

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 455

“Up Against the Wall”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

For a brief moment, the collapse of the German Army in France seemed as if it would lead to a rapid German defeat.

But under the command of Walter Model, the Germans rebuilt their Western Front along the Siegfried Line. The Western Allies searched for ways through or around the German defenses, while in Berlin, Adolf Hitler was being urged to talk peace with the Soviet Union.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 455. Up Against the Wall.

The last time we looked at events on the Western Front, was back in episode 446. From there we went on to other topics for a while, but now it's time to circle back to France. In episode 446, I joked that nothing much happened on the Western Front for the rest of the year. Today's episode along with several to come are the punch line.

The German garrison force in Paris surrendered to the Allies on August 25 after offering mere token resistance. The following day, the German garrison in Toulon surrendered, and on August 29, Allied forces secured control of Marseilles. In both of these cases, Hitler had ordered the garrison to destroy the port facilities and resist the Allies to the last soldier, but remember these garrison troops in southern France were not Germany's best, and their commanders were not the most zealous of Army officers. Both garrison commanders chose to surrender early, rather than throw away the lives of everyone under their command for a lost cause. The port facilities had not been completely destroyed as they had at Cherbourg or Brest. The port at Marseilles was only moderately damaged; Toulon was only lightly damaged. The port of Toulon was back in service in just a few weeks.

That's all well and good, but Toulon and Marseilles were pretty far away from the Seine, the most important part of the front, and would not contribute significantly toward alleviating Allied

supply problems. And the Western Allies were experiencing serious supply problems. Supply for the Western Front was still coming through the Normandy beachheads, the one surviving Mulberry harbor, and the port at Cherbourg, which by this time had been made available for limited use by Allied cargo ships.

The French rail network was a mess, so supplies that landed in Normandy were still being transported from there to the front lines via the Red Ball Express, but as the Allies advanced, the Red Ball Express got increasingly stretched. Longer trips meant more trucks required, and breakdowns became increasingly common. Front line American units had to give up their own trucks to keep the Red Ball Express running, which meant those units became less mobile. The long drives also meant greater driver fatigue, which led to mistakes and accidents.

And as the delay increased between when the trucks were loaded in Normandy and when they reached the front, it became increasingly difficult for those in Normandy who were loading the trucks and organizing the convoys to anticipate what would be needed a day or two from now on the front line. How many trucks should be loaded with fuel, versus how many with artillery shells, and so on.

There were no shortages in Normandy, but the Western Allies could no longer keep front line units fully supplied with their day-to-day needs, let alone build up stockpiles that could then be used to support the increased demands of an offensive.

The overall battle plan for Operation Overlord had included a schedule of which objectives Allied units were expected to reach by which dates. Thus far, it had taken longer to break out of the Normandy beachheads than the Overlord plan had anticipated, but the destruction of the German Seventh Army and the rapid advance on Paris had put Overlord back on track. Paris actually fell a few days earlier than scheduled. Now, there was hardly any German force left between the Western Allies and Berlin.

Remember that back in 1918, Germany capitulated after an Allied offensive in September and October shattered the German front line. That defeat, coupled with the defections of Germany's allies, induced the Germans to seek an armistice.

Today, as September 1944 approached, history seemed poised to repeat itself. Once again, Germany's allies were abandoning it and the German Western Front was collapsing. One more good push might force Germany into an armistice. The trouble was that Allied supply lines couldn't support one more good push. How frustrating it was for Allied commanders.

That sums up Allied thinking in early September 1944. What you and I know, and Allied commanders knew but failed to consider, were Adolf Hitler's repeated pledges that this war would *not* end like the last one. Germany was not going to quit the war before enemy soldiers even reached its borders. There would be no surrender at a quarter to midnight, as Hitler put it.

Perhaps Allied leaders dismissed Hitler's vows as so much Nazi bluster. But Hitler was in deadly earnest. He was determined to fight to the last drop of German blood.

On August 24, the day before the German garrison in Paris surrendered, Hitler issued a decree calling for the reconstruction of the Westwall. Remember Westwall? It was meant to have been Germany's defense against an attack from France, the mirror image of the Maginot Line. After France fell, Westwall was mostly forgotten. When the German military began constructing the Atlantic Wall fortifications, they even cannibalized material from Westwall. Now Hitler planned its revival, using some 20,000 forced laborers plus German civilian volunteers, mostly teenage boys, to do the work of reconstructing the defenses.

A week earlier, on August 17, Bernard Montgomery, the overall commander of Allied ground forces in France, flew to the headquarters of the US 12th Army Group to meet with its commander, Omar Bradley, and discuss the next phase of the Allied offensive. Montgomery proposed to revise the Overlord plan. He wanted the British 21st Army Group, augmented with a dozen or so American divisions, to drive through Belgium north of the Ardennes Forest and on into the open plains of northern Germany. It was the Schlieffen Plan in reverse, Monty said. Do an end run around the German Army, seize the Ruhr, Germany's most important industrial region, and then drive toward Berlin. He next ran the proposal past Eisenhower, who was lukewarm on the idea.

Montgomery developed his plan with one eye on the post-war situation. If Britain was to be a major power in Europe after the war ended, it would have to have played a major role in defeating Germany, but it would also have to have a substantial military force in occupied Germany when it came time to negotiate the final peace agreement. But since Britain was short on reserve soldiers, another way of saying this is that Britain had to wage many of the battles to come, but not lose very many of its all but irreplaceable soldiers.

Those two priorities would seem to be mutually exclusive. On the other hand, a British army group led by a British general that happened to be almost half American would still count as British, right? Britain would get the glory, the British Army would get the glory, and coincidentally, so would Bernard Montgomery.

Bradley, meanwhile, was considering an alternative suggestion from George Patton. Patton wanted to take his Third Army forward into Germany south of the Ardennes, seize the industrial Saar region, and then on to Berlin.

These two proposals were similar. Given the increasingly difficult Allied supply situation, either of them would require that the advancing force get first priority for supplies, while the rest of Allied forces on the Western Front would have to halt their own advances and concentrate on holding the line.

Or to put it another way, Montgomery and Patton were each promising they could end the war by Christmas, provided Eisenhower give their force all the supplies and starve the other one.

Jeez, they don't pay Eisenhower enough.

On September 1, 1944, Eisenhower assumed overall command of all Allied ground forces on the Western Front, the post that Bernard Montgomery had held since before the Normandy invasion. Eisenhower would now be both the supreme commander of all Allied forces in the West and commander of Allied ground forces in the West.

Montgomery complained vociferously about this change in command. He believed Dwight Eisenhower to be an excellent administrator and diplomat, but questioned his ability as a strategist or field commander. He argued that the two positions were too much for one person to manage, and therefore Eisenhower should remain Supreme Commander, while the front-line commander should be someone who had already demonstrated outstanding leadership and strategic thinking. And the person Bernard Montgomery had in mind for the post naturally was Bernard Montgomery.

But it was not to be. The Normandy landings were a 50/50 proposition, by which I mean roughly half of the invasion force was American and the other half composed mostly of British soldiers, along with Canadians and units from other Allied nations. Since the Supreme Commander was an American, it seemed only fair that the three overall commanders of Allied air, sea, and ground forces involved in the invasion, Eisenhower's three immediate subordinates, all be British officers.

But that was then and this is now. By September first, three-quarters of the now enormous number of Allied soldiers in France were Americans. Considering that fact, and that an American Presidential election was just two months away, it would have been politically and diplomatically untenable to insist this huge force of American soldiers be commanded by a British officer, even if he was someone who had demonstrated outstanding leadership and strategic thinking, a proposition which many American commanders, and even a few British ones, would have disputed as regards Montgomery.

Winston Churchill acted to salve Montgomery's wounded ego by promoting him to field marshal on August 31, the last day before the transfer of his command.

Let's take a moment to consider exactly what that command was, the one Montgomery lost and Eisenhower gained. By September 1, Western Allied forces in France were organized into three army groups. The northernmost one was the 21st Army Group. Montgomery still commanded this one. The 21st consisted primarily of the British Second Army and the First Canadian Army. The latter was mostly Canadian, though it also included one British infantry division and the Polish First Armored Division.

South of the 21st and on their right flank stood the Twelfth United States Army Group, commanded by Omar Bradley. The Twelfth consisted of four American armies, the First, Third (that's Patton's army), Ninth, and Fifteenth. These armies totaled 48 divisions, triple the number in the 21st Army Group, composed of 1.3 million American soldiers, making the Twelfth Army Group the largest military formation the United States ever fielded.

South of them was the Sixth US Army Group. This is the force that landed in southern France as part of Operation Dragoon, plus reinforcements. The Sixth consisted of the US Seventh Army and the French First Army, which in turn was made up of French colonial units from Africa, plus French resistance fighters who joined the regular Army after the liberation. The Sixth Army Group was still bringing up its forces to the front line, on the right flank of Bradley's Twelfth Army Group, which was holding the line until the Sixth caught up, much to the frustration of George Patton, who was impatiently awaiting permission to seize the fortress city of Metz and advance into the Saar.

Overlord had been behind schedule, according to the timetable the planners had projected before the invasion began, until the breakout from Normandy and the rapid advance to Paris brought it back on schedule. Now that the Western Allies were approaching the German border, they were ahead of expectations. The planners hadn't thought they'd get this far until spring of 1945.

And as I explained a minute ago, Eisenhower had to make the decision on which proposal to accept, Montgomery's or Patton's. Eisenhower was one of the few Allied commanders who had not succumbed to the late summer euphoria. On August 15, he held a press conference in which he told the gathered reporters that anyone who thought the war would be over by the end of 1944 was "crazy." (That's his word.)

Eisenhower decided to reject both proposals. In his view, either Patton's or Montgomery's quick advance into Germany would doubtless begin strong, but the deeper it penetrated into German territory, the more units it would have to peel off to guard the flanks of its salient. The advance force, the tip of the spear, would gradually weaken until it could no longer continue. And even if it could, the Allies lacked the capacity to supply a force that size all the way to Berlin. Also, it was now September. The winds were blowing colder and winter weather was on the way. Once it arrived, movement and supply of Allied units would become considerably more difficult.

Also take note of the fact that, owing to the supply difficulties, the Western Allies weren't able to supply the front-line soldiers with winter uniforms.

So instead of either proposal, Eisenhower decided on a broad-front strategy. The German Army was clearly incapable of holding off the advancing Western Allied force. Ike preferred to push forward slowly and grind them down. He saw no reason to undertake a risky strategy like those advocated by Montgomery or Patton that might backfire, when a steady advance would gradually steamroll over the Germans more securely and likely with a lower cost in lives.

Eisenhower directed that the next set of goals would be to capture the Ruhr and Saar regions in western Germany, which were home to a good portion of German industry, while also aiming to capture the ports of Le Havre and Antwerp. Control of those ports would alleviate the Allied supply problem, as cargo ships would then be able to unload their supplies much closer to the front. Once those ports had been taken and made available for Allied shipping, then the question of an offensive deeper into Germany could be considered, probably in the spring of 1945.

Let's take a closer look now at the Channel Coast and consider those ports Eisenhower identified as objectives. Montgomery's 21st Army Group held the northern end of the Allied line, and it was the First Canadian Army specifically that was moving along the coast once the Allies began their advance east of the Seine. Capturing ports was critical, but this advance was also important because it would clear, or at least surround, the German positions at the Pas de Calais, the Strait of Dover, where the Germans launched their V weapons toward England. Eisenhower placed a high priority on shutting down the V-1 attacks.

On September 1, 1944, the 2nd Canadian Division captured Dieppe, which must have been a bittersweet moment. Dieppe was, you'll recall, the site of a 1942 Allied raid that did not go well and led to heavy Canadian casualties.

The Canadians received an enthusiastic welcome from the citizens of Dieppe. On September 3, the Canadians held a victory parade through the town and a memorial service for those who fell during the raid in 1942. In 1946, the town of Leger's Corner in New Brunswick, a predominantly Francophone community, was renamed Dieppe to commemorate the 1942 raid.

Meanwhile, other Canadian units reached Abbeville and the River Somme. As the 2nd Canadian Division was securing Dieppe, the 3rd Canadian Division proceeded north along the French coast to the port cities of Boulogne and Calais. The 2nd next approached Dunkirk. All three towns were garrisoned by German units pursuant to Hitler's orders, forcing the Canadians to besiege them.

Canadian and Polish armored units continued to advance to the Belgian border and beyond. Farther inland, the British Second Army and the US First Army had also advanced into Belgium. The British captured Brussels, the Belgian capital, on September 3. On September 6, the 1st Polish Armored Division liberated the Belgian town of Iper, or Ypres, if you insist. Either way, it was a significant moment for the British military. Iper is the site of the Menin Gate, a memorial to British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the region during the First World War.

That memorial opened in 1927. In 1928 began a tradition of closing the gate to traffic every evening at 8:00 PM while buglers sound the "Last Post," a traditional British bugle call used to commemorate the fallen. After Iper fell in 1940, the Germans banned the ceremony. On the evening of the very day the Polish entered the town, the ceremony was resumed, even though the sounds of combat could still be heard in the distance.

September 4, 1944 brought the Western Allies a critical victory. The British captured the Belgian city of Antwerp intact, thanks to the assistance of the Belgian resistance, who had seized control of the port before the Germans were able to destroy it. Antwerp is, of course, a port city. And it is not just *a* port city; it is one of the biggest ports in Europe. Antwerp was the answer to the Allied logistical problem.

Or it would have been. A look at the map will tell you that Antwerp does not lie on the seacoast. It lies at the head of the Scheldt Estuary, where the River Scheldt flows into the North Sea. But Allied military leaders turned a critical victory into a critical mistake. The Germans still held positions along the banks of the estuary. Their artillery would make it impossible to use the port at Antwerp.

Alas, Bernard Montgomery's eyes were on the Rhine. He wanted his army group to be the first across the Rhine and into Germany proper. On his right flank, the US First Army was also advancing through Belgium, reaching Liège on September 8. On September 10, units of the First liberated Luxembourg and reached the German border.

If Montgomery was to get the glory—excuse me, if *Britain* was to get the glory, Montgomery's force would have to press on to the east. The Americans had the disadvantage of facing the Westwall, which the Western Allies usually called the Siegfried Line. The British and Canadians were farther north, in Belgium and headed toward the Netherlands. The path from here into Germany had no Westwall fortifications standing in its way.

What it did have, though, were rivers. Lots of them. Rivers downstream, approaching the North Sea, meaning here they were at their widest. There were also artificial canals. Any approach toward Germany through these lands would have to cross rivers and canals over and over and over, presumably only after the Germans had blown up all the bridges. German engineers were quite good at that.

So Montgomery was pondering this problem and not paying attention to the Scheldt, which was unfortunate. But there was plenty of blame to go around. Neither General Eisenhower nor his staff at Supreme Headquarters raised the issue with Montgomery when they could have. The only senior officer among the Western Allies who did foresee the problem of the Scheldt Estuary was the Allied naval commander-in-chief, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, but his warnings went unheeded, and a valuable opportunity was lost. It was one of the biggest mistakes the Western Allies made during the war.

Ultimately, the Canadians and the British would have to fight a bloody, month-long battle in October to clear the Germans out of the estuary, at a substantial cost in casualties. It would not be until November 28 that the first Allied freighter unloaded its cargo at Antwerp.

Here's a bit of good news: the Canadian sweep along the French coast at the Pas de Calais overran the sites where the Germans had been launching V-1 buzz bombs at London. They

would no longer be a threat. However, as you already know, the first V-2 ballistic missile was launched against London on September 8. This missile was launched from the Netherlands, as it had sufficient range to reach the British capital even from that distance. The V-1 did not, but the Germans also began launching both V-1s and V-2s from Holland toward Antwerp, part of their effort to deny the port to the Allies for as long as possible.

But Montgomery was still eyeing the River Rhine, and he had an idea.

[music: "Last Post."]

US General Omar Bradley later wrote in his memoir that if Bernard Montgomery, a man who famously never drank, had come stumbling into headquarters one morning with a severe hangover, he, Bradley, would not have been any more shocked than he had been by Montgomery's latest idea.

Remember when I said that the Allies had to face Westwall, but closer to the North Sea, in the part of the front held by Montgomery's 21st Army Group, there was no Westwall, but there were many rivers that would have to be crossed. These would give the defending Germans a considerable advantage: they could use each river as a defensive line, then when the Allies made it across, probably with heavy losses, the Germans could simply fall back to the next river and make them do it all over again, all the way back to the last river, which would also be the most difficult of them all to cross, the River Rhine, Germany's traditional western defensive barrier.

Montgomery's idea was simple, but risky. His forces had reached the Belgian-Dutch border. His plan was to drop more than four Allied paratrooper divisions along Dutch Highway 69, which ran from the Dutch city of Eindhoven, not far behind the German line, all the way to Zwolle, in the eastern-central part of the Netherlands. The highway is known as the A50 in our time. For Allied soldiers of the Second World War, it would become known as "Hell's Highway."

The plan entailed dropping paratroopers, a total of four divisions plus one brigade, at three points along the highway: near the Dutch cities of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem. These airborne units would then seize the bridges where Highway 69 crossed the various rivers and canals. This first phase of the operation was codenamed Market.

In the second phase, the British XXX Corps would push forward along the highway, reaching Eindhoven in one day, Nijmegen in the second day, and Arnhem on the third or fourth day. At Arnhem stood a road bridge and a rail bridge across the Lower Rhine, so by the end of the fourth day at the latest, the Allies would control a hundred kilometers of highway, including the bridges, that ran through the German front line, on through the Netherlands, bypassed the Siegfried Line, and led to the plains of northern Germany.

This second phase was codenamed Garden; the entire operation would be known as Operation Market Garden. Its goal would be to open a route straight through the still-shaky German front

line and into Germany itself. This would force the Germans to fall back in disarray yet again and might still allow the Western Allies to reach Berlin before the end of the year. It would also serve to cut off German forces in the Netherlands, which was important to Churchill and the British War Cabinet because the V-2 rockets bombarding London were launched from Dutch soil.

You'll recall that Allied airborne units played an important role during the Normandy invasion in June. In August, command of all Allied airborne units was consolidated into one command, named the First Allied Airborne Army. Among its units were three American and two British airborne divisions and an independent Polish airborne brigade. During the period from late August through early September, Allied military planners proposed more a half-dozen operations using forces from the First Allied Airborne Army that would land behind German lines and assist in the push to liberate France. But none of these operations was ever carried out, because the rapid advance of the Western Allied units on the ground in France kept rendering the various proposals obsolete before they could be carried out.

In early September, Montgomery had supported a plan that would have used the British 1st Airborne Division and the Polish Parachute Brigade to capture bridges across the Rhine, but early September saw a spate of bad weather and a firming up of German defenses that made this plan infeasible, and it was cancelled on September 10. But rather than give up altogether on that plan, Montgomery expanded it into what would be the largest airborne operation in military history. It was a surprise to many that Montgomery, who had many times proved a cautious and conservative commander, would propose such a bold, not to mention risky, plan. Hence Omar Bradley's remark about how shocked he'd been when he first heard of it.

On September 10, the day the earlier operation was cancelled, Montgomery met with Eisenhower. It was a heated confrontation, apparently. Montgomery was angry with what he perceived to be Eisenhower's slow and vague replies to Montgomery's messages. To Montgomery, this merely proved correct his earlier complaint that Eisenhower had taken on more responsibilities than one person could handle. He emphasized his point by theatrically tearing a stack of Eisenhower's messages into shreds.

Eisenhower, ever the diplomat, patted Montgomery's knee and said, "Steady, Monty. You can't talk to me like that. I'm your boss."

That helped calm Montgomery down. He even apologized to Eisenhower for the outburst. Eisenhower appeased Montgomery by agreeing to Operation Market Garden and promising to give it priority. Market Garden was scheduled to begin on Sunday, September 17.

Meanwhile, in Germany, on September 4, Ōshima Hiroshi, Japan's ambassador to Germany, traveled to the Wolf's Lair to present Hitler with a request from the Japanese government. I described to you the US invasion of Saipan and how that defeat shook the Japanese like no loss they had suffered before, so much so that it led to the fall of the Tōjō government. Now the new

Japanese government was encouraging the German government to seek an end to the war with the Soviet Union. The Japanese government believed that if Germany and the USSR could work out a peace agreement, this would free the German military to concentrate on the threat from the Western Allies, which would also benefit Japan. Japan, which still had diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, would be willing to use its contacts in Moscow to facilitate such discussions.

Hitler listened politely, then told Ōshima that he had not been informed of any interest on the part of the Soviet Union in discussing peace. He asked Ōshima whether Japan had sounded out the Soviet government on its willingness to talk peace. Ōshima told him Japan had not.

Ōshima did not give up after that first meeting. In the days that followed, back in Berlin, he continued to press German officials, telling them that a peace agreement was in Japan's vital interest, and arguing that Joseph Stalin was a realist and would not pass up an offer to end the war early. True, a peace deal might require Germany to abandon some of its objectives in the East, but it could then focus on defeating its enemies in the West.

These appeals from Ōshima came at the same time Churchill and Roosevelt were holding their second set of meetings in Québec, and soon came to the attention of Joseph Goebbels, the German propaganda minister. Goebbels had been closely following the news from Québec and he thought he detected signs of a split developing between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, and on September 20 he took the unusual step of drafting a long memo to the *Führer* arguing the case for peace negotiations with Moscow.

Knowing well how Hitler thought, Goebbels compared the situation to the days leading up to Hitler's becoming chancellor in 1933. The Nazi Party had achieved this by deftly playing its opponents against one another. Here was another such opportunity. Once the Soviet Union was out of the war, the British and Americans would not fight on their own indefinitely. The peace that would emerge would not be "the victory we had dreamed of in 1941, but it would still be the greatest victory in German history." Yes, he knew Hitler well, didn't he?

Surprisingly, Goebbels included in his memo strong criticism of the foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, advising Hitler that Ribbentrop was not the right person for such delicate negotiations and should be replaced before the attempt was made. Any guesses on who he had in mind to become the new foreign minister?

Hitler was not fooled, nor was he persuaded to attempt peace talks. He read Goebbels's memo but never replied to it. He was becoming increasingly delusional, and Hitler often remarked that it would be foolhardy to attempt to negotiate with the Allies now, while Germany was on the defensive. Germany would have to recapture the initiative in this war before he would consider the diplomatic option.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd like to thank John and Alexander for their kind donations, and thank you to Chris for becoming a patron of the podcast.

Donors and patrons like John, Alexander, and Chris help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

As always, the podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. You know the drill. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as the Western Allies execute Operation Market Garden. How did it turn out? The answer is right in the title. A Bridge Too Far, in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I feel I should say a few words about the Japanese ambassador in Berlin, Ōshima Hiroshi. Ōshima was a career Army officer. He held the rank of colonel when he was made Japan's military attaché in Berlin. That was in 1934. Ōshima spoke German fluently and soon developed a relationship with Joachim von Ribbentrop years before Ribbentrop became the German foreign minister. Ōshima played a key role in the drafting of the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact.

He was promoted twice and became a lieutenant general by the time he was appointed ambassador to Germany in 1938. With that appointment, he transferred to the Army reserve. One of his first projects as ambassador involved running an operation intended to assassinate Joseph Stalin. Ōshima hoped that Japan and Germany could work together to bring down the Soviet government, without any need to go to war.

But then came August 1939, when Germany surprised the world by signing a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Ōshima was recalled to Japan and replaced. But Germany and Japan did sign the Tripartite Pact in September 1940 and a few months later, Ōshima was reinstated as ambassador to Germany at the German government's request. He would remain in that position until the end of the war.

Ōshima developed a close relationship with Adolf Hitler. Hitler confided in him and he was more closely involved in the highest levels of the German government than any other foreigner. He engendered such confidence with his enthusiastic embrace of Nazi ideology. American journalist William Shirer wrote of Ōshima that he was "more Nazi than the Nazis."

Ōshima's close relationship with Hitler was a boon to Allied intelligence, since he regularly shared what he learned from the Germans with Tokyo, using the Japanese diplomatic code,

which American cryptanalysts had broken. Ōshima unwittingly gave the Western Allies two weeks' warning of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, although the British were unable to convince Stalin. In late 1943, Ōshima was given a tour of the German Atlantic Wall preparations to repel an invasion by the Western Allies. He sent his superiors in Tokyo a detailed 20-page description of German preparations that was invaluable to the planners of D-Day. During the Allied bombing campaign against Germany, Ōshima regularly sent home detailed assessments of the damage done by Allied bombers, which were helpful to the Allied air forces.

After the war, Ōshima was prosecuted for war crimes, based on his involvement in drafting the Anti-Comintern Pact and the Tripartite Pact and his plot to assassinate Stalin. He served seven years in prison before he was paroled in 1955.

Ōshima Hiroshi died in 1975, at the age of 89, never knowing how much his diplomatic messages had helped the Allies.

[music: Closing War Theme]