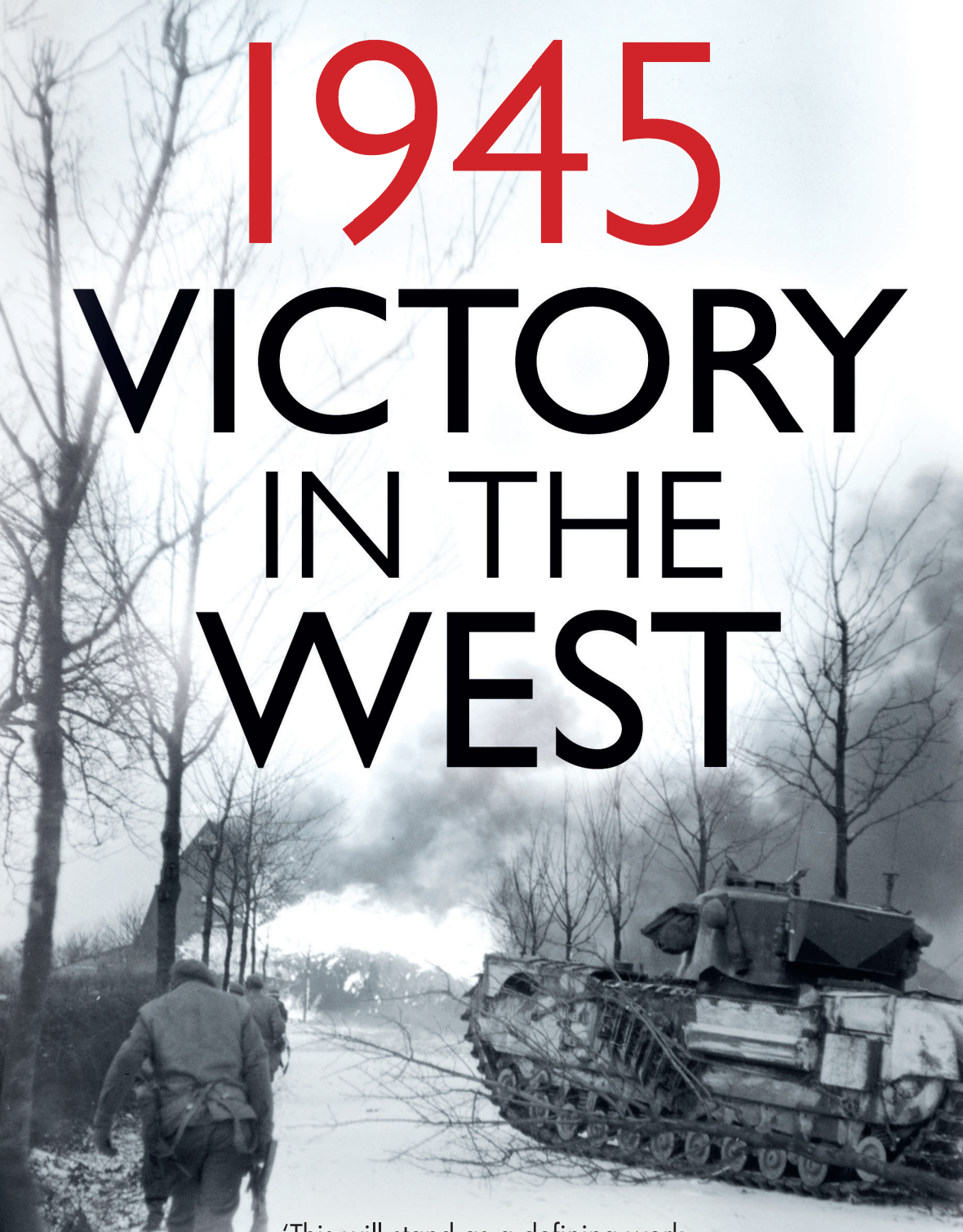
1945

VICTORY IN THE WEST



'This will stand as a defining work
on these darkest months of the conflict.'
JAMES HOLLAND, author of *BROTHERS IN ARMS*

PETER CADDICK-ADAMS

1945
VICTORY IN THE WEST

ALSO BY PETER CADDICK-ADAMS

By God They Can Fight!: A New History of the 143rd Infantry Brigade
The Fight for Iraq: January–June 2003
Monty and Rommel: Parallel Lives
Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell
Snow and Steel: Battle of the Bulge 1944–5
Sand and Steel: A New History of D-Day

1945 VICTORY IN THE WEST

PETER CADDICK-ADAMS

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To A.L. LeQuesne
who taught me history
at Shrewsbury School (1974–1978)
&
Paul Beaver and Cate Pye
who have kindly accommodated, wined and dined
the wandering historian
during his many travels

Contents

PART THREE

Beyond the Rhine

Military Tool Kit And Glossary

Military folk worldwide, like many other communities, tend to adopt their own abbreviations, which they forget puzzle those outside. Military algebra, by which I mean the designation of divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions and so on, is particularly vexing to the uninitiated, hence this briefest of tool kits for your enlightenment.

Units of all the nations covered here followed much the same approach, in that their basic formation was the division. By 1945 German divisions had often shrunk to perhaps 10,000 and sometimes much less. Allied ones tended to vary between 12,000 and 15,000 men, depending on purpose (airborne, armoured or infantry). Divisions (usually commanded by a Major General, Generalmajor or Generalleutnant) were self-supporting, with their own reconnaissance, artillery, anti-aircraft and anti-tank, engineers, signals, machine-gun, supply, transport, ordnance (for repair), workshop (for vehicles), medical and military police elements.

All divisions were numbered, and often had a secondary title, which indicated where they recruited, for example 15th Scottish, 43rd Wessex and 53rd Welsh under Montgomery; or the 36th Texas and 42nd Rainbow (the latter drawing recruits from across the United States). Two divisions or more – often many more – made an army corps. Allied corps possessed their own heavy artillery (an AGRA, Army Group Royal Artillery in the Anglo-Canadian forces), anti-aircraft, armoured and reconnaissance units, a Mechanized Cavalry Group (in US corps), plus other assets.

Allied infantry divisions were broken down into three infantry brigades (regiments in US terminology), each of around 3,000 personnel, commanded by a Colonel or Brigadier (Brigadier General, or Général de Brigade). The Cottonbalers was the unofficial title of a US Army regiment, more formally titled the 7th Infantry. A brigade, in turn, comprised three battalions, led by lieutenant colonels, which remain the basic building blocks of military formations. Tank battalions (sometimes called armoured regiments) fielded around sixty tanks, infantry battalions contained 600–1,000 riflemen, whilst artillery battalions (or regiments) comprised anything from nine to forty-eight guns, depending on type and calibre. Each generally included three infantry companies, armoured squadrons or artillery batteries, plus headquarters elements.

American and British airborne forces, with minimal transport, who deployed into battle by glider and parachute, fielded fewer numbers, as did British Commandos. The

latter, all numbered, were split between the Navy (Royal Marine Commandos) and Army, each unit being the equivalent of a highly-trained, well-armed, but small battalion. Their US equivalents are Ranger battalions.

American battalions and regiments were numbered, while the Anglo-Canadians retained a variety of exotic and confusing titles for their battalions, evoking nineteenth-century antecedents. These included the 13th/18th Hussars, 22nd Dragoons and Staffordshire Yeomanry (all British tank battalions); 3rd Scots Guards (also a tank battalion); 13th Royal Horse Artillery (an artillery battalion); the Algonquin Regiment and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (both Canadian infantry battalions, the latter fielding machine-guns); and 4th/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers, 5th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and (bizarrely) the 12th King's Royal Rifle Corps (all British battalions).

Now, for some TLAs (Three Letter Abbreviations) and others, which have crept past the censors and into this volume.

30 Assault Unit	British commando unit, raised by Ian Fleming, tasked to capture German codes, technical documents, equipment and personnel
AEF	American Expeditionary Force, which fought in World War One
AFS	American Field Service; an all-volunteer US force of ambulance drivers
AGRA	Army Group Royal Artillery; corps-level medium and heavy artillery units
AGRE	Army Group Royal Engineers; fielded troops for corps and army activities
AVRE	Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers, based on the 40-ton Churchill tank
Army Group 'B'	FM Model's central German force; 5th Panzer, 7th and 15th Armies
Army Group 'G'	SS Gen. Hausser's force defending southern Germany; 1st and 19th Armies
Army Group 'H'	Defended Holland with 1st Parachute and 25th Armies under Blaskowitz
BAR	Browning Automatic Rifle; US Army squad light machine-gun, 20-round magazine, 0.30-06-inch calibre
Bagration	Soviet operation, 23 June 1944, to compliment D-Day in Normandy
BLA	British Liberation Army
Blackcock	British XII Corps operation to clear Roermond Triangle, 13–27 January 1945
Blockbuster	Canadian operation to clear Rhineland, 26 February to 3 March 1945
Blue and White Devils	Nickname for 3rd US Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. John W. O'Daniel)

Bren Carrier	British-Canadian 3-ton armed and armoured, tracked carrier for moving combat supplies and towing equipment
Bren gun	British-Czech .303-inch calibre, 30-round, magazine-fed, light machine-gun
Bronze Star	US decoration for achievement or bravery in a combat zone
C-rations	(US) canned combat rations, also gum, matches, cigarettes, toilet paper
CEF	(French) Corps Expéditionnaire Français, under Général Alphonse Juin
CIC	US Counter Intelligence Corps; provided tactical intelligence from captured documents, interrogations, or civilian sources
CIGS	British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, FM Sir Alan Brooke
Combat Command	US all-arms combat grouping in armoured divisions, designated 'A', 'B' and 'R'
Cottonbalers	(US) nickname for 7th US Infantry Regiment (Col. John A. Heintges)
Crocodile	Churchill flame-throwing tank, towed armoured trailer of fuel; range 100yds
Curtiss C-46	(US) twin-engined transport, forty troops, aka 'Commando'
DD tank	Duplex Drive Sherman tank, able to float using canvas side screens
DESt	Deutsche Erd und Steinwerke, SS-run German Earth & Stone Works
Deutsche Reichsbahn	German railways
Division-Leclerc	(French) 2nd Armoured Division, led by Général Philippe Leclerc
Douglas C-47	(US) twin-engined transport, twenty-eight troops, aka 'Dakota' or 'Skytrain'
Douglas C-54	(US) four-engined, long-range transport, fifty troops, aka 'Skymaster'
Dragoon	Anglo-US amphibious assault of southern France, 15 August 1944
ETO	(US) European Theater of Operations
Fallschirmjäger	(German) parachute troops, forces
Festung	(German) fortress; if so designated, area obliged to fight to the last bullet
Flakhelfer	German teenaged anti-aircraft assistant personnel; females designated as Flakhelferinnen
Flashpoint	Ninth US Army operation to cross the Rhine, 24 March 1945
FOO	Forward Observation Officer (for artillery)
Franconia	Old Germanic region centred on northern Bavaria and eastern Württemberg

G-1	(SHAEF/US, later NATO) designation for administration and personnel issues
G-2	(SHAEF/US) personnel and departments responsible for intelligence matters
G-3	(SHAEF/US) personnel responsible for operations, plans and training
G-4	(SHAEF/US) personnel and departments devoted to supply issues
G-5	(SHAEF/US) personnel and departments responsible for civil-military matters
Gauleiter	Powerful regional political leader, senior to Kreisleiter and Ortsgruppenleiter
Gebirgsjäger	German mountain troops or formations
Goldflake/Penknife	Anglo-Canadian operation to bring troops from Italy to North West Europe
Grenade	US Ninth Army operation to clear Rhineland, 23 February to 10 March 1945
Hauptbahnhof	Main railway station
Herbstnebel	German 'Autumn Mist' Ardennes attack, beginning on 16 December 1944
Hitlerjugend	Hitler Youth movement for males aged 14–18; heavily militarised
Jagdpanther	German turretless, tracked vehicle, mounting 88mm gun on Panther chassis
Jagdpanzer IV	German turretless, tracked vehicle with 75mm gun on Panzer IV chassis
Kaiserreich	German Empire of 1871–1918 (Second Reich); preceded by the Holy Roman Empire of 800–1806, first established by Charlemagne (First Reich)
Kampfgruppe	German temporary all-arms combat grouping
Kangaroo	Armoured personnel carrier, based on M7 Priest or Canadian Ram tank
King Tiger	German 70-ton heavy tank, mounting 88mm gun, armour up to 7.5 inches
K-rations	US emergency rations, included chocolate, crackers, powdered drinks
LCM	Landing Craft Mechanised, capable of carrying a tank, 50-foot long
LCVP	(US) Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel; the 36-foot- long Higgins Boat
Lumberjack	US First Army operation to clear west of Rhine, 1 to 25 March 1945
LVT	Armoured tracked amphibious carrier, nicknamed 'Buffalo' or 'Alligator'
M4	Sherman: US-designed 32- to 42-ton medium tank in general Allied service
M5	Stuart: US light tank, with 37mm gun in revolving turret

M7	Priest: US tracked, armoured motor gun carriage with 105mm howitzer
M8	US 6-wheeled armoured car with 37mm gun in revolving turret
M10	US tank destroyer on Sherman chassis, 3-inch gun in revolving turret
M26	Pershing: 46-ton heavy US tank with 90mm gun, introduced early 1945
M29	Weasel: US rubber-tracked, amphibious load carrier, with a crew of four
M36	US tank destroyer; development of M10, with 90mm gun
Manhattan Project	US operation to develop atomic weapons
Market Garden	Anglo-American airborne and ground operation, Holland, 17 to 25 September 1944
Marne Division	US 3rd Infantry Division, named 'Rock of the Marne' from service in 1918
Monty's Moonlight	Reflecting searchlights on low clouds, creating night-time illumination
Nashorn	German self-propelled 88mm anti-tank gun on Panzer IV chassis
Nebelwerfer	German multi-barrelled mortar tubes, wheeled or towed into position
Nordwind	'North Wind' German attack against US Seventh Army, 1 to 25 January 1945
Oberbürgermeister	(German) lord mayor, senior to Bürgermeister (mayor)
Oberrhein	Himmler's Upper Rhine army group, November 1944–January 1945
Oflag	Abbr. of 'Offizierslager', (German) prison camp for officers
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the German Armed Forces High Command headquarters near Berlin
Overlord	Anglo-American-Canadian invasion of France, from D-Day, 6 June 1944
P-47	US single-seat ground attack fighter, aka 'Thunderbolt'
P-51	US long-range, single-seat fighter, aka 'Mustang'
Panzerfaust	German shoulder-launched, single-shot anti-tank weapon
Panzergrenadier	German armoured infantry personnel or units
Panzerjäger	German anti-tank units, weapons or personnel
Panzerschreck	German stove-pipe-like two-man anti-tank weapon, modelled on bazooka
Paperclip	US operation to remove to America German scientists, engineers and technicians from post-war Soviet influence, 1945
PFC	(US) Private First Class, rank above private, for military service of one year
Phantom	British liaison unit of teams with special communications; equivalent of US Signal Information and Monitoring (SIAM) Companies

PIAT	Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank (Anglo-Canadian bazooka)
Plunder	British-Canadian Rhine crossing operation, 23 to 24 March 1945
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, modern term for shell shock (WW1), or battle exhaustion (WW2)
PX	(US) Post Exchange, front-line store, where troops could buy non-issue items
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service), 6-months' compulsory service for those aged 18–25, before joining the Wehrmacht or SS
Ram	Canadian training tank; turretless, converted into Kangaroo armoured personnel carrier for 10-man infantry section or squad
Rathaus	(German) city or town hall
Repple Depple	(US slang) Replacement Depot, where troops are processed before combat
SAS	(British) Special Air Service; air-dropped or Jeep-equipped special forces operating forward of Allied troops
SCAEF	Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force, General Dwight David Eisenhower
Schmeisser	German MP-40 machine-pistol, 9mm calibre, 32-round magazine
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, forward base in Reims
Silver Star	US award for bravery in battle from 1942, above Bronze Star
Sten	British-Canadian submachine-gun, 9mm calibre, 32-round magazine
Sturmgeschütze	German tracked, turretless vehicle with 75mm gun, abbreviated to StuG
T-4	German programme to murder individuals designated 'of no use to the Reich', disguised as euthanasia
TAC	Tactical Command Post/HQ
Task Force	US all-arms grouping, usually two per armoured combat command
T-Force	Anglo-US military mission in 1945 to secure German scientific and industrial technology before it could be destroyed or fall into Russian hands
Torchlight	British XII Corps attack on Xanten, 24 March 1945
Turnscrew	Anglo-Canadian XXX Corps assault on Rees, 23 March 1945
Typhoon	RAF ground attack fighter, 4x 20mm cannon, 8x rockets plus 2x bombs
Ultra	Strategic intelligence gleaned from cryptoanalysis of German radio signals
V-1	*Vergeltungswaffe* (vengeance weapon) flying bomb
V-2	German rocket, assembled by slave labour in underground facilities

Varsity	Anglo-American airborne operation beyond Rhine, 24 March 1945
Veritable	Anglo-Canadian operation to clear Rhineland, 8 February to 11 March 1945
Volksgrenadier	German infantry soldier or formation, designated from autumn 1944
Volkssturm	German armed civilian militia, established in battalions from 25 September 1944
wald	German for 'wood' or 'forest', hence Hochwald, Pfälzerwald, Reichswald, Schwarzwald
Westwall	German western frontier defences, aka the Siegfried Line
Widgeon	British Commando attack on Wesel, 23 March 1945

Order of Battle, Allied Forces Western Europe, at the Time of the *Plunder/ Varsity* Rhine Crossings, 24 March 1945

Note: this is a snapshot of Eisenhower's ninety-one full-strength divisions and other forces on a significant day. No more divisions arrived after this date. Allied divisions changed between corps frequently, and several senior commanders changed. John Millikin had just been replaced at III US Corps on 17 March by James A. Van Fleet. On 23 March, Dan Spry had been replaced by Ralph Keefler as commander of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. On 24 March, Tom Rennie (51st Highland Division, Second British Army) was killed in action and replaced by Gordon MacMillan. Maurice Rose (3rd US Armored Division) was killed on 30 March and replaced by his deputy, Doyle Hickey; on 4 April, Simpson's Ninth US Army would revert from Montgomery's control to Bradley's Twelfth US Army Group. On 22 April, Van Fleet's III US Corps would be switched from First to Third US Army in exchange for VIII US Corps joining First Army. On 17 April, John Wogan (13th US Armored Division) was wounded and replaced by John Millikin, recently sacked from III Corps. On 20 April, Manton Eddy at XII US Corps was replaced for medical reasons by Leroy Irwin. Matthew Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps was moved frequently between armies in the last month. US V Corps joined Patton's Third Army from Hodge's First at the beginning of May 1945.

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

FIRST ALLIED AIRBORNE ARMY (Lt Gen. Lewis H. Brereton)

XVIII US Airborne Corps (Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway)
13th US Airborne Division (Maj. Gen. Elbridge G. Chapman Jr)

515th and 517th Parachute Infantry and 326th Glider Infantry Regiments
17th US Airborne Division (Maj. Gen. William M. Miley)
507th and 513rd Parachute Infantry and 193rd Glider Infantry Regiments
82nd 'All American' Airborne Division (Maj. Gen. James M. Gavin)
504th and 505th Parachute Infantry, 325th Glider Infantry Regiments
101st 'Screaming Eagles' US Airborne Division (Maj. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor)
502nd and 506th Parachute Infantry, 327th Glider Infantry

I British Airborne Corps (Lt Gen. Sir Richard Gale)
1st British Airborne Division (Maj. Gen. Robert E. 'Roy' Urquhart)
1st Parachute Brigade, 1st Airlanding Brigade
6th British Airborne Division (Maj. Gen. Eric Bols)
3rd and 5th Parachute Brigades, 6th Airlanding Brigade
1st and 2nd (UK), 3rd and 4th (French) and 5th (Belgian)
Special Air Service (SAS) units
1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade (Lt. Col. Stanislaw Jachnik)
(3 parachute battalions; brigade later joined
1st Polish Armoured Division)

TWENTY FIRST ARMY GROUP
Field Marshal Sir L. Bernard Montgomery

2nd Tactical Air Force, RAF (Air Marshal Sir Arthur 'Maori' Coningham)
No. 2 Group (medium bombers), No. 83 Group (supported British),
No.84 Group (supported Canadians),
No. 85 Group (night fighters/light bombers)

FIRST CANADIAN ARMY (Gen. H.D.G. 'Harry' Crerar)

2nd Canadian Independent Armoured Brigade (Brig. G.W. Robinson)
(1st Canadian Hussars, Fort Garry Horse, Sherbrook Fusiliers)

4th Commando Brigade (Brig. Bernard W. 'Jumbo' Leicester)
(41, 46, 47 and 48 RM Commandos)
1st and 2nd Canadian Army Groups Royal Artillery

I British Corps (Sir John T. Crocker)
(lines of communication and military government duties)
49th West Riding Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Stuart B. Rawlins,
later to I Canadian Corps), 56th, 146th and 147th Infantry Brigades
1st Polish Armoured Division (Maj. Gen. Stanisław Maczek,
later to II Canadian Corps): 10th Polish Armoured Brigade,
3rd Infantry Brigades

I Canadian Corps (Lt Gen. Charles Foulkes)
Arriving from Italy, 1st Canadian Infantry Division
(Maj. Gen. Harry W. Foster) 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigades
Arriving from Italy, 5th Canadian Armoured Division
(Maj. Gen. Bert H. Hoffmeister)
5th Canadian Armoured Brigade, 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade
Arriving from Italy, 1st Canadian independent Armoured Brigade
(Brig. William C. Murphy: Ontario, Three Rivers and Calgary Regiments)

SECOND BRITISH ARMY (Gen. Sir Miles C. 'Bimbo' Dempsey)

30th Armoured Brigade (Brig. Nigel W. Duncan: Flail Tanks)
31st Armoured Brigade (Brig. Gordon S. Knight:
Crocodiles, LVTs and Kangaroos)
33rd Armoured Brigade (Brig. Henry B. Scott: DD tanks and LVTs)
1st Assault Brigade, Royal Engineers (Brig. Philip St. B Sydenham:
AVREs and LVTs)

II Canadian Corps (Lt Gen. Guy G. Simonds, under command)
4th Canadian Armoured Division (Maj. Gen. Chris Vokes)
4th Canadian Armoured Brigade, 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade
2nd Canadian Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. A. Bruce Matthews)
4th, 5th and 6th Canadian Infantry Brigades

VIII British Corps (Lt Gen. Evelyn H. 'Bubbles' Barker)
11th Armoured Division (Maj. Gen. G.P.B. 'Pip' Roberts)
29th Armoured Brigade, 159th Infantry Brigade
6th Guards Independent Tank Brigade (Brig. Walter D.C. Greenacre)
(4th Coldstream Guards, 4th Grenadier Guards, 3rd Scots Guards)
Arriving from Italy, 5th British Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Richard A. Hull)
13th, 15th and 17th Infantry Brigades

XII British Corps (Lt Gen. Sir Neil Ritchie)
7th Armoured Division (Maj. Gen. Lewis O. Lyne)
22nd Armoured Brigade, 131st Infantry Brigade
15th Scottish Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Colin M. 'Tiny' Barber)
44th and 46th Lowland Brigades, 227th Highland Brigade
52nd Lowland Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. E Hakewill-Smith)
156th, 157th, 158th Infantry Brigades
53rd Welsh Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Robert K. 'Bobbie' Ross)
71st, 158th and 160th Infantry Brigades

1st Commando Brigade (Brig. Derek Mills-Roberts)
(3 and 6 Army Commandos, 46 and 45 RM Commandos)
4th Independent Armoured Brigade (Brig. R. Michael P. Carver)
(Sharpshooters Yeomanry, Royal Scots Greys, 44th Royal Tank Regiment plus
2nd Kings Royal Rifle Corps, infantry battalion)
34th Independent Tank Brigade (Brig. William S. Clarke)
(107th and 147th Royal Armoured Corps, 7th and 9th Royal Tank Regiment)
3rd, 8th and 9th Army Groups Royal Artillery

XXX British Corps (Lt Gen. Sir Brian G. 'Jorrocks' Horrocks)
Guard Armoured Division (Maj. Gen. Alan H.S. Adair)
5th Guards Armoured Brigade, 32nd Guards Brigade
3rd Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Lashmer G. 'Bolo' Whistler)
8th, 9th, 185th Infantry Brigades
3rd Canadian Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Ralph H. Keefler,
later to II Canadian Corps)
7th, 8th and 9th Canadian Infantry Brigades
43rd Wessex Division (Maj. Gen. G. Ivor Thomas)
129th, 130th, 214th Infantry Brigades
51st Highland Division (Maj. Gen. T.G. Rennie,
killed in action 24 March, then Maj. Gen. G.H.A. MacMillan)
152nd, 153rd and 154th Infantry Brigades
4th and 5th Army Groups Royal Artillery

8th Independent Armoured Brigade (Brig. Gen. Erroll Prior Palmer)
(Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry, 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards,
13th/18th Hussars
12th King's Royal Rifle Corps, infantry battalion)

NINTH US ARMY (Lt Gen. William H. Simpson)
XXIX Tactical Air Command (Brig. Gen. Richard E. Nugent)

XIII US Corps (Maj. Gen. Alvan C. Gillem)
11th Mechanized Cavalry Group
5th 'Victory' Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver)
10th, 34th and 81st Tank, and 15th, 46th and 47th Armored Infantry Battalions
84th 'Lincoln' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Alexander R. Bolling)
333rd, 334th and 335th Infantry Regiments, 771st Tank Battalion
95th 'Victory' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Harry L. Twaddle)
377th, 378th and 379th Infantry Regiments, 709th Tank Battalion
102nd 'Ozark' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Frank A. Keating)

405th, 406th and 407th Infantry Regiments, 709th Tank Battalion

XVI US Corps (Maj. Gen. John B. Anderson)
15th Mechanized Cavalry Group
8th 'Thundering Herd' Armored Division (Brig. Gen. John M. Devine)
18th, 36th and 80th Tank, and 7th, 49th and 58th Armored Infantry Battalions
30th Infantry 'Old Hickory' Division (Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs)
117th, 119th and 120th Infantry Regiments, 743rd Tank Battalion
35th Infantry 'Santa Fe' Division (Maj. Gen. Paul W. Baade)
134th, 137th and 320th Infantry Regiments, 784th Tank Battalion
75th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Ray E. Porter)
289th, 290th and 291st Infantry Regiments, 701st Tank Battalion
79th 'Cross of Lorraine' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Ira T. Wyche)
313th, 314th and 315th Infantry Regiments, 717th Tank Battalion

XIX US Corps (Raymond S. McLain)
113th Mechanized Cavalry Group
2nd 'Hell on Wheels' Armored Division (Brig. Gen. Isaac D. White)
66th and 67th Armored Regiments, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment
29th 'Blue and Gray' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Charles H. Gerhardt)
115th, 116th and 175th Infantry Regiments, 747th Tank Battalion
83rd 'Thunderbolt' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon)
329th, 330th and 331st Infantry Regiments, 736th Tank Battalion

TWELFTH US ARMY GROUP
Gen. Omar N. Bradley

FIRST US ARMY (Lt Gen. Courtney H. Hodges)
IX Tactical Air Command (Maj. Gen. Elwood R. 'Pete' Quesada)

III US Corps (Maj. Gen. James A. Van Fleet)
14th Mechanized Cavalry Group
7th 'Lucky Seventh' Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Robert W Hasbrouck)
17th, 31st and 40th Tank and 23rd, 38th and 48th
Armored Infantry Battalions
9th 'Old Reliables' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Louis A. Craig)
39th, 47th and 60th Infantry Regiments, 746th Tank Battalion
99th 'Checkerboard' Infantry (Maj. Gen. Walter E. Lauer)
393rd, 394th and 395th Infantry Regiments, 786th Tank Battalion

V US Corps (Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner)
102nd Mechanized Cavalry Group

9th Armored Division (Maj. Gen. John W. Leonard)
2nd, 14th and 19th Tank Battalions; 27th, 52nd and 60th Armored Infantry Battalions
2nd 'Indianhead' Infantry Division (Walter M. Robertson)
9th, 23rd and 38th Infantry Regiments, 741st Tank Battalion
28th 'Keystone' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota)
109th, 110th and 112th Infantry Regiments, 777th Tank Battalion
69th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Emil F. Reinhardt)
271st, 272nd and 273rd Infantry Regiments, 777th Tank Battalion

VII US Corps (Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins)
4th Mechanized Cavalry Group
3rd Armored 'Spearhead' Division (Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose)
32nd and 33rd Armored Regiments, 36th Armored Infantry Regiment
1st 'Red One' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Clift Andrus)
16th, 18th and 26th Infantry Regiments, 745th Tank Battalion
8th 'Arrow/Pathfinder' Infantry Division (Brig. Gen. Bryant E. Moore)
13th, 28th and 121st Infantry Regiments
78th 'Lightning' Infantry (Edwin P. Parker Jr)
309th, 310th and 311th Infantry Regiments, 774th Tank Battalion
86th 'Blackhawk' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Harris M. Melasky)
341st, 342nd and 343rd Infantry Regiments
104th 'Timberwolf' Infantry Division (Terry de la Mesa Allen)
413th, 414th and 415th Infantry Regiments, 750th Tank Battalion

THIRD US ARMY (Lt Gen. George S. Patton Jr)
XIX Tactical Air Command (Maj. Gen. O.P. Weyland)
6th Mechanized Cavalry Group (Army reporting and liaison)

VIII US Corps (Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton)
11th Mechanized Cavalry Group
87th 'Golden Acorn' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Frank L. Cullin, Jr)
345th, 346th and 347th Infantry Regiments, 735th Tank Battalion
89th 'Rolling W' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Thomas D. Finley)
353rd, 354th and 355th Infantry Regiments, 748th Tank Battalion

XII US Corps (Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy)
2nd 'Dragoons' Mechanized Cavalry Group
4th Armored Division (Brig. Gen. William M. Hoge)
8th, 35th and 37th Tank, 10th, 51st and 53rd Armored Infantry Battalions
6th 'Super Sixth' Armored (Maj. Gen. Robert Grow)

15th, 68th and 69th Tank, and 9th, 44th and 50th Armored Infantry Battalions
5th 'Red Diamond' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. S. Leroy Irwin)
2nd, 10th and 11th Infantry Regiments
26th 'Yankee' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Willard S. Paul)
101st, 104th and 328th Infantry Regiments, 778th Tank Battalion
76th 'Onaway' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. William R. Schmidt)
304th, 385th and 417th Infantry Regiments
90th 'Tough Ombres' Infantry Division (Brig. Gen. Herbert L. Earnest)
357th, 358th and 359th Infantry Regiments

XX US Corps (Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker)
16th Mechanized Cavalry Group
3rd Mechanized Cavalry Group (later SHAEF reserve)
11th 'Thunderbolt' Armored Division (Brig. Gen. Holmes E. Dager)
22nd, 41st and 42nd Tank, and 21st, 55th and 63rd Armored Infantry Battalions
65th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Stanley E. Reinhart)
259th, 260th and 261st Infantry Regiments, 748th Tank Battalion
80th 'Blue Ridge' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Horace L. McBride)
317th, 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments, 702nd Tank Battalion
94th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Harry J. Malony)
301st, 302nd and 376th Infantry Regiments, 778th Tank Battalion

SIXTH US ARMY GROUP
Gen. Jacob L. Devers

SEVENTH US ARMY (Lt Gen. Alexander 'Sandy' M. Patch)
XII Tactical Air Command (Brig. Gen. Glenn O. Barcus)

Reserve: 13th US Armored Division (Maj. Gen. John B. Wogan)
24th, 45th and 46th Tank, and 16th, 59th and 67th
Armored Infantry Battalions

VI US Corps (Maj. Gen. Edward H. Brooks)
117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron
14th Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Albert C. Smith)
25th, 47th and 48th Tank, and 19th, 62nd and 68th
Armored Infantry Battalions
4th 'Ivy' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Harold W. Blakeley)
8th, 12th and 22nd Infantry Regiments, 70th Tank Battalion
42nd 'Rainbow' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Harry J. Collins)
222nd, 232nd and 242nd Infantry Regiments, 48th Tank Battalion
36th Texas Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. John E. Dahlquist)

141st, 142nd and 143rd Infantry Regiments, 753rd Tank Battalion
103rd 'Cactus' Division (Maj. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe)
409th, 410th and 411th Infantry Regiments, 761st Tank Battalion

XV US Corps (Maj. Gen. Wade H. Haislip)
106th Mechanized Cavalry Group
2nd French Armoured Division (Général de Division Philippe Leclerc)
12th Chasseurs d'Afrique, 12th Cuirassiers, 501st Régiment de Chars (tank battalions)
Régiment de Marche du Tchad (3 battalions mechanised infantry)
3rd 'Marne' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. John W. O'Daniel)
7th ('Cottonbalers'), 15th and 30th Infantry Regiments
44th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. William F. Dean)
71st, 114th and 324th Infantry Regiments
45th 'Thunderbird' Division (Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick)
157th, 179th and 180th Infantry Regiments, 191st Tank Battalion
63rd 'Blood and Fire' Division (Maj. Gen. Louis E. Hibbs)
253rd, 254th and 255th Infantry Regiments, 740th Tank Battalion

XXI US Corps (Maj. Gen. Frank W. Milburn)
101st Mechanized Cavalry Group
10th 'Tigers' Armored Division (Maj. Gen. William H. H. Morris, Jr)
3rd, 11th and 21st Tank, 20th, 54th and 61st Armored Infantry Battalions
12th 'Hellcats' Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Roderick R. Allen)
3rd, 11th and 21st Tank, and 20th, 54th and 61st Armored Infantry Battalions
70th 'Trailblazers' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Allison J. Barnett)
274th, 275th and 276th Infantry Regiments, 772nd Tank Battalion
71st Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Willard G. Wyman)
5th, 14th and 66th Infantry Regiments, 761st Tank Battalion
100th 'Century' Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Withers A. Burress)
397th, 398th and 399th Infantry Regiments, 781st Tank Battalion

FIRST FRENCH ARMY (Général Jean De Lattre De Tassigny)

I French Corps (Général de corps d'armée Émile A. Béthouart)
1st French Armored Division (Général de Brigade Aime Sudre)
2nd Moroccan Division (Général de Division Maurice Carpentier)
4th Moroccan Mountain Division (Général de Division René de Hasdin)
9th Colonial Infantry Division (Général de Brigade Jean-Étienne Valluy)
10th French Infantry Division (Général de Brigade Pierre Billotte)

II French Corps (Général de corps d'armée Joseph de Goislard de Monsabert)
5th Armored Division (Général de Brigade Guy Schlesser)

French 1st Motorised Infantry Division (Général de Division Pierre Garbay)
French 1st Infantry Division (Général de Brigade Jean Callies)
French 3rd Algerian Infantry Division
(Général de Division Augustin Guillaume)
French 14th Infantry Division (Général de Brigade Raoul)

Detachment Army of the Alps (Général de corps d'armée Paul Doyen)
French 27th Infantry Division (Col. Jean Valette d'Osia)

SHAEF RESERVE

FIFTEENTH US ARMY (Lt Gen. Leonard T. Gerow)
(Inward processing, training of troops)

XXII US Corps (Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon)
16th US Armored Division (Brig. Gen. John L. Pierce)
Arrived ETO 11 February 1945
5th, 16th and 26th Tank, and 18th, 64th and 69th Armored Infantry Battalions
20th US Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward)
Arrived ETO 21 February 1945
9th, 20th and 27th Tank, and 8th, 65th and 70th Armored Infantry Battalions
66th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Herman F. Kramer)
262nd, 263rd and 264th Infantry Regiments (training French Army)
97th Infantry Division (Brig. Gen. Milton B. Halsey)
Arrived ETO 3 March 1945
303rd, 386th and 387th Infantry Regiments
106th 'Golden Lions' Division (Maj. Gen. Donald A. Stroh)
422nd, 423rd and 424th Infantry Regiments

Prologue

> 'You are in enemy country! These people are not our allies or our friends. You must remain an alert soldier. Protect yourself at all times.'
>
> *US Army Pocket Guide to Germany*, 1944[1]

'We were over Germany,' wrote Martha Gellhorn, 'and a blacker, less inviting piece of land I never saw.'[2] In early 1945 General Dwight D. Eisenhower had assembled seven Allied armies, totalling 4 million men and women, to invade the Western Reich. This is the story of the last hundred days of their war.

Let us begin on one of them, 14 March 1945. The weather still hovered between the seasons. The raw edge of winter had gone, but the penetrating damp had not. 'Warm days and cold nights,' noted one GI. Captain Earl E. Swanson's diary told him it was a Wednesday – not that days mattered in combat. He lifted his binoculars and surveyed the terrain ahead. Standing in France, he looked over to the village in Germany. Across the morass of rain-soaked soil, his eyes focused first on Utweiler. Then five miles beyond, where he knew lay the true ramparts of the Reich. Called the *Westwall* by the natives, it was marked 'Siegfried Line' on Swanson's map. Built before the war, its five belts of anti-tank obstacles, barbed wire, ditches, minefields, machine-gun nests and bunkers, thousands of yards deep, hugged the contours and awaited his men.

In these lonely southern borderlands of France and Germany there was no frontier fence or wall. Just marker stones in the corners of fields, observed only by generations of farmers, for few travelled this

way. In 1769, Marshal Ney, Napoleon's finest warrior, was born in the nearby fortress town of Saarlouis and grew up speaking both German and French, which reflected the frequent changes of nationality in the region. In Hitler's day, Ney's hometown had been renamed Saarlautern. Even here, in this tiny place, the shadow of past conflicts loomed large. Always an area of Franco–German tension, it had lost eight of its menfolk in the Great War, including three pairs of brothers.[3] History mattered not to Swanson, but he had read the Seventh Army assessment that 'the people and their cows live together in thick-walled buildings and manure is piled neatly in the streets'.[4] He knew the French Army had occupied the area for a few weeks in September 1939, when the German population had been evacuated. Swanson expected the locals to have again been removed, including prisoners forced to work on the surrounding farms. His job was to clear these outposts.

Aerial photos picked out the low rolling ridgelines topped with trees that ringed the village. His map indicated Utweiler lay just three hundred yards inside the Reich. A 700-year-old hamlet, one of the smallest settlements in the region, he could see it comprised no more than a couple of farms, a few dozen houses and a tiny church grouped around a crossroads.[5] Instinct had told his superiors this collection of stone and wood structures, a symbolic gateway into Germany, would be symbolically defended. Swanson viewed the glossy black-and-white air imagery, taken days earlier. They highlighted machine-gun posts, mortars, minefields, and trenches.[6]

Swanson's men were known as the 'Cottonbalers'. In January 1815 at New Orleans, their predecessors had repelled English redcoats from behind walls of cotton bales, and the moniker had stuck. As the US 7th Infantry Regiment, they had campaigned throughout the Civil War, notably at Gettysburg, where they had taken over 50 per cent casualties in the Wheatfield. Alongside their Anglo compatriots 128 years later, they had waded onto the sands of Morocco in November 1942, splashed ashore in Sicily the following July, and in September 1943 passed through the newly won Salerno beachhead in Italy towards Monte Cassino. January 1944 saw the three battalions of the 7th Infantry – more than 3,000 GIs – assault the port of Anzio.

It was at Anzio that their German opponents first labelled everyone

in the US 3rd Infantry Division, Cottonbalers included, the 'Blue and White Devils', after the distinct, diagonal stripes all wore on their helmets and uniform sleeves. This was their second nickname, for the 3rd Division were also known as the 'Rock of the Marne' after their combat service in France during 1918. The 3rd prided themselves on being 'Eisenhower's favourite division', not least because Ike had commanded one of their battalions before serving as their chief of staff in late 1940.

The Cottonbalers' next amphibious landing had seen them arrive on the French Riviera in August 1944 and fight their way to the German frontier. Following 188 days of continuous operations, latterly in the Colmar Pocket of France, on 18 February 1945 exhausted Cottonbalers, commanded by German-born Colonel John A. Heintges, were pulled out of the line to rest and absorb replacements. Now they were returning to the fray, attacking fifteen miles east of Saarbrücken, in the middle of German-held terrain known as the Saar-Palatinate Triangle. They spent a couple of weeks in March training for village and street fighting, including night operations, then teamed up with other divisions as the Seventh Army's spearhead to punch their way through the Siegfried Line.

Before Swanson and the rest started out, their divisional commander, Major General John 'Iron Mike' O'Daniel, gave them all a pep talk about the opposition ahead. Their mission, he told the Cottonbalers, was part of a larger divisional operation called *Earthquake*. Friendly troops would be to their right and left. However, he warned them, the Germans were waiting, determined to defend their homeland at all costs. O'Daniel ordered that 'gas masks with protective eye ointment must be carried'.[7] Staff Sergeant Eldon Berthiaume, a former military policeman assigned to Company 'G', recalled the anxiety that caused many to skip their meals that afternoon. At six in the evening the men of the 7th Infantry started out in the dark towards their objective. The ground was unforgiving caramel: 'every step was agony', remembered one, as GIs wrestled their boots out of the mud. 'We was sweating like pigs, and when we stopped, the sweat froze on us.'

In many ways Utweiler resembled the French village of Pournoy-la-Chétive, a southern suburb of Metz, which the Cottonbalers had just left, where the 7th Infantry had trained with demolitions, grenades, rocket

launchers and flame-throwers, and worked with tanks and tracked tank destroyers.[8] As a result, the Americans considered themselves expert at night-fighting. At one in the morning on the 15th, Captain Swanson's Fox Company led the way, followed by Easy and George, advancing downhill in the half-light. Searchlights bounced their beams off clouds to create 'artificial moonlight', a tactic borrowed from the British.

All was quiet, with the Germans either absent or asleep.[9] Ben Loup, carrying a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) with First Platoon, recalled their orders were to follow the white tape placed by another unit through a minefield. A mile short of Utweiler, Loup observed, 'the officer who was supposed to lead us through the mines pointed out the engineer's tape to Captain Swanson and took off for the rear. Swanson led, followed by his radio operator, my squad's scout, then myself and my assistant BAR-man.' After twenty yards or so, the tape ended. The captain looked around for more, found none and assumed no more tape equalled no more mines.[10]

Ten yards later, Loup recalled, 'Swanson's radio operator set off a bouncing mine that killed him and destroyed the radio on his back. Almost simultaneously, there were two other explosions farther back in my squad. Swanson immediately gave us the order to stop in our tracks, to not move our feet, and gently feel around where we were standing. If we felt nothing, lie prone.' As his men groped blindly in the freezing mud and clotted leaves, the captain sent a runner back to battalion HQ alerting them to his predicament, but now had no wireless communications. Flares soared into the sky and tracer stabbed the dark: the noise had alerted their opponents, who deluged the GIs with anti-aircraft fire in flat trajectory, machine-guns, and mortars.

At this juncture Loup was wounded in the cheek by a shell fragment and told to make his way back to the battalion aid station for treatment. Rifleman George Corpis, in action for the first time, saw what happened next. A shell landed next to his captain. Earl Swanson – the veteran of every campaign since 1942 and already wounded in the arm – was killed instantly by the blast. Corpis then witnessed his own platoon commander, Lieutenant Robert W. Rankin, step on a mine blowing him into the air. He came down on another mine, which eviscerated him.

Fox Company was soon badly disorganised, with dead and wounded

lying everywhere. The commander of Easy, Captain James Powell, stepped forward to lead the rest around the minefield while Fox sorted itself out. Under fire, the companies extracted themselves with difficulty, skirted right and found a new route into what they now knew was a heavily defended position. Corpis remembered Fox Company retracing their steps away from the mines and following Easy into Utweiler, 'where we charged the German defenders, firing from the hip, just like in the movies'. The rest stormed downhill into the village, finding it ringed by zigzag trenches and felled trees, and took sixty prisoners.

It was 06:00 by the time they had mopped up, but the Cottonbalers' first visit to Germany had been unexpectedly costly. As he moved his command post into the village, the CO, Lieutenant Colonel Jack M. Duncan, mused that his Second Battalion had grown careless. The minefield delayed the laying of telephone lines from Duncan to other units, but he was more concerned that almost half his battalion, which in the preceding month had been brought up to strength by 'repple-depples' – replacements from training depots and rear areas, many of them without combat experience – had failed to arrive at all. Presumably the 'greenhorns' had been disorientated by the minefield, the shelling, the darkness, and their own fear.

Pondering how to better grip his battalion, Duncan waited for communications to be restored and the arrival of his supporting armour, which had no night-fighting capability and tended to operate only in daylight. However, all was not well back at the line of departure, where four tanks lay disabled by mines and shellfire. Other armoured vehicles refused to move forward until engineers had 'deloused' the road ahead of munitions, objecting that the ground was too soft to go cross-country. While the Cottonbalers' CO, Colonel Heintges, persuaded some vehicles to move, the GIs in Utweiler were unaware that their friendly armour would be delayed.

However, none of this was an issue to Duncan, whose men consolidated their positions and grabbed a hasty breakfast. George Corpis recollected that Company 'F', now officerless, was told to occupy the small Catholic church and adjacent graveyard and wait for their armour to catch up before resuming the advance. Once in the church they relaxed, reflecting on their nightmare in the minefield, just glad to be alive.

Another GI, Joseph Corrigan, recalled that his squad leader, Sergeant Jacob Cohen, was soon 'off with a German woman'.

At 08:00, Corpis had put down his rifle and unbuckled his trousers to answer a call of nature in the churchyard when he happened to glance uphill. On the slope above lurked a German tank, surrounded by small specks – infantrymen.[11] It was one of several that suddenly surrounded the village and began firing at the surprised GIs who had been off their guard and inattentive. Corpis dashed back towards the church to raise the alarm but was wounded in the shoulder by shrapnel that hit the church wall. PFC Hubert 'Kly' Kleiboeker was killed instantly when a tank shell burst near him. A devout Lutheran, Kleiboeker had just written home, 'I hope if you ever hear I am wounded, don't get all excited and worried, because nine out of ten that go to hospital make it OK.'[12]

Although each rifle company carried bazookas, their inexperienced handlers had yet to learn to let enemy armour crawl to within sniffing distance, to be sure of a kill. They soon used all their ammunition firing at extreme range. Once the bazookas fell silent, German tracked assault guns nosed their way into Utweiler, demolishing each house, while their supporting infantry overran Duncan's men. Eldon Berthiaume, the former military policeman of Company 'G', and five of his buddies took shelter in the cellar of a nearby barn, where they were captured by a young German soldier. 'He was a kid no older than fifteen or sixteen,' remembered Berthiaume, who was marched away with his hands up. He regretted not having eaten the previous day and had no idea when he would next be fed. They happened to pass a wounded German officer and put a tourniquet on his leg to stop the bleeding, which resulted in better treatment during their captivity.[13]

Machine-gunner Ross West was a 'repple-depple' newcomer, in Europe for only two months when he was taken prisoner. Utweiler was his first and last day of combat. He recalled German cameramen snapping pictures, muttering 'infanterie, gut, gut', sharing a big vat of beer, before trucking their captives away from the front.[14] Sergeant Robert Cook and ten others from Company 'F' were in the church with the injured Corpis and Sergeant Cohen, who had rushed back from his fraternisation. A tank shell crashed through the door and skidded along the floor. They all watched and held their breaths. It did not explode: a

dud. At about 11:00 Cook recollected he was at a window firing when 'Sergeant Cohen yelled at me to stop shooting because we were going to have to surrender. One of our German prisoners, taken in the first firefight, signed that he would go and negotiate the capitulation. As he stepped outside, he was felled by a German machine-gun.'

Cook observed, 'an SS officer came in with several infantrymen; he was waving a potato-masher grenade over his head and yelling, "Amerika ist kaput". He began arguing with one of our German prisoners in a loud and threatening voice. Later, one of our guys who could understand German said that the SS officer wanted to kill all of us but was talked out of it by one of our prisoners who told him we had taken good care of their wounded. We were then marched out of town, picking up other groups from Fox Company along the way.'[15] The 7th Infantry's official history noted the Germans 'closed in on the town with a combination of four flak wagons and nine tanks and tank destroyers, which included two Tigers. It was a tough situation to be in without support of any kind. Attached armor had not gotten through to the battalion and without communication, artillery could not be called into play.'[16]

In a short morning, the Second Battalion of the 7th Infantry Regiment had ceased to exist. Colonel Duncan and three others survived by immersing themselves to their necks in a water-filled bomb crater for almost eight hours. Dale Schumacher of Company 'F', his pelvis and femur damaged by shrapnel, played dead for almost twenty-four hours before rescue by friendly medics. For the rest, with small arms useless against armour, without radio or telephone communication to friendly aircraft or artillery, and without supporting tanks, there was no alternative but for the Blue and White Devils to surrender.

When they saw the signature SS runes on the collars of their opponents – panzermen of the 'Götz von Berlichingen' Division, and infantry of the First Battalion, 37th SS Panzergrenadiers – the surviving Cottonbalers understood why they had been outfought. These units, who had an appalling reputation for brutality in Normandy, had orders to 'keep the enemy out of the Reich at any cost'. They were not merely fighting for their Homeland, but everything they believed in. Mostly in their late teens, these were fanatics who had no fear of death.

Back home and safe on the other side of the Atlantic, in their diners,

apartments and farmhouses over morning coffee, Americans read the Associated Press communiqué in their newspapers. 'Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch sent his Seventh Army into its first major action since the Colmar Pocket fight, at one o'clock yesterday morning, striking silently without the usual artillery preparation. Only light resistance met the first assault forces, and the enemy began at once to fall back into the Siegfried Line, behind thick minefields. Then massed American guns opened up with a thunderous barrage and only scattered fire met the attackers.'

More intent on eggs or toast, they might have missed the last paragraph, where Colonel Duncan's Second Battalion of the 7th Infantry were rewarded forty-five words: 'Fifteen miles east of Saarbrucken, other forces broke into the Saar on a two-mile front, penetrated the basin as far as a mile and were locked in a swirling battle near the border town of Utweiler where the Germans threw in their first tanks.'

That 'swirling battle', a footnote on the Seventh US Army's front, cost the Second Battalion 456 missing personnel. More than at Gettysburg. Ten GIs per word of the press notice. By the war's end, military accountants would assess the bill as twenty-one killed, seventy-two wounded; 222 had been captured, while seventeen men remain missing to this day.[17] Lieutenant Colonel Duncan's 640 men had been reduced to a cadre of 'scattered and ineffective personnel' in a mere forty-five words.

Although the 'Marne' Division and its 7th Infantry were experienced outfits, the darkness, confusion, shelling, mines and panzers terrified the many newcomers that made up all US Army formations in 1945. In this case there were clearly tensions between the engineers, infantry and armour. All were cautious; many were tired; no one wanted to be the last to die. Even before 1945, the Marne Division's turnover had exceeded 100 per cent, which included the killed, wounded, captured and the missing, but also those claimed by illness, injury and battle fatigue. The Blue and White Devils would sustain the most casualties of any division in the European Theatre.[18] These losses fell disproportionately on its nine infantry battalions and their junior leadership. Captain Earl Swanson, Fox Company's commander, was one of these: an experienced GI who had worked his way up through the ranks; in Sicily he had been a staff sergeant.[19]

By March 1945, many US platoons and companies were being led by outstanding GIs who had bubbled to the surface as natural leaders. The same was true in the British, Canadian, French and Polish forces. Elsewhere in the US 3rd Division, First Lieutenant Audie Murphy (who would emerge as the US Army's most decorated soldier of the war) and Second Lieutenant Michael Daly (a month away from earning himself a Medal of Honor in the ruins of Nuremberg), both recipients of battlefield commissions, were serving in the neighbouring 15th Infantry Regiment. Yet, success or failure in combat can be random. When Murphy and Daly attacked Epping and Ormersviller on the 7th Infantry's right at the same time, they compelled a German withdrawal. It was Swanson's misfortune to alert his opponents by triggering landmines in the middle of the night.

To be fair, their 17th SS opponents were in much the same condition. Comprising conscripts and volunteers, they made up with fanaticism what they lacked in experience. They had recently disengaged from heavy combat in Operation *Nordwind*, a smaller version of the Ardennes assault but further south, and in January, much of the divisional staff had been sacked and replaced with veteran army officers. A week later the divisional General was captured and was replaced temporarily by a Wehrmacht colonel. This was the *tenth* change of command in a year, surely an indication that by March 1945, the 17th SS lacked professionalism, never mind personnel and equipment.[20]

However, it was 283 days since the Allies had first set foot in northern France. Both sides had fought without respite since those first landings on German-occupied soil and were very tired. Across the armies, morale during the shockingly awful weather of the Bulge had been tested. Now it would be equally tested in victory. The 15 March setback at Utweiler indicated that any invasion of the Reich, even in 1945 with the Germans seemingly on the run, was going to be a slow and costly affair.

No one would have believed there were just fifty-four days of conflict left before the permanent demise of Nazi Germany. World War Two in Europe would officially finish on Tuesday 8 May – or some 336 days after the Normandy invasion. The Western Allies would call it VE (Victory in Europe) Day. For Germany, it was *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour), marking the beginning of a new era.[21]

Introduction

> 'You are not in Germany to carry a chip on your shoulder or brutalize the inhabitants. We are not like the Nazis. But you are not there on a goodwill errand either. Don't take chances. You are in unfriendly territory.'
>
> *US Army Pocket Guide to Germany*, 1944

This volume concentrates on the last hundred days of war in the west against Nazi Germany in 1945. It does so without diminishing the achievement of those squeezing the Reich from the opposite direction. While there are no Russian voices here, there are also few Germans', and fewer still from the Allied air forces that enabled victory. These omissions resulted from a conscious decision to relate this account from the point of view of the Western Allied ground forces. The reader will encounter each of the seven Allied armies involved, including the First French and Seventh US of the lesser known Sixth Army Group who fought in the south. The First, Third and Ninth American Armies of the Twelfth Army Group, which campaigned in the centre. Finally, the British Second and Canadian First of the Twenty-First Army Group, who invaded Germany's northern flank.

The tale of these last days is one rarely told. Standard accounts of the war in Western Europe tend to dwell on the 1944 D-Day landings (analysed in the first volume of this trilogy, *Sand and Steel*) and summer battles in Normandy; the autumn stalemate of Operation *Market Garden* in Holland; and the winter campaign in the Ardennes forests (focus of the second volume, *Snow and Steel*). The subsequent months of 1945

then rush through to victory in May, like a movie suddenly speeded up. Even the participants are at fault here, as though hurrying to the end of a bad dream with indecent haste. Once across the Rhine, the advance into Germany of March–May often passes in a few paragraphs, with the end seemingly predetermined, as if it only remained to occupy territory and mop up a few diehards.

As the Prologue has demonstrated, the opposite was true. Much hard campaigning remained to be done. We will see there was bitter fighting all along the front until the last moments. On 4 January 1945 in the midst of the Ardennes fighting, Third Army commander General George Patton had confided to his private diary 'We can still lose this war.' He immediately qualified the observation with, 'However, the Germans are colder and hungrier than we are, but they fight better.'[1] This remained as a malevolent shadow sitting on the shoulders of many Allied commanders well into 1945. The British Prime Minister did not help matters when on 24 March, Winston Churchill expressed his view to Eisenhower: 'My dear General, the German is whipped. We've got him. He is all through.'[2] The next month, former journalist Major Bill Deedes of the 12th King's Royal Rifle Corps, a British infantry battalion, railed against 'the damned papers, which are full of propaganda and pretend the war is as good as won. By golly, it's not,' he wrote home to his wife. 'Lots of sixteen-year-olds are keen to die for Hitler.'[3] From crossing the Rhine to 4 May, when he took the German surrender in the north, Montgomery in his *Memoirs* allowed himself only ten pages, Bradley, and Eisenhower scarcely double that. The early post-war narratives by journalists such as Alan Moorehead, Chester Wilmot and Milton Shulman, as well as most modern ones, all fall into the same trap of offering their readers only the sketchiest coverage of the last days of the Reich.[4]

For the Allied commanders, led by Eisenhower, ever since Normandy there remained the obstacle of the River Rhine, the greatest water barrier in Europe. It is impossible to overstress the extent to which its 820 miles, an international waterborne highway that rises in Switzerland and passes through six countries before emptying into the North Sea, had dominated their thinking.[5] The September 1944 thrust at Arnhem had been an attempt to force a passage over it. The waterway loomed as large an obstruction in their minds as had the English Channel before

June 1944. The Rhine had last been crossed with hostile intent by Napoleon; long before that, for much of its length, the river marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Beyond, as in 1945, maps might as well have carried the legend 'Here be Dragons'.

The first code name for the 1944 Ardennes assault had been *Wacht am Rhein* ('Watch on the Rhine'), itself the title of Germany's foremost patriotic anthem. With its Rhinemaidens and Rheingold, it dominated the Wagnerian folklore so beloved of the Reich's hierarchy. Thus, as far as the Allies were concerned, breaching what amounted to Germany's natural western frontier would tap deep into the nervous system of the Nazi state. Flying over it, war reporter Martha Gellhorn opined 'the land itself looked actively hostile'. It was impossible not to believe that traversing the waterway would be a major undertaking, and one the Germans were bound to oppose with all their resources, cunning and passionate determination.

The river loomed large in Allied minds for another reason. There was among the western generals a sense of unfinished business. After the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919, Germany's Rhineland had been demilitarised and came under Allied control for up to a decade. The Americans, British and French had maintained large occupation forces there, in which Charles de Gaulle, army group chiefs Bernard L. Montgomery and Jacob L. Devers, and army commanders Courtney H. Hodges of the First, Miles C. Dempsey of the Second, Alexander M. Patch of the Seventh, and William H. Simpson of the Ninth had served. Many of their subordinates had also learned their trade in the area. Third Army's George S. Patton Jr, with his strong sense of military history which redefined the professionalism of the US Army, had extensively studied the bloodlands on both banks of the Rhine.

A Major Eisenhower, of whom no one had heard, was posted to the region in the 1920s to write a guidebook, *The American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, for the American Battle Monuments Commission.[6] Remembering that 19 per cent of Americans in the 1940 national census regarded themselves as of Germanic descent, maybe there was also a sense of puzzlement, disbelief and shame – stretching from Eisenhower (whose ancestors left Karlsbrunn, a stone's throw from Utweiler, in 1741) to Private Henry A. Kissinger (who migrated with his family

from Bavaria in 1938) – that their kinsmen had departed so far from the norms of decency and democracy.

Other aspects of the western war in Europe evolved with common themes. For the landings in Normandy, it was fear of drowning in the hostile English Channel and landing on an equally hostile shore. The sky soldiers in Market Garden recollected the billow of silk and matchstick-fragility of their gliders. All the warriors in the snow-covered Ardennes discovered the misery of plunging outdoor temperatures and frozen feet. What then is the shared experience you will encounter in this volume? The answer may come as a surprise and will emerge throughout the narrative. It was not combat.

Invading Germany in the spring of 1945 was rather like conducting a series of archaeological digs on a fresh piece of terrain. As maps, aerial photographs and human intelligence provided only hints of insight into what lay beneath, there was great uncertainty as to what the Third Reich had created, both in a material and spiritual sense. None of the Allies really knew what was under the topsoil. Discovery would come only by systematic probing and examination of the ground. Making sense of the whole – as we can today – would only come after long and patient analysis.

Put simply, most of Eisenhower's people stumbled over the Holocaust in some form or other. Not just the awfulness of the concentration camps, but the far more numerous slave labour camps, and their pitiful inmates making their way home after liberation.[7] These were often referred to as 'Displaced Persons' (DPs) in memoirs and accounts, which obscures the depth of their suffering. In early November 1941 Hitler had stated, 'The area that works for us now includes more than 250 million people, but the area indirectly at our disposal has more than 350 million human beings.'[8] The Third Reich was able to release huge numbers of men into its armed forces and give its citizens a reasonable standard of living only by enslaving millions from neighbouring states. According to documentation cited at the Nuremberg trials, over 12 million people were used as serfs, enduring differing degrees of hardship. This was the Nazi policy of *Ausländereinsatz* (use of foreigners), most usually without recompense. By 1944 these unfortunates comprised 26 per cent of the entire workforce within Greater Germany.[9]

The advancing troops knew nothing of this. Nor did their commanders. Even today we are still coming to terms with how the Third Reich operated. There were about 45,000 camps of all kinds run by Hitler's Germany. Such a figure strikes the reader like a sledgehammer, proving there is always something new to learn.[10] This included all the prisons and other types of detainment facilities established at some stage between 1933 and 1945. These comprised well over 30,000 *Arbeiterziehungslager* (slave labour camps), which could range from huge factories to farms employing a dozen; Jewish ghettos (all 1,150 of them); and the 980 sites designated as concentration camps, only a very few equipped with gas chambers, but most sporting perimeter fences of barbed wire and sentry towers.[11] Factories were the 'slow-death camps for the still useful', noted one GI, as opposed to 'quick-death camps for the unwanted. Nearby townspeople closed their minds and their hearts to ignore the screams of men being whipped, the gutters, the miles of hasty graves, the smell of death and dirt and rotting food and fear.'[12]

Between 1941 and 1945, 6 million Russian soldiers ended up in restricted sections of POW camps assisting the German war effort or wasting away through sheer neglect. They were starved and brutalised more than their Western counterparts, their suffering witnessed by American, British and Commonwealth prisoners held in separate compounds. Post-war, it was assessed that 3 million Russian POWs had died in captivity. All these nationalities were conveyed to their camps or factories by Deutsche Reichsbahn (German Railways), in closed wagons, like cattle. After the war, Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and former minister of armaments and war production, conducted a successful obscuration of the full impact of the slave labour programme and his role in it. Instead, the prosecutors at Nuremberg turned their attention towards the plight of the Jews. The true nature of German war crimes uncovered by Allied troops in 1945 was the intertwining of three separate factors, each designed to kill. The Nazi use of slave labour. The camp system where many died. And the 47,076 miles of railway track, every single mile marking the spot where someone died of malnutrition, exposure – or a guard's bullet. Yet, until March 1945, no Western soldier had encountered any large-scale civilian atrocity, much less seen a camp.

One reason for the desperate fighting of April–May 1945 was to buy time. Time for the Nazi regime to burn archives, dismantle buildings, move or exterminate its victims, and hide the evidence of its crimes. Yet the skeletal appearance of those that were left, with their feverish eyes, shaven skulls, malnourished and shuffling gait, whether of camp inmates or the surviving slave labourers, betrayed the reality of life imposed by the SS and Speer's minions. Nearly all of these facilities were within the borders of Germany, whom the policy was designed to enrich. As the greatest proportion of the Fatherland was occupied by Eisenhower's troops until the country was divided into East and West in July 1945, it was the Western armies who encountered more camps of all types and their survivors than Soviet forces.

Thus, it turns out that stumbling over the dead, far more of them outside the camps than within, as well as releasing the living, was a surprisingly common experience for Eisenhower's personnel advancing into Germany in 1945. For these men and women, the images of fire and steel and death continued up to the last seconds of the European war. They found the shock so traumatic that, decades later, they were still reliving the moment in nightmares and panic attacks, with an inability to share what they had seen with anyone outside their comrades of those far-off days. They were only released of such visions with their departure from this world to join the Great Muster Beyond.

PART ONE

To The Rhine

Throughout the advance from Normandy and the French Riviera, the sheer weight and speed of the Allied war machine crushed their opponents. (*Above*): German prisoners had to endure the repressed emotion of the French, Belgian and Dutch populations, but left many booby traps behind. (*Below*): A Jeep and trailer have driven over a mine. Beyond, its two-man crew are receiving aid from red-cross helmeted medics, but the threat of mines reduced road movement to a crawl.

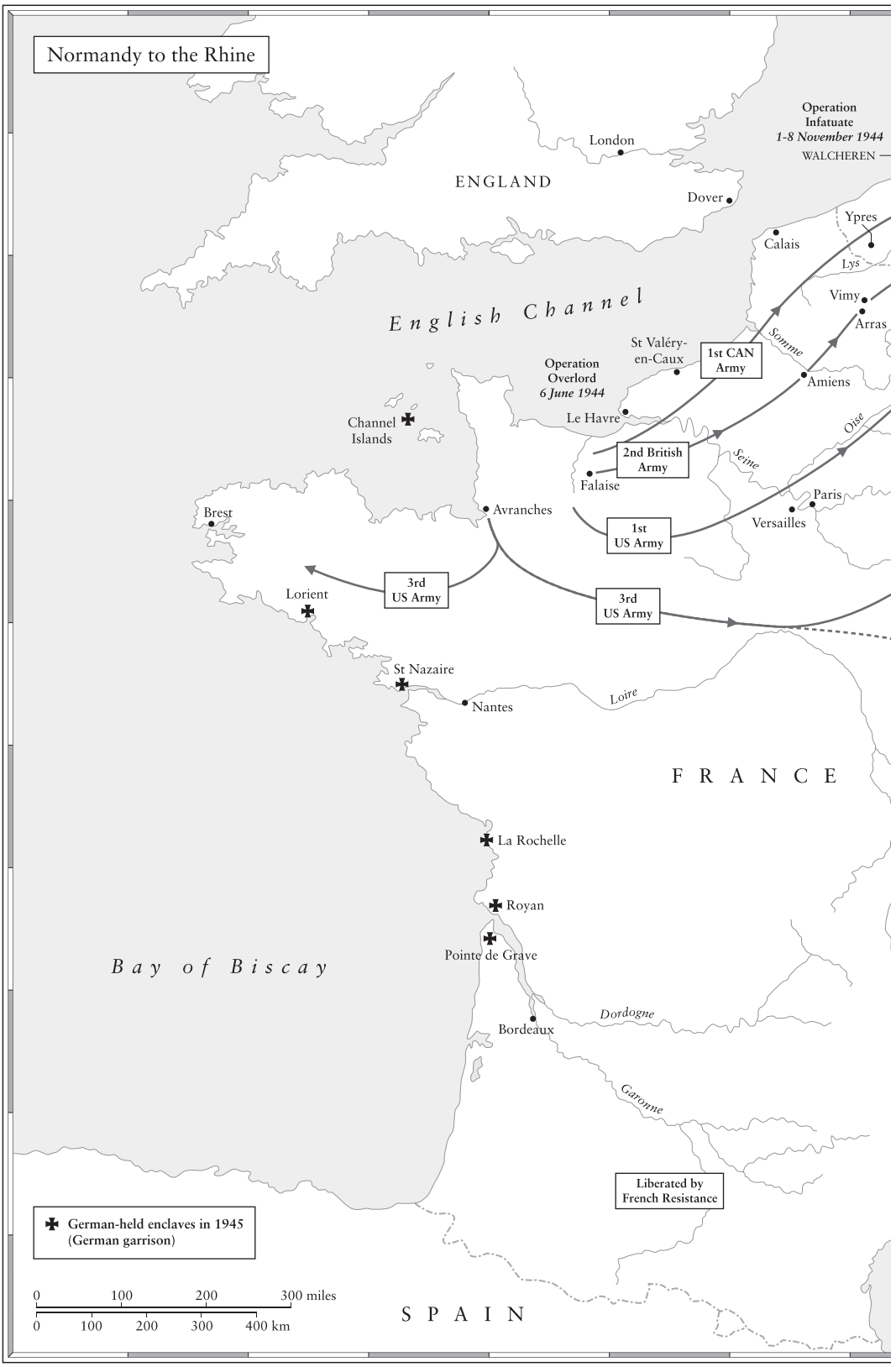
1

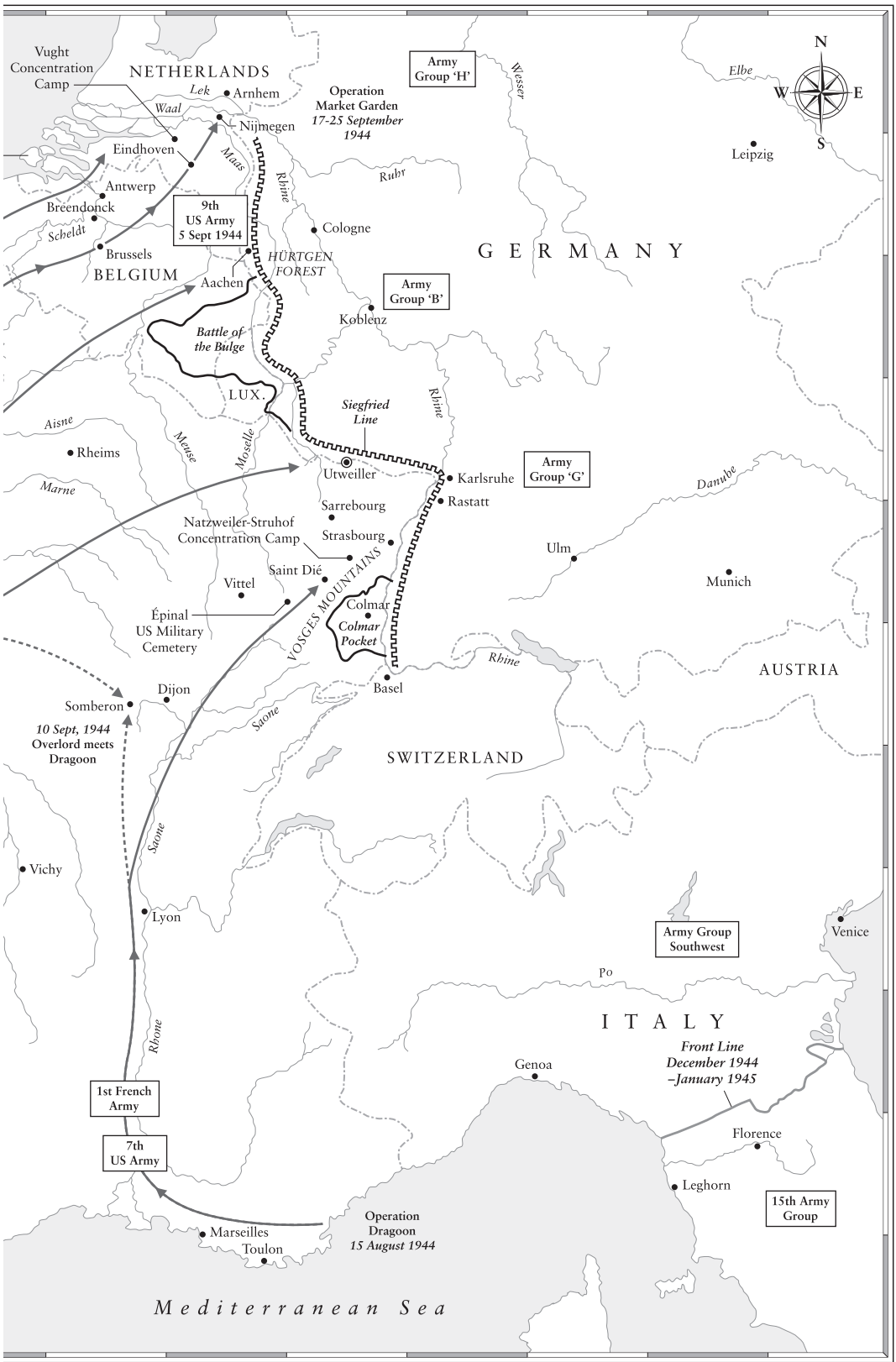
From Normandy to the Reich

On 28 January 1945, Master Sergeant Forrest Pogue, US Army historian attached to V Corps, carefully noted in his diary: 'Cold. Snow. Must be about zero. Today is D + 236.' This was the number of days since the Allied forces first landed in Normandy. Their leaders had long since expected to be in Berlin. Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower had even bet Bernard Montgomery, leading one of his army groups, that the European war would end before Christmas – and had lost five pounds. Colonel Ernest 'Tex' Lee, Eisenhower's senior aide, recorded the 'Agreement entered into, 11 Oct 1944, between Generals Eisenhower and Montgomery. Amount £5 – General E. bets war with Germany will end before Xmas 1944. Local Time.' Eisenhower had promptly paid up.

The Allies had broken out of Normandy in August, driven headlong through France, and were nestling along the German border when Hitler's panzer onslaught, code-named *Herbstnebel* ('Autumn Mist'), erupted out of the Ardennes forests on 16 December. It caught Troy Middleton's VIII US Corps, guarding that sector, completely by surprise. General Omar Bradley's Twelfth Army Group had been on the receiving end and its First and Third Armies played a vital part in defeating this last major German assault. By 28 January the German Bulge into Allied lines had been pinched out.[1]

On this day – officially, the last day of the Bulge – the war in Europe had exactly one hundred more days to run. The same January Sunday saw one of Bradley's men – Sergeant Henry Giles of the 291st Engineers – reading his copy of the US Army's newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*. 'The headlines are – Bulge is gone. The Krauts are running hard to get back





into Germany. The British and Ninth Armies up north are back to the Roer River. Six weeks and a lot of good men lost, and we're back where we were on 16 December.'[2]

The Battle of the Bulge had played out with estimated German losses of over 90,000 men, 500 tanks and 800 aircraft – all irreplaceable. These almost exactly matched the casualties inflicted on the US defenders, but the Americans could replace their lost tanks, planes – and, at a pinch, their manpower.[3] Hitler's last throw of the dice would delay the Western Allies by two months, but not much more. Meanwhile Bradley, headquartered at the 1930s Hotel Alfa opposite the main railway terminus in Luxembourg City, was still hankering after the return of General William Simpson's Ninth US Army, loaned to Montgomery on 20 December to help eliminate the north half of the Ardennes Bulge. Simpson had jokingly telephoned Bradley from his own HQ in Maastricht. 'Hey, Brad, what can you do to save us? If this goes on much longer, they'll begin thinking that we were given to them along with a shipment of Lend-Lease.'

Hiding the slight Bradley felt at this deprivation of a valuable resource by his old friend Eisenhower, his jocular response was, 'There's nothing we can do. You'd better polish up your British accent. You may be needing it for some while yet.'[4] At times during these short, grey, January days, the coalition glue lost its strength. The sun rose at eight and set at four thirty, but some days it never really got light before the afternoon gloom set in. Bradley's army group would fight much of the 1945 campaign without Simpson's Ninth, detached to Montgomery's command. It would not return to Bradley's fold until 4 April.

After exhaustive preparation, the North West European campaign had begun back on 6 June 1944 in Normandy when 156,000 Allied soldiers stormed five separate beaches and dropped from the air in three landing zones. Omar Bradley, then commanding First US Army, watched his Americans assault the terrain opposite their training areas in southern England. The first week saw elements of V Corps landing on Omaha beach and VII Corps further west at Utah beach, building up at a rate of over a division a day. In the east, under General Miles Dempsey's Second British Army, three more corps had also landed on D-Day.

The Canadians were initially under the British, though eventually they formed their own corps, and finally an Army, which started operations on 23 July.

The Anglo-Canadians, as planned, were soon sucked into the bitter attritional battles around Caen, which as they had foreseen, would be bloodily contested by the Germans. The ancient city was the main route centre in and out of Normandy, and the choke point through which panzer and infantry divisions would have to pass to attack the beaches and US forces in the west. It took five weeks to subdue Caen, which had been a naively optimistic D-Day objective, by which time the burial place of William the Conqueror was a total ruin.

Collectively, the Anglo-Canadian forces served their purpose in drawing most German armour to the Caen area where it was destroyed, rather than be permitted to approach the beaches or engage in large numbers with the Americans further west. Transatlantic tempers frayed at the time taken to crush the Caen garrison, but once achieved, in early August an irresistible Anglo-Canadian-Polish steamroller of men and tanks advanced south to Falaise, birthplace of the Conqueror and the region where the army group commander's ancestor, Roger de Montgomerie, had been born.

Further west, despite support from two American airborne divisions, it had taken time to expel the defenders from behind the landing beaches. The terrain of small fields bordered by dense hedgerows, the Normandy *bocage*, played to the defensive tactics of the Germans, already perfected in Russia. It was not until seven weeks into the campaign that the combination of American logistical might and erosion of German forces tipped the balance. On 25 July, the First US Army launched Operation *Cobra*, which saw the German front across the Cherbourg Peninsula suddenly rent asunder by J. Lawton Collins, commanding VII Corps, preceded by a massive preliminary aerial bombardment.

Although the carpet bombing of the Germans on a very narrow front of eight miles caused significant friendly fire casualties, Collins pushed for two days before breaking through. Troy Middleton's VIII Corps then joined the effort and later Charles Corlett's XIX Corps, all plunging down a narrow funnel through the German lines, kept open by tactical air power. Rather like punching a small hole in a huge dam,

the German Seventh Army was unable to resist the momentum of the American pressure and rapidly crumbled away. The break-in rapidly evolved into a breakthrough and then a breakout.

The timing for General George Patton's entry into the fight could not have been more fortuitous. His Third Army was officially activated at noon on Tuesday 1 August, with three corps on the extreme right of the Allied line. Within four days, seven of his divisions had swept through Avranches and into Brittany. Other Third Army elements captured Le Mans, formerly the German Seventh Army's headquarters, on the 8th. *Cobra* had taken Bradley's Twelfth Army Group, the fusion of First and Third US Armies, beyond the stalemate of hedgerow warfare and into open country beyond, transiting from static operations to a fluid, rapid pursuit. This was exactly the kind of warfare that best suited Patton, sweeping manoeuvres and envelopments from a flank.

By this stage in the east, General Harry Crerar's First Canadian Army was operational, which included John Crocker's I British Corps, Stanisław Maczek's 1st Polish Armoured Division, as well as Guy Simonds' II Canadian Corps. With two armies comprising four British and one Canadian corps advancing from the north and north-east,[5] and Bradley's Twelfth Army Group swinging in from the west and south, the remnants of the German Fifth Panzer and Seventh Armies found themselves bottled up in a pocket east of Falaise. By 21 August, the area had been sealed and the 50,000 within killed or captured, which added to the 400,000 who had already suffered similarly. The Allied casualties of 210,000 in the campaign, beyond the worst-case planners' scenarios, hinted at a manpower crisis all the Western Allied armies would face by the year's end.

The American breakout, *Cobra*, which led to the unplanned Falaise pocket, emphasised the US Army's ability to move great distances at high speed. On the evening of 19 August Patton's foremost elements had crossed the Seine, and by 10 September were advancing on the Moselle département of eastern France, named after the river which flows through the area and into the Rhine, and five hundred miles distant from Normandy. Thereafter, Third Army, exhausted from their four-week trek across France, ground to a halt in the face of stiffening German opposition, poorer weather and difficult terrain. This was

not the high point of Patton's career, for he relished swift advances and despised set-piece battles. For the next three months, until the Bulge began, he advanced sixty miles at the cost of 50,000 troops. However, Third Army wore down their opponents, who lost 180,000, but Third Army's 'romp through France' had concluded.

Despite its own breakout and achievement in creating and sealing the Falaise pocket, Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group had come to be seen as a slow, plodding juggernaut in the way it had moved little, but bled heavily, during its two months in the wider Caen area. Yet this was always the plan, with the Anglo-Canadians crumbling away the panzers and German infantry at huge cost to themselves, enabling an American breakout south and east. Each nation played to its strengths: Twenty-First Army Group cautious, slow but well resourced, and the Twelfth US Army Group, more adventurous and richer in vehicles, dashing around Normandy. However, this interpretation became a springboard for innumerable criticisms of Montgomery by American, British and Canadian veterans, journalists, and historians, and misses a couple of points.

Only *by comparison* with the Americans did the British seem slow. Both wings of the Normandy assault made progress, but their intentions and methodologies were different. US forces were engaged in hedgerow warfare, where progress through the *bocage* was measurable. The Anglo-Canadians were often involved in static urban warfare around Caen, a slower kind of battle. Moreover, Twenty-First Army Group's task was to absorb the blows coming from German tanks and their panzergrenadiers. The American task was to seize ground, Montgomery's to destroy the opposition's forces by attrition.

As soon as the battles around Falaise were over, all the Allies thrust beyond the Seine in mid-August. There was little opposition, for most German combat power in France had already been spent. While the 51st Highland Division of I British Corps stayed behind to capture St Valéry-en-Caux, where they had been surrounded by Rommel in 1940, the rest of that corps took the port of Le Havre on 12 September. The remainder of Twenty-First Army Group moved forward in a three-week period known as the 'Great Swan', for its swift passage, devoid of German resistance. This was a time of Montgomery's fully mechanised army group, on Bradley's left, covering astonishing distances by

road, following the German advance of 1940 in reverse, and far more efficiently.

Meanwhile, a Franco-American army group, the Sixth, led by General Jake Devers, had also entered the fray along the French Riviera coast in August 1944. Originally timed to coincide with *Overlord* in Normandy, logistics and political differences delayed this second D-Day for nearly two months. Unlike the northern landings, which initially failed to capture a usable port, the Franco-US invasion of 15 August quickly yielded two major deep-water harbours, Marseilles and Toulon, which brought logistical heft. Led initially by Alexander Patch of the Seventh US Army, who commanded all Franco-American forces until Devers took over, this second invasion exceeded all expectations in the way it seized the entire southern French coast within days and moved rapidly inland, exploiting the movement corridor of the Rhône Valley. On 11 September, *Dragoon* met *Overlord*, when French troops linked up with Patton's Third Army, ensuring a continuous Allied front. By the winter, Devers' Franco-American force had fought their way through the Vosges mountains and reached the west bank of the Rhine.

With their flanks protected by the Resistance, Patch's Seventh and the First French Army of Général Jean de Lattre de Tassigny (usually referred to as de Lattre) soon had their own lines of communication stretching back to the ten basins and thirteen miles of quay in the major port of Marseilles. By mid-October, French and American engineers had repaired German sabotage attempts in both harbours which were then open to merchant shipping. Thereafter, over 500,000 tons of military cargo was landed at Marseilles and Toulon each month, meeting between a third and a half of the entire Allied needs, excluding vehicles and fuel.[6]

The refurbished main highway, National Route 7, and double-track rail links daily facilitated the movement of up to 10,000 tons of supplies northwards, up the Rhône Valley as far as Lyon, which were then collected from railheads and distributed to both of Devers' armies in a vast fleet of trucks. Villagers along the route of the N7 remember the long columns of speeding American vehicles which posed more of a danger to their children than the Germans had ever done. Thus, the advancing GIs and French troops avoided some of the logistical constraints

affecting Eisenhower's northern armies, where stability of supply was only achieved with the opening of Antwerp on 28 November 1944.[7] That September, General Wade Haislip's XV Corps was transferred from Patton's Third to Patch's Seventh Army, doubling the latter's combat power. The Seventh would gain a third corps and more divisions, particularly in early 1945, controlling eighteen at various stages, and finishing the war with fourteen, but it never grew to the size of the First or Third.[8]

Until 4 September 1944, soldiers in Montgomery's Anglo-Canadian Twenty-First Army Group had been fighting a military campaign. Few Western troops or their leaders possessed any understanding of the immorality towards civilians of their German opponents. On this day, as they sped down the main road from Brussels to Antwerp, the 11th Armoured Division in General Neil Ritchie's XII Corps discovered the old Belgian army fort of Breendonk. The 23rd Hussars described it as a 'large sinister grey fortress', where the Reich's 'enemies' had been herded for onward transit to camps further east, and members of the Belgian resistance tortured for information. 'The Gestapo made special runnels in the cement floors for the blood,' noted one witness. Some inmates left their details etched in the plaster walls and several hundred died through torture, executions and neglect.'[9]

Though captured empty, WRAF Officer Eileen M. Younghusband recalled that all RAF personnel in the area were ordered to visit the prison. 'In the courtyard, daily shootings took place; the victims were tied to wooden stakes already brown with the blood of those who had died before. In a nearby area, the guards buried Jewish prisoners up to their necks and left them to suffocate and perish. The policy of the Kommandant was to eliminate the weak by any conceivable method, and he pursued this policy with sadistic vigour.'[10]

The Canadian Army's II Corps followed the Channel coast and liberated Dieppe on 1 September, scene of the humbling of their own 2nd Division in August 1942. On the 6th of the month, Maczek's Polish troops in II Canadian Corps freed Ypres, another echo from an earlier war. On their right, XII Corps of General Miles Dempsey's Second British Army passed Arras on 1 September, north of the Somme bloodlands, and Vimy Ridge, scene of Canada's great triumph

of 1917. By 4 September the 11th Armoured Division in the same corps had captured Antwerp, three hundred miles from Caen. Further right, on Second Army's southern flank, the Guards Armoured Division of XXX British Corps entered the capital of Belgium on 3 September, a similar distance from Normandy. Appropriately, Brussels was liberated on the fifth anniversary of Britain's declaration of war on Germany.

A sense that the German Army in the West was finished, as demonstrated by the easy advance experienced by all the Allied armies, was what undoubtedly led to the *Market Garden* operation of 17–25 September. In an attempt to circumvent the twin barriers of the German *Westwall* and the River Rhine, despite American airborne troops seizing Eindhoven and Nijmegen, the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem was tactically defeated. It prompted Montgomery to a rare admission that he had 'underestimated the difficulties of opening up the approaches to Antwerp'.[11]

If there was an operational benefit bequeathed by *Market Garden* in September 1944, it was the sixty-mile salient carved into German lines, which constantly threatened an Allied breakout. It was one which their opponents never possessed enough combat power to close by land or air. It would prove advantageous subsequently when Twenty-First Army Group launched its operations in 1945. Of *Market Garden*, Montgomery would soon claim the operation had been 'ninety-percent successful', to which Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands responded, 'My country can never again afford the luxury of another Montgomery success.'

The Twenty-First Army Group staff system had broken down in persuading its chief of the necessity of immediately capturing both German-held banks of the Scheldt Estuary, which ran from Antwerp, the largest seaport in Northern Europe, to the North Sea. Without control of the estuary, Antwerp – vital to Allied logistics at the operational level – was useless. The inability to use the port and having to haul supplies all the way from the Normandy beaches, created crushing shortages of everything from fuel and spare tyres to vehicles and artillery shells. Thus, the 'Great Swan' came to an abrupt halt equally for Montgomery and Bradley in mid-September. The fault was Montgomery's in

opting to undertake *Market Garden* before first clearing the Scheldt, and Eisenhower's for backing him.

By 26 October, the Allies had fought their way into Holland but the campaign turned sour when Crerar's Canadians uncovered a concentration camp in Vught, a southern suburb of the city of 's-Hertogenbosch. Among others, Jewish diamond dealers from Amsterdam had been sent there as labour for the nearby Phillips Electric Company. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division had already overrun several POW camps, but this was beyond their ken. Lieutenant Colonel John Proctor, the divisional quartermaster, took a Jeep to investigate, returning 'badly shaken'. Addressing his commander, Major General Harry Foster, he reported, 'You'd better see this for yourself, Sir.' Vught was laid out like an army camp with barracks and a rail spur that ran into workshops. The main gates had been left open. They were shown around by an ashen-faced officer of the South Albertas. What he, the 7th Black Watch and the 96th Battery, 5th Anti-tank Regiment, had found were five hundred corpses left in piles, executed that morning by a rearguard of SS. Eight rope nooses dangled from an overhead beam. Nearly six hundred inmates were still alive, due to be executed that afternoon.

From them they learned the full extent of Vught. It was modelled on Dachau (encountered later), with wooden barracks, twelve-foot-high fencing, watchtowers built a hundred yards apart, and a crematorium. From January 1943 the main site and its associated fifteen sub-camps, where detainees operated lumber and woollen mills, had (in the German terminology of the era) 'processed' 31,000 Dutch Jews, political prisoners, resistance fighters, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, homeless people, black-market traders and criminals. These unfortunates had been transferred to other camps in Germany as the Allies approached, eighty at a time shoehorned into freight cars for the four-day journey to another hell. At Vught, the records show 750 perished, of whom 329 were shot just outside the wire.[12] The discovery resonated through the Canadian division, and British troops were aware of it, but it did not feature in the international press.

That autumn, Eisenhower and General Jake Devers, commanding the Franco-American Sixth Army Group in the south, had clashed twice. In mid-November when the Sixth had first arrived on the Rhine, Devers

saw an opportunity to cross the river and advance into Germany. This was consistent with Eisenhower's immediate objective of 'destroying the German Army west of the Rhine in order to enable river crossings', contained in a written order of 23 October, and a Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) directive of five days later to 'take any opportunity to gain a bridgehead over the river'.[13] To Devers and his staff, such a bold manoeuvre in their area would seal off the German Nineteenth Army in Alsace and cut behind the Wehrmacht's First Army, then opposing Patton in Lorraine. In a flash, opposition to the US Third and Seventh Armies could be neutralised, and a southern axis opened into the Reich.

Logistically, Devers had strong lines of supply back to Marseilles. His Seventh Army was bullish they could overcome the twin barriers of the Rhine and Siegfried Line. His intelligence staff had already determined that most of the *Westwall* bunkers opposite were empty. Devers' chief engineer, Brigadier General Henry C. Wole, had assembled over three hundred assault boats, and stockpiled bridge components and pontoons. He had studied the 750-foot-wide waterway, which flowed at six miles per hour, and assessed that Seventh Army's XV Corps was ready and capable of mounting a two-division assault. Patch envisaged using the 45th and 79th, crossing south-west of Karlsruhe, in the first week of December, with 150 DUKW amphibious trucks in support.[14]

First used in support of *Husky*, the July 1943 landing on Sicily, the amphibious DUKWs were a game-changer for the Allies in Western Europe. Essentially a floating, six-wheeled cargo truck, the letters stood for a complicated factory code: D (Year of Design, 1942), U (Amphibian), K (all-wheel drive) and W (dual rear axles). More than 2,000 had been used in Normandy and subsequently six companies – fifty vehicles each – had arrived with the August *Dragoon* landings and unloaded ships in southern France until sabotage and demolition in the major ports had been repaired and railway lines leading to the front overhauled or re-laid.[15] Eventually DUKWs would carry supplies to the German frontier, participate in the Rhine crossings, and become troop carriers in the spring of 1945. Twenty-seven other companies (1,350 vehicles), using non-amphibious trucks, had also operated in the Riviera ports, which after November 1944 would also switch to supporting Devers' army.[16]

Devers kept both the US Army Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall, and Major General Harold 'Pinky' Bull, chief operations officer at SHAEF, apprised of his plans, but somehow this development escaped Eisenhower. The latter's attention was focused on Bradley's army group further north and Devers' slower-than-planned progress through the High Vosges, an extensive sandstone massif, with peaks stretching to between 3,000 and 4,000 feet. This rugged, pine-forested mountain range that runs from the Saverne Gap east of Strasbourg to the Belfort Gap sixty miles due south, lies parallel to the Rhine, and had witnessed some of the costliest fighting of World War One. Rommel had learned his military trade here in 1915–16. The Germans had avoided it in 1940 and later used slave labour to exploit its geographical features as a deadly defensive maze they hoped would hold the Allies until the spring of 1945.

Devers' men spent the autumn and winter grinding their way through its various passes but at an agonisingly slow pace. One of his sergeants noted the scenery 'full of Christmas trees and lousy with snipers; the winding streams through the valleys only made our feet wetter. We cursed, thinking of the long climb, and the mud, and more mud on the other side.'[17] To their north Patton's Third Army was equally behind schedule, spending the same months slithering through the slush of Lorraine to its capital, Metz. On 24 November, Eisenhower journeyed to Devers to warn Sixth Army Group that he was planning to switch some of their troops to aid Patton. However, he was also concerned that the Germans had not fallen back across the Rhine as expected but formed a pocket below Strasbourg which would pose a threat to Devers' southern flank for any future activity.

When Eisenhower, with Bradley in tow, visited Seventh Army's XV Corps headquarters at Sarrebourg, he found its commander, Wade Haislip, busy making plans for a Rhine crossing the Supreme Commander knew nothing about. The same picture greeted him hours later, on visiting Major General Edward Brooks' VI Corps in Saint-Dié. That evening, the spa town of Vittel played host to a dinner and subsequent discussion between Eisenhower, Bradley and Devers at Sixth Army Group headquarters in the Hôtel de l'Hermitage.[18] After dining with the staff, the three generals adjourned to Devers' office and the door was shut.

Devers, who had previously been unaware of Eisenhower's lack of knowledge of his plans, had maps, charts and briefing notes already laid out, and explained his scheme of manoeuvre to cross the Rhine. From the other side of the door, staff heard 'a lot of yelling'. No stenographer was present, but as Devers recalled, he found the Supreme Commander not only uninterested in changing his strategy and backing a new axis in the south but ordering him to send two divisions to Bradley's Twelfth Army Group, which would go to Patton.[19]

At Sixth Army Group headquarters, the consensus was that none of Bradley's formations were able to cross the Rhine in 1944, but their own Seventh Army had enough combat power to leap the river, though not exploit much beyond it. This would not deviate from the SHAEF strategy of a main axis in the north – where Montgomery and Bradley were to envelop the Ruhr – and a secondary axis further south, where Patton would attack the Saar. Arguing that he was still adhering to Eisenhower's original plan, Devers observed that Seventh Army could greatly assist both these axes with a surprise crossing in his sector, where the opposition was known to be weak. Then his men could head north to attack other Wehrmacht units lining the Rhine, taking them from behind. Unhinging the German front in this way would allow both First and Third Armies to cross unhindered.

Thus, Devers pleaded, it was he, not Patton, who should be reinforced. He even had it in mind to lobby for Patton's Third Army to be detached from Twelfth Army Group (which already contained Hodges' First and Simpson's Ninth Armies) and given to him. Such a strong force, well balanced logistically, would certainly succeed, he argued. At 02:00 on the 25th, Devers later recollected, Eisenhower compromised. 'You won't cross the Rhine – and you won't send two divisions to Bradley.'[20] The meeting finished leaving both men angry. According to one contemporary source, the Supreme Commander was 'mad as hell' with Devers, while the latter was left 'wondering if he was a member of the same team'.[21] Professionalism overrode pique the next day when the trio descended on de Lattre's headquarters at Besançon, then toured the French Army, betraying not a hint of their disagreement.

To their consternation and surprise, Devers' staff immediately received orders to cancel all river-crossing plans and turn around the bridging.

There were long faces at the Hermitage, feeling they were being 'denied the opportunity' to exploit the moment. As the Sixth Army Group's war diary tactfully observed, 'Gen. Devers was anxious to make a crossing of the Rhine by Seventh Army Group, but Gen. Bradley preferred the maximum of close-in support west of the Rhine.'[22] The relevant chapter of the US Army narrative, *Riviera to the Rhine*, is labelled 'Lost Opportunities', with the paragraphs relating to Vittel headed 'The Dubious Decision', its two official historians observing, 'Eisenhower and his major subordinates remained preoccupied with their existing plans.'[23] Other historians, including David P. Colley, whose *Decision at Strasbourg* deals extensively with this episode, have not been kind about Eisenhower's judgement at Vittel, calling it 'questionable', 'surprising' and 'inflexible', and assessing Devers' proposed operation as sound, logical and workable.[24]

Significantly, Patton – who would have benefitted from the manoeuvre – thought it practicable, writing on receipt of the news, 'I personally believe they should have crossed the Rhine.'[25] On the face of it, Eisenhower's opposition comes across as petty and illogical. However, for two months the Supreme Commander had received a series of tough setbacks. First with Montgomery's failure of *Market Garden*, then Patton's loss of momentum before Metz. Latterly, there had been Hodge's inability to subdue the Hürtgen Forest, an ongoing attritional battle south of Aachen that would eventually cost 30,000 American casualties over three months. Now another subordinate was proposing a new variation of the SHAEF strategy, which still carried risk: Eisenhower's patience was at an end. For Devers, it was probably a case of right solution, wrong time.

Apart from the remaining German garrison west of the Rhine, which Eisenhower regarded as a huge threat to Devers' rear, we now know the reason why the front opposite Sixth Army Group was only lightly held. Most of the available German forces were massed east of the Ardennes to launch what would become the Battle of the Bulge, three weeks hence. It is now assessed that the 16 December assault would have been postponed if not cancelled altogether, had Devers been allowed to continue. Wehrmacht formations would have to have been dispatched to counter Seventh Army's dangerous incursion, reinforcements which could only have come from the troops about to strike in the Ardennes.

The Germans opposite Seventh Army had lost 17,500 men in the November fighting alone, 13,000 of them taken prisoner. At the precise moment Devers was planning his river crossing, only 14,000 poorly equipped and demoralised Volksgrenadiers (the Nazi moniker for German infantrymen since October 1944) faced Patch's divisions. His Rhine crossing would almost certainly have succeeded and the defenders opposite Patton also crushed. The risk to Eisenhower was, in fact, minimal – but he did not know that.[26]

Pondering the Vittel decision years later, Brigadier General Garrison H. Davidson, Patch's Chief Engineer, observed, 'I have often wondered what might have happened had he [Eisenhower] had the audacity to take a calculated risk as General Patton would have, instead of playing it safe. Perhaps success would have eliminated any possibility of the Battle of the Bulge; the casualties there could have been avoided, and the war shortened by several months, saving more thousands of lives.'[27]

On 25 November, it was Seventh Army men who tripped over something which hinted, only vaguely, of the darkness they would uncover in 1945. GIs of Company 'K', 7th Infantry, the Cottonbalers we have met already, were scouting the area around Schirmeck, thirty miles southwest of Strasbourg. They followed a well-built road which climbed the 2,400-foot-high north slope of Mont Louise past a granite quarry and discovered Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. Deep in the Vosges mountains and hidden by pine forests, it was a series of purpose-built wooden huts, neatly laid out, surrounded by a double electric fence, and equipped with watchtowers, a gas chamber and crematorium. At its peak, it also administered fifty sub-camps in Alsace-Lorraine and the adjacent German provinces of Baden and Württemberg, typically holding around 7,000 in the main site, but over 20,000 in its satellites.[28]

Twelve days after its capture, the *New York Times*'s Milton Bracker was taken to the site. 'It might have been a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, from the winding road to the bald hilltop, the sturdy green barracks looked exactly like those that housed forestry trainees in the United States during the early New Deal.'[29] He was shown a room full of empty burial urns (for which relatives could pay fifty Reichsmarks to have a few spoonfuls of a prisoner's ashes sent to them), storerooms full of prisoners' shoes and civilian clothing, meat hooks from which

prisoners were hung, dissection tables and the nearby granite quarry where inmates died of overwork and undernourishment. But no bodies. The camp was 'clean'.[30] Bracker's comment about a Civilian Conservation Corps camp betrays the innocence with which the Western Allies approached the whole concept of concentration camps. It would take until April 1945 to enlighten them.[31]

In Montgomery's northern sector, during the first week of November, both sides of the Scheldt Estuary, which flowed into the North Sea, were captured in appalling weather. Operation *Infatuate* combined attacks by II Canadian Corps with an amphibious assault against Walcheren, a former island at the estuary's mouth. This was the first major blooding of 52nd Lowland Division, the last infantry formation to arrive in 1944, which remained with II Canadian Corps for two months. It is worth noting that the First Canadian Army in 1944 was the smallest of all the four major national contingents to serve under Eisenhower's command. Until reinforced the following year, the Canadian element of Crerar's force never totalled more than 185,000 of the 4 million under SHAEF in North West Europe.

Yet, overall Canadian casualties were 20 per cent higher than in comparable British formations, as a direct result of more days spent in close combat. The burden fell on General Guy Simonds' II Canadian Corps, which in its securing of the Channel ports and opening the approaches to Antwerp, placed it among the most consistently utilised of all Allied formations. In terms of infantry losses, by the close of 1944, 3rd Canadian Division had suffered the highest casualties in Twenty-First Army Group, with the 2nd close behind them. Similarly for tank formation casualties, 4th Canadian Armoured Division was at the top, as was the nation's 2nd Armoured Brigade. Several scholars have sought to argue that this represented a failure in command. However, this more reasonably hints at the toughness of the Canadians' opponents, the weather in which they fought, and their length of time in battle.[32]

We must remember that the Western Allied campaign in Europe was only one half of the battle to destroy the Third Reich. At the highest level, the Big Three of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin were loosely able to coordinate their grand strategy. To complement the invasion of

Normandy, from 23 June 1944 Operation *Bagration* enabled the Red Army to recapture Belarus, Lithuania and Poland during the ensuing month. While the Western Allies were stumbling through the orchards and lanes of Normandy, the Soviet Union was destroying twenty-eight of Army Group Centre's thirty-four divisions, killing, wounding or capturing around 400,000 Axis personnel.

Bagration was a blow from which the German Army in the East would never recover and caused a not dissimilar casualty rate to that imposed by the Western Allies on Army Groups 'B' and 'G' in France.[33] However, Stalin's way of war was victory at any cost, with a complete disregard for his own casualties. Russia's losses in *Bagration* were possibly 800,000, double that of their opponents. In Normandy, the Western democracies, mindful of having to account for military deaths to their future electorates, would suffer a mere quarter of the Russian sacrifices, though still a high at 225,000, over a much longer period – the twelve weeks of 6 June to 30 August 1944.[34] Yet the unprecedented length and speed of the Red Army's advance, 450 miles in five weeks, but more importantly the erosion of its human capital, explains why Marshal Georgi Zhukov, Stalin's premier general, was unable to exploit the Wehrmacht's rout and move any further in the autumn of 1944. His halt on the River Vistula would last nearly six months.

Once consolidated and reinforced, on 12 January 1945 the Russians would follow *Bagration* with a further offensive that took them another three hundred miles westwards from the Vistula, as far as the River Oder. Outnumbered by 2.2 million to 400,000 along the six hundred miles of their front, from the Carpathians to the Baltic, Germany's Army Group 'A' was forced back as far as the Reich's last water barrier in the East. At those points along the Vistula chosen for their assaults, the imbalance was even more marked: the Wehrmacht's General Staff calculated the numbers were eleven to one in infantry, seven to one in tanks, and twenty to one in artillery, in the Russians' favour.[35]

Zhukov and Marshal Ivan Konev, the former's rival and commander of the First Ukrainian Front (equivalent to an army group), would consolidate on the Oder in another operational pause before resuming their advance on Berlin, just thirty-seven miles away, on 16 April 1945. Through the haze of ruins still smouldering from RAF and US air raids,

the thunder of the Russian guns would be heard on 20 April, Hitler's fifty-sixth birthday. The journey of those *Ivans* (as they were collectively known by the Germans) from the gates of Moscow and ruins of Leningrad and Stalingrad, was longer and more arduous that that of their Western comrades, and no less heroic. Yet the manoeuvrings of Stalin's men (and a sizeable number of women) had only a minimal impact on Eisenhower's forces as all fought their way into Germany during the last hundred days of this narrative.

While there was broad Allied strategic alignment, the operational campaigns in the East and West were conducted completely separately, coordinated only as the two forces met. Lieutenant Belton Cooper with the 3rd US Armored Division would discover this when he visited a G-2 (Intelligence) officer to look at his situation map in the spring of 1945. Cooper noted blue grease pencil marking American units and red identifying German outfits. 'I was curious to see if there were any markings for the Russians. I saw none, so I asked one of the G-2 lieutenants. He said he didn't know. "We can pick up their voices on the radio and know they must be within a range of fifty miles. We've assumed they're on the other side of the River." '

Throughout the campaign, Western Allied casualties would turn out to be dreadful. From D-Day to VE-Day they were recorded as 766,294, of which American losses were 586,628, including 135,576 dead. The British, Canadians, French and other Western allies lost approximately 60,000 dead.[36] Many senior officers, including Eisenhower himself, Patch and de Lattre, had sons serving, which added to their personal burdens. One of Patch's subordinates, the Marne Division's commander, Major General John O'Daniel, whose men assaulted Utweiler, had news of his eldest son's death on 20 September. His namesake was fighting as a private with Company 'A', 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, at Nijmegen. Hit in the chest his last words to his platoon sergeant were, 'Sarge, tell Dad I tried damned hard, won't you?' O'Daniel, whose brother had been killed serving during World War One, struggled with his loss, writing to a fellow general, 'It has been tough losing the young fellow. I am grateful though, that if he had to go, he went as he did – attacking the enemy.'

The following month, Patch in his headquarters at Lunéville was told of the death on 22 October 1944, of the CO of Company 'C' in the

315th Infantry Regiment. Captain Alexander McCarrell 'Mac' Patch III, his only son, was serving with the 79th Infantry Division when he was killed in action. De Lattre (whose own son, Bernard, was serving with him) was not alone in noting Patch's grief, recalling the 'sensitive man, who spoke tenderly of his wife, and dearly loved the son who fell in the Vosges'.[37] Patch, distraught like O'Daniel, buried his son, who had graduated from West Point only in May 1942, in the American military cemetery adjacent to his army's main field hospital at Épinal. Perturbed at being unable to comfort Julia, his wife, over their loss, he was also aware of his wider responsibilities.

As he pointed out in a letter to her, they were 'far from unique' in their situation.[38] Seventh Army staff observed their commander 'was never the same man after the loss of Mac'. Yet Patch soldiered on, providing a worthy example of devotion to duty in a higher cause. In February 1945 he would pen Julia a further heartfelt letter. 'In my quiet moments alone, I too get a great sense of depression . . . Am getting so very, very many letters from parents of boys who have been killed, wounded, or missing from this Army. Nothing is more devastating than that – There is so little I can say.'[39]

(*Above, left to right*): Two US Army Group commanders, Devers of the 6th and Bradley of the 12th, flank two cavalry officers: Patton of the Third Army and Patch of the Seventh. (*Below*): Dempsey of the Second British, Hodges of the First US, Simpson of the Ninth US and Crerar of the First Canadian Armies surround Montgomery, leader of the 21st Army Group

2

Allied Leadership

Dwight David Eisenhower had just turned fifty-three when he was named as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SCAEF) that would invade France.[1] He had earlier overseen all operations in the Mediterranean theatre and was well versed in the challenges of senior alliance leadership. Based in London then France, the Kansan would hold this elevated position until the end of hostilities, afterwards becoming Military Governor of the American occupation zone and subsequently succeeding George C. Marshall as US Army Chief of Staff.

Marshall's British opposite number as Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), Sir Alan Brooke, watched Eisenhower at a conference in May 1944. There was perhaps a hint of sour grapes – through not having the Supreme Command, which Churchill had implied earlier might be his – in his observation of the SHAEF commander. 'The main impression I gathered was that Eisenhower was no real director of thought, plans, energy or direction! Just a coordinator – a good mixer, a champion of inter-Allied cooperation, and in those respects, few can hold a candle to him. But is that enough?'[2] In retrospect, Brooke's bias seems shocking and indefensible. However, what were the prerequisites for Eisenhower's post? There was no job description. Eisenhower's core belief was the sanctity of the Anglo–US relationship, which for him assumed the status of a religion when he took up his new post of SCAEF in England on 14 January 1944.

One of his junior officers, Group Captain Desmond Scott, a New Zealander in charge of the Typhoon-equipped No.123 Wing, based at RAF Thorney Island, West Sussex, remembered a visit from Eisenhower

before D-Day. 'The impression he made on me was a revelation. Some people you take to immediately – Eisenhower was one of them. Most of the British generals I met during my time in England were as stiff and unbending as the silly little sticks they carried. Eisenhower's authority, humility and broad friendly smile made you feel when meeting him that you had made his day.'[3] The American was a 'natural' with soldiers, as Major George Chambers of the 8th Durham Light Infantry, a battalion in 50th Northumbrian Division, recalled when the Supreme Commander addressed his battalion. 'At this stage the troops were bored stiff, bolshie, and had had all this so many times before. But, you know, at the end of his speech, the troops burst into spontaneous applause, which was tremendous praise of the man. His personality carried across to the troops.'[4]

Eisenhower was a man of humble origins who had emerged as the premier general of West Point's finest year, the vintage in question being the Class of 1915. His undisputed qualities lay in being an excellent organiser and planner, the pick of this generation – and in his ability to lead a multinational coalition of forces, each with their own national jealousies, characteristics and sensitivities. He was more of a politician than a soldier, thought Montgomery, who noted in a letter to Brooke of 4 April 1943: 'Eisenhower came and stayed a night with me on 31 March. He is a very nice chap; I should say probably quite good on the political side. But I can also say, quite definitely, that he knows nothing whatever about how to make war or to fight battles; he should be kept away from all that business if we want to win this war. The American Army will never be any good until we can teach the generals their stuff.'[5] These may have been fair criticisms in April 1943 when the US Army was fresh to combat and command, but what their British colleagues failed to appreciate was that the Yanks were *very* quick learners.

Most were won over by Eisenhower's natural charm and humility. Sergeant Norman Kirby, in charge of Montgomery's personal security detail, recalled that while de Gaulle refused to show his identity card, expecting to be recognised, Eisenhower had no such pretensions when challenged. He wrote later of 'Eisenhower putting his hand on my shoulder, handing me his wallet and saying, "Help yourself, son" '.[6] Montgomery, too, was occasionally won over. The two dined quietly together