

'THE MARSHALL SYSTEM' IN WORLD WAR II, MYTH AND REALITY: SIX
AMERICAN COMMANDERS WHO FAILED

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This is an analysis of the U.S. Army's personnel decisions in the Second World War. Specifically, it considers the U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall's appointment of generals to combat command, and his reasons for relieving some generals while leaving others in place after underperformance. Many historians and contemporaries of Marshall, including General Omar N. Bradley, have commented on Marshall's ability to select brilliant, capable general officers for combat command in the war. However, in addition to solid performers like J. Lawton Collins, Lucian Truscott, and George S. Patton, Marshall, together with Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lesley J. McNair, often selected sub-par commanders who significantly underperformed on the battlefield. These generals' tactical and operational decisions frequently led to unnecessary casualties, and ultimately prolonged the war. The work considers six case studies: Lloyd Fredendall at Kasserine Pass, Mark Clark during the Italian campaign, John Lucas at Anzio, Omar Bradley at the Falaise Gap, Courtney Hodges at the Hürtgen Forest, and Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. at Okinawa. Personal connections and patronage played strong roles in these generals' command appointments, and often trumped practical considerations like command experience. While their superiors ultimately relieved corps commanders Fredendall and Lucas, field army and army group commanders Clark, Hodges, and Bradley retained command of their units, (Buckner died from combat wounds on Okinawa). Personal connections also strongly influenced the decision to retain the field army and army group commanders in their commands.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

[A successful general] must be resourceful, active, careful, hardy, and quick-witted; he must be both gentle and brutal, at once straightforward and designing, capable of both caution and surprise, lavish and rapacious, generous and mean, skillful in defense and attack.

Xenophon, attributed to Socrates, *The Memorabilia*.

On 1 September 1939, the same day that German panzers rolled into Poland and ignited what soon became a world war, General George Catlett Marshall formally began his tenure as Chief of Staff of the United States Army. Marshall originally came from Pennsylvania and graduated from the Virginia Military Institute. Professionalism, competence, and ambition had marked his career. Between tours as an infantry officer in the Philippines he had first taught and then instructed at the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Like over one million other Americans, Marshall had served in Europe during the First World War. While there, he drew the attention of the commander of the American Expeditionary Force, John J. “Black Jack” Pershing, and the general became a mentor to the younger officer. Various postings followed, including an assignment in China, as an instructor at the War College in Washington, and at the Infantry School at Fort Benning. Eventually he rose to head the War Plans Division before serving as the deputy Chief of Staff to General Malin Craig. It did not take long for the serious, forthright officer to impress Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the president soon decided that he would succeed Craig as Chief of Staff, despite the fact that it meant leapfrogging other, more senior officers.

The war in Europe quickly demonstrated fundamental changes to the nature of modern warfare. The plodding pace and trench-warfare mentality that had prevailed in the First World War no longer applied. Rather, the German development of *Bewegungskrieg*, or war of

movement, reintroduced mobility to the battlefield. Adolf Hitler's fearsome panzers, operating in close coordination with aircraft and infantry, had swept aside opposition in Poland and did so again in France and the low countries the following year. German success had proven the theories of younger military innovators such as Heinz Guderian, Erich von Manstein, and Kurt Student.¹

As Chief of Staff, Marshall hoped to introduce wide-ranging reforms into the Army by cutting red tape and minimizing bureaucracy. Retiring older officers in order to make way for their younger, more dynamic comrades was one way in which he hoped to better organize the Army into an effective fighting force. He told columnist George Fielding Eliot that most officers serving in 1939 were "too old to command troops in battle under the terrific conditions of modern war." With an eye toward developments in Europe, Marshall noted the fundamental ways in which wars had changed, and he believed that younger officers with new ideas who were willing to innovate would be key to success in a modern war. One of the great Army legends surrounding Marshall concerned his "little black book," a list that the general kept throughout his military career that recorded the names of officers who impressed him as competent, and who displayed the qualities he believed necessary for command. Supposedly, many officers that held significant wartime posts had their names recorded in Marshall's black book, including Terry de la Mesa Allen, Omar Bradley, Simon Buckner, Mark Clark, Dwight Eisenhower, Lloyd Fredendall, Courtney Hodges, John Lucas, George Patton, Mathew Ridgway, Lucien Truscott and others.²

¹ Trevor N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (Garden City: Military Book Club, 1977), 255-257; Dennis Showalter, *Hitler's Panzers: The Lightning Attacks That Revolutionized Warfare* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2009), 86.

² Debi Unger, Irwin Unger, & Stanley Hirshson, *George Marshall: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 159-160, 189, 267-268; Thomas F. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 24.

The Asian and Pacific theaters in World War II had their share of older American generals, such as Douglas MacArthur, Walter Krueger, Joseph Stilwell, and Robert Richardson. All of these men had been over fifty-five years of age the year that Marshall became Chief of Staff. Typically, however, younger men served in the European theater during the war in command of field army, corps, and divisions. Marshall had promoted talented younger officers even as he showed many older generals the door. Eisenhower was only forty-nine years old in 1939. Bradley was forty-six, Patton was fifty-three, Hodges was fifty-two, William Hood Simpson was fifty-one, Clark was forty-three, Truscott was forty-four, Orlando Ward was forty-eight, Allen was fifty-one, Ernest Harmon was forty-five, Ridgway was forty-four, J. Lawton Collins was forty-three, and Lucas was forty-nine. At fifty-six years old, Fredendall was an exception. Marshall's preference for youthful officers remained with him through the war.

General Lesley McNair shared Marshall's desire to reform the Army. The officer served as the head of the Army's General Headquarters beginning in 1940, and two years later he became the head of Army Ground Forces. In these capacities, he had tremendous influence over doctrinal development and personnel appointments within the United States Army during the Second World War, and his intellectual contributions to the war effort earned him the Chief of Staff's praise. Indeed, Marshall once referred to him as, "the brains of the Army." It was McNair who prepared on short notice and in great haste ninety-five Army and Marine divisions for combat in Europe and the Pacific. In a 1942 letter to McNair, Marshall noted there would be "no arbitrary limits" when it came to appointing generals. However, he wrote "I desire, however, that maximum consideration be given to younger men." He further declared that "an increasing number of those under forty-five be given greater opportunity for command experience in regiments and units of comparable size." In late 1942, a memorandum prepared

for Marshall indicated that the average age for full generals was between sixty and sixty-one; lieutenant generals between fifty-six and fifty-nine; major generals between fifty-one and fifty-four; and brigadier generals between fifty and fifty-eight.³

In addition to relative youth, Marshall prized other factors among the general officers he selected for command. Health and a vigorous constitution were essential, as was formal military education. The majority of Marshall's high commanders in the Second World War were graduates of the Command and General Staff School, and many attended the War College as well. Marshall tolerated, and perhaps even valued eccentricity among many of his generals, explaining not only Patton's frequent profanity and pearl-handled pistols, but also MacArthur's narcissistic swagger, and Allen's hard-drinking, maverick bravado. He valued combat experience, but it was not always a requirement. Neither Eisenhower nor Bradley had seen combat in the First World War. In the same letter to McNair he stated, "I propose to utilize to the maximum the officers who have actual combat experience in filling the general officer positions in new units."⁴

As historian James Lacey asserts, ambition is a critical requirement for high command in any service. Marshall himself had been a risk taker during his career, sometimes adopting unpopular positions and willing to accept seemingly dead-end assignments in the hope that they would lead to greater opportunities later. Further, Marshall could be utterly ruthless and driven in order to achieve his objectives. He expected the same absolute dedication from his

³ Mark T. Calhoun, *General Lesley J. McNair: Unsung Architect of the US Army*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015). 1; NARA, Chief of Staff and General Staff Papers, Record Group 165, Box 5, Marshall to McNair, 22 November 1942, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 9 October 1942.

⁴ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict was Fought and Won* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 429-431, 446; Gerald Astor, *Terrible Terry Allen: Combat General of World War II – The Life of an American Soldier* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2003), xii; NARA, Chief of Staff and General Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 54, Marshall to McNair, 22 November 1942.

subordinates. Marshall commented at one point on his plans to weed out officers for high command. “I am going to put these men to the severest tests which I can devise ... I am going to ask them more than human beings should be required to deliver ... Those that stand up to the punishment will be pushed ahead. Those who fail are out at the first sign of faltering.”⁵

In another letter to McNair later that year, Marshall dismissed the notion that qualified generals could be found using only percentages and numbers and offered his own ideas on selecting commanders: “Vital qualifications for a general officer are leadership, force, and vigor.” The training that most officers received over their careers could not replace these qualities. “The officers who possess them must be singled out and advanced regardless of other considerations.” Again, Marshall noted the importance of promoting younger officers to critical commands, “I am convinced that [these qualities] will be found among our [younger officers] to a much larger degree than your percentages indicate.”⁶

The qualities that Marshall prized – leadership, force, and vigor – can be difficult to discern in an officer in peacetime. An officer’s military career does not evolve in a vacuum. It is often the product of factors such as careful consideration by superiors, timely promotions and appointments, battlefield success, and proven competence. A common practice among modern militaries has been to hold maneuvers to simulate battlefield conditions. Among other purposes, these war games provide military authorities the opportunity to see officers in action, promote talent, and sideline incompetence. The U.S. Army General Headquarters Maneuvers witnessed approximately half a million soldiers engage in war games only a few months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. They remain the largest military maneuvers in American

⁵ James Lacey, *The Washington War: FDR’s Inner Circle and the Politics of Power that Won World War II* (New York; Bantam Books, 2019), 240.

⁶ NARA, RG 165, Chief of Staff and General Staff Papers, Box 54, Marshall to McNair, 1 December 1942.

history and proved essential to America's war preparations. McNair stated at the time, "we're going to start at the top and work down. We've got some bum Generals, and maybe I'm one of them, but we're going to weed them out." However, according to Christopher Gabel, the historian of the GHQ Maneuvers, Marshall had almost certainly picked out his key commanders for the upcoming war before the 1941 war games. Rather, he asserts, the exercises most likely served simply to prepare officers like Eisenhower and others for their wartime roles.⁷

As the war unfolded, Eisenhower became the U.S. Army's most important officer in Europe and was responsible for the development of many officers' careers. Like Marshall, Eisenhower had strong views on how and when to promote officers, and his recommendations proved critical for personnel decisions in that theater. In a March 1943 letter to his subordinate generals, Eisenhower began with, "the matter of officer promotion and demotion is of such importance as to warrant earnest study by every officer, particularly every General Officer." He then cut to the heart of the matter with regard to promotion. "The only valid reason for advancing an individual is to improve the quality of our military leadership and so produce greater battle and general efficiency in the American forces." He further noted that "promotions in time of war are not to be used as a reward for long or faithful service in peace time." Eisenhower was clearly stating that leadership and its inherent qualities, not simply long service, must be the basis for promoting officers. Essentially, an officer should not advance in rank because it was his turn, but rather because he had displayed competence and the other proper traits necessary to make him effective in his new assignment. Eisenhower maintained, "the

⁷ Christopher R. Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1991), 187; Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 733.

purpose must be to use promotions to extend the influence of officers who have produced effective results and who have not yet reached the limit of their productive capacity.”⁸

Marshall had no problem relieving older generals to make way for new talent, and during the course of the war he frequently relieved or approved the relief of battlefield commanders who did not measure up. Thomas Ricks’ main argument in his 2012 book *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* is that Marshall and other Army leaders during the Second World War were far more likely to relieve incompetent generals than were subsequent generations of commanders in subsequent wars. The author painted Marshall as a man of integrity and competence, a no-nonsense military commander who promoted officers according to their quality and merits, and who had no hesitation relieving incompetent or insubordinate generals. Before the war Marshall relieved Brigadier General Charles Bundel for telling him that he could not update training manuals for the Army in just four months. In another instance, Marshall retired a general, supposedly a friend, for being unwilling to leave for Europe because his wife was not at home, and they had not yet packed up the furniture.⁹

Ricks argues that Marshall’s lack of sentimentality toward the generals and his willingness to resort to reliefs at times deemed necessary “tended to create an incentive system that encouraged prudent risk taking.” This attitude stemmed from his experiences working with Pershing during the First World War. The AEF commander had little reservations about relieving officers from their commands for incompetence or for their unwillingness to fight. The Army sent such officers to appear before reclassification boards that it had set up at Blois, France, approximately 100 miles southwest of Paris. The Army branded officers sent to Blois

⁸ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., ed., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years, Vol. II*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1038-1039.

⁹ Ricks, *The Generals*, 33, 36.

with a stigma of failure, and those serving at the front lived in constant fear of being “blooeyed,” as it came to be known. Marshall believed that this fear of failure greatly motivated officers to carry out their orders with determination, courage, and a sense of duty.¹⁰

In September 1943, shortly after the Allied landings at Salerno, Italy, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall appraising him of the decision to relieve Major General Ernest J. Dawley from his command of VI Corps. Eisenhower’s logic concerning the issue perfectly echoed Marshall’s own sentiments about relief in the war, and indeed Eisenhower’s views could just have easily been uttered by the Chief of Staff himself. “Dawley is a splendid character, earnest, faithful and well informed,” the commander of the Allied Mediterranean forces wrote. “There is nothing against him except that he cannot repeat cannot exercise high battle command effectively when the going is rough.” He further stated that in battle Dawley “grows extremely nervous and indecisive.” Therefore, the decision to relieve the corps commander was self-evident. “I feel that battle leadership is the test for which we have trained professional officers. They were given wartime rank to meet wartime jobs and if they cannot measure up to the standards required then we must reduce them to peace rank.” He expressed regret that Dawley would be heartbroken and acknowledged that he had “done his best.” However, Eisenhower’s meaning is clear – generals who could not fight effectively had no place commanding men in battle. A willingness to relieve generals on this basis formed a major part of the Marshall system.¹¹

In his memoirs, Eisenhower elaborated on the importance and dangers of relieving general officers during wartime. “The relief of a combat commander is something that is not to

¹⁰ Ricks, *The Generals*, 38-39; Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 329-330; Richard S. Faulkner, “‘Gone Blooey’: Pershing’s System for Addressing Officer Incompetence and Inefficiency,” *Army History*, No. 95 (U.S. Army Center for Military History, Spring 2012), 11, 20

¹¹ Chandler, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years, Vol. III*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1436.

be done lightly in war.” Such a relief could signal that higher command was dissatisfied with the troops. And critically, the officer contemplating relieving a subordinate must weigh the potential advantages that another officer could bring against the status quo. “On the other hand,” he continued, “really inept leadership must be quickly detected and instantly removed. Lives of thousands are involved – the question is not one of academic justice for the leader, it is that of concern for the many and the objective of victory.”¹²

However, according to Ricks, beginning with the Korean and Vietnam Wars and lasting through the present day the Marshall system began to break down. The Army no longer promoted generals on the basis of quality and merit, but rather simply because they had become “Organization Men,” career officers who did not stray from orthodox Army thought, did not identify with particular units but rather the Army as a whole, and got along well with their fellow generals. The new system promoted mediocrities like General William Westmoreland and other “ambitious micromanagers.” Essentially, the brilliant system for promoting and relieving officers that operated in the Second World War gave way to a much more political system in which merit was less important than simply going along with prevailing attitudes.¹³

Ricks’ thesis that Marshall set a very high standard for the promotion and relief of generals in the Second World War, and that the Army did not maintain this standard in subsequent decades is essentially correct. Yet not even the Marshall system was foolproof. Ricks’ greatest error is that, despite his acknowledgement that Marshall sometimes promoted poor generals like Clark, he idealizes the system too much. Further, Ricks asserts that the Marshall system should be the standard that the United States Army uses for officer promotion

¹² Eisenhower, Dwight D, *Crusade in Europe*, (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 188.

¹³ Ricks, *The Generals*, 203-204, 213-214, 330-332.

and relief today. Again, Ricks is correct that fighting men's lives are more important than officer's careers, and that there needs to be greater accountability among generals in today's Army, yet he too often portrays the Marshall system as a generally unimpeachable standard.¹⁴

The Marshall system was never an ironclad formula or absolute set of prerequisites for military command and relief. Rather, Marshall was flexible when necessary in order to meet the changing circumstances of the war, and the decision to relieve unit commanders often rested with subordinates like Eisenhower, that he subsequently approved. The system assumed that a unit commander would fight vigorously with competence, intelligence, and a strong sense of duty. Marshall and Eisenhower observed the men under their command, considered their merits and faults, and made considered judgements based on those unique factors in each case. Therefore, we should look at the Marshall system as an improvised process rather than a firm set of rules. Often, they got it right and occasionally they made mistakes.

The American Army that fought in the Second World War ultimately proved itself a superior force to the armies of its enemies. Generally, America's corps and division commanders were outstanding in the war and made significant contributions to the Allied victory, although there were notable exceptions and justified reliefs among these officers. In a letter to Major General Walter K. Wilson exactly two months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Marshall noted the problems experienced in France in 1918 with corps commanders who had not commanded divisions in combat. The great September 1941 Louisiana maneuvers had also highlighted the U.S. Army's deficiencies when it came to corps command. "The difficulty flows," he wrote, "from our inexperience in this field; there is a vast difference between theoretical concepts and practical operations." Despite these challenges, the Marshall system

¹⁴ Ricks, *The Generals*, 461.

succeeded in promoting a host of corps commanders who performed exceptionally. Among them were Collins, Truscott, Ridgway, Harmon, Troy Middleton, Wade Haislip, Manton Eddy, and others.¹⁵

One cannot objectively make the same argument for army group and field army commanders during the war. Certainly, there were truly great officers who commanded these formations such as Jacob Devers, Alexander Patch, Simpson and Patton. However, there were other generals who at one or more critical periods in their commands displayed an astonishing lack of operational imagination, understanding of battlefield realities, or nerve. In books and articles, Hanson has noted that many times army group and field army commanders proved far less able, creative, and daring than their subordinates, and that on occasion this led to disastrous American casualties or missed opportunities of the highest order. Yet even after these disasters, Marshall and Eisenhower did not relieve the army group and field army generals, and indeed they often eventually received promotion.¹⁶

Ricks cites Russell F. Weigley's judgement, among others, concerning the American generals. The historian concluded that American military leadership in the war reflected a deep "unimaginative caution." Weigley further noted that "American generalship by and large was competent but addicted to playing it safe." This overly cautious leadership stemmed from overwhelming Allied material superiority over the Axis. Reliance on an abundance of

¹⁵ Larry I. Bland and Sharon Ritenour Stevens, eds., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3: "The Right Man for the Job," December 7, 1941- May 31, 1943* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 631-632; Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 446.

¹⁶ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day, How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 400-401; Victor Davis Hanson, "George Patton's Summer of 1944", *Victor Davis Hanson's Private Papers*, 24 July 2014. <http://victorhanson.com/wordpress/george-pattons-summer-of-1944/>; Victor Davis Hanson, "Could World War II Have Ended Sooner than it Did?", *Victor Davis Hanson's Private Papers*, 11 June 2015. <http://victorhanson.com/wordpress/could-world-war-ii-have-ended-sooner-than-it-did/#more-8473>; Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 431, 446.

manpower, weapons, and supplies engendered an aversion to risk taking, and Weigley asserted that “a bolder generalship might have shortened the war.” Ricks himself believed that the record of American generalship in the war constituted “a mixed legacy.” It was a kind of leadership that often played it safe in order to save lives, but in doing so it often led to operational stalemates and a prolonged war. Ricks offers Bradley as practitioner of this overly cautious leadership. Indeed, if American generalship in the Second World War did produce a mixed legacy, it was largely because the daring and competence of the division and corps commanders were often in sharp contrast with the failures of many of the field army and army group commanders.¹⁷

Still, Ricks maintains an overly positive view of Marshall’s ability to select effective combat commanders. He asserts that “while sometimes mistaken and occasionally brutal to individual officers, the Marshall system generally achieved its goal of producing military effectiveness.” Marshall biographers H. Paul Jeffries and Alan Axelrod contend that Marshall was a “genius for judging leadership candidates.” Bradley himself wrote that “in his choice of commanders General Marshall evidenced his almost unerring judgment of men.” Some historians, like Marshall biographers Debi Unger, Irwin Unger, and Stanley Hirshson, acknowledge that Marshall did indeed err in several crucial combat command appointments, but offer little evidence for Marshall’s process in these selections or detailed explorations of his failures.¹⁸

Marshall showed poor judgement on other critical issues during the war as well. For

¹⁷ Ricks, *The Generals*, 118; Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants: The Campaigns of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 729.

¹⁸ Ricks, *The Generals*, 18, 39; H. Paul Jeffries and Alan Axelrod, *Marshall: Lessons in Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 116-117; Omar Bradley Forward in Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshal: Organizer of Victory, 1943-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), ix; Unger, *George Marshall: A Biography*, 161.

instance, he favored a cross-Channel invasion of France in 1942, far earlier than was practicable for the Allied armies. He opposed President Roosevelt's decision to emphasize aircraft over other weapons production for 1943, which would have severely limited America's ability to fight offensively in both Europe and the Pacific that year. Mentioning these mistakes is not meant to detract from Marshall's considerable, perhaps even essential role in the successful prosecution of the war. However, it is necessary to illustrate Marshall's humanity and fallibility and is a corrective to the popular sentiment that somehow Marshall stood above such shortcomings.¹⁹

This work illustrates the flaws in Marshall's system with regard to promotion and retention of officers. It involves six case studies of generals who underperformed at critical moments in the war. It considers two corps commanders, Fredendall and Lucas, three field army commanders, Buckner, Clark, and Hodges, and one army group commander, Bradley. Each chapter begins with an overview of the battle in which the generals failed to perform to expectations. Here, I have defined underperformance as failing to accomplish a critical objective, decisions that resulted in massive and unnecessary American and Allied casualties, or a general failure to fulfill the duties of command. I do not intend for these overviews to be general narrative histories of the battle, which other historians have covered exhaustively elsewhere, but instead I mean to highlight the subject general's role and decisions in the fighting. After the consideration of the general's role in battle, each chapter contains an examination of the subject general's career, their relationship with Marshall and other officers, and their promotion and assignment to the critical command.

This study considers two major questions. First, why were the underperforming corps

¹⁹ Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West, 1941-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 167-169; Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (New York: Random House, 2003), 202, 207; Philips Payson O'Brien, *How the War Was Won* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 54.

commanders relieved while the field army and army group commanders were not? The second question is more important to understanding the Marshall system and the army as an institution in the years leading up to and during the Second World War: In what ways did the underperforming generals obtain their commands in the first place? These questions surrounding general officer promotion and relief in the Second World War era are critical to understanding how the Army functioned as an institution under Marshall, how patronage and connections led to officer appointments and retention of command, and to a broader understanding of the American contribution to the Allied victory.

Chapters in this work follow a broadly chronological order, according to the subject general's battles. Chapter 2 examines Fredendall's poor leadership during the Battle of Kasserine Pass and the circumstances of his relief before considering his rise to general rank, and critically his appointment to command the Center Task Force during Operation Torch. It also analyzes Eisenhower's decision to place him in command in Tunisia. Clark's leadership in Italy is the subject of chapter 3. The chapter considers his failings as commander of Fifth Army before providing an overview of his career and rise to the command.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of Lucas' underperformance during Operation Shingle at Anzio, before evaluating his career and the decision to appoint him to the command of VI Corps. Chapter 5 begins by highlighting Bradley's disastrous decision to halt George Patton's Third Army during the Battle of the Falaise Gap, then considers Bradley's meteoric rise during the war to command an army group. Hodges' sub-par generalship during the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest begins chapter 6, followed by an examination of his career and rise to command the First Army. Finally, Buckner's dreadful leadership on Okinawa is the subject of chapter 7, as is his career path and appointment to command the Tenth Army.

The central argument of this work is that while the Marshall system was for the most part an effective and praiseworthy way to run the United States Army in the Second World War, it was not without serious flaws. Marshall and Eisenhower (except in the case of Buckner) demonstrated faith in these officers, helped their careers, and were the ultimate authorities in placing them in their respective commands. However, these Marshall system officers' battlefield performances were at times seriously wanting, frequently led to unnecessary casualties, and ultimately prolonged the war.

CHAPTER 2

LLOYD RALSTON FREDENDALL

The February 1943 Battle of Kasserine Pass proved one of the greatest disasters in American military history. The battle took place just three months after the successful Anglo-American landings in North Africa and was the first direct conflict between the German Wehrmacht and the United States Army. The Americans sustained 6,000 casualties out of a force of roughly 30,000 men, while German losses were under 1,000. The battle, fought in the desolate Tunisian desert, graphically illustrated the green American Army's shortcomings and proved a baptism by fire for its troops. While many factors contributed to the calamitous defeat, the failure of the U.S. Army leadership was one of the most critical deficiencies the battle exposed.²⁰

Major General Lloyd Ralston Fredendall commanded the United States II Corps during the battle, and his poor performance ultimately led General Dwight D. Eisenhower to relieve him of command. Unsurprisingly, Fredendall's personality and command style met with derision from his fellow generals during the war. General Lucian Truscott, also serving in North Africa at the time, described Fredendall to General Omar Bradley as "small in stature, loud and rough in speech." Truscott noted he was not afraid to speak his mind and was "critical of superiors and subordinates alike." Further, he was "inclined to jump at conclusions which were not always well founded." Truscott referred critically to his command style. "He rarely left his command post for personal reconnaissances and visits yet he was impatient with the recommendations of

²⁰ Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2002), 389.

subordinates more familiar with the terrain and other conditions than he was.”²¹

General George Patton eventually replaced Fredendall as commander of II Corps, and reported General Ernest Harmon as saying that “Fredendall is a physical and moral coward.” Harmon went on to call him a “son of a bitch.” After Fredendall’s relief, as Patton was settling into his new command and Fredendall was preparing to depart, Patton wrote that “I think Fredendall is either a little nuts or badly scared.”²²

Historians likewise have had little good to say about Fredendall. Victor Davis Hanson calls the general an “abject mediocrity”. Dennis Showalter calls Fredendall “an incompetent” and “a poltroon.” Martin Blumenson notes that “Fredendall had directed operations poorly and had lost control of his corps.” Carlo D’Este comments that Fredendall was “one of the most inept senior officers to hold a high command during World War II.” Eisenhower’s wartime biographer, Kenneth S. Davis, refers to the II Corps commander as “Fredenhall,” and comments that “he was an infantry general who had little flair for tank warfare.” Jean Edward Smith calls him simply a “military disaster.”²³

Prior to late 1942, when Fredendall’s Central Task Force successfully took Oran in northwest Algeria as part of Operation Torch, the general had never led men in battle. Fredendall had built up a reputation as a tough trainer of men and an ambitious officer in the years before American entry into World War II. This reputation, combined with superior

²¹ Omar Bradley & Clair Blair, *A General’s Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army, Omar N. Bradley* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 127-128.

²² Martin Blumenson, ed., *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945* (New York: De Capo Press, 1996), 177-178, 181; Carlo D’Este, *Patton: A Genius For War* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 460.

²³ Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 434, 445; Dennis Showalter, *Patton and Rommel: Men of War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2005), 301; Martin Blumenson, *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend, 1885-1945* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985), 181; D’Este, *Patton: A Genius For War*, 459; Kenneth Davis, *Soldier of Democracy: A Full-Length Biography of Dwight Eisenhower* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1945), 412; Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), 226.

officers' confidence in him, did much to explain his rise and his position at the time of Kasserine Pass. Indeed, the patronage of Generals such as Lesley J. McNair, Mark Clark, and most especially the Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall allowed Fredendall to rise to high command early in the war. Few of those officers could have known that Fredendall would ultimately prove himself one of the worst generals in American history, ranking alongside such disappointments as Charles Lee, George McClellan, and Ambrose Burnside.

Eisenhower had twice selected Fredendall for important roles in North Africa, despite the fact that prior to 1942 the two men did not know each other well. Eisenhower first selected Fredendall to command II Corps, operating as the Central Task Force, during Operation Torch, which saw the unit sail from the United Kingdom and land at Oran. Eisenhower again selected Fredendall and the II Corps to attack into Tunisia in early 1943 in order to put pressure on German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps.

In January 1943, Eisenhower formally designated the units under Fredendall as the II Corps, (until that time those units had been officially known as simply the Center Task Force) and ordered him to move his corps into southern Tunisia. From there, the II Corps could attack the Mediterranean port of Sfax and disrupt Rommel's supply lines as well as threaten the Afrika Korps itself. The 1st Armored Division, commanded by Major General Orlando Ward, was II Corps' striking fist. Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen commanded the 1st Infantry Division. The 509th Airborne Infantry Regiment also fell under II Corps command. Fredendall also had authority over the XII Air Support Command, a section of Brigadier Jimmy Doolittle's Twelfth Air Force. Eisenhower's general plan was to concentrate the 1st Armored behind a screen of infantry along the Eastern Dorsal, a small, rocky mountain range that ran north-south. Eisenhower's decision to set up his line along the Eastern Dorsal, as opposed to the more easily

defensible Western Dorsal, was controversial, but the chosen position kept Allied forces closer to Tunisia and did not require giving up any ground already won.²⁴

It was at this time that one of the most important charges that fellow officers leveled against Fredendall gained steam, namely that he was a coward. Fredendall selected a site near Tebessa for his headquarters, nearly seventy miles behind the front lines. Here, in a narrow canyon that Fredendall dubbed “Speedy Valley,” he ordered two hundred engineers to carve a command post out of the rock. Fredendall spent most of his time in this remote, protected enclave, which historian Dennis Showalter described as “a bunker that would not have been out of place on the Maginot Line.” One witness stated that “most American officers who saw this command post for the first time were somewhat embarrassed, and their comments usually caustic.” Bradley later wrote that “it gave the impression that, for all his bombast and bravado, Fredendall was lacking in personal courage.” Fredendall believed that he could not take any chances with German aircraft, since they often targeted various unit headquarters. Together with his staff of young officers, nicknamed “Fredendall’s Kindergarten,” the general intended to run II Corps’ operations with modern communications, and therefore believed he did not need to be nearer to the front.²⁵

Eisenhower expressed concern that his corps commander had little intention of budging from his headquarters after he visited Fredendall’s command post in early February. “It was the only time during the war, that I ever saw a divisional or higher headquarters so concerned over

²⁴ Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), 23; Shawn P. Rife, “Kasserine Pass and the Proper Application of Airpower,” 1999, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a525519.pdf>; Robert M. Citino, *Tough Call in Tunisia: Eisenhower’s Winter Line*, Historynet. <http://www.historynet.com/tough-call-in-tunisia-eisenhowers-winter-line.htm>.

²⁵ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 274-275; Stephen Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 168-169; Showalter, *Patton and Rommel*, 168, 301; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 127-128; Martin Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass: Rommel’s Bloody Climactic Battle for Tunisia* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 86-87.

its own safety that it dug itself into underground shelters,” Eisenhower later recalled. The senior officer deemed visiting the front lines essential for battlefield leadership, and he wrote an unofficial letter to Fredendall on 4 February in which he subtly urged him not to hunker down in his headquarters. “One of the things that gives me the most concern is the habit of some of our generals in staying too close to their command posts,” he remarked. “Please watch this very, very carefully among all your subordinates. Speed in execution, particularly when we are reacting to any move of the enemy’s, is of transcendent importance. Ability to move rapidly is largely dependent upon an intimate knowledge of the ground and conditions along the front.” Eisenhower told him that such speed is dependent upon a commanders’ visits to the front line. “Generals are expendable just as is any other item in an army; and, moreover, the importance of having the general constantly present in his command post is frequently overemphasized.” He concluded by noting that this was true for all levels of command. “I sincerely hope that you will make this a matter of primary interest in the handling of your forces.”²⁶

Historian John Keegan argues that a general’s distance from his troops constituted, “a negative dimension. The man who insists on it becomes a recluse, and the reclusive commander achieves nothing.” This was something that Eisenhower understood, and he did not directly criticize Fredendall with his letter. Rather, he urged Fredendall to monitor in his subordinates the very trait that Eisenhower feared the corps commander exhibited himself. Eisenhower had hoped to diplomatically spark some courage or initiative in Fredendall, but it was not to be. Indeed, during the battle Fredendall remained safely tucked away at Speedy Valley as he

²⁶ Gerald Astor, *Terrible Terry Allen: Combat General of World War II -The Life of an American Soldier* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 148; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 939-941.

attempted to direct troops via radio and telephone against the enemy he had dubbed “Professor Rommel.”²⁷

The battle began in the evening of 19 February. The headquarters report described the German opening assaults: “enemy infiltrated to positions on the high ground north and south of KASSERINE PASS. From these positions, which overlooked the defensive positions in the pass, the enemy brought small arms and mortar fire directly on our defensive positions.” The next day, German infantry began attacking along the American line with artillery support. The XII Air Support Group, lacking strong radar coverage in the area and suffering from supply problems and muddy, rained out airfields, played little part in the battle. German FW 190s and Me-109s outclassed the American P-40s and P-39s. Rommel’s strike into the American lines forced the group pilots to pull back from forward airfields or risk capture, leaving the II Corps with little air cover. Additionally, at the height of the battle the Allies shook up their air command organization by placing all of their air assets under a single commander, American General Carl Spaatz. This was a prudent move but badly timed.²⁸

That day, Eisenhower sent 2nd Armored Division commander Major General Ernest N. Harmon, then serving with Patton’s Western Task Force, to observe Fredendall and intervene in the battle if necessary. “In sending Harmon to you I have done so merely to give you a senior assistant,” Eisenhower wrote to Fredendall on 22 February. “I feel that under the unusual conditions of the present battle you may find such a man most useful.” After Harmon arrived at Speedy Valley the next day, he found an agitated Fredendall contemplating withdrawing his

²⁷ John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 316-317; Mark Perry, *Partners in Command: George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007), 163.

²⁸ NARA, RG 407, Box 2606, Headquarters II Corps, Report of Operations. 2 May 1943; Rife, “Kasserine Pass,” <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a525519.pdf>; Christopher M. Rein, *The North African Air Campaign: U.S. Army Air Forces from El Alamein to Salerno* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 117-120.

headquarters westward. When Fredendall asked Harmon his opinion the division commander replied simply, “hell, no!” “That settles that,” Fredendall said. “We stay.” As though a corps commander in the midst of running a battle asking a newly arrived subordinate officer whether he should retreat was not strange enough, Fredendall then handed command of the corps over to Harmon and went to bed, sleeping for the better part of a day. Additionally, Historian Victor Davis Hanson has suggested that Fredendall may have been drunk at the time. Fortunately for the American Army, Rommel had already decided to withdraw his forces by that point.²⁹

Patton later gave Harmon credit for turning the battle around. “Harmon did well... and drove the Germans from the pass of Kasserine,” he wrote in his diary on March 2. “Fredendall never went to the front and tried to make Harmon the goat. Harmon won the battle...” Bradley also recognized Harmon’s contribution, later writing, “Fredendall turned over the entire battlefield to Harmon and went to bed. Harmon, in effect acting corps commander, took over Ward’s tank operations and directed the battle in Fredendall’s name for several days.” These events appear to confirm Harmon’s negative assertions regarding Fredendall. The corps commander abrogated his responsibility to his troops by handing over his command to a subordinate officer and then abandoning his post in the middle of a desperate battle where the need for experienced leadership was critical. Only the combination of Harmon’s intelligence and competence as well as Rommel’s decision to pull out of the battle prevented an even greater disaster from befalling the United States Army.³⁰

There were smaller events leading up to the Battle of Kasserine Pass that seemed to

²⁹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, 981-982; Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 174; Victor Davis Hanson, *George S. Patton: American Ajax*, Address to Hillsdale College, February 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJsC-bulkSE>

³⁰ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 177-178; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 135; David Fraser, *Knight’s Cross: A Life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 419.

indicate Fredendall's hyper-sensitivity about his safety. In one instance, while speaking with a number of reporters, Fredendall heard the rumble of aircraft engines in the sky above. Abruptly curtailing the exchange, he looked up and said grimly, "some of ours, I hope." 1st Division intelligence officer Robert W. Porter recalled an event not long after the landing at Oran in which Fredendall and his staff met up with the division commander, Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen along a road outside the city. The II Corps commander arrived in an "entourage of four jeeps. He came over and started talking to Allen. Within two minutes, the artillery started in on the jeeps sitting there on the road. The II Corps men abandoned their jeeps and got into the ditches right away." While Allen recognized the Germans had begun shelling in earnest, he kept his head. However, "the II Corps people were all piled on one another in the ditch. It amused Allen a great deal to think they, including Fredendall whose driver was on top of him, might be afraid."³¹

Perhaps one of Fredendall's concerns about his safety stemmed from his belief that the U.S. Army did not have an adequate way to defend against German tanks. It was common knowledge that the Army's 37mm antitank gun was woefully underpowered, and Eisenhower even told Fredendall during the battle that he was going to request heavier guns "as rapidly as possible." Fredendall had recognized the gun's deficiencies and remarked that "the only way to hurt a kraut with a 37mm anti-tank gun is to catch him and give him an enema with it." Eisenhower also promised to replace the underperforming M3 Sherman with the more powerful M4, which boasted a 75 mm gun.³²

³¹ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 275; Astor, *Terrible Terry Allen*, 117-118.

³² Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 981-982; Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 302; Stanley Weintraub, *15 Stars: Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall, Three Generals Who Saved the American Century* (New York: Nal Caliber, 2007), 156.

Questions of concern for his safety aside, there were other factors that marked Fredendall as an incompetent commander. He had no particular interest in the political situation in the areas under his control, and after he took Oran, he failed to purge Axis sympathizers from government positions in the city. He likewise failed to find and reward French men and women who had offered the American forces help during the fighting, like the nineteen soldiers imprisoned by Vichy forces after they sabotaged their weapons during the invasion. He ignored the advice of his political adviser, Leland Rounds, and viewed his political work primarily as unnecessary and distracting. From Oran's Grand Hotel, or "II Corps – In the field" as his dispatches read, Fredendall and his staff had enjoyed the spoils of victory and easy garrison living. The codes Fredendall employed to his subordinates were often confusing nonsense that often baffled the general himself.³³

One such code, transmitted to Brigadier General Paul M. Robinett, who commanded 1st Armored Division's Combat Command A on January 19, reads as a jumble:

Move your command, i.e., the walking boys, pop guns, Baker's outfit, and the outfit which is the reverse of Baker's outfit, and the big fellows to 'M', which is due north of where you are now, as soon as possible. Have your boss report to the French gentleman whose name begins with a 'J' at a place which begins with 'D', which is five grid squares to the left of 'M'.³⁴

Robinett noted that the code was confusing and unclear, and that he had trouble decrypting the message. He said that it took "about as much of my time [to decipher] as it did of the opposing German commander's."³⁵

Fredendall also was guilty of something else: he hated the British and was not shy about

³³ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 84; Norman Gelb, *Desperate Venture: The Story of Operation Torch, the Allied Invasion of North Africa* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1992), 274; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 273.

³⁴ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 304

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

speaking his mind on the subject. For Eisenhower, fostering a positive working relationship with America's ally was of paramount importance, and he demanded that officers of all grades refrain from insults and murmuring against the British. Given the close working relationship between the allies during the war, Eisenhower's insistence on cordial relations toward the British among American officers was undoubtedly correct. Fredendall was not alone in this anti-British sentiment. Certainly, other generals such as Patton harbored anti-British feelings. Bradley held Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and the British Army in contempt before the war was over. Indeed, later in the war, American soldiers received a pamphlet entitled, *Guidelines for the behavior of troops in England*. Among other helpful tips, it stated that "the Englishman suffers from a certain lack of imagination when faced with new situations," and "the greatest strength of the Englishman is to appear ignorant, (stupid)." Yet North Africa was the first real test of American and British armies fighting side by side with integrated command structures, and Ike intended to make sure his subordinates followed his policy now that the U.S. Army was in the fight. In early 1943, wind of Fredendall's vocal prejudice against the British came to Eisenhower's attention. The corps commander apparently escaped any kind of reprimand, possibly because Eisenhower was preoccupied with preparing for offensive operations in Tunisia at the time and did not need the petty distraction. In the same 4 February letter in which he warned Fredendall about the dangers of remaining at headquarters, he also addressed the issue. "Truscott has told you something of my concern about a report that had been made to me of your criticism of the British," he wrote. "That is all cleared up and I have no further anxiety about it, because I assure you that I have no doubts concerning your loyalty and determination to do your full part in the winning of this war. That means, of course, that our Allies have got to be partners

and not people that we view with suspicion and doubt.”³⁶

Eisenhower continued, letting Fredendall know that he expected II Corps to operate alongside the British and French forces so “as to enhance the reputation of the American Army.” Fredendall, however, remained as aggressively caustic toward the British as ever. British General Kenneth Anderson, the First Army commander who nominally exercised operational control over II Corps, was Fredendall’s particular target for scorn. Indeed, Fredendall laid much of the blame for the disaster at Kasserine Pass at Anderson’s feet. Anderson reciprocated the sentiment. Not only did Anderson disdain Fredendall, but he also thought little of the Free French units under his command.³⁷

However, Fredendall’s unforgivable sin was his inability to forge his command into an effective fighting unit. By all accounts, Fredendall was frequently suspicious of his subordinates, and many of them in turn thought little of their corps commander. Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on 3 March, shortly after the battle. “He [Fredendall] has difficulty in picking good men and, even worse, in getting the best out of subordinates; in other words, handling personnel,” he stated. “I have discovered that a man must take the tools he has and do the best he can with them, but in this case I must either find a good substitute for Fredendall or must place in his command a number of assistants who are so stable and sound that they will not be disturbed by his idiosyncrasies.” Eisenhower further commented on the fact that Fredendall did not appear to work well with his subordinate commanders. “My own real worry is his apparent

³⁶ D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 419; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 135, 299; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, 939-941; Carlo D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2002), 367; Len Deighton, *Blood, Tears and Folly: An Objective Look at World War II* (New York: Castle Books, 1993), 382.

³⁷ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 939-941; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 135, 299; Carlo D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2002), 367; Michael Burleigh, *Moral Combat: Good and Evil in World War II* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2010), 357.

inability to develop a team, and in this war the team must be developed before any of these large organizations will work.”³⁸

Eisenhower viewed the idea of teamwork as essential to any commander because of the size of units and the challenge of combined armed warfare, artillery, tanks and aircraft. Fredendall appeared to fail in this key area. Eisenhower wrote to Marshall again on 11 March, “under conditions of strain, [Fredendall] is not particularly successful in developing a happy family and complete teamwork, and I have personally cautioned him about one or two personal faults that have had a bad effect in the past.” In another letter to Marshall on 24 April, he wrote that “Fredendall had no ability, under (fighting conditions), to develop a happy, unified family that worked together in mutual confidence.”³⁹

On 2 March, just before Eisenhower wrote to Marshall about Fredendall’s shortcomings as a leader, he wrote to Fredendall and offered him some advice on the subject. “I assure you that you are going to find the problem of the right person for the right place an increasingly difficult one as things go on,” he wrote. Eisenhower could have been consoling himself about Fredendall’s deficiencies when he wrote to the corps commander that “even where we believe we know there are weaknesses in a person’s qualifications as the ideal leader, we must always realize that the ideal man doesn’t exist.” Not only did Fredendall fail to inspire confidence in his subordinate commanders, but Eisenhower also noted that British General Harold Alexander had lost confidence in him as well. In the aftermath of Kasserine Pass, as Eisenhower saw an opportunity to advance against Rommel, Fredendall showed a “peculiar apathy” for the mission. Eisenhower wrote to Marshall, indicating that he had recently spoken with Alexander’s chief of

³⁸ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1006-1007.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1007, 1023.

staff. The officer reported that Alexander initially, “thought the world of Fredendall,” but then the British general expressed serious doubts about the corps commander and his “apparent inability to plan the next operation.”⁴⁰

Lloyd Fredendall’s performance at Kasserine Pass proved his inability to lead men in wartime conditions effectively. Ultimately, as Bradley noted, Alexander, Anderson, Eisenhower’s chief of staff Walter Bedell Smith, Truscott, and Harmon all pressed Eisenhower to relieve Fredendall of command. After Alexander visited Fredendall’s headquarters he told Eisenhower, “I’m sure you must have better men than that.” Despite having assured Fredendall time and again during and after the battle that the corps commander had his confidence, Eisenhower assented to their recommendations and relieved II Corps’ commanding general.⁴¹

To be sure, the failures at Kasserine were not completely due to Fredendall’s incompetence. As mentioned above, the weak 37mm antitank gun did little to inspire confidence in American troops in clashes with German armor, and America had not yet effectively mastered air power application. Another factor was that the sudden integration of American and British command systems caused problems, with Anderson overseeing a front of 200 miles with imperfect communications. Often American troops did not know whether to follow orders from Anderson or Fredendall, as the two were often contrary, and Anderson possessed a personality that often bristled the sensibilities of American commanders. Also, at the time of Kasserine, Eisenhower himself was still largely an untested leader and often interfered too closely in the commands of his subordinates. Eisenhower also failed to rally his commanders and attack Rommel in a prompt manner when it was clear that the German general had overextended

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1002-1003, 1006-1007.

⁴¹ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 136-137; D’Este, *Patton: A Genius For War*, 460.

himself in the battle. Still, despite these other problems, there is no denying that Fredendall's ineptitude cost the U.S. Army dearly, and he must bear the brunt of the disaster's odium.⁴²

So, how did such an incompetent officer reach high command in the United States Army at such a critical period? A wartime article in the *Saturday Evening Post* offered a brief biography of the man's early life. Fredendall was born in Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1883. His father, New Yorker Ira Livingston Fredendall, came to Wyoming as a pioneer and soon became involved in politics in the territory. Ira joined the Army when the Spanish-American War broke out and served in the quartermaster corps. Lloyd's mother had a hand in her son's future and worked to see that he received an appointment to West Point. Wyoming Senator Francis Emroy Warren appointed the young Fredendall to the military academy, and the boy and his mother lived in nearby Highland Falls until he was ready to begin his studies there in June 1901. Major General Allen W. Gullion, who served as Provost Marshal General of the United States Army during World War II, recalled his West Point bunkmate as "a very soldierly little fellow, but extremely goaty at mathematics." Indeed, math proved to be the young Fredendall's Achilles' heel, and West Point threw him out of the program when he could not keep up with the subject. His diligent mother once again lobbied Warren, and the Senator again appointed Fredendall the following year. Once again West Point expelled him for his poor math performance. Still determined to be an Army officer, Fredendall then enrolled in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and worked hard to improve his ability with math. In 1906, Fredendall ranked first out of seventy candidates taking the Army officer examination and he finally achieved his goal

⁴² Porch, *The Path of Victory*, 302, 383; Jim Deflice, *Omar Bradley: General at War* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery History, 2011), 59; D'Este, *Patton: A Genius For War*, 459.

of becoming an infantry officer in the United States Army.⁴³

Fredendall's first posting was in Zamboanga in the Philippines, where he met and married his wife, Crystal Chant, originally from Spokane, Washington. He later served in a variety of posts, including Fort Assiniboine in Montana. Fredendall served with the 1st Division in France during the First World War and participated in the 1918 Meuse-Argonne offensive near St. Mihiel. He also served with the 39th Division's signal corps and served as an instructor of tactics at the First Corps School. In the early 1920s, Fredendall attended the United States Army Command and General Staff school at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.⁴⁴

In October 1933, *The Minneapolis Star* reported Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd Fredendall, then the Army ROTC commanding officer, making a bold prediction. He told the paper that there was little possibility that America and Germany would go to war once again. The idea that the two countries would draw the sword against each other any time soon was "all a lot of hooey." He went on to say that "there is no chance of war - least of all from Germany. There probably will be one in the future, but I hope we are on the sidelines." It is easy to understand that Fredendall failed to see World War II coming. Hitler had been in power only a little over seven months by that time, and only five years had passed since the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the international treaty created with the intention of outlawing war.⁴⁵

For the rest of the 1930s Fredendall held a variety of posts. He returned to the Philippines in 1936 to command the 57th Infantry Division for two years, then served in

⁴³ Mark Murphy, "These Are the Generals- Fredendall," *The Saturday Evening Post* (20 March 1943, Vol. 215, No. 38), 22, 100.

⁴⁴ Mark Murphy, "These Are the Generals- Fredendall"; NPRC, Fredendall Papers, Brig. Gen. H. B. Fiske to Chief of Staff, France, 29 October 1918, Fredendall, application for Victory Medal, 15 December 1925; NPRC, Fredendall Papers, Fredendall to Col. L. S. Upton, France, 5 November 1917.

⁴⁵ *The Minneapolis Star*, Minnesota, 17 October 1933, www.newspapers.com; John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 435.

Washington D.C. as the executive officer to the Chief of Infantry. He then served with the 5th Infantry Division at Fort McClellan in Alabama for several months before he became the division's commanding officer. In September 1940, while commanding the division at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, the Army promoted Fredendall to major general. On the same page that it reported Fredendall's promotion, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran a headline that read, "112 Promotions add 84 Generals to Army Roster," followed by the subheading, "shortage of High Commanders." The article reported that "a White House statement on the need of promotions said 'the permanent general officers now authorized have been assigned, and there are still a large number of major tactical units which lack commanders of appropriate rank.'" Now was the time for a general like Fredendall to come forward. Europe's war was already a year old, and with the increase in military expansion that the United States government was undertaking, men of Fredendall's apparent ability and experience were at a premium.⁴⁶

According to the wartime *The Saturday Evening Post* article, Fredendall liked to read "magazine articles, novels, treatises on tactics, logistics, the art of war, and history - and always late at night." When not reading he played solitaire on the floor while sitting cross-legged, and it was during these solo card games that he supposedly found solutions to difficult military problems. The article stated further that he had "a competent command of profanity and, in his rebukes to junior officers, a nicely balanced phrasing." Indeed, like his rival George Patton, Fredendall liberally employed strong language.⁴⁷

At the time Marshall became Chief of Staff in 1939, Fredendall was fifty-six years old and at the tail end of that older generation that Marshall was generally trying to phase out.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Illinois, 28 September 1940, www.newspapers.com.

⁴⁷ Murphy, "These are the Generals – Fredendall," 110

Nevertheless, at some point in his career Fredendall impressed the Chief of Staff, who had decided that the two-time West Point failure who had belatedly applied himself would make an excellent combat commander. During a staff meeting in 1941 or 1942, Marshall reportedly said of Fredendall, "I like that man: you can see determination all over his face." Over the course of their duties, the two men corresponded with each other concerning various matters. In October 1941, an apparent case of anti-Semitism within Fredendall's XI Corps prompted a letter from Marshall. The Army had ordered Fredendall to investigate the relief of a Lieutenant Colonel Ritchel, a friend of the Chief of Staff's. The commander of the 49th Infantry division, Brigadier General James I. Muir, was preparing to trim a number of the 174th Infantry Regiment's officers, and before Ritchel's relief, the division commander told him that he was unfit for command. Fredendall wrote back to Marshall, stating that the inspector general had found a complaint by the enlisted men that they were unhappy because they believed the regiment contained too many Jewish officers. He wrote, "correctly or incorrectly, Lieut. Col. Ritchel was assumed to be a Jew." However, the Army did not reinstate Ritchel in his command, and the officer returned to his earlier assignment with the Inspector General's Department.⁴⁸

In a letter to Lieutenant General Hugh H. Drum only a few days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Marshall apologized for not seeing him during the previous month's maneuvers in the Carolinas. He mentioned, however, that he did manage to see Drum's corps commanders, "and had quite a talk with Fredendall, but only a brief stop with the others." The following May Marshall wrote a letter to Fredendall in which he heaped praise upon him for organizing a tank review for the former Chief of the Imperial General Staff and now British military liaison in

⁴⁸ Murphy, "These are the Generals – Fredendall," 110; Larry I. Bland and Sharon Ritenour Stevens, eds., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 2: "We Cannot Delay," July 1, 1939 – December 6, 1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 640-641.

Washington, Field Marshal Sir John Dill. Marshall apologized to Fredendall that he was not able spend more time seeing the unit in action. The War Department placed Fredendall in command of II Corps in July 1941, but in June 1942 Marshall had abruptly transferred him to command the XI Corps in Illinois just as the II Corps was preparing to leave for England. On 1 July, Marshall wrote to Fredendall about the matter. "My dear Fredendall," he began, "in the rush of events in Washington I find that no explanation was offered you regarding your transfer." Marshall further stated that "this was certainly due you, and I apologize for the delay." Marshall detailed the decision to Fredendall, telling him he had decided Clark would "better serve" in taking the II Corps to Britain because of his "intimate knowledge of the various factors involved." Since Clark had already developed a good working relationship with the British, Marshall decided to send him with the II Corps. Marshall concluded the letter by stating that "I want you to feel that the change in no way reflected on the efficiency you have displayed." He then stated that both General Lesley McNair and Clark had been his constant champions. These letters demonstrate that Marshall did indeed hold Fredendall in high regard prior to his command in North Africa.⁴⁹

In June 1942, just before the II Corps went to England under Clark, Marshall wrote a memorandum for Colonel John Russell Deane regarding upcoming arrangements for a dinner and unit demonstrations in Georgia. General Levan C. Allen was the host, and his guests included Deane, the British dignitaries Sir John Dill and Lord Louis Mountbatten as well as the Chief of Staff himself. Marshall suggested that, given the odd number, Allen might consider inviting General Wills D. Crittenger, his wife, and Fredendall. Further, he suggested the car seating arrangements for the ride to the demonstrations the following day. He wrote to Deane, "if you and Fredendall go out together, that will probably avoid embarrassment." Although the

⁴⁹ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 2, 693-694; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 180-181, 264.

Army presented the demonstration for Mountbatten's benefit, Marshall noted, Dill was the senior member of the British delegation. "When we leave for the parachute troops," Marshall continued, "you and Fredendall should take Mountbatten and I will follow with Sir John Dill."⁵⁰

For Marshall to suggest that the party hosting such important British officials include Fredendall illustrates his trust in the man. Further, Marshall may have seen the dinner and the demonstrations as a chance to introduce him to the British, and the British to him. With Marshall intending Fredendall to have a combat command in the future, and possibly under Eisenhower in North Africa in the coming months, the Chief of Staff may have believed early exposure to the British allies could only help Fredendall's position.

By the summer of 1942 Eisenhower was selecting the officers he wanted on his team for Operation Torch, the forthcoming invasion of North Africa. This time was a critical period in the war, the first real test of the American Army exercising offensive operations against the Germans and their European allies. Although Marshall had given Eisenhower full authority over his command, the Chief of Staff took a healthy interest in the preparations for the coming invasion. The Army had promoted Clark to brigadier general in August 1941, and he now worked as the chief of staff to the newly created Army Ground Forces, commanded by McNair. With the outbreak of war, the War Department assigned Fredendall to Army Ground Forces headquarters along with Stillwell and had charged the two with planning a number of operations including landings at the West African French colony of Dakar, and the Portuguese Azores islands in the Atlantic. However, as noted above, Clark took over command of II Corps when the Army transferred it to England in July 1942. He had expected Patton, or current II Corps commander Fredendall to lead the corps to England. "I almost fell out of my chair," Clark wrote

⁵⁰ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 225-226.

when Marshall told him that he was considering sending him to command the II Corps in England.⁵¹

Clark's appointment, however, was a political move to reassure the British who had developed a good working relationship with Clark. Patton, Stilwell, and Fredendall still outranked Clark and each had more practical experience commanding at the corps level. Clark was preparing to lead the Center Task Force against Oran before Eisenhower promoted him to be his deputy commander and tasked him with the overall planning for Operation Torch. McNair and Clark had discussed at length the officers best fit for command in North Africa. As Eisenhower prepared to move forward, Marshall cabled Clark in England for his suggestions, and he responded with Major Generals Stilwell, Patton, and Fredendall. Eisenhower too discussed the matter with Clark, and ultimately they decided that Patton would command the Western Task Force charged with landing at Casablanca, Morocco. The Eastern Task Force, charged with taking Algiers, fell under overall British command, with Anderson in charge of the operation and Brigadier General Charles W. Ryder commanding the American units. Fredendall would command the Center Task Force, charged with taking the critical Algerian port of Oran.⁵²

Eisenhower based his decision largely on the recommendation from Marshall, McNair and Clark. Shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, McNair had listed seven corps commanders that he believed would be the best men for command in the coming war. Fredendall's name figured on the list alongside five other officers who did not distinguish themselves in World War II. Stilwell was the list's only officer who played a major role during World War II, other than Fredendall. Marshall wrote to Eisenhower on 24 August 1942 and

⁵¹ Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950), 15-17; Martin Blumenson, *Mark Clark: The Last of the Great World War II Commanders* (New York: Congdon & Weed, Inc., 1984), 58, 75.

⁵² Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 15-17. Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 75.

discussed the logistics of the Oran operation, and the possibility of another landing at Dakar. He wrote, “give us your views on practicability of utilizing 1st Division and part of 34th Division in British ships at Oran, possibly followed up by British Force at same time utilizing all or most of original US Oran Force on West Coast of Africa.” Critically, he suggested Fredendall for a major part in the operation. “Latter might be commanded by Fredendall who is familiar with the project.” Fredendall is the only officer named in the cable, which again appears to indicate Marshall’s desire to see the officer receive a major combat command.⁵³

However, Fredendall was not Eisenhower’s first choice. Eisenhower had initially settled upon Major General Russell Peter “Scrappy” Hartle, who had commanded a unit in Northern Ireland and then led V Corps headquarters in England. Marshall rarely intervened in Eisenhower’s command decisions, but he objected to the appointment of Hartle, possibly because he believed the officer had a drinking problem. The Chief of Staff also did not approve of Eisenhower’s plans to replace Brigadier General James “Jimmy” Doolittle as commander of Twelfth Air Force with Major General Walter H. Frank.⁵⁴

In a 26 September 1942 letter headed “General Eisenhower’s eye alone,” Marshall stated his objections to the two officers. First, he assured Eisenhower that “you have my full confidence” and that he “heartily approved” of his decisions except for these choices in personnel. He stated that Eisenhower’s plans to replace Doolittle with Frank “disturbed” him, and that both he and General Henry “Hap” Arnold, the commanding general of the Air Force, believed the decision to be a “tragic error.” He stated that he was “even more disturbed over the

⁵³ Stanley P. Hirshson, *General Patton: A Soldier’s Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 5; Bland, *Marshall Papers Vol 3*, 316-318.

⁵⁴ Stephen R. Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals: U.S. Commanders in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 61; D’Este, *Eisenhower*, 341.

selection of Hartle for a vital command. I think he did all right in Ireland but I think he gave a decidedly mediocre performance in cleaning up his unit and providing adequate leadership.” He went on to say, “to put him in charge of the key operation disturbs me greatly. If you can’t use Clark for this I will send you practically anyone you name. Dawley, Simpson, Griswold, Hodges, Lucas, Fredendall, Richardson, or White.” He noted that Ernest J. Dawley had impressed McNair during the Carolina maneuvers. “However, please think this over but make your own decision.⁵⁵

Eisenhower formally requested Fredendall on 1 October, and Marshall quickly replied that he would have the general bound for London within a few days. On 3 October Eisenhower cabled Marshall, stating the reasons for his initial decision. “My original selection of General Hartle for the Center Task Force was based upon the conviction that he would do a workmanlike job,” he wrote. With Fredendall now added to the lineup and commanding what Marshall had called the “key operation” of Oran, he would serve alongside his fellow major general and sometime rival, George Patton.⁵⁶

The Army leadership had considered Fredendall and Patton for major command once war broke out since both appeared experienced officers, powerful personalities, and potential battlefield commanders with the ability to get a job done. The two men had butted heads while serving at Fort Benning Georgia in 1941, and one incident in particular stands out. At the time, Fredendall commanded the 4th Infantry Division and was the senior base officer while Patton commanded the 2nd Armored Division. One day Patton’s car sped past a motorcycle MP under Fredendall’s command. After a brief chase the MP finally succeeded in pulling Patton over and

⁵⁵ Bland, *Marshall Papers Vol. 3*, 367.

⁵⁶ Alfred D. Chandler, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years, Vol. I*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 591-593.

informed him that he was under arrest for speeding and invoked Fredendall's name and orders. Patton flew into a profanity-laced rage, with the brunt of his remarks reserved for Fredendall, whom he suspected of targeting his command for surprise vehicle inspections at hastily set up roadblocks. Patton refused to comply and stalked off to his headquarters. Subordinates soon informed Fredendall of the situation and he remarked, "that son of a bitch. He's not going to get away with this." Fredendall ordered the 2nd Armored commander to report to him personally and apologize to the policeman. Patton, knowing when not to fight, apologized to the MP.⁵⁷

Both men had also participated in the Carolina maneuvers in October and November 1941. The military exercise was part of the larger Army GHQ program which included the Louisiana maneuvers that took place the preceding September. Fredendall was hard on his men during the war games, criticizing their lax discipline. He stated, "officers set a poor example for the men, falling out Monday morning when they could have kept going. Week-end belly-wash and a hot sun don't mix." Pennsylvania's *The News-Herald* reported on II Corps activities, stating that its soldiers "swarmed into and 'captured' such strategic towns as Monroe, N.C., Pageland., S.C. and several other communities near Kershaw, S.C." The story noted that the II Corps had attacked from several different directions and had gained "the initial advantage in this first inter-corps exercise." Such apparent success in these corps-level maneuvers no doubt instilled in Marshall, McNair and other senior generals' confidence in Fredendall's ability and competence. Fredendall himself lavished praise upon his troops in November, stating his pleasure with their performance. Further, he noted that "by the time we complete the GHQ maneuvers and return to our base camps these men will be in readiness for that final test that

⁵⁷ D'Este, *Patton: A Genius For War*, 388-389.

comes to all troops sooner or later - real war.”⁵⁸

On 12 November Fredendall spoke to the 28th Division, commending them on their progress and noting the need to continue to move forward. He spoke of their division’s traditions and reminded them of what it was they were preparing to fight against. “Today our government and our people are opposed to the remaking of the world which the Nazi Party of Germany is undertaking. We cannot and will not allow that party and its underlings to bring about economic and political changes which will take away not only from us, but also from our children, that rich heritage- the American way of life.” He then commented on the need for such rigorous training. “The American soldier of the last war delivered the final crushing blow to the Germans, and today, if he is called upon, his efforts will be just as decisive. ... I have also a feeling that the maneuvers in which the Second Corps is taking part have welded us all into a close-knit fighting team, and that we no longer look upon each other as strangers, but as comrades in arms.”⁵⁹

Unfortunately, Fredendall’s performance in the field army exercises that began a few days later on 16 November did little to reinforce earlier perceptions of competence. Fredendall made no major mistakes, and generally led his corps well. The official history stated that under Fredendall’s command the corps “gained a high reputation for good staff planning” during the maneuvers in the Carolinas. However, there were several instances where his troops faced significant setbacks. During Phase I of the maneuvers, later known as the Battle of the Pee Dee River, GHQ assigned II Corps to General Drum’s First (blue) Army. Drum ordered his three

⁵⁸ *The Sun*, Baltimore, Maryland, 10 October 1941, www.newspapers.com; *The News-Herald*, Franklin, Pennsylvania, 23 October 1941, www.newspapers.com; *Birmingham Press*, New York, 11 November 1941, www.newspapers.com.

⁵⁹ *The Pittsburgh Press*, Pennsylvania, 12 November 1941, www.newspapers.com.

corps across the Pee Dee, with Fredendall's unit in the center. Major General Karl Truesdell, commanding the VI Corps on Fredendall's right, successfully crossed the Pee Dee and gained a stable foothold on the west bank of the river by the end of the first day. Fredendall's corps, which consisted of the 28th and 44th Infantry Divisions, did not fare as well. While the 28th made it across relatively quickly, the 44th wasted a considerable amount of artillery ordinance firing at an enemy that was not there. The artillery barrage also delayed elements of the 44th from performing reconnaissance. Units from the 44th eventually made it across and they quickly ran into opposing elements from the enemy 1st (red) Armored Division. The subsequent engagements prevented Fredendall's corps from establishing a secure foothold that day. Ultimately, Drum's blue forces won the day against the red army's armored units, including Patton's 2nd Armored Division, but there was no mistaking Fredendall's early poor showing.⁶⁰

During Phase II, the Battle for Camden, Drum required his blue forces to attack the city from the north. Krueger charged his red army, again composed of motorized and armored divisions, with defending the city. Fredendall met with another setback as Patton's tanks exploited a gap between the II Corps and VI Corps, allowing nearly twenty tanks with infantry support to push through. Fredendall's superiors had warned him about the gap but he took no action, perhaps because he was focusing on his own intentions rather than on the enemy's operational options. In any event, the blue force ultimately encircled and destroyed the penetrating red force, and Phase II ended without a clear winner a few days later. Despite an adequate overall performance in the maneuvers, Fredendall had twice demonstrated a lack of judgement under simulated battlefield conditions.⁶¹

⁶⁰ NARA, RG 407, II Corp Operational History, Box 2606, Outline History of II Corps, 1918-1945; Gabel, *GHQ Maneuvers*, 133-137.

⁶¹ Gabel, *GHQ Maneuvers*, 158, 165.

By contrast, George Patton's performance in the maneuvers was quite impressive. During the Louisiana maneuvers he had consistently shown himself to be an aggressive, fighting officer who got the job done. At Patton's order, Lieutenant Colonel A. G. Kelly prepared the 2nd Armored Division's official report of the Louisiana war games, and the record demonstrates Patton's unhappiness that Krueger did not set his division loose sooner in the exercises. In reference to Phase II in Louisiana, which took place September 23-28, the report read "Again while successful, the difficulties encountered were in direct proportion to the time spent in reserve." During that game, as part of Lieutenant General Krueger's Third (blue) Army, Patton had led a daring flanking maneuver that cut through east Texas in two columns. While the inner column, composed mostly of tanks, threatened the objective of Shreveport from the south, the outer wheeled column executed a daring, 400-mile move around the city, threatening it from the north and capturing the red army's primary airbase at Barksdale Field.⁶²

Both Patton and Fredendall performed generally well during the GHQ maneuvers in 1941, but while Patton had shown flair and a dynamic drive, Fredendall stumbled more than once. This situation begs the question: just how critical were the games in deciding the wartime assignments of the participants? *The Saturday Evening Post's* 1943 article on Fredendall stated that "the Carolina games were declared a more military exhibition than those the month before in Louisiana." As stated in the introduction, maneuvers historian Christopher Gabel asserted that Marshall had already selected the generals he wanted for battlefield command before the wargames, and that the GHQ maneuvers were largely to help officers prepare for wartime roles. If this is the case, then Marshall may have overlooked Fredendall's missteps because he had

⁶² NARA, Lt. Col. A. G. Kelly to The Commanding General, General Headquarters (U.S. Army, Army War College, Washington D.C., *Report on Corps Field Exercises and Army Maneuvers, August and September 1941*, October 28, 1941), 7.

already decided that Fredendall would get a battlefield command at some point. Still, the question remains: why did Fredendall and not Patton receive the “key operation,” the command of the Center Task Force?⁶³

That decision may have been partly due to McNair’s high opinion of Fredendall. As mentioned above, McNair considered Fredendall one of the U.S. Army’s seven top corps commanders, and had recommended Fredendall to Marshall, along with Patton and Stillwell, as a possible overall commander for U.S. troops in Europe. Not long after the maneuvers McNair wrote a letter to Marshall reiterating his confidence in the II Corps commander, “I feel strongly that you have something in Fredendall. I wish that there were more like him.” Marshall shared McNair’s views with Eisenhower, who despite never having met Fredendall, believed that the corps commander could perhaps play Stonewall Jackson to Eisenhower’s Robert E. Lee. Further, despite McNair’s willingness to name Patton as a possible commander in Europe, it appears that he had more faith in Fredendall, and perhaps held Patton in lesser regard. Just prior to the Louisiana maneuvers, McNair deprecated Patton’s unorthodox approach to tank warfare, and told his staff, “I want armor used properly in these maneuvers, and Patton must not be allowed to run all over the countryside as he did in the Tennessee maneuvers.” McNair’s orthodox view was that tanks should be confined to roads and obvious avenues of attack, while Patton believed they should be taken off road to enhance their element of surprise and mobility. Earlier McNair had stated that Patton was a good division commander, but that the command of a division was “probably his ceiling.”⁶⁴

Of course, Eisenhower had chosen Patton to command the Western Task Force before he

⁶³ Murphy, “These Are the Generals- Fredendall,” 110; Gabel, *GHQ Maneuvers*, 187.

⁶⁴ Taaffe, *Marshall and his Generals*, 61-63; Ladislav Farago, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), 160; D’Este, *Patton: A Genius For War*, 377.

had decided upon Fredendall's participation. Indeed, in a letter to Thomas Troy Handy, the chief of the Army's operations division, Eisenhower wrote, "the commanding generals of the three attacks will each report separately in the initial stages to the commander in chief. As we now see it, these will be Patton, Hartle, and Ryder." The fact that Eisenhower first chose Hartle, whom he expected to do a "workmanlike" job, and then Fredendall whom he had never met, instead of the dynamic Patton for the "key operation" at Oran, seems to confirm suspicions that Eisenhower had some reservations about Patton for that role, perhaps based in part on McNair's views. These reservations, along with Marshall's support for Fredendall, most likely played major roles in Eisenhower's decision for his commanders in North Africa in late 1942. The Army, in short, was suspicious of mavericks like Patton. It preferred more predictable types like Fredendall.⁶⁵

"So far, I have been most favorably impressed with Fredendall," Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on 20 October. "He was not one of those in whom I had instinctive confidence, but my opinion of him has become increasingly favorable ever since he came." He went on to say that he had complete faith in the team of leaders he had assembled, and that if he felt differently about any one of them, "I would get rid of him instantly because I am not going to trust any part of this expedition to a person who, in my opinion, is not up to the job." Once the landings in North Africa began, Patton and Fredendall appeared to reward Eisenhower's faith. In a letter to his chief of staff, Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower noted that although they had received only sketchy reports from Morocco, Patton appeared to be advancing in good order. "If he captures Casablanca by noon tomorrow," he wrote, "I will recommend both him and Fredendall for third stars. I am the first to admit that Fredendall has done a fine job."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. I, 591-593, 546-547.

⁶⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. I, 629; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 685-686.

Highlighting the importance of Oran, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on the same day he cabled Smith. “For the past two days Oran has been the key to the situation,” he wrote. “Study of developments there indicates that Fredendall has done a fine job of leadership.” Eisenhower went on to praise the Center Task Force’s performance, noting the significant amount of time the troops had spent in combat and on the march with little sleep. He then continued to heap praise upon Fredendall. “I am confident that reports will show that he has fulfilled every condition of brilliant leadership in a tough situation and will have completely deserved a prompt recommendation from me to you for his promotion.” He offered some provisional praise for Patton as well, provided he was able to secure his objectives in a timely manner. The next day Eisenhower wrote to Marshall again in which he reiterated his desire to see Fredendall promoted. “I bless the day you urged Fredendall upon me and cheerfully acknowledge that my earlier doubts of him were completely unfounded.” If we take this statement at face value, Eisenhower may not have had much of a free hand in picking Fredendall at all, and Marshall’s recommendation of Fredendall for the command may have been a politely concealed order.⁶⁷

In subsequent letters to Marshall and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Eisenhower continued to paint Fredendall in a heroic light, noting his critical role in destroying resistance at Oran. He went on to call Fredendall one of “our outstanding performers in the field,” and stating that the British naval officers who oversaw the transportation of much of the Central Task Force all approved of the corps commander. “They think he is doing a marvelous job,” he wrote.⁶⁸

The progress of the operation delighted Marshall, and he asked Eisenhower to pass on his congratulations to Fredendall and Patton in early December. He also praised Eisenhower for his

⁶⁷ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 688-690.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 697, 731.

overall leadership. However, events were moving quickly, and they needed to consider the next step in the invasion. In a letter to Eisenhower on 4 December, he suggested the possibility of Clark reporting to Churchill in London, temporarily giving his command of Fifth Army to Fredendall. Eisenhower himself began to consider his two most important field generals at this time. In a 10 December letter to his naval aide, Harry Cecil Butcher, Eisenhower wrote, “among American commanders, Patton I think comes closest to meeting every requirement made on a commander. Just after him I would, at present rate Fredendall, although I do not believe the latter has the imagination in foreseeing and preparing for possible jobs of the future that Patton possess.”⁶⁹

In weighing his corps commanders’ abilities, Eisenhower was considering which general he needed to move into southern Tunisia for the push against the Afrika Korps. Once again, the commander-in-chief of the operation had to choose between the two generals, this time for the critical first ground operations against the Germans in the Second World War. Despite Eisenhower’s observations that Patton possessed greater battlefield imagination than Fredendall, it appears that he chose the II Corps for this assignment largely for logistical reasons; that is to say, II Corps was closer to Tunisia.

In a New Year’s Eve letter to Marshall, Eisenhower explained that in order to coordinate and exercise control over both the French and American units near Tunisia, he needed to improvise a new headquarters unit. II Corps headquarters already had a major hand in running this new headquarters. “For this reason and for the further one that General Patton commands the main body of any force that might become engaged in the west, I had decided to give the assignment in southern Tunisia to Fredendall.” On the unlikely chance that Spain might enter

⁶⁹ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 462, 465; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1943.

the war alongside Germany, Patton's role in North Africa would then become critical. Eisenhower also noted the role that he expected the 1st Armored Division under Ward to play. Further, he appeared to lament the fact that the front would depend greatly upon armored units. Patton had a reputation as a tank expert while Fredendall had been primarily an infantry commander. Despite this, he wrote that "I believe that Fredendall, with the assistance indicated, will be the best selection under the circumstances."⁷⁰

Eisenhower formally assigned Fredendall the task of moving his units to southern Tunisia on New Year's Day, 1943. "The moment the U.S. II Corps had been committed in Tunisia, Patton was desirous of leading it against Rommel," wrote General James M. Gavin, at the time a colonel attached to the 82nd Airborne. He recalled a conversation with Butcher, in which the naval aide had said that Patton told him, "I cried my heart out when Ike gave the job to Fredendall."⁷¹

The official operational history of the II Corps noted the movement of Fredendall's command into Tunisia: "on January 3, II Corps with the 1st Armored Division, elements of the 1st Infantry Division, and small forces of tank destroyers, engineers and auxiliary units, was moved to Tunisia, proceeding by road to Constantine." Once there, the Allies formally attached it to Anderson's British First Army. It was then "assigned the Southern flank with headquarters at Tebesse and a task force headquarters at Gafsa."⁷²

Further demonstrating Eisenhower's newfound appreciation for Fredendall, the Mediterranean theater commander recommended Fredendall for promotion to Lieutenant General alongside Patton and Eisenhower's air chief, Major General Carl "Tooe" Spaatz.

⁷⁰ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 880-881.

⁷¹ Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 23; James M. Gavin, *On To Berlin* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 11.

⁷² NARA, II Corps Operational History, RG 407, Box 2606, Outline History of II Corps, 1918-1945.

Noting that the Army should recognize Spaatz for his role as an Air Force officer, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on 4 February that “I think that Fredendall and Patton should be handled together with no distinction between them.” He went on to say that the order of the new rank should be Fredendall first, Patton second, and Spaatz third.⁷³

With Fredendall in place to move into Tunisia, the disaster was not far off. Fredendall had shown himself to be an adequate peacetime general, but at Kasserine Pass proved himself to be an incompetent battlefield commander. On 22 February, as the battle was raging, Eisenhower wrote to Fredendall to reassure him. “I have every confidence that under your inspiring leadership current advances of the enemy will be stopped in place...” he wrote after telling him that II Corps was formally being placed under Anderson’s command in order to better meet the crisis. Only days later, on 25 February, however, Eisenhower was already distancing himself from his decision to place Fredendall in Tunisia. “The personal choice of the Commander-in-Chief was General Patton because of particular qualifications and his experience in desert work, and also because of his experience with mechanized troops,” he wrote in a memorandum. Again, Eisenhower reiterated the logistics argument for Fredendall’s selection, noting that II Corps staff officers had already been assembling in the south-east sector of the front. He then stated that he had explained the overall strategy for the Allies’ drive in Tunisia to the II Corps commander. Eisenhower undoubtedly wanted it on record that he had fully briefed Fredendall on the Allied plan.⁷⁴

That same day, New York’s *Daily News* heaped praise on “the man the Army brass hats once thought was too old for combat duty but who was called to this theatre when the chips were

⁷³ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers Vol. II*. 937.

⁷⁴ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*. 980-981, 989-990.

down.” The paper, which the previous November had referred to Fredendall as “soft-spoken,” went on to call the general one of the “brains” behind the successful American and British resistance to Rommel. In a feat of reporting completely detached from reality, the story went on to state that Rommel had his Waterloo at Kasserine, and that Fredendall was his Wellington. In conclusion the story read, “so tonight, Major Gen. Fredendall deserves the credit for checking the most serious enemy drive of the entire campaign.”⁷⁵

Eisenhower and Marshall pondered Fredendall’s future. Although Eisenhower knew he was correct to relieve Fredendall from command of the II Corps, he showed concern that the Army not retire him altogether. “[Fredendall] has many qualities,” he wrote to Marshall on 8 March, “and now has acquired battle experience of which the American Army should make the greatest possible use.” A few days later Eisenhower wrote to Marshall again, assuring him that Fredendall’s new assignment made better use of his talents. “He has the physical and nervous energy to keep on producing for a very considerable time and has very clear and specific ideas as to additional requirements in our training program,” he wrote. Eisenhower went on to note that while Fredendall had shown shortcomings under battlefield conditions, he believed Fredendall would be successful in getting the best results in his new mission which was training troops in the United States. Subsequent letters to Marshall in the following weeks reiterated these themes.⁷⁶

Fredendall never held a front-line command again. After returning home to the United States, he received a hero’s welcome, although his name and the disaster at Kasserine remained

⁷⁵ *Daily News*, New York, 10 November 1942, 25 February 1943. www.newspapers.com.

⁷⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers Vol. II*, 1017, 1023, 1101; Jonathan W. Jordan, *Brothers, Rivals, Victors: Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, and the Partnership that Drove the Allied Conquest in Europe* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2001), 122.

intertwined. In late March, Eisenhower's naval aide Harry Butcher visited the White House and met with President Roosevelt for thirty-five "delightful minutes." Butcher described the president as "inquisitive about commanders at the front," and curious about the setback at Kasserine Pass. Butcher told the president about Eisenhower's reluctance to relieve Fredendall, and his hope that the former II Corps commander's talents would be put to good use in training troops.⁷⁷

By all accounts Fredendall did indeed succeed in his Stateside mission, commanding the Second Army in Tennessee. Shortly before General Ben Lear handed command of the Second Army to Fredendall, he wrote to McNair and expressed his regret at leaving the Second Army so soon. However, he understood that it was more convenient for the War Department under the circumstances. "Fredendall I saw out getting acquainted with various units of the Second Army," Lear wrote, and expressed a hope that Fredendall would continue his visits with the units of his new command. "I believe you can count on him to do a splendid job, and I am delighted that he has been selected as my successor." McNair generally expressed confidence in the former II Corps commander, despite one instance that saw Fredendall insult an officer in front of his subordinates during a training exercise and required a stern reprimand. McNair wrote to him in 1944, "I recognize with appreciation your force and decisiveness."⁷⁸

In the case of Lloyd Fredendall, the Marshall system clearly did not work properly. Marshall supported Fredendall's career and guided him toward combat command in the war. He believed that Fredendall was tough, decisive, vigorous, and possessed the necessary leadership

⁷⁷ Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower: The Personal Diary of Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, Naval Aide to General Eisenhower, 1942-1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1946), 278.

⁷⁸ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 10, Lear to McNair. 9 April 1943; NARA. Army Ground Forces Papers. RG 337. Box 9, McNair to Fredendall. 4 February 1944. McNair to Fredendall. 14 February 1944.

skills for modern war. However, Marshall displayed flawed judgement regarding the man. Rather than possessing those virtues, Fredendall displayed a hyper-sensitivity toward his personal safety, an unwillingness or inability to foster good working relationships with his subordinates and the British, and a paralyzing indecision at the critical moment. Yet, even after Kasserine Pass had exposed Fredendall's shortcomings, Marshall's ruthless practice of relieving underperforming generals was not immediately evident. Indeed, as Marshall biographers Debi Unger, Irwin Unger, and Stanley Hirshson pointed out, when it came to Fredendall's relief, there was hesitation. On 6 March 1943, Marshall forwarded Eisenhower's recommendations for Patton's and Spaatz's promotions, and noted that Patton was now in charge of the II Corps. "It is for this reason that [Fredendall's] name is not included." Despite this omission, a few months later Fredendall did indeed receive his third star. Further, Marshall showed concern for Fredendall's future career within the Army. In a memorandum to a press officer, Marshall wrote, "I am a little afraid that we are permitting the periodicals to tear Fredendall down to a point where his appointment to the Second Army will not register well."⁷⁹

It is impossible to know during peacetime which commanders will stumble and which will rise to the top when war breaks out. As the 1941 GHQ maneuvers demonstrated, it is not possible to completely create wartime conditions during war games. If it were, the question of selecting officers for battlefield assignments would have been much easier. By the summer of 1942, Fredendall looked like the perfect leader to command II Corps in battle. He had held various Army commands throughout the country, many recognized him as a first-class troop trainer, he had operational planning experience at the highest levels, and if his performance during the Carolina maneuvers was not stellar, it was at least competent. Fredendall also

⁷⁹ Unger, *Marshall: A Biography*, 209; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 3*, 580, 625-626.

projected a seasoned certainty and determination that his superiors noticed and approved of, and it was a combination of these factors that bred confidence in Marshall, McNair, Clark, and ultimately Eisenhower. Time and again Marshall had shown an interest in the two-time West Point washout from Wyoming. Marshall believed that Fredendall had the necessary qualities for wartime command, as he did in the case of Eisenhower, Bradley, Clark, and others. It was Marshall's desire to put Fredendall on a battlefield that saw the latter general in command of the Center Task Force during Operation Torch. For a brief time, Eisenhower's enthusiasm for Fredendall soon rivaled the Chief of Staff's, and he too became a champion for the II Corps commander. Fredendall's command in Tunisia, just in time to meet the German offensive, was due to Eisenhower's enchantment with the man and his image as much as the practical logistical considerations present in North Africa at the time.

Marshall offered what was probably the strangest example of his interest in and regard for Fredendall in March of 1944, a year after the disaster at Kasserine. In a letter to Eisenhower, the Chief of Staff suggested possible Army commanders to lead U.S. forces in Normandy. His two suggestions were Fourth Army commander Lieutenant General William Hood Simpson and Second Army commander Lieutenant General Lloyd Ralston Fredendall. Marshall wanted to know what Eisenhower thought of the candidates. Eisenhower's response was simple and firm. He wrote, "to take up the question of the next Army headquarters, I much prefer Simpson to Fredendall."⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1795.

CHAPTER 3

MARK WAYNE CLARK

Beginning with Operation Avalanche in September 1943 and continuing through the end of the war in Europe, Allied armies continuously engaged the Wehrmacht in Italy. Despite the formal surrender of the Italian government at the time the Allies crossed from Sicily to the mainland, the fighting continued and saw determined British and American attacks against tenacious German soldiers holding mountainous terrain that greatly favored the defenders. In approximately twenty months of fighting in the peninsula, the Allies suffered 312,000 killed, wounded and missing. From that number, 123,254 belonged to the British Eighth Army, and 188,746 came from the American Fifth Army. Total German casualties reached approximately 434,646. Although the Allies suffered higher casualties in the shorter campaign in northwest Europe, Italy nevertheless proved one of the vast killing grounds of the Second World War.⁸¹

To this day the Italian campaign remains the subject of considerable controversy. Many historians have questioned whether the campaign was worth the effort, given the considerable casualties and arguably limited gains it produced. John Ellis criticizes the “ad hoc, opportunistic planning” throughout the Mediterranean and notes that it had “serious tactical repercussions.” Operations in the theater, Ellis maintains, lacked a master plan and firm direction. This was because “no one, least of all on the American side, could think of anything better to do.” Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell argue that the Italian campaign only drew resources away from the Allied effort in Northwestern Europe, and vice versa. They assert that “the failure of Allied grand strategy, as determined by the Americans, was due to treating the two theaters

⁸¹ Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell, *Tug of War: The Battle for Italy: 1943-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 403.

[Italy and Northwestern Europe] as rivals when they should have been seen as a single strategic whole.” Joseph E. Persico considers the Italian campaign “a bloody misstep,” and agreed with historian Hanson Baldwin’s statement that “all roads led to Rome, but Rome led nowhere.”⁸²

Other historians have defended the war in Italy. Douglas Porch affirms that “the Mediterranean Theater [which included the Italian campaign] was the war’s pivotal theater,” and a necessary training ground for the subsequent invasion of Normandy in 1944. In rebutting Ellis’ notion that the Americans could not “think of anything better to do,” Porch argues that “no better alternatives existed until 1944.” Rick Atkinson agrees, stating that “no oceangoing fleet was available to move a half million men from the African littoral to England, or anywhere else.” Further, Atkinson considers the political and diplomatic necessity that compelled the Allies to invade Italy in 1943. “Moscow would not have tolerated an idling of Allied armies during the ten months between the conquest of Sicily and the Normandy invasion.” Benoît Lemay, David Glantz and Jonathan House note that the invasion of Sicily contributed to Hitler’s decision to halt the German attack at Kursk in the Soviet Union.⁸³

If the Italian campaign was one of the most controversial episodes of the war, then the commander of the United States Fifth Army, Mark Wayne Clark, was certainly one of the war’s most controversial commanders. Many historians have defended his handling of the Fifth Army in Italy, believing that he was a competent, judicious, and bold general. Martin Blumenson believes that Clark received much unwarranted criticism, especially that from the British. “By [Clark’s] driving will he prevailed, and many British historians and writers never forgave him.”

⁸² John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War* (New York: Viking, 1990), 292-293; Graham, *Tug of War*, 404; Joseph E. Persico, *Roosevelt’s Centurions*, 385.

⁸³ Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 662; Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2007), 583-584; Benoît LeMay, *Erich von Manstein: Hitler’s Master Strategist* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2010), 373; David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *The Battle of Kursk* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 264.

Jon B. Mikolashek argues that “in many regards Clark was given a tougher task than his flag-officer brethren in other theaters. He fought with limited manpower and supplies against a skilled and determined foe on ground that did not suit the United States Army or its military doctrine.” He further doubts that other American commanders could have had more success in Italy than Clark. James Holland remarks that Clark did not deserve much of the criticism leveled at him and should actually receive much greater credit for his role in the war.⁸⁴

Other historians have judged him as an overly ambitious, inexperienced, and insubordinate combat commander who recklessly gambled with the lives of his men. Gerhard L. Weinberg maintains that “incompetent leadership by General Mark Clark” played a large role in the Allied failure at Anzio. Carlo D’Este states that “what Clark lacked was that ill-defined but vital ingredient for successful command – the ability to sense instinctively the right course of action on the field of battle.” Ian Blackwell elaborates on Clark’s transparent ambition and publicity seeking which often alienated his brother officers. “Clark ensured that the Fifth Army’s successes were attributed to him; press reports were to be issued using the phrase ‘Mark Clark’s Fifth Army’...” Thomas Ricks notes that “Clark’s approach in a crisis tended to be to blame everyone but himself. ... Disliked and distrusted by subordinates and superiors alike, the querulous Clark should have been removed from his position.” Further, Ricks observes that the only general in Italy that appeared to like Clark in his role as the commander of the Fifth Army was his opponent, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 2; Jon B. Mikolashek, *General Mark Clark: Commander of America’s Fifth Army in World War II and Liberator of Rome* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2013), 9, 165; James Holland, “General Mark Clark and the Fall of Rome,” *Griffon Merlin: James Holland’s Second World War Forum*, <https://www.griffonmerlin.com/2016/04/20/general-mark-clark-the-fall-of-rome/>

⁸⁵ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 661; Carlo D’Este, *Fatal Decision: Anzio and the Battle for Rome* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 61; Ian Blackwell, *Fifth Army in Italy, 1943-1945: A Coalition at War*, (Barnsely: Pen & Sword Limited Books, 2012), 111; Ricks, *The Generals*, 69-71.

On 9 September 1943, the United States Fifth Army landed near the Italian port of Salerno, commencing Operation Avalanche. The operation marked the first time in over a quarter of a century that Clark had commanded a unit in combat. He had no experience at all leading a division, corps, or field army in battle. The last time he had engaged the enemy he had led an infantry battalion against the Germans in France's Vosges region during the First World War. Now, at forty-seven years old, Clark played a leading role in one of the Western Allies' most ambitious actions of the war to that time, the invasion of Italy. A few days earlier General Bernard Law Montgomery's British Eighth Army had crossed the Messina Straits from Sicily into Italy, and now that force worked its way north, although it appeared to move too slowly to support Clark's efforts at Salerno.⁸⁶

The selection of beaches just south of Salerno had not been ideal for a landing. The mountain arc surrounding the plain stood far inland, and some planners doubted that Allied forces could reach it before dawn. Nevertheless, the Navy could bring the transports in close to the shore for unloading. There were no serious natural obstacles to overcome on the beaches, and the landing area was close to the road network. Also, paratroopers could easily land on the terrain just beyond the beaches. British Vice Air Marshal Hugh Lloyd's Northwest African Air Force provided air support for the invasion fleet and the ground assault. The NAAF was an integrated force of British and American air units, and at the time of the Salerno landings it boasted roughly 850 operational aircraft. However, Allied air planners feared that Germany could have approximately 1,500 planes ready to defend southern Italy within days and that Hitler

⁸⁶ Carl W. McCardle, "Lieutenant General Mark Wayne Clark," *These Are the Generals*, Walter Millis, ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), 91; Hugh Pond, *Salerno* (London: William Kimber and Co. Limited, 1961), 48, 75.

would send more once it was clear that the Allies were committed to a full-scale Italian invasion.⁸⁷

The 16th Panzer Division opposed the initial landings in the early hours of 9 September. According to the Fifth Army Historical Summary, “the landings south of SALERNO took place in the face of machine gun, artillery, tank and shore battery fire. The Germans had mined the beaches extensively. Our shipping suffered damage from mines which had been planted in the GULF of SALERNO.” Despite significant initial enemy resistance, the Germans began to pull back from the beaches later in the day, covering their withdraw with heavy artillery fire. The enemy continued making counterattacks against the British X Corps, north of the Sele River.⁸⁸

A little over a week before the landings, George Patton had visited Al Gruenther, Clark’s chief of staff. Their meeting lasted forty-five minutes, and Patton later recorded that Gruenther “was interested in administrative matters, but not at all in tactics.” However, the officer did ask Patton to look over the operation plan for the invasion, and Patton expressed concern that the boundary between the British X Corps to the north and the U.S. VI Corps to the south was the Sele River. Patton worried that Clark had dedicated no forces to protecting the river valley itself, and consequently, as the British and American forces moved inland, a gap would develop. Patton recorded in his diary that “I told him just as sure as God lives, the Germans will attack down that river.” Gruenther responded that more than enough artillery would be ashore in time to meet any German units attempting to counterattack along the river. When Patton suggested that plans rarely conformed to the reality on a battlefield, “it did not register.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ NARA, Fifth Army History, RG 407, Box 1619, Fifth Army History, Part I, 5 January-6 October 1943. 26-27; Thomas Alexander Hughes, *Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 89, 104.

⁸⁸ NARA, RG 407, Box 1636, Fifth Army Historical Summary G-2. Sept-Oct 1943.

⁸⁹ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 343-344.

Patton was not wrong. Three days after the landing the Germans launched a massive counterattack along the Sele with the intent of preventing the U.S. Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army from linking. Kesselring later wrote, “the fighting on the beaches of Salerno, despite the Allies’ overwhelming air superiority, their tremendous naval gunfire and our numerical weakness, went better than I had dared hope.” They attacked with the 76th Panzer Corps, hitting the American units south of the Sele hard. German commanders leading the counterattack reported back to Kesselring that they believed they could “throw the enemy back into the sea.” However, Kesselring and German Tenth Army commander Heinrich von Vietinghoff were skeptical of the claim.⁹⁰

In total, Allied air forces flew 24,500 strategic and tactical sorties during Operation Avalanche. Most of the Allied aircraft flew from bases in Sicily, and from small escort carriers in the bay. Originally, Clark and Allied planners had hoped to utilize Montecorvino airfield in the British sector and allow the escort carriers to withdraw on 10 September. However, although the X Corps captured the airfield on schedule, German guns within range easily destroyed any aircraft that touched down there, and so the escort carriers remained. Fighters protected the fleet, even as they covered the ground forces on the beaches, and yet the Luftwaffe succeeded in sinking five Allied ships and damaging several more in nighttime raids. The Germans committed far fewer aircraft than the Allies had feared and made only 450 sorties during the initial landings, but nevertheless showed remarkable determination. Fatigue became almost as great an enemy as the Luftwaffe for Allied pilots. Accidents became much more common, especially from carrier-based aircraft. Additionally, complications with radar and echoes from the hills near the water caused operational difficulties. Despite these issues, air-ground

⁹⁰ Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field Marshall Kesselring* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), 186.

cooperation during Avalanche had been far better than in previous Allied operations in North Africa and Sicily.⁹¹

Norman Lewis, a British intelligence officer with the Fifth Army, recalled the uncertainty that prevailed on the Salerno beachhead. He lamented in his diary on 11 September that the field army “does not altogether realize what it is doing here.” He saw no tanks or artillery, and only a few anti-aircraft guns. Little thought was given to defensive preparations. “The only urgent activity in our neighborhood is that of hundreds of soldiers streaming like ants to bring typewriters and filing cabinets up from the beach.” The Americans repeatedly pestered him for news on Montgomery’s arrival. Occasionally the Fifth Army soldiers would spot a flight of German FW 190s overhead. “These cause great alarm but do no damage, as their target is the great armada of ships anchored in the bay.”⁹²

On 13 September, later known as “Black Monday” within the U.S. Fifth Army, Eisenhower noted the difficulties that the Fifth Army was experiencing at Salerno in a letter to General Albert Wedemeyer, the outgoing chief of the War Plans Division and close advisor to Marshall. “Clark is unable to move and cannot clear away the German artillery covering the airfield in Salerno Bay,” by which he meant the airstrip at Montecorvino. In his memoirs, Eisenhower stated that “the German attack struck in all its fury, and fierce fighting ensued for a considerable period.” He further explained that the Germans reached “within two or three miles of the beach.” The next day Harry Butcher recorded in his diary that “this morning, the news from General Clark was bad.” He noted that the enemy had pushed back British units in the X Corps, and the American 36th Division, composed of Texas National Guardsmen, “took a heavy

⁹¹ Hughes, *Over Lord*, 106-107; Rein, *The North African Air Campaign*, 186-187; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 209, 213.

⁹² Norman Lewis, *Naples '44: A World War II Diary of Occupied Italy* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005), 14.

beating yesterday.” That day also saw Eisenhower send a letter to Clark. He told the Fifth Army commander that “we know you are having a sticky time but you may be sure that everybody is working at full speed to provide the reinforcements you need.” He reminded him that the “Air Force is more than anxious to do its full part in your support.” He concluded by telling Clark that “you and your people have done a magnificent job. We are all proud of you and since the success of the whole operation depends upon you and your forces, you need have no fear that anything will be neglected in providing you all possible assistance.” On 15 September Butcher noted, “now, with Clark in trouble, Ike is moving heaven and earth to help him and his Fifth Army. He has the Air Force pounding away to disorganize the expected heavy counterattack of the Germans.” With B-17s flying two missions each day to help, the hope was that Montgomery, battling his way up from the straits of Messina, would soon arrive to take the pressure off of Clark. Butcher further recorded that “Ike is tremendously worried but has the satisfaction of having done everything he could think of before, during, and after the landings to make the whole assault a success.”⁹³

The German counterattack had deeply rattled Clark’s nerves. On 13 September, the Germans pushed hard against Ernest J. Dawley’s VI Corps near the town of Parsano. The enemy attack struck the 36th Division unexpectedly, resulting in significant casualties before it was able to pull back and regroup. Clark telephoned Dawley and asked him what he intended to do about it, and the corps commander responded by saying, “nothing. I have no reserves. All I’ve got is a prayer.” Not only did VI Corps have no reserves, but in choosing to land the Fifth Army on both sides of the Sele, Clark had no reserves to meet the Germans either. In his memoirs, Clark wrote

⁹³ John J. McLaughlin, *General Albert C. Wedemeyer: America’s Unsung Strategist in World War II* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2012), 109; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol III*, 1409, 1417-1418; Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 187-188; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 416, 419.

that “I recall that about this time I had to consider the possibility that we would be driven back to the sea.” Clark contacted Admiral Henry Hewitt, who commanded the armada tasked with landing and protecting the Fifth Army from the sea. Without initially informing his corps and division commanders, Clark instructed Hewitt to prepare a plan for evacuating the VI Corps, and transporting it north of the Sele, where it could support the British X Corps.⁹⁴

Clark later denied that he seriously considered evacuating the VI Corps. He later wrote that “a commander always is supposed to have an alternate plan, and I felt that if it came to a point where we had to abandon part of the beachhead, we should be able to evacuate some troops by sea to the British sector and continue the fight from there.” He then said if it had been a War College exercise he would “get hell from some instructor” by not creating a plan to destroy Allied supplies on the beach. Clark dramatically presents his decision against issuing the order to destroy the supplies, however, since it would only damage morale. “Finally I said to hell with the theory,” he wrote. “Furthermore, I decided, the only way they’re going to get us off this beach is to push us, step by step, into the water.” To his mother he wrote that evacuation “was never in our thoughts.” However, during the crisis, he was met with grumbling when he informed his officers of the plan. Dawley told him he intended to remain fighting where he was, regardless of an evacuation order. Others questioned Clark’s resolve behind his back. On 14 September, on board the *USS Biscayne*, Alexander heard about the evacuation order and approached Hewitt, who was also unhappy with the scheme. “Oh, no. We can’t have anything like that,” Alexander told the admiral. “There will be no evacuation.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 221-226; Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 187-188; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 163; Des Hickey and Gus Smith, *Operation Avalanche: The Salerno Landings, 1943* (New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 1983), 230.

⁹⁵ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 163; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 226-231.

Alexander then visited the Paestum beach where he met Clark and discussed the situation with him. A pessimistic Clark believed that the Germans could indeed push the VI Corps into the sea. Lieutenant General Richard McCreery, the British X Corps commander, opposed the idea of evacuation, as did Dawley. McCreery feared that reembarking the VI Corps presented a seriously dangerous risk. Alexander made the decision to hold the beachhead and promised Clark more reinforcements soon. The Army Group commander had officially scrapped Clark's plans for evacuation.⁹⁶

On 16 September, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall. "General Alexander has just returned from a visit to the Fifth Army. He was most favorably impressed by Clark and by his calmness and serenity under adverse circumstances." Eisenhower later remarked about Clark's evacuation order that the plan "caused consternation because it seemed to indicate that commanders on the spot were discouraged and preparing to withdraw the whole force." Despite this, Eisenhower maintained faith in Clark. He wrote that both Clark and McCreery "never once faltered in their determination." Further, Eisenhower stated that even though Clark had not yet held a combat command in the war, "he proved to be a fine battle leader and fully justified the personal confidence that had impelled me to assign him to such an important position." No doubt Eisenhower was aware of Alexander's intervention against the evacuation order, but if he had any doubts about Clark's ability as a field army commander at this time, he did not share them. It is possible that in his memoirs he was covering for an old friend, or just as possible that Eisenhower believed that Clark's temporary loss of nerve did not diminish the fact that he had ultimately successfully landed an American Army on the continent of Europe.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Pond, *Salerno*, 193.

⁹⁷ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1428; Eisenhower. *Crusade in Europe*. 187-188.

Despite the impression he made on Alexander and Eisenhower at the battle, Clark failed in two key aspects. First, Clark invited trouble by leaving a ten-mile gap across the Sele River and dividing his forces on either side. The two forces were simply too far apart and had a major natural obstacle between them that was at least 200 feet wide at its mouth. Predictably, the Germans exploited this disposition of units. This operational danger is precisely what Patton had warned Gruenther about before the invasion. Just as predictably, the VI Corps could not fall back to support the X Corps, nor could the X Corps support VI Corps without reembarking on the transports and then landing again north of the Sele. Second, Clark's skittishness led him to actually prepare plans for an evacuation of the VI Corps to north of the Sele. After Clark informed his subordinate commanders of these plans, morale sank accordingly, and the generals began to lose faith in Clark's leadership. In the touch-and-go battle at the beaches near Salerno, it was a dangerous and foolish decision to rock his officers' confidence in such a manner. Clark's inexperience in high command was evident.

Whatever his anxiety over the fate of Fifth Army, Clark did show personal courage on the beaches at Salerno and moved among the various troops to encourage them. At least once he took command of a defensive position in action. Two months after the landings, Gruenther wrote a letter to Eisenhower without Clark's knowledge in which he praised the Fifth Army commander and recommended him for another Distinguished Service Cross. "Ever since the beginning of the Italian Campaign," he wrote, "General Clark constantly has maintained close personal contact with front line units. Many of his almost daily visits to the troops have been made under fire, and always without regard to his own personal safety."⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Blumenson. *Mark Clark*. 138; NPRC, Clark Papers, Gruenther to Eisenhower. 6 November 1943.

The ultimate victory of Salerno meant that Clark's superiors largely forgot his temporary loss of nerve. Just as Eisenhower stated that Clark had vindicated his faith in him, other important figures looked on the outcome of the invasion with approval. Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote Clark on 23 September to let the Fifth Army commander know that he had been following his exploits. "I am delighted that you have now gotten your opponents pushed back into a position where they are no longer threatening," he wrote. "I send to you and your brave men my heartiest congratulations on the successful accomplishment of one of the most difficult and hazardous operations in the history of warfare." A short time later Henry Butcher joined Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox as Clark led the party on a tour of the Allied foothold in Italy.⁹⁹

Clark survived the rigors of command at Salerno, despite his shaken fortitude. However, one of his generals did not. As mentioned previously, Clark relieved Ernest J. Dawley as commander of VI Corps. In a 1948 interview with Sidney T. Mathews, Clark stated that "Dawley just did not measure up as a combat commander." Further, Clark told him that Dawley's relief was "the hardest decision of his military career" since he knew that the corps commander was a favorite of McNair's. Clark told Forest S. Rittgers in an interview in the early 1970s that "Dawley was close to McNair, loved him. ... Mike Dawley was his good friend. ... McNair is the one that begged me to take Dawley." Clark recalled that at the time Marshall asked Eisenhower if he wanted Dawley for an assignment, Eisenhower simply said, "by golly, I don't want him either." It was also difficult for Clark since he was younger than Dawley. Eisenhower explained the relief to Marshall by writing that "there is nothing against him except

⁹⁹ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 43, Stimson to Clark. 23 September 1943.; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 427.

that he cannot repeat cannot exercise high battle command effectively when the going is rough. He grows extremely nervous and indecisive.” Clark related to Mathews that Dawley had been quite bitter about his relief and had gone to see Marshall in Washington. He complained about the situation, and the fact that Clark had praised him to the troops shortly after his relief. Marshall responded by telling Dawley that he did not agree with what had happened. “He should have relieved you sooner,” he told the former corps commander.¹⁰⁰

Dawley’s relief at Salerno is interesting for several reasons. Despite the corps commander’s anger at Clark for proposing evacuation, he proved “extremely nervous and indecisive” during the battle. Dawley also failed to impress Alexander, and the army group commander recommended his relief. Therefore, the chain of command was in agreement over the action. Clark, the field army commander, Alexander, the army group commander, and Eisenhower, the theater commander had all decided that Dawley failed in his task, and, therefore, they agreed to relieve him. Clark too had shown indecisiveness at Salerno, but in his case his superiors opted to retain him in his position. If Alexander had wanted to relieve Clark, it would have been much more difficult. An officer in the British army could recommend relief, certainly, but he must also accept the political realities of the alliance. His only recourse would have been to go to Eisenhower, the senior American officer, and seek his approval for such an action. Also, Clark had built up personal relationships with many top British officers and even Churchill himself, who had nicknamed him “the American Eagle.” In any event, there does not appear to be any indication that Alexander intended such a drastic move. Just as importantly, Eisenhower, disappointed by Clark’s nervousness, chalked it up to inexperience in high battle

¹⁰⁰ USAHEC, Clark Papers, Box 1, Sidney T. Mathews interview with Mark Clark. 10 May to 21 May 1948; USAHEC, Clark Papers, Box 1, Forest S. Rittgers, Jr. interview with Mark Clark. 1972-1973; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1436.

command, and had his faith restored once Alexander had scrapped the evacuation plans. The battle was soon won, and the Allies had their foothold in Europe. Nothing succeeds like success.¹⁰¹

The next few months saw the Fifth Army engaged in a slow, painful slog through the mountainous Italian terrain. In Berlin, Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels recorded in his diary that “we have achieved great military defensive successes in Italy. The English and Americans are simply not advancing and must pay for every kilometer of ground with rivers of blood.” War correspondent Ernie Pyle grimly observed the perilous conditions which the Allied soldiers faced as they crept slowly up the Italian spine. “The land and the weather are both against us,” he wrote. “It rains and rains. Vehicles bog down and temporary bridges wash out. The country is shockingly beautiful, and just as shockingly hard to capture from the enemy.” He noted the hills and solid rock ridges that were virtually inaccessible from the valleys “because the Germans look down upon you and would let you have it.” He further lamented the fact that a platoon of German soldiers fortified in those heights “can hold out for a long time against tremendous onslaughts.” He remained optimistic that the Fifth Army would get to Rome eventually, “but the way is cruel. Right this minute some of them are fighting hand-to-hand up there in fog so dense they can barely see each other – one man against another.”¹⁰²

In December 1943, Chief of the Imperial General Staff Alanbrooke toured the Italian front in Italy. After meeting with Montgomery, he wrote in his diary that “I can see that he does not feel that Clark is running the 5th Army right.” The commander of the British Eighth Army

¹⁰¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1436, 1439-1440; Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence. Vol. I: Alliance Emerging* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 614.

¹⁰² Louis P. Lochner, ed. & trans., *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), 501; David Nicholas ed., *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 172-173.

informed Alanbrooke that he did not believe the Allies would take Rome before March. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff found Montgomery tired, and considered that Alexander was not up to his duties. "I must now see during the next few days what hopes rest in the plans of the 5th Army. Frankly I am rather depressed from what I have seen and heard today." A few days later he met with Clark and Alexander at Fifth Army headquarters. After dinner with Clark, Alanbrooke wrote, "I had a long talk with him about the offensive on his front and do not feel very cheered up as to the prospects for the future from what I heard from him. He seems to be planning nothing but penny packet attacks and nothing sufficiently substantial."¹⁰³

The new year proved a critical turning point in the war in the Mediterranean. During that period – December 1943 to January 1944 – Eisenhower left the theater to take up his duties as the Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force in England. Before his departure he did take time to lecture Clark about proper etiquette regarding their British allies. Specifically, Eisenhower expressed his displeasure that during a visit to Sicily, Clark did not give advanced notification to Alexander. "These little points of courtesy must be observed with greater care in an Allied command than in a purely nationalistic one, a point which I know you are fully aware." During his last few weeks in the Mediterranean, Eisenhower discussed with Marshall arrangements for future operations. Eisenhower had considered the possibility of Clark's elevation to theater commander, but he dismissed the idea. He wrote to Marshall that "Clark's presence with his 5th Army I regard as a virtual necessity until the Rome line has been secured. He is doing a very good job and is in the middle of the problem." Further, he did not like that it would mean selecting Patton for command of the invasion of southern France. "I believe that

¹⁰³ Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., *Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke: War Diaries, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 2001), 499-500.

Clark should be the man to plan and execute ANVIL [Dragoon] if we can work it out, because of his particular skill in that sort of work.” Marshall responded that he did not oppose Clark leading the Anvil operation. Both men believed that Clark was an effective leader and combat commander.¹⁰⁴

Field Marshal Maitland “Jumbo” Wilson replaced Eisenhower as theater commander, and the British officer’s arrival signaled a shift in Allied influence over the war in Italy. The chain of command now went from Wilson as theater commander, to Alexander as the 15th Army Group commander, to Clark as Fifth Army commander. The Italian campaign was now a British show with Clark acting under their orders. However, for administrative purposes within the United States Army, Clark’s immediate superior was Lt. General Jacob L. Devers, Wilson’s deputy. Marshall had had full confidence in Devers, and the Pennsylvanian became the second most senior general in Europe after Eisenhower. Devers had served as the commander of the European Theater of Operations while Eisenhower ran the Mediterranean theater in 1943, and then they swapped positions now that Eisenhower had taken command of preparations for Overlord. Eventually, Devers commanded the Sixth Army Group in France and Germany and proved one of the truly great commanders of World War II. Despite the confidence that Eisenhower continued to feel in Clark, Devers did not share it. He wrote his wife Georgie shortly after arriving in the Mediterranean that “[I wish] I could re-arrange some of the command set up in the commanders. Clark is not a good commander. I have known this for some time but now it drifts in to me from many sources.” Devers’ opinion of Clark remained generally low. A few weeks after the capture of Rome, Devers’s efficiency report for Clark rated the Fifth Army

¹⁰⁴ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III.*, 1595, 1604; Larry I. Bland and Sharon Ritenour Stevens, eds., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 4, “Aggressive and Determined Leadership,” June 1, 1943 – December 31, 1944* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 210.

commander as fourteen out of twenty-seven generals of the same grade. By October Clark had fallen to twenty-one out of twenty-seven. However, with both Marshall and Eisenhower still firmly confident in Clark's abilities, and Wilson "favorably impressed with Clark," Devers had no choice but to accept the situation.¹⁰⁵

The change in theater command occurred just as preparations were underway for Operation Shingle, the invasion of Anzio. It is important to comprehend the events that occurred along the Fifth Army front at the same time in order to understand Clark's generalship during the campaign. The Allies intended the amphibious invasion at Anzio to be an end run around the German Gustav Line, to trap the Germans south of the line and annihilate them, or force them to flee north. Clark had initially favored the idea, but felt that for it to be successful, the landings must only occur after the Fifth Army had penetrated past the German defenses and made its way into the Liri Valley. Clark believed that only when the Fifth Army had taken Frosinone, within fifty miles Rome, would it be safe to launch Shingle. He expected to take Frosinone by 20 December, and from there the bulk of the Fifth Army would be in supporting distance of the beachhead at Anzio. However, the Fifth Army did not make any headway against the defenses at Cassino well into the new year, and with British pressure for the operation emanating from the highest levels, the Allies agreed to launch the invasion around 20 January. Meanwhile command was taking its toll on Clark. Patton recorded in his diary at this time that "the left corner of Clark's mouth is slightly drawn down as if he had been paralyzed. He is quite jumpy and so is Greunther."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ James Scott Wheeler, *Jacob L. Devers: A General's Life* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 1-4, 244-245; NPRC, Clark Papers, Devers. efficiency report for Mark Clark. 22 July 1944. 22 October 1944; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 4*, 311.

¹⁰⁶ Whitlock, Flint. *Desperate Valour: Triumph at Anzio*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2018), 4-8; John S. D. Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2007), 88; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 396.

As preparations steamed ahead for Shingle, Clark understood that it was necessary to launch an offensive along the Fifth Army line. The purpose of this offensive would be to ensure that some of the enemy units along the Gustav Line did not redeploy against the Allied forces at Anzio; to draw off enemy strength from the beachhead, and to hopefully finally push into the Liri Valley to move to link up with John Lucas' VI Corps at Anzio. With these objectives in mind, Clark ordered the British X Corps to launch an assault on the left of the Allied line in order to cross the Garigliano River. If all went according to plan, the Germans would throw their weight in that direction and then the American II Corps, now under the command of Geoffrey Keyes, could deliver the coup de grace in an attack across the Rapido River further north. Clark tasked the 36th Infantry Division with the mission.¹⁰⁷

Prior to the landing at Salerno, Clark had chosen the 36th Division over the 34th for employment in the Fifth Army, despite the fact that the latter had gained amphibious combat experience landing in North Africa in 1942. Clark later wrote that "considering all the factors involved, I selected the 36th for the initial attack because I felt that it had good leadership and high caliber personnel." Fred L. Walker was the 36th Division's commander and had known Clark for some time. While assigned to the War College, Walker had been Clark's instructor, and the two had become good friends despite the fact that Walker was nearly ten years older than Clark. After the landing and subsequent campaign in Italy, particularly the tough fighting at San Pietro, Walker became disillusioned with his former pupil. Walker did not think Clark's plan for crossing the Rapido was a good idea. The 36th had seen heavy action since Salerno. The men were tired, and the division had not yet received significant numbers of replacements. The plan

¹⁰⁷ Martin Blumenson, *Bloody River: The Real Tragedy of the Rapido* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 52-53.

called for the men to cross directly under the guns the Germans, who held the perfect observation spot with the Monte Cassino Abby. One regiment would cross north of the village of Sant' Angelo, while another would cross south of it, giving German artillery spotters another key observation post. With the crossing scheduled for 20 January, Walker poured his frustration out in his diary a week earlier. "I have mentioned the difficulties involved," he wrote. "They do not want to talk about them."¹⁰⁸

The British X Corps attacked along the Garigliano River on the night of 17-18 January and achieved some success. Kesselring later wrote that "the enemy broke through in force at Castleforte, and the [German] Tenth Army ... was unable to seal off the gap with its weak reserves." Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of German military intelligence, had given Kesselring an optimistic report that excluded the possibility of an Allied amphibious landing near Rome in the near future. With that in mind, Kesselring sent the Tenth Army the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, which had been in place to defend Rome. Clark's objectives of tying down units and provoking the Germans to send reinforcements to the Fifth Army front had worked. The X Corps' attack ensured that the Germans could not defend against the Anzio landing in strength. However, for all of its success, the X Corps did not gain a secure foothold on the far bank of the Garigliano.¹⁰⁹

Clark's final objective, the breakthrough into the Liri Valley, depended on Walker's 36th Division. The Fifth Army commander had not informed his subordinate about the necessity of the timing for the mission, and with the two assaulting regiments still 500 men understrength,

¹⁰⁸ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 146; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 331-332; Carlo D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean, 1942-1945* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1990), 123-124; Fred. L. Walker, *From Texas to Rome with General Fred L. Walker: Fighting World War II and the Italian Campaign with the 36th Infantry Division as seen through the Eyes of its Commanding General*, (Ed Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Publishing, 1969), 627.

¹⁰⁹ Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 192-193.

Walker remained unaware of the Anzio landings. As the division prepared for its attack, Walker lamented the forthcoming operation. “We might succeed but I do not see how we can,” he wrote in his diary. “The mission assigned is poorly timed.” He noted the heights from which the Germans looked down upon his men, and the certain losses to follow from heavy and accurate artillery shelling. He also considered the difficulties associated with crossing a river under such conditions. “I do not know of a single case in military history where an attempt to cross a river that is incorporated into the main line of resistance has succeeded; So according to history, we may not succeed. The mission should never have been assigned to any troops ... when both flanks will be exposed...”. Clark had called him and offered his best wishes. “I think he is worried over the fact that he made an unwise decision when he gave us the job of crossing the river under such adverse tactical conditions. However, if we get some breaks we may succeed.”¹¹⁰

Walker’s pessimism is similar to John Lucas’, the VI Corps commander who led the Anzio expedition at the same time, and both men had justification for their doubts. However, Clark had ordered Walker to send his men into an obvious, heavily fortified killing ground with understrength regiments and a firm start date. The purpose of the British X Corps’ attack had been to support the II Corp’s push into the Liri Valley, and its failure to cross the Garigliano in strength exposed the 36th Division’s left flank. Still, Clark insisted that the attack begin on the night of 20 January. To further complicate matters, German artillery had destroyed twenty-nine rubber boats and destroyed tape on the ground which marked cleared minefields. Clark wrote in his diary that day, “it is essential that I make the attack, fully expecting heavy losses, in order to

¹¹⁰ Blumenson, *Bloody River*, 79-80; Walker, *From Texas to Rome*, 640.

hold all the [German] troops on my front and draw more to it, thereby clearing the way for Shingle.”¹¹¹

The result of the battle was predictably grim. Clark wrote in his diary the next day, “as was anticipated, heavy resistance was encountered to the 36th Division crossing the Rapido.” German artillery fire obliterated the constructed bridges that the division had put up.” The afternoon of 21 January Clark insisted that Walker renew the attack, especially as a number of Americans made it across the river, had dug in, and the Germans pinned them in place. Clark ordered Keyes to “bend every effort to get tanks and tank destroyers across” the river as soon as possible. Originally, Keyes had ordered the attack during the day, but Walker and other division commanders protested that their men simply could not move under such effective artillery fire in daylight. Keyes insisted, telling him that the Germans were “groggy, that their morale is low; that all they needed was another ‘blow’ by a fresh regiment to turn their position.” Walker reluctantly made plans for an assault at 2:00 p.m., and noted in his diary that “I expect this attack to be a fizzle just as was the one last night.” Problems continued to plague the assault regiments, and boats and equipment were slow coming forward. Further delays occurred, and Walker’s battalion commanders all objected to a daylight assault. Walker postponed the attack to 4:00 p.m. In any event, poor morale and disorganized units meant that the second assault did not go forward until 9:00 p.m. Clark had just returned from visiting the beachhead at Anzio, and in his memoirs, he asserted that Keyes insisted on renewing the attack. During the second assault approximately forty Americans made it the far bank, but the soldiers that had crossed the night before had disappeared. From 20 January to 22 January, the attacks across the Rapido resulted in

¹¹¹ John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory: The Battle for Rome, January-June 1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), 77; Lee Carraway Smith, *A River Swift and Deadly: The 36th “Texas” Infantry Division at the Rapido River* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997), 32, 35-36, 42; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 338.

at least 1,681 casualties, with 143 killed, 663 wounded, and 875 missing. As historian John Ellis has noted, it was “a 56 per cent casualty rate among the riflemen and company officers.”¹¹²

Clark placed the blame for the disaster on Walker’s subordinate officers, including fifty-five-year-old William H. Wilbur, Walker’s assistant division commander and a Medal of Honor recipient for his actions in North Africa. The Fifth Army commander relieved these officers, an injustice that Walker found hard to swallow. “The officers removed were in no way responsible for the Rapido fiasco. ... But they are being used as scapegoats,” Walker wrote in his diary on 31 January after a meeting with Clark. “If they want a scapegoat, they should ‘can’ me.”¹¹³

Clark’s insistence on the attack when the units were not ready is another testament to his inexperience. The day after the assault Clark met with Keyes and Walker at Walker’s headquarters for lunch to discuss the failure. As Keyes explained the situation Clark stopped him and remarked, “it was as much my fault as yours.” After the senior generals had left, Walker requested that a subordinate prepare an affidavit recording Clark’s admission of guilt. Walker, fearing that the Army or public might hold him accountable for the disaster, placed the affidavit in his own diary.¹¹⁴

The story of the tragedy of the Rapido did not end there. In January 1946, two years after the disastrous river crossing, veterans of the 36th Division published a resolution condemning Clark’s judgement and decisions during the battle just as the Senate was considering his promotion to the permanent grade of major general. “The results of this blunder are well known,” the document stated. “The crossings were made under the most adverse conditions and

¹¹² Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 221-224; Blumenson, *Bloody River*, 96-99; Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory*, 108; Walker, *From Texas to Rome*, 655.

¹¹³ Walker, *From Texas to Rome*, 673.

¹¹⁴ Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 346-347.

required two nights to get elements of the two combat teams across.” The resolution cited a higher casualty figure of 2,900 men, called the attack “a colossal failure,” and asked Congress to investigate the matter. It likewise urged Congress to “correct a military system that will permit an inefficient and inexperienced officer, such as Mark W. Clark ...” to attain high rank. It further hoped that in the future soldiers would not be “sacrificed, wastefully and uselessly.” Miller Ainsworth, the president of the Thirty-Sixth Division Association, an organization for veterans of the unit, stated before the Senate Military Affairs Committee that Clark was “unworthy in the position of leadership and command.” Further, he said that “we are not complaining or attempting to deny that it was necessary to cross the Rapido River.” Rather, Ainsworth’s concerns centered on “the place at which the attack was ordered, and the equipment and time that was given us in order to accomplish the impossible mission.” Ainsworth also disparaged Clark’s leadership at Salerno and contended that the operation there succeeded in spite of Clark.¹¹⁵

The 1946 board of inquiry that investigated the matter ultimately exonerated Clark of wrongdoing. In a letter to the chairman of the Military Affairs Committee, Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson stated that “General Clark exercised sound judgment in planning [the attack] and ordering it.” Historians Lee Carraway Smith and Rick Atkinson note that Clark had access to British Ultra intercepts, and before the assault on the Rapido he should have known that Kesselring had already sent the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions from Rome to shore up the Tenth Army line. He had already accomplished his objective. Smith makes the point that had the board of inquiry known Clark already had access to this information and had understood that the Germans would not oppose the Anzio landings in strength, it almost certainly would not have

¹¹⁵ Smith, *A River Swift and Deadly*, 135-136; *El Paso Herald Post*, 11 June 1946, www.newspaperarchive.com.

cleared him. Unfortunately, the information surrounding the Ultra intercepts remained classified until 1974.¹¹⁶

Clark later wrote in his memoirs that “it has always seemed to me that the successful landings at Anzio, where we might have been driven into the sea had not the Germans been busily occupied on the Rapido, was more than sufficient justification for the task to which the 36th Division ... [was] assigned.” It appears that Clark was being dishonest here. Even if he had not examined the Ultra intelligence prior to ordering the assault upon the Rapido, which seems unlikely, he surely had to have known about it by the time he published his memoirs. Clark desperately wanted to break into the Liri Valley and aid the VI Corps beachhead as soon as possible, but with the knowledge that Kesselring had already sent his reserves to the Tenth Army the imminent pressure to assault across the Rapido had little justification. Surely the assault could have waited a few days at least until the 36th Division had better prepared to carry it out.¹¹⁷

Clark’s actions during the battle for Rome in May/June 1944 also provide another example of his unfitness for high command. The official Fifth Army history, which Clark approved, reported on the march to Rome in glowing terms. “The drive on Rome forms one of the most spectacular parts of the Fifth Army campaign in Italy,” it read. “In extent and importance of terrain gained, in the magnitude of forces involved, this operation far outshadows all previous action since Salerno.” Further, the history stated that despite the enemy determination to keep the Fifth Army pinned south of the city, the Germans “had failed, and in that failure had suffered disaster. Fifth Army had shown that we could meet and decisively conquer the Germans on their ground.” The bravado bore the unmistakable mark of Clark’s

¹¹⁶ Smith, *A River Swift and Deadly*, 99, 101-102, 137; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 343.

¹¹⁷ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 222-224.

notorious publicity machine, a Fifth Army public relations program that led one British officer to amend Clausewitz's most famous maxim by asserting that Clark "believed war to be an extension of publicity by other means."¹¹⁸

On 4 June 1944, Roosevelt sent a message to Churchill. "We have just heard of the fall of Rome and I am about to drink a mint julep to your very good health," the president wrote. "I have sent telegrams to Alex and Clark and Leese [the Eighth Army commander that replaced Montgomery] and Jumbo [Wilson]. The whole operation was a magnificent example of perfect teamwork." Nothing could be further from the truth. While the Allies in Italy did achieve ultimate success in the push toward Rome, and cooperated as necessary to make that happen, there was considerable friction between Clark and his British superiors and colleagues.¹¹⁹

This friction revolved around Clark's obsession with the Fifth Army capturing Rome. Clark remarked in his memoirs that "I was determined that the Fifth Army was going to capture Rome and I was probably overly sensitive to indications that practically everybody else was trying to get into the act." Clark appeared paranoid that Alexander hoped to orchestrate events to ensure that the British Eighth Army would take the city. Since the fighting in Sicily, BBC reports that played up British military accomplishments at the expense of American efforts had annoyed Clark. (Butcher recorded a conversation in his diary in which Clark disparaged the British as soldiers. "He said that the British were bolder than the Americans but were not so adept at maneuver," Butcher wrote. Clark believed that the British were prone to run straight at a machine gun nest instead of approaching "from all possible directions like Indians," as the

¹¹⁸ NARA, Fifth Army Papers, RG 407, Box 1620, Fifth Army History, Part V, 1 April – 4 June 1944, 165; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 3.

¹¹⁹ Warren F. Kimball ed., *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, Vol. III: Alliance Declining*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 167; Michael Craster, "Cunningham, Ritchie, and Leese," from John Keegan, ed., *Churchill's Generals* (London: Cassell, 1991), 216-217.

Americans did). In any event, Clark sought to claim his stake early when it came to Rome, telling Wilson in January that the Fifth Army had earned the right to take the city after its many sacrifices and hardships in Italy. In further blending the army he commanded with his own ego and sense of mission, he told war correspondent C. L. Sulzberger that “you can tell the world just how Mark Clark took Rome.”¹²⁰

In mid-May the Allies launched Operation Diadem, which finally succeeded in cracking the German fortifications along the Gustav Line and allowed them access to the Liri Valley. The Fifth Army now commanded the II Corps under Keyes, the Free French Corps under Alphonse Juin, and the VI Corps at the Anzio beachhead under Truscott. Juin made significant gains on the American right, as Keyes dashed north to link up with Truscott’s corps. At the Berghof in Bavaria, Hitler tried to downplay the German disaster in Italy and commented on the Allied leadership. “The fact that they [the Allies in Italy] still have those big losses shows that they are poorly led,” he said to his generals. “The fact that they have to bring up their divisions so quickly also shows that they have big losses.” On 17 May 1944, Clark wrote to Marshall, reporting on the assault. “I am delighted with the five-day results of our Fifth Army attack,” he stated. “We have broken the Gustav Line in several places by attacking over mountains. We have penetrated to a distance of fourteen miles on both the II Corps and French Corps fronts.” He further noted that the Fifth Army had captured around 3,000 prisoners since the attack began, and he complimented Juin’s troops. “The French are fighting splendidly with our U.S. equipment. We will continue to make progress.” The VI Corps conducted its own breakout beginning on 23 May, and two days later elements from both Keyes and Truscott’s corps met at

¹²⁰ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 284; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 122; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 435; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 377.

Borgo Grappa. After four months and three days, the Anzio beachhead had merged with the general advance, and the VI Corps' territory became integrated into the wider Fifth Army front. The German Tenth Army retreated quickly from the Allied wave of steel that threatened to overwhelm it, and Alexander ordered Truscott to rush to Valmonte, thirty miles to the north in order to block Highway Six; with the VI Corps at Valmonte in strength, the Allies stood ready to trap the German Tenth Army. Alexander and Clark had agreed upon this course on 5 May.¹²¹

A Fifth Army G-2 report after the battle read that “from the very start of the spring offensive the German High Command had appreciated that our mission was not primarily the seizure of territory but rather the destruction of the German Armies in ITALY...” The report further noted that the German strategy necessitated that fixed geographic objectives were secondary to the conservation of forces. However, “thrift had turned out to be extravagance. The enemy had hoped to hold his ground. Failing that he preferred to trade ground for reserves.” The Germans recognized that their army was far more important to the overall strategic situation than Rome. Churchill, Alexander, Truscott, and others recognized this fact as well. Unfortunately, Mark Clark ultimately did not.¹²²

On 28 May, as the plan was coming to fruition, Churchill sent Alexander a message reminding him of the importance of destroying the enemy army. “At this distance it seems much more important to cut their line of retreat than anything else,” the prime minister wrote. He used the word “cop” to stop, arrest and destroy the German army. “A cop is much more important than Rome, which would anyhow come as its consequence. The cop is the one thing that

¹²¹ Peter Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell*, (London: Arrow Books. 2013), 278-279; Heiber, *Hitler and his Generals*, 436; NARA, Stimson Papers, RG 107, Box 10, Clark to Marshall. 17 May 1944.; Harold Alexander, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Alexander of Tunis* (London: Cassell, 1962), 185.

¹²² NARA, Fifth Army Papers, RG 407, Box 1636, Fifth Army Historical Summary G-2, June 1944-April 1945.

matters.” Churchill reinforced the point with a second message that same day. “The glory of this battle, already great, will be measured not by the capture of Rome or the juncture with the bridgehead, but by the number of German divisions cut off,” he affirmed. “I feel I ought to tell you that it is the cop that counts.”¹²³

A few days earlier, as Truscott made the preparations for the VI Corps breakout, Clark held a press conference in the cellar of the Borghese villa, his headquarters at the Anzio beachhead. There he told the assembled war correspondents that his mission was to “bottle up the main body of the Germany army,” and that the assault’s main target was not Rome. However, he stated, he was going to keep his plans flexible as events unfolded. Then, suddenly, he contradicted his earlier statements. “We’re going to take Rome,” he declared.¹²⁴

On 30 May, Clark wrote in his diary, “the British have their eye on Rome, notwithstanding Alexander’s constant assurance to me that Rome is in the sector of the Fifth Army.” He questioned Alexander’s boundary line between the Fifth Army and the Eighth Army, and the British potential routes for advance. “The Eighth Army has done little fighting,” he wrote. “It has lacked aggressiveness and failed in its part in this combined Allied effort.” He lamented that Alexander had denied his requests to change the boundary line further east, to protect his advance on Rome, since “the Eighth Army must participate in the battle for Rome.”¹²⁵

A few days earlier, shortly after the breakout of VI Corps, Clark had decided to alter his orders and push on toward Rome. On 25 May Truscott returned to his headquarters to find Fifth Army G-3 Don Brann waiting for him. “The boss wants you to leave the 3rd Infantry Division and the Special Force to block Highway 6,” Brann told him. Then, the operations officer

¹²³ Winston S. Churchill, *Closing the Ring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), 607.

¹²⁴ Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 537.

¹²⁵ USAHEC, Clark Papers, Box 1, Mark Clark Diary, 30 May 1944.

informed him that the bulk of his corps was to move northwest via the Alban Hills to push on Rome, a seemingly remote possibility that Clark had discussed with Truscott earlier. “I was dumbfounded,” the corps commander later wrote. “I protested that the conditions were not right.” Truscott and Clark had only agreed that the plan would be feasible if the Germans began withdrawing from the west, and there was no indication that that was the case. Further, the enemy only lightly held the Valmontone area. Truscott wrote that “we should pour our maximum power into the Valmontone Gap to insure the destruction of the retreating German army.” Truscott demanded that he speak with Clark before he agreed to change the plan, but Brann stated that the army commander could not communicate at that time. Both Ernest Harmon commanding the 1st Armored Division and John W. O’Daniel commanding the 3rd Division were angry at the change. Truscott wrote with a sense of bitter regret that “such was the order that turned the main effort of the beachhead forces from the Valmontone Gap and prevented the destruction of the German X Army.”¹²⁶

Clark commented in his memoir that just after the battle of Salerno back in September, Montgomery had visited his headquarters. The British general had asked Clark about his relationship with Alexander. Clark replied that he did not know him personally. “Well, I do,” said Montgomery. “From time to time you’ll get instructions from Alex that you won’t understand. When you do, just tell him to go to hell.” With the decision to place only the 3rd Infantry Division and smaller elements of other units at Valmontone, Clark appeared to do exactly that.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Lucian K. Truscott. *Command Missions: A Personal Story*, (Novato: Presidio, 1954), 375; Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino*, 379-380.

¹²⁷ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 173; Robert Katz, *The Battle for Rome: The Germans, the Allies, the Partisans, and the Pope, September 1943 – June 1944* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 300-301.

The army group commander only learned of Clark's change in his orders the following day from Gruenther. By then, too much time had passed to revert to the original plan.

Alexander initially seemed to offer approval when he said that he was fine with any move Clark chose that continued the Allied momentum. However, he then asked Clark's chief of staff, "I am sure the Army commander will continue to push toward Valmontone, won't he?"¹²⁸

Alexander later wrote that the VI Corps' role had been to cut the German troops off at Valmontone. "But for some inexplicable reason," he related, "General Clark's Anglo-American forces never reached their objective." On his own authority, Clark had shifted the direction of the main attack toward the Alban Hills and Rome. "If he had succeeded in carrying out my plan the disaster to the enemy would have been much greater," Alexander explained, and added that he had always clearly laid out the boundaries for the armies, and fully intended for Clark's Fifth Army to take Rome at the appropriate time. "I had always assured General Clark in conversation that Rome would be entered by his army; and I can only assume that the immediate lure of Rome for its publicity value persuaded him to switch the direction of his advance." Clark wrote in his diary that Alexander and his chief of staff, John Harding visited his headquarters on 2 June 1944. "They were quite meek," he observed, especially in light of the fact that Gruenther had warned him that Harding intended to be combative. He stated that Alexander appeared to approve of all of his decisions as he prepared to move on Rome. However, Harding was in fact quite irate with Clark during the encounter and noted that the discussion nearly came to blows. Clark even went so far as to tell his British guests that if the Eighth Army attempted to enter Rome first, he would

¹²⁸ Raleigh Trevelyan, *Rome '44: The Battle for the Eternal City* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 291-292; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 284.

order his troops to fire on them.¹²⁹

Kesselring believed the Allies had blundered in not concentrating on Valmontone, and conducted a skilled, fighting withdrawal of the Tenth Army. He declared Rome an open city and merged his units further north to continue the fighting. Tenth Army commander Vietinghoff later stated that “if the Allies, as in previous days, had directed their attack against Valmontone, the initially weak forces of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division would not have been able to prevent a breakthrough.” Not only would Rome have fallen, Vietinghoff asserted, but the Allies would have bottled up the two German armies. Certainly, Truscott believed this. He later wrote, “there has never been any doubt in my mind that had General Clark held loyally to General Alexander’s instructions, had he not changed the direction of my attack ... the strategic objectives of Anzio would have been accomplished in full,” he maintained after the war. “To be first in Rome was a poor compensation for this lost opportunity.”¹³⁰

Despite allowing so many German formations to escape, and despite the rank insubordination that threatened the very fabric of the Alliance, Alexander accepted Clark’s plan. The only other alternative was to relieve Clark on the spot, and with no direction from Wilson or Devers to do so, the political niceties of coalition warfare held. The Allies captured Rome on 4 June, a great symbolic victory for their cause, and two days later, Operation Overlord began in France. The Italian Campaign became a sideshow, and Allied policymakers and military leaders had more important matters to attend to than considering Mark Clark’s mixed record as

¹²⁹ Alexander. *Memoirs*, 127, 185; USAHEC, Clark Papers, Box 1, Clark Diary. 2 June 1944; Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, 303; Lloyd Clark, *Anzio: Italy and the Battle for Rome – 1944* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 316-317.

¹³⁰ Shelford Bidwell, “Kesselring,” from *Hitler’s Generals*, Correlli Barnett, ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 284-285; Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 402; Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino*, 279; Robin Neillands, *Eighth Army: The Triumphant Desert Army that Held the Axis at Bay from North Africa to the Alps, 1939-45* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004), 298-299.

commander of the Fifth Army.

Charles Clark and Rebecca Ezeziels welcomed Mark Wayne Clark into the world at Watertown, New York in 1896. Rebecca's father was an eastern European Jew who immigrated to the United States and eventually settled in Montana as a small businessman before serving as a representative in the state legislature. Clark's wife, Maurine "Renie" Doran Clark, later wrote about the peculiar circumstances of her husband's entrance into the United States Military Academy in 1913. "Mark Wayne Clark began his military career just about auspiciously as anyone could," she asserted with apparent pride. "A President of the United States helped get him his appointment to West Point." Clark's aunt, Zettie Marshall, (no relation to the Chief of Staff), happened to be a friend of Dudley Field Malone, then serving as the assistant secretary of state. At Zettie Marshall's urging, Malone prevailed upon Woodrow Wilson to intercede. A short time later a New York congressman made the appointment.¹³¹

At West Point, Clark struck up a friendship with Eisenhower, despite the fact that the future Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force was two years ahead of him. "Ike was a cadet officer of Wayne's company," Renie wrote later. "They got to know each other well during the summer encampment between Wayne's first and second years." Little did either know that their friendship would eventually lead to one of the Second World War's most profound working relationships. Clark graduated from West Point in April 1917 as a second lieutenant in the infantry, 110 out of a class of 139. Classmates that graduated alongside him included fellow future generals J. Lawton Collins and Matthew B. Ridgway. That same month the United States entered the First World War, and after a few Stateside postings and some time

¹³¹ Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 11-15; Mikolashek, *General Mark Clark*, 10; Maurine Clark, *Captain's Bride, General's Lady*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956), 38.

at hospitals to have his appendix and tonsils removed, the Army assigned Clark to the 11th Infantry Division. On 1 May 1918, he arrived in France as a captain. While leading a battalion the next month, enemy artillery severely wounded Clark in the Vosges, leading to several weeks of recovery in a hospital.¹³²

The Army then reassigned Clark to lighter duties and he served as the G-4 supply officer on the general staff of the United States First Army. On Christmas Day 1918, Clark's superiors promoted him to the wartime rank of major, citing the critical role he played in supplying the troops during the battle of St. Mihiel and during the Argonne-Meuse offensive. The recommendation board wrote that Clark was "very conscientious and energetic in the performance of his duties. The manner in which Captain Clark performed his work was shown in the satisfactory condition of food supply of all troops during the operation." Indeed, Clark was beginning to earn his reputation as a master planner and organizer. Colonel John L. DeWitt, a former fellow First Army general staff officer and future Second World War general, wrote to Clark a few weeks later. "I failed ... to express to you my appreciation of the work performed by you," he stated. "You have been on duty in the Supplies Branch of that Section since August 13, 1918, and during that period have shown yourself to be an energetic, conscientious and hardworking officer – fully alive to your responsibilities." He noted that Clark's promotion owed much to his outstanding performance in the G-4 role. "I want you to know that I fully appreciate the excellent work that you have done, and I desire to take this means of expressing to you my appreciation of it." Back in the States later that year, Clark's superior officer within the 49th Infantry Division, Major W. A. Rafferty, stated on Clark's efficiency report that he was "an

¹³² Clark, *Captain's Bride, General's Lady*, 70-71; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 18-19, 293-294; Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 103-104.

officer of initiative, good judgement and exceptional ability.”¹³³

After the war, Clark reverted to his permanent rank of captain. He served in several posts throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, including time spent at Fort Benning, Georgia, as the Post Exchange Officer at the Presidio, and as the Army advisor to the Indiana National Guard. While in Indiana, his commanding officer, Major General George Van Horn Mosely, described Clark as, “an especially efficient officer of good judgement. He is tall and thin and presents a smart appearance. Dignified and somewhat reserved. Has an unusual ability to impart his knowledge to others.” Clark married Renie in 1924 and two children followed. It was not until 1933 that he attained the permanent rank of major, and he soon enrolled in the Command and General Staff School in Kansas. Two years later he attended the War College. While a student there, he served on a committee that recommended the abandonment of the brigade level of command in the infantry division, a position that the War Department eventually adopted.¹³⁴

During this period, Clark had hoped to belatedly receive the Distinguished Service Medal for his efforts in France. Specifically, Clark believed his actions as the First Army G-4 warranted the honor, and he lobbied his former commanding officers for their help. DeWitt sent a letter to the Adjutant General of the Army Edgar T. Conley on Clark’s behalf. “I feel justified in again bringing the services of Major Clark to the attention of the War Department with the request that it receive consideration,” DeWitt wrote in 1936. “I erred in not recommending Major Clark for the Distinguished Service Medal immediately after the armistice ... and I desire now to correct an act of omission that justice may be done for services rendered.” Conley

¹³³ NPRC, Clark Papers, Recommendation of Board Convened under the provisions of letter from G.H.Q. 25 December 1918, DeWitt to Clark, 6 February 1919, Major W. A. Rafferty, efficiency report for Clark, 17 September 1919.

¹³⁴ Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 34-37; NPRC, Clark Papers, Major General George Van Horn Mosely, efficiency report for Clark., 10 June. 1933.

received a similar request a few weeks later from Major General Frank C. Bolles, another Clark patron. The adjutant general responded to Bolles in the negative, citing the fact that the cutoff date for such an award was ten years after the act which merited it. He wrote, “inasmuch as the records fail to show that any recommendation in behalf of Major Clark was pending before the Department on May 26, 1928, it is regretted that his case is precluded by law from consideration...” However, Clark was not finished. Displaying the same sense of ambition and tenacity that later marked his drive for Rome, Clark again lobbied DeWitt for help in the matter. “I recently saw where a new decoration board was appointed in Washington,” he wrote to DeWitt in 1938, twenty years after his service in the Great War. “I am wondering if there is anything which you feel might be done at this time.” Again, the effort came to nothing.¹³⁵

Upon completion of his studies at the War College, the War Department assigned Clark to the 3rd Division at Ft. Lewis in Washington, and he served in various staff positions during his time there. “Fort Lewis itself was a gay place in which to serve,” Rennie wrote years later, “even though Wayne was being loaded down with increasingly heavy duties.” While at Ft. Lewis, Clark renewed his old friendship with Eisenhower, and made a considerable impression upon other important officers as well. Clark’s commanding officer at the time, Colonel Francis W. Clark, gave him a glowing report. “An alert energetic affable officer markedly efficient in all his work,” the superior Clark wrote. “The results of his efforts are outstanding. Intensely interested in his profession and a fine tactician of exceptional high all round professional attainments. This officer will go far in the Army.” Almost certainly, Clark had crossed paths with Marshall at some point during the First World War, but it was at this time that the two firmly entered each

¹³⁵ NPRC, Clark Papers, DeWitt to Conley, 21 February 1936, Conley to Bolles, 3 April 1936, Clark to DeWitt, 16 January 1938.

other's orbit. Marshall had been serving with the 3rd Division at Vancouver Barracks, close to Portland, Oregon, and took an interest in the younger staff officer's work. The two men began a professional relationship and commenced a correspondence about their military ideas.¹³⁶

In November 1938, Clark wrote to Marshall about upcoming maneuvers for the division and lamented the limited space with which he had to work, and the possibility that the division would need funds in order to rent land. Marshall replied back and suggested that they find a way to conduct the maneuvers in a national forest. "Motorized as most of your Lewis crowd is," he wrote, "is there not some Government land convenient for such a concentration." Marshall requested that Clark not mention his suggestion to General Sweeney, the division's commander. "It is for your eyes only. I am merely interested in the possibilities of getting off the home grounds and doing things on a more warlike basis."¹³⁷

Shortly after war broke out in Europe, Clark received an important assignment while serving as the division's G-3 operations officer. Clark was responsible for planning the United States Army's first ever large-scale modern amphibious maneuver. The exercise took place at Monterey, California, in January 1940. Clark organized the division's embarkation in Washington and transportation by sea to California before wartime Army engineers had created specialized equipment. The maneuver succeeded as planned and impressed Marshall, now Chief of Staff. Perhaps just as importantly, Major General Leslie J. McNair took an interest in the young officer in charge of the exercise, and the two also struck up a correspondence. Rennie later noted that McNair, "wrote Wayne many letters, and although the two men never had met before,

¹³⁶ Clark, *Captain's Bride, General's Lady*, 69; NPRC, Clark Papers, Colonel Francis W. Clark, efficiency report for Clark, 30 June 1939; Carl W. McCardle, "These Are the Generals – Clark," 92; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 36-37.

¹³⁷ Larry I Bland and Sharon Ritenour Stevens, eds., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume I: "The Soldierly Spirit," December 1880 – June 1939* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1991), 650.

they became good friends.” The 3rd Division commander, Major General Walter C. Sweeney, lauded Clark’s performance in a June 1940 letter. He wrote, “you performed your duties as AC of S, G-3 for the Division in a superior manner and demonstrated exceptional understanding in the complicated problem of training the troops and preparing them for ... landing on hostile shore.”¹³⁸

Clark’s role in the amphibious maneuver proved a critical step in his career. Marshall promoted him to Lieutenant Colonel in the summer of 1940 and ordered him to report as an instructor at the War College. However, the Chief of staff expressed concern for Clark’s career since he had “only three months of actual duty with troops since 1920,” and offered to send him to any other assignment he wished where he could correct this deficit. As he was preparing to leave Ft. Lewis, he received expressions of gratitude from fellow officers and local leaders. Brigadier General Robert Eichelberger thanked him for his work on the 3rd Infantry staff. “Your courteous and efficient help in solving our many training and administrative problems has been most gratefully received,” he wrote. “Among the many well qualified general staff officers with whom I have served, I consider you have had no superiors and few equals.” E.T. Smith, the president of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, expressed regret that Clark was leaving the area. “The impression he has made on this community through his public relations work has been so outstanding that he is deserving of the highest commendation,” he affirmed. “His has been a difficult role, meeting and dealing with the public, but we hear nothing but praise for him.” With sadness, Clark left the 3rd Division, but before he arrived in Washington, he received new orders. The War College was closing to free more personnel to meet the needs of the

¹³⁸ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 10-12; Clark, *Captain’s Bride, General’s Lady*, 69; NPRC, Clark Papers, Sweeney to Clark, 17 June 1940.

expanding Army. Clark's new assignment was with McNair, who served as chief of staff to Marshall in the newly created General Headquarters of the Army (GHQ).¹³⁹

As a member of McNair's staff responsible for troop training, Clark was constantly busy, travelling over 60,000 miles throughout the country within the first year of his GHQ assignment. With Marshall overseeing the political aspects of preparing the Army for war, McNair's job was to help prepare the Army's organizational infrastructure for wartime. Marshall mentioned his reliance upon McNair and his organization at this time to Lt. General Charles D. Herron, head of the Hawaiian Army command. "McNair has taken a tremendous load off my shoulders but is having a pretty hard time himself," the Chief of Staff wrote. "He has a ten-passenger plane and he and his staff are on the go almost constantly." With regard to troop training, Marshall relied heavily on Clark, and the younger officer proved essential in developing a streamlined approach. Marshall said, "I gave the dilemma to General Clark and he gave me the answer." McNair, who had come up through the artillery, suffered hearing loss and frequently delegated authority to Clark to attend meetings in his name. McNair's reliance on the younger officer for such meetings undoubtedly contributed to Clark's rise in visibility and status among the Army leadership. Clark received a promotion to brigadier general in the summer of 1941, leaping the rank of colonel altogether, and soon thereafter McNair officially appointed him his deputy. The entry for Clark on the GHQ Director's staff list read, "Clark, Mark W., Brig. Gen., Deputy Director, Room Number: C-701, Quarters C-11."¹⁴⁰

While at GHQ, soon rebranded Army Ground Forces, Clark's importance within the

¹³⁹ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 2, 160; NPRC, Clark Papers, Robert Eichelberger to Clark, 13 May 1940; NPRC, E. T. Smith to Clark, 19 June 1940; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 47-50.

¹⁴⁰ McCardle, "These Are the Generals – Clark," 93-94; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol 2. 345; Calhoun, *General Lesley J. McNair*, 220-221; NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 6, GHQ Director Staff List.

Army continued to grow. Eisenhower, while still with the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington, feared he might miss out on a combat role in the coming war as he did in the First World War. Patton wrote to him in October 1940, telling him that he expected to get command of an armored division. “If I do,” Patton confided, “I shall ask for you either as Chief of Staff ... or as a regimental commander.” The news elated Eisenhower, and he quickly dashed off a letter to his old friend Clark. As one of McNair’s staff officers, Clark had influence with the Chief of Infantry, and Eisenhower hoped that if Patton called for him, the GHQ staff officer could help to approve the transfer.¹⁴¹

As the officer responsible for troop training, Clark played a significant role in the GHQ maneuvers in late 1941. McNair had told his staff that “maneuvers are the highest form of training,” and now he, Clark, and less than 100 officers and men on the GHQ staff planned the war games and created the umpire manual that dictated the rules for the roughly three dozen umpires attached to most divisions. The maneuvers took place in Louisiana in September and in the Carolinas in November. Each location saw two phases, and after each phase Clark organized the critique that followed. After the first phase in Louisiana, Clark outlined the itinerary. “I will orient you on initial dispositions,” Clark wrote in a memorandum to those attending. “Following that, the Army commanders, General Lear and General Krueger, in the order named, will discuss the actions of their respective armies.” A report on the air forces would follow, and then the participants would take a ten-minute break. General McNair concluded the critique with comments using a slide show presentation.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Eisenhower, Dwight D., *At Ease: Stories I tell to Friends* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 237-238; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 15.

¹⁴² NARA. Army Ground Forces, RG 337, Box 1, Harry J. Malony, Radio Broadcast Interview, 15 November 1941; Gabel, *GHQ Maneuvers*, 44-45, 59; NARA, Army Ground Forces, RG 337, Box 6, Critique of 1st Phase, GHQ-Directed Maneuver, Camp Polk, LA. 14-19 September 1941, Brig. Gen. M. W. Clark, GSC, Deputy Director.

The maneuvers pleased Marshall. In a letter to Henry H. Woodring, the former Secretary of War, he wrote that the Louisiana maneuvers “were really a great success and to me very impressive.” He particularly appreciated the scope of the war games, which included nearly half a million men and 600 aircraft. “The war picture was very realistic. Apparently, we have mastered the technique of supply, of providing replacements in the field, of evacuating the sick, prisoners, etc., and of handling large organizations with facility.” The maneuvers likewise impressed Secretary of War Stimson. Shortly after the end of the Carolina maneuvers, Major Eugene L. Harrison, an officer attached to Stimson, wrote to Clark. He commented, “the Secretary was much pleased with the trip to the maneuvers and was very sorry that he did not have an opportunity to stay longer.” Clark responded, and noted that he and the GHQ staff enjoyed Stimson’s visit as well. He had also sent the Secretary slides and a report on the Critique.¹⁴³

Marshall had managed to attend the maneuvers briefly, and one night, he dined alone with Clark. The Chief of Staff remarked that he was going to make some changes to key personnel in Washington and was looking for a new operations division chief for the general staff. Marshall asked Clark to suggest ten officers for the role. “I’ll be glad to do that,” Clark responded, “but there would be only one name on the list. If you have to have ten names, I’ll just put nine ditto marks below it.” Clark chose the newly minted Brigadier General Eisenhower. Marshall commented that he knew Eisenhower only through reputation, but quickly assigned the officer to the general staff position and promoted him again to major general. Clark’s strong endorsement of Eisenhower was in sharp contrast to that of his superior, McNair.

¹⁴³ Bland, *Marshall Papers Vol 2*, 633-634; NARA, Henry Stimson Papers, RG 107, Box 6, Harrison to Clark, 25 November 1941, Clark to Harrison, 27 November 1941.

Despite Eisenhower's strong showing as a staff officer during the Louisiana maneuvers, the chief of Army Ground Forces had listed him dead last on a list of seven officers for potential division command. Given his close relationship with Clark, Eisenhower almost certainly knew whom he had to thank for his new position.¹⁴⁴

War broke out on 7 December 1941, and the pace of Army expansion dramatically increased. These factors kept McNair's staff busy and by the spring of 1942 the Army promoted Clark to Major General and he received the title of Chief of Staff, Army Ground Forces. Eisenhower and Clark began working closely together and made several recommendations to Marshall including sending II Corps (then commanded by Fredendall) to England to form the nucleus of the American military presence in Europe. Eisenhower continued to appreciate Clark's influence in personnel matters. He wrote to one officer desiring a transfer that he had "mentioned your name to General Clark ... and he has told me two or three times that you are definitely set up for another job."¹⁴⁵

Marshall soon dispatched Eisenhower and Clark to London to inspect the American mission there and lay the groundwork for the U.S. Army buildup in Britain. After their initial visit, the Chief of Staff ordered them to return to London and continue the work. Marshall's intention was to put an Anglo-American force on the continent as soon as practicable. It was for this end that he gave Clark his second star. Marshall intended for Clark to command the II Corps when it arrived in England because of his extensive experience with troop training. Given Clark's lack of experience in leading troops, especially during the GHQ Maneuvers, it is doubtful that Marshall intended him to command the force in any cross-Channel invasion in

¹⁴⁴ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 16; D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, 282.

¹⁴⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. I*, 267, 2990.

1942, but he certainly had confidence in the officer's ability to get the II Corps into fighting shape. Marshall wrote to Admiral Harold Stark that he was sending Clark "to command the Army Corps Headquarters which will do the ground planning in the south of England." As mentioned earlier, Clark later stated that he "almost fell out of my chair" when Marshall told him of the assignment. The Chief of Staff also felt the need to write to Fredendall, explaining why he had chosen the junior officer to take his command. "It became evident that Clark could better serve our purpose because of his intimate knowledge of the various factors involved," Marshall wrote. "I found that he made an immense impression in England and inspired great confidence." A few months later, Patton noted in his diary that Eisenhower had sidelined Fredendall because "Clark made a big impression on the Prime Minister."¹⁴⁶

The British did indeed initially take to Clark. Churchill recalled in his memoirs his first meeting with Eisenhower and Clark. "I was immediately impressed by these remarkable but hitherto unknown men," he wrote. "We had a most agreeable discussion, lasting over an hour." The conversation focused mostly on the proposed cross-Channel invasion, and Churchill came to believe that the two American generals would play big roles in the war. "Thus began a friendship which across all the ups and downs of war I have preserved with deep satisfaction to this day." Later that summer, Alanbrooke noted his fondness for Clark in his diary. "I like Clark," he recorded. "He is a most charming personality." He also continued to impress McNair, who named him in the top five out of 115 general officers known to him. He wrote that

¹⁴⁶ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 220, 240, 264; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 19; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 92-93.

Clark, “has everything – personality, poise, brilliant executive, sound thinker, splendid judgement.”¹⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly, Eisenhower too maintained a high opinion of Clark as they began their duties in England. Harry Butcher noted in his diary that Eisenhower described Clark as “one of the really coming officers of the American Army.” Eisenhower had recommended Clark for the command of II Corps, and his friend had not disappointed. He wrote to Marshall that “General Clark has already gotten into the full swing in his problem of establishing a headquarters and planning the initial stages of the assault.” In the event of imminent Soviet collapse, the Americans prepared for an immediate cross-Channel assault. Eisenhower wrote to Butcher that “if that decision is to attack, we intended to do our utmost to have ready a small corps under Clark, comprising two divisions and auxiliary troops with the armored division in reserve.” Giving Clark a combat command in a theoretical assault at this point made sense. The U.S. Army had not yet engaged the Germans anywhere, and no American unit commanders had any combat experience in the current war. Further, Clark was on the spot and understood the organizational and logistical constraints such a force would be under.¹⁴⁸

In August 1942, Eisenhower assigned Clark to be his deputy in addition to his other duties and remained enthusiastic in his praise for him. “He is on the ball every minute,” Eisenhower wrote to Marshall, “and his splendid organizational sense, his fine personality and his realism all combine to make him an officer who grows steadily in my esteem and admiration.” Further, he stated that “I know of no one upon whom you can depend with greater

¹⁴⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 384-385; Danchev, *Alanbrooke Diaries*, 322; NPRC, Clark Papers, McNair, efficiency report for Clark, 14 June 1942.

¹⁴⁸ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 14; Robert H. Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 62; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers Vol. I*, 405-406.

confidence and assurance, no matter to what post you may eventually raise him.” Butcher remarked in his diary on Clark’s energy and optimism. “How Clark keeps his good humor, I don’t know,” he wrote. “At the moment, he’s taking a tremendous load off Ike’s shoulders.” Eisenhower continued his compliments toward Clark in a letter recommending him for the Legion of Merit to the War Department Decorations Board. “His unusual military judgement, common sense, devotion to duty and loyal services have been of inestimable value to the Theater command,” he asserted. Clark received the award. However, not everyone celebrated Clark’s rise. George Patton, perhaps with a note of professional jealousy, wrote to his wife that he disapproved of Clark’s elevation to deputy Supreme Commander. “I doubt the wisdom of it,” he complained. “He may be too intrusive.” A few days later he noted in his diary that he had had a drink with Clark. “I do not trust him yet, but he improves on acquaintance.” The next month he recorded that “as far as I’m concerned, General Clark has explained nothing. He seems to me more preoccupied with bettering his own future than in winning the war.”¹⁴⁹

After Roosevelt and Churchill had decided to invade North Africa before the end of 1942, it fell to Eisenhower and Clark to prepare much of the operation. In September, amid planning, the prime minister suggested to the president that either Eisenhower or Clark should inspect naval facilities with Admiral Bertram Ramsay and Lord Mountbatten. Roosevelt, keenly aware of the constraints on the officers’ time and trusting their judgement, responded. “I do not see advantage of Eisenhower or Clark coming over at this time,” he wrote to Churchill. “I know they have heavy pressing responsibilities in organizing slowly-arriving American forces and I am sure we have a full understanding of their viewpoint.” Roosevelt even began to use Churchill’s

¹⁴⁹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. I*, 456, 478; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 78; NPRC, Clark Papers, Eisenhower to War Department Decorations Board, 11 August 1942; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 83-84.

nickname for Clark in correspondence, “the American Eagle.” Clearly, as the first major coalition offensive of the war was taking shape, both leaders valued Clark’s time and abilities.¹⁵⁰

By this point, Marshall was ready to consider Clark for command of the Center Task Force for Operation Torch, although he left it to Eisenhower’s discretion. In the 26 September letter Marshall sent to Eisenhower in which he rejected Hartle for the command, he implied that he would accept Clark for the “key operation,” although he promised to send one of a host of other officers if Eisenhower preferred. Clark had returned to Washington at this time to confer with Marshall, and the two men had discussed several points relating to the upcoming invasion. Marshall expressed to him his uneasiness about placing Hartle in the command, and trusted Clark to relay his concerns to Eisenhower. Clark also met with Patton in his office in the munitions building, and after a briefing with Stimson, the Secretary of War told him, “God bless you, my boy. We’re all anxiously waiting.”¹⁵¹

Eisenhower wrote back to Marshall at the beginning of October explaining his reasons for denying Clark the command. “As long as only two attacks were contemplated, I was content to [let Clark command the Center Task Force],” he wrote. “Now, however, it is a different story. I foresee a very probable and urgent need for a Deputy during the early weeks before consolidation and reorganization can take place.” Eisenhower anticipated the necessary political meetings with French officials prior to the invasion, and the need for a high-ranking American officer to conduct them. Further, he feared that in the event something happened to him, Clark could assume the supreme command. “The purpose of the Deputy is to take instantaneous command, without any further governmental action, in the event that the commander should

¹⁵⁰ Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt: Alliance Emerging*, 589-590, 614.

¹⁵¹ Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 3*, 367-368; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 52-53.

become a casualty, either temporary or permanent.” Eisenhower wondered if the War Department should promote Clark to lieutenant general on the day that the invasion began, ensuring that he had the necessary standing in the Army for such a large assignment. “It might be extremely awkward for Clark to attempt to do this unless he were then a grade higher than at present.”¹⁵²

Clark had wanted the command. Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower’s chief of staff, agreed that Clark should lead the Center Task Force, and noted that there was no precedent for the deputy role in American military history. Further, Smith believed that Eisenhower “should always be one rank above his deputy or any other American officer in this theater.” Regardless of Clark and Smith’s views, Eisenhower decided to keep Clark close to him. In nearly a quarter century, Clark had spent a mere handful of months commanding troops. Staff jobs and stints at service schools had almost entirely composed his career since the First World War. Despite Eisenhower’s ultimate decision to keep him on as his deputy, both he and Marshall had seriously considered him for command of the entire American effort in the African theater, albeit as a contingency.¹⁵³

In mid-October, intelligence arrived from American diplomat Robert D. Murphy, then in French North Africa. He had indicated that some Vichy French leaders were possibly interested in cooperation with American forces, and Eisenhower could not ignore the potential for a bloodless invasion. Eisenhower even contemplated naming French General Henri Giraud or French Admiral François Darlan as his deputy, in order to win their trust. Such a move would free Clark to organize the American Fifth Army. In any event, Clark volunteered to meet with

¹⁵² Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. I, 591-592.

¹⁵³ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 113.

the French leaders near Algiers and preparations were soon under way to send him to North Africa. Butcher noted Clark's qualifications for the adventure in his diary. He wrote, "Clark is thoroughly familiar with the whole operation, has the appropriate rank, and, in fact has planned most of the detail under policies and decisions laid down by Ike." He also commented on Clark's attitude toward the mission. "Clark was as happy as a boy with a new knife." Butcher noted Eisenhower's unease at having to send his right-hand man. "He is a close friend of twenty-five years' standing, and if anything should happen to him Ike would be desperate." Indeed, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall a few days later that "I will be somewhat worried until General Clark has gotten back." Still, he believed the potential rewards were worth the risks. "I am most hopeful as to the results of General Clark's mission."¹⁵⁴

Clark flew in a B-17 to Gibraltar and there boarded the *HMS Seraph*, a British submarine. After waiting a day and a half off the coast of Algiers, the French delegation signaled that they were ready, and Clark's party rowed small foldboats to the shore. The talks took place in a farmhouse between the Americans and French General Charles Mast and his staff. Murphy also attended the meeting. At one point a police patrol showed up, forcing Clark and his men to hide in the cellar. One of his men began a coughing fit, and Clark gave him the chewing gum out of his own mouth to quiet him. Clark believed that Mast would support the American invasion forces when they landed and decided that his mission was a success. After the sun set, Clark and his men prepared to leave. Strong winds were blowing high waves in the sea, and the Americans stripped down to their underwear in the hopes of keeping their clothes dry. The foldboat tossed and turned, and the waves threw Clark's clothes into the sea, as well as a significant amount of

¹⁵⁴ James Holland, *The Allies Strike Back, 1941-1943: The War in the West* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017), 395-397; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. I*, 623, 627-628; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 146.

money he was carrying for the mission. He had to return to shore and to the house to beg for clothes. Clark told the story to Eisenhower on his return a few days later, and the Supreme Commander interrupted Clark midway to tell him that he intended to recommend him for the Distinguished Service Medal for the adventure. “Clark had merely grinned and gone on with his story,” Butcher noted in his diary. Eisenhower further recommended that Clark should write up his tale and try to get it published, guessing it would be worth \$1,000.¹⁵⁵

“As I have anticipated,” Eisenhower reported to Marshall, “the trip made by General Clark was crowded with personal risk to the entire party.” He told the Chief of Staff of his intention to recommend Clark for the Distinguished Service Medal, and other awards for members of Clark’s party. A few days later, Eisenhower considered the value of the mission. “There is no question that General Clark’s visit to North Africa did much good,” he wrote to Marshall, “even if it resulted in nothing more than the acquisition of a lot of information.” Eisenhower released the full story to the press a few days later, much to Marshall’s displeasure. “There was more about the loss of his pants and of his money than there was of the serious phase of the matter,” the Chief of Staff wrote. Marshall feared that the disclosure of the fact that Clark was carrying a large sum of money would lead to the assumption that the U.S. Army had attempted to bribe French officials and undermine America’s moral credibility. “I do not object to bribery if that is what it was,” he explained, but he feared that the Germans could use it as a propaganda tool against any Frenchman, claiming that the Americans had bribed him. Marshall further noted that the story disturbed Stimson, especially since they were preparing to act on Eisenhower’s recommendation and promote Clark to lieutenant general.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 71-72; Holland, *The Allies Strike Back*, 412-413; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 156.

¹⁵⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. I*, 637, 639; Bland, *Marshall Papers Vol. 3*, 445.

On 8 November the Torch landings commenced; American ground units were now in the war against the European Axis, and within days, Clark was in Algiers deep in talks with the local French authorities. Darlan, whom Clark later described as “a little man with watery blue eyes and petulant lips,” led the French delegation, but dithered when Clark pressed for a cease fire. They insisted on receiving instructions from Vichy. Eisenhower later wrote that “in dealing with French soldiers and officials General Clark quickly ran afoul of the traditional French demand for a cloak of legality over any action they might take. This was a fetish with the military.” Although the Allies viewed Darlan as a collaborator with the Germans, he was the only military officer who commanded enough respect to potentially end the fighting and order French forces to resist the Germans in Tunisia. The French continued to dither, and Clark kept pressing for them to resist the Germans before they entered Tunisia from the east.¹⁵⁷

Eisenhower, who had been encouraging Marshall to promote Clark as soon as possible, (“I would like to have him senior to any other of my American Army subordinates,” he wrote), supported Clark’s efforts fully, and made arrangements to take part in the negotiations himself. “Naturally, I approve of everything you have done,” he reassured Clark after his visit. “My only purpose in coming down was to bring up the last pieces of ammunition we had and simply lay down the law with a bit of table pounding.” During the visit Eisenhower had pinned Clark’s third star to his lapel, although Clark removed it after his superior left, preferring to wait until official confirmation had arrived. Eisenhower let him know that he was ready to return if Clark needed him, and also commented on Clark’s imminent promotion. “Your nomination is going to the senate this afternoon... I expect prompt confirmation and believe that by Friday or Saturday you can pin your third star. You know how delighted I am about this.” Shortly before the

¹⁵⁷ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 89-90; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 100-101; Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 105.

landing Patton had railed against Clark and his earlier meeting with Mast. “It looks from the radio as if Clark has told [the French] D-day and H-Hour. The fool.” His private feelings did not stop him from sending him a complimentary letter when his promotion went through. “Please accept my sincere congratulations on your promotion,” he wrote, “and also on the magnificent work you have been doing in connection with this operation.” President Roosevelt also sent a letter of congratulations to Eisenhower for the job he had Clark had done. “I want to add on a personal note to you and Clark to tell you what great confidence [Roosevelt and Churchill] have in both of you and how satisfied we are with the progress of events.”¹⁵⁸

Eventually, the Allies reached an agreement with the French and the latter’s forces in Tunisia resisted the German advances. The diplomatic mission had exhausted Clark. He wrote to Eisenhower on 22 November. “I know the hell you have been taking [in Gibraltar],” he wrote. “But don’t think I haven’t had my share of it here. I have never gone through ten days like this before in my life.” For his efforts in connection with Operation Torch, Clark received the Distinguished Service Medal on 4 December. Marshall wrote in the citation that Clark “carried out a vitally important and hazardous mission to Algiers by submarine and conducted with conspicuous success important negotiations with French officials.” Critically, Marshall cited his “outstanding characteristics of leadership and sound judgement.” Rumor that Clark was going to receive the award had been spreading since his mission, and on 27 November Patton wrote to his wife that the new lieutenant general was going to get the award “for riding on a sub-marine.” With little graciousness of spirit, Patton added, “I don’t believe it but still it is not pleasant.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 690, 698-699; Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 107; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 98, 119; Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt: Alliance Forged*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Blumenson, *Mark Clark*, 108-109; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 3*, 448; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 130.

Marshall authorized the creation of the Fifth Army on 2 December, informing Eisenhower by cable that day. Clark had lobbied Eisenhower some time for the command of a field army and now he finally had his wish. Eisenhower discussed his reasons for Clark's selection in a letter to Butcher. "Clark is an unusual individual," he began, "and is particularly strong in his organizational ability and orderliness of mind. Unfortunately, I have not yet seen him in a position where he has had to carry the responsibility directly on his own shoulders." Despite Clark's lack of command experience, Eisenhower was optimistic. "But there seems to be no reason why he should not measure up in this respect." He noted that Clark had "begged and pleaded" for the command for some time, but in the coming months his mission would play to his primary strengths, "organization and training and in these fields, I think Clark has no superior." Clark finally had something he had always wanted, the command of a field army. A horrified Patton wrote to his wife the day after Clark's new appointment, "the Fifth Army under Clark ... makes me mad but there is nothing that can be done about it." A few days later Patton noted in his diary that neither Eisenhower nor Clark had been to the front and lamented their "lack of decision." They were, "too damned slick, especially Clark."¹⁶⁰

Clark activated the United States Fifth Army on 5 January 1943 and selected Oujda in northeastern Morocco as its headquarters. He told his men he chose Oujda because of its airfield, road and railroad lines, and, tongue-in-cheek because there were no politicians there. He also made sure to thank Eisenhower for the appointment in a letter. "I want to tell you how deeply I appreciate all you have done for me," he began. "You have brought about all the success that has come to me during the past few months." At the same time, Eisenhower was

¹⁶⁰ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers Vol. II*, 825; Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 84; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 133, 138.

filling out Clark's efficiency report and named him three on a list of 17 generals of the same grade. He stated that Clark was "vigorous, energetic, ambitious, imaginative, and well informed."¹⁶¹

The same day that Marshall wrote the DSM citation for Clark, he sent a letter to Eisenhower noting that Churchill expressed concern that he would be out of the loop since Smith was leaving London to join Eisenhower in the Mediterranean. "Smith and I later discussed the possibility of your having Clark proceed with the organization of the Fifth Army," he wrote, "and then return to London leaving Fredendall in temporary command." Essentially, Marshall hoped that Clark would be able to both organize the new army and act as Eisenhower's liaison with Churchill in London at the same time. Eisenhower flatly rejected the idea the next day. "I realize importance of keeping Prime Minister informed on tangled and constantly changing political and military situation," he explained. "I can not repeat can not concur at this time in solution that requires frequent presence of Clark in London." Eisenhower stressed that the organization of Fifth Army had to take priority as the Allies could require it to enter the field at any time. "Clark most suitable for this task because of organizational, training, and planning qualifications, and knowledge of a broad situation." Additionally, Eisenhower noted that another emergency could occur and at any time and he may need Clark's special skills. Churchill's offer flattered Clark, but he preferred staying with the troops. "I don't want this politico-military liaison job with the Prime Minister," he confided to his diary, "but I am pleased that I have been asked to take it."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 123; Mikolashek, *General Mark Clark*, 44; NPRC, Clark Papers, Eisenhower, efficiency report for Clark, 4 January 1943.

¹⁶² Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3. 464; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 800; Mikolashek, *General Mark Clark*, 42.

Clark's relationship with Eisenhower and apparent gratitude toward him for the Fifth Army command did not stop him from complaining about his superior vocally to his fellow officers once he settled in Oujda. Indeed, Clark's ambitions and arrogance were becoming more apparent. Patton recorded in his diary an incident when Clark visited his command in early January 1943. "Clark arrived ... I met him and had a guard of honor ... took him on inspection of all local troops and installations. He was not in the least interested. His whole mind is on Clark." The two generals went back to Patton's lodgings and for an hour Clark "spent his time cutting Ike's throat. And Ike, poor fool, sent him here." Patton commented in his diary that Major General Albert W. Kenner, the chief medical officer for Operation Torch, called Clark an "S.O.B." A few days later, when Roosevelt visited North Africa for his conference with Churchill, Clark allowed Patton to ride with the president. Patton wrote in his diary that "Clark is trying to be nice but it makes my flesh creep to be near him."¹⁶³

However, Clark's bad attitude began even before the army command appointment. In May 1944 Eisenhower commented on Clark's poor demeanor in his diary. At the same time that Clark's Fifth Army finally pushed through the Gustav Line and linked up with the Anzio beachhead, the Supreme Commander wrote, "I am reminded of the attitude of that headquarters a year ago this spring, which illustrates not only the shortsidedness of the average human but the intense personal outlook that most officers have upon even such a critical thing as war." He remembered that Clark had been "very anxious to have [the Fifth Army command] instead of his then title of deputy commander in chief." Eisenhower had told him that the Fifth Army would be a training organization for the foreseeable future. Further, if Clark remained on Eisenhower's staff then he would almost certainly see front-line duty much quicker. Eisenhower had in fact

¹⁶³ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 150, 157.

offered II Corps to Clark before Fredendall, “but the title of army commander was too attractive.” Shortly after Clark took up his command with Fifth Army, he and a few of his staff officers began to “plague me as to their future.” Clark was afraid that the war in the Mediterranean would be over before the Fifth Army got a chance to get in on the fighting. Eisenhower had to reassure Clark and his staff that they would indeed get their chance before the Mediterranean conflict ended and insisted that he intended to use them at some point. “Nevertheless,” he wrote, “they were most unhappy throughout the whole spring, and I had to make special efforts to keep up their morale.”¹⁶⁴

Eisenhower also explained to Clark that the Fifth Army needed to remain in Morocco for a while since Spain remained something of a wild card. Hitler had supported the Iberian nation’s regime during its civil war in the 1930s, and there remained a threat, however remote, that the nation’s fascist government might enter the war alongside the Axis and endanger the Allied supply lines to the Mediterranean. Clark appeared to accept the argument, but in fact remained frustrated that his command could not take part in the fighting in Tunisia. If he had followed Eisenhower’s advice, he could have commanded a corps and been in the thick of it. Clark’s attitude became such an issue that by the end of January Eisenhower decided to finally do something about it. At Allied headquarters in Algiers, the Supreme Commander discussed the matter bluntly with Clark.¹⁶⁵

In order to “keep up their morale,” Eisenhower reassured Clark in March that the Fifth Army would soon get into the action. “Please don’t forget that the day of the Fifth Army Headquarters is coming,” he wrote to Clark. “This war is not going to be won until we are in the

¹⁶⁴ Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 116.

¹⁶⁵ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 68-69.

heart of Europe, and the Fifth Army is going to be in that organization just as sure as fate.” He sympathized that the work Clark was doing at the time lacked excitement compared to the front-line generals but reminded him of the importance of his mission. He concluded with a note of personal warmth. “It is always fun to get a letter from you,” he wrote, “so write to me whenever you have the notion.”¹⁶⁶

The backbiting against Eisenhower did not stop. Patton delighted in Clark’s frustration, and his schadenfreude contains an element of truth. He wrote to his wife in May that “Wayne was given a chance to take Lloyd Fredendall’s place in the beginning but refused to go in as a corps commander. Now he is about [next to] nothing, and I think he knows it.” In another letter Patton wrote “now Clark commands a hypothesis.” He noted that he and Clark had finally started to get along. “He is much chastened.” Still, he remained wary of Clark. “I think that if you treat a skunk nicely, he will not piss on you – as often.”¹⁶⁷

Patton was not the only officer that had reservations about Clark at this time. Shortly after Clark took command of Fifth Army, Alanbrooke remarked on the unsavory aspects of his character in his diary. Commenting on a report from General Sir Ian Jacob, the Chief of the Imperial General staff wrote, “Clark has been creating trouble. Very ambitious and unscrupulous...” Alanbrooke believed that Clark had been scheming to get the Fifth Army to the Tunisian front by sowing distrust between the French and British. “The news about Clark was a bit of an eye opener and quite unexpected,” he continued. “However, from everything I gathered, there was no doubt that he was trying to discredit the British in the eyes of the French in order to obtain for himself the command of the Tunisian Front.” Alanbrooke suspected that

¹⁶⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1062.

¹⁶⁷ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 233, 248, 252, 256, 258.

Eisenhower had been aware of Clark's disloyalty and plotting when he was his deputy, and that is why he sent him to command a reserve force in Morocco. "Through this action Ike greatly rose in my estimation."¹⁶⁸

A wartime profile described Clark at this time. "Mark Wayne Clark looks like a general," the article stated. "He is six feet two inches tall, weighs 190 pounds, and is fastidious about his perfectly tailored uniforms. He is solidly built, with strong shoulders; he has a lean face, deep brown eyes, and black hair, with a touch of gray at the temples." It drew a comparison between Clark and the Duke of Wellington by noting that both men had a big nose. "He is popular with the officers and enlisted men alike ... His subordinates know where they stand with him." The article commented on the fact that he did not smoke, did not drink coffee, but enjoyed Scotch-and-soda, going fishing, and playing poker, "seldom profitably."¹⁶⁹

Throughout this period, Clark continued his friendly relationship with one of his most valuable patrons, his former boss McNair. Shortly after taking command of the Fifth Army, Clark wrote to McNair, perhaps hoping that the head of Army Ground Forces had some pull with Eisenhower, "[I'm] trying to commence our organization with the hope that we may go into action as an American unit in the minimum possible time." He also championed the interests of his staff officers to McNair, in the hopes that they might get promoted, specifically two officers named Rooks and Tommy. McNair responded that he could make no promises regarding the promotions, and that in any event Eisenhower's recommendations would be decisive in the matter.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Danchev, *Alanbrooke Diaries*, 355-356.

¹⁶⁹ McCardle, "These Are the Generals – Clark," 89.

¹⁷⁰ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 9, Clark to McNair, 8 January 1943, McNair to Clark, 26 January 1943.

Clark also reported to McNair about the state of his new command. In March he wrote that “the Fifth Army has developed into more or less of a training organization, much to my regret.” He wrote this despite the fact that Eisenhower had told him that the Fifth Army’s chief mission for the foreseeable future was in fact training. He proceeded to detail the many instructional organizations that he had created for the Army, writing, “I have set up and am operating an Invasion Training Center under O’Daniel, an Airborne Center, a School for the Development of Technique in the Use of Land Mines and their Disposal, a Mountain Training Center soon to get under way and several other lesser institutions.” He lamented again the fact that the Fifth Army remained far from the front, again playing the nationalist card. “I deeply regret that the opportunity has not come to get an American Army into combat, supported by American Air Forces which are so eager to assist us.” He illustrated his readiness to move at a moment’s notice by recounting the fact that his forward echelon had been rehearsing setting up a command post over 500 miles away from his headquarters requiring fourteen C-47s to move equipment for thirty officers and forty men. “We will do that weekly until our camouflage and ability to move at night are automatic.”¹⁷¹

Assistant Secretary of State John J. McCloy visited Fifth Army headquarters in February 1943, and Clark briefed him on his negotiations with Vichy leaders and on the ongoing political situation in North Africa. “Clark was certainly an actor in the original scene,” McCloy wrote to McNair. “He had followed the political developments in Morocco very closely.” Clark told the diplomat that the men in his army were in great health generally, and the only problem was venereal disease. However, the problem was “much less there than it is anywhere else along the line.” Clark took credit for this, citing a “frigid control system that he has put into effect,” which

¹⁷¹ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 9, Clark to McNair, 18 March 1943.

included “an exclusive establishment for Americans and every man has to take his shot.” Clark ended the visit by requesting that McCloy help him procure replacement parts for his personal aircraft so that he would not “be wasting most of the day on the road.”¹⁷²

Clark continued to foster good relations with McNair, who still had considerable influence within the Army hierarchy. In April, McNair had visited the North African front. In a grim foreshadowing of his ultimate fate a year later, while inspecting the 1st Division on the front lines in Tunisia, enemy artillery fire wounded McNair. Clark had also been in Tunisia on a similar observation mission. “I eagerly took advantage of an opportunity to visit my old boss, whom I considered one of our greatest soldiers, at the Oran hospital,” Clark wrote in his memoirs. McNair noted in his diary that Clark sent his plane to pick him up after he left the hospital on 29 April. He recorded that “landed at Oujda momentarily, in order to see members of Clark’s staff. A very impressive guard of honor was present.”¹⁷³

By the summer of 1943, as the Allies planned operations for invading Sicily and Italy, Eisenhower contemplated the virtues and shortcomings of his subordinates. In considering Clark, he began by noting that “he is the best organizer, planner, and trainer of troops I have yet met in the American army.” He further explained that Clark thought “in an orderly and logical fashion” and was “energetic” in executing plans. Eisenhower remarked on his tendency to overwork himself. “While at one stage of the operations it seemed that he was becoming a bit consumed with a desire to push himself, all that has disappeared – if it ever existed – and he is certainly one of the best we have.” Again, Eisenhower considered what he thought was Clark’s biggest problem with regard to command. “His only drawback now is a lack of combat

¹⁷² NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 10, McCloy to McNair. 31 March 1943.

¹⁷³ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 140; NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 1, McNair Diary, 29 April 1943.

experience in a high command position.” He lamented the fact that Clark had not accepted the corps command when he had offered it to him and commented regretfully on his ambition. “He rather resented taking any title except that of army commander.” Eisenhower related that at the time he did not have the ability to create an American Army, and he had to give someone else the corps command. The reader can detect a note of irritation at Clark, as the commander Eisenhower ultimately chose, Fredendall, failed miserably in the assignment. He concluded by writing, “this was a bad mistake on Clark’s part, but I still think that he could successfully command an army in operations.” Eisenhower offers no real evidence for why he thought Clark would succeed with an active Army command, and the diary entry reads like wishful thinking.¹⁷⁴

Just over a month before the launch of the Salerno operation, Clark received the Award for the Legion of Merit. The award listed his contributions to the Allied cause, noting his work at Army Ground Forces, as Eisenhower’s deputy and for his brief command of II Corps in England. It read, “by his tact, professional efficiency and leadership, he laid the groundwork in the European Theater for a vast organizational housing and training development for United States Army Ground Forces.” The award concluded with, “his exceptional military judgement, common sense, devotion to duty and loyal services were of inestimable value to the Theater Commander.” The award cited his “exceptional military judgement,” although, as Eisenhower noted, he had not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate that in combat.¹⁷⁵

In late August, Eisenhower explained his decision to let Clark command the landings in Italy. “Clark continues to be what I have always told you – the best organizer, planner and trainer of troops that I have met. Unless something unforeseen occurs, he will shortly have a

¹⁷⁴ Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 94.

¹⁷⁵ NRPC, Mark Clark Papers, Headquarters NATO (North Africa Theater of Operations), award of Legion of Merit to Mark W. Clark, 6 August 1943.

chance to prove his worth in actual operations.” He further noted that “I have every confidence in him.” Curiously, and in guarded language, Eisenhower addressed the problem of Clark’s unbridled ambition and narcissism to the Chief of Staff. “The one trait concerning him that you and I have discussed last January has been suppressed.” Again, he drove home the point that Clark’s role in a major combat operation would work out. “He inspires an intense loyalty in all his staff and in his subordinates, and I have the earnest conviction that if success is possible in the next operations, he will achieve it.”¹⁷⁶

Eisenhower elaborated a few days later in another letter to Marshall, this time noting the constraints that forced him to place Clark in charge of the operation. He noted that Patton and Bradley, both experienced combat commanders by this point, had been fighting in Sicily, and had not been available to plan the Avalanche landings. “I had no recourse except to name Clark to command that expedition.” Eisenhower was as much as admitting that he did not have anyone else of appropriate rank and standing to lead an army into Italy. He followed this up with, “Clark is the ablest and most experienced officer we have in planning of amphibious operations.” He related once again that Clark would have his first test of battle command in high rank but felt confident that he would rise to the occasion. Still, his chief argument for Clark’s command in the operation was his ability to plan amphibious operations. “In preparing the minute details of requisitions, landing craft, training of troops and so on, he has no equal in our Army. His staff is well trained in this regard.”¹⁷⁷

Bradley also expressed unease with Clark in the lead role for Operation Avalanche. “I was not certain that Mark Clark was the best choice for this rather bold leap into Italy,” he wrote

¹⁷⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1354.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1137-1138.

in his autobiography. He recognized that enemy fire had wounded Clark while he commanded a battalion in the First World War but noted that he had no experience in commanding large units in combat. “Moreover,” he stated, “I had serious reservations about him personally. He seemed false somehow, too eager to impress, too hungry for the limelight, promotions and personal publicity.” He also believed that, despite Clark’s reputation as an organizer, he had poorly constituted the Fifth Army with one American and one British corps. “We had never done well in mixing American and British units in the same army. The situation seemed ripe for disaster.” Even as Bradley fought in Sicily, Eisenhower insisted that he familiarize himself with plans for Avalanche, on the chance that something could happen to Clark. The fact that Eisenhower turned to Bradley at this time further lends credence to the idea that he felt there really was no one else available to command the Salerno landings. Bradley met with Clark and Gruenther and believed “the planning was flawless.” However, he wrote that “I still came away with misgivings.”¹⁷⁸

Eisenhower knew that Marshall was eyeing Bradley for a leadership role in Overlord and in the letter of 27 August told him plainly that he hated to lose the officer. At one point, he even suggested that Marshall take Clark for the job, explaining that “I could shove Bradley immediately into command of the Fifth Army.” He was careful to suggest that he was not trying to get rid of Clark. “But he has not been up front during the past four or five months with British and other commanders and is therefore not so intimate a member of this particular combat team, which has begun to function smoothly and well.” The next day, Eisenhower seemed to backtrack on this position. “The truth of the matter is that you should take Bradley ... I will get along.” He concluded by stating that he understood the gravity of the Overlord preparations, and

¹⁷⁸ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 203-204.

that “nothing is too good for that project.” From these letters it seems clear that Eisenhower preferred Bradley for Avalanche, and with some reluctance acquiesced to Clark as its commander.¹⁷⁹

Clark undoubtedly displayed a talent for organizing and planning, as Eisenhower and others repeatedly acknowledged. Indeed, a great measure of the success he enjoyed in his career was due to these abilities. As early as the First World War, Clark proved an extraordinarily gifted supply officer as he ensured that First Army troops received food, ammunition and equipment during some of its most important battles. His strengths in these fields served him well when he organized the 3rd Infantry Division’s amphibious maneuvers, the GHQ war games in Louisiana and the Carolinas, as commander of the II Corps, first American unit in England during the war, as Eisenhower’s deputy in London and the Mediterranean, and as the commander of the Fifth Army in Oujda. Likewise, no one could accuse Clark of being a coward. His mission to the French African coast before Operation Torch was perilous, and as Fifth Army commander in Italy he repeatedly visited the front to check on men and morale, most notably at the Anzio beachhead. He had also benefitted from extensive military education at the Command and General Staff School and at the War College. Clearly, Clark appeared on paper to be an ideal staff officer.

In considerable measure, Clark’s superior officers recognized and appreciated these qualities, and saw to it that they noted his attributes to a higher authority. Clark, in no small part, owed his rise to the patronage of three men: Eisenhower, Marshall, and McNair. He had known Eisenhower since his cadet days, and the two had rekindled their friendship at Fort Lewis. Clark had recommended Eisenhower to Marshall for an important wartime job. Eisenhower had feared

¹⁷⁹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1137-1138, 1364.

another Stateside assignment during the war, and no doubt felt gratitude and a sense of loyalty to Clark because of his efforts. Clark's time with the 3rd Division also brought him to Marshall's attention, and the two developed a mutual respect based on professionalism and a desire to prepare the Army for any future conflict. Marshall's rise to Chief of Staff ensured that Clark would play an important role in the war. Clark's responsibility for the 3rd Division's amphibious operation at Monterey also impressed McNair, and the general decided that he wanted Clark on his staff at the newly formed GHQ. Clark proved indispensable to McNair, and soon the Army promoted the lanky lieutenant colonel directly to brigadier general to act as McNair's right hand.

Clark's meteoric rise, (he was only forty-five years old when he became a general), did little to endear him to officers like Patton. Yet Patton and others correctly saw in Clark an arrogance, vanity, and disingenuousness that later caused serious problems. His ruthless ambition and need for recognition led him to lobby time and again for the Distinguished Service Medal, nearly twenty-years after the First World War, most likely because he believed it would help his career at the time. Alanbrooke thought little of Clark after his efforts to drive a wedge between the French and the British in North Africa, simply so that he could get his Fifth Army in on the fighting in Tunisia. Bradley likewise found him a narcissist and glory-hound.

Eisenhower was aware of Clark's oversize ego, and clearly had his doubts about his ability to command an army in combat. It is clear that Eisenhower would have preferred either Patton or Bradley for the Salerno assignment, and he knew that Clark's insistence on army command as opposed to the less glamorous corps command was an indication of his pettiness. He allowed Fifth Army to continue under Clark for Avalanche because he felt he simply did not have another officer of appropriate rank and standing available. Marshall was willing to back Eisenhower's

decision regarding Clark, as the two men both knew his strengths. Still, Eisenhower had to reassure Marshall that Clark's ego was in check.

Clark's record as army commander in Italy is less than impressive. He repeatedly demonstrated his lack of higher combat command experience throughout the campaign and proved that Eisenhower's faith in his abilities was fanciful. Despite Bradley's belief that the planning for Salerno was solid, Patton correctly saw a dangerous gap in the lines along the Sele River, one that the Germans exploited with a counterattack. Clark lost his cool at Salerno, and for a time seriously considered withdrawing his force and regrouping despite objections from his subordinates and Admiral Hewitt. It took Alexander's direct intervention to deter him from the disastrous course of action. Clark further proved his inexperience in twice ordering the 36th Division to cross the Rapido under extremely unfavorable conditions. The attacks resembled something out of the First World War as the American troops did their best to advance under the guns and unrestricted observation of the German-controlled heights. At the same time, his contradictory orders to Lucas at Anzio, (see the chapter on John Lucas), ensured confusion and the mission's failure. Neither Lucas nor Fred Walker forgave Clark for his poor leadership in January 1944, and Clark never fully accepted responsibility for his role in the disasters. He allowed his ambition and ego to impact his decision in the critical drive for Rome. For Clark, his Fifth Army had earned the right to capture the eternal city and he suspected that the British were secretly plotting to steal his glorious moment. That fear led him to disobey orders and allowed the bulk of the German Tenth Army to escape.

Despite these failures, Clark eventually took command of the Fifteenth Army Group at the time Alexander became theater commander in December 1944. The following spring, Clark received his fourth star. Eisenhower, aware of Clark's shortcomings, nevertheless sent him a

note of congratulations in March 1945, and just days before the final German collapse, he sent Clark another letter. “Your accomplishments, since you landed at Salerno, are among the notable ones of the war and I realize more keenly than most, how difficult your task has often been.” He praised him for keeping his “sense of balance,” and stated that “I am darned proud of you – just as is the whole country.” Following the war Clark served as American military governor in Austria, held the United Nations command in Korea, and served as president of the Citadel in South Carolina. He died in 1984.¹⁸⁰

In the case of Mark Clark, the Marshall system clearly failed twice. During his career, Clark became one of the best staff officers the United States Army ever produced. However, Marshall and Eisenhower should not have given him field army command without experience at the division or corps level. Perhaps an understanding about the practical problems commanders at these levels faced could have illuminated his decisions in Italy. Historian Lee Carraway Smith put it best: “Clark outranked his abilities.” As early as Salerno, Clark showed his unsuitability for high command. Yet Eisenhower and Marshall repeatedly overlooked this fact and accepted his lack of nerve and the high casualty figures. Overlord consumed Marshall’s attention by the time of the Rapido disaster and the insubordination regarding the drive on Rome. Eisenhower was no longer the theater commander, and Devers felt constrained to keep Clark in place despite his own misgivings about the general. Marshall and Eisenhower gave no serious thought to relieving him.¹⁸¹

In November 1944, war correspondent Eric Sevareid asked the question, “have we, in fact, had a victory in Italy?” He wrote that “I for one – and many of my colleagues from that

¹⁸⁰ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., ed., *The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, The War Years, Vol. IV* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 2528, 2685-2686.

¹⁸¹ Smith, *A River Swift and Deadly*, 104.

front are of like mind – am impressed by the major miscalculations made in high places.” He noted the failed attacks across the Rapido “which the divisional commander pleaded against in tears.” He considered the failure at Anzio. After the 23 May link-up with the Fifth Army front Clark tried to justify the entire operation, “a statement that many reporters refused to send to their papers.” Certainly, we cannot blame Clark for the entirety of the horrors the Allies encountered in Italy, but given his lack of experience, glory-seeking, and poor decisions throughout the campaign, he no doubt contributed greatly to them.¹⁸²

Perhaps the best contrast in experienced, competent generalship with Clark’s showboating comes from Truscott. In his memoirs, he described the flood of reporters and cameras that surrounded the Fifth Army commander once he reached Rome. He wrote that “Clark made a speech which began: ‘This is a great day for the Fifth Army –’ And I reckon it was, but I was anxious to get out of this posturing and on with the business of war.”¹⁸³

¹⁸² Eric Sevareid, “The Price We Pay in Italy,” *Reporting World War II: Part Two: American Journalism 1944-1946* (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 566-570.

¹⁸³ Truscott, *Command Decisions*, 380.

CHAPTER 4

JOHN PORTER LUCAS

The 1944 Battle of the Anzio Beachhead proved to be one of the Western Allies' greatest debacles of the Second World War. Codenamed Operation Shingle, the Allies intended for the amphibious landing to outflank the German-held Gustav Line in central Italy, prompt the enemy into retreating into northern Italy, and lead the Allied charge into Rome. Instead, the American VI Corps hunkered down at the beachhead, and the Wehrmacht was able to form a solid defensive line which kept the American and British assaulting units bottled up for four months. Those months saw approximately 4,400 Allied servicemen killed in action, 18,000 wounded, and roughly 7,000 taken prisoner. Additionally, the force suffered nearly 40,000 non-combat casualties from illness and accidents. As Winston Churchill remarked, "I had hoped that we were hurling a wildcat onto the shore, but all we had got was a stranded whale."¹⁸⁴

Few American generals emerged from the Second World War with more controversy surrounding their name than John Porter Lucas, the commander of VI Corps at Anzio. Many of Lucas' contemporaries judged him lacking in essential combat leadership qualities, and many felt he was responsible for VI Corps' failure. George Patton visited Lucas a few weeks before the Anzio operation, and wrote in his diary, "I hope he is successful at Shingle, but I am not sure that he has sufficient drive." Field Marshal Harold Alexander, commanding the 15th Army Group, later wrote that Lucas "allowed time to beat him." Fifth Army commander Mark Clark noted in his memoirs that "bolder and more aggressive action was necessary in view of the enemy's strength." Lucian Truscott, who commanded the 3rd Infantry Division at Anzio, later wrote that "I was not blind to the fact that General Lucas lacked some of the qualities of positive

¹⁸⁴ Whitlock, *Desperate Valour*, 418; Winston S. Churchill. *Closing the Ring*, 488.

leadership that engender confidence.” Harry Butcher, Eisenhower’s naval aide, recorded his impressions of Lucas after the former VI Corps commander visited England following his relief at Anzio. “He seemed to be simply a soldier carrying out orders with which he was not in sympathy.”¹⁸⁵

Historians differ on Lucas’ role in the disaster. Andrew Roberts stated that “Lucas was the wrong man to command Shingle.” Antony Beevor noted that Lucas, “was a kindly man ... but he lacked any killer instinct.” Victor Davis Hanson included Lucas in a list of generals “in way over their heads.” Other historians, such as Steven L. Ossad, Douglas Porch, Lloyd Clark and James Scott Wheeler believe that Lucas was predominately a scapegoat for mistakes made by his superiors, Clark and Alexander. However, none view Lucas as decisive, bold, or possessing in any great quantity Marshall’s favored traits of leadership, force, or vigor. The best that could be said was that he was a fine logistical organizer and a competent defensive fighter.¹⁸⁶

The Allies launched Shingle on 22 January 1944. In addition to Truscott’s 3rd Infantry Division, the VI Corps consisted of the 1st British Infantry Division under W.R.C. Penney, and various assorted smaller units including Commandos and Rangers. General Ira Eaker’s Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) provided air support for the mission. This force included air units from United States, Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and other nations. Initially, Lucas and the Allied commanders feared tough German resistance on the landing beaches, but the VI Corps managed to take the enemy totally unaware. From aboard his floating

¹⁸⁵ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 396; Alexander, *Memoirs*, 126; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 236; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 319-320; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 507.

¹⁸⁶ Roberts. *The Storm of War*, 394; Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), 537; Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 445; Steven L. Ossad, “Major General John P. Lucas at Anzio: Prudence or Boldness?” *Global War Studies*. (Volume 8, Number 1), 35-56; Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 539; Clark. *Anzio*, 322-325; Wheeler, *Jacob L. Devers*, 267.

headquarters, the *USS Biscayne*, Lucas sent a message to Penney, “heartiest congratulations on the splendid landing. Please convey my personal and official thanks to all members of your command.” He concluded by exhorting the British general, “continue the drive to make this year the year of victory.” Two days later, the VI Corps commander wrote in his diary, “we have achieved what is certainly one of the most complete surprises in history. The Germans were caught off base and there was practically no opposition to the landing.” He further noted that the Allies lost no transport ships in the operation. “The Navy did a magnificent job putting every man ashore at exactly the right time, in the proper order, and on the proper beach. This is the first time that this perfection has ever been achieved.”¹⁸⁷

The initial resistance that the VI Corps faced was indeed light, and the Allied commanders in Italy were optimistic. Truscott later wrote that “there had been almost no opposition.” What little there had been, understrength battalions from the 29 Panzer Grenadier Division, the VI Corps had brushed aside easily. “More than two hundred men were captured, many of them still in bed.” Only a brief Luftwaffe raid had caused any concern for Truscott’s command, and it did little damage. Within days of the landing both Alexander and Clark arrived to inspect the beachhead, and the VI Corps’ achievement impressed them both. “General Alexander seemed very enthusiastic,” Lucas wrote in his diary. He recorded Alexander’s compliment to him, “you have certainly given the folks at home something to talk about.” Lucas further noted that pace of the Allied build up astounded the captured Germans. “They expressed great admiration for the discipline displayed by the troops, in that all came ashore and, with no waste of time, started immediately to perform those tasks assigned them.” Optimism for the

¹⁸⁷ Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 351; D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 50; USAHEC, Lucas Papers, Box 1, Lucas Diary, *From Algiers to Anzio*, 24 January 1944, 324.; NARA, Fifth Army Papers, RG 407, Box 3207, Lucas to Penney, 22 January 1944.

project flourished in London as well. Jock Coleville, private secretary to Winston Churchill, observed in his diary the first day of Shingle that the landing “has started out well and General Alexander seems confident.” A few days later he wrote, “Italian Operation going well; build-up ashore quicker than had been expected.”¹⁸⁸

The geography surrounding Anzio played an important role in the battle. The port city stood approximately forty miles south of Rome. The port of Nettuno lay just three miles east of Anzio, and the VI Corps captured it in the initial landings. A cellar in the town functioned as Lucas’ headquarters. The village of Aprilia, nicknamed “the Factory” because of its fascist-designed geometrical brick buildings intended to make it stand out as the ideal modern farming village, stood roughly ten miles north of Anzio. The British 1st Division took the village soon after the landing. Approximately fifteen miles north of Aprilia, the Alban Hills (Colli Laziali) loomed in the distance, and offered a commanding view of the beachhead to the south. While planning the operation, Lucas recorded his thoughts on the geography in his diary, “the terrain in the vicinity of Anzio was entirely flat, rising gradually towards the northeast. A straight road ran directly north towards Albano (the Alban Hills), thence northwest to Rome.” He noted that little cover existed on the ground except for sparse clusters of trees. “There was no terrain feature nearer than the mountains (Colli Laziali), over twenty miles away, that could be seized and held against a determined attack.”¹⁸⁹

During the initial planning, Lucas listed three tentative objectives that VI Corps had been given, “1) To seize and secure a beachhead in the vicinity of Anzio, 2) advance and secure the

¹⁸⁸ Truscott, *Command Missions*, 309-310; Lucas Diary, 21 January 1944, 327-328. 332; John Coleville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1945* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 468.

¹⁸⁹ Martin Blumenson, *Anzio: The Gamble That Failed* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 106-107; Lucas Diary, 8 January 1944, 294.

Colli Laziali, and 3) be prepared to advance on Rome.” On 12 January Clark issued field order No. 5, which formalized these plans. In addition to securing a beachhead, Clark ordered Lucas to “advance on Colli Laziali.” As Martin Blumenson has observed, the wording of Clark’s order was deliberately vague. Clark did not specifically order Lucas to seize the Alban Hills. Rather, Clark ordered him to “advance on” them. According to Blumenson, Clark wanted Lucas to have flexibility in his mission, and not have the VI Corps committed to one unalterable plan. Clark’s direction also meant that Lucas had wide latitude in interpreting his orders.¹⁹⁰

Instead of taking advantage of the VI Corp’s surprise landing and the subsequent enemy confusion, Lucas ordered his force to consolidate the beachhead. He feared that by taking the Alban Hills too quickly he would overextend the VI Corps and leave it vulnerable to German counterattack. After Clark’s first visit to the beachhead, as the Fifth Army commander was preparing to leave, he told Lucas, “don’t stick your neck out, Johnny. I did at Salerno and got into trouble.” Despite his order to “advance on” the Alban Hills, Clark apparently was warning Lucas to do just the opposite.¹⁹¹

Lucas’ decision to consolidate rather than advance gave Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, the opportunity to reorient the Wehrmacht in Italy to meet the new threat. General Siegfried Westphal, Kesselring’s chief of staff, later noted the dearth of German units that could easily repel the Allied force. “The road to Rome was open. No one could have stopped a bold advance-guard entering the Holy City.” Only after two days did the Germans manage to form a new line. “They enemy kept surprisingly quiet.” Kesselring himself later wrote that “I had the confident feeling that the Allies had missed a uniquely favorable

¹⁹⁰ Lucas Diary, 8 January 1944, 294; NARA, Fifth Army Papers, RG 407, Box 1619, Fifth Army History, Part IV. 16 January 1943 – 31 March 1944, 21; Blumenson, *Anzio: The Gamble That Failed*, 54-55.

¹⁹¹ D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 133.

chance of capturing Rome ... I was certain that time was our ally.” Within hours of the landing Kesselring had ordered elements from eleven divisions to concentrate at the Alban Hills. These units came from all over Italy, as well as France and Germany. Even forces from the Balkans rushed toward Anzio. The chance to seize the high ground had passed.¹⁹²

From his command post in East Prussia, the Wolf’s Liar, Adolf Hitler projected optimism about events playing out in Italy and believed that the Allies had overreached. “I think they have decided to do something, and when the execution comes, they implode.” With customary bombast and no evidence, he told his generals that although the Allies frequently made grand operational plans, they often failed in execution. “Then comes the realization about the real toughness of German resistance.”¹⁹³

“The swiftness of the enemy build-up was highly disconcerting, but should really have caused no astonishment,” Lucas wrote in his diary. “He had, of course, perfect communications – roads and railroads – over which to bring his troops.” He then lamented the much longer and more cumbersome lines that kept the VI Corps supplied by sea. “My allowance of troops was meager in any event.” On 25 January, three days after the landing, Alexander again visited the beachhead and again complimented the corps commander on the landing. Lucas “reminded him that it wasn’t over yet.” Lucas was keenly aware that the situation was deteriorating, and even as German strength increased, he lamented the lethargic pace of his operations. Still, he determinedly took his time and methodically prepared his forces. “This is the most important thing I have ever tried to do and I will not be stampeded.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Churchill, *Closing the Ring*. 482; Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 193-194; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 364-365.

¹⁹³ Helmut Heiber & David M. Glantz, eds., *Hitler and his Generals: Military Conferences, 1943-1945* (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), 408.

¹⁹⁴ Lucas Diary, 24 January 1944, 328-329, 25 January 1944. 334-335.

By 30 January, eight days after the landings, the situation looked grim, despite the arrival of the 45th Division and the 1st Armored Division in the beachhead. Lucas ordered an attack along the line with the aim of capturing major road and rail junctions at Campoleone and Cisterna, north and east of the Factory respectively. German control of these two towns meant that Kesselring held the interior lines between the Anzio beachhead and the Fifth Army front and could shift units as needed. The Fifth Army history noted that “General Lucas now had the equivalent of four divisions under his command and felt strong enough to attack in order to secure Campoleone and Cisterna as a firm base for further action.” Intelligence indicated that the German positions before these towns consisted primarily of hastily improvised fortifications and that the enemy would fall back to the Alban Hills once challenged in force. The original target date for the attack was 29 January, but Lucas delayed it one day so as to allow the new units time to prepare. However, the German resistance proved tougher than expected. Truscott noted that his force expected only to encounter units from the Herman Goering Division, but his command had not detected the arrival of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Division. “Thus, we encountered not one division extended over a wide front, but two on fronts capable of defense.”¹⁹⁵

The attack was a debacle and saw widespread Allied casualties. One of the great tragedies of the attack was the ordeal of two U.S. Army Ranger battalions, which spearheaded the attack for Truscott’s 3rd Division. The Rangers had crept forward that night under cover of darkness along irrigation canals and as the dawn broke, they climbed out and began to move on Cisterna. The well-prepared German forces cut them down savagely with intense machine gun

¹⁹⁵ Fifth Army History, 71-73; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 313.

fire, and eventually with tanks and artillery. The two battalions had consisted of 767 Rangers. Only six made it back to the Allied lines.¹⁹⁶

In his diary on 30 January, Clark expressed his doubts that the capture of the Alban Hills would have worked but lamented the fact that VI Corps had not shown more fighting spirit. “Reconnaissance in force with tanks should have been more aggressive to capture Cisterna and Campoleone.” The same day, Lucas expressed irritation that the Fifth Army commander was again visiting the beachhead and that he intended to remain for a few days. “His gloomy attitude is certainly bad for me. He thinks I should have been more aggressive on D-day and should have gotten the tanks and things out to the front.” He noted that the Anzio beachhead and the Fifth Army front – separated by roughly one hundred miles of rough, mountainous terrain – were too far apart to support each other, and lamented the limitations imposed on his force by available shipping. “I can win if I am let alone but don’t know whether or not I can stand the strain of having so many people looking over my shoulder.” This was a red flag and a red herring: command in major war is all about having people – generals, politicians, and press – looking over your shoulder.¹⁹⁷

The mood in London had soured as well. Field Marshal Alanbrooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, recorded in his diary on 31 January: “news from Italy bad and the landing south of Rome [Anzio] is making little progress, mainly due to the lack of initiative in the early stages.” He noted with concern the German reinforcements pouring into the area. “I am at present rather doubtful as to how we are to disentangle the situation.” The next day Coleville commented on Churchill’s disappointment. “The P.M. is suffering from indigestion

¹⁹⁶ Blumenson, *Anzio*. 97-100.

¹⁹⁷ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 236-237; Lucas Diary, 30 January 1944, 349.

and also very perturbed by SHINGLE's lack of success. It was strategically sound and it had a perfect beginning. He cannot understand the failure to push inland from the beach-head."

Coleville also observed that Churchill's faith in Alexander was "a little shaken."¹⁹⁸

Alexander was only too aware of his political master's displeasure. On 1 February he visited the beachhead once again; this time his generally amiable disposition masked his anger at the situation. Lucas wrote "he was kind enough but I am afraid is not pleased." Sensing the vulnerability of his command, he added, "my head will probably fall in the basket but I have done my best." He then justified the situation, asserting that he was incapable of building up his force faster than the Germans. "As I told Clark yesterday, I was sent on a desperate mission, one where the odds were greatly against success, and I went without saying anything because I was given an order and my opinion was not asked." He went on to write that he really liked Clark personally, but he was unsure of his British allies. He commented that Alexander "really knows very little of tactics as Americans understand it and I still have trouble because I don't understand the British very well." The Marshall system was supposed to ensure against just this kind of vacillation and excuse mongering.¹⁹⁹

The next few weeks proved a desperate struggle to hold the beachhead against determined German attacks and harassment. The Factory fell to a German frontal assault on 9 February, pushing the Allies back toward the sea. The Fifth Army history reported that "with the entire beachhead under constant enemy artillery fire and air attack, personnel at the beachhead were under severe strain." Most troops on the line had nothing but improvised foxholes to protect them from enemy gunners. "They had to stay underground during daylight hours, and

¹⁹⁸ Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., *Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke, War Diaries, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), 517; Coleville, *The Fringes of Power*, 470.

¹⁹⁹ Lucas Diary, 1 February 1944, 353.

even at the rear there were no safe areas from shelling.” The situation was so critical that soldiers remained in “foxholes half-filled with water” for long stretches on end without the prospect of relief. The winter weather took its toll, even in the Mediterranean, and cold rain was the VI Corps’ frequent companion. Troops suffered from trench foot, exposure and other non-combat related issues in addition to the gruesome casualties sustained from German artillery.²⁰⁰

Air support did what it could to aid the beachhead defenders. In total, MAAF employed 2,700 aircraft for the operation. Eaker had only taken command of MAAF a few days before the operation began but was committed to its success and adhering to the established plan. In the weeks leading up to the invasion, MAAF aircraft flew over 20,000 sorties and dropped over 17,000 explosive tons on roads, railroads, and other high priority targets. After the landings, thirty-two fighters flew patrols directly over the beachhead during the day, and eight at night. A radar ship off the coast coordinated these patrols. Both the Germans and the Allies each lost over 140 aircraft before boots hit the ground on the beach. The weeks following the landing saw increased close air support from the XII Tactical Air Command and its many constituent units, including the famed Tuskegee Airmen. An American soldier from the 157th Infantry Regiment later praised the air forces at Anzio, stating, “It was a massive morale boost to see a huge formation of aircraft fly over and drop bombs on the road. We could see the enemy scattering as they exploded.” One German officer recalled the arrival of Allied aircraft after the horrors of continuous artillery shelling. “Then came the bombers which caused blasts that killed anybody

²⁰⁰ Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 417; Fifth Army History, 163-164.

within 30 yards. I saw one man atomized in front of my eyes. It was terrible for the wounded who were taken away only to then be blown up in their trucks on the Via Anziate.”²⁰¹

By the time of the Salerno landings in September 1943, coordination between ground units and air assets had already markedly improved over such cooperation in North Africa and Sicily. However, there was only so much that air power could accomplish at Anzio. After the battle, “Hap” Arnold and other air commanders did not believe that MAAF had provided adequate support at Anzio. Arnold stated, “the air forces did not always concentrate their available air power so as to hit selected target areas with sustained mass attacks.” Also, air planners hoped to disrupt supplies to German units around the beachhead, and therefore bombed marshaling yards approximately every twelve days. The Germans typically were able to reopen their marshaling yards every one to three days. German staff officers rerouted trains and created truck convoys with relative ease. Historian Robert A. Renner concludes that the air commanders failed to properly plan for Shingle and notes that their performance “reflected inadequate operational research.”²⁰²

With the intense pressures of the Wehrmacht threatening to annihilate the VI Corps and the constant close supervision of Clark and Alexander, Lucas began to suffer under the strain. Suspicion, blame, and resentment began to color the relationship between Lucas and the British troops under his command. Lucas had earlier written in his diary, “there is a very profound and fundamental difference between the professional soldier of the British Army and his American

²⁰¹ D’este, *Fatal Decision*, 122; Whitlock, *Desperate Valour*, 177; Robert S. Ehlers, Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 325-326; Clark, *Anzio*, 180-181.

²⁰² D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 412; Robert A. Renner, “Allied Airpower Comes of Age: The Roles and Contributions to Italian Campaign” (Air University, 2003), <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Chronicles/renner.pdf>, 5; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 365.

brother.” He contended that in the field of military education, from West Point to the War College, the American system produced better soldiers. “On the other hand,” he wrote, “the officer of the British Army is only secondarily a military man.” The primary focus of the British soldier, Lucas maintained, was the empire and the sea lanes that bound it together. While in Sicily the previous summer he had written cynically, “at great expense to ourselves we are saving the British empire, and they aren’t even grateful.” Lucas’ method of command saw him hunkered down in his command post, a cellar-headquarters near the coast, rather than out visiting the troops. In Truscott’s words he “leaned heavily on his staff.” Lucas’ ambiguous orders and vaguely defined missions confounded General Penney. Truscott remarked that Lucas did not think highly of the British forces under his command, and that the feeling was reciprocated. “His British commanders had even less confidence in him.”²⁰³

Events occurring at Anzio and Lucas’s leadership failed to inspire confidence in American or British leaders alike. On 16 February, Eisenhower, then in London preparing for Overlord, sent an urgent cable to Marshall. He had just received a copy of a letter that Alexander had sent to Alanbrooke in which the 15th Army Group commander expressed lack of confidence in VI Corps headquarters. “They are negative and lack the necessary drive and enthusiasm to get things done.” Events had left the headquarters staff demoralized, Alexander asserted, and he intended to meet with the theater commander, Field Marshal Maitland Wilson, his deputy, American General Jacob Devers, and Clark. Alexander wanted to know what Eisenhower’s thoughts were on replacing Lucas. Further, Alexander told Eisenhower that “it is one thing to command a corps when everything is going in the right direction and quite another to regain the

²⁰³ Lucas Diary, 6-7; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 319-320; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 125; C. J. C. Molony. *The Mediterranean and Middle East: Volume V, The Campaign in Sicily 1943 and The Campaign in Italy 3rd September to 31st March 1944* (Uckfield: The Naval & Military Press, 2004), 751-752.

initiative when lost.” In considering replacements, Alexander stated, “what we need is a thruster like George Patton.” Eisenhower was willing to send Patton to temporarily take command of VI Corps, provided that the request observed the American chain of command and came from Devers, although he noted he could only spare him for a month. “I will send him without delay because I feel that if the troops in that beachhead need a lift and no one else is available Patton is the man that can give it to them.” Clearly, Eisenhower was aware of the tenuous situation of Lucas’ command.²⁰⁴

On 19 February, Devers wrote to Marshall that “Lucas is tired and appears very old, but he had been fighting hard.” He noted that Alexander and Clark had decided to replace Lucas with Truscott, and that Lucas would serve as Clark’s deputy at Fifth Army headquarters for a time, until they could find a suitable new post for him. He told the chief of staff, “Clark and Alexander both say Lucas could have done more with what he had.”²⁰⁵

Clark later noted the increasing pressure that Alexander was putting on him to do something about Lucas. He explained, “I knew this was coming, for on several occasions Alexander had indicated his feelings.” He agreed that a change was probably for the best. “My own feeling was that Johnny Lucas was ill – tired physically and mentally – from the long responsibilities of command in battle.” Clark chose Truscott, who had been at the beachhead since the beginning, to replace Lucas. Alexander noted in his memoirs that it had taken the Americans exactly one month to relieve Lucas, and he had grown increasingly impatient. The 15th Army Group commander had to take Clark aside and remind him of the stakes. “You know, the position is serious,” Alexander told him. “We may be pushed back into the sea. That would

²⁰⁴ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1730-1731.

²⁰⁵ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol 4, 312.

be very bad for both of us – and you would certainly be relieved of your command.” Alexander then wrote, “this gentle injunction, I am glad to say, impelled action.” Essentially, according to Alexander, he had to form his suggestion to relieve Lucas as a subtle threat to Clark’s own career before Clark agreed.²⁰⁶

Lucas certainly knew he had not pleased his superiors. On 16 February Devers visited the beachhead. The VI Corps commander recorded in his diary, “he seemed to think that as soon as I landed, I should have gone on as fast as I could to disrupt enemy communications. At least he intimated that the higher levels thought, and still think, that.” The next day, Alexander sent Lucas a new British deputy, General Everleigh. Lucas called the new arrival “a very fine fellow” but no doubt understood Alexander’s intention to have greater influence on VI Corps headquarters. Still, Lucas did not expect Clark to relieve him. The VI Corps had halted a massive German counterattack that had begun on 16 February. Two days later the Allies contained the offensive, and shortly after that Lucas had ordered a counterattack that retook key ground. On 20 February, Clark sent a message to Lucas congratulating him on his accomplishments on the beachhead and singling out 1st Armored Division commander Ernest Harmon who had led the successful Allied effort. The Fifth Army commander told Lucas, “continue your good work.” This admonition was hardly the expression of confidence he actually felt.²⁰⁷

Two days later, exactly one month to the day that Operation Shingle began, Lucas received an ominous message. Clark was on his way to VI Corps headquarters with an entourage of eight generals. Lucas wrote in his diary, “what the hell.” Clark had already

²⁰⁶ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 244; Alexander, *Memoirs*, 126.

²⁰⁷ Lucas Diary, 16 February 1944, 17 February 1944, 22 February 1944, 381, 385, 392.

promoted Truscott to serve as Lucas' deputy, a move that the former division commander did not appreciate. Clark had earlier told Truscott that he would most likely have to relieve Lucas and that in the event he would then promote Truscott to the command at Anzio. Now, on the night of 22 February, Clark informed Truscott that he would indeed relieve Lucas, despite Truscott's urgings to maintain the present command structure. He later wrote, "I was perfectly willing to continue as his Deputy, and I felt that Lucas was more than willing to have me remain so." Clark told him that he and Alexander had settled it – he would replace Lucas. At 8:00 P.M., in the cellar of Clark's Anzio command post, the Villa Borghese, the Fifth Army commander relieved Lucas of command of the VI Corps. Perhaps shifting responsibility, Clark stated that both Alexander and Devers had insisted, and he had no choice but to go along with his superiors' decision. Lucas knew that Alexander had little confidence in him, but Devers' views had come as "a great shock." Clark informed Lucas that he would reassign him as his deputy at Fifth Army headquarters, but first he needed rest at Sorrento for a few days. Lucas' expressed surprise at his relief, writing in his diary with pathos, "I thought I was winning something of a victory."²⁰⁸

In no way should Lucas bear all of the blame for the failure of Operation Shingle, a flawed plan from the beginning. Still, he did not perform well during the battle, and Clark and Alexander justly relieved him from command. His rocky relationship with the British, failure to inspire confidence in superiors and subordinates, his overreliance on his staff and officers under his command to make major decisions, his lack of aggressiveness, his own self-doubt and lack of faith in his mission, and his want of boldness all contributed significantly to the disaster at Anzio.

²⁰⁸ Lucas Diary, 22 February 1944, 394; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 319-320, 323, 327-328; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 261.

John Porter Lucas was born in Kearneysville, West Virginia on 14 January 1890. In 1911 he graduated from West Point as a cavalry officer and the Army soon stationed him in the Philippines. After two and half years he returned to the United States and was sent to Columbus, New Mexico to serve with the 13th Cavalry Regiment. It was there that the young officer first saw combat. Before dawn on 9 March 1916, Lucas awoke to shots near his tent. Sentry Fred Griffin, a private with K troop, opened fire on a “party of Mexicans attacking [Lucas’] quarters.” Mexican guerilla leader Pancho Villa had attacked Columbus with one hundred men after President Woodrow Wilson had backed one of his political opponents. The Mexicans shot and killed Private Griffin in the exchange, but he bought time for Lucas to escape to his camp and assemble the machine gun troop he commanded. The next day a newspaper reported that “Lucas’ machine gun troop caught [Villa’s men] as they crossed the track and riflemen in the ditch took them in the flank as the Mexicans, practically all mounted [escaped].” The Mexicans had killed Twenty-three Americans in the attack. Years later, another newspaper described Lucas as “the Paul Revere of the Villa Raid.”²⁰⁹

Lucas took part in the punitive expedition to Mexico that followed, and while there spent time with another young officer, George S. Patton. A few weeks after the Columbus raid Patton recorded in his diary the frigid night he spent with Lucas and another officer in the Mexican desert. “Very Cold. All I took off was my field glasses.” Six months later Patton wrote to his wife that he and Lucas were attempting to procure polo equipment to help alleviate boredom. The next week, Patton suffered an accident in his tent when a lamp exploded, resulting in painful

²⁰⁹ Ossad, *Major General John P. Lucas at Anzio*, 37-39; Wawro, *Sons of Freedom*, 38; *Ogden Examiner*, Utah, 10 March 1916, www.newspaperarchive.com; *El Paso evening Post*, Texas, 11 July 1929, www.newspaperarchive.com.

burns. He went to the hospital and took ill, but daily visits from Lucas and other officers raised his spirits.²¹⁰

During the First World War, the Army assigned Lucas to the 33rd Division and he arrived in France in 1918. The month after his arrival enemy artillery fire wounded him during the fighting at Amiens and he returned to the United States to recuperate. Following the war, Lucas formally transferred to the Field Artillery and in 1921 attended the artillery school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He attended the Command and General Staff school during the 1923-1924 year, and graduated seventy-eighth out of 247. He then taught military science at the Colorado Agricultural College in Fort Collins before the Army selected him to command the 82nd Field Artillery battalion at Fort Bliss near El Paso, Texas in 1929. Upon his arrival the *El Paso Evening Post* noted that “Maj. Lucas is an expert polo player.” In 1931 the *El Paso Herald* reported that the Army transferred him to Washington D.C., “where he will be assigned to the war college permanently.” He served at the War College until 1936, before an assignment with the Personnel Division serving on the Field Artillery Board.²¹¹

Lucas was among the many officers who benefitted from Marshall’s elevation to Chief of Staff in 1939, and not long after he received a general’s star. The Army gave Lucas the command of the artillery section within the Second Division, and then three months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Marshall promoted Lucas to command the 3rd Division at Ft. Lewis Washington. While in command of the 3rd Division, Lucas honed the unit through intense

²¹⁰ Martin Blumenson, ed., *The Patton Papers, 1885-1940*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 353, 381-383.

²¹¹ Ossad, *Major General John P. Lucas at Anzio*, 39; Taaffe, *Marshall and Hist Generals*, 100; Robert H. Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1989), 11; *El Paso Evening Post*, Texas, 11 July 1929, www.newspaperarchive.com; *El Paso Herald*, Texas 14 July 1931, www.newspaperarchive.com; *San Antonio Express*, Texas, 25 October 1940, www.newspaperarchive.com.

training, which included amphibious landings. Brigadier General Harry J. Malony, working with McNair at the General Headquarters, recommended that Lucas tour the country's ports and amphibious training centers at this time, and the 3rd Division worked closely with the navy "as part of the Pacific Amphibious Force."²¹²

However, Lucas' tenure with the 3rd Division did not last long. On 3 March 1942, McNair recommended Lucas to the command of the III Corps, and the Secretary of War directed that Lucas take up the post the next day. Only a few weeks later the question of command of the VIII Corps came up. Marshall questioned Lesley McNair about possibly moving Lucas to that position, although he ultimately thought better of transferring Lucas so soon after he took command of III Corps. Six months later, after Eisenhower had settled on Major General Russell P. Hartle to command the Center Task Force for Operation Torch, Marshall resisted the choice. As noted previously, Marshall provided a list of candidates he preferred for the job. "If you can't use Clark for this I will send you practically anyone you name. Dawley, Simpson, Griswold, Hodges, Lucas, Fredendall, Richardson, or White." The command, of course, went to Fredendall. However, since Marshall considered the mission of the Center Task Force at Oran Torch's "key operation," Lucas' inclusion on the list demonstrates the Chief of Staff's supreme confidence in his abilities at this time.²¹³

By the spring of 1943, the U.S. Army had fully engaged the Germans in North Africa, and Lucas went to observe the fighting up close. He wrote in his diary, "the War Department felt that first-hand knowledge thus gained might help us with our war-time problems in training

²¹² *San Antonio Express*, 25 October 1940, www.newspaperarchives.com; NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 54, Assignment of General Officers, 4 December 1941; NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 1, Brigadier Harry J. Malony to Lucas, 28 October 1941.

²¹³ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 54, McNair to the Commanding General, Field Forces, 3 March 1942; NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 54, General J. H. Hilldring to General James Ulloa, 4 March 1942; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 151-152, 367-368.

troops for combat.” That March, Lucas joined several other corps commanders overseas, and then returned to the III Corps at Fort McPherson, Georgia in April. However, his time with the III Corps was quickly drawing to a close. On 15 May, Eisenhower had written a letter to Marshall requesting an officer from the States to replace one of his staff officers, General Harold “Pinky” Bull. Marshall had decided that Bull should command III Corps, and that Lucas should fill the vacant staff role in North Africa. Nine days later, Marshall summoned Lucas to his office and explained to him “that Eisenhower was so immersed in the political side of his job that he had little or no opportunity to keep in touch with the troops under his command.” Marshall considered this “a very serious, a very dangerous situation.” Therefore, the Chief of Staff had decided to send Lucas to assist Eisenhower in his work.²¹⁴

Further, Marshall let Lucas know that he had selected him because the job needed someone who possessed “military stature, prestige, and experience.” If Lucas saw commanders or troops doing something incorrectly, he would need to correct it, or report it to Eisenhower immediately. Marshall expected the job to take Lucas approximately a few months, then the Army would give him another command. Although Marshall believed that Lucas would return to the States upon completion of his assignment, he let him know that “anything can happen.” Indeed, he reminded Lucas that Bradley had started out as an observer for Eisenhower and “he had fallen into command of the II Corps.” Marshall also told Lucas not to worry about aggravating other officers while doing his job. “If you get under their skins and they fire you back to the United States, I will look after you.”²¹⁵

“This order was received with joy,” Lucas wrote in his diary, “for I was convinced that

²¹⁴ Lucas Diary, 24 May 1943, 1-2; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1135-1136.

²¹⁵ Lucas Diary, 24 May 1943, 1.

once established in the theater, I would be difficult to pry loose.” He understood that it was unlikely that Marshall or Eisenhower would select him for a battle command as long as he remained in the United States, and he eagerly embraced the chance to participate in the war. He wrote that “the man on the ground would inevitably be given preference.” In May, he arrived in Algiers and reported to Eisenhower. “This job was not prescribed in any Tables of Organization. My relationship with the Commander-in-Chief was a personal one.” Lucas functioned as an observer for Eisenhower, keeping him informed on events transpiring throughout the Mediterranean Theater, and “correcting” officers that were not precisely following orders or doctrine. Lucas noted that he and Eisenhower had long been friends and he looked forward to the assignment. However, Eisenhower’s staff was initially cool toward him until they came to see that “my intentions were not wholly evil.”²¹⁶

Lucas arrived in the Mediterranean just as preparations were underway for Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. While visiting his old friend George Patton and the Seventh Army, Lucas learned a great deal about the requirements for the coming mission. Patton remarked in his diary, “I got Lucas well indoctrinated in what we need and told him to say it was his idea and not mine.” He further noted that Lucas along with other officers frequently lectured him about taking too many risks. “It is making a woman of me.” Lucas was less than impressed when he saw Terry de la Mesa Allen’s 1st Division training and commented in his diary that it was “the most complicated operation ever devised. The most glaring thing is the lack of projected close-in air support and the difficulty of having adequate reserves available.” He likewise had little kind to say about the poorly trained 3rd Division artillery. The passage to Sicily began on 6 July, and Lucas bunked with Patton aboard Admiral Kent Hewitt’s flagship,

²¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

the *USS Monrovia*. In the early hours of 10 July, Lucas watched the bombardment of the Sicilian coast near Gela with the two other officers. On witnessing the horrific splendor, he recorded in his diary, “war, with all its terror and dirt and destruction, is at times the most beautiful phenomenon in the world.”²¹⁷

Lucas was not an idle observer during Operation Husky. Together with Seventh Army Deputy Commander Geoffrey Keyes, Lucas helped to organize the logistics for the invading units from the beach. The two men helped to ensure that the landing ran as smoothly as it could. After the Seventh Army successfully repulsed a German counterattack at Gela, Lucas wrote to Eisenhower, extolling the leadership of his friend and mentor Patton. “I am convinced that his presence had much to do with restoring the situation.” A few days later Alexander visited the Seventh Army without any American staff officers accompanying him. Lucas wrote in his diary that he felt that this was “an act of deep discourtesy.” In mid-July, while visiting Eisenhower in Algiers, Lucas railed against Alexander, telling his superior that the British general intended to put the American forces under his command “in a secondary role.” He further told Eisenhower that Patton should stand up to Alexander over this issue. Eisenhower replied that Alexander considered the Americans inexperienced compared to British troops, and the British general had reason to be cautious. The seeds of the animosity that Lucas felt for his superior at Anzio were already being sown.²¹⁸

On 3 August, Lucas accompanied Patton on a visit to the 15th Evacuation Hospital near the Sicilian village of Nicosia. There, the first of Patton’s infamous “slapping” incidents occurred. Patton had asked Private Charles H. Kuhl what he was doing there, and the young

²¹⁷ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 263, 268; Lucas Diary, 7 June 1943, 18 June 1943, 6, 16; D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 504-505; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 72.

²¹⁸ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 276-278; Lucas Diary, 14 July 1943; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 190.

soldier responded that he could no longer take the pressures of the front. Enraged, Patton called Kuhl a coward, slapped his face, and literally kicked him out of the tent. Lucas wrote in his diary that “I saw nothing serious about it at the time.” He noted that while Patton was superficially violent, “under the surface, however, he is tender hearted, too often for his own good.” Lucas believed that the press had overhyped the incident and remarked that Patton’s critics had no idea of the strain that the general was under. Still, he called it “A regrettable incident. A display of weakness.” The next week, Patton had a similar encounter at a different hospital with another soldier.²¹⁹

A few days after the first incident, Eisenhower, still unaware of Patton’s indiscretion, ordered Lucas to prepare the facts surrounding the Battle of Gela for him. Eisenhower wanted to award the commander of the Seventh Army with the Distinguished Service Cross. Lucas wrote in his diary that he requested that he “be allowed to pin it on [Patton].” The same day, he also remarked on the fact that the British Broadcasting Corporation had reported that the Seventh Army had been doing nothing in Sicily, presumably leaving Montgomery and the British Eighth Army to do all of the fighting. The report even upset Eisenhower. However, on 16 August, Eisenhower learned about the slapping incidents. After escorting Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., on a tour of Sicily, Lucas had returned to Eisenhower’s headquarters in Algiers and offered to fly to Washington to explain the matter to Marshall. Instead, Eisenhower, the commander of the Mediterranean theater, shot a letter off to Patton on 20 August, stating that he was sending Lucas to see him about the incidents. “It is highly important that you personally meet General Lucas and give your full attention to the message that he will bring you.” However, by the time

²¹⁹ D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 533; Lucas Diary, 3 August 1943, 102-103.

Lucas arrived in Sicily, another officer had already carried Eisenhower's strongly worded letter to Patton.²²⁰

At this time, Lucas also recorded his thoughts about Clark, then actively preparing for Operation Avalanche, the invasion of Italy. He wrote, "Clark impresses me, as always, with his energy and intelligence. You cannot help but like him." Ironically, in view of future events at Anzio, Lucas took Clark for a risk taker, a quality he asserted was necessary for victory in war. Lucas claimed that he had visited Clark's headquarters to see if the Fifth Army staff officers had any questions for him about his experiences in Sicily. However, he feared that Clark suspected his motive was to ask for a command in the invasion. Clark did indeed tell him that "he would certainly need another corps headquarters before the show was over and that he would give me a chance." He further noted that although Bradley currently commanded the II Corps, Bradley might soon transfer to another assignment. The next day the War Department awarded Clark with the Legion of Merit in Oran.²²¹

On 24 August Eisenhower sent a letter to Marshall in which he offered his thoughts on generals for future battlefield command. Patton, Bradley, and Clark topped the list for army commanders, and he named Middleton, Truscott, Harmon, and Dawley for corps command. However, he did think that Dawley perhaps lacked "good judgement and common sense." Eisenhower then added a few lines about Lucas. "He has not had combat responsibility, but he has had combat experience." Eisenhower related that Lucas had "spent the entire month in Sicily and is well acquainted with battlefield conditions and requirements. I think he would command a corps most successfully." The next week Marshall addressed the situation in a letter to

²²⁰ Lucas Diary, 7 August 1943, 12 August 1943, 18 August 1943, 102-103, 112, 126; D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 536; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 328-329.

²²¹ Lucas Diary, 30 August 1943, 31 August 1943, 133-134.

Eisenhower, and seemed to sign off on the selection of Lucas to command II Corps. He offered to send someone to replace Lucas in his role as Eisenhower's observer. The following day Eisenhower sent another letter to the Chief of Staff discussing whether the Army would transfer II Corps to England or have it remain in the Mediterranean. "If I keep the II Corps [in the Mediterranean], I will place Lucas in command. If the II Corps should eventually go to England, I will find out if Bradley wants Lucas as a corps commander and I am quite sure the answer will be 'yes.'" Eisenhower further conveyed his deep confidence in Lucas by writing, "Lucas has been on the front a great deal and is well thought of by all of us."²²²

That same day, Lucas learned that he would get a combat corps command. Eisenhower told him about Bradley's transfer to the United Kingdom. Further, he informed Lucas that Bradley was currently debating whether to take the II Corps staff headquarters with him, or to leave it in the Mediterranean. In any event, Eisenhower intended for Lucas to take command of the unit in Sicily. Clark had previously asked Lucas to accompany him with his headquarters for the upcoming Salerno invasion, but Eisenhower's news meant that Lucas now had to make preparations for his new command. Clark most likely wanted Lucas to join him because of his experience in the Sicily invasion. Lucas now declined the invitation and remarked in his diary about Clark's desire for company during the expedition, "an army commander is a lonesome cuss and needs someone around to talk to." Eisenhower had told Bradley that he could take whomever he wanted from II Corps headquarters for his new staff in Britain. According to Bradley, Lucas "wailed" at the list of officers he had selected for transfer, but the new II Corps commander understood the importance of solid staff officers for the forthcoming cross-Channel invasion and acquiesced. The day before Lucas took command of II Corps, he mused at his good

²²² Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1353-1354, 1381; Bland, *Marshall Papers*. Vol. 4, 108-109.

fortune to get a combat command, particularly because it was unlikely that many officers still stuck back in the United States would receive one. Indeed, officers already in Europe and the Mediterranean were getting all of the experience. “The constant cry is for battle-trying veterans,” he wrote in his diary. “The Sicilian show save my life.”²²³

Lucas finally had a command in the war. His new assignment was something that he had craved since the outbreak of hostilities, and it proved an important turning point for him on the road to Anzio. While he had commanded a corps back in the States, his only role thus far in World War II had been that as Eisenhower’s observer. The job had allowed Lucas to get close to the action and interact with the highest levels of American and British commanders in the field. Still, it was not the command role that Lucas coveted, because it did not involve the command of men in combat. Despite this, the assignment was critical for his career, and it ultimately paid some major dividends. Lucas had gained Eisenhower’s confidence and seemed to confirm Marshall’s high opinion of him. Although it was what he always wanted, Lucas expressed self-doubt about his new assignment. In his diary he remarked on the history the II Corps had made in the past year. “I hope I can maintain its prestige,” he wrote in his diary. “I feel very inadequate, but maybe that will pass off.” Here we see a principal flaw in the Marshall system. To all surface appearances, Lucas was a “Marshall Man.” Inwardly, however, Lucas was racked by doubt. There was no psychological component in the Marshall system that would have detected this weakness.²²⁴

However, Lucas’ tenure as II Corps commander did not last long. Operation Avalanche began on 9 September 1943, and soon Dawley’s VI Corps ran up against significant German

²²³ Lucas Diary, 2 September 1943; 7 September 1943, 136, 139; Bradley, *A Soldiers’ Story*, 10-11.

²²⁴ Lucas Diary, 3 September 1943, 140.

resistance at Salerno and took heavy casualties. In the first eight days after the initial landings the VI Corps had suffered over 800 wounded, nearly 600 missing, and 225 combat deaths. Eisenhower blamed Dawley for VI Corps' poor performance, and when he visited the corps headquarters on 17 September, he asked Dawley, "how did you ever get your troops in such a mess?" Dawley tried to explain, but it was apparent to those present that he simply did not understand the tactical decisions of his division commanders nor the overall situation on the battlefield. The Supreme Commander of the Mediterranean theater began to pressure Clark to relieve Dawley and sent a letter to Allied Force Headquarters later that day "directing Major General John P. Lucas with personal staff only report to commanding general Fifth Army AVALANCHE area by fastest means practicable." The note further read that "this is a permanent transfer." Alexander also had lost confidence in Dawley after seeing his hands shake during a meeting. Although Clark had sent Dawley a congratulatory letter on 19 September, the Fifth Army commander relieved him the next day.²²⁵

Eisenhower sent a letter to Marshall explaining Dawley's relief and Lucas' transfer, as well as informing him that Keyes was the new II Corps commander. Lucas's orders did not immediately inform him that he was going to take over VI Corps, only that the Army had relieved him of his current assignment and that he needed to rush to Salerno. He almost certainly knew why he had received these orders, and a quick dinner with Patton in Palermo seemed to confirm his suspicions. Once he had reached the Allied beachhead at Salerno Clark gave him his new orders and sent him to Paestum, the VI Corps headquarters command post. Lucas wrote not long after arriving that "I was rather dazed and haven't recovered from it yet."²²⁶

²²⁵ Pond, *Salerno*, 215-216; Hickey, *Operation Avalanche*, 303; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1430.

²²⁶ Bland, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1436; Lucas Diary, 24 September 1943, 152.

Shortly after Lucas took command of his corps, the immediate crisis at Salerno had passed and the Fifth Army began the slow slog up the boot of Italy. Clark's immediate objective was to take Naples, and the port city fell to the Allies in early October. Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on 4 October, telling him, "Alexander and I both believe we will have Rome by October." Churchill intended to visit Rome later that month. The Fifth Army plan was simple: push forward toward the Eternal City as quickly as possible. However, as the Allies encountered tough German resistance in the hills along their advance, Lucas began to show some exasperation with Clark, a sign of things to come. On 2 October, Clark held a meeting with Lucas and the VI Corps divisional commanders, Truscott, Middleton, and Ryder. Afterward, Lucas wrote in his diary, "General Clark tries to make suggestions only, but he always wants speed and becomes impatient sometimes when I can't give it to him." He lamented the fact that Clark did not seem to understand the limitations and obstacles that the units under his command had to face, including blown bridges. The next day, Clark visited him again for lunch. The Fifth Army commander praised the meal as the best he'd had since arriving in Italy, and the two discussed operational matters. "The General seemed highly pleased with what we are doing and have done," Lucas wrote. Clark also complimented him on his ability in mountain warfare, and before leaving, Clark said that he intended for Lucas to take Rome.²²⁷

Lucas appeared to work well with Clark at this time, and frequently prodded his division commanders forward at the Fifth Army commander's urging. Lucas noted that the key to pleasing Clark was victory. "Our relations have been very pleasant," he wrote in his diary. "As long as I win battles, I imagine they will be." By mid-October, the 45th Infantry Division stalled,

²²⁷ Bland, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1485; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 248; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 171; Lucas Diary, 3 October 1943, 169.

and Clark hastened to throw Middleton, the division commander, under the bus. In one telephone conversation, Lucas lamented to Clark, “the going is OK but a little slower than I like. ... Troy [Middleton] is not so well. I would like to talk to you about him. Everything is okay but lots of opposition.”²²⁸

A few weeks after taking command of the VI Corps, Lucas wrote to Patton, telling his old friend that fighting on the Italian peninsula was like “Sicily all over again. Same rough, rugged terrain, same mountain roads, more cover, same demolitions but fewer mines.” He noted that there were many lessons that he learned in Sicily he brought with him in his new assignment. “My experience in Sicily and especially what I learned from sitting at your feet has been worth a million dollars to me.” By December, traces of Lucas’ self-doubt were evident in another letter he sent to his old friend. After comforting Patton over his treatment in the press regarding the slapping incidents, he wrote that “I always try to figure out what you would do in my place [as VI Corps commander] but I know I fall considerably short [in my operations] of the examples you have set.”²²⁹

To Eisenhower and Marshall, it looked as though Lucas’ appointment to command the VI Corps was a winning move. In December, Eisenhower learned that Roosevelt had selected him to command Operation Overlord in the spring and he soon sent Marshall a letter considering the command structure that he would be leaving in the Mediterranean. “My first idea was as follows: Bring back Clark as Theater Commander and assign Lucas to command the 5th Army.” He had also considered placing Patton in command of Operation Anvil, the proposed invasion of southern France. However, the more he considered it, he believed that Patton should accompany

²²⁸ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 104; USAHEC, Lucas Papers, Box 12, Telephone Conversation between Clark and Lucas. 16 October 1943.

²²⁹ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 355-356, 396.

him to England. “This solution would permit Clark, at the proper time, to take active command of the 7th Army headquarters and turn over the 5th to Lucas.” Marshall responded that he was willing to sign off on Eisenhower’s proposal, including giving Lucas the Fifth Army. On 29 December Eisenhower sent another letter to Marshall clarifying his thoughts on the subject. “Lucas will succeed to Fifth Army command provided his work continues to be good.”²³⁰

In under a year, Lucas had gone from a Stateside corps command, to being Eisenhower’s observer, to commanding the II Corps for a short time, to command of the VI Corps in an active theater of war. It is amazing that, with only a few months of combat command experience, Marshall and Eisenhower considered Lucas capable enough to command a field army. It is also interesting that, in Eisenhower’s 29 December letter to Marshall, he qualified the suggestion of Lucas’ elevation to field army command with the words “provided his work continues to be good.” Undoubtedly, Lucas’ progress pleased Marshall, Eisenhower, and Clark and they foresaw great things for him in the future. However, Eisenhower’s caveat appears to indicate that he believed Lucas had not yet quite proven himself for field army command, although by making the suggestion in the first place he more than likely expected he would do so soon. Lucas’ greatest test was about to begin.²³¹

By late fall 1943, the Allied advance up the boot of Italy had stalled. Kesselring had ordered a series of defensive positions created across the narrowest part of the peninsula just south of Rome. At this point, Italy was only eighty-five miles across, and the mountainous terrain strongly favored the defenders. The Gustav Line, anchored at the central position of the monetary complex at Monte Cassino, proved a formidable obstacle to the Allies, and Clark and

²³⁰ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1604, 1631; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 4, 211.

²³¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1631.

Alexander began to consider alternative strategies. Clark was the first officer to suggest an amphibious invasion behind the Gustav Line to trap and destroy the German army in Italy. However, with the Allies transferring more and more shipping from the Mediterranean to England in preparation for Operation Overlord, the idea seemed to go nowhere for a time, and Clark thought the matter a dead letter. Churchill then heard the idea, quickly became its staunchest champion, and by mid-November Alexander and Clark began actively preparing for the assault. Initial plans called for an invasion force of only one division, and the Allied leadership considered Truscott's 3rd Division for the job. In an exercise of supreme wishful thinking, Clark told Truscott that he would only have to hold a beachhead with his division, and it would cause the Germans to beat a hasty retreat north of Rome. "My reaction was rather pessimistic," Truscott later wrote.²³²

On Christmas Day 1943, Churchill met with Allied leaders in Tunis. The official Fifth Army history read that "Winston Churchill and the ranking Mediterranean commanders decided that an amphibious landing of not less than two assault divisions behind the enemy's right flank was essential for a decision in Italy." However, Eisenhower expressed reluctance over the operation. Despite the fact that he was preparing to go to Britain in anticipation of Overlord, all of the officers appeared to look to the outgoing theater commander for his ideas. Eisenhower had tremendous say with regard to the allocation of Allied shipping, which was of necessity a major requirement for Operation Shingle, but he was reluctant for other reasons as well. To Eisenhower, the prospect of landing only two divisions so far behind enemy lines seemed perhaps too risky. He later wrote that "I could not escape a feeling of uneasiness over the Anzio project." Still, he would soon be in England and operations in Italy were no longer his

²³² Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 254; Whitlock, *Desperate Valour*, 1-5; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 291.

responsibility. In any event, he still believed that the Allies should press forward in Italy since the Germans there “were still full of fight.” Two days later, Churchill’s physician Lord Moran remarked in his diary, “the P.M. has a bright idea. He is organizing an operation all on his own. He has decided that it should be a landing behind the lines at Anzio.”²³³

“General Lucas was selected to command the operation because he was the only available corps commander who was not actively engaged at the time,” Alexander later wrote. “Moreover, since Anzio was on the Fifth Army front, he was a logical choice.” By the time Lucas received orders to participate in Operation Shingle in late December 1943, the VI Corps was actively engaged in the line after acquitting itself well in the mountain fighting in the Avellino and Venafro areas. Clark and Alexander’s selection of Lucas to command Shingle coincided with Eisenhower and Marshall’s exchange regarding Lucas’ possible future assignment as Fifth Army commander. While Alexander may have had a dubious view regarding Lucas, American military leaders such as Marshall, Eisenhower, and Clark undoubtedly had confidence in him. Shortly after Lucas’ relief, Churchill would tell his old friend Field Marshal Jan Smuts – prime minister of the Union of South Africa – that the Allied leadership had selected Lucas because he had “distinguished himself at the command of a corps at Salerno.” The Anzio mission was certainly going to be a risky, perilous assignment, and there is simply no logical reason why these American commanders would have consented to a commander in whom they had doubts.²³⁴

Lucas immediately began coordinating his staff with the Fifth Army’s for the upcoming

²³³ Fifth Army History, 15; Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio*, 86-87; Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1991), 763-764; Carlo D’Este, *Warlord: A Life of Winston Churchill at War, 1874-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 638.

²³⁴ Alexander, *Memoirs*, 126; Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio*, 89-90; Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 488.

operation, and he sent several of his officers to Clark's headquarters at Caserta, outside Naples, to work out the details. The pressure of the operation began to take its toll on Lucas, and on 29 December he wrote in his diary, "time was all too short as January 25 had been tentatively established by the high command as the target date for the landing." He worried because major amphibious operations, in his experience, usually took months of preparation. On 4 January, Lucas lamented the lack of shipping available for Operation Shingle, and his pessimism found its way into his diary. "I will do what I am ordered to do but these 'Battles of the Little Big Horn' aren't much fun." He further noted that "a failure now would ruin Clark, kill many of my men, and certainly prolong the war." He also expressed concern about the size of his force, the distance it had to travel to Anzio, and the many misconceptions that his superiors had about amphibious operations. "But I could say nothing as General Clark, evidently under pressure, said emphatically that the operation would take place, and after that I could only obey orders." Here was another problem with the Marshall system. It relied on "optimism," a gung-ho spirit. To exhibit pessimism of any kind was a mortal sin. So, pessimists learned to act like optimists, often with disastrous results.²³⁵

On 7-8 January, Churchill held a special conference on the Anzio expedition in Marrakech. The attendees included Field Marshal Wilson, Alexander, Devers, and Eisenhower's chief of staff, Walter Bedell Smith. The commanders of the United States Fifth Army and VI Corps were conspicuously absent. Churchill's entourage had not invited them. However, members of their staffs did attend to offer their superiors' views. Despite objections from the British intelligence officer Brigadier General Kenneth Strong and others, Churchill remained undeterred. The prime minister told the assembled officers that "without risk there is no honor,

²³⁵ Lucas Diary, 29 December 1943, 4 January 1944, 281, 284-287.

no glory, no adventure.” After the conference Churchill sent a letter to President Roosevelt. “A unanimous agreement for action as proposed was reached by the responsible officers of both countries and of all services as a result of our ... conferences.”²³⁶

A few days later, Lucas’ staff officers William H. Hill and Col. E. J. O’Neil returned to Italy. They informed him of Churchill’s resolution and the many questions that he had for them concerning the tactical operation and the supply situation. Lucas wrote in his diary, “apparently Shingle has become the most important operation in the present scheme of things.” The Allied leadership set the date for 22 January 1944, despite Hill and O’Neil’s insistence that 25 January was a more reasonable target, as that would give VI Corps more time to rehearse the operation. Lucas poured his frustration and pessimism into his diary once again. “I feel like a lamb being led to the slaughter...” Lucas protested the target date, again citing the need for more rehearsal time. He was overruled, with “many reasons being advanced as to the necessity for this speed.” A note of suspicion crept into his diary over this issue as he wrote, “the real reasons cannot be military.” He suspected that Churchill was rushing the pace for political reasons having to do with post-war British supremacy in the Mediterranean.²³⁷

It seems peculiar that the British leaders at the Moroccan conference did not invite Clark or Lucas, considering they had a direct stake in the operation. Perhaps it reflected a British desire to dominate the proceedings without the Americans distracting them with their objections or concerns. Certainly, Churchill believed that the Anzio operation was the key to success in Italy and the Mediterranean area, and he undoubtedly had that agenda with the meeting. Lucas compared what was happening to the Dardanelles fiasco engineered by Churchill in 1915, when

²³⁶ Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 447-448; Clark, *Anzio*, 73-75.

²³⁷ USAHEC, Lucas Papers, Report of Col. H. Hill and Col. E. J. O’Neil on Conference Held in Marrakech, French Morocco on 7-8 January 1944; Lucas Diary, 10 January 1944, 294-295.

insufficient force had been sent for what should have been a massive amphibious and naval undertaking. “This whole affair had a strong odor of Gallipoli,” Lucas wrote. Lucas met with Alexander on 9 January, and the British general had told him that with the success of Shingle “Overlord would be unnecessary.” It was no secret that Churchill had dragged his feet when it came to the cross-Channel invasion. For Lucas, Alexander’s remark seemed to confirm his suspicion that the prime minister hoped that success with Shingle would render an invasion of France irrelevant. With this unspoken suspicion and mistrust in the air, Alexander left Lucas with a kind, if perhaps unconvincing word. “We have every confidence in you. That is why you were picked.”²³⁸

Patton relinquished command of the Seventh Army on New Years’ Day, 1944. A few days later, he failed to calm Lucas’ nerves or offer reassuring inspiration. “John, there is no one in the Army I hate to see killed as much as you, but you can’t get out of this alive. Of course, you might only be badly wounded.” Thinking of Lucas’ career, Patton then offered, “no one ever blames a wounded general for anything.” Lucas attempted to show confidence in the mission, but Patton remained fatalistic. Patton then encouraged Lucas to read the Bible to strengthen him in adversity. The next day he took one of Lucas’ staff officers aside and suggested that if the invasion did not work out, he should shoot the VI Corps commander in the rear end but take care not to kill him. Lucas noted in his diary that he feared turning his back on the officer throughout his time at the Anzio battle.²³⁹

Lucas and Truscott had insisted that at least one rehearsal landing take place before the invasion, and so on 19 January, both the British 1st Division and the United States 3rd Division

²³⁸ Lucas Diary, 10 January 1944, 295-305.

²³⁹ D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 560; Lucas Diary, 10 January 1944, 295-305.

landed at beaches near Salerno and Naples. Although the British landings proceeded generally well, Truscott's division encountered many problems including infantry battalions landing on the wrong beaches and at the wrong times. The navy failed to get in close to the beach, and consequently hours passed before the landing craft arrived. Communication problems vexed the operation, and no heavy weapons made it ashore until well after dawn. Worst of all, forty DUKWs (amphibious trucks) sank with their cargo, many carrying heavy artillery pieces. Truscott later wrote that Lucas reported to Clark that the rehearsal was entirely successful. Truscott remarked that Lucas was "in a difficult position with regard to General Clark, and he was unwilling to protest further although he had no objection to me doing so." Clark appeared disturbed by the 3rd Division commander's report, and despite Lucas and Truscott's pleas for more time for another rehearsal, Clark refused. However, the Fifth Army commander did call Admiral Frank J. Lowry and arranged for Lucas and Truscott to work with naval experts to iron out the problems they had encountered during the rehearsal.²⁴⁰

Shortly before Lucas and the VI Corps set out on their mission, Patton recorded his feelings about the operation in his diary. "Shingle is pretty dubious as the beaches are largely unknown." He added that the plan had always been problematic, and the disastrous rehearsal had seemed to confirm his lack of confidence. He did add a note of hope, writing that "It seems inconceivable that the Boche will not guess that we are coming but he has made so many foolish mistakes that we may get ashore unopposed after all." However, he expressed a prophetic thought for the operation. "If the thing is a success, Clark will get the credit. If it fails, Lucas will get the blame."²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 108; Blumenson, *Anzio*, 61; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 303-304; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 216.

²⁴¹ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 400.

And so, without much confidence in himself or in his mission, Lucas set out to launch his amphibious invasion like a modern-day Nicias, the fatalistic Athenian general that lead the doomed Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian War. The night before the invasion, on board the *USS Biscayne*, Lucas recorded his thoughts, which seemed to swing from optimism to dread. He expressed some confidence that the Germans had not ascertained the Allied plans, and even believed that “we have a good chance to make a killing.” Yet he still lamented the lack of training time. “We have done in three weeks a job that should have taken three months.” His men had been working fifteen-hour days, and the Allied leadership had neglected many important aspects of the invasion, he observed. “Nothing could be done about this because shipping is available now and will not be later.” He wrote that despite his misgivings he was optimistic, then his pessimism returned. “I struggle to remain calm and collected.” His gloom soon turned to his superiors. “I wish the higher levels weren’t so over-optimistic.” Lucas believed that Clark’s assault against the Gustav Line in anticipation of Shingle would not draw sufficient German strength away from the Anzio sector. “They can still slow us up there and move against me at the same time.”²⁴²

At the time of Lucas’ relief and in the weeks following, his superiors all expressed concern for him and his career. Two days before the relief, Marshall, who could see the writing on the wall, wrote to McNair and considered how best to go about finding him a new assignment. “[Lucas] has had a wealth of experience and quite evidently is tired out. I want to save his pride, I want to protect his reputation and, at the same time, get the best benefit of his service.” He asked McNair if he could find a suitable appointment for him, and then suggested that Eisenhower could use him in England to help with troop training. Clark later wrote that he

²⁴² Lucas Diary, 21 January 1944, 322-323.

told Alexander, “I would not under any circumstances do anything to hurt the man who had contributed so greatly to our success at Salerno and our drive northward to Anzio.” Truscott also mentioned in his memoirs Clark’s reluctance to “hurt” Lucas. A few days after Lucas’ relief, Marshall had suggested that Lucas resume his old role as Eisenhower’s “eyes and ears” man, but Eisenhower responded that his current staff worked well and had no need for the former VI Corps commander. However, he did request that Lucas be sent to Britain so that he and his staff could question the former VI Corps commander about his experience fighting the Germans. When he arrived at Eisenhower’s headquarters on 21 March, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force wrote to Marshall that “I must say he doesn’t seem to me to be a ‘defeated’ man. I believe you’ll get a lot of good out of him.”²⁴³

Shortly after Clark relieved Lucas, Truscott went to visit the outgoing VI Corps commander. He later wrote that “while Lucas was deeply hurt, he had no ill feeling toward me, and our friendship was unbroken up to the time of his death.” Instead, Lucas’ reserved his bitterness for Clark and Alexander. Truscott remarked that “it was one of my saddest experiences during the war.” Lucas offered his thoughts to Eisenhower’s headquarters staff in late March. He was forthcoming about his own misgivings before the operation, and about the problems the VI Corps had encountered during the rehearsal. He informed them of the German thrust in mid-February, Harmon’s counterattack that halted the enemy advance, and the baffling, continued optimism of captured German soldiers that Hitler’s armies would win the war. However, without directly criticizing his superiors, he mentioned that he had been “often in a quandary as to the intentions of the Fifth Army and of General Alexander.” Harry Butcher,

²⁴³ Bland, *Marshall Papers Vol. 4*, 313; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 244; Truscott, *Command Missions*, 327-328; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1760-1761, 1779.

Eisenhower's naval aide, recorded Lucas' remarks to the staff and then considered events then occurring at Monte Cassino as the Fifth Army continued its slog without Lucas. "No one seems to know just what is likely to happen in Italy."²⁴⁴

Like Lloyd Fredendall, Lucas soon rotated back to the United States to be placed in a position to train troops. On 4 April 1944, Marshall received a memorandum prepared by his chief of staff which recommended that Lucas command a training army but did not recommend his promotion to lieutenant general. Lucas took up the role as deputy commander to the Fourth Army at Fort Sam Houston, Texas and served under William H. Simpson shortly before his transfer to Europe to command the Ninth Army. The day that Eisenhower's troops stormed the beaches at Normandy, McNair wrote a letter to Lucas in which he explained the situation. "The Chief [Marshall] has decided that in the case of General Simpson and others in his status, he will withhold further promotion until after there has been a satisfactory battle demonstration of capabilities." In short, Lucas would have to wait until Simpson proved himself in battle before his confirmation in command of the Fourth Army. "I tell you this," McNair continued, "since the decision may postpone your assumption of full and final command of the Fourth Army for a rather indefinite period – not too long, I hope, but possibly not too short."²⁴⁵

Just over two years after the debacle at Anzio, American newspapers ran a story that came to define the narrative surrounding Lucas' command. "Officer Timidity at Anzio Costs Thousands of U.S. Boys," ran one headline. Clark Lee, an American war correspondent, reported Lucas' failure to take the Alban Hills and stated that had he done so the "whole story of

²⁴⁴ Truscott, *Command Missions*, 327-328; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 505-507.

²⁴⁵ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 164, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, M.G. White, Major General, Assistant Chief of Staff. 4 April 1944; NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 10, McNair to Lucas, 6 June 1944.

the war in Italy would have been different.” Lee recalled Lucas’ excessive caution and remembered him saying: “not too fast. Just go as far as the canal and sit there. We must prepare for a counterattack. We can’t take too many risks.”²⁴⁶

In 1948, Lucas took up the duties of deputy commander of the Fifth Army in Chicago. While in this post in early 1949, he took an active role in Operation Snowbound, the U.S. Army’s efforts to relieve small towns in the Midwest from the winter’s massive blizzards. The *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* described Lucas as a, “scholarly, white-haired general,” and quoted Lucas’ plans for the operation. “Our objective,” Lucas said, “is to smash through to settlements isolated for weeks. We must reach the people. We must bring food and water for livestock.” In December of that year he entered Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Chicago and passed away on Christmas Eve. He was fifty-nine years old.²⁴⁷

Lucas had consistently displayed competence and professionalism in his career prior to American entry in the Second World War. He’d tasted combat against Poncho Villa in 1916, and then later against the German army in France. In both instances he had acquitted himself well. He had further distinguished himself through his military education, which included attendance at the Command and General Staff School, as well as at the Colorado Agricultural College. He had served in a variety of peacetime postings and had proven himself as a first-class troop trainer while preparing the 3rd Infantry Division for amphibious landings. He eventually commanded a corps in the United States. Throughout it all he had made important connections in the Army by befriending officers like George Patton, and critically, he impressed George Marshall, who in no small part helped to shape his career as America entered the war.

²⁴⁶ *Springville Herald*, Utah, 20 June 1946, www.newspaperarchives.com.

²⁴⁷ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, Wisconsin, 10 February 1949, www.newspaperarchives.com; *Austin American*, Texas, 27 December 1949, www.newspaperarchive.com.

Marshall's selection of Lucas to serve as Eisenhower's observer in early 1943 proved a turning point in his career. Marshall's decision plucked him from the obscurity of Stateside command and inserted him in the middle of the action. While serving under Eisenhower, Lucas earned the various American Mediterranean commanders' respect. He showed intelligence, an understanding of logistics, and a willingness to take on any role that came his way. It did not hurt that Lucas had been a long-time friend of Patton, who had already earned a reputation as a bold and aggressive field commander. Lucas' time with Patton on Sicily had placed him in a combat zone that critically boosted his profile despite the fact that he did not have a command role. Indeed, he repeatedly thanked Patton for his tutelage in Sicily, and measured his own progress as a corps commander in the Fifth Army against what he thought Patton would have done in his shoes.

Eisenhower noted Lucas' experience in Sicily as key at the time he gave him the II Corps command. While in Washington, Marshall had told Lucas that anything could happen once he accepted the observer job with Eisenhower, and the Chief of Staff seemed to fulfill that musing by agreeing to Lucas' appointment. A short time later, Lucas appeared to be the most able candidate to replace Dawley after his relief at Salerno, and quickly found himself in command of the VI Corps, the key American component of Mark Clark's Fifth Army. All of these events had worked to place Lucas in position to command a bold, American-led amphibious envelopment of the Germans in early 1944. For Clark and the American commanders, Lucas was the obvious choice to command Shingle, by virtue of the fact that he was already in command of the VI Corps, had seen combat in Sicily, and had acquitted himself well in the fighting after Salerno. From Clark's point of view, Lucas had not only proven himself a capable combat commander by that point, but Marshall, Eisenhower, and Devers all appeared to have complete faith in him.

Whatever Alexander's feeling toward Lucas at the time of the selection, he understood the diplomatic niceties that prevented him from voicing objections to the American choice for command and acquiesced to their decision.

In many ways, John Lucas was a victim of the political pressures behind Anzio. As historian Steven L. Ossa asserts, Churchill must bear a considerable amount of the blame for the failure at Anzio. The British prime minister had become obsessed with the operation, and Lucas was keenly aware of it, as the "Gallipoli" comment in his diary attests to. Ossa also correctly states that American political and military leaders also must share blame since they acceded to Churchill's wishes "in spite of their suspicions about British intentions." Ossa's chief argument, that Clark and Alexander are mostly to blame for the debacle, and that subsequently they placed the responsibility for the failure on Lucas, is only partially correct. Certainly, Clark and Alexander made a series of poor decisions, not the least of which was selecting Lucas for the operation. Their failure to stand up to their superiors and demand more time for training, unwarranted over-optimism, and Clark's conflicting orders to Lucas all played a part. Nevertheless, Lucas was entirely a product of the Marshall system. And the Marshall system required optimism and a willingness to attack against heavy odds. When the prerequisites were not right, the system failed.²⁴⁸

Indeed, there is evidence that various actors set Lucas up as a scapegoat, something Patton predicted on the eve of the invasion. Churchill's memoirs pointedly place the blame with Lucas. He wrote, "no general attempt to advance was made by the commander of the expedition. ... the opportunity for which great exertions had been made was gone." In a letter to Smuts, Churchill further denigrated Lucas when he wrote that "naturally I am very disappointed at what

²⁴⁸ Ossa, "Major General John P. Lucas at Anzio," 54.

has appeared to be the frittering away of a brilliant opening in which both fortune and design had played their part.” Curiously, Churchill mentioned in his letter that Lucas was “a man of fifty-three.” Alexander wrote in his memoirs that “a younger or more experienced soldier would have been quicker to react.” Clark made it a point to mention that Lucas “died a few years later”. Among the senior political and military leaders behind the expedition, it appears there was an attempt to portray Lucas, justly or not, as old and lacking energy.²⁴⁹

General James M. Gavin believed that Lucas had been the scapegoat at Anzio. In 1948, Gavin served with Lucas as the Fifth Army’s chief of staff in Chicago while Lucas was the deputy commander. He called Lucas, “a widely read man of unusual intelligence and sensitivity” who had been “highly regarded in the peacetime army.” While serving together the two men had discussed Shingle many times, and Lucas remained bitter toward Clark for his treatment. Lucas told him that he had the choice to accept a flawed mission or face relief and another officer would command Shingle. According to Gavin, Lucas believed that Clark was too weak a character to say no to Churchill and Alexander. Gavin wrote that “Lucas was relieved for not being more tigerish. ... the blame had to be placed somewhere and someone had to go. It was Lucas.”²⁵⁰

However, there is no denying that Lucas’ failures as a commander at Anzio cost American and British lives and squandered the element of surprise that the landing had achieved. Like Lloyd Fredendall, Lucas too proved ill-suited for the task that Marshall and the Army had assigned him. Fredendall had showed himself completely incompetent in his role, while Lucas certainly had his positive qualities. Indeed, Lucas was at least capable of tough defensive

²⁴⁹ Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 488; Alexander, *Memoirs*, 126; Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 244.

²⁵⁰ Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 77-78.

fighting. However, both men had faltered under the extreme conditions of combat, and in doing so had jeopardized the men under their commands and their missions. One characteristic that both men shared not only with each other but with many American officers during the war was a rocky relationship with the British. Still, the nature of the integrated command structure at Anzio was quite different from that of the II Corps in North Africa under Fredendall. As stated previously, Fredendall's immediate superior was General Sir Kenneth Anderson, who often offered contradictory orders to Fredendall's subordinates. This command structure, occurring just at the moment when American troops were coming into contact with the Wehrmacht for the first time proved disastrous, and fed into Fredendall's prejudice against the British. However, Lucas had to contend with a superior British army group commander that had little confidence in him, as well as a subordinate British divisional commander who likewise had little confidence in him. Given the integrated nature of Lucas' command, the mutual low opinion that existed between the VI Corps commander and these British officers proved a major handicap to the mission.

Because of his antagonistic relationship with General Penney, Lucas was not capable of creating a truly strong, working command structure for the VI Corps. Eisenhower's injunction about Fredendall, that "under conditions of strain, he is not particularly successful in developing a happy family and complete teamwork," certainly applied to Lucas as well. However, this failure to create a "happy family" did not end with the British. Although Lucas generally got along well with his American divisional commanders, particularly Truscott, he delegated too much authority to his staff and subordinates, especially in difficult situations. As mentioned above, Truscott later wrote that Lucas lacked leadership qualities and did not "engender confidence" in his subordinates. Self-doubt before and during the battle riddled his diary entries.

As British historian and Brigadier General C. J. C. Molony noted about VI Corps headquarters, “in short, under Lucas the atmosphere had become negative.” When Truscott took over, his decisive leadership ensured that morale in the beachhead increased sharply.²⁵¹

Understandably, lack of aggressiveness was the most serious charge leveled at Lucas at the time and since. Churchill had certainly hoped that the landing at Anzio, followed by the VI Corps’ speedy occupation of the Alban Hills would have forced a rapid German retreat into northern Italy. Instead of taking the chance of overextending his corps and risking the beachhead, Lucas chose to consolidate his position. The British 1st Division eventually advanced to the Factory, but no further. Historians still hotly debate the wisdom of this decision. Clark issued Lucas vague and even contradictory orders. Given the swiftness of the German buildup in the days following the landing, it seems unclear that the VI Corps could have withstood a determined enemy counterattack.

Even if Lucas’ decision to consolidate the beachhead rather than take the Alban Hills was correct, the VI Corps commander still exhibited a lack of aggressive, fighting spirit throughout the battle. As noted above, he failed to cut the German transportation networks at Cisterna and Campoleone. Despite Truscott’s prodding, Lucas delayed the attack to these key locations until the enemy had strongly reinforced them. After 18 February, the final day of the massive German assault that drove a salient into the Allied lines, a day that historian Carlo D’Este called “the most critical day of battle for the Anzio beachhead,” Lucas only reluctantly agreed to a counterattack, fearing that committing his reserves could lead to disaster. Lucas acceded only after assurances from Truscott and with the eager approval of Clark, indicating that the VI Corps

²⁵¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1023; Truscott. *Command Decisions*, 319-320; C. J. C. Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East: Volume V*, 752.

commander undoubtedly lacked vigor, one of Marshall's key requirements for command.²⁵²

Marshall had promoted the career of Lucas as he had that of Fredendall, and both men had failed in the crucial test of battle. These failures highlight the difficulties that Marshall and other higher American commanders had in selecting officers for combat commands, and the reality that training and success in the peacetime Army was no indicator of just how effective a commander would be under fire. However, unlike Fredendall, Lucas was at least competent in command. He had performed relatively well as the VI Corps commander in the months leading up to Shingle, as Clark put pressure on his divisional commanders to advance. He understood and appreciated the difficulties of logistics, and the necessities of keeping an operation like Shingle supplied. He offered a decent defense of the Anzio beachhead once the possibility of a daring advance had passed. He did not freeze or abdicate his responsibilities as Fredendall had at the Kasserine Pass.

Yet for all that, Lucas exhibited extreme self-doubt, an overly cautious nature, a hostility toward his British superiors and subordinates, and a tendency to depend too much on his staff and subordinates. These aspects of his command proved a major detriment to the Allied effort at Anzio. As with Fredendall, the Marshall system clearly failed in its elevation of Lucas. Further, it also took time for the Fifth Army to relieve Lucas once his limitations as a commander became apparent. Within days of the Anzio landings, Alexander and Clark understood that the VI Corps had wasted its advantages of surprise, and Lucas had left the force in a barely tenable position. A full month passed before Clark relieved Lucas, and then only after weeks of prodding from Alexander. Signs of Thomas Ricks' notion of the "Organization Men" – general officers going

²⁵² Truscott, *Command Missions*, 323; D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 245.

along to get along – were already apparent in the Fifth Army, as Clark did not want to hurt Lucas' career by relieving him in the middle of the battle.

For all of these issues with Lucas as commander, it is difficult to ignore one aspect of his leadership at Anzio. The Germans in Italy clearly feared that the Allies would make a dash toward the Alban Hills and then take Rome. By their accounts, there was nothing that could have stopped Lucas. Such a move could very likely have shocked Kesselring into a massive withdrawal of his forces north of the city, lest they be cut off before he understood the limitations of the Allied force, or its surprising lack of effective air support. The VI Corps may very well have achieved Churchill's view of the operation as he envisioned it. But such a daring move required a commander of a different caliber. Lucas was a cautious and doubtful general, a modern George McClellan or even a Bernard Montgomery – a commander who needed to wait until all the pieces were in place before he would even consider any kind of an advance. What the VI Corps at Anzio needed, and what Lucas most assuredly was not, was a commander like Ulysses S. Grant, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, George S. Patton, or Erwin Rommel. However, the qualities of boldness, daring, and risk-taking were simply not in Lucas' DNA, and not apparently easy for the Marshall system to detect in advance.

CHAPTER 5

OMAR NELSON BRADLEY

On 18 August 1944, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, while visiting the British and American forces in Italy, wrote a letter to U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt. “The situation in Europe is being vastly changed by the glorious and gigantic victories achieved in France by the U.S. and British forces,” he began with typical Churchillian flourish. “It may well be that our armies will gain a victory in Normandy which far exceeds in scale anything that the Russians have done on any particular occasion.” Only the day before he had written to his wife, Clementine, “what tremendous events are taking place in France! The Ike-Monty operations appear to be the greatest battle of the war and may result in the destruction of German power in France.” Churchill’s excitement was in reference to the unfolding battle of the Falaise Pocket, or Falaise Gap. The final great battle of the Normandy campaign witnessed tens of thousands of German soldiers trapped on three sides by the surrounding Allied armies. British and American military leaders believed that if the pocket could be closed, then the German Seventh Army as well as other enemy forces within it could be annihilated, and then the Axis position in France rendered completely untenable.²⁵³

The Battle of the Falaise Gap is another one of the most controversial episodes to emerge from the Second World War. To be sure, this battle was a major Allied victory that saw massive German casualties and the vast destruction of Nazi weapons and material. Years later, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote down his experiences touring the field two days after the battle had ended. He noted that the “roads, highways, and fields were so choked

²⁵³ Kimball, *Alliance Declining*, 282; Mary Soames, ed., *Winston and Clementine: The Personal Letters of the Churchills* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 501.

with destroyed equipment and with dead men and animals that passage through the area was extremely difficult.” He described the slaughter fields as though they were something out of Dante’s *Inferno*. “It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh.” Francis De Guingand, Montgomery’s chief of staff, recalled his impressions flying over the battlefield. “Never have I seen such a scene of desolation,” he wrote. “It was an unforgettable sight, and the smell of decay was strong in the air above.” The Allies killed at least ten thousand Germans in the pocket and captured approximately fifty thousand prisoners.²⁵⁴

However, the Allies had failed to close the gap in time. The victory was incomplete, and many Germans escaped. The exact number of German soldiers who eluded capture will almost certainly never be known. A few days after the battle, Adolf Hitler, still suffering from the physical effects of the assassination attempt on his life a month earlier, ordered Field Marshal Walter Model to compile a report on the survivors. Historians have never located this report, if indeed Model ever created it. Most reliable estimates state that fifty thousand battle-hardened veterans managed to slip through the Allied net. Roughly 150,000 more German troops held positions to the northeast and south of Falaise, and if the Allies had closed the pocket earlier the German positions would have been untenable, and possibly led to their destruction as well. The Germans that escaped and those just outside it played roles in the subsequent actions on the Western Front, most notably in the Netherlands during Operation Market-Garden the following month, and during the Ardennes Offensive which launched in December.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 279; Francis De Guingand, *Operation Victory* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), 410.

²⁵⁵ William B. Breuer, *Death of a Nazi Army: The Falaise Pocket* (Chelsea: Scarborough House, 1985), 293-294; Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 295; Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 56; Hanson, *The Soul of Battle*, 369.

Participants in France at the time recognized the enormity of the lost opportunity at Falaise. General James M. Gavin, commander of the United States 82nd Airborne Division, later wrote, “the destruction of two German armies was in their grasp.” He noted that the generals commanding the battle saw they had the potential to deliver a Cannae-style defeat upon the Germans. “If they could have been successful in realizing that objective, it would have saved many lives and almost certainly have ended the war in 1944.” Richard Rohmer, a Mustang pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force, asserted later that the failure to close the gap in a timely manner was “one of the most costly Allied blunders in the European theater in World War II.” Frank W. Norris, with the 90th Division artillery, stated, “those same German units and senior commanders who escaped comprised much of the hard core of the units we were to confront later under much less favorable circumstances.”²⁵⁶

Historian John Ellis states that “in these precious extra days the Germans managed to extricate thousands of men.” He further explains that of the nine panzer, two parachute, and fifteen infantry divisions that constituted the German Seventh Army, “only one, 77th infantry, was permanently eliminated from the German order of battle.” However, those units that did survive were hardly in top-notch fighting condition. Carlo D’Este observes that “whatever the [casualty] figures the aftermath of the battles around Falaise has left lingering doubts that despite their great victory the Allies had let slip from their grasp an even greater opportunity.” Russell F. Weigley asserts that “of fifteen divisional commanders in the pocket only three did not get away. Only one of five corps commanders did not reach safety.” He also notes that the Germans themselves portrayed the struggle and extrication of these forces from the pocket as a kind of

²⁵⁶ Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 128; Richard Rohmer, *Patton’s Gap: Mustangs Over Normandy, Second Edition* (New York: Stoddart, 1981), xviii; John Prados, *Normandy Crucible: The Decisive Battle that Shaped World War II in Europe* (New York: Nal Caliber, 2012), 251.

victory. “This interpretation is not without merit.” Gerhard L. Weinberg also comments on the magnitude of the disaster, stating that the Germans “had extricated some 50,000 thousand men including many experienced officers, from the wreckage of Army Group B.” Despite the victory in terms of destruction inflicted upon the enemy, the Allies undoubtedly suffered a disaster of the first order by failing to close the gap in time.²⁵⁷

Indeed, Walter Warlimont of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht later noted that while the Battle of the Falaise Pocket represented a significant German defeat, it was nevertheless an incomplete victory for the Allies. “The Operations Staff War Diary indeed records that ‘a good half’ of the troops thus encircled fought their way out, characterizing this as ‘one of the great feats of arms of this campaign.’” The fact that so many German soldiers had escaped brings to mind Churchill’s words after the British evacuation of Dunkirk: “wars are not won by evacuations. But there was a victory inside this deliverance, which should be noted.” In pulling out a sizeable number of troops, the Germans had found the victory in the deliverance.²⁵⁸

The Falaise Pocket represented a unique opportunity for the Allies to destroy a sizeable portion of the Wehrmacht in Western Europe and almost certainly end the war against Hitler’s empire sooner than they actually did. Omar Nelson Bradley was the principle American officer responsible for operations in France at the time as commander of the United States 12th Army Group. In failing to close the gap in time, Bradley blundered terribly. Yet despite his poor decisions at Falaise, which were nothing short of disastrous, Marshall and Eisenhower never considered any form of censure, let alone relieving him of command. Indeed, he continued in his

²⁵⁷ Ellis, *Brute Force*, 391; Carlo D’Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1983), 438; Weigley, *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants*, 214-215; Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 694.

²⁵⁸ Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-1945* (Novato: Presidio, 1964), 450; Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 115.

position until the end of the war and within weeks of the battle received a promotion. He eventually capped his career as the United States Army Chief of Staff.

Bradley's blame for the failure stemmed from his famous order stopping George Patton's Third Army from closing the gap on 12 August. Other factors played into the failure to close the gap as well, and Montgomery also has received criticism over the mistake. Indeed, after the war Bradley laid the blame for the disaster with Montgomery, and this is also the source of much controversy among historians. Certainly, there was enough responsibility between them for the failure to close the gap. Historian Rick Atkinson blames them both, remarking, "the two most senior Allied field commanders, Montgomery and Bradley, had made a hash of things." Weinberg cites Montgomery's unwillingness to hold regular meetings with his American counterparts as the chief cause of failure. Rohmer declares that despite Bradley's insistence that he alone issued the 12 August halt order, Montgomery had in fact commanded the 12th Army Group leader to stop Patton, an argument that D'Este dismisses. British historian Richard Lamb is also critical of Montgomery, blaming him for not supporting his inexperienced Polish and Canadian units in the push on Falaise from the North. Regardless, he explained that "the major cause of failure was Bradley's lack of initiative." Weigley also faults Bradley for "failing to persist in completing his own design." John Keegan concludes that "Bradley's imagination had failed him." Victor Davis Hanson cites "Bradley's timidity and caution" as major factors in the failure. Most commentators that fault Montgomery, like Lamb and Rohemer, still note Bradley's bungling in the battle, and others lay the blame primarily with the 12th Army Group commander.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 366; Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2013), 163; Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 694; Rohmer, *Patton's Gap*, 201; D'Este, *Decision at Normandy*, 454; Richard Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe 1943-45: Success or Failure* (London: Buchan & Enright, Publishers, 1983), 173; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 216; John Keegan, *Six Armies in*

Operation Cobra began in late July 1944. Bradley's ambitious plan to breakout from the Normandy beachhead was intended as the first step toward the liberation of Paris. The plan called for a massive saturation bombing campaign against the German positions before Bradley's First Army struck southward from the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. Soon after, George Patton's Third Army would activate and swing westward to liberate the Brittany ports. Montgomery's drive on Caen, a D-Day first day objective that had still not been secured a month later, had diverted German attention. Once the Brittany ports were taken, the plan foresaw the British forces acting as the pivot around which the U.S. Army would turn. Then, the British could make a shallower wheel to the east once Caen had been secured, marching toward the Seine north of Paris. The bombing and the First Army drive south was a success, and Bradley later commented that "the breakout was decisive because it instantly banished any lingering doubt on the outcome of the war. If the enemy could have contained our beachhead, he might still have hoped to negotiate peace."²⁶⁰

On 24 July Eisenhower wrote to Bradley about the coming operation. "My high hopes and best wishes ride with you in your attack today, which is the largest ground assault yet staged in this war by American troops exclusively." The Supreme Commander told Bradley that every American back home would be watching the First Army's advance into France and reminded him that Montgomery's forces were busy in their operations to support the attack. The 21st Army Group's push further east would allow Bradley to "pursue every advantage with an ardor verging on recklessness."²⁶¹

Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 260; Hanson, *The Soul of Battle*, 333-334.

²⁶⁰ Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 316, 330.

²⁶¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 2018.

However, not everything went according to plan. The B-24s that preceded the operation dropped some of their ordinance short of the target and claimed almost 600 American casualties, leaving approximately 100 dead. The bulk of these unfortunate servicemen came from the 30th Infantry Division. This friendly fire incident also resulted in the death of Lt. General Lesley McNair, the head of Army Ground Forces and one of only four U.S. lieutenant generals to die in the war. McNair observed from the front as the bombs dropped, and the Army had to identify his body by his unit patch, general's stars, and West Point ring. The next day, 26 July, Bradley called Patton and told him to come to his headquarters for dinner that evening. Patton noted in his diary that Bradley also ordered him "to wear good clothes. I always do." At Bradley's HQ, the First Army commander informed him that friendly fire had killed McNair. "We buried him ... No band. A sad ending and a useless sacrifice. He was a great friend."²⁶²

Eisenhower wrote to Bradley that day, expressing concern that J. Lawton Collin's VII Corps was driving faster than the units protecting its flanks. "Such meagre news as I have this evening on your attack makes it look like you were making pretty fair progress toward the West and that Gee's [Leonard Gerow's V Corps] attack is also going fairly well. I have heard nothing at all about [VIII Corps commander Troy] Middleton's progress." Still, Eisenhower expressed confidence in the First Army commander. "However, I am perfectly certain that you are going to make the grade. You have got the stuff piled up and we must give the enemy no rest at all until we have achieved our objective. Then will we crush him."²⁶³

As the First Army push began to make serious headway on 27 July, Winston Churchill, Dwight Eisenhower, Walter Bedell Smith and Alanbrooke had dinner in England. Afterward,

²⁶² Calhoun, *General Lesley J. McNair*, 321-322; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 489.

²⁶³ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 2029.

the Chief of the Imperial General Staff recorded his thoughts on the unfolding events in France. “The strategy of the Normandy landing is quite straight forward,” he wrote. “The British must hold and draw Germans onto themselves off the western flank, whilst Americans swing up to open Brest Peninsula.” He also expressed his dissatisfaction with Eisenhower, although the American had labored for good working relations between his countrymen and the British. “It is equally clear that Ike knows nothing about strategy and is quite unsuited to the post of Supreme Commander.” He further considered the question of relations between nations when he wrote, “‘National’ spectacles pervert the perspective of the strategic landscape.” Alanbrooke was correct that national considerations were to indeed play heavily into the war in France over the next several weeks.²⁶⁴

That same day, the First Army war diary read that “the news from the front everywhere encouraging ... the boche was apparently on the run.” Collins ordered the 3rd Armored Division “to keep smashing southward to the Bois de Souilles, and once that spot was taken to keep going.” Middleton reported what appeared to be a general withdraw all along his front. On hearing of First Army’s apparent success, Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote to Bradley. “I am very much thrilled and gratified with the progress you have made. Please convey my appreciation and congratulations to all concerned and give them my very best wishes for continued success.” The Americans had pushed the line forward roughly fifteen miles since the offensive began on 25 July, only two days earlier. In point of fact, the operation unfolded much faster for the U.S. Army than Bradley had anticipated. In the words of historian Richard Overy, “[Bradley] had expected the usual steady steamroller, but now he had a racing-car.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Danchev, *Alanbrooke Diaries*, 586.

²⁶⁵ Sylvan, William C. & Francis G. Smith, *Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney H. Hodges & the First U.S. Army* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 72; NARA, Stimson Papers, RG 107,

By the last day of July, Allied units had reached Avranches, to the delight of Eisenhower, and the Supreme Commander wrote to Montgomery. “This is great news and Bradley must quickly make our position there impregnable. ... Good luck.” Two days later he wrote to Marshall, explaining the situation. “Bradley’s offensive was set up to drive rapidly toward the Avranches area and to secure an open flank if we possibly could so as to be free to operate both in the Brittany peninsula and to roll up the German line.” From Avranches, Bradley could launch attacks into Brittany in the west and toward the flank of the German Army to the east. Eisenhower was hoping that the current success would shortly evolve into a major operational victory.²⁶⁶

On 1 August, Bradley activated Patton’s Third Army, which initially consisted solely of Middleton’s VIII Corps, and ordered it into Brittany. Bradley justified this order as a logistical necessity. “Logistics were the lifeblood of the Allied armies in France,” he later wrote. “Without Ports and facilities we could not supply our armies.” Ultimately, Bradley ordered Patton to take Brittany with two corps, which many commentators since have viewed as overkill. Historians such as Carlo D’Este criticizes the operation since it did not play to the Third Army strength, notably mobile striking power. Further, D’Este faults Bradley for not realizing that battlefield events had overtaken the importance of taking the Brittany ports. He also faults Patton for failing to stand up to Bradley and Eisenhower over the issue. A Third Army operation summary stated that while VIII Corps quickly overran the bulk of the Brittany peninsula, “various strongpoints ... which were heavily fortified, were strongly resisting. These included ST. MALO, BREST, LORIENT, and ST. NAZAIRE.” In any event, by 3 August, Bradley

Box 10, Stimson to Bradley, 27 June 1944; Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 171-173.

²⁶⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2046, 2049.

correctly changed his mind and scaled back Patton's efforts in Brittany significantly in order to meet the opportunities presenting themselves to the east. Bradley directed Patton to launch his armored thrusts south of Avranches, and the Third Army turned west to capture St. Malo. The result was that the Americans held a relatively thin north-south line along the Atlantic coast in western Normandy down into Brittany. The same day that Patton's Third Army activated, 1 August, Bradley had relinquished command of the U.S. First Army to his deputy, Courtney Hodges, and assumed the leadership of 12th Army Group, the first such formation in American military history. Montgomery still formally commanded all Allied land forces in Normandy within the command structure, but Bradley was now theoretically his equal. This change to the U.S. Army command structure occurred at the same moment that American troops in France began to outnumber British and Canadian forces.²⁶⁷

Around the same time, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall, lobbying on behalf of Bradley's career. "If you still have a vacancy on the list of regular major generals would you consider promoting Bradley ... to major general [on the Regular Army list]." He cited the fact that Bradley had just assumed command of the army group and was working diligently with the British to work out the logistics of the Allied advance. "I am confident you will agree he has richly earned some definite recognition." Further, Eisenhower continued, promoting Bradley would reflect the importance of his new assignment, and would make his rank comparable with Montgomery's, who had yet to be promoted to field marshal.²⁶⁸

From his command post in Rastenburg, East Prussia, Hitler, and his military courtiers

²⁶⁷ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 285-286; D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 633-634; NARA. 12st Army Group Papers, RG 401, Box 1572, Lt. Col. C.V. Frey. *A Brief Summary of Operations, Third Army*. 1 June 1945.; Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy*, 260; Antony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 376, 406-407.

²⁶⁸ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2053.

tracked the Allies' progress in France. The first day of August also witnessed the Führer order a major counterattack against Avranches, intending to cut off American units operating south of the city. In the following days Avranches became an even more tempting target as Patton's army extended further into Brittany and south of Normandy. The Germans named the counterattack Operation Lüttich, and the plan called for the XLVII Panzer Corps to attack the American lines at Mortain, less than twenty-five miles from Avranches. German units struck Mortain in the early morning hours of 7 August, and Collins later noted that the attack itself did not come as a surprise, thanks to Ultra intercepts. However, "what did surprise us was the strength and exact timing of the attack."²⁶⁹

Bradley watched closely as events unfolded at Mortain. "The boche are attacking," read the First Army war diary, "with the acknowledged purpose ... of cutting across from Mortain to Avranches, thus separating the First and Third Army." Collins' VII Corps held against the German attack, despite the enemy pushing hard. The war diary noted that "[Hodges] is not too worried about the overall situation, though there is admittedly the strongest kind of pressure." Nor was Bradley overly concerned. The 12th Army Group commander visited Patton's command post and notified him about the German attack at Mortain, and that he had reserves ready to meet the enemy. Bradley returned to his own headquarters to find Churchill waiting for him, eager to argue for the cancelation of Operation Dragoon, the invasion of France's Mediterranean coast. In brief, Churchill wished to redirect the assets slated for Dragoon, what later became Operation Anvil, to other theaters. However, the prime minister began by complimenting Bradley on his performance. "I came to tell you how magnificently we believe

²⁶⁹ James Holland, *Normandy '44: D-Day and the Epic 77-Day Battle for France*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2019), 485-486; Beevor, *D-Day*, 376, 406-407; General J. Lawton Collins, *Lighting Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 251.

you are doing.” Bradley politely remained uncommitted to any position on Operation Dragoon during the interview, and Churchill eventually left to continue his campaign to enlist support elsewhere.²⁷⁰

In his memoirs, Bradley claimed that after Churchill left, he was able to discern that the Mortain attack was a major German blunder, one that provided the Allies with a unique opportunity. “In betting his life on the success of Kluge’s panzer attack,” he later wrote, “Hitler had exposed his whole flank to attack and encirclement from the south.” Indeed, if the Third Army could quickly move to the east while the German Seventh Army continued its investment at Mortain, “we might strike north in a pincer movement to cut off his entire army. I resolved to take the plunge and strike for annihilation of the German army in the west.” In Bradley’s autobiography, published in the 1980s, he left no doubt about the plan’s author: “Let me put it this very plainly: it was my idea.” Two days later United States Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau visited Bradley’s command post. The general told him that “this is an opportunity that comes to a commander not more than once in a century. We’re about to destroy an entire hostile army.”²⁷¹

On 9 August the First Army war diary noted, “it is still not certain, tonight, whether the boche is going to have another ‘go’ at a breakthrough or not.” The Germans had failed to achieve their objectives at Mortain, but had started another push further south, again with little success. “Some have argued that for [the Germans], this is a ‘now or never’ attempt. If he fails to break through, there is a strong possibility that the Third [Army] ... may yet succeed in drawing tight the string around his neck. This would be inevitable disaster for his forces.”

²⁷⁰ Sylvan, *Normandy to Victory*, 87; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 293.

²⁷¹ Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 372, 375; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 295.

Hodges ordered his troops to prepare for another German push, although he believed that the German striking power was spent.²⁷²

The shape of the pocket began to take form as units from Patton's Third Army raced eastward in accordance with the plan over the next few days. "The enemy's counterattack against the MORTAIN area has apparently been contained," Bradley's headquarters notified Patton and Hodges. "In concentrating his armored forces for the counterattack, he has incurred the risk of encirclement from the south and north." The Germans were now suffering "recent losses, deterioration in morale, supply shortages, and confused communication." Patton's orders were to advance toward Argentan, approximately sixty miles to the east of Avranches. Montgomery's 21st Army Group had also made progress on 7 August, and now was attacking south from Caen toward Falaise, with the intention of closing the pocket from the north. The British Second Army held the line to the north as the Canadian First Army, including the Polish 1st Armored Division, fought southwards to close the gap, running into considerable resistance. Hodge's First Army closed in from the west, having weathered the brunt of Operation Lüttich, while Patton's Third Army was in position to close the mouth of the pocket from the south. By 12 August, Wade Haislip's XV Corps reached Argentan, roughly fifteen miles south of Falaise.²⁷³

Eisenhower later wrote in his memoirs his confidence in American leadership at the time. "In Patton ... we had a great leader for exploiting a mobile situation. On the American left we had the sturdy and steady Hodges to continue the pressure on the Germans." Eisenhower also

²⁷² Sylvan, *Normandy to Victory*, 90.

²⁷³ NARA, 12th Army Group Papers, RG 407, Box 1343, Headquarters Twelfth Army Group to Army Commanders, 8 August 1944.; Martin Blumenson, *The Duel for France, 1944: The Men and Battles that Changed the Fate of Europe* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1963), 256; Keegan, *Six Armies at Normandy*, 253.

had great faith in the “battle tested corps and division commanders” that he could depend “upon in any situation to act promptly and effectively without waiting for detailed instructions from above.” The Supreme Commander prized initiative and understood that the man on the scene often had to move quickly to seize an opportunity. Eisenhower had visited Bradley’s headquarters on 8 August after touring the rear areas and having lunch along the side of a road. Harry Butcher recorded in his diary that “Ike keeps continually after both Montgomery and Bradley to destroy the enemy now rather than to be content with mere gains of territory.” Eisenhower had given Bradley his orders in no uncertain terms: the Allies needed to destroy the German Army in Normandy completely. Geographic advances were merely the means to that end, and Bradley himself understood this principle. The 12th Army Group commander wrote in his war memoir that “normally, destruction of the enemy’s army is the first objective of any force.”²⁷⁴

On 9 August, Eisenhower told Marshall that “I firmly believe that we have a great opportunity for a victory which if fairly complete will allow us complete freedom of action in France and will have incalculable results.” He noted that units arriving at the Normandy beachhead would need to enter the battle as soon as possible, and that Bradley, Patton, and Montgomery were all “alive to the opportunity.” Eisenhower informed the Chief of Staff of Patton’s movements, and the hope that he could exploit the German investment at Mortain. “The enemy’s bitter resistance and counter attacks in the area between Mortain south of Caen make it appear that we have a good chance to encircle and destroy a lot of his forces.”²⁷⁵

The First Army began putting heavy pressure on the retreating Germans from the West.

²⁷⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 275; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 636; Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 378.

²⁷⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2062.

The 3rd Armored Division history noted that “by August 12, German forces had been thoroughly beaten back at Mortain and another turning point in the war in the west had been reached.”

Allied airpower was relentless in its air attacks against Field Marshal Gunther Von Kluge’s forces, the history noted. “The Normandy campaign appeared to be a complete Allied success.” As the pocket formed, the 3rd Armored Division received orders to “drive deep into this Nazi cauldron of elite units in an attempt to close the gap.”²⁷⁶

A few days before Patton began his dash to the east, British Second Army commander Miles Dempsey had offered a wager to Bradley that the British and Canadian forces would beat the Americans to Argentan. Bradley did not accept the wager as Patton’s army at the time was much further away than Dempsey’s forces. During the meeting, the generals settled on a boundary line, delineating which armies would capture which objectives. Bradley told Patton, “we’ll go as far as Argentan and hold there. We’ve got to be careful we don’t run into Monty coming down from Falaise.” However, the XV Corps had arrived at Argentan while the British were still well north of Falaise, and Patton saw no reason for Haislip to hold position. The Third Army commander ordered units from XV Corps to proceed cautiously north to Falaise without asking Bradley’s permission.²⁷⁷

A 12th Army Group headquarters intelligence summary for 12 August noted that “the enemy is capable of making a strong effort to hold open the escape route between FALAISE and ARGENTAN. Success in this effort might allow the withdrawal of his badly battered divisions.” The report noted that if the Allies proved successful in closing the gap, they must prepare for a desperate German attempt to break out. “In any event the enemy has been forced to employ an

²⁷⁶ DDEL, U.S. Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, 3rd Armored Division, 1944-1949, Box 49, *Spearhead in the West*.

²⁷⁷ Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 374-375; Hirshson, *General Patton: A Soldier’s Life*, 515.

opportunist strategy which is difficult to predict.” Patton called Bradley late that night to tell him that Haislip’s units were pushing on to Falaise. Patton said, “we have got elements in Argentan ... let me go to Falaise and we will drive the British back into the sea for another Dunkirk.” Bradley replied, “nothing doing. You are not to go beyond Argentan. Just stop where you are and build up that shoulder.” By the time of the phone call, Patton had reconnaissance units just outside of Falaise, and with Bradley’s order he now had to pull them back. Patton’s move to close the pocket was the critical moment, the very thing that Bradley himself had planned for. Yet Bradley squandered the opportunity he had worked so hard to bring about. In what has become perhaps the most often repeated justification for a bad decision from the Second World War, Bradley later wrote the basis for his order: “I much preferred a solid shoulder at Argentan to the possibility of a broken neck at Falaise.” Patton was to hold at Argentan and consolidate his forces.²⁷⁸

From the German point of view, the situation looked increasingly grim. Hitler ordered the Seventh Army to continue its drive to the coast in the west, even as it fought to keep the gap open in the east, dividing its strength. Major General Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff, Seventh Army chief of staff, noted the relative strength of the German and Allied forces at the time. “The strength ratio ... was unfavorable, as all German units had suffered heavy losses which could not be replaced from reserves, whereas the Allies’ superiority had increased considerably.” He also lamented the fact that Hitler, on the other side of the continent, needed to approve vital orders when time was of the essence. “The enormous distance separating Supreme Command in East Prussia from what was happening in Normandy proved fatal, as all decisions

²⁷⁸ NARA, RG 407, Box 1319, Headquarters Twelfth Army Group, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 2 For Week Ending in 12 August 1944; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 128; George S. Patton, Jr. *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 104-105; Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 377.

arrived too late in spite of modern means of communication.”²⁷⁹

Gersdorff asserted that “in an energetic and determined thrust to the north, the enemy could have succeeded on 13 August in penetrating ... toward ... Falaise, thereby enveloping the Seventh Army and considerable parts of Fifth Panzer Army.” Gersdorff attributed the less than aggressive Allied performance to the division over inter-Allied boundary lines, or the Allied preparations to take Paris absorbing too many units. In any event, Gersdorff called 14 August “a turning point for the battle of France.” The Germans in the pocket realized that further offensive operations were no longer possible and began the planning to break out.²⁸⁰

The night of 13 August Patton wrote in his diary that “I am sure that this halt is a great mistake, as I am certain that the British will not close on Falaise.” That same day Eisenhower visited Bradley’s headquarters. Eisenhower’s naval aide Harry C. Butcher reported that at this critical time the commander of 12th Army Group was “playing cards as calmly and peacefully as if he had just come off the golf course on a Sunday afternoon. He stayed for dinner.” Gavin related this story in his memoirs, implying that Bradley had not been monitoring battlefield developments with sufficient urgency. Bradley refuted this characterization in his autobiography, insisting that he took a few moments to relax at the bridge table and that his proper place was not at a forward command post, but with Eisenhower.²⁸¹

Eisenhower noted in his memoirs that he had been at Bradley’s headquarters “when messages began to arrive from advancing American columns.” These units had been “complaining that the limits placed upon them by their orders were allowing Germans to

²⁷⁹ David C. Isby, ed., *Fighting the Breakout: The German Army in Normandy from ‘Cobra’ to the Falaise Gap* (London: Greenhill Books, 2004), 198-199, 202.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁸¹ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 508; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 640; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 130-131; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 301.

escape.” Eisenhower made it clear that he had agreed with Bradley and placed great importance upon keeping to the boundary that Bradley and Montgomery had worked out. He asserted, “otherwise a calamitous battle between friends could have resulted.”²⁸²

Eisenhower’s claims of rigidity in respecting the boundary line are curious, considering he had previously ordered Bradley to be “reckless” in his advance during Cobra, and to destroy the enemy army. However, the Supreme Commander understood the stakes at Falaise. On 14 August he issued a statement to all the forces under his command. “I request every airman to make it his direct responsibility that the enemy is blasted unceasingly by day and by night and is denied safety either in fight or in flight.” He issued instructions that every sailor make sure that their “comrades on land want for nothing ... that ships and ships’ companies can bring them.” He ordered that his ground troops force the enemy to surrender, and “let no foot of ground once gained be relinquished nor a single German escape through a line once established.” There was no doubt that Eisenhower saw the opportunity for what it was. He hoped to make history, and that it would be “a brilliant and fruitful week for us, a fateful one for the ambitions of the Nazi tyrants.” It is difficult to believe that the same general who issued this statement also concurred with Bradley’s halt order, which allowed tens of thousands of Germans to escape.²⁸³

Indeed, Eisenhower downplayed the disaster in his memoirs. “Mix-ups on the front occurred,” he wrote, “and there was no way to halt them except by stopping troops in place, even at the cost of allowing some Germans to escape.” He asserted that many enemy troops did indeed escape the trap but put forth a silver lining. “Their escape, however, meant an almost

²⁸² Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 278-279.

²⁸³ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2068; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 636.

complete abandonment of their heavy supply and was accomplished only by terrific sacrifices.”²⁸⁴

Eisenhower wrote a letter to Marshall the following spring, singing Bradley’s praises. Astoundingly, he asserted that “never once has [Bradley] held back in attempting any maneuver, no matter how bold in conception and never once has he paused to ‘re-group’ when there was an opportunity lying in his front.” He further noted that Bradley’s “handing of his army commanders has been superb.” Did Eisenhower really believe this about Bradley, or was he just covering for a brother officer and friend?²⁸⁵

Bradley gradually understood the magnitude of the catastrophe and called it one of his greatest disappointments of the war. “I boiled inside, blaming Monty for the blunder.” He noted that the American Army had done its part in the battle, and that he had “restrained Patton from a brash and foolish overextension.” He fumed that Montgomery had trusted the untested Canadian Army to complete such an important mission. “I could not understand why at so crucial a moment Monty had not reinforced the Canadians with some of his battle-hardened British troops, especially the armor. His unrealistic faith in the Canadians had cost us the golden opportunity.” Patton too had little good to say about the Canadians, writing to his wife on 18 August, “the family [the Canadians] got Falaise... I could have had it a week ago but modesty via destiny made me stop.”²⁸⁶

“Bradley came down to see me suffering from nerves,” Patton wrote in his diary on 15 August. Apparently, the 12th Army Group commander feared a rumor that the Germans had a force of five panzer divisions building near Argentan. After Bradley had stopped Haislip’s corps

²⁸⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 278.

²⁸⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2564.

²⁸⁶ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 299; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers: 1940-1945*, 517.

from its movement toward Falaise, he had redirected it eastward toward Dreux. Patton had hoped to salvage the situation with a wider envelopment. Bradley now stopped that movement as well, believing that if the five German panzer divisions did attack the Third Army's flank would be vulnerable. Patton wrote in his diary that he did not believe the rumor; nevertheless, Bradley ordered Patton to stop. The Third Army commander derisively referred to Bradley in his diary, "his motto seems to be, 'In case of doubt, halt.'" The next day, Patton was still attempting to get orders to move on Falaise. He telephoned Bradley's headquarters only to find that the general was away. Bradley's chief of staff, General Leven Allen, insisted that Patton not proceed north from Argentan. Patton recorded in his diary, "I again called him at 1215 and asked if he had any orders to permit me to advance. I told him... it was perfectly feasible to continue the operation." Allen repeated the order to halt on the line and consolidate."²⁸⁷

Within days two facts became apparent to the Allied leadership. First, the Germans had taken a considerable beating within the pocket, one from which their forces in Normandy almost certainly could not recover. The second fact was that an even greater victory had escaped their grasp. Butcher lamented the lost opportunity in his diary on 17 August. "General Ike is a bit disappointed that because of the extraordinary defense ring created by the Germans north of Falaise, which had taken so long to break, our total bag of prisoners will not be as great as he first thought." Eisenhower wrote to Marshall explaining the situation and attributed the escape of so many German soldiers to "the extraordinary defensive measures taken by the enemy north of Falaise." In other words, the Canadians were not able to advance south fast enough.

However, he affirmed that "my personal opinion is that [the Germans] still [have] a very large

²⁸⁷ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 508, 511; Martin Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket - The Campaign that Should Have Won World War II* (New York: Quill, 1993), 223; Hanson, *The Soul of Battle*, 370.

portion of their combat elements [inside] the gap.” The fact of the matter remained that tens of thousands of German soldiers, including many staff officers and headquarters troops, personnel necessary to reconstitute and reorganize units, made it out of the trap.²⁸⁸

Bradley later attempted to justify his halt order, citing several reasons. First, he expressed concern about Haislip’s left flank. He wrote that “an advance to Falaise would leave Haislip thinly strung out over a forty-mile line with troops who had not yet proven themselves in a difficult situation.” The XV Corps did indeed string itself out, but unlike Bradley, Patton appreciated that the overwhelming air superiority the Allies enjoyed gave the corps solid protection. Patton once had a conversation with Henry “Hap” Arnold and Carl “Tooe” Spaatz in which the air force generals asked him about his quick advances and the danger to his flanks. They wanted to know if this vulnerability ever worried him. Patton replied with confidence, “no worries. The Air Force takes care of my flanks.” When XII Corps commander Manton S. Eddy expressed concern for his right flank as he moved eastward across France, Patton offered his faith in the Allied airmen. “If I had worried about my flanks, I never could have fought the war,” he later wrote. “Also, I was convinced that our Air Service could locate any groups of enemy large enough to be a serious threat, and then I could always pull something out of the hat to drive them back while the Air Force in the meantime delayed their further advance.” On 17 August, Patton wrote to Marshall, stating that “the cooperation between the Third Army and the XIX Tactical Air Command ... has been the finest example of the ground and air working together that I have ever seen.” Patton’s understanding and use of armor and air coordination was second

²⁸⁸ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 647; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2071; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 196.

to none, and no doubt steady pressure by Allied tactical aircraft could have compensated for any deficiencies in his containment of the pocket.²⁸⁹

Bradley likewise should have appreciated the tremendous power and protection that air superiority had given the Allies in their advance. Only a few weeks earlier, on 2 August, Bradley wrote to Eisenhower, stating his enthusiasm for airpower during Cobra: “The operation could not have been the success it has been without such close cooperation from the Air. In the first place the bombardment which we gave them last Tuesday was apparently highly successful.” However, he did refer to the friendly fire incident that claimed the life of McNair and others, “we did suffer many casualties ourselves.”²⁹⁰

Patton argued that the Germans could not use the bulk of their strength for the breakout, as much of its fighting power was required to hold the perimeter. The Germans still needed troops to hold off Hodges’ First Army to the west, and Dempsey’s British Second Army and Harry Crerar’s First Canadian Army to the north. Patton felt confident he could withstand whatever the Germans threw at him. The Third Army commander’s assertion alone made the effort worth the risk.²⁹¹

Bradley also made much of the agreed upon inter-Allied boundary that separated his 12th Army Group and Montgomery’s 21st Army Group’s lines of advance. The British Second Army commander, Dempsey, certainly did not see the boundary as an ironclad law that unit commanders absolutely could not break under any circumstance. He wrote in his diary on 13 August: “so long as the northward move of Third Army meets little opposition, the two leading

²⁸⁹ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 298; H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 543; D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 638; Patton, *War as I Knew It*, 112-113; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 517.

²⁹⁰ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2051.

²⁹¹ Hirshson, *General Patton*, 515.

Corps will disregard the inter-Army boundaries.” Further, he stated that “the whole aim is to establish forces across the enemy’s lines of communications so as to impede – if not to prevent entirely – his withdrawal.” Earlier that day, Bradley met with Montgomery and Dempsey and the generals somewhat casually rearranged the boundary lines. Historian Martin Blumenson calls Bradley’s concern over the boundary, “a nonissue.”²⁹²

Another justification that Bradley offered for his halt order was the fear that friendly fire incidents would develop between the Third Army from the South and the Canadians from the north. He wrote in his autobiography that the friendly fire deaths that resulted from the Cobra bombing campaign “had already killed or wounded too many Allied troops to suit me.” He asserted that airmen would mistakenly attack Allied forces. “The same danger applied to the artillery. With the utmost care, I could foresee our armies accidentally shelling one another.” Certainly, Bradley had reason for concern about the possibility of friendly fire in such a delicate operation. However, if Bradley had concerns on 13 August with this possibility, why had he not been concerned with it a week earlier when he claims he created the plan for an Allied envelopment? He had to have known at that time of the real possibility of friendly fire incidents leading to disaster – the Allies had to close the gap somewhere – yet he still went forward with his plan at that time.²⁹³

Bradley also later noted in his autobiography that “Falaise was a long-sought British objective. If Patton’s patrols grabbed Falaise, it would be an arrogant slap in the face at a time when we clearly needed to build confidence in the Canadian Army.” As historian Victor Davis Hanson has asserted, when Bradley wrote *A General’s Life* in the late 1970s, he had to have been

²⁹² D’Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 440; Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals*, 213-214.

²⁹³ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 297.

well aware of the situation that the Canadians had faced north of Falaise. Did he really believe that the Canadians would have seen Patton's appearance as a "an arrogant slap in the face?" It is more likely Bradley was still scrambling to find ways to justify his bad decision nearly forty years after the fact.²⁹⁴

Certainly the 21st Army Group commander must bear a measure of responsibility for the disaster as well. Montgomery's failure to reinforce the Canadian and Polish units as they slogged their way through Falaise greatly contributed to the German escape. Montgomery was something of a paradox. Much like Mark Clark, he was a first-rate planner and organizer, and in earlier campaigns he had proven himself as a worthy tactician. However, few historians dispute that Montgomery had a tremendous ego, and his victories in North Africa had inflated his opinion of his abilities. While fighting in Normandy, Montgomery looked down on his American allies, considering them inexperienced and often unwilling to concede to his point of view. The feeling of antipathy was mutual, although Montgomery could not understand the American position toward him. Given his attitude toward the Americans and his own British superiors, it is reasonable to assume that Montgomery believed himself to be the best general in the theater, if not the greatest Allied general of the war. For Bradley, such a personality could not have been easy to work with.²⁹⁵

Given Bradley's poor judgement at Falaise, it is hard to understand how Marshall and Eisenhower allowed him to retain command. At the very least, one would expect some kind of reprimand or censure, but that was not the case. Indeed, both he and Montgomery received accolades and eventually promotions. This fact is quite puzzling considering the numerous times

²⁹⁴ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 298; Hanson, *The Soul of Battle*, 369.

²⁹⁵ Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy*, 478-479; Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe*, 173, 401; Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 230, 283.

Marshall, Eisenhower, and others including Bradley himself relieved American battlefield commanders during the war.

Several reasons explain why the Army leadership took no action against Bradley, as well as the fact that he continued to enjoy the confidence of his superiors despite his significant underperformance at Falaise. Marshall's long professional relationship with and respect for Bradley proved an important factor. Eisenhower's belief that his subordinates, Bradley in particular, had created positive and dynamic working relationships with their subordinate officers and the British also played a major role. The forthcoming shakeup of the Allied command system in France, with Eisenhower taking a much more active role in the campaign is another reason, as was the fact that virtually all of the major players saw the war as virtually won by mid-August 1944. Each of these factors did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they happened simultaneously and manifested as aspects of the larger U.S. Army institutional approach to the war. With Allied momentum in France achieved only after months of hard work and at tremendous cost in blood and treasure, even the disaster at Falaise could not alter what many saw, rightly or wrongly, as a winning strategic command arrangement. Criticism of Bradley could lead to criticism of the U.S. Army, so the critiques were quietly dropped.

Omar Nelson Bradley was born in Randolph County, Missouri on 12 February 1893, and named after a local newspaper editor and family friend. His father died from pneumonia shortly before he turned fifteen, and the young man began working at various jobs, even as he diligently attended school and played sports. He soon became obsessed with the idea of a West Point education, and contacted his Congressman, William M. Rucker. Rucker had already made a selection, but a new law allowed him to pick an alternate in case his first choice did not pass the exams. Fortunately for Bradley, the other hopeful failed and West Point accepted him in 1911.

His hometown paper, the *Moberly Weekly Monitor*, wrote that Bradley was “one of Moberly’s brightest young men and we wish him unbounded success.” He reported for duty that August. “The four years I spent at West Point were among the most rewarding of my life,” Bradley later wrote. “I loved every minute of it.” As a cadet, Bradley soon came into contact with other young men that eventually reached high rank in the Second World War, including Joseph T. McNarney, James A. Van Fleet, and Eisenhower. The West Point class of 1915 produced so many generals that many referred to it as “the Class the Stars Fell on.”²⁹⁶

Bradley received a commission as a second lieutenant in the infantry, and initially served with the 14th Infantry Regiment near Spokane, Washington and along the Mexican border. The next year he married his hometown sweetheart, Mary Quayle, and in 1917 the Army promoted him to captain. Bradley spent the First World War on the home front on recruiting duty and guarding copper mines in Butte, Montana, and feared for his future career prospects. “I tried every possible scheme I could dream up to get out of the 14th Infantry and into an outfit bound for France,” he wrote years later. “I sincerely believed that if I did not get to France I would be professionally ruined.” He served in various assignments after the war, including as an ROTC instructor in South Dakota and an appointment to West Point as a mathematics instructor. In 1924 he attended the advance course at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and then spent three years with the troops in Hawaii. Next, he attended the Command and General Staff School before returning to Fort Benning as an instructor in 1929.²⁹⁷

Bradley’s appointment to Fort Benning proved to be a critical moment in the

²⁹⁶ Jim Defelice, *Omar Bradley: General at War* (Washington D.C.: Regnery History, 2011), 9-17; *Moberly Weekly Monitor*, Missouri, 23 July 1911, www.newspaperarchive.com; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 30-31.

²⁹⁷ Steven L. Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley: America’s GI General* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017), xxi-xxii; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 44-45.

development of his career. George C. Marshall, then a lieutenant colonel, served as the assistant commandant and developed a rigorous program to replace the old, antiquated curriculum. He infused a new sense of purpose and direction into the school, so much so that many students and instructors referred to the “spirit of Benning” that motivated them during their time there under Marshall. Marshall described to his students the future of warfare with all its grim technological horror in one lecture that proved incredibly far-sighted. “Picture the opening campaign of a war,” he told his students. “It is a cloud of uncertainties, haste, rapid movements, congestion on the roads, strange terrain, lack of ammunition and supplies at the right place at the right moment, failures in communications, terrific tests of endurance, and misunderstandings.” He noted that both officer inexperience and enemy aggression would play major parts in the coming war, as would “fast flying planes, fast moving tanks, armored cars, and motor transportation in general.” It would be similar to what happened in Belgium in 1914, only much faster. “That, gentlemen, is what you are supposed to be preparing for.”²⁹⁸

Marshall employed officers he held in high regard to run the various school sections he had set up such as tactics, logistics, and publications. Bradley oversaw the third section, weapons and weapon doctrine development. Marshall believed the soft-spoken Bradley was “conspicuous for his ability to handle people and his ability to do things simply and clearly.” Bradley’s work pleased Marshall, and one instance in particular earned the assistant commandant’s respect. Some officers had pushed the idea forward that machine guns should be used in the same manner as artillery, with short, sharp bursts and with the crew in radio connection with higher command. They urged that machine gun units should require the same

²⁹⁸ David L. Roll, *George Marshall: Defender of the Republic* (New York: Dutton Caliber, 2019), 82-85; Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 69; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 1, 335.

communications equipment that artillery batteries carried with them. Marshall opposed the idea, not wanting to bog down the companies with extra equipment. Bradley organized a demonstration that illustrated that the companies could fulfill the desired role without the need for extra equipment, but with the material they already carried. Marshall told Bradley that it was “the best demonstration I ever saw.” Soon, it was part of Bradley’s regular presentation for every Fort Benning class.²⁹⁹

Bradley then attended the War College before returning to instruct at West Point once again. He became a lieutenant colonel in 1936, and two years later he joined the General Staff in Washington. Shortly after Marshall took over the duties of Chief of Staff, he made Bradley one of the assistant secretaries. Collins joined Bradley as a member of the secretariat in 1940, along with Walter Bedell Smith and Maxwell Taylor, “a high caliber group,” he wrote later. In his memoirs, Collins described their duties at the time: “the function of the Secretariat was to assist the Chief of Staff with his correspondence, to keep him up with his appointments, and more importantly to save time for him and his deputies in their decisions.” In order to satisfy Marshall, all papers the members of the group submitted to the Chief of Staff could be no longer than two pages, regardless of the subject’s complexity. “The format was fairly rigid: first, a statement of the problem; next, factors bearing on the problem, pro and con; a brief discussion, if necessary; conclusions; and finally, and most important, recommended action.” With his access to Marshall, Bradley became an integral part of America’s military decision making. Marshall considered Bradley part of his professional inner circle.³⁰⁰

Marshall directed Bradley to look into many problems facing the Army and its

²⁹⁹ Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 258-259.

³⁰⁰ Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, xxii, 76; Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 95-96.

preparations for war at this time. In one 1940 letter to Bradley, Marshall highlighted the problems with National Guard units. “A serious weakness of the National Guard is the lack of trained staffs from the battalion up,” he wrote. He directed Bradley to find ways to foster teamwork in these units and create more effective staffs. In May 1940, Marshall detailed Bradley to escort Senators Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., and Rufus C. Holman, members of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, while they observed the 70,000-man Army maneuvers in Louisiana and Texas. The corps-level war games highlighted the need for stronger and more mobile artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, tank units, anti-tank units, and more. It also uncovered the problems of integrating air power on the battlefield. “Of thirty-four air missions requested by the ground commanders, only two were carried out,” Bradley noted in his autobiography.³⁰¹

In the spring of 1941, Bradley returned to Fort Benning, this time as commandant of the Infantry School. Macon, Missouri’s *Macon Chronicle Herald* ran an article headline, “Missourian Heads Infantry School.” The article stated that Bradley “takes over his new assignment at a time when the tremendous expansion of the army has greatly intensified activity at the school, and more than trebled its size.” The new assignment came with a temporary rank of brigadier general. Like Mark Clark, he had skipped the rank of colonel entirely, another sign of Marshall’s faith and favor. A few weeks earlier, the *Moberly Monitor Index* had commented on his promotion, “friends who had heard of the announcement ... rejoiced in the signal honor and recognition accorded their former schoolmate.” The article noted that his friends considered him a “fine fellow” and “a hard and thorough worker.”³⁰²

³⁰¹ Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol 2*, 181-182; *Amarillo Sunday News Globe*, Texas, 19 May 1940, www.newspaperarchive.com; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 89.

³⁰² *Macon Chronicle Herald*, Missouri, 1 March 1941, www.newspaperarchive.com; *Moberly Monitor Index*, Missouri, 21 February 1941, www.newspaperarchive.com.

Marshall continued to value Bradley's advice even after the newly made general took up his duties in Georgia, and he wanted to know Bradley's thoughts on the eleven men chosen to attend the Infantry School that summer. "I wish you would write direct to me and tell me frankly what your reaction is as to the selections made for this first group," Marshall asked. Marshall queried him on the possibility of setting up Infantry School teams at the division level "for brightening up the junior officers." He also sought Bradley's thoughts on better training for National Guard units as well. In September, Marshall intended to deliver a speech to the Infantry School's graduating class. However, the Chief of Staff decided to visit the Army General Headquarters maneuvers in Louisiana instead. Bradley wrote to Marshall, stating, "we are very sorry you were unable to come to Benning today for our officer candidate graduating exercises." Bradley expressed Marshall's regrets to the class, had Marshall's speech read to them, and made sure each student received a printed copy as well.³⁰³

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army transferred Bradley to Camp Clairborne, Louisiana to take up his new assignment as commander of the 82nd Infantry Division, which later became the nation's first airborne division. In February 1942, Bradley received the wartime rank of major general. The following summer he became commander of the 28th Infantry Division, a Pennsylvania National Guard unit organizing at Camp Livingston, Louisiana. Many considered the division poor quality, and Marshall selected Bradley to whip it into shape, despite the fact that the major general did not want to repeat his First World War experience and remain on the home front. By fall, the unit was combat ready, and Bradley expected to take it into action overseas.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 2, 574, 622.

³⁰⁴ Defelice, *Omar Bradley*, 56-57.

In December, Marshall wrote to Bradley, thanking him for a report on operations that he had sent. He touched on several topics, including a recent hunting trip that he and Hap Arnold had enjoyed in Maryland. “I got two ducks and four pheasant, and a couple of quail,” he wrote with a tone of pride. He told Bradley about how busy things were at the General Staff, and how much work he had. “The plot grows and thickens and becomes more complicated,” he noted. “I often wonder if I shall ever be free to sit down and relax with my own affairs. God knows I have no other ambition except the early and successful culmination of the war.” He then acknowledged Bradley’s frustration with his continuing Stateside post with the 28th Infantry. “I have felt rather badly about you, but also felt sure you would understand, in holding you with your division.” He admitted that Bradley’s name had come up several times for corps command, and that he had disapproved each suggestion, “because I thought we must not have such rapid changes in National Guard units we are trying to build up.” Bradley’s name appeared in a memorandum suggesting candidates to replace Lloyd Fredendall as commander of XI Corps since Fredendall would now command the Center Task Force for torch. Nevertheless, Marshall did offer a measure of hope for Bradley’s career prospects. “You need have no fear of being passed over and that your name will not be considered for interesting Task Force assignments.”³⁰⁵

As Bradley wallowed with the 28th Infantry back in the States, the war was moving forward in North Africa. Eisenhower had his hands full both with military operations and with the political situation and had very little time. The largely untested U.S. Army in North Africa had yet to come up against the battle-hardened Afrika Korps and its legendary commander,

³⁰⁵ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 490-491; NARA, RG 165, Box 54, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff. 9 October 1942.

Erwin Rommel. Marshall believed that Eisenhower required another pair of “eyes and ears” to stay informed on the development of the units under his command and offered to send him an officer from the States that he could use in this capacity. The Chief of Staff prepared a list of officers that he thought could do the job.³⁰⁶

Eisenhower thought it a splendid idea and examined the list that Marshall had provided. He wrote to the Chief of Staff, “I suspect that all those now in the grade of general officer, whom would function well in this special capacity, already have very important tasks such as division commander.” He believed that a division commander back in the States would benefit from the kind of experience that this job could offer. “The nature of the work involved here requires brains, tact and imagination more than it does thorough acquaintanceship with the theater.” He believed that any competent officer would only take a week to get familiar with the situation before he could begin his duties. Eisenhower named several officers who Marshall had suggested as candidates, including Mathew Ridgway, Charles Corlett, Bradley, and a few others.³⁰⁷

Marshall had been considering giving Bradley command of X Corps, and he had issued orders sending him to Texas. “It is only fitting that your birthday should precede by only a few days your transfer to command a corps,” Marshall wrote to Bradley. The promotion “comes as a long delayed acknowledgement of your splendid record with the twenty eighth division. Congratulations and best wishes.” Shortly after Bradley heard the news of this assignment, a member of McNair’s staff called to inform him he would instead be going overseas without a command. After a brief stop in Washington and a visit with Marshall, Bradley was on a flight

³⁰⁶ Forrest C. Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 183.

³⁰⁷ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 951.

that took him to North Africa via Brazil. He arrived in Algiers on a rainy 24 February, in the middle of the Kasserine crisis. “The atmosphere was somber, even grim,” Bradley later wrote in his memoirs. Other than a few letters, he had had no contact with Eisenhower since their West Point days. Eisenhower outlined Bradley’s assignment, and gave him the power to make “suggestive changes” to unit commanders as he thought appropriate.³⁰⁸

In the aftermath of Kasserine and Lloyd Fredendall’s relief, Eisenhower appointed Patton to command the II Corps and sent Bradley along to act as his observer. Harry Butcher noted in his diary that “Patton will find Bradley most co-operative and available for duty desired.” Patton quickly assigned Bradley as his deputy corps commander, and the two began an inspection tour of the 1st Armored and 9th Infantry Divisions. Marshall suggested at the time that Bradley should take over Patton’s old command with the Western Task Force. “If you so desire there would be no objection to giving Bradley the Moroccan Command,” he wrote to Eisenhower in early March. “His judgement, ability, and outstanding capacity as a trainer for Husky [the forthcoming invasion of Sicily] requirements and his selfless attitude make him a natural choice for the assignment.” He believed that Bradley would do a better job in that role than Geoffrey Keyes, Patton’s previous deputy. Should Eisenhower wish to use Bradley in that capacity, Marshall was willing to send “another outstanding replacement.”³⁰⁹

Eisenhower rejected Marshall’s suggestion, as it would mean leaving Patton in charge of II Corps. He preferred to have Patton return to his previous command and lead the Husky operation when it was ready, as he initially intended. “After a full discussion of command

³⁰⁸ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 43, Marshall to Bradley, 12 February 1943; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 112-113, 131-133.

³⁰⁹ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 273; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 184; NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 43, Marshall to Eisenhower, 6 March 1943; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 3*, 580.

problem with Bradley and my staff,” Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on 11 March, “all of us believe that it best to adhere to original plan of [eventually] giving Bradley command of II Corps.” That same day, Eisenhower dashed off another letter to the Chief of Staff, praising Bradley’s work. “I cannot tell you how fortunate it was for me that Bradley arrived here at the time he did. He has been a godsend in every way and his utter frankness and complete loyalty are things that I count on tremendously.” Not long after his arrival in North Africa, both Marshall and Eisenhower trusted Bradley with high command in operations against the enemy.³¹⁰

Bradley first met Patton during his service in Hawaii in the late 1920s. The two had not been particularly close despite the fact that they had been neighbors. Nevertheless, the foul-mouthed commander of II Corps appreciated the abilities of his deputy as they worked together in North Africa. He wrote to his wife shortly after Bradley’s arrival, “Omar Bradley is my deputy and is good. He will get the job when I have finished this place.” During the Kasserine Pass battles, the Germans captured Patton’s son-in-law, John K. Waters. Patton was sleeping when news arrived that Waters had survived and was in captivity. Patton noted in his diary that “Omar Bradley woke me at midnight to read me the radio that John is safe.” Bradley was not present for the Battle of El Guettar, Patton’s bold action that erased the Army’s odium of defeat after Kasserine. Instead, he had been in Algiers with Eisenhower discussing plans for the forthcoming offensive in Tunisia.³¹¹

Bradley formally assumed command of II Corps on 15 April 1943, having served as Patton’s deputy for a little over a month. The next day, as Bradley prepared for his assault into

³¹⁰ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1022, 1024.

³¹¹ Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 63; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 189, 195; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 144.

Tunisia – his first taste of real combat – Eisenhower wrote to the new II Corps commander, and admitted that there would be hazards in the coming Tunisian campaign, notably with the geography of the region and in the Army’s lack of communications. “But we must overcome these difficulties,” he wrote, “and prove to the world that the four American Divisions now on the front can perform in a way that will at least do full credit to the material we have and the quality of our leadership.” He conceded that it was impossible to supply the II Corps to the level they would like under the circumstances, “but we can plan every operation carefully and meticulously, concentrate maximum fire power in support of each attack, keep constant pressure and convince everyone that we are doing our full part in the winning of this battle.” However, Bradley would have the opportunity to make good use of his tanks in the southern portion of his sector, and he directed him to launch his advance there. (Bradley ultimately ignored this charge to attack down a narrow river valley dubbed the Mousetrap, for fear that the Germans could easily ambush his force there). Eisenhower again noted how important it was not only from an American viewpoint that he succeed but also from the viewpoint of the Allied cause. “It is unnecessary for me to tell you again how complete is my confidence that you will do this job up to the hilt.”³¹²

Eisenhower concluded the letter with a final bit of advice. “It is that you must be tough.” Eisenhower expected Bradley to be tough on the officers under his command, and he expected them to be tough on the officers and men under their commands. “We have passed the time where we cannot demand from troops reasonable results after you have made careful plans and preparations and estimated that the task can be accomplished.” He told Bradley that just that morning a general had requested to withdraw an infantry battalion from the fighting since he had

³¹² Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1093-1094; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 486-487.

lost ten men. “We have reached the point where troops must secure objectives assigned by commanders and, when necessary, we must direct leaders to get out and lead and to secure the necessary results.” Finally, he told Bradley that he would back him whatever happened.³¹³

Not long after Bradley began his push into Tunisia, McNair visited the front with members of his staff. After setting up a command post tent for his guests, Bradley informed them about the situation in Tunisia and went over his operational plan. “Bradley had stated ... that his troops were in position for the attack all right, but that he was concerned lest his ammunition supply be not ready in time.” A member of the II Corps staff informed McNair that there would be plenty of ammunition for the attack, as well as to “meet any demands during the subsequent operations. Bradley made available for the purpose every truck which he could take and scrape anywhere in the corps.” After enemy artillery wounded McNair on a visit to the front on 23 April, he went to the hospital. Bradley sent an urgent message to Eisenhower stating McNair had been “seriously but not repeat not dangerously wounded” and that the general had received a “bad gash on shoulder and minor head wounds.” McNair’s diary entry the next day consisted of only three brief lines: “was up a little. Gen. Bradley awarded [McNair] the Purple Heart. There were a number of visitors.”³¹⁴

As Bradley took up his new assignment, Eisenhower continued to express faith in him, and the commander of Allied forces in the Mediterranean was not alone in his praise. He wrote to Marshall on 30 April, stating, “I cannot speak too highly of Bradley. He is doing a great job and McNair states, ‘Bradley definitively impressive.’” A few days later he sent another letter to the Chief of Staff. “I hope [Bradley] can be promoted. I will send you a full recommendation.”

³¹³ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol II*, 1093-1094.

³¹⁴ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 1, Lesley McNair Diary. North African Visit, April-May 1943; DDEL, Bradley Papers, Box 13, Bradley to Eisenhower, 23 April 1943.

Even Churchill soon sent Bradley a telegram expressing his approval. Eisenhower sent another encouraging message to the II Corps commander on 5 May. “I have been so pleased with your progress that I hesitated to say a word because I don’t want to break the spell. But you must know that everything you are doing excites not only my great admiration but my very deep appreciation.”³¹⁵

Patton, too, conveyed his confidence. “Please accept my most sincere congratulations on your magnificent work,” Patton wrote on 5 May. “I am just as tickled as if I had been there myself. Everyone tells me what a magnificent job you have done.” Indeed, Patton had spent the previous day with Eisenhower, who “was loud in your praise.” Patton told Bradley he expected that the Army would promote the II Corps commander and had even made preparations for that event. “[I] have ordered some stars for you.”³¹⁶

In conjunction with the British First Army, II Corps pushed the Germans, by now two badly beaten field armies, further back into Tunisia. At a press conference on 8 May, Eisenhower officially announced that Bradley, rather than Patton, now commanded the II Corps. That same day Eisenhower visited Bradley, who explained his plan to take Bizerte, the large port at Tunisia’s northernmost point. The 1st Armored Division and the 9th Infantry Division, together with the Corps d’Afrique were advancing on Ferryville, about fifteen miles southwest of Bizerte, what Harry Butcher called, “the most important naval base for our use in the Mediterranean, the capture of which marks the beginning of the end of Mussolini’s attempt to make the Mediterranean an Italian lake.” That night during dinner, word arrived that Bizerte had fallen. “Surprisingly, there was no jubilation,” Butcher reported. “Ike said he wasn’t interested

³¹⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1104, 1110.

³¹⁶ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 242.

in the capture of mere geographical locations – he would be satisfied only when all the Axis forces were cleared from Africa.”³¹⁷

Nevertheless, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall, communicating his pleasure at the victory, and again heaping praise on Bradley. “The II Corps had been superb throughout the operation,” he began, “and a great amount of the credit must go directly to Bradley. I recommend his promotion to the grade of lieutenant general.” Marshall wrote back the same day: “send Bradley the following from me personally: ‘You have justified our confidence in you many times over.’” A week later Marshall told retired General John L. Hines, “from all reports Bradley did us all proud and made an immense impression on the British.” He then noted the individual qualities that made him an effective commander. “Quiet, forcible, with a complete understanding of the requirements of the situation, he dominated the Second Corps and inspired them to splendid action.” Eisenhower’s message to Bradley was likewise complimentary. “I am bursting with pride over you and the magnificent team you are commanding.” Even Roosevelt asked Eisenhower to extend “his personal congratulations for your remarkable leadership in initiating the breakthrough.”³¹⁸

Bradley’s performance had warranted the praise. In Tunisia, the II Corps took over 40,000 prisoners, six of them generals. He had shown a proficiency in tactics, in his ability to coordinate the various organs of his command, and he frequently outflanked enemy positions rather than rely on brute frontal assaults. From Eisenhower’s point of view, one of Bradley’s greatest achievements involved working well with the British, something at which neither Fredendall nor Patton excelled. “This officer is about the best rounded, well balanced senior

³¹⁷ Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 112-113; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 299.

³¹⁸ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1117, 1120; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 3*, 685, 694.

officer that we have in the service,” Eisenhower wrote in his diary. “His judgements are always sound, and everything he does is accomplished in such a manner as to fit in well with all other operations. He is respected by British and Americans alike.” Eisenhower further declared that “I have not a single word of criticism of his actions to date and do not expect to have any in the future. I feel that there is no position in the army that he could not fill with success.”³¹⁹

Indeed, Bradley had impressed British 18th Army Group commander Harold Alexander, as did Patton. Alexander, responsible for Allied coordination in the North African campaign, later wrote that “they were two completely contrasted military characters; the one impatient of inaction, the other unwilling commit himself to active operations unless he could clearly see their purpose.” He recalled a conversation between the two men. Patton stated, “why are we sitting down doing nothing? We must do something!” Bradley responded with, “wait a minute, George! What do you propose we do?” Patton bellowed: “anything rather than just sit on our backsides!” For his part, Bradley characterized Alexander as, “a patient, wise, and fair-minded soldier.” He credited Alexander with helping the American Army “come of age in the Tunisian campaign.”³²⁰

Eisenhower clearly had tremendous faith in Bradley, as his diary entry indicates. Not only did he have no criticism, but he had set his expectations as such that he began to see Bradley as a major player in events as the war progressed. After the II Corps performance in Tunisia, Eisenhower almost certainly started to consider Bradley for higher command. In this, he and Marshall were apparently of one mind.

Preparations quickly began for Husky, the invasion of Sicily, and Bradley worked closely

³¹⁹ Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 112-115; Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 94.

³²⁰ Alexander, *Memoirs*, 44; Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 35.

with Patton, the commander of the U.S. Seventh Army. This new field army included II Corps and a provisional corps commanded by Keyes. “Had a long talk with Bradley,” Patton wrote in his diary on 17 May. “He grows on me as a very sound and extremely loyal soldier.” A few weeks later, Eisenhower sent Patton a message that if the battle in Sicily degenerated into “a slugging match,” he would pull Patton out “and let Bradley finish the operation.” Patton, unsurprisingly, objected, asserting that he would like to finish what he started. “I can’t make out whether [Eisenhower] thinks Bradley is a better close fighter than I am or whether he wants to keep in with Marshall, who likes Bradley. I know that Bradley is completely loyal to me.”³²¹

Although Bradley came down with an acute case of hemorrhoids during the sea voyage to Sicily and had to have surgery, and that he was in pain for most of the campaign, he performed well during Husky. However, his frustration with Patton bloomed at this time. A reserved man himself, he found Patton’s bravado and showmanship off putting. He disliked the lack of attention that Patton paid to logistics, and the way Patton sometimes ignored the chain of command and interfered directly with Bradley’s subordinates. In one instance, Patton countermanded one of Bradley’s orders shortly after the campaign began, instructing Terry de la Mesa Allen’s 1st Division to attack instead of holding as a reserve as Bradley had intended. Bradley later wrote that “it soon developed that the order was a mistake and that the unit found itself in serious jeopardy.” Patton apologized, but later complained to Eisenhower that Bradley was too cautious. “This naturally infuriated me,” Bradley related. Patton’s infamous slapping of shell-shocked soldiers at field hospitals did not help matters. At the root of their disagreements was a fundamental difference in approach to war. Bradley later commented on Patton’s command style: “He’s impetuous. I disliked the way he worked ... Thought him a rather

³²¹ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 252, 272.

shallow commander.” Bradley believed in slow and methodical planning, while Patton believed that nothing made up for sheer aggressiveness on the battlefield. They were approaches that were colored, at least somewhat, by the difference between the dash of Patton’s cavalry background and the more stolid infantry doctrines of Fort Benning.³²²

Bradley could do nothing about his superior, but his subordinates were a different matter. The II Corps commander generally got along well with Middleton, who led the 45th Infantry Division, and other officers under his command, but not with Allen. In some ways, the “Big Red One” commander was a lot like Patton; arrogant, foul-mouthed, and spontaneous. Again, these were qualities that Bradley had no use for. Nor did Allen’s deputy commander, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the son of the former president, impress him. He particularly objected to the lack of discipline that permeated the 1st Infantry Division. “Both men were exceptional leaders revered by their men, but both had the same weakness: utter disregard for discipline.” Bradley had no confidence that they could restore proper order to their division. Additionally, Allen had led an unauthorized attack with his men in Tunisia that resulted in heavy casualties. “From that point forward, Terry was a marked man in my book.” During the Battle of Troina in Sicily, the 1st Division launched another ill-considered attack and took unnecessary heavy casualties in the hardest fighting of the campaign. Bradley finally decided to relieve Allen and Roosevelt, something he later described as, “one of my most unpleasant duties of the war.” It was not the last time that Bradley relieved a subordinate for underperformance. For instance, Bradley would later relieve the commander of the 90th Infantry Division, Jay W. MacKelvie, and two of his regimental commanders in Normandy. At about the same time he relieved William C.

³²² Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 90-91; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 182-183; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 115; D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 466-467.

McMahon, commander of the 8th Division. Indeed, he gained a reputation for being ruthless to officers who did not meet his standards.³²³

Despite the hard feelings that Bradley harbored toward Patton, the Seventh Army commander continued to value his subordinate. Before the slapping incidents became widely known, Patton anticipated receiving an army command for the cross-Channel invasion. “I should like to have General Bradley, or if Bradley gets an army, then General Middleton to command one of the corps,” he wrote to McNair. A few days later he wrote to Bradley, “to make a permanent record of my frequently expressed admiration for and appreciation of the magnificent loyalty and superior tactical ability you have evinced throughout the campaign in Sicily.” Butcher recorded his thoughts on Bradley at the time in his diary. “He is a man in whom all, especially Ike, have great confidence.”³²⁴

Indeed, Eisenhower’s enthusiasm for Bradley appeared boundless after the Sicily campaign. He summarized his opinion about the man in a letter to Marshall. “There is very little I need to tell you about him because he is running absolutely true to form all the time,” he wrote. “He has brains, a fine capacity for leadership and a thorough understanding of the requirements of modern battle. He has never caused me one moment of worry.” Eisenhower then asserted that Bradley should command a field army. “He has the respect of all his associates, including all the British officers that have met him.” Roosevelt had not yet chosen Eisenhower for the Overlord command, and Eisenhower feared losing Bradley to that project. “I am very anxious to keep him in this theater as long as we have any major operations to carry out.”³²⁵

³²³ Astor, *Terrible Terry Allen*, 160, 218-221, 227; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 158, 195, 270; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 90, 188-189; Ossaad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 198.

³²⁴ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 318, 328; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 397.

³²⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1353.

The next day Marshall wrote back to Eisenhower and noted the pressure he was under to select an American field army commander for Overlord. “My choice has been Bradley, but I had hoped to stall them off until October or November. ... Could you release Bradley for this command?” Eisenhower responded, acknowledging Marshall’s need for experienced commanders in England. He reported that, out of Patton, Clark, and Bradley, “Bradley is the best rounded in all respects, counting experience, and he has the great characteristic of never giving his commander one moment of worry.” He noted that Bradley had limited experience in amphibious operations, but nevertheless believed he could overcome any challenges in the operation. On 1 September Marshall ordered the transfer. “Thanks for your generous attitude regarding Bradley,” he wrote Eisenhower. “Have him make preparations to leave for England. Formal orders will be radioed.”³²⁶

A few days later, Eisenhower offered the Chief of Staff another assessment of Bradley. “He is, in my opinion, the best-rounded combat leader I have yet met in our service,” he wrote. “While he possibly lacks some of the extraordinary and ruthless driving power that Patton can exert at critical moments, he still has such force and determination that even in this characteristic he is among our best.” He then lamented losing the officer. “In all other things he is a jewel to have around and I cannot tell you with what real distress I see him leave this theater.” On 16 October, Bradley took up the duties as commander of the First US Army Group (FUSAG) under the provisions of European Theater of Operations USA General Order No. 74.³²⁷

According to Eisenhower, Bradley had proven himself a steady and reliable corps commander that would do well with a field army. He recognized that he lacked Patton’s killer

³²⁶ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 4, 93. 108; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1357.

³²⁷ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. II, 1388; NPRC, Bradley Papers, Bradley to First US Army Group, 19 October 1943.

instinct for battle but felt that he made up for it with his level-headedness, ability to effectively lead his subordinates, good working relations with the British, and his general likeability. By late summer 1943, Marshall expected to command Overlord, and wanted the best, most reliable officers to serve under him. Bradley had succeeded in every assignment that Marshall had given him, and after his strong performance in Tunisia and Sicily, the Chief of Staff wanted him for the cross-Channel invasion. Patton, while time and again demonstrating his ruthless drive and energy, possessed an element of chaos that Marshall viewed with caution. Especially after the slapping incidents, Marshall preferred the balanced Bradley to the rough but unpredictable Patton.³²⁸

On 6 December 1943, a few days after the conclusion of the Tehran Conference, which witnessed Roosevelt, Churchill, and Joseph Stalin all meeting face to face for the first time, the president sent the Soviet leader a message. “The immediate appointment of General Eisenhower to command of Overlord Operation has been decided upon.” Eisenhower soon left for London and began creating the organizational infrastructure for Overlord. He noted that “Bradley will have command of the First U.S. Army and as quickly as another army can begin to come in alongside of him, Bradley will move back to U.S. Army Group.” In a letter to Marshall he pondered the various field army commanders who could serve in Normandy under the 12th Army Group. “To be perfectly frank,” he considered, “I feel that as long as we have Bradley in the U.K., we have the proper man to command the U.S. Army to enter the battle and that the final selection of the other two need not be rushed.” By the end of 1943 Marshall and Eisenhower had determined that Bradley would play a key role in the largest Allied operation of the war.³²⁹

³²⁸ Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 370-371.

³²⁹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1605, 1623.

During the D-Day landings, Bradley generally performed well, but had a moment of crisis that is reminiscent of Clark's skittishness at Salerno the previous November. Increasingly concerning reports about the fighting at Omaha Beach began to flood into Bradley's command post on the *USS Augusta* after several hours with little information. The First Army commander sent a message to Admiral Bertram Ramsay and to Eisenhower's headquarters. "Opposition Omaha considerable," it read. "If required, can US forces be accepted through [the British sectors]?" In the midst of the day's chaos, the message was not read until after the situation had stabilized. Historian Peter Caddick-Adams asserts that "such a move would surely have been interpreted in terms of a Gallipolian disaster." Nevertheless, Bradley ultimately did decide to send in the second wave to Omaha, a move that biographer Steven L. Ossad called, "the single most important operational decision taken on D-Day."³³⁰

As the battle of Normandy unfolded over the next few weeks, both Eisenhower and Marshall kept a close eye on the First Army commander. Despite the tough fighting in the hedgerows, Eisenhower told Bradley in mid-June that "you have every reason to be gratified with your operations – I'm delighted with the performance of yourself and your troops." Bradley presented an aggressive attitude to his superiors. He messaged Eisenhower the next week. "I am very anxious to hit the enemy this time," he wrote. "We will hit him with such power that we can keep going and cause him a major disaster." At the end of June he presented awards to the men of the 101st Airborne, and after making sure that no reporters were present told them that "there is a possibility at this point, as I see it, that we could be in Berlin by Christmas." A few days later he seemingly apologized for the sudden slogging pace. "Disappointed at the slow rate

³³⁰ Peter Caddick-Adams, *Sand & Steel: The D-Day Invasion and the Liberation of France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 683; Beevor, *D-Day*, 104; Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 186-187.

of our progress but everyone concerned informs me that we are running against very carefully prepared positions and are walking into some pretty good traps.” He believed that if First Army could break through the German bottleneck it could make significant gains. “In any case we are busy killing Germans.” Eisenhower continued to express confidence: “I am perfectly certain that you are on the right track.”³³¹

Marshall maintained complete faith in Bradley as well at this time. In mid-June he complimented the officer to the President and the Secretary of War. “I was much impressed by the calm competence of 1st Army Commander Bradley and by the aggressive attitude of his corps commanders.” On 12 July the Chief of Staff sent Bradley a message. “I have been on the verge several times recently of sending you and some of your people a special commendation, but for several reasons decided that the time was not quite ripe.” He praised Bradley for his work in taking the port of Cherbourg, noting that it had required “a very high capacity of leadership, organization, and general battle management,” and he extended his thanks to Bradley’s corps commanders. Further, he wrote, “please have in mind my complete confidence in your ability.” He also noted the difficulties that First Army had encountered, including the weather, but nevertheless understood that things were much rougher for the enemy.³³²

Marshall’s reasons for delaying Bradley’s promotion were partly practical. Many more nominations from various generals in the field had followed Bradley’s promotion to permanent brigadier general on 31 May 1944. For instance, General Douglas MacArthur had used the occasion to put forward his chief of staff, Richard Sutherland for promotion. The Senate had to take up time to consider each name, and since the Army had so recently promoted Bradley on the

³³¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1935, 1968, 1986; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne From Normandy to Hitler’s Eagle Nest* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 106.

³³² Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 4*, 480, 517-518.

permanent lists, the Chief of Staff thought it prudent to wait for a few more weeks at least.³³³

Patton, sidelined until the Third Army came online at the beginning of August, vented his frustration in his diary, which included scorn for Bradley. “Sometimes I get desperate over the future,” he wrote. “Bradley and Hodges are such nothings. Their one virtue is that they get along by doing nothing.” He was convinced that if he commanded the Army Group, he would have the Germans on the run. “I could break through [the German defenses] in three days if I commanded. They try to push all along the front and have no power anywhere.” However, publicly Patton continued to support the First Army commander. With a finely attuned sense of Army politics, he wrote to Eisenhower on 28 July, stating, “Bradley certainly has done a wonderful job. My only kick is that he will win the war before I get in.” Certainly, Patton was not a disinterested observer, and his diary comments largely reflected egocentric considerations. Still, Bradley did not enchant everyone who understood the situation and stakes at this time.³³⁴

The day after Eisenhower issued his call to arms for soldiers, airmen, and sailors during the Falaise Pocket battle, he also considered Bradley’s prospects for the future. By this point it was not yet clear that so many Germans had escaped the trap, and Eisenhower’s thoughts were not of relief or censure, but of promotion. He sent a letter to Marshall that read, “recently I sent you a telegram about the possibility of promoting General Bradley on the regular list. I wonder if you received the message.” The next day the Chief of Staff replied, “I agree with you, and more too, as to Bradley’s ability, recent performance and future potential.” Marshall then told Eisenhower that the timing was not right, but that he would see that Bradley received the promotion eventually. He also mentioned that Eisenhower should let Bradley know that his

³³³ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 156, M. G. White, Assistant Chief of Staff, to Marshall, 2 August 1944.

³³⁴ Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 482.

promotion would not be far off.³³⁵

The battle of the Falaise pocket unfolded just as Eisenhower prepared for a major change in the Allied command structure. As commander of SHAEF, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Eisenhower had overseen the grand strategy of the Allied armies in the west. As a gesture of inter-Allied amity, SHAEF had given Montgomery the overall command of land forces. Now, in the middle of August, Eisenhower decided that it was time to assume this duty for himself. In addition to his role as Supreme Commander, he planned to become the overall land forces commander on 1 September. The announcement was not without controversy. Alanbrooke, a Montgomery partisan, wrote in his diary that “this plan is likely to add another 3 to 6 months on to the war!” Montgomery noted in his memoirs that he had tried to talk Eisenhower out of the decision. “The Supreme Commander must sit on a very lofty perch in order to be able to take a detached view of the whole intricate problem,” he wrote. “Someone must run the land battle for him. We had won a great victory in Normandy because of unified land control and not in spite of it.” He even offered to serve under Bradley as land forces commander if Eisenhower preferred, almost certainly a disingenuous offer.³³⁶

Further, this command shakeup led to a minor controversy. British newspapers reported that Eisenhower’s assumption of the land forces commander role demoted Montgomery, and a public outcry soon followed. Army press officers had erred with the timing of press reports, and American newspapers came to believe that the British were really running the war in northwestern Europe and that Eisenhower was in fact a figurehead. Marshall feared that the

³³⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2069, 2073.

³³⁶ D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life*, 594; Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 394; Danchev, *Alanbrooke Diaries*, 585; Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field Marshall Montgomery of Alamein, K.G.* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2005), 268-269.

misunderstanding could lead to a Congressional investigation. He wrote to Eisenhower, “just what lay behind this confusion of announcements I do not know but [Stimson] and I and apparently all America are strongly of the opinion that the time has come for you to assume direct exercise of command of the American contingent.” He noted that the situation in Washington was serious. “The astonishing success of the campaign up to the present moment has evoked emphatic expressions of confidence in you and in Bradley,” he noted. However, “the late announcement I have just referred to has cast a damper on the public enthusiasm.”³³⁷

After meeting with Bradley, Eisenhower responded to Marshall on 19 August. “My first reaction,” he wrote, “is that it would be a great pity if Bradley failed to get the full credit due him for his brilliant performance.” No doubt Eisenhower was still unaware of just how many Germans had escaped the trap when he wrote this. Nevertheless, his letter of 17 August had made clear to Marshall that the tremendous opportunity to bag the entire German Seventh Army had been lost. In spite of this, Eisenhower was still championing Bradley. Ten days later, Eisenhower issued a memorandum to all of his top commanders detailing the sorry state of the Wehrmacht in both the west and the east. “We ... must seize this opportunity by acting swiftly and relentlessly and by accepting risks in our determination to close with the German wherever met.” Earlier that month, Bradley had not acted swiftly and relentlessly and had not accepted the risk in closing the Falaise pocket.³³⁸

In order to take the sting out of Montgomery’s apparent “demotion,” Churchill promoted him to the rank of field marshal the same day that Eisenhower assumed his new role. Churchill had had his private reservations about Montgomery’s leadership in Normandy, notably over his

³³⁷ Forrest C. Pogue, *The United States Army in World War II: The Supreme Command* (Washington D.C.: Center for Military History, 2017), 261-264; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 4*, 550-551.

³³⁸ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2074-2077, 2100; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 648.

failure to take Caen, a D-day first day objective, for several weeks. In one late night drunken outburst, the prime minister railed against Montgomery for being too cautious. Now, the promotion was largely a political move to calm British fears that the Americans were running the show. Alanbrooke recorded in his diary that “[Churchill] felt that such a move would mark the approval of the British people for the *British* effort that had led to the defeat of the Germans in France through the medium of Montgomery’s leadership.”³³⁹

Bradley had been promoted to full colonel on the permanent lists in November 1943, and to brigadier general in May 1944, and had held the temporary rank of lieutenant general since 1943. Now, in the wake of the Falaise fiasco, Eisenhower got his wish and the War Department promoted Bradley to major general on the permanent lists on 16 September. Stimson recommended the promotion to the president, stating that it was “in recognition of [Bradley’s] outstanding accomplishments on the battlefields of northern France.” The promotion ensured that he would have good post-war prospects in the Army. It also reinforced the chain of command, at least in theory, since Patton, Hodges and Simpson, Bradley’s subordinates, were also temporary lieutenant generals. However, Patton received his permanent promotion to major general on 2 September – granting him two weeks seniority over Bradley on the permanent lists.³⁴⁰

Bradley’s career continued on an upward trajectory. Eisenhower did not let Bradley’s poor performance during the Battle of the Bulge dampen his enthusiasm for the officer. During the German attack, Bradley failed to appreciate the strength of the German attack that saw his

³³⁹ Alistair Horne and David Montgomery, *The Lonely Leader: Monty, 1944-1945* (London: MacMillan, 1994), 220; Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Monty, Vol. II: Master of the Battlefield, 1942-1944* (London: Sceptre, 1987), 735; Danchev, *Alanbrooke Diaries*, 566-567, 586.

³⁴⁰ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 207-208, 284-285; NPRC, Bradley Papers, European T of OPNS, USA Lord to Twelfth Army Group, 16 September 1944.

headquarters unable to maintain communications with First Army. He even remarked to Troy Middleton at the time that “even if the German were to bust through all the way to the Meuse, he wouldn’t find a thing in the Ardennes to make it worth his while.” Indeed, he spent more time worrying about his own stalled attack to reach the Rhine. Despite this, he retained his command through to the end of the war in Europe. In March 1945, the War Department promoted Bradley again, this time to the temporary rank of full general. A few weeks after Germany’s surrender, President Harry Truman appointed Bradley to head the Veterans Administration. In 1947, he rose to the newly created position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the reorganized American military command structure and oversaw the United States’ efforts in the Korean War. He then enjoyed a long retirement, although he stayed active in American public life for years. He passed away in 1981.³⁴¹

It is not hard to understand Omar Bradley’s rise in the United States Army. The officer had consistently demonstrated competence, ability, and leadership in peace time. The critical moment in his career occurred when he served with George Marshall at Fort Benning’s Infantry School between 1929 and 1933. Bradley impressed the future Chief of Staff and made his way into Marshall’s fabled little black book. Just as important, Bradley’s relationship with Eisenhower, which dated back to their days at West Point and flowered during the North African and Sicilian campaigns, ensured that Bradley gained a high-level command for the fighting in France in 1944. In both Tunisia and Sicily, Bradley demonstrated the key qualities of vigor and leadership that both of his superiors prized.

Further, unlike Fredendall, Bradley had, for the most part, created in his command of II

³⁴¹ Bevin Alexander, *How Hitler Could Have Won World War II: The Fatal Errors that Led to Defeat* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 278; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers Vol. IV*, 2356-2357; NPRC, Bradley Papers, War Department announcement, 29 March 1945; Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 288, 294-295; DeFelice, *Omar Bradley*, 350-351.

Corps a “happy family,” the notable exceptions being Terry de la Mesa Allen and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Eisenhower highly regarded an officer’s ability to command the respect of his staff and subordinates, and Bradley had done just that. Just as critically, Bradley developed good working relationships with British officers in the Mediterranean. The two previous II Corps commanders, Fredendall and Patton (and, for that matter, Bradley’s successor in the role, John Lucas), grumbled about the British, and fostered an air of distrust and tension. It was little wonder that by late 1943 Bradley seemed the ideal general to command FUSAG in Britain.

What is more difficult to understand is the fact that Marshall and Eisenhower completely overlooked Bradley’s role in the Falaise blunder, a military disaster of the first order. Bradley had lost his nerve at Falaise and failed to execute the very plan he had designed. The result allowed tens of thousands of German fighting soldiers and headquarters staff to flee eastward to continue the struggle. If Bradley had allowed Patton to close the gap, it almost certainly would have resulted in the further if not complete destruction of the German Seventh Army. The decision could have significantly shortened the war in Europe. Unlike Bradley, Patton fully appreciated the decisive advantage that air superiority gave to the Allies. It could provide “flying artillery” to guard flanks. The Allies also critically weakened the German forces attempting to break out to the east since the rest of their army had to hold the back the Americans, the British, and the Canadians to north and west. Patton’s boldness, the Third Army’s mobility, and the Allies’ unrelenting air power could have made the victory at Falaise complete but for Bradley’s aversion to taking a risk at the critical moment.

There are several reasons why Marshall and Eisenhower did not relieve Bradley after the Falaise disaster, or at the very least offer some form of censure. First, both generals appeared to have something of a blind spot for Bradley. Eisenhower took a professional liking to Bradley

almost as soon the junior officer arrived in North Africa, building up on their previous friendship. Eisenhower asserted in a book after the war that “of all the ground commanders I have known, even, and of those of whom I’ve read, I would put Omar Bradley in the highest classification.” He further noted that “in every respect of military command, from the planning of an operation to the cleanup after its success, Brad was outstanding.” He noted that Patton was better when it came to mobile operations and aggressiveness but stated that “Bradley was a master of every military maneuver.” Eisenhower believed that Bradley was his most militarily balanced and most emotionally stable commander. If he lacked the flair of Patton, so too did he lack the headaches and controversies. Just prior to the Sicilian invasion, Eisenhower had noted in his diary that “I have not a single word of criticism of his actions to date and do not expect to have any in the future.” Eisenhower genuinely liked Bradley personally as well as professionally, and by the summer of 1943 he had decided that Bradley was, if not completely infallible, then at least unimpeachable.³⁴²

Marshall, too, had valued Bradley tremendously, and was therefore unwilling to hold him responsible for the disaster at Falaise. The Chief of Staff had taken a keen interest in Bradley’s career, and always intended to get him a battlefield command. Marshall had arranged for Bradley to become Eisenhower’s “eyes and ears,” and in mid-1943 Marshall believed that he himself would command Overlord, and he selected Bradley to command FUSAG in England. Bradley was a Marshall man. The Chief of Staff’s blind spot for him after Falaise is not too surprising when one considers that even after the disaster at the Kasserine Pass, he had suggested Fredendall to Eisenhower for field army command for Overlord.³⁴³

³⁴² Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 261; Ferrell, *Eisenhower Diary*, 94.

³⁴³ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1795.

There were other factors as well. The debacle at Falaise took place just as Eisenhower was preparing to assert his direct authority over the Allied effort in France. This move met with significant opposition from the British, who perhaps felt the need to reassert their own position even as their overall contribution to the war effort was diminishing. Additionally, the move sparked controversy with both the British and American public and led to more contention between the Allies. This political battle proved a not insignificant distraction for both Eisenhower and Marshall, and perhaps kept them from immediately appreciating the scope of the disaster. For the two leading American generals, political considerations always factored into their war leadership. Additionally, it was possible that relieving Bradley less than three months after D-Day could have created an exaggerated perception of disharmony and irresolution among the high command.

Finally, by mid-August 1944 the top Allied generals believed the war was nearly won. This is what historian Martin Blumenson called the “ultimate mistake.” Operation Cobra had freed the American 12th Army Group to practice maneuver on a grand scale in northern France, and the Germans simply could not counter the Allied advantages in manpower, airpower, and supplies. Indeed, Eisenhower’s 17 August message to Marshall, seems to downplay the scope of the disaster, and appears to emphasize that it allowed for an easier Allied advance, “the opposition has been greatly weakened.” In the words of Blumenson, to Eisenhower, Bradley, and Montgomery, “the Germans appeared to be uprooted and fleeing, incapable of further resistance, no longer important.” The Allied command simply did not appreciate the magnitude of what they had allowed to happen by failing to close the Falaise pocket in time. In the subsequent days and weeks, Allied armies were in pursuit, plans were in motion, and no one had time to consider relieving or even criticizing Bradley for second-guessing himself and making a

colossally lousy decision.³⁴⁴

There is no question that the Battle of the Falaise Pocket was a major Allied victory. However, in many ways, perhaps it was a victory in the same sense that Dunkirk was a German victory in 1940. During that iconic battle four years earlier, Hitler, as supreme commander of the German armed forces and leader of the German state, gave the critical order to halt his panzer divisions, which allowed the British Army to escape across the Channel. There was no one in authority at that time to question this order, or even to publicly suggest that Hitler's military decision had been in error. That the democratic governments and their military leaders failed to relieve or even censure Bradley after his disastrous performances at Falaise in August 1944 is curious, and more than a little troubling.

³⁴⁴ Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals*, 262; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2071.

CHAPTER 6

COURTNEY HICKS HODGES

Winston Churchill wrote in his history of the First World War, *The World Crisis*, that “battles are won by slaughter and maneuver. The greater the general, the more he contributes in maneuver, the less he demands in slaughter.” Given the horrors of the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, America’s longest continuous battle of the Second World War, by Churchill’s calculus First Army commander Courtney Hicks Hodges was not a great general. Indeed, the Hürtgen, with its dense forests, sharp ridges, and narrow roads, nullified American advantages in airpower and mobility, and resulted in carnage and destruction on a massive scale. The United States First Army suffered 24,000 killed, captured, wounded and missing soldiers in the series of engagements, and nearly 10,000 more non-combat related casualties. It was one of the few major battles of the war that witnessed the Germans suffer fewer casualties than the U.S. Army. Despite ultimate success, the needless bloodshed in the Hürtgen Forest proved one of the great military disasters of the Second World War.³⁴⁵

Historians are largely in agreement about Hodges’ poor showing during the battle. Stephen L. Ossad states that the Hürtgen “was Courtney Hodges’ low point and Bradley should have relieved him.” David W. Hogan asserts that Hodges enjoyed success in the weeks following his assumption of First Army command, but his poor leadership, failure to communicate his orders effectively, his worsening health, and his overreliance on his chief of staff, William Kean, all led to poor battlefield performance by fall 1944. Stephen R. Taaffe maintains that “it was a shame that Marshall and Eisenhower did not appoint [Ninth Army

³⁴⁵ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 299; Gerald Astor, *The Bloody Forest: Battle for the Heurtgen: September 1944 – January 1945* (Novato: Presidio, 2000), 356.

Commander William Simpson] head of the First Army instead of the retiring and difficult Hodges.” Both Edward G. Miller and Russell F. Weigley lament the fact that Hodges did not see the Roer River dams as the focus of the battle from the beginning. Weigley notes that “if the object battles of the Huertgen Forest had been the offensive one of winning the dams ... the full-scale clearing of the forest, the bitter combat for every obscure crossroads, need not have happened.” Gerald Astor refers to the battle as “a tale of bungled management.” Victor Davis Hanson argues that for his performance in the battle, “General Hodges certainly should have been upbraided at best and at worst relieved.”³⁴⁶

Rick Atkinson considers that Hodges had created a toxic system of command in the First Army, that “bred inordinate caution, suppressing both initiative and élan.” Daniel P. Bolger explains that these harmful conditions stemmed in part from the tone that Bradley created as First Army commander. Hodges inherited Bradley’s willingness, even eagerness to relieve subordinates often after their first mistake, rather than give them sufficient time to prove themselves. James Gavin, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, criticized this practice, stating that it “makes [officers] pusillanimous and indeed discourages other potential combat leaders from seeking high command.” He further stated that “summarily relieving those who do not appear to measure up in the first shock of battle is not only a luxury we cannot afford – it is very damaging to the [US] Army as a whole.” Between June 1944 and May 1945, First Army relieved a total of ten corps and division commanders. By contrast, the seemingly tough-as-nails

³⁴⁶ Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 267; David W. Hogan, Jr., *A Command Post at War: First Army Headquarters in Europe, 1943-1945* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army, 2000), 288-289; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 247; Edward G. Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground: The Hürtgen Forest and the Roer River Dams, 1944-1945* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 206; Weigley, *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants*, 432; Astor, *The Bloody Forest*, 364; Victor Davis Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 296.

George Patton only made three similar reliefs from the Third Army during this time.³⁴⁷

Atkinson also notes Hodges' lack of imagination as a combat commander, and his preference for, and indeed insistence upon, frontal assaults as his preferred battlefield tactic. Shortly before Hodges' assumption of First Army command in August 1944, the unit's war diary recorded his displeasure with XIX Corps commander Charles Corlett's desire to initiate a flanking maneuver against the German 2nd Panzer Division. It stated that Hodges "felt since the beginning that too many of these battalions and regiments of ours have tried to flank and skirt and never meet the enemy straight on, as opposed to the maneuver outlined." Although he did ultimately agree with Corlett's plan, he believed it was "safer, sounder, and in the end, quicker to keep smashing ahead, without any tricky, uncertain business of possibly exposing yourself to being cut off." The contrast with the dynamic, risk-taking Patton could not be greater.³⁴⁸

By mid-September 1944, from the English Channel to the Swiss frontier, Eisenhower's forces moved toward the borders of the German Reich like a giant, creeping curtain. It was the meticulous execution of the Supreme Commander's broad front strategy. In the Netherlands, British Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery prepared for his bold push to capture a Rhine River bridgehead. Close to the British right, Hodges' First Army moved into Belgium, with Patton's Third Army advancing further south. Hodges' force consisted of three corps and a few auxiliary units that represented roughly a quarter of a million men that had charged through France in the preceding six weeks. It was the largest formation the United States Army fielded in Europe at the time. From north to south, the force included the XIX Corps under Corlett

³⁴⁷ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 311; Daniel P. Bolger, "Zero Defects: Command Climate in the First US Army, 1944-1945," *Military Review* (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College, May 1991), 61-73.

³⁴⁸ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 311; Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 76.

(which trailed the army's other corps by two days due to a gasoline shortage), the VII Corps under J. Lawton Collins, and the V Corps under Leonard Gerow. Collins' command moved to a position directly opposite of the Hürtgen and the German town of Aachen.³⁴⁹

On 4 September, as his army approached the German frontier, Hodges agreed to pose for the Marchioness of Queensbury as she painted his portrait. After a sitting that lasted two days, the First Army commander made a bold, overoptimistic prediction. Despite the shortages already afflicting the Allies, the war diary recorded that "the General said tonight that given ten good days of weather he thought the war might well be over as organized resistance was concerned." Collin's VII Corps was in a position to move to the north around the Hürtgen, but he wanted to keep his right flank secure. He recommended sending a reconnaissance in force into the forest, to ensure that the Germans infesting the Hürtgen could not launch an attack against his flank from that direction. Hodges agreed, and on 14 September elements of the 3rd Armored Division, 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions entered the forest, which lay inside Germany.³⁵⁰

The First Army positioning was the opening move of America's longest continuous battle in the war, a battle that saw the Germans boasting significant advantages in terrain and prepared defenses. The Hürtgen Forest consisted of roughly fifty square miles, bordered on the south by the village of Monschau in Germany's Eifel region, and to the north at Düren. The Roer River marked the eastern border of the forest. Hidden among the dense trees, narrow roads, and the sudden, rising ridges were various pillboxes, land mines, and tank obstacles – the remainder of Hitler's Siegfried Line. In 1936, construction had begun on the West Wall, which the Germans

³⁴⁹ Charles B. MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 6-7; Atkinson, *Guns at Last Light*, 310.

³⁵⁰ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 119-121; Charles Whiting, *The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest* (New York: Orion Books, 1989), xi-xiii, 16-17; MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 33-35.

named the line of defenses across Germany's western boarder. It was Hitler's answer to the Maginot Line along France's eastern frontier. Collins stated in an interview in 1972 that the defenses along the Siegfried Line, "were really very formidable." He remarked upon the generous employment of dragon teeth, concrete obstacles that prevented American armor from advancing. "It was an engineering feat to just break through them even with tanks, because it was a continuous band." Significant supply shortages continued to seriously hamper the Allied advance.³⁵¹

Bradley later wrote that "now facing the Siegfried Line across a wide front, Hodges grew cautious." Intelligence reported that the Germans had not invested the defensive system in strength, but Allied commanders knew that as their armies approached Germany Hitler demanded fanatical resistance from his troops. Before Hodges ordered the first big push into the Hürtgen, he had to deal with the shortages plaguing his army. "Hodges wanted more ammunition," Bradley wrote. "He ordered a two-day halt so that it could be brought forward."³⁵²

Kean remarked on the unexpectedly ferocious fighting that the Americans encountered on the Siegfried Line in an after-action report later that month. "By 25 September it was plain that the enemy had succeeded in manning and improving his west wall defenses, not only with remnants of the battered divisions from France, but also with scratch units and some elements which may have been intended for use elsewhere." It appeared that the Germans intended to defend the line with anything they could find. "His [The German's] morale tightened and hardened as he began to fight on his home soil." The 28th Division, part of Gerow's V Corps, attacked into Germany further south. The unit's history reported that "the 'Wall' was stubbornly

³⁵¹ Charles Whiting, *West Wall: The Battle for Hitler's Siegfried Line* (Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 1999), 9; USAHEC, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Box 1, 218, J. Lawton Collins Interview, U.S. Army, 1972.

³⁵² Bradley, *A General's Life*, 324-325.

defended with the enemy infiltrating back into bypassed forts at night and launching fierce counterattacks.” The rapid advance had slowed dramatically as the American Army met with ferocious German resistance. The emphasis on mobility, long part of American operational doctrine, gave way to a slow slog reminiscent of First World War fighting and the halting advance in Italy earlier that year. The 28th Division’s history further noted that “it was certainly strange, after the long pursuit across parts of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, to more or less settle down in a somewhat static situation for a time.”³⁵³

Despite the tough resistance, Eisenhower’s report to Marshall remained optimistic, and he singled out the First Army commander by name. “Hodges is going well. His operations are coordinated with those of Montgomery. Hodges is driving straight on to Cologne and Bonn for the eventual purpose of attacking the Ruhr from the south as Montgomery swings into it from the north.” By the end of September, Eisenhower calculated that fifty German divisions faced the Allied armies, but the German divisions, ravaged by casualties were at half strength. The German Panzer divisions were even worse off, Eisenhower noting that of the estimated six panzer divisions facing them, only about 450 tanks remained between them, and that “the enemy’s depleted armor has been concentrated mainly about Aachen and south of Nancy.” Many of these tanks were in the Hürtgen.³⁵⁴

Hodges moved cautiously as the First Army invested the forest. Weigley asserts that he and other American commanders were too cautious and expected the Germans to act with the same prudence. However, by 1944, Hitler and his forces continually gambled, just as they had at Mortain in August. Further, Weigley compared the fighting in the Hürtgen to the intense combat

³⁵³ NARA, RG 407, Box 1384, Gen. W. B. Kean. After-Action Report, First U.S. Army, 1-30 September 1944.; NARA, RG 407, Box 7376, History of the 28th Infantry Division.

³⁵⁴ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2158, 2199.

that took place in the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864, and the American experience in the Argonne Forest in the First World War. Hodges began the slow, painful process of feeding divisions into the forest in the hopes of budging the defenders from their strongholds. In 1983, U.S. Army Major Gary Wade asked Collins why the First Army kept pushing into the Hürtgen when it was clear it had become a stalemate. Collins responded that “I didn’t have any choice in it. I would never pick it as the place to be. It was assigned as part of my corps sector, and reluctantly we had to fight in it.”³⁵⁵

By mid-October, the battle for Aachen, Charlemagne’s medieval capital, reached its climax, and several notable figures visited First Army headquarters. Marshall had visited on 11 October and King George VI had visited three days later. This put increased pressure on Hodges to perform, and he became desperate to take the city. By this time the 30th Division, part of Corlett’s XIX Corps, was driving toward the city. Hodges had given Corlett the task of piercing the Siegfried Line and enveloping the city. The XIX Corps began the mission on 1 October, but after two weeks of hard fighting the 30th Division had suffered heavy losses. The division acted as the spearhead to close a gap that allowed the Germans access into and out of Aachen via highway Fifty-Seven. In order to do this, Corlett repeatedly requested more men and more ammunition from Hodges, and the First Army commander, only too aware of the shortages all along the line, repeatedly said he would try, but produced little. Just before Hodges, Bradley, and other American top brass sat down to dinner with the king, Corlett called to repeat his request. XIX Corps had stalled and could not go on without the requested men and supplies. In his characteristic lack of tact and subtlety, Hodges informed Corlett that if he did not present a

³⁵⁵ Weigley, *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants*, 432-433; USAHEC, Collins Papers, Box 1, Gary Wade, Conversation with General J. Lawton Collins, Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

new plan immediately, “as far as you are concerned the war is over.”³⁵⁶

American forces closed the gap two days later, but stiff resistance remained, and the city did not fall until 21 October. The 30th Infantry Division lost 3,000 men in the drive for Aachen, the 1st Division over 1,300. From these divisions and other units, nearly 1,000 Americans lost their lives. There was another casualty of the battle. Hodges relieved Corlett of command of XIX Corps on 16 October. Hodges had claimed that Corlett’s health was failing and relieved him. The two men had not seen eye to eye on many points, and the relief stemmed more from their personality clash than due to a performance issue. Hodges had always relied on Collins, who was at the forefront of virtually every major First Army operation, and this drew resentment from the XIX Corps commander. As Hodges biographer Stephen T. Wishnevsky argues, “Hodges never gave Corlett any warmth or encouragement and rarely visited him.” Hodges frequently yelled at Corlett that progress on his front was slow, and Corlett yelled back at him. Corlett was insubordinate, and perhaps deserved the relief, but it almost certainly never should have come to that. The incident illustrates Hodges’ inability to lead his subordinates and create Eisenhower’s prized ideal in a command, a happy family, a concerted team.³⁵⁷

As the battle for Aachen reached its climax, *Time Magazine* featured the First Army commander on its cover. The accompanying story commented on the drama unfolding on the German border, “Lieut. General Courtney Hicks Hodges’ U.S. First Army pounded unrelentingly at the crouching enemy, in a tremendous burst of infighting against the Germans’ main forces in the West Wall, trying for a knockout before winter.” The article noted the supply

³⁵⁶ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 146-149; Robert W. Baumer, *Aachen: The U.S. Army’s Battle for Charlemagne’s City in WWII* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2015), 118-119, 329-330; Stephen T. Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges: From Private to Four-Star General in the United States Army* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 139.

³⁵⁷ Baumer, *Aachen*, 373; Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 152; Bolger, “Zero Defects,” *Military Review*, 65; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 240-242; Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 140.

problems that plagued the Allied command but offered a reassuring note. “One thing is certain: General Hodges would not be moving as he was unless he could move with certainty. Above all other things, Courtney Hodges was a believer in making sure before he went ahead.” Indeed, as events subsequently proved, Hodges often failed to properly consider the consequences of his command decisions.³⁵⁸

After the fall of Aachen, the First Army made its investment into the Hürtgen Forest in earnest. Hodges prepared to renew the drive to the Rhine, but instead of attempting a flanking move around the forest, such as using the V Corps to move around the south, he insisted on clearing it, playing into German hands. Collins’ VII Corps led the attack, while Gerow’s V Corps moved to take the village of Schmidt and to ensure protection for Collins’ right. By this point, the U.S. 9th Infantry Division, which had been slogging forward to capture Schmidt earlier in the month, had taken heavy casualties, and Gerow dispatched the 28th Infantry Division, known as the “Keystone” division since it had been a Pennsylvania National Guard unit, to capture the village. In addition to taking Schmidt, Gerow ordered one of his regiments to take the heights over the village of Hürtgen, while another to protect roads and supply lines. Therefore, only one regiment was available for the primary mission. Despite the heavy fighting before Aachen, and the reservations of the division commander, Norman D. Cota, Hodges agreed to this foolhardy plan. First Army scheduled the attack to begin on 1 November, though it pushed the opening back one day due to the weather. The plan called for the 28th attack to precede the VII Corps’ main attack, intended to begin on 5 November, and thus act as a diversion. However, Bradley ordered the VII Corps attack, (in concert with a Ninth Army advance further north), postponed to at least 10 November, and possibly as late as 16 November

³⁵⁸ “Precise Puncher,” *Time*, <http://www.3ad.com/history/courtney.hodges/hodges.time.cover.htm>

with the anticipation of better weather. However, Hodges did not alter the 28th Division's timetable. Therefore, the 28th Division could potentially face the full weight of a German counterassault for up to two weeks without support.³⁵⁹

A pamphlet published by the 28th Division to indoctrinate incoming recruits into the history of the unit described the beginning of the assault. "D-Day was Nov. 2, 1944. H-Hour, 0900. After five comparatively quiet days of preparation, the three regiments struck the forest. Snow blanketed the fields. Keystone men stormed through the forest, through Vossenack, Kommerscheidt, Schmidt." The attacks met with initial success. The First Army War Diary noted on 3 November that in the village of Vossenack, "all buildings there were destroyed by our artillery but the basements themselves were fortified and considerable bayonet and hand-to-hand fighting was necessary to clear the enemy from these points." The division's progress pleased Hodges. However, the Germans soon counterattacked, unleashing on the 28th Infantry Division the same punishment it had visited on the overextended 9th Infantry Division. "Odds did not favor the 28th," the pamphlet stated. "Terrain and weather made proper support from heavier weapons impossible. Casualties were heavy. Withdrawals necessary."³⁶⁰

As the battle played out, the shortages persisted. On 5 November, Eisenhower wrote to logistics officer Brehon B. Somervell, detailing the Allied armies' requirements. "Spectacular quantities of ammunition are consumed in the European campaign," he wrote, "particularly during major offensives." He explained that for each month, his forces consumed "6,000,000 rounds of artillery and 2,000,000 rounds of mortar ammunition," and that these numbers

³⁵⁹ MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 88-9, 93-94; Michael E. Weaver, *Guard Wars: The 28th Infantry Division in World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 187-188.

³⁶⁰ NARA, RG 407, Box 7376, 28th Roll On: *The Story of the 28th Infantry Division*, 20-21; DDEL, Courtney Hodges Papers, Box 25, First US Army War Diary, 3 November 1944; Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 163.

increased as more troops arrived at the front. Eisenhower also noted that the Allied effort during the battle for Aachen had suffered from the shortages, and that the First Army had expended over 300,000 105mm howitzer rounds over the course of two weeks. “More than 750,000,000 pounds of ammunition have been expended during the campaign. Four to 5,000 pounds a minute, every minute, 24 hours a day, are required to support operations.”³⁶¹

That same day Hodges visited Cota’s command post and received a full report on the 28th Division’s grim situation and slow progress. The next day Hodges remained at his headquarters, monitoring the battle. “No less than four separate counterattacks were made against the 28th,” read the First Army war diary, “all supported by heavy fire.” In some areas the Germans succeeded in pushing back American battalions, in others they held firm. “No progress was made in the direction of SCHMIDT, and bad weather coupled with uncertain red smoke markings made air support of little value.”³⁶²

On 7 November, Hodges traveled to a high-level meeting which discussed the possible advantages of separating the air force from the Army after the war, a proposal Hodges opposed. Returning to his headquarters, Hodges, found “the 28th Division situation going from bad to worse.” The Germans had pushed back the American regiments near Vossenack and had captured the town. Enemy artillery fire continued to be punishing, but Hodges remained confident. With the assurance of a man safely behind the lines, he declared that “no matter how heavy enemy artillery was, casualties would not be high nor would ground be lost.” Despite his optimistic statement, “he is rather worried tonight over the general situation.” Collin’s VII Corps attack depended on the 28th securing its objectives, notably the town of Schmidt. The war diary

³⁶¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2281.

³⁶² Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 165-166.

read ominously for Hodges' subordinates that "it is possible that there may be some personnel changes made."³⁶³

The situation at the front was indeed dire. American soldiers who had fought in Normandy agreed that "nothing they encountered there could begin to compare in ferocity and intensity of artillery fire with what happened in the Hurtgen Forest." James Gavin, commander of the 82nd Airborne, later wrote that the 28th Division's fighting highlighted "the disastrous consequences that can befall a command when the generals do not know the environment in which the troops must fight." Lt. Col. Carl Peterson, commander of the 112th Infantry Regiment, led his men in some of the worst of the fighting. Cota, the division commander, had supposedly ordered Peterson back to his command post to learn the details of the fighting, but Peterson believed that Cota wanted to relieve him. By the time he finally made it to Cota's headquarters, enemy artillery had wounded Peterson, and he bitterly ranted about the disastrous employment of his men. Cota in fact had not sent the message for Peterson to return to the command post, and the events surrounding the order to return are unclear. However, as medics took Peterson to an aid station, Cota collapsed with exhaustion. The next day from his hospital bed, Peterson dictated a message to Cota about the fighting at the front. "Highway littered with trucks. Take armored medium bulldozer. Send morphine, sulfanilamide, and additional dressings, also plasma, litters, blankets, whisky, also doctor and first aid men..." Peterson also asked for more self-propelled artillery, "handled by men who have guts." He took a dim view of the 112th Infantry's armor support. "Light tanks useless, don't send them." He called for an airstrike despite bad weather and poor observation. "The planes will scare the krauts away."³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 166-167.

³⁶⁴ Weaver, *Guard Wars*, 201-204; Macdonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 118; James Gavin, "Bloody Huertgen: The Battle that Should Never Have Been Fought," *American Heritage*, (Volume 31, Issue 1. 1979),

As Peterson dictated his message, Hodges travelled to the 28th Division command post. There he found Eisenhower, Bradley, and Gerow in deep discussion with Cota. The First Army war diary explained that “pleasantries were passed until the official party left, then General Hodges drew General Cota aside for a short sharp conference on the lack of progress made by the 28th Division.” Hodges’ concern stemmed from the fact that Cota’s headquarters appeared to lack detailed information on the division’s units engaged in the battle, nor was it actively trying to gather such information. “General Hodges, needless to say, is extremely disappointed over the 28th Division’s showing.” For a time, Hodges contemplated relieving Cota over the debacle. After the meeting, the First Army commander proceeded to V Corps headquarters and ordered Gerow to “keep a close watch over the Division’s efforts and to recommend any personnel changes he thought necessary.” Hodges had frequently criticized Gerow harshly for what he considered to be poor troop dispositions and the fact that the corps commander often lost track of his units. However, if Hodges had seriously considered relieving Gerow he had to contend with the fact that his subordinate enjoyed a close friendship with both Eisenhower and Bradley.³⁶⁵

As First Army prepared for Collins’ attack into the Hürtgen, British officer Tom Bigland, Montgomery’s liaison to Bradley’s headquarters, briefed the field marshal on the operation. Montgomery asked Bigland if he was confident that the attack would break through the German line. “Yes,” he replied. “They had built up good supplies and ammunition, they had fresh troops and attack was to be headed by the Commander of VII Corps, Joe Collins, whom Monty knew and of whom he had a high opinion.” Montgomery then went to the map and “pointed to a spot halfway to the point I had marked for the limit of the advance and said, ‘They will get there and

<https://www.americanheritage.com/bloody-huertgen-battle-should-never-have-been-fought#1>; NARA, First Army Papers, RG 407, Box 7376, Carl Peterson to Norman Cota, 8 November 1944.

³⁶⁵ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 168-169; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 244-245.

then they will stick.’’ The British field marshal correctly predicted the course of the attack.³⁶⁶

Collins’ main effort had prepared to launch on 10 November, but continuing bad weather led to further postponements. Finally, the attack began on 16 November, after significant preliminary bombardment from air and artillery assets. “It started with the use of air power in unprecedented strength,” the First Army war diary read. “Heavy bombers, 1100 in number, saturated the area.” Bradley later wrote that “what followed over the next several weeks was some of the most brutal and difficult fighting of the war ... [it] was sheer butchery on both sides.” Terry Allen’s 104th Division made some progress, but the 4th Infantry Division, covering a wide sector with diffused strength, managed to penetrate only a mile or so by 19 November and achieved no solid breakthrough despite heavy casualties. It was not the first time in the battle that the First Army leadership had asked a single division to do far too much given its strength and resources. The next day, Hodges acknowledged that the initial plan had not succeed the way he had intended. The First Army had made gains along the line, but at substantial cost and not in key sectors. By this point, the disease that had plagued so many First World War generals had infected Hodges: the unshakable conviction that one more great push would break the enemy. He ordered another division to go in.³⁶⁷

Major General Donald A. Stroh’s 8th Infantry Division, assigned to V Corps, met with the same setbacks and hard fighting as the 9th, 28th, and 4th. On 23 November, Thanksgiving Day, Hodges and Kean set out to Stroh’s command post, meeting Collins and Gerow there. The First Army commander told Stroh, in “emphatic terms,” just how unhappy he was with his division’s performance toward its objective, the village of Hürtgen. He told him that “the minefields had

³⁶⁶ Tom Bigland, *Bigland’s War: The War Letters of Tom Bigland, 1941-1945* (Willaston: Tom Bigland, 1990), 79.

³⁶⁷ MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 126, 140, 148; Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 175; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 343.

not proven to be as much of an obstacle as people feared and that the [division's] progress, or rather lack of it ... showed lack of confidence and drive." He warned Stroh that he expected more from the division the next day. Hodges and Kean then visited the 4th Division headquarters for Thanksgiving dinner, before returning to First Army headquarters for another meal followed by a movie. Four days later Gerow relieved Stroh. The division commander had suffered from exhaustion given the horrors of the Hürtgen and from the news that the enemy had shot down his son's B-17. Neither Gerow nor Bradley regretted his departure. The next day, the village of Hürtgen fell to the 8th Division.³⁶⁸

For the next two weeks Hodges' units slogged forward through the unforgiving forest, clawing their way toward the eastern edge and the Roer River. Between the launch of the main effort on 16 November, and the beginning of Germany's Ardennes Offensive on 16 December, First Army had taken over 21,000 casualties. The fighting in the forest had badly mutilated four Infantry divisions. Bradley later commented, "to put it candidly, my plan to smash through to the Rhine and encircle the Ruhr had failed." Only at the end of the first week in December were the Roer River Dams in sight and the Hürtgen Forest finally behind First Army. General Siegfried Westphal, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's chief of staff, later wrote that during the fighting in the Hürtgen, "the village of Hürtgen changed hands fourteen times, the Hürtgen Forest eighteen times, and the village of Vossenack no less than twenty-eight times."³⁶⁹

The great German December counterattack in the west caused a military crisis of the first order. At this, the most critical point of the war for the Western Allies since D-Day, Hodges

³⁶⁸ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 184-190.

³⁶⁹ Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 317; Bradley, *A General's Life*, 343; Antony Beevor, *Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 78; Siegfried Westphal, *The German Army in the West* (London: Cassell and Company, 1951), 181-182.

came down with an illness. Historian Steven L. Ossad suggests that Hodges' infirmity may have in fact been a kind of psychological breakdown. In any event, during those first, harrowing days of the Battle of the Bulge, Hodges failed to appreciate the magnitude of the German attack and left the running of the First Army to his subordinates. Kean essentially held operational command of First Army. Bigland remarked at this time that "Hodges was not really in control." He described Hodges as "a tired old man – and I think a frightened man too." Brigadier General Sir Edgar Williams, Montgomery's intelligence chief, accompanied the Field Marshal to confer with the First Army commander. He later stated that "Hodges looked Ashen to me. He looked as though somebody had punched him in the tummy, or indeed kicked him in the crutch." He commented on the fact that Hodges' role as First Army commander was his first assignment in high combat command, and that "he wasn't either intellectually or morally fit for bearing responsibility." Williams found Hodges indecisive. "I don't think Hodges knew quite what to do or quite what had hit him." Further, he noted that Hodges, "was mightily relieved to find a father-figure showing up to sort it all out for him." Indeed, Montgomery had to virtually take command of his headquarters and prepared it to weather the storm of steel the Germans had thrown at it. The Field Marshal believed that Hodges was on the verge of a heart attack and suggested that relief might be in order.³⁷⁰

Bradley later wrote that "had Hodges been a more 'colorful' and forceful character, inspiring unbounded confidence in the high command ... I believe the Allied high command would have perceived much sooner that the [German] offensive was doomed." Largely because of Bradley's failure to maintain communications with Hodges and Simpson during the battle, Eisenhower soon transferred operational control of First and Ninth Armies to Montgomery. On

³⁷⁰ Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 297; Bigland, *Bigland's War*, 81; Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe*, 311.

22 December, the Supreme Commander tried to reassure the Field Marshal. “I know you realize that Hodges is the quiet reticent type and does not appear as aggressive as he really is,” Eisenhower wrote. “Unless he becomes exhausted, he will always wage a good fight.” Did Eisenhower really think that Hodges had not become exhausted by this point?³⁷¹

From September to December 1944, Hodges had repeatedly demonstrated poor judgement that resulted in needless death and suffering for American soldiers in the Hürtgen Forest. His inferior generalship at this crucial time stemmed from several factors. First, Hodges simply did not understand the ground that his men were fighting on, the obstacles they faced, and the limitations of their abilities. On more than one occasion he had sent a division into the forest to accomplish multiple objectives, diffusing their strength. The 9th, 28th, 4th, and 8th Infantry Divisions all paid a heavy price for Hodges’ obsession with fixed geographic points on a map. In total, First Army employed six infantry divisions in the forest, along with smaller supporting units. Despite setback after bloody setback, Hodges never learned that he was simply asking too much of his troops. Hodges should have known better, considering that he himself had fought in similar terrain in 1918. Twenty-six years had obviously dimmed his recollection of the bitter fighting in the Argonne Forest.³⁷²

Second, Hodges failed to create a happy family in his command. He certainly got along well with his First Army staff, particularly his chief of staff, Kean. Indeed, Hodges leaned heavily on him throughout the battle, and when the First Army commander suffered from illness, real or imagined, during the first days of the Battle of the Bulge, Kean essentially ran the field army as his deputy. Hodges likewise leaned on his operations officer, Truman C. Thorson, and

³⁷¹ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 360, 367; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2369.

³⁷² Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 325.

his intelligence chief, Benjamin A. Dickson. Nevertheless, the staff was jealous of its authority, ran the field army with an iron fist, and stifled initiative among the subordinate commanders. Hodges' usually reserved demeanor hid an explosive temper that frequently burst forth as he interacted with his corps and division commanders. Instead of encouraging and inspiring his subordinates, he yelled at them for not accomplishing the impossible tasks he had set for their units. Like Bradley, he was quick to relieve generals, and failed to give them time to prove themselves. This poor treatment of subordinates further inculcated a sense of caution and fear in his officers.³⁷³

Finally, Hodges' determination to clear the Hürtgen Forest bordered on obsession. At several points in the battle, he could have redirected his strength around the forest. Such a move would have meant leaving a covering force to watch First Army's flanks. The Germans could have launched limited attacks from the Hürtgen, but surely it was better to fight the enemy outside the forest, areas able to restore to the Americans the advantages of air power and mobility. Instead, Hodges pushed on and on, further and further into the woods. He fed division after division into the Hürtgen to face the deadly artillery tree bursts, the labyrinthine minefields, and the hidden pillboxes. As Weigley asserts, "the most likely way to make the Huertgen a menace to the American Army was to send American troops attacking into its depths." As the casualties began to pile up, Hodges never stopped to question whether securing the forest was worth the cost.³⁷⁴

To be sure, Hodges was not alone in the responsibility for the disaster. Gerow's enthusiastic support of the 28th Infantry Division's operational plan, despite Cota's reservations,

³⁷³ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 311; Hogan, *A Command Post at War*, 288-291.

³⁷⁴ Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 365.

contributed to the high casualty rate. Likewise, Bradley's confidence that opposition in the forest could be swept aside and his ongoing support for Hodges likewise proved a factor. However, Hodges commanded the First Army. He had the final word on how to deploy the units, the nature of their missions, and exercised ultimate judgment on the operations. In commanding the First Army at this critical time, Hodges failed the test of leadership, and his superiors should have relieved him of his command.

Courtney Hicks Hodges was born in Perry, Georgia on 5 January 1887, the second of eight children. In the backwoods of Georgia, the young Hodges developed a lifelong passion for shooting and hunting, as well as other sporting activities. During the Spanish-American War, Hodges and his friends staged mock battles. John Hodges, his father, published a county newspaper, the *Houston Home Journal*. After high school, the young man briefly attended North Georgia College, but was eager to become an Army officer. The elder Hodges was good friends with Representative Elijah B. Lewis, and in 1905 the Congressman appointed his son to West Point. "It is my custom to hold a competitive examination to fill these places," Lewis wrote to John Hodges, "but I am going to waive that and make the direct appointment in this case." Like Lloyd Fredendall, Hodges flunked out of the school in his first year, also from poor grades in math. "I was only 17 years old," he later said in an interview, "and found that North Georgia College taught a different brand of mathematics from that required at the academy. So, I didn't go back after the first year." Unwavering in his determination to be part of the United States Army, the next year Hodges enlisted as a private. "It was up the ladder from there on," the September 1944 *Time* magazine article read, "corporal and then sergeant in the 17th Infantry, and then a chance for a commission." After taking first place in in the 1908 Army Rifle Competition at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, Hodges took the competitive examination and won a second

lieutenancy in 1909, the same year he would have graduated from West Point.³⁷⁵

Hodges did the usual rounds of Army posts for a young lieutenant in the pre-First World War Army: Fort Leavenworth, San Antonio, El Paso. While serving in the Philippines, Hodges befriended a fellow officer who was to have a significant influence on the course of his career, George C. Marshall. Hodges often accompanied the future Chief of Staff and Hap Arnold on hunting expeditions in the islands. His service record noted that “from March 1916 to February 1917, he was on duty with General Pershing’s Punitive Expedition into Mexico as an officer of the 6th Infantry.” An efficiency report from this time noted that he was single, stood at 69 inches, and weighed 139 pounds. It stated, “[Hodges] is an expert shot, an excellent coach and instructor on the rifle range.” It also noted that he had a, “slight knowledge of Spanish.” While on duty in Mexico, Hodges won promotion to first lieutenant, and the next year to captain. In the spring of 1918, Hodges and the 6th Infantry Regiment sailed for Europe as part of the 5th Infantry Division to take part in the war against Imperial Germany.³⁷⁶

The 6th Infantry Regiment commanding officer, Robert H. Noble, offered Hodges a glowing recommendation to the Army’s adjutant general. “On relinquishing command of the 6th Infantry,” he wrote, “I wish ... to report that Captain Courtney H. Hodges, Adjutant, 6th Infantry, has shown during the eighteen months he has been under my command, soldierly qualities of a high grade in important capacities.” He noted Hodges’ service in Mexico, as well as his work in training the regiment, first at Chickamauga Park and later in France. “His knowledge in all that is required in a commander of a battalion of infantry is exact and complete,” he noted. “He has

³⁷⁵ Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 5-11; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 23, Elijah B. Lewis to John Hodges, 16 January 1904; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 23, Brig. Gen. William H. Carter, Programme of the Army Rifle Competition, 1908, Fort Sheridan, Illinois; *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Illinois, 3 December 1944, www.newspaperarchive.com; “Precise Puncher,” *Time*.

³⁷⁶ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record; NPRC, Hodges Papers, efficiency report for Courtney Hicks Hodges, Undated; Roll, *George Marshall*, 304; Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General*, 126.

special aptitude and predilection for infantry weapons.” Commenting on his experience at the head of his troops, Noble explained that “he is aggressive in spirit, a natural leader, and commands the respect and confidence of both officers and men.”³⁷⁷

Hodges took part in some of the hardest fighting of the war, leading a battalion during the push at St. Mihiel, and later during the fighting in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. While fighting in those bitter woods, so like the Hürtgen he would encounter twenty-six years later, Hodges’ received orders to reconnoiter the Meuse River and search for suitable locations for bridging near Brioules, France. “Having organized a storming party,” the 5th Division chief of staff, C. A. Trott, wrote in Hodges’ citation for the Distinguished Service Cross, “he attacked the enemy not 100 paces distant, and, although failing, he managed to effect the crossing of the canal.” It took twenty hours of constant pressure before the Germans fell back and the crossing was secure. “His fearlessness and courage were mainly responsible for the advance of his brigade to the heights east of the Meuse.” The following spring, Trott cited Hodges for distinguished conduct during the action in the division general orders. “The success attained by his regiment is measurably due to the constant and efficient efforts of this able officer.”³⁷⁸

That same spring, the general staff certified that Hodges had a score of 547 in the A.E.F. rifle competition, placing him in first place in the distinguished marksman class and entitling him to wear a special A.E.F. medal commemorating the achievement. He returned to the United States and continued to serve with the 6th Infantry until the following year. General Noble lauded Hodges in his efficiency report. “An excellent officer of good natural ability and fine

³⁷⁷ NPRC, Hodges Papers, Brig. Gen. Robert H. Noble to Brig. Gen. Henry P. McCain, Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, 2 May 1918.

³⁷⁸ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 1C, A. Trott, citation for Distinguished Service Cross. 21 December 1918; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 2, C. A. Trott, General Orders, 10 June 1919.

soldierly qualities,” he wrote. “So far as I know he has not attended any service school; when he shall have done so, I believe he will compare favorably with any officer I know of his rank and length of service.” Hodges became a major in 1920 and did not wait long to continue his military education. His next assignment was at the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and upon graduating he reported for duty as a tactical instructor at West Point. While at West Point he grew close to another instructor, Omar Bradley, and the two frequently hunted and golfed together. Bradley later commented on their time at West Point and noted that as Hodges was a tactical instructor it was ironic that “he was a profound inspiration for the very corps that had rejected him. He may well have been the first non-West Point graduate ever to teach tactics to the cadets.” Regarding his character, Bradley observed that “he was my ideal of the quintessential ‘Georgia gentleman’ and the most modest man I have ever met.”³⁷⁹

In 1924, Hodges reported for duty as a student at the Command and General Staff School in Kansas, graduating the following year ninety-fourth out of 258 students. His next assignment was back in his home state of Georgia, serving as an instructor at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, before serving at posts in Virginia and Utah. In 1929 he returned to the Infantry School and served on the Infantry Board under his old friend and mentor, George Marshall. Bradley recalled that at this time, “Marshall had enormous regard for Hodges.” Hodges also served as the captain of the Infantry Rifle Team, which held its competitions at Camp Perry, Ohio. Collins, who was also serving as an instructor at the Infantry School, later commented on his time with the team. Hodges was determined to beat the Marine Corps rifle team which held the championship due to its superior showing in off-hand shooting. Collins wrote, “Major

³⁷⁹ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 2, Warren T. Hannum, General Staff Statistical Officer, certification for Courtney Hodges, 17 May 1919; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record; NPRC, Hodges Papers, Noble, efficiency report for Courtney Hodges, 27 December 1919; Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 44-45; Bradley, *A Genera's Life*, 94-95.

Hodges cited the failure to lick the Marines and his resolve to erase this blot on the escutcheon of the Infantry. He appealed to our love of the Infantry, the Army, and the country to sign up for the tryouts for the next year's team." Hodges turned to Collins, looking for him to show support and volunteer, but Hodges had decided against joining the team again and simply said, 'No.' "To Courtney Hodges credit," he remarked, "he never held this defection against me. While I was serving under his command in Europe in World War II, we became fast friends."³⁸⁰

Hodges prepared diligently for the 1930 competition. Retired General George C. Shaw wrote to Hodges in the spring, hoping to inspire him to lead the team to victory. "I am sending you by parcels post today the flag used by the Army Infantry Team of 1910," he stated. "It was a winner then and I send it to the Team of 1930 wishing that it may bring you 'Good Luck' and help you win this year at Camp Perry." Hodges and his team proved successful, and he earned special praise from the Chief of Infantry, General Stephen O. Fuqua. He wrote to Hodges, "the impressive showing made by the Infantry Rifle Team during the National Matches for 1930, indicated that high degree of individual and team training which marks a championship team." He then singled out Hodges for individual praise. "You as Captain of the Infantry Team, are responsible for the development of this fine organization," he affirmed, "and it is a pleasure to me as Chief of Infantry to thus record my acknowledgment of your leadership."³⁸¹

Hodges met Mildred Alston Lee Buchner, the widow of an Army Air Corps officer, while he was serving in Langley, Virginia in 1927. The two married on 23 June the next year in Montgomery, Alabama. Major General Paul B. Malone, Hodges' old friend from the 5th

³⁸⁰ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record; NPRC, Hodges Papers, Adjutant General to Hodges, 3 November 1923; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 2Lt. Col. J. G. Pillow to Hodges, 19 June 1925; Bradley, *A General's Life*, 94-95; Collins, *Lighting Joe*, 45-46.

³⁸¹ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, George C. Shaw to Hodges, 10 March 1930, Stephen O. Fuqua to Hodges, 16 September 1930.

Division in France, wrote to express his best wishes. “Ordinarily, these announcements are satisfied by the sending of cards,” he stated, “but this case is unusual, and I depart from standard procedure to extend to you my very hearty congratulations upon the occasion of your marriage.” Malone noted that Hodges, by that time forty-one years old, had taken his time in finding a bride, and felt confident in asserting that “I can’t escape the conclusion that Mrs. Hodges possesses in a very high degree those attractive qualifications without which you would never have been won from the paths of bachelorhood.” Hodges’ service record noted that “Mrs. Hodges is an excellent skeet shot.”³⁸²

Hodges spent the summer of 1933 to the summer of 1934 as a student at the Army War College in Washington D.C., with his friend Omar Bradley. After successfully graduating from the institution, the Army assigned Hodges to Washington state, and among his duties there he worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps, Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal program that ultimately employed over three million men by the time Japan attacked the United States in 1941. In May 1936, Hodges returned to the Philippines as a lieutenant colonel, this time serving as G-3 operations officer on Douglas MacArthur’s staff. MacArthur supposedly requested Hodges because he had heard that “he was the type of man once given an assignment firmly believed that he shouldn’t go causing trouble.” The assignment also marked the first time Hodges had served with Eisenhower. The 1944 *Time* magazine article reported that “Eisenhower, too, made a note of Hodges as a man who knew how to get things done.”³⁸³

While Hodges was on assignment in the Philippines, Major E. N. Slappery from the 33rd

³⁸² Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 47-48; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 2, Paul B. Malone to Hodges, 5 July 1928, Courtney Hodges Service Record.

³⁸³ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record; Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 319; Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 60; “Precise Puncher,” *Time*.

Division staff wrote to Hodges, indicating that Marshall was leaving his post with the division. The future Chief of Staff had served as a senior instructor to the Illinois National Guard, but the War Department promoted him brigadier general and he was moving on to another assignment. Marshall had directed Slappery to write to Hodges. “He wishes to know,” the major relayed, “if you would favorably consider being detailed in his place with the headquarters of the Thirty-Third Division here in Chicago.” Despite Marshall’s recommendation, Hodges remained in the Philippines until 1938. In 1937, Brigadier General Alfred T. Smith, the outgoing commander of the Philippine Division, extended his gratitude toward Hodges. “Shortly following your arrival in the Philippine Islands,” he wrote, “you were confronted with many complex problems in connection with the training of the Philippine Army... all of which you meet with composure and marked efficiency.” He offered his best wishes, “for your future years of service – which to me appear to be the most promising.”³⁸⁴

Hodges received orders to report to Washington D.C. as a War College instructor in early 1938. The War College commandant, Major General John L. DeWitt, wrote to Hodges in January, stating, “I am very much pleased, as you must know, to have you here and as you are familiar with the work and the living conditions, hope that you are as pleased with the detail as I am to have you.” Hodges responded the next month. “Needless to say, I am delighted with this fine assignment and am looking forward with great pleasure to again serving under your command.” He assured DeWitt that he would do his best to excel at his new post. He further noted that he and his wife were ready to return to the States. Before departing Asia, his wife joined another couple on a journey to Bali and Java, “while I go on a shooting trip in Indo

³⁸⁴ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, Major E. N. Slappery to Hodges, 8 September 1936, Brig. Gen. Alfred T. Smith to Hodges, 7 January 1937.

China.” They planned to meet in Saigon, do some sightseeing at Angkor and Bangkok, then back to Manila and a boat bound for America in May.³⁸⁵

After Hodges arrived in the United States, he received another assignment. Hodges returned to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, this time as assistant commandant in August 1938, and two months later the War Department promoted him to full colonel. In April 1940, he received his first star. *The Perry Houston Home Journal* noted in its announcement of his new rank that he “is known as a specialist on arms and tactics.” Hodges received several notes of congratulation from prominent names in the Army. Hap Arnold told him, “how pleased I was to learn of your promotion, and I want to join your many family and friends in extending heartiest congratulations. And good wishes.” Lesley McNair wrote, “I was delighted to see your promotion, partly because of the favorable impression I formed during my visit a year ago, but more especially because of the universal acclaim with which your name is being proclaimed on all sides.” Millard Harmon, like McNair destined to be one of four lieutenant generals to die in the war, recalled his fondness for Hodges’ work in Virginia with Army aviators. “All here at the Air Corps Tactical School who have been so happily associated with you during the past several years join me in this message.”³⁸⁶

Congratulations also came at this time from his two future commanding officers in Europe. Bradley relayed that “Mary joins me in heartiest congratulations on your selection to be a Brigadier General, and particularly on being first on the list.” He noted that no one was more deserving of the honor, and that everyone he had talked to likewise thought positively of

³⁸⁵ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, DeWitt to Hodges, 7 January 1937, Hodges to DeWitt, 12 February 1938.

³⁸⁶ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record; *Perry Houston Home Journal*, 2 May 1940. Georgia. www.newspaperarchive.com; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, Henry Arnold to Hodges, 25 April 1940, McNair to Hodges, 25 April 1940, Millard Harmon to Hodges, 29 April 1940.

Hodges' promotion. Bradley also expressed regret that he had not been to see him at Fort Benning but hoped to visit in the future. "I hope you get in some hunting during the winter," he continued. "I had a few days, getting some ducks, pheasants, and quail." Eisenhower, himself only a lieutenant colonel at the time, also reached out to his fellow officer from the Philippines. "I cannot tell you what a thrill it was to read in the bulletin the other day that you had received your promotion. To say that I'm delighted is just understatement." Eisenhower filled Hodges in on his current assignment. "Here at Camp Ord I've been having a grand time in a succession of field exercises and maneuvers ... Our permanent station is Fort Lewis, Washington, where ... I arrived on February 1st, after leaving Manila on December 13th."³⁸⁷

Marshall took a keen interest in Hodges' work at the Infantry School. The same month that Hodges became a general, the Chief of Staff planned a tour of Fort Benning, and wrote to the commandant, Asa L. Singleton, suggesting he could stay with Hodges during the visit. Later that summer, Orlando Ward, then serving on the General Staff under Marshall, contacted Hodges to solicit his views on Marshall's proposed reorganization of division, corps, and field army units. "General Marshall is very anxious to get your informal views on this organization before he takes final action. He has asked me to send it to you and will appreciate it very much if you can send it back with your comments as soon as possible." Hodges wrote back to Marshall directly a week later. "I know that you are anxious to have this problem of organization, which is so vital to procurement, tactical doctrine and training, settled at an early date." He noted that he did not have all the available information at that time. "I do believe, however, that the points raised in my comments herein should receive consideration prior to your final decision in this

³⁸⁷ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, Bradley to Hodges, 24 April 1940, Eisenhower to Hodges, 1 May 1940.

important matter.” The Chief of Staff viewed Hodges as an expert in infantry matters and valued his views.³⁸⁸

In October 1940, Hodges became the head of the Infantry School, and his leadership in that capacity stood out in Henry Stimson’s eyes. “I was most impressed with the successful manner in which the great expansion of the Infantry School has been conducted,” the Secretary of War wrote to Hodges in November after a visit to Fort Benning. “The Infantry is fortunate in having so effective an institution for the training of its officers.” In January 1941, Marshall again wrote to Hodges with approval. “This is just a note to tell you that I have had a number of flattering comments regarding the two weeks’ course you conducted for the National Guard Generals,” the Chief of Staff remarked. “It is evident that you and your people did a splendid job and I want you to know that I am deeply appreciative. More and more Benning looms in our mobilization development a factor of immense importance.” Hodges wrote back the following week. “Needless to say, your expression of appreciation of work accomplished at Benning means everything to us,” he explained. “We shall all continue to do our best to keep Benning marching forward.”³⁸⁹

As commandant at Fort Benning, Hodges reported to the Chief of Infantry, Major General George A. Lynch. In February 1941, Lynch rated Hodges only twenty-eight out of sixty-four generals of similar grade that he knew. However, that same month, Bradley wrote to Hodges to tell him that he had received orders to report to the Infantry School. “Confidentially,” he told Hodges, “you are going to receive orders effective about a week after I get down there

³⁸⁸ Bland, *Marshall Papers Vol. 2*, 200-201; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, Orlando Ward to Hodges, 1 August 1940, Hodges to Marshall, 7 August 1940.

³⁸⁹ NARA, Stimson Papers, RG 107, Box 3, Stimson to Hodges, 25 November 1940; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, Marshall to Hodges, 15 January 1941, Hodges to Marshall, 22 January 1941.

ordering you here as Acting Chief of Staff of Infantry until General Lynch's time is up when you will be it." Bradley noted that most likely he would take Hodges' job at Fort Benning. "It was General Marshall's idea and he may have discussed the matter with you, though he didn't say anything about it." Bradley was correct, and he soon replaced Hodges as commandant of the Infantry School. Lynch retired at the end of April, and the following month Emory S. Adams, the Adjutant General, wrote to Hodges. "The President has submitted to the Senate your nomination for appointment as Chief of Infantry, with the rank of major general, Regular Army." Hodges wasted no time in accepting the new position, and the War Department officially announced his new rank and assignment 2 June.³⁹⁰

In November, Hodges participated in the Army General Headquarters maneuvers in the Carolinas as an observer. "During the five day exercise I covered approximately 800 miles," he wrote to Adams. "I devoted the larger part of my time to observation along the line of contact." He criticized the fact that most of the maneuvers took place along road networks, with few commanders considering the possibility of a flank attack. "In every situation that came to my attention, the defense could have been ruptured with the utmost ease by an advance off roads." This seems more than a little ironic considering Hodges' own unwillingness to flank the Hürtgen Forest three years later. He noted that during the maneuvers, "the desire for speed too often resulted in haste." An infantryman, Hodges paid close attention to the special needs and circumstances of foot soldiers. "The necessity for rifle protection of antitank units appeared to be largely ignored. In those instances where riflemen were charged with protecting antitank installations their dispositions were faulty. Ordinarily they stood or sat beside the installation to

³⁹⁰ NPRC. Hodges Papers, George A. Lynch, efficiency report for Courtney Hodges, 28 February 1941, Emory S. Adams to Hodges, 23 May 1941, Hodges to Adams, 24 May 1941, War Department announcement, 2 June 1941; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 3, Bradley to Hodges, 19 February 1941.

be protected.” He stated that other than at the squad and platoon level, there was little coordination between units, and that the various headquarters’ staffs had little understanding of what was transpiring out in the field. “Control units from companies on up appeared to be largely ephemeral. Paper wars were being fought in command posts.” Hodges further lamented the fact that many officers remained at their headquarters, “out of fear of capture,” and observed that “in contact situations, infantry systematically failed to avail itself of cover and concealment.”³⁹¹

Hodges gave a mixed report concerning the use of trucks and transports in the operation. “The handling of vehicles, particularly in the initial stages of the last phase of the maneuver, was excellent.” However, this work deteriorated as the exercise continued. “Little effort was made to conceal vehicles or to clear roads. Traffic jams and congestion became the rule rather than the exception.” He criticized small unit leadership, stating that it was “inferior or often non-existent.” Hodges deplored the fact that after all large-scale maneuvers, authorities called for more small unit training, but the same problems inevitably would persist during the next maneuvers. He concluded his report to Adams expressing his overall negative impression of the war games. “Our large exercises as presently conducted are artificial, illogical, unreal, and lacking in training values that should be present. We must learn to crawl before we walk, and how to walk before we run; for some time, we have been reversing this process.”³⁹²

Historically, the assignment of Chief of Infantry lasted for four years, but the U.S. entry into the Second World War necessitated a shakeup in Army organization in early 1942. On 9 March, Hodges took up the newly created position of head of the Army Replacement and School

³⁹¹ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 7, Hodges to Adams, November 1941.

³⁹² Ibid.

Command, tasked with preparing troops throughout the United States for combat roles overseas. In addition to Fort Benning, Hodges oversaw the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe, as well as several infantry and artillery replacement centers around the country. He made Birmingham, Alabama his headquarters, as it was roughly in the center of his command. Marshall wrote to General John McAuley Palmer, explaining his thoughts on the shakeup and Hodges' appointment. He noted that he had engineered it so that the shift would occur at the same time the Adjutant General's tour would expire, as well as two of the Chiefs of Arms. Hodges, one of the remaining Chiefs of Arms, was "perfectly suited" to a more important position than Chief of Infantry.³⁹³

Marshall and McNair had their hands full at this time selecting capable officers to command units overseas and forming in the United States. McNair had suggested Hodges for corps command in the future, a recommendation backed up by Marshall's assistant, John H. Hilldring. In late March Marshall wrote to McNair asking for his input on selecting commanders for the 7th and 40th Infantry Divisions. Anticipating one of McNair's top choices, Marshall wrote, "incidentally, I should think it would be very bad business to take Hodges away from his present organizational job at this time." However, a month later McNair proposed Hodges as one of three officers to possibly command X Corps, set to activate in Dallas, Texas in May, and Marshall concurred. Hodges received his orders on 1 May to assume command of X Corps. Hodges could not have been happier to command a combat unit. He sent Marshall a note at the end of May. "I wish to express to you my deep appreciation for the opportunity you have given me to command an army corps," he wrote. "I can think of nothing finer and shall exert every effort to build the best corps in the army." He reported that he had established a headquarters in

³⁹³ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record.; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 129.

Sherman, Texas, near the Oklahoma border. “We are getting organized, reconnoitering the camps to be occupied and planning for the task ahead.”³⁹⁴

As in his previous assignments, Hodges performed well as commander of X Corps. From his headquarters in Sherman, Hodges commanded a force that stretched from Texas’ Camp Maxey and Camp Howze to Camp Gruber in Oklahoma, with several smaller elements scattered throughout the area. Hodges reported to Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, the commander of Third Army, and in July Krueger ranked Hodges as number three on a list of his command’s eleven major generals. In December, he placed Hodges as first among his three corps commanders. Hodges’ did not escape Marshall’s attention, and in September 1942, the Chief of Staff included the X Corps commander’s name on the list of recommended officers to command the Center Task Force for Eisenhower’s invasion of North Africa.³⁹⁵

On 16 February 1943, Hodges received orders to report to Fort Sam Houston to take command of the Third Army. The assignment came with the rank of lieutenant general, as well as the command of the United States Southern Defense Command, based in San Antonio. This post gave him authority over Army units in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas. The command also oversaw the critical final training of units in the Louisiana maneuver area. Hodges took a keen interest in this training, and often personally directed the exercises. As head of the Southern Defense Command, Hodges frequently played the role of diplomat, receiving foreign military officers reviewing American training methods. In the summer of 1943, a member of the Adjutant General’s staff wrote to

³⁹⁴ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 54, McNair to Marshall, 12 March 1942, J. H. Hilldring to Marshall, 12 March 1942, McNair to Marshall 27 April 1942; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 152; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 7, Hodges to Marshall. 29 May 1942.

³⁹⁵ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record; NPRC, Hodges Papers, Walter Krueger, efficiency report for Courtney Hodges, 7 July 1942, Krueger, efficiency report for Courtney Hodges, 31 December 1942; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 367.

Hodges to inform him that the Mexican military attaché in Washington D.C. visited the War Department, “for the purpose of commending you and the officers and men under your command for the many courtesies extended to General [Francisco L.] Urquizo and his party during their recent visit to the Louisiana Maneuver Area.” Indeed, Hodges so impressed Urquizo that the Mexican officer sent a sarape that he had made himself. “It has given me much pleasure,” the Mexican general wrote, “that this present, which I made to you with all sincerity and affection, has been to your liking.” Further, he spoke of the “friendship which unites us and in recognition of the kindness which you have tendered me.”³⁹⁶

Hodges was no stranger to rubbing shoulders with foreign military officers and dignitaries over the course of his career. While working with Army aviators in Virginia he had helped to train officers from different parts of the world. Hodges had received a silver cigarette case embossed with the Siamese (Thai) coat of arms because he had impressed two Siamese officers, Captain Visith Svasti and Captain Moht Sinhaseni. The Siamese minister of war sent the case to him via Harold O. Mackenzie, the American minister to Siam, while Hodges was serving at his next post at Fort Douglas, Utah. In his capacity as commander of Southern Defense Command in 1943, Hodges visited Mexico to celebrate that nation’s 133rd anniversary of independence. The Mexican president, Manuel Avila Camacho, wrote to Hodges expressing his satisfaction that his country had made a good impression on the general. “Please be assured,” he affirmed with goodwill, “that your presence among us produced an analogous sentiment, (and you) being deserving of the attentions accorded you.” He closed the letter with, “please accept a cordial salutation from your attentive friend and servitor.” Later that year, Hodges assisted the

³⁹⁶ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Courtney Hodges Service Record, Francisco L. Urquizo to Hodges, 20 October 1943; NPRC, Hodges papers, L. N. Chitwood to Hodges, 11 August 1943.

Mexican governor of Nuevo Leon, Arturo B. de la Garza, in obtaining medicine for a medical condition. Hodges wrote to Garza in December, stating, "I appreciate your generous expressions of good will and I trust that the New Year will bring you restored health and all good fortune."³⁹⁷

Hodges continued to cultivate relationships with his superiors. In May 1943, Hodges reached out to his old friend McNair after the latter's injuries in Tunisia. "We were very much disturbed when we received the 'flash' disclosing the fact that you had been wounded on an inspection trip in North Africa," he wrote. "We are happy, indeed, to learn that you have returned to duty and hope to see you in the Third Army area in the near future." McNair responded a few days later, thanking him for his well wishes. "I am planning to be down at your war in the latter part of next week," he informed the Third Army commander. "It will be good to see some maneuvers again." Later that year, Hodges dutifully sent Stimson birthday wishes. "I deeply appreciate the kind letter of birthday congratulations which was sent to me by the officers and men of the Third Army," the Secretary of War responded.³⁹⁸

These relationships certainly did not hurt Hodges' career. Despite McNair ranking Hodges number eight out of fourteen officers of similar rank, he recognized the general's efforts as head of the Replacement and School Command the previous year with a Legion of Merit recommendation. The recommendation stated that Hodges had displayed "sound judgement, professional skill, untiring energy and devotion to duty." However, since Hodges already received a recommendation for the Distinguished Service Medal for the same duty, the War Department rejected the Legion of Merit recommendation. Hodges eventually received the DSM

³⁹⁷ *Salt Lake City Telegram*, Utah, 28 January 1930, www.newspaperarchive.com; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Manuel Avila Camacho to Hodges, 7 October 1943, Hodges to Arturo B. de la Garza, 22 December 1943.

³⁹⁸ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 5, Hodges to McNair, 18 May 1943, McNair to Hodges, 22 May 1943, Stimson to Hodges, 24 September 1943.

in April 1944. The citation read, “for exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service in position of great responsibility as Commanding General, Replacement and School Command, and as Commanding General X Corps.” The citation credited Hodges with organizing the expansion of the replacement training operations “so as to meet fully the needs of the Army.” His training of X Corps’ units, “on a sound and progressive basis,” also meant “great advantage to our war effort.”³⁹⁹

Hodges also had to oversee a politically sensitive matter within the Third Army at this time, the training of the Japanese-American 442nd Combat Team. Political and military leaders had feared that there would be tension or even violence between the Japanese-American troops and their fellow soldiers. In September 1943, McNair wrote to John J. McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War, and told him that he had corresponded with Hodges about the unit, then stationed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. McNair reported, “General Hodges has heard of no clashes between white and Japanese soldiers, a fact which leads me to believe that the incidents reported to you are not too serious.” Hodges had toured Camp Shelby a few months earlier, investigated the issue, and concluded that there were no major problems. Still, reports troubled Stimson and his staff, and McNair promised further inquiry. “I am forwarding the cases to General Hodges for his information and the necessary action. In the meantime, he will contact Camp Shelby by telephone and if necessary, personally proceed to that situation.” McNair ended the letter on an optimistic note. “I trust that no serious situation will be uncovered, and I will make every effort to bring about a proper relationship between white and Japanese soldiers at the

³⁹⁹ NPRC, Hodges Papers, McNair, efficiency report for Courtney Hodges, 1 July 1943, McNair, recommendation for Legion of Merit for Courtney Hodges, 17 August 1943, H. L. Thomas to McNair, 7 October 1943, G. D. Gardner, citation for publication in War Department General Orders, 10 April 1944.

earliest possible date.”⁴⁰⁰

The same day, McNair sent the War Department reports to Hodges. “Regardless of whether there is any serious present or prospective clash between white and Japanese soldiers, these seem to indicate that relations are not all that could be desired.” He stated that Hodges could take some action in order to foster amity at Camp Shelby. “It seems to me that an appeal to the better elements on both sides by qualified officers could readily produce a change in their attitude.” After Hodges had further investigated the matter, McNair wrote again to McCloy the next month. He noted that “conditions are improving gradually,” and that the “Japanese troops are making a very creditable showing in their training.” He reported that the soldiers of the 442nd Combat Team had a “98% qualifications with the M1 rifle,” and a “99.95% in the physical test,” which he stated was “an amazing score.”⁴⁰¹

In anticipation of his employment in Europe, the War Department sent Hodges to Italy to view the war firsthand in late 1943. He toured the Sicilian battlefields with Patton in October, and the Seventh Army commander recorded in his diary that Hodges, “apparently is less dumb than I considered him ... However, I am personally very fond of him.” A few weeks later, after discussing the slow advance of Clark’s Fifth Army, he wrote, “Hodges and I had a long talk. We both feel that viewed at face value the situation in Italy is bad. Our men are tired and fed up.” Patton and Hodges believed that the soldiers in Italy “can appear to attack without doing so and only advance when there is an amazing amount of artillery support.” The two men had been casual friends, and Patton’s apparent low opinion of his intelligence had not prevented him from writing to Hodges and lamenting his decreased aptitude for skeet shooting once he had taken

⁴⁰⁰ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 9, McNair to McCloy, 25 September 1943.

⁴⁰¹ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 9, McNair to Hodges, 25 September 1943, McNair to McCloy, 15 October 1943.

command of the 2nd Armored Division in early 1941.⁴⁰²

After Hodges returned to Texas, the *San Antonio Express* printed a story based on a War Department interview about his visit to Italy. The Third Army commander reported the “generally excellent” condition of American equipment. “Our infantry soldiers like both the bazooka and the rifle grenade not only for anti-tank work but against personnel.” In a clear bid to reassure the American people of the G.I.’s fighting prowess, Hodges had said that “our infantry has no fear of German tanks; the tanks were not regarded as the ‘bully’ of the battlefield. They just consider the tanks as good targets now and place their faith in the effectiveness of our anti-tank weapons.” However, Hodges did note that the Germans possessed “ideal terrain” for the defense. The newspaper story also related that Hodges’ tour had included spending time with front line units “in contact with the enemy.”⁴⁰³

As Hodges was busily preparing the Third Army for its eventual transfer to Europe, Marshall and Eisenhower were considering the command arrangements for the new year’s operations on the continent. The Supreme Commander knew that eventually he wanted Bradley to command an army group in Europe and needed to decide on his field army commanders. “One of his army commanders should probably be Patton,” Eisenhower wrote to Marshall. “The other, a man that may be developed in OVERLORD operations or, alternatively, somebody like Hodges or Simpson.” Eisenhower’s suggestion of Hodges delighted Marshall and the Chief of Staff wrote back a few days later. “Hodges is exactly the same class of man as Bradley in practically every respect. Wonderful shot, great hunter, quiet, self-effacing. Thorough understanding of ground fighting, DSC, etc. etc.” Considering Marshall’s regard for Bradley,

⁴⁰² Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 367, 371; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 4, Patton to Hodges, 24 April 1941.

⁴⁰³ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 23, *San Antonio Express*, Texas, 7 December 1943.

this endorsement constituted high praise indeed.⁴⁰⁴

Eisenhower responded the next day. “Looking at this business of organization from the broadest standpoint, including your problems at home, I have come to the conclusion that it would be a good thing of us to get an occasional very senior officer directly from home to insert him in a responsible position.” This letter is notable because Eisenhower stated that he was willing to base a decision for a critical command position on Marshall’s personnel decisions Stateside, rather than combat experience. “Therefore,” Eisenhower continued, “I request that you make ready to relieve Hodges there at a date that I will later indicate to you and send him to England. It would be my thought that he will live by Bradley’s side during the later stages of planning and preparation.” He intended for Hodges to work closely with Bradley during the execution of Overlord as well. Eisenhower then made another important statement. “In no repeat no event will I ever advance Patton beyond army command.”⁴⁰⁵

Eisenhower was willing to elevate Hodges to a critical position within Bradley’s First Army organization, with an eye toward eventually giving him that command. Hodges had not led men in combat since 1918. Like Mark Clark, Hodges had no experience leading a division or a corps in combat. Clark’s disastrous leadership at the Rapido was still a month away, yet Eisenhower had seen Clark’s skittishness and nerves at Salerno. Did he really think it wise to promote another general that lacked modern combat experience in high command? Just as baffling is Eisenhower’s decision to make field army command Patton’s ceiling. Certainly, Patton lacked tact and often presented unnecessary headaches for his superiors. Eisenhower no doubt understood, perhaps better than anyone, that the higher up the chain of command an

⁴⁰⁴ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers Vol. III*, 1609; Bland, *Marshall Papers, Vol. 4*, 210.

⁴⁰⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1630.

officer went, the more political the job became. Nevertheless, Patton had consistently proven himself a master of the modern battlefield in North Africa and Sicily. By grooming Hodges for command of First Army, did Eisenhower think that he was really Patton's equal?

Marshall wondered if Hodges might not be a better fit for Fifth Army, presumably since Clark was at this point still slated for command of the invasion of southern France. Eisenhower rejected Marshall's suggestion. "Concerning Hodges there is no doubt that if he could come immediately to the Fifth Army he would make a satisfactory commander," he wrote. "However, we are going to have to find several capable senior officers and my present thought is that it would be best to leave the arrangement stand as indicated in my former message to you." Marshall concurred with Eisenhower's decision. "Tell General McNair that Hodges will go to England," the Chief of Staff wrote to his assistant, General Thomas T. Handy. Marshall dictated that Hodges would have a say in selecting which Third Army staff officers he wanted to accompany him, but that Eisenhower would have the final authority. "As a matter of fact, Patton will command the [Third] Army in all probability and Hodges may end up commanding the First Army." A few weeks later Marshall and Eisenhower agreed that Third Army headquarters should travel to England in February, but that Hodges should remain Stateside until the Supreme Commander called for him.⁴⁰⁶

Astoundingly, Eisenhower even suggested that Patton remain in the Mediterranean, presumably to head up Operation Anvil, and thus allowing Hodges to retain command of Third Army, "with which he is, of course, thoroughly acquainted." He left no doubt about his preference. "I personally believe therefore that Patton should stay in the Mediterranean and Hodges should come here." However, he agreed to acquiesce to Marshall's judgement in the

⁴⁰⁶ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 4, 215-216, 239; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1641.

matter, and stressed that whatever the decision, “one of these two Army commanders should proceed here soon and begin the necessary organization of an American Army.” In another letter, Eisenhower again lamented the fact that Hodges had to separate from his Third Army Staff, “and will be presumably without definite assignment for the next several months.” Despite Eisenhower’s views, Marshall opted for Patton to take command of Third Army.⁴⁰⁷

Hodges remained unaware of these machinations. In January, he could not understand the fact that Eisenhower had called the Third Army to Europe and Marshall had not yet summoned him to Washington for a briefing on his new position, the usual protocol for an overseas combat assignment. Eisenhower had not informed Hodges that Patton was to command Third Army in Europe, and by the time Third Army arrived in England less than half of its officers knew about the command shakeup. Hodges only learned of his relief from seeing a letter from Beatrice Patton addressed to her husband as commander of Third Army. The news must have been a shock and great disappointment to Hodges, as he had reason to believe his work with Third Army in no way warranted relief. McNair had continued to file positive efficiency reports for him. On 1 January, McNair ranked him, “no. 1 of three army commanders now in the Army Ground Forces, so far as concerns home training.” At the end of February, he rated him fourth out of fourteen lieutenant generals, and noted that Hodges, “has been my best training army commander and I have all faith in his combat value.”⁴⁰⁸

Hodges did not have to wait too long to find out his fate. Eisenhower wrote to the Adjutant General on 21 February, requesting Hodges’ transfer to the United Kingdom. “Because

⁴⁰⁷ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. III*, 1665, 1669-1670.

⁴⁰⁸ Wishnevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 89-90; Robert S. Allen, *Lucky Forward: Patton’s Third U.S. Army* (New York: Manor Books, 1977), 20-21; NPRC, Hodges Papers, McNair, efficiency report for Courtney Hicks Hodges, 1 January 1944, 29 February 1944.

of Bradley's necessary presence in London for planning purposes, we could use General Hodges very advantageously, for the moment, as Deputy for Bradley." At approximately the same time that Patton assured the men of the Third Army that "I was just as much their father and as deeply concerned for their welfare as Courtney had been," Hodges arrived in England to take up his new duties. Since Eisenhower was planning to activate the Third Army several weeks after the cross-Channel invasion, he would then kick Bradley up to lead the Army Group and Hodges would take command of First Army. Despite their long friendship, Bradley later expressed disappointment with Hodges. "I had always liked and admired Courtney Hodges, but now, as he became my subordinate, I began to fret privately. Courtney seemed indecisive and overly conservative." Bradley stated that he had hoped William Kean and other members of the First Army staff, "would keep a fire under him." It is impossible to know whether Bradley really believed this at the time, or merely wrote about his reservations decades after Hodges' poor performance made such criticism seem appropriate.⁴⁰⁹

Marshall and Eisenhower considered another command shakeup in late April, after Patton made injudicious remarks at a public gathering in Knutsford, England. Patton had a knack for courting controversy, and despite his aggressiveness and combat experience, Eisenhower had brought him to the United Kingdom only reluctantly. Now, Marshall feared that Patton's statement that the Americans and the British were destined to rule the world threatened to derail officer promotions in the Senate. It was yet another headache that the U.S. Army did not need, particularly with just weeks to go before D-Day, and Marshall and Eisenhower gave serious thought to relieving Patton. The Chief of Staff left the matter to Eisenhower, although he

⁴⁰⁹ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 133, Eisenhower to James A. Ulio, 21 February 1944.; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 427; Bradley, *A General's Life*, 218.

reminded him that “Patton is the only available Army Commander for his present assignment who has had actual experience in fighting Rommel and in extensive landing operations followed by a rapid campaign of exploitation.” However, Marshall did note that “if you feel that that operation can be carried out with the same assurance of success with Hodges in command, for example, instead of Patton all well and good.”⁴¹⁰

Eisenhower quickly responded to Marshall, telling him that he had sent for Patton and he would allow the Third Army commander to defend himself before he made a final decision. “Of all the evidence now available,” he told Marshall, “I will relieve him from command and send him home unless some new and unforeseen information should be developed in the case.” He then commented on Patton’s possible replacement. “I have every faith in Hodges and my conviction is that he can do a very fine job as Third Army Commander. The big difference is that Patton has proved his ability to conduct a ruthless drive whereas Hodges has not.” Bradley later wrote that he “fully concurred in Ike’s decision to send Patton home. I, too, was fed up.” He noted that Eisenhower’s first choice for a replacement was actually Lucian Truscott, then commanding VI Corps in Italy under Fifth Army, but Mark Clark refused to free him for Overlord. “We resorted ... to the ‘next best thing.’ We selected Courtney Hodges to command the Third Army, leaving open, for the time being my replacement for the First Army.”⁴¹¹

In any event, Eisenhower decided to retain Patton in command. No doubt Marshall’s counsel to consider Patton’s extensive combat experience played a part, especially in contrast to the green Hodges. However, the fact that Eisenhower was seriously considering replacing Patton with Hodges once again illustrates a lack of judgement. The Supreme Commander did not need

⁴¹⁰ D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, 585-587; Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 4, 437, 442.

⁴¹¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 1840-1841; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 222-223.

the political aggravation that always seemed to trail Patton, but was it really worth replacing a proven military talent with an unknown quantity? Also, if we are to believe Bradley's notoriously self-serving autobiography, it is very troubling that he was fine with Hodges replacing Patton considering that he had just recently thought of his deputy as "indecisive and overly conservative." Apparently, Bradley's dislike for Patton outweighed his reservations about Hodges.⁴¹²

Hodges performed generally well as Bradley's First Army deputy. In the days following the D-Day landings, he went ashore to gather information for his chief and frequently met with local commanders. On 12 June, Marshall, Eisenhower, Arnold, Admiral Ernest J. King, and Admiral Alan Kirk visited the Normandy beachhead with a host of reporters and photographers. After a press conference and luncheon, Hodges rode with Marshall and Eisenhower back to inspect the American positions at Isigny and Carentan, which had just fallen that morning. According to the First Army war diary, the two senior generals, "were apparently very pleased with the way operations were proceeding and asked many questions." Hodges, "extremely familiar" with the Carentan operation, briefed them on the 101st Airborne's action. The next month, after the Cobra breakout, Hodges again played the role of diplomat by escorting a delegation of high-ranking Soviet officers around the beachhead.⁴¹³

Hodges worked closely with Bradley and the First Army staff in preparation for Operation Cobra. Patton visited First Army headquarters on 23 July, and in characteristic dislike for any plan that was not his own, recorded his thoughts about the upcoming offensive in his diary. "Cobra ... is really a very timid operation," he wrote, "but Bradley and Hodges consider

⁴¹² Bradley, *A General's Life*, 218.

⁴¹³ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 18, 70.

themselves regular devils for having thought of it. At least it is the best operation which has been planned so far, and I hope it works.” Patton poured his further frustrations onto the page. “I am sometimes appalled at the density of human beings. I am also nauseated by the fact that Hodges and Bradley state that all human virtue depends on knowing infantry tactics.” Patton asserted that a general did not need to bother himself with events on the tactical level. “The tactics belong to battalion commanders. If generals knew less tactics, they would interfere less.” Certainly, both Bradley and Hodges were micromanagers, explaining, in part, their frequent relief of division and corps commanders. Bradley himself wrote in his autobiography that after his elevation to 12th Army Group commander, “I would exercise the very closest control over Hodges and Patton.” Marshall, on the other hand, understood the importance for a higher commander to delegate responsibility, as Collins among others had commented on.⁴¹⁴

On 1 August 1944, Hodges received General Orders No. 4, and proceeded to sign four copies. Three went to the First Army corps commanders, and one went to the Adjutant General. In line with the plan that Marshall and Eisenhower had set in motion months earlier, under this order Hodges assumed command of First Army. Eisenhower initially wanted Hodges’ and Bradley’s new roles kept secret. The First Army war diary noted that “until SHAEF released news of the existence of two Armies in operation under command of 12th Army Group, there will be no general publicity given to General Hodges’s assumption of command.” Hodges formally took command at noon, the same time that Patton’s Third Army activated. Hodges now commanded the V, VII, and XIX Corps, with a total of eleven divisions, although two soon left for Third Army. For the first time in twenty-six years, Hodges held a combat command. Like

⁴¹⁴ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 56-63; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 486; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 284; Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 96-97.

Mark Clark, he went from commanding a battalion in the First World War to commanding a field army in the Second. Although Hodges had performed well in the role of deputy commander, he had never commanded a corps, division, or even regiment in battle.⁴¹⁵

There is no denying that Hodges and First Army performed well during the battle at Mortain and in the subsequent dash across France and into Belgium. One recent Ph.D. dissertation refers to this period as an “American Blitzkrieg.” Historian Stephen R. Taaffe asserts that First Army in this period fought harder, took more casualties, and inflicted more losses than Patton’s Third Army. However, we need to attribute much of Hodges’ success to Collins. Hodges came to rely heavily on Collins, and the corps commander played the leading role in every major First Army action in 1944. Ernest Harmon, commander of the 2nd Armored Division, held this view, and considered Hodges an unoriginal thinker and a generally timid leader.⁴¹⁶

After the debacle at the Hürtgen Forest and Hodges’ dismal performance during the Battle of the Bulge, Eisenhower should have demanded the First Army commander’s relief. However, he and other high-ranking officers continued to support him. During the battle in the Ardennes, Marshall wrote to Hodges, perhaps hoping to inspire him to greater action. He lamented that the First Army commander would have little or no time to celebrate the Christmas holiday. “However,” he wrote, “I send you my Christmas greetings, together with my hope that you will find something of cheer on that day.” Conveniently forgetting the grim, avoidable slog in the Hürtgen, Marshall boldly stated, “the First Army has written glorious history since June

⁴¹⁵ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 81.

⁴¹⁶ Adam J. Rinkleff, *American Blitzkrieg: Courtney Hodges and the Advance Toward Aachen (August 1 – September 12, 1944)*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Texas, December 2012. <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc177245/>); Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 167-169.

6th, and I feel that it will crush the present desperate counter thrust and forge ahead through the enemy's depleted ranks." He concluded with, "you have been a strong, cool-headed leader, and you have our complete confidence." In the hard days of fighting in the Hürtgen and the Bulge, Hodges had failed to offer inspired leadership to his men, he had repeatedly reinforced failure by making poor operational choices, and many officers, including Montgomery, had expressed their doubts about him.⁴¹⁷

Eisenhower too tried to inspire Hodges during the Bulge. "In the recent battling you and your army have performed in your usual magnificent style," he wrote to Hodges on 22 December. "Now that you have been placed under [Montgomery's] operational command, I know that you will respond cheerfully and efficiently to every instruction he gives." However, Eisenhower sent an identical letter to William Simpson, then commanding the United States Ninth Army. In February 1945, Eisenhower ranked Hodges number eleven out of thirty-eight officers of similar rank. He wrote in a memo with rankings for all of his officers that "the order of listing hereon is based upon my conclusions as to the value of services each officer has rendered in this war and only secondarily upon my opinion as to his qualifications for future usefulness." For Hodges, he left the comments, "sound, able, experienced." In light of Hodges' recent poor performance, the words seem rather vague. Certainly, Hodges had gained experience, but he had proved himself far from sound and less than able.⁴¹⁸

Montgomery had always held a low opinion of Hodges, and the American general's performance during the Battle of the Bulge only confirmed this view. The Field Marshal's liaison to 12th Army Group, Tom Bigland, had not been impressed with the First Army

⁴¹⁷ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 8, Marshall to Hodges, December 1944.

⁴¹⁸ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2369, 2466-2467.

commander, nor had Montgomery's intelligence chief, Edgar Williams. Williams later stated that "Hodges was an example, even a victim, of the seniority principle which to the Americans, (like ourselves earlier) had got to work itself out of the system." Nevertheless, in a diplomatic gesture to foster inter-Allied amity, Montgomery wrote a gracious letter to Hodges in mid-January. "Your Army passes from my command tonight, and I feel I cannot let it go without saying what a very great pleasure it has been to work with you and to have such fine troops under my command." He praised the destruction of the enemy salient during the Battle of the Bulge as "almost entirely an American feat of arms; and a very fine one." He commented on the pride he felt at cooperating with Hodges during the battle, and his faith throughout the dark days that they would emerge victorious in the end.⁴¹⁹

In early March, First Army had captured the critical Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, an important step in the Western Allies' invasion of Germany. Hodges received tremendous credit for this and had greatly impressed his superiors. A few days later, 6th Army Group commander Jacob Devers, who had moved from his deputy job in the Mediterranean theater to an army group command in northern Europe, sent Hodges a flattering message. "Please accept my sincere congratulations on the fine work of the First Army under your inspiring leadership. All of us here wish you continued success and good luck." Certainly, the capture of the bridge was a feather in Hodges' cap that reinforced the view that he was a capable commander.⁴²⁰

On 26 March, as Allied armies poured into Germany, Eisenhower wrote candidly to Marshall about his generals. He noted his friendship with Patton, which stretched back a quarter of a century. "In certain circumstances," the Supreme Commander affirmed, "he had no equal.

⁴¹⁹ Horne, *The Lonely Leader*, 302; Bigland, *Bigland's War*, 81; Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe*, 310-311; DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 8, Montgomery to Hodges, 17 January 1945.

⁴²⁰ DDEL, Hodges Papers, Box 8, Devers to Hodges, 11 March 1945.

But by and large it would be difficult indeed to choose between him, Hodges, and Simpson.” It makes little sense that Eisenhower still considered Hodges anywhere near the same level of ability as the dynamic and successful Patton or even the steady and dependable Simpson. While Patton had made his share of mistakes during the war, he had never made the same tragic errors, and on the same scale, that Hodges had. The same day he wrote to Marshall, Eisenhower fired off a message to the First Army commander noting the fact that he sat largely in Patton’s shadow. “You have gone about your business so quietly, modestly and efficiently that you and First Army have possibly not been publicized to the same degree as have other formations.” Then the Supreme Commander made a truly baffling statement. “I have often had occasion to congratulate the First Army on its unbroken record of tactical accomplishment all the way from Normandy to its present position East of the Rhine.” Eisenhower’s characterization of the Hürtgen battle as part of an “unbroken record of tactical accomplishment” is nothing short of astonishing.⁴²¹

A few days later Eisenhower again wrote to Marshall, expressing concern about Hodges’ legacy. “I should very much like to see Hodges get credit in the United States for his great work.” He recommended that Alexander Surles, the head of the Army’s public relations office, “should be able to build a story from his situation maps and by tracing progress of First Army.” Patton had grabbed most of the headlines, and just as Eisenhower had tried to be fair in his allocation of resources for his broad front strategy, so too did he want equality in the history books for his army commanders. Of course, Eisenhower was not the only person to comment on Hodges’ charisma deficit. The previous September, as First Army began its advance against the Westwall, Harry Butcher had noted in his diary that “Patton is getting great publicity and is

⁴²¹ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2544-2545.

overshadowing Hodges of the U.S. First Army.” He had suggested that the war correspondents include Hodges’ name on dispatches about the First Army and hoped that would raise the general’s public profile. “But it takes a lot of color in any man to balance Patton.” The September 1944 *Time* magazine article noted that “for glamor and color he was no “Georgie” Patton. He had had no adventures like Mark Clark ... [He] had given the public no such vicarious feelings of the rich panoply of Army life as had ... the bemedaled, able Douglas MacArthur.”⁴²²

At this time, Bradley rated Hodges as eight out of thirty-two general officers he knew. He remarked that Hodges was “hard-working, meticulous, and conscientious; has a very fine knowledge of training methods and standards. He is very sound in his tactical decisions.” Eisenhower recommended Hodges for promotion to full general in April. In a letter to Marshall, he praised Hodges’ performance in the weeks following the Cobra breakout, calling it “a model of boldness and daring.” He noted that the pursuit across France, “was conducted with the greatest degree of tactical skill and resulted in the elimination of great numbers of the enemy.” Curiously, he called his operations during the Hürtgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge, “tactical masterpieces.” Again, it is difficult to understand Eisenhower’s enthusiasm for Hodges, even after the First Army commander’s success at Remagen.⁴²³

On 1 May 1945, Bradley arrived at First Army headquarters with important news. Marshall and General Douglas MacArthur had selected the First Army for a critical role in the invasion of Japan. The men received the order with mixed emotions. The war diary read, “this

⁴²² Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2564; Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 657; “Precise Puncher,” *Time*.

⁴²³ NPRC, Hodges Papers, Bradley, efficiency report for Courtney Hodges, 29 March 1943; Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. IV*, 2598.

news, although it is a matter of pride to most members of First Army, strikes in very few a particularly enthusiastic or responsive chord. ... General Hodges is naturally pleased at the news, as is General Kean.” In any event, the war in the Pacific ended before the First Army could take part. Hodges turned sixty-two in 1949, the mandatory retirement age, and left the service. He died from natural causes in 1966.⁴²⁴

By any metric, Courtney Hodges forged a remarkable career. He was a private who rose to the wartime rank of four star general. He was an expert marksman and an adroit hunter. He was a theoretical master of infantry tactics, an adept staff officer, and a skilled troop trainer. Yet, for all that, Hodges represents another failure of the Marshall system, which was supposed to override what Montgomery’s intelligence chief Edgar Williams called, “the seniority principle.” Hodges had met Marshall early in his career, before the First World War. Hodges impressed the senior officer, and soon found his way into Marshall’s fabled little black book. As Hodges steadily climbed the Army ladder, Marshall groomed him for high command, recommended him to Eisenhower for Overlord and, after his poor showing at the Hürtgen and during the Battle of the Bulge, to MacArthur for the operation against the Japanese homeland.⁴²⁵

Although Eisenhower had served with Hodges in the Philippines under MacArthur, the two men had not been especially close. There was no common West Point experience to bind them in the way that Eisenhower connected with Bradley and Clark. Marshall had “suggested” Hodges for the eventual command of First Army in the same manner that he had “suggested” Lloyd Fredendall to command the Center Task Force for Operation Torch in 1942. Eisenhower was politically adroit enough to accept his superior’s suggestion, but quickly became a champion

⁴²⁴ Sylvan, *From Normandy to Victory*, 388-389; Taaffe., *Marshall and His Generals*, 310; Wishevsky, *Courtney Hicks Hodges*, 206, 211.

⁴²⁵ Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe*, 310-311.

for Hodges as well. Historian Stephen R. Taaffe commented that “Marshall, Eisenhower, and Bradley thought the world of Hodges, but their personal affinity seemed to blind them to his flaws. Whatever the First Army’s accomplishments as Eisenhower’s workhorse outfit, it deserved a better commander.” Indeed, just as Marshall and Eisenhower had developed a blind spot for Bradley, so too did they fail to discern Hodges’ significant weaknesses as a commander. There was a certain “Army type,” and Bradley and Hodges were it. Patton, too much of a star, was not. For all of the praise of the Marshall system, it contained a seemingly irreducible element of mediocrity.⁴²⁶

Although Hodges had served well as Bradley’s deputy with First Army prior to August 1944, he had not held a combat command since 1918. Like Mark Clark, he lacked critical high combat command experience in the current war. During the Hürtgen Forest battle, Hodges failed as a leader time and again. He failed to forge a ‘happy family’ in his command. Aside from Collins, he tended to be imperious toward his corps and division commanders, relieving many that failed to live up to his sometimes-impossible standards. He frittered away men and material in a needless, headlong assault into a killing ground that he should have bypassed. In doing so, he traded his army’s chief doctrinal advantages of mobility and firepower for a brutal slugfest that favored the enemy. He further hampered his army’s efforts by diluting the strength of his divisions and assigning each regiment different missions in such a manner that they could not easily support each other. He did this repeatedly, feeding more and more men into the grinder for gains that were nowhere near commiserate with his losses.

The disaster of the German attack in the Ardennes distracted the high command from the tragic failure of Hodges’ leadership in the Hürtgen Forest. Certainly, Hodges was a more

⁴²⁶ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 330.

competent commander than Fredendall, yet like the former II Corps commander, Hodges broke down at the critical moment. Whether his physical health failed him, or he suffered a nervous breakdown, Hodges failed to effectively lead his unit. After Montgomery had taken charge of the U.S. First Army and organized its headquarters, it was effectively able to beat back the German offensive and counterattack. With the Battle of Bulge successfully concluded, and with the end of the war clearly in sight, the American high command allowed Hodges to push forward at a steady pace in line with Eisenhower's broad front strategy. The capture of the Ludendorff Bridge benefited Hodges and reinforced notions of his ability.

The United States First Army played a critical role in the war in Northwestern Europe in 1944 and 1945, and it undoubtedly aided the Allies in their victory over Germany. Its brave officers and men fought hard and with determination to rid the world of Nazism and Hitler's aggression, and it could boast of many successes in France, Belgium, and Germany. It is too bad that Hodges so poorly led such a fine organization, and that so many of its officers and men often had to suffer because of the failures of its commander. Marshall and Eisenhower made a mistake in selecting Courtney Hodges for command of the First Army. They erred again in retaining him in that command after he had proven his inadequacy.

CHAPTER 7

SIMON BOLIVAR BUCKNER, JR.

The 1945 Battle of Okinawa proved to be America's final major military offensive of the Second World War. The United States invaded the island with the Tenth Army, consisting of 172,000 fighting men, a combination of U.S. Army soldiers and Marines and an additional 115,000 men in supporting roles. The Japanese defended an island that they considered part of their home island chain with the 100,000-man Thirty-Second Army, while over 400,000 thousand civilians called Okinawa home. The conflict witnessed American troops attempting to advance against determined, entrenched Japanese forces effectively using southern Okinawa's sharp hills and rocky terrain. Frequent rain and mud accompanied precise, deadly Japanese artillery fire to turn the American advance into a slow, grinding slog. Over 12,200 American soldiers, Marines, airmen, and sailors died in the fighting, and approximately 32,000 were wounded. The Tenth Army accounted for 7,374 of the dead, and the number included Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., the field army commander.⁴²⁷

Buckner's unimaginative tactical approach to the war on Okinawa, and his refusal to consider alternative suggestions from his subordinates helped to ensure the high American casualties. While historian Gerald Astor asserts that Buckner was "a stolid, skilled veteran," few other historians are as kind. Max Hastings notes that "for more than two months he conducted a campaign which seemed to its participants close kin to those of the First World War in Flanders." Victor Davis Hanson likewise compares the fighting on Okinawa to the plodding trench warfare of 1914-1918, and comments that Buckner's stubbornness contributed to the

⁴²⁷ Dan van der Vat, *The Pacific Campaign: World War II – The U.S. Japanese Naval War, 1941-1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 382; Russell F. Weigley, *The American War of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 308.

morass. Joseph H. Alexander remarks that, despite being a “popular, competent commander,” Buckner’s conservatism and lack of combat experience hampered the American forces at Okinawa. Stephen R. Taaffe also maintains that Buckner’s combat inexperience played a large part in his failure to lead his army effectively. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett contend that “compared with his subordinates, Buckner was hardly fit to command a corps, let alone a field army. Yet he held the lives of over 100,000 soldiers and marines in his hand.” Robert L. Gandt states that the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific fleet, Chester Nimitz, came to regret selecting Buckner for the command.⁴²⁸

Unlike the fighting in Europe, the United States Navy dominated the war in the central Pacific. President Roosevelt had ordered General Douglas MacArthur to flee from his command on Corregidor in the Philippines in early 1942, and the general soon set up his headquarters in Australia. Meanwhile, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and Naval Chief of Operations Ernest King selected Nimitz to take command of the Pacific fleet in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. The Army and the Navy had a long and storied rivalry, and the outbreak of war did little to dampen the antagonism. MacArthur publicly denigrated the Navy in a 1942 interview with *Time* magazine, stating that it was a fourth-class navy behind the Japanese, the British, and the Italians. King, himself no mild-mannered sailor, raged at Marshall about MacArthur’s behavior. Despite Roosevelt and Marshall’s desire to see MacArthur, viewed by the American public as a hero, lead the war in the Pacific, they had to face the fact that the Navy had the key assets for

⁴²⁸ Gerald Astor, *Operation Iceberg: The Invasion and Conquest of Okinawa in World War II* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1995), 19; Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 619; Victor Davis Hanson, *An Autumn of War: What America Learned from September 11 and the War on Terrorism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 125; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 330; Joseph H. Alexander, *Storm Landings: Amphibious Battles in the Central Pacific* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 165; Williamson Murray & Allan R. Millett, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 515; Robert Gandt, *The Twilight Warriors: The Deadliest Naval Battle of World War II and the Men Who Fought It* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 125.

such a conflict. Since the conclusion of the First World War, U.S. naval leaders had viewed Japan as the coming power to face and had readied the Navy for a long-ranged war across the Pacific. However, rather than favor Army over Navy, or vice versa, Roosevelt and Marshall divided the ocean in half. MacArthur, based in Australia, commanded the Southwest Pacific Area, while Nimitz commanded the Central Pacific, official known as the Pacific Ocean Area.⁴²⁹

By mid-1944, despite the strong personalities involved and many relatively small interservice crises, the Army/Navy rivalry never seriously threatened the prosecution of the war against Japan. Indeed, the services worked well together on many occasions. As Nimitz had command of the theater, the Navy dominated preparations for the campaign. Admiral Raymond Spruance held overall command of the intended naval offensive, with Vice Admiral Kelly Turner leading the invasion fleet. Although both Spruance and Turner favored Marine General Holland Smith to lead the ground forces, Nimitz decided that since the Tenth Army comprised both Army and Marine divisions, it was fitting that an Army general lead the ground forces. To that end, he selected Buckner for the job. On 2 September, shortly before Buckner officially received his orders to command Tenth Army, he attended a meeting in San Francisco with Nimitz, Spruance, and Turner to discuss the upcoming campaign. Nimitz and Spruance debated the subject of what Buckner referred to in his diary as “my coming project.” Ultimately, despite Spruance’s concerns and the fact that the Joint Chiefs had not yet decided on a target, Nimitz confirmed the plan for the upcoming offensive operation.⁴³⁰

In late March 1945, Buckner’s command ship, the *USS Eldorado*, sailed closer to

⁴²⁹ Walter R. Borneman, *The Admirals: Nimitz, Halsey, Leahy, and King – The Five Star Admirals Who Won the War at Sea*, (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2012) 280, 288; Persico, *Roosevelt’s Centurions*, 173.

⁴³⁰ Gandt, *The Twilight Warriors*, 124-125; Nicholas Evans Sarantakes, *Seven Stars: The Okinawa Battle Diaries of Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., and Joseph Stillwell* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 17.

Okinawa with the invasion fleet, spotting the occasional enemy submarine and floating mine. The night before the American landings on Okinawa's western Hagushi beaches, Buckner noted that the following day, 1 April, was Easter Sunday. Further, he stated that it was his father's birthday, "and the day of my first battle. I hope that I shall be able to look back upon it with the same degree of enthusiasm with which I anticipate it." Buckner's command consisted of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions, organized under Major General John R. Hodge's XXIV Corps, and the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions under Major General Roy S. Geiger's III Amphibious Corps. Additionally, the Tenth Army commanded the 2nd Marine Division, as well as the 27th and 77th Infantry Divisions as a reserve, and Buckner intended to use them for capturing nearby islands. All of these formations had significant combat experience, although military authorities had only recently created the Tenth Army.⁴³¹

The invasion began with a massive naval shelling of the Hagushi beaches. However, despite the enormous quantities of ordinance expended, the barrage did virtually no damage to the enemy. General Mitsuru Ushijima, the commander of the Japanese Thirty-Second Army, had opted for his troops to abandon the beaches and instead hunker down in the hills in the north and south of the island to engage in a longer war of attrition. Buckner recorded in his diary that "the crescendo of the bombardment, culminating in the rocket discharge was a magnificent spectacle." War correspondent Ernie Pyle expressed amazement at the lack of carnage. "I had dreaded the sight of the beach littered with mangled bodies. My first look up and down the beach was a reluctant one. ... I realized there were no bodies anywhere – and no wounded. What a wonderful feeling." The regiment he sailed with only suffered two casualties, neither from

⁴³¹ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 28; Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russell A. Gugeler, and John Stevens, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2011), 26-27.

enemy fire. The smooth operation elated Buckner. “From start to finish the landing was a superb piece of teamwork. . . . We landed without opposition and gained more ground than we expected to for three days, including the Yomitan and Kadena airfields.” Buckner was convinced that in not opposing the landing, the Japanese had critically erred. “When their counter-attack comes we will be holding strong ground.”⁴³²

The next day, Buckner’s forces succeeded in bisecting Okinawa. The sixty-six-mile-long island ran from roughly northeast to southwest, and American forces now completely controlled the narrow center, cutting Japanese forces to the north and south off from one another. Buckner wrote to his wife that “resistance is stiffening somewhat on both flanks, but the Jap commander failed to counterattack this morning.” However, despite the easy first few days, Buckner was under no illusions that the Japanese enemy would ultimately prove a deadly and dangerous foe. “Very hard fighting and against a strong system of concrete and underground defenses is still ahead of us. However, we are here to stay.”⁴³³

Buckner’s Marine divisions concentrated against the Japanese to the north, while the 7th and 96th Divisions began the push against the main concentration of enemy forces to the south. By mid-April, the Americans had secured most of northern Okinawa, including Motobu, a peninsula that jutted out at a right angle to the general shape of the island. The Marine 6th Division had faced bitter fighting up the rocky Yae-Dake Mountain and claimed 2,500 enemy dead for its own 236 dead and 1,061 wounded. By contrast, the Marine 1st Division had a much easier time, a welcome respite after it had experienced brutal fighting on Peleliu the previous fall. Buckner then dispatched the 77th Infantry Division to take the island of Ie Shima, just

⁴³² Robert Leckie, *Okinawa: The Last Battle of World War II* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 68-69; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 29; Nicholas, *Ernie’s War*, 405.

⁴³³ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*. 31.

northwest of the Motobu Peninsula, in order to secure its airbase. During the fighting there, Pyle lost his life on 18 April. A 1947 divisional operation report noted that the unit's commander, Major General Andrew Bruce, sent a message to Buckner. "Regretfully report Ernie Pyle, who has so materially aided in building morale of foot troops, was killed instantly by surprise Jap machine gun fire."⁴³⁴

Despite the successful conquest of northern Okinawa and Ie Shima, the fighting in southern Okinawa proved Buckner's ultimate test of generalship. For the next two months, American forces engaged in a slow slog against carefully prepared Japanese defensive positions, well-positioned artillery, and had to endure savage local counterattacks. Nature proved just as great an opponent to the Americans as the terrain favored the defense, and frequent downpours drenched the landscape. Buckner wrote to his wife on 14 April, noting the success in the north, and stating the dangers in the south. "We are up against the most formidable defenses yet encountered in the Pacific, well backed up by artillery and navy mortars." He then stated something that became a recurring theme for Buckner's generalship, the belief that a slow and steady advance would save American lives. "I am not hurrying the attack on the south, but am greatly reducing casualties by a gradual and systematic destruction of their works." He then expressed optimism that this would ultimately wear down the Japanese defenses.⁴³⁵

Buckner moved his command post to Okinawa on 18 April, and the XXIV launched a major offensive the following day, using the 7th, 27th and 96th Infantry Divisions. It was the largest land attack that the United States had made in the Pacific war to that date. Hodge had

⁴³⁴ Joseph Wheelan, *Bloody Okinawa: The Last Great Battle of World War II* (New York: Da Capo, 2020), 113-115; NARA, RG 407, Box 9791, Major General A. D. Bruce, 77th Infantry Division Operation Report, Iceberg Phase I, 30 June 1947.

⁴³⁵ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 39.

told the press that his troops had made “good gains,” and Buckner stated that the attack went, “just about as we expected.” He added that “the Japs have as well an organized line as I have ever heard of anywhere.” However, in his diary, he wrote that the troops had gained only “800 to 1,200 yds on the right flank and left leaving a salient in the heavily fortified escarpment area in the center.” He hoped that the next day he could make gains against the salient. Nevertheless, he added, “progress not quite satisfactory.” He then recorded that he spoke with Hodge and urged him to greater efforts. “Seventh Div too cautious.”⁴³⁶

Buckner commented on the fighting in a letter to his wife. “Practically every day I get to some part of the forward regiment and watch the fighting,” he wrote. “In this way I get a good idea of the situation at first hand and am in a position to make necessary decisions.” He noted the strong Japanese positions he was up against and stated that “it will be a slow tedious grind with flame throwers, explosives placed by hand and the closet of teamwork to dislodge them without heavy losses.” The capture of air facilities and the subsequent buildup of more greatly pleased Buckner, and he believed that his force was making progress.⁴³⁷

The XXIV objective had been to break through the Japanese line to cut the road that ran from the Okinawan capital Naha in the west to Yonabaru on the island’s east coast. The attack was typical of Buckner’s offensive operations – massive artillery bombardments followed by infantry and tank assaults. As historian Joseph Wheelan asserted, the attack, “would be devoid of flourishes, feints, or flanking movements.” Losses were heavy on both sides, and after four bloody days the Japanese did fall back to a new, tougher line one mile south, centered on Shuri Castle, the Thirty-Second Army headquarters.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 41-42; *Tucson Daily Citizen*, Arizona, 20 April 1945, www.newspaperarchives.com.

⁴³⁷ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 44; USAHEC. Buckner Papers, Box 1, Buckner to Adele Buckner, 22 April 1945.

⁴³⁸ Wheelan, *Bloody Okinawa*, 126, 143.

By 1 May, Buckner had reshuffled his front line. The 1st Marine division relieved the 27th, and the 77th Division relieved the 96th. These divisions now faced the full fury of the formidable Japanese Shuri line defenses. A 77th Division intelligence report noted the desperate fighting that the XXIV Corps encountered along the line. “The enemy has been tenaciously resisting the slow but relentless advance. ... the enemy defenses consist of a maze of mutually supporting pillboxes, caves and blockhouses.” The Japanese made excellent use of machine gun placement with interlocking fields of fire. “Artillery pieces, mortars and supplies are reported to be protected by tunnels equipped with sliding doors and camouflaged rear entrances ... In his defense the enemy employs also the usual infiltration tactics.” The report noted that the Shuri line “continued to be the nucleus of enemy strength.” Southern Okinawa’s geography worked against the American mission as well. “Terrain along the entire front is more favorable to defense than offense.” Critically, the Japanese held high ground throughout the area. “Fields of fire, observation and important heights in the hands of the enemy acts as natural barriers and limits our mobility. The ruggedness of the terrain plus the natural and artificial caves and positions in the whole area is very favorable for the fixed type of combat the enemy is using and probably will continue to use.”⁴³⁹

Bruce wrote to his wife on 1 May. Nimitz had asked Buckner to convey to Bruce a bottle of scotch whiskey, and the Tenth Army commander had brought it to his command post at nine o’clock that morning. “My, I was flattered today,” he told her. Bruce then reported on his role in the attack. “I took General Buckner up to a front-line OP on a high hill with a steep reverse slope that we could use to climb to it. It was one of the best OP’s I have ever had.” He wanted to convey to Buckner just how formidable the Japanese defenses were, perhaps in the hopes of

⁴³⁹ Leckie, *Okinawa*. 156; NARA, RG 407, Box: 9793, 77th Infantry Division, G-2 Report, 30 April 1945.

convincing him to make an amphibious landing in southern Okinawa. “I know this sounds usual ‘say-so’ but we are now up against the toughest terrain of the whole Okinawa sector. However, we are progressing slowly but carefully and are gradually overcoming the enemy.”⁴⁴⁰

Buckner persisted with his methodical tactics. On 3 May he wrote to his wife that “we continue to move slowly but are killing the Japs steadily. ... I feel well satisfied with my troops and confident of the outcome but I must avoid a spectacular hurry in order to save lives.”

Buckner told reporters on 20 April that his forces were using “corkscrew and blowtorch” tactics in order to fight the Japanese. Essentially, generous use of artillery fire followed by tanks outfitted with flamethrowers and supporting infantry. The Americans targeted cave openings with explosives to seal the Japanese in. The fact that the Japanese could easily defend their positions for a time, endure the American assault, then relatively easily retreat to defend the next ridge again and again proved the futility of Buckner’s tactics.⁴⁴¹

However, the Navy was far from pleased with Buckner’s slow, methodical advance. Shortly after the invasion, Japanese Kamikaze pilots began their deadly assault against Turner’s supporting fleet. In early April, Buckner wrote to his wife about the first large scale Kamikaze attack while still onboard the *USS Eldorado*. He reported that twenty-two aircraft groups consisting of 182 planes attacked the fleet, inflicting serious damage, although the Americans fought back with tenacity. “Some ships were hit but our planes and anti-aircraft shot down 116 that we counted, and a good many others may not have gotten back to Japan.” He expressed the exhilaration that he had felt during the battle. “I have had thrills in duck blinds but none

⁴⁴⁰ USAHEC, Andrew Bruce Papers, Box 2, Andrew Bruce to Roberta Bruce, 1 May 1945.

⁴⁴¹ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 6, 51; *Jefferson City Daily Capital News*, Missouri, 21 April 1945, www.newspaperarchive.com; Victor Davis Hanson, *Ripples of Battle: How the Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 67-68.

comparable to that of seeing an enemy plane shot down when it was heading directly at our ship.”⁴⁴²

Many ships supporting the Tenth Army on Okinawa were not as lucky as the *Eldorado*. On 11 May, the Japanese struck Admiral Marc Mitschner’s flagship, the aircraft carrier *USS Bunker Hill*. American planes had been refueling on the flight deck, and the attack ignited a fire that created several ordinance explosions. War correspondent Phelps Adams reported that “from the deck of the neighboring carrier a few yards distant I watched the Bunker Hill burn, and I do not yet see how she lived through it. It is hard to believe that men could survive those flames, or that metal could withstand such heat.” Kamikaze raids and conventional attacks, along with the Japanese battleship *Yamato*’s suicide mission against the American fleet, took a devastating toll. In April alone, the Japanese succeeded in sinking thirteen Allied ships, and damaged over 100 more. The enemy had killed nearly 1,000 men at sea and wounded 26,000. Almost 900 had gone missing.⁴⁴³

The longer Buckner took to pacify the island, the more exposed the Navy was to merciless Japanese air assaults. “I doubt if the Army’s slow, methodical method of fighting really saves any lives in the long run,” Admiral Spruance wrote to his longtime friend, Admiral Charles J. Moore about the crisis. “It merely spreads the casualties over a longer period. The longer period greatly increases the naval casualties when Jap air attacks on ships is a continuing factor. However, I do not think the Army is at all allergic to losses of naval ships and personnel.” Further, he stated that he “got impatient for some of Holland Smith’s drive, but

⁴⁴² Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 36.

⁴⁴³ Phelps Adams, “Attack on the Carrier Bunker Hill,” from *Reporting World War II*, 754; Wheelan, *Bloody Okinawa*, 104.

there is nothing we can do about it.”⁴⁴⁴

Nimitz had initially deferred to Buckner’s judgement in waging the ground war. On 12 April he wrote to King that “Buckner is proceeding methodically and effectively to penetrate and pinch off the extremely strong and cleverly prepared Japanese defenses and is using all the field artillery and naval gunfire and air support available.” Yet as Navy losses mounted, he urged Buckner to greater action. On 22 April, in the midst of Hodge’s offensive, Buckner reported in his diary a visit from Nimitz, Spruance, and Alexander Vandergrift, the commandant of the Marine Corps. “I took them sightseeing,” he wrote, and noted that the commander-in-chief of the Pacific fleet inquired about various aspects of the mission. He remarked that Nimitz gave him a “bottle of liquor which I told him I would open when all organized resistance here had ended.” However, the meeting was not as completely cordial as Buckner recorded. At Tenth Army headquarters Nimitz told the Tenth Army commander that he had to get his troops moving. Buckner cited his authority over the ground campaign, and he would proceed in his own manner. “I’m losing a ship and a half a day,” Nimitz responded. “If this line isn’t moving within five days, we’ll get someone here to move it so we can all get out from under these damn air attacks.”⁴⁴⁵

Nimitz and Vandergrift favored an amphibious invasion on Okinawa’s southeast coast to take the Japanese forces from behind. Various officers, including Bruce, had recommended the strategy to Buckner. Prior to the Ie Shima operation, Bruce had advocated a 77th amphibious attack against the Japanese rear. The division had made a similar landing behind Japanese lines

⁴⁴⁴ Thomas B. Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 387.

⁴⁴⁵ Chester W. Nimitz to Ernest J. King, 12 April 1945, Command Summary, Vol. 6, http://www.ibiblio.org/anrs/docs/Volumes/Nimitz_Graybook%20Volume%206.pdf; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 43; Gandt, *The Twilight Warriors*, 295.

at Leyte, and Bruce believed the maneuver would work again. However, Buckner rejected these proposals as too dangerous, perhaps recalling the debacle at Anzio the previous year. He wrote in his diary, seemingly with some condescension, “as usual, [Bruce] is rarin’ to try a landing behind the Jap main position in southern Okinawa.” Despite Nimitz’s ultimatum, Buckner refused to cede ground and he insisted that he would run the war on Okinawa his way. Nimitz, fearing an incident between Army and Navy, did not press the point any further.⁴⁴⁶

Buckner’s refusal to open up a second front remains controversial. After the war Colonel Samuel Taxis, operations officer for the 2nd Marine Division, expressed his frustration over the decision. “I will always feel that the Tenth Army should have been prepared the instant they found they were bogged down; they should have thrown a left hook down there in the southern beaches ... they had a hell of a powerful reinforced division, trained to a gnat’s whisker.”⁴⁴⁷

Navy leaders continued to express exasperation at Buckner’s slow drive. On 6 May, Spruance visited Buckner, Hodge, and other ground commanders on the island. “Buckner and Hodge were loath to make any prediction as to when end of organized resistance would come but when pressed they hoped for it toward end of May.” Bruce and Major General Pedro del Valle, the First Marine Division commander, related to Spruance the many difficulties they faced fighting the Japanese. “I do not believe accurate prediction is possible at present.” He lamented the fact that until the Army pacified the island, the Navy’s role remained essential. “Our troops ashore have much hard fighting ahead. I feel that our fleet must continue with its support until the job is done.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Gandt, *The Twilight Warriors*, 295-196; Leckie, *Okinawa*, 156-159; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 37.

⁴⁴⁷ Alexander, *Storm Landings*, 166.

⁴⁴⁸ Raymond A. Spruance to Nimitz. 6 May 1945, Command Summary, Vol. 6.
http://www.ibiblio.org/anrs/docs/Volumes/Nimitz_Graybook%20Volume%206.pdf

Throughout that month, the Japanese continued to prove tenacious fighters, and Buckner repeatedly relied on heavy artillery barrages followed by frontal infantry and tank assaults. Few officers failed to note the similarities to the battles of the First World War. On 26 May, the 77th Division's official newspaper informed the men. "DID-U-NO," the paper began, "that the type of fighting that we are now doing is quite similar to the fighting done in World War One near the famous Verdun?" It noted that during that earlier battle the Germans had hid in "deep shafts in the hills, several stories deep, long tunnels, pillboxes, and concrete and steel observation posts." These fortifications, like the Japanese lines along Shuri Castle, boasted sleeping quarters and places for the men to live and eat. "The only difference between this and the Verdun area is that now each side has much less artillery than they had then, nor are there continuous lines of deep trenches ... [and] endless miles of narrow gauge railroads used for supply front line troops." The weather also continued to slow up the headlong advance. A press release from XXIV headquarters stated that "with heavy rains continuing to make the countryside impassable to every type of vehicle, tank, or assault gun, General Mud is emerging as the temporary victor in the battle for Shuri."⁴⁴⁹

Journalists began to report on the savage conditions of the fighting on Okinawa and criticized Buckner's plodding tactics and failure to make a landing behind the Japanese lines. At a press conference, Buckner dismissed the idea altogether, stating that the proposed amphibious landing was not unlike a general's navel, "you'd look totally stupid without one, but it serves no useful purpose." War correspondent Homer Bigart of the *New York Herald Tribune* did not discard the notion so easily. He wrote, "our tactics were ultra-conservative. Instead of an end-

⁴⁴⁹ USAHEC, Bruce Papers, Box 1, *The Liberty Torch*, (*The Official Newspaper of the 77th Infantry Division*), 26 May 1945; NARA, RG 407, Box 2480, Headquarters XXIV Corps, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Press Release, 25 May 1945.

run, we persisted in frontal attacks. It was hey-diddle-diddle straight down the middle.” He lamented the fact that the Japanese easily discerned American tactics. “Our intention to commit the entire force in a general assault was apparently so obvious that the Japanese quickly disposed their troops in such a way as most effectively to block our advance.” Columnist David Lawrence was even more damning. He asked, “why is the truth about the military fiasco at Okinawa being hushed up?” He also stated, with exaggeration, that what was happening on the island was “a worse example of military incompetence than Pearl Harbor.” However, he was not wrong in criticizing Buckner’s slow, conservative advance southward, “which only theoretically and temporarily saves lives.”⁴⁵⁰

Nimitz defended Buckner’s actions at a press conference a few weeks later. From his headquarters on Guam, the commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet stated that Buckner’s tactics “were his own, but they had my concurrence.” Further, he told the press that “new landings would have had to be made over unsatisfactory beaches against an alerted enemy defense.” He predicted that the operation would have resulted in vast numbers of Marines killed and wounded, and that supply issues would have made a landing on Okinawa’s southern shore untenable. He attacked Lawrence personally, stating that he was “misinformed.” Despite the fact that just a few weeks before, Nimitz was trying to prod Buckner into just such an attack, the admiral was now obviously trying to show solidarity with Buckner in the interests of both the mission and in maintaining inter-service amity.⁴⁵¹

Colonel Horomichi Yahara, the Japanese Thirty-Second Army’s capable operations

⁴⁵⁰ George Feifer, *The Battle of Okinawa: The Blood and the Bomb* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 1992), 184; G. Vance Corbitt, *Operation Iceberg: Campaign in the Ryukyus: An Operational Analysis*, 13 February 1998, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a348863.pdf>. 20; *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Iowa, 4 June 1945, www.newspaperarchive.com.

⁴⁵¹ *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Iowa, 17 June 1945, www.newspaperarchive.com.

officer, and the army's only senior staff officer to survive the battle, likewise had little good to say about Buckner's leadership on Okinawa. He believed that the Americans had underestimated the Japanese, and he learned later that Buckner had made wildly optimistic claims about the Tenth Army's operations and condescending statements about the Japanese situation. "We were smarter than the enemy thought," Yahara noted. He also stated that, toward the end of the battle, a surrender proposal Buckner had sent to General Ushijima indicated that he did not understand the Japanese code of honor that forbade capitulation.⁴⁵²

Buckner wrote to his wife on 14 June, her birthday, and commented on the episode. First, he assured her that "we have splendid relations here between Army, Navy and Marine components of my command in spite of unpatriotic attempts on the part of certain publicity agents at home who are trying to stir up controversy between the Army and Marines." He told her that he had seen Lawrence's column and expressed contempt at its conclusions. "By the same mail I got a letter from the Army-Navy Staff college saying that their studies of the campaign indicate that it had been handled beautifully. Take your choice." He also expressed optimism for the war and his career prospects for the invasion of Japan. "Gen. MacArthur will probably take over our command and I hope he will point us toward Tokyo. It would be great to fight all the way through Japan and the Kurils and return via Aleutians." This was the last letter that Buckner wrote to his wife.⁴⁵³

Having succeeded in fulfilling his promise to return to the Philippines, MacArthur watched events in Okinawa closely, and he too was less than impressed with Buckner. Before Buckner's forces landed on the island, MacArthur's pilot, Weldon Rhoades, was party to a

⁴⁵² Horomichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa: A Japanese Officer's Eyewitness Account of the Last Great Campaign of World War II*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 95, 108, 136, 146.

⁴⁵³ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 79-80; USAHEC, Buckner Papers, Box 1, Buckner to Adele, 14 June 1945.

conversation between the general and his chief of staff, Richard K. Sutherland. MacArthur expressed concern with the idea of a field army serving under the command of the Navy, despite the fact that in other operations the Army frequently commanded naval operations that had supported it. Further, MacArthur expressed satisfaction that he did not have to lead the mission, which was sure to result in massive casualties. Likewise, Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger, the commander of the United States Eighth Army under MacArthur, wrote to his wife noting that his superior was happy not to lead the Okinawa expedition. MacArthur expected that Marshall would soon grant him overall command for Pacific operations in anticipation of the invasion of Japan. Such a move would eventually subordinate the Tenth Army to his headquarters. Further, the commander of the Southwest Pacific Area expressed disdain for Buckner, fearing he had grown too close to his Navy superiors. Eichelberger wrote, “the Big Chief says if Buck ever comes under him, he would bust him because he had sold out to one of our sister services.” However, Eichelberger expressed doubt as to whether or not MacArthur was serious.⁴⁵⁴

MacArthur criticized Buckner’s tactics in assaulting the Shuri line head on. He believed that the Tenth Army commander should simply have contained the Japanese south of the line, thus saving American lives. The strategy would have meant conceding a large portion of the island, including the capital at Naha, to the enemy. Such a concession could also potentially have delayed preparations for the invasion of Japan. MacArthur nevertheless remarked that “the Central Pacific command just sacrificed thousands of American soldiers because they insisted on driving the Japanese off the island.” He stated that the Tenth Army had gained all the ground it

⁴⁵⁴ Weldon E. (Dusty) Rhoades, *Flying MacArthur to Victory* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 372; Robert L. Eichelberger, *Dear Miss Em: General Eichelberger’s War in the Pacific, 1942-1945*, Jay Luvaas, ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1972), 230.

required, including the air bases, within the first few days of the operation. “They should have had the troops go into a defensive position and just let the Japs come to them and kill them from a defensive position, which would have been much easier to do and would have cost less men.”⁴⁵⁵

Buckner had written to his wife on 13 May, expressing his continued determination to avoid casualties through his methodical tactics. “Naturally I am eager to get this island completely cleaned up so as to move on to other battlefields,” he wrote, “but it can’t be hurried without heavy losses.” He also expressed concern about the future of his command, perhaps sensing MacArthur’s antipathy toward him. “With Gen. MacArthur now taking over the Army forces it is difficult to predict my future assignments since he has his own group of generals that he has been working with and my chances can scarcely be as good as those of Krueger and Eichelberger as a result.” MacArthur was hardly a disinterested observer. He had been butting heads with Nimitz’s command since the beginning of the war, and no doubt Buckner was right to be leery.⁴⁵⁶

Joseph Stilwell was likewise critical of Buckner, and the four-star general visited Okinawa in early June on an inspection tour. Like MacArthur, Stilwell had his own agenda, and hoped that MacArthur would sack Buckner in favor of himself in time for the invasion of Japan. Stilwell had spent virtually the entire war in China as an advisor to Chiang Kai-shek and longed to lead troops in battle. On Okinawa he recoiled at Buckner’s tactics, and disapproved of his overreliance on artillery barrages and infantry assaults. He recorded in his diary on 5 June, “tactics all frontal.” Two days later he wrote, “Buckner is obviously playing the Navy.” He

⁴⁵⁵ Rodney Earl Walton, *Big Guns, Brave Men: Mobile Artillery Observers and the Battle for Okinawa* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 51-52.

⁴⁵⁶ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 6-7, 57.

expressed displeasure at the fact that Buckner had selected Geiger, the Marine commander of III Amphibious Corps, as his successor as Tenth Army commander in the event of his death or injury, rather than an Army officer. “[Buckner’s] own staff is perfect,” he added with sarcasm. “It is all rather nauseating. There is NO tactical thinking on push. No plan was ever discussed at the meetings to hasten the fight or help the divisions.” However, Bruce greatly impressed Stilwell, and he believed that the 77th Infantry Division commander, “is the only man I’ve met who remembers his tactics.” In his 5 June diary entry, he remarked that “Buckner laughs at Bruce for having crazy ideas. ‘Two out of 15 are O.K. The rest are impossible.’ It might be a good thing to listen to him.” Indeed, Bruce had been experimenting and innovating his tactics in order to reduce American casualties.⁴⁵⁷

Bruce had worked to overcome the Japanese placing of artillery on the reverse slope, among other problems. A 77th Division intelligence report noted that “the positions on these hills were mutually supporting and covered all avenues of approach. The enemy was so well dug in and sheltered on the reverse slopes that he could not be hit with direct fire from the infantry’s supporting weapons and artillery.” Mortars and air strikes did little damage as well. “From these reverse slopes he employed accurate fire on our advancing troops who had practically no cover.” Bruce began to position his own artillery correctly to hit Japanese guns on the reverse slope before he ordered assaults. These tactics necessitated focusing his attacks on limited objectives rather than making grand offensives. Bruce’s order on 19 May read that divisional artillery, “will prepare a series of protective barrages to cover the attack if discovered including fires to thoroughly cover ravines, sunken roads, reverse slopes, and other positions likely to

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 73-75.

contain enemy mortars and artillery which might interfere with the attack.”⁴⁵⁸

Bruce also innovated with surprise nighttime attacks against the Japanese, a tactic the enemy had been using to great effect throughout the battle. An after-battle operational report recounted one such attack before dawn on 17 May, in which the division “decided to play the enemy’s own game.” Two regiments attacked just after four o’clock in the morning, and the enemy did not answer with artillery fire for nearly an hour and a half. “The attack progressed rapidly and quietly, making maximum use of bayonet and capitalizing on the element of surprise.” The regiments experienced few casualties and managed to gain 500 yards in some areas. The attack against the disorganized Japanese positions continued through the day. “Fierce firefights were frequent.” The report concluded that “on several occasions, pre-dawn limited objective night attacks gained their objectives without firing a shot.” Unfortunately, Buckner and his other subordinate commanders had shown no such tactical imagination.⁴⁵⁹

On 5 June, Stilwell and other officers visited Bruce’s command post and discussed several details of the campaign. Bruce wrote to his wife, stating that “we had a long, heart-to-heart talk.” His wife had previously urged him to be more assertive, and Bruce expressed his problems with Buckner’s combat leadership. “I bluntly told them facts, and that I was, of course, considered somewhat crazy.” He noted that the exchange was friendly and interesting. “When [Stilwell] left, he pulled me off from every other officer and said to me: ‘Keep up your crazy tactics, Bruce, kid. I wish I had more ... out here. You have shown more initiative than anyone else.’”⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 302-204; Leckie, *Okinawa*, 163; NARA, RG 407, Box 9793, 77th Infantry Division, G-2 Periodic Report, 12 May 1945, 77th Infantry Division Orders, Maj. Gen. Bruce, 19 May 1945.

⁴⁵⁹ NARA, RG 407, Box 9792, 77th Division, Operational Report, 25 April – 30 June 1945.

⁴⁶⁰ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 303-304; USAHEC, Bruce Papers, Box 2, Bruce to Roberta, 5 June 1945.

Regardless of Stillwell's machinations against Buckner, he did not have to wait too long to gain command of the Tenth Army. On 18 June, while observing at a Marine forward position, Japanese artillery fire killed Buckner. A Tenth Army headquarters report to the adjutant general stated that he arrived at the observation post around noon. An hour and fifteen minutes later, Buckner and another officer watched as American artillery shelled Japanese machine-gun positions. "Without any preliminary warning a direct artillery hit was received on the forward slope of the Observation Post, as a result of which a sizeable shell fragment entered the General's right chest causing profuse bleeding." No one else was seriously injured. When more enemy shells exploded nearby, Marines moved his body and prepared to take him to an aid station. However, he died only a few minutes later, the highest-ranking American officer to lose his life to enemy action in the war. A communique from Nimitz's office stated that the same day, "the troops of the 10th Army broke through Japanese Defense lines in all the sectors of the front during the day against resistance which was crumbling and diminishing at nightfall." Geiger assumed temporary command of the Tenth Army in the aftermath, and Stilwell soon arrived to formally lead the formation just before the campaign came to an end.⁴⁶¹

Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. was born in Mumfordsville, Kentucky on 18 July 1886. His father, Simon Bolivar Buckner, had been a Confederate lieutenant general during the U.S. Civil War. While in the U.S. Army in the 1850s, the elder Buckner had loaned Ulysses S. Grant money so that he could return to his family after he had resigned from the Army. He next saw Grant in 1862. Now a general, Grant compelled him to surrender Fort Donelson to his army. After the Civil War, he earned a living as a newspaper editor and later served as the governor of

⁴⁶¹ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 304; NPRC, Buckner Papers, HQ Tenth Army to Adjutant General, 15 July 1945; NARA, RG 407, Box 2481, CINCPAC Communique Number 397, 18 June 1945; Leckie, *Okinawa*, 201.

Kentucky. At sixty-three years old Buckner became a father for the first time, thus allowing his name to survive. During the 1896 presidential election, the former Confederate general had split with the Democratic Party and its pro-silver nominee, Williams Jennings Bryan. He then accepted the vice-presidential nomination for the National Democratic Party, also known as the 'Gold Democrats,' in a ticket headed by John H. Palmer. During the party convention, Buckner introduced his ten-year-old son to the delegates, and they passed a resolution proclaiming the youngster, "the Child of Democracy." It was an event that abashed the Second World War general for the rest of his life.⁴⁶²

After Buckner attended the Virginia Military Institute, his father prevailed upon President Theodore Roosevelt to secure the young man an appointment to West Point in 1904. He graduated as an infantry officer four years later. His first assignment was with the 9th Infantry Regiment along the Mexican border. For a time, the second lieutenant lived in the same house and shared a car with Millard Harmon, another future lieutenant general destined to die in the line of duty during the Second World War. His first efficiency report as a lieutenant stated, "attention to duty, professional zeal, general bearing and military appearance: excellent." Likewise, his intelligence and military judgement in handling his men won high marks. His commanding officer wrote, "I believe he could perform recruiting, college, or militia duty. Has availed himself of his opportunities for improvement, is qualified for his position and should be entrusted with important duties." The report further noted that he would be suited to "any soldier's duty" in the event of war. The next year, another commanding officer likewise gave Buckner an excellent rating for his duties as a first lieutenant, but stated that he, "has shown no

⁴⁶² David Wittels, "Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner" from *These Are the Generals*, 78-80; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1988), 401-402.

particular fitness for detail on the General Staff or in the Staff Departments.” Nevertheless, the officer believed that Buckner showed promise for the future. He believed he excelled as a troop trainer, and perhaps could instruct at West Point or at the service schools. “Would have no objection to this officer being under my immediate command. In the event of war is best suited for any duty with troops at the extreme front.”⁴⁶³

In 1910, Buckner went to the Philippines for two years, and an incident occurred involving the young lieutenant while he served at the post. Apparently, someone either stole or misplaced some Army property that was Buckner’s responsibility. Buckner failed to take the matter of missing military equipment seriously, and he received a stern letter from the 9th Infantry headquarters. “I am instructed by the Secretary for War to inform you that your explanation of your failure to give proper attention to this matter is unsatisfactory, and that notation of your neglect will be made on your permanent record.” Despite this, his commanding officer, Colonel Charles J. Crane was generally well pleased with his service, and noted that he was a, “good man with a machine gun and with horses.” In the fall of 1945, Grover C. Achors wrote a letter to Washington Senator Warren G. Magnuson describing the time he had spent with Buckner in the Philippines and hoping that the Senator could put him in touch with his widow. He noted that Buckner was one of the first officers he met there and, “in the next three years I was on maneuvers with him several times, on many marches, besides several weeks each year on the target range. He was a fine man, loved and respected by all who knew him.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ *Military Hall of Honor*, GEN Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., <https://militaryhallof Honor.com/honoree-record.php?id=197>; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 10-11; USAHEC, Buckner Papers, Box 1, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. Service Record, Buckner to Adele, 12 March 1945; NPRC, Buckner Papers, Paul M. Goodrich, efficiency report for Buckner, 1908; Kaolin L. Whitson, efficiency report for Buckner, 1909.

⁴⁶⁴ NPRC. Buckner Papers, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. Service Record, 9th Infantry Regiment Headquarters to Buckner, 26 May 1911, Charles J. Crane efficiency report for Buckner, 1912, Grover C. Achors to Warren G. Magnuson, 28 September 1945.

Although he had enjoyed his assignment, he wrote to his mother about his surprise and delight in returning to the States in the spring of 1912. “As yet, we have received no word whatever as to our new station, but it is most probable that we will attend the maneuvers in southern California before going to any post.” He speculated that he could end up at any number of bases around the country but noted the ongoing tensions with Mexico. “The uncertainty of the Mexican situation will probably keep us at ‘maneuvers’ on the border for some time.” He also looked forward to the possibility of returning to Kentucky. “It is delightful to think of the possibility of spending three months with you and Father in the near future.”⁴⁶⁵

The following year Buckner did indeed return to Kentucky, serving at Fort Thomas. Captain Fred L. Munson generally gave Buckner high marks in his efficiency report, stating that the lieutenant was “a good gymnast and very fair topographer,” but again the young lieutenant had to be censured. The company commander had reprimanded him for repeatedly showing up late to drills. Buckner responded to the charge by declaring that he was “a part of a post where drill call cannot be heard while indoors. There have been two, or possibly three, occasions during the past year when I failed by a small fraction of a minute to be in my place at the formation of my company.” He also blamed a “discrepancy in time pieces,” for his tardiness. He noted that he understood that as an officer he had to set a better example for his men and did not intend to excuse his infraction of the rules. “It is merely my purpose to set forth the fact that in no case did I miss any duty with my company and to prevent it from appearing on record that tardiness on my part is habitual.”⁴⁶⁶

During the March 1913 Great Flood along the Mississippi River, the United States Army

⁴⁶⁵ Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., *Tales of the Philippines – In the early 1900’s* (William C. Buckner, 2019), 172-173.

⁴⁶⁶ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Fred L. Munson, efficiency report for Buckner, 31 December 1913.

worked to prevent as much damage as possible, and Buckner participated in the relief action. A few weeks later the members of the Business Men's Club of Memphis Tennessee wrote a letter to the Secretary of War, Lindley Miller Garrison, praising the Army for its help during the emergency. "Their work was done promptly, quietly and up to the high standard of army efficiency. ... It was directed and controlled by a spirit of charity and humanity and good common sense." The members expressed gratitude toward the officers involved, stating that they belonged to a, "roll of honor," and offered accolades for Buckner. The young lieutenant, "did the outside relief work, going where most needed in flooded districts at a moment's notice ... rendered services of the highest order." Several of Buckner's fellow officers also noted his distinction during the floods. Major James Normoyle remarked that Buckner "is an exceptionally good officer and that he has his work in fine shape." In a letter to General Leonard Wood, Normoyle affirmed that Buckner's commanding officer said that he was "an especially good man and everything in good shape at Cairo [Illinois]."⁴⁶⁷

In 1914, Munson wrote that "it is my opinion that [Buckner] is a most worthy young man and a credit to his profession." Lieutenant Colonel William W. Harts of the Corps of Engineers had an opportunity to work with Buckner and offered his impression. "One month's experience with this officer has made a very favorable impression as to his ability, industry, good habits, and fitness for his duties." That year he received a promotion to First Lieutenant. He served a second tour in the Philippines beginning in 1915 but returned to Kentucky in order to marry Adele Blanc in late December 1916. The couple then arrived back in the Philippines to finish out Buckner's duties there with the 27th Infantry Regiment, and Buckner and Marshall possibly

⁴⁶⁷ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Members of the Business Men's Club to Lindley Miller Garrison, 8 May 1913, extracts from reports of flood sufferers in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, 9 April 1913.

first met there at this time. Buckner had just passed his captain's exam shortly before the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, and the next day, Buckner wrote to his old patron, Theodore Roosevelt. He stated his expectation that now that the country was at War, Roosevelt would raise a regiment of volunteers. "I still recall with gratitude that I received my appointment to the Military Academy from you," he wrote, "and hope that it will now be my privilege to serve under your command against the enemy. My military record in the War Department is subject to your examination." Roosevelt responded, telling him that "you were down on my list, but the president will not send me." Instead, Buckner soon transferred back to the States to serve with the Army Signal Corps' Air Service department, hoping to become a pilot.⁴⁶⁸

Buckner received his promotion to captain and then major later that year but longed to see action overseas in the Great War. In 1918 he wrote to the adjutant general, stating, "considering the fact that the emergency requiring a great number of field officers for organization work in the Signal Corps appears to be about over, and the fact that the Infantry is being rapidly increased," he wondered if he could return to his original service branch. "If any such transfers are made, and it is found to be consistent with the best interests of the Service, I request that I be returned for duty with the troops." Buckner's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel G. V. S. Quackenbush, forwarded Buckner's request but recommended that his superior deny it. "Major Buckner is not only a valuable officer for the Air Service, but his services cannot be spared at Kelly Field." Buckner felt compelled to justify his request for transfer to Quackenbush, and to apply again. Writing a few weeks later, he asserted, "my desire to return for duty with the Infantry is in no way prompted by the idea that the Air Service is not on an

⁴⁶⁸ NPRC, Buckner Papers Munson, efficiency report for Buckner, 1914, Lieutenant Colonel William W. Harts, efficiency report for Buckner, 1914; Buckner, *Tales of the Philippines*, 173-175.

equal footing with other line troops who exercise combat functions.” He noted that he had succeeded in learning to fly and felt confident that he could lead air units into combat if necessary. “For the last ten years I have served in the Infantry, and my training during that time has been with a view to serving in that branch during war.” Later that year the Army transferred him briefly to Washington D.C., but by that time the war was almost over. He returned to Kelly Field, Texas, and accrued roughly 125 hours solo flight time. In 1920, Quackenbush reported that Buckner was “an unusually able and intelligent officer. Has a high standard of honor and can be trusted implicitly to carry out efficiently any order or plan given him. One of the best and most capable officers both officially and personally that I know.”⁴⁶⁹

Buckner spent the next few years in various assignments around the country. He served at West Point as a tactical officer, charged with instilling discipline into the plebes. Upperclassmen had traditionally meted out discipline, but at the time the Army assigned many of these students to formal duties due to the World War. Buckner joined two other officers, Major Edwin Butcher and Major Charles H. Bonesteel, in inculcating the students with West Point’s traditions and stern regulations. The tormented plebes referred to the officers collectively as the “Three B’s Board.” Buckner then spent a year at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, followed by time at the Command and General Staff School from 1924 to 1925, graduating fifty-third out of 258 students. He remained at Fort Leavenworth for three more years as an instructor before leaving for Washington to attend the War College for the 1928-1929 academic year. Buckner then returned to West Point, first as executive officer and then as Commandant of Cadets, from 1932 to 1936. This assignment came with a promotion to lieutenant colonel, his

⁴⁶⁹ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Buckner to Adjutant General, 7 July 1918, Lieutenant Colonel G. V. S. Quackenbush to Adjutant General, 8 July 1918, Buckner to Quackenbush, 25 July 1918, Colonel J. Partello, efficiency report for Buckner, 31 December 1919, Quackenbush, efficiency report for Buckner, 20 May 1919.

first Regular Army promotion in twelve years. In these years Buckner and his wife started a family, and had one girl and two boys, including his eldest, Simon Bolivar Buckner III, an officer with the Army Signal Corps during the Second World War.⁴⁷⁰

While serving as Commandant of Cadets at West Point, the superintendent, Major General William D. Connor, wrote that Buckner was “one of the most generally all-round, able officers that I know. Filled with tremendous energy and blessed with sound commonsense.” He considered Buckner one of the best officers he had served with, and Connor recommended that once the army promoted Buckner to colonel, it should waste little time before promoting him again to general. “I would equally trust him with any command and think he would make a superior division commander who by his personality and energy would inspire his men to great accomplishments.” Buckner also reached out to his friend Omar Bradley and enticed him to return to West Point as an instructor once again. Bradley later recalled that Buckner, “informed me that one of my first duties would be to construct a skeet range and establish a cadet training program for it.” Buckner and Bradley worked very well together, and Bradley appreciated the older officer’s folksy wisdom. Among other pearls, Buckner said that “judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from making bad judgements.”⁴⁷¹

In 1932, a lieutenant of fifteen years, Philip E. Gallagher, wrote to Marshall asking for his help. Despite his age and the fact that Gallagher had taught at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, the Command and General Staff School denied him admission because of his junior rank. Marshall had long advocated allowing lieutenants to attend some of the school’s programs. After writing a letter on Gallagher’s behalf, Marshall wrote back to the lieutenant, telling him

⁴⁷⁰ Buckner Service Record; Wittels, “Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner,” 73-74.

⁴⁷¹ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Major General William D. Connor, efficiency report for Buckner, 1 July 1935; Ossad, *Omar Nelson Bradley*, 74.

that he had an ally in Buckner. “It just so happens that Col. Buckner was sort of a ‘go between’ in a discussion of this I had with Gen. [Edgar T.] Collins [commandant of the Infantry School].” He noted with approval that Buckner, “did break the jam,” while serving at the War College, and had allowed junior officers to attend service schools in some cases. Marshall believed that Buckner would be an important advocate for Gallagher given his standing in the Army. However, Marshall was not particularly impressed with Buckner’s bravado. About this time Marine Major General John Lejeune considered him for commandant of the Virginia Military Institute, Buckner’s alma mater. Marshall discouraged the action, telling Lejeune that Buckner’s “habit of talking a great deal might involve him in difficulties.”⁴⁷²

Buckner’s career clearly appeared to be on an upward trajectory, and many of his commanding officers remarked on his ability and potential. Following his time at West Point, Buckner returned to the troops, serving as the executive officer of the 23rd Infantry Regiment at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. While acting as an umpire for maneuvers at this time, Brigadier General R. C. Foy commented that Buckner, “performed all his duties in a highly efficient manner, displaying exceptional organizing ability. And sound tactical judgement.” In 1937, Buckner became a full colonel. Major General A. J. Bowley wrote that Buckner, “possesses a very dominant but with all pleasing personality,” and that he was “exceptionally well informed.” Later that year, Buckner commanded the 66th Infantry, a light tank regiment, at Fort George C. Meade, Maryland. Major General J. X. Parsons noted that Buckner was “a fluent public speaker ... An outstanding officer of striking appearance and attractive personality. Up-to-date professionally and a natural leader. An asset to any command.” Parsons further recommended Buckner for promotion to brigadier general, “in due time.” He then served as the commanding

⁴⁷² Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 1, 379-381; Ricks, *The Generals*, 38.

officer of the 22nd Infantry regiment at Fort McClellan. While serving with the 22nd, Major Joseph S. Dougherty reported to the adjutant general that Buckner “is commended for his superior leadership as evidenced by the appearance of his command, its equipment, its barracks, and, in general, the outstanding efficient administration of his Post.” Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, Buckner took up the responsibility of 6th Division chief of staff at Camp Jackson, South Carolina.⁴⁷³

As war with Japan increasingly became a possibility in 1940, George C. Marshall’s eyes turned toward Alaska. Marshall had first appreciated the region’s significance while serving with the 3rd Division at Vancouver Barracks in Washington state. No doubt the Japanese would see the massive, resource-rich territory with over 6,000 miles of coastline and strategic northern Pacific location as a tempting target. That summer, he transferred Buckner to oversee the preparation of Alaskan defenses. Buckner began his tenure at Fort Richardson, just outside of Anchorage, with 276 men divided into two companies. The territory contained virtually no military aircraft, and Buckner forcefully requested and received units of P-36 fighters and B-18 bombers for the region’s limited number of airfields. His men labored diligently to create new airfields, as well as various other buildings and military infrastructure. In September, Buckner earned his first star, and by the summer of 1941 the Alaska Defense Command boasted 6,000 troops. By the time the United States entered the war, Buckner’s command numbered nearly 22,000 men spread out over the vast Alaskan frontier and often with inadequate housing.⁴⁷⁴

Initially, the Navy had relatively little interest in Alaska, and Buckner worked primarily

⁴⁷³ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Buckner Service Record, Brigadier General R. C. Foy, efficiency report for Buckner, 30 August 1936, Major General A. J. Bowley, efficiency report for Buckner, 3 March 1937, Major General J. X. Parsons, efficiency report for Buckner, 29 October 1937, Major General S. Dougherty, I.G.D. Assistant Corps Area Inspector General to Adjutant General, 10 January 1940.

⁴⁷⁴ Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 148; Walter R. Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Land* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 347; NPRC, Buckner Papers, Buckner Service Record.

with a small fleet of coast guard ships. In June 1941, Coast Guard Rear Admiral R. R. Waesche wrote to Marshall, commenting on Buckner's willingness to work with his service, and allow Coast Guard personnel to use Army planes to scan for ice in the Bering Sea. "General Buckner has been informed of your note of appreciation," Marshall responded. However, the Navy increasingly took an interest in the region, and requested that they take responsibility for defense preparations in Alaska. President Roosevelt's preference for the Navy did not help to smooth out this contest over control of Alaska. (At one point in the war Marshall had to ask the president to stop referring to the Army as "They" and the Navy as "Us"). Publicly, Buckner denied any animosity between the services. He did get along with Navy Captain Ralph C. Parker, who commanded the Navy's Alaskan fleet beginning in October 1940. Parker made Buckner an acting brigadier Admiral in the Navy, but the rivalry of their superiors often soured the personal friendship between the two.⁴⁷⁵

General John L. DeWitt's Western Defense Command held administrative authority over Buckner's Alaska Defense Command, and in the spring of 1941, the general visited Alaska to inspect Buckner's preparations. On 16 June, Marshall wrote to Buckner about DeWitt's tour. "Throughout the report," he began, "he refers in highest terms to your accomplishments and those of the officers and men of your command." DeWitt had told the Chief of Staff that the creation of military infrastructure in the region had been "advanced with energy, initiative, and good judgement." Marshall then quoted DeWitt's letter, praising the troops' morale in Alaska, "I have never seen higher spirits among soldiers than I did at all the stations visited. The morale was fine and the men seemed interested in their work and environment." Everyone was doing

⁴⁷⁵ Brian Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War: World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 60-63; NPRC, Buckner Papers, Rear Admiral R. R. Wasche to Marshall, 9 June 1941, Marshall to Wasche, 16 June 1941; Mark A. Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman of the American Century* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 74.

their job, there were few cases of illness, and good order and discipline reigned. DeWitt asserted that “General Buckner and his subordinate commanders have done and are doing a splendid piece of work.” Marshall congratulated Buckner for the high praise. “I am sorry that I could not have been with him to see for myself and to thank you and the members of your command in person.”⁴⁷⁶

The next month Marshall wrote to DeWitt, telling him that he wished to inspect the troops in Alaska himself, but that he did not have the time. Further, he stated, “incidentally, you might tell Buckner most confidentially that I am trying to make him a major general and will probably succeed shortly, so I do not want him to feel that I have been unappreciative of the splendid job he has done.” He mentioned that there was some resistance to the appointment but remained vague on the specifics. “I do not want Buckner to be cogitating among his friends as to just why there should be any difficulty.” Whatever the issues were, Buckner’s promotion to major general occurred the following month. Buckner’s performance in his Alaska duties at this time undoubtedly pleased the Chief of Staff.⁴⁷⁷

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent American declaration of war meant increased preparations for Alaska’s defense. On 21 January 1942, Marshall wrote to the president, informing him that the Army expected a “destruction raid” somewhere along the Alaskan coast. He explained that Buckner had the funds and the manpower to prepare against the fire hazards that such a raid might cause. “He is very resourceful and energetic, and with troop labor available, has undoubtedly decentralized his storage and otherwise improved the situation.”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Marshall to Buckner. 16 June 1941.

⁴⁷⁷ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 2, 575; NPRC, Buckner Papers, Buckner Service Record.

⁴⁷⁸ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 76.

Buckner worked closely with the territorial governor, Ernest Gruening, and the two enjoyed a cordial, if sometimes rocky relationship. Buckner created a list of sensitive areas around the territory and worked with Gruening to implement a territorial guard plan. Buckner detailed local Alaskan forces to guard locations including bridges, mines, telephone exchanges, docks, oil plants, and more. Gruening later wrote that “many of these points, it seemed to me, should have been the responsibility of the military, but General Buckner insisted that he could not dispose his troops for guard duty; they had to be held in use en masse for defensive and offensive operations.” The two men later butted heads over a matter concerning native Alaskan women. Alaskan Defense Command headquarters had ordered that USO functions not admit native women. This form of racism appalled Gruening, and he flew to meet with Buckner about it in Anchorage. Buckner refused to budge and told him that the headquarters had only thought to protect the native women’s virtue, but the governor suspected more sinister motives. “Although a product of the border state of Kentucky,” Gruening later wrote, “Buckner had the color prejudice of the deep South and held it strongly.” Gruening recalled that Buckner had told him that he had tried to dissuade Benjamin O. Davis, an African American who eventually held the rank of four-star general, from joining the service. Gruening eventually went to Washington to meet with Roosevelt, and the Secretary of War soon ended the racist policy against the native women.⁴⁷⁹

Buckner and Gruening clashed on other issues as well. Later in the war, the governor took exception to an Alaska Defense Command headquarters request for military authority over Fire Island in Cook Inlet, just off the coast of Anchorage. The headquarters cited “for the

⁴⁷⁹ Ernest Gruening, *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (New York: Liveright, 1973), 309, 320-321.

defense of Anchorage,” as the justification. Gruening later wrote, “the war was nowhere near Anchorage, and it was ludicrous to consider it necessary for defense purposes. I wired back: ‘Only reason for the withdrawal of Fire Island is to supply duck-hunting ground for the brass. Request denied.’” In another episode, Mrs. Frye, a young Army wife, requested exemption from the order requiring evacuation of military families from Alaska. The woman had just had twins and had no place else to go in the States and wrote the governor to prevail on Buckner. The general responded to Gruening’s letter by stating simply, “I shall decide this matter as I see fit.” Buckner did not grant the exception. “I could see no justification for such a needlessly haughty attitude,” Gruening commented. He contacted an attorney and filed an injunction against Buckner. “I hoped [the attorney] would make those twins as famous as Romulus and Remus.” In the end, the injunction became unnecessary as the Army ordered Buckner to ship out to the Pacific. His successor, Major General Charles Corlett, canceled Mrs. Frye’s evacuation order. Gruening lamented that Buckner died on Okinawa, “and I have always regretted that we were not able to patch up our differences.”⁴⁸⁰

Gruening’s portrait of Buckner is less than favorable. Despite the fact that he insisted that their relations were often friendly, he presented the general as arrogant, bull-headed, jealous of his authority, and sometimes petty. No doubt, the two often found themselves on opposite sides of many issues, and Gruening’s autobiography must be read with this in mind. Still, given Buckner’s later performance on Okinawa, much of these characteristics seem to ring true. He was bull-headed in his refusal to heed the advice of his subordinates like Bruce and the Marine

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 326-327.

commanders. He also jealously guarded his prerogatives as an army commander from his naval superiors.⁴⁸¹

A wartime profile described Buckner in Alaska with great flourish as “a big bear of a man, ruddy-faced, with a hunter’s sharp blue eyes, a roaring voice, and a thatch of snowy hair, he is like that rugged land: huge, uninhibited, hard.” The piece further noted that “the Southerner has fallen in love with that harsh northern outpost, which has been called the most important strategic spot in the world.” It stated that Buckner had bought his own land in Alaska and planned to retire there, “after he is finished with the Japs.” The profile remarked on Buckner’s feeling right at home when he first arrived, camping in a tent in sub-zero temperatures. Other officers and men emerged from their tents with heavy coats and sweaters, but Buckner stepped outside in his undershirt, “breathing great drafts of air with relish, as if it were a balmy spring morning in his native Kentucky.” Then, he would wash himself with ice water poured into a basin. Further, it reported on his obsession with physical fitness. (During the Okinawa campaign, he required his staff officers to undergo a rigorous physical regimen better suited to younger battalion commanders than paper-pushers in their forties and fifties.)⁴⁸²

On March 27, 1942, Marshall inquired to McNair on Buckner’s future role in the war. “I had in mind that we would bring Buckner back and give him a corps in order to prepare him for a tank force command. He seems a very vigorous type.” Exactly one month later the head of Army Ground Forces wrote back, responding to the fact that Marshall wanted Buckner for a “key position.” McNair stated that “if it is desired that he be assigned to command an army corps, it is recommended that he be returned to this country immediately, be attached to a division for

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Wittels, “Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner,” 71-72; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 9.

refresher instruction, and be considered later for assignment to the XI Army Corps to be activated June 15th.”⁴⁸³

In July, DeWitt gave Buckner superior marks for his service in Alaska, recommended him for a corps command, and ranked him five on a list of sixty generals of the same grade known to him. He remarked that Buckner was “an aggressive, determined officer of high professional attainments, dependable, hardworking, thorough, with initiative, good judgement.” He also praised his “exceptional high quality of leadership,” and noted that he possessed a “fine physique,” and a “pleasing personality.” The next month, DeWitt recommended Buckner for the Legion of Merit. He wrote to Marshall that Buckner “has so justly earned [the award] through his unremitting attention to duty, undivided loyalty, and splendid spirit of cooperation.”⁴⁸⁴

Despite the praise Buckner had received from his superiors, two events occurred in the late summer/early fall of 1942 that threatened to derail his career. The first was rooted in Buckner’s love of hunting. The Alaska territory required that non-residents pay a fifty-dollar fee for hunting and fishing licenses, while residents only had to pay one dollar. This law meant that most of Buckner’s troops could not afford them. To help his men, Buckner applied for a license, paying only one dollar and the officials denied his application. He then brought the matter before a federal court and won the right for military personnel to pay the lower fee. The wartime profile noted that Buckner, “has not fired a shot at game in Alaska,” but underwent the process simply for the sake of his men.⁴⁸⁵

Perhaps as a result of this episode, word of Buckner’s love of hunting began to spread

⁴⁸³ NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box 54, Marshall to McNair, 27 March 1942, McNair to Marshall, 27 April 1942.

⁴⁸⁴ NPRC, Buckner Papers, DeWitt, efficiency report for Buckner, 5 July 1942, DeWitt to Marshall, 14 August 1942.

⁴⁸⁵ Wittels, “Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner,” 77.

throughout the country. On 29 September 1942, a Texas doctor named W. H. Bryant wrote to Senator Tom Connally, concerning media reports about the general. He accused Buckner of, “promiscuously murdering the wild game of [Alaska]. It has even been reported that he has been using army planes for that purpose.” Bryant, himself a hunter, was appalled at Buckner’s actions. He told the Senator, “I think it is your duty to see that this is stopped, and also THAT THIS MAN BE RECALLED TO THE UNITED STATES AND PUT WHERE HE BELONGS [emphasis in the original].” Further, he asserted that “a man of this low caliber has no place in our armed forces.”⁴⁸⁶

The War Department launched an investigation into the matter and directed Buckner to respond to the charge. “The accusations contained in Dr. Bryant’s letter to Senator Connally are wholly without foundation in fact,” Buckner wrote to DeWitt in November. “During my entire service of nearly two and half years in Alaska I have never at any time killed a single specimen of big game of any species.” He had been too busy with his military duties for hunting. At the conclusion of the War Department’s investigation into the matter, Robert H. Dunlop, the acting adjutant general, wrote to Senator Connally with the results. “Nothing has been found to substantiate such allegations,” he wrote. “In view of the foregoing, no further action is deemed necessary by the Department and none is contemplated.”⁴⁸⁷

The second incident was more serious and contained potentially far greater consequences for Buckner. In late May 1942, Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald sailed from Pearl Harbor and arrived on Kodiak island to command his fleet for the defense of Alaska. Buckner and Theobald immediately disliked each other, and during their initial meeting at the naval base on the island

⁴⁸⁶ NPRC, Buckner Papers, W. H. Bryant, M.D. to Senator Tom Connally, 29 September 1942.

⁴⁸⁷ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Buckner to DeWitt, 3 November 1942, Brigadier Robert H. Dunlop to Connally, 8 December 1942.

the admiral's cluttered papers annoyed the general. "Nail those damn maps up on the wall," Buckner roared. Gruening later wrote that "from the first, General Buckner and Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald ... clashed and neither one got along with Air Corps Brigadier General William D. Butler." The meeting inaugurated a period of interservice discord in Alaska, with constant disagreements over command authority, operations, and other matters. Tension between Army and Navy soon came to a head. In June 1942, the Japanese had invaded the Alaskan islands of Kiska and Attu as part of the Midway deception operation. DeWitt had favored a landing on Tanaga island, approximately 200 miles west of Kiska, as a staging area to take the islands back. Theobald believed the operation presented a number of navigational problems for his fleet, and persuaded Admiral King to reject the proposal. Buckner was furious at the decision, and commented that Theobald was "as tender of his bottoms as a sixteen-year-old-girl."⁴⁸⁸

It did not end there. While drinking with Theobald and other officers, Buckner recited a poem that called into question the admiral and the Navy's courage. A livid Marshall wrote to DeWitt, citing the need to address the situation. "Relations between Army and Navy in Alaska have reached a point where there appears to be no other cure but a complete change," he stated. "King is replacing Theobald. We intended to replace Butler." The Army needed to reassign Buckner as well. However, Marshall further noted that "we intend to do this in such a way as to avoid reflection on Buckner." Marshall reminded DeWitt that all reports until that point had been, "very favorable to Buckner," but his impatience with Theobald led him to carry, "matters beyond the point of discretion." Both Theobald and another admiral had asserted that Buckner had "aggressively attacked" Theobald's character for his decision regarding the Tanaga

⁴⁸⁸ Garfield, *The Thousand Mile War*, 14-15; Gruening, *Many Battles*, 323; Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 151-152.

operation. Marshall expressed further displeasure that Army partisans had printed the poem and circulated it about the Alaskan Defense Command. "This adds to the gravity of Buckner's indiscretion." Marshall concluded that a change in the command structure in Alaska was necessary. Both Marshall and Admiral King agreed that given the delicate situation in the Aleutian Islands, and the coming operation to expel the Japanese invaders, the command shakeup needed to wait. However, If operations against the Japanese resulted in failure, the press and public could attribute the reliefs to the officers' underperformance. "We would have a difficult problem on our hands," Marshall feared.⁴⁸⁹

Marshall concluded by asking for DeWitt's views on the subject. However, he was careful to mention that Buckner's career and future prospects should not suffer. He wrote, "understand that Buckner has done a splendid job in Alaska and I also think, without any doubt, that he permitted himself to act with seriously bad judgment in the particular matter referred to."⁴⁹⁰

Marshall was set on relieving Buckner from his Alaskan command, and perhaps saw the incident as an excuse to finally move him to the corps command that he and McNair had discussed earlier in the year. This motive would explain Marshall's emphasis on what he considered Buckner's outstanding performance to that point and not wanting to tarnish his reputation as he began a new command. However, DeWitt had persuaded the Chief of Staff to keep Buckner in Alaska. On 2 October 1942, Marshall again wrote to DeWitt and told him of his communications with King on the matter. "I told him ... that I was not entirely prepared to agree with you as to the retention of Buckner and Butler, also that Theobald should go." King

⁴⁸⁹ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 339-341.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

believed that they should continue to hold off on immediate action, and Marshall concurred.

“My feeling in the matter is that however much you have patched up affairs there is no escaping the fact that Buckner’s reasons were based on a lack of faith in Theobald’s willingness to engage the enemy except under conditions so favorable to us that they were unlikely to develop.”

Ultimately, Marshall allowed Buckner to stay in Alaska but left no doubt about his displeasure over the whole episode.⁴⁹¹

DeWitt’s efficiency report for Buckner that December again recommended a corps command. He now ranked him at number five of thirty officers of the same grade, and again gave him favorable marks. He commented that Buckner was “an officer of high professional qualifications,” and also, “outstanding in leadership.” Despite the incident with Theobald, DeWitt concluded his remarks with the words, “common sense, practical.” Buckner’s immediate superior did not consider the incident a danger to the Alaska commander’s career or future prospects.⁴⁹²

DeWitt had plans to retire in January 1944, and Marshall began considering his successor as commander of the Western Defense Command early in 1943. He wrote to DeWitt in February and asked him his thoughts on Buckner for the job. DeWitt responded on 5 March, “as to Buckner replacing me, I think it the thing to do and I feel you may rest assured that his mix up with Theobald will in no way influence his action in any future command, involving contact or cooperation with the Navy.” Marshall wrote back a few weeks later. “I am glad that you feel Buckner would not be irritating to the Navy, though I must say that I should think he would be because it would be difficult to forget the implications of his jocular assault on Theobald.”

⁴⁹¹ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 379.

⁴⁹² NPRC, Buckner Papers, DeWitt, efficiency report for Buckner, 31 December 1942.

Unlike DeWitt, Marshall still believed that the incident may yet have ramifications. He continued, “just how long Buckner should be held in Alaska is another question.” Whatever Marshall’s reservations about Buckner, he still intended to give him another command at some unspecified future date.⁴⁹³

The following month, Marshall made a decision. Buckner would get an army. He ordered Buckner’s name added to the next promotions list, elevating him to lieutenant general. Buckner’s new rank was “for command of 90,000 Army Air and Ground troops in the Aleutian-Alaska region, and for prospective command of the army of 150,000(?) troops on the West Coast.” The Chief of Staff intended for this new army to fall outside the authority of DeWitt’s Western Defense Command. Rather, Buckner would report to McNair in Washington. This army existed only on paper, although the War Department did promote Buckner to lieutenant general in May. Still, it did signal Marshall’s intention to give a potential combat unit to another officer who had commanded neither a combat corps nor division in the current war. Further, unlike Mark Clark and Courtney Hodges, Buckner had never commanded men in combat in his entire life. While Clark and Hodges had led battalions in the First World War, Buckner had trained pilots in Texas.⁴⁹⁴

In May 1943, United States forces under Army Major General Albert E. Brown landed on Attu, fighting the only land battle of the Second World War to take place on American soil. Buckner had opposed Brown as the commander of the operation, and preferred an “Alaskan,” someone from his own command. The War Department overruled him, and Buckner monitored the battle from nearly 500 miles away, on Adak island. Not long after, the Alaska commander

⁴⁹³ Bland, *Marshall Papers*, Vol. 3, 591-592.

⁴⁹⁴ NARA, RG 165, Box 43, Marshall memorandum, 15 April 1943; NPRC, Buckner Papers, Buckner Service Record.

offered a report on the American experience fighting the Japanese on the island intended for public consumption. “The Jap was well-armed,” it began. “His small arms were good and abundant, with ammunition in excellent quality and ample quantity and adequately dispersed.” He also noted the effectiveness of Japanese anti-aircraft guns. “The enemy is tough, but we are tougher. The enemy’s tactics are good, but our tactics will lick him if we’ll stick to our time-and-battle-tested doctrines. The enemy’s weapons are good, but not as good as ours, and our weapons will defeat him if we use them aggressively and in close support of our infantry.” He acknowledged that the “wily and deceitful” Japanese would fight to the death but if the Americans could anticipate their plans, it would throw them off balance. “The enemy’s individual marksmanship is bad. We can outshoot him, man for man, rifle for rifle.” He remarked on the hardiness of the Japanese troops, and that they could endure the hardships of the cold northern climate. “The Jap on Attu was a very tough customer.” Critically, Buckner asserted, wounded Japanese soldiers frequently participated in battles with remarkable vigor. “He could play dead and shoot or throw grenades after you passed by, and literally hundreds of wounded Japs took part with deadly effect in the last all-out drive.”⁴⁹⁵

The next month McNair wrote to Marshall about his views on command structures in the Pacific, specifically regarding Eichelberger’s possible assignments. He recommended Eichelberger for command of the Fourth Army, then based at the Presidio in San Francisco, California, although he considered the possibility of sending him to command the First Army forming in England. He then considered the future role the Alaska Defense commander. “Buckner should make a fine army commander,” he began, “but he has had neither the training

⁴⁹⁵ Garfield, *The Thousand Mile War*, 203; NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 10, Buckner, Brief of Typical Overseas Reports on the Jap as a Fighter, *Action on Attu*. (undated).

nor battle experience that Eichelberger has had.” If training and experience were not the primary indicators that made a “fine army commander,” then McNair’s criteria are unclear.⁴⁹⁶

In August, American forces undertook the invasion of Kiska, the other island that the Japanese had occupied since the previous year. For two and half months the Navy had bombarded the island, and 29,000 American troops accompanied by 5,300 Canadian soldiers in nearly 100 ships took part in the operation. However, unknown to the Allies, the Japanese had evacuated the island shortly after the invasion of Attu and the operation became a debacle that siphoned away resources from other critical theaters and drew significant press attention. Buckner stated, “to attract maximum attention, it’s hard to find anything more effective than a great big, juicy, expensive mistake.” Marine General O. P. Smith had been present at Kiska, and during the unopposed landing at Okinawa a year and half later he remarked on Buckner’s fear that it would be another anticlimax. “He did not want to be involved in another Kiska.”⁴⁹⁷

DeWitt’s efficiency reports for Buckner remained enthusiastically positive throughout 1943, and in September he recommended him for the Distinguished Service Medal. “General Buckner has displayed the most outstanding qualities of leadership, sound military judgement, keen foresight, and resourcefulness in the planning and organization of the formidable defenses now existing in Alaska.” Again, apparently forgetting the incident with Theobald, DeWitt continued, “his personal tact, consideration of the formidable rights of others and splendid spirit of cooperation have always been in evidence and have contributed to inspiring the wholehearted respect and confidence of all military, naval, and civilian personnel located in Alaska.” Later than month, the Secretary of War presented Buckner with the medal. Marshall remarked, “in the

⁴⁹⁶ NARA, Army Ground Forces Papers, RG 337, Box 9, McNair to Marshall, 7 June 1943.

⁴⁹⁷ Van Der Vat, *The Pacific Campaign*, 275-276; Garfield, *The Thousand Mile War*, 297-298; Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2008), 376.

face of a difficult climate, a rugged terrain, and conditions of extreme isolation, General Buckner by his personal example and fortitude, inspired his troops to overcome severe hardship and maintained a high state of morale and military efficiency.”⁴⁹⁸

By the end of 1943, it appeared that Army and Navy leaders had forgiven Buckner for the interservice animosity that he had stoked the previous year. In December, Buckner exchanged cordial Christmas messages with Nimitz. The Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific fleet wrote, “we in the Pacific Fleet appreciate your Holiday Greetings. For you and the Officers and Men of your Command, our best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Victorious New Year.” A few days after Christmas, Marshall passed along an encouraging note. “I send you my personal thanks for the fine job you have done during the past year and for the high state of efficiency of your entire command.” If indeed the incident had been forgiven, it had not entirely been forgotten, and tensions between the services remained.⁴⁹⁹

By mid-1944, Marshall no doubt sensed the war was entering its final phase and had decided that the time had come to give Buckner a combat command. The War Department relieved Buckner from his duties with the Alaska Defense Command and transferred him to the Central Pacific Area under the command of General Robert C. Richardson, assigning him to command the U.S. Tenth Army. However, before he left for Hawaii, the War Department ordered Buckner to Washington D.C. for temporary duty. While in the nation’s capital in July, Buckner lunched at the White House with a host of Navy admirals including Nimitz. “Sat on the President’s right,” he recorded in his diary. “On his left, Gene Halsey, ... Adm Leahy ... others.

⁴⁹⁸ NPRC, Buckner Papers, DeWitt, efficiency report for Buckner, 30 June 1943, DeWitt, efficiency report for Buckner, 2 November 1943, DeWitt to Marshall, 4 September 1943, Marshall, Award of Distinguished Service Medal Citation to Buckner, 1 October 1943; NARA, RG 165, Box 43, Major H. M. Pasco, Decorations & Awards Branch, Memorandum for Marshall, 24 September 1943.

⁴⁹⁹ NPRC. Buckner Papers, Nimitz to Buckner, 23 December 1943, Marshall to Buckner, 28 December 1943.

Pres talked cheerfully and made everyone feel relaxed and at home. ... Pres looked well but his hand shook a little when he raised his cocktail glass.”⁵⁰⁰

Buckner’s first duty in the Pacific required him to preside over another important matter regarding the Army/Navy relationship. During the invasion of Saipan in June, Marine Major General Holland Smith had relieved Army Major General Ralph C. Smith from command of the 27th Infantry Division, a unit that Buckner’s Tenth Army later commanded on Okinawa. The action caused considerable controversy, as a Marine officer had never relieved an army commander in combat before, and the incident struck to the heart of the interservice rivalry. Richardson, ever suspicious of the Navy, convened a board of inquiry into the matter and named Buckner to head it. In addition to Buckner, John Hodge, later the XXIV Corps commander on Okinawa, sat on the four-man committee, unofficially later dubbed the Buckner Board. The board exclusively interviewed Army personnel, neglecting to consider the Navy’s views. Richardson clearly had an anti-Navy agenda, and he let the board know that he expected condemnation of Holland Smith’s actions. Indeed, Holland Smith later charged in his memoirs that immediately after the incident, Richardson began, “making trouble.” Later, during the Okinawa campaign, Buckner had lamented the fact that Richardson appeared to play favorites in press dispatches. On 24 April 1945, Buckner noted in his diary that Richardson published a map of the island showing only Army units. Buckner wrote, “wrote him an official letter urging him to give due credit to my *Marines*, [emphasis in the original]. Richardson is always a menace to good relations between the services in the Pacific. Admiral Nimitz knows it.”⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰⁰ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 297; NPRC, Buckner Papers, Ullo to Buckner, 12 June 1944; DDEL, Buckner Papers, Box 1, Buckner Diary, 29 July 1944.

⁵⁰¹ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 155-6; Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 448-449; *Oakland Tribune*, California, 10 November 1948, www.newspaperarchive.com; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 45.

The incident on Saipan and Richardson's reaction to it seriously threatened good relations between the services just as the United States was driving the war to Japan's shores. In the words of historian Forrest Pogue, Marshall feared that "the fight would soon make the earlier Buckner-Theobald incident in Alaska look like a parlor game." However, Buckner attempted to find a solution that everyone could live with. The board ultimately ruled that while Holland Smith acted within his authority to relieve the Army general, the move was "not justified by the facts." It concluded that Holland Smith did not have all the information he had required in order to make such a consequential battlefield decision. While the outcome pleased neither Richardson nor Holland Smith, Buckner now emerged as someone willing to rise above the interservice rivalry.⁵⁰²

On 13 September, after meeting with naval leaders, Nimitz took Buckner aside and discussed his role on the board of inquiry. According to Buckner's diary, Nimitz regretted that "Richardson had sent a copy to Washington to Gen. Marshall. He wanted it all cleared up here." Buckner agreed with the admiral, and "called his attention to personalities involved and assured him that inter service feeling existed in my army." Perhaps prompted by Nimitz, Buckner stated that he did not feel it was his place to go over Richardson's head and write to Marshall directly to explain his views on the matter. "Admiral Nimitz agreed but hoped that Gen. Marshall would make it appropriate by bringing up the subject himself." He later noted that he gained his command after Nimitz conferred with him about, "my attitude on the Smith vs. Smith controversy and finding that I deplored the whole matter and harbored no interservice ill feelings."⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 155-6; Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 448-449.

⁵⁰³ Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, 17.

Nimitz had full authority over operational decisions in the central Pacific, and he easily could have placed a Marine general in command of the coming operation. As stated above, both Spruance and Turner favored Holland Smith for field army command, a situation that could have resulted in Buckner commanding the XXIV Corps. Marshall, despite his reservations after the Theobald incident, held Buckner in high regard and wanted him to get the combat command. Nimitz was aware of Marshall's wishes that the Army command the ground forces for the upcoming offensive, and Buckner's performance as head of the board of inquiry into the Smith vs. Smith affair demonstrated his willingness to work with the Navy. Critically, Nimitz saw the coming offensive as a moment to help mend the interservice rivalry, and Buckner appeared to be the ideal candidate. On 4 September, two days after the San Francisco meeting in which Buckner discussed "my coming project" with the admirals, he formally took command of the Tenth Army. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had not yet settled on a target for the invasion. They had long looked at Formosa as the objective, but Buckner believed that logistical problems would plague any such invasion. A few weeks later, the Joint Chiefs declared Okinawa the target and directed Nimitz to make preparations.⁵⁰⁴

In January 1945, Richardson gave Buckner excellent and superior marks for physical activity, endurance, knowledge of his profession, and the manner of his performance. However, Richardson only ranked Buckner as twenty out of twenty-five officers known to him of similar grade and stated that he had "no specific recommendation [for duty] to make as he has not been under my command sufficiently long to form a judgement." He also noted that he had only infrequently observed the Tenth Army commander in action. In the section that asked for

⁵⁰⁴ Gandt, *The Twilight Warriors*, 124-125; Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 297; Sarantakes, *Seven Stars*, xvii, 17.

remarks, Richardson wrote simply, “none.” It is possible that Richardson simply did not feel that he had had adequate time to form an opinion of Buckner and was therefore answering the form as honestly as he could. It is also possible that he had little love for Buckner after the latter’s refusal to censure the Navy during the Smith vs. Smith controversy.⁵⁰⁵

The next month, as the Tenth Army gathered its forces for the coming invasion, Buckner made another decision that he intended to repair lingering interservice animosity. He selected Geiger, the Marine commander of III Amphibious Corps, as his successor in the event that anything happened to him. This decision did not please his Army superior officer. Buckner reported in his diary that “Richardson returned my recommendation, through him to Adm Nimitz, that Geiger be my replacement ... His endorsement said it was undesirable to forward it and ... that neither I nor any member of my staff mention the subject to Adm Nimitz nor his staff.” Richardson intended to take the issue to the War Department for their recommendation, but Buckner insisted. “I returned the letter to him for reconsideration, stating that it was an opportune time to heal the differences and bad feelings between army and marine services.” Further, he asserted that he had the right to speak to Nimitz about the matter but agreed that he “would be guided by [Richardson’s] express wishes.” As Buckner wished, Geiger did indeed assume command after the Tenth Army commander died in the line of duty.⁵⁰⁶

On 11 March, Buckner wrote to his wife describing the various units that comprised Tenth Army and took pride in the size and skill of the force. “My divisions are composed of seasoned and experienced troops.” He also noted his awareness that he had not yet seen battle. “In fact, I seem to be the only raw recruit in the crowd when battle experience is considered.

⁵⁰⁵ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Robert C. Richardson, efficiency report for Buckner, 20 January 1945.

⁵⁰⁶ DDEL, Buckner Papers, Box 1, Buckner Diary, 17 February 1945.

However, the others should raise the average.”⁵⁰⁷

After news of Buckner’s death on 18 June reached Nimitz’s headquarters, the admiral wrote to Richardson, stating, “officers and men of all armed services in the Pacific Ocean Areas are greatly shocked ... The operation which Buckner conducted with such skill and courage will have a profound influence on the war against Japan.” The next day, James A. Ulio, the adjutant general, fulfilled the unhappy duty of informing Buckner’s wife, Adele. “The War Department shares with you the deep sorrow that you have been called upon to bear in the loss of your husband who gave his life so unselfishly. May you be comforted in the knowledge that by his heroic and valiant service he has earned for himself a lasting place in the memory of a grateful nation.” Colonel Yahara also commented about the attitudes at the Japanese headquarters. It was “the greatest news of the entire operation. We had managed to kill the enemy leader before our own commanding general committed ceremonial suicide. It seemed as if our forces had won a victory.” However, he remarked that General Ushijima did not celebrate the news. “He looked grim, as if mourning Buckner’s death. Ushijima never spoke ill of others. I had always felt he was a great man, and now I admired him more than ever.” Marine Private E. B. Sledge, perhaps the most famous memoirist to emerge from the battle, recalled that he heard about Buckner’s death as the Japanese sent large-caliber shells into a party of Marines far to Sledge’s right.⁵⁰⁸

Buckner’s rise to command a field army represents another failure of the Marshall system in the Second World War. At the time Buckner assumed command of the Tenth Army in late 1944, he had never commanded troops on a battlefield in his life. He had remained Stateside

⁵⁰⁷ USAHEC, Buckner Papers, Box 1, Buckner to Adele, 11 March 1945.

⁵⁰⁸ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Nimitz to Richardson, June 1945, Ulio to Adele Buckner, 19 June 1945; Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa*, 146; E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 299.

during the First World War, and the closest he had ever come to battle was monitoring the advance of Army forces under Albert E. Brown on Attu in 1943. Despite a few minor rules infractions as a young lieutenant, Buckner's service in the peacetime Army had repeatedly shown competence and ability. Marshall had taken an interest in him and sought to promote his career, believing that he had the qualities necessary for effective battlefield command. The Chief of Staff understood the strategic importance of Alaska, and assigned Buckner to prepare its defenses, a job at which he excelled. In early 1942, Marshall wrote to McNair that Buckner "seems to be a very vigorous type," apparently meeting one of Marshall's requirements for a battlefield commander.⁵⁰⁹

However, Buckner's career appeared to be in danger later that year as a result of his incident with Theobald. Marshall seriously contemplated relieving Buckner from his assignment as the Alaska Defense commander, although he was careful to make sure that the episode did not taint Buckner's future prospects for command. DeWitt had always appreciated Buckner's ability and enjoyed a good working relationship with his subordinate, and so urged Marshall to reconsider. After consultation with Admiral King, Marshall agreed. Nevertheless, the incident almost certainly made Buckner more sensitive of the need to foster good interservice relations. Buckner offered a compromise as head of the board of inquiry during the Smith vs. Smith controversy, despite pressure from Richardson to embarrass the Navy. He chose a Marine general as his understudy during the battle of Okinawa, further annoying Richardson. Buckner's conciliatory actions also led MacArthur to believe that the Tenth Army commander had sold the Army out to the Navy.

Marshall had chosen Buckner to command the Tenth Army, but ultimately Nimitz

⁵⁰⁹ NARA, RG 165, Box 54, Marshall to McNair, 27 March 1942.

selected the general to lead the ground forces on Okinawa. He did so to promote interservice amity. The admiral appreciated Marshall's high regard for Buckner, and understood the implications of the Army transferring a lieutenant general to the Pacific theater just as the Navy began planning the new offensive. Further, Nimitz respected Buckner's role in the Smith vs. Smith episode, and the general had assured him that he had no lingering animosity toward the Navy himself. As the Okinawa plan called for the employment of both Army and Marine units, Nimitz saw the advantages of an Army general leading the fight in what was largely a Navy show. If Nimitz had any reservations about Buckner's lack of combat experience, he did not let that deter him from making the safe political choice.

However, Nimitz regretted the decision not long after the battle began. Buckner insisted on slow, methodical tactics he believed would save his men's lives. The plodding nature of the Tenth Army's advance put the naval support vessels at risk from Japanese kamikaze attacks and cost that service dearly in men and ships. There were other options rather than the slow, artillery and infantry frontal attacks that so resembled those of the First World War. Buckner refused to heed the advice of his superiors and subordinates alike. He failed to opt for the second landing behind Japanese lines, a move that could potentially have dissipated the enemy's strength on both fronts. He dismissed Bruce's innovative tactics that had offered proven results on the battlefield. He refused to consider simply cutting off the Japanese forces and allowing them to wither and ultimately bring the fight to American forces on favorable terms. In short, Buckner remained fixed on his ideas of fighting the battle.

During Nimitz's late April visit to Okinawa, he insisted that Buckner speed up his advance, and even threatened the Tenth Army commander with relief. Buckner asserted his prerogative as an Army general to run the campaign as he saw fit, and Nimitz ultimately backed

down. However much Nimitz may have deferred to Buckner's judgement with regard to waging a ground war, the admiral's reasons for retaining Buckner in his role almost certainly stemmed from those same political considerations that saw him appoint Buckner in the first place. If Nimitz had relieved Buckner it seems likely that it would have resulted in another Smith vs. Smith controversy, only this time larger and more consequential. Holland Smith had been a Marine corps commander who relieved an Army division commander. Nimitz was the commander-in-chief of the Pacific fleet, and Buckner the commander of a field army. Almost certainly MacArthur and Richardson, two hardline Army partisans, would have had a field day disparaging the Navy and asserting the need for their service's dominance in the Pacific. In any event, Buckner continued on as Tenth Army commander until a Japanese artillery shell cut short his service.

Buckner's death offered another opportunity to promote interservice accord. Since the Army had already awarded Buckner with its Distinguished Service Medal for his service in Alaska, Nimitz recommended that the Navy posthumously award him its Distinguished Service Medal. The citation, forwarded to President Roosevelt from James Forrestal, the Secretary of the Navy, read in part, "skillfully coordinating the fire power of all branches of the armed services under his command, he boldly executed maneuvers designed to neutralize savage Japanese resistance." Buckner gave his life leading the Tenth Army on Okinawa, and for that he deserves America's profound thanks. It was a pity he did not lead it better.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ NPRC, Buckner Papers, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal to Roosevelt, Distinguished Service Medal citation, undated.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The generals examined in this study were all American patriots. They did not hesitate to serve their country at a time of national emergency, each of them was willing to give his life for his country and his fellow officers, and one of them did indeed make the ultimate sacrifice in combat. We must consider any criticism of their leadership and actions in the Second World War in light of these facts. And yet, criticism is necessary. An exploration of these generals' failures, as well as the failure of the system that elevated them to key combat commands, provides a greater understanding of the nature of successful combat leadership, of the United States Army as an institution during the war, and America's contribution to victory.

In examining all six of the generals, one fact becomes inescapable: it was exceedingly difficult for Marshall in peacetime to determine effective combat commanders for war. While Marshall successfully promoted military talent like Eisenhower, Patton, Collins, Truscott, Simpson, Devers, Allen, Griswold, and others, he also promoted the flawed Bradley, the timid Lucas, the vainglorious Clark, the inexperienced Hodges and Buckner, and the incompetent Fredendall. The fact that officer requirements for peacetime are quite different than those demanded in a combat command is a partial explanation. Each of these six officers excelled in their various peacetime assignments, and gained promotion through combination of ability, hard work, and patronage. Marshall took an interest in these officers' careers and believed they would prove effective leaders in war. McNair, as head of Army Ground Forces, had considerable influence over their careers as well, as did Eisenhower as the Supreme Commander in Europe. In the case of Buckner, Admiral Nimitz, the dominant voice in the Pacific theater, played an important role.

Maneuvers and war games were the closest that the Army could come to simulating wartime conditions. The GHQ field army-level maneuvers that took place in Louisiana and the Carolinas in 1941 constituted the largest military exercise the Army had ever undertaken and gave officers like Eisenhower and Patton a chance to shine. However, as mentioned in the introduction, Marshall did not use the maneuvers to decide on officers he would promote during the war. Rather, Marshall had already picked out those officers he had in mind for combat command and saw the maneuvers as an experience to help better prepare them for wartime assignments. The maneuvers replicated the experience of war as best they could. They allowed generals and subordinate officers to plan and execute operations with field armies and their constituent elements. They tested new weapons and new tactics in rugged conditions. They exposed the successes and setbacks of new logistical and supply systems stretched over hundreds of miles. In all of these cases the maneuvers provided valuable lessons and experiences for the Army. However, in one aspect these games simply could not adequately simulate the experience of war. Umpires and mathematical formulas are a poor substitute for war's unrelenting chaos, stress and carnage. They could not replicate the toll that reports of death and destruction took on officers, and the constant fear that making mistakes could cost more men their lives. Nor could the maneuvers provide Marshall a window into an officer's soul or a psychological blueprint for his future performance under actual combat conditions. In short, taking the measure of an officer's wartime leadership ability requires a war.⁵¹¹

Marshall relied on a combination of factors to determine the officers he wanted for wartime roles. He preferred younger men to older, believing that they brought an energy and willingness to innovate that their seniors did not possess. He considered vigor, physical and

⁵¹¹ Gabel, *GHQ Maneuvers*, 45-46, 187.

mental strength, the critical quality that would motivate and sustain officers through trying situations. The officer had to have a proven record of leadership, the ability to inspire the men under his command to complete their missions and handle complicated and dangerous situations themselves. Marshall witnessed these factors in officers during World War I and in the peacetime years that followed, and these observations provided the basis for his selections during World War II. Unfortunately, Marshall often discerned these qualities in many men who ultimately did not perform well during the war. In many cases, they were superficial qualities that hid inner weakness. Consider Marshall's estimation of Lloyd Fredendall early in the war: "I like that man, you can see determination all over his face."⁵¹²

Eisenhower's March 1943 letter to his subordinate generals admonished them to consider officer promotion carefully. "The only valid reason for advancing an individual is to improve the quality of our military leadership and so produce the greater battle and general efficiency in the American force." Critically, he asserted that "promotions in time of war are not to be used as a reward for long and faithful service in peace time." And yet, this is often exactly what Marshall and Eisenhower did. Time and again, Marshall rewarded long-serving officers with high command in spite of a lack of battlefield seasoning. Marshall elevated Clark, Hodges, and Buckner to field army command based on their successful peacetime assignments and non-combat wartime missions. British Brigadier General Edgar Williams called this institutional sickness, "the seniority principle." Although he claimed that the British Army generally overcame it, given the evidence it appears that the disease infected the American Army throughout the war.⁵¹³

⁵¹² NARA, Chief of Staff Papers, RG 165, Box, 54, Marshall to McNair, 22 November 1942, Marshall to McNair, 1 December 1942; Murphy, "These are the Generals – Fredendall," 110.

⁵¹³ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers, Vol. II*, 1038-1039; Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe*, 311.

Despite Fredendall being completely incompetent in battlefield command, it is perhaps easier to excuse Marshall and Eisenhower for elevating this officer to command the key operation for Torch, and subsequently to lead the II Corps. In late 1942 and early 1943, the United States Army had yet to battle the Wehrmacht. It is entirely understandable that the Army made mistakes as it was in the process of creating its military machine and preparing it for combat operations against the Germans. By the time of Kasserine Pass in 1943, Germany had been at war for nearly three and half years, had fought approximately a dozen different European armies, and had largely worked out its own command organizational problems, (although Hitler's increasing meddling in operations eventually took its toll on the Wehrmacht). Marshall recommended Fredendall to Eisenhower at the moment that the Army needed to prove itself the equal not only of the German foe, but also of its British ally. Fredendall appeared to be a tough, no-nonsense leader who had consistently demonstrated ability in his peacetime assignments. He performed generally well during the 1941 maneuvers and seemed to be a perfectly adequate candidate for the task at hand. Marshall had earlier apologized to him for taking away the II Corps in the States and giving it to Clark for deployment in England. Nevertheless, the Chief of Staff fully intended to give Fredendall a combat command in time. Before Fredendall's overseas deployment, Marshall introduced him to British officers in the hopes of allowing him to smoothly integrate into the Allied command structure. Eisenhower's declaration to Marshall after Oran fell that "I bless the day you urged Fredendall upon me," certainly implies that the Chief of Staff's suggestion in reality represented a politely concealed order. Nevertheless, Eisenhower's enthusiasm for Fredendall at the time ensured his command of the II Corps in early 1943.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. III, 690.

However, Fredendall proved completely incompetent in his wartime role. He dug out the side of a mountain in order to create a sheltered command post sixty miles from the front lines, a dugout that Eisenhower and other officers found absurd and demoralizing. He refused to visit the front lines, believing that he could better exercise command using modern communications technology and completely ignored the inspiring effect that a commander had on the troops by visiting the battlefield. He failed to develop a strong working relationship with his subordinate commanders and with the British. He did not adequately prepare for the German assault and suffered a breakdown shortly after it began. He delegated all battlefield authority to Ernest Harmon, an officer who had just arrived at the command post at Eisenhower's order, and then went to bed for a day. Given these facts, Eisenhower had complete justification for relieving Fredendall after the debacle.

Despite Fredendall's disastrous leadership, Eisenhower helped to salvage his career by recommending him to Marshall for Stateside training service, and for later promotion to lieutenant general. Marshall concurred, and Fredendall spent the remainder of the war training troops. Yet even after Kasserine Pass proved Fredendall's unfitness for combat command, Marshall offered him to Eisenhower for a combat role in Operation Overlord in 1944. This offer is one of the greatest pieces of evidence that in promoting general officers to critical roles, Marshall could sometimes show a puzzling lack of judgement.

After the United States Army had bloodied itself in battle against the Wehrmacht in North Africa, there are fewer reasons to excuse Marshall and Eisenhower's poor personnel decisions, and by 1944 there really is no defense for such decisions. Lucas possessed an impressive peacetime record of service. He had combat experience in Mexico in 1916, in the First World War, and earned a reputation as an accomplished troop trainer. Marshall selected

Lucas as an observer for Eisenhower in early 1943, and this assignment had dramatic implications for the officer's career. The position put Lucas into the war, and he took part in the Sicilian invasion with Patton's Seventh Army. Although Lucas had still not commanded a division or corps in combat, Eisenhower believed the experience he gained on Sicily made him suitable for wartime command. Lucas took over the II Corps after Bradley left for England, and only a short time later he transferred to command the VI Corps in Italy after Dawley faltered. He appeared to acquit himself well in the slog up the Italian peninsula, although he increasingly lost patience with the Fifth Army commander, Clark. After only a few weeks, Eisenhower and Marshall began to consider Lucas for field army command.

Alliance politics as much as military strategy shaped Lucas' career, and Clark soon tasked him to lead the VI Corps in an amphibious assault in Italy. Lucas proved ill-suited to this task for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was his lack of aggressiveness and failure to secure necessary objectives in a timely manner. He failed not only to secure the Alban Hills, but later to cut the German road networks at Cisterna and Campoleone. He too developed poor working relations with the British and leaned far too much on his staff and subordinate officers. He suffered from extreme self-doubt that poisoned his relationships with fellow officers and he lacked the leadership qualities necessary to engender confidence. His failures ensured that the Anzio landing did not achieve its objective of forcing the Germans to retreat north of Rome and led to a tenuously held beachhead for the next four months. However, he did at least prove to be a capable defensive fighter who held off repeated German counterattacks. Regardless, Lucas was the wrong man to command the effort, and Clark and Alexander correctly relieved him.

Marshall and Eisenhower's selection of Clark to command the Fifth Army for the invasion of Salerno was another mistake. Clark's peacetime service showed a track record of

achievement in troop training and organization. Before the war, Clark impressed Marshall with his views on various subjects, and the two began an important professional friendship. Clark's appointment to the Army General Headquarters under McNair proved another major stepping stone. The patronage of these two powerful figures had an important effect on Clark's career, as did his friendship with Eisenhower. After American entry into the war, Clark accompanied Eisenhower to England to begin organizing the Army's effort there. He soon fell into the orbit of powerful figures like Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, leaders who sometimes debated his assignments in their correspondence.

Clark became a household name in the United States after his daring, clandestine contact with French officials in North Africa prior to Torch, and in the subsequent negotiations. He longed for a combat command, and Eisenhower offered him a corps. However, the ambitious Clark had decided that his contributions warranted field army command, and Marshall and Eisenhower agreed to assign him command of the Fifth Army, a training unit. In that position he gave Eisenhower numerous headaches as he lobbied to take the Fifth Army into combat. As the date for the invasion of Salerno approached, Marshall and Eisenhower gave him the command despite the fact that Clark had not commanded a unit in combat since 1918, and then only a battalion. Despite the availability of other commanders with combat experience at the division, corps and field army level, Marshall and Eisenhower decided that Clark had earned the right to command Fifth Army in Italy because of non-combat assignments rather than proven battlefield ability.

Clark's lack of experience threatened disaster for the Allies at Salerno. As the Germans counterattacked, Clark became timid and made plans to evacuate the beachhead further north, alarming both Admiral Kent Hewitt and the Fifth Army corps and division commanders. Clark

only abandoned the idea after Alexander's intervention. In January 1944, Clark ordered the disastrous Rapido River crossing. The attacks further illustrated Clark's lack of experience, sending the men of the 36th Infantry Division against well-fortified German positions with good observation. The result was a bloodbath for the Americans, and justifiably tarnished his reputation. Clark's insubordination regarding his decision to take Rome instead of enveloping fleeing German units is troubling and illustrates the fact that the Fifth Army commander put his ambition and lust for publicity ahead of sound military strategy. Clark's superiors should have relieved him of Fifth Army command for these reasons.

However, Eisenhower had left for England in December 1943, and British Field Marshal Maitland Wilson replaced him as theater commander. Now, Clark's immediate superiors were British and did not believe it was their place to relieve an American commander, especially one who Marshall and Eisenhower had picked. Clark's administrative superior within the Army and Wilson's deputy, Jacob Devers, disliked the Fifth Army commander, but likewise felt constrained by Marshall and Eisenhower's apparent continuing support for Clark. For their part, Marshall and Clark's attentions remained focused on Overlord that spring, and to them Italy had already become a sideshow. Therefore, despite his faltering leadership and reckless insubordination, Clark retained his command. Far from Clark being relieved or censured for his tragic errors, he remained in the Army's good graces. In 1945, Eisenhower even sent Clark a letter congratulating him on his successes, "what I am trying to say in all this roundabout way is that I am darned proud of you – just as is the whole country."⁵¹⁵

Courtney Hodges also had a remarkable career in the United States Army. After failing his courses at West Point, he enlisted as a private, worked his way up to a commission, and

⁵¹⁵ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2685-2686.

ended the Second World War as a four-star general. He distinguished himself as an infantry officer and commanded a battalion in a daring river crossing in the First World War. He commanded the Infantry School at Fort Benning, earning his patron Marshall's respect as well as a reputation for being an expert on infantry tactics. He observed the 1941 General Headquarters maneuvers and provided useful feedback for the Army. He commanded the Third Army as it prepared for its overseas deployment, and in that capacity oversaw the defenses of the American South. His record had so impressed both Marshall and Eisenhower that they soon considered him for field army command in Europe. However, like Clark, he had no battlefield experience in the Second World War. He had never commanded a division or corps under fire, and yet Marshall and Eisenhower believed that he was qualified to lead a massive military organization that eventually topped 250,000 men. After Clark's near-disastrous leadership at Salerno the previous September, Eisenhower should have shown better judgement. Instead, he was more concerned with marginalizing or sidelining Patton, a proven battlefield talent.

Hodges performed well as Bradley's deputy for First Army and benefitted from the organization's superb corps and divisions commanders after he took command in August. During the race across northern France in August 1944, Hodges leaned heavily on his staff, as well as on Collins and his VII Corps to attack German positions and keep the army moving. However, once First Army came up against the entrenched German positions in the Hürtgen Forest, Hodges' inexperience and lack of military judgement became apparent. Rather than bypassing the deathtrap, Hodges kept feeding men into it, gave multiple missions to individual divisions that sapped their strength, and failed to understand just what horrors his men faced. During the German attack in December, Hodges suffered a breakdown and Montgomery had to organize his headquarters to weather the storm. Ironically, the Battle of the Bulge perhaps saved

Hodges from relief as Eisenhower had his hands full at the time, and once Hodges had recovered and Montgomery exercised operational control over First Army, the crisis became an opportunity for the Allies. The First Army capture of the Ludendorff Bridge a few months later increased Hodges' reputation, and Marshall and Eisenhower simply overlooked his past failures.

Eisenhower even stated that Hodges' tenure as First Army commander represented an "unbroken record of tactical accomplishment," and wrote to the Chief of Staff hoping to cement Hodges' legacy as a chief contributor toward the Allied victory, "I should very much like to see Hodges get credit in the United States for his great work." Marshall and Eisenhower's continuing support for Hodges after the Hürtgen fiasco is truly baffling.⁵¹⁶

Buckner falls into the same category as Clark and Hodges, a generally solid peacetime and non-combat wartime officer who Marshall believed possessed the necessary "vigor" for successful combat leadership. However, unlike the other two generals, Buckner had not even commanded a battalion in the First World War. He had served successful tours in various posts Stateside and in the Philippines, only occasionally running afoul of a superior over a minor infraction. As war clouds formed over Europe, and Japanese aggression threatened in the Pacific, Marshall selected Buckner to command the defenses of the strategically critical Alaska territory. Buckner proved an effective organizer and worked diligently to prepare the territory's defenses for a Japanese attack. After Pearl Harbor, Buckner's authority expanded, and he played a critical role in the Pacific war. Buckner's bravado and boisterous personality, so reminiscent of Patton's, nearly cost him dearly in 1942. Marshall almost relieved Buckner after his altercation with Admiral Theobald, an incident that appeared to poison Army-Navy relations. Only DeWitt's strong influence allowed Buckner to maintain his position. Yet, even as Marshall

⁵¹⁶ Chandler, *Eisenhower Papers*, Vol. IV, 2545, 2564.

considered sacking Buckner from the Alaska command, he was careful to make sure that his future combat command prospects did not suffer. After Marshall transferred Buckner to the Pacific and gave him command of the Tenth Army, Buckner seemingly offered a mea culpa to the Navy by refusing to embarrass that service during the Smith vs. Smith controversy, despite Richardson's pressure to do so. Marshall's decision to transfer Buckner, a lieutenant general, to the Pacific at that time clearly indicated to Nimitz that he wanted Buckner to command the upcoming operation. In the interest of interservice amity, Nimitz agreed to allow Buckner to lead the Okinawa offensive.

Navy leaders soon blasted Buckner's leadership during the campaign. Buckner believed that a slow, methodical advance with careful tactics could save lives. Instead, it simply drew out the carnage over a longer period and left Navy ships vulnerable to repeated, deadly Japanese kamikaze attacks. Buckner refused to listen to his subordinate officers, including Marines, who urged him to consider a second amphibious landing behind the Japanese lines. He ignored Bruce's tactical innovations on the island and continued his "blowtorch and corkscrew" tactics that increasingly came to resemble the hellish conditions that took place at Verdun during the First World War. Further, he refused to consider simply establishing his own defensive line to the south and starving the Japanese out, a strategy favored by MacArthur. Nimitz threatened Buckner with relief in late April 1945, but it was an empty gesture. The admiral had no desire to repeat the severe strain that the Smith vs. Smith controversy exerted on Army-Navy relations, especially considering that the services needed to work closely together to prepare for the expected invasion of Japan. In any case, Japanese artillery killed Buckner in mid-June.

Of the generals profiled in this work, Bradley showed himself to be the most capable despite his failure to close the Falaise Gap. Bradley's peacetime career impressed his superiors,

and Marshall took a keen interest in the officer, even assigning him to lead one of the sections at the Infantry School. He eventually rose to command the school himself. Bradley enjoyed as close a professional relationship with Marshall as any officer could, and the Chief of Staff kept him apprised of his hunting trips and personal musings. After Pearl Harbor, Bradley languished Stateside training units, and longed for an overseas combat command. Marshall promised his protégé that he'd soon have his wish and sent him to North Africa as Eisenhower's observer in early 1943. Bradley impressed his old West Point classmate, and a short time later he took over the II Corps from Patton. Leading the II Corps in Tunisia, Bradley showed ability and competence, despite not always following Eisenhower's instructions, and an overabundance of caution. He likewise acquitted himself well in Sicily, even as his dislike for Patton intensified and his tendency to micromanage his subordinates emerged. Marshall and Eisenhower particularly appreciated Bradley's easy working relationship with the British. Eisenhower's satisfaction with Bradley led him to write in his diary that "this officer is about the best rounded, well balanced senior officer that we have in the service. ... I have not a single word of criticism of his actions to date and do not expect to have any in the future." Eisenhower believed that Bradley could excel at any Army assignment. Marshall concurred, and as he prepared to organize forces for Overlord in England, he assigned Bradley to head up the American First Army.⁵¹⁷

Bradley performed generally well during D-Day and thereafter. If he displayed an overly cautious leadership, at least it was competent. Critically, he continued to impress Marshall and Eisenhower. After the Cobra breakout in late July, Bradley noticed the opportunity to trap the German Seventh Army as it savagely attacked toward Mortain. Such a development could have

⁵¹⁷ Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 94.

utterly destroyed German resistance in the West, and possibly led to an end of the war by Christmas 1944. Yet as the plan began to unfold, Bradley lost his nerve. Failing to fully realize the advantages that air superiority gave to his plan, Bradley halted Patton before he could close the trap, allowing thousands of German soldiers and headquarters staff to flee eastward. Perhaps traumatized by the friendly fire incidents that had occurred at the beginning of Cobra, he feared similar casualties as Patton's Third Army drove north toward the Canadians. Despite the massive death and destruction that the Allies visited on the Germans during the battle, Bradley's failure to capitalize on the opportunity made Falaise an incomplete victory and ensured that the war dragged on into 1945, with more brutal fighting and Allied casualties in the interim. It was an error so great that Marshall and Eisenhower seriously should have questioned his judgement and considered relieving him. It is possible they did not because the question of a successor loomed large. Eisenhower had previously said he thought field army command was Patton's calling. Hodges had only commanded First Army since the beginning of August – his first combat command in the war.

However, Marshall and Eisenhower never seriously considered relieving Bradley, nor even censuring him for the blunder. Instead, the two leading generals largely ignored Bradley's part in the missed opportunity and soon followed through with their plans to promote him. The subsequent command shakeup and ensuing controversy that saw Eisenhower assume direct control of all land forces from Montgomery no doubt distracted them from Bradley's error. Nevertheless, Marshall and Eisenhower continued to hold Bradley in high regard, as much for his seeming ability to work well with subordinates and the British, despite his growing antipathy for Montgomery, as for his battlefield conduct. Critically for Eisenhower, Bradley brought with him none of the drama and headaches that Patton frequently courted. Even after Bradley's

performance during the Battle of the Bulge left much to be desired, Marshall and Eisenhower's faith in him never seemed to waver. The fact of the matter is that, like Hodges, Marshall and Eisenhower had a blind spot for Bradley. He was the perfect Army "type."

The system that George Marshall created to promote talented officers to high ranking combat command positions and quickly relieve incompetent or underperforming officers from those same assignments generally worked well in the Second World War. Marshall was responsible for the promotion of dozens of effective, talented combat leaders during the war, particularly at the corps and division level. However, the system that Marshall put in place was not a perfect science, but an often flawed process that allowed several mediocre commanders to rise high and failed to relieve them after they had proven their lack of ability. In addition to peacetime officer performance, Marshall relied heavily on gut instinct and personal impressions to select generals for combat command. He preferred combat experience, but it was not always necessary. The majority of the time this instinct proved correct, and Marshall's many protégés succeeded in their wartime roles. However, as this study has shown, Marshall did not have a supernatural ability to separate the wheat from the chaff, and he promoted some officers to posts beyond their experience and ability, often with disastrous consequences for the men under their command and for the war effort in general.

This study risks running afoul of the old adage that the perfect is the enemy of the good. The Marshall system was not perfect, but it was good. Despite Marshall's occasional poor judgement and baffling personnel decisions, it is nevertheless remarkable just how well the system managed to elevate the right man at the right time for the right job. Without Marshall's intelligence and keen instinct, the Army never would have had a Patton to punch through German lines from North Africa to Europe, a Collins to forge a corps that spearheaded the First

Army across northern France, an Eisenhower to lead the coalition to ultimate victory, and many other first-rate combat commanders during the war. But these six cases prove that the Marshall system was far from perfect. Generals who made it into Marshall's "little black book" and assumed major commands in World War II caused battlefield disasters and the needless loss of American lives.

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