

dwindling supplies would finally bring the pursuit to a halt was a painful question that troubled all commanders.

The port capacity problem was still with the Allies, despite optimism in early September stemming from capture of Rouen on 31 August, seizure of Antwerp on 4 September, the rapid liberation of the minor Channel ports of Dieppe and Ostend, the quick investiture of Le Havre, Boulogne, Calais, and Dunkerque, and the not so remote possibility of taking Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The capacity of most of the ports was small, even when they were captured intact, and Le Havre, taken on 12 September, was far behind the front. Most important of all, British seizure of Antwerp—the greatest port in continental Europe, one close to the fighting front—had failed to prompt the Germans to relinquish the banks of the Schelde estuary along the sixty miles between Antwerp and the sea. Until the Schelde could be cleared, Antwerp was useless. It would be more than two months before the complex port problem would be solved.<sup>54</sup>

### *To the West Wall*

The reorientation of First Army on 3 September from a northward to an eastward direction involved some complications. Gerow's V Corps in the center, virtually pinched out by the converging advances of the corps on its flanks, was to move across the rear of Collins' VII Corps to a new zone on the army right. Corlett's XIX Corps and Collins' VII Corps, turning to the right, were to ad-

vance, respectively, on the left and in the center of the army zone.<sup>55</sup> Since Meuse River crossings were the most urgent objective, Hodges diverted available gasoline supplies to the V and VII Corps, which were closer to the Meuse and which were to strike at once toward the river between Sedan and Namur. The XIX Corps thus remained inactive for several days.

Ordered to move through the Ardennes to fill the gap between the First and Third Armies, Gerow designated an assembly area in his new zone. Some units assembled there before marching eastward, others moved at once because of an absence of opposition. While the 4th Division on 4 September cleared some slight resistance near St. Quentin in the old zone, the 102d Cavalry Group and the 5th Armored Division abreast, the latter particularly troubled by gasoline shortages, started toward the Meuse. By 5 September they had crossed the river without difficulty. As the 4th Division followed the cavalry and the 28th Division trailed the armor, V Corps began to move through the Ardennes. A rugged wooded plateau, the Ardennes extends in a northeasterly direction across the Meuse River valley in France, through Belgium and north Luxembourg, almost to the Rhine. The corps was to sweep the region, maintain contact with the Third Army, and eventually support Patton's projected Rhine River crossings.

Spread thin over a fifty-mile front, the corps moved through southern Belgium

<sup>54</sup> For the port story, see Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support*, II, Chs. III and IV, and MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*.

<sup>55</sup> Hodges to the corps commanders, 3 Sep, FUSA G-2 (Comd Echelon) Jnl and File; VII Corps FO 10, 3 Sep; Hodges to Gerow, 1727, 3 Sep, V Corps G-3 Jnl and File; see Answers by Gen Kibler to Questions by Col Cole, 29 May 46.

and Luxembourg in a dozen or more parallel battalion columns several miles apart. The troops encountered only the most perfunctory resistance and advanced as rapidly as their limited transportation permitted. When the 5th Armored Division ran out of gas on 7 September, Gerow passed the 28th through and diverted his meager supplies of gasoline to the infantry, which consumed less than armor. The 4th and 28th both moved steadily forward on foot and by motor.

On 8 September Gerow looked ahead to the West Wall, prepared an attack against it for 10 September, and designated Koblenz as the objective. Choosing to make his main effort on the left,<sup>56</sup> he shifted his infantry to the north and aimed at Pruem in an approach to Koblenz. Conducting a virtually independent operation, his cavalry screens maintaining only light contact with units on his flanks, yet instructed to support a Third Army crossing of the Rhine, Gerow nevertheless turned toward closer contact with the First Army. If he concentrated the bulk of his strength at Trier, he would be forty miles from the closest Third Army forces at Metz. Perhaps recognizing the significance of the stable defenses the Germans seemed to have erected at the Moselle, Gerow turned the 4th and 28th Divisions northeastward into a narrowing zone of advance that led to the juncture of the borders of Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany.

Meanwhile, the 5th Armored Division, with an infantry regiment attached, refueled on 9 September, passed through

the 28th Division, and entered Luxembourg. On the following day, as the inhabitants of Luxembourg gave an enthusiastic welcome, the armored troops entered and liberated the capital unopposed. With them came Prince Felix, consort of the Grand Duchess and at the time a brigadier in the British Army. East of the city, American tankers came into contact with some enemy forces. His troops extended over a sector about thirty miles wide, General Oliver halted his advance briefly to await instructions concerning the West Wall.

That afternoon General Gerow ordered his divisions to close the next day into assembly areas previously designated on the St. Vith–Echternach line. From there they were to probe the West Wall positions.

Although the Rhine River was only fifty miles away and the end of the war seemed at hand, General Hodges was about to postpone a co-ordinated attack on the fortifications for a day or two until sufficient artillery ammunition for an attack on the fortified line could be moved forward. Obscured by the prevailing optimism, the pause turned out to be a significant event—it marked the end of the pursuit.<sup>57</sup>

On the evening of 3 September, the three divisions of Collins' VII Corps were deployed on a 20-mile front from Mons to a point south of Charleroi. The 3d Armored and 1st Divisions were around Mons, the 9th was at Philippeville. Screening the right flank of the corps along the Meuse River, the 4th Cavalry Group was at Mézières and

<sup>56</sup> V Corps FO 26, 1830, 8 Sep; V Corps Memo for Rcd, 10 Sep, V Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>57</sup> V Corps Operations in the ETO, pp. 229ff.; TSFET, Siegfried Line.

Rocroi. Instructed to move eastward through Liège and Aachen to the Rhine near Bonn, Collins ordered the 9th Division to seize a Meuse River bridgehead near Dinant. The division moved out, hoping to be across the Meuse within twenty-four hours.<sup>58</sup>

An unexpectedly large number of roadblocks slowed the advance. At the river between Givet and Namar, the division discovered that Germans held the east bank in some strength. Two regiments established shallow bridgeheads north and south of Dinant, but success was far from certain. With excellent observation of the crossing sites and the bridgeheads, German troops counterattacked while their artillery shelled supply parties and potential bridge sites. One American battalion, partially surrounded, lost over two hundred men.

The German stand at Dinant was the first attempt to defend a water line since the Seine, and to the American troops it was a surprising divergence from the pattern of the pursuit. Veteran elements of the *2d SS* and *12th SS Panzer Divisions*, under *I SS Panzer Corps* control, forced the 9th Division to cling grimly for thirty-six tense hours to footholds on the east bank. The Americans were unable to reinforce the bridgeheads properly, expand and consolidate them, or construct bridges for armor and supply vehicles. During the evening of 6 September, an American company commander on the east bank reported the approach of an unidentified tank column from the east, exclaiming, "We are either the luckiest people in the army or

we are all going to be *kaput*." They were lucky. The tanks were part of a task force dispatched on Collins' order by the 3d Armored Division, which had crossed the Meuse farther north. The task force soon broke the German defenses. Infantrymen took Dinant on the morning of 7 September without opposition and that afternoon began to advance rapidly eastward.<sup>59</sup>

The 3d Armored Division, immobilized at Mons twenty-four hours for lack of gasoline (the troops took more than 2,500 prisoners while waiting—"Hunting was excellent"), began a forty-mile march to Namur on 4 September. Tanks moved on both sides of the Sambre River; infantrymen crossed the Meuse on a damaged bridge and dispersed light German forces defending Namur. By morning of 6 September tanks were rolling over the river on a 505-foot floating treadway bridge. While an armored task force moved south to help the 9th Division, the remainder of the division again found itself out of gasoline. Meanwhile, the 1st Division had cleaned up the Mons pocket, and the infantry moved up to sweep the corps left.

When gasoline was again available, the armor advanced east of Namur astride the Meuse River, reached the town of Huy that evening, and captured the bridges there intact. On the afternoon of 7 September, after another short halt while gasoline was brought up, the 3d Armored Division moved the fifteen remaining miles to Liège practically unopposed. The Liège bridges were destroyed, but enemy opposition was

<sup>58</sup> 9th Div FO's 30 and 31, 0230, 3 Sep, and 2230, 4 Sep.

<sup>59</sup> 9th Div AAR, Sep; TSFET, Siegfried Line; MS # P-164 (Meyer); MS # P-159 (Stueckler).

weak. Hindered somewhat by the enthusiastic welcome of the inhabitants, the troops completed routine mopping up. One of the participants later remarked:

Our chief difficulty was the fact that there were so many civilians trying to get out of town. We carried on a battle anyway, firing over their heads. At one point my tank ran over four of them as we backed up . . . several civilians crawled up on the tank and begged for guns. We had none for them. We entered the town and our tanks went up parallel streets cleaning out Germans. This took us all afternoon and we suffered no casualties.<sup>60</sup>

In the slightly bored tone that indicated that they had become accustomed to this sort of thing, the troops reported, "Once again cognac, champagne, and pretty girls."<sup>61</sup>

Advancing on the Liège-Aachen axis, the best invasion route into Germany, the VII Corps took Verviers and Eupen on 9 and 11 September, respectively. Although resistance was still sporadic, it seemed to be increasing. There were no more V-for-Victory signs, no more flowers, no more shouts of *Vive l'Amérique*. Instead, a sullen border populace showed hatred, and occasional snipers fired into the columns.<sup>62</sup>

By the end of 10 September the VII Corps was deployed along a front extending from Malmédy through Verviers to Herve, eleven miles east of Liège. The 9th Division had lost contact with

the enemy, and it appeared that the Germans were disengaging to take positions in the West Wall. With German soil within reach, pursuit came to an end for the VII Corps too. Ahead lay the task of breaching the West Wall.<sup>63</sup>

Corlett's XIX Corps—which remained temporarily out of action near Tournai awaiting gasoline—trained, rested, and incidentally gathered almost nine hundred prisoners. The 79th Division departed the corps to rejoin the Third Army.<sup>64</sup> By the time gasoline arrived and the corps was ready to move, the Allied forces on both sides had already outflanked the Germans in the new zone of advance leading east toward the Albert Canal and Meuse River between Hasselt and Liège. Bypassing or overrunning ineffectual rear-guard detachments, the 113th Cavalry Group rushed past the historic battlefields near Waterloo and reached the canal line on 7 September. The 2d Armored and 30th Divisions followed as rapidly as fuel supplies permitted, the infantry marching a good part of the way on foot. The units closed to the water barrier by 10 September.

Cavalrymen had meanwhile explored the situation along the water line and discovered all bridges destroyed and apparently strong German detachments dug in on the east bank. Since the British on his left already had a bridgehead across the Albert Canal and the VII Corps on his right was beyond both the Albert Canal and the Meuse, Corlett saw no reason for his corps to stage what

<sup>60</sup> Interv with 1st Lt Robert A. Annin, Hosp Intervs, ML-2234. Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose, the 3d Armored Division commander, was awarded the DSC for his leadership 6-9 September.

<sup>61</sup> 3d Armored Division, *Spearhead in the West*, p. 91.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93. Colonel Gibney, commander of the 60th Infantry, was awarded the DSC for heroic leadership on 9 September.

<sup>63</sup> 3d Armd Div AAR, Sep; CI 259 (3d Armd Div); 9th Div AAR, Sep.

<sup>64</sup> See Ltr, Corlett to OCMH, 2 Sep 53.

would probably be a costly assault crossing. While General Corlett made arrangements with his neighbors to use their bridges across the water obstacles, XIX Corps, like V and VII Corps, paused briefly.<sup>65</sup>

No one knew it yet, but the pursuit was over. The troops were soon to discard the "carnival garlands, ribbons, and souvenirs gathered during the liberation parade" through northern France, Belgium, and Luxembourg and become caught up again in hard fighting.<sup>66</sup> Patton's Third Army was already immersed in the difficulties of the Lorraine campaign. Immobilized by lack of gasoline for several days, the army attacked on 5 September to gain Moselle River bridgeheads near Metz and Nancy. Five days later, though some troops had seized Toul in the Moselle bend, others had been repulsed at Pont-à-Mousson, and the army was fighting furiously for bridgeheads in the Metz and Nancy areas. Hodges' First Army was soon to be involved in problems of similar difficulty at the West Wall.<sup>67</sup> The war of movement set in motion by Operation COBRA in the last days of July was merging imperceptibly into a war of position.

### *The End of the Line*

Though it was not to become obvious for a week or so, the Allied troops were tired. The pursuit had been wearing on men and equipment. Casualties had not been heavy at any one place, but

their cumulative effect reduced the strength of all combat units. Tanks and vehicles had gone so long and so far without proper maintenance and repair that in one armored division less than a third of the authorized number of medium tanks were actually fit for combat.<sup>68</sup> Another had had so many tanks fall out of column because of mechanical failure or lack of gasoline that its equipment was spread over the countryside between Valenciennes and Luxembourg, more than a hundred miles. Since the gasoline shortage prevented transferring vehicles for repair, mobile crews performed on-the-spot adjustments when they were able, but those tanks that needed shop treatment had long to wait.<sup>69</sup> Tank engines had passed the time limit of efficient operation but were hard to replace. Of 190 reserve engines considered necessary for effective combat, one armored division had had only 30 available at the beginning of the pursuit. Replacement tracks were particularly difficult to come by. Ceaseless driving caused vehicles literally to fall apart, and serious shortages of spare parts could not be remedied in the near future.<sup>70</sup>

Transportation facilities were unable to maintain an adequate flow of supplies to the front. By 6 September, for example, daily deliveries to the First Army were 1,500 tons (almost one third) below normal daily requirements. With income below operating expenses, the army began to live on its capital; basic loads vanished, reserve stocks virtually disappeared. Although a diminishing arrival of everyday necessities had not

<sup>65</sup> XIX Corps FO 22, 1730, 7 Sep; [Ferriss], Notes.

<sup>66</sup> Quote from 3d Armd Div CCA AAR, Sep.

<sup>67</sup> See Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, and MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*.

<sup>68</sup> 3d Armd Div AAR, Sep.

<sup>69</sup> 5th Armd Div AAR, Sep.

<sup>70</sup> See XV Corps AAR, Aug.

actually stopped the sustained drive, the day of reckoning was not far away. The Allies needed no soothsayers to know that an economy of famine awaited them as they moved onto German soil.

Yet it seemed as though the Allies only partly appreciated the implications of these conditions, for no admission was made that the pursuit had come to an end. Instead, optimism in most quarters continued, "tempered only by exasperation over supply shortages." The first train arrived in Soissons on 6 September, bringing hope that shortages might soon cease to exist. On that day the regrouping of the First Army forces had been almost completed, and American leaders had expected the drive to the Rhine to gather speed. With ten days of good weather, General Hodges said, he thought the war might well be over as far as organized resistance was concerned. Four days later, however, despite promises that shortages would be only temporary, Hodges admitted, as he awaited shipments of artillery, that the supply situation would undoubtedly delay, at least slightly, a concentrated attack on the Siegfried Line.<sup>71</sup>

Hodges' feeling actually mirrored concern with a question that was beginning to trouble some Allied commanders: Was the pursuit going to peter out before the Allies got through the West Wall and across the Rhine? Certain signs, though not to become clear until later, indicated that this might happen. The Allied forces were overextended along a 200-mile front between Antwerp and Switzerland, the troops exhausted, their equipment badly worn. Continental ports of entry were inadequate, and

transportation on the Continent was unequal to the demands placed upon it. As the Allies approached the German border, opposition seemed to stiffen, and the existence of the West Wall had its psychological effects. To insure the establishment of at least one bridgehead beyond the Rhine, General Eisenhower on 10 September approved employment by Field Marshal Montgomery of the Allied strategic reserve, the First Allied Airborne Army, which Montgomery was to use like seven-league boots in an attempt to get across the lower Rhine in the Netherlands.<sup>72</sup>

Whether Eisenhower drew upon SHAEF's strategic reserve to exploit the success of the pursuit or to propel a dying advance across the Rhine, the act, while perhaps subconsciously admitting the weariness of the Allied troops, sought to take advantage of German disorganization before the Germans could re-form a cohesive line. As the dispersed though optimistic Allied forces approached the West Wall, vague symptoms appeared that the Germans might achieve what they would later call the "Miracle of the West." *Army Group B*, despite the Mons pocket, managed to get what remained of its units east to the West Wall, and *Army Group G* (the *Nineteenth Army* and the *LXIV Corps*) escaped from southern and southwest France with the major part of its combat elements. By 10 September the juncture of *Army Groups B* and *G* was accomplished, and the front formed a continuous, if not solid, line from the North Sea to the Swiss border.<sup>73</sup> Considering the shortages of men, arms, equipment,

<sup>71</sup> Ruppenthal, *Logistical Support*, I, 583; Sylvan Diary, 6 and 10 Sep.

<sup>72</sup> For an account of this operation, see MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*.

<sup>73</sup> *OB WEST*, a *Study in Command*, p. 166.



DRAGON'S TEETH, THE SIEGFRIED LINE

and supplies, the condition of the West Wall, and the immensity of the defeat suffered, the German recuperation would later appear incredible.

During the first few days of September there had been no coherent German defense. Panic infected rear areas. Supply installations were destroyed without orders, fuel depots demolished, ammunition dumps abandoned, ration and supply installations looted by troops and civilians, and reports on the status of supply nonexistent.<sup>74</sup> The retreating units had hardly any heavy weapons. Few of the panzer divisions had more than five to ten tanks in working order. The morale of the troops was depressed by Allied control of the air and by the

abundance of Allied matériel, as compared with the inadequate German supplies. On 4 September Model stated that, in order to prop up the entire Western Front before it gave way completely, he needed a minimum of twenty-five fresh infantry divisions and at least five or six panzer divisions.<sup>75</sup>

Hitler, for his part, showed little appreciation of the difficulties facing *OB WEST* and some lack of knowledge of the situation. Since 28 August, on Hitler's order, *OB WEST* had been planning a counterattack against the southern Allied flank, a strike north in the Troyes area between the Seine and Marne Rivers. On 3 September Hitler

<sup>74</sup> MS # B-596 (Gerber).

<sup>75</sup> *AGP B Lagebeurteilungen, Ia*; MS # B-730 (Brandenberger); MS # B-623 (Keppler); MS # C-048 (Kraemer).

instructed *OB WEST* to launch an attack from the Nancy–Langres area toward Reims to roll up the Third Army right flank, to prevent junction of the *OVERLORD* and *DRAGOON* forces, and to cut American lines of communication. Reinforcements arriving piecemeal and committed defensively prevented the attack from ever getting under way. As late as 9 September, several days after the Americans had crossed the Meuse and the day after the British had crossed the Albert Canal, Hitler ordered the *Seventh Army* to “continue to fight a delaying action forward of the West Wall, especially [at] the mighty obstacles of the Meuse and the canal west of Maastricht.”<sup>76</sup> He continued to hope that German counterattacks would cut off Allied armored spearheads and stabilize the front. He felt that the West Wall was at least potentially impregnable. And he guessed that the Allies were outrunning their supplies and would soon have to halt.

Perhaps the most critical day for the Germans had been 4 September. On that day, as the *Fifteenth Army* withdrew along the French coast generally to the north and as the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies* retired generally to the northeast, the Second British Army plunged into the gap between the two forces and captured Antwerp. The news brought consternation to Hitler’s headquarters in East Prussia. The possibility that Antwerp would solve the Allied port deficiency was bad enough, but far worse was the fact that only replacement and rear echelon units held the line along the entire Albert Canal

from Antwerp to Maastricht. Unless blocked quickly, “the door to northwestern Germany stood open.”<sup>77</sup>

Hitler immediately ordered headquarters of the *First Parachute Army* and Generaloberst Kurt Student, commander of the German parachute troops, to move to the Netherlands and defend the canal lines. *OB WEST*, which had intended to commit the *First Parachute Army* in the Nancy–Langres area in a counterattack against the right flank and rear of Patton’s Third Army, ordered Dietrich’s *Fifth Panzer Army* headquarters to Nancy for the purpose. Dietrich departed at once, transferring his troops to the *Seventh Army*, newly commanded by General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger.<sup>78</sup> Model ordered the *Fifteenth Army*, cut off by the British thrust to Antwerp, to withdraw part of its troops to the banks of the Schelde estuary (the sixty-mile water entrance to Antwerp); another part to the fortresses of Boulogne, Dunkerque, and Calais for a last-ditch defense; and a third portion to attempt to break through toward the east.<sup>79</sup> Though the latter quickly proved impossible, the presence of German troops in the Channel ports and along the Schelde would prove a headache to the Allies for weeks to come.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile Student was forming a defense of the Albert Canal as “an improvisation on the grandest scale,” and in a few days he succeeded in organizing the semblance of a defensive line by borrowing and

<sup>77</sup> MS # B-034 (Schramm).

<sup>78</sup> *OB WEST KTB*, 3 and 4 Sep.

<sup>79</sup> *AGp B* to *OB WEST*, 0115, 5 Sep, *AGp B Tagesmeldungen*.

<sup>80</sup> See Lucian Heichler, German Defense of the Gateway to Antwerp, OCMH MS R-22, and The Germans Opposite the XIX Corps, OCMH MS R-21.

<sup>76</sup> *AGp B* to *Seventh Army*, transmitting Hitler Order, 9 Sep, *AGp B KTB*, *Op. Befehle*; see Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 304.



confiscating staffs, troops, and matériel from retreating units.<sup>81</sup>

Hitler on 5 September also recalled Rundstedt whom he had relieved at the beginning of July. While Model remained the *Army Group B* commander, Rundstedt assumed his old post, Commander-in-Chief, West. Though Rundstedt was every bit as pessimistic as Model and canceled plans for counterattacks, his reappearance at *OB WEST* brought a resurgence of morale. Rundstedt was able to direct his attention to the whole Western Front, which Model in his preoccupation with *Army Group B* had been unable to do, and for the first time since 18 July, when Kluge had assumed Rommel's duties in addition to his own, a theater commander was present to co-ordinate the entire defensive effort in the west.

Counting his forces, Rundstedt found that *Army Groups B* and *G* consisted of forty-eight infantry and fifteen panzer-type divisions, of which only one quarter could be considered anywhere near full combat strength. He judged their effectiveness to be the equivalent of twenty-seven infantry and six or seven panzer divisions at the most. He estimated that the Allies had sixty in opposition. The silver lining in this dark cloud was the fact that although few units were up to authorized strength, the staffs of all higher headquarters were for the most part intact and able to function. Discipline and reorganization soon revealed that the fabric of command, though stretched and worn, could be made serviceable. By 11 September most of the German units that had been battered, outflanked, encircled, and ap-

parently destroyed had reappeared, in name at least, and were making an honest effort to protect the German border in the west.<sup>82</sup>

That they were able to accomplish even this much was miraculous in view of earlier German casualties. During June, July, and August the Germans had lost a minimum of 1,200,000 troops killed, wounded, missing, and captured, casualties of which approximately two thirds had been incurred in the east, where larger masses of men were employed.<sup>83</sup> The *OB WEST* staff later estimated that the campaign in the west, from the invasion to the West Wall, and including southern France, had cost Germany about 500,000 troops, of which about 200,000 had been lost in the coastal fortresses. Matériel losses were impossible to estimate; in addition to battle losses, all equipment permanently installed or lacking mobility was gone.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, the Allies had landed more than 2,100,000 men and 460,000 vehicles on the Continent by 11 September, a combat force of forty-nine divisions.<sup>85</sup> Excluding the forces in southern France, where losses were light, Allied casualties from 6 June to 11 September numbered almost 40,000 killed, 164,000 wounded, and 20,000 missing—a total of 224,000, which was less than half the German casualties in the west.<sup>86</sup>

No wonder Rundstedt warned on 10 September that he needed at least five

<sup>82</sup> *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, pp. 175ff., 188; see Charles V. P. von Luttichau, *The Ardennes Offensive: Germany's Situation in the Fall of 1944*, Pt. III, *The Military Situation*, OCMH MS R-19.

<sup>83</sup> See Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*, pp. 29-43, for a detailed examination of German manpower and equipment losses.

<sup>84</sup> *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, pp. 192ff.

<sup>85</sup> SHAEF G-3 War Room Summary 99.

<sup>86</sup> SHAEF G-3 War Room Summary 102.

<sup>81</sup> MS # B-717 (Student); see MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*.

or six weeks to restore the West Wall and characterized his situation on 11 September as "continued reduction in combat strength and lack of ammunition."<sup>87</sup> SHAEF had observed that the Germans did not seem to have enough men to hold the West Wall, and despite the increasing deterioration of Allied logistics, commanders on all echelons were quite certain that the end of the war was at hand.<sup>88</sup> The troops that had fought in the battle of the hedgerows remembered with some surprise how St. Lô had "seemed months away and Germany itself almost unattainable."<sup>89</sup>

There was a quality of madness about the whole debacle of Germany's forces in the West. . . . Isolated garrisons fought as viciously as before, but the central planning and coordination . . . were missing. . . . it looked very much as though Adolf Hitler . . . might be forced into surrender long before American and British units reached the Rhine. That was the avowed opinion of allied soldiers on the western front, and German prisoners were of the same mind, often stating that it couldn't last for another week.<sup>90</sup>

The fact that the Third Army had met increasing resistance in Lorraine hardly seemed as important as the fact that the enemy was in headlong flight before the First U.S. Army. Other developments bolstered this point of view:

While it is highly unlikely that Hitler, while he holds the reins of Government in Germany, will ever permit a capitulation of her Army, his position as head of government is becoming daily more unstable, and

<sup>87</sup> *OB WEST KTB*, 11 Sep; *AGp B Sitrep*, 11 Sep, *AGp B KTB*.

<sup>88</sup> SHAEF Weekly Intel Summary 25, 9 Sep, SHAEF G-2 File; see Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 283.

<sup>89</sup> Hewitt, *Story of the 30th Infantry Division*, p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> 3d Armored Division, *Spearhead in the West*, p. 81.

interior unrest and dissension coupled with the gradual loss of Germany's satellites makes her position less and less stable. This indicates an early end of Herr Hitler.<sup>91</sup>

Most officers believed that the West Wall was only a bluff and that, since the Germans had hardly any troops left, it would take the Allies three days at the most to get through the fortifications. After that, there would remain only the task of mopping up scattered demoralized units inside Germany.<sup>92</sup>

The Siegfried Line . . . although a strong natural position, is not what it was ballyhooed to be by the Germans. . . . it will not be too difficult to break. . . . the great expenditure of money, materiel, and time the Germans made on the Siegfried Line is as great a waste as the French Maginot Line proved to be.<sup>93</sup>

General Bradley reported that Hodges was "quite optimistic about his ability to push through the Siegfried Line and on to the Rhine," and that the "situation in front of Patton looks very hopeful."<sup>94</sup> Field Marshal Montgomery was still thinking of getting on to Berlin. And General Eisenhower, though he may have had reservations, began to consider objectives beyond the Rhine—as far distant as Berlin.<sup>95</sup>

In most respects, optimism seemed justifiable. Turkey had broken diplomatic relations with Germany in August, and Rumania, Bulgaria, and Finland were negotiating for peace. A repetition of the autumn of 1918, when Bulgaria had defected, and Turkey and

<sup>91</sup> VII Corps Annex 2 to FO 9, 27 Aug.

<sup>92</sup> See CI 32 (4th Div).

<sup>93</sup> 5th Armd Div AAR, Sep.

<sup>94</sup> Bradley to Eisenhower, 14 Sep, 12th AGp File Mil Objs, II.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Eisenhower to Bradley, 15 Sep, SHAEF File GCT 370-31/Plans.