



## THE ARDENNES CAMPAIGN

The Ardennes phase of World War II may well be termed as one of the primary turning points of the European Campaign, insofar as the Western Allies were concerned, since it was in that campaign that the remaining significant strength of the German Armed Forces on the Western Front was liquidated. It was a gamble on the part of the Germans to forestall their inevitable defeat, but its failure brought on their downfall earlier than the German High Command anticipated.

After the highly successful campaigns of Normandy and Northern France, the operations of the First United States Army entered a new phase in the middle of September. Beginning with this period the advances were measured by thousands of yards and by a heavy price in casualties and material for every yard gained. The Nazi had been thrown back to his own frontier and had fortified his positions to fight to a finish.

At this time the First Army was disposed on a front of approximately 120 miles. The strength of the Army was concentrated on the left (north). The center and right were held lightly. The front line ran through heavily wooded country, which approximately paralleled the frontier from Maonschau to the line of the OUR River, and SAUER RIVER, and the MOSELLE River. (See Chart #1)

The order of battle of major combat units of the First Army on 13 December was as follows, frontline units being listed in order from north to south:



Northern Sector

Central Sector

Southern Sector

VII CORPS

V CORPS

VIII CORPS

104th Infantry Div.

8th Infantry Div.

14th Cav Group

9th Infantry Div.

78th Infantry Div.

106th Infantry Div.

83rd Infantry Div.

2nd Infantry Div.

28th Infantry Div.

CCB 5th Armored Div.

99th Infantry Div.

9th Armored Div. (-CCB)

4th Cav. Group

CCB 9th Armored Div.  
(in reserve)

4th Infantry Div.

5th Armored Div.  
(CCB & CCR)  
(in reserve)

102nd Cav. Group  
(in reserve)

1st Infantry Div

CCR 5th Armored Div.  
(in reserve)

During the opening days of December before the German counter-attack the enemy was making every effort to give his dispositions an appearance of normalcy although extensive troop movements were taking place further to the rear. Certain units in the line were withdrawn and replaced by others which had undergone a short rest and refit. This was a regular practice however, and the resulting identifications were not likely to arouse suspicion.

In order to maintain the offensive on the north it had been necessary to reduce to the minimum the strength of the VIII Corps on the south which had been maintaining a defensive position along the OUR River and to interchange divisions periodically to allow them to rest and refit after operations east of AACHEN and in the HURTTGEN Forest. On 7 December the 83rd Infantry Division which had been in a quiet sector relieved the 4th Infantry Division which moved from VII Corps control



into the old area of the 83rd Infantry Division under VIII Corps control. On 10 December the 9th Armored Division placed a combat command in the line on the west bank of the OUR River between WALLENDORF and BOLLEMDORF, taking over that portion of the front from the right of the 28th Infantry Division. On 12 December the 106th Infantry Division which had arrived recently from England, completed the relief of the 2nd Infantry Division on the SCHNEE EIFEL front of VIII Corps, and the 2nd Infantry Division moved to V Corps control.

Captured documents indicate that the broad plan of the enemy in their winter offensive was to strike toward the MEUSE River and on to BRUSSELS and ANTWERP. The Sixth SS Panzer Army on the right was to drive through to LIEGE and the Fifth Panzer Army on the left to thrust toward NAMUR. A diversionary attack was to be made by the reconstituted Seventh German Army with the city of Luxembourg as the objective. The area of the attack was a 60 mile front between the EIFEL and the ARDENNES. The mission of the Sixth SS Panzer Army was to thrust westward seizing MALMEDY. The II SS Panzer Corps was held in rear of the I SS Panzer Corps, initially, to exploit the breakthrough and swing on the east flank of I SS Panzer Corps along the axis MALMEDY-EUPEN. To the south, Fifth Panzer Army was to attack with the LXVI, LVII, and the XLVII Corps. (See Chart #2)

In conjunction with the attack, a special operation known as "Graif" was to be undertaken using American equipment, weapons, insignia, and uniforms. According to captured documents, this operation was to commence once the high ground west and southwest of ST VITH had



been reached. Its purpose was to seize the American supply installations along the axis ST VITH - DINANT. The enemy intended to keep his armored vehicles rolling with captured gasoline and his soldiers fed with American rations. Furthermore, he had organized a tank brigade which was equipped with approximately 70 American and German Tanks camouflaged to resemble US Mark IV tanks. These vehicles carried Allied markings and the personnel operating them were dressed in American uniforms obtained from American dead and Prisoners of War. The tanks of this brigade were divided into three equal groups to operate with the spearheads of Sixth SS Panzer Army. Their mission was to infiltrate through the forward positions and then cause confusion and disorder within the lines, permitting the following units to break through and exploit with minimum losses. Later, once the breakthrough had been made, these tanks were to dash ahead to the MEUSE River crossings, where they would join up with a long-range reconnaissance and sabotage formation know as "Einheit Stielau". The latter consisted of thirty  $\frac{1}{4}$  ton truck loads of Germans dressed in American uniforms who infiltrated through the lines at various points. A certain number were to engage in Signal intelligence work and act as a communication link for the others. Another group was to carry out acts of sabotage against reinforcements and supplies brought to the front, while a third was to reconnoiter the crossing sites of the MEUSE River, and be prepared to function with 150th Panzer Brigade when it broke through. Approximately 800 parachutists were to be dropped



along the axis EUPEN-MONSCHAU with the mission of cutting the road and preventing the movement of reinforcements until 1700 on 17 December at which time "one of the SS Divisions of Sixth SS Panzer Army would join up and effect a relief".

On the 16th of December 1945 the enemy launched their desperate counter-offensive in the Ardennes region pouring a terrific long-range artillery barrage on the VIII Corps front, the southern flank of the Army, and followed it with power thrusts of both armor and motorized infantry troops. First Army troops were forced back by the fury and strength of the attack, and by noon of the same day efforts were made to secure reinforcements to meet the counter-offensive. The first of these were the 7th Amored and 30th Infantry Divisions from the Ninth Army on the north. Upon requests the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were released which were in rest and training areas in the vicinity of Rheims, France.

By the end of the second day a penetration of ten miles had been made in the area northeast of ST VITH and penetrations to the south continued. Many parachutists were dropped in the V and VII Corps rear areas. These groups landed in small detachments and were seized before they could assemble. The penetrations through the front of VIII Corps continued. At the same time in the zone of V Corps the Germans attacked vigorously toward MUTZENICH north of MONSCHAU, but were thrust back. The 2nd and 99th Division units on the right flank of V Corps adjacent to the penetration were forced



back. Enemy elements of apparently small size had penetrated to MALMEDY.

Additional units were moved in to maintain the defense. The 30th Division had been transferred from the Ninth Army to the First Army and was enroute to MALMEDY. The 82nd Airborne Division which had been transferred from SHAEF Reserve to First Army moved into position at WERBOMONT west of ST VITH and slightly north of the penetration, and the 101st Airborne Division which also had been transferred from SHAEF Reserve to First Army assembled at and were ordered to hold the key position of EASTOGNE.

The German penetrations had disrupted almost all normal means of communications between First Army and the 12th Army Group; so in order to maintain control, the battle area was divided into a Northern Zone under 21st Army Group commanded by Field Marshal Montgomery, and a Southern Zone under the 12th Army Group commanded by General Bradley. With Field Marshal Montgomery responsible for the northern half of the battle area, units and supplies of the British Second Army, the Canadian First Army, and the Ninth United States Army were available to assist the First United States Army and to provide depth to the defense of the MEUSE River.

In the ST VITH area, an enemy attack drove the 7th Armored Division out of the town to positions approximately a mile west thereof. Late in the afternoon a message was received from the Commanding General of the 7th Armored Division to the effect that because of the



heavy enemy pressure the division and attached elements could be expected to hold their positions and continue as an effective fighting force for only 24 hours.

Although the ST VITH garrison had imposed a long delay to the German time-table while it held the vital ST VITH crossroad, this crossroad had been lost. Since time had been gained for the First Army to establish a second line of defense in rear of the ST VITH area, the 7th Armored Division's position was no longer of any value except as a departure area for an attack to recapture the ST VITH crossroad. However, sufficient troops were not available at this time for a counter-attack to gain the line MALMEDY, ST VITH BASTOGNE, and therefore Field Marshal Montgomery ordered the withdrawal of the ST VITH garrison before it was destroyed. After dark the 7th Armored Division commenced its withdrawal under the protection provided by the 82nd Airborne Division.

In moving to the relief of the ST VITH garrison, the 82nd Airborne Division created a large salient in their lines. Therefore, in order to avoid excessive losses in an exposed position, to shorten the defensive line, and to gain better defensive position from the standpoint of terrain, the Division readjusted their lines. The enemy mistook this local readjustment by the 82nd Airborne Division for a full scale retreat. This led the enemy to believe that he would meet little resistance in securing the two vital road junctions which were essential for the jump-off of this attack; MALMEDY and MARCHE.



When the enemy attacked in these areas, he temporarily pushed back our troops, but although MAREY was taken, it was recaptured a few hours later. All attempts to take MARCHE were repulsed.

The initial phase of the German counter-offensive ended on 22 December after 6 days of hard fighting, in the course of which the enemy succeeded in over-running the VIII Corps front. Although successful in penetrating almost 50 miles at some points it became necessary for Von Rundstedt to make the first major change in his plans.

The success of the operation depended on the enemy's ability to maintain the impetus of the offensive. It was imperative that he reach his objectives, particularly the MEUSE bridgeheads, before the First Army reserves could be brought into action. Furthermore, he had to seize First Army gasoline dumps and other supply installations in order to maintain the supply of his advance elements. To date only a negligible quantity of supplies had been obtained. Because of the delay imposed at ST VITH, the counter-offensive was already three days behind schedule.

Von Rundstedt had sacrificed the best part of four divisions: 12 SS Panzer, 3 parachute, 12 Volks and 277 Volks Divisions, in his repeated attempts to assault the EISENBORNE Ridge and the MONSCHAU area. Without MONSCHAU-EUPEN and MALMEDY-VERVIERS Roads he could not follow his plan to commit II SS Panzer Corps, which still remained in reserve, on the east flank of I SS Panzer Corps. Belatedly II SS Panzer Corps was ordered to move through ST VITH to the sector between the OURTHE





and AMBLEVE Rivers.

After the 25th the ferocity and weight of the German attacks began to decrease. The determined defense of the EISENBORNE Ridge, the successful defense of the vital road junctions at MALMEDY, ST VITH and BASTOGNE, and the failure of the Germans to capture any but negligible quantities of gasoline and other supplies had all contributed to the failure of the German counter-offensive.

On the third of January the American 2nd and 3rd Armored and 83rd and 84th Infantry Divisions initiated the counter-attacks to restore our former positions. As this attack progressed other divisions joined in the offensive until all three Corps of the Army were engaged. At the same time the Third Army on the south attacked to reduce the southern half of the salient. Despite extremely difficult weather conditions that attack made good progress and by the 28th of January the former positions in the First Army Area had been regained.

With the restoration of the former line it became apparent that the offensive mounted by Field Marshal Von Rundstedt which had been planned to break through the First Army lines to Antwerp had failed. This plan to isolate the entire northern flank of the Allied Forces had been doomed to failure by the sound tactical employment of our troops who absorbed the initial shock of the attack, and then halted the drive by increasing pressure. The vast enemy losses in irreplaceable men and material so weakened the German Army that final collapse became a certainty.



The partial success attained by the German counter-offensive may be attributed to two main facts as follows:

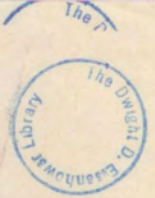
1. The selection of an assault area which was lightly defended by tired or inexperienced troops. Whereas it was realized that the lack of strength defending the ARDENNES region constituted a risk it was necessary to take such a risk in order to insure the success of the Allied offensive along the AACHEN-COLOGNE axis, and in the SAAR region. Sufficient Allied Forces did not exist on the continent to hold every mile of the long Western Front in substantial strength. Moreover, it was not considered that the ARDENNES was a particularly vulnerable area in as much as the main supply axis was in the northern part of the Army zone along the LIEGE-AACHEN axis. In addition the terrain and roads in the ARDENNES region were far from ideal for a large scale armored-infantry offensive. Despite the success of the German offensive of 1940 in this region the terrain situation and road nets there were favorable to a determined defender.

2. For none to ten days preceeding the attack the weather was very unfavorable for flying, affording the Germans the opportunity they required to assemble the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies undetected by aerial reconnaissance. Although a few new German Divisions were identified on this front by elements of the VII Corps, there was no reason to believe that these changes were not a continuation of the Nazi program of utilizing this quiet sector to train and rest their units.

The successful defense and subsequent counterattacks executed by the First Army may be attributed to the following:



1. The quick appraisal of the situation by the First Army and the prompt reaction to include the rapid, efficient shifting of units to a new battle area. During the period 17-26 December over 48,000 vehicles and 248,000 personnel were moved in regrouping the army and shifting reserves from adjacent army zones. This tremendous movement crossed most of the existing supply lines and was accomplished without a major traffic tie up.
2. The successful defense of the vital junctions at MALMEDY, ST VITH and BASTOGNE. Without these key communication centers the enemy was unable to move up supplies in sufficient quantity to maintain the supply of his armored spearheads. Although the units defending ST VITH were subsequently driven back, it was held long enough to force the Germans to change their original counter-offensive plan.
3. The determined defense of the EISENBORNE Ridge in the face of repeated attacks by overwhelming numbers of infantry and tanks, and by preventing an expansion of the northern flank of the enemy salient, the V Corps denied the Germans the use of sufficient maneuver room to permit the most efficient employment of their troops. From positions south of Camp EISENBORNE, the V Corps artillery was able to interdict the supply arteries of the enemy's advance elements farther in the STAVELOT-HOTTON area.
4. The blocking of every German move to turn north or northwest into the valley of the MEUSE River between LIEGE and NAMUR. Blocked at the EISENBORNE Ridge they turned toward MALMEDY; blocked there they tried to breakthrough at STAVELOT and STOUMON; further west they were again denied access to the road running north from GRAMDMENTIL and MENAHY. Finally, the last attempt was made at CELLES where the



2nd US Armored Division annihilated the 2nd Panzer Division.

5. The failure of the Germans to capture any but negligible quantities of gasoline and other supplies required to maintain the impetus of the advance of their armored task forces. Only a few large supply dumps located in the area were overrun and these were promptly evacuated before the enemy's arrival.

6. The determination, courage, resourcefulness and devotion to duty of every officer and man in the army in stopping the fierce, unrelenting onslaught of the enemy.

Despite the fact that the German counter-offensive achieved some measure of surprise and succeeded in penetrating the First Army positions more than 50 miles, it is believed that the defeat which he suffered as a result of such rash moves, shortened the campaign in Europe materially. From the date that the First Army resumed the offensive following the German blow, the German defense was characterized by a definite clackening of resistance and apparent lack of purpose and organization. The cream of the German Army on the Western Front was skimmed off in the ARDENNES.