



## *From Victory to Stalemate: The Western Front, Summer 1944* by C.J. Dick.

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Review by Steven D. Mercatante, Brighton, MI (sdmercatante@yahoo.com).

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C.J. Dick's *From Victory to Stalemate* is the first of two volumes<sup>1</sup> examining operations on Germany's western and eastern fronts in 1944. The author means to provide "a comparative critique of the differing approaches employed by the Allied powers ... against the Wehrmacht of Hitler's Germany during the summer of 1944" (ix). In so doing, he "put[s] forward broad arguments about the conduct of war at the operational level—the handling of armies and army groups by both the Western Allies and the Red Army in contemporaneous campaigns" (1). He succeeds admirably in achieving these goals within the scope of the present volume.

The book comprises seven long but accessible chapters, on several critically important military operations in Western Europe: Cobra, Bluecoat, the Falaise Pocket, the Pursuit across France, and Market-Garden among others. Each explains why the Allied offensive fell short of its strategic goals by September 1944.

The chapters uniformly feature discussions of objectives assigned to the Allied armies, the nature of German opposition, and the role of terrain. Dick recounts specific operations as they unfolded, assessing and comparing their efficacy. Each chapter addresses Allied leadership on the army, army-group, and theater levels. The selection of maps is more than adequate.

Chapter 1, "Immature Armies," carefully differentiates between the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of the military art as well as the characteristics of effective generalship. Biographical sketches of key Allied commanders describe the training and combat experience that shaped them, as well the culture and doctrine of their respective armies.

Chapter 2, "The Tipping Point," turns to the condition of the opposing armies on the eve of Cobra, the operation designed to effect a breakout from the Normandy lodgment where the growing Allied armies had been pent up since D-Day.

Beginning in chapter 3, "July: Breakthrough and Near Breakthrough," the author investigates Allied commanders' practice of the operational art. He examines the methodology that made Operation Cobra successful, while the British-led 21st Army Group fell short of its goals. The discussion here of Bluecoat is most welcome, since it is often overshadowed by the larger operations conducted by the same Army Group, such as Goodwood, Totalize, and Tractable.

Chapter 4, "August: Incomplete Encirclements," describes the pursuit that followed Cobra's penetration of German lines in Normandy. The author criticizes Allied leaders for failing to capitalize on German errors and to completely destroy the Seventh Army and Panzer Group West (later, Fifth Panzer Army). Instead, though they later suffered heavy losses in the Falaise Pocket, the two armies escaped with enough men to constitute a German defensive front in the Netherlands, Lorraine, and along the German border that stalled the Allied pursuit well short of its goals after the success of Cobra. Among the senior Allied leaders involved in these operations, Dick writes, only Lt. Gen. George Patton distinguished himself. Though the chapter covers well-trod ground in examining the unhelpful

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1. Joint title: *Decisive and Indecisive Military Operations*.

rivalries among Allied generals, its analysis of the potentials—realized or not—of the Allied operational art is compelling.

Chapter 5, “September: Operational Ideas and Developments on the Ground,” delves more deeply into the post-Normandy pursuit across France. Dick reviews in detail Allied pre-invasion plans and expectations and elucidates why the Allies failed to take full advantage of their initial success. A leit-motif here is the disunity in command. It is common knowledge that Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, Patton, and Gen. Omar Bradley often disagreed sharply. While Dick does not explore how exactly that disunity played out, he does cogently explain these men’s subversion of the operational wishes of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces. He also argues that Gen. Dwight Eisenhower’s inability to rein in his subordinates contributed to Allied failures .

The book truly shines in its larger discussion of logistics. In chapter 6, “Logistic Realities,” the author describes the problems caused by the Allies’ inability to streamline an increasingly overburdened supply chain and communications network. But for these mistakes, they might even have established bridgeheads on the Rhine and threatened the most vital strategic target in Western Europe: the Ruhr Valley, the industrial heart of the Third Reich.

Chapter 7 offers a penetrating look at “Command, Operational Art, and Generalship.” None of the major Allied generals escapes criticism, except for, ironically, Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey. Eisenhower, Montgomery, Bradley, Patton, Gen. Harry Crerar, and Gen. Courtney Hodges are indicted for their mediocre practice of the operational art, a critique that likely anticipates volume 2’s examination of the superior operational performance of Soviet commanders.

The author does, however, give praise where it is due. Even Crerar and Hodges have their moments. Bradley is commended for Operation Cobra and Patton for his stress on tempo and speed as a means to shock and destroy enemy forces. Moreover, the (rightly) much maligned Montgomery is commended for the overall planning for Allied operations in Normandy during the difficult buildup and attritional prelude to Cobra. That said, he is also excoriated for his failure, following the capture of Antwerp, to clear the approaches to this most important port in Western Europe and for permitting the German 15th Army to elude an easily closed trap. Dick is correct to call these the biggest Allied mistakes of the campaign.

C.J. Dick has an enviable knack for bolstering his analyses and critiques with commonsense observations. Again and again, he reveals how easily the Allies could have avoided their unforced errors and hastened Germany’s defeat. But he does not fault Allied commanders alone:

A significant portion of the blame for failings in generalship must be laid at the door of doctrinal inadequacies. The conceptual boundaries of most Anglo-American generals of 1944 had been established in some cases by experience in the 1914–1918 war and in most cases by their respective interwar staff colleges and by the writings and mentoring of their formative years. Moreover, the British and US armies drew different, often incompatible lessons from their historical experiences. The resulting ideas were not well attuned to the demands the armies faced.... The interwar armies had not fully grasped the implications of the revolution in military affairs that was taking place; they used new technologies to make incremental improvements to existing doctrine rather than experimenting with qualitatively new and different methods. (362–63)

*From Victory to Stalemate* should be required reading for anyone interested in either the conception and execution of operations or the art of generalship itself.