of large units. He even noted that the instruction was “first rate.”<sup>63</sup>

The fundamental doctrinal base of Leavenworth’s instruction was the FSR 1923, which laid out the fundamentals of command, and combat at division level and above. From 1923 through 1944, these fundamentals did not change significantly. The critical elements of modern war, the need for effective command and control, reliance on firepower, and the requirement for offensive operations utilizing combined arms to generate either envelopment or a penetration remained consistent beginning with the FSR 1923 through the 1944 FM 100-5.<sup>64</sup>

This doctrine was important to Collins for several reasons. First, he learned that “decisive battle was only possible in open warfare, or the war of movement.” Further, to create the conditions for open warfare, detailed planning was required for the execution of combined arms assaults in order to penetrate a stabilized defensive front. This was significant because the United States Army learned the correct lessons late in the First World War, breaking the

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<sup>60</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 277, 15-17. For a more extensive discussion on the curriculum, see Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 36-86.

<sup>62</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 56-7.

<sup>64</sup> Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 48.

paradigm of static warfare dominated by the defense, commonly associated with the First World War.<sup>65</sup>

Further, the FSR 1923 outlined the role of a commander, and more specifically the commander's responsibilities.<sup>66</sup> This theoretical doctrinal framework is exactly what Collins used to be successful at the division and corps-level. The command style that he demonstrated as a corps commander was very consistent with the doctrinal characterization of a commander. As Schifferle argues, the FSR 1923 "required commanders to command, to lead through personal visits to subordinate commanders and units, to demonstrate professional competence, and to ensure that staff worked in his support, not as a council of war."<sup>67</sup> This description resembles his leadership style as a division and corps commander in the Second World War. He led from the front regardless of how dangerous it was.<sup>68</sup> His practical ability to position himself on the battlefield where he needed to be to make correct and timely decisions was grounded in the governing doctrine, which he learned at the CGSS. Further, as a corps commander, he would demonstrate the ability to plan and conduct offensive, combined arms, mobile warfare, as doctrinally prescribed in the FSR 1923. For example, his leadership of the VII Corps from the cross-channel attack to the defeat to Nazi Germany demonstrated not only an understanding of United States Army offensive combined arms doctrine, but also the practical ability to conduct operations in accordance with that doctrinal framework.<sup>69</sup>

During the interwar period, CGSC leadership chose instructors from among "the highest-rated graduates of the school." Based on Collins' performance as a student, The CGSS Commandant selected him to remain as an instructor.<sup>70</sup> He respectfully declined the Commandants' offer, as he had spent the last twelve years as either an instructor or student. Instead, he became a staff officer in the Philippines for the next three years.

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<sup>65</sup> Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 56-7.

<sup>66</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 17; U.S. Army, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923*, 4; Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 50.

<sup>67</sup> Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Wade, *Combat Studies Report 5: Conversations with General J. Lawton Collins*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Blumenson, *Masters of the Art of Command*, 372.

<sup>70</sup> Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 57, 91. An indicator of the quality of CGSS instructors during the interwar period is the fact nearly ten percent of instructors yearly would eventually become corps commanders.

Following attendance of the Army Industrial College, Collins demurred staying on as an instructor, and moved on to attend the Army War College. Again, his school record was excellent. In his evaluation, the commandant characterized him as “broadminded; original independent thinker, with active imagination.”<sup>71</sup> Following this solid performance as a student, he elected to stay on as an instructor at the War College for two years. He thoroughly enjoyed that mature and open atmosphere there where he served within the War Plans Division.<sup>72</sup> While a faculty member, his typical lessons focused on the concentration and offensive operations of field armies and army groups.<sup>73</sup>

The timing of this assignment was important, because it once again positioned him to work for General George C. Marshall—who by this time was the Chief of Staff of the United States Army. As the United States prepared for the Second World War, Marshall suspended the War College in June of 1940. As a result, Collins became a member of the Secretariat of the General Staff for General Marshall. There, he joined Omar Bradley, Stanley Mickelson, Walter Bedell Smith, and Maxwell Taylor in assisting General Marshall in his fight to garner support for rapidly expanding the Army and shaping strategy for United States’ participation in the Second World War.<sup>74</sup>

Collins, through his theoretical preparation as a student and instructor during the interwar years, developed technical and tactical competence. The critical postings were his student time at the company-level infantry and artillery branch courses, as an instructor at the Infantry School, and as a student at the CGSS. Not only did he gain specific technical knowledge of infantry and artillery weapons systems, but he also learned a methodology for solving tactical problems. He also learned how to perform staff work to Marshall’s exacting standards, which prepared him to excel as a student at the CGSS. Equally important, he became one of “Marshall’s men” as an instructor at the Infantry School, initiating a long trusted relationship with the future Chief of Staff of the Army. While a student at the CGSS, he learned the doctrinal framework necessary to lead at the division and corps levels. The most important aspects of which were, the role of a commander with respect to leading and decision-making, the doctrine of offensive combined arms mobile warfare, and the sustainment of division and corps level units. His theoretical preparation while a student and instructor during the interwar years

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<sup>71</sup> Efficiency report for August 16, 1937 to June 30, 1938, Collins file, NPRC. As quoted in Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 91.

<sup>73</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 54.

<sup>74</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 95. See also Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Solider-Statesman of the American Century*, 50.

provided the basis for practical application in key assignments leading up to and during the Second World War. This monograph will discuss his experiences leading in combat in the next subsection.

## Leading From the Front

He earned the nickname “Lightning Joe” while commanding the 25th Infantry Division. At the time, he signed his name J. Lawton Collins with the division nickname “Tropic Lightening.” One of his soldiers, upon seeing the General on Guadalcanal exclaimed, “By God, there is J. Lightning himself,” resulting in his nickname becoming “Lightning Joe.”<sup>75</sup> This nickname was appropriate and succinctly described his style of leadership. He led from the front and possessed the uncanny ability to position himself at the critical point on the battlefield. As described by eminent historian, Russell Weigley, ““Lightning Joe” Collins’ style of corps command was one of highly personal leadership, the corps chieftain close to the front, hastening by scout car from one division, regiment, or battalion to another to solve problems directly and to urge everybody forward.”<sup>76</sup>

There are many different command styles. Some command styles are aggressive, where leading from a forward position allows a leader to visualize and understand the fight, and make decisions that are more effective. In order to command in this way a leader must empower a trusted subordinate with the management of the tactical operations center and even make decisions in his or her absence. By contrast, other commanders lead from their command posts, trusting others to provide information from the front lines, so that they visualize and understand the situation. Another aspect of command style is how the commander motivates subordinates. Some commanders are authoritarian in manner, using fear of reprisal and or intimidation to motivate subordinates. The opposite approach is motivating subordinates through referent power, or causing subordinates to want to perform well out of respect for their leader. Yet another aspect of command style is how the commander deals with and treats people, particularly those whom he leads. Some commanders are strictly professional and communicate only what is necessary to accomplish the mission, whereas, others by virtue of their priorities and personality are personal and know those they lead.<sup>77</sup> Collins characterized

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<sup>75</sup> Jeffers, *Taking Command: General J. Lawton Collins from Guadalcanal to Utah Beach and Victory in Europe*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, 99.

<sup>77</sup> Blumenson, *Masters of the Art of Command*, 368-372. See chapter V, Some Related Problems, Relieved of Command for discussion of the dynamics of command interaction and styles.

leadership as the “essence of command,” stating that, “Without good leadership you simply cannot have a command or exercise command.”<sup>78</sup>

These interpretations differ little from current United States Army doctrine, which provides a model that defines what properties comprise a good leader.<sup>79</sup> By the current definition, there are three leadership properties, character, knowledge, and application, and without a balance of all three properties, a leader will be ineffective.<sup>80</sup> General Eisenhower described Collins as “a master of tactics...a dynamic leader...he is at one and the same time a real leader and driver.”<sup>81</sup> General Eisenhower recognized that he possessed the properties of a leader. His command style was effective. A panel of historians substantiated this fact by voting him the best corps commander of the Second World War. He then served as the Chief of Staff of the Army.<sup>82</sup>

As General Bradley assessed, Collins’ ability to position himself at the critical point on the battlefield was central to his success throughout, and enabled him to accurately assess the situation and rapidly make effective decisions.<sup>83</sup> He first showed his ability to lead from the front while commanding the 25th Infantry Division during the Guadalcanal Campaign in January of 1943. Later he continued to demonstrate this ability as the VII Corps Commander in the European Theater of War in 1944 and 1945.

The first example of Collins leading at the point of attack took place during the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment’s heroic attack to seize Sims’ Ridge on January 13, 1943. The 25th Infantry Division attack began on January 10, 1943. The 27th Infantry attacked to seize the

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<sup>78</sup> J. Lawton Collins, J. Lawton Collins Papers. “Elements of Command.” Speech presented by J. Lawton Collins, 30 August, 1971 (Abilene, KS, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, 1971), 1,2.

<sup>79</sup> United States, *Field Manual 600-22, Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), 2-3. The Army Leadership Requirements Model: “Just as the diamond requires three properties for its function—carbon, heat, and pressure—successful leaders require the interaction of three properties—character, knowledge and application. Like carbon to the diamond, character is the basic quality of the leader... But as carbon alone does not create a diamond, neither can character alone create a leader. The diamond needs heat. Man needs knowledge, study and preparation.... The third property, pressure—acting in conjunction with carbon and heat—forms the diamond. Similarly, one’s character attended by knowledge, blooms through application to produce a leader.”General Eduard C. Meyer, Chief of Staff, Army (1979-1983).

<sup>80</sup> United States, *Field Manual 600-22, Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile*, 2-3.

<sup>81</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Papers: Pre-Presidential, 1916-52, Principle File, Box No. 133*, (Abilene, KS Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, 1945), 1,2.

<sup>82</sup> Wade, *Conversations with a General: J. Lawton Collins*, Introduction.

<sup>83</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier’s Story*, 228.

mass of high ground collectively named the Galloping Horse.<sup>84</sup> The attack progressed well for the first few days. However, the last portion of the Galloping Horse consisting of a ridgeline, known as Sims' Ridge, and Hill 53 posed a challenge for the 27th Infantry. He positioned himself forward on Hill 52 with Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell, the 2nd Battalion Commander. He assisted by repeatedly adjusting mortar fire to a wooded area to the southwest of Sims' Ridge to suppress enemy fire originating from that area.<sup>85</sup> His presence and leadership at Mitchell's command post was critical to the 2nd Battalion's seizure of Sims' Ridge and Hill 53 for two reasons. First, he helped by directing mortar fire to suppress enemy to the 2nd Battalion's flank. Second, his presence freed Mitchell and his Battalion Executive Officer, Captain Davis, to lead two elements in an effort to fix and envelop the enemy strong point.<sup>86</sup> His personal presence and assistance helped to ensure the 27th Infantry's success.

A second example of Collins forward leadership occurred during the 25th Infantry Division's attack toward Kokumbona on January 22, 1943. The 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry attacked quickly and seized all initial objectives by 1035.<sup>87</sup> Observing the rapid advance of the 27th Infantry, he left the division command post on Hill 49 and moved forward to gain permission to continue the attack and issue orders for exploitation.<sup>88</sup> The 27th Infantry advanced so rapidly that they had out run their communications wire. He traveled by jeep then by foot to Hill 89, on route, he met Brigadier General Robert Spragins, the XIV Corps Chief of Staff. He received permission to continue the 25th Division attack toward Kokumbona. In order for the 25th Division to continue their attack they required a boundary change so that they could advance north through the adjacent unit's zone to their right. General Spragins immediately changed the boundary to facilitate the 25th Division's continued pursuit of the enemy toward Kokumbona. Following his coordination with Spragins, he moved forward and met the 27th Infantry Commander, Colonel McCulloch, on Hill 89.<sup>89</sup> By the time he arrived at Hill 89, the 1st Battalion was digging in on Hills 88 and 89. He conferred with McCulloch and then instructed him to continue his attack to seize secondary objectives located immediately southeast of Kokumbona. The 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry pivoted and attacked to the north seizing 25th Division secondary objectives southeast of Kokumbona by 1700. His positioning enabled him assess the situation and make a quick decision to continue the attack, and maintain the initiative, rather than halting at initial objectives. Lieutenant Colonel Journey, the 1st

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<sup>84</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 261.

<sup>85</sup> Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 212.

<sup>87</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 326.

<sup>88</sup> Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, 67.

<sup>89</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 326.



Battalion Commander, had seized the initiative and initial objectives. Following his initial success, his battalion dug in as per the original plan. His ability to position himself at the critical point on the battlefield and make effective and timely decisions resulted in the 25th Division's seizure of Kokumbona the following day.<sup>90</sup>

By positioning himself near the fighting on Guadalcanal, Collins accurately assessed the situation. He knew how to assist his subordinate units, make decisions, and implement orders. He knew that his subordinate commanders focused on the fight to their front and that he could lend assistance by employing indirect fire assets. His position at the front, and knowledge of the corps commander's intent, allowed for rapid modification of existing plans, and exploitation of success. Had he not been positioned forward to observe the situation, his subordinate unit leaders would have stopped once they reached their planned objectives.<sup>91</sup> His success as a division commander in combat earned him the opportunity to command the VII Corps during the Normandy campaign of 1944.<sup>92</sup>

Collins, as the VII Corps Commander on June 7, 1944, positioned himself at his forward command post enabling him to employ a reserve element to repel a German counterattack. He transitioned from the Bayfield to his forward command post near the village of Audouville-la-Hubert. The 82nd Airborne Division cleared the area behind the beachhead and seized Ste. Mere-Eglise to prevent German counterattacks on the western flank of the beachhead.<sup>93</sup> When he arrived at the 4th Infantry Division Headquarters, which was located adjacent to his forward command post, an officer from the 82nd Airborne Division met him. The officer requested tank support to counter a suspected attack by German armored forces. Collins decided to release the armored task force from the 746th Tank Battalion, an uncommitted reserve element under the control of the 4th Infantry Division. His decision resulted in the armored task force defeating the German counterattack, destroying two anti-tank guns, and causing panic among the counterattacking Germans. The action was critical to the 82nd Airborne Division, as Ste. Mere-Eglise was the center of its lodgment, and its holdings elsewhere were scattered.<sup>94</sup>

He timed his command and control transition from the operations center on the Bayfield to a forward tactical command post near the village of Audouville-la-Hubert well. His position on the Bayfield during the D-Day assault enabled him to understand the VII Corps situation, and the overall First Army situation during the attack to seize the lodgment. It also put

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<sup>90</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 327.

<sup>91</sup> Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier's Story*, 228.

<sup>93</sup> Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 289.

<sup>94</sup> Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 344.

him in a position that allowed him to preclude Rear Admiral Moon from halting the continued landing of forces on the afternoon of D-Day.<sup>95</sup> Rear Admiral Moon, panicked following the loss of several watercrafts to mines during the afternoon of D-Day, and wanted to cease landing follow on forces onto Utah Beach. Further, Collins correctly judged at the conclusion of D-Day that he needed to establish a tactical command post forward with the 4th Division. He understood the need to expand the VII Corps' lodgment, in order to facilitate the capture of Cherbourg. He also knew that he must be on the ground with his forward units in order to ensure that he could correctly assess the situation. Collins' decision to release the armored Task Force from the 746th Tank Battalion is another example of his being at the critical point on the battlefield, correctly assessing the situation, and making a correct and timely decision.

A second example of Collins' forward leadership as a corps commander occurred from June 15 to 18 when he pushed VII Corps' lead elements to cut off and isolate the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. Following initial attacks to expand the VII Corps lodgment to the west, He began his drive west with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 9th Infantry Division attacking abreast. The 325th Glider Infantry of the 82nd Airborne Division closed to within 1,000 meters of St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte late on June 15. Though the 325th was well ahead of the 9th Infantry Division advance to the north, He ordered them to cross the Douve and proceed to St. Sauveur. On June 16, he ordered the 82nd and the 9th Division to attack with the 82nd in the lead, with the 9th protecting the right rear flank of the 82nd. He countermanded this order on the 17th however, assessing that the enemy was not capable of preventing the VII Corps drive to the west. He pushed General Manton Eddy, Commander of the 9th Infantry Division, to stay abreast of the 82nd.<sup>96</sup> The 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry attacked cross-country to seize two of three bridges over tributaries of the Douve near Ste. Colombe. Collins, who observed the action, credited Lieutenant Colonel Kauffman, the 2nd Battalion Commander, with "one of the most brilliant actions I know of in the entire war."<sup>97</sup>

Though the third bridge was destroyed and the 2nd Battalion came under heavy fire, Kauffman reinforced his position throughout the night of the 16th enabling the 9th Infantry Division's continued drive to the west the following day. Collins, sensing opportunity, positioned himself close to the 9th Division's lead elements during the night of June 17.<sup>98</sup> The 60th and 47th Infantry continued their attack to the west, and by the evening of the 17th the 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry had seized St. Jacques-de-Nehou. He met the 3rd Battalion Commander in the town, who explained that the Germans had just withdrawn and that he had lost contact

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<sup>95</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 201.

<sup>96</sup> Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 406.

<sup>97</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 212.

<sup>98</sup> Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, 101.

with them. Collins, seeing that the Battalion Commander was asleep on his feet, called General Eddy and told him to meet him at his location.<sup>99</sup> When Eddy arrived, he told him to move fresh units up and continue the attack to the west coast, as the way appeared open. General Eddy promptly complied with his directive and drove the 60th and the 47th west through the night of the 17th. The 47th Infantry reached the road intersection at Barneville-sur-Mere several hours later, effectively cutting off and isolating the Cotentin peninsula on the evening of June 17. His ability to position himself at the critical point on the battlefield enabled him to accurately assess the situation, issue verbal orders, and seize the opportunity to prevent the enemy from establishing a coherent defense or withdraw forces south to preserve combat power. Had he not pushed the VII Corps so hard the German 77th Division could have successfully withdrawn from the Cotentin. In addition, there would likely have been a meeting engagement with the 77th as his units attacked to the west. His rapid cutting of the peninsula both expanded the First Army lodgment and facilitated the rapid seizure of Cherbourg.<sup>100</sup>

The third example of Collins' leadership as a corps commander occurred during the planning and execution of Operation COBRA, where his corps was the First Army's main effort. General Bradley selected him to serve as the main effort for the First Army during Operation COBRA because he was the "most aggressive" field commander in the European Theater.<sup>101</sup> Bradley's purpose for Operation COBRA, as originally conceived, was to breakthrough and breakout to seize the Breton ports to ensure the sustainment of the American Army group he was building to defeat Germany.<sup>102</sup>

Collins and his staff made several significant changes to the First Army plan. First, he asked for and received the 4th Division to add combat power to the breakthrough force, which previously had less than three Infantry divisions. Second, he changed the task organization, making the 1st Infantry Division the corps main effort, strengthening it with the attachment of Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division. The 1st Division's mission was to attack along a more direct route, through Marigny, to Countances. The remainder of the 3rd Division was to seize the southerly exits from Countances to protect the corps main effort 1st Division. Additionally, he strengthened the 2nd Armored Division by attaching the 22nd Regimental Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division. The 2nd Division was to attack to the left of the main effort to protect their flank in two, rather than three columns, focusing on key blocking positions south of St Gilles. He also modified the 2nd Division's final objective to the west, positioning them at Cerences in order to allow the VIII Corps a movement corridor through which to exploit

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<sup>99</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 213.

<sup>100</sup> Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 413.

<sup>101</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier's Story*, 228.

<sup>102</sup> Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, 137.

the breakthrough.<sup>103</sup> As Martin Blumenson notes, his modifications to the First Army plan transformed it from a plan to breakout and envelop German forces around Countances into a plan to encircle Countances, disrupt German defenses west of the Vire River, and set the conditions for continued exploitation.<sup>104</sup>

Operation COBRA, after multiple weather delays and two days of tragic short bombing incidents, finally commenced on July 25, 1944. The attack got off to a slow start and the VII Corps attack continued late in the day. However, the Infantry divisions were able to fight through gaps in the otherwise stubborn German defenses.<sup>105</sup> Collins, sensing that the massive air bombardment and initial attack had significantly disrupted enemy command and control on the opening day of Operation COBRA, decided to commit the 1st Infantry and 2nd Armored divisions with attachments ahead of schedule on July 26. Though the VII Corps had not achieved initial objectives on the 25th, the attack had done more damage than most of his subordinate leaders realized. Observing that the German defense was comprised of isolated pockets of resistance, he determined that the initial attack had broken the main line of defense.<sup>106</sup>

Based on this assessment, he decided on the afternoon of July 25 to commit two of his exploitation forces the following day, so the Germans would not be able to reestablish a coherent defense.<sup>107</sup> The 1st Division, with Combat Command B, attacked toward Marigny, and the 2nd Armored Division toward St. Giles. Though the main effort, the 1st Division made slow progress over the next several days, but their attack facilitated the VIII Corps seizure of Coutances. The 2nd Armored Division progressed toward St. Giles in the afternoon of July 26th, beginning the exploitation phase of Operation COBRA. On July 26, he ordered both elements to continue their attacks through the night. By the afternoon of July 27, the 2nd Division had seized its objectives for Operation COBRA.

Collins planning for Operation COBRA ensured its success. His modifications to the First Army plan ensured the penetration of German Defenses, with the addition of the 4th Infantry

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<sup>103</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Battle Analysis: Course P651, Vol. 3, Part 1* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1987), 132. This volume contains a VII Corps Field Order Number 6 for Operation COBRA, confirmation of verbal orders of the commanding General issued July 16, 1944.

<sup>104</sup> Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 218-219.

<sup>105</sup> Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, 155.

<sup>106</sup> Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, Breakout and Pursuit*, 246.

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Battle Analysis: Course P651, Vol. 3, Part 1*, 15. This volume contains a VII Corps Special Report COBRA, confirmation of verbal orders of the commanding General issued 2230 July 25, 1944.

Division to the initial attack, which enabled him to launch his exploitation forces. His modifications to the task organization of both exploitation forces resulted in combined armor and motorized infantry task forces that gave them the firepower, mobility, and infantry necessary to achieve the breakthrough and exploitation of German defenses. His leadership during the execution of Operation COBRA helped the VII Corps achieve success. His decisions ensured successful penetration of the German defenses in his zone.<sup>108</sup> His understanding of the enemy situation on the afternoon of July 25 enabled him to make effective decisions. He determined that the Germans' failure to launch counterattacks was an indicator of the severe disruption the attack inflicted on enemy command and control. Finally, his decision to continue the attack through the night of July 26 ensured the VII Corps' success in Operation COBRA.<sup>109</sup>

The previous examples display General J. Lawton Collins' ability position himself forward at the critical point on the battlefield resulting in his making correct decisions. His experiences at the Infantry School, and the CGSS, provided the theoretical basis for his leadership style. Further, his experience performing key positions during the interwar years contributed the development of sound judgment. He first displayed his preparation and practical ability in combat in the Pacific, with the 25th Infantry Division during operations on Guadalcanal. Because of his success as a division commander, Eisenhower selected him to serve as the VII Corps Commander during the Allies' Campaign in Europe. His initial success as a corps commander, most notably in isolating the Cotentin peninsula, and as the First Army main effort for Operation COBRA, resulted in his supervisors routinely selecting him to serve as the First Army main effort.<sup>110</sup> From observing his forward style of leadership, one can see that his practical ability to position himself at the right place to make decisions and lend assistance to subordinate units, was an integral part of his command style. Further, that this ability enabled him to influence operations in a positive manner at both the division and corps-level.

## Sound Judgment

One of the most outstanding field commanders in Europe, Collins was without a doubt also the most aggressive. With a hand-picked staff to help him he seasoned an unerring tactical judgment with just enough bravado to make every advance a triumph. To this energy he added boundless self-confidence. Such self-assurance is tolerable only when right, and Collins, happily, almost always was.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations. Breakout and Pursuit*, 246.

<sup>109</sup> Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations. Breakout and Pursuit*, 329.

<sup>110</sup> Blumenson, *Masters of the Art of Command*, 372.

<sup>111</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: Soldier's Story*, 228.

Collins, established the foundation for developing sound judgment through preparation as a student and instructor, however, it was his experience before and during the Second World War that enabled him to develop sound judgment. In the words of General Bradley, "Judgment comes from experience and experience comes from making bad judgments."<sup>112</sup> Even as a cadet at West Point, he possessed a gift for focus, concentration and decision-making, "The 1917 Howitzer observed that typical of the cadet life of J. Lawton Collins was 'first concentration and decision, second, rapid and hearty action.'"<sup>113</sup> What enabled him to establish both a foundation of technical and tactical knowledge and the thought process to analyze and assess situations and solve problems, was what he learned at the Infantry School. Marshall taught him how to think, rather than what to think. Essentially, to analyze and clearly define each problem, discern the important variables and make a decision based on the specific problem under consideration.<sup>114</sup>

He continued his preparation, expanding his knowledge of staff procedures, doctrine and tactics at the division and corps-level, and improved his problem solving ability at the CGSS.<sup>115</sup> From 1931 to 1933, when he was a student at Leavenworth, these subjects were the core of the program of instruction. These academic experiences were the foundation, upon which he developed sound judgment and decision-making ability. With sufficient theoretical preparation behind him, he gained experience in key positions, most notably as a corps chief of staff during multiple large-scale Army maneuvers.<sup>116</sup> Where he fully developed and honed his judgment was as a division and corps commander.<sup>117</sup> This section will discuss one early and two later examples of his decision-making experiences during the Second World War. First, however, it will discuss past and current doctrine with respect to sound judgment and decision-making.

Doctrinal definitions and prescriptions for sound judgment and decision-making from the interwar period are similar to current interpretations with respect to the commander's responsibility in making decisions. The *FSR 1923*, which was the prevalent doctrine during Collins' student time at the CGSS, outlines the commanders' responsibility in assessing the

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<sup>112</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Manual 600-22, Army Leadership, Competent, Confident, and Agile*, 6-2.

<sup>113</sup> United States Military Academy, *The Howitzer* (West Point, New York: 1917, United States Military Academy Press), 50. Quoted in Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Education of a General 1880-1939 Vol. I*, 256. See also, C.T Lanham, *Infantry in Battle*, 2nd Ed, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography*, 9-10.

<sup>116</sup> Gabel, *U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941*, 52.

<sup>117</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier's Story*, 228.

situation, including all of the facts and factors of the specific problem. It prescribed the development of an estimate of the situation, which included factors such as, the mission, information about the enemy, friendly disposition and condition of troops, and terrain and weather, from which the commander was to make a decision.<sup>118</sup> United States Army doctrine changed very little from the *FSR 1923* to the Field Manual 100-5 of 1941 and 1944.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the doctrine current during his student time at Leavenworth remained relevant through the Second World War. Current doctrine addresses sound judgment directly, stating that sound judgment and agility are closely related and that a commander must be able to assess the situation and develop logical conclusions, which support decisions. Further, that good judgment is a key attribute of the art of command and “the transformation of knowledge into understanding and quality execution.”<sup>120</sup> Past and present doctrine with respect to the commander’s responsibility for assessing the situation, being agile of mind, and the requirement for the commander to personally make important decisions, will serve as the basis for analyzing his judgment and decision-making. Prior to examining his combat decision-making, however, this section will briefly discuss several of his key pre-war experiences.

Collins following a twelve-year stint as either a student or instructor, gained valuable experience as a brigade executive officer, a division-level operations officer and as a corps chief of staff during the Army’s large-scale maneuvers of 1941. As a brigade executive officer and operations officer for the Philippine Department, he engaged in developing operational plans based on strategic plans for the impending war with Japan. He also planned and executed exercises designed to rehearse and validate the plan for the defense of the Philippines.<sup>121</sup> The three years that he spent in key positions at the brigade and division level were important because he gained valuable experience leading a staff, and planning and executing training. This

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<sup>118</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923*, 4. This is the portion which discusses the commander’s role in decision making:

“Decision as to the course of action to be pursued in any given case is the responsibility of the commander and presupposes on his part an analysis of all the facts and factors having a bearing on the particular problem under consideration.”... “In estimating the situation, the commander considers his mission as set forth in the orders and instructions under which he is acting, or as deduced by him from his knowledge of the situation, all available information of the enemy (strength, position, movements, and probable intentions, etc.), conditions affecting his own command (strength, position, supporting troops, etc.), and the terrain, weather, climate, morale, and other factors in so far as they affect the particular military situation. He then compares the various plans of action open to him and decides upon the one that will best enable him to accomplish the mission.”

<sup>119</sup> Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*, 48.

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Manual, 600-22 Army Leadership, Competent, Confident, and Agile*, 6-2.

<sup>121</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 62-72.

experience would serve him well, when he returned to serving with troops as the VII Corps Chief of Staff five years later.

Collins became the Chief of Staff of the VII Corps in 1941, at which point he began the practice of hand picking his key staff members.<sup>122</sup> As an example of this, he managed to get Major John Hodge, who he had known at the Infantry School, to serve as his operations officer. Later, he pulled Hodge up to serve as his deputy division commander as soon as he took command of the 25th Infantry Division. He continued the practice of hand picking his staff and commanders while a corps commander. This eventually allowed him to develop a high-performing team that could function in his absence, which freed him up in order to spend his time forward with his subordinate units.<sup>123</sup>

During his time as the VII Corps Chief of Staff, he gained experience while planning and executing three large-scale training exercises culminating with force-on-force maneuvers involving the United States Second and Third Armies in Louisiana in 1941.<sup>124</sup> While planning and conducting combined-arms maneuver training he learned many valuable lessons. As an example, large-scale maneuver training is not necessarily conducive to properly training company and battalion-level units, and in some cases, it actually resulted in the encouragement of bad habits.<sup>125</sup> This lesson was important, as he would use a more progressive approach to training subordinate units later at the division-level.<sup>126</sup> Planning and executing the training and evaluation program for the divisions of the VII Corps, and conducting live, force on force, combined arms training, became part of his collective experience. Just two years later, he tested his preparation and training experience in combat in the Pacific Theater of War.

One of his early judgment tests in a combat environment occurred when he, along with a subordinate regimental commander, decided that a double envelopment of the Gifu strongpoint on Guadalcanal was not feasible. Having just arrived on Guadalcanal, he conducted reconnaissance of the Gifu strongpoint with his subordinate 35th Regimental Commander, Colonel McClure, and leaders from the 132nd Regiment with whom the 35th was to conduct a relief in place. Both he and Colonel McClure accepted the assessment by leaders of the 132nd Regiment, that terrain around the Gifu strongpoint precluded a double envelopment of the

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<sup>122</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 98.

<sup>123</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 271.

<sup>124</sup> Gabel, *U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941*, 64-129.

<sup>125</sup> Gabel, *U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941*, 174.

<sup>126</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 137.



position.<sup>127</sup> Based on a second hand assessment, they decided to conduct a frontal holding attack in order to facilitate an eventual single envelopment. The result, however, was a series of costly and unsuccessful assaults on the Gifu strongpoint, which began on January 10, 1943.<sup>128</sup> Not until January 17, did Colonel McClure decide to attempt the double envelopment that he and his division commander had decided against earlier.<sup>129</sup> Even with his decision to conduct the double envelopment, massive artillery bombardments, and Marine tank support on January 21, it took the 35th Regiment until January 23 to clear the Gifu strongpoint. The 35th Regiment lost sixty-four men killed, and forty-two wounded.<sup>130</sup>

Collins admitted his mistake during the series of conferences the 25th Division held following the XIV Corps' second January offensive, stating "You must rely on your own reconnaissance. It is interesting to know that the maneuver that finally closed the pocket was that which Colonel McClure and I projected when we first saw the ground from Hill 27."<sup>131</sup> He continued by saying that he and they had changed their plans because an officer who had seen the ground said "you couldn't get through."<sup>132</sup> He learned a valuable lesson from this mistake, that the commander must see the terrain and conditions personally in order to determine the correct course of action. This lesson would serve him well when confronted with the task of seizing Cherbourg in June 1944.

Collins, having learned from his earlier mistake, developed his plan of attack only after conducting a detailed analysis of the mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available. His plan of attack maximized the use of a variety of firepower, psychological operations, and a double envelopment to seize Cherbourg in June 1944. He began the attack at approximately three in the morning on the morning of June 19, 1944, without preparatory fires. General Bradley's First Army intelligence officer, who possessed intelligence provided by ULTRA, let him know that the German forces between where the VII Corps had cut the Cotentin peninsula and Cherbourg proper were transitioning to positions within Cherbourg and its outer defensive ring.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, the 9th Division captured an order from the German LXXXIV Corps on the June 19 which provided details of the German plan for the defense of Cherbourg and an

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<sup>127</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 292.

<sup>128</sup> Carl K. Hixon, *Guadalcanal: An American Story* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 201-203.

<sup>129</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 296.

<sup>130</sup> Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 303-305.

<sup>131</sup> Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, 102.

<sup>132</sup> Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, 102.

<sup>133</sup> Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, 102.

attempted breakout of the 77th and 91st Divisions.<sup>134</sup> Understanding that the enemy was vulnerable while transitioning from prepared positions to the Cherbourg defense proper, he maintained rapid tempo by pressing his three divisions to attack. Having just cut the Cotentin peninsula on June 18, Collins gave General Manton Eddy only twenty-two hours to reorient his entire 9th Division and initiate his attack along the western portion of the VII Corps' zone of attack.<sup>135</sup>

Attacking with three divisions abreast, he used his two experienced divisions, the 9th and 4th to execute a double envelopment of Cherbourg. He used the 79th Division, which was untested in combat, to conduct a fixing attack in the center, which he personally managed to ensure success. The VII Corps attack closed around Cherbourg by June 21. He issued a broadcast to the German Commander General Karl Wilhelm von Schlieben and his soldiers calling for their surrender on the night of the June 21, announcing that if they did not surrender annihilation by aerial bombardment would follow.<sup>136</sup> When von Schlieben did not reply by nine in the morning on June 22, Collins unleashed the largest aerial bombardment employed by the Allies since June 6. He also employed a naval gunfire attack directed at the German guns protecting the Port of Cherbourg, and a massive artillery attack on known strong points. The effects of the preparatory fires had a tangible physical effect. Perhaps more important, however, was the psychological effect of the variety of types of fires which demoralized the German defenders. His' 9th, 79th, and 4th divisions methodically dismantled the German defense piece by piece. By June 30, the VII Corps had captured 39,000 prisoners on the Cotentin peninsula and captured the prized Port of Cherbourg and surrounding strong points.

General Eisenhower summed up his performance in seizing Cherbourg, "General Collins had conducted against it a relentless offensive and as a result of the operation justified his nickname "Lightning Joe."<sup>137</sup> He learned to conduct his own thorough analysis of the facts and factors of the tactical problem. He also maximized the use of firepower, psychological effects, and combined arms maneuver to conduct a double envelopment to destroy the German defense of Cherbourg. This subsection will examine one more example of his decision making from the Battle of the Bulge.

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<sup>134</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Battle Analysis: D-Day Cherbourg, Course P651, Vol. 1, Part 3, 4*. This volume contains a copy of the VII Corps After Action Review for the Capture of Cherbourg and the Cotentin Peninsula by VII Corps, U.S. Army (June 6 to July 1, 1944).

<sup>135</sup> Bradley, *Omar N. Bradley: A Soldier's Story*, 300-301.

<sup>136</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Battle Analysis: D-Day Cherbourg, Course P651, Vol. 1, Part 3, 5-7*. This volume contains a copy of the VII Corps After Action Review for the Capture of Cherbourg and the Cotentin Peninsula by VII Corps, U.S. Army (June 6 to July 1, 1944).

<sup>137</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 260.

He demonstrated his matured judgment toward the end of the Allies' Campaign in northwest Europe, when he sensed enemy weakness and counterattacked German forces during the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes. On December 16, 1944, the Germans moved through the Ardennes and counterattacking the United States V and VIII Corps with eleven divisions. The German counter attack caused a bulge in the Allied front line with the United States First Army and the British 21st Army Group in the north and General Bradley's 12th United States Army Group in the south. Because the German attack threatened to sever the lines of communication between Bradley's 12th Army Group and General Courtney Hodges' First Army, General Eisenhower decided to temporarily place the First Army under the control of Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, the British 21st Army Group Commander. Montgomery selected Collins to lead the main effort for the Allies northern counter attack against German forces in the Ardennes.<sup>138</sup> He assembled his subordinate elements and prepared for the counter attack, but advancing German forces attacked the VII Corps while it was preparing to counterattack. On December 24, Montgomery and Hodges conferred and agreed that based their perception of the enemy situation, Collins should be relieved of his mission to counterattack the German spearhead and that if he felt it necessary withdraw his right flank to strengthen his line.<sup>139</sup>

Collins was not in his command post on December 24, however, knowing that he would be away from his headquarters most of the day, he charged Brigadier General Winston Palmer, his artillery commander, to remain at this command post to make decisions in his absence.<sup>140</sup> The First Army Staff issued vague verbal orders instructing the VII Corps to withdraw. At the same time General Ernest Harmon, Commander of the 2nd Armored Division, was pressuring Palmer to allow him to conduct an attack on German forces near Celles. By the time Collins returned to his command post, Colonel Russell "Red" Akers from First Army was there attempting to clarify the verbal orders. After listening to Akers, he required him to put the instructions in writing.<sup>141</sup> Then after conferring with his staff, he ordered Harmon to attack with the 2nd Armored Division near Celles. Harmon, who had already postured his Combat Command Bravo for the attack south of Ciney, replied, "The bastards are in the bag!"<sup>142</sup> Harmon was not

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<sup>138</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 191. For more on the Battle of the Bulge, also see Charles B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (Harper Perennial, 1997)

<sup>139</sup> MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge*, 579.

<sup>140</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 277.

<sup>141</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 271, 273.

<sup>142</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 274.

kidding, as he led the 2nd Armored Division to crush German elements near Celles, taking only light friendly casualties, he inflicted mass destruction with the assistance of tactical air and artillery. The attack resulted in breaking the German advance.<sup>143</sup> Collins knew that the German attack had stalled and that they were vulnerable to an all out attack. Thus, he decided to defend by conducting a limited attack oriented on desperate enemy elements, as opposed to doggedly following the intent of a higher order. Harold Winton described his decision stating, "In short, we see in this pivotal decision not only the mental acuity to perceive the situation correctly and come to an appropriate judgment, we also see the moral fortitude to do so under conditions of significant stress."<sup>144</sup> Winton also noted that Collins possessed the ability to sense enemy weakness, and acted to take advantage of it, just as he had done at the critical moment during Operation COBRA. Toward the end of the Allies Campaign in northwest Europe, he had refined his judgment and decision-making ability.

Collins, through his theoretical preparation, training experiences during the interwar period and especially while leading soldiers in combat during the Second World War developed sound judgment. He established a foundation of technical and tactical expertise, combined with a methodology for solving tactical problems while a student and instructor at Army schools. During his performance of key positions during the interwar years, he applied his theoretical knowledge while gaining experience leading and training soldiers. Then as a division commander, he had to learn the hard way in combat, that he must make his own detailed assessment and, not base his decisions on second hand information. As he gained experience while serving as a corps commander in the European Theater of War, he trained his staff to function in his absence so that he could position himself forward to develop and maintain an accurate assessment of the situation. His decision to attack the German spearhead near Celles during the Battle of the Bulge demonstrated the maturation of his decision-making ability.

## Conclusion

This monograph has discussed the three aspects of General J. Lawton Collins' command style, and argues that it was characterized by technical and tactical competence, the practical ability to lead from the front, and sound judgment. His preparation as a student and instructor during the interwar period was a critical aspect contributing to his developing competence. Further, his performance of key positions during this same period enabled him to apply what he learned and gain experience leading and training soldiers. When he finally led soldiers in

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<sup>143</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Battle Analysis: Ardennes, Course P651, Vol. 5, Part 1*, 86. This volume contains a copy of the original VII Corps After Action Review "EIFEL." See also Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 274.

<sup>144</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 277.

combat, his technical and tactical competence provided the foundation of his command style. His practical ability to position himself at the critical point on the battlefield greatly facilitated his ability to lead effectively both the division and corps-level. Finally, combat experience as a division and corps commander enabled him to develop the sound judgment.

He gained technical and tactical competence as a student and instructor during the interwar period. He prepared intensively grounding himself theory and doctrine. While an instructor at the Infantry School, he learned General Marshall's tactical problem solving methodology and staff procedures. He also became one of "Marshall's Men," which facilitated his career advancement. While a student at the CGSS, Collins learned the doctrinal framework necessary to lead at the division and corps levels. The most important aspects of which were, the role of a commander with respect to leading and decision-making, the doctrine of offensive combined arms mobile warfare, and the sustainment of division and corps level units. His theoretical preparation while a student and instructor during the interwar years provided the basis for practical application in key assignments leading up to and during the Second World War.

Collins' ability to position himself forward at the critical point on the battlefield, as described in the leading from the front subsection, resulted in his making correct decisions. His student and instructor experiences at the Infantry School and the CGSS provided the theoretical and doctrinal basis for his leadership style. Further, his experience holding key positions during the interwar years helped him develop sound judgment and decision-making ability. His first combat test was as the Division Commander of the 25th Infantry Division, where he displayed his preparation and practical ability in combat in the Pacific, during operations on Guadalcanal. Eisenhower, who recognized his leadership potential, chose him to serve as a corps commander.<sup>145</sup> Due to his aggressive leadership style, he became the First Army main effort on multiple occasions, including Operation COBRA.<sup>146</sup> Leading from the front was one of his distinctive characteristics. Regardless of the level of command, he never felt comfortable remaining in the rear area, or giving orders without seeing the terrain for himself.

Collins developed sound judgment and decision-making ability through preparation as a student and instructor, however his experiences serving in key positions prior to and during the Second World War were pivotal to the development of his judgment. Army schools provided the foundation of technical and tactical expertise, as well as his problem solving methodology, both of which are required for the development of sound judgment. What separated him from his peers was his ability to apply what he learned while performing key positions during the

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<sup>145</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 228. This included Generals Bradley and Hodges, and Field Marshall Montgomery.

<sup>146</sup> Blumenson, *Masters of the Art of Command*, 373.

interwar period and during the Second World War. While applying what he learned as a division commander in combat, he learned that he must personally make a detailed assessment and base his decisions on that, rather than on second hand information.<sup>147</sup> As a corps commander in the European Theater of War, he developed his staff to perform necessary tactical operations center functions, which freed him to spend the majority of his time forward with subordinate units.<sup>148</sup> Thus, he was able to conduct his own assessment of the situation and make decisions based accordingly. His decision to attack the German spearhead near Celles during the Battle of the Bulge demonstrated the maturation of his decision-making ability.<sup>149</sup> His performance throughout his career, but especially as a commander during the Second World War, launched him on a path of high-level Staff positions including Chief of Staff of the Army and finally President Eisenhower's special representative to the Republic of South Vietnam with the rank of Ambassador.<sup>150</sup>

As this monograph has shown, Collins' command style was effective. His career following the conclusion of the Second World War is proof of this. He served as the Chief of Information for the War Department and Deputy Chief of Staff under General Eisenhower. When General Bradley became the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1949, President Truman appointed him to succeed General Bradley as the Chief of Staff of the Army. He served as the Chief of Staff during the entire Korean War. His personal assessments of the situation on the ground in Korea served to undermine General MacArthur's view that he should either withdraw United Nations troops or expand the war to include China.<sup>151</sup> Further, he assessed that General MacArthur did not have an accurate assessment or understanding of the situation from which to make decisions, because he attempted to command his forces on the Korean peninsula from Japan.<sup>152</sup> Following his four years as the Chief of Staff, President Eisenhower requested that he serve as the United States Representative to the Military Committee for the Standing Group of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1953. Finally, in 1954, President Eisenhower made him his special representative to Vietnam with the rank of Ambassador. Hence, what made him successful was his command style, which was characterized by technical and tactical competence, leadership from the front, and sound judgment.

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<sup>147</sup> Collins, *Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal*, 102.

<sup>148</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 277.

<sup>149</sup> Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes*, 276-277.

<sup>150</sup> Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 347,378-379.

<sup>151</sup> Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 705.

<sup>152</sup> Wade, *Conversations with a General: J. Lawton Collins*, 11-12.

The key characteristics of J. Lawton Collins' command style are timeless. Leaders, regardless of their profession, must possess expertise. They must also be able to assess and understand situations, in order to make correct decisions, particularly if they lead soldiers in combat. Finally, a leader must develop sound judgment and decision-making ability through experience. In essence, a leader must be able to visualize the fight and anticipate how events will unfold to lead effectively. In Collins', own words, "Where the crux of the fighting was likely to be was the place I headed for."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Wade, *Combat Studies Report 5: Conversations with General J. Lawton Collins*, 6.

## APPENDIX: General J. Lawton Collins' Timeline

- 1896**            1 May—Born in New Orleans, Louisiana
- 1911**            Father Died
- 1912**            Left home for Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (wanted to go to West Point but did not initially get the appointment)
- 1913**            Entered West Point on 2 June, with assistance from the Mayor of New Orleans (interest in school was in literature, poetry and play writes), English Professor from Yale was his inspiration)
- 1917**            Graduated West Point on 20 April. He requested to be branched Infantry.
- May—Promoted to First Lieutenant
- June—Assigned to Company M and then Company K, 22nd Infantry Regiment, Stationed at Fort Jay. New York. Assigned as a platoon leader and then company commander until June 1918.
- 1918**            June—Promoted to Captain. Became the Supply Officer for the 22nd Infantry Regiment.
- September—Promoted to Major (temporary) on 9 September
- October—Took command of the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment (age 22)
- 1919**            May— Sent to France, following the conclusion of the First World War
- June—Took command of the 3rd Battalion, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, a few months later the 1st Infantry Division was transferred to the U.S. and he was transferred to the 8th Infantry Regiment where he commanded an outpost with several companies.
- 1920**            March—Reverted back to Captain takes command of Company L, 8th Infantry Regiment, applies to The Columbia School of Law and is accepted, considers resigning. June—Selected to serve as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, of American Forces in Germany (AFG).
- 1921**            July—Married Gladys Easterbrook in Germany.



- August—Instructor at West Point, Chemistry.
- 1924** Mother Died
- 1926** Graduated from the Company Officer Course, Fort Benning, Georgia.
- 1927** Graduated from the Advanced Course at the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.
- 1927-31** Served as an instructor at the Infantry School (weapons and tactics); promoted to Major.
- 1931-33** Student time at the Command and General Staff School
- 1933-34** Served as the Executive Officer 23rd Brigade Manila.
- 1934-36** Served as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Philippine Division
- 1937** Graduated from the Army Industrial College.
- 1938** Graduated from the Army War College
- 1938-40** Served as an instructor at the Army War College
- 1940** Promoted to LTC in June
- 1941** Chief of Staff VII Corps; promoted to Colonel (temporary)
- 1942** Promoted to Brigadier General (temporary) February
- May—Promoted to Major General (temporary); served as the Chief of Staff of the Hawaiian Department
- 1942-43** Served as the Commanding General of the 25th Infantry Division on Ohau, and in operations against the Japanese on Guadalcanal
- 1944-45** Commanded VII Corps in the Normandy Invasion and in Western Europe campaigns to the German surrender; promoted to Lieutenant General (temporary) in April and permanent Brigadier General in June, 1945.

- 1945** He was the Deputy Commanding General and Chief of Staff of Army Ground Forces (August-December)
- 1945-47** Served as the Director of Information of the Army (later Chief of Public Information)
- 1947-49** Served at the Deputy then Vice Chief of Staff United States Army; promoted to General (temporary) and Permanent Major General in January 1948
- 1949-53** Served as the Chief of Staff of the United States Army (16 August 1949-15 August 1953)
- 1953-54** Representative of the United States to the Military Committee and the Standing Group of NATO
- 1954-55** Served as the Special Representative of the United States in Vietnam with the rank of Ambassador
- 1956** Retired from active service in March
- 1987** Died in Washington D.C. on 12 September 1987. He was buried in Arlington Nation Cemetery

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