

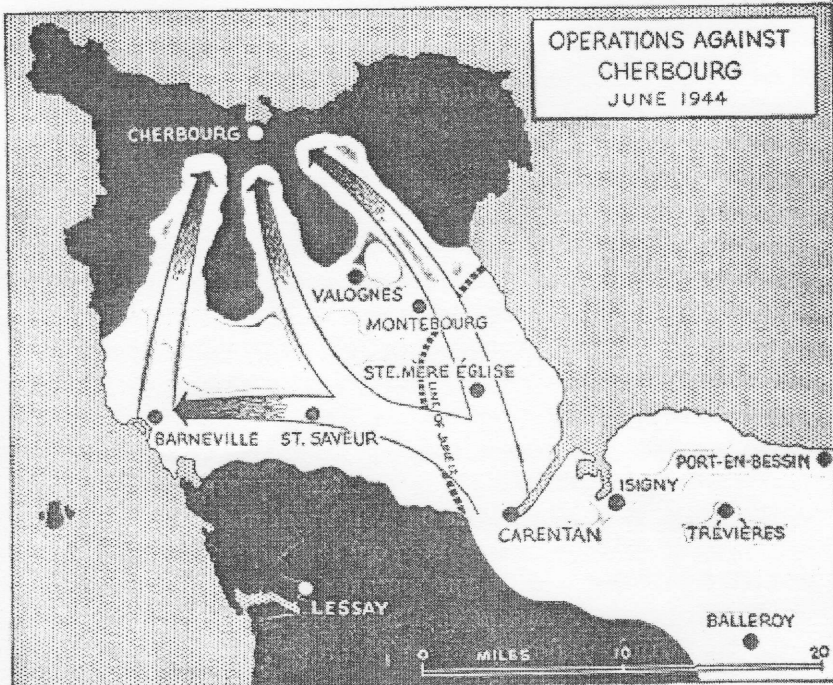
northwest Europe not committed to the fighting were in and about Calais, in the German Fifteenth Army. To maintain connection with these troops he had to hold Caen. If he lost that city his two principal forces would be divided and could thenceforth operate together only if both executed a long withdrawal. So to Caen he hurried his strongest and best divisions, and made every possible preparation to hold it to the end.³

Our frustration in the attainment of our immediate tactical goals in the eastern sector involved no change in the broad purposes of the operational plan. It was merely another example of the age-old truth that every battle plan comprises merely an orderly commitment of troops to battle under the commander's calculations of desirable objectives and necessary resources, but always with the certainty that enemy reaction will require constant tactical adjustment to the requirements of the moment. As quickly as it became certain that the enemy intended at all costs to hang onto Caen as the hinge of his operations it instantly became to our advantage to keep him so preoccupied in that region that all other Allied operations would be facilitated.

On the far western flank General Collins' VII Corps initially attacked straight westward to cut the peninsula in two. He then turned swiftly toward Cherbourg but had also to establish on his southward flank a secure line to block any enemy reinforcements attempting to push into the peninsula.⁴

On June 12, 1944, the first flying bomb, known as V-1, reached London. The V-1 was a small pilotless airplane which flew at high speed on a predetermined course and terminated its flight by means of settings in its mechanism. It contained a large amount of explosive which detonated upon contact, and the blast effect was terrific.⁵ The first V-2 was not used until early August. It was a rocket, shot into the air to a great height, which fell at such high speed that the first warning of its coming was the explosion. During flight it could not be heard, seen, or intercepted and for these reasons was never as terrifying as the V-1.

The V-2 bomb was particularly destructive when it fell directly into a structure of some kind. Owing to its speed, it penetrated deeply into the ground and its great explosive effect was exerted directly upward. As a consequence, when it fell into open spaces it was relatively ineffective, but so great was its explosive charge when it hit a building that destruction was almost complete.⁶



The development and employment of these weapons were undoubtedly greatly delayed by our spring bombing campaign against the places where we suspected they were under manufacture. Peenemünde, in Germany, was known to be one of the largest of the German experimental plants and periodically we sent large formations of bombers to attack that area. There were other places indicated to us as suspicious. One was Trondheim, in Norway, where we thought that the Germans were engaged in atomic development. We also bombed the suspected launching sites along the coast of northwestern Europe, where our reconnaissance photography showed numerous facilities and installations that could not be interpreted in terms of any known weapon. These areas were continuously hammered.

The effect of the new German weapons was very noticeable upon morale. Great Britain had withstood terrific bombing experiences. But when in June the Allies landed successfully on the Normandy coast the citizens unquestionably experienced a great sense of relief, not only at the prospect of victory but in the hope of gaining some insurance against future bombings. When the new weapons began to come over London in considerable numbers their hopes were dashed. In-

deed, the depressing effect of the bombs was not confined to the civilian population; soldiers at the front began again to worry about friends and loved ones at home, and many American soldiers asked me in worried tones whether I could give them any news about particular towns where they had previously been stationed in southern England.

It seemed likely that, if the German had succeeded in perfecting and using these new weapons six months earlier than he did, our invasion of Europe would have proved exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible. I feel sure that if he had succeeded in using these weapons over a six-month period, and particularly if he had made the Portsmouth-Southampton area one of his principal targets, Overlord might have been written off.

Defensive measures against the V-1 soon attained a very high degree of efficiency, but even so, the threat of their arrival was always present at all hours of the day and night and in all kinds of weather. We in the field wanted to capture the areas from which these weapons were fired against southern England. However, it must be said to the credit of the British leaders that never once did one of them urge me to vary any detail of my planned operations merely for the purpose of eliminating this scourge.

On June 18, Montgomery still felt that conditions permitted the early capture of Caen. His directive of that date stated: "It is clear that we must now capture Caen and Cherbourg, as the first step in the full development of our plans. Caen is really the key to Cherbourg. . . ." In the same directive he gave the following instructions to the British Army: "The immediate task of this Army will be to capture Caen." The final sentence of that order was: "I shall hope to see both Caen and Cherbourg captured by June 24."⁴

On the left the German armor and defensive strength continued to defeat our intentions, but the port of Cherbourg fell on June 26, just twenty days after the landing. General Collins had conducted against it a relentless offensive and as a result of the operation justified his nickname, "Lightning Joe." The final assault was materially assisted by heavy and accurate naval gunfire.

In the matter of luck we had enjoyed a rough medium between Bradley's minimum and maximum estimates of the influence of this imponderable factor. Our good luck was largely represented in the degree of surprise that we achieved by landing on Utah Beach, which the Germans considered unsuited to major amphibious operations, and by the effective action of the two airborne divisions, the 82d and the

101st, which had landed almost in the center of the peninsula. Our bad luck was in the hurricane that struck us on June 19. It stopped for a period of four days nearly all landing activity on the beaches and therefore interfered seriously with every operation; it was so fierce in character as to render offensive fighting extremely difficult.

During that time sea communications between the United Kingdom and the Continent were completely interrupted and it was almost impossible to land an airplane on the small landing strips we had constructed in the bridgehead. The mulberry at Omaha Beach in the American sector suffered damage beyond repair. Great numbers of ships and small vessels were grounded or hurled onto the beach.⁹

Conditions would have been ideal for a German counterattack except for the prior effectiveness of the air forces' campaign of isolation. Here, as always, was emphasized the decisive influence of air power in the ground battle.

On the day of the storm's ending I flew from one end of our beach line to the other and counted more than 300 wrecked vessels above small-boat size, some so badly damaged they could not be salvaged.

When the storm struck, one American division, the 83d, was still lying in its ships just off the beach. Bulk unloading was out of the question and so during the entire storm the division underwent an extremely uncomfortable and trying experience. I visited the men of that division the day they finally got ashore and found a number of them still seasick and temporarily exhausted.

There was no sight in the war that so impressed me with the industrial might of America as the wreckage on the landing beaches. To any other nation the disaster would have been almost decisive; but so great was America's productive capacity that the great storm occasioned little more than a ripple in the development of our build-up.

With the capture of Cherbourg the work of port rehabilitation was started immediately. The Germans had accomplished major demolitions and had planted in the harbor and its approaches a profusion and variety of mines. Some of the new types of mines could be removed only by deep-sea divers, who had to descend to the bottom to disarm the mines. The work of the mine sweepers and the deep-sea divers in Cherbourg Harbor was dramatic and courageous.¹⁰

During the twenty days required by the U. S. VII Corps to capture Cherbourg, the fighting was continuous throughout the remainder of the front, with only local gains anywhere, and almost stalemate in the Caen sector. The sketch shows our lines on June 12 and 26.