

Caen, Cobra and Confusion: Has Montgomery's Normandy Campaign
Been Understood and its Legacy Fairly Assessed?

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Abstract

This thesis examines key points within the Normandy campaign of 1944 as a way of assessing the part played by General Montgomery in his leadership of Allied forces. By focusing on critical aspects of the battle, this work shows how fundamental misunderstandings of his plan and its execution have fed into the revisionist view that Montgomery's plan was flawed and its conduct poorly handled. By an analysis of critical sub-questions (such as the effectiveness of Allied operations around Caen in attracting German reinforcements away from the American sector) it has been possible to establish the need for an empirical re-evaluation of Montgomery's campaign.

The research for this work is doctrinal in nature, with a series of primary and secondary sources being placed within the context of the wider Normandy campaign. In doing so it shows the level of air cover provided by the Allied Air Forces was not affected by the fewer than anticipated numbers of airstrips available in the initial stages of Overlord. It also shows how Montgomery's campaign plan was misunderstood from the start and how Caen still served the Allied cause despite not being captured on D-Day. Operations Epsom and Goodwood are also analysed as part of Montgomery's overall intention to attract German reinforcements away from the Americans, aiding their breakout. Finally, the connection between the use of language and a dislike of Montgomery's character and how it has affected the historic narrative is demonstrated.

The conclusion recaps issues concerning Caen as they are fundamental to the understanding of Montgomery's intentions. Suggestions are also made for further areas of research. The thesis is completed with quotes from Eisenhower and his Chief of Staff which support this work's conclusion that Montgomery proved to be the best choice to lead the Normandy campaign.

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Introduction

Thesis Intentions and Relevance

The intention of this work is to examine whether Montgomery's planning and execution of the Normandy campaign has been fairly assessed and if not, what has come to affect its legacy? General Bernard Law Montgomery has always been a controversial figure. That controversy has affected the historical narrative to a point beyond Michelet's contention that every writer's work is "coloured with the feelings, the times, of the person who produced it."¹ This is especially true with regards to Montgomery's planning and execution of the Normandy campaign. A dislike of his character traits combined with fundamental misunderstandings of his overall plan and intentions during the battle have led to a series of influentially negative assessments of Monty and the campaign he oversaw. These interpretations continue to affect his legacy with caricature replacing reality.² The analysis contained within this thesis will challenge the myths which have built up around Montgomery and will show that despite his difficult character, he was the best General amongst his peers to lead the Normandy campaign.³

This thesis has a relevance beyond the promotion of new thinking on the subject although it is important to acknowledge that some work has been done in this area.⁴ The Normandy campaign was part of the wider liberation of north-west Europe, achieved by the creation of a multinational military coalition formed for that purpose. That coalition would have been impossible to create had the political will to do so been lacking. The need for similar coalitions, such as the one formed to counter the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 has been repeatedly demonstrated post-war, with

¹ Michelet, J. (2013). *The History of France* (within the edited book *On History*). (E. K. Kaplan, F. Kimmich, & L. Grossman, Trans.) (L. Grossman, Ed.) Open Book Publishers. (Original work published 1869) p 143 https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/On_History/4ba8AQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1 (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

² Turner, B. (2020, February). The Desert Martinet: Viscount Montgomery: Tactless, Arrogant and with No Instinct for Politics. *The Critic* <https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/february-2020/the-desert-martinet/> (Last accessed 12/08/2022).

³ *ibid*

⁴ See, for example, Hart, S. A. (2007). *Colossal Cracks, Montgomery's 21st Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*. Stackpole Books.

events focusing on the Ukraine and Taiwan likely to create the need for similar groupings.⁵ The controversies which were allowed to develop as a result of command misunderstandings and enmities within SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) during the Normandy campaign illustrate perfectly the need for military figures to take account of political as well as military considerations. The reflections of (the then) Lt. Colonel Copinger-Symes, based on his experience of operating with coalition allies in Afghanistan in 2011 could have been spoken by General Eisenhower in 1944/45:

Coalitions are not military by nature; they are political by nature....and if we misunderstand that then we risk forgetting that a fundamental requirement is the need to maintain the coalition....to that end, military leaders of coalition need to remember that they are holding together a political entity and that cohesion will have a value all of its own.⁶

The inability of senior commanders within SHAEF to heed such considerations had the potential to damage Eisenhower's coalition. The lessons to be learned from the Normandy experience are equally applicable today.

Sub-Questions

To answer the main question of the thesis, this work will focus on questions critical to the understanding of the Normandy campaign and Montgomery's part within it. How did misunderstandings around Montgomery's intentions for Caen, commencing with the pre-invasion Thunderclap presentations, affect the campaign? Why did the issue

⁵ See, for example, The White House. (2022). *Remarks by President Biden Announcing Actions to Continue to Hold Russia Accountable*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/11/remarks-by-president-biden-announcing-actions-to-continue-to-hold-russia-accountable/> (Last accessed 13/08/2022); U.S. Department of State. (2022). *U.S.-Australia-Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue*. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-australia-japan-trilateral-strategic-dialogue/> (Last accessed 13/08/2022); Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. (2022). *PM call with President Macron: 9 August 2022*. Gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-president-macron-9-august-2022>

⁶ Glenn, R. W. (2011). *Band of Brothers or Dysfunctional Family? A Military Perspective on Coalition Challenges During Stability Operations*. RAND Corporation p 31 <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG903.html> (Last accessed 13/08/2022) For Eisenhower's view of the importance of the voluntary nature of the coalition formed between the Allies, see, for example, Eisenhower, D. D. (1948). *Crusade in Europe*. William Heinemann p 4

of airfields required by the Allies in Normandy come to create so much controversy, given the effectiveness of Allied air power over the battlefield? Why are Operations Epsom and Goodwood considered failures when they were demonstrably crucial to the success of the American breakout during Operation Cobra? The Allied way of waging war and how it countered the allegedly superior German armed forces is also addressed, as is the legacy of Montgomery and the battle, together with factors which have led to both being unfairly assessed. Analysis of the subjects set out in these sub-questions will contribute to the wider understanding of the Normandy campaign and will answer the original research question.

Historiography

Montgomery's difficult, at times abrasive, personality has influenced the way many historians have come to write about the man and the battles he fought. This historiography will serve as a basis for the work which follows. It will examine pre-existing commentary and provide the reader with an insight into the way the written record has influenced popular conceptions of both Montgomery and the Normandy campaign.

British authors Max Hastings⁷ and Antony Beevor⁸ have been influential in their criticism of Montgomery. They both illustrate much of what they write with accounts from service personnel who were there, but they largely expand on what previous like-minded historians have already mapped out elsewhere.

Hastings uses the performance of Allied soldiers as a way of criticizing Montgomery, quoting the work of American soldier and historian, T.N. Dupuy:

On a man for man basis, the German ground soldier consistently inflicted casualties at about 50% higher rate than they incurred from the opposing British and American troops under all circumstances.⁹

⁷ Hastings, M. (1984). *Overlord, D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*. Michael Joseph.

⁸ Beevor, A. (2010). *D-Day, The Battle for Normandy*. Penguin.

⁹ Dupuy, T. N. (1977). *A Genius for War*. Prentice-Hall. p 253 quoted by Hastings, M. *Overlord*, p 184

Dupuy's research and the calculations he employed have since been challenged, making their conclusions seem less sound.¹⁰ Hastings writes skeptically of Montgomery's intentions for Caen throughout his work whilst praising the abilities of the German defenders.¹¹

Beevor's work is similar to Hastings', expressing scepticism over Caen but he chooses to use words such as 'puerile' to describe Monty's thinking.¹² His use of overly descriptive narrative gives the impression that Montgomery deliberately delayed the capture of Caen, footnoting an "unsubstantiated rumour" speculating on Churchill's intention to relieve Monty as a way to strengthen his observations.¹³ As the following work will show, SHAEF's frustration with Monty was an issue but Beevor's own writing style at times highlights his own issues with Montgomery.

Edward E. Gordon and David Ramsay expand on many of the points raised by Hastings.¹⁴ They contend that "For the Allies the very boldness of Montgomery's plan to take and hold Caen on D-Day ensured its failure."¹⁵ On a superficial level they are correct. Montgomery's pre-invasion directives seem clear enough as will be seen in chapter one of this work, but they fail to consider I Corps order to 3rd British Infantry Division for D-Day, of which Monty would have been aware. This clearly shows there was an alternative in place for Caen should its capture not be possible on the day, claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

It is possible for authors to change their perspectives over time. Carlo D'Este is an example of such a historian. With 'Decision in Normandy,'¹⁶ (originally published in 1983), D'Este was unequivocal in his opinion that Montgomery was at fault for much of the campaign. He was unconvinced, for instance, that Caen was intended to be the hinge upon which the American breakout would be based. His work was well

¹⁰ See, for example, Brown, J.S. (1987) *The Wehrmacht Mythos Revisited, a Challenge for Colonel Trevor N. Dupuy*. Military Affairs pp 146-147, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1987518> (Last accessed 18/07/2022)

¹¹ Hastings, M. *Overlord*, p 179

¹² Beevor, A. *D-Day*, p 184

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Gordon, E. E., & Ramsay, D. (2017). *Divided on D-Day, How Conflicts and Rivalries Jeopardized the Allied Victory at Normandy*. Prometheus Books

¹⁵ Gordon & Ramsay, *Divided on D-Day*, p 163

¹⁶ D'Este, C. (2001). *Decision in Normandy*. Penguin.

supported by positive book reviews agreeing with his conclusions, but several reviewers also took the opportunity to perpetuate the caricature of Monty being a small man out of his depth.¹⁷ In 2005, D'Este wrote a series of articles in which he tempered his earlier opinions of Montgomery.¹⁸ The most critical of D'Este's observations is that historians have been too inclined to judge Montgomery solely on his personality. This is an issue which will be returned to in this work.

The subject of airfields is an important one within the campaign and is highlighted by several historians. They are right to do so as their establishment within the beachhead plays a central part in the narrative of the campaign. Richard Doherty notes Tedder's growing enmity towards Monty as Caen held out, backed up by Air Marshal Arthur Coningham.¹⁹ Richard Mead notes the part played by the former head of planning for the invasion of Europe, General Frederick Morgan, in the criticisms of Monty, in which he added his voice to that of Tedder's.²⁰ John Terraine notes Montgomery's own Thunderclap briefing in April 1944 stressing the need for airfield construction in Normandy.²¹ The subject of airfields in Normandy was to become a contentious one for Montgomery, being the cause of much argument at the time. Whether airfields were truly required to the extent claimed by Tedder early in the campaign is examined in this work, as is Montgomery's appreciation of the value of Allied air support.

The understanding (or otherwise) by SHAEF of Montgomery's overall plan and intentions are the basis of much conjecture within the World War Two community. Nigel Hamilton, Montgomery's biographer, doubted Eisenhower ever understood the realities of the Normandy campaign and lacked an understanding "of what was possible and impossible against German opposition."²² Hamilton is correct in his assessment of the Eisenhower of June – September 1944 but thereafter his handling of the Allied armies improved. Peter Caddick-Adams writes of Monty's stated

¹⁷ See for example, Middleton, D. (1984, January 22). Mistake In the Master Plan [Review of the book *Decision in Normandy* by C. D'Este]. New York Times p 10.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1984/01/22/issue.html> (Last accessed 01/08/2022)

¹⁸ D'Este, C. (2005). Monty: World War II's Most Misunderstood General, Part 1. *Armchair General*, (1), <http://armchairgeneral.com/monty-world-war-iis-most-misunderstood-general.htm>

¹⁹ Doherty, R. (2004). *Normandy 1944, the Road to Victory*. Spellmount p 172

²⁰ Mead, R. (2015). *The Men Behind Monty*. Pen & Sword Military p 167

²¹ Terraine, J. (1997). *The Right of the Line*. Wordsworth Editions p 615

²² Hamilton, N. (1989). *Monty, Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944*. Hamish Hamilton p 531

intention to prioritise the destruction of German forces over mere capture of ground.²³ Robin Neillands is clear in his understanding that Monty had consistently outlined his intent to fix the Germans before Caen prior to the breakout which was always to commence on the American sector.²⁴ It proved difficult for Eisenhower and others to grasp that Montgomery's plan for the eventual breakout did not include the acquisition of territory for its own sake. That lack of understanding (in addition to Montgomery's refusal to re-state his intentions) would become the cornerstone of the plot to have Monty removed.

The culmination of Montgomery's efforts before Caen, Operation Cobra and the American breakout, is mentioned in every study of the overall campaign, as is the German counterattack at Mortain. Martin Blumenson's official history of the build-up to the operation and beyond is complete but its introductory chapter recounts the role of non-Americans with detachment whilst being critical of Montgomery.²⁵ Widely quoted in studies of Normandy, an unwillingness to criticise senior American figures in such a history was likely due to the fact that many of them were still alive at time of publication. A clear, alternative account by James Carafano makes the point that such unwillingness to challenge previously accepted narratives about World War Two, Operation Cobra included, has not helped with its study.²⁶ It is hard to argue with such a conclusion. This thesis will explore the extent to which there is a need to re-evaluate Montgomery's legacy through an analysis of his generalship rather than his perceived personality failings.

British and Canadian soldiers have been frequently compared unfavourably with their German counterparts for being overly cautious and inflexible. This has been used in the past as a way to criticise both their respective armies and Montgomery. *Monty's Men* examines such claims and is able to show how effectively Anglo-Canadian forces adapted to the realities of the battlefield which even the most realistic training could not fully replicate.²⁷ Ben Kite, in a study supported by the

²³ Caddick-Adams, P. (2020). *Sand & Steel, a New History of D-Day*. Arrow Books p 244

²⁴ Neillands, R. (2002). *The Battle of Normandy 1944*. Cassell p 38

²⁵ Blumenson, M. (1993). *Breakout and Pursuit*. Centre of Military History, U.S. Army pp 3-16

²⁶ Carafano, J. J. (2000). *After D-Day, Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout*. Stackpole Books pp 261-262

²⁷ Buckley, J. (2013). *Monty's Men, the British Army and the Liberation of Europe*. Yale University Press.

testament of veterans, does a similar service to the legacy of British and Canadian troops.²⁸ It is important to be reminded that even those German formations with the most formidable of reputations were defeated by ordinary Allied soldiers.

The works mentioned above are representative of the published accounts concerned (in part or entirely) with Montgomery, the Normandy campaign or related subjects. Some have been written with ostensible authority even when they contain no fresh research or interpretations, but they still have a part within the study of the subject. This work will use these titles and other sources to align it closer to the works of Buckley and Neillands than those of Hastings or Gordon & Ramsay.

The manner in which historians have analysed Montgomery and the battles in which he fought has had a major influence on his legacy. Facts (no matter how empirical) and their interpretation are not the only factors which influence the way historians approach their themes.

G. J. Renier contends that history “fulfils a wider social need” beyond the emplotment and presentation of facts.²⁹ This need is seen in the way research is occasionally presented, serving to confirm or enhance a widely held belief within society or a section thereof. Renier notes that an unwillingness to challenge what he calls “accepted history” can also lead to dogmatism.³⁰ It is accurate to say that such accepted histories and wisdoms have played a significant part in the creation of Montgomery’s legacy.

Bias and sentiment, which all historians inevitably bring to their work, affects the way they write and the conclusions they reach. This is a theme Hubert Watelet explores in an essay from 2004.³¹ The merits or otherwise of a subjective or objective approach to history have been the cause of debate for decades. Watelet refers to the declaration made by Jules Michelet that his life was in his book, that it and his own

²⁸ Kite, B. (2014). *Stout Hearts, The British and Canadians in Normandy 1944*. Helion & Company.

²⁹ Renier, G. J. (1961). *History, its Purpose and Method*. George Allen & Unwin p 13

³⁰ Renier, G.J. History p 129

³¹ Watelet, H. (2004). Illusions About and Underestimation of the Role of Sentiment in the Historian's Work. In C. Barros, & L . J. McCrank (Eds.), *History Under Debate, International Reflection on the Discipline*. Haworth Press pp. 213-238.

identity were one.³² What he omits from that paragraph is the line, “Is not the work coloured with the feelings, the times, of the person who produced it?”³³ Michelet’s point is irrefutable, sentiment plays a part in every historians work but with some subjects, Montgomery being one, it excites it (sentiment), more than others.

The manner in which historians convey their findings plays an important role in any given subject. Alan Munslow examines how facts selected by historians as relevant to or illustrative of their subject, are in turn placed within the narrative of their own work, adding to the wider historical narrative.³⁴ This in turn ties in with the thoughts of Michelet on the influence of personality and sentiment. The use of sources and the context facts are put in together with their interpretation, create what Munslow calls “Historians’ Facts.”³⁵ His analysis of the historian’s process, how a question leads to a determination is useful in helping the reader to understand (in a very simplified way) how the same facts can produce different conclusions.³⁶ It also shows the limits of epistemology if dogmatism is allowed to intrude into a historian’s work. This is often the case with the study of the Normandy campaign.

Sources

The majority of the primary sources for this thesis came from the Montgomery Collections held by the Imperial War Museum, London and documents held by the Public Records Office, Kew.

The value in accessing the original primary sources is twofold: Firstly, it is possible to see exactly what is recorded in a manner that cannot be replicated, even by a faithful transcript. Secondly the importance of many documents to the author can be accurately assessed by either the style and manner of handwritten text or the annotations applied to typed copies. A good example of this is to be found in

³² Watelet, H. Illusions About and Underestimation p 223

³³ Michelet, J. (2013). *The History of France* (within the edited book *On History*). (E. K. Kaplan, F. Kimmich, & L. Grossman, Trans.) (L. Grossman, Ed.) Open Book Publishers. (Original work published 1869) p 143 https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/On_History/4ba8AQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1 (Last accessed 01/08/2022)

³⁴ Munslow, A. (2003). *The New History*. Routledge p 165

³⁵ Munslow, A. *The New History* p 160

³⁶ *Ibid* – As the basis for his guide, Munslow compares the construction of a historical point to the way an artist paints with oil on canvas.

Montgomery's handwritten draft of his notes entitled 'Some Army Problems' in which he clearly underlines the overriding point of D-Day in the first line of the document: "We must get ashore".³⁷ Without a successful Allied lodgement in Normandy, nothing else was possible.

The importance of the primary sources used cannot be overstated but they have a unique issue of their own in that they only record what they record, by their nature they do not discuss wider context. Secondary sources also have limitations, e.g. the biases which can be reflected within such works. This is a theme which will be explored throughout this thesis and it is for this reason that a reconstructionist approach has been taken in this work. Where necessary, sources and analysis have been placed in context with events on the ground illustrating the points being made. This work does not cover every phase of the Normandy campaign. By focusing instead on those aspects which most affect the historic narrative, it challenges past assertions which will be useful in expanding the academic discourse surrounding the subject as a whole.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One will cover how the planning for Overlord was completed, including Montgomery's declared intentions for Caen and Allied concerns regarding the capture of land suitable for the construction of airfields. This will address the sub-questions relating to the importance of aircraft and airfields to the Allies and Montgomery and Allied understanding of the overall plan regarding the city of Caen. Chapter Two covers the events immediately after D-Day. The subject of airfields is returned to, the effect of Allied airpower in the early part of the campaign and the early moves against Caen, including Operation Epsom, are also assessed. In doing so this chapter will return to the sub-questions related to Monty's intentions for Caen as the campaign developed, linking back to Allied understanding of his plan as it was presented before D-Day. It also addresses the sub-question regarding Operation Epsom and its contribution to the eventual American breakout. Chapter Three covers the aftermath of Epsom and Allied understanding or otherwise of Montgomery's

³⁷ IWM, Montgomery Collections, Ancillary Collection 3, File 2, Montgomery Memoranda.

ongoing strategy towards Caen. The fall of that city to the Allies and the methodology of their military operations are also analysed. This chapter and the next addresses the sub-questions relating to the true value of Operations Epsom and Goodwood and how they were linked to the success of the American Operation Cobra. This chapter also addresses the sub-question relating to the effectiveness of Allied military doctrine in dealing with the Germans in Normandy. Chapter Four focuses on perceptions of Operation Goodwood and its ramifications for the American breakout (Operation Cobra) which led directly to the conclusion of the Battle for Normandy. This chapter addresses the sub-questions relating to Montgomery's intentions towards Caen and its overall impact on the campaign as a whole. The part language played in the campaign and its influence on the historical narrative will also be examined and will form the focus of Chapter Five, addressing the sub-question of how Montgomery's Normandy legacy has come to be shaped.

Chapter One – Appointment & Planning

This chapter will examine the appointment of General Montgomery to command ground forces for the invasion of Normandy. It will look at Churchill and Eisenhower's preferred candidate, General H. Alexander whose record and style of generalship differed from Montgomery's. It will show how Montgomery approached the planning of the invasion and his presentation of that plan to senior allied commanders. The intentions and expectations regarding Caen's early capture will also be explored, as will the unspoken flexibility allowed to the British division assigned to its capture. Understanding of this issue will show the virtue of Montgomery's claims at the time and subsequently, that the campaign went largely to plan.

The Appointment of Montgomery

On 4th December 1943 Winston Churchill agreed (on the recommendation of Field Marshal Alan Brooke) that Lt. General Bernard Law Montgomery be appointed head of 21st Army Group then in Britain preparing for the invasion of Normandy.¹ The appointment put Montgomery at the head of the British and Canadian forces making up that formation. It also made him Commander in Chief of the Allied ground forces for the duration of the campaign in Normandy. The formation would in addition include American troops of First U.S. Army until an American army group was formed. By the time Monty received word of his appointment, all the key political and senior figures within the United States and Great Britain had accepted the fact but not everyone was happy with it.

Montgomery had come to the fore with his defeat of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and the Afrika Korps at El Alamein in November 1942.² Before that victory few outside of military circles had heard of Monty (as he was frequently called), but from that time forward he was to become the most famous British General of the war. Had it not been for the death of Churchill's preferred candidate, General William Gott,³

¹ Danchev, A., & Todman, D. (Eds.). (2001). *War Diaries 1939-1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke* (6th ed.). Weidenfeld & Nicolson p 491

² See Lucas Phillips, C. E. (2021). *Alamein*. Sapere Books.

³ Clayton, T., & Craig, P. (2002). *End of the Beginning*. Hodder & Stoughton pp 243-244

Montgomery would not have been given Eighth Army. If not for El Alamein, it is likely his war and reputation would have ended in North Africa.

Alexander and Montgomery

Churchill was not alone in needing convincing of Montgomery's suitability for the coming task. General Dwight D Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and head of SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) also had his doubts. Had it been Eisenhower's decision, the position would have gone to General Harold Alexander, Montgomery's immediate superior in North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

General (later Field Marshal), Harold Alexander had been appointed to oversee British operations in the Middle East shortly before Montgomery had been sent to North Africa to replace General Gott. Alexander was everything Montgomery was not. Empathic and considerate of others, yet with a reputation for relying too heavily on his subordinates for ideas. A former resident historian at the British Army Staff College described him as "Not a great soldier though he was a strategist of some insight", adding that he had the ability to make varied and powerful personalities work together but that he was not a master of detail.⁴

Another, more penetrating verdict of Alexander's abilities as a general came from Liddell Hart who concluded, "Alexander, though highly intelligent with an open mind, was fundamentally a lazy general" and that "he might have been a greater commander if he had not been so nice a man and so deeply a gentleman."⁵

General Eisenhower had met Alexander in the course of his duties as Supreme Allied Commander in North Africa, beginning with the invasion of the French colonies of Algeria and Morocco during Operation Torch.⁶ Eisenhower (or Ike as he was

⁴ Holden Reid, B. (1991). Alexander, Field Marshal Earl Alexander. In J. Keegan (Ed.), *Churchill's Generals* (pp. 104-129). Grove Weidenfeld.

⁵ Liddell Hart, B. 1946, Liddell Hart Papers, as cited by Holden Reid, B. (1991). Alexander, Field Marshal Earl Alexander. In J. Keegan (Ed.), *Churchill's Generals* (pp. 104-129). Grove Weidenfeld, p 125

⁶ For an overview of that campaign see for example Breuer, W. B. (1985). *Operation Torch, The Allied Gamble to Invade French North Africa*. St Martin's Press.

colloquially known) liked Alexander, the latter becoming Eisenhower's deputy in the Mediterranean theatre. The two forged a good working relationship as the British Army pursued the Germans after their defeat at El Alamein. By comparison, Montgomery's first meeting with Eisenhower set the tone of their future working relationship. Having begun a lecture on an army exercise witnessed by Eisenhower in 1942, Monty broke off when he saw Ike light a cigarette, ordering him to extinguish it immediately. Eisenhower did so.⁷

Upon his appointment as Supreme Commander for the invasion of Northwest Europe, Eisenhower suggested Alexander should command the land forces for the invasion of Normandy.⁸ Field Marshal Alan Brooke as CIGS had however already decided on Montgomery to take over command of 21st Army Group. Monty would also lead Allied ground forces on D-Day and the subsequent campaign to clear the Germans from Normandy.⁹ For Brooke there was no alternative. Montgomery and he had established a symbiotic working relationship, Monty being described as Brooke's "Battlefield executive."¹⁰

In one major respect, Alexander and Montgomery were alike. Both would identify objectives and leave their staff officers to draw up more detailed plans. This gave them time to concentrate on the wider picture, but Alexander's style has been interpreted as laziness by some,¹¹ and was dismissed by Montgomery entirely: "Alexander is very definitely third-class as a high commander...so long as I was with him, I ran the battles for him and we won."¹²

It is important to understand the type of general and person Alexander was in comparison with Monty. Whilst Alexander would not have been the worst choice over Montgomery, the latter had the strength of character to fight the Normandy campaign in the manner he saw fit with the minimum of Allied losses. Alexander would have

⁷ Barr, N. (2017). *Eisenhower's Armies, The American-British Alliance During World War II*. Pegasus Books p 175

⁸ Danchev, A., & Todman, D. *War Diaries 1939-1945* p 496

⁹ *ibid*, p 502

¹⁰ Keegan, J. (1983). *Six Armies in Normandy*. Penguin p 22

¹¹ See footnote 5 above.

¹² IWM, Montgomery papers part II, LMD 55/1 as cited by Pill, M. (2019). *Montgomery, Friends within Foes Without Relationships in and Around 21st Army Group*. Uniform p 45

been more pliable to alternative courses of action suggested by his subordinate generals as the battle developed. There is little doubt this inclination to accommodate others in order to maintain friendly relations would have been exploited. Strong characters such as the American General George Patton and Eisenhower's deputy, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder would have made Alexander's task even more difficult than they did Montgomery's.

Montgomery's Approach to Planning the Campaign

Montgomery received notification of his new command on Christmas Eve 1944, both Churchill and Roosevelt agreeing to Brooke's recommendation.¹³ At the time he was still leading the British 8th Army as part of the Allied effort in Italy. On 27th December, Monty flew to Algiers where he and Eisenhower reviewed the initial planning for Operation Overlord.

The original draft for the invasion of France had been drawn up by an organisation named COSSAC (Chief Of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander), led by Lt. General Frederick Morgan.¹⁴ Established in March 1943, Morgan was faced with two challenges; the Supreme Commander COSSAC was working for had yet to be appointed which led directly to the second issue: they had no authority to requisition or allocate equipment and formations over and above what they had been advised was available.¹⁵

The draft plan for Overlord was submitted by COSSAC in July 1943. It envisaged a three-division invasion supplemented by airborne troops with two more divisions in reserve.¹⁶ The area chosen for the invasion was Normandy, the landing beaches located in the same zones as those later selected by Monty and his Overlord planning staff. COSSAC was aware that a three-division front was too narrow but could do little more with the projected resources allocated to them.

¹³ Lamb, R. (1987). *Montgomery in Europe 1943-45, Success or Failure?* Buchan & Enright p 58

¹⁴ Mead, R. (2015). *The Men Behind Monty*. Pen & Sword p 123

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Lewin, R. (1971). *Montgomery as Military Commander*. B. T Batsford p 170

The plan shown to Montgomery in Algiers was the one drawn up by Morgan and his staff at COSSAC.¹⁷ Monty's first impression was that the landings would be too small to ensure success and to allow enough room for follow up forces to concentrate easily, echoing Eisenhower's opinion. Montgomery went on to meet Churchill in Marrakesh on New Year's Eve and was again asked his opinion of the COSSAC proposal.¹⁸ Before delivering his written appreciation of General Morgan's draft plan, Montgomery caveated his reply to Churchill with, at best, a half-truth.

I replied that I was not his military adviser; Overlord was clearly a combined operation of the first magnitude and I had not seen the plan, *and had not even discussed the subject* with any responsible naval or air authority. He agreed but said he would like me to study the plan nonetheless, and give him my "first impressions."¹⁹

This is an explicit example of Monty hair splitting. It is clear he was shown COSSAC's proposal by Eisenhower in Algiers four days before, Ike says as much in his own memoirs.²⁰ It is equally clear that the plan, as it then stood, had been reviewed at that meeting. For Monty to intimate otherwise was deliberately misleading. Monty's claim is not credible, but it did allow him to give the impression that he was able to offer alternatives to the Prime Minister after just a few hours consideration.

Eisenhower returned to the United States on 1st January to discuss the upcoming campaign with General Marshall, (the U.S. Army Chief of Staff and Eisenhower's long-time mentor), and President Roosevelt, before arriving back in Britain on 14th January 1944. Montgomery, on Eisenhower's instructions, had in the meantime conducted several meetings with the COSSAC staff, certain that the draft invasion plan lacked scale.

¹⁷ Caddick- Adams, Sand & Steel pp 135-136

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Montgomery, B. L. (1959). *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery*. Signet Books p 191 (Emphasis added)

²⁰ Eisenhower, D. D. (1948). *Crusade in Europe*. William Heinemann p 238

Montgomery immediately made his thoughts on the COSSAC plan known to General Morgan and his staff. As he recorded in his diary for 3rd January 1944, "The more one examined it the more it became clear that the original plan was thoroughly bad."²¹ This was an unfair assessment which did COSSAC a disservice, and reflected poorly on Montgomery. Morgan's staff had been acutely aware that their projected invasion front was too small, but they were unable to earmark additional forces as they had no authority to do so. Upon the appointment of Eisenhower as Supreme Commander with Monty responsible for planning, all that changed.

Early on, Montgomery envisaged a five-division landing with at least two airborne divisions covering the forces landing on the Cotentin Peninsula. At one point, he considered a landing on the other side of the peninsula to facilitate the taking of the port of Cherbourg. This important target assigned to the Americans would have made the deep-water port immediately available to the Allies, improving their logistical capabilities.²² In a sign that Monty could change his mind if faced with indisputable facts, COSSAC was able to prove the unfeasibility of a landing in the St. Malo area and the idea was abandoned.²³

When discussing 'The Montgomery Plan', the methodology he usually adopted in planning his battles needs to be considered. In the notes for his 'Talks to Generals' of 13th January 1944, he set out his thinking and personal doctrine:

Time is short and there is much to be done; I have got to prepare the weapon. We must stop experimenting and prepare for battle. *I will lay down the general form; everyone must accept it and act on it*; all bellyaching will cease. You will give me your confidence. American doctrine is their own affair & General Bradley will act as he thinks most suitable.

The British and Canadian Armies will do as I say. No Criticism of Allies.²⁴

²¹ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 54/1

²² Cherbourg eventually fell on 27th June, see Bradham, R. (2012). *To The Last Man, The Battle for Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula and Brittany*. Frontline Books p 50

²³ D'Este, C. (2001). *Decision in Normandy*. Penguin p 63

²⁴ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 90/3 (Emphasis added).

In the same document he stated, “On my level I must keep clear of the detail; I have great responsibilities”, exercising what he called “personal” command, i.e., he would give verbal orders to his subordinates as needed.²⁵ The broad style of Montgomery’s generalship was to identify the tasks to be accomplished and leave the details to his head-quarters planning staff for them to work through with the subordinate staffs of the relevant corps and divisions.

There were exceptions to this broad rule, e.g., at El Alamein, Monty adopted a much more hands on approach with the initial planning. When it became obvious that the battle was not going exactly as envisaged, he took it upon himself to draw up a supplemental plan. Operation Supercharge was to remedy the slow progress made against enemy minefields and anti-tank guns and in this it succeeded. The change of offensive thrust days into the battle proved sufficient to force Rommel’s troops and what was left of his armour into a general retreat.²⁶ The example of Supercharge contradicts the widely held criticism that Montgomery was unable to alter plans or adapt to realities on the ground once battle was joined.

The idea of a paperless environment is regarded as a sign of modernity but Montgomery (as was Rommel, his opponent in both the Western Desert and Normandy), was an early advocate of such an approach to the issuing of orders and the settling of obstacles and disputes.²⁷ Monty clearly spelt out what he meant by his exercising of “Personal” command thus:

I issue no written orders; I read no paper; I expect everyone to act on my verbal orders, in battle or out of it.... I like Army Commanders to ring me up on the telephone direct, or come to see me and discuss their problems, whenever they like.²⁸

This does not mean that there are no written memoranda, notes or letters to be found in the archives originating from Montgomery. Actual written orders are

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ See Chalfont, A. (1976). *Montgomery of Alamein*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson pp 184-188

²⁷ Beaumont, R. A. (1979) Command Method: A Gap in Military Historiography. *Naval War College Review*, 31(3), 61–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44635570> (Last accessed 29/08/2022).

²⁸ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 90/3. (Underlining as the original).

relatively sparse but this preference for verbal and, if necessary, personal interaction with his commanders, backed up in the field by his aides, (sometimes referred to as 'Monty's spies' by the units they visited),²⁹ gave Monty the clarity and flexibility he relied upon to issue his orders. That same flexibility was, and continues to be, used by his detractors to question his claim that the campaign went to plan.

Had it not been for the work of COSSAC (which was absorbed into SHAEF once Eisenhower had taken overall charge) Montgomery and his various staffs would have stood little chance of coming up with a workable plan by the projected invasion date. One major issue remained which threatened the plan for an expanded invasion. The head of the American Navy, Admiral Ernest King refused to allocate additional landing vessels from those earmarked for use in the Pacific. Despite the British and American governments early agreement to concentrate their efforts primarily against Germany and Italy³⁰ (the 'Germany First' policy), before turning fully against Japan, the admiral had been reluctant to send additional shipping to Europe. Eisenhower, via his mentor General Marshall back in Washington, was able to insist on the additional landing craft. The date of the landings was postponed to June to allow for their delivery and the logistical build up for a five-division seaborne invasion.³¹

Presenting the Plan

The plan for which Montgomery bore ultimate responsibility was finalised during two presentations named Exercise Thunderclap. The first, in April 1944 was presented to the most senior personnel who were to be involved in the assault and follow up.³² Also present were representatives of the British and American Chiefs of Staff and for part of the exercise, Winston Churchill.

²⁹ Caddick-Adams, P. (2011). *Monty and Rommel, Parallel Lives*. Preface Publishing p 398

³⁰ See Bercuson, D. J., & Herwig, H. H. (2006). *One Christmas in Washington, Churchill and Roosevelt Forge the Grand Alliance*. Phoenix.

³¹ Neillands, R. (2002). *The Battle of Normandy 1944*. Cassell pp 61-62

³² Eisenhower, D. (1986). *Eisenhower At War*. Collins p 210

The presentation confirmed the invasion was to be spearheaded by five seaborne divisions with three airborne divisions covering the flanks. From east to west the landing beaches were:

Sword Beach – British 3rd Infantry Division near Ouistreham and Caen.

Juno Beach – Canadian 3rd Division at Courseulles.

Gold Beach – British 50th Division at Arromanches.

Omaha Beach – American 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions to the west of Bayeux.

Utah Beach – American 4th Infantry Division in the Carentan area.

Supporting the British just inland from Sword Beach would be the British 6th Airborne Division which would secure the flank of British 3rd Infantry Division by capturing key bridges to forestall a German counterattack. The Americans would be supported by two airborne divisions, the 82nd dropping around the village of Ste. Mere-Eglise to secure road junctions and the 101st which would land close behind Utah to control the causeways off the beach heading inland.

British 3rd Infantry, supported by tanks, was to quickly clear Sword Beach and advance swiftly inland for Caen (approximately 9 miles inland) capturing the city by the end of D-Day. On the face of it, Montgomery's intentions seemed unambiguous:

Armoured columns must penetrate deep inland, and quickly, on D Day; this will upset the enemy plans and tend to hold him off while we build up our strength. We must gain space rapidly and *peg out claims well inland*.³³

Monty had seemed clear in his intention to get to Caen on D-Day. British Second Army confirmed that intent in their draft plan issued 21st February 1944. Any grey area was removed in that army's final plan for D-Day issued between the two Thunderclap exercises, "I Corps will capture Caen."³⁴

³³ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 55/16 (emphasis added)

³⁴ Neillands, R. The Battle of Normandy p 51

Of all the operations connecting the overall Normandy Campaign, none has generated more comment by historians and those who oversaw the various Allied formations involved, either directly or indirectly. Why did Montgomery repeat this aim so often? What is it that made him insist during and after the campaign that the operation went largely according to plan?

Three things will have affected the way Montgomery focused on the planning for which he would be responsible:

- 1) The failed Dieppe Raid of 1942.³⁵ The early attempt by a large Allied force to capture and hold a French channel port ended in disaster, with the (mostly) Canadian troops and their supporting tanks trapped on the beach, many of them being made captive. Dieppe was a costly mistake, but it did at least provide vital experience which was utilised in the planning for Neptune (the actual D-Day landings) and Overlord.
- 2) The short-lived success of the Anzio landings in Italy of January 1944.³⁶ Having got ashore with the minimum of casualties, the U.S. General in charge took too long to expand the bridgehead before attempting a breakout, allowing German reinforcements to reach the area, boxing them in.
- 3) Had the Allied landings failed, the pressure from the American people to turn fully against Japan would have been irresistible, effectively ending the Germany First policy agreed between Britain and America in 1941/1942.³⁷

Montgomery had to show a clear intent to both the military and his political masters that Neptune would go beyond the successful landing of troops. The Allies *would* be able to get off the landing beaches. They *would* frustrate the enemy's attempts to stop them. The invasion *would not* fail. It had to be made clear from the very start that big things were expected of the troops and the officers leading them. Before any of that could happen, the Allies had to land successfully. This concern is highlighted

³⁵ See Atkin, R. (1980). *Dieppe 1942: The Jubilee Disaster*. Macmillan.

³⁶ See Zaloga, S. J. (2013). *Anzio 1944: The Beleaguered Beachhead*. Osprey.

³⁷ See Bercuson, D. J., & Herwig, H. H. *One Christmas in Washington*.

in Montgomery's private papers. In one handwritten draft for a briefing entitled 'Some Army Problems' from 20th March 1944, he begins by writing "We must get ashore", underlining it heavily.³⁸ This emphasis is kept in the typewritten version, again with the same underlining.³⁹

The Plan for Caen and the Need for Airfields

The rationale for the capture of Caen and the surrounding area was twofold. With its capture, the way would be cleared to better tank country away from the region's river valleys and bocage country. Once captured, it would free up more space for the construction of airfields for allied fighter-bombers. This would extend the range of such aircraft by removing the need to cross the English Channel in support of Allied troops.

For the Germans it was imperative they retained Caen as it was the principal road hub within Normandy. Without it they would find it almost impossible to reach the Anglo-Canadian forces in the east and the Americans to the west. For the Germans, this was *the* reason for keeping control of Caen and why they had to deploy so many of the all-important Panzer Divisions to hold it. This was also recognised by Monty and General Omar Bradley of the U.S. 1st Army, the latter understanding that Caen, captured or not, would be used by the Canadians and British to draw German reinforcements, especially armour, away from the American sector of the front. When the time came, U.S. forces would be able to breakout with less opposition from the more mobile panzers. Bradley acknowledged the clearly defined roll assigned to the British and Canadians, calling it "sacrificial", so that his forces would benefit.⁴⁰

Having been given responsibility for capturing Caen on D-Day, General Crocker of I Corps, under which 3rd British Infantry Division served, issued the following order: "3 Brit. Inf. Div. should, by the evening of D-Day have captured *or effectively masked Caen*, and be disposed in depth with brigade locations firmly established."⁴¹

³⁸ IWM, Montgomery Collections, Ancillary Collection 3, File 2, Montgomery Memoranda.

³⁹ PRO PREM 3/339/1

⁴⁰ Bradley, O. N. (1999). *A Soldier's Story*. Modern Library Paperback p 241

⁴¹ PRO, WO 171/258 (Emphasis added).

Montgomery may not have read any paper but his trusted Chief of Staff, Major General Freddie De Guingand did, and would have brought this not-so-subtle change to 3rd Infantry's orders to Montgomery attention. It is impossible that Monty would have remained ignorant of I Corps' order to their infantry division, but it *is* credible that Montgomery and his C-o-S (Chief-of-Staff) from what they knew of Sword Beach, recognised the pragmatism of the order.

Sword was the smallest of the five landing beaches, capable of landing just one brigade at a time instead of the two the other beaches could take. This meant that the assault on Caen could not commence until the German beach defences had been sufficiently cleared. Only then could the advance on the city commence, once the division's 185th Brigade had been landed and organised. Even before the division landed on D-Day, the chances of it even getting to Caen looked doubtful, resting as it did on the efforts of a single brigade and its supporting tanks.

The second Thunderclap presentation took place on 15th May 1944. Eisenhower delivered the opening address, concluding with the words, "I consider it to be the duty of anyone who sees a flaw in the plan not to hesitate to say so."⁴² The meeting was thorough. Monty gave his presentation, going into great detail, followed by the air and naval briefings. No one spoke up to question the overall plan or to question the reality of Caen's capture on D-Day.

D-Day – An Overview

The D-Day landings took place on Tuesday 6th June.⁴³ To understand what followed, it is important to understand the events of that day, especially around the city of Caen. Space precludes an in-depth examination of the invasion itself but there are scores of books dedicated to the day.⁴⁴

⁴² Caddick-Adams, P. *Sand & Steel* p 247.

⁴³ Eisenhower, D.D. *Crusade* p 275

⁴⁴ See, for example, Ambrose, S. E. (2002). *D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Battle for the Normandy Beaches*. Pocket Books & Ryan, C. (1999). *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944*. Wordsworth Editions.

The invasion was a success but not everything went smoothly. The Americans got ashore relatively easily at Utah Beach but down the coast on Omaha the situation was considerably worse. The lead regiments of the 29th and 1st Infantry Divisions were badly handled by the German beach defences before gradually, order was restored, leadership re-established, and the men were able to clear the beach.

For the British 50th Division, the landing on Gold Beach was successful but punctuated by heavy fighting around Port en Bessin. Bayeux was not reached until the next day. Juno Beach saw fierce fighting for the Canadian 3rd Division which also experienced a counterattack by the 21st Panzer Division. Already on the first day, German armour had been diverted to the eastern part of the bridgehead as Montgomery intended.

On Sword Beach, 3rd British Infantry Division was held up by stronger than expected German defences, most notably two strongpoints codenamed Morris and Hillman. The latter was especially difficult to overrun, significantly delaying the forming up of the division's 185th Brigade and their supporting tanks for their attempt on Caen. The tanks were so delayed getting off the beach that the commander of the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI) decided to start the advance on Caen alone, well after midday.⁴⁵ The rest of the brigade managed to eventually catch up, but the reality of the Division's advance is that it was made by a single battalion up front with five troops of tanks (each troop contained 4 tanks), flanked by a covering battalion. The actual numbers leading the advance on Caen were even worse, approximately one infantry company and one troop of tanks. When the 9th Support Brigade and its accompanying armour came ashore at approximately 13:00, they were met by both Generals Crocker and Rennie (commanders of I Corps and 3rd British Inf. Div. respectively). The Brigade was ordered to get to Pegasus Bridge to relieve part of 6th Airborne instead of supporting the forces heading for Caen.⁴⁶ The advance was stopped by a counterattack by 21st Panzer Division advancing from the city. The Germans lost several tanks but managed to reach the sea between Sword and Juno

⁴⁵ Delaforce, P. (1995). *Monty's Ironsides, from the Normandy Beaches to Bremen with the 3rd Division*. Chancellor Press p 41

⁴⁶ Delaforce, P. *Monty's Ironsides* p 47

beaches at Luc sur Mer. This is the closest the Germans got to dividing the beachheads before being forced back towards Caen.⁴⁷

The landing by British 6th Airborne were successful, the bridges assigned to them being captured intact with the resulting German counterattacks being driven back. This area would be used as the start point for Operation Goodwood in July. The American 82nd Airborne at Ste. Mere Eglise suffered a mis-drop but the important road hub and town were secured. The U.S. 101st Airborne suffered a similar mis-drop and it was some days before those blown furthest off course were able to rendezvous with the division, Despite this, the division still succeeded in securing the causeways off Utah beach.

Neptune ended broadly in success for the Allies. Setbacks at Omaha and Juno were overcome. German armour was prevented from exploiting their advance to the sea between Sword and Juno whilst Caen, for the moment, was masked.

Conclusion

The delays caused by the fortifications on Sword Beach were enough to throw the advance of 3rd British Infantry Division on Caen off schedule. It is clear from the initial planning for D-Day that this had been anticipated by I Corps and was reflected in their orders to 3rd British Inf. Division. It is equally clear that Montgomery (through his C-o-S, General de Guingand) would have been aware of I Corps' contingency planning. SHAEF (and by extension General Eisenhower and his staff) must at least have been aware of such a contingency, even if they failed to appreciate the effects this would have on Caen's capture.

This chapter has shown how the plans for Caen, although seemingly definitive, were already open to a degree of interpretation, particularly by the Corps and Division assigned to its capture. This unacknowledged flexibility went unmentioned by Montgomery during the Thunderclap presentations and would create mistrust and exacerbate misunderstandings between Monty and his critics within SHAEF. The

⁴⁷ Ford, K. (2010). *D-Day 1944, Sword Beach & the British Airborne Landings*. Osprey p 13

consequences this lack of clarity would have on the early stages of the campaign will be explored further in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two – Airfields, Airmen and Epsom

This chapter will examine the progress of the Normandy Campaign in the days immediately following D-Day and the way Allied aircraft were already making their presence felt in support of troops on the ground. The impact Allied airpower had on approaching German reinforcements will also be addressed. This will test the concerns of senior Allied airmen surrounding the lack of available forward airfields and in so doing, Montgomery's true pre-invasion expectations regarding airfields will be revealed.

The experiences of Allied aircrew and how they viewed the way they operated at that stage of the campaign will be briefly examined, as will their attitudes to the way their efforts were viewed by Montgomery. Finally, Monty's initial efforts to exploit early opportunities to capture Caen and the reasons they failed will also be explored. This will show why concerns regarding airfields, although important, were not vital to the early prosecution of the campaign. It will also show that despite his failure to take Eisenhower and his deputy into his confidence, Caen served its purpose within the wider campaign before its capture, as he had anticipated.

Events Post D-Day

By Thursday, 8th June (D+2), Bayeux had been liberated by 50th British Division but Caen was still out of reach. As the Canadian 3rd Division consolidated and moved out from Juno Beach, they had come under attack by leading elements of the 12th SS Hitlerjugend Division, one of the most fanatical of the approaching panzer divisions. The Canadians were able to repulse this counterattack, but it would not be the last time the Canadians would encounter 12th SS.

The following day, the Wehrmacht's premier panzer division, Panzer Lehr, arrived at Tilly-sur-Seulles, a little to the south of Bayeux.¹ Already, the plan to pull German armour towards the Anglo-Canadian sector was working as Montgomery intended.

¹ Man, J. (1994). *The Penguin Atlas of D-Day and the Normandy Campaign*. Viking p 73

The Early Impact of Allied Air Power

It is not uncommon to see panzer divisions being referred to as 'Elite'. In the case of Panzer Lehr the sobriquet was deserved. Formed in 1943 from training and demonstration units of the Wehrmacht's armoured training schools, it was an experienced, well-equipped division with many veterans amongst its ranks. At the time of Normandy, the division was led by General Fritz Bayerlein, Rommel's Chief of Staff in North Africa. From his time with Rommel, Bayerlein had come to understand the realities of operating under conditions of Allied air superiority, unlike many of his peers.

Panzer Lehr's march to the front illustrated those realities perfectly. By the time it arrived, allied fighter-bombers had destroyed 130 trucks, approximately 80 half-tracks and self-propelled guns and disabled five of its tanks.² Although there is some dispute as to whether the figure regarding the half-tracks refers to the entire month of June 1944 or just the approach march to the front,³ those were serious losses for any division which had yet to make ground contact with the enemy. The efforts of patrolling fighter-bombers over the German rear echelon caused significant problems with the supply of fuel and ammunition. Infantry units fared worse than the reinforcing panzer divisions due to their reliance on horse drawn transport and general lack of manoeuvrability.⁴ Paucity of air support was never an issue for the Allies.

During the early stages of the invasion, Allied aircraft were able to provide effective support to ground troops without forward airstrips being established in Normandy. The example of Panzer Lehr's difficult journey to the front, whilst one of the most widely known examples of the effects of Allied aircraft during this time, was reproduced in scores of different encounters all along the front line and beyond.⁵ Combined, they took a steady toll on German morale which cumulatively, degraded

² Beevor, A. (2010). *D-Day, The Battle for Normandy*. Penguin p 176

³ *ibid*

⁴ Napier, S. (2015). *The Armoured Campaign in Normandy, June-August 1944*. Spellmount p 119

⁵ See, for example, the delays caused by Allied aircraft to 2nd Panzer division, 9th June 1944. Isby, D. C. (Ed.). (2016). *Fighting in Normandy, The German Army from D-Day to Villers Bocage*. Frontline Books pp 96-97

the operational ability of the German army and its deployment. The destruction of Panzer Group West's HQ near Caen during a double airstrike on 10th June was further example of the dominance of Allied aircraft over the battlefield.⁶ Despite this obvious supremacy, senior airmen continued to argue for the capture of ground in a manner which would have surprised their German counterparts who were already blaming the presence of Allied aircraft for much of their failure to repulse the invaders.

Airfields and Airmen

The most vocal of the airmen pushing for the capture of ground suitable for airfields was Eisenhower's deputy, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder. His fixation with the need for aircraft to be based permanently in Normandy was out of all proportion to its actual requirement at that point. The affect Allied air support was having on the battlefield was already significant. It cannot be denied that from the perspective of the Allied Air Forces, the pre-invasion Air Plan had, by the first week, fallen behind schedule. Even so, the Allies continued to receive effective air cover.

Tedder's absolute commitment to furthering both the Allied cause and that of the Air Forces which would facilitate that cause is beyond doubt: "If our strongest card, overwhelming air-power, was to be played effectively and promptly, we had to have airfields in France."⁷ This overriding desire to see permanent airstrips established in Normandy is understandable, but it came to obscure his view of the campaign as events unfolded, adding to his hostility towards Montgomery. The Air Marshal saw an objective (the building of airfields), but lacked the realisation that for the moment, Air Plan or not, they were not required in the numbers envisaged. That was Tedder's failing, not Monty's but it is clear that Montgomery could and should have explained his thinking early on in the campaign. It is entirely possible that Tedder would have remained hostile to Montgomery but there would have been no mistaking the latter's reasoning.

⁶ Terraine, J. (1997). *The Right of the Line*. Wordsworth Editions p 636

⁷ Tedder, 1966, as cited by Terraine, J, *The Right of the Line* p 614

The truth is that airfields had been established very early on the continent. The American IX Tactical Air Command's chief, General Pete Quesada, landed on just such an airstrip behind Utah Beach on Thursday 8th June, two days after the invasion.⁸ On the same day, Spitfires of the RAF's 144 Wing landed on a similar airstrip at St. Croix-sur-Mer, just behind the British sector of the front near Gold Beach.⁹ Other airstrips such as the one first used by Typhoon fighter-bombers of 123 Wing on 14th June at Plumetot, also near Gold Beach, followed as soon as the engineers could establish them.¹⁰ Those early airstrips were primarily used to re-arm and re-fuel aircraft between sorties before they returned across the Channel at the end of the day. The airfields, in the numbers they existed in the early stages of the campaign, sufficed.

Airfields – Matching Plans to Reality

It is clear from the wording of Montgomery's paper to his commanders, 'Some Army Problems' dated 20th March 1944, that he recognised the importance of establishing airfields:

As we secure airfields, and good areas for making airfields, so we get increased air support, and so everything becomes easier. It is very important that the area to the S.E. of Caen should be secured *as early as Second Army can manage*.¹¹

The expectations lodged in the minds of Tedder, Eisenhower and other senior members of SHAEF by Montgomery's Thunderclap presentations of April and May 1944 are not difficult to understand. The dichotomy created by Monty's confident pre-invasion declarations of intent were bound to cause misunderstandings between him and his critics, which they did. Worse still, they were to cause a loss of confidence (although to what degree this loss of confidence truly amounted to is debatable), which would grow as the campaign developed.

⁸ Holland, J. (2019). *Normandy '44, D-Day and the Battle for France*. Bantam Press p 255

⁹ Johnson, J. E. (1956). *Wing Leader*. Chatto & Windus p 225

¹⁰ Scott, D. (1982). *Typhoon Pilot*. Leo Cooper p 115

¹¹ PRO, PREM 3/339/1 (Emphasis added).

The words “as early as Second Army can manage” was clearly open to interpretation.¹² Montgomery’s long standing and much respected Chief of Staff, Major General Francis de Guingand, was adamant, both during and after the war that no definite timetable had been given to the airmen regarding capturing ground for airfields. In his memoirs he wrote:

Now I am quite certain that no promises were made about Caen and these airfield sites. Many times during meetings I was pressed to say we would get them by a certain day, but I would never make such promises.¹³

General de Guingand was also adamant that he stressed to the RAF (supported, he insisted, by minutes taken during those meetings), that they were not to rely on suitable ground being taken early in the campaign, that even if airfields were established, not all of them would be safe to use, given their proximity to German guns.¹⁴ The evidence indicates (it cannot be stated more conclusively than this until such time as definitive written proof is discovered) that privately, Montgomery thought the Air Forces could operate adequately from the UK during the early stages of the campaign without the need for airstrips in Normandy.¹⁵

Given what is definitively known, the answer to what Montgomery (and General’s Dempsey and Crocker, the commanders of British 2nd Army and British I Corps respectively) truly thought possible runs approximately thus: Having stressed the need for aggressive action to capture Caen on D-Day, British 3rd Infantry Division would do its utmost to clear Sword Beach and advance on Caen before the Germans could stop them. If events on the day were to prevent Caen’s capture, then Anglo-Canadian units would push as far inland as possible and form a bulwark against German attempts to roll up the Allied beachheads. General Bradley’s 1st American Army would also push as far inland as possible, again to act as a buffer against German counterattacks, allowing room for follow on forces and supplies to be landed.

¹² PRO, PREM 3/339/1

¹³ de Guingand, F. (1947). *Operation Victory*. Hodder and Stoughton p 393

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ See, for example, Montgomery in Europe 1943-1945, Success or Failure? p 80

Monty's intentions are clearly spelt out in his document 'Some Army Problems' (mentioned above) and refined in his communication dated 15th April 1944 to General's Dempsey and Bradley. Point 2 of the document states:

The best way to interfere with the enemy concentrations and counter-measures will be to push forward fairly powerful armoured-force thrusts on the afternoon of D Day.... The whole effect of such aggressive tactics would be to retain the initiative ourselves and to cause alarm in the minds of the enemy.¹⁶

In the event, this is precisely what happened on D-Day and although Caen was not captured, enough ground was "pegged out".¹⁷ The Germans were prevented from taking any effective action to push the Allies back into the sea on D-Day whilst sufficient territory was taken to allow the bridgehead to be expanded incrementally over the coming days. The truth is that little more could realistically have been achieved by the airborne and amphibious assault forces on the day.

Airmen and Attitudes

Disenchantment with Montgomery on the part of Allied, and particularly British and Commonwealth airmen, was nothing new. What was new was the degree to which that disenchantment spilled over into thinly veiled, at times outright hostility.

Much of that resentment had its origins from events in North Africa where Monty scored his famous victory with Eighth Army over Rommel. At first glance this is a surprising turn of events. When Montgomery first arrived in the desert, one of his first actions was to move his own HQ next to that of the Desert Air Force's, the better to liaise with each other.¹⁸ This act was recognition of the important part played by the Desert Air Force (a branch of the RAF stationed in North Africa, frequently shortened to the acronym DAF). Had it not been for the Desert Air Force hitting Rommel's

¹⁶ PRO, PREM 3/339/1

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Moorehead, A. (1974). *Montgomery*. New English Library p 121

supply lines during Allied reverses in the desert in 1941/42, Eighth Army would have been pushed out of Egypt.¹⁹

The victory at El Alamein would not have been achieved without the able support of the DAF. Working relationships between Montgomery and its commander, Air Vice Marshal Coningham were initially very good. Following his first meeting with Montgomery in Egypt on 16th August 1942, Coningham wrote to his deputy:

I have now been with the Army in this desert for over a year and have seen three Army Commanders and two Corps Commanders come and go, but we have a man, a great soldier if I am any judge, and we will go all the way with him.²⁰

Coningham and Tedder (the former's superior) thought they had in Montgomery a person who would value the Air Force and the support it would give to the army. In this they were correct but as the campaign in North Africa evolved and Montgomery's fame grew through media exposure, both men became resentful. The perceived lack of public acknowledgement given by Monty to the role the DAF played in his victory was interpreted as a professional slight.²¹

This breakdown of communication between Montgomery and Coningham was due in part to the former having to break camp and follow the fighting more closely as the Allies closed in on the Axis powers in Tunisia. This literal separation of the two headquarters inevitably led to misunderstandings which were exacerbated by Monty's tendency to sometimes sound highhanded in verbal and written communications. The separation of their respective HQ's would contribute to similar issues in Normandy.

¹⁹ See Delve, K. (2017). *The Desert Air Force in World War II*. Pen & Sword Military.

²⁰ Orange, V. (1992) Coningham, *A Biography of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham*. Centre for Air Force History edition, p 106.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160110155902/http://newpreview.afnews.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-100525-086.pdf> (Last accessed 31/08/2022).

²¹ Wilmot, C. (1952). *The Struggle for Europe* (1977 ed.) Wordsworth Editions pp 340-341

By the end of the campaign in North Africa and the beginning of the Italian, Tedder, Coningham (and to a lesser extent, Harry Broadhurst, Coningham's successor), were wary of Montgomery. They brought that wariness with them to Normandy, making them more inclined to question the conduct of the battle and their role within it.

These negative attitudes to Montgomery and the Army in general were, on occasion, passed on to less senior airmen. For example, Wing Commander Desmond Scott, head of 123 Typhoon Wing believed Montgomery had not sufficiently acknowledged the Allied Air Forces which had contributed to Monty's own fame and success. Scott was also of the opinion that many in the Army regarded aircraft and by default, airmen, to be almost expendable.²² This is in contrast to Wing Commander 'Johnnie' Johnson who had been present at Montgomery's presentation of the plan for Overlord in April 1944. He judged the campaign to have been largely successful although he acknowledged that the failure to take Caen earlier was the cause of some allied disunity.²³

It is worth noting that Scott and Johnson's squadrons flew two largely different mission profiles. The Typhoon's of 123 Wing were primarily interdiction aircraft, their sorties conducted at very low level to hit their targets. This exposed them to increased levels of effective ground fire which took a heavy toll on Scott's pilots. The Spitfire's of Johnson's wing, whilst they occasionally flew against such targets, were less effective in that role. As such, their missions were mostly concerned with keeping the German Air Force away from the battlefield. Losses sustained by dedicated ground attack squadrons were likely to have made their commanding officers more inclined to criticise Army strategy.

Due to the efforts of the Allied Air Forces in the run up to D-Day, the quality of Luftwaffe pilots was significantly poorer than their Allied opponents.²⁴ This made missions assigned to aircraft such as Johnson's Spitfires comparatively less

²² Scott, Typhoon Pilot pp 112-113

²³ Johnson, Wing Leader p 257.

²⁴ For an example of how the Luftwaffe was degraded prior to D-Day, see Yenne, B. (2014). *Big Week, Six Days that Changed the Course of World War Two*. Berkley Publishing Group.

hazardous than those handled by the Typhoons. It is not hard to understand why pilots assigned to such divergent missions differed in their views of the campaign and the generals fighting it, given the different (though still not inconsiderable) risks they faced in their primary missions. For all that, Allied armies rarely wanted for effective aircover regardless of the number of forward airstrips available.

Early Attempts To Take Caen

By D+1 it was obvious that for the moment, Caen was to remain uncaptured. On 8th June, Montgomery admitted as much to his friend, Major-General F.E.W. Simpson:

The Germans are doing everything they can to hold on to Caen. I have decided not to have a lot of casualties by butting up against the place; so I have ordered Second Army to keep up a good pressure on Caen and to make its main effort towards Villers Bocage and Evrecy and thence S.E. to Falaise.²⁵

That same day, Montgomery messaged General Eisenhower advising that German counterattacks from Caen had been repulsed and that he was organising a thrust towards the villages mentioned above to Simpson.²⁶ Montgomery had been obliged by events on the ground to alter the timeline of his plan but it remained broadly in place. This was an early demonstration of his flexibility when faced with realities on the battlefield, but his overall intentions remained. The city of Caen would still be used as the bait to draw German reinforcements away from the American sector. Airfields could wait.

Montgomery had communicated his intentions to Ike and Simpson after a fresh attempt by 3rd (British) Infantry Division to reach Caen had been thwarted by 21st Panzer Division, their opponents on D-Day, near the fortified village of Lebisey on 7th and 8th June.²⁷ A further attempt by British XXX Corps, using 50th Division and supporting armour to reach Caen in a flanking attack via the village of Tilly-sur-

²⁵ IWM, Simpson Papers.

²⁶ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 110/3

²⁷ Neillands, R. (2002). The Battle of Normandy 1944. Cassell p 99

Seulles was also halted by Panzer Lehr on 10th June.²⁸ The famous 'Desert Rats' of 7th Armoured Division did no better in the same action.

In an attempt to get behind Panzer Lehr through a gap identified in the German lines, 7th Armoured was ordered on 11th June to bypass Tilly.²⁹ Having done so they were to push on towards the town of Villers-Bocage. From there they could advance towards Caen, relieving pressure on 3rd Canadian Division who were facing 12th SS Panzer as they also made for the city. American successes around the nearby village of Caumont could also be exploited, splitting the German defences.

In the event, 7th Armoured did reach Villers Bocage on 13th June, managing in the process to take the important high ground of Point 213 beyond. They got no further. A failure to correctly utilise a reconnaissance force specifically attached to the division was to have serious consequences.³⁰ The gap in the German lines was not as great as thought, added to which a detachment of Tiger tanks had observed the British armour entering Villers Bocage. In a short action the Tigers entered the town and destroyed the British advanced guard before being knocked out themselves. The tanks and infantry on point 213 were also heavily attacked, the survivors being ordered to withdraw. The next day, General Erskine, commander of 7th Armoured, withdrew the entire division.

There can be no disguising the inadequate performance of 7th Armoured Division during the battle. Its abject failure to use the reconnaissance force in the manner intended is especially difficult to understand, as is the handling of 22nd Armoured Brigade (the formation disabled at Villers Bocage). The actions of the Tigers and their commander, Michael Wittmann achieved almost mythical status at the time and continue to do so to this day.

²⁸ Williams, E. R. (2014). *50 Div In Normandy: A Critical Analysis Of The British 50th (Northumbrian) Division On D-Day And In The Battle Of Normandy*. Pickle Partners Publishing pp 77-78

²⁹ Neillands, Normandy 1944 p 102

³⁰ Beevor, A. (2010). *D-Day, The Battle for Normandy*. Penguin p 189

All the above was used by Montgomery's detractors as proof of his poor judgement in selecting 7th Armoured for inclusion in the campaign.³¹ The British and Canadian Armies were criticised as being inadequately prepared for Normandy and being tactically inferior to their German counterparts, criticisms more widely heard after Villers Bocage. These misconceptions and half-truths still hold currency today.³² Whilst poorly handled, 7th Armoured and 50th Divisions were not controlled by Montgomery but by Lt-General G Bucknall of XXX Corps who in turn came under General Miles Dempsey, C-in-C of British Second Army. The decision to cease direct assaults on Caen was Montgomery's but the planning for the enveloping flanking moves against the city was Dempsey's.³³ The events at Tilly-sur-Seulles, Villers Bocage and the later Operation Epsom were the results of 2nd Army's planning.

These battles achieved Montgomery's wider aim of attracting German armoured reinforcements to the Caen sector away from the American area of operations. As Villers Bocage wound down, elements of a fresh armoured division, 2nd Panzer, were identified, having been pulled into the battle piecemeal instead of being used as part of a concentrated counterattack.³⁴

Epsom & More Airfield Issues

Montgomery had still not given up on the idea of flanking Caen. The initial proposal was for a pincer movement based on thrusts from the Orne and along the right wing towards the Odon River crossings. This plan was altered after General O'Connor, head of VIII Corps voiced his doubts to Lt-General Dempsey regarding the lack of space in the Orne area, making the concentration of attacking forces extremely difficult.³⁵ Dempsey was persuaded by the argument and informed Montgomery that he was going to move VIII Corps further towards the Odon, turning the operation (now named Epsom) into a single thrust attack. Support for Epsom would be

³¹ Major General Roberts, commander of 11th Armoured Division, considered Monty's decision to use the Desert Rats in Normandy an error of judgement on Monty's part as they were worn down by the campaigns in North Africa and Italy. Delaforce, P. (2003). *Churchill's Desert Rats, From Normandy to Berlin with the 7th Armoured Division*. Sutton Publishing p 11

³² See D'Este, C. (2001). *Decision in Normandy*. Penguin, in particular chapter 16, 'The Price of Caution'

³³ Beevor, D-Day p 188

³⁴ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 59/1

³⁵ Confirmed by Montgomery. IWM, Montgomery Papers, Part I, BLM 126/5

provided by I Corps, still in the vicinity of the Orne after its D-Day actions, distracting German forces from the main axis of advance. Once again, Montgomery demonstrated a willingness to listen to reasonable arguments, accepting changes to his desired intentions when it served the broad intentions of the overall campaign. Epsom also had another role, that of preventing the Germans from reinforcing the U.S. First Army area with units from the British sector, thus helping the Americans as they fought to capture the port of Cherbourg.

Originally intended to commence on 23rd June, Epsom was delayed until the 26th due to the Great Storm in the English Channel which lasted for three days.³⁶ The summer storm, the worst for sixty years, severely delayed the Allied build-up of men, supplies and vehicles, in addition to wrecking the floating Mulberry Harbour in the American lodgement area.³⁷ The weather was to remain poor over the course of Epsom and supporting operations. Montgomery, in a letter dated 20th June to Simpson back at the War Office in London, described the weather as “The very devil”, voicing his concerns about the effects it was having on the build-up of reinforcements and supplies.³⁸ Monty returned to those concerns again in another letter to Simpson dated 23rd June, writing that “The enemy has had a great stroke of luck in the bad weather. It has saved him.”³⁹

The weather cleared sufficiently for Epsom to be launched on 26th June, although it remained poor enough over England to prevent bombers allocated to support the opening moves of the operation from taking off. Those aircraft would have been too large for forward airstrips to handle, but fighter-bombers of the RAF’s 83rd Group were by now based in Normandy and were able to provide support, as were warships offshore.⁴⁰

A detailed examination of Epsom is not necessary, but in brief the facts are these: 15th Scottish Division managed to reach the Odon River on day one, capturing a

³⁶ Clark, L. (2004). *Operation Epsom*. Sutton Publishing p 21

³⁷ Barr, N. (2017). *Eisenhower's Armies, The American-British Alliance During World War II*. Pegasus Books p 373

³⁸ IWM, Simpson Papers

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ Napier, *The Armoured Campaign* p 148

crossing suitable for tanks. The next day, further units of VIII Corps crossed the Odon at Buron, heading for the high ground of Hill 112 approximately 9 miles from the centre of Caen. Over the course of the next three days, Hill 112 was captured, and 11th Armoured Division had established itself over the Odon. The powerful II SS Panzer Corps, comprising of the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions (newly arrived from the Eastern Front) was ordered to counterattack VIII Corps which it did without success on 29th June. Having received ULTRA intelligence reports that further attacks could be expected by II SS Panzer Corps, General O'Connor, with the support of General Dempsey, withdrew from Hill 112 concerned it was too exposed to defend.⁴¹ On 1st July, Montgomery ordered Epsom be closed down since there was no immediate prospect of VIII Corps getting to Caen as things stood.

Whilst Epsom was still being fought, Winston Churchill wrote to Tedder enquiring as to how many airfields were in operation in Normandy. Tedder replied there were thirty-five fighter and fighter-bomber squadrons operating full time on the continent flying out of thirteen airfields (five in the British sector, eight in the American). In fact, fifteen airfields had been built but, as General de Guingand had warned, those built close to the front line were too hazardous to use, leading to the closure of two of them. According to the original Air Plan, the Allies had estimated they would have approximately eighty such squadrons based in Normandy by the end of June.⁴²

Tedder was correct in one sense; the construction of airfields was unarguably behind schedule when compared with pre-invasion expectations. What is equally beyond doubt is that the Germans were obliged by Hitler to fight the campaign against all logical reason.⁴³ Whereas in North Africa and Italy the Germans had conducted a steady fighting withdrawal, utilising naturally occurring features such as rivers and mountains on which to form defensive lines, the Fuhrer had forbidden such a strategy in Normandy. This in turn had nullified the need for the number of airfields anticipated in pre-invasion plans at this stage of the campaign. It was the airmen

⁴¹ ULTRA was the codename given to the codebreakers based at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire. So secret was their work that the information gained by Bletchley Park was considered was designated Ultra Secret. See Lewin, R. (1980). *Ultra Goes to War, The Secret Story*. Arrow Books.

⁴² Holland, Normandy '44 pp 367-368

⁴³ Buckley, J. (2004). *British Armour in the Normandy Campaign 1944*. Frank Cass p 211

who consistently demonstrated the sort of inflexibility they accused Montgomery of by repeatedly failing to recognise this fact.

During a meeting on 17th June with Rommel and his immediate superior, von Rundstedt, Hitler had again rejected proposals to pull back out of range of the guns of the Allied fleet and to form a defensive line along the river Somme. In addition to that, the two Field Marshals also asked to be allowed to abandon parts of the South of France and reinforce the 7th Army with divisions taken from the Pas de Calais. Whilst such measures would only have delayed the inevitable, they would have made more sense than Hitler's 'No Retreat' orders. Their proposals were predictably denied.⁴⁴

Hitler's constant refusal to consider realistic military doctrine was nothing new. Ever since his infamous 'No Retreat' order of December 1941 to Army Group Centre in Russia, countless numbers of men had been lost by the constant reiteration of similar orders.⁴⁵ That he would once more confound military logic, preventing his generals from exercising their best judgement, should not have surprised the Allies but it did, and would continue to do so throughout the last 11 months of the war.⁴⁶

During the first weeks of the invasion, it became clear that the Germans were not going to fight the campaign as the Allies had expected. Tedder and Coningham's insistence that Montgomery and the Army were not only being too cautious but were endangering air cover over the battlefield became increasingly misplaced. Until such time as the German military was routed, the number of airfields available to the tactical air forces in Normandy, supplemented by those in Southern England, would suffice. Montgomery's pre-invasion statement that good areas would be secured for airfields "as early as Second Army can manage", would increasingly be proven.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Trigg, J. (2020). *D-Day Through German Eyes, How the Wehrmacht Lost France*. Amberley Publishing pp 185-186

⁴⁵ See Seaton, A. (1971). *The Battle for Moscow, 1941-42*. Hart-Davis for an account of how Hitler first came to use the 'No Retreat' doctrine.

⁴⁶ The Ardennes counteroffensive (The Battle of the Bulge), of December 1944 - January 1945 is another example of Hitler's ability to ignore reality, obliging his generals to fight a campaign with no prospect of success.. See Caddick-Adams, P. (2015). *Snow & Steel, The Battle of the Bulge 1944-45*. Arrow Books

⁴⁷ PRO, PREM 3/339/1

The number of Allied airfields would grow exponentially as the bridgehead increased in size prior to the breakout and beyond.

Conclusion

Despite the failure to capture Caen as outlined in the Thunderclap presentations, Montgomery was able to demonstrate a degree of flexibility in his approach to the capture of the city. In doing so he continued to attract reinforcing panzer divisions to the Anglo-Canadian sector of the bridgehead, away from the American beachhead. The conclusion must therefore be that Caen, captured or not, was serving Montgomery's earlier stated purpose of drawing the bulk of German armour on to 21st Army Group's sector, away from the Americans. The plan, for which Montgomery was responsible, was largely working *as he intended*.

It can also be concluded that the senior air contingent in SHAEF had themselves demonstrated inflexibility in matching their demands and expectations to the realities of the campaign. By ignoring the way the Germans were conducting the defence of Normandy, their intransigence would threaten Allied unity. This chapter shows that the lack of projected airfields at this stage of the campaign did not hinder Allied progress.

Chapter three will examine the capture of Caen and how the campaign had been fought to that point, depriving the Germans of the opportunity to launch their own concerted counterattack. Also to be examined is the Allied way of fighting the Germans in Normandy, focusing on whether it was the most effective use of resources and available manpower. This is important as it reflects in part on Montgomery's legacy as the General in overall command of the Normandy campaign. It also goes some way to addressing criticisms made against him and the Anglo-Canadians of hesitancy during the campaign.

Chapter Three – Phase Lines, Caen and Doctrine

This chapter will examine the aftermath of Operation Epsom and the effect it had on the taking of Caen in July 1944. Whether Eisenhower and his staff truly understood Montgomery's pre-invasion intentions as the campaign developed will also be considered. This is important as it is this lack of clarity between senior Allied Commanders which has influenced the way historians have come to gauge Montgomery's conduct of the campaign and is central to the way the battle has come to be understood.

A clear understanding of the battles on the Caen front and how the city came to be taken as part of the wider Allied prosecution of the campaign is vital. Without such clarity and an understanding of Allied doctrine it is impossible to judge whether criticism of Monty and 21st Army Group by observers at the time and post war are valid. The chapter will consider briefly the manner in which the German Armed Forces fought their campaign. This will prove that Montgomery and the Allies fought the Germans effectively, thus enabling the American breakout during Operation Cobra which had always been Monty's intention.

Panzer Distribution Post Epsom

By the time Epsom was launched, the majority of reinforcing German armour was either facing the Anglo-Canadians or were en route to that sector of the front. Even as Epsom was being fought, the newly arrived II SS Panzer Corps was introduced, piecemeal to the battlefield in a bid to stop British VIII Corps. By the end of June, eight Panzer divisions (containing approximately 700 tanks) had been identified in the Caen area.¹ Just 140 faced the Americans.² Crucially, the Germans had also been prevented from gathering their armoured divisions into one powerful formation. Instead, they were obliged to use small detachments of tanks for local counterattacks or to act as mobile pillboxes with which to hold up the advancing allies on both the British and American fronts.

¹ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 59/1

² Lamb, R. (1987). *Montgomery in Europe 1943-45, Success or Failure?* Buchan & Enright p 116

There is no doubt that such a tactic had successfully forestalled major Allied advances all along the front, but it also prevented a concentrated counterattack. In the aftermath of Epsom, the Germans had been forced to abandon ideas for such a riposte designed to reach the coast and split the allied armies apart.³ Once those small detachments of German armour were used up, they had nothing left with which to replace them.

Changing Allied Perceptions of Monty's Plan

One of Montgomery's sternest critics, Martin Blumenson, wrote of Epsom and its aftermath:

Whatever Montgomery's intent which was obviously not clear to other Allied commanders at the time - the British seemed to be stalled before Caen. Denied access to the desirable terrain east of Caen and to the main approaches to the Seine and Paris, the Allies looked to General Bradley's U.S. First Army for operational progress.⁴

It is difficult to understand how this passage came to be written, much less widely believed. It has come to be seen as further evidence that Montgomery hid his true intentions regarding the attraction of German armoured reinforcements to the Anglo-Canadian front around Caen and of his inability to adapt his plan to events. It had never been Montgomery's intention to begin the Allied breakout from the Caen sector towards Paris, but it had been part of the supplanted COSSAC plan.⁵ COSSAC's intentions regarding Caen and the eventual Allied breakout played no part in Montgomery's thinking. The breakout, when it came, was always to commence in the American sector.

³ Napier, S. (2015). *The Armoured Campaign in Normandy, June-August 1944*. Spellmount p 168

⁴ Blumenson, M. (1993). *Breakout and Pursuit*. Centre of Military History, U.S. Army p 16

⁵ Hamilton, N. (1989). *Monty, Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944*. Hamish Hamilton pp 497-498

General Bradley, commander of First U.S. Army was clear about the primary mission assigned to British and Canadian forces prior to the invasion.⁶ He was aware, as was Eisenhower, that the bulk of the panzer divisions were to be drawn away from the US sector to allow the Americans a greater chance of success when it came to their breakout. The truth regarding the reality of his intentions must be clearly stated; Epsom was a success, fitting as it did within Montgomery's wider plan for the prosecution of the campaign.

In the traditional sense it could be argued that Epsom was a failure in that the territory captured was, from an outsider's point of view, disappointingly small. Such an appreciation is to completely miss Montgomery's approach to Overlord. Part of the issue went back to the earlier Thunderclap presentation of April 1944. The map used to illustrate the anticipated progress of the Allies in France contained a series of phase lines drawn upon it.⁷ Phase lines can be found on almost any military planning map, highlighting not just the desired timeframe for territorial gains but acting also as a tool to aide logisticians in planning for coming operations. In this case, Montgomery had asked his assistant, Lt.-Colonel Kit Dawnay to draw them onto the map shortly before the presentation, starting with the furthestmost line signifying D+ 90, just short of Paris. When asked where to place the intervening phase lines, Monty replied that it didn't matter, so Dawnay drew them approximately equidistant from each other. Dawnay explained the phase lines thus:

In his opinion (Monty's), it was not of any importance where he would be groundwise between D plus 1 and D plus 90, because he felt sure he could capture the line D plus 90 by the end of 3 months, and he was not going to capture ground, he was going to destroy enemy forces.⁸

General Bradley, unhappy at the inclusion of the lines had them removed from maps covering the American sector.⁹ Montgomery himself observed that phase lines for the Normandy campaign could only be regarded as estimates not to be regarded

⁶ Bradley, O. N. (1999). *A Soldier's Story*. Modern Library Paperback p 241

⁷ Horne, A., & Montgomery, D. (1994). *The Lonely Leader, Monty 1944-1945*. BCA & Macmillan pp 89-90

⁸ Hamilton, N. *Monty, Master of the Battlefield* p 560

⁹ *ibid*

with any degree of certainty due to events on the ground.¹⁰ Regrettably for both Allied unity and Montgomery's reputation, those projections were to be held by many as almost sacrosanct and were used by Monty's critics as further examples of his alleged overcaution. As events were to prove, Allied forces were to reach the D+90 line with time to spare. Ironically, given Bradley's dislike of phase lines, he is on record as saying that "France was to be liberated in phases."¹¹

If General Bradley and SHAEF were still doubtful of Montgomery's overall intentions regarding Caen, specifically the luring of German panzers away from the U.S. sector, then Canadian General H.D.G. Crerar entertained no such doubts. Writing in his war diary for 23rd June 1944, his understanding of Monty's intentions for Epsom and the wider campaign are clear:

His fourth intention had been to pull the main enemy weight on the British Army, in order to ease the pressure against the First U.S. Army. In this, the object has been attained. This last aim had been in accordance with the strategy of the campaign which was to get early possession of the Cherbourg and Brittany peninsulas. To succeed in this, the main German forces required to be brought against the British Army, holding the eastern sector of the bridgehead, and that Army must remain firm.¹²

Cherbourg fell to the American VII Corps on the first day of Epsom, organised resistance ceasing on 1st July.¹³ When General Patton's Third U.S. Army came to be activated in August, it was to find relatively few organised German units facing them on the Brittany peninsula.

The Fall of Caen and the Allied Way of War

Montgomery had not finished with Caen. Even as Epsom was concluding, he wrote to generals Bradley and Dempsey on 30th June, outlining Allied options.¹⁴ Shortly

¹⁰ Lewin, R. (1971). *Montgomery as Military Commander*. B. T. Batsford p 184

¹¹ Bradley, O. N. (1999). *A Soldier's Story*. Modern Library Paperback p 317

¹² PRO, CAB 106/1064

¹³ D'Este, C. (2001). *Decision in Normandy*. Penguin pp 240-241

¹⁴ IWM, Montgomery Papers, Part I, BLM 126/6

thereafter he had Dempsey draw up a plan forgoing another attempt to flank the city, opting instead for a frontal assault. Operation Charnwood (the intentions for which were outlined by Montgomery in a letter to Field Marshal Alan Brooke dated 7th July)¹⁵ was to feature bomber support on a scale hitherto unseen in Normandy.

In addition to the usual artillery support, RAF Bomber Command was to lay down a blanket of bombs the evening before the ground troops started their assault. The intention was to destroy and disorientate the Germans in the bomb zone to the extent they would be unable to offer organised resistance to the advancing British and Canadian forces. Dempsey had already considered the use of heavy bombers to support his operation and was aware (through Montgomery) of General Eisenhower's offer of "All the air that could be used, even if it were determined to be necessary to resort to area bombing if it were determined to be necessary to soften up the defense (*sic*) of the Germans."¹⁶

Montgomery was eager to utilise Eisenhower's offer, as was Dempsey who was concerned, after reviewing the attempt by a brigade of 3rd Canadian Division to capture Caen Carpiquet airfield on 3rd-4th July. This precursor to the main assault on 8th July was only partially successful due to the presence of 12th SS Hitlerjugend. Dempsey was apprehensive that without the support of the heavy bombers, casualties would become serious and was willing to accept the help of Bomber Command.¹⁷

The commander of the British bombers, Arthur Harris, and Trafford Leigh Mallory (Eisenhower's Air commander) were concerned about the risk of casualties caused by the bombing drifting backwards on to the waiting allied soldiers. It was decided to move the aiming point for the bombers 6000 yards (approximately four miles) in front of the allied front line, creating a safe zone.¹⁸ Normally this would not have been an issue as German practice was to leave the front line relatively lightly defended with

¹⁵ IWM, Montgomery Papers, Part I, BLM 126/9

¹⁶ Brooks, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy*. The History Press for the Army Records Society p 187

¹⁷ Doherty, R. (2004). *Normandy 1944, The Road to Victory*. Spellmount p 199

¹⁸ Keegan, J. (1983). *Six Armies in Normandy*. Penguin p 188

the main defences set back to allow the enemy to expend its energies in the initial assault.

For the waiting allied forces, the bombing, although good for morale, did the waiting troops little good overall. The villages leading to Caen had been fortified by the Germans and were left almost entirely untouched whilst the bombing crept forward (not backwards as anticipated) into the centre of the city. The devastation was near total. The airstrike occurred on the evening of 7th July, but the Allied advance did not commence until the early morning of the 8th. The major effect on Allied movement was in making the roads nearly impassable, especially when tanks entered the city without the support of engineers and tankdozers (a tank fitted with a bulldozer blade).

This time, the assault by British I Corps (3rd British Infantry Division, 59th Infantry and 3rd Canadian) plus supporting armour managed to clear the contested outer belt of German defences, reaching the centre of Caen by the morning of 9th July.¹⁹ A follow up assault to pursue the retreating Germans over the River Orne made little progress due to rubble blocking the roads. The city's suburbs would not be cleared of the enemy until later in the month as part of Operation Goodwood. The faith placed in the heavy bombers by Eisenhower and Dempsey had been misplaced.

The devastation of Caen has been presented as a grave error of judgement by the Allies, Montgomery and to a lesser extent, the British Army. During the publicity tour for his book on D-Day, author Antony Beevor made the claim, later retracted, that the bombing of the city was equivalent to a war crime.²⁰ Beevor is a long-time critic of Montgomery's conduct throughout the war, especially so in the book he was publicising,²¹ but others who fought in Normandy or experienced the effect of the bombing as civilians have also been critical.²²

¹⁹ Wilmot, C. (1977). *The Struggle for Europe*. Wordsworth Editions p 351

²⁰ Hickley, M. (2009, May 25). D-Day bomb raids were 'close to a war crime' says author [Scot Region]. Daily Mail <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/d-day-bomb-raids-were-close-war-crime-says-author/docview/320677587/se-2?accountid=11526> (accessed 31/08/2022)

²¹ Beevor, A. (2010). *D-Day, The Battle for Normandy*. Penguin.

²² See: Daily Telegraph YouTube Channel (2014). *D-Day: French Resentment Over Allied Bombing of Caen*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QifD4ocprsk> (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

Alexander Mckee, a veteran who witnessed the aftereffects of the raid likened it to the atrocity carried out at Oradour-sur-Glane by the 2nd SS Panzer Division on 10th June 1944.²³ That a serving officer and eyewitness of the bombing felt strongly enough to equate a genuine attempt to reduce Allied casualties with a deliberate massacre of civilians shows the strength of feeling the bombing aroused. Still others laid the decision to use Bomber Command and the casualties inflicted on the citizens of Caen solely on Montgomery.²⁴ It is demonstratable that this is simply not the case. Not only was such bombing already part of Allied doctrine (having been used several times before)²⁵ but the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower, had been instrumental in the encouragement and use of heavy bombers prior to Charnwood.²⁶ In this he was not alone, his deputy (Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder) was also keen to use heavy bombers as a method of breaking down German defences.

The disbelief expressed by service personnel at the devastation inflicted on Caen by the Allies is understandable. Nevertheless, they failed to see (or fully appreciate), that bombing and the associated use of overwhelming firepower was integral to the Allied way of prosecuting the war. Many post-war historians have also been remiss in this respect, as this approach was well known at the time. Montgomery's intelligence chief, Brigadier Bill Williams summed up Allied thinking thus:

We were always very aware of the doctrine 'Let metal do it rather than flesh.' The morale of our troops depended on this. We always said – 'waste all the ammunition you like, but not lives.'²⁷

²³ Mckee, A. (1984). *Caen, Anvil of Victory*. Souvenir Press p 207-208

²⁴ For example, Prados, J. (2019). *Normandy Crucible, The Decisive Battle That Shaped World War Two in Europe*. Amberley Publishing pp 96-97

²⁵ Strategic bombers had been used at Salerno, Italy in September 1943 in support of the Allied beachhead. See U.S. War Department, Historical Division. (1944). (Centre of Military History edition, 1990). *Salerno, American Operations from the Beaches to the Voltorno, 9 September-6 October 1943*.

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Salerno_American_Operations_from_the_Bea/yAdN9abfGqYC?hl=en&gbpv=1&kptab=overview (Last accessed 31/08/2022).

²⁶ For an account of the effects of a similar bombing mission on an Allied campaign, see Parker, M. (2014). *Monte Cassino*. United Kingdom. Headline.

²⁷ Hastings, M. (1984). *Overlord, D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*. Michael Joseph p 151

This doctrine (also called 'Steel not Flesh')²⁸ was based partly on a desire to protect Allied soldiers from becoming casualties and partly on the realities of war. Chief amongst those realities was the anticipated shortage of infantry replacements as casualty numbers mounted. This was an especially pressing concern for the British and Canadian armies, less so for the Americans. The unpleasant fact was that proportionately, the U.S. Army could afford projected casualty estimates without having to break up divisions to redistribute men to other units. This reality was always a factor in Montgomery's thinking, but he was as anxious to preserve the lives of American soldiers as he was British and Canadian ones.

This care for the troops under his command was not a new phenomenon. In a letter to his mother Maude in 1917, he wrote, "The whole art of war is to gain your objective with as little loss of life as possible."²⁹ This guiding principle stayed with Montgomery into the Second World War. One of the criticisms levelled against him was that he was good in a set piece attack against a clearly defined opponent but less so during a fluid campaign. Those same critics often used Monty's words as a way of supporting their own interpretation of Monty the general. In an address to officers in February 1943 he declared: "I limit the scope of my operations to what is possible and I use the force necessary to ensure success."³⁰ As a statement of intent there seems little to argue with. Whereas Rommel or Patton may have been inclined to race for a certain objective,³¹ paying little heed to logistics, Montgomery ensured, as far as was possible, that his operations stood a realistic chance of success before commencing them. Resources and lives were important to Monty, the shadows of the Great War were ever present in his planning.

'Steel Not Flesh' essentially meant that artillery and armour would be used plentifully in order to shield the infantry from taking unnecessary casualties. Throughout the Normandy campaign and the battles which followed, both U.S. and Anglo-Canadian

²⁸ Holland, J., & Murray, A. (Hosts). (2021). *We Have Ways of Making You Talk*. [Audio podcast]. Goalhanger Films. <https://play.acast.com/s/wehaveways/268.steelnotflesh> (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

²⁹ Hamilton, N. (1984). *Monty, The Making of a General 1872-1942*. Coronet Books p 121

³⁰ French, D. (2000). *Raising Churchill's Army, The British Army and the War Against Germany 1919-1945*. Oxford University Press p 243

³¹ For a description of Rommel's lack of logistical awareness, see, Caddick-Adams, P. (2011). *Monty and Rommel, Parallel Lives*. Preface Publishing pp 268-269

armies adhered to this concept. Artillery barrages played a vital part in every attack and an equally important role in breaking up enemy counterattacks.³²

As Bill Williams noted, the idea of using artillery in this manner played an especially important role in British and Canadian thinking. Both armies were acutely aware that each country was to face manpower shortages as the wider campaign progressed. It was almost inevitable that units would be broken up to provide replacements for other formations, as happened to British 50th Division in November 1944.³³

Tanks were equally important to Allied tactics but their limitations in dense bocage country found throughout Normandy were quickly exposed. The need for greater integration between the infantry and its supporting armour had to be addressed. This issue came to be rectified as the campaign progressed, proving that Allied flexibility in the field was at least equal to anything the Germans could show.³⁴

Montgomery's posting to the Staff of 49th (West Riding) Division in 1923 had taught him an important lesson in how to train and get the most out of soldiers. The 49th was a TA (Territorial Army) division. As such they were volunteers, attending a summer camp each year augmented by training sessions based at the local barracks in York. Montgomery realised early on that tasks such as drill instruction were of minimal use with such troops, that the limited time available would be more profitably spent in training them and their officers. Monty set about changing the ethos of training within the division and in doing so came to learn much about the handling of non-professional, post Great War servicemen, and what could reasonably be expected of them.³⁵ This was to prove invaluable to him throughout the rest of his career.

³² As an example of how artillery was able to effectively support even the most precarious of Allied positions, see Whitaker, D., Whitaker, S., & Copp, T. (2004). *Normandy, How Ordinary Allied Soldiers Defeated Hitler*. Ballantine Books p 131

³³ Williams, E. R. (2013). *50 Div in Normandy, A Critical Analysis of the British 50th (Northumbrian) Division on D-Day and in the Battle of Normandy*. Pickle Partners Publishing p 106

³⁴ See Doherty, R. *Normandy 1944* p 251 for an example of how Canadian self-propelled guns were modified in the field, converting them into armoured personnel carriers to allow infantry to keep pace with advancing armour.

³⁵ Hamilton, N. *Monty, The Making of a General* pp 158-160

The German Army in Normandy

Much has been written about the German way of war and how they came to adapt to the conditions found in Normandy and elsewhere,³⁶ but it is important to address three key questions: were German formations largely superior to their Allied opponents, is the German soldiers reputation for being superior to their Allied counterparts justified, and could the Allies have fought them more effectively?

It cannot be denied that in several respects, in the field of armour especially, some German equipment appeared to be superior to their Allied equivalents. The example of Michael Wittmann and his Tiger tanks at Villers Bocage on 13th June 1944,³⁷ is often used to illustrate the pre-eminence of German armour and tactical flair over the Allies.

At face value Wittmann's destruction of 25 tanks, 28 armoured cars and troop carriers plus accompanying vehicles was indeed astonishing. What followed next is not so widely reported. Having entered the town to follow up their actions, the Tigers were knocked out one by one as Wittmann had ordered his tanks to advance without waiting for infantry support.³⁸ The German commander had demonstrated a willingness to take chances during his time on the Eastern Front but as he was to discover, Normandy was not the Russian Steppes. What worked against the Soviets would not be so useful in France and northwest Europe generally. This was a lesson many experienced units would come to learn as they were redeployed to the west.

The issue of German tank superiority would play a major role in the way the Allies fought the panzers. The first Tiger to be captured by the British during the fighting for Tunisia in 1943 came as a shock to the Allies.³⁹ It was capable of knocking out any tank then in use by the Allies at ranges far exceeding British or American tank guns. In addition, its armour was thick enough to withstand shots at the equivalent of point

³⁶ See for example, Liddell Hart, B. H. (1973). *The Other Side of the Hill*. Cassell.

³⁷ See chapter 2, p 40.

³⁸ Maule, H. (1976). *Caen, The Brutal Battle and Break-Out from Normandy*. Purnell Book Services p 24

³⁹ That Tiger is now on display at Bovington museum in Dorset <https://tankmuseum.org/tank-nuts/tank-collection/tiger-i> (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

blank (in tank-on-tank fighting terms) range. It was fortuitous that only 1354 Tiger I's were built. It was also mechanically unreliable, slow and very heavy, making it difficult to transport by rail to the battlefield. Additionally, in terms of fuel consumption, the Tiger I was not efficient having a theoretical range of just 121 miles. Many of those traits were shared by the larger Tiger II and the Panther, but not, crucially by Allied tanks.

For the Allies, the Panzer IV (which had been in action in various upgraded marques since 1939), and self-propelled guns such as the StuG were more frequent foes. Due to extreme shortages of vehicles of all types within the German army, Allied formations frequently faced a plethora of captured specimens such as the French Char B tank, pressed into service following earlier German victories. Of all the German armoured divisions in Normandy, 21st Panzer was especially reliant on repurposed foreign armour with an entire battalion of guns mounted on French chassis.⁴⁰

The above is not just a list of armoured vehicles available to the Germans in Normandy. The apparent strengths of tanks such as the Tiger I would eventually become their weaknesses as the campaign reached its conclusion. Montgomery was aware, as was Bradley, Patton and almost every other senior Allied commander, of the comparative strengths and weaknesses not just of German armour but of their own armoured fighting vehicles.⁴¹ On a tank versus tank basis it is true that against the Tiger and Panther, the British made Cromwell and Churchill or the American Sherman were at a distinct disadvantage at ranges above 200 – 500 metres. Faced with the evidence of their own eyes and experiences, Allied tank crews and infantrymen naturally showed caution when dealing with their armoured opponents but that caution never became timidity. The harsh fact is that Allied materiel superiority could afford, when the occasion demanded, the loss of three or four tanks for every Tiger or Panther destroyed. Such odds were a mathematical reality, one as

⁴⁰ Napier, S. *The Armoured Campaign In Normandy* p 86

⁴¹ See, for example, Montgomery's attempts to play down the capabilities of the Panther in a letter to Field Marshal Alan Brooke, 27th June 1944, Brooks, S. (Ed.). *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy* p 167

familiar to Montgomery and his peers as it was to the servicemen who fought such engagements.

Tanks by themselves do not win battles. As proven at Villers Bocage, even those as robust as the Tiger could become casualties if they were not covered by screening infantrymen. Germany could still call on experienced infantry units (such as the 352nd Infantry which caused the Americans such trouble at Omaha Beach on D-Day)⁴² but many were often at half or three-quarter strength and had been posted to France to rest, re-equip and train replacements.

To offset the shortfall of infantry, German units were often assigned large numbers of machine guns and mortars. The latter were especially dangerous, and were the cause of a significant proportion of Allied casualties, but they were no match or replacement for organised and overwhelming firepower of the sort that Allied artillery units could put down.⁴³ Towed anti-tank weapons in addition to the handheld, single use Panzerfaust were also allocated to Panzer and Infantry divisions. As important as tanks were for both sides it was anti-tank weapons, firing from ambush positions, which disabled most armoured vehicles, German or Allied. In Normandy, geography played as influential a part on the battle as did armour or artillery.

Until the general breakout of Allied forces created by the collapse of the German army, much of the fighting was done in 'Bocage Country'. The Bocage was created by generations of farmers creating small fields bound on all sides by thick earthen banks, separated by deep sunken lanes. It made ideal ambush territory. The Bocage extended for much of the invasion zone to a depth of approximately fifty miles and was especially troublesome in the American sector. To the South of Bayeux on the British front, the land was slightly more open but also featured thickly wooded ridge lines and rivers, stretching to the town of St-Lô in the American zone.⁴⁴ Neither environment makes good tank country.

⁴² Ryan, C. (1999). *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944*. Wordsworth Editions p 208

⁴³ See Hastings, M. *Overlord* p 349 for an overview of theoretical establishment unit strengths for various German units in Normandy.

⁴⁴ Badsey, S. (1999). *Normandy 1944, Allied Landings and Breakout*. Osprey Military p 40 - 42

Whatever Montgomery's critics at the time may have believed, the effect his overall plan had on the Germans from the very start of the campaign was devastating. Prior to the invasion, many senior German officers knew the battle would be unlike anything experienced on the Eastern Front. The commander of the Panzer Lehr division recalled a conversation with Rommel before D-Day:

It's not a matter of fanatical hordes to be driven forward in masses against our line, with no regard for casualties, and little recourse to tactical craft; here we are facing an enemy who applies all his native intelligence to the use of his many technical resources, who spares no expenditure of material and whose every operation goes its course, as though it had been the subject of repeated rehearsal. Dash and doggedness alone no longer make a soldier.⁴⁵

Rommel was largely correct in his assessment of Allied capabilities. Although he had never seen action on the Eastern Front, he did have first-hand experience of the weight of Allied firepower and the overwhelming effect air superiority had on combat efficiency and morale.

By 12th of June, (D+6), both von Rundstedt (the nominal C-in-C of German forces in the west) and Rommel knew it would be impossible to hold the Allies in Normandy and requested permission to pull back their forces to a more defensible line along the river Seine. Hitler refused. This early recognition that the Allies were winning the battle is in direct contrast to Air Marshal Arthur Tedder's declaration on 14th June that the failure to capture Caen "had the makings of a dangerous crisis."⁴⁶

There is no doubt that German tactics delayed the Allies, but those same tactics played directly to Allied strengths. The almost Pavlovian German response to even local Allied gains was to immediately counterattack, exposing their troops to Allied artillery. On the Eastern Front, space could be traded for the time. This allowed the establishment of a more defensible line further to the rear or provided an opportunity to regroup before delivering a riposte, as at Kharkov in February 1943.⁴⁷ In

⁴⁵ Caddick-Adams, P. (2020). *Sand & Steel, a new History of D-Day*. Arrow Books pp 29-30

⁴⁶ Neillands, R. (2002). *The Battle of Normandy 1944*. Cassell p 120

⁴⁷ Clark, A. (1985). *Barbarossa, The Russian-German Conflict 1941-45*. Papermac pp 304-306

Normandy, no such advantage could be bought. The lack of space, the constant presence of the Allied air forces (operating in a way almost unheard of by the Soviet Air Force), combined with overwhelming artillery support from both regular artillery units and the guns of the fleet offshore, all precluded such trades.

As Rommel observed, fanaticism against well trained armies (thoroughly integrated with supporting air and seaborne assets), was no way to counter the Allies. Units such as the SS often fought with the determination that years of indoctrination had instilled in them. When they won back lost territory, the resulting counter bombardment central to the 'Steel not Flesh' approach ensured that such counterattacks, even if successful, were pyrrhic in nature. The loss of experienced section leaders, already in short supply, led to the premature grinding down and ultimate combat ineffectiveness of even the most fanatical German units.⁴⁸ The Allies, overseen by Montgomery, fought effectively.

German formations were generally no more superior than their Allied counterparts. That they delayed the Anglo-Canadian and US forces for so long was due in large part to the way they were obliged to fight their campaign within the limits of Hitler's 'No surrender' policy which precluded the use of the panzer divisions in concentrated formations.

The piecemeal commitment of German armoured divisions in support of under strength infantry units prolonged the campaign beyond which mere numbers would have suggested possible. The role the Bocage played in aiding the German defenders was not anticipated by the Allied planners from Montgomery downwards, but the Allies fought the Germans effectively utilising their own unique strengths. It is also a fact, as will be examined in the next chapter, that despite their reputation for manoeuvre warfare, the Germans were no more adept at large scale offensive action within the confines of the Bocage than the Allies.

⁴⁸ See Isby, D. C. (Ed.). (2016). *Fighting in Normandy, The German Army from D-Day to Villers Bocage*. Frontline Books p 134 for a breakdown of substantial losses to 21st, 12th SS and Panzer Lehr in just the first 6 days of the campaign drawn up by the then deputy of I SS Pz Corps, Fritz Kramer.

Conclusion

The taking of Caen was facilitated by the after-effects Operation Epsom had on the Germans. Epsom succeeded in not only tying down most of the panzer divisions in front of the Anglo-Canadian forces around Caen, but also prevented them from being used en masse in an effective counterstrike. Once the Germans came to rely on their armour to plug gaps in their lines, they sacrificed any chance to easily reverse that process, significantly limiting their future operations. The taking of Caen did, however, show the limitations of the 'Steel not Flesh' doctrine in creating problems for advancing forces. Those limitations will be examined once more in the next chapter.

The fears of Allied airmen regarding the less than envisaged number of airfields within the Allied bridgehead proved groundless. At no time did lack of aircover impinge on Allied plans but Montgomery could have eased many of his issues with Tedder and Coningham had he taken them into his confidence. In this, Montgomery was as remiss as the airmen were but Eisenhower should have stepped in as the head of SHAEF to gain clarification from Montgomery. This may have required the assistance of Montgomery's mentor, Field Marshal Alan Brooke, but it could and should have been done.

Allied concerns regarding a lack of progress were not reflected in German assessments of the campaign. It is reasonable to conclude that the taking of Caen on, or shortly after D-Day, would have allowed the Germans the freedom to withdraw out of range of the guns of the Allied fleet and consolidate their remaining armour. The subsequent counterattack over more suitable ground would have played to the strengths of the heavier German tanks, and whilst the Allies would still have defeated the panzers, the cost would have been much greater.

This chapter shows definitively that the manner in which Caen fell to the Allies vindicated Montgomery's overall plan by keeping German attentions largely fixed on the Anglo-Canadians. It also proves that German experience gained on the Eastern Front neither prepared them for nor gave them any advantage over the Allies. Chapter Four will show how Anglo-Canadian operations contributed to the

successful U.S. breakout, ensuring the early defeat of the counterattack aimed at Avranches.

Chapter Four – Confrontation, Cobra and Breakout

In this chapter, the twin Allied operations which led to the Allied breakout, Operations Goodwood and Cobra will be examined. It is important to understand the extent to which the American breakout (Operation Cobra) was facilitated by Montgomery's wider conduct of the battle for Normandy. Without such understanding, it is impossible to determine whether Montgomery's generalship and the criticisms levelled at him to that point (and as the campaign reached its conclusion) are valid.

The perceived failure of Goodwood created much ill will towards Montgomery, leading to an overt attempt to have him removed from his position as overall ground forces commander.¹ The language Montgomery used before and after Goodwood gave his detractors opportunity to act against him, as did his pre-invasion Thunderclap briefings regarding the early capture of Caen. His words and the way they were interpreted as events unfolded play an important role in how Montgomery's leadership of the campaign was perceived.

A Failure to Communicate

A post-war magazine article written by Walter Bedell Smith (Eisenhower's Chief of Staff) chronicled the events of the Normandy Campaign from the American perspective. In it, he compared Eisenhower to a football coach, running up and down the line, urging his players on, "Exhorting everyone to aggressive action."² This is an accurate analogy of Eisenhower's style of command and leadership, quite at variance to Montgomery's method. As Monty stated in his briefing note to army commanders in March 1944, "Not everything can be important."³ It is this difference in approach, coupled with the wording used, not just by Montgomery but between the Allies generally, which were responsible for so many misunderstandings and misconceptions. The differing styles and usage of language, what each party

¹ See Terraine, J. (1997). *The Right of the Line*. Wordsworth Editions pp 655-656 for an account of the strength of feeling against Montgomery.

² Bedell Smith, W. (June 15, 1946). Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions. *The Saturday Evening Post* pp 18-19, <https://doi.org/https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/flipbooks/issues/19460615/> (Last accessed 17/07/2022)

³ PRO, PREM 3/339/1

interpreted from what they heard or read in their dealings with each other, were the cause of so many issues between them. Specifically, the way Montgomery communicated with his American peers, particularly Eisenhower, exacerbated many of the strategic and tactical differences which lay between them. The role language played in the expectations and aftermath of Operation Goodwood will be more fully examined later in this chapter and will be expanded upon in the next.

Goodwood – The Failure that Wasn't

In a letter to Field Marshal Alan Brooke, dated 14th July 1944, Montgomery wrote, “I would say we lose three men to his (the enemy's) one in our infantry divisions.”⁴ The reason, as he noted earlier in the same letter, was that the ground around Caen favoured the defence, just as it did in the American sector. Montgomery had been mindful from the outset to keep casualties in his army, particularly amongst the infantry, to an absolute minimum.⁵ Bluntly stated, the British Army was a wasting asset.

Operation Goodwood, following close behind the fall of Caen, was to be primarily a battle utilising the tanks of three British Armoured divisions, which Monty described as being “Quite fresh”.⁶ Tanks were the one thing the British Army had in abundance. The intention was for the armoured divisions to pierce the German defences in the area of the Bourguebus ridge, approximately eight miles from the Orne bridgehead established on D-Day. In addition to reaching good tank country, the goal was to continue to pin down German armour and prevent reinforcements reaching the American sector. As the British collided with the German defences, General Bradley would initiate Operation Cobra, the breakout by U.S. forces. This would precipitate a general collapse of the enemy in that sector who would be distracted by the ongoing British operation.⁷ Once again, the British would act as bait whilst the Americans were shielded from the worst the Germans could level at them.

⁴ IWM, Montgomery Papers, Part I, BLM 126/12

⁵ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 110/3

⁶ Dunphie, C. (2004). *The Pendulum of Battle, Operation Goodwood July 1944*. Pen & Sword p 30

⁷ Lewin, R. (1971). *Montgomery as Military Commander*. B. T. Batsford pp 212-213

Montgomery was continuing to adhere to his established plan of distracting enemy reinforcements away from the Americans.

Goodwood was General Dempsey's plan but Montgomery took an active part in arranging the air support it received from the 'Bomber Barons.' To do this, he had to appeal to Eisenhower directly (12th July 1944), using language that set Ike's expectations high:

This operation will take place on Monday 17th July. Grateful if you will issue orders that the whole weight of the air power is to be available on that day to support my land battle. We must have the air to ensure success so good weather is essential and we will wait for it if Monday is bad. My whole eastern flank *will burst into flames* on Saturday⁸ and the operation on Monday *will have far reaching consequences*.⁹

The reply from Eisenhower was enthusiastic. Not only did he confirm that Montgomery would get all the air support he would need, but he also added, "We are so pepped up concerning the promise of this plan that either Tedder or myself or both will be glad to visit you if we can help in any way."¹⁰ Ike's exuberance was an indication that the purpose of Goodwood had been misunderstood. Monty took steps to ensure that SHAEF would clearly understand the primary purpose of Goodwood *before* it was launched but expectations were to remain at cross purposes with Montgomery's intentions.

The language used by Montgomery to get the air support he needed blinded Eisenhower to the realities of the situation on the ground. Images of the Anglo-Canadian front "bursting into flames" with "far reaching consequences" doubtless seemed to the Supreme Commander to be the very thing for which the Allies and

⁸ The operation Montgomery was referring to on the Saturday was a preliminary one (Operation Pomegranate). The intention was to fix the Germans in place and try to create more room on the flank of the upcoming Goodwood front. In the event there were two such operations, the other taking place the day before Pomegranate, Operation Mainline. Both operations kept German attention fixed away from other parts of the frontline but the cost to British and Canadian infantry units was high, approximately 3,500 casualties.

⁹ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 108/7 (Emphasis added).

¹⁰ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 60/14

their political masters had been agitating for from day one of the invasion. It must be remembered that Eisenhower was under immense strain throughout the whole of the NW Europe campaign. He not only had to deal with very strong characters (many of whom had surprisingly fragile egos) within the Allied armies, but also the political interference he regularly faced was significant.¹¹ Although Montgomery thought little of Eisenhower's abilities as a General, he was mindful enough to try to ensure that Ike and the wider SHAEF command were aware of his intentions regarding Goodwood. To this end, he dispatched his Chief of Staff to brief Eisenhower personally so there could be little doubt.¹² As a good General, Montgomery could do little more. Any misunderstandings were Eisenhower's alone.

As Montgomery had anticipated, poor weather conditions delayed the start of Operation Goodwood. When it did commence on 18th July, the aim was to force the three armoured divisions of VIII British Corps over the Orne Bridgehead in a trident formation. Once through the German defensive belts, they were to take the Bourguebus ridge and the villages to its approach.¹³ As the British armoured divisions fought their way forward, they were to bring the waiting German tanks and guns to action, destroying as many as possible. The disruption of the enemy's attempts to transfer units to the American sector, coupled with the destruction of German formations was the primary goal. The capture of ground, whilst desirable, was of secondary importance.

Following his Chief of Staff's visit to Eisenhower to make clear Goodwood's objectives, Monty again attempted, unsuccessfully, to temper Ike's expectations.¹⁴ It is clear Eisenhower had (at least temporarily) forgotten the broad strategy set down by Montgomery in the Thunderclap presentations of April and May. In his enthusiasm for the coming attack, Ike had conflated the potential of a British breakthrough with the notion of it becoming a breakout. That was not, and never had been,

¹¹ See for example Matloff, M. (1960). *The Anvil Decision, Crossroads of Strategy*. Center of Military History, U.S. Army for an example of how Churchill's continued preoccupation with the Mediterranean and the Balkans consumed much of Eisenhower's valuable time.

¹² Hamilton, N. (1989). *Monty, Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944*. Hamish Hamilton p 727

¹³ See Dunphie, C. *The Pendulum of Battle* p 35

¹⁴ On 19th July Monty invited Eisenhower to come and see him, see Brooks, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy*. The History Press for the Army Records Society p 220

Montgomery's intention. The breakout, when it came, was always intended to be an American one.¹⁵

Goodwood was a short-lived operation. Launched on 18th July, it immediately ran into difficulties. Lack of space within the Orne bridgehead meant that individual armoured divisions had to be fed in turn over the bridges spanning the river, placing the weight of the initial assault on the 11th Armoured Division, the first unit across. The opening heavy bombing was reasonably successful, but the armour soon outran its artillery support based on the far side of the Orne. Second Army Intelligence had failed to recognise the depth of German defences on the approach to the Bourguebus ridge. Not four but eight separate defensive belts lay between the start line and the intended target. All three armoured divisions reached the battlefield, but it was clear by the end of the first day that that the operation was unlikely to achieve its geographic goals. Nor did it. By 20th July, the operation was over, a sudden downpour further compounding the attacking armour's difficulties. General Erskine, commander of 7th Armoured had regarded the operation as a misuse of concentrated armour. It was certainly unorthodox.¹⁶ From a strategic viewpoint, the plan had succeeded and Montgomery's intention of "crumbling"¹⁷ the panzers, was a success. It was seen as a costly tactical failure by Eisenhower and SHAEF because of their inability to understand the role of Goodwood within the wider campaign.

In addition to the lack of ground captured, Goodwood was also seen as a failure due to the number of tanks lost by VIII Corps. Without context the numbers are grim. Before Goodwood commenced the Corps three divisions had on strength approximately 765 tanks.¹⁸ In a report drawn up by the Military Operations Unit in 1946, based on divisional returns post Goodwood, total losses were reported as being in the region of 493.¹⁹ From there is easy to see where the figure of 500 British tanks knocked out and lost has been widely arrived at and quoted.²⁰ Other authors

¹⁵ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 74/4, Section 16, Subheadings First U.S. Army and Third U.S. Army

¹⁶ Wilmot, C. (1952). *The Struggle for Europe* (1977 ed.) Wordsworth Editions p 359

¹⁷ "Crumbling" was a description used by Monty from his Alamein campaign, see Hamilton, N. (1984). *Monty, The Making of a General 1872-1942*. Coronet Books p 726

¹⁸ PRO, WO 205/636

¹⁹ Napier, S. (2015). *The Armoured Campaign in Normandy, June-August 1944*. Spellmount p 228

²⁰ See for example Kershaw, R. (2009). *Tank Men, The Human Story of Tanks at War*. Hodder & Stoughton p 335

have taken an almost pot-luck approach to settling on a figure for British tank losses during Goodwood. As an example, one book quotes 200 tanks lost in a single day,²¹ using as its source another widely read and quoted book on the Normandy campaign.²² Both are incorrect, but the mistaken assertion continues to be made with Montgomery bearing the blame.

The true figure regarding the number of tanks being declared as total losses during Goodwood is closer to 156.²³ The reason for the discrepancy was twofold. Many unit records were lost during the war, but the most common reason was many of the tanks abandoned on the battlefield were recovered where possible. This work was carried out by the Royal Mechanical and Electrical Engineers (REME). As the REME post war report for the European campaign noted, "Recovery happened after the battle not during. Not all vehicles needed recovery but could be repaired where found."²⁴ Those requiring more substantial repairs were transported to the regimental workshops, but the REME managed to sustain a return rate of 70% of recoveries "to the owners" (i.e., the units they originally belonged to), inside of 48 hours.²⁵ Within days of Goodwood's conclusion, all three armoured divisions were back to full strength.²⁶ German tank losses remained unreplaced.

It is important to understand the contents of the two preceding paragraphs. The situation immediately after Goodwood would still have been in a state of flux when critics came to use the raw figures against Montgomery. Tedder especially would have been aware of the nature of modern warfare and its demands on equipment. Since his days overseeing the Desert Air Force in North Africa and Italy, he would have known that figures relating to availability always took time to collate after a battle. The apparent loss of so many tanks combined with the misunderstood intentions for Goodwood were the catalyst to attempt Montgomery's removal. Tedder was not the only plotter, but it is accurate to call him the chief conspirator. Months of

²¹ Whitaker, D., Whitaker, S., & Copp, T. (2004). *Normandy, How Ordinary Allied Soldiers Defeated Hitler*. Ballantine Books p 72

²² D'Este, C. (2001). *Decision in Normandy*. Penguin p 383

²³ See Napier, S. *The Armoured Campaign in Normandy* pp 229-230 for an in-depth account of how this figure was arrived at.

²⁴ REME War Report, 21 Army Group, Part 2. Section 1, page 6, subsection 42

²⁵ REME War Office Historical Monograph No. 27, Part One, Organisation and Operations. Chapter VII, Section 4, Subsection J, Recovery

²⁶ See Dunphie, C. *The Pendulum of Battle* p 181

distrust and professional jealousy came to a head with the perception of another Monty failure. Goodwood had not failed. German armour was still largely fixed to the Anglo-Canadian front. Despite the coming short-lived campaign to remove Montgomery as Eisenhower's land force commander, Montgomery's strategic handling of the campaign would come to fruition just five days after Goodwood's conclusion.

The Plot to Remove Montgomery

Criticism of Montgomery had been growing since early in the campaign, culminating in a plot to remove him even as Goodwood wound down. The conspirators believed that a continued lack of space within the bridgehead for airstrips was affecting Allied air support, and that Montgomery's overcaution had caused the campaign to stall.²⁷ The perceived failure of Goodwood was the catalyst for them to act but in doing so they demonstrated the very inflexibility they were accusing Montgomery of.

Allied aircraft had been making conditions difficult for the Germans from day one of the invasion. Montgomery (and Morgan at COSSAC before him), had selected Normandy as it was within range of the allied air forces based in the south of England.²⁸ The success or failure of Overlord was not dependent on the presence of airstrips within the bridgehead early in the campaign. Whilst the enemy was still within range around Caen to the east and the St-Lô area to the west, UK airfields sufficed. Had the enemy fallen back earlier, then the availability of ground for airstrips would have led to their earlier construction, as acknowledged by Montgomery in his briefing paper, 'Some Army Problems' written before the invasion.²⁹ His understanding of what the Allied air forces were capable of early in the battle, combined with their requirements as the campaign progressed is clear: "As we secure airfields, and good areas for making airfields, so we get increased air support, and so everything becomes easier."³⁰

²⁷ See, for example, Blumenson, M. (1993). *Breakout and Pursuit*. Centre of Military History, U.S. Army p 16

²⁸ The National Archives. (2021). *British Battles, D-Day 1944*. <https://tinyurl.com/mw8bpbcy> (Last accessed 27/03/2023).

²⁹ PRO, PREM 3/339/1

³⁰ *ibid*

British and American strategic heavy bombers with their longer ranges did not need airfields in France. Tedder and others, such as Harry Butcher (Eisenhower's aide) and Walter Bedell Smith (Eisenhower's Chief-of-Staff), saw Montgomery's use of the heavy bombers as wasteful and disproportionate, more so after Goodwood. Tedder felt Montgomery had betrayed the Allied cause, writing to Lord Trenchard on 25th July, that he and SHAEF had "been had for suckers" following Goodwood's early conclusion.³¹ Tedder was wrong, as events on the day he wrote his letter were to prove.

The belief that Montgomery was guilty of overcaution is equally without merit but there are at least *prima facie* reasons for it. The first is Monty's pre-invasion declaration of intent regarding Caen. As shown in Chapter One, I Corps' interpretation of Montgomery's orders regarding Caen's capture, whilst realistic, were quite different from his intentions, or at least his *declared* intentions. This would not have caused the issues it did had Montgomery been unambiguously clear with Eisenhower and Tedder within a week of the landings.

Montgomery's way of planning, "I will lay down the general form; everyone must accept it and act on it.... I read no paper,"³² was the chief cause of many of his issues throughout the campaign. The written directive by I Corps to 3rd British Infantry Division, that it should "by the evening of D-Day have captured or effectively masked Caen,"³³ was a detail always likely to have been overlooked by anyone other than Francis de Guingand, who would have brought it to Monty's attention. The result of this realistically pragmatic order was that the city, although uncaptured was to be effectively masked on D-Day. Montgomery's overall plan for Caen was successful. If he had taken the time to explain his intentions after D+1 he would have avoided much of the subsequent criticism levelled at him. Montgomery was wrong not to do so.

³¹ Tedder, A. (1966). *With Prejudice*. Cassell, as cited by Terraine, J. (1997). *The Right of the Line*. Wordsworth Editions p 657

³² IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 90/3

³³ PRO, WO 171/258

The accusations of overcaution levelled at Montgomery by his critics overlooked one obvious factor: the enemy. Put simply, having failed to stop the Allies on the beaches, accepted military wisdom would have seen the Germans retreat from the coast in phases to a series of natural, more easily defensible features such as the River Seine.³⁴ Hitler forbade such manoeuvres, further ensuring the success of Montgomery's approach. The Fuhrer's 'Hold Firm' orders obliged Rommel *et al* to commit divisions, critically the panzer divisions, piecemeal as they became available, preventing the exercise of sound military logic.³⁵ This had the effect of temporarily bolstering enemy positions, delaying the Allies in the process. It also prevented the Germans from concentrating their panzers as their numbers became depleted by Allied action. Montgomery's overall plan was vindicated as it was able to take advantage of German strategic and tactical weaknesses forced upon them by Hitler's interference.

The plot against Montgomery lost momentum. On 20th July, Eisenhower paid a visit to Normandy specifically to see him. He could have relieved Montgomery of command but chose not to. The following day Ike wrote to Monty, confirming what they had discussed, clarifying what needed to be done in the next stage of the campaign.³⁶

Operation Cobra and the American Breakout

As originally planned, the U.S. Operation Cobra had been timed to commence the day after Operation Goodwood began.³⁷ This had not proven possible as the operation's start line of St-Lô, the principal road hub in the American sector, only fell on 19th July. U.S. First Army's original pre-invasion plan had called for the town to be taken by 15th June.³⁸ The bocage, combined with Hitler's 'Hold Fast' orders had thwarted that intention. The Americans found at St-Lô, as the British and Canadians had at Caen, that battlefield realities could significantly affect the most

³⁴ Keegan, J. (1983). *Six Armies in Normandy*. Penguin p 260

³⁵ See chapter 2 p 44.

³⁶ IWM Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 126/14 as cited by Brooks, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy*. The History Press for the Army Records Society pp 228-230

³⁷ Badsey, S. (1999). *Normandy 1944, Allied Landings and Breakout*. Osprey Military p 56

³⁸ Yates, P. (2004). *Battle Zone Normandy, Battle for St-Lô*. Sutton Publishing p 17

comprehensive of plans. At no point did Montgomery push General Bradley to speed up its capture.

Until now, this study has emphasised the success of Montgomery's overriding intention to keep the bulk of the panzers away from the Americans. It is important to recognise that this success did not mean the Americans were spared substantial casualties. The combined effects of the bocage and a tenacious German defence inflicted a heavy price on the attackers.³⁹ From D-Day to 24th July, the day before the American breakout, U.S. casualties amongst the combat divisions totalled approximately 54,000, including just short of 13,000 killed.⁴⁰

Montgomery had recognised from the earliest days of his appointment that, although he was Commander Land Forces for the duration of the Normandy campaign, the Americans should be entirely responsible for their own operational planning. He made this quite clear, "American doctrine is their own affair & General Bradley will act as he thinks most suitable."⁴¹ Montgomery stuck to this principle for the duration of the campaign. The understanding Monty gave General Bradley was considerable, as Bradley acknowledged in his wartime account:

During these operations in the lodgement where Montgomery bossed the U.S First Army as part of his 21st Army Group, he exercised his Allied authority with wisdom, forbearance, and restraint. While coordinating our movements with those of Dempsey's, Monty carefully avoided getting mixed up in U.S. command decisions, but instead granted us the latitude to operate as freely and as independently as we chose. At no time did he probe into First Army with the indulgent manner he sometimes displayed among those subordinates who were also his countrymen. *I could not have wanted a more tolerant or*

³⁹ For an assessment of how geography aided the Germans in Normandy, see Davies, A. (1946). Geographical Factors in the Invasion of Normandy, *Geographical Review*, vol 36, No. 4, pp 621-622 via <https://www.jstor.org/stable/211418?origin=crossref&seq=1> (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

⁴⁰ Office of the U.S. Adjutant General. (1946). *Army Battle Casualties and Non Battle Deaths in World War II, Final Report 7 Dec 1941 – 31 Dec 1946*, p 92 via <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA438106.pdf> (Last accessed 28/08/2022)

⁴¹ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 90/3

judicious commander. Not once did he confront us with an arbitrary directive and not once did he reject any plan that we had devised.⁴²

Montgomery understood the difficulties faced by Bradley and the troops under his command. He was also aware that the time would shortly come when the bulk of Allied divisions fighting not just in the current campaign but in NW Europe generally, would be provided by the United States. It was not his place to offer anything more than suggestions, to accommodate his American allies as far as he was able.

An example of a Monty light touch occurred during a meeting between him, Bradley and Dempsey on 10th July to discuss future operations. Bradley had been concerned with Third Army's lack of progress. Monty listened to Bradley's update before commenting, "Never mind. Take all the time you need, Brad."⁴³ Monty's understanding of the American situation in the Bocage needed no further comment from him, yet some have accused him of condescension towards Bradley.⁴⁴

Narrative style observations inserted into the works of post-war historians who were not present illustrate a lack of impartiality for which Montgomery cannot be held responsible.

Adverse weather conditions further delayed the start of Operation Cobra to 25th July. The plan called for infantry of the American VII Corps to break through the German defences along the Lessay – St-Lô Road, keeping each side of the breach open. Follow up formations would exploit the broken German front line, swinging southwest to the town of Coutances, 14 miles from the first day's objectives. From there the American advance would head further south to the town of Avranches on the Atlantic coast. Once achieved, the Cotentin peninsula would be cut off, leaving the way clear into Brittany with its potentially useful ports.⁴⁵

⁴² Bradley, O. N. (1999). *A Soldier's Story*. Modern Library Paperback pp 319-320 (Emphasis added).

⁴³ Napier, S. *The Armoured Campaign in Normandy* p 240

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Man, J. (1994). *The Penguin Atlas of D-Day and the Normandy Campaign*. Viking p 113

The plan was a success.⁴⁶ The initial advance was slow, in part due to the remnants of the Panzer Lehr Division (which had been transferred from the Caen front earlier in the campaign) putting up a final defence. By the start of Cobra, the two panzer divisions facing the Americans could between them deploy just 150 tanks and assault guns.⁴⁷ By 30th July, American armour had reached Avranches, beating off a local counterattack the following day. Bradley's victory had been facilitated by Montgomery's adherence to his campaign plan.⁴⁸

The End In Normandy

On 1st August, Patton's Third Army was activated. Bradley handed over First Army to Lt. General Hodges, assuming control of both in the newly created 12th Army Group. Third Army was able to advance quickly through Brittany, many of the German formations having been worn down by the Cobra breakout.⁴⁹

While Patton was engaged in clearing Brittany, Adolf Hitler issued another Fuhrer Order, this time instructing his commander in France to transfer the bulk of the Panzers to the American sector. The intention was to cut off the American forces to the north of Avranches, at the same time isolating Third Army in the Brittany peninsula.

Scheduled to begin on the night of 6th-7th August, the Germans were able to concentrate just four depleted panzer divisions for the assault. By the time of its launch, the attack and enemy intentions had been detected by ULTRA intercepts. The Germans did manage to envelop the town of Mortain before advancing to within approximately 2 miles of Avranches, though the counterattack was essentially defeated in the first 24 hours. The Americans, aided by effective air support, proved themselves superior to the enemy. Whether held fixed before the Anglo-Canadians

⁴⁶ See Carafano, J. J. (2000). *After D-Day, Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout*. Stackpole Books for a full account of Operation Cobra.

⁴⁷ Zetterling, N. (2019). Normandy 1944 German Military Organization, Combat Power and Organizational Effectiveness as cited by Napier, S. *The Armoured Campaign in Normandy* p 243

⁴⁸ Montgomery's own figures for the period gave an overall German tank strength facing the Americans of 190 with 645 facing the Anglo-Canadians. Montgomery, B. L. (1959). *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery*. Signet Books p 235

⁴⁹ See Bradham, R. (2012). *To The Last Man, The Battle for Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula and Brittany*. Frontline Books.

or transferred piecemeal to face the growing strength of the U.S. Army, Montgomery's overall strategy of "crumbling" German armour, either destroying or reducing its effectiveness, had proven to be the correct strategy.⁵⁰

Hitler ordered the operation, codenamed Lüttich, be renewed twice over the course of the next week.⁵¹ Each fresh attempt failed. Bradley ordered Patton's forces to shift its axis of advance to strike against the flanks of the German panzers, aiming for the town of Argentan. Montgomery, in conjunction with Bradley's thrust northwards, ordered First Canadian Army to push south towards the same objective via the town of Falaise, the intention being to entrap what remained of two German armies. The German commander in Normandy had realised too late the danger they were in following the failure of Lüttich and the removal of the panzers facing the Anglo-Canadians. The delicate balance forced upon the Germans by Montgomery ensuring that operations to the east of the bridgehead kept the bulk of the panzers fixed there had been broken, leaving no way to re-establish it.

Despite Field Marshal von Kluge having ordered a general retreat from Normandy on 15th August, it would be too late for many of his troops who were to be either killed or captured in the coming days. Most of their heavy equipment and what remained of their tanks also had to be abandoned. What became known as the Falaise Gap was eventually closed on 21st August, effectively bringing the Normandy campaign to a close.

Conclusion

The way the Germans fought their campaign created numerous difficulties for the Allies but, as Chalfont stated:

It ensured that German resistance would be much stiffer on the ground than was strategically sensible; it also made the German Army's dispositions brittle

⁵⁰ Hamilton, N. *Monty, The Making of a General 1872-1942* p 726

⁵¹ Zaloga, S. J. (2019). *Mortain 1944, Hitler's Normandy Panzer Offensive*. Osprey pp 79-91 (the battle was known as the Mortain counteroffensive to the Americans).

and inflexible, ready to collapse if enough weight was applied but unlikely to bend before breaking point arrived.⁵²

Montgomery appreciated the above in a way no-one else was able. His experience of fighting the Germans gave him the moral and professional courage to plan for and fight his enemy to the best of his ability. It allowed him to withstand the criticisms frequently levelled at him. More importantly, it made him aware of what could reasonably be expected of the troops serving under him, whatever their nationality. It also made him careful of their lives, so far as a responsible General can be.

How Monty has come to be remembered since Normandy and the part language played in the Allied campaign will be explored in the next chapter. In order to begin the process of rehabilitating Montgomery's reputation it is important to understand the way he spoke, his style of language and the words he chose to communicate intent.

⁵² Chalfont, A. (1976). *Montgomery of Alamein*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson p 240

Chapter Five - Language & Legacy

This chapter will examine Montgomery's use and style of language. This is an important area of study as it affected both Eisenhower's and SHAEF's (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces) understanding of his plan and intentions as the campaign developed.. The influence wartime correspondents, post-war historians and modern media have had on his and the campaign's legacy will also be evaluated. This is important as combined, they have been pivotal to the way Monty has come to be remembered.

The Language of Intent and Objectives

Montgomery's intentions and the language he used to expound upon them were a frequent source of miscommunication and conflict. They still are but it is accurate to say that the level of confusion depended on his audience or readership.

Pre-invasion, senior British and Canadian army officers had little doubt as to the manner of campaign they were to fight and their part within it. They understood the language used by Montgomery and his Corps commanders. That understanding largely remained as the campaign developed.¹

Senior American officers within SHAEF did not always show the same level of understanding. Some non-Americans within Supreme Headquarters exploited those misunderstandings where they occurred to further their own agenda, fuelled by their antagonism towards Montgomery. Tedder, Coningham and Morgan were guilty of such behaviour.² Misinterpretations were fewer the further away from SHAEF senior U.S. officers operated. General Bradley, for example, always seemed to appreciate

¹ For example, Canadian General H.D.G. Crear: PRO, CAB 106/1064

² Morgan's COSSAC plan had proposed the breakout, when it came, should be made by Anglo-Canadian forces. This was a position he maintained throughout the campaign, influencing many within SHAEF in the process. See Chalfont, A. (1976). *Montgomery of Alamein*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson p 238

the sacrificial nature of the Anglo-Canadian forces in tying down German armour until his army was ready to breakout,³ even if some of his staff officers did not.⁴

Language played a key role in the formulation of plans for Overlord, both before and after the invasion. The way in which the English language was utilised by the British and Americans illustrates their respective approaches to the campaign. A perfect example of American usage, being at once seemingly clear but with a degree of ambiguity, is the order issued to Eisenhower by the Combined Chiefs of Staff upon his appointment:

You will enter the continent of Europe and in conjunction with other Allied nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.⁵

This final draft was largely drawn up by the American Joint Chiefs. The words “at the heart of Germany” left the exact determination of what constituted the successful completion of the ultimate Allied objective, the eventual defeat of Germany, unspecified. British attempts to make the wording less ambiguous were rejected by the Americans.⁶ The wording is portentous, unquestionably with an eye to the history of the operation which would inevitably be written upon the cessation of hostilities. Compare the words used by the Joint Chiefs with those of Montgomery in his letter to Army commanders of May 1944:

Armoured columns must penetrate deep inland, and quickly, on D Day; this will upset enemy plans and tend to hold him off while we build up our strength. We must gain space rapidly and peg out claims well inland.⁷

³ See Bradley, O. N. (1999). *A Soldier's Story*. Modern Library Paperback p 241

⁴ See Ingersoll, R. (1946). *Top Secret*. Harcourt Brace & Company p 158 for an example of such a misunderstanding. Ingersoll was an officer on Bradley's staff in Normandy.

⁵ Eisenhower National Historic Site, Virtual Museum Exhibit, <https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/eise/allied.html> (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

⁶ Eisenhower, D. (1986). *Eisenhower At War 1943-1945*. Collins p 133

⁷ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 55/16

The difference is striking, its intention clear. Talk of causing “upset” to the enemy, “holding him off” and to “peg out claims” are significantly different in both style and substance, wholly typical of Montgomery.

It was Montgomery’s utilisation of non-military phrases which gave his directives theatrical colour but they could also be a source of confusion, making their true meaning opaque for those not used to such phraseology.⁸ In one of his final directives to Bradley of 20th August 1944, he directed that 12th U.S. Army Group was to “Take advantage of any opportunity to secure a bridgehead over the Seine in the Mantes area *or anywhere else*”,⁹ (emphasis added). Monty’s phraseology demonstrated his willingness to make advances anywhere they could be achieved, giving those under him the flexibility to act as they saw fit. Addressing his other commanders in the same directive he wrote, “I call on all commanders for a great effort. Let us finish off the business in record time.”¹⁰ For Montgomery, there was only one “business”, namely the destruction of the German army. The language he used was explicit, emphasising the goal with no ambiguities as to how he thought it best achieved, leaving that to the commanders on the spot. This was far from being cautious or prescriptive.

Montgomery’s style of language, his choice of words, were used as a way of signalling intent. When seen in that context they are appropriate, but if there was a fundamental misunderstanding of those intentions and their endpoints then issues could arise. Ultimately, such issues did arise.

Before the taking of Caen on 9th July, Montgomery was aware of the need to make his intentions clear. In a letter dated 7th July to Field Marshal Alan Brooke, he described the coming operation to take Caen as “The show”, and that he would “Set things alight on my eastern flank.”¹¹ In a letter to Eisenhower the following day, he

⁸ Montgomery utilised theatrical language and a sense of drama in similar fashion to Napoleon and Nelson as part of his style of leadership. See Adair, J. (2008). *Inspiring Leadership*. Thorogood Publishing p 132

⁹ Crillo, R. (2001). *The Market Garden Campaign, Allied Operational Command in Northwest Europe, 1944* [PhD Thesis, Cranfield University, College of Defence Technology]. <https://files.core.ac.uk/pdf/23/9637608.pdf> (Last accessed 29/08/2022).

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Brooks, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy*. The History Press for the Army Records Society p 181

referred to Anglo-Canadian operations in front of Caen in similar terms, describing them as “a big show”, adding that there was a need to get First and Third U.S. Armies up to strength “and to get them cracking” westwards and into Brittany.¹²

Montgomery’s wording is clear, as is his meaning, for those used to the British style of military parlance. Eisenhower had been dealing with the full cross section of Allied personnel since 1942 when he was appointed Supreme Commander for Operation Torch (the landings in French North Africa) and subsequent link up with British and Commonwealth forces. His familiarity with the British military’s use of language, the idioms it frequently contained, would have been further strengthened in the course of his command of subsequent operations in Sicily and Italy before his appointment to lead SHAEF. It is not credible that Eisenhower would be unfamiliar with such nuances which could possibly confuse someone less familiar with British forces. Nevertheless, confusion could still occur regardless of a person’s familiarity with phraseology. Montgomery was aware of this and took steps, as he did before and during Goodwood, to ensure that SHAEF and his political masters (via Field Marshal Alan Brooke) were kept briefed through liaison visits or private letters.

Montgomery’s choice of words also left him open to accusations of putting a more positive spin on events than seemed warranted.¹³ There is no doubt he was guilty of such behaviour at times,¹⁴ but so too were his contemporaries.¹⁵ However, some of his comments served a quite different purpose beyond the literal. Given the violence of the campaign and the casualties it created, such language served a double, ruthlessly pragmatic purpose. A soldier serving in the Black Watch found one of his comrades in the village of Lisieux:

¹² IWM, Montgomery Papers, Part I, BLM 126/10

¹³ See post-war interview between Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff, Bedell Smith and the American historian, Dr F. C. Pogue quoted by D’Este, C. (2001). *Decision in Normandy*. Penguin pp 205-206

¹⁴ Monty’s verdict that Operation Market Garden of September 1944 was “90% successful” is his most famous example of spin. <http://www.battle-of-arnhem.com/montgomery-was-the-only-one-who-thought-market-garden-was-90-percent-successful/> (Last accessed 31/08/2022).

¹⁵ Eisenhower adopted a similar approach in the early days of the German Ardennes Offensive during a meeting with his commanders, opening with the words, “The present situation is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us and not of disaster” See <https://www.nps.gov/eise/blogs/the-present-situation-is-to-be-regarded-as-one-of-opportunity-for-us-and-not-of-disaster-dwight-eisenhower-and-the-battle-of-the-bulge.htm> (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

His eyes had sunk into their sockets. He had lost all colour from his face, and his cheeks were hollow...he was completely numbed to the vicious ferocity and daily death, seemingly under an imminent, unavoidable death sentence himself.¹⁶

Montgomery was aware of the demands being made on servicemen at the front and had witnessed the cumulative effects of attrition warfare on men during the Great War. If they were to carry on, they had to feel their sacrifices were worth it. It was not enough for him to know in his own mind that his plan was working, that German reinforcements were being drawn mostly towards the east, away from the American sector. To convince soldiers such as those in the Black Watch that their efforts were paying off, they had to hear as much from the General in overall charge of the campaign.

When Montgomery spoke of being “Well satisfied” with events around Operation Epsom in his letter to Churchill of 29th June, he was not only (from a military standpoint), truthfully reporting the battles progress, he was also fulfilling the covenant between him and those under his command.¹⁷ The men of the Allied armies had not been indoctrinated by years of Nazi ideology, they were primarily citizen soldiers.¹⁸ There was an acknowledgement amongst the Allies, both politically and within their respective militaries, that the lives of their citizenry could not be expended as recklessly (as it was overwhelmingly perceived), as their predecessors had been during the First World War.¹⁹ For the British and Commonwealth forces especially, casualty figures in Normandy were a reminder of the legacies of the Somme and Passchendaele.

¹⁶ Renouf, T. (2011). *Black Watch, Liberating Europe and Catching Himmler - My Extraordinary WW2 with the Highland Division*. Little, Brown Book Group p 134

¹⁷ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part I, BLM 110/16

¹⁸ A phrase coined by the American historian, Stephen Ambrose, see Ambrose, S. E. (2011). *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army From The Beaches of Normandy to the Surrender of Germany*. Open Road Integrated Media Incorporated

¹⁹ For an account of Churchill's dismay at the losses created on the Somme see International Churchill Society, <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-172/battle-of-the-somme-2/> (Last accessed 29/08/2022). See also Montgomery, B. L. (1959). *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery*. Signet Books p 31 for his views on the losses during the Great War. “The frightful casualties appalled me. The so called “good fighting generals” of the war appeared to me to be those who had a complete disregard for human life.”

The need for Montgomery to show complete public confidence in the plan, and by default, in those at the sharp end carrying it out, was understood by his intelligence chief, Bill Williams:

He'd got to be overconfident all the time in order to get people to be willing to be killed (on the Caen flank). It was this overconfidence, I think, that misled those people who began to be impatient for results and therefore impatient with Montgomery.... if, when you go to see him, you're always told everything's fine, and so on, you do set up a barrier. It becomes a problem of credibility.²⁰

The problem of credibility goes to the heart of the issues that separated Eisenhower and Montgomery, as it illustrated the fundamental differences between the perspectives of the two men and the language used to put forward their opinions.

Legacy and Remembrance

It is accurate to say that Montgomery's personality has affected his legacy as much as any of his command decisions. The response from Churchill on hearing that General von Thoma, captured after El Alamein and invited to dine with Monty, effectively illustrates this point:

I sympathise with General von Thoma. Defeated, humiliated, in captivity and (long pause) dinner with General Montgomery.²¹

Churchill was happy enough to make political capital from Montgomery's decisive victory over the Afrika Korps²² but his relationship with Monty was especially fractious and remained so after the war.²³ Churchill was at times guilty of making his

²⁰ Hamilton, N. (1989). *Monty, Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944*. Hamish Hamilton pp 760-761

²¹ Hayward, S. F. (1998). *Churchill on Leadership, Executive Success in the Face of Adversity*. Forum p 105

²² It was the catalyst for one of Churchill's most famous speeches at the Mansion House, November 1942, see Ibiblio.org (1997) / Churchill W. S. <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/421110b.html> (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

²³ See, for example, Murphy-Bates, S. (2018, October 16). Mind your own business, Monty!' Daily Mail. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6281837/1947-letter-reveals-Churchill-told-Field-Marshal-clear-politics.html> (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

unhappiness with Montgomery known outside of Cabinet.²⁴ It was doubtless as a result of such unguarded prime ministerial outbursts that those plotting within SHAEF imagined they would receive Churchill's support in having Montgomery removed after Goodwood. Tedder had spoken to Eisenhower on the evening of 19th July in an attempt to convince him that the British Chiefs of Staff would be minded to support Monty's removal if he thought it desirable.²⁵ For Tedder to make that claim, he must have been sure (in his own mind at least) of Churchill's acquiescence should Eisenhower have made such a request.

Given what is known about the plot to have Montgomery removed from his post and the behaviour of the plotters, it was unrealistic to expect the Allied press corps (especially the American contingent) to behave any differently than they did. They would not have been deaf to the signals emanating from SHAEF and took their stances accordingly, often along partisan and/or national lines. Criticisms aimed at Montgomery and the Anglo-Canadians in the eastern half of the bridgehead were not uncommon, particularly after Operation Goodwood. An example of this can be seen in a *New York Times* article dated 25th July 1944, headlined "Cautious Tactics in Normandy Seen":

The stalemate on the Normandy front that followed the halting of the British offensive southeast of Caen focuses attention on a considerable success won by the German Seventh Army in Normandy. The Germans have not been able to prevent some Allied gains – a five-mile penetration below Caen and the taking of St-Lô are examples – but in the opinion of this correspondent the Germans have frustrated thus far the achievement of what must be the principal objective of any force in the present position of the Twenty-First Army Group: the expansion of the bridgehead.²⁶

²⁴ As he did after Eisenhower, at Montgomery's request, asked Churchill not to visit the bridgehead as he was too busy for visitors. Monty had to make amends with Churchill, "As Minister of Defence you naturally are above all these rules...I hope you will visit Normandy whenever you like." See, PRO, PREM 3/339/11, dated 19th July 1944

²⁵ Hamilton, N. Monty, Master of the Battlefield p 737

²⁶ Middleton, D. (1944, July 25). Cautious Tactics In Normandy Seen. New York Times. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1944/07/25/issue.html> (last accessed 29/08/2022)

The by-line for the report emphasised it had been cabled in from SHAEF and went on to add that the reporter:

Could attest that this failing was not shown in Tunisia nor has it been noticeable in the latest offensives in Italy, both of which were commanded by Gen. Sir Harold Alexander and fought by armies including a large proportion of British troops.²⁷

The *New York Times*' report, having been passed through SHAEF censorship, clearly misinterpreted the objective of Goodwood (the halted British offensive to which it refers). It is also unambiguous in its verdict that General Alexander, at that time serving in Italy, would have done a better job than Montgomery. Plainly, there were those within SHAEF who were still agitating for Alexander's appointment in place of Montgomery, even as the latter's strategy was on the brink of success with the American breakout commencing on the day of the article's publication. Having failed to get Monty removed, dissenters within SHAEF manifestly turned to the press to further their opposition to him.²⁸

The partisan nature of the campaign's reporting carried on into the immediate post war years, underlining the differences between the one-time Allies, often along nationalistic lines.²⁹ Several war correspondents went on to write studies of the battle, influenced by what they saw. One such writer was Alan Moorehead, who in 1946 produced the first popular post war biography of Montgomery.³⁰ In spite of

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ For other examples of articles published in the States, detrimental to the British and by default to Montgomery, see The New York Herald Tribune, 25/07/1944 as cited by Lamb, R. (1987). *Montgomery in Europe 1943-45, Success or Failure?* Buchan & Enright p 153 and Baldwin, H. W. (1944, July 27). Normandy Called A Magnified Anzio. New York Times. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1944/07/27/issue.html> (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

²⁹ See for example: Falls, C. (1946, 8 June). Aftermath of War, A Record of the 11th Armoured Division, The Illustrated London News, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001578/19460608/048/0011> which accepted the Montgomery plan of attracting German reinforcements to the east of the bridgehead. (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

³⁰ Moorehead, A. (1946). *Montgomery*. Hamish Hamilton. See also Wilmot, C. (1952). *The Struggle for Europe* (1977 ed.) Wordsworth Editions. Wilmot was also an experienced war correspondent who had followed events in NW Europe.

Moorehead's largely positive appraisal, he was critical of Montgomery's dealings with Eisenhower and acknowledged Monty's difficult personality.³¹

Such early, broadly positive post war accounts of Montgomery's record marked the apogee of his reputation for the next 35 years.³² Wartime infighting within SHAEF, combined with the published memoirs of many of the personalities vying to put forward their own accounts skewed the historical record.³³ Opinion frequently became accepted wisdom when it came to Montgomery.

On occasion, hyperbole and overly narrative styles of writing have influenced the way authors have portrayed events. Norman Gelb provides a representative example of such writing, attributing the lack of a parking space for Eisenhower's car at Norfolk House, London, in January 1944, as a calculated slight by Montgomery.³⁴ Whatever else Monty was responsible for during early Overlord planning meetings, parking allocation for attendees was not one of them. Gelb's writing is an example of a seeming eagerness to see slights where none were intended or where actions were out of Montgomery's immediate remit or control.

When an influential historian such as Stephen Ambrose can feel comfortable calling Montgomery a "Supercilious prick" in front of an audience at the National Press Club, Washington, *and* get a laugh in the process, then impartiality and reasoned argument has been replaced with something less than epistemic knowledge.³⁵ Such language adds nothing to the discourse, encouraging instead negative stereotyping which seems to condone nationalistic bias. In the words of H.P. Willmott:

³¹ Moorehead's description of the two men's personalities makes it clear that his sympathies were with Eisenhower in his dealings with Monty. Moorehead, A. (1974). *Montgomery*. New English Library pp 206-207

³² Not all early post-war accounts viewed Montgomery in a positive light, see Ingersoll, R. (1946). *Top Secret*. Harcourt Brace & Company

³³ See for example Summersby, K. (1949). *Eisenhower Was My Boss*. Dell, and Tedder, A. W. (1966). *With Prejudice*. Cassell.

³⁴ Gelb, N. (1994). *Ike & Monty, Generals at War*. Constable p 285

³⁵ Stephen Ambrose, 1997 to the National Press Club, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?80207-1/honoring-day-veterans#!>, timed at 32.10 – 32.20 (Last accessed 29/08/2022)

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that historical portrayal and interpretation have largely followed national lines, and, in so doing, for the most part have generated more heat than light.³⁶

The more outspoken North American critics of Montgomery have had an audience in part consisting of or influenced by what came to be known as “The Greatest Generation.”³⁷ That demographic has frequently been cited by historians and politicians alike as embodying all that is best in American society.³⁸

Authoritative criticism has not been restricted to North American writers. Corelli Barnett³⁹ and Alun Chalfont⁴⁰ found fault with Monty’s record, as have Max Hastings and Antony Beevor.⁴¹ The latter are highly critical not just of Montgomery’s conduct but also of the fighting qualities of Allied soldiers, particularly the Anglo-Canadians. Both Hastings and Beevor have repeatedly expressed their views on U.S. media outlets where they have found a ready audience of fellow travellers.⁴²

The cumulative effect of this undermining of Montgomery’s reputation has been the steady denigration of the part he played in the Allied victory.⁴³ As a result, the experiences and presence of non-American combatants has also been eroded by their association with Montgomery, most notably by the entertainment media.⁴⁴ A scholarly reassessment of the actions of both Monty and 21st Army Group,

³⁶ H. P. Willmott as quoted in, Baxter, C. F. (1999). *Field marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, 1887-1976: A selected bibliography: a selected bibliography*. ABC-CLIO, LLC. p 7

³⁷ Brokaw, T. (2010). *The Greatest Generation*. Random House.

³⁸ See, for example, Ivey, K. (2020). Remembering My Father and the Greatest Generation. Alabama Political Reporter. <https://www.alreporter.com/2020/05/08/opinion-remembering-my-father-and-the-greatest-generation/> (Last accessed 07/08/2022)

³⁹ Barnett, C. (1960). *The Desert Generals, Portraits of Five Generals Who Led the Campaign in North Africa, 1940-1943*. Kimber.

⁴⁰ Chalfont, A. (1976). *Montgomery of Alamein*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson

⁴¹ Hastings, M. (1984). *Overlord, D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*. Michael Joseph & Beevor, A. (2010). *D-Day, The Battle for Normandy*. Penguin. See historiography for further discussion.

⁴² See Antony Beevor, (2019). Rancho Mirage Writers Festival, broadcast on the C-Span network, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?456775-8/discussion-day>, timed between 23.52 to 27.30 (Last accessed 29/08/2022) and Hastings, M. (2020 May 28). Botch on the Rhine. The New York Review, <https://doi.org/https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/05/28/battle-arnhem-botch-rhine/> (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

⁴³ For example Spielberg, S. (Director), & Spielberg, S. (Producer). (1998). *Saving Private Ryan* [Film]. Paramount; Amblin Entertainment.

⁴⁴ For example Schaffner, F. J. (Director), & McCarthy, F. (Producer). (1970). *Patton* [Film]. 20th Century Fox; 20th Century Fox, Messina scene, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubB--22mPEQ>

unencumbered by the more challenging aspects of the former's personality traits, would serve a double purpose. Firstly, previous assumptions would come under rigorous scrutiny. Secondly, popular historians basing their work on more contemporary thinking, would be able to challenge assumptions held by a more general readership.

Events which fall beyond the scope of this work have also had a retrospectively negative effect on Montgomery's Normandy legacy. His continuous advocacy of a single "Narrow Front" advance over Eisenhower's preferred "Broad Front" policy led to repeated clashes with SHAEF,⁴⁵ creating much animosity in the process.⁴⁶ Eisenhower's decision to place two of Bradley's armies under Montgomery's temporary command during the German Ardennes offensive in December 1944 was an act of enforced pragmatic realism but was deeply unpopular.⁴⁷ Monty's style of command clashed with American doctrine, reminding some of events in Normandy.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The frustration felt within Allied circles at the slower than envisioned expansion of the bridgehead was shared and reflected by the press corps. Too many correspondents with too little to cover prior to the breakout sometimes led to divisive, occasionally partisan copy being filed. As one account of the campaign noted, "practically every newspaper in the US sent a correspondent except Dog World".⁴⁹ On D-Day alone there were approximately 558 officially accredited writers, radio reporters and cameramen accompanying the invasion forces.⁵⁰ Between them on that first day they

⁴⁵ So convinced was Montgomery over the correctness of this approach that he offered to serve under Bradley if the "Narrow Front" policy was adopted. See Wilmot, C. (1952). *The Struggle for Europe* (1977 ed.) Wordsworth Editions p 467

⁴⁶ For an account of how one of Montgomery's calls to Bedell Smith on the subject was received, see Gelb, N. (1994). *Ike & Monty, Generals at War*. Constable p 364

⁴⁷ Caddick-Adams, P. (2015). *Snow & Steel, The Battle of the Bulge 1944-45*. Arrow Books pp 419-421

⁴⁸ For example, Montgomery's decision to order a withdrawal from the town of St. Vith was seen as being overcautious despite being tactically sound. See Eisenhower, D. (1986). *Eisenhower At War 1943-1945*. Collins pp 576-579

⁴⁹ Belfield, E., & Essame, H. (1967). *The Battle for Normandy*. Pan p 172

⁵⁰ Knightley, P. (2000). *The First Casualty, The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from The Crimea to Kosovo*. Prion Books p 352

produced approximately 700,000 words, a level of coverage the correspondents would find difficult to sustain until the Allied breakout.⁵¹

The perceived lack of Allied progress on which to report on early in the campaign created a vacuum, filled in part by reporters offering their own, often pessimistic, evaluations of Allied operations and strategy. Infighting within SHAEF was also the cause of much partisan, even nationalistic copy. Such articles may not have been implicitly approved by SHAEF, but neither were they stopped. Post-war they acted as supportive building blocks for historians and other media commentators to build their own work upon.

A dislike of Monty's personality and character traits has had a disproportionate effect upon the historic record. As a consequence, Montgomery related subjects worthy of more constructive research have also been ignored or left only partially investigated.⁵² The more outspoken of his North American critics have (or had), an audience consisting in part, and influenced by, what came to be known as "The Greatest Generation."⁵³ That demographic has been lauded by both historians and politicians as representing all that is good in American society.⁵⁴ Until comparatively recently that generation's legacy has remained inviolate, but in recent years it has been undergoing something of a re-evaluation.⁵⁵ It is too soon to predict how this will alter the way Montgomery's Normandy campaign will be understood more broadly by historians in future studies, but it is likely to challenge the current historical narrative, particularly those who are based in or have a readership largely found in the United States.

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² For example, his failure to ensure the approaches to the port of Antwerp were cleared in early September 1944 to allow its early use was one of his greatest failings and one deserving of more research. This would have alleviated the chronic logistical issues facing the Allies in the winter of 1944/45 and would have been a better use of Allied assets than Montgomery's failed attempt to force the Upper Rhine in Operation Market Garden. See Ryan, C. (1975). *A Bridge Too Far*. Coronet and Middlebrook, M. (1994). *Arnhem 1944, The Airborne Battle*. Avalon Publishing

⁵³ Brokaw, T. *The Greatest Generation*.

⁵⁴ Hitchcock, W. I. (2003 April 20). The Greatest Myth. The Prospect, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/thegreatestmyth> (Last accessed 31/08/2022)

⁵⁵ See Goldman, S. (2021 December 23). The Myth of the Greatest Generation, How Great Were the Greatest? The Week <https://theweek.com/feature/opinion/1008390/how-great-was-the-greatest-generation> (Last accessed 31/08/2022).

Conclusion

The intention of this work was to examine whether Montgomery's planning and execution of the Normandy campaign has been fairly assessed and if not, what came to affect its legacy? The research was based upon a reconstructionist examination of sources placed in context with key aspects of the campaign. On this basis, it has been established that, despite bringing the campaign to a successful and early conclusion, continuous misunderstandings of Montgomery's intentions, combined with a dislike of his personality traits, have negatively affected the historical narrative. A bias amongst some historians, occasionally along nationalistic lines, has also been identified.

Studies on Normandy and Montgomery's conduct of the campaign are not hard to find. Many re-tread the same paths, often reinforcing past narratives. The approach taken in this study was to examine several key features of the battle and Montgomery's role within it with the aim of showing how, if accepted reiterations can be shown as questionable, then the subject as a whole should be viewed afresh. In a work of this size it has not been possible to go through each controversial aspect of the campaign, nor would it have been profitable to do so. An examination of the use of language and the influence of historians and journalists clearly illustrates their effect on the legacy of the battle and how Montgomery's role has come to be defined.

Although the subject of much previous debate, the issue of Caen cannot be ignored. To understand the Normandy campaign it is imperative that Montgomery's intentions for the city are understood. Its strategic location effected every aspect of the battle for Normandy prior to the American breakout and ensured the early failure of the German counterstroke directed at Avranches. Montgomery's pre-invasion Thunderclap presentations seemed clear - Caen was a D-Day objective, but it should have been evident to his audiences that this was more of an aspiration than likelihood. The aftermath of Anzio was still fresh in Allied minds, Montgomery needed to emphasise that D-Day would be about more than just getting successfully ashore. The need to push forward to "Peg out claims well inland" was a precursor not to the

capture of Caen,¹ as welcome as that would have been, but to allow the Allies room to manoeuvre in order to defeat the inevitable German counterattacks. When seen in that light, I Corps order to 3rd British Infantry Division that by nightfall of D-Day, Caen should be “Captured or effectively masked,”² makes perfect sense.

Such an order seemed to directly contradict Montgomery, but the reality is that it suited his intentions perfectly. Caen, taken or not, was going to remain the critical focal point of German opposition. The issue was and remains Montgomery’s refusal to take General Eisenhower fully into his confidence from D+7 (following events at Villers Bocage but before Epsom). In keeping Eisenhower and SHAEF at a distance, Montgomery gave succour to his critics within SHAEF and, to paraphrase Nigel Hamilton, dug his own professional, reputational and historical grave in the process.³

The research conducted for this thesis has revealed the extent to which negative bias and a reluctance to challenge established interpretations of the original sources has affected the narrative. This also feeds into the notion that the campaign lasted as long as it did due to the superiority of the German army over their Allied opponents. Such accepted wisdoms and others examined in this work demonstrates the limitations of research, no matter its reputed epistemology. As has been noted elsewhere:

Since conventional wisdom is presented as fact, yet lacks close scrutiny, its validity is open to debate. In other words, being generally accepted does not make information accurate.⁴

¹ IWM, Montgomery Papers Part II, LMD 55/16

² PRO, WO 171/258

³ Hamilton, N. (1994). *Monty, The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery*. Hodder & Stoughton p 370

⁴ Hennessey, L. Pennsylvania State University. (2022). To Problem-Solve Creatively, Scrutinize Conventional Wisdom. <https://psyld.la.psu.edu/lead/leadership-cafe/to-problem-solve-creatively-scrutinize-conventional-wisdom/> (Last accessed 11/08/2022).

In recent years historians such as William F Buckingham,⁵ S. A. Hart,⁶ John Buckley⁷ and Andrew Stewart⁸ have re-examined the Normandy campaign, seeking to challenge such accepted wisdoms. Buckley's assessment of the task facing the British and (by default) their Canadian comrades in 21st Army Group encapsulates the findings of all four historians:

The British Army would also have to win without too many casualties...it was not simply a matter of winning battles: the army had to deliver victory both in the war and the ensuing peace. Finding a method of fighting the Germans that reflected these imperatives was fundamental to Montgomery and the leadership of the army.⁹

The accepted wisdoms focusing on Montgomery and the handling of forces under his command during the Normandy campaign continue to affect the narrative. As compelling as the arguments made by Buckley and others are, their conclusions continue to be refuted. For example, after the publication of the works cited above, C.J. Dick stated the following:

It was fortunate for the Allies that the circumstances in which Patton's army entered battle were so favourable to his aggressive, risk taking style of command. That the German defense in Normandy unravelled so completely and, above all, so quickly was largely due to Patton's energy and audacity, often in spite of the wishes of his more cautious superior.¹⁰

The 'cautious superior' referred to in the above quote is General Bradley but the author's inference is clear, Patton's breakout was achieved almost by force of personality alone, that Montgomery and 21st Army Group as a whole lacked both

⁵ Buckingham, W. F. (2004). *D-Day, The First 72 Hours*. Tempus Publishing.

⁶ Hart, S. A. (2007). *Colossal Cracks, Montgomery's 21st Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*. Stackpole Books.

⁷ Buckley, J. (2013). *Monty's Men, the British Army and the Liberation of Europe*. Yale University Press.

⁸ Stewart, A. (2014). *Caen Controversy, The Battle for Sword Beach 1944*. Helion & Company.

⁹ Buckley, J. *Monty's Men* p 17

¹⁰ Dick, C. J. (2016). *From Victory To Stalemate, The Western Front, Summer 1944*. University Press of Kansas p 184

energy and the capacity for audacious operations. The efforts of the latter to fix and hold the bulk of the German armour away from the American sector, enabling the undeniably spectacular U.S. breakout are ignored. The work of Rick Atkinson¹¹ and Edward E. Gordon & David Ramsay reach similar conclusions with the latter also focusing on Montgomery's character traits and his suitability for command throughout their study.¹²

A re-examination of the sources and how they reflect the realities of the campaign not only clarifies but answers the central question of this thesis: Montgomery's plan for, and execution of, the Normandy campaign has been misunderstood. The value of Montgomery's legacy has been and continues to be eroded by bias created in part by his difficult personality. His relevance and generalship of the Normandy campaign requires wider re-evaluation. Such analysis by contemporary scholars would allow for a potential revalidation of his legacy by looking at Montgomery's command rather than his more negative personality traits.

The methodology selected has answered the questions originally posed by this work but in doing so, further lines of research present themselves:

- 1) Montgomery's handling of the U.S. First and Ninth Armies during the Ardennes Campaign. This was a particularly controversial period for Monty and research would establish just how much of that controversy was based on fact or the result of partisan reporting by British and American journalists.
- 2) How media representation of the campaign and the wider European conflict has come to influence and define public understanding of it.
- 3) The Falaise Gap and its aftermath. How many German units escaped to fight again in the autumn/winter of 1944-45?

¹¹ Atkinson, R. (2013). *The Guns at Last Light, The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945*. Abacus, See, for example, p 137

¹² Gordon, E. E., & Ramsay, D. (2017). *Divided on D-Day, How Conflicts and Rivalries Jeopardized the Allied Victory at Normandy*. Prometheus Books. See, for example p 61

This last line of research would also cover a gap in this work as space precluded its inclusion. Falaise and the battle to prevent German units escaping via routes near that town is often quoted as an example of Montgomery's overcaution.¹³ Much of the work referred to in secondary sources relies on old research and a new examination of the battle would help to update the wider narrative.

This thesis has addressed the contentious issues surrounding Montgomery, his part in the Normandy campaign and his legacy. It adds to the academic discourse by the examination of primary sources and a reappraisal of secondary ones, placing them in the context of events on the ground. The conclusion of this work is clear and leaves little scope for ambiguity: Montgomery's plan for and execution of the Normandy campaign has been the subject of unfair assessment. As a result, the historic record has been negatively affected and the legacy of the campaign and the lessons they teach have been misinterpreted.

This work has shown that Montgomery was the best choice to lead the campaign. The same conclusion was acknowledged post-war by Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, Bedell Smith who, whilst recognising Monty's difficult nature, stated "There wasn't anyone else who could have got us across the Channel and ashore in Normandy; it was his sort of battle."¹⁴ Bedell Smith's wartime superior, Eisenhower affirmed, "No-one else could have got us across the channel."¹⁵

¹³ See Barker, J., & Lucas, J. (1978). *The Battle of the Falaise Gap August 1944*. B. T. Batsford and Tucker-Jones, A. (2008). *Falaise The Flawed Victory, The Destruction of Panzergruppe West, August 1944*. Pen & Sword.

¹⁴ Middleton, D. (1976, March 25). Montgomery, Hard to Like or to Ignore. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/03/25/archives/montgomery-hard-to-like-or-to-ignore.html?searchResultPosition=20> (Last accessed 14/08/2022)

¹⁵ *ibid*

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