Prologue

Good night, then sleep to gather strength for the morning. For the morning will come. Brightly will it shine on the brave and the true, kindly upon all who suffer for the cause, glorious upon the tombs of heroes. Thus will shine the dawn. Vive la France!

—Winston Churchill,
BBC *broadcast to the people of France,*
October 21, 1940

Belfast's waterfront pubs and streets were quiet, empty of Allied sailors, the night of June 3, 1944. In the fifth year of the war for which Belfast was a vital base for Allied warships defending the North Atlantic sea lanes, a night absent the sounds of sailors seemed impossible. But the night was quiet. Like ports throughout the United Kingdom, day and night for a year, Belfast also had witnessed the unloading of ships bearing the inflowing transatlantic flood of troops, equipment, and materiel for the growing Allied armies. But in recent weeks, the harbor's activities could be seen, instead, to be . . . loading. Did that outflow and this night's quiet hint at the start of D-Day?

Barely visible offshore in rain-swept Belfast Lough were the hulking outlines of the U.S. Navy's Battleship Division Five: *Texas*, *Arkansas*, and Pearl Harbor attack-survivor *Nevada*. Each had taken turns escorting twelve fast troop convoys east across the North Atlantic in an eight-month surge of U.S. forces to the United Kingdom. With the onset of spring, the old but still deadly sluggers of "BatDiv 5" had remained

forward, one by one assembling in Belfast as part of the gathering invasion force.

Aboard the battleships' leader, USS *Texas*, as in each of the many ships gathered, the crew had been briefed for the mission to come. Now *Texas* was a sealed ship. Inside, the passageways were quiet except for the hum of ventilators. Tense anticipation had given way to fatigue from the exacting work to get the 27,000-ton ship ready for sea and for battle. In darkened berthing spaces, the crew slept.

At 0200, on June 4, *Texas* received the expected order flashed to a thousand recipients in the British Isles: "Carry out Operation Neptune." D-Day, the amphibious phase of the campaign to liberate Western Europe and defeat Nazism, Operation Overlord, was beginning.

The battleships slipped quietly from their moorings. Building speed to 15 knots, *Texas* steamed down the channel to open water in tactical command of her BatDiv 5 sisters, following in a column astern, and screened by five destroyers. Joining them from the darkness were the Free-French Navy cruisers *George Leygues* and *Montcalm,* the Royal Navy cruiser HMS *Glasgow*, and more destroyers. In the gray dawn, the bombardment group, designated Task Group 129.2, steamed into the Irish Sea and came to course 160 degrees, heading south by southeast. Through the day's heavy rain, the silhouettes of many more ships could be seen in all directions from the bridge of the *Texas.* Allied ships of all types were present—battleships and cruisers of other bombardment groups, transports, landing ships, destroyers—all on parallel south-southeasterly courses.

Notified in the night that D-Day had been postponed, the ships reversed course northward at dawn to mask their intentions from possible German reconnaissance through the daylight hours of June 4. Then in the dim northern twilight came a new message. D-Day was on for June 6.

In the Bristol Channel at 2204, like a mighty giant that had stepped back to flex before leaning once again into a colossal task, the rain-lashed armada reversed course

once more. The "prospect of fair weather for the next 48 hours [was] reported very good." So all hoped. By the morning of June 5, "steaming as before following swept channels around Land's End," Task Group 129.2 sailed into the English Channel.

For the crews aboard Free French *George Leygues* and *Montcalm*, anticipation was mixed with a particular anxiety. The terrible destruction soon to be inflicted on occupying German soldiers by shells from their ships' six-inch guns might also cause the death or wounding of many innocent French civilians. How many? Unknowable.

Known and bracing to every officer and *marin* aboard, however, was this. As Land's End grew distant in the west, so too receded for them four and a half years of wandering the Atlantic from Norway to West Africa. Since 1939 the French cruisers' crews had sailed for the Third Republic, then collaborationist Vichy, then gone into a lengthy refit in Philadelphia for the Allies. Wakes curved as helms were spun to bring the Task Group to new course 090 degrees, and the two cruisers entered La Manche. This day, they were sailing for France.

Soon after the Task Group turned into the Channel, USS *Nevada* and its accompanying destroyers bore off to rendezvous with the ships of Force Utah. Off Portland Bill in the late afternoon of June 5, *Texas* logged, "Many convoys of LST's, LCT's, combat loaded transports, and squadrons of Fire Support Ships and escorts in sight in all directions heading towards rendezvous area." That, just ahead, was a ten-mile diameter marshaling area, hectic with ships and nicknamed "Piccadilly Circus." From there, ten channels that had been swept through German and British minefields and marked covertly branched off toward five D-Day landing beaches on the Normandy coast: two British, one Canadian, and two American. Led by HMS *Glasgow* and other Royal Navy escort vessels, all crews at general quarters, the ships of the *Texas* bombardment group advanced silently into their designated channel leading to Omaha Beach. Theirs was only a portion of the largest amphibious armada the world had ever seen. Before D-Day ended, 358,000 Allied soldiers, airmen, sailors, coast guardsmen, and merchant mariners would thrust 156,000 of their number onto the landing grounds

and beaches of Normandy against fierce opposition. By day's end, an estimated 9,000 Allied participants would become casualties, 3,000 of whom would be dead.

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Now blurred by the passage of three-quarters of a century, these events leading to the Allied defeat of Nazi Germany might casually be mistaken for a progression of logic and certainty. There would be a cross-Channel invasion of France. After all, Winston Churchill had told the French people in 1940 that the Allies would return. Breaking out on the offensive from their Normandy lodgment, the western Allies, together with the Red Army pressing forward from the east, would win complete victory in the European theater of operations, certainly by 1945. The path to D-Day's eve, however, had been neither straight nor certain.

To become a viable military campaign, Overlord, the strategy ultimately chosen in the west, needed a clear military objective, a plan, a Supreme Allied Commander, the forces for him to implement the plan, and, most important, leadership's endorsement. Eighteen months before D-Day, none of that had been defined. The process for doing so had been stormy. As months passed, disagreement persisted. The very concept of what would become Operation Overlord was disputed hotly.

By the end of 1942, the pivotal Allied victories at El Alamein, Midway, and Stalingrad had tipped the war's balance in the Allies' favor. The threat of defeat by the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan had been eliminated. The Allies now could concentrate on offensive action to win World War II. Approaches to the European offensive had been discussed in 1942, some calling for quite unrealistic overreach given the resources then available. In 1943, the Allies could begin serious planning for military victory because of their improved strategic position and the fact that the great engine of North American industry was reaching full wartime production. The burning question for the Allies was how exactly they best could win. Answering that question with a plan to act upon the Allies' strategic advantages, hard won in 1942, was anything

but resolved between Great Britain and the United States.

Certainly not agreed was that the liberation of Western Europe should begin, as the Americans advocated, with a cross-Channel assault at the time and place of the Allies' choosing. Instead, intense dispute raged at the highest levels of Allied leadership over the emergent competition of concepts for what should be the strategy for liberation. Should that be the American vision of an explosive offensive across northwestern Europe striking into the Nazi citadel? Or should it be the British preference for a series of thrusts from the Mediterranean into the "soft underbelly" of Europe while banking on the mounting pressure on Germany, from maritime blockade, all land fronts, and the sky above? The hoped for objective of the British strategy option was to force the political-economic collapse of Hitler's Reich much like Germany's unexpected collapse in 1918.

The issue was not simply a dispute confined to which was the best military strategy. Roots of the internal alliance conflict were to be found in differing conceptions for the desired result for the war in Europe, differing British and American perceptions of each other's capabilities and intentions, and each nation's evolving perception of its own – and the other's -- role in the world. A constant factor influencing everything was the actual disparity in their national strength. The differences fed on each other throughout 1942 to create a near-toxic relationship between the British and American military chiefs. This carried into the new year despite its promise.

Inevitably in the swirling complexity of a world war, the military strategy dispute, even so broadly defined, did not proceed for long in isolation from other issues. Emergent, at least among a few select and critical decision makers, was an ever closer proximity of the unresolved strategy question to another great Anglo-American secret, their quest to develop an atomic bomb. That venture, anticipated to be joint, had instead ruptured.

Late in 1942, openly applying a rationale of practicality underlaid by their personal views of U.S. national security interests, and belief that their intent was

endorsed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, American scientists unilaterally cut Britain's scientists out of most of the Manhattan Project. That was the super-secret effort to develop an atomic bomb to which British research had made a strong early contribution. Prime Minister Winston Churchill was alarmed by the American turnabout. Foreseeing a postwar world that would be dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union, each to be atomic-armed, Churchill was convinced that a British atomic bomb would be essential to ensuring Britain's de facto independence. Yet, as Churchill was made acutely aware by his own atomic research leaders, wartime Britain lacked the resources and some of the knowledge to develop the bomb on its own.

Opposed though Churchill was to the U.S.-advocated cross-Channel invasion based strategy, he wanted full British access to the Manhattan Project. He also wanted an Anglo-American security relationship that would endure beyond the war.

Nineteen forty-three opened with the first of what would be five major conferences that year involving Roosevelt, Churchill, and their military chiefs The Allies picked up the discussion where 1942's wrangling over a winning offensive strategy had left off. Although mostly freed from the specter of the threat of defeat, relations between the British and American military chiefs remained mired in distrust and acrimony. Soon, separately but in parallel, Churchill was resisting the Americans' military strategy preference while pressing for restoration of British access to the Manhattan Project—and a broader Anglo-American atomic agreement. As British-American circular arguments on strategy raged, the growing intensity of Churchill's atomic sharing entreaties was met with American scientific leadership resistance and political leadership ambivalence.

The separate issues of European strategy and atomic bomb cooperation, now closed off by the Americans, came into ever more frequent and intimate proximity over the passing months, evident candidates for a quid pro quo. Yet only a very few of the actors had the "need to know" to be privy to the existence of both highly classified subjects and thus their potential to affect the political dynamics of the alliance, should

they become linked. Churchill and Roosevelt knew.

Although planning cooperation blossomed between middle-ranking Allied military officers, among their own commanders Anglo-American guidance for conduct of the war remained locked in differences and confrontation. Against these arguments at the top, the war's imperatives were becoming compelling. By mid-1943, the need to pick a single strategy and implement it was becoming so urgent as to lessen the importance of which strategy.

A letter written by an important British civilian advocate for the American position on strategy captured the exasperation felt on both sides of the Atlantic. In mid-June Churchill's close adviser and friend, Lord Max Beaverbrook, wrote to his American counterpart, Harry Hopkins with FDR. On the seeming Allied incapability to agree on one primary strategy, Beaverbrook declared, "If we are not prepared to accept the risks, face the difficulties, suffer the casualties, then let us concentrate at once exclusively on the production of heavy bombers and think in terms of 1950." An end to the war in 1950? That was a prospect for a postwar world that in hindsight is too devastating and unstable to contemplate.

Advocating Overlord is the story of the British and American struggle to devise and commit to the liberation strategy that achieved victory in Europe in May 1945. The story is told from January 1943 when, heartened by the prospect of winning, the question of deciding on an Allied offensive strategy took on new urgency, leading to their decision in August and its sealing in December 1943.

This was a transformative year for how the United States came to see and act upon its role in the world. Isolationism's hemispheric defense-based strategies were left behind. Instead, the Roosevelt Administration decided to engage globally, permanently accepting the full import of the rendezvous with destiny that FDR had foreseen in 1936. The United States became the guarantor of relationships from which would emerge the postwar cornerstone alliances of stable, free societies that provide both assurance and deterrence through collective security and cooperation. That new role, taken up by

Roosevelt and his military leaders in 1943, depended on by allies and understood by adversaries, has endured to this day.

This is a tale of success that also carries a caution to be drawn from the obstacles to be overcome by national leaders who in 1942-43 found cooperation between their countries retarded by stereotyping and suspicion. Political distrust and prejudicial oversimplification had filled the void when collaborative international endeavor dissipated in the shortness of two decades between the Armistice of 1918 and the outbreak of World War II. The resulting friction that held up agreement on a winning Allied strategy is a sharp reminder to us today. The corrosiveness of ill-informed stereotypes cannot be turned off and collaboration turned back on, like throwing a switch, even in the face of a shared existential threat. In our time of challenges to community from go-it-alone nationalists who question the value and continuance of proven mechanisms for collective security, economic, and environmental well-being, that history confronts us with a lesson to be recalled again.

Advocating Overlord is also the counterbalancing story of a rising generation of young military leaders who moved past national biases and the animosity demonstrated among their own senior commanders, British and American. Instead, they joined in a genuinely connected endeavor as the only sure path to find a way to accomplish what they had been told was infeasible and, by inference, not universally desired among their chiefs to whom they reported, Operation Overlord. Their success at convincingly arguing the viability within achievable conditions of a cross-Channel assault-based liberation strategy advanced the emerging consensus. Their advocacy for their Overlord plan, even to the point of violating orders, quelled a nascent American crisis of confidence and helped to set the conditions to bring closure to the strategy debate. However, also necessary for closure were two more, sequential elements, one only achievable between Roosevelt and Churchill directly.

Circumstantially but strongly evident as the first element is this development. The American determination, with key British supporters, to base Allied strategy for

Europe on a cross-Channel assault and Churchill's need to reestablish Anglo-American collaboration on atomic weapons, and do so in the context of a relationship extending beyond World War II, did become the two sides of a quid pro quo. That happened in the Quadrant Conference when, a few hours after the final strategy document had been agreed to and presented to them, Roosevelt and Churchill signed a second, secret atomic agreement on August 19, 1943. *Advocating Overload* examines through primary documents the development of this much-overlooked story. These point to the increasingly intentional, step-by-step elevation of the question of resuming atomic cooperation with a concurrent awareness of the need to settle on strategy. The credibility of oral assurances at the top fell away. Imperative became the need for one leader to act followed by the other in response, each in writing. They did so.

The Quadrant Conference in Quebec effectively set the Allied strategy and reopened atomic cooperation. But, it did not prevent revisits to the strategy question by Churchill. The strategy decision, and assignment of its command to an American, had to be sealed by creating as an irreversible new fact on the ground in Britain the concentration of forces to invade the Continent in 1944. This, which became the second element for closure, had been anticipated.

Even as the ink was drying on the two Quadrant agreements, fast troop convoys began to sail. In the eight months that followed the first Quebec Conference, more than one million troops were transported to the British Isles for Operation Overlord without losing a single soldier to enemy action, manifesting that the Battle of the Atlantic had been decided. Before the Quadrant Conference, before the apparent quid pro quo atomic agreement for strategy reaffirmation, the achievability of this massive transfer of troops, their equipment, and materiel in time for D-Day had been promised by the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall. He did so to gain the commitment of the ultimate advocate for Overlord, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

This then is the story of how the advocates for Overlord, British and American, prevailed against operational and political adversity to win the Allied commitment to

D-Day. Only a very few of the actors then knew that in so doing, a link was made between two events that would profoundly shape the twentieth century with effect to this day, the liberation of Europe from Hitler's tyranny and the advent of the atomic bomb. Just as it does to the millions on all fronts who by their bravery and sacrifice in combat achieved the victory over Nazism in 1945, our debt to these advocates for Overlord endures.