

MAP 1

From a tactical point of view, each field is a tiny terrain compartment. Several adjoining fields together form a natural defensive position echeloned in depth. The abundant vegetation and ubiquitous trees provide effective camouflage, obstruct observation, hinder the adjustment of artillery and heavy weap-

ons fire, and limit the use of armor and the supporting arms.

The hedgerow is the most persistent feature in the Cotentin. Unimpressed by fine terrain distinctions, American soldiers called the whole area the hedgerow country, often simply "this goddam country." Many troops had already be-

come familiar with it in June, and before long many more would come to know and detest it.

Tactics

The OVERLORD and NEPTUNE plans had been so concerned with the scope and complexity of the problem of getting troops ashore on the Continent that the bulk of the invasion preparations had pointed only toward the initial assault. In comparison to the wealth of material on the physiography of the coastal region, little attention had been given to the hedgerows inland. Operational techniques had not been developed, nor had special equipment been devised. The combat units had devoted little time in England to training for hedgerow tactics.

Looking beyond the landing, some British officers, particularly those who had withdrawn across France toward Cherbourg in 1940, were convinced that the Allies could not wage effective warfare in the hedgerows against a strongly established enemy. Such leaders as Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the British Imperial General Staff, and Lt. Gen. Sir Frederick E. Morgan, the chief COSSAC planner, were among those who anticipated serious difficulties.¹⁶ They remembered also the poorly armed Chouans, who in the last decade of the eighteenth century had utilized the hedgerows to fight an effective guer-



HEDGEROW POSITION in the Cotentin.

rilla war of ambush against the superior armies of the Republic.¹⁷

Other invasion planners had found argument to support the contrary contention. They felt that the natural defensive features of the hedgerow country would aid the Allies in maintaining their initial continental foothold during the critical early period of the build-up. They believed that the Germans would be unable to stop an attack mounted across a wide front. And they expected enough progress to be made by the British through Caen, the gateway to the Seine, to outflank the Cotentin.¹⁸

Failure to secure Caen by 1 July was

¹⁷ Intervs, Pogue Files.

¹⁶ COSSAC formed the initials of the Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander (designate), whose organization formulated the OVERLORD plan in 1943 before the appointment later that year of General Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander.

¹⁸ Interv, Col S. L. A. Marshall with Gen Eisenhower, Detroit, 3 Jun 46, and Interv, Pogue with Lord Tedder, London, 13 Feb 47, Pogue Files; see Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Morgan, *Overture to OVERLORD* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1950), pp. 157-58.

the greatest single disappointment of the invasion. A vital communications center, Caen was the key to operations eastward to the Seine and southeastward to the Paris-Orléans gap. Held by the Germans who blocked the comparatively flat plain that invited the use of armor and the construction of airfields, Caen also offered harbor installations for small ships. Three groups clamored for the capture of Caen: the proponents of armored warfare, who were in search of mobility; the tactical air force engineers, who were looking for airfield sites; and the logistical organizations, which were seeking port facilities. In addition, continued German occupation of Caen seemed to be dramatic evidence of Allied impotence. Without Caen, the Allies were vulnerable to an enemy armored thrust to the sea, a drive that would, if successful, split the Allied foothold and imperil the entire invasion effort. To some observers, the failure to take the city savored of hesitation and excessive caution.¹⁹

Conspicuously untroubled about Caen, and apparently unaware of the concern the situation was causing, General Montgomery directed the tactical operations on the Continent with what might have seemed like exasperating calm. For Montgomery, the commander of the Allied ground forces, the important factors at this stage of the campaign were not necessarily the capture of specific geographical objectives, or even the expansion of the continental

foothold. Retaining the initiative and avoiding setbacks and reverses were the guiding principles that determined his course of action.²⁰

These aims were paradoxical. Retaining the initiative was possible only by continued offensive operations; yet this course was often risky because the Germans had massed the bulk of their armor in front of the British sector of operations.²¹ If in trying to maintain a balance between offense and defense General Montgomery seemed to give more weight to preventing Allied reverses, he was motivated by his belief that holding the beachhead securely was more important at that time. By directing General Dempsey to make a series of limited objective attacks with his British Second Army during June, however, General Montgomery had prevented the Germans from regrouping their forces for a major counterattack and thus had denied them the initiative.²²

From the equilibrium that General Montgomery established, a corollary principle was evolved. Unable to move through Caen for the moment, General Montgomery reasoned that if he could "pull the enemy on the Second Army," he would facilitate the U.S. First Army advance to the south. General Eisenhower had come to the same conclusion and expressed the hope that General Bradley could attack south while Montgomery had "got the enemy by the

¹⁹ Lewis H. Brereton, Lieutenant General, U.S.A., *The Brereton Diaries* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1946), p. 287; Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, *My Three Years With Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1946), p. 581.

²⁰ 21 AGp Dir, M-502, 18 Jun, Pogue Files.

²¹ See below, Ch. II.

²² Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, *Normandy to the Baltic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp 86, 108; see also Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, *Despatch* (New York: The British Information Services, 1946), p. 6.

throat on the east.”²³ Both men were harking back to the OVERLORD concept, which had proposed that the British institute operations toward the east in order to cover American operations to the south. Attracting the bulk of the enemy strength was a dangerous game, but the Germans, for other reasons, had already concentrated a larger part of their power in front of the British sector. General Montgomery thus had little alternative but to contain these forces. He had begun to do so even before the Americans were ready to attack to the south. While the U.S. First Army was driving north toward Cherbourg, General Montgomery had planned an attack by the British Second Army to insure, as he later wrote, “the retention of the bulk of the enemy armour on the Second Army front.”²⁴

Originally set for 18 June, the British attack had been postponed because certain essential units were still unloading on the beaches and artillery ammunition was temporarily in short supply. Not until a week later, on 25 June, had the British Second Army jumped off—its objective the capture of Caen and bridgeheads across the Orne River south of that city. Rainy weather and determined enemy resistance balked the British of gaining their objectives, and Caen remained in enemy hands. Yet the nearness of the British to Caen threatened the city, and on 29 June, in order to insure retention of it, the Germans launched a large-scale counterattack. The British dispersed by massed artillery

fire what turned out to be un-co-ordinated thrusts.²⁵ The situation then became relatively calm.

The results of General Montgomery's activity were clear in retrospect. He had held the eastern flank firmly and had continued to keep a great part of the German strength on the British front. But if this had been General Montgomery's basic intention, his apparent determination to take Caen had obscured it. Even General Eisenhower seemed bewildered, particularly since Montgomery had informed him that the British offensive launched on 25 June was to be a “blitz attack.”²⁶

General Montgomery had certainly wanted Caen. That he had not secured it led to inevitable comparison and contrast of the British and the American operations. On 18 June General Montgomery had given the Americans the “immediate task” of seizing Cherbourg and the British the “immediate task” of capturing Caen. He had quickly changed the British task after judging the difficulties too great for immediate execution. The Americans had secured Cherbourg on schedule.²⁷

Debate had already arisen over General Montgomery's intentions, a debate that was to grow as time passed. Did Montgomery, from the beginning of the invasion, plan to attract and contain the bulk of the German power to facilitate an American advance on the right? Or did he develop the plan later as a rationalization for his failure to advance

²³ Montgomery to Eisenhower, M-30, 25 Jun, SGS SHAEF File 381, OVERLORD, I (a); Eisenhower to Montgomery, 25 Jun, Pogue Files.

²⁴ Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, p. 94.

²⁵ Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 94, 97, 101; see below, Ch. II.

²⁶ Montgomery to Eisenhower, M-30, 25 Jun, SHAEF Incoming Msgs.

²⁷ 21 AGp Dirs, M-502 and M-504, 18 and 19 Jun, Pogue Files; Pogue Intervs.

through Caen? Was he more concerned with conserving the limited British manpower and was his containment of the enemy therefore a brilliant expedient that emerged from the tactical situation in June? ²⁸ The questions were interesting but irrelevant, for the Germans had massed their power opposite the British without regard for General Montgomery's original intentions.

Whatever Montgomery's intent—which was obviously not clear to other Allied commanders at the time—the British seemed to be stalled before Caen. Denied access to the desirable terrain east of Caen and to the main approaches to the Seine and Paris, the Allies looked to General Bradley's U.S. First Army for operational progress. Thus it came about that, although the British

sector offered terrain more favorable for offensive operations, American troops in July were to undertake the unenviable task of launching a major attack in the Cotentin through terrain ideally suited for defense.

Romans, Franks, Bretons, and Normans had fought on the Cotentin, and innumerable skirmishes had occurred there between the English and the French. But since the devastating civil wars of religion and revolution, little had disturbed the tranquillity and prosperity of the inhabitants. Even the German occupation had had little effect on the habits of people who were mainly concerned with the problems of cattle breeding and the production of butter and cheese. Although they had "prayed for an Allied landing," they had "hoped that it would take place far from them." ²⁹ They were not spared. Where megalithic monuments of prehistoric times lay beside the remains of medieval monasteries, the armies of World War II marked the land in their turn, creating their own historic ruins to crumble with the others.

²⁸ Pogue Intervs; Memo, Eisenhower for Pogue, 10 Mar 47; 21 AGp CinC Notes, 15 Jun 44; 21 AGp Dirs, M-502, 18 Jun, M-505, 30 Jun; Photostatic copy of Gen Montgomery's address, Brief Summary of Opn OVERLORD, 7 Apr 44; Statement concerning British manpower strength, no title, n.d., in folder labeled CALA Docs, Cables and Dirs, etc. All six in Pogue Files. Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 21-24; Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 336-41; Harrison *Cross-Channel Attack*, p. 181; Pogue, *Supreme Command*, pp. 183ff; Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1951), pp. 325-26.

²⁹ Robert Patry, *St.-Lô* (St. Lô, 1948), page 14 of Eugene Turboul's English translation.

CHAPTER II

The Enemy

At the beginning of July 1944, Germany was the target of military operations on four fronts: the Soviet drive in the east, the partisan warfare in the Balkans, the Allied operations in Italy, and the Allied offensive in western France. Only in Scandinavia did German military forces enjoy the quiet of a relatively static situation.

Of the four fronts, the Balkan battlefield was of minor importance, and the Italian sector, where the Germans fought a delaying action as they fell back, was of secondary significance. The Eastern Front, engaging the preponderance of German resources, was of most concern to the Germans, although the cross-Channel attack had posed a more direct threat to the homeland, and for a brief time—until the Russians launched their summer offensive late in June—the Normandy front was more important. From July on, the Eastern and Western Fronts received nearly equal attention from those directing the German war effort, though far from equal resources.

Exhausted by almost five years of war, its Navy powerless, its Air Force reduced to impotence, and able to offer serious resistance only on the ground, Germany seemed on the verge of defeat.

In addition to the responsibility and the nominal command borne by all heads of states, Hitler exercised a direct control over military operations. He determined the military strategy on all fronts and supervised closely the formulation of plans and their execution. Increasingly, as the struggle continued, he controlled the tactical operations of the troops. This close control of the military was perhaps inevitable. The pyramidal hierarchy of command reached its ultimate in him.

With an active and bold imagination, and often displaying an astute grasp of military matters, Hitler could coordinate his military objectives and his political goals far better than anyone else in Germany. Though by 1944 Hitler had delegated to others many of his governmental functions, he felt that he could not afford to do so in the military realm. The urgency of the life and death struggle with the Allies, he was convinced, compelled him to give his personal attention even to relatively minor problems, and his self-assumed commitments overworked him.

As head of the state, Hitler bore the title of *Fuehrer*.¹ As such, he was also

The Machinery of War

Adolf Hitler was directing the war. In

¹ The following account is based on: Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, pp. 128ff; Pogue *Supreme Command*, pp. 175ff; James B. Hodgson, *The German Defense of Normandy*, OCMH MS R-24; Capt.



HITLER with (from left to right) Gross-admiral Erich Raeder and Field Marshals Keitel and Goering.

the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces—the *Oberster Befehlshaber der Deutschen Wehrmacht*. His staff was the Armed Forces High Command, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW), headed by Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel. Theoretically, OKW was the highest military echelon under Hitler, and to it belonged the prerogatives of grand strategy and joint operations. On a lower echelon, Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering headed the Air Force High Command, the *Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* (OKL); Gross-

admiral Karl Doenitz headed the Navy High Command, the *Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine* (OKM); while Hitler himself headed the Army High Command, the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH).

In theory, the chief of the OKW, Keitel, received the reports and co-ordinated the activities of the OKL, OKM, and OKH. But Goering outranked Keitel and therefore reported directly to Hitler. Doenitz felt that Keitel had little interest in and understanding of naval matters, and he also reported directly to Hitler. Since Hitler himself was chief of the OKH, there seemed to be no practical need for the OKW. Yet because the war against the Soviet Union required all the attention of the OKH, the OKW assumed the direction of the other theaters.² OKW and OKH were thus reduced to agencies directing the ground campaigns and, together with OKL and OKM, were directly subordinate to and dominated by Hitler, the Supreme Commander in Chief.

Although the chain of command was unified at the top in the person of Hitler and although spheres of activity seemed clearly defined among the high commands, staff functions in actual practice were often confused. OKW, for example, had no intelligence section or logistical apparatus. For information about the enemy and for administration, including replacements, it relied on the OKH. OKL organized and controlled antiaircraft artillery units, Luftwaffe field divisions, and paratroopers, which in American doctrine were ground force

James F. Scoggin, Jr., ed., *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, containing MS # B-308 (Zimmerman), MS # B-672 (Buttlar), MS # B-718 (Speidel), MS # B-633 (Rundstedt), and MS # B-344 (Blumentritt), Hist Div, Dept of the Army (German Report Series, 3 vols, n.d.).

² These included the areas of western Europe, Scandinavia, and the Mediterranean. See Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, pp. 133ff.

units. Competition over such matters as replacements caused friction among the services. Goering exploited his political power, while Reichsfuehrer Heinrich Himmler complicated the command structure because he headed the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), an elite corps of infantry and armored units.³

Similar inconsistencies appeared in the field. Commanders exercised control over assigned troops but not over strictly defined geographical areas. Except in designated fortress cities, the three military services were independent branches, expected to co-operate but not functionally organized to insure complete co-ordination of effort. The result, perhaps not so surprisingly, redounded to Hitler's personal advantage.

In western Europe, *Navy Group West* was the field command of the OKM, and the *Third Air Fleet* was the field command under OKL. The ground force field command under the OKW was *Oberbefehlshaber West* (*OB WEST*), and within the limits of the German command system it functioned as the theater headquarters. Unlike General Eisenhower, who in comparison had virtual carte blanche for the conduct of the war, the German theater commander operated under the close personal supervision of Hitler, who directly or through the Operations Staff of OKW, the *Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab* (*Wfst*), a planning section directed by Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, did not hesitate to



GENERAL JODL

point out what he deemed errors of judgment and maneuver.

The theater commander did not control the naval and air force contingents in his sector. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, though under the nominal control of *OB WEST*, each had a military governor who exercised responsibility for internal security of the occupied territory; yet for tactical action against an invading enemy, *OB WEST* had operational control over the troops assigned to the military governors. OKW maintained direct contact with each military governor and supervised *OB WEST* supply and administration.

For tactical operations *OB WEST* controlled two army groups. These had the mission of defending the Channel and Atlantic and the Mediterranean coast lines of the *OB WEST* area. Their

³ Founded in 1925 to protect Hitler, the SS evolved from a small bodyguard to a vast organization that formed military units called the *Waffen SS*. Regiments and divisions were gradually organized from *Waffen SS* battalions.

zones of operations were the Netherlands and Belgium and those French administrative and political departments touching the sea. The boundary between the army groups was an east-west line across France from the Loire River to the Swiss border near Lake Geneva, although there was always a lack of clarity as to whether *OB WEST* or the military governor exercised authority over tactical troops in central France. (*Map 2*)

South of the boundary was the sector of *Army Group G*, a headquarters that controlled the *First Army*, which defended the Atlantic coast of France south of the Loire, and *Nineteenth Army*, which held the Mediterranean shores of France. The *Replacement Army*, which trained units in the interior of France, furnished troops for security duties against the FFI and was ready to undertake operations against airborne landings.

North of the Loire-Geneva boundary line was *Army Group B*. Under this headquarters, *LXXXVIII Corps* occupied the Netherlands, *Fifteenth Army* defended the coast of Belgium and of northern France to the Seine River, and *Seventh Army* had responsibility for that part of northwest France between the Seine and the Loire Rivers.

The chain of command, then, that had functioned to meet the Allied invasion of western Europe consisted of Hitler; the OKW, which transmitted Hitler's orders; *OB WEST*, the ground force headquarters in the west that operated as the theater command; *Army Group B*, which had tactical control of the troops along the Channel coast; and *Seventh Army*, which had found itself responsible for the area invaded.

The Changing Strategy

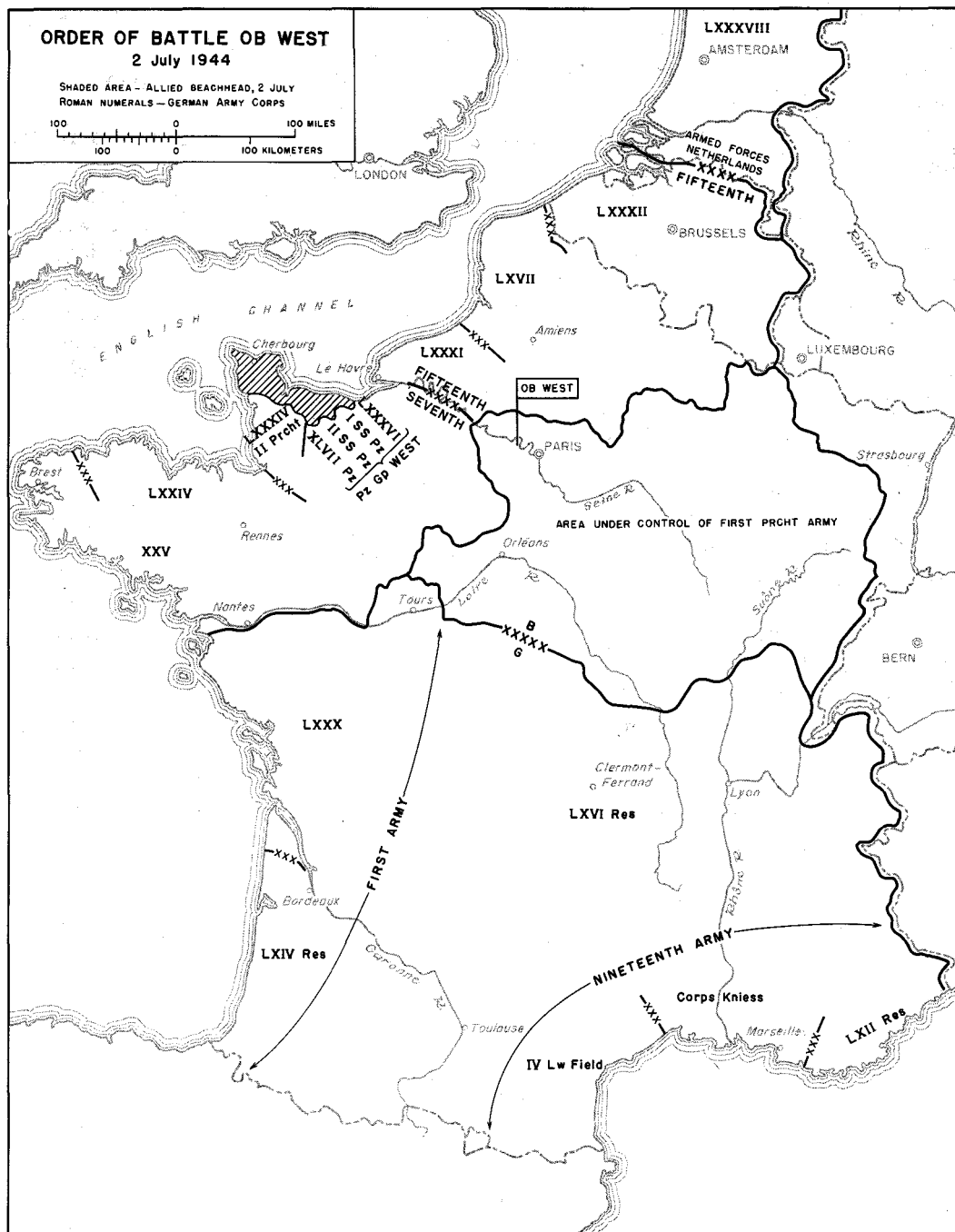
German strategy in July was rooted in the events of June. When the Allies landed on the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944, the Germans were without a firmly enunciated policy of defense.⁴ The *OB WEST* commander, Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, and the *Army Group B* commander, Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel, were in vague but basic disagreement on how best to meet the expected Allied invasion. Rundstedt tended to favor maintaining a strong strategic reserve centrally located, so that after he determined the main invasion effort he could mass the reserve and destroy the Allies before they could reinforce their beachhead. Sometimes called the concept of mobile defense, this was a normal operational technique. Rommel presupposed Allied air superiority, and he argued that the Germans would be unable to move a centrally located reserve to the battlefield since the Allies would control the air in that area; he believed it necessary to defeat the Allied invaders on the beaches. Sometimes called the concept of static defense, this theory gave impetus to the construction of the Atlantic Wall.⁵

Hitler never made a final decision on which method of defense he preferred. Consequently, neither method was established as a distinct course of action. By

⁴ See Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, pages 151-57 and 243-58 for a detailed discussion of the changes in German strategic concepts.

⁵ See *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, pages 49ff. for a description of the divergence in the operational views of Rundstedt and Rommel.

2 July 1944



MAP 2