

munication crossing the axis of the two American armies. Moreover, it was foremost in my mind that as soon as the German attack had been defeated the business of the Rhineland battle should be returned to as quickly as possible.

The battle of the Ardennes was won primarily by the staunch fighting qualities of the American soldier, and the enemy's subsequent confusion was completed by the intense air action which became possible as weather conditions improved. Sixth S.S. Panzer Army broke itself against the Northern shoulder of the salient, while Fifth Panzer Army spent its drive in the fierce battle which centred on Bastogne. Regrouping of the First and Ninth U.S. Armies, assisted by British formation, made possible the rapid formation of a reserve corps of four U.S. divisions under General Collins. The action of this corps, co-ordinated with the drive from the south by General Patton's Third U.S. Army, pinched the enemy forces out of the salient and began the bitter struggle which was to push them out of the Siegfried Line.

The enemy had been prevented from crossing the Meuse in the nick of time. Once the Meuse crossings were secure it became increasingly apparent that the opportunity had come to turn the enemy's position to our advantage. Hitler's projected counter-offensive ended in a tactical defeat, and the Germans received a tremendous battering. As soon as the situation had been restored I was able to order the British divisions north again to the concentration areas which had been made ready in December.

The Battle of the Rhineland.

The main objective of the Allies on the Western front remained the Ruhr. Once the Ruhr had been isolated from the rest of Germany, the enemy's capacity to continue the struggle would quickly peter out. Beyond this, the object of our operations was to force mobile war on the enemy by developing operations into the northern plains of Germany. It was necessary first to line up on the Rhine; then to bridge the river and gain a suitable jumping off position for a mobile campaign in the Spring.

The enemy was in a very bad way; he had suffered another major defeat with heavy losses in men and equipment. Moreover, the great Russian winter offensive was now under way, and we did not wish to give the enemy the chance to switch forces to the east.

The Supreme Commander's orders to 21 Army Group provided for a line-up on the Rhine from Düsseldorf northwards. Ninth U.S. Army remained under my operational control.

First it was necessary to eliminate the enemy salient west of the R. Roer between Julich and Roermond. Second Army completed this task by 28 January. The divisions concerned, less defensive troops left holding the river line, immediately started north to join the concentration for the Rhineland battle.

The battle of the Rhineland was based on two converging offensives between the Rhine and the Meuse, with the object of destroying the enemy forces masking the Ruhr. It was intended, by interdiction from the air and by employing the maximum available forces on the ground, to prevent the enemy withdrawing to the east bank of the Rhine; in this, success was largely achieved.

First Canadian Army was ordered to launch an attack S.E. from the area of the Nijmegen bridgehead to meet the Ninth U.S. Army, whose thrust was developed from the Julich-Roermond sector northwards.

It was originally planned to launch the two operations almost simultaneously, but the southern thrust was delayed. In the event this proved to our advantage.

The date by which the Ninth U.S. Army could attack was dependent on the rate at which U.S. divisions could be released from other sectors of the Allied front, as the strength of that Army was to be increased to 12 divisions. Release of these divisions depended on the situation on the rest of the front. Twelfth U.S. Army Group was still involved in the Ardennes, particularly in thrusting towards the system of dams on the River Roer which control its flood waters. As long as the enemy held these dams he was in a position to impose flood conditions likely to impede the crossing of the river. Further south, the heaviest fighting was in the Saar and in the Colmar pocket—in both areas the enemy had achieved local successes.

The weather remained an anxious uncertainty. The thaw was beginning and, apart from the floods, it was playing havoc with our road communications.

The concentration of divisions for the Canadian Army attack was completed in the first week in February. Elaborate arrangements were made to assemble the forces employed into the very confined concentration areas, and also to mislead the enemy about our intentions.

On 8 February the northern wing of the pincer movement started. 30 Corps, under command of First Canadian Army, launched its attack into the Reichswald Forest and the northern extension of the West Wall, on a front of five divisions, supported by very considerable Air Forces and over 1,000 guns. This began the memorable battle which, in intensity and fierceness, equalled any which our troops have experienced in this war.

The Germans quickly built up to about eleven equivalent divisions, including four parachute divisions and two armoured divisions; in particular their paratroops fought magnificently.

Meanwhile the situation was improving in other parts of the Allied Front. Operations in the Colmar area had been successfully concluded and the Germans thrown back across the Rhine at the southern extremity of the Allied front; the Saar sector had been stabilised. More important still, Sixth S.S. Panzer Army was transferred to the eastern front, to oppose the mounting Russian offensive. The concentration of American divisions into the Ninth U.S. Army was achieved remarkably quickly, over long distances, using shocking roads and tracks, and in appalling weather.

The launching of the American thrust had been planned to start between 10th and 15th February but at the last minute, before abandoning the Roer dams, the enemy carried out demolitions which loosed the flood waters. There followed an anxious period of waiting, with all the troops teed up for the battle, while the water subsided sufficiently to enable the crossing to be launched. On 23rd February the Ninth U.S. Army, under command of General