

**Home by Christmas:  
The Illusion of Victory  
in 1944**

*RONALD ANDIDORA*

**GREENWOOD PRESS**

# Home by Christmas

**Recent Titles in  
Contributions in Military Studies**

The Formative Influences, Theories, and Campaigns of the Archduke Carl of Austria

*Lee Eysturlid*

Great Captains of Antiquity

*Richard A. Gabriel*

Doctrine Under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I

*Mark E. Grotelueschen*

Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War

*Edward J. Erickson*

Surgeons at War: Medical Arrangements for the Treatment of the Sick and Wounded in the British Army during the late 18th and 19th Centuries

*Matthew H. Kaufman*

Soviet Military Assistance: An Empirical Perspective

*William H. Mott*

The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It

*David M. Toczek*

The Emperor's Friend: Marshal Jean Lannes

*Margaret Scott Chrisawn*

An Uncertain Trumpet: The Evolution of U.S. Army Infantry Doctrine, 1919–1941

*Kenneth Finlayson*

Death Waits in the "Dark": The Senoi Praaq, Malaysia's Killer Elite

*Roy Davis Linville Jumper*

War Wings: The United States and Chinese Military Aviation, 1929–1949

*Guangqiu Xu*

A Navy Second to None: The History of U.S. Naval Training in World War I

*Michael D. Besch*

# Home by Christmas \_\_\_\_\_

*The Illusion of Victory in 1944*

RONALD ANDIDORA

Contributions in Military Studies,  
Number 216



GREENWOOD PRESS

Westport, Connecticut • London

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Andidora, Ronald, 1953—

Home by Christmas : the illusion of victory in 1944 / Ronald Andidora.

p. cm.—(Contributions in military studies, ISSN 0883-6884 ; no. 216)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-313-31751-8 (alk. paper)

1. Nineteen forty-four, A.D. 2. World War, 1939-1945—Campaigns—Western Front. I. Series.

D756.A575 2002

940.54'21—dc21 2001033680

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2002 by Ronald Andidora

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2001033680

ISBN: 0-313-31751-8

ISSN: 0883-6884

First published in 2002

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

[www.greenwood.com](http://www.greenwood.com)

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

The maps and diagrams that support this text were produced by Dawn M. Smith. Her time and talents are greatly appreciated.

The photographs of the Allied commanders were acquired from the U.S. Army Military Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

A final note of appreciation must go to my long-suffering wife, Judy. Her forbearance was exceeded only by her computer skills, which proved indispensable to a nineteenth-century man trying to cope with an incomprehensible world.

To  
Russell Weigley and  
George Will

# CONTENTS ---

*Illustrations*      **ix**

*Acknowledgments*      **xi**

*Introduction*      **xiii**

1. Marriage of Convenience      **1**
2. The Heart of the Enemy      **9**
3. Ways and Means      **21**
4. Success and Stalemate      **37**
5. Agonizing Appraisal      **51**
6. Breakout and Meltdown      **65**
7. Plague of Options      **79**
8. A World Turned Upside Down      **97**
9. Competing Panacea      **111**
10. The Harsh Mistress      **127**
11. Past Imperfect      **141**



## **Contents**

12. Single Thrust Refuted      **155**

13. The Illusion of Victory      **171**

*Notes*      **181**

*Bibliography*      **195**

*Index*      **199**

# ILLUSTRATIONS ---

## PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1 General Dwight D. Eisenhower      **xv**
- 2 General Patton, General Bradley, and Field Marshal Montgomery      **xvi**

## MAPS

- 3.1 Northwest Europe      **22**
- 4.1 Normandy Front July 24, 1944      **50**
- 6.1 Operation COBRA July 25–29, 1944      **66**
- 7.1 Allied Breakout August 1944      **94**
- 9.1 Germany's Western Frontier      **113**
- 11.1 Montgomery's Single Thrust (Including Operation MARKET-GARDEN) vs. Residual German Strength      **153**
- 12.1 Operation MARKET-GARDEN September 17–26, 1944      **157**



Photo 1. General Dwight D. Eisenhower. U.S. Army Military History Institute.



Photo 2. General Patton, General Bradley, and Field Marshal Montgomery. U.S. Army Military History Institute.



# INTRODUCTION

---

The campaign to liberate Western Europe from Nazi tyranny is an uneven story in which periods of static positional warfare contrast sharply with sudden outbursts of movement. This cycle was especially prevalent in the French phase of the campaign, which took place from early June to mid-September of 1944. After landing in Normandy, Allied ground troops experienced seven weeks of virtual stalemate in which forward progress was excruciatingly slow and extremely costly. During this period, unsuccessful but ruthlessly prosecuted British offensives had forced the Germans to concentrate the bulk of their armored strength on their right flank. Thus, when the Americans launched a concentrated attack against the German left on July 25th, they finally achieved a decisive breakthrough. Allied mobility then turned the campaign into a war of movement that rapidly swept the German Army out of France. But logistical constraints then demarked the limits of the road march at the German border, ushering in a new period of generally static fighting.

Allied morale understandably rose and fell in direct proportion to battlefield success. Initially, the greatest source of anxiety within the Western Alliance was the prospect of failure at the water's edge. This fear naturally gave way to a wave of relief with the establishment of footholds on all five invasion beaches by the evening of June 6, 1944. However, the prevailing mood then turned into depression during the weeks of stalemate when neither the British nor the Americans seemed able to significantly expand the lodgement area. As casualties mounted, the intractable German defense began conjuring up new fears that the campaign might degenerate into the same

## Introduction

bloody attrition that had ruled the battlefields of World War I. But after their breakout, Allied spirits soared to euphoric heights as they chased an apparently crumbling German Army back to its homeland.

By the late summer of 1944, the Allies' lightning dash through France had raised morale to the point of producing an illusory expectation of imminent victory. As their forces approached the borders of the Third Reich, British and American generals began to champion competing alternatives to replace the original plan of advancing into Germany on a broad front. The proponents of these so-called "single-thrusts" ignored their growing logistical inadequacies and justified themselves by what proved to be a gross misreading of Germany's residual capacity for resistance. In sum, they caused a mini-crisis within the Allied command and left a historical controversy which still persists.

The failure of postwar retrospectives to dispel the illusion of victory in 1944 has often allowed this unreasonable expectation to become the standard against which the campaign is measured. Unfortunately, this view sometimes obscures the magnitude of the Allied accomplishment by focusing on an improbable scenario and then casting blame for its failure to reach fruition. This study is not so presumptuous as to purport that it finally lays the issue to rest. Hopefully, however, it will at least illuminate the subject sufficiently to be viewed in a more coherent light, devoid of parochialism and wishful thinking.

# 1

## MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

---

Winston Churchill had been at war with Adolf Hitler and the Nazis long before hostilities commenced between Germany and Great Britain on September 3, 1939. As 1941 entered its final month, the British Prime Minister could reflect back upon a struggle that had begun with his warning cries from the political wilderness in the early 1930s. Those years were rife with frustration, as Churchill's strident advocacy for rearmament went unheeded by the general public and made him a pariah within his own political party. When rearmament did begin in 1936, it was pursued in such a halfhearted and haphazard manner that England still found herself grossly unprepared when the war finally came.

Churchill had entered the War Cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty and then, in May of 1940, was asked to form a government. But his frustrations only multiplied once he assumed the reigns of the British Empire's rusty war chariot. Churchill became prime minister just in time to watch France collapse in six weeks and Benito Mussolini bring Italy into the war on the side of Germany. Standing alone against the Axis Powers, Britain then endured an aerial blitz of its cities by the planes of the *Luftwaffe* and a systematic assault upon her maritime lifeline by German U-boats. Churchill's trepidations also extended to the ground war which saw the British Army ignominiously evicted from Greece and bedeviled by General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps in the Libyan desert.

Great Britain's isolation had ended on June 22, 1941, when Hitler's Operation Barbarossa hurled over 130 German divisions against the Soviet Union. Despite his bitter aversion to communism, Churchill immediately made



## Home by Christmas

common cause with Russian dictator Joseph Stalin against the greater evil posed by Hitler. But Britain could as yet provide the Soviets with little tangible aid, leaving Churchill to watch in horror, as Stalin's Red Army seemed to disintegrate under the mechanized onslaught of the German *blitzkrieg*. Mercifully however, the *Wehrmacht's* logistical apparatus was not prepared to deal with Russia's vast distances and rugged terrain. After coming within sight of the spires of Moscow, the exhausted Germans were pushed back by Stalin's final reserves and forced to hunker down for the winter. But, the German Army remained ensconced deep in the Russian hinterland, and would undoubtedly regain the initiative after the spring thaw.

Churchill decided to spend the first weekend of December at his country retreat at Chequers. After Sunday dinner, he received an unconfirmed report of a Japanese air raid against the United States Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. Within minutes, he contacted American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who confirmed the news, saying, "We are all in the same boat now."<sup>1</sup> The damage inflicted by Japan's surprise attack at Pearl Harbor might have supported a conclusion that the boat was sinking. But Churchill felt otherwise. He later wrote of his feelings on the evening of December 7, 1941:

So we had won after all! . . . How long the war would last or in what fashion it would end, no man could tell, nor did I at this moment care. Once again in our long Island history we should emerge, however mauled or mutilated, safe and victorious . . . Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder. All the rest was merely the proper application of overwhelming force . . . Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his time of troubles, Churchill never wavered from his faith that England's deliverance would come from the United States. An American mother plus a keen sense of history had given him insight into the American character as well as a romantic, albeit accurate, appreciation of the country's undeveloped potential. Churchill regarded the United States as a "gigantic boiler" which, once lit, had "no limit to the power it can generate."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he felt that the marriage of America's lusty vitality to Great Britain's solidity would be a match of "complimentary virtues and resources."<sup>4</sup> Finally, a partnership between cultural "parent and child" satisfied Churchill's sense of historical destiny.<sup>5</sup> The New World had marched forth to help Great Britain defeat Imperial Germany in World War I. It was fitting that the Americans would once again stand shoulder to shoulder with the British and smash Hitler's Third Reich.

President Roosevelt recognized early on that Great Britain was fighting on the front lines of a conflict that could eventually involve the United States. He therefore saw the value of preserving Churchill's island as both a buffer and a potential base. But hamstrung by the isolationist sentiments of his constituents, the American president could take only incremental steps to aid Britain and prepare his own country for war. As Hitler ran amok throughout Europe, however, Roosevelt's steps grew progressively bolder. In September of 1940, he authorized the transfer of 50 destroyers of World War I vintage to the Royal Navy in exchange for leases on several British bases in the Western Hemisphere. When Britain faced bankruptcy the following spring, Roosevelt initiated the Lend-Lease Program to replace the existing "cash and carry" policy governing the sale of American armaments to belligerents. Lend-Lease, which provided war materials to Britain free of charge, was explained, in the president's folksy analogy, as the equivalent of "lending a garden hose to a neighbor whose house was on fire."<sup>6</sup> Lend-Lease aid was also formally extended to the Soviet Union in August of 1941.

Meanwhile, Roosevelt took measures to insure that the merchandise got through to its destination. In April of 1941, the U.S. Navy began to aggressively patrol the western half of the Atlantic Ocean for German submarines and report any sightings to the British. Five months later, U.S. destroyers began escorting British convoys of merchant ships across that same expanse of ocean before turning them over to the Royal Navy near Iceland. Although Hitler saw this as a deliberate provocation, he strictly prohibited his submarine captains from attacking American vessels. Nevertheless, two U.S. destroyers were torpedoed in October, including the *Reuben James* which sank with the loss of 115 lives. But even this tragedy was not sufficient pretext for Roosevelt to take the final leap into full partnership against the Axis Powers.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor finally shoved the United States into the war but only in what was generally regarded as secondary theatre. The Japanese had been waging war against China since 1937, but Roosevelt's grand strategy sought to delay a showdown in the Far East in order to concentrate on Europe. Therefore his response to Japanese aggression had come primarily in the diplomatic and economic areas. So while Pearl Harbor made war with Japan inevitable, it was not necessarily sufficient pretext for war against Hitler. But Germany and Italy were bound to Japan by the Tripartite Pact of 1940 that, in its essence, required each signatory to aid any one that was attacked by the United States.<sup>7</sup> On December 11, 1941, Hitler solved Roosevelt's problem by interpreting the treaty liberally and declaring war on the United States. It seemed that the idyllic union envisioned by Churchill would indeed be consummated.

## Home by Christmas

The geopolitical partnership that Winston Churchill sought with the United States turned out to be a basically cooperative and overwhelmingly successful venture. But it also included sources of friction that made the marriage less than an ideal match. Despite their common antecedents, the two nations had a history of conflict. The United States won its independence through armed insurrection against the motherland and then defended its sovereignty against British encroachments in the War of 1812. Furthermore, Great Britain was an imperial power and her prime minister was an unreconstructed apologist for the Empire. Despite its periodic forays into the affairs of Latin America and its acquisition of the Philippines, the United States still saw itself as progressive and anticolonial. British society was founded upon a rigid class structure that was manifest in the stiff and formal manner of its soldiers and statesmen. Conversely, the United States prided itself on the social mobility reflected in the informality of its own leaders. Finally, many Englishmen projected a condescending attitude toward the United States, regarding it as an adolescent whose physical maturity was not matched by its wisdom or judgment. Americans naturally resented this smug air of superiority and questioned its justification.

The aforementioned problems, though irritating on a personal level, were largely matters of style, which can always be overcome by reasonable men of common purpose. Yet, the purpose itself was not necessarily common to all concerned as 1941 drew to a close. Any poll taken at that time would most likely have shown that a popular consensus of Americans wished to concentrate immediately upon the Japanese.<sup>8</sup> This view was also shared by many within the U.S. Navy, most importantly its Chief of Operations, Admiral Earnest J. King. The issue was laid to rest when Churchill came to Washington for the ARCADIA Conference in late December. There, Roosevelt's inclinations coalesced with those of the British and U.S. Army Chief-of-Staff George C. Marshall to reaffirm the "Germany first" strategy. The conference also created the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff, made up of representatives from Britain and the United States, to chart the future course of the war.

The specific plot of that course would become the greatest source of discord within the grand alliance. American planners supported a speedy implementation of a direct approach, which envisioned crossing the English Channel, defeating the German Army in France, and then driving into Germany itself. The British were more cautious, emphasizing the value of peripheral operations in the Mediterranean and an expansion of the strategic bombing campaign against German industry and morale. Each nation's point of view was founded in its history, both long-term and recent.

For most of its long history of involvement in European affairs, Great Britain pursued a peripheral strategy, which relied primarily on naval power

and projected only small land forces onto the continent itself. In the Seven Years War, she acquired a global empire by fighting mainly in North America, leaving European battles to the Prussian Army of Frederick the Great. Against Napoleon, Wellington's small British force operated in the Iberian Peninsula while the much larger armies of Prussia, Russia, and Austria took on the main French force in central Europe. Even at Waterloo, which must be regarded as a direct confrontation of Napoleon's primary army, less than one-half of Wellington's troops were actually British.

Great Britain's strategy veered sharply away from its traditional course during the Great War of 1914–1918. Her small professional army was quickly committed to the main theatre in France and was virtually annihilated by the war's first winter. Britain responded with an unprecedented expansion of her ground forces, fueled initially by a rush of volunteerism and sustained through conscription. By the war's final year, the British Army was maintaining some 60 divisions in France as well as significant forces in the Middle East and in the Balkans. With victory came a butcher's bill to the Empire of over one million dead, including nearly 900,000 from the British Isles.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the folly of the exception provided by World War I seemed to confirm the wisdom of the rule that had previously governed British policy.

American military leaders drew their lessons primarily from their nation's experience in the Civil War of 1861–1865. They remembered that despite its overwhelming material preponderance, the Union had stumbled for three years until General Ulysses S. Grant took charge of its war effort. Grant then applied unrelenting pressure to grind down Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia while directing subsidiary operations against the civilian infrastructure that supported it. In less than one year, Lee had surrendered his army at Appomattox and the Confederacy had ceased to exist. To the U.S. Army, the Civil War stood for the proposition that victory was best achieved by using all possible means to defeat the main enemy force in the decisive theatre of battle. Its limited experience in World War I proved nothing to the contrary. Germany capitulated only after its army had been defeated repeatedly in battles on the Western Front throughout the late summer and the autumn of 1918.

The attitude of the Americans was perhaps best expressed by a colonel at the Army War Plans Division. Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote in his diary that winter: "We've got to go to Europe and fight, and we've got to quit wasting resources all over the world—and still worse—wasting time. If we're going to keep Russia in . . . we've got to begin slugging with air at Western Europe; to be followed with a land attack as soon as possible."<sup>10</sup>

In fairness to the British, it must be pointed out that they generally agreed in principle with the need to open a second front in France. (Russia was the

## Home by Christmas

first front.) For instance, while Churchill's main priority at the ARCADIA Conference was getting the Americans involved in the Mediterranean, he also looked beyond that immediate goal. The written assessment of the war that he presented to Roosevelt included the following:

The war can only be ended through the defeat in Europe of the German armies, or through internal convulsions in Germany produced by the unfavorable course of the war, economic privations and the Allied bombing offensive. As the strength of the United States, Great Britain and Russia develops and begins to be realized by the Germans, an internal collapse is always possible, but we must not count upon this. Our plans must proceed upon the assumption that the resistance of the German Army and Air Force will continue at its present level.<sup>11</sup>

Churchill's postwar writings cite this letter as proof of his early and unwavering support of a large-scale cross-channel invasion.<sup>12</sup> Yet the true nature of the British position might be found less in the document's passing endorsement of a second front than in its almost whimsical hope that internal convulsions within Germany would make it unnecessary. Churchill's ARCADIA letter further supports this suspicion by speaking of "three or four landings" by armies "strong enough to enable the conquered populations to revolt."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the memorandum can also stand as evidence of an exercise in wishful thinking rather than an endorsement of bold and direct action. If German morale could be crushed by bombing and internal revolt plus reverses on the Eastern Front and Mediterranean periphery, the cross-channel enterprise might then be a mere matter of picking up the pieces.

To the Americans, any such contention was complete balderdash. The existing U.S. Army doctrine held that only decisive defeat of the enemy's armed forces breaks his will and forces him to sue for peace.<sup>14</sup> Colonel Albert C. Wedemeyer, who prepared the blueprint for the composition of the U.S. Army in World War II, included in his paper, "We must prepare to fight Germany by actually coming to grips with and defeating her ground forces and definitely breaking her will to combat . . . effective and adequate ground forces must be available to close with and destroy the enemy inside his citadel."<sup>15</sup> Thus, whatever debate is justified concerning British strategic assumptions, those of the United States are quite clear. Nazi Germany would not collapse without a full-fledged cross-channel assault that stabbed at the heart of the enemy.

So much has been made of the divergent strategic views of Great Britain and the United States during World War II that their common premise has received little attention. It is important to note that each approach included

the assumption that Germany *would* collapse somewhere short of total annihilation. Even the Americans believed that, while victory would require hard fighting, it need not necessarily entail dismantling the Third Reich brick by brick. The source of this shared presumption can be found in the experience of the cataclysm that had engulfed Europe just one generation before.

In 1917, the equation that had so far yielded only bloody stalemate in Europe changed abruptly. Russia, wracked by internal revolution, dropped out of the Allied coalition, while the United States, driven by Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, opted in. Since Germany could shift her forces west from Russia much quicker than the United States could raise an army and ship it to France, the tradeoff favored the Germans for a fleeting moment. Accordingly, in the spring of 1918, Field Marshall Erich Ludendorff began a series of offensives that he hoped would win the war before the U.S. Army became a factor. The Germans gained ground and knocked assorted Allied Armies senseless, but failed to deliver the *coup-de-grace*. With the Americans now arriving in droves and his own losses staggering, Ludendorff was forced to go on the defensive.

By early August 1918, the depleted German Army was reeling backwards from Allied thrusts up and down the entire Western Front. These reverses continued into autumn, convincing Ludendorff that the German Army was spent, and causing Kaiser Wilhelm II to seek an armistice. When harsh Allied terms led the German leadership to reconsider its position, the German people decided the issue by taking to the streets in mass protest against continuing the war. Both the violent nature and left-wing tone of the public unrest gave strong indication that Germany was about to go the way of Russia one year before. Faced with the prospect of complete social disintegration, the German government felt compelled to accept an armistice that was tantamount to surrender.

The sequence of events that ended the First World War on November 11, 1918, understandably served as a strategic frame of reference to Allied planners during World War II. Each Ally dwelt on the decisive circumstance most in line with its own predilections. While the Americans focused more on the brutal fighting that broke the Kaiser's army on the battlefields of France, the British tended to emphasize the relentless naval blockade that literally starved the German people into submission on their home front. In truth, of course, victory sprang from a conjunction of both causes, plus a German leadership that finally chose to accept defeat rather than destroy their nation. Few Allied planners seemed to appreciate that even a combination of the first two factors might yield a different reaction from the more ruthless regime of the Nazis. As they continued their strategic debate, Great

## **Home by Christmas**

Britain and the United States would have been better served by a clearer understanding of their past successes and the nature of their present enemies.