

to make rapid headway in the sector which the enemy obviously regarded as the most vital.

THE DRIVE ACROSS THE PAS DE CALAIS TO ANTWERP AND THE RHINE.

On 26th August, I issued detailed orders for the conduct of the advance North of the Seine. Twelfth Army Group was to operate on the right flank of 21 Army Group, and directed First United States Army along the general axis Paris—Brussels, with the object of getting established in the general area Brussels—Maastricht—Liège—Namur—Charleroi.

On 1st September the Supreme Commander assumed command and direction of the Army Groups himself, and I was no longer, therefore, his overall land force commander. From now on my despatch will be primarily concerned with 21 Army Group proper, that is, with the British and Canadian forces, together with the various Allied contingents which served with them.

In considering the development of the strategic plan after crossing the Seine the primary object, of course, was the destruction of the German Army.

As a result of discussions between the Supreme Commander and myself, from now on the eventual mission of 21 Army Group became the isolation of the Ruhr.

The urgent problem was to prevent the enemy's recovery from the disaster sustained in Normandy. A major consideration was the administrative situation created by our ever-lengthening Lines of Communication. My administrative staff had, however, been building up reserves during August in order to support the pursuit. Imports were cut by 60 per cent. in order to release a considerable quantity of transport from beach and port clearance for forward maintenance purposes.

The immediate tasks of 21 Army Group were the destruction of the enemy in North-East France, the clearance of the Pas de Calais with its V-bomb sites, the capture of airfields in Belgium, and the capture of Antwerp.

Between 25th and 30th August, Second British Army and First Canadian Army crossed the Seine, and the four Allied armies now started advances which were eventually to bring them to the Rhine on a very broad front.

On the right, Third United States Army, having concentrated East of Paris (which was liberated on 25th August), was striking Eastwards during the first week of September to Nancy and Verdun. Shortly afterwards another column was directed South-East towards the Belfort area, to join up with the Seventh United States Army approaching from Marseilles.

The First United States Army advanced over the Aisne with its right flank directed on the Duchy of Luxembourg and its left flank on the general axis Mons—Liège.

Second British Army advanced North-East on Central Belgium, while First Canadian Army was about to sweep up the Channel coast.

On the left, 2 Canadian Division drove straight through Tôttes on Dieppe; the division entered the port towards the evening of 1st September. 2 Canadian Corps continued to advance rapidly North of the Somme which was crossed on 3rd September. 3 Canadian

Division closed in on the defences of Boulogne and Calais on 5th September; reconnaissance revealed that the enemy was intending to fight in defence of both these ports.

Meanwhile, 1 Corps advanced North of the Seine on 1st September. While the 49 Division swung left into the Havre peninsula, the 51 Division went straight for St. Valery and liberated the town on 2nd September. Probing on the 3rd September showed that the elaborate defences of Havre were fully manned. 51 Division was ordered to take over the Northern sector of the perimeter and preparations for the assault were put in hand. On the 12th September the garrison commander surrendered.

30 Corps was the spearhead of the British drive to the North. Amiens was reached on 31st August, Brussels was entered on 3rd September, and the city of Antwerp on the following day. This advance imposed a considerable strain on administration. Our spearheads were being maintained some 400 miles from the temporary base in Normandy. The greatest strain was thrown on road transport, because only short stretches of railway were available owing to the widespread demolitions. But all difficulties were overcome, and the pace of the pursuit was maintained.

The Advance to the Meuse and Rhine.

The Supreme Commander directed that our immediate aim should be the establishment of bridges over the Rhine throughout its entire length, and that we should not go beyond this until Antwerp or Rotterdam could be opened. In view of the time factor it was agreed that 21 Army Group should launch its thrust to the Rhine before completing the clearance of the Scheldt estuary.

My intention now was to establish bridgeheads over the Meuse and Rhine in readiness for the time when it would be possible to advance eastwards to occupy the Ruhr. I ordered the resumption of the Second Army advance from the Antwerp—Brussels area for 6th September, and by 11th September a bridgehead was established over the Meuse—Escaut Canal. It was already noticeable that the enemy was beginning to recover his balance, so that the urgency of launching the thrust to the Rhine was underlined.

On Sunday 17th September the battle of Arnhem began. The purpose was to cross the Meuse and the Rhine, and to place Second Army in a suitable position for the subsequent development of operations towards the northern face of the Ruhr and the North German plains. The thrust to Arnhem outflanked the northern extension of the West Wall, and came very near to complete success.

The essential feature of the plan was the laying of a carpet of airborne troops across the waterways from the Meuse—Escaut Canal to the Neder Rijn, on the general axis of the road through Eindhoven to Uden, Grave, Nijmegen and Arnhem. The airborne carpet and bridgehead forces were provided by 82 and 101 United States Airborne Division and 1 British Airborne Division, and a Polish parachute brigade. Along the corridor, or airborne carpet, 30 British Corps was to advance and establish itself North of the Neder Rijn with bridgeheads over the IJssel facing East. From the start, however, adverse weather conditions prevailed, and indeed, during the eight vital days of the battle, there were only