

THE SHARED BURDEN

UNITED STATES-FRENCH COALITION OPERATIONS IN THE
EUROPEAN THEATER OF WORLD WAR II

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

THE SHARED BURDEN: UNITED STATES-FRENCH COALITION OPERATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER OF WORLD WAR II, by LTC John J. Neal, 67 pages.

The United States military rarely conducts unilateral actions. Normally, it operates with coalition partners. This has been true for over a century and there is little indication that it will change in the future. This monograph examines the relationship between the U.S. Sixth Army Group and its subordinate French First Army during World War II to draw out operational lessons learned in coalition warfare. The Sixth Army Group was responsible for the invasion of southern France in August of 1944, was the first Allied unit to reach the Rhine River, held the line in the face of the German winter offensives of 1944-1945, and drove into southern Germany to secure the alpine redoubt at the end of the war. The conflict between national aims and operational objectives surfaced in the army group during these nine months of war. This monograph looks at the divergent goals as they arose in three different areas: French re-armament, coalition operations, and partisan organizations. Each of these provides insights that have the potential to shape the way the United States military prepares for future coalition warfare.

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ACRONYMS

CFLN	Comité Français de la Libération Nationale
FFI	French Forces of the Interior
FTPF	Franc-Tireurs et Partisans Français
GPF	Grand Puissance Filloux
MUR	Mouvements Unis de la Résistance
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
SOE	Special Operations Executive

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There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.¹

-Winston S. Churchill

INTRODUCTION

“Often in war, the military and political factors dictate opposing courses, but rarely have they so dramatically conflicted as they did in those opening days of the year 1945.”² These words from the biography of the French First Army commander, General Jean Marie Gabriel de Lattre de Tassigny, perfectly summarize the competing forces that so affected United States-French operations. In particular, the biographer is referring to what very well could have been the breaking point of the coalition between France and the United States: the German NORDWIND offensive in January of 1945.

On 16 December 1944, the Germans launched a large-scale attack against American units in the Ardennes forest of Belgium. The Germans called the operation WACHT AM RHEIN but it is commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge. It was Germany’s attempt to seize the port of Antwerp in order to severely disrupt Allied supplies and cause a political rift between United States and British leadership. The Germans executed the assault with two hundred thousand troops and six hundred tanks. The size and suddenness of the attack took the Allies by surprise.³ However, by New Year’s Eve the offensive had culminated and the Allies were well on their way to destroying the salient of what many believed was Germany’s last major offensive in Western

¹ Piers Brendon, “Sir Winston Churchill: Biographical History,” Churchill College Cambridge, http://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/collections/churchill_papers/biography/ (accessed January 31, 2013).

² Guy Salisbury-Jones, *So Full a Glory: a Biography of Marshal de Lattre de Tassigny* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1955), 171.

³ Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: a Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 766-767.

Europe. The Germans had other plans and at one hour to midnight on New Year's Eve 1944, they launched Operation NORDWIND. The main blow struck south of the Ardennes where the United States Sixth Army Group, consisting of the American Seventh Army and French First Army, was struggling to eliminate the Colmar pocket that stubbornly remained on the west bank of the Rhine.⁴ The Germans intended to split the United States Sixth Army Group, clear northern Alsace, and capture Strasbourg.⁵ They ultimately committed five corps to the assault as well as one thousand aircraft to support the operation.⁶

As the German attack developed, Eisenhower directed that the Sixth Army Group to abandon Strasbourg and establish a defensive line in the Vosges Mountains to the west, a move that was absolutely unacceptable to the French leadership. Strasbourg held a position of supreme importance to a resurgent French Republic. General Charles De Gaulle, leader of the Free French, felt strongly enough on this matter that he threatened Eisenhower with removing the French forces under United States military control and holding Strasbourg regardless of Allied support. In the end, American and French forces remained in control of the city and the German offensive receded.⁷ This episode was a microcosm of the relationship between the Americans and French during the war and highlighted the overriding part that national political objectives played in coalition operations.

Political considerations have always had a significant role in military operations and they have a particular importance in coalition war.⁸ In the 1830s, Prussian military theorist Carl von

⁴ See the appendix for map reference (The Sixth Army Group Front, 26 November 1944).

⁵ Jeffrey Clarke and Robert Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1993), 494.

⁶ Gerhard, 769.

⁷ Russell Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 554-555.

⁸ The United States military defines a coalition as an arrangement between two or more nations for common action. Coalitions are normally formed for a single occasion or for longer

Clausewitz described the effect of the political on the military objective in his masterwork *On War* and succinctly explained the intricacies of alliances and divergent national objectives. Clausewitz observed that, “one country may support another’s cause, but will never take it so seriously as its own.”⁹ The members of an alliance each value their own objectives above their partner’s regardless of its strength. The corollary to this is that each ally will seek to control the alliance in order to achieve their own objectives.

The overriding common goal of both the Free French and the United States was the defeat of Germany and the removal of enemy troops from French soil. However, both parties had other, sometimes divergent, objectives. For the Free French leadership, and in particular de Gaulle, these goals remained at the forefront throughout the war. De Gaulle wanted to place France in the best position possible in the post-war world. De Gaulle had to seamlessly replace the Vichy regime and their German handlers with a government capable of preventing the eruption of civil unrest. This was necessary to avoid social and political fracturing that had led to bloodshed in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 and defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1940. It was also vital that France regain its place of importance in the world. The nation had to recover its stature lost in the humiliation of German occupation. It had to regain control of its colonies and re-establish the economic links that allowed it to prosper.¹⁰ Achieving Allied aims was critical to accomplishing Free French objectives. However, the United States military’s methods would not ensure the attainment of French goals.

cooperation in a narrow area of common interest. A coalition is different than an alliance which is the result of formal agreements between two or more nations for broad, long-term objectives that further the common interests of the members. Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 5-0: Joint Operations Planning* (2011), II-37.

⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Book Eight, Chapter Six, 603.

¹⁰ Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: the Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 565-570.

The United States leadership had its own national objectives that could potentially infringe on French goals. They wanted a restoration of the balance of power in Europe upended by the war. However, this did not necessarily correlate to full restoration of France's place among European powers. In addition, the United States leadership sought to establish democratic regimes that were favorable to economic freedom.¹¹ This goal did not appear to be in conflict with French objectives but many saw de Gaulle as a man with little regard for representative government and therefore viewed him as an obstacle to a democratic regime. Another point of contention was France's colonies. The leadership of the United States did not support the maintenance of these colonies and perceived them as a potential source of conflict in the post-war period. This was in direct conflict with the French goal of re-establishing its global holdings.¹² All of these points of contention illustrate that allies are never perfectly aligned in their objectives. This supports the idea that Clausewitz's dictum on the interaction of allies applied to United States-French operations in Europe in 1944-1945.

Clausewitz also explained the command relationship issues of allied formations and the difficulties they pose in unity of purpose. Each country requires sufficient control over its forces employed in the coalition to achieve its national aims as well as the common objectives. As Clausewitz describes it, the problems of coalition command would be greatly simplified, "if the contingent promised...were placed entirely at the ally's disposal and he were free to use it as he wished."¹³ However, this is rarely the case. Instead, "the auxiliary force usually operates under his own commander; he is dependent only on his government, and the objective the latter sets him

¹¹ Maurice Matloff and Edwin Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1953), 61.

¹² Robert Paxton and Nicholas Wahl, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1994), 49-50.

¹³ Clausewitz, Book Eight, Chapter Six, 603.

will be as ambiguous as its aims.”¹⁴ This proved to be the case for Free French forces operating under American command.

One of the principles of war is unity of command. It is important because it allows for the coordination of military force to achieve the objective as seamlessly as possible.¹⁵ However, a coalition command structure rarely achieves this principle. Current United States Department of Defense doctrine states that coalitions generally have either a lead nation or parallel command structure. Member nations are usually reluctant to give up full control of their respective armed forces to another country so their leadership retains some level of command.¹⁶ This was the case for the United States-French coalition in 1944. General de Lattre’s First Army operated under the control of the United States Sixth Army Group, but also received guidance and instructions from General de Gaulle. During the closing months of the war, de Gaulle clearly expressed this in a letter to Eisenhower, “While agreeing to place French operational forces in the Western theater under your Supreme Command, I have always reserved the right of the French government eventually to take the necessary steps in order that French forces should be employed in accordance with the national interest of France which is the only interest that they should serve.”¹⁷ De Lattre maneuvered his forces in combination with American units in order to achieve the operational objectives of the Sixth Army Group, while balancing both the coalition’s and his own country’s aims. When his orders from Sixth Army Group appeared to diverge from the national goals set by his political leaders then de Lattre protested to General Devers. In a few

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jan Armstrong and J.J. Widen, “Adopting a Recipe for Success: Modern Armed Forces and the Institutionalization of the Principles of War,” *Comparative Strategy* (2012): 273.

¹⁶ Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 3-16: Multinational Operations* (2007), II-9.

¹⁷ General Charles de Gaulle to General Dwight Eisenhower, 28-29 April 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

instances, de Lattre took actions that were contrary to his orders from the army group. This dichotomy of command was always a major consideration for Devers.¹⁸

The dynamics of the competing factions both inside and outside German-occupied and Vichy France were very complex. During World War II, these groups were in a power struggle for control of France. Initially, the predominant group was the Vichy administration, led by the French World War I hero Marshall Philippe Pétain, which most countries initially considered the legitimate government of France after the defeat of 1940. Vichy represented the conservative old guard of France who promised to bring stability to the country through a return to traditional values. General de Gaulle led a faction that sought to restore France's rightful place in world by driving the Germans from the country. The Vichy regime branded de Gaulle a traitor and sought to delegitimize him in the eyes of both the French and the international community. There were numerous other groups besides the Gaullists who rejected the German occupation. These included disillusioned leaders in the Vichy military, as well as communists and labor organizations disenfranchised in the political life of France before the war who sought to carve out a place for themselves in the new order. There was a great deal of uncertainty for the French population as they sought to build a new future for themselves and their country. As the years passed and German occupation became more repressive, the basic struggle to survive turned into daily life-or-death decisions for the citizens of France. Laid on top of this were factions fighting for control of the destiny of the country, a country that was still one of the strongest in the world despite its recent setbacks.¹⁹ The United States stepped into this fray as it worked with the factions to liberate the country and defeat Germany.²⁰

¹⁸ General Jacob Devers to General George Marshall, 19 February 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁹ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 167-169.

²⁰ For a full explanation see Robert Gildea's *Marianne in Chains*; Robert Vinen's *The Unfree French*; Henri Amouroux's *La grande histoire des Français sous l'occupation*, un

Initially the United States military worked with two separate factions, one headed by General Henri Giraud and the other by General de Gaulle. At the outbreak of the war, Giraud held the rank of General of the Army and commanded the Seventh Army. At the end of hostilities in 1940, he was interned as prisoner of war. He escaped and began organizing forces in unoccupied France to defeat the Germans. The French military and the general population held Giraud in high regard. The United States government also supported him.²¹ De Gaulle was significantly junior in rank to Giraud and a relative unknown when the Germans invaded. He had made a name for himself with his appeal to the French to resist the occupation broadcast on 18 June 1940. He was confident and offered a focal point for hope in France's darkest hour. Winston Churchill personally supported de Gaulle's faction and materially backed it with equipment from the British military. It took several years for the United States government to recognize his importance in the French balance of power.²²

The power struggle that existed between Giraud and de Gaulle complicated efforts to prepare for the liberation of France. As often happens, one side finally gained enough advantage to eliminate the competitor. In April 1944, after more than a year of political infighting, de Gaulle nullified Giraud's authority by abolishing the position Giraud held as commander in chief. De Gaulle offered Giraud the position of inspector general but he refused.²³ Giraud ultimately resigned even after several senior officials, including General Devers, tried to convince him to

Printemps de Mort et d'espoir joies et Douleurs du peuple Libere, septembre 1943-6 Aout 1944; Julian Jackson's France The Dark Years 1940-1944; Robert Paxton's Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 and Michael Neiberg's The Blood of Free Men: the Liberation of Paris, 1944.

²¹ Kwang-Yew See, "The Downfall of General Giraud: a Study of American Wartime Politics," *Penn History Review* (Fall 2010): 36.

²² Charles Williams, *The Last Great Frenchman: A Life of General de Gaulle* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 137-138.

²³ Report by the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Southern France August 1944, Box 158, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 11.

stay.²⁴ Giraud's departure codified the status quo that had existed for several months before hand. De Gaulle was now the uncontested leader of the Free French. As De Gaulle consolidated political leadership of the Free French, the Allies were in the final stages of preparing for the invasion of the northwest Europe.

French units had already proven themselves prior to the invasion of southern France but this operation marked the introduction of the largest French contingent in the Allied war effort. The new French Army had already fought with distinction in North Africa and Italy. The French Second Armored Division carried on this tradition in Normandy and went on to liberate Paris.²⁵ On 15 August 1944, a force composed primarily of American and French formations landed in southern France as part of Operation ANVIL-DRAGOON²⁶ and began the long march to the German frontier. This force became the United States Sixth Army Group, commanded by General Jacob Devers, and was composed of the United States Seventh Army and the French First Army.²⁷ The First Army was the largest French contingent to the Allied forces in Europe with over a quarter million soldiers. By mid-September, the Sixth Army Group linked up with the United States Twelfth Army Group, uniting the Allies in a continuous front from the English Channel to the Swiss border. After fighting through the Vosges Mountains and closing on the

²⁴ Minutes of a Meeting between General Devers and General Giraud, 5 April 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

²⁵ Maurice Boverat, *Du Contentin a Colmar avec les Char de Leclerc* (Paris: Éditions Berger-Levrault, 1947), 11-16.

²⁶ Anvil was the original operational name for the Allied invasion of southern France when planning began in late 1943. From that time, the operation was postponed, cancelled, and re-started several times. As a result, the operation was renamed Dragoon because of the possible security concerns associated with the plan. I will refer to the operation as Anvil-Dragoon throughout this work in order cover both the planning and execution of the invasion and subsequent actions. Paul Gaujac, *Dragoon: the Other Invasion of France* (Paris: Histoire et Collections, 2004), 15.

²⁷ Headquarters, Sixth Army Group Narrative History, Box 1, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: Narrative History, 1944-1945, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Rhine in the fall of 1944, the Sixth Army Group absorbed the NORDWIND offensive and by March of 1945 had entered Germany. The Sixth Army Group finished the war in southern Germany with United States and French units eliminating the last vestiges of the Nazi regime.

All of this represented the triumph of a coalition against an incredibly formidable foe. It was not the first or the last time the United States government worked with other countries to defeat a common enemy. However, it was the last time the United States military and its partners fought an adversary with the potential to bring about significant changes in the world balance of power. This aspect paired with large scale combined arms maneuver sustained over a long period of time makes the United States-French operations a unique source of lessons learned. What was the key to successful coalition operations?

Understanding and adapting to French political considerations was the paramount task of United States commanders in invasion of southern France and subsequent operations to the defeat of Germany. This important aspect of coalition operations directly influenced the way the French were re-armed, how they conducted combined operations, and how partisan forces interacted with the Allies. It was the overriding factor that colored all aspects of United States-French interaction throughout the war. The Allied campaigns from the invasion of southern France in August 1944 to the defeat of Germany in May 1945 provide a framework to study these factors in order to glean lessons learned for future coalition operations.

COALITION MATERIAL: ORGANIZING AND EQUIPPING THE FREE FRENCH

On the morning of 2 February 1945, the battered citizens of Logelbach, an industrial suburb of Colmar, emerged into the light of a cloudless new day. Only the smoke from the surrounding ruined buildings touched the sky. It was eerily quiet, a distinct change from the last few months of almost continuous shelling and gunfire. Someone shouted, “They’re coming!” A young boy watched as the Allies finally closed the Colmar pocket, a salient in the line that had been an enormous source of difficulty for the Sixth Army Group and a daily struggle to survive for the French civilians who lived there. Something struck the boy as odd. He saw French soldiers but they were dressed in American uniforms, wearing American helmets, driving American armored vehicles and trucks. How could this be? When he had seen them march off to war in 1940, they were armed with French weapons and equipment.²⁸ The answer resided in the first step in the long road from the defeat of that year to the Allied triumph in 1945: re-armament.

The first crucial step in making the new French Army a valuable military partner to the Allies was its re-armament. As with all other aspects of the United States-French coalition, political considerations played the overriding factor. In 1942-1943, the divisions between the de Gaulle and Giraud factions played a key role in this process. There were many challenges to the re-armament process. Where was the material coming from in a resource-constrained environment? Who would fill the new units, and in particular, did the French have the right skill sets in large enough quantities to operate in the specialized fields required by modern warfare? What kind of units would they create? Could the French build the structure that would allow them to operate as a separate army? In the end, all these issues would affect how the United States Sixth Army Group and the Free French forces conducted operations for the liberation of France and the ultimate defeat of Germany.

²⁸ Tomi Ungerer, *Tomi: a Childhood under the Nazis* (Niwot: the Roberts Rinehart Publishing Group, 1998), 157-163.

Since December of 1942, Giraud had been the chief civil and military authority in north and west Africa while de Gaulle was president of the French National Committee and chief of Free French Forces in London. In January of 1943 they agreed to unite their respective organizations. On the third of June of the same year the two factions were consolidated into the Comité Français de la Libération Nationale (CFLN) with the two generals as co-presidents. However, President Roosevelt did not trust the political motives of the Gaullists and therefore directed that his subordinates exclude the CFLN from re-armament decisions.²⁹

The tenuous union between the factions began to break down immediately. Within weeks of the formation of the CFLN, de Gaulle pushed for administrative changes that would in effect make him commander of all French forces. Because of Roosevelt's distrust of de Gaulle, he directed Eisenhower to inform the French that the United States government would not arm units if Giraud was not the commander in chief. The CFLN reached an agreement where the two generals would continue to command their respective forces separately. This new accommodation complicated the relationship and communications between the French forces and the Allied headquarters. The fractured CFLN and its associated disunity in the armed forces alarmed Cordell Hull, the United States Secretary of State, to the point that he recommended suspending the re-armament process until the political situation resolved itself.³⁰ By the end of July, the the two factions resolved the issue by making Giraud the military leader of all French forces with de Gaulle as the CFLN political chief.³¹

The amalgamation of all French forces under Giraud had unintended consequences for the Free French. De Gaulle had a force of 13,000 soldiers organized into an infantry division and an ad hoc armored unit. The British supported him so these units had British equipment. Part of

²⁹ Clarke and Smith, 78-79.

³⁰ Marcel Vignaris, *Rearming the French* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1957), 80-81.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

the Allied agreement to accepting Giraud as the commander in chief was that not only would the British stop arming French units, those units that had received British equipment would immediately return it to British depots. This included vehicles and weapons as well as clothing, individual equipment, and organizational materials. The Allies ultimately reversed this decision but the confusion it caused in the interim had a significant effect on the re-armament process.³²

The French were almost completely dependent on the Allies for war material. There were limited stocks of French equipment in the colonies and there was the possibility of recapturing French equipment from the Germans. However, neither of these sources was sufficient on the scale required. In addition, there was no French manufacturing capability outside of France so they had to be supplied by an external source. The lack of equipment, and in particular heavy weapons and vehicles, was a major obstacle to the employment of a potential source of Allied combat power. However, there was a significant upside to this. Arming the French military with American material would greatly simplify the diversity of supply issue. Instead of the French operating with tanks, trucks, and weapons different from the Americans, which would require different types of ammunition and spare parts, the supply problem would be greatly reduced if there was a common user logistics requirement between the United States and French forces.³³

Of course, French units were competing for material originally intended to equip new American formations. At the Casablanca conference in January 1943, General Marshall proposed that the Allies arm the French out of American stocks. President Roosevelt agreed and directed that the Americans would make every effort to provide the necessary equipment. Marshall acknowledged that he was prepared to accept the postponement in forming new American units.³⁴

³² Ibid., 87-88.

³³ Ibid., 81.

³⁴ Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1959), 54-55.

As a result, the United States Chiefs of Staff planned to delay the organization of combat units in the United States in proportion to the French units to be re-armed.³⁵ For the commanders on the ground, the question was whether or not this trade off was worth it. Did a French division have the same capabilities as a United States division?

During the initial phase of Operation TORCH, the United States invasion of North Africa, Eisenhower was not convinced that this was a fair trade off. He did concede that an initial token shipment of arms and equipment would be politically beneficial and planned to use the French forces under his control for garrison duties. However, French units rapidly engaged German formations and displayed a high degree of fighting spirit. Their performance swayed Eisenhower to believe he could count on them.³⁶ Eisenhower's confidence in French formations went back and forth for the remainder of the war. In the wake of the German winter offensives of 1944-1945, Eisenhower relayed to Marshall as part of his operations update that, "the French divisions have at present, except for one, a low combat value" and "French divisions are always a questionable asset."³⁷ This ambivalence toward French units would affect the way they were equipped and employed throughout the war.

General Giraud had a highly optimistic view of the number of soldiers his country could muster for service. He believed he could field an army of 250,000 to 300,000 soldiers. Several sources would be used to constitute this force: troops already available from the former Vichy forces, the native populations of French colonies, men who would escape from France to join the fight, and French nationals living outside the country.³⁸ While Giraud's prediction of the size of

³⁵ Vignaris, 49.

³⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁷ General Dwight D. Eisenhower to General George C. Marshall, 15 January 1945, SHAEF Cable Log-Out [January 1945] (1)-(4), Box 26, Walter Bedell Smith Collection, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

³⁸ Vignaris, 23.

French forces proved to be correct,³⁹ there were unique issues with the different categories of French manpower.

The French military maintained units manned by soldiers from its colonies starting in the eighteenth century. These organizations policed France's far-flung empire and constituted a significant portion of the country's military power. The majority of the units were from Africa and the Middle East. Algeria and Morocco provided excellent cavalry units. Senegalese and other West Africans served in infantry regiments. These units had served with distinction in France during World War I. Generally, colonial formations did not serve in metropolitan France but the First World War was a national emergency that required it. The defeat of the French military in 1940 was a much graver situation so the country would again call on colonial troops to fight on the continent.⁴⁰

French colonial units had a solid reputation but they were vulnerable to climatic conditions different from their native territory. United States commanders including Eisenhower recognized the fighting spirit of French colonial units and employed them accordingly in North Africa and Italy. However, these troops were not acclimated to the conditions of northwest Europe. The fall and winter in Alsace would prove to be debilitating to soldiers who had only known desert and tropical environments. General de Lattre highlighted an example of this in his history of the First Army. "The temperature was especially cruel to the Senegalese of Magnan's 9th [Division] and the colonial troops of Brosset's 1st [Division]. September had not ended before we were informed of cases among the units of frost-bitten feet."⁴¹ Issues like these severely

³⁹ Jean Marie Gabriel de Lattre De Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army*, trans. Malcom Barnes (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1952), 28-29.

⁴⁰ Myron Echenberg, "'Mort Pour La France': the African Soldier in France During the Second World War," *Journal of African History* (1985): 363-364.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

curtailed the effectiveness of the French First Army during the German winter counteroffensives of 1944-1945.

There were other issues with using a preponderance of colonial troops. Given their general lack of education, these soldiers could either not be used in the specialized fields of technical and support units or required a very long period of training in order to do so.⁴² These troops lacked the technical skills to operate in the array of units required to support combat arm formations. This meant that metropolitan French troops had to fill these roles. Unfortunately, there were never enough of these soldiers available. An American report on French combat readiness submitted in early 1944 sums this up, “Principle difficulty is the availability of trained personnel or personnel capable of being trained”.⁴³

The harsh climatic effects were not as much of an issue for soldiers from metropolitan France. However, the few number of these soldiers and the commiserate lack of skilled personnel proved to be a major obstacle in creating an independent French army. While French commanders recognized this issue, they felt they would overcome it once the invasion of France occurred. In 1942, de Gaulle assured the Allies that, “in the event of an Allied landing in France, large numbers of Frenchmen would rally to the cause.”⁴⁴ The problem that this raised was that it would not account for the required skilled manpower the First Army needed to prepare for the invasion and to insure that there were sufficient units of the right mix to support a field army. As Allied forces progressed across France, de Lattre was able to make up some of his short fall in technical expertise by enlisting or hiring liberated Frenchmen. For example, by February 1945 he

⁴² Report of French Readiness for Combat-No.3, 15 January 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Vignaris, 13.

had added 1,200 mechanics to his force in order to increase his capability to repair vehicles at the lowest level.⁴⁵

The ability to hire or enlist locals as de Gaulle envisioned and de Lattre practiced had inherent limitations. Over course of the four years of occupation, the Germans had systematically deported many able-bodied men out of France. These men were either sent to prison camps for various infractions against the Germans or they were sent off to work as forced labor in Germany or other occupied areas. Germany had exhausted its available manpower for war industry by 1943. France offered the best source of skilled labor for Germany to exploit in order to maintain its military production.⁴⁶ The results were telling as the example of the Allied effort to hire locals in the first month demonstrates. By the sixth day after the ANVIL-DRAGOON landings, the Seventh Army had managed to hire 1,000 locals most of whom were old men and teenagers. By mid-September, this number had only risen to 7,000.⁴⁷

As the Allies advanced across France, the Resistance groups provided another source of military manpower.⁴⁸ By September 1944, there were few replacements coming from Italy or North Africa for the First Army. At that point, the Resistance offered the only real opportunity for the First Army to make up for its losses. While this solved part of the manpower issue it created logistical complications. French units absorbed Resistance units or individuals from outside the normal Allied replacement channels. These units in turn requested equipment and rations that was far in excess of the number of soldiers they had on their books, which only added

⁴⁵ Letter from General de Lattre de Tassigny to General Jacob Devers, 12 February 1945, Box 1, Reel 1, General de Lattre [1186-1269], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁴⁶ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 401.

⁴⁷ Clarke and Smith, 202.

⁴⁸ Letter from General de Lattre de Tassigny to General Jacob Devers, 27 January 1945, Box 1, Reel 1, General de Lattre [1186-1269], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

to American misgivings about the French supply system.⁴⁹ There were also political complications with the amalgamation of the Resistance.

The political nature of many of the Resistance groups also made their incorporation in the First Army challenging. The disparate resistance groups operating in France came from a wide variety of backgrounds with very different loyalties and motivations. This meant that their willingness to answer to the authority of the First Army was problematic. The leadership of units within the First Army was predominately from the conservative North African army cadre. In addition, many of these officers had served in the army of Vichy France and sided more or less with Pétain. There were obvious friction points between these officers and the leader of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI), particularly those who were members of the French Communist Party. De Lattre tried to mitigate this by assigning battalion-sized FFI units to existing units. This worked with varying degrees of success and by the end of October 60,000 FFI soldiers had reinforced the First Army.⁵⁰

The lack of qualified personnel for service and support units only added to the French political outlook that required more divisions at the expense of supporting units. In September 1943, the French leadership rejected adding more support units to the re-armament plan. General Leyer, of the French General Staff, explained that French authorities, “had been led by ‘pressing considerations of a moral, psychological, and political nature, more than military,’ to set a relatively high figure for divisions at the expense of non-divisional combat and service units.”⁵¹ The French wanted the maximum amount of combat forces available in order to restore their national honor. Many metropolitan Frenchmen who had the skills to serve in the required support units had no desire to do so. For these men the idea of serving in administrative, maintenance, or

⁴⁹ Clarke and Smith, 211.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 355.

⁵¹ Vignaris, 105.

labor units was repulsive. In order to properly serve France the majority of this pool of limited manpower had to serve in combat arms.⁵²

The French and American leadership continued to debate this issue. For example, in March 1944 in a meeting between General Devers and General Giraud, the French general made his point for using French soldiers in the divisions by stating that it was unwise to assign good combat troops to service units when there was a dearth of good infantrymen. Devers responded by pointing out that the United States Army was already short 10,000 service personnel and could not support the additional French support requirement.⁵³ General de Lattre, as the field army commander, recognized the importance of the lack of service and support personnel. However, his priority was still for combat troops.⁵⁴

By January 1944, the pace of the creation of non-divisional support units was at a point that it could not meet the goal of creating a self-sufficient First Army by the time of the ANVIL-DRAGOON landings. French signal units were in the best shape with training and equipping keeping pace with the deployment timeline. Quartermaster, fuel, and engineer units had both equipment and personnel issues. The formation of ordnance and medical units was the most difficult. The shortage of personnel for medical units was so great that half of the scarce equipment received for their formation was deferred to other Allied formations.⁵⁵ The First Army never fielded enough of these non-divisional units to be self-sufficient even by the end of the war. The United States Army provided the support formations it could and the First Army fought on with what it had. One way or another, the French were going to liberate their country.

⁵² Ibid., 106.

⁵³ Minutes of the conversation between General Devers and General Giraud, 18 March 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁵⁴ Tassigny, 25-26.

⁵⁵ Report of French Readiness for Combat-No.3, 15 January 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

The French First Army represented the goal of the re-armament process. For General de Lattre, the forces assembled and equipped for operations in southern France, “was not a symbolic force, but a solid and powerful reality, forming an appreciable part of the total Allied strength,” 256,000 men strong.⁵⁶ Its combat power consisted of two armored divisions and five infantry divisions. In addition, the First Army had a collection of commando units, sixteen artillery groups to include three heavy groups, six tank destroyer regiments, and seven engineer/pioneer regiments. The First Army also had a mix of service support units including fourteen motor transport groups, ten muleteer companies and numerous quartermaster, supply, fuel, and medical units.⁵⁷ Although it never had enough service elements to be independent of United States Army support, it did have a large enough contingent for a degree of self-sufficiency.

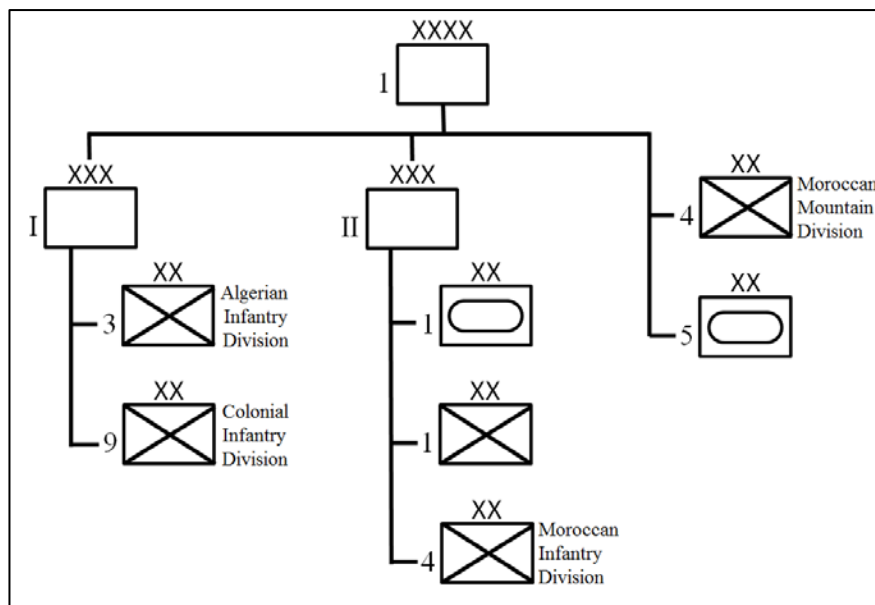


Figure 1. Organization and Composition of the First French Army.

⁵⁶ Tassigny, 28-29.

⁵⁷ Memorandum sur l’armement des Forces Terrestres Françaises, 6 June 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Source: Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, Sixth Army Group: Narrative History 1944-1945

This new French force represented a significant portion of the Allied combat power in Northwest Europe. By January 1945, Eisenhower had seventy-one divisions available and eight of these were French. The remaining sixty-three divisions were not only American, but also British, Canadian, and Polish. Using divisions as the measuring stick of Allied strength, the French constituted eleven percent of the Allied forces available for the defeat of Germany.⁵⁸

The French re-armament and its associated logistical issues continued to be a problem for the Sixth Army Group throughout the operations in northwest Europe. In January 1945, Eisenhower directed Devers to look at where the Sixth Army Group could reduce the types of ammunition used in order to simplify production and supply problems in theater.⁵⁹ This directive came at the same time that Devers was desperately fighting to beat back the German NORDWIND offensive that threatened to split the army group. Artillery ammunition was the largest category of ammunition by weight and haul capacity that the Allies used. Reducing the artillery ammunition types used by the Sixth Army Group presented Devers with two problems linked to French re-armament.

The first problem was that the French continued to use a number of World War I era artillery pieces to fill out their units. For example, in January 1945 the French First Army operated seventy-two 155-mm Grand Puissance Filloux (GPF) guns.⁶⁰ The GPF guns were

⁵⁸ General Dwight D. Eisenhower to General George C. Marshall 15 January 1945, SHAEF Cable Log-Out [January 1945] (1)-(4), Box 26, Walter Bedell Smith Collection, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁵⁹ *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, the War Years: IV*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: the John Hopkins Press, 1970), 2436-2437.

⁶⁰ General Jacob L. Devers to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 23 January 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

designed and built during World War I and were still formidable weapons firing a ninety-five pound shell out beyond fourteen kilometers.⁶¹ Both the French and American militaries had used the weapon prior to World War II. The United States replacement was the M1 howitzer. This weapon fired the same weight of shell at about the same range as the GPF but it had a greatly improved carriage that allowed for rapid engagement in wider arc than the GPF.⁶² The main problem was that the GPF did not use the same propellant charge as the M1.



Figure 2. Grand Puissance Filloux.

Source: Camp Butner, North Carolina; Author's Collection.

The second problem Devers faced was that not all of his American formations operated the latest equipment. The 155-mm howitzer problem is one example. As mentioned before, the M1 howitzer was the standard 155-mm weapon in United States units. However, not all of the American formations in the Sixth Army Group were armed with the latest United States equipment. Some were equipped with the American built version of the GPF, known as the

⁶¹ Ian Hogg, *Allied Artillery of World War II* (Wiltshire: The Crowood Press Limited, 1998), 76.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 77.

M1917/18. In addition, the Sixth Army Group operated a number of M12 systems, which were the self-propelled version of the M1917/18. As the United States Army replaced these weapons in its artillery formations, they were transferred to French units in the First Army. In effect, the Sixth Army Group could not change out its obsolete artillery systems both in its American units and subsequently in its French units fast enough to streamline the ammunition requirements.⁶³

The lack of replacements that plagued Allied units and the mixed nature of personnel in the First Army became critical just as the Sixth Army Group was fighting for its life in January of 1945. Devers reported to Eisenhower on the eve of the German offensive that the First French Army was short 8,000 infantry replacements. In addition, Devers reported that there were serious morale issues amongst the colonial troops because of the lack of French officers with experience in handling these soldiers.⁶⁴ The combination of these issues put a great deal of strain on United States-French operations in the face of a resurgent German army and brought the divisional versus non-divisional support unit strength issue to a head.

The Sixth Army Group, like all Allied forces in northwest Europe, was chronically short of supplies. General de Lattre made it a nationality issue during the fighting in Alsace. In a memorandum to General Devers, he stated that, “the ‘unfavorable treatment’ of his army in the matter of supplies was inexcusable and ‘seriously endangered its existence and operations.’”⁶⁵ To make his point, de Lattre included statistics in the memo showing that his army, which at the time consisted of five reinforced divisions, had received 8,715 tons of supplies from 20 to 28 September while the United States Seventh Army, with only three divisions, had received 18,920 tons in the same period. The Americans attributed part of the disparity to the lack of service units

⁶³ General Jacob Devers to General Dwight Eisenhower, 23 January 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁶⁴ Weigley, 551.

⁶⁵ Clarke and Smith, 299.

within the First Army which had been an issue from the outset of the French re-armament process. Ultimately, the situation was resolved but de Lattre made a point of bringing it up to General Marshall during his visit to the Sixth Army Group in October.⁶⁶

Despite all of the issues in equipping the French, the end product, embodied in the French First Army, met the military, social, and political requirements. First, it provided the Allies with significant additional combat power in order to defeat Germany. Second, it helped restore national honor by taking part in the liberation of France. Third, it gave the French additional political clout for a place of importance in post-war Europe. The re-armament process created an instrument of national power that was able to meet all of these goals. However, politics would play a major role in its use, just as it had in its creation.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 300-301.

COALITION WARFARE: SOUTHERN FRANCE TO THE DEFEAT OF GERMANY

When Winston Churchill was a young boy, he visited Paris with his father. As they admired the statues of the great cities of France on the Place de la Concorde young Winston noticed one of the statues was draped in black and asked his father the reason. His father replied that the statue represented the city of Strasbourg, which the Germans had taken from France along with whole of Alsace. Winston told his father that he hoped the French would reclaim their lost heritage.⁶⁷ The armies of France realized this wish at the end of 1918 only to have it shattered again in the humiliating defeat of 1940. On 23 November 1944, The French Army retook the city and in doing so, restored France's honor with the return of this much-disputed territory which they considered to be hallowed ground. A few weeks later, Strasbourg's liberty was again at stake as the German Army launched its last major bid to reclaim lost ground in the west. France and its army prepared to break with the Allies in order to save the city.

The French First Army was a significant addition to the Allied order of battle. It provided a large proportion of the combat power the United States Sixth Army would use to defeat its German foe. However, the French leadership did not simply provide this field army to the Allies as a force to do with as the Allies pleased. It was first an instrument of French national power and as such was tied primarily to French war aims, then secondarily to Allied objectives. When these two sets of goals came into conflict, the Americans sometimes found their coalition partner acting counter to Sixth Army Group intentions. National pride and an acute awareness of their defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1940 also made the French leadership sensitive to their position within the coalition. All of these factors combined to make the drive from the Mediterranean coast of France to the heart of Germany a complicated endeavor. As the army group commander, General Devers always had to balance operational objectives with French

⁶⁷ Salisbury-Jones, 160.

national proclivities. This tension manifested itself early and often in the campaigns of 1944-1945. In fact, French political factors even influenced the formation of the Sixth Army Group.

Although the United States government had agreed to create eleven French divisions and allocate the majority of these units to operations in southern France there was still an American-French conflict over the creation of a French field army headquarters. The formation of a French army-level command had national prestige implications for the role they would play in the liberation of France. In a letter to General Marshall dated 1 July 1944 General Devers raised the issue of the creation of a French army headquarters that would operate in conjunction with the United States Seventh Army. The new army would also require the creation of an army group headquarters to coordinate the activities of the two field armies since the Americans had originally planned for French units to be subordinate to the United States Seventh Army. In effect, the French First Army necessitated the creation of the United States Sixth Army Group.⁶⁸ Eisenhower wanted to create the Sixth Army Group for both military and political reasons. Since the French First Army would not be subordinate to the United States Seventh Army, it made sense to have an army group controlling these two elements. In addition, Eisenhower wanted to put an echelon of command between his headquarters and another coalition partner headquarters. Eisenhower felt that he already had his hands full with the British Twenty-first Army Group and did not want to add a French headquarters to his array of immediate international subordinates.⁶⁹

Eisenhower's desire to keep this separation of his headquarters from the French field army also affected how he arrayed his southern American armies. In September 1944, he wanted to transfer the Seventh Army from Dever's Sixth Army Group to Bradley's Twelfth Army Group. In a letter to Bradley, Eisenhower explained that, "except for political reasons, I would prefer to

⁶⁸ General Jacob L. Devers to General George C. Marshall, 1 July 1944, Box 1, Reel 2, General Marshall [117-220], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁶⁹ Chandler, 2146-2147.

throw Patch's [Seventh] Army of that Group under your control but I must preserve an American complexion to the Southern Army Group for reasons you will understand."⁷⁰ Eisenhower was referring to his concern that if he removed the only major United States element from the Sixth Army Group then de Gaulle would press for a French commander of that group. He might instead ask for the elimination of the group and an expanded role for the French forces in the south. This meant that Eisenhower would have to deal with both British and French national interests personally, which would further complicate his command.⁷¹

Choosing the commander of the new field army was also an issue between the Americans and the French. The Americans preferred General Juin. He had commanded a corps in Italy and had proven to be a dependable leader who worked well with other Allied forces. Juin was characterized as being someone who was approachable and calm.⁷² As General Beaumont-Nesbitt of the Allied Force Headquarters put it, Juin lacked "the excitability, the verbosity, and the vehemence which characterize so many Frenchmen."⁷³ In essence, Juin was the American choice because they felt he was their best bet for a commander with whom they could work. General de Gaulle's choice for the command was General de Lattre who General Beaumont-Nesbitt described as having all of these negative attributes. De Lattre was, "temperamental, inclined to be theatrical, and to take offense where no offense is meant."⁷⁴ He had the same disposition that made de Gaulle difficult for Eisenhower to deal with. If de Lattre took command of the field army, the American-French command relationship could threaten to de-synchronize

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2147.

⁷¹ Clarke and Smith, 226.

⁷² Letter from Major General F. G. Beaumont-Nesbitt, Liaison Section, Allied Force Headquarters to the Chief of Staff, Allied Force Headquarters on Command of the French Army, 13 June 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the Allied effort in southern France.⁷⁵ Regardless, in the end it was more politically expedient to accept de Gaulle's pick for command.⁷⁶

In some respects, the American misgivings were validated as events unfolded. In an update to Eisenhower on 7 September 1944, Devers stated, "De Lattre is a real problem child."⁷⁷ He was referring to the difficulty in getting the French forces to close the Belfort gap. However, this was the American perspective of a foreign general deeply invested in his country's future. De Lattre understood full well that the actions of his army would have larger political implications for France than simply the defeat of Germany. He grasped that his countrymen would have to rebuild their nation after the fighting was over and it was important that he see beyond the objectives laid out by his army group commander. De Lattre was a leader that carried the weight of his country on his shoulders and constantly had to balance operational requirements with national objectives.

The Allies landed in southern France on 15 August 1944. By 2 September, their forces had advanced up the Rhone valley, captured Lyon and were threatening Dijon.⁷⁸ The situation developed faster than planners had anticipated. Because of this, General Lucian Truscott, the VI Corps commander, proposed to General Alexander Patch, the Seventh Army commander, that the VI Corps attack to seize the Vosges-Belfort gap, which in the original plan was a French objective. In addition, the new plan meant that French units would be split on either side of

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ General Jacob L. Devers, oral history interview, conducted 19 August 1974, 18 November 1974, and 4 February 1975, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 168.

⁷⁷ General Jacob Devers to General Dwight Eisenhower, 7 September 1944, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁷⁸ See the appendix for map reference (Seventh Army Advance toward Belfort, 4-14 September).

Seventh Army strung out from the Italian border to Dijon.⁷⁹ General Devers approved the change on 3 September but de Lattre strenuously objected. His primary issue was that American commanders were making significant operational decisions without consulting with him or his staff. He was also concerned that the change in objectives would delay or preclude the activation of the First Army and that the French divisions would be used piecemeal. De Lattre had a strong argument for returning to the original plan both because of a robust attack made by the Third Algerian Division toward Belfort and the fact that in a very short time the French would have the preponderance of divisions in the Sixth Army Group. Ultimately, Devers sided with de Lattre.⁸⁰

Both Patch and de Lattre had valid arguments. The VI Corps was in a better position to press the attack on the Belfort gap. However, this would significant issues for the Sixth Army Group in straightening out control of a mix of French and American units. This problem would be exacerbated once the Sixth Army Group linked up with the Twelfth Army Group in the north and additional American corps were added to the Seventh Army. This subsequent predicament could have delayed other operations in order to facilitate a more rapid push toward Belfort at that moment. Devers had to weigh operational and political considerations and de Lattre's concerns encompassed both. In the end, the Army Group's operational objectives and the French national aims were in agreement.

The Sixth Army Group created a pocket of German forces on the west bank of the Rhine between Strasbourg and Belfort, centered on the town of Colmar, as it closed on the German frontier in the autumn of 1944.⁸¹ The Colmar pocket became a major source of tension between the Americans and French as the First Army made repeated efforts to reduce the pocket and secure the west bank of the Rhine. This step was crucial to set the conditions for the final Allied

⁷⁹ Tassigny, 158-160.

⁸⁰ Clarke and Smith, 182.

⁸¹ See the appendix for map reference (The Sixth Army Group Front, 26 November 1944).

offensive into Germany. The Germans understood the importance of the pocket and poured resources into the area in order to hold it. This only added to the difficulty the French found in trying to secure it.⁸² From 14 to 24 November the First Army conducted a major offensive to liberate southern Alsace. In doing so, the French became the first Allies to reach the Rhine River. By the end of the operation, they had captured Belfort, cleared the southern Vosges Mountains and reached the German frontier. In the process, they had lost a considerable amount of equipment and taken a high number of casualties. The First Army had made incredible gains but had essentially shot its bolt.⁸³

De Lattre had originally planned that once his forces had captured the southern approaches to the Rhine via Belfort, his army would then conduct a subsequent operation to clear the rest of Alsace of German forces. However, the circumstances at the end of November put this out of the question for the near future for a variety of reasons. The First Army had expended a great deal of men and material in its operation to clear southern Alsace. In addition, the First Army had been directed to give up one infantry and one armored division to de Gaulle for operations in western France. The United States Seventh Army had helped to set conditions by capturing Strasbourg but it was focused on securing the right flank of the United States Twelfth Army Group to the north and was oriented in that direction. The First Army boundary with Seventh Army had repeatedly shifted to the north so that by the end of November the First Army had far more ground to cover than would normally be assigned to it. Finally, the weather became progressively worse which was taking its toll on the colonial troops that constituted the majority of de Lattre's army.⁸⁴

⁸² Weigley, 408-410.

⁸³ Clarke and Smith, 406, 429-430.

⁸⁴ Tassigny, 271-272.

American commanders did not see these limitations as de Lattre saw them. General Devers was so confident that the First Army could reduce the pocket that on 26 November he ordered the United States Thirty-sixth Infantry Division pulled from the cordon around the pocket to reinforce a Seventh Army offensive to the north. He subsequently rescinded this order but it was indicative of his optimism at the end of the Belfort offensive.⁸⁵ The result of this difference in perspectives was that the reduction of the Colmar pocket became a point of contention between the French and the Americans over the next few months and continued to affect the way American commanders viewed the French through the end of the war.

Eisenhower's broad front strategy required that the Allies destroy all German forces west of the Rhine from the Netherlands to the Swiss border before making the assault across the Rhine.⁸⁶ The Colmar pocket represented an obstacle to this strategy. First Army's failure to destroy the pocket was seen as holding up the Allied war effort. Hitler's usual dictum of not yielding ground played into the Allied frustration. German commanders had requested to evacuate their forces to the east side of the Rhine in order to consolidate along a more defensible line. Hitler flatly refused and in doing so necessitated the reinforcement of this precarious German position.⁸⁷

By early December, General Devers was growing increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress made by the First Army. He transferred the United States Thirty-sixth Infantry Division and the French Second Armored Division from the Seventh Army to de Lattre's command on 5 December. In addition, Devers delayed the transfer of French divisions to De Gaulle. However, even with these accommodations the First Army did not make significant progress. Devers expressed his dissatisfaction in a letter to de Lattre on 18 December:

⁸⁵ Clarke and Smith, 442.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 434-435.

It was with the greatest confidence that I passed to you the command of all French forces and certain American units engaged on the Alsatian front and assigned you the mission of reducing rapidly the German bridgehead to the west of the Rhine. The means which have been made available for this purpose were, in my opinion adequate for the rapid reduction of this German force, if they had been employed with vigor and determination. I must confess that I am sincerely disappointed with the results you have attained to date.⁸⁸

Devers followed up this admonishment with orders to attack along the entire front in order to destroy the pocket.⁸⁹ Just before Devers sent this letter, Hitler had made one of his chief deputies, Heinrich Himmler, responsible for the task of defending the pocket⁹⁰ and Himmler had taken on the job with the same zeal as he had in running the SS.⁹¹

The American-French conflict over the reduction of the Colmar pocket went beyond the Sixth Army Group. De Gaulle raised the issue with Eisenhower citing issues the French saw as reasons for the delay. Eisenhower responded to de Gaulle's views by pointing out that the lack of infantry in the French divisions was the same problem that plagued American units that had made progress against stronger resistance in other parts of the front.⁹² Eisenhower continued to put pressure on Devers to close the pocket. Eisenhower's opinion of French fighting ability seems to have hit bottom at this point. In his theater assessment to General Marshall on 15 January 1945,

⁸⁸ General Devers to General de Tassigny, 18 December 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Matthew Cooper, *The German Army 1933-1945*, (United States of America: Cooper and Lucas Limited, 1978), 537.

⁹¹ Heinrich Himmler was an early convert to the Nazi party and loyal follower of Hitler. Himmler was the head of Hitler's personal bodyguard, the Schutzstaffel or SS, and carried the organization forward to become the Nazi party's military arm and instrument for the Final Solution, the eradication of the Jews and other undesirables. Michael Haskew, ed., *The World War II Desk Reference* (Edison: Castle Books, 2008), 120.

⁹² General Dwight Eisenhower to General de Gaulle, 5 January 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

he expressed his concern with their performance and questioned their value in the coming Allied spring offensive.⁹³

After the defeat of the NORDWIND offensive in January 1945, the United States Sixth Army Group turned its full attention to dealing with the Colmar pocket. Devers reinforced the First Army with additional American formations to include the American XXI Corps. The final offensive began on 20 January and by 9 February the Allies had driven the Germans from the west bank of the Rhine. Inter-Allied criticism and counter-criticism persisted through the end of January with exchanges between Eisenhower and de Gaulle.⁹⁴ However, this tension appears to have been reduced between Devers and de Lattre, particularly as the strength of the German resistance became clear to Devers. De Lattre, for his part, continued to drive his army to destroy the pocket, understanding both the operational and national prestige implications of the objective.⁹⁵ Overall, the American-French conflict surrounding the Colmar pocket was indicative of how operational progress, or the lack thereof, can create divisions in a coalition.

On 23 November, the French Second Armored Division, assigned to the Sixth Army Group, captured the key city of Strasbourg.⁹⁶ This hallowed symbol held great strategic significance for the French as well as operational significance for the Allies. It was the capital of the Alsace region that both the Germans and French claimed as part of their ancestral lands. The Germans had incorporated it into their new state after the Franco-Prussian war in 1871. The French had won it back at the end of World War I, regaining lost territory that had become a

⁹³ General Dwight D. Eisenhower to General George C. Marshall, 15 January 1945, SHAEF Cable Log-Out [January 1945] (1)-(4), Box 26, Walter Bedell Smith Collection, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁹⁴ Chandler, 2457-2458.

⁹⁵ General Devers to General de Tassigny, 23 January 1945, Box 1, Reel 1, General de Lattre [1186-1269], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁹⁶ Clarke and Smith, 380-381.

national obsession. The Nazis made Alsace part of Germany again in 1940.⁹⁷ In addition, by November of 1944, Strasbourg was the last major city in France still in German hands. The liberation of Strasbourg and its occupation by the Allies on 23 November was a tactical victory with enormous operational and strategic consequences.

The Germans launched the NORDWIND offensive in January 1945, which threatened to cut off and re-capture Strasbourg.⁹⁸ This possibility created a disagreement between the French and the Americans because of the strategic significance of the city for the French versus the American operational imperative to absorb the brunt of the offensive without needlessly losing forces by defending the city. Strasbourg was a symbol that transcended military importance. It was a bastion that had to be held at all costs, on par with Verdun in 1916. France's military was not simply going to abandon it, regardless of what the Americans thought. The Allies were still in the process of beating back the German attack in the Ardennes and the NORDWIND offensive presented the possibility of not only drawing off Allied forces from the fight in the Ardennes but also cutting off those forces between the two offensives. In order to prevent this from happening, Eisenhower directed Devers to abandon Strasbourg and pull back to the Vosges Mountains. This was unacceptable to the French.⁹⁹

Eisenhower's order provoked an immediate response from de Gaulle. They met on 3 January at which point the French leadership threatened to withdraw all French forces under Allied command and move them to Strasbourg if Eisenhower chose to abandon the city.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ungerer, ix-x.

⁹⁸ Clarke and Smith, 494; See the appendix for map reference (The Last German Offensive, 31 December 1944-25 January 1945).

⁹⁹ Stephen Ambrose, *The Supreme Command: The War Years of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company Incorporated, 1969), 577.

¹⁰⁰ General Charles de Gaulle to General Dwight Eisenhower, 3 January 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Eisenhower responded with uncharacteristic emotion but eventually relented. There were several compelling reasons to retain Strasbourg. From the French perspective, the city had been the symbol of either victory or defeat since 1871. From an operational view point, both the First Army and Seventh Army commanders argued that they could hold the city without giving way to the German offensive and therefore prevent the German envelopment.¹⁰¹ Finally, from a humanitarian aspect, Nazi re-occupation would, in General Patton's words, "probably condemn to death all the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine if we abandon them to the Germans."¹⁰² In the end, the German offensive ran out of steam before it seriously threatened to accomplish what the Allies had feared. However, Eisenhower's misreading of the effects of his decision to abandon Strasbourg could have been just as disastrous to the coalition.

As the war drew to a close, another American-French conflict emerged. One of de Gaulle's post-war objectives was to carve out a zone of occupation in Germany. He had complained to Eisenhower that the Allies had excluded France from the planning for the occupation of Germany and that this required him to take matters into his own hands. De Gaulle cited the fact that although he allowed French forces to operate under American command, ultimately he reserved the right to direct them to achieve French national objectives regardless of Allied orders.¹⁰³ This came to a head as the Sixth Army Group broke out of its Rhine bridgehead and drove into the heart of Germany in April 1945.

On 15 April, Devers issued orders for the Seventh Army to encircle Stuttgart to trap the German Nineteenth Army, at which point the First Army would capture the city. The key to the operation was Seventh Army's effort to cut off the German escape routes to the west. De Lattre

¹⁰¹ Weigley, 554.

¹⁰² Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers 1940-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 606.

¹⁰³ General Charles de Gaulle to General Dwight Eisenhower, 28-29 April 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

disregarded these orders. He initiated his attack early, maneuvered through Seventh Army's zone, and captured Stuttgart before the trap could be closed on the German forces.¹⁰⁴ Devers changed the inter-army boundary after the fact to codify the actions already taken by the First Army but it was not the end to the American-French difficulties.¹⁰⁵

Once the First Army occupied Stuttgart, de Lattre set up a French occupation government on de Gaulle's orders.¹⁰⁶ He did this despite the fact that Devers had explicitly ordered him not to do so.¹⁰⁷ De Gaulle had directed de Lattre seizure of Stuttgart at the first opportunity and to establish a military government there in order to secure French claims on the area as part of their zone of occupation after the war. De Gaulle gave orders that he knew were counter to what de Lattre's commander, General Devers, had given him.¹⁰⁸ De Lattre, when faced with these conflicting orders, chose to follow the directives of his national command authority.

De Gaulle's conflicting orders affected the Sixth Army Group. Operationally, they disrupted the subsequent maneuvers by the Army Group to secure its follow-on objectives, its drive into Austria, and clearing the southern portion of the German national redoubt. It also caused problems in the supply network. The Allies had planned to use Stuttgart as a logistical hub but the presence of a French military government in the city created friction between the two administrations. The war ended a few weeks after the Stuttgart incident, which obviated these

¹⁰⁴ Weigley, 711-712.

¹⁰⁵ Modification of Letters of Instruction 14, 20 April 1945, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁶ General de Lattre to General Devers, 26 April 1945, Box 1, Reel 1, General de Lattre [1186-1269], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁷ General Jacob Devers to General Bedell Smith, 24 April 1945, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁸ General Charles de Gaulle to General Dwight Eisenhower, 28-29 April 1945, Box 34, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

problems, but they still caused distrust between the coalition partners that would reach far into the post-war period.

The Stuttgart incident is a clear example of divergent coalition and national objectives. Numerous other conflicts similar to this one arose throughout Sixth Army Group's operations in France and Germany. The Strasbourg incident probably had the highest potential for creating a serious rift in the coalition but there were many others that added to the friction of coalition operations. In order to maintain an effective fighting unit, General Devers always had to balance how he employed the French First Army to achieve coalition objectives with the national caveats that were inherent to the unit. He also had to work through prejudices from both sides in order for the Sixth Army Group to achieve success.

COALITION PARTISANS: THE FRENCH RESISTANCE

In the months just prior to the invasion of southern France a massive struggle occurred between the French Resistance and the German Army in the Vercors mountains, located in southeastern France just south of Grenoble. The Vercors had few roads leading into the region and its terrain was difficult to traverse. It offered an excellent site for the Resistance to fortify against the German military. When the French populace learned of the Normandy landing on 6 June 1944, Resistance fighters began pouring into the Vercors to start the long-awaited uprising against the Germans. Their numbers swelled from 500 to 5,000 by the end of the two-month battle. Their insurrection was ill timed and on 10 June, the Allies communicated to them that they should disperse and go into hiding but at the point, it was too late.¹⁰⁹ Over the course of June and July, the Resistance fought an incredibly bloody series of engagements that ultimately involved 20,000 German soldiers.¹¹⁰ The German military took the threat seriously and eventually employed overwhelming force to include glider assaults to destroy the uprising. In addition, they committed a series of atrocities including the massacre of all the inhabitants of the village of Vassieux and the occupants of the hospital at Die including doctors and nurses. These acts only steeled further opposition by the French population. The Resistance in the Vercors was broken by the end of July but the fight drew off a significant portion of the German military.¹¹¹ Some of these forces remained in the region to prevent further uprisings, which took German resources away from the ANVIL-DRAGOON landings. The actions of the Resistance in the Vercors represented the commitment, even against overwhelming odds, of the French people to

¹⁰⁹ Claude Chambard, *The Maquis: a History of the French Resistance Movement* (New York: the Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976), 178-181.

¹¹⁰ Bertam Gordon, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 361.

¹¹¹ Chambard, 187-192.

restore their liberty. It was illustrative of the importance the Resistance played in securing the Allied victory both before and after the landings in France.

The French Resistance was a vital key to Allied operations in Southern France and was an important asset to the Sixth Army Group. It helped set the conditions for ANVIL-DRAGOON through reconnaissance and sabotage. It also provided valuable assistance in planning the operation. The Resistance also played a significant role once the Allies were ashore and driving for the German frontier. Members of the Resistance operated as guides and augmented Allied units in their fight against the Germans. In addition, they were also an important source of manpower for the French First Army. However, the political relationship between the various groups of the Resistance and the Free French government affected the U.S.-French coalition.

The diverse groups that constituted the Resistance were a potential liability to de Gaulle's post-war objectives. These factions could pitch France back into the divided state that existed before the war that many saw as the reason for the nation's defeat in 1940. The divergent political agendas of the various Resistance groups and de Gaulle became more apparent as the fight in southern France wore on. The Americans recognized the multifaceted nature of the Resistance but the Sixth Army Group focused on operational objectives. De Gaulle was intent on re-establishing national leadership and stability in France after the Germans were defeated. He did not want a return to the political divisiveness that had wracked the country before the war.¹¹²

The French Resistance was a broad term applied to all of the French partisan movements during the war. The Resistance was composed of many diverse groups from all over the country. The only thing they all had in common was their desire to evict the Germans from France. As with any dissimilar group bound together by a common enemy, once the threat receded the unity of the group began to fade. The French Resistance experienced this same phenomenon as the

¹¹² Paxton and Wahl, 52-53.

German presence in the country diminished.¹¹³ In order to understand the dynamics of this conflict and its significance to the Sixth Army Group it is important to appreciate how the Resistance came into being and its major organizations.

The French Resistance began to coalesce shortly after the German occupation in 1940. It was made up of both former military personnel as well as civilians who banded together to fight back against the Germans. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the French communist party formally recognized Germany as their enemy and began operations against them. The communists were a significant force in the Resistance but their political orientation represented a threat to other groups who were vying for power in France. In early 1943, several Resistance factions came together as the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance (MUR). They recognized de Gaulle and the Comité Français de la Libération Nationale (CFLN) as the legitimate provisional government of France. However, the MUR did not encompass all of the Resistance groups, particularly the communists. The communist led Franc-Tireurs et Partisans Français (FTP) complicated clandestine operations in France. This group was opposed to both the pre-1940 Third Republic government and the fascist government of Pétain. They were very distrustful of the MUR, which was led by officers from the Third Republic, and did not recognize the legitimacy of de Gaulle. In addition, the British government, which had a hard line anti-communist tradition, almost exclusively supported the MUR.¹¹⁴

The need for a smooth transition of power from the Vichy government and the German occupation to the Free French was of paramount importance to de Gaulle. He and his followers feared a resistance movement dominated by the communists. This state of affairs could be the seeds of revolution in post-war France. De Gaulle remembered the Paris Commune that emerged in 1871 in the wake of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. The potential for this existed

¹¹³ David Schoenbrun, *Soldiers of the Night: the Story of the French Resistance* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), 36-37.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 163-164.

given the political and social schisms in France before the war. National authority had to pass seamlessly to a unified government. If not, then the country could fall into the same chaos that had wracked it in the nineteenth century. De Gaulle needed to unify the Resistance, just as he had unified the government in exile under the CFLN. If he could not do that, then he needed to marginalize groups that were a threat to national unity. Over time, both of these occurred but the issue remained throughout the war.¹¹⁵

There were several events in 1943 that worked to unify all of the Resistance groups under the direction of the CFLN led by de Gaulle. In March of 1943, he sent Jean Moulin, a former prefect, to negotiate with the FTPF to bring them into the fold. They agreed with the provision that they maintain their own autonomous organization and that they would not be amalgamated into the MUR. Another factor that helped unify the Resistance was the Soviet Union's recognition the CFLN as the provisional government of France and de Gaulle as its leader. This action rallied the French communist party to de Gaulle's government and included them in the French national government, an entity they had been excluded from before the war.¹¹⁶

In order to facilitate Resistance operations the Allies created the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and later the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The SOE was formed immediately following the defeat of France. It was designed to provide aid and leadership to groups throughout occupied Europe that were willing to resist the Germans. The SOE worked with de Gaulle's government to train and equip French agents. In addition, the organization ran its own operations in France. They built networks throughout the country that worked with both Gaullist and non-Gaullist resistance movements. The SOE integrated the OSS into its operations as the war continued but the overall leadership remained British.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 18.

¹¹⁶ Schoenbrun, 227.

¹¹⁷ Arthur Funk, *Hidden Ally: the French Resistance, Special Operation, and the Landings in Southern France, 1944* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 9-11.

By early 1944, the SOE represented the French Resistance in the preparations for the invasions of France. De Gaulle wanted the Resistance directly integrated into the Allied planning process and appointed General Pierre Koenig as his military delegate to Eisenhower's staff. Koenig commanded Free French forces in North Africa fighting alongside Montgomery and was highly regarded by the Allies. He set up his headquarters in London in April of 1944 and on 24 May he made his case to the Allies that all French Resistance units be brought under Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force control. He was subsequently named as the commander of the FFI, the umbrella organization for all French Resistance organizations. Unfortunately, these moves came too late to be significant for the Normandy invasion planning. ANVIL-DRAGOON would be the first test.¹¹⁸

There were a number of ways that the Resistance laid the groundwork for Allied operations in southern France. On 17 March 1944, Eisenhower set out his plans for the Resistance. He stated that they should be used for sabotage, blocking roads, destroying communication facilities, and other hit-and-run operations. These actions would help in a number of ways. They would disrupt German movement by inhibiting road and rail networks. They would force the Germans to establish redundant communication methods because of the sporadic interference with existing systems. All of these actions would also draw off German forces to guard key points, which would further diminish the number of units available to fight the Allied invasion. Most importantly, the Resistance would help deceive the Germans as to the landing locations by executing operations over a wide area.¹¹⁹

The Seventh Army gave the Resistance specific targeting guidance in order to make the most effective use of the organization. It directed the objectives to hit and in what time frame. The headquarters prioritized the locations for attack and the period of attack in reference to the

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

invasion day for the ANVIL-DRAGOON landings. It also provided target descriptions for guerilla attacks including fuel dumps, airfields, ammunition dumps, isolated garrisons, and small detachments travelling by road. The Seventh Army headquarters also prioritized enemy headquarters for attack singling out the XIX Army, LXII Corps as well as seven division headquarters for assault.¹²⁰ Finally, it prioritized aerial supply for the units in order to manage the limited resources available.¹²¹ Seventh Army's specificity in its guidance helped focus Resistance efforts for maximum gain.

The Resistance also conducted passive operations that helped the Allies prepare for the invasion. These were primarily reconnaissance missions on key installations, landing sites, and German formations. They smuggled out German plans for defensive works for bunkers and casemates. The Resistance produced diagrams of the coastal fortifications including location, caliber and orientation of shore emplacements as well as intricate maps of the port facilities. They provided updates on German unit movements and troop strengths. They were also used to select targets for Allied bombing.¹²² All of these efforts played a significant role in preparing for the invasion of southern France and paid great dividends when the time came to strike.

On 22 August 1944, the Sixth Army Group laid out its immediate and mid-term objectives for the Resistance in support of ANVIL-DRAGOON. Until 1 September, the intent was to build up groups in the Massif Central, Vercors, and Hautes Pyrenees regions to facilitate the rapid maneuver of Allied conventional forces in the latter stages of operations. Resistance units were restricted to clandestine and sabotage operations and were directed not to take overt

¹²⁰ These included the 242nd, 148th, 338th, 244th, 157th Infantry, and 9th Panzer Division headquarters.

¹²¹ Headquarters Seventh Army to Special Projects Operation Center, 26 July 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹²² *La Rôle de la Résistance dans le Débarquement en Provence*, Service Historique de la Défense. Département Armée de Terre.

action like the kind executed in the Vercors in June and July. During this period, the Allies planned to materially build up the Resistance through airdrops from North Africa. Once Allied forces had firmly established their bridgehead in southern France, the Resistance would support small Allied airborne operations up the Rhone valley to open the way for an Allied drive into central France.¹²³ As the campaign developed, these objectives were reviewed and modified to further leverage these groups for Allied success.

Resistance operations had a significant influence on the German military. After 1 August, Resistance units established an almost daily routine of wire cutting of both overhead and underground telephone and telegraph lines. Sabotage increased to the point that the German Army was no longer able to repair the damage fast enough to maintain its communications systems. The result was that by 6 August the German field army in southern France was only able to communicate with its higher headquarters sporadically. In addition, Resistance units had become so aggressive that German elements could only move safely by operating in large, well-protected convoys on main roads in the region. On 7 August, the German field army commander reported that the Resistance was no longer a terrorist group but had emerged as an organized army. By 15 August, they had control over large sections of southern France.¹²⁴ The efforts and sacrifices of the Resistance paved the way for ANVIL-DRAGOON.

The Resistance continued to be a significant force after the Allies landed in Provence. As mentioned above, the Sixth Army Group intended to use these units to facilitate Allied operations. A great deal of planning and coordination had occurred in order to set the conditions for operating with the Resistance. They proved their worth as soon as the first Allied trooper touched ground in southern France. United States and British paratroopers came in contact with

¹²³ Chief of Staff, Allied Force Headquarters to Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, 22 August 1944, Box 1, Reel 1, French [888-1184], Papers of Jacob L. Devers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹²⁴ Clarke and Smith, 96-97.

elements of the Resistance in the early morning hours of 15 August. They assisted in linking up the widely dispersed airborne soldiers, joined with the paratroopers to fight the Germans, and provided medical assistance to the wounded and injured. Resistance units helped clear German units from the amphibious landing areas as well. Their contributions did not go unnoticed by the Allies. For example, General Patch, the Seventh Army commander, took time to participate in a review of a local Resistance unit and presented their leader with the Silver Star medal shortly after landing in southern France.¹²⁵

The Sixth Army Group continued to benefit from its contact with the Resistance for the duration of its time in France. After the landings, the Allies established links with Resistance units to facilitate further coordination. These units continued to provide intelligence for the Allies including the location and strength of German elements as well as information on operating conditions of roads, bridges, and passes. This information allowed the Sixth Army Group to more effectively employ its limited resources across a large area from the Swiss border to the Rhone valley. The Resistance also fought alongside the Allies in their drive to the German border. Allied units used them as guides and combatants as they battled north. As discussed previously, the French First Army incorporated some of these units as much-needed replacements. The Resistance also helped in a myriad of other ways that further aided Allied progress. For example, they built a fording point on the Verdon river so that elements of Seventh Army's vanguard could prevent the escape of German units trying to regroup near the village of Quinson.¹²⁶ While all of this was a great help to the Sixth Army Group, the close coordination of Allied units and Resistance elements threatened to undermine de Gaulle's national objectives.

De Gaulle's overarching goal was the peaceful restoration of a free central government in France, which he would lead. The various factions in the Resistance who had their own divergent

¹²⁵ Funk, 98-102.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 114-115.

agendas threatened his intent. Prior to the Allied landings in northern and southern France, de Gaulle had worked to consolidate the Resistance under his authority and direction. For the most part, he had been successful. His concern was that once the German threat, which had united the Resistance, was eliminated these groups would seek to establish their own power bases in France. This could lead to a long and bloody civil war reminiscent of the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war that would further degrade the country's ability to rebuild and re-establish its rightful place in the world. As a result, it was very important to de Gaulle that he and his government assume administrative control of liberated France as soon as possible. It was also vital that Resistance groups that were a potential threat to his government be disarmed and neutralized at the first opportunity. De Gaulle planned to quickly amalgamate the Resistance into the French Army in order to put them under the direct control of an established military hierarchy that answered to him. Those that rejected this option would be disarmed and marginalized.¹²⁷ This plan affected how the Sixth Army Group worked with local Resistance elements in southern France, many of whom were communists.

De Gaulle's authority in France was still tenuous when the Allies landed and began driving the Germans from the country. As a result, it was important that the Allies, and in particular the Americans, be seen by the local population as supporting him. For example, Eisenhower had elements of the American Army conduct a troop review for de Gaulle on the Champs-Élysée in Paris just days after the city's liberation as a sign of recognition and support of his position as leader of France.¹²⁸ It was important that the Sixth Army Group reflect this sentiment and support the rapid amalgamation of the Resistance into the French Army, or its disarmament. De Lattre's First Army was the focal point in the army group for the incorporation of these elements. De Lattre understood the political implication of these groups in post-war

¹²⁷ Schoenbrun, 171.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 169.

France but he empathized with their position and the enormous sacrifices they had made. These fighters were also a source of much needed manpower that he could not afford to lose. His command worked diligently to integrate members of the Resistance with the least possible damage to their esprit de corps. Overall, he was successful and the Resistance was dissolved in southern France without significant opposition.¹²⁹

There were issues with Resistance groups outside of Sixth Army Group's area of operations that affected the command as well. The army group was chronically short of the forces required for the missions at hand. In late September, de Gaulle requested two of the French divisions be withdrawn from the army group in order to clear German units still holding out between La Rochelle and Bordeaux. However, General Juin, de Gaulle's chief of staff, later confided to Eisenhower that these units were needed to establish control over Toulouse and Limoges. The communist Resistance groups in these two areas were very strong and well armed. They refused to take orders from de Gaulle's representatives who had recently arrived in the respective regions.¹³⁰ De Lattre and Devers both vehemently protested the loss of these critical units. In order to forestall their redeployment west, de Lattre committed his army in a major attack on Belfort and subsequent push to the Rhine.¹³¹ In February, de Gaulle pressed again for troops for the liberated zones of France. This time he requested the units for training and refit in order to maintain contact between select regions of the country and the field army in the east.¹³² The continuous pressure from de Gaulle to take resources out of the Sixth Army Group to deal with Resistance political issues was a constant burden for both Devers and de Lattre.

¹²⁹ Chandler, 2182.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Salisbury-Jones, 162.

¹³² Forrest Pogue, *The Supreme Command* (Washington: Center for Military History, 1989), 328.

The French Resistance played a significant role in the liberation of southern France but its political ramifications affected the United States-French coalition. The Resistance provided much needed intelligence for the ANVIL-DRAGOON landings. It disrupted German military operations to the point that the enemy lost control of large portions of the region before the Sixth Army Group even set foot on French soil. The Resistance continued to be an asset to the Allies after the landings. It provided information and direct action to facilitate the army group's operations. The Resistance was also an important source of military manpower for the French First Army. However, the disparate and independent political motivations of various Resistance groups threatened de Gaulle's national objectives. For him, these groups were a danger to the peace and stability of the restored nation. The Sixth Army Group felt the effects of this important conflict and it became an operational consideration for its commander.

CONCLUSION

The United States-French coalition during World War II, embodied in the Sixth Army Group, offers many lessons but the overriding one is the primacy of each coalition partner's national objectives. The monograph examined this principle in three specific areas: French re-armament, conventional operations, and partisan warfare. The overriding factor that shaped these cases was the convergence or divergence of each coalition nation's goals. The French desire to weight the re-establishment of their military with combat formations met their aim of creating a force that would provide a larger proportion of fighting forces among the Allies. This was tied to their political goal of re-establishing France's place in post-war Europe. Creating an unbalanced force was in conflict with American requirements. A combat heavy French military meant that the United States Army would have to provide the logistical units in order to support the French field army. This tension was reflected in how this field army operated under a United States army group. There were several instances in southern France and Germany when the French First Army either disobeyed orders from the Sixth Army Group or threatened to do so because these orders conflicted with the attainment of national goals. The Allied withdrawal from Strasbourg is the most notable example and has been discussed at length. Finally, the politically charged nature of the French Resistance, which threatened de Gaulle's desire for a peaceful transition to civil control, affected how the Sixth Army Group engaged this valuable asset. The issue also created an almost constant threat of the loss of significant combat power from the army group in order to support de Gaulle's national aims. These three areas highlight several aspects of the primacy of national objective principle.

No coalition partners are ever perfectly aligned in their strategic goals. Therefore, each member must be very cognizant of the where their goals differ and understand the operational effects these differences will have. France's leadership wanted to drive the Germans from the country, quickly establish democratic rule, do so without the internal divisions that had wracked the country before the war, and re-establish France's position on the world stage. The United

States shared some of these objectives, foremost the defeat of Germany and a peaceful and stable France. However, the two countries had different ideas about how even these shared goals should be accomplished. General Devers was aware of these differences and concentrated his efforts on his relationship with his subordinate French commander, General de Lattre, in order to achieve Allied objectives. There were instances where the dissimilarities could not be reconciled and a decision had to be made that would favor one or the other. This is connected to the second lesson from this study: commitment to national objectives.

The level of commitment each nation has to its strategic goals will affect its willingness to compromise for coalition objectives. There were multiple coalition friction points in the three focus areas of this monograph. In some cases, American and French leadership made compromises that fully satisfied neither party. In other instances, one country yielded to the other in order to continue operations. In re-armament, the United States agreed to equip more divisions at the cost of support units. However, they limited the number of divisions created to fewer than requested by the French and continued to push for the formation of service units throughout the war. Another example is de Gaulle's request to withdraw several French divisions from the Sixth Army Group in order to establish authority over former Resistance groups in western France. This began shortly after the ANVIL-DRAGOON landings and continued into 1945. Devers repeatedly postponed the re-deployment of these divisions, citing operational requirements. De Gaulle did not significantly press the issue and the forces remained in place for the time being. In the case of Strasbourg, the national implications were so great that the Americans relented and kept forces in place. There were examples with no agreed resolution, as occurred at Stuttgart in the closing months of the war. This highlights another lesson: impetus for coalition unity.

Nations form coalitions to combat a mutual threat, which creates a level of shared commitment. The extent of the danger posed by the threat usually indicates the degree to which each nation is willing to forgo their aims for the good of the coalition. Conversely, as the

unifying threat fades, the differences in national objectives become more pronounced, making coalition operations more problematic. France and the United States were closely tied in purpose when the German military occupied the entire country and threatened Allied interests throughout Europe. This meant the coalition had to work together out of the necessity because of the enormity of the threat. The French military had to accept the conditions of re-armament by the Americans since at that time there was nowhere else to turn. Correspondingly, the United States government needed to ally itself with Free French elements that would facilitate the defeat of Germany. Both partners accepted conditions that were less than ideal for their national aims. After the Allied landings in northern and southern France, this threat began to recede. By late 1944, the Allies were certain of defeating Germany, with its armies largely evicted from the country. At this point, the United States' and France's post-war aims became much more prevalent and the differences between the two emerged in how the Sixth Army Group operated.

The United States military recognizes that it will usually operate with international partners, whether as part of an enduring alliance or in a coalition. Based on this, current military doctrine includes coalition operations. The Department of Defense defines a coalition as an, "ad hoc arrangement between two or more nations for common action...usually for a single occasion or a longer period of time while addressing a narrower sector of common interest."¹³³ This reflects the nature of the United States-French coalition during World War II, which was bounded only by the duration of the war. The temporary nature of this kind of arrangement means that there is less inclination to look beyond the conflict at the effects that divergent national objectives will have on the international relationship. This means that the nature of the common threat is what primarily binds the coalition. This vulnerability threatens the coalition's unity of effort.

The key to successful coalition operations is unity of effort among political as well as military leaders. Unity of effort is built on the achievement of common objectives as well as mutual support and respect of national aims. The United States military recognizes that there

¹³³ Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 3-16: Multinational Operations* (2007), I-1.

may be conflicts between coalition and national aims. Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operations Planning*, specifically states that, “US national interests may not be in complete agreement with those of the multinational organization or some of its individual nation states.”¹³⁴ This monograph alludes to the responsibility that political and military leaders have to consult with the other nations to establish a common set of operational objectives. This proved to be a daunting task for the French and Americans as they worked to forge a plan for the liberation of France. This hindered the coalition’s unity of effort since both parties never really addressed communally their separate strategic objectives.

How does the coalition leadership maintain this unity of effort in the face of divergent national aims? Joint Publication 3-16, *Multinational Operations*, lays out four tenets for success in coalition operations. The first is respect. The leadership must recognize that national honor and international standing are at stake for each country’s forces. Commanders must bring their international partners into the planning process and take national interests into account as they assign roles and responsibilities. The second tenet is rapport. Building a solid relationship with coalition commanders that facilitates the discussion of problem areas allows the coalition leadership to avert major disconnects that can derail operations.¹³⁵ General Devers spent a great deal of time cultivating his relationship with General de Lattre and vice versa. In addition, Devers selected Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., a former senator and future diplomat, as his liaison to the French First Army.¹³⁶ This judicious choice reflected the importance Devers placed on his interaction with the First Army. Another tenet is patience. This includes patience to develop the relationships of mutual trust necessary for successful operations. The last tenet is knowledge of partners. Commanders and their staff must understand what motivates and drives their coalition

¹³⁴ Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 5-0: Joint Operations Planning* (2011), II-37.

¹³⁵ Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 3-16: Multinational Operations* (2007), I-3.

¹³⁶ Clarke and Smith, 577.

partners. This includes not only their partner's strategic position and goals but also their culture and historical background that will provide information on what is truly important.¹³⁷ The United States military appeared to be lacking in this area during World War II with respect to their French counterparts. The Strasbourg example illustrates the absence of understanding of the deeper historical motivations of the French. This tenet is also the focus of recommendations based on the three areas examined in the monograph.

There are two ways the United States military can improve the knowledge of partners tenet in its coalition commanders and staffs. The first is education. It is vital for these personnel to study the history and culture of the other coalition nations. This must go beyond the simplistic nuances like, "Don't shake with the left hand." Education should cover pivotal historical events that shaped the coalition nation's psyche as well as an understanding of its political background as well as the current political-military dynamics. Ideally, this is an in-depth process that includes immersion in the partner country. This may not be possible given the sometimes ad hoc nature of coalitions. However, there is a small group of countries with whom the United States habitually operates. It is advantageous to establish education programs for these countries. Currently, the United States has military exchanges with many of these nations but these include only a handful of participants. In order to be effective, the educational process must be provided to a larger audience. This includes directed self-study as well as classroom work with subject matter experts. This program can potentially alleviate the kind of knowledge of partner blind spots that created the rift over Strasbourg in January 1945 and a myriad of other issues that arose for the Americans in their coalition with France.

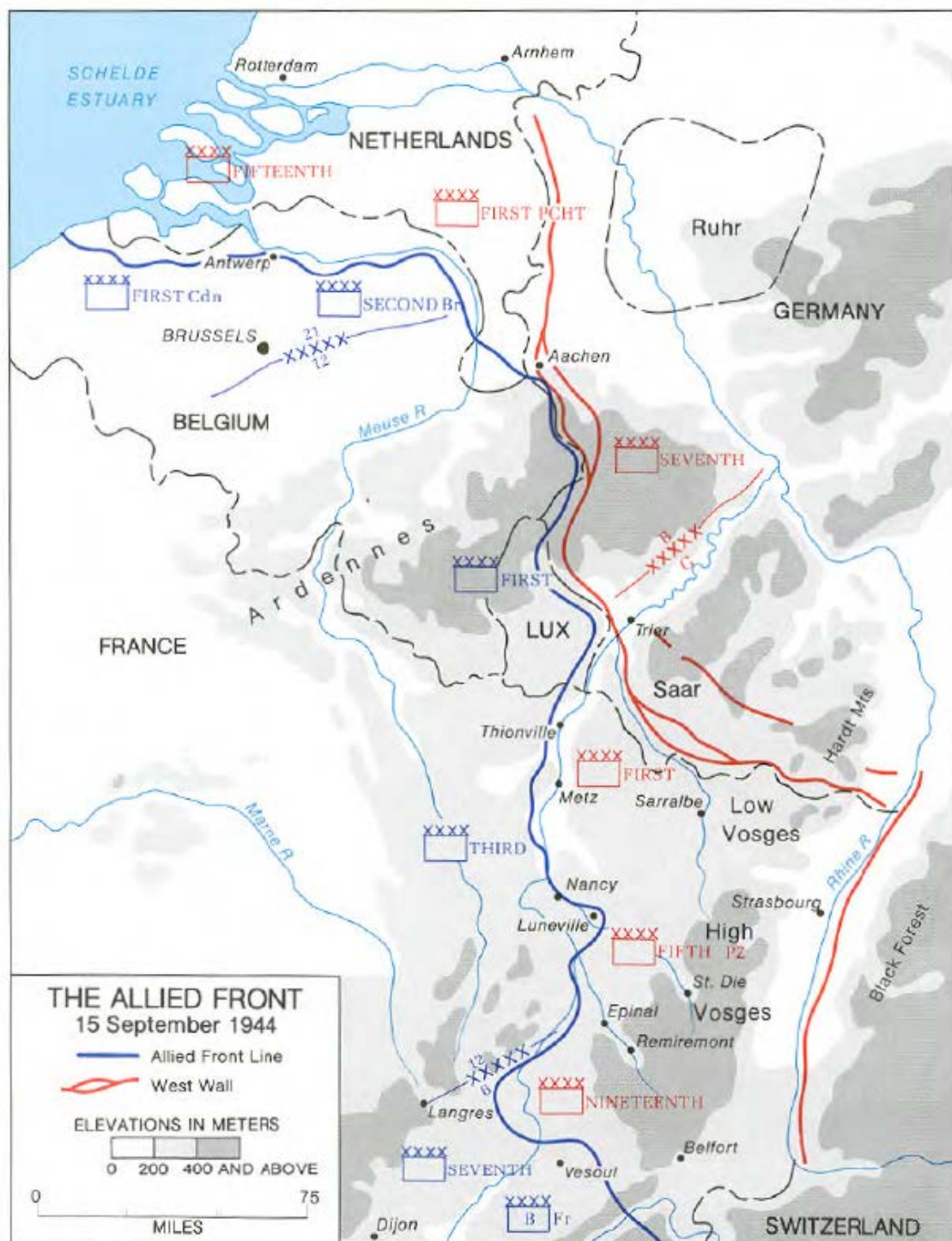
The second area of improvement is doctrine. Current United States military doctrine lays out a process for understanding the operational environment that does not adequately encompass coalition partners. The analysis includes a broad range of topics as well as several tools like

¹³⁷ Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 3-16: Multinational Operations* (2007), I-3, I-4.

PMESSI- political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure designed to help commanders and their staffs understand the various groups in the environment.¹³⁸ However, the methodology does not sufficiently touch on the historical background and national motivations of coalition countries. These areas often explain deep-seated beliefs that can have adverse and unforeseen effects on coalition behavior. The historical aspect tends to be wrapped up in other topics that do not properly address the issue. In addition, the tools laid out in doctrine focus on the friendly-adversary environment without properly taking into account the nuances of the coalition partners. Future doctrine should reflect the examination of the historical background, cultural dynamics, and political motivations of coalition nations. This would provide commanders and their staffs with a better guide that will allow them to account for coalition national proclivities, which will produce a stronger coalition unity of effort.

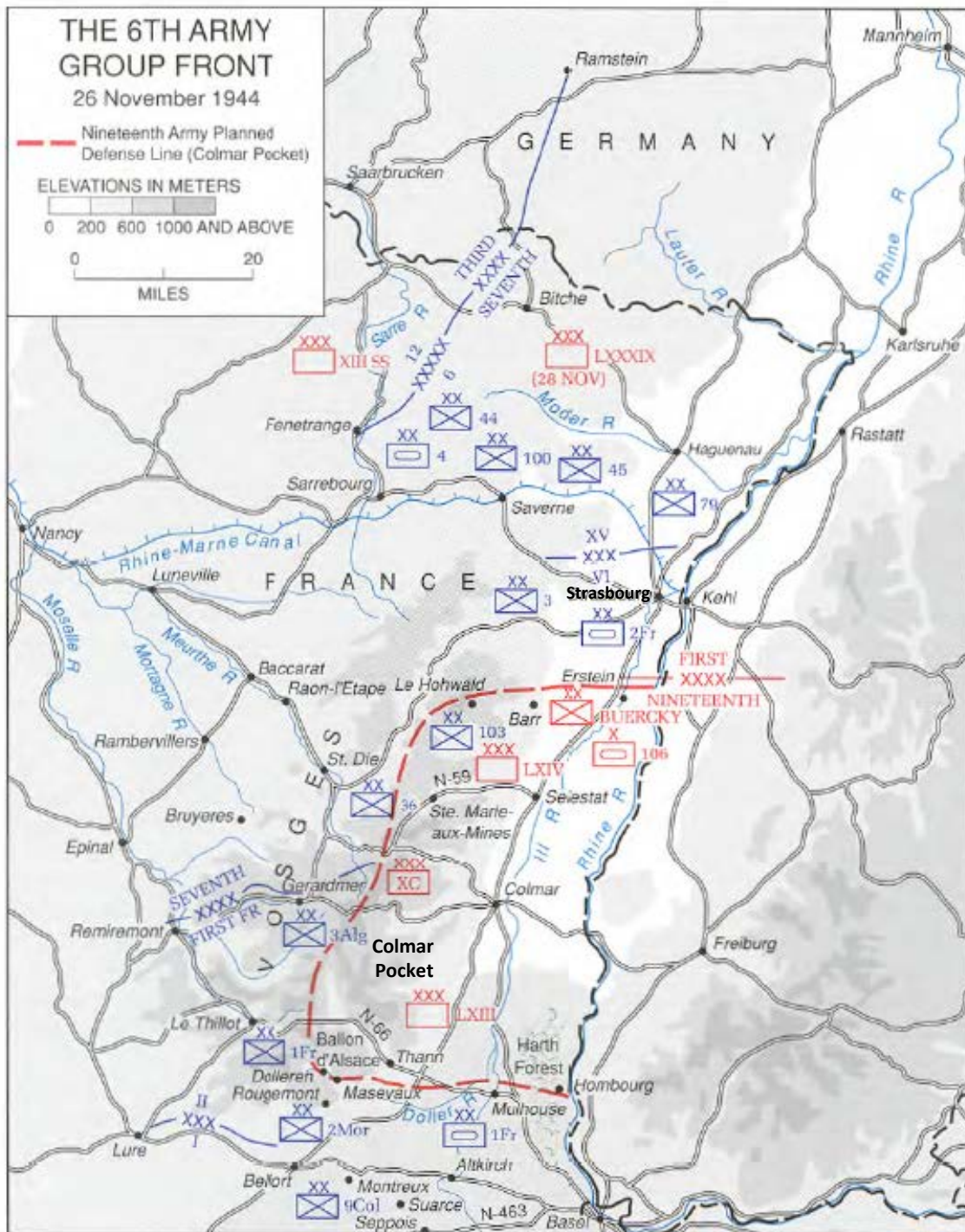
¹³⁸ Headquarters, Department of Defense, *JP 5-0: Joint Operations Planning* (2011), III-8.

APPENDIX: MAPS



The Allied Front, 15 September 1944¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Clarke and Smith, Map 12.



The Sixth Army Group Front, 26 November 1944¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Clarke and Smith, Map 30.

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