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## RESEARCH REPORT

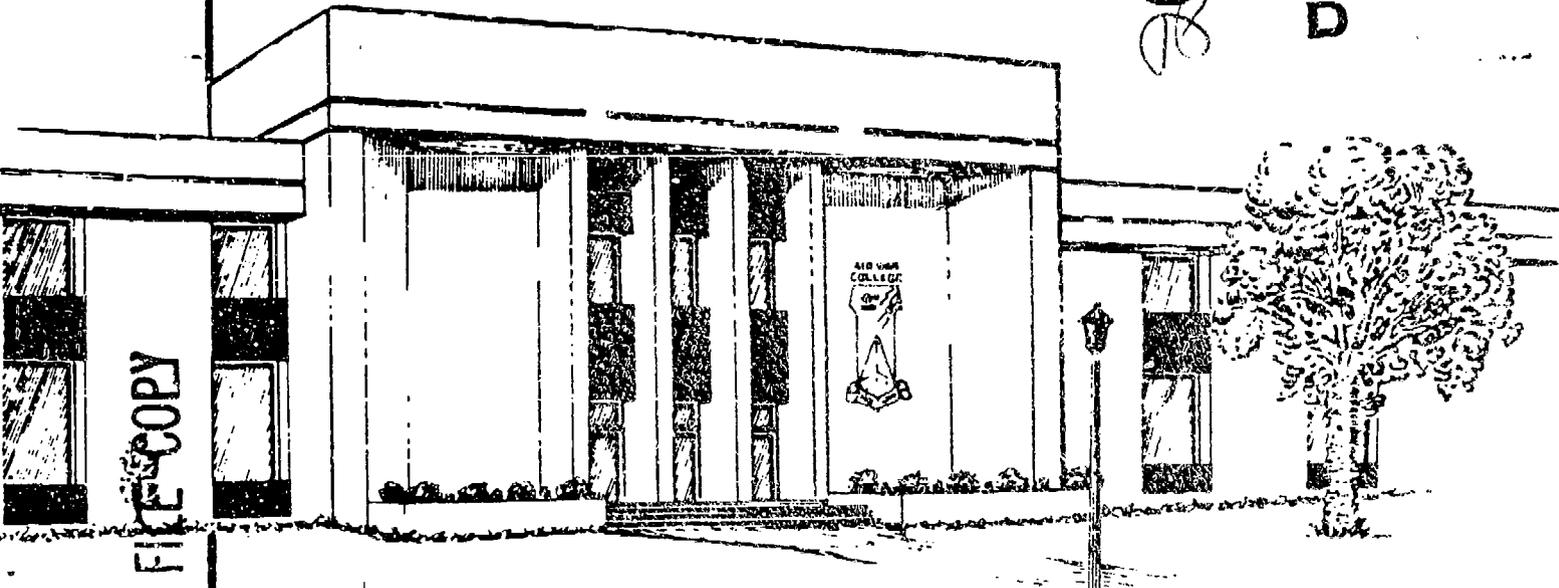
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OVERLORD: THE UNNECESSARY INVASION

By LT COL WILLIAM F. MOORE

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AIR WAR COLLEGE  
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OVERLORD: THE UNNECESSARY INVASION

by

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Dr. Joseph L. Strange

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

March 1966

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: OVERLORD: The Unnecessary Invasion

AUTHOR: William F. Moore, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

*This document* Assesses whether the OVERLORD invasion of Normandy was necessary for military victory in Europe during World War II.

*It is concluded*  
Concludes that it was not necessary, based on Russian success against the German Army on the Eastern Front, the ability of the strategic bombing campaign to destroy German war support industries, and the extended political uncertainty concerning the requirement for OVERLORD which preceded the final decision.

*The report*  
Concludes with a discussion of possible allied motives for assuming the risk associated with OVERLORD when it was not necessary for victory.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel William F. Moore (B.S. United States Air Force Academy, M.B.A. Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania) has been interested in American military history and leadership throughout his Air Force career. He has had several assignments in Research and Development, most recently on the MX and Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) programs. He is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1986.

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## INTRODUCTION

OVERLORD. Normandy. D-Day. June 6, 1944. The Longest Day. The event has been referred to as "The Mighty Endeavor," "The Great Crusade," "Much the greatest thing we have ever attempted," and other equally extravagant titles. Whatever the nomenclature, it commonly evokes the image of decisive victory - a do-or-die operation upon which hung the outcome of World War II in Europe. The common perception that D-Day, OVERLORD, was necessary, even vital, for victory against Hitler has influenced policy decisions regarding the nature, size, composition, and missions of American armed forces from the end of World II to the present.

The purpose of this paper is to point out that this perception of OVERLORD is in all likelihood based upon an illusion - a myth. Americans typically believe that Nazi Germany was defeated during World War II by American fighting forces, and that it was primarily the skill and dedication of the American fighting man, the civilian-soldier, which proved decisive in this conflict. Typical Americans also believe that combined US and British forces were primarily responsible for destroying the German Army in 1944 and 1945 after the successful amphibious landing on the coast of Normandy. The exploits of Generals Eisenhower, Patton and Montgomery as they swept across France and into Germany following the breakout from Normandy have become the stuff of legend, as well as the subject of numerous books and movies.

Unfortunately, history shows these views concerning American and British supremacy and the importance of Normandy and the Western Front in Europe to be inaccurate. Operation OVERLORD and the massive cross-channel invasion of Europe were not necessary to the military defeat of Germany. Furthermore, had the invasion merely been delayed for a few months, the political objectives which resulted from OVERLORD could have been attained with only a fraction of the British/American casualties.

These conclusions may seem startling or even ridiculous to those accustomed to popularly held views of allied victory in Europe. However, they are based on readily documented historical information. The historical record shows that by the end of 1943 the German Army had been beaten decisively on the eastern front and that it could not resist the increasing power and tempo of the Soviet advance to Berlin. It also shows that by early 1944 the American and British strategic bombing campaign was systematically devastating the German industrial base and that defeat or total incapacitation of the German war machine was inevitable -- sooner, not later. Most remarkable of all, however, history shows that American and British planners believed that the massive Normandy invasion was not necessary to achieve military victory, and that it could easily result in a catastrophic defeat for the allied forces. Such a result would, as a minimum, have lengthened rather than shortened the war and could well have caused incalculable damage to the allied cause.

The process which led to the development of this flawed allied strategy for the European theater was intensely political, emotional, and chauvinistic. An examination of this process provides a disturbing insight into the difficulties and complexities of coalition warfare. It also provides the basis for serious inquiry into the motives of US military and political leaders during this period when merely winning the war was not a sufficient objective.

## WAR ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT

On the importance of the Eastern front in World War II, most serious historians are in agreement. Trumbull Higgins puts it this way, "It remains an incontestable fact that in the Second World War the Eastern Front constituted the main and decisive theater against the Germans, the theater in which...the backbone of the German Army was broken."(4:1x) Not only is this statement true now, it was already true by the end of 1943 when America and Britain made their final commitment to the OVERLORD landing in Normandy. In 1941 and 1942 the Germans had suffered disastrous defeats at Moscow and at Stalingrad, and with the defeat at Kursk in the summer of 1943, the German Army "lost the initiative and was forced to turn to the strategic defense along the entire Soviet-German front."(19:95) After Kursk the Germans were never again able to launch a coordinated offensive in the East.(18:239) This was demonstrated conclusively, not so much by the success which the British and Americans enjoyed at Normandy and during the subsequent campaign across France, but by the devastation which the Russians were again able to inflict on the remnants of the German Army during their 1944 summer offensive. During the first month of this offensive alone, the Soviets reported killing 381,000 German soldiers and capturing another 158,000.(18:270) Such devastation after the losses of the preceding three years clearly indicates that the German army no longer had the capacity to achieve victory.

The decisive nature of the Eastern Front can be deduced by reviewing the size of Hitler's commitment. On June 21, 1941, the eve of BARBAROSSA, the German Order of Battle included over 3,300,000 men comprising 154 German divisions, 18 Finnish divisions, and 14 Rumanian divisions.(4:121,122) Opposing the Germans, but not alerted for the surprise attack, were approximately 4,500,000 men in European Russia comprising 235 divisions.(4:122) Hitler left another 60 German divisions to guard the western and southern borders of Nazi occupied Europe.(4:123) With this vast commitment of resources to his eastern front, Hitler knew that if he did not win there, he would lose the war. Victory in the other theaters could not compensate for a loss in the east.

Within a month the eastern front stretched more than 1200 miles. Subsequent battles along this vast front were truly massive in scale. The opposing forces at the major eastern front battles through the end of 1943 are summarized below:(19:37,39,69,71,80,82,113,114)

<u>Battle</u>	<u>German Divisions</u>	<u>Russian Divisions</u>
Moscow:Oct-Nov 41	77.5	95
Stalingrad:Nov 42-Feb 43	50	78
Kursk:Jul 43	50	110
Battle for the Dnieper: Aug-Sep 43	98	231

These numbers are most meaningful when viewed relative to the German forces which the other allies faced during their campaigns in North Africa, Italy, and France. At the peak of their strength during the Tunisian Campaign, German forces in North Africa never exceeded eight divisions.(20:Map 87) In Italy German strength usually varied between 20 and 25 divisions.(21) On June 6, 1944, there were 58 German divisions in France to oppose the landings at Normandy and the subsequent drive to the East. These opposing forces on the other fronts are summarized below:

<u>Battle</u>	<u>German Divisions</u>	<u>Allied Divisions</u>
North Africa:May 43 (20:Map 87)	8	18
Italy:May 43 (21)(20:Map 103)	23	26
France(available for OVERLORD, Jun 44)	58	39

These figures indicate that the opposing forces for the major eastern front battles greatly exceeded the total forces engaged on the other fronts. This disparity was recognized by allied leaders. In 1942 President Roosevelt said, "I find it difficult this Spring and Summer to get away from the simple fact that the Russian armies are killing more Axis personnel and destroying more Axis materiel than all the other 25 United Nations put together."(16:61)

German army records show that between June 1941 and December 1943 approximately 94% of their losses occurred on the Eastern front.(4:282) In only the two and a half months between November 19, 1942 and February 2, 1943, the time period during which the Germans surrendered at Stalingrad, German losses totaled over 500,000 men.(4:261) In the summer of 1943 the Germans lost over 3,000 tanks, 1,000 pieces of artillery, 5,000 motor vehicles, and 1400 airplanes at the Battle of Kursk alone.(18:237) This level of destruction and loss of life has not been seen before or since.

It is a common weakness among Western historians to regard Russian losses in World War II as an indicator primarily of the ineptitude of Russian leadership, rather than as an indicator of the skill of the German Army and of the tenacity of the Russian resistance. When focusing on the Eastern front, many tend to forget the amazing success of the Germans against western armies in 1939 and 1940. After all, at the outbreak of World War II, the French, not the Germans or the Russians, had the largest standing army in the world. As an indicator of the ferocity of conflict on the Eastern Front, Russian losses during World War II simply have no parallel in modern history. Although German losses by end of February 1942 totaled 258,000 dead or missing, Russian army losses had totalled approximately 4,000,000 prisoners of war alone.(4:196) By the spring of 1943, German losses of approximately 1,000,000 men were matched by Russian losses of eight to nine times that number.(4:273) The Russians were

victorious, but they paid a higher price than any of their allies for victory.

Of the total German losses, it suffices to say that the 3,300,000 man army that invaded Russia in June 1941 and their replacements over the next four years were simply consumed. Most were killed. Of those who surrendered or were taken prisoner of war, only a small fraction were ever repatriated. Practically all of the German prisoners on the eastern front were either killed outright or deprived of the food and shelter needed to survive. German skill at soldiering has never been surpassed, but they could not replace their losses, and the Russians could.

Perhaps of equal importance to the war's final outcome, Russian industry was significantly outproducing the Germans. As early as August of 1942 Soviet tank production was reported by Stalin at approximately 2000 per month as compared to only 350 per month for the Germans.(4:230) The Germans were able to increase tank production to a maximum of approximately 1000 per month in 1943, but they were never able to match the Russians.(18:232) In contrast to German industry, Soviet production continued to increase throughout the war. Russia's average annual output for 1942 through 1945 is summarized below:(18:232)

Tanks and self-propelled artillery	30,000
Planes	40,000
Cannon	120,000
Machine guns and automatic weapons	450,000
Rifles	3,000,000

Lend Lease also provided a critical boost to the Russian war effort, especially during the early months following Hitler's invasion. In 1942 alone over 4500 tanks were provided through Lend Lease. It cannot be argued that Lend Lease was not important, but in total it comprised only a small fraction, estimated at 10-11%, of total Soviet production.(16:286) It was primarily the efforts of the Russian people, their army, and their industry which defeated Hitler on the eastern front.

Of perhaps even greater significance than previous German losses and Russian industrial strength was the overwhelming size of the Russian Army. By 1943 the Russians had mobilized an army of such numerical strength that the Germans could not hope to match it. At that time the Soviet Army had reached its full strength of 500 divisions.(18:230) From 1943 on, German strength on the eastern front never exceeded 140 divisions.(18:280) Although the Germans were accustomed to fighting at a numerical disadvantage, they could not hope for victory against odds this great.

By the end of 1943 all that was apparently required to insure defeat of the German Army was continuation of the war of

attrition on the eastern front. The time frame for opening a truly decisive second front had already passed.

However, it was not until this time that British and American forces became capable of making a major contribution to the ground war. This opportunity was not to be lost, even if the decisive battles had already been fought.

## THE STRATEGIC BOMBING CAMPAIGN

A supporting view concerning Operation OVERLORD is that it was unnecessary since Nazi Germany's ability to wage war was being systematically destroyed by the combined bomber offensive. According to this view, Germany's complete economic collapse was only a matter of time. Without her industrial base, Germany could not have supported her forces in the field, regardless of their remaining numerical strength.

This view is controversial primarily because it focuses on a major doctrinal dispute between the US Air Force and the Army. Throughout World War II, the Army Air Corps was intent on conducting its operations in a clearly decisive fashion, so that when victory was won, strong support for the creation of a new, separate air service would exist. While the importance of using tactical air forces to support the operations of ground troops was recognized, air commanders consistently felt that the strategic bombing campaign against Germany should not be tied to the ground campaigns. They felt that if left alone to do the job for which their long range bombers were designed, they could destroy Germany's industrial capacity to wage war. German armies without tanks, guns, ammunition, gasoline, or clothing would be unable to resist even the most modest Allied ground offensives. For this reason, diversion of long range bomber forces to support ground operations, including OVERLORD, was resisted by air commanders and viewed as counterproductive. However, such diversions were commonplace in the European theater.(12)

It should be recognized that this was a minority view concerning the potential dominance of strategic airpower. Its relationship to allied grand strategy is accurately characterized in the United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report as follows:

In both the RAF and the United States Army Air Forces there were some who believed that air power could deliver the knockout blow against Germany, and force capitulation. This view, however, was not controlling in the overall Allied strategic plan. The dominant element in that plan was invasion of the Continent to occur in the spring of 1944.... The deployment of the air forces opposing Germany was heavily influenced by the fact that victory was planned to come through invasion and land occupation....(Air attacks were) a part of a larger strategic plan - one that contemplated that the decision would come through the advance of ground armies rather than through air power alone.(3:3)

Army ground commanders generally found views concerning the decisive role of airpower to be incredible. To bring Germany to submission would, in their view, require defeating her Army and occupying her territory, in that order. It was entirely proper that all available air forces should be used to bring about that end. Since they felt that ground forces would ultimately "defeat" Germany, diverting strategic bombers to support ground operations in general and to support the planned landing at Normandy in particular could only serve to hasten the termination of hostilities. As indicated above, their views were dominant in the derivation of allied grand strategy.

During the initial phases of the European conflict, the claims of the airpower advocates were shown to be grossly extravagant. Bomber operations were not effective until

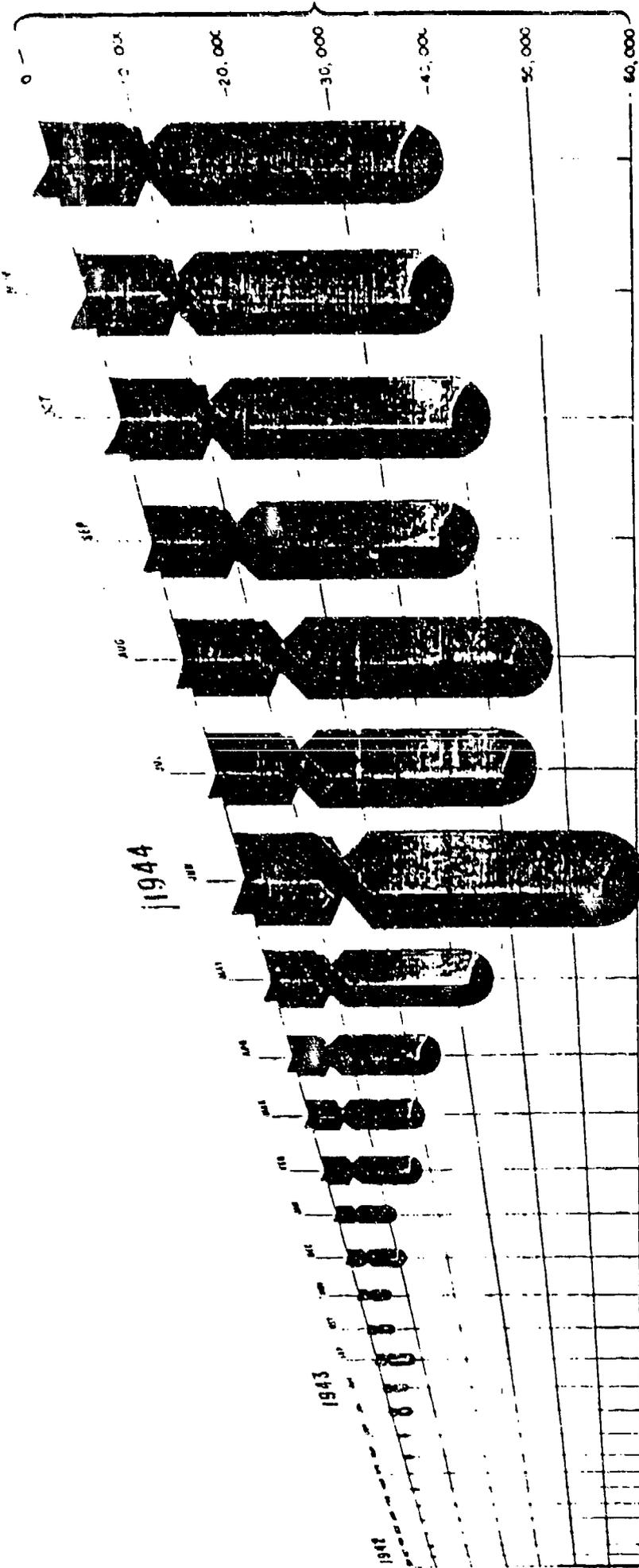
airplanes and crews were available in very large numbers. They were not effective until long range escort fighters were developed and produced. And finally, they were not effective in destroying Germany's ability to wage war until they were consistently used against the strategic targets for which they were designed. For all these reasons and more, the strategic bomber forces were not decisive, perhaps not even very effective, until late in the war.

However, by December 1943, these conditions had been met and the strategic bomber forces were systematically destroying Germany's ability to wage war. Long range bombers were regularly attacking targets deep within the Reich from bases in the United Kingdom and in the Mediterranean. American forces flew daylight missions and targeted specific industrial facilities, striving for precision bombing accuracy based on disciplined formation tactics and the Norden bombsight. British bombers were concentrating on night missions against area targets such as German cities and other population centers. Long range P-51 and P-47 fighters were available in large numbers to escort American bombers and they were winning consistent victories over Luftwaffe fighters that had previously been decimating the bomber formations. Finally, targets critical to the German war effort were being selected and destroyed. Figure 1 shows the dramatic increase in strategic bombing capacity which had occurred in the Eighth Air Force alone.(22) All that was required in late 1943

Figure 1  
(22)

# TONS OF BOMBS DROPPED

TOTAL EIGHTH AIR FORCE



was the uninterrupted opportunity to apply this nascent capability.

However, the requirement to support OVERLORD provided a most inopportune interruption. For four months prior to the planned invasion date and for two months after it, Gen Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander for OVERLORD, was given complete control of all aircraft stationed in England. Russell Weigley states in The American Way of War that,

In the spring of 1944 all Allied air power in Britain was placed temporarily under the direction of Gen Eisenhower, and he instructed it to isolate the proposed invasion beaches - and for purposes of security and deception, other beaches where the Germans might expect landings - from assistance from the interior of France and Europe, by ruining the transportation systems. (10:343,344)

This tasking was especially disruptive to the strategic bombing campaign, since it required the preservation of deception concerning the actual Normandy invasion site. In practical terms, this meant that for every bomb dropped on transportation links which supported the Normandy area, two more had to be dropped in other areas, especially in the Pas de Calais area, which Patton's fictitious army was "preparing to invade." In essence, the strategic bombing campaign was terminated for over six months, at the precise point in time when it had finally become effective.

Air Corps generals who planned and commanded the strategic bombing campaign are scathing in their criticism of this diversion. Maj Gen Heywood Hansell who prepared the operational

plan for the strategic air campaign has this to say of the use of the strategic bombers to support OVERLORD,

But Gen Eisenhower retained control of those forces for six crucial months when they could have been most effective against systems in interior Germany. As a result of these delays and diversions, the massive air offensive against the selected primary targets did not really begin until September of 1944 - ten months late and three months after the invasion. ... The strategic air forces were finally returned to their primary objectives in October. In the next four months, the strategic air forces completed all the remaining strategic purposes originally proposed.

Similarly, Gen Curtis LeMay who was commanding the Eighth Air Force in England at the time has stated, "Neither for that matter, did I agree with the decision to invade Europe. I believed that once we had the complete upper hand in the air we could have waited for an inevitable German collapse." (14:15) He has further commented that without this diversion and interruption, the strategic air forces could have completed the destruction of Germany before Normandy. (11)

While these observations could possibly be viewed as self-serving, they are remarkably consistent with assessments made by high ranking German officials. The following brief review of the results of the bombing campaign from the German perspective clearly indicates the war-winning potential which the strategic bombing forces represented at that time.

Although the American 8th Air Force began operations from bases in England on 17 August 1942, it did not stage its first raid on the ball bearing plants at Schweinfurt until August 1943. The initial raid was successful in disrupting production of

bearings, but the aircraft losses to German fighters and flak were intolerable. A second raid in October 1943 resulted in even higher losses of aircraft and crews. Further raids on ball-bearing production were conducted from December 1943 through February 1944 with consistently improving results, but they ceased in April to the amazement of Albert Speer, the German Minister of Production. He states, "Thus the Allies threw away success when it was already in their hands." (8:286) Speer goes on to state that had these raids been continued, "Armaments production would have been crucially weakened after two months and after four months would have been brought completely to a standstill." (8:284) During the period of these raids, Speer made attempts to disperse his ball bearing plants, but very plainly states that, "...what really saved us was the fact that ... the enemy to our astonishment ceased his attacks on the ball bearing industry." (8:284) These raids were discontinued at a time when the Army Air Corps had the capability to continue them on an almost unlimited scale. They were discontinued so the bomber forces could be diverted to support OVERLORD.

The German oil production industry was also targeted. Although the bomber force had been adequate for the task for several months, preliminary raids were not conducted until May 1944, and the main blow was not struck until after D-day. The synthetic oil plants were especially critical, since they were the only source of aviation gasoline and since Russian occupation forces had eliminated the Rumanian fields by August 1944.

Production from the synthetic plants had averaged 316,000 tons before the attacks began, but it was reduced to 17,000 tons in September 1944 and kept at a small fraction of previous capacity for the duration of the war.(3:8) The Germans considered these attacks to be catastrophic. Speer states that on July 21, "Ninety-eight percent of our aircraft fuel plants were out of operation."(8:350) Again, however, the requirement to support OVERLORD had delayed the strikes against this critical industry for over four months.

Similar situations existed in other industries such as aircraft production and electric power generation. Electric power is of special interest because post war analysis indicates that it was particularly vulnerable and that it could have been attacked with relative ease. According to the German chief electrical engineer, "The war would have been finished two years sooner if you concentrated on the bombing of our power plants."(13:113) Unfortunately, it was removed from the approved target list by the Committee of Operations Analysts in Washington who were responsible for developing the target list for the strategic bombers. Maj Gen Heywood Hansell states this was done, "Apparently on the grounds that ... its effects would not be felt on the invasion beaches."(13:111)

As stated in the introduction to this section, it is impossible to completely separate fact from emotion when reviewing the information available on the strategic air campaign against Germany. However, one additional fact is of particular

relevance. Due to the continuing complaints from the airpower advocates which diversion of strategic bombers caused in Europe, the B-29s were placed under JCS control when they became available for the Pacific theater. Official JCS approval was required for the use of these aircraft on other than strategic missions tasked from Washington.(12) Under these arrangements, with the ground and naval commanders denied ready access to the B-29s, a much clearer case for the decisive nature of strategic airpower was made.

In summary, when the strategic bombing forces reached full capability in December 1943, Nazi Germany did not have long to survive as an active combatant. Considering also the cumulative devastation of the German Army which had taken place on the Eastern Front by that time, the case for the necessity for OVERLORD is tenuous at best.

## PLANS AND POLITICS

Perhaps the most persuasive argument that OVERLORD was not necessary is the one that can be based on the intense disagreement that existed among allied strategists during 1943. The British consistently felt that a peripheral strategy based on operations in the Mediterranean and the Balkans was preferable to a large scale direct assault like the Normandy invasion. Although there was considerable internal support for the British recommendation among American planners, the official American position, as espoused by Gen Marshall, adamantly advocated OVERLORD.

American planning for OVERLORD had been started early in 1942. At that time it appeared that a massive continental invasion would be mandatory for victory in the European theater. Not only did the invasion appear to be mandatory, it was needed as soon as possible to prevent a possible German victory on the eastern front. Furthermore, there was little choice involved in this early commitment to OVERLORD, simply due to the immensity of such an operation. Unless US strategic planners made early commitments of industrial resources to the type of equipment needed for a massive amphibious invasion, and unless they committed to firm production schedules for it, the allies would never have the capability to conduct such an operation. Therefore, the original commitment to OVERLORD, based as it was on the European situation in early 1942 and US industrial lead times, was sound. Following this commitment, the US became a

consistent advocate for OVERLORD, and very reluctantly agreed to adoption of the British position favoring the invasion of Sicily and Italy in 1943.

By mid 1943, the western allies knew they must commit to a definite plan for operations against Germany in 1944. It was clear that Mediterranean operations would take the remainder of 1943, and that little time remained for the detailed planning required for a major endeavor such as OVERLORD. A British/American conference known as QUADRANT took place in Quebec in August 1943 to resolve these issues.

The American position at the QUADRANT conference was heavily influenced by a new, high level military estimate which Harry Hopkins brought with him. It contained several major points. First, it stated that Russia occupied the "dominant" and "decisive" position in the defeat of Germany and would continue to occupy such a position relative to the rest of Europe in the post-war world.(2:120) Secondly, it maintained that, "The future of Europe will be affected profoundly, and perhaps decisively, by the strength and the geographic disposition of the armed forces at the cessation of hostilities."(2:121) Finally, it stated that America must consider the war in the Pacific, which was the "most important factor" in its relations with Russia.(2:121) Prior to QUADRANT Russia had consistently insisted that a second front was a necessary condition to future military and political cooperation with the West. Furthermore, Stalin had stated that he would join the Pacific War only after the Germans were

defeated and only if the West had helped in that defeat by opening a second front.(2:116,120)

For these reasons and others, presumably military, the Americans insisted on a firm, unambiguous commitment to OVERLORD. No one was more adamant than Gen Marshall. He continually emphasized that OVERLORD was mandatory for victory and felt that all attempts to modify or delay plans for a massive invasion of France were foolhardy and had to be overcome. Gen Marshall insisted that OVERLORD must have "overriding priority." If not, it, "weakened our chances for an early victory and rendered necessary a reexamination of our basic strategy with a possible readjustment toward the Pacific." To the British, this was the ultimate threat, since their hopes for a meaningful share in the defeat of Germany were totally dependent on continued American assistance. But Gen Marshall followed up with a second body blow. He stated that a refusal to give OVERLORD top priority would result in his immediate resignation, a position he had previously expressed to President Roosevelt.(2:113)

Although the Americans presented a united front at QUADRANT, it is interesting to note that a mini-revolt had occurred during the summer of 1943 among the strategists on the JCS. Led by Lt Gen John Hull, chief of the Operations Division Theater Group, these planners felt that a cross-channel invasion was not necessary. They recommended adoption of the British strategy of peripheral operations in the Mediterranean, continued strategic air operations against the German homeland, and continued use of

dominant allied seapower. They advocated a relaxation of the total commitment to OVERLORD and advised against setting a firm date for it. In their view planning should be done on an "opportunistic" rather than a rigid basis. They were supported in this advocacy by Admiral Cooke of the Joint Staff Planners.(17:165-166) During this time frame Gen Curtis LeMay also briefed the JCS concerning the potential capability of the strategic bombing campaign to put Germany out of the war in a matter of months.(11) Needless to say, Gen Marshall soundly suppressed such thinking prior to engaging the British at Quebec. As an historical footnote, it is remarkable that this suppressed American position is identical to the recommendations made by the British at QUADRANT and in later discussions with the Russians at Tehran.

The British were consistently opposed to OVERLORD. They continued to advocate more limited, less risky operations in the Mediterranean and against the Balkans. They were fascinated with the possibilities of bringing Turkey into the war on the allied side and felt that such operations in combination with American operations in the Pacific theater would satisfy Russian demands for opening a second front. Throughout the summer of 1943, prior to QUADRANT, Churchill expressed his concerns about the cross-channel invasion, and on one occasion drew images of a "Channel full of corpses" during a conversation with Secretary of War Stimson.(2:99) Churchill expressed these same fears to Secretary of State Hull at QUADRANT. He feared that OVERLORD

would involve frightful casualties and "that a victory under such conditions would be barren for Britain; she would never recover from it and would be so weakened that the Soviet Union would inevitably dominate the European continent." (2:119) To quote from Hastings, "Four years of war against the Wehrmacht had convinced Britain's commanders that Allied troops should engage and could defeat their principal enemy only on the most absolutely favourable terms. Throughout the Second World War, wherever British or American troops met the Germans in anything like equal strength, the Germans prevailed." (1:24) Fortunately, the allies enjoyed a considerable numerical advantage on the beaches of Normandy, but the British knew there could be no guarantees for such an operation. Having endured the aftermath of the ill-fated Dieppe fiasco in August 1942 and understanding the uncertainties associated with amphibious operations, Churchill's opposition to another risky cross-channel venture was well founded. History shows that these British concerns were remarkably prescient. The OVERLORD landings would probably have been "Dunkirked" had only two of the available German divisions been repositioned.

Predictably, due to American strength, the official results of the QUADRANT conference called for full support of OVERLORD and confirmed the planned date of 1 May 1944. However, the British were still not totally convinced, and continued to express their concerns during the coming months. In October, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt, "I do not doubt our ability in the

conditions laid down to get ashore and deploy. I am however deeply concerned with the build-up and with the situation which may arise between the thirtieth and sixtieth days...My dear friend, this is much the greatest thing we have ever attempted."(1:22) In a memo prepared in November, the British Chiefs of Staff stated, "We must not...regard OVERLORD as the pivot of our whole strategy on which all else turns." (1:22) (Emphasis added) The Americans were not naive concerning British skepticism. An autumn memorandum prepared by the American Joint Chiefs recognized a new rationale for British reluctance. It stated,

It is apparent that the British, who have consistently resisted a cross-Channel operation, now feel OVERLORD is no longer necessary. In their view, continued Mediterranean operations coupled with POINTBLANK (the strategic bombing of Germany) and the crushing Russian offensive, will be sufficient to cause the internal collapse of Germany and thus bring about her military defeat without undergoing what they consider an almost certain "bloodbath". The conclusion that the forces being built up in the United Kingdom will never be used for a military offensive against western Europe, but are intended as a gigantic deception plan and an occupying force, is inescapable.(1:22)

This is the crux of the issue. The British, who had access to the same intelligence information as the dominant American war planners and considerably more experience fighting the Germans felt that OVERLORD was both unnecessary and a terrible risk. With victory over the Germans practically in the allies' grasp due to successes in the north Atlantic, on the Eastern front, and in the strategic air campaign, the British saw no justification at the time of QUADRANT (or later) for risking an avoidable

defeat which could have had catastrophic political consequences for the Alliance.

It is interesting to note that an almost contrasting contingency was included in Allied plans at that time. Known as RANKIN, this plan provided for rapid reentry onto the continent in late 1943 or early 1944 in case of German weakening or collapse before OVERLORD. (2:113) RANKIN recognized that, "For both political and military reasons, speed of entry will be of the first importance." (2:123) RANKIN was a completely political plan. It was designed to get allied armies into Germany as fast as possible in the event of a German collapse, so the Russian advance would be stopped. Unlike OVERLORD, it was not cloaked in a garb of "military necessity."

Following QUADRANT the British were not content merely to voice their concerns about OVERLORD to the Americans. Remarkably, they began to communicate their alternative strategies and to receive apparent support from the most unlikely of sources, the Russians. Stalin was still insisting that the second front was a necessary condition for post-war cooperation, but the British began to notice a new softness in his insistence. When Anthony Eden advised Stalin on October 28 that OVERLORD might be delayed for a few months, due to difficulties being encountered in the Italian campaign, Stalin calmly accepted the news, and the entire talk "went off surprisingly well." (2:132) This response was in total contrast to previous tirades which had been triggered by news of British/American delays and tactical

misfortunes. At a later conference of foreign ministers in Moscow, Stalin was receptive to British overtures concerning short term military operations in the Balkans or a possible expansion of the Italian operation instead of OVERLORD.(2:134) No doubt, the British were very persuasive. Churchill is known to have said concerning the necessity to curtail offensive operations in the Mediterranean theater to support OVERLORD, "It is certainly an odd way of helping the Russians, to slow down the fight in the only theater where anything can be done for some months."(15:254) Stalin's attitude changes have been attributed to the huge success of the Russian Army in its 1943 offensive. By this time Stalin apparently felt that British and American assistance was becoming less critical in defeating the German Army. In any event, after the Moscow conference of Foreign Ministers, the final decision on OVERLORD was again uncertain. If Stalin no longer felt it was necessary, the British position would prevail, and the cross-channel invasion would be canceled or at least postponed.(2:134)

At this point a stalemate again existed between the American and British positions, and it appeared that Joseph Stalin would make the final decision by expressing his preferences at the summit scheduled for late November in Tehran. This remarkable turn of events was confirmed at a preparatory British/American planning conference (SEXTANT) held in Cairo on November 23, 1943.(15:165)

On November 28, 1943, the summit at Tehran began. Although Stalin had obviously been considering the alternatives, there was no question at Tehran that he preferred OVERLORD as the primary offensive for 1944.(15:306) He further sided with the Americans by recommending an offensive in southern France after the capture of Rome rather than continued operations in Italy or in the Balkans.(15:261) Concerning previous operations in the Mediterranean, Stalin commented that, "They were really only diversions."(15:307) Churchill, no match for the Russian/American combination, became moody and sulked, perhaps sensing the shape of the future.

Did Stalin really consider OVERLORD to be essential to Germany's defeat, as he had earlier in the war? After his return to Moscow from Tehran, Stalin commented to Marshal Zhukov, "Roosevelt has given his word that large scale action will be mounted in France in 1944. I believe he will keep his word. But even if he doesn't, we have enough of our own forces to complete the rout of Nazi Germany."(15:340)

If he did not consider OVERLORD to be mandatory, why did Stalin torpedo the British at Tehran? Perhaps he realized that Churchill's Mediterranean strategy could result in British and American occupation of much of central and eastern Europe. Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and part of Poland could well have followed the inevitable allied victory in Italy. Could Stalin have been so astute as to realize that OVERLORD

would confine British and American forces to western Europe, and leave central and eastern Europe for him?

To summarize, OVERLORD was not a clear choice for allied planners. It was not clear that OVERLORD was necessary to defeat Germany, and it was not clear that it would be worth the price of the expected British and American casualties. The British advised caution, knowing full well that Russia would dominate the continent unless strong British and American armies remained after the war.(2:119) The Americans felt compelled to engage the German Army directly despite the potential casualties, and OVERLORD was the way to do this.

This compulsion is all the more remarkable when the Pacific theater is considered. It would seem that with Nimitz and MacArthur constantly complaining about their second priority status and their critical need for more men and materiel to defeat Japan, the JCS would have been actively seeking opportunities to reduce requirements in the European theater. Canceling or delaying OVERLORD, as the British were recommending, was such an opportunity. In retrospect, it must be concluded that more powerful motivators than simple logic were operating throughout 1943.

## OTHER STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Although the primary purpose of this paper is to address the military requirement for OVERLORD, any paper on OVERLORD would be deficient if it ignored the broader political and strategic issues which concerned senior policy makers during World War II. The first of these issues was the desire for a "second front" to provide relief to the Russians.

While this had been a consistent and well-justified theme from Stalin throughout 1941 and 1942, by late 1943 the urgency had been relieved. At Tehran, Stalin knew he could defeat the Germans unilaterally, if required. (15:340) Although the possibility of a separate peace between Germany and Russia may have been a basis for real concern in 1942 and early 1943, by the time of the Tehran Conference it would have taken a catastrophic reversal to change the Russian commitment to victory. Russia was in the war to stay and to win. Furthermore, the Americans would have been well justified had they maintained that the second front already existed in the Pacific, where Russian forces were not engaged. It may have been a great historical misfortune that the other allies could not do more to relieve Russia during the darkest days of 1941 and 1942 when she faced the Germans essentially alone, but this compelling need simply did not exist at the Tehran conference. By that time, the argument for a second European front was merely a "rationale of convenience."

Some assume the allied decision to proceed with OVERLORD was based on a desire to limit Russian territorial gains to eastern Europe. This rather Machiavellian rationale probably has more validity than a purely military one, but it also has several deficiencies. First of all, it was not apparent in late 1943 that Germany would fight to the bitter end. It was conceivable that surrender, rather than destruction would be chosen at some point prior to Russian invasion of German territory. Occupation forces would then have entered Germany unopposed, and it is reasonable to assume that American and British forces would have been given preference. Secondly, even if the Germans did not surrender, continuing attrition on the eastern front would gradually have resulted in the transfer of German forces out of France, so British and American forces would have faced little or no opposition to a deferred landing there. This was the contingency covered by the war plan known as RANKIN. It provided for a very rapid invasion and advance across France in the event of an imminent collapse of the German government. There is no question that Hitler would have expended his last resources fighting the Russians for Berlin rather than British and American forces for France and western Germany. Had British and American strategists been truly Machiavellian in their deliberations concerning OVERLORD, they would have deferred the invasion and waited for a later opportunity when they would have faced little or no opposition.

Even more opportunistic strategists would have recognized the wisdom of Winston Churchill's recommendations for a Mediterranean strategy rather than a massive invasion of France. His strategy promised to do two things. First, it would have limited British and American casualties and risk, so that strong forces would have been available to confront Russia in the post-war world. Secondly, successful execution of this strategy would have prevented Russian occupation of much of eastern Europe. As described by Churchill and British Field Marshals Alexander and Wilson, the Mediterranean strategy would have included campaigns throughout the Danube basin. (17:466-475) (23:537-538) As indicated earlier, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and even Poland could well have come under British and American control. It is entirely conceivable that this option, followed by operation RANKIN, would not only have prevented Russian occupation of western Europe, but would also have kept them out of much of central and eastern Europe as well. Unfortunately, Churchill's mistrust of the Russians was completely ignored or discounted as an insufficient basis for changing the OVERLORD planning. It is therefore very unlikely that American insistence on OVERLORD could have been based on distrust of the Russians or a desire to limit their occupation of Europe. There were too many more favorable opportunities for doing this, had it been a strategic objective, and there is simply too much evidence to the contrary.

As a final point on the strategic basis for OVERLORD, the potential gains from OVERLORD did not compare with its potential cost to the allies. Allied victory on the beaches of Normandy followed by the successful invasion of France were not decisive in the European theater. Even without OVERLORD, the outcome of the European war had already been decided. The Russian Army and the combined bombing campaign could guarantee Germany's defeat. Furthermore, British and American forces could have been massacred on the beaches of Normandy or "Dunkirked" at a later date. This outcome is not only plausible, it came very close to actually happening. Repositioning one or two divisions would probably have given the Germans a victory on the Normandy beaches. Less interference by Hitler in the decisions of his commanders might also have given him a victory even after the allied beachhead had been established. The invasion was a serious and unnecessary risk. American and British strategists can be critically questioned for deciding on an operation which in all likelihood was going to cost them more than it could possibly gain. Good strategists do not give their opponents the opportunity to win major victories when they are under no military compulsion to do so.

Having determined that OVERLORD was not necessary for allied victory in Europe; that OVERLORD was too late to provide the much needed relief to Russia; that OVERLORD was perhaps the least advantageous opportunity to limit the scope of Russian post-war occupation; and that as a strategy, OVERLORD had a greater

potential for losing or extending than for winning the war; it is extremely difficult to justify the operation. The apparent basis for the final decision on OVERLORD was that the American strategists were committed to it. Even though the original rationale for OVERLORD was sound, American strategists refused to recognize that the European situation had changed. After fighting for OVERLORD for over two years with the British, the US Army would not relinquish its only opportunity to play a major role in the defeat of the Germans. By late 1943 the inertia associated with OVERLORD was simply too great to overcome.

## CONCLUSION

The massive allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944 was not necessary for the military defeat of Germany. The German Army had already been destroyed on the eastern front, and the German war industry was being devastated by the combined bombing offensive. According to Trumbull Higgins,

When the British were finally compelled by their Allies to invade France in 1944, it was an invasion essentially undertaken in the self-interest of the West, the terrible risk of the collapse of the Soviet Union having long since passed. At this date the Red Army no longer needed more than Western supplies with which to occupy eastern Europe.(4:283)

The Normandy invasion was simply too late to be of meaningful assistance to the Russians. In fact, Stalin had conceded that it was no longer necessary.(15:340)

Furthermore, many capable allied strategists knew that OVERLORD was no longer required and recommended against it. Why were these recommendations not heeded, especially since they would have resulted in greatly reduced British and American casualties? Two considerations cannot be ignored. First was the sheer momentum behind the OVERLORD planning. American planners had placed all their European "eggs" in this basket, they had been advocating OVERLORD against the British for over two years, and they were unwilling to concede to the British position in late 1943. Secondly, American leaders, including Roosevelt, felt that unless American forces took a significant (albeit late) share in defeating the German Army, the Russians would be entirely uncooperative in the post-war world and probably would

not assist in defeating the Japanese. The British were much less concerned about Russian sensitivities, feeling instead that their post-war interests would be better served by strengthening and conserving their armed forces rather than squandering them on the beaches of Normandy.

OVERLORD was not a military necessity; it was an unnecessary military gamble that could easily have failed. In retrospect, it is impossible to understand why American strategists were so committed to it. This commitment itself is evidence of serious strategic inflexibility. American planners either could not or would not adjust to the realities of the European theater in late 1943 and early 1944. Having already made the investment in a strategic bombing force that, in combination with the Russian Army, could have defeated Germany in a matter of months, why did the US not unleash the bombers and turn its attention to the Pacific theater? Why did US strategists not accept British recommendations for a less risky Mediterranean/Balkan strategy that would have left the western forces in a much more favorable post-war position relative to the Russians? The answers to these questions have political as well as military dimensions. President Roosevelt believed he could buy Stalin's post-war cooperation. When Stalin expressed his final preference for OVERLORD at Tehran, he essentially allowed American political and military strategy to coalesce. OVERLORD was what the Russians still wanted and it was what Gen Marshall had always wanted. Roosevelt could not have been more pleased.

In the final analysis, parochialism cannot be discounted. During World War I American leaders and forces had chafed under the constraints of a strategy developed by Britain. With World War II, America had another opportunity to assert its world leadership role and develop the strategy for victory. Gen Marshall was entirely consistent with the attitudes of the American people and their political leaders when he insisted that OVERLORD, the American plan, would be used to defeat Germany. Furthermore, and perhaps even more important to Gen Marshall, he knew that victory in the Pacific theater would be achieved primarily by Naval and Air forces. Geography alone dictated this. OVERLORD was the last opportunity for the US Army to play a major rather than a peripheral role in the victory. General Marshall simply would not let such an opportunity pass.

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