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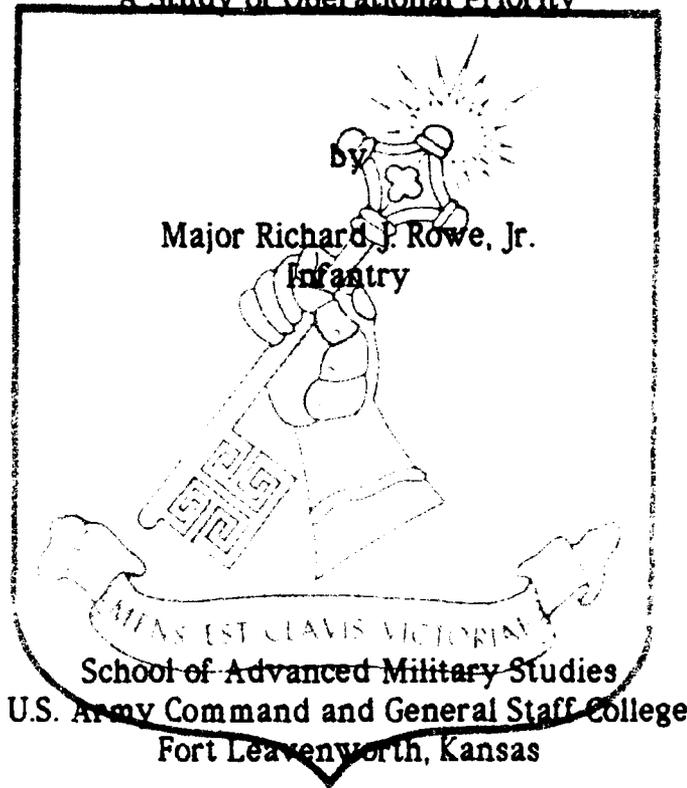
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A Study of Operational Priority



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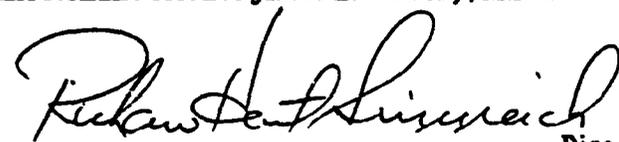
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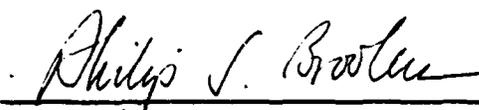
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ABSTRACT

COUNTERATTACK: A STUDY IN OPERATIONAL PRIORITY by MAJ Richard J. Rowe, Jr., USA, 51 pages.

This monograph seeks to determine whether the counterattack demands prioritization in the operational defense. It examines the operational defender's force allocation when he confronts a major enemy offensive thrust. The study includes a review of theoretical insights and three WWII case studies: the French in the Ardennes (1940), the Americans in the Bulge (1944), and the Germans in the Donetz (Winter, 1943). The analysis indicates the importance of battlefield shaping, the need to weigh force allocation decisions based upon operational design, the requirement to synchronize operational efforts to shape the penetration and to counterattack, and the necessity to translate holding a penetration into operational success. The monograph highlights key lessons for operational commanders. The study concludes that the operational commander should prioritize his allocation of forces to the counterattack. Further, in recognition of his limited available forces and the exigencies of a threat penetration, the operational commander must consider a scheme of maneuver for the defense that while disrupting the enemy, preserves the ability to concentrate for counterattack to win the battle.

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INTRODUCTION

Even when the only point of the war is to maintain the *status quo*, the fact remains that merely parrying a blow goes against the essential nature of war, which certainly does not consist merely in enduring. Once the defender has gained an important advantage, he must strike back, or he will court destruction.¹

--Clausewitz, On War

The U.S. Army generally expects to begin a future conflict on the operational defensive because of America's strategic policy of deterrence. AirLand Battle Doctrine suggests that operational commander wrest the initiative from the threat through the conduct of offensive operations within and from the defensive. "At higher levels, even a defensive strategy designed to deny success will require offensive components to preclude defeat."² Trevor N. Dupuy includes among his "Timeless Verities of Combat" that "offensive action is essential to positive combat results."³

A problem for the defender lies in his allocation of effort between counterattack and defensive actions to hold or otherwise control the threat. Which effort will accrue the greater benefit to the operational force commander? This monograph seeks to determine whether the counterattack demands prioritization at the operational level.

Force allocation decisions are among the most difficult choices facing a commander. This reflects "the difficulty of defense against enemy penetration....If anything, however, the true test of an army's skill in combined arms is its ability to reorient and orchestrate the different arms under the pressure of a fast-moving enemy

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 370.

² Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 100-5: Operations, (Washington, DC, 5 May 1986), p. 129.

³ Trevor N. Dupuy, The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare, (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1984) p. 326.

attack."⁴ Generally, the commander of the operational defense will not have the luxury of both strong defensive forces and large, powerful reserves. He will have to allocate and shift forces based upon imperfect and incomplete information. The commander's vision of the opportunity to achieve a favorable decisive result against an attacking enemy may require the acceptance of a high risk.

This study aims to examine a force prioritization question at the operational level of war. Specifically, it presents the situation of a major enemy offensive thrust against an operational defense and seeks the answer to the question of how an operational commander best uses his available forces to counter this thrust.

This monograph will consist of four parts. It starts with a review of theoretical insights into the counterattack from the operational defense. Next, three historical examples provide empirical data for analysis: the French in the Ardennes (1940), the Americans in the Battle of the Bulge (1944), and the Germans in the Battle of the Donetz (Winter, 1943). Then, the paper analyzes these historical examples based upon the theoretical concepts developed earlier. Finally, this analysis furnishes findings and a conclusion.

⁴ Jonathan M. House, Toward Combined Arms Warfare: A Survey of 20th-Century Tactics, Doctrine, and Organization, Research Survey No. 2, (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, August 1984), pp. 189-190.

THEORY/ BACKGROUND

A review of theoretical concepts provides a common line of departure for the discussion of the monograph question. This review includes definition of the operational art and the operational level of war, development of classical and modern theorists' insights into the operational defense, and establishment of the key theoretical concepts. The strengths of the operational defense, the role of the counterattack within the operational defense, and the key analytical concepts for the study of operations are established in this section.

Operational art "involves fundamental decisions about when and where to fight and whether to accept or decline battle." The operational art practitioner seeks to produce the military condition in his theater that will achieve the strategic goal. Success requires the sequencing of events and the application of resources to accomplish the sequence of actions.⁵ "By looking on each engagement as part of a series, at least insofar as events are predictable, the commander is always on the high road to his goal."⁶

Operational art involves large units--generally, army group and theater. Theater commanders perform operational art. The operational level of war involves the design of campaigns or major ground operations within a theater of war to concentrate combat power against the enemy's operational center of gravity to achieve decisive success.⁷

⁵ FM 100-5, p. 10.

⁶ Clausewitz, On War, p. 182.

⁷ FM 100-5, p. 10.

Consideration of the defense and counterattack at the operational level demands attention to theoretical concepts. Classical theorists such as Clausewitz and Sun Tzu as well as 20th century writers have commented widely on this subject.

Classical Theorists

Clausewitz emphasizes the requirement for an offensive component within the defense. He describes the defense as a "shield of well-directed blows."⁸ Clausewitz notes:

The one advantage the attacker possesses is that he is free to strike at any point along the whole line of defense, and in full force: the defender, on the other hand, is able to surprise his opponent constantly throughout the engagement by the strength and direction of his counterattacks.⁹

Sun Tzu prescribes the use of two types of forces. In the defense, *Cheng*, the normal force, confronts the enemy and meets the penetration; *Ch'i*, the extraordinary force, flanks the attacker and provides the capability for the defender to gain the initiative. In the operational defense, the extraordinary force equates to an operational reserve with the mission of counterattack, and the normal force resembles the element assigned to hold or control the enemy penetration.¹⁰ Sun Tzu definitely identifies the need to develop and prioritize specific forces for the counterattack.

Also, Sun Tzu recommends a manner of employment of forces: "When he [enemy] concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him," and "Now war is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces."¹¹ Sun Tzu proposes that the

⁸ Clausewitz, On War, p. 357.

⁹ Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁰ Mark L. Hanna, Employment of Reserves in the Operational Defense (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, 10 April 1986), p. 6. For Sun Tzu's observations on normal and extraordinary forces see: Sun Tzu, The Art of War, trans. by Samuel B. Griffith, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 91.

¹¹ Sun Tzu, The Art of War, pp. 67 and 106.

prudent defender prepares well to meet enemy strength, but concentrates the defender's strength against enemy weakness. Deception is important to keep the enemy unsure and wrongly disposed. These ideas are significant considerations for the operational defense.

Twentieth Century Military Thought

Twentieth Century military thinkers have carefully considered the matters of the operational defense and the importance of the counterattack. From a review of selected writings of B. H. Liddell Hart, J. F. C. Fuller, F. O. Miksche, Ritter von Leeb, Waldemar Erfurth, and Bill Lind several common concepts emerge. For the operational defense, these include initiative, concentration, timing, speed, depth, and vision.

Although all these writers commonly refer to the initiative, three theme variations appear: Initiative as an attribute of the offense; as the protection of one's own freedom of action; or as the imposition of one's will on the enemy.¹² Fuller, Miksche, Erfurth and Leeb follow the classical definition and find the initiative related to the offense. Liddell Hart and Lind stress the imposition of one's will on the enemy. All relate the importance of freedom of action to possession of the initiative. There is a unity among these themes. However, the direction to the operational defender may depend upon which theme he emphasizes.

Twentieth century writers agree on the importance of concentration, but not on how to achieve or use or recognize it. FM 100-5 defines the principle of mass as the need to "concentrate combat power at the decisive place and time."¹³ Liddell Hart, the adherent to the indirect approach, believes that "the principles of war, not merely one principle, can be condensed into a single word--'concentration.'" He then draws a line

¹² David J. Oberst, Three Kinds of Initiative: The Role of Initiative in AirLand Battle Doctrine, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, 15 May 1986), pp. 28-29.

¹³ FM 100-5, p. 174.

which separates him from others (with the exception of Sun Tzu) by his emphasis on the "concentration of strength against weakness" and the value of concentration as "the fruit of calculated dispersion."¹⁴ These distinctions will be critical in the determination of force allocation priorities in the operational defense and will receive additional attention later in this paper.

Generally, the twentieth century military writers stress speed and timing in their discussions of military operations. They write from a frame of reference which includes the widespread mechanization of armies. They attempt to develop rational counters for the powerful potential of a mechanized attacker. F. O. Miksche states: "Initiative and speed enable the attacker to concentrate so swiftly, and to shift his local superiority so swiftly, that unless the counter to his move is made by force moving equally swiftly, this counter-move is bound to reach the decisive area too late."¹⁵ Bill Lind observes that maneuver warfare means that a force must be consistently faster in its decision-making cycle than an opponent until the latter loses his cohesion and suffers defeat.¹⁶ Timing and speed will be two additional critical considerations in how to use forces in the operational defense.

The role of depth in the operational defense receives comment from von Leeb, writing prior to World War II: in the future "defensive will have to support offensive and contribute to its preparation. The role of this defensive, in case of an absolute superiority of the enemy, is to wear out his strength."¹⁷ Miksche advocates the importance of deeply dispersed defensive positions: "Huge numbers gives [sic] less

¹⁴ B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy, (New York, NY: Signet Books, 1967) p. 334.

¹⁵ F. O. Miksche, Atomic Weapons and Armies, (New York: Praeger, 1955), p. 92.

¹⁶ William S. Lind, Maneuver Warfare Handbook, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p. 6.

¹⁷ Ritter von Leeb, Defense, trans. by Dr. Stefan T. Possony and Daniel Vilfroy, (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1943), p. 169.

strength than a distribution that makes really effective use of ground and fire."¹⁸ The desirability of counterattacks into the rear of the attacking enemy draws much comment from Fuller, Liddell Hart and Lind, though for varying individual reasons. The consensus is that the operational defender needs to allocate his forces in such a manner that he has depth in time, space and resources.

Vision and determination in an uncertain battlefield environment are necessary on the part of the operational defensive commander. Leeb writes that as the attacker has the initial advantage of the initiative, the defending operational commander faces particular difficulties due to uncertainty and friction. "Truly, such a situation requires all of a leader's calmness, cold decision, not to let the propitious moment pass and not to take counter-measures too late." He adds that the defender has to recognize enemy intentions early in order to use limited forces to advantage, press forward, establish depth, consolidate and concentrate at the right time.¹⁹

Theoretical Concepts

Three theoretical terms have particular significance for the subject of the counterattack. These are the center of gravity, the decisive point and the culminating point. The center of gravity is the hub of all power. Clausewitz states:

A center of gravity is always found where the mass is concentrated most densely. It presents the most effective target for a blow; furthermore, the heaviest blow is that struck by the center of gravity.²⁰

The decisive point is that specific place on the battlefield or in time when the result of the battle becomes unalterable. Clausewitz indicated that "... forces available must be employed with such skill that even in the absence of absolute superiority,

¹⁸ F. O. Miksche, Attack: A Study of Blitzkrieg Tactics (New York, NY: Random House, 1942), p. 74.

¹⁹ Leeb, Defense, p. 168.

²⁰ Clausewitz, On War, p. 485.

relative superiority is attained at the decisive point....To achieve this, the calculation of space and time appears as the most essential factor."²¹

The culminating point for the offense is when the attacker no longer has the capability to defend successfully.

Unless it is strategically decisive, every offensive operation will sooner or later reach a point where the strength of the attacker no longer significantly exceeds that of the defender, and beyond which continued offensive operations therefore risk overextension, counterattack, and defeat.²²

The defender seeks to speed the culmination of the enemy's attack before it achieves operational success.

This section has introduced several concepts and analytical tools for use in the consideration of the monograph question. These concepts include the strength of the defense; the need for an offensive content within an operational defense; and the requirement to consider initiative, timing and speed, concentration, depth, and the commander's vision in an uncertain operational environment. The tools for analysis of operations include the center of gravity, the decisive point, and the culminating point of the offense. In this paper these concepts provide a basis for the introduction and the subsequent analysis of historical examples. The analytical skills exercised in this presentation are those necessary for military staff sections in Army and joint commands.

²¹ Ibid., p. 196.

²² FM 100-5, p. 181.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

In this section three historical examples from World War II will provide case studies of an operational defense against an overwhelming enemy mobile thrust. The French in the Ardennes in May 1940, the Americans in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, and the Germans in the Battle of the Donetz fought in the Don to the Dnepr Region in February-March 1943 executed operational defenses when their enemies launched major offenses aimed at penetration to strategic depth. The presentation of these case studies focuses on the commander of the operational defense, his operational plans and appreciation of the enemy's operational pattern, and the execution of the operational defense. Especially, the paper draws out the operational efforts against the penetration, establishment and employment of operational reserves, and the results of counterattacks against the enemy penetration. The appendices at the end of the paper include appropriate maps to follow the operations described. The bibliography provides references for more detailed study.

French, Ardennes, May 1940

Following the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the French declared war on the Germans. By 4 September, the French had launched an offensive into the Saar region of Germany. On 12 September, General Maurice Gamelin, the Chief of the General Staff of National Defence and Supreme Commander of all French land forces, directed his forces to halt and to assume a defensive posture against similarly disposed Germans. Until the following May, the "Phoney War" on the frontier would continue.

During the "Phoney War" both sides worked on plans. The Germans developed plans for an attack on France; the French built plans to counter the expected German invasion along the 1914 Schlieffen Plan route. With the Maginot Line to protect the

French Eastern frontier and the "inpenetrable" Ardennes in the middle area, the French would advance into Belgium to defeat the major German thrust along the Dyle River. Eventually, Gamelin extended the planned advance to Breda, the Netherlands.

The Germans eventually arrived at the "Sichelshnitt" Plan with success to "lie in 'defeating and annihilating the whole of the enemy forces fighting in Belgium, or north of the Somme, and not only throwing them back frontally.'"²³ The German plan reflected French force dispositions. It relied on speed and shock of massed armor to rupture the French defense at its weakest point in the center in the Ardennes, to breakthrough, and to defeat the French Army in the North.

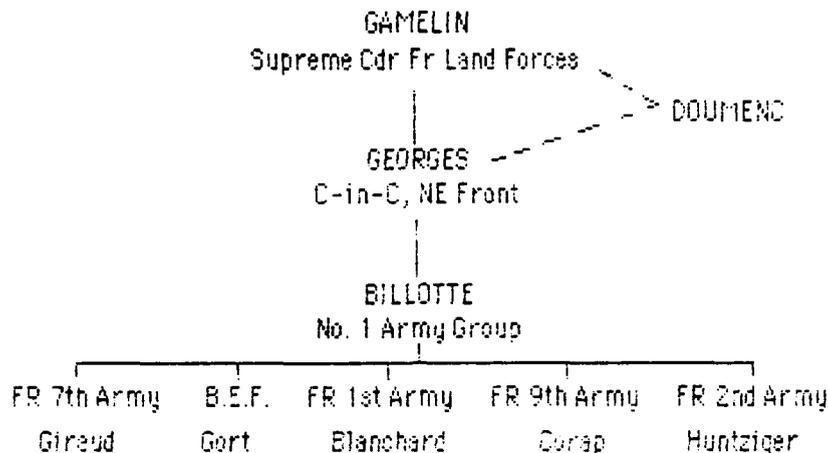
General Georges, Commander of the North-East Front, nominally commanded the French defense in the Ardennes. Georges had responsibility for an area from the Swiss border to the English channel. He arrayed half of his effective forces in the Maginot Line on the right flank and possessed a powerful left flank which faced North Belgium with the responsibility of the advance forward to meet the German attack. In the center of the North-East Front area "behind the so-called 'inpenetrable' Belgian Ardennes," General Corap's Ninth Army and General Huntziger's Second Army consisted of four light cavalry divisions and 10 generally mediocre infantry divisions.²⁴

Gamelin as Supreme Commander of all French land forces reserved the right to intervene in operations of the North-East Front, even after he appointed Georges as Commander-in-Chief, North-East Front in January 1940. At the same time, Gamelin had established General Doumenc as Commander, General Headquarters, Land Forces with the responsibility for preparation and elaboration of Gamelin's orders. Essentially, Doumenc represented a buffer between Gamelin and Georges. By splitting the staff of

²³ Alistair Horne, To Lose a Battle: France 1940. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 185 and 195. Horne draws this quote from Manstein's first memorandum (of a total of six sent by Manstein) to OKH on the subject of the German offensive.

²⁴ ibid., pp. 164-5.

NE Front to create Doumenc's headquarters, Gamelin simultaneously limited his direct exposure to and severely weakened a disliked subordinate, Georges.²⁵ Further, Gamelin retained control of the French strategic reserve (a total of eighteen divisions to include three armored divisions). Thus, Gamelin reserved operational authority for himself because of his veto right over Georges' decisions and his control of the reserve.



FRENCH CHAIN OF COMMAND

On 10 May 1940, the Germans marched "to one of the most brilliant war plans of all time--but one so risky that any serious setback to it, any breaking of the steel cutting-edge of Guderian's Panzers, could but end in another calamitous defeat for Germany."²⁶ In response, Gamelin directed execution of the Dyle-Breda Plan. On the left of the North-East Front, General Giraud's Seventh Army headed for Breda and General Gort's British Expeditionary Force rushed toward the Dyle Line.

In accordance with the war plan, XI (FR) Corps, the left flank unit of Ninth Army, moved forward 55 miles to the vicinity of Dinant, Belgium to tie in with the Dyle Line. Unknown to the XI (FR) Corps, the greatly more mobile 7th Panzer (PZ) Division had only 75 miles to advance to the same point from the opposite direction.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 241.

For the first two days, the German advance into the Ardennes resembled an approach march with the main problems administrative, not tactical. By 11 May, German successes at the Belgian fortress Eben Emael and along the Albert Canal line jeopardized Gamelin's strategy of forward defense in Belgium and Holland and focused his attention northward.²⁷ Meanwhile, in the Ardennes, Kleist's armor forces of 1200-1500 tanks (7 of 10 German Panzer Divisions) covered by air advanced with little bother from scarce Belgian frontier forces or scattered French light cavalry units screening the French Army's front.

Critically, neither Belgian nor French defenders generally reinforced or covered obstacles with fires to disrupt or delay the delicately timed German advance. Belgian forces blew obstacles at the frontier and fell back. The Germans simply repaired the damaged surfaces and continued. "The French cavalry made no attempt to cover the destroyed bridges on the Ourthe, and within a matter of hours the German engineers had thrown pontoons across the undefended river."²⁸ This was a typical example of the French tactical defensive effort forward of the main defensive line along the Meuse.

By 13 May, the German Panzer forces reached the Meuse defensive line. At 1500 hours, Guderian's XIX Corps launched the main German attack across the Meuse at Sedan, the decisive point for this operation. On the German right, Rommel's 7th PZ Division, which had crossed a small force on 12 May at Houx, continued to cross in the vicinity of Dinant on the 13th. The penetration of French defenses along the Meuse exceeded the expectations of the German tactical panzer commanders who pressed their forces forward rapidly. During the next five days the Germans drove deep into France to split the French Army. While this occurred, the French frittered away their operational reserves and opportunities to counterattack the German thrust.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

The French employed their available reserves in a wanton manner. In bits and pieces eighteen divisions, Gamelin's strategic reserve, disappeared ineffectively into the battle. Although on 11 May General Georges' Instruction Number 12 predicted a need to build a force behind Sedan, the actual movement of the two armored divisions, one motorized division and three infantry divisions followed too late and not in mass.²⁹ By the afternoon of 12 May, General Roton, Chief of Staff of North-East Front, had learned of problems in Huntziger's Second Army and ordered movement of three of these earlier marked general reserve divisions to arrive at Sedan on 14 May (or one day after the decisive crossing by the Germans).³⁰ Gamelin's solution to penetration or its threat was to use his reserves to build new defense positions. Ultimately, this exposed his forces to greater problems when the German forces created a new breakthrough.³¹

The French high command remained optimistic. Intelligence failures and a lack of forthrightness by subordinates supported the high command's false sense of security. On the night of 13 May, Gamelin was unaware of the extent of the German success on the Meuse. Neither his staff nor subordinate commanders reported the actual situation to Gamelin. The French commander failed to press for intelligence, to take advantage of available intelligence, or to understand the German doctrine. For a period of several days after the German attack, Gamelin took comfort in his belief in the "impenetrable" Ardennes.³² "On the morning of the 15th, during another visit to La Ferte [Georges' HQ], Gamelin was surprised to hear that Georges had given the Ninth Army the order for a general withdrawal from the Meuse."³³

By 15 May, Gamelin figured out the situation. He informed the political leadership that a German breakthrough existed and that he had no reserves. A

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

³¹ Miksche, *Attack: A Study of Blitzkrieg Tactics*, p. 94.

³² Horne, *To Lose a Battle*, p. 233.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

reported conversation on 16 May between Gamelin and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill illustrated Gamelin's acceptance of defeat:

Turning back to Gamelin, Churchill asked point blank: 'When and where are you going to counter-attack the flank of the Bulge? From the north or from the south?' Gamelin's reply was: 'Inferiority of numbers, inferiority of equipment, inferiority of method'-- and then a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.' There was no argument. Here was the admission of the bankruptcy of a whole generation of French military thought and preparations.³⁴

The critical French armor divisions disappeared separately and ineffectively into the battle. 1st Armored (AR) Division arrived 13 May in the area of Rommel's bridgehead at Dinant on the Meuse. It remained inactive until ready to attack on 15 May. In the meantime, Rommel swept violently around the French armored division. General Corap employed the 4th North African Division to defend separately rather than in coordination with the 1st AR Division attack. The result was an unsynchronized French effort and significant destruction of the 1st AR.³⁵

3rd AR Division arrived at Stonne early on 14 May. General Flavigny of XXI (FR) Corps directed the Division Commander, General Brocard, to contain the bottom of the pocket and to counterattack in conjunction with 3rd Motorized Division. General Flavigny issued this contradictory order to hold and attack without any timing instruction. While 3rd AR prepared, the enemy situation changed. General Flavigny ordered 3rd AR Division to disperse over a front of 12 miles. On 15 May, 3rd AR received orders to attack, but, as a result of the earlier dispersion, the division was unable to concentrate and attacked ineffectively in pieces against the Grossdeutschland Division of Guderian's XIX (GE) Corps. The result was German destruction of a second French armored division.³⁶

2nd AR Division under General Bruche never reached the battlefield as a division. Initially, Georges directed the division toward Charleroi away from Sedan.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 430, 446-7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 364-5, 398.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-7, 408-11.

Later, the division received instructions to turn around and join Army Detachment Touchon. Meanwhile, Reinhardt's XLI (GE) Corps smashed through the 2nd AR as it unloaded from trains on 16 May. 2nd AR scattered without artillery or supply. The third of three French armor divisions had disappeared without any impact on the battle.³⁷

From 10 to 15 May, the French high command directed reinforcements of 17 divisions from the strategic reserve. First Army received five divisions. Eight divisions went to Huntziger's Second Army. Not until 15 May did Ninth Army receive a division; by that time the Germans had ruptured Ninth Army. It was too late for help. On 15 May, Corap tried and failed to create new stop-lines before, and then on, the frontier.

The Germans outsped Ninth Army. Corap was unsure of the situation and his force disposition. As a result Corap's Army broke up without turning rare local successes into operational success. For example, the 102d Frontier Division halted Reinhardt at Montherme for two days before the Germans drove the French back. The French did not reinforce the 102d Division and lost an opportunity to disrupt the German attack.³⁸

Where did the French go wrong? They failed either to hold the penetration or to counterattack effectively against the breakthrough. They made two major mistakes in the battle: first, they believed that no army could pass through the Ardennes; and second, they failed to react with mass to the situation. In retrospect, Miksche advanced the following prescription for the French situation: "Disregarding all dangers to the rear of the powerful forces he [Gamelin] had gathered near Brussels, he should have flung all their strength into a lightning counterattack."³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 415-16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 394-5, 402, 427-8.

³⁹ Miksche, *Blitzkrieg*, p. 13.

Next, the presentation of historical examples continues with the American operational defense against the German major counter-offensive through the Ardennes in the last month of 1944. In this case, the American operational commander recognized the enemy scheme and took action to deny the enemy success. This differed markedly from the actions of General Gamelin in 1940.

Americans, Battle of the Bulge, December 1944

By September 1944, the Germans looked back on three months of setbacks on all fronts. Despite his nation's weakened state, Hitler persuaded himself that he could reverse the course of the war with one decisive stroke, a major offensive effort through the Ardennes, the most difficult terrain of the Western Front. He would aim this effort to the West to breakthrough the American and British forward lines, split them, seize the strategic objective of the key port of Antwerp, and annihilate the British and Canadian forces to the north of the penetration.⁴⁰ Hitler directed priority of support to build thirty divisions including ten panzer divisions for the attack.

German military commanders attempted to diminish the goals of the attack. Rundstedt, Commander of the West, proposed a "Small Solution" involving a double envelopment of Allied forces to the Meuse. He seriously doubted the means available to accomplish the "Big Solution." "Hitler remained adamantly in favor of the "Big Solution," the thrust to Antwerp.⁴¹

During the autumn of 1944 following the summer successes in the Allied drive across France and into the Low Countries, General Eisenhower, Commander, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), had concentrated his forces north and south of the Ardennes in preparation for offensives into the Ruhr and the Saar

⁴⁰ Charles V. P. von Luttichau, "The German Counteroffensive in the Ardennes," in *Command Decisions*, ed. by Kent Roberts Greenfield, (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1960), p. 444.

⁴¹ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1965), p. 28.

industrial areas. The Ardennes and Alsace areas remained economy of force areas with fewer troops, spread widely on the defensive.⁴² Middleton's VIII (US) Corps of Hodges' First US Army (FUSA) occupied most of the Ardennes front, an area three times wider than doctrine would generally direct.⁴³ FUSA was under the command of Bradley's 12th Army Group (AG). Generally behind the armies, SHAEF did not establish a separate reserve under Eisenhower's control.

The German command recognized the weakness in the Allied center:

Opposite the attack sector were approximately three divisions which had been replaced by divisions exhausted during the battle of the Roer....No considerable reserves were assumed to be in their rear area. On the contrary, the conviction prevailed that, once the breakthrough had been accomplished, the enemy forces up to the Maas [Meuse] would be weak, if this area were crossed before the enemy had time to bring up reserves.⁴⁴

On 16 December at 0530 hours, the Germans attacked into the Ardennes with three armies. They completely surprised the Allies. Virtually none of the Allied commanders and their staffs had recognized the German offensive capability.

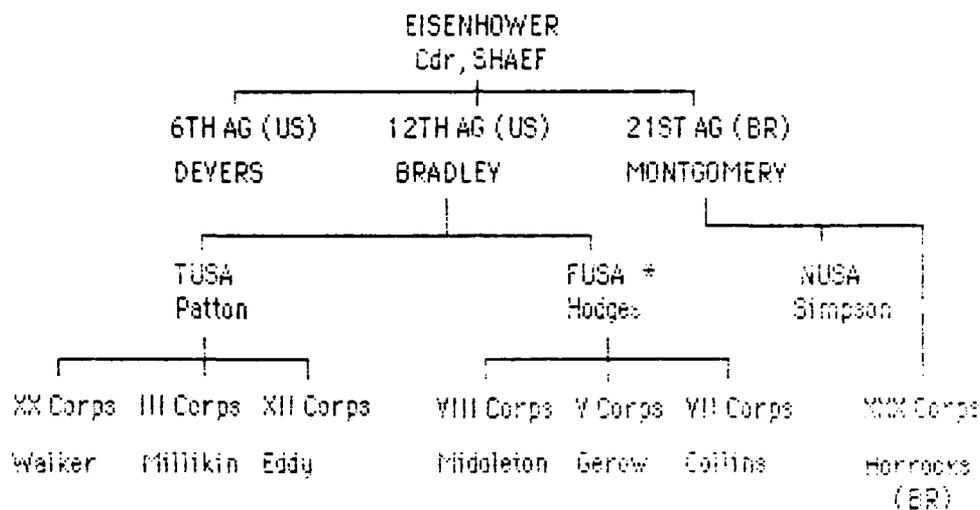
At the operational level, Eisenhower, with the advantage of intelligence intercepts not available to his subordinates, recognized the German attack as a major effort on 16 December. He saw the German attack as an opportunity to destroy a large portion of the German Army decisively by large scale counterattack. In preliminary moves, he directed shifts of two armored divisions (7th and 10th) from the flanks to join Middleton and to disrupt the German attack. Additionally, he stressed to 12th AG the need to deny the Meuse bridges to the Germans. Finally, he identified uncommitted forces to include the XVIII (US) Corps and XXX (BR) Corps. Eisenhower and Bradley, the

⁴² Charles B. MacDonald, A Time For Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge, (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 49.

⁴³ Russell F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944-1945, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 448.

⁴⁴ Percy Ernst Schramm, "The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes, Sep. to 16 Dec. 44" [A862], in World War II German Military Studies, Vol 10: Part IV. The OKW War Diary Series, continued, ed. by Donald S. Detwiler, (New York, NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1979) p. 221.

Commander of the 12th AG, responsible for the Ardennes, "agreed...that in the event the German advance should prove to be an all-out assault we would avoid piecemeal commitment of reserves."⁴⁵



(*FUSA (-VIII Corps) to 21st AG at 1200 hrs, 20 Dec; VIII Corps to TUSA)

SHAEF GROUND ORDER OF BATTLE, BATTLE OF THE BULGE

American tactical commanders realized the extent of the German attack only after 12 to 36 hours. By the evening of 16 December, Middleton identified a major German offensive, probably toward the Meuse River at Liege. He expected a rupture and wanted to disrupt the German advance. He directed Combat Command "R" of 9th AR Division and four available combat engineer battalions to block major road junctions at St. Vith, Houffalize, Bastogne, and Luxembourg City.⁴⁶ Further, Middleton directed the 7th AR Division to St Vith. On 17 December, Hodges permitted Gerow of V (US) Corps to cancel the Roer Dams offensive in order to free V (US) Corps to concentrate on holding the Northern shoulder against the German attack.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Gerow's 99th Infantry Division and Middleton's three infantry divisions (106th, 28th and 4th) recovered from the complete tactical surprise and achieved some limited tactical success against the

⁴⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), pp. 342-344; and Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, pp. 458, 501.

⁴⁶ Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, p. 480.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 481, 497.

German thrusts in spite of the thinness of U. S. lines. Bradley felt that the VIII (US) Corps divisions "rallied nobly in a furious delaying struggle."⁴⁸

Eisenhower felt that "to carry out our general scheme successfully it was vitally necessary that the shoulders of our defenses bordering upon the German penetration be held securely."⁴⁹ On the Northern shoulder, the V (US) Corps fought the battle for Krinkelt-Rocherath, the twin villages. Both sides paid heavily in men and material. The outcome favored the American forces and left them "firmly entrenched atop the Elsenborn Ridge." Four American infantry divisions (1st, 2d, 9th, and 99th) showed "true grit" in stopping the German attack.⁵⁰

7th AR Division plus other combat elements denied the road net through St. Vith until late on 23 December. The Germans had planned to own St. Vith on Day One of their offensive. "It was a critical, crushing delay, second in importance in disruption of German plans only to the stand of American troops on the northern shoulder in front of and along the Elsenborn Ridge."⁵¹ The 7th AR Division's success helped relieve pressure on the 2d Infantry Division on the Elsenborn Ridge until 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions arrived to shore up the shoulder. Eisenhower declared: "Thereafter, with these three proved and battle tested units holding the position, the safety of our northern shoulder was practically a certainty."⁵²

The Germans realized in the first two days of the offensive that the Americans had disrupted the main attack by the 6th PZ Army on the right. "Most unsatisfactory was the situation on the right wing, where not only did 6th PZ Army threaten to bog down, but also the enemy made counter thrusts against the flanks."⁵³

⁴⁸ Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier's Story, (New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co., 1951), pp. 475.

⁴⁹ Eisenhower, Crusade, p. 346.

⁵⁰ William C. Cavanagh, Krinkelt-Rocherath: The Battle for the Twin Villages (Norwell, MA: The Christopher Publishing House, 1986), pp. 129, 138.

⁵¹ MacDonald, A Time For Trumpets, p. 487.

⁵² Eisenhower, Crusade, pp. 347-8.

⁵³ Schramm, "The Course of Events in the German Offensive..." [A858], p. 2.

On the evening of 17 December, Eisenhower released the two airborne divisions of XVIII (US) Corps to Middleton for use in the Ardennes at the Bastogne and Houffalize road junctions. Subsequently, FUSA redirected the 82nd Airborne Division to the northern shoulder at Werbomont. The 101st Airborne Division moved to Bastogne where it thwarted the efforts of 5th Panzer Army. The German OKW War Diaries commented: "Obviously, the enemy command also recognized that Bastogne had a decisive meaning for the success or failure of the offensive."⁵⁴

The original German goal had been for armor columns to reach the Meuse at the end of 48 hours. The attack was way behind schedule as a result of the tenacious defense of the in-place American divisions, the inability of German tactical and logistical support to keep pace with the panzers, the German failure to gain control of key road hubs, the success of the Americans on the shoulders, the slow build-up of the attack, and the speed of U. S. reaction.⁵⁵

While the division and corps commanders fought to stop the German advance at key road junctions and on the shoulders, the operational commander, Eisenhower, considered a counterattack by 12th Army Group to converge from both flanks of the bulge on the Bonn-Cologne area in order to encircle the German attacking army.⁵⁶

On 18 December, Bradley spoke to Patton, Commander of the Third U.S. Army (TUSA), concerning the need to attack north. Over the next few days the objective of the TUSA attack changed from Eisenhower's vision of a converging counterattack to encircle German forces in the Ardennes to an attack to relieve American defenders. Bradley focused on the pressure against Hodges' FUSA on the northern shoulder and the developing encirclement of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne and urged Patton to speed his attack to reduce those pressures.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Cole, *The Ardennes*, p. 670.

⁵⁶ Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, p. 496.

⁵⁷ Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 470-2.

Patton attacked on 22 December with three divisions, although Eisenhower had wanted a six division attack. However, Patton contended: "that it is better to attack with a small force at once, and attain surprise, than it is to wait and lose it."⁵⁸ Patton combined his main effort by Millikin's III (US) Corps toward Bastogne with supporting attacks. Along the southern shoulder, 5th and 4th Infantry Divisions drove the enemy east of the Sauer River. Also, XX (US) Corps conducted a limited attack from the original TUSA front lines in the direction of Saarburg as a diversion.⁵⁹ Additionally, on 23 December the skies cleared sufficiently to permit the air force to contribute significant battlefield support for the first time in eight days.

Although Patton counterattacked to relieve Bastogne before the defense blunted the nose of the penetration and secured the Meuse, a similar attack from the north shoulder did not develop as quickly. On 22 December, Eisenhower divided responsibility for the Bulge between Bradley's 12th AG on the south and Montgomery's 21st AG on the north. Montgomery wanted "Lightning Joe" Collins of the VII (US) Corps, perhaps America's finest offensive corps commander, to lead a counterattack from the north. While Collins planned for a counterattack, the exigent German panzer threat to the north shoulder caused commitment by FUSA of the divisions marked for Collins' counterattack. The risk of piecemeal destruction of the divisions marked for Collins' counterattack was real.⁶⁰

Montgomery determined to wait until the last German offensive effort before launching his counterattack. He hesitated to commit Collins. Collins' limited attack which stopped the 2nd (GE) Panzer Division on 26 December resulted from Collins' personal initiative at the time of orders "to remain on the defensive."⁶¹

⁵⁸ George S. Patton, Jr., War as I Knew It, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 197.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 200.

⁶⁰ Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, p. 509.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 536.

General Eisenhower had hoped from the beginning that his forces might crush the whole of the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies as Collins had now wrecked 2nd Panzer Division. To accomplish the goal, however, would almost certainly require from other commanders a boldness comparable to Collins's; but so far in the counterattacks that quality had remained in short supply, as usual.⁶²

Eventually, Montgomery did attack south on 3 January, seven days after the German westward attack stopped. Patton continued his attack slowly on a wide front north of Bastogne. On 15 January the attacking forces from the flanks converged around Houffalize to cut the Bulge. However, significant portions of the German armies had escaped the pocket due to the hesitation and slowness of the counterattack as well as the strong German resistance.⁶³

Germans, The Battle of the Donetz, February-March 1943

In the third historical case study, the German forces in the Don to the Dnepr region of Russia demonstrate a remarkable operational maturity in their defensive efforts against the Russian attacks of February 1943. Although this battle occurred twenty-two months before the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans in the Battle of the Donetz were a more experienced army which benefited from the nearly four years of combat. Manstein, the German commander, was able with a major counterattack to translate his defensive efforts into stunning operational success.

By the end of January 1943, the Russians had assured victory at Stalingrad against the encircled German 6th Army. Further, the Soviets had broken German Army Group "B" into "disconnected parts." The mid-January Soviet offensive through AG "B" had blown through the 2nd Hungarian Army south of Voronezh and left a 175 mile gap in the German lines from Kursk south-east to over the Donetz River. Eyeing the void between German forces, the Russians hatched plans for Operations "GALLOP" by Vatutin's South-West (SW) Front and "Star" by Golikov's Voronezh Front. Strategically,

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 537.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

the Russians aimed for the area around Melitopol and the northern approaches to the Crimea to cut off AG's "A" and DON from withdrawal.⁶⁴

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Commander, AG DON, (after 13 February redesignated AG SOUTH) recognized the threat to the German Southern (right) Wing represented by the Soviet offensive. Manstein realized that the Russians possessed the operational advantages of the initiative, numbers, and position because of their Stalingrad success and the German policy to hold terrain. By January, Soviet forces were significantly closer (by half) than the right wing of the German Army to Rostov and the Dnepr crossings.⁶⁵ As a result, Manstein wanted to shorten the lines to the south to free forces for his left wing against the Russians in their advance toward the Dnepr. Further, Manstein saw early on an opportunity for counterattack against the Russians. The arrival of the SS (GE) Corps to AG CENTER would help the German situation, although Manstein was "certain" that this corps alone could not close the gap and relieve the south wing.⁶⁶

In late January, Hitler finally gave Manstein approval to shorten AG DON's lines. In addition, Hitler attached 1st Pz Army to Manstein on 24 January. Although this required the employment of 4th Pz Army at Rostov while the 1st Pz Army moved north from the AG "A" area, Manstein gained needed forces for the effort to hold the Donetz basin. He still saw the need for a strong effort by German forces from the Kharkov area to relieve his left wing, if his Donetz defense was to be successful. According to Manstein, even with strong support from the north, the German defense in the Donetz

⁶⁴ Friedrich Schultz, "Reverses on the Southern Wing (1942-1943)," Selected German Army Operations on the Eastern Front, Vol III, (Historical Division, Headquarters United States Army Europe), p.77; and F. W. von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles: A Study of the Employment of Armor in the Second World War, trans. by H. Betzler and ed. by L. C. F. Turner, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), p. 206.

⁶⁵ Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), pp. 368-70

⁶⁶ Friedrich Schultz, "Reverses..." pp.77-8; and Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 400.

basin could not hold the whole area; it would not be wise to depend on enemy exhaustion or premature halt due to supply shortfall.⁶⁷

The Russians thrust into the hole north of AG DON with Operation "Gallop" on 29 January and Operation "Star" on 2 February. By 11 February, the Soviet attack had disrupted the German supply lines east from the Dnepr crossings and endangered all ground supply to AG DON. Additionally, the Soviet attack threatened the AG "B's" formation of the SS Corps as the combat element of Army Detachment (AD) Lanz in the Kharkov area. Furthermore, the initial Russian assault pressed back Manstein's AD Hollidt as it withdrew to positions on the Mius to protect the army group's line of communication. Certainly, the Soviet attack offered the opportunity for encirclement of the southern wing. Manstein recalled the situation as follows:

And so, around the middle of February 1943, the acute crisis in the area of Southern Army Group reached a new climax. With it the danger that the entire southern wing of armies would be encircled by an extensive flanking movement from the neighbouring sector in the north threatened to take shape sooner or later. And yet, paradoxically, it was in this very culmination of the crisis that the germs of a counterstroke lay.⁶⁸

Three Soviet armies converged on Kharkov and captured the city from the lead elements of the SS Corps in mid-February. However, when the Russians continued the attack, they slowed dramatically from exhaustion. In the south, Popov's 3rd Tank Army (SW Front) aimed for Dnepropetrovsk. Popov's "objective was to cross the Dnepr before German forces were able to build up their defenses along the river, but it soon became obvious that his forces lacked the necessary drive."⁶⁹ (By February 18, Popov's lead elements would be 40 miles from the Dnepr and Manstein's headquarters with no intervening German defenders.) The Russian offensive culminated in mid-February because they overreached given their sustainment capability, split the thrusts of the

⁶⁷ Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 401.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 418-20.

⁶⁹ Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-233, German Defensive Tactics Against Russian Breakthroughs, (Washington, DC: DA, 4 October 1951), pp. 4-5.

two fronts, and underestimated German combat power, particularly the armor formations.⁷⁰

Manstein accelerated the Soviet offensive's culmination by his defensive maneuver. In early February, he "flung" 1st Pz Army to the Middle Don and started 4th Pz Army out of the Rostov area. On 2 February, 1st Pz Army's primary mission was to prevent an enemy advance to the south or southwest through the flank of AG DON. Manstein provided 1st PZ Army with mobile units to conduct local attacks, to reestablish a defensive line along the Donetz, and to link across the gap on the left between Army Groups. He expected the enemy to follow the path of least resistance and continue its attack to the east through the gap. General von Mackensen, Commander, 1st Pz Army reported that his job was not simple:

Powerful Russian infantry units attacked, supported by tanks. They advanced through the thin front line of the XX Corps and the III Panzer Corps. In some instances they penetrated deep into the rear areas. Like the billions of grains of sand carried by a *Khamzin* (hot desert wind) they oozed through the very smallest of gaps.⁷¹

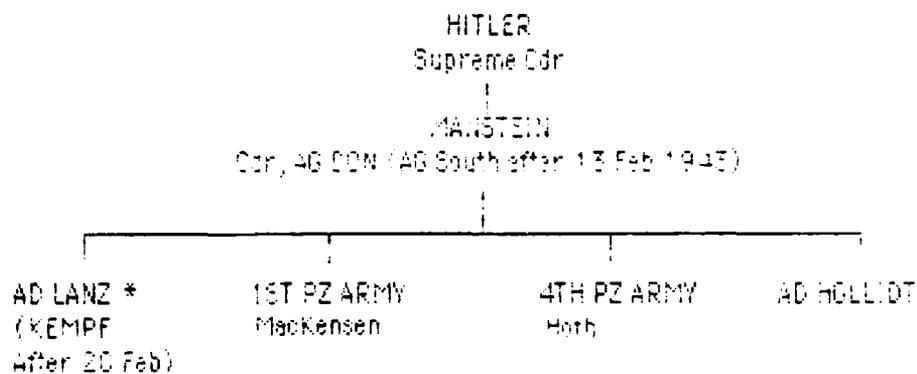
In early February, Manstein specifically directed actions by 1st Pz Army and AD Hollidt to keep pressure on the Russian flank and to maintain the German shoulder on the south of the Russian thrust. 7th Pz Division's seizure on 2 February of Slavyansk disrupted the Russian attack and seized an important bridgehead for future operations. On 6 February, 1st Pz Army attacked toward Slavyansk to provide movement freedom for Hollidt. During this period, 6th Pz Division established a screen across the extended gap between the 1st Pz Army and Hollidt.⁷² Always, Manstein reacted rapidly to counter the Russians' clear intentions to crush his left wing (Hollidt and 1st Pz Army) and to flank his AG to the west.⁷³

⁷⁰ Schultz, "Reverses...", pp. 80-1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9, 167.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 168-171, 347.

⁷³ Manstein, *Lost Victories*, pp. 402.



*from AG "B" on 13 Feb

GERMAN COMMAND BATTLE OF DONETZ, FEBRUARY 1943

By 20 February, 1st Pz Army controlled the gap's right shoulder. In the north, AD Kempf (formerly Lanz) with SS Pz Corps held the left shoulder. "Although there was a 100 mile gap between 1st Pz Army and AD Kempf, Manstein's ability to hold these two shoulders anchored his defense, provided some coherence to the battlefield, and helped secure his flanks as he launched his subsequent counterattacks."⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the Russian attacks had slowed, but not ended. In 1st Pz Army's area, a Russian Cavalry Corps had broken through. Major Russian armored units (Popov) stood between AD Kempf and 1st Pz Army.⁷⁵

Manstein organized his forces for a major counterattack. He received command of the SS Corps in the Kharkov area on 15 February, when the high command divided AG "B"'s area at Belgorod between AG SOUTH and AG CENTER. By this time, the Russians had captured Kharkov. Earlier, with difficulty, Manstein had convinced Hitler to give up terrain for time in order to bring the Soviet attack to culmination. Now, Manstein had to persuade Hitler to permit SS Corps to attack south in order to destroy the Russian

⁷⁴ Lawrence L. Izzo, An Analysis of Manstein's Winter Campaign on the Russian Front, 1942-43, (Ft Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, 1986), p. 59.

⁷⁵ Schultz, "Reverses..." p. 79.

armored formations within the gap now in the AG middle, before the AG attempted to retake the prestige objective of Kharkov (as Hitler favored). A decision in Manstein's favor came from the high command only after the SS Corps had assembled on 19 February.⁷⁶

Manstein planned to launch his main attack from the south with 4th Pz Army to destroy Popov's armor formations. To build 4th Pz Army and the left wing of 1st Pz Army to sufficient armor strength for his counterattack, Manstein stripped armor units from his remaining forces along the Mius River. He expected AD Hollidt and the balance of 1st Pz Army to reestablish their lines and destroy Russian formations in their midsts with extremely limited mobile forces.⁷⁷

The SS Corps, the 4th Pz Army, and elements of the 1st Pz Army attacked on 20 February. By 23 February, the Russian tank army (Popov's Mobile Group) was in a state of panic.⁷⁸ Within a week, the converging counterattacks had left the SW Front incapable of offensive action. Manstein's attack had punished severely the Soviet 6th Army, Popov's Group, and 1st Guards Army as well as destroyed 25th Tank Corps and three rifle divisions. Behind and within the Mius river lines, the German defenders had managed to wipe out the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps and the 7th Guards Cavalry Corps.⁷⁹ After the victory between the Donetz and Dnepr against the SW Front, AG SOUTH attacked to the north against the Voronezh Front in the Kharkov area. Manstein sought to strike into the flank and rear of the Voronezh Front. The Russians futilely committed the 3rd Tank Army to the SW Front to halt the German counterattack. 4th Pz Army and the SS Corps converged to grind up 3rd Tank Army. On 14 March, Manstein's

⁷⁶ Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 425. Although Manstein persuaded Hitler of the need for additional forces in AG SOUTH and Hitler agreed to provide six divisions from AG's CENTER and NORTH, the perceived exigencies in those AG's sectors prevented Manstein's reinforcement with any of the six promised divisions (Manstein, p. 415)

⁷⁷ Schultz, "Reverses...", p. 82.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 174.

⁷⁹ Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 432

turning movement resulted in the recapture of Kharkov and four days later of Belgorod. Then the spring thaws set in and offensive action ended.⁸⁰

"During the winter, the Germans avoided wholesale defeat largely due to the flexibility and initiative of commanders at all levels, the high cohesion and morale of units, and a deeper understanding by Manstein of the nature of operations."⁸¹ General von Mellenthin, who served under Manstein, believed that there were four reasons for the success of Manstein's counterattack: the provision of otherwise unrestricted armor formations with long range tasks, the ability of infantry to accomplish flank protection of the armor, forward command, and surprise. Manstein handled a difficult strategic problem "with masterly coolness and judgment, shrewdly assessing the risks and moving his slender reserves from point to point as the situation demanded."⁸²

⁸⁰ Izzo, An Analysis of Manstein's Winter Campaign, p. 45.

⁸¹ David M. Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr: A Study of Soviet Offensive Operations, Dec 1942-Aug 1943, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, undated), p. 444.

⁸² Mellenthin, Panzer Battles, pp. 403-409.

ANALYSIS

The three case studies provide an opportunity to develop insights concerning whether at the operational level the counterattack demands prioritization. These areas require attention:

- battlefield shaping.
- force employment weight to hold versus counterattack.
- synchronization of the operational effort between shaping the penetration and the counterattack.
- translation of holding the penetration into operational success.

Battlefield Shaping

Battlefield shaping is an important consideration for the operational commander who defends against a threat penetration. He faces the challenge of overcoming the attacker's advantage of "the initial choice of when and where to strike."⁸³ This implies the need for the operational commander to understand and see the battlefield. The operational commander must identify his own as well as the enemy's centers of gravity, culminating points, and decisive points. Operational vision takes this information and provides the path to success.

In 1940, Gamelin failed to identify the German center of gravity as the massed panzer forces moving through the Ardennes. The French were unable to react in a timely manner to bring their center of gravity, the mobile armor forces, to bear on the German panzers. Gamelin retained an inaccurate operational vision of a war fought to decision in the low countries until too late. The Germans maintained the initiative throughout without any French disruption of the "Sichelshnitt" Plan.

⁸³ FM 100-5, p. 129.

Notably, in 1944 the Americans did shape the battlefield and early on started to influence the German center of gravity and plan of attack. Eisenhower, the operational commander, recognized the German center of gravity as the panzer divisions and the criticality of key road junctions to their operations. Undoubtedly, the defense of these road junctions speeded the culmination of the German attack through the Ardennes. Additionally, Eisenhower early on realized the importance of holding the shoulders to contain the penetration. He hoped eventually to cut off the penetration at its base and destroy the encircled German forces. Although Eisenhower did not accomplish the latter, he did shape the battlefield. The result of this shaping in combination with the employment of operational forces to counterattack was the turning of the initiative away from the Germans to the American defenders.

During Manstein's winter campaign of 1943, he displayed at the Battle of the Donetz the importance of the operational commander's vision and the shaping of the battlefield. Manstein understood that his massed panzer forces could constitute his center of gravity. He believed that he needed to bring his panzers into position to destroy the Russian mobile forces (Popov) which had attacked into the gap in the German lines toward the Dnepr. Manstein's energies focused on bringing the Russian attackers to their culminating point. He intended to follow this with a decisive counterattack to destroy the Russian center of gravity. This required Manstein to shape the battlefield in accordance with his operational vision. He denied early victory to the Russians with tenacious flank defense and awaited the culmination of the Russian attack. At a time and place of his choosing, Manstein was able to launch his counterattack into the weakened Russian forces.

Accurate operational vision and its implementation provide the basis for operational success or failure. Battlefield shaping is critical to the operational commander's ability to establish conditions for wresting the initiative from the attacker. Manstein and Eisenhower took steps to deny a potential decisive point (Dnepr

and Meuse crossing points, respectively) to their enemies. They shaped their battlefields both in terms of time and space. They provided for the maneuver of their forces first to disrupt and then to destroy the enemy center of gravity. On the other hand, Gamelin did not accomplish these tasks and failed.

Weight to Hold versus Counterattack

The acceptance of the importance of shaping the battlefield implies the need to emphasize the efforts to hold the penetration. Miksche identifies a defense in two parts to defeat specifically a blitzkrieg-type penetration. These are a web to absorb and delay the enemy attack and a counterattack to defeat the enemy.⁸⁴ In regard to the same problem, Fuller writes:

When a mechanized force is used for a decisive attack, it is necessary that the enemy be first held or that his power of mobility be reduced so that his freedom of movement is restricted. Unless this is done, rear attacks are likely to prove wasteful. In other words, the enemy must first be held, and it is from this holding operation that the rear attack should be developed.⁸⁵

In May 1940, Gamelin devoted most of the French efforts to hold the penetration. Piecemeal commitment of three French armor divisions resulted in their destruction without notable impact upon the German attack. The bulk of the reserve received missions either to establish new defensive lines or to reinforce existing lines. Significantly, French reserves had little impact upon the German operations at their point of main effort. Certainly Gamelin's operational vision did not comprehend the nature of the German attack on his center.

In their efforts against enemy penetrations, Eisenhower and Manstein contrasted sharply with Gamelin. Generally American forces in the Bulge and German forces in the Donetz received meaningful missions in accordance with the operational commander's accurate vision of the battlefield.

⁸⁴ Miksche, *Blitzkrieg*, p. 86.

⁸⁵ J. F. C. Fuller, *Machine Warfare*, (Washington, DC: The Infantry Journal, 1943), p. 90

Eisenhower committed available forces rapidly to control the penetration. He stressed the importance of disrupting the penetration by defense at key road junctions and along the shoulders. Early on Eisenhower identified the need for a counterattack. Patton's forces from the south flank attacked well before other American forces had controlled the penetration. However, until seven days after the German attack had reached its zenith, there was no counterattack from the north. Clearly, Eisenhower voted with his divisions to weight the effort to control the penetration early and then to shift the weight to the counterattack.

Manstein similarly committed all available forces to a flank defense against the Soviet onslaught. He was terribly short of forces initially to affect the Russian attack. Deliberately, he repositioned forces and built strength while the Russian drive continued. His defensive efforts sought to delay and disrupt the Soviet attack on the flanks. Not until the Soviet attack had culminated did Manstein shift the weight of his forces to the counterattack.

Both the American and German efforts to hold or shape the penetration included offensive efforts. The 7th AD at St Vith and German panzers at Slavyansk provided excellent examples of the disruptive impact of these offensive actions within the operational defensive.

Where the Americans in the Bulge slowly shifted the bulk of their forces to the counterattack, Manstein changed pace dramatically and quickly from the shaping mission to the counterattack into the penetration. Because the commanders in the Bulge were reluctant to counterattack boldly in accordance with Eisenhower's vision, they did not achieve the total destruction of the German forces. On the other hand when Manstein counterattacked, he weighed that effort. Manstein correspondingly gained far greater success in the destruction of the Russian forces within the penetration. Furthermore, Manstein's Germans found themselves in a posture to

continue with their offensive. At the Bulge, the failure to attack decisively extended the time period before Eisenhower could resume his planned offensive into Germany.

The effort to hold or shape the penetration is initially key to provide time for the defense to react and to disrupt the attacker. It is necessary to change battlefield conditions. However, once the defender is in position to seize the initiative through counterattack, the effort to shape the penetration diminishes in priority.

The principles of economy of force and objective are prominent considerations. The commander of the operational defense needs to commit forces to efforts based on consideration of these two principles. When the main effort is to contain the penetration, he allocates his forces predominantly to this mission. Once he creates the conditions to regain the initiative by a counterattack, this becomes the main effort. The weight of forces must shift from the containment to the counterattack.

The ability to establish and employ a mass of maneuver successfully is important. Concentration is critical to the success of the operational defense and ultimately the counterattack. Leeb in his tract Defense indicates that a principle of operational defense is the use of small forces at "non-decisive places of the front" in order to permit the concentration at the critical point.⁸⁶ Deception and surprise provide ways to magnify the impact of the mass of maneuver. These considerations enter the decision as to how to weight the allocation of forces. The situation will determine the initial prioritization of forces within the operational defense either to the defensive effort or to the build-up of operational reserves for the counterattack. Critical considerations include the availability of forces, the terrain, force ratios, and the objective.

⁸⁶ Leeb, Defense, p. 166.

Synchronization of the Operational Effort

"Synchronization is the arrangement of battlefield activities in time, space and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at the decisive point."⁸⁷ In the operational defense against a concerted enemy attack, there are requirements for synchronization of the effort between shaping the penetration and the counterattack. The defender must sequence and synchronize his operations to deny the enemy his objective and to establish the opportunity to seize the initiative.

Gamelin in 1940 did not synchronize the activities of the French Army. He never produced concentrated combat power against the German blitzkrieg. The French did not deny the Germans victory at the decisive point.

Eisenhower in 1944 brought his combat power to bear quickly against the German surprise offensive in the Ardennes. The American forces possessed the necessary agility to deny the Germans their objective. The efforts on the shoulders, the defenses at critical road junctions, and Patton's counterattack demonstrated the American ability to synchronize activities.

The German operations in the Battle of the Donetz demonstrate how synchronized activities lead to synchronized operations. Manstein in 1943 faced a difficult task of synchronization against the Russian attack to the Dnepr. He managed to use his forces to great benefit. He shifted forces several hundred miles over a period of several weeks to provide the necessary synchronization of combat power. Initially, Manstein used his few available forces to control the flank of the Soviet penetration. Meanwhile, German forces accomplished large movements and redeployments within the area of operations. When Manstein had arranged his forces properly on the battlefield, he was able to achieve a decisive result from his counterattack.

⁸⁷ FM 100-5, p. 17.

Translation of Holding the Penetration to Operational Success

The concepts of maneuver warfare provide the manner of thought and action necessary by the commander to translate his battlefield activities into an operational success. "Again, maneuver warfare is like judo--you want to use the enemy's own momentum against him. That is what a good counterattack does."⁸⁸ Concentration, surprise, and timing are the ingredients of maneuver warfare and of the counterattack. Maneuver warfare theory furnishes grounds to consider the allocation of forces to various missions in the operational defense--primarily either to hold or to attack. Miksche declares that "the two factors of modern defence, a web of islands of resistance and a swift-moving large-scale counter-attack, ... join and complement each other."⁸⁹ The idea behind maneuver warfare is to conduct all activities to disrupt, dislocate the enemy plan and to attack the enemy when and where he is most vulnerable.

The three historical case studies provide a basis to point to the critical role of the counterattack to secure operational success against an enemy penetration. Gamelin showed failure. His defensive efforts were inept and the allocation of forces to counterattack was inadequate. There was no French mass of maneuver brought to bear against the Germans. Gamelin was unable to allocate forces and maneuver to take advantage of German vulnerabilities as they extended their penetration.

Eisenhower set the conditions for victory by his defensive efforts. His counterattack, however, did not focus on destruction of the enemy; rather it was an attempt to rescue Americans at Bastogne and to link the American lines through the Ardennes. Any operational success achieved by the Americans in the Bulge took far longer than it might otherwise had taken in the event of strong counterattack on 26 December from both shoulders along the base of the penetration to encircle and

⁸⁸ Lind, Maneuver Warfare Handbook, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Miksche, Blitzkrieg, p. 95.

destroy the German attackers. Eisenhower permitted his subordinates to allocate too few forces, too late to the counterattack. Montgomery's prioritization of the defensive effort prevented early operational success through a decisive counterattack.

If the essence of operational art is to recognize the enemy's center of gravity,⁹⁰ then Manstein's operational scheme demonstrates this. Manstein translated his holding or shaping efforts into operational success by the timing of force shifts and the building of a large mass of maneuver, his panzer forces. In order to accomplish this, Manstein "reused" forces: first to hold the flank and then to counterattack. He took advantage of the Soviet offensive culminating point, which he had helped speed along, and achieved a decisive result through a counterattack.

CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at a question of operational priority: Given an enemy penetration to operational depth of the defense, should the commander allocate his main effort to hold the penetration or should he prioritize forces for a counterattack against the penetration? This final section identifies AirLand Battle doctrine considerations, offers the NATO context for American operations, and answers the monograph question.

U.S. Army AirLand Battle Doctrine addresses prioritization of operational effort in the defense. This doctrine advises:

Whatever the design, commanders conducting defensive campaigns mix offensive with defensive tactical actions and contest the initiative in the theater at every opportunity....The ultimate objective should be to turn to the offensive and to defeat the enemy decisively.⁹¹

⁹⁰ FM 100-5, p. 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Successful defense combines reactive and offensive elements to deprive the enemy of the initiative. The fundamentals of defensive operations include preparation, disruption, concentration, and flexibility. FM 100-5 suggests that "once the attacker has been controlled the defender can operate against his exposed flanks and rear."⁹²

The U.S. Army emphasizes readiness to meet the major threat of a Warsaw Pact attack in the Central Region of Europe. Soviet offensive doctrine stresses the concentration of forces for attack through the depth of the defense. However, the NATO concept of forward defense combined with a lack of operational reserves creates doubt as to the readiness of NATO forces to defeat a successful penetration by the Warsaw Pact. It appears that NATO does not possess significant mobile reserve forces for either holding or counterattacking a Warsaw Pact penetration.

In 1981, a war game exercise pitted a pair of German World War II general officers against a major Warsaw Pact front thrust into one division of a U.S. Corps. The German generals accepted that the Soviets were capable of penetration deep into the Corps defense. They prepared to meet the attack with static strong points along the frontier and a large mobile force "to launch a decisive attack against the rear of the leading Soviet division and the flank of the following one." Their command style indicated a flexibility of mind and a practical appreciation of enemy capability. Although their solution was audacious by NATO standards, it offered a command style comfortable with maneuver warfare to confront the Warsaw Pact.

The guiding principle of the German strategy was that great results could be achieved only when the defending NATO forces shape the battlefield and retain the initiative. Baick and Mellenthin [the German general officers] believed that only a daring major counterattack could resolve the challenging situation facing them.⁹³

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 132-134.

⁹³ F. W. von Mellenthin, and R. H. S. Stolfi, with E. Sobik, NATO under Attack: Why the Western Alliance Can Fight Outnumbered and Win in Central Europe without Nuclear Weapons, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1944), pp. 144-145.

The monograph's lessons and conclusions are drawn from the historical examples, their analysis, and the theoretical background. AirLand Battle doctrine and the NATO environment provide an important backdrop for these findings.

Four key lessons emerge from this study. First, mindset is important for the commander. The commander must have presence of mind, the ability to think clearly in a crisis. This implies that the operational commander must possess the judgment to pull the correct information from the fog of battle. In this study, the French commander Gamelin failed to demand information and his subordinates did not provide it in the absence of orders. The fog of battle distracted Gamelin into believing what he wanted to see rather than what existed. Gamelin's mindset contrasted sharply with Eisenhower's. The latter's mindset permitted him to accept critical information and to take action early in a crisis situation.

Second, the commander must be willing to look beyond the obvious, to consider the impossible. His ability to visualize the future course of the campaign is critical. When he develops a course of action, he continues to anticipate what is the worst thing that can happen. Again Gamelin provided the negative example of failure to anticipate and prepare for the impossible, the penetration of the Ardennes. Manstein on the other hand forecasted the Soviet operational pattern and planned for the worst case Soviet attack.

Third, this need to develop contingencies for the unexpected appears clearly in the historical examples. The French were bankrupt early due to their failure to foresee and plan. The price of failure to prepare for the unexpected increased as the enemy attack continued without recognition by the operational commander. German success in the Battle of the Donetz resulted from the operational commander Manstein's willingness to develop contingencies for the unexpected.

Fourth, the commander must understand the nature of opportunity. Time and space relationships are such that the opportunity to achieve operational success by

counterattack is fleeting. The French never caught up with the Germans; the Americans were slow to launch a major counterattack from the north shoulder of the Bulge and achieved less success against the German attackers because of this delay. Manstein identified his likely opportunity early, even before the battle. He awaited his chance to launch a major counterattack and accomplished the necessary maneuvers to bring his forces to bear at the decisive time and place. He shaped the battlefield in accordance with his plan and assisted the culmination of the Soviet offensive. When the opportunity to attack occurred, Manstein was ready to seize it.

Successful defense at the operational level demands preparation for the unexpected. Defense against an enemy penetration requires a flexibility of mind to identify the situation and to take steps to counter the enemy penetration. The choice to employ forces in either a controlling operation or a counterattack is not simple. The best answer may be to do both. Sufficient forces are not likely to be available for even one of the two options.

Force allocation becomes an issue of time and space relationships. The operational commander must allocate forces early to disrupt the enemy attack. Disruption of the enemy attack permits the commander to shape the battlefield within his capabilities and to help the enemy attacker approach his culmination point for the offensive.

The operational commander must weigh his allocation of forces. Initially, he must commit forces to disrupt the enemy penetration. He must protect his forces from destruction by the enemy attack, while he considers offensive action to regain the initiative. At the proper time he must shift his forces from holding efforts to counterattack.

This shift of effort indicates the importance of synchronization of the operational defense and allocation of forces. The operational counterattack follows success in disrupting the enemy penetration, shaping the battlefield, and forcing the

enemy's offensive culmination point. These successes establish the conditions for the defender to regain the initiative through a counterattack against a weakened enemy.

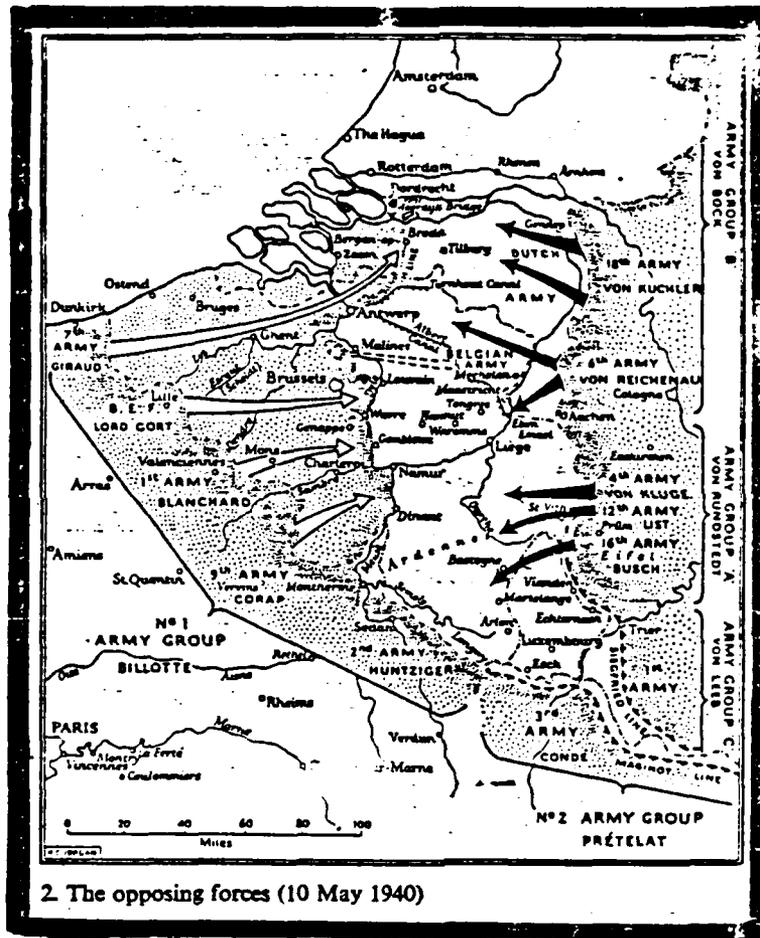
The counterattack component of the operational defense against an enemy penetration is necessary to translate success in disruption of the enemy attack into a major operational success. For this reason the operational commander must carefully allocate his forces during the battle so that he can ultimately launch a major counterattack. Throughout the battle the operational commander must ensure that he retains his freedom of action with his forces so that he is able to impose his will on the enemy.

Thus, the operational commander must prioritize his allocation of forces so that he preserves his ability to initiate a counterattack. Because he is unlikely to possess an abundance of forces both to hold and to counterattack, the operational commander in the defense must "reuse" forces to hold, then counterattack. He must keep in mind that he can best achieve decisive results through a counterattack into a weakened enemy. The holding effort must not consume forces which are necessary for the counterattack and operational success.

In conclusion, the operational commander should prioritize his allocation of forces to the counterattack. In recognition of his limited available forces and the exigencies of a threat penetration, the operational commander must consider a scheme of maneuver for the defense that while disrupting the enemy, preserves his ability to concentrate for counterattack to win the battle.

APPENDIX A: Maps, French, Ardennes, 10-16 May 1940

Source: Alistair Horne, To Lose a Battle: France 1940, pages 16-20.





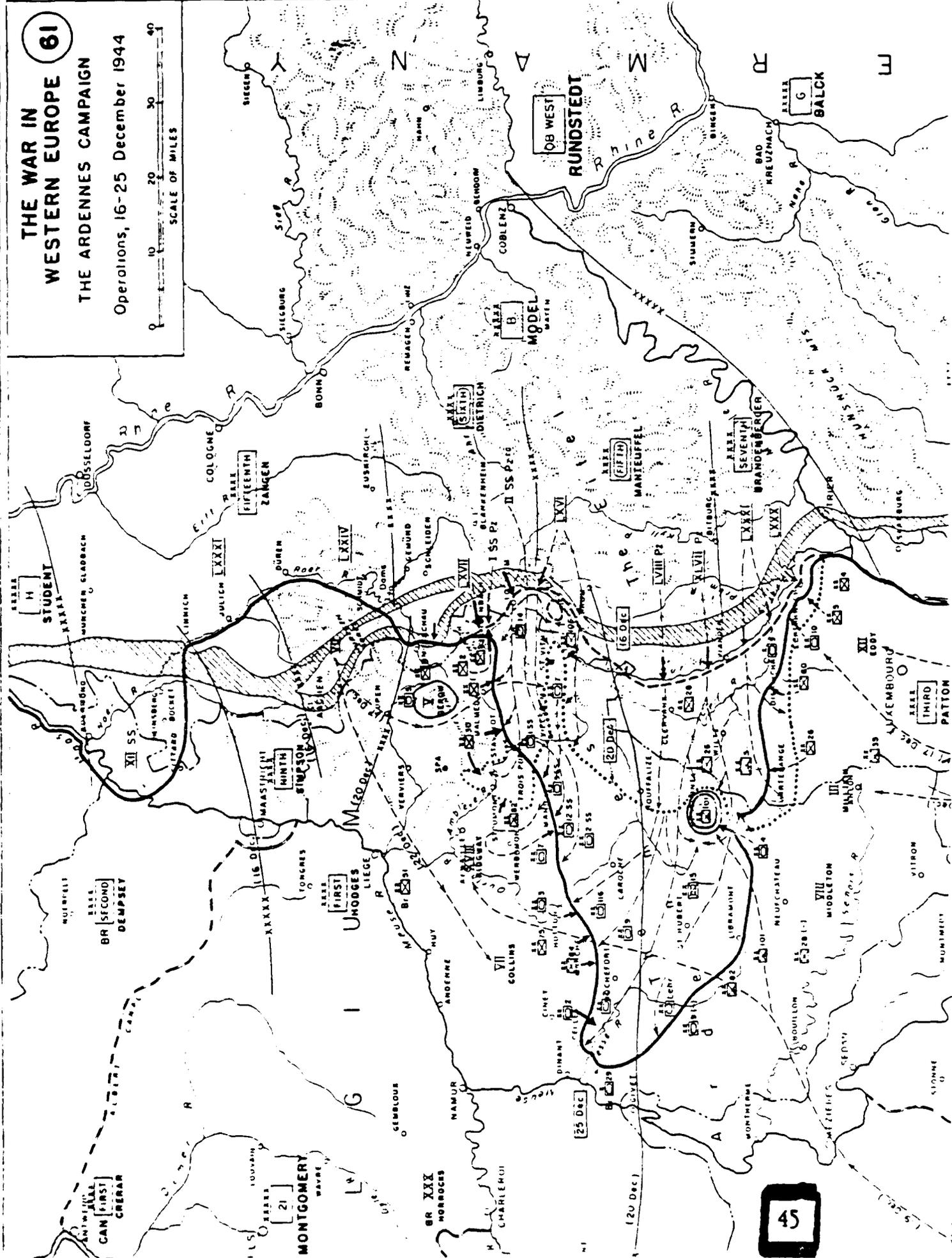
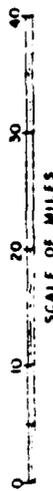
**APPENDIX B: Maps, Americans, Battle of the Bulge, 16 December 1944 thru
16 January 1945**

**Source: The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Vol II, 1900-1953, edited
by BG Vincent J. Esposito, Maps Numbers 61 and 62.**

THE WAR IN WESTERN EUROPE 61

THE ARDENNES CAMPAIGN

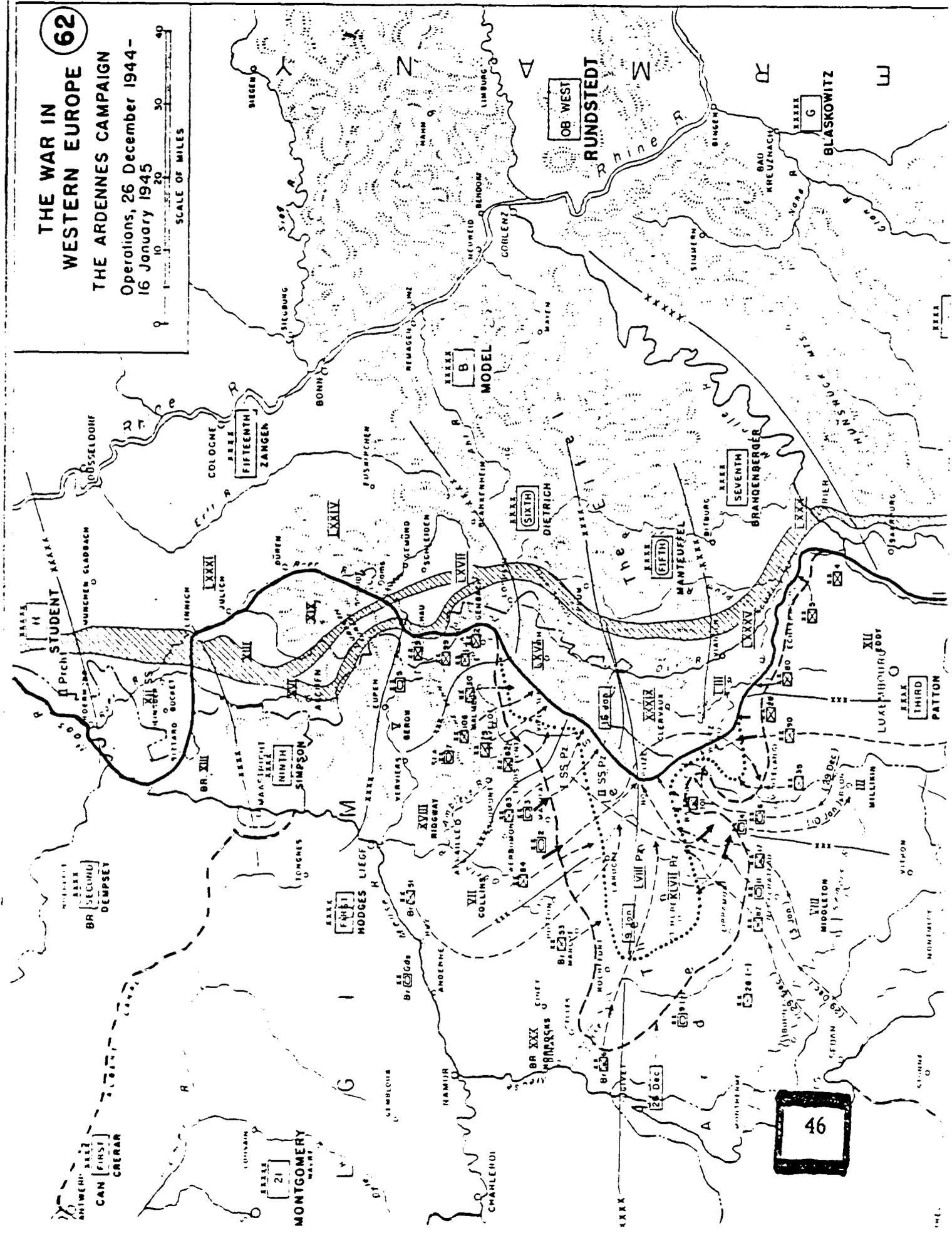
Operations, 16-25 December 1944

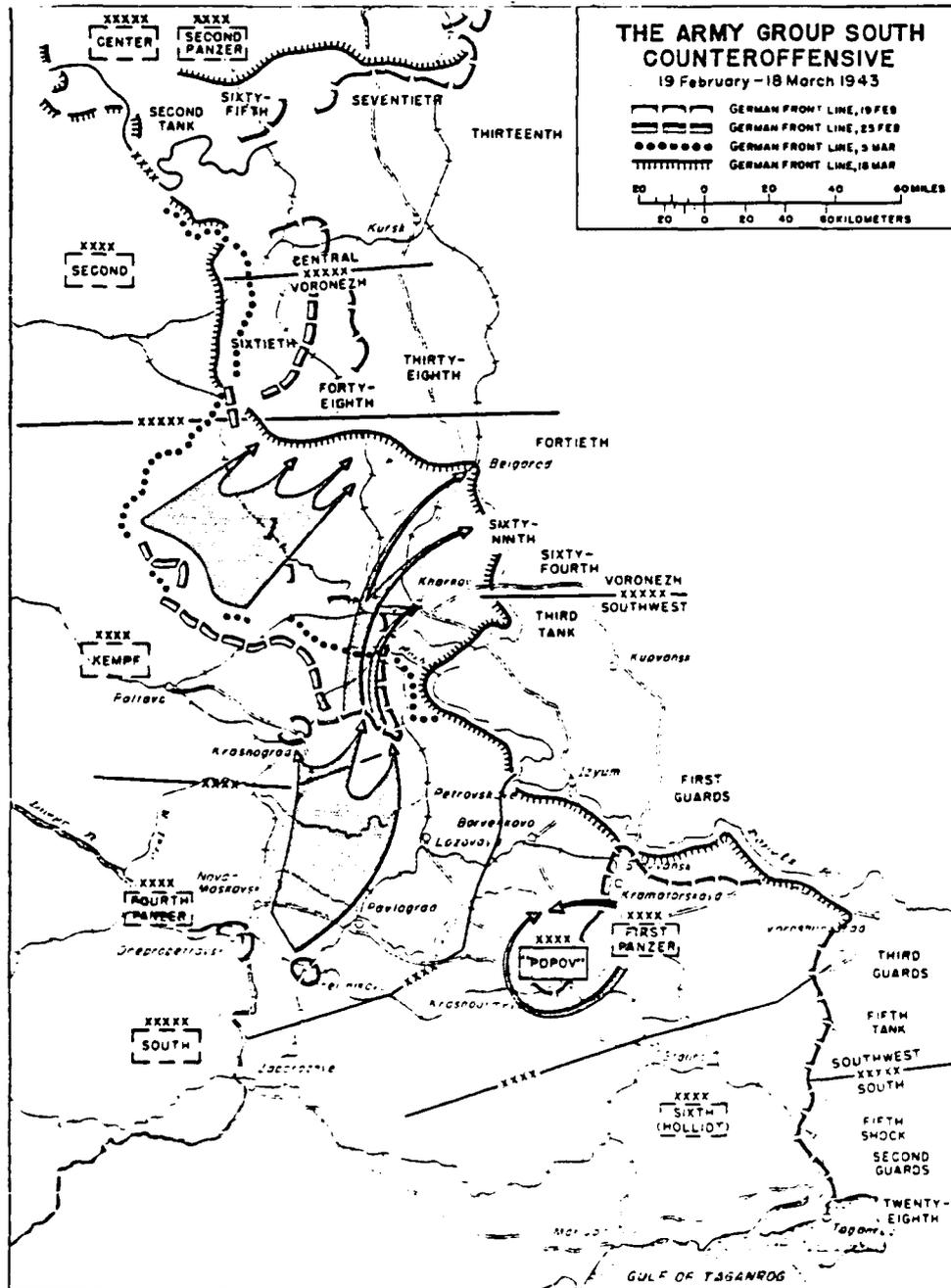


THE WAR IN WESTERN EUROPE

THE ARDENNES CAMPAIGN

Operations, 26 December 1944 - 16 January 1945





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