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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 28TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
IN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE,  
15 - 26 DECEMBER 1944  
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY DIVISION IN DEFENSE

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 28TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 28th Infantry Division in the Battle of the Bulge, ARDENNES-ALSACE Campaign, during the period 15 - 26 December 1944. In order to establish continuity of thought between this operation and those which preceded it, and therefore made it possible, a brief resume of the major Allied ground actions in FRANCE, between 6 June and 15 December 1944, is in order. On 6 June 1944 the combined British, Canadian and American forces created the much desired second front by invading NORMANDY. Slowly but surely they expanded their beachhead and built up reserves.

By the end of July, eighteen American Divisions were in FRANCE.

- (1) On 25 July 1944 the First U.S. Army jumped off in an attempt to break through the German cordon which contained the beachhead forces.
- (2) Several days later, after fierce fighting, the German lines were ruptured by First Army and General George S. Patton's newly created Third Army raced through the gap.
- (3) The German defenses quickly collapsed under the numbing shock of the American penetration and exploitation, and the rout of the German forces in northern FRANCE was on.
- (4) The Allied Armies raced across FRANCE in a fashion reminiscent of the German conquest of that country in 1940. It

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- (1) A-1, p. 50
  - (2) A-1, p. 50
  - (3) A-1, p. 51
  - (4) A-5, p. 274-280

is possible that had it not been for the ever present, restraining influence on mobility in warfare, namely the problem of supply, the Allied Armies might have raced on through to BERLIN in one slashing lunge. But the cold science of logistics caught up with them near the German border and brought them to a halt. (5) The overextended supply lines cracked and the racing tanks and trucks were temporarily immobilized. The pause that resulted gave the Germans the breathing spell they needed and they hastily organized their routed forces, and manned their border fortifications. (See Map A)

Coincidental to the late stages of the race across northern FRANCE, the Allied invasion of southern FRANCE was launched on 15 August 1944. This led to the collapse of the German Forces in southern FRANCE and to a joining of the northern and southern Allied Forces. (6) Thus, on 1 October 1944, the German west border defenders were confronted by a force of fifty-four divisions on the continent, and six more being staged in the UNITED KINGDOM. (7)

Advances by the Allied Forces, through October, November and early December 1944 were small and costly. (8) The attacks made during the period were, from a theatre level viewpoint, local in nature with limited objectives. Nevertheless, they were of great tactical significance and were bitterly fought. A prime example is the SCHELDT ESTUARY fight which led to the opening of the port of ANTWERP. The middle of December found the Allied Armies strung along a line running generally north from the SWISS border, along the German

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- (5) A-4, p. 47  
(6) A-5, p. 310  
(7) A-5, p. 322  
(8) A-4, p. 47; A-5, p. 323-338

border to the WAAL RIVER in HOLLAND, and west to the NORTH SEA. (9) (See Map A)

### THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 15 December 1944 there were seven Allied Armies spread along a front extending from SWITZERLAND to the NORTH SEA. On the left flank were the Canadian First and British Second Armies, both under 21st Army Group. In the center were the American Ninth, First and Third Armies, in that order from north to south, all under 12th Army Group. In the south was the American Seventh Army with the French First Army to its right, both under 6th Army Group. (See Map A) The positions held had been attained mainly through a series of attacks during November and early December, 1944, all along the front. These attacks were part of the first phase of a three phase plan created by Supreme Headquarters. This first phase called for the clearance of German forces from areas west of the RHINE RIVER. It was to be followed by phase two which included crossing the RHINE and deployment of Allied Forces on the east bank. The third and final phase would then be launched and it proposed an advance into GERMANY and that country's defeat. (10)

Mid December found the Allies at the RHINE RIVER in the Seventh Army area. (11) To the north of the Seventh Army, the Third Army was preparing for an all out smash through the SIEGFRIED LINE (West Wall) and on to the RHINE, to be launched on 19 December 1944. (12) Further to the north, the First U. S. Army had one Corps attacking to capture the ROER RIVER

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- (9) A-5, p. 322-340; A-1, map, front end sheet  
(10) A-1, p. 67  
(11) A-1, p. 68  
(12) A-1, p. 72

dams and thus permit the Ninth Army, on its left, to cross the ROER RIVER and continue its advance. (13) First Army's other two Corps and Ninth Army's two Corps were resting and/or awaiting the capture of the ROER RIVER dams. (14) In the north General Montgomery's 21st Army Group was preparing for an offensive from the NIJMEGEN area southeast to the RHINE. (15) (See Map A)

#### FIRST U. S. ARMY SITUATION

The First United States Army was composed of three Corps in mid December 1944. They were the VII, V and VIII Corps and they held a section of the front line extending from northeast of AACHEN to a point southeast of the city of LUXEMBOURG. (16) The VII Corps was on the left, V Corps was in the center and VIII Corps was on the right. To the north of the First Army, the Ninth Army was poised along the west bank of the ROER RIVER but they did not dare attempt a crossing because the Germans held the river dams, near its headwaters, and could flood out, disastrously, any attempted crossings north of the dams. These dams were located opposite the V Corps front. Therefore, First Army assigned the mission of capturing the dams to V Corps. This attack jumped off on 13 December 1944. (17) (See Map A)

The VII Corps on First Army's left flank was in a similar position to that of the Ninth Army to the north. It could not cross the ROER RIVER until the dams were captured or destroy-

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- (13) A-1, p. 71
  - (14) A-1, p. 71
  - (15) A-1, p. 68
  - (16) A-5, p. 343
  - (17) A-5, p. 340



ed. (18) It therefore, remained in a static condition to the west of the river, engaged in reorganization of its units. This reorganization was essential because of the bloody war of attrition in which the Corps had engaged to achieve its present position. (19)

#### VIII CORPS SITUATION AND THE CALCULATED RISK

On 15 December 1944 the VIII Corps occupied a front of about 88 miles on First Army's right. (20) The sector extended from a ridge in GERMANY known as the SCHNEE ELFEL along the German border to the southeast corner of LUXEMBOURG. (See Map B) The northern portion of the Corps front was held by the 106th Infantry Division with the 14th Cavalry Group attached. They covered a 22 mile front with all three of the division's regiments and one of the 14th Cavalry Group's two squadrons on the line. (21) To the south of the 106th Infantry Division was the 28th Infantry Division manning a front of over 20 miles. (22) Still further south was the 9th Armored Division (minus). It occupied a two and one half mile front. (23) One of the division's three combat teams, Combat Command "B", had been attached to V Corps. One of the two remaining combat commands, Combat Command "R", was utilized as VIII Corps reserve. Combat Command "A" held the division's sector of the front line. (24) The remainder of the Corps front to the south was held by the 4th Infantry Division. (25) (See Map B)

Military manuals teach that a division should normally cover about 4 to 5 miles of frontage in a defensive situation.

They allow for the unusual and set these figures as guides

(18) A-1, p. 70-71

(19) A-1, p. 71

(20) A-11, p. 1

(21) A-2, p. 15, 25

(22) A-15

(23) A-11, p. 2

(24) A-1, p. 108

(25) A-1, p. 108

rather than inflexible rules. They also advocate defense in depth and encourage implementation of the "two up and one back" theory to insure depth of position through the placing of any two of a unit's elements on the line and one of its elements to their rear. In cases where frontages are extended military manuals usually recommend a thinly held line backed up by a strong mobile reserve. On the VIII Corps front neither of the above teachings was or could be adhered to. The paucity of troops and the length of the front precluded complete adoption of either method of deployment. Instead a series of strong points was manned. These were not and could not be backed up by adequate reserves. Gaps existed between the strongpoints, which, in the event of a heavy attack, would permit enemy forces to flow through the line, isolate the manned positions, and unravel the front line. The Corps front lacked depth and elasticity.

The VIII Corps in mid December 1944 was the victim of a calculated risk. In order to mount attacks in other sections of the front, such as the ROER RIVER dams attack, and the scheduled Third Army attack, economy of forces elsewhere along the line had to be effected. (26) There were only sixty three Allied divisions available in the European Theatre and they were faced by seventy identified German divisions. (27) Therefore, rather than suspend offensive operations and await reinforcements, General Eisenhower decided to run the risk of having a portion of his line thinly held and vulnerable in order to continue to attack in other sectors. (28) The VIII Corps sector was selected as a logical place to be thinly held and

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(26) A-5, p. 338

(27) A-1, p. 96

(28) A-5, p. 338

in which to take a calculated risk. The sector was selected because it abounded with almost impenetratable barriers behind which small forces could hold with small likelihood of attack. The VIII Corps line was stretched across the hilly, heavily forested country of eastern BELGIUM and LUXEMBOURG. The area is generally known as the ARDENNES FORESTS. It contains ridges, heavy forests, sharp gorges, a poor road net, and is interspersed with rivers. In addition to the nature of the terrain, the sector was selected to be thinly held because of the lack of apparent strategic objectives behind it and because the Germans were thin on their side of it. (29)

The wisdom of the decision to run the risk of a breakthrough on the VIII Corps front has been a subject of debate by historians since the war and will probably continue to be so for decades to come. Any blame for the decision, if blame is in order, is clearly assumed by General Eisenhower. (30)

The condition of VIII Corps' three and a fraction divisions in mid December 1944 was only fair. The 106th Infantry Division and Combat Command A of the 9th Armored Division were in good shape although the 106th was a new, green, untried unit which had just arrived in FRANCE. (31) The 28th Infantry Division had participated in the bloody HURTOEN FOREST fight and in the middle of November 1944 had been shifted to the center of the VIII Corps sector the rest and reorganize. (32) At that time the division needed 3400 replacements. It received about 3100 in late November and came to within 300 of authorized strength. (33) The 4th Infantry Division had also been badly

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- (29) A-1, p. 75-79  
(30) A-5, p. 341  
(31) A-1, p. 77  
(32) A-1, p. 77  
(33) A-11, p. 2

mauled in the HURTTGEN FOREST fighting and had suffered 7000 casualties. It joined VIII Corps on 6 December 1944 and was still short 1500 infantrymen. (34) The division was in great need of rest and reorganization and training of new replacements.

#### THE GERMAN PLAN

The German ARDENNES offensive of December 1944 was Adolph Hitler's last big gamble and possibly his most rash one. In the late months of 1944 the German situation was growing more desperate daily. The Russians were advancing from the east and their pressure on the German lines was constant. The Allies were slowly moving into position for attacks through to the RHINE and on into the heart of GERMANY. A giant vise, in the form of a two front war, was slowly beginning to squeeze Hitler's Reich to death. He had to find a way to ease this tremendous pressure in order to gain time. Without more time it was obvious that GERMANY would soon be overrun. So, Hitler searched for and found a weak point in the Allied line and decided to gamble all in order to ease the tremendous Allied pressure on the western front. (35)

Hitler selected the ARDENNES sector for a mighty counter-offensive. This same route had been used in 1940 to unlock the door to FRANCE and, in 38 days FRANCE fell. (36) He had seen it work once and he ordered it tried again. The element of gambling entered the picture through Hitler's use of the last vestiges of a strategic reserve available to the German High Command. If the offensive failed it was clear, even during the planning stages, that Germany's fighting days would soon

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- (34) A-1, p. 77
  - (35) A-6, Chap. XIX
  - (36) Personal knowledge

be over. The lack of a strategic reserve would hamstring the Germans in their efforts to plug gaps and to contain Allied pressure. Allied superiority in materiel and air power was bound to tell and the German line would inevitably crack. But Hitler gambled.

His aim was to break through on the American ARDENNES front, by using four armies, and to cross the MEUSE RIVER and swing northwest and take ANTWERP and BRUSSELS. However, this was only an immediate objective. It might be termed the first phase. His ultimate objective was to cut off the British Armies, First Canadian Army and Second British Army, from their bases of supply and to force them to evacuate from the continent of EUROPE. (37) (See Map C)

The plan was Hitler's own brainchild and was developed by his personal command group, the O.K.W. (38) At the time, it was generally credited to Von Runstedt by Allied soldiers and layman. (39) However, Von Runstedt, who was then Commander-in-Chief in the west, was actually opposed to the whole idea.(40)

Success of the plan was contingent upon three main elements. The first of these was surprise. This entailed the massing of the striking forces in close proximity to the ARDENNES front, prior to jump-off time. This was a Herculean task in view of Allied air superiority at the time and considering the usual efficiency of Allied intelligence collecting agencies. The second requirement for success was that a breakthrough had to be effected. The Germans believed that this could be done without too much trouble because the American

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- (37) A-6, p. 275
  - (38) A-6, p. 274
  - (39) Personal knowledge
  - (40) A-6, p. 275

line in the ARDENNES was actually an extremely thin crust. The third essential was resupply of the penetrating columns, particularly with fuel. An overall requirement, upon which success was contingent, was speed. The Allies had to be thrown off balance and their northern forces ringed before they could regain their balance. Otherwise, divisions might be peeled off from other sectors of the Allied line, moved to the threatened area, and eventually contain the penetration short of its objectives.

Tactically the plan was as follows. The Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies, with the Sixth on the right, were to attack through the ARDENNES, drive to the MEUSE RIVER, cross it between LIEGE and DINANT, bypassing LIEGE, and take BRUSSELS and ANTWERP. (41) To the north of the Sixth Panzer Army, the Fifteenth Army, using the reinforced XII SS Corps was to attack west and form a wall or block, to protect Sixth Panzer Army's right flank. (42) To the south of the Fifth Panzer Army, the Seventh Army was to attack west and southwest and act as a blocking force to protect Fifth Panzer Army's left flank. (43) (See Map C)

The operation was to be under the command of Field Marshal Model, Commander of Army Group B. He in turn was under the command of Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, Commander-in-Chief in the west. The Fifth Panzer Army was under the command of General Von Manteuffel. It was to attack on a 30 mile front using three Corps abreast. (44) (See Map C) Two of these Corps were to be aimed almost squarely at the 28th Infantry Division.

Part of LVIII Corps faced the northern portion of the 28th

- (41) A-1, p. 11-14; A-6, p. 274-275
- (42) A-6, p. 275
- (43) A-16, Map No. 6
- (44) A-17, p. 308

and reorganize battle weary divisions.

The area that the division covered rested squarely in the heart of that region of BELGIUM and LUXEMBOURG known as the ARDENNES FORESTS. The left flank of the division position extended into BELGIUM and northeast across the OUR RIVER into GERMANY. About four-fifths of the division front was in LUXEMBOURG and ran along the west bank of the OUR RIVER. (See Map D) To the rear of the division position the CLERF RIVER flowed from north to south and the SURE RIVER, flowing from west to east, joined it behind the division's right. The combination meandered south and east and flowed into the OUR RIVER just inside the division's right boundary. The OUR RIVER, along the 28th Division front is the German border. (See Map D)

The ARDENNES sector is composed of steep, heavily wooded hills and deep ravines. It has numerous streams and rivers and, in general, all are swift running. Its road net, by American standards, is poor and behind the 28th Division the roads radiate out of two cities, HOUFFALIZE and BASTOGNE. Heavy fall rains and winter snows characterize the area and make most of its roads almost impassable to vehicular traffic during these seasons. These factors of terrain and climate, plus the apparently passive German attitude on their side of the front, caused the ARDENNES sector to be regarded as, and utilized as, a quiet area. (53)

On 15 December 1944 the 28th Infantry Division had all three of its regiments on the line. (54) The 112th Infantry Regiment was on the left. It was the only one of the divi-

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(53) Personal knowledge

(54) A-15

Division line with a Panzer and Infantry Division. To the south XLVII Corps was opposite the 28th Division center with two panzer divisions and one infantry division. The 28th Division's right was opposite two infantry and one paratroop divisions of the Fifteenth Army's blocking force. (45) D-Day was 16 December 1944. (See Map D)

#### THE 28TH DIVISION SITUATION

On 15 December 1944 the 28th Division was stretched as tight as a fiddle string along a front about 25 miles, extending from the northeast tip of LUXEMBOURG to the area of WALLENDORF at the mouth of the SURE RIVER. (46) It covered one of the longest divisional fronts in EUROPE. (47) The front was five times the length of a normal division front and longer than the fronts of some army Corps. (48) (See Map D)

The division had moved into its present area to relieve the 8th Infantry Division on 17 - 19 November 1944. (49) It had been in action continuously since July and had fought a very hard fight in the HURTGEN FOREST in early November, in an attempt to capture the same ROER RIVER dams that the V Corps was now attacking toward. (50) It was badly in need of rest and had received 3100 replacements who had to be absorbed into the various companies through proper training. (51) It was still 300 men short of authorized strength. (52) The division had been transferred to the quiet VIII Corps front in keeping with the practice of utilizing that area to rest

(45) A-16, Map No. 6; A-4, Map No. 8; A-12, p. 1

(46) A-15

(47) A-15

(48) A-15

(49) A-15

(50) A-15

(51) A-11, p. 2

(52) A-12, p. 2



sion's regiments on the east side of the OUR RIVER. Its right flank was on the OUR RIVER close to the junction of the FRENCH, GERMAN and LUXEMBOURG borders. Its front extended from that point in an east by north direction for about four miles. (See Map D) Its artillery support consisted of the 229th Field Artillery Battalion attached. (55) The regiment had two of its battalions on the line with the 1st on the left and the 3d on the right, while the 2d Battalion was in reserve. (56)

The 110th Infantry Regiment covered the center of the division area. It extended for fifteen miles along the west bank of the OUR RIVER. (57) The regiment had only two of its three battalions with which to cover this extensive frontage. The 2d Battalion was in division reserve. (58) Therefore, the regiment used its two remaining battalions to man a series of strongpoints, of company size and less, back from the west bank of the OUR RIVER, with outposts on the OUR during daylight, and patrols to the river at night. The 1st Battalion was on the left and the 3d was on the right. Artillery support consisted of the 109th and 687th Field Artillery Battalion, attached. The regimental CP was at CLERVAUX. (59) (See Map D)

The 109th Infantry Regiment, with two battalions on the line, covered the remainder of the division front, to the south. Its 1st Battalion was in regimental reserve at DIEKIRCH. The regimental CP was at ETTLEBRUCK. (60) The 2d and 3d Battalions were confronted with a similar situation to that of the two front line battalions on the 110th Infantry,

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- (55) A-12, p. 4
  - (56) A-14, p. 2
  - (57) A-15
  - (58) A-15
  - (59) A-15
  - (60) A-13, p. 3

although they covered a much smaller frontage. They therefore, established a comparable defensive arrangement of strongpoints, outposts and patrols. (61) The regiment had the 197th Field Artillery Battalion attached, (62) and the 108th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support. (63)

In addition to its infantry and artillery elements the division had four other battalions attached. It had the 103d Engineer Combat Battalion which was parcelled out in the form of attachments to the three infantry regiments. (64) The 447th AAA Battalion was located near division headquarters at WILTZ. The other two additional battalions were the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 707th Tank Battalion, both of which were attached by companies to the various regiments. One company of each, plus the two battalion headquarters, were retained under division control. (65) The division CP was located at WILTZ. (See Map D)

Thus on 15 December 1944, the division was deployed in a defensive position, along too extensive a front, and lacking in essential depth. What had to be covered could not be covered properly with what was available. The mission of VIII Corps, which in turn became the mission of its subordinate divisions, was one of aggressive defense. (66) In addition, the 28th Division had to train its new replacements to fit into their proper slots within platoon and company teams. This they did wherever practicable and within the limits imposed by simultaneously manning a front line sector.

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- (61) A-15
  - (62) A-12, p. 4
  - (63) A-13, p. 4
  - (64) A-12, p. 4
  - (65) A-12, p. 4
  - (66) A-2, p. 11

## NARRATION

### 15 DECEMBER 1944, ALL QUIET

The weather on 15 December was cold and damp. Heavy clouds hung low over the ARDENNES. Fog and mist permeated the atmosphere during early morning and evening hours. This was characteristic of the area and the season and was due to continue as such until 23 December when a change brought clear skies. Snow covered the ground.

On the 15th of December the 28th Infantry Division conducted its routine duties along the quiet ARDENNES front. It patrolled, it trained and it watched. One factor had been noted which might be termed unusual. On the preceding night sounds of enemy vehicular movements had increased. (67) But no one was unduly alarmed. The greatest German counteroffensive against combined British-American arms, of the entire war, was about to be launched and no one of the Allied side seemed to know it. Intelligence officers, as far to the rear as Supreme Headquarters, were complacently optimistic concerning enemy capabilities. (68) How such a situation could occur, in view of the elaborate organization involved in collecting and evaluating intelligence in the Allied military machine, is not readily understandable. Obviously, air reconnaissance had also failed, despite Allied air superiority. As a result, the 28th Division unsuspectingly manned its line on 15 December and enjoyed its rest in the "quiet" sector.

### THE FIRST DAY

At 0530 hours on 16 December 1944 the German artillery

(67) A-12, p. 1

(68) A-1, p. 86-93

opened up along the American VIII Corps front and the "Battle of the Bulge" was on. The artillery continued until after 0730 hours and at that time the Germans launched their attack all along the 28th Division front. (69) On the left the 110th Infantry was hit hard. Penetrations were made into the positions of both of its front line battalions. (70) The penetration into the 1st Battalion area, on the regimental left, reached the kitchens and company CP's in places. The penetration was checked and C Company, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion, counterattacked and restored the MLR except for one gap between two rifle companies. (71) The penetration into the 3d Battalion area, on the regimental right inflicted heavy casualties and reached the battalion's rear area. Early in the afternoon the 2d Battalion counterattacked through the badly mauled 3d Battalion and restored the MLR by 1700 hours. It then attached one of its companies to the 3d Battalion, to counterbalance losses sustained, and returned to the regimental reserve position. (72)

The 28th Division's center regiment, the 110th was in the most vulnerable position of all three regiments. It was covering 15 miles of front with only two battalions. The heavy concentration of artillery in the early hours of 16 December played havoc with the regiments wire communications. Shortly thereafter most strongpoints were under infantry and tank attack. Other enemy elements infiltrated between strong points and reached some of the artillery positions. These were beaten off by hand to hand fighting. By mid morning communi-

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(69) A-11, p. 4,5

(70) A-14, p. 2

(71) A-14, p. 1

(72) A-14, p. 2

tions with division were gone. At this point the regimental commander dispatched his executive officer to his right battalion to take charge in that sector. Orders reached the regiment from division and directed that every unit and installation was to hold and fight it out at all costs. The 110th Infantry was a series of strongpoints, all fighting for their lives. The division order pinned them in place and they had no reserve with which to strike at the overwhelming horde of Germans. Both artillery battalions were fighting off German attackers by direct fire. Toward evening the various strongpoints were begging regiment for more ammunition, by radio. As the day ended the regiment was a series of isolated detachments, still holding out against tremendous odds, with Germans infiltrating between them. (73)

The 109th Infantry on the division's right fared best of all three regiments on the opening day of the attack. When the German artillery concentrations began crashing into the regimental positions the reserve battalion at DIEKIRCH was alerted. At 0820 groups of German infantry were across the OUR RIVER and probing for the regimental front line positions. The 2d Battalion, on the left, moved G Company, its reserve, into the line northeast of BRANDENBURG to check an infiltration around F Company's right flank. They secured F Company's right flank but E Company, at FOUHREN, was surrounded. At 1425 hours 2d Battalion reported to regiment that communication to E Company had failed. The last report received from the isolated company had been that they were receiving heavy mortar concentrations and were being attacked by an enemy force of

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(73) A-15

about battalion strength. Company A of the reserve battalion, augmented by a platoon of medium tanks from C Company, 707th Tank Battalion, was sent to establish contact with E Company. Attention is invited at this point to the fact that a company of infantry and a tank platoon were being ordered to attack through a reported enemy battalion to relieve a surrounded company. The attack failed and A Company, plus tanks, was stopped south of LONGSDORF. Meanwhile C Company, also of the reserve battalion, was dispatched to seize BRANDENBURG, slightly to the rear of the 2d Battalion's center and to hold it at all costs. Germans who had infiltrated through to it were ousted and the town was secured by 2230 hours. The 3d Battalion, on the regimental right, held well all day in face of heavy attacks. The only penetration was a minor one, which was contained. (74)

At the end of the first day the division's right and left regiments were holding their positions. Both had fought off repeated penetrations during the day. The 112th Infantry had committed its reserve as a unit in a counterattack and had been successful. The 109th Infantry had committed its reserve piecemeal and had been only partially successful. One of its companies was still cut off. In the center regiment's sector the situation was fluid with the Germans infiltrating through gaps between isolated strongpoints. The situation was considered serious by division headquarters. Therefore, the 110th Infantry's 2d Battalion, which was in division reserve, was released to the regiment, except G Company, which was retained in division reserve. The battalion was moved to the

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(74) A-13, p. 3, 4

high ground northeast of CLERVAUX. G Company was moved to the vicinity of the Division CP at WILTZ. (75) (See Map D) Two Panzer Divisions, three Infantry Divisions and one Paratroop Division had been identified on the 28th Division front during the first day. (76)

At the end of the first day the magnitude of the enemy attack had manifested itself through the number of divisions used. Enemy tactics used were to infiltrate American positions, surround our troops and pin them down by all around attack and flow on through the gaps between the encircled positions. The pattern of the attack did not unfold so early. Objectives and eventful directions of attack were not clear. (77)

During the night of 16-17 December the enemy moved up more troops and tanks, under cover of darkness. They aided these movements through extensive use of flares and searchlights. (78) The searchlights were directed skyward and the reflected illumination, which bounced back earthward off cloud formations, gave them light in which to work. (79)

#### THE SECOND DAY

Early in the morning hours of 17 December the enemy renewed his attack with increased vigor. The buildup during the night had made him stronger. The attack on the 112th Infantry in the north opened with heavy artillery concentrations at 0600 hours. At 0630 the regiment was hit by a fierce attack by the 560th Volksgrenadier and 116th Panzer Divisions.

(80) The enemy appeared to be attempting to circle both flanks.

(75) A-12, p. 3

(76) A-11, p. 5

(77) A-11, p. 1, 8

(78) A-11, p. 8

(79) A-6, p. 280

(80) A-11, p. 9

Some positions of the 1st Battalion were overrun and B Company was forced left and pressed against the adjacent 424th Infantry, 106th Division. A penetration was also made in the center of the 3d Battalion's area. This one reached the Battalion CP and brought it under attack. The pressure on the regiment was terrific. Each battalion had its positions penetrated. The left one was split. The reserve 2d Battalion was committed in a counterattack in the 3d Battalion area at 1600 hours and it restored the position except for small pockets of resistance. Up to this time the regiment had been unable to do much about the other penetration. By 1600, division headquarters became so concerned about the pounding the 112th Infantry was receiving and its precarious position that the regiment was ordered to withdraw, under cover of darkness, to a defensive position on the west bank of the OUR RIVER. The movement commenced at 2200 hours with the 3d Battalion leaving first. Before dawn the regiment had crossed the river and had taken up defensive positions along a line WEISWAMPACH-BIBLER. (81) (See Map D)

The morning of 17 December found the 110th Infantry playing the part of a strainer through which the enemy was flowing. The augmented German forces resumed the attack before dawn. The 2d Panzer and the 26th Divisions ground away at the various pockets of resistance which comprised the regimental front. Infantry protection could not be supplied to the two artillery battalions supporting the regiment and the batteries of these battalions defended themselves with all available weapons. In the 1st Battalion area, C Company,

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(81) A-11, p. 9; A-14, p. 2



late in the afternoon of 16 December, had counterattacked into the town of MARNACK to assist B Company, who was holding the town. By morning 17 December both companies were ringed in town. The regimental commander ordered his newly returned 2d Battalion (-) to relieve MARNACK and secure that hard-pressed town. The battalion tried to do this but was hit by an attack of about regimental strength and surrounded northeast of CLERVAUX. There it was mercilessly pounded by intense artillery, tank and small arms fire. It withstood numerous attacks until its ammunition ran out and then its perimeter collapsed. About sixty men and officers managed to infiltrate through the German ring to reach division headquarters at WILTZ, where they joined its defenders. The 2d Battalion was a unit in name only. While all of this was occurring the positions of the 109th Field Artillery Battalion were overrun and that organization ceased to exist as a fighting unit. Division headquarters in an attempt to assist the 110th Infantry ordered D Company, 707th Tank Battalion, from the north, where it had just joined the 112th Infantry at 1630 the previous afternoon, to attack and relieve MARNACK. The attack failed because it was directed against overwhelmingly superior forces and the company was smashed with a loss of fifteen light tanks.

(82)

With what remained of the 1st Battalion isolated in its strongpoints and the 2d Battalion gone, the enemy soon had the regimental CP at CLERVAUX under attack. (83) By the evening of the 17th it was being attacked by ten tanks and a battalion of infantry. (84) By 1930 the enemy had penetrated into the

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(82) A-15; A-12, p. 4; A-11, p. 9

(83) A-15

(84) A-15

town and had driven the regimental command group to the upper floors of the hotel which was being used as a CP. The Germans had the ground floor. Colonel Fuller, the regimental C.O., designated ESSELBORN as an assembly point and ALLERBORN as the location for the next CP and directed his staff to attempt to infiltrate through the German lines. The staff evacuated the hotel by means of a steel ladder, through a third floor window to an adjacent cliff. Only the Regimental Adjutant and a handful of others got through and set up a CP at ALLERBORN. The regimental C.O. was captured. (85)

Meanwhile on the regimental right the 3d Battalion was also fighting for its life. As was previously stated, the regimental executive officer had been sent to the right sector on 16 December to take command there because of the failure of communications. He commanded the sector from the 3d Battalion CP at CONSTHUM. (See Map D) All three rifle companies were surrounded in strongpoints. Company B, 103d Combat Engineer Battalion was with K Company. All were subjected to constant attacks from daybreak on. The battalion CP at CONSTHUM, defended by the headquarters personnel plus a battery of the 667th Field Artillery, was brought under attack early in the day. This hodgepodge of clerks, cooks, drivers and artillerymen beat off five attacks. Requests kept pouring in by radio for ammunition from the beleaguered rifle companies. Attempts were made to send it from CONSTHUM but failed. The pressure proved too great and finally K Company reported that the enemy was into the company CP and that they were smashing their radio. That was the last heard from K Company. With them

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(85) A-15

went Company B, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion. Later I Company was overrun and finally L Company was swamped. All that was left by evening, 17 December, of the 3d Battalion was the surrounded CP at CONSTHUM. (86)

During the 17th, the 109th Infantry was subjected to heavy attacks throughout the day. Commencing at 0530 hours the regimental positions were subjected to terrific artillery concentrations which lasted an hour. This was followed by heavy attacks against both front line battalions. The attacks were beaten off. Company A from the reserve battalion augmented by tanks from C Company, 707th Tank Battalion, again tried to reach PUEHREN and relieve E Company. Again they were stopped. By late afternoon enemy groups had infiltrated to the rear and were harassing the artillery positions. This resulted in hand to hand fighting around the positions. The regimental CO decided upon another try to relieve E Company and he sent B Company of the reserve battalion plus 4 tanks. This attack also failed and the CO ordered it tried again the next morning. Meanwhile the situation on the 110th Infantry's right, where strongpoint after strongpoint was being overrun, was weakening the 109th Infantry's left. Its flank was becoming exposed. (87)

The end of the second day of the German drive saw the disintegration of the 28th Division's center, and its two flank regiments holding on under terrific pressure. The wide gap in the division center jeopardized the entire division position to a degree where it was rapidly becoming untenable. The elimination of one of its line regiments and the paucity

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(86) A-15

(87) A-13, p. 4,5

of division reserves precluded decisive division action to restore the situation at this time.

It is obvious at this time that the hold at all costs order contributed to the swift elimination of the 110th Infantry as a fighting regiment. Had it instead been permitted to roll with the blow it probably would still be in action, in the division center but further to the rear, at this point. This, of course, is open to conjecture.

During the late stages of the day it became apparent at division headquarters that infiltrating forces of the enemy from the 110th Infantry's overrun area would soon threaten the CP at WILTZ. Therefore, at 1800 hours, the 44th Engineer Combat Battalion was ordered to take up defensive positions around the town and defend it. This unit had just been attached to the division by VIII Corps. Their fears proved accurate when, in the late evening, a penetrating enemy force advanced to within three kilometers of WILTZ and overran the headquarters of the 707th Tank Battalion. That headquarters fought a delaying action until it was within the WILTZ defenses. (88) The day closed with division headquarters preparing to fight for its own existence in and around WILTZ.

(See Map D)

VIII Corps Headquarters, at BASTOGNE, was alarmed by the breakthrough which was taking place on the 110th Infantry front and, therefore, CC "R", 9th Armored Division, in Corps reserve at TROIS VIERGES, was moved out along the BASTOGNE-ST. VITH HIGHWAY where it established two road blocks. One was at the junction of this highway and the WILTZ ROAD and the other was

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(88) A-12, p. 4, 5

at the highway's junction with the CLERVAUX ROAD. (89) (See Map D)

### THE THIRD DAY

During the early hours of 18 December the 112th Infantry set up its new line to the west of the OUR RIVER. (See Map D) Heavy pressure, in the form of attacks from the east and south, was immediately applied by the Germans. (90) These attacks continued through the day but the regiment held. This is considered quite a feat in view of the fact that the regiment's right flank was anchored to nothing but thin air. Late in the day all communication with division headquarters failed. However, prior to its failure the regiment received an order to withdraw to TROIS VIERGES and fight a stiff delaying action from there to BASTOGNE. It immediately prepared for movement. (91) At this point it becomes imperative to point out that VIII Corps wanted the regiment to do one thing and the orders received by regiment called for something entirely different. The VIII Corps after action report states that the 28th Division was directed to have the 112th Infantry establish a strong roadblock just south of MALSCHIED with the aim of blocking the enemy, who already had the ridge road to the west of the OUR RIVER, from proceeding north on that road toward ST. VITH and BEHO. (92) However, the order received by regiment, as indicated by its after action report directed that it defend and move rearward from TROIS VIERGES to the southwest toward BASTOGNE rather than defend at a point south of MALSCHIED against attack from the south. (93) The division after action

- (89) A-9
- (90) A-11, p. 13
- (91) A-14, p. 2
- (92) A-11, p. 13
- (93) A-14, p. 2

report is silent on the subject. At any rate the regiment obeyed the order it received and probably never received the Corps order. (See Map D)

On the morning of 18 December two pockets of resistance represented the 110th Infantry. One was at ALLERBORN and the other was at CONSTHUM. (See Map D) The group at ALLERBORN consisted of about 60 survivors from the 2d Battalion, the remnants of the Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Company, and stragglers from various other units. It operated as the Headquarters 110th Infantry and was commanded by Colonel Seely who had just arrived from division headquarters for that purpose. He took command at 0800. (94) With what was available this group set up a defense position east of the town and the CP was in the town. At CONSTHUM the 3d Battalion CP with an assortment of survivors of the 3d Battalion, some artillery, the battalion headquarters personnel, and other odds and ends, was holding out. The force totaled about 200 and was commanded by the Regimental Executive Officer, Lt. Colonel Strickler. Between the two pockets, and outside of them, the 110th Infantry's fifteen mile front was wide open. Information from stragglers indicated that the isolated companies of the 1st Battalion had been overrun by this time. (95)

The CP at ALLERBORN was not in trouble until late afternoon when a German attack penetrated its defenses and forced its way into the town. A previously prepared plan of evacuation was put into effect but a heavy fog, combined with the fall of darkness, induced limited visibility and confusion. The result was that a great many of the defenders were cap-

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(94) A-15

(95) A-15

tured, including Colonel Seely. This anticlimax terminated the activities of the remnants of the command group of the 110th Infantry a day after its command had ceased to exist as a cohesive unit. (96)

On the morning of the 18th the group at CONSTHUM was hit by a heavy German attack. They were battered by artillery, tank and mortar fire. They repelled attack after attack but the pressure was terrific. Finally they fell back three miles to KAUTENBACH. There they were hit again and retired to NOCHER, about two miles to the west. (See Map D) Here they dug in and division headquarters ordered them to hold at least until morning. As the day ended this tired hungry force was awaiting the next German attack. (97) (See Map D)

The 18th of December commenced for the 109th Infantry, on the division right, with two companies of the reserve 1st Battalion poised for renewed attempts to relieve isolated E Company in FOUHREN. Company A tried first and failed. Then B tried and failed, finally the I & R Platoon got to within 200 yards of E Company's position and learned that the company had been wiped out. The right battalion was then hit hard and part of K Company was wiped out. This left a hole in each of the line battalion's fronts. The Regimental Commander reported his situation to division. Division had learned that the 60th Armored Infantry Regiment of the 9th Armored Division, to the 109th Infantry's right was falling back. This fact, coupled with the holes in the 109th Infantry line, plus the fact that its left flank was also exposed, caused division to order the regiment to withdraw to the high ground northeast of DIEKIRCH.

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(96) A-15  
(97) A-15

The order was to roll back with the 9th Armored Division. The mission given to the regiment was to delay the enemy advance. The regiment conducted an orderly withdrawal. It started at 2000 hours, 18 December and was completed by 0200 hours, 19 December. (98) (See Map D)

While the units of the division were being pounded during the 18th, they were not alone in their difficulties. The division headquarters at WILTZ was also having a hard time. It had organized a provisional defense battalion made up of stragglers from various units, plus clerks, cooks, drivers, etc. This battalion was used to augment the 44th Combat Engineers. Also available was the division reconnaissance troop, remnants of the 630th TD Battalion, elements of the 707th Tank Battalion, elements of the 687th Field Artillery Battalion, and elements of the 447th AAA Battalion. (99) The force manned a perimeter around the town. At 1500 hours the town was heavily attacked. At 1800 hours contact with the Reconnaissance Platoon and elements of the 630th TD Battalion, both fighting north of the town was lost. At the end of the day the force was holding but was still under attack. (100)

The 18th of December had seen the division's situation continue to deteriorate. Both of its remaining regiments had been forced to withdraw. Contact with the 112th Infantry had been lost. The penetration into the division's center had been widened and deepened. The headquarters itself was under attack. This probably was the division's darkest hour.

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(98) A-13, p. 6

(99) A-12, p. 5; A-15

(100) A-12, p. 5



## THE FOURTH DAY

During the early morning hours of 19 December the 112th Infantry commenced its movement to TROIS VIERGES. It moved to the vicinity of HULDANGE and at 0600 hours moved out toward TROIS VIERGES. (See Map D) At 1500 hours the movement was completed. It was then hit by an attack from the south which was repulsed. Elements of Company B, which had been pushed left onto the adjacent 424th Infantry earlier in the attack, rejoined the regiment during the afternoon. (101) At 1745 hours the regiment was attached to the 106th Infantry Division. (102) This action was taken by Major General Jones of the adjacent 106th Infantry Division, on his own initiative. General Jones knew the predicament the 112th Infantry was in. He further knew that he could better secure his own right flank by adding the regiment to his command. Further, the regiment could not go on indefinitely fighting as an independent unit. It needed supplies badly. At this time a gap existed between the 112th Infantry and the 424th Infantry to its left, brought about by the retrograde movement of the 112th Infantry. The C.O. of the 424th Infantry in a desire to close that gap sent an officer who located the 112th Infantry CP at HULDANGE with its line units to the south of that town. When General Jones, in ST. VITH, was informed, he attached the regiment and informed VIII Corps. They approved his action. (103) This gave the 112th Infantry the opportunity to anchor its left flank on to a larger force, the force defending ST. VITH, and would allow it to swing back with that force, if necessary. It also placed it under a higher command, whereas, it had been without com-

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(101) A-14, p. 2,3

(102) A-14, p. 2,3

(103) A-2, p. 135-136

munication with the 28th Division since the previous afternoon. Thus, the 28th Division was reduced to one effective infantry regiment, the 109th.

In the 28th Division center, on the morning of 19 December, the group at NOCHER and the division CP and its defenses at WILTZ represented the total division effort in the sector. Pressure developed early at NOCHER so the Executive Officer of the 110th Infantry, in command there, went to the division CP for orders. At the CP General Cota, Commanding General 28th Division placed him (Lt. Col. Strickler) in command of the WILTZ defenses. He was informed that the CP was about to move to SIBRET, just south of BASTOGNE, and that the WILTZ defenders would hold until later in the day and would move back when so ordered. Due to increased pressure on NOCHER, Lt. Col. Strickler ordered the remnants of the 3d Battalion of the 110th Infantry there, now numbering about 250, to withdraw to WILTZ. This they did under fire. They took up defensive positions southwest of WILTZ, within its perimeter defense. The division CP moved out and got away, but the town's defenders were rapidly ringed and attacked from all directions. The perimeter was gradually decreased in size by attacks from all directions. By late evening fighting was in progress in the streets of WILTZ. Communication with division at SIBRET had failed so Lt. Col. Strickler ordered his subordinate commanders to take their groups, break them up, and strike out on foot for friendly territory. This they did and WILTZ fell to the Germans. However, the small American force at WILTZ, although hastily organized, pinned down super-

ior German forces and delayed the enemy advance, through their tenacious defense of the town and its roadnet. (104)

On the morning of 19 December the 109th Infantry was digging in on the high ground northeast of DIEKIRCH. Its right flank was tied in with the 9th Armored Division and its left flank was exposed. During the morning a heavy attack was launched against the 3d Battalion. It was repulsed and the battalion took 80 prisoners and killed or wounded 300 Germans. At 1400 hours both the 2d and 3d Battalions were hit hard in an attack which lasted 2 hours. The attack was repulsed. The day closed with the receipt of an order to fall back again. The reason for it was that the 9th Armored Division on the right was swinging back like a gate with its right flank anchored and the 112th Infantry had become the prolongation, to the left, of that gate. A retrograde movement was necessary to secure the 9th Armored Division's left flank and to protect the 112th Infantry's own right flank. The new line was to be an east-west line extending from just south of ETTTELBRUCK as far west as GROUSBOUS. (105) (See Map D)

The fourth day of the German drive closed with the 28th Division CP at SIBRET, preparing to defend itself with a small makeshift force, and located over 20 miles from its one remaining infantry regiment, which was defending the flank of an adjacent unit.

#### 20 TO 26 DECEMBER 1944

On 20 December, the fifth day of the German attack the 109th Infantry completed its move to its new line by 0400

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(104) A-15; Exhibit D; A-11, p. 17

(105) A-13, p. 6; A-11, p. 17

hours. All three battalions were established on the line. The 2d Battalion tied in with the left flank of CC "A", 9th Armored Division, at ERMSDORF and extended west. The 1st Battalion was next in line on the high ground south of ETTELBRUCK. The 3d Battalion was strung on out to the left in three towns, with a company plus heavy weapons in each. I Company was at FEULEN, K Company was at MERZIG and L Company was GROUSBOUS. (See Map D) The regiment spent the day preparing defensive positions. During the day the enemy probed with patrols but did not attack. Early in the evening the regiment was attached to the 9th Armored Division. (106) This action was brought about by a reorganization of Allied forces and a regrouping within Third Army. At noon on 20 December a new boundary between First and Third Armies, which also served as the dividing line between XII Army Group in the south and XXI Army Group in the north was established. It ran east and west through HOUFFALIZE. (See Map D) VIII Corps became part of Third Army and lost its units north of the new line to XVIII Airborne Corps. Third Army then moved III Corps to ARLON and the dividing line between it and VIII Corps was fixed as the ARLON-BASTOGNE HIGHWAY which runs north and south. The 109th Infantry was on the III Corps side of this new boundary, therefore, it was attached to the 9th Armored Division which had also just become part of III Corps. (107) (See Map D) Thus the 28th Division lost its last effective regiment and was reduced to command of the battered remnants at SIBRET. The boundary changes and regrouping did not affect the 28th Division in regard to its being under the command of VIII

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(106) A-13, p. 6, 7

(107) A-11, p. 18

Corps.

Meanwhile, on 20 December, the division CP at SIBRET continued to have a rough time. About 150 men from various units plus the headquarters personnel manned a road block just outside of town. At 1000 hours they were attacked. Their position rapidly became untenable and they withdrew to the southwest, to VAUX LES ROSIERES. (See Map D) Here they established two road blocks northwest of the town. By this time the force had swelled to 500 men through the addition of stragglers from an assortment of units. The new men were re-armed during the afternoon, with available weapons, and they manned the second roadblock. The day ended with the defenders of both blocks waiting for the expected German attack. (108) It did not materialize during 21 December and the defenders got their first nights sleep in six nights. The Germans struck early on 22 December and plans were made for evacuation to NEUFCHATEAU, about six miles to the southwest. The German attack was overwhelming and the CP evacuated to NEUFCHATEAU. The defending force followed shortly thereafter. The defenders had formed a perimeter defensive position around the town by night. (109) Meanwhile, the VIII Corps CP at BASTOGNE, had displaced to FLORENVILLE on the previous evening. The 101st Airborne Division had arrived in BASTOGNE on the night of 18 December and by now was surrounded and isolated in and around the town.

On 23 December the 28th Division, consisting of stragglers from at least fifteen different units, plus about 500 men from the 110th Infantry, was given the mission of setting up a re-

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(108) A-11, p. 20

(109) A-15, Exhibit D

connaissance screen from NEUFCHATEAU to LIBRAMONT. (110)

(See Map D) The 7th Tank Destroyer Group patrolled left or north from there. This patrolling activity, plus reorganization of the force available, occupied the division's time through the 26th of December. By this time the German efforts in the area were concentrated on cracking the defenses of the 101st Airborne Division in BASTOGNE. The main German efforts were directed to the northwest, as planned, and on containing Third Army attacks from the south.

The 28th Division cannot be considered successful in its operations for the period 15 - 26 December. To be so considered it would have had to have stopped the German attack and generally held its positions. This was not accomplished. However, the division did make a large contribution to the eventual containment of the penetration and in so doing added more lustre to an already glowing record. The division's tenacity in the face of an overwhelming flood of enemy inflicted heavy damage, tied down thousands of German troops who might well have been utilized against other American units, and delayed the German advance. By delaying the advance, time was gained by our forces which permitted units from other sectors and from the rear areas to move into position and stop the advance. Had these units not been given sufficient time to get into blocking positions and check the German rush the results could have proven disastrous for our armies, and for our Allies.

## ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

### 1. THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE

The series of sensational victories achieved by our forces from the NORMANDY BEACHES to the West Wall appear to have produced a marked effect on the evaluation of our intelligence estimators. From front to rear they appear to have been imbued with an erroneous optimism which apparently hampered their ability to properly evaluate information. They did not know that the ARDENNES offensive was coming. They did not know its scope, objectives or purpose until it was well under way. The G-2's at such high levels as Army, Group and Supreme Headquarters apparently did not believe the Germans capable of mastering a striking force of the size of the one which rumbled through the ARDENNES front on 16 December. This thinking resulted in improper evaluation of those scraps of information which were gathered. It also resulted in the biggest surprise since PEARL HARBOR. Statements of prisoners of war, captured documents and increased motor movement noises were discounted. In addition, although four German armies were ~~jeckeyed into position for the attack, along with the accompany-~~ing logistical buildup, our air reconnaissance did not uncover the preparations. This, in spite of the fact that air superiority was ours.

### 2. THE GERMAN SURPRISE

The first important requisite which the Germans had to ensure for the ARDENNES drive was surprise. Had the Americans learned of the German buildup and deduced its intent the opera-

tion would probably have failed before it started. Even with surprise the penetration was finally contained and eventually crushed. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that had the element of surprise been lost in the buildup stage the offensive would have failed in its early stages.

~~The German~~ achievement borders on the miraculous. In spite of Allied air superiority and normally efficient Allied intelligence agencies the Germans effected the required buildup and launched the attack with a minimum of leaks. The surprise was so complete that American front line units were reeling under the impact of the attack before their higher echelons knew an attack was on or forthcoming.

### 3. THE EXTENDED FRONT

On 16 December the 28th Division manned a frontline about 25 miles long. Its center regiment had lost one battalion to division reserve and, thus, had only two battalions with which to hold about 15 of the 25 miles of front. This is a flagrant violation of the precepts set forth in military manuals concerning defensive frontages. It conclusively substantiates the wisdom of the military manuals' concepts of defensive frontages. The 28th Division front was too long to be held by one division against a strong attack. The 110th Infantry was forced to adopt a defensive position consisting mainly of a series of strongpoints. Mutual support was not and could not be maintained. Defense in depth was sacrificed. The result was inevitable against an attack in force. The strongpoints were isolated and eliminated. The division center was split wide open and a German breakthrough made pos-



able. This happened in spite of a fierce defense by the various strongpoints, which proves that the division's front was not cracked because of a lack of the will to fight. Rather, it was broken because of its own overextended condition and the weight of the German onslaught. The 28th Division's operations during this period make it obvious that a front, which is extended to a point where sizable gaps exist between positions and mutual support cannot be maintained, will be ruptured by a heavy attack.

#### 4. DEFENSE IN DEPTH

In addition to its overextended condition the division center did have any semblance of defense in depth. This was a contributing factor to the cracking of the division front. The center was only a thin crust. From its lowest basic units it lacked supports and reserves. In the 110th Infantry sector, battalion backed the two on the line as a regimental reserve when the attack struck. In turn no regiment was available behind the line regiments as a division reserve. Consequently when the thin crust was broken the enemy flood flowed rearward with practically nothing between it and the division rear boundary but supporting artillery and headquarters units, with their defenses. The only hope the division could have to stop an enemy penetration after its line was broken was to halt it in reserve positions. Lacking reserves and therefore depth, the division was powerless and could not check the penetration. It could only offer that resistance put up by the division, 110th Infantry and 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, CP's.

## 5. THE VALUE OF HASTILY ORGANIZED FORCES IN A BREAKTHROUGH

When the Germans overran the division center, hundreds of American stragglers sifted through their advancing columns to fight them again at various places in the rear. These stragglers were gathered up and organized into defensive forces by various members of the division. They fought the advance from new positions and when overrun again drifted rearward to man other positions and fight again. The fact that they could be gathered up and organized to a point where they could offer resistance is a tribute to the ability of their leaders. Such forces had definite value. They delayed the enemy advance when time was vital to other American units racing towards the scene. They pinned down many times their own number of enemy troops preventing these from being used against other Americans. They inflicted damage and casualties. They enabled the 23th Division Headquarters to continue to exist and function throughout the battle. From 23 to 26 December they constituted the main portions of a security screen which the division was called upon to provide. These forces, by their example, teach us their value. In the future, any American forces in a similar situation, should endeavor to emulate them.

## 6. LAUNCHING OF A COUNTERATTACK WITHOUT INFORMATION OF ITS OPPOSITION

The 2d Battalion, 110th Infantry was ordered to relieve MARNACK upon its return to regimental control. At that time the situation in the regiment's area was fluid. Information was lacking on such essential elements as enemy strength around MARNACK and enemy strength in the entire 1st Battalion

area. Hence, the order to attack and relieve MARNACK was, in effect, an order to counterattack against an enemy of undetermined strength. Such a decision can, and in this case did, result in the elimination of the counterattacking force. The 2d Battalion was ringed by a superior force and wiped out. There is little doubt present that, in view of the regiment's and division's desperate plight at the time, it could have been put to better use. It is believed that the attack should not have been ordered without more assurance of success. Under more normal circumstances in the defense, counterattacks are withheld until penetrations are checked. Even then they are not advised unless the counterattacking force is of sufficient strength to assure at least a fair chance of success. In this particular instance the chances of success could not have been known because the location as well as the enemy strength was uncertain. Therefore, the counterattack reduces itself to that which it actually was, a gamble in which even the odds were unknown.

#### 7. PIECEMEAL COMMITMENT OF RESERVES BY THE 109TH INFANTRY

When E Company of the 109th Infantry was isolated in FUEHREN the regimental commander attempted to relieve it. He had the 1st Battalion in reserve at DIEKUCH, plus elements of the 707th Tank Battalion available for the mission. He utilized A Company plus some tanks for the operation and failed. Then he tried B Company with some tanks. Again he failed. Elements of his reconnaissance troop eventually got close enough to see that E Company had been overrun. The weakness of the regimental commander's action was that he committed his

reserve piecemeal. In effect, he sent a boy to do a man's job. He obviously was concerned about the remainder of his line and must have been afraid that his reserve would be needed elsewhere. So he split it. Had he committed the entire battalion as a unit, his chances of relieving E Company would have increased threefold and perhaps much more. The end result was E Company was wiped out.

#### LESSONS

1. Intelligence officers, at all levels, should evaluate each scrap of available intelligence with an open mind and without preconceived ideas of enemy capabilities.

2. Tactical surprise can be achieved in warfare under the most difficult of circumstances, if sufficient effort is forthcoming to achieve it.

3. ✓ A twenty-five mile front cannot be held by one division against a strong attack.

4. Defense in depth is one of the prime requisites of successful defense.

5. In cases where units are overrun by an enemy advance, hastily organized groups of stragglers can contribute materially towards slowing the enemy advance.

6. ✓ Counterattacks should not be launched without sufficient evidence of assurance of success.

7. Whenever possible reserves should be committed intact rather than piecemeal.