

Normandy Invasion Campaign Introduction Preliminary Study

This study is the starting point for the Normandy invasion virtual staff rides. It is the lead-in for all the other modules. These instructions are designed to help participants prepare for this initial portion of the study, which covers the planning and the preparation for the invasion.

This campaign introduction is roughly a half hour long and does not include terrain; it consists of instructor notes, visual aids (a PowerPoint slide show), and read ahead materials to be used in the preliminary study phase of the staff ride.

All participants should read the extract from the U.S. Army Center of Military History Pamphlet 72-18:

NORMANDY, by William M. Hammond, CMH Publication 72-18.

This portion covers the planning and preparation for the Normandy landings. The pamphlet can be downloaded in its entirety at:
<https://history.army.mil/html/books/072/72-18/index.html> Note that the brochure covers the whole operation and is an excellent overview for the materials covered in the other Normandy VSRs.

Participants wishing to read in more depth on the planning of D-Day should consult:


Cross-Channel Attack, by Gordon A. Harrison, CMH Publication 7-4-1.

The book can be downloaded at: <https://history.army.mil/html/books/007/7-4-1/index.html>. Pages 1-258 cover the planning and preparation in great detail.

NORMANDY



THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS
OF WORLD WAR II



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6 JUNE–24 JULY 1944

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Center of Military History
United States Army
Washington, D.C., 2019

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A great invasion force stood off the Normandy coast of France as dawn broke on 6 June 1944: 9 battleships, 23 cruisers, 104 destroyers, and 71 large landing craft of various descriptions as well as troop transports, minesweepers, and merchantmen—in all, nearly 5,000 ships of every type. The naval bombardment that began at 0550 that morning detonated large minefields along the shoreline and destroyed a number of the enemy's defensive positions. To one correspondent, reporting from the deck of the cruiser HMS *Hillary*, it sounded like “the rhythmic beating of a gigantic drum” all along the coast. In the hours following the bombardment, more than 100,000 fighting men swept ashore to begin one of the epic assaults of history, a “mighty endeavor,” as President Franklin D. Roosevelt described it to the American people, “to preserve . . . our civilization and to set free a suffering humanity.”

The attack had been long in coming. From the moment British forces had been forced to withdraw from France in 1940 in the face of an overwhelming German onslaught, planners had plotted a return to the Continent. Only in that way would the Allies be able to confront the enemy's power on the ground, liberate northwestern Europe, and put an end to the Nazi regime.

Strategic Setting

The British Chiefs of Staff charged Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten and his Combined Operations Headquarters in September 1941 with investigating the feasibility of amphibious operations in the European theater of the war. Earlier, Admiral Sir Roger Keyes had undertaken some planning for commando raids, but Mountbatten was to do more. “You are to prepare for the invasion of Europe,” British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill told him. “You must devise and design the appliances, the landing craft, and the technique. . . . The whole of the South Coast of England is a bastion of defense against the invasion of Hitler; you've got to turn it into the springboard for our attack.”

American planners began formal cooperation with Britain in December 1941, just after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and the German and Italian declarations of war against the United States. In compliance with earlier, informal understandings, the two partners agreed to put first the defeat of Germany and its ally Italy if forced to

wage a two-front war against both those nations and Japan. Shortly thereafter, British planners drafted a proposal, code-named ROUNDUP, for an attack across the English Channel into France. The assault would come only after a series of major campaigns on the periphery of Europe, in Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the Soviet Union, where the Germans would have difficulty massing their power. Once bombing, blockade, partisan uprisings, and the fighting on those other fronts had weakened the enemy sufficiently, ROUNDUP, or something like it, would begin.

Despite talk that a Continental invasion might come as early as 1942, Allied leaders in the end decided tentatively to make the assault in 1943, either through Western Europe or the Balkans. Because British forces would bear the burden of operations in Europe until the United States could complete its buildup for war, the decisions that came out of the conference hewed closely to Britain's preference for attacks on Germany's periphery. Although the British later accepted an American proposal, code-named BOLERO, for the establishment in Britain of a million-man force trained and equipped for the 1943 invasion, the United States agreed that during 1942 Allied forces should concentrate on wearing down Germany's resistance through air attacks, operations along the North African coast, and assistance to the Soviet Union.

Allied leaders honed their strategy further at a series of great conferences during 1942 and 1943—at Casablanca, Quebec, Cairo, and Tehran. Examining a range of alternatives, they gradually adopted the broad outlines of the attack they would launch. As planning continued, however, it became clear that the Americans disagreed ardently with the British desire to wear down the Germans before beginning a final confrontation on the Continent. Confident in the strength of their vast resources, American planners argued that “war cannot be finally won without the use of land armies” and that only direct action against the main body of the German force could produce an Allied victory. Britain's peripheral approach, they asserted, would waste valuable assets on operations that could have at best an indirect effect on the outcome of the war. There was also the Soviet Union to consider, which had suffered millions of casualties in its fight with the Germans on the Eastern Front and might conceivably collapse and conclude a separate peace if Britain and the United States failed to relieve some of the pressure by attacking in the west. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was already clamoring for a second front. To the Americans it seemed far better to seize the initiative from Germany with a bold assault than to allow the alliance's resources to

dribble away in operations that would have little long-term effect on the enemy's will to resist.

The British viewed the situation in Europe with an eye closely focused on their own circumstances and experience. As conscious of their nation's lack of resources as the Americans were of the vast wealth available to the United States, they had already withstood a disaster at Dunkerque in 1940, when the Germans had driven a British army off the Continent in defeat, and at the French seacoast town of Dieppe in August 1942, when the Germans, at great cost to the Allies, had repelled a Canadian landing. Their experiences with amphibious warfare during World War I had been little better. Their forces had endured a blood-letting at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles, where landings championed by Churchill had failed. They had also lost an entire generation of young men to trench warfare on the stalemated Western Front in France. Britain's leaders thus had visions of catastrophe whenever the Americans raised the issue of a cross-Channel attack. If haste prevailed over reason, Churchill warned, the beaches of France might well be "choked with the bodies of the flower of American and British manhood."

If the British had agreed in principle at the Arcadia Conference to an early attack across the Channel, by the end of 1942 they had nevertheless succeeded in shifting many of the resources marked for BOLERO to TORCH, an Allied invasion of North Africa much more in accord with their own point of view. The American military had little choice but to go along. They not only lacked the landing craft, warplanes, and shipping necessary to carry out a cross-Channel attack, they also had to contend with their commander in chief, President Roosevelt, who had become convinced that some sort of immediate action against Germany was necessary to divert the attention of the American people from the Pacific to the Atlantic side of the war.

The vehement German response to the assault at Dieppe, resulting in the loss of nearly a thousand British and Canadian lives, the capture of more than two thousand fighting men, and the destruction of better than one hundred aircraft, weighed heavily upon American planners. If the German response at Dieppe was any indication, an invasion of the Continent would require more meticulous preparation and more strength than a 1943 attack could possibly allow. Indeed, Allied planners and logisticians would have to create, field, and supply an organization that could meet and defeat the worst counterattack the enemy was capable of devising.

The British point of view prevailed for much of the next year, causing Allied forces to fight on the fringes of the enemy's power in Sicily

and southern Italy. By the middle of 1943, however, with victory in North Africa in hand, the fall of Italy near, and the first Russian victories in the east, the Americans renewed their call for a cross-Channel attack. A crash effort in the United States to construct shallow-draft landing vessels and long-range fighter aircraft had assured that at least minimum resources would be available to move a major force onto the beaches of France and to protect it from air attack. Meanwhile, the success of the anti-U-boat campaign in the Atlantic had guaranteed that the vast supplies of ammunition and provisions necessary for the invasion could move safely from the United States to staging areas in Great Britain.

Although British leaders continued to advocate their peripheral strategy, the importance of American resources to the war effort had become so great that they had little choice but to go along with their ally. At the Casablanca Conference of January 1943 they thus agreed in principle to a 1944 invasion of the Continent. Shortly thereafter, the British General Staff appointed Lt. Gen. Frederick E. Morgan to be Chief of Staff (COS) to a still to be appointed Supreme Allied Commander (SAC) and gave him responsibility for planning the attack. By April 1943 Morgan had established an organization to carry out that task and had named it COSSAC after the initials in his new title. He warned his officers at that time to avoid thinking of themselves as planners and to see themselves instead as the embryo of a future supreme headquarters. "The term *planning staff* has come to have a most sinister meaning," he observed. "It implies the production of nothing but paper. What we must contrive to do somehow is to produce not only paper but action."

Under Churchill's influence, the British for a time continued to argue in favor of possible operations in the Balkans. The Americans, however, suspected that their ally was more interested in securing a post-war empire than in defeating Germany as soon as possible. Refusing further delays, they won agreement for a 1 May 1944 attack during the May 1943 Trident Conference in Washington. Three months later, the Quadrant Conference in Quebec reaffirmed the decision.

Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin strengthened the Americans' hand during the Tehran Conference in November. He had reacted furiously to news after the Casablanca Conference that there would be no second front in 1943. At Tehran he welcomed the new emphasis on an attack and pushed vigorously for the appointment of a supreme commander to head the operation. From then on, the Americans were able to argue that any postponement of the invasion would constitute a breach of faith with the Russians. Wrangling continued over the Italian campaign and a possible invasion of southern France, code-named ANVIL, the flow of men and

supplies to the Mediterranean theater slowed and the final buildup for the cross-Channel attack began in earnest.

The selection of a commander for Allied forces required considerable thought. If the invasion had occurred early in the war, the British would have supplied the bulk of the resources and would have controlled the operation. Churchill had tentatively selected General Sir Alan Brooke for the task. But as the war lengthened and American resources became predominant, the selection of an American commander seemed appropriate. Roosevelt and Churchill first inclined toward the man who had played the principal role in coordinating the overall American military effort, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. When Roosevelt decided that Marshall's presence in Washington was indispensable, the Allies agreed on General Dwight D. Eisenhower, another well-experienced officer and the commander of Allied forces in North Africa and the Mediterranean. In the end, Eisenhower would serve as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and as commanding general of all U.S. forces in the European Theater of Operations.

Appointed as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in December 1943, Eisenhower selected his former chief of staff in the Mediterranean, Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, to be his chief of staff in Europe. Smith transformed COSSAC into the supreme headquarters Morgan had envisioned and installed Morgan as his deputy. Aware of British sensitivities and attuned to the political difficulties that might develop if American generals came to dominate Allied councils, Eisenhower selected his principal commanders from among the British. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder became the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander and principal coordinator of the theater's air forces, and Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay served as naval commander for the invasion. An American, Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz, commanded U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, while an Englishman, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur T. Harris, commanded the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command. Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory headed those portions of the Allied air forces concerned with tactical air support.

If the tactical air forces for the invasion were clearly under Eisenhower, there was disagreement over whether he commanded the strategic air forces employed in bombing Germany. Spaatz and Harris were disposed to cooperate with Eisenhower but insisted on remaining independent in order to concentrate on destroying Germany's industrial base and air force. After considerable give and take, an arrangement suitable to all sides emerged. Subject to the oversight of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, a joint committee composed of the British Chiefs of



Allied invasion planners. Left to right, General Bradley, Admiral Ramsay, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, General Eisenhower, General Montgomery, Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, and General Smith. (National Archives)

Staff and their American counterparts, Eisenhower gained responsibility for the “direction” of strategic air forces. It was understood, however, that the cross-Channel attack, code-named Operation OVERLORD, would not absorb the entire bomber effort and that the air campaign against Germany would continue.

Eisenhower asked General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, who had led the Eighth Army in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, and who had become the commander of the 21st Army Group for the invasion, to serve as pro tem commander of the Allied ground forces coming ashore in France. Montgomery would carry out final planning and coordinate the early phases of the attack. Two commanders would serve under Montgomery: Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley would head the American force, the First U.S. Army; General Sir Miles Dempsey would lead the Second British Army, composed of British, Canadian, and a contingent of French troops. The Third U.S. Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., would enter the battle after the Allies had achieved a secure lodgment on the Continent. It would join the First U.S. Army, now commanded by

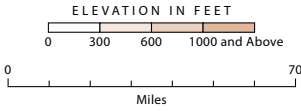
Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges, to form the 12th Army Group under Bradley. Lt. Gen. Henry D. G. Crerar's First Canadian Army would join Dempsey under Montgomery.

During the summer of 1943, COSSAC had formulated a tentative plan of attack that involved a force of from three to five divisions. That assault would depend for supply upon the development of two prefabricated harbors, called MULBERRIES, that were to be positioned along with breakwaters composed of scuttled ships just off the invasion beaches. The MULBERRIES would give the Allies a measure of flexibility by allowing them to provision the force moving inland without having to rely upon the immediate capture of an established port.

As COSSAC developed that plan, the question of where to land posed problems. The site would have to be within the range of fighter aircraft based in Great Britain but also on ground flat enough to construct the airfields that would become necessary once the invading force moved off the beaches and out of the range of its initial fighter support. The landing zones themselves would have to be sheltered from prevailing winds to facilitate around-the-clock resupply operations and would have to possess enough exits to allow the invading force to proceed inland with as little difficulty as possible. Similarly, the area behind the beaches would have to include a road network adequate to the needs of a force that intended to move rapidly. Since the region would ultimately form a base for the drive across France toward Germany, a series of large ports would also have to be close enough to facilitate the unloading of the massive quantities of supplies and ammunition that would be necessary to sustain the attack.

The most appropriate location, COSSAC's planners decided, lay directly across the English Channel from Dover in the Pas de Calais region. The area fulfilled many of the Allies' requirements and offered a direct route into the heart of Germany. Since the enemy had recognized that fact, however, and had already begun to construct heavy fortifications along the coast, an alternative had to be found. The most suitable stood farther to the west, along the Normandy coast near Caen and the Cotentin Peninsula. That region contained major ports at Cherbourg and Le Havre and offered a gateway to ports at Brest, Nantes, L'Orient, and St. Nazaire. Allied planners believed that the Germans would undoubtedly sabotage Cherbourg, forcing the invaders to place heavy initial reliance upon the MULBERRIES, but the damage could be repaired and the region itself was less strongly defended than the Pas de Calais. Offering, as well, a satisfactory opening into the French interior, it became the site of the invasion.

OVERLORD OPERATIONAL AREA
1944





As planning continued, both Eisenhower and Montgomery recognized that the three- to five-division assault COSSAC had envisioned would have to be strengthened and spread over a larger area. Looking toward the early capture of Cherbourg and the secure flow of supplies that port would ensure, Montgomery argued in favor of a broad attack somewhat west of Caen. Stretching from the area below that city into the region beyond the town of St. Martin-de-Varreville, the front he envisioned would have a breadth of some sixty miles. When Morgan's planners responded that a bridgehead of that size would require resources far in excess of those available, Montgomery asserted that nothing less would work and that the Allies would either have to find the means or another commander.

Montgomery's insistence led to a sometimes acrimonious debate over the value of ANVIL, a plan to invade southern France that Eisenhower wanted to schedule simultaneously with OVERLORD. The invasion's planners considered the attack important and the conferees at Tehran had endorsed it, but the British—particularly Churchill—had never seen its merit. Hesitant at first to cancel the operation because it seemed a necessary diversion for the main effort in the Cotentin, Eisenhower in the end agreed to a postponement. Given the enlarged scope of OVERLORD, no other alternative seemed possible. There were too few landing craft to go around.

Although the debate over ANVIL continued, by 23 January 1944 the Allies had settled on a basic plan of attack for Normandy. The Americans would take the western flank closest to Cherbourg while the British operated to the east, on the approaches to Caen. Logistics determined the arrangement. American forces had arrived in Britain via the country's western ports and had positioned depots in those areas. It made sense for them to operate near those bases. In addition, responding to the congestion in Britain's ports brought on by preparations for the invasion, American logisticians planned to load ships in the United States for direct discharge onto the beaches of France, without an intermediate unloading in Britain. The western flank was closer to that line of supply.

On the night before the invasion, the U.S. 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions would land by parachute and glider near the town of Ste. Mere-Eglise, securing the roads that led from the shoreline and obstructing enemy efforts to reinforce beach defenses. The next morning Bradley's First Army would arrive. The VII Corps would put the U.S. 4th Division ashore on UTAH Beach near les Dunes de Varreville. To the east, the V Corps, composed of the U.S. 1st and portions of the 29th Infantry Divisions, would land on OMAHA Beach near the town

of Vierville-sur-Mer. With a foothold secure in Normandy, V Corps would expand the beachhead to the south while VII Corps cut across the Cotentin Peninsula and then wheeled north to capture Cherbourg. With the seaport in hand, VII Corps was to turn south and move toward the town of St. Lo. Once Bradley held the town and the St. Lo–Perriers road, he would have his army on dry ground suitable for offensive operations by mechanized forces. Patton's Third Army would then take to the field. Advancing into Brittany, it would seize Brest and other ports and cover the south flank when the First Army began an attack to the northeast toward Paris.

To the east, the Second British Army would operate in the region between Bayeux and Caen, an area that possessed suitable sites for airfields and that offered a relatively unimpeded route to Paris. As in the American sector, an airborne division, the British 6th, would secure the northeastern flank of the operation, dropping during the hours before dawn near Caen and the mouth of the Orne River. At H-hour, the British 50th Division under the British 30 Corps would come ashore on GOLD Beach, near Bayeux and the American zone, while 1 Corps conducted a two-pronged attack farther to the east. There, the 3d Canadian Division would cross JUNO Beach near the town of Courseulles and the British 3d Division would come ashore at SWORD, near Lion-sur-Mer. "In the initial stages," Montgomery told his officers, "we should concentrate on gaining control quickly of the main centres of road communications. We should then push our armoured formations between and beyond these centres and deploy them on suitable ground. In this way it would be difficult for the enemy to bring up his reserves and get them past these armoured formations."

Overall, Allied planners intended to gain a lodgment between the Seine and Loire Rivers. Assuming that the Germans, after initial resistance, would choose to withdraw their forces behind the natural barrier provided by the Seine, they estimated that the task would take about ninety days. After a pause to regroup and resupply, the Allies would then begin an advance into the regions beyond the Seine and toward Germany.

As planning continued, the BOLERO buildup in Britain, begun in 1942 to arm and provision the invasion, took on new momentum. With 39 divisions slated to participate in the invasion—20 American, 14 British, 3 Canadian, 1 French, and 1 Polish—along with hundreds of thousands of service troops, there was little time to waste. The number of U.S. fighting men based in Great Britain alone would double in the first six months of 1944, rising from 774,000 at the beginning of the year to 1,537,000 in the

week preceding the final assault. More than 16 million tons of supplies would be needed to feed and supply those men and their allies: six and one-quarter pounds of rations per day per man; 137,000 jeeps, trucks, and half-tracks; 4,217 tanks and fully tracked vehicles; 3,500 artillery pieces; 12,000 aircraft; and huge stores of sundries—everything from dental amalgam for fillings to chewing gum and candy bars.

Quarters and depots to house the entire force mushroomed across the English countryside, many in just the seventeen weeks that preceded the invasion. The fields of Somerset and Cornwall became armories for the vast stores of bombs and artillery shells that the operation would require. The congestion extended to Britain's harbors, where ships laden with more supplies stood by. By the day of the attack, besides the immense force of fighting ships that would land the troops in Normandy and of cargo vessels that continued to ply Atlantic supply routes, more than 3 million deadweight tons of merchant shipping were in direct service to the invasion. The huge size of the buildup notwithstanding, landing craft were in such short supply that Eisenhower postponed the invasion for one month, from May to June.

While logisticians laid the base for the invasion, the Allied air forces opened the way for the attack itself by waging massive bombing campaigns in Germany and France. In Germany, between January and June 1944, Allied fighters swept the skies clear of German warplanes and took a heavy toll in pilots. As a result, by June 1944 the enemy lacked both the aircraft and the airmen to mount more than a token resistance to Allied plans.

Meanwhile, in France, as members of the French resistance cut railroad tracks, sabotaged locomotives, and targeted supply trains, Allied aircraft bombed roads, bridges, and rail junctions to prevent the Germans from moving reinforcements toward the invasion beaches. To deceive the enemy's intelligence agencies, the attacks occurred along the entire length of the Channel coast. By June, despite intelligence reports questioning the value of the attacks, all rail routes across the Seine River north of Paris were closed; the transportation system in France was at the point of collapse.

Deception was, indeed, a major part of the Allied campaign plan. To mislead the Germans into believing that the Pas de Calais, rather than the Cotentin, would be the site of the invasion, Eisenhower's staff created a mythical 1st Army Group, with an order of battle larger than that of Montgomery's 21st Army Group. Basing the phantom force near Dover, just across the Channel from the supposed target, the planners then set construction crews to building dummy installations of plywood



Artillery equipment is loaded aboard LSTs at Brixham, England. (National Archives)

and canvas and dotted them with an array of inflatable tanks and vehicles. They also anchored a vast armada of rubber landing craft in the Thames River estuary, where German reconnaissance aircraft were certain to spot them. Eisenhower assigned Patton, the American general the Germans most respected, to command the phantom army and saw to it that known enemy agents received information on the status of Patton's force. Allied naval units conducted protracted maneuvers off the Channel coast near the location of the shadow army, and components of Patton's fictitious command indulged in extensive radio trafficking to signal to German intelligence analysts that a major military organization was functioning. A careful plan of aerial bombardment complemented the ploy. During the weeks preceding the invasion, Allied airmen dropped more bombs on the Pas de Calais than anywhere else in France.

To protect the date of the invasion from prying German eyes, the Allies called it D-Day, which carried no implications of any sort. NEPTUNE, the code name they used in place of OVERLORD on planning documents after September 1943, was similarly devoid of connotation.

Although American commanders doubted that their ruses would have much effect, their schemes succeeded far beyond expectations.

The Germans became so convinced that the Pas de Calais would be the Allied target that they held to the fiction until long after the actual attack had begun. As a result, nineteen powerful enemy divisions, to include important *panzer* reserves, stood idle on the day of the invasion, awaiting an assault that never came, when their presence in Normandy might have told heavily against the Allied attack.

For their part, enemy forces labored against problems generated by a long war and an autocratic political system. In May 1942 the Germans had adopted a policy that gave the Russian Front first priority for troops and garrisoned the west with those who, because of wounds or other disabilities, were unable to endure the rigors imposed by that theater. Over the year that followed, twenty-two infantry and six armored divisions left France for the Eastern Front, along with the best equipment and men from the divisions that stayed behind. They were replaced by soldiers who were overage or convalescing from wounds and by units composed of Russian, Italian, and Polish defectors. A few first-line units were present on the Western Front, but most of the rest had been shattered in the east and required replacements and refitting. The weapons they used were often leftovers. The artillery, for example, consisted of more than twenty types of guns, many of Czech or French rather than German manufacture. Training lagged because the men were frequently employed in crash efforts to build fortifications rather than in exercises to sharpen their combat skills.

In theory, the German chain of command in the west was an example of good order. Adolf Hitler served as supreme commander of the *Wehrmacht*, the nation's armed forces. The *High Command (OKW)*, led by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, ran the war everywhere except in the Soviet Union. *Navy Group West* and the *Third Air Fleet*, in turn, managed Germany's naval and air forces in Western Europe while the ground force, some 58 divisions, came under the *Oberbefehlshaber West (OB West)*, headed by Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt. *OB West* controlled two army groups, *Army Group G*, which had charge of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of France, and *Army Group B* under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who had charge of anti-invasion forces along the Channel coast as far south as the Loire River. Rommel commanded two armies: the *15th*, guarding the Pas de Calais and the Normandy coast to a line just south of the Seine River with 19 divisions (5 *panzer*), and the *7th*, with 13 divisions (1 *panzer*), covering the coast from the boundary with the *15th Army* to the Loire River.

So logical on paper, those arrangements masked conditions in the field that were close to byzantine. Using the operations staff of *OKW*

as an intermediary, Hitler exercised direct control over Rundstedt's *OB West*. In theory a theater commander, Rundstedt had no authority over air force or naval units based within areas under his jurisdiction. The navy commanded most of the coastal artillery that would be called upon to repel an Allied attack, and the air force controlled the bulk of the anti-aircraft and parachute units stationed in the region. Some armor units also came under the administrative supervision of the *SS (Schutzstaffel)*, the elite political army that answered first to Hitler and Berlin rather than to its supposed commanders in the field.

The manner in which Rommel exercised authority at *Army Group B* was symptomatic of the debilities afflicting the German staff. Subordinate in theory to Rundstedt, Rommel was his equal in rank. Much more forceful than Rundstedt in personality, he came to exercise far more influence than his position would normally have dictated. In addition, as a field marshal, he had the privilege of communicating directly with Hitler outside the chain of command. Thus he had the ability to undercut his superior whenever he wished.

Rommel disagreed with Rundstedt over how best to repel an Allied invasion. Rundstedt placed great reliance on mechanized reserves that could respond quickly and flexibly to an enemy thrust. To that end, he stationed a newly created armored command, *Panzer Group West*, near Paris. From there, the force could move, as circumstances required, toward the site of an enemy assault in either the Pas de Calais or Normandy.

Understanding the ability of the Allied air forces to isolate a battlefield and inhibit the movement of ground troops, Rommel believed Allied air superiority in France prevented the sort of mobile response Rundstedt envisioned. If Eisenhower's forces gained even the barest foothold on the Continent, he reasoned, they would win the war. To prevent that, German forces would have to repel the invasion at the water's edge through the use of well-dug-in and stationary troop formations on the shoreline. Directing his efforts to that end, Rommel built beach defenses, laid down minefields, and constructed obstacles to entangle Allied landing craft before they reached land. He also applied personally to Hitler, over Rundstedt's head, for control of the *panzer* divisions he believed he needed to reinforce his design.

Hitler temporized. Agreeing to Rommel's request at first but then returning control of the reserves to Rundstedt when the latter objected, he finally compromised between the two approaches. Three of *Panzer Group West*'s divisions went to Rommel, but *OKW* maintained control over four others that were to operate as a central reserve. Hitler's caution

satisfied neither field marshal and deprived each of the decisive authority over armor that would become critical as the battle for France evolved.

The malaise gripping the *Wehrmacht* might have made little difference if Hitler had been more forceful in preparing for the inevitable invasion. Although his generals, misled by the Allied deception plan, believed that the main Allied assault would come in the Pas de Calais, he thought that the attack would occur near Caen, and he said as much during March. Yet he failed to push the idea with any vigor, perhaps because he doubted his intuition in the face of his generals' certainty. Lacking any impetus from Hitler, his subordinates took no action on his insight. Based on Allied naval activities, Germany's naval commander in France likewise predicted the true site of the invasion but also neglected to take adequate precautions. He reasoned that the Allies had yet to concentrate the weight of their air power on targets in the region and so were obviously unprepared to carry out the attack.

The ruse enacted by Patton's nonexistent 1st Army Group was not the only reason that German commanders failed to deduce the correct location of the Allied attack. By 1944 Britain's secret services had deprived Germany of its eyes by identifying and either turning or eliminating virtually every enemy agent assigned to their shores. Meanwhile, Allied warships had rendered German naval patrols in the English Channel ineffective, and Allied bombers had destroyed most of the German radar units that might have monitored air and naval traffic near the invasion beaches. A German spy working in the British embassy in Ankara had provided his mentors in Berlin with the code name for the invasion—OVERLORD—but the revelation apparently carried little weight and led to no concrete action. German intelligence had also managed to learn that the British Broadcasting Corporation would transmit two lines of a poem by the nineteenth century author Paul Verlaine to warn the French Resistance that the attack was imminent. Even so, that finding was of little use without firm indications of where and when the invasion would occur.

The *Luftwaffe* might have made the difference by conducting reconnaissance flights over the coastal regions of Great Britain. The Allied buildup was proceeding at a frenzied pace, mainly in the south of England opposite Normandy. Yet no flights of the sort occurred during the critical early months of 1944. German air commanders were preoccupied with the wounds inflicted upon their forces by the Allied bombing campaign and loath to waste valuable pilots on an exercise that, given their enemy's air superiority, would spell virtually certain death for most of those involved.