# CHAPTER I

# The Allies

## *Mission*

The heart of Germany was still a long way off for the United States and British and Canadian troops battling the Germans on the Channel coast of France on 1 July 1944. The invading armies of the Western Allies, with the help of other United Nations, had crossed the Channel to strike at the heart of Germany and destroy her armed forces. Their purpose: the liberation of western Europe.[1] Two months later, in September, after combat in the hedgerows, breakout, exploitation, and pursuit, the Allies were much closer to their goal. Having carried the battle across France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands to the frontier of Germany—to within sight of the dragon's teeth along the Siegfried Line—the Allies seemed very close indeed.

The cross-Channel attack, launched from England on 6 June 1944, had accomplished the first phase of the invasion by 1 July. Ground troops had broken through the crust of the German coastal defenses and had also established a continental abutment for a figurative bridge that was to carry men and supplies from the United Kingdom to France. At the beginning of July the Allies looked forward to executing the second stage of the invasion: expanding their continental foothold to the size of a projected lodgment area.

Lodgment was a preliminary requirement for the offensive operations aimed toward the heart of Germany. Before the Allies could launch their definitive attack, they had to assemble enough men and material on the Continent to assure success. The plans that had shaped the invasion effort—OVERLORD and NEPTUNE—defined the boundaries of the lodgment area selected.[2] Securing this region was the Allied objective at the beginning of July.

The lodgment area contemplated in the master plan consisted of that part of northwest France bounded on the north and the east by the Seine and the Eure Rivers and on the south by the Loire, an area encompassing almost all of Normandy, Brittany in its entirety, and parts of the ancient provinces of Anjou, Maine, and Orléans. Offering adequate maneuver room for ground troops and providing terrain suitable for airfields, it was within range of air and naval support based in England. Perhaps most important, its ocean coast line of more than

[1] Dir, CCS to SCAEF, 12 Feb 44, quoted in Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1951), App. B.

[2] COSSAC (43) 28, Opn OVERLORD, 15 Jul 43, conveniently digested in Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack,* App. A; NEPTUNE Initial Jt Plan by the ANCXF, the CinC 21 AGp, and the Air CinC AEAF, 1 Feb 44, NJC 1004, copy 100, SHAEF RG 910.

five hundred miles contained enough port facilities to receive and nourish a powerful military force. The Seine ports of Rouen and Le Havre; Cherbourg; St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, and Vannes in Brittany; St. Nazaire and Nantes at the mouth of the Loire—these and a number of smaller harbors had the capacity to handle the flow of men and matériel deemed necessary to bolster and augment the invasion force.( *See Maps I, VIII, XII.*)

The planners felt that Allied troops could take the lodgment area in three months, and in June the Allies had already secured a small part of it. After seizing the landing beaches, the troops pushed inland to a depth varying from five to twenty miles. They captured Cherbourg and the minor ports of St. Vaast, Carentan, Isigny, and Grandcamp. They possessed a good lateral route of communications from Cherbourg, through Valognes, Carentan, and Bayeux, toward Caen. Almost one million men, about 500,000 tons of supplies, and over 150,000 vehicles had arrived on the Continent.[3]

Despite this impressive accomplishment, certain deficiencies were apparent. According to the planners' calculations, the Allies at the end of June should have held virtually all of Normandy within the confines of the lodgment area; in actuality, they occupied an area scarcely one fifth that size. The amounts of personnel, equipment, and supplies brought to the Continent lagged behind the planners' expectations, and the 31 air squadrons that operated from 17 continental airfields contrasted with the planners' requirements for 62 squadrons based on 27 fields. In addition, the small Allied beachhead was crammed and congested. Airstrips were so close to the beaches that flight operations sometimes interfered with ground traffic. Carentan, a major communications center on the single lateral road held by the Allies, was little more than three miles from the front, and the city and its small but important highway bridge received periodic shelling from German field artillery. Caen, a D-Day objective, still remained in German hands and blocked the approaches to the Seine over a comparatively flat plain that favored tank warfare and the construction of airfields.[4]

The disparity between plans and reality prompted speculation as to whether the Allies had lost their momentum, whether a military stalemate had already been reached, and whether trench warfare similar to that of World War I was to recur. It also caused revision of the build-up schedules. Additional combat troops were ferried to the Continent at

* Maps numbered in Roman are in accompanying map envelope.

[3] Roland G. Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume I,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1953) (hereafter cited as Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support, I*), 421, 422, 422n.

[4] Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch, Air Operations by the Allied Expeditionary Air Force in N.W. Europe, November 1944," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946 (January 2, 1947); PS/SHAEF (44) 13 (Final), SHAEF Plng Staff, Post-NEPTUNE Plng Forecast 1, 27 May 44, and SHAEF (44) 17, Comments on NEPTUNE Initial Jt Plan and Annexes, 12 Feb 44, both in SGS SHAEF File 381, Post-OVERLORD Plng; Annex A to SHAEF/1062/7/GDP, 17 Jun, Summary of Manoeuvre, SHAEF File 307.2, Logistic Studies; CS (44) 16th Mtg (19 May), Min of CofS Conf, SGS SHAEF File 337/3; IX Engr Comd Prog Rpt, 8 Jul, and 5th ESB Tel Rpt, 28 Jun, FUSA G-3 Jnl File; Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support, I,* 415–16.

TYPICAL COTENTIN TERRAIN, *looking westward from UTAH Beach.*

the expense of service units. The disruption of the planned equilibrium of combat and service troops was not serious, for the lines of communication were short and required only a small administrative establishment; but if the Allies suddenly surged forward and overran a large area, the disproportionately small number of service troops might prove unequal to the task of maintaining adequate logistical support. Despite this unpleasant possibility, the Allies had little choice. Their basic need was space—room for maneuver, space for the build-up, and more depth in the beachhead for security.[5]

Tied to the need for space was a corollary requirement for port capacity. Cap-

[5] Ltr, General Dwight D. Eisenhower to Lt Gen Omar N. Bradley, 25 Jun, FUSA G–3 Jnl File; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), pp 245, 265; Answers by Lt Gen Walter B. Smith and Maj Gen Harold R. Bull to questions by members of the Hist Sec. ETOUSA, 14–15 Sep 45, OCMH Files.

ture of Cherbourg had confirmed the expectation that the Germans would destroy the major harbors before allowing them to fall to the Allies. The destruction of the Cherbourg facilities had been so thorough that extensive and lengthy rehabilitation was necessary. Although restoration of the minor ports was practically complete by the beginning of July, their facilities could accommodate only a relatively insignificant portion of the build-up requirements. Consequently, as anticipated by the planners, the Allies were relying on improvisation at the invasion beaches. At the end of June the Allies did not yet appreciate the surprisingly large tonnage capacities developed there. What seemed more important were the effects of a severe Channel storm that had occurred between 19 and 21 June, a storm that had interrupted logistical operations, deranged shipping schedules, diminished the rate of build-up, and destroyed beyond repair one of two artificial harbors. This seemed to indicate beyond doubt the pressing need for permanent installations that would be serviceable in the autumn and winter as well as the summer of 1944.[6] Securing major continental ports to sustain the invasion effort depended on the acquisition of more space, and so the Allies hoped to expand their continental foothold to gain first the ports of Brittany and later those of the Seine.

Though achievement had not kept pace with the blueprint, there was good reason in the summer of 1944 for Allied confidence in ultimate victory. Expecting quick success in their endeavors, the Allies were not aware of the heartbreaking combat that awaited them in Normandy. The difficulty of the campaign in July was to exceed the forebodings of the most pessimistic, even as comparatively rapid advances in August were to surpass the prophecies of the most daring.

The operations in western Europe comprised but one act of the larger performance on the stage of World War II. In widely separated theaters of operations the war against the Axis powers had entered the decisive phase. In the same month that Allied troops invaded western Europe, U.S. forces in the Pacific invaded the Marianas and gained an important naval victory in the Philippine Sea. In Burma and India, the Allies put the Japanese on the defensive. In southern Europe the capture of Rome prompted the Germans to start withdrawing 150 miles up the Italian peninsula toward Florence and Pisa. Only in China was the enemy still conducting offensive operations, but this was to be his last major attack of the war. The Russians broke the Mannerheim Line in Finland and were gathering strength for advances in the Minsk area and western Ukraine, and also in Poland and Rumania. Arrangements were being completed for an Allied invasion of the Mediterranean coast of France in support of OVERLORD.

Of all these actions, the cross-Channel attack was perhaps the most dramatic. It illustrated clearly that the Allies had taken the initiative. By the summer of 1944, Allied strategy rather than Axis aims had become the controlling factor in the bitter struggle.

[6] Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support, I,* 406–15; Msg, NCWTF to ANCXF, 28 Jun, FUSA G–3 Jnl File.

GENERAL EISENHOWER *with American field commanders (left to right) Generals Bradley, Gerow, and Collins.*

*Forces*

Based on the concept of unconditional surrender enunciated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Allied strategy had as its object the ultimate occupation of the enemy countries. Before this was possible, the enemy war machines had to be destroyed. With this as the determining motivation, the Allies had embarked on a series of operations in an attempt to reach positions from which they could launch the final crushing blows against the enemy homelands. Against the enemy in Europe, the Allies had set into motion an inexorable march begun in 1942 in North Africa, continued in 1943 in Sicily and Italy, and developed in 1944 in France. Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill promised that the fighting would be kept in constant flame until the final climax, and to many observers the end of the war in Europe seemed near at hand. The invasion of Normandy, "part of a large strategic plan designed to bring about the total defeat of Germany by means of heavy and concerted assaults upon German-occupied Europe from the United Kingdom, the Mediterranean, and Russia," gave hope that the pledge would be fulfilled.[7] Since the resources

[7] NEPTUNE Initial Jt Plan cited in n. 2, above.

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of Great Britain and the United States in 1944 did not permit maintaining more than one major fighting front in Europe, France was selected as the decisive theater, OVERLORD the decisive campaign.[8]

Directing the invasion of western Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, synchronized the joint operations of air, sea, and land forces in a field operation of a magnitude never before attempted. In commanding U.S., British, and Canadian troops—the major components of his force—and contingents representing the governments-in-exile of Norway, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and the embryo government of the Free French, he was also making coalition warfare work. By temperament and by experience, General Eisenhower was extraordinarily well qualified for his assignment.[9]

The naval forces under General Eisenhower that participated in the invasion were under the command of Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay. Though the air forces had no over-all commander, General Eisenhower employed Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W. Tedder, his deputy commander, as a *de facto* commander to co-ordinate the operations of the strategic and tactical air arms. Strategic air power was the function of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, under Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz, and the British Bomber Command, under Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris. Tactical air power in direct support of ground operations on the Continent came from the U.S. Ninth Air Force (under Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton), the 2d Tactical Air Force of the Royal Air Force, and the Air Defence Command of Great Britain, all co-ordinated by the Allied Expeditionary Air Force (AEAF), a headquarters commanded by Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory. Assigned to render close assistance to U.S. ground troops were the fighter-bombers of Maj. Gen. Elwood A. Quesada's IX Tactical Air Command (TAC), a subordinate unit of the Ninth Air Force.

General Eisenhower reserved for himself the eventual direction of the Allied ground forces, a task he would assume later. His headquarters, SHAEF, was in England, but he was a frequent visitor to the combat zone, and he advised his subordinate commanders through per-

[8] See, for example, SHAEF to AGWAR, S–54425, 23 Jun. SHAEF Msg File.

[9] See Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1954), pp. 33ff.

sonal conversations and tactful letters.[10] Early in July he would establish a small command post in Normandy so that he could remain in close touch with the situation.

For the initial stages of the cross-Channel attack, a period that was to last until September, General Eisenhower had delegated operational control of the Allied land forces to General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery. The ranking British field commander, General Montgomery, was thus the *de facto* commander of all the Allied ground forces engaged in western Europe. As Commanding General, 21 Army Group, General Montgomery directed two armies: the Second British commanded by Lt. Gen. Miles C. Dempsey, and the First U.S. commanded by Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley.[11]

The headquarters and subordinate elements of two other armies—Lt. Gen. Henry D. G. Crerar's First Canadian Army and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s, U.S. Third Army—were in the process of being transported from England to France. Although the elements were incorporated into the active armies as they arrived on the Continent, the more quickly to bolster the fighting forces, the army headquarters were not to become operational until a time to be determined later. When that occurred, the British and the Canadian armies would come under General Montgomery's 21 Army Group, while the U.S. armies would function under an army group commanded by General Bradley. With two army group headquarters and four armies operational, and with SHAEF presumably active on the Continent by that time, the direct control of all the continental ground troops was to revert to General Eisenhower as Supreme Commander.

To help the armies on the Continent, the Allies were counting on a friendly civilian population in France. At the least, the French were expected to assure safety in Allied rear areas, thus freeing military forces that would otherwise be needed to protect the lines of communication. At the most, the inhabitants might support the Allied effort by armed insurrection, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare against the occupying Germans. Long before the invasion, the Allies began to try to increase anticipated French support by reconstituting the French military forces outside France and by fostering the growth of an effective underground resistance inside the country. By the summer of 1944 one French division was in England and ready to take part in OVERLORD, and an estimated 100,000 men inside France had arms and ammunition for sabotage and diversionary activity.[12]

To regularize the resistance movement and accord its members the same status as that of the armed forces in uniform, SHAEF, in June 1944, recognized General Pierre Koenig of the Free French headquarters in London as the commander of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). His mission was to delay

[10] See, for example, Ltr, Eisenhower to Bradley, 25 Jun, cited in n. 5, above.

[11] For description of General Montgomery's character, personality, and habits, see Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand, *Operation Victory* (New York. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), pp. 165–94.

[12] For a detailed account of how the French military forces were reconstituted, see Marcel Vigneras, *Rearming the French,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1957).

the concentration of German forces opposing the invasion by impeding the movement of German reserves, disrupting the enemy lines of communication and rear areas, and compelling the enemy to maintain large forces in the interior to guard against guerrilla raids and sabotage.

By 1 July it was clear that French assistance to OVERLORD was of substantial value. Although no French Regular Army units were yet on the Continent, resistance members were helping Allied combat troops by acting as guides, giving intelligence information, and guarding bridges, crossroads, and vital installations. Far from the fighting front, the presence of armed resistance groups in German rear areas was becoming a demoralizing psychological factor for the enemy, a harassing agent that diverted his troops from the battlefield, disturbed his communications, and shook his confidence.[13]

The Allied combat forces in Normandy at the beginning of July were deployed on a front about seventy miles long. In the eastern sector—the left of the 21 Army Group—General Dempsey's British Second Army occupied positions from the mouth of the Orne River westward to the vicinity of Caumont. During June the British had moved south from three landing beaches toward the general target area of Caen. At the end of the month, with three corps operational, General Dempsey's line formed a semicircle from about three to seven miles from the northern edge of the city. (*Map I*)

In the western sector—the right of the 21 Army Group—General Bradley's U.S. First Army extended from Caumont to the west coast of the Cotentin.[14] In June the Americans had pushed south from OMAHA Beach to Caumont, had driven west from UTAH Beach to isolate Cherbourg, and had moved north and taken that port. At the end of the month, three corps were in the line while a fourth, after capturing Cherbourg, was hurrying south to join them.

The disposition of the Allied forces—the British on the left and the Americans on the right—had been planned to facilitate supply in the later stages of the invasion. Although stocks in the United Kingdom flowed to the troops of both nations over the landing beaches in the summer of 1944, eventually men and matériel in support of the U.S. forces were to come directly from the United States, and the Breton ports were the most convenient points of entry to receive them. Likewise, the continental harbors along the Channel were logical ports of entry for the British forces. This determined not only the deployment of troops but also their objectives from the outset.

### *Terrain*

With the capture of Cherbourg at the end of June marking the close of the first phase of continental operations, General Eisenhower had the choice in the next phase of directing action east toward the Seine ports of Le Havre and Rouen, or south toward the Breton ports, principally St. Nazaire, Lorient, and

[13] See Pogue, *Supreme Command*, Chapters VIII and XIII, and below, Chapter XXIX.

[14] Throughout this volume, the term *Cotentin* refers to the area bounded by Cherbourg on the north, Avranches on the south, the Vire River on the east, and the English Channel on the west.

Brest. A move to the Seine ports, a more direct thrust toward Germany, was the bolder course of action, but unless the Germans were already withdrawing from France or at the point of collapse, success appeared dubious. More logical was an American drive southward to capture the Breton ports while the British and Canadians covered American operations by striking through Caen and later toward the Seine. A major impediment to this course of action was the terrain. (*Map 1*)

The ground that was to serve as the battlefield in July was of a diversified nature.[15] On the Allied left was the Caen–Falaise plain, gently rolling open country of cultivated fields and pastures, dry and firm ground suitable for large-scale armored operations and airfield construction. Facing the Allied center between the Orne and Vire Rivers were the northern fringes of a sprawling mass of broken ground—small hills, low ridges, and narrow valleys—gradually rising in height toward the south. West of the Vire River in the Carentan area was a marshy depression crisscrossed by sluggish streams and drainage ditches. On the extreme right of the Allied front, between the marshland and the coast, a cluster of hills dominated the countryside and gave the Germans a solid anchor for their left flank.

With the exception of the Caen–Falaise plain, the battlefield had a compartmentalized character that was bound to impose limitations on the Allies. It restricted maneuver and by the same token favored the German defense. The natural limitations were further aggravated by a man-made feature encountered at every turn, the hedgerow, the result of the practice of Norman farmers for centuries of enclosing each plot of arable land, pasture as well as orchard, no matter how small.

The hedgerow is a fence, half earth, half hedge. The wall at the base is a dirt parapet that varies in thickness from one to four or more feet and in height from three to twelve feet. Growing out of the wall is a hedge of hawthorn, brambles, vines, and trees, in thickness from one to three feet, in height from three to fifteen feet. Originally property demarcations, hedgerows protect crops and cattle from the ocean winds that sweep across the land. They provide the inhabitants with firewood. Delimiting each field, they break the terrain into numerous walled enclosures. Since the fields are tiny, about 200 by 400 yards in size, the hedgerows are innumerable. Because the fields are irregular in shape, the hedgerows follow no logical pattern.

Each field has an opening in the hedgerows for human beings, cattle, and wagons. For passage to fields that do not lie adjacent to a road, innumerable wagon trails wind among the hedgerows. The trails appear to be sunken lanes, and where the hedgerows are high and the tops overarch and shut out the light, they form a cavelike labyrinth, gloomy and damp.

[15] Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, *Régions géographiques de la France* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 263–65; British Admiralty, Handbook Series, *France*, 3 vols. (London, 1942), Vol. I, p. 12, fig. 7, and p. 18, Vol. II, *passim; Atlas Bottin*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1951), II, 145; Opn Plan NEPTUNE (20 May 44); First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations, 20 October 1943–1 August 1944*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1945), I, 124–25. In footnotes through Chapter XXII, all references cited as First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, are to the 20 October 1943–1 August 1944 report. See also footnote 13, Chapter XXIII.