

Chapter 15

The 90-Division Gamble

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Of all the calculated risks taken by General George C. Marshall in World War II none was bolder than the decision in mid-war to maintain the U.S. Army's ground combat strength at ninety divisions. Students of warfare will long debate whether the decision was as wise as it was courageous, as foresighted as it was successful.

The decision to limit the Army, ratified in May 1944 on the eve of OVERLORD, was a compound of necessity and choice. A variety of influences played a part in it—national policy, Allied strategy, air power, American technology, the balance between American war economy and manpower, logistical and operational requirements, the needs of Allies and sister services, and General Marshall's faith in the fighting qualities of the American soldier. The decision came at the end of a long series of steps going back to the pre-Pearl Harbor days when American planners had first begun to be concerned about the problem of determining the size and shape of the Army needed for global and coalition warfare. [1]

[1] The subject of this study is treated more fully in connection with mid-war strategic planning in Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1959). In addition to the works listed in the notes, published sources that provide helpful bibliographical leads or background are: Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1948); "The Army Re-Shaped," in Kent Roberts Greenfield, *The Historian and the Army* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 1954); and Bureau of the Budget, *The United States at War* (Washington, 1946).

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In the beginning the military had shared the traditional confidence of the nation at large that there would be sufficient resources and strength to meet the needs of war. Early estimates, in late 1941 and in 1942, of the "cutting edge"-in divisions-needed to win the war were high. In the Victory Program of the fall of 1941, the War Department projected an Army with a peak strength of 213 divisions. The Victory Program was premised on a strategic policy of offensive operations in Europe and on the assumption that the Soviet Army might collapse and the United States and Great Britain might have to defeat the huge armies of Germany unaided. [2] Throughout most of 1942 the common assumption in the War

Department was that it would ultimately be necessary to support at least two hundred divisions. [3] The Washington Army Staff recognized the parallel need of building a far-reaching, heavy-fisted air arm. The blueprint for that expansion, embodied in the 273-air-group program approved in September 1942, was to remain the Army Air Forces guide in World War II.

By the end of 1942, despite the turning of the tide of war, General Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, and his advisers were uneasy. They had seen their plan for an early cross-Channel operation-ROUNDUP-scuttled in favor of TORCH (invasion of northwest Africa) and divisions that they had hoped to concentrate in the United Kingdom skimmed off to meet the requirements of the northwest African and Pacific campaigns. This trend reinforced sober second thoughts they were beginning to have about the American manpower problem. To continue what appeared to them to be essentially a policy of drift in Allied strategy raised grave issues about mobilizing and deploying U.S. forces. Supporting a war of attrition and peripheral action, in place of concentrated effort, raised serious problems about the size and kind of Army the United States should and could maintain.

At the same time the conviction was growing that it was becoming both necessary and possible to plan on a more realistic, long-range basis for mobilizing the manpower-and resources-needed to win the war. The transition to the initiative in northwest Africa and in

[2] Accounts of the Victory Program planning are contained in (1) Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, 1950), Ch. XI; (2) Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, 1951), Ch. IV; and (3) Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington, 1953), pp. 58-62, 350-52, all in UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.

[3] In September G-3 reached its peak estimate of about 350 divisions needed to win the war. Memo, G-3 for CofS, 15 Sep 42, sub: Mobilization Plans, War Department G-3 files (WDGCT) 320 (9-15-42). The projected number of divisions grew in 1942, partly because estimated requirements for defeating Japan were superimposed on the original estimates for defeating Germany.

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the Pacific appeared to present the opportunity as well as the compulsion to define with greater certainty the main outlines of subsequent operations and to make more dependable estimates of how many trained and equipped units would be required.

To establish a proper manpower balance for the United States in wartime was as difficult as it was important. Out of some 25,000,000 Americans physically fit for military service, the absolute ceiling on the number that could be utilized for active duty was estimated to be between fifteen and sixteen million. [4] On the

surface, it was hard to understand, given this pool of manpower, why there should be any manpower problem at all. Why, if Germany could maintain a military establishment of 9,835,000 or 10.9 percent of its population and Britain could support 3,885,000 or 8.2, did American manpower officials insist in late 1942 that 10,500,000 or only 7.8 percent would be the maximum force that the country could sustain without incurring serious dislocation to the American economy? [5] The problem as well as the answer stemmed basically from the fact that the Allies had from the beginning accepted the proposition that the single greatest tangible asset the United States brought to the coalition in World War II was the productive capacity of its industry. From the very beginning, American manpower calculations were closely correlated with the needs of war industry.

The Army had therefore to compete for manpower not only with the needs of the other services but also with the prior claims of industry. Cutting too deeply into the industrial manpower of the country in order to furnish men for the Army and Navy might interfere seriously with arming U.S. troops and those of the Allies for the successful conduct of the war. Furthermore, the United States was fighting a global conflict. To service its lines of communications extending around the world required large numbers of men, and great numbers of troops were constantly in transit to and from the theaters. The problem for the Army was not only how much should it receive as its share of the manpower pool but also how to divide that share most effectively to meet the diverse demands made upon it. The progress of the war on the Russian front and the prospective air bombardment over the European continent still left uncertain, at the end of 1942, the Army's ultimate size as well as the number of combat divisions necessary to win the war. It was also still difficult to

[4] *Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, July 1, 1943 to June 30, 1945, to the Secretary of War*, p. 101.

[5] (1) OPD Brief, title: Notes ... 43d Mtg JPS, 28 Oct 42, filed with JPS 57/6 in Operations Division (OPD) files, ABC 370.01 (7-25-42), 2.

(2) Memo, Brig Gen Idwal H. Edwards for Lt Gen Joseph T. McNarney, 4 Feb 43, sub: Troop Basis, 1943, War Department Chief of Staff of the Army files, WDCSA 320.2, Sec. III (1942-43).

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predict with exactitude the casualty rates to be expected or the reserve strength that would be needed.

Postponement of the plan to launch a major cross-Channel operation in 1943 made the need of mobilizing a large U.S. ground army less immediate. Instead, greater emphasis was placed on first developing U.S. air power. Given this and anticipated limitations in shipping, it appeared at the end of 1942 that the projected deployment of a huge air force overseas by the end of 1944 would definitely restrict the number of divisions that could be sent overseas by that time. It was clearly undesirable to withdraw men from industry and agriculture

too long before they could actually be employed in military operations. Allowing a year to train a division, the mobilization of much more than a hundred divisions by the end of 1943 appeared to be premature. In late 1942, moreover, materiel procurement plans for the armed services for 1943, particularly for the Army ground program, were revised downward by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in response to a War Production Board recommendation. All these limiting factors pointed to the need for scaling down previous long-range calculations, as well as for effecting economies in manpower within the Army. [6]

The process of reducing earlier long-range estimates, begun on the War Department and joint planning levels toward the end of 1942, was clearly reflected in the approved Army troop basis for 1943, circulated by G-3 in January of that year. [7] This troop basis set the mobilization program for 1943 at 100 divisions. It called for a total Army strength of 8,208,000, a figure previously approved by the President. This troop basis marked the turning point in War Department and joint Army-Navy calculations. At last these estimates were approaching the ultimate ceiling strengths of the Army.

Efforts to formulate troop bases for 1944 and beyond that were being made at the same time pointed to the need for drastic reductions of earlier estimates. [8] The planners were working from the old assumption of the late 1941 and early 1942 period that the USSR might be defeated by the Germans, thus forcing on the Allies a far greater and more costly ground effort. Since the effects of the planned

[6] For a discussion of the late 1942 factors influencing Army troop basis calculations see Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington 1947), pp. 214-17.

[7] Memo, G-3 for CG AGF and CG SOS, 25 Jan 43, sub: Troop Unit Basis, 1943, WDGCT 320.2 General (1-25-43).

[8] The Victory Program of late 1941 had assumed a total of 10,199,101 men for the Army alone by June 1944, and as late as November 1942 the Joint Planners were estimating that 10,572,000 men would be needed for the Army by December 1944.

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bomber offensive from the United Kingdom were also unknown, the planners had had to take its possible failure into consideration. Viewing both of these factors pessimistically, it was inevitable the planners should produce high estimates envisaging a very large ground force. They calculated that it would be far easier to decrease an over-expanded Army than it would be to build up an inadequate one, especially since it took a year to train a division for combat. Add to their dilemma the uncertainties of shipping and production and the lack of firm strategic decisions to guide them and it was small wonder that the planners were overshooting the mark.

The JCS, on the other hand, faced with criticism of their use of manpower, had

realized that the planners' figures would not be accepted and had turned the manpower problem over to their senior advisers. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee concluded that the Joint Planners had gone astray in trying to match Allied forces, division for division, with the enemy. They held that proper consideration had been given neither to the relative efficiency of forces nor to prospective Allied air superiority and the effect of the bomber offensive on German morale and war effort. They recognized that shipping would determine the amount of force that could be applied, and they believed that Allied superiority in production would also be a controlling factor and should be exploited in every possible way. [9]

In line with this more optimistic outlook, the Army planners suggested that the most realistic approach to the manpower problem would be to agree upon the maximum number of men that could be inducted into the armed services without impairing the development of U.S. war production capacity. This number would represent the final troop basis, and strategy would be devised in accord with that figure. [10] Since the President in September 1942 had approved an Army of 8,208,000 for 1943, 8,208,000 appeared to be the logical figure with which to work.[11]

In January 1943, G-3 warned that the 8,208,000-man Army might approach the limit of manpower available and that adjustments from within would have to be made to secure the kind of Army needed to win the war. [12] Faced with the prospects of a declining manpower reserve and an improving strategic situation, the Army reviewed its

[9] JCS 154/1, 24 Dec 42, title: Troop Basis for All Services for 1944 and Beyond. JCS approved this study at their forty-eighth meeting on 29 December 1942.

[10] OPD Brief, title: Notes ... 48th Mtg JCS, 29 Dec 42, with JCS 154/1 in ABC 370.01 (7-25-42), 2.

[11] Memo, Admiral William D. Leahy for the President, 30 Sep 42, with JPS 57/D in ABC 370.01 (7 25 42), 2.

[12] Memo, Edwards for CGs AAF, AGF, ASF, 29 Jan 43, sub: Reduction in Training Establishments and Other Zone of Interior Activities, WDCSA 320.2 Sec. III (1942-43).

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employment of men in the continental United States. Early in January Marshall set up the War Department Manpower Board, with Maj. Gen. Lorenzo D. Gasser as its president, to make specific recommendations for reducing the forces assigned to the zone of the interior. [13]

In consonance with this economy drive, Marshall approved-in February-a new Army troop basis that called for an enlisted strength of 7,500,000 and between 120 and 125 divisions, for June 1944. The over-all goal for 1943 of 8,208,000, which included officers, was retained on the ground that such a force would be

necessary to take advantage of any favorable opportunities that might come to pass. [14]

Defense of these requirements before the Senate and against such critics as Herbert Hoover was made slightly more difficult by the unofficial opposition of certain Navy officers. [15] In early February five investigations on the subject of manpower were going on in the Senate and one in the House. The position of the Army in the face of this Congressional probing rested upon the heavy preponderance of divisions at the disposal of the enemy and the possible disaster that might ensue if the size of the Army was reduced and the disparity in combat divisions increased." [16] The War Department correctly gauged the reaction of Congress. Maj. Gen. Alexander D. Surles, director of the War Department Bureau of Public Relations, put it succinctly: "Despite all talk, Congress isn't sure, and members will not risk their political necks by taking a position where they might be charged with sabotaging the war effort. They will talk, but they won't act." [17]

Nevertheless, in order to fortify its own thinking and planning on mobilization, the Army decided that it should also conduct an investigation. In accord with the earnest efforts of the Chief of Staff to trim Army requirements, the Operations Division in February designated a special committee, headed by Col. William W. Bessell, Jr., to recommend changes in the current military program indicated by

[13] (1) Ltr, Marshall to McNarney, 10 Jan 43, and (2) Memo, Gasser for CofS, 11 Feb 43, sub: Missions and Functions of the War Dept Manpower Board and Methods of Procedure, both in WDCSA 334 War Dept Manpower Board.

[14] (1) Memo, Brig Gen Patrick H. Tansey and Lt Col Marshall S. Carter for Maj. Gen Thomas T. Handy, 3 Feb 43, sub: Troop Basis Planning, and (2) Memo. Edwards for ACofS, G-1, G-4, OPD, and CGs SOS, AAF, AGF, 25 Feb 43, sub: Troop Basis Planning, both in OPD 320.2, 673.

[15] (1) Final Draft of a Text Prepared for Mr. Green of the Senate Military Affairs Committee by SOS with OPD and G-3 Co-operation, 16 Feb 43, title: Size of the Army, OPD 320.2, 678. (2) Memo, Marshall for SW, 5 Feb 43, sub: Manpower, and (3) Ltr, Stimson to Knox, 12 Feb 43, WDCSA 320 SS. (4) Address by Stimson, 9 Mar 43, title: The Size of the Army, OPD 320.2, 678.

[16] (1) Min, Gen Council Mtg, 1 Feb 43, OPD 334.8 Gen Council, II. (2) Memo North for Handy, 14 Feb 43, OPD Files, Book 7, Exec 8.

[17] Min, Gen Council Mtg, 8 Mar 43, OPD 334.8 Gen Council, II.

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shifting strategic conditions. The main question the committee was to investigate was the efficacy of building up foreign forces-such as the Free French-as opposed to arming U.S. troops, and the comparative effects of these alternatives on the American manpower situation and on Allied efficiency in prosecuting the war. [18] This was a rephrasing of the thorny problem-how far to go in aiding Allies-which the Army planners had faced from the very beginning and were to continue to face.

The Bessell committee survey revealed that little could be gained by increasing the volume of international aid to the Allies at the expense of the development of U.S. forces. Equipping the manpower of nations, other than the Soviet Union and Great Britain, with arms and munitions would not substantially increase the total amount of effective manpower that could be placed in combat, nor would it put troops into combat more quickly than would the current program for preparing American troops for active service overseas. [19] In late April the committee scaled down its estimates of the ultimate strength from 185 to 155 divisions and accepted an 8,200,000-man total as the planning ceiling figure-the "maximum strength" for the Army imposed by manpower limitations. It recommended that the U.S. Army, and especially the Air Forces, be developed to the maximum strength practicable within the estimated limitations on armed forces and be deployed as quickly as possible. [20]

The committee concluded that the time had definitely come for long-term programming to guide the war machine developing in the United States. Since adequate training for a division required a year, mobilization and production had to be planned well in advance. Mobilization and production had, therefore, to be linked to national policy and strategic planning. The basic strategy of the United States was still sound and should be adhered to, and "any tendency to disperse our forces to other than the main effort [should] be avoided." What was required, the committee decided, was a broad and long-range strategic plan for the defeat of the enemies of the United States whereby requirements might be balanced against means and resources and then translated into a realistic military program. In this connection, the committee warned that the American public wearied quickly of war and would not countenance any slow process of attrition. [21]

[18] Memo, Handy for Bessell, *et al.*, 26 Feb 43, sub: Current Military Program, ABC 400 (2-20-43).

[19] Rpt by Special Army Committee, 15 Mar 43, title: Survey of Current Military Program, ABC 400 (2-20-43).

[20] Rpt by Special Army Committee (Rev.), 28 Apr 43, ABC 400 (2-20-43).

[21] *Ibid.*

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In April the need for careful manpower budgeting was further emphasized. The War Manpower Commission, informing the armed services that approximately 1,500,000 men could be furnished to them in 1944, stated that this figure would be close to the limit of those that could be withdrawn from the manpower pool without jeopardizing war production, transportation, and essential civilian services. The Army estimated that by vigorous economy it would be able to save about 485,000 men during the remainder of 1943. Since the Army-Navy requirements for replacements alone would run about 971,000 for 1944, there should be a cushion of about one million men to fill the need for new units and to meet emergencies. At this time the War Manpower Commission estimated 11,300,000 men, and the Joint Staff Planners 10,900,000, as the number that could

be kept in uniform indefinitely. The JPS went so far as to recommend no increase in the Army for 1944 over the approved 1943 Army Troop Basis goals-8,200,000 total strength and 100 divisions (though the latter was already a somewhat dubious figure). [22]

As the TRIDENT (Washington) Conference between the Americans and the British approached its close in late May 1943, a deepening realization that careful examination of troop strength and its employment was a "must" led the Army to attempt a correlation between the military program and the requirements imposed by the conference decisions. At this point General Marshall and his assistants took what proved to be an important step in calculating the wartime Army troop basis. A Committee on the Revision of the Military Program was appointed in the War Department General Staff to study that program carefully in an effort to revise it downward. This committee, composed of two Operations Division officers, Col. Ray T. Maddocks and Lt. Col. Marshall S. Carter, and Col. Edwin W. Chamberlain, G-3, was to examine the threat of over-mobilization and "to investigate the possibility of decreasing the total number of ground divisions required in our troop basis." [23] It was anticipated that the findings of the committee would serve as a guide to determining the ultimate strength of the Army and the subsequent mobilization rates.

Early in June 1943 the committee (informally called the Maddocks Committee since Colonel Maddocks was the steering member) issued its general report. [24] Its studies confirmed the need for reducing the number of divisions-a view that had been gaining increasing

[22] JPS 57/8, 26 Apr 43, title: Troop Bases for All Services for 1944 and Beyond.

[23] Memo, McNarney for Maddocks, Chamberlain, and Carter, 24 May 43, sub: Revision of Current Military Program, filed with Tab G with Rpt by Special Army Committee, 15 Mar 43, in ABC 400 (2-20-43).

[24] Interim Rpt by Special Army Committee, 1 Jun 43, title: Revision of Current Military Program, submitted with Memo, Maddocks, Chamberlain, and Carter for CofS, 1 Jun 43, sub: Revision of Current Military Program, ABC 400 (2-20-43).

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support since the end of 1942. The strategic basis for this conclusion was in part the demonstration by the Soviet armies of their ability to check the German advance. Another significant factor brightening the strategic picture was the improving prospect of gaining air superiority over the Continent. These developments finally made obsolete the initial Victory Program estimates of 1941.

The committee made three basic recommendations. First, it proposed the reduction of the strength of the Army authorized for 1943 from 8,248,000 to 7,657,000.²⁵ Second, it called for modification of the current troop basis to provide a balanced force built around eighty-eight divisions, the number already

activated. The twelve additional divisions scheduled for activation during the remainder of 1943 were to be deleted from the 1943 program. Third, it recommended that the ultimate size of the Army and of the major units in it (air and ground) should be decided at the end of the summer. The ultimate size of the Army was largely to depend on the course of Soviet-German fighting and the effectiveness of the combined British-American bomber offensive in Europe.

If the outcome of the fighting on the Soviet front and of the combined bomber offensive was favorable, the committee believed that an ultimate strength of one hundred divisions would be necessary to win the war. To defeat Germany would require between 60 and 70 divisions, and from 30 to 40 divisions would be needed for operations against Japan and for a strategic reserve. After the downfall of Germany, additional divisions could be transferred from Europe to defeat Japan. [26]

In mid-June 1943 General Marshall and the Secretary of War approved the committee's general report. [27] The Chief of Staff informed the press that the activation of twelve additional divisions would be deferred until 1944. Lest this news lead the American public to overconfidence and a relaxation of the war effort, and obversely, lest the enemy conclude that the reduction signified that the United States was unable to fulfill its mobilization schedule, he requested that the information be kept in confidence. [28] On 1 July 1943 the War Department circulated a new, approved troop basis for 1943. In accord with the committee's recommendations, it provided for 88 divisions and an

[25] Forty thousand nurses had been added to the 8,208,000 figure.

[26] Interim Rpt by the Special Army Committee, 1 Jun 43, title: Revision of Current Military Program, ABC 400 (2-20-43). In June 1943, soon after the completion of its work, the Maddocks Committee was dissolved. For the committee's studies and recommendations, see especially papers filed in OPD 320.2 and in ABC 400 (2-20-43).

[27] Interim Report by the Special Army Committee, 1 June 1943, title: Revision of Current Military Program, filed in ABC 400 (2-20-43) contains General Marshall's recommendations. An attached "Brief" of the report, 7 June 1943, bears the note: "This paper has the approval of the Secretary of War. 6/15/43. G.C.M."

[28] Ch. VII (prepared by Maj William P. Moody) in Sec. IIC, "Mobilization, Procurement and Allocation of Manpower," in JCS MS, History of World War II.

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Army strength of about 7,700,000. Two provisional light divisions, which were also authorized, soon were given permanent status. As a result, the new troop basis for 1943 envisaged a 90-division Army.

Reduction of the early 1943 Troop Basis of 8,208,000 to 7,700,000 men, approved by the President in November, was accomplished by the more or less general acceptance of the 90-division limit as the "cutting edge" necessary to win the war.

Within this limit the character of the cutting edge changed considerably. There was a definite trend toward increasing infantry and airborne divisions during 1943 since strategic and tactical demands as well as the need to save shipping space favored the use of forces that were not so heavily armed or so completely motorized. As a result, a decrease in the rate of activation of armored divisions was ordered and motorized infantry divisions were reconverted to standard infantry divisions. At the end of 1942 there had been 52 infantry, 2 cavalry, 14 armored, 2 airborne, and 4 motorized divisions in the Army-74 in all. One year later there were 90 divisions in existence-67 infantry, 2 cavalry, 16 armored, and 5 airborne. The 16 new divisions activated during 1943 represented less than half the number of divisions-38-activated in 1942.

Accumulation of activated and trained divisions in the United States began to mount during 1943 because of the imbalances in shipping and the strain on port capacities and in the absence of final strategic decisions." Training camps were crowded and it was difficult to activate additional divisions-only 13 divisions moved overseas during the year as compared with 17 in 1942. This left 60 divisions in various stages of readiness scattered throughout the United States. Many, however, were neither at full strength nor fully equipped, since replacements often had to be drawn from the newer divisions and the outfitting of French divisions in northwest Africa had produced shortages in equipment. [30] When in late 1943 new demands for manpower were made to operate the B-29's, to provide for the rotation program, and to keep the Army Specialized Training Program going on a reduced basis, any possibility of organizing another fifteen divisions in 1944, as had been planned in mid-1943 and approved in the Victory Program Troop Basis of October 1943, appeared doomed. [31]

[29] Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1955), Chs. XXV and XXVI.

[30] Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, pp. 220-21.

[31] (1) *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32. (2) Victory Program Troop Basis, 26 Oct 43, Tab Deployment of Divisions, in Condensed Information Book, 6 Nov 43, Gen Handy's copy, Exec 6, OPD Files. This document bears the typed notation "Approved-By Order the Secretary of War-Joseph T. McNarney, Deputy Chief of Staff."

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With the activation of a new division in August 1943, the 90-division program was fulfilled. Henceforth, problems of reserves and narrow margins of safety became nightmares to disturb the planners' dreams. The question whether 90 divisions would be enough was to plague the War Department down to the end of the war. [32]

In early 1944 the requirements in troops for the cross-Channel attack (OVERLORD) accentuated certain Army-wide manpower pinches and made the

planners take another serious look at the Army troop basis. During the Cairo-Tehran Conference, the Joint Logistics Committee had estimated that there would be a serious shortage of service troops during 1944 for the war against Japan, and also a shortage of men for the B-29 program. The committee suggested that the Army troop basis be revised to anticipate these shortages and that the United States take a calculated risk and eliminate the fifteen infantry divisions that were to be set up in 1944. This would leave the Army with 90 divisions-43 for the war in Europe, 7 for North Africa, 22 for the Pacific, and 18 for the continental reserve. If necessary, service troops could be organized from the eighteen reserve divisions. [33] A report of the Operations Division's Strategy Section in late December 1943 substantiated this estimate that 90 divisions would be enough to win the war, although it allocated 58 divisions for Europe and North Africa, 25 for the Pacific, and kept only 7 in the reserve. The Strategy Section recognized the possibility that the Army might not be able to activate the additional fifteen divisions and remain within the 7,700,000-man ceiling adopted in November. The economy program had released some 212,000 men for reassignment during 1943, but Selective Service had fallen behind in its inductions, and the War Department was 200,000 men short of its 7,700,000 goal. On top of this, the rotation program approved in December would require 60,000 men during 1944, and the Air Forces had requested 130,000 men for its B-29 program. Even if Selective Service were to meet its quotas in 1944 and make up the 200,000-man deficit, there would be a cushion of only 22,000 men left over from the 212,000 recovered from the economy program. Besides, the Strategy Section concluded, there were no firm requirements for the fifteen additional infantry divisions. [34]

The activation of the fifteen divisions was deferred, but the con-

[32] (1) John J. McCloy, "In Defense of the Army Mind," in *Harper's Magazine* (April, 1947), Vol. 194, pp. 341-44. (2) Interv with Brig Gen Frank N. Roberts, 29 Mar 51. (3) Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 476.

[33] JCS 581/3, 4 Dec 43, title: Specific Operations for the Defeat of Japan.

[34] (1) SS 199, 21 Dec 43, title: U.S. Divisions and Aircraft Required To Win the War, and (2) SS 203, 24 Dec 43, title: Summary of Current Situation With Regard to the 15-Division Proposal, both in ABC 381 Strategy Sec Papers, Nos. 196-213 (7 Jan 43).

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tinuing scarcity of service troops led Marshall to call a conference of theater G-4's in Washington in late January to consider the problem. Writing personally to several theater commanders he requested their aid in effecting any economies possible and recommended a number of expedients to relieve the deficiency in service troops. [35]

The Army was trying desperately to stay within the 7,700,000 ceiling and to meet

needs from within by rigid economy and adjustment. Discussing the whole Army personnel problem frankly with the Joint Chiefs in early February Marshall pointed out that the ground forces were short about 87,000-97,000 troops and were forced to take men from other divisions to fill up those going overseas. Economies had produced a saving of 100,000 men but the need of manpower for the B-29 program had eaten this up. Now there was a deficiency of 100,000 service troops for OVERLORD, the invasion of southern France (ANVIL), and western Pacific operations, and a large number of tactical units were being used to help in the housekeeping of training establishments in the United States in order to release service forces for overseas duty. The need for service personnel often resulted in abbreviated training periods and less efficient troops. Marshall estimated that replacements and rotation fillers, added to induction shortages and ground force and service deficiencies, made the present deficit between 340,000 and 400,000 men. [36]

Marshall decided that the time had come for drastic action. The Army, he concluded, could not justify, in the face of such personnel shortages, the Army Specialized Training Program that had been set up to educate some of its more intelligent men in colleges. On 10 February, he cut back this program to 30,000 men, releasing 120,000 for distribution, mainly to ground and service forces. Later in the month he was able to secure Presidential pressure on the War Manpower Commission and the Selective Service to review occupational deferments and to provide the forces required by the armed services. [37] By spring, most of the induction backlog had been made up.

Easing the manpower situation still left the haunting question whether there would be enough strategic reserve in the Army troop basis to ensure the defeat of Germany once the troops were ashore in France. Of all the calculated risks taken by Marshall and his staff in preparing for invasion of the Continent, the greatest was the de-

[35] (1) Msg, Marshall to Harmon, 27 Jan 44, CM-OUT 10668. (2) Ltr, Marshall to Devers, 27 Jan 44, no sub, WDCSA 320.2, 4.

[36] Min, 144th Mtg JCS, 1 Feb 44.

[37] (1) Memo, Marshall for SW, 10 Feb 44, no sub; (2) Memo, G.C.M. [Marshall] for McNarney, 18 Feb 44, no sub; and (3) Memo, Marshall for the President, 22 Feb 44, no sub, all in WDCSA 320.2, 19.

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cision to hold to the 90-division troop basis. Even on the eve of OVERLORD, there were uneasy doubts in high Washington military circles about the gamble. On 10 May Secretary Stimson, long an advocate of a bold cross-Channel move, raised the issue with General Marshall. Stimson wrote:

I have always felt that our contribution to the war should include so far as possible an overwhelming appearance of national strength when we

actually get into the critical battle. By this I mean not merely strength on the battle front but in reserve. It has been our fate in two world wars to come in as the final force after the other combatant nations had long been engaged. Our men have thus come to the field untested, even when well trained, to fight against veteran enemies. Such conditions make the appearance and possession of overwhelming strength on our part important both tactically and psychologically. [38]

Stimson feared this might not be the case on the Continent in 1944. Against the estimated fifty-six German divisions that were to defend France, the United States would have barely more than an equal number available for the offensive by the end of the summer. The average age of the men in the American divisions was now rather high, and the Army would need a large number of replacements. Army calculations, both in the European theater and in the United States, seemed to Stimson "to shave the line of sufficiency rather narrowly instead of aiming at massive abundance." When all the OVERLORD divisions had left the United States, there would remain in the United States only fourteen uncommitted divisions. These would constitute practically the only reserve for operations in France. The British could offer no such reserve to assist the United States. As a result, the Germans would not get a picture of overwhelming strength opposing them. Furthermore, the estimated German reserve of eleven divisions was almost as large as the American reserve. The German Army was better fed than in 1918, when German morale did not break. All of this led Stimson to fear that a stalemate might develop in November when climatic conditions on the Continent would reduce the power to maneuver. Even the advantageous factors of intensified air bombardment of Germany and the Soviet advance might not be enough to ensure complete victory. The Russians, he observed, were still a long way from Germany. "Furthermore, the Russians are already reaching boundary lines where they conceivably might stop with their grand strategic objective of national defense satisfied by the eviction of the invader and the gaining back of all they had lost, plus the Baltic states." To forestall a

[38] Memo, Stimson for Marshall, 10 May 44, sub: Our Military Reserves, Paper 42, OPD Files, Item 57, Exec 10.

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stalemate, Stimson asked Marshall, should not new manpower legislation be sought from Congress before the elections in November? Should not new divisions be activated now by the War Department?

On 16 May, just three weeks before OVERLORD was launched, General Marshall replied. He agreed that everything possible must be done to prevent a stalemate from developing in the fall, but he disagreed with Stimson's analysis and conclusions. Marshall wrote Stimson, "We are about to invade the Continent and have staked our success on our air superiority, on Soviet numerical

preponderance, and on the high quality of our ground combat units. [39] Exploiting these advantages, Marshall hoped, would convince the Germans of the futility of fighting for a stalemate. He felt "the air arm should be our most effective weapon in bringing home to the German people and the German Army the futility of continued resistance." As a result of recent conversations between Averell Harriman and Stalin, he also believed the Russians would not break off their current efforts until Germany was defeated. Emphasizing that the Army was relying on the qualitative rather than the quantitative superiority of its ground force units, he declared, "Our equipment, high standard of training, and freshness should give us a superiority which the enemy cannot meet and which we could not achieve by resorting to a matching of numerical strength." Marshall pointed also to the advantages of the replacement system designed to keep American divisions in the line at full strength, the preponderance of artillery, and the employment of air superiority in close tactical support.

Even on a strictly numerical basis, Marshall thought that the American divisions would eventually compare very favorably with the German forces. Shipping and other logistical factors would limit the build-up in Europe to about 4 divisions a month, but even at that rate, by April 1945 the 59 divisions available to the United States could be utilized. Adding some 21 British divisions, and an additional 10 to 15 U.S. and French divisions that could be made available for employment in France if a defensive position were assured in Italy, the Western Powers would have some 95 divisions to employ against the estimated 56 German divisions. The most troublesome factor, he informed Stimson, would be the comparatively slow rate of American build-up—a direct product of purely logistical limitations. That factor, above all others, might result in slowing down Allied operations, since the Germans, if they felt free to transfer divisions from other fronts, could deploy their forces more rapidly than the Americans could build up theirs.

[39] Memo, Marshall for SW, 16 May 44, sub: Increase in the Strength of the Army Secretary of War Files, Staff.

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If, however, all current plans failed and a stalemate did occur in November, then Marshall felt new major strategic decisions would be required. A few additional divisions would probably not be enough to break the impasse. If new divisions and supporting units were now created, furthermore, "emasculating drafts" on existing divisions would result and present plans for their deployment would be upset. Thus, he reasoned, no far-reaching changes should be made in the Army troop basis until the outcome of the initial stages of the invasion was clear. "Considering the matter from all angles and with the realization of the hazards involved," Marshall concluded, "I believe that at the present time no increase should be made in the over-all strength of the Army, except as may prove to be necessary to provide replacements." Beyond "prudent" advance staff planning for increasing the troop basis, which he had ordered the War Department General

Staff to undertake, Marshall was willing to stand pat. Clearly, he looked upon the Allied divisions in the Mediterranean as part of the strategic reserve for the invasion of the Continent. He was anxious to make what he regarded the surplus American and French divisions in Italy available to support the main effort in France, as earlier he had been to extract seven British and American divisions from the Mediterranean for OVERLORD.

Behind the calmly reasoned and formal language of Marshall's reply to Stimson lay one of the boldest calculations of the war. [40] How great a calculated risk was being taken was further emphasized by the concomitant willingness of General Marshall and his staff to allocate military manpower for the B-29 program against Japan, instead of investing in more divisions.

The remainder of the story belongs to the annals of accomplishment. The strenuous efforts of General Marshall and his staff from early in the war to conserve the precious stock of American military strength for the desired cross-Channel operation paid off. To support OVERLORD and its follow-up operations, the Army funneled forces into the United Kingdom and later into continental Europe in ever-increasing numbers during the first three quarters of 1944. Actually, more divisions were sent overseas in the first nine months of 1944-the bulk of them going to the European theater-than had been shipped overseas during the previous two years of war. By the end of September 1944, 40 divisions were located in Europe with 4 en route, as against 21 in the Pacific. [41] In the air, the preponderance lay ever more heavily in favor of Europe-149 groups were allocated to that

[40] See McCloy, "In Defense of the Army Mind," *Harper's Magazine* (April, 1947).

[41] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, Ch. XXIII and App. D.

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struggle as opposed to 57 groups on the other side of the world. With the bulk of the Army's combat strength overseas deployed against the Reich, and with most of the divisions still in the United States slated to go to the European theater, the Chief of Staff and his planners could consider their original concept of "beat Germany first" well on the way toward accomplishment. Although there were still over three and a half million men left in the continental United States at the end of September, there were only some 24 combat divisions remaining. Most of these were to be sent to Europe eventually, but the Army planners had hoped to maintain some of the 24 divisions as a strategic reserve to cope with any unforeseen emergencies. The estimated size of the reserve ranged from 5 to 15 divisions, but no definite decision had ever been made by the Chief of Staff. With Germany supposedly on its last legs, there seemed little need for concern on this score.

But there is a postscript to this story that deserves careful reflection. When the crisis caused by the Ardennes breakthrough of December 1944 denuded the United States of all the remaining divisions and left the strategic reserve a memory, the possibility of having raised too few divisions rose again to cause War Department planners from Stimson on down some anxious moments. [42] Because of the unexpected developments in Europe, not one division was sent to the Pacific after August 1944. By V-J Day all eighty-nine active divisions were deployed overseas and all but two had seen combat. [43] Fortunately the crisis of late 1944 was the last unpleasant surprise. If another had come the divisional cupboard would have been bare.

Certain by-products and implications of the decision also deserve serious consideration by postwar students. The decision was a striking illustration of acceptance by Army leaders of the fact that there were limits to their slice of the American manpower pie. The 90-division troop basis represented their attempt to provide a realistic meeting ground of three fundamentals of modern warfare—strategy, production, and manpower. It represented the relatively small, if compact, ground combat force that the country that was also serving as the "arsenal of democracy" found it could provide for a global coalition war without unduly straining the war economy and standard of living of the American people. In the postwar debate over strategy, critics who have characterized the American case for concentration

[42] (1) Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 476. (2) McCloy, "In Defense of the Army Mind," *Harper's Magazine* (April, 1947), p. 342.

[43] The 2d Cavalry Division had been inactivated in North Africa, giving a final total of 89. The 13th Airborne Division stationed in Europe and the 98th Infantry Division stationed in Hawaii failed to get into action.

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and power-drives as "narrow" and "rigid" have uniformly overlooked the impact of manpower ceilings on that case. It is doubtful that the United States could have succeeded with its 90-division ground combat force had not the ground forces of the Russians and other allies held and fought well. It is also doubtful that the United States could have succeeded with the size and kind of ground cutting edge it produced had not it also turned out an effective, heavy-fisted, long air arm. The self-denying limit on cutting edge of Army ground forces in favor of air force expansion undoubtedly spurred further the growing movement for air force autonomy.

It will long be a question whether the photo-finish in World War II reflected an uncommonly lucky gamble or a surprisingly accurate forecast. But few would deny that, in their performance on the field of battle in the critical campaigns of 1944-45, the hitherto still largely untested divisions of the U.S. Army, so largely a product of General Marshall's own faith and struggles, vindicated the bold

calculation in Washington.

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