THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

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THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

THESIS

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By

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PREFACE

I was one of the thousands that participated in the Battle of the Bulge and for that reason it has led me to try to recreate the story. I approach with great humility the task of outlining the greatest pitched battle on the Western Front in World War II. No book could tell of the confusion and chaos which gripped the forces that were locked in great struggle in the frozen forests of the Ardennes during the wintry weeks of December, 1944 and early January, 1945. I have humbly picked and pieced together information that may offer some explanation of the cause and effect of that chaos, knowing that the true picture cannot be presented of a struggle with more than two million men involved.

Like most returning soldiers I was thinking of the future, of the comforts of civilian life, that bright, cold December day in 1945, when our small ship swung into Boston harbor with whistles blowing. But in my mind the Battle of the Bulge continued to interest me. I resolved to follow further the study of the great battle. Most of us want to forget war and its horrors, but in our haste we are apt to forget that something was accomplished by all the suffering,
killing, waste. Too often we throw ourselves into ventures where valuable lessons can be learned, only to throw away this precious knowledge in a hurry to return to normal. I have read widely and searched for the truth. Too often we harp about the mistakes of the other man, to blame our Allies for everything that went wrong, forgetting that we, too, were not perfect. If there should be a theme in this story, it is that we should strive for peace and profit from the lesson in the past in the hope that mankind will have a better world to live in.

All books used and quoted, are in the stacks of these various libraries: North Texas State College, Denton, Texas; Texas State College for Women, Denton, Texas; Southwestern State College, Weatherford, Oklahoma; East Central State College, Ada, Oklahoma; Southeastern State College, Durant, Oklahoma; Frederick Public Library, Frederick, Oklahoma; Ada Public Library, Ada, Oklahoma; Durant Public Library, Durant, Oklahoma; Denton Public Library, Denton, Texas; Ardmore Public Library, Ardmore, Oklahoma. I have attempted to document the various factual assertions. I have also supplemented some information by personal knowledge.
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CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN WATCH ON THE RHINE

Prelude

So long as Americans read American history, and military talk is discussed, there will be controversy over the Battle of the Bulge of World War II. Was the breakthrough planned? Did it happen in complete ignorance? Did American forces really stop the Germans or did they run out of supplies? Was Bastogne the turning point of the Bulge Battle? Was General Eisenhower responsible for the early failures and likewise did he plan the strategy that resulted in breaking the great German offensive?¹

The story of the Battle of the Bulge is itself dramatic. It all began on July 20, 1944, forty five days after the first Allied soldiers waded ashore through the carnage on the Normandy beaches. Just after noon on that day, Count Felix Von Stauffenberg, Chief of Staff of the Replacement Army, and one of the high Nazis, strolled into a wood near Rastenburg in East Prussia to meet with Der Führer, his chief commanders, Field Marshal Keitel,

¹ George Marshall, Victory Report, p. 44.
Colonel General Jodl, and eight other high ranking German officers. Nothing was thought as Count Stauffenburg placed a huge brief case against the leg of the conference table, and then, shortly walked out of the room. Ten minutes later the bomb in Stauffenburg's brief case exploded and sent the room into turmoil. Der Fuehrer was extremely lucky and suffered only arm and ear injuries. He was ordered to bed, where he personally produced the great German attack called the Battle of the Bulge.\(^2\)

Count Von Stauffenburg watched in high glee as the roof of the building was blown off.\(^3\) Hastily leaving his safe area, Stauffenburg went to the nearest airport to arrange for flight to Berlin to set in motion an uprising to seize control of the German Government. But in Berlin things began to go wrong. The great master planner waited at the airport for a car which he had forgotten to order. In Berlin itself, events were going badly. Major Remer, in command of Hitler's personal guard, was told by the conspirators that Hitler was dead and to surround the government buildings and prevent anyone from leaving or entering. Remer was not very intelligent but he thought something was wrong. Remer sent one of his lieutenants to

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\(^2\) Robert Merriam, *Dark December*, p. 5.

confer with the Goebbels office. The answer was for Remer to come at once to the Goebbels office.

Goebbels was furious as Remer asked him of his loyalty to Hitler. Remer hastily told of the strange happenings much to the alarm of Dr. Goebbels. The "mouth-piece" picked up a private telephone and soon was connected with an angry, frightened, very much alive Hitler. "Let me speak with Remer," demanded Hitler. "Now we have the saboteurs and criminals of the Eastern Front; only a few officers are involved and we will eliminate them from the root," Hitler told Remer.4 "You are placed in a historic position. You are under my direct command until Himmler arrives to take over the Replacement Army. Do you understand me?" Thus Remer stepped out of obscurity into the realm of the Hitler trusted high and mighty.5

The Offensive Attack Idea

The story from here on is well known. The insurrection was put down; the ringleaders were either captured or killed. The German forces were subjected to a ruthless purge, even Rommel, the master of tank warfare, killed himself when confronted with the choice of suicide or liquidation for his conspiracy.6 It looked good for an

5Curt Riess, Joseph Goebbels, p. 279.  
6Ibid., p. 281.
early breakup of the Third Reich. But Hitler was not too badly hurt to think and think is exactly what he did.

During the final days of July and the following month of August Hitler lay in bed recovering from the effects of Stauffenberg's bomb of July 20. The Fuehrer could not carry on his work before when he handled details of many sorts. But he allowed himself concentration to the fullest, how to regain the initiative since the Anglo-American landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944.  

Hitler watched the battle area constantly. He paid special attention to the movement of specified divisions. This fact has been verified by many of his close circle at this time. There is no doubt but that the attack in the Ardennes was Hitler's personal idea. With a kind of spiritual rebirth in himself, Der Fuehrer regained some of his old brilliance.  

The details of the first plan to regain the offensive were developed at the height of great American gains through France, when American forces were rapidly approaching the west wall. In mid-August Hitler called in his general staff and ordered preparation for an attack from the German borders on the rear of General Patton's Third Army. The crack

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7 Marshall, op. cit., p. 34.
8 Robert Merriam, op. cit., p. 3.
German units, Third and Fifteenth Panzer Grenadier Divisions were hastily brought from Italy and assembled on the Western Front. The German hope was to cut off the rear of Patton's Army and consolidate a line across France in front of Metz, to the Belgian border. The plan was to break off communication and then break the spearheads of the armored and infantry forces just coming into contact with the West Wall. But the plan was never carried out. The German forces were too weak to cope with the assignment. The idea of an attack, however, was not forgotten. In the early days of September, Hitler called Jodl to him and said, "We must regain the offensive."

Where to Strike with an Offensive

Once having settled on securing the initiative, the problem of doing so fell on Der Fuehrer and his military henchmen. Hitler's Chief Planners were Field Marshal Keitel, Minister of War, and Colonel General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff. The big problems were to analyze the situation on all fronts to find exactly the right spot to strike when an opportune moment came. The sudden attack plan to drive on Patton's Third Army was hastily drawn. The new attack had to be carefully prepared and planned to the utmost.

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\[9\] Merriam, op. cit., p. 4.  
[10] Ibid., p. 5.  
First in Hitler's consideration was the Eastern Front. The situation there was not rosy. Rumania had withdrawn from the war and the Southern Wing of the German Army had collapsed. It was hoped that a new line could be erected in the Carpathian Mountains and more uses made of Hungarian soldiers. But by mid-September the center of the Eastern Front had been stabilized. The Russians had been blocked in their attempt to cross the Vistula. The prevailing thought in September of 1944 was that the Reds would not be on the move until February of the new year. For a further analysis, Finland had withdrawn from the war and Hitler, Keitel, and Jodl found comfort in this fact. There were some excellent unused German divisions in Finland that could be routed around by Northern Norway and directed to needed fronts.

As the first days of golden autumn came into being, the Americans were sputtering to a halt on most of the Western Front for the lack of gasoline and other supplies. 12 The Americans had outdistanced their supply lines. Hitler now looked in relief as his troops filled the fortress of the West Wall. For the first time since June 6, 1944, there was a settled front and this gave him time to reorganize and rearm for the future offensive.

12 George S. Patton, The War as I Knew It., p. 120.
In Italy there was comfort also as the Army Group there still held to a stable line in the Appennines Mountains. There they were recuperating and reorganizing since the retreat from Central Italy. German troops might even be pulled from here, Hitler thought.

The Balkans were a different story. The Hitlerite Armies had retreated to Croatia. The dropping out of Rumania had forced a new line to be set up between the Balkan front and the Eastern Front. The German General Staff argued that there were obstacles to this situation in the Balkans but it could be brought under control.

After the July 20 attempt on his life, Hitler was worried as to the popular feeling of the Germans.\textsuperscript{13} Was there popular support? His agents swarmed over Germany and soon found the answer. The German home front was readily behind the Fuehrer. On the other hand the German Fatherland was aroused to a high degree behind the Nazis because of the great threat of invasion from two directions. The German people were still undefeated in their own eyes and were ready to rally to a great final stand.

\textsuperscript{13} Riess, op. cit., p. 279.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 280.
The German Plan

In the summer of 1944, Hitler had made further demands on the people in the organization of the Volksstrum. This was a people's army built on the version of the British Home Guard. The purpose of the Volksstrum was to build new fortifications mostly in the East, to be trained for combat on invasion of German soil, to fill the depleted forces in the West Wall as there was a great demand there. There in the West Wall soldiers of the Volksstrum army with stomach ulcers and other ailments could man guns in pillboxes and kill as well as first line soldiers for the German army. Though in the days to come this Volksstrum army was to fade as swiftly as a mist while facing the Allied Might on the West.

A fact of profound importance was that German production continued to rise in the face of increasing air raids on their industries and cities. In actuality, in spite of all efforts to drop the production of artillery, tanks, and airplanes, they all continued to rise in production. This rise of production could be traced to the German industry going underground. The airplane industry particularly was given a new shift in location. On the production front Hitler had high hopes of setting back the

\[ \text{Ibid., p. 285.} \]
Anglo-American air raids by the use of a new jet propelled plane called the "Duesen". Thus with reducing the enemy air blanket Hitler could force greater production.

These optimistic considerations led Hitler to believe that he could springboard an attack to destroy great numbers of troops and to force a decisive change in the war. To find the weak spot for an attack and determine the strength necessary for the success of that attack were the momentous questions.

The cocky Field Marshal Keitel continued to beg Hitler for thirty divisions to launch a new attack. But the days of collecting a large army at one grab were over. The German army had fought for five years in an expanse from the Polar Zone to a degree in closeness to the equator. Where could such a force come from? The first thing to be done was to organize a series of new divisions called the Volksgrenadiers, infantry units largely horse drawn rather than motorized. The Volksgrenadiers were to be made up of young men barely old enough to fight and old men drawn from the production line. The nucleus of the new organization was to be a crop of regular army officers and noncommissioned officers. The full complement of the new divisions was to be reached by adding ersatz infantrymen—pilots without planes, air ground forces without fields, and sailors without ships. They were all to be

16 Merriam, op. cit., p. 7.  
17 Merriam, op. cit., p. 7.
taught to shoot and fight as infantrymen. The next considerations were given to the divisions that had taken a beating in France. They were to be refitted and readjusted as they lay behind the West Wall. The backbone of this new army was to be the four elite Twelfth SS Schutzstaffel (Guard troops) Panzer divisions, which were to be refitted and held deep in the center of Germany. Named the Sixth Panzer Army, this group held all priority in men, equipment, and officers. Selected to head this new army was Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich, loyal Nazi to Hitler since even before the world had heard of Hitler. In Hitler's mind it now began to shape up. There was the making of an attack force and if reinforcements were needed other fronts could be stripped to add power to the all out gamble.

While the needed forces were being gathered, another question was running parallel. Where to attack? The first suggestion of the Russian Front was easily turned aside. A highly successful drive against the Russians would only eliminate twenty or thirty divisions and this would not be felt in the manpower shortage because of Russia's huge manpower barrel. Then too, what would the objective there be? Nothing seemed to be! In Italy, there was nothing offering for a grand offensive. The terrain and difficult weather in Italy made it receive no consideration.

18 Ibid., p. 9.
But in the West things looked far better. The Americans were limited in troop concentration and the Germans were well aware of it. The Battle for France had been won with a small degree of troops, thanks to our command of the air, and our complete mechanization. In spite of this noble victory, our forces were still weak, with a total of less than fifty divisions. There were other bright spots. German troops were still holding out in Channel port areas and had forced the Allies to use conquered parts and the Normandy beaches. Antwerp was still blocked by Nazis. The supplies were not coming through to the Americans. And in the ending, the German High Command completely guessed our future plans of breaking through in the vicinity of Aachen and heading for the Rhine River and over to the Ruhr industrial area eventually.

This was it, the German High Command reasoned, a successful place for an offensive attack. A sudden attack which would trap twenty to thirty divisions would change the entire course of the war. On the Western Front, this success would enable the German army to regroup before the Allies could recover. Hitler in optimism even thought the

the British and American will to win would fade consider-
ably. 21

The odds were heavy. All fronts would have to con-
tribute to make the attack preparations. The Volksgrena-
diers divisions would be held back until urgently needed
to reinforce exhausted troops. The Eastern Front would
suffer in receiving supplies of tanks and gasoline as
these would go to the West. Then too, another danger was
that the Allies might go on an offensive while prepara-
tions were being made and force through German positions.
There was another heavy thought in connection with Allied
Air power. The attack would have to be in a bad weather
period. This was so necessary to allow for as much quiet
as possible as troops and supplies were being assembled.
The Germans learned a lesson in Russia in 1943 on frontal
attack. 22 Here it was found that attacks could not be car-
ried against good defenses. The factors for the new attack
were to be surprise and break through the weakest area, and
a thrust to the rear areas, all during a period of bad
weather for Allied aircraft. The future of the attack
seemed to be boundless in hopes, the destruction of large
armies, capture of huge quantities of supplies, recapture
of Channel ports. There were heavy odds but the stakes were
high enough to warrant a gamble.

21 Merriam, op. cit., p. 12.

The place to attack was brought up in further meetings during the mid part of September. Colonel General Jodl brought to Hitler’s attention the forested areas of Luxembourg and Belgium where four American divisions held an eighty mile front. This was a gripping form of information and Hitler continued to gaze at the Ardennes sector. It was this information that was to burst forth on December 16 to bring to the Allies the greatest battle fought in Europe of World War II. 23

Once before a surprise attack had been sprung and failed. This was at Avaranches, 24 France where American troops were close to being shoved into the sea from the Cotentin Peninsula. The Germans sent four Panzer divisions and one Panzer Grenadier division toward Avaranches to split the Allied invaders who were still contained in Normandy. General Omar Bradley exploited the attack. He held it off with forces in hand and sent four divisions racing around the German flank to begin the Allied sweep across France.

On September 25, Hitler called in Jodl and Keitel. This time he was a fully determined man even though he still

23 Bernard Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 276.

24 Harry C. Burcher, My Three Years with Eisenhower, p. 626.
was suffering from the July 20 bomb burst. "I am", he cried, "determined to hold fast to the execution of this operation regardless of any risk." Hitler ordered Jodl to prepare the plans and submit them for inspection as soon as possible.  

The outline was simple but direct; a quick drive to Antwerp to cut off the American supplies and to trap twenty or thirty divisions in the area north of Antwerp.

Der Fuehrer could hope from his fanatical belief that the course of the war on the Western Front would be changed entirely.

The matter was now settled; there remained only to fit the pieces together for the final moment. There was hasty research done on the battle plans of the 1940 campaign which so surprisingly led through the Ardennes to the fall of France. The continuous research led to the final draft of the attack. The heavy attacking was to be done by two panzer armies; supported by antitank and antiaircraft weapons and units on the North and South. The dormant Luftwaffe would be called out to support the attacking forces. The attack

26 Andre' Simone, Jaccas[se], p. 352.
called for a whirlwind blow in the first stage upon American troops in the thinly held Ardennes forest. Then afterward the panzer units were not to slow down until the Meuse River had been reached.

Once crossing the Meuse, regrouping and reorganization would take place for the final drive through Brussels on to Antwerp, as Model made the springboard for the attack with these words, "Onward to the Maas." (Meuse)

On October 8, 1944, Colonel General Jodl walked into Hitler's office and handed him the final draft for the grand offensive. Hitler was in grand spirits and winked and smiled as he progressively unfolded the plan bit by bit. But plans can often do "back flips." Six months later Hitler and his mistresswife, Eva Braun, would lie dead and burned from drenched gasoline in dying Berlin and Germany. But this thought did not bother Hitler as he thought of the coming offensive and this coming offensive did not enter into the heads of the Allied High Command. On October 23, the U.S. Ninth Army under General Simpson was brought into line directly south of the British area.

Now in the closing days of October, Hitler, Jodl and Keitel were planning the campaign to destroy General Simpson's

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27 Dwight Eisenhower, *Eisenhower's Own Story of the War*, p. 75.
new Ninth Army by cutting them away from the First and Third American Armies.

On this fateful day, October 8, 1944, General Jodl presented a favorable picture: four panzer divisions in the Sixth Panzer Army, two panzer divisions in the Fifth Panzer Army, six panzer divisions for reserves. There were other available infantry units, parachute units, artillery units all to the total of twenty-nine combat divisions. The Sixth Panzer Army was assigned to old faithful, loyal, fanatical "Sepp" Dietrich; trusted Manteuffel was to handle the center with the Fifth Panzer Army; Brandenkuger was assigned seven divisions to hold the south side of the attack against the American Third Army under General George S. Patton. Twenty days were allowed for the panzer forces of Dietrich and Manteuffel to plunge through the center and reach the Meuse River, from there onward to Brussels and Antwerp. Then afterwards, forces should be drained from other units and other fronts to be used to mop up the bypassed American and British units. The three armies were called Army Group B and under Field Marshal Model, who was in turn under the Old Master, Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, Commander in Chief of all forces in the West.

The discussion continued with Antwerp being made the chief objective, because it had now become the great delivery port for Allied supplies. The attack would cover a distance of one hundred twenty-five miles to Antwerp, sixty miles to the Meuse River as the nearest point, which would be slightly south of Liege, Belgium.

The date for the attack was set for November 25th, when there would be a new moon period, good for attack because the dark nights would serve to hide night movements. The topmost recognition was set to be complete secrecy. This it remained up to the surprise beginning.

Hitler knew that 1944 was a far cry from the 1939 campaign against Poland, the crash through the Lowlands in 1940, and the drives against Yugoslavia and Russia in 1941. In all of these cases an unsuspecting "friend" was caught off balance by the Germans and overrun almost before the other could declare a state of war. By this time Germany was weakened by having many of her best men, (a million and a quarter dead according to Jödl), and German factories were hard pressed by Allied bombings. A large offensive army was sitting on Germany's doorstep. The only hope for the Germans was a quick thrust through Allied lines.

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30 Eisenhower, Eisenhower's Own Story of the War, p. 75.
After twenty years of absolute rule and suspicions and attempts on his life, Hitler could see no trust in Germany. Could he trust Goering? Could he trust Goebbels? Could he trust Rundstedt? Who were his friends? Finally Hitler came to the conclusion to admit knowledge to the few closest confidants, Keitel, Jodi, and a few in each headquarters. Even Rundstedt was not trusted as Hitler sent word to the effect that new reserves were being sent to meet the threatened Allied attack on the Rhine. The new code name sent to Von Rundstedt was Macht am Rhein (Watch on the Rhine); thus deception was carried to the Commander in the West. There was no trust in Germany in the closing days, according to Hitler.\(^{31}\)

These secrecy regulations were held all the way up to the German attack. Those who were informed had to sign a secrecy pledge. Each army commander was told only his particular role. There was to be no movement of troops in the daytime. There was to be no scouting into enemy positions. The combat Luftwaffe was ordered to cease all flights until the attack began. Army command posts were not to be moved. The divisions moving up were told that they were to relieve battle worn troops. Motor vehicles were not allowed nearer

\(^{31}\)Reiss, *op. cit.* p. 283.
than five miles to the front. Airplanes were to fly up and
down the lines at night to drown motorized noises. Only ar-
my officers were allowed to carry orders. All unreliable
elements, Poles, Russians, Luxembourgers, were weeded out
and sent to schools. Bridging equipment and artillery
pieces were carefully hidden from Allied reconnaissance
planes. The officers whispered false rumors in cafes,
knowing they would spread to Allied ears.32

The code name, Watch on the Rhine, was more misleading
to the English and Americans than anything else. It im-
plied a defensive attack to prevent the Americans from
reaching the Rhine. The overconfident Allies swallowed this
to the greatest degree. Not much attention was paid by In-
telligence Officers to the recorded facts of the German
moves in the Ardennes sector.

The secrecy plans of the Germans were a great success.
True, there were some slips and very anxious moments for
the German Army. The Sixth Panzer Army was spotted as plan-
ned on the Cologne plain in November and many an anxious
question was asked about it. But no one thought of the Ar-
dennes forests. This is from General Eisenhower:

The German Sixth Panzer Army, which has ap-
peared on our front was the strongest and most

32 Merriam, op. cit., p. 17.
efficient mobile reserve remaining to the enemy within his whole country. At that time some intelligence officers indicated a growing anxiety about our weakness in the Ardennes, where we knew the enemy was increasing his infantry formations. Previously he had like ourselves been using that portion in which to rest tired divisions.  

This closely indicates the situation as to the seriousness of the German moves along the Rhine and in the Ardennes, but nothing was realized as to the forthcoming attack by the Germans.

The German Generals

Looking at the officers to carry out this last German offensive, the first one to be considered is Marshal Gerd Von Rundstedt. He was born in 1875 of noble family in East Prussia of the old Junker class. His first prominence came during World War I when serving in Alsace and Poland. His retirement came between the two World Wars, but when Germany went to war against Poland in 1939, he returned to command an army group in Poland. When the Nazi war machine crashed through the Low Countries in 1940, his guiding hand was behind these successes. In 1941, Rundstedt commanded the Southern group of armies in Russia and suffered defeat. He was shifted to France in 1942, and put in command of the Atlantic Coast defenses and the occupying German forces in

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33 Dwight Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 310.
34 David Crot, "The Last Prussian", Life (December 25, 1944), p. 58.
France. There was no direct implication that Rundstedt was involved in the July 20 plot on Hitler's life. Rundstedt took no part to cause the downfall of Hitler. Now in his seventieth year, Rundstedt was to play the major role in the Battle of the Bulge.35

Rundstedt was a brilliant military leader, quick to realize the outcome because of complete understanding analysis. Because of his age, much of the field work was left to younger men. More of this credit goes to Field Marshal Model.

Field Marshall Walter Model was an opposite in every way to the stiff, haughty, Marshal Rundstedt. To say in a short summary as to Model's feelings, he took his life at the downfall of Germany. From 1934 to 1941, he had commanded a panzer division on different fronts. On the July 20 attempt on Hitler's life, Model was the first to proclaim his loyalty to Der Fuehrer. He was repaid by being placed in charge of Army Group B which was now the main strength in the West. It was Marshall Model who pushed the Ardennes attack.

Of all the Army Commanders, none matched Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich for fanatical, rapid, unashamed, Nazi political maneuvering. This fact made him hated almost wholesale by the German Generals. His knowledge of the military was far.

35 Cort, op. cit., p. 59.
from being first rate. Dietrich's career is a parallel to the Nazi party in Germany. During World War I, Dietrich spent a short time as a tank sergeant in addition to other military services. He considered himself a master of tank warfare, because of this short service with tanks. The World War I being over, Dietrich held on to the German Army until 1928, when he went to Munich and joined the Nazis. The Nazi party rose in Germany and Dietrich rose with it by furnishing protection for Nazi rallies. In 1931, he gained a seat in the Reichstag. In 1932, he had advanced to the position of Hitler's special bodyguard. Later he organized a special unit called the Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler.\(^{36}\)

Later his L.A.H. led the Germans across the German border, marched into Sudetenland, attacked Poland, fought in Greece, fought in France, fought in Normandy, and in November of 1944, he was placed at the head of the German Sixth Panzer Army. Dietrich was the highest SS officer in Germany. "Sepp" Dietrich was not trained or gifted mentally to become an army commander. Rundstedt said in one sentence: "He is decent, but stupid." Herman Goering said of him: "He had at most the ability to command a division." Then why did Hitler choose this man to head Germany's greatest offensive in the closing days of the war?\(^{37}\)

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\(^{36}\)Merriam, op. cit., p. 21.  
\(^{37}\)Merriam, op. cit., p. 22.
The answer goes back to shaky July 20 when Hitler came close to meeting his death. There is also the reason that Hitler distrusted old line German officers. Jodl later confirmed this. The only answer seems to be that of undying loyalty to Hitler's cause, the reward of friendship to Dietrich.

General Von Manteuffel, an alert Wehrmacht officer, was one of the leading experts on armored forces and armored tactics. In September of 1944, Manteuffel was given command of the Fifth Panzer Army. The Fifth Panzer Army was shifted from Patton's flank in September to the Metz region in October and in November were in defense of the crucial German city of Aachen. From here he and the Fifth Panzer Army moved to the Ardennes to prepare for the next step, the Ardennes offensive. Manteuffel persuaded Hitler to make a few changes in the attack plans and Field Marshal Model came to lean heavily on Manteuffel for the execution of the battle plans.

The soldiers' soldier, the little known Erich Brandenberger, General of the Artillery, was trained in principles of attack and defense. Thus, like Manteuffel, he stood head and shoulders over the fanatical Dietrich. His assignment was to take six infantry divisions and fan out to the South and break any American threat to halt the German spearhead. It was thought his greatest task would be to keep up with the fast moving panzer on the North.
These, then, were the major men of the attack. All except Dietrich were steeped in German militarism. There were others who stood out. Topping the list was Skorzeny. Hitler's fellow Austrian, Skorzeny joined the Nazi Party at the age of twenty-four in 1932. At the war's beginning, he joined the SS and served on the French, Balkan, and Russian fronts. In September, 1943, he gained fame by parachuting down and rescuing Benito Mussolini. From this time on Skorzeny became more popular in Nazi circles. In 1944, when Hitler planned a massive deception, it was quite natural that Skorzeny received the job.38

A second of palace favorites to play a role was Otto Remer. He had made himself solid with Hitler on first detecting the plot to take over Berlin on July 20. This made him for a short while hold the fate of Germany, as stated above.

Remer rose rapidly from Major to Brigadier General. When the attack plans were being made, Hitler told Remer to prepare brigade units in preparation to engage in the huge coming attack.

And so we have the Nazi leaders, some brilliant, some stupid. This was given to show a picture of the men that

38 Butcher, op. cit., p. 728.
the American troops had to deal with during the greatest battle on the Western Front of World War II.\textsuperscript{39}

The Small Solution on the Large Solution

October was a very crucial month for the Germans. Hitler had ordered top priority given to the Sixth Panzer Army in terms of tanks and supplies. This proved to be difficult when heavy American attacks began on the border city of Aachen, some few miles from the Belgian border. Because this was the first German city to be attacked, Hitler ordered it held at all cost, "Hold on, no surrender, no matter what the odds."\textsuperscript{40} However, American power proved to be too much for them and Aachen was left in total ruins. These German divisions hastily began preparations for the big push.

In mid-October, Rundstedt, still not knowing of the offensive plans, reported to Hitler that he needed eight infantry divisions and three panzer divisions to hold his six hundred twenty-five mile Western Front. His survey showed German strength at forty-seven infantry and seven panzer divisions against an enemy strength of forty-two infantry and eight armored divisions and eleven armored brigades. From September to October 15, Rundstedt had received one hundred

\textsuperscript{39} Merriam, op. cit., p. 25.

\textsuperscript{40} Reiss, op. cit., p. 287.
fifty thousand men for his front; mostly men not suitable for front line combat; he had lost one hundred fifty thousand men. In addition eight thousand men had been withdrawn for the new Sixth Panzer Army. His request for new troops was accompanied with a sad note saying he realized that the troops would not be furnished but felt compelled to record the need.

By the end of October Hitler had reached other decisions. The Sixth Panzer Army was to be doubled in strength and the entire tank supply on the Eastern Front was ordered sent to the build-up in the West. Manteuffel had his hands full around the Aachen sector but Hitler ordered him to regroup. Model's Army Group B was given a shorter line to allow more time for reorganization. Such was the situation when Generals Westphal and Krebs, Chiefs of Staff to Rundstedt and Model traveled to Rastenburg, Hitler's headquarters, to receive the news that soon the attack would be coming.

Westphal and Krebs were briefed for four days personally by Hitler. Following this they were sent on their way with complete drawings and sketches and personal directives to Rundstedt and Model. Thus as soon as they were studied, Hitler was to expect a report on views and intentions to the plans. Only about the first of November were the

41 Merriam, op. cit., p. 27.
generals allowed to see the plans that they were expected to carry out.

But from the beginning Von Rundstedt opposed the plans as promulgated by Hitler and his Chief of Staff. Perhaps this is why he did not enter wholeheartedly in the operation. Model also disagreed, but his devotion and loyalty caused him to enter deeply into the plan to execute Hitler's last grandiose dream. 42

On November 3, Rundstedt, through Model, issued his reply to Hitler based on study by himself, Model, and their chief assistants, although the plan was revealed to only a few. This reply was in basic agreement but suggested changes. For the main one, instead of the fast gallop to Antwerp, a pincers movement was suggested. This pincers movement was to be concentrated on the packed Allied troops around Aachen. This huge protruding fist in the German side had parts of the British Second Army, all of the American Ninth Army, and parts of the American First Army. This heavily packed Allied region had a base of thirty short miles. The German Generals accompanied the reply with suggestions for a Northern drive and a Southern drive through the weakly held Ardennes to the Meuse River, turn north and lock

42 Cort, op. cit., p. 60.
43 Hatch, op. cit., p. 242.
with the German pincers on the North. Rundstedt further stated if this was successful the drive could be carried across the Meuse and on to Antwerp.

The reply of Rundstedt and Model on reaching Hitler was quickly killed. Hitler reasoned that the German forces were not sufficient to handle the Allied mass if ever they were chewed off. Hitler, backed by Keitel and Jodl rejected the so-called "small solution" proposed by Rundstedt and Model and decreed that the only way to kill off the Allied thrust was a rapid movement to destroy their line of supplies, to kill by strangulation. 44

So Hitler overrode his generals in the field. You cannot deny but what his objective was great. That the Germans could mount an offensive at all in the light of the air poundings was a wonder. From here on it became clear to see that the execution of this doubtful plan must go to loyal Nazis, ready to die for their Master. For this reason, Model, Dietrich and Jodl were called on for the execution of the plan, but Model and Dietrich went ahead with no heavy hearts; theirs was the faith sublime.

The Trojan Horse

To Hitler one of the first phases of this offensive was to have an operation of confusion made up of special brigades.

44 Marshall, op. cit., p. 44. 45 Buthor, op.cit., pp.728-729
Two problems loomed high on the German list. The first one was the seizure of bridges across the Meuse River so the panzers could go over and not break their stride in the race for Antwerp. The other problem was the Luftwaffe.

The Luftwaffe had lost its power on the Western Front and therefore could not help secure the bridges. For this reason Hitler fell on the once glamorous Goering and denounced Goering and the Luftwaffe with rage. It was a fact that the bridges must not be destroyed. The mist cleared over the problem when the idea was born to create a great hoax. Hitler's choice to head this mission was the blonde head of Otto Skorzeny. The task that confronted Skorzeny was to secure bridges on the Meuse River in the confusion that would accompany a terrific break through.

Colonel Skorzeny turned to the task to accomplish wonders for his god, Hitler! Skorzeny had no morals or conscience as he made plans for the use of captured American uniforms. As he said, this was justified by our use of captured German uniforms in the Aachen fighting. This instance is one of many where the German Army threw away the military book in the all-out gamble.

The orders were sent out for all units to provide their best English-speaking men. These men were made into the

46 Merriam, op. cit., p. 31.
strongest unit of the German Army. They had no home military district, no name, only a code designation; buzzard. They were kept isolated from all other soldiers; their barracks were strictly shut off and securely guarded. They had orders to speak only English, even in their most trivial and personal conversations. There were letters passed among the chosen ones, Ethel from Baltimore, Honey Lou May from Oklahoma City, and Dotty from Memphis were now centered in German pockets. They went through a concentrated and vigorous training in anything requiring stealth and trickery; they learned to move in silence and to kill in silence. They studied the details of American weapons and vehicles. They even subdivided into small groups according to the localities from which they were supposed to have come. Some were actually born there; they were instructed in the lore, in the customs, the names of prominent people there. They knew more about their congressmen than the average American. They could tell you exactly how to get to the town's Sears and Roebuck or Montgomery and Ward. With all this knowledge they were to use captured American uniforms, weapons and vehicles to pass through American lines and have the bridges ready when the panzers arrived.

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49 Heym, *op.cit.*, p. 344.
Skorzeny was first alarmed by rumors that floated about of this intended mission. But as he soon realized that these rumors were of value and he allowed the wildest of rumors to float toward Allied lines. Some of these were that Skorzeny and his men were going to free the Germans holding out at Dunkirk, but the one that created the most excitement and chaos was the one that he (Skorzeny) was going to capture the army headquarters and kill General Eisenhower. This story spread like wildfire and created the greatest stir of any let loose on the Western Front of all the war.

A Final Decision

In November Hitler said the final "No" to General Model's and Marshal Rundstedt's pleas for the "small solution" in trying to capture Aachen and pinch off the Allied salient. Hitler called on his meteorologist for the best possible weather to cover a move up of the German forces. The last week in November was pointed out as having a new moon rising and the worst possible flying weather in Europe.

In the next big meeting of Hitler, Rundstedt, Model, Westphal, Krebs, Manteuffel and Dietrich, all were of the same belief, that the German forces were unprepared for the late November attack. Hitler alone set the date for the project, and picked December 10 for the attack offensive.
On November 16, an American attack started from Aachen toward the Rhine. Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army moved into the Ruhr area. This created a furthering of the Watch on the Rhine. But as the Germans had hoped, this provided an excellent kick in the wrong direction when the German attack did come. On November 23, the German Army Group G had faced heavy fighting in the Alsace Lorraine region by the American Third Army. This reason shut off all thought of a late November drive. Hitler overlooked the collapse of his Southern wing and declared, "Now is the time to attack, when the enemy is most exhausted."

There was another German defense to prove valuable in slowing the American attack. This was the Roer River defense system that protected the Rhine River. To Hitler's joy the Roer River was admirably set up for defense. It was small, narrow, swift running and had enough head water dams to keep the river in continuous overflow. There was heavy fighting for several days along the river, but by December 1 the American fall offensive had halted.

In the last meeting plans were laid for the movement of the armies up to the front. "Sepp Dietrich was to remain out on the Cologne plain until three days before the attack.

50 Reiss, op. cit., p. 286.

51 Marshall, op. cit., p. 42.
and then move up to the front in night moves. Manteuffel's army was to remain in the vicinity of the Ardennes forests. Brandenberger's army was to remain in contact with the enemy.

The High Command scraped every barrel for supplies. As the supplies were being moved up, the Allies fell into the procedure of thinking that the supplies were for the defense on the Rhine. Also, because of the secrecy of the Germans among themselves, much vital gasoline, oils and supplies were left on the East bank of the Rhine as the Germans thought they were for defense there.

At the close of November the German code name of "Watch on the Rhine" faded into the code Herbstnebel (Autumn Smoke), and properly named it was because of the European December cloudy and snowy weather.

Supplies continued to be moved up in early December as Hitler postponed the attack of December 10. Hitler now called on Goering and the idle Luftwaffe to put two thousand planes on the Western Front. The Luftwaffe had not been seen since Normandy in any degree of mass or strength.

Liege or Not Liege

Manteuffel felt it his duty to carry out the plans as nearly as possible. Dietrich and his Chief of Staff, Kramer, laid somewhat different plans. They prepared for a

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52Merriam, op. cit., p. 37.
crossing on the Meuse slightly north of Liege. Now was this in conjunction with Hitler's orders? Or was the plan to cross the Meuse south of Liege near Dinant? This vital point is argued both ways by historians but the greater evidence seems to favor the Meuse being crossed at Liege, which was slated for capture.\(^5^3\) Liege was the greatest supply base on the Western front, and was bulging with food and gasoline for millions of men and thousands of vehicles. German intelligence agents were well aware of the Liege supply depot, and "Sepp" Dietrich and the Sixth Panzer Army hoped to consume them on their dash to Antwerp.

As the plan unfolded, some army commanders violated the sacred orders of Hitler, thus showing the rift between the Nazis and the Old Prussian Junker class of officers.

The Attack Hour

The plans now left the drawing boards for execution. The Sixth Panzer Army moved off the Cologne plain and faced the weak American Eighth Corps,\(^5^4\) while in the South, Manteuffel and Brandenberger were bringing the Fifth Panzer Army and the Seventh Army into the heavy forests of the Ardennes. The troops were moved into assembly areas and made ready for battle. The Germans moved in seventeen divisions

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\(^5^3\) Eisenhower, Eisenhower's Own Story of the War, p. 75.

\(^5^4\) Merriam, op. cit., p. 36.
only a few miles from the American lines, making considerable noise. But intelligence officers regarded it as only some form of relief. As one American Intelligence Officer moaned, "Nothing happens here, this is a rest center."

This little story is said to have floated through the elite German High Command some time previous to the great offensive. "Take a guess at your opponent's intelligence as he stretches his hands forward containing marbles. The first round he would have two marbles. If he was on the lowest level of intelligence, you would know the next time he would have three marbles. If the marble holder was on the highest level you would know he again would hold two marbles. Remember the two marbles and the three marbles. The Americans are on top level. In 1940, we (Germans) used two marbles. We pushed through the Ardennes to victory. They just won't believe that we'll do the same in 1944. The Americans will bet on three marbles. We must win, time is running out."  

The plans were settled; nineteen divisions prepared to move out with three attacking armies; eight more divisions were held in reserve, while five more divisions waited further back. "Forward and over the Maas" (Meuse), shouted

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56 Ibid., p. 348.
Hitler. Model cried out, "We must not fail for Der Fueh-
er and the Fatherland." Rundstedt said in all serious-
ness, "We gamble everything now. We cannot fail." Hit-
ler set the final day for December 16 and on that Saturday
morning at 5:30, gray clad troops sprang out of hiding
into a snow swirling offensive. 57

The German people received the news with elation and
joy. Their troops were marching once more. The Goebbels
office gleefully told the people that Antwerp and Paris
would soon belong to Germany once more. 58

57 Montgomery, op. cit., p. 276.

58 Riess, op. cit., p. 291.
CHAPTER II

GENERAL EISENHOWER'S SOLDIERS

The Battle for France

Life was relatively serene among the German formations in France on the evening of June 5, 1944. There had been no warning of Allied moves and an invasion seemed weeks away.  

Tuesday, June 6, 1944, was the big D Day. Four thousand ships were launched. Half a million men, with millions to back them up, faced outward across a stormy sea. Come wind or storm or a fair day, the beaches would be stormed.  

The Allied forces landed and everyone was aware of the sacrifices that American assault waves made on bloody red Omaha beach. At dusk of the sixth the word was flashed that the beach head was secured.  

In Normandy, for once, it was the Germans with the extended supply lines. The invasion was successful. Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, who commanded the German forces in

1 Milton Shulman, *Defeat in the West*, p. 100.


the West, was replaced by Field Marshal Von Kluge. But Von Kluge did no better, and the Anglo-American build-up continued at high speed. The rest of June daily saw 30,000 tons of supplies and 300,000 men landed. By the first of July, one million American soldiers and twenty eight thousand vehicles were on the continent. There were eighteen combat divisions at this time.

Several days later following an attack of 1700 planes, the ground troops and armor slashed their way out of the Normandy hedgerows. On August 1, a shift in command took place: an American Army group was put in the field under General Omar Bradley. Lt. General Courtney Hodges took over the First Army and George S. Patton took over the newly formed Third Army. Hodges was to turn east behind the German forces holding up Montgomery and the English; Patton was to head south and isolate the Brittany peninsula, then swing east and in a pincers movement trap the Germans on the Seine River. To heap more troubles on the Germans, Southern France was invaded on August 15. This invasion Churchill tried to prevent. American plans went well, going beyond the greatest expectations, all except the Channel ports. In this matter, the Channel ports caused much trouble. General

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4 Robert Merriam, *Dark December*, p. 51.
Patton was instructed to bypass the Germans in the Channel ports, especially Brest, St. Nazaire, and Lorient. The Germans holed up there and remained. Patton then turned east along the Loire River and by mid-August his tank columns were nearing Paris. 5

At this time there appeared a corridor between the First Army and the Third Army, between the Normandy peninsula and the Brittany peninsula. Through this corridor the Germans tried to drive a wedge for the purpose of separating the two American Armies. "Sepp" Dietrich, about whom we have already heard, led the attack. The attack was led by four German divisions and the American Thirtieth Division stopped it cold. 6 This division covered itself in glory here, and the race across France was on.

Hitler had ordered that the invaders be thrown back into the sea. Now the Germans had a Blitzkrieg on their hands in reverse order. The boldness of the American operation turned the armor loose, from here on they led every attack with success. 7 In the early part of August soldiers landing in Normandy were wondering why they had come to France, because they would not have to fight.

5 Patton, op. cit., p. 105.
7 Hatch, op. cit., pp. 234-235.
General Hodges and General Patton closed a hook into the rear of the German Army which was fighting the British and Canadians around Cain. Montgomery turned on a south drive and created what was known as the Falaise Gap, which held over one hundred thousand Germans. The slaughter of the Germans was immense and they also suffered huge losses of equipment and arms. The German commander of the west at this time, Von Kluge, contacted the British and even talked of surrender. The negotiations were not made and Von Kluge killed himself rather than face Hitler after this offer.

The rest of the story of the Battle of France is a happy period. It was a game of cat chasing mouse, with German soldiers racing for the protection of the West Wall and American soldiers after them. It was the grand liberation for which the French, Belgians, and Dutch had waited five years. Le Mans, Chartres, Paris, Rheims, and Verdun fell without much struggle. Hodges' First Army swung north from Paris and soon pretty Belgian girls were smiling at American soldiers in Dinant, Namur, Huy, and Liege. The British Army moved north from Le Harve region toward Brussels and it fell to them on September 3. On September 4, Antwerp

9 Merriam, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
fell to the British, but there was much work to be done before supplies could be handled there. Some other historic cities fell in the onrush, Lille, Luxembourg City, and Dieppe fell into the hands of the Canadians. Dieppe for the Canadians was a bitter revenge for a D Day that had failed. By early September the Allies were up against the West Wall.

The German plan now began to unfold bit by bit. It was not a German debacle after all. The fact that troops were left behind to hold Brest, Lorient, St. Nazaire, Calais, Dunkirk and Le Harve conformed exactly to German plans, which were to hinder supplies arriving. The German High Command meant to stretch Allied supply lines and now this was the major problem.

The Red Ball Express

One of the greatest miracles of the entire war was the formation and maintenance of the supply lines. At the war's ending, 3,000,000 men, 48,000,000 tons of supplies, 700,000 vehicles, and thousands of other items to support the troops, had been moved 3000 miles from the home front to the battle front. 11

When the battlefield could be toured in a few hours the supply problem was not so difficult. Once the armies

11 Randolph Leigh, 48 Million Tons to Eisenhower, p.28.
started rolling, the supply problem headed the list on the agenda. At the first stage it was seen that the railroads could not be used because of total disruption. The heavy Allied bombings and the last minute operations of the Germans reduced them to piles of wreckage.

The answer was that the Americans had to rely on trucks to keep the Army going. Thus, the famous Red Ball Express was born.\textsuperscript{12}

When people think of a battle, they usually think of guns roaring, tanks charging, the moaning of the dying, and generals going here and there brilliantly commanding. But none was more dramatic or better planned than the Red Ball Express battle. From only a few small detachments of trucking companies, the Red Ball grew to contain more than seven hundred miles of well-marked roads. The system was equipped with its own service stations, repair and wrecking stations, mess halls, and was kept going all hours of every day. The Red Ball began work on August 25 with 5,400 trucks, hauling 5000 tons of supplies for the eighty-one days of its operation. On one peak day, 12,000 tons of supplies were hauled to the front.\textsuperscript{13} The Ninety-fifth Infantry Division was converted into fifteen trucking

\textsuperscript{12} Eisenhower, \textit{Eisenhower's Own Story of the War}, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{13} Merriam, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 58.
companies, and hauled 23,140 tons of supplies from September 15 to October 5.

The Red Ball ran day and night, and at night even drove with lights on in total disregard of the Luftwaffe. From this, losses were few. They had the run of the highways and no unit was allowed to break into them on the highways. At the end of the Red Ball service in November, 9,500 vehicles were hauling for the transportation system.

Paris was liberated on August 25. The armies now found themselves 150 miles from the beaches and 200 more miles to the German border. Three hundred fifty miles of hauling supplies by the millions of tons could hardly be done. It was too expensive. Gasoline, rubber, and trucks were a supply problem for the Red Ball itself.

This was the picture in brief: the German Army running for the West Wall bunkers, an Anglo-American army chasing after them, long and insufficient supply lines, three thousand miles from the home production base, and channel ports not ready for use. Now it was up to General Eisenhower, the man from the plains of Kansas, to make a decision.

Eisenhower's Decision in September

Following the Battle for France Eisenhower found greater problems than ever. Once having opened the iron door called

14 Leigh, op. cit., p. 23.  
15 Ibid., p. 29.
Festung Europa, General Eisenhower had to go on. Afterwards the Allied Armies had a month and one half of sure successes chasing the Germans toward the West Wall. Then came the supply problem as supplies were falling behind farther and farther.\textsuperscript{16}

Now as the First and Third Armies drew up on the Siegfried line, Eisenhower found himself faced with a great decision:\textsuperscript{17} whether to try a deep thrust into the heart of Germany, or whether to try to push all along the line with a continuous front. Supplies were lagging, as the channel ports were not being used and ship unloading was being done on the Normandy beaches. Then too, the supply base of England was being drained. These warm summer days laid the foundation for the Battle of the Bulge.

War is sporadic, never a continuous running battle. After a battle period armies withdraw and regroup for the next effort. The German Armies faced the supply problem in the year of 1940 after they had lunged to the channel and the Atlantic coastline. This supply problem saved England.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} George S. Patton, \textit{War As I Knew It}, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{17} Bernard Montgomery, \textit{From Normandy to the Baltic}, p. 321.

\textsuperscript{18} Winston Churchill, \textit{Blood, Sweat, and Tears}, p. 433.
Now Eisenhower faced the same problem. The armies were up against the German border and faced the problem of entering Germany. The great question at this time came to be, how were they going to tackle Germany? Some argued that all supplies should be brought to one point, rip a hole in the border defenses, and let all the American forces plunge through the hole. Let the armies then cross over the Rhine River and go on to Berlin. \(^\text{19}\) Generals Patton and Bradley wanted to do this very thing. Bradley made great plans for the capture of Metz and the crossing of the Rhine. Then Montgomery brought his plan to Eisenhower; to rush around the Germans in Holland, cross the Rhine, and take the North German plains to Berlin. \(^\text{20}\) General "Monty" argued for the great circle route saying how much shorter it would be than a direct push.

Here politics reared its dirty head on the battlefield. This was once the case over the invasion. Churchill wanted to hit the Pas de Calais Area, north of the Seine River, and drive direct down on Paris. Previous to the June 6 invasion, Hitler had expected an invasion from here and had concentrated heavy equipment and troops. The Americans held out for the Normandy invasion, where Intelligence Agents showed less enemy strength. Eisenhower had won out and had been successful. Now how successful was his decision going to be on

\(^{19}\) Patton, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 139. \(^{20}\) Montgomery, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 270.
this operation? He tried to stay away from politics in the war, and to win the war in the shortest time.

Eisenhower, in London headquarters, studied the plan carefully and came up with a different solution from either Bradley or Montgomery. His plan was to close up the lines all along the West Wall defenses. Bradley's Twelfth Army Group was to close up with General Devers' Sixth Army Group in the South, and on the north for the First Army to hook up with Montgomery's Twenty-first Army Group. Then once the supplies caught up with the armies, a continuous push could be made, and surely the Germans could not save the West Wall defenses. Patton was extremely anxious to try a deep thrust into German territory. Experience had shown that an armored finger had pushed through to Metz and was chopped off. Finally, the British and American drive into Arnhem, Holland was hacked off. There at Arnhem, over 7000 men were lost to German defenses. Some writers claim that Eisenhower was weak in this decision; but he was right. Had we lost an entire army on a thrust gamble it would have damaged American forces to a disaster point.

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21 Dwight Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 306.

22 Merriam, op. cit., p. 63.
German records confirm the belief that they were an effective force at this time on the West Wall defense. The Seventh, Fifteenth, and Fifth Panzer Armies were there. Goering made the statement that all had gone as to plan, and that a defensive stand would be made on the *Siegfried* line. This statement helped to lull the Allies to sleep and they came to believe that Germany could not mount an offensive.

General Eisenhower had made the decision.

**Location of American Units**

The last of September and October were months of preparation and receiving of supplies for the American Army. The new Ninth American Army was shifted north between the British Army and the First U. S. Army. The Ninth Army was under General Simpson. During October the port of Antwerp was being cleared.

The Ardennes was a ghost front all along through the war. The first charge of American forces into the Ardennes had ended in a repulse. Afterwards the forces dropped action all along the thick woods of the Ardennes.

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The month of October saw some heavy fighting by General Hodges' First Army in the Aachen sector. The Ardennes sector of eighty miles was loosely held by three divisions of Major General Troy H. Middleton's VIII Corps. These three divisions were the Fourth (Ivy) on the north, the Eighth (Pathfinder) in the center, and the Eighty-third (Thunderbolt) on the south. Each division held a twenty-six mile front whereas each should have had four or five miles. This was Hitler's dream situation.

In September, American forces were not strong. There were thirty-three divisions in Europe, aided by fifteen British divisions and two other scattered divisions. This set the Allied divisions at only fifty. The Germans could no more than match this with divisional strength. In mid-October the Ninth Armored Division was moved to the VIII Corps in the Ardennes, but it was too late: the weakness had been spotted. General Middleton chose not to fortify his position, but chose rather to have his men on the offensive approach, supported by General Hodges, his boss. He even loaned his trucks to other units engaged in battle when he should have been hauling for himself to meet the offensive.

26 Kenneth Davis, Soldier of Democracy, p. 516.

27 Davis, op. cit., p. 517.
On September 30, the Fourth (Ivy) Division was replaced by the Second (Indianhead) Division, and the Fourth was sent to try for the Roer River dams. In the middle of November the Twenty-eighth (Bloody Bucket) Division replaced the Eighth (Pathfinder) Division. The Eighth was sent to the terrible fighting in the Hurtgen forest, near Aachen. On the sixth of December, the Fourth returned to Middleton's Corps after having lost 7,000 men on the drives to take the Roer River dams. This Roer River defense was the first defense for the Rhine River. This was the Ardennes strength prior to the coming offensive.

General Middleton's line of defense ran through the rolling hills of Eastern Belgium and Luxembourg which we commonly call the Ardennes. This area has been noted for hundreds of years for its beauty and as a resort center. In the summer with the cherry and plum trees in bloom on the hills, it is a picture not easily forgotten. It is bordered on the east by the Our River and on the west by the beautiful Meuse that winds across half of Europe. The roads are narrow and winding and not best suited for armored columns but German boats were to resound out of the Ardennes as in 1871 and 1914.


29 Merriam, op. cit., p. 78.
Rumors and Intelligence Reports

The American forces were weak in the Ardennes and the Germans knew it. The Sixth Panzer Army was spotted early on the Cologne plain. The Air Corps made the report that German troops were being moved up, reporting as high as one hundred trains a day.

In the last days of November, some copies of the German order setting up Skorzeny's brigades and calling for English speaking soldiers were captured. This proved that something unusual was coming. On November 30, a German prisoner was brought in. He told of the movement of panzer troops in front of Middleton's Eighth Corps. In the first two weeks of December the Germans were hurling V-1 rockets into Liege. Then the robot rockets stopped. The reason was not clear then; but later it was easy to understand as the railroad which formerly hauled rockets was now hauling men and equipment.

In December, many prisoners were caught and told of a coming counteroffensive. Those coming into contact with the German prisoners of war often heard such talk as, "Wait till Christmas," "We are finished," "We will be rescued soon." There seemed a quiet unrest in the air as prior to a storm. Two prisoners were captured by the Eighth Corps

30 Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 346.
31 Merriam, op. cit., p. 89.
on December 14, and they told that all members of their division had been called back in preparation for an attack against the Eighth Corps. Strangely enough much of this information was not sent to higher headquarters.

Eisenhower once came near to predicting the Battle of the Bulge. On September 22, he wrote to Montgomery and mentioned that his lines were getting too thinly stretched, and for this reason he would not shift men to Montgomery. As paraphrased by Butcher, he said, "We may get a nasty little 'Kasserine' if the enemy chooses the right place to concentrate his strength." Kasserine Pass was a place in North Africa, where in 1942, the Germans pulled a costly desperation battle on the green Americans. The Battle of the Bulge proved to be a big "Kasserine".32

Bradley, Eisenhower, Hodges and Patton all were surprised at the attack and none claimed to have in mind what came on December 16. As for Hodges, his plan called for moving the One Hundred Sixth Infantry (Golden Lions) Division into the Ardennes rest center.33 This division was green, had never been under fire, because it was fresh from the United States. The area that the One Hundred Sixth was

32 Butcher, My Three Years with Eisenhower, p. 676.

33 Merriam, op. cit., p. 87.
assigned to was later overrun by twenty-nine German divisions on or near December 16, 1944.

Here is General Bradley's Intelligence Officer, Brigadier General Edwin Silbert's report, about December 10:

It is now certain that attrition is steadily sapping the strength of German forces in the West and that the crust of defense is thinner, more brittle, and more vulnerable than it appears on our G-2 maps, or to the troops in the lines.

General Eisenhower's Intelligence Officer, General Kenneth Strong, reported that the Germans were losing twenty divisions a month. This shows that American G-2 Intelligence Service was caught completely napping.

The Americans were misled by their own thinking in the early days of December. Did not Hitler almost lose his life because of unrest in Germany? Did not the Americans and English win the Battle of France easily? Were not the Germans about ready to quit? These disturbing questions now were steeped in optimism.

The weather was to play its part. In December, in Europe, one can count on cloudy weather. The Germans reasoned that the Allied air blanket would be reduced.

So the stage was set for the Battle of the Bulge which Hitler launched on December 16. General Bradley had said

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34 Ibid., p. 88.  
35 Ralph Ingersall, Top Secret, p. 246.  
36 Ingersall, op. cit., p. 247.
a few weeks before that the battle lines had to be thinned and that the safest place to reduce troops was in the Ardennes sector. 37 Later on, General Bradley was to use a military phrase to describe this reasoning. He referred to the thinning of the line in the Ardennes as "taking a calculated risk". He meant that the odds were against the enemy attacking there; the enemy might come, but it was worth the advantage gained by staying on the offensive. And if the enemy did attack maybe that would be an advantage, too.

So Bradley decided to take the calculated risk—but it is only fair to the German Commander who mounted Hitler's battle to say that so skillfully did he prepare for it that not a single Allied Intelligence Officer had even a suspicion of what the Germans were up to on the day before they attacked.

When the attack came, it was a total and complete surprise, catching a relief division on its first night in the lines. Two regiments were captured and killed. Never had a battle gotten underway so swiftly before for both sides. At St. Lo, the American infantry had to fight inch by inch for days. In the Ardennes, during the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans passed through American front lines at thirty

37 Ibid., p. 248.
miles an hour. The German forces seemed to have everything, surprise, speed, fire power, and morale.\textsuperscript{38} For those who looked on the map on the morning of December 17, it seemed impossible that the Germans would ever be stopped, for they had torn a fifty mile gap in the lines. And on every west road ahead of the Germans there were Americans and Belgian civilians fleeing for their lives.\textsuperscript{39}

During this time there were many remarks made that we knew all about the Battle of the Bulge in advance. There were others who hinted that it was a trap to draw the Germans out of their fortress West Wall defenses. If anyone ever knew, it was not really brought to light. The German code, "Watch on the Rhine" was a complete cover for their movements.\textsuperscript{40} There is no need to elaborate further. The Allies were blindly fooled. They should have remembered past lessons. As it happened, it was similar to 1940 all over again.

\textsuperscript{38} Dwight Eisenhower, \textit{Eisenhower's Own Story of the War}, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{39} Ingersall, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 250.

\textsuperscript{40} Joseph C. Marsch, \textit{Pattern of Conquest}, p. 72.
Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force

**Legend**
- **American Ninth Army**: Simpson
- **British Army**: Montgomery
- **American First Army**: Hodges
- **Canadian Army**: Bradley
- **Second Army**: Devers
- **American Seventh Army**: Ridgway
- **First Army**: Eisenhower

**Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force**

- **21st Army Group**: Montgomery
- **12th Army Group**: Bradley
- **6th Army Group**: Devers

**American Ninth Army**
- **XII Corps**: Gillem
  - 7th Armored Div
  - 102nd Div
  - 84th Div
- **XIX Corps**: McLain
  - 2nd Armored Div
  - 29th Div
  - 30th Div

**British Army**
- **Second Army**: Eisenhower

**American First Army**
- **VII Corps**: Collins
  - 104th, 9th, 83rd, 8th, 78th, 2nd, 5th, 3rd, 1st Div
- **V Corps**: Gelow
  - 99th Div
- **VIII Corps**: Middleton
  - 106th, 28th, 9th Armored, 4th Div

**American Seventh Army**
- **III Corps**: Walker
  - 90th Div
  - 95th Div
  - 5th Div
  - 10th Armored Div
- **XX Corps**: Milliken
  - 36th Div
  - 6th Armored Div
  - 87th Div
  - 35th Div
- **X Corps**: Eddy
  - 80th Div

*Fig. 1—Allied order of battle on December 15, 1944, before German attack*
CHAPTER III

THE PENETRATION

Final Preparation

American soldiers slept soundly on the night of December 15, unaware of the preparations of only a few miles away. The generals of Der Fuehrer wanted a little more equipment and some more bridging material, but Hitler would have no more delays. However, Hitler did make one change. If the Meuse River was reached the Aachen salient would be taken into consideration. Hitler dictated that there would be three attack waves.¹

As ordered, seventeen divisions were to be used in the first days' fighting. Between Mouschau and Monderfield, a total of fifteen miles, four infantry divisions and one parachute division were to open a hole to let two panzer divisions of Dietrich's army through the gap.² The Twelfth SS Panzer Division was to take the Elsenborn ridge now held by General Gerow's Fifth Corps. Then from here, the infantry divisions of the Sixth Panzer Army were to seize the three main roads running from Verviers to Liege. The Jodgtigus (King Tiger) tanks were to repulse any attack.

¹Robert Merriam, Dark December, p. 58.
²Bernard Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 276.
Fig. 2--Situation; (December 16-23)
Manteuffel, the Fifth Panzer Army Commander, planned differently from Dietrich. Instead of having infantry out front, Manteuffel planned to have his tanks in the first fray of assault. And to his credit it might be said that his tankers came within three miles of the Meuse River before being turned back. The Sixty-sixth Corps had the assignment to take the Schnee Eifel forest. It was defended by the One Hundred Sixth Infantry Division. Afterwards the Sixty-sixth Corps was to turn toward St. Vith, a vital rail and road center on the north.³

The vital objectives in the field were left to the attacking commanders but Marshal Kietel stressed three main objectives in the final order: the Elsenborn ridge, the Schnee Eifel, and the junction of the Salur River and Our River, a hinge to use in bringing about a southern pivot attack. Little was thought of the Allies attacking from the flanks as the German High Command made the preparations to hold slack reins and let the armies run. This was the attack that struck the Allies on the morning of December 16.⁴

Two Fatal Days

On an eighty-mile front on the morning of December 16, the sleepy Americans were jerked out of bed by the sound of

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³ Francis Miller, History of World War II, p. 775.
⁴ Milton Schulman, Defeat in the West, p. 242.
roaring cannons. These men had felt that this was a rest center.\(^5\) The first flashes sent artillery shells flying into many front line units. They didn't have to wait long: the first reports sent back told of German troops in that familiar walk. Behind the troops snorted the tanks ready to race through gaps cleared by the infantry.

Middleton's Eighth Corps did not realize the extent of the attack for one of his Intelligence Officers remarked, "Just a local diversion." The question is often asked, how could it not have been recognized that this was a major attack? Seventeen divisions in the first wave, a total of 200,000 men!\(^6\) But one must remember that only a fragment of a unit engages in combat and also in the murky foggy weather nothing could be determined.\(^7\) War today is far from the days when mass charges were ordered. It is now a surprise element, ranging from a squad to a platoon in action.

General Gerow's Fifth Corps was moving up for a final crack at the Roer River dams when his Corps plunged headlong into five attacking German infantry divisions and for a while there was an offensive meeting an offensive. There the

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\(^5\) Montgomery, _op. cit._, p. 277.

\(^6\) Henry Commager, _The Story of World War II_, p. 459.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 459.
Second (Indianhead) and the Ninety-ninth (Checkered) held the Germans long enough to disrupt their timetable. Dietrich hurled his Twelfth SS Panzer Division at the Second--Ninety-ninth Divisions, but they held on until General Hodges gave permission to move back on the Elsenborn ridge. There they withstood all attacks to the end of the offensive in this area.  

Just to the south of the Second--Ninety-ninth sector in a gap between the Schnee Eifel and Elsenborn ridge lay the One Hundred Sixth U. S. Infantry Division. The One Hundred Sixth was exposed to the first wave.  

The First SS Panzer Division ran over the unlucky One Hundred Sixth (Golden Lions) Division on the 16th and 17th of December. Its losses were over eight thousand men and much equipment.  

The remnants of the One Hundred Sixth withdrew to the Meuse River for reformation. But it may be said that these men did well in the initial stages of the battle.

The First U. S. Division was called by Hodges to hold the gap between the Elsenborn ridge and the town of St. Vith. The big red one, insignia of the division, was well known by the Germans of nearly every campaign from Africa to Normandy.

8 Merriam, op. cit., p. 121.
9 Kenneth Davis, Soldier of Democracy, p. 519.
Late in the night of December 17, the First Division was in action. General Middleton secured the release of the Seventh Armored Division from the Ninth Army and called for it to arrive at St. Vith before the Germans got there.\textsuperscript{11} The Seventh Armored left Holland on the 16th and on the 17th of December was assembled in St. Vith ready to launch an attack. This was a record movement. During the time the Seventh Armored was in movement, the Two Hundred Eighty-Fifth Field Artillery Observation Battalion was caught at Malmedy and liquidated by orders of a SS Lieutenant and his henchmen. There were one hundred forty-three Americans murdered and it is now known historically as the "Malmedy Massacre." The Nazis were so inflamed with savagery by the switch from retreat to attack that they murdered captured Americans in revenge.\textsuperscript{12}

In the South the German Seventh Army hit the Twenty-eighth Division, Fourth Division and part of the Ninth Armored Division. Brandenberger's Seventh Army had no armor, therefore the American divisions could cope better with it than the American divisions could in the North against armored thrusts. Here too, the terrain was more rugged and this helped offset the German advantages. Later the Tenth Armored division was moved here to help in the defense.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{12} Gask, op. cit., p. 21.
Von Rundstedt did effect tactical surprise. Some units were completely surprised; some were overwhelmed; others were made to turn in confusing reports, and the German strength and intentions could not be determined. During the first few hours each division was strictly on its own.

Thus, by the evening of December 17, the Germans had torn two gaps in American lines, both in the Eighth Corps area. The northern gap was between the Second-Ninety-ninth Divisions and the Schnee Eifel held by the One Hundred Sixth Infantry. Through this hole Dietrich was pouring his Sixth Panzer Army with the First SS Panzer Division in the lead. The southern gap was through an area close to the Twenty-eighth Division, some ten or twelve miles wide. Manteuffel swept around the Schnee Eifel and headed for St. Vith, a focal point for roads and railroads. Over in Zeigenberg, Hitler was all smiles as on the day he did the little dance in France on hearing that France had fallen to his goose stepping army.

SHAPE Goes Into Action

On December 16, General Bradley was at Eisenhower's headquarters at Versailles when news of the first penetration

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13 Alden Hatch, *General Ike*, p. 244.
of American lines arrived. The battle points were marked for General Eisenhower and he studied them. At first, General Eisenhower did not catch the full meaning of it all. But by the evening of the 16th it became alarmingly clear that the One Hundred Sixth Infantry Division was under heavy attack and not a local attack.

General Eisenhower and General Bradley were now sufficiently convinced that the center of the attack was against the Twelfth Army Group. They began to shift strength from its flanks toward the Ardennes sector. This was a temporary move—rather a guard—made in order to support Middleton's Eighth Corps Zone.

The SHAEF, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, staff went over carefully the list of reserves. The reserves were never heavy due to divisions' continuously begging for men. Those accessible were the Eighty-second and One Hundred First Airborne Divisions, both battle tested and good. Their last action had been in Holland. Some others were the Eleventh Armored, Seventeenth Airborne, and the Eighty-seventh Infantry. But they were not readily accessible.

16 Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 342.
17 Ibid., p. 343.
18 Eisenhower, Eisenhower's Own Story of the War, p. 76.
Now, at last, General Eisenhower knew what the Germans were after. It was evident that Von Rundstedt was striking for Liege, Antwerp, and the Channel ports. If he succeeded, he could cut off all the Allied troops in the North. Without supplies they would be helpless in the North; surrender would be inevitable. Then from there they could turn through France.  

He decided not to meet the German Armies head on, but rather to throw up strong walls on the sides, to move the attack from precious bases. The attack was to be treated as a fluid drive, canalize it, and then let it run through the unprofitable Ardennes till it played out. The first walls of resistance sold their lives in order to gain precious minutes to build the forces into a wall defense.

As early as December 17, the Eighty-second (All American) and the One Hundred First (Screaming Eagle) Airborne Divisions were released from SHAEF Reserves to General Bradley. The Eleventh Armored Division was alerted to the front and the Seventeenth Airborne Division left the United Kingdom for France. On the 17th, Bradley ordered the Eighteenth Corps to move to the front with Bastogne as the original destination. Bradley was the first to realize the

\[20\] Walter Hall, Iran out of Calvary, p. 344.

\[21\] Hatch, op. cit., p. 245.
importance of Bastogne. The Eighty-second Airborne Division had to be sent to help plug the gap near Stavelot. So the One Hundred First (Screaming Eagle) became the heroic defenders of Bastogne some few days after the Battle of the Bulge started. 22

The First Allied Plans

Hitler had used optimistic thinking and arrived at the conclusion that Eisenhower could not do anything until Churchill and Roosevelt had approved his plan. But the truth is that Hitler was wrong. As soon as Eisenhower gauged the seriousness of the situation, he went into planning for the counteroffensive, though he later consulted with Marshall, Roosevelt, and Churchill. 23 The first thing that the Supreme Commander did was to move the Seventh Armored to the northern flank and the Tenth Armored to the southern flank.

"Fold with the attack," Major General Kran, Hodges' Chief of Staff told Middleton. At first General Middleton did not know what he meant, but did all he could to stop the penetrations. Both Bradley and Hodges thought that the American Armies should be on the offensive with counterattacks and then hit the Germans with co-ordinated attacks


23 Harry Butcher, My Three Years with Eisenhower, p. 719.
from both sides. General Patton even went farther, and said, "Fine, we should open up, and let them get to Paris. Then we'll bite off the rear of their attack." \(^{24}\) But more sober heads ruled at SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces). \(^{25}\)

All through December 18, scattered reports of new German advances poured into Supreme Headquarters of Versailles. By late afternoon, Eisenhower had made his decision. A meeting was called for the next day (19th) at Verdun with Bradley, Patton, Devers, and a representative from the First Army. The first thing to be cancelled was the Patton hope to go on the offensive against the West Wall defenses, despite Patton’s plea to let him go ahead and "see who can get the farthest." \(^{26}\) Dever’s Sixth Army group was to abandon its offensives, and take up Patton’s line along the Moselle River. Then Patton was to assemble six divisions to hit the southern flank of the German by the date of December 22. Using Patton and Hodges, General Bradley managed to secure a line from Namur to Liege to Aachen. \(^{27}\) General Montgomery was ordered to place reserves west of the Meuse River and prepare an offensive to drive on Bonn-Cologne and

\(^{24}\) George S. Patton, The War as I Knew It., p. 195.

\(^{25}\) Merriam, op. cit., p. 117.

\(^{26}\) Merriam, op. cit., p. 118.

\(^{27}\) Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 355.
meet with Bradley's drive on the south. But it did not work out that way. There was more bad news to come.

On the 19th, reports kept coming in telling of the confusion that was reigning over the battlefield. It was a war of nerves and everyone was jittery. Where was the enemy? The Arctic weather completely hid the tiger tanks and the invaders from the American lines. A revised plan was drawn up by SHAEF: Patton was to attack northeast from Arlon. He declared that he would soon take St. Vith (St. Vith was not liberated until January 23). General Middleton's Eighth Corps was to use the One Hundred First Airborne Division and contain the area that they held and handle the penetration. A new corps, the Sixteenth, was drawn up in the Liege area with two new divisions as an army group reserve. 28

This plan was not the solution: the Eighth Corps was badly mauled by the Germans, the Fifth Corps was weak from fighting the Germans on the Elsenborn ridge, the Eighteenth Corps was not the answer for Bastogne with four German Corps headed for Bastogne. 29 Eisenhower could now see this: Manteuffel was fighting desperately for St. Vith, Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army was driving a thrust toward Spa, the First

28
Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 347.

29
American headquarters, Wiltz was lost, roads were being captured that led directly to Liege, the American great base of supplies. Eisenhower realized the magnitude of the situation: it was now a decision that would have to save Allied forces a setback of years, it was now that the German forces could be destroyed west of the Rhine, it was now the time to force the Germans to a standstill before they cracked the atom bomb and turned it loose on Allied soldiers.\footnote{Merriam, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 121.}

According to SHAPE four areas had to be held at all cost, the part of Antwerp through which supplies were now coming, the city of Brussels, the city of Liege, signal, road, rail center, piled high with supplies, then, the line of communication from Antwerp to Laurain to Liege. Everyone of the four critical areas was north. This motivated Eisenhower to his next move.

The Split of the Battlefield

On the 19th of December, Eisenhower, back from Verdun, sat down to study the reports from the front. This time Eisenhower made a new decision without consulting his staff. Only afterwards was Bradley, Churchill, Marshall, and Montgomery notified.\footnote{Ralph Ingersall, \textit{Top Secret}, p. 265.} He was aware that the brunt of
attack would be felt in the north where Hodges', Simpson's and Montgomery's forces would be directly menaced. This was the historic decision; to split the battlefield from Givet on the Meuse running eastward to Prum in the West Wall. All forces north of this line went to Montgomery and his Twenty-first Army Group, while the Eighth Corps and all south of the line went to Bradley.

This is what Montgomery had to say about his new assignment by the Supreme Commander: 32

On the night of December 19, General Eisenhower instructed me to take command the following day of the American Armies (First and Ninth) north of the German salient; the depth of the enemy penetration has put these formations remote from Twelfth U. S. Army Group axis and made their control by that headquarters extremely difficult.

Eisenhower was fully aware of the storm that would arise because of such a move. 33 Montgomery had for many months tried to assume the role of Deputy Supreme Commander in charge of all ground forces. Eisenhower's refusal for this demand fill many notes. 34 Captain Butcher in his diary points out the same thing, that Montgomery would have liked to have had Eisenhower's position! Though Eisenhower was worried over the storm of the public opinion that would arise he tried to act best for the situation. He wanted

32 Montgomery, op. cit., p. 281. 34 Butcher, op.cit.,p.736

33 Ingersall, op. cit., p. 264.
Montgomery to take over the north wing. It can be said to Montgomery's credit that he was an excellent general and he made himself famous against the Germans in Africa, possibly saved Egypt and Africa at one time. Eisenhower was worried over the battle and not public opinion, for this man from Abilene, Kansas handed to Captain Butcher a crumpled piece of paper shortly after the Normandy invasion which read, "If there is any blame or fault attached to the cross channel attempt, it is mine alone."\(^{35}\) This was to have been issued if the Normandy invasion had failed. This showed Eisenhower's shouldering of responsibility and lack of public opinion. He did not lose his nerve.

General Bradley was shocked by the decision,\(^{36}\) but the decision was based on sound judgment. There were two factors that motivated the decision. One was that it was necessary that the Twelfth Army group headquarters remain in Luxembourg city. To move an entire army headquarters at this time would have been difficult and also hurt soldiers' morale in that area. Secondly, as has been pointed out, the northern area was most threatened by an isolation move.\(^{37}\) The southern wing could not be isolated from their supplies or precious bases. Then too, the American Army needed help and why not let the British help stop the Germans.

\(^{36}\) *Ingersall, op.cit.*, p. 265.  
The communication cable was cut on December 23, the open circuit on December 25, the radio link on December 23. Communications were poor indeed between the north and south battlefields. On one occasion, Bradley had spent one whole day getting to the battlefield of the First Army. On his reporting this to Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander reminded him that he could not be away from his headquarters for a whole day getting to one of his army headquarters and back. These were sufficient reasons for splitting the battlefield.

There have been many to criticize Eisenhower for destroying the unity of the battlefield on the theory that the Germans were already stopped. If this was so maybe there would be truth in their assumptions. But was the hardest of the conflict passed on December 19? There yet remained the fierce battles of St. Vith, Stavelot, Marche, Wiltz, and Bastogne to account for. As the German drive continued it became clear that the Germans wanted Antwerp for a Christmas present. Eisenhower felt that if any new attacks were launched they would come from the north in Holland. After this momentous decision had been made, the battle operations were conducted mainly at the two Army Group headquarters, Bradley's and Montgomery's. SHAPE ordered

38 Merriam, op.cit., p. 124.  39 Montgomery, op.cit., p. 282
the Eleventh Armored Division held in reserve at Rheims. The Seventeenth Airborne Division was there too. These two divisions played no part in the Battle of the Bulge, but when the drive into Germany came off they were to engage the enemy. There is one factor to consider that has been omitted so far, and that is the psychology of the battlefield.

Operation Grief

Before going into the crucial eight days before the tide was turned, it is necessary to turn to the psychology warfare. What gripped the minds of the American soldiers as the first shells fell on December 16 must be understood. If properly mentioned, the stories of American heroism would fill many books of large size.

It is also necessary to say something about the despair and pessimism that spread among soldiers. There are some explanations for it.40

The battle of France had been a tremendous success as the American Army was on the alert. But on reaching the West Wall they were fed by bright assumptions that, "The war would be over by Christmas", "The Germans were licked," "Hitler was dead", and so forth. The American Army let its guard down. Then the big offensive hit them like a dash of

40 Shulman, op.cit., p. 249.
cold water. The American Army could not believe it. Roads were swallowed up, units disappeared, men went away never to come back. At this, one's mind can run from pole to pole in a short time. The weather was horrible, with snow, ice, and freezing temperatures for days and days. V-1 and V-2 rockets were thrown on the lines to break men's frame of mind. Germans were reported seen at every place. Units made faulty reports. Some German divisions were reported in action and evidence later showed that they were never used in the Battle of the Bulge.

Picture this first phase and one can see why panic developed. The Belgian civilians were leaving their homes carrying only a few things in their hands. Trains were sent from France to evacuate the people and little was thought of age or frailty as the people scampered to them. When the people were asked why they were leaving the same reply came from all, "The dirty Germans are coming here again." The people were afraid that they would be carried off for labor in Germany. The Germans had come through several times and the people felt that they could return at any time. Allied flags were tucked away and the friendly atmosphere vanished.

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41 Hatch, _op. cit._, p. 245.
42 Merriam, _op. cit._, p. 134.
43 Ingersall, _op. cit._, p. 253.
Topmost in the confusion, operation of "Grief" was led by Otto Skorzeny, the foremost espionage agent on the Western Front.\textsuperscript{44} As stated before, his mission was divided into parts: the first objective called for the seizure of the Meuse River bridges by the Trojan One Hundred Fiftieth Panzer Brigade, completely outfitted with American and British equipment, guns, and tanks; secondly, the creation of confusion by using small bands of Komandos, four men in a jeep, who would roam the battle area and spot vital points, change road signs, misdirect traffic, and do other things to create confusion.

On the first attack, the One Hundred Fiftieth Panzer Brigade rode with Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army.\textsuperscript{45} When Dietrich bogged down later, it kept Skorzeny and his men from reaching the Meuse, but there were some Komandos who filtered through the lines and caused much confusion. Some of these groups reached Liege where they sent back reports to Dietrich. One German posing as an American was caught in Liege dressed as an M. P. and directing traffic in the wrong direction.

The most famous of all rumors to be circulated was that a Komando group was to meet in Paris at the Cafe de la

\textsuperscript{44} Shulman, op. cit., p. 240.

\textsuperscript{45} Shulman, op. cit., p. 241.
Their mission was to kill the Supreme Commander in conjunction with help from German agents and sympathizers. All were supposed to have an excellent command of English. There were similar attacks to be carried out against other high officials, such as Montgomery.

This scare was on the 23rd of December and General Eisenhower soon found himself virtually a prisoner of his own guards. Eisenhower was persuaded to move into Versailles where a better eye could be kept on him. This irritated the General very much. But that was not all. In order that the Germans who might be snooping around would not know that he had moved from the usual residence of St. Germaine and start looking for him in other places, the pretense was kept up that General Eisenhower had not moved. Lieutenant Colonel B. B. Smith, an officer of the Security Command, who resembled General Eisenhower, was assigned to impersonate General Eisenhower. Every evening at the hour when the General would leave his office, Colonel Smith would come out wearing one of General Eisenhower's overcoats and be driven in a staff car to St. Germaine. Then

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46 George Marshall, *Victory Report*, p. 44.
he would pull off the overcoat, come back out, and be driven away in a jeep. That was supposed to fool the Germans, maybe it did!

Another successful German scare was the paratroop mission which was dropped along the northern penetration flank. Their mission was to cut the roads leading south into the Bulge. On December 16, sixty Junker planes carried eight hundred German paratroopers up near Malmedy where they jumped. Their rendezvous point was Malmedy. This scare sent the First and Ninth Armies searching for paratroopers. This was another instance of the war of nerves. The sudden German attack, the Skorzeny mission, and the roaming Kommandos made a successful story of the war of nerves far better than Hitler had ever hoped or planned.

Word of the German measures spread like wildfire through the Allied ranks. Hastily, counter-measures were set up, road blocks sprang up, guards were posted on all vital bridges. American soldiers stopped all comers, regardless of rank and questioned them. The questions were in line with the President, ball teams, songs, folklore and the comics. There were many questions about Little Abner and Daisy Mae.

The reader should not jump to the conclusion that all American soldiers were scared and panicky during the first

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phase of the Battle of the Bulge. They certainly were not, and the fine heroic stands that they made will come in later discussions. This matter was pointed out to bring into focus a vital consideration in the Battle of the Bulge—and not to disparage the American soldier. Rumors and false propaganda caused a heavy toll in damages to the American Army in the first phase of the battle.

The psychology of the war correspondents was affected also. Current newspapers from December 18 to 26 carried many conflicting reports concerning the Battle of the Bulge. Finally, in hope of securing a true, sober, balanced account of the Battle of the Bulge, Life Magazine sent its best man, Charles Christain Wertenbaker to write on the battle.52 During this time, the press and public showed a lack of stability blowing either too hot or too cold. When the Germans advanced, headlines cried "disaster". When the Allied armies stopped the Germans, the press claimed instant victory. It was very hard for the people at home to get a complete picture of what was going on at the Western Front.

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CHAPTER IV

THE CRISIS (DECEMBER 18-26)

Americans Are Aroused

The German attack quickly gained the popular name of "Battle of the Bulge" because of the rapid progress made by the heavy assault against American weakly-held lines, with a resulting penetration of some fifty miles.\(^1\) Despite the crushing blow of the first two days and the war of nerves, the immediate effects began to wear off. This first shocked, dazed feeling gave away to a determination that has never been equaled by the American soldier. A new faith was born.

To the Germans, the American soldier with his lack of strict discipline, and his lack of military bearing was strictly contrary to their belief of a good soldier. The Germans thought the American soldier was not experienced and not interested in the war. But there were times when the American soldier rallied to a point where the Germans had to bow to his fighting qualities. Some of these places were Kasserine Pass in North Africa, Salerno in Italy, Anzio Beachhead and the Normandy invasion.\(^2\) The Germans

\(^1\)Vincent Sheean, *This House Against This House*, p. 365.

could not understand why the American soldier stiffened when he was trapped. The American when backed against the wall became a fighting demon. This same characteristic showed up in the Battle of the Bulge.

The first two days on the Ardennes front showed complete chaos. Some Americans ran, some surrendered and some stayed to fight. The Germans wrung their hands in glee as they appraised the American soldier, but they still did not understand him.

This was the shock treatment for the Americans and it worked. The troops and their leaders no longer felt that the war was over and settled down to the grim business of killing Germans.

As never before, since D Day in Normandy, all of the troops and commanders were aware of what was ahead of them. The wisecracks were banished and the thoughts of going home were forgotten. First things were placed first, and the first things were Germans streaming through American lines.

At the moment of the crisis there appeared to be three torn gaps in the American lines: there was one between the Elsenborn Ridge and the Schnee Eifel where the First SS Panzer Division was pouring westward toward the

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3 Milton Shulman, *Defeat in the West*, p. 222.

Meuse, there was one through the Twenty-eighth Division lines which allowed Hanteuffel to pour through toward Houffalize and Bastogne, and the third danger point was at St. Vith where both sides were struggling for the town.

What really did happen in the next few days is not yet known as the Allies attempted to plug up the gaps in the lines. The events of the crucial week of December 18-26 are clear. The fighting must be examined on the basis of from north to south because the main German strength was shifted in a north to south direction.

The Ambleve River Line

The First American Army suffered a shattered line through the Ardennes, but before going on it is best to look again at the attack plans of "Sepp" Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army. As has been stated Dietrich used five infantry divisions against General Gerow's Fifth Corps line and some armored panzers against General Middleton's Eighth Corps line. The Seventh and Eighth Corps lines covered a distance of twenty-five miles. The plan for Dietrich called for the capture of the Elsenborn Ridge, Malmedy, Spa,

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and Verviers, then cross the Ambleve River at Stavelot and eventually reach the Meuse River. The Trojan Horse design, the One Hundred Fiftieth Panzer Brigade, was to secure the Meuse bridges.  

The Twelfth SS Panzer Division got more than it asked for from the U. S. Ninety-ninth and Second Divisions along the Elsenborn ridge. There two divisions held the Germans for three grim, decisive days.  

The southern end of the ridge was defended by the First Infantry Division. There at the Elsenborn Ridge was the Twelfth SS Panzer Division, but what had become of the First SS Panzer Division?

From Malmedy west along the Ambleve River, which flows west to the small town of Trois Ponts where it joins with the Salm River—to flow north toward the Meuse, exists a natural defensive line. The rivers are narrow but swift and they cut through steep valleys, very fine for defense among the hills. The area north of the Ambleve River line was packed with vital supplies for the First Army. The First Army’s Command post was at Spa, ten miles to the north of the Ambleve River. Just south of Spa was the largest gasoline dump on the continent. The gasoline dump held 2,500,000 gallons of gasoline. Along the Ambleve River there were two important crossings: one at the town of

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8 Alden Hatch, General Ike, p. 245.
Kalmedy, which contained heavy supplies for the First Army, and the second at Stavelot. These two towns covered the approaches to the gasoline dumps, where most of First Army reserves were stored, and controlled the roads toward Spa and eventually Liège.

The town of Spa seemed remote from the battle area on the morning of December 16. The first reports of the German attack was received by First Army Headquarters as a small German attack. In a few short hours the sudden thrusts of the First SS Panzer Division changed the picture, and by evening it became clear that the panzers had broken through the Losheim Gap and were heading toward Spa. During the first hours of confusion, steps were taken to guard and to provide a defense for the approach to Spa and Liège. Engineer units were sent to Kalmedy and Twelfth Army Security troops were sent to Stavelot. Finally, on December 18, the Thirtieth Infantry Division was rushed from Ninth Army Reserves and arrayed in front of Stavelot. The Thirtieth had won praise in the defense of Mortain in France. The Thirtieth arrived barely in time to meet the First SS Panzer Division in front of Stavelot. The well timed arrival of the Thirty-fifth on the Ambleve River caused another defeat to be added for "Sepp" Dietrich's roughriding panzers.

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11. Ibid., p. 2.
For a moment it is necessary to follow the activities of the First SS Panzer Division. Leading this division was Colonel Joachim Peiper, an arrogant Prussian officer. Peiper burst through the Losheim Gap, captured a gasoline dump at Bullingen on the morning of the 17th, and then headed for the Ambleve River where he was to cross at Stavelot. Two miles south of Malmedy Peiper's tanks ran into the American Two Hundred Eighty Fifth Field Artillery Observation Battalion. The Two Hundred Eighty Fifth was murdered by one of Peiper's fanatical lieutenants.

At this time the only troops in Malmedy belonged to the Two Hundred Ninety-first Engineer Combat Battalion. They were weak and were no match for the First SS Panzers. Early in the morning of December 18, Peiper attacked Stavelot and rode roughshod over the defending American soldiers. The First SS Panzers now streamed over the Ambleve River crossing and headed for Spa. Before reaching Spa, Peiper was stopped by a wall of fire in a steep cut in the narrow road where 100,000 gallons of gasoline had been dumped and then ignited. Peiper and his division were turned west by the fire. Some few miles from Stavelot he tried to cross the

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14 Merriam, op. cit., p. 145.
Salm River to get in the open to make a run for the Meuse. Now success seemed to be his, but not for long. The Fifty-first Engineer Combat Battalion had been ordered to Trois Ponts. Their orders were to blow the bridge if the enemy approached. When Peiper came into sight they blew the bridge. "If we could have captured the bridge intact, it would have been a simple matter to drive to the Meuse River early that day," Peiper lamented later. He now turned back into the Ambleve River valley and this was his undoing.

Peiper bivouacked for the first night near the town of Staumont, less than twenty-five miles from Liege. During that day fighter bombers had pounded his tank columns. A see-saw battle raged through December 19 in the canyons of the Ambleve River, but the American defenders were stubborn and the terrain friendly so the Germans fell back into Staumont. Another blow had been dealt to German hopes.

In the meantime, happenings along the Ambleve River line further sealed the fate of the First SS Panzers. On December 18, part of Stavelot was recaptured from the Germans by the Thirtieth Infantry Division. The Germans made fanatical charges through the icy Ambleve River to try to regain Stavelot. The fighting at Stavelot ranks among the most bitter of the war, and German losses were heavy. The Americans stood their ground and Stavelot remained theirs. General Hodges noticed that First SS Panzer Division was
moving toward the rear of the First Army. He was determined to set a trap for it and called on the Eighty-second (All American) Division to do the trick. The Eighty-second moved up past Peiper and crossed over the Ambleve River from Staumont. The trap was now set. From December 20 to December 23, pressure by the Thirtieth, Eighty-second, and Third Armored was applied to the First SS Panzers. Peiper was aware that he was trapped. He and his men abandoned their thirty-nine tanks, seventy half tracks, thirty-three big guns, and thirty other vehicles and made their way through American lines back to German lines on the Ambleve River.

Here was a case where the fate of divisions and armies rested for a few moments on the shoulders of a handful of men: first at Trois Ponts where the engineer group had blown the bridge, and then, only hours later, another engineer group had destroyed the bridge at Werbomont. As a result Colonel Peiper and the First SS Panzers left their equipment and walked back to German lines on foot. Another defeat was_handed to Hitler.

By December 18, Hitler and Jodl were sad because the Meuse had not been reached in the two days set aside for that.

16 Shulman, op. cit., p. 243.
The fast motorized American Army began to wheel in front of Hitler's panzers. The German command now realized that Dietrich's Army was bogged down. The Second SS Panzer Corps was sent to Manteuffel and told to try for a south break.

The St. Vith Salient

Situated on a low hill, St. Vith, Belgium is surrounded on all sides by a series of higher hills. The town of several thousand population is the best road and rail center for the northern section of the Ardennes. The town had many residents who were pro-Nazi in feeling. St. Vith belonged to Germany until after World War I and it was then handed to Belgium. After 1940, St. Vith and a region called Limburg was again incorporated into the Reich.

Following up the initial successes around the Schnee Eifel, Manteuffel's Sixty-sixth Corps began pushing toward St. Vith. The advancing Germans were not discovered until the 17th. The Seventh Armored Division had been alerted on the 16th in Holland. It left the Ninth Army area and barely arrived at St. Vith before the Germans. The Seventh Armored had been told that "they were going to help out a little." Suddenly, and unexpectedly, the mission of mercy

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on which the Seventh Armored had set out on was turned into a hard battle for survival.

By the evening of December 18, the Americans had formed a tight horseshoe around the town of St. Vith, with the Seventh Armored on the north, the Ninth Armored on the south and the One Hundred Twelfth Infantry Regiment aided by the Four Hundred Twenty-fourth Infantry Regiment in the center.19 This twenty-five mile horseshoe was out of touch with friendly units. Not until December 20 did the Eighty-second Airborne come up to hook back on the Ambleve River with the Thirtieth.

Thus, the huge fist stuck deep into the German masses pouring west; it became the number one sore spot to Manteuffel, Commander of the German Fifth Panzer Army.

Manteuffel could not crack the St. Vith defenses. The Seventh Armored made a decisive stand on the north of the horseshoe defense and won glory for itself. Remer with his crack Fuehrer Escort Brigade jabbed away at the defense with no success. Manteuffel finally turned his panzers away from St. Vith. He left it for his infantry units.

This was the situation when Montgomery issued orders to the brave defenders of St. Vith. His orders were to draw back from St. Vith into the Eighty-second's lines.20

19 Merriam, op. cit., p. 150.

20 Montgomery, op. cit., p. 283.
The defense of St. Vith is now recognized by German and Allied Commanders alike as a turning point in the Battle of the Bulge. General Eisenhower addressed the men on the 23rd of December and personally thanked them for the magnificent stand at St. Vith. 21

While this thorn pricked deep into the German right flank, heavy German forces were rolling through the eighteen mile gap between St. Vith and Bastogne. Then it became a question of plugging up the gaps. The First Army turned toward this with haste.

First Army Attempts to Plug the Gaps

Eisenhower, Bradley, and Hodges agreed that the most effective way of dealing with the German attack was to seal off the penetrations and then strike at the flanks and pinch off the Bulge. This was the strategy that they attempted to follow. 22 But first, Hodges had to plug the gaps.

Hodges was still worried about the Ambleve River line. He carried on in the hope that the Eighteenth Airborne Corps would be able to plug the gaps in the Eighth Corps and hook up with the Fifth Corps on the north. Montgomery’s first order to Hodges was to continue using the Eighteenth Corps to plug the gap. Hodges also planned to hit the flanks,

21 Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 347.

22 Merriam, op. cit., p. 159.
once the gaps were closed. The Seventh Corps under Major General Collins was given a new assignment. That was to take an offensive stand east of the Meuse River.  The Seventh Corps was comprised of the Eighty-fourth Infantry, the Second Armored (veterans of many a hard battle from Africa on), and the newly arrived Seventy-fifth Infantry.

On December 20, Hodges put his plan into operation to try to close the gaps. The Thirtieth, the Eighty-second, the Third Armored, and the Eighty-fourth were to swing on a hinge from Malmédy to Bastogne. Here was the plan to seal the holes and again stabilize the First Army front. The plan was never used because the Germans were advancing too rapidly westward.

Manteuffel now headed two corps west. One corps broke through the Eighth Area, and the other one headed for Bastogne and engulfed it. From here the panzers moved around Bastogne and turned west. Manteuffel's Fifty-eighth Corps pushed around the northern tip of the St. Vith horseshoe and almost caught the Eighty-second Airborne off guard.

From here the Fifty-eighth Corps headed west between St. Vith and Bastogne. Past St. Vith it ran into the Third Armored Division and a grim fight developed. Then Hodges sent the Eighty-fourth Division to make a stand against the

23 Montgomery, op. cit., p. 282.
Germans at Marche, Belgium. The Seventy-fifth Infantry
and the Second Armored raced to keep ahead of Manteuffel's
Army as the Germans were getting close to the Meuse.\textsuperscript{24}
The Battle of the Bulge was in a decisive stage from De-
cember 22 to December 25. All through these days it looked
dark for the Allies.

The westward lunge continued, but it hit its peak on
Christmas Day. That day the Second Armored Division under
Major General Harmon made contact with the British Re-
seves that Montgomery had rushed east of the Meuse.\textsuperscript{25}
The Second Armored engaged the lead division of Manteuffel's
Army and stopped it cold at Celles, Belgium. Manteuffel
sent the Third Panzer Grenadier Division to the Elsenborn
Ridge fight and the Fifteenth Panzer Grenadier Division in-
to the fight for Bastogne. The Forty-seventh Panzer Corps
was ordered to pull back near Marche. Near Marche the
Ninth Panzer Division and Panzer Lehr Division dug in on
December 26, pending further attack orders from Manteuffel.
The race for the roads to the Meuse was ended;\textsuperscript{26} the First
Army had barely won, thanks to divisions borrowed from the
Ninth Army.

\textsuperscript{24} New York Times, December 23, 1944, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{25} E. N. Harmon, "We Gambled in the Battle of the Bulge",
Saturday Evening Post, October 2, 1948, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{26} Merriam, op. cit., p. 167.
If the immediate threat to the Meuse River was finished, it did not mean that grim battles were not going on elsewhere. As stated before, the First SS Panzer Division had lost its equipment in the Ambleve Valley. The Thirtieth Division was on the road from Malmedy to Stavelot to Liège. Hodges thought that maybe yet the Germans would make an all out drive to capture Stavelot, a movement which they did try on December 22. The Ninth Panzer Division aided by Skorzeny's One Hundred Fiftieth Panzer Brigade made heavy attacks for several days. A number of Germans in American uniforms were captured and shot. The attack played out on the 29th when Skorzeny left for Germany on new orders. Such was the end of the Trojan Horse design.

Model ordered the Sixth Panzer Army to open a hole in the defense and quit trying to use the gap that Manteuffel used. This Dietrich tried to do against the Eighty-second Airborne Division and failed. The Eighty-second put up a magnificent stand all through the Battle of the Bulge.

General Montgomery called the Eighty-second back and the Germans lunged over part of the Seventh Armored. There was instantly a storm of protest about Montgomery's decision. But the Eighty-second was tired and in danger of having its flank turned. As the Germans turned north and west on the

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north part of the Bulge, the Seventy-fifth Infantry and the Third Armored blocked their path. From December 23 to December 26, Hodges rushed reinforcements to seal the break, fearful that the Germans would launch a new attack. By December 26, the First Army line was again intact, after four major threats to the First Army. The First Army's attempt to plug the gaps had been converted into a struggle for survival. Every American division on the north shoulder of the Bulge had its own heroic story to tell. But much credit is due the Air Corps in helping the First Army.

The dawn of December 23, two days before Christmas was the war's most beautiful sunrise.\(^{28}\) After several days of being grounded it gave the Air Corps the chance to hunt west driving panzers. The Ninth Tactical Air Force had the assignment to hit at armored columns and communications. Hitler sent up the Luftwaffe in the strongest concentrations since Allied soldiers had been on the Continent. The Luftwaffe struck at airfields and did considerable damage in the first phase of their attack. On December 23 and 25 the American Air Corps met the Luftwaffe in the cold blue sky of Belgium. The Luftwaffe was totally defeated and never reappeared during the war. The Ninth Air Force knocked out 4,000 vehicles, 600 tanks, 300 heavy gun positions, and hundreds of enemy positions. Their losses were

162 aircraft. Most of the air help went to the northern part of the Bulge and east of the Meuse River. From here it is necessary to turn to the dramatic story of Bastogne.

Bastogne: An American Epic

To the average American, Bastogne symbolizes the "Battle of the Bulge." The heroic defense of this town, when it was completely surrounded by German forces, was perhaps the most spectacular of the European fighting. Perhaps the reason for so much being written about it is because it was the only ray of hope in a black sky for some time. No one has evaluated the defense of Bastogne in relation to the overall struggle. It is fair to give Bastogne its proper place in the defeat of the Germans, but the Battle of the Bulge was not fought solely in Bastogne.

The defense of Bastogne was a great feat of arms and had a great effect upon the outcome of the Battle of the Bulge. Bastogne lay in the general path of the Fifth Panzer Army. The first German orders called for Bastogne to be bypassed if defended. Afterwards, the German troops were supposed to move west and join the northern drive to the Meuse.

30 Laurence Critshell, Four Stars of Hell, p. 256.
31 Ibid., p. 257.
As has been stated the Eighty-second and One Hundred First Airborne Divisions were to go to Bastogne together but at that time heavy German attacks broke out at Stavelot and the Eighty-second was ordered to Stavelot. By late evening of the 19th, the One Hundred First, parts of the Ninth and Tenth Armored and the Seven Hundred Fifth Tank Destroyer Battalion were in Bastogne. Already at this time there were Germans driving on Bastogne anxious to seize the town.

Manteuffel assigned his Forty-seventh Panzer Corps to take Bastogne. The Forty-seventh was under General Luttwitz. In his corps was the Second Panzer, Panzer Lehr, and Twenty-sixth Volksgrenadier.

The One Hundred First was under the Eighth Corps which later was under General Middleton. Middleton could not reach Hodges to talk over the question of Bastogne, so he took the matter to Bradley. Middleton presented his plan for a defensive stand at Bastogne and also said that if help did not come through, the defenders of Bastogne would be surrounded. "O. K.", said Bradley, and the defense was on.

Bastogne, Belgium, center of seven leading roads, a town of several thousand population, is a familiar word in

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32 Critchell, op. cit., p. 259.

33 Lewis H. Brereton, Brereton Diaries, pp. 380-381.
American history today. Bastogne has long been acquainted with war as it lies on the old German war route to Paris. The town lies in a series of rolling hills which offer excellent defensive positions. The people are French speaking and friendly.

Luttswitz planned to use the Second Panzer on the north, Panzer Lehr on the south and the Twenty-sixth Volks-grenadier in the center. Luttswitz made a personal appeal to Manteuffel to envelop Bastogne, despite previous orders of Hitler, Jodl, Kietel, Rundstedt, and Model. Manteuffel would not change the orders and said to make a limited attack.

By December 20, the defenders of Bastogne were firmly established. When the last stragglers had drifted into town the force stood at 18,000 men, including tankers, engineers, artillery, and all the men of the One Hundred First Airborne. On this day, the 20th, three German divisions, totaling 45,000 men attacked Bastogne from three sides. The Panzer Lehr Division slipped around Bastogne from the south. By nightfall of the 21st of December the town was almost surrounded. But not on the 21st or the 22nd were the Germans able to complete the ring around Bastogne.

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34 Walter P. Hall, *Iran Out of Calvary*, p. 345.

Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe, acting divisional commander in the absence of Major General Maxwell Taylor who was in Washington, had his last conversation with Middleton. Middleton jokingly said, "Now don't get yourself surrounded." It was very clear to each that this would probably happen. By the night of the 22nd of December it became evident that the siege was on.

The Germans now thought that they had the Bastogne defenders in a sack and sent four emissaries through the American lines with an ultimatum to surrender.\(^{36}\) The paper called for the surrender of the Bastogne garrison and threatened its complete destruction otherwise. The Americans were to have two hours to consider. The note was sent on up to One Hundred First Divisional Headquarters. General McAuliffe asked someone what the paper contained and was told that it requested a surrender.

McAuliffe laughed and said, "Aw, Nuts!"\(^{37}\) It really seemed funny to him at the time because he thought the Bastogne garrison was holding up well. General McAuliffe sat down to consider what words to write back and Colonel Kinney, his aide, replied, "The first remark would be hard to beat." So with this, the general properly addressed to the

\(^{36}\) Collie Small, "Bastogne", Saturday Evening Post, 217 (February 17, 1945), p. 91

German demand one word, "Nuts" and signed it. The note was then handed to the German emissaries and they could not understand it. An American, Colonel Harper, explained it briefly and they understood it quite well. The puzzling, vehement reply convinced the Germans that they would not win Bastogne without a struggle.\textsuperscript{38}

Luttswitz had no other choice but to send the Second Panzer and Panzer Lehr on toward the Meuse, for he had definite orders and Bastogne would not surrender without a fight. Soon Luttswitz was to hear the sad news that the Second Panzer Division had fallen to the American Second Armored Division four miles from the Meuse River.

Meanwhile, back at Bastogne, the siege was on. Hitler ordered the Fifteenth Panzer Grenadier Division to attack Bastogne.\textsuperscript{39} On Christmas Day, the German attacking troops came within the divisional headquarters time and time again only to be thrown back. Dead Germans were piled up as the fighting continued with fanatical charges.

On Christmas Eve, 647 American planes came over with an air drop. A force of 389 planes and gliders was sent over Bastogne dropping to earth food, ammunition, medical supplies and gasoline.\textsuperscript{40} On that day 100 tons of supplies

\textsuperscript{38} Critchell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 262.

\textsuperscript{39} Kenneth Davis, \textit{Soldier of Democracy}, p. 523.

\textsuperscript{40} Critchell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 266.
were dropped to the Bastogne defenders. Of this, ninety-five per cent was brought in by the garrison.

"The finest Christmas present the One Hundred First could get would be a relief tomorrow," McAuliffe told Middleton. Unable to win the ground the Luftwaffe poured everything they had on Bastogne. The wounded were in bad shape as there was only one doctor, and the supplies were running low once more. This situation caused even McAuliffe to lose some of his confidence. But General Patton was driving his Third Corps against the German Seventh Army. On December 27, the Patton forces burst into Bastogne.\(^{41}\) The siege was ended, but on the black, charred wall of an abandoned barn, scrawled in white chalk was the legend of McAuliffe's GI's, "Kilroy was stuck here."

The defenders of Bastogne carved their niche in American military exploits. In the midst of defeat and uncertainty, they held their ground, a solid rock in a German sea. The important fact about the defense of St. Vith and Bastogne was the physical accomplishment of occupation. The Germans wanted both towns, and not getting either of them caused the whole German timetable to be thrown off balance. This gave American forces time enough to group for the assaults which followed.

Third Army Movements

Back in the original beginning, Brandenberger's Seventh Army was to protect the lower flank of the Fifth Panzer Army. This he tried to do in driving through Echternach and toward Luxembourg City.

General Patton's orders were to take six divisions in two corps, shift them to the north as rapidly as possible with the Third Corps moving toward Bastogne. Patton did an amazing job in leaving the Saar well under control. He then prepared a plan for the movement of thousands of troops over the harrowing roads to the Ardennes. Patton's men moved rapidly; the Fourth Armored Division covered 100 miles in twenty-four hours and the Eightieth Infantry about the same, a remarkable record. The assembly area was seventeen miles from Bastogne. The Third Corps launched the Twenty-sixth, the Eightieth, and the Fourth Armored toward Bastogne. The attack moved upward for five days and on the 27th, the lead tanks of the Fourth Armored pushed into Bastogne.

Now for the first time the Germans became disturbed about the Patton attacks and Hitler rushed reinforcements to Brandenberger in the south. In seven days time, the Third

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42 Eisenhower, Eisenhower's Own Story of the War, p. 77.

Army had completed its ninety degree pivot, assembled two corps along the south flank of the German penetration, straightened out the line to the east, drove a wedge through the German Seventh Army into Bastogne itself. Patton was now ready for the next great step, the elimination of the Bulge. This was the situation of December 27 when the great crisis came to an end.
CHAPTER V

THE COLLAPSE OF THE BULGE

The End of the Crisis

The Allied world waited and held its breath as the great moving drama unfolded in the Ardennes for a crucial nine days. German columns appeared to be everywhere, heading in all directions. Intelligence officers threw up their hands, frankly confused. These were days of great trials for the western Allies.

There is no doubt but that the German plan, boldly and daringly executed, might have made greater gains with a few breaks. That the Germans were stopped must be attributed to a multitude of small but important events. These events were Elsenborn, the Ambleve River line, St. Vith, Bastogne, Marché, and the east bank of the Meuse River.¹

The German Sixth Panzer Army began to meet setbacks on the first day when its northern panzer division was unable to crash through the Elsenborn Ridge defenses. Its southern panzer division nearly broke into the open, only to wind up in a trap on the Ambleve River. Meanwhile, to

¹Alden Hatch, General Ike, p. 251.
Fig. 4—Situation; (December 27-29)
the south the Fifth Panzer Army battled its way to the Ourthe River to plunge into First U. S. Army defenses. The southern panzer corps went by way of Bastogne and one panzer division went on to the Meuse. It almost reached the German goal before being hit by two American divisions. The infantry corps of Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army captured St. Vith after a delay of six days.

Rundstedt begged Hitler to go on the defensive. He claimed, on December 24, that the Meuse could not be reached. Hitler held to the attack and continued to throw more reserves into the battle.

Meanwhile, the Allies carried out the greatest troop movements in the history of warfare. The First American Army, in the first week of the attack alone, moved 248,000 troops and 48,711 vehicles. On December 17, the First Army moved 60,000 men in 11,000 vehicles to the front lines. These movements spelled disaster for German plans.

In addition to troop movements, millions of tons of supplies were moved in and out of the Bulge. The greatest move of all was the 2,500,000 gallons of gasoline moved from Spa. We were fighting a defensive battle and shortages showed up in the American supply of mines, rockets, and

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2 Robert Merriam, Dark December, p. 191.
3 Ibid., p. 192.
small arms fire. The First Army suffered a loss of 270 tanks which were very difficult to replace. The Battle of the Bulge was a combined effort of all branches of the service. It was the combined resources of all men and materials in the western European theatre of war.

Hitler's Decision

A sick, tired, but stubborn man Hitler proved to be when his aides were trying to convince him that plans should be changed. Despite well laid plans, elaborate preparations, and complete surprise, the Germans rapidly and painfully discovered they were no longer the terror they had been in 1940. Americans for years had listened to German propaganda and at one time were almost convinced that German Armies were invincible. Then when the American Army had come to grips with the Germans in Normandy it was found that the "much heard about" German military machine was wearing away. The German generals could see slim hopes in the Ardennes but Hitler was as far from listening to his generals as he always had been.

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After the July 20 attempt, Hitler was a sick man. He had become very nervous and was not in complete control of himself. His left side trembled. His mind was not clear enough to see the real situation of Germany. He was a man of energy and will; his will outweighed his sense. He hypnotized his circle of workers. Hitler lived in a different world and not the Germany of reality on January 1, 1945.

Into the Führer's headquarters at Berlin, a solemn delegation came on the day after Christmas. General Jodl, Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff, said, "We must face the facts, we cannot force the Meuse River." With this there came a review of the nine bitter days of fighting, stopped at Elsenborn, slowed at St. Vith, trapped in the Ambleve River valley, halted at Bastogne, too late to the Meuse River and now the big Bulge lacked a goal. The Sixth Panzer Army was faced with a combined American drive from Stavelot and Malmedy. The nose of the Bulge faced a unified attack. The Fifth Panzer Army was without flank support and now Brandenberger's Seventh Army was under strain from the American Third Army.\(^8\)

All through the day the conference dragged on, proposals and counterproposals were discussed. The big question was

\(^8\)George Patton, *War As I Knew It*, p. 227.
whether it was possible to thrust forward over the Meuse as planned? The answer reached, after long hours of debate, was that the thrust across the Meuse would have to be abandoned.

Once the fateful decision was made, the German war machine began new operations. To stabilize the southern front, two Volksgrenadier divisions were sent to the Seventh Army. Rundstedt's projected attack on Duren was called off. Model's Army Group B was promised a ten per cent increase in men in the hope that German morale would rise on the Western Front, and finally, an all out attack on Bastogne, which was to be the first order of business. 10

The Drive on Bastogne

Having made his decision to fight east of the Meuse River, Hitler at once centered his attention on Bastogne, about which he had thought little prior to the change of plans. Now, with a huge battle looming east of the Meuse River, Bastogne stood out against the Germans. It had to be taken. With this in mind, Hitler ordered an all out drive on Bastogne. German divisions descended on Bastogne preparatory to a new siege of the town. American casualties were very heavy during this time. 11

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10 Merriam, op. cit., p. 196.
First to be moved south was Reiner's Fuehrer Escort Brigade with orders to cut the narrow neck opening into the town and once again isolate the defenders of Bastogne.\textsuperscript{12}

Then the panzer divisions of "Sepp" Dietrich's Sixth Army were to descend upon the town from three sides and crush the defenders. From his command, the Ninth, and Twelfth Panzer Divisions were ringed around Bastogne. By the first of the year, eight German divisions were packed around Bastogne, pushing in for "the kill."

To offset the terrific German pressure being exerted on Bastogne, General Patton attacked west of the town. Once the threat to the Meuse River line was ended, General Eisenhower was ready to release the divisions that had been attached to Middleton's Eighth Corps; prior to this time he would not let these divisions be used east of the Meuse. On December 28, Eisenhower ordered the Eighty-seventh Infantry Division and the Eleventh Armored Division sent to Bradley. The purpose of this was to use them in a strong Bastogne-Houffalize attack. On the cold, crisp morning of December 30, the attack orders were issued and troops moved forward under towering snow drifts. Soon joined by the Seventeenth Airborne Division, the divisions crawled forward in the worst of weather. Their progress was slow but if they had waited

\textsuperscript{12}Merriam, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198.

\textsuperscript{13}Eisenhower, \textit{Crusade in Europe}, p. 362.
just a little before attacking, it is probable that the Germans would have launched another attack, and surrounded Bastogne.

General Middleton got the Eighth Corps reorganized and back in the fray and eased the pressure on Bastogne, although, up through January 3, the Germans attacked the town. Patton arrayed his Third Corps and Twelfth Corps on the west and east shoulders of the Third Army line with the One Hundred First Airborne Division remaining in Bastogne.\textsuperscript{14} During these early days of January the conflict was intense. The Germans bottled in the Bulge turned all their fury on Bastogne.

On January 2, Hitler ordered Rundstedt to speed up the capture of the town. The last co-ordinated attack began on January 3, but the American defenders hurled the Germans back with armor support. This was the last of the great blows flung at Bastogne. On January 8, Hitler issued new orders that changed the war in the Bulge.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{American Armies Attack in Force}

With the American Air Force pounding the German lines of communication and troop and supply concentrations, as well as supporting the ground troops, the return blow of the Battle of the Bulge was now coming off. The attack offensive to drive the Germans out of the Bulge started on

\textsuperscript{14} Patton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 214. \textsuperscript{15} Merriam, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198.
January 3, nineteen days after the start of the German attack. While the Third Army continued its heavy fighting around Bastogne, the First Army began to press from the north. The Seventh Corps led the attack accompanied by the Eighteenth Airborne Corps on the east and the British Thirtieth Corps on the west.

The conditions under which the attack was made were the worst. The snow in many cases was waist deep and movements were made under trying conditions. The roads were ice coated and dangerous for vehicle movement. Tanks could hardly cope with the ice and often went spinning out of control. It was unbelievably cold, near zero, and the battle for existence against the elements was true here as all along through the Battle of the Bulge. 16 As the Third Army beat off the attacks on Bastogne, the First Army moved through the snowbound woods and fields of Belgium. On January 9, the last attack occurred on Bastogne and General Patton continued to move toward Hauffalize.

Hitler, the eternal optimist, was finally convinced that the Ardennes was lost. On January 8 he ordered the withdrawal of the Bulge tip to a line just west of the Bastogne-Hauffalize road. 17 His long cherished dream of


17 Dwight Eisenhower, Eisenhower's Own Story of the War, p. 78.
lunging to the coast vanished in the smoke of cannons that had been made in America. Hitler tried to content himself with the thought that he had disrupted the plans of an Anglo-American winter offensive. On January 8, the Sixth Panzer Army fell back on a defensive line.

On January 12, the bombshell fell which was to disrupt forever German offensive plans on any front. The Russians left their winter quarters and began the long expected winter attack to the east. This was the final blow to German hopes in the west. The Sixth Panzer Army was ordered to the Eastern Front where "Sepp" Dietrich soon found himself facing the Russians in Austria. Now, all the Germans could hope for was an orderly and gradual retreat back to the West Wall from which they had battered their way only a month before.

On January 16, patrols from the First and Third Armies met in Hauflazie, their mutual goal, and the tip of the Bulge was eliminated. From here both armies turned to the east, and again faced the West Wall.

Soon after the First and Third Armies had joined hands at Hauflazie, the First returned to Bradley's Twelfth Army Group, despite Montgomery's wish to be commander of all ground troops. The need of a unified control in the

19 Harry Butcher, My Three Years with Eisenhower, p. 742.
north vanished with the end of the German threat. Montgomery made capital of his part in the Battle of the Bulge to press again for his command of all ground forces. General Eisenhower remained firmly to the idea of having American forces strictly under American officers. In this, Chief of Staff George Marshall supported General Eisenhower.

The greatest battle for the Western Front was over. Twenty-nine German and thirty-two Allied divisions participated in the Battle of the Bulge, which raged for a little over a month.  

The last great German gamble had ended, not without certain successes, but far short of the prized goal. As Winston Churchill said, the Battle of the Bulge was an American battle, the greatest that American Armies had up to that time fought in their entire history, the greatest in number of troops engaged at one time, the greatest in bloodshed and sustained losses, and if the German ambitions are acknowledged, perhaps the greatest in its effect on the course of history.  

Inventory of Damages

According to General Eisenhower's personnel officer, American losses in the Battle of the Bulge totalled 76,890

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22 Winston Churchill, Victory, p. 23.
men of whom 8,607 were killed, 47,139 wounded, and 21,144 missing. Because of heavy German attacks, 733 tanks and tank destroyers were lost. Two divisions, the Twenty-eighth and the One Hundred Sixth were almost annihilated.

The German attack delayed the Allied ground offensive for six weeks, according to General Eisenhower. When the assault on Germany came, a much weakened enemy was found, and, though the fighting was bitter and hard, the end was never in doubt.

What did the Germans lose? The Germans suffered heavy casualties including their reserve of men, materials, and morale. The German figures were 61,834 casualties; of these, 12,562 were killed, 38,000 wounded, and 30,582 missing. Material losses were 324 assault guns, 751 tanks, 6000 vehicles, and 1600 planes.24 These were serious losses for the Germans.

To offset these losses the Wehrmacht (German Army) had little to show. They had gained no ground at all, being back to where they had started from by the end of January, 1945. Their only real achievement was the fact that the Allied forces were held out of the Saar and Ruhr for some time. But it is safe to say that by depriving themselves of the resources in men and material consumed in the

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23 Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 345.

Ardennes, the Wehrmacht had so weakened itself for the battles both east and west that, in the long run, they had shortened the duration of the war by many months.

Another loss suffered by the German Army was the lowering of morale among German troops.\(^{25}\) A deep disillusionment now gripped the average German soldier in the west. His faith was strained to the breaking point by the Normandy invasion and the battles along the Siegfried line. During the Battle of the Bulge he was called upon to believe in a new set of promises and to hope for a new series of miracles. But when all of this vanished as each snowy day passed, despair in full measure fell upon the German soldier on the Western Front.

The reaction could be seen in the letters and diaries written by the German soldiers in the Ardennes. The sensation of advancing instead of retreating, the thrill of seeing the enemy dying and captured, a victory feeling in the air, had brought German morale up to an equal of the old 1940 days. A German soldier wrote to his family:\(^{26}\)

Yes, you are surprised that we are again in Belgium and we advance every day. What do you think our morale is like? Everyone is enthusiastic as never before.

\(^{25}\) Riess, op. cit., p. 293.

\(^{26}\) Milton Shulman, Defeat in the West, p. 249.
And a Lieutenant Rockhammer writing to his wife, on December 22:27

This time we are a thousand times better off than you at home. The snow must run red with American blood. We will throw them into the ocean, the big mouthed apes from the new world. We cannot be too brutal in the deciding moments of this struggle.

Another common soldier wrote on Christmas Eve:28

Even I, as a poor private, can tell that it won't take much longer until the Ami (American) will throw away his weapons.

But by Christmas the exalted feeling was wearing off. Some still were confident, but others were far less sure. Thus on December 25, a German soldier wrote to his wife:29

Slept last night in a barn. At eleven in the morning the enemy attacked with planes and tanks. It can hardly be worse in hell, the Lord save me.

And as the power of the Allies grew with each passing day, and as the snow fell thicker, and the nights grew colder and longer, the hopes for the Germans faded farther and farther into the black Ardennes forests. The diaries and letters now struck a different note. As one soldier wrote on January 2:30

If you actually saw me you would lift your hands in dismay. I am ragged and filthy. I have had the same underwear on for five weeks. If one does not get lice it is a miracle. If only the war were over; it has lasted long enough already.

27 Ibid., p. 249. 29 Ibid., p. 250.
On January 5, another soldier wrote: 31

I have already got my present. I have frozen both of my legs. Many are learning to pray here, if they could not already. One should not forget dear God; he will not forget us.

Goebbels hailed the Battle of the Bulge as a great triumph for Hitler and National Socialism. The press and radio blared out about the fighting spirit of the Third Reich. The propaganda office in Berlin could offer little comfort to the dreary German soldier now back in the Siegfried line. The German soldiers in the west needed no Goebbels to tell them what had happened. They had seen it. The sweet taste of victory now became bitter fruit. The Battle of the Bulge completely broke the German Army and it could no longer wait for victory. The Germans could only wait for the end.

Early in February, 1945, the British attacked along the Roer River toward the Rhine. On February 16, the American First Army captured the Roer River dams; and headed for the Rhine. The First American Army secured the Remagen bridge near Cologne and sent thousands of troops on the east bank of the Rhine. This was the first time the Rhine had been crossed by an enemy since Napoleon. The First Army crossed on March 7, 1945 and the Third Army crossed on March 22. 32

31 Ibid., p. 250.
The Ruhr industrial area was added to American victories on April 13. Only isolated German resistance continued through the rest of April. On April 25, the American Army linked with the Russian Army and less than two weeks later at Rheims, France, Colonel Alfred Jodl, who had planned the Battle of the Bulge, surrendered all land, sea, and air forces of Germany on May 7, 1945. 33

33 Butcher, op. cit., p. 832.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

So uncertain were those black December days, so confusing the events, so mixed up the fighting, so wrong the reports, so many mistakes, that it is hardly surprising that from the information which came through official and unofficial channels many wrong interpretations were made. These interpretations are varied much from one author to another author. Most of them have been noted but if only to straighten the record they bear repeating now.

The Western Allies Could Not Have Won the War in September

It is quite a registered fact that the Seigfried line could not have been broken through in September. The first stumbling block for the Anglo-American operations in September was that supplies were not keeping pace with the armies. The supplies were being unloaded on the beaches and that was slow. The railroads were beyond use and the trucking companies of the Red Ball Express could not get enough supplies to the front. As experience soon showed, small thrusts into the German West Wall were hacked off. It was not possible to use a small force thrust into the heart
of Germany because heavy German flank attacks would have soon enveloped it. General Eisenhower made a wise choice in September when he decided that the front would be maintained in a continuous line from Switzerland through Holland to the North Sea.

The Battle of the Bulge was Hitler's Personal Idea

As Jodl expressively states, Hitler personally produced the idea of the Battle of the Bulge. Goebbels and Goering echoed this in the same manner. After the July 20 attempt on his life, Hitler was ordered to bed. While in bed he had plenty of time to think and think is exactly what he did. Hitler had planned the desperation attack near Averanches, France in August to split the First and Third American Armies at that time. It is very possible that this was his guide in planning the counteroffensive known as the Battle of the Bulge. The thinly held Ardennes sector seemed to answer his hope for securing the initiative on the Western Front. Hitler pitted his faith and judgment against the military judgment of his field commanders. That his objective was great no one will deny, but only his loyal Nazi henchmen believed in his plan.

Anglo-American Operations set the Stage that Invited the Battle of the Bulge

The rapid advance across France with lagging supply lines proved to be the trouble. The early jabbing attacks
on the West Wall was Hitler desired. In this he could fill the West Wall with troops that were not physically fit for combat and save the best German troops for a counteroffensive. Then too, the supplies were moving slowly because they had to be unloaded on the beaches. All of this delay gave Hitler time to try a war of attrition on the Anglo-Americans. The German withdrawal from France was according to plans and sufficient strength was saved to defend the West Wall. The "calculated risk" taken by Bradley in the Ardennes proved to be the trouble maker. The American thinly held Ardennes led Hitler to plan the break through in that sector.

Was There a Chasm Between the Nazi High Command and the Regular Army Field Commanders

There never was a close relationship between Hitler and the German regular officer Corps. There seemed to be a gulf between Hitler and the old Junker officers. Hitler believed in himself as a military planner. To add further to his ego, the march into Austria and the fall of France were exactly according to his predictions. He never got over these two accuracies. Then came the July 20 attempt on his life with several officers of the Junker class involved. Von Stauffenberg and Rommel and others were executed or forced to liquidate themselves. This completely severed
Hitler with the old officer corps. He now completely
dominated the planning of the Battle of the Bulge. His
wishes were to use more and more of his loyal Nazi offi-
cers to carry out the last military gamble. The old mas-
ter, Von Rundstedt, was asked very little and told very
little. Rundstedt later complained that the SS Officers
reported to Hitler and not to him. He meant much of this
for Dietrich and the Sixth Panzer Army. As Goebbels said,
"Hitler hated generals."

The Americans Knew Nothing
About the Battle of
the Bulge Beforehand

The Allies were fooled and it is best to admit it.
However, the error was in the evaluation of the information,
rather than in gathering the material itself. The Americans
were fooled because they were over-confident and certain
that the Germans were on the run. Intelligence officers
became too optimistic and wrote long stories of the weak-
ened German war machine. The rumors and prisoner reports
were turned aside and not carefully evaluated. It was a
dangerous game and the stakes were high. The American Army
recovered because of recuperative means, there was a young,
strong, resourceful nation behind the Army. To add further,
the Battle of the Bulge was certainly not a trap to draw
the Germans out of the west Wall defenses.
The German Objective was Antwerp

Very clearly were German hopes directed toward Antwerp. On November 16, the port of Antwerp unloaded the first Allied supplies. From this time on the beach unloading became less and less as plentiful Antwerp supplies moved to the front. To Hitler, this was danger indeed as he could envisage well supplied Allied Armies. Then from another angle, the German Army had long longed to get back on the Channel and Antwerp was chosen as a limiting pole. To get to Antwerp would also split the Allied Armies into two camps with the Northern Allied Army becoming unsupplied and left to wither away under German attacks, Hitler reasoned. "Make no little plans," was a phrase to occupy Hitler's mind. Hitler was a favorite believer in this. "Destroy the Allied Armies," he said, "and don't worry about the rest."

Eisenhower was in Danger Because of the Plot on His Life

Otto Skorzeny and his band of cutthroats had a sizeable record behind them. Skorzeny had arranged the clever paratrooper rescue of Mussolini when it seemed utterly impossible. Skorzeny was a loyal Nazi and welcomed the chance to prove it to his god, Hitler. There were many men and women in Belgium and France that were pro-Nazi and would have aided Skorzeny to any limit. It is very conclusive that
Eisenhower's life was in danger as confusion reigned for several crucial days. Extra care was taken in guarding General Eisenhower and the job the army did can be pointed to with pride.

The Battle of the Bulge was
Won not by General
Patton's Third
Army

Even if the Third Army did liberate Bastogne it was a long way from winning the Battle of the Bulge. The first fierce ten days of fighting was in the northwest against Hodges' unspectacular First Army. Not until after December 26 did the Germans turn south with fury on Bastogne. By this time the dream to capture Liege, Brussels, and Antwerp had vanished in First U. S. Army smoke.

As now realized, Patton's initial fighting, though important, was conducted against four weak infantry divisions of the Seventh German Army. Meanwhile, in these first ten critical days, both the Fifth and the Sixth Panzer Armies pounded their way through First American Army lines, coming closer and closer to the Meuse River. While Patton was fighting Brandenberger's four infantry divisions, four panzer corps with 1200 tanks and 250,000 men descended on Hodges' 60,000 men of the First Army. Here was the great crisis of the attack. The Germans attempted to turn the flank of the First Army. The Third Armored, the Second
Armored and the Eighty-fourth Divisions were fed into the line to prevent a flanking movement. Only later, on December 26, after the crisis in the north had been met and Hitler realized his dream was done, did the Germans turn toward Bastogne in force. The defenders by this time greatly reinforced, in a magnificent stand beat off eight German divisions. Patton's Army performed well; his true glory was as part of a team, directed by Eisenhower, which was flexible enough to rebound from a completely surprising attack.

Eisenhower's decision to split the Battlefield was a Wise Choice

By December 19, it became clear that the Germans were headed for Antwerp. With this in mind, Eisenhower divided the battlefield and gave Montgomery the northern section which included the British and Canadian Armies plus the First and Ninth American Armies. The southern sector with the Eighth Corps, the Twelfth Army Headquarters, and the Third Army was handed to General Bradley. There were many who said this destroyed the unity of the battlefield but it did not. General Eisenhower was aware that the Germans were planning another large thrust into Holland toward Antwerp. This attack never did come off but if it had, the choice made by Eisenhower would have saved the day. Bradley could
not keep in touch with the First and Ninth Armies because of broken communications and it was very necessary that they be put under Montgomery who could co-ordinate his forces with General Simpson and General Hodges.

It Was the Rundstedt Offensive

Haughty Gerd Von Rundstedt, seventy years old, commander of the German forces in the west, called back to service after Von Kluge conspired with the enemy, did not take the trouble to attend the planning conference held at Hitler's headquarters. They refused his advice so he let the Battle of the Bulge become Hitler's, Kiel's, and Jodl's responsibility. Rundstedt looked more after the supplies for the forces and gave to Model much of the command of the field operations.

Why were the Germans stopped?

Generally, however, the Germans were unanimous in blaming certain factors for their defeat. They were: (1) shortage of men and materials as a result of the long war; (2) lack of qualified leaders; (3) improper use of the German Sixth Panzer Army; (4) Allied air power; (5) bad roads; (6) bad weather; (7) the Allied reaction to the attack; (8) isolated defenses at unexpected points.

The condition of Germany after five years of war was rated high on the list. The age of the German war machine
was hurting it. The Germans had lost heavily in manpower, Jodl said that 1,500,000 men had been killed up to the time of the Battle of the Bulge.

The condition of the petroleum supply was another haunting picture for the Germans. The U. S. Airforce continually hacked at their petroleum output. At the time of the Battle of the Bulge there was a reserve supply of gasoline, but this was used up as the battle dragged. The further they advanced into the Bulge, the more the Germans felt the petroleum shortages. Goering summed it up: "It was no longer 1940."

Equally disturbing to the Germans was the lack of trained troops and commanders. Here the drain in manpower made a great difference in German actions. Tank drivers were not skilled in winter driving, and no prior training could be given because of the gasoline shortage. Many of the best unit commanders had been killed off by five years of warfare and there had not been time to train replacements.

Closely related to the lack of leadership was the criticism by all except the high command in Berlin, that the Sixth Panzer Army should have been used in the south with the Fifth Panzer Army.

Other factors that may be included such as the weather, Allied airpower, terrain, bad preparations, the gallant defenses at St. Vith and Bastogne, and the quick reaction of
the American Command to the German attack. Special emphasis must be placed on the fighting qualities of the American soldiers in stopping the Germans. The Americans clung to the snowy Ardennes hills and made the Germans pay dearly for each town, road junction, and bridge. The American Commanders made some mistakes in the planning but the American soldiers carried them through so well that the mistakes became great battle successes. The common American soldier rose to invincible glory in the Battle of the Bulge and this should be rightfully pointed out.

There was a Cause for Alarm

There is ample reason to point to December, 1944 as a dark time of World War II. There was the tragic destruction of shattered bodies and minds. The total misery of the infantrymen, wading waist deep in snow, the dead tankers in burning tanks, pilots in falling planes, all of this part of the black December story. This was the first time Allied forces were sent reeling back by German blows. To a victorious people and their army on the march, the effect was almost unbelievable: curfew in Paris; prayers in New York; wonder in London; the First and the Ninth American Armies preparing to move; stark fright on the faces of Belgians and Luxembourg citizens left behind retreating armies; and
then the bitter truth of the slaughter of American soldiers at Malmedy, with it forming a bitter hatred for the Germans.

It should be pointed out that the American casualties were 76,890 who were struck in their vigor and youth of life. The telegrams that poured out, "The War Department regrets . . . ." Was all of this because the Allies were asleep?

On the morning of December 16, the Americans were caught asleep in the Ardennes. They did not realize that they were dealing with a madman who had long since thrown the military books out the window. It was forgotten that a trapped beast will make a final death lunge in which he has been known to emerge the victor. All of this was forgotten and the Allies paid a heavy cost in two weeks of fright and temporary rout.

Nor should it be forgotten that the Battle of the Bulge was only a part of a larger struggle which the English, Russians and Americans won, a struggle against a particular form of selfishness and greed called Fascism. All Americans should not forget the Allied reaction to the attack, the rallying of the forces, the diversion of the troops to the attack areas, the great stands of small and large units in isolated spots, and finally, the complete elimination of
the German gains. All of this stands as a feat of arms which all Americans can be proud of the Battle of the Bulge.
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