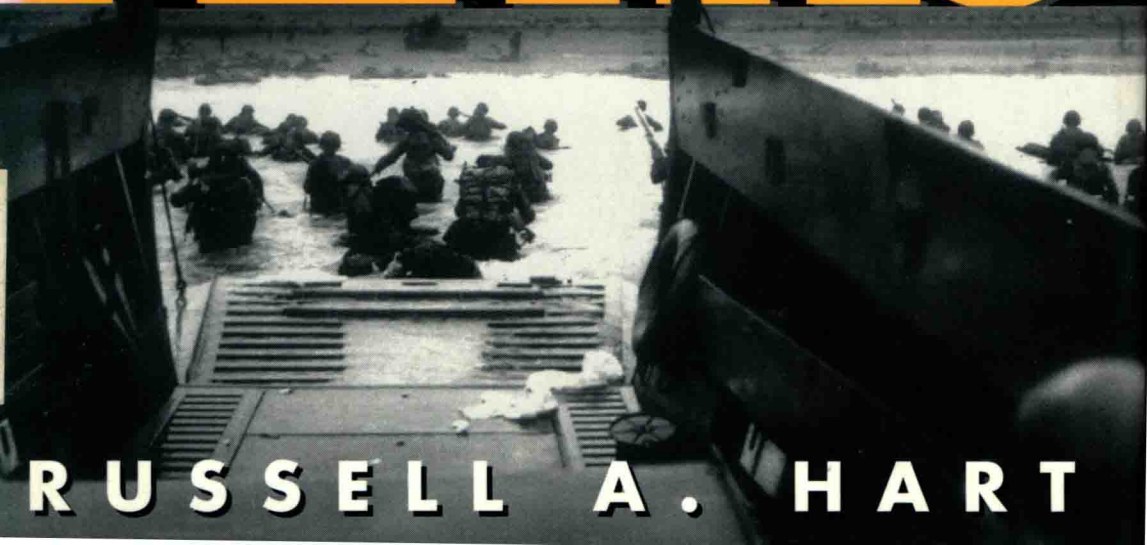


# Clash of Arms

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NORMANDY



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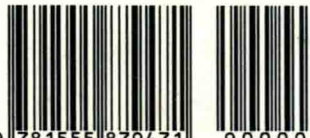
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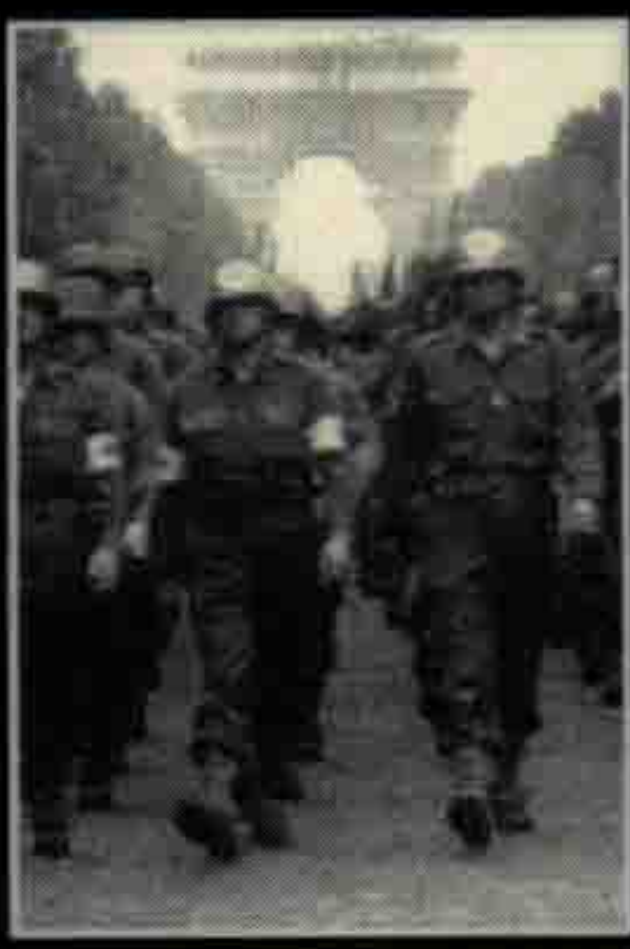
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# Clash of Arms

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## How the Allies Won in Normandy

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Russell A. Hart



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# Clash of Arms

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# The Art of War

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*Series Editor, Col. David Zabecki*

*To Mum and Dad, Stephen, Sharon, Allison, Oscar, and Clio*





# Foreword

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*D. E. Showalter*

Defining operational effectiveness and determining how it is established are once again among the central questions of military history. Temporarily eclipsed by a focus on the general social, cultural, and economic factors of warmaking, the issue of combat performance is increasingly recognized as the *sine qua non* of armed forces, even those with a domestic, constabulary orientation.

That subject is particularly vital in the context of World War II. Since 1945 a virtual cult of the *Wehrmacht* has emerged among its former enemies. Books, magazines, and films pay tribute to its fighting power. Even when acknowledging its weaknesses at the levels of strategy and policy, even when accepting the role of Nazification in its effectiveness, this school continues to praise in particular the German Army's virtuosity at operational and tactical levels. At times it seems as though the German generals allowed the Allies to win the war out of kindness. Allied military performance is generally treated condescendingly. The British and American armies in particular are dismissed as lacking fighting spirit, tactical skill, and operational virtuosity, depending on numbers and material superiority to win victories by the low common denominator of attrition.

Recent challenges to this paradigm fall into three categories. One approach, exemplified by Ken Tout's narratives of the fighting in the Anglo-Canadian sector, stresses the difficulties of conducting offensive operations, going so far as to argue that the normal result of attacks is either defeat or a too-costly advance, and that the outcome of battle should be judged against an expectation of failure. A second perspective, illustrated by the work of Stephen Ambrose, proffers anecdotal arguments that Allied soldiers were in fact motivated to fight, and fought well throughout the northwest Europe campaign. The focus of the third challenge is expressed in the title of one of its best-known examples. Keith Bonn's *When the Odds Were Even* argues that under conditions when their air and artillery superi-

ority were nullified, U.S. divisions by 1944–1945 were in fact more effective than their German opponents.

The end result of this revisionism too often resembles the kind of ongoing dispute better associated with the relative capabilities of sports teams—more of a pastime than an intellectual or professional exercise. It is in that context that *Clash of Arms* makes a seminal contribution. Making extensive use of both archival and published sources, Hart establishes a comparative two-stage model that includes the Western Front's three major combatants: the German, the American, and the Anglo-Canadian armies. In general terms he establishes the importance of such factors as geography and domestic politics. Germany, a continental power, was fighting on its own ground, and in contexts of preparation that dated back to the Weimar Republic. The Allies on the other hand were geostrategic islands, who had to devote as much attention to getting to Europe as to staying there once they landed. Neither the U.S., British, nor Canadian governments, moreover, was willing to devote resources to military preparation between the world wars in ways acceptable to even a democratic German government, much less Adolf Hitler's Reich.

At institutional levels, Hart stresses the importance of adaptability. By 1944, none of the major combatants in Western Europe was an easy enemy to defeat. The outcome of battles and campaigns depended to a corresponding degree on learning the operational lessons one's adversary taught. And that in turn depended heavily on prewar approaches to doctrine. Were those fundamentally flawed, appropriate adaptation to circumstances became questionable. The German way of war was essentially artistic, emphasizing individualistic virtuoso performances at all levels. Cooperation, particularly among the services, was correspondingly discounted. More seriously, the "artistic" paradigm was significantly vulnerable to a Nazi ideology that encouraged replacing rational calculation with wishful thinking in such crucial matters as the military capabilities of "racially inferior" opponents—Americans in particular.

On the other side of the line, the Americans followed a managerial/scientific paradigm. They took advantage of late entry into the war to study German methods and develop responses to them. If their operational "machine" did not work, they repaired it or redesigned it, paying little regard to feelings or traditions. This gave them a flexibility, and eventually a fighting power, significantly greater than their Anglo-Canadian allies, who followed what might be called an artisanal model of warmaking. Incorporating respect for tradition and low-risk, trial-and-error methods of adaptation, the "British way" reflected both prewar doctrinal shortcomings and wartime lack of resources compared to both the Germans and the Americans. In the end, both the Americans and the Anglo-Canadians proved able to outfight their German adversaries—but as much because of German shortcomings as their own positive qualities. Hart's conclusion, that

modern war offers no shortcuts and seldom rewards improvisation, merits application well beyond the parameters of this single monograph. *Clash of Arms* is a must read for anyone concerned with the creation and maintenance of combat effectiveness, whether in the twentieth or the twenty-first centuries.



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Any errors of fact or of interpretation are solely my responsibility.

—*Russell A. Hart*

# Chronology: 1918–1944

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11 November 1918	Armistice ends World War I
1919	Ten-Year Rule promulgated by Great Britain
1920	National Defense Act (United States)
1923	British Army forms Royal Tank Corps
1927	Britain forms Experimental Mechanized Force
1935	Germany forms its first panzer divisions
1936	German reoccupation of the Rhineland
1937	Canadian War Scheme Three and Austrian <i>Anschluss</i>
August 1938	Munich crisis—Germany occupies the Sudetenland
March 1939	Germany overruns the rump Czech state
April 1939	British Army forms Royal Armoured Corps
1 September 1939	Germany invades Poland
3 September 1939	Anglo-French declaration of war
April 1940	German <i>Weserübung</i> invasion of Denmark and Norway
10 May 1940	German invasion of the west
June 1940	Italy enters the war
July 1940	Independent Armored Force formed in United States
13 August 1940	Canadian Royal Armoured Corps activated
September 1940	U.S. Selective Service Bill enacted
9 December 1940	Western Desert Force launches Operation COMPASS
7 February 1941	Battle of Beda Fomm
6 April 1941	German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece
11 April 1941	Rommel besieges Tobruk
15 June 1941	Wavell launches Operation BATTLEAXE
21 June 1941	National Resources Mobilization Act in Canada
22 June 1941	German invasion of the Soviet Union



5 July 1941	Auchinleck replaces Wavell in the Middle East
September 1941	Louisiana Maneuvers (United States)
November 1941	Carolina Maneuvers (United States) and Operation CRUSADER
6 December 1941	Soviet winter counteroffensive begins
7 December 1941	Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor
6 April 1942	Anglo-Canadian raid on Dieppe
April 1942	Anglo-Canadian Exercise TIGER
26 May 1942	Battle of Gazala
20 June 1942	Fall of Tobruk
30 June 1942	First Battle of El Alamein
10 July 1942	Battle of Ruweisat Ridge
30 August 1942	Battle of Alam Haifa
23 October 1942	Second Battle of El Alamein
8 November 1942	Operation TORCH invasion of northwest Africa
23 November 1942	German Sixth Army encircled at Stalingrad
13 December 1942	Battle of Agheila
23 January 1943	Fall of Tripoli
22 February 1943	Manstein retakes Kharkov
6 March 1943	Battle of Medenine
1 April 1943	Battle of Wadi Akarit
4 April 1943	Exercise SPARTAN
8 May 1943	Axis resistance in Tunisia ends
July 1943	Allied Operation HUSKY invasion of Sicily
August 1943	Operation AVALANCHE landings at Salerno
September 1943	First U.S. Army begins assembling in Britain
3 November 1943	German Directive 51 to repulse the Second Front
November 1943	Montgomery takes command of 21st Army Group
31 December 1943	Rommel appointed commander in chief, Army Group B
January 1944	Anzio landings in Italy
15 February 1944	Carpet bombing of Monte Cassino
March 1944	Operation STRANGLE in Italy
20 April 1944	Crerar takes command of First Canadian Army
May 1944	Operation DIADEM in Italy