

two on which the weather permitted even a reasonable scale of offensive air support and air transportation. As a result, the airborne formations were not completed to strength (indeed 82 Airborne Division was without a complete gliderborne Combat Team). It had moreover been the intention to fly in 52 Division, but this project had to be abandoned. Resupply missions were repeatedly cancelled, and when flown were often on a greatly reduced scale.

Had reasonable weather conditions obtained, I believe the Arnhem bridgehead would have been established and maintained.

Full success at Arnhem was denied us for two reasons. First: the weather prevented the building up of adequate forces in the vital area. Second: the enemy managed to effect a very rapid concentration of forces to oppose us, and particularly against the bridgehead over the Neder Rijn. In face of this resistance the British Group of Armies in the North was not strong enough to retrieve the situation created by the weather, by intensifying the speed of operations on the ground. It was not possible to widen the corridor sufficiently quickly to reinforce Arnhem by road.

On 25th September I ordered withdrawal of the gallant Arnhem bridgehead.

The vital crossings at Grave and Nijmegen were retained, and their importance was to be amply demonstrated.

On the central sector of the Allied front, by the middle of September the First and Third U.S. Armies were fighting on the Siegfried Line from the Aachen area through the Ardennes to the region of Trier, and southwards along the general line of the upper Moselle.

By the third week in September the Sixth U.S. Army Group which had landed at Marseilles was firmly deployed on the right of Twelfth U.S. Army Group; the Allied front was continuous to Switzerland.

#### *Operations to open up Antwerp.*

The enemy had achieved a measure of recovery. This was clear not only in the Arnhem operation, but also in his reaction to American thrusts in the Siegfried Line. It was necessary to prepare for a hard killing match before it was possible to secure the Ruhr and advance into Germany. There was also the task to open the approaches to Antwerp before winter set in.

The immediate intention therefore became the clearance of the Scheldt Estuary.

This task was given to the First Canadian Army and lasted through October to the first week in November. The enemy resistance was vigorous, and some very hard fighting took place, leading up to the final operation for the capture of Walcheren. The reduction of this fortress presented many novel problems which were overcome principally by very remarkable precision bombing by Bomber Command, which breached the dykes and submerged large areas of the island. The extensive use of special amphibious devices enabled our troops to operate in the resulting floods. The naval craft put up a very fine performance in this battle, in spite of severe casualties from the coast defences and the rough seas. Walcheren was eventually cleared of the enemy by 8th November.

While the First Canadian Army were clearing the banks of the Scheldt, 1 Corps on its right wing, together with 12 Corps of Second

Army, were engaged in clearing south-west Holland up to the River Maas; at the same time 1 Corps was protecting the right flank of 2 Canadian Corps operating in Beveland and Walcheren.

As soon as the Scheldt and south-west Holland operations were completed, First Canadian Army took over the northern sector of 21 Army Group as far east as Middelaar, which included assuming responsibility for the Nijmegen bridgehead.

This was to facilitate the Second Army operations which were to line up facing east for the drive to line the Meuse. This regrouping had a further object: First Canadian Army was required to plan the battle of the Rhineland, which was to be launched from the Nijmegen area; Second British Army was to plan the subsequent assault across the Rhine.

By early December, Second British Army was lined up along the River Meuse as far South as Maeseyck, whence the front crossed the river to the area of Geilenkirchen and joined the Ninth United States Army.

Plans for the regrouping of 21 Army Group for the Rhineland battle were completed by early December. In fact some divisions were actually on the move to their new concentration areas, when, on 16th December, the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes broke.

#### *The Battle of the Ardennes.*

The full weight of the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes was not immediately apparent; extremely bad weather had precluded satisfactory air reconnaissance, and the German concentration had been carried out with a high degree of secrecy. However, on the 18th I was considering the possible effects of a major enemy thrust towards Brussels and Antwerp on our dispositions—for the Army Group was at that time transferring the bulk of its weight to the extreme Northern flank. I ordered the concentration for the Rhineland battle to stop, and had plans prepared for switching some divisions from the Geilenkirchen sector to the west of the Meuse.

By the 19th the full implications of the German attack were established. It was known that the Sixth S.S. Panzer Army was thrusting in a North-Westerly direction towards Liège, with the Fifth Panzer Army in a wider wheel on its left. Seventh German Army was in support. On the same day the Supreme Commander entrusted to me temporary command of the First and Ninth U.S. Armies (with effect from the 20th), as they were at that time on the Northern side of the German salient, and therefore remote from the Twelfth U.S. Army Group axis.

On the 19th I ordered General Dempsey to move 30 Corps west of the Meuse, to a general line from Liège to Louvain, with patrols forward along the Western bank of the river between Liège itself and Dinant. This Corps was thus suitably placed to prevent the enemy crossing the river, and could cover the routes from the S.E. leading into Brussels. It subsequently became necessary in connection with the regrouping of American First Army to send some British divisions east of the Meuse. But throughout the battle I was anxious to avoid committing British forces more than was necessary. Had they become involved in large numbers, an acute administrative problem would have resulted from their Lines of Com-