Chapter 13

PLANNING OVERLORD

I LEFT THE UNITED STATES ON JANUARY 13 TO undertake the organization of the mightiest fighting force that the two Western Allies could muster. On the evening of the second day I was back in London. Now began again the task of preparing for an invasion, but by comparison with the similar job of a year and a half earlier, order had replaced disorder and certainty and confidence had replaced fear and doubt. Immediate subordinates included Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, General Sir Bernard Montgomery, Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz, and Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, all tested battle leaders and all experienced in the problems of developing real allied unity in a large operation. Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory was assigned to the Allied forces, with the title of Air Commander in Chief. He had much fighting experience, particularly in the Battle of Britain, but had not theretofore been in charge of air operations requiring close co-operation with ground troops.

As on my first arrival in London in June 1942, I found headquarters staffs concentrated in the heart of the city, but this time I determined I would not be defeated in my plan to find a suitable site somewhere in the countryside. I found one, and there were protests and gloomy predictions. Once concentrated in the Bushey Park area, however, we quickly developed a family relationship that far more than made up for minor inconveniences due to distance from the seat of Britain's administrative organization. My headquarters was officially called Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, and taking the initials from the name, SHAPE was born.

The period of planning and preparing that then ensued will be studied in detail only by professionals and by technical schools. With respect to command and staff organization, there were several important points to consider. The first of these was determination of the most desirable composition of the headquarters staff. Ever since I had been appointed an Allied commander in July 1942, with command over ground, air, and naval forces, we had understood and studied certain desirabilities in a truly integrated staff with approximately equal representation from each of the ground, air, naval, and logistic organizations. I believed that under certain situations, where large task forces might have to carry on extensive operations at great distances from Supreme Headquarters, such a composition of the staff would be necessary. In the preparatory days of Torch in 1942 we had initially planned to organize in this way. We finally abandoned the idea as being expensive in personnel, and not necessary in our situation.

The scheme which we found most effective, where it was possible for all commanders to meet together almost instantly, was to consider the naval, air, and ground chiefs as occupying two roles. In the first role each was part of my staff and he and his assistants worked with us in the development of plans; in the second role each was the responsible commander for executing his part of the whole operation. This was the general system that we followed throughout the Mediterranean operation and I was convinced that, considering only the conditions of our theater, it should be adopted as the guide for the new organization, although certain exceptions were inescapable.

The first of these exceptions involved the air forces. It was desirable that for the preparatory stages of the assault and for proper support during the critical early stages of the land operation—until we had established ourselves so firmly that danger of defeat was eliminated—all air forces in Britain, excepting only the Coastal Command, should come under my control. This would include the Strategic Air Forces, comprising the British Bomber Command under Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, and the U.S. Eighth Air Force under General Doolittle. Some opposition quickly developed, partly from the Prime Minister and his chiefs of staff. The Strategic Air command were also unwilling to take orders from the Tactical Air commander of the expedition. Their objections, I felt sure, were not based upon personal reasons but upon a conviction that a Tactical Air commander, who is always primarily concerned with the support of front-line troops, could not be expected to appreciate properly the true role and capabilities of Strategic Air Forces and would therefore misuse them.
A broader contention was that these great bomber units, with their ability to strike at any point in western Europe, should never be confined, even temporarily, to a role wherein their principal task would be to assist in a single ground operation. In answer we pointed out that the venture the United States and Great Britain were now about to undertake could not be classed as an ordinary tactical movement in which consequences would be no greater than those ordinarily experienced through success or failure in a battle. The two countries were definitely placing all their hopes, expectations, and assets in one great effort to establish a theater of operations in western Europe. Failure would carry with it consequences that would be almost fatal. Such a catastrophe might mean the complete redeployment to other theaters of all United States forces accumulated in the United Kingdom, while the setback to Allied morale and determination would be so profound that it was beyond calculation. Finally, such a failure would certainly react violently upon the Russian situation and it was not unreasonable to assume that, if that country should consider her Allies completely futile and helpless in doing anything of a major character in Europe, she might consider a separate peace.

My insistence upon commanding these air forces at that time was further influenced by the lesson so conclusively demonstrated at Salerno: when a battle needs the last ounce of available force, the commander must not be in the position of depending upon request and negotiation to get it. It was vital that the entire sum of our assault power, including the two Strategic Air Forces, be available for use during the critical stages of the attack. I stated unequivocally that so long as I was in command I would accept no other solution, although I agreed that the two commanders of the heavy bombing forces would not be subordinated to my Tactical Air commander in chief but would receive orders directly from me. This imposed no great additional burden on me because my deputy, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, was not only an experienced air commander, but in addition enjoyed the confidence of everybody in the air forces, both British and American.

We had no intention of using the Strategic Air Forces as a mere adjunct to the Tactical Air Command. On the contrary, we were most anxious to continue the destruction of German industry with emphasis upon oil. General Spaatz convinced me that, as Germany became progressively embarrassed by her diminishing oil reserves, the effect upon the land battle would be most profound and the eventual winning of the war would be correspondingly hastened.

My representations were accepted in early April and from that time until the critical phases of the campaign in France and Belgium were past Doolittle and Harris reported directly to me. Strictly speaking, however, Leigh-Mallory's organization comprised only those air forces that were definitely allocated as a permanently integral part of the expeditionary forces. These were the British air forces supporting the Twenty-first Army Group, the Ninth Air Force supporting the U.S. Twelfth Army Group, and, later on, the American air forces that operated in support of the Sixth Army Group (French and American) in the south. His command included also large air transport, reconnaissance, and other special units.

For control of ground forces no special appointment as "Ground Commander in Chief" was contemplated. Since our amphibious attack was on a relatively narrow front, with only two armies involved, one battle-line commander had to be constantly and immediately in charge of tactical co-ordination between the two armies in the initial stages. Montgomery was charged with this responsibility. But plans called for the early establishment of separate British and American army groups on the Continent and it was logical that, when these were in sufficient force to accomplish a decisive breakout and begin a rapid advance through western Europe, the land force in each natural channel of march should have its own commander, each reporting directly to my headquarters. This plan would apply also to the army group which was later to invade France from the south. It would be completely confusing—a case of too many cooks—to place any headquarters intermediate between these three principal ground commanders and my own. As a consequence each of these three ground commanders was in effect to be a ground commander in chief for his particular zone and each would be supported by a tactical air force for day-by-day operations.

This point was thoroughly discussed and well understood by all long before the operation was undertaken. However, a number of British officers—but not including those in my own headquarters—were by tradition wedded to strict compliance with the "triumvirate" method of command, and believed that we should have a single ground commander, installed as a deputy in my headquarters.

Our team acquired an important member with the arrival of George Patton, whose transfer from the Mediterranean I had asked. Sometimes he would spend the evening with me at my quarters, and though this usually involved the certainty of sitting up till the wee hours of the
morning, conversation with him was always so stimulating that it
was difficult to remember that the work day began before dawn when
operating under double daylight saving time.

I made a particular point of directing George to avoid press con-
ferences and public statements. He had a genius for explosive state-
ments that rarely failed to startle his hearers. He had so long prac-
ticed the habit of attempting with fantastic pronouncements to astound
his friends and associates that it had become second nature with
him, regardless of circumstances. A speech he made to an American
division shortly after his arrival in the United Kingdom caused more
than a ripple of astonishment and press comment, and I well knew
that it would be far easier to keep him for a significant role in the
war if he could shut off his public utterances. He promised faithfully
to do so.

Later in the spring, however, another storm broke around his
head. Before a British gathering he expressed indiscreet and inap-
propriate opinions about the need for Great Britain and America to
combine to run the world after the victory should be won.

Because the memory of the Sicilian slapping incident was still fresh
in the public mind the statement, widely publicized, attracted far more
attention than it would otherwise have done. His public critics were
confirmed in their conviction that he was totally unsuited to command
an army. For the first time I began seriously to doubt my ability to
hang onto my old friend, in whose fighting capacity I had implicit
faith and confidence. However, my concern was not so much for
his particular statements, which were the object of criticism at home,
as it was for his broken promise with the resultant implication that
he would never improve in this regard.

Investigation quickly revealed two points which influenced my de-
cision. The first of these was that in advance of the meeting Patton
had refused to make any speech and had merely, under the insistence
of his hosts, risen to his feet to say a word or two in support of the
purpose of the particular gathering. The second point was that he
had been assured that the meeting was a private one, with no reporters
present, and that no information concerning its details would be
given to anyone.

In the meantime the incident had become one for an exchange of
cablegrams with the War Department, but as usual the Secretary and
the Chief of Staff left final decision to me, to be based completely
upon my judgment as to the needs of battle.

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During my investigation George came to see me and in his typically
generous and emotional fashion offered to resign his commission so
as to relieve me of any embarrassment. When I finally announced to
him my determination to drop the whole matter and to retain him
as the prospective commander of the Third Army, he was stirred to
the point of tears. At such moments General Patton revealed a side
of his make-up that was difficult for anyone except his intimate friends
to understand. His remorse was very great, not only for the trouble
he had caused me but, he said, for the fact that he had vehemently
criticized me to his associates when he thought I might relieve him.
His emotional range was very great and he lived at either one end or
the other of it. I laughingly told him, "You owe us some victories;
pay off and the world will deem me a wise man."

It was important that a long-term strategic concept of the opera-
tion—of which the amphibious assault would be merely the opening
phase—should develop early. The directive from the Combined Chiefs
of Staff was very simple, merely instructing us to land on the coast
of France and thereafter to destroy the German ground forces. Its
significant paragraph ran, "You will enter the continent of Europe
and, in conjunction with the other Allied Nations, undertake opera-
tions aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her Armed
Forces." This purpose of destroying enemy forces was always our
guiding principle; geographical points were considered only in re-
lation to their importance to the enemy in the conduct of his opera-
tions or to us as centers of supply and communications in proceeding
to the destruction of enemy armies and air forces.

The heart of western Germany was the Ruhr, the principal center
of that nation's wartime munitions industry. The second most im-
portant industrial area in western Germany was the Saar Basin.
Within those two areas lay much of Germany's war-making power.

Of the natural avenues for crossing the Rhine with large forces, one
lay north of the Ruhr. Another good route passed through the Frank-
furt area, while still farther southward, in the Strasbourg region,
crossings were practicable. Of these feasible avenues the northern
one was, from our viewpoint, the most important. One reason was
that north of the Ruhr the terrain near the Rhine was of a more
favorable nature for offensive action. Another was that in this region
a relatively short advance from the Rhine would cut off the Ruhr and
its war industries from the rest of Germany. A third consideration
favoring the northern channel of operations was the perfect location,
from a logistic viewpoint, of Antwerp, the finest port in northwest Europe. Seizure and use of that port would vastly shorten our lines of communication, and it was clear that when we once arrived on the borders of Germany logistic problems were going to be critical.

However, our hope of destroying Germany’s final powers of resistance could not be attained merely by devoting all our resources to organizing a single thrust along a narrow channel following the northern coast. The problem remained that of destroying the German armed forces in the field and it was certain those forces would be encountered head on in whatever region the enemy felt his safety to be most greatly threatened. To employ offensively only a fraction of our forces anywhere on the front would have meant merely a head-on collision between our spearheads and all the defensive forces the enemy could muster. We wanted to bring all our strength against him, all of it mobile and all of it contributing directly to the complete annihilation of his field forces.

To avoid stalemate and to attain the position of power and mobility required to destroy the German forces, we planned, following upon any breakout, to push forward on a broad front, with priority on the left. Thus we would gain, at the earliest possible date, use of the enormously important ports of Belgium. This advance would also overrun the areas in which we knew some mysterious “secret weapons” were being installed, and as the advance continued we would directly threaten the Ruhr. It was additionally planned, from the start, to advance in the direction of the Saar, so far as this would be possible after assuring the capture of the Belgian ports and the arrival of the left at a location to threaten the Ruhr. The enemy would be sensitive about the safety of the Saar Basin, while our own forces, pushing in that direction, would soon connect with the invasion planned to come up from the south through the Rhone Valley. This linking up of our whole front was mandatory and would have several great and early advantages. It would liberate France. It would open up for us a great additional line of communication to insure the rapid arrival of troops from America and the sufficiency of their supply. Finally, it would cut off whatever German troops might remain behind the point of junction and so eliminate them from the war. This would allow us to use all our troops in facing and fighting the enemy and would prevent the costliness of establishing long defensive flanks along which our troops could have nothing but negative, static missions.

If all these movements should prove successful, we next had to look forward to the final destruction of the enemy, who would then, presumably, be defending the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River.

In May 1944 we calculated that with the ports of entry upon which we were counting we would probably have sixty-eight strong divisions available to us, not including divisions from the Mediterranean, when the time came to make our decisive thrusts across the Rhine. Allotting thirty-five of these to the advance on the axis, Amiens–Maubeuge–Liège–Ruhr, which, according to administrative estimates, was the maximum number that could be sustained along that channel of invasion, would leave us some thirty-three plus those introduced through the south of France for other operations along the long line from Wesel on the Rhine all the way south to Switzerland. Consequently, unless we could eliminate the Siegfried, we would be able to do little more than to defend along the front south of the Ruhr. With all the advantages the enemy would thus enjoy, he could concentrate almost at will for strong counterattack.

However, this prospect would be completely changed provided we could gain the line of the Rhine substantially throughout its entire
length. Once this was done we would enjoy a comparative degree of safety throughout the theater that would permit the assignment of offensive roles to practically our entire force instead of only to the thirty-five divisions that could be sustained along the one route north of the Ruhr.

There were other considerations dictating the wisdom of gaining the whole length of the Rhine before launching a final assault on interior Germany. Our objective was the destruction of the German armed forces. If we could overwhelmingly defeat the enemy west of the river it was certain that the means available to him for later defense of the Rhine would be meager indeed; Soviet forces had already entered Poland and much of the German strength would be tied down to meet future Russian offensives on the eastern front. Finally, if we could not destroy the German armies west of the Rhine obstacle, where our own supply lines would be as short as possible, how could we expect to do it east of the Rhine, where this advantage would not be ours? Generals Bradley and Patton, along with my entire staff, always concurred in these planning views for advances both through the Metz gap and north of the Ardennes.

Proceeding to the next step from this one, we reasoned that the Ruhr, which we expected to be defended by the strongest forces the enemy could provide, would be best reduced by a double envelopment. To achieve it we planned to make the northern attack as strong as the lines of communication would sustain, and the Frankfurt attack as strong as remaining resources would permit. We believed further that once these two attacks had joined in the vicinity of Kassel, east of the Ruhr, there would be no hope, in the military sense, remaining to Germany. In any event we believed that, once established in the Kassel region, we could easily thrust out offensively on our flanks. This would mean the end of the war in Europe.

All these successive moves with possible alternatives were the subjects of long discussions but the general plan approved as the outline of the operation we intended to conduct was:

Land on the Normandy coast.

Build up the resources needed for a decisive battle in the Normandy-Britanny region and break out of the enemy's encircling positions. (Land operations in the first two phases were to be under the tactical direction of Montgomery.)

Pursue on a broad front with two army groups, emphasizing the left to gain necessary ports and reach the boundaries of Germany and threaten the Ruhr. On our right we would link up with the forces that were to invade France from the south.

Build up our new base along the western border of Germany, by securing ports in Belgium and in Brittany as well as in the Mediterranean.

While building up our forces for the final battle, keep up an unrelenting offensive to the extent of our means, both to wear down the enemy and to gain advantages for the final fighting.

Complete the destruction of enemy forces west of the Rhine, in the meantime constantly seeking bridgeheads across the river.

Launch the final attack as a double envelopment of the Ruhr, again emphasizing the left, and follow this up by an immediate thrust through Germany, with the specific direction to be determined at the time.

Clean out the remainder of Germany.

This general plan, carefully outlined at staff meetings before D-day, was never abandoned, even momentarily, throughout the campaign."

The timing of the operation was a difficult matter to decide. At Teheran the President and the Prime Minister had promised Generalissimo Stalin that the attack would start in May but we were given to understand that any date selected in that period of the year would fulfill the commitments made by our two political leaders."

In order to obtain the maximum length of good campaigning weather, the earlier the attack could be launched the better. Another factor in favor of an early attack was the continuing and frantic efforts of the German to strengthen his coastal defenses. Because of weather conditions in the Channel, May was the earliest date that a landing attempt could be successfully undertaken and the first favorable combination of tides and sunrise occurred early in the month. Thus early May was the original and tentatively selected target date.

Alarming Intelligence reports concerning the progress of the Germans in developing new long-range weapons of great destructive capacity also indicated the advisability of attacking early.

From time to time during the spring months staff officers from Washington arrived at my headquarters to give me the latest calculations concerning German progress in the development of new weapons, including as possibilities bacteriological and atomic weapons. These reports were highly secret and were invariably delivered to me by word of mouth. I was told that American scientists were making progress in these two important types and that as a result of their own experience they were able to make shrewd guesses concerning some of the details of similar German activity. All of this information was supplemented by the periodic reports of Intelligence agencies in
London. In addition, aerial photographs were scrutinized with the greatest care in order to discover new installations that would apparently be useful only in some new kind of warfare.

The finest scientific brains in both Britain and America were called upon to help us in evaluation and in making estimates of probabilities. Our only effective counteraction, during the preparatory months of 1944, was by bombing. We sent intermittent raids against every spot in Europe where the scientists believed that the Germans were attempting either to manufacture new types of weapons or where they were building launching facilities along the coast.14

During this long period the calculations of the Intelligence agencies were necessarily based upon very meager information and as a consequence they shifted from time to time in their estimates of German progress. Nevertheless, before we launched the invasion, Intelligence experts were able to give us remarkably accurate estimates of the existence, characteristics, and capabilities of the new German weapons.

Two considerations, one of them decisive in character, combined to postpone the target date from May to June. The first and important one was our insistence that the attack be on a larger scale than that originally planned by the staff assembled in London under Lieutenant General Frederick Morgan. He was an extraordinarily fine officer and had, long before my arrival, won the high admiration and respect of General Marshall. I soon came to place an equal value upon his qualifications. He had in the months preceding my arrival accomplished a mass of detailed planning, accumulation of data, and gathering of supply that made D-day possible. My ideas were supported by General Morgan personally but he had been compelled to develop his plan on the basis of a fixed number of ships, landing craft, and other resources. Consequently he had no recourse except to work out an attack along a three-division front, whereas I insisted upon five and informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff that we had to have the additional landing craft and other gear essential to the larger operation, even if this meant delaying the assault by a month. To this the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed.15

Another factor that made the later date a desirable one was the degree of dependence we were placing upon the preparatory effort of the air force. An early attack would provide the air force with only a minimum opportunity for pinpoint bombing of critical transportation centers in France, whereas the improved weather anticipated for the month of May would give them much more time and better opportunity to impede the movement of German reserves and demolish German defenses along the coast line. The virtual destruction of critical points on the main roads and railroads leading into the selected battle area was a critical feature of the battle plan. Nevertheless, acceptance of the later date was disappointing. We wanted all the summer weather we could get for the European campaign.

Along with the general plan of operations we thoroughly considered means of deceiving the enemy as to the point and timing of attack. Our purpose was to convince him that we intended to strike directly across the Channel at its narrowest point, against the stronghold of Calais. In many ways great advantages would have accrued to us if we could have successfully attacked in this region. Not only were the beaches the best along the coast, they were closest to the British ports and to the German border. The enemy, fully appreciating these facts, kept strong forces in the area and fortified that particular section of coast line more strongly than any other. The defenses were so strong that none of us believed that a successful assault from this beach could be made except at such tremendous cost that the whole expedition might find itself helpless to accomplish anything of a positive character, after it got ashore. But we counted upon the enemy believing that we would be tempted into this operation, and the wide variety of measures we took for convincing him were given extraordinary credence by his Intelligence division.16

The complementary attack against southern France had long been considered—by General Marshall and me, at least—as an integral and necessary feature of the main invasion across the Channel. In the planning of early 1944, I supposed that all principal commanders and the Combined Chiefs of Staff were solidly together on this point. Our studies in London, however, soon demonstrated that, even with a June date of attack, the Allies did not have enough landing craft and other facilities to mount simultaneously both the cross-Channel and the Mediterranean attacks in the strength we wanted.17

The United States was at that time committed to offensive action in the Pacific and the necessary additional craft could not be diverted from that theater. In the face of this, General Montgomery proposed the complete abandonment of the attack on southern France, which then had the code name of Anvil. He wrote to me on February 21, 1944: "I recommend very strongly that we now throw the whole weight of our opinion into the scales against Anvil."18 I refused to go along with this view.19 But it became clear that there was no other
recourse except to delay the southern attack for a sufficient time to permit ships and craft first to operate in Overlord and then to proceed to the Mediterranean for participation in that battle. We concluded that this arrangement was not especially disadvantageous; at least it was far better than cancellation. The presence of Allied troops in the Mediterranean would prevent the German from completely evacuating his troops from southern France, while, if he gradually drained that area, our later advance from the south would be much speedier. Consequently we agreed upon the delay in the southern attack with the recommendation that it be made as soon after July 15 as was feasible.

Our scheme for employing the air force in preparation for the great assault encountered very earnest and sincere opposition, especially on the political level. To demolish the key bridges, freight yards, and main rail arteries of France would inevitably result in casualties among the French population. Even though we planned, in the case of large cities, to disrupt communications by bombing critical points surrounding the locality instead of within the highly populated centers, some statisticians calculated that the plan would cost at least 80,000 French lives. Such a catastrophe was of course likely to embitter the French nation; the Prime Minister and many of his subordinates insisted that some other way must be found to employ the air forces in support of the attack. The Prime Minister was genuinely shaken by the fearful picture presented to him by opponents of our idea, and his appeals to me were correspondingly urgent and appealing. He said, "Postwar France must be our friend. It is not alone a question of humanitarianism. It is also a question of high state policy."

My own air commanders and I challenged the accuracy of the statisticians' figures. We anticipated losses of not more than a fraction of 80,000—particularly because we planned to issue both general and specific warnings to the inhabitants. We used every possible means repeatedly to tell the French and Belgians to move away from critical points in the transport system. More than this, preceding every raid we planned to warn inhabitants, by radio and by leaflet, to evacuate temporarily the areas selected for that attack. We could afford to give these definite warnings because of our knowledge that we had badly diminished the strength of the German Air Force and because also we knew that the enemy could not have anti-aircraft in sufficient quantities to cover, on short notice, every critical spot in the transportation system of France. The plan had to be so arranged

that it did not, by its general pattern, reveal the area selected for assault. Consequently, in furtherance of our deception plans, we invariably chose some targets in the Calais area for heavy bombing simultaneously with every critical raid.

The value and need of the bombing were argued long and earnestly and of course, sympathetically, because of human factors involved. Finally the Prime Minister and his government and General Pierre Joseph Koenig, the commander of the French Forces of the Interior, all agreed that the attacks had to be executed as laid down, with the hope that the measures we adopted for warning the population would be effective in minimizing casualties. In the outcome the efficacy of this preparatory bombing for the ground attack was clearly proved. Moreover, not only were the civilian casualties a mere fraction of those originally estimated, but the French nation as a whole calmly accepted their necessity and developed no antagonisms toward the Allied forces as a result of them. In addition to the work of the air forces against the transportation system of France we continued our steady pounding at German oil plants and other vital parts of its warmaking industry. Moreover, the air forces constantly sought
to engage the Luftwaffe in battle with a view to wearing down its strength still more, before the crisis of the land battle should develop."

In the meantime both ground and air staffs were constantly working on the perfection of measures for the co-ordination of ground and air in actual battle. We had long ceased to refer to "air support of the ground forces" and referred to our battles merely as "ground-air." This interdependence is a characteristic of modern battle. Ground forces must always be determined to gain and protect favorable localities from which the air can operate close up to the front lines, while on the other hand constant fighter-bomber support of ground forces must be accepted as a matter of routine. In several crises of the European campaign the air flew more than 10,000 combat sorties per day as its share of the ground-air battle."

One of the most difficult problems, which invariably accompanies planning for a tactical offensive, involves measures for maintenance, supplies, evacuation, and replacement.

Prior to the late war it had always been assumed that any major amphibious attack had to gain permanent port facilities within a matter of several days or be abandoned. The development of effective landing gear by the Allies, including LSTs, LCTs, ducks, and other craft, did much to lessen immediate dependence upon established port facilities. It is not too much to say that Allied development of great quantities of revolutionary types of equipment was one of the greatest factors in the defeat of the plans of the German General Staff."

Nevertheless, possession of equipment and gear that permit the landing of material on open beaches does not by any means eliminate the need for ports. This was particularly true in Overlord. The history of centuries clearly shows that the English Channel is subject to destructive storms at all times of the year, with winter by far the worst period. The only certain method to assure supply and maintenance was by capture of large port facilities.

Since the nature of the defenses to be encountered ruled out the possibility of gaining adequate ports promptly, it was necessary also to provide a means for sheltering beach supply from the effect of storms. We knew that even after we captured Cherbourg its port capacity and the lines of communication leading out of it could not meet all our needs. To solve this apparently unsolvable problem we undertook a project so unique as to be classed by many scoffers as completely fantastic. It was a plan to construct artificial harbors on the coast of Normandy."

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The first time I heard this idea tentatively advanced was by Admiral Mountbatten, in the spring of 1942. At a conference attended by a number of service chiefs he remarked, "If ports are not available, we may have to construct them in pieces and tow them in." Hoots and jeers greeted his suggestion but two years later it was to become a reality.

Two general types of protected anchorages were designed. The first, called a "gooseberry," was to consist merely of a line of sunken ships placed stem to stern in such numbers as to provide a sheltered coast line in their lee on which small ships and landing craft could continue to unload in any except the most vicious weather. The other type, named "mulberry," was practically a complete harbor. Two of these were designed and constructed in Great Britain, to be towed piecemeal to the coast of Normandy. The principal construction unit in the mulberry was an enormous concrete ship, called a "phoenix," boxlike in shape and so heavily constructed that when numbers of them were sunk end to end along a strip of coast they would probably provide solid protection against almost any wave action. Elaborate auxiliary equipment to facilitate unloading and all types of gear required in the operation of a modern port were planned for and provided. The British and American sectors were each to have one of the mulberry ports. Five gooseberries were to be installed.

Experience in Mediterranean warfare had demonstrated that each of our reinforced divisions in active operation consumed about 600 to 700 tons of supplies per day. Our maintenance arrangements had to provide for the arrival of these amounts daily. In addition we had simultaneously to build up on the beaches the reserves in troops, ammunition, and supplies that would enable us, within a reasonable time, to initiate deep offensives with the certainty that these could be sustained through an extended period of decisive action. On top of all this we had to provide for bringing in the heavy engineering and construction material needed to re-establish and re-fit captured ports, to repair railways, bridges, and roads, and to build airfields. A further feature of the logistic plan, and a most important one, provided for the speedy removal of wounded from the beaches and their prompt transfer to the great array of hospitals in England.

In SHAEF my principal logistic officers were Lieutenant General Sir Humfrey Gale and Major General R. W. Crawford, both widely experienced and extremely able. The commander of the American logistic organization was Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee. He was an engineer officer of long experience, with a reputation for
getting things done. Because of his mannerisms and his stern insistence upon the outward forms of discipline, which he himself meticulously observed, he was considered a martinet by most of his acquaintances. He was determined, correct, and devoted to duty; he had long been known as an effective administrator and as a man of the highest character and religious fervor. I sometimes felt that he was a modern Cromwell, but I was ready to waive the rigidity of his mannerisms in favor of his constructive qualities. Indeed, I felt it possible that his unyielding methods might be vital to success in an activity where an iron hand is always mandatory.

Special tactical problems anticipated in the initial attack were many, some of them most difficult of solution. The principal subordinate commanders and staff officers met with me frequently to discuss and fit together evolving plans; often experts and specialists of a variety of categories attended these meetings to give technical advice.

Constant advisers in all tactical and operational affairs were these officers in whom I reposed the greatest confidence. They were Major General Harold R. Bull, Brigadier General Arthur S. Nevins of the American Army and Major General J. F. M. Whiteley of the British.

At a secluded spot in eastern England the British Army constructed every type of tactical obstacle that the German might use in defending against our attack. The British built pillboxes, massive stone walls, and great areas of barbed-wire entanglements. They planted mine fields, erected steel obstacles for underwater and land use, and dug anti-tank ditches. Each of these was a replica of similar defenses we knew the Germans had already installed. Then the British set about the task of designing equipment that would facilitate destruction of these obstacles. They used the area for actual test of the equipment so developed and for trying out new battle techniques."

An interesting example of this experimentation was a new method for using the Bangalore torpedo. This torpedo is nothing but a long tube filled with explosive. It is thrust out into a mine field and upon detonation explodes all the mines planted along its length. Thus is created a narrow path through the mine field, along which troops can advance and continue the attack while others in the rear come forward to clear up the remaining portions of the field. These torpedoes had long been used in warfare but the British developed a novel way of employing them. They did this by covering a Sherman tank with a series of pipes, each of which contained a Bangalore torpedo. The pipes pointed straight to the front and were, in effect, guns with light charges of black powder at the rear. As the tank advanced it automatically fired these makeshift guns in succession so that, as each of the torpedoes flew out in the air and exploded some thirty feet in front of the tank, it cleared a continuous path through the mine field. Each tank carried a sufficient number of torpedoes to clear a path approximately fifty yards long. The idea was that, instead of depending upon defenseless foot soldiers to do this hazardous work, it would be done by a tank crew, from the comparative safety afforded by its protecting armor. I never saw this particular piece of equipment used in action but it is an example of the methods by which we tried to ease the problem of the foot soldier. Transportable bridges to span anti-tank ditches, flame-throwing tanks, and flails, plows, and heavy rollers for destroying mines were other items constantly under development and test.

As always, the matter of the Army's morale attracted the constant attention of all senior commanders. Sometimes this attention had to be directed toward particular and specific points. For example, a columnist estimated that any attempt to land on the defended coast of northwest Europe would result in eighty to ninety per cent losses in the assaulting units. This irresponsible statement was sufficiently circulated to cause doubt and uneasiness in the command. Bradley and others immediately took occasion, during numerous visits to troops, to brand this statement for just what it was—a fearful, false, and completely misguided statement by someone who knew nothing of warfare or of the facts. Bradley predicted that the attacking losses would be no greater than in any other stiff battle of comparable size. We went so far as to give publicity to his estimate in the papers and used every other means available to us to prevent the doleful prediction from shaking the confidence of the troops.

The air plan, in both its preparatory and supporting phases, was worked out in minute detail, and as the spring wore on the results obtained in the preparatory phase were reviewed weekly. Reconnaissance by submarine and airplane was unending, while information was gathered from numbers of sources. The naval plan involved general protection, mine sweeping, escorting, supporting fire, and, along with all else, erection of artificial ports, repair of captured ports, and maintenance of cross-Channel supply. The coastal defenses were studied and specific plans made for the reduction of every strong point, every pillbox. Pictures were studied and one of the disturbing things these continued to show was the growing profusion of beach
obstacles, most of these under water at high tide. Embarkation plans for troops, equipment, and supplies were voluminous, and exact in detail. Routes to ports, timings of departures and arrivals, locations, protection and camouflage of temporary camps, and a thousand related matters were all carefully predetermined and, so far as feasible, tested in advance.

Senior commanders used every possible moment in visiting and inspecting troops. Records left by a staff officer show that in four months, from February 1 to June 1, I visited twenty-six divisions, twenty-four airfields, five ships of war, and numerous depots, shops, hospitals, and other important installations. Bradley, Montgomery, Spaatz, and Tedder maintained similar schedules. Such visits, sandwiched between a seemingly endless series of conferences and staff meetings, were necessary and highly valuable.

Soldiers like to see the men who are directing operations; they properly resent any indication of neglect or indifference to them on the part of their commanders and invariably interpret a visit, even a brief one, as evidence of the commander’s concern for them. Diffidence or modesty must never blind the commander to his duty of showing himself to his men, of speaking to them, of mingling with them to the extent of physical limitations. It pays big dividends in terms of morale, and morale, given rough equality in other things, is supreme on the battlefield.

As the time came for shifting our concentrations toward the ports, the southern portion of England became one vast camp, dump, and airfield. At our request the British Government stopped all traffic between this part of England and the remainder of the United Kingdom, just as it did between the United Kingdom and Eire, since enemy spies abounded in neutral Eire. The government even took the unprecedented step of arbitrarily stopping all diplomatic communications from the United Kingdom to foreign countries and drew down upon itself angry and prolonged protest. Further, it withdrew from normal use its coastwise shipping so that we could employ these immensely valuable vessels for military purposes. This threw an almost impossible load on the already overworked railways. Passenger traffic practically ceased and even essential commodities were transported with difficulty. Construction of the great artificial harbors engaged the services of thousands of men and added indescribable congestion to already crowded ports and harbors.

The war-weary British public responded without a whimper to

these added inconveniences and privations. Sustained by the certainty that a decisive effort was in the offing and inspired by the example and leadership of Winston Churchill, people cheerfully accepted the need of using their own streets and roads at the risk of being run down, of seeing their fields and gardens trampled, of waiting in long queues for trains that rarely arrived, and of suffering a further cut in an already meager ration so that nothing should interfere with the movement of the soldiers and the mountains of supplies we so lavishly consumed.

After the abandonment of the May target date, the next combination of moon, tide, and time of sunrises that we considered practicable for the attack occurred on June 5, 6, and 7. We wanted to cross the Channel with our convoys at night so that darkness would conceal the strength and direction of our several attacks. We wanted a moon for our airborne assaults. We needed approximately forty minutes of daylight preceding the ground assault to complete our bombing and preparatory bombardment. We had to attack on a relatively low tide because of beach obstacles which had to be removed while uncovered. These principal factors dictated the general period; but the selection of the actual day would depend upon weather forecasts.

If none of the three days should prove satisfactory from the standpoint of weather, consequences would ensue that were almost terrifying to contemplate. Secrecy would be lost. Assault troops would be unloaded and crowded back into assembly areas enclosed in barbed wire, where their original places would already have been taken by those to follow in subsequent waves. Complicated movement tables would be scrapped. Morale would drop. A wait of at least fourteen days, possibly twenty-eight, would be necessary—a sort of suspended animation involving more than 2,000,000 men! The good-weather period available for major campaigning would become still shorter and the enemy’s defenses would become still stronger! The whole of the United Kingdom would become quickly aware that something had gone wrong and national discouragement there and in America could lead to unforeseen results. Finally, always lurking in the background was the knowledge that the enemy was developing new, and presumably effective, secret weapons on the French coast. What the effect of these would be on our crowded harbors, especially at Plymouth and Portsmouth, we could not even guess.

It was a tense period, made even worse by the fact that the one thing that could give us this disastrous setback was entirely outside
our control. Some soldier once said, “The weather is always neutral.” Nothing could be more untrue. Bad weather is obviously the enemy of the side that seeks to launch projects requiring good weather, or of the side possessing great assets, such as strong air forces, which depend upon good weather for effective operations. If really bad weather should endure permanently, the Nazi would need nothing else to defend the Normandy coast!

A particularly difficult decision involved our planned airborne attack in the Cotentin Peninsula. The assault against the east coast of that peninsula, to take place on a beach called Utah, was included in the attack plan because of my conviction, concurred in by Bradley, that without it the early capture of Cherbourg would be difficult if not almost impossible. Unless we could soon seize Cherbourg, the enemy’s opportunity for hemming us in on a narrow beachhead might be so well exploited as to lead to the defeat of the operations. Rapid and complete success on Utah Beach was, we believed, prerequisite to real success in the whole campaign.

The only available beach on the Cotentin Peninsula was, however, a miserable one. Just back of it was a wide lagoon, passable only on a few narrow causeways that led from the beaches to the interior of the peninsula. If the exits of these causeways should be held by the enemy our landing troops would be caught in a trap and eventually slaughtered by artillery and other fire to which they would be able to make little reply.

To prevent this, we planned to drop two divisions of American paratroopers inland from this beach, with their primary mission to seize and hold the exits of the vital causeways. The ground was highly unsuited to airborne operations. Hedgerows in the so-called “bocage” country are big, strong, and numerous. The coast lines that the vulnerable transport planes and gliders would have to cross were studded with anti-aircraft. In addition, there were units of mobile enemy troops in the area and these, aside from mounting anti-aircraft fire, would attempt to operate against our paratroopers and glider troops before they could organize themselves for action.

The whole project was much argued from its first proposing, but Bradley and Major General Matthew Ridgway, our senior American airborne general, always stoutly agreed with me as to its necessity and its feasibility. At an early date it was approved for inclusion in plans and I supposed the matter settled, but it was to come up again in dramatic fashion, just before D-day.
The staffs that were developing, co-ordinating, and recording all these details were, of course, working in constant co-operation with numerous agencies and personalities in London and Washington. During the preparatory period an endless stream of staff officers from Washington visited our headquarters to provide information on the availability of needed items, confirm dates of shipment, discuss plans for personnel replacements, for security, for photographic coverage, and a thousand related items.

One of General Somervell's principal assistants, Major General LeRoy Lutes, remained with us in Britain several weeks, investigating arrangements for insuring the uninterrupted flow of supplies all the way from the factories in the United States to the front line. At various times we had conferences with such people as Mr. Eden and Mr. Bevin of the British Cabinet, with Mr. Stimson and Mr. Stettinius from Washington, with Mr. Winant, Mr. Harriman, and Mr. Biddle, American representatives in London, and with General de Gaulle, who came up from Africa for the purpose. These conferences had to do with every type of subject, including that of future plans for controlling the areas in which we intended to operate and for governing Germany and Austria once we should reach those countries.

During all this period my personal contacts with the Prime Minister were frequent and profitable. He took a lively interest in every important detail, and was able to lend us an effective hand when some of our requirements demanded extra effort on the part of overburdened British civil agencies.

Visits to Chequers always had business as their main purpose. But the countryside was so pleasant and peaceful that an occasional hour spent in strolling through the fields and woods was real recreation. Chequers was at one time occupied by Cromwell; its setting, architecture, and furniture were all historically interesting.

The Prime Minister would usually ask his guests to arrive during the late afternoon. Dinner would be followed by a short movie and then, at about 10:30 p.m., business conferences would begin. These sometimes lasted until three the next morning. Nearly always present were Mr. Eden and one or more of the British Chiefs of Staff. Every type of problem was discussed and often definite decisions reached. Operational messages arrived every few hours from the London headquarters, and Mr. Churchill always participated with the British Chiefs in the formulation and dispatch of instructions, even those that were strictly military, sometimes only tactical, in character.
In such conferences as these I came to admire and like many of the people with whom I was so often in contact. One of them was Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Air Member of the British Chiefs of Staff. He was a profound military student—but with it all a man of action—and quiet, courteous, of strong convictions. It was a pleasure to discuss with him any problem of war, whether or not it pertained exclusively to his own field of the air. He enjoyed great prestige in British military and civil circles, as well as among the Americans of the Allied command. His distinguishing characteristic was balance, with perfect control of his temper; even in the most intense argument I never saw him show anger or unusual excitement.

Mr. Churchill, on the other hand, rarely failed to inject into most conferences some element of emotion. One day a British general happened to refer to soldiers, in the technical language of the British staff officer, as “bodies.” The Prime Minister interrupted with an impassioned speech of condemnation—he said it was inhuman to talk of soldiers in such cold-blooded fashion, and that it sounded as if they were merely freight—or worse—corpses! I must confess I always felt the same way about the expression, but on that occasion my sympathies were with the staff officer, who to his own obvious embarrassment had innocently drawn on himself the displeasure of the Prime Minister.

As in most other British homes, there was a guest book in Chequers. Each guest was expected to sign it every time he entered the house. Once, on a trip to the southern coast, I dropped in at Chequers to see Mr. Churchill for ten minutes, after which I dashed for the door to continue the journey. Just as I gained the seat of my car I became aware that the family butler, in all his dignity, was standing by to speak to me. He said, “Sir, you have forgotten the book,” and his solemn tone meant to me that he found it difficult to forgive my oversight. I corrected the omission and sped upon my way.

In spite of all his preoccupations, Mr. Churchill constantly evidenced an intensely human side. When London had to endure the “Little Blitz” of February 1944 he took frequent occasion to urge me to occupy one of the specially built underground shelters in London. He even went to the extent of having an entire apartment, complete with kitchen, living room, bedroom, and secret telephones, fixed up for me. While I never used or even saw the place, yet he never ceased to show great concern for my safety, although paying absolutely no attention to his own. His single apparent desire, during an air raid, was to visit his daughter Mary, then serving in an anti-aircraft battery protecting London.

In all our conferences Mr. Churchill clearly and concretely explained his attitude toward and his hopes for Overlord. He gradually became more optimistic than he had earlier been, but he still refused to let his expectations completely conquer his doubts. More than once he said, “General, if by the coming winter you have established yourself with your thirty-six Allied divisions firmly on the Continent, and have the Cherbourg and Brittany peninsulas in your grasp, I will proclaim this operation to the world as one of the most successful of the war.” And then he would add, “And if, in addition to this, you have secured the port at Le Havre and freed beautiful Paris from the hands of the enemy, I will assert the victory to be the greatest of modern times.”

Always I would reply, “Prime Minister, I assure you that the coming winter will see the Allied forces on the borders of Germany itself. You are counting only on our presently available thirty-six divisions. We are going to bring in ten additional from the Mediterranean, and through the ports we capture shall soon begin to rush in an additional forty from the United States.”

He doubted that we could get the elbow room to do all this in the summer and fall of 1944 and often observed, “All that is for later; my statement still holds.” In reply to my insistence that the picture I painted him was not too rosy, even if the German continued to fight to the bitter end, he would smile and say, “My dear General, it is always fine for a leader to be optimistic. I applaud your enthusiasm, but liberate Paris by Christmas and none of us can ask for more.”

On April 7, General Montgomery was ready, with co-operating air and naval staffs, to present the completed picture of the detailed plan for the ground assault against the beaches. A huge conference was arranged in St. Paul’s School in London and there an entire day was spent in presentation, examination, and co-ordination of detail.

The plan carried the troops straight southward against the shore of France with the Americans on the right, the British and Canadians on the left. The extreme right flank of the assault was against Utah Beach on the Cherbourg peninsula, the left flank at approximately the mouth of the river Orne. The entire front of attack was over sixty miles long.

Since our desire was to bring up close to the battle lines large numbers of fighter bombers and to seize areas in which our great tank strength could operate most effectively, the plan provided for the early
capture by the British Second Army of the open plains lying south of Caen. To the right of that city the Americans were to advance southward from Omaha Beach abreast of the British, while farther right Major General J. Lawton Collins’ corps, after landing on Utah, was to make its principal objective the early capture of Cherbourg. Because large German forces were located in the Calais area it seemed probable that to preserve communications between that region and Normandy the enemy would concentrate heavily in the Caen area. It was certain also that he would make desperate efforts to hold Cherbourg and so deny us the use of that port. Nevertheless, we hoped that speed and surprise would gain for us early possession of the open ground outside Caen, while Bradley estimated that the Americans would take Cherbourg in from ten to thirty days, depending upon the degree of luck we might enjoy.

Montgomery’s detailed plan also indicated the areas that he estimated we would probably be holding in successive periods following the assault. These estimates are shown on map “Overlord Forecast.”

The anticipated development pictured in the phase lines was not, of course, an essential feature of the landing plan, since the first and great objective was to assault and capture a satisfactory and indestructible beachhead which we could build up as rapidly as possible for the later decisive battle for France. But progress predictions are always helpful to the supply staffs in order that they may plan their own operations according to a concept that gives some idea of the scope of responsibilities they will be called upon to meet. The predicted ninety-day line was actually reached slightly ahead of schedule, but those forecasts for the earlier days of the operation proved impossible of attainment. Out of this circumstance developed some difficulties.

The air plan, already in execution, called for the progressive wearing down of the Luftwaffe and the destruction of critical points in the rail and highway systems so as to isolate the coastal areas selected for assault. For D-day the air forces were charged with the responsibility of demolishing selected targets in the enemy's coastal defenses, of providing overhead cover and rendering general fighter-bomber support as the troops progressed inland.

The naval plan was complicated by the configuration and nature of the coastal area, which provided little sea room for maneuver, and by the density and extent of mine fields. Nevertheless, the whole program of mine sweeping, escorting, preliminary bombardment, gunfire support, and general protection against enemy surface and submarine forces was provided for in detail. The logistic plan for transportation, care, and maintenance of troops and forwarding of supplies was fully as comprehensive as any of the others.

On May 15 a final conference was held at St. Paul’s School under the supervision of SACEF. At this final meeting every principal member of the British Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet attended, as did also the King of England and Allied generals by the score. Field Marshal Smuts came with his old friend, Mr. Churchill. During the whole war I attended no other conference so packed with rank as this one. The purpose was to assure that any doubtful points of the earlier conference would be ironed out and corrected. It also served to bring to the attention of all commanders the broad purposes of the highest headquarters and to give to each a fully completed and rounded picture of the support he could expect. Instructions for the briefing of small units and their care during the period of moving to the ports were checked and confirmed. Secrecy was a dominating factor.

This meeting gave us an opportunity to hear a word from both the King and the Prime Minister. The latter made one of his typical fighting speeches, in the course of which he used an expression that struck many of us, particularly the Americans, with peculiar force. He said, “Gentlemen, I am hardening toward this enterprise,” meaning to us that, though he had long doubted its feasibility and had previously advocated its further postponement in favor of operations elsewhere, he had finally, at this late date, come to believe with the rest of us that this was the true course of action in order to achieve the victory. The whole meeting was packed with dramatic significance. It not only marked the virtual completion of all preliminary planning and preparation but seemed to impart additional confidence as each of the scores of commanders and staff officers present learned in detail the extent of the assistance he would receive for his own particular part of the vast undertaking.

Before the actual assault, operational portions of SACEF and Twenty-first Army Group Headquarters were set up at Portsmouth on the south coast. This was the region of our principal embarkation point, and here also the Navy had established a communication system that would keep us in touch, during the early hours of D-day, with the progress of each element in the great armada.

By the time the operational staffs had moved to Portsmouth, I felt that the only remaining great decision to be faced before D-day was that of fixing, definitely, the day and hour of the assault. However, the
old question of the wisdom of the airborne operation into the Cherbourg peninsula was not yet fully settled in Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory's mind. Later, on May 30, he came to me to protest once more against what he termed the "futile slaughter" of two fine divisions. He believed that the combination of unsuitable landing grounds and anticipated resistance was too great a hazard to overcome. This dangerous combination was not present in the area on the left where the British airborne division would be dropped and casualties there were not expected to be abnormally severe, but he estimated that among the American outfits we would suffer some seventy per cent losses in glider strength and at least fifty per cent in paratroop strength before the airborne troops could land. Consequently the divisions would have no remaining tactical power and the attack would not only result in the sacrifice of many thousand men but would be helpless to effect the outcome of the general assault.

Leigh-Mallory was, of course, earnestly sincere. He was noted for personal courage and was merely giving me, as was his duty, his frank convictions.

It would be difficult to conceive of a more soul-racking problem. If my technical expert was correct, then the planned operation was worse than stubborn folly, because even at the enormous cost predicted we could not gain the principal object of the drop. Moreover, if he was right, it appeared that the attack on Utah Beach was probably hopeless, and this meant that the whole operation suddenly acquired a degree of risk, even foolhardiness, that presaged a gigantic failure, possibly Allied defeat in Europe.

To protect him in case his advice was disregarded, I instructed the air commander to put his recommendations in a letter and informed him he would have my answer within a few hours. I took the problem to no one else. Professional advice and counsel could do no more.

I went to my tent alone and sat down to think. Over and over I reviewed each step, somewhat in the sequence set down here, but more thoroughly and exhaustively. I realized, of course, that if I deliberately disregarded the advice of my technical expert on the subject, and his predictions should prove accurate, then I would carry to my grave the unbearable burden of a conscience justly accusing me of the stupid, blind sacrifice of thousands of the flower of our youth. Outweighing any personal burden, however, was the possibility that if he were right the effect of the disaster would be far more than local: it would be likely to spread to the entire force.

PLANNING OVERLORD

Nevertheless, my review of the matter finally narrowed the critical points to these:

If I should cancel the airborne operation, then I had either to cancel the attack on Utah Beach or I would condemn the assaulting forces there to even greater probability of disaster than was predicted for the airborne divisions.

If I should cancel the Utah attack I would so badly disarrange elaborate plans as to diminish chances for success elsewhere and to make later maintenances perhaps impossible. Moreover, in long and calm consideration of the whole great scheme we had agreed that the Utah attack was an essential factor in prospects for success. To abandon it really meant to abandon a plan in which I had held implicit confidence for more than two years.

Finally, Leigh-Mallory's estimate was just an estimate, nothing more, and our experience in Sicily and Italy did not, by any means, support his degree of pessimism. Bradley, with Ridgway and other airborne commanders, had always supported me and the staff in the matter, and I was encouraged to persist in the belief that Leigh-Mallory was wrong!

I telephoned him that the attack would go as planned and that I would confirm this at once in writing. When, later, the attack was successful he was the first to call me to voice his delight and to express his regret that he had found it necessary to add to my personal burdens during the final tense days before D-day.

There was, of course, much to do aside from merely waiting to make the final decision concerning the timing of the attack. We had visits from many important officials. One of our final visitors was General de Gaulle, with whom some disagreement developed, involving the actual timing and nature of pronouncements to be made to the French population immediately upon landing. General de Gaulle wanted to be clearly and definitely recognized by both the Allied governments as the ruler of France. He insisted that he alone had the right to give orders to the French population in directing the necessary co-operation with the Allied forces.

President Roosevelt was flatly opposed to giving General de Gaulle this specific and particular type of recognition. The President then, as always, made a great point of his insistence that sovereignty in France resided in the people, that the Allies were not entering France in order to force upon the population a particular government or a particular ruler. He asserted, therefore, that our proclamations should show
that we were quite ready to co-operate with any French groups that would participate in the work of destroying the German forces. He agreed that if any or all of these groups chose to follow De Gaulle we would operate through his command, but the President could not agree to forcing De Gaulle upon anyone else.46

The attempt to work out a plan satisfactory to De Gaulle and still remain within the limits fixed by our governments fell largely to the lot of our headquarters and occasioned a great deal of worry because we were depending on considerable assistance from the insurrectionists in France. They were known to be particularly numerous in the Brittany area and in the hills and mountains of southeastern France. An open clash with De Gaulle on this matter would hurt us immeasurably and would result in bitter recrimination and unnecessary loss of life.

The staff thought the argument was, in a sense, academic. It was considered that, in the initial stages of the operation at least, De Gaulle would represent the only authority that could produce any kind of French co-ordination and unification and that no harm would result from giving him the kind of recognition he sought. He would merely be placed on notice that once the country was liberated the freely expressed will of the French people would determine their own government and leader. We had already, with the consent of our governments, accepted De Gaulle’s representative, General Koenig, as the commander of the French Forces of the Interior, who was serving as a direct subordinate of mine in the Allied organization.

We particularly desired De Gaulle to participate with me in broadcasting on D-day to the French people so that the population, avoiding uprisings and useless sacrifice at non-critical points, would still be instantly ready to help us where help was needed. We worked hard, within the limits of our instructions, to win De Gaulle to our point of view, but although after the campaign was started he co-operated with us effectively, he did not meet our requests at the moment.47

A number of other details remained to be ironed out during the days at Portsmouth preceding D-day, but the big question mark always before us was the weather that would prevail during the only period of early June that we could use, the fifth, sixth, and seventh.

All southern England was one vast military camp, crowded with soldiers awaiting final word to go, and piled high with supplies and equipment awaiting transport to the far shore of the Channel. The whole area was cut off from the rest of England. The government had established a deadline, across which no unauthorized person was allowed to go in either direction. Every separate encampment, barrack, vehicle park, and every unit was carefully charted on our master maps. The scheduled movement of each unit had been so worked out that it would reach the embarkation point at the exact time the vessels would be ready to receive it. The southernmost camps where assault troops were assembled were all surrounded by barbed-wire entanglements to prevent any soldier leaving the camp after he had once been briefed as to his part in the attack. The mighty host was tense as a coiled spring, and indeed that is exactly what it was—a great human spring, coiled for the moment when its energy should be released and it would vault the English Channel in the greatest amphibious assault ever attempted.

We met with the Meteorologic Committee twice daily, once at nine-thirty in the evening and once at four in the morning. The committee, comprising both British and American personnel, was headed by a dour but canny Scot, Group Captain J. M. Stagg. At these meetings every bit of evidence was carefully presented, carefully analyzed by the experts, and carefully studied by the assembled commanders. With the approach of the critical period the tension continued to mount as prospects for decent weather became worse and worse.

The final conference for determining the feasibility of attacking on the tentatively selected day, June 5, was scheduled for 4:00 a.m. on June 4. However, some of the attacking contingents had already been ordered to sea, because if the entire force was to land on June 5, then some of the important elements stationed in northern parts of the United Kingdom could not wait for final decision on the morning of June 4.

When the commanders assembled on the morning of June 4 the report we received was discouraging. Low clouds, high winds, and formidable wave action were predicted to make landing a most hazardous affair. The meteorologists said that air support would be impossible, naval gunfire would be inefficient, and even the handling of small boats would be rendered difficult. Admiral Ramsay thought that the mechanics of landing could be handled, but agreed with the estimate of the difficulty in adjusting gunfire. His position was mainly neutral. General Montgomery, properly concerned with the great disadvantages of delay, believed that we should go. Tedder disagreed.

Weighing all factors, I decided that the attack would have to be postponed.48 This decision necessitated the immediate dispatch of orders
to the vessels and troops already at sea and created some doubt as to whether they could be ready twenty-four hours later in case the next day should prove favorable for the assault. Actually the maneuver of the ships in the Irish Sea proved most difficult by reason of the storm. That they succeeded in gaining ports, refueling, and readying themselves to resume the movement a day later represented the utmost in seamanship and in brilliant command and staff work.

The conference on the evening of June 4 presented little, if any, added brightness to the picture of the morning, and tension mounted even higher because the inescapable consequences of postponement were almost too bitter to contemplate.

At three-thirty the next morning our little camp was shaking and shuddering under a wind of almost hurricane proportions and the accompanying rain seemed to be traveling in horizontal streaks. The mile-long trip through muddy roads to the naval headquarters was anything but a cheerful one, since it seemed impossible that in such conditions there was any reason for even discussing the situation.

When the conference started the first report given us by Group Captain Stagg and the Meteorologic Staff was that the bad conditions predicted the day before for the coast of France were actually prevailing there and that if we had persisted in the attempt to land on June 5 a major disaster would almost surely have resulted. This they probably told us to inspire more confidence in their next astonishing declaration, which was that by the following morning a period of relatively good weather, heretofore completely unexpected, would ensue, lasting probably thirty-six hours. The long-term prediction was not good but they did give us assurance that this short period of calm weather would intervene between the exhaustion of the storm we were then experiencing and the beginning of the next spell of really bad weather.

The prospect was not bright because of the possibility that we might land the first several waves successfully and then find later build-up impracticable, and so have to leave the isolated original attacking forces easy prey to German counteraction. However, the consequences of the delay justified great risk and I quickly announced the decision to go ahead with the attack on June 6. The time was then 4:15 a.m., June 5. No one present disagreed and there was a definite brightening of faces as, without a further word, each went off to his respective post of duty to flash out to his command the messages that would set the whole host in motion."

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**PLANNING OVERLORD**

A number of people appealed to me for permission to go aboard the supporting naval ships in order to witness the attack. Every member of a staff can always develop a dozen arguments why he, in particular, should accompany an expedition rather than remain at the only post, the center of communications, where he can be useful. Permission was denied to all except those with specific military responsibility and, of course, the allotted quotas of press and radio representatives.

Among those who were refused permission was the Prime Minister. His request was undoubtedly inspired as much by his natural instincts as a warrior as by his impatience at the prospect of sitting quietly back in London to await reports. I argued, however, that the chance of his becoming an accidental casualty was too important from the standpoint of the whole war effort and I refused his request. He replied, with complete accuracy, that while I was in sole command of the operation by virtue of authority delegated to me by both governments, such authority did not include administrative control over the British organization. He said, "Since this is true it is not part of your responsibility, my dear General, to determine the exact composition of any ship's company in His Majesty's Fleet. This being true," he rather slyly continued, "by shipping myself as a bona fide member of a ship's complement it would be beyond your authority to prevent my going."

All of this I had ruefully to concede, but I forcefully pointed out that he was adding to my personal burdens in this thwarting of my instructions. Even, however, while I was acknowledging defeat in the matter, aid came from an unexpected source. I later heard that the King had learned of the Prime Minister's intention and, while not presuming to interfere with the decision reached by Mr. Churchill, he sent word that if the Prime Minister felt it necessary to go on the expedition he, the King, felt it to be equally his duty and privilege to participate at the head of his troops. This instantly placed a different light upon the matter and I heard no more of it."

Nevertheless, my sympathies were entirely with the Prime Minister. Again I had to endure the interminable wait that always intervenes between the final decision of the high command and the earliest possible determination of success or failure in such ventures. I spent the time visiting troops that would participate in the assault. A late evening trip on the fifth took me to the camp of the U. S. 101st Airborne Division, one of the units whose participation had been so severely
questioned by the air commander. I found the men in fine fettle, many of them joshingly admonishing me that I had no cause for worry, since the 101st was on the job and everything would be taken care of in fine shape. I stayed with them until the last of them were in the air, somewhere about midnight. After a two-hour trip back to my own camp, I had only a short time to wait until the first news should come in.

Chapter 14

D-DAY AND LODGMENT

THE FIRST REPORT CAME FROM THE AIRBORNE units I had visited only a few hours earlier and was most encouraging in tone. As the morning wore on it became apparent that the landing was going fairly well. Montgomery took off in a destroyer to visit the beaches and to find a place in which to set up his own advanced headquarters. I promised to visit him on the following day.

Operations in the Utah area, which involved the co-ordination of the amphibious landing with the American airborne operation, proceeded satisfactorily, as did those on the extreme left flank. The day’s reports, however, showed that extremely fierce fighting had developed in the Omaha sector. That was the spot, I decided, to which I would proceed the next morning.

We made the trip in a destroyer and upon arrival found that the 1st and 29th Divisions, assaulting on Omaha, had finally dislodged the enemy and were proceeding swiftly inland. Isolated centers of resistance still held out and some of them sustained a most annoying artillery fire against our beaches and landing ships. I had a chance to confer with General Bradley and found him, as always, stouthearted and confident of the result. In point of fact the resistance encountered on Omaha Beach was at about the level we had feared all along the line. The conviction of the German that we would not attack in the weather then prevailing was a definite factor in the degree of surprise we achieved and accounted to some extent for the low order of active opposition on most of the beaches. In the Omaha sector an alert enemy division, the 352d, which prisoners stated had been in the area on maneuvers and defense exercises, accounted for some of the intense fighting in that locality.
Crusade in Europe