

## Joint Force Quarterly

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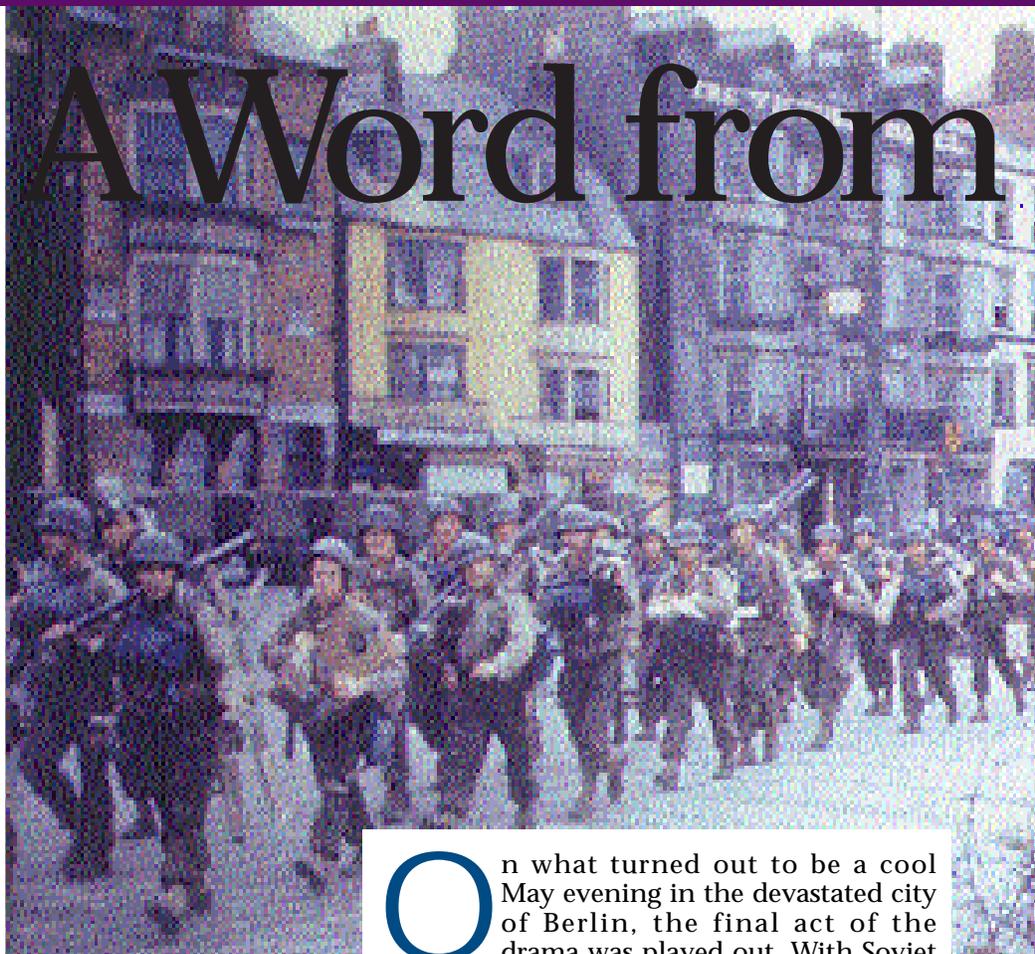
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# A Word from



On what turned out to be a cool May evening in the devastated city of Berlin, the final act of the drama was played out. With Soviet troops only blocks away, grim figures moved up the steps of a bunker, carrying a limp corpse. As “Stalin’s organs” lit up the night sky with bright flashes of orange, punctuated by the deafening roar of the largest concentration of artillery fire in history, a circle of men laid the lifeless bundle on the ground, soaked it in petrol, and struck the match that turned a mass murderer into vapor and ash. Hitler’s death ended years of war that had begun when Nazi forces pulverized Poland’s frontier and ignited the most terrible conflict ever seen. With his suicide, the world was free to start anew.

Americans and Europeans will join hands this spring to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the counter-invasion of Europe, an effort made irreversible on June 6, 1944 when the greatest armada ever assembled set sail from Portsmouth harbor for the short voyage to the beaches of Normandy, a voyage that would liberate Europe.

This issue of *Joint Force Quarterly* revisits the lessons learned from some of the campaigns of that war. But while the articles in JFQ Forum examine specific strategic and operational aspects of the European and Pacific theaters, I want to elevate the historical

# the Chairman



Naval Historical Center

American soldiers marching through an English coastal town to board landing ships for Normandy.

level of this retrospective by dwelling for a moment on the larger, enduring lessons of World War II.

The first lesson was the strategic realization that the fate of Europe and America was one and the same. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans could watch as Europeans fought each other, using the expanse of the Atlantic moat as a barrier to involvement. Conducting business with those states in need of loans and goods to field armies and sustain their populations was typical of the extent of American interest in European conflicts of the last century. By the dawn of this century, however, the Atlantic was little more than a pond. Our affairs became so intertwined with those of Europe that we could no longer avoid the reach of political intrigue and war on the Continent. After being drawn into two world wars by events in Europe, we vowed never again to sink into the trap of disengagement. And for fifty years, throughout the entire Cold War, we honored that lesson.

The second lesson was that collective action—regardless of its drawbacks, intricacies, and frustrations—is almost always preferable to unilateral action. It took the shock of two world wars and the advent of the Cold War before we finally abandoned George Washington's dictum to avoid alliances. But in departing from his warning we did so with quintessential American enthusiasm. In the wake of World War II we became the most ambitious architect of interlocking alliances to ever come upon the international scene. Our security arrangements spanned the globe, created by one treaty after another. When we completed this system of alliances the United States was tied by mutual defense agreements to every continent, save for Africa and Antarctica.

The third and largest lesson was exerting our great strength to shape the world or suffer the fate of a rudderless ship caught in a storm, buffeted in every direction, trying desperately to avoid being capsized, flung from one course to another, and always at the whim of some external force. We mastered the complexities of global leadership, assumed enormous responsibilities, and invested our power and resources to create a

new world under the rule of law and nurtured by free markets and the spread of democratic institutions.

We embraced these three lessons and made them the focus of our Cold War policies and strategies. But in embracing them we created an uneasy alliance between experience and wisdom, on one hand, and the attitudes that go to the heart of our national being, on the other. As a nation of immigrants we have a deep yearning to leave behind the problems of the proverbial "old world." To this day we remain wary of becoming involved in the seemingly endless rivalries of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Similarly, rugged American individualism, an instinct that goes back to core democratic values, causes us to chafe at the prospect of collective action, even when it appears to be the only alternative and clearly to our advantage. Finally, as citizens of the oldest democracy, Americans have a native distrust of power, in any form, including our own national power. Every occasion when we are called upon to use our power, regardless of how noble and grand the aim, we find ourselves caught in a vise, pressed on the one side by a sense of responsibility and on the other by a fear that we might be abusing our power.

The commemoration of Normandy and other great battles and campaigns of World War II coincides fortuitously with our entry into a new era. These events are reminders of what happens when we flirt with isolationism or disengagement. They make us recall that the world has grown far too small, and that economic and other national interests have grown far too large, to disengage from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. They clearly remind us that the Armed Forces must be strong and ready, superbly equipped, comprised of our finest young men and women, and able to deploy to any region of the world where American interests are threatened.

These are the enduring lessons of World War II. We must carry them into the future.

JOHN M. SHALIKASHVILI  
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