

DECLASSIFIED

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SHAEF Main, ---On December 16 Hitler himself launched his western armies in a gamble massive, long premeditated, final. Into one counter-offensive were to be thrown all the Panzer forces of the West worthy of the name, all the fresh infantry made available by the culmination of the Volksgrenadier program, and all the last dregs of thuggery still fermenting in the Fatherland.

After a long period of meticulous and secret planning, Field Marshal Model's forces were to be suddenly gathered together from all quarters, flung in mass at the unsuspecting Allies' center which consisted of difficult terrain but was weakly held and then herded forward on a broad front towards the Meuse. Two Panzer armies were to advance with 8 Panzer divisions in line in a vast, simple turning movement, four divisions of the SS on the axis MALMEDY-LIEGE, and four of the army on the axis MARCHE-NAMUR. Antwerp and Brussels would then lie straight ahead. In the train of each army were to follow two or three fresh Volksgrenadier divisions with a parachute division for protection on the outer flank. Still further in the rear and in disguise were to follow the Wallonian SS and the Flemish SS for the political butchery. On the north and south flanks of the army group two further armies were involved, both controlling only infantry, one to hold the old line forward of Cologne, as a firm hinge for the advance, and the other to make covering advances on the southern flank, push out into the hills and forests of the Ardennes to secure the left and rear. In reserve were two further Panzer divisions and two Panzer Grenadier divisions, probably one of each for each Panzer army for the exploitation of success or retrieving of mishaps, and all the time additional infantry was to be accumulated in reserve from any and every sector where the Allies should show signs of themselves withdrawing troops.

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In the sector of each Panzer army the crust of the defense (such as it was) was to be broken by artillery preparing our infantry attack and then the Panzers were to plunge immediately through, themselves preceded however, by desperado units dropped from the air to seize road crossings or sent forward disguised in American tanks and uniforms to seize the vital bridges over the Meuse.

The timing was perfect — the blow was to fall just when the Allies themselves were poised for an offensive, so that maximum surprise could be achieved and, even if nothing further were gained, at least their plans would be dislodged for the winter. The weather too, was favorable, fog and near-fog to nullify the Allied air superiority.

In fact the plan worked in general well in the center, where 5th Panzer Army reached its first bound along the road and railway through MARCHE without mishap, the infantry following up comparatively stoutly; BASTOGNE, however, was not taken and remained, though surrounded, a galling commitment in the middle of the Army's line of communication, while 11 Panzer Division, late at the start line, was in trouble with Allied forces at LAROCHE. In the South the Volksgrenadiers led off with some limited advances, but were soon stopped and even driven back, suffering unwelcome casualties. But it was in the north, where much the greatest weight had been placed, that things went most seriously wrong from the start. Between Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies was an infantry corps (LXVI) which had the mission of seizing the key communications center St. Vith; in this it failed over a crucial period of five days, and a firm Allied salient was maintained, thrusting deep into the centre of the enemy's advance. Worse still, although 1 SS Panzer Division got away to a flying start, rapidly reaching the neighbourhood of Malmedy, its companion 12 SS Panzer Division floundered hopelessly after an advance of only a few kilometres, and has since been vainly attempting to batter a way out. The result has been that considerable spearhead

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elements of I SS Panzer Division were isolated, and the division has taken punishment. Meantime II SS Panzer Corps never started at all; the infantry corps (LXVII) on its right, which was to pave the way for its advance by seizing Monschau, failed badly. The true responsibility for the frustration of Sixth SS Panzer Army rests very largely, therefore, on the green Volksgrenadiers of LXVI and LXVII Infantry Corps. Meantime, the desperadoes were being steadily rounded up in isolation or perishing piecemeal on their cross roads and bridges from cold, trenchfeet and disillusion.

At the time of writing, the enemy is making rapid moves to meet the situation. The divisions of II SS Panzer Corps have been brought up on the south of I SS Corps, instead of on the North: LXVII Corps sector is thus left derelict and LXVI Corps sector is being taken in hand, the first essential being clearly to crush in the Allied salient to St. Vith. Fifth Panzer Army meantime, is left in the air, consolidating, waiting for its companion to come up, and no doubt considering itself, with some reason, in the light of a success to be reinforced.

The remainder of the Western front was, as is only natural, comparatively quiet, but the enemy showed signs of aggressiveness, according to plan and order, even as far away as the west coast fortresses; at La Rochelle 200 cows were brought in in return for as many German carcasses.

During the past week 19th Army in the south has shown consistent aggressiveness although there has been no appreciable change in its position west of the Rhine. The area northwest of Colmar was especially active, 189th Division making many vigorous small scale attacks towards Ammerschweier and Kayserberg.

One of the interesting changes in command is the double advent of Hitler and Himmler on the scene of action for the showdown. Hitler addressed

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his commanders before the battle, appealing to the spirit of the Battle of Leuthen, where Old Fritz retrieved his fortunes against apparently overwhelming odds. His own personal bodyguard Brigade has apparently been flung into the fray. Meantime Himmler's more modest Bodyguard Battalion has been identified on the Upper Rhine, and Himmler himself is copiously reported present, in his special train. If all went well he too might like to stage an offensive - certainly the bridgehead west of the Rhine is being held obstinately enough. However, there are probably not enough forces for two offensives and it may be that Himmler has the mission of preparing in haste every defense and every dump needed for the famous Last Redoubt in the Black Forest, in case the last throw of the Nazi party should fail. Hitler, perhaps, is to conduct the battle to the last limit ~~but~~ by all means that pass (in Germany) for fair play and Himmler has reserved such means as even in Germany pass for foul.

From G-2 summaries there is no longer any shadow of doubt that the enemy will continue at all costs to push the present offensive to the limit. The only unanswered question is "what is the limit?".

The first stage of the attack has not so far been successful in seizing the Meuse crossings but it did have considerable success and a second push is just now starting. The only major change in plan necessitated has been the transfer of the central axis of advance of the 6th SS Panzer Army southward from Malmedy to Vielsalm. Its objectives on the Meuse probably remain unchanged and it is now at least succeeding in getting all four of its straggling divisions into line abreast according to the new plan. Fifth Panzer Army has also started to move again.

There is no doubt that the enemy intended originally to cross the Meuse and even now if he reaches it short of exhaustion he will in all probability try to cross.

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However, his advantage of surprise which was skilfully gained, is now wearing thin and it was gained, moreover, at the expense of some over-haste and lack of build-up at the last moment. Further, the great weakness of the enemy's forces, lack of training, has made itself apparent in the infantry divisions. The enemy staff work has shown care and ability of a very high order in planning and his intelligence has foreseen every move in the game of a continental battle of maneuver, over terrain familiar to German strategists for centuries. But the execution by undertrained formations, is not faultless. Supply difficulties have arisen and will grow. Much of the petrol carefully hoarded on the start line has been expended without the capture (one of the major hazards) of Allied stocks; the communications net in the EIFEL and ARDENNES is poor, and, with clearing weather will be at the mercy of Allied air superiority.

If the Meuse had been reached in the first four or five days Allied stocks would have been captured and Allied positions would have been turned before their forces could have been mustered and regrouped. But it was NOT. The enemy is far from beaten yet. For the last time he has accumulated men and machines in Teutonic mass, by draining all sectors of the West, even the most vital and the whole Fatherland, of all reserves. This mass will fight on, dragging in even the last panzer or Volksgrenadier from the North and South and East, to exhaustion. It can never be reproduced, it has gone on too far to draw back.