

Operation cobra



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Operation Cobra is a part of the Normandy operation aimed to force out the German troops and withdrawal of the military actions out of the Normandy, which is located on the northwest coast of France. The operation started after the D-Day landings. The offensive started on July 25, 1944 and lasted till July 31, 1944 (Pugsley, 2004). The main warfare was allocated around the Saint Lo, the third largest town in Normandy.

The belligerents were Allied forces under the direction of General Eisenhower and the German Oberbefehlshaber West commanded by Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge (Combat Studies Institute, 1984). US Forces were presented by 12th Army Group, 1st Army, 3rd Army, VIII Corps, 4th Armoured Divisions (Combat Studies Institute, 1984). The major American commanders that were leading the operation were Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, General George S. Patton, General Dwight Eisenhower, and General Courtney Hodges (Zaloga, 2001). The German part conducted the warfare with LXXXIV Corps, 7th Army, 116 PZ DIV, 91st Day (Combat Studies Institute, 1984) under the command of Gunther von Kluge, Paul Hausser, and Eugen Meindl (Zaloga, 2001).

The research sources used for this paper are three books, namely Operation Cobra, 1944: Breakout from Normandy (Zaloga, 2001), Operation Cobra (Pugsley, 2004) and Operation Cobra (Combat Studies Institute, 1984). The research uses an article The Botched Air Support of Operation Cobra by Sullivan (1988) and Atlas of World War II (Natkiel & Sommer, 1985).

Zaloga (2001) uses information from US Military Achieves (West Point, New York) and the Military History Institute at the US Army War College (Carlisle

Barracks, Pennsylvania). The book describes the opposing commanders, operation plans for US and Germany forces, and details of the operation. It is a historical report with photos and maps, however, it is easy to read and understand. The work of Pugsley (2004) is a part of the Battle Zone series by authors from Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. The book, as any other book of the series, is a historical account and a battlefield tour. It outlines the opposing forces, battlefield tours and actions using the descriptions, photos and maps. Combat Studies Institute (1984) book includes data on strategic settings, tactical situation, battle description and the significance of the operation. The aim of the authors was to separate and follow the actions of the forces in Operation Cobra. The book is old and includes descriptions only. However, the authors of the chapters are the officers, so they describe the actions from the professional point of view. The Sullivan's article (1988) was published in the US Army's Senior Professional Journal, so it thoroughly describes and criticizes the dispositions of the forces and military actions from the military commander's point of view and for the professionals. It includes a map and uses a large amount of references, which proves the high level of trustworthiness. The Atlas of World War II is a documentary outline of all operation theatres during the World War II. One chapter is deducted to the Normandy operation. The source includes detailed maps and their descriptions.

The Cobra Operation originated as a part of World War II when Germany tried to dominate Europe economically and politically. Two military alliances were the belligerents in the war, namely the aggressing part, Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) and Allies (United Kingdom, France, Soviet Union and

the USA), the defending part. After the quick success of Germany in 1939-1943, the Allies started to supersede the German troops. By 1944, the German troops were displaced from the territory of the Soviet Union and thus Germany loses its positions on the East theatre of operations (Natkiel & Sommer, 1985). In June 1944, the Allies started the Normandy invasion. The operation is known as a Normandy Landings or the D-Day operation. It preceded the Cobra Operation aimed to “ disrupt German transportation to prevent reinforcement from reaching Normandy” (Zaloga, 2001).

The operation was scheduled for July 24, but the weather conditions were unfavourable, and as the operation was about to start with an aerial bombarding, it was postponed. There were heavy overcast over the battle theater (Pugsley, 2004).

The terrain tended to hinder the mechanized warfare. The Norman terrain had the hedgerows and swamps that traversed the countryside. The territory had four main roads that headed south and three leading to east-west across the Cotentin. The Allies forces had to develop the means to go through the hedgerows (Rhino tanks) and examine the territory to check that the ground north of higher St. Lo-Periers was drier. The hedgerows neutralized the ability of the Tiger's guns to penetrate the American tanks at 2500 yard (Combat Studies Institute, 1984). The territory around the Coutances St. Lo plateau has several ridges, including the ridges around the highway. The terrain protected the advance route and was a blocking position for the Germans, opposing Corps withdrawal route.

The Allies forces consisted of 23 compartments as listed in the work of Combat Studies Institute (1984), among which were eight infantry divisions and three armoured divisions. The technology used was medium weight tanks, with 75 and 90mm high velocity guns, manoeuvrable tanks with 37 and 75 mm guns, artillery weapon systems of 105 and 155 mm. The Allied forces gave the preference to speed and manoeuvrability and employment techniques to weight. The artillery was supported by cavalry. Logistics support was the complicated issue as the lines of communications were long, and the forces moved quickly. The supply lines were 30-40 miles long. The Allies divisions were well-trained; the soldiers were battle wise and dedicated that lead to the operation success. The commanders were experienced. However, they faced difficulties passing the orders due to high mobility of forces. For instance, the interval between sending the message and the receipt of acknowledgement from the corps was 24-34 hours (Pugsley, 2004). The attacking commanders used the intelligence data to estimate the corps that oppose them. First Army's intelligence estimated Germans are not likely to counterattack during the first few days after Cobra's launch (Pugsley, 2004).

Combat Studies Institute (1984) lists the German forces as 2 infantry, 1 Parachute division, 4 Panzer Divisions, 1 Panzergrenadier Division, total about 17, 000 soldiers. The tank forces were estimated as 100 (Pugsley, 2004), mainly medium tanks off 75 mm guns. Although the German forces had technical superiority, they lost the Allies in quantity. The Germans experienced severe supply difficulties as the infrastructure was destroyed by air forces. This lead to manpower shortages in front, as well as supply and

equipment shortages (fuel, ammunition, ration). The German intelligence has failed during the Cobra Operation. Some divisions were reorganized and rehabilitated, and the cadres with combat experience were weak. The leaders were outdated. Furthermore, the soldiers, who spent about 2 years in France, were spoilt by French wine, women and laziness. The corps training was under the level of the tasks that they were to fulfill (Combat Studies Institute, 1984).

The strategic aim of the Allies was to liberate the Western Europe. The aim of the operation was to destroy German armed forces. The battle was as a checkpoint, and in two months, the Allies kept on carrying battles across France, Belgium, Luxemburg to Germany.

The German defense organization was poor; the commandment has not even decided which method of defense it prefers. As a result, no proper defense course was achieved. During the operation, Allies forces experienced low resistance numerous times.

On the 25 July 600 Allied fighter bombers attacked the Saint Lo area where the Germans allocated the artillery. The next attack occurred several hours later, when 1, 800 bombers attacked the road around Saint Lo. Then, the third and fourth wave followed. The plan was to approach the target from the east, but the bombers approached from north, resulting in Allies forces losses. Then, the infantry started its actions, moving along the German outpost line (Sullivan, 1988).

The second day has resulted in occupation of road junction, located north of Le Mesnil-Herman. On 27 July, the Allies forces moved forward rapidly. The

analysis proves that the Germans failed to defense the borders of the front. Although Germans made several attempts of the counterattacks, they lost and abandoned vehicles. On 30 July, the US forces reached the Avranches, inducing the German loses in manpower and tanks. The Cobra operation devastated German forces and created the conditions for the breakthrough of the German forces back to homeland (Pugsley, 2004).

Despite the damages due to bombing and false bombing, the military history counts the operation successful. The severe destruction of the Normandy area was the reasonable price for the results achieved. The significant conclusions of the operation, as interpreted by Combat Studies Institute (1984) follow. The artillery support significantly assists in accomplishing the objective. The communication speed between the commanders and the troops is vital as commanders were forced to act independently, as the situation changed quickly, while they could not get the operative information. The operation gave experience on combined acts of air and infantry and proved the effectiveness of this combination in a fast moving situation. The false bombing was the sign of the thorough planning necessity during the aerial attacks. The mobility of troops is vital as it allows swinging the direction of attacks. However, the logistic issues were rationalized. The operation showed that the troops training proved its effectiveness.