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**A FAILURE OF COALITION LEADERSHIP:
THE FALAISE-ARGENTAN GAP**

BY

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Douglas C. Carpenter

TITLE: A Failure of Coalition Leadership: The Falaise-Argentan Gap

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 09 April 2002

PAGES: 34

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper describes the roles, missions, and command relationships of four significant personalities (Generals Eisenhower and Montgomery and Lieutenant Generals Bradley and Patton) of the Allied military coalition prior to and during the Allied breakout from the Normandy peninsula. Specific personalities and personal characteristics that affected coalition relationships are described. The paper discusses the strategic and operational advantages of both sides as of August 1, 1944 and gives a brief overview of the actual battle. Specific leadership failures and analysis of those failures and the strategic consequences are described in detail.

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A FAILURE OF COALITION LEADERSHIP: THE FALAISE-ARGENTAN GAP

"Even though the battle of the Falaise-Argentan pocket did not accomplish the utter annihilation of the German armies in Normandy, they were broken as an effective fighting force, and our way across France was opened."¹

—General Dwight D. Eisenhower

In the Allied battle for Normandy and the subsequent breakout and race across France, one phase of the operation remains the subject of significant discussion among historians. That is the Allied failure to encircle and destroy the German Seventh Army and Panzergruppe West (renamed Fifth Panzer Army on August 6, 1944) in the Falaise-Argentan pocket. The Allies had the opportunity to close the Falaise-Argentan Gap on August 15, 1944, but failed to close it until August 19, 1944.² How many German troops and how much equipment escaped from the Falaise-Argentan pocket in that five days? What was the rationale for, and strategic importance of, the Allied failure to close the Falaise-Argentan Gap before August 19, 1944? Would the closing of the Falaise-Argentan Gap before August 19, 1944 have made a significant difference in the outcome of World War II? Was the Allied failure to close the Falaise-Argentan Gap a failure of the land component commander or a larger failure of Allied military coalition leadership?

THE MAJOR ALLIED ACTORS AND PERSONALITIES:

General Eisenhower's early military experience as a staff officer under General Douglas MacArthur and later under General George C. Marshall developed his ability to work the political angles required of the Supreme Allied Commander. His dedication to the preservation of the Allied military coalition manifested in an often overt capitulation to the British point of view which did not endear him to his American subordinates. General Eisenhower's lack of experience in the operational art of war made his observations to General Marshall an update of the situation lacking any analysis, possible courses of action, or a recommended course of action. General Eisenhower was extremely competitive, ambitious, short-tempered, and a stern disciplinarian who exuded charm when necessary while choosing to remain aloof from the everyday concerns of his subordinates. He preferred to be above it all, and, where battle was the subject, had no hard-and-fast rules.³ General "Montgomery didn't think much of [General] Eisenhower as a soldier, but he appreciated [General Eisenhower's] other attributes." Field Marshall Montgomery would later remark that, "His real strength lies in his human qualities. He has the

power of drawing the hearts of men toward him as a magnet attracts the bit of metal. He merely has to smile at you, and you trust him at once.⁴

General Bernard L. Montgomery was an austere and rigorous commander. Essentially a loner, he tended to over caution. General Montgomery started his military career in the First World War and saw at firsthand the significant losses endured by Britain during this war. His conservative outlook was reinforced as available British manpower diminished during the later part of the Second World War. The manpower shortage was caused by the competing demands of the military and the war production effort, and culminated in 1944. British military officials were forced to disband existing units to gain the troops required for casualty replacements in other combat formations. Because of this, General Montgomery had to be conservative in his practice of war.⁵ Nigel Hamilton was perhaps too close to General Montgomery to be very objective, but his unlimited access to General Montgomery's papers was important. Hamilton provides a good description of General Montgomery in the preface to his book *Monty: The Battles of Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery*:

"His legacy to the Allied armies endures today: training, rehearsal, and professionalism in the handling of men and women in a democratic cause - guided by the demand for simplicity, clear aims, frontline leadership and care among commanders to preserve human life ... Often on the border of madness in his determination to see the right military decision prevail, he was venerated by his troops but often maligned by his Allies ... Arrogant, vain, boastful, boorish, and bigoted, he wanted to win ... Lacking magnanimity, he went to his grave embattled, lonely and haunted."⁶

Lieutenant General Patton was obsessed with speed, surprise, movement and action. "He became impatient in static situations... [and] was the ideal commander for fluid situations, ..."⁷ He was shrewd and calculating in his plans. Lieutenant General Patton wanted his men and the public to see him as a rugged, dashing and colorful commander who was bold and daring in his actions. To him, the smaller incremental casualties taken by the measured British actions over the long run would surpass the higher, but shorter-term losses that so suited his personality.⁸ Instead of the empty, generalized rhetoric of no substance often used by General Eisenhower, Lieutenant General Patton spoke to his men in simple, down to earth language that they understood. Lieutenant General Patton explained his use of profanity to his nephew by saying,

"When I want my men to remember something important, to really make it stick, I give it to them double dirty. It may not sound nice to some bunch of little old ladies at an afternoon tea party, but it helps my soldiers to remember. You can't run an army without profanity; and it has to be eloquent profanity. An army without profanity couldn't fight it's way out of a

piss-soaked paper bag. ... Sometimes I just, By God, get carried away with my own eloquence."⁹

Lieutenant General Bradley displayed an uncharacteristically mild temperament for a military leader. His demeanor conveyed humility. Lieutenant General Bradley played by the book and was admired for his soundness and dependability. His polite manner was coupled with a demanding nature and the mind of a brilliant military tactician. Lieutenant General Bradley preferred not to take any chances. Thus, while he might never win an outstanding victory, neither would he suffer a disastrous defeat.¹⁰ Lieutenant General Bradley thus became the ideal moderator for Lieutenant General Patton's overly aggressive and colorful characteristics.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ALLIED STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES (AUGUST 1, 1944):

The mobilization of the American industrial base was in full tide by 1944 and was able to support two theaters of war (and multiple fronts in each theater) simultaneously. This industrial base provided all the equipment, transportation assets and logistics for the American forces and significantly supplemented the equipment, transportation assets and logistics needs for the rest of the Allied forces.

The Allies broke the German enigma encryption codes (Codename Operation ULTRA) for the Luftwaffe in the late spring of 1940, the Kriegsmarine in early 1941, and the Wehrmacht in 1942. Ultra provided intelligence information from the German high command concerning German operations, personnel and equipment strength, and troop movements before they occurred. During the Allied breakout and the battles of the Falaise-Argentan pocket, Ultra was able to quickly decode many of the orders given to and by Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge. The ability of the Allies to rapidly disseminate this decoded information to Generals Bradley and Montgomery provided them with real time information of the German plans.¹¹ Thus the Allies were able to effect immediate counter-action to take advantage of the intelligence.

The three major Allied political leaders, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Premier Josef Stalin were very strong. Their ability to diplomatically agree to prosecute the war against the Axis powers was amazing considering the diverse backgrounds and different agendas of each of the principals. The Europe first concept was developed as a result of the collaboration between American and British military strategists trying to determine American military strategy required to fight as a combatant in two major theaters of war.¹²

Public support in the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union was overwhelming. Because of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, American public support for the war

effort was immense. American victories in the Pacific theater and three successful operations against the Axis in the European theater (North Africa, Sicily and Italy), contributed to the continued American popular support. The resolve of the British people, especially considering their five years of continuous warfare, their numerous defeats in the early years of the war and the price paid in winning the battle of Britain, was admirable. The British finally had a winning military leader in General Montgomery, who turned the British rout in North Africa into victory at El Alamein, played a principal role in the capture of Sicily, led forces in Italy and successfully landed British and American troops in France. Since the battle of Kursk in July 1943, the largest tank battle of the war, the Soviet Union's victories on the Eastern front beginning in August 1943 and continuing through 1944 kept the German Army on the defensive.

ASSESSMENT OF THE AXIS STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES (AUGUST 1, 1944):

The Nazi party exerted considerable control over Germany and German occupied lands. After the failed assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler's life by Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg on July 20th, 1944, this control became absolute. What followed was the execution of all people who were directly involved, indirectly involved, or implicated in the assassination plot against Adolf Hitler. The Nazi party further used the assassination plot as a convenient excuse to enhance their control by executing other known enemies of the Nazi party not involved in the plot.¹³

In mid-1944 the Axis still dominated most of Europe. With the exception of the Cotentin peninsula, the southern part of Italy and Sicily, Germany controlled Europe. In 1942 under the direction of Albert Speer, the German industrial base was able to increase and then maintain its armament production in order to keep pace with war losses, but it was not able to build any type of stockpile. It was not until the German defeat at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-1943, that Adolf Hitler recognized the need for a vast increase in armament production. He made Albert Speer the "Minister for Armaments and War Production with authority over almost every phase of economic life, civil and military, with the exception of the aircraft industry." Albert Speer's effective leadership and management permitted the transformation of German industry from domestic production efforts not in direct support of the war effort to those of armament, to drastically increase the number of foreign workers, and to modernize production techniques to those of mass production.¹⁴ The effects of Albert Speer's efforts were realized in 1944, when the highest armament production of the entire war was achieved. And this was still short of the industrial mobilization of the Third Reich.

Adolf Hitler's innovative, daring and radical approach to military thinking made it difficult for the Allies to anticipate what the German army was going to do next. Many of the previous Axis successes were due not only to its military might, but also to the boldness and originality of Hitler's unpredictable strategy. This remained true with the counter-offensive in the Mortain sector and again, later, in the Ardennes counter-offensive.¹⁵

The German Navy failed in its early attempt at surface raiding with the losses of the Admiral Graf Spee in 1939 and the Bismarck in 1941. Grand Admiral Erich Räder decided to position the Tirpitz in Norwegian waters "to protect our position in the Norwegian and Arctic areas by threatening the flank of enemy operations against the northern Norwegian areas, and by attacking White Sea convoys...to tie down enemy forces in the Atlantic, so that they cannot operate in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean or the Pacific."¹⁶ With the Tirpitz bottled up in the Norwegian fjords, only the German U-boat fleet remained effective at sea, but by mid-1943 the Allies had won the Battle of the Atlantic. In any case the Third Reich was very much a continental power. Save for the movement of Swedish iron ore on "interior" waters, Germany had little need of maritime commerce.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ALLIED OPERATIONAL ADVANTAGES (AUGUST 1, 1944):

The Allies had overwhelming air superiority as evidenced by their ability to conduct both daylight-bombing raids by the United States Army Air Corps and nighttime bombing raids by the Royal Air Force. Even though Germany transferred 800 fighters to Western Europe after the Normandy invasion, the Luftwaffe was not able to challenge the Allies for control of the air. Allied fighter aircraft attacked Luftwaffe aircraft as soon as they took off.¹⁷

The Allies enjoyed the momentum of campaign successes that bolstered troop morale and confidence and fresh uncommitted forces, supplies and equipment arrived daily on the continent. By August 1st, the Allies had landed over 1.5 million men, over three hundred thousand vehicles and over 1.6 million tons of supplies in Normandy.¹⁸

The Allies had enormous sea superiority as evidenced by their ability to conduct and protect the following operations effectively and simultaneously; 1) the cross-channel supply of men and material to the Cotentin peninsula from their Logistics base in England without Axis naval interference, 2) the transatlantic supply of men and material with minimal Axis naval interference (the only threat was from the U-boats), 3) the supply of men and materials to the Italian theater of operations, 4) the supply of material to Russia, and 5) the massive supply of ships and materials to the Pacific for the concurrent war against Japan.

ASSESSMENT OF THE AXIS OPERATIONAL ADVANTAGES (AUGUST 1, 1944):

The Axis lines of communication continued to shorten as their military forces on all three fronts were forced back toward Germany. The German commanders and staff officers were seasoned veterans of numerous campaigns of the war. The Axis forces were well used to the terrain and area of operations (the home court advantage) having occupied the area for the past four years.

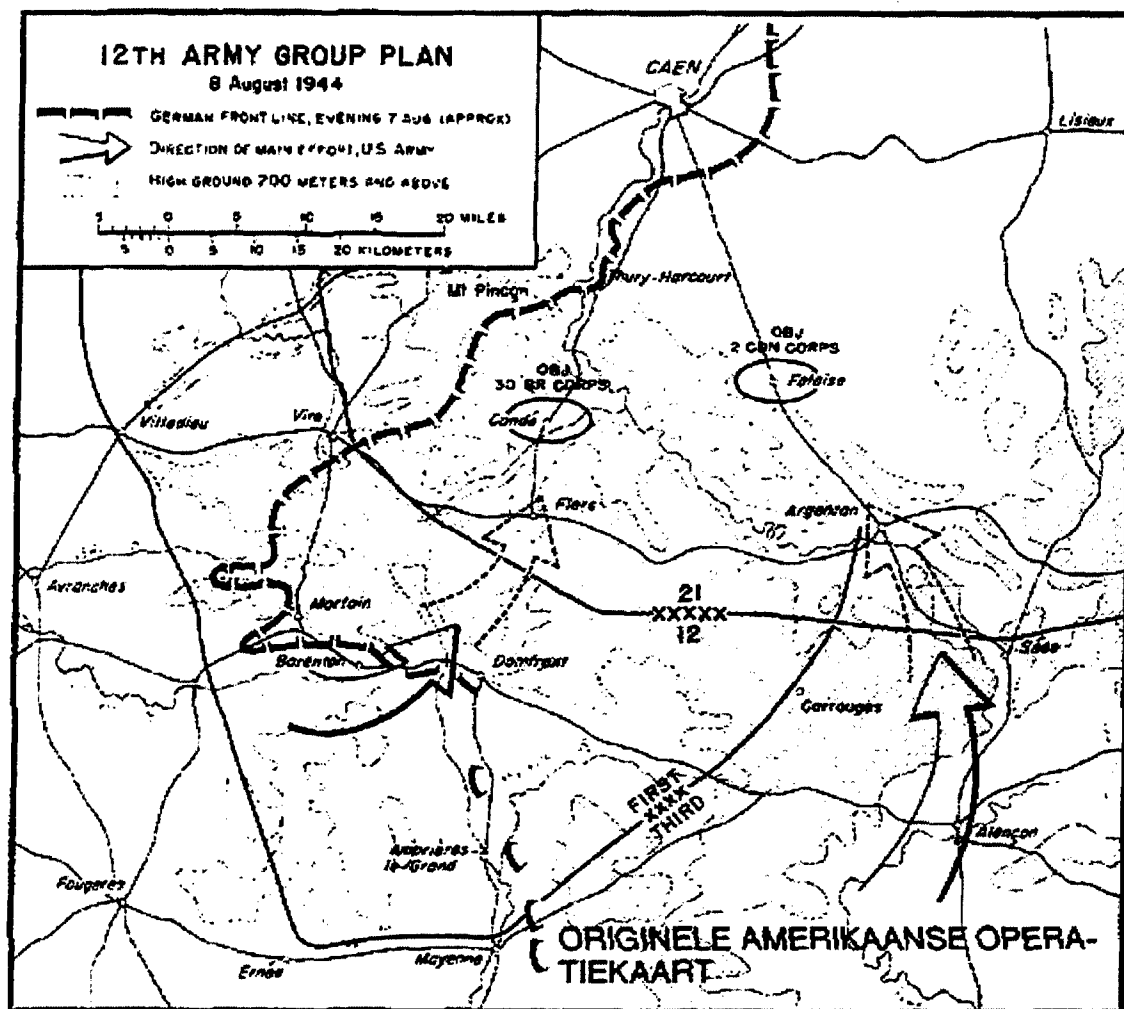


FIGURE 1: 12TH ARMY GROUP PLAN¹⁹

OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

When the Allies invaded German occupied France on June 6, 1944, the Germans contained the Allied advance and limited their initial operations to the confines of the lodgment area of the Normandy peninsula. After weeks of grueling struggles in the hedgerows, the Allies developed Operation Cobra to break out of the Normandy lodgment area and to start an

offensive toward Paris and ultimately Germany (Figure 1). Operation Cobra broke the stalemate in Normandy. During the Allied breakout from Normandy, the German armed forces launched a counter-offensive on the evening of August 6, 1944. The German Seventh Army and Fifth Panzer Army attacked from the Mortain sector in a drive toward Avranches. Adolf Hitler designed the German counter-offensive to cut the Allied forces in half and to drive the Allies back into the Normandy peninsula and off the continent. The Allies were fully aware of the German high command's planning and decision to execute the Mortain counter-offensive because of ULTRA intercepts.²⁰ The intelligence information provided by ULTRA prior to the Mortain counter-offensive enabled Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley to quickly reinforce the VII Corps with four additional divisions.²¹ By August 9th these four American divisions had effectively stopped the four German Panzer division counter-offensive.²²

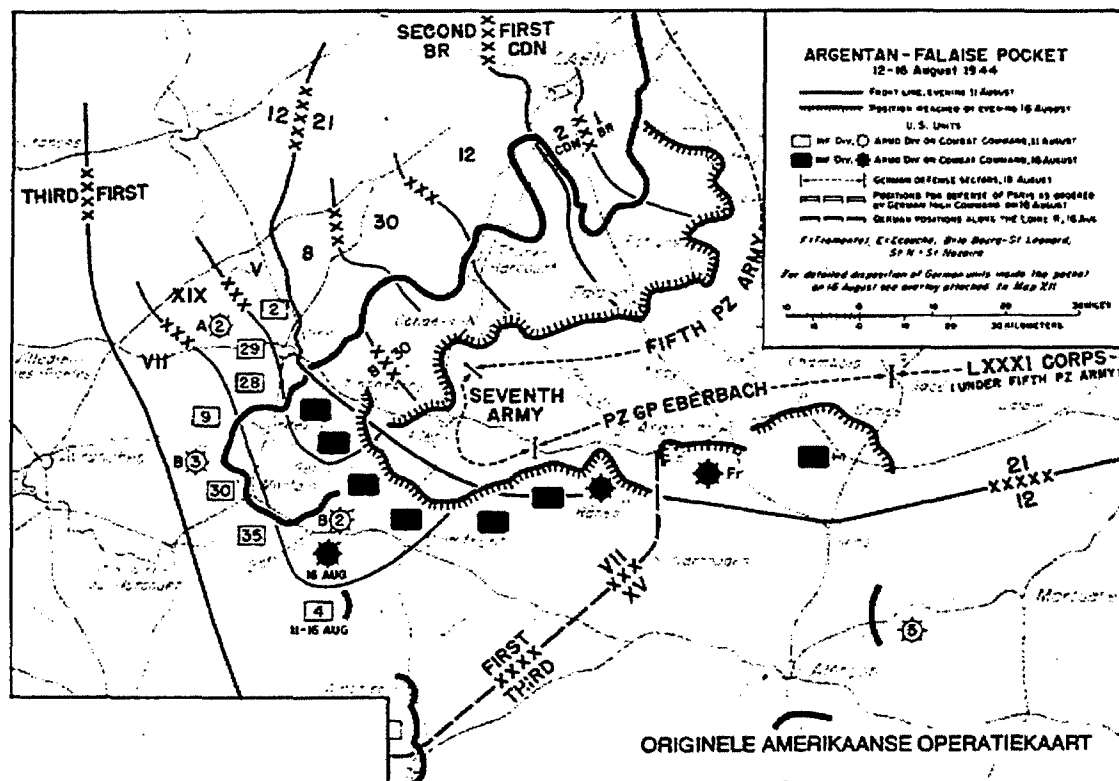


FIGURE 2: FALAISE-ARGENTAN POCKET²³

Lieutenant General S. Patton Jr. commanded the U.S. 3rd Army's counterattack, and avoided significant resistance by sweeping around the stopped German forces and advancing rapidly toward Argentan.²⁴ The U.S. XV Corps led the U.S. 3rd Army's drive towards Argentan. The U.S. XV Corps was a weak corps commanded by a strong commander, Major General

Wade Hampton Haislip. The corps consisted of the 79th and 90th U.S. Infantry Divisions, the 5th U.S. Armored Division and the 2nd French Armored Division. At this point, the 90th U.S. Infantry Division was one of the weakest U.S. infantry units, plagued with poor leadership and discipline. The unit was on its third commanding officer, Brigadier General Raymond S. McLain. Under Brigadier General McLain's leadership, the 90th U.S. Infantry Division would eventually correct its deficiencies and provide a good showing for itself in this and later campaigns.²⁵ Major General Jacques Leclerc, commanding the 2nd French Armored Division, arrived in Normandy on August 1st, with the mission to have "an important French formation present at the reoccupation of Paris"²⁶ and was attached to the U.S. XV Corps by Lieutenant General Patton. Major General Leclerc was headstrong, impatient, skeptical of American abilities because of his service with General Montgomery in North Africa, and resentful that Americans were running the operation to free France. Major General Leclerc's attitude caused friction in his dealings with all American commanders in the area of operation (Generals Bradley, Patton, Haislip, Hodges and Gerow). Major General Leclerc's failure to follow specific orders was a severe handicap to the 12th U.S. Army Group during the development and early closure of the Falaise-Argentan pocket.²⁷

Outside of Argentan, in "an upland forest [with] difficult terrain, ... Haislip instructed his armored divisions to go around it, the French on the left, the Americans on the right ... Leclerc disregarded Haislip's order. He sent his elements around the left side, through the forest, and around the right. The later troops preempted a major road reserved for the Americans and blocked their movement to Argentan, which was undefended. During the six hours it took Leclerc's men to complete the maneuver, the remnants of three panzer divisions arrived in Argentan and assumed defensive positions. They turned back the XV Corps and kept the Americans and French out of the town."²⁸

Meanwhile, the British 2nd Army was advancing slowly in sector and the Canadian 1st Army was moving toward Falaise.²⁹ On August 13th, Lieutenant General Bradley, commander of the 12th U.S. Army Group, ordered Lieutenant General Patton to change the direction of the advance of his XV Corps from its northward advance through Argentan and its link up with the Canadian forces moving south from Caen in the direction of Falaise, to march eastward to Paris and the Seine River. The Allied ground forces had an opportunity to encircle and destroy the German Seventh Army and the Fifth Panzer Army in the Falaise-Argentan pocket (Figure 2). Why did Lieutenant General Bradley decide to shift the direction of Lieutenant General Patton's advance away from Argentan? Questions about this decision make Lieutenant General Bradley's order one of the most controversial decisions of the war.³⁰

The resulting failure to close the Falaise-Argentan Gap on August 15, 1944, left open a passage (Figure 3) which allowed somewhere between 20,000 to 100,000 German troops to escape; Martin Blumenson cites a range of between 20,000 to 40,000 German troops³², Paul Carrell cites 50,000 German troops³³, James Lucas initially cites 50,000 German troops then later cites an unnamed German historian who says there were 20,000 German troops³⁴. Martin Blumenson developed the best of these analyses by working backward. Blumenson starts with the 175,000 German troops in the area of the encirclement, and then using the highest numbers reported by the Allied forces, he takes away the number of German troops reported captured, killed and missing in action. This analysis indicates that more than 100,000 German troops escaped capture in the Allied encirclement action.³⁵ When the fighting stopped within the Falaise-Argentan pocket, the Allies completed the two and a half months of fighting in Normandy and were firmly entrenched in France.³⁶

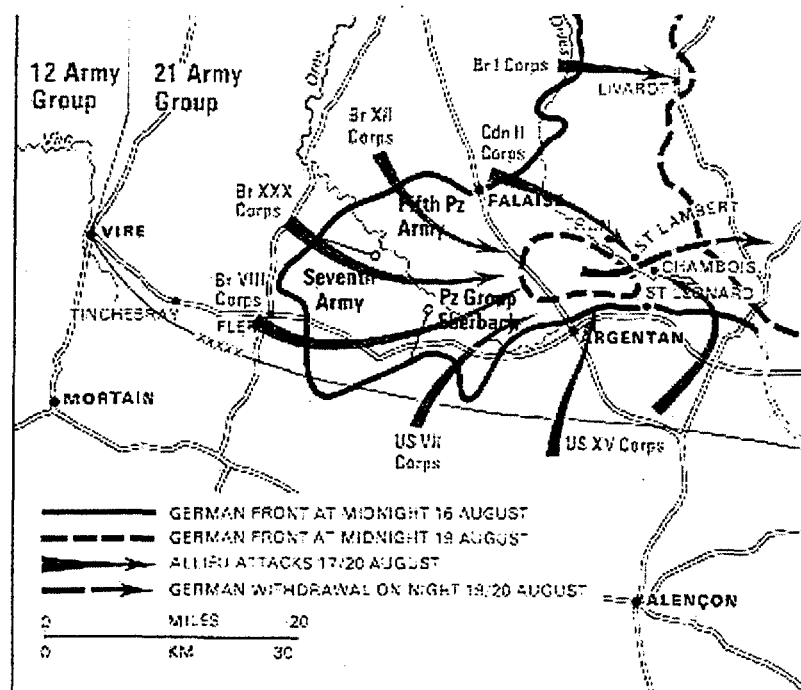


FIGURE 3: THE ESCAPE ROUTE³¹

COMMAND DECISIONS:

General Eisenhower was responsible for the selection of the field commanders who would play a major role in the development of the Falaise-Argentan pocket. He selected Lieutenant General Bradley to command the American forces for operation Overlord over Lieutenant General Patton and Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark. Lieutenant General Patton was not selected because of the incidents involving hospitalized American soldiers and

Lieutenant General Clark was left to command the Allied invasion at Salerno.³⁷ General Eisenhower wanted to select General Sir Harold Alexander as the Allied land component commander, however Field Marshall Alan F. Brooke and Sir James Grigg, the British Secretary of State for War wanted General Montgomery to command the Allied land forces. General Eisenhower relented to the wishes of the coalition and selected General Montgomery.³⁸ General Eisenhower, supported by General George C. Marshall, selected Lieutenant General Patton to command the U.S. Third Army over Lieutenant General Bradley's objection.³⁹

Lieutenant General Patton was humiliated by their new roles; the reversal of authority, the taking of orders from a subordinate he had trained and developed in combat, would take some getting used to. Lieutenant General Patton swallowed his pride and accepted the fact, that in order for him to be in the glorious fights ahead, he would have to serve under Lieutenant General Bradley. Earlier in the war, Lieutenant Generals Patton and Bradley worked together in harmony. Now both felt uncomfortable working within their reversed roles. To Lieutenant General Patton, Lieutenant General Bradley now seemed tentative and cautious in his decision making process. Lieutenant General Bradley had his own perceptions. "Patton's manner set his teeth on edge. 'Had it been left up to me,' Bradley later said, 'frankly I would not have chosen Patton.'"⁴⁰

General Montgomery was the British land commander, and he was chosen as the senior Allied commander ashore to fill the role of the Allied land component commander until the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) was established ashore. This occurred, and command did pass, on September 1, 1944. The initial command alignment may have worked exceptionally well had the American general placed in charge of American forces been Patton instead of Bradley. The General Montgomery and Lieutenant General Patton relationship as equal army commanders under General Alexander worked well during the Sicily campaign, in spite of their prima donna mannerisms and bombastic grandstanding for media attention. When General Montgomery's advance in Sicily got bogged down, Lieutenant General Patton was allowed a free reign to advance and to divert some of the Axis forces opposing General Montgomery's advance to Messina.⁴¹ "Patton's whirlwind movement to Palermo ... has given Montgomery respect for Patton's expertise ... [and Patton] knew his tactical business. Where the battlefield was concerned, Montgomery felt, the generals saw eye to eye. As Army commanders working on the same level, they could be rivals and at the same time find mutually acceptable solutions to problems." This same type of situation would happen again during the encirclement of the Axis forces in the Falaise-Argentan pocket, and General "Montgomery would make a similar decision ... Unfortunately, Patton would be serving two steps below

Montgomery in the chain of command. This being the case there was no opportunity for them to have mutually frank exchanges on a purely professional basis. Patton would have to work [up] through Bradley, and so would Montgomery [down through Bradley]."⁴²

General Eisenhower was in Normandy most of the time during this battle, however he did not take an active role in the operational issues leading to and culminating at Falaise, nor did he actively engage in taking relief actions with regard to senior military leaders.⁴³ Prime Minister Churchill had given General Eisenhower carte blanche in determining the fate of any British commander. The key example of senior leader issues that General Eisenhower failed to take action upon for coalition reasons was his failure to relieve Air Chief Marshall Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory when there was sufficient evidence to do so as a result of his actions during operation COBRA. This same failure to relieve a senior Allied commander can be argued in regard to General Montgomery. The specific incident regards false reporting about the failure at Goodwood and General Montgomery's continued failure to aggressively pursue the ground campaign. Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder fully supported the removal of General Montgomery from his position as the British commander and the overall ground forces commander.⁴⁴ In fact, General Eisenhower reluctantly assumed command of the Allied ground forces from General Montgomery on September 1st, instead of relieving him even though General Montgomery was under significant criticism from American commanders in the field, British military and civilian officials and from Washington as a result of his timidity during Overlord, the slow pace of his forces during COBRA and the failure of his forces to reach Argentan in a timely manner. General Eisenhower could have relieved General Montgomery and replaced him with someone else instead of assuming command of the Allied ground forces himself, but it was the plan for General Eisenhower to lead the overall ground campaign – only General Montgomery and his die-hard fans believe otherwise.⁴⁵ Winston Churchill's behind the scenes meddling to maintain British prestige and the appearance of British primacy is evident here. General Montgomery is promoted to Field Marshall on September 1st, the same day as he passed command of the Allied ground forces in Normandy, amidst demands for his relief.⁴⁶ During all coalition struggles General Eisenhower, as well he should, played the role of the Supreme Allied Expeditionary Forces commander. He maintained an air of statesmanlike neutrality, free from bias, and bent over backwards to keep the Allied coalition together.⁴⁷

General Eisenhower was the commander of all of the Allied forces invading and liberating Europe. As part of the phased command plan, he had temporarily turned control of the ground forces (land component commander) over to General Montgomery. Once he delegated that responsibility, General Eisenhower refrained from interjecting his decisions into his junior

commanders operational and tactical operations.⁴⁸ Like General Eisenhower, Lieutenant General Bradley was reluctant to interject his views on successful subordinates, but he was also unwilling to address critical battlefield issues with General Montgomery.⁴⁹ The practice of allowing subordinate commanders a significant amount of latitude in the conduct of operations was normal U.S. Army practice.⁵⁰ The combination of this normal US Army practice with General Montgomery's timidity and Lieutenant General Bradley's reluctance or unwillingness to challenge his superiors created the environment for future Allied military failure.

General Montgomery believed that the Germans' only course of action was to fight a delaying action and withdraw to the Seine River. Thus General Montgomery developed the overall land operational plan to swing the right flank of the Allied armies (12th Army Group) toward Paris, combined with a sweep south from Caen to Falaise (1st Canadian Army) to cut off the retreating Germans.⁵¹

The Canadian attack toward Falaise (launched on August 8th) brought a new dimension to the German Mortain counter-attack begun on the evening of August 6th. The opportunity to encircle the German Army was readily seen by both Lieutenant General Bradley and General Eisenhower. General Eisenhower called General Montgomery and obtained his approval for a change of plan to spring the trap. Should the Germans somehow evade the encirclement at Argentan, General Montgomery's alternative plan was for the armies to restart their original offensive, driving straight toward the Seine. On August 11th, General Montgomery made a new analysis of the situation and projected the probable link up of British and American forces in the "short envelopment" south of Argentan. Therefore he drew an army group boundary line to reduce the chances of friendly fire during the meeting between the British and American forces. General Montgomery did not anticipate the rapid advance of the XV Corps from the south and expected the Canadian forces in his command to reach Argentan well ahead of the Americans. The over optimism of this expectation was revealed when the Canadian advance was slowed eight miles north of Falaise on August 9th.⁵² The evidence suggests that the Canadian attack, as the pincer movement from the north, was not pursued as aggressively as it should have been,⁵³ nor were enough seasoned forces used for such an enveloping attack.⁵⁴ The Canadian commander, General Crerar relieved the commander of the Canadian 4th Armored Division because of his failure to move fast enough⁵⁵. General Montgomery later asserted that the battle in Normandy developed exactly as it had been war-gamed before the invasion. In one version of his story of the Falaise-Argentan pocket, General Montgomery stated that "The battle of Normandy may be said to have ended on the 19th of August, as it was on this day that we finally

cleaned up the remnants of the enemy trapped in the 'pocket' east of Mortain. The final victory was definite, complete, and decisive."⁵⁶

ANALYSIS:

It is always easy while looking back and analyzing historical data to second-guess and make critical judgments about the decisions made at specific moments in time by the Allied coalition senior military leadership. Senior military leaders make their decisions, right or wrong, based on their knowledge and experience. These decisions are developed in stressful and ambiguous combat situations, like the encirclement of the German Seventh Army and Fifth Panzer Army in the Falaise-Argentan pocket, or in the nebulous political environment of an evolving coalition.

The politics of the Allied coalition and America sentiments towards Lieutenant General Patton's abusive treatment of "battle fatigued" soldiers resulted in Lieutenant General Bradley's elevation. Lieutenant General Bradley did not have Lieutenant General Patton's experience or Lieutenant General Patton's proven success as a combat commander, which might have permitted him to "meet Montgomery as an equal. They [Lieutenant General Patton and General Montgomery] would have worked closely and effectively together, for they respected each other. Their interests were professional and tied to the operational scene. Their strengths were complimentary."⁵⁷ Placing Lieutenant General Patton and General Montgomery in equal leadership roles with Lieutenant General Bradley as the land component commander would probably "have produced the perfect team." Lieutenant General Patton was the most effective combat commander of the group.⁵⁸ Lieutenant General Patton's use of profanity, his prejudices, and his unruly expression of views that strained Allied coalition relations, made him an unacceptable choice to lead a combined American-British coalition ground force. The fighting in

Normandy was "as much a German success as an Anglo-American failure," Raymond Callahan has said. "In the end, the Falaise pocket gave the Allies a great, if an incomplete victory. ... the pocket could have been sealed off more quickly. In fact, given the problems of coordination in coalition warfare, the personal feelings that affected vision at the top, the inexperience of the Canadians, and the quality of the German army, the failure to do so [is] ... unsurprising. ... The Allied generals in charge of the campaign were the best of the available professionals. Despite their expertise, the three at the top fumbled badly."⁵⁹

General Eisenhower's "fumble" was his failure to take action and get directly involved with his two army group commanders, General Montgomery and Lieutenant General Bradley, when the execution of the envelopment to close the Falaise-Argentan gap did not develop as desired.

"Had he [Eisenhower] been more perceptive and more forthright, he could have insisted on behavior in conformance with what was his forte, coalition cooperation and coordination. Instead, he pursued his traditional hands-off policy, and the result was"⁶⁰ the Allied delay in closing the Falaise-Argentan gap and the tactical and operational failure to destroy the German Seventh and Fifth Panzer armies.

As the land component commander, General Montgomery was responsible for making and adjusting the boundary lines between the two army groups. His failure for whatever reason to adjust the army group boundary line after the Canadian forces were eight miles north of Falaise⁶¹ while the American forces were pressing the southern boundary of Argentan was inexcusable. Just as inexcusable was Lieutenant General Bradley's failure to request permission from General Montgomery to adjust the army group boundary line instead of issuing the order to Lieutenant General Patton to halt Major General Haislip's advance.⁶² Major General Haislip's XV Corps was at the outskirts of Argentan, prepared to cross the army group boundary line.

The rationale Lieutenant General Bradley used to explain his decision to stop Major General Haislip's advance, that the link up between American and Canadian forces would have been a "dangerous and uncontrollable maneuver"⁶³ does not make sense. Lieutenant General Patton had told Major General Haislip to "push on slowly in the direction of Falaise [and] after reaching Falaise ... to continue to push on slowly until ... contact [is made with] our Allies, the Canadians."⁶⁴ There were, and are, protocols for a meeting engagement between two units; both units were aware of the scheduled link up and prepared for this outcome, the commanders of each unit could be informed of the new area for the link up, the units spoke the same language, and in any case the two units would eventually have to link up somewhere. Even absent a link up protocol, the thought process of this weak rationale begs the question. When in this war did we suddenly become overly concerned with coalition casualties caused by friendly fire? So what if the Canadians inadvertently fired upon American forces and/or Americans inadvertently fired upon Canadian forces causing American and Canadian casualties? An earlier encirclement of the Falaise-Argentan pocket would have prevented the escape of the German 7th Army and 5th Panzer Army and reduced subsequent Allied casualties. The German ability to reconstitute forces produced the reserves later used in the Ardennes counter-offensive which caused the loss of over eighty thousand Allied lives.⁶⁵ The loss of a few American and Canadian casualties to close the Falaise-Argentan gap on August 16th might have been worth the resulting loss of life.

Lieutenant General Bradley's fumble was his failure to communicate to General Montgomery his decision to halt Major General Haislip's XV Corps attack toward Argentan, keeping two divisions to hold the shoulder south of Argentan and sending two divisions toward the Seine River for a larger and longer pincer envelopment movement.⁶⁶ This masterful decision by Lieutenant General Bradley was prompted by Lieutenant General Patton to take advantage of a developing situation. But, without coordination with General Montgomery for the movement of the northern pincer (required to link the two forces and close the gap), it was doomed to disjointed failure.⁶⁷

When the Canadian force's advance became bogged down after their initial failure to take Falaise, General Montgomery, as the 21st Army Group commander should have reinforced the inexperienced Canadian forces with experienced British troops to ensure that the second Canadian offensive to take Falaise would succeed.⁶⁸ Instead, the British forces continued to advance slowly and push the German forces out through the Falaise-Argentan Gap.

General Montgomery called Lieutenant General Bradley on August 16th to restart the American advance to close the gap between the two army groups and shut off the German armies ability to withdraw from the pocket. By this time the German forces were withdrawing from the pocket and the concentration of their forces between the two Allied armies was significantly greater than it had been three days before. There was a delay in the American attack due to the absence of Major General Haislip's headquarters. Major General Haislip was advancing toward the Seine River with two of his divisions. Lieutenant General Patton had already established a "provisional corps under his chief of staff, Major General Hugh J. Gaffey ... [who] ordered his troops to be ready to attack by 1000 hours on 17 August, but" Lieutenant General Bradley sent Major General Leonard T. Gerow's V Corps headquarters to take charge. This further delayed the attack until the morning of August 18th.⁶⁹

"[During the Normandy offensive, General] Montgomery seemed to have lost the firm grasp, the master's touch, the flame like leadership he had heretofore displayed, particularly in North Africa. Of the verve and arrogance formerly characteristic of him, only the arrogance was visible. ... The situation west of Seine in August begged for Allied audacity. Yet Montgomery [was] 'bound to miss opportunities that called for daring exploitation.' [Harold] Deutsch continues, 'actually with the sole exception of Patton, there usually was small urge toward risk-taking among Allied military leaders.' Closing the pocket at Falaise and again at the Seine River was hazardous, and Montgomery, like Bradley, preferred to be safe."⁷⁰

Lieutenant General Bradley was a dependable subordinate to Lieutenant General Patton in the North Africa and Sicily campaigns. His ability to "play the role of the bold leader"⁷¹ was a

complete failure. Lieutenant General Bradley had the clairvoyance to see potential opportunities as they presented themselves on the battlefield; however, his personality and leadership style made the execution of those ideas impossible.

"He made instant decisions, then second-guessed himself and wondered whether his quick-trigger timing was little more than an ill-considered impulse. He initiated potentially brilliant maneuvers, then aborted them because he lacked the confidence in his ability to see them through to completion. As a consequence, he ... mismanaged the affairs on the southern side of the pocket from Argentan to the Seine."⁷²

The mutual trust and confidence between the senior military commanders or their staffs that denotes a well-oiled machine was not present in the Allied coalition. Underlying issues that caused coalition friction included: 1) Lieutenant Generals Patton and Bradley fostered a mutual frustration and irate dissatisfaction with General Montgomery,⁷³ 2) Lieutenant Generals Bradley and Patton both lost the closeness of their earlier teacher-pupil relationship in North Africa with the reversal of senior-subordinate relationship, 3) Most American commanders and their staffs saw General Eisenhower as a pro-British Supreme Allied Commander, 4) General Montgomery and Lieutenant General Patton were both seen as being pompous asses,⁷⁴ 5) General Montgomery thought that General Eisenhower was "a very nice chap ... he knows nothing whatever about how to make war or fight battles ... He should be kept away from all that business if we want to win this war"⁷⁵ and "would vigorously oppose" General Eisenhower's decision to take over as the land component commander,⁷⁶ 6) The "dissimilar personal traits of the four principals involved ... all [were] mature professionals. Each was governed by a lifetime of military experience. All had assiduously studied warfare. Yet their habits made it difficult for them to interact in complete harmony,"⁷⁷ 7) The British bid for prestige in the European campaign was predicated upon General Montgomery maintaining his role as the land component commander, since the number of American personnel in the European theater dwarfed the whole of the British Empire's personnel on the ground,⁷⁸ and 8) Lieutenant General "Bradley had become less willing to operate under Monty's command. With Allied victory in Normandy, the American army had finally come of age."⁷⁹

"I have often asked myself," Bradley declared in the January 1, 1965, issue of the military review, *The Pointer*, "if I should not have done Monty's work, and if we should not have closed the gap ourselves. Montgomery was so scared that he made the push from the west; as Eisenhower said, he squeezed the tube of toothpaste and made it go out the hole instead of closing the opening."⁸⁰

STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES:

Aggressive offensive action does not appear to have been a part of General Montgomery's experience as a commander to this point in World War II. He fought a defensive victory at El Alamein and failed to make an aggressive pursuit to destroy Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Africa Corps,⁸¹ thus allowing the Africa Corps to escape and fight another day.

General Montgomery was given the lead role in the invasion and capture of Sicily, but his failure to aggressively drive to Messina allowed the Germans to cross the Strait of Messina unimpeded and escape to Italy. In Italy, General Montgomery ground the British 8th Army to a halt after the Sangro crossing, but Winston Churchill pulled him out of his stalemate to plan the cross-channel invasion. General Montgomery left Italy on December 24th before he ruined his reputation.⁸²

There appears to be a common theme in all of General Montgomery's military "victories" in World War II; a failure to aggressively pursue and destroy fleeing German forces. This theme is particularly apparent when comparing General Montgomery's failure to exploit the pursuit phase of El Alamein and the timely encirclement of Falaise-Argentan pocket. This theme would show itself again in the Ardennes in December 1944. Lieutenant General Patton would tell the press: "If you get a monkey in a jungle hanging by his tail, it is easier to get him by cutting his tail than kicking him in the face." Kicking him in the face was what Montgomery proposed to do. The First Army-Third Army convergence on Houffalize was a compromise solution, and cutting the Germans' salient at its tail was never done. The enemy escaped."⁸³ In reviewing General Montgomery's actions as a commander, no one, especially General Eisenhower, should have been surprised that General Montgomery turned out to be so much like General George McClelland. This comparison is not within the scope of this paper, but warrants further research.

There is one strategic lesson General Montgomery should have recognized from his experience prior to the Normandy campaign. That lesson was the speed with which the U.S. infantry and armored divisions could operate and the unique possibilities this presented to develop attack and pursuit operations. General Montgomery failed to discern this due to his prejudice concerning the willingness of American soldiers to fight, his perception that American general officers lacked the leadership qualities required to lead armies in the field⁸⁴ and his own ego. General Montgomery should not have been surprised by the speed of the American advance after breakout. He was aware of the speed of American divisions advance in Africa after Major General Patton took command of the 2nd U.S. Corp, and again in Sicily. General Montgomery witnessed the speed of Lieutenant General Patton's Seventh Army in its drive to Palermo and then to Messina. I suspect the media attention given to Lieutenant General

Patton's operational successes in Sicily usurped General Montgomery's status with the media and hurt his blustering ego. This diverted General Montgomery's attention from the operational lesson from the Sicilian campaign regarding American mobility and the adaptability of the American officer corp's leadership.

Due to the rapid advance and conquest of terrain in Normandy combined with the German retreat across the Seine River and the virtually unopposed Allied landing in southern France, the Allies developed a sense that the Germans were beaten and the war would be over quickly.

"The Allied gamble to win the war in 1944 by springing toward Germany without first sweeping the German forces from the field turned out badly. Bradley was optimistic about getting quickly through the German West Wall to the Rhine. Eisenhower was gazing beyond the Rhine River. Montgomery had his eyes fixed on Berlin. Only Patton was out of step, concerned by the mistakes being made, unable to make his genius felt."⁸⁵

Because of the perceived impending victory in Europe, the Allies shifted resources originally designated for the European theater to the Pacific theater in September 1944.⁸⁶ "In the Mortain-Falaise Pocket, the Wehrmacht suffered its greatest defeat since Stalingrad, but ... more than a third of Seventh Army had eluded the trap," however, "the generals for the most part made good their escape. Of the five corps commanders who were still in the pocket on August 17th all but one got away; of the fifteen divisional commanders only three failed to reach safety."⁸⁷ The Allies tactical and operational failure to destroy the German armies and their officer leadership in the Falaise-Argentan pocket combined with the German industrial capacity to maintain its production of tanks and Adolf Hitler's belief in the eventual victory became the major reason for Germany's ability to launch the Ardennes offensive in December.⁸⁸

This escape combined with the German Army's tremendous and surprising ability to regenerate shattered forces ensured the German army's ability to maintain an effective resistance on the Western Front. Thus the failure of the Allied senior military leadership to keep focused on the destruction of the two German armies and specifically its officer leadership in the Falaise-Argentan pocket meant that the war in Europe would last for another eight months.⁸⁹

WORD COUNT: 7,221

ENDNOTES

¹ Eddy Florentin, The Battle of the Falaise Gap (New York: Hawthorne Books Inc., 1967), 332.

² Russell Weigley, From the Normandy Beaches to the Falaise-Argentan Pocket (Military Review, September 1990), 59-64.

³ Martin Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 27 & 263.

⁴ Stephen Ambrose, "Dwight D. Eisenhower," no date; available from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/character/glossaries/eisenhower.html#Montgomery>; Internet; accessed 6 April 2002.

⁵ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 27.

⁶ Nigel Hamilton, Monty: The Battles of Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery (New York: Random House Inc., 1994), preface.

⁷ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 271.

⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁹ Charles M. Province, "General Patton's Address Speech to the Third Army, June 5, 1944, Part I The Background Research," no date; available from <http://www.patriotcampaign.com/patton.html>; Internet; accessed 6 April 2002.

¹⁰ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 27.

¹¹ Ralph Bennet, Ultra in the West: The Normandy Campaign of 1944-1945 (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1979), 24, 116-121.

¹² Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 47.

¹³ Chester Wilmot, The Struggle for Europe (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 371, 375 & 379.

¹⁴ Ibid, 149.

¹⁵ Ibid, 161.

¹⁶ No Author, "Tirpitz Operational History," No Date; available from <http://www.bismarck-class.dk/tirpitz/tiroperationhist.html>. Internet; accessed 4 April 2002.

¹⁷ Wilmot, 383.

¹⁸ Ibid, 388.

¹⁹ No Author, "The Falaise Pocket," no Date; available from <http://www.xs4all.nl~hulsmann/falaise.html>; Internet; accessed 4 April 2002.

²⁰ Bennet, 24.

²¹ Jay Hollister, "General Omar Nelson Bradley," May 3, 2001; available from <http://history.acused.edu/gen/WW2Timeline/bradley3.html>; Internet; accessed 6 April 2002.

²² David Irving, The War Between The Generals Inside the Allied High Command (New York: Congdon & Lattes, Inc., 1981), 242.

²³ No Author, "The Falaise Pocket," no Date; available from <http://www.xs4all.nl~hulsmann/falaise.html>; Internet; accessed 4 April 2002.

²⁴ Martin Blumenson et al., Command Decisions (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Department of the Army, 1960), 402.

²⁵ Russell F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 189-190.

²⁶ Martin Blumenson, Politics and the Military in the Liberation of Paris (Carlisle Barracks: Parameters, Summer 1998), 4-8.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Florentin, 331.

³⁰ Blumenson et al., Command Decisions, 401 & 407.

³¹ No Author, "The Falaise Pocket," no Date; available from <http://www.xs4all.nl~hulsmann/falaise.html>; Internet; accessed 4 April 2002.

³² Martin Blumenson, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of operations: Breakout and Pursuit (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History), 555.

³³ Paul Carrell, Invasion: They're Coming (New York: Dutton, 1963), 268.

³⁴ James S. Lucas and James Barker, The Battle of Normandy: The Falaise Gap, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978), 19 & 160.

³⁵ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 21.

³⁶ Lucas and Barker, 18.

³⁷ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 33.

³⁸ Richard Lamb, Montgomery in Europe 1943-1945: Success or Failure?, (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984), 62.

³⁹ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 37.

⁴¹ Ibid, 60.

⁴² Ibid, 61.

⁴³ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁴ Irving, 12, 212-215, 220-228.

⁴⁵ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 263-5.

⁴⁶ Lamb, 183.

⁴⁷ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁹ Lucas and Barker, 59.

⁵⁰ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 27.

⁵¹ Blumenson et al., Command Decisions, 403.

⁵² Ibid, 405-406.

⁵³ Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, A General's Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 299-300.

⁵⁴ Lamb, 169.

⁵⁵ Bradley and Clay Blair, 299-300.

⁵⁶ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 334.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 273.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 263.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Blumenson et al., Command Decisions, 406.

⁶² Weigley, From the Normandy Beaches to the Falaise-Argentan Pocket, 58-59.

⁶³ Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier's Story, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1951), 377.

⁶⁴ Blumenson et al., Command Decisions, 407.

⁶⁵ No Author, "Ardennes-Alsace 16 December 1944 – 25 January 1945," September 15, 2000; available from <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/brochures/ardennes/arel.htm>; Internet; accessed April 7, 2002, 4 & 53.

⁶⁶ Weigley, From the Normandy Beaches to the Falaise-Argentan Pocket, 60.

⁶⁷ Blumenson et al., Command Decisions, 414.

⁶⁸ Lamb, 169.

⁶⁹ Weigley, From the Normandy Beaches to the Falaise-Argentan Pocket, 60-63.

⁷⁰ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 264.

⁷¹ Ibid, 268.

⁷² Ibid, 268.

⁷³ Weigley, From the Normandy Beaches to the Falaise-Argentan Pocket, 59.

⁷⁴ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 60.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 58.

⁷⁶ David Eisenhower, Eisenhower at War 1943-1945 (New York: Random House Inc., 1986), 411.

⁷⁷ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 26-27.

⁷⁸ Bradley, 353.

⁷⁹ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 244.

⁸⁰ Florentin, 331.

⁸¹ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 56.

⁸² Lamb, 57-58.

⁸³ Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, 566.

⁸⁴ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 57-58.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 272.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 262 & Eisenhower, Eisenhower at War 1943-1945, 431-2.

⁸⁷ Wilmot, 423-4.

⁸⁸ Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket – The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II, 263.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 260.

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