

TRANSLATION OF WRITTEN QUESTIONS ANSWERED
BY GENEBERST ALFRED JODE, CHIEF OF WEHR-
MACHTS FUEHRUNGSSTAB AND APPROVED BY
GENERAL FELDMARSCHALL WILHELM KEITEL,
CHIEF OF OBERKOMMANDO DER WEHRMACHT

MAJOR K. W. HECHLER

PLACE: CC PWE #32, Mondorf, Luxembourg
DATE: 26 July 1945

ARDENNES



QU: 1. What factors influenced the selection of 16 December 1944 as the date for the start of the German Ardennes offensive? a. First Army (V Corps) attack toward Roer River dams? b. Threat offered by Third U.S. Army's imminent attack on the Siegfried Line scheduled to start 19 December (How much intelligence did the Germans have of this attack?) c. Situation and Russian capabilities on East front? d. Military or political morale considerations? e. Weather.

ANS: 1. The moment for the attack was dictated by circumstances. In our first planning we hoped to launch the attack somewhere between 26 and 28 November (new-moon period) But the arrangement and refresher training of the combat divisions, as also the bringing up of munitions and fuel dragged on into December, as a consequence of Allied air raids.

16 December was, unfortunately, the earliest moment at which an attack could be made. This brought the operation already into a period of improving flying weather. The divisions of the 1st and 2nd wave were marched up, the divisions of the 3rd wave were just arriving.

1a) Neither the attack of the 1st U.S. Army nor the intended attack of the U.S. 3rd Army, which was unknown to us, had any influence on the choice of the time of attack. On the contrary the attack of the U.S. 5th Corps was just what we wanted; we should have liked it still better if the British Army Group had already started a major attack over the Roer

1 c,d,e) The situation on the Eastern Front had no more immediate influence on the moment of attack, except in the general tendency to make the attack as soon as possible in order to use the experience-proven worst flight weather and to release as soon as possible more units for the east.

The morale of the troops played no part in it. The men were certainly inadequately and hurriedly trained and still not sufficiently welded together but in the mass they were optimistic and full of aggressiveness. On 12 December Hq was moved from Berlin to Ziegenberg, on 13 and 14 the Fuehrer spoke to the Commanding Generals. On 14 December the 16th was fixed as the day for attack.

QU: 2. What, specifically, were the ultimate and intermediate objectives of the offensive in the final orders issued?

ANS: 2. The objects of the operations were: Breakthrough with the 6th Armored Army over the Meuse between Liege (excluded) and Huy (included) with Antwerp as the objective. The 5th Armored Army had to cross the Meuse between Huy and Dinant and cover the left flank of the 6th Army against Brussels-Charleroi. The 7th Army was to take the line Dinant-Neufchateau-Luxemburg and secure the deep left flank of the Army Group. The mission of the left wing of the 15th Army was to press forward over the Hohe Venn into the line Monschau-Verviers-Liege, and there intercept a counter-attack of the strong enemy forces from the Aachen region into the deep right flank of the Army Group. A later supplementary attack between the Meuse and Cellenkirchen towards the south was wanted by Oberbefehlshaber West but not approved and the forces provided for it were brought up behind the main attack as OKW reserves. Secondary objectives were not given, in accordance with our fundamental operational principles of the tactics of missions and not of orders.

QU: 3. Was there ever an intention on the part of the German high command, either in the planning phase, or during the course of the offensive when the attacks to the north failed, to swing south and turn the flank of Third U.S. Army?

ANS: 3. The idea of turning S after the breakthrough, in order to operate against the left flank of the U.S. 3rd Army, was voiced by the Fuehrer before the final decision on the attack, but it was dropped as it lacked an opposite pole. By reaching Antwerp on the other hand the entire British Army Group would have been cut off from its connections to the rear. During the course of the Offensive the idea of wheeling S was never again taken up.

QU: 4. What counter-intelligence measures were used to conceal the assembly and preparations for attack of the 6th SS Panzer and 5th Panzer armies?

ANS: 4. The directives for the secrecy and masking were particularly carefully drawn and comprised the following:

- a) Whoever knew about our intention had to subscribe a written undertaking.
- b) All preparations were made under the slogan, counter-attack into the south flank of a British major attack on the Ruhr.
- c) The moment when the Armies, Corps, Divisions and Regiments might be informed of our real intentions was fixed by the OKW.
- d) The Armored Divisions of the 6th Panzer Army were brought up at the last moment and in night movements.
- e) The new assault divisions might only be brought into the front line on the very last night. It was for-bidden to send out any scouts in advance from these units. In the last few days no scouts at all might be used. Unreliable soldiers (Alsations &c) had to be taken out of the front line.
- f) Artillery and AA could only fire in the same field as before.
- g) Troop movements in daytime were forbidden.
- h) The combat (fighter, pursuit) planes could not move to their jumping off place before the first day of the attack.

- l) The 6th and 5th Panzer Armies had to retain their existing CPs. The new CPs for the attack might only be occupied by a small operational staff under a cover name (or reference)
- k) Comprehensive sending of fake radio messages was to preserve the existing organization of the operational staffs in the radio picture.

QU: 5. Planning dates. a. When was the Ardennes selected as the area in which the offensive would be launched? b. When was the plan adopted to use offensively the reserves in the west?

ANS: 5, a & b. In the last few days of September.

QU: 6. What was the minimum build-up of forces considered necessary, in the planning stage, for the launching of this offensive? Was this minimum met or exceeded? When was the build-up started and when completed? Were available reinforcements considered sufficient?

ANS: 6. 25 to 30 Divisions were considered the necessary minimum. This number was considerably exceeded. The troops began to move up at the beginning of November. The first arrivals, the 3rd Infantry or more accurately 3 Volksgrenadier Divisions, were put into the front line of the attack sector. No changes were made in the manning of the front until the day of the attack. By about 10 December all the forces had been brought up. Assuming always that the attack was a complete surprise for the enemy we considered the reserves at our disposition as sufficient to attain our objective.

QU: 7. What were the available stocks of motor fuel for the two armies, in terms of kilometers, at the start of the offensive? Was the German command in a position to sustain the drive by drawing on its own fuel reserves, in the event that American POL dumps were not captured? How much fuel and other major supply items needed to be captured in order to sustain the offensive? Was there accurate knowledge of the location of the main Allied supply installations (elements of the ISS Panzer Corps penetrated to the southern edge of a 3,300,000 gallon dump near Spa)?

ANS: 7. There were three supply units of 200 Km (8000 ton) with the troops. Another about 20 000 was also ready. With these the objective could be reached without capturing any fuel from the enemy. We had no exact information about U.S. fuel but assumed that near Liege was the head of a pipe line.

QU: 8. If the plan for the offensive contemplated failure to reach ultimate objectives, how long did the German High Command estimate it would take for the Allies to recover from the spoiling effect of the offensive and mount a new offensive of their own?

ANS: 8. In the event the object of the offensive was not attained we believed the Allied major attack would be delayed for a minimum of 6 weeks at any rate.

QU: 9. What, if any, important effects in halting the drive had the heavy air attacks of 24-25 December on German lines of communication?

ANS: 9. The crusing air attacks on transport installations and crossings aimed especially at the middle Rhine zone, Koblenz-Mainz-Frankfurt, against the valleys of the Moselle, Lahn and Nahe, and against traffic hubs like Giessen, Hanau and Limburg, had the consequence that the difficult transportation situation which had been in existence already for a long time, could not be improved, in spite of every kind of auxiliary service and repair and restoration work. The Rhine was the end of any through R.R. movements on a large scale. West of the Rhine islands of communication functioned on individual R.R. sectors, so that all movements, especially of supplies, had essentially to be made across country.

QU: 10. Does the enclosed map correctly depict the original plan of the German attack and its subsequent revision? What factors determined the revision of the original plans? When was the revised plan made and when was it put into effect? Why was the II SS Panzer Corps held in reserve until 23 December?

ANS: 10. Sketch 1 is a rather correct reproduction of the plan of attack for the Ardennes offensive. The Corps divisions I cannot any longer reconstruct from memory. As far as I can remember, there were 3 Corps each in the 6th and 5th Panzer Armies, and at least 2 Corps (commandos) in the 7th Army. Already on 24 December we were engaged on going over to the defensive. No new plan of attack with far-reaching aims was made. The II SS Panzer Corps originally stood as a second attack wave behind the I SS Panzer Corps and was, after a successful breakthrough, to follow, NE wards, driving around W of Liege and wheeling against the Meuse S of Maastricht and against the Albert Canal, in order to start the pocketing of the enemy main force in the Aachen area and to cover against an attack from the British and Canadians on the Albert Canal. The Corps was not held back in reserve but could not follow up the I SS Panzer Corps on account of the completely jammed roads. It was then brought up behind the right wing of the 5th Panzer Army and wheeled in towards the N.

QU: 11. At what point (date) in the counteroffensive did it become evident that it would be impossible to continue forward to the original objectives and that it would be necessary to take up the defensive of that much which had been obtained? At what point (date) did it become evident that a retrograde movement from the whole of the ARDENNES salient was imperative?

ANS: 11. It was recognized already on the 18th or 19th of December that we should not succeed in gaining the Maas or crossing it by surprise. A major battle with the U.S. forces S and E of the river was impending. The decision to defend what we had gained was taken about Christmas, the decision to retreat from the Ardennes was made on 14 January, 2 days after the beginning of the major Russian offensive. At the same time the relinquishing of 9 armored units, 3 infantry divisions and about one-third of the Artillery corps and mortar brigades was ordered.

QU: 12. What was the relative importance of St. Vith and Bastogne to the German High Command plan of attack? Did the fact that St. Vith was seized too late (i.e. after the Allies had succeeded in setting up a strong defensive line on the northern flank of the penetration) add weight to the importance of seizing Bastogne?

ANS: 12. The significance of St. Vith and Bastogne was realized, yet it was ordered that the first attack waves ought not to stop to wipe out such stubbornly defended key points but leave them for the second wave. The decision for the immediate capture of Bastogne was made as soon as it was realized that we had to reckon with strong enemy counter-attacks E and S of the Meuse. The experiences of St. Vith had no influence on it.

QU: 13. What caused the failure of I SS Panzer Corps in the MONSCHAU-MALMEDY area?

ANS: 13. The main reason for the failure lay in the indescribably bad road conditions. A thaw had set in and the few unpaved roads were soon quagmires (soft). The deployment and development of the I SS Panzer Corps was impeded extremely. The attack of the LXVII A.K. did not gain enough ground towards the Hohe Venn and through this also hampered the free movement of the I SS Panzer Corps towards the W. SS Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich can give you more exact details.

QU: 14. Was the Allied reaction to the German attack quicker than had been anticipated by the German High Command? (Note: 7th Arm Div moved to ST. VITH area 17 December 1944. 30th Inf Div moved to MALMEDY-STAVELOT AREA 18 December 1944. 82d Airborne Div moved to WERBEMONT area, 18 December 1944. 101st Airborne Div moved to BASTOGNE 18 December 1944. 84th Inf Div moved to MARCHE 20th December 1944. 2d Armd Div moved to CELLES 22 December 1944. Third U.S. Army attack of 22 December.

ANS: 14. The promptness with which the Allies reacted to the German attack did perhaps exceed our expectations. Before anything else however it was the speed of our own movements which lagged far behind expectations.

QU: 15. What methods were employed to gain an accurate knowledge of Allied dispositions in the ARDENNES? To what extent were civilian agents depended upon to supply this information?

ANS: 15. Our picture of the distribution of American forces in the attack sector was essentially derived from tactical reconnaissance, prisoners of war, radio intelligence and our information was as far as we know only obtained to a very small degree from agents. Oberst I.G. (Gen. Staff Col.) Buerklin could give you better information, as chief of the Dept. of Foreign Armies, Western Front (Chef der Abteilung Fremde Heere, West)

QU: 16. Did the Germans, mistaking a limited withdrawal for major retreat, believe that on the 24th of December the XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps was in such a weakened condition that it would be

possible to break through to Liege?

ANS: 16. No We did not have this opinion. A breakthrough in the direction of Liege was not intended.

QU: 17. What knowledge did the Germans have of the faked U.S. Troop movements into the VIII U.S. Corps sector in early December?

ANS: 17. Out of the ordinary troop movements in the U.S. VIII Corps area at the beginning of December were not observed, only a relieving movement on the north wing of the Corps and a reinforcement of Artillery at two points, neither of which exercised any influence on our intentions.

QU: 18. In what order of importance would the Germans place the following factors influencing the failure of the German counter-offensive in the ARDENNES?

- A. The failure to seize ST, VITH in time to prevent the formation of a stout line of defense by the Allies on the northern shoulder of the breakthrough area?
- b. The appearance of good flying weather on or about 24 December, allowing Allied air superiority to be extensively used.
- c. The failure to seize BASTOGNE.
- d. The failure to seize large stocks of Allied gasoline and supplies.
- e. The ability of the Allied Command to move reinforcements quickly to the threatened area.
- f. The failure of "Operation GREIF"
- g. Other factors.

ANS: 18. The failure of the offensive is to be ascribed to the following reasons, in the order of importance:

- a. Soft roads which made impossible the rapid advance of armored units and hindered a breakthrough in depth into the Meuse area.
- b. Tougher resistance of in themselves weak U.S. troops than expected, especially in St. Vith (The forces occupying the Schnee Eifel in our opinion could have held out longer)
- c. The inadequate training for such an attack of the leaders, subordinate commanders, and troops, in many of the Divisions, especially the Armored Divisions.
- d. The widespread shortage of transport means, especially heavy prime movers (tracked)
- e. The enemy superiority in the air which made itself felt in particular in the major fighting of 24 December.
- f. In the uniform and promptly applied operational measures taken by the Allies.

The rest of the grounds cited in the questionnaire in 18 (c), (d) and (f) did not play much part. Particularly the "Greif" operation, apart from a few long-range patrols, never came into effect, since the rapid breakthrough on the 2nd day, to the Meuse, which was its condition precedent, did not happen.

QU: 19. What was the significance of the heavily reinforced attacks of 31 December to 4 January on the BASTOGNE area?

ANS: 19. The object of the reinforced attacks in the Bastogne area from 31 December was to capture Bastogne itself and so create more favorable conditions for the holding of the ground gained.

ANS: 20. We do not believe, with the troops and material then at our disposal, that the Supreme Command could have done anything better as it saw the situation. The operation was fundamentally one of surprise, and to this extent we believe it was a complete success. Perhaps one or other exaggerated measure for the ensuring its secrecy may have hampered the thoroughness of the preparations for the attack. But such things have to be taken for better or worse as solely in complete surprise did the chance of success lie. That this chance could not be exploited lay in the reasons cited in Answer 18.

The criticism, whether it had not been better to have employed our available reserves in the East rather than in the West, we submit to the judgement of history; whether it was a 'crime' to prolong the war by this attack, we leave to the Allied courts. Our own judgment is unchanged and independent of them.

20 July 1945



(signed) KEITEL

Gen. Field Marshal
(Field Marshal)

(signed) JODL

Colonel-General
(Lt. General)