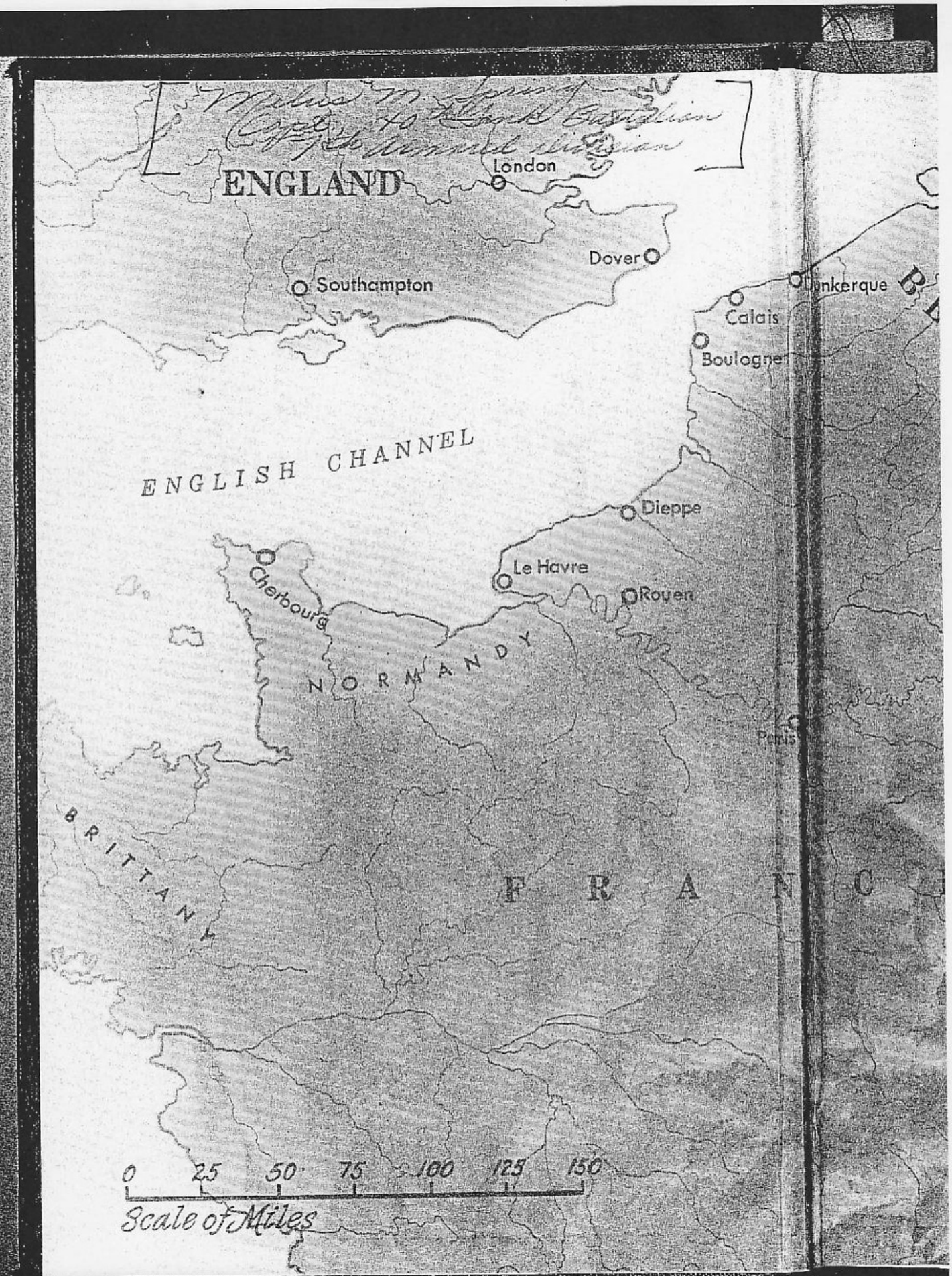
DARK DECEMBER

The Full Account of The Battle of the Bulge

By

ROBERT E. MERRIAM

CHICAGO ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY NEW YORK


ENGLAND
London
Dover
Southampton
Dunkerque
Calais
Boulogne
ENGLISH CHANNEL
Dieppe
Le Havre
Cherbourg
Rouen
NORMANDY
Paris
BRITTANY
FRANCE
0 25 50 75 100 125 150
Scale of Miles

Foreword

LEO TOLSTOY, IN THE GREATEST PIECE OF MILITARY HISTORY yet to be composed, *War and Peace*, ably sketches the confusion and uncertainties which have plagued every battlefield from time immemorial. He points up the inexorable forces at work which dwarf the decisions of men commanding at a time when life and death are at stake. Tolstoy ably sketched how legends grow up around certain men and incidents, and he noted how these legends are compounded as a battle sinks into obscurity. As one who recognizes the utter validity of these criticisms of battle reporting, I approach with great humility the task of outlining the greatest pitched battle on the Western Front in World War II. No book of some two hundred pages can adequately recreate the utter confusion and chaos which gripped the forces that were locked in a titanic struggle in the frozen forests of the Ardennes during the wintry weeks of December, 1944, and early January, 1945. I have humbly picked and pieced together isolated bits of information which, when fitted together, may offer some explanation of the cause and effect of that chaos, knowing that true comprehension of the myriad factors influencing such a gigantic struggle of over a million men can never be adequately transferred to the written word.

The origin of this book traces back to the early days of the war when a group of farsighted historians, recognizing the inevitable weaknesses of official military reports, convinced the

Chief of Staff of our Army, General Marshall, that some attempt should be made to capture, for posterity, the accurate story of our then-pending military operations. Out of that meeting came a new historical section of the War Department, charged with the responsibility of recording, insofar as possible, the complete history of our military operations. Faced everywhere with suspicion and lack of understanding, the historians struggled against overwhelming odds to convince Army commanders, high and low, of the importance of their mission. The effort was most successful in Europe, where each field army had an historical team attached to it. I was a member of such a team in the Ninth Army, and in the course of my duties, I spent much of my time with the 7th Armored Division. Free to wander where I pleased, to sit in on such conferences as I could find out about, to interview whomever I desired, I was able to gather considerable material about this Division's fights. Always viewed with suspicion by the soldiers who were being interviewed, I was faced with a constant fight to convince them they should tell the true story, to show them that I was preserving the facts for posterity, and not for the dreaded Inspector General. Those of us who were intrusted with this strange task soon discovered the inevitable tendency to cover up mistakes, to warp facts, to convey the impression that all went according to plan. But the historians found that, despite these obstacles, they could piece together adequate accounts of the operations if they persisted in their searching.

About six o'clock on the evening of December 16, 1944, I was sitting in the office of the 7th Armored Division's Intelligence Officer, speculating with some of his assistants about the meaning of a recent 12th Army Group Intelligence report which said that the crust of German defenses was thinner than ever before. As we were talking, the assistant operations officer dashed in to say that the division was alerted for immediate movement to First Army where they were to fight a small counterattack somewhere in Belgium. Inasmuch as the division was going to another army, I returned to Ninth Army headquarters for new orders, unaware of the harrowing week which lay ahead for the division. When I rejoined them six days later, the men

of the division were many years older; they were just withdrawing from a pocket in which they almost had been caught by the Germans. Over half the equipment and nearly one-third of the men were missing, as units of the division straggled back through friendly lines. In the meantime, I had been wandering from army to corps headquarters, listening, noting, and talking with men who were attempting to stem this sudden German tide. This was the beginning of my book.

During the next thirty days I interviewed more than one hundred members of the 7th Armored Division, examined all battle records, went over the ground where the fighting had taken place, and finally pieced together the story of those six days. Later, I returned to Paris, where I became a member, and then Chief, of the Ardennes section of the Historical Division, European Theater of Operations, writing the official history of this great battle. We spent eight long months poring over the records from all units mixed up in the battle; we analyzed the reports of various historical officers; we interviewed again, in written or oral questioning, most of the Allied commanders; and several of us spent weeks going through Germany, interviewing German commanders who had led and planned this attack. Out of it all came five long, detailed volumes describing the Battle of the Bulge. From my notes, through access to these volumes which are available in the War Department, from other unclassified documents now available, and from papers which I had collected during this work, the factual basis of this story is gathered. My interviews with Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, and Hodges in the summer of 1946, when as a civilian I could more freely question them, rounded out the factual analysis. The interpretations are, of course, my own.

Like most returning soldiers I was thinking only of the future, of the comforts of civilian life, that bright, crisp December day in 1945 when our small ship at long last swung into New York harbor with whistles blowing. Farthest from my mind was the thought of writing a book about any of the activities I had participated in, or worked on, while in Europe. Most of us want to forget war and its horrors, but in our haste, we are prone to forget that something was accomplished by all

the discomfort, killing, waste. Too often we Americans throw ourselves into various ventures where valuable lessons can be learned, only to discard the precious knowledge in our haste to return to normal. Too often we begin to carp about the mistakes of the other man, to blame our Allies for everything that went wrong, forgetting that we, too, were not perfect. These were the compulsions which led me to begin to recount the story of the Battle of the Bulge during the hot summer months of 1946, when many Americans were complaining about shortages, even though we Americans found ourselves in an oasis of plenty in the midst of a desert of starving nations. If there is a theme in this book, it is that we should benefit from the lessons of the past, as we strive for the more perfect future.

My thanks are due to numberless people who offered advice and assistance to me. First, I wish to express my appreciation to Warrant Officer Meyer M. Cahn who on December 17, 1944, forecast the importance of the Battle of the Bulge; Lieutenant Colonel C. N. Jones, head of the Ninth Army Historical Section; Lieutenant Colonel Hugh M. Cole, Deputy Historian, European Theater of Operations, and now with the War Department Historical Division, for valuable suggestions and criticism; Alfred De Grazia, James L. Cate, and Laura Bergquist, for patiently wading through the various drafts of the manuscript; and finally, Simon and Schuster, Publishers, for permission to quote Captain Harry Butcher's book, *My Three Years With Eisenhower* (copyright, 1946, by Harry Butcher), the Arco Publishing Company for their permission to quote from *Eisenhower's Own Story of the War*, and Harcourt, Brace and Company for permission to quote Ralph Ingersoll's book, *Top Secret*, and also for their permission to use the map on page 55. All other maps in this book were drawn by Clarence Pontius.

All documents quoted, with the exception of those for which special credit has been given, are in the files of the War Department. While I have not attempted to document the various factual assertions in the book, all of the material is based on these records, supplemented by personal knowledge.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS — ROBERT E. MERRIAM

Dedicated to the memory of the men who fought and died in those dark December days, in the hope that the lessons learned through their sacrifice will be well remembered.

Walter J. Hughes, Capt., 40th Tk. Bn.
K.I.A. Manhay, Belgium.
December 24, 1944.

as the Allies did not land troops on the Dalmatian coast behind the German withdrawal.

Even the home front gave Hitler cause for optimism. His private "Gallup polls," taken by swarms of probing secret agents, indicated that the attempt on his life and regime had not aroused strong popular support. On the contrary, the imminent invasion of the sacred soil of the homeland from two directions rallied the people behind the Nazis, as the most ruthless purges and pogroms had failed to do. Love of homeland swept aside personal feelings and antagonisms in a surge of popular, emotional, nationalism. The German people, still unconvinced that they were defeated, were ready to rally to the last great stand. For this reason, more sober analysts, both German and American, are prone to agree that from the prostrated Germany of May, 1945, a healthier Germany will grow than would have arisen from a surrendering, but still undefeated, Germany with which we would have been dealing had the July 20, 1944, *putsch* succeeded.

And so, in this summer of 1944, Hitler was able to exact further sacrifices from his people: the *Volkssturm* (People's Army) was formed, armed, and hastily trained; hundreds of thousands of civilians were put to work building fortifications, especially in the east, and inductions of younger men were speeded. Although the *Volkssturm* were not used to man the West Wall, as claimed by such military commentators as Ralph Ingersoll, Hitler put special units, such as the famous Stomach Battalions, composed of men on special diets because of ulcers and other stomach ailments, into the West Wall. Actually the *Volkssturm* was never used as a military force, a partisan group, and most of the "commanders" surrendered to the first Allied troops they could find. Thus, the German version of the British Home Guard failed to rise to the heights expected of it, but it did build morale on the home front.

Most startling to Americans, who had overestimated the effect of our air raids, was the continued vitality of German industry. Despite ceaseless war in the air, Germany succeeded in maintaining production levels in many industries, and even increasing it in the absolutely vital fields of artillery, air-

German Panzer groups never seemed to be understrength. Especially true of the Pzkw Mk. VI. (Tiger)

planes, and tanks. While admittedly suffering deeply from the war in the air, this remarkable achievement was brought about largely through the transfer of important facilities underground. Further cause for optimism on the production front was offered Hitler by the prospect of stabilizing the air war in several months, through use of the new *Duesen* (jet propelled) plane, which he knew would be superior to anything the Allies would be able immediately to offer. With stability in the air achieved, he would be able to expand production still further.

These were the considerations which led Hitler to believe that he would be able to take the initiative on at least one front, to destroy considerable enemy troops, and to influence the course of the war. But where to attack? And with how many divisions?

"*Mein Fuehrer*, give to me between twenty and thirty divisions, and I will launch an attack," blustering Field Marshal Keitel opined. But the Germans could no longer pick up such a number of divisions at a moment's notice, because they had been fighting for five long years. Where would such a force come from? First, by scraping the manpower barrel for the last time, a whole new series of divisions called the *Volksgrenadiers*, were to be formed, infantry divisions shorn of all but essential units, largely horsedrawn rather than motorized. Into the *Volksgrenadiers*, not to be confused in any way with the *Volkssturm* (the People's Army), were to be poured the new draftees, young men barely old enough to fight, and older men who had fought out the war on the production front. These men were to be fitted around the core of regular army officers and noncommissioned officers, and the divisions were to be filled out with *ersatz* infantrymen — pilots without planes, ground crews without fields, sailors without ships — all of whom were to be given guns, and told how to shoot and fight. Next, the divisions which had been battered in the Battle of France were to be reconstituted and refitted as they lay in readiness behind the West Wall. And finally, the *coup de grace* would be administered by a completely new army, the core of which would be four of the élite *SS* panzer divisions, which were to be completely refitted and retrained deep in the heart of Germany. Christened the *Sixth Panzer Army*, this group was given top priority in men, equip-

THE FINGER POINTS

It was during these deliberations, on a bright summer day in mid-September, that Colonel General Jodl stalked into Hitler's room, followed by his aide, Major Herbert Buechs, who was carrying the large map of Europe on which, twice daily, progress of the fighting was recorded for *Der Fuehrer*. As General Jodl ran his stubby finger up the line representing the Western Front, he pointed to the forests of Belgium and Luxembourg, where four American divisions held a total of eighty miles. Hitler sat up in bed, propped himself on his elbows, and asked Jodl to point out that area again. Still later in the briefing, Hitler again asked about the sector where the Americans were so few. The seed had been planted and from it the German attack in the Ardennes forests was to burst forth on December 16 to shock the Allied world.

Too Close for comfort

Before then, an attack had been agreed upon in principle. The first effort, at Avranches, when the Germans tried to cut off the thin corridor skirting the bay separating the Cotentin peninsula from Brittany, nearly succeeded, but ultimately failed. The second try was with *Army Group G*, reinforced by *3* and *15 Panzer Grenadier Divisions*, rushed from Italy to hit Patton's southern flank in early September, but was not ready in time. But on September 25th, Hitler summoned Jodl and Keitel. This time he was prepared to attack. He was still a sick man, but he was also a desperate, determined man. "I am," he cried, "determined to hold fast to the execution of this operation, regardless of any risk, even if the enemy offensives on both sides of Metz, and the imminent attack on the Rhine territory lead to great terrain and town losses." The die had been cast: Jodl was ordered to prepare the detailed plan for submission at the earliest possible date. *Der Fuehrer's* outline was bold and simple: a quick thrust toward Antwerp to cut off the rear installations of the Allies and crush twenty to thirty divisions in the trap north of Antwerp. And a fanatic Hitler hoped that this would turn the tide of battle on the Western Front.

one northwest of Cologne, the other in the Eifel. Latter to be concealed as far as possible, former to be made to appear more important. This is to be given as the reason for deployment of *Luftwaffe*.

By this device a clever plan was made diabolic. It was clever because the German High Command knew that the Allies would surely spot some attack preparations, as they did, but it was diabolic because the Germans sensed the Allied frame of mind — exhilarated at the tremendous victories in France, overconfident, anxious to end the war with a final blow, intent on this end almost to the exclusion of other possibilities. The Nazis cashed in on it for their own good. Overwhelming proof of the success of this maneuver is the astounding fact that the only American Intelligence Officer who, in a printed report, mentioned the possibility of a large-scale German attack, predicted exactly what the Germans wanted him to predict — a defensive counterattack (see Chapter III for further discussion).

No one can deny that the secrecy plans were a great success. True, there were some slips, and some anxious moments in the German camp. The *Sixth Panzer Army* was spotted, as it was planned, in the Cologne plain in November, and many a cold night was spent around the Allied fireplaces speculating about when it would be used, but not once was the suggestion advanced that it would attack in the Ardennes forests. Two artillerymen from the *Sixth Panzer Army* were reported lost about four days before the attack began, but one had been killed before capture, and the second eventually returned. One deserter was lost from *Seventh Army*. Reports drifted through the lines mentioning concentrations of German troops in various villages behind the lines. Despite careful precautions, heavy vehicular movements were heard. All of these clues might have been important slips were it not for the Allied frame of mind, and the cunning German cover-plan of *Wacht Am Rhein* which threw us completely off guard. The Germans scored their first major prerequisite for a successful attack — complete, utter surprise. very mildly put.

three of the chosen few were tied up in the fighting for Aachen. Then, in mid-October the predominantly British push to relieve the port of Antwerp, by clearing the Scheldt peninsula and adjoining islands dominating the waterways linking the city with the ocean, was begun. To relieve the pressure on this attack, and at the same time to test the possibility of a large-scale tank attack in middle Holland, Hitler committed two more of the panzer type divisions which were allotted to the attack forces. This attack, which was only partially successful, was against the American 7th Armored Division, the first Allied armored division sent into the Battle of the Bulge on December 16. Incidentally, it added final proof that mass attack in the swampy canal land of Holland was not feasible, because these two German divisions only advanced about five miles against one American division strung out over a thin twenty-five mile front.

In mid-October, Rundstedt, still unaware of the impending attack, reported to Hitler that he needed eight infantry and three panzer divisions to hold his 625 mile Western Front. His recapitulation showed effective strength of 47 infantry and 6½ panzer divisions against an estimated enemy strength of 42 infantry, 18 armored divisions, and 11 armored brigades. Between September 1, and October 15, Rundstedt received 150,000 men on the Western Front, mostly fortress troops not suitable for offensive fighting; he had lost 150,000 men. In addition, 80,000 men, mostly of the *Sixth Panzer Army,* had been withdrawn, he thought, for rest. His request for new units was accompanied by a sad note, saying that he realized he could not get the troops, but that he was compelled to record his need.

By the end of October, the initial painful steps had been taken. Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army* was being refitted and reorganized in eastern Germany. On October 27, Hitler decided to give Dietrich's units double their intended tank strength, and he ordered the entire supply for the Eastern Front diverted to Dietrich. He was ready and willing to risk all on this last great attempt to put out the enemy fire. Manteuffel had been withdrawn from a fighting sector on October 15, and was reorganizing the troops available to him, although most of his ear-

NOVEMBER TAKES ITS COURSE

The final, definite "no" which Hitler gave to Model's plea for the "small solution" ended once and for all any indecisiveness regarding the direction of the attack. However, all was not so simple in the designation of a date for the push. Hitler had tentatively set the attack for the last week in November. Called upon once again were his personal air force meteorologists who had played such an important and decisive role in the selection of previous attack dates, most conspicuously in the Lowlands in 1940. Lieutenant Colonel Schuster, head of the service, voted for November, which was notoriously the worst flying weather in Europe. He further stipulated the last week in November, when the new moon would be rising; this would tend to cut down night raids on troop reinforcements moving to the front. But Germany in 1944 was not the Germany of old: there was a considerable gap between hope and reality. Despite the superhuman efforts which had been made, the German war machine was not the vigorous youth it had been in 1940. Jodl plaintively bleated later: "This offensive could not be executed so speedily as those of the past. There was a wide gulf between the wishes of the Supreme Command and the ability of the lower echelons to put them into effect. Considerable strain resulted. We were short on many things that had been overabundant in 1940." Actually, Hitler had laid plans for a 1940 attack in 1944; he refused to admit that Germany had gone downhill.

Therefore, it is not at all strange that on November 23, when Rundstedt, Model, Westphal, Krebs, Manteuffel, and Dietrich assembled in conference with Hitler and his planners, item number one on the agenda was the unpreparedness of the various commands. Unanimous agreement was reached that the attack plans were not sufficiently advanced to allow for an immediate thrust. Hitler reluctantly agreed to hold up his project, but reserved the right to set the day; he then tentatively picked December 10.

Meanwhile, during November, other changes had vitally affected the course of the war in the west. On November 16 the expected Allied attack toward the Rhine River from the Aachen salient had started forward. The German defensive positions were excellent, and, despite hard fighting, the Allies were unable to make much headway. However, the threat was great; Dietrich's army began moving west on November 6, and had closed into the area in front of the Ruhr industrial section by mid-November. This served a dual purpose: first, if the American attacks became sufficiently grave, Dietrich's men could be thrown in as a last resort to stem the tide; second, the movement of the *Sixth Panzer Army* to the west at that time was the crowning stroke of genius to the German cover plan *Wacht Am Rhein*. It provided perfect meaning to the movement, and gave the Allied intelligence officers the final kick in the wrong direction. But, actually, the American attacks had raised a more serious question; four infantry and nine panzer or panzer grenadier divisions, which had been counted on for the great offensive, were tied up in the fighting east of Aachen, and could not, according to Rundstedt, be relieved until the fighting had died down. In addition, the front of *Army Group G* to the south had all but collapsed, and *Panzer Lehr Division*, originally part of the *Sixth Panzer Army* and one of the crack German armored divisions, had been sent south in an attempt to stem the tide. So serious was the southern situation that on November 23 consideration was given to the suggestion that the entire Ardennes attack be dropped, and that German efforts be concentrated in restoring the front in Alsace-Lorraine, where *Army Group G* had collapsed. Such attack, some argued, would rewin coal and electrical supplies, and destroy most of the élite units of the reconstituted French army.

Hitler vetoed all such suggestions. Citing the weakened condition of the Allies as a result of their attacks, the fact that they had placed all their reserves near the front, increasing supply difficulties, and continued light occupation of the Ardennes sector, he resolutely announced that the German attack would continue as planned. "Now is the time to attack," Hitler said, "when the enemy is most exhausted."

He was further encouraged by the excellent Roer River defenses, which the American forces were fast approaching. Hitler and his generals knew, and the Americans did not discover until too late, that the Roer River (not to be confused with the Ruhr), although small and narrow was actually a mighty defense barrier, because the dams at its headwaters could be so regulated that the river would be flooded for several weeks. The wide river valley was a perfect barrier which no sane military commander would attempt to cross, especially with a fresh, new panzer army waiting for him on the other side. In this, Hitler proved himself a prophet, because by December 1 the American troops were along the Roer River for most of its distance, and there the fall offensive in the north halted.

Schwammenauel Dam Schmidt, Ger. Taken Feb. 1945 by 78th Div. and 744th Bn.

At the November 23 meeting final plans were laid for the movement of the various armies to the attack front. Dietrich was to remain north of Cologne until three days before the attack, when, in a series of night moves, he was suddenly to shift south into the attack position. Manteuffel's units were to assemble in secret in the dense woods of the Ardennes Forests, to move up to the attack line only at the last minute. Most of Brandenberger's units were already in the line, and would remain there until time for the attack. Reserves would be so distributed that in an extreme emergency they could be used in threatened areas, but were to be so arranged that the Allies would not be able to guess the German plan. The attack was divided into two waves of the attacking armies, and a third wave of troops who would act as the reserve. Transportation plans were worked out so that the last groups would just be coming west as the attack began. Actually, by the end of November, air raids notwithstanding, 100 trains a day were moving toward the Western Front.

Although supplies were being moved forward more slowly than hoped for, by scaping the bottom of the various barrels the High Command was providing considerable material. However, in building up their supplies, the Germans were caught in their own web: not only because of the threat of the Allied November attacks, but also because the supply chieftains still believed that the preparations were for a defensive attack. As

Model and the army commanders paid only lip service to this dictum; there was no arguing, but Manteuffel at least, as stubborn in his way as Hitler, had set his goal — it was the Meuse River.

Manteuffel, the shrewd tactician, presented two additional proposals which were accepted after long and bitter debate. First was the recommendation that the attack begin before dawn instead of broad daylight as originally planned. Manteuffel reasoned that the daylight attack would be subject to devastating Allied artillery fire, and might conceivably be subject to air attacks, even though the meteorologists promised dismal weather. Manteuffel took as his thesis the principle that the Allied ability to react to the attack should be the determining factor in setting the time; despite the confusions of a night attack, he considered them to be outweighed by the advantages of catching the Americans when they could not readily react — the break would thus be achieved before air and artillery could swing into play. And he later added, "Everyone knows that the American outpost guards sleep in the early hours of the morning." His concurrent proposal revolved around the use of a preparatory artillery concentration. Hitler, the World War I soldier, had insisted on a huge preparatory concentration along the entire front line. Manteuffel argued, convincingly, that this would only alert the sleepy Americans. He favored a short concentration on selected points immediately prior to the jumpoff. Again Manteuffel's recommendations were accepted after heated debate, although Dietrich ignored them when D-Day arrived.

No Joke!

At this last planning session, each army commander outlined the condition of his troops. Dietrich, the chronic complainer, was loudest in his protestations that he was unready for the attack, but his cries went unheeded by Hitler. However, to provide further strength for Dietrich's vulnerable north flank, Hitler provided a battalion of special *Jagdtigers*, with twenty-one huge Tiger tanks mounting 12.8 cm guns, total weight of each being seventy-two tons, with special armor said to be thick enough to stop any known shell. These tanks were to lumber up the roads leading into the penetration area from the north, and in conjunction with the von der Heydte parachutists pre-

Too clumsy and immobile

riod of the campaign, and only when the break-through had been achieved were its infantry divisions brought west across the Seine — too late to have any effect upon the course of victory."* And when the Germans did move from the Pas de Calais, it was to run for their lives toward the German border. Here, then, was the great fooler in the Allied plans, which may have spelled the difference between victory and defeat in the critical days following the landing.

Our plans went well, exceeded fondest expectations, all except the channel ports. And there lay the source of our future difficulty. Patton was instructed not to waste forces in Brittany. (Rumor has it that a British General looking at a war map inquired if the arrow across the Brittany peninsula were Patton, and the one toward St. Malo, one of the Brittany ports, his aide). He cut off the peninsula, but the German forces, stronger than expected, holed up in the usable ports, Brest, St. Nazaire, Lorient, and there they remained. Patton then swung sharply east, established a flank along the Loire River, and by mid-August turned toward Paris.

Meanwhile, Hodges' First Army held open the narrow corridor between Normandy and the Brittany peninsula, and at the same time it turned behind the shattered German flank. The Germans made one frantic attempt to stop these vast turning maneuvers as they gathered together four of their best panzer divisions and threw them at the thin corridor leading into Brittany in an attempt to sever the American forces, to isolate Patton completely from his line of supplies. Hitler personally ordered this attack, and it was directed by his loyal General "Sepp" Dietrich, about whom we have already heard. The panzer formations were hastily gathered, many of them from the British sector where they had been tenaciously fighting Montgomery's drive, and were spirited toward the small town of Mortain, where American forces were entrenched, covering the road leading from Normandy to Brittany. Among the great individual battles in the history of American arms, the defense

* *Eisenhower's Own Story of the War*, The Complete Report by the Supreme Commander on the War In Europe from the Day of Invasion to the Day of Victory. Arco Publishing Company, New York, p. 27.

by the 30th Division at Mortain ranks high. Aided by the air forces and supporting infantry and armor hastily rushed to the scene, the 30th Division stopped the counterattacking Germans, and the foot race across France was on.

THE CHASE

Hitler had shot his last wad in France. He had failed to contain the beachhead, as he had so confidently announced he would do; he had failed to pinch off the sweeping armored spearheads once the hole had been made. Now he had a blitz in reverse on his hands. Our air force raised havoc with his troop movements, his supply lines were long and tenuous with no air force to defend them, and he was still worried about our potential landing in the Pas de Calais. Coupled with this was a brilliant, bold strategy which turned the American armor loose. Our optimism rose like the barometer after the storm; from the despair created by previous minute gains, we were swept into the clouds by glorious victories. As early as August 1, when our hold on the coast of France was still very tenuous, soldiers landing in the fields of Normandy on the way to the battlefront were talking about their luck — they wouldn't have to fight. I know, I was one of them. But sometimes we would laugh, those of us who even bothered to look at the maps, at the ridiculously small area we held, compared to the distance which remained.

Once we had broken into the open a myriad of possibilities became apparent. Hodges and Patton quickly closed two gigantic hooks into the rear of the German formations still fighting the British and Canadians around Caen, and in conjunction with a Montgomery drive to the south created the so-called Falaise gap which at one time contained 100,000 Germans. The gap was not completely closed, and some Germans made their escape, allegedly because Montgomery ordered American troops to fall back when they crossed the line separating the American and British armies. The boundary between the British and American forces ran through the mouth of this gap, which was a tactical error, but the dividing line was essential to prevent

the fast-rushing British and American troops from colliding head-on in a second Bunker Hill. The Americans went faster than expected, but once the boundary was set by Montgomery, he had to stick with it, for to change in the middle of the battle would have created an intolerable situation of chaos. And although some American writers have contended that our forces could have completely closed the gap if they had not been ordered back across the line by Monty, the leading tank commanders of that attacking force say the Germans threw them out of Falaise, key to the gap; they weren't ordered out. Nevertheless, thousands of Germans were captured, and those who escaped were not in fighting trim. The German army in France was licked. And even before the Falaise pocket, the first crack had appeared when Field Marshal von Kluge elected to discuss surrender terms. The details of this discussion are still veiled in secrecy, but we do know that von Kluge actually contacted the British and talked about surrender. The negotiations were not completed at the time of the *putsch* attempt, and with its failure von Kluge killed himself — another German general had permanently parted with Hitler.

From mid-August until mid-September all hell broke loose in France. It was the happy period for the Anglo-American forces. Battle-weary soldiers often remarked during the bitter slugging in late fall that they wished all war was like those earlier days. It was a game of cat chasing mouse, of divisions racing toward the German border with German formations going the same way on the next road north. Many times the Germans were unmolested. LeMans, Chartres, Paris, Rheims, Verdun, all fell almost without a struggle. Patton raced, and beat the Germans to many of the Seine River crossings. To the north, Hodges' First Army and Montgomery both rapidly swung forward, Hodges heading for Belgium and Luxembourg, and the British hugging the coast pushing toward Holland. The advances were miraculously rapid, too fast for headquarters even to mark their maps, and unbelievable were the stories of chance encounters: part of the still untouched German *Fifteenth Army* was trapped by the American 1st Division which slaughtered thousands of unsuspecting Germans before they could fight;

Liberated by 7th armd. Div.

claimed, they would meet and defeat the German armies west of the Rhine River. He rejected the "finger-like" approach, opposingly recommended by Montgomery and Bradley, as impractical in view of the acute supply situation. How, he said, could we push through to Berlin with a narrow salient, maybe twenty miles wide, in which we would have possibly three good roads and, if we were lucky, one railroad? How would we get the 700 tons of supplies needed for each division into that narrow finger, and how would we ever beat off the German pressure on the sides of that finger?

Eisenhower has much history to back up his decision. An American finger pushing through the forests of the Ardennes early in September was nearly chopped off and was pushed back through the West Wall. Another finger at Metz was horribly mangled, when we discovered that the Germans were not through fighting. And finally, the finger poked across the Neder Rijn at Arnhem was hacked off, and the troops lost. The serious study of army historians, still underway in Washington, has already proved to their satisfaction that had Patton been given more force, and had he pushed further through the Frankfurt gap at Metz, he would have been stopped, perhaps with disastrous results. Some authors have claimed that Eisenhower proved himself a weak man when he failed to risk all on a quick drive to the heart of Germany. Chalk that up to their uninformed enthusiasm, to the rooting spirt of college partisans angry at their team's frustration. The decision was sound. Everybody wanted the war to end as quickly as possible, but the saner heads prevailed. Had we lost an entire army in a dangerous gamble, it would have been a grave disaster to our still small field force.

20th Corps objective aug, 1944

The immediate result of Eisenhower's decision is ancient history. The air-borne drop to secure the lower Rhine bridgehead failed; even this modest attack was projected too far beyond the following ground troops, and the reinforcements could not reach the most advanced paratroopers, the British, until too late. The bridgehead across the Neder Rijn was lost, but the British lines were pulled forward sixty miles. Even the limited offensive had been a gamble, based on 100 per cent

luck. The drop had landed in the midst of German panzer forces, and the British paratroopers were overwhelmed — only 2,000 of the total 7,000 escaped to the far shore of the river. Meanwhile, further south, Hodges pulled up along the West Wall, but fierce German attacks forced him to withdraw his thin penetration through the West Wall in the Ardennes region.

And still further to the south, Patton's troops ran smack into a hornet's nest at Metz, the traditional fortified city which had never been taken by direct assault, and he too received a bloody nose. Despite the supply shortages, blustering Patton laid plans to strike through the Frankfurt corridor into the heart of Germany, and if a shoestring was all that they would give him, then he intended to do it on a shoestring. In any event on September 6, one of Patton's corps was ordered to, "Attack and seize the area east of the Moselle River, capture Metz and Thionville, and continue east to secure bridges over the Saar River, thence east to secure bridges over the Rhine River vicinity Mainz, and prepare to continue the advance to seize Frankfurt." For six long days the lead 7th Armored Division lay at Verdun waiting for gasoline. When the gas arrived, the tankers fueled up, and started to execute the corps order. The division ran into a murderous defense at Metz, which cost thousands of casualties, and it was unable to advance into or around the city. Historians who have spent months studying this campaign report that if our forces had received the gas, and had gotten to Metz six days earlier, they would still have taken a beating — the troops defending Metz were largely young officer candidates and their teachers, and they had been there all the time. The town was never abandoned, contrary to persistent stories still being repeated.

The critical link in the contention that Eisenhower made the greatest mistake of the war when he failed to follow through after the chase across France, is the suggestion that the German armies in the west had ceased to be an effective force by late August. German records do not confirm this belief. There are many indications that the German withdrawal from France, although very disorganized and costly, was not the complete rout that it has so often been pictured. Three German armies

a small river, the Roer. Defensive positions were a dime a dozen, maneuvering area for the tanks small; it was a straight line plunge, and the Germans knew that and were ready for it. Further south, the First Army had similar terrain due east of Aachen, but more serious, their right flank was fighting through the Hurtgen forest, a densely wooded area which had to be penetrated before the Roer River could be reached. Again, lack of room to maneuver made necessary this line plunge through the dense forests; we had rejected as impractical the possibility of going south and turning the flank of the Germans by attacking through the Ardennes forests. The fighting in the Hurtgen forests was the bloodiest and most costly of the Allied experience on the Western Front. Parts of three entire divisions were cut to pieces. Two of these were later sent to the static front along the Our River, in the Ardennes forests, to rest and recuperate.

After two weeks of the most bitter fighting, the Ninth Army and the northern wing of the First Army had advanced ten miles, and were along the Roer River for a distance of about twenty miles. First Army's exhausted remaining attacking forces were just poking their heads through the east end of the Hurtgen forest when a new obstacle arose. The headwaters of the Roer River, in the northernmost hills of the Ardennes forests, east of the town of Eupen, were bottled up by a series of huge earthen dams built by the Nazis for purposes of flood control, but with military defense in mind. Although we knew about these dams, we failed to realize the apparent invulnerability of their defenses to a straight attack from the west. The plan was to capture the dams by the push through the Hurtgen forest, but the German resistance was too stubborn. Key to the dams was a little town called Schmidt, which had been captured in the early push to the German border, but recaptured by the Germans. Suddenly we realized that we could not cross the Roer River until the dams were taken or destroyed; if the troops crossed the river, puny though it was, the Germans could loose a torrent of flood waters, which would cover the mile-wide river valley, and make it very difficult, if not impossible, to supply and reinforce the attacking troops. And sitting on the opposite

Taken and re-taken five times

side of the Roer River were not only the infantry divisions defending in this area, but further to the rear "Sepp" Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army*, which had already been brought back to the west, and whose mission was unknown. And so began a period of frantic bombing to knock out the Roer River dams; historians writing in the future would do well to ask why this was not started long before the attacks reached the Roer River. But the planes could not turn the trick. Direct hits were scored on the huge earthen dams, it is true, but day after day at the briefings at the First and Ninth Armies, the air officer would report, "No results." It got to be something of a standing joke when they would announce that the planes were going out for the dams. Finally, the air attacks were called off, and General Hodges hastily organized a ground attack which was to capture the Roer River dams by hitting at them from the south, just north of the Ardennes — this was on December 13.

RAF Tried Blockbusters

THE DAM ATTACK

Hodges' First Army on December 13 was composed of three corps containing a total of three armored divisions, eleven infantry divisions, and three cavalry groups, arrayed as follows: the southern flank of the Army stretched north for eighty miles from the southern boundary of the army at the junction of the Moselle and Sure Rivers, just east of Luxembourg City. This was the Ardennes sector, some eighty miles covered by four divisions and a cavalry group of Major General Troy Middleton's VIII Corps; North of Middleton was V Corps commanded by Major General Leonard T. Gerow, Chief of the War Plans Division at the time of Pearl Harbor. This Corps of four infantry divisions, with parts of two armored divisions, and a cavalry group, was assigned the mission of capturing the Roer River dams; on the extreme north flank of First Army, Major General J. Lawton Collins' VII Corps was generally along the Roer River with four infantry divisions, an armored division, and part of a second, and a cavalry group. North of First Army, Ninth Army with two corps and six divisions was sitting along

A conservative estimate would place at least two *Volksgrenadier* and one *Panzer Grenadier* division in the enemy's rear area opposite VIII US Corps." The next day, prisoners of *3 Parachute Division* reported that they were to be relieved in the northern portion of the Ardennes sector by the *12 SS Panzer Division.*

Other reports made on that same day indicated a southward movement of *116 Panzer Division* from its rest area east of Aachen. And on that same day, a German woman came through the lines of VIII Corps and told of her observations during the three days beginning December 10. Her statements were considered as reliable by Intelligence Officers of VIII Corps. They included observation of many horsedrawn vehicles, pontoons, small boats, and other river-crossing equipment coming from the direction of Bitburg, and moving west, many panzer troops in Bitburg, and many artillery pieces. First Army Intelligence Officers also reported: "Build-up of troops has been confirmed by Tac/R (aerial reconnaissance) and PW statements. Presence of large numbers of engineers with bridging equipment suggests preparation for offensive rather than defensive action."

The next day in the First Army Intelligence summary, Colonel Dickson reported "Reinforcements for the West Wall between Dueren and Trier [a broad limit of the Ardennes sector], continue to arrive. The identification of at least three or four newly reformed divisions along the army front must be reckoned with during the next few days."

Many prisoners began to speak of the coming attack between the seventeenth and twenty-fifth of December, while others related promises of the recapture of Aachen as a Christmas present for Hitler. About the same time, VIII Corps announced an abrupt change of routine in the enemy personnel opposite it. On that same day, considerable vehicular traffic was noted on the southern flank of the Schnee Eifel salient. Perhaps most startling was the capture of two prisoners on December 14 who reported that members of the divisions in the line opposite Middleton's VIII Corps were ordered back to their divisions from rest areas on December 11, and that the Germans were preparing to attack. So novel was this suggestion that when the

report was reprinted it read that the German prisoners said they were expecting us to attack. "We must have made an error in translating their statement," said Intelligence, "it's obvious they couldn't be preparing an attack." Another prisoner captured on December 15 reported that the Germans were preparing to attack, but this report was not sent on to higher headquarters. Most startling of all, we knew that the Germans had imposed a radio blackout on December 12, that new troop movements had begun, and we could estimate the general direction of these columns. This information, gathered at high levels, may not have been transmitted to lower headquarters. I found no record of it down below, and, at any rate, we can examine the record of our behavior in the face of all of those indications to discover how they were read or misread.

General consensus of opinion in any unit.

SIX AND SIX ARE THIRTEEN

Strangely enough, Eisenhower himself first predicted the Battle of the Bulge — by intimation at least. He does not remember that now, because I asked him. He does not claim that he knew it was coming. But tucked deep in the heart of the diary of his confidant, Captain Butcher, is a letter which "Ike" wrote to "Monty" on September 22. He reminded Montgomery, who wanted more men, that in response to an earlier request for additional troops, he had already stretched Bradley's line to give Montgomery the men, and he went on to say that Bradley's forces were getting fearfully stretched south of Aachen. Eisenhower then added, as paraphrased by Butcher, "We may get a nasty little 'Kasserine,' if the enemy chooses the right place to concentrate his strength."* Eisenhower had too many other things to think about to recall this prediction later on, but we got much worse than a "nasty little 'Kasserine.' "

No person of stature among the American leaders claims we knew at the time that the Germans were going to launch such a huge attack in the Ardennes. Eisenhower, Bradley, and

* From p. 676, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, by Captain Harry C. Butcher, by permission of Simon and Schuster, Publishers. Copyright, 1946, by Harry C. Butcher.

out in this same report that the terrain favors the defense, and added that there would be little opportunity for the use of armor. And on December 9, Reeves reported that an estimated 24,000 German troops representing four infantry divisions, three of which were *Volksgrenadier* Divisions, the new streamlined, 1944 version of the German infantry, with horsedrawn artillery, fewer troops, and less training, were defending the VIII Corps sector against Middleton's 40,000 men. Reeves did not know of the attack, and he has said as much, nor did any of the Intelligence Officers in any of the divisions in VIII Corps.

What about the higher echelons of command? Although normally most intelligence information begins at the lowest level, and is then disseminated upward, oftentimes the lower echelons do not have sufficient information correctly to interpret the material they have gathered, and, therefore, all intelligence information is passed up the chain of command regardless of its seemingly inconsequential nature.

Skipping the First Army Intelligence Officer for a moment, we will examine the prognostications of General Bradley's Intelligence Officer, Brigadier General Edwin L. Sibert. Four days before the German attack, Sibert issued his weekly summary of the enemy situation. He was in an exuberant mood, and his enthusiasm bubbled over in his first sentence: "It is now certain that attrition is steadily sapping the strength of German forces on the Western Front and that the crust of defenses is thinner, more brittle, and more vulnerable than it appears on our G-2 maps, or to the troops in the lines." Although Sibert recognized the capabilities of the *Sixth Panzer Army,* which everyone knew was lurking west of the Rhine River, his optimism stemmed in part at least from the reports of Eisenhower's Intelligence Officer, General Kenneth Strong, who had recently announced that the Germans were losing the equivalent of twenty divisions a month, and that the maximum new personnel available to them were fifteen divisions a month. Mathematically it was simple: every month the equivalent of five less German divisions on the Western Front; every month new American divisions (the British were already down to the bottom of their barrel). Net result: the Germans undoubtedly would be forced

to commit their reserves into the line to replace the losses caused by the war of attrition. Sibert recognized, in passing, the possibility of a German offensive, but only as a counterattack against our crossing of the Roer River. And this happy man concluded his report with a statement which was to warm the cockles of many a homesick soldier's heart: "With continued Allied pressure in the south and in the north, the breaking point may develop suddenly and without warning." This was Sibert's last written word before the great attack, but in all fairness to him, it must be reported that in his weekly summary two weeks previous to this he discussed in some detail the possibility that the Germans would use "Sepp" Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army* in a counterattacking role. However, because of the serious situation to the south and the Allied concentration east of Aachen he concluded: "While it is likely that Rundstedt would employ a part or all of the *Sixth Panzer Army* in a counterattack against any bridgeheads east of the Roer, in conjunction with flooding the river, in order to protect the Cologne corridor, it seems unlikely that he would bring them westward across the Roer to commit them in a major counteroffensive. This counteroffensive use of the *Sixth Panzer Army* is a capability that appears less probable now than it did a week ago."

Major General Kenneth Strong, Eisenhower's Intelligence Officer, reported on November 26 in his Weekly Intelligence Summary: "The intentions of the enemy in the Aachen sector, therefore, become quite clear. He (the enemy) is fighting the main battle with his infantry formations and army panzer divisions, and with these, he hopes to blunt our offensive. Meanwhile, *Sixth SS Panzer Army* waits behind the River Roer, either to continue the defensive action, and prevent bridgeheads from being established, or, if Rundstedt gauges that we are becoming exhausted, to counterattack and regain lost ground." But the next week Strong's report presaged the wave of optimism which was to sweep down from Eisenhower's headquarters through the entire army in the field when he reported, "The problems still facing the enemy are naked enough. The longest term problem is to find enough men and equipment to stand up to the present rate of attrition . . . . So far this rate has been

met, partly by replacements *but to a large extent by feeding the fat from the Ardennes and from Holland to the battle sectors*" (italics mine).

Strong was aware that German panzer divisions began to disappear from the line about December 1, and that there seemed to be more *Volksgrenadier* divisions in the Eifel than warranted by a static front, but he did not guess the Germans' true intent, nor did he visualize the potential striking force and determination of the German attackers, and on December 14, General Strong's war maps still showed only four German divisions opposite Middleton, with two panzer divisions lurking far to the rear of this area, apparently moving north.

At First Army, Hodges' Intelligence Officer, Colonel Dickson, had been considering the possibility of a German attack since early November, when he indicated that the Germans seemed to want to mount an offensive, probably in the area Aachen-Venlo (in Holland). He concluded that there was high probability of an attack against the British and the Ninth Army, but low probability of an attack against First Army. Later, on November 20, shortly after the First and Ninth Armies began their attack toward the Roer River, Dickson lost his cautious touch, and predicted that the possibility of a German spoiling attack, in any sector, had been lost with the beginning of the American attacks. The remaining German capabilities, Dickson concluded, were continued defense or surrender — attack was impossible. But again about the first of December, when the American attacks were dying down, the additional clues, already noted, indicated the renewed possibility of a German attack.

Throughout the first week of December, many additional indications of a German build-up came through, as the railroads were working overtime pouring the German troops and supplies into the Western Front. On December 10, Dickson issued his last estimate of the enemy situation before the attack, which has led some to credit him with the prediction of the German attack. After citing numerous indications of a German build-up, Dickson concluded: "It is plain that his (the enemy's) strategy in defense of the Reich is based on the exhaustion of

likely a recently arrived *Volksgrenadier* Division came in to relieve *212 Volksgrenadier Division.*"

Certain definite conclusions may be drawn from this array of statements and facts. Most important, no serious consideration was given by any echelon in the entire command in the west to the possibility of a strong German attack through the weak "calculated risk" in the Ardennes. The nature of the divisions occupying the front, the written statements of the Intelligence Officers, unconcern for secondary defensive positions in the Ardennes, loan of part of Middleton's only armored division to V Corps, all added to confirm the candid statement of Middleton's Intelligence Officer, "It surprised me," and to deny that in their wildest dreams or predictions anyone gave consideration to this location for the German attack.

However, we should recognize that the various Intelligence Officers had seriously considered the possibility of a German attack, and that Hodges' Intelligence Officer, for one day at least, had gloomily forecast a rather heavy German attack which would risk the entire German future. But all of these predictions were based on the presumption that the Germans would attack our concentration in the Aachen sector, and that attacks would occur only after we had battered our way across the Roer River, and were lunging for the fattened industrial area of the Ruhr, barely twenty miles east of the Roer River, on the opposite shore of the Rhine.

During the war no armchair strategist's theories so infuriated American GI's as the statements in which several of our leading civilian "military experts" insinuated we knew all about the Battle of the Bulge in advance. Several even hinted that it was merely a trap to get the Germans into the open. Today, certain columnists, military analysts, and commanders are still suggesting that they knew the Ardennes attack was coming all the time. If they did, they concealed their knowledge as well as the Germans did their troop movements. The German cover or camouflage plan, *Wacht Am Rhein,* had exceeded its fondest expectations. We were completely, utterly fooled.

For just one minute let us cast our eyes back to the German plan, to review how its strategy had succeeded so well. First,

breadth of France, destroyed thousands upon thousands of its men, and equally astronomical numbers of its tanks, guns, planes, and other equipment, liberated most of four European countries, and charged to the very border of the enemy himself. You probably would not think that the enemy would be in condition to strike back with a vicious blow that would rock you on your heels. Neither did "Ike," nor anyone else in Europe; nor did the Americans at home either. That is no excuse for what happened, but it goes far toward explaining it.

Despite the crushing, grinding, fighting of October and November, this optimism, which reached its height during the chase across France, continued to pervade all ranks of the Anglo-American armies, sometimes to the blinding of reason. Ralph Ingersoll, one of Bradley's staff officers, now says that he was gloomy when Eisenhower missed "The Great Decision" in September, but he seems to have been alone. Certainly Bradley's Intelligence Officer did not show any gloom in his glowing intelligence reports. The Intelligence Officers of all commands seemed to enter into a deliberate contest in those fateful days to see who could make most fun of the critical German situation. Wisecracks and serious reports alike, led one to only one decision — the Germans were on their last legs even if they did not act like it. I well remember the day we received our copy of the 12th Army Group Intelligence report which said that, "The crust of defenses is thinner, more brittle, and more vulnerable than it appears on our G-2 maps or to the troops in the line." I was in the G-2 office of the 7th Armored Division at the time. We were comfortably sitting astride the little river which separates Holland and Germany, in reserve waiting and planning for the big push across the Roer River. We did not have much to do in those days, and we sat around discussing this report. I was ready to pack my bags, and prepare to go home, but some of the more sober individuals rather hesitatingly pointed out that it seemed as though the *Sixth Panzer Army* was waiting across the river, licking its chops in anticipation of our crossing. It did not happen that way, but less than a week later, the 7th Armored Division was fighting portions of both Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army* and Manteuffel's

Fifth Panzer Army, and nobody was joking then. I WAS really scared

A symptom of the times was the talk in higher headquarters of issuing a joint Churchill-Roosevelt statement which might break the will of the Germans to resist. However, Eisenhower recommended against this. Nevertheless, his aide, Captain Butcher, writes that on November 11 he ordered a mobile radio transmitter ready by December 15, ironically enough the eve of the German attack, so that it would be ready in time for the fall of Berlin; and on December 13, Eisenhower sent a letter to Montgomery describing the irreparable damage done to the Germans by the then current offensive. On December 16, General Eisenhower's chauffeur and orderly, Micky, was married to a WAC in a military ceremony attended by the Supreme Commander.

The lack of concern with any secondary defensive line for VIII Corps was another indication of this optimism. No matter what the "calculated risk," sound defensive tactics would seem to call for the establishment of alternate positions in any defense, even if it be for one night. But Middleton's VIII Corps had been in the Ardennes sector for nearly three months.

The underestimation of the German ability to recover was the most flagrant example of this overoptimism. We thought that all German divisions were down from one third to one half strength, but much to our surprise, we discovered that the panzer units of "Sepp" Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army* carried their full strength, and then a little more. And most of the *Volksgrenadier* divisions were in the same condition. We thought the Germans did not have enough tanks, guns, ammunition, and fuel, but they turned up with vast quantities of all of these in the Ardennes forests in December.

Germans captured before their December wave of high morale, fed this optimism of ours. From general to private they confided that they were licked and knew it. Some asked that we take letters to their wives in Berlin because they knew we would be there in a few weeks (this was during the chase across France). Others "admitted" that the German war machine was through; some confided that great unrest was stirring Germany, and, of course, the attempt on Hitler's life added fuel

then agreed that even should the Germans attempt an attack, these large formations would rapidly be turned around to hit the German flank. But neither Eisenhower nor Bradley guessed the extent of the German power, nor the fanaticism of the German leadership. Nor did they remember the German attacks of 1940, 1914, and even 1870.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Why, in the light of the considerable array of information available to us, did we not predict more accurately not only the time, but the nature of the German offensive? Numerous apologies, excuses, or rationalizations have been offered, suggested, or ordered to explain this curious situation. They seem to consolidate into five general categories: (1) our optimism; (2) the situation; (3) the cleverness of the German plan; (4) poor interpretation of intelligence; and (5) lack of aerial reconnaissance.

The first three reasons have been thoroughly discussed in previous sections. Just a brief glance at the last two:

(a) *Poor Evaluation of Collected Intelligence* — Although they came in driblets rather than bucketfuls, isolated clues to the German intentions dripped through the Allied lines for nearly a month before the attack. Admittedly, some of the intelligence media were not producing at full strength. Combat patrolling by the divisions occupying Middleton's sector was at a minimum: the Golden Lions of the 106th Division had only closed into their positions four days before the German attack, and when they arrived, they were cold and wet and disheartened after a miserable truck ride from Normandy. The weather had been rainy all the time, and the division commander ordered his regimental commanders to get the men rehabilitated before doing anything else. The shelters were full of water, and many of the men already had trench foot because of their continuously wet feet from the ride, the wet shelters, and the lack of dry socks. Similarly in the other two infantry divisions, rehabilitation was taking place, and extensive patrolling was not under-

taken despite corps orders to send out strong feelers behind the enemy lines. Then, too, the Germans began to react violently to American patrol activity, but this should have been an indication that something unusual was in the air. In addition, misfortune befell some of the line crossers sent into the German-held portion of the Eifel; five were sent through the lines in early December, and none of them returned.

Despite these rather awkward limitations in the intelligence material gathered during the crucial period, the opinion of this author, backed by other serious students of the intelligence picture, some of whom filed official reports which were not received with favor by the army hierarchy, is that the material at hand was sufficient to warrant the criticism that the Intelligence Officers were not fully alert.

Several factors helped build this Intelligence blind spot. First was the general overconfidence of the times, already discussed in detail. Second was the smugness of the Intelligence Officers, who are supposed to be pessimists by training, if not by nature. And third was a more fundamental weakness in our entire Intelligence organization. The function of an Intelligence Officer is first to collect, then to evaluate, and finally to disseminate to other levels of command, information of the enemy. Through a process of over-specialization, which often seems to pervade our life, Intelligence Officers seemed to operate in a vacuum, charged with describing enemy intentions without consideration to our plans. Because our actions so directly affect theirs, it is very difficult to say what the Germans may do if we do not first say what we intend to do, but this is exactly what our Intelligence Officers were doing throughout their combat career. For example, to discuss German intentions in the Ardennes without analyzing the weakness of our positions there, our present and pending attacks elsewhere, is to overlook the true situation. An Intelligence man who only considers the German potentialities without assessing our own aims and desires, soon does not become an "intelligent" man. This we have learned the hard way. The more aggressive Intelligence Officers conquered this weakness; the others did not, and we suffered accordingly.

his exposed troops from the Schnee Eifel before they were cut off. And then late in the evening of December 16, Middleton obtained the release of the 7th Armored Division from Ninth Army reserve for immediate movement to St. Vith, to assist Jones in his already grave situation. When Jones was informed by Middleton that the 7th Armored Division was on its way and scheduled to arrive by early morning of December 17, he immediately shifted CCB of the 9th Armored Division south to assist the southern regiment, the 424th Infantry, in restoring the southern flank of the 106th Division sector. CCB attacked and was making progress on December 17, when suddenly orders came to cease the attack and withdraw just west of the Our River, which it had crossed, pending stabilization of the situation on the Schnee Eifel. The 424th Infantry had already begun a rather disorganized withdrawal after being buffeted on both sides by onrushing Germans.

Meanwhile, further to the north in the 106th Division sector, all was not well. Middleton, not yet realizing the gravity of the situation, expected the 7th Armored Division to make a rapid sixty mile night road march from its Ninth Army assembly area, to arrive in St. Vith in ample time to launch an attack on the morning of December 17. Actually, the division, its route lit by German reconnaissance planes dropping flares, made a hectic journey south into the unknown where its staff was told, "an attack of three or four German divisions is underway." Moving on two routes, the division was exasperatingly delayed by many retreating units, and actually CCR on the most eastern route, came within a half hour of colliding with the spearhead of "Sepp" Dietrich's *1 SS Panzer Division* bursting toward Malmedy. Only luck or fate let CCR through Malmedy, and caught Battery B of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, which had wormed its way between the march columns of the 7th Armored Division; this latter group was trapped, and then liquidated by order of an ardent *SS* Lieutenant leading a tank column in the infamous "Malmedy massacre" which aroused the entire Allied world. The 7th Armored Division artillery columns, following CCR, were forced to backtrack and join the remainder of the division on a road

everybody
no orders —
no destination —
no guts

further to the west. As a result, the artillery was not in firing position until December 18. Whereas, Middleton had estimated that the first combat command of the 7th Armored would arrive at seven-thirty in the morning of December 17, advance reconnaissance elements did not get to St. Vith until about three in the afternoon. It was too late; the Schnee Eifel was already cut off, and advance elements of the German *66 Corps* were advancing on St. Vith itself. St. Vith was a scene of wildest confusion, befuddled by conflicting rumors, aided by few concrete facts about the enemy's intentions or whereabouts. The Germans had completely achieved their first objective — isolation of the Schnee Eifel.

Compares with the Bastogne

In the center of VIII Corps, the Germans were equally successful in those first two hectic days. Immediately south of the Schnee Eifel, one panzer corps, the *58th,* steam-rollered through the southern portion of the 424th Infantry, which had also been squeezed on the north by the pincers around the Schnee Eifel. The 424th Infantry pulled back in disorder toward the Our River in the vicinity of Winterspelt, just south of CCB of the 9th Armored Division which had been attacking in this region until recalled by Jones, 106th Division Commander. Simultaneously, the main effort of *47 Corps,* with an infantry and two panzer divisions, was directed at the eleven mile front of the 110th Infantry in the center of the 28th Division sector. Hit on the first day by the *2 Panzer Division* and the *26 Volksgrenadier Division,* the regiment reeled back, only to be hit again on the next, by a second panzer division, the *Panzer Lehr.* This aggregation of armor and infantry bridged the Our River, cut the ridge road along which I had so peacefully ridden several months before, completely overwhelmed the regiment, and rapidly moved toward the beautiful town of Clerf, the rest center eight miles west. A second combat command of the 9th Armored Division, CCR, behind the 28th Division, was alerted on December 16 by Middleton. It shipped tank destroyers, and then a few tanks to the front; but they, too, were overwhelmed, and the rest of the command began to pull back to the west, confused by the turn of events. Just north of the ill-fated 110th Infantry, its sister regiment, the

siderably aged by so many sudden demands to halt at unexpected points. Back in Paris, Eisenhower was virtually held prisoner in his own headquarters by overzealous counter-intelligence men, who even sent a double through the streets of Paris in an attempt to smoke out the would-be killers. So serious was the situation deemed that an eight o'clock curfew was clamped on Paris; the order was to keep all soldiers off the streets after dark. And all this time Skorzeny was safely behind the German lines, innocent of the havoc he had wrought.

More serious was the inability to get reports on various units. The headquarters of First Army, originally at Spa, (headquarters of the Kaiser in the last war), went to a small town called Chaudfontaine near Liége, and finally to Tongres, west of the Meuse River, between Liége and Maastricht. Spa seemed to be in the path of the onrushing German armor, and forward elements of *1 SS Panzer Division* actually were within several miles of the town on December 18. On the seventeenth, the headquarters had been hastily evacuated; those of us who were there later found many secret documents left by various hastily departing staff divisions. Others found new pistols, and other types of equipment, left behind in the departure. At Malmedy, near panic gripped the town as the Germans approached, and an evacuation hospital hastily loaded up and left, as did the other units in the town. All these people were scared, most of all by the fact that they did not know what was going on. Nobody seemed to comprehend what had happened. Communication with the forward divisions had in many cases been cut or greatly reduced, and corps and higher commanders were unable to obtain sufficient information to put together the pieces of the puzzle. Retreating troops clogged the roads and blocked reinforcements on their way to the front. At times complete panic gripped some of these units as rumors of approaching Germans were heard; in one instance, eight huge 240mm. guns, in perfect working condition, were abandoned in a ditch with no demolition because the Germans were approaching. Much equipment was so jettisoned in perfect working order, despite previous careful instructions on how to disable matériel if need be.

I saw this

before the Russians confirmed our earlier understanding that the division was on the Eastern Front.

On December 22, the Intelligence Officer of the First Army, Colonel B. A. Dickson, took occasion to issue an estimate of the enemy situation in which he reported, without expressing doubt, that thirteen German divisions were reported to be in reserve in the battle area, that five and one half more were possibly in reserve, and four additional divisions were reported in reserve, but not confirmed. This was six days after the attack's beginning when twenty-four German divisions had already been identified. In addition, Colonel Dickson predicted that Germany proper could supply an additional four *Volksgrenadier* divisions within a week, the Italian front could yield up to four divisions, the Eastern Front possibly five, and Norway four to five more divisions.

Here was the Intelligence Officer at his gloomiest. So grave was this report that all copies were ordered destroyed after they had been distributed, and the divisions which had received them were ordered to send signed certificates indicating they had destroyed them. General Hodges was afraid of its effect on already low morale, should such a report be made public. Here you have a very dangerous and concrete example of the state of mind which grips an overconfident army suddenly jolted with a haymaking punch.

Where is this brave man?

Do not jump to the conclusion that everyone in the Battle of the Bulge was scared and panicky. Many of the most heroic deeds of the war were performed by small, isolated groups of soldiers, unaware of the situation, without adequate equipment or support, who stood and battled it out with the Germans until overwhelmed. Some of these deeds will be discussed later. But, although we like to think of our soldiers as always heroic, it's time the public began to view them as the human beings that they really are, with the weaknesses which one finds in any group or individuals, in any working situation. This talk of fear and panic is not recited to deprecate the American soldier, but rather to bring into focus a vital consideration in the Battle of the Bulge. We were not used to defeat; that made it more difficult to take.

our forces seemed trapped. Being big and strong and undisciplined, the colossus of the New World, we often seemed casual in our interest and fighting ability. But when backed against a wall, our troops suddenly became fighting demons. The same inconsistency showed up in the Battle of the Bulge.

Those first two days on the Ardennes front were complete chaos. Many Americans ran. Some stayed to fight. Others surrendered in large groups. The Germans wrung their hands with glee and said, "Did we not tell you that the Americans were cowards; did we not say they would wilt if surprised and overwhelmed?" But once again they failed to understand the psychology of our young nation. As the initial shock wore off, and the terror and dismal uncertainty of those first hours diminished, a perceptible change swept through American ranks. Rudely shocked out of their complacency, the grim truth suddenly dawned on our dazed troops and leaders — the war was far from over.

Sometimes I wished I had run with the rest

Partly because of the humiliation at being caught asleep, partly because of the sobering realization that much hard fighting remained ahead, and partly because of the surprising German strength, the often careless, casual, and even uninterested Americans suddenly buckled down to the grim business of killing Germans in large numbers. Too often overzealous correspondents have described in sweeping, colorful terms, the sensational ripple of an idea through the ranks; hence, the discerning reader has become skeptical of generalizations about morale of fighting men. But here was the great "shock treatment" of the war in the west: the German attack was the insulin injected under American skin. The sudden serious light in which the war was viewed was a subject for comment by all. Stung by the surprise punch of the Germans, we staggered and then rebounded. Our minds suddenly cleared.

As never before, since D-Day in Normandy, all of the troops and the commanders were aware of the dangers ahead; by mutual consent they banished the wisecracks about the Germans, forgot for the moment their desire to get home, and placed first things first. Those first things were Germans unendingly streaming through the shattered American line.

wormed his way to First Army headquarters, to break in on a meeting between Generals Hodges, Kean (Chief of Staff of First Army), Simpson, and Montgomery. In a dramatic message, Hasbrouck presented for the first time the condition of the St. Vith "horseshoe." The note to General Kean read:

DEAR BILL:

I am out of touch with VIII Corps, and understand XVIII Airborne Corps is coming in. My division is defending the line St. Vith-Poteau both inclusive. CCB, 9th Armored Division, the 424th Infantry Regiment of the 106th Division, and the 112th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Division are on my right, and hold from St. Vith (exclusive) to Holdingen. Both infantry regiments are in bad shape. My right flank is wide open except for some reconnaissance elements, TDs, and stragglers we have collected and organized into defensive teams at road centers as far back as Cheram, inclusive. Two German divisions, *116 Panzer* and *560 Volksgrenadier,* are just starting to attack northwest with their right on Gouvy. I can delay them the rest of today *maybe* but will be cut off by tomorrow. VIII Corps has ordered me to hold, and I will do so, but need help. An attack from Bastogne to the northeast will relieve the situation and, in turn, cut the bastards off in rear. I also need plenty of air support. Am out of contact with VIII Corps so am sending this to you. Understand 82d Airborne Division is coming up on my north, and the north flank is not critical.

BOB HASBROUCK

In answer to this dramatic appeal for information and help, Hodges dispatched a message to Hasbrouck telling him that Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps was closing in behind him, and making Hasbrouck commander of all the troops in the "horseshoe." This was the first order they had received in three days. But the help was never to get as far as St. Vith. On the afternoon of December 21, the Germans attacked and overwhelmed the garrison holding St. Vith, capturing many of the defenders who were cut off in the hills east of the town. A loose defensive line was formed of stragglers who made their way out of the battle, aided by troops along the north flank which had been unmolested, and a second stand was attempted

on December 22,
Germans attacked,
but also from the
aided by *9 SS Pa*
clean up the situa
by this time were
plies, and without
borne Corps Comm
and, eventually, p
22, Ridgway orde
to defend until re
the Germans ma
demoralized, poo
dramatic message
were withdrawn
Armored Divisio

This was the
sent his personal
advice regarding
Hasbrouck said
of the tactical i
that it was diffi
area he now he
units had lost ta
morale. Ridgw
vinced the tired
ning early in the
began to pull ba
in the face of c
of the troops w
of the 82d Airb
add emphasis
smashing 1,27(
town — thereaf

While the bi
trapped regime
Schnee Eifel,
German forces

on December 22, several miles west of St. Vith. Again the Germans attacked, not only from the east with *66 Corps*, but also from the north with the *Fuehrer Escort Brigade*, now aided by *9 SS Panzer Division* sent south by Dietrich to help clean up the situation. All units in the "horseshoe" defense by this time were badly mauled, low on ammunition and supplies, and without reserves. Hodges and Ridgway, XVIII Airborne Corps Commander, had hoped to hold onto the salient, and, eventually, pull their other troops up to it; on December 22, Ridgway ordered them to form a complete defensive circle, to defend until relieved, supply to be brought in by air. But the Germans made another penetration of the weak line of demoralized, poorly equipped troops. Hasbrouck sent another dramatic message to Ridgway, saying that unless the division were withdrawn immediately, "there will be no more 7th Armored Division."

This was the situation when Field Marshal Montgomery sent his personal liaison officer to visit Hasbrouck to elicit his advice regarding future action of the "horseshoe" defenders. Hasbrouck said he would try to defend, if so ordered because of the tactical importance of the terrain, but he pointed out that it was difficult to supply by air in the densely wooded area he now held, and that fighting elements of the various units had lost tactical unity, were low in men, materials, and morale. Ridgway was overruled by Montgomery, who convinced the tired Hodges, much to Ridgway's disgust. Beginning early in the morning of December 23, troops in the salient began to pull back in an amazing daylight withdrawal executed in the face of continued German attacks. By nightfall, the last of the troops were across the Salm River, through the lines of the 82d Airborne Division. On December 26, as though to add emphasis to the importance of St. Vith, the RAF, in a smashing 1,270 ton raid on the town, nearly devastated the town — thereafter, German traffic was routed around the town.

While the big battle had been going on around St. Vith, two trapped regiments of the 106th Division, still perched on the Schnee Eifel, were subjected to minor attacks by containing German forces. On December 18, the regiments were given

Corps which, even though relieved of part of its sector by VII Corps on its west, was still opposed by considerable German force.

First Army Intelligence Officer's preoccupation with the threat through the 30th Division, leading to a concentration of reserves behind that division, left XVIII Airborne Corps with little help to meet this new threat along the Bastogne-Liége road. Only the 7th Armored Division and attached units, still pouring out of the St. Vith salient on the night of December 23, were available to XVIII Airborne Corps. These units were completely disorganized, tired, low in men and equipment, demoralized, and without information of their own strength — no reports had been received during the seven days of the "horseshoe" siege. Despite this, the 7th Armored Division was ordered to prepare immediately a fighting force to take over a very narrow sector between the 82d Airborne Division and the 3d Armored Division, and, specifically, to defend the crossroads center of Manhay.

No — Co. A 40th Tk Bn. occupied position South of MANHAY at 0600 24 December

The first units were in place late in the afternoon of December 24, but in the meantime, the German *2 SS Panzer Division* had pressed north from Parker's crossroads, and was punching at the 82d Airborne Division in conjunction with *9 SS Panzer Division,* which made numerous attempts to cross the Salm River to cut through the 82d Airborne Division lines from the east. Although the 82d Airborne Division occupied good defensive positions along most of its line, its front extended some eighteen miles. Known to be punching at it were the *2* and *9 SS Panzer Divisions,* from south and east, respectively, and part of *560 Volksgrenadier Division.* More alarming was the commanders' suspicion that the *1* and *12 SS Panzer Divisions* were moving to the west toward XVIII Airborne Corps; in addition, *10 SS Panzer* and *11 Panzer Divisions* were both headed for the Ardennes, according to our Intelligence, and were probables for the new attack which seemed to be forming. Also the *Fuehrer Escort Brigade, 9 Panzer* and *3* and *15 Panzer Grenadier Divisions* as yet unidentified, were possible additions to the enemy attack against 82d Airborne Division.

Despite the great importance of the road from Vielsalm to

prised man was Hitler when the democracies [illegible] act with firmness and resolution during this crisis. It was a plain boy from the Kansas plains who made the great decisions, without any dictator to guide him.

WAS IT A DARK DECEMBER?

There are many who would answer a sharp unequivocal "yes" to the proposition that December, 1944, was truly a dark December. First, they would point to the tragic destruction, the shattered bodies and minds, the arms and legs which lay crumpled on snowcovered hills and forests of the Ardennes, the total misery of the infantrymen wading waist deep in snow, the dead tankers in burning hulks, the pilots in falling planes. They would tell you of things it is impossible to recount — of chaotic days when for the first time in Europe the Allied invasion forces were sent reeling by German blows. To a victorious peoples and their army on the march, the effect was almost unbelievable: curfew in Paris; prayers in New York; wonder in London; frantic preparations for withdrawal in Maastricht, Holland, headquarters of Ninth Army; dazed amazement in Spa, Chaudfontaine, and Tongres, successive headquarters of a fleeing First Army; stark fright on faces of Belgian and Luxembourg citizens left behind by retreating armies; the punchdrunk look of lost soldiers; the utter despair of French liaison officers remembering only too vividly the tragic summer days of 1940; and then, as the bitter truth dawned on the at first uncomprehending mind, grim determination and bitter hatred as reports were received about the slaughter of American soldiers at Malmedy.

They would point to the 76,890 American men who were casualties in that great struggle, of their youth and vigor, of stricken parents and wives and sweethearts who received the form telegrams which began "The War Department regrets . . . " They would conclude the battle was stupid and

senseless because we should have predicted the German attack, and should have been ready for it. But was the picture so dark?

We were caught completely unawares, asleep in the forests of the Ardennes that cold morning of December 16, 1944, and we were caught because we were overconfident. We had not yet realized that we were dealing with a madman who had long since thrown the military books out of the window — Hitler had replaced Clausewitz as the German military genius. We did not realize the extent to which the leading German generals had sold their souls, and we forgot the lessons which nature sometimes teaches — that trapped animals may suddenly spring forward in a final death lunge in which they have been known to emerge victorious over their surprised adversaries. We forgot all of those things, and we paid for it with two weeks of fright and temporary rout.

Granting that we should not have been caught in the Ardennes, we are still faced with the undisputed fact that once the surprise was over, our reaction was magnificent. History will prove that the team led by Eisenhower put on one of the greatest performances of the entire war when it faced the German attack. The 90-degree turn by Patton, rapid redeployment of most of the First and Ninth Army, the movement of two British corps, rearrangement of supplies, an entire new air plan developed overnight, the complicated logistical rearrangements, which have barely been touched upon in this book, all are military feats of which we may rightly be proud. They are feats which surprised the Germans. That the Battle of the Bulge, and its irreparable damage to the German war machine and morale, hastened the day's end, stands as an inescapable fact. Caught in the open, away from their fortifications and their river defenses, the Germans were hit and hit again. It was a stroke of luck for which we have only Hitler to thank. As he had done at Stalingrad before, the *Fuehrer* gambled heavily on his intuition, and lost.

Perhaps even more catastrophic to the Germans was the complete collapse of home front morale. From the dizzying emotional heights of those pre-Christmas days, when for the first time in two years the German armies were on the march,

German civilians were suddenly jarred back to their senses by the hard realities of impending national defeat. For two joyous weeks the years of suffering seemed meaningful, as hopes for the western armies pyramided. But just as rapidly, these hopes were shattered, not only by Allied advances in the west, but also by stupendous Russian advances in the east. Once more the faces in the villages grew long, smiles vanished. To most, only despair and an uncertain future lay ahead.

Although the unexpected fury of the German attack threw the Allied team off balance, and upset the timetable of advance, the blow inflicted only temporary damage, which was quickly repaired. The jolt of even temporary defeat shocked many overconfident Americans, military and civilian, into realization of the serious nature of the fight; the laughing and joking about the German armies ceased. And our Intelligence Officers at last began to overestimate German power, too late, I grant you, to prevent the nearly fatal attack, but nonetheless a healthy sign. And from the overseas Arsenal came men and materials, which soon replaced the damage wrought by the unpredictable Hitler. The *Fuehrer* had gambled and lost; our top military men in the battle, Eisenhower, Bradley, and Hodges, all believe that Hitler made one of the greatest mistakes of his career when he ordered the Ardennes attack. It was in the tradition of this fanatic to risk all in one great gamble; his only regret, shared by many Germans today, was that he lost the gamble.

Nor should we ever forget that the Battle of the Bulge was only a part of a larger struggle which we won, a struggle against one particular form of selfishness and greed called Fascism. This struggle, of which the Battle of the Bulge was only a small segment, was important because it gave us the opportunity to create a better world in which we all could live. We triumphed over one form of social malignancy, and gained that chance. If we throw away that opportunity, we will have only ourselves to blame.

War is an unbelievable potpourri of deep fear, exhilaration, dull, monotonous, dirty living, strange heroics, and complete cowardice, all intermingled to form a way of life at once stimulating and completely depressing. Man at his best and at his

of the deep mysteries of human nature. Like any army we had both kinds of soldiers; the mind of man, like a brittle rubber band, often snaps and breaks in the dark times of uncertainty.

But a saving grace is that very elasticity. The average soldier, subject to terrible stresses in the early days of the German attack when one was lucky if he knew whether the next squad was friend or foe, very readily snapped back to the life he had led before this devastating experience. Perhaps this is actually a weakness, for if man were to remember vividly the horror and degradation of war, he might strive more desperately for the real life of peace and good will to which we all pay lip service, but toward which men and nations seem to grope only vaguely, with lack of understanding and wavering desire.

Until we can cope with selfishness and greed in the entire world, until we have abolished war as a means of enforcing needs and desires, we must be prepared to face the consequences of the lawless society in which we live. When we, who are again civilians, criticize the hundreds upon thousands of stupid, aristocratic, undemocratic, wasteful, extravagant, malicious, and petty acts committed in the army, we must not forget that until we, as a nation, find the means, in concert with other nations, of understanding and resolving our differences in custom, habit, economy, and philosophy, until we are willing to give up some small, narrow right to obtain a greater good for the world, until that time we must tolerate and live with an army. So when we criticize our Intelligence Officers, as I have, and denounce "Pearl Harbor" mentality, we should remember that we are also obligated to rectify this condition by careful suggestion rather than just reckless carping and criticism. We should never forget either that in the eyes of military observers of all nations, the Allied reaction to the German attack, the rallying of our forces, the diversion of troops to the attack area, the tenacious stands of small and large units in isolated spots, and finally the complete elimination of the great German gains within six weeks, do stand as a feat of arms to which we may point with well justified pride.