

Historic Mission Command in Large Scale Combat Operations: The 80th Infantry Division in the Ardennes

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Historic Mission Command in Large Scale Combat Operations: The 80th Infantry Division in the Ardennes. MAJ Thomas Buller, US Army, 47 Pages.

History

One of the most significant problems facing the United States Army today is the challenge of realizing mission command in large scale combat operations. After years of optimizing command posts for low intensity conflict, processes and procedures vital for mission command may not enable success on the highly lethal and mobile battlefields of the future. Considering the past offers examples when command posts excelled in similar environments. The activities inside of the command post of the 80th Infantry Division that enabled the allies to respond during the Battle of the Bulge offers just such an example. What processes and procedures enabled this division to respond so quickly and so effectively in a highly lethal and mobile environment?

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Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
ATP	Army Techniques Publication
FM	Field Manual
G-1	Division Personnel Section
G-2	Division Intelligence Section
G-3	Division Operations Section
G-4	Division Supply Section
LSCO	Large Scale Combat Operations
NSS	National Security Strategy
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command

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Introduction

As the US Army continues to shift its doctrinal focus in the direction of large scale combat operations (LSCO), many capability gaps exist—legacies from years of low intensity conflict. Following the Vietnam War, the US Army fought primarily in short duration contingency operations around the world. Military interventions in the 1980s consisted of small, tailored forces seeking to achieve limited objectives in small areas. These operations usually lasted a period of weeks or months. During the Persian Gulf War, despite potential for major ground combat, land combat operations lasted only four days. Intervention in the Balkans involved little to no ground combat at all. After the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, the US Army executed a long series of counterinsurgency operations that followed a relatively short period of decisive action. For nearly two decades, the force grew capabilities to solve the challenges of wide area security and win at the platoon and squad level. During this time, the force balanced preparation for future battle with the requirements to fight and win in low intensity environments.

Now the US Army is preparing for the next war. The most recent National Security Strategy (NSS) projects serious long-term military challenges from rival nations. As these rival nations modernize their militaries, traditional advantages will continue to dwindle.¹ The US Army must prepare for the prospect of fighting forces with both qualitative and quantitative advantages. This includes preparing for war with adversaries that may dominate any or all domains. Combat in a future LSCO will be highly lethal, mobile, multi-domain, and potentially lengthy.²

¹ The President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (White House: Washington DC, 2017), 3.

² Rick Maze, “Radical Change is Coming: Gen. Mark A. Milley Not Talking About Just Tinkering Around the Edges” *The Association of the United States Army*, December 13, 2016, accessed August 31, 2018, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/radical-change-coming-gen-mark-milley-not-talking-about-just-tinkering-around-edges>.

Descriptions of future large-scale combat evoke images of warfare much like that of World War II. This highlights the challenge that the US Army faces today—the need to transform a force optimized for low intensity conflict into one capable of prevailing in conditions like those seen in past conventional wars. The current US Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, recently echoed this idea saying that the character of ground warfare was on the cusp of fundamental change. Milley described this future environment as “unlike anything our Army has experienced since World War II.”³

Preparing for this challenge requires accurate anticipation of the future threat environment. This task presents a unique challenge, however, as anticipation of the future is speculative. Take, for example, a common question about future warfare: what role will disruptive emerging technologies play in the employment of ground combat power? Answering this question highlights the challenge of preparing for the future. Without knowing the future relationship between emerging technologies and ground combat, the question cannot be answered with any usable accuracy. Understanding the relationships between phenomena, specifically cause and effect relationships, then becomes critical in understanding the future. The only place these relationships are fixed is in the past.

History serves as a useful tool to study the relationships between phenomena. The careful study of history reveals cause and effect relationships useful for anticipation of the future. In his book *The Landscape of History*, John Lewis Gaddis described this idea by writing “we know the future only by the past we project.”⁴ Gaddis suggested that historians, by employing a systematic study of history, can identify patterns or “continuities” likely to extend into the future.⁵ If, as

³ Rick Maze, “Radical Change is Coming: Gen. Mark A. Milley Not Talking About Just Tinkering Around the Edges” The Association of the United States Army, December 13, 2016, accessed August 31, 2018, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/radical-change-coming-gen-mark-milley-not-talking-about-just-tinkering-around-edges>.

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

General Milley suggests, future wars will resemble WWII, then a systematic investigation of past conventional conflicts may identify continuities. These continuities will be useful in solving the challenges of the future.

Problem and Hypothesis

One of the most significant challenges facing the United States Army involves optimizing command posts for large-scale ground combat. Command posts, in their current form, reflect adaptation to years of low intensity conflict. *Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-0.5, Command Post Organization and Operations*, explains that the relatively fixed nature of low intensity conflict resulted in large, static, and complex command posts.⁶ This adaptation to low intensity conflict is particularly pronounced at the division level. For example, throughout the last two decades division command posts conducted continuous operations, typically in permanent structures, with robust staffs, while facing negligible threats. The current division command post, adapted to low intensity conflict, does not fit well into the highly mobile and lethal future LSCO environment. As such, the US Army is actively assessing organization and equipment changes to adapt the division command post to large-scale combat. However, processes and procedures inside these command posts must also adapt.

The command post exists to assist the commander's decision making. As stated in ATP 6-0.5, commanders organize their command posts to assist them in the exercise of mission command.⁷ Inside of a command post, the exercise of mission command manifests itself in the daily activities of the staff, organized around processes and procedures that enable mission efficient decision making. An investigation into successful processes and procedures of the past is therefore warranted.

⁶ US Department of the Army, *Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-0.5, Command Post Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), iv.

⁷ Ibid.

What processes and procedures enabled US Army division command posts to achieve success in WWII? Divisions, in this conflict, operated in highly lethal and mobile environments against peer adversaries. The historic record is full of examples where US Army divisions overcame the challenge of this environment and achieved decisive results. As they do today, division command posts in these conflicts existed to enable the exercise of mission command. Determining which processes and procedures enabled these headquarters to overcome the challenges posed by the LSCO environment may provide context for similar problems today.

Determining the causal relationships between command post activities and success in the LSCO environment presents unique challenges. As military theorist Carl von Clausewitz warned in *On War*, deduction of causality in military history “is often blocked by insuperable extrinsic obstacle.”⁸ Clausewitz argued that in war, facts may not be fully known, and numerous causes create a potential “labyrinth of detail.”⁹ To overcome this labyrinth, or what historian John Gaddis referred to as a “cacophony of events,” historians employ selectivity, simultaneity, and scale in their research.¹⁰

The scale of this research, or the level of the investigation, used the frame of the US Army division command post. Simultaneity, or the ability to investigate a similar case across time, allowed for research into command posts at different points in time during WWII. Finally, selectivity helped narrow the investigation down to an individual case of importance. Therefore, this investigation focused on the command post activities that enabled the 80th Infantry Division to support the relief of Bastogne in WWII.

Finally, Clausewitz suggested that a “working theory” would help those researching military history to focus inquiries and avoid the labyrinth of detail.¹¹ This working theory, or a

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 156.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, 22.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 157.

hypothesis, helps to structure the investigation, and becomes the criteria to judge the case. One hypothetical explanation behind the success of these divisions is that their respective command posts enabled them to efficiently execute the operations process of the time. According to *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, Operations*, the operations process consists of planning, preparing, executing, and assessing.¹² The hypothetical answer to the research question then reads: the processes and procedures that supported effective execution of the operations process enabled US Army division command posts to achieve success in WWII.

Methodology

Testing this hypothesis systematically yields both an answer to the research question, and a starting point to anticipate the future. The systematic approach in this research began with establishing the context of each case study. The context includes the background of the case, as well as a justification of why each case represents a good example of command post activities in a LSCO environment. Guided by the hypothesis, the investigation then examined how the operations processes and procedures inside the division command post enabled success. Analysis of primary sources such as reports, orders, and testimonials provided the evidence to support the hypothesis.

Following the case studies, the investigation then sought to find useable patterns between both cases. In this analysis, comparison of the findings from both cases highlighted similarities and differences. Finally, based on the findings of each case, and a cross-case analysis, the investigation closed with conclusions and recommendations.

Significance

As the US Army decides on what organization and equipment will support command posts in future large-scale combat environments, identifying LSCO optimized processes and procedures becomes critical. Leaders in charge of this design effort recently said “it’s important

¹² US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 11.

not to decide the physical form of what something looks like until you understand the functional requirements.”¹³ These functional requirements must support the overarching purpose of a command post: to enable a commander’s exercise of mission command. The exercise of mission command inside a command post is structured around processes and procedures. Theoretically, this is the execution of the operations process: planning, preparing, executing, and assessing operations.

Case Study 1: 80th Infantry Division in the Ardennes, 1-17 December 1944

The Second World War offers one of the best examples of modern large-scale combat operations. WWII placed every major power in the world into a global conflict, which rapidly moved towards total war. This war decided the survival of nations, and established the foundation of today’s rules-based order. Land combat in WWII saw massive armies leverage cutting-edge technology to execute some of the most significant maneuver campaigns in history. As an armed conflict between nations, WWII remains without precedent in terms of scale and scope.¹⁴

Selecting a moment in the operational history of WWII to study division command post operations therefore presents another challenge. The US, for example, fought in two theaters, over a period of four years, conducting numerous campaigns that each consisted of numerous battles and engagements. In 1943 alone, the US Army fielded over three million soldiers in thirty combat divisions across both theaters.¹⁵

Looking back at history for lessons today, the criteria must isolate a case that shares characteristics of anticipated large-scale conflict. The US Army Training and Doctrine Command’s (TRADOC) recent publication of *Pamphlet 525-3-1, The US Army in Multi-Domain*

¹³ Claire Heininger, “Army Designing Next-gen Command Posts,” US Army, May 12, 2016, accessed September 21, 2018, https://www.army.mil/article/167807/army_designing_next_gen_command_posts.

¹⁴ Ernest R. Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History, 4th Ed.* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1993), 1110-1123.

¹⁵ Allan R Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: a Military History of the United States of America* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994), 453.

Operations, helps to narrow down the field. Based on the Multi-Domain Operations Concept outlined in the document, the US Army's primary contribution to Multi-Domain Operations is the rapid penetration and disintegration of enemy defenses.¹⁶ Mission Command systems in the future must then support rapid transitions and movements into penetrating attacks.

Abstracting these ideas towards their inherent purposes, campaigns where a division command post demonstrated the ability to orchestrate a rapid transition into a sequence of decisive maneuver reflects the emerging requirements of large-scale combat. The counter-attacking divisions of the US Third Army in the early phases of the Ardennes Campaign fit this description well. The 80th Infantry Division's rapid change of orientation, mission, task organization, and location, followed in less than 100 hours by successful attacks conducted under the command of an adjacent higher headquarters, stands as an especially monumental achievement in military history that is worthy of investigation.

Operational Background: 1-17 December 1944

Analysis of how the command post of the 80th Infantry Division orchestrated such a tremendous feat begins with understanding the operational environment in the Ardennes during early December, 1944. The 80th Infantry Division, under Major General Horace McBride, consisted of over 13,000 soldiers and nearly 1,600 vehicles.¹⁷ In early December of 1944, the 80th Division reported to the XII Corps, under Lieutenant General Manton Eddy, which reported to General George Patton's Third Army.¹⁸ At this time, Third Army was advancing east from Metz, France towards the Saar River and the Siegfried Line.¹⁹ Units in the XII Corps massed east

¹⁶ US Department of the Army, *Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-1, The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), iii.

¹⁷ Allan R Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*, 453.

¹⁸ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, US Army in WWII, European Theater of Operations (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1963), 485-490.

¹⁹ Ernest R. Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History, 4th Ed.* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1993), 1216.

of the Seille River by the first of December, and continued to clear elements of German First Army Group.²⁰ By the 16th of December, Patton's Third Army effectively concluded the first phase of the campaign to cross into Germany and breach the Siegfried line near Zweibrucken.²¹ Figure 1 below depicts the general situation in western Europe during this period of time.

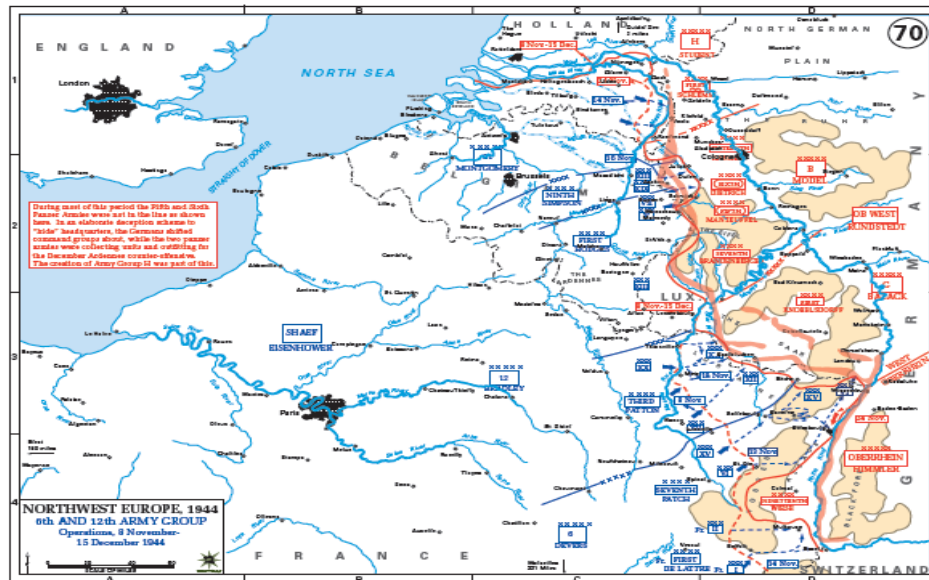


Figure 1: Northwest Europe, 1944. *US Military Academy, WWII European Theater of Operations Atlas.*

As part of these efforts, McBride's 80th Division began the month of December, 1944, east of the Seille River, near Saint Avold in France. From the 1st of December to the 7th, the 80th Infantry Division conducted consolidation operations, patrols, and one division-level attack. Operations logs from their G-3 section indicate that the Division's 318th Infantry Regiment, supported by armor, seized several towns near Cochem, France. This attack on the 4th of December moved the effective front line of troops in Third Army to within 10 miles of the German border.²²

²⁰ US Military Academy, Department of Military History, *WWII European Theater of Operations Atlas*, Map #70, accessed December 3, 2018, https://www.usma.edu/sites/default/files/inline-images/academics/academic_departments/history/WWII%20Europe/WWIIEurope70.pdf

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-3 AAR, December 1944, 1-2.

To prepare for the impending attack on the Siegfried line, the 6th Armored Division relieved all elements of the 80th on the 7th of December, 1944. The XII Corps ordered the 80th Division back to Saint Avold to prepare for future operations.²³ From the 7th to the 17th of December, the division conducted much needed maintenance, reconstitution, and refit operations after 102 consecutive days in contact with the German Army.²⁴ In this ten-day period, the Division kept its artillery battalions in support of the 6th Armored Division, but allowed the three organic infantry regiments, the 317th, 318th, and 319th, to conduct focused training on breaching, anti-tank tactics, and combined arms operations.²⁵

While subordinate units trained and recuperated, the division staff, also located in Saint Avold, focused on planning to breach the Siegfried Line. The Division published Field Order 20 at 1:00 a.m. on the 16th of December 1944.²⁶ This order ended the period of refit and instructed the subordinate units of the 80th Division to begin movement towards assembly areas near Bining, France. The order detailed the initial tasks of relieving the 25th Cavalry Squadron, as well as establishing boundaries with the 87th Infantry Division and the XV Corps.²⁷ The division command post redeployed to Bining, arriving at 12:25 p.m., while the remainder of the division closed in designated areas late in the afternoon of the 18th of December 1944.

It is important to note that based on operational documents of the 80th Infantry Division, the entire focus of the unit from the 16th of December thru the afternoon of the 18th of December remained on conducting a division attack. This attack would begin on the 19th, north towards Zweibrucken from the Bining assembly areas.²⁸ The posture of the division reflected unity of effort towards this task. This included the deployment of all infantry regiments, supporting

²³ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 8.

²⁴ Ibid., 8-10.

²⁵ Ibid., 8.

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 8-10.

artillery, the division command post, logistics trains and supply points, and signal communications architecture.

Analysis

Understanding the relevant facts surrounding events that led the 80th Infantry Division to success in early December of 1944 enables a detailed analysis of the processes and procedures inside of the division's command post. Specifically, analysis of the division during this period sheds light on command post activity in a static and non-time constrained environment.

Command posts enable the commander to exercise mission command. The US Army's current framework for the exercise of mission command is the operations process. The four major mission command activities conducted during the operations process consist of planning, preparing, executing, and assessing.²⁹ These four activities serve as appropriate assessment criteria to determine how the 80th Infantry command post enabled success in the Ardennes.

Case Study 1: Planning

What planning processes and procedures did 80th Infantry Division's command post use to enable their success during the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge? The United States Army defines planning in *Field Manual 3-0, Operations*, as the "art and science of understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and laying out effective ways of bringing about that future."³⁰ Therefore, the planning processes and procedures inside the command post of the 80th Infantry should reflect an understanding of the unfolding situation, a desired future state, and identifiable ways to achieve that future.

The War Department issued two critical pieces of doctrine that guided planning processes and procedures in WWII. *Field Manual 101-5, Staff Officers' Field Manual, The Staff and*

²⁹ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2-24.

³⁰ US Department of the Army, FM 3-0, 2017, 2-24.

Combat Orders, from 1940, provided general staffs a guide to execute combat operations.³¹ *Field Manual 100-5, Field Service Regulations, Operations*, dated 15 June 1944, provided the “basis of instruction of all arms and services for field service.”³² The agility of orders, based on speed and flexibility, is common theme in both manuals relating to command post planning. *FM 101-5* (1940) described the prompt dissemination of orders as vital to command.³³ *FM 100-5* (1944) underscored this by stating that the speed of orders must afford the maximum opportunity for subordinates to plan, prepare, and execute. Additionally, *FM 100-5* (1940) stated that staffs gain flexibility by focusing their planning on the immediate future, and the essential tasks for subordinates to execute.³⁴ Division plans focused therefore on the immediate situation and included the minimum details required to achieve the commander’s intent.

The most significant planning effort in mid-December determined when and where units would occupy positions in support of an attack towards the Siegfried Line. The 80th Division remained static near St. Avold during this planning. Further, as the unit remained off the line, the command post did not face a significant time constraint in planning. By the 19th of December, the Division would need to begin its attack towards Zweibrücken. Despite this impending task, Field Order 20 focused only on setting conditions for this attack. The limited scope of the field order is significant. Following the doctrine of the time, planning for Field Order 20 addressed only the activities anticipated to take place on 18 December 1944.³⁵

Case Study 1: Preparation

What preparation processes and procedures did 80th Infantry Division’s command post use to enable their success during the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge? The current *FM 3-0*,

³¹ War Department, *Field Manual (FM) 101-5, Staff Officers’ Field Manual, The Staff and Combat Orders* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), iii.

³² War Department, *Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Field Service Regulations Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), II.

³³ War Department, *FM 101-5*, 1940, 4.

³⁴ War Department, *FM 100-5*, 1944, 40.

³⁵ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, *Operational History*, December 1944, Part I, 8.

Operations, defines preparation as the major mission command activity performed by units to improve their ability to execute an operation.³⁶ This current doctrine goes on to explain that preparation begins during planning, and remains continual throughout an operation. In the dynamic environment of LSCO, preparation is critical to overcoming the challenges presented by a highly lethal and mobile battlefield. Both the doctrine of the US Army in WWII, and the actions of the 80th Infantry Division command post in the Ardennes, reflect this principle.

Ensuring the maximum amount of time for preparation served as the main driving force behind the speed and flexibility of WWII planning processes. The 1940 version of *FM 101-5* clearly reflected this idea stating the most important factor influencing the issuance of orders is the resulting time available for preparation.³⁷ *FM 100-5* (1944) echoed this point emphasizing the use of warning orders to gain time for subordinate unit preparation.³⁸ In addition to the timeliness of orders, command posts ensured the maximum preparation of subordinates through other processes and procedures. For example, the wide use of standing operating procedures, and seamless support processes from both the forward and rear echelon of the headquarters.

With over a week in a rear area, the 80th Division did not face a significant time constraint in preparing to move towards Zweibrucken by the 17th of December. With this time, the division focused on maintenance, reinforcement, and training. It is important to note that during this time the division provided time and space for the infantry regiments to train on specific combat tasks. The division only employed their field artillery units during the rest period, following the *FM 101-5* (1940) principle of maximum preparation.

Case Study 1: Execution

What execution processes and procedures did 80th Infantry Division's command post use to enable their success during the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge? Current doctrine simply

³⁶ US Department of the Army, FM 3-0, 2017, 2-25.

³⁷ War Department, FM 101-5, 1940, 40.

³⁸ War Department, FM 100-5, 1944, 40.

describes the execution mission command activity as putting the plan into action.³⁹ United States Army doctrine from WWII placed responsibility of execution squarely into the hands of unit commanders. *FM 100-5* (1944) very clearly articulated the staff does not exercise command; however, this doctrine acknowledged the staff performs a critical role in supervising the execution of orders.”⁴⁰ Additionally, the staff, and by association the command post, assisted the commander during execution by providing information and advice.⁴¹ During WWII, division command posts enabled execution through processes and procedures that allowed commanders to remain forward, synchronized the staff battle rhythm with operational tempo, and placed very little burden on subordinate units.

Based on the guidance of *FM 100-5* (1944), a commander remained forward during execution when they were not urgently required in the command post. Once the commander communicated his intent to the staff, his presence was no longer needed in the command post.⁴² This concept challenged the staff inside the command post, however, as they still needed to advise the commander and supervise execution, despite the decision-making authority remaining forward.

Execution during this period seems to be an anomaly. For the first time in 102 days, the 80th Infantry Division remained out of contact with enemy forces.⁴³ Despite this significant change in tempo, the division processes still contributed towards future combat success. In particular, the main effort of the division during this period focused on the replacement of combat losses and maintenance of equipment. In less than ten days, coordination between the forward and rear echelons of the command post brought the combat power of the division back up to nearly

³⁹ US Department of the Army, *FM 3-0*, 2017, 2-25.

⁴⁰ War Department, *FM 100-5*, 1944, 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, *Operational History*, December 1944, Part I, 8-10.

full strength.⁴⁴ Focusing execution on combat readiness during a lull in the operational tempo built options for higher headquarters. After committing the 101st Airborne Division and the 82nd Airborne Division into the Ardennes, the Allies kept the ability to counter-attack based on the readiness of divisions such as the 80th Infantry.⁴⁵

Case Study 1: Assessing

The final step of the operations process as outlined in current doctrine is the continual assessment of operations. *FM 3-0, Operations* (2017), describes assessment as the continual determination of progress, which informs the planning, preparing, and executing mission command activities.⁴⁶ The process and procedure that best represented this activity in WWII divisions is the estimate process and “war-room” procedure.⁴⁷ The use of estimates to continually assess operations received considerable attention in WWII US Army doctrine. *FM 100-5* (1944) described the use of estimates as a continual mental process to evaluate the current situation.⁴⁸ Divisions in WWII would prepare a staff estimate to determine progress in current operations. Likewise, division commanders would conduct their own estimates based on their circulation on the battlefield. Division “war-rooms” would utilize both estimates to assess the current situation, and the staff would recommend adjustments to planning, preparing, and execution activities. Essentially a fusion center in the forward echelon staff, doctrine did not describe the procedure to establish a “war-room.” Despite the lack of doctrinal support, nearly every division in WWII adopted some form of “war-room.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-1 AAR, December 1944, 2.

⁴⁵ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 486-487.

⁴⁶ US Department of the Army, *FM 3-0*, 2017, 2-25.

⁴⁷ The Infantry Conference. Report of Committee on Personnel, Policies, and Procedures, June 1946, 278.

⁴⁸ War Department, *FM 100-5*, 1944, 35.

⁴⁹ The Infantry Conference. Report of Committee on Personnel, Policies, and Procedures, June 1946, 278.

During the static environment of early December, the 80th Division did not rely significantly on assessment to make adjustments. The intelligence summaries from the 15th of December indicate that that majority of work in the war-room centered on intelligence preparation for future operations. Staff estimates during this time reflected detailed terrain and photographic studies of the Siegfried Line. These studies directly fed the planning, preparing, and execution activities. However, as these activities did not seek to determine progress towards an objective or effect they would not be considered assessment in modern doctrine. The decision to focus training on breaching, demolitions, and fighting in fortified areas offers the most significant evidence of assessments. Based on the previous 102 days of combat operations, the division focused training in early December on those tasks directly related to upcoming missions. The prioritization of these preparation activities reflects a determination that the division needed additional training to accomplish future tasks. The assessment also guided preparation activities, focused on training for breaching and attacks against a fortified line.⁵⁰

Case Study 2: 80th Infantry Division in the Ardennes 18-23 December 1944

Beginning on the 16th of December, 1944, a tremendous asymmetry developed between the posture of units under Patton's Third Army in eastern France, and Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges' First Army in Belgium. Early in the morning of 16th December, after a massive artillery barrage, the lead elements of four German armies began a major counter-offensive in the Ardennes.⁵¹ Regardless of the assessed feasibility of the German plan to completely split the British 21st and American 12th Army Groups, the threat posed by over twenty attacking divisions was clear. The German counter-offensive shattered both the 28th and the 106th Infantry Division, and penetrated Allied defenses along the Our River.⁵²

⁵⁰ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-2 AAR, December 1944, 2-4.

⁵¹ Ernest R. Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 4th Ed., 1217.

⁵² Ibid.

Patton first received word of the desperate situation developing to the north when 12th Army Group Commander, General Omar Bradley, ordered him to transfer the 10th Armored Division to reinforce Lieutenant General Troy Middleton's VIII Corps. Despite the impact of this transfer, and the discussion between Bradley and Patton, the Third Army's attack towards the Siegfried Line remained on schedule for the morning of the 19th of December. The subsequent cancelation of a planned attack by the 6th Armored Division in support of XII Corps on the 17th of December presented the only real indication of a major change in posture for Third Army units.⁵³ Despite the transfer of 10th Armored Division to the north, and the halt of 6th Armored Division, the 80th Infantry Division had already established two thirds of its combat power in eastern assembly areas by 5:00 p.m. on the 17th of December.⁵⁴

Operational Background: 18-23 December 1944

Twenty-four hours later, the situation in the Ardennes began to rapidly impact the units in Third Army. Early on the 18th of December Bradley met with Patton in Luxembourg. During this meeting, Patton offered to support Ardennes operations with three divisions almost immediately.⁵⁵ This decision, on the morning of the 18th, set forth the chain of events that would see the 80th Infantry Division perform their monumental feat. In less than 100 hours McBride's 80th Infantry would conduct a surprise attack directly into the right flank of the 352nd Volksgrenadier Division over 150 miles to the north.

Following the morning meeting with Bradley, Patton telephoned his headquarters and instructed the staff to halt the XII Corps attack planned for the 19th of December, and prepare the 80th Division, along with the 4th Armored Division, for movement towards Luxembourg City.⁵⁶ However, by noon that day, the command post for the 80th Infantry had already moved another

⁵³ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 486.

⁵⁴ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 9.

⁵⁵ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 486.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

forty-two miles away from the Ardennes towards the Siegfried Line.⁵⁷ The division, still planning on attacking towards Zweibrucken the following morning, reached nearly one hundred percent combat power by 5:00 p.m.

The first mention of the change in mission for the 80th Infantry Division appears in both the operational history and the G-3 after action review as the last entries for the 18th of December. Both documents log the receipt of orders from XII Corps sometime in the evening of the 18th. These orders originated from Patton's telephone call that morning, processed through the XII Corps, and then to the 80th Infantry in their forward assembly areas.⁵⁸ The order from XII Corps instructed the 80th Infantry to begin immediate movement towards Luxembourg City to intervene in an enemy offensive. It is important to note that despite the brevity of mission description, the XII Corps began to set conditions for the division move. This included opening and maintaining roadways for movement, authorizing immediate liaison with units to the north, and assisting in the relief in place of the 80th Infantry by the 12th Armored Division.⁵⁹

Still, the 80th faced a complicated task. Less than twelve hours from the initiation of an attack on Zweibrucken, the unit now needed to move over 13,000 soldiers and 1,600 vehicles approximately 120 miles to the north.⁶⁰ From the command post in Bining, France, McBride presumably issued Field Order 21. This order superseded Field Order 20, canceling the attack on the Siegfried Line, providing movement instructions for the forward assembled infantry regiments, and phased the movement to correspond with the arrival of the relieving 12th Armored Division.⁶¹

To further complicate this situation, just before midnight on the 19th, Bradley telephoned Patton again to inform him that the situation to the north had degraded significantly since they

⁵⁷ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part II, 1.

⁵⁸ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 8-9.

⁵⁹ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-3 AAR, December 1944, 8-9.

⁶⁰ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part II, 1.

⁶¹ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 8-9.

last spoke. While the 80th Division staff worked out the details of Field Order 21, the 3rd Army Staff feverishly began preparing three plans to launch a broad counter-attack into the southern flank of the German penetration.⁶² On the morning of the 19th of December, in Verdun, France, Patton informed the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, that the 80th Infantry Division, along with the 4th Armored Division and the 26th Infantry Division could begin their counter-attacks as early as the 22nd.⁶³ Eisenhower, urging Bradley to begin the attack as quickly as possible, subsequently informed the 21st Army Group Commander, Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, to begin his counter-attack in the north no later than the 24th of December.⁶⁴ Despite Eisenhower's doubts on the timing of a counter-attack, the lead elements of the 80th Division began arriving in Luxembourg City that night.⁶⁵

With support from XII Corps and the 80th Division Supply Section (G-4), the maneuver regiments of the division began the movement to Luxembourg City by the afternoon of the 19th.⁶⁶ Most units in the division spent the period of darkness between the 19th and the 20th of December driving towards Luxembourg. At 3:00 a.m., on the 20th of December, despite being in the middle of a displacement, and radio blackout, the division command post issued Field Order 22. This order provided in-transit infantry regiments guidance for the occupation of battle positions around Luxembourg City. The advanced elements of the command post arrived in Gonderange, Luxembourg by 2:00 a.m. that day, and began work on Field Order 23. The operational history of the 80th Infantry Division reveals that at this point the division remained postured for the defense of Luxembourg City despite Third Army's plans for a major counter attack.⁶⁷

⁶² Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 487.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 487.

⁶⁵ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-2 AAR, December 1944, 2.

⁶⁶ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-4 AAR, December 1944, 4.

⁶⁷ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 10-11.

At some point after the issuance of Field Order 22 early on the 20th, the division became aware of their impending task to attack north towards Etlebruck. The official history of the US Army in the Ardennes suggests that McBride first learned about the requirement to attack on the 21st of December.⁶⁸ However, the 80th Division issued Field Order 23, directing the preparations for the attack at 12:30 a.m. on the 21st. This suggests that the recently established command post rapidly developed a scheme of maneuver throughout the afternoon and evening of the 20th. Significant changes in the division task organization throughout the day of the 21st, captured in the Division's operational documents, indicate that McBride and his staff knew early about the requirement to attack.⁶⁹

If on the 20th of December McBride knew about the requirement to attack towards Etlebruck, as reflected in the issuance of orders at 12:30 a.m. on the 21st, there appears to be confusion about just how quickly the 80th was required to attack. During the morning of the 21st of December, the division released the 808th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and assumed control of the 610th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The 317th and the 318th Infantry Regiments occupied attack positions just north of Luxembourg City with the 319th Infantry Regiment in reserve. Around noon, the 80th Division suspended Field Order 23, halting all movement. At this point the division realized that their attack towards Etlebruck must commence at 6:00 a.m. the following morning. Some of the confusion about the exact time of attack may have come from the reassignment of the 80th Division to III Corps. Operational documents from the 80th conflict as to exactly when the division came under control of III Corps, but the command post quickly fixed the problem. Field Message Number Three amplified and augmented the instructions from the suspended Field Order 23 and the unit prepared to attack at 6:00 a.m. on the 22nd of December.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 512.

⁶⁹ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 10-11.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Based on the instructions of the field message, the 317th Regiment reverted to the division reserve, while the 318th and the 319th Regiments advanced to new attack positions by 6:00 p.m. that day. As light snow fell throughout the night between the 21st and the 22nd the division continued preparations for an attack the following morning.⁷¹ Final preparations included committing the 80th Divisions Reconnaissance Troop throughout the assigned sector to augment communications and conduct security operations.⁷² In less than 100 hours since Patton initially discussed options with Bradley, the 80th Infantry Division repositioned the entire unit over 120 miles to the north and established attack positions. During this period, the division conducted a relief in place and passage of friendly lines, changed task organization, and was reassigned to a different corps. Current doctrine considers each of these four activities sufficiently complicated as to require the presence of the division tactical command post and the assistant division commander.

Perhaps most significantly, the 80th Division's rapid maneuver restored some positional advantage to the Allies as nearly 13,000 soldiers began to cross the line of departure at exactly 6:00 a.m. on the 22nd of December, just as Patton had planned. Ahead of the division, the 352nd Volksgrenadiers of the German 7th Army continued to march to the west, assuming they successfully penetrated allied defenses. If the 80th Division had not moved north of Luxembourg City so quickly the Germans would have been correct, as only small remnants of the decimated 28th Infantry Division remained in the area.⁷³

At this point in the battle, the command post for the 80th Division flawlessly orchestrated one of the most important division maneuvers of the war. Travelling nearly 200 miles and displacing the command post three times since the 18th of December, the staff officers in the command post now focused on the execution and continual assessment of the division's counter-

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Reconnaissance Troop Operational History, December 1944, 3.

⁷³ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 515.

attack. The complete lack of situational awareness throughout the III Corps zone defined the primary problem the division needed to solve on the morning of the 22nd. Division intelligence section (G-2) documents indicate that the allies knew that the 352nd, 276th, and 212th Volksgrenadier Divisions had crossed the Sauer River. Along with the 5th Paratroop Division, the G-2 section believed these units lie somewhere directly to the north.⁷⁴ Adding to this problem, between the templated positions of the enemy and the 80th Division line of departure, the 109th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Infantry Division still held terrain near Vichten, Luxembourg.⁷⁵

Now running at an extremely high operational tempo for four days, the command post of the 80th Division set about solving these problems. With the division arrayed along a five-and-a-half-mile front, the 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments began their movement to contact at 6:00 a.m. on the 22nd of December. Within two hours the 319th made contact with the 109th Infantry at Vichten, executed a relief and forward passage of lines, and continued their advance towards Merzig. Around 10:00 a.m. combat developed rapidly for the division, as both the lead regiments attacked elements of the 352nd Volksgrenadiers near Merzing and Ettlebruck.⁷⁶

The rapid movement of the 80th Infantry Division to get into the Ardennes fight caught German commanders on the southern flank of the “bulge” completely off guard. With total surprise, the 80th Division attacked 352nd Volksgrenadiers’ poorly protected left flank and rear. The 80th Division continued advancing throughout the day of the 22nd and gained a foothold in town of Ettlebruck after midnight.⁷⁷ By the 23rd of December, the 80th Division had cut one of the major supply lines of the German Seventh Army, destroyed the combat trains of several German regiments, and inflicted significant casualties to German infantry and field artillery units. As the 80th Infantry Division achieved nearly complete surprise, German commanders ordered

⁷⁴ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-2 AAR, December 1944, 2.

⁷⁵ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 515

⁷⁶ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 10-11.

⁷⁷ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 516-517

units in the 7th Army area to halt, turn south, and prepare to defend.⁷⁸ The counter-attack of the 80th Infantry Division ended the southern progress of the “bulge” in less than a week.⁷⁹

Analysis

Understanding the relevant facts surrounding the events that led the 80th Infantry Division to success in a rapid transition enables a detailed analysis of the systems and processes inside of the division’s command post. Just hours from the execution of a major attack into Germany, the Division command post orchestrated a complete change of orientation and mission. From the 18th to the 23rd of December the operational environment changed for the division. Adjustments in planning, preparing, executing, and assessing led to a successful transition during this period.

Case Study 2: Planning

Evidence of timely and flexible planning processes appears most clearly in the chronology of field orders issued by the 80th Infantry Division between the 16th and the 20th of December 1944. During this period, the overarching mission of the 80th Division changed definitively three times. Field Order 20, issued on the 16th of December, provided the commander’s intent for the pending December 19th attack towards Zweibrucken.⁸⁰ This order represented the culmination of nearly a week’s worth of planning when the command post occupied the rear area of XII Corps zone between December 8th through the 15th. However detailed this plan, *FM 100-5 (1944), Operations*, warned, “orders which attempt to regulate action too far into the future result in frequent changes.”⁸¹ In this case, a plan devised for over a week, and issued on the 16th of December, became totally irrelevant in less than forty-eight

⁷⁸ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-2 AAR, December 1944, 2.

⁷⁹ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 517

⁸⁰ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 9.

⁸¹ War Department, FM 100-5, 1944, 40.

hours. Sometime after 1700 hours on the 18th of December, the division received orders from XII Corps to immediately move towards Luxembourg City.⁸²

The operational documents of the division do not formally record the issuance of Field Order 21, which suggests that this order was orally transmitted. Following the doctrinal guidance of *FM 101-5* (1940), as the situation called for immediate action, Field Order 21 represented a warning order that conveyed the commander's intent.⁸³ The subsequent activities of the division reconnaissance troop showcase the speed of the divisions planning system. No more than twelve hours elapsed between the receipt of corps orders and the departure of the 80th Reconnaissance Troop towards Luxembourg. The fact that the troop assumed risk by traveling under headlights, immediately beginning reconnaissance east of Luxembourg City to develop the situation, reflects the influence of McBride's intent. Not only did the staff plan and issue this order in less than twelve hours, it also did so during a period of radio silence.⁸⁴

Field Order 21 initiated the division's movement to north, changing their mission from an attack against the German Siegfried Line, to a defense of the approaches to Luxembourg City. While Field Order 21 displayed the speed of the planning process, subsequent Field Orders 22 and 23 showcased both speed and flexibility of the process. In less than twenty-four hours after issuing Field Order 21, the division issued Field Order 22 giving the commander's decision, or intent, for the defense north of Luxembourg. The broad and flexible plan tasked two infantry regiments to occupy high ground positions north of Luxembourg City, with the purpose of preventing a breakthrough of enemy forces.⁸⁵ Notably, the staff planning process issued these orders during a period of significant change in battle space management and command and

⁸² Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 10.

⁸³ War Department, FM 101-5, 1940, 39.

⁸⁴ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Reconnaissance Troop Operational History, December 1944, 2-3.

⁸⁵ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 14.

control relationships. Specifically, the Third Army reassigned 80th Infantry Division to III Corps with orders to operate in the zone assigned to the 4th Infantry Division.⁸⁶

The third planning iteration in five days resulted in the issuance of Field Order 23, thirty minutes after midnight on the 21st of December. Again, in less than twenty-four hours, the division changed their mission from the defense of Luxembourg City to preparation for a counter-attack to the northwest.⁸⁷ This order enabled critical changes to the task organization of the division and the occupation of attack positions. By noon however, the staff realized that Third Army intended to counter-attack with three divisions by 6:00 a.m. the following day. Rapidly, the staff suspended Field Order 23. Instead of issuing a new order, the staff used the planning process to issue amplified instructions in Field Message 23. This fragmentary order took advantage of the current array of infantry regiments, and allowed the division to close in attack positions by 1800 on the 21st. In six hours, and already after three major changes to mission, the planning processes of the division gave the agility needed to meet their higher headquarters intent.⁸⁸

From 18 to 21 December the division adjusted to changing conditions and devised ways to achieve the commander's intent—achievements indicative of a highly effective LSCO planning capability. The three distinct field orders and one field message produced through the staff's planning processes and procedures transformed the posture of the division and restored positional advantage. Sacrificing details for speed, while remaining flexible, enabled the division to achieve its mission in the Ardennes.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 14.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Case Study 2: Preparation

Standing operating procedures during WWII enabled the division command posts to execute complicated activities transparent to subordinate units.⁹⁰ The division's ability to manage these activities resulted in lightening the burden of subordinate units, affording them maximum time for preparation. From the 18th through the 22nd of December, 1944, the 80th Infantry Division executed a relief in place, several task organization changes, and the passage of friendly lines. These complicated activities involved significant risk, and could take considerable coordination to execute properly. Without efficient division procedures, these activities would have burdened subordinate commanders, robbing them of preparation time. The relief of the 80th Division in eastern France by the 12th Armored Division provides a good example of this premise. The division received notification by XII Corps on the evening of the 18th of December to move at once to Luxembourg. However, before movement could begin, elements of the 12th Armored Division would need to relieve the forward elements of the 80th Infantry Division. Based on operational documents of the division, the command post stayed behind in Bining, France, to coordinate the relief while the preponderance of forces began movement north.⁹¹ Limiting the impact of the relief to only the 2nd Battalion, 319th Infantry Regiment and the division command post provided more than 90 percent of the division maximum time for movement and preparations. In the next two days, the division command post leveraged standing operating procedures to change task organization and pass friendly lines with no impact on subordinate units. The G-3 after action review of the 80th Division captures a change in headquarters from XII Corps to III Corps, and the exchange of tank destroyer battalions from the 808th to the 610th between 19 and 20 December. While in the midst of this task organization change, all three infantry regiments focused on preparations for combat.⁹²

⁹⁰ War Department, FM 101-5, 1940, 34-35.

⁹¹ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part II, 2.

⁹² Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-3 AAR, December 1944, 3.

Additionally, the support processes of the rear echelon afforded maximum time for preparation. Based on WWII doctrinal definitions, the term “command post” specifically applied to the forward echelon of the division headquarters.⁹³ However, the personnel and logistics staff sections in the rear echelon worked in concert with the operations and intelligence sections of the forward echelon. The 80th Infantry’s logistics and reinforcement processes ran uninterrupted during the move to the north. After reinforcing the division with over 600 personnel on the 15th of December, the replacement process continued to strengthen the infantry regiments during the move. From 18 to 21 December, the rear echelon reinforced the division with another 100 soldiers. These reinforcements reached their units in an average of eighteen hours from the time they arrived at the division.⁹⁴ Further, the logistics processes of the division, in coordination with plans of the forward echelon, greatly enabled the preparation of subordinate units. The logistics section (G-4) after action review from the 80th Infantry reflects processes to simplify the move north. For example, the G-4 allocated trucks and drivers to the subordinate units, while providing overall movement control, maintenance and recovery. This enabled the infantry regiments to simply report to an assembly area, direct drivers to their destinations, dismount, and begin preparations for combat.⁹⁵

Adhering to the principle of maximum preparation for subordinate units, the 80th Infantry Division command post leveraged the rear echelon support processes and standardized procedures to enable their success during the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. These processes and procedures sought to build overall unit efficiency, which improved the ability of subordinate units to execute their operation. Without the command post’s seamless and transparent execution of high risk, complicated activities, the division would not have moved so quickly and gained a position of relative advantage in the Ardennes.

⁹³ War Department, FM 100-5, 1944, 40.

⁹⁴ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-1 AAR, 2.

⁹⁵ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division G-4 AAR, December 1944, 2.

Case Study 2: Execution

WWII division command posts needed to maintain continual understanding of the progress of an operation and provide the commander, wherever located on the battlefield, with tactical options. The 80th Infantry Division accomplished this task by maintaining a flexible signal communication architecture and continually adjusting the division's array to support McBride's decisions. The most compelling pieces of evidence of this process center on the division's use of the 80th Reconnaissance Troop for signals communication, and the commitment and reconstitution of the division reserve during the night of the 22nd of December 1944.⁹⁶

First, to maintain radio communications throughout the area of operations, the command post deployed sections of the reconnaissance troop to each of the infantry regiments to augment communication. With consistent communications between all three regiments and the command post, McBride could remain forward while still receiving information.⁹⁷ Further, by maintaining a reserve, the command post gave McBride the ability to order continuous attacks throughout the night of 22 December.⁹⁸ The concept outlined in Field Order 23 relied on the 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments to lead the division counter-attack north while retaining the 317th Infantry Regiment in reserve. Based on rapid progress during the first day of the counter-attack, MG McBride committed the 317th to press the attack north through the 318th's axis of advance. To preserve options for follow-on operations, the command post adjusted the division's array, reconstituting a reserve from the halted 318th Infantry.⁹⁹ The supervision processes in the division command post, supported by reliable communications, enabled McBride to carry out effective command of the division in a forward area.

⁹⁶ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Reconnaissance Troop Operational History, December 1944, 2-3.

⁹⁷ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Reconnaissance Troop Operational History, December 1944, 3.

⁹⁸ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 516-517.

⁹⁹ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-3 AAR, December 1944, 3-4.

By the night of the 22nd of December, the 80th Infantry Division command post had been in continual operations since the night of the 18th, and would continue to run at a high operational tempo for several weeks. However, the command post executed this volume only after a rest period of a week. Post war testimony suggested the dynamic nature of operations drove the staff battle rhythms. The Infantry Conference Report of the Committee on Personnel, Policies, and Procedures from June of 1946 held several observations on this topic. Most critically, testimony in this report suggested that the command posts should continue to keep full manning only during peak hours, while shifting to minimal manning during combat lulls.¹⁰⁰ Analysis of the operational reports from the 80th Division shows this process in action. During the rest period from 8 to 15 December, the division G-3 and G-2 sections reported only working on plans for future operations. However, as soon as XII Corps issued its alert order the command post erupted in a flurry of activity, displacing twice, moving over 150 miles, issuing multiple orders, and supervising operations.¹⁰¹ By synchronizing the staff battle rhythm with the operational tempo of the environment, the command post entered the Ardennes prepared to execute operations indefinitely.

In addition to allowing the commander to remain forward and synchronizing the battle rhythm, the processes and procedures of the command post also did not create any additional burden on subordinate unit commanders. As reflected in the Infantry Conference Report, the division command post rarely placed any meeting requirements on subordinate units.¹⁰² Commonly referred to as conferences, formal meetings in the division command post were rare. The testimony from the post-war Infantry Conference indicates that, at most, the division command post conducted one meeting a day. This synchronization meeting, typically conducted

¹⁰⁰ The Infantry Conference, Report of Committee on Personnel, Policies and Procedures, 298.

¹⁰¹ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944,6-10.

¹⁰² The Infantry Conference, Report of Committee on Personnel, Policies and Procedures, 283-300.

in the evening, did not require the attendance of any subordinate units.¹⁰³ The command post did require the submission of written reports to maintain an accurate common operating picture with subordinate units. However, there is no indication that these reports placed any undue burden on subordinate units.

The execution processes and procedures of the 80th Infantry Division command post enabled success in the Ardennes by allowing the commander to stay forward, synchronizing the staff battle rhythm to the operational tempo, and limiting the burden of subordinate units. Through efficient execution processes the division balanced the need to supervise operations despite often remaining away from the commander. Keeping the staff battle rhythm coordinated with operations enabled surge periods often demanded by the unpredictable nature of LSCO. Limiting command post meetings allowed both the staff and subordinate units to focus on their primary tasks.

Case Study 2: Assessing

Just like planning, preparing, and executing, the 80th Infantry Division changed its assessment framework significantly after the 18th of December. The difference in the detail of estimates between the 15th and the 22nd of December reflected a significant change in the staff's battle rhythm. For example, staff estimates during the 15th of December reflected detailed terrain and photographic studies of the Siegfried Line. Additionally, the division focused on assessing the readiness of subordinate units to conduct future tasks. However, as the situation rapidly changed by the 18th of December, the command post estimate process adapted. As prescribed in *FM 100-5* (1944), estimates required only essential information for decision. Further, the 1944 version of *Operations* stated that exact information on the enemy is seldom known, and to delay action in an emergency would result in missed opportunities.¹⁰⁴ The unfolding of events in the Ardennes revealed the accuracy of this quote from doctrine. From the 19th of December, the G-2

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ War Department, FM 100-5, 1944, 36.

estimates reflected only a rudimentary understanding of the situation north of Luxembourg City.¹⁰⁵ Staff officers inside the command post of the 80th Infantry Division knew by the 19th of December that elements of the 352nd, 276th, and 212th Volksgrenadiers, along with the 5th Parachute Division, had established bridgeheads across the Sauer River and were attacking towards the west. The exact disposition was unknown, however the G-2 surmised that these German divisions would continue to attack along the Sauer and Sure Rivers.¹⁰⁶ With this rudimentary understanding of the situation, the division could now begin to determine progress towards achieving their objectives.

The early assessment of the situation then informed the planning, preparing, and executing mission command functions. Knowing that a window of opportunity existed to occupy some positions of relative advantage north of Luxembourg City, the division command post executed rapid planning, maximized preparations, and maintained flexibility by executing a two-regiment movement to contact north. Using the “war-room” to synchronize the division, the staff assessed all progress in terms of how fast they were closing on positions north of Luxembourg City. Feedback from this assessment enabled the division to fine tune the execution of the movement.

Most United States Army division “war-rooms” contained the forward echelon personnel of the G-3 and G-2 sections. Additional support from tactical air, field artillery, and liaisons rounded out this organization. The division “war-room” supported a current operating picture to include the impact of friendly forces, the enemy, terrain, and weather.¹⁰⁷ Essentially, this team conducted a continuous war game that enabled the division to make timely and accurate decisions. The rapid execution of the 80th Infantry’s move to the north, followed by a successful movement to contact and exploitation shows the impact of the decision support offered by a “war-room.” It is important to note that the division’s assessment system operated most efficiently

¹⁰⁵ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-2 AAR, December 1944, 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ The Infantry Conference, Report of Committee on Personnel, Policies and Procedures, 278.

in a dynamic environment, but remained confined to the measurement of progress towards objectives only forty-eight hours into the future.

Cross-Case Analysis

This investigation into the command post processes and procedures that enabled success in LSCO during WWII began with narrowing the scope and scale down to the 80th Infantry Division during the Ardennes Campaign. To provide further depth, the investigation simultaneously focused on the 80th Division during two distinct operational periods. Case Study 1 analyzed the division command post during the pre-bulge period of 1 to 17 December, 1944. Case Study 2 analyzed the same command post during the subsequent period of 18-23 December 1944. Comparing the differences and similarities of these cases yields answers to the primary research question: what command post processes and procedures enabled success during WWII.

Differences

These two case studies differ in three major ways. First, and most obvious, the timelines between both case studies differ by eleven days. In the first case study the division command post enjoyed seventeen days to plan, prepare, execute, and assess operations. After 17 December, the division had only six days to perform the same tasks.¹⁰⁸ Despite the difference in time available, process and procedure remained focused on maximum preparation for subordinate units and the immediate task at hand. The second significant difference involves the posture of the physical command post in the case studies. In the first case, the division command post remained static for periods of time exceeding a week. After the German counter-offensive, however, the division command post displaced three times. An adaptable operations process enabled mission command both in a static posture and while on the move. In fact, the 80th Infantry staff produced at least three field orders while on the move compared to only one while static. The third, and perhaps most significant difference between the two cases involves the difference in time and space with

¹⁰⁸ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, Operational History, December 1944, Part I, 8-10.

relation to the enemy. The relative speed and movement of a force in time and space in relation to an enemy force is often described as tempo. The difference in operational tempo presents a stark contrast between the two cases. During the period of 1 to 17 December, the 80th Division remained generally out of contact with German forces. With sufficient time, in a static and secure area, the Division command post focused on refining the intelligence picture for an attack into Germany, restoring combat power, and training. Beginning on the 18th of December, the Division entered an extremely high operational tempo in relation to a significant enemy force already two days into a counter-offensive over one hundred miles away.¹⁰⁹ Staff process during this period focused on providing understanding of this emerging problem, and the rapid production and dissemination of orders. Processes and procedures enabled three distinct decision-making cycles: the re-orientation and movement of the division north, the initial occupation of defensible terrain in Luxembourg, and the counter-attack into the German left flank.¹¹⁰ The surge in capability required to execute these tasks reveals that the division command post battle rhythm remained synced to the operational tempo. In the first case, the staff took advantage of the lull in tempo to regenerate capability. As soon as that situation changed, the staff surged to run at full capacity until another lull in tempo allowed further regeneration of capacity.

Similarities

Despite these differences, the two cases share some significant similarities. Specifically, three doctrinally supported concepts remain universally true across the cases. First, regardless of the time, tempo, and movement of the command post, all processes and procedures enabled the maximum amount of preparation for subordinate units. In the first case this included regeneration of combat power and training focused on the anticipated attack into Germany. In the second case, despite extreme circumstances, this included optimizing task-organization early, leveraging division and corps assets to manage movement, and assuming risk for speed over security to buy

¹⁰⁹ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*, 486-488

¹¹⁰ Headquarters, 80th Infantry Division, G-3 AAR, December 1944, 3-4.

time. The result of this focus enabled the division's regiments to defy the odds and attack in a prepared fashion at the time prescribed by the Third Army. Next, the role of the staff and the commander remained unchanged between both cases despite the different conditions. Process and procedure inside the command post enabled the staff to focus on their estimate, while McBride focused on his commanders estimate. After reaching a decision based on these estimates, the staff disseminated orders and continually supported execution and assessment of the operation. This process enabled the commander to remain forward and command the division at the decisive points of the operation reducing the time required for adjustments and subsequent decisions. Finally, the management and flow of information in both cases unburdened subordinate commanders. Information requirements and sharing focused on the immediate situation which enabled adjustments at the cost of detailed planning products. The subordinate units produced the same predictable daily reports to the division command post from their headquarters, while orders from the command post flowed directly to subordinate units. Continuous assessment of the combat situation occurred in the division "war-room" based on this information flow. This simple information management system enabled rapid decision making which allowed the division to seize the initiative from the Germans less than a week into their counter-offensive. Further, with no requirement to travel to higher headquarters, subordinate unit commanders focused on their role in an operation, and enjoyed significant flexibility based on intent driven orders.

Based on the similarities and differences of the case studies, the 80th Infantry Division command post enabled success in the Ardennes by utilizing processes and procedures that supported effective planning, preparing, executing, and assessing. Agile planning processes enabled the division to rapidly translate commander's intent into actionable orders, while maintaining flexibility. A universal focus on maximizing preparation time helped to address challenges of a mobile and highly lethal battlefield. The division's execution systems enabled subordinate commanders to lead, and synchronized the staff to the operational tempo. Finally, a

continuous assessment processes—enhanced by using estimates and the “war-room”—provided the division with the ability to seize the initiative by the 22nd of December.

Conclusion

This investigation began with proposing a problem facing the United States Army in the future. Current command post systems and processes, adapted to years of low intensity conflict do not remain optimized for the highly mobile and lethal battlefield of the future. The investigation addressed this problem by looking to the past. A critical analysis of historic large-scale combat operations yields lessons that help provide context for the future. Searching for an appropriate case to analyze the cause and effect relationship between command post processes and procedures and battlefield success yielded the case of the 80th Infantry Division in the Ardennes.

This investigation proposed that systems and processes that enabled efficient execution of the operations process of the time led to the 80th Infantry Division’s success. The investigation selected two distinct periods of time in December of 1944 to analyze the processes and procedures of the 80th Infantry’s command post. In both cases, the investigation used the steps of the operations process as criteria to judge the events and test the hypothesis. Finally, the investigation compared the results from both cases to determine what led the division to success.

Findings

Based on the totality of the investigation several conclusions address the primary research question. First, operational tempo provided the primary driving mechanism behind the battle rhythm in a command post. Though evidence suggests the division maintained continuous manning in the command post, the staff capacity and capability adjusted to the division’s situation relative to time, space, and the enemy. During lulls in combat the division regenerated combat power. During highly dynamic situations, the division surged all potential staff capacity to overcome the challenges of a highly lethal and mobile battlefield. The ability of the 80th

Infantry Division to produce three field orders while on the move and execute a decisive counter-attack highlights the benefit of these systems and processes. Next, staff process and procedure reinforced several doctrinally supported concepts. The clear roles of the commander and staff enabled commanders to lead operations from the front. The command post flow and management of information in the war-room enabled subordinate leaders to lead and unburdened these units from administrative requirements. Short planning timelines and limited focus, provided subordinate commanders with intent-based orders quickly, enabling maximum preparation time. Thus, the 80th Infantry Division decision cycle enabled the unit to overcome the challenges posed by distance, weather, and the enemy. Finally, highly adaptive planning and assessment processes, augmented by standing operating procedures, allowed the division to operate across the spectrum of operational tempo. In case 1, the division used multiple days to assess German defenses and develop a detailed plan contained in Field Order 20. As soon as the situation changed, the division rapidly produced three more field orders along with field message adjustments based on an entirely new assessment. It is worthy to note that once the situation changed in case 2, the division immediately abandoned all efforts towards the invasion of Germany and re-orientated physically and cognitively on the new problem.

Continuities

It is clear the division performed one of the most remarkable feats in the WWII European Theater of Operations, and that this war shares many characteristics of a future highly mobile and lethal battlefield. However, the context of the past is vastly removed from both today and the future. Changes in information technology, organizations, equipment, force structure, mobility, and lethality make present and future battlefields distinctly different from WWII. However, to anticipate the future requires at least a hypothesis, or working theory, about cause and effect relationships that lead to success. This working theory must be based on proven instances of cause and effect relationships from history.

Analysis of the 80th Division in the Ardennes offers justification of certain concepts guiding the process and procedure of a command post optimized for LSCO. Specifically, planning processes in the command post remained flexible and adaptive to changes in the environment. Leveraging this flexibility, the staff functioned well in static, non-time constrained environments as well as highly dynamic situations. Today, the United States Army identifies three planning methodologies: the Army Design Methodology, the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP), and Troop Leading Procedures.¹¹¹ In the first case, the 80th Division executed a process much like the detailed Military Decision Making Process. However, most of the planning in the second case adapted to the dynamic environment. Today a similar process, the Rapid Decision-Making and Synchronization Process (RDSP) does exist in doctrine, but is not the major focus for division warfighter exercises or professional military education.¹¹² In a future LSCO, divisions may immediately face situations like those that the 80th Infantry faced, where there is no time available for detailed planning.

With respect to preparation activities, the concept of maximum preparation is highly relevant to LSCO environments. Doctrine today recommends dividing time into one third for higher headquarters planning and preparations, and two thirds for subordinate units. Though parallel planning enables modern units to begin preparations, the so called “one thirds-two thirds” rule may be an invalid assumption in LSCO environments. Focusing all efforts on immediately providing critical information allowed the 80th Division’s subordinate units to attack in a decisive manner at the right time and location to have operational impact — they were prepared.

The operational tempo drove the execution of planning and operations for the 80th Infantry. This gave the division a surge capacity in peaks of operational tempo, and allowed for regeneration of capacity in lulls. Another assumption worthy of further investigation is the current

¹¹¹ US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrinal Publication (ADRP) 5-0, The Operations Process*, 2012, 2-4.

¹¹² US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrinal Publication (ADRP) 5-0, The Operations Process*, 2012, 2-4.

concept of continuous operations of a command post. Continuous operations remain mutually exclusive of full capacity. LSCO in WWII required units to surge to full capacity in events such as the counter-attack into the bulge, and leveraged lulls to regenerate the surge capacity. Modern battle rhythms that ensure roughly one third of the staff is capable at any given time may not be optimized for the dynamics of LSCO environments.

Finally, the general concepts of staff and commander roles, procedures for information sharing, and the corresponding assessment framework of the 80th Division enabled success. The amount of collection capability today and a tendency to measure everything might not be realistic in a future LSCO environment. Current capability and tendencies have led to a growing list of board, bureaus, centers, cells, and working groups inside a current division command post. Further, there remains numerous requirements for subordinate units to participate, often in person, in these division sub-organizations. Though the responsibility of a modern division has grown tremendously since WWII, limiting sub-organizations to a “war-room” and information requirements to minimal and predictable daily reports enabled success in the WWII version of LSCO. Tailoring assessments, along with corresponding meetings and organizations may require a reduction in current systems to optimize a command post for LSCO.

The 80th Infantry Division made history with their rapid counter-attack into the flank of the last German offensive of WWII. This historic event offers valuable insights for the future. By assessing this event, and others like it, through the lens of a working theory for success, continuities may emerge to help anticipate the future. Without this insight, the walk into the future is blind, and fraught with potential dangers.

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