

UNCLASSIFIED

THE GENERAL BOARD
United States Forces, European Theater

STRATEGY OF THE CAMPAIGN

IN

WESTERN EUROPE

1944 - 1945

MISSION: Prepare a factual, annotated report of the strategy of the campaign in Western Europe, 1944-1945.

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File: 385/1

Study Number 1

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STRATEGY OF THE CAMPAIGN

I N

WESTERN EUROPE

1944 - 1945

FOREWORD

In preparing this study, the authors have endeavored to present a factual statement of the strategic considerations underlying the campaign of the Allies in Western Europe during 1944-45, both as planned and as actually executed. Tactical aspects have been introduced only as necessary to provide continuity.

The campaign in Western Europe, like the other campaigns of World War II, will in due course be studied in the light of knowledge acquired after the fact. The present study invites the reader to observe the campaign from the viewpoint of the commanders in the field. Thus, in the discussion of a given plan and the strategic considerations upon which it was formulated, an effort has been made to avoid reference to information that was not available to the responsible commanders and their staffs at the time.

It will facilitate the reading of the study if the general form of its composition is understood in advance. The reader will note that the campaign has been treated as a series of distinct phases, each of which has been discussed on a chronological basis. That is to say, the plans for the phase are presented first, followed by an enumeration of the strategic factors influencing the adoption of the plans; thereafter, the actual development of the operations is reviewed and departures from the plans are cited, together with the strategic reasons therefor. For the sake of uniformity the strategic factors are discussed in each instance in the same order, namely: (1) enemy situation and capabilities, (2) terrain, obstacles, weather, time and space, (3) own (Allied) forces - strength, combat power, dispositions, and (4) logistical considerations.

Care has been taken to indicate the source of every significant statement by reference to a bibliography appearing at the end of each chapter. This bibliography should be helpful to historians making more detailed studies. A glossary and chronological list of important events are included at the end of the book. A collection of ten maps supplements the text.

Air Force plans and operations are presented in this study only to the extent necessary to show their influence on the strategy of the campaign as planned and as actually executed. A comprehensive treatment of the strategical plans and operations of the Air Forces may be found in separate Air Forces studies and reports. These studies and reports are listed in the bibliography on pages 40 and 41.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

CHAPTER 1

THE SECURING OF THE INITIAL LODGEMENT AREA

(Maps Nos 1, 2, and 3)

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

THE AXIS OFFENSIVE

1. The offensive of May - June 1940 left the German armies dominating Western Europe from Norway to the Pyrenees. After the British withdrawal at Dunkerque and the capitulation of the French army, Great Britain alone offered an organized base for resistance to the German war machine in the West.

From August through October 1940, the German Air Force waged an air offensive designed to bring England to her knees. The failure of this operation was a decisive event. However, Britain could not fight an offensive war against Germany with air and sea power alone, and it was apparent that eventually Allied forces must establish a lodgement on the mainland of Europe.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and Germany's declaration of war, the United States and the British Commonwealth of Nations became active allies against the Japanese Empire, with the United States joining Great Britain and the Soviet Union in their war against Germany.

FORMULATION OF ALLIED STRATEGY

2. Combined Conferences. The grand strategy for the global war to be waged by the two Allies was formulated by the high commands of the United States and Britain in a series of conferences beginning in December 1941. Briefly stated, this grand strategy provided that, concurrent with limited offensive operations against Japan, the United States and Great Britain would build up large ground and air forces and, in conjunction with the Soviet Union, would bring about the defeat of Germany at the earliest possible time by combined ground, air, and naval offensive operations. After the defeat of Germany, the full military resources would be available for direction against Japan.¹ (In conformity with this plan, the United States and Great Britain in November 1942 launched their Mediterranean Campaign, which drove the Germans from North Africa and made possible the subsequent invasions of Sicily, the Italian peninsula, and Southern France.)

3. Overlord Planning. At Casablanca, in January 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff of the United States and Great Britain directed that detailed plans be developed for an Allied invasion of Western Europe.² A planning staff, headed by the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Allied Commander (designate), was organized in London as an agency to make plans for the invasion.³ This staff, known in brief as COSSAC, made the estimate of the situation and the preliminary invasion plan which were finally approved by the combined Chiefs of Staff in Quebec in August 1943.⁴ The approved plan, called "Overlord", was designed to establish a strong Allied army in France to strike at the heart of

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Germany. It constituted the basis for the subsequent preparation of detailed plans.

4. Operation Against Southern France. At Quebec the Combined Chiefs of Staff recommended to the President and the Prime Minister an additional landing in the Toulon - Marseilles area of Southern France. In connection with Overlord, this assault would create a diversion and permit exploitation towards the north.⁵

5. Reaffirmation of Anvil Operation. The projected operation against Southern France ("Anvil", later renamed "Dragoon") was reaffirmed and its target date set for early May by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the Cairo Conference in December 1943. This proved to be a decision second in importance only to Overlord in the overall strategic planning of the campaign in Western Europe.

SECTION 2

THE OVERLORD PLAN⁶

OBJECT OF PLAN

6. The object of the Overlord Plan was to mount and carry out an operation with forces and equipment established in the United Kingdom in order to secure a lodgement on the Continent from which further offensive operations could be developed. It was essential that the Lodgement Area contain sufficient port facilities to maintain a force of 26 to 30 divisions and to accommodate follow-up shipments of three to five divisions per month. The target date was 1 May 1944.

OUTLINE OF ORIGINAL PLAN APPROVED IN AUGUST 1943

7. Selection of Area. The Cherbourg - Brittany group of ports (from Cherbourg to Nantes) was selected for inclusion in the Lodgement Area, with the assault landing to be made over the Normandy beaches in the vicinity of Caen.

8. Preliminary Phase. The plan provided that, commencing in August 1943, all possible means, including air and sea action, propaganda, political and economic pressure, and sabotage, would be integrated into a combined offensive aimed at softening German resistance against any major attack from air, sea, or ground. Such actions would be so designed as to avoid focussing attention on the Caen area. In particular, this program envisaged the reduction of the German Air Forces in the West; reduction and dissipation of the German armies, especially reserves located in France and the Low Countries; progressive destruction of the German economic system; and the undermining of the enemy's morale.

9. Preparatory phase. Plans provided that just prior to D-Day, air action would be intensified against the German Air Forces, especially in Northwestern France, and that attacks would be made against lines of communications directly associated with movement of enemy reserves that might reinforce the Caen area.

Three assault forces would be assembled with naval escorts and loaded at ports along the south coast of England. Two naval assault forces carrying follow-up forces also would be assembled and loaded; one in the Thames Estuary and one on the west coast.

Mines would be laid with the object of interfering with the operation of the enemy's light naval forces. Because the coastal channels were covered by enemy radar, sweeping of enemy mines was to be avoided in order not to prejudice surprise.

10. Assault. The original plan to secure the initial beachhead on D-Day included:

- a. A minimum of preliminary air action against the coastal defenses.
- b. The simultaneous landing of three assault divisions on the Caen beaches, followed on the same day by two tank groups and one regimental combat team.

c. The seizure of Caen by airborne forces.

d. Subsidiary operations by commandos and possibly by airborne forces to neutralize specific coast defenses and to seize important crossings over the Eure River.

e. A D-Day objective for the assault forces of the general line Grandcamp - Bayeux - Caen.

11. Expansion of Beachhead. As forces became available, the beachhead would be expanded to include Cherbourg and to reach the general line Mont St Michel - Alencon - Trouville. It was estimated that this objective would be reached by D + 14, by which time the forces on the Continent were scheduled to include 18 divisions and 28 to 33 fighter-type squadrons.

The maneuvers to reach this new objective were to include the following:

a. A thrust to the south and southwest to destroy enemy forces west of the Orne River, outflank enemy forces between the Orne River and the Dives River, and gain sufficient depth in the bridgehead to permit a turning movement into the Cotentin Peninsula.

b. A subsequent thrust southeastward to drive the enemy forces from the area west of the Dives River and to obtain sufficient depth to cover the construction and operation of airfields in the area southeast of Caen.

c. Simultaneously with the latter operation, a drive into the Cotentin Peninsula to seize Cherbourg.

d. Should the advance to Cherbourg be delayed by enemy resistance in the base of the Peninsula, it was considered that an assault landing on the Peninsula to outflank the enemy positions might become necessary. This could be done by a landing on the eastern beaches, or, if the island of Alderney was previously captured, on the western beaches of the Peninsula.

12. Securing of the Lodgement Area. Subsequent operations towards Germany would require the securing of additional ports and airfield sites. Accordingly, the plan provided for:

a. Securing the left flank along the Eure River from Dreux to Rouen and thence along the line of the Seine to the sea, at the same time seizing Chartres, Orleans, and Tours.

b. Seizing Nantes and St Nazaire, and following with subsidiary operations to capture Brest and the various smaller ports on the Brittany Peninsula.

These operations would complete occupation of the Lodgement Area and insure ports sufficient to maintain a minimum of at least 30 divisions.

13. Future Operations. Decisions on future operations would have to be made after the Lodgement Area had been seized. The principal objectives to be considered were:

a. Paris and the Seine ports. Subsequent to securing the

Lodgement Area, Paris and the Seine ports would be the main objectives. Upon their seizure a pause of some three months was anticipated as a likely necessity, during which time ports would be reconditioned and railways restored.

b. The Channel Islands. The necessity to reduce the Channel Islands would depend on the degree to which enemy aircraft and E-boats based on the islands proved embarrassing to the Allies' use of Granville, St Malo, and the East Brittany ports.

c. The Mediterranean ports. It was considered improbable that the Germans would be able to hold the Mediterranean ports of France. It was necessary that our forces in the Mediterranean seize any opportunity to capture these ports and follow up a German retirement.

d. The Biscay ports. Their capture and use might become essential for logistical and build-up purposes.

e. Southern France. During the period of delay after the capture of Paris and the Seine ports it was hoped that an opportunity might arise to clear the enemy from the area of France south of the Loire River and Dijon.

14. Land Forces, Command and Control. Recommended policies to facilitate command and control of land forces included:

a. Command:

- (1) Command of the initial assault would be under a British army commander.
- (2) Command of subsequent operations up to the capture of the Brittany Peninsula, or the establishment of a U.S. Army Group Headquarters on the Continent, would be under the commander of the British-Canadian Army Group.
- (3) Forces of one nationality (corps or greater) on occasions might be placed under command of a higher headquarters of the other nationality.

b. Control:

- (1) Forces of both nationalities would take part in the initial assault, always keeping U.S. forces on the right, British forces on the left.
- (2) British-Canadian forces would be based on ports nearest the United Kingdom.
- (3) The port of Cherbourg would be used by both British and American forces, if necessary.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOPTION OF PLAN

General Considerations

16. Main Factors. The main factors affecting the operation were:

a. The possibility of attaining the air superiority necessary to provide effective air cover in the assault area with fighter aircraft based in England.

b. The number of offensive divisions which the enemy could make available for counterattack in the assault area.

c. The availability of landing ships and craft and of transport aircraft.

d. The capacity of beaches and ports in the Lodgement Area.

17. Port Facilities. In order to provide sufficient port facilities to maintain these large forces, it was necessary to select a lodgement area which included a group of major ports. The assumption had to be made that captured ports would be seriously damaged and probably blocked, and that it would take some time to restore normal facilities. Reliance on maintenance over beaches thus would be necessary for an extended period. Unless adequate measures were taken to provide sheltered waters by artificial means, the operation would be at the mercy of the weather. Adequate beaches, artificial anchorages, and a group of major ports therefore were considered to be logistical prerequisites to a successful invasion.

18. Lodgement Area Considerations. Prior to formulation of the Overlord Plan, the securing of lodgements on the Danish and German coasts had been considered and judged impracticable. The Overlord Plan therefore limited its consideration of assault and lodgement areas to the coasts of Holland and Belgium, and the Channel and Atlantic coasts of France.

19. Beachhead Areas. In examining possible beachheads, the coasts of Holland and Belgium, the coastal areas immediately adjacent to the mouth of the Seine River, the Brittany Peninsula, and the Biscay Coast were rejected after consideration of the following factors:

a. The coasts of Holland and Belgium.

(1) Adequate air cover could not be provided so far from England.

(2) Limited road exits made the beaches unsuitable for maintenance on a large scale.

- (3) On the Dutch Coast, there was insufficient tidal range to dry out coasters.
- (4) Beaches in the Belgian sector, although having a high capacity, are backed by extensive sand dunes.
- (5) The beaches were exposed to prevailing winds.

b. The coastal area immediately adjacent to the mouth of the Seine River.

- (1) The Seine River would necessitate the splitting of forces without prospect of an early junction.
- (2) The wide separation of beaches would disperse and weaken the air cover.
- (3) The good beaches south of the Seine were covered by guns on the cape of Le Havre.
- (4) The beaches north of the Seine were small and scattered and would subject the assault forces to defeat in detail if they were immediately counterattacked by German reserves.

c. The Brittany Peninsula.

- (1) The beaches were too small and scattered for an assault by a large force.
- (2) Adequate air cover could not be provided so far from England.

d. The Biscay Coast.

- (1) Adequate air cover could not be provided so far from England.
- (2) The naval commitment would be too large.

This left the Pas de Calais area and the Caen - Cotentin area as the two most acceptable beachhead areas. In the following paragraphs the ground, air, and naval factors influencing the adoption of the original Overlord Plan in 1943 are set forth in more detail. Additional data concerning both the Pas de Calais and the Caen - Cotentin areas show the underlying factors which influenced the selection of the Caen area for the assault landing.

Ground Force Considerations

20. Enemy Situation. It was considered that the Germans would attempt to defeat any invasion at or close to the beaches. The German coastal defenses were designed for the primary purpose of denying the Allies access to principal ports on the assumption that without them the Allies could not supply, maintain, and build up their forces. It also was known that extensive demolitions had been prepared at major French and Belgian ports.

Other sectors of the coast were weakly defended by divisions which were expected to hold for only eight to twelve hours. However

Intelligence reported armored divisions held in reserve near the coast with which the Germans could rapidly counterattack the Allied forces. Therefore, the success of the Allies was likely to depend more on their ability to drive off German reserves than on their initial piercing of the coastal defenses.

The Pas de Calais was the most strongly defended area of the French coast and the pivot of the German coastal defense system. The sector between Gravelines and the Somme River normally was held by two coastal divisions. A portion of the German armored reserves in the West also was located customarily north of the Seine behind the Pas de Calais and Belgian coast. Moreover, the Pas de Calais area could be reinforced more easily than the Caen area, either from the interior of France or from Germany.

On the other hand, it was estimated that the Caen section of the coast, from the base of the Cotentin Peninsula to the Orne River, would be weak in coast artillery and other coastal defenses at the time of the assault. This area normally was held by only one defensive division of two regiments. To the east one defensive division covered the area from the Orne to the Seine, while to the west one defensive division held the entire Cotentin Peninsula. During periods when an invasion attempt appeared imminent, as in the summer of 1942, two armored divisions were located in reserve behind the Caen area.

It was considered impossible to forecast the total strength of the German land forces and the probable number of available reserves on the target date of the operation. Based, however, on a study of the likely rate of an Allied build-up in the Caen area and the probable German courses of action, it was considered possible to arrive at a rough estimate of the strength which the German forces must not exceed if an Allied assault were to have a reasonable chance of success. Therefore, it was concluded that:

a. The defenses and the number of defensive troops in the Caen sector on D-Day should be approximately the same as they were in June 1943.

b. The German Command should not be in a position to deploy more than the following number of full-strength first quality divisions to support their forward divisions holding the coasts:

- (1) On D-Day, not more than three divisions (including one armored).
- (2) On D + 1 and D + 2 days, not more than five divisions (i.e., two additional divisions, armored or otherwise).
- (3) By D + 8, not more than nine divisions (i.e., four additional divisions, armored or otherwise).

c. German reserves in France and the Low Countries on D-Day should not comprise more than 12 first quality divisions at full strength. This number was not to include divisions holding the coastline nor German Air Force field divisions and reserve (training) divisions which might be located in France and the Low Countries.

d. During the first two months, the German command should not be in a position to transfer from the Eastern Front, or from other commitments, more than 15 first quality divisions at full strength.

21. The Subsequent German Reaction. If he failed to destroy the Allied forces near the beaches, it was expected that the enemy next would attempt to prevent the Allies from reaching Cherbourg by moving reserves to close the base of the Cotentin Peninsula and by making maximum use of demolitions and inundations in that area. It was also estimated that he would attempt to cover the Seine ports by holding the Orne and Dives Rivers.

After the Allies had achieved a decisive defeat of the forces concentrated against the landing, and had secured the Cotentin Peninsula, the enemy's probable action would be to fall back with the main body of his forces to cover Paris while holding along the line of the Seine River with any defensive forces he could draw from the interior. Part of these forces probably would be regrouped to delay any advance the Allies might attempt toward the Loire ports and into the Brittany Peninsula.

22. Terrain. It was considered that a lodgement area, in addition to containing adequate beaches for the assault and sufficient ports to maintain Allied forces, should contain terrain which would permit the defense and exploitation of the bridgehead by the occupation of successive natural obstacles.

In the Pas de Calais area, the only four beaches suitable for the landing of assault divisions lay astride Boulogne, between Cap Gris Nez and the Canche River. Although having a high capacity, these beaches were exposed to the prevailing wind, were backed by extensive sand dunes, and south of Boulogne were dominated by high ground. Exits from the beaches were generally limited to stream or river valleys, and all exits were blocked by numerous obstacles, such as concrete walls, minefields, and antitank ditches. It was estimated that the exit limitations would prevent the landing of more than one division on D-Day, one additional division daily on D + 1 and D + 2 and one and one-third divisions each day thereafter. Natural flanks to a bridgehead might be found in the Canche River to the south and the Calais Forderlands in the east. Inland, however, the terrain was flat to rolling limestone country. There were no suitable natural defensive positions that might be held while building up forces and supplies for offensive action.

In the Caen - Cotentin area, beaches were available partly on the Cotentin Peninsula and partly in the Caen area, wholly on the Cotentin Peninsula or wholly in the Caen area.

a. An attack with part of our forces on the Cotentin Peninsula and part on the Caen beaches was considered unsound since it would entail dividing the limited assault forces by the low-lying marshy ground and intricate river system at the neck of the peninsula.

b. An attack entirely against the Cotentin Peninsula was considered to be unsound because the Germans easily could block the narrow neck of the peninsula and thereby make a break-out more difficult.

c. An attack entirely on the Caen beaches was considered to have no prohibitive disadvantage.

In the Caen area, there were two large beaches within reasonable supporting distance which would provide excellent landing facilities. These beaches were reasonably sheltered from the prevailing wind, and their exits were more numerous and less obstructed than those in the Pas de Calais area. It was felt that three divisions could be

landed simultaneously. The Orne River on the east and the Vire River on the west would facilitate the defense of the flanks of the beachhead. The Caen area also was considered suitable for the landing of airborne troops.

Inland, there were favorable features for defending the initial beachhead and, except for an area between Caen and Bayeux, the ground was unfavorable for counterattack by armored divisions. Large portions of the region were "bocage" -- pasture land divided by trees, hedges, banks, and ditches into many small fields. In some places the roads were sunken and lined by steep banks. The Normandy hills, some 25 miles from the coast and running southeast to northwest, would provide some protection against enemy armored attacks.

23. Own Forces. An estimate of Allied forces available for the operation indicated that an equivalent of 26 to 30 divisions would be in the United Kingdom on 1 May 1944. Further build-up could be expected at the rate of three to five divisions per month, if these divisions were able to move directly from the United States to ports on the Continent.

Airborne forces amounting to two airborne divisions and some five or six parachute regiments would be available, but due to the shortage of transport aircraft only two-thirds of one airborne division could be transported at one time.

It was appreciated that the combat power of the Allied assault forces would be reduced as a result of the tiring cross-Channel voyage.

In addition to the forces employed in the initial assault, it was envisaged that one U.S. division and one British division, both trained in amphibious assault technique, would be held in reserve for subsidiary operations.

It was contemplated that resistance groups would be available to assist in delaying movement of enemy reinforcements and to create confusion behind the enemy lines.

24. Logistical Factors. Although not mentioned in the Overlord Plan, the location from which the operation was to be mounted was a factor in the selection of the Lodgement Area. Western England did not offer satisfactory shore embarkation facilities, adequate space for assembly and staging areas, nor suitable road and rail networks for the movement of troops and supplies. Eastern England already was burdened by air force installations and operations. On the other hand, Southern England offered many ports, suitable shore conditions, ample space for supplies and troops, and good road and rail facilities. However, the use of Southern England for mounting the operation meant that great difficulty would be encountered in any attempt to move the assault force to a point north of Calais.

Logistical support of the operation required that the Lodgement area contain one of the following groups of ports:

- a. The Dutch - Belgian group, from Dunkerque to Rotterdam.
- b. The Pas de Calais - Belgian group, from Boulogne to Antwerp.
- c. The Seine - Pas de Calais group, from Le Havre and Rouen to Calais.

- d. The Cherbourg - Seine group, from Cherbourg to Dieppe.
- e. The Brittany - Cherbourg group, from Nantes to Caen.
- f. The Biscay - Brittany group, from Bordeaux to Brest.

Any one of these groups, it was estimated, would support an initial force of 30 divisions and allow further expansion. After a varying number of months of expansion, further ports would have to be captured.

As it was anticipated that a great amount of supplies would have to pass over the beaches while ports were being restored, the capacity of beaches to accept and move vehicles and stores was a major factor. The provision of special berthing facilities was required to prevent cumulative damage to ships and to avoid deterioration of beaches from continual grounding of landing craft, with the consequent diminution in lift and beach capacity. Two artificial ports were to be constructed as early as possible, sheltered water being provided by sinking block and pier ships.

Except for equipment required for the development of ports and discharge facilities, and ships or craft required for the evacuation of wounded, no serious shortages or delays in provisions of any class of supplies were foreseen. However, an increase of at least ten percent in landing craft was highly desirable in order to provide a greater margin for contingencies.

Since no reliance could be placed on French rail facilities before D + 90, it would be necessary to maintain the Allied forces by motor transport during this period and to limit the Continental line of communications to a maximum of 150 miles.

A landing in the Pas de Calais area would permit turn-around of shipping and would facilitate the planned laying of a cross-Chennal pipeline for gasoline and oil. The main ports in the area, Boulogne and Calais, were believed capable of maintaining only nine to twelve divisions after three months. In order to obtain the requisite port facilities to maintain 30 divisions, it would be necessary to expand the beachhead eastward to include the ports from Boulogne to Antwerp inclusive, or southwestward to include the ports from Calais to Le Havre and Rouen inclusive.

A landing on the beaches in the Caen area, under optimum weather conditions, would permit a maximum build-up of five reinforced divisions by D + 2, 11 divisions and five tank groups by D + 6, and one additional division per day thereafter until about D + 24. Over these same beaches, by use of artificial anchorages, it was estimated that a minimum of 6,000 tons of supplies could be discharged daily beginning D + 4 or 5, building up to 12,000 tons per day by D + 16. It was anticipated that 18 divisions would have to be supported over the beaches during the first month, 12 the second month, and none by the end of the third.

Since there were no sizeable ports in the Caen area, it was important to capture and develop Cherbourg as early as possible. After capturing Cherbourg it would be necessary to drive either eastward to the Seine ports or southwestward to the Brittany group, the latter course being considered the more likely alternative. The Cherbourg and Brittany ports were expected to be able to support 31 divisions after

three months' development, or, if all minor ports were included, this force could be supported after one month's development and 45 divisions after three months.

Air Force Considerations

25. Enemy Situation. It was recognized that achievement of air supremacy was a necessary prerequisite to a successful invasion of the Continent. The implication in the shift of German aircraft production from emphasis on bomber to fighter-type aircraft in 1943 was apparent. Unless this German fighter strength was checked and reduced, it could reach such proportions as to render an amphibious assault impracticable.

Defensively, the German Air Force had to be prevented from attacking Allied ports, marshalling areas, shipping, depots, beachheads, and movement. Offensively, dominance of the air was required to bring the full weight of Allied air power against the enemy as he attempted to defend the beachhead and to prevent the maximum effective employment of Allied land power.

It was recognized that it would be impossible to forecast the strength and fighting value of the German Air Force in 1944. At the time of the Overlord estimate in June 1943, neither the effect of the fighting anticipated in the Mediterranean area nor that of the main strategic bomber offensive on German air power could be evaluated accurately.

As a basis of comparison and as a guide to the proportionate disposition of enemy air forces and their potentialities, an examination of the enemy air situation as it existed on 1 June 1943 was presented in the Overlord Plan. This examination revealed a vast numerical superiority of Allied strength, but it was noted that the relative strength of the Allied fighter forces would be much reduced over the area of combat, in view of the distance from their own bases and the many commitments they would face.

This appraisal credited the German Air Force, as of 1 June 1943, with a first-line strength on the Western Front of 1,800 planes of all types. Of these, it was estimated that 600 aircraft were available initially in the Caen area. The estimated maximum reinforcement on D-Day would bring the total to 1,170 planes. It was believed that German production was just keeping pace with operational and other requirements and that any curtailment of production would be felt immediately in the front line.

In summary, the plan concluded that the weak link in the chain of German air defense in the West lay in the lack of strength in depth, rather than in first-line aircraft. It was known that the enemy was making every effort to conserve his strength, and to increase his production in fighter-type aircraft.

The scale of effort which he could turn against the Allies in 1944 would depend, therefore, to a large extent on the degree of loss that could be inflicted upon him by the Allied air offensive between August 1943 and the date of the operation.

It was recognized that the two main air factors governing selection of a lodgement area were the provision of air cover during the assault phase, and the rapid provision of airfields in the initial beachhead, and later in the Lodgement Area as a whole.

26. Terrain. The necessity for air cover by land-based aircraft during the assault phase limited the consideration of possible assault areas to that section of the coast between Flushing and Cherbourg. The optimum coastal area was that of the Pas de Calais. Eastward, air cover capability decreased rapidly toward Flushing. Westward, it decreased steadily as far as the Seine, reached its weakest point in the Caen area, and then increased slightly over the Cotentin Peninsula. Unless the required degree of air superiority had been previously achieved, it would be inadvisable to carry out simultaneous main assaults on more than one beach, if this would involve a continuous frontage of over 25 miles.

Provision for Continental air bases was governed by the number of existing airfields and the general suitability of the terrain for construction of new airfields. It was noted that the greatest concentration of existing airfields within a short distance of the coast was south and southeast of Calais. In the Seine area there were a few airfields near the coast, but the terrain was fairly suitable for new airfield construction. In the Caen area there was only one airfield, but the terrain was most favorable for rapid airfield construction. There were two airfields in the Cotentin area, but the terrain in that region did not lend itself to rapid construction of new ones.

From the foregoing, it was concluded that the Pas de Calais sector was pre-eminently the most suitable for the initial beachhead from the air point of view. If the combat value of the German fighter force and fighter-bomber force that might be brought to bear in the assault area could be reduced sufficiently, the Caen area was acceptable.

27. Weather. Weather and lunar conditions at the time of invasion were important factors in the air phase of the operation. Operation of paratroop aircraft by night required good weather, at least a quarter moon, and a wind strength in the drop zone of not more than 20 miles per hour. Daylight operations could be carried on in less favorable weather, but wind requirements were the same.

Effective fighter operation could be expected only when the cloud base exceeded 5,000 feet. A cloud base under 3,000 feet restricted operation of day bombers, other than for low-level attacks, to areas where enemy anti-aircraft defenses were weak.

It was believed imperative that paratroops be dropped at night, since a landing during daylight would compromise surprise. Glider combinations were to be scheduled so as to reach the drop zone at dusk or at night.

28. Own Forces. Allied air plans for attaining air supremacy provided for:

a. The infliction of heavy casualties on the German fighter force by air battles brought about at an early date in areas advantageous to the Allies.

b. A long-term bomber offensive against the sources of production and first-line units of the German Air Force.

c. The disorganization of German Air Force units and the disruption of airfield installations within enemy fighter range of the Caen area.

d. The disorganization of the main elements of the German fighter command and control organization in the Caen area.

To accomplish the foregoing and to give the required air cover for the assault, it was computed that the Allies would have 663½ squadrons, a total of 11,377 planes, by 1 May 1944. This number included all types of aircraft, of which 450 squadrons (7,302 aircraft) would be American, and 213½ squadrons (4,075 planes) would be British. Fighters would total 3,785, of which 2,500 would be U.S. and the remainder British. Bombers would total 6,012, of which 3,856 would be U.S. and 2,156 British.

29. Logistical Factors. Squadrons would be based originally at 190 airfields in the United Kingdom. Of these fields, 63 were within a radius of 150 miles of the Lodgement Area and the remaining 127 fields were at an average distance of 175 to 200 miles. They would accommodate from one to six squadrons each, the majority being large enough to base three or more squadrons.

During the follow-up and build-up phases, it was considered essential to build up a force of fighters, fighter-bombers and reconnaissance squadrons on the Continent as follows:

a. As soon as possible after the landing on D-Day, day and night fighter control facilities would be established on the Continent.

b. By D + 3 two single landing strips, one in rear of each beach area, would be made available for the operation of fighters on a refuelling, rearming, and standby basis.

c. By D + 8, six airfields and two single strips would be made available, from which 17 fighter-type squadrons would be operated.

d. By D + 14, 14 airfields would be made available, from which 28 to 33 fighter-type squadrons would be operated.

Light bomber squadrons would continue to operate from England as long as they could reach their assigned targets. Heavy bombers would continue to operate from England throughout the operation.

Consideration of the capabilities of the Allied Air Forces in comparison with the anticipated combat efficiency of the German Air Force led to the conclusion that the Allies could maintain effective air superiority throughout the operation.

Naval Considerations

30. Enemy Situation. The German system of coast defenses had been designed with the primary purpose of denying access to the principal ports. It was very strong in coast artillery and antiaircraft weapons in defended localities and in obstacles in the immediate neighborhood of such ports. Among the strongest coast defenses in Western Europe were those in the Pas de Calais, where many long-range guns threatened all shipping in the Straits and offset the advantages the area offered in short turnaround periods and better air protection of naval craft. The Caen sector and the eastern Cotentin beaches were the only portions of the northern French coast where defenses and garrisons were considered weak, although the east Cotentin sector was protected by some coast artillery. The Caen and east Cotentin areas were, in fact, the only areas within air cover range of England where the enemy defenses

offered reasonable prospects of rapid penetration without long preliminary naval and air bombardment.

It was assumed that the degree of resistance that was likely to be met from the enemy's naval and coastal defenses at the time of invasion in the spring of 1944 would be similar to that which existed on 1 June 1943. At that time, enemy naval forces between Northern Holland and the Spanish frontier consisted of four destroyers based at Bordeaux, 12 torpedo boats located at Cherbourg, Brest, and La Pallice, 45 E-boats and 65 R-boats distributed along the coast, and a number of auxiliary vessels such as minesweepers and patrol craft.

The possibility of attacks by submarines or surface craft against the flanks or lines of communications of the over-water expedition was apparent. There was no doubt that the enemy would attempt to increase his minelaying activities against Allied assembly ports and shipping routes, both by air and by minelaying craft. It was estimated, however, that because of his limited resources no great damage was probable.

31. Weather. Weather conditions are generally uniform in the Channel east of the line Portland - Cherbourg. There are likely to be 23 days in May with winds not more than nine knots (9.9 MPH) on shore and not more than 13 knots (14.3 MPH) off shore and thus suitable for the beaching of landing craft. The records of the past ten years showed an average of about two periods of four consecutive days or longer per month between May and September during which the foregoing conditions existed. The probability of sea fog was small. The average rainfall during the summer was about two inches per month. The chances of forecasting three-day periods of good weather were about 80 percent, but if 24 hours' notice was required, the chances became about 70 percent. Signs of a breaking of the weather usually would be evident about two days ahead.

Beaches in the Channel are exposed to winds between northwest and northeast and fairly exposed to winds from both east and west. The prevailing winds in the Channel are southwesterly, although, generally light winds between north and east are common. To assure that weather conditions would not interrupt operations, ports or sheltered waters were imperative.

32. Own Forces. Insofar as the Allied naval forces were concerned, it was visualized that adequate means would be available to the Navy to provide protection against any enemy fleet units and submarines; that the necessary minesweepers could be made available to sweep the passages for the operation; and that sufficient destroyers and coastal craft would be on hand to afford adequate close protection throughout the operation.

It was considered that subsequent to the capture of Cherbourg there would be constant calls on the naval assault forces to assist in the maintenance and build-up of the ground forces until adequate port facilities were available, and to undertake subsidiary operations such as those involving the Channel Islands or Le Havre. Further calls would be expected as Allied armies advanced into the Low Countries. Should a rapid German withdrawal take place, naval forces would be necessary to open up ports in the Low Countries and, perhaps, to transport large contingents of the Allied armies to those ports.

33. Logistical Factors. Landing craft would be available to lift three assault divisions, with attachments, and the equivalent of two

C O N F I D E N T I A L

divisions in the immediate follow-up. It was assumed that enough merchant shipping would be available to transport two additional divisions.

SUMMARY

34. In order to achieve success with our limited air and assault forces, it was considered essential to concentrate our forces and to obtain tactical surprise. It was decided to make a single, concentrated assault in one area, and to further the achievement of surprise by carrying out a diversionary operation directed against another area. From the analysis of ground, air, and naval considerations governing the assault in the Pas de Calais and Caen areas, it was concluded that the assault should be made on the Caen beaches, utilizing the Pas de Calais area for diversionary operations. Governing factors which led to this decision were:

- a. The enemy's seacoast defenses and his numerical strength in the Caen area were weaker than in the Pas de Calais area.
- b. The enemy's capabilities of reinforcing his coastal defenses in the Caen area were less than those in the Pas de Calais area.
- c. The beaches and beach exits in the Caen area were more favorable for the operations of the assault and build-up forces than those in the Pas de Calais area.
- d. Although the air cover in the Caen area would not be so effective as that in the Pas de Calais area, this condition was accepted because of the overriding weight of the above considerations.
- e. In spite of the fact that the minesweeping commitments and the turn-around of landing craft and vessels for a landing in the Caen area were greater than in the Pas de Calais area, these factors were considered of insufficient importance to outweigh the advantages enumerated in a, b, and c above.

The Overlord Plan of 1943 envisaged the simultaneous assault of the Caen beaches, the western portion of Beach 307 (Lion sur Mer - Courseulles sur Mer), Beach 308 (Courseulles sur Mer - Arromanches les Bains), and Beach 313 (Colleville sur Mer - Vierville) by three divisions with commando and ranger units, followed on the same day by the equivalent of two tank groups and one regimental combat team. Concurrent with the foregoing operation, airborne forces would seize the town of Caen. The landing would be preceded by air bombing of enemy rear installations and by air and naval bombardment of coastal defenses. The D-Day objective would be the general line Grandcamp - Bayeux - Caen.

SELECTION OF SUPREME COMMANDER

35. In December 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was named Supreme Commander for Operation Overlord. Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsey, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory were named commanders of the ground, naval, and air components respectively (see paragraphs 14 a (1) and (2)).

SECTION 3

MODIFICATION OF OVERLORD PLAN TO INCREASE
THE ASSAULT FORCE AND ASSAULT AREA

LIMITATIONS OF ORIGINAL PLAN

36. After detailed study of the Overlord Plan by the designated commanders, it was believed that certain weaknesses in the plan would seriously endanger the whole enterprise unless they were corrected.⁸ These weaknesses were:

a. The assaulting force of three divisions provided for in the Plan was considered insufficient.

b. The Overlord Plan for an attack on a relatively narrow front had certain disadvantages:

- (1) It would enable the enemy more easily to locate and hold the Allied forces.
- (2) It limited the area in which to discover a soft spot in the enemy's lines preliminary to a breakout.
- (3) It confined the Allies to a small beachhead through which all subsequent operations would have to develop.

c. The plans for securing the Cotentin Peninsula had the disadvantage of including a complicated turning movement, and a frontal attack through its easily defended base.

THE MODIFIED PLAN

37. Major Changes. In view of the weaknesses indicated above, the Overlord Plan was modified and the changes were embodied in the Initial Joint Plan (Operation Neptune), dated 1 February 1944.⁹ The major departures from the original Overlord concept were as follows:

a. The strength of the assaulting forces was increased from three to five composite divisions.¹⁰

b. The assault area was widened to include the eastern Cotentin beaches north of the Carentan Estuary, and the beaches just west of Ouistreham.

c. The D-Day objective was expanded to include the towns of St Mere Eglise, Carentan, Isigny, Bayeux, and Caen.

38. Detailed Plan. To permit implementation of these changes, the target date was postponed from early May to 31 May 1944. The plan provided that:

a. The U.S. zone, on the right, would be assaulted by units of the First U.S. Army in cooperation with the Western Naval Task Force. One regimental combat team would assault between Varreville and the Carentan Estuary on "Utah" Beach. Two regimental combat teams would assault between Vierville and Colleville sur Mer on "Omaha" Beach. One airborne division would drop in the area behind Utah Beach. Two and

two-thirds U.S. infantry divisions were to be ashore by the evening of D-Day. One additional airborne division would come in late on D-Day or early on D + 1. First U.S. Army's missions, in order of their priority, were:

- (1) To capture Cherbourg as quickly as possible.
- (2) To develop the Omaha beachhead south toward St Lo in conformity with the advance of Second British Army.

b. The British zone, on the left, would be assaulted by units of the Second British Army in cooperation with the Eastern Naval Task Force. Five brigades would assault the beaches between Asnelles sur Mer and Ouistreham. Two airborne brigades would drop east of the Orne River. Three and one-third British infantry divisions were to be ashore by the evening of D-Day. The mission of the British forces would be the development of the beachhead south of the line St Lo - Caen and southeast of Caen to secure airfield sites, and the protection of First U.S. Army's left flank while the latter captured Cherbourg.

c. The air program for the disorganization of rail communications leading into the assault area would be advanced and the operational area somewhat reduced. The new program was to be started immediately (1 February 1944) with a view to the general reduction of the enemy's rail movement potential over the zone extending northward, along the general line of the Seine, from its mouth to Paris, inclusive, and thence to Troyes - Chaumont - Mulhouse.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ENLARGEMENT OF THE ASSAULT FORCE AND ASSAULT AREA

Ground Force Considerations

39. Enemy Situation. The estimate of the enemy's capabilities as set forth in the original plan were based on an assumption that there would not be more than nine offensive divisions in France on D-Day. As of 31 December 1943, this condition was exceeded by one such division, and there remained no assurance that further increases would not occur between then and D-Day. It was further thought likely that the German forces which could be brought to bear against the assault by D + 4 and D + 5 would considerably exceed the Allied forces.¹¹

40. Terrain. The rapid movement into the Cotentin Peninsula from the beachhead area, as contemplated in the original plan, would be difficult if the enemy made use of the marshes and rivers at the neck of the peninsula as a defensive barrier.¹² The original planners of Overlord had considered that an assault on both sides of the Carentan Estuary would be unsound in that it would expose our forces to defeat in detail. Nevertheless, the apparent key to any plan to capture Cherbourg quickly was a landing on the north side of this barrier. Since the early capture of the Cotentin Peninsula and Cherbourg was vital, it was considered advisable to extend the assault area to include part of the Cotentin beaches north of the Carentan Estuary. To the east, it appeared that the security of the left flank of the beachhead and the early capture of Caen with the vital airfield sites in that vicinity would be facilitated by extension of the assault area to include the beaches just west of Ouistreham.

41. Own forces. An operation of the type envisaged necessitated obtaining an adequate beachhead quickly and maintaining the initiative.

Restudy indicated that three divisions in the assault were insufficient to accomplish this purpose and that the frontage of assault likewise was too narrow. To provide the combat means considered desirable to assure success, it was decided that the assault forces should be increased from three to five divisions. The original target date of early May had been selected, in part, to permit the maximum campaigning season. However, a month's postponement was accepted in order to permit an increase in the assault force.

Air Force Considerations

42. Enemy Situation. It was estimated in the Overlord Plan that on the target date the German fighter strength would have to be materially reduced below its level in July 1943. By the end of 1943 this strength had not been reduced -- in fact, it was appreciably greater.¹³ However, the Allied air operations had reduced the enemy fighter production from a planned 1,000 - 1,500 per month to some 600 per month.¹⁴

43. Own Forces. Eight additional fighter squadrons would be necessary to insure adequate cover over the extended assault area and the wider shipping lanes. The use of additional airborne forces meant that an increase of 200 carrier aircraft would be required. Both the additional fighter squadrons and the aircraft needed for the airborne operations could be made available to carry out the new plan. From the air point of view, the proposal to employ the airborne forces in the Cotentin Peninsula rather than in the Caen area met with favor.

Postponement of the target date was desirable from an air point of view in that it would give an additional month of good weather for preparatory air operations. It also would give another month in which to train the necessary additional troop carrier crews.

Naval Considerations

44. Enemy Capabilities. The assembling of two additional assault forces would cause serious congestion along the south coast of England and present a good target to the enemy for bombing by aircraft or with the expected V-type bombs. Also, the additional forces would have to sail from an area farther west and the longer cross-Channel sailing would give the enemy early notice of the approaching assault.

45. Weather. In the original plan, the assault forces were to be located on the central south coast, from which they would sail on a 24-hour forecast. The decision to use a five-divisional assault force necessitated the employment of five naval assault forces extending as far west as Falmouth. This, in turn, meant that a 60-hour forecast would be required, with the disadvantage that, when the moment for the assault arrived, conditions might be suitable for naval forces and not for air forces. Since it might be necessary to dispense with air support, the naval assault forces would have to include adequate fire units.

The moonlight conditions of early May or June were desired by the Navy for the assault. If, because of shortage of ships and craft, the attack could not be staged in early May, it was believed desirable to postpone the attack to early June.

46. Own Forces. The enlargement of the beachhead to encompass two areas meant that additional naval forces would be required, including minesweepers and, to neutralize the defense batteries of

Cherbourg and Le Havre, naval bombardment units. Indications were that the combatant naval vessels could be provided.

47. Logistical Factors. The main problem created by the change in the Overlord Plan was to make additional landing craft available without either a reduction in the number of assault forces required in other operations or a prolonged postponement of D-Day.¹⁵ In order to transport the increased forces, it was estimated that a total of 231 additional ships and craft would be required. By delaying the operation for one month, it was estimated that a substantial number of these could be produced in the United Kingdom. Craft to transport one additional assault regiment plus one reserve regiment could be made available by reducing the number of vehicles allotted for administrative and technical purposes. The remaining craft would have to be drawn from the Mediterranean area or from other sources.¹⁶

INFLUENCE ON THE OPERATION PLANNED FOR SOUTHERN FRANCE.

48. At the time the modification of the Overlord Plan was under consideration (January 1944), planning was under way for the invasion of Southern France (Operation Anvil). It was estimated that landing craft for at least two divisions would be required for this operation. Since availability of landing craft throughout the Theaters was critical, and requirements had been closely figured for all needs, it was possible that any appreciable increase for lifting additional assault forces for Overlord might have to be made at the expense of the Southern France operations.

Because the invasion of Southern France was designed primarily to assist Overlord by creating a diversion to draw or hold enemy strength, the possibility of weakening or even eliminating it was a matter of considerable strategic import.

On this matter, General Eisenhower, at a conference convened on 21 January 1944, commented as follows: "We ought to look upon the elimination of the Anvil attack only as a last resort. We must remember that the Russians have been led to expect that the operation would take place; and in addition, there would be at least seven American and seven French divisions which would remain idle in the Mediterranean if Anvil did not take place." He stated that while the decision rested with the Combined Chiefs of Staff, a recommendation to them had to be made not later than 1 February as to the future of Anvil. He added, "We must not recommend that Anvil should be reduced to a threat unless we are convinced that Overlord could not otherwise be successfully mounted. We must consider whether we could not manage a successful Overlord without damaging Operation Anvil."¹⁷

APPROVAL OF MODIFIED PLAN

49. On 23 January 1944, in a message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, General Eisenhower set forth his recommended changes in the Overlord Plan.¹⁸ The Combined Chiefs of Staff approved General Eisenhower's recommendations, providing for the simultaneous assault on the Caen and Cotentin beaches and deferring D-Day to early June. The measures to obtain the assault landing craft for the five reinforced assault divisions in Overlord were initiated. The greater portion of the additional craft was provided from the Mediterranean Theater, as Operation Anvil had been postponed to a later date.¹⁹

SECTION 4.OVERLORD PLAN AMENDMENT TO CHANGE THE MAJOR U.S. PORTS OF ENTRYTHE PORT PROBLEM:

50. After Allied forces had secured a lodgement area on the mainland, the most important single strategic objective would be the early capture and development of a major port, or ports, for the use of U.S. forces. The selection of the ports would of course be contingent on the outcome of planned military operations and the enemy's reactions.

In order to build up sufficient forces and supplies with which eventually to force a crossing of the Seine, the Overlord Plan estimated that the most probable line of Allied action, after the seizure of Cherbourg, would be the seizure of the Brittany ports. To accomplish this purpose, it was considered that the development of the Lodgement Area could best be effected by:

- a. Extending the bridgehead to the line of the Eure River from Dreux to Reuen and thence along the line of the Seine to the sea.
- b. Seizing simultaneously Chartres, Orleans, and Tours.
- c. Capturing the Brittany ports during the execution of the operations indicated in 'a' and 'b'. The first step in the seizure of the Brittany ports would be a thrust to the south to capture Nantes and St Nazaire, followed by subsidiary operations to capture Brest and the various small ports of the Brittany Peninsula.

THE MODIFIED PLAN - OPERATION CHASTITY

51. In lieu of opening the ports of Nantes and St Nazaire on the Loire River, however, it was decided to develop Quiberon Bay, northwest of the Loire Estuary, as a major port of entry for U.S. forces. This plan, named Chastity,²⁰ provided that:

- a. Coincident with the establishment of the southern limits of the Lodgement Area along the strong natural obstacles of the Loire River, the Quiberon Bay and adjacent estuaries would be developed into a large artificial port area.²¹
- b. The Quiberon Bay area would be captured by overland assault. After the neutralization of the batteries and naval force at Lorient, an amphibious assault would be made against Belle Isle, which covered the approaches to Quiberon Bay.²² Certain other small islands might be captured through airborne and naval attacks in conjunction with ground operations.
- c. The capture of Nantes and St Nazaire could be deferred.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THE CHASTITY PLANGround Force Considerations

52. Own Forces. The Chastity Plan was a strategic and economical amendment to Overlord in that it did not require an extensive crossing

of a major obstacle, the Loire River, nor the establishment of an extensive bridgehead south of that river, which would be necessary if the ports of St Nazaire and Nantes were to be utilized. The maintenance of this bridgehead would have required a large number of troops.

It was considered feasible to move landing craft overland from the Normandy beaches to the Quiberon Bay area for operations against Belle Isle.²³

53. Logistical Factors. Since it was anticipated that St Nazaire and Nantes would be destroyed by the enemy, it was believed that the Quiberon Bay area could be developed initially to provide as great a capacity as the aforementioned ports, and that its facilities could be made available earlier.

To meet the requirements of the army build-up, the Overlord Plan contemplated the use of the Brittany ports to support 26 to 30 divisions by D + 90. It was also visualized that with the development of the Brittany ports there would be a simultaneous decrease of traffic over the Normandy beaches, and their use would be abandoned with the advent of bad weather in the fall season.

The supply situation was further complicated by the projected withdrawal of certain shallow-draft coasters after D + 42, which would necessitate the use of Liberty ships. This, in turn, imposed the necessity of discharging, between D + 42 and D + 90, nearly all cargo by means of lighters.

It was believed that not more than 15 divisions could be supported through the St Malo and Cherbourg port areas by D + 40. Thus, the entrance and maintenance of additional divisions would be contingent on the development of French Atlantic ports.²⁴

The utilization of the Quiberon Bay area was planned as an answer to the above logistical difficulties.²⁵ The area has 3,000 yards of excellent beach, a sheltered anchorage capable of floating 200 liberty ships, four nearby minor ports, and an excellent rail and road net within easy reach of many discharge points.²⁶ Moreover, the shortened line of haul from Quiberon Bay direct to army maintenance areas would increase carrying capacity and relieve the overworked network of roads and railroads from the Normandy region.²⁷

Furthermore, with the Quiberon Bay area being used for supplies, it would be possible to bring in later contingents of U.S. troops through the St Malo and Cotentin areas. This would reduce the distance that personnel would be required to move from the United Kingdom and would centralize the army rather than place it on a far flank of its projected advance toward the Seine River. Advantage could not be taken of these desirable factors if the St Malo and Cotentin areas also were required for the maintenance of supply levels.

Air Force Considerations

54. Own Forces. Fighter aircraft could be made available to support ground operations in the Quiberon Bay area, but it would be impractical to operate them from bases on the Normandy coast. The intervening distance would permit only a relatively short time over the target area and a considerable number of fighter aircraft would be required to maintain constant cover over this target area on a shuttle basis. It would be necessary, therefore, to establish forward fighter

bases, probably in the vicinity of Rennes, which was free of bocage and offered suitable sites for the development of landing strips.

The provision of Coastal Command aircraft also would be a major consideration. Until Brest, St Nazaire, and Nantes were captured, it would be essential to maintain a continuous patrol against enemy submarine and E-boats operating from those ports.

Furthermore, it was believed that the neutralization of coastal batteries in the St Nazaire - Belle Isle - Lorient triangle, to permit Allied surface craft to approach Quiberon Bay, would require a lengthy diversion of the bomber forces from their primary mission of cooperating with the Allied main efforts.

Naval Considerations

55. Own Forces. Due to the long route to the Quiberon Bay from the southern coast of England, the initial minesweeping effort would be great. Seven days of preliminary clearance would be required in the Quiberon area alone.²⁸

Since it was expected that some material would be landed over beaches initially, the use of landing ships and towed lighters would be necessary. The employment of these craft and coasters would necessitate some slow convoys, and in consequence, the size of the necessary anti-submarine escort would be large.²⁹ The retention of the Brittany and Loire ports by the enemy also would increase the submarine and air menace to the Chastity operation.³⁰ It followed that, if Brest was not captured within a week after the capture of Quiberon Bay, enemy naval interference would make it impossible to send convoys to Quiberon Bay.

56. Weather. It was preferable that Quiberon Bay be captured prior to 1 September, otherwise towing and other naval operations would become difficult because of weather.³²

Apart from considerations of enemy naval action, the capture of Brest was a prerequisite to the development of Quiberon Bay. The port of Brest was necessary for the safety of vessels towing barges, which otherwise would have to make a continuous passage to Quiberon Bay with no possibility of taking shelter from the weather. Staging in Brest would reduce each leg of the passage by two days, for which period reliable weather forecasts could be made. Under these circumstances, the development of Quiberon Bay could proceed throughout the winter.³³

57. Logistical Factors. In general, the time and effort required for minesweeping, escorting slow convoys, and providing protection from the weather, would be about the same for the support of Quiberon Bay as for the Loire ports. Consequently, these factors were not considered sufficient to justify disapproval of the plan.

SECTION 5

THE FINAL PLANS AS OF D-DAY

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FEATURES

58. The major changes in the original Overlord Plan have been discussed in preceding paragraphs. Many minor adjustments also were made in forces and equipment. However, the salient features of the amended Plan as it existed on D-Day were as follows:

The Normandy beaches between the Orne River and the Carentan Estuary, and the east coast of the Cotentin Peninsula in the vicinity of St Mere Eglise were to be the sites for the amphibious assaults. Assault landing craft were provided to transport three British divisions with attached Commando units, and two U.S. divisions (one of which was composite) with attached Ranger units. Landing craft and ships for two additional divisions afloat were to be provided for follow-up on the second tide of D-Day. The plan provided for airborne landings by one British division near Caen and by two U.S. divisions in the Carentan area, about six hours in advance of the amphibious assaults in the two areas.³⁴ It was also provided that heavy air and naval bombardment of targets in rear areas and enemy installations on the beaches would precede the amphibious assault.

The ground assault forces were under the command of Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, commanding 21 Army Group. The Second British Army, Lieutenant General Miles C. Dempsey commanding, and the First U.S. Army, General Omar N. Bradley commanding, were designated to make the amphibious landings.

The Ninth U.S. Air Force, commanded by Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton (later commanded by Lieutenant General Hoyt S. Vandenberg), operated with the U.S. forces. The Second British Tactical Air Force, commanded by Air Marshal Sir Arthur Cunningham, operated with the British forces.

The plans visualized a rapid advance inland and, in the west, the early capture of Cherbourg; an eastern expansion of the bridgehead to the Eure River from Dreux to Rouen, thence along the lower Seine to the sea; and the simultaneous seizure of Chartres, Orleans, and Tours.

At the same time, U.S. forces were to drive south and cut off the Brittany Peninsula to pave the way for the opening of the Brittany ports and the development of Quiberon Bay. The Lodgement Area would be cleared of the enemy as far south as the Loire before an advance would be made beyond Paris and the Seine ports. It was anticipated that a period of about three months would be required to achieve the foregoing objectives.³⁵

SELECTION OF TIME AND DATE OF ASSAULT AND PRELIMINARY AIR OPERATIONS

59. It was decided to launch the assault in daylight. This decision was influenced principally by the fact that the naval commanders required daylight conditions in order to be reasonably certain that the assault forces would be landed at the proper points, and to be able to give adequate fire support. A daylight landing also would favor air action against the coast defenses.

From the Ground Force point of view, however, it was considered most desirable to make a night landing in order to reduce the effectiveness of enemy observation.

The height and flow of the tides also were controlling factors. Beginning about three hours after high tide, the flow of the water in the landing areas was so fast that landing craft would not have sufficient time to discharge their personnel and pull away from shore.

On the other hand, at low water the landing craft would be grounded so far out that the assault troops would have been forced to advance across a wide strip of exposed beaches as well as over irregular areas covered by deep pools of water.

A landing at high water had many advantages, but these were offset by the fact that the underwater obstacles were so emplaced as to offer maximum interference at high tide.

The best compromise solution was decided to be three hours before high tide and one hour after first light.

The day when the above conditions would be most favorable was considered to be 2 May. However, with the delay required by the change in plan for the increase in assault divisions and landing areas, the date was postponed to early June.

Since it also was desirable to have a moonlight night to facilitate the airborne drop and the visual bombing of beach defenses, a date had to be selected when favorable tidal and moonlight conditions would coincide. The date for the attack was therefore set for the period 5 - 7 June, when the moon and tidal conditions would again be favorable.³⁶

Preliminary air operations prior to D-Day proceeded according to plan. Immediately affecting the forthcoming beachhead operations, the majority of the railroad centers in the Lodgement Area had been bombed to such an extent that they were of little use to the enemy.³⁷ Only one of the road bridges between Conflans and Rouen inclusive remained intact. Bomber attacks on rail rolling stock and road traffic seriously immobilized traffic west of the Seine and north of the Loire River.^{38,39,40} In addition to attacks on coastal defenses, air attacks extending east and north of the Seine River had been and were being carried out according to cover plans to deceive the enemy as to our intentions.

By 3 June the assault forces were assembled for the cross-Channel movement in ports in Southern England. The landing was scheduled for 5 June and was to be preceded by an airborne drop and naval and air bombardment of the beach defenses.

On 4 June the forecast of sea and wind conditions in the Channel for the following day was considered to be too unfavorable. The Supreme Commander thereupon postponed the assault for 24 hours.

The forecast for 5 June indicated some improvement in conditions from late afternoon of the 5th to the afternoon of the 6th, followed by an indefinite period of unfavorable wind and sea conditions.

General Eisenhower was now required to choose between initiating the operation forthwith or postponing it. Any further delay would

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have necessitated a postponement of approximately four weeks before proper conditions of tide and moon would appear again and this would of course reduce the period available for a campaign before the onset of winter; moreover, part of the forces were already in the marshalling areas, others were loaded and briefed for the operation, and some of the assault troops were on the Channel. At 0400 hours 5 June, General Eisenhower directed that the operation proceed the following day.⁴¹

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SECTION 7DEPARTURE FROM ADOPTED PLAN DURING OPERATIONSEXPLOITATION OF BREAKTHROUGH

(Map No 4)

DEVELOPMENTS LEADING TO CHANGE OF PLAN⁴⁵

55. In the morning hours of 6 June 1944, under continuous air cover, and behind additional air bombardment of coastal defenses and operations to isolate the battle area, and behind naval gunfire support, the combined American - British forces drove ashore on the Normandy coast. On the right, the VII U.S. Corps, assisted by an airborne drop some six hours ahead of the seaborne assault, secured a firm beachhead; farther to the east, the V U.S. Corps established and maintained a foothold despite unexpected enemy strength.⁴⁶ Farther eastward, the Second British Army, with airborne assistance, pushed inland to the approaches of Bayeux and Caen (see Map No 3). By nightfall, although the three landings remained unlinked, it was apparent that the D-Day operations had been successful.

During the following week the landings were merged into a secure beachhead, and limited advances were made in all directions. VII U.S. Corps cut the Cotentin Peninsula on 18 June, and the newly arrived VIII U.S. Corps blocked the south side of the corridor thus formed. Thereafter, VII U.S. Corps swung rapidly north to converge on Cherbourg. The city capitulated on 27 June. The first major port was won.

First U.S. Army regrouped to the south of the beachhead and with the Second British Army initiated a series of attacks designed to gain additional maneuver room and the key terrain features considered essential for a line of departure for a general offensive. On 9 July I British Corps captured the vital communication center of Caen, and on 18 July the equally important town of St Lo fell to XIX U.S. Corps. With Caen and St Lo in Allied hand, with the arrival of fresh infantry and armored divisions, and with mounting stocks of supplies and equipment available, the stage was set for a powerful thrust to reach the base of the Cotentin Peninsula as a prelude to a drive for the Brittany ports. The area selected for the offensive was the plateau mass running generally west from St Lo to Coutances. To divert attention from the St Lo area, the British unleashed an armored attack on the Caen - Falaise axis on 18 July. Most of the gains here were erased by enemy counterattacks, but the diversion of German strength aided the subsequent assault of the First Army.

On 25 July, following a tremendous saturation bombing of enemy defenses along the St Lo - Periers road, First U.S. Army pierced the German line and by 30 July reached Granville on the west coast of the peninsula. As the entire First Army swung southward, pivoting on the British, armored columns advanced nearly to Avranches against only sporadic resistance. On 22 July, the First Canadian Army became operational with Lieutenant General Henry D. G. Crerar in command. On 1 August, the First Canadian Army and the Second British Army, now making up 21 Army Group, were maintaining steady pressure towards Falaise and Beny Bocage. On the same day, 12th Army Group and Third U.S. Army became operational, the former assuming command of First and Third U.S. Armies, with General Omar N. Bradley commanding 12th Army Group, General Courtney H. Hodges commanding First Army, and General George S. Patton, Jr in command of Third Army. While the First Army

drove the Germans back against the line Mortain - Vire, Third Army, with the principal mission of securing the Brittany ports,⁴⁷ poured armor and mechanized cavalry south, capturing Avranches and the bridges over the Sée and Selune Rivers on the afternoon of 1 August.

Under the impact of the Third U.S. Army blow, the German left flank crumbled and by 2 August armored elements were at Rennes and probing deep into the Brittany Peninsula. Behind these spearheads the entire Third Army was pouring through the Avranches gap. The enemy continued to resist stubbornly the advance of 21 Army Group and First U.S. Army, but the Third Army penetrations to the south and east of the Selune River and into the peninsula were unchecked by serious opposition. Although the German Commander-in-Chief still was capable of mounting strong counterattacks, his mobility was limited by constant attacks by Allied air units, and the open left flank of the German line was an invitation which received the full attention of the Allied High Command.

CHANGE OF PLAN — DRIVE TOWARD ORLEANS GAP

66. Anticipation of Developments. As early as June, the planning staffs of the Allied High Command had visualized that events might develop as they now were unfolding on the ground. This particular sequence of events and circumstances was forecast in Plan "Lucky Strike", a series of studies based on the possible acceleration of Overlord timings.⁴⁸ Plan B of Lucky Strike was premised upon the conditions that:

- a. No appreciable enemy forces were left in the Brittany Peninsula.
- b. Few, if any, enemy forces were in the area between the Loire River and the line Laval - Le Mans - Chartres.
- c. No strong mobile enemy forces were south of the Loire. In brief, the plan was based on the assumption that a virtually open flank had been created.

The Allied plan of action contemplated a straight drive east with 21 Army Group and a portion of the U.S. forces, and simultaneously, a wide sweep with a strong U.S. armored force along the north bank of the Loire to block the Paris - Orleans gap and thereafter cooperate with the other armies in the destruction of German armies west of the Seine.⁴⁹ At the same time, operations in Brittany would proceed with a minimum of troops.

67. The New Directive. Presented on 3 August with an actual situation comparable to the foregoing, which made the destruction of the German Seventh Army west of the Seine a distinct possibility, the Supreme Allied Commander hastened to exploit it and directed that:

- a. Third U.S. Army, leaving only minimum forces to clear the Brittany Peninsula, make its main effort to the east,⁵⁰ driving with strong armored forces on the general axis Laval - Le Mans - Chartres.
- b. First U.S. Army, Second British Army, and First Canadian Army maintain relentless pressure on the enemy and by continued strong attacks prevent his disengagement.⁵¹
- c. Plans to be completed for an airborne operation to seize the Chartres area to block the Paris - Orleans gap and assist the drive of the Third Army.⁵²

FACTORS INFLUENCING REDIRECTION OF EFFORT

Ground Force Considerations

68. Enemy Situation. As late as mid-July, the German High Command was not convinced that the Normandy landings constituted the single main Allied effort on the Atlantic coast. Fearing a possible landing in the Pas de Calais area, they had maintained there the bulk of the German Fifteenth Army. While the second landing remained, in their minds, an Allied capability, the Pas de Calais forces could not be thinned appreciably to reinforce the troops in the Cotentin area.⁵³

Meanwhile, the German scheme of defense had been to contain the Allied forces in the Normandy bridgehead at all costs to prevent their expansion to the Seine. In short, they apparently intended to fight the battle of France in the Normandy bocage. This required the commitment of practically all reserves in France, except the Fifteenth Army and the weak Nineteenth Army guarding the Mediterranean approaches. In the bridgehead area, infantry attrition required the continued use of armored units to bolster front line defenses. Consequently, although the German plan was to maintain a mobile striking force to deal with a serious threat or to launch a counteroffensive, constant Allied pressure prevented its constitution.⁵⁴

As a result, when the breakthrough occurred with the full weight of Allied power behind it, the Germans were unable to apply effective countermeasures because:

a. The destruction of the Seine bridges and Allied air supremacy made impossible the rapid shift of the Pas de Calais divisions. The only available route was through Paris and it was inadequate to maintain properly the divisions already engaged. Allied air forces, aided by good weather, were driving even small convoys from the roads during daylight. Therefore, while they might establish a defense line along the Seine, the German divisions from the Pas de Calais area could not be employed to oppose an Allied advance to that river.

b. No other appreciable reserves were on hand or remotely available:

- (1) Most of the armored forces in France had been used in counterattacks or to bolster front line defenses.
- (2) The Brittany garrison already had been thinned to the minimum in an attempt to limit the Allied advances during July.
- (3) The Russian drive which started in mid-July made improbable the receipt of further forces from the Eastern Front.
- (4) With an Allied striking force poised in the Mediterranean, further substantial help was not available from Southern or Central France.

69. Terrain and Weather. The zone of operations for the eastward drive of Third U.S. Army was clear of bocage features. Open, gently rolling to flat, and replete with good roads, it was an ideal area for the employment of armored and motorized forces.

The Loire River, which formed the southern boundary of Third U.S. Army, constituted a useful barrier for protection of Third Army's extended right flank. Nearly all bridges from Nantes to Orleans had been destroyed and the remainder were under constant air surveillance.⁵⁵

Principal terrain obstacles to the advance were the Mayenne and Sarthe Rivers, both sizable streams. The state of the enemy, however, made it highly improbable that he could organize along them. undefended, they could be bridged in a matter of hours by available equipment; moreover, at the See and Selune Rivers the enemy had had no integrated plan for prepared demolitions. The same situation could well be true along the Third Army's route of advance, and speed might even secure bridges intact.

The forecast for the continuation of dry weather favored unlimited maneuver by tanks and other mechanized equipment.

70. Own Forces. Progress in Brittany had been rapid. Speed, deception, the thinning of the defending garrison during the preceding month, and some contribution from the French resistance groups in the peninsula had combined to win for the Allies a sizable portion of Brittany by 3 August. The one U.S. Corps in Brittany was astride all the vital and unimpaired routes of communications from the ports.

The withdrawal of the remaining enemy forces into the fortress port cities forecast siege operations as a prelude to capture. The excellence of the outer and inner defenses of Brest and the size of its garrison, made it plain that the reduction of this port city would take time.⁵⁶

The total defeat or destruction of the German forces was the prime consideration of the Supreme Allied Command.⁵⁷ The opportunity for such a stroke in the West, in conjunction with the campaign to secure the Lodgement Area, had been only a possibility heretofore. Now the rapidity with which operations had proceeded following the St Lo breakthrough, and the positions of the opposing armies, presented a favorable opportunity to destroy the German forces west of the Seine.⁵⁸

Immediately available to prosecute the attack to the east were three fresh armored divisions and three infantry divisions. As soon as the two armored divisions in Brittany, now engaged only in containing missions, could be relieved by infantry units they could be employed to reinforce the drive. Similarly, the two armored divisions with First U.S. Army could be sideslipped into the Third U.S. Army zone at a later date. Also, the somewhat convergent attacks of 21 Army Group and Third Army, progressively narrowing the First Army front, would permit the release of some infantry divisions to the Third Army for employment in Brittany. Lastly, the impending assault on Southern France would pin down enemy forces south of the Loire.

71. Logistical Factors. The opening of the Brittany ports, particularly Brest and the Quiberon Bay area, was still an important item in Allied strategy, because it was considered that unless they were in operation at an early date, the U.S. build-up would be unfavorably affected.⁵⁹ However, while the redirection of the Third U.S. Army's main effort might delay the capture of these ports, such delay was expected to be of short duration -- the advances of 21 Army Group and Third Army would soon pinch out several First U.S. Army divisions, which could be made available for the assault on these ports.

Cherbourg, the only major port available, began receiving supplies at the expected rate by 3 August.⁶⁰ The planned development of the port, however, had been revised upward and it was anticipated that its capacity soon could be increased to twice the anticipated peak tonnage.⁶¹ The beaches, scheduled to remain operative through D + 90, were receiving supplies in excess of original estimates.⁶² The development of minor ports on the Cotentin Peninsula increased the total daily tonnage. Nevertheless, although by 1 August the U.S. supply build-up had almost reached the planned figure in total tonnage, shortages existed in specific items.⁶³

Maintenance and service factors were not altogether favorable. Combat troops had been landed in excess of planned estimates but at the expense of service units. Consequently, the developing shortage of service units foreshadowed increasing difficulty in extended operations. Railroad development was insufficient to ameliorate the transportation problem which would arise in August.⁶⁴ Pipelines under construction likewise could not be expected to supply any considerable quantity of gasoline to forward areas for some time.⁶⁵

Arrangements were made for air delivery of a small percentage of Class I and III requirements to forward army areas,⁶⁶ and it was concluded that capacities of the available ports and beaches, the use of operational reserves, the maximum employment of truck transportation at the expense of proper maintenance, and the assistance expected from the Air Force, would support a drive to the Seine River. Support beyond the Seine River was dependent on many unknown factors, particularly on the rate at which rail facilities could be developed to relieve truck transport in rear areas.⁶⁷

Air Force Considerations

72. Enemy Situation. Enemy air effort in the bridgehead area had been ineffective since D-Day. The sole activity directed against Allied forces had been reconnaissance and sporadic bombing attacks by a limited number of craft, particularly at night. Enemy fighter strength was engaged primarily in defending installations against Allied strategic bombing, and its employment on a serious scale in ground attack on Allied columns was not anticipated.⁶⁸

73. Terrain and Weather. Because of the open terrain, the zone of operations of Third U.S. Army facilitated close and effective reconnaissance and fighter bomber operations in front of columns by U.S. air forces.

Favorable weather forecasts, coupled with long daylight hours, insured continuous air cover and tactical bombing during the projected advance.

74. Own Forces. With air supremacy assured within the Lodgement Area, the full weight of tactical air commands could be directed to offensive missions. Sufficient fighter bomber bases were available on the Continent to facilitate timely briefing and continuous column cover.⁶⁹ The Seine and Loire River bridges could be kept partially or completely destroyed and enemy crossing attempts constantly harassed.

The development of an excellent system of air-ground liaison for armored column cover, achieved by the tactical air command in the Ninth Air Force and the U.S. Armies of the 12th Army Group, in which

direct communication was obtained between pilots and tactical air liaison personnel moving with leading tank elements, had greatly increased the rapidity with which the air cover could assist the armored columns. As a consequence, the boldness and aggressiveness of the armored units were enhanced.

The attacks against road traffic were seriously crippling to German mobility.⁷⁰ The situation was extremely favorable for the execution of fighter bomber missions against any significant movement of enemy reinforcements to the battle area or enemy forces retreating before the advance of the Allies.

OPERATIONS AFTER THE CHANGE OF PLAN⁷¹

75. Advance elements reached Mayenne and Laval on 5 and 6 August, respectively, and the drive continued towards Le Mans.⁷² In a desperate attempt to cut the Avranches corridor and isolate Third U.S. Army, the enemy launched an attack with five armored divisions against Mortain on 7 August. One Third Army division was immediately released to First U.S. Army for employment at Mortain while others were held in the Avranches area as a reserve force. While recognition was given to the serious threat posed by the German attack, it was considered that the Third Army advance promised such sweeping success that it could not await the outcome of the Mortain action, and consequently 12th Army Group ordered a continuation of the eastward drive. Spearheads, operating behind excellent tactical air operations, reached the line of the Sarthe and Le Mans on 9 August; at the same time, on the promise that First U.S. Army could hold the German attack, the remaining Third Army divisions in the Avranches area were directed eastward on the Laval - Le Mans axis. By 11 August a substantial portion of Third Army was completely in rear of the German Seventh Army and the attack was redirected northward on the axis Alencon - Sees in conjunction with a 21 Army Group effort south through Falaise to complete the encirclement of the German forces.⁷³ Armored elements of Third Army were in the outskirts of Argentan by 12 August, where the advance was halted to avoid entanglement with the southward attack of the First Canadian Army.⁷⁴ The latter's attack, however, had been slowed by determined enemy resistance in the vicinity of Falaise and, although Allied air and long-range artillery inflicted severe losses on the fleeing enemy formations, a 15-mile escape gap remained open for some time. Meanwhile the Second British and First U.S. Armies made considerable progress against the western shoulders of the enemy pocket. As the Third Army resumed its eastward advance to Mantos - Gassicourt to cut the main German supply line from Paris,⁷⁵ the Third Army troops left in the Argentan area passed to the control of First Army⁷⁶ and subsequently were ordered to attack north to effect a junction with the Canadians. The trap was closed on elements of 15 enemy divisions at Chambois on 19 August. Enemy losses included 70,000 killed and captured. As a result of this Allied operation, the German Seventh Army was destroyed as a fighting force.⁷⁷

On 15 August the Seventh U.S. Army, under command of Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch, with elements of the French Army attached, assaulted the coast of Southern France between Cannes and Toulon. The assault landing was made by the VI U.S. Corps with a French combat team attached, coordinated with an airborne drop by American-British paratroopers (See Map 4-A). Following up the assault forces with French Army "B", under command of General Joan de Lattre de Tassigny. By aggressive action, the attacking forces secured the beachhead and, advancing rapidly northward, on 28 August captured Montelimar in the Rhone Valley.

On 19 August, Orleans, Chartres, and Dreux had fallen to the Third U.S. Army, and a bridgehead had been established across the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt, just west of Paris. While the Second British Army mopped up the pocket and the the First Canadian army attacked along the Channel coast towards Le Havre and Rouen, First U.S. Army sidestepped into the zone cleared by the Third Army and sped eastward. From Dreux, a strong attack was launched north into the British zone along the west bank of the Seine to cut off the remaining German forces in this area.⁷⁸ On 23 August, First Army took over the Mantes-Gassicourt bridgehead and the Third Army troops which had seized and held it started across the Seine. The following day, Third Army forced new crossings at Molun and Fontainebleau. On 25 August, Paris was liberated.

In the Brittany Peninsula, the assault on Brest continued while Allied forces contained St Nazaire and Lorient. With these exceptions, the campaign to secure the Lodgement Area was complete.

EFFECTS OF THE CHANGE OF PLAN

76. Advantages. The encircling drive of 12th Army Group to the Seine accomplished the following:

a. Gained the line of the Seine on D + 80, ten days ahead of schedule, and resulted in the wholesale destruction of the bulk of the German forces in Northwestern France.⁷⁹ Without the encircling attack, it is probable that the German forces, although at great loss, could have extricated themselves and delayed the Allied advance to the Seine considerably beyond D + 80.

b. Facilitated the early capture of the Seine ports and Antwerp.⁸⁰ This made possible the cancellation of Operation Chastity⁸¹ and of plans to capture other South Brittany ports. The abandonment of Chastity was desirable because of approaching winter weather and anticipated difficulties in guarding convoys past enemy-held installations in south Brittany.

c. Helped insure a rapid advance to Holland, the Maas, the Ardennes, and the Moselle River. Had the Germans been given an opportunity to regroup behind the Seine, subsequent advances undoubtedly would have been slower and more costly.

d. Made unnecessary, as a result of the rapid ground advance, the airborne operation to close the Paris - Orleans gap. This in turn released the cargo aircraft, earmarked for that operation, for air supply of the field forces, permitting a continuation of the advance.

e. Accelerated the initial stages of the Allied campaign. Plan Overlord had forecast a two to three months' delay after the capture of the Lodgement Area before full scale offensive operations could be resumed.⁸² As it developed, this pause would not occur on the Seine and Loire, but on the borders of Germany and the Netherlands.

77. Disadvantages. There were also less favorable aspects:

a. Serious logistical complications, with particular reference to support of U.S. forces, were foreshadowed because:

- (1) The speed of the advance had consumed operational reserves and had strained transportation facilities to the breaking point.

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(2) Time had been insufficient to develop rail lines or extend pipelines to army service areas.

b. Brest was still uncaptured, and only one major port -- Cherbourg -- was operational. It remained to be seen whether logistical compensation could be gained by the earlier opening of the Seine ports and Antwerp.

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CHAPTER 2

THE ADVANCE TO GERMANY

(Map No 5)

SECTION 1

THE ORIGINAL PLAN FOR THE ADVANCE

DECISION AS TO MAIN EFFORT

78. Concurrently with the completion of preparations for the invasion of France and the securing of the Lodgement Area, plans were being prepared for the Allied advance to Germany.¹ It was decided that the Ruhr, the nearest of the industrial areas vital to German economy, would be the primary objective in Germany. The line Amiens - Maubeuge - Liege - the Ruhr was chosen as the main axis of advance, with a subsidiary axis on the line Verdun - Metz - Saarbrucken. These axes were selected to obtain flexibility of maneuver and after consideration of factors such as logistics, suitability of terrain for armor and for airfield construction, and the degree of tactical air operations possible from bases in the United Kingdom.²

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THE PLAN³

General Considerations

79. Initial Objective. The Combined Chiefs of Staff on 12 February 1944 assigned General Eisenhower the following task:

"You will enter the Continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."⁴

The Ruhr was the initial strategic objective selected by the Supreme Commander in the prosecution of his mission because it was the most important economic region in Western Germany.

80. Possible Courses of Action to Achieve the Mission. Courses of action open were:

- a. To advance southeast from the Lodgement Area in an effort to cut off the German units in Southern France and defeat the enemy forces in detail.
- b. To advance eastward from the Lodgement Area with the main threat directed south of the Ardennes toward Metz and the Saar.
- c. To advance in a northeasterly direction with the object of striking directly at the Ruhr by the route north of the Ardennes.
- d. A combination of b and c above.

81. Possible Subsidiary Operations. Operations into Southern France from the Mediterranean and into Southwestern France from the Lodgement Area were considered subsidiary to the primary mission. The guiding principle in determining the advisability of such operations was that the mission of striking at the heart of Germany was paramount, and no troops should be diverted unless by so doing they would contribute more effectively

to the success of the main operation than if they were used for direct reinforcement of the main force in the north.

a. Southwestern France. It was believed that operations into Southwestern France would not contribute to the main mission except for possible benefits derived from occupation of the port of Bordeaux. It was planned that if the Germans should evacuate the Bordeaux area, a small force would be moved overland to occupy and, in conjunction with naval forces, open the port.

b. Southern France. Although the actual execution of Operation Dragoon by Mediterranean Theater Forces had not been decided on prior to the Overlord D-Day, it was recognized that an assault landing and subsequent operations in Southern France would constitute a considerable contribution to an Allied advance and would permit a coordinated effort to cut off or destroy part of the enemy elements in France. It would also open additional port and rail facilities.

Ground Force Considerations

82. Enemy Situation.⁵ A study of probable German lines of action revealed that the enemy was likely to make successive stands on:

- a. The line of the Seine, with Paris as a pivot.
- b. The line of the Somme to the Argonne.
- c. A line along the flat, easily flooded terrain from Calais to Ostend to Naubeuge, including numerous canals and minor streams; thence to the Argonne.
- d. The line Antwerp - Namur - Meuse.
- e. The waterways covering the Siegfried Line, and the Siegfried Line itself.

The enemy was expected to hold the coast north of Le Havre and to keep some forces on the Biscay and Mediterranean coasts. Based on these expectations, it was considered necessary to keep the campaign fluid in order to avoid assaulting heavily defended river lines.

It was estimated that after the capture of the Lodgement Area the Germans would have available no more than 55 divisions in the West, including 20 in the coastal sectors and 35 in the battle area. Reinforcement with 26 additional divisions was possible if the enemy evacuated Norway, Denmark, and the Aegean Islands, and withdrew to the Alps in Italy. Considerable attrition of enemy manpower, tanks, aircraft, and crews was anticipated.

It was expected that most of the enemy forces, except the coastal divisions, would be withdrawn from Southern and Southwestern France during the campaign for the Lodgement Area. However, since there would be no serious threat to communications between Southern France and Germany, it was not expected that the Germans would withdraw all forces from that area unless urgently required for reinforcing the main battle front.

83. Terrain. There were four areas through which the Ruhr might be reached from the Lodgement Area:

- a. South of the Ardennes through the Metz gap.
- b. Through the Ardennes.
- c. Along the north side of the Ardennes on the general line Maubeuge - Liege.
- d. Through the plain of Flanders.

Only two of these offered suitable axes of approach. The Ardennes was considered too difficult for passage and too easily defended to provide a suitable route for a main attack; also the whole area afforded few airfield sites. The Flanders plains were rejected because of numerous water obstacles and the difficulty going in the wet part of the year; good airfield sites were available, but would have been hard to maintain in the winter. Of the two axes considered feasible - north of the Ardennes on the general line Maubeuge - Liege, and south of the Ardennes on the general line Verdun - Metz - Saarbrücken - the northern route was preferred because there were more suitable airfield sites and because it led directly to the Ruhr. The southern route led directly to the lesser Rhine cities and a turning movement through the Rhine Valley would have been necessary to reach the Ruhr. Both axes, however, contained possibilities for defense which increased towards the east, canalizing the attackers on narrow fronts in both cases.

84. Own Forces. The strength of Allied forces in the Lodgement Area would depend on the development of port capacity and lines of communications. It was estimated that a maximum of 36 divisions, 18 U.S. and 18 British, would be in the Lodgement Area on D + 60, and that four U.S. divisions per month would arrive thereafter. It was anticipated that no additional British divisions would be available, and that those on the Continent gradually would be reduced in strength owing to irreplaceable losses in personnel. Assuming that the Germans would not withdraw forces to the west from the Russian front and would not suffer extremely heavy losses in the early operations, it was considered unlikely that the Allies would have superiority in infantry until D + 200 and not even then if the Germans should secure reinforcements by evacuating Norway, Italy, and the Balkan area. However, it was anticipated that by D + 60 the Allies would have a superiority in armor which would continue to increase thereafter.

85. Logistical Factors. It was anticipated that by D + 60 the following situation would exist:

- a. The British forces would be supplied through the artificial harbors and captured beaches.
- b. The U.S. forces would be supplied through Cherbourg, St Malo, the minor Brittany ports, and Quiberon Bay.
- c. Brest and Nantes would be captured, but would not yet be operating ports.

Requirements for further operations included:

- a. The opening of Le Havre and Rouen to supplant the artificial beaches before the setting in of bad weather in October.
- b. The opening of Brest to facilitate staging of U.S. troops.

c. The capture of Antwerp, without which port capacity would continue to limit the number of forces that could be maintained on the Continent.

It was planned to use Le Havre for both British and U.S. forces until Dunkerque, the Belgian coast ports, and perhaps even Antwerp were opened for British use. U.S. forces would be supplied partly from Cherbourg and Brittany even after Le Havre became available for sole U.S. use.

Planning in early August 1944 visualized that until October a British force of nine divisions could be maintained as far as the Somme without the use of the Seine ports, and without rail facilities east of Caen. This force could be increased to 12 divisions after the opening of Dieppe and other minor ports.

The U.S. forces, having longer lines of communications, were expected to be more dependent upon railroad construction, and it was believed that the destruction of major bridges by demolitions and bombing would impose considerable delay in reopening rail routes. It was anticipated that a maximum of 12 U.S. divisions could be supported as far east as the line Mantes - Orleans prior to October, and that by November, when railroads and ports should be sufficiently developed, approximately 18 U.S. divisions could be maintained 100 miles farther east. (Actually it was found possible to support 19 and 22 divisions, respectively, during these two periods, but some of these were receiving only a minimum of supplies.) Any advance beyond the Mantes - Orleans line earlier than October could be achieved only by stationing resting divisions near depots and ports to reduce transport requirements, by strictly limiting expansion of our right flank to the southeast, and by use of airborne supply. Even with these expedients, it was thought that not more than six U.S. divisions could be maintained in an assault north or south of Paris. Once railheads had been established at Chartres, it was considered that a force of 9 to 15 divisions could be maintained in a rapid advance to Reims.⁶

The capture of Paris also would involve a number of problems. The loss of Paris would deprive the enemy of his main center of road, rail, and wire communications in Northern France. For that reason, plus the political effect, it was desirable to cut off Paris at an early date.⁷ However, early capture of Paris would involve the road transport of large quantities of relief supplies, thereby imposing severe limitations on maintenance of operating divisions. If Paris were captured before late October, when railheads would have advanced to that vicinity and additional port capacity should be available from the Seine ports, serious logistical difficulties would result.⁸ It was calculated that the capture of Paris would entail a civil affairs supply commitment equivalent to the maintenance of eight divisions.⁹

Air Force Considerations.

56. Enemy Situation. It was anticipated that by the time the Lodgement Area was secured, the German Air Force would be incapable of offering substantial resistance and could make only spasmodic attacks against military concentrations and ports.

The enemy's lack of transport aircraft was expected to prevent him from launching large scale airborne operations.

87. Terrain. Along the Amiens - Liege axis to the Ruhr, terrain was generally satisfactory for airfield sites. Along the Reims - Metz axis of advance the terrain was considered favorable as far as Verdun and less favorable beyond.

Fighter-bomber and reconnaissance units could be moved forward in the northern area, thereby increasing operating time over enemy-held territory and vacating bases suitable for development to medium bomber standards and accelerating the movement of medium bomber units to the Continent.

The best targets for strategic bombardment were in northwestern Germany, including the Ruhr. The securing of close-up fighter bomber bases behind an advance north of the Ardennes would facilitate one of the missions of fighters on the Continent, which was to protect bombers on strategic missions.

COMPARISON OF POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION

88. Route to the Southeast. a. The advantages of a drive in the general direction of Dijon or Lyons were:

- (1) It would favor coordinated action with any forces operating from Southern France.
- (2) It offered the possibility of isolating and destroying the German forces in Southwestern France.

b. Disadvantages were:

- (1) It would not lead to the strategic objective nor to the main German forces.
- (2) It would leave both flanks exposed.
- (3) Such an operation soon would be out of range of air support from bases in the United Kingdom.
- (4) It would involve a long extension of the lines of communication.

c. It was decided not to adopt this axis as a main approach, although during the planning stage prior to D-Day it was considered that a subsidiary operation with a small force might be feasible in conjunction with landings in Southern France.

89. Route south of the Ardennes towards Metz and the Saar.

a. Advantages were:

- (1) The first part of this route was over terrain favorable for airfield construction.
- (2) The initial part of the terrain also favored the employment of armored forces; consequently a quick approach toward Metz was believed possible.

b. Disadvantages were:

- (1) Its use would constitute no direct threat to the Ruhr.

- (2) Both flanks would be exposed.
- (3) Operations soon would be out of range of medium and light bombers operating from the United Kingdom.
- (4) The terrain east of Chalons was not favorable for construction of airfields.
- (5) Communications would be extended over the entire length of France.

c. This route was initially rejected,¹⁰ but it was later concluded that its use should not be entirely eliminated.¹¹

90. Route north of the Ardennes. a. Advantages here were:

- (1) It was the most direct path to the Ruhr.
- (2) An advance along this route would insure a secure left flank resting on the Channel.
- (3) It was within range of air bases in the United Kingdom.
- (4) The route was through good airfield country.
- (5) It would make feasible maximum coordination with Allied sea power in opening and operating the Channel ports.

b. Disadvantages were:

- (1) There was no check to prevent German forces in Southern France escaping and entering the campaign in the north.
- (2) There were numerous water obstacles.
- (3) The approach would become narrower and easier to defend toward the east, thus limiting the opportunities for surprise and maneuver.
- (4) Lines of communication would be subject to possible counterattack through the Ardennes or Metz gap.

c. Initially, this axis was selected exclusively, provided the Germans could be contained in the Metz gap.¹² Later in the planning stage, it was decided that this approach alone should not be adopted because:¹³

- (1) It would lead to a head-on collision of the opposing main forces on a narrow front with no opportunity for maneuver.
- (2) It was considered desirable to cut off and, if possible, destroy the German forces in Southern France before they could make their escape into Germany.

91. Simultaneous advances through the Metz Gap and north of the Ardennes.

a. Advantages of this procedure were:

- (1) An advance on a broad front would have the advantage

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that all forces would not be irrotreivably committed to one or the other of the comparatively narrow gaps.

- (2) Opportunity for surprise and maneuver would be enhanced, thus requiring the enemy to extend his forces, and leaving him in doubt as to the direction of the Allied main thrust.
- (3) It was considered that a deep drive into either gap would require the enemy to weaken his defenses elsewhere.

b. The disadvantage of this procedure was that use of two axes would necessitate maintenance of two widely separated lines of communication. For this reason, initial SHAEF plans ruled out this two-pronged approach.¹⁴

On further study this objection was overruled because of the belief that Allied success along one axis would force withdrawal of the Germans in both areas, thus leaving adequate lateral communications between the two axes.¹⁵

92. Course of Action Adopted. After reviewing all factors, the Supreme Commander in May 1944 approved the course of action which would use both the route north of the Ardennes and the Metz gap.¹⁶ It was decided, therefore, to make the main effort with the bulk of the forces along the axis Amiens - Maubouge - Liege - the Ruhr, and a secondary effort with a small force along the axis Verdun - Metz.

SECTION 2

MODIFICATION OF PLAN - STRONG ATTACK THROUGH METZ GAP

SITUATION

93. In Northern France the Allied armies, by 26 August, had secured the Lodgement Area (except Brest, St Nazaire, and Lorient), liberated Paris, and captured firm bridgeheads across the Seine River.¹⁸ In Southern France Operation Dragoon, involving an assault landing on the French Mediterranean coast, had been successfully initiated on 15 August. By 26 August eight divisions were ashore and the advance up the Rhone Valley had proceeded beyond Grenoble. The operation in Southern France remained under control of Allied Force Headquarters in the Mediterranean Theater until 15 September.

THE MODIFIED PLAN

94. Earlier estimates of developments beyond the Lodgement Area had visualized a pause by the Allied forces on the line of the Seine for a period of some three months as a likely necessity.¹⁹ Such a halt was visualized in order that the forces might be reorganized and reinforced, and their logistical situation strengthened before initiating the next phase of the campaign.²⁰

The decisive victory in the Falaise - Argentan pocket and the disintegration of German resistance in front of the Allies revised this concept. The situation in Northern France, coupled with the success of the Seventh U.S. Army drive in Southern France now afforded an opportunity to seize the Saar industrial area²¹ as well as the Ruhr.²² It was decided to continue the attack without delay, regardless of the logistical difficulties that might be incurred by so doing.²³

Moreover, the original plan had proposed that the secondary effort along the Reims - Verdun - Metz axis would be made by a small force with the mission of diverting enemy resistance from the main thrust and preventing the escape of enemy troops from Southwestern France by linking up with the Allied forces moving up from the Mediterranean.²⁴ At the end of August the plan was modified to provide for an attack in force along the Reims - Verdun - Metz axis by the Third U.S. Army (less the VIII Corps, which was operating in Brittany) and one corps of the First U.S. Army. Further developments in the situation led to the additional decision on 4 September that these forces would continue east to occupy the sector of the Siegfried line covering the Saar and then seize Frankfurt. 21 Army Group and that portion of 12th Army Group which was to advance north of the Ardennes were to breach the sector of the Siegfried Line covering the Ruhr and then seize the Ruhr.²⁵

FACTORS INFLUENCING AUGMENTATION OF METZ EFFORT

Ground Force Considerations

95. Enemy Situation. Prior to D-Day, captured enemy documents and intelligence reports indicated that German defense plans included successive stands on the major water barriers across France and Belgium and on the Siegfried Line itself.²⁶ However, it seemed likely that the enemy's heavy losses in the campaign of the Seine and the Loire would

prevent his offering effective resistance to a rapid advance, provided no time was lost in launching the offensive.²⁷ By late August the German forces were disorganized and were retreating along the entire front.²⁸

At the end of August, it was estimated that the enemy could muster no more than the equivalent of two weak armored divisions and nine infantry divisions northwest of the Ardennes, and the equivalent of a panzer grenadier and four infantry divisions south of the Ardennes. Troops estimated to be equal to one division in fighting value (though perhaps 100,000 numerically) were withdrawing from Southwestern France, and two and one-half divisions were being driven northward up the Rhone Valley.²⁹

It was believed the enemy could prevent the advance into Germany only by reinforcing his retreating forces with divisions from Germany and from other fronts, and by manning the more important sectors of the Siegfried Line. It was considered doubtful that he could do this in time and in sufficient strength, but, were he to succeed, he was likely to concentrate on blocking the two main approaches to Germany, i.e., by way of the Ruhr and the Saar.³⁰ If so, an opportunity would be afforded for the destruction of a considerable portion of the German armies remaining in the West.³¹

96. Terrain. As previously stated, the area northwest of the Ardennes was the preferred approach because most of it afforded good tank country and airfield sites, while south of the Ardennes the country became less favorable east of Verdun. Despite the advantages of the northern route, the employment of powerful thrusts on dual axes would result in increased flexibility.

Water barriers blocked both approaches -- the Seine, Somme, Albert Canal, and Meuse across the northern route, and the Seine, Marne, Meuse, and Moselle across the southern. Formidable artificial obstacles, the Maginot and Siegfried Line defenses, were strong in the path of both approaches.³² The existence of these fortifications dictated a rapid advance to secure a wide breach before they could be occupied and their defensive possibilities fully developed by the enemy.³³

97. Own Forces.³⁴ On 26 August the Allies had available 15 divisions in 21 Army Group, 21 divisions in 12th Army Group and four airborne divisions in the United Kingdom. Three additional U.S. divisions would be available to 12th Army Group on or before 15 September. Dragoon forces moving up the Rhone Valley included eight divisions and an airborne task force.³⁵

It was clear that the Allies had, at this time, superiority in both armor and infantry and could move in almost any direction against the weakened enemy. It was possible to mass a large force for a drive along the main axis to the Ruhr and still to have seven divisions from Third U.S. Army and three divisions from First U.S. Army available for a drive south of the Ardennes.

98. Logistical Factors. The postponement of the capture of the Brittany ports, in order to permit exploitation of the breakthrough to the east, limited the Allied forces to the supply lines from the Cotentin - Caen area. Sufficient supplies were available there, but the rapid advances had not permitted the build-up of intermediate supply points, and motor transport supply lines to U.S. forces on the Seine River averaged over 250 miles in length. Fast advances east of the Seine with the bulk

of the troops would conflict with the availability of truck transport to supply the forces.³⁶

Allied bombing and enemy demolitions had crippled the French railroads; despite great efforts, rail reconstruction was unable to keep pace with the advance.

Air supply was insignificant in comparison with requirements but, by restricting its use to selected and emergency items, considerable benefit was being derived from the limited number of aircraft available.³⁷

Administrative plans and the proposed build-up of service support had been predicated on the advance taking the course of a slow offensive rather than a pursuit of a disorganized enemy. Despite the emphasis being placed on all-out employment of available facilities for immediate operations, it was obvious that only by long range logistical development and build-up of supplies could ultimate large-scale operations be supported.³⁸ Deep water ports east of the Seine were required.³⁹ Brest also was desired for staging troops direct from the United States and to relieve the Normandy ports and beaches. However, with the imminent seizure of the Seine ports, need for the development of Quiberon Bay grew progressively less urgent and the project was cancelled in early September. Early juncture with the forces from Southern France was counted on to assist in support of troops driving east, since the capacity of lines of communications from Marseilles was expected to be in excess of requirements for forces operating from the south.⁴⁰ Rail developments were being rushed forward as rapidly as possible and the entire logistical structure strengthened progressively as circumstances permitted.

A period of rehabilitation of the logistical support facilities would be required at a later date to place the supply structure in reasonable order before further major offensives could be supported. Support of the increased forces along the Reims - Verdun - Metz axis offered no greater problem than on the northern axis. In spite of the logistical difficulties, the opportunity of taking full advantage of a disorganized enemy at this time justified approval of the plan.⁴¹

Air Force Considerations

99. Enemy Situation. Events in the Lodgement Area had substantiated the original estimate that the enemy would be capable only of defensive air action and of spasmodic attacks against Allied military concentrations and ports. Despite the limited scale of his activities, the enemy had incurred heavy losses in aircraft and personnel and was believed incapable of offering serious opposition to our air or ground forces.⁴² The Allied advance with subsequent forward movement of Allied airfields would curtail enemy air effort as more of his airfields came within range of our tactical air forces.

Considerable Allied air striking power, both strategical and tactical, had been allotted to attacks on V-1 sites.⁴³ In spite of these air attacks, flying bombs launched from the Channel Coast were striking London and represented a potential threat to ports and supply installations in the United Kingdom and in the Cherbourg area.⁴⁴ The effect had been to disquiet the civil population and to raise enemy morale, but little material damage was being done to the military or naval effort.⁴⁵ Although the attacks were not of great military importance, relief for the civil population necessitated consideration of measures to capture the launching areas.⁴⁶

100. Terrain. The Allies were in possession of good airfield country in the Dreux - Chartres - Chateaudun area to support operations to the east or northeast. Advances along either axis would uncover additional good airfield sites -- eastward from Reims to Verdun, and northeastward from Paris through Central Belgium.⁴⁷

Strategic bombing would continue from bases in the United Kingdom, regardless of the direction of advance on the Continent.⁴⁸

101. Own Forces. The Allies were able to retain the air superiority enjoyed since D-Day, and with the new bases on the Continent, the Ninth U.S. Air Force and Second British Tactical Air Force would be able to conduct tactical air operations in any area chosen for attack by the Supreme Commander. The disorganization of the enemy would enhance the effective use of tactical aircraft in the maintenance of air superiority, continuous disruption of enemy supply lines, and direct participation in ground operations.

The First Allied Airborne Army of four divisions was available for operations within the range limit of their transport aircraft, but advantages from their use would have to be weighed against the needs for air supply to ground forces, inasmuch as sufficient air transport was not available to perform both missions. In keeping with the intention to place the bulk of the Allied strength in the north, it was considered desirable to make these forces available to 21 Army Group.

DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONS, 26 AUGUST - 8 NOVEMBER

102. During the period from 26 August to 30 September the Allies overran Northern France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Southern Holland. The British captured the ports of Le Havre, Bruges, and Antwerp, although the approaches to Antwerp in the Schelde Estuary were still held by the Germans. In the north and northeast, First U.S. Army forces liberated Maastricht and penetrated the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Aachen. In the east, other First Army forces penetrated the Siegfried Line east of Luxembourg while the Third U.S. Army closed to the Moselle River in the vicinity of Metz and secured bridgeheads at Nancy and south of Metz. On 5 September the Ninth U.S. Army, under command of Lieutenant General William H. Simpson, became operational and assumed responsibility for operations in the Brittany area.

On 17 September, 21 Army Group launched a combined airborne - ground attack to obtain a bridgehead across the Neder Rijn at Arnhem as a preliminary to a drive in force around the Siegfried Line and across the North German Plain. The operation failed to attain its objective at Arnhem, but bridgeheads were secured across the Maas and the Waal Rivers which furnished a springboard for later attacks.

The Third U.S. Army made contact with the Seventh U.S. Army (of the Dragoon forces) at Sombornon, France, on the 11th of September.⁴⁹ On 15 September, the Dragoon forces, consisting of Seventh U.S. Army and French Army B (later First French Army), passed to control of 6th Army Group under command of General Jacob L. Deyers. At the same time, these forces were relieved of assignment to the Mediterranean Theater of Operations and came under General Eisenhower's control.⁵⁰ Ninth U.S. Army moved from Brittany and on 5 October took over a zone, between First and Third U.S. Armies, facing the Siegfried Line from Echternach to Dahlen. Operations during the latter part of the period consisted of relatively small scale engagements. The only significant accomplishments were the clearance of the approaches to Antwerp by the First

Canadian Army, completed on 9 November, and the establishment of a sizeable breach in the Siegfried Line with the taking of Aachen by the First U.S. Army on 21 October.

On 12 October, the XII Tactical Air Command operating with the Seventh U.S. Army, passed to the control of the Ninth Air Force. On 15 November, the First Tactical Air Force (Provisional), consisting of the XII Tactical Air Command and the First French Air Force, was formed and placed under control of SHAEF.⁵¹

PAUSE TO IMPROVE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS

103. The Allied drive lost its impetus with the reaching of the Siegfried Line in the north and the Moselle River in the south. The prepared enemy positions, the extent of the area covered by the Allied troops over a short space of time, and the need for additional supplies at forward points to sustain the drive made it apparent that no further large-scale offensive could be launched until additional forces could be concentrated and the logistical situation improved.⁵² From late September to early November, the opposing forces were drawn up on a continuous line extending from the Swiss border along the Vosges Mountains and the Moselle River to the Siegfried Line, along that line to north of Aachen, thence generally northwest to Nijmegen and west to the Schelde Estuary.

Support during the rapid advances in August and September had been furnished under many adversities. Railroad capacities still were small, owing to limited rehabilitation of tracks and shortage of rolling stock. Most of the supplies for the forward areas were handled by truck from Normandy bases to the front lines, and truck transportation was also required to carry large numbers of troops in the rapid advance. There were not sufficient vehicles to meet the requirements of the situations.⁵³

Certain critical types of ammunition in the U.S. Communications Zone were practically exhausted, due to inadequate port and beach unloadings. There were other critical shortages in U.S. forces forward areas, but the length of time required before major U.S. offensives could be resumed was dependent upon the ammunition situation. It was believed, however, that by early November the ammunition situation could be solved by increasing the number of discharge berths, diverting all port and beach inflow toward the build-up of Communications Zone stocks, and then maintaining a steady flow.⁵⁴

The British forces operating northward also had over-extended their lines of communication and needed time to improve their supply structure. A period of relative inactivity was essential to permit development and extension of rail lines, which in turn would relieve over-burdened transport, improve distribution facilities and make it possible to build-up reserves in forward areas.⁵⁵

During the period, October to early November, the logistical situation was appreciably improved. Le Havre and other Channel ports were placed in operation; rail rehabilitation was pushed well forward, with priority on lines leading from Antwerp in anticipation of large tonnage receipts at that port. The port of Marseille, supporting 6th Army Group, reached a capacity greater than that of the railroads loading north from it. Improvement was continuing in all capacities, in the accumulation of proper reserves in army areas and in rear of them, and in the general distributional means.⁵⁶

SECTION 3

RENEWAL OF THE ADVANCE

PLANS FOR THE OFFENSIVE

104. Detailed plans had been prepared for resumption of major attacks early in November.⁵⁷ The initial operation envisaged was to close to the Rhine and inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy (first phase). Subsequent operations were planned for seizing bridgeheads over the Rhine (second phase) and for advancing to the east (third phase). To carry out the first phase, 21 Army Group, after opening Antwerp, was to attack southward to clear the area between the Meuse (Maas) and the Rhine to the line Venray - Goch - Roes. In the 12th Army Group zone, a major effort was to be made north of the Ardennes to advance to the Rhine and destroy the enemy forces west of the river. In preparation for the resumption of the advance, Ninth Army was moved to the north between First U.S. Army and 21 Army Group. South of the Ardennes, 12th Army Group forces were to occupy the Saar and advance to the Rhine. Concurrently, 6th Army Group was to advance in its zone to the Rhine while protecting 12th Army Group's south flank. In the second phase the Army Groups were to secure crossings and establish themselves in strength across the Rhine. The main effort was to be made in the north.⁵⁸ At the same time, it was considered desirable to take aggressive action in the south, thereby taking advantage of the maintenance resources available from the Mediterranean. Before the attack jumped off, 21 Army Group was released from the requirement of attacking southward between the Meuse and the Rhine, and its efforts were directed to clearing the area west and south of the Maas.⁵⁹

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THIS COURSE OF ACTION

Ground Force Considerations

105. Enemy Situation. Enemy strength at the end of October was estimated to be the equivalent of 32 divisions; 12 opposite 21 Army Group, 15 facing 12th Army Group and, 5 opposing 6th Army Group.⁶⁰

By this time the Germans had succeeded partially in their efforts to reorganize and reinforce their Western Armies. Many of the hastily organized battle groups and temporary divisions that had been able to block the Allied rush in September had been reassembled into recognized numbered divisions. Four divisions had been brought into the area from other fronts during October, in addition to the 18 new divisions identified during September in the West. Many of the armored units had been withdrawn temporarily from the line for rest and re-fitting.⁶¹

The main enemy capability was considered to be the execution of a counterattack with strong armored reserves against any Allied breakthrough on the First or Ninth U.S. Army fronts.⁶² He was expected to continue the build-up of this armored reserve until Allied thrusts eastward demanded its employment.⁶³

106. Terrain. Terrain favored the defender all along the Western Front. The enemy occupied the high ground covering the passes through the Vosges Mountains against 6th Army Group; the Metz fortifications and the Moselle River opposite Third U.S. Army; the Siegfried Line, Hurtgen Forest, and Roer River defenses from Trier to points northeast of Aachen

in front of First and Ninth U.S. Armies, and the water barriers covering the approaches to Central and Northern Holland and Northwestern Germany opposite 21 Army Group. The route through Holland was almost impassable in the wet seasons of the year, and the southern routes into Germany were over difficult country and were a long distance from the Ruhr. Once the initial defenses were breached, it was believed that the Aachen approach to the Rhine over the Cologne plain was the quickest and best route to the Ruhr.⁶⁴

107. Own Forces. On the Western Front by the beginning of November the Allies had 57 divisions, of which 15 were assigned to 6th Army Group, 23 to 12th Army Group and 19, including two airborne divisions, to 21 Army Group.⁶⁵ In addition there were two airborne divisions in the United Kingdom, and two armored divisions at Cherbourg and Marseilles. During November, five additional divisions were scheduled to arrive on the Continent.

It was considered that 21 Army Group, then engaged in reducing the approaches to Antwerp, had insufficient strength to join in the attack in the early stages.⁶⁶ Its efforts therefore were to be confined to clearing the area west and south of the Maas.⁶⁷

108. Logistical Factors. As had been anticipated in October, the logistical situation was improved in all respects. It was now considered that offensives with the forces available could be supported as far as the Rhine River. Prerequisites for conducting operations beyond the Rhine were:

- a. Building up sufficient troop strength to overcome whatever resistance the enemy might be capable of offering.
- b. Improvement of available ports and the development of Antwerp.
- c. Close follow-up in railroad rehabilitation and construction to assure an adequate flow of supplies for daily maintenance and reserves.⁶⁸

Air Force Considerations

109. Enemy Situation. It was estimated that the enemy had been able to build up his air strength to an estimated 1,800 aircraft,⁶⁹ including about 50 jet propelled fighters. He had been able to fly several hundred sorties daily against Allied positions.⁷⁰ The most important capability of the enemy air forces was considered to be the provision of considerable fighter strength to support any counterattack made by his armored force against an Allied breakthrough.⁷¹

110. Weather. Flying weather had been poor in October, with limited visibility conditions prevailing on most of the 17 days when planes could get into the air.⁷² Although no great improvement in flying conditions was expected, it was anticipated that it would be possible to make the offensive a combined air and ground operation.⁷³

DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONS, 8 NOVEMBER - 15 DECEMBER

111. Advance North of the Ardennes. North of the Ardennes, the First and Ninth U.S. Armies' attacks, hampered by the worst weather in the area in years, made slow progress. The offensive started on 16 November, preceded by the heaviest close-support air bombardment that had yet been delivered by all types of aircraft. By 3 December Ninth Army reached the Roer River, with First Army conforming more slowly. Before attempting

crossings of the Roer, it was considered necessary to seize the Schmidt dams, which controlled the flooding of the Roer Valley. On 13 December First Army launched an attack to seize the dams. The attack was in progress when the German counteroffensive struck.⁷⁴

112. Advance South of the Moselle. South of the Ardennes, the Allied attack met with greater success. After large-scale air attacks against key points in the line of the planned advance and communications targets in the battle area and with the XIX Tactical Air Command performing close cooperation,⁷⁵ the Third U.S. Army jumped off on 8 November. By the 22d it had encircled and captured Metz. Early in December the Third U.S. Army had closed on a substantial portion of the Saar River and penetrated the Siegfried Line defenses in the vicinity of Saarlautern. Farther south, 6th Army Group started its attack on 13 November. Within a week, the First French Army breached the Belfort Gap and reached the Rhine. Seventh U.S. Army broke through the Saverne Gap and cleared Strasbourg by the 27th, then turned north⁷⁶ and penetrated the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Wissembourg, while the French Army carried on an unsuccessful effort to liquidate the remaining enemy resistance west of the Rhine in the vicinity of Colmar.⁷⁷

113. 21 Army Group Offensive. 21 Army Group cleared the approaches to Antwerp by 9 November and reduced the remaining enemy pockets west of the Maas by 4 December.

SITUATION ON 15 DECEMBER

114. Allied Situation. 6th Army Group had closed to the Rhine from Basle to the German border, except for a German pocket around Colmar, and having penetrated the Siegfried Line, was driving into Germany on a front extending from the Rhine to Bitcho. In the 12th Army Group area, Ninth U.S. Army had closed to the Roer River northeast of Aachen. First U.S. Army had closed to the Roer in the Duren area and was advancing slowly through the Hurtgen Forest toward the Roer dams east of Monschau. Farther south, First Army held the Our River sector from south of Malmody to the southeastern border of Luxembourg. Third U.S. Army was closing to the Siegfried Line from Luxembourg to Bitcho, and had penetrated the Line at several places in the vicinity of Saarlautern.⁷⁸ 21 Army Group, with 14 divisions, was holding a front generally along the Maas River from the sea to a point a few miles north of Aachen.

115. Enemy Situation. The enemy had suffered heavy casualties as a result of the Allied offensives in November and December. Nevertheless, aided by the worst weather in many years and by the static situation on the Russian front,⁷⁹ the Germans had been able to build up a substantial reserve, including 11 armored type divisions, among which were the four divisions of the newly organized Sixth Panzer Army.⁸⁰ On 15 December it was estimated that the enemy in the West had 74 nominal divisions, equivalent to 36 - 39 full-strength divisions. They were disposed as follows:

Opposite 6th Army Group -- 14 nominal (5 equivalent) divisions.

Opposite 12th Army Group -- 42 nominal (22 - 24 equivalent) divisions.

Opposite 21 Army Group -- 18 nominal (9 - 10 equivalent) divisions.

On the morning of 16 December, Von Rundstedt launched his counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

CHAPTER 2

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CHAPTER 3

THE GERMAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE

(Map No 6)

SECTION 1

THE GERMAN ATTACK

INTRODUCTION

116. Intention to Regain Initiative. Throughout the campaign in the West, the German High Command retained the concept of regaining the initiative which had passed to the Allies on 6 June 1944.¹ Several possibilities for a counterthrust to intercept and check the Allied advance across France were discussed, but the exigencies of the situation permitted no positive action. However, when the Allies were stopped on the German border and the front began to stabilize, the counterthrust intention again took shape, but with the significant change that instead of an operation to exploit gaps in the enemy's front or deep flanks, it had to be a penetration of a fixed front.²

117. Prerequisites for the Attack. The German High Command determined that the following conditions were prerequisites for a successful operation, wherever and whenever it might be launched:³

a. Maintenance of the integrity of positions generally along the line Maas - Roer - Siegfried Line - Moselle (Saar) - Rhine.

b. No adverse developments on the Eastern Front beyond the capabilities of the replacement army to restore (i.e., no demands on strategic or Western Front reserves).

c. Continuation of adequate personnel and materiel supply in the West.

d. Reasonable expectancy of a ten-day period of bad weather to compensate for inferiority in the air.

e. Quick destruction of the enemy in the assault area to compensate for lack of depth in the attack.

In early October 1944 it was estimated that the desired conditions would exist by the end of the two months period necessary to mount the operation.

THE PLAN ADOPTED

118. Selection of Assault Area. The Ardennes was chosen as the most suitable area for the offensive because:

a. The numerical weakness of the American forces there was well known. Through tactical ground reconnaissance, prisoner of war interrogation, and radio intercept, German intelligence had maintained an accurate and up-to-date picture of the American order of battle.⁴

b. It was believed that the Allies could not strike any blow disastrous to Germany while the bulk of the German forces in the West was

concentrated in the Ardennes. The German High Command gauged the great Allied strength in the Aachen area and north thereof as the most serious threat to Germany. However, while they retained control of the Roer dams and the consequent capability of flooding the Roer River, they were confident that no strong attack would be launched towards the Ruhr.⁵ South of the Moselle, it was considered that sufficient forces were available to stem Allied advances at the West Wall; the territory short thereof was not deemed of great strategic importance.

c. It had been demonstrated in 1940 that strong armored forces faced only with light resistance could smash swiftly through the Ardennes area. The Germans felt that the road net was adequate for supply, the country suitable for maneuver.

d. The broken and wooded nature of the terrain would provide adequate cover for German troop formations and installations should the weather suddenly clear.⁶

119. Objectives. The contemplated offensive was intended to regain the initiative and was, therefore, wholly strategic in concept.

The object was the seizure of Antwerp and the severance of the major Allied supply lines emanating from that port. Secondary or lesser objectives were not envisaged by Hitler,⁷ who in all instances made the decisions.

Once Antwerp was won, subsequent objectives would be based largely on Allied reactions.⁸

The German High Command did not deceive themselves that the offensive, even if successful, would win the war in the West,⁹ but they did hope for valuable remuneration:

- a. Complete disruption of Allied offensive plans.
- b. Severe Allied losses.
- c. Months of respite gained for the Reich.

It was obvious that a great upsurge of German morale would result if a brilliant victory were won, but this was not a motivating factor in planning the offensive.¹⁰

120. Selection of Forces.¹¹ The initial estimate of the requisite strength was 25 - 30 divisions (a number eventually exceeded) with the normal balanced supporting troops. Fifth Panzer Army, then holding the Aachen front and the Sixth Panzer Army, forming in Central Germany, were designated to make the drive, with the main effort entrusted to the latter. The Seventh and Fifteenth Armies were to provide flank support to the south and north respectively. The four participating armies were assigned to Army Group "B" and immediate tactical direction of the operation was made the responsibility of its commander, Colonel General Model. Von Rundstedt, as Commander-in-Chief West, exercised over-all supervision.

121. Attack Directive. On 12 October the German High Command issued a general operational directive as a basis for planning by the staffs of C-in-C West and Army Group "B". By the end of the month, following numerous conferences with Hitler, the general outline of the plan was formed.¹²

a. The ultimate goal of the operation was announced as the capture of Antwerp and the destruction of enemy forces north of the line Antwerp - Brussels - Bastogne.

b. Army Group "B", assaulting with the Sixth Panzer Army on the right (north), Fifth Panzer Army in center and Seventh Army on the left (south), and Fifteenth Army holding the north flank, would break through U.S. defenses to tactically favorable positions after a short but intensive artillery preparation. Subsequent army missions were to be as follows:

- (1) Sixth Panzer Army making the main effort, would drive across the Meuse between Huy and Liege and seize Antwerp and Maastricht. Infantry divisions employed to block the north flank short of the Meuse would revert to control of Fifteenth Army after armored units had crossed that river. Liege, itself, was to be avoided.
- (2) Fifth Panzer Army, driving shoulder to shoulder with the Sixth Panzer Army, would cross the Meuse between Huy and Dinant and prevent the attack of enemy reserves on the rear of the Sixth Panzer Army on the line Brussels - Namur - Dinant.
- (3) Fifteenth Army, pivoting on the right, would press forward to secure the general line Monschau - Verviers - Liege and there intercept the anticipated strong enemy attacks into the deep right flank of the Army Group. Infantry of the Sixth Panzer Army would pass to its control under the conditions of (1) above.
- (4) Seventh Army was to seize the general line Dinant - Neufchateau - Bastogne - Grevenmacher and protect the deep left flank of the Army Group.

c. The target date was completely dependent upon the arrival of bad weather and was tentatively set for the period 26 - 28 November.

d. The initial breakthrough would be accomplished by the infantry divisions, leaving the armored units free for exploitation. Surprise and speed were to be considered all-important.

e. The entire operation was to be prepared under the utmost secrecy and cloaked under a master cover plan.

Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, considering the objectives too far reaching for the available troops, submitted a counter-proposal for an attack in the Aachen area, advancing the arguments that the German soldier would fight better to regain German soil and, furthermore, that an assault in that area presented less difficulties.¹³ Hitler vetoed the plan as falling short of any strategic objective, and the matter was not again discussed.

122. Cover Plan and Deceptive Measures. With the success of the entire operation dependent upon surprise and securing a clear breakthrough before the Allies could react, great stress was placed on the maintenance of secrecy in all preparations. The cover operation decided upon by the High Command was simple and sound. In brief, it was announced that the High Command expected strong enemy attacks across the Roer into the Cologne area during the calendar year. To counter this threat, two strong counterattack forces were to be assembled. The first, assembly

of which was to be made obvious, would be located in the Cologne - Dusseldorf - Euskirchen area. The second, to be assembled with the strictest secrecy, would be located in the Eifel, from which area it could strike a decisive blow against the right flank of the Allied Roer - Rhine drive. All attack preparations were to proceed under the foregoing deception.¹⁴

Other security measures included:

- a. Requiring all persons briefed on the operation to sign a pledge of secrecy.
- b. Transmitting all operational correspondence by special courier, and allowing no one with knowledge of the plan, or carrying documents relating thereto, to fly west of the Rhine.
- c. Staging troops forward to final assembly areas at the last practicable moment and then only by night.
- d. Removing all non-German soldiers from the front lines a week before D-Day.
- e. Prohibiting registration of reinforcing artillery.
- f. Requiring the participating armies to maintain their old command posts, and to preserve the existing radio picture.
- g. Establishing a complete dummy Army Headquarters, the Twenty-Fifth, at Munchen Gladbach.¹⁵

PREPARATION

123. Supply Build-Up. By strictly rationing fuel within the Reich during the six weeks immediately preceding the attack, it was planned to provide Army Group "B" with four consumption units (50 Km each), this quantity to be with the divisions or in army dumps west of the Rhine.¹⁶ Beginning on the second day of the offensive, an additional unit was to be made available daily. By 1 December, the basic quantity of four units was stocked as planned.

Eight days ammunition supply was stocked west of the Rhine, although dumps were considerably in rear of the line of departure. An additional eight-day allocation was made available in Central Germany.¹⁷

All tank replacements to the Eastern Front were stopped in mid-October.¹⁸ Each participating armored division had 80 - 100 tanks, its normal complement, when it moved into the assembly area. However, critical shortages in spare parts and retrievers were never overcome.

124. Strength and Training. The initial build-up was to be 23 divisions; if conditions were propitious this total could be increased to 38 by release of all strategic reserves that it would be possible to employ.¹⁹ With the success of the attack completely dependent upon surprise and speed, the strength available to Army Group "B" was considered adequate.

Although most of the armored divisions and some infantry divisions were brought to full strength, many of the troops were now replacements who had received a maximum of ten weeks training. The

standards of the individual soldier and of loaders had ebbed greatly since the beginning of the western campaign, owing to the loss of seasoned personnel. No special training was given for the particular type of fighting which was to characterize the Ardennes offensive, largely because the cover plan kept knowledge of the attack from even the corps commanders until the last moment.

125. Special Operations. Two subsidiary operations were introduced as a part of the grand scheme:

a. A task force constituted from the 150 Panzer Brigade (reinforced) and a picked group of Commandos was given the twofold mission of seizing undamaged at least two Meuse bridges (Brigade task) and creating confusion and loss of control in the American rear (commando task).²⁰ The brigade, partially equipped with U.S. vehicles, was to break through with the mass of armor and, splitting into small groups, attempt to get through to the Meuse by stealth at night. The Commandos were provided with American uniforms and vehicles and were to slip through the lines to give false commands and directions, cut communications, and generally disrupt leadership.

b. A paratroop unit was to be dropped on the first night of the attack to cut roads leading into the north flank of the penetration area in order to block the movement of Allied reinforcements and to create confusion.

126. Final Instructions and Deployment. Beginning 15 November, Sixth Panzer Army displaced from its Westphalian training area to positions west of Cologne, and Fifteenth Army secretly relieved the Fifth Panzer Army of responsibility for the Aachen sector in order to free the latter for preparations for the offensive.²¹ So far as practical, all divisions earmarked for participation in the assault were withdrawn from the battle lines.

Heavy Allied pressure on the Ruhr and Saar fronts in December caused no alterations in the German plans. In mid-November Hitler had stated categorically that he was "determined to hold fast to the execution of this operation, regardless of any risk, even if the enemy offensive on both sides of Metz and the imminent attack in the Rhine territory should lead to great terrain and town losses."²² Army groups north and south of Army Group "B" were directed to hold at all cost, and Army Group "C" in the Saar - Upper Rhine area was ordered to exert maximum pressure after D-Day to tie down the greatest possible number of Allied forces in the south.

The German High Command reasoned that for complete success, the Meuse must be reached in force not later than D + 4.²³ Consequently, the necessity for rapidity of assault and follow-up was reiterated; leading units were warned not to concern themselves with strongpoints, however critical the terrain features they guarded.

The rail movement of the assault wave infantry and armored divisions was completed on 10 December.²⁴ Infantry elements moved immediately by successive night marches to final assembly areas, while armored units followed on 13 December. By the night of 15 - 16 December the assault divisions had closed into final assembly areas, the bulk of the artillery was in position, and reserve divisions were enroute. Existing and forecast weather conditions were now most favorable for the attack.

THE ATTACK

127. Assault. At 0530 hours, 16 December, Army Group "B" attacked with three armies on a 50-mile front, roughly from Monschau south to Eichternach. Sixth Panzer Army's assault was aimed at securing the high ground of the Hohe Venn (running southwest from Monschau to Stavelot) to open a path for the armored units. The infantry attack was poorly executed and the resistance in the critical Elsenborn - Bullengon - Wortzfeld triangle was unexpectedly strong, with the result that armored units had to be committed to break the crust of the defense. Fifth Panzer Army made good progress on the first day and achieved the conditions for a breakthrough on its left (south) flank. Seventh Army made limited but important advances to the south and southwest in pursuance of its flank protection mission.

128. Follow-Up. Three days later on 19 December, Sixth Panzer Army was still battering against the Elsenborn ridge, between Monschau and Butgenbach. Fifth Panzer Army's south wing had made good progress, reaching Houffalize and cutting the roads north and south of the defended city of Bastogne. Meanwhile, Seventh Army continued to move units west, conforming to the south flank of Fifth Panzer Army and took up blocking positions generally south of and parallel to the Sauer and Wiltz Rivers. By this time it was apparent to the German High Command that the Meuse was not to be reached by a surprise drive and that major battles were impending east of that river. Decisions were not changed however, since it was felt that if a way could be battered to the Meuse, Allied counter-attacks then developing would be delayed and their point of application shifted. Based on respective progress of the armies, the main effort was transferred from the Sixth to Fifth Panzer Army and all reserves given the latter.²⁵

129. Situation, 25 December. Sixth Panzer Army had made little progress at great cost. The bulk of the army was on the defensive from the Elsenborn area to Stavelot. Fifth Panzer Army in the center, with elements at Marche, Rochefort, and Hotton and with reconnaissance nearly to the Meuse, found its supply situation precarious as secondary roads deteriorated and Allied air pounded its trains. The weather as forecast by the enemy had prevented the Allied Air Forces from participating to any great extent in the battle until 23 December. On that date, however, the skies cleared and there commenced a tremendous air attack by combined tactical and strategic air forces. The full efforts of the Ninth and Eighth U.S. Air Forces, as well as the RAF Bomber Command, were being thrown against communication centers, supply lines, vital rail bridges, marshalling yards, and spearheads employed in the counteroffensive. Seventh Army had made no progress after 20 December and from 22 December onward began to lose ground in the face of Allied attacks from the south. The hourly increase of flank pressure required the commitment of the main reserves to stabilize the shoulders of the penetration rather than to reinforce the spearheads.

The attack had not reached the Meuse, and the offensive was therefore a failure. Admitting this, the German High Command was faced with the alternatives of withdrawing or defending in place. A withdrawal, although it would preserve considerable reserves for further defensive operations, had the disadvantage of permitting the Allies to regroup and resume planned offensive operations. On the other hand, if the gains could be defended, the High Command reasoned that Allied preoccupation with the Ardennes would limit their freedom of action in other areas.²⁶ Accordingly, orders were issued for a determined defense of ground won during the preceding ten days.²⁷

SECTION 2

ALLIED MEASURES TO MEET THE ATTACK

(Map No 7)

ALLIED SITUATION AT TIME OF ASSAULT

130. Dispositions. Throughout the fall, the Ardennes had been held lightly to permit the massing of forces farther north and south for the offensives in the Roer and the Saar. On 16 December a front of 75 miles was defended by two battle-worn and two untried divisions, backed by a new armored division. Such a disposition of forces was admittedly a calculated risk, but it was reasoned that, while the enemy might make a spoiling attack in this sector, he could not achieve decisive results before the Allies could apply adequate countermeasures.²⁸

131. Reaction. When the Germans struck on 16 December, operations along most of the front gave the attacks the appearance of a reconnaissance in force; in general, U.S. forces on the shoulders of the attack area held firm and only in the center was the defense unable to withstand the power of the German onslaught. Not until 17 December, after the enemy had employed paratroops in the Falkedy - Eupen area, and armored units had been definitely identified, was it apparent that the German thrust was powerful in nature and ambitious in design.²⁹ The immediate objective was obviously the Meuse,³⁰ with a consequent threat to the integrity of Allied forces north and northwest thereof.

Allied reaction was prompt. By 19 December three divisions from the First and Ninth U.S. Armies had been committed to stabilize the north shoulder of the penetration, one from Third U.S. Army had been committed on the south shoulder, and two airborne divisions (SHAEF reserves) had been placed directly in the path of the German drive.³¹ The combined British and American Air Forces were ready to launch powerful attacks against the enemy when the weather cleared.³²

At 12th Army Group Main Headquarters, Verdun, France, on 19 December, the Supreme Allied Commander met with the Commanders of the 6th and 12th Army Groups and of the Third U.S. Army and announced a coordinated plan for the entire Western Front.³³

THE PLAN TO STOP THE ATTACK AND RESTORE POSITIONS

132. Basic Decisions. The decisions announced at the 19 December conference were:³⁴

- a. To defend the front north and south of the Ardennes sector with minimum forces;
- b. To gather every possible reserve, and
- c. To launch counterattacks without delay against both flanks of the enemy penetration.

At the same time, it was announced that, aside from enforcing a delay, the German offensive had not changed the underlying strategic plan of the Allied Expeditionary Force. The objective was still the destruction of enemy forces west of the Rhine and north of the Moselle, and the crossing of the Rhine with the main effort north of the Ruhr.³⁵

C O N F I D E N T I A L

133. The Directive. On 20 December Supreme Headquarters translated the plan into orders by the issuance of an operational directive to major subordinate commanders.³⁶ In substance, it directed:

a. 6th Army Group:

- (1) To abandon its offensive operations, relieve Third U.S. Army westward to Saarlautern, exclusive, and defend in zone against any major hostile penetration.
- (2) Subject to securing essential lines of communication, to be prepared to yield ground rather than to endanger the integrity of its forces.

b. 12th Army Group:

- (1) To pass operational control of its units north of the enemy penetration, as well as responsibility for that area, to 21 Army Group.
- (2) To check within its area the enemy advance east of the House.
- (3) In conjunction with 21 Army Group, to launch a counter-offensive against the enemy salient.

c. 21 Army Group:

- (1) To check within its area the enemy advance east and south of the House, paying particular attention to securing the line of communications, Namur - Liege.
- (2) In conjunction with 12th Army Group, to launch a counteroffensive against the enemy salient.

134. Air Mission. The striking power of the Allied Tactical Air Forces, summoned from all fronts, was ordered to be employed in the immediate battle zone and against the enemy lines of communication west of the Rhine. The main effort of the Strategic Air Forces was diverted from the integrated program of the destruction of German industry and directed against marshalling yards east of the Rhine as well as road communication centers west thereof.³⁷

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THE COUNTERMEASURES

General Considerations

135. Immediate Action. To defeat and, if possible, turn to our advantage the German offensive, it was imperative that the Allied forces react with utmost speed. In consequence, plans for countermeasures had to be quickly formulated and promptly implemented. Since the enemy possessed the initiative in the area involved, Allied operations were dictated by necessity and plans were perforce flexible.

136. Delimitation of Attack. Before adequate countermeasures could be applied, it was essential that the westward momentum of the German attack be slowed. While this could be accomplished by the formation of a continuous front on the line of the Meuse, an equally effective and more immediate solution lay in holding firm on the shoulders, thus restricting German deployment to roads which were few in number and poor

in quality. The holding of the Elsenborn Ridge to the north and the general line Echternach - Bastogne to the south was therefore of primary importance.

137. Command. By 19 December, a deep salient had been driven between 12th Army Group forces north of the Ardennes and 12th Army Group forces south of that region. With 12th Army Group Tactical Headquarters located south and considerably east of the limit of penetration, it was considered that communication weaknesses made it impracticable for that headquarters to exercise proper command and coordination of the U.S. forces both north and south of the salient.³⁸ On the other hand, the integrity of the front north of the penetration and the location of 21 Army Group Headquarters made practical the passage of command of First and Ninth U.S. Armies to that unit. With the bulk of 21 Army Group's supply and command installations lying directly in the path of the German main effort, it had the most vital interest in the employment of First Army.

Ground Force Considerations

138. Enemy Situation. Before the enemy offensive, his strength in the West was estimated at 69 nominal or 40 equivalent divisions supported by 840 tanks.³⁹ The bulk of this strength, representing 39 nominal or 25 equivalent divisions and some 750 tanks, was on the 12th Army Group front.⁴⁰ Further reinforcement of the Western Front was limited by the necessary large-scale commitments in the East and in Italy, and by the difficulty of moving troops to the Ardennes area over the wrecked German transportation system. While perhaps 10 to 12 additional divisions might be made available, this would be the top figure.

In late November Allied intelligence had reported the assembly of the Sixth Panzer Army in the Cologne - Dusseldorf area. At the same time, despite Allied attacks toward the Ruhr, armored and armored-grenadier divisions were being replaced in the defense line by newly formed "people's grenadier" divisions. The Allies were aware that by December the Germans had built up a reserve force of some 10 armored or armored-grenadier divisions opposite the First and Ninth U.S. Armies.⁴¹ Meanwhile, it was known that Von Rundstedt had collected six infantry divisions and one armored division in the Eifel area east of the Ardennes - a considerably larger force than required for reasonable security.⁴² Thus, it was realized in early December that a powerful striking force had been amassed west of the Rhine between Dusseldorf and the Moselle.⁴³ The evaluation of this concentration of force, strengthened by interrogation reports, was that its purpose was to counter any Allied offensive from the Aachen area to the Rhine.⁴⁴

It was appreciated that the Germans could launch an attack into the Ardennes to divert Allied forces from the Roer or Saar-Palatinate fronts. However, despite the weakness of U.S. forces in this area, other considerations made such an attack appear improbable. An extremely deep penetration would be required before any worthwhile objective could be attempted and the German strength was believed inadequate for such a task. Moreover, it was considered unlikely that badly needed German reserves would be committed west of the Siegfried Line where they would be liable to destruction in open warfare by the superior forces the Allies could gather.

When the enemy finally directed his thrust into the Ardennes with approximately 14 infantry and 10 armored type divisions, the remainder of his forces was disposed behind strong obstacles that helped guarantee the integrity of his positions while the offensive was under

was. At this time his primary capability became the use of his uncommitted infantry and armor to strengthen and widen his penetration.⁴⁵ Other capabilities included:⁴⁶

- a. An attack in the north across the Meuse toward Antwerp.
- b. An attack southwest along the Meuse from Geilonkirchen toward Liege.
- c. An attack from Trier southwest out of the Saar - Moselle triangle, or from Saargomund south to join with an attack from the Colmar pocket.

Enemy morale was higher than at any time during the campaign.⁴⁷ The individual soldier had been propagandized into the belief that this was the opportunity to destroy enemy aspirations in the West and to save Germany from a two-front disaster.

139. Terrain. The rough, wooded tableland of the Ardennes in Eastern Belgium and Northern Luxembourg contained a fair primary but a poor secondary road net. Control of the limited road net was therefore a prerequisite to either a successful attack or defense. The principal ridge line runs from Bastogne northeast to St Vith while parallel to and north thereof lies the high ground of the Hoge Vonn. Elsewhere the terrain is broken and there are numerous small streams which become serious obstacles only during periods of heavy rain or thaw.

The Meuse River bordering the Ardennes on the west and north-west constituted the main obstacle to a German advance beyond the Ardennes and conversely provided the Allies with an excellent final defense line. To the east of the Ardennes lay the Siegfried Line against which the Allied advance had halted in September and which probably would mark the limit of counterattacks thrown against the German drive.

Winter had arrived on the entire Western Front and with it correspondingly greater difficulties to the prosecution of large operations. In the Ardennes, particularly, winter months normally were severe; the expected heavy snow would make infantry maneuver difficult and seriously limit tank movement.

140. Own Forces. When the German offensive began the three Allied army groups had 61 divisions, about a third of which were armored, disposed along the Western Front; the bulk of these forces were committed to the line. Allied strength was concentrated mainly on the Roer River front, east of Aachen, and on the Saar - Palatinate front. Along the Meuse - Moselle, in the Ardennes, and along the Upper Rhine, the line was weakly held.

Reserves available to Supreme Headquarters consisted of two airborne divisions in the Reims area, an armored division assembled at Le Havre and an airborne and a partially equipped armored division in England. To obtain the forces necessary to stop the German offensive and erase its gains, it was considered necessary to halt the offensive and gather every possible division for employment in the Ardennes.⁴⁸ However promising the 6th Army Group Palatinate offensive, it could not be counted upon to divert appreciable German strength from the Ardennes area. To the north, the Roer offensive awaited the capture of the Roer dams. With no clear cut opportunity to launch a completely successful spoiling attack in the north or south, the remaining solution was to hold with minimum forces in all other areas and commit all available units against the German salient. The thinning of other fronts was not a serious

risk since, with the greater part of all enemy reserves employed in the Ardennes and with the imminence of a Russian offensive holding eastern reserves in place, the Germans could not attack elsewhere in strength beyond that which 6th and 21 Army Groups could handle. It was also considered that by rushing out of his fixed Siegfried defenses the enemy had given us the opportunity to attack in the open and administer him a decisive defeat.⁴⁹

141. Logistical Factors. Except for army forward installations, there were no supply concentrations in immediate danger. The German attack was directed away from the Verdun - Etain supply area in the south; the Liege - Namur supply area would be seriously threatened only if the attack gained the Meuse River. Lines of communication to these areas were in no greater danger, giving reasonable assurance of an uninterrupted flow of supplies for the execution of the planned countermeasures. The rail lines in the south were convenient for the directional shift of Third U.S. Army since its support would continue to hinge on Verdun - Etain; in the north, where lines had been developed east and southeast from Antwerp for supply of both British and U.S. forces, there would be no serious complication to continuous support of such forces as might be shifted to the threatened areas.⁵⁰

The danger to First U.S. Army forward installations could be met by evacuation. However, the requirement for motor transport, coupled with the speed necessary in the shift of the Third U.S. Army axis of forward support and the demands for movement of major tactical units, would greatly exceed transport resources available to the armies. It would therefore be necessary to call heavily on rear area transport.⁵¹

The transfer of command of First and Ninth U.S. Armies from 12th to 21 Army Group had no effect on logistical control, since the former retained administrative responsibility for those armies.

Air Force Considerations

142. Enemy Situation. The careful husbanding of the German Air Force during the fall and the conversion of practically all aircraft productive capacity to fighter output made some 2,000 single-engine fighters available for operations on the Western Front and the strategic defense of the Reich.⁵² The intention of employing this strength to provide maximum cooperation to the German ground forces was clearly demonstrated during the first two days of the offensive when more than 500 daily sorties were flown in the assault area.⁵³

143. Weather. Many days during the remainder of December and January would be unsuitable for flying. It was evident that the Allied forces would have to make a maximum effort, regardless of maintenance and other factors, during spells of clear weather.

144. Own Forces. The necessity of destroying or blocking the enemy routes of communication into and within the battle area dictated the employment of the full weight of the Allied tactical air forces in the Ardennes and the enemy build-up area east to the Rhine. Consequently, three fighter bomber groups were transferred from the XXIX Tactical Air Command to the IX and XIX Tactical Air Commands operating in and east of the Ardennes salient. The destruction of 13 rail bridges ringing the eastern exit of the salient would push enemy railroads back to the Rhine. This task would be suitable for Ninth Air Force medium bombers.⁵⁴ To apply the maximum Allied air effort close to the battlefield it was considered advisable to divert the strategic bombers from oil and aircraft plants to road centers, bridges, marshalling yards, and forward fighter bases. Although such action would give essential German war production a breathing spell, the blocking of enemy movement and neutralization of the enemy air force outweighed, for the moment, all strategic air considerations.

ALLIED OPERATIONS TO 16 JANUARY

145. 12th Army Group. On 20 December Ninth U.S. Army and the units of First U.S. Army north of the enemy salient were placed under the operational control of 21 Army Group. Third U.S. Army stopped its Saar offensive, gave up a large portion of the Saar front to 5th Army Group, and rapidly concentrated two corps in the Luxembourg - Arlon area. Deciding that action could not be postponed until 21 Army Group should mount its attack, 12th Army Group on 22 December launched the Third Army attack north against the southern flank of the enemy penetration. On 25 December the left wing of the Army broke through to the garrison encircled in Bastogne. Thereafter, the enemy made a series of determined efforts to seize that communications center. Elsewhere, the Third Army made slow but steady progress against the combined difficulties of weather, terrain, and a stubborn defense. Fresh divisions gave new vigor to the attack on 9 January, and after a week's fighting, which inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, contact was made with First Army at Houffalize.

146. 21 Army Group. Prior to 26 December the force of the German offensive was directed against First U.S. Army on the north side of the salient. St. Vith was lost on 24 December and a withdrawal from Vielsalm ordered the following day. The XXX British Corps was placed in reserve in the Brussels area and First and Ninth U.S. Army divisions were shifted from the Rocq sector to bolster the defensive line on the north shoulder of the penetration. On 3 January the counterattack from the north, directed at Houffalize, was launched by First Army. Fighting the same combination of elements and enemy resistance as Third U.S. Army, the lines were slowly advanced until the forces converged at Houffalize on 16 January.

147. 6th Army Group. Seventh U.S. Army, which had nearly achieved a breakthrough of the Siegfried Line in the Palatinate, was halted and placed on the defensive on 20 December.⁵⁵ The defensive mission of 6th Army Group was to hold the line of the Vosges if heavy enemy pressure made withdrawal necessary. The French government opposed the evacuation of the Alsace east of the Vosges on the grounds that a withdrawal from the Strasbourg area without fighting would have a most unfavorable effect upon French morale,⁵⁶ and offered to provide several partially trained French divisions to aid in the defense of the Alsace province. After the German counteroffensive had been stalled, the Supreme Commander, recognizing that civil unrest in France would interfere with Allied lines of communication, directed 6th Army Group to defend Strasbourg as strongly as possible, consistent with the overriding necessity of maintaining the integrity of his forces.⁵⁷ On 1 January an anticipated German attack developed on the Seventh Army front. Some enemy penetrations were made during the confused fighting which lasted through 16 January, but after a withdrawal of U.S. forces to prepared positions along the Moder River, the German threat was terminated.

148. Air Forces. Throughout this period the Allied air arm concentrated its efforts in the Ardennes battle area. For five days, beginning 23 December, the weather was clear, permitting all available effort to be employed. Fighter bombers concentrated against enemy aircraft, armored spearheads, and supply lines. Medium and heavy bombers hit bridges and marshalling areas along the Rhine, bridges on the lines leading west from the Rhine, and key choke points in the road network. This combined effort had a great effect in turning the tide of battle, and by 16 January the strategic air arm was returned to its usual primary missions.

On 1 January, a large-scale attack on Allied tactical airfields failed in its objective. While the German attack succeeded in knocking out over 125 Allied aircraft on the ground, a number far too small to influence Allied tactical air operations, German losses on that day were more than 200 planes. German pilot losses in this operation were suf-

ficiently heavy to affect adversely the operations of the Luftwaffe during the remainder of the war.⁵⁸

SITUATION ON 16 JANUARY

149. German Situation. With the establishment of contact between the First and Third U.S. Armies at Houffalize, the main Battle of the Ardennes was concluded. Although the enemy still held gains considerably ahead of his 16 December line of departure, he was clearly attempting to withdraw his forces behind the Siegfried defenses as quickly as they could be extricated. His main preoccupation was to free the maximum of forces for recommitment on the Eastern Front to stem the Russian January offensive.

The Ardennes counteroffensive had failed to achieve any objective commensurate with the elaborate preparations and heavy losses it involved; having consumed the major portion of reserves in the West, it placed the German High Command in an awkward position to meet the Russian offensive, now in full swing, or future Anglo-American drives to the Rhine. It was estimated that in the month ending 16 January the enemy had suffered 120,000 casualties and lost 600 tanks and assault guns.⁵⁹ Equally severe were his air losses, aggregating about 1,600 planes.⁶⁰ The offensive had caused a serious reduction in enemy stocks and the state of his reserves precluded further offensive action on a scale comparable to the Ardennes.⁶¹ Possibly even more serious in the final analysis was the widespread disillusionment likely to ensue from the conspicuous failure of the counteroffensive.⁶²

150. Allied Situation. The German counteroffensive had succeeded in stopping the Allied attacks in the Roer and the Saar - Palatinat. In addition to the month of delay already enforced, it was estimated that a minimum of two weeks would be required for the necessary regrouping before the offensive to the Rhine north of the Ardennes could be resumed.⁶³ Allied lines were short of the 16 December positions in the Ardennes and on the Seventh U.S. Army front.⁶⁴

Allied divisions on the Western Front now totalled 72, including 20 armored and 4 airborne divisions (49 U.S., 15 British, 8 French). The main concentration was still in the Ardennes, with 31 divisions located in the area south of Eupen, Belgium, and north of Luxembourg City. Combat units were still under strength, but the flow of replacements to the Theater had increased and physically qualified men from non-combat units were being trained as infantrymen. Despite the heavy fighting, the morale of U.S. units was high and the British, having seen little fighting since late November, were rested.

The logistical position of the British forces remained substantially as at the beginning of the counteroffensive. Depot stocks were approaching target figures, railheads were well forward, the canal system of Belgium was in working order, motor routes were well developed, and stocks in army installations were ample.⁶⁵

First U.S. Army reserve stocks had been moved behind the Meuse and would require some shifting for resumption of offensive operations. Replacement of U.S. battle losses and readjustment of motor transport dislocated as a result of heavy troop movements and supply shifts, were the chief problems requiring immediate attention. Nevertheless, the return to normal procedure had begun and the logistical support of operations to close to the Rhine was still assured.⁶⁶

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Air Force losses in planes and personnel had been replaced. Tactical air forces were operating at their normal efficiency, and units were prepared for regrouping for the concentration of their effort on any chosen task. The strategic air arm, diverted to the battle area during the counteroffensive, had returned to its program of destruction of strategic targets in Germany.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

SECTION 3

ALLIED COUNTEROFFENSIVE

THE PLAN

151. The juncture of the First and Third U.S. Armies on 16 January had reestablished the integrity of the Allied front. At midnight 17 - 18 January, First Army reverted to control of 12th Army Group⁶⁷ and the Allied line took up the order in which it was ranged when the German counteroffensive opened. Having soundly defeated the enemy in the Ardennes and with the mounting Russian offensive claiming the major share of German attention, the opportunity of regaining the strategic initiative lay in the Allies' grasp. It was decided to launch strong offensives north of the Moselle, while remaining on the defensive elsewhere. As immediate measures SHAEF directed:⁶⁸

- a. 6th Army Group to remain generally on the defensive while conducting local operations to improve its position (particularly the reduction of the enemy-held Colmar pocket).
- b. 12th Army Group to continue its attacks to take advantage of the enemy's unfavorable position in the Ardennes and inflict the maximum losses on him, to seize any opportunity of breaching the Siegfried Line and, if successful, to advance northeast on the axis Prum - Buskirkchep. This attack was to be pressed with all possible vigor so long as a reasonable chance of securing decisive success existed.
- c. 21 Army Group, in conjunction with 12th Army Group, to complete plans and preparations for "Veritable" and "Grenade", operations designed to close to the Rhine north of Dusseldorf.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THE PLAN

General Considerations

152. The basic strategic plan remained unchanged, namely, to close to the Rhine north of Dusseldorf, and cross the river and envelop the Ruhr from the north.⁶⁹ The operational plans for the offensive, developed prior to the Ardennes battle, gave the main effort to 21 Army Group (including Ninth U.S. Army). 12th Army Group's mission was to protect Ninth Army's right flank by securing the line of the Erft River west and northwest of Cologne, and subsequently to clear the west bank of the Rhine north of the Moselle. Consequently, any gains made by the 12th Army Group in completing the Ardennes action would facilitate the accomplishment of its subsequent mission when the main effort was transferred to 21 Army Group. Furthermore, it would insure continued pressure on a beaten enemy during the period necessary for the regrouping of 21 Army Group.

Ground Force Considerations

153. Enemy Situation. Though they had maintained a cohesive front, the Germans were steadily withdrawing from the Ardennes in the face of Allied pressure. The armored forces already had been extricated from the battle area, and intelligence reported the movement of the Sixth Panzer Army to the Eastern Front (later verified). Indications were clear that the enemy planned to withdraw all committed forces to the security of the Siegfried Line and generally assume the defensive in the West while countering the critical situation on the Eastern Front. German

C O N F I D E N T I A L

attacks still were continuing in alsace but were diminishing in intensity daily.

Severe losses in personnel and equipment, depletion of supply stocks, and transportation and communication problems created by the damaging Allied air attacks had placed the enemy in a less favorable position to resist the Allied offensive than in November. Relentless pressure applied by the Allies from this point onward augured profitable results.

Fully aware that his retention of the Roer dams constituted a bar to the launching of the anticipated Roer offensive, the enemy was likely to defend this area with the greatest tenacity.

154. Terrain. At the Siegfried Line, the Ardennes blends into the topographically comparable German Eifel. Approaching the Rhine, the country levels off and, although still broken, is less restrictive of maneuver. The road net to and through the Eifel is adequate, improving from Prun northeastward. By January, all roads had been subjected to usage well above their designed capacities and were fast deteriorating -- a condition aggravated by Allied air strikes during the preceding month. The normal February thaw would further reduce road capacity.

155. Own Forces. In 6th and 12th Army Group areas, the main forces were opposite barriers which precluded the initiation of any successful offensives with the forces then at their disposal. In the Ardennes, however, where 26 U.S. divisions were concentrated, the Allied attack continued to gather momentum as the Germans accelerated their withdrawal, and continuation of pressure against the weakening enemy in this area obviously was desirable. To have ceased attacks with the juncture of the First and Third U.S. Armies on 16 January and initiated the large-scale troop movement necessary for the implementation of the planned 21 Army Group Rhine offensive would have given the enemy an undeserved respite.

It was considered that even in the face of continued ground and air attacks the enemy probably would extricate the bulk of his forces. However, it was felt that he would not be prepared for a strong defense of his Siegfried Line or rearward positions. The forces available to 12th Army Group and the constriction of the front as the Allied line straightened permitted the creation of local reserves. This, in turn, insured depth of attack and maintenance of vigor in the execution thereof. Although a preconceived plan for the closing to the Rhine existed, it was not inflexible; should the 12th Army Group attack breach the Siegfried Line in force and promise decisive success, the main effort could be changed to an exploitation of its gains. In any event, the offensive had the primary objective of capturing the important Roer dams and of holding considerable forces away from the projected zone of operations of 21 Army Group.

Despite the difficult conditions of battle and weather which characterized the Ardennes fighting, morale, heightened by the clear-cut victory, was good. Losses, though heavy, had been replaced by the preponderant allocation of reinforcements to First and Third U.S. Armies.

156. Air Force Considerations. Due to decreased enemy air activities, the tactical air forces could intensify their attacks against ground objectives. The minor regrouping of tactical units required could be accomplished with ease. Intensified air attacks on already depleted rail and motor transport would materially assist both offensive and defensive operations.

157. Logistical Factors. No special considerations were involved. The supply services had met the problems imposed by the German counter-offensive satisfactorily. The continuance of large tonnage unloadings at Antwerp and the development of rail lines away from that port made the supply outlook increasingly favorable. It was expected, however, that the February thaw would cause movement difficulties in the forward areas.⁷⁰

OPERATIONS TO 7 FEBRUARY

158. 12th Army Group. Following their junction, First and Third U.S. Armies pushed towards St Vith, which was captured by the former on 24 January.⁷¹ The offensive continued without pause towards the Siegfried Line and the Rhine with the main effort along the St Vith - Bonn axis.⁷² Third Army restored the Our River line and First Army pushed towards the Siegfried Line with a strong corps of armor and motorized infantry poised in reserve to exploit a breakthrough. On 7 February, with both Armies deep in the enemy's fortified zone, 12th Army Group, acting on SHAEF instructions, issued orders for a cessation of the offensive except for those attacks designed to capture the Roer dams.^{73, 74} With a pronounced thaw making large-scale troop movements difficult, transfer of divisions to 21 Army Group was initiated.

159. 6th Army Group. On 20 January the First French Army, reinforced by two U.S. divisions, launched an attack to eliminate the enemy-held Colmar pocket west of the Rhine. Meanwhile, Seventh U.S. Army executed a limited withdrawal to straighten its lines. The Colmar attack, prosecuted under unusually severe weather conditions, was successful and by 7 February Colmar had been captured and the salient all but eliminated.

160. 21 Army Group. During this period 21 Army Group closed its forces to the Roer River between Linnich and Roermond and continued planning and preparations for the subsequent advance to the Rhine.

SITUATION ON 7 FEBRUARY

161. The Ardennes campaign had ended and henceforth attention was to be centered to the north and south thereof. In the weeks which had passed since 16 December, the all-out German offensive had been met, stopped, and its gains erased while additional Allied advances had been made on the lower Roer and in the Colmar area. The Allied offensives had been delayed by about six weeks, but the cost to the enemy in loss of stocks and transport, impairment of communications, and weakening of defensive capabilities had been disproportionately severe. Events were to prove that he was never able to make an effective effort thereafter, either offensively or defensively.

With the collapse of the enemy's effort to seize the initiative, with full logistical support assured, and with overwhelming superiority in the air, the Allied Supreme Command was prepared to resume the offensive. Having decided that the 12th Army Group advance, despite its uncommitted power, would not guarantee a decisive victory west of the Rhine, all preparations were directed towards the speedy mounting of the campaign to close to the Rhine north of Dusseldorf.

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CHAPTER 4THE CROSSING OF THE RHINE AND ENVELOPMENT OF THE RUHR

(Map No 8)

SECTION 1THE PLANS ADOPTED FOR CROSSING THE RHINE AND ISOLATING THE RUHR

THE BASIC CONCEPT

162. As has been related in previous chapters, it was the Supreme Commander's intention to cross the Rhine and envelop the Ruhr, with the main effort on the north.¹ This intention was confirmed in a series of commander's conferences and staff discussions which took place both before and immediately following the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes.² The master concept of operations to cross the Rhine and envelop the Ruhr was developed thereafter in a series of component plans which covered three phases: closing to the Rhine, crossing the Rhine, and enveloping the Ruhr.

COMPONENT PLANS

163. Closing to the Rhine. Upon the conclusion of the Ardennes campaign, it was estimated that the Allies had no marked superiority over the Germans in ground force strength. To free the maximum number of divisions for offensive operations, therefore, it was considered essential to establish the remainder of the Allied forces along key terrain features that could be defended strongly by comparatively few troops. Obviously, the Rhine would be the most effective barrier which could be turned to the advantage of the Allies for this purpose. Consequently, in summarizing on 20 January his plans for advancing into Germany, the Supreme Commander announced the intention to close his forces to the Rhine along its length before advancing east of the river. At most, the enemy would be permitted to retain west of the Rhine only small bridgeheads incapable of supporting a major counter stroke against the Allies.³ The following steps were visualized for the accomplishment of this task:

a. The initial attack was to be made by 21 Army Group, with Ninth U.S. Army under its operational control. While the Second British Army exerted pressure frontally in the center, the First Canadian Army on the left was to sweep in a southeasterly arc between the Meas and the Rhine River from the vicinity of Nijmegen to the Geldern - Xanten area (Operation Veritable).⁴ This drive was to be complemented by a Ninth Army advance on the right in a northeastward direction across the Roer River to meet the Canadian forces at Niers and to close along the Rhine from Dusseldorf to Wesel (operation Grenade).⁵

b. At the same time, 12th Army Group was to secure the Roer dams and attack on its left across the Roer River to protect 21 Army Group's south flank during the Grenade advance. Throughout the remainder of its front, 12th Army Group was to assume an aggressive defense generally along the existing front line.⁶ Upon the completion of 21 Army Group's advance to the Rhine, 12th Army Group was to resume the offensive and, with the means then available, to close to the Rhine in

its zone north of the Moselle (Operation Lumberjack).⁷

c. While the Army Groups to the north were successively engaged in offensives to close to the Rhine, 6th Army Group was to remain generally on the defensive. As the final stage of the Allied advance to the Rhine, 6th Army Group was to close thereafter to the river south of the Moselle (Operation Undertone).⁸

164. Crossing the Rhine. a. In keeping with the intention to make the main effort north of the Ruhr, plans were made for an assault crossing of the Rhine by 21 Army Group, with Ninth U.S. Army under its operational control, in the Wesel - Emmerich area (Operation Plunder).⁹ Airborne forces, dropping behind the enemy positions on the east bank of the river, were to assist the ground assault forces (Operation Varsity).¹⁰

It was intended that this operation should be carried out with the maximum possible strength that could be supported logistically. To reinforce 21 Army Group, the Supreme Commander directed that 12th Army Group be prepared to build up Ninth U.S. Army to a strength of 12 divisions.¹¹

b. It was also proposed that 12th Army Group contribute forces to 6th Army Group in order to accelerate its advance across the Palatinate. In these circumstances, 12th Army Group would likely be limited to containing Cologne and Bonn, possibly crossing the Rhine in that area after the enemy in its front had been forced to withdraw because of developments in the north and south.¹²

c. With regard to the employment of 6th Army Group during this period, it was visualized that the creation of a threat to the Frankfurt industrial area would form a useful diversion in support of 21 Army Group's assault across the Rhine.¹³ General Eisenhower considered that by restricting Allied action between the Ruhr and the Swiss frontier to the defensive in all but the Saar area, it would be possible to make this demonstration strong enough to constitute the beginning of an Allied secondary effort.¹⁴

165. Enveloping the Ruhr. Prior to the Ardennes operation, a proposal had been made that the Ruhr be isolated by a double envelopment with the main effort (21 Army Group and Ninth U.S. Army) along the northern edge of this area and a complementary advance by First U.S. Army along the general axis Cologne - Hamm.¹⁵ The Supreme Commander's staff suggested in late December that the Ruhr be isolated by complementing the northern drive with air action to disrupt the southern and eastern exits of the Ruhr.¹⁶ However, General Eisenhower indicated his hope that it might be possible to carry out a double envelopment with a wider sweep in the south along the natural corridor Frankfurt - Kassel. This maneuver would circumvent the rugged terrain east of Cologne and would be a speedier means of accomplishing the complete isolation of the Ruhr.¹⁷ Since a definite commitment would have to await an estimate of the situation closer to the time for initiating operations east of the Rhine, no decision was made at this stage of the planning.

166. Summary. The master plan and component schemes of maneuver reviewed above thus contemplated:

a. A strong effort across the Rhine and north of the Ruhr by 21 Army Group, with the reinforced Ninth U.S. Army under its operational control.

b. A diversionary effort in the Saar to threaten the Frankfurt area, by 6th Army Group, which would also be reinforced with forces drawn from the central front.

c. Containing action and feints along the west bank of the Rhine by 12th Army Group.

d. Subsequent operations, east of the Rhine, as determined by developments. An assault crossing in the Mannheim - Mainz area and an advance up the Frankfurt corridor, if possible, would be welcome contributions to the success of the main effort in the north.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THE PLANS

Ground Force Considerations

167. Enemy Situation. The strength of the German forces opposing the Allies had been reduced by recent developments. The Ardennes Campaign had cost the enemy 120,000 men and much materiel.¹⁸ Relying again upon the defensive value of the Siegfried Line, the German High Command had thereafter transferred 15 divisions to the Eastern Front, including the Sixth Panzer Army.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the German situation with regard to ground forces was still a cause for concern on the part of the Supreme Commander. In late January, the 71 divisions of the Allies were confronted by 80 German divisions. Although many of the latter were seriously depleted in both men and materiel, the enemy's combat strength was not considered markedly inferior to that of the Allies. Moreover, should the Russian winter offensive weaken and the Germans carry out a partial withdrawal from Northern Italy, an additional 20 enemy divisions might be diverted to the Western Front. These possibilities could not be ignored.²⁰

168. Terrain. Consideration of the several natural obstacles facing the Allies at this time supported the plan to make the strong effort on the north.

a. Before emerging into the Cologne plain, First U.S. Army would be required to clear the dense Hurtgen Forest and to seize the Roer River dams. While these reservoirs remained in German hands, the possibility of artificially created floods would deter any Allied advance across the Roer Valley. Third U.S. Army and 6th Army Group were still engaged in the Siegfried positions; the former would have subsequently to negotiate the difficult terrain extending to the Rhine along its front, the latter still would be separated from the Middle Rhine by the broad expanse of the Palatinate. Despite the industrial and built-up sections which were to be found in the north, this area seemed best suited for immediate exploitation.

b. East of the Rhine, the North German Plain was considered to offer the terrain best suited for resumption of the mobile-type warfare which favored the Allies. It was recognized that the region embraced an intricate drainage system which, by timely demolition of dikes and bridges, the enemy could use to slow an Allied advance. A rapid drive by the Allies, however, might deny to the Germans this capability. It was felt, moreover, that the network of highways which served the North German Plain would provide greater freedom of maneuver than that offered by the narrow corridor leading northeast from Frankfurt, the only other natural route of advance into Central Germany.²¹

c. It was nevertheless apparent that a strong secondary effort in the Frankfurt area would be desirable.²² With the Saar overrun by the Allies, this region would constitute an industrial zone second in importance in Western Germany only to the Ruhr. Allied thrusts in that direction would pin down enemy forces which might otherwise be shifted northward to strengthen the Ruhr defenses. In trying to hold both vital regions, the enemy would expose himself to possible defeat in detail, since the rugged terrain separating the two areas tended to isolate them from each other.

169. Own Forces. In January, when plans were being prepared in detail, the Allied forces amounted to 71 divisions, of which several were understrength as a result of the Ardennes Campaign. This figure would rise to 85 in March, including six airborne divisions.²³

The German onslaught in the Ardennes and the Allied counter-action had affected primarily 12th Army Group. However, 6th Army Group had been reduced in effectiveness by transfer of forces to the affected area and by the extension of its zone northward.²⁴ While 21 Army Group had diverted the efforts of Ninth U.S. Army and a reinforced corps of five divisions to oppose the German drive, the Group as a whole had been less arduously employed during December than the two U.S. Army Groups. It was considered, therefore, to be the logical force to undertake the next major Allied effort.

170. Logistical Factors. Rail capacity and the overall availability of supplies, including ammunition, had steadily improved. Railheads in the north, were close behind the front lines and not far distant from the Rhine River; rehabilitation had progressed so well that little time would be required to extend lines to the Rhine when the areas were cleared.²⁵ Railheads in the center and the south were also close behind the front lines but still at considerable distance from the Rhine River; the rehabilitation of the rail lines through the general area of Saarbrücken to the Rhine would require some time.²⁶

The support of an advance east of the Rhine to any appreciable distance with large forces would require rail operations east of the Rhine River and rail crossings over the Rhine. Since construction facilities and equipment were limited, the crossings and main lines had to be selected so as best to support the operations and priorities established. Such crossings and lines for the encirclement of the Ruhr were obviously those in the north running east from Wesel and those in the south through Frankfurt, permitting a junction through Kassel. Pending the placing into operation of rail lines across and east of the Rhine, the extent of the advance would depend upon the availability of motor and air transport.²⁷

Air Force Considerations

171. Enemy Situation. The continuous Allied effort against the enemy's production of fighter aircraft and fuel was showing its effect. In addition, it was believed that a part of the remaining German fighter strength had recently been shifted to the Eastern Front. Some of his new jet planes would continue to operate in the West but the superiority of the Allies was considered incontestable.²⁸

172. Own Forces. Air force dispositions would permit a greater tactical air effort in the north than in the south. To strengthen an effort in the south, additional airfields would have to be developed around Metz to accommodate Ninth U.S. Air Force groups currently based north of the Ardennes.²⁹

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Air operations had progressed so favorably that it appeared that a portion of both the strategic and tactical air effort could be directed toward an operation which, by cutting rail lines, would isolate the Ruhr from the remainder of Germany. There existed a series of 17 rail bridges in an arc through Bremen, the lower Weser, Minden, thence Neuwied above Koblenz, which tied in with the rail bridge interdiction line of the Eifel. Although the results of this operation would primarily affect the enemy's economy, a telling by-product would be to reduce his ability to move men and supplies to and from the battle area.³⁰

SECTION 2

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION NORTH OF THE MOSELLE

RESUMPTION OF THE OFFENSIVE³¹

173. In compliance with the Supreme Commander's directive, 21 Army Group launched on 8 February its attack to close to the Rhine. On that day also, First U.S. Army resumed its drive through the Hurtgen Forest. Third U.S. Army continued to probe into the Siegfried defenses east of Luxembourg. On 23 February First and Ninth Armies launched a crossing of the Roer.

On 28 February, Ninth U.S. Army, under operational control of 21 Army Group,³² broke clear of the Roer bridgehead and turning northward on 2 March met the Second British Army at Venlo. First Army captured Cologne on 8 March and Bonn on the 10th, while Third U.S. Army closed to the Rhine in its zone north of the Moselle and prepared to seize Koblenz.

PLAN MODIFIED TO EXPLOIT REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD

174. The outstanding event of the Rhineland campaign occurred on 8 March when a First U.S. Army spearhead, capitalizing on the enemy's failure to destroy the Remagen Bridge, seized the structure and established a bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine. On the following day, the Supreme Commander authorized the commitment of five divisions to the bridgehead and directed General Bradley to secure and develop the position with a view to making an early advance from it to the southeast.³³

FACTORS INFLUENCING MODIFICATION OF THE PLAN

Ground Force Considerations

175. Enemy Situation. The unexpected crossing of Germany's traditional inner moat was a serious blow to both the military and civilian elements of the Reich. To capitalize upon this stroke of fortune, it was essential to allow the enemy no pause for recovery. Bold risks were justified.

In the immediate tactical situation, the seizure of a bridgehead at Remagen assisted not only 12th Army Group but the other Army Groups as well. The enemy promptly threw the bulk of his remaining mobile reserves against what was obviously a grave danger,³⁴ thus reducing the scale of opposition that he might otherwise have employed against 21 Army Group's Operation Plunder. In the Palatinate, a protracted stand against 6th Army Group seemed doubtful as it became apparent that further penetration of inner Germany by the Allies would make the enemy's position in the Palatinate ineffective as well as precarious.³⁵

176. Terrain. Despite the fact that the Remagen bridgehead was surrounded by hill masses, its eventual expansion to the Cologne - Frankfurt autobahn would restore to First U.S. Army forces a considerable measure of mobility. If First Army could then drive southward along the autobahn towards Wiesbaden, it would roll back enemy defenses

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along the east bank of the Rhine and assist further crossings between Koblenz and Mainz. This, in turn, would accelerate an Allied advance up the Frankfurt - Kassel corridor to effect the southern envelopment of the Ruhr.³⁶

177. Logistical Factors. The plan contemplated logistical support along the general rail lines: Antwerp - Nijmegen - Osnabruck; Liege - Wesel - Munster; Verdun and Nancy - Saarbrucken - Mainz - Frankfurt; Epinal - Mannheim - Frankfurt; with the probable heavy load in the north.³⁷ The capture of the Remagen bridge caused a reconsideration of possible early rail support of forces intended for action south of the Ruhr. If the crossings of the Rhine south of the Moselle River were delayed by increased enemy resistance and large forces were poured through the Remagen bridgehead, it would be necessary to develop rail lines leading from the northwest for the First U.S. Army and from the southwest for the Third U.S. Army to the Remagen bridge, and from that bridge to the east and southeast. The lines themselves did not offer great capacity and did not traverse the shortest route, but if they could be rehabilitated quickly enough they would greatly assist progress east of the Rhine until the routes through Mainz were opened.³⁸

SECTION 3DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION SOUTH OF THE MOSELLE

THIRD U.S. ARMY MISSION ENLARGED

178. It had been planned that, upon completion of operations north of the Moselle, 6th Army Group would be given strong logistical support and would force its way to the Rhine south of the Moselle, prepared to take advantage of any opportunity to cross in the Mannheim - Mainz area. Third U.S. Army's rapid advance to Koblenz suggested a further strengthening of the plan: concurrently with 6th Army Group's attack through the Siegfried Line defenses in the vicinity of Saarbrücken, Third Army would thrust southeastward across the Moselle to disorganize the enemy in rear of the Siegfried Line and to array itself as a left wall along 6th Army Group's corridor of advance.³⁹

DEPARTURE FROM PLAN

179. Partly as a result of the demoralization caused by the capture of the Remagen bridge and because the enemy possessed no reserve forces to meet this new thrust, Third U.S. Army's attack across the Moselle, launched on 13 - 14 March, achieved marked success. Enemy resistance was particularly ineffective south of Koblenz, and armored forces of Third Army advanced rapidly southeastward across the rugged Hunsrück region into Bad Kreuznach on 16 March.

The 6th Army Group attack, which began on 16 March, was making slow progress through the easily defended Siegfried positions east of Saarbrücken as Third U.S. Army's columns poised for a dash to the Rhine near Mainz. To take advantage of this situation, the boundary between 12th and 6th Army Groups was temporarily shifted southward to permit Third Army to continue its drive.⁴⁰ Third Army forces immediately pressed forward and, at Oppenheim on 22 March, made the first Allied assault crossing of the Rhine. On 25 March, Third Army forces made two additional crossings in the Oberwesel - Boppard area. Thus assisted, 6th Army Group broke through the obstacles in its zone and crossed the Rhine near Worms on 26 March.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEPARTURE FROM PLAN

Ground Force Considerations

180. Enemy Situation. While the Allied forces were closing to the Rhine north of the Moselle, reports indicated that the enemy had been forced to dispose his remaining forces in the south as a thin crust along the Moselle from Koblenz to the vicinity of Trier, thence along the general line Saarlautern - Hagenau. His losses in the north had been so great that he now had no reserves with which to provide depth to these defenses. Moreover, the units that had been disposed along the perimeter were almost completely immobilized by lack of transport and fuel. Thus, an Allied breakthrough anywhere along the enemy's line would render untenable his entire position in the Palatinate.⁴¹

181. Terrain. Although terrain features in the Palatinate would favor the enemy initially, the area subsequently would constitute a

grave problem for him. The highlands along the southern bank of the Moselle and the Siegfried defenses which extended from Trier to the Rhine near Hagenau provided excellent defensive features. In this respect, however, the region conformed to the enemy's own disposition of forces; there was no depth. The broad expanse of the Saar basin behind these obstacles would favor the highly mobile Allies, and the Rhine would assist them in trapping the enemy.

182. Logistical Factors. The provision of logistical support for breakthrough operations south of the Moselle, over long, almost unguarded motor routes, would be a major undertaking. As had been seen during the drive across France, however, rapid advances required a minimum of ammunition expenditure and thus eased to some extent the very supply problem which they created. The importance of sustaining the speed of operations at this time was considered to justify the transfer of additional truck transport from the Communications Zone to the armies, despite its effect upon Communications Zone activities. 42

SECTION 4

DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONS TO ENVELOP THE RUHR

MAXIMUM STRENGTH PROPOSED NORTH OF RUHR

183. After 8 February, when the Allies resumed the offensive, the situation along the entire Western Front developed so rapidly as to make impracticable the preparation of detailed plans for operations east of the Rhine. However, the general premise that the Ruhr should be enveloped on the north had already been established⁴³ and it had been possible in early January to consider more precisely the scale of effort which should be applied to this main drive. An examination of the logistical situation indicated that a total of 36 divisions could eventually be supported through the northern bridgehead.⁴⁴ Accordingly, on 13 March, 12th Army Group was directed, while continuing to exploit the Remagen bridgehead, to be prepared to employ First U.S. Army in strength of not less than ten divisions north of the Ruhr. The initiation date for such employment was indicated to be 15 April.⁴⁵

DECISION TO MAKE STRONG DRIVE SOUTH OF RUHR

184. On the night of 23 - 24 March, Ninth U.S. Army and Second British Army crossed the Rhine River in the vicinity of Wesel. In conjunction with this operation, on the following morning an airborne drop was made by one U.S. and one British division farther east of the Rhine. In the south, meanwhile, the speed of the Allied operations caught the enemy completely unprepared to defend east of the Rhine. Third U.S. Army, having crossed the Rhine on 22 March, seized two bridges intact over the Main River on 26 March as First U.S. Army, with nine divisions in the Remagen bridgehead, broke two columns out of that area. On the same date, it will be recalled, 6th Army Group crossed the Rhine in the vicinity of Worms.

On 28 March, First and Third U.S. Armies were directed to continue abreast up the Frankfurt - Kassel corridor, the former to make contact with 21 Army Group forces in the Paderborn area.⁴⁶ The effect of this decision was to shift the emphasis of the Allied offensive from the north to the center of the front.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHANGE OF EMPHASIS TO SOUTH OF RUHR

Ground and Air Force Considerations

185. General Situation. Along the central front, the enemy had been bewildered by Third U.S. Army's swift advance, uninterrupted from the moment of its inception along the Moselle. When First U.S. Army broke forth from the Remagen bridgehead, Third Army crossed the Main River and 6th Army Group gained the east bank of the Rhine opposite Worms, a disintegration of enemy forces similar to that witnessed in Western France began to take place.⁴⁷ It was possible that a deep penetration in this area might cause a similar weakening among the enemy forces still opposing 21 Army Group.

Sufficient tactical air effort could be maintained in front of the Third U.S. Army by rapid forward displacement of fighter-bomber and reconnaissance groups to rehabilitated captured enemy airfields in the vicinity of Frankfurt and thence northeastward.

By 24 March rail isolation of the Ruhr had become an accomplished fact. One or more spans were down on 14 of the main lines of interdiction bridges and two backup bridges, while tracks were cut at the other three main lines of interdiction bridges. By the same date, 20 out of 25 marshalling yards on the periphery of the Ruhr had been so heavily damaged as to prevent either through running or marshalling. Photo reconnaissance revealed that traffic in the Ruhr itself was to all intents and purposes at a standstill.⁴⁸

186. Terrain. In the north, extensive demolition of the many water courses which laced the Westphalian plain was causing delay and giving the enemy frequent opportunity to reform and fight. This condition did not exist in the Frankfurt - Kassel corridor, which was found to offer excellent highways for fast-moving armor and motorized infantry.

187. Logistical Factors. The collapse of the Remagen bridge and the early crossings of the Rhine in the south by the Third U.S. Army and the 6th Army Group relieved any necessity for development of main rail lines through Remagen, and permitted following the original planned axes of supply, except for limited use of subsidiary rail lines on both sides of the Rhine for the support of the First U.S. Army.⁴⁹ Arrangements had been made for the transfer of more truck transportation from the Communications Zone to the Armies for the advance east of the Rhine, and it was estimated that, with favorable conditions for air supply, logistical support could be given to the operations to include at least the encirclement of the Ruhr. The sacrifice of the logistical effort of the Communications Zone and of British supply build-up at this time was considered justified in view of the probably great, immediate operational gains.⁵⁰

COMPLETION OF THE ENVELOPMENT

188. In compliance with the directive of 28 March, 12th Army Group forces advanced rapidly northeastward from the Frankfurt - Giessen area. While Third U.S. Army branched eastward below Kassel to follow the autobahn toward Eisenach, First U.S. Army drove through the Hessian hills to capture Paderborn and to contact armor of the Ninth U.S. Army (still under operational control of 21 Army Group) at Lippstadt on 1 April. This junction formed the huge Ruhr pocket in which Army Group "B" was trapped, and from which 325,000 prisoners were shortly to be taken.

On 30 March the Fifteenth U.S. Army, under command of Lieutenant General Leonard T. Gerow, was ordered to relieve First, Third, and Ninth U.S. Armies of their occupational responsibilities in Germany west of the Rhine and to take over the defense of the area along that river line.

Thus, on 1 April, the Allied front extended generally in a wide arc based on the Rhine at Emmerich in the north and Mannheim in the south. Along this arc, the important cities of Munster, Kassel, Eisenach, and Wurzburg were immediately threatened by the Allied advance.

CHAPTER 4

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CHAPTER 5

ADVANCE TO MEET THE SOVIET FORCES

(Map No 9)

SECTION 1

ADVANCE TO LINE OF ELBE AND MULDE RIVERS

FINAL OBJECTIVE IN SIGHT

189. The encirclement of the Ruhr, isolating the industrial heart of Germany, set the stage for the accomplishment of the final objective assigned the Supreme Commander by the Combined Chiefs of Staff -- the destruction of the German armed forces.¹ However, rapid action still was necessary to destroy the disorganized enemy armies.²

PLAN FOR THE ADVANCE

190. The Plan adopted to accomplish the further division of the enemy provided for a powerful thrust eastward on the axis Kassel - Leipzig to split Germany in half and make contact with the Soviet Army.³

a. 6th Army Group was directed:

- (1) To protect the right flank of the main thrust as far as Bayreuth.
- (2) To be prepared to attack on the axis Nurnberg - Regensburg - Linz.

b. 12th Army Group, including the Ninth U.S. Army, was directed:

- (1) To destroy the enemy forces encircled in the Ruhr.
- (2) To launch the main Allied attack on the axis Kassel - Leipzig.
- (3) To be prepared to carry out operations beyond the Elbe River.

c. 21 Army Group was directed:

- (1) To continue its advance to the Leine River and Bremen.
- (2) To launch, thereafter, a thrust to the Elbe River.
- (3) To be prepared to carry out operations east of the Elbe River.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOPTION OF PLAN

General Considerations

191. It long had been recognized that the formulation of a definite plan for the advance to the east after the capture of the Ruhr would have to await an examination of the situation existing at that time.⁴ The Allied armies now were advancing east of the Rhine on a broad front, and the Supreme Commander was afforded an opportunity to deliver a final crushing drive along any or all of three routes.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

- a. An advance south, down the Danube Valley, would:
- (1) Isolate the "National Redoubt", a highland region in lower Bavaria and Austria that was reported to have been developed as the final refuge for the Nazi government.⁵
 - (2) Lead to a junction with the Soviets in Austria.⁶
- b. A central drive on the Kassel - Leipzig axis would:
- (1) Capture the last important German industrial area (Leipzig - Chemnitz).
 - (2) Split Germany in half by meeting the Soviet main effort.
 - (3) Retain the flexibility necessary to reinforce rapidly the advance in the south or north, or both, depending on the development of the situation.⁷
- c. An advance across the North German plains would:
- (1) Secure the German ports.
 - (2) Cut off Holland, Denmark, and Norway from Germany.⁸

Berlin could be reached by either the central or northern route but, aside from the psychological effect that its capture would have upon the German people,⁹ it no longer was considered an important strategic objective. The effects of the Allied strategic bombing had nullified Berlin's industrial value; the movement of governmental ministries to the Erfurt - Leipzig area already had been reported; and the early capture of the city by the Soviet Army was probable.¹⁰

If German resistance were to continue to disintegrate, simultaneous Allied drives against each of the strategic areas might achieve the desired results, but it was believed that the war could be shortened by concentrating on a single, powerful drive.¹¹

Ground Force Considerations

192. Enemy Forces. A gaping hole had been created in the center of the German Front by the encirclement of the whole of Army Group "B" and two corps of Army Group "H" in the Ruhr.¹² Against the 6th Army Group, the German First and Nineteenth Armies were offering some resistance to the Allied advance, and, in the north, the German First Parachute Army still maintained a fairly unified front. The rapid exploitation by the Allied forces had disrupted enemy communications almost completely, and Kesselring, who had been brought hurriedly from Italy to replace Von Rundstedt, found it practically impossible to exercise unified control over his scattered forces. Enemy morale was extremely low, and the Germans had lost an average of 10,000 prisoners per day during March.¹³ It appeared that the enemy's only chance for prolonging resistance lay in retreating into the National Redoubt in the Alps and in holding out in Denmark, Norway, and Western Holland.

193. Terrain. The terrain between Kassel and Leipzig offered no major river obstacle and was a plateau suitable for the rapid movement of armored columns. In contrast, the North German plain was intersected by many waterways, and the ground tended to be wet and boggy in the

spring. Rapid movement was the essence of the Allied plan and, if the Germans continued their usual practice of bridge destruction, it would be better to advance across the headwaters of the rivers rather than their lower reaches.¹⁴

194. Own Forces. The destruction of large German forces west of the Rhine followed by the rapid build-up of Allied forces east of the Rhine gave the Allies everywhere a superiority over the Germans facing them. The Allied armies were so disposed that a strong drive could be made along any of the three routes under consideration with a minimum of regrouping. It was in the center, however, as a result of the parallel drives of First and Third U.S. Armies up the Frankfurt - Kassel corridor, that strong forces were in the best position to exploit the Allied successes by driving eastward through the gap in the German lines. It was also the center which could most quickly be reinforced by divisions as they were progressively released from the operations in the Ruhr. It was believed advisable to return Ninth U.S. Army to the operational control of 12th Army Group in order to place all of the forces engaged in clearing the Ruhr under one army group commander and thereby put him in the best position to determine when the situation in the Ruhr would permit releasing forces from that operation to augment the drive to the east.¹⁵

195. Logistical Factors. Allied advances had been so rapid and so extensive that rail development had been outdistanced, and transport in forward areas was again the primary logistical problem. Although ample port capacities were provided by the principal ports of Marseilles, Cherbourg, Le Havre, Rouen, and Antwerp, the rehabilitation and development of railroads had resulted in adequate rail capacities forward only to the general line Karlsruhe - Saarbrücken - Trier - München Gladbach. East of this line, logistical support initially was dependent entirely upon air and truck transport. Although completion of rail facilities across the Rhine at Mainz and Wesel was imminent and lines were being repaired east of the Rhine in the direction of Frankfurt, Hünster, and Osnabrück, rail and railhead capacity would be very limited before 15 April. Until this time no heavy supply concentrations would be possible east of the Rhine. Meanwhile, it would be possible successfully to support the advancing armies against light resistance by strict economy and the judicious employment of the available motor transport. Every effort would have to be directed toward the continuing extension of rail lines in order to release progressively the maximum amount of motor transport for use in forward areas.¹⁶

Air Force Considerations.

196. Enemy Situation. By this time the German Air Force was capable of very little in the way of offensive action.¹⁷ Allied strategic bombers had neutralized the threat of German jet aircraft by smashing the long runways required for the operation of these planes. Lack of fuel was keeping the bulk of the enemy's standard aircraft grounded. The loss of almost half the airfields in Germany resulted in greater congestion on the available fields and in consequence greater losses from Allied air attacks.¹⁸

197. Own Forces. Allied air superiority was now so great that enemy opposition to tactical air operations, which were being reduced owing to lack of suitable targets, was negligible.¹⁹ Transport aircraft were able to carry out supply and evacuation missions to forward areas with a high degree of safety.

Naval Considerations.

198. Allied naval superiority was so great as to render unimportant

the threat to our supply lines across the Channel and, although some U-boat and E-boat activity was still possible so long as the enemy bases in Norway, Denmark, Northern Germany, and Western Holland remained in German hands, this was not considered serious.²⁰

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS TO 15 APRIL

199. Executed as Planned. The plan for advancing rapidly to the Mulde and Elbe Rivers was successfully carried out without modification.

200. In the South. The 6th Army Group advanced rapidly and the Seventh U.S. Army occupied Schweinfurt on 11 April. On the next day Würzburg and Heilbronn fell, and the advance, conforming to that of Third U.S. Army, continued toward Nurnberg. The First French Army met stiff resistance at first, but broke through to capture Karlsruhe on the 5th and Baden-Baden on the 13th. Kohl, across the Rhine from Strasbourg, was captured on 15 April, and the Germans started to withdraw to the east in the Black Forest.

201. In the Center. At midnight 3 - 4 April, the Ninth U.S. Army reverted to 12th Army Group, and the task of clearing the entire Ruhr pocket became the responsibility of the 12th Army Group commander.²¹ While the Fifteenth U.S. Army held the west bank of the Rhine, the First and Ninth U.S. Armies attacked the pocket and initially met stiff resistance. Signs of disintegration soon appeared, and on 15 April the encircled enemy forces were cut in two at Hagen. Three days later all resistance collapsed, and 325,000 prisoners, together with immense quantities of supplies, were captured.

Meanwhile, the advance to the east was never halted, and as troops were pinched out during the compression of the Ruhr pocket they joined the main drive of 12th Army Group. Paderborn was cleared on 2 April and Kassel on 4 April, after a sharp fight. Third U.S. Army troops cleared Erfurt, Weimar, and Jena by 13 April and two days later reached the outskirts of Chemnitz. Other Third Army units meanwhile advanced through Neustadt and Bayreuth and were approaching the Czechoslovakian border by 15 April. First U.S. Army advanced rapidly eastward against disorganized and scattered resistance, reached Dessau at the junction of the Elbe and Mulde Rivers on 14 April, and arrived at the Mulde River, southeast of Leipzig on the following day. On the left, Ninth U.S. Army captured Hanover and Brunswick and on 11 April broke through to the Elbe near Magdeburg. Four days later a secure bridgehead had been established over the Elbe at Barby south of Magdeburg, and Ninth Army units were along the river as far north as Witttenborg. The rapid advance to the Elbe south of the Harz Mountains by First Army and north of that area by Ninth Army virtually encircled large German forces including reinforcements brought hurriedly from the Eastern Front.

As the central drive gained momentum, and as word of the rapid advance of the Soviet armies in the center reached the Supreme Commander, direct liaison with the Soviet High Command, which had been so successful in coordinating earlier strategic plans,²² was again instituted to arrange the junction between the forces.²³

202. In the North. The First Canadian Army reached the sea in Northern Holland on 15 April, thus completing the isolation of Western Holland. With the capture of Arnhem on the same day, the Twenty-Fifth German Army fell back into "Fortress Holland", behind the protective

C O N F I D E N T I A L

barriers of the easily-inundated river valleys between the Neder Rijn and the Zuider Zee. More resistance was met by the Second British Army, but it advanced steadily, and by 15 April elements had reached Uelzen, advanced to the Weser River just south of Bremen, and established two bridgeheads across the Aller River farther south.

203. Logistical Developments. To support the troops encircling the Ruhr and at the same time to maintain the forces advancing east, southeast, and northeast had required full exploitation of all logistical facilities. Additional truck companies from rear areas were shifted forward to meet the demands for moving troops long distances and keeping them supplied. Administrative airfields were progressively developed in forward areas and a daily average of 500 transport planes were used for supply and evacuation. Air cargo from 5 April to 9 May included more than 9,000,000 gallons of gasoline to forward areas; on return trips over 100,000 allied prisoners of war were evacuated. This was an immense contribution to overburdened surface transport and permitted advances at a speed which would not otherwise have been possible.

The status of supplies in the rear remained satisfactory during the period, due to the prior balanced build-up. Small army reserves, particularly of Class I and III supplies, were moved forward to maintain the daily flow.²⁴

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

SECTION 2

CONCLUSION OF THE CAMPAIGN

DEFEAT IN DETAIL ENVISAGED

204. Contact with the Soviet armies approaching the Leipzig area was expected at any time, and Germany had been virtually split in half. It was now necessary further to divide, isolate, and destroy the German forces remaining in the south and north.²⁵

PLAN FOR THE ADVANCE

205. The essence of the plan was to stop the Allied advance in the center on the Elbe and concentrate on drives to clean up the flanks.²⁶

a. 6th Army Group was directed:

(1) To occupy Western Austria and that part of Germany within its zone of advance.

b. 12th Army Group was directed:

(1) To defend the general line Erz Gebirge - Mulde River - Elbe River.

(2) To launch a powerful thrust to meet the Soviet Army in the Danube Valley and to occupy that part of Austria in its zone.

c. 21 Army Group was directed:

(1) To seize crossings over the Elbe and secure Hamburg.

(2) To advance to the Baltic in the general area Kiel - Lubeck, prepared to launch operations to liberate Denmark.²⁷

Any thrust to Berlin was to await the outcome of those operations.²⁸

FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOPTION OF PLAN

General Considerations

206. To complete the defeat of the remaining German forces in the shortest possible time, it was necessary to crush the enemy's will to resist by destroying the forces seeking to withdraw into these areas where prolonged resistance would be possible.²⁹ It was believed that the rapid elimination of the National Redoubt also might result in the early surrender of the German forces in Denmark and Norway.³⁰

Ground Force Considerations.

207. Enemy Forces. It was estimated that the enemy's important capability at this point was to hold out in the National Redoubt in the south and in Denmark, Norway, and Western Holland in the north.³¹ From 1 to 15 April over a half million prisoners were taken on the Western Front and the enemy's power to resist had been largely broken. Field

Marshal Busch was appointed C-in-C Northwest; Kesselring, as C-in-C West, now commanded only the southern part of the front. Rail and road communications were completely disrupted, and supplies of all kinds were very short. It was estimated that in the vicinity of the Redoubt elements of some 100 divisions, including the bulk of the remaining armored and SS units, were facing the Allied and Soviet forces. Some nominal divisions remained in the north, of which the only formidable elements were those of the First Parachute Army.³²

208. Terrain. The extent of the defensive system in the National Redoubt was not known. However, the nature of the country was such that a minimum of forces could effectively block the narrow entrances to the area. The main avenues of advance were from the north up the valleys of the Ill, Inn, and Salzach Rivers. Operations in this area were considered practicable only between May and October because of avalanches and heavy snow.³³

In the north, island fortresses and coastal defenses protected the North German ports, Denmark, and Norway. In addition, a fairly complete system of field works in Schleswig-Holstein covered the land approaches to Denmark. In Norway the mountainous terrain would make operations difficult and during the winter the climate would make them impracticable.³⁴

209. Own Forces. To achieve the required concentrations of forces in the south and north, economies were necessary in the center.³⁵ By resting the center on the easily defended terrain feature of the Mulde and Elbe Rivers, these economies would be facilitated and, in addition, a clearly defined line would be provided for joining with the approaching Soviets. Thus, Third U.S. Army of 12th Army Group could be diverted to make the attack down the Danube Valley to join with the Soviet Army. The 6th Army Group, which was prepared to launch an attack to eliminate the Redoubt, thus would be enabled to utilize its entire force in the drive.³⁶ Other units released from the center could be used to strengthen the drive by 21 Army Group in the north.³⁷

210. Logistical Factors. Although railroad bridges had been completed over the Rhine at Mainz and Wesol and rail rehabilitation had been rapid east of the Rhine, it was not possible to keep pace with the advancing troops. In the extreme north 21 Army Group had rehabilitated the Osnabruck line and, although not having completed a rail crossing of the Rhine, was making good use of the line by the expedient of boat transfer. The outstanding logistical problem was transport of supplies and troops from the Rhine eastward and the reverse movement of huge numbers of prisoners of war and displaced persons.³⁸

It was estimated that, as of 1 May, 12 British divisions could be supported as far as Hamburg and that an advance to Kiel could be supported only by reducing proportionately the number of divisions on the Elbe. It also was estimated that U.S. divisions could be supported in limited operations into the Innsbruck area, provided no advances were made beyond the Elbe. It was estimated that by 15 May, British forces probably could be supported in operations into Denmark and that U.S. forces could be supported in extensive operations in the Redoubt area.³⁹ However, the strength of forces operating under the 6th Army Group in the Salzburg - Passau area would have to remain substantially the same until support facilities could be strengthened by development of rail capacity through the Karlsruhe area.⁴⁰

C O N F I D E N T I A L

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS TO 3 MAY

211. No changes in plan. The operations to reach the Baltic and to advance into Austria and Czechoslovakia were carried out according to plan.

212. In the South. Seventh U.S. Army units reached Nurnberg on 17 April, but heavy fighting for the city continued until it was finally cleared on 21 April. 6th Army Group began its final advance on 22 April; Munich fell on 30 April; Berchtesgaden and Salzburg were taken on 4 May. Other Seventh Army forces pressed rapidly south through the Brenner Pass and on 4 May made contact at Vipiteno with elements of Fifth U.S. Army from Italy. The whole of German Army Group "G" surrendered on 6 May.

At the same time, the First French Army farther west was smashing the enemy on its front, and by 26 April was along the Swiss border from Basle to Lake Constance. Contact was made with Seventh U.S. Army units in Austria as the Germans finally capitulated. Operations on the French-Italian border and against the Gironde pocket on the west coast of France were successfully carried out by French forces during this same period.

213. In the Center. Third U.S. Army units reached the Czechoslovakian border on 18 April. On the following day First U.S. Army cleared Leipzig, and Ninth U.S. Army took Magdeburg. The Harz Mountain pocket was eliminated on 21 April. First and Ninth Armies then took up defensive positions along the Mulde and Elbe Rivers, and at 1640 hours on 25 April the junction with the Soviet Army was made at Torgau on the Elbe. Meanwhile, on 22 April, Third U.S. Army launched its drive to the southeast. Resistance was light and, after Regensburg fell on 26 April, armored columns drove on to Linz, which was occupied on 4 May. Also on 4 May Third Army was ordered to advance to an agreed line of contact with the Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia. Pilsen was liberated on 6 May.

214. In the North By 20 April, Second British Army forces had reached Harburg on the south bank of the Elbe opposite Hamburg. Bremen fell on 26 April after a stiff fight against an enemy heavily reinforced by naval and marine troops. On 29 April, with XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps under operational control of 21 Army Group, a drive across the Elbe was launched on a two-corps front, and the dash across Schleswig-Holstein reached Lubeck on the Baltic on 2 May. Hamburg surrendered on 3 May, and contact was established with the Soviet forces all along the front from Wismar to Grabow. During this same period the Cuxhaven and the Emden - Wilhelmshaven Peninsulas were cleared.

No further offensive operations were undertaken against the German forces contained in Western Holland for fear they would flood and permanently damage the land. A truce was arranged and, as a result, large supplies of food were sent by the Allies to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population in this area. On 5 May all German land, sea, and air forces in Northwestern Germany (including the Frisian Islands, Heligoland, and all other islands), Holland, Schleswig-Holstein, and Denmark surrendered unconditionally.

215. In the Air. Until 27 April the Allied air forces concentrated the attack on German airfields with bombers, shooting up aircraft on the ground with fighters. Rail centers, railroad rolling stock, and road traffic continued to be additional lucrative targets for the tactical air units. After 27 April all offensive air force activity was sharply curtailed. Heavy bombers participated principally in food-dropping missions and evacuation of repatriates while medium bombers were stood down for lack of targets and fighter-bombers performed defensive patrols.⁴¹

C O N F I D E N T I A L

216. Logistics. Transport in the forward areas continued to be the major logistical problem. Air transport was again used extensively to supplement motor transport in supporting the rapidly advancing columns. By utilizing every possible resource of road, air, and rail transport, the Allied troops were moved and supported to their final objectives.⁴²

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

217. Certain high German officials for some time had realized the futility of continuing the struggle, and several surrender offers were made through neutral channels during April. The military disasters had so broken the German will to resist that mass surrenders occurred with increasing frequency during the last days of April and the early days of May. At midnight 8 - 9 May, when the final unconditional surrender became effective, the armed forces of Germany had been completely defeated by the combined efforts of the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. The mission of the Allied Expeditionary Force was accomplished.

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STRATEGY OF THE CAMPAIGN

IN

WESTERN EUROPE

1944 - 1945

GLOSSARY

Allied Airborne Army (First)

Commanded by Lieutenant General Louis H. Brereton, USA. The headquarters was activated in August 1944 to control all United States and British airborne divisions. It also included the IX U.S. Troop Carrier Command and two RAF troop-carrying groups.

Allied Force Headquarters

The senior headquarters in the Mediterranean Theater of operations. Joint U.S.-British. Located at Caserta, Italy, at time amphibious assault on south coast of France was launched under its control.

Ardennes

Wooded hill mass in southeastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg, extending roughly from the Meuse River to the German border.

Atlantic Wall

German defenses along the Western European coast, designed to repel seaborne invasion.

Belfort Gap

Terrain corridor between the Vosges Mountains and the Upper Rhine, providing access to Mulhouse and Strasbourg from the south.

Block Ship

One of a column of ships sunk generally parallel to a beach so as to provide an area of sheltered water for the operation of lighters and landing craft.

Coastal Command

An arm of the British Royal Air Force, charged primarily with protection of shipping.

Combined Chiefs of Staff

Committee created in December 1941, convening generally in Washington, D.C., and exercising over-all direction of Allied grand strategy throughout the world in accordance with policies established by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Membership (six officers) composed of senior U.S. and British chiefs (or, for the British, their representatives) of ground, naval, and air forces.

Cossac

Short title derived from initial letters of Chief of Staff to Supreme Allied Commander, denoting interim chief of SHAEF nucleus pending appointment of the Supreme Commander. Also used loosely to identify the initial Overlord planning staff from which SHAEF developed.

E-Boat

German motor torpedo boat. Small, high-speed vessel, armed with torpedoes and automatic weapons.

Field Division, German Air Force

An infantry type division organized by the German Air Force with air force personnel. Originally designed to guard air force ground installations.

Flanders

A coastal region shared by France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and centered about the cities of Bruges, Ghent, Courtrai, and Ypres.

Flying Bomb

A pilotless, jet-propelled, flying missile; the first successful weapon of its kind. Developed by the Germans as a "secret weapon" (V-1).

Lodgment Area

That area of Northwestern France extending generally from St Nazaire east along the Loire to Tours, thence north to include Orleans, Chartres, Dreux, Rouen, and the Seine to the sea.

Magnet Line

French system of concrete and steel fortifications, protecting the 1939 Eastern French Frontier from Switzerland to the vicinity of Sedan.

Metz Gap

Terrain corridor between the Hunsruck hill mass on the north and the Vosges Mountains on the south, following the general axis Metz - Saarbrücken - Kaiserslautern - Mainz.

Panzer Division

German armored division composed of a tank regiment (about 200 tanks at full strength), two regiments of armored and/or motorized infantry, and other supporting arms and services. The SS Panzer Division was generally in greater strength and better equipped than the Wehrmacht Panzer Division.

Panzer - Grenadier Division

German motorized-infantry division composed of two armored and/or motorized infantry regiments, a battalion of assault guns, and

other supporting arms and services. (The SS Panzer-Grenadier Division was generally in greater strength and better equipped than the Wehrmacht Panzer-Grenadier Division.)

R-Boat

A small, fast craft designed for coastal patrol.

Ruhr

The richest German coal-mining and industrial area, lying between the Lippe and Ruhr Rivers. A thickly populated district, it includes the industrial centers of Essen, Duisburg, Dortmund, and Gelsenkirchen.

Saer Basin

Territory north of French Province of Lorraine, formerly belonging to Prussia and Bavaria, and later administered by the League of Nations under the International Commission. It comprises one of the richest mining and industrial areas in Europe. Returned to Germany after plebiscite in 1935. Principal towns are Saarbrucken, Neunkirchen, Dudweiler, and Sulzbach.

Saverne Gap

Terrain corridor through the northern foothills of the Vosges Mountains leading to Strasbourg from the west. Path of the Rhine-Marne Canal.

SHAEF

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces. The combined U.S.-British headquarters which, under General Eisenhower, directed the campaign in Western Europe.

Siegfried Line

German system of concrete and steel fortifications, protecting the 1939 Western German Frontier.

Strategic Air Force

A composite heavy bomber and long-range fighter force which had the primary mission of destroying the German economic and industrial system. Commanded by General Carl Spaatz, USA, it included the 8th U.S. Air Force, the 15th U.S. Air Force, and an RAF bomber group.

Supreme Allied Commander

The senior commander of all the Allied ground, naval, and air forces engaged in the Western European campaign; General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, USA.

Volksgranadier Division

A reduced German infantry division (6,000 - 8,000 men) with increased automatic fire power in the infantry component. This type division made its first appearance in the autumn of 1944.

West Wall

Same as Siegfried Line.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

IMPORTANT DATES IN THE CAMPAIGN IN WESTERN EUROPE
1944 - 1945

- 13 February 1944 - General Dwight D. Eisenhower, USA, assumes command of the Allied Expeditionary Force.
- 6 June 1944 - First U.S. and Second British Armies assault the Normandy coast.
- 26 June 1944 - The garrison of Cherbourg surrenders to First U.S. Army.
- 8 July 1944 - Second British Army enters Caen.
- 18 July 1944 - First U.S. Army captures St Lo.
- 22 July 1944 - First Canadian Army becomes operational.
- 25 July 1944 - First U.S. Army launches breakout offensive from the Normandy beachhead.
- 1 August 1944 - 12th Army Group and Third U.S. Army become operational. Third Army breaks out and captures Avranches.
- 5 August 1944 - The Brittany Peninsula is isolated.
- 7 August 1944 - German counteroffensive is launched at Mortain.
- 15 August 1944 - Seventh U.S. Army and French Army "B" assault the coast of Southern France.
- 19 August 1944 - First U.S. and First Canadian Armies link up at Chambois, closing Argentan - Falaise Gap.
- 20 August 1944 - Third Army establishes bridgehead over Seine near Mantes-Gassicourt.
- 25 August 1944 - Paris is liberated.
- 28 August 1944 - Marseilles is liberated.
- 1 September 1944 - First Allied Airborne Army becomes operational.
- 4 September 1944 - Second British Army enters Brussels.
- 5 September 1944 - Antwerp is liberated.
Ninth U.S. Army becomes operational and assumes command of VIII U.S. Corps on the Brittany Peninsula.
- 11 September 1944 - Third U.S. Army and Seventh U.S. Army link up at Sombornon, France.
- 15 September 1944 - 6th Army Group becomes operational and passes to SHAEF control.
- 17 September 1944 - 21 Army Group launches combined airborne - ground attack to secure a bridgehead over the Neder Rijn at Arnhem.
- 19 September 1944 - All organized resistance ends in Brest area.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

- 21 October 1944 - Aachen capitulates to First U.S. Army.
- 8 November 1944 - Third U.S. Army assaults the Moselle River barrier, resuming its advance toward the Rhine.
- 9 November 1944 - British-Canadian forces clear the Schelde Estuary area permitting opening of water approaches to Antwerp.
- 13 November 1944 - 6th Army Group launches offensive to close to the Rhine.
- 16 November 1944 - First and Ninth U.S. Armies launch offensive to close to the Rhine.
- 22 November 1944 - Metz garrison surrenders to Third Army.
- 26 November 1944 - Fort of Antwerp is opened.
- 27 November 1944 - Seventh U.S. Army liberates Strasbourg.
- 16 December 1944 - Germans launch Ardennes counteroffensive.
- 22 December 1944 - Allies launch counteroffensive to reduce the Ardennes salient.
- 6 January 1945 - Fifteenth U.S. Army becomes operational.
- 15 January 1945 - First and Third U.S. Armies link up at Houffalize.
- 24 January 1945 - Saint Vith falls; Ardennes salient rapidly collapses.
- 7 February 1945 - First French Army eliminates the Colmar pocket.
- 8 March 1945 - First U.S. Army seizes intact the bridge across the Rhine at Remagen.
- 22 March 1945 - Third U.S. Army crosses the Rhine at Oppenheim.
- 23-24 March 1945 - Ninth U.S. and Second British Armies cross the Rhine River in the Wesel - Emmerich area; U.S. and British airborne divisions are dropped east of the Rhine.
- 26 March 1945 - Seventh Army crosses the Rhine near Worms.
- 1 April 1945 - Ninth and First U.S. Armies link up at Lippstadt and form the Ruhr pocket.
- 18 April 1945 - The Ruhr pocket is eliminated with the capture of 325,000 Germans.
- 25 April 1945 - First U.S. Army contacts the Soviet Army at Torgau.
- 4 May 1945 - Seventh U.S. Army passes through the Brenner Pass and contacts Fifth U.S. Army (15th Army Group) at Vipiteno, Italy.
- 5 May 1945 - German land, sea, and air forces in Northwestern Germany surrender.
- 8-9 May 1945 - Germany surrenders unconditionally to the Western Allies and the Soviet Union.