

# Fighting with Allies: Integrating Multinational Formations in Large-Scale Combat Operations

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

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In December 1944, the German Army launched the Ardennes counteroffensive, creating command relationship challenges for the Anglo-American Alliance that forced the First and Ninth US Armies to task organize under the British 21 Army Group. With the counteroffensive halted in January 1945, First Army reverted to US 12th Army Group control, while Ninth Army remained under 21 Army Group's control until the conclusion of the Rhineland Campaign, when it returned to the 12th Army Group. What can commanders and staffs of today's US Army learn from the coordination, cooperation, and integration of the US Ninth Army under the British 21 Army Group while conducting large scale combat operations during WWII? As the US Army shifts its focus back to large scale combat operations, it must realize that future conflicts will require multinational cooperation. Therefore, commanders and staff officers must identify the elements of a successful integration prior to the change in task organization. While the strict application of rules developed from studying history is dangerous territory, the example provided by the past can help inform decisions made in the future.

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## Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Company
COIN	Counterinsurgency Operations
CTC	Combat Training Center
FM	Field Manual
JMRC	Joint Multinational Readiness Center
JP	Joint Publication
LNO	Liaison Officer
LSCO	Large-Scale Combat Operations
NDS	National Defense Strategy
OPFOR	Opposition Force
PME	Professional Military Education
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
TTP	Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures
US	United States

## Introduction

There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies and that is fighting without them.

—Sir Winston Churchill

On December 16, 1944, the forces of Nazi Germany launched the Ardennes Counteroffensive, or Battle of the Bulge—their last offensive of World War II. This action caught the Anglo-American Allied forces almost completely off guard. As the Germany Army surged forward, their forces created a salient (the “bulge”) in the Allies’ forward lines. The bulge created a command relationship challenge for the United States (US) 12th Army Group, commanded by Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, by splitting its armies, the First and Ninth to the north and the Third to the south. Due to the inability to reach and difficulty to communicate with the First and Ninth Armies, the Supreme Commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces General Dwight D. Eisenhower decided to task organize both armies under the nearby British 21 Army Group, commanded by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. The task organization took effect December 20, 1944. When the Allies transitioned back to the offensive on January 17, 1945 and continued the drive into Germany, the First Army reverted to 12th Army Group Control.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the First Army, the Ninth would continue to serve under 21 Army Group for the Rhineland Campaign. This modified, and at times contentious, command support relationship would last for approximately three and a half months and contribute significantly to the operational capability of 21 Army Group.

The Ninth Army’s operations as part of 21 Army Group offer a useful example of the challenges—and methods to overcome those challenges—associated with multinational operations and command relationships during modern-day Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO). The Ninth Army effectively organized for and conducted LSCO under the command of

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<sup>1</sup> Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 492.



21 Army Group due to Lieutenant General William Simpson's command style, a relative similarity of culture and purpose, and the effective use of coordination elements such as liaison officers (LNOs), comparable technological advances, and the sharing of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). The lessons of coordination, cooperation, and integration exemplified by the Ninth Army are important planning considerations for today's commanders and staffs as the possibility of LSCO within a multinational force appears to be increasing. While best utilized as planning considerations facing integration of or in a multinational force, these lessons can also be used to overcome the immediate challenge of being in a multinational force without an adequate planning timeline, such as the example of the Ninth Army, which suddenly found itself reporting to 21 Army Group in December 1944.

## Large-Scale Combat Operations in the 21st Century

As the US Army conducted LSCO in the twentieth century, most notably in both World Wars and the later generation-defining Operation Desert Storm, it did so as a part of Multinational Forces.<sup>2</sup> As we entered the twenty-first century the US Army has continued the trend of conducting warfare, admittedly at a smaller scope and scale, in conjunction with other nations forming organizations based around multinational coalitions. As the US military shifts its focus from Counterinsurgency Operations (COIN) to LSCO, the implications of fighting within a multinational force or with partnered nations as a part of our formations increases. In fact, there is a prevailing belief, evident in the multinational presence in rotations at the three dirt Combat Training Centers (CTCs), that it is the intent of the United States to never fight a war by itself again. While this increase in capabilities presents unique opportunities it also presents unique challenges. When considering the increase in complexity, lethality, and multiple other conditions,

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), I-1.

US Army doctrine asserts that LSCO presents the "greatest challenge for Army Forces."<sup>3</sup> How much more challenging will it be if asked to integrate formations that have different language, equipment, doctrine, or cultural ideas of how to conduct warfare? In this author's experience these challenges are not discussed, disseminated, or standardized through Professional Military Education (PME), at any level. Field Manual (FM) 3-0 *Operations* describes LSCO as "intense, lethal, and brutal."<sup>4</sup> These characteristics describe warfare in its entirety; however, the scale will only increase during LSCO. As the stewards of the military profession, commanders and staffs must understand and consider the challenges they will face in LSCO when incorporating multinational formations into their organic units, or when working for a multinational commander or organization.

## Methodology

Research for this monograph included the use of both primary and secondary sources, available at the Combined Arms Research Library, nearby archives, and online collections. A case study of the US Ninth Army's operations while under the command of the British 21 Army Group will reveal successes and or shortfalls in their coordination, cooperation, and integration, leading to recommendations for US Army command and staff who may find themselves in similar situations today or in the future.

## The Ninth Army

The US Ninth Army was activated in September 1943, albeit with a different designation. What would become the Ninth Army was originally the Fourth Army, designated a training army, responsible for training all Army Ground Forces units on the West Coast before preparing and processing them for shipment overseas, while simultaneously training the staff in preparation for

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

deployment to combat as a field army headquarters.<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces, recommended Major General William H. Simpson to command the Fourth Army. US Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, accepted McNair's recommendation, and the newly promoted Lieutenant General Simpson took command on September 27.<sup>6</sup> Historian Joseph Balkoski described Simpson as "an expert trainer of troops," and "a man to whom logic and humility, rather than bravado and egotism, came entirely naturally."<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Stone, a military historian who planned on writing Simpson's biography, said Simpson "had the knack for eliciting the best from his staff, and working for him was enjoyable in many ways. He let staff officers do their jobs, appreciated and praised good performance, and provided encouragement as necessary."<sup>8</sup> Simpson's personality and command style would later be recognized, by multiple commanders, as one of the main reasons that the partnership between Ninth Army and 21 Army Group was successful.

In January 1944, the Fourth Army moved to Fort Sam Houston, taking over the Third Army's mission as it departed for duty in the European Theater of Operations.<sup>9</sup> Here the Army was responsible for operating the Louisiana Maneuver Area, supervising large exercises simulating the realism of combat. This gave the Headquarters staff valuable training that paid dividends once the Army rotated to Europe. During this period, the headquarters staff placed the proper focus on the quality of training by adopting the question, "Would it work effectively in

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<sup>5</sup> T. W. Parker Jr. and William J. Thompson, *Conquer: The Story of Ninth Army* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Jack B. Beardwood, "Study No. 18: History of the Fourth Army" (Historical Section, Army Ground Forces, 1946), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Balkoski, *From Beachhead to Brittany: The 29th Infantry Division at Brest, August – September 1944* (Mechanicsville, PA: Stackpole Books, 2008), 88.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas R. Stone, "General William Hood Simpson: Unsung Commander of US Ninth Army," *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 44-52, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 16.

combat?”<sup>10</sup> In the spring of 1944, in preparation for deployment to the European Theater, the Fourth Army staff received the full complement of personnel needed to form an additional army headquarters. This would ensure that the army’s training mission would continue while also allowing General Simpson’s headquarters, redesignated the Eighth Army, to depart for England in May 1944.<sup>11</sup> This designation would also not last for long.

## “Conquer”

On May 16, 1944, shortly after arriving in England, General Simpson reported to General Eisenhower, whom he had known since before the war, at his headquarters in London.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of their meeting was to discuss Simpson’s nominations for corps commanders to serve in his army, because the Supreme Commander was the approval authority for all senior commanders in the European Theater. According to historian Niall Barr, this meeting is the first example of “Simpson’s generosity towards the British.”<sup>13</sup> Prior to their discussion, Eisenhower asked Simpson the designation of his army, to which Simpson replied the Eighth Army. Eisenhower responded, “well, we can’t duplicate the famous British Eighth Army. I’m going to send a wire to General Marshall and recommend that your number be changed.”<sup>14</sup> Simpson spent approximately three weeks in command of an unnumbered army, until June 3, when he again met with Eisenhower, who informed him of the new designation: the US Ninth Army.<sup>15</sup> This redesignation required a redesign of the distinctive shoulder patch worn to identify members of specific units, but Simpson’s staff accomplished this task quickly, with elements reflecting the lineage of the

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<sup>10</sup> Nathan N. Prefer, *The Conquering 9th: The Ninth U.S. Army in World War II* (Havertown: Casemate Publishing, 2020), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Stone, “He Had the Guts to Say No: A Military Biography of General William Hood Simpson” (PhD Diss.: Rice University, 1974), 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Niall Barr, *Eisenhower’s Armies: The American-British Alliance During World War II* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2015), 418.

<sup>14</sup> Stone, “He Had the Guts to Say No,” 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Fourth Army.<sup>16</sup> Simpson also approved a new headquarters codename and radio call sign: “Conquer.”<sup>17</sup>

Simpson and his headquarters advanced party did not spend the weeks as an unnumbered army idly. In addition to attending the final Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) conference on the invasion of the continent, Simpson conducted circulation through the headquarters of American divisions, corps, and armies located in England, in order to gain from their experiences.<sup>18</sup> They additionally visited all the support structures located in order to familiarize themselves with the supply and administration systems used to support the invasion. As the rest of the army headquarters arrived in England at the end of June, it garrisoned in Bristol. There it became responsible for the reception, equipping, training, and preparation of units arriving from the United States prior to their deployment on the continent.<sup>19</sup> In anticipation of becoming combat operational, Simpson and the chiefs of his staff sections conducted battlefield circulation by visiting and observing units, of all echelons, in combat. After these observations were complete, the lessons learned and best practices were communicated through a night school at the army headquarters for all the remaining members of the staff.<sup>20</sup> At the end of August, the Ninth Army was aligned to the operational control of the 12th Army Group, commanded by Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, and arrived on the continent via Utah Beach. Conquer was prepared for combat operations.

### “King of Brittany”

Near the end of August, 1944, General Simpson received guidance for the Ninth Army’s first operational mission during a meeting with General Bradley. Following the success of the

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<sup>16</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Stone, “He Had the Guts to Say No,” 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

breakout from Normandy, approximately two months after the invasion landings, Lieutenant General George S. Patton's Third Army turned eastward in pursuit of German forces retreating from France. However, Patton could not both apply pressure to the retreating Germans and simultaneously clear the Brittany Peninsula, especially the major port of Brest which the German defenders turned into fortress based on Adolf Hitler's guidance to hold all Atlantic ports to the last man.<sup>21</sup> In their meeting, Bradley told Simpson "I think I'll give you a chance to be King of Brittany," directing him to assume responsibility for the Brittany Peninsula.<sup>22</sup> On September 5, 1944 the Ninth Army became operational, with orders to "complete the reduction of the Brittany Peninsula and to protect the south flank of the 12th Army Group."<sup>23</sup>

The Ninth Army assumed responsibility for the Brittany Peninsula on the twelfth day of the siege of Brest, the largest port on the peninsula, whose defenders accounted for 3,400 of the approximately 30,000 Germans in Brittany.<sup>24</sup> Along with the operational responsibility for the Brittany Peninsula, the Ninth Army gained control of three corps. The XIII Corps, commanded by Major General Alvan C. Gillem, Jr. had become the Ninth Army agency in England, conducting the former mission of the headquarters when they transferred to France.<sup>25</sup> Upon completion of XIII Corps' mission its divisions would transition to Major General John Millikin's III Corps, which was located on the Cherbourg Peninsula to oversee the reception and training of all units arriving in France, before their assignment to a field army.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the VIII Corps, commanded by Major General Troy Middleton, was conducting combat operations on the Brittany Peninsula.<sup>27</sup> The most pressing of Middleton's concerns was the reduction of Brest, a

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<sup>21</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Stone, "He Had the Guts to Say No," 39.

<sup>23</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Stone, "He Had the Guts to Say No," 54.

mission that involved three of his infantry divisions, the 2nd, 8th, and 29th. Further to the southeast, the 83rd Infantry and the 6th Armored Divisions protected the corps' flanks and conducted daily combat patrols.<sup>28</sup> To allow Middleton to concentrate his focus on the reduction of the Brest stronghold, Simpson placed the 83rd Infantry and 6th Armored Divisions and their missions directly under the control of Ninth Army.<sup>29</sup> The initial attack on Brest had begun in late August, with an initial estimate that it would fall within a week; however, by September 5 the offensive had stalled. While the enemy played a role in the slowing of the operation, Middleton's primary concern was the critical shortage in artillery ammunition, which was essential to reduce the defenses of Brest.<sup>30</sup> Simpson immediately leveraged the Ninth Army staff and resources to solve Middleton's ammunition supply problem. Simpson's command style was uncomplicated, resembling an early version of mission command, and on full display in Brittany. He recalled after the war, "what I did was just let General Middleton run the show down there."<sup>31</sup> The substantial increase in ammunition and the obvious support from his army commander gave Middleton the confidence to renew the attack on Brest on September 8.

The reduction of Brest presented an excellent opportunity for subordinate elements of the Ninth Army to conduct multinational integration at the tactical level. Due to the strategic nature of the port, this was not the first time Brest was considered a military objective, and the old city was protected accordingly with over seventy-five major defensive fortifications.<sup>32</sup> Located two miles west of the old city walls, Fort Montbary, was the "strongest of strongpoints."<sup>33</sup> Montbary, an eighteenth-century fort with sturdy masonry and a forty-foot-thick earthen

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<sup>28</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Stone, "He Had the Guts to Say No," 58.

<sup>30</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Balkoski, *From Beachhead to Brittany*, 88.

<sup>32</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 33.

embankment, was surrounded by a moat that was fifteen feet deep and forty feet wide.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the pre-existing fortifications the German defenders increased the complexity facing the attackers by constructing a 200 yard wide minefield, immediately followed by an anti-tank ditch that was ten feet deep by thirteen feet wide.<sup>35</sup> This huge obstacle would need to be cleared before continuing on to Brest proper. The task of eliminating resistance from Montbarey fell to elements of the 115th and 116th Infantry Regiments from the 29th Infantry Division. Their assault on the fortress began on September 12, 1944, and the day concluded with confusion following a report that inaccurately claimed the fortress was cleared.<sup>36</sup> In fact the fort either remained occupied or was reoccupied by German troops who resisted the American regiments with increased ferocity. The bitter resistance went on for two days. On September 13, the situation improved for the 116th Infantry Regiment with the attachment of a British Army unit.

Squadron B of the 141 Regimental Armoured Corps, 'the Buffs' as they were known, brought the capabilities of fifteen flame throwing Crocodile tanks and four regular Churchill tanks to the assault on Montbarey.<sup>37</sup> While the British were recognizably different, both nationalities impressed each other with their professionalism, demonstrated by the close relationship formed between Major Tom Dallas, commander of the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry regiment and Major Nigel Ryle, commander of Squadron B.<sup>38</sup> The coordination between the two commanders, as well as their admiration for the handling of their organizations, contributed largely to the successful cooperation of the two units. Starting on September 14, the British joined the assault on the fortress, and for "two successive days these tanks flamed the fort, its walls, and the moat, and after exhausting their fuel, remained in position while the crews employed white-

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<sup>34</sup> Balkoski, *From Beachhead to Brittany*, 171.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>36</sup> Ninth United States Army, "Operations I: Brest-Crozon," US Army Heritage and Education Center, William H. Simpson Collection, box 9, page 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Balkoski, *From Beachhead to Brittany*, 223.



phosphorus hand grenades in support of the assault by the infantry.”<sup>39</sup> Major General Charles Gerhardt, the 29th Infantry Division commander, recognized the Buffs’ vital contribution to the reduction of Fort Montbary, noting their “superior service” and “combat efficiency.”<sup>40</sup> In a report detailing the Buff’s operations with the 29th, Brigadier General William Sands, the Acting Division Commander, noted the “splendid cooperation” between the infantry battalion commander and the British squadron commander as the key to operation’s success.<sup>41</sup> The Ninth Army also recognized their contribution, leading Simpson to award one Silver Star and thirteen Bronze Stars to the Buffs on January 2, 1945.<sup>42</sup>

Brest was finally taken on September 18, 1945.<sup>43</sup> Most of the fighting in and around Brest took place at platoon level or below, leading Major General Walter M. Robertson, commander of the 2nd Infantry Division, to remark later that the fighting resembled “a corporal’s war.”<sup>44</sup> The brutal urban warfare conducted in Brest is reminiscent of the ugly street fighting conducted in Fallujah and will most certainly be a hallmark of LSCO in and around major population centers. Upon completion of the fighting in Brest, a survey of the damage revealed that the port was now “entirely useless.”<sup>45</sup> Two days after the capture of Brest the major resistance on the Brittany Peninsula ceased with the surrender of the German commander.<sup>46</sup> When Simpson’s Ninth Army replaced Patton’s Third Army in Brittany, Simpson allowed Major General Troy Middleton, VIII Corps commander, to command and control the fighting in Brest, so that his staff could focus its planning efforts on the continuation of the campaign towards

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<sup>39</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Balkoski, *From Beachhead to Brittany*, 223.

<sup>41</sup> G3 File: Allied Troops, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD, Record Group 331, Entry 182, Box 64.

<sup>42</sup> Balkoski, *From Beachhead to Brittany*, 223.

<sup>43</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 35.

Germany. Based on their current location, the staff assumed that Ninth Army would take up a position on the Third Army's southern flank.<sup>47</sup> This presumption changed on September 24, when 12th Army Group instructed Ninth Army to move to the vicinity of Belgium and Luxembourg, opposite the Siegfried Line.<sup>48</sup> Completely altering Simpson's contribution to the coming campaigns, Bradley "wedged" Ninth Army between the First and the Third in a quiet, unpromising sector of the Ardennes.<sup>49</sup>

## Operation Queen

The Ninth Army initiated movement immediately and was soon operating in five countries: France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Germany.<sup>50</sup> October 4, 1944 brought the assumption of responsibility of a new sector between First and Third Armies, with orders to contain the enemy along its front while simultaneously preparing for offensive operations. The VIII Corps, reduced to the 2nd and 8th Infantry Divisions, made the transition to Belgium-Luxembourg as the only combat power immediately available to the army.<sup>51</sup> On October 9, the 94th Infantry Division, which was protecting the 12th Army Group's southern flank, was transferred to 12th Army Group control, ending the Ninth Army's responsibilities in Brittany.<sup>52</sup> In order to increase its frontage and relieve the First and Third Armies, the Ninth Army would need additional combat power. The XIII Corps, relieved of its mission in Normandy, moved to the front, relieving elements of the Third Army.<sup>53</sup> In England, on October 10, the III Corps joined the Third Army, transitioning its responsibility to Major General John B.

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<sup>47</sup> Stone, "He Had the Guts to Say No," 57.

<sup>48</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 423.

<sup>50</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 39.

<sup>51</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 57.

Anderson's XVI Corps, which was ultimately destined to join the Ninth Army.<sup>54</sup> The beginning of October 1944 consisted of patrolling, small scale raids, and defeating German counterattacks. General Simpson, always thinking forward, directed planning by the army staff for an attack eastward which included securing a bridgehead over the Rhine. This planning, while a useful process that would pay dividends, was premature as Ninth Army received new instructions on October 10.<sup>55</sup> The orders from 12th Army Group entirely changed the situation; the Ninth Army was to move from its current position between First and Third Armies, taking up the northernmost 12th Army Group sector.<sup>56</sup> Like the shift from Brittany to Belgium-Luxembourg, this move altered the course of the rest of the war for the Ninth Army, which assumed responsibility for protecting the southern flank of the British 21 Army Group.

In October, the allied leadership realized that Montgomery's 21 Army Group would need further assistance from the Americans, though there had not yet been a formal request or notification for long term help. Bradley, reluctant to give up either the First or Third Army given their experience gained in the campaigns so far, argued that "because Simpson's army was still our greenest, I reasoned that it could be the most easily spared" should it become necessary to provide forces to Montgomery for an extended period.<sup>57</sup> This movement, while unusual, turned out to be fortuitous because of Simpson's nature. In his memoirs Bradley noted, "Actually this worked to Monty's advantage for the Ninth soon developed into a first-rate fighting unit. And it campaigned for him with less friction than would have either the First or the Third."<sup>58</sup> As Ninth Army moved to its new sector, its task organization also changed. The VIII Corps remained in the Ardennes under the control of First Army; in its place Major General Raymond McLain's XIX

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<sup>54</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Stone, "He Had the Guts to Say No," 103.

<sup>58</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 437.

Corps would now report to Ninth Army. In an interesting prediction of the future situation, Simpson remarked upon learning he would relinquish responsibility for the Ardennes, "Thank God we're getting out of this mess."<sup>59</sup> On October 22 the Ninth Army established its new command post in Maastricht, Netherlands while completing the mostly administrative transfers of VIII and XIX Corps.<sup>60</sup>

With this change of sector complete, Ninth Army continued XIX Corps' current mission of protecting First Army's flank, while integrating new units for the upcoming "attack in zone to the Rhine in close conjunction with First Army, protecting its left flank."<sup>61</sup> Initially this attack was scheduled to begin on November 5, however due to a multitude of factors outside of Ninth Army's control the attack was postponed first to November 10 and finally to November 11. While frustrating, this allowed Ninth Army to solve several logistical issues, as well as to continue to strengthen its combat power.

Again, Simpson exemplified his generosity to the British during Operation Queen. Simpson and his staff were highly concerned with the town of Geilenkirchen, a fortified town that threatened the Ninth Army's flank and constricted their operational frontage. Further complicating the situation, Geilenkirchen was squarely within the British area of operations.<sup>62</sup> Simpson attended a conference with Lieutenant General Brian Horrocks, commander of the British XXX Corps, where Eisenhower asked Horrocks whether he could take the town. Horrocks replied, "the spirit was willing, but the flesh, in the shape of one extra division, was weak." Eisenhower turned to Simpson and simply said, "Give him one of ours."<sup>63</sup> The simplicity of this

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<sup>59</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 42.

<sup>60</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 68.

<sup>61</sup> Twelfth Army Group, "Letter of Instruction Number Ten," in *Report of Operations: Initial After Action Report, 12th Army Group*, vol. 5, Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS, Main Collection, page 98.

<sup>62</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 46.

<sup>63</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 418.

arrangement foreshadowed the future of the Ninth Army's operations. Thus, at the beginning of Operation Queen, the 84th Infantry Division, assigned to US XIII Corps, was temporarily under the control of the British XXX Corps. Horrocks assigned 84th Infantry Division as the main effort, later giving high praise to the division for its excellent combat effectiveness. In an attempt to stem the cold, wet weather, and to increase sentiments furthering the Anglo-American bond, the 84th Division received the standard British rum rations. Even prior to Ninth Army's transition to work for 21 Army Group, multinational units at the tactical level shared TTPs to increase efficiency. While the 84th Division was conducting operations in the vicinity of Geilenkirchen, XXX Corps shared its TTP to create artificial moonlight or "movement light" using antiaircraft searchlights. This technique supplied enough light to operate at night by reflecting the searchlights' intense beams off low cloud cover onto rough terrain and enemy positions. Soldiers placed the searchlights in a defilade 4,000-6,000 yards behind the front lines, elevated approximately twenty degrees above the horizon, aimed at the low cloud banks. The placement and the angle of the lights produced a dark area between the lights and the approximation of the enemy positions, allowing the Allied forces to operate in darkness while illuminating the enemy and any terrain that would be difficult to navigate in the darkness. Additionally, the light shined directly into the enemy's eyes. The initial reaction to this TTP was hesitation, as it left the front-line troops feeling "exposed and naked," but its effectiveness quickly won over even the most doubtful American soldiers, who from then on demanded such lighting for all future night operations.<sup>64</sup> Again, as in Brittany, there was successful collaboration between British armor, specifically the Crocodiles, and American infantry.<sup>65</sup> The 84th Infantry Division history praises the collaboration during the battle for Geilenkirchen, highlighting that the tankers earned the

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<sup>64</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> Theodore Draper, *The 84th Infantry Division in the Battle of Germany: November 1944 - May 1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 33.

American admiration and enthusiasm “even though they stopped for a bit of tea at the most unlikely moments.”<sup>66</sup>

During Operation Queen, the American press nicknamed the Ninth Army as “The Phantom Army” due to its already impressive frequent, quick moves. This compliment acknowledged Ninth Army’s feat of moving to and fighting in Brittany, shifting to a position in Luxembourg-Belgium and then moving north again, this time to the Netherlands where Simpson began pushing towards Germany, all within a period of only two months.<sup>67</sup> At the tactical level, the Ninth Army continued to conduct multinational operations. In early November, alleviating a shortage of Military Police, a battalion of Belgian Fusiliers and three battalions of Netherlands Storm Troops augmented American forces by guarding logistical depots and prisoner of war internment areas.<sup>68</sup> After five days of fighting under XXX Corps, the 84th reverted back to XIII Corps control. Throughout November and into December, the Ninth Army continued to push east. This slow and costly offensive operation, described by German forces as “the most terrible and ferocious battle in the history of the whole war,” ground to a halt on December 16 as the Allied forces closed on the flood threatened Roer River.<sup>69</sup>

## Battle of the Bulge

The problem created by the Roer needed solving before the 12th Army Group could continue east. The main concern was that the German Army was still in control of the two dams on the river. Allied engineers estimated that destruction of the Schwammenauel Dam would raise the Roer by twenty-five feet and create “a raging torrent one and a half miles wide,” at best sweeping away bridges and at worst, if the crossings had already started, isolating bridgeheads on

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<sup>66</sup> Draper, *The 84th Infantry*, 43.

<sup>67</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 56.

<sup>68</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 102

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-13.

the far side.<sup>70</sup> Bradley determined that to attack piecemeal would threaten the integrity of the army group; therefore the Ninth Army would need to conduct a tactical pause to allow the First and Third Armies to also close on the Roer.

Unfortunately, the solving of the Roer problem took a backseat on December 16. Two days after the Ninth Army closed on the river, the Germans launched a counteroffensive through the Ardennes attempting to wrest the initiative from the Allies, resulting in the Battle of the Bulge. Due to its shift in the line of battle the Ninth was not directly engaged by the German thrust; however, it would contribute heavily to the upcoming battle. Simpson, recognizing the severity of the aggressive German action and, at the request of Bradley and characteristic of his generosity and humbleness, immediately began shifting divisions south.<sup>71</sup> In the first week, Simpson sent five divisions and supporting troops to help the beleaguered First Army.<sup>72</sup> As historian Niall Barr sums up his contributions, “Simpson garnered little or no fame for his actions during the Battle of the Bulge, yet his actions in sending assistance was as vital as Patton's in stemming the German advance.”<sup>73</sup> This bulge in the Allied lines had the potential to create a command and control issue, virtually isolating First and Ninth Armies from the remainder of the 12th Army Group.

Eisenhower's Chief of Intelligence and Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, both British officers, were the first to recognize the potential severing of communications, and recommended to the Supreme Commander that two commands should be formed: one consisting of Bradley's 12th Army Group and all forces south of the Bulge, and the other made up of Montgomery's 21 Army Group to the north, temporarily reinforced with the First and Ninth US Armies.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 442.

<sup>71</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 86.

<sup>72</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 117.

<sup>73</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 434.

<sup>74</sup> Neillands, *The Battle for the Rhine*, 290.

Eisenhower recognized the utility of this change in command organization, despite protesting from Bradley that this change would discredit American forces or signify a loss of faith from the Supreme Commander.<sup>75</sup> Eisenhower ended the protesting saying, “Well, Brad, those are my orders.”<sup>76</sup>

On December 20, the Ninth Army transitioned to the operational control of 21 Army Group, reporting directly to Montgomery, a move highly resented by some American senior leaders.<sup>77</sup> Over time, this brought to Ninth Army headquarters a more international character, as British liaisons from both higher and adjacent units maintained the closest contact, adding to the already present French, Belgian, and Dutch army representatives.<sup>78</sup> There was concern among US Army senior leadership concerning an American field army commander working for Montgomery, who was deemed difficult to work for and with. A member of Montgomery’s staff described his arrival to his first meeting with Simpson and Hodges, saying, he “strode into Hodges’ H.Q. like Christ come to cleanse the temple.”<sup>79</sup>

Further complicating the relationship, Montgomery released a press statement on January 7, 1945 to stifle British press’ critiques of American military leaders, especially Eisenhower.<sup>80</sup> Although he praised the individual American soldier, Montgomery failed to clearly rebuke the British press, and the overall sentiment appeared disingenuous, causing great offense both at SHAEF and 12th Army Group Headquarters. The situation worsened on January 8, when German propagandists released a statement on the radio wavelength used by the British Broadcasting

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<sup>75</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 476.

<sup>76</sup> Neillands, *The Battle for the Rhine*, 291.

<sup>77</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1972), 2: 677.

<sup>78</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 119.

<sup>79</sup> Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World*, 2: 656.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Quinn, “How Nazi ‘fake news’ split Allied commanders in 1945,” *The National Archives*, accessed January 15, 2020. <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/how-nazi-fake-news-split-allied-commanders-in-1945/>



Company (BBC) purporting to be an official BBC summary of Montgomery's press conference statement. According to the propagandists' statement, the Americans were on the brink of defeat in the Ardennes until Montgomery intervened. British official historian Major L. F. Ellis later wrote that this statement "cleverly slanted the whole affair in a way calculated to give most offence to the Americans."<sup>81</sup> Taking it as an actual BBC report, American leaders from Eisenhower down were furious, creating dissent among the Allies during a critical moment in the battle. Remembering this period, Eisenhower said this incident caused him "more distress and worry than did any similar one of the war."<sup>82</sup> Though Simpson personally found Montgomery "a very pompous guy," he was clearly the best choice to be his subordinate and he refrained from openly complaining, unlike his peers Hodges and Patton.<sup>83</sup> Writing to Eisenhower, Simpson assuaged fears that there would be difficulty, stating that "I and my army are operating smoothly and cheerfully under the command of the Field Marshal. The most cordial relations and a very high spirit of cooperation have been established between him and myself personally and between our respective staffs."<sup>84</sup> In the midst of this chaos among the high command and squarely on the defensive, the Ninth Army staff spent the remainder of December and early January planning for the resumption of offensive operations.

## Operation Grenade

On January 17, 1945 First Army reverted to 12th Army Group control; however, despite Bradley's protests, Ninth Army remained under the control of 21 Army Group.<sup>85</sup> Eisenhower understood Bradley's concern, but he had decided that the Ninth Army would remain under British control until after Allied forces crossed the Rhine. Simpson called Bradley after learning

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<sup>81</sup> Quinn, "How Nazi 'fake news' split Allied commanders in 1945."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 434.

<sup>85</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 492.

of this decision and lightened the mood by asking, “Hey, Brad – what can you do to save us? If this goes on much longer, they’ll begin thinking that we were given to them along with a shipment of lend-lease.” General Bradley responded that there was nothing to do, so Simpson should “polish up [his] British” accent, as he would need it for the foreseeable future.<sup>86</sup>

The Ninth Army spent more than a month stalled at the Roer River, but the staff used this time wisely to plan for the upcoming Spring offensive. While unsure which divisions would return to the Ninth after the fighting in the Ardennes wound down, Simpson was certain that the envelopment of the Ruhr industrial area would ensure the destruction of the German armed forces and that his position was the most suitable from which to carry this attack all the way to the Rhine.<sup>87</sup> When Simpson briefed Montgomery on his plan, entitled Operation Grenade, he recognized its advantages, especially when coupled with the First Canadian Army’s upcoming attack codenamed Operation Veritable. Montgomery approved both plans, meaning 21 Army Group would conduct a double envelopment from the Roer to the Rhine, with the Canadian First Army attacking to the southeast, and Ninth Army, increased to twelve divisions, as the southern pincer attacking to the northeast.<sup>88</sup> Codified on January 21 in an instruction from 21 Army Group, Montgomery set the target date for launch of the attack no earlier than February 15.<sup>89</sup> However, due to the uncertainty of warfare, plans and timelines change. Operation Veritable began on February 8, a week early, which required Simpson to adjust the launch of Operation Grenade to February 10. Unfortunately, approximately twenty-four hours before the attack the Germans destroyed the discharge valves on the Roer dams, increasing both the water level and the current.<sup>90</sup> Simpson spent an anxious day closely watching the river levels rise, but being “left

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<sup>86</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 492.

<sup>87</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 135-138.

<sup>88</sup> Stone, “He Had the Guts to Say No,” 134.

<sup>89</sup> 21 Army Group C-in-C Directive, January 21, 1945, National Archives, Kew, WO 229-72.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas R. Stone, “1630 Comes Early on the Roer,” *Military Review* 53, no. 10 (October 1973): 19.

alone” by Montgomery, the decision to postpone was solely his.<sup>91</sup> The flooding required an almost two-week hold to allow the current to slow down and the level to fall enough to safely cross the river. Based on advice from his engineers, Simpson set February 24 as the earliest date that Ninth Army could feasibly cross the Roer.<sup>92</sup> This gave Simpson time to regenerate and consolidate combat power, a process complicated slightly by Lieutenant General Miles Dempsey’s British Second Army’s situation as it held the line along the Maas River in between the two attacking armies. The Canadian First Army required additional forces for its attack, which the British Second Army provided, leaving it understrength. Simpson’s international generosity led him to extend the attachment to 21 Army Group of the 75th and 95th Infantry Divisions by a week, until February 22, when the defensive operation would no longer require their support.<sup>93</sup>

As February 24 approached, Simpson was concerned that the Ninth would lose the element of surprise by waiting for the river to return completely to normal. He made the difficult decision to attack early on February 23, mitigating the risk of a still swollen river by the prediction of fair weather and the element of surprise.<sup>94</sup> At 2:45 a.m. on February 23 more than a thousand artillery pieces of the Ninth Army, joined by artillery of the First Army to the south and the British Second Army to the north, commenced a forty-five-minute artillery preparation.<sup>95</sup> This preparation led the way for the assault of six infantry divisions across the Roer.<sup>96</sup> While not an easy operation, the lead elements faced only light to moderate resistance, Lt. Richard Hawkins of Company A, 1st Battalion, 334th Infantry, 84th Infantry Division describing the crossing later

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<sup>91</sup> William H. Simpson, interview by Thomas R. Stone, 1971, US Army Heritage and Education Center, William H. Simpson Collection, box 16.

<sup>92</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 158.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>96</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 109.

said, “I really don’t know whether the enemy fired any shots at us or not.”<sup>97</sup> At the end of the first day twenty-eight infantry battalions secured the foothold on the eastern side of the Roer.<sup>98</sup>

Having the bridgehead secured by the completion of the first day practically ensured the success of the operation; however, the Ninth was not at the Rhine yet.<sup>99</sup> Simpson now watched the tempo of the offensive closely, paying attention to corps boundaries to minimize risk of exposed flanks.<sup>100</sup> East of the Roer there were few deliberate fortifications, the defensive positions occupied by the enemy were hasty in nature, consisting of extensive antitank ditches, trenches, mine, and wire obstacles.<sup>101</sup> The bulk of the Ninth Army was across the Roer by the end of February, racing to secure a bridge over the Rhine in full attack mode. As of the first of March, the campaign was reminiscent of the previous year’s race across France, rather than the slogging faced in the November offensive.<sup>102</sup> At this point Ninth Army liberated two major cities; Venlo, a bastion of the Siegfried Line, and Munchen-Gladbach. Ninth Army had spent considerable time and energy planning the operation, but Munchen-Gladbach fell in less than a day, and Venlo fell without a fight.<sup>103</sup> In a letter praising the 35th Infantry Division, which he had also commanded, Simpson stated, “The skill with which the division made its crossing of the Roer River and the speed and power with which it raced up the Army left flank, progressing up to twelve miles a day was most impressive.” Concluding the letter, Simpson expresses his desire that every member of

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<sup>97</sup> Draper, *The 84th Infantry Division*, 145.

<sup>98</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 171.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>101</sup> Allan H. Mick, *With the 102d Infantry Division Through Germany* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 145.

<sup>102</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 134.

<sup>103</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 182.

the division understands that, “Operation ‘Grenade’ constitutes another glowing chapter in the splendid record” of the 35th Infantry.<sup>104</sup>

On March 2 the first elements of Ninth Army closed on the Rhine, the operation transitioned to an attempt to seize intact at least one of eight bridges in its sector.<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, as they cleared the city of Neuss on March 2 the retreating Germans destroyed all three Neuss-Dusseldorf bridges.<sup>106</sup> A fourth bridge dropped the next day in Uerdingen, with elements of the 2d Armored Division on the western end of the bridge.<sup>107</sup> On March 3, advancing against scattered resistance, the pincers closed as forward elements of XVI Corps linked up with Canadians from their First Army near Berendonk.<sup>108</sup> Eager to exploit the seizure of an intact bridge, the Ninth Army staff, directed by Simpson, had spent the first days of March developing plans, and on March 4 General McLain of XIX Corps presented Simpson with a plan to force a crossing in his zone.<sup>109</sup>

Simpson presented McLain’s two options to Montgomery, but he denied the opportunity to attempt the Rhine crossing, saying “I don’t want you to go. Don’t go across.”<sup>110</sup> Montgomery seemingly wanted to conduct a near-simultaneous crossing along the entire Army Group front, but after the war Simpson would attribute this to Montgomery’s saying, “Now, when I make a plan, I want people to stick to it.”<sup>111</sup> Thus the original goals of Operation Grenade were met by March 5, as was the quick attempt at a bridge, but when the sun rose on March 6 the Germans had

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<sup>104</sup> *The 35th Infantry Division in World War II 1941-1945* (Atlanta: Albert Love Enterprises, n.d.), 202.

<sup>105</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 183-84.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>108</sup> Ninth Army G-2 After Action Report, 1-15 March 1945, Inclusive, Inclosure No. 1, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD, Record Group 407, Entry 427, Box 2411, G2 AARs (03-45), 1.

<sup>109</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 189-90.

<sup>110</sup> William H. Simpson, interview by Thomas R. Stone, 1971.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

destroyed the remaining four bridges, and Ninth Army would spend the next five days clearing the remaining resistance west of the Rhine.<sup>112</sup>

As activities and responsibilities of the Ninth Army increased, the headquarters element expanded, increasingly becoming a “colorful spectacle” as the number of liaison personnel from allied nations swelled, including elements from the Royal Navy and Air Force, the British Army, and the Netherlands, Canada, France, and Belgium.<sup>113</sup> These LNOs were instrumental in the functioning of the army, both to higher and lower echelons. On March 6, Bradley and Eisenhower attended a lunch with Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who told the two generals that he had visited Simpson the day before and was elated with the speed achieved by the Ninth Army.<sup>114</sup> In later estimation the actions of the Ninth Army between the Roer and the Rhine was its “most brilliant contribution to Allied victory in Europe.”<sup>115</sup> Montgomery summarized his experience with the Ninth to Simpson in a letter dated March 10: “I would like to tell you how very pleased I have been with everything the Ninth Army has done...the experience I have gained enables me to judge pretty well the military caliber of Armies. I can truthfully say that the operations of the Ninth Army...have been up to the best standards.”<sup>116</sup>

## Operation Flashpoint

The entirety of 21 Army Group had closed on the Rhine by March 11.<sup>117</sup> On March 7, elements of the First Army had secured an intact bridge spanning the Rhine at Remagen. The first Allied unit to do so, First Army troops were quickly expanding a bridgehead on the eastern bank.<sup>118</sup> Forward thinking being one of the aspects expected of a field army, the Ninth Army staff

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<sup>112</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 190-91.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>114</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 508.

<sup>115</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 114.

<sup>116</sup> Stone, “Unsung Commander of US Ninth Army,” 50.

<sup>117</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 155.

<sup>118</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 199.

had been considering and updating plans for the crossing of the Rhine for approximately six months. In early January, Ninth Army published a guide, Engineer Technical Notes Number 3: *Rhine River Study, Cologne to Emmerich*, that codified all the engineering data available for subordinate units to help the planning and execution of an opposed crossing.<sup>119</sup> The 21 Army Group held a planning conference on January 19, attended by representatives of the three armies under its command, dealing mostly with technical details and the distribution of specialized equipment.<sup>120</sup> The most important aspect to emerge from this planning conference was the difference in opinion about crossing site requirements for both the British Second Army and the Ninth Army. The constrictive terrain forcing restrictive access to vital crossing sites led to the only serious tension between Simpson and Montgomery of their entire relationship.<sup>121</sup> The argument centered on the use of the road network and crossing sites near Wesel, to which both Dempsey and Simpson required access; with the caveat that the British Second Army would require assistance from the far greater resources of the Ninth Army Engineers to construct the bridges.<sup>122</sup>

When the 21 Army Group released the directive dealing with crossing the Rhine, named Operation Plunder, on January 21, the Ninth Army was “flabbergasted!”<sup>123</sup> The directive reinforced the British Second Army with an American corps of two divisions, but left Ninth Army no other role in crossing the Rhine.<sup>124</sup> Reflecting on the initial guidance from 21 Army Group, Simpson later recalled, “his initial plan didn’t mention the Ninth Army at all; I wasn’t

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<sup>119</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 207.

<sup>120</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 157.

<sup>121</sup> Christopher M. Rein, *Forging the Ninth Army-XXIX TAC Team: The Development, Training, and Application of American Air-Ground Doctrine in World War II* (Fort Leavenworth: Army University Press, 2019), 155.

<sup>122</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower’s Armies*, 448.

<sup>123</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 208-9.

<sup>124</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower’s Armies*, 448.

assigned a damn thing.”<sup>125</sup> Amid confusion about the diminished role, Simpson made it clear that the Ninth was capable of an expanded role, to which Montgomery relented by assigning it a single corps frontage.<sup>126</sup> Adjacent since October, the British Second Army and the Ninth had “long engaged in mutual exchange of information and conclusions,” developing a relationship that would ease some of the tension created over the argument of crossing sites.<sup>127</sup> 21 Army Group published the final directive for Operation Plunder on February 21, establishing an assault date of March 31 and incorporating the Ninth Army’s portion of the operation, titled Operation Grenade.<sup>128</sup> The Ninth would establish, use, and protect the crossing sites in the area of Rheinberg, which was originally assigned to the British Second Army.<sup>129</sup> The directive solidified an awkward compromise in which the two armies would share the Wesel crossing site.<sup>130</sup> After the British had secured the bridgehead, the Ninth would secure the crossing sites and build multiple bridges for both organizations to cross. To facilitate a quick turnaround on requests for engineer support, the Ninth Army provided a LNO directly to the British Second Army Headquarters.<sup>131</sup> Operation Varsity, an airborne operation dropping paratroopers east of the Rhine, added to the complexity of Operation Plunder. The Ninth Army inherited the responsibility for logistical support of the American units within the XVIII (Airborne) Corps who would support the British Second Army dropping behind Wesel.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> William H. Simpson, interview by Thomas R. Stone, 1971.

<sup>126</sup> Rein, *Forging the Ninth Army-XXIX TAC Team*, 160.

<sup>127</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 209.

<sup>128</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 159.

<sup>129</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 212.

<sup>130</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower’s Armies*, 450.

<sup>131</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 213.

<sup>132</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 158.



Due to the rapid advance from the Roer to the Rhine, the assault date for Operation Plunder shifted to March 24.<sup>133</sup> At 1:00 a.m., approximately 2,070 artillery pieces began an hour-long artillery preparation fire opposite the XVI Corps crossing sites.<sup>134</sup> After the preparatory fires concluded, Anderson, commander of XVI Corps, launched the crossing with the 30th and 79th Infantry Divisions.<sup>135</sup> Facing mainly ineffectual small arms and machine gun fire, the assaulting regiments of the two divisions firmly established themselves on the far bank and rapidly overran the forward German lines. As expected, almost immediately after securing the far side of the river, there was a shift in mentality and the operation placed its emphasis on engineering construction versus maneuver combat.<sup>136</sup> While the engineers were building their bridges and fortifying the crossing sites, the Ninth Army practiced joint operations with the Navy. The Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel (LCVP) and Landing Craft, Medium (LCM) operated by the sailors of Task Unit 122.5.3 enhanced the speed of the crossings.<sup>137</sup> At approximately ten in the morning, the paratroopers of the British 6th Airborne Division and the 17th US Airborne Division began to drop on their landing zones north of Wesel. They met determined resistance but it did not prevent them from consolidating and securing all their objectives on schedule. Eisenhower, present since the previous night, watched Operation Varsity with Simpson from the 30th Division command post.<sup>138</sup> At the conclusion of the first day a bridgehead approximately ten miles wide and an average depth of three miles had been established, leaving little doubt of the complete success of Rhine assault.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 214.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>135</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 164.

<sup>136</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 245.

<sup>137</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 156.

<sup>138</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 247.

<sup>139</sup> Ninth Army G-2 After Action Report, 1-15 March 1945, Inclusive, Inclosure No. 1, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD, Record Group 407, Entry 427, Box 2411, G2 AARs (03-45), 6.

The plan slated construction of the bridges spanning the Rhine to begin only after the bridgehead expanded enough to prevent observed enemy fire at the crossing sites, which could have taken days, but the light resistance and the availability of obscurity allowed the construction to begin on day one of Operation Flashpoint.<sup>140</sup> As the construction continued, the debate over the bridge at Wesel reached its culmination point on March 27. According to the initial agreement, the Ninth Army would use the bridge for five hours after its construction to supply the 17th Airborne Division, at which point it would transition to the British for the following ten days. With the situation developing rapidly, the bridge agreement effectively penned the Ninth Army on the near side of the Rhine, unable to exploit the situation. During a conference on March 27 to determine army boundaries for the advance to Berlin and the use of this bridge, Dempsey told Montgomery and Simpson that he “didn’t see how he was going to let the Ninth Army have the bridge for an indefinite time.” Simpson finally lost his patience, demanding that Dempsey stick to the original agreement. Montgomery agreed and ordered Dempsey to turn over control of the bridge to Ninth Army on March 31 at 7:00 a.m. The night before the handover, Brigadier General James E. Moore, Chief of Staff of the Ninth Army, called his Second Army counterpart and warned him, “tomorrow morning I’m sending my provost marshal with three tanks up there, and if they find one damn British vehicle anywhere near that bridge it’s getting knocked off into the ditch.”<sup>141</sup> While this incident may have slightly spoiled the international relationships that up till that point were friendly and efficient, the two armies continued to cooperate. The TTP of pairing British tanks with American infantry, tried and tested in both Brest and Geilenkirchen, worked again east of the Rhine. On March 29 and 30, the ‘B’ Squadron, Fife and Forfar of the British 79th Armoured Division, supported American

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<sup>140</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 248-49.

<sup>141</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower’s Armies*, 450.

infantrymen with their Crocodiles; flaming both machine gun positions and the woods forcing many of the enemy to surrender.<sup>142</sup>

Eager to exploit the expanding bridgehead, Simpson issued orders for the breakout on March 29; XVI Corps was to protect the army's northern flank, XIX Corps would provide the main effort to encircle the Ruhr, and XIII Corps would seize Munster while maintaining contact with the British Second Army.<sup>143</sup> On the first of April, at approximately 3:30 p.m., the First and Ninth armies met in Lippstadt.<sup>144</sup> This action completed the encirclement of the Ruhr industrial area and trapped 430,000 Germans, crumbling the main German resistance.<sup>145</sup> Bradley, describing these events, said, "As soon as Simpson was permitted to break out of his bridgehead he threw the 2d Armored across the north rim of the Ruhr...just seven days after he had forced the Rhine, joined forces with Hodges."<sup>146</sup> April 4 brought Ninth Army back under the control of 12th Army Group after, as Bradley put it, spending "a restless three and a half months under Monty."<sup>147</sup> On April 21, 1945, LtCol C. J. Y. Dalimeyer, commander of the 1st Lothians & Border Yeomanry, wrote to Major General Percy Hobart, commander of the 79th Armoured Division, in appreciation of working with the Ninth Army, saying "there is not one officer or man who has anything but the highest praise for their keenness, enthusiasm, efficiency and gallantry. It has, indeed, been a notable and unforgettable experience for all of us."<sup>148</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>142</sup> *Story of the 79th Armoured Division, October 1942 – June 1945* (Uckfield, East Sussex: Naval & Military Press Ltd., n.d.), chap. XV, Kindle.

<sup>143</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, 185-86.

<sup>144</sup> Ninth Army G-2 After Action Report, 1-15 March 1945, Inclusive, Inclosure No. 3, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD, Record Group 407, Entry 427, Box 2411, G2 AARs (03-45), 1.

<sup>145</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 452.

<sup>146</sup> Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 528.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> C. J. Y. Dalimeyer to Percy Hobart, April 21, 1945, US Army Heritage and Education Center, William H. Simpson Collection, box 2, folder 28.

The Ninth Army's contribution to the war effort did not end on April 4, 1945; Simpson's command simply returned "home" to the 12th Army Group. The Ninth continued the drive east until halted short of Berlin by Eisenhower to avoid a problematic encounter between Russian and American Forces. Simpson was "convinced we could have taken Berlin," but he agreed with Eisenhower's reasoning and felt that there had been no impact on the future of Germany by not taking Berlin.<sup>149</sup> At the cessation of conflict in Europe, the Ninth became an army of occupation until June 15, 1945 when it transferred all responsibility to the Seventh Army in preparation to transition to the Pacific Theater of Operations. However, Japan surrendered before the transition took place, and the Ninth Army was inactivated on October 10, 1945.<sup>150</sup> The special relationship between the Americans and the British is noted in an official British staff history: "The complete integration of Anglo-American Planning and Intelligence during World War II, like many other aspects of the direction of the War, was something which had not been attempted previously in history as between Allies."<sup>151</sup> While this description is more generic in nature, reflecting the entirety of the war, the point is valid in describing the unity of effort found in the Ninth Army's actions under 21 Army Group.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations*, states, "partners with similar cultures and a common language experience fewer obstacles to interoperability."<sup>152</sup> Having a common language certainly increased the ability of the Ninth Army to integrate with 21 Army Group. Coordination during LSCO is difficult but, as illustrated by the pairing of British armor with American infantry at the company level mere hours prior to an operation, sharing a language eliminates one stumbling block immediately. Unfortunately, when looking at the potential of LSCO and its likely location, the majority of allies and partnerships in those locales will speak

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<sup>149</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 454.

<sup>150</sup> Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 361-64

<sup>151</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 2.

<sup>152</sup> US Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-16, I-3.

English as a second language at best. The difference in languages “may present a significant challenge to command, control, and communications and potentially affect unity of effort if not mitigated.”<sup>153</sup> Commanders and staffs should be prepared for the difficulties effected by language barriers, including translation time and errors, and deliberately emplace mitigations and train to combat them.

A best practice for LSCO, highlighted in the relationship between Ninth Army and 21 Army Group, is the proliferation of LNOs at multiple echelons. JP 3-16 highlights the importance of this, noting that units “should establish early and continuous liaison that enhances mutual understanding.”<sup>154</sup> LNOs cannot simply be a representative of either element, rather they should be an extension of the commander they represent. 1-4 Infantry Battalion, the Warriors, is the Opposing Force at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JRMCC); in every exercise they integrate multinational units ranging from a sniper team to a battalion minus. Two former Warrior company commanders describe their approach as, “the role of LNOs is not merely to serve as a retrans platform between two units...Rather, the Warriors use LNOs as the commander’s representatives to attached units to serve as the continuity of the commander’s intent.”<sup>155</sup> Implied in this requirement is the necessity for distinction when choosing LNOs. The LNO for a multinational force executing LSCO cannot be the “extra officer;” rather, they must be capable of understanding the commander’s intent with commiserate interpersonal skills to effectively communicate the intent to the unit of attachment.

Possibly the greatest factor in the relationship of the Ninth Army and 21 Army Group is the nature and character of its commander, William Hood Simpson. Historian Nathan Prefer highlighted Ninth Army’s contribution as a “vital link in inter-allied cooperation and success.” He

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<sup>153</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 3-16, III-6

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, I-2

<sup>155</sup> Dan Dipzinski and Erik Prins, “An OPFOR Perspective on Multinational Interoperability,” *Infantry* 108, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 22.

noted that nearly half of the army's operational contributions were under British control, "the only American Army to serve under foreign command for so long a period. Given the well-known inter-allied bickering during these campaigns, it is a tribute to the Ninth U.S. Army, and particularly its commander, General Simpson, that this unusual arrangement worked so well for so long."<sup>156</sup> After the war, Eisenhower described Simpson as "Alert, intelligent and professionally capable...the type of leader that American soldiers deserve."<sup>157</sup> Historian Carlo D'Este described Simpson as, "soft-spoken, self-effacing...as unflappable as he was confident."<sup>158</sup> Attributing the continuing cordial relationship with the British to Simpson's character, he went on to say, "Amid the squabbles large and small that plagued Eisenhower's relations with Bradley and Montgomery, Simpson stood out. Of all the American generals, no one was ever heard to say a bad word about Simpson."<sup>159</sup> Obviously, in LSCO, operational necessity may trump the ability to decide which subordinate unit may be attached to a multinational organization, or have one attached to it. However, if given the opportunity, it would be wise to choose a commander—like Bradley and Eisenhower did—who exhibits the qualities of a Simpson, over one like Patton or Hodges. While not an absolute guarantee, this will facilitate the relationship required to execute multinational operations. Respect, patience, team-building, trust, and confidence are six of the tenets of multinational operations exhibited by Simpson.<sup>160</sup> At the end of the war, General Dempsey, commander of the British Second Army, the operational neighbor for all of the Ninth's time under 21 Army Group, told Simpson, we are "very fortunate

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<sup>156</sup> Prefer, *The Conquering 9th*, x.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>158</sup> Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower, A Soldier's Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 668.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 3-16, I-2

to have met you in this war...we must not let our friendship die...I hope you realise how much we of the Second Army admire your splendid Ninth, and your great achievements.”<sup>161</sup>

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) describing the importance of multinational integration states, “mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric advantage that no competitor or rival can match.”<sup>162</sup>

Unfortunately, this unmatched advantage is not a simple solution or process. To fully capitalize on multinational organizations there must be a deliberate approach to the integration of units. This approach might follow notification of attached units, or could occur as a unit is thrust into a multinational arrangement like the one in which the Ninth Army found itself on December 20, 1944. However, like most operations in the Army, the relationship would benefit from planning beforehand. The importance of forging relationships and incorporating them in training has led to more multinational presence during rotations at the three dirt CTCs. This is only the first step in solving the difficulty presented by multinational organizations. Anecdotal as it may seem, the author spent two years in the OPFOR battalion for the JMRC, as both the Executive and Operations Officer, conducting at least four LSCO-focused Brigade Combat Team (BCT)-level rotations as well as multiple smaller Mission Readiness Exercises (MREs) per year. Every single rotation, the US forces had multinational attachments, ranging from additional platoons to entire battalions. Consistently, the US forces were incapable of, or unwilling to, fully integrate their attachments to create the asymmetric advantage mentioned in the NDS. It became apparent that there was little, if any, prior planning with regards to how to incorporate the multinational units or with whom to pair them. Most often, the pairings took on the appearance of frustrated babysitting. Ignoring the significant need for quality LNOs, the difficulties presented by different languages, and careful consideration of the leadership in the pairing of US and multinational units in future

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<sup>161</sup> Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 461.

<sup>162</sup> US Department of Defense, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: 2018), 8.

operations would create a significant seam, easily exploited by the enemy. As the US Army continues its difficult transition from focus on COIN to LSCO, its leaders must incorporate thinking about, planning for, and training with multinational elements. It is simply not enough to do so only at a culminating event like a CTC rotation; rather, it must be integrated into unit training throughout the year and at all levels of PME. The failure to emphasize the importance now increases the difficulty of the learning curve when attempting to apply these examples later, during the opening days of intense, lethal, and brutal LSCO.



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