Observing the Past to Prepare for the Future: Operational Art in the Ardennes Campaign

A Monograph

by

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2018

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ORGANIZATION.

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
24-05-2018	Master's Thesis	JUN 2017 - MAY 2018

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
Observing the Past to Prepare for the Future: Operational Art in the Ardennes Campaign

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER

5b. GRANT NUMBER

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)
Major Ryan J. Karasow, USA

5d. PROJECT NUMBER

5e. TASK NUMBER

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
Advanced Military Studies Program

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)

11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
The focus of this monograph is the application of operational art during the Ardennes Campaign. The goal is to analyze a historical case study to gain a better understanding of operational art and its application by commanders and staffs to achieve desired end states. This monograph answers the question of what were the reasons behind the US success and German failure in the Ardennes Campaign through the practice of operational art which can be applied to future potential conflicts with a peer or near-peer threat. By applying the elements of operational art as criteria with which to draw evidence from the case study, the analysis demonstrates that the German Army failed to develop a feasible campaign because it lacked both the resources necessary to accomplish its objectives, and the flexibility to maintain operations. Meanwhile, the US forces' quick response and tactical actions led to eventual strategic objectives. This monograph concludes that future conflicts will likely resemble the Ardennes Campaign; therefore, commanders must adhere to the principles of mission command to empower agile and adaptive leaders. Additionally, commanders and staffs must confirm or deny assumptions, observe indicators, and develop contingencies to increase adaptability and flexibility to their plans.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Operational Art, Global War on Terrorism, Near-Peer and Peer Threat, Ardennes, Western Wall, Mission Command, Contingencies

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			Major Ryan J. Karasow
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	51	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(Include area code)* 215-873-9280

Reset

Monograph Approval Page

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Monograph Title: Observing the Past to Prepare for the Future: Operational Art in the Ardennes Campaign

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Abstract

Observing the Past to Prepare for the Future: Operational Art in the Ardennes Campaign, by MAJ Ryan J. Karasow, US Army, 51.

The focus of this monograph is the application of operational art during the Ardennes Campaign in 1944 to 1945. The goal is to analyze a historical case study to gain a better understanding of operational art and its application by commanders and staffs to achieve desired end states. This monograph answers the question why the US Army defeated the German Army in the Ardennes Campaign through the practice of operational art, and addresses considerations for future potential conflicts with a peer or near-peer threat. By applying the elements of operational art as criteria with which to draw evidence from the case study, the analysis demonstrates that the German Army failed to develop a feasible campaign plan because it lacked both the resources necessary to accomplish its objectives and the flexibility to maintain operations. By contrast, the US forces' quick response and tactical skill led to the achievement of Allied strategic objectives. This monograph concludes that future conflicts will likely resemble operations like the Ardennes Campaign; therefore, commanders must adhere to the principles of mission command to empower adaptive leaders. Additionally, commanders and staffs must confirm or deny assumptions, observe indicators, and develop contingencies to increase adaptability and flexibility of their plans.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my monograph director Dr. Calhoun and my seminar leader COL Davis for assisting me with the completion my monograph. I would also like to thank my classmates who participated in the US Army Command and General Staff College German Exchange Program in December 2016. The experience during the Battle of the Bulge Staff Ride due to the professional conduct of every student and faculty member inspired me to continue my research on the Ardennes Campaign. Thanks also are due to my classmates from my seminar and monograph syndicate for providing advice and continued support throughout the process. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife for providing me the freedom at her expense to accomplish my research and writing.

Acronyms

AD	Armored Division
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
COIN	Counterinsurgency
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
ID	Infantry Division
JB	Joint Board
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
US	United States
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWII	World War II

Illustrations

Introduction

> More than most professions the military is forced to depend on intelligent interpretation of the past for signposts charting the future. Devoid of opportunity, in peace, for self-instruction through actual practice of his profession, the soldier makes maximum use of the historical record in assuring the readiness of himself and his command to function efficiently in an emergency. The facts derived from historical analysis he applies to conditions of the present and proximate future, thus developing a synthesis of appropriate method, organization, and doctrine.
>
> —Chief of Staff of the Army General Douglas MacArthur, *1935 Report to the Secretary of War*

The increasing global activity from peer and near-peer threats poses a risk to US national security. The US Army has not engaged in a major war against a peer enemy since World War II (WWII), and senior military leaders have expressed concerns over the military's ability to succeed in high-intensity conflict.[1] Therefore, an examination of the planning and execution of the Ardennes Campaign in 1944-45 will reveal successes and failures which can improve current military leaders' understanding and application of operational art.

Although operational art is a modern concept, the linkages to World War II provide a valuable tool which can be applied by current military leaders and staffs. The 1944 Ardennes Campaign provides both positive and negative insights regarding the application of operational art by military leaders for both the present and potential future conflicts. Specifically, the campaign illustrates the importance of creating lines of operation with clear and attainable objectives and decisive points. This enables combat forces to achieve the military end state while deliberately planning for phases and transitions to maximize the forces' operational reach, thereby avoiding the risk of premature culmination. Additionally, as evident in the result of the campaign, military leaders must account for risk, create mitigation measures, and establish methods to execute contingency plans throughout the planning and execution of operations to ensure the attainment of desired goals and effects.

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[1] Michelle Tan, "Army Leaders: Service Must Look to the Future while Training for Today," *Defense News,* October 3, 2016, accessed August 11, 2017, https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/ausa/2016/10/03/army-leaders-service-must-look-to-the-future-while-training-for-today/. Although the Chinese intervened in the Korean War, it is debatable whether they represented a near-peer threat. Therefore, World War II provides better examples for the monograph topic. See also "Explaining China's Intervention in the Korean War in 1950," accessed August 11, 2017, http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1069/explaining-chinas-intervention-in-the-korean-war-in-1950.

Military leaders' understanding of the concept and application of operational art assists in the attainment of desired conditions and end states. Analyzing the Ardennes Campaign as a case study using the elements of operational art individually as well as collectively can assist military leaders' practice of operational art. This monograph analyzes the circumstances surrounding the Allied success and German failure in the Ardennes through the planning and execution of operational art to assist commanders involved in present and future conflicts against a peer or near-peer enemy. The analysis offers insight regarding operational art and its application by commanders and staffs to link tactical actions to strategic objectives.[2]

The monograph consists of six sections. The first section provides a brief background of the US Army during the seventeen years from 2001 to 2018. Analysis of the US Army's involvement in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) during this period illustrates the importance of identifying continuities and contingencies in US Army history during WWII. Since 2001, the US Army has concentrated its efforts on modernization and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because of this long period of focus on counterinsurgency operations, senior military leaders feel unprepared to execute the national security strategy for high-intensity conflict against a peer or near-peer threat.[3] Analysis of US Army operations during WWII provides an opportunity for leaders to understand how to conduct operational art in potential peer or near-peer future conflicts.

The second section defines current doctrinal terms to ensure the analysis and recommendations remain relevant to the modern force. The elements selected highlight the successful implementation by the Allies and unsuccessful application by the Germans. The specific elements introduced are end state, lines of operation (including decisive points, phases, and transitions), culmination, operational reach, and risk. Additionally, two of the three operational frameworks are introduced in the section for further

[2] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-1.

[3] Dave Majumdar, "The U.S. Military Isn't Ready for a War with Russia or China," *The National Interest*, September 15, 2016, accessed August 11, 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-us-military-isnt-ready-war-russia-or-china-17728; Tan, "Army Leaders."

review. These elements and frameworks also serve as the criteria for analyzing the Allied and German application of operational art during the Ardennes Campaign.

Following the doctrinal definitions that support the analytical methodology of the monograph, an overview and analysis of the campaign from the strategic setting, initial planning, and execution serve as the next three sections, respectively. These sections begin with a brief description of the strategic setting leading up to the 1944 German offensive. An overview of the German and Allied key leaders during the campaign assists in the understanding of their planning and decision making and how their subordinates executed tactical actions to achieve their strategic objectives. Analyzing the events that transpired before as well as during the execution of the campaign enables evaluation of the successes and failures of the application of operational art using the elements from section two as criteria. The execution section focuses on the German offensive and Allied reaction.

The monograph concludes with both significant deductions from the Ardennes Campaign and identification of contingencies and continuities that are relevant to the US Army as it prepares for future warfare in high-intensity conflicts. This includes the campaign's successes and failures that could provide insight to current and future leaders operating against a peer or near-peer threat. The monograph outlines how former commanders and staffs linked tactical actions to strategic objectives. Ultimately, readers will gain a better understanding of the concept of operational art; meanwhile, planners and staffs will benefit from analysis of the importance of linking tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to achieve strategic objectives.[4]

This monograph is a historical analysis based on a synthesis of a variety of sources. Research focuses on the operational level of war; however, a brief description of the Allied and German strategic goals provides a bridge from the strategic to the operational level of war. Therefore, the strategic goals of President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill highlight the linkage between their end state and how military leaders achieved their objectives. Some of the key military personnel include

[4] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-1.

General Dwight Eisenhower, General Omar Bradley, and other subordinate Army commanders. Similarly, the monograph outlines the actions by German leaders such as Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, Field Marshal Walter Model, and subordinate army commanders attempting to achieve Adolf Hitler's strategic objectives.

This monograph will evaluate some of the elements of operational art defined within Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Operations. The elements and the application of operational art serve as criteria on which to evaluate both the Allies and Germans during the Ardennes Campaign. Despite defining operational art in current Army doctrine, this monograph does not include a description of the evolution of operational art from WWII to the present.[5]

While this analysis focuses on the operational level of war on the Western Front, a brief overview of the Eastern Front provides valuable context to the strategic setting. This monograph aims to answer what led to the US success and German failure to apply operational art effectively in the Ardennes Campaign, highlighting insights for application to future potential conflicts with a peer or near-peer threat. In addition to answering this primary question, this monograph also considers what other options were available to Germany, whether the US Army could have prepared more effectively for the German offensive, and whether professional and personal relationships had any effect on the campaign.

Background

The lives of the citizens of the United States of America changed on September 11, 2001. The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC caused fear and shock among the population and soon led to the US military's involvement in the Global War on Terrorism. As written in President George W. Bush's 2003 "National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,"

> We must use the full influence of the United States to delegitimize terrorism and make clear that all acts of terrorism will be viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy, or genocide: behavior that no respectable government can condone or support and all must oppose. In short, with our friends

[5] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-1. For additional reading on operational art, see also Antulio J. Echevarria, "American Operational Art, 1917-2008," in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, eds. John A. Olsen and Martin van Creveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137-65.

> and allies, we aim to establish a new international norm regarding terrorism requiring non-support, non-tolerance, and active opposition to terrorists.[6]

For nearly the past two decades, the United States has been operating in the Middle East conducting stability, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism operations.

The Global War on Terrorism includes operations across the globe, but this monograph addresses Afghanistan and Iraq. The ongoing military operations in Afghanistan began in 2001, making it the longest war in American history. Operation Enduring Freedom focused on combat operations until 2014, when the military transitioned its role to training and advising. This new mission is now known as Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Meanwhile, the military conducted operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn from 2003-2011, making it the third longest war in American history.[7] Similar to the transition in Afghanistan, in 2010 the campaign in Iraq became known as Operation New Dawn, as military forces transitioned from combat operations to stability operations.[8] Although the circumstances that led to Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom differed, the strategies and methodologies shared similarities and eventually converged.

Despite the initial successes with regime changes and tactical victories in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, the United States grossly underestimated host nation capabilities and poorly planned for follow-on operations. While shifting focus on the war in Iraq, the Taliban reemerged from their hiding in Pakistan.[9] Additionally, an insurgency developed in Iraq out of Ba'ath Party members who

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[6] George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 2003), 23-24.

[7] Anna Mulrine, "Five ways 9/11 has transformed the US military," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 9, 2011, accessed October 1, 2017, https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2011/ 0909/Five-ways-9-11-has-transformed-the-US-military/How-the-US-military-fights-on-the-ground; Michael A. Reynolds, "The Wars' Entangled Roots: Regional Realities and Washington's Vision," in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, eds. Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 21.

[8] Operation Inherent Resolve is a separate operation from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. For more information see also "It's 2015. It's time for some new US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan," accessed October 15, 2017, https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-01-06/its-2015-time-some-new-us-operations-iraq-and-afghanistan.

[9] Joseph J. Collins, "Initial Planning and Execution in Afghanistan and Iraq," 33; Conrad C. Crane, "Military Strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq," in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, eds. Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 127, 130.

once held positions in the Saddam regime, as well as Sunni tribes and Shi'a militias.[10] Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom evolved into protracted wars which forced the military to adopt different strategies for achieving strategic objectives.

Adopting a New Strategy

As the wars continued, violence increased in both countries. The sectarian divide in Iraq caused security to weaken as a communal civil war broke out between Iraq's Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish populations. Meanwhile, pockets of Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan eventually grew into sizable Taliban-controlled areas. The initial plans for the invasion and follow-on ad hoc plans no longer saw desirable effects. Instead, the military adjusted its priority from combat operations to stability operations. New doctrine emerged which highlighted the importance of protecting the population over killing or capturing the enemy. The military executed operations to stabilize the area; garner support from the population; and create, train, and build forces capable of securing their own country to allow their government to succeed. Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency, dominated training and execution for the GWOT upon its release in 2006.[11] However, the application of COIN tactics and operations varied between Iraq and Afghanistan, as did the success of the new doctrine. Whether the COIN approach proved a success or failure during the GWOT, the US military maintained its resolve over the past decade and a half of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Still, current military leaders are concerned about the US military's ability to conduct conventional operations against a peer or near-peer threat after such a long period focused on limited war.[12]

[10] Crane, "Military Strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq," 133.

[11] Ibid., 135-36.

[12] Kris Osborn, "The U.S. Army's Biggest Fear: Getting Crushed in a Devastating Land War to Russia or China." *The National Interest*, January 5, 2017, accessed August 13, 2017, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-us-armys-biggest-fear-getting-crushed-devastating-land-18950.

The Current Environment

The current global environment concerns senior military leaders regarding the readiness of the force. Recent activities from potential threats increase the likelihood of a high-intensity peer or near-peer conflict as compared to a stability or COIN-centric conflict. Chief of Staff of the Army General Mark A. Milley echoed this belief with his comment, "The future operating environment against a near-peer higher-end threat is going to be intensely lethal, the likes of which the U.S. military has not experienced since World War II."[13] Despite evidence supporting a future high-intensity conflict against a competent enemy, senior leaders recognize the need to maintain current lessons learned from the GWOT. As General Milley sees the current problem, "…we have to develop the capability to be able to present the President with options in the event of a potential conflict with a higher-end threat, a near-peer competitor. You have to be able to do both [conventional and COIN] of those simultaneously."[14] Since the force currently has experience in COIN operations from the GWOT, leaders must study the past, as General Milley highlighted, to implement force on force fundamentals lost over the past eighteen years of war.

Operational Art

Defining doctrinal terms from the past and today will provide an understanding of the planning and execution from the United States and German perspectives and enable drawing conclusions from historical examples. Despite the difference in terminology between WWII and current military doctrine, enough overlap exists to link past and current concepts and ensure conclusions and recommendations remain relevant to the modern force. Thus, certain elements of operational art as defined in modern US Army doctrine serve as the criteria to determine the outcome of the campaign. Much like operational art, the modern operational frameworks, if not by name, existed and were utilized during WWII. Providing definitions of main effort and supporting effort, as well as the decisive, shaping, and sustaining

[13] Mark A. Milley, "Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting," October 2016, quoted in Michelle Tan "Army Leaders: Service Must Look to The Future While Training for Today," *Defense News*, October 3, 2016, accessed August 11, 2017, https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/ausa/2016/10/03/army-leaders-service-must-look-to-the-future-while-training-for-today/.

[14] Ibid.

operations, assists in understanding the decisions for organizing and employing the forces during the campaign. Likewise, it provides additional criteria to support the conclusion and recommendations.

While operating in a constantly changing operational environment, commanders and staffs apply operational art to achieve their desired objectives.[15] While one can see similar concepts of operational art in many conflicts during the past few centuries of combat operations, the practice of operational art has evolved over time. Today, ADRP 3-0, Operations, defines operational art as "the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose." Meanwhile, joint doctrine defines operational art as "the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means."[16] To assist commanders and their staffs, the elements of operational art and design serve as tools to develop an operational approach. During planning, the operational approach helps commanders visualize the broad objectives that tactical units must achieve for attainment of the overall strategic aim. In execution, commanders and staffs can adjust tactical tasks and objectives as needed. One of the first steps in developing an operational approach is to understand the current situation and establish conditions for a desired end state.

Establishing end state conditions enables units to achieve clearly defined, consistent desired goals. ADRP 3-0 notes that "the end state is a set of conditions the commander wants to exist when an operation ends." Doctrine highlights the importance of clearly describing the end state to maintain unity of effort and foster disciplined initiative. As operations unfold and the commander assesses the situation, the end state potentially evolves to set conditions for future operations.[17] This monograph examines the end state and conditions established by Adolf Hitler and the implications on German combat operations in

[15] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-1.

[16] US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), IV-1.

[17] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-5.

the Ardennes Campaign of 1944 to 1945. Similarly, it evaluates the end states of the Anglo-American Alliance to highlight their evolution throughout the campaign and the resulting effect on operations.

Once an end state is determined, commanders and staffs synchronize objectives towards the accomplishment of that end state. Like an end state, lines of operations may change throughout the course of an operation. ADRP 3-0 notes that "A line of operations is a line that defines the directional orientation of a force in time and space in relation to the enemy . . . that generally consist of a series of actions executed according to a well-defined sequence." The following analysis identifies the lines of operation established by both the Germans and the Americans to achieve their end states. The case study focuses on the changes in operations based on the shift in the initiative during the campaign.

The shift in operations also highlights the importance of establishing phases and transitions. As defined in ADRP 3-0, "a phase is a planning and execution tool used to divide an operation in duration or activity" which "can extend operational reach."[18] Meanwhile, "transitions mark a change of focus between phases or between the ongoing operation and execution of a branch or sequel." By anticipating contingencies and creating branch plans, commanders and staffs increase flexibility during execution. Specifically, commanders make predetermined execution decisions based on decision points rather than making reactionary adjustment decisions based on the situation dictating a response. Essentially, commanders adapt rather than react to a situation. Both phases and transitions require appropriate planning to provide the commander with options during execution based on the situation. Without proper analysis or planning for phases and transitions, units could prematurely culminate.

Commanders employ military forces across all domains to seek an advantage through the continuation of operations, rather than through culmination.[19] "The culmination point is that point in time and space at which a force no longer possesses the capability to continue its current form of operations"

[18] Operational reach is the distance and duration for which combat power may be successfully employed. See also US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-8.

[19] Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

which is caused by "direct combat actions or higher echelon resourcing decisions." Likewise, the continuation of operations directly relates to the unit's operational reach "to ensure Army forces accomplish their missions before culminating." This monograph highlights the Germans' limited operational reach and premature culmination caused by poor planning and the inability to deal effectively with contingencies. Additionally, the monograph analyzes US forces' logistical issues, which often forced units to halt prematurely and wait for supplies before continuing operations.[20]

The US Army currently relies on three operational frameworks to maintain operational reach and attain objectives. These operational frameworks are deep, close, support, and consolidation areas; decisive, shaping, and sustaining operations; and main and supporting efforts. As ADRP 3-0 notes, "An operational framework is a cognitive tool used to assist commanders and staffs in clearly visualizing and describing the application of combat power in time, space, purpose and resources in the concept of operations." Evidence suggests the combatants employed similar operational frameworks during the Ardennes Campaign; therefore, this monograph focuses on main and supporting efforts as well as decisive, shaping, and sustaining operations. Per ADRP 3-0, "The main effort is a designated subordinate unit whose mission at a given point in time is most critical to overall mission success" whereas "a supporting effort is a designated subordinate unit with a mission that supports the success of the main effort." The Germans had a similar concept of main effort which they called *Schwerpunkt*.[21] The main and supporting efforts adjust throughout execution based on the priorities of resources and combat power due to the type of operation conducted.

Using the elements of operational art and the various operational frameworks assists commanders and staffs to visualize an operational approach, integrate combat power, and maintain a position of advantage over an adversary. However, ADRP 3-0 warns that "inadequate planning and preparation puts

[20] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-1, 2-5—2-9.

[21] Peter Caddick-Adams, *Snow and Steel: The Battle of the Bulge, 1944-45* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 239.

forces at risk," as seen during the Ardennes Campaign. [22] By applying the elements of operational art as criteria with which to draw evidence from the case study, the analysis will demonstrate that the German Army failed to develop a feasible campaign because it lacked both the resources necessary to accomplish its objectives, and the flexibility to maintain operations. Meanwhile, the US forces' quick response and tactical actions led to eventual strategic objectives.

Strategic Setting

This section outlines the strategic setting leading up to the planning of the Ardennes Campaign. It also introduces the US and German political and military leadership, which impacted the decision making for the campaign. Additionally, understanding the strategic goals from both perspectives allows for analysis to determine whether tactical actions achieved strategic objectives.

Germany's Rise to Power

Adolf Hitler's strategy consisted of "three concepts: *Grossdeutschland, Lebensraum,* and *Weltmacht*: A 'greater Germany' with sufficient 'living space' would inevitability acquire 'world power.'"[23] Based on the territorial adjustment of the Treaty of Versailles, many Germans now lived within the borders of Austria and Czechoslovakia. Therefore, Hitler annexed Austria in 1938, and later that year occupied part of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland. The result of this annexation, which Hitler deemed suitable on account of the ethnic Germans living in Czechoslovakia, convinced British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Edouard Daladier of the appropriateness of Germany's actions. The Munich Pact, signed in September 1938 by Neville Chamberlain, Edouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler, and Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini proposed the surrender of the Sudetenland to Germany. In March 1939, Germany annexed the remaining portion of Czechoslovakia.

[22] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-10.

[23] Matthew Cooper, *The German Army: 1933-1945* (Chelsea: Scarborough House, 1978), 122.

Furthermore, in August 1939, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact, guaranteed mutual non-aggression while dividing Poland and other territory between the two powers.[24]

Emboldened by the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, Hitler continued his expansionist ideology in Western Europe despite Britain's and France's pledge to support Poland. Additionally, Italy informed Germany of its inability to fulfill the pact without Germany's help in the form of supplies. Dismissing the possibility of a multi-front war, Hitler proceeded with his plans to invade Poland. On September 1, 1939, Hitler and the German "war-machine" invaded Poland. Shortly after that, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, starting WWII.[25]

The United States and Allies

After the loss of American lives on distant battlefields during WWI, American citizens favored an isolationist foreign policy—a view strengthened by the tragedy of the Great Depression. Therefore, during the early years of WWII, the United States' security strategy revolved around defending the continental United States, its overseas possessions, and the Western Hemisphere.[26] However, German successes throughout Europe convinced President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the need for US involvement. Like the American population's preference for neutrality, President Roosevelt did not want to become a belligerent in the war. He understood "that hostilities in Europe, in Africa, and in Asia are all parts of a single world conflict;" therefore, "our [US] strategy of self-defense must be a global strategy." Understanding the magnitude of the situation in Europe surrounding Great Britain, Roosevelt began the

[24] Sandra Halperin, *War and Social Change in Modern Europe: The Great Transformation Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 212; David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 16; Matthew Cooper, *The German Army*, 108-9.

[25] Halperin, *War and Social Change in Modern Europe*, 213; Cooper, *The German Army: 1933-1945*, 109-13, 69.

[26] Mark Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 3.

Lend-Lease program in April 1941 to provide support to Britain without sending forces overseas. The program expanded to include the Soviet Union after the German invasion in June 1941.[27]

The United States did not anticipate direct involvement in WWII before a sufficient buildup of army and air forces, which planners expected no earlier than 1943. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and declaration of war by Germany days later, forced the United States to become formally involved in the war.[28] Still, the agreed-upon strategy was a Germany-first approach with an offensive plan and a defensive plan in the Pacific against Japan.

The Anglo-American Alliance began execution of the indirect approach with Operation Torch--the invasion of North Africa in November 1942. After a hard-fought campaign, the Anglo-American Allies (with some Free French units) eventually forced the German and Italian forces to withdraw from North Africa by May 1943. The Allies secured the coast in Northern Africa and prepared for future operations. During the campaign, an Allied conference in Casablanca led to a continued disagreement between British and American staffs about the future strategy of the war. The Americans continued to argue for execution of a cross-channel invasion at the earliest possible moment. The British remained committed to the "underbelly strategy"—a plan that involved continued operations in the Mediterranean to reduce pressure from on the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front, and ultimately remove Italy from the war.[29]

Allied forces initiated Operation Husky and invaded Sicily in July 1943. One month later, the Allies had secured the island. The swift success in Sicily led Eisenhower to request approval from the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) to continue operations on mainland Italy. Another outcome of the swift Allied success was the removal of Mussolini, which contributed to the CCS approving Eisenhower's request to invade the Italian mainland. Pietro Badoglio replaced Mussolini and sought peace with the

[27] Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 26, 37, 45.

[28] Ibid., 49.

[29] Ibid., 102-3; Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, United States Army in WWII: The Mediterranean Theater of Operations (1963; repr., Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 5-8.

Allies. Eisenhower initiated the invasion of mainland Italy on September 3, 1943; on September 8 the Italians surrendered.[30]

The Allies achieved one of their goals by removing Italy from the war; however, the Germans remained in Italy despite losing an ally. The Germans had lost the initiative in the Mediterranean, and Hitler began relocating forces to establish a defensive posture in Italy. After months of fighting, the Allies broke through the German defensive lines and captured Rome on June 4, 1944. As historian Martin Blumenson noted, "the Allied Armies in Italy had made Germany more vulnerable to the cross-channel attack and the subsequent operations."[31]

Initial Planning

The decision to conduct a cross-channel operation—first proposed at Casablanca—came to fruition during the Trident and Quebec Conferences in May and August 1943, respectively. After much deliberation, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed the assault against the continent would occur at the earliest possibility in 1944. The invasion was dependent upon the outcomes surrounding the Mediterranean campaign and the effect it would have on Germany and the Eastern Front with the Soviet Union. Additionally, the campaign in the Mediterranean consumed substantial amounts of resources required for the cross-channel invasion, specifically soldiers and landing craft. To sort out the challenges associated with the planned invasion, CCS agreed to establish a staff with the sole responsibility of planning Operation Overlord, the cross-channel attack.[32]

Allied Command and Staff Planning

Lieutenant General Frederick Morgan was appointed as the Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander. Due to his successes in North Africa in 1942 to 1943 and Italy in 1943, President Roosevelt

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[30] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 24, 53-54; Cooper, *The German Army*, 400-1.

[31] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 456; Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, United States Army in WWII: The European Theater of Operations (1961; repr., Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1984), 7.

[32] Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack,* United States Army in WWII: The European Theater of Operations (1951; repr., Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2007), 48-49, 83, 98-99.

selected General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander with the overall responsibility of Operation Overlord. Likewise, due to his experience, Churchill appointed General Bernard Montgomery as commander of 21st Army Group, which controlled all the ground forces during the assault phase of the invasion.[33]

The Reality of Multiple Fronts

Unlike the perception in 1941 regarding the slim chances of a British invasion on the continent, by 1943 German leaders understood the dire state of the Third Reich's war effort. The Eastern Front consumed resources and planning effort without the expected results. Little attention was given to defending against a possible invasion from the west. Although Germany occupied France in June 1940, defensive measures did not begin construction until mid-1942.[34]

After relieving Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, Field Marshal Rundstedt assumed command as Commander in Chief West in March 1942. Shortly after Rundstedt's appointment, Hitler ordered the defense of the west. Rundstedt's responsibility included all German-occupied territory in the west. However, the military lacked unity of command and Rundstedt was required to coordinate with the Navy and Air Force for the defense of the Western Theater.[35]

Following a Canadian raid at Dieppe, within occupied France, Hitler held a conference in September 1942 with senior military leaders including Rundstedt. At the conference, Hitler discussed his concern over the possibility of a large-scale invasion from the west and the creation of a second front. Hitler wanted an Atlantic Wall constructed of 15,000 concrete interconnected strong points defended by 300,000 soldiers to deter and defend against such an invasion. Rundstedt tried to update Hitler on the

[33] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 48-51, 112, 116-18, 158.

[34] Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 193; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 130-32; Cooper, *The German Army*, 447, 451-52.

[35] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 132-35; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 206; Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 19.

progress in the west, or lack thereof, during a meeting in spring 1943. However, Hitler paid little attention as he was consumed by his desire for a decisive victory against the Soviets.[36]

Following the meeting with Hitler, Rundstedt filed a detailed report on the progress and delays on the western defenses. In the report, dated October 25, 1943, Rundstedt highlighted numerous deficiencies in manpower and resources, which resulted in a thin, porous defensive line along the Atlantic Coast. Rundstedt argued that the plan of defense in the West would only divide an attacking force, but not defeat it. To defeat the Allied invasion, Rundstedt requested the forces required to create a robust mobile defense with capable counterattack capabilities.[37]

Rundstedt's report prompted Adolf Hitler to issue a directive in November 1943. Given recent German losses on the Eastern Front and Allied successes in Italy, Hitler's concern for a multi-front war became a realization. However, rather than a two-front war, Hitler faced a three-front war after the surrender of Italy. With the recognition of the possibility of an attack against Germany from the West, Hitler directed a halt of troop transfers between theaters. However, transfers continued between the West and East until 1944.[38]

Regardless of the form of defense, static or mobile, the Germans realized an Allied invasion posed a significant danger to the Reich, yet it also provided an opportunity for victory. A swift defeat of an Allied invasion would afford the Reich time to focus efforts back to the Eastern Front. However, limited intelligence resources meant the Germans could not mass combat power significant enough to react to an Allied invasion at a single point along the coast because they might not detect a smaller,

[36] Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 195-96; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 137-40; Cooper, *The German Army*, 491-92.

[37] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 140.

[38] Ibid., 148; Cooper, *The German Army*, 494; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 201, 209.

supporting amphibious assault in time to react to the additional threat.[39] Therefore, they had to defend along the entire coast with minimal resources and unprepared units.[40]

Liberating Western Europe

The Allies successfully penetrated the German defensive system along the coast despite delays, shortages in supplies, and a smaller lodgment than planned. The successful invasion of France by the Allies altered the outcome of the war. Germany now faced the realization of the war coming to the heart of Germany. The initiative shifted in favor of the Allies with the successful invasion of France, which served as the starting point of the liberation of Western Europe.

Breakout

The next several months following the invasion proved promising for the Allies. The initial success of Operation Overlord turned to slow progress for the Allies moving east. Nevertheless, the Allies controlled the tempo and forced the Germans to withdraw. The buffer between the Allies and Germany shrunk, and the potential for combat operations on German soil increased drastically.[41]

General Eisenhower replaced Field Marshal Montgomery as the ground force commander as part of a planned command structure reorganization on September 1, 1944.[42] Following some deliberation among senior leaders, specifically Montgomery, Eisenhower directed a broad-front strategy to stretch out German forces defending the West Wall.[43] By early September 1944, Eisenhower's plan included three armies serving as the main effort to head north of the Ardennes; meanwhile, a single army served as the

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[39] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 231; Cooper, *The German Army*, 498-99; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 210.

[40] Frederick the Great wrote, "He who defends everything, defends nothing," quoted in Charles B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 49.

[41] Cooper, *The German Army*, 515. The successful Allied landing in Southern France as part of Operation Dragoon in August 1944 further increased pressure on Hitler. The Allied forces involved in Operation Dragoon became the Sixth Army Group in September 1944. See also Caddick-Adams, *Snow and Steel*, 21.

[42] Montgomery was promoted to Field Marshal following the transition with Eisenhower.

[43] The West Wall is also known as the Siegfried Line. It comprised of various fortifications in depth along Germany's western border from Holland to Switzerland. For additional information see MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 19.

supporting effort moving south of the Ardennes. The three armies operating as the main effort from north to south included First Canadian Army commanded by Lieutenant General Henry Crerar, Second British Army commanded by Lieutenant General Miles Dempsey, and First Army commanded by Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges.[44] Lieutenant General Patton's Third Army served as the supporting effort in the south. The plan also included sending one corps from Hodges' First Army through the Ardennes to cover the seam between First and Third Armies. Field Marshal Montgomery commanded the 21st Army Group responsible for the First Canadian and Second British Armies; meanwhile, recently promoted General Omar Bradley served as 12th Army Group commander responsible for First and Third Armies.[45] The objective was to reach the Rhine River before the Germans could prepare their defenses along the West Wall and then broadly move through the Ruhr region.[46]

[44] A fourth army was added to the north in October 1944. The Ninth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General William H. Simpson, operated between the Second British Army and First Army. See also Antony Beevor, *Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Viking, 2015), 33.

[45] Caddick-Adams, *Snow and Steel,* 20-1; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets,* 49-50.

[46] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit,* 676, 684-86. The Ruhr region was key to Germany's industrial base and output of equipment during the war.

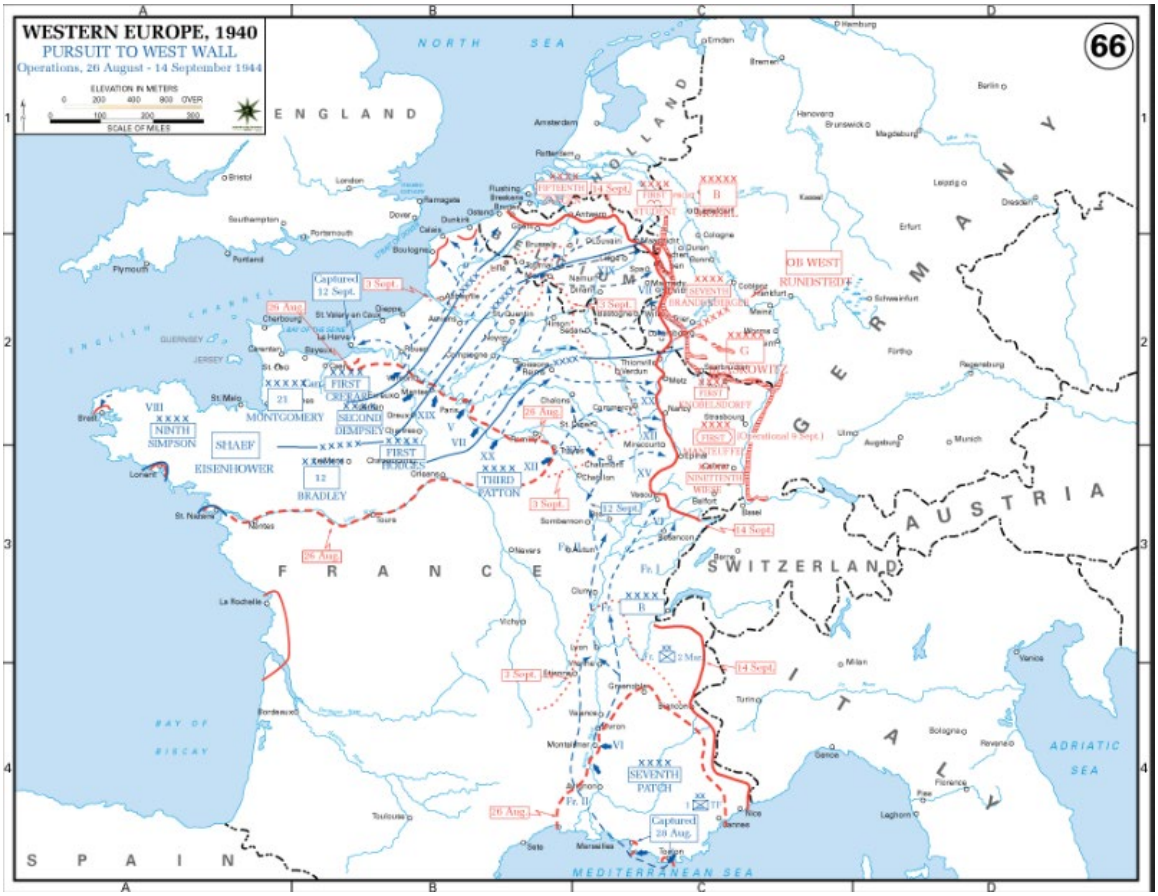

Figure 1. Eisenhower's Broad-Front Strategy. Image from US Military Academy, "World War II European Theater," accessed February 13, 2018, https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWII%20European%20Theater.aspx.

The broad-front strategy initially appeared extremely promising. The Allies met little organized opposition, allowed for subordinate initiative with little overhead control, and swiftly liberated most of France, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg. However, logistical support limited further advance. The lines of communications stretched because most of the supplies remained at the Normandy Beach invasion sites. The Allied liberation of Antwerp on September 4, 1944 provided the Allies with an important port to help cope with Allied forces' supply demands. Eisenhower made a slight adjustment to the broad-front strategy as hope grew that the Allies might end the war by Christmas. Montgomery convinced Eisenhower to let him conduct a single thrust along a narrow front into Germany with a combination of airborne and ground forces named Operation Market Garden. The forces selected for the attack consisted of the First Allied Airborne Army and the British Second Army tasked to secure a

crossing site across the Rhine; however, the operation failed.[47] Still, despite the logistical shortcomings and the failure of Operation Market Garden, many Allied senior leaders felt the Germans could not put together an organized defense against a more powerful and traditional offensive.[48]

Hitler also recognized the dismal state of the Third Reich. The West Wall was poorly defended, the Soviets were making steady progress towards Germany, and the remaining defending forces in Italy were retreating north. The Allies put pressure on Hitler from all directions, leading Hitler to order a counterattack to shift the initiative back in favor of the Third Reich.[49]

[47] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 697; Cooper, *The German Army*, 518; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 18-19. Eisenhower did not yet believe he could deny Montgomery the chance to lead this mission, which he planned and championed. After its failure, Montgomery never regained the reputation among the Americans, or the confidence of British senior leadership that he won with victory at El Alamein, a battle most historians consider one of the key turning points of the war.

[48] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 688-89, 699; Cooper, *The German Army*, 516; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 5.

[49] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 702; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 216-17; Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, United States Army in WWII: The European Theater of Operations (1965; repr., Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1985), 2-3.

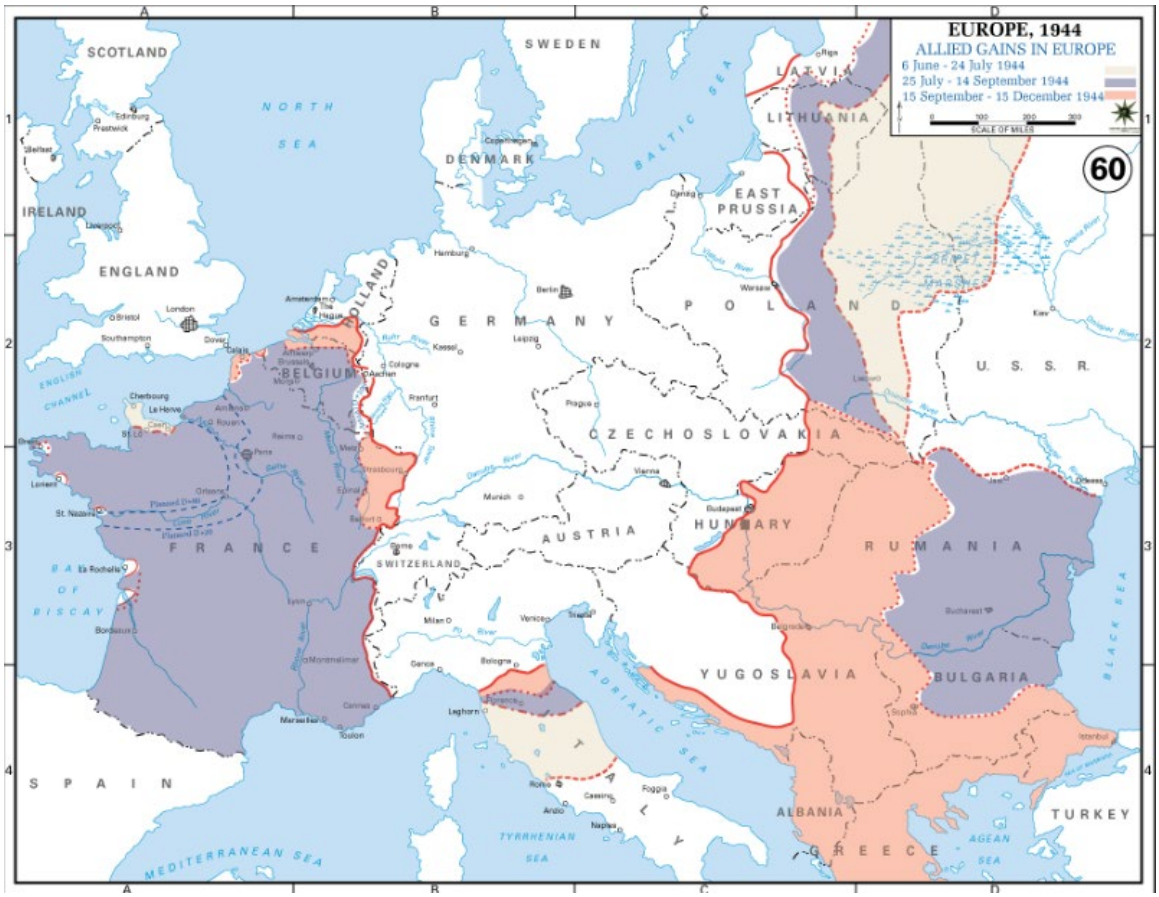

Figure 2. The Allied Fronts: June to December 1944. Image from US Military Academy, "World War II European Theater," accessed February 13, 2018, https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWII%20European%20Theater.aspx.

Hitler's Momentous Decision

The logistical issues and delays gave the Germans a chance to fill gaps in the Western Wall. The established defense gave Hitler and some key leaders the ability to plan for a future offensive operation, hoping to stop simply reacting to the Allies as the Germans had been doing since the Normandy invasion. Despite the constant aerial bombardment, the German war productivity maintained or increased output in some industries, and the railroad system remained an adequate means to transport equipment and personnel. Therefore, on September 16, 1944, Hitler informed his staff to plan and prepare an offensive operation to attempt to regain the initiative.[50]

[50] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 5; Cooper, *The German Army*, 518; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 10-11.

Several factors led Hitler to his decision to focus on the West. First, Hitler believed that splitting the British and American military coalition with a blow to one would jar the other and force political negotiations. Second, the Third Reich lacked the strength to win a swift, decisive victory against the endless number of Soviet troops compared to the logistically strung out British and American forces. Lastly, the Ruhr region's industrial importance outweighed the less vital eastern territory. Hitler established Antwerp as the objective to split the British and American armies and decided to conduct the operation in November when the weather negated the Allied air supremacy. Like the successful 1940 campaign, Hitler wanted to go through the Ardennes due to the proximity to Antwerp, and the likelihood to split the seam between the British and American forces with the possibility of isolating the British.[51]

To accomplish this task, Hitler and his staff realized the need to consolidate forces from the Western Front, relocate units and equipment from other theaters, and continue to produce and distribute new personnel and equipment to the west. Three armies, two *panzer* and one infantry, would conduct the operation in two phases with the panzer armies abreast and the infantry army covering the southern flank.[52] The first phase involved securing bridgeheads along the Meuse River which would then allow the second phase—the seizure of Antwerp—to begin. Infantry units would secure key intersections and bridges allowing for the rapid movement of panzer units. Each of the armies relied on specific routes within their line of operation as well as seizing towns and villages with key intersections. The plan also relied on the ability of units to capture allied fuel depots to prevent culmination.[53]

Operating on the right or north shoulder, the Sixth Panzer Army commanded by *Generaloberst* Josef "Sepp" Dietrich would serve as the *schwerpunkt*. Within his formation, Dietrich commanded three corps which would penetrate American defenses around the Losheim Gap, cross the Meuse River around

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[51] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 18-20; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 12; Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 217; Cooper, *The German Army*, 519-20.

[52] Panzer means Armor or Tank. The Fifteenth Army was later added to the far north of the Ardennes for future operations. Additionally, *Kampfgruppe Heydte*, a 1200-soldier airborne operation, was to block Allied reinforcements from the north.

[53] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 82-3, 133; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 14, 19, 22, 24, 33-34, 666; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 24.

Liege, and then continue towards Antwerp.[54] The LXVII Corps would set up blocking positions to protect the Sixth Panzer Army's northern flank as the two-remaining corps, the I and II SS Panzer Corps, would thrust towards the Meuse River and then to Antwerp.[55]

The Fifth Panzer Army, commanded by General Hasso-Eccard von Manteuffel, served in the center and would protect the Sixth Panzer Army's flank. Like Dietrich, Manteuffel commanded three corps, but with fewer divisions. The Fifth Panzer Army served as a supporting effort to the Sixth Panzer Army by attacking through St. Vith towards the Meuse River around Namur, then attack towards Brussels. The LXVI Corps to the north initially would envelop the Schnee Eifel followed by seizing St. Vith.[56] The LVIII and XLVII Panzer Corps had orders to seize Houffalize and Bastogne respectively, then cross the Meuse River north and south of Namur.[57]

Lastly, the Seventh Army, commanded by General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger, fought to the south, protecting the movement of the Sixth and Fifth Panzer Armies. Unlike the panzer armies, the Seventh Army had no tanks and consisted of only two corps. The LXXX Corps would attack around Echternach; meanwhile, the LXXXV Corps would penetrate south of Bastogne, and both would establish defensive positions. Field Marshal Walter Model served as the Army Group B commander responsible for the attack, and Rundstedt, after being recalled, once again served as the Commander in Chief West.[58]

The entire plan depended on speed and surprise; therefore, the success of the operation relied on strict secrecy. Hitler understood the importance of deceiving the Allies, so dissemination of the plan

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[54] The Losheim Gap was a seven-mile-wide valley from Germany to Belgium.

[55] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 24; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 75-77; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 82-83; John Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge* (New York: Random House, 1960), 20.

[56] The Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountains) area consisted of heavily wooded, hilly terrain with winding streams along the German-Belgium border. Small villages sat within the valleys or atop the hills.

[57] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 29; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 82-83; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 20.

[58] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 29; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 26; Caddick-Adams, *Snow and Steel*, 86-87, 9, 27.

remained with a small group and subordinates did not become informed until a few months before execution. Specifically, Hitler informed Rundstedt and Model in September, but the three army commanders did not learn of the operation until late October. To further deceive the Allies, the German Army named the operation *Wacht am Rhein,* "Watch of the Rhine," to convince the Allies that the plan was defensive. This also fed into the Allies' bias that the Germans lacked the ability to conduct organized operations and were close to capitulating.[59]

Despite the secrecy and deception, several subordinates criticized Hitler's plan. Many thought the plan was too ambitious, specifically seizing Antwerp with the forces available, and recommended concluding at the Meuse River, or phase one. Additionally, due to Hitler's strict and shortened timeline for both planning and execution, many believed the operation overly optimistic and too unreasonable to accomplish. Josef Dietrich extended the criticism following the war in his statement:

> All I had to do was cross a river, capture Brussels and then go on and take the port of Antwerp. And all this in December, January and February, the worst three months of the year, through the Ardennes where snow was waist deep and there wasn't room to deploy four tanks abreast, let alone six armored divisions; when it didn't get light until eight in the morning, and was dark again at four in the afternoon, and my tanks can't fight at night; with divisions that had just been reformed and were composed chiefly of raw, untrained recruits; and at Christmas time.[60]

Despite the many attempts by Rundstedt and Model to persuade Hitler to adjust the plan, Hitler approved it just days before execution on December 9, 1944.[61] Corps and division commanders involved in the execution of the offensive did not learn about it until the end of the first week of December, and soldiers did not find out until the night prior.[62]

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[59] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 13, 14, 17, 22-26; Cooper, *The German Army*, 519; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 29, 32; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 3-4, 20.

[60] Josef Dietrich, "Interview," 1945, quoted in Cooper, *The German Army*, 521.

[61] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 25-27, 32; Cooper, *The German Army*, 521; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 35-36.

[62] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 47-48; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 70-71.

Execution

This section concentrates on the execution of the Ardennes Campaign from December 16, 1944 to December 28, 1944. It entails the German offensive, the Allied reaction, and Allied transition to the offensive. The execution focused on the German Sixth, Fifth, and Seventh Armies and their subordinates to the north, center, and south, respectively, attacking the position on the line held by the US First and Third Armies and their subordinate corps and divisions. The description focuses on the tactical decisions and actions made by key leaders to accomplish strategic objectives. Additionally, throughout the description, an analysis using elements of operational art enables comparison of the effectiveness of the Allies' and Germans' application of operational art.

The German Offensive

The three armies involved in the offensive moved towards their assault positions on December 13, 1944. By the 15th, all units moved to their lines of departure. Hitler managed to produce twenty-five divisions for the offensive: thirteen infantry, seven armored, and five reserve.[63] Six divisions, from both V and VIII Corps from Hodges' First Army, defended along an eighty-five-mile defensive line from Monschau in the north to Echternach in the south. The American force consisted of 2nd Infantry Division (ID) and 99th ID from V Corps, and 106th ID, 28th ID, 9th Armored Division (AD), and 4th ID from VIII Corps. Three of the six divisions had been sent to get some combat experience before any major operation; meanwhile, the remaining had been sent to refit after months of combat.[64] This resulted in a weakened defense, highlighting the effect of intelligence failures among the American units, and the Germans' successful deception. Despite many indicators suggesting that a German offensive could begin soon, the American unit headquarters dismissed the warnings. Specifically, Major General Alan Jones, commander of the 106th ID, the newest unit on any front, as well as local civilians, reported significant vehicular movement around the Western Wall nights before the attack. Additionally, a captured German

[63] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 71-72; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 21.

[64] Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 3-4; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 137.

prisoner reported an imminent attack in the area. The German army prepared to launch its second Ardennes Campaign in WWII against an unsuspecting enemy.[65]

German artillery initiated the attack throughout the Ardennes at 5:30 a.m. on December 16, 1944. Simultaneously, columns of German infantry and tanks began their movement west. For the next hour along the defensive line, the US divisions received rocket, mortar, and artillery barrages. Damaged or destroyed telephone wire and German jamming prevented communications between US headquarters, leading to isolated attacks throughout the line. The Germans' first attack achieved mixed results against the thinly defended V and VIII Corps' positions.[66]

Elements from the Sixth Panzer Army engaged the 99th ID in the northern shoulder. Although the defense wavered, the line held against the initial attack between Monschau and the Losheim Gap.[67] By the evening, the 99th ID committed its reserve to reinforce the line. However, the 14th Cavalry Group attached to the 99th ID responsible for a portion of the Losheim Gap saw different results. In addition to Dietrich's forces on the left flank attacking towards the gap, elements of Manteuffel's right flank also engaged the 14th Cavalry Group, forcing it to withdraw later in the afternoon, exposing the 106th ID flank. Nearly all the villages within the Losheim Gap were seized or under attack by noon. Manteuffel's infantry units successfully cleared roads within the 28th ID sector and forced the 106th ID to deploy most of its divisional reserve. Middleton informed his VIII Corps units to stay in its defensive positions until they were "completely untenable," and then fall back to a secondary defensive line.[68] Brandenberger's Seventh Army started the attack along a front that spanned the whole of the 28th and 4th ID boundaries. The Seventh Army exploited gaps between the strongpoints throughout the VIII Corps sector and made

[65] Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 9-12; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 111-12.

[66] Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 23-25, 29; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 82.

[67] The Losheim Gap was partially defended by the 99th and 106th ID: two of the newest units. It also served as the boundary between V and VIII Corps with two of the seven miles undefended. For additional information see Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 6-7.

[68] Troy Middleton, "Holdfast Order," quoted in Cole, *The Ardennes*, 187.

considerable ground on the opening day. Echternach remained in American control despite being surrounded.[69]

US Army unit commanders made several important decisions throughout the sporadic reporting on the offensive's first day. In addition to the commitment of divisional reserves by the 99th and 106th IDs due to the powerful German thrust, VII Corps alerted and transferred a portion of the 1st ID as reinforcements. Likewise, once news reached Eisenhower at Versailles, he informed Bradley to send reinforcements to the Ardennes. Specifically, Eisenhower ordered two ADs: one from Patton's Third Army (10th AD) and one from Simpson's 9th Army (7th AD). [70] The American commanders were successful at executing strategy according to Moltke's definition: "strategy is the art of action under the pressure of the most difficult conditions."[71]

The first day of the German-offensive ended with mixed results. The delays to the timeline caused by the slow crossing of the Our and Sauer Rivers, the tenacious defense by the US divisions, and reduced mobility caused by the limited, poorly maintained road networks disturbed the army commanders. The goal of the first phase—crossing the Meuse River—already appeared untenable, but Hitler denied recommendations to adjust the plan. Each of the armies had specific lines of operation which focused on infantry seizing certain key road networks and towns to allow a swift penetration of panzer units. However, in the north, I SS Panzer Division's *schwerpunkt, Kampfgruppe Peiper,* was delayed by a day because of supporting units inability to conduct a breakthrough of US strongpoints at Lanzerath.[72] Although the plan was not producing the expected results according to the timeline, little or no changes were made in following days. This highlights the lack of contingencies anticipated in the plan.

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[69] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 114-20; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 23-25, 29-30, 41; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 82-86, 145-51, 213-18.

[70] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 88; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 32-33.

[71] Peter Paret, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 290.

[72] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 197-98. A *Kampfgruppe* is an ad hoc battlegroup or combined arms formation. Joachim Peiper was the commander of *Kampfgruppe Pieper* and served as the decisive operation for the offensive.

Despite the varying results from the initial attack, the Germans maintained pressure for the next several days. In the north, elements of the I SS Panzer Corps (*Kampfgruppe Peiper*) made considerable progress by seizing the village of Honsfeld located in the rear area of the 99th ID by midday on the 17th. Due to the success, 2nd ID halted its attack on the Roer Dams, and V Corps placed them in defensive positions behind the 99th ID lines. This subsequent position by the 2nd ID stunned the I SS Panzer Corps who were only expecting the 99th ID. The 2nd ID positions at the Elsenborn Ridge prevented Dietrich's Panzer Army from achieving its phase 1 objective of crossing the Meuse River. In the center, Manteuffel surrounded the 106th ID on the Schnee Eifel and outflanked the 28th ID around St. Vith. Almost eight-thousand American troops surrendered on the Schnee Eifel because of the envelopment. The Germans on the southern shoulder did not obtain the same level of success as those in the north and center. The gap between the LXXX and LXXXV Corps widened and eventually forced Seventh Army to go over to the defensive.[73]

The reinforcements alerted on the first day helped bolster the defense of First Army's line. The 7th AD assumed control of the defense of St. Vith, the 1st ID defended in the north, and 10th AD joined the troops holding Bastogne. Despite the contributions of the reinforcements, which delayed the German attack, Hodges requested reinforcement by the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions from Major General Mathew Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps. Eisenhower approved the request, sending his theater reserve to join First Army. The 82nd Airborne Division headed to the Elsenborn Ridge around the town of Werbomont, while the 101st Airborne Division went to Bastogne.[74]

With the help of these reinforcements the defenders managed to hold back the German offensive. Meanwhile, the 99th and 30th IDs maneuvered towards the northern shoulder of the Allied line to prevent Dietrich's forces from heading into Holland. The hasty defensive positions along the northern shoulder

[73] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 137, 151; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 104, 164-66, 258; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 50-51, 53, 66, 133; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 416.

[74] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 140; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 289; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 55, 69, 86-87, 107, 121.

prevented the Sixth Panzer Army from carrying out its mission on Hitler's timeline. Teams from the 10th AD delayed Manteuffel's forces in the center, allowing time to improve the defensive positions around Bastogne. On the evening of the 18th, the 101st Airborne Division arrived at Bastogne. Divisions from the XLVII Panzer Corps surrounded Bastogne and the 101st Airborne Division and other supporting units on December 21, 1944. However, days of fighting threw the Fifth Panzer Army off its timeline to get to the Meuse River. In the northern portion of the bulge, Manteuffel enjoyed more success in the effort to seize St. Vith. Elements from the LXVI Corps forced the withdrawal of the 7th AD, 28th ID, 106th ID, and other remaining forces at St. Vith on the 21st. General Ridgway assumed command of the numerous units at various combat strength around St. Vith.[75] Like Bastogne, St. Vith possessed vital road networks in the Ardennes which were decisive to the plan.[76]

Regardless of the German gains during the first week of the offensive, the delays caused by the quick US reactions, poor weather and terrain, and internal congestion from the buildup of vehicles on limited road networks allowed the American leadership to adjust to the changing situation. During a meeting in Verdun on December 19, 1944, Eisenhower said, "The present situation [in the Ardennes] is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us, and not of disaster."[77] Rather than attacking in the Saar region, Patton's army would attack north, making a ninety-degree turn to head towards Bastogne. Eisenhower directed Patton to conduct the attack no earlier than the 22nd, but no later than the 23rd of December. During the meeting, Eisenhower adjusted 6th Army Group's boundary to cover Patton's sector. Later that day, Eisenhower altered the command structure and organizational relationships by dividing the Ardennes between Montgomery and Bradley. The new boundary placed the First and Ninth US Armies under

[75] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 426-27, 460-63, 477-78. The Ardennes Campaign was also known as the Battle of the Bulge due to the German offensive creating a bulge in the Allied lines.

[76] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 280-89, 292, 422; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 102, 152; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 47-48.

[77] Dwight Eisenhower, "Opportunity Brief," quoted in Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 189.

Montgomery's 21st Army Group, which controlled the northern part of the Ardennes. Within days, Montgomery improved the defensive positions while Patton headed north to attack.[78]

Shortly after arriving at the First Army Headquarters, Montgomery, anticipating the German plans, created conditions to improve his forces' defensive positions. He established the VII Corps as his reserve, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins. Montgomery also ordered the British 30th Corps to form a deeper reserve to deny the Germans the ability to cross the Meuse River which Eisenhower stated at Verdun.[79]

The Germans also adjusted their plans based on their limited progress during the first week of the offensive. Since Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army did not achieve any real success other than Peiper's, Model shifted the main effort to Manteuffel's army. Dietrich was to continue offensive operations at the Elsenborn Ridge and send the II SS Panzer Corps south to support the Fifth Panzer Army. Without Hitler's understanding, the commanders adjusted the plan so the Sixth Panzer Army would fix US forces at Elsenborn Ridge and allow the Fifth Panzer Army to cross the Meuse River and envelop the forces at Elsenborn Ridge. For several days, the 30th ID held Peiper and eventually forced his withdraw. The inability to support Peiper resulted in his early culmination due to a lack of supplies. *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, the main thrust for *Wacht am Rhein,* culminated by Christmas without reaching its objective and withdrew to German lines. After initiating the offensive with nearly 6,000 men, Peiper withdrew with just under 1,000.[80]

[78] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 423-24; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 142-43, 152-54.

[79] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 421-26; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 189; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 427-28.

[80] Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 4; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 426-27, 460-63.

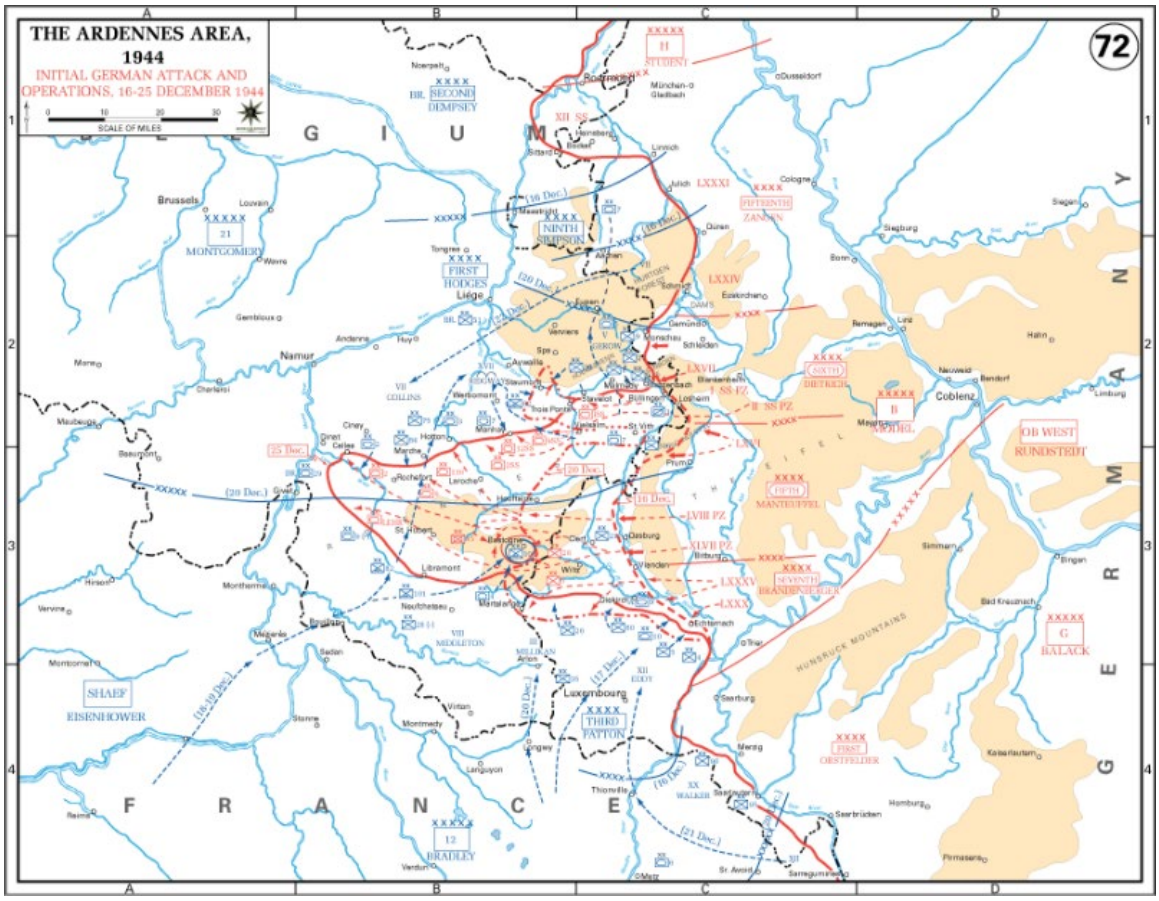

Figure 3. The German Attack. Image from US Military Academy, "World War II European Theater," accessed February 13, 2018, https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWII%20European%20Theater.aspx.

The Allied Reaction

Patton's Third Army began its attack on December 22, 1944. Initially, III Corps from the Third Army engaged Brandenberger's LXXX Corps in the southern shoulder of the bulge. Days later, Patton's VII Corps joined the fight in the southern shoulder. Despite being tasked to prevent the US forces from influencing the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies, Patton's Third Army broke through the defenses of the Seventh Army. Patton's plan to relieve Bastogne consisted of the 4th AD penetrating along a highway; meanwhile, infantry divisions would clear the countryside.[81]

[81] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 514-15; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 262.

During Patton's advance north, the weather cleared enough to allow for aerial support. Supplies were airdropped, surgeons arrived via glider, and fighter-bombers engaged armored vehicles and protected the perimeter around Bastogne. The Germans also took advantage of the weather with their aerial support. On Christmas Eve, in preparation for the final, large-scale attack on Christmas Day, the Germans' bombed Bastogne on two separate occasions. The bombardment destroyed several buildings including a command post and an aid station. The Germans launched the attack with a force smaller than a division, while the remaining units moved towards the Meuse River. Despite their efforts, the formation conducting the attack failed to break through the perimeter around Bastogne. The next day, on December 26, 1944, two battalions of the 4th AD successfully linked up with the 101st Airborne Division and lifted the siege of Bastogne.[82]

While Patton's Army moved north, the newly arrived VII Corps engaged in back and forth fighting while in defensive positions between the XVIII Airborne Corps and the British 30th Corps. On December 25th, the same day as the major German offensive against Bastogne, Hodges authorized Collins to withdraw his VII Corps to avoid the risk of being overrun. However, recognizing that the Germans were near culmination, Collins continued aggressive defensive maneuvers to retain the initiative. As Collins engaged the Fifth Panzer Army, the XVIII Airborne Corps engaged the Sixth Panzer Army. Like the back and forth fighting in VII Corps sector, the XVIII Airborne Corps experienced back and forth fighting, much like Collins' VII Corps. Specifically, the town of Manhay, directly west of St. Vith, exchanged possession numerous times. Recognizing the vital road network which led directly to Liege, Hodges ordered Ridgway to recapture the town which he successfully did on Christmas.[83] By the 26th, the Fifth Panzer Army culminated and transitioned to the defense. According to author Charles MacDonald:

> The day after Christmas marked if not the absolute end, then at least the beginning of a precipitous end to the German offensive as Adolf Hitler had originally planned. On that day, December 26, the American defenders on the Elsenborn Ridge were still holding firm; the big

[82] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 279-80; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 521-33.

[83] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 283, 288-89; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 542-43, 557-59.

attack on Christmas Day at Bastogne had failed, and General Patton's attack against the southern flank was still under way and a relief column entered Bastogne.[84]

Many US senior leaders, especially Collins, requested the Allies take advantage of the German culmination. The Germans had over-extended their operational reach, causing Collins to identify an opportunity to shift the initiative in favor of the Allies. Collins proposed an offensive plan to Montgomery on December 27; however, Montgomery felt the Germans still possessed offensive capabilities. Additionally, Montgomery doubted that the Allies could logistically sustain the plan as outlined by Collins, and would therefore prematurely culminate due to the lack of operational reach. As days went by, Allied units improved defensive positions and conducted refitting operations. Manteuffel conducted counteroffensive operations without success, and on January 2, 1945, requested to fall back to establish better defensive positions around Houffalize. Hitler agreed to a partial withdrawal on January 8, 1945.[85]

On January 3, 1945, the Allies transitioned to the offensive and began attacking east towards the German lines to push them back towards St. Vith. Adolf Hitler approved the withdrawal of his forces based on the success of this counteroffensive, and the initiation of a major Soviet offensive on the Eastern Front. The Allies pushed the Germans back to the West Wall, and the Ardennes Campaign came to an end on January 26, 1945. The last German offensive on the Western Front ended in abysmal defeat.[86]

[84] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 584.

[85] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 303-6; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 599, 607-10.

[86] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 333, 347, 349; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 609-12, 616-17.

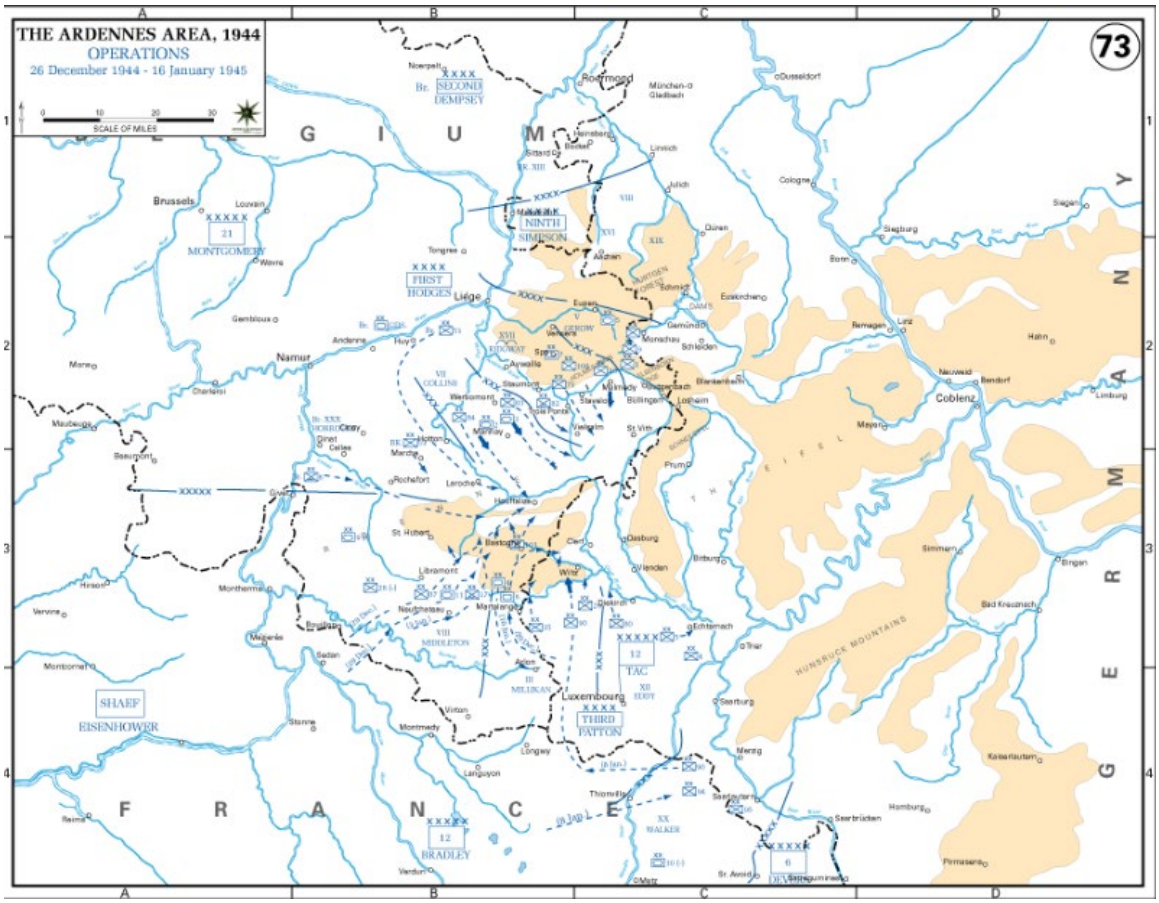

Figure 4. The Allied Reaction. Image from US Military Academy, "World War II European Theater," accessed February 13, 2018, https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWII%20European%20Theater.aspx.

Analysis

The United States' first involvement in WWII revolved around providing resources rather than directly engaging in conflict. However, the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and the German declaration of war in December 1941, fully committed the United States to the war. After many months and several conferences, the Anglo-American Allies eventually settled on strategic aims, despite their differences in global priorities. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed to defeat Germany as their top priority, and demand unconditional surrender from each of the Axis Powers.[87]

[87] Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 64.

The United States' declaration of war in December 1941 set conditions for the Allies to put pressure on Hitler from multiple fronts. Hitler's "living space" became constricted as the Allies landed at Normandy and, along with troops in the Mediterranean and Eastern European Theaters, applied constant pressure from the west, south, and east. Choosing to focus on the Western Front, Hitler's strategy involved isolating and defeating the British, hoping to convince the Anglo-American Allies to enter peace negotiations with Germany, after which Hitler could return his focus to the Eastern Front.[88] Understanding these strategic aims helped the Allies formulate plans and identify military end states.

The Germans intended to seize Antwerp as the end state for *Wacht am Rhein*. Antwerp was a vital port to the Allies because it would greatly increase their logistical throughput, thereby allowing for greater operational reach to attack Germany.[89] However, Hitler established unrealistic timelines while committing valuable forces that could have bolstered the defense of Germany. Hitler created lines of operation for each of the three armies involved in the December 1944 offensive. The Sixth and Fifth Panzer Armies had objectives throughout their areas of operation which they had to fulfill to achieve their desired end state. For example, crossing the Our and Sauer Rivers; seizing key road networks like St. Vith and Bastogne; and seizing bridges across the Meuse River around Liege and Namur. However, the fierce American defense delayed or prevented the accomplishment of those objectives. In fact, the Germans never transitioned to phase two of the operation because they failed to seize crossing sites across the Meuse River—a key objective of the first phase.[90]

Germany's inability to maintain its forces' operational reach created an additional factor that contributed to the failure to achieve their phase one objectives. The Germans culminated prematurely due to the lack of supplies and failure to resupply, the inability to reinforce mobile forces efficiently, and the failure to conduct maintenance on damaged equipment. While planning for the operation, the German staff estimated fuel consumption rates based on normal travel, without factoring in Allied reactions.

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[88] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 81-83; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 11-13.

[89] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 13.

[90] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 19; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 20.

Despite having enough fuel for panzer units to go ninety miles, the operational environment of the time did not support normal travel. The winding roads and poor weather conditions of the Ardennes increased consumption rates, as did the near-constant combat operations. This meant that German units had to capture Allied supply depots to maintain their operations.[91]

Kampfgruppe Peiper suffered significantly from the lack of fuel, resupply, and reinforcement throughout operations in the north. As the main thrust of the offensive, Hitler personally chose *Kampfgruppe Peiper's* route. However, on just the second day of the offensive, Peiper deviated from his assigned route and headed north towards Büllingen, inside another division's boundary. With little resistance, Peiper captured a small 2nd ID fuel depot, then resumed operations back on his assigned route.[92] Peiper's fortune began to run out a few days later when destroyed bridges and fierce resistance stalled his momentum, and he was forced to defend while waiting for reinforcements from the I SS Panzer Division. American soldiers cut off Peiper's supply line, and the fighting on Elsenborn Ridge prevented reinforcements and resupply from reaching him. Peiper and his remaining men abandoned their vehicles on December 24th and walked back to the German lines. Thus, the decisive operation for the entire offensive failed to reach its initial objective or even remain combat effective.[93]

The Germans completely surprised the Allies executing Eisenhower's broad-front strategy. Convinced that the German offensive was more than a spoiling attack, Eisenhower accepted risk by committing reserves and sending reinforcements from other armies. Following the initial attack, Eisenhower established the Meuse River as the no penetration line for the German advance. Having identified risk to troops and mission, army, corps, and division commanders employed reserve forces to prevent further penetration by German troops. Division commanders from V and VIII Corps used their reserves to strengthen defensive positions at the Losheim Gap and St. Vith. Additionally, Eisenhower released his theater reserve consisting of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions to bolster defensive

[91] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 68, 72-73.

[92] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 205-8.

[93] Ibid., 450-51, 460-63; Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 248.

positions at the Elsenborn Ridge and Bastogne. Reinforcements from Simpson's and Patton's Armies also strengthened defensive positions days after the attack. Throughout the campaign, commanders authorized forces to withdraw to prevent units from becoming isolated. Others, however, specifically Collins, outweighed the reward of maintaining the initiative compared to the risk of being enveloped during the German attack on Christmas Day. Unlike the Germans, the Allies mitigated risk through contingency planning, which enabled smooth transitions throughout the operation.[94]

While discussing options with his commanders at Verdun, Eisenhower saw an opportunity to transition to the offensive and push the Germans back to the West Wall. He ordered Patton's forces to transition from their attack towards the Saar region and head north to relieve Bastogne. Several subordinate commanders proposed offensive plans, but Montgomery, exercising tactical control of all forces in the northern portion of the Ardennes, transitioned to the offense only when the Germans could no longer conduct offensive operations. Shortly after the new year, Montgomery initiated the attack, with VII Corps as the main effort.[95]

Conversely, Hitler remained tied to his plan despite the lack of progress. He failed to identify the risk caused by the overly ambitious timeline and shortage of combat-ready forces to achieve the end state or to direct his staff to create contingency plans. Although Dietrich's forces failed to accomplish their objectives in the early days of the offensive, Hitler continued to pursue the Meuse River with the northern shoulder as the main effort until, after some convincing, Hitler changed the main effort to the Fifth Panzer Army. With Manteuffel as the *schwerpunkt*, Hitler continued to pressure the commander into seizing the town of Bastogne rather than bypassing the town and accepting the risk of attempting to reach the Meuse River. The lack of contingency plans forced Hitler and subordinates to make ad hoc decisions rather than deliberate execution decisions. The Allies quickly anticipated events, created plans to adjust to the

[94] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 423-24; Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 142-43, 152-54.

[95] Beevor, *Ardennes 1944*, 189; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 608-9.

situation, then executed. The initiative shifted, in part, because the Allies anticipated events and made decisions faster than the Germans.[96]

Recognizing the operational frameworks serves as another way to analyze the campaign. Hitler identified the Eastern Front as the main effort and focused on the fighting there rather than the Western Front. One can see the effect of Hitler's priorities from the lack of attention he paid to the west despite the numerous reports that Rundstedt submitted, and Hitler's lack of commitment to his November 1943 directive to end troop transfers from the west to the east. By wavering at his directive, the troops assigned to Western Europe arrived unprepared, lacking equipment, supplies, and experience. After Peiper culminated, Hitler ordered "Sepp" Dietrich and the Sixth Panzer Army to take over as the *schwerpunkt*, after which Dietrich received the preponderance of men and equipment, which created an imbalance across the three armies, especially in Seventh Army. As historian Hugh Cole has written, "It should be added that Seventh Army divisions suffered as the stepchild of the Ardennes offensive."[97] Seventh Army, a supporting effort, had no tanks and was tasked to prevent allied forces (Patton's Third Army) from influencing the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies as they moved west.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis shows that Adolf Hitler ordered an overly ambitious counterattack with insufficient forces to allow tactical commanders to achieve the desired end state. In contrast, Allied tactical actions throughout the Ardennes Campaign set conditions for the attainment of strategic aims. Establishing clear political objectives allowed commanders to arrange tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to succeed at accomplishing those objectives. Analysis using elements of operational art—lines of operation, operational reach, culmination, and risk—helps explain the successes and failures of the forces involved in the Ardennes Campaign. The Germans failed to apply the elements of operational art during their last offensive of WWII. After reacting to the German surprise attack, the Anglo-American

[96] Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 4; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 426-27, 460-63.

[97] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 258.

forces conducted effective tactical actions, ultimately leading to the accomplishment of strategic objectives.

Analysis of Allied and German actions in search of evidence regarding the use of methods related to the modern concept of operational art during the Ardennes Campaign should improve current leaders' understanding of the concept and identify lessons for future conflicts against peer and near-peer competitors. Eisenhower understood Roosevelt's and Churchill's political aims and to achieve them he established the broad-front strategy after the invasion of Normandy. Despite the Allied intelligence failure to recognize the German offensive, the tactical actions during and following the Ardennes Campaign led to victory in Europe. Eisenhower and subordinates, such as Montgomery and Hodges, recognized current requirements as well as anticipated future events which led to success during the campaign. Adolf Hitler's gamble and stubbornness to adjust his plan stifled commanders' initiative and prevented conditions for possible success. Further research into Eisenhower's decisions following the Ardennes Campaign provides insight into the planning and execution which led to the defeat of Germany. Additional factors also support the thesis which assists future leaders in potential conflicts against a peer and near-peer threat. The two significant lessons learned for practical purposes from the Ardennes Campaign include the application of mission command and writing contingency plans.

As defined in ADRP 6-0, "Mission command is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders within the conduct of unified land operations."[98] Through the application of mission command, commanders lead the operations process. Meanwhile, "The staff helps the commander understand situations and problems, implement decisions, control operations, and assess progress."[99] The Ardennes Campaign provides examples from both ends of the spectrum of mission

[98] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1.

[99] US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-1.

command with Hitler's directive nature with his subordinates compared to Eisenhower allowing subordinates to use or being forced to use their initiative.

Hitler was the driving force behind the planning and execution of *Wacht am Rhein.* Despite concerns and recommendations from his subordinates before and during the offensive, he denied most of the recommended changes to the plan. The plan was so detailed that, as Charles MacDonald has written, "Hitler had decreed death to any commander impinging on the route of another."[100] Even when his staff convinced Hitler to make a change, his decision came too late to have a positive effect on the outcome of the campaign. Conversely, Eisenhower and his subordinates understood the importance of open dialogue throughout the campaign. Per ADRP 3-0,

> When applying operational art, commanders and staff ensure a shared understanding of purpose. This requires open, continuous collaboration between commanders at various echelons of command to define accurately the problems and conditions of an operational environment. Effective collaboration facilitates assessment, fosters critical analysis, and anticipates opportunities and risk.[101]

Eisenhower identified an opportunity to transition to the offensive and subordinate commanders were free to provide input to the plan, much like Collins did.

Future conflict could bear a stronger resemblance to the Ardennes Campaign than any combat the US Army has engaged in during the previous seventeen years of war. Units will find themselves isolated from higher headquarters and adjacent units, so commanders must empower subordinates to be agile and adaptive. Leaders must have the trust and confidence in their subordinates to accomplish their missions. Conditions should foster collaboration and dialogue between the commander and subordinates. Per General Milley, "Our most valuable asset, our most significant asymmetric advantage inherent in the American military and the United States Army: We come from a society of improvisers, a society of innovators, tinkerers, problem-solvers, techno-savvy at early age, and independence of action comes

[100] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 205.

[101] US Army, ADRP 3-0, (2017), 2-1.

natural to all Americans."[102] The success of future operations, like the Allied victory during the Ardennes Campaign, requires commanders to use mission orders, allowing subordinates to operate freely to achieve their purpose.

Hitler became obsessed with and fixated on his plan. As a previous German commander stated, "No plan of operations survives the first collision with the main enemy body."[103] Therefore, commanders and staffs must confirm or deny assumptions, observe indicators, and incorporate contingencies into the plan. During the planning phase of the operations process, the staff must create branches and sequels tied to decision points to allow commanders to make anticipated rather than reactionary decisions. Flexibility and adaptability increase with established contingency plans.

Despite indications of a German offensive, the Allied command and staff discredited the possibility of a German attack. As a result, the Allies were caught off guard during the initial attack and leaders made reactionary decisions. Fortunately, the Allies possessed sufficient means to reinforce the Ardennes and nearly doubled the troop strength to 180,000 by December 19, 1944.[104] Hitler's plan lacked contingencies or the means to shift the initiative back in his favor. The multiple fronts and limited resources and manpower prevented Hitler from establishing a theater reserve. The outcome of the Ardennes, resulted, in part, from the Allies' ability to mass firepower, air and ground, against an enemy incapable of matching that firepower. The air and ground supremacy achieved during the Ardennes Campaign is unlikely in future conflicts against a peer or near-peer threat. Commanders and staff must use their skill and experience to develop more effective solutions than simply relying on mass to achieve victory. Creating contingency plans provides options to transition, either exploiting opportunities or preventing culmination, as evident with the Germans in December 1944.

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[102] Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "Miserable, Disobedient and Victorious: Gen. Milley's Future US Soldier," *Breaking Defense*, October 5, 2016, accessed January 1, 2018, https://breakingdefense.com/2016/10/miserable-disobedient-victorious-gen-milleys-future-us-soldier/.

[103] Paret, Craig, and Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 299-300.

[104] MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 217.

The monograph explored the successes and failures of the application of operational art during the Ardennes Campaign from the perspectives of the United States and Germany. It observed the decisions before and during the campaign to highlight the evolution of decision making by key leaders as events transpired. Using modern terms to assess the combatants' actions and the outcome of the campaign, leaders and planners can identify the importance of linking tactical actions to strategic objectives while developing solutions in accordance with the screening criteria.[105] The analysis of the Ardennes Campaign through the lens of operational art can help prepare today's leaders for future conflicts against a peer or near-peer enemy.

[105] For more information on the screening criteria, see US Army, FM 6-0, (2014), 4-4.

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