

Troops and crewmen aboard Coast Guard–manned LCVP as it approaches Normandy beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944 (National Archives and Records Administration/U.S. Coast Guard Collection)



Behind Enemy Plans

A Process-Tracing Analysis of Germany's Operational Approach to a Western Invasion

By Bradley Podliska, Karin Hecox, and Oliver Sagun

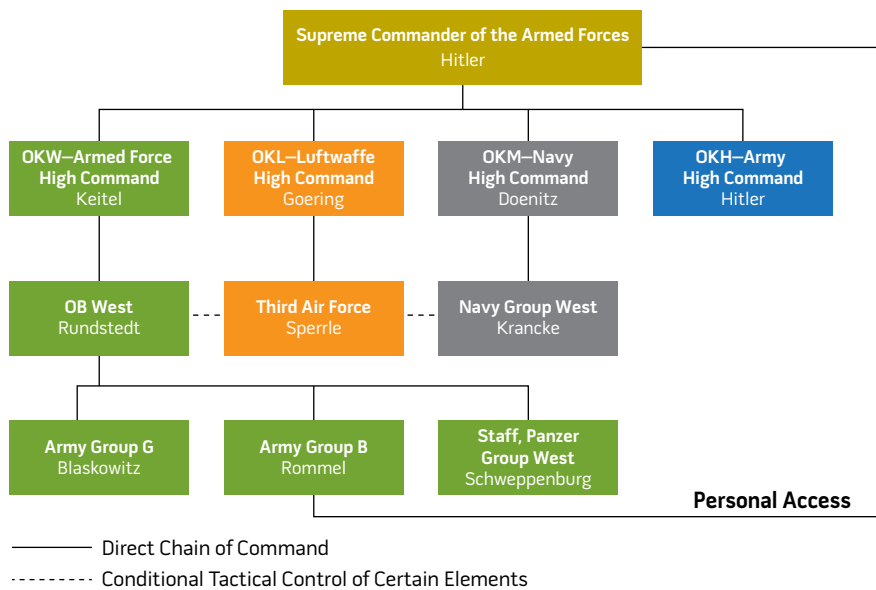
No plan survives contact with the enemy.

—FIELD MARSHAL COUNT HELMUTH VON MOLTKE THE ELDER

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Sixty-four years after Moltke's observation, two mid-level German commanders, faced with the herculean task of changing the course of history on an early June 1944 morning, failed in their duties. In using

Figure 1. German Chain of Command



structured and qualitative analysis to examine German strategy and operations in the events leading up to and on D-Day, the loss can be traced to Admiral Theodor Krancke, commander of Naval Group West, and Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, commander of Luftwaffe Third Air Fleet. Infighting, conflicting authorities, and lack of warfighting capabilities clearly hampered German command and control of operations on the Normandy coast. The Germans did have a plan, however, and Krancke and Sperrle proved to be the weak links: Both failed to execute when facing an Allied invasion on the Western Front.

This failure is counter to the mythological story of D-Day. The Allies, with overwhelming force and an overabundance of courage, executed a brilliant assault plan and won the longest day. As the story goes, the Allied invasion was so superior and heroic that nothing the Germans did mattered; the good guys were bound to win.¹ At least superficially, this story fails to go beyond some notable facts. Adolf Hitler micromanaged tactical actions, and given his late wake-up on June 6, the Allies took full advantage.² The personal feuds and fights over power, especially the one between Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, Oberbefehlshaber West (Supreme Commander West, or OB

West), and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Army Group B, contributed to the German failure at Normandy.³

More specifically, the research remains problematic because it fails to answer basic questions: Did the Germans have a plan in place to defeat an Allied Western invasion? If so, did Hitler and his commanders follow the plan? To put it simply, who lost D-Day? These questions are independent of Allied plans and actions and cover the events leading up to and on the day of the invasion.

By organizing German plans into elements to create a cognitive map or operational approach, historians may better understand the German defeat.⁴ An operational approach is “a broad description of the mission, operational concepts, tasks, and actions required to accomplish the mission.”⁵ Specifically, it is the plan of how Hitler and his generals sought to defeat a Western invasion. Constructing a German operational approach post hoc will also help future joint planners better understand a commander’s role and responsibilities in executing an operational plan.⁶

The German operational plan can be analyzed with process-tracing, a popular qualitative method for performing within-case analysis. Process-tracing evaluates causal links and describes a

phenomenon (in this case, German defense of its Western theater) in a sequential manner.⁷ One such process-tracing test is the hoop test. For a hoop test, a fact must be able to “jump through a hoop” in order to be considered true. The hoop, in this case, is an element of operational design assigned to an individual German leader or general (see figure 1). In other words, a German commander is eliminated as being at fault for the D-Day loss if the commander did in fact conduct his responsibilities as assigned in planning.⁸

German War Strategy

Understanding Germany’s war strategy, operational environment, and problems is crucial to contextualizing Hitler and his commanders for the hoop test.⁹ Hitler, adhering to his *Mein Kampf* objective of *lebensraum* (living space) in the East, first secured his eastern flank by invading Poland, next conquered Western Europe, and then began his campaign to defeat Russia.¹⁰ The Russian invasion stalled, and by autumn 1942, the Germans changed their strategy to focus on a global war, not a theater war. Several new factors were at play: First, Hitler realized the Eastern Front had become a quagmire. Second, the Allies opened a second front in North Africa. Third, the Germans reached their zenith of manpower (losses could not be made up).¹¹ By summer 1943, the German situation worsened. Tunisia in North Africa fell. Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz lost the U-boat Atlantic campaign, and a German operation to halt Russian advances failed. Moreover, the Allies invaded Italy and began a relentless air-bombing campaign over Germany.¹² By the fall, with manpower and resources becoming scarce, the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Armed Forces High Command, or OKW) issued a directive requiring all changes in strength to be approved.¹³

The Operational Environment in 1944

In defending about 1,000 miles of the Atlantic Wall, the Germans assessed



Troops wade ashore from LCVP landing craft, off Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944 (National Archives and Records Administration/U.S. Army Signal Corps Collection)

defense of the coastal environment based on forces available, evaluation of the threat, and terrain. In consultation with the navy, OB West assessed sectors for suitability of troop landing, and defensive obstacles were placed accordingly.¹⁴ Both the OKW and OB West expected the Allies to land at a port.¹⁵ The Oberkommando der Marine (Navy High Command, or OKM) stated that an attack would occur at high tide.¹⁶ The Germans expected to be able to move and resupply troops rapidly to the invasion area via rail.¹⁷

Defining the Problem

The problem Germany faced in 1944 was how to defeat enemy forces on multiple fronts. For the Western invasion, German estimates varied widely from 10 Allied divisions to as many as 70 divisions. Germany expected the

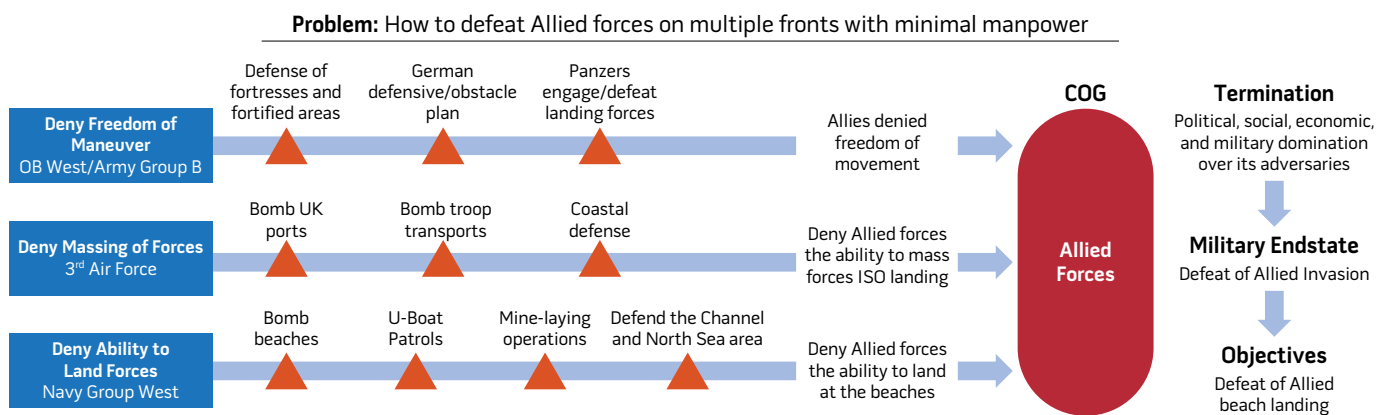
Allies to have a tank superiority ratio of 10 to 1.¹⁸ From April to May 1944, the Fremde Heere West (Foreign Armies West) reported the number of Allied divisions as 75 to 90 divisions (a misinformed count due to double agents and bureaucratic rivalry). The extreme estimates led Hitler to believe there would be a diversionary attack first, followed by the main attack.¹⁹

To counter this threat, Germany prepared 10 Panzer divisions and 50 infantry divisions to defend against an invasion.²⁰ These units were organized under a German command and control structure that was disjointed, convoluted, and contradictory.²¹ Directly under Hitler was the OKW, the OKM, the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe (Luftwaffe High Command, or OKL), and the Oberkommando des Heere (Army High Command). OB West fell

under OKW, and, on paper, had the subordinate units of Army Group B, Army Group G, and Panzer Group West.²²

Rommel was responsible for the defense of Normandy, where he had the Seventh Army with the 84th Corps being the forward corps. In total, the Seventh Army had 14 infantry divisions, 1 Panzer division, and 47 heavy guns. The 716th Division—comprising mainly old men, teenagers, convalescents, and ethnic Germans from occupied territories—covered the British beaches. The 352nd Infantry Division and 726th Regiment covered Omaha Beach. The 352nd Division consisted of 12,734 veterans with modern weapons (for example, 105-millimeter [mm] and 150mm artillery pieces). The 709th Infantry Division covered Utah Beach and the Cherbourg port.²³ The Luftwaffe Third Air Fleet, under Sperrle, reported directly to OKL,

Figure 2. German Operational Approach



under Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering. It operated in a “cooperative” relationship with OB West.²⁴ Planes employed in coastal defense were under the control of OB West. Otherwise, OB West had to request the services of Third Air Fleet,²⁵ which consisted of the 2nd, 9th, and 10th Flying Corps, 2nd Air Division, 2nd Fighter Corps, and 122nd Reconnaissance Group.²⁶ Sperrle had 319 operational aircraft under his command at the time of the Allied invasion.²⁷ Notably, a majority of the German fighter aircraft and reserves, some 600, were stationed in Germany for defense of the homeland.²⁸

Navy Group West, under Krancke, reported directly to OKM, under Doenitz. As with Third Air Fleet, only naval elements involved in coastal defense were under the control of OB West. Naval artillery, deployed on land, remained under navy control, unless a land invasion was occurring.²⁹ Navy Group West assets included the 5th Torpedo Flotilla, the 15th Patrol Boat Flotilla, the 5th Schnellboot (S-Boat, or, by the Allied name, E-Boat) Flotilla, and the 9th S-Boat Flotilla, which in total consisted of 20 to 30 E-boats, 6 torpedo boats, 20 minesweepers, 3 to 4 destroyers, and 4 to 5 U-boats in the English Channel area.³⁰

A Process-Tracing Analysis of Germany’s Operational Approach to a Western Invasion

Hitler and his commanders’ plan to defeat the anticipated invasion can be organized into elements of operational design (see figure 2). Elements are used

to assess an individual German leader or general. The elements of operational design are taken from Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning*, and include:

- center of gravity (COG)—a source of power that provides strength, freedom of action, or will to act
- lines of operations (LOO)—actions or activities on nodes or decisive points designed to achieve an objective
- decisive points—geographic points, events, or factors that allow a commander to achieve an advantage
- objectives—what militarily must be accomplished to achieve an endstate
- military endstate—the point at which the military instrument of power is no longer needed to achieve national objectives
- termination—the conditions that must exist at the end of military operations.³¹

Hitler’s Actions Regarding the Termination Criteria and Military Endstate. For Germany, Hitler was clearly responsible for setting the termination criteria and for approving, if not crafting, the military endstate. In U.S. joint doctrine, the President sets the termination criteria of every operation, according to JP 5-0.³² For a hoop test to be accepted, Hitler must have failed to set the termination criteria or approve a military endstate. In terms of German operations in the West, the termination criteria were political, social, economic, and military domination over its adversaries. The

military endstate was the defeat of an Allied invasion.³³

Hitler believed that the Allies, if defeated on the beach, would not make another invasion attempt. He could then focus on defeating Russian forces.³⁴ As such, he made his strategy clear with Fuhrer Directive 51, dated November 3, 1943. The directive ordered commanders to upgrade coastal defenses and mass Panzer divisions.³⁵ Furthermore, on December 20, during a situation update meeting, Hitler made clear, “I have studied most of the [reports] now. There’s no doubt that the attack in the West will come in the spring; it is beyond all doubt. . . . If they attack in the West, [then] this attack will decide the war.”³⁶

Hitler also took extensive steps to turn the war bureaucracy toward these objectives. First, he concentrated his power.³⁷ On March 23, 1943, he issued an order stating that higher commands could not prevent subordinate units from reporting directly to him.³⁸ Rommel, for example, appealed to Hitler to place the army and labor forces under him for the purpose of defending against a Western invasion. Hitler denied his request.³⁹ Second, and despite claims to the contrary, Hitler moved forces to the West. For example, in March 1944, Hitler ordered the Panzer Lehr (Teach) Division to be removed from the West and used in Hungary. However, the division was sent back to France in May.⁴⁰ Hitler also ordered light antiaircraft weapons to France, even at the expense of protecting the



Soldiers relax outside French café, in Sainte-Mère-Eglise, France, June 6, 1944 (National Archives and Records Administration/National Museum of the U.S. Navy)

German homeland.⁴¹ Most important, Hitler ordered forces comprising troops from Eastern European countries (for example, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania) to be moved to the West. In total, 72 battalions were deployed in France by early 1944.⁴² Third, at the beginning of April 1944, Hitler believed the attack would come at Normandy.⁴³

Hitler anticipated the Allied attack, and he was focused intently on the Western invasion and how to stop it. In fact, Hitler's intuition was confirmed on the afternoon of June 5 from intelligence reporting of radio intercepts that the invasion would occur on June 6.⁴⁴ Thus, Hitler performed his planned duties on D-Day.

Doenitz's Actions Regarding the Military Endstate, Objective, COG, LOO, and Decisive Point. Doenitz was responsible for helping craft the military endstate, identify the enemy operational COG, prepare the LOO, and determine the decisive points.⁴⁵ In addition to the already stated military endstate, the objective was the defeat of an Allied landing, and the agreed-upon Allied operational COG was fielded forces, in particular those landing on the coast.⁴⁶ The LOOs involved the establishment of the Atlantic Wall and joint operations. The most important decisive point was the invasion landing site. If Doenitz carried out these assigned elements, the hoop test is rejected.

By spring 1944, the German navy was greatly diminished, but in anticipation of a cross-channel invasion, OKM deployed its largest and deadliest E-boats (a fast attack craft), the S-38/100 class, along with minesweepers to the West to defend the channel invasion area.⁴⁷ Moreover, OKM planned to send out 40 U-boats at the time of the invasion.⁴⁸ Fearing an invasion, it placed no less than 34 E-boats in Cherbourg and in Boulogne, bracketing the future invasion area.⁴⁹ The deployment effectively placed any Allied landing in "deadly peril."⁵⁰ It also had radar to help direct forces when the Allies were detected crossing the channel.⁵¹

Doenitz, like Hitler, focused on stopping a Western invasion. The deployment

of the preponderance of naval forces in the anticipated attack area, which could have potentially defeated an invasion, demonstrates that Doenitz fulfilled the military endstate, objective, COG, LOO, and decisive point requirements.

Goering's Actions Regarding the Military Endstate, Objective, COG, LOO, Decisive Point, and Ordering Operations. Goering, like Doenitz, was responsible for helping craft the military endstate, identify the enemy operational COG, prepare the LOO, and determine the decisive points.⁵² Goering, however, was able to order operations. This additional duty, while giving him more power and authority, also means that Goering has a greater chance of passing the hoop test of failing to have carried out his responsibilities.

Goering understood the urgency of repelling the invasion, and he planned to recall all German fighters defending the homeland and send them to the invasion sector. At the commencement of an invasion, Goering would send out a coded message: "Threatening Danger West." Moreover, Goering ordered that 50 percent of all units be kept in readiness status to conduct low-level attacks to support the army in defensive measures.⁵³

Goering, like Hitler and Doenitz, focused on stopping a Western invasion. The readiness order and the plan to defeat a landing demonstrate that Goering fulfilled the military endstate, objective, COG, LOO, and decisive point requirements. Goering failed, however, to place additional forces in the West in anticipation of an invasion. Moreover, he retained operational authority, and he believed June 5 reports that an imminent invasion was a feint. Therefore, Goering did not issue "Threatening Danger West" until June 7 and thus partially failed to carry out his responsibilities.⁵⁴

Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel's Actions Regarding the Military Endstate, Objective, COG, LOO, and Decisive Point. Keitel, like Doenitz and Goering, helped craft the military endstate, identify the enemy operational COG, prepare the LOO, and determine the decisive points.⁵⁵ Keitel was not a popular general, but he did have Hitler's

trust, serving as "the funnel through which Hitler's orders passed and which received reports, complaints, and questions."⁵⁶ As OKW chief, Keitel did not have any command authority, but he did have the authority to issue directives, prepare operational plans, and coordinate joint operations.⁵⁷ This lack of command authority makes it more difficult to pin a specific failure on Keitel in accepting the hoop test.

First, regarding the endstate and objective, OKW took extensive steps to defeat an Allied landing. Beginning in 1942, OKW (and OB West) designated high-priority harbors as "fortresses" and lower-priority harbors as "fortified areas." Between these harbors was a system of strongpoints, which consisted of batteries protected by infantry.⁵⁸ Then, in coordination with Rommel, OKW (and OB West) established a beach defensive system. The Germans, relying on conscripted labor under Organization Todt, poured concrete for bunkers and put in place a multilayered defensive belt, which consisted of Belgian Gates festooned with mines, Hemmenbalk tripod-shaped ramps, Czech hedgehogs, and 2,000 stakes with mines.⁵⁹ In terms of operational defense, the Germans flooded wide swaths of area to make the terrain impassable.⁶⁰ In terms of tactical defense and to prevent Allied access to road networks, beach draws were closed off with obstacles, mines, and gun emplacements.⁶¹

Second, regarding the Allied operational COG, on January 28, 1944, OKW briefed Hitler that the Allies had 488 combat vehicle landing ships, a sufficient number to land 25 divisions in each wave.⁶² The critical vulnerability of the fielded forces was the troops, still in naval transport from the United Kingdom to the beaches of Normandy.

Third, OKW established plans that laid the groundwork for LOOs. In its planning, it ordered that if an attack occurred in southern France or in Brittany, German bombers were to bomb English ports, as weather permitted, and fighters were to be kept on call and launched to assault the landing forces.⁶³ German ground forces were to defend the fortresses at all costs, and then remaining

forces were to withdraw to a defensive line running from the Seine River above Paris southwest to Switzerland. If an attack occurred in Normandy or along the channel coast, defensive tactics were to be used to throw the invaders back into the sea. Failing this, defeated forces were to withdraw behind the Seine.⁶⁴

Fourth, regarding the decisive point, OKW determined in 1943 that the Fifteenth Army sector, an area from Belgium south to Rouen, France, would be the decisive point in the expected invasion.⁶⁵

Finally, OKW served as an arbiter of disputes and established its authority as necessary.⁶⁶ For example, the Germans believed the Panzers were key to repelling the Allied invaders, and on this Rundstedt and Rommel were in disagreement. Rundstedt was clear that the invasion needed to be stopped on D-Day, not D-Day plus one. He was skeptical that he had the resources to defeat the invasion; thus, he believed keeping reserves out of reach of naval artillery and aerial bombardment was key. These reserve forces would then be sent to destroy the Allies on the beach.⁶⁷ Alternatively, Rommel shared the view of OKW that forces, including mobile artillery and Panzer tanks, should be placed as close to the shore as possible. Rommel went so far as to send almost daily requests to OB West for tactical changes.⁶⁸ Both generals appealed to OKW, and OKW effectively divided up the Panzer divisions between the two generals. Rommel was given control of three divisions, and the remaining were kept under the Panzer Group West Commander General Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, who reported directly to Rundstedt.⁶⁹

As a second example, OKW made the decision to disaggregate Eastern troop units and integrate them into German regiments rather than deploy them as independent units. A "Commander of the Volunteer Units under the Commander-in-Chief West (OB West)" was created for coordination of these troops, adding to the bureaucratic confusion.⁷⁰ As a third example, Army Group B Chief of Staff General Hans Speidel specifically requested an operational directive on April

1, 1944, and Hitler and OKW Chief of Staff General Alfred Jodl rejected his request on the grounds that OB West and Army Group B bore the mission for defeating the Allies on the beach.⁷¹

Keitel, like his peers and in his role as a de facto chief of Hitler's personal staff, focused on stopping a Western invasion. The plan for how to defeat an invasion such as bombing English ports, defending fortresses, and defeating the landing invasion at all costs fulfilled the military endstate, objective, COG, LOO, and decisive point requirements, exonerating Keitel of responsibility.

Rundstedt's Actions Regarding the LOO. In JP 5-0, commanders are responsible for executing actions, such as planned use of LOOs, in order to attain the objective and military endstate.⁷² As such, Rundstedt would have been responsible for executing his assigned LOO, denying Allied freedom of maneuver. Like Keitel, Rundstedt was limited in the troops he actually commanded, which also lowers the threshold for rejecting the hoop test for him.

Rundstedt was initially distracted. He believed an attack would occur in the Pas de Calais area.⁷³ Moreover, he got into a political squabble with Rommel. Fearing Rommel had too much power, Rundstedt sought to divide and diminish Rommel's area of responsibility and received OKW approval in April 1944 for the creation of Army Group G, consisting of the 1st and 19th armies, with an area of responsibility of southern France. Rundstedt named a trusted confidant, Johannes Blaskowitz, as commander.⁷⁴

However, Rundstedt attempted to execute his LOO. At 2:30 a.m. on June 6, Rundstedt ordered the 12th SS Panzer Division and the Panzer Lehr Division out of operational reserves and into action under the command of Rommel. OKW rescinded the order at about 6:30 a.m., stopping these forces when cloud cover still obscured their movement.⁷⁵

Rundstedt took action and attempted to carry out his LOO. His political fight with Rommel, especially about how to place Panzer divisions, did not negatively impact the LOO or decisive point. Rundstedt bears no culpability because

his plan was OKW approved and was consistent with the approach to deny the Allies to land and establish a beachhead.

Krancke's Actions Regarding the LOO. Krancke, as an operational commander, would also have been responsible for executing his assigned LOO, denying the Allied ability to land forces. This is a narrowly focused LOO and requires specific action by Krancke. Together, this increases the probability that a hoop test is accepted.

Krancke did not conduct reconnaissance patrols in the days prior to D-Day due to weather. Furthermore, he restricted mine-laying operations to port.⁷⁶ Krancke did not believe the Allies would attempt a landing and wanted to give his men a break, so he issued orders the night prior to D-Day to lower war readiness from condition two to condition three.⁷⁷ Furthermore, sailors, using position-finding radar, located surface ships during the early hours of June 6 but did not send out an invasion alert until hours later.⁷⁸

The 15 E-boats of the 5th S-Boat and 9th S-Boat flotillas did depart at 4:30 a.m. out of Cherbourg, but lacking any information on the invasion fleet, the E-boats searched north despite the fact that the invasion fleet was south and east. Given the late launch of the E-boats, which were designed to work in the stealth of the night, their efficacy against the invasion fleet is doubtful.⁷⁹ However, 15 E-boats, if launched based on radar findings and in the darkness of night, could have potentially wreaked havoc on the invasion fleet in a manner similar to the April 1944 Lyme Bay disaster.⁸⁰

Krancke failed to carry out the LOO of denying the Allies the ability to land at the beach. This failure was based on inaction. Despite the fact that he could not rely on his radar, Krancke issued a stand-down order for his boats. As such, Krancke failed to carry out his responsibilities per the planned operational approach.

Sperrle's Actions Regarding the LOO. Sperrle, like Krancke, would also have been responsible for executing a specific LOO. For a hoop test to be accepted, Sperrle must have failed to

take action to deny an Allied massing of forces in Western Europe. In this LOO, Sperrle's responsibilities involved all air activities in defending the beaches, including reconnaissance, acting on intelligence, and bombing the landing transports and forces.⁸¹

Sperrle, like Krancke, grounded his force due to weather.⁸² On D-Day, Sperrle had a limited force of 80 serviceable fighters (out of 319), but he still did not take the initiative and employ these forces.⁸³ Three bombers were ordered to bomb Allied troop transports, but the order was inexplicably rescinded at 9 a.m.⁸⁴ Strafing runs were ordered on Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches after 9:30 a.m., too late to impact the troop transports.⁸⁵

Like Krancke, Sperrle failed to carry out the LOO of denying the Allies the ability to land at the beach. This failure was also one of inaction. Sperrle issued a stand-down order for planes, and he failed to launch planes at the first sign of an invasion. As such, Sperrle failed to carry out his responsibilities per the operational approach.

Rommel's Actions Regarding the LOO. As an operational commander, Rommel, like Krancke and Sperrle, would also have been responsible for executing a specific LOO. With his infantry and Panzer divisions, Rommel was to lead the main effort of German operations in denying the Allies freedom of maneuver. If Rommel failed to execute in this effort, a hoop test is accepted.

Rommel was responsible for the overall defense of Normandy, but the command structure did not lend itself to unity of effort. Rommel's ability to execute his LOO was limited, as he could not make an independent move. This remained a concern for Rommel leading up to the invasion.⁸⁶ Like Rundstedt, Rommel believed an attack would occur in the Pas de Calais area.⁸⁷ Rommel visited his wife on June 6 and was not available to issue orders for 14 hours.⁸⁸ The 21st Panzer Division, as a rare exception, was directly under Rommel's control. But its commander, General Edgar Feuchtinger, did not receive orders to move his division until 10 hours after

the start of the invasion. Once Rommel took control, he ordered Feuchtinger to attack, but Feuchtinger, apparently receiving contradictory orders from Rundstedt, did not attack.⁸⁹

Rommel took action and attempted to carry out his LOO. His political fight with Rundstedt, especially about how to place Panzer divisions, did not negatively impact the LOO or decisive point. Moreover, he did what he could; Feuchtinger's failure to take action cannot be blamed on Rommel.

Conclusion

Examined through the lens of the joint planning process, the German strategy and plans to defeat an Allied Western invasion demonstrate that the popular arguments—blaming Hitler or Rommel or bad luck—do not hold up to a hoop test analysis. The results of the hoop test demonstrate that individuals failed to execute their assigned responsibilities in thwarting the D-Day invasion. Specifically, Krancke and Sperrle failed to execute their LOOs. Goering also failed to complete all his duties. Unlike Keitel, Goering asserted control over forces, but he failed to issue a directive—even, as in the case of Keitel, an incorrect one.

The German chain of command was disorganized and contradictory, and the commanders seemed unwilling to take the initiative or think critically once the invasion commenced. All of the incompetence and bad decisions were made in spite of Hitler's order that subordinates could report directly to him. A thorough understanding of this disorganization and contradiction and its effect on German D-Day operations would help explain German failures, including the inaction of Krancke and Sperrle. Research generally focuses on Hitler and the high command, but a second area would be a more nuanced examination of exactly what Krancke and Sperrle were doing on June 6. A third area would be to determine what possibly could have happened if Krancke and Sperrle did not cancel reconnaissance operations, if the Cherbourg E-boats went south and east, and if a daring attack was executed (for example, the April 1944 Lyme Bay attack).

This article answers the question of who lost D-Day. Despite the common narrative that the Allies prevailed over an inferior enemy, this article finds that the Germans did take significant measures to defeat an Allied invasion. This research also shows that the dynamics of infighting and conflict of authorities in mid-level leadership are critical elements in understanding strategic plan implementation. Commanders do not operate in a vacuum, and as found in this case, mid-level leaders did not follow instructions and plans. German pre-invasion efforts were all for naught. This not only makes the adage of Moltke the Elder relevant, but it also makes the advice of Dwight Eisenhower profound: "Plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."⁹⁰ JFQ

Notes

¹ Robert Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity: Twenty-Four Hours at Omaha Beach* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2018), xxv–xxvi; Mary Kathryn Barbier, *D-Day Deception: Operation Fortitude and the Normandy Invasion* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 195. Notably, Kershaw points out that the Germans had a formidable force on D-Day within the Normandy theater. In particular, the Germans had 14 infantry divisions, a Panzer division, and 47 heavy guns to fight an invasion force of 6 amphibious divisions and 3 airborne divisions. In total, Germany could bring 58 to 60 divisions from around France to repel the 37 divisions of invaders. See Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 34, 67.

² Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day: June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 481–482; Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, 165–167.

³ David C. Isby, *Fighting the Invasion: The German Army at D-Day* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 47–50.

⁴ To be clear, the Germans did not think in terms of the modern U.S. doctrine of operational approach. Nonetheless, as a teaching and learning aid, professional military education instruction structures historical operations and battles, such as Operation *Torch*, into an operational approach as part of its curriculum.

⁵ *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 2020), 159, available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>.

⁶ There are 13 elements of operational design, but not all 13 elements need to be

used. See Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 16, 2017), IV-19, available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0_20171606.pdf>.

⁷ David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011), 823–830.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 826–827. A hoop test is a qualitative, sequential analysis of an event. In its scope, it must account for commanders who still followed the plan, but engaged in unique or creative tactical reactions to battlefield conditions.

⁹ See JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, IV-16.

¹⁰ Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 189–193.

¹² *Ibid.*, 198.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 206–207. The OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht), despite consistent bureaucratic infighting that hampered operations, released an optimistic forecast that Germany "will win" the war.

¹⁴ The navy concluded that the Normandy coast, due to its reefs, was not likely an invasion target. Thus, no defensive obstacles were placed there. Rommel, arriving in winter 1943, immediately ordered construction of defensive obstacles. See Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 40; Bodo Zimmermann et al., *OB West (Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line), A Study in Command: MS #B-308 GENLT Zimmermann, MS #B-672 GENMAJ von Buttler, MS #B-718 GENLT Speidel, MS #B-633 GENFLDM von Rundstedt, MS #B-344 GEN INF Blumentritt* (Washington, DC: European Command Historical Division, 1945), 21.

¹⁵ Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 4; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 82.

¹⁶ B.H. Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1948), 242.

¹⁷ However, 3 weeks prior to D-Day, the Allies began a bombing campaign that eliminated 75 percent of the rail system within 150 miles of Normandy. Normandy had been effectively isolated. See Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, 178.

¹⁸ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 78, 82.

¹⁹ OKW maintained control over several military intelligence agencies, including the Amt Ausland/Abwehr (Office of Foreign and Counterintelligence). Admiral Wilhelm Canaris was chief of the Abwehr. Canaris did not believe the Germans had the forces to win the war, and the Abwehr, based on double agents, submitted unreliable reports. Canaris cared only about supplying reports consistently to Keitel and was considered a poor organizer. Hitler lost trust in Canaris and disbanded the Abwehr in early 1944. See Barbier, *D-Day Deception*, 158–160; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 105, 175; Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters: 1939–45* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1964), 409.

- ²⁰ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 64.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 19–20.
- ²² Rommel and Army Group B were subordinate to OB West only on paper. Rommel consistently appealed to Hitler directly for operational decision approvals. See Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 20, 48.
- ²³ Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 3–9.
- ²⁴ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 9.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Richard Townshend Bickers, *Air War Normandy* (London: L. Coopers, 1994), 88.
- ²⁷ Richard Brett-Smith, *Hitler's Generals* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1976), 125.
- ²⁸ Bickers, *Air War Normandy*, 89.
- ²⁹ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 9; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 19.
- ³⁰ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 86; James F. Tent, *E-Boat Alert: Defending the Normandy Invasion Fleet* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 112.
- ³¹ See JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, IV-19–IV-40. For a variation on center of gravity (COG), the German military used the term *Schwerpunkt* (weight of main effort).
- ³² *Ibid.*, IV-19.
- ³³ Helmut Heiber and David M. Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942–1945: The First Complete Stenographic Record of the Military Situation Conferences, from Stalingrad to Berlin* (London: Greenhill, 2002), 311, 314, 918; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 71; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 207.
- ³⁴ Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals*, 314; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 92.
- ³⁵ Friedrich Ruge, *Rommel in Normandy: Reminiscences* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1979), 4.
- ³⁶ Hitler was likely reviewing reports on the Tehran and Cairo conferences, which finalized the plans for Operation *Overlord*. See Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals*, 311, 314, 918.
- ³⁷ Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 63.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.
- ³⁹ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 42. A consequence of this was that commanders, fearing betrayal and severe consequences for failure, began to underestimate their strength and overestimate enemy capabilities. See Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 204.
- ⁴⁰ Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals*, 959.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 963; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 88.
- ⁴² These troops were reported to have fought well at D-Day. See Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals*, 438, 970.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 965; Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 236–237.
- ⁴⁴ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 91.
- ⁴⁵ JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, IV-19–IV-40.
- ⁴⁶ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 41.
- ⁴⁷ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 69; Tent, *E-Boat Alert*, 51.
- ⁴⁸ Only 10 to 15 U-boats went out after the invasion. See Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 40.
- ⁴⁹ Tent, *E-Boat Alert*, 58.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 69.
- ⁵² JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, IV-19–IV-40.
- ⁵³ Bickers, *Air War Normandy*, 87.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 88–89.
- ⁵⁵ JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, IV-19–IV-40.
- ⁵⁶ Brett-Smith, *Hitler's Generals*, 189.
- ⁵⁷ Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 65, 78, 195–196, 198.
- ⁵⁸ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 22–23.
- ⁵⁹ Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 128–129.
- ⁶⁰ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 53.
- ⁶¹ Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 5.
- ⁶² In fact, the Allies could land only a third of this number; the Germans were falling for Operation *Fortitude*, a deception campaign designed to make the Pas de Calais seem to be the intended target. See Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals*, 953, 965.
- ⁶³ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 83–84. The combined air offensive concentrated on bombing submarine construction yards, transportation systems, manufacturing plants, oil refineries, and other war-producing industries. As such, Luftwaffe fighter operations shifted to protect the homeland. See Albert Norman, *Operation Overlord: The Allied Invasion of Western Europe* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing, 1952), 141.
- ⁶⁴ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 65.
- ⁶⁵ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 33, 36.
- ⁶⁶ Keitel made a series of decisions that, at best, demonstrated a lack of competence. OKW did not change its 1939–1941 decision model that assumed unhindered troop movements, despite the reports of subordinate commanders that the Allies gained air superiority. See Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 35. On June 6, 1944, OKW disapproved of the movement of seven divisions from the Fifteenth Army to Normandy. See Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 85–87.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 34–35, 50–51.
- ⁶⁸ OKW consistently supported Rommel's requests. See Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 49–50; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 66. Rundstedt also disagreed with Rommel in flooding wide areas of the countryside, believing it was too hard on the local population. On this matter, OKW stepped in to side with Rommel. See Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 53.
- ⁶⁹ Brett-Smith, *Hitler's Generals*, 34.
- ⁷⁰ Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals*, 970.
- ⁷¹ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 37.
- ⁷² JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, IV-28.
- ⁷³ Normandy was listed as the third most likely invasion target, after the Fifteenth Army English Channel sector and the Fifteenth Army Seine estuary sector. See Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 37; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 26, 63.
- ⁷⁴ Zimmermann et al., *OB West*, 57–58.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 72, 75; Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 29.
- ⁷⁶ Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 42, 74–75.
- ⁷⁷ Tent, *E-Boat Alert*, 108.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.
- ⁸⁰ In the Lyme Bay disaster, 9 E-boats destroyed 2 landing ship tanks and killed 789 servicemen. See *ibid.*, 9–22.
- ⁸¹ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 83–84.
- ⁸² Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 42, 74–75.
- ⁸³ Bickers, *Air War Normandy*, 89. On D-Day, the Allies had an air strength ratio of 25 to 1. See Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 28.
- ⁸⁴ Kershaw, *Landing on the Edge of Eternity*, 219.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.
- ⁸⁶ Ruge, *Rommel in Normandy*, x, 109, 119, 123, 124.
- ⁸⁷ Isby, *Fighting the Invasion*, 26, 63.
- ⁸⁸ Brett-Smith, *Hitler's Generals*, 268.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.
- ⁹⁰ Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 235.